

# 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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## HOLY THEOPHANY

By Fr. Seraphim Holland, St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney (Dallas area) Texas, 1999.

Today we celebrate a day that is called by many names: the Baptism of our Lord, Theophany, and it is also called *Illumining*. We commemorate our Lord's baptism today in the Jordan. Theophany is the appearance of God, where indeed the Holy Trinity manifested Himself after Our Lord's baptism. Why would we call it *Illumining*? It is because through baptism we are indeed *illuminated*.

God had a plan for man. The primeval plan was for us to grow in knowledge and in wisdom, according to how we could bear it, in purity, without any knowledge of evil at all. But man didn't choose that plan. So God, in His wisdom knowing this, sent his only-begotten Son.

Salvation is the knowledge of God, but only the pure can know the pure. We can even see this in our daily lives. There are people whom we just don't completely understand, and we know this because we understand that they're somehow more pure and more humble than us. And we think: "I don't understand how that person can take such abuse from her husband, or his son, or his co-worker, or some other person, and be so humble about it." We know people like that. Hopefully there are people that speak about us in those kinds of tones, because we are supposed to be a light to the rest of the world.

Only the pure can know the pure. But we're dirty, and we *need* purification. And what's more, we don't have any way to become pure. We don't have any way to clean ourselves. And our flesh, what is more, wars against us. Even if we wished to clean ourselves, (and we don't have the means, without God's help, mind you), we cannot. We don't have the strength, the ability, we don't have the knowledge, we don't have the grace. We cannot understand God without Him revealing himself to us. So, that is why our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came incarnate of a Virgin, into the midst of us—to invigorate us and make us able to live, but not only that; also to give us an example.

His ministry was two-fold. Being God, He taught us all the things that were necessary for our salvation, by His example, by how He lived, by how He spoke, by His demeanor. And He transmitted this faithfully and carefully to his disciples. And this is only to be found—this *mind of Christ* is only to be found—in the Orthodox faith, and it has been transmitted carefully and perfectly, throughout the ages, by the Church.

He showed us not only by His teaching, but also by how He lived. And He was a man, as well as being God, so He was subject to the things we are subject to, even unto death. So therefore, when He told us to be baptized, later on, after His resurrection, his words certainly have weight, because He subjected himself to baptism. He was not the kind of leader, or the kind of king, who would tell his

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subjects to do something that He wasn't willing to do. In fact, he said to James and John, that you cannot drink the cup that I will drink and be baptized with the baptism I will be baptized with. They could not bear what our Lord bore for us.

He will do more for us than He requires of us and expect more of Himself. And indeed, that is a principle of leadership. A leader, whether he be a father, a mother, or a priest, or an employer, or someone who teaches children, such as many of the men in this church, must lead by example. All the men in this church should be teachers of our boys, and all of the women, of our girls, and you teach them by being selfless, and emptying yourself as Christ emptied Himself. He taught us how to do it, and gave us the blueprint of how to do it.

Today we observe an amazing event before us. He who created the waters submits to being baptized in them. He who created the heavens and the earth and saw that it was good and not any whit evil, submits to cleansing in waters. He Who is the Regenerator regenerates our flesh, He descends in the flesh into regenerating waters. And he does this to show us how necessary it is for baptism.

To know Christ we must be like Him. You cannot know somebody unless you become like that person—it is not possible. So our Christian life in the flesh is to try to acquire the virtues, to be a good husbandman, to acquire the Holy Spirit, as my patron, St. Seraphim of Sarov, said, *By fasting,*

*by diligence, by care, by prayers, by weeping, by repentance, by the whole Christian life.* That is the whole reason for ascetical exercises. It's not because they're rules to be followed. It's because they are **Life!**

A person who sees a way of life that leads to eternal life, would be crazy, blind, not to follow such a life. Thus, our Lord taught us many principles of how to live, but the most important aspect of His ministry is that He made us **able** to live this way. I can tell you many things about the teaching of the Church, but I cannot invigorate you or make you able to live this way. That is only possible through your submission to the God-man Jesus Christ and the All-Holy Holy Trinity, Who makes a man able to live. So the God-man, when He preached, preached with authority, because He was able to back up his words like nobody else can.

Baptism is also an image; it's an *image of death and of life*. The Church says it over and over and over again. When we descend into the waters, we die. Our old man, with its lusts, dies in the waters. When we ascend out of the waters, we are reborn a new creature. This is a hard thing to understand. We cannot fathom it. We do not know how a man is reborn of water and the Spirit, we just know how we are told to begin the Christian life.

Baptism is the first mystery, although perhaps one would say the first mystery is really the incarnation of the Son of God,



which made everything else possible. In our life, our entrance into the Christian life is through baptism. Without it, we are not able to progress one whit in the knowledge of God. **And the knowledge of God IS salvation, brothers and sisters.** But remember, **one cannot progress in the knowledge of God without progressing in purity at the same time.**

We have no “armchair theologians” in the Orthodox Church. He who is a theologian—who studies God—lives as God wishes him to live, and is enlightened. We have had theologians that have not been able to read or write. Or even, and this is hard for us in our industrialized society to understand, they might not even have been intelligent, as we would think of intelligence. But they were intelligent in the ways of God, because they lived a life in accordance with His grace.

I hope you understand now why our Lord was baptized. There was no **need** for Him to be baptized. In fact, what does it say after He was baptized? *Straightway He came up out of the water.* To the fathers this is crystal clear, and therefore to us it will be now, too. He came straightway out of the water because He has no sin.

In those days St. John was baptizing for repentance, a baptism of repentance, but not for remission of sins, because he cannot remit sins. People would, when they came out of the water—(and how would you like this, some of you have been baptized in streams that are cold!)—they were held in the water. They came up partway,



and they confessed their sins right then and there. And then they were released out of the water. That’s how it was done. But our Lord had no need to do so, He had no sins to confess. In fact, when He went into the water, the demons fled. You see the icon? You see the demons in there? The demons are fleeing from the water, because they could not bear to be in the same place as the God-man Jesus Christ.

How can anyone stand against this mystery when our Lord endorses it so emphatically? And also, if we have an understanding of how water was treated, throughout the whole history of the Church—now I mean the history of the Church from Adam, you know, because God had a salvific plan from that time. There is a cute bumper sticker, but it’s not quite true: “Founded AD 33, Christian Church.” It was reborn, and recreated in AD 33, but the plan had been in place since Adam and Eve.

Let’s take a look, a little bit, at these short scriptures we read today: *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to*

*be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest thou to me?” And Jesus said unto him, “suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. (Mt 3:13-15).*

It’s a little bit of a riddle; what is He talking about, *all righteousness?* The Lord had no need for baptism or anything else to act upon Him in order to be righteous. He was able to save His human flesh by His own ability, but **our human flesh requires baptism.** He was baptized in order to change the nature of water so that, in those who believe, and by the grace of God, in the Church, it can make a person capable of being saved, that is, to be perfected and know God intimately. We can therefore give a rather free paraphrase of our Lord’s words as “Suffer it to be so now, because without baptism, you cannot become righteous.”

It was also tradition, a strong tradition, a God-inspired tradition, of the Jewish people, that when a prophet said something, you did it! Jesus obeyed a prophet. John was the greatest of the prophets; our Lord Himself said so. So He obeyed a prophet, by being baptized. John did not mean for the God-man to be baptized, and he wanted to tell him, “No, I can’t. I am unworthy. I want to be baptized of you.” He therefore was obedient, showed us an example, and later, after His resurrection, he issued us the command to be baptized.

Our Lord does not tell us to do anything we are not capable of doing. He does not tell us to do anything in the flesh that we cannot do in the flesh, and that he did not already do in the flesh. He told us that our flesh should become pure. His flesh was always pure; he made his flesh completely invigorated with the Godhead. And indeed, that will happen to us, because He did it to Himself. He promises us that we will rise from the dead. Well, he did it to Himself, so we are capable. He commands us to be baptized; He did it himself. He turned the other cheek when he was slapped by the arrogant Pharisees and by their henchman, the Roman soldiers. And He commands us to turn our cheek when we are slapped. He commands us to forgive, and He forgave.

There is nothing, there is no commandment that the Lord gave that He did not fulfill Himself in the flesh. And He even told us to be perfect, and He was perfect—in the flesh and as God. So all those things we are capable of doing because He did them for us and made us able to. He led by example, and He led by power and grace and mercy.

*Then He suffered him. And Jesus, when He was baptized went up straightway out of the waters and lo! The heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him. And a voice from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased"* (Mt 3:14-17). We already said what it means that He went *straightway out of the water*. John was in the water trembling, as a man before God. And God comes out of the water, and the Holy Spirit descends upon His shoulder, Jesus' shoulder, so as not to confuse the two. And the voice says, *This is my son, in whom I am well-pleased*.

And the heavens are opened. Why? This is because the heavens are opened to us through baptism. And also the heavens are opened to us through something else. Right away after the baptism, St. Mark barely catches his breath, I don't think he even has to dip his pen again in ink, and he starts to write, *"and straightway He was led out by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days."* (Mk 1:12).

There is a reason why he writes with such haste, why he doesn't even finish talking about baptism and wham! He is talking about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, because this happens to us. Right after our baptism we are tempted. During the whole of our life we're tempted, and sometimes we feel that we are in a barren place, a rocky desert, with no water and no comfort, and we get despondent. Our Lord had the same things happen to Him; He became hungry as a man, tired as a man, He wept as a man. And right after His baptism He shows that we all should expect to be in a life or death struggle.

Immediately upon being baptized we are enlisted as soldiers. Not as conscripts, mind you, but as willing men, willing to put on the armor of faith and of righteousness. We are willing to fight the good fight, because we have stated so, whether it was as an infant when our godparents stated for us and we grew to maturity and we learned of the Church, or whether it is, in the case of others, where we spoke for ourselves and agreed to the tenets of the Christian faith before we were thrust down into the water and out of it three times.

### About Holy Water

The Church today, (and yesterday by the way), blesses water. This is called the great blessing, and in it we read amazing passages from the Old Testament about water and its salvific qualities. And then we take this water and we sanctify everything with it. And you should listen closely to the services—especially I can remember some things from last night—they talk about how our Lord cleanses the water, casting out demons from it, and making it pure and wholesome. It is good to drink, to anoint ourselves with, good to bless and sanctify everything. And we indeed bless and sanctify water because our Lord blessed and sanctified water.

I am always amazed how our faith involves all of our life, everything! All of our senses—sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste—everything! And every aspect of our life—nothing is

untouched by the holy Church. In a pious Christian life, nothing is secular; everything is sacred.

So after we bless the water today, and bless the inside of the church, and go around and bless the outside precincts, you will take water home. You should drink this water in the morning, with the sign of the cross, and also eat a small piece of *antidoron*, before you eat or drink anything else. And you should also drink this water if there is a temptation or a difficulty in your life. You should anoint yourself with the water. You should sanctify things in your home.

I have had the custom of going around all the rooms of my house with a censer, with all the rest of the family carrying candles and singing the Theophany Troparion, to bless everything with holy water on a regular basis. I do not do it as much anymore—I guess I am more distracted and busy than I should be—but this is an important task. Anyone can do this. The demons see the water, even after the water dries on the walls and you cannot see it; you have marked your house as a dwelling of Christians. But of course, if you do this, then you must live as a Christian. What happened to the man who had the demons taken out of him, and the demon went around deserts and rocky places, and desolate areas, and then found no place to dwell? What did the demon do? He got seven other demons worse than himself, and he went back to the man. They found his soul was all swept and garnished inside, but since the man had not lived a virtuous life since his deliverance from the one demon, and the demons were able to make their abode in him, the last state of the man became worse than the first!

There is responsibility placed upon us, brothers and sisters, because of the grace we have been given—because of our baptism. Also because of the All-Holy mysteries which all of you should desire to receive today, and the services of the Church, and all the mind of the Church. Everything that you do is sacred, and it makes you responsible, for living according to how you have promised to live. The good news is that you are **able** to do it, because the God-man made you able to do it!

God revealed Himself, and continues to reveal Himself to us, as we are able to understand Him. As we become more pure, He reveals more of His purity to us. And we ascend like eagles! That is the meaning of Theophany. That is the meaning of the *illuminating*. May it be that all of us are illumined and follow Him in all ways. Amen.



**Y**ou receive the Cup which seemingly comes from the hands of man. What is it to you whether the bearer of the Cup acts righteously or unrighteously? As a follower of Jesus, your concern is to act righteously; to receive the Cup with thanksgiving to God and with a living faith; and courageously to drink it to the dregs.

**St. Ignatius Brianchaninov**

## EUROPE'S GREAT MORAL AND SPIRITUAL VACUUM

### DOES THIS VACUUM INVITE ACTS OF TERRORISM?

*By Ms. Iben Thranholm. This article examines political and social events with focus on their religious aspects, significance and moral implications. Ms. Thranholm is one of Denmark's most widely read columnists on such matters. She is a former editor and radio host at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), at which she created a religious news program that set a new standard for religious analysis in the newsroom. She has traveled extensively in the Middle East, Italy, the United States and Russia to carry out research and interviews. She has been awarded for her investigative research into Danish media coverage of religious issues.*

The media, for several weeks after the terrorist attacks in Paris, continued to overflow all of its avenues with comments and analyses. One particular angle is consistently ignored—or banished: religion. This is a curious omission since the terrorists themselves issue statements that indicate that religion is their motivation.

The statement in which IS accepts responsibility for the attacks in Paris is made in the name of Allah and the killings are referred to as “a blessed battle whose causes of success were enabled by Allah.” It states that Paris was targeted because it is “a capital of prostitution and vice” and “the lead carrier of the cross in Europe.”

IS is consistently referring to the Parisians as “crusaders”—the audience at the Bataclan, however, are called “pagans gathered for a concert of prostitution and vice.” The statement closes with a terror threat to strike those who “dare to curse the Prophet and boasts about their war against Islam.”

A further look at the character of the attacks reveals with ever-increasing clarity their symbolic significance. They were carried out on a Friday, the Muslim holiday. The victims at the Bataclan were listening to music, which is banned in fundamentalistic Islam, and the first targets to be shot were guests at the bar drinking alcohol. The symbolism assumed a new dimension when the perpetrators started firing on the audience of a performance by the band “Eagles of Death Metal” of its popular tune “Kiss the Devil.”

A series of images taken moments before the massacre started, members of the audience are seen making the hand sign used for devil worship, their index and little finger lifted in preparation for singing along with the lurid lyrics:

Who'll love the Devil?  
Who'll sing his song?  
Who will love the Devil and his song?  
I'll love the Devil  
I'll sing his song  
I will love the Devil and his song

What diabolical irony: the audience in the concert hall sings to the devil and is then butchered in cold blood by Jihadists claiming to serve Allah by annihilating pagans celebrating and invoking the Devil.

The Parisians seem devoid of any sense of the spiritual reality they are inviting. Yet their invocation was heard and answered.

What a heart-breaking scene. Servants of Allah and pagan revelers becoming a devilish blood sacrifice.

In spite of IS' own constant and unambiguous references to Allah as the motivation for their terrorist acts, politicians

and mass media alike consistently refuse to acknowledge religion, let alone mention it. Instead, they contort their rhetoric into fantastical figures of unreality by stressing that the world is not at war with Islam, supported by claims that IS/ISIS/ISIL is not Islamic, and for this purpose they have adopted the new brand name Daesh, ostensibly to express denial of Islamism as a religious faith.

When Francois Hollande spoke at the Congress at the Versailles shortly after the attacks, he refused to link the atrocities with Islam with even a single word. Obama has also said time and again that the West is not at war with Islam.

Religion is thus a total taboo in the narrative of the fight on terror. There are two reasons. One is political correctness: the ideology of secularism propounds the doctrine that religion is irrelevant, as it is not one of the ideals of the Enlightenment and must therefore be ignored, except in so far as it is made the object of derision and scorn. The other, and more significant, reason is that there is little sensibility to religion and spirituality in Europe—and none whatever among the political elite.

This is the root of the problem. Irrespective of the way one chooses to interpret the desire of the jihadists to strike “pagans gathered for a concert of prostitution and vice” and the audience's invocation of the devil, it provides a strong picture, or perhaps rather a sign, of what creates and nurtures terrorism. The driving force is spiritual rather than political. The decline of Christianity in the West has created a spiritual and moral vacuum of colossal proportions. It is this vacuum that gives Islamism momentum and nourishment.



The West simply no longer understands spirituality and has lost touch with its spiritual foundations by abandoning Christianity, now banished also from the EU Treaty. Several countries have removed Christian and all religious symbols from public spaces. By removing God they have created an empty space for evil to fill. This has been combined with morally bankrupt foreign policies that have accepted the slaughter and beheading of Christians, which is tantamount to a destruction of Europe's own spiritual foundations to achieve geopolitical gains, the latest of which is regime change in Syria by removing the country's democratically elected president.

The monster created by the rejection of Christianity is gaining power, as terrorism has grown from a de-christianized culture. Secularism and Islamism are two faces of the same destructive spirituality, two parasites nurturing each other. While justice and mercy combine in the virtues that spring from Christianity, the destructive justice of Islamism becomes glaringly demonic. There is no longer a spiritual counterweight of grace, forgiveness and charity, only a political counterpoint, which is clearly inadequate.

Secularism, relativism of values, materialism and democracy as a new religion (idolatry devoid of a deity) constantly prove their feeble inadequacy when facing Islamism. The post-Christian ideologies possess no core of spiritual strength—surveillance and military hardware is what they offer. It takes more to win a war. It takes moral strength. The West has lost its moral strength, amply evident in its approach to foreign policy by supporting so-called moderate terrorist groups that show little moderation when it comes to beheadings and literally eating the hearts of their victims.

The orgy of death at the Bataclan shows with superb clarity what happens when a people turn their backs on Christianity, invoke diabolical forces intending to use them for their own purpose and reap the bitter harvest of a reality they should have foreseen.

Unless Europe acknowledges the religious pivot of terrorism, Europe will perish clueless of the identity of its real enemy. Europe will remain fatally feeble. A spiritual revival is the single and sole hope for Europe to muster the strength to stand up to IS. The spiritual vacuum is also a vacuum of true values: patriotism, honor, virile virtues, masculine values like valor, courage, self-sacrifice, and strong faith in a good and loving God. All this is urgently needed if Europe is to defeat terrorism and radical Islam. Such a spiritual revival, a resurgence of Christianity, has been sweeping through Russia after the end of the Cold War. This provides Russia with a much clearer sense of what it takes to defeat terror and evil: the correct calibration of the moral compass, which allows you to know where you are and where you need to go.

Europe has prevailed against Islam several times through history. It did so in Spain, France, in Austria in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, and all of these victories were won at a time

when Christianity was the explicit and acknowledged foundation. Now, for the first time in history, Europe must face Islam in mortal battle without the rock of Christianity to provide the foundation to stand on and without identifying the enemy, and without admitting it is at war. No compass to show where it is, where it should go, or why.

If Europe is to win this battle, it must rediscover Christianity. French Foreign Minister and founder of the EU Robert Schumann once made the statement: "Europe will not live and will not be saved except to the degree in which it has awareness of itself and of its responsibilities, when it returns to the Christian principles of solidarity and fraternity."

**If Europe persists in rejecting Christianity, it must abandon all hope of ever being able to stand up to Islam and its Islamic terrorism.**



However, when the Day of Judgment comes, when the resurrection of the dead comes—and this book talks about the resurrection of the dead, over a thousand years before Christ—when the sinners see the righteous shining like the sun, they will be in dreadful fear, and in anguish they will groan and say, this is the man whom we once held in derision! We thought that His life was madness! We are the fools! We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction, and we journeyed through trackless deserts. What good has our boasted wealth profited us? We were deceived. We were deceived. These two chapters of the Wisdom of Solomon [refers to expanded content of homily] present us with a tremendous picture of the psychology of the ungodly—the mind of the worldly man—who will discover his deception on that day.

The Apostle Peter also talks about all these things. These are exceedingly important—let's look at this. *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!* (2 Pet 3:11-12).

So why are we wasting ourselves dealing only with earthly matters in a world that is about to be pulverized, to dissolve and collapse, a world that is going to be renovated? How should we spend our lives, knowing all this? Shouldn't we be characterized by holy conduct? And see what he says, ... *yearning for and hastening...* yearning and hastening with a joyous expectation, and racing towards that day of the coming of the Lord.

**Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios(+2006)**

## ST. JOHN MAXIMOVITCH AND THE DOVE

By Fr. Herman Podmoshensky, co-founder with Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and first abbot of the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery in Platina, California (+2014).

When I came to San Francisco to be close to the saintly Archbishop John Maximovitch, I heard a lot of fascinating accounts of his ascetic life. Frequently I visited St. Tikhon's Orphanage, founded by this Saint, and run then by his long-time assistant, Mrs. Maria Alexandrovna Shakhmatova (+1967). Archbishop John was a very busy man, and I did not dare to be often in his presence.

The orphanage was no longer just a place where children were sheltered. Within its walls was Archbishop John's tiny office, which was so small that even a bed would not fit, where he both lived and had his prayer-room and office. I would visit him there, and have long constructive talks that shaped my life.

One day I came to see Mrs. Shakhmatova, and she, as usual, insisted that I stay for tea, even though I never liked tea. She would get me into her kitchen, almost next to Archbishop John's office, and ask, almost in the form of an interrogation, about my whereabouts, what I had done that week, what I had read, etc. Usually she scolded me for not visiting her more often and not being closer to her "orphans," who by then were already leading their own married lives.

This particular day I noticed a white pigeon with a reddish pattern in its feathers, making pigeon noises outside the window on a specially built ledge. It was pacing back and forth, obviously not intending to fly away, but, as I assumed, waiting to be fed. As it seemed no stranger to her, I paid little attention then.

On that particular feast day of the Baptism of the Lord, I chanced to be in St. Tikhon's for the Blessing of Water. The service was performed in the little courtyard right under the kitchen window, which had a separate gate from the street through which I had entered. To my great surprise, as St. John was blessing the water, a dove flew right out into the courtyard. It flapped its wings and actually soared over the basin of holy water, while all of us vigorously sang: *When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore wit-*

*ness unto Thee, calling Thee the beloved Son, and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed His word as sure and steadfast ...*

I was amazed, as I had never seen such a service with a live dove hovering over this holiness.

The sight was unforgettable. St. John stood there with lifted hands, holding a huge golden Cross high above his mitered head, and the bird flew high about the building next door, and then with a swift graceful glide descended upon the Saint and sat on his shoulder. Then, loudly flapping its wings, it flew way up into the air, only to descend again, to the utter joy of all there, and it did this several times. St. John, apparently oblivious to the bird's spectacular maneuvers, continued deep in prayer. It seemed so natural, as if it were all a standard part of the holy ceremony. A similar event occurred in the life of St. Basil the Great, when a dove was seen by St. Ephraim the Syrian to be "whispering holy words into St. Basil's ear."

After the service I was invited to drink a lot of the water inside St. Tikhon's Orphanage, and to partake of tasty treats. Archbishop John was there, and the bird was outside the window on



St. John blessing a garden

his ledge, apparently feeding. There I learned the following touching story of Archbishop John's "heavenly bird."

Once Archbishop John came home to discover that a pigeon was hurt, his wing was damaged, and was sitting outside the window. He opened the window and let it in. The bird could barely flutter, and Archbishop John bound its wing and fed it. That was enough to make it feel adopted. The bird stayed around, especially

when the Saint would arrive and would feed it. Actually it remained a mystery how both of them conversed. But one thing we knew: the pigeon reacted to the words of St. John as if it understood what he said. I was told that both of them would sit facing each other, the man softly speaking and the bird making its pigeon sounds in agreement and peacefully walking to and fro, as if memorizing what it was taught.

This company Archbishop John kept for a long time, until his death. The pigeon lived on that window ledge and would often fly around in the kitchen and the main visiting room, and in the little corner office of Mrs. Shakhmatova in the northwestern corner of the house. I saw the bird fly around, and wondered why they had no cage for it, as for a canary. But I was told, "It is Archbishop John's friend and companion." It was a friendly bird, often eating from his hands.

Once I came and saw Archbishop John sitting silently next to the window, his head in his hand, thinking, watching the bird; and the bird was sick. I never learned what was the

matter, but there was silent contact between the dove of the Baptism of the Lord and John its “Baptist.” (The altar boys said that, by sprinkling the bird during the blessing of the water, Archbishop John had baptized the pigeon, and that it was a “baptized” bird.) Mrs. Shakmatova later told me that the bird was a sort of messenger of mysteries for Blessed John, but I never pried for an explanation. On the day Archbishop John died, the bird began to pace the window and flutter in agony, as if knowing about its master.

One frequenter of St. Tikhon’s Orphanage wrote: “We all learned to love that little friendly bird, who became a close friend to man. It never flew too far from the house and never chased other birds, as if its little heart sought warmth from people; and it had no greater joy than to fly into the house and sit quietly on some corner of an armchair. Often when Archbishop John would drink coffee in the kitchen, the bird would knock at the window pane begging to be let in and then it would sit on the Saint’s shoulder and watch his hands as he blessed the bird.

“When the death knell announced the earthly end of Archbishop John, the bird was frantic. It fluttered in agony, missing the Saint, and its little heart also stopped a few months afterwards, to our deep sorrow.

“I remember how someone said firmly that one should not cry over a bird, it is sinful. How harsh this resounded in my ears! Why is it a sin when a quiet sadness touches a heart over the loss of the little ones given to us by the Lord Himself to protect, who also are capable of giving us love. I remember Archbishop John’s words to me when I used to complain that in some cities birds are removed from the streets: *Yes, now throughout the whole world, attacks are carried out against all living beings that surround us.*”

At that time there was a veritable persecution of pigeons in San Francisco, due to the assumption that they carried some disease, and hundreds of them were poisoned or shot. I do not know these details. But I do remember vividly the beautiful white-feathered creature flying about the little bent-down figure of the precious Saint, who not only loved this God-sent bird, but had some mystical contact with it. The bird appeared in his life when he endured the greatest of his earthly trials; it forbade his ascent to the other world, and some other mysteries I was told about. That feathered little creature of God was sent as a consolation to the sorrowing man of God, rendering him greater solace than men could do, who at that time were inflicting upon him his greatest pain. Men who hate men cannot understand how animals could be truly God-sent consolers.

A spiritual daughter of Archbishop John, Olga Skopichenko, recalling this dove, even wrote a lovely poem, in which she hinted that the appearance of the bird, damaged by cruel men, was for our Saint a little window through which he gazed into Heaven.

## LIFE ACCORDING TO THE HOLY GOSPELS

*St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+ 1867).*

Do not be content with a mere fruitless reading of the Gospel; strive to fulfill its commandments, and read it with your deeds. This is the Book of Life, and it must be read by life.

We will be judged according to the Gospel commandments at the judgment established by God for us Orthodox Christians ... we will be judged according to the Gospel, that carelessness in fulfilling the Gospel commandments is an active rejection of the Lord Himself.

The Gospel is the image of the qualities of the new man, who is *the Lord from the heavens* (1 Cor 15:47). This new man is God by nature. He makes His holy tribe of men, who believe in Him and are transformed in accordance with Him, gods by grace.

Humility, love, meekness, and so it would follow, all the holy commandments of Christ are a throne and resting place, so to say, for the Holy Spirit.

Take counsel with the Gospels concerning your own thoughts as well as your neighbor’s thoughts and advice.

The Gospel beatitudes are a spiritual state that is revealed in the Christian from his fulfillment of the Gospel commandments; beatitudes are revealed one after the other, one giving birth to another.

The Holy Spirit effects purification in a person who expresses by his life the will for purification.

Confessing God with the lips without confessing Him through deeds and the hidden life of the heart, through only a few external church rites and institutions, is recognized as empty, soul-destroying hypocrisy.

The Commandments should be the soul of each Christian, and of Christian society.

Spiritual discernment is acquired by reading the Holy Scriptures, first and foremost the New Testament, and reading the holy Fathers whose writings correspond to the type of life the Christian lives.

It is necessary that reading be assisted by a way of life: *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* (Jas 1:22).

Our abode in the sonship of God received through holy Baptism is upheld and continued by a life according to the Gospel commandments. This abiding in sonship is lost by departing from a life according to the Gospel commandments.

It is necessary for salvation that the one who has been baptized into Christ should live according to the laws of Christ.

Damage to humanity consists in the mixing of good with evil; healing consists in the gradual removal of evil, when it begins to act more than good in us.



## DELUSION AND DECEPTION

By St. Paisios the Athonite, from "Elder Paisios' Spiritual Counsels: Spiritual Struggle," vol. 3, ch. 4.

*But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse,  
deceiving, and being deceived.*

[2 Tim 3:13]

† † †

### Regarding the Delusion of the Pentecostals

– Elder, the things that are said by those who go over to the Pentecostals—that is, about seeing visions, speaking in tongues, etc.—are those things from their own imagination, or from demonic influences?

– They are energies of demonic influences; because when they go over to the Pentecostals and are re-baptized, they are actually disregarding, denying the Holy Baptism: *I confess **one** Baptism, in absolution of sins...* as the Creed declares, in which case, they un-baptize themselves and become susceptible to demonic influences and then they ... jabber-jabber, supposedly in tongues. "It is the Holy Spirit of the Pentecost talking" they tell us. But it is not the Holy Spirit; it is a whole mess of unclean spirits.

What tongues? They are merely uttering gibberish, which not even they can comprehend. They even record that gibberish and then produce statistics and reach conclusions: "That tongue has so many *hallelujahs* in it, and there are so many in the other tongue..." Well, it's to be expected, among so much jabber-jabber, you will surely hear something that resembles the word *hallelujah* in one of the languages of the world! And so you can see, while it is something demonic, they actually believe that demonism to be the energy of the Holy Spirit, and that they are supposedly experiencing what the Apostles had experienced on the day of the Pentecost! It is blasphemies that they believe, which is the reason why they become demon-possessed.

– Elder, why are they re-baptized?

– Because they claim: "When I was baptized, I was young and didn't know; now I am baptized and fully aware." They are re-baptized, and thus justify their sins. If the Church didn't have infant Baptism, what would happen to infants in case of death before their Baptism? That is why a godparent becomes the child's guarantor and recites the Creed and bears responsibility for the child until it is of age. Is the child treated unfairly, simply for being baptized young? No; on the contrary, it is helped because it receives Holy Communion. And when the child has grown up and is already baptized, even if any sin is committed, there is always repentance and confession, which can wash away any committed sin, without the need of being baptized again.

### Regarding "Fire-Walking"

– Elder, they say that the fire-walkers on the feast-day of Saint Constantine trample across a patch of glowing coals

on the ground and yet they don't suffer any burns. What is that about?

– It is both demonic as well as a deception. The fact that they dance holding an icon or the Cross is impudence on their part—it is a denial of faith. The grace of God withdraws from them, which is why the devil assists them. Is it possible for the devil to not help them, after such behavior? Of course not; they are "entitled" to receive his assistance! However, it is also their own cunning that helps. They go beforehand to prepare the spot; in other words, they burn wood taken from plane trees—wood that leaves a lot of ash behind—and they also know where they tread, when they dance. Why don't they choose wood that will retain the burning embers? Let someone else prepare the fire, and THEN let them go there and dance on it!

Someone once said to me: "It's a miracle! The fire-walkers are standing on the fire and aren't being burnt!" "Is that what you're admiring?" I replied; "Demons have been standing inside the fires of hell for entire centuries and haven't been burnt; that's what you should be admiring, and not these people here, who are treading lightly over some coals and ashes without being burnt..."

### Reincarnation

– Elder, how can people—even educated people—believe in reincarnation?

– Reincarnation "accommodates" certain people, especially the atheists, the unbelievers. This is the devil's greatest trick. The devil keeps them living the life of sin, by inspiring the thought that the soul comes back again and again in this world. "Eh, even if you don't succeed this time around (says the devil), you will come back to life and succeed the next time; and if again you don't succeed, you will again come back, again and again... you will evolve..."! So those people say to themselves "It doesn't matter if I commit this sin also..." and they throw caution to the wind; they live carelessly, they don't repent. See how the devil blinds them, and gets them hooked in hell? I have never seen bigger cunning and artfulness by the devil, for the purpose of getting people into hell! And if the devil gets his hooks into you once, do you think he will let you turn back? This is the worst theory of all the Hinduist theories.

Late one afternoon, a young man came by the my hut. "You know, around this time of day, I normally read Vespers" I told him. "Do you still preoccupy yourself with those things?" he said, and walked off. The next day he came around again and told me about his visions. "Did you smoke hash before?" I asked him. "I used to. Yes. But when I saw the visions, I hadn't smoked any." "Did you perhaps read anything about reincarnation?" "Yes" he replied. Well, that's where he was snagged. He had read about reincarnation, egotism entered the scene and it fashioned dreams that thousands of years ago, he was an important man, and wealthy! Then he saw in

another vision that he went up to heaven but he wasn't listed there, so he was told to go back down. The devil created that condition in him. So I remarked: "All of this is just fairytales, and you actually believe it?"

And unfortunately there are even educated people who believe in such foolishness. There was a donkey near my hut which they had named Nasser, because he was such a frisky animal. One day, a Greek man who lived in Switzerland came to visit, and he heard me calling out to the donkey with the name Nasser. When he came to visit again after some time, he brought with him a box of plain sweets and another box with special sweets. "These are for you" he said, handing me the plain sweets. "These special sweets are for Nasser" he said. "I recognized him from the last time I visited that it was Nasser. When I went up to the donkey, it looked at me with a sad gaze that broke my heart"! He actually believed that Nasser (of Egypt) was reincarnated and had become a donkey! He actually believed it! "Are you out of your mind?" I said to the man. "I named the donkey Nasser because it was such a lively creature!" But the man simply couldn't be convinced.

And that's nothing! Let me tell you of another incident: Years ago, some Germans went to Crete to perform a memorial service for the Germans who were killed during the Occupation in Greece. During the service, a Cretan local passed by with his donkey that was laden with his goods. When the donkey spotted all the people gathered there, he began to bray. One of the Germans thought that the donkey was his brother who had been killed in the war and was reincarnated! Apparently the donkey had recognized him and was greeting him with its braying! The German stood at attention, and—snap! —greeted it in military fashion!... He then broke into tears!... so, he immediately went over to the Cretan and said to him: "How much do you want, so I can buy it?" "Get lost!" the Cretan replied... But the German was counting his money: "This much? This much?" "Go away, leave me alone" the Cretan kept saying. Finally, another local said: "You moron, he's paying you the value of a Mercedes for the donkey, just give it to him!" So the Cretan unloaded the donkey, removed its saddle, set it free, and the German took it with tears in his eyes, and brought it back to Germany with him!

– Seriously, Elder?

– It's a fact! If I hadn't heard it from a reliable witness, I wouldn't have believed it either.

#### Regarding the Hindus' "Ascesis"

– Elder, do Hindus achieve a certain self-control because they are helped by the severe ascesis that they perform through yoga?

– They strive and they strive, and what do they achieve with it? Orthodox self-restraint and spiritual ascesis in general always aspire to a loftier spiritual purpose: the sanctification of the soul. Their satanic, worldly ascesis is only implemented to give them a flexible body so that they can contort arms

and legs like a paper puppet, and so that other foolish people might admire them and the silly demons can ridicule them. From early childhood they learn to twist their legs and place the one leg over one shoulder and the other leg over the other shoulder, and that's how they "pray." They practice by punching their fist for many hours against a sack of gravel, and then they are enabled to break stones, wood, etc.

But, even all the things they say that they feel have an explanation. For instance, they drag their tongue until it touches their nose or they suck it in until it touches their throat, and this causes an aggravation, the feel a certain sweetness—a tickling—and they say "This is nectar"... Then they press down on certain nerves near their ears and they hear a "hummmm" sound like music. Or they press their eyes and this makes them see little stars! They sit staring at the sun with eyes wide open and when they close them, they can see light! "There! We did it! We saw uncreated light!"

So the devil says: "Oh, so you want lights? Let me give you lights!" and he then cultivates their imagination so that afterwards, without pressing their eyes or holding them open to the sun, they will be able to see lights. The devil often tries to seduce us without being provoked, by presenting lights, etc., but we turn our backs to him, so just imagine what would happen if we provoked him! All he needs is an excuse to act!

– In other words Elder, the devil presents them with various images?

– Yes. He cultivates their imagination to a large degree and then he leads them to delusion. Some of our own people go to the Indians (the holy Elder is referring to the people of India, not to American Indians, *Ed.*), the Indians teach them to utter some vile remarks in their language about Christ, about the Holy Mother, about the saints—unbeknownst to them—and they become demon-possessed. Then they begin to utter all sorts of ineffable words. They reach a wild state and others who observe them think that they are in a spiritual state! But it is a demonic state.

#### Hinduism Has Caused Severe Damage

The Indians, who are an extremely intelligent people, while having metaphysical concerns and lots of heart, preoccupy themselves with supposed philosophy, with delusions and with sorceries. They wreak havoc among Europeans with their theories. And you can see how their leaders are as fit as bulls, while the others in India are dying of hunger! They come to Greece also, and they fool people with nirvana, with laziness, with reincarnations... meantime in their books they even use quotes from the Holy Bible, from the Philokalia, from the Fathers, and thus attract people. In olden times, the Orthodox would in no way believe in Hinduist theories! Now—how can one say it—there are even some very correct people who support such nonsense and who give a whole lot of money. Hinduism has caused severe damage.

– Elder, are there any Indians who are Orthodox Christians?

– Very few. There were a few who remained from the Church that the Apostle Thomas had established, but they were abandoned. Others became (Roman) Catholics, others Protestants. Today, the Orthodox there are very few.

The things that other religions or para-religions present as miracles have nothing in common with the miracles of our Faith. Christ wants us to be honorable; He does not want us to love Him because He is Omnipotent. If He wanted, He could work a miracle and make the whole world believe instantly. But that way, He would be confining man's freedom. That is why He said *Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.* (Jn 20:29).

Orthodoxy has the miracle and divine grace. Hinduism has magic and philosophy. It replaces the miracle with magic, and divine Grace with philosophy. The devil gives powers to the gurus, the sorcerers, etc., because they have given the devil the right. That is why they can perform supposed miracles, and the others who see them admire them. From the moment someone realizes that the one performing such fake miracles is in no way related to Christ, he must understand that whatever he does is a deception of the devil, who is never able to say the truth but instead lies and deceives God's creatures. Those who have a positive predisposition—after having become a little bit familiar with Orthodoxy—are somewhat hesitant, because they can see that the life of such sorcerers is not a clean one; it is a mixed-up one, whereas in Orthodoxy they will find a clean life and superiority. They find people who possess sanctity and who perform true miracles.

In Orthodoxy, kindness is the overflowing of man's love; love for God and for one's neighbor. All the kindnesses that are displayed by persons of other religions or by deluded persons, etc., do not contain any in-Christ elements, although they may have certain positive human elements. Whoever lives the Orthodox life correctly has humility, love, and he gives himself wholly to the other—he sacrifices himself. And the asceticism, the fasting and the all-night vigils that he pursues are again out of love for the Lord, and not so that he might get some kind of pleasure out of it.

Christ came into the world to be crucified out of love for His creature. First He was crucified, and then He was resurrected. It is a cheap thing for one to merely ask for spiritual favors; it is another thing, if Christ Himself gives one a taste of the celestial sweetness. Thus, while they, for instance, are preoccupied with Hinduistic philosophies, with yoga, etc., with the things that they do, they aspire to attaining a supposed spiritual state, an ecstatic state. They do this to either feel a form of pleasure or to become "superior" to others. But, whatever their reason may be, they do it without showing any actual concern for others.

Let's assume that a Hinduist is sitting on a shore meditating. If during that time someone at sea is in danger and is crying

out for help, he will remain steadfastly indifferent; he will not budge from his place, so that he won't deprive himself of that pleasure that he is feeling. If it was an Orthodox monk there at the time saying the Prayer, he would have dropped his prayer-robe and dived into the water to save him.

### People Being Misled

– Elder, when the Prophets Elijah and Enoch come back in order to preach repentance, will people understand what is happening, and come back to their senses?

– Those who have a good predisposition will understand. Those who aren't positively predisposed will not understand and will be misled. Our Lord had warned us that we must be very careful, because *false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders, to deceive, if possible, even the elect.* (Mk 13:22).

There are some who mistake certain deluded persons for prophets. Several years ago, there was a Protestant who constantly wandered around with a leather briefcase which had an inscription on it, written in English: "I am the Prophet Elijah"! He wore a short-sleeved shirt, he had a Bible in English and he claimed to have descended from heaven!

When they asked him what he believes in and what religion he belongs to, he said "Eh, they are obsolete things. Religions didn't exist then!" See? To him, everyone—Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, all the heresies and all the branches of heresies are the same to him. Is it not obvious then what his true state was? And oh, how many letters did that person send me! He would write down various passages from the Holy Bible and all his positions were Protestant... he would also send a whole lot of letters to various other people, sometimes from England and sometimes from other places. There were those who believed the things he wrote and they wanted to publish in a magazine that the Prophet Elijah had come. "Are you in your right minds? What on earth are you about to do?" I said to them.... Poor people....they are so confused!

A person sins just through listening to what such deluded people have to say. There are some who say: "If you believe that it will happen that way, then it will." This is pure belief in themselves, but behind them is the little imp (mythological demonic-looking creature, *Ed*). Thus, they deify themselves and they strip themselves of divine Grace. It is with theories like these that they strive to fool people.

A 45-year-old man presented himself as a graduate of the Halki Orthodox Seminary and yet discussed all sorts of Hinduist philosophies. "You" I said to him "are doing damage to yourself and to others, when you expound all that refined nonsense and at the same time you present yourself as a graduate of the Orthodox School of Halki. Watch out, because you'll become demonically possessed."

– Elder, why do the various para-religions in Greece strive to present themselves as unions, etc., and do not admit they are religions?

– They do it in order to disorient others. Notice how St. Constantine abolished idolatry and ordained that Christianity would be the official religion of the entire Empire, and yet, today they are striving to bring back idolatry. They allow the erection of mosques, or gurus having their own monasteries where they can freely give lectures and become centers for proselytism, and where Masons can act freely, and Jehovah's Witnesses the same... Orthodoxy is being attacked by a swarm of theories. But they won't last; they will eventually crumble...

Poor souls... people are fooled, because they have distanced themselves from God and have become dimmed! There were two young men who went to Hebron on a pilgrimage; they were told to put on that little Jewish cap before paying their respects to the graves of Abraham... What's the purpose of a pilgrimage, if you have put on something that the Jews use in their worship? What can one say?... Such confusion...

In Paris, outside a Roman Catholic church there was a sign that said: "Lessons on practicing prayers with the method of yoga." Just look where things have gone! Then the psychological problems begin, and they go mad; they don't know what they want afterwards.

There are some Roman Catholics, Protestants, etc., who are taught that if one is baptized in the Orthodox Church he changes—he becomes reborn—so they think that if they get baptized, their psychological problems will go away. I warned against a certain Protestant who wanted to be baptized Orthodox: "See that you don't baptize him. He should not be baptized." "No" they replied; "if he is baptized, he will be helped." "But he isn't a case for baptism. Don't you understand?"

They paid no attention to what I said; they took him and they went down to the sea, where they baptized him! After 2-3 days, he came along and said to me: "I was baptized, but Baptism didn't solve my psychological problems." "Do you mean to say that you were baptized in the hope that your psychological problems would go away?" I replied. "Look here: if you had felt the need for Baptism, and if you had comprehended its worth and was aiming for that grandeur, then those problems would have gone away. But when you went to be baptized for the sake of ridding yourself of the psychological problems, how do you expect them to leave? Magically?"

They confuse magic with miracle. They can't tell gold from bronze. And you will notice, for example, a Protestant may be baptized Orthodox then becomes a Roman Catholic, then says "I'm not at ease" and thereafter goes back to the Protestants or back to the Orthodox. There was a Catholic who was baptized Orthodox, became a monk and lived nine years in a monastery. He came to my hut and said to me: "I hadn't lived the secular life as an Orthodox, so I want to return to the world and get married"! Did you hear what he said? And

imagine, me telling him all the while how severe a thing he was thinking of doing, and him saying: "Why is it severe? I can't understand."

### Return to Orthodoxy

Today's world feels comfortable with weird things, not the correct ones. They know about India—which is at the other end of the globe—because of her "magic," and they go there. But the Holy Mountain—which is in their homeland, very close to them and with the true, mystical, in-Christ life—they are totally oblivious to! A student once told me that he had gone to India and stayed there for three and a half years. He went there looking for the truth in regard to religions. Finally, an Indian said to him: "Why did you come here? The thing you're looking for exists in Orthodoxy. That's where the light is. Go to the Holy Mountain and find what you're seeking. (It is a well-known fact that God may reveal His will to a well-meaning person, in various ways. One example is the narration about Barlaam's donkey, who spoke to him in order to avert his actions, which would have been contrary to the divine will. (see Numbers 22:18-35). That's how he returned to Greece and came to the Holy Mountain.

– Elder, when an Orthodox goes to the Hinduists, gurus, etc., and repents afterwards, does he become accepted again in the Orthodox Church?

– He will need a lot of repentance, then Holy Myrrh. If he wishes to return to Orthodoxy and become a member of the Church again, he will normally have to first confirm with a "libel" (from the Latin term *libellus* = booklet, pamphlet, meant a written confession of faith, which was submitted to the Synod or the Bishop of the King); this confirmation is his declaration that he denounces their cacodoxies and confesses the Orthodox faith. Then the Orthodox priest will read the special *prayers for those returning to the true faith* over him (from the *Major Book of Blessings*), and then chrismate him with Holy Myrrh.

I have noticed several youngsters—Greek youngsters—who, without having read a single line from the Gospel, will go and read on Brahmanism, Buddhism, the Koran, etc., and they also go to the Hindus. Then they find they are not at ease, so they return to Orthodoxy, but in the meantime they will have also contracted a whole lot of "spiritual germs." They suffer damage, and it is hard for them to afterwards find the truth.

One must first become acquainted with Orthodoxy and then, if he doesn't like it, he can leave. But he should first get to know Orthodoxy properly, before making any comparisons with the various theories that he has heard. Because, if he gets to know Orthodoxy, he will be able to distinguish between copper and gold, or evaluate how many karats the gold is. He will not be fooled easily, into mistaking whatever glistens as gold. However, I have noticed that only an egotist leaves Orthodoxy when he does get to know it. A truly humble person never leaves...

## Χαρακτηρισμοὶ Αἰρετικῶν

Τοῦ κ. Νικ. Σωτηροπούλου, Θεολόγου-Φιλολόγου (+2014).

Τὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο γράφεται γιὰ τοὺς αἰρετικούς γενικῶς, καὶ γιὰ τοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς εἰδικῶς. Οἱ διδάσκαλοι καὶ οἱ ὀπαδοὶ τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ εἶναι οἱ χειρότεροι ἀποστάτες ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, διότι ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς δὲν εἶναι μία μόνον αἵρεσις, ἀλλ' εἶναι παναίρεσις, προχωρεῖ δὲ πέρα ἀπὸ τὶς αἱρέσεις καὶ γίνεται καὶ πανθησκεία. Ἀρχαιοκουμενιστὴς μὲ πολὺ μεγάλα ρᾶσα δήλωσε ὅτι καὶ οἱ ἄλλες Θρησκείες εἶναι σεβαστὲς καὶ σεβάσιμες καὶ δρόμοι σωτηρίας!

Θέμα τοῦ παρόντος ἄρθρου εἶναι τὸ πῶς ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, χαρακτηρίζει τοὺς αἰρετικούς, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον τοὺς παναιρετικούς καὶ πανθησκειακοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς.

Ἄν οἱ κ.κ. Οἰκουμενισταὶ ἔχουν τὴν αἴσθησιν, μᾶλλον ψευδαἴσθησιν, ὅτι πιστεύουν στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη, ἃς διαβάσουν τὸ ἄρθρο, γιὰ νὰ ἴδουν πόσο πλανῶνται, καὶ μὲ πόσους καὶ πόσο βαρεῖς χαρακτηρισμοὺς τοὺς χαρακτηρίζει τὸ Θεόπνευστο κείμενο, καὶ ἃς ἀνησυχίσουν γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τους μὲ τὴ μεγαλύτερη ὄλων τῶν ἀνησυχιῶν, καὶ ἃς ἀλλάξουν φρονήματα· ἃς γίνουν ὄντως πιστοί, γιὰ νὰ τύχουν ἐλέους καὶ σωτηρίας παρὰ τοῦ Ἀρχηγοῦ τῆς Πίστεως, τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Στὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς δημοσίας δράσεώς του ὁ Χριστὸς κήρυξε· «Μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ» (Μάρκ. α' 15). Καὶ πρὸς τὸ τέλος, μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασί Του, εἶπε στοὺς μαθητάς Του· «Κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάση τῇ κτίσει. Ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται» (Μάρκ. ιστ' 15-16).

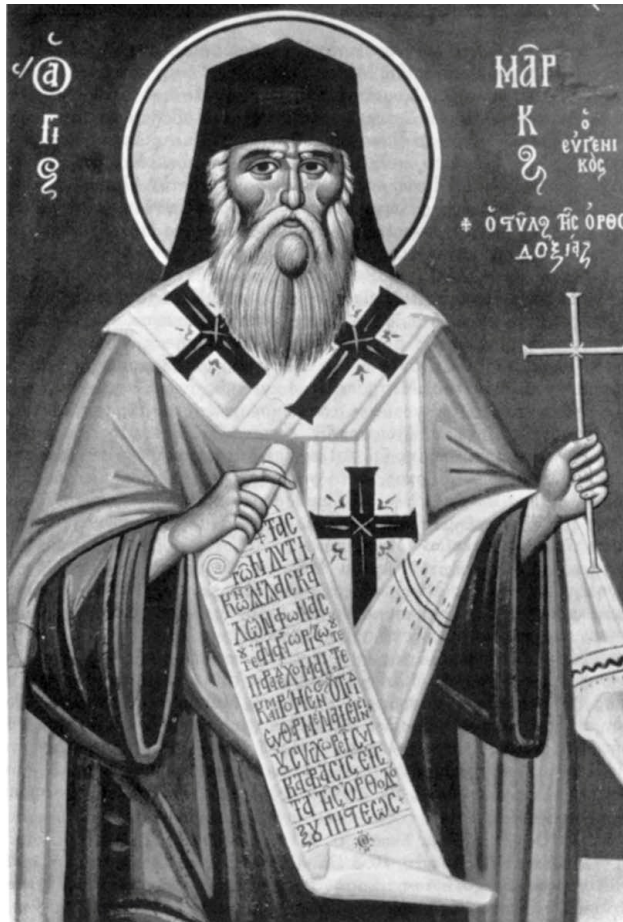
Ἡ πίστις στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Χριστοῦ σώζει, ἡ ἀπιστία καταδικάζει. Ἡ αἵρεσις εἶναι «ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον»,

διαστροφή τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Γαλ. α' 6, 7) καὶ δὲν σώζει, ἀλλὰ καταδικάζει. Οἱ διδάσκοντες κατὰ διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἀπὸ τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀναθεματίζονται! (Γαλ. α' 8-9).

Ἄν οἱ Οἰκουμενισταὶ εἶναι ἐνσυνειδήτως ἄπιστοι, ἄν, μὲ ἄλλες λέξεις, δὲν πιστεύουν στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ διαβάσουν τὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο. Ἄς τὸ διαβάσουν ὅμως οἱ πιστοί, γιὰ νὰ αἰσθανθοῦν πόσο τρομερὸ καὶ βδελυκτὸ εἶναι τὸ φαινόμενο τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ποὺ ὀνομάζεται Οἰκουμενισμὸς, καὶ νὰ τηροῦν ἀποστάσεις ἀπὸ τοὺς χειρότερους ἀποστάτες ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι, τοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς, καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἐλέγχουν καὶ νὰ διαμαρτύρονται κατ' αὐτῶν, μάλιστα ἂν αὐτοὶ κατέχουν ἐκκλησιαστικὲς θέσεις ἢ ἔχουν θεολογικοὺς τίτλους. Εἶναι ἔλλειψις στοιχειώδους τιμότητος νὰ παρουσιάζονται Οἰκουμενισταὶ ὡς ἐκπρόσωποι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἢ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Θεολογίας!

Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε στοὺς ἰδικούς του· «Προσέχετε ἀπὸ τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν, οἵτινες ἔρχονται πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ἐνδύμασι προβάτων, ἔσωθεν δὲ εἰσὶ λύκοι ἄρπαγες» (Ματθ. ζ' 15). Συμφώνως πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοπροφήται». Στὴν Ἁγία Γραφὴ «προφήται» μὲ τὴν ἀληθινὴ ἔννοια τῆς λέξεως εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι διδάσκουν μὲ ἔμπνευσιν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ δὲ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοπροφήται», διότι δὲν διδάσκουν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἰδικὰ τους λόγια, ἢ μᾶλλον λόγια τοῦ Διαβόλου, καὶ ἰσχυρίζονται ψευδῶς ὅτι διδάσκουν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται ἐπίσης «λύκοι ἄρπαγες» «ἐν ἐνδύμασι προβάτων». Ἀπ' ἔξω ἐμφανίζονται ὡς πρόβατα, φρόνιμοι, γλυκεῖς καὶ μελιστάλακτοι. Καὶ ἀπὸ μέσα εἶναι αἰμοβόροι λύκοι, ἔτοιμοι ν' ἀρπάξουν



**Τὴν 19<sup>ην</sup> Ἰανουαρίου ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας τιμᾷ τὴν μνήμην τοῦ ἐν Ἁγίοις Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Μάρκου τοῦ Εὐγενικοῦ, Προμάχου τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας.**

**Τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ταῖς ἀστραπαῖς, λάμψας ἐν τῇ Δύσει, ἐξεθάμβησας ἐμφανῶς, Δυτικῶν τὰς ὄψεις, τοὺς ὄρους τῶν Πατέρων, ᾧ Μάρκε ῥήτορεύων, πυρίνη γλώττη σου.**

**[Ἄνωτέρω εἰκὼν τοῦ Ἁγίου διὰ χειρὸς Φωτίου Κόντογλου]**

καὶ νὰ κατασπαράξουν τὰ λογικὰ πρόβατα τῆς ποιμένης τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἐφιστᾷ τὴν προσοχή μας νὰ φυλασσωμεθα ἀπὸ τοὺς ψευδοπροφήτες καὶ προβατοσχήμους λύκους, οἱ ὅποιοι στὸν ἐπόμενο στίχον 16 χαρακτηρίζονται «ἄκανθαι» καὶ «τριβόλοι», ἀγκάθια καὶ τριβόλια, ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα δὲν περιμένουμε ἐκλεκτοὺς καρπούς.

Στὸ Ματθ. κδ' 11 ὁ Χριστὸς προλέγει ὅτι θὰ ἐμφανισθοῦν «πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται», καὶ ὅτι «πλανήσουσι πολλούς». Καὶ στὸ Ματθ. κδ' 24 λέγει ὅτι θὰ ἐμφανισθοῦν «ψευδοπροφῆται», οἱ ὅποιοι θὰ κάνουν «σημεῖα μεγάλα καὶ τέρατα, ὥστε πλανήσαι, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς.» (Βλέπε ἐπίσης καὶ Μάρκ. ιγ' 22).

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος στὸ Β' Πέτρ. β' 1-2 γράφει:

«Ἐγένοντο δὲ καὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐν τῷ λαῷ, ὡς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσονται ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι, οἵτινες παρεισάξουσιν αἰρέσεις ἀπωλείας. Ἐδῶ προλέγεται ἡ ἐμφάνισι αἰρετικῶν, οἱ ὅποιοι χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι» συνωνύμως πρὸς τὸ «ψευδοπροφῆται». Οἱ δὲ αἰρέσεις τους χαρακτηρίζονται «αἰρέσεις ἀπωλείας». Οἱ αἰρέσεις ὀδηγοῦν σὲ ἀπώλεια, καταστροφή, καὶ κόλασι. Ὁ δὲ Ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης στὸ Α' Ἰωάν. δ' 1 γράφει, ὅτι «πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον». Καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωάννη λοιπὸν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοπροφῆται».

Στὴν Ἀποκάλυψι ἀναφέρεται «ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης» (Ἀποκ. ιστ' 13, ιθ' 20, κ' 10), ὁ ὑπασπιστὴς τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, ὁ ὁποῖος περιγράφεται ὡς «θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς γῆς», ἔχει «κέρατα δύο ὅμοια ἀρνίῳ» καὶ ὁμιλεῖ «ὡς δράκων» (Ἀποκ. ιγ' 11). Θεωροῦμε εὐστοχη τὴν ἐρμηνεία, ὅτι μὲ τὸ χαρακτηρισμὸ «ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης», ἐνάρθως, ὁ κατ' ἐξοχὴν ψευδοπροφήτης, χαρακτηρίζεται ὁ μεγαλύτερος τῶν αἰρεσιάρχων, ὁ Πάπας. Τὰ δύο κέρατά του σημαίνουν τὶς δύο ἐξουσίες του, τὴ θρησκευτικὴ καὶ τὴν πολιτικὴ. Καὶ ἡ ὁμοιότης του πρὸς τὸ ἀρνίον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὸν δράκοντα, σημαίνει τὴ μεγάλη ὑποκρισία του. Φαίνεται ὡς Χριστιανὸς ἡγέτης, ἀλλ' εἶναι σατανικός.

Στὶς ἡμέρες μας ὁ Πάπας συγκαλεῖ συνέδρια ὄχι μόνο διαχριστιανικὰ καὶ παναιρετικά, ἀλλὰ καὶ διαθρησκειακὰ καὶ σατανιστικά, καὶ συμπροσεύχονται γιὰ τὴν εἰρήνην τοῦ κόσμου! Συμμετέχουν δὲ σὲ τέτοια συνέδρια καὶ λεγόμενοι Ὁρθόδοξοι! Ὁ δὲ Πάπας, ἀφοῦ καὶ συγκαλεῖ τὰ συνέδρια καὶ κατέχει τὴν πρώτη

θέσι σ' αὐτά, ἤδη ἀναγνωρίζεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἡμετέρους Οἰκουμενιστὰς ὡς ἔχων τὸ περιβόητο πρωτεῖο, καίτοι στὴν πραγματικότητα, ἀφοῦ εἶναι αἰρετικός, δὲν ἔχει ἱερωσύνη, δὲν εἶναι ἐπίσκοπος.

Τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου «ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης», ὁ Πάπας, ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος θὰ εἶναι ἰσχυρότερος ἀπ' αὐτὸν καὶ δὲν θὰ δύναται νὰ διεκδικήσῃ πρωτεῖο, κοσμικῶς καὶ διπλωματικῶς σκεπτόμενος θὰ γίνῃ ὑπασπιστὴς τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, γιὰ νὰ ἔχη τὰ δευτερεῖα τῆς ἐξουσίας. Νὰ τὸν χαίρωνται οἱ Οἰκουμενισταί, οἱ σφόδρα φιλοπαπικοί.

Ὅμοίως πρὸς τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος χαρακτηρίσε τοὺς αἰρετικούς «λύκους βαρεῖς μὴ φειδομένους τοῦ ποιμνίου» λύκους φοβερούς, πὺ δὲν λυποῦνται τὸ ποιμνιο. Προφήτευσεν δὲ ὅτι καὶ ἀπὸ



**Νικόλαος Σωτηρόπουλος (+2014)**  
**Ὁ γνήσιος Ἑλληνορθόδοξος ὁμολογητὴς**

τοὺς ποιμένες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θὰ προέλθουν αἰρετικοί, τοὺς ὁποῖους ἐπίσης χαρακτήρισε «ἄνδρας λαλοῦντας διεστραμμένα» (Πράξ. κ' 29, 30). Ἀνέφερε δὲ καὶ πρόρρησι τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος γιὰ τὴν ἐμφάνισι ἀποστατῶν ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι, τῶν γνωστῶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία αἰρετικῶν Ἐγκρατιτῶν. Οἱ διδάσκαλοι τῆς αἰρέσεως αὐτῆς ἐμπόδιζαν τὸ γάμο καὶ κήρυτταν ἀποχὴ ἀπὸ τροφῆς ὡς δῆθεν ἀκάθαρτα πράγματα. Χαρακτηρίζονται δὲ «πνεύματα πλάνα» μὲ δαιμονικὲς διδασκαλίες, «ἐν ὑποκρίσει ψευδολόγοι» καὶ «κεκατηριασμένοι τὴν ἰδίαν συνείδησιν» (Α' Τιμ. δ' 1-3).

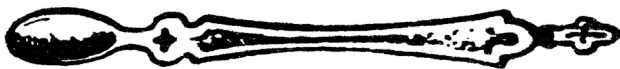
Ὁ ἀδελφόθεος Ἰούδας στὴν Καθολικὴ Ἐπιστολὴ του, τὸ δυνατότερο ἀνταιρετικὸ κείμενο τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, αἰρετικούς τῆς ἀποστολικῆς ἐποχῆς, τοὺς Νικολαίτες, χαρακτηρίζει μὲ τοὺς ἐξῆς ἐκτὸς ἄλλων χαρακτηρισμοὺς: «Σπιλάδες», δηλαδὴ κηλίδες, δημωδῶς λέρες: «ἐαυτοὺς ποιμαίνοντες», ἰδιοτελεῖς, πὺ βόσκουν καὶ τρέφουν τοὺς ἐαυτοὺς των: «νεφέλαι ἄνυδροι ὑπὸ ἀνέμων παραφερόμεναι», σύννεφα ἄνυδρα, πὺ παρασύρονται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνέμους: «δένδρα φθινοπωρινά, ἄκαρπα, δις ἀποθανόντα, ἐκρίζωθέντα», δένδρα φθινοπωρινά, χωρὶς καρπούς, δύο φορὲς ξεραμμένα, ξερριζωμένα: «κύματα ἄγρια θαλάσσης ἐπαφρίζοντα τὰς ἐαυτῶν αἰσχύννας», κύματα ἄγρια τῆς θάλασσας, πὺ ἀφρίζουν καὶ φέρουν στὴν ἐπιφάνεια τὶς ἀσχημίαις τους: «ἀστέρες πλανῆται, οἷς ὁ ζῶφος τοῦ σκοτίου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τετήρηται», ἄστρα σκοτεινά, στὰ ὁποῖα τὸ βαθὺ σκοτάδι διατηρεῖται παντοτινὸ (Ἰούδ. 12-13): «ἐμπαῖκται κατὰ τὰς ἐαυτῶν

ἐπιθυμίας πορευόμενοι τῶν ἀσεβειῶν», ἐμπαίχτες βαδίζοντες συμφώνως μὲ τὶς ἀσεβεῖς ἐπιθυμίες τους «ἀποδιορίζοντες», διακρίνοντας τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς τῶν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ παρουσιαζόμενοι ὡς ἀνώτεροι «ψυχικοί, Πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες», ἄνθρωποι ποὺ κυριαρχοῦνται ἀπὸ φυσικὰ ἔνστικτα, ποὺ στεροῦνται Πνεύματος Ἁγίου (Ἰουδ. 18-19).

Δύο ἀκόμη χαρακτηρισμοὶ τῶν αἰρετικῶν, φοβερῶτεροι τῶν προηγουμένων. «Κατάρως τέκνα!», λέγει μὲ πολὺ μεγάλη ἔμφασι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος. Καταραμένοι ἄνθρωποι! (Β΄ Πέτρ. β΄ 14). Καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης λέγει, «Ἡκούσατε ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασι». Ἀκούσατε ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ τώρα πολλοὶ ἀντίχριστοι ἔχουν ἔλθει (Α΄ Ἰωάν. β΄ 18). Ὁ ἀναμενόμενος Ἀντίχριστος εἶναι ὁ χειρότερος καὶ ὁ ἀπαισιώτερος ὄλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Μὲ τὸ ὄνομα δὲ ἐκείνου ὁ Ἀπόστολος ὀνομάζει τοὺς αἰρετικούς τῆς ἐποχῆς του, καὶ ὄλων βεβαίως τῶν ἐποχῶν. Καὶ «ἀντίχριστοι» λοιπὸν χαρακτηρίζονται οἱ αἰρετικοί. Naί, ἀντίχριστοι, διότι φρονοῦν καὶ πράττουν ἀντίθετα πρὸς τὸ Χριστό, καὶ προετοιμάζουν τὸ ἔδαφος γιὰ τὸν κατ' ἐξοχίαν Ἀντίχριστο.

**Γιὰ τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη ἐκφράζεται μὲ συμπάθεια. Ἀλλὰ γιὰ τοὺς αἰρετικούς ἐκφράζεται μὲ τὰ φοβερῶτερα λόγια,** λόγια θεόπνευστα καὶ ἀρμόζοντα σ' αὐτούς, καὶ μάλιστα στοὺς παναιρετικούς καὶ πανθηρησκειακοὺς Οἰκουμενιστάς. Δὲν φοβοῦνται αὐτοὶ ἀπὸ τὰ φοβερὰ καὶ θεόπνευστα λόγια, ἔστω καὶ ἂν φοροῦν μεγάλα ράσα καὶ ἐγκόλπια καὶ ἔχουν τὶς μεγαλύτερες εὐθύνες; Οἱ πιστοί, οἱ συνειδητοὶ Χριστιανοὶ φοβοῦνται καὶ ἀγωνίζονται καὶ θὰ ἀγωνίζονται μέχρι τέλος γιὰ «τὴν ἄπαξ παραδοθεῖσαν τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστιν» (Ἰουδ. 3). Εἶναι βεβαίως πάντοτε ὀλίγοι οἱ ἀγωνισταί, ἀλλὰ τελικῶς αὐτοὶ νικοῦν, διότι Ἀρχηγός τους εἶναι ὁ Χριστός, ὁ ὁποῖος διακήρυξε: «**Ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον**» (Ἰωάν. ιστ' 33).

Ἡ ἱστορία ἀποδεικνύει τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἀληθές. Παρὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν αἰρέσεων καὶ τὴν ὄλη πολεμικὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, τοῦ μεγάλου ἐχθροῦ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἡ ὀρθὴ πίστι ἔφθασε μέχρι σήμερα. Καὶ θὰ φθάσῃ μέχρι τῆς συντέλειας τοῦ κόσμου. Διότι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ θέλησι τοῦ Χριστοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν πιστῶν.



**Ἄ**ν δὲν κυριευθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἔρωτα τῶν οὐρανίων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν πόθον τῆς ἄνω Ἰερουσαλήμ (ποὺ εἶναι ἡ Βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν), ἀλλὰ μένουμε προσκολλημένοι στὴν ἐπίγεια ζωὴ, κυλιόμενοι μέσα στὸν βοῦρκο τῶν κοσμικῶν φροντίδων, δὲν θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἀπολαύσουμε τὴν οὐράνια πατριδα!

**Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος**

## Θεολογικὴ Θεώρησις τοῦ Χρόνου

ὑπὸ τοῦ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Χίου, Ψαρῶν καὶ Οἰνουσσῶν κ. Μάρκου.



**Σ**τὴ χαρὰ τῶν ἐορτῶν τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ τοῦ νέου ἔτους, ἡ ἐμπειρία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας ψηλαφεῖ τὴν παρέμβαση τοῦ ἄχρονου Θεοῦ στὴν δική μας μετρούμενη ροὴ καὶ διαδοχὴ τοῦ χρόνου, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι πλήρως συνυφασμένη μὲ τὴν φθορὰ καὶ τὴν ματαιότητα. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἔρχεται νὰ ἀνακαινίσῃ τὴν διάστασι τοῦ χρόνου, ἐλευθερώνοντάς τὴν ἀπὸ τὴν περατότητα καὶ τὴν φθοροποιὸν φορὰ. Μὲ τὴν ἐνανθρώπησι τοῦ Κυρίου μας, ὁ χρόνος φθάνει στὸ «πλήρωμά» του, ἀποκτώντας μίαν ἐντελῶς νέα προοπτικὴ. Στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Χριστοῦ, παύει νὰ ἀποτελεῖ πιά ἐμπόδιο, τὸ ὁποῖο ὀριοθετεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τὸν κόσμον ὡς πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Ἡ ἐνσάρκωσις τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ πραγματοποιεῖται ἐν χρόνῳ καὶ ὁ «αἰὶ ὼν» ἐνοικεῖ στὸ «νῦν». «Αἰώνια» ζωὴ δὲν εἶναι, ὑπ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἐννοία καὶ μὲ συμβατικούς ὅρους, ἡ χρονικὰ ἀτελεύτητη, ἀλλὰ ἡ «πλήρωσις» τοῦ μετρητοῦ χρόνου μὲ τὴν βίωσίν του ὡς διαρκοῦς καὶ ἀδιάστατου παρόντος κοινωνίας μὲ τὸν Θεό.

Ὁ χρόνος, τὸν ὁποῖο βιώνουμε ὡς δημιουργία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχει ἀρχή, δηλαδὴ αἰτιώδη ἐναρξή, καὶ δὲν εἶναι «ἀναρχος». Ἐπίσης εἶναι πεπερασμένος καὶ ἔχει ὅρια, δὲν εἶναι οὔτε ἄπειρος οὔτε αἰώνιος («οὐκ αἰδίδος»). Ὁ χρόνος ξεκινᾷ μὲ τὴ δημιουργία καὶ πορεύεται μαζὶ μὲ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ ὀλόκληρη τὴν κτίσι σὲ ἓνα σκοπὸ, στὴ «συντέλεια τῶν αἰώνων», δηλαδὴ στὴν ὀλοκλήρωσίν τους στὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Αὐτὴ ἡ καινὴ κτίσι, ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ τὴν προσημονία τῶν πιστῶν καὶ εἶναι ἐτοιμασμένη «ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου» (Ματθ. 25:34), βρίσκεται ἤδη παροῦσα «ἐν μυστηρίῳ» στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Δὲν εἶναι σωστὸ νὰ τὴν νιώθουμε ἀπομακρυσμένη σ' ἓνα ἀπροσδιόριστο τέλος τοῦ κόσμου, γιὰ τὴν ἔτσι ἡ πίστι μας καὶ ἡ προσδοκία τῆς «ζωῆς τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος» ἀτονοῦν καὶ δὲν νιώθουμε τὴν πληρότητα τῶν λέξεων «**Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία Σου**».

Ὅσον ἀφορᾷ στὴν φύσι τοῦ χρόνου, οἱ φωτισμένοι Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας προηγήθηκαν κατὰ αἰῶνες τῆς σύγχρονης ἐπιστήμης, ὅταν δίδασκαν ὅτι ὁ χρόνος καὶ ὁ χρόνος εἶναι ἄρρηκτα συμφυεῖς, συνιστώντας μίαν ἐνιαία πραγματικότητα. Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος σημειώνει ὅτι ὁ χρόνος εἶναι «**τσιμπαρεκτεινόμενον τῇ συστάσει τοῦ κόσμου διάστημα**» (Κατὰ Εὐνομίου, PG 29, στ. 560):

δεν θα μπορούσε να βρεῖ κανείς τελειότερη διατύπωση για τὴν διαστολὴ τοῦ κοσμικοῦ χωροχρόνου, σύμφωνα μὲ τίς πιστοποιήσεις τῆς σύγχρονης φυσικῆς.

Ἀντιστοίχως, ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς χρόνος δὲν βιώνεται ἐκτὸς τοῦ τόπου καὶ τοῦ χρόνου ποὺ ζοῦμε. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, στὴν ἐπίγεια διάστασή της, ἀποδέχεται καὶ ἀγκαλιάζει τὴ ροὴ τοῦ χρόνου, παρὰ τὴ φθαρτότητα καὶ τὴ συμβατικότητα, οἱ ὁποῖες τὴν συνοδεύουν. Ἔτσι ἀκολουθεῖ, στὴν ἐτήσια κυκλικὴ ὁργάνωση τῆς λειτουργικῆς ζωῆς, τὰ χρονικὰ μέτρα, τὰ ὁποῖα ὀρίζονται μὲ βάση τὰ ἀστρονομικὰ στοιχεῖα καὶ ἄλλες ἀνθρωποκεντρικὲς ἡμερολογιακὲς συμβάσεις. Ὅμως, ταυχορόνως ὑπερβαίνει αὐτὴ τὴν κατάταξη τοῦ χρόνου, ὅπως καὶ τὴν διάκρισή του σὲ παρελθόν, παρὸν καὶ μέλλον.

Στὴν Ἐκκλησία μας οἱ ἡμέρες συναντοῦν τὰ ἱερά γεγονότα, καθιστώντας δυνατὴ τὴν μέθεξη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου σὲ αὐτά. Μὲ αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο, τὸ παρελθὸν γίνεται συγχρόνως ἑορταστικὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ συμμετοχικὸ παρὸν, γεγονός ποὺ δηλώνεται μὲ τὴν διαρκῆ ὑμνολογικὴ χρῆση τοῦ ἐνεστωτικοῦ «*Σήμερον*»

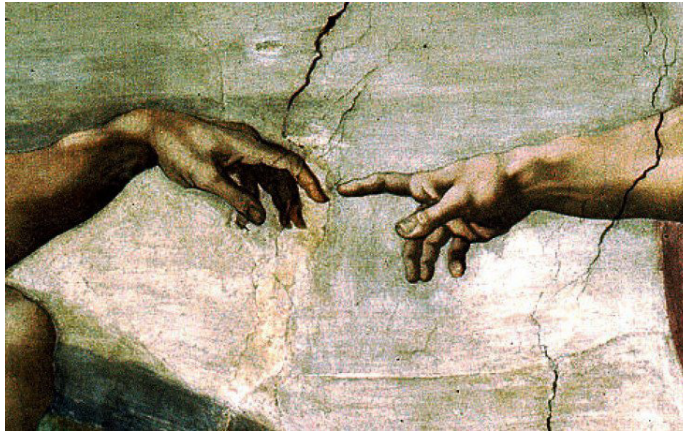
στὶς λειτουργικὲς συναθροίσεις (ὅπως εἰς τὰ «*Ἡ Παρθένος σήμερον τὸν ὑπερούσιον τίκτει*», «*Σήμερον ὁ Δεσπότης τέμνεται τὴν σάρκα ὡς βρέφος, πληρῶν τὸν Νόμον*», «*Σήμερον ὁ Δεσπότης σαρκὶ περιετιμήθη, καὶ Ἰησοῦς ἐκλήθη*», «*Σήμερον ὁ Δεσπότης τὸ βάπτισμα λαμβάνει*»). Ὁ Θεὸς γίνεται σημεῖο ἀναφορᾶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου σὲ κάθε ὥρα, ἡμέρα καὶ ἑορτῆ, ὥστε κάθε στιγμή τοῦ χρόνου μας νὰ εἶναι γεμάτη μὲ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁ χρόνος «*τοῦ παρόντος βίου*» νὰ γίνεται «*ἐνιαυτὸς Κυρίου δεκτός*».

Στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὴν Θεολογία μας ὁ χρόνος αὐτὸς δὲν εἶναι κάτι τελείως διακριτὸ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον τῆς Βασιλείας τῶν Οὐρανῶν, ἀλλὰ περιλαμβάνει τὴν προτύπωση καὶ τὴν πρόγευσή του. Μὲ τὸν Χριστὸ ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀρχίζει ἐντὸς τῆς ἱστορίας καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον προσφέρεται στὸ παρὸν, μὲ τὴν προοπτικὴ τῆς «*αἰωνιότητος*». Αὐτὸ φανερώνει καὶ ἡ δοξολογικὴ ἀναφορὰ μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἀρχίζει κάθε Θεῖα Λειτουργία: «*Εὐλογημένη ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*».

Τὸ χρονικὸ κορυφώνεται στὸ αἰώνιο ἤδη ἐδῶ καὶ τώρα, μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας νὰ γίνεται ὁ μαζὶ μὲ ἡμᾶς καὶ «*ὄλω τῷ κόσμῳ συμπαρεκτεινόμενος*»

Χριστὸς στὸν χρόνο καὶ τὴν ἱστορία. Ὁ χρόνος, ποὺ ἔλαβε τὴν ἀρχὴ ἀπὸ τὸν Δημιουργὸ Υἱὸ καὶ Λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀγιάζεται, καὶ βρίσκει τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ πλήρωμά του στὸν ἴδιο ὡς σαρκωθέντα Χριστό, τὸν «*Εμμανουήλ*» «*Θεὸν μεθ' ἡμῶν*» καὶ «*πάλιν Ἐρχόμενον*». Στὸ Πρόσωπό Του, ὁ «*Παλαιὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν*» γίνεται «*Νεὸς τῶν ἐσχάτων χρόνων*», καὶ ὁ προαιώνιος καὶ ὑπεράχρονος Θεὸς Λόγος, ἀπαρχὴ τῆς καινῆς κτίσεως.

Στὴν λατρεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, οἱ χρονικὲς συναρτήσεις, τὸ παρελθόν, τὸ παρὸν καὶ τὸ μέλλον, χωρὶς νὰ καταλύονται, συναίρουνται σὲ διαρκὲς παρὸν τῆς σωτηρίας. Ἡ πίστη τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ ἡ ἐλπίδα τοῦ μέλλοντος συνδέονται καὶ βιώνονται μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη στὸ παρὸν. Ἡ Θεῖα Λειτουργία εἶναι ὁ ἄχρονος χρόνος τῆς πίστεως, τῆς ἐλπίδας καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ἐν Χριστῷ. Ἄν ὁ ἐπίγειος χρόνος γίνεται παλαιός, γεροντὰ καὶ φθείρει, ἢ βαθύτερη ὑπόσταση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μένει ἀνεπηρέαστη κατὰ τὴν δυναμικὴ ἀνταπόκριση στὴν σχέση του μὲ τὸν Θεό. Γιατὶ «*ἂν ὁ ἐξωτερικὸς σ' ἐμᾶς ἄνθρωπος φθείρεται, ὁ ἐσωτερικὸς ἀνανεώνεται ἡμέρα μὲ τὴν ἡμέρα*» («*ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ' ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαι-*



νοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα»), μᾶς διδάσκει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Κορ. Β', 4:16).

Μὲ τὴν ἐνσάρκωσή Του ὁ Κύριός μας καινοτομεῖ τὸν χρόνο, γιὰ νὰ χορηγήσει «*ζωὴν τὴν ἄχρονον τοῖς ἐν γῆ καὶ λῆξιν αἰώνιον καὶ δόξαν τὴν ἀκήρατον*».



Ἡ τελικὴ νίκη ἀνήκει στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησία Του καὶ ὄχι στὸ Ἰσλάμ, στὸ φῶς καὶ στὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ ὄχι στὸ σκοτὸς καὶ στὴν πλάνη τοῦ Κορανίου, στὴν σαρκωμένη Ἀγάπη καὶ ὄχι στὴν βαρβαρότητα καὶ τὴν ἀπανθρωπία. Μέχρι τότε ἡμεῖς οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι Ἕλληνες ἀπ' αὐτὴν ἐδῶ τὴν γωνιά τοῦ πλανήτη, ποὺ λέγεται Ὁρθόδοξη Ἑλλάδα, δὲν θὰ παύσουμε νὰ προσευχόμαστε πρὸς τὸν Κύριο τῶν Δυνάμεων, τὸν Βασιλέα τῶν Βασιλευόντων καὶ Κύριο τῶν Κυριευόντων: «*Ἀνάστα ὁ Θεὸς κρίνων τὴν γῆν ὅτι Σὺ κατακληρονομήσεις ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν*» (Ψαλμ. 81:8).

+ Ὁ Πειραιῶς ΣΕΡΑΦΕΙΜ



**Όταν οι Νέοι Μάθουν ν' Αγαπούν...***Του Μητροπολίτου Λεμεσού Αθανασίου.*

**Μητροπολίτης Λεμεσού Αθανάσιος: «Τὸ "λάθος" ἦταν ὅπὸ δὲν ἀνπληφθῆκαμε ὅπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ἔπρεπε νὰ δώσουμε στὰ παιδιὰ μας ἦταν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ»**

† † †

Στὴν Ἐκκλησία ἀγωγή σημαίνει ὁδήγία, ὁδήγηση τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὄχι πρὸς συγκεκριμένες ιδέες ἢ ἀξίες ἢ ἰδανικά, ἀλλὰ ὁδήγηση τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀγωγή στὴν Ἐκκλησία σημαίνει νὰ μάθει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰτὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ζητούμενό της.

Μία ἐκκοσμικευμένη ἀντίληψη τῆς θρησκείας, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, μιᾶ γιὰ τὴν πίστη στὸν Θεὸ καὶ μόνο αὐτῇ. Ἐνῶ τὸ τέλειο στὴν Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη ἢ ὁποῖα θὰ παραμείνει στοὺς αἰῶνες, ἀφοῦ τόσο ἡ πίστη ὅσο καὶ ἡ ἐλπίδα θὰ καταργηθοῦν στὴν ἐσχάτη ἡμέρα καὶ ἐκεῖνο πὸν θὰ ἀπομείνει θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη. Ἐπομένως τὸ ζητούμενο στὸν ἄνθρωπο εἶναι νὰ μάθει νὰ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεό.

Τὸ νὰ πιστεύει στὸν Θεὸ εἶναι ἓνα βασικὸ σκαλί, εἶναι τὸ πρῶτο, τὸ ὁποῖο τὸ πατᾶ καὶ ἀνεβαίνει στὸ ἐπόμενο καὶ στὸ ἐπόμενο. Δὲν μένει σ' αὐτὸ μόνο, γιὰτὶ ἓνας ἄνθρωπος, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ παραδώσει τὴ ζωὴ του ὀλόκληρη σὲ κάτι τὸ ὁποῖο ἀπλῶς τὸ πιστεύει. Ἄν εἶναι τόσο ἰδεολόγος, μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ κάνει, ὅπως γίνεται σὲ ἄλλες περιπτώσεις στὴν καθημερινότητα πὸν βλέπουμε γύρω μας. Ἀλλὰ ὅμως στὴν Ἐκκλησία αὐτὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ὑπάρχει εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Σὲ μᾶς ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ ζητούμενο. Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι αὐτός, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι ὁ Διδάσκαλος τοῦ κάθε ἀνθρώπου.

Βλέπετε πόσο ὠραία ὁ Κύριος στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο μᾶς λέει: «Μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ...». Δηλαδή ὁ ἄνθρωπος μαθαίνει ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό, ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Χριστό, ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ προπάντων ἀπὸ τὴν ἐμπειρία τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ μέσα του. Γι' αὐτὸ αὐτὴ ἡ ἐμπειρία εἶναι τόσο δυνατὴ πὸν νικᾷ ὅλες τὶς ἀγάπες τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

Δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετό, ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ λέμε στὰ παιδιὰ μας γιὰ τὶς ιδέες τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετὸ νὰ λέμε ὅτι τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι τὸ καλύτερο πὸν μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ τοὺς δώσει, ὅτι εἶναι ὠραία ἢ ἀγάπη, ἢ χαρὰ, ἢ ἐλευθερία, ἢ δικαιοσύνη. Βέβαια εἶναι ὠραία ὅλα αὐτά, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνο πὸν χρειάζεται ὁ νέος ἄνθρωπος σήμερα εἶναι νὰ μάθει νὰ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Χριστό. Νὰ μάθει ὅτι αὐτὸ πὸν τοῦ δίδει ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς, καὶ αὐτὸ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τοῦ δώσει ὁ κόσμος. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος μπορεῖ παντοῦ νὰ μάθει νὰ σέβεται τοὺς συνανθρώπους του, νὰ τοὺς ἀγαπᾷ, νὰ εἶναι τίμιος, εὐλικρινής, δίκαιος, δημοκρατικός, φιλελεύθερος καὶ ὅλα αὐτά.

Δὲν χρειαζόταν ἡ Ἐκκλησία γιὰ νὰ μᾶς μάθει αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα, πὸν μᾶς τὰ διδάσκει ἢ ἴδια ἢ φύση μας. Γιὰτὶ ἄλλωστε ὁ ἀνθρώπινος ἑαυτός μας καὶ ἡ ἀνθρώπινή μας ὑπόσταση, μᾶς διδάσκει τὴν ἐλευθερία, τὴ δικαιοσύνη, τὴ δημοκρατία, τὸν σεβασμό, τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους.

Ἐκεῖνο πὸν ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἔχει νὰ μᾶς πεί εἶναι γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Κι ἐδῶ, νὰ μοῦ ἐπιτρέψετε, νὰ σᾶς πῶ ὅτι εἶναι τὸ σημεῖο στὸ ὁποῖο σκοντάφουμε ἐμεῖς οἱ σημερινοὶ Χριστιανοί, γιὰτὶ θεωροῦμε τὴν Ἐκκλησία ὡς ἓνα σύστημα ἰδεολογικὸ καὶ εἶναι ἀρκετὸ γιὰ μᾶς νὰ εἴμαστε καλοὶ ἄνθρωποι. Εἶναι ἀρκετὸ γιὰ μᾶς νὰ τηροῦμε τὰ καθήκοντά μας. Εἶναι ἀρκετὸ τὰ παιδιὰ μας νὰ ἔχουν τὰ ὄριά τους. Νὰ μὴν κάνουν ἀταξίες. Νὰ μὴν κάνουν ἄσχημα πράγματα. Λένε καμιά φορᾶ πράγματα πὸν τ' ἀκοῦμε, χαμογελοῦμε βέβαια μὲ ἐπιείκεια, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἐκφράζουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Τὶ λένε: «Παρὰ νὰ εἶναι κάποιος στὰ ναρκωτικά, καλύτερα στὴν Ἐκκλησία». «Παρὰ νὰ εἶναι κάποιος στὴ φυλακὴ, καλύτερα στὴν Ἐκκλησία». Λες καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι τὸ ἀντίθετο τῶν ναρκωτικῶν καὶ τῆς φυλακῆς. Θὰ ἔλεγε κανεὶς, ὅπως ἔλεγε καὶ ἡ καμήλα: «Καλὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἴσιος δρόμος, μέσος δρόμος»; Δηλαδή ἡ ναρκωτικὰ ἢ Ἐκκλησία; Δηλαδή ὁποῖος δὲν εἶναι στὴν Ἐκκλησία εἶναι στὰ ναρκωτικά; Ἀσφαλῶς ὄχι! Μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν εἶσαι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ νὰ εἶσαι τίμιος, σωστός, εὐλικρινής, καλὸς σύζυγος, καλὸς πατέρας, καλὸς μαθητῆς κι ὅλα τὰ καλὰ νὰ ἔχεις πάνω σου.

Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ καταλάβουμε πολλὲς φορὲς γιὰτὶ τὰ παιδιὰ μας ἔχουν μίαν ἄλλη σχέση μὲ τὸν Θεό. Γιὰτὶ ἐμεῖς οἱ μεγαλύτεροι δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ καταλάβουμε. Λέμε: «Γιὰτὶ θέλεις αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα; Δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετὸ γιὰ σένα ὅτι ἔγινες καλὸς ἄνθρωπος καὶ καλὸς ἐπιστήμονας κι ἔχεις τὴ δουλειά σου καὶ προσφέρεις στὸν κόσμο καὶ στὴν κοινωνία; Τὰ περισσότερα τὶ τὰ θέλεις; Αὐτὰ εἶναι ὑπερβολές, εἶναι φανατισμοί, ἐκκεντρικότητες, ἄρρωστα πράγματα». Γιὰτὶ ὅμως ἐκφράζουμε τέτοιες ἀπόψεις; Διότι μετροῦμε τὴ ζωὴ μας ὄχι μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν καθηκοντολογία. «Τὸ καθήκον σου νὰ κάνεις καὶ εἶναι ἀρκετό».

Ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀγάπη, ἀδελφοί μου, δὲν ἔχει ὄρια. «Όταν ἀγαπᾶς τὸν Θεό, δὲν ἔχει ὄρια. Ὅπως καὶ ὅταν ἀγαπᾶς ὁποιοδήποτε ἄνθρωπο. Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾶς ἓναν ἄνθρωπο, θέλεις νὰ εἶσαι μαζί του, νὰ ἐνώσεις τὴ ζωὴ σου μαζί του. Μπορεῖς νὰ βάλεις ὄρια σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγάπη; Ἡ ἀγάπη εἶναι φωτιὰ πὸν καίει μέσα στὴν καρδιά τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Δὲν μπαίνει σὲ ὄρια καὶ σὲ καλούπια τῆς λογικῆς, ἀλλὰ ἐνεργεῖ ἀπὸ μόνη της, γιὰτὶ ἐνεργεῖ καρδιακὰ κι ὄχι ἐγκεφαλικά. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία διδάσκει καὶ καλεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἀγαπήσει τὸν Χριστὸ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα.

Ξέρετε, παρατηρούνταν παλαιότερα τὸ φαινόμενο στὴν Ἐκκλησία νὰ ὑπάρχουν πάρα πολλὰ παιδιά. Θυμόμαστε, ὅσοι εἴμαστε μεγαλύτεροι, ὅτι μέχρι μία ἡλικία σχεδὸν ὅλα τὰ παιδιά πῆγαιναν στὸ κατηχητικό, στὴν Ἐκκλησία, εἶχαν σχέση μετὸν Θεό. Ἀπὸ μία ἡλικία καὶ ὕστερα χάνονταν. Στὰ δεκατέσσερα, στὰ δεκαπέντε ἢ τὰ δεκαοχτώ. Ἐρχόταν ὁ στρατός, τὸ πανεπιστήμιο, ἐξαφανίζοταν ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ προσπάθεια τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τῶν κατηχητῶν, τῶν κύκλων, τῶν συνάξεων, τῶν πάντων. Γιατί, νομίζετε; Ποῦ ἦταν τὸ λάθος; Ἐντάξει βέβαια ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ἀδυναμία, οἱ ἀνθρώπινες προκλήσεις, τὰ αἷτια τὰ ὁποῖα πληθαίνουν, ὅταν μεγαλώνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Ἀλλὰ τὸ «λάθος», ἂς τὸ πῶ ἔτσι ἐντὸς εἰσαγωγικῶν, «τῆς Ἐκκλησίας», ὄχι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καθαυτῆς, ἀλλὰ ἐμᾶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἦταν ὅτι, δυστυχῶς, δὲν ἀντιληφθήκαμε ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ἔπρεπε νὰ δώσουμε στὰ παιδιά μας ἦταν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τοὺς μαθαίναμε τὶς ιδέες τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου: «Νὰ'σαι καλὸ παιδί, τίμιο παιδί, ν'ἀγαπᾶς τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, νὰ κάνεις ἐλεημοσύνες, νὰ'σαι σωστὸς ἀνθρώπος», ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν μιλούσαμε.

Ἐπειδὴ καὶ γιὰ ἐμᾶς ἡ θεολογία ἦταν ιδεολογική, φιλοσοφική, ἀνθρωποκεντρική. Ἄγνοοῦσαμε τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸ τί σημαίνει ν'ἀγαπᾶς τὸν Χριστό. Γι'αὐτὸ τὸν λόγο δὲν ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα σημαντικό γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ μάθουν νὰ νηστεύουν, νὰ ἀγρυπνοῦν, νὰ κοινωνοῦν, νὰ ἐξομολογοῦνται, νὰ διαβάζουν τοὺς βίους τῶν Ἁγίων. Ὁχι. Ἦταν ἀρκετὸ νὰ διαβάζουν ἄλλα βιβλία. Οἱ βίοι τῶν Ἁγίων παραμερίστηκαν. Ἡ ἀσκητικὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας παραμερίστηκε. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὁ ὁποῖος καλοῦνταν νὰ βιώσει τὸν Χριστὸ μέσα στὸ μυστήριο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἦταν περιθωριοποιημένος. Ἐμπαιναν ἄλλα πράγματα μπροστά.

Γι'αὐτὸ τὸν λόγο χάναμε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τὸν ἕναν μετὰ τὸν ἄλλο, μόλις πλησίαζαν στὴν ἐφηβικὴ ἡλικία. Γιατὶ βέβαια ἡ ἁμαρτία ἔχει δύναμη καὶ εἶναι ἐμπειρία. Εἶναι κάτι τὸ ὁποῖο ἐλκύει τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τὸν αἰχμαλωτίζει. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη πλευρά, τί θὰ τραβήξει τὸν ἄνθρωπο πέρα; Οἱ ιδέες; Οἱ ιδέες εἶναι νεκρὲς σκιὲς τῶν πραγμάτων. Δὲν μπορεῖ μία ιδέα νὰ σὲ κρατήσει, ὅσο ἰδεολόγος καὶ νὰ εἶσαι. Εὐτυχῶς παρῆλθε ἡ ἐποχὴ αὐτὴ καὶ σήμερα βλέπουμε ὅτι ἀνακαλύψαμε, ξαναβρήκαμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας, τὶς ρίζες μας, τὴν παράδοσή μας. Καὶ βλέπουμε νέους ἀνθρώπους στὴν Ἐκκλησία, βλέπουμε νέους ἀνθρώπους νὰ ἀγαποῦν τὸ Θεό, νὰ μπαίνουν στὴν Ἐκκλησία μετὰ νέα δεδομένα, μετὰ νέες προϋποθέσεις. Μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχουν τὶς δυσκολίες τους, τὰ προβλήματα τους, τὶς πτώσεις τους, τὶς ἀδυναμίες τους, ὅπως κι ὅλοι μας. Ἀλλὰ ἀκοῦν γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κι αὐτὸ εἶναι ποῦ πρέπει, ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ λέμε στὰ παιδιά μας. Νὰ μάθουν νὰ ἀγαποῦν τὸν Θεό.

Ὅταν ἀγαποῦν τὸν Θεό, τότε ἀνακαλύπτουν μέσα τους τὴ μεγάλη ἐμπειρία τῆς ἀγάπης Του. Τότε μαθαίνουν καὶ ἀποκοτῶν ἕνα ἰσχυρὸ πνευματικὸ ἀντίσωμα μέσα τους, τὸ ὁποῖο εἶναι ἕνα ἀντίβαρο στὸ βάρος τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Καὶ ὅτι, κι ἂν πληγωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἡ παρουσία τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Χριστοῦ παρηγορεῖ τὴν καρδιά του. Ξέρει ὅτι δὲν θὰ σωθεῖ ἀπ'τὶς δικές του δυνάμεις, δὲν θὰ σωθεῖ μετὰ τὰ δικά του δεδομένα. Ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, μετὰ τὴν εὐσπλαχνία τοῦ Θεοῦ, μετὰ τὴν ἐλεημοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ, μετὰ τὴ θυσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ πάνω στὸν Σταυρὸ γιὰ μᾶς ὅλους. Ἄν μιλοῦμε γιὰ ἀγωγή σήμερα στὴν Ἐκκλησία, μιλοῦμε ἀκριβῶς γι'αὐτὴ τὴ μύηση, γι'αὐτὴ τὴν ὁδηγία. **Νὰ βοηθήσεις τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἀγαπήσει τὸν Θεό.**



## Ἡ Ἀθεΐα Καλπάζει Παγκοσμίως!

*Ἀνωνύμου συγγραφέως.*

**Ἡ** ἀθεΐα εἶναι ἡ τρίτη «θρησκεία» στὸν κόσμο! Αὐτὸ τουλάχιστον ἰσχυρίζεται ἕρευνα σχετικὰ μετὰ τὶς θρησκείες τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας. Μετὰ τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς (ὅλων τῶν δογμάτων) καὶ τοὺς μουσουλμάνους, ἡ πλειονότητα τῶν ἀνθρώπων σήμερα παγκοσμίως εἶναι ἄθεοι. Ὁ ἕνας στοὺς ἑξὶ ἀνθρώπους δηλώνει ἄθεος!

Εἶναι ὀλοφάνερο πὼς τὰ ἀποτελέσματα τοῦ ἀθεϊσμοῦ ἀπὸ τὰ χρόνια τοῦ «διαφωτισμοῦ» ὡς τὰ σήμερα ἄρχισαν νὰ φαίνονται στὶς ἡμέρες μας. Ὁ λεγόμενος δυτικὸς «πολιτισμὸς» μετὰ τὰ παράγωγά του, ὅπως τὸν ἄκρατο φιλελευθερισμὸ, τὸν μηδενισμὸ, τὸν μαρξισμὸ καὶ ἄλλα παρακλάδια τους, κατόρθωσε νὰ ἐμβολιάσει τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα μετὰ τὴν ἐπικίνδυνη καὶ θανατηφόρα πνευματικὴ τοξίνη τῆς ἀθεΐας.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅπου δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ ἐδραιώσει τὴν ἀθεΐα, ἐγκαθιστᾷ τὴν πλάνη καὶ τὴν αἵρεση, μετὰ ἀποτέλεσμα σήμερα νὰ διατελεῖ ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα στὴν χειρότερη πνευματικὴ κατάπτωση ὅλων τῶν ἐποχῶν. Εἶναι ὄντως τραγωδία νὰ δηλώνουν τόσο μεγάλο ποσοστὸ ἀνθρώπων ὡς ἄθεοι, διότι στὸ παρελθὸν ἡ ἀθεΐα ἦταν σπάνιο φαινόμενο καὶ περιορισμένο.

Ἄν μὴ τὶ ἄλλο μπορεῖ νὰ σημαίνει τὸ φαινόμενο αὐτό, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν προφητευμένη ἀποστασία τῶν ἐσχάτων; Κρατήστε ἀδέλφια τὴν πίστη μας, μόνο αὐτὴ μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς σώσει διότι «αὕτη ἡ πίστις τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐστήριξεν» κατὰ τὸ «συνοδικό» τῆς ἁγίας Ζ' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου!

## Τέτοιος Λαός, Τέτοιοι Άρχοντες

Από τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Ν. Φαρουδάκη «Μαῦροι καὶ Ἄσπροι».

Πέθανε κάποτε ὁ ἄρχοντας μιᾶς πολιτείας κι οἱ κήρυκες καλέσανε τὸ λαὸ νὰ παραστεῖ στὴν ἐκλογή τοῦ καινούριου. Ἡ ἐκλογή γινότανε μὲ ἓνα ἐντελῶς πρωτότυπο τρόπο. Μαζεύονταν οἱ ὑποψήφιοι— ὑποψήφιος μποροῦσε νὰ ἦταν ὅποιος ἤθελε, ἀκόμα κι ἀγράμματος καὶ κουρελῆς—μπροστὰ ἀπὸ τὰ Ἀνάκτορα καὶ περιμέναν. Στὴν ὀρισμένη ὥρα ἔβγαινε ὁ ἀρμόδιος ὑπάλληλος στὸν ἐξώστη καὶ πετοῦσε στὸ πλῆθος τῶν ὑποψηφίων ἓνα μῆλο ποὺ κρατοῦσε στὸ χέρι του. Ὅποιον χτυποῦσε τὸ μῆλο, αὐτὸς γινόταν ἄρχοντας, μὲ ἀπεριόριστα δικαιώματα πάνω σ' ὅλη τὴ χώρα.

Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ὑποψηφίους, αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ, ἦταν καὶ δυὸ τσομπαναραῖοι, ποὺ παρατήσανε τὴ στάνη καὶ τὰ γίδια τους πάνω στὰ κατσάβραχα κι ἦρθαν στὴ μεγάλη πόλη, γιὰ νὰ δοκιμάσουν κι αὐτοὶ τὴν τύχη τους στὴν ἐκλογή τοῦ νέου ἄρχοντα. Τὸν ἓνα τὸν λέγανε Γιάννο καὶ τὸν ἄλλο Μῆτρο. Οἱ τσομπαναραῖοι αὐτοὶ ἦταν παιδικοὶ φίλοι, μέχρι ποὺ παίζανε καρπαζιὲς καὶ κάνανε καὶ διάφορα ἄλλα ἀστεῖα, ποὺ ἔδειχναν τὴν μεγάλη οἰκειότητα, ποὺ εἶχανε μεταξὺ τους. Στὸ δρόμο ποὺ πηγαίνανε γιὰ τὴν ἐκλογή συζητούσανε καὶ λέγανε τὰ σχέδιά τους, γιὰ τὸ τί θὰ ἔκανε καθένας σὲ περίπτωση ποὺ θὰ τὸν εὐνοοῦσε ἢ τὴν τύχη καὶ θὰ γινότανε ἄρχοντας.

Λέει ὁ Γιάννος: Ἐγώ, ἐάν ἐκλεγῶ, θὰ καταργήσω ὅλους τοὺς φόρους, θὰ δώσω δικαιοσύνη σ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, θὰ ἐξαλείψω τὴ φτώχεια, θὰ ἀνοίξω σχολεῖα νὰ μαθαίνουν ὅλοι γράμματα δωρεάν, θὰ χτίσω σπίτια σ' ὅλους, θὰ καταργήσω τὸ στρατιωτικὸ καὶ γενικὰ θὰ κάνω ὅ,τι εἶναι καλὸ καὶ εὐχάριστο στὸν κόσμο.

Λέει κι ὁ Μῆτρος: Ἐγώ, ἐάν ἐκλεγῶ, θὰ κάνω ἐντελῶς τὰ ἀντίθετα. Θὰ κάμω ὅ,τι μπορῶ, γιὰ νὰ καταστρέψω καὶ νὰ ἐξαχρειώσω τοὺς ἀνθρώπους...

Ἐτσι συζητώντας φθάσανε μπροστὰ στὰ Ἀνάκτορα. Ἀνακατευθῆκανε μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους ὑποψηφίους καὶ περιμένανε. Βγαίνει σὲ λίγο ὁ ὑπάλληλος στὸ μπαλκόνι, πετάει τὸ μῆλο, καὶ κείνο πηγαίνει κατευθεῖαν, σάν συστημένο, καὶ χτυπάει, ποῖον νομίζετε;— τὸν Μῆτρο!... Ὅλοι στραφήκανε καὶ κοιτάξανε ζηλόφθονα τὸν ἄγνωστο τσομπάνη, ποὺ μύριζε τραγίλα, μὰ ποὺ ὡστόσο ἦτανε πιά ὁ ἄρχοντας τῆς Πολιτείας!

Οἱ δυὸ φίλοι ἀποχαιρετηθῆκανε κι ὁ μὲν Γιάννος γύρισε στὴ στάνη του, ὁ δὲ Μῆτρος ἀνέβηκε τὰ σκαλιὰ τοῦ παλατιοῦ καὶ σὲ λίγες ὥρες γίνηκε ἀγνωρίστος μὲ τὰ χρυσοῦφанта φορέματα καὶ τὸ ἀδαμαντοκόλλητο στέμμα τῆς ἐξουσίας. Σωματοφύλακες τὸν παράστεκαν, γραφιάδες στέκαν προσοχὴ καὶ περιμένανε νὰ γράψουνε τοὺς καινούριους νόμους καὶ τίς καινούριες διαταγές.

Ἐβγαλε λοιπὸν διαταγὴ ὁ νέος ἄρχοντας ποὺ ἔλεγε τὰ ἐξῆς: Ἀπὸ σήμερα κλείνουν ὅλα τὰ σχολεῖα, τὰ γράμματα ἀπαγορεύονται ὡς περιττὰ καὶ ἐπιζήμια. Ἀμέσως νὰ γκρεμισθοῦν ὅλα τὰ γεφύρια σ' ὅλο τὸ κράτος καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ περνᾶνε μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ νερό. Ἀπαγορεύεται νὰ φορτώνονται τὰ ὑποζύγια. Ὅποιος θέλει νὰ μεταφέρει πράγματα, θὰ τὰ μεταφέρει στὴν πλάτη του. Ὅσοι πεθαίνουν στὸ σπίτι τους, δὲν θὰ τοὺς βγάζουν ἀπὸ τὴν πόρτα, ἀλλὰ θὰ γκρεμίζουν τὴ σκεπὴ καὶ θὰ τοὺς βγάζουν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ! Καὶ ἄλλα τέτοια παρόμοια διέταξε ὁ νέος ἄρχοντας καὶ τὸ σπουδαιότερο, ὅποιος παρουσιασθεῖ γιὰ νὰ κάμει ὀποιοδήποτε παράπονο, νὰ ἀποκεφαλίζεται ἀμέσως!

Διάβασε ὁ λαὸς κι οἱ προύχοντες τίς νέες διαταγές καὶ μείνανε κόκκαλο.

—Τρελλὸς ἄρχοντας μᾶς βγήκε, σκέφτονταν, μὰ ποῖος τολμοῦσε νὰ πάει νὰ κάνει παράπονο; Ἡ φρουρὰ εἶχε ἐντολὴ νὰ τὸν ἀποκεφαλίζει ἀμέσως.

Ἐτσι τὰ πράγματα βαδίζανε στὸ ἀπροχώρητο. Γκρεμίστηκαν τὰ γεφύρια, καὶ τὰ ποτάμια πνίγανε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Δὲν ἀρκεῖ ποὺ ἔχανε κανεὶς τὸν ἀνθρώπο του, τοῦ γκρέμιζαν καὶ τὸ σπίτι του. Ὁ λαὸς ἄρχισε νὰ μὴ ὑποφέρει τὴν κατάσταση. Κάποια λύση ἔπρεπε νὰ βρεθεῖ. Τότε οἱ προύχοντες θυμηθῆκανε τὸν Γιάννο, τὸν τσοπάνο, τὸν φίλο τοῦ ἄρχοντα.

—Μονάχα αὐτὸς μπορεῖ νὰ πάει νὰ πει μιὰ κουβέντα στὸν ἄρχοντα καὶ νὰ μᾶς σώσει, εἶπανε καὶ στείλανε καὶ τὸν φέρανε ἀπὸ τὸ βουνό.

Παρουσιάσθηκε ὁ Γιάννος, ὁ τσοπάνος, στὸν φίλο του τὸν Μῆτρο, τὸν ἄρχοντα, γνωρίσθηκαν, μίλησαν ἐγκάρδια μεταξὺ τους καὶ ρώτησαν ὁ ἓνας γιὰ τὰ νέα τοῦ ἄλλου.

—Ἐγώ, εἶπε ὁ Γιάννος, περνῶ τὸ ἴδιο ὅπως πάντα. Τὰ ξέρεις δὲ τὰ καλὰ τὰ τοῦ χωριοῦ. Πότε οἱ λύκοι μᾶς τρῶνε τὰ πρόβατα, πότε ἡ ξηρασία, πότε τὰ χιόνια, ὅλο καὶ κάτι βρίσκεται, γιὰ νὰ μὴ βλέπουμε πρόσωπο Θεοῦ. Ἐσὺ πῶς τὰ περνᾶς;

—Ἐγώ, εἶπε ὁ Μῆτρος, εἶμαι μιὰ χαρά. Ὅ,τι θέλω λέω κι ὅ,τι λέω γίνεται. Σκέφτομαι πολλές φορές, τί κουτοὶ ποὺ εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι! Θέλουνε κάποιον νὰ τὸν λένε ἀφέντη, νὰ εἶναι αὐτοὶ δοῦλοι, νὰ νιώθουν ἥσυχοι!

—Καλὰ εἶναι αὐτά, τὸν διακόπτει μὲ ἀφέλεια ὁ τσοπάνος, μὰ αὐτὲς οἱ διαταγές ποὺ ἔβγαλες εἶναι σωστὸ τρελλοκομεῖο! Ὁ κόσμος βρίσκεται σὲ ἀναστάτωση...

—Ἐπειδὴ εἶσαι ὁ μόνος φίλος μου, τὸν διακόπτει μὲ αὐστηρὸ ὕφος ὁ ἄρχοντας, γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ θὰ γλυτώσεις τὸ κεφάλι σου. Ἐάν ἄλλη φορὰ ἔλθεις γιὰ παράπονα, κανεὶς δὲ θὰ μπορέσει νὰ σὲ γλυτώσει. Τὶ λέγαμε ὅταν ἐρχόμασταν γιὰ τὴν ἐκλογή; Ἐσὺ εἶχες πει πῶς θὰ ἔκανες ὅ,τι μποροῦσες γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἐγώ εἶχα πει πῶς θὰ ἔκανα τὸ ἀντίθετο. Πῶς θὰ ἔκανα δηλαδὴ

ὅ,τι μπορούσα γιὰ τὸ κακὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Εἶναι ἔτσι ἢ δὲν εἶναι; Γιατὶ λοιπὸν τὸ μῆλο δὲν χτύπησε σένα, ἀλλὰ χτύπησε μένα; Αὐτὸ σημαίνει, ἀγαπητέ μου, πὼς τέτοιος λαός, παράνομος καὶ δυσσεβής, ποὺ λέει κι ὁ παπᾶς, τέτοιο ἄρχοντα θέλει. Ἄν ἦταν ἄξιος γιὰ καλύτερο ἄρχοντα, νὰ εἶσαι βέβαιος πὼς ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἔφερνε τὸ μῆλο σὲ σένα κι ὄχι σὲ μένα...

—Κι ὕστερα, γιατί ἔχουν ἀπαίτηση νὰ ἔχουνε καλὴ διοίκηση, ἀφοῦ οἱ ἴδιοι δὲν εἶναι ἐντάξει; Μιλᾶνε γιὰ γράμματα. Κι ὅμως, ποῖς ἔγινε καλύτερος μ' αὐτά; Μαθαίνουνε γράμματα οἱ πονηροὶ καὶ γίνονται πονηρότεροι! Παραπονιοῦνται ποὺ σηκώνουν τὶς ἀποσκευές τους στὴν πλάτη τους. Κι ὅμως καθένας τους τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν σκέφτεται παρὰ τὸ πὼς νὰ καθήσει στὸ σβέροκο τοῦ ἀλλουνοῦ καὶ νὰ ζεῖ σὲ βάρος του! Φωνάζουν πού, ὅταν πεθάνει κανεὶς, τοῦ γκρεμίζουν τὸ σπίτι του. Κι ὅμως αὐτοὶ τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν κάνουνε σ' ὅλη τους τὴ ζωὴ παρὰ νὰ γκρεμίζουν τὴν τιμὴ, τὴν γαλήνη, τὴν ἐργασία, τὴ ζωὴ, ὁ ἕνας τοῦ ἄλλου!

—Ὅπως βλέπεις λοιπὸν, ἀγαπητέ μου, ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἄρχοντας ἀπολύτως στὰ μέτρα τους. Γι' αὐτὸ νὰ μὴ μιλάει κανεὶς. Ὅ,τι ἄξιζαν, αὐτὸ βρῆκαν. Πήγαινε, λοιπὸν, καὶ σὺ στὰ γίδια σου κι ἄσε καὶ μένα στὰ δικὰ μου. Γιδο-πρόβατα ἐσύ, γιδο-λαὸ ἐγώ...

† † †

Ἡ ἱστορία, ὅπως βλέπετε, ἀγαπητοὶ ἀναγνώστες, εἶναι πολὺ ἀπλή. Χρειάζεται ἄραγε σχόλιο; Ἄς φροντίσουμε ὅλοι νὰ γίνουμε ἄξιοι καλύτερων ἀρχόντων, καλύτερων νόμων, καλύτερης πολιτείας, ἄρα καὶ καλύτερης ζωῆς. καὶ τότε αὐτὰ μόνα τους θὰ ἔλθουν.

Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο εἶναι ἡ μόνη σωτηρία καὶ γιὰ τὸ ἄτομο καὶ γιὰ τὸ σύνολο. Σ' ἕνα Χριστιανικὰ ξυπνημένο λαὸ εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ σταθοῦν ἄρχοντες διεφθαρμένοι, ἄθεοι, φαταούληδες, μασόνοι. Γι' αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ ξυπνήσει ὁ λαός...



**Ο** Μοναχισμὸς διέσωσε καὶ θὰ διασώσῃ καὶ πάλι τὴν ἀκεραιότητα τῆς Πίστεως καὶ τὴν Θεογνωσία, διὰ τῆς ἐμπειρίας τῆς προσωπικῆς κοινωνίας μὲ τὸν Θεό. Προασπισταὶ πάντοτε τῶν Δογμάτων καὶ τῶν Ἀληθειῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας οἱ Μοναχοί, πολέμιοι τῶν αἰρέσεων καὶ θεματοφύλακες τῆς Παραδόσεως, θὰ ἀποτελέσουν καὶ σήμερα, **μὲ τὸ γνήσιο Ὁρθόδοξο αἰσθητήριό τους καὶ μὲ τὸ ὁμολογιακὸ φρόνημά τους**, τὴν προφυλακὴν στὸν ὑπουλο κίνδυνο τοῦ συγκρητισμοῦ καὶ σὲ κάθε ἐπιβουλή κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας.

**Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν καὶ πάσης Ἑλλάδος  
Χριστόδουλος (+28 Ἰαν. 2008)**

## Ὁ Ἅγιος Γέροντας Πορφύριος Μᾶς Μαθαίνει νὰ Λέμε τὴν Εὐχή

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Ἀνθολόγιο Συμβουλῶν» Ἁγίου Γέροντος Πορφυρίου.

**Ε**να ἀπόγευμα ξεκινήσαμε μιὰ παρέα γιὰ τὰ Καλλισία. Ἐξω ἀπὸ τὸ κελὶ τοῦ Γέροντα, στὴν αὐλή, συναντήσαμε πλῆθος προσκυνητῶν ποὺ περιμέναν. Ἦμασταν τελευταῖοι. Ὅταν ἦλθε ἡ σειρὰ μας, εἶχε νυχτώσει. Τὸν εἶδαμε ἕνας-ἕνας κι ὅταν τελειώσαμε, ὁ Γέροντας μᾶς ξεπροβόδισε ὡς ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ Μοναστήρι. Ἄν καὶ κατάκοπος, ἔδειχνε εὐδιάθετος. Ἦταν μιὰ ὁμορφη καλοκαιρινὴ νύχτα. Τὸ ἀεράκι φουσοῦσε ἀνάλαφρα καὶ ἡ πανσέληνος εἶχε ἀνατείλει ἀπ' τοὺς ἀντικρινοὺς πευκόφυτους λόφους.

Μέσα σ' αὐτὸ τὸ εἰδυλλιακὸ τοπίο, ποὺ τὸ ἀσήμωνε τὸ ὠχρὸ φῶς τοῦ φεγγαριοῦ καὶ μεταμόρφωνε ἀπόκοσμα ὅλα τὰ γύρω, ἔμψυχα καὶ ἄψυχα, ὁ Γέροντας θεώρησε κατάλληλη τὴ στιγμὴ νὰ μᾶς μιλήσῃ γιὰ τὴν προσευχή. Δὲ μᾶς μίλησε θεωρητικά, ἀλλὰ πρακτικά. Πάντοτε ὁ Γέροντας «πράττων ἐδίδασκε».

Ἦμασταν τέσσερις τῆς παρέας, κι ὁ Γέροντας πέντε. Μᾶς τοποθέτησε, μὲ μέτωπο στὴν ἀνατολή, δυὸ στὰ δεξιὰ καὶ δυὸ στὰ ἀριστερά του, στὸ μέσον ἐκεῖνος. Καὶ μᾶς εἶπε: «Τώρα θὰ κάνουμε νοερὰ προσευχή. Θὰ λέω ἐγὼ πρῶτα τὰ λόγια κι ὕστερα θὰ τὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνετε ἐσεῖς. Ἀλλὰ προσέξτε, χωρὶς βία καὶ ἄγχος. Θὰ τὰ λέτε ἡρεμα, ταπεινά, μὲ ἀγάπη, μὲ γλύκα».

Ἄρχισε ὁ Γέροντας, μ' ἐκείνη τὴ λεπτὴ, τρυφερή, ἐκφραστικὴ φωνή του: «*Κύριε, Ἰησοῦ, Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με*». Τὸ ἔλεγε ἀργὰ ἀργὰ, μία μία λέξη, χωρὶς καθόλου βία, σὰν νὰ εἶχε μπροστά του τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ νὰ τὸν παρακαλοῦσε, κάνοντας μιὰ μεγαλύτερη παύση στὸ «Χριστέ» καὶ χρωματίζοντας παρακαλεστικὰ τὸ «ἐλέησόν με». Κι ἐμεῖς, κάθε φορὰ ἐπαναλαμβάναμε, προσπαθώντας νὰ μιμηθοῦμε τὴ στάση του, τὸ χρῶμα τῆς φωνῆς του, κι ἂν ἦταν δυνατό, τὴν ψυχικὴ του διάθεση.

Κάποια στιγμὴ ὁ Γέροντας σταμάτησε νὰ λέει μεγαλόφωνα τὴν προσευχή καὶ συνέχισαν νὰ τὴν ψιθυρίζουν τὰ χεῖλη του. Κάναμε κι ἐμεῖς τὸ ἴδιο. Πόσο κράτησε αὐτὴ ἡ νυκτερινὴ προσευχή μας; Δὲν θυμάμαι. Τὸ μόνο ποὺ θυμάμαι εἶναι μιὰ συγκίνηση, ποὺ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ τὴν ἐκφράσω μὲ ἀνθρώπινα λόγια.

Κάποτε διέκοψε τὴ θεία ἐκείνη σιγή, λέγοντας: «Ἄς σταματήσουμε ἐδῶ τὴν κοινὴ προσευχή. Συνεχίστε τὴν μόνοι σας. Ἄντε τώρα νὰ πᾶτε στὸ καλὸ στὰ σπίτια σας». Καθὼς ἀπομακρυνόμασταν, γύρισα πίσω τὸ κεφάλι καὶ διέκρινα κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ σελιγνόφως, τὴ σεβάσμιμα σιλουέτα τοῦ Γέροντα, ποὺ στεκόταν ὄρθιος κοντὰ στὰ βράχια, μὲ τὸ χέρι ὑψωμένο, καὶ μᾶς εὐλογοῦσε...

## THE VALUE OF TIME

### [THE “NUMBER” 8,760]

By the late Rev. Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kantiotis of Florina (+2010), from the weekly bulletin “Kyriaki” («Κυριακή», “Sunday”), January 1, 2005 [translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen]. Originally published in *Orthodox Heritage*, vol. 04, issue no. 12, pp. 1-3.



On midnight of December 31<sup>st</sup>, when the clocks reach exactly 12:00, one full year—with all of its joys and sorrows—is fully erased, and a new year rises. The previous year becomes part of history; all of its 365 days are left behind, a simple memory.

My dear brethren, did you ever think, I mean truly contemplate about the time period of these 365 days that on each December 31<sup>st</sup> becomes part of our own history? What have we truly accomplished during its duration? Let me assure you that all of us are immensely indebted for all of these days. In an effort to provide a notion of our responsibility as well as accountability for each year of our earthly lives, I will draw you a picture and provide you a comparative example; I will present a small parable.

There was a king with many subjects who carried great fondness and devotion for all of his kingdom’s citizenry. He loved them all very much, every single one of them, without any exception. One day, he decided to give them all a gift. He prepared and distributed purses filled with gold coins, one to each citizen. The grateful subjects opened the purses up and begun counting the coins within. They each counted them, over and over, again and again... All of them had the exact same quantity of gold within their respective purse: 8,760 coins! This was a significant amount of gold. The good and loving king gave it to them out of his goodwill and love, so that they could each use it for their own benefit and the benefit of their fellow men. And do you know what each of them did with their respective small fortune? You could have never guessed it! Instead of using this blessed inheritance for their home, neighbor or society, they each went by the river bank, opened up their purses and began throwing the gold coins away into the deep river water, one by one, until all of their small fortune was completely gone and their purses stood empty. If any one of us had been there observing them, what might we have said? Surely all of us would have assumed that they had all gone mad.

My brethren, this is where my simple parable ends. Now who is this loving king? He is our God. Who are these senseless citizens? We are the King’s citizenry. And what is

this 8,760 number? Grab a pencil and paper and figure it out. Every day that passes by has 24 hours and all of the year has 365 days. If we multiply the 365 days with the 24 hours of each day, we then determine that an entire year contains 8,760 hours; these are then the hours that each year of our life has to offer. From January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year to the next December 31<sup>st</sup> that follows 8,760 hours will have passed. I thus repeat my question: What have we truly accomplished during the duration of the year we are about to leave behind? Have we made it a worthwhile year? Did we add any value? Or, perhaps we are all like those foolish citizens that threw away all of their 8,760 gold coins. Let us then make an examination, each one of us on our own, and let us evaluate and estimate the usefulness of last year’s 8,760 hours that are about to draw to a close.

Among all of these hours, was there any time set aside for listening to the divine word of God and for the study of Holy Scriptures? Were there any days that we ran to a Church to listen to sermons or attend Church services? How about opening and studying the Bible? Did we do that? If the answer is yes, then we may consider ourselves blessed. This is how the Psalter begins. We read that “blessed” is that person, happy and with good fortune. Who does the Psalmist refer to? Is it the person that has lots of money, apartment buildings, businesses, limousines, and enjoys the finest of worldly entertainment? Not quite; the Psalmist says: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* (Ps 1:1-2). Blessed is he who takes time to place the Holy Bible in his hands and read it. I thus ask all of us: During the year that is coming to an end, did our angel see us hold the Holy Gospel in our hands and read it on a regular basis? Christ Himself tells us: *Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.* (Lk 11:28).

We are coming to the close of this year’s 8,760 hours. I ask another question: During this entire year, were there hours regularly devoted to prayer? During the earlier years of Christianity, the faithful would dedicate hours upon hours for the purpose of prayer. Does our angel ever “catch us” on our knees, in prayer to our Heavenly Father? Oh if we only knew the great power of prayer and how much we truly lose by not making prayer a companion to our daily life. There would have been so many unsolved problems (personal, family, professional, etc.) that would simply find rapid solutions if, and only if, we used this invaluable key to unlock such solutions; the key of prayer is just another valuable gift granted to us by our God and Creator. What great comfort and consolation can be found when we whisper *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and all of Your saints, have mercy upon me!*

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During this time, were there any hours or days of fasting? There are certain days such as Wednesdays and Fridays, and others that are even more significant, such as Holy Friday, that must be days of fasting for all of us. A politician dedicated 15 straight days for his campaign, and vested several towns. When he returned to his office, he pridefully announced: "I traveled for 15 days straight and toured 15 different towns, In every single one I was treated and fed as royalty; freshly slaughtered meat every single day..." And one of the villagers that heard him, a shepherd, asked him in a soft tone: "Your Excellency, how can there be no Wednesday and no Friday for 15 days straight? Was every day a Pascha?..." You see, my brethren, fasting is nowadays not even a "custom" among many of our faithful—there is no desire or will to fast even on Great Friday! Satan has gotten hold of the special eraser and wiped out fasting from the daily lives of Christians.

This year's 8,760 hours are ending. Among these hours was time set aside for repentance and confession? These hours would have been the year's most blessed ones for that is the time that we placed the devil on the ground and stampeded him while angels in Heaven are singing divine victory hymns. It was during those hours that we the sinful ones, full of contrition and in utmost humility, knelt in front of our spiritual father and opened up our lips to whisper not words of criticism and condemnation but the ones that our Lord thrives to listen to: I sinned my Lord, please, grant your mercy upon me the wretched one... And all of us have so many sins to repent for and confess... So, I ask all of us, during this last year, did we manage to spend time with our confessor, to open our heart, to tearfully confess our sins and then say *God be merciful to me a sinner* and *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom*? (Lk 18:13 & 23:42). Did we do this? If not, we better ask ourselves why not.

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. Is it possible that we might have also forgotten the other golden hours of the year that are coming to a close? Which hours are these, you ask? These are the hours of almsgiving and mercy towards our fellow man. Did you reach into your pocket and silently, secretly and with as little attention as possible place a few crumbs from your many blessings into the hands of a less fortunate man? Did you dedicate a few moments in prayer for a neighbor or a colleague who was in a moment of crisis? Did you spend a few dimes from your earthly blessings towards a Christian mission or cause? Never forget that the hands that spread goodness and alms are the hands of God, the hands of Christ!

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During these hours were there any of the most significant and spiritually highest moments, the moments of receiving Holy Communion, our Lord's holy Body and most precious Blood? These are indeed blessed moments; once we

repent and confess our sins, once we are cleansed with tears of true repentance, once we embrace and make peace with our enemies, we approach the Royal Gate with the look of the thief on the cross and receive the Holy Mysteries: *Take, eat; this is my body... Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* (Mt 26:28). These are the moments that carry a unique and incomparable weight and significance; there is no price for them and can neither be purchased nor sold. They are truly above all other hours of our life.

So now we all need to ask: Were there such hours for any of you my brethren, and most pointedly for me the wretched one? I am greatly afraid that in reality we have no such hours. Our hours are almost exclusively hours of sin, the devil's hours; they are everything and anything except one thing; hours of God. Let us not kid ourselves; we waste each year's hours like all those who threw their gold coins into the river.

We truly are inexcusable. Our Holy Gospel says that, during the time of our Lord's time on earth, the citizens of Jerusalem showed great interest in spiritual matters. When they heard that a preacher and confessor came to the area, St. John the Forerunner, they closed their shops, took their wives and children, walked for several miles past the Jordan river, and came to the desolate desert to listen to his sermons and confess their sins. And all of them *were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins* (Mk 1:5). In comparison with the faithful of those days, most of the so-called Orthodox Christians today remain completely indifferent on such matters. The bells ring yet they stay away from Churches. In the not-too-distant past, when the faithful could find no confessor in their area, they would travel for days to go to the Holy Mountain to find a spiritual father and partake of the Holy Sacrament of confession. In our days, this is an extremely rare occurrence for most of our neighbors and friends.

One year is comprised of 8,760 hours and each week has 168 hours. My fellow brethren, let us dedicate to God a couple of hours each week and make our way to our local Church so we can at least attend Liturgy. We anxiously throw away so many hours each week on worldly matters; is it not proper to devote at least a couple of hours for our God? We have completely forgotten Him and have literally pushed Him out of our lives. Putting it simply, we have forgotten Him. We are an adulteress generation, like trees that bear no fruit and are fit to be only fuel for fire. Our Lord represented this type of condition very accurately during His homily at the mountain: *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* (Mt 7:19).

What is it then that we should do, you ask. Why are you asking me or any of your clergy? The answers lie elsewhere, in black and white, as written by St. John the Evangelist. What does he have to tell us? One simple word that is the one and

only key: Repent! (*Repent ye: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand*, Mt 3:2). In other words, change your mind, your behavior, your life, your daily spiritual path; the road that our ultra-progressive society has carved for the citizens of our days leads the faithful to the deep, dreaded canyon of eternal damnation, Hell. That is the destination towards where most of us are marching; unless we choose here and now to change, re-program our lives, use wisely every minute granted to us by our Lord. Let us stop wasting time now, let us stop throwing our gold coins senselessly into the river.

My dear brethren, if we could hear the repeated petitions of those judged to eternal damnation, those countless souls in Hades, do you know what we would hear them ask? To return to life for a little time, a few moments, a few seconds, so that they can emphatically pronounce: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son and Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Lk 15:21 & 23:42). Let us therefore waste no more time. Let us all comprehend how much we have lost, the countless hours we have wasted. Let us repent, let us shed tears of contrition and kneel in the sight of a spiritual father, let us confess our sins. Starting with this January 1<sup>st</sup>, let us commit to make full use of our God-granted time, let us not waste a single one of next year's precious hours. Let us promise God that this year, we will not grant or allow the devil to take possession of even a single hour. All of next year's hours, all of next year's days, all of next year's weeks, and all the days of our lives will be spent near God, near His angels, near His Most Holy Mother so that we can be worthy of the blessings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ unto the ages of ages. Amen.



**K**eept the eyes of your soul wide open; guard your senses, both those of the body (primarily the eyes) as well as those of the soul (especially by keeping the mind from wandering). This is necessary because it is through these senses that all the poisonous germs of spiritual diseases creep in. And thus, in time, the careless Christian contracts many diseases and loses the invaluable health of his immortal soul.

Adultery of the soul occurs very easily when we allow filthy thoughts with their corresponding fantasies within us to overcome us. My child, be careful with your eyes if you want to conquer the demon of lust. Likewise, it is no less dangerous to look at indecent images, newspapers, magazines, etc.

**Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona**  
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

## AN EARTHQUAKE OF SORTS IS TAKING PLACE IN AMERICA

*By Maria Stroganova, 06 July 2015. An Interview with Archpriest Victor Potapov, Rector of St. John the Baptist in Washington D. C., a cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, regarding the reaction to the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States. This is a translated article from "Pravmir.com. Orthodox Christianity and the World, The Daily Website on How to be an Orthodox Christian Today."*

**F**ather Victor, please tell us how the Orthodox of America reacted to the decision of the US Supreme Court recognizing the legitimacy of same-sex marriage throughout the country?

– To tell you the truth, we feel like we are in mourning. Of course, no one was surprised that it happened. We all understood that the majority of the Supreme Court would vote in favor of the decision to register same-sex marriages. It all started a long time ago, and over a year ago, the Supreme Court declared the Marriage Protection Act illegal. Now this is the result.

Of course, homosexuals claim that they are looking for equality in civil life and they want gay husbands and wives to have the right to visit each other in the hospital, inherit property, to have children, and the rights which are provided to traditional couples. I think, though, they actually are pursuing other goals. Just this morning, I read an interview with a rather famous Russian emigrant, Masha Gessen, who has long been an activist in the LGBT movement. She, of course, is an anarchist, but they listen to her opinion in America, and she said: "Our goal is to destroy marriage as an institution, so that there is no longer the concept of marriage." Her words need to be taken very seriously.

I am also very concerned about what will happen next. What group will now demand equality. Now someone might say: Why not, for example, legalize polygamy? This already occurred in American history among Mormons, and now people are talking about it again. Why can't a man have several wives,—and a woman a few husbands? Moreover, isn't it, in some sense, more natural than same-sex marriage? So who knows what awaits us—and what will they now teach our children and grandchildren in school?

It is really disturbing for all of us, because now, homosexuality is considered the norm, it will be introduced into the school curriculum, children will grow up with it, and will get used to it. It is still being debated in the school boards of various regions of America. In some places they defend the traditional approach to teaching children about gender and others, who are more liberal, have simply told children, that a child may have two fathers, without a mother, and non-traditional families are presented as the norm.

We know what will then happen. Now that same-sex marriage has been legalized in the country, it has just become a matter of time before propaganda will be promoted throughout the schools. Parents who are unhappy and have other views can homeschool children or send them to religious schools, but in ordinary schools, everything will be “under the law.”

**Are the Orthodox of America united in having a negative opinion of the law?**

– So far they are virtually united, but already in some Orthodox jurisdictions priests are beginning to take positions. For example, a priest of the Orthodox Church in America in Boston is talking about the possibility of accepting same-sex couples.

Unfortunately, over the last fifteen years, homosexual propaganda has been being circulated and many have already been influenced. Even some Orthodox say: “Well, it is not that bad. Let them do what they want. It doesn’t concern us.” That earthquake of sorts that is occurring, though, is changing the order established by God. It is terrible that we are encroaching on the will of God.

Of course, to a certain extent, we Christians are to blame for what happened. I see that marriage is not revered in Russia or in America. Young people are fine to live together, and only after 5 or 6 years decide to have a church marriage, but prayer in the wedding rite is addressed to a chaste couple. Can you imagine, we, priests, marrying people who already have children. I am not talking about the older generation that did not know the Church, but about the current generation of young people. We do not honor marriage properly as a Divinely established institution.

That said, of course, Patriarch Iliya of Georgia and the Mid-American Diocese of ROCOR condemned the decision of the Supreme Court, also remembering that we have to despise the sin, but are required to love the sinner.

There is another danger, though. We recently learned that in the UK, a rich gay couple is suing the Church of England, wanting the opportunity to marry. So, an attack on the Church has already begun. In general, people are afraid to say anything bad about the homosexual lifestyle, because anyone who is against it is immediately accused of homophobia and misanthropy. Our freedom of speech has already been limited and I am afraid that in time, it will become worse and worse.

**Have you had such a precedent, so that this sort of couple has come and asked to be married?**

– No, there hasn’t been. There was, however, a so-called Orthodox Christian who leads this way of life and he asked if he could get married in our church. Of course, we told him that it is absolutely impossible. This, though, was the only instance—and of course, if such efforts are made in the future, we will flatly refuse.

Every person is a child of God, and everyone deserves to receive attention and pastoral care. After all, we help the infirm and mentally ill and don’t turn anyone away. We all need God’s help, but cannot allow sin.

**Is such a development in America possible, that eventually pressure will be put on the Church and the Church will be required to accept gay marriage?**

– Yes, it is possible. Nothing surprises me. Of course, I can’t predict this, but could we have expected 15 years ago that same-sex marriage would be legalized? It’s mind boggling, especially so quickly.

The other day I was listening to an interview with a representative of the gay movement, and the interviewer asked: “What’s next?”

“Next, we are going to set out to other countries. We are going to carry out our policy in other countries where it is prohibited.”

Last year, I was in Georgia and when gay parades were organized there, the Orthodox were outraged and resisted. Now, though, if they want to join the European Union, it will simply require them to hold gay parades legally and to give the country’s homosexuals full rights. Now it’s just a normal requirement.



A brother visiting Abba Poimen asked him: “My Father, how will I defend myself against the influence of thoughts?” Abba Poimen replied: “A person may have fire to his right and a vessel of water to his left. So, when the fire gains strength, let him take water from the vessel to extinguish it. By the fire, I mean the seed of the Enemy, that is, a shameful thought; by the water, I mean the capability of throwing ourselves before God and seeking His help.”

A brother asked an ascetic Father: “My Father, what am I to do; for the thoughts that war against me are many, and I do not know how to defend myself against their attacks?” The Elder replied: “My child, do not war against all of them together; but against one, the chief one. All of the thoughts that bother us have one common head: a commander, on whom they are dependent. We must, therefore, learn who this commander is, and fight against him with vehemence; whereupon, when he has been vanquished, the remaining thoughts are humbled together with him.

An Elder, skilled in instruction, expressed the following opinion: “However long you offer strands of material to Satan, he will weave ropes; for he is a rope-weaver.” He meant by this one’s thoughts: the more you pay attention to them—that is, accept them—the more they will multiply and tie themselves to you.

From the “Evergetinos”



## ON THE CREATION OF THE HUMAN BODY

By Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos.

### The Human Body According to Ancient Greek Philosophy

From ancient times, the mystery of man engaged philosophers who, as expected, studied man in relation to the “He who Is,” God. The questions of what man is, what the body is and what motivates the body are questions of utmost significance and importance.

According to one interpretation, in Greek the word body *sōma* (σῶμα) derives from the word *sēma* (σημα) meaning, “sign.” Among many other meanings, the latter word, *sēma* means a pointer showing a grave. Therefore, in this sense, the word *sōma* refers to ancient Greek philosophy, which viewed the body as a *sēma*—the grave of the soul.

Indeed, in ancient Greek tradition, there was a prevalent view of a naturally immortal soul and a naturally mortal body. Several ancient philosophers believed that man’s soul is unborn and previously belonged to the impersonal world of ideas, but when it moved from this prosperous world, God punished it and enclosed it within the body, which has constituted the prison, the grave of the soul ever since. Thus, according to this view, the salvation of the soul consists in its release from this prison and its return to the unborn world of ideas, from whence it fell, so that it would return to the prosperity of the ideal world.

In the myth of the cave, Plato demonstrates that the entire perceptible world is a bondage house, a prison, in which human souls perceive the shadows of the archetypes as reality per se. Thus, the souls have to escape the bondage house and return to the light. This is Platonic Eros. Plato himself describes the drama of the Fall of naturally eternal souls to bodies.

The middle Platonic and the Neo-Platonic philosophers, as well as other ancient systems, were influenced to varying degrees by these theories and for this reason denigrate the body. There were also other systems that overrated the beauty of the body, disregarding the value of the soul.

Many views and theories have been articulated about the world, in relation with God and man, by various philosophical and religious systems. His Eminence the Metropolitan of Pergamon John summarizes the basic teachings of ancient philosophers (and of some Christians that were influenced by philosophy) and sorts them to five views.

The first set of teachings is the theories of Gnosticism, according to which the world we live in is permeated with evil, and therefore, it is not possible for God to be its creator. Between God the Father and the world there is a hierarchy of “ages,” of which the last is the creator of the world.

The second view contains the ideas of the Neo-Platonist, Plotinus, according to which God had the world within him

and at some point brought it out to the surface. The ideas exist in God and, based on them, he creates the world from pre-existing matter. But the world created by God is not perfect, because matter and space oppose what God wished to create. The perfect world is the world of ideas.

A third view is the ideas of Philo, a Jew, who tried to combine his biblical faith with Plato. According to him, God created matter, implying that matter did not preexist. But the ideas are the thoughts of God. This view influenced Neo-Platonism, which believed that the world is an emanation from the One God, i.e. it is an extension of the thoughts of the One.

Fourth, are the theories of Origen, who was influenced by Platonic views: According to the teaching of Origen, there are two Creations: one is the eternal Creation, which includes the creation of souls, the other is Creation in time, when this eternally present world takes material form. Origen considers this creation as a fall.

It is clear that Plato’s views influenced, to varying degrees, the Gnostics, the Neo-Platonists, Jewish and Christian theologians, and those theories that diverged from Orthodox teaching on the creation of the world and of man.

Lastly, the doctrine of reincarnation is conjoined to the creation of the world. According to the doctrine of reincarnation, souls belonged to the eternal and unborn world of ideas, but afterwards, either through sin or through emanation from this world they were enclosed in the body for punishment and prison. Hence, if man is unable to purify himself and be liberated from the body, he must come back anew in other successive bodies, even animal bodies, until his soul is completely rid of sin and returns to the eternal world of ideas. Such a view denigrates the body by not considering man as a single psychosomatic unity.

### Orthodox Christianity Concerning the Body

Christian teaching on the body and on man in general differs from all metaphysical theories. The creation of man is discussed in the first books of the Bible. We read: *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.* (Gen. 1:26-28).

Some basic truths are manifested in this passage. First, it can be seen that God who created man is a Person (three Persons), not an ideal nor impersonal. He is not an assemblage of impersonal ideas.

Then it declares that man is created according to the image and likeness of God. If this passage is linked with another passage (which mentions that God formed the body from the dust of the ground and then breathed into him and thus the soul was created) it is clear that man was directly created by God in a positive way. This means that the soul did not previously live in an eternal and unborn world of ideas, but was created by God at that moment. It also means that the body is not the prison of the soul, but was formed by God at that moment, and man was formed in this way in a unity of soul and body. That is to say, the body did not exist before the soul, and the soul did not exist before the body. Man is not simply a soul or simply a body. The soul is the soul of a human person and the body is the body of a human person, i.e., man is always both, because he consists of both soul and body.

Furthermore, this passage shows the truth that man was created by God to be king, the ruler of all creation.

Therefore, the body is not the prison of the soul, but was created together with the soul in a positive way by God. Both soul and body must have a common course towards God.

However, in studying the human body from a Christian point of view we can look at five phases.

The first phase refers to how the body functioned before man's fall. Right after man's creation, the body had the grace and energy of God.

That is, the soul was in communion with God and this brightened, gave glory, to the body as well, and through the body this brilliance was extended to the whole of nature. Nicholas Cabasilas says that the soul is a looking glass or mirror. Since the soul received the energies of the light of God, it radiated this through the body to the whole of creation. This is why Adam and Eve felt no shame even though they were naked. This is an indication that the body is not to blame for what followed.

The second phase is what took place after man's Fall. As soon as man lost his communion with God, the mirror was shattered, and as a result great darkness fell upon all creation. Then Adam and Eve saw that they were naked and felt ashamed, so they tried to cover their nakedness. The body became untamed, because of sin, and all bodily passions appeared, and this means that death entered into man. The body suffered a great catastrophe, diseases appeared, and

it became weak and needed more food and clothing to be protected from changes in the weather. The body that we know today is not the body received at creation. It is not the same body as that which was created by God; rather it is the body that accepted the consequences and the results of sin, that is, death.

The third phase of the body starts with Christ's Incarnation. The Word of God assumed the human body, indeed, a mortal body, in order to bring it back to its former glory and raise it beyond where it was in the person of Adam. The Transfiguration of Christ, when His face shone like the sun and his tunic turned as white as light, shows the glorification of the human body. So, our God is not simply an idea, He is not just a Person, but the Theanthropos, both God and man, the God-man. The human body acquired great glory in the Person of the Word. We also have the opportunity to live within the Body of Christ. We are reborn

through the holy mysteries (sacraments) of the Church, the holy Baptism, the holy Chrismation, and we give glory to the body through Holy Communion. With asceticism, that is, with fasting, abstinence, etc., we do not hate and underrate the body, rather we try, with God's help, to restore it to that original condition of Adam and Eve and to raise it up even further. As the holy Fathers say, with *ascesis* (the practice of severe self-discipline) we become killers of the passions not killers of

the body, that is, we mortify the passions.

The fourth phase of the body begins with the soul's exit from it. Despite the separation of the soul, man's unity remains intact, the person, the hypostasis, remains. If someone manages with God's Grace to balance the relationship between soul and body, then his/her body becomes a holy relic. In the Orthodox Church we have several holy relics, namely bodies, which remain incorruptible, give off fragrance, and make miracles. This means that these bodies, without undergoing any chemical process, without being in certain, suitable, climate conditions, are maintained incorruptible, an indication that God's Grace is within them. Such incorruptible whole relics can be found in Corfu (St. Spyridon), Cephallonia (St. Gerasimos), Zakynthos (St. Dionysios) and in many of our Church's Monasteries. Their incorruptibility is shown by the fact that the cells in the saint's body, remain incorruptible, the saint's body has not decayed and disintegrated.



The fifth phase of the body will start with the Second Coming of Christ, when the bodies of all human beings will be resurrected. Ancient Greek philosophy did not believe in the resurrection of the body, because, as we saw before, it taught the distinction between a naturally immortal soul and a naturally mortal body. Therefore, according to this philosophy, man's salvation is the exodus of the immortal soul from the mortal body, which will disappear afterwards.

Christianity, however, does not accept this. Christianity's basic teaching is that bodies will be resurrected through the energy of God, the souls will enter their bodies and man will live eternally having both body and soul in a single unity. Of course, the bodies will be different from our present ones, i.e., they will not have corruption, mortality, or diseases; they will have a better form than the body that they had in Paradise after the Creation. St. Paul writes in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.* (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Therefore, in the Christian tradition, the body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul teaches: *Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* (1 Cor 6:19)

### The Created and the Uncreated

Orthodox Theology talks about the difference and distinction between what is created and what is uncreated. God is uncreated and the whole of nature, including man, is created.

God is not simply the Creator but also the Maker of the world. This is said because the word "create" means to construct and beautify something from pre-existing matter. But the whole of creation was made from non-existing matter. God did not make the heavens and the earth out of pre-existing matter, but He spoke and they were born, *He commanded, and they were created.* (Psalm 148:5). The evil that exists in the world does not originate from its own nature and its creation. It originates from its separation from God through the Fall of man.

As we saw above, the Orthodox Church does not believe in the distinction between a naturally eternal soul and a naturally mortal body. In other words, it does not believe that the soul used to belong to the unborn and eternal world of ideas and that the body is the prison of the soul. Instead, it believes that God created the soul and the body simultaneously and thus the whole of man was formed. The soul did not exist before the body, nor did the body exist before the soul. Therefore, man's body was created in a positive way by God and was joined with the soul. The soul is not

located in a specific part of the body but is throughout the entire body as energy.

From this perspective, the Orthodox Church rejects the theory of reincarnation, because man constitutes a unity of soul and body. There is a psychosomatic unity in man from the creation of Adam and Eve and from each man's birth. Man constitutes a person, a hypostasis, which means that the body does not vanish and that it is not the garment of the soul, which the soul has to throw away in order to assume something else. After man's death, that is, the exodus of the soul from the body, the hypostasis and the person is maintained, yet at the future resurrection of bodies, each soul will return to its own body. This constitutes a true scandal for ancient (pagan) philosophy.



A mind far from God becomes either like a beast or a demon, and once it has gone beyond the bounds of nature it desires what belongs to others and cannot satisfy its greed for gain. Such a man surrenders himself to the lusts of the flesh and recognizes no limit to self-indulgence. He dishonors himself through his deeds, but desires to be revered by all. It is his wish that everyone should flatter him, agree with him and assist in putting his ideas into practice, and if this does not happen—for how could it?—he is filled with uncontrollable rage. In his anger and aggressiveness towards his fellows he resembles a snake. The man becomes a murderer, and he who was made in God's image and likeness comes to resemble Satan, who *was a murderer from the beginning* (Jn 8:44).

St. Gregory Palamas



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## OUR HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH

*By the New Martyr Patriarch Tikhon (+1925). Translated from Pravoslavnaya Rus', No. 16, 2000, where it was excerpted and reprinted from Vechnoye, June 1964. From various sermons delivered while he was Bishop of North America and the Aleutian Isles.*

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

[Isa 2:2, 4; Mic 4:3-4]

† † †

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

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

Church and live according to their own will, then there reigns self-love, divisions, discord, wars.

Ought we not to rejoice and thank the Lord that He, in His merciful kindness, regards His Church and preserves her unharmed and invincible even to this very day? After all, it was not only in the first centuries of her history that Christ's Church endured various troubles and was subject to persecutions, and it was not only during the time of the Ecumenical Councils that she was attacked by false teachers, who elevated their minds above the mind of God. From the first days of its existence and to the end of time she will be like a ship with passengers, sailing upon a tempestuous sea that is ready at any minute to capsize the ship and swallow its cargo. And it seems that the further the ship sails, the more fiercely the waves lash against it.

In the early centuries the Christians endured persecution from without, from the pagans. But when the Church proved victorious over them, an even greater danger arose, this time from another side: while troubles from the pagans



ceased, there arose troubles from her own, troubles from false brothers, attacks from within. From within the bosom of Christianity itself there appeared one heresy and schism after another. Of course, the truth of God vanquished human falsehood, but members of the Church can never retire their weapons. They must wage war no longer against ancient heretics, but against new enemies: against unbelievers, against those who deny the truth, against those who pretend to be representatives of a powerful science. And we cannot say that with the passage of time this war has abated; no sooner does the Church manage to conquer one foe, than she is confronted with a new antagonist. Evil is like some hydra; as one head is decapitated, another appears in its place.

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

waves beat against this immovable rock, the farther they recoil from it.

At times, the enemies of Christ's Church are ready to celebrate a complete victory over her; it seems to them that they have put an end to her. But what do they discover? Just as swelling waves beat against a ship only to fall back into the sea to merge and become indistinguishable from other waves, so, too, the enemies of Christ, having launched an attack against the Church, again return to that nothingness from which they emerged, while the ship of the Church continues as before to advance in its victorious voyage. Every year that passes serves to affirm the certainty that the truth of the Lord abideth forever, and that even *the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's Church*.

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

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

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

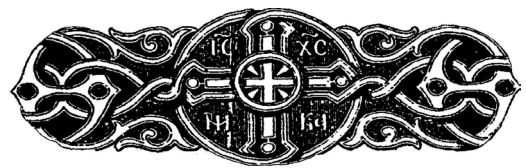
## THE THEOLOGIAN

By Protopresbyter Michael Azkoul.

Before we examine Orthodox theology, we must consider another related matter: the man who has traditionally explained the doctrine of God to us: the theologian.

St. Gregory the Theologian tells us that the study of theology is a privilege and an awfully serious responsibility. It is not a subject for academic debate, nor a sport, nor should it be part of a casual after-dinner conversation. Neither should everyone presume to discourse on it; not before every audience or under any circumstances. The subject of theology is not *so cheap and common*. Only he should *speak or philosophize or theologize about God* who is a *past master of theoria* and, if not purged completely of his passions, is at least *being purified*. *It is not safe, I say, for the impure to touch the pure, even as it is unsafe to fix weak eyes on the rays of the sun.* (Theol. Ora. 1:4).

Theology is not a matter of speculation and research; it is not a "science" nor a "discipline." Theology is a *knowledge* which leads to *union with God* (*henosis tou Theou, ένωση του Θεού*). Moreover, theological knowledge is a special kind of knowledge to which the name *gnosis* is given. *Gnosis* is not a knowledge which comes by the senses; it is not a reasoned knowing which is proper to the scientist, mathematician and logician; nor is *gnosis* what philosophers call "intuition" or the immediate certainty about the thing felt or perceived or conceived. *Gnosis* is a *spiritual or noetical knowledge*, an experience of the human heart (*kardia, καρδιά*) or "mind" (*nous, νοῦς*) or "spirit" (*pneuma, πνεῦμα*), all synonyms for the cognitive aspect of the human soul. By *gnosis* the human mind enters the spiritual world and obtains directly a knowledge of God (*theognosis, θεογνωσις*).



When you cut down a tree, all its branches immediately wither. Conversely, when a tree is watered at the roots, its branches stand strong and healthy. Parents resemble a tree. The father and mother comprise the roots of the children. When a father and mother are watered with fasting, prayers, almsgiving, and other virtuous deeds, then God protects the children...

When an apple tree produces sour apples, what is to blame? Will we lay blame on the apple tree or the apples? Obviously, the problem lies in the tree. Therefore, you the parents, who constitute the apple tree, must live correctly and virtuously so that the apples that are produced also become sweet.

St. Kosmas Aitolos

## WE LIVE IN PROPHETIC TIMES!

*By Archpriest Andrew Phillips, November 30, 2015. Fr. Andrew is an English parish priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), rector of St. John of Shanghai Orthodox Church in Colchester, Essex, in the United Kingdom.*

The shooting down of an anti-terrorist Russian airplane by Turkey's anti-Kurdish, NATO-run forces has implications far beyond the obvious one—that it was preventing the terrorist organization ISIS from selling cheap oil to Turkey's corrupt businessmen-politicians and therefore had to be destroyed.

First of all, it reminds us that Western secularism has always allied itself with militant Islam against Russia. It was thus in the thirteenth century when St. Alexander Nevsky fought simultaneously against the Teutonic Knights, who stabbed Christian Russia in the back while it was already fighting the Mongol Tartars from the East. It was thus in the nineteenth century when Imperial Britain fought against the liberation of the Balkan Christians by Russia, and allied itself with the Muslim Ottoman oppressors.

It was thus in 1915 when German's ally, Turkey, massacred a million Armenians, who had been protected by Russia alone. It was thus in the 1970's when the US and the UK allowed Turkey to invade and occupy northern Cyprus, wrecking its Christian shrines. It was thus in the 1980's when the Western-created, funded, trained and armed Al-Qaida in Afghanistan and in the 1990's when its Western-funded and protected offshoots fought Serbia in the Balkans and Russia in the Caucasus. It is thus today in Libya and Syria. Western secularism and Islamic fundamentalism are simply the two sides of the self-same coin.

Secondly, it reminds us of the prophecies of the saints, of St. Cosmas of Aitolia and, more recently, of St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994), who foresaw the war between Russia and Turkey, the Russian liberation of Constantinople from its physical enemies and also from internal enemies who, though Orthodox in name, are in fact apostates from the Faith, being rather paid agents of the Washington-Vatican axis. These prophecies speak of bloodshed, of a third of Turks converted to Orthodoxy, a third being driven away to Mesopotamia and a third dying.

Thirdly, it reminds us that Eden, Paradise, was *in the east*, somewhere in Mesopotamia, and that anti-Eden, anti-Paradise, is also in the east, in today's blood-drenched Iraqi Mesopotamia. It reminds us that the war that is going on in western Syria, created by the West, is dangerously close to the place called Armageddon and that the war that is continuing there is a war against those who hate Christ and His teachings, including those who are planning to rebuild the Temple on Zion, ready for the enthronement of their master Antichrist.

The consequences are far-reaching. The Church meeting that the ecumenist-minded and Western-guided Phanariots want for next year may now not happen. How can Russian delegates even enter Turkey? Does this mean that the Russian Church will hold a real Council for all free Orthodox? The situation in the Ukraine, on the northern shores of the Black Sea, just across from Turkey, is also concerned. The Western-installed and funded junta in Kiev looks ever more discredited, as it welcomes the illegal Turkish aggression, but it is also fragile and bankrupt. How can the weak Western world still support the junta when isolated Western Europe is faced by mass Muslim invasion and the isolated USA by the joint might of Russia, China and India?

Today the minority of Orthodox, for so long undecided and ambivalent on the fringes of the Church, as well as all others who call themselves Christians, are being asked to face reality and decide whom they support: the pro-Islamic Western elite and its bandit consumerism, or resurgent Russia. No more so in the Paris Jurisdiction, whose Archbishop Job has just been removed. Those on the fringes can hesitate no longer. Are they "Halfodox" apostates from Orthodox Christianity, or are they patriots of the worldwide Holy Russia that is, by the grace of God, being born?

Today is the time of St. John the Baptist. We are being called on to prepare the way for the enthronement of the new Emperor of the Christian Empire of Russia. He will be, by the grace and anointing of the Church, the only protector of Christians from those who are preparing the coming of Antichrist on Zion, even arranging in Paris the largest gathering of world leaders in history. Our destiny is to fight in the mystical battle against spiritual impurity and slander.

Last week I prayed in Odessa as a pilgrim at the grave of the humble Elder Jonah (+2012). Are his prophecies regarding the Ukraine and all Russia in 2016 to be realized? All depends on our repentance. All the fragments of Holy Russia, *the footstool of the Kingdom of Heaven*, in the words of St John of Kronstadt, are to be guarded, propagated and gathered together before the end. All Orthodox of all nationalities who know what is prophesied in the holy book of Esdras\*, the enthronement of the last Christian Emperor before the end, are to repent and show the way.

† † †

[\*] The books of Esdras, 1 and 2, are part of the Apocrypha books of the Bible. The article's author refers herein to the 2<sup>nd</sup> book wherein the seer is instructed by the archangel Uriel of seven revelations. The two books are hypothesized to have different authors and they are not treated consistently amongst all Orthodox traditions, the Greek Orthodox focus primarily on the 1<sup>st</sup> book while the Russian use both books amongst the Apocrypha writing of the Russian Orthodox Bible. The prophesy relative to the last kingdom is contained within the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> book. **Ed.**)

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## ISAIAH'S PROPHECY OF ST. JOHN THE FORERUNNER

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

*The voice of one that cries in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God*  
[Isaiah 40:3]

When a king wants to visit a certain place, he sends before him in advance his heralds. To an unusual king an unusual herald is appropriate. The herald of Christ the King in the wilderness was Moses; in Jerusalem, the Prophets; in Nazareth, the Archangel; in Bethlehem, the Magi of the East; on the Jordan, St. John the Forerunner. Not one king in the history of mankind has had such heralds.

St. John the Baptist was also as unusual and special as were the other heralds of Christ. He was the voice crying in the twofold wilderness: in the wilderness of Jordan and in the human wilderness. Just as the wilderness of Jordan was fruitless and dry, so the wilderness of the human spirit, was unfruitful and dry. John was not able to make the human wilderness green and fruitful, but he cleared and plowed it and, in that way, was preparing the earth and leveled it [the earth] for the great Sower Who, by His com-

ing, brings with Him the seed and the rain to sow the seed of knowledge and the rain of grace from on high to make it green and be fruitful.

By repentance, John prepared the way and by baptism in water, made the path straight. The way and the paths these are the souls of men. By repentance, the souls of men were prepared to receive the seed of Christ and by baptism in water

to bury that seed deep in the earth of their heart. The proud and the lowly when they are immersed naked in the water are all as one, equal in their nothingness before the majesty of the All-glorious Christ the Savior: *Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low* (Isa 40:4). The word here is not about earthly valleys and hills but of lowly and proud men. As corpses in the grave are all the same before the eyes of a living man, thus all sinners, lowly and proud, slaves and masters are equal before the living God.

Such a wondrous vision was seen by Isaiah, the son of Amos, the prophet of the living God, the one and true God.

O Lord, Heavenly King, to Whom the heavenly hosts worship day and night, look down once again upon our nothingness and because of Your humiliation and passion for us, save us. Amen.





# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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## THE STRUGGLE OF GREAT LENT

By Elder Ephraim of Arizona (a transcribed homily).



At this time, we are entering the great spiritual arena of the blessed Great Lent. Holy and Great Lent is a time of compunction, repentance, and tears; it is time for a change in ourselves, for a new stage in our spiritual life. Like an affectionate mother caring for Her children, us Orthodox Christians, the Church has designated this time of Lent as dedicated to the struggle, in order to help Her children fight harder, so that they can purify themselves, and thus draw closer to God; it is the time that they undergo these trials so that they can be counted worthy of celebrating the great day of the radiant Resurrection.

Orthodox Christians, especially monks, have always paid particular attention to this spiritual arena and have thought of it as especially sacred because it is a period which focuses and contemplates upon both spiritual and bodily struggles. There is the struggle of fasting, the struggle of vigils, the struggle of purification and the struggle to fulfill one's spiritual duties which are many more than at any other time of the year. There is a spiritual "defragmentation" and people pay greater attention to the voice of their conscience in order to correct what they have perhaps neglected and to improve spiritually.

The Church assists us with Her penitential hymns and services, as well as

with a myriad of teachings. These serve so as to "oil" us up for the fight towards the purification of our souls.

We have the penitential evening divine liturgies of the Presanctified Gifts. The Presanctified Liturgy is extremely beneficial. Its Cherubic Hymn is full of spirituality, contemplation, and angelic presence. That is why we should come to these liturgies during Great Lent with even greater compunction. We, who consume the Body and Blood of Christ, must be pure and clean, straight in both body and soul so that divine grace can have its effect. For this reason we must lead very careful lives. Both in our homes or cells and in church we must wet our face with tears so as to wash our souls and be worthy to take Holy Communion.

Of course, the devil often brings us various temptations and desires during these moments of compunction. This intensifies the struggle and it means that we cannot have both tears and concurrent evil thoughts. Evil thoughts and the sinful images that accompany them must be rejected as soon as they make their appearance. And when we have wicked thoughts or our soul is cold towards one of the brethren, let us not approach the God of true love, Who is so pure and beyond holy.

Throughout this period, at every service in Great Lent, we say the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, which is as follows: *Lord and Master of my life, do not give me the spirit of sloth, inquisitiveness, lust for power or idle talk, but give rather the spirit of sobriety, humility, patience and love to me, your servant. Indeed, Lord King, grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for you are blessed to the ages of ages. Amen.*

With these words, the saint wishes to make us understand very clearly, that, apart from our pursuit of various virtues

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20<sup>th</sup> century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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we also need to address our self-censure and eliminate criticism of our brethren, for without true love for our fellow human beings there is no chance of making even the slightest progress towards our spiritual purification. If we do not pay vigilant attention towards our thoughts, our words and our heart, there is no benefit in fasting. Fasting is of benefit when it is combined with love for our neighbor and when we do not criticize others. When we do not criticize our fellows and instead criticize ourselves, then we are marked by love for others and love for our soul, concern for purification and the fulfillment of the great commandment, that of love of God and one's neighbor. Love for God and our fellow brethren are the two great virtues which support the whole of our Lenten spiritual structure; if they are absent, then others cannot take form. For *God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.* (1 Jn 4:16).

Another area which demands that we push ourselves as hard as possible is prayer. We should continually pray in the name of Christ, without neglecting any opportunity and without any waste of time. During our personal vigil within our bedroom or cell, we should push ourselves to new limits, not letting sleep overcome us, and with neither any neglect nor any sign of idleness; we should willingly engage in deeds that enhance and support our spirituality. As soon as we wake up, prayer should command first place, accompanied with awareness of our Lenten prayer rule, our prayer-rope, spiritual study and

the continuous contemplation of God. We need to attend Church services with great readiness and we shall thus reap the best possible results from our presence within the arena of spiritual struggle and purification.

Apart from this, fasting together with bodily exertion supports awareness of and the forgiveness of our sins. *Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.* (Pss 24:18). When we labor while fasting, with kneeling, with prayers, with a true effort from our heart and mind, such godly exertion is



holy and is richly rewarded by God because it makes people worthy of the crown of glory and honor. The demons fear the fast greatly, because it keeps them laying low: *Howbeit this kind (of demon) goeth not out but by prayer and fasting,* said the Lord. (Mt 17:21). **This is why the holy fathers always began any godly task with a fast.** They considered a fast to be very powerful and they (rightfully) believed that the Holy Spirit does not provide His protection to people when they are replete with food and

their stomachs are full. And any Christian who desires purification has to start from this same foundation which is fasting, prayer and vigilance. When these three are combined, many people of God have acquired great stature.

In olden times, the Church's fathers had a holy custom. On the eve of Lent, they would leave the monasteries and go deeper into the desert, where they lived in great asceticism until Lazarus Saturday, when they returned in order to celebrate Palm Sunday all together. Some would take a few of

the basic essentials as far as food was concerned, others would eat only green plants, in order to struggle more fiercely in the desert. Thereafter they would spend all the days of Holy Week together in church, existing on just a piece of rusk and a few nuts per each day. We were also afforded the great blessing and the grace of knowing other, more extreme ascetic elders who spent not only Great Lent in such fasting and spiritual struggle but also their entire life!

Our departed elder, Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller, kept an extremely strict fast during Great Lent. And, of course, he imposed such a fast upon us as well. From Monday to Friday, five days of the week, there was no real food to be consumed except a handful of flour, from which we made a batter with just water. That was it. A small flour batter plate every twenty-four hours. Concurrently, we worked hard, lifting loads on our back during the day and during the whole night we performed hundreds of prostrations and many hours of prayer, getting minimal rest. Such a struggle so that we be given the opportunity to purify the inner person, to make ourselves cleaner, more honorable in the eyes of God, in order to acquire boldness before God and thus be able to pray for the whole world. This is because the world at large, people everywhere, need the prayers of saints, particularly those of ascetic saints. St. Anthony the Great supported the whole world with his prayers.

Of course, we must keep the fast only as far as we are able, with discretion, as we are not all the same. *Unless the good be done well, it is not good.* In other words, unless good is done in a good way, method, time and amount, but instead is done without discretion, then it will do more harm than good. Fasting is certainly extremely necessary, it is good, but it is a means rather than an end to a goal. The means has an end and that is humility. This is why we need to arrange everything in accordance with the discretion of a spiritual father, someone illumined by the Holy Spirit. Your spiritual father will tell you how much to fast, how often to receive Holy Communion, where to strike at the enemy, what you should do here and what you must do there. And then, through the discretion of your spiritual father, you can put your spiritual house in order. We should not do more than is appropriate, we need moderation in all things, because immoderation cancels out any benefit. So fasting is holy, but it is a means. We should adjust it according to what our spiritual father says and what our psychosomatic powers allow and only as long as there is good will. Basil the Great says there is as much difference in resilience among people as there is between iron and grass.

St. Synklitiki fell ill towards the end of her life with a throat disease. Her blessed throat, which had always spoken the word of God, festered on the inside. Her mouth had saved countless people. The devil had asked permission to test her and God had granted it. The stench from her rotting flesh became so bad that the nuns had the greatest difficulty in seeing to her needs. They used the most pungent perfumes to try and bring her a little rest

in her sickness. When her mouth and throat had been healthy, she had spoken and brought benefit to many, but when she fell ill, she was able to preach even more strongly. How could a silent and rotting mouth possibly preach? She noiselessly declared her great patience and endurance in God's trial. She made a titanic effort to deal with the devil of impatience, of complaint, of the labor and toil of sickness. What reason then could she possibly have in following the need for fasting?

This is exactly why illness is regarded as involuntary asceticism. One person has cancer, another diabetes, and somebody else has various troublesome health problems. How will these people purify themselves? How will they see God's light? Through patience and giving thanks to Him. These make up for the fast which, because of their illness, they are unable to keep, and, in fact, often struggle in their physical pain ten times harder than if they were fasting.

During this period, we really have to struggle to purify ourselves. From the ascetic tradition we have hermits who spent the whole of their lives in the desert, with labors, toil, fasts, tears, sleeping on the ground and deprivation of every other kind of pleasure. And all this effort, together with the struggle of the soul against all kinds of thoughts concerning the rebellions of the flesh, engendered sanctity. Thus, every Orthodox Christian or monk who wishes to experience purification has the right to labor and to, in turn, not be deprived of his equitable reward. Purity brings great boldness towards God, because He Himself is pure, the Mother of God is most pure and St. John the Theologian lived his life as a virgin, as did so many other saints. The whole beauty of the Church is founded on purity and spotlessness. When our heart is pure and beautiful it will exude fragrance and loveliness. But if people have filth in their hearts, filth is what they will expel. Let us struggle to cleanse the inside of our glass, our heart, so that we can it turn be pure and pleasing in God's eyes.

We have instances from Church history of many people "in the world" (not monastics, that is), who pleased God and became great. Abba Paphnutius of Thebes, an ascetic of great gifts (and disciple of St. Antony the Great), once prayed to God:

— God, who have You placed me with? With whom do I share the same measure of virtue?

And he heard a voice, saying to him:

— Down in Alexandria there is a poor man, a cobbler, down in a basement. You have the same amount of virtue as he does.

He responded:

— But I have been a hermit in the desert from childhood and I am equal in virtue with a lay person, a married man?

God responded:

— Yes, you are equal to him.

Next day, the saint picked up his bag, put in some dry rusks, and set off for Alexandria. He went down into the city, found the layman and said to him:

— What do you do here, friend?

The layman responded:

— What should I do, father? I am a sinner, the worst person in the world.

— Can we talk?

— Certainly.

— What is the virtue that you're working on acquiring?

— Virtue, me? I live "in the world" and am completely mixed up. Now you, you have got virtues.

— No, you are doing something.

— I am not doing anything.

— God showed me, so you cannot tell me lies. I prayed and He told me that we share the same measure of virtue. There must be something about you.

— Sorry, Father. If what I do can be considered something, I'll tell you. I married, and from the moment I put on the crown, I said to my wife: "If you love me, we'll live apart, like brother and sister and work for the sanctification of our souls. Do you agree?" She responded "I agree." And since then we have lived in purity and virginity.

In the desert, Blessed Paphnutius tried to cleanse himself through the ascetic life, and restraint, in which he was greatly assisted by the condition of his way of life. The other man lived "in the world," with a wife, with all the challenges of secular life and, with God's help, he had reached the stature of a saint. And his struggle was greater

than that of the hermit. Proof that he was indeed great in the eyes of God.

After that, something else happened which has to do with this cobbler. One day a Christian went to the Blessed Paphnutius and said:

— Father, I quarreled with a priest and I do not know how he reacted, whether he cursed me or swore at me, but he is now departed this life and we were not reconciled. What do I do now?

— There is nothing I can do in this case, but there is a holy man to whom I shall send you to and he will help you. Go down to Alexandria, to a basement where there is this cobbler. Tell him I sent you, mention the problem and he will help.

The Christian said to himself: "For goodness' sake. A hermit cannot help and a layman can?" Nevertheless, out of obedience to the hermit, he did as he was told. The cobbler told him to wait until night fell and then took him to a church in the city. After again telling him to wait, the cobbler went up

to the large door made the sign of the cross and it opened. The inside of the church was bathed in light and there was heavenly music. The cobbler told the man:

— Go in there and look at the choirs on the left and right. You'll see the priest there.

The man went in, saw the priest in the left choir and knelt down and received his forgiveness...

Do you see what a true ascetic effort can achieve? What the soul's true and honest struggle can do? What did that layman do to purify his soul? When he told the girl he had married that they should live like brother and sister, was that an end to it? No, they fasted and kept vigil together, they made prostrations and read the Gospel. They read Patristic books, went to church, confessed, took Holy Communion, chased away evil thoughts and struggled assiduously. And that is how they became saints "in the world."

So here is proof that even "in the world," when Christians take on the struggle with good will, the grace of God does

not exclude anyone. But we all make excuses for ourselves and say that because we are "in the world," we cannot. Desires and passions get the best of us. What do we need to do? Fight in the body and in the soul. In other words, control our thoughts. Thoughts come, sinful fantasies, images, faces, idols and scenes. We must get rid of them immediately with *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me*. When the mind is careful not to accept all of that

and has the divine weapon ready to use, the name of Christ, then every enemy of our soul is slain, whether it be the devil, sordid fantasies or repulsive thoughts. Then, if we guard our soul, mind and heart in this manner, our inner self will remain clean and pure.

Let us struggle now, and the rewards shall be great. Nobody finds grace unless they make the effort. If a farmer does not tend his crops, he will not see any yield. When our fast is accompanied, reinforced and flanked by prayer, study, vigilance, church attendance, Confession, Communion, good works—especially almsgiving—then the beauty of the preparation of the soul for the reception of Holy Week is complete. Then we shall truly experience the Holy and Sacred Passion of Christ more intensely, because our heart will soften, it will alter and it will realize how great God's love for mankind is. Then, within us, we shall experience very forcibly the Holy Resurrection, we shall celebrate it in a way befitting to God and we shall celebrate Holy Pascha together with the angels. Amen.



## THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH

By St. Justin Popovich, originally published in "Orthodox Life," vol. 31, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1981), pp. 28-33. Translated by Stephen Karganovic from "The Orthodox Church & Ecumenism" (in Serbian), by Archimandrite Justin (Popovich) (Thessalonica: Chilandar Monastery, Holy Mountain, 1974), pp. 64-74.

The attributes of the Church are innumerable because Her attributes are actually the attributes of the Lord Christ, the God-man, and, through Him, those of the Triune Godhead. However, the holy and divinely wise fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council, guided and instructed by the Holy Spirit, reduced them in the ninth article of the Symbol of Faith to four—*I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*. These attributes of the Church—*unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity*—are derived from the very nature of the Church and of Her purpose. They clearly and accurately define the character of the Orthodox Church of Christ whereby, as a theanthropic institution and community, She is distinguishable from any institution or community of the human sort.

### The Unity and Uniqueness of the Church

Just as the Person of Christ the God-man is one and unique, so is the Church founded by Him, in Him, and upon Him. The unity of the Church follows necessarily from the unity of the Person of the Lord Christ, the God-man. Being an organically integral and theanthropic organism unique in all the worlds, the Church, according to all the laws of Heaven and earth, is indivisible. **Any division would signify Her death.** Immersed in the God-man, She is first and foremost a theanthropic organism, and only then a theanthropic organization. In Her, everything is theanthropic: nature, faith, love, baptism, the Eucharist, all the holy mysteries and all the holy virtues, Her teaching, Her entire life, Her immortality, Her eternity, and Her structure. Yes, yes, yes; in Her, everything is theanthropically integral and indivisible Christification, sanctification, deification, Trinitarianism, salvation. In Her everything is fused organically and by grace into a single theanthropic body, under a single Head—the God-man, the Lord Christ. All Her members, though as persons always whole and inviolate, yet united by the same grace of the Holy Spirit through the holy mysteries and the holy virtues into an organic unity, comprise one body and confess the one faith, which unites them to each other and to the Lord Christ.

The Christ-bearing apostles are divinely inspired as they announce the unity and the uniqueness of the Church, based upon the unity and uniqueness of Her Founder—the God-man, the Lord Christ, and His theanthropic personality: *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* (1 Cor 3:11).

Like the holy apostles, the holy fathers and the teachers of the Church confess the unity and uniqueness of the Orthodox

Church with the divine wisdom of the Cherubim and the zeal of the Seraphim. Understandable, therefore, is the fiery zeal which animated the holy fathers of the Church in all cases of division and falling away and the stern attitude toward heresies and schisms. In that regard, the holy ecumenical and holy local councils are preeminently important. According to their spirit and attitude, wise in those things pertaining to Christ, the Church is not only one but also unique. **Just as the Lord Christ cannot have several bodies, so He cannot have several Churches.** According to Her theanthropic nature, the Church is one and unique, just as Christ the God-man is one and unique.

Hence, a division, a splitting up of the Church is ontologically and essentially impossible. A division within the Church has never occurred, nor indeed can one take place; apostasy from the Church, on the other hand, has and will continue to occur after the manner of those voluntarily fruitless branches which, having withered, fall away from the eternally living theanthropic Vine—the Lord Christ (cf. Jn 15:1-6). From time to time, heretics and schismatics have cut themselves off and have fallen away from the one and indivisible Church of Christ, whereby they ceased to be members of the Church and parts of Her theanthropic body. The first to fall away thus were the Gnostics, then the Arians, then the Macedonians, then the Monophysites, then the Iconoclasts, then the Roman Catholics, then the Protestants, then the Uniates, and so on—all the other members of the legion of heretics and schismatics.

### The Holiness of the Church

By Her theanthropic nature, the Church is undoubtedly a unique organization in the world. All Her holiness resides in Her nature. Actually, She is the theanthropic workshop of human sanctification and, through men, she sanctifies the rest of creation. She is holy as the theanthropic Body of Christ, whose eternal head is the Lord Christ Himself; and Whose immortal soul is the Holy Spirit. Wherefore everything in Her is holy: Her teaching, Her grace, Her mysteries, Her virtues, all Her powers, and all Her instruments have been deposited in Her for the sanctification of men and of all created things. Having become the Church by His incarnation out of an unparalleled love for man, our God and Lord Jesus Christ sanctified the Church by His sufferings, Resurrection, Ascension, teaching, wonder-working, prayer, fasting, mysteries, and virtues; in a word, by His entire theanthropic life. Wherefore the divinely inspired pronouncement has been rendered: *Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.* (Eph 5:25-27).

The flow of history confirms the reality of the Gospel: the Church is filled to overflowing with sinners. Does their pres-

ence in the Church reduce, violate, or destroy Her sanctity? Not in the least! For Her Head—the Lord Christ, and Her Soul—the Holy Spirit, and Her divine teaching, Her mysteries, and Her virtues, are indissolubly and immutably holy. The Church tolerates sinners, shelters them, and instructs them, that they may be awakened and roused to repentance and spiritual recovery and transfiguration; but they do not hinder the Church from being holy. Only unrepentant sinners, persistent in evil and godless malice, are cut off from the Church either by the visible action of the theanthropic authority of the Church or by the invisible action of divine judgment, so that thus also the holiness of the Church may be preserved. *Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.* (1 Cor 5:13).

In their writings and at the Councils, the holy fathers confessed the holiness of the church as Her essential and immutable quality. The fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council defined it dogmatically in the ninth article of the Symbol of Faith. And the succeeding ecumenical councils confirmed it by the seal of their assent.

### The Catholicity of the Church

The theanthropic nature of the Church is inherently and all-encompassingly universal and catholic: it is theanthropically universal and theanthropically catholic. The Lord Christ, the God-man, has by Himself and in Himself most perfectly and integrally united God and Man and, through man, all the worlds and all created things to God. The fate of creation is essentially linked to that of man (cf. Romans 8:19-24). In Her theanthropic organism, the Church encompasses: *All things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.* (Col. 1:16). Everything is in the God-man; *He is the Head of the Body of the Church.* (Col. 1:17-18).

In the theanthropic organism of the Church everyone lives in the fullness of his personality as a living, godlike cell. The law of theanthropic catholicity encompasses all and acts through all. All the while, the theanthropic equilibrium between the divine and the human is always duly preserved. Being members of Her body, we in the Church experience the fullness of our being in all its godlike dimensions. Furthermore: in the Church of the God-man, man experiences his own being as all-encompassing, as theanthropically all-encompassing; he experiences himself not only as complete, but also as the totality of creation. In a word: he experiences himself as a god-man by grace.

The theanthropic catholicity of the Church is actually an unceasing christification of many by grace and virtue: all is gathered in Christ the God-man, and everything is experienced through Him as one's own, as a single indivisible theanthropic organism. For life in the Church is a theanthropic catholicization, the struggle of acquiring by grace and virtue the likeness of the God-man, christification, theosis, life in the Trinity, sanctification, transfiguration, salvation, immortality, and churchliness. Theanthropic catholicity in the Church is reflected in and achieved by the eternally living Person of Christ, the God-man Who in the most perfect way has united God to man and to all creation, which has been cleansed of sin, evil, and death by the Savior's precious Blood (cf. Col. 1:19-22).

The theanthropic Person of the Lord Christ is the very soul of the Church's catholicity. It is the God-man Who always preserves the theanthropic balance between the divine and the human in the catholic life of the Church. The Church is filled to overflowing with the Lord Christ, for She is *the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.* (Eph 1:23). Wherefore, She is universal in every person that is found within Her, in each of Her tiny cells. That universality, that catholicity resounds like thunder particularly through the holy apostles, through the holy fathers, through the holy ecumenical and local councils.

### The Apostolicity of the Church

The holy apostles were the first god-men by grace. Like the Apostle Paul each of them, by his integral life, could have said of himself: *I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.* (Gal 2:20). Each of them is a Christ repeated; or, to be more exact, a continuation of Christ. Everything in them is theanthropic because everything was received from the God-man. Apostolicity is nothing other than the God-manhood of the Lord Christ, freely assimilated through the holy struggles of the holy virtues: faith, love, hope, prayer, fasting, etc. This means that everything that is of man lives in them freely through the God-man, thinks through the God-man, feels through the God-man, acts through the God-man and wills through the God-man. For them, the historical God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the supreme value and the supreme criterion. Everything in them is of the God-man, for the sake of the God-man, and in the God-man. And it is always and everywhere thus. For them immortality is in the time and space of this world. Thereby they are, even while on this earth, partakers of the theanthropic eternity of Christ.



This theanthropic apostolicity is integrally continued in the earthly successors of the Christ-bearing apostles: in the holy fathers. Among them, in essence, there is no difference: the same God-man Christ lives, acts, enlivens and makes them all eternal in equal measure, He Who is *the same yesterday, and today, and forever*. (Heb 13:8). Through the holy fathers, the holy apostles live on with all their theanthropic riches, theanthropic worlds, theanthropic holy things, theanthropic mysteries, and theanthropic virtues. The holy fathers in fact are continuously apostolizing, whether as distinct godlike personalities, or as bishops of the local churches, or as members of the holy ecumenical and holy local councils. For all of them there is but one Truth, one Transcendent Truth: the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Behold, the holy ecumenical councils, from the first to the last, confess, defend, believe, announce, and vigilantly preserve but a single supreme value: the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The principal Tradition, the transcendent Tradition, of the Orthodox Church is the living God-man Christ, entire in the theanthropic Body of the Church of which He is the immortal, eternal Head. This is not merely the message, but the transcendent message of the holy apostles and the holy fathers. They know Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ ascended. They all, by their integral lives and teachings, with a single soul and a single voice, confess that Christ the God-man is wholly in His Church, as in His Body. Each of the holy fathers could

rightly repeat with St. Maximus the Confessor: *In no wise am I expounding my own opinion, but that which I have been taught by the fathers, without changing aught in their teaching.*

And from the immortal proclamation of St. John of Damascus there resounds the universal confession of all the holy fathers who were glorified by God: *“Whatever has been transmitted to us through the Law, and the prophets, and the apostles, and the evangelists, we receive and know and esteem highly, and beyond that we ask nothing more... Let us be fully satisfied with it, and rest therein, “removing not the ancient landmarks (Prov. 22:28),” nor violating the divine Tradition.* And then, the touching, fatherly admonition of the holy Damascene, directed to all Orthodox Christians: *Wherefore, brethren, let us plant ourselves upon the rock of faith and the Tradition of the Church, removing not the landmarks set by our holy fathers, nor giving room to those who are anxious to introduce novelties and to undermine the structure of God’s holy ecumenical and apostolic Church. For*

*if everyone were allowed a free hand, little by little the entire Body of the Church would be destroyed.*

The holy Tradition is wholly of the God-man, wholly of the holy apostles, wholly of the holy fathers, wholly of the Church, in the Church, and by the Church. The holy fathers are nothing other than the **guardians of the apostolic tradition**. All of them, like the holy apostles themselves, are but **witnesses** of a single and unique Truth: the transcendent Truth of Christ, the God-man. They preach and confess it without rest, they, the **golden mouths of the Word**. The God-man, the Lord Christ is one, unique, and indivisible. So also is the Church unique and indivisible, for She is the incarnation of the Theanthropos Christ, continuing through the ages and through all eternity. Being such by Her nature and in Her earthly history, the Church may not be divided. It is only possible to fall away from her. That unity and uniqueness of the Church is theanthropic from the very beginning and through all the ages and all eternity.

Apostolic succession, the apostolic heritage, is theanthropic from first to last. What is it that the holy apostles are transmitting to their successors as their heritage? The Lord Christ, the God-man Himself, with all the imperishable riches of His wondrous theanthropic Personality, Christ—the Head of the Church, Her sole Head. If it does not transmit that, apostolic succession ceases to be apostolic, and the apostolic Tradition is lost, for there is no longer an apostolic hierarchy and an apostolic Church.

### Holy Tradition

The holy Tradition is the Gospel of the Lord Christ, and the Lord Christ Himself, Whom the Holy Spirit instills in each and every believing soul, in the entire Church. Whatever is Christ’s, by the power of the Holy Spirit becomes ours, human; but only within the body of the Church. The Holy Spirit—the soul of the Church, incorporates each believer, as a tiny cell, into the body of the Church and makes him a *fel-lowheir* of the God-man (Eph. 3:6). In reality the Holy Spirit makes every believer into a God-man by grace. For what is life in the Church? Nothing other than the transfiguration of each believer into a God-man by grace through his personal, evangelical virtues; it is his growth in Christ, the putting on of Christ by growing in the Church and being a member of the Church. A Christian’s life is a ceaseless, Christ-centered theophany: the Holy Spirit, through the holy mysteries and



the holy virtues, transmits Christ the Savior to each believer, renders him a living tradition, a living life: *Christ who is our life*. (Col 3:4). Everything Christ's thereby becomes ours, ours for all eternity: His truth, His righteousness, His love, His life, and His entire divine Hypostasis.

Holy Tradition? It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man Himself, with all the riches of his divine Hypostasis and, through Him and for His sake, those of the Holy Trinity. That is most fully given and articulated in the Holy Eucharist, wherein, for our sake and for our salvation, the Savior's entire theanthropic economy of salvation is performed and repeated. Therein wholly resides the God-man with all His wondrous and miraculous gifts; He is there, and in the Church's life of prayer and liturgy. Through all this, the Savior's philanthropic proclamation ceaselessly resounds: *And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*. (Mt 28:20). He is with the apostles and, through the apostles, with all the faithful, world without end. This is the whole of the holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church of the apostles: life in Christ = life in the Holy Trinity; growth in Christ = growth in the Trinity.

Of extraordinary importance is the following: in Christ's Orthodox Church, the Holy Tradition, ever living and life-giving, comprises: the holy liturgy, all the divine services, all the holy mysteries, all the holy virtues, the totality of eternal truth and eternal righteousness, all love, all eternal life, the whole of the God-man, the Lord Christ, the entire Holy Trinity, and the entire theanthropic life of the Church in its theanthropic fullness, with the All-holy Theotokos and all the saints.

The personality of the Lord Christ the God-man, transfigured within the Church, immersed in the prayerful, liturgical, and boundless sea of grace, wholly contained in the Eucharist, and wholly in the Church—this is holy Tradition. This authentic good news is confessed by the holy fathers and the holy ecumenical councils. By prayer and piety holy Tradition is preserved from all human demonism and devilish humanism, and in it is preserved the entire Lord Christ, He Who is the eternal Tradition of the Church. *Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh*. (1 Tim 3:16). He was manifest as a man, as a God-man, as the Church, and by His philanthropic act of salvation and deification of humanity He magnified and exalted man above the holy Cherubim and the most holy Seraphim.



**W**e are convinced that nothing is more sacred, nothing more wise than the Patristic tradition and we hope to run this course under faithful leaders.

**Gennadios II Scholarios (+1473)**

**Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, 1454-1464**

## WILL THERE BE A TERRIBLE JUDGMENT?

*By Archbishop Averky (Taushev) 1906-1976.*

**I**n our time we have become witnesses of a completely new teaching, so far unheard-of in our Church, to the effect that the Second Coming of Christ and the Terrible Judgment must be understood somehow in an "allegorical" way, and not literally, and that the Terrible Judgment will in essence be not at all terrible. In propagandizing this "teaching," they affirm with great aplomb and authority that everything we expounded above "has been thought up by dark fanatical monks," and that contemporary "enlightened Christians" cannot and must not believe in it all.

But how, we may ask, can we not believe in that which has been clearly and definitively said in the Sacred Scriptures, or by the great Fathers of the Church or the glorious, Spirit-bearing ascetics who have been glorified by the Holy Church? For Christ Himself, "they" say, said that He came not to judge the world, but to save it (and then references are made to Jn 12:47, Mt 18:11 and Lk 9:56).

Already a long time ago we were warned that the cunning of Satan and his servants, especially in the last times, will be manifest also in the fact that, in order to destroy people, they will also begin skillfully to use even the texts of the Sacred Scriptures, interpreting them in a distorted manner. After all, on such distorted interpretations are based all the numerous contemporary sects. And it is like that in the given case: Christ truly came to earth the first time in order to save the world, but **the second time He will come no longer to save, but to judge the world**. Moreover, the measure of this Judgment, as He Himself said, will be the word uttered by Him: *The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day* (Jn 12:48), that is: he who does not observe the teaching brought by Christ the Savior to the earth will be subjected to condemnation at the Terrible Judgment.

To whom could this not be clear? Only to a mind that is ill-intentioned! But how can one distort that which is said so clearly in the Sacred Scriptures? *Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen*. (Rev 1:7; cf. Acts 1:11). *Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his works* (Rev 22:12), says the Lord Himself.

What could be clearer or more comprehensible than these words? And so there will undoubtedly be the Terrible Judgment, and there will be the reward of each according to his works, and there will be hell and the everlasting torments for the impenitent sinners. This will be demanded by the Highest Divine Justice, which is so clearly felt and whose inexorable necessity is recognized by every human heart that is uncorrupted, not poisoned by lying pseudo-wisdom...



## WHAT UNITY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

### THOSE WHO DEPARTED FROM THE CHURCH ARE HERETICS AND SCHISMATICS!

*By His Eminence Athanasios, Metropolitan of Limassol, Cyprus; excerpts from his letter to the Holy Synod of Cyprus on the upcoming Holy and Great Orthodox Synod, arranged by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and currently scheduled to take place on the day of Pentecost this year. (Translated by Fr. Kristian Akselberg). Accessed through the web pages of Romfea.gr.*



There are serious gaps in the theological and canonical discussions at the upcoming meeting of the Pan-Orthodox Synod, notes Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol.

In a letter to the Holy Synod of Cyprus, the eminent hierarch does not consider there to be any problem of restoring the unity of Christians, since this, in his opinion, was never disrupted. Rather, certain Christians chose a path different to the one we follow, that of the original Orthodox truth. There are no churches or confessions. Rather, these have cut themselves off from the Church and must be considered heretics and schismatics, notes His Eminence, expressing confusion as to why such an important issue has been ignored.

The stance of His Eminence, who invokes the right of each hierarch to express his opinion regarding such an important event, is sure to cause discussion and debate within Orthodoxy.

“Since, in agreement with regulations sent to us regarding the organization and operation of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, and in particular article 12, paragraphs 2 and 3, indicate that we are entitled first to express our views at our local Synod, I, having examined my conscience, humbly submit to the Holy and Sacred Synod of our holy Church my views and opinions regarding the following matters,” the Reverend Metropolitan Athanasios underlines in his letter.

In his letter, His Eminence Athanasios speaks about the text of the 5<sup>th</sup> Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference held in Chambesey in October entitled “Decision - Relations of the Orthodox Church to the rest of the Christian world,” stating the following: “I am in total agreement with the first three articles of the text. However, at article 4 onwards, I have made the following observations: The Orthodox Church has always prayed ‘for the union of all’—I believe this to mean the return to and union with Her of all those who broke away and distanced themselves from Her, of heretics

and schismatics, once they have renounced their heresy and schism and flee from those things with repentance and are integrated and joined – united – with the Orthodox Church in accordance with the teachings of the sacred canons,” remarks His Eminence Athanasios.

His Eminence continues: “The Orthodox Church of Christ never lost the ‘unity of faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit’ and does not accept the theory of the restoration of the unity of those ‘who believe in Christ,’ because it believes that the unity of those who believe in Christ already exists in the unity of all of Her baptized children, between themselves and with Christ, in Her correct faith, where no heretics or schismatics are present, for which reason She prays for their return to Orthodoxy in repentance.”

His Eminence completes his letter thusly: “I believe that what is stated in article 5 regarding ‘the lost unity of Christians’ is incorrect, because the Church as God’s people, united among themselves and with the Head of the Church which is Christ, never lost this unity and therefore is not in need of rediscovering or seeking it, because it always was, is, and will be just as the Church of Christ has never ceased nor will cease to exist.”

His Eminence Athanasios adds that, “what happened is that groups, peoples or individuals left the body of the Church and the Church prays, and is required to try through mission, that they all return in repentance to the Orthodox Church via the canonical route. In other words, there do not exist other Churches, only heresies and schisms, should we wish to be more precise in our definitions.”

“The expression ‘towards the restoration of Christian unity’ is incorrect because the unity of Christians – the members of the Church of Christ – has never been broken, as long as they remain united to the Church. Separation from the Church and flight from the Church have unfortunately happened numerous times due to heresies and schisms, but there was never a loss of the internal unity of the Church,” His Eminence continues in his letter.

Elsewhere, His Eminence Athanasios states: “I question why the text contains multiple references to ‘Churches’ and ‘Confessions’? What difference and which element allows us to call some Churches and others Confessions? Which is a Church and which a heresy and which a schismatic group or confession? We confess one Church and that all the others are schisms and heresies. I maintain that giving the title ‘Church’ to heretical or schismatic communities is entirely incorrect from a theological, dogmatic and canonical perspective because the Church of Christ is one, as also stated in Article 1, and we cannot refer to a heretical or schismatic community or group outside the Orthodox Church as ‘Church.’”

“At no point does this text state that the only way that leads to union with the Church is solely the repentant return of heretics and schismatics to the One, Holy, Catholic

and Apostolic Church of Christ, which according to Article 11 is our Orthodox Church. The reference to the 'understanding of the tradition of the ancient Church' gives the impression that there is an ontological difference between the ancient Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and the genuine continuation of the same until the present day, namely our Orthodox Church. We believe that there is absolutely no difference between the Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the Church of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, because one of the attributes of the Church is the fact we also confess in the Symbol of Faith, namely that it is Apostolic," stressed the Metropolitan of Limmassol.

The Bishop subsequently underlines that in Article 12, the impression is given that the Orthodox are looking to restore the right faith and unity, giving cause for an unacceptable view: "Article 12 states that the common purpose of the theological dialogues is 'the final restoration of unity in correct faith and love'. This gives the impression that we Orthodox are seeking our restoration to correct faith and the unity of love, as if we had lost the right faith and are seeking to discover it through the theological dialogues with the heterodox. I maintain that this theory is theologically unacceptable for us all," underlines Metropolitan Athanasios.

Elsewhere, His Eminence expresses objections to the text, stressing that "the reference of the text to 'the World Council of Churches' gives me the opportunity to make a complaint against occasional syncretistic events which took place therein, but also against its title, since it regards the Orthodox Church as 'one of the Churches' or a branch of the one Church which seeks and strives for Her realization at the World Council of Churches. For us, however, the Church of Christ is one and unique, as we confess in the Symbol of Faith, and not many."

His Eminence further states: "The view that the preservation of the genuine Orthodox faith is guaranteed only through the synodical system as the only 'competent and final authority on matters of faith' is exaggerated and ignores the truth that many synods throughout Church history taught and espoused incorrect and heretical doctrines, and it was the faithful people which rejected them and preserved the Orthodox faith and championed the Orthodox Confession. Neither a synod without the faithful people, the fullness of the Church, nor the people without the synod of Bishops, is able to regard themselves as the Body of Christ and Church of Christ and to correctly express the experience and doctrine of the Church."

Addressing the Archbishop of Cyprus and the members of the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan of Limassol stresses: "Use of hard or insulting language cannot be made in ecclesiastical encyclicals of this kind, nor do I think anyone desires the use of that form of expression. However, the truth must be expressed with precision and clarity, though naturally with

pastoral discernment and genuine love towards all. We owe it also to our brothers who find themselves in heresy or schism to be entirely honest with them, and with love and pain to pray and do everything possible to bring about their return to the Church of Christ."

"I humbly maintain that texts of such importance and prestige as those of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church must be very carefully formulated with theological and canonical precision in order that these ambiguities or untested theological terms do not also give rise to incorrect expressions which could lead to misconceptions and distortions of the correct attitude of the Orthodox Church. Moreover, in order for a Synod to be valid and canonical, it must not depart in any way from the spirit and teaching of the Holy Synods which preceded it, the teaching of the Holy Fathers and Holy Scriptures, and it must be free from any ambiguity in the precise expression of the correct faith," adds His Eminence Athanasios.

Elsewhere, invoking the Holy Fathers, His Eminence Athanasios stated: "Never did the holy Fathers nor ever in the holy canons or rulings of the sacred Ecumenical or Local Synods, are heretical or schismatic groups referred to as churches. If the heretics are indeed churches, where is the single One Church of Christ and the Apostles?"

The Metropolitan of Limassol also expressed his strong opposition, stressing that those who do not have the right to vote and participate in the Synod are merely ornamental: "I humbly express my disagreement with the fact that the practice of all Sacred Synods until the present of allowing each bishop a vote is abolished. There was never before a system of 'one Church, one vote,' which renders the members of the Holy and Great Synod, with the exception of the primates, mere decorative items by refusing them the right to vote," His Eminence Athanasios says in his letter.

In closing, the courageous and Orthodox-minded Hierarchy of the Church of Cyprus states that: "I do not want to upset anyone with what I wrote, nor do I want to be seen to be teaching judgement of my brothers and fathers in Christ. I simply feel the need to express what my conscience requires me to."

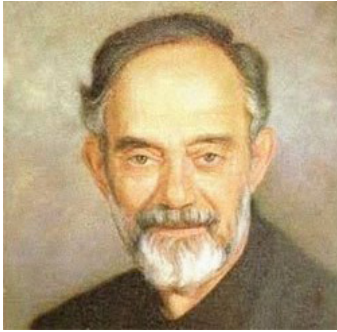


A Synod that does not differentiate *between the profane and holy* (term of the Seventh Ecumenical), Orthodoxy and heresy, the truth of Christ and demonic delusion, and thus ecclesiastically normalizes heresy, can not truly be Orthodox, but, rather, must be considered a pseudo-synod.

**Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus**

## ON MENTAL ILLNESS

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001).



Everyone is mentally ill according to the Patristic meaning of mental illness. You do not have to be schizophrenic in order to be mentally ill. The definition of mental illness from a Patristic point of view is that people are mentally ill when the noetic energy they have

inside them is not functioning properly. In other words, being mentally ill means your nous is full of thoughts (*logismoi*), not only bad thoughts, but good thoughts as well.

The term used within patristic terms is *logismos* (plural *logismoi*), which is the technical term in ascetic literature for a thought combined with an image. According to St. Maximos, a *logismos* can be simple (dispassionate) or composite (passion-charged: e.g., a memory combined with a passion). According to St. Isaac the Syrian, four causes generate *logismoi*: Firstly, from the natural will of the flesh; secondly, from imagination of sensory objects in the world which a man hears and sees; thirdly, from mental predispositions and aberrations of the soul; and fourthly, from the assaults of demons who wage war with us in all the passions. Although *logismoi* first appear on the horizon of the mind, they are immediately transmitted to the heart, so that we feel as though they arise from the heart. The Lord Himself referred to this saying, *for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.* (Mt 15:19).

In its physiological prayerful state, noetic energy moves cyclically like an axle turning within the heart. In its ailing state, noetic energy does not turn like an axle cyclically, but while being rooted in the heart, it unfolds and cleaves to the brain and creates a short-circuit between the brain and the heart. So, the concepts of the brain that are all from the environment become concepts of noetic energy always rooted in the heart. Thus, the sufferer becomes a slave of his environment. The undefeatable weapon against the devil is the healing of this short circuit between the heart's noetic energy and the brain's reason. The healing consists of the limitation of all concepts in the brain, whether they be good or bad, which is achieved only when the noetic energy of the heart returns to its physiological cyclical movement by means of unceasing noetic prayer. Those who maintain that it is possible to cast out bad concepts and keep only good ones in the brain are naive. One must know the concepts of the devil with precision to defeat him. This is achieved by means of the cyclical movement of prayer in the heart.

Based on the above, anyone who has thoughts in his heart, whether they are good thoughts or bad, is mentally ill from the Patristic perspective. It makes no difference whether these thoughts are moral, extremely moral, immoral, or anything else. In other words, according to the Church Fathers, anyone whose soul has not been purified from the passions and who has not reached the state of illumination through the grace of the Holy Spirit is mentally ill, but not in the psychiatric sense. It should be noted that for a psychiatrist, being mentally ill is an entirely different topic. It means suffering from psychosis or being schizophrenic. For Orthodoxy, however, if you have not been purified of the passions and have not reached a state of *illumination*, are you normal or abnormal? That is the question.

Who is considered a normal Orthodox Christian in the Patristic tradition? If you want to see this, read the service of Holy Baptism, read the service of Holy Chrism that is held at the Patriarchate of Constantinople on Holy Thursday, read the service for the consecration of Church sanctuaries. There you will see what it means to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. There you will see who is truly *illuminated*.

In all of the Church services as well as the ascetic tradition of the Church, three spiritual states are mentioned: the state in which the soul and body have been *purified* from the passions, the state in which the human nous has been *illuminated* by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the state in which the human soul and body experience *theosis*.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, however, they speak about *purification* and *illumination*, since the Church services are expressions of reasonable worship.<sup>2</sup> So, who is the normal Orthodox Christian? Can someone who has been baptized but not *purified* be considered normal? What about someone who has not yet been *illuminated*? Or is it someone who has been *purified* and *illuminated*? Naturally, someone in the last category, the person who is *purified* and *illuminated*, is the normal Orthodox Christian.

So, what makes normal Orthodox Christians different from the rest of the Orthodox? Is it dogma? Of course not! Take the Orthodox in general. They all share the same dogma, the same tradition, and the same common worship. A Church sanctuary, for example, might hold three hundred Orthodox Christians. Of that number, however, only five are in a state of *illumination*, while the rest of them are not. The rest of them have not even the slightest idea what *purification* is. So this raises the question: How many among them are normal Orthodox Christians? Unfortunately, out of the three hundred only five are.

All the same, *purification* and *illumination* are specific conditions of healing that experienced and *illuminated* spiritual fathers can recognize. So, after all, we do have here clearly medical criteria. Or maybe you are not convinced that these criteria are strictly medical? Consider the fact that the *nous* is a physiological human organ that everyone has. It is not

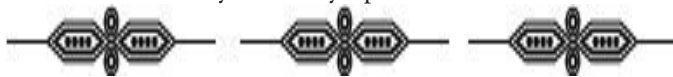
only Greeks and Orthodox that have a *nous*, so do Muslims, Buddhists, and everyone else. So all human beings have the same need for *purification* and *illumination*. And there is only one true therapeutic treatment—the one offered by the Holy Orthodox Church.

† † †  
NOTES

(1) Although many Orthodox theologians who write in English translate the Patristic term *theosis* as *deification*, that translation is problematic, because the wider public associates *deification* with the imperial cult of Rome. Toward the end of the republic, the Senate would formally “deify” certain emperors. Although this practice began in Rome with the “deification” of Romulus as the god Quirinus, it was common to ancient and oriental monarchies as a form of ancestor worship, reverence, or even flattery. The Classical Greek term for this kind of “deification” was *apotheosis* (the term *theosis* was seldom used prior to the Patristic period). It implies polytheism and the notion that some individuals can cross the line separating the created and the uncreated. This *deification* was condemned and mocked by early Christian apologists such as St. Justin Martyr and Tertullian.

In his English writings, Fr. John consistently avoids the term *deification*, sparingly uses the term *theosis* as it is (although he uses it frequently in Greek), and prefers the term *glorification*. The value of a term such as *glorification* is that it reflects both the Biblical continuity and the nature of the experience. According to the will of God, the prophets could see God’s glory, the Apostles could see Christ’s glory at the Transfiguration, and the saints still can see the glory of the Resurrected and Ascended Lord.

(2) Worship associated with texts formulated by the reason that is illumined by the Holy Spirit.



## ON “EPISCOPAL SYNODS”

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001).

Some people are convinced that sacred tradition is guarded by “episcopal synods.” But contemporary synods in the Orthodox Church are not like the local or ecumenical councils of bishops in the age of the early Christians, because the early councils were composed of bishops who had mastered the Church’s therapeutic method. Their aim in coming together as a council was not merely to safeguard the Church’s doctrine and liturgical order, as is the case today. No, their aim was **to preserve and protect the Church’s therapeutic method.** So a proper bishop is a **master of the therapeutic method of the Church.** During those early years, the work of a bishops’ synod was absolutely vital, more so than today. Their task was to preserve and protect the Church’s therapeutic method and curative treatment.

But when the bishops’ synod would safeguard this method, they would struggle along two fronts. The inner front involved taking care to safeguard sound ascetic culture and practices within the Church. The outer front consisted in safeguarding doctrinal teachings for the cure of the soul. Another aspect of the inner front was protecting dogmas from heresies, which always have their source in people who have not mastered the proper therapeutic method. Whenever an innovation appears within the Church, it always means, from the very moment it appears, that the person introducing the innovation not only fails to view doctrine properly, but he also fails to be in a healthy spiritual state.

Some of the greatest Fathers of the Church were systematizers who situated their understanding of doctrine in the context of the therapeutic method. They include St. John of Damascus, St. Maximos the Confessor, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Dionysios the Areopagite, and the disciples of St. Gregory Palamas among others. Moreover, we also find all these basic principles present and organized in the works of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, as well as in the works of St. Ignatios the God-bearer, because this is an unbroken tradition dating back to the first century. The same basic principles are also present throughout St. Paul’s epistles, as well as throughout the entire Old and New Testament. If we have the proper criteria, we can discover the presence of these basic principles and locate them in texts that contain them.

St. Makarios of Egypt carefully explains these issues by setting forth a coherent body of principles. He claims that *Christians who do not have noetic prayer are not intrinsically different from believers in other religions.* The only factor that makes such Christians different from believers of other religions is that these Christians intellectually believe in Christ and merely accept Christian doctrine, while the believers in other religions do not accept Christian doctrine. But such Christians do not gain anything from this kind of intellectual faith, because it does not heal them or purify their hearts from the passions. In terms of healing the human personality, they remain without benefit and with behavior that does not differ from that of non-Christians. This can be seen in their way of life.

Consider an Orthodox Christian whose soul is sick, but who not only fails to struggle to be healed, but does not even imagine that the Church has an effective therapeutic strategy for curing his sickness. What is the difference between such a nominal Orthodox Christian and a Muslim, for example? Does doctrine make him different? But what good is doctrine when it is not used as a pathway towards healing? **What good is doctrine when it is merely kept hung up in the closet so that it can be worshipped?** In other words, what is the point of worshipping the letter of the dogma and ignoring its spirit, hidden within the letter?

## Ἡ Κυρὰ - Σαρακοστή

Γράφει ὁ Πρωτ. π. Θεμιστοκλῆς Μουρτζανός.

Όταν ἦμουν μικρὸ παιδί καὶ ἔφτανε αὐτὴ ἡ λεγόμενη Καθαρὴ Ἑβδομάδα, στὸ σχολεῖο μᾶς μιλοῦσαν γιὰ μία παράξενη γυναίκα μὲ 7 πόδια! Τὴ γυναίκα αὐτὴ τὴ λέγαμε Κυρὰ-Σαρακοστή! Μᾶς ἔβαζαν καὶ τὴ ζωγραφίζαμε καὶ κάθε βδομάδα τῆς σβήναμε ἀπὸ ἓνα πόδι! Ἔτσι περνούσαμε τὸ διάστημα αὐτὸ μὲ τὴν ἀναμονὴ τοῦ Πάσχα, ὅταν θὰ σβήναμε καὶ τὸ τελευταῖο πόδι της. Θυμάμαι μὲ πόση χαρὰ περιμέναμε αὐτὸ τὸ διάστημα καὶ γιὰ τὰ κούλουμα καὶ γιὰ τὰ Σαρακοστιανὰ, τὴν ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ φαγητοῦ!

Βέβαια, κάπου μᾶς πείραζε τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι δὲν μπορούσαμε νὰ φάμε τὰ σχολικὰ ἐδέσματα, ἀπὸ τὴν τυρόπιτα μέχρι τὴ σοκολάτα, καὶ περιοριζόμασταν στὸ ἀπλὸ καὶ ταπεινὸ κολουρακι, ὅμως κανένας ἀπὸ μᾶς δὲν ἔλεγε νὰ ὑποκύψει στὸν πειρασμὸ καὶ ἐφόσον ἡ μητέρα μας δὲν ἦταν μπροστὰ νὰ κάνουμε μία μικροπαράβαση τοῦ τῆς νηστείας κανόνα! Ἀντίθετα, ἦμασταν περήφανοι ποὺ νηστεύαμε καὶ χαιρόμασταν φοβερὰ τὴ Πασχαλιάτικη μαγειρίτσα ποὺ ἔρχονταν μετὰ ἀπὸ μία ὑπέρβαση τοῦ συνηθισμένου γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία ζήλου!

Καὶ σήμερα πολλοὶ ἀνθρώποι νηστεύουν, ὄχι μόνον τὴ Σαρακοστή, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὶς ἄλλες νηστείες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ Τετάρτη καὶ ἡ Παρασκευή. Ὅμως ἡ νηστεία τῆς κυρὰ-Σαρακοστῆς παραμένει ἡ πιὸ σπουδαία νηστεία τοῦ χρόνου γιὰτὶ συνδυάζεται μὲ κάποια ἄλλα στοιχεῖα πολὺτιμα καί... γιὰ τὸ σύγχρονο ἄνθρωπο. Νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι 40 εἶναι οἱ ἡμέρες τῆς νηστείας γιὰτὶ τόσες μέρες νήστεψε ὁ Χριστὸς στὴν ἔρημο, μετὰ τὴ Βάπτισή Του, ἐνῶ οἱ 40 ἡμέρες εἶναι περίπου τὸ 1/10 τοῦ χρόνου, κι αὐτὸ τὸ 1/10 ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ ἀφιερώνει στὸ Θεό;

Δυστυχῶς, ὅπως ὅλα τὰ θρησκευτικὰ στοιχεῖα, ἔτσι κι ἡ Σαρακοστή ἔχει ἀπολέσει τὸ βαθύτερο νόημά της σήμερα, ἴσως μὲ εὐθύνη καὶ τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν ἀρχῶν. Κι αὐτὸ γιὰτὶ ἔχει τονιστεῖ ὑπὲρ τὸ δέον τὸ θέμα τῆς σωματικῆς νηστείας καὶ καθόλου δὲν τονίζονται τὰ συμπαρομαρτούντα της, τὰ ὁποῖα προσδίδουν καὶ τὴν οὐσία της. Γιὰτὶ ἡ Σαρακοστή εἶναι ἡ ἀφορμὴ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο τοῦ 21<sup>ου</sup> αἰῶνα νὰ ἐπαναδιατυπώσει μέσα του τὸ νόημα τῆς ζωῆς.

Σαρακοστή σημαίνει πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα νηστεία ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀπὸ ὅ,τι δηλαδὴ μᾶς ἀσχημίζει ἐσωτερικά. Ὁ σύγχρονος ἄνθρωπος ἔχει πολλὰ πάθη καὶ ἀδυναμίες, τὰ ὁποῖα δυστυχῶς τὰ ὠραιοποιεῖ καὶ τὰ θεωρεῖ φυσικά. Τὸ πρῶτο καὶ κυριότερο πάθος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ὁ ἐγωισμὸς, ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο πάσχουμε ὅλοι ἀνεξαιρέτως. Ἡ σωματικὴ νηστεία μᾶς βοηθᾷ νὰ περιορίσουμε τὸ νὰ θέλουμε διαρκῶς, κάνοντας ἐγκράτεια στὰ φαγητὰ ταυτόχρονα κάνουμε ἐγκράτεια στὴ διαρκὴ ἱκανοποίηση τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν μας! Σκεφτεῖτε τὴ πρόταση ζωῆς προβάλλει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας: Στὴν καταναλωτικὴ ἀδηφαγία καὶ ἐγωιστικὴ αὐτάρκεια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μιλά γιὰ τὸν περιορισμὸ τῶν ἀναγκῶν καὶ τὴν ταπείνωση καὶ τοῦ σώματος καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς!

Σαρακοστή ἀκόμα σημαίνει ἐπαναβίωση τοῦ λατρευτικοῦ στοιχείου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἡ κατάνυξη στὶς Προηγιασμένες Λειτουργίες, ἡ προσευχὴ στὴν Παναγία

μας μὲ τοὺς Χαιρετισμοὺς της, ἐκεῖνες οἱ ὠραιότατες λειτουργίες τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου κάθε Κυριακῆ, τὸ Μεγάλο Ἀπόδειπνο καὶ ὁ θρηνητικὸς Μεγάλος Κανόνας, ποιητικὰ κείμενα ὑψιστῆς ἀξίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρουσίας ἐνὸς τρόπου ζωῆς ποὺ ἀπεικονίζει τὴ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Στὸν σύγχρονο κόσμο τῆς κραιπνῆς, τοῦ φτηνοῦ ἐντυπωσιασμοῦ, τῶν δυνα-



τῶν ἡχῶν καὶ τῆς χειρίστης ποιότητος μουσικῆς, ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ λατρεία μιλά στὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μυστικά, μὲ τοὺς κατανυκτικοὺς βυζαντινοὺς ψαλμοὺς της, τὸ ἰλαρὸν φῶς τῶν κεριῶν, μὲ τὴ μετοχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα στὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Παναγίας, μὲ τὴν μετοχὴ στὸ χρόνο τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀποφυγὴ τοῦ ἄγχους τῆς γῆς. Στὸν κόσμο ποὺ προβάλλει ὡς ἰδανικὸ του τὴν τάση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ τὰ προλαβαίνει ὅλα καὶ τὴν παντοκρατορία τῆς τεχνολογίας καὶ τῶν νέων ὄπλων, ἡ Ἐκκλησία προβάλλει τὴν προσευχὴ ὡς ἔκφραση ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τὸ συνάνθρωπο, τὴν εὐχαριστία πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ γιὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸ τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴν πρόνοιά Του γιὰ μᾶς! Ἡ φράση τῶν Πατέρων «**Κύριε ὅπως ξέρεις καὶ ὅπως θέλεις, ἐλέησόν με...**» εἶναι ἡ ἐπανάσταση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στὸν ἀκτιβισμὸ τοῦ κόσμου!

Ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχει κι ἓνα τρίτο στοιχεῖο στὴ Σαρακοστή ποὺ τῆς προσδίδει οὐσία. Εἶναι τὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς χαρμολύπη! Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας

αὐτὴ ἡ περίοδος εἶναι ἡ ἀποτύπωση τῆς πραγματικῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ καθενὸς ἀνθρώπου. Λύπη γιὰ τὴν ἐξορία μας ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο ποὺ γιὰ μᾶς δὲν εἶναι τίποτε ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν κοινωνία μὲ τὸ Θεό, λύπη καὶ μετάνοια γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας, λύπη γιὰ τὰ ἐπικείμενα πάθη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ ὅ,τι μᾶς βασανίζει στὴ ζωὴ μας, ἀλλὰ ταυτόχρονα καὶ χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴ ζωὴ μας, χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν ξαναγεννημένη ἐπιθυμία γιὰ τὸ Θεό, εἰρήνη γιὰ τὴν ἐπιστροφή μας στὸ σπῆναι Του ποὺ εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία, εἶναι ἡ χαρὰ τῆς ἐπικείμενης Ἀνάστασης ποὺ δεσπόζει ἀκόμα καὶ στὶς πένθημα κατανυκτικές Ἀκολουθίες τῆς κυρά-Σαρακοστής!

«Πάντα τὴ Μεγάλῃ Παρασκευῇ, νᾶ ὄσαι μόνος σὸν τὸ Χριστὸ προσμένοντας τὸ τελευταῖο καρφί, τὸ ξύδι, τὴ λόγγη. Τὶς ζαριές ν' ἀκοῦς ἀτάραχα σὸ μοῖρασμα τῶν ὑπαρχόντων σου, τὶς βλαστήμιες, τὶς προκλήσεις, τὴν ἀδιαφορία. Πρὶν τὴν Παρασκευῇ δὲν ἔρχεται ἡ Κυριακῇ, ποὺ τότε λησιμονᾶς τὰ μαρτύρια τῶν δρόμων τῆς Μεγάλῃ Παρασκευῆς τῆς ζωῆς μας. Μὴν ξαφνιαστεῖς, μὴ φοβηθεῖς σ' ἀπρόσμενο σουρούπωμα. Οἱ μπόρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ δὲ στερεοῦν. Ἡ ξαστεριά θὰ ἔρθει τὸ Σαββατόβραδο. Τότε λησιμονᾶς τὰ μαρτύρια τῶν δρόμων τῆς μεγάλῃ Παρασκευῆς τῆς ζωῆς μας.» (Μοναχὸς Μωϋσῆς).

Εἶναι ὁμορφὴ ἡ κυρα-Σαρακοστή γιὰ τὴν μᾶς φέρνει κοντὰ στὴν Ἀνάσταση. Κι ὅταν αὐτὴ θὰ ἔρθει θὰ λησιμονήσουμε τοὺς κόπους καὶ τὸ δάκρυ, καὶ θὰ γευτοῦμε τὴ χαρὰ καὶ τὸ φῶς τῆς καινούργιας ζωῆς! Στὴ βουὴ τοῦ κόσμου, στὰ πάθη τῶν ἀνθρώπων, στὸ χάος τοῦ τίποτα ἕνα νόημα ζωῆς, ἕνας κόσμος βασιμμένος στὴν ἀγάπη, τὴν προσευχή, τὴν κάθαρη ἀνατέλλει μπροστὰ μας. Ἄς τὸν γευτοῦμε κι ἂς τὸν περπατήσουμε! Τὸν ἔχουμε ἀνάγκη...

Καλὴ Σαρακοστή!



Ἡ κάθε καλὴ ἰδέα ποὺ ἔρχεται στὸν ἀνθρώπινο νοῦ εἶναι ἀπὸ ἄνω ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Μόνο ὅτι κατεβάξει ἡ μύτη μας μὲ τὸ συνάχι εἶναι δικό μας.

Ὅσοι γεννήθηκαν ἀνάπηροι ἢ ἔγιναν ἀνάπηροι ἀπὸ ἄλλους ἢ ἀπὸ δική τους ἀπροσεξία, ἂν δὲν γογγύζουν ἀλλὰ δοξάζουν ταπεινὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ζοῦν κοντὰ στὸν Χριστό, μὲ τοὺς ὁμολογητὲς θὰ τοὺς κατατάξει ὁ Θεός.

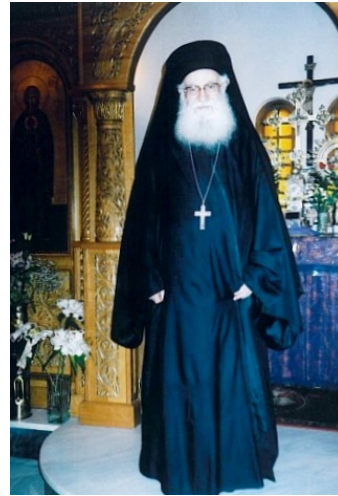
Ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δέχονται τὶς πλούσιες εὐλογίες τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ λίγοι εὐχαριστοῦν τὸν Θεὸ καὶ εἶναι εὐχαριστημένοι καὶ χαρούμενοι κοντὰ στὸν Χριστό. Πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι τὰ ἔχουν ὅλα ἀλλὰ ἔχουν καὶ λύπη γιὰ τὸν τοὺς λείπει ὁ Χ ρ ι σ τ ὁ ς.

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης

## Προφητικὴ Ὁμιλία τοῦ 1981!

Γιὰ τὸν Πρόδρομο τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου ποὺ εἶναι Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς, τοὺς Μουσουλμάνους καὶ τὴν Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἐνωση.

Ἀπὸ τὴν ὁμιλία τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ π. Ἀθανασίου Μυτιληναίου, στὶς 15.11.1981, ἐπὶ τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης «Δανιὴλ».



Νὰ ξέρετε ὅμως, ὅτι ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς εἶναι ὁ τελευταῖος πρόδρομος τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου· διότι ὅταν θὰ γίνῃ μιὰ ἰσοπέδωσις θρησκευτικὴ καὶ πολιτικὴ, κυβερνητικὴ, καὶ θὰ ὑπάρξῃ ἕνας μόνον ποὺ θὰ κυβερνήσῃ τὸν κόσμον, αὐτὸς ὁ ἕνας κατὰ τὴν Ἁγίαν Γραφήν καὶ τοὺς Πατέρες, αὐτὸς θὰ εἶναι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος.

Προσέξτε σ' αὐτὸ τὸ σημεῖο· ἴσως ἐδῶ θὰ

καταλάβετε τὸ κλειδί, τὸ γιὰ τὴν ἐδιώκοντο οἱ Χριστιανοί. Εἶναι ἕνα πάρα πολὺ σημαντικό σημεῖο, ποὺ πιθανῶς νὰ σᾶς λυθῇ μιὰ ἀπορία. Βέβαια πολλοὶ ἄρχοντες μετὰ τὸν Ναβουχοδονόσορα τὸ εἶχαν ἐπιχειρήσει αὐτό, ὅπως καὶ οἱ Ρωμαῖοι τὸ εἶχαν ἐπιχειρήσει, ὅπως καὶ σήμερα ἐπιχειρεῖται αὐτό. Ξέρετε πὼς ἐπιχειρεῖται αὐτὸ σήμερα; μὲ τὸν Οἰκουμενισμὸν!

Ὅταν ἐπὶ παραδείγματι λέμε: «Τὶ θὰ πῆ εἴσατε Ὁρθόδοξοι; τί θὰ πῆ εἴσατε Ρωμαιοκαθολικοί; Τίποτα. Μποροῦμε νὰ τὰ βάλωμε αὐτὰ σ' ἕνα χαρμάνι καὶ νὰ βγάλωμε ἕνα καινούργιο πρᾶγμα». Μάλιστα, ἐσχεδιάζετε νὰ γίνῃ στὴν Ἀμερικὴ ἕνας ναός, ὁ ὁποῖος θὰ εἶχε μίαν σκεπὴν, ἀλλὰ μέσα θὰ ἦταν τρεῖς ναοί, ἢ τέσσερες ναοί, ἴσως πέντε. Ἀκοῦστε· θὰ ἦταν οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, οἱ Ρωμαιοκαθολικοί, οἱ Πρωτεστάνται, οἱ Μωαμεθανοὶ καὶ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι. Ὅλοι θὰ ἦσαν κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ ἴδια κεραμίδια, κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδιαν σκεπὴν.

Αὐτὸ ἦταν ἕνα ἐπιχείρημα, νὰ δοθῇ σὰρκα καὶ ὀστᾶ στὴν ἰδέα τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ. Καὶ σήμερα ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς ὑπερ-ὑπάρχει, καὶ ὅπως θὰ γνωρίζετε εἶναι ὁ ὑπ' ἀριθμὸν ἕνα ἐχθρός, ὄχι μόνον τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἀπλῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ γενικὰ τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ.

Δέν εἶναι πολλὰ χρόνια, λίγο μετὰ τὸ 1970, ὅταν στὶς ἐφημερίδες ἐγράφοντο κάτι ἄρθρα ὑπὲρ τοῦ Μωαμεθανισμοῦ. Καὶ μάλιστα σὲ μιά, θὰ λέγαμε, διπλωματικὴ σχέσι μετὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτο, ὅτι ἡ ἡμέρα ποὺ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ θὰ ἐνωθοῦν μὲ τοὺς Μωαμεθανοὺς εἶναι πολὺ κοντὰ. Ἀκούσατε;... Εἶναι ἀπίθανο, εἶναι

δηλαδή αδιανόητα πράγματα. Αυτά, επιχειρούνται και τελεσιουργούνται αυτήν την στιγμή. Είναι ήγεμονική τελεσιουργία αυτή.

Ποιός ο σκοπός; Βέβαια είναι σχέδια του παγκοσμίου Σιωνισμού, ώστε με τον Οικουμενισμό να δημιουργήσουν μία θρησκευτική ένότητα των λαών, δήθεν εν όνόματι της ειρήνης, ενώ στην πραγματικότητα είναι δια την ύποταξη του κόσμου σε μία παγκοσμία κυβέρνηση. Μάλιστα την πρωτοχρονιά του 1980, ένας πολιτικός της Ελλάδος, είχε μιλήσει γι' αυτήν την παγκοσμιά κυβέρνηση, ότι δεν άργει η ημέρα που θα έρθει αυτή η παγκοσμία κυβέρνηση.

Ξεκινούν όμως από τον θρησκευτικόν τομέα, γιατί, όπως ξέρετε, ο θρησκευτικός τομέας είναι εκείνος ο οποίος χωρίζει τους λαούς, και αυτή τη στιγμή, επί παραδείγματι, είδατε πώς κινούνται οι Άραβες; Δεν πολιτικολογώ μ' αυτά που λέγω. Θέλω να σας δώσω να δήτε το φόντο των πραγμάτων· διότι είναι Μουσουλμάνοι και στρέφονται έναντι των Χριστιανών. Αντιθέτως οι ίδιοι θέλουν να είναι ήνωμένοι, άλλο αν δεν το καταφέρνουν αυτό το πράγμα· έτερον εκάτερον. Λέγονται αδελφοί Μουσουλμάνοι, όπως θα λεγόμαστε εμείς αδελφοί Χριστιανοί.

Να ξέρετε όμως, ότι ο Οικουμενισμός είναι ο τελευταίος πρόδρομος του Αντιχρίστου· διότι όταν θα γίνει μια ισοπέδωση θρησκευτική και πολιτική, κυβερνητική, και θα υπάρξει ένας μόνον που θα κυβερνήσει τον κόσμο, αυτός ο ένας κατά την Αγία Γραφή και τους Πατέρες, αυτός θα είναι ο Αντίχριστος.

Έτσι ο Οικουμενισμός χαρακτηρίστηκε αντίχριστον σύστημα, από τους μεγαλύτερους θεολόγους της εποχής μας, όπως από τον μακαρίτην τον π. Ίουστίνο Πόποβιτς, Σέρβο, αλλά και από άλλους επιφανείς θεολόγους Ορθοδόξους. Χωρίς δηλαδή περιστροφές.

Έτσι εδώ ο Ναβουχοδονόσορ θέλει να δημιουργήσει έναν θρησκευτικόν οικουμενισμόν. Δηλαδή βλέπει κανένας ότι οι ρίζες πραγμάτων που επιχειρούνται στην εποχή μας δεν είναι καινούργιες· είναι παλιές, είναι πολύ βαθιές, ανήκουν μέσα στην Ιστορία.

Αλλά ο Ναβουχοδονόσορ ήθελε να επιτύχει και κάτι άλλο· ήθελε να επιτύχει μίαν έθνική ένότητα· και αυτή ήταν, αν όλοι οι υπό κατοχήν λαοί, ελάτρευαν τον θεόν Μαρδούχ, και έτσι δεν ήταν πολύ εύκολο να υπάρξει μία επανάσταση εκ μέρους ενός λαού, ο οποίος σιγά-σιγά, αφού θα ελάτρευε τον Μαρδούχ, τον πολιούχον της Βαβυλώνας, θα ήσθάνετο ότι στρέφεται έναντιον της Βαβυλώνας ως εις τον θεόν της Βαβυλώνας.

Ξέρουμε ότι οι Ρωμαίοι αυτοκράτορες θεοποιούσαν τον éαυτόν τους. Η θεοποίηση των αυτοκρατόρων δεν έχει άπλως θρησκευτικόν χαρακτήρα, αλλά και πολιτικόν· διότι μόλις ανέκυρσσετο ένας αυτοκράτωρ, άμέσως έφτιαχναν άγάλματά του σ' όλη την ρωμαϊκήν

έπικράτεια, και διετάσσοντο όλοι οι υπό κατοχήν λαοί να προσκυνούν τὸ άγαλμα του θεού αυτοκράτορος και να προσφέρουν εις αυτό θυσίες. Γιατί; Χάριν πολιτικής ένότητος. Είναι κάτι ανάλογο που σήμερα συμβαίνει με την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ε. Ε. ή Ε.Ο.Κ.). Προσέξτε να ιδήτε.

Σας είπα δεν είναι καινούργια πράγματα· είναι πολύ-πολύ παλιά αυτά. Η Ε. Ε. είναι ένας οικονομικός οργανισμός. Φαινομενικά είναι ένας οικονομικός οργανισμός, όμως είναι κάτι πολύ περισσότερο. Αν ανοίξετε την παλιά έγκυκλοπαίδεια του Πυρσοῦ, υπάρχει ένα πολύ μεγάλο άρθρο που αναφέρεται σ' αυτήν την απόπειρα της Ηνωμένης Ευρώπης, εϋθύς μετά τον Α' παγκόσμιον πόλεμον, με ξεκίνημα την οικονομικήν ένότητα της Ευρώπης και με τέλος, την πολιτικήν ένότητα της Ευρώπης.

Άς υποθέσουμε ότι υπάρχει ένας συνεταιρισμός σιταριού και πηγαίνουν όλοι οι παραγωγοί τὸ σιτάρι τους εκεί. Αυτός ο συνεταιρισμός ν' αρχίσει, (πέρα από την περίπτωση συλλογής σίτου), να λείη στους ανθρώπους, τους παραγωγούς, και να όρίζει έναν τρόπο ζωής που να είναι όμοιος στα σπίτια τους. Θα σας φαινόταν παράξενο αυτό; Δηλαδή να εξαγγέλλη μέτρα ο συνεταιρισμός που να προσαρμόζονται όλοι οι συνεταιίροι κάτω από τα μέτρα του συνεταιρισμού. Είναι αδιανόητον! Ο συνεταιρισμός δεν ενδιαφέρεται παρὰ μόνον να παραλάβη τὸ σιτάρι. Τι θα κάνης σπίτι σου έσύ, τι θα φάς, πώς περνάς με τη γυναίκα σου και τὰ παιδιά σου, τι πιστεύεις, αυτό δεν ενδιαφέρει τον συνεταιρισμό.

Αλλά τον οικονομικόν συνεταιρισμόν που λέγεται Ε. Ε. ενδιαφέρει. Γι' αυτό έρχεται και λείη στη Βουλή των Ελλήνων ότι θα εισαχθῆ αυτός ο νόμος, εκείνος ο νόμος κ.τ.λ... Φέρ' είπειν: Οί Χιλιασταί θα κινούνται έτσι, οί όμοφυλόφιλοι, θα γίνη νόμος και θα άμνηστευθούν, ή μοιχεία θα άμνηστευθῆ, οί άμβλώσεις, οί εκτρώσεις θα γίνη νόμος να άμνηστευθούν, δεν θα καταδικάζεται πλέον ούτε ο γιατρός ούτε ο άνθρωπος, ή γυναίκα που κάνει άμβλωσι, εκτρωσι· όχι. Αυτά γιατί; Λείη για να έχωμε προσαρμογή από νομοθετικής πλευράς με την Ευρώπη! Γιατί; Για ποιόν λόγο; Για να 'χωμε 'Ηνωμένη Ευρώπη· για να πρέπη να σκεφτώμαστε όλοι τὸ ίδιο!...

Οί ρίζες αυτών των καταστάσεων ανήκουνε πολύ παλιά! Να μια πρώτη· ο Ναβουχοδονόσορ, με τὸ χρυσὸ αυτό άγαλμα, και καλεί όλους τους διοικητάς, τοπάρχας, ύψηλά πρόσωπα και τὰ λοιπά, να έρθουν να προσκυνήσουν τὸ χρυσὸ αυτό άγαλμα, την χρυσή εικόνα. Δόθηκε ή έντολή ως έξης· όταν θα έπαιζαν μουσικά όργανα, θα έπεφταν όλοι να προσκυνήσουν τον Μαρδούχ...

Ο έχων ὦτα ακούειν ακουέτω!

## Ἡ Ἐπανάσταση τοῦ 1821

### Ἡ Ἑλληνική Ἐπανάσταση εἶναι ἡ πῶς πνευματική ἐπανάσταση πού ἐγίνε στό κόσμο. Εἶναι ἀγιασμένη!

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἡ ἐπανάσταση γίνεται τις περισσότερες φορές ἀπό κάποιες ὑλικές αἰτίες, πού εἶναι ἡ σκλαβιά, ἡ στέρση, ἡ κακοπέραση, τὰ βασανιστήρια, ἡ περιφρόνηση. Ἡ λευτεριά εἶναι ἡ θεότητα πού λατρεύει ὁ ἐπαναστάτης, καί γι' αὐτή χύνει τὸ αἷμα του. Μὰ τὴ λευτεριά, πολλές φορές, σάν τὴν ἀποχτήσει ὁ ἐπαναστάτης, δὲν τὴ μεταχειρίζεται γιὰ πνευματικούς σκοπούς, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ χαρεῖ τὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ μονάχα. Κοντὰ στὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ ἔρχεται κ' ἡ πνευματικὴ, μὰ τις περισσότερες φορές γιὰ πνευματικὴ ζωὴ θεωροῦνε οἱ ἄνθρωποι κάποιες ἀπολαύσεις πού εἶναι κι αὐτὲς ὑλικές, κι ἄς φαίνονται σάν πνευματικές.

Ἐνας ἐπαναστάτης τῆς Γαλλικῆς ἐπανάστασης, νὰ ποῦμε, θεωροῦσε γιὰ πνευματικὰ κάποια πράγματα πού, σι' ἀλήθεια, δὲν ἦταν πνευματικά. Αὐτὸς ἤθελε ν' ἀποχτήσει τὴ λευτεριά, γιὰ νὰ κάνει αὐτὰ πού νόμιζε πὼς εἶναι σωστὰ καὶ δίκαια γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμο μονάχα, δηλαδή γιὰ τὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ τους, μὴ πιστεύοντας πὼς ὑπάρχει τίποτ' ἄλλο γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἐπιδιώξει ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω πὼς, γιὰ τις περισσότερες ἐπαναστάσεις, οἱ αἰτίες πού τις κάνανε νὰ ξεσπάσουνε σταθήκανε ὑλικές, καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία πού ἐπιδιώξανε ἦταν προορισμένη νὰ... ἰκανοποιήσει μονάχα ὑλικές ἀνάγκες.

Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ὅμως Ἐπανάσταση εἶχε μὲν γιὰ αἰτία καὶ τις ὑλικές στερήσεις καὶ τὴ κακοπάθησή τοῦ κορμιοῦ, ὅπως ἡ κάθε ἐπανάστα-

ση, ἀλλὰ, ἀπάνω ἀπ' αὐτὲς τις αἰτίες, εἶχε καὶ κάποιες πού εἶναι καθαρὰ πνευματικές. Καὶ πνευματικὸ, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, ἀληθινὰ πνευματικὸ, εἶναι ὅ,τι ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὸ πνευματικὸ μέρος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, μὲ τὴ ψυχὴ του, δηλαδή μὲ τὴ θρησκεία.

Ἡ σκλαβιά πού ἔσπρωξε τοὺς Ἕλληνες νὰ ξεσηκωθοῦνε καταπάνω στοῦ Τοῦρκο δὲν ἦταν μονάχα ἡ στέρση καὶ ἡ κακοπάθησή τοῦ κορμιοῦ, ἀλλὰ, ἀπάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, τὸ ὅτι ὁ τύραννος ἤθελε νὰ χαλάσει τὴ πίστη τους, μποδίζοντάς τους ἀπὸ τὰ θρησκευτικὰ

χρῆμα τους, ἀλλαξοπιστίζοντάς τους καὶ σφάζοντας ἢ κρεμάζοντάς τους, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἀρνιόντανε τὴ πίστη τους γιὰ νὰ γίνουνε μωχαμετάνοι. Γιὰ τοῦτο πίστη καὶ πατρίδα εἶχανε γίνε ἓνα καὶ τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα, καὶ ἡ λευτεριά πού ποθοῦσανε δὲν ἦταν μονάχα ἡ λευτεριά πού ποθοῦνε ὅλοι οἱ ἐπαναστάτες, ἀλλὰ ἡ λευτεριά νὰ φυλάξουνε τὴν ἀγιασμένη πίστη τους, πού μ' αὐτὴν ἐλπίζανε νὰ σώσουνε τὴ ψυχὴ τους. Γιατί, γι' αὐτούς, κοντὰ στοῦ κορμιοῦ, πού ἔχει τόσες ἀνάγκες καὶ πού μὲ τόσα βάρη γίνεται ἡ συντήρησή του, ὑπῆρχε καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, πού εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς πὼς ἀξίζει περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ὅσο περισσότερο ἀξίζει τὸ ροῦχο ἀπ' αὐτό.

Ἐκεῖνες οἱ ἀπλὲς ψυχές, πού ζοῦσανε στὰ βουνὰ καὶ στὰ ρημοτόπια, ἦτανε διδαγμένες ἀπὸ τοὺς πατεράδες τους στὴ πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ γνωρίζανε, μ' ὅλο πού ἦτανε ἀγράμματες, κάποια ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια του,

ὅπως εἶναι τοῦτα: «*Τί θὰ ὠφελήσει ἄραγε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἂν κερδίσει τὸν κόσμον ὅλο, καὶ ζημιωθεῖ τὴ ψυχὴ του;*» Ἡ: «*Τί θὰ δώσει ἄνθρωπος γιὰ πληρωμὴ τῆς ψυχῆς του;*» Καὶ «*Ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι πῶς πολύτιμη ἀπὸ τὴ τροφή, ὅπως τὸ κορμὶ ἀπὸ τὸ φόρεμα!*» κ. ἄ.

Γιὰ τοῦτο, κατὰ τὰ πικρὰ χρόνια τῆς σκλαβιάς μας, χιλιάδες παλληκάρια σφαχτήκανε καὶ κρεμαστήκανε γιὰ τὴ πίστη τους, ἀψηφώντας τὴ νεότητά

τους, καὶ μὴ δίνοντας σημασία στοῦ κορμιοῦ τους καὶ σὲ τοῦτη τὴ πρόσκαιρη ζωὴ. Στράτευμα ὀλάκερο εἶναι οἱ ἅγιοι νεομάρτυρες, πού δὲ θανατωθήκανε γιὰ τὰ ὑλικὰ ἀγαθὰ τούτης τῆς ζωῆς, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὴ πολύτιμη ψυχὴ τους, πού γνωρίζανε πὼς δὲ θὰ πεθάνει μαζί μὲ τὸ κορμὶ, ἀλλὰ θὰ ζήσει αἰώνια. Ἀκούγανε καὶ πιστεύανε ἀτράνταχτα τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πού εἶπε: «*Μὴ φοβηθεῖτε ἐκεῖνον πού σκοτώνει τὸ σῶμα, καὶ πού δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει τίποτα παραπάνω. Ἀλλὰ νὰ φοβηθεῖτε ἐκεῖνον πού μπορεῖ νὰ θανατώσει καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴ ψυχὴ.*»

Ἡ ἐλευθερία, πού γι' αὐτὴ θυσιάζονταν, δὲν ἦταν κάποια ἀκαθόριστη θεότητα, ἀλλὰ ἦταν ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς, πού γι' αὐτὸν εἶπε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «*Ὁπου το Πνεῦμα τοῦ Κυρίου, ἐκεῖ εἶναι καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία.*» Κι ἄλλοῦ λέγει: «*Σταθεῖτε στερεὰ στὴν ἐλευθερία πού σὰς χάρισε ὁ Χριστὸς, σταθεῖτε καὶ*



Ὁ Παλαιὸν Πατρὼν Γερμανὸς ὑψώνει τὴ σημαία τῆς Ἀνεξαρτησίας



*μὴν πέσετε πάλι στὸ ζυγὸ τῆς δουλείας. Γιατί γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία σᾶς κάλεσε. Ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία μὴν τὴν παίρνετε μονάχα σὰν ἀφορμὴ γιὰ τὴ σάρκα σας».*

Γιὰ τοῦτο εἶναι ἀγιασμένη ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάσταση, κι ἀγιασμένοι οἱ πολεμιστές της, ὅπως ἦταν ἀγιασμένοι ὅσοι πολεμήσανε μαζί με τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Παλαιολόγο, πρὶν ἀπὸ τρακόσα ἐξηνταοχτῶ χρόνια, κατὰ τὸ πάρσιμο τῆς Πόλης, καταπάνω στὸν ἴδιο ὄχτρο τῆς πίστες τους.

Στὴν ἐπανάσταση τοῦ Εἴκοσι-Ἔνα, ὅπως καὶ στὴν πολιορκία τῆς Πόλης, μαζί με τοὺς λαϊκοὺς πολεμοῦσανε πλῆθος ρασοφορεμένοι, καλόγεροι, παπάδες καὶ δεσποτάδες, καὶ τραβούσανε μπροστὰ με τὸ σταυρὸ στὸ χέρι, κι ἀπὸ πίσω τους χίμιζε κλαίγοντας ὁ λαός, κ' ἔφελνε: **«Γιὰ τῆς πατρίδος τὴν ἐλευθερία, γιὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν πίστη τὴν ἀγία, γι' αὐτὰ τὰ δύο πολεμῶ, μ' αὐτὰ νὰ ζήσω ἐπιθυμῶ, κι ἂν δὲν τὰ ἀποκτήσω, τί μ' ὠφελεῖ νὰ ζήσω;»**

Στὴ Πόλη κρεμάστηκε ὁ πατριάρχης Γρηγόριος, ἀνοίγοντας πρῶτος τὸ μαρτυρολόγιο τῆς Ἐπανάστασης. Ὁ Θανάσης Διάκος πολέμησε σὰν νέος Λεωνίδα, καὶ σουβλίστηκε γιὰ τὴ πίστη του. Ὁ Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανός, ὁ Ἡσαΐας Σαλώνων, ὁ Ρωγῶν Ἰωσήφ, ὁ Παπαφλέσσας, ὁ Οὐμῖος Βλαχάβας, κι ἄλλοι πολλοί, πολεμήσανε γιὰ τὴν ἀγιασμένη πατρίδα τους.

Στὴ Τριπολιτσὰ κλειστήκανε στὴ φυλακὴ κατὰ τὴν Ἐπανάσταση οἱ δεσποτάδες τοῦ Μοριά, κ' οἱ περισσότεροι πεθάνανε με ἀβάσταχτα μαρτύρια. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ στὴ Πόλη, φυλακωθήκανε καὶ κρεμαστήκανε πολλοὶ δεσποτάδες.

Παρακάτω βάζω λίγα λόγια ἀπὸ τὸ ἡμερολόγιο τοῦ ἀντιναύαρχου Γεωργίου Σαχτούρη: «Παρασκευή, 25 Δεκεμβρίου. Ἐορτὴ τῶν Γενεθλίων τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀραγμένοι εἰς Ντάρδιζα με ἤσυχον ἀέρα τῆς τραμουντάνας, πλὴν με χιόνια. Αὐτὴν τὴν ἡμέρα, διὰ τὸ χαρμόσυνο τῆς ἐορτῆς, τὸ πρωί, ὑψώνοντας τὴν σημαίαν μας, ἐρρίχθη καὶ μία κανονιά, καθὼς καὶ ὅλα τα ἑλληνικὰ ἐδῶ ἀραγμένα τὸ αὐτὸ ἔπραξαν. Κυριακή, 15 Αὐγούστου. Ἐορτὴ τῆς Θεοτόκου. Ἐξημερώθημεν ἀραγμένοι. Ὑψώσαμεν τὰς σημαίας καὶ ἐρρίξαμεν καὶ ἀπὸ μίαν κανονιάν διὰ τὸ χαρμόσυνο τῆς ἡμέρας».

Ὁ ναύαρχος Κουντουριώτης ἔκανε τὴ προσευχὴ του, σὰν τοὺς παλιούς, νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει ἡ Παναγία στὴ ναυμαχία τῆς «Ἑλλης», κι ὅπου ἄλλοῦ τὸν καλοῦσε τὸ χρέος του. Τὸ ἴδιο κάνανε καὶ κάνουνε ὅλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες στὸ πόλεμο.

Κατὰ τὴν καταστροφὴ τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, πρῶτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς θρησκείας πληρώσανε με τὴ ζωὴ τοὺς τὸ καινούργιο χαράτσι στὸν ὄχτρο τῆς πίστες μας. Ὁ μητροπολίτης τῆς Σμύρνης Χρυσόστομος

κρεμάστηκε, ὁ δεσπότης τῶν Κυδωνιῶν Γρηγόριος θάφτηκε ζωντανός, ὁ Μοσχονησιῶν Ἀμβρόσιος θανατώθηκε ἄσπλαχνα, κι ὅλοι οἱ παπάδες κ' οἱ καλόγεροι περάσανε ἀπὸ τὸ σπαθί.

Οἱ Γερμανοὶ κ' οἱ Ἴταλοὶ θανατώσανε κι αὐτοὶ τοὺς ρασοφορεμένους τῶν χωριῶν, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀπομείνουν παραπίσω ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους θεομάχους.

Ναί! Πίστη καὶ Πατρίδα εἶναι γιὰ μᾶς ἓνα πράγμα. Κι ὅπως πολεμᾷ τὸ ἓνα, πολεμᾷ καὶ τ' ἄλλο, κι ἂς μὴν ξεγελιέται.

Ἡ μάννα μας ἡ πνευματικὴ εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας, ποὺ ποτίστηκε με πολὺ κι ἀγιασμένο αἷμα. Κανένας λαὸς δὲν ἔχυσε καὶ δὲν χύνει ὡς τὰ σήμερα τὸ αἷμα του γιὰ τὴ πίστη, ὅσο ὁ δικός μας. Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη εἶναι ὁ θησαυρὸς ὁ κρυμμένος κι ὁ πολύτιμος μαργαρίτης ποὺ λέγει ὁ Χριστός.



**Ν**ὰ παύση ἡ συστηματικὴ περιφρόνησις τῆς θρησκείας ἐκ μέρους πολιτικῶν ἀνδρῶν, ἐπιστημόνων, λογίων, δημοσιογράφων καὶ ἄλλων. Ἡ λεγομένη ἀνωτέρα τάξις νὰ συμμορφωθῇ με τὰ ἔθιμα τῆς χώρας, ἂν θέλῃ νὰ ἐγκλιματισθῇ ἐδῶ. Νὰ γίνῃ προστάτις τῶν πατριῶν καὶ ὄχι διώκτρια. Νὰ ἀσπασθῇ καὶ νὰ ἐγκολληθῇ τὰς ἐθνικὰς παραδόσεις. Νὰ μὴ περιφρονῇ ἀναφανδὸν ὅ,τι παλαιόν, ὅ,τι ἐγχώριον, ὅ,τι Ἑλληνικόν. **Νὰ καταπολεμηθῇ ὁ ξενισμὸς, ὁ πιθηκισμὸς, ὁ φραγκισμὸς...** Νά μὴ χάσκωμεν πρὸς τὰ ξένα...

Ἡμύνθησαν περὶ πάτρης οἱ ἄστοργοι πολιτικοί, οἱ ἐκ περιτροπῆς μητροιοὶ τοῦ τάλαιπώρου ὠρφανισμένου Γένους... Ἄμυνα περὶ πάτρης δὲν εἶναι αἰ σπασμωδικαί, κακομελέτητοι καὶ κακοσύντακτοι ἐπιστρατεῖται, οὐδὲ τὰ σκωριασμένης ἐπιδεικτικότητος θωρηκτά. Ἄμυνα περὶ πάτρης θὰ ἦτο ἡ εὐσυνειδήτος λειτουργία τῶν θεσμῶν, ἡ ἐθνικὴ ἀγωγή, ἡ χρηστὴ διοίκησις, ἡ καταπολέμησις τοῦ... ξένου ὑλισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ πιθηκισμοῦ, τοῦ διαφθείραντος τὸ φρόνημα καὶ ἐκφυλίσαντος σήμερα τὸ ἔθνος, καὶ ἡ πρόληψις τῆς χρεωκοπίας. Τις ἡμύνθη περὶ πάτρης; Καὶ τί πταίει ἡ γλαῦξ, ἡ θρηνοῦσα ἐπὶ ἐρείπιων; Πταίουν οἱ πλάσαντες τὰ ἐρείπια. **Καὶ τὰ ἐρείπια τὰ ἔπλασαν οἱ ἀνίκανοι κυβερνῆται της...**

**Κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης  
(1851-1911)**

## Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία Εἶναι Ἀήτητη!

Τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010), Ἰ. Ναὸς Ἁγ. Παντελεήμονος Φλωρίνης, 18-3-1973.

«Λέγει αὐτῷ Φίλιππος· ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε.»

(Ἰωάν. 1:47)



Σήμερα, ἀγαπητοί μου, εἶνε ἑορτὴ μεγάλη καὶ ἔνδοξος. Δὲν ἑορτάζει ἓνας ἢ δύο ἅγιοι, ὅπως τὶς ἄλλες ἡμέρες· ἑορτάζει ὅλη ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία μας.

Ποιός μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφωνήσῃ λόγο ἀντάξιο

τῆς μεγάλης ἑορτῆς; Θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ βρισκεται ἐδῶ ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἁγίους ἀγγέλους ἢ τοὺς πατέρας καὶ διδασκάλους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἢ τοὺς μάρτυρες ποὺ ἔχυσαν τὸ αἷμα τοὺς γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Ἐμεῖς λίγες σκέψεις θὰ διατυπώσουμε ἐπὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ εὐαγγελίου.

Ὅμιλεῖ τὸ εὐαγγέλιο γιὰ κάποιον Ναθαναήλ, ποὺ εἶχε μικρὰ ἰδέα γιὰ τὸ Χριστό. Ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καταγόταν ἀπὸ ἄσημο χωριὸν (τὴ Ναζαρέτ), ἐπειδὴ γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ πτωχὴ μητέρα καὶ ὑπὸ ταπεινὲς συνθήκες, κρίνοντας ἀπ' αὐτὰ εἶπε· «Ἐκ Ναζαρέτ δύναται τι ἀγαθὸν εἶναι;» (Ἰωάν. 1:47). Ἐἶνε δυνατόν ἀπ' τὸ χωριὸν αὐτὸ νὰ βγῆ κάτι καλὸ, νὰ βγῆ ὁ Σωτὴρας τοῦ κόσμου;

Ἄλλ' ὅπως τότε ὁ Ναθαναήλ εἶπε τὸν περιφρονητικὸν αὐτὸν λόγο, ἔτσι καὶ σήμερα ὑπάρχουν «Ναθαναήλ», ποὺ μιλοῦν περιφρονητικὰ γιὰ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ γιὰ τὸ ἔργο του. Λένε κι αὐτοί, κατ' ἄλλο τρόπο βέβαια· «Ἐκ Ναζαρέτ δύναται τι ἀγαθὸν εἶναι;», καὶ θεωροῦν ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας εἶνε πλέον κάτι ξεπερασμένο, ἓνας θεσμὸς χρεωκοπημένος, ἀνάξιος λόγου, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ μπῆ στὸ μουσεῖο. Τί ἔχουμε νὰ ποῦμε σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς «Ναθαναήλ»; Θ' ἀπαντήσουμε μὲ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Φιλίππου· «Ἐρχου καὶ ἴδε». Ἄπιστοι καὶ ἄθεοι, ἐλάτε νὰ θαυμάσετε σήμερα, τὴν ἁγία αὐτὴ ἡμέρα, τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ἐπὶ ἔρχονται, ἀγαπητοί μου, πολλὰ ἀξιοθαύμαστα. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, στὸν ἀρχαῖο κόσμος ἦταν οἱ κρεμαστοὶ κῆποι τῆς Βαβυλώνας, οἱ πυραμίδες τοῦ Χέοπος, ὁ Κολοσσὸς τῆς Ῥόδου, ἡ Ἀκρόπολις τῶν Ἀθηνῶν· καὶ σήμερα πολλὰ ἐπιτεύγματα τῆς ἐπιστήμης καὶ τῆς τεχνικῆς εἶνε θαυμαστά. Ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀνώτερο ἀπὸ ὅλα, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ προκαλεῖ τὸ θάμβος τῶν αἰώνων, εἶνε ἡ ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία. Ἐορτάζει σήμερα ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ἀλλὰ τί εἶνε Ἐκκλησία; Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἀγαπητοί μου, δὲν εἶνε τὸ κτήριον τοῦ ναοῦ· ὄχι. Τοὺς ναοὺς μπορεῖ μιὰ μέρα ἓνα ἄθεο καθεστὼς νὰ τοὺς γκρεμίσῃ, ὅπως ἔγινε στὴ Βόρειο Ἡπειρο ἐπὶ Ἐμβερ Χότζα. Ὁ ναὸς γκρεμίζεται, ἡ

Ἐκκλησία δὲ γκρεμίζεται· ἐδῶ εἶνε ἡ μεγάλη διαφορά. Γιατὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν εἶνε τὰ ντουβάρια· ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶνε κάτι βαθύτερο καὶ ὑψηλότερο, κάτι ἅγιο καὶ πνευματικὸ καὶ ἀθάνατο. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶνε τὸ σύνολο τῶν ψυχῶν ποὺ πιστεύουν. Τί πιστεύουν· ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν εἶνε ἀπλῶς ἓνας ἄνθρωπος, ἓνας φιλόσοφος ἢ κοινωνιολόγος, ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς μεγάλους ἄνδρες τῆς ἱστορίας· ὁ Χριστὸς εἶνε παραπάνω ἀπὸ ἀγγέλου, ἀρχαγγέλου, ἁγίου, παραπάνω ἀπ' ὅλο τὸν οὐράνιο κόσμ· εἶνε αὐτὸς ὁ Θεός. Αὐτὴ εἶνε ἡ πίστι μας, τὴν ὁποία διακηρύττει σήμερα ἡ ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία. Καὶ ὅσοι πιστεύουν στὸ Χριστὸ ὡς Θεό, αὐτοὶ ἀποτελοῦν τὸ σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας του.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶνε τὸ βασίλειον—ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς ὁποίας «οὐκ ἔσται τέλος» (Λουκ. 1:33 καὶ Σύμβ. Πίστ.).

Ποιὰ ἦταν ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς; Ξεκίνησε ἀπὸ δώδεκα ψαράδες. Σ' αὐτοὺς εἶπε ὁ Χριστός· Σᾶς στέλνω νὰ σαλπύσετε τὸ κήρυγμά μου σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμ· ἓνα κήρυγμα ἀντίθετο μὲ τὶς ἐπιθυμίες τοῦ ὄχλου, συγκρουόμενο μὲ ὅλο τὸν ἀρχαῖο εἰδωλολατρικὸν κόσμ, ἀνατρεπτικὸ τοῦ κατεστημένου. Πῶς ἔγινε ἡ ἐξάπλωσις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Ἐὰν ῥίξουμε μιὰ ματιὰ στὴν ἱστορία, θὰ δοῦμε ὅτι ὠρισμένοι ἴδρυσαν βασιλεῖες καὶ αὐτοκρατορίες μεγάλες, ὅπως εἶνε λόγου χάριν τὸ Μακεδονικὸ κράτος τοῦ Μ. Ἀλεξάνδρου, ἡ Ῥωμαϊκὴ αὐτοκρατορία, τὸ κράτος τοῦ Μ. Ναπολέοντος, ποὺ ἔφθασαν ὡς τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς. Ἐφθασαν· ἀλλὰ πῶς ἔφθασαν; Ὁ μὲν Ἀλέξανδρος μὲ τὶς περίφημες φάλαγγες ποὺ ἐξώπλισε, ὁ Καῖσαρ μὲ τὶς λεγεῶνες του, ὁ Ναπολέον μὲ τὶς στρατιές του.

Ἡ βασιλεία ὅμως τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν ἐπεβλήθη μὲ ὄπλα. Πῶς ἀπλώθηκε; Ἐδῶ εἶνε τὸ θαυμαστό. Ποῦ εἶνε οἱ φάλαγγες, οἱ λεγεῶνες, τὰ στρατεύματά τῆς; Ποῦ εἶνε τὰ ὄπλα καὶ τὰ πυροβόλα τῆς; Τί μέσα μεταχειρίστηκε λοιπόν; Χρῆμα; Οἱ ἀπόστολοι δὲν εἶχαν στὶς τσέπες τοὺς τίποτα. Ὅπλα; Ἐνα σουγιὰ εἶχε ὁ Πέτρος, καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦ ἀπηγόρευσε νὰ τὸν ἔχη κι αὐτόν. Σοφία καὶ γνῶσι; Ἀγράμματοι ἦταν. Καὶ ὅμως, χωρὶς λεφτά, χωρὶς ὄπλα, χωρὶς γνώσεις καὶ ἐπιστήμες, ξεκίνησαν οἱ δώδεκα ψαράδες καὶ ἐξέτειναν στὸν κόσμ τὴν μεγαλυτέρα βασιλεία, τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας.

Τὶς δυσκολίες αὐτὲς τὶς γνώριζε ὁ Χριστός, γι' αὐτὸ τοὺς εἶπε· «Ἴδου ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω ὑμᾶς ὡς πρόβατα ἐν μέσῳ λύκων»· σᾶς στέλνω σὰν πρόβατα ἀνάμεσα σὲ λύκους (Ματθ. 10:16). Πρόβατα οἱ ἀπόστολοι, λύκοι ὁ κόσμος τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων, τῶν διωκτῶν, τῶν Νερῶνων. Γιὰ φανταστήτε τώρα τὸ χεμῶνα νὰ πάρῃς δώδεκα πρόβατα καὶ νὰ τὰ σπρώξῃς μέσα σ' ἓνα ἄγριο δάσος γεμᾶτο λύκους. Τὶ περιμένετε, ποιὸ θὰ εἶνε τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα; Ἐκατὸ τοῖς ἑκατὸ τὰ πρόβατα θὰ γίνουν βορὰ τῶν λύκων. Καὶ ὅμως ἐδῶ τὰ πρόβατα

δὲν ἐξωλοθρεύθησαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ νίκησαν τοὺς λύκους! Καὶ μόνο αὐτό; Ἐκαναν καὶ τοὺς λύκους πρόβατα! Εἶνε ποτὲ δυνατὸν ὁ λύκος νὰ γίνῃ πρόβατο; Ἐν τούτοις ἔγινε· οἱ ἀποστολοὶ κατώρθωσαν νὰ κάνουν Χριστιανοὺς καὶ πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς διώκτες των.

Ποιά ἡ δύναμι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Φαίνεται, ὅτι παραπάνω ἀπὸ τὰ ὄπλα, τὰ χρήματα, τὴ σοφία, ὑπάρχει μιὰ ἄλλη δύναμι, ἀόρατη. Ἄς μὴ πιστεύουν οἱ ἄπιστοι· δὲ νικοῦν τὰ ὑλικά μέσα. Μιὰ χούφτα ἀνθρώπων κατώρθωσε νὰ νικήσῃ ὁλόκληρο τὸν κόσμο. «Αὕτη ἡ ἀλλοίωσις τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ Ὑψίστου.» (Ψαλμ. 76:11). Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο ἐκπορεύεται μιὰ ἀήττητος δύναμις, πὺν νικᾷ τὰ πάντα.

Ἐὰν λοιπὸν ἀποβλέψουμε στὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἐὰν ἀποβλέψουμε στὴν ἐξάπλωσί της, ἐὰν δοῦμε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς πὺν ἀντιμετώπισε, παντοῦ βλέπουμε τὸ θαῦμα. Ἀξιοθαύμαστη ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, ἀήττητη. Κανεὶς δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ τὴν καταβάλῃ. Ἡ ἱστορία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶνε ἱστορία ἀλλεπαλλήλων θαυμάτων. Ἀναφέρω δύο μόνο.

Τί ἐορτάζουμε στὶς 25 Μαρτίου; Πὺς σώθηκε ἕνας λαὸς πὺν ἦταν 400 χρόνια σκλάβος. Πὺς σώθηκε; Ἐρώτημα μεγάλο. Ἄλλα ἔθνη, μέσα σὲ 50 - 60 χρόνια δουλείας, ἀφωμοιώθηκαν καὶ ἔσβησαν. Πὺς ἐδῶ τέσσερις ὁλόκληροι αἰῶνες δὲν κατώρθωσαν νὰ διακόψουν τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ ἔθνους μας; Τί ἀπαντᾷ ἡ ἱστορία; Ὅχι οἱ πλαστογράφοι τῆς ἱστορίας, ἀλλὰ ἡ πραγματικὴ ἱστορία; Καὶ οἱ λίθοι ἀκόμα καὶ οἱ πέτρες φωνάζουν, ὅτι τὸ γένος τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀνωρθώθηκε καὶ σώθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Αὕτη στάθηκε ἡ κιβωτός, μέσα στὴν ὁποία διατηρήθηκε. Αὕτη τὸ κράτησε στὶς ἀγκάλες της ὅπως ἡ μάνα τὸ νήπιο. Αὐτὸ ἔκανε τὸν ποιητὴ Κώστα Κρυστάλλη νὰ γράψῃ:

Ὡ Ἐκκλησία! Θρησκεία! Γλυκεῖα μάνα, τί ὁμορφὴ δίνεις ἐσὺ λαλιὰ καὶ στὴν καμπάνα, καὶ πόσο ἐκείνη ἡ λαλιὰ σαλεύει τὴν καρδιά μας! Πόσες, ἐκεῖνος ὁ σταυρὸς ἀπ' τὰ καμπαναριά μας, στὴν ἀντηλιάδα χύνοντας τόσες χρυσὲς ἀχτίδες, χύνει βαθειὰ μας, στὴν ψυχὴ, γλυκὲς χρυσὲς ἐλπίδες!

Θέλετε ἄλλο θαῦμα; Ρίξτε ἕνα βλέμμα στὴ Ῥωσία. Τὸ 1917 ἔγινε τὸ πείραμα. Ἄθεο καθεστὼς ἔβαλε μπροστὰ νὰ ξεῤῥιζώσῃ τὴν πίστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Κάψανε, γκρεμίσανε, καταστρέψανε· ἔστειλαν σὲ στρατόπεδα, βασάνισαν, θανάτωσαν. Τελικὰ τί κατώρθωσαν; Στὸ Στάλινγκραντ καὶ στὴ Μόσχα λαὸς πολὺς, καὶ ἄντρες καὶ παιδιὰ καὶ γέροντες, καὶ ἐπιστήμονες καὶ ἄνθρωποι τῶν γραμμάτων, πηγαίνουν στὶς ἐκκλησίες καὶ πιστεύουν περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅ,τι πιστεύουμε ἐμεῖς. Ὡ Ἐκκλησία ἀήττητος! Κανεὶς μὰ κανεὶς δὲ θὰ μπορέσῃ ποτὲ νὰ σὲ κλονίσῃ. Ἀγαπητοί μου!

Εἴμεθα παιδιὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. Δὲν εἴμεθα χιλιασταί, δὲν εἴμεθα μασόνοι, δὲν εἴμεθα

ὀδοτριανοί, δὲν εἴμεθα ὀπαδοὶ τοῦ ἀθέου ὑλισμοῦ, δὲ λατρεύουμε τὰ εἶδωλα. Ἀνήκουμε στὴν μία, ἁγία, καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία, στὴ μητέρα Ἐκκλησία.

Τὸ συμπέρασμα ποῖο εἶνε; Γράψατέ το: Ὅποιος τὰ βάζει μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ γίνῃ στάχτη. Θὰ ὁμολογήσῃ καὶ αὐτός· «Νενίκηκάς με, Ναζωραῖε». Τὸ εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ ὁ λόγος του εἶνε ἀληθινός· «Πύλαι ἄδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.» (Ματθ. 16:18). Ὅλοι οἱ δαίμονες δὲ μποροῦν νὰ κλονίσουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Σ' αὐτὴν ἀνήκουμε, καὶ εἶθε ὁ Κύριος νὰ μᾶς ἀναδεικνύῃ πάντοτε πιστὰ καὶ ἀφωσιωμένα τέκνα της, διὰ πρεσβειῶν τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων ἀμῖν.

† ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος



Οἱ Σαρκεῖοι ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι πὺν καταγίνονται ἀποκλειστικὰ μὲ τὶς ἡδονὲς καὶ τὶς ἀπολαύσεις τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῆς. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι, πὺν εἶναι προσκολλημένοι στὰ πάθη τους, ἐκεῖνοι πὺν ἔχουν ἀποκτηνωθεῖ καὶ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ καταλάβουν ὅτι ὑπάρχουν πνευματικὲς ὁμορφιές, κι ὅλο ἀγωνίζονται, κι ὅλο φροντίζουν μόνο γιὰ χρήματα, γιὰ δόξα, γιὰ ἡδονή.

Οἱ Ψυχικοὶ ἄνθρωποι τοποθετοῦνται ἀνάμεσα στὴν ἀρετὴ καὶ τὴν κακία. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ ἀποβλέπουν στὴν καλὴ διατήρησι τοῦ σώματός τους καὶ στοὺς ἐπαίνους τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἀποφεύγουν τοὺς πόνους τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἀλλὰ ἀποφεύγουν καὶ τὶς σαρκικότητες, γιὰτὶ θέλουν νὰ μὴ χάσουν τὴν ἐκτίμησι τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Οἱ «ψυχικοὶ» αὐτοὶ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι πολὺ φίλαυτοι καὶ θέλουν νὰ ἀσχολοῦνται μόνο μὲ τὸν ἑαυτό τους.

Τέλος οἱ Πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἐντελὼς διαφορετικοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς προηγουμένους δυὸ τύπους. Εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, πὺν ἀγωνίζονται μὲ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ μὲ τὴν ἄσκησίν τους νὰ καθαρίσουν τὴν καρδιά τους ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη. Καὶ τὸ πετυχαίνουν αὐτὸ καὶ καθαίρονται καὶ θεώνονται.

**Σεβασμιώτατος Μητροπολίτης Γόρτυνος καὶ Μεγαλοπόλεως Ἱερεμίας Φούντας**  
Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ «ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΚΑΤΗΧΗΣΗ»

## ON THE 2016 HOLY GREAT ORTHODOX SYNOD

SET TO TAKE PLACE IN CRETE ON PENTECOST,  
JUNE 19<sup>TH</sup>, 2016.

By George Karras, "Orthodox Heritage" Editor.

Over the last few weeks, we have received several questions relative to the upcoming 2016 "Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church," organized under the leadership of the Constantinople Patriarchate. In response to such inquiries (and in the unfortunate absence of any concise document which the faithful may review) we are attempting to provide our readers various views relative to the purpose, agenda and potential outcomes of this gathering.

Most of what is presented within this article has been extracted from various opinions or writings by well-known and respected, traditional Orthodox bishops and theologians.<sup>1</sup> We especially relied on a recently broadcasted three-hour interview of Dr. Dimitrios Tselengidis (professor of Dogmatics at the School of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) on the radio station of the Metropolis of Piraeus, Greece. This program was a most enlightening presentation of the aforementioned topics and the concerns that exist among many relative to the potential outcome for the faithful and Orthodoxy at large. (For those of our readers who are fluent in Greek, the entire three-hour interview is available at "[http://www.orthodoxia-ellhnismos.gr/2016/03/blog-post\\_4.html?m=1](http://www.orthodoxia-ellhnismos.gr/2016/03/blog-post_4.html?m=1)." ) Professor Tselengidis and several hierarchs have also written letters of concern to several Local Orthodox Churches (including those of Greece, Russia, Serbia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Alexandria, and Antioch); some of these have been translated into English and are available within the web pages of "<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/>."

Our presentation is made based on the various questions which have been posed to us or ones which we have seen posted within various Orthodox web logs.<sup>2</sup>

### Is this Orthodoxy's "Eighth" Ecumenical Synod?

While it does not utilize this term, the title certainly implies that its organizers, through the Pan-Orthodox participation of sorts, desire that it be recognized as ecumenical in nature. This targeted recognition among the Orthodox faithful would certainly go a long way in the flock's acceptance of the Synod's decisions, as such decisions "resolve" the open items which are being included by the organizers within the currently planned agenda.

There has not been an Ecumenical Council since 787, when the Second Council of Nicaea resolved the heresy of iconoclasm. The organizers have been quoted as desiring to consider the Holy and Great Council as a continuation of the early ecumenical councils of the first Christian millennium. If this is the case, as part of its agenda and presentation, any

Ecumenical council must commence with the reading and acceptance of the detailed decisions of the past seven ecumenical councils. Doing this, however, leads the participants in supporting past decisions which clearly stand against current agenda items such as the one relative to the all-important *de facto* recognition of heterodox "churches," which appears to be a primary agenda topic, as discussed below.

Our readers should be aware that the term "Holy and Great" was preserved for the Church's Ecumenical Synods and that the decisions of such Synods have been deemed as absolute and of no question by any of the Orthodox faithful whatsoever. Thus, one can surmise that the Synod's organizers have an implied need in portraying the decisions of 2016 as "binding" for the universal Orthodox world.

There is also a concern that the term Ecumenical is not utilized so as to not offend the schismatic "churches," more specifically the Roman Catholics and Protestants. The Synod's organizers are thus overly concerned about the term "ecumenical" being preserved only for the Synods that include representatives from all other heterodox "churches." This is in direct contrast of past Ecumenical Synods; more specifically, every Synod after the Fourth have excluded all heretics and schismatics, and still referred to themselves as Ecumenical, both in their accepted composition as well as their decisions. Thus, by the Synod's title, we see that a significant motive for this Pan-Orthodox gathering is the recognition of the ecumenist movement and the other heterodox. This topic is discussed in detail by His Eminence Athanasios, Metropolitan of Limassol, Cyprus, in the article that is presented on page 9 of the current issue.

### The Synod's Invitees, Composition of Attendees

While the Synod aspires to be considered as Pan-Orthodox (and Ecumenical, in its decisions) unlike other Ecumenical Synods, it has not included all Orthodox Bishops within its invitation list. The invited Orthodox Primates of the various, world-wide Orthodox churches (14 in number), are to be accompanied by 23 members. As a result of this "stipulation," the Churches of Greece and Russia, for example, will see most of their bishops absent from this all-important gathering, and (again) in direct contract of all past Ecumenical Synods. The Orthodox Church of Russia has some 350 bishops and less than 10% of them will be in attendance. Thus, **the exclusion of bishops automatically precludes it from being truly characterized as Holy and Great.** It is best that we think of it as an "expanded" Orthodox Synod of the Heads of the 14 Local Orthodox Churches. Another important point is the selection of the 23 intended attendees—no information has been provided for such a selection basis. The representation of the views of the non-attending bishops becomes problematic and the selection of the 23 directly classifies the non-selected bishops into a lesser, secondary class, clearly in violation of Orthodoxy's Canons.

In contrast, all Orthodox hierarchs, even within the limitations of transportation during the first 10 centuries of Christianity, were invited and participated (with very few, justifiable exceptions) in the first seven Ecumenical Synods. At a time that technological advances enable travel and communications in an immensely more efficient manner, the world-wide participation of Orthodox hierarchy should have been a fundamental cornerstone of this gathering. And, of course, no reason has been provided by the organizers for such limited participation.

#### The Proceedings of Preparatory Meetings

The records and meeting minutes of all preparatory meetings (which have been held for several decades, at least five, and ended with the one that took place in Geneva, earlier this year) are not being made available. As a matter of fact, requests made by Orthodox bishops of the Church of Greece for such documents have been declined; the proceedings are being deemed by the Synod's organizers as confidential and not open to the faithful or the Orthodox hierarchy at large. One thus wonders the reason for such secrecy and certainly provides the impression of its organizers wishing to hide information.

#### The Voting Protocol

The consensus of the Great Synod will be limited to one vote for each Local Autocephalous Church; all 14 Local Churches are planning to participate. Individual disagreements—should they happen among a minority of a given Local Church—will be set aside as “their internal affair,” something which is ecclesiological unacceptable to any Pan-Orthodox Synod, when, indeed, the disagreement is over a subject of a doctrinal nature. And, the potential for minority views on vital topics, even among the “carefully selected” attendees, is very probable. Imagine if the theological positions of great saints who were in the minority circle (such as Sts. Athanasios the Great or St. Basil the Great or St. Photios the Great) were to be set aside for their “objections” to be addressed within or by their “Local Churches” and away from the audience of the truly Pan-Orthodox Synod of their time; the Arian heresy might have prevailed or the anathematizing of St. Photios by the Roman Catholic pope in the 869 Constantinople Council could have remained with the obvious repercussions for Orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup>

Most importantly, the exclusion of the great majority of Orthodox hierarchs excludes the ability of too many hierarchs to express and vote on any item is excluded. This is contrary to the Orthodox Canons of equality of views and votes amongst all Orthodox bishops, including the heads of the Church; **the votes of the absolute majority of the Orthodox hierarchy shall not be a factor for any Synodical decisions whatsoever.** Thus the cornerstone of ecclesiastical and spiritual foundation of the Orthodox Synodical system is violated; in clearer terms, the spiritual foundation of Orthodox Holy Tradition and Patristic spirituality (through the presence of the Holy

Spirit that governed all past truly Pan-Orthodox Ecumenical Synods) are being dissolved and invalidated.

The planned composition and voting standards of the subject Synod are commonly found amongst the Roman Catholics. Their Synods (such as the Vatican II gathering) are characterized by the presence of absolute power in the hands of a few cardinals and the pope; thus, as in the cases of Catholicism, the conduct and subsequent decisions of the planned Holy and Great Synod are being based upon Caesar-like human authority instead of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, to this date, there exists no announcement as to how voting even amongst the participants shall take place. It appears that each Church in attendance shall have but one vote. As such, the views of every attending bishop, albeit already minimized, shall never be known or expressed within any voting structure. In other words, the heads of each Orthodox Church appear to be the voting members and represent the “majority views” of the other 23 members. Utilizing this method in past Ecumenical Synods would have (for example) excluded and robbed Orthodoxy of the views of Sts. Athanasios the Great, Basil the Great, and Nicholas of Myra who clearly represented the minority position against Arianism, at least at the onset of the First Ecumenical Council. It has been often that the minority views are the ones that preserved Orthodoxy through the last 2,000 years.

The only “hope” in the voting on any controversial topic is the possibility that one of the 14 Local Churches votes against any favorable decisions that stands against past Orthodox canons or Holy Patristic views. Should one of the represented Churches vote against a measure, that agenda's item is set aside and no decisions around that topic can be made. Of course, even this is not definitive and one wonders what will truly transpire amongst the various Orthodox Church leaders, especially behind closed doors.

In summary, our concern evolves as to how this Pan-Orthodox Holy Great Synod will confess the one faith of the Church, *with one mouth and with one heart?* How will the fathers of the Synod be able to say, *it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us?* How will they demonstrate that they have *the mind of Christ*, as did the God-bearing Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils of our Church?

#### The Synod's Agenda

The agenda has been decided exclusively by the “appointed” representatives of the 14 Local Orthodox Churches. The selected items were never presented to their respective local synods for discussion or acceptance. Thus, it was their decision on what topics the Synods shall address and their respective Church heads adopted it absent of any discussions amongst their fellow bishops. This again reminds us of the ways and practices of Roman Catholics.

The proposed agenda has seen its topics move in and out over the last several months, with very little information being

issued publically. As a matter of fact, the most accurate data that we have seen in writing is the one presented within the “U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops” website! That alone alarms us greatly—there has been immense attention by the pope and his “bishops” towards the agenda and wishes for the successful outcome of the Orthodox Synod. As St. Kosmas Aitolos taught us, **any Orthodox must be alarmed upon the receipt of any wishes from the Latin pope.**

Here are the current agenda items and some thoughts on them:

*The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World:* The contribution of the Orthodox Church to the attainment of peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood and love between peoples and the removal of racial and other discrimination. Clearly a “social” topic on its first view and one that would normally be unworthy of a Pan-Orthodox Synod, but one that could introduce ecumenist dimensions in the efforts to (supposedly) normalize current social needs and norms. For example, one cannot ignore the evil forces of homosexual agendas that have penetrated many heterodox circles to not just mere acceptance and condoning but also extending into glorifying its existence. Any effort to normalize Pan-Orthodox views on social issues in today's world could compromise fundamental dogmatic truths such as the one that involves homosexuality. The danger is rather apparent. In our view, the gospel of His Truth and the teachings of the Church's Holy Fathers have divinely addressed the world's social need over the last 2,000 years; and most certainly can do so for the rest of human history.

*The Orthodox Diaspora:* It shall be proposed that “Episcopal Assemblies” of all canonically recognized bishops in each region should be created (or founded) in the Diaspora regions which include the Americas as well as Australia/New Zealand regions and several western European countries. The “problem” of the Orthodox Diaspora is desired to be resolved as quickly as possible, and that it be organized in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church. However, that shall come later. In the meantime, the “Episcopal Assemblies” shall serve the primary goal of supporting the unity of Orthodoxy within their respective, assigned geographical jurisdictions, through a series of actions.

*Autonomy and the Means of Proclaiming It:* The ecclesiological, canonical and pastoral aspects of the institution of autonomy shall be discussed, the method of initiation and completion of the process of proclaiming autonomy and implications arising from the proclamation of autonomy.

*The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments:* There is no question that the institute of family is threatened today by such phenomena as extreme secularization and a complete degradation of family and society's moral values. The sacral nature of marriage (only between a man and a woman) is a fundamental and indisputable doctrine of the Orthodox

Church, as has also been the position of disallowing any mixed marriage whatsoever. Current positions, as formulated within Synodical documents relative to the “practice church *oikonomia* in conformance with the principles established in church canons” most certainly appears to be the start of watering down the dogmatic posture of Orthodoxy relative to the Sacrament of marriage, starting with the creation of “allowances for marriages with non-Orthodox.” It is indeed incomprehensible for anyone to attempt justifying the basis for the acceptance of any such union with a non-believer through the sacramental energy of the Holy Spirit, be it for *oikonomia* or any other reason. The Mysteries of His Church are exclusively for Her faithful children; they can never be held or canonically accepted with non-faithful parties of whatever other non-Orthodox religious persuasion.

Concerning the impediments to marriage due to whatever possible situation (kinship by blood, kinship by affinity and adoption, spiritual kinship, marriage of priests, etc.) these have been well defined by the Church's Canons and any re-affirmation equally carries the suspicion that some may be “worthy of re-visiting.” More specifically, special dispensation for mixed marriages with the heterodox and permission for the second marriages for priests due to “certain circumstances” had been topics in draft form; it is believed that disagreement(s) by members of some Local Churches led to this latest proposed topic.

*The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today:* Fasting is God's commandment; the Synod is supposed to affirm the obligatory character of Nativity, Apostles', and Dormition fasts. Who has ever doubted the extreme value of fasting to warrant it as worthy of becoming a topic of discussion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Perhaps there is a movement to “lessen it,” as has been repeatedly rumored. Indeed, ecclesiastical circles have reported that the initially intended topic was for the re-consideration of our current fasting rules; and, that it was altered to its current topic title of “The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today,” after strong disagreement(s) by members of some Local Churches. One, though, wonders as to whether an effort of sorts may still take place during Synodical discussions to introduce a fasting morphology or tropology that differs from what has been established and passed to us by Holy Tradition and the Church's Holy Fathers.

*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World:* This is greatest area of concern by many respected theologians (refer to one such view that we presented in our article on page 9 of the current issue). Who or rather what faith(s) compose this “Rest of the Christian World?” It is apparent that the Synod agenda shall discuss relations with what we commonly term as heterodox, i.e., those who neither believe nor are conforming with accepted Orthodox standards, dogmas or beliefs. This topic's introduction thus becomes a clear matter of accepted Orthodox ecclesiology; in other words, an eminently theological problematic issue at

its onset: It is not theologically permissible for this Synod to lead or eventually adopt any decisions which will essentially recommend the Protestant “branch theory.” Their current position legitimizes the status of the heterodox “churches” which in turn leads to the acceptance of the many different and often contradicting doctrines that the west has invented over the last ten plus centuries.

This topic’s main implication, as judged from a theological perspective, yields the clear realization that there is no discussion whatsoever of the return of the heterodox to the Orthodox Church, the only Church. Rather, **the baptism of the heterodox is considered an accepted fact from the outset—and this without any Pan-Orthodox decision.** In other words, the pre-Synodical proceedings clearly endorse the “Baptismal Theology.” Simultaneously, released pre-Synodical texts providing the basis for this topic deliberately ignore the historic fact that the contemporary heterodox of the west (Roman Catholics and Protestant) have not one, but heaps of dogmas that differ from the Orthodox Church (besides the *filioque*, created grace in the sacraments, the primacy of the pope, papal infallibility, the rejection of icons, and the rejection of the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, etc.).

The introduction of this topic alone signifies the Pan-Orthodox acceptance of the long-held ecumenist dialogues and meetings with the heterodox over acceptance of the heterodox baptism and the implied equality of the various Christian faiths. **The Truth of Orthodoxy is thus watered down and mixed with the lies of the various western heresies and served to the faithful in the spirit of “brotherhood and common good.”** Any decision towards this agenda topic by this Synod will constitute the *de facto* acceptance of the ecumenist agenda towards recognition of the heterodox. As such, it is worthy of **not just re-formatting its intended content but pure and unequivocal condemnation!** Its continued presence in this Synod’s agenda represents **an absolute dilution of the Orthodox Church’s conscience and identity as the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ.**

Of note is the fact that these agenda items became known to the Orthodox hierarchy after the fact, as this Synod’s list of discussion topics progressed. And, as correctly noted by several respected Orthodox theologians, it is possible that new topics may make it within the agenda, either during last minute amendments or once the Synod’s doors close and the proceedings commence, away from any public view or observation. Other than the introductory and concluding sessions, it has been announced that all other sessions shall take place behind closed doors, a truly outrageous and unacceptable method in deciding anything that is expected to be abided by the entire Orthodox faithful and clergy, world-wide.

A question as to the Synod’s conduct is whether it shall review and accept (or at least recognize in totality) the decisions of all past Orthodox Ecumenical Councils and Synods upon whom current Orthodox Canon law is based. Such

an act would of course create a potential rift with the topics formulated for discussion and the above mentioned implied ecumenist, western-influenced positions.

#### Concerns-Conclusive Thoughts

The aforementioned canonical irregularities, secrecy in the agenda development and preparatory discussions, reduced participation, an agenda that seems to have only one topic of primary “concern” (interestingly placed as the last agenda discussion topic), the proposed voting scheme, the closed doors sessions, and the strength of the current ecumenist movement create a sense of uncertainty, anxiety, and unnecessary stress among the members of His flock.

**Best case scenario** is that objections prevail which nullify anything in the participating ecumenist proponents plans and the Synod terminates with no decisions or with very few decisions along the Diaspora and Autonomy issues. Even in this case, however, it is our clear opinion and concern that this Synod will have follow-up sessions. It is very likely that other, future “Holy Great Orthodox Synods,” will further promote the various pro-western and anti-Patristic thoughts of those who wish to modernize His Church along the Latins’ ways and means. Once the “leaders” of these Synods deem it ready, they could eventually call their version of a “true Eighth Ecumenical Council” whose intended outcome shall be the full and open union with all heterodox. May we be proven wrong and may this Synod be the last that maintains the peculiarities and character that we bring to our readers’ attention.

**Worst case scenario** is that the ecumenists are successful in developing decisions that are accepted by the heads of the participating 14 Local Orthodox Churches and that such decisions “push” Orthodox towards the eventual recognition of the Latins and Protestants as “true churches,” much quicker than our aforementioned hypothesis. It is certain, though, that any serious deviation from the way of Truth and the Holy Fathers, whether now or later, shall concurrently create a response of wrath amongst the traditional arm of Orthodoxy. Such wrath **may result in not just mere misunderstandings among the faithful but also lay the foundation for the creation and strengthening of schisms.** It is for this exact reason we sincerely hope and pray that, through God’s providence, this Synod gets cancelled since it truly can serve no good purpose that would further enhance Orthodoxy along the path set by the Holy Fathers and can only create damage instead of good.

**The most disconcerting aspect** of the released pre-Synodical texts is their stern warning that Synodical decisions must be accepted by all and adopted in the Church’s life (and in turn Orthodoxy’s values, irrespective as to whether any impending decisions contradict pre-existing Church dogma or canons). This warning is being issued especially towards those whom the organizers and ecumenists view as “zealots.” Implications are being made of a strong response towards any voice of

subsequent dissention, albeit specifics are not being provided. We view this behavior and posture as clearly authoritarian, totalitarian, papal and extremely non-Orthodox. Unlike the western heterodox, and especially the Roman Catholics, His Holy Orthodox Church is not in the hands of a few. Hierarchy, monastics, clergy, and laity, all of them comprise His Bride and all have a responsibility towards the preservation of His Truth.<sup>2</sup>

We apologize to those of our readers who find our position as absolute or consider this article as the source of any anxiety. We are believers in the steadfast nature of His Church and the Canons, writings and Holy Tradition that 2,000 years of spiritual leadership by His Bride's Holy Fathers have set forth in eternity. We continue to believe that, no matter what transpires, His true Church, the one and only Holy Orthodox Church shall prevail whatever temptations are presented. Her Creator the Almighty commissioned and assured us: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* (Mt 28:19-20).

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#### NOTES

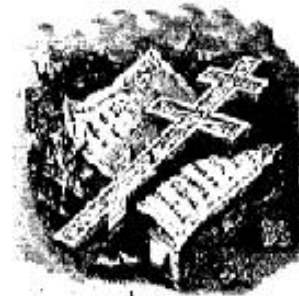
(1) The web site of the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Grand Junction, CO, has established an Internet locale where the various views, concerns, positions by hierarchs and theologians as well as other useful information are presented. We strongly encourage our readers to consider visiting these web pages and educate themselves beyond the weak presentation that we attempted to provide within this article. These pages are located at: "[http://www.denver.goarch.org/saintnicholasgj/Great\\_and\\_Holy\\_Synod\\_2016/](http://www.denver.goarch.org/saintnicholasgj/Great_and_Holy_Synod_2016/)."

(2) It is very possible that, being mere Orthodox laymen (and as we have experienced in the past), our voice of objection towards this Synod will be considered by some as criticism towards the leadership of the Orthodox Church and as such inappropriate. As Dr. Dimitrios Tselengidis points out (in his position as a world-respected professor of Orthodox Dogmatics) **the various warnings that have already been issued towards the "zealot believers" of our Faith who may react to the ecumenist decisions of this Synod have no dogmatic basis whatsoever;** instead, they are there reminding us of the absolute exercise of power by the Roman Catholic pope and how the ecumenist movement within our Church strives for the exact same authoritarian standards for the Orthodox. As Dr. Tselengidis states, in Orthodoxy and as in the days of St. Mark of Ephesus, **the lay people have the right and obligation to defend and voice positions of dissention in matters that involve the patristically-based dogmatic Truth of our Faith:** The flock at large constitutes the dogmatic conscience of the Church, and not just the clergy; in other words, it is the condensed

spiritual experience of the flock that preserves the faith, which is nothing else than the energy of the Holy Spirit operating among the faithful that are Sacramentally in union with Him and with each other.

A historical reminder that demonstrates this dogmatic truth is as follows: It was the "zealot" lay people who sided with the only voice of dissention, that being of St. Mark of Ephesus, at a time when the rest of the many representatives of Orthodox Hierarchy agreed and signed for the 1439 (False) Union of Florence. Around St. Mark united all the "Orthodox zealots," many lay people and especially the monks of the Holy Mountain and the ordinary village priests. The whole episcopate and the whole imperial court of Constantinople—all were in the hands of the Uniates, in absolute submission to the representatives of the Vatican. Together, St. Mark and the "simple" crowd of Orthodox faithful and clergy, secured the Faith which we have been blessed to now believe and defend; equitably, it is every Orthodox believer's obligation since that time to safeguard Orthodoxy, unaltered and pure, for future generations. Lastly, let us also remind ourselves of the words of the Apostle of love: *There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.* (Gal 1:7-8).

(3) We encourage our readers to research and read about the life and works of St. Photios the Great and his role in preserving Orthodoxy through the serious threats posed during his time. There exists ample material available within Orthodox web sites that allow the faithful an appreciation of another struggle in the preservation of our Faith in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.



**D**o you not notice that, in his mania for culture, European man has transformed Europe into an idol-factory? Almost every cultural item has become an idol. Our era is, above all, an era of idol-worship. No other continent is so engulfed by idols as is contemporary Europe. Nowhere else are material things so revered, nowhere else do people live for them as much as in Europe. This is idol-worship of the worst kind, for it is the worship of clay. Tell me, does a man not worship clay when he selfishly loves his earthen flesh of clay, and persistently asserts: I am flesh, and flesh alone? Tell me, does European man not worship clay when he takes as his ideal a class, a nation or mankind as a whole?

St. Justin Popovich (+1979)



## OUR CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos (edited for length).

### Young Samuel in the Temple

The holy Prophet Samuel was a great Prophet, who never distressed or annoyed God (to speak in human terms); God rested upon him. He also played an important role in the life of Israel.

Samuel was the son of God's good pleasure and his life was connected with the great events in the history of the people of Israel. He anointed Saul as King of the Israelites, and later, when Saul lost God's grace, he anointed David as King. Following him from his childhood until his death, one observes the afflictions he suffered, but also the lamentation of his people, when they lost this great Prophet.

As soon as Samuel was weaned, when he was around three years old, he was offered and dedicated to God by his devout mother, Hannah. Holy Scripture tells us that *Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest.* (1 Sam 2:11). His mother dedicated him to God, leaving him in the Temple before the Lord and Eli the priest.

Holy Scripture goes on to describe Samuel's presence in the Temple: *Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.* (1 Sam 2:18). He stayed in the Temple wearing a kind of



priestly vestment made of linen, which covered his shoulders, chest and back. With it he wore a little coat, which his parents brought him each year when they came up to the Temple to offer sacrifice to God. Samuel lived apart from his family, residing in the Temple. From an early age he had the great privilege of experiencing life beyond the family. Transcending the biological family and belonging to another, spiritual family develops and expresses unselfish love.

As time went by, Samuel became more and more devout and dear to God and other people. Holy Scripture says, *And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.* (1 Sam 2:26).

The three verses that we have quoted show Samuel and his work in the Temple during his childhood years. Three main points stand out. The first is indicated by the phrase *before the Lord*, and is connected with the Temple, where God dwelt. The second is Samuel's work and ministry in the Temple, as shown by the phrase [he] *was serving before the Lord*. The third is linked with the presence of holy people. Samuel grew up with the priests, such as Eli. Holy Scripture says, *and the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest*. This gives

us the opportunity to refer to the Temple, the worship and ministry that took place within it, and also the significance of the holy Fathers for our life.

### The Temple and its Importance

The Greek word *naos*, which signifies both *temple* and *church building*, comes from a verb meaning "to dwell," and denotes the place in which God dwells. The Christian church building evolved from the Tabernacle of Witness and from the Temple, which Solomon built at God's command and with His blessing. As we know, every religion has its temples, the special places where worshippers fulfil their religious duties and pray to God.

The whole of the Old Testament clearly shows that the worship of God is linked with a particular place, where God's good pleasure is expressed. In the beginning this function was performed by the altars where sacrifices were offered. We know about Abel's altar, upon which he offered sacrifice to God, and God smelt the sweet savour and was pleased. We also find altars in the lives of Noah, Abraham and Jacob.

At God's command, Moses constructed the Tabernacle of Witness, which was the model for Solomon's Temple, to be constructed later.

In the beginning the Church used houses for prayer, later the Catacombs, then, once the persecutions ceased and the Christian Church was free, special places began to be built, which were dedicated

to God. There the bloodless sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered, as well as the daily prayers of Christians to God.

Of course, from a theological point of view we can state that God does not have a particular location, as He is the place where everything is. The whole earth belongs to God. *The earth is the Lord's and its fullness, the world and all who dwell therein.* (Pss 24:1). However, as St. John of Damascus says, we can describe God's place as being where *His energy is manifested*. Just as in ancient times God's energy was manifested at the altars and in other places, so now the same happens within Christian church buildings. The sacred building or temple becomes a *place where His glory appears*.

It is repeatedly made clear in the New Testament that Christians, who are members of the Church and members of the Body of Christ, are temples of the All-Holy Spirit. *You are the temple of the living God* (2 Cor 6:16), says the Apostle Paul. This has two meanings. The first is that every Christian who is a member of Christ is a temple of the All-Holy Spirit. This does not actually apply to every Christian, but to those who share in God's *illuminating* and *deifying* energy. St. Basil the Great underlines this important truth. He says that someone

is a temple of the All-Holy Spirit when his *nous*, which is the principal part of the soul, is not troubled by cares and unexpected passions. When someone's *nous* has unceasing prayer and remembrance of God, he is a temple of the All-Holy Spirit. St. Nicholas Cabasilas stresses that *nothing visible can truly be God's temple and His altar except human nature*. The second meaning is that all those who make up the Church, the Body of Christ, taken together as a whole, are called the temple of the All-Holy Spirit. Since these Christians, who are God's real temple, assemble in a special place to worship God, that place is also called a temple and a church.

It is in this second meaning that a place of worship is called a temple or church. St. Symeon of Thessaloniki, commenting on the church or temple, says that, although it is made of inanimate material, nevertheless it is the house of God, because it is sanctified through divine grace and the prayers of the bishop. It is not like other, ordinary buildings, but is dedicated to God: *It is rich in God's grace, as He Himself dwells in it, with His glory, power and grace*. Because the house of God has been sanctified, it is called a holy House. In fact, St. Symeon of Thessaloniki says more. Because every church is dedicated and consecrated in the name of a particular saint, it is not only God's dwelling-place, but also in some way the dwelling-place of the saint whose name it bears. The saint to whom the church was dedicated, *lives there from then onwards as though in his own home. He dwells there in an immaterial way through his soul, but often he also dwells there through his holy relics, which are placed there, and works miracles by means of God's power and grace through the relics as well. Because we too are twofold [soul and body] we receive gifts twice over*. Since the grace of God also enters material objects, *we see very clearly that truly divine powers act in church buildings. Angels and saints appear, wonders are worked, requests are granted and cures are bestowed*.

Speaking about the parable of the unforgiving servant, St. Gregory Palamas says that it can be interpreted in ecclesiological terms. The place where the ruler stands and settles accounts with his servants is the sacred church building, specifically the sanctuary, where the bishop's throne is situated. The saint says that Christ, *has His royal throne within the holy veil, as in the heavenly dwellings*, and sits and converses with His servants, the Christians.

We cannot understand these things rationally, but the saints experience them. If we acquire pure spiritual senses, and especially if our *nous* is *illuminated*, we shall grasp these realities. We shall realize that the church building is not simply a structure or somewhere ordinary, but the house of God, and the house of the saints to whom it is dedicated.

The saints are aware of the presence of God in churches, which is why St. John Chrysostom calls them *harbours in the ocean*. Our life is often storm-tossed and churches are spiritual havens. St. John of Kronstadt says ecstatically: *O sacred church, how comfortable and pleasant it feels to pray under your*

*domes! Where can prayer be more ardent than in church, before the throne of God and beneath His gaze? In church the soul is softened by contrite prayer and abundant tears flow down... The Church is the school of faith and worship, founded by God Himself. It is the treasury of heaven on earth... In the holy temple we ourselves become the temple of the Holy Spirit through the prayers, the words of God and the Mysteries*.

Unfortunately, most of us lack this awareness. We are not overwhelmed by longing and eagerness to be in God's house. David said, *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness*. (Pss 83:11). St. John Chrysostom, rebuking us for being lazy about going to God's house, says that, if someone invited us to go to *lawless theatres*, many would eagerly rush. When, however, they invite us to the house of prayer, *many hesitate*. He actually says that this mentality shows that we are worse and lazier than the Jews, who had a great longing to go to the house of God.

Samuel was *before the Lord*, because the Temple was the place where God's glory was manifested.

### Worship and Children

It is said of Samuel that he did not simply stay in the Temple but *performed the services before the Lord* from his early childhood. This ought to be interpreted as meaning that he took part and helped in the services, as is clear from the clothes that he wore. He also prayed in the Temple. This shows his complete participation in the worship of God.

God was worshipped in the Temple. As in ancient times, so also in the life of the Church, children are not excluded from the worship of the people of God. Through holy Baptism, children too are members of the Church. Not only did children always take part in gatherings for worship, but they also took part in prayers of repentance. We have many examples of this.

The Prophet Joel announces to his contemporaries a great divine visitation on account of the sins of the people. At the same time, however, he exhorts them to repent, in the hope that this terrible trial may perhaps be averted. In particular, he urges them all, including infants still at the breast, to offer penitent prayer. He writes: *Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, call out the elders, and gather the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom go out from his bedchamber and the bride out of her bridal chamber. Between the porch and the altar, the priests of the altar, ministering to the Lord, will each be weeping and will say, 'O Lord, spare Your people...'* (Joel 2:16-17).

The participation of infants in this prayer of repentance has a twofold significance. Firstly, it shows that no sin is simply a personal event, but has cosmic dimensions. Thus the whole community ought to pray to God. Secondly, the prayer of infants, who pray in their own way, may be heard by God. Additionally, and equally important, it has another profound purpose: Children learn what their real family is and who its members are. They also acquire experiences of worship of God, and these childhood experiences will play an important

role in their later development. We see in the Psalms of David that God prefers praise *from the mouths of babies and nursing infants* (Pss 8:2) and accepts their prayers.

The New Testament preserves an account of the participation of a child in worship, specifically in worship at night, combined with teaching. In Troas, after the celebration of the Mystery of the Eucharist, the Apostle Paul, because he was going to depart the next day, *continued his message until midnight*. Then a certain young man called Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, *was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third storey and was taken up dead.* (Acts 20:7-9). Eutychus not only took part in the Divine Liturgy but also attended the Apostle Paul's long talk, which lasted until midnight. This sets an example to parents, that they cannot and should not deprive their children of services in church, even vigils and talks, although the children may not understand rationally, because they acquire experiences in a way beyond our comprehension.

Patristic theology states that all human beings have a *noetic faculty*, as all are created in the image of God. Children too have a *noetic faculty*, including infants. **In fact, because their noetic faculty has not yet been polluted, it is purer than our own.** Their rational faculty, however, is not yet developed, so they do not pray with our own received forms and images. Babies also pray to God, but in their own fashion. As time passes, and as all their mental powers develop, they understand things differently, but usually their *nous* is darkened and obscured by the darkness of their surroundings. It is possible for the presence of children in worship to be more intense than our own presence. They may pray better than adults.

From his infancy, Samuel was found worthy by God to minister to Him in His Temple. He took part in all the services there. He acquired a sense of worship and liturgy. He was kept pure in both body and soul. As he grew older, his *nous* was not darkened by the surrounding darkness, but was kept pure. For that reason, he was counted worthy of experiencing great things. He received a great revelation from God because, as we said earlier, even babies and small children have a *noetic faculty* and are able to receive divine revelations. In fact, a contemporary monk of the Holy Mountain says that, sometimes when infants laugh and we do not know why, it is because they see their angel, whom all of us have but cannot see.



St. Gregory Palamas says that the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Holy of Holies, developed this *noetic faculty*, lived hesychasm intensively, directed her *nous* into her heart and from there was caught up to God. She attained to *deification* and so was found worthy to become the Mother of Christ. At the same time, however, she participated in the services, listened to the problems and sorrows of the people who came to the Temple, and so felt compassion for the suffering and afflicted.

We could say that the same applied to Samuel, with certain differences. In addition, Samuel met holy people who came to the Tabernacle of Witness, and would no doubt have had significant experiences as a result of these encounters. On the Holy Mountain venerable old Elders used to tell me how much they benefited when, in the early stages of their monastic life, they met Elders who spoke wisely and whose words were the fruit of their personal experience.

Three factors, therefore—the Temple, worship in the Temple and holy people—played an important role in Samuel's life. When someone lives in this way, without great theories and teachings, he develops naturally and his whole personality is formed. It is as though he were in his mother's womb. The unborn baby increases in size in its mother's womb without making great efforts. It grows precisely because it sits and waits, and eventually the moment comes for it to be born. The same happens in the spiritual womb of the Church, which is the place of worship and the whole liturgical and eucharistic community. Without formulating exalted theories or taking part in endless discussions, one grows spiritually by participating in gatherings for worship, and helps one's children to develop even more.

### Bringing Up Children in the Church

Everything we have said so far, prompted by Samuel's presence in the Temple, gives us the opportunity to look at the elements that contribute to the good upbringing of children in the Church. This is a burning issue for parents. We shall emphasize certain points that are indispensable for bringing up children well in the Church.

Children's ecclesiastical training begins before they are conceived, with the ecclesiastical training of their parents, at the time of their conception, during pregnancy, and after they are born. Upbringing in the Church is very different from any other sort of humanistic and even religious training. I make the distinction between ecclesiastical upbringing and religious

upbringing because the Church is something different from all the religions that exist today. Parents pray for the child that will come. They pray when it has been conceived. In particular, the mother, who carries it in her womb, prays and takes Holy Communion, and subsequently nurtures the child with prayer. A contemporary spiritual father says something very significant: in order for someone to learn to pray, he must also have the blood of parents who pray. Once the child is born, the parents do everything laid down in the Church's *typikon*: naming, offering in church on the fortieth day after the birth, Baptism, Holy Communion and taking part in the gatherings of the faithful for worship. In accordance with the earlier analysis, however, all these things can be summed up in three elements that are essential for Orthodox upbringing. The first is the place of worship, the second is worship, and the third is holy people and saints.

Children ought from the earliest age to love the church, the place where God dwells and where the glory of God is manifested. We all retain many such experiences from our childhood, when we were asked to clean the church, to help with rebuilding or decorating it. I can add that, pointless as they may seem, even the games that children play in the area around the church have much to offer and leave indelible impressions on their soul. In fact, without attempting to say too much, various experiences of this sort during childhood help people in later life.

The Russian ascetic, St. Theophan the Recluse, who wrote many books on asceticism, said that he owed much to the services and vigils that he attended in church as a child, but also to the games that he played outside the church.

Father Gheorghiu, a Romanian priest in Paris, describes in one of his books his childhood experiences of his life in church. He was the son of a priest and had the blessing of seeing the church continuously and taking part in the services held there. He writes that, in church he gradually experienced the dogmatic truth of the Church. Seeing the icons, he experienced the presence of God and communion with the angels and saints. He did not learn about the priesthood from books, but from his father, who was a priest. Through the services he experienced the fact that the Church is the Body of Christ. And through frequent visits to the cemetery he realized that the Church is the mother of the dead and the living. He describes most eloquently how he reached the point of understanding the mission of the priest, who is everyone's father, and not only exclusively his own father.

In church the child will live the Church's life of worship. Worship will play a major role in his later development. It will leave him with lasting impressions, which will not easily be lost. Personally, I retain the best impressions of when I used to help the priest in the sanctuary to celebrate the Divine Eucharist, of later when I took part in the church choir, and when I stood with the choir and we chanted Byzantine hymns. Even today I vividly remember many pieces of music, the services on Good Friday, litanies, vigils, attending nocturnal Liturgies in monasteries, and so on.

The presence of children in worship is not merely a matter of form, but essential. According to tradition, the Thrice-Holy Hymn, *Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal have mercy upon us*, was the inspiration of a child who, during a litany in Constantinople for deliverance from an earthquake, heard this hymn sung by angels. He told St. Proclus, and thus it became customary to sing it in church during the Divine Liturgy.

Children should attend church with their parents and their whole family. In this way they feel that they belong to a worshipping community, which is their wider family. It is very important for them to pray with their parents, not at separate Liturgies. Of course, this may happen sometimes, when a child attends the Divine Liturgy with pupils from his school. But these Liturgies for schoolchildren cannot and should not be separated from the Liturgies of the eucharistic community



and regarded as independent. Attending church services ought not to be associated absolutely with school, lest it should cease when school ends.

There is, of course, a problem when babies and young children cause a disturbance in church during the service. It ought, however, to be emphasized, that we who are older should be more patient. We should be more aware of the fact that infants too are members of the Church and make their presence felt in worship by crying. This ought not to annoy us. We too as children caused a problem by being restless, and others were patient with us. All the same, mothers should use their discretion. When they see that the child is tired, they ought to try everything, perhaps even temporarily leaving the church to soothe him. Clearly we should all realize the value of the whole family gathering together for worship, including the older generation, parents, children and infants.

Apart from the place of worship and the services, at which they will take Holy Communion and in which, depending on their age, they will take part personally, another essential ele-

ment in bringing up children in the Church is acquaintance and contact with holy people. When we refer to holy people and saints, we mean those who are associated with Christ, who are dwelling-places of the All-Holy Spirit, living icons of Christ and tabernacles of God's glory. Holiness does not have a moral meaning, but a spiritual one. It is participation in the life of Christ and sharing in the uncreated energies of God. The saints participate in Pentecost. It is a matter of great significance to meet someone holy during our life.

We all appreciate the importance of St. Gregory Palamas in our Church, as well as the importance of his theology for Orthodox ecclesiastical life. However, we should not forget that he was the child of holy parents, who brought him up completely within the atmosphere of Orthodox Tradition. His parents also made sure he had a spiritual father. In fact, his biographer, St. Philotheos Kokkinos, describes a miracle performed by the Saint's father when they were on their way to visit a holy ascetic, who was the family's spiritual father. St. Gregory must also have been impressed by the lessons given by St. Theoleptos of Philadelphia, who was his teacher, but also practiced noetic prayer and the Orthodox hesychastic life. If we add to this the climate then prevailing in Constantinople, which influenced St. Gregory Palamas, we can complete the picture of his life as a child, and see the important role it played in his later development.

Another typical example is St. Basil, who expresses his great gratitude to his grandmother, Macrina. He praises Macrina, because from her he learnt *the words of the most blessed Bishop Gregory*. St. Gregory, Bishop of Neocaesarea, was the spiritual father of Macrina, St. Basil's grandmother. She brought up her grandchildren with the teaching and recollections of that holy man.

An elderly man in the region of Kozani was asked what had made the most impression on him in all his years of life. He replied: *When, as I was a little boy, I was counted worthy to kiss the hand of St. Kosmas Aitolos*. This made such a great impression on him that it determined the whole of his life.

St. Symeon the New Theologian says that for a time, when he was young, he went far away from God and the Church. What restrained him, however, was that he used to visit his spiritual father, even though he did not follow his advice. Only love and veneration for his spiritual father helped him to return to the Church and become a great saint.

I know many men with families who try to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain every year with their sons, because they want to bring them into contact with holy spiritual fathers, so they will have people to rely on in the future course of their life.

This also means that children associate with and love bishops, who are canonical shepherds of the Church; priests who serve in church; deacons, and all those who exercise a pastoral ministry in the Church. Parents ought to invite devout priests to their home, because this is very significant for the life of their children. Such events have left impressions on all of us.

### Ecclesiastical Life and the Home

In parallel with all this, good ecclesiastical upbringing requires that the routine at home, where the child is growing up, is inspired as faithfully as possible by the Church's *typikon*. This, to be sure, is problem with wider implications. Everyday life should be linked with the life of the Holy Eucharist. When we attend the Divine Liturgy, we should acquire the liturgical *ethos*, which is sacrificial, an *ethos* of self-offering. We must learn to live in our interpersonal relationships, in the course of everyday life, as we live during the Holy Eucharist, because severing daily life from eucharistic life creates many problems.

The same should happen as regards bringing up children in the Church. A Russian theologian writes on this issue: *We*



*loved the church like our mother, like our country, like God. We were inspired by it. For us it was a place of sanctification and a source of enthusiasm. We had nothing more beautiful or better... The Church's typikon regulated life in our home as regards fasts, feasts, services and prayers. For us it was self-evident and inviolable, like a natural law, that we would keep the fasts, especially the*

*strict rules of Great Lent.*

A profound impression is made on children by shared evening prayer, when the whole family says Compline together and all the members, depending on their age, say part of the service. Let no one claim that this is impossible, because I know many families that pray together. If this form of shared prayer is difficult, the pious mother can pray with the children. Let them say *Paraklisis*. A priest could be invited to perform the Blessing of Oil in the home. He could read *Paraklisis* or bless the house. Devout parents can think of many things to do in order to adapt, to some extent, the routine of the home to the *typikon* of the Church. At the very least, they can pray before and after meals. In this way the children will understand that God sends the food, and we ought to thank Him. They will also realize that we must have God's blessing for all the actions in our life.

Metropolitan Dionysios of Kozani observes: *What comes first in people's lives is always upbringing, in this case, upbringing in the Church... our Christians must be taught what is said and done in Church, and learn to love the people and things of the Church. Unless we start from here, we do not make Christians,*

because, if we do not have people with the mind of the Church, we do not have Christians.

The significant comment has been made that young people who learn to attend church, visit monasteries, venerate holy icons, sing the Church's hymns, love iconography, and generally enjoy and understand the Church's art, will not easily distance themselves from the Church, even if they go through difficulties and are cut off from ecclesiastical life for a while. Parents ought to bring up their children in such a way that they can easily return after their temporary departure. It is very important that the children should retain a good memory and image of God and the maternal affection of the Church.

If parents are aware of the Church as a mother, they will inspire this attitude in their children. If they feel differently about the Church, the children will adopt the same attitude.

Imitating Hannah and inspired by the Prophet Samuel, who spent his childhood years in the Temple, we should be careful to instill an ecclesiastical way of thinking in children. We should involve children with the church, with worship and with holy people and saints. We should also attune the routine of the home to the *typikon* of Church. Then our own efforts will be easier and less laborious and painful.



We should accept every tribulation without argument, with the thought of the wise thief that we justly receive these sorrows for our sins, for the cleansing and salvation of our souls. With this attitude, every sorrow takes on the quality of sorrow for the Lord's sake, and our personal cross is transformed into the Cross of Christ. And through this we find salvation.

Elder Nikon, *Letters to Spiritual Children*

Grumbling is caused by misery and it can be put aside by doxology. Grumbling begets grumbling and doxology begets doxology. When someone doesn't grumble over a problem troubling him, but rather praises God, then the devil gets frustrated and goes off to someone else who grumbles, in order to cause everything to go even worse for him. You see, the more one grumbles, the more one falls into ruin.

St. Paisios the Athonite

## ON FASTING

By an Orthodox Monk.

*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 armor 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 no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

[Rom 13:12-14]

† † †

From the time of the Apostles, Prophets and Fathers till our own day, it is evident from the life of the Church that fasting is part of our *armor of light*; it is a mighty weapon against the enemy given into our hands by the Saviour Himself, Who is a type and example for us in all things and Who fasted in the flesh in order to teach us to fast. To those weak and ill, it is a medicine and antidote—a bath in which to be washed and cleansed.

Armored with holy fasting, St. Elias the Tishbite withstood Ahab and his army singlehandedly and called down fire from the heavens. By fasting St. Moses, the seer of God and the elder of Israel, prepared to ascend the mountain in the desert and behold the Glory of God. By fasting the Three Children were shown forth to be fairer than the other children in Babylon in the house of the king, and Daniel was shown forth to be a shepherd of lions.

Fasting, therefore, should always be understood as a thing most necessary in our battle with the evil one. Only a man who has lost his mind would put down his weapons, strip himself naked of his armor and then jump into the line of fire to do battle with the enemy. Such a one would be committing suicide. A man who calls himself an Orthodox Christian and does not fast, is such a man.

In the final analysis he who does not fast does not believe in God, for he does not really believe in the existence of the enemy and the great victory gifted to us over him by our Saviour. He who does not fast does not believe in Him Who said to the enemy: *Man shall not live by bread alone.* (Mt 4:4 and Lk 4:4). This is why Apostolic and Patristic canons proclaim that all who do not keep the fasts have fallen away from the Faith (i.e., have become self-excommunicated), and our Holy Father St. Seraphim of Sarov instructs us not even to speak with such persons.

Those who fell away from our Holy Faith through schism and heresy, by distorting the dogmas and truth of Holy Orthodoxy, in consequence distorted the life of the Church also, and especially the teaching concerning fasting. Thus, to the Latins, fasting became primarily a means of atonement, satisfaction, retribution, payment for sins committed or for earning merits, wages, favor, etc., when all sins had been paid for. The Protestants correctly abhorred the use of fasting as

“works” which won merits which, in turn, were banked as surplus in the treasury of the Popes to be dispensed to “poor souls” in purgatory; the few that continued to fast, however, were not able to free themselves from the error of Anselm concerning atonement and punishment. Thus, after some centuries of keeping fasts as “a pious and ancient custom,” yet having lost the correct understanding and position of fasting in the life of the Church, both Latins and Protestants have totally abandoned fasting!

Now we see that even those that were “nearer” to Holy Orthodoxy in Liturgy and practice—the Copts, Armenians, Jacobites, etc.—in their last gathering in Addis Ababa have “reformed” their rules concerning fasting. This was to be expected, since they have fallen into heresies and are separated from the Holy Church. But now we hear even from those who bear the name Orthodox similar trends and aspirations. For us sinful folk, who nevertheless are still Orthodox in our

Faith, this is one more indication that these people are despisers of and apostates from Orthodoxy. They are only proclaiming to all that have ears to hear that they no longer wish to walk in the way and tradition of our Saviour, the Apostles, Prophets, and Fathers, but rather wish to make *provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof*. Of them the Psalms say: *They were mingled among the heathen, and*

*learned their works.* (Pss 105:35); and the Holy Apostle says: *They have a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.* (2 Tim 3:5).

St. Abba Isaac the Syrian instructs us that: *Our Saviour began the work of our salvation with fasting. In the same way, all those who follow in the footsteps of the Saviour build on this foundation the beginning of their endeavor, since fasting is a weapon established by God. Who will escape blame if he neglects this? If the Lawgiver Himself fasts, how can any of those who have to obey the law be exempt from fasting? This is why the human race knew no victory before fasting, and the devil was never defeated by our nature as it is: but this weapon has indeed deprived the devil of strength from the outset. Our Lord was the Leader and the first example of this victory, in order to place the first crown of victory on the head of our nature. As soon as the devil sees someone possessed of this weapon, fear straightway falls on this adversary and tormentor of ours, who remembers and thinks of his defeat by the Saviour in the wilderness; his strength is at once destroyed and the sight of the weapon given us by our Supreme Leader burns him up. A man armed with the weapon of fasting is always afire*



*with zeal. He who remains therein, keeps his mind steadfast and ready to meet and repel all violent passions.*

Those who do not fast—especially clergy—teach that fasting consists in not thinking and doing evil and quote from our Saviour, the Apostles and Fathers to support their views. They usually forget that our Saviour, the Apostles and Fathers all fasted the physical fast as well as the spiritual fast.

When man partakes of the glory of God, he does not partake of it in the spirit only, but physically also—in a complete sense. When one praises God, he does not praise Him only in the Spirit, but with physical voice also in chant and prayer. When one worships God, he does not worship him noetically only but physically also—the body participating by standing in prayer, by making prostrations and using the fingers and hand to seal itself with the sign of the Cross. When one communicates God, he does not communicate in spirit only but eats the very Body and drinks the very Blood of the Lord unto

healing of soul and body.

Thus one praises God and is united with God not in part, but completely as one whole—soul and body. When one labors in virtue, one labors not only noetically but physically also, even unto blood, in order not to deny our Saviour. Our Holy Martyrs did not witness just by words and thought, resisting evil in their hearts and minds, but gave their

bodies up to torments and their heads to be cut off, that they might remain with our Saviour.

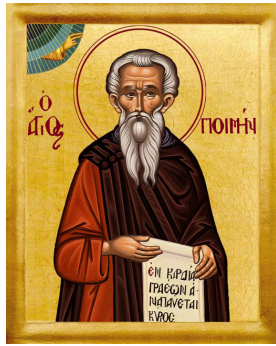
Thus, since we are not just spirits, but “wear flesh and live in the world,” we cannot possibly fast spiritually only and not fast physically also. There is a unity and interaction between the body and the soul. They cannot be separated while we are still in the body. In the Ladder of Divine Ascent, St. John writes *Satiety of food is the father of fornication; an empty stomach is the mother of purity.* He who always keeps his stomach full and he who fasts know the strength of this saying.



If leather bottles are kept supple, they can hold more; but they do not hold so much if they are neglected. The man who stuffs food into his stomach expands his insides, whereas the man who fights his stomach causes it to shrink, and once it has shrunk there is no possibility of overeating, so that henceforth one fasts quite naturally.

St. John Climacus

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## IS THERE A JUDAS WITHIN US?

By Fr Seraphim Rose (+1982).

As our Lord prepared for His Passion, a woman came and anointed Him with very precious ointment; and it is very touching how our Lord accepted such love from simple people. But at the same time Judas—one of the twelve who were with Him—looked at this act, and something in his heart changed. This was apparently the “last straw;” Judas was the one in charge of the money and he thought that this was a waste. We can see the logical processes going on in his mind. We can hear him think the ideas which the devil put in his mind about Christ: “I thought this man was somebody important. He wastes money, he doesn’t do things right, he thinks he’s so important...”. And this passion (love of money), led him to betray Christ. He did not “mean” to betray Him; he simply wanted money; he had been unable to crucify his passion of avarice.

Anyone of us can be exactly in that position. We have to look at our hearts and see which passion of ours will the devil utilize and lead us to betray Christ. If we think that we are something superior to Judas we are quite mistaken. Like Judas, everyone of us has several passions within his heart. Let us examine ourselves: we can be caught with love for neatness, for correctness, for a sense of beauty: any of our little faults which we cling to can be a thing that the devil can catch us with. Being caught, we will begin to justify this condition “logically,” on the basis of our passion. And through such a “logical” process, we can betray Christ. We have but one remedy: watchfulness and realization as to how we are filled with passions—each one of us is a potential

Judas. When the opportunity comes—when the passion begins to operate in us and logically begins to develop from a passion into betrayal—we should stop right there and whisper: *Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!*

We must not look at life through the glasses of our passions, nor see how we can “fit” life into being what we would like it to be—whether this is a life where there is peace and quiet or where there is a lot of noise and excitement. If we try to make life “fit” like this, a total disaster will result. In looking at life, we should accept all the things which come to us as God’s providence, knowing that they are intended to wake us up from our passions. We should pray to God to show us some God-pleasing thing that we can do. When we accept what comes to us, we begin to be like the simple woman in the Gospel who heard the call from God and was thus able to be His minister. She was proclaimed to the ends of the world, as our Lord says, because of the simple thing she did—pouring out the ointment upon Him. Let us be like her: sensitive to watching God’s signs around us. These signs come from everywhere: from nature, from our fellow men, from a seeming chance of events... There is always, everyday, something that indicates to us God’s will. We must be open to this.

Once we become more aware of our passions and commence our warfare against them, we will not let them begin the process which was seen in Judas. Judas started from a very small thing: being concerned for the right use of money. And from such small things we betray God the Saviour. We must be sober, seeing not the fulfillment of our passions around us, but rather the indication of God’s will: how we might this very moment wake up and begin to follow Christ to His Passion and save our souls. Amen.



# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

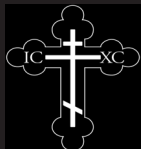
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Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

## HE DIED THAT WE MAY LIVE...

By Inok Vsevolod (Filipiev), from "Orthodox America," Vol. 140, May-June 1996.

*What storms, what disturbances, what sins, what tears there are in every dwelling, every town and every market place! And what good is there in the world? It is full of deception, fear and sickness. Our birth is strange, our death is frightful, and what is after death is inscrutable.*

[St. Joseph of Volotsk, +1515]

† † †

The whirlwind of life, like falling leaves, spins around the people of this age in a frenzied dance. Vanity—this is the most accurate definition of all that occupies our minds and hearts; it is what moves us to sorrow and to rejoice. So pass the years and decades of our life. Sooner or later, however, there comes for each person the hour of awakening, the hour of realization that he is mortal. And this seemingly obvious truth strikes us in the depths of our souls, like a terrifying revelation.

This awakening comes in different ways, but most frequently it finds us when we are ill. Lying in bed, we suddenly realize that we are not eternal, that we are, in fact, going to die, possibly very soon. Then the sickness leaves us and again we become absorbed by new concerns, and we forget about death. But sickness and adversities are those messengers sent to us by the Lord, who call to our hearts: *People, come to your senses! Do not imagine that you are im-*

*mortal gods. Take a good, hard look at yourselves, and you will see that death and decay reign over your bodies. See, your hair is getting gray, your skin is withering, and all this is irreversible. Think well. Are you prepared for death? What awaits you there in eternity, after the last clump of earth is thrown into your grave and a new life begins for you?*

Only a few blessed souls, even before the coming of an illness or other dread messenger of death, come to realize, with God's help, all the vanity of this earthly life. Multitudes of holy fathers and mothers who in every age filled the deserts and monasteries, were motivated precisely by this soul-saving awareness. And we too are capable of the same realization. We have but to listen carefully to the voice of our conscience, when we are alone with ourselves, when we have no reason to be hypocritical or double-faced.

Here before us lies the path of the God-pleasers, who came to realize that however beautiful, however marvelous this temporal world is, there will come a time when it will no longer exist. The beauties of nature, which today delight our eyes, will disappear; the mountains, the flowers, the sun, the stars—all will disappear. The beauty of youth will wither, the canvasses of the old masters will fade, the books of renowned authors will decay. All will pass away. God will remain, but will we be with Him? According to our deeds, according to our sins we must conclude that it is not our lot to enjoy His eter-



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nal presence. But He alone is truly Existing, Who always is. And if our lot is not with Him, then what good to us is eternity? For it will be for us an eternity without God.

Unbelievers are often panic-stricken at the thought of leaving this temporal life. They want to live forever, although they know that they are destined to die. These foolish people do not understand that their awful tragedy lies precisely in the fact that after death their souls (and, at the General Resurrection, their bodies also) will receive that eternal existence without God, towards which they have been striving. And can one compare even the most dreadful torments and illnesses of this present life with those hellish torments that sinners will experience for all eternity?

True Christians, by contrast, do not fear the death of their mortal bodies. In the Symbol of Faith they confess, *I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come*. For them, the death of the flesh is a passage to that place *where there is neither sickness nor sorrow, nor sighing but life everlasting*. The only thing they fear is that they have not prepared themselves for eternal life by sincere repentance and good deeds.

Let us ask ourselves: We who call ourselves Christians today, what do we hope for? Do we keep in mind *the life of the age to come*, at least when we recite the Creed? Or are we captivated by the sparkle and the tawdry brilliance of Satan's carnival whirling around us with its mad fascination? That fallen angel has forever been trying to divert people from the soul-saving inclination to prepare for the coming passage into eternal life.

It is instructive in this regard to recall the story of Saint Ioasaph of India. His father, the prince Abenner, desiring to guard his son from any exposure to Christianity, had a

palace specially constructed for him, where he was constantly entertained by courtiers; he was deliberately kept from hearing anything about illness, old age or death. No sick or elderly people were allowed to visit him. When, however, he chanced to see two sick people and one old man, he came to understand the transitory nature of this temporal life, and he fell into despair. He was delivered from this state when the Lord sent to him His servant, the monk Barlaam, who revealed to Ioasaph the truth of Christianity. (Saints Barlaam, Ioasaph and Abenner are all commemorated on the same day, November 19<sup>th</sup>.)

Nowadays, the devil is setting new snares. We are surrounded by a sea of diversions, by unheard-of discoveries in science and technology, by ultra-modern medicine, and all this is designed to divert us from *the one thing needful*. And we, unfortunate and deceived little people, puffing ourselves up as though we were gods, try to catch eternity in our toy nets. We try to stay the passage of time, dinging onto it with cameras and video cameras, and then we look greedily at these shiny little squares of paper, which have captured irretrievably lost moments of life. Meanwhile, our God Jesus Christ stands invisibly over this frenzied world of ours, and waits: When will we repent, when will we come to our senses? He is merciful and long-suffering, *suffering for us, even unto death*, and today He again suffers, gazing into the soul of each of us. **Have we no shame before His all-pure gaze?**

We who call ourselves Christian have reason to be ashamed. A spiritual self-examination inevitably reveals that even if we maintain an outward semblance of piety, inwardly we are, alas, far from Christ. Where, for example, is the joy of the anticipation of meeting the Lord and His saints beyond the

grave, a joy which was common to all the early Christians? Nowadays this joy is known only to a few chosen righteous ones; to the majority it is unknown. We must admit that many of us, contemporary Christians, fear death and cling to this temporal life almost like the unbelievers. The holy fathers say that to be a Christian means to be daily crucified with Christ, to mortify our fallen nature. Daily! But we do not want to die with Christ even once in our life. Self-conceit, intellectual pride, vainglory—these are the “blind guides” of our souls. They whisper to each of us, “You are such a good Christian, so decent; you are doing such important work. You can’t possibly die now.” And we believe this lie, forgetting about death.

If tonight any one of us should be unexpectedly hauled off to our deaths by execution (as this often happened in the years of persecution in Russia or the days of early Christianity), many would doubtless murmur to themselves: “Why me? I am still young, I can still serve the Church.” The primordial fear of death, which possesses our whole being, would not allow us to recall that martyrdom and confession is the highest and most noble form of service to God and the Church. We have only to realize this or, better yet, to believe in this, and the murmuring will cease, and a divine consolation will settle in our souls, a joy shared by the inhabitants of the world above.

Let us bring to mind the Holy Royal Martyrs of Russia, especially the young and brutally murdered crown-prince and grand duchesses. Life held out to them such wonderful promises. And what did they get? Golgotha and the cross of martyrdom. And with what humility and meekness they drank this bitter cup. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was Himself crucified when He was only thirty-three years old.

What a striking contrast His path in life makes with the lot of so many false-prophets of Eastern religions. There we see venerable gurus surrounded by crowds of disciples, or, in extreme cases, a “prophet” who, at the end of his life, simply flies into the sky on a horse. In Christianity, the God-man Jesus spent three years tirelessly preaching the word of Truth, and in the end was abandoned by almost all His disciples and was crucified on the Cross. Truly, this was a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. (*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness*—I Cor 1:23).

But let us—all of us who are called by the Saviour to renounce the pharisaism of the Jews and the paganism of the Greeks—take off from our souls’ hardness and despondency, and follow after Christ and the saints, so that we too might confess, not only with our lips but with our hearts, the Christian faith that makes no sense to the people “of this world”; *I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen*

## THE THREE VISITS OF MARY MAGDALENE TO THE TOMB OF CHRIST

*Blessed Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky (+1936).*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

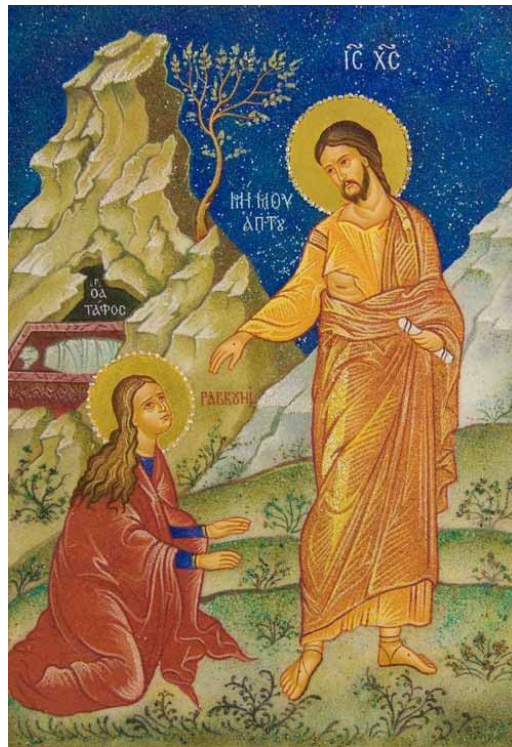
Moreover, something is not yet complete, for He must *ascend* to the Father. Later, the Lord behaves differently to the two Marys. This time, the two women are fully aware that the Lord is appearing to the faithful as the victor over death and Hades, as one ascending to the Father in the eternal kingdom,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

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

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

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

Let us begin with this last event. It is not necessary to conclude from Mark's narration that the women did not ever inform the apostles of the appearance of the angel. Mark only notes that they could not do so immediately, and that the apostles heard the news from Mary Magdalene, to whom the Lord had *appeared first*. (Mk 16:9). You see, Mark singles her out from the group of other Myrrhbearers and, consequently, separates the informing of the apostles from the bringing of the spices and myrrh. Mark does not speak of her as participating in the bringing of the spices



to the tomb, but only of her participation in the purchase of them (16:1)—which took place on Saturday evening, after the end of the Sabbath restrictions, that is, after the sixth hour.

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

Luke does not name the ones who prepared the myrrh, nor the ones who brought it to the tomb, but indicates that the two groups were not identical (*together with some others*, Lk 24:9). Evidently some of them had obtained myrrh and spices already on Friday after the Savior's death, but remained at rest on the Sabbath according to the law (Lk 23:55), while others purchased ointment and spices after the end of the prescribed Sabbath rest (Mk 16:1). Luke does not name the women who brought the spices, but only says of someone, *returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to the other disciples. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the Mother of James who told this to the apostles*. (Lk 24:10).

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

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

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

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

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

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

(5) Not knowing about all this, the other Myrrhbearers come to the tomb and encounter the angels (Mark, Luke)

and return too tearful to speak at first (Mark), but later also proclaim the news to everyone (Luke).

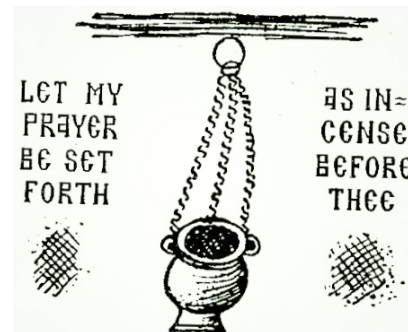
(6) Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, already aware of the Resurrection, go to look at the tomb and the Lord's burial bandages, which Peter and John had seen (Luke, John), but which Mary herself had not seen for herself. Coming to the tomb, this time both Marys enter it, as the angel advises them to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

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

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

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

It is clear that the two Marys went to the tomb together after Mary Magdalene had already been there alone, and that both already knew of the Resurrection. In fact, in the *Menaion* for 22 July, Saint Nikiforos says the same: *Mary Magdalene came thrice to the tomb, twice seeing Christ. First, at night, and then telling Peter and John, with whom she returned. Then with another a third time, seeing the Lord again and hearing Him say "rejoice"*. (Matthew, Ch. 28).



The death of the soul through transgression and sin is, then, followed by the death of the body and by its dissolution in the earth and its conversion into dust; and this bodily death is followed in its turn by the soul's banishment to Hades. In the same way the resurrection of the soul—its return to God through obedience to the divine commandments—is followed by the body's resurrection and its reunion with the soul. And for those who experience it the consequence of this resurrection will be true incorruption and eternal life with God; they will become spiritual instead of non-spiritual, and will dwell in heaven as angels of God (cf. Mt. 22:30). As St. Paul says, *We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall be with the Lord forever*. (1 Thess 4:17).

St. Gregory Palamas

## WHAT DID CHRIST PRAY ABOUT IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE?

By Saint John Maximovitch, "Living Orthodoxy," Vol. XV, No. 3, May-June 1993 issue, tr. Vladimir Moss, (pp.5-8).



When the Lord had finished the Mystical Supper with His disciples and given them His Instructions, He went with them to the Mount of Olives (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26; Lk 22:39). On the way He continued His final

teachings, after which He addressed the Heavenly Father with a prayer for His disciples and those who would believe their word (Jn 17).

On crossing the stream of the Cedron, the Lord and His disciples went into the garden of Gethsemane, where He had been accustomed to gather with them earlier (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32; Jn 18:1-2). Here He left His disciples, except for Peter, James and John, telling them to sit down for a time while He prayed. Then He Himself with Peter, James and John went on a little further. He wanted to be on His own as much as possible, but knowing all that was going to happen, He began to sorrow, to be distressed and horrified (Mt 26:37; Mk 1:27), and He said to those with Him: *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Stay here and watch with Me.* And going a little further off, He fell face down on the earth and prayed.

Twice the Lord interrupted His prayer, and went up to Peter and the sons of Zebedee. Alas! They were there, but not watching; sleep had overcome them. In vain did their Divine Teacher exhort them to watch and pray, so as not to fall into temptation: *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38). The disciples again fell asleep and immediately the Savior departed from them in order to continue His prayer, which ended only when the hour of the betrayal of the Son of Man into the hands of sinners drew near. Jesus' intensity of prayer reached the highest degree—He came out in a bloody sweat which fell in drops on the earth: *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* (Lk 22:44).

What did Jesus pray about with such fiery intensity? What did He beseech the Heavenly Father, falling face down to the earth three times? *Abba, My Father! All is possible to Thee; O if only Thou wouldst grant that this cup be taken from Me. If it is possible, let this cup pass by Me; take this cup from Me.*

*However, not as I will, but as Thou wilt; not My will, but Thine be done. My Father, if this cup cannot pass by Me, but I must drink of it, may Thy will be done.*

The Lord Jesus Christ was the God-Man. The Divine and human natures, without merging into each other and without changing, *undivided and unseparated* (per the dogma of the Chalcedonian Council) were united in Him in one Person. In accordance with His two natures, the Lord also had two wills. As God, Jesus Christ was of one substance with God the Father and had one Will with Him and the Holy Spirit. But as perfect man, consisting of a soul and a body, the Lord also had human feelings and a human will. His human will was completely obedient to His Divine will. The Lord subjected His human will to the Divine will—He sought only to do the will of the Heavenly Father (Jn 5:30); His spiritual food was *to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to finish His work.* (Jn 4:34).

But the work which was set before Him to finish was greater than any other, and even unfeeling, soulless nature was bound to be amazed at it. It was necessary for Him to redeem man from sin and death, and reestablish the union of man with God. It was necessary that the sinless Savior should take upon Himself all human Sin, so that He, Who had no sins of His own, should feel **the weight of the sin of all humanity** and sorrow over it in such a way as was possible only for complete holiness, which clearly feels even the slightest deviation from the commandments and Will of God. It was necessary that He, in Whom Divinity and humanity were hypostatically united, should in His holy, sinless humanity experience the full horror of the distancing of man from his Creator, of the split between sinful humanity and the source of holiness and light—God.

The depth of the fall of mankind must have stood before His eyes at that moment; for man, who in Paradise did not want to obey God and who listened to the devil's slander against Him, would now rise up against his Divine Savior, slander Him, and, having declared Him unworthy to live upon the earth, would hang Him on a tree between heaven and earth, thereby subjecting Him to the curse of the God-given law (Deut 21:22-23). It was necessary that the sinless Righteous One, rejected by the sinful world for which and at the hands of which He was suffering, should forgive mankind this evil deed and turn to the Heavenly Father with a prayer that the Divine righteousness should forgive mankind, blinded by the devil, this rejection of its Creator and Savior. Such a holy prayer could not fail to be heard, such a power of love was bound to unite the source of love, God, with those who even now would feel this love, and, understanding how far the ways of men had departed from the ways of God, would manifest a strong determination to return to God the Father through the Creator's reception of human nature.

And now there came the time when all this was to come to pass. In a few hours the Son of Man, raised upon the cross, would draw all men to Himself by His own self-sacrifice. Before the force of His love the sinful hearts of men would not be able to stand. The love-of the God-man would break the stone of men's hearts. They would feel their own impurity and darkness, their insignificance; and only the stubborn haters of God would not want to be enlightened by the light of the Divine greatness and mercy. But all those who would not reject Him Who called them, irradiated by the light of the love of the God-Man, would feel their separation from the loving Creator and would thirst to be united with Him. And invisibly the greatest mystery would take place—mankind would turn to its Maker, and the merciful Lord would joyfully accept those who would return from the slander of the devil to their Archetype. *Mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace ardently kissed.* (Pss 84:10); righteousness has pressed close from heaven, for the incarnate Truth has shone out on the cross from the earth. The hour had come when all this was about to take place.

The world did not suspect the greatness of the coming day. Before the gaze of the God-Man all that was to happen was revealed. He voluntarily sacrificed Himself for the salvation of the



human race. And now He came for the last time to pray alone to His Heavenly Father. Here He would accomplish that sacrifice which would save the race of men. He would voluntarily give Himself up to sufferings, giving Himself over into the power of darkness.

However, this sacrifice would not be saving if He would experience only His personal sufferings—He had to be tormented by the wounds of sin from which mankind was suffering. The heart of the God-Man was filled with inexpressible sorrow. All the sins of men, beginning from the transgression of Adam and ending with those which would be done at the moment of the sounding of the last trumpet—all the great and small sins of all men stood before His mental gaze. They were always revealed to Him as God—*all things are manifest before Him*—but now their whole weight and iniquity was experienced also by His human nature.

His holy, sinless soul was filled with horror. He suffered as the sinners themselves do not suffer, whose coarse hearts do not feel how the sin of man defiles and how it separates

him from the Creator. His sufferings were the greater in that He saw this coarseness and embitteredness of heart, the fact that *men have blinded their eyes that they should not see, and do not want to hear with their ears and be converted, so that they should be healed.* He saw that the whole world was even now turning away from God Who had come to them in human form. The hour was coming and had already come (Jn 16:31) when even those who had only just declared their readiness to lay down their lives for Him would be scattered. The God-Man would hang in solitude upon the cross, showered with a hail of insults from the people who would come to see this spectacle. Only a few souls remained faithful to Him, but they, too, by their silent grief and helplessness would increase the sufferings of the heart of the Virgin's Son, overflowing with love. There would not be

help from anywhere...

True, even in these minutes He would not be alone, for the Father was always with Him (Jn 8:19; 10:30). But so as to feel the full weight of the consequences of sin, the Son of God would voluntarily allow His human nature to feel even the horror of separation from God. This terrible moment would be unendurable for His holy, sinless being. A powerful cry would break out from His lips: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*

And seeing this hour in advance, His holy soul was filled with horror and distress.

Still earlier, when some Hellenes came to see Jesus, He allowed His human nature to experience the approach of that dreadful hour. When these *sheep from another fold* came to Him, the God-Man saw that the hour when everyone would come to Him as He was raised upon the cross, was near. His human nature shuddered, His soul was in distress. But Jesus knew that without His sufferings the salvation of men was impossible, that without them His earthly activity would leave a trace as small as that of a grain which lies for a long time on the surface of the earth before being dried up by the sun. It was therefore at that time that He appealed to His Father not to allow human weakness to prevail over all the thoughts and feelings of His human nature: *Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? And yet for this purpose have I come to this hour.* (Jn 12:27). And as if heartened by the remembrance of why He had come to the earth, Christ prays that the Will of God

for the salvation of the human race be carried out: *Father, glorify Thy name* (Jn 12:28)—glorify it on earth, among men, show Thyself to be not only the Creator but also the Savior. (St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius*, book 4). *I have glorified it and will glorify it again* (Jn 12:28) came a voice from heaven announcing that the time for the fulfillment of the Mystery which had been hidden from the beginning of the age was coming. (Col 1:26; Eph 1:9; 3:9).

And now that time had already come. If before the human nature of Christ had shuddered and been troubled at the thought of what was to come, what did it experience now, when in expectation of the coming of His enemies and betrayer He for the last time prayed alone to God? The Lord knew that every prayer of His would be answered (Jn 11:42), He knew that if He would ask the Father to deliver Him from torments and death, more than twelve legions of angels would appear (Mt 26:53) to defend Him. But had He not come for this? So that at the last moment He should refuse to carry out that which He had fore-announced in the Scriptures?

However, *the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*. The spirit of Jesus now burns (Rom. 12:11), wishing only one thing—the fulfillment of the Will of God. But by its nature, human nature abhors sufferings and death (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book 3, chapters 18, 20, 23, 24; Blessed Theodoret; St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, word 6, *On the Remembrance of Death*). **The Son of God willingly accepted this weak nature. He gives Himself up to death for the salvation of the world.** And He conquers, although He feels the approaching fear of death and abhorrence of sufferings. Now these sufferings will be particularly terrible, terrible not so much in themselves, as from the fact that the soul of the God-Man was shaken to its depths. **The sin of man that He takes upon Himself is inexpressibly heavy.** This sin weighs Jesus down, making the sufferings that are to come unendurable.

Christ knows that when His sufferings reach their peak, He will be completely alone. No man will be able to relieve them —*and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.* (Pss 69:20). *I looked, but there was none to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold.* (Isa 63:5). But in order that He should feel the full weight of sins, He would also be allowed to feel the burden of separation from the Heavenly Father. And at this moment His human will can wish to avoid the sufferings. But it will not be so. Let His human will not diverge for one second from His Divine Will. It is about this that the God-Man beseeches His Heavenly Father. If it is possible for mankind to reestablish its unity with God without this new and terrible crime against the Son of God (cf. St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius* book 4), then it is better that this hour should not come to pass. But if it is only in this

way that mankind can be drawn to its Maker, let the good Will of God be accomplished in this case, too. May His Will be done, and may the human nature of Jesus, even at the most terrible moments, not wish anything other than the fulfillment of the will of God, the completion of God's economy. This is precisely what Christ prayed for in the garden of Gethsemane: *He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him Who was able to save Him from death.* (Heb 5:7).

He offered up prayers and supplications to Him Who was able to save Him from death, but He did not pray for deliverance from death. It is as if the Lord Jesus Christ spoke as follows to His Father: “Abba, My Father, the Father of Him Whom Thou has sent to gather into one the people of Israel and the scattered children of God—the people of the Gentiles, so as to make out of two one new man and by means of the cross reconcile them with Thee. All is possible to Thee, all is possible that is in accord with Thy boundless perfections. Thou knowest that it is natural for human nature to abhor sufferings, that man would always like *to see good days* (Pss 33:12)... But he Who loves Thee with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind wishes only that which is pleasing to Thy good and perfect will. I have come down to earth to fulfill Thy wise will and for this purpose I have communed with flesh and blood, assuming human nature with all its weaknesses, except the sinful ones. I also have wished to avoid sufferings, but only on one condition—that this is Thy holy will. If it is possible that the work of economy should be completed without a new and terrible crime on the part of men; if it is possible for Me not to experience these mental sufferings, to which in a few hours' time will be united the terrible sufferings of the human body; if this is possible—deliver Me then from the experiences and temptations which have already come upon Me and which are still to come. Deliver Me from the necessity of experiencing the consequences of the crime of Adam. However, this request is dictated to Me by the frailty of My human nature; but let it be as is pleasing to Thee, let not the will of frail human nature be fulfilled, but Our common, pre-eternal Council. My Father! If according to Thy wise economy it is necessary that I offer this sacrifice, I do not reject It. But I ask only one thing: May Thy will be done. May Thy will be done always and in all things. As in heaven with Me, Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thee there is one will, so may My human will here on earth not wish anything contrary to Our common will for one moment. May that which was decided by us before the creation of the world be fulfilled, may the salvation of the human race be accomplished. May the sons of men be redeemed from slavery to the devil, may they be redeemed at the high price of the sufferings and self-sacrifice of the God-Man. And may all the weight of men's sins, which I have accepted on Myself, and all my mental and physical sufferings, not be able to make



My human will waver in its thirst that Thy holy will be done. May I fulfill Thy will with joy. *Thy will be done.*"

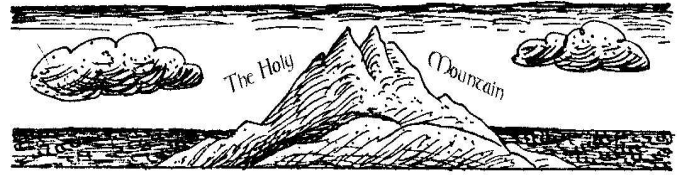
The Lord prayed about the cup of His voluntary saving passion as if it was involuntary (Sunday service of the fifth tone, canon, eighth *heirmos*), showing by this the two wills of the two natures, and beseeching God the Father that His human will would not waver in its obedience to the Divine will (Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, book 3, 24). An angel appeared to Him from the heavens and strengthened (Lk 22:43) His human nature, while Jesus Who was accomplishing the exploit of His self-sacrifice prayed still more earnestly, being covered in a bloody sweat. And for His reverence and constant obedience to the will of the Father, the Son of God was heard. Strengthened and reassured, Jesus rose from prayer (Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, book 3, 24). He knew that His human nature would not waver any more, that soon the load of the sins of men would be taken away from Him, and that by His obedience to God the Father He would bring human nature that had gone astray to Him. He went up to His disciples and said: *You all sleep and rest. It is finished, the hour has come: Lo! the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go, he who betrays Me is at hand. Pray that you do not fall into temptation.*

Coming out to meet those who had come for Him, the Lord voluntarily gave Himself into their hands. And when Peter, wishing to defend His Teacher, struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, the Lord healed the servant, and reminded Peter that He was voluntarily giving Himself up: *Put your sword into its sheath: am I not to drink the cup which the Father has given Me? Or do you think that I cannot now ask My Father and He will send Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, that this must come to pass?* And willingly drinking the whole cup of mental and physical sufferings to the bottom, Christ glorified God on earth; He accomplished a work which was no less than the very creation of the world. He restored the fallen nature of man, reconciled Divinity and humanity, and made men partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

Having accomplished the work which *the Father gave Him to do*, Christ was glorified also in His human nature with that glory which He as God had *before the world was* (Jn 17:5), and sat in His humanity at the right hand of God the Father, waiting until His enemies should be laid at the footstool of His feet (Heb 10:13).

Having been made for all those who obey Him the cause of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9), Christ remains even after His ascension *known in two natures without confusion* (Dogmatikon of the sixth tone), *bearing two wills according to each nature unto the ages* (Sunday canon of the fifth tone, *troparion* of the eighth *heirmos*), but His glorified body cannot now suffer and does not need anything, while in accordance with this His human will, too, cannot diverge from His Divine will

in anything. But with this flesh Christ will come again on the last day *to Judge the living and the dead*, after which, as King not only according to His Divinity, but also according to His humanity, He will be subject to God the Father together with the whole of His eternal kingdom, so that *God may be all in all.* (I Cor 15:28).



Let us believe in the power of our Jesus, and the tempter will surrender his weapons and there will be a great calm. For whose love do you bear afflictions? For whose sake did you jeopardize your very lives for the sisters? Out of love, whose command are you carrying out? You will answer: **For the love of our Christ, in Whom we hope that all things, through His power, will have a good ending.**

Good, very good—for He is the One Who numbers all the hairs of our head. How could we think that anything will happen without His willing it? And if we are protected by Divine Providence, what are we to fear? Should we not rather fear Him Who is able to put us into the fire of hell on account of our sins?

Instead of having courage and pride in our Christ unto His glory, Who counted you worthy to struggle in this way, you, on the contrary, are filled with grief and thoughts and murmuring. I repeat: You ought to be proud that God deemed you, the base and unworthy, worthy to become instruments of His Divine Providence for the salvation of select souls, for whom our Christ died. Do not grieve, for God's sake! Do not seek to lose your reward, which will be great in Heaven.

Preaching the divine word is the smallest virtue, but sacrificing ourselves for Him is **perfect love**; that is, to lay down our lives out of love for our neighbor. Certainly this virtue is laborious and dangerous, but are any high offices attained without labor and toil? Let us not forget the meaning of the divine Crucifixion, that we also ought to become small saviors, when the time calls for it, by the divine will.

Let us see God as our Father; let us rest in the warmth of His secure embrace, for He knows how to arrange everything for our benefit. As humans we—and first of all, I—lose courage in the beginning, so that our human weakness shows; but then the good Cyrenian, divine grace, comes and bears our cross and thus we ascend Golgotha more easily.

Wasn't our Christ afraid on Gethsemane? What were the great drops of holy sweat for? These and other things characterized the human weakness; but afterwards, as God, quiet and meek as an innocent lamb, He sacrificed His life for the sake of ungrateful man.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona  
"Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

## ST. GREGORY PALAMAS & HIS DISPUTE WITH BARLAAM

By Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, from his book "St. Gregory Palamas as a Hagiorite."



It was with great difficulty that the saint began this "dispute," because he did not wish to abandon the stillness of his life on the Holy Mountain. But when he was asked by his spiritual brothers, and when he himself realized that the faith was in danger of being altered, which would also have resulted in altering the means of man's cure, of losing the way of salvation, then he began his struggle.

At first he did it with great humility and discretion. He finished one of his letters to Barlaam by saying that in spite of the reproach that he felt against Barlaam for his erroneous ideas on serious theological questions, he still maintained the same love for him. He called him a very wise man, the best of those who loved and were loved, and he emphasized that in spite of the dispute, the state of peace would be maintained. At the same time, he expressed the desire that they should meet to embrace with a holy kiss.

All these things imply a soul that has peace and stillness. Because of this hesychastic life he could criticize the erroneous belief and at the same time keep peace and love.

But also on the matters which were in dispute with Barlaam we can see the hesychastic life of St. Gregory Palamas. He expresses the whole Tradition of the Orthodox Church. At this point we would like to look at several characteristic views taken from the first triad of his well-known work *On the Holy Hesychasts*. Three topics are raised. The first one is the relationship between the two wisdoms, worldly and godly. The second is about noetic prayer, the return of the nous to abide in the heart, and the third is about vision of the uncreated Light.

In the first part he opposes Barlaam's view that human knowledge is a gift of God, and indeed of equal or higher value than the knowledge of the Apostles and the Prophets. This was why Barlaam had come to wrong conclusions. One of these incorrect conclusions was that the monks should pursue human education and human knowledge in order to be perfected.

In answer to this view, St. Gregory maintains that man's aim is to progress from the image to the likeness of God. In his fall man lost his direction toward the likeness, and the image was darkened. Therefore, he must now purify the image. But this does not come about through *carnal wisdom*.

Since the darkening of the image happens through sin, this means that when sin is removed, when man attains inner prayer, when his life is harmonized with Christ's commandments, and when he attains vision of God, then he is in fact in the image of God. Therefore, the philosophers' teaching is different from that of the Christians.

St. Gregory emphasizes particularly that man purifies the image through Christ's commandments and the power of the Cross of Christ. He refers to the cases of St. John the Forerunner and of Christ Himself. The Forerunner, he who is greater than the Prophets, lived from his early years in the desert, where, he points out, there was no education nor any of what Barlaam called saving philosophy. There were no books there, and no teachers of worldly wisdom.

And we find the same thing in the life of Christ. When a young man asked what he should do to attain salvation and eternal life, He did not say: "If you want to be perfect, take up outward education, hasten to assimilate the sciences, acquire for yourself the science of beings," but He said: *Sell your possessions and give to the poor, take up the cross and be willing to follow me.* Therefore, in order to shame the outwardly wise the Lord took on uneducated fishermen.

At this point St. Gregory refers to passages from the epistles of the Apostle Paul, mainly from the first letter to the Corinthians, where it says that Christ took unlettered men *in order to shame the outwardly wise*, that God made foolish the wisdom of the world, that *the world through its wisdom did not know God* and that *through the foolishness of what was preached He was pleased to save those who believe.*

Then, taking passages from Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa, he makes the distinction between demonic human knowledge and knowledge from the Holy Spirit, and naturally he prevents the monks from acquiring that worldly wisdom and knowledge. He ends his first section by saying that outward wisdom, meaning philosophy, *appeared futile and contemptible to our holy Fathers and especially to those who had had experience of it.*

In the second part he refers to the vast subject of prayer, and especially to what is called noetic prayer, where the nous is centered in the heart. Barlaam and his followers had said that it was not right to take our nous into the body, particularly into the heart. They said that the right thing was to take the nous out of the body.

In reply to this view, which presupposes Plato's philosophical conceptions that the body is the prison of the soul and man's salvation is the soul's liberation from the body, he first uses the Apostle Paul's three passages: *Through Holy Baptism the body became the temple of the Holy Spirit in us*; the body is the *house of God*, and finally God gave his promise *I will live with them and walk with them, and I will be their God.*

He emphasizes that the body is not evil, but it is the carnal attitude that is evil. When a person purifies his body

through self-control, and the irascible and appetitive parts of the soul with self-control and love, and when he further makes his intelligence secure with prayer, then he sees divine Grace in his heart.

In what follows he makes excellent anthropological analyses. He analyzes just what man's nous is, that the heart is the place of the rational faculty, the first rational organ of the body, that the nous is in the bodily organ of the heart, not as in a receptacle, but as in an organ which directs the entire body. Thus we must struggle to bring the nous back into the heart, where its natural place is. Being a great and holy hesychast the saint brings into the soul that which also exists in God. Just as God has essence and energy, so also the soul has essence and energy. The soul's energy which finds itself in the rational part and is flowing out through the senses towards creation must return to the heart. Beginners in the spiritual life can succeed in this by controlling their breathing.

When Barlaam and those who agreed with him scoffed at this method used by beginners, St. Gregory made very correct and very theological observations. The circular motion of the nous, that is to say its return from the outside world to the heart and its ascent from there to God, is the unerring method and **the only way for man to acquire pure knowledge of God**. But St. Gregory also made Orthodox observations about the body's participation in prayer, as well as in the path to sanctity.

The circularity of the body too is essential for the return of the nous to the heart. He says all these things because the Barlaamites mock the hesychasts, who at the beginning of their spiritual life also make use of the circular pattern of the body (*omphalopsychoi*). The saint cites the case of the Prophet Elijah, who used the circularity of his body to bring his nous back into his heart and thus relieved the drought.

In the third part he refers to the fruits of prayer, which are the uncreated Light and divine Knowledge. Barlaam maintained that any light which is accessible to the senses is created and therefore is lower than thought, man's rational faculty. So, with his view that all external light is created and symbolic, he went so far as to consider the philosophers superior to the Prophets and Apostles, who saw the uncreated Light.

This part touches on many other topics as well that relate to this and other accusations by the Barlaamites. First he cites various patristic passages according to which at the beginning of the spiritual life the study of Holy Scripture is reduced, not in disparagement of it, but because we must first be purified through prayer, and then we will understand the spirit of the Scriptures.

He cites other patristic passages as well, in order to show how the body participates in noetic prayer, because often the heart itself leaps with joy at the coming of Grace, and

frequently a pleasant taste is created in the mouths of those who pray and sing, and this is the energy of divine Grace.

Then he makes the distinction between the light of natural knowledge and the Light of the uncreated energies of the Holy Spirit. He concludes that natural knowledge is not the light of the soul. Thus when the saints see the uncreated Light, they see the garment of deification. He cites many patristic passages—and he surely interprets them within his own spiritual experience, which is the same as that of the holy Fathers—that say that man can attain vision of the uncreated Light.

This Light is not symbolic and created, but the shining of hypostatic light; it is divinity itself. The light on Mt. Tabor is not a third hidden nature in Christ, but divinity itself. And towards the end of the third section he refers to the great difference between the theologian and one who has seen God. A theologian can also be said to be one who speaks about God without even having his own personal experience, but a *theoptis* is one who sees God. Theology differs from the vision of God in the same way as the knowledge of a thing differs from the possession of it.

There are other places as well in the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas where he refers to the great subject of the knowledge of God. He affirms that vision of the uncreated Light is union with God. Union is communion, and this communion offers knowledge of God.

True knowledge of God is superior to human created knowledge. And the saint demonstrates that in the Orthodox Church we teach that the Prophets are incomparably higher than the philosophers, for the Prophets of both the Old and New Testaments attained the vision of God, while the philosophers were making conjectures about God.

In this analysis of the first triad of St. Gregory's work *On the Holy Hesychasts* he is clearly shown to be a hesychast father, expressing the genuine hesychasm which is experienced on the Holy Mountain.



A characteristic sign of the soul that feels the majesty of God, and loves God, is to seek always the glory of God, to apply all of the commandments of God, and to find humility and its own self-deprecation; since to God is due honor and majesty, while humility is appropriate to man, that we might—through it—become friends of God. If, indeed, we do this, then we too, like St. John the Baptist, will find joy through the glory of Christ; and shall say continuously, *He must increase, but I must decrease*. (Jn 3:30).

St. Diadochos of Photiki

## THE SOCIAL AIMS OF ORTHODOXY

*By Fr. John Romanides, Patristic Theology: The University Lectures.*

Every human being, every person who lives in society must function as a healthy social entity.

Earlier we referred to the healing of the human soul's noetic energy. The completion of this course of treatment automatically results in the creation of a social human being, a person whose soul is healthy and who is prepared for all aspects of social activity. And such healed people, automatically and implicitly, are "ordained" doctors for others whose souls are sick. Here, the medical science called Orthodoxy differs from other sciences: once patients have been healed, they automatically become people who can heal others. For this reason, it is inconceivable for people who have been healed not to have spiritual children—that is to say, other people who depend on them spiritually, other people whom they advise and guide towards healing.

In the early Church, there was no special or official healer, because every Christian was a healer. Healing was the mission of the early Church. The missionary effort of the early Church was not like that of today's Orthodox Church, which sometimes consists of advertising our beautiful beliefs and traditional form of worship as though they were nothing but products for sale. For example, we talk like this: "Take a look, folks! We have the most beautiful doctrines, the most beautiful worship, the most beautiful chanting, and the most beautiful vestments. See what a beautiful robe the bishop is wearing today!" And that sort of thing. We try to dazzle them with our staffs, our robes, and our head coverings so that we can carry out our missionary work. Of course, there is some sense and some success in doing missionary work this way, but it is not genuine missionary work like that of the early Church.

Today's missionary work consists mainly of this: we enlighten superstitious people and make them Orthodox Christians, without trying to heal them. By doing this, however, we are just replacing or exchanging their former beliefs with a new set of beliefs. We are replacing one superstition with another. And I say this because when Orthodoxy is presented in this way and is offered in this way, how is it different from superstition? After all, when Orthodoxy is presented and offered as a Christianity that does not heal—despite the fact that healing is its primary task—how is it different from superstition?

There are Christians in the West who also have Christian dogmas and accept certain councils. On the basis of outward appearance, there does not seem to be such a great difference between the dogmas of the heretics and those of the Orthodox. The difference is not as huge as it is between Christians and idolaters. On the surface, Orthodox doctrine is not so strikingly different from that of heterodox Christians, espe-

cially given the fact that Orthodox doctrine, as taught today in Greece, is unrelated to the therapeutic treatment found in Orthodox tradition. So from the perspective of doctrine, how is Orthodox tradition different from the tradition of the heterodox? And why should someone who is not Orthodox believe in Orthodoxy and not in some other Christian dogma? After all, in the way that they are presented, neither one of them is offered as a treatment or pathway towards healing, but as superstition.

These days we talk about changing our way of thinking, about changing our beliefs, about changing our outlook on life, and this is the way we view repentance. In other words, for Orthodoxy today repentance is identified merely with the acceptance of Christ. That is to say, we accept Christ. And because we accept Him, we go to Church, we light a candle or two, and we become good little boys and girls. If we are young, we go to Sunday school. If we are adults, we go to a religious meeting now and then. And supposedly we are living in repentance; supposedly we are repentant. Or else, if we have done something bad in our life, we show some regret and ask forgiveness and call what we are doing repentance. However, this is not repentance. It is simply regret. Regret is the beginning of repentance, but the human soul is not purified by mere regret. In order for one's soul to be purified of the passions, the fear of God and repentance must first be present and continue throughout the stage of purification until it is completed with divine illumination, the illumination of our nous by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Since the modern Orthodox do not put this therapeutic treatment into practice, what makes them different from those who are not Orthodox? Is it doctrine? And what good are Orthodox doctrines if they are not used for the healing of the soul? When used in such a way, doctrine offers no benefit whatsoever.



When it concerns the body, in order to be delivered from sickness, it is exceedingly important for a sick man to find out the cause of his sickness. By discovering what it is, not only will he be released from the sickness which possesses him, but afterwards he will not fall into it again, knowing what caused him to fall into it once, and guarding against it. So let us also, first of all, show those who suffer such things, from where they got the disease of scandal. If they come to know this, and if they are willing to pay heed to it scrupulously, they will be delivered not only from this sickness, but from many others; not only for the present, but perpetually. For the nature of this remedy is such that it cures the illness at hand, and acts as a preventative against other diseases.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## Ἡ Κάθοδος τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τὸν Ἄδη

*Ἀγίου Ἐπιφανίου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντίας Κύπρου.*

Ἐκεῖνος ποῦ χθές, μέσα στὴν ἄπειρη συγκατάβασί Του, δὲν ἐκαλοῦσε νὰ τὸν βοηθήσουν οἱ λεγεῶνες τῶν Ἀγγέλων, λέγοντας στὸν Πέτρο, ὅτι εἶναι στὸ χέρι μου νὰ παρατάξω τώρα ἀμέσως, περισσότερες ἀπὸ δώδεκα λεγεῶνες Ἀγγέλων (Ματθ. 26:53), σήμερα κατέρχεται μὲ τὸν θάνατό Του κατὰ τοῦ ἄδου καὶ τοῦ θανάτου, τοῦ τυράννου, ὅπως ταιριάζει σὲ Θεὸ καὶ Κυρίαρχο, ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς τῶν ἀθανάτων καὶ ἀσωμάτων στρατευμάτων καὶ τῶν ἀοράτων ταγμάτων, ὄχι μὲ δώδεκα μόνο λεγεῶνες, ἀλλὰ μὲ μύριες μυριάδες καὶ χίλιες χιλιάδες Ἀγγέλων, Ἀρχαγγέλων, Ἐξουσιῶν, Θρόνων, Ἐξαπτερῶν, Πολυομιμάτων, οὐρανίων ταγμάτων, τὰ ὅποια, ὡς Βασιλέα καὶ Κύριό τους, προπέμπουν, δορυφοροῦν καὶ τιμοῦν τὸν Χριστό. Ὅχι, ὅτι συμμαχοῦν καὶ συμπολεμοῦν μαζί Του. Ὅχι, ποτέ! Γιατί ἀπὸ ποῖα συμμαχία ἔχει ἀνάγκη ὁ παντοδύναμος Χριστός; τὸν συνοδεύουν γιατί χρωστοῦν πάντοτε καὶ ποθοῦν νὰ εἶναι κοντὰ στὸν Θεό τους.

Οἱ ἀγγελικὲς δυνάμεις ἔτρεχαν σὰν δορυφόροι ὀπλίτες, ὀπλισμένοι μὲ ξίφη καὶ σὰν ἀστραπόμορφοι κεραυνοβόλοι, ὀπλισμένοι μὲ τοὺς θεϊκοὺς καὶ παντοδύναμους κεραυνοὺς τοῦ Βασιλέως των, οἱ ὅποιοι πρόφθαιναν μὲ πολὺ ζήλο καὶ ξεπερνοῦσαν ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλο στὴ γρηγοράδα, ὑπακούοντας στὸ θεϊκὸ μόνο νεῦμα καὶ κάνοντας ἔργο καὶ πράξι τῆ διαταγῆ καὶ στεφανωμένοι μὲ τὸ στέφανο τῆς νίκης κατὰ τῆς παρατάξεως τῶν ἐχθρῶν καὶ τυράννων. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ κατέρχονται στὰ ὑποχθόνια δεσμωτήρια τῶν πανάρχαιων νεκρῶν, ποῦ ἦταν μέσα στὴν καρδιά τοῦ Ἄδη καὶ βαθύτερα ἀπ' ὅλη τὴ γῆ, γιὰ νὰ βγάλουν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ μέσα τοὺς ἀλυσσοδεμένους καὶ ἀπὸ αἰῶνες τώρα... κεκοιμημένους.

Μόλις δὲ φάνηκε στὰ κλεισμένα ἀπ' ὄλες τὶς πόρτες, τὰ ἀνήλια καὶ κατασκότεινα δεσμωτήρια, στὰ ὑπόγεια καὶ τὰ σπήλαια τοῦ Ἄδη ἡ θεϊκὴ καὶ λαμπρὴ παρουσία τοῦ Κυρίου, προβαίνει ἐμπρὸς ἀπ' ὄλους ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος Γαβριήλ, ἐπειδὴ εἶχε συνηθίσει νὰ φέρνῃ χαρὰς εὐαγγέλια στοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ μὲ φωνὴ

δυνατὴ, ἀρχαγγελικώτατη, ἔντονη καὶ λιονταρίσια φωνάζει πρὸς τὶς ἀντίπαλες δυνάμεις: «Ἄρατε πύλας οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν». καὶ μαζί του φωνάζει ὁ Μιχαήλ: «Γκρεμισθῆτε προαιώνιες πύλες». Ἔπειτα οἱ Δυνάμεις συμπληρώνουν: «Κάνετε πέρα παράνομοι θυρωροί». Οἱ δὲ Ἐξουσίες διατάζουν μὲ ἐξουσία: «Σπάτε ἄλυσες ἀλυσίδες». Κι' ἓνας ἄλλος Ἀρχάγγελος προσθέτει: «Αἰσχος σὲ σὰς, ἀνάληγοι τύραννοι».

Καὶ καθὼς συμβαίνει ὅταν παρουσιασθῆ μιὰ φοβερὴ, ἀήτητη καὶ παντοδύναμη βασιλικὴ στρατιωτικὴ παράταξι, φρίκη μαζί καὶ τρόπος καὶ ταραχὴ καὶ ὀδυνηρὸς φόβος κυριεύει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ ἀκαταγώνιστου Στρατηγοῦ, τὸ ἴδιο ἔγινε ξαφνικά, μόλις παρουσιάσθηκε τόσο παράδοξα ὁ Χριστὸς στὰ καταχθόνια τοῦ Ἄδη. Ἀπὸ ἐπάνω μιὰ δυνατὴ ἀστραπὴ



ἐτύφλωνε τὰ πρόσωπα τῶν ἐχθρικῶν δυνάμεων τοῦ Ἄδη καὶ ταυτόχρονα ἀκούονταν βροντερὲς στρατιωτικὲς φωνὲς ποῦ διέταζαν: «Ἄρατε πύλας, ὄχι ἀνοίξετε, ἀλλὰ ξεροζῶστε τὶς ἀπὸ τὰ θεμέλια, βγάλτε τὶς τελείως ἀπὸ τὸν τόπο τους, ὥστε νὰ μὴ μποροῦν πιά νὰ ξανακλείσουν. Ἄρατε πύλας οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν, ὄχι γιατί δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τὶς ἀνοίξῃ ὁ Κύριός μας, ποῦ ὅταν θέλῃ, διατάζει καὶ μπαίνει μὲ κλεισμένες τὶς πόρτες, ἀλλὰ σὰς διατάζει, σὰν δραπετὲς δούλους, νὰ σηκώσετε καὶ νὰ μεταφέρετε αὐτὲς

τὶς προαιώνιες πύλες. Γιὰ τοῦτο καὶ δὲν διατάζει τοὺς ὄχλους σὰς, ἀλλὰ σὰς ποῦ παρουσιάξεσθε σὰν ἀρχηγοὶ τους: Ἄρατε πύλας, οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν.» (Ψαλμ. 23:7-10).

Ἀπὸ τώρα καὶ ἔπειτα δὲν θὰ εἶσθε πιά ἄρχοντες κανενός, παρ' ὅλο ποῦ κάκιστα κυριαρχήσατε πάνω στοὺς μέχρι τώρα κεκοιμημένους. Οὔτε αὐτῶν θὰ εἶσθε πλέον ἄρχοντες, οὔτε ἄλλων, οὔτε τῶν ἐαυτῶν σας ἀκόμη. Ἄρατε πύλας, γιατί ἦρθε ὁ Χριστὸς, ἡ οὐράνια θύρα. Ἀνοίξετε δρόμο σ' Αὐτὸν ποῦ ἔβαλε τὸ πόδι Του στὴ φυλακὴ τοῦ Ἄδη. Τὸ ὄνομά του εἶναι Κύριος καὶ ὁ Κύριος ἔχει τὸ δικαίωμα καὶ τὴ δύναμι νὰ περάσῃ τὶς πύλες τοῦ θανάτου. Γιατὶ τὴ μὲν εἴσοδο τοῦ θανάτου τὴ φτιάξατε σεῖς, Αὐτὸς δὲ ἦρθε γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτύχῃ τὸ πέρασμά της. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀνοίξετε γρήγορα καὶ μὴν ἀργοπορήτε. Ἀνοίξετε καὶ κάνετε γρήγορα.

Ἀνοίξετε καὶ μὴν ἀναβάλλετε. Ἄν νομίζετε πῶς θὰ σᾶς περιμένουμε, κάνετε λάθος. Θὰ διατάξουμε τὶς ἴδιες τὶς πύλες νὰ ἀνοίξουν αὐτομάτως καὶ χωρὶς νὰ βάλουμε χέρι: Ἀνοίξτε πύλες αἰώνιες!

Καὶ μόλις οἱ ἀγγελικὲς δυνάμεις ἐβόησαν, τὴν ἴδια στιγμή ἀνοίξαν οἱ πύλες! Τὴν ἴδια στιγμή ἔσπασαν οἱ ἀλυσίδες καὶ οἱ μοχλοί. Ἐπεσαν τὰ κλειδιά καὶ συγκλονίσθηκαν τὰ θεμέλια τῆς φυλακῆς. Οἱ ἐχθρικὲς δυνάμεις ἐτράπησαν σὲ ἀτακτη φυγή, ὁ ἕνας ἔσπρωχνε τὸν ἄλλο, ἄλλος μπερδεύεται στὰ πόδια τοῦ ἄλλου καὶ καθένας φώναζε στὸ διπλανό του νὰ φεύγη γρήγορα. Ἐφριζαν, συγκλονίσθηκαν, τὰ ἔχασαν, ἐταράχθηκαν, ἄλλαξε τὸ χρῶμα τους, φοβήθηκαν, στάθηκαν καὶ ἀπόρησαν, ἀπόρησαν καὶ τρώμαξαν. Ὁ ἕνας ἔμεινε μὲ ἀνοιχτὸ στόμα. Ἄλλος ἔκρυψε τὸ πρόσωπο μέσα στὰ γόνατά του. Ἄλλος ἔπεσε κάτω, παγωμένος ἀπὸ τὸ φόβο. Ἄλλος στάθηκε ἀκίνητος, σὰν νεκρός. Ἄλλος κυριεύθηκε ἀπὸ δέος καὶ ἄλλος ἔτρεξε νὰ σωθῆ σὲ βαθύτερο μέρος.

Τὴν ὥρα αὐτὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπεκεφάλισε τοὺς σαστισμένους τυράννους. Τότε χαλάρωσαν τὰ χαλινάρια τους καὶ ρωτοῦσαν: «Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης; Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ ἦρθε ἐδῶ, κάνοντας τόσα παράδοξα πράγματα; Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης, ποὺ κατορθώνει τώρα στὸν Ἄδη, αὐτὰ ποὺ δὲν ἔγιναν ποτέ; Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης, ποὺ βγάζει ἀπὸ ἐδῶ τοὺς προαιώνιους φυλακισμένους; Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ διέλυσε καὶ κατέλυσε τὸ ἀήτητο κράτος καὶ τὸ θρόνος μας;»

Σ' αὐτοὺς ἀπαντοῦσαν οἱ δυνάμεις τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τοὺς ἔλεγον: «Θέλετε νὰ μάθετε ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης; Εἶναι ὁ Κύριος, ὁ κραταῖος καὶ δυνατός, ὁ Κύριος, ὁ δυνατὸς καὶ πανίσχυρος στὸν πόλεμο. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνος, ἐλεεινοὶ καὶ παράνομοι τυράννοι, ποὺ σᾶς ἐξόρισε καὶ σᾶς ἔρριξε κάτω ἀπὸ τὶς οὐράνιες ἀψίδες. Εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ συνέτριψε μέσα στὰ νερὰ τοῦ Ἰορδάνη τὶς κεφαλὲς τῶν δρακόντων σας. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἐπάνω στὸ Σταυρὸ του σᾶς ἔκανε θέατρο, σᾶς διεπόμπευσε καὶ σᾶς ἀφαίρεσε κάθε δύναμη. Εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ σᾶς ἔδωσε καὶ σᾶς ἔρριξε στὸ ζόφο καὶ στὴν ἄβυσσο. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ποὺ θὰ σᾶς ἐξοντώσῃ τελειωτικὰ μέσα στὴν αἰώνια φωτιὰ καὶ τὴ γέεννα. Μὴν ἀργήτε, μὴν περιμένετε, ἀλλὰ τρέξετε γρήγορα καὶ βγάλτε τοὺς φυλακισμένους, τοὺς ὁποίους μέχρι τώρα κακῶς ἔχετε καταπιῆ. Ἀπὸ ἐδῶ κι' ἐμπρὸς καταλύεται τὸ κράτος σας. Καταργεῖται ἡ τυραννικὴ ἐξουσία σας. Ἡ ἀλαζονεὶα σας καταπατήθηκε οἰκτρά. Ἡ ὑπερήφανη καύχησί σας ξεκουρελιάσθηκε. ἡ δύναμί σας ἔσβησε καὶ χάθηκε γιὰ πάντα.»

Αὐτὰ φώναζαν οἱ νικητρίες δυνάμεις τοῦ Κυρίου σὲ τὶς δυνάμεις τοῦ Ἐχθροῦ καὶ συγχρόνως ἐνεργοῦσαν μὲ βιασύνη. Ἄλλοι γκρέμιζαν τὴν φυλακὴ ἀπὸ τὰ θεμέλια

τῆς. Ἄλλοι καταδίωκαν τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ποὺ ἔφευγαν γιὰ νὰ σωθοῦν στὰ βαθύτερα μέρη. Ἄλλοι ἔτρεχαν καὶ ἐρευνοῦσαν τὰ ὑπόγεια, τὰ φρούρια καὶ τὰ σπήλαια. Καὶ ὅλοι, ἀπὸ διάφορες κατευθύνσεις καθένας, ἔφερναν τοὺς δεσμώτες ἐμπρὸς στὸν Κύριο. Ἄλλοι ἔδεναν τὸν τύραννο, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι ἀπελευθέρωναν τοὺς προαιώνιους δεσμώτες. Καὶ ἄλλοι μὲν ἔτρεχαν μπροστὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο, καθὼς προχωροῦσε βαθύτερα. Ἄλλοι δὲ τὸν ἀκουλουθοῦσαν νικηφόροι, ὡς Θεὸν καὶ Βασιλέα.

Ἐνῶ λοιπὸν αὐτὰ διεδραματίζοντο καὶ ἐλέγοντο στὸν Ἄδη καὶ ἐσεῖοντο τὰ πάντα, ὁ δὲ Κύριος ἐπλησίαζε νὰ φθάσῃ στὰ πιὸ ἔσχατα βάθη, ὁ Ἄδὰμ ὁ πρωτοδημιουργητὸς καὶ πρωτόπλαστος καὶ πρωτόθνητος ποὺ βρισκόταν δεμένος γερὰ καὶ βαθύτερα ἀπὸ ὅλους, ἄκουσε τὰ βήματα τοῦ Κυρίου, ποὺ ἐρχόταν στοὺς φυλακισμένους καὶ ἀμέσως ἀνεγνώρισε τὴν φωνή Του, καθὼς ἐπερπατοῦσε μέσα στὴ φυλακὴ. Στράφηκε τότε πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐπὶ αἰῶνες συγκρατούμενους του καὶ τοὺς φώναξε: «ὦ φίλοι μου! Ἀκούω νὰ πλησιάξῃ σ' ἐμᾶς ὁ ἦχος τῶν βημάτων Κάποιου. Ἐὰν πραγματικὰ μᾶς ἀξίωσε νὰ ἔρθῃ ἕως ἐδῶ, τότε εἴμαστε ἐλεύθεροι! Ἐὰν τὸν ἰδοῦμε ἀνάμεσά μας, σωθήκαμε ἀπὸ τὸν Ἄδη!»

Καὶ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ὁ Ἄδὰμ ἔλεγε αὐτὰ πρὸς τοὺς συγκαταδίκους του, εἰσέρχεται ὁ Κύριος, κρατῶντας τὸ νικηφόρο ὄπλο τοῦ Σταυροῦ. Μόλις τὸν ἀντίκρισε ὁ Ἄδὰμ, χτύπησε τὸ στήθος ἀπὸ τὴν χαρούμενη ἔκπληξι καὶ φώναξε πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐπὶ αἰῶνες κεκοιμημένους: «Ὁ Κύριός μου ἄς εἶναι μαζί μὲ ὅλους!» Καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπάντησε στὸν Ἄδὰμ: «Καὶ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου».

Ἐπὶ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ὁ Ἄδὰμ ἔλεγε αὐτὰ πρὸς τοὺς συγκαταδίκους του, εἰσέρχεται ὁ Κύριος, κρατῶντας τὸ νικηφόρο ὄπλο τοῦ Σταυροῦ. Μόλις τὸν ἀντίκρισε ὁ Ἄδὰμ, χτύπησε τὸ στήθος ἀπὸ τὴν χαρούμενη ἔκπληξι καὶ φώναξε πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐπὶ αἰῶνες κεκοιμημένους: «Ὁ Κύριός μου ἄς εἶναι μαζί μὲ ὅλους!» Καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπάντησε στὸν Ἄδὰμ: «Καὶ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου».

Ἐπὶ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ὁ Ἄδὰμ ἔλεγε αὐτὰ πρὸς τοὺς συγκαταδίκους του, εἰσέρχεται ὁ Κύριος, κρατῶντας τὸ νικηφόρο ὄπλο τοῦ Σταυροῦ. Μόλις τὸν ἀντίκρισε ὁ Ἄδὰμ, χτύπησε τὸ στήθος ἀπὸ τὴν χαρούμενη ἔκπληξι καὶ φώναξε πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐπὶ αἰῶνες κεκοιμημένους: «Ὁ Κύριός μου ἄς εἶναι μαζί μὲ ὅλους!» Καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπάντησε στὸν Ἄδὰμ: «Καὶ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου».

ὄλους τοὺς ἄλλους νεκροὺς. (Ψαλμ. 87:5). Γιὰ σένα ποὺ βγῆκες μέσα ἀπὸ τὸν κῆπο τοῦ παραδείσου, μέσα σὲ κῆπο παραδόθηκε στους Ἰουδαίους καὶ μέσα σὲ κῆπο ἐσταυρώθηκε. (Ἰωάν. 19:41).

Κύτταξε στὸ πρόσωπό μου τὰ φτυσίματα, ποὺ καταδέχθηκα πρὸς χάριν σου, γιὰ νὰ σὲ ἀποκαταστήσω στὴν παλαιά σου δόξα, ποὺ εἶχα δώσει μὲ τὸ ἐμφύσημά μου. (Γεν. 2:7). Κύτταξε στὰ μάγουλά μου τὰ ραπίσματα, ποὺ καταδέχθηκα, γιὰ νὰ ἐπανορθώσω τὴν διεστραμμένη μορφὴ σου καὶ νὰ τὴν φέρω στὴν ὄψη ποὺ εἶχε σὰν εἰκόνα μου. Κύτταξε στὴ ράχη μου τὴ μαστίγωση ποὺ καταδέχθηκα, γιὰ νὰ διασκορπίσω τὸ φορτίο τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων σου. Κύτταξε τὰ καρφωμένα χέρια μου, ποὺ τὰ ἄπλωσα καλῶς ἀπάνω στὸ ξύλο τοῦ Σταυροῦ, γιὰ νὰ συχωρεθῆς σὺ ποὺ ἄπλωσες κακῶς τὸ χέρι σου στὸ ἀπαγορευμένο δένδρο. Κύτταξε τὰ πόδια μου ποὺ καρφώθηκαν καὶ τρυπήθηκαν στὸ Σταυρὸ, γιὰ νὰ ἐξαγισθοῦν τὰ δικά σου πόδια ποὺ ἔτρεξαν κακῶς στὸ δένδρο τῆς ἁμαρτίας.

Τὴν ἕκτη ἡμέρα βγῆκε εἰς βάρος σου τότε ἡ καταδικαστικὴ ἀπόφασίς. Γι' αὐτὸ πάλι τὴν ἕκτη ἡμέρα σὲ ἀναπλάττω καὶ ἀνοίγω τὸν παράδεισο. Πρὸς χάριν σου γεύθηκα τὴν χολή, γιὰ νὰ σοῦ θεραπεύσω τὴν πικρὴ ἠδονὴ ποὺ γεύθηκες ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον τὸν γλυκὸ καρπὸ. Γεύθηκα τὸ ξύδι, γιὰ νὰ βγάλω ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ σου τὸ δρῦν καὶ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴ φύσι σου ποτῆρι τοῦ θανάτου. Δέχθηκα τὸν σπόγγο, γιὰ νὰ σβῆσω τὸ κατάστιχο τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν σου. Δέχθηκα τὸ καλάμι, γιὰ νὰ ὑπογράψω τὴν ἀπελευθέρωσι τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους. Ὑπνωσα στὸν Σταυρὸ καὶ τρυπήθηκα στὴν πλευρά μου, γιὰ σένα ποὺ ὑπνωσα στὸν παράδεισο καὶ ἔβγαλα ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρά σου τὴν Εὐα. Ἡ πληγωμένη πλευρά μου ἐθεράπευσε τὸν πόνο τῆς πλευρᾶς σου. Ὁ δικός μου ὕπνος θὰ σὲ βγάλῃ ἀπὸ τὸν ὕπνο σου μέσα στὸν Ἄδη. Ἡ ρομφαία ποὺ χτύπησε ἐμένα, σταμάτησε τὴ ρομφαία ποὺ στρεφόταν ἐναντίον σου. (Γεν. 3:24).

Σῆκω, λοιπόν. Ἄς φύγουμε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ. Τότε σὲ ἐξώρισα ἀπὸ τὸν γήινο παράδεισο. Τώρα σὲ ἀποκαθιστῶ, ὄχι πλέον σ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν παράδεισο, ἀλλὰ σὲ οὐράνιο θρόνο. Τότε σ' ἐμπόδισα νὰ φᾶς ἀπὸ τὸ ξύλο τῆς ζωῆς. (Γεν. 3:22). Νὰ ὅμως τώρα ποὺ ἐνώθηκα πλήρως μὲ σένα, ἐγὼ ποὺ εἶμαι ἡ ἴδια ἡ ζωὴ. Ἔταξα τὰ Χερουβιμ νὰ σὲ φρουροῦν σὰν δοῦλο. Τώρα ὀδηγῶ τὰ Σεραφίμ νὰ σὲ προσκυνήσουν σὰ Θεό. Κρύφθηκες τότε μπροστὰ στὸν Θεό, ἐπειδὴ ἦσουν γυμνός. Νὰ ὅμως ποὺ ἀξιώθηκες νὰ κρύψῃς μέσα σου γυμνὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Θεό. Γι' αὐτὸ σηκωθῆτε, ἄς φύγουμε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ. Ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατο στὴ ζωὴ. Ἀπὸ τὴν φθορὰ στὴν ἀφθαρσία. Ἀπὸ τὸ σκοτάδι στὸ αἰώνιο φῶς. Ἀπὸ τὴν ὀδύνη στὴν ἐλευθερία. Ἀπὸ τὴ φυλακὴ τοῦ Ἄδη στὴν ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ. Ἀπὸ τὰ δεσμὰ στὴν ἄνεσι. Ἀπὸ τὴ σκλαβιά στὴν τρυφὴ τοῦ Παραδείσου. Ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ στὸν οὐρανό.

Γι' αὐτὸ τὸν σκοπὸ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανε καὶ ἀνέστη: Γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ Κύριος καὶ νεκρῶν καὶ ζώντων. (Ρωμ. 14:9). Σηκωθῆτε, λοιπόν. Ἄς φύγουμε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ. Ὁ οὐράνιος Πατέρας περιμένει μὲ λαχτάρια τὸ χαμένο πρόβατο. Τὰ ἐνενηντα ἑννέα πρόβατα τῶν ἀγγέλων (Ματθ. 18:12) περιμένουν τὸν σύνδουλό τους Ἀδάμ, πότε θὰ ἀναστηθῆ, πότε θὰ ἀνέλθῃ καὶ θὰ ἐπανεέλθῃ πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Ὁ χερουβικὸς θρόνος εἶναι ἔτοιμος. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ θὰ σᾶς ἀνεβάσουν εἶναι γρήγοροι καὶ βιάζονται. Ὁ νυμφικὸς θάλαμος ἔχει προετοιμασθῆ. Τὸ μεγάλο ἑορταστικὸ δεῖπνο εἶναι στρωμένο. (Ἀποκ. 19:9, Λουκ. 14:16). Τὰ θησαυροφυλάκια τῶν αἰωνίων ἀγαθῶν ἄνοιξαν. Ἡ βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν ἔχει ἐτοιμασθῆ «ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου» (Ματθ. 25:34). Ἀγαθὰ ποὺ μάτια δὲν τὰ εἶδαν καὶ αὐτιά δὲν τὰ ἄκουσαν περιμένουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο. (Α' Κορ 2:9).

Αὐτὰ καὶ ἄλλα παρόμοια εἶπεν ὁ Κύριος. Καὶ ἀμέσως ἀνασταίνεται μαζί Του ὁ ἐνωμένος σ' αὐτὸν Ἀδάμ καὶ μαζί τους καὶ ἡ Εὐα. Ἀκόμη δὲ καὶ «πολλὰ σώματα δικαίων, ποὺ εἶχαν πεθάνει πρὶν ἀπὸ αἰῶνες, ἀναστήθηκαν» (Ματθ. 27:52), διακηρύσσοντας τὴν τριήμερο Ἀνάστασι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Αὐτὴν ἄς τὴν ὑποδεχοῦμε καὶ ἄς τὴν ἀγκαλιάσουμε οἱ πιστοὶ μὲ πολλὴ χαρὰ, χορεύοντας μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἑορτάζοντας μὲ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους καὶ δοξάζοντας τὸν Χριστό, ποὺ μᾶς ἀνέστησε ἀπὸ τὴν φθορὰ. Εἰς Αὐτὸν ἀρμόζει ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις, μαζί μὲ τὸν ἀθάνατο Πατέρα καὶ τὸ πανάγιο καὶ ἀγαθὸ καὶ ζωοποιὸ καὶ ὁμοούσιο Πνεῦμα, εἰς ὄλους τοὺς αἰῶνες τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.



Ὁμολογούσαν οἱ Πατέρες τὴν ταπεινότητα τοῦ Ἀββᾶ Ποιμένος σ' ὅλη του τὴ συμπεριφορὰ. Ὅταν αἴφνης συζητοῦσε μὲ τοὺς Γέροντας, ποτὲ δὲν ὑποστήριζε τὴ δική του γνώμη. Ὑποχωροῦσε καὶ ἐπαινοῦσε τὴν γνώμη τῶν ἄλλων. Τοὺς ἀδελφούς ποὺ πήγαιναν νὰ τὸν συμβουλευτοῦν, τοὺς ἔστελνε πρῶτα στὸν μεγαλύτερο ἀδελφὸ του, τὸν Ἀββᾶ Ἀνούβ. Ἐκεῖνος πάλι τοὺς ἔστελνε πίσω στὸν Ἀββᾶ Ποιμένα, λέγοντάς τους πὼς σ' ἐκεῖνον ἔχει δώσει ὁ Θεὸς τὸ χάρισμα νὰ ξεκουράζῃ τὶς ψυχές.

Μπροστὰ στὸ μεγαλύτερό του ἀδελφὸ δὲν ἄνοιγε ποτὲ τὸ στόμα του ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν νὰ μιλήσῃ σὲ ἄνθρωπο. Στεκόταν παράμερα μὲ σκυμμένο τὸ κεφάλι ἀπὸ συστολὴ καὶ σεβασμὸ.

**Ἀποσπάσματα ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸν**

## Δύο Άπαντήσεις για την Πανορθόδοξη Σύνοδο από το 1971

Τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010), ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Χριστιανικὴ Σπίθα» (φ. 344 / Ιουλ.-Σεπτ. 1971) καὶ τὸ βιβλίο Σφενδόνη Β' (ἀπόσπασμα β').



Δύο φοβερές, προφητικές ἀπαντήσεις τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου γιὰ τὴν Πανορθόδοξη Σύνοδο τὶς ὁποῖες εἶχε γράψει ἀπὸ τὸ 1971. Συγκεκριμένα εἶχε ἀναφερθεῖ στὰ ἑξῆς:

(1) Τί χρειάζεται γιὰ νὰ ὀνομασθεῖ μία Σύνοδος Ὁρθόδοξη, καὶ

(2) Γιατί θὰ ὀνομάσουν οἱ Οἰκουμενιστὲς τὴ Σύνοδο Πανορθόδοξη καὶ ὄχι Οἰκουμενική.

Ἀπὸ ὅτι φαίνεται, ἄλλωστε, ἀπὸ τὰ παλιὰ χρόνια κάποιοι προετοιμάζαν αὐτὴ τὴν Πανορθόδοξη Σύνοδο, γεγονὸς ποὺ γνώριζε πολὺ καλά ὁ ἀγωνιστὴς Ἱεράρχης Φλωρίνης π. Αὐγουστίνος. Γι' αὐτὸ μιλοῦσε καὶ μὲ τόση ἀκρίβεια γιὰ τὰ σημερινὰ γεγονότα.

† † †

Τὶ ἀπαιτεῖται γιὰ νὰ χαρακτηρισθῇ Ὁρθόδοξη μία Σύνοδος; Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὶς ἑπτὰ Οἰκουμενικὲς καὶ τὶς ἀναγνωρισμένους Τοπικὲς, ἔγιναν καὶ ἄλλες σύνοδοι ποὺ ὅμως δὲν ἀναγνωρίσθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνείδησι. Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνείδησις εἶνε ἡ κρίσις καὶ ἐκτίμησις τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς πληρώματος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει ἐκ Θεοῦ τὸ πνευματικὸ αἰσθητήριον νὰ διακρίνῃ τὴν ἀλήθεια ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη, ὅπως τὰ πρόβατα ἔχουν ἐκ φύσεως τὸ αἰσθητήριον νὰ διακρίνουν τὰ ὠφέλιμα βότανα ἀπὸ τὰ βλαβερά (Μ. Βασίλειος). Ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος λαός, ποὺ ζῆ σὲ μυστηριακὴ ἐπαφὴ μὲ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ ἔχει Πνεῦμα ἅγιο, ὅταν ἀκούσῃ ἀπόφασι Συνόδου ποὺ εἶνε σύμφωνη μὲ τὴν πατροπαράδοτη πίστι, μὲ «ὅ,τι πάντοτε, πανταχοῦ καὶ ὑπὸ πάντων ἐπιστεύθη» (Βικέντιος Λεο.), αἰσθάνεται χαρὰ καὶ λέει: «Αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν ἀποστόλων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν πατέρων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐστήριξεν». Εἰ δ' ἄλλως, ἐκδηλώνει τὴ διαφωνία καὶ ἀποδοκιμασία του.

Ὡστε κατὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη ἀντίληψιν αἱ Σύνοδοι βρῖσκονται ὑπὸ τὸν ἔλεγχον τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς συνειδήσεως, ποὺ δὲν περιορίζεται μόνον στοὺς κληρικὸν ἀλλὰ ἐπεκτείνεται καὶ ἀποκορυφώνεται στὸν εὐσεβῆ λαό. Τοῦ λαοῦ ἡ ἐπιδοκιμασία ἢ ἡ

ἀποδοκιμασία κρίνει ἂν μία Σύνοδος εἶνε ἀληθινὴ ἢ μὴ. Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία διαφέρει ἀπὸ τὸν παπισμὸ καὶ στὸ σημεῖο αὐτό: ἐδῶ τὸ ἀλάθητο δὲν τὸ διεκδικεῖ ἓνα πρόσωπο, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔχει τὸ πλήρωμα, ὁ εὐσεβὴς λαὸς ποὺ ὀνομάζεται «Φύλαξ τῆς Πίστεως». Ὁ πιστός, ὅσο ἄσημος καὶ ἂν εἶνε, δὲν ἐκμηδενίζεται ἢ ἡγεσία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀγνοῇ τὴ φωνὴν του. Ἔτσι ὑπάρχει ἁρμονία. Ἐκκλησιαστικὲς ἀποφάσεις ἐρήμην τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς λαοῦ καὶ ἀντίθετες μὲ τὸ φρόνημά του δὲν μποροῦν νὰ σταθοῦν. Οἱ Πράξεις τῶν ἀποστόλων, ποὺ περιγράφουν τὴν πρώτη Σύνοδο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὴν Ἀποστολικὴ Σύνοδο, λένε γιὰ τὸν τρόπο λήψεως τῶν ἀποφάσεών της: «Ἔδοξε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις καὶ τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ» (Πράξ. 15,22). Ἀκοῦτε, κύριοι, ὅσοι κεκλεισμένων τῶν θυρῶν παίρνετε ἀποφάσεις γιὰ λογαριασμὸ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων; Τί εἶστε σεῖς, ἀνώτεροι τῶν ἀποστόλων; Τόσο μεγάλη ἰδέα ἔχετε γιὰ τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς σας;

Ἐνα παράδειγμα Συνόδου ποὺ δὲν ἀνεγνώρισε ἀλλ' ἀπεδοκίμασε ἢ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνείδησι, εἶνε ἡ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ συγκληθεῖσα τὸ 449 μ.Χ. πολυαριθμότητα Συνόδου.

Κατὰ τὸν ἱστορικὸ Βασίλειο Στεφανίδη, ἡ Σύνοδος αὐτὴ συνήλθε ὑπὸ τὸ κράτος βίας καὶ τρομοκρατίας, ποὺ ἀσκοῦσαν σκληροὶ στρατιῶτες, φανατικοὶ μοναχοὶ φερμένοι ἀπὸ ἄλλοῦ, χερσὶ δύναμοι ναῦτες καὶ κακότροποι «παραβολάνοι» (νοσοκόμοι καὶ νεκροθάφτες). Ὅταν ὁ πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Φλαβιανὸς σηκώθηκε νὰ ὑπερασπίσῃ τὸ δόγμα περὶ τῶν δύο φύσεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀκούστηκαν κραυγές, ὑψώθηκαν ῥαβδίδια καὶ σφιγμένες γροθιές, ἔπεσαν χαστούκια καὶ κλωτσιές. Ὁ Φλαβιανὸς ζήτησε νὰ καταφύγῃ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγία τράπεζα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ κεῖ σπρώχνοντας καὶ χτυπώντας τὸν πέταξαν ἔξω ἀπ' τὸ ναό, τὸν καθαίρεσαν καὶ τὸν ἐξώρισαν. Τὰ ἔκτροπα βεβαίωσαν κατόπιν παριστάμενοι ἱεράρχες, ποὺ ἐνώπιον τῆς Δ' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου ὡμολόγησαν: «Οὐδεὶς (ἐξ ἡμῶν) συνήνεσε· βία ἐγένετο· βία μετὰ πληγῶν· εἰς ἄγραφον χάρτην ὑπεγράψαμεν... ὅπου ξίφη καὶ βάκλα (=ῥαβδίδια), ποῖα σύνοδος;» (Mansi, Πρακτ. Δ' Οἰκ. Συν.). Γιὰ τὰ ἔκτροπα αὐτὰ ὁ λαὸς ὠνόμασε τὴν Σύνοδο αὐτὴ ληστρικὴ.

Ἡ τελευταία Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος, ἡ Ἐβδόμη (Ζ'), συνήλθε τὸ 787 μ.Χ.. Ἀπὸ τότε μέχρι σήμερον ἔχουν περάσει 12 αἰῶνες. Κάποιος εἶπε, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἦσαν αἰῶνες συνοδικῆς ἀπραξίας. Ἀλλὰ κάνει λάθος.

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία ἦταν καὶ εἶνε ἡ ἐμπροσθοφυλακὴ τῆς ἀγωνιζομένης χριστιανοσύνης. Ἄν ῥίξῃ κανεὶς ἓνα βλέμμα στὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία τῶν 12 αὐτῶν αἰώνων, θὰ δῆ ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν ἔπαψε νὰ ὑπερασπίζεται τὴν πίστιν της ἀπέναντι σὲ



μικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα θηρία. Πρῶτο ἀπ' αὐτὰ εἶνε τὸ ἰσλάμ, ποὺ ἀπ' τὴν Ἀραβία μὲ φωτιά καὶ σίδερο ἐρείπωσε περιοχὲς τῆς Βυζαντινῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἄλλο θηρίο εἶνε ὁ παπισμὸς, ποὺ ἀπ' τὴ Δύσι μὲ προπέτασμα τῆς σταυροφορίας ἐξασθένησε τὴν αὐτοκρατορία, ὥστε αὐτὴ νὰ πέση στὸ στόμα τοῦ πρώτου θηρίου καὶ ἦταν τόση ἢ φρικτὴ τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων ἀπὸ τοὺς σταυροφόρους τοῦ πάπα, ὥστε μεταξὺ τῶν δύο κακῶν, ἰσλάμ καὶ παπισμοῦ, οἱ Ὀρθόδοξοι νὰ προτιμοῦν τὸ πρῶτο, ὡς λιγώτερο ἐπικίνδυνο γιὰ τὴν Ὀρθόδοξο πίστι, ποὺ τὴν ἔθεταν πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα. Τέλος παρουσιάστηκε τρίτο μεγάλο θηρίο, κόκκινο, ὁ ἄθεος κομμουνισμὸς, ποὺ κατεσπάρραξε μυριάδες ἀγίων πίσω ἀπὸ τὸ σιδηροῦν παραπέτασμα.

Κατὰ τὸ μακρὸ αὐτὸ διάστημα στὸν Ὀρθόδοξο χῶρο ἔγιναν πάνω ἀπὸ 30 Σύνοδοι, μικρὲς καὶ μεγάλες· τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιο δὲν ἔπαυε νὰ λαλῆ μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Μερικὲς ἀπὸ αὐτὲς ἔχουν ὅλα τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου. Ἄκου το ἐσύ, ποὺ λὲς ὅτι ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία βρισκόταν σὲ συνοδικὴ ἀπραξία.

Οἰκουμενικὴ π.χ. εἶνε ἡ Σύνοδος ποὺ συνήλθε τὸ 879-880 στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολι ἐπὶ Μ. Φωτίου. Ἡ Σύνοδος αὐτὴ, στὴν ὁποία μετεῖχαν 383 ἐπίσκοποι, μεταξὺ τῶν ὁποίων καὶ ἀντιπρόσωποι τῶν πατριαρχείων τῆς Ἀνατολῆς ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ πάπα, κατεδίκασε ὁμοφώνως τὸ Filioque, δηλαδὴ τὸ παπικὸ δόγμα, καὶ ἀποφάσισε ὅτι, ὅποιος ἀλλοιώσῃ τὸ Σύμβολο τῆς πίστεως, προσθέσῃ ἢ ἀφαιρέσῃ κάτι, ἂν εἶνε κληρικὸς νὰ καθαιρῆται καὶ ἂν εἶνε λαϊκὸς νὰ ἀναθεματίζεται. Αὐτὴ ἡ Σύνοδος στὴ συνείδησι τοῦ Ὀρθοδόξου πληρώματος θεωρεῖται ὡς ἡ Ὁ Οἰκουμενικὴ. Ἔτσι τὴν χαρακτηρίζουν διαπρεπεῖς κανονολόγοι καὶ ἱεράρχες, ὁ δὲ ἱστορικὸς Στεφανίδης λέει ὅτι ἡ μέλλουσα νὰ συνέλθῃ Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος πρέπει ν' ἀσχοληθῇ μὲ τὸ ζήτημα τῆς ἀναγνωρίσεώς της.

Καὶ μερικὲς ἄλλες ἐπίσης Σύνοδοι μποροῦν νὰ χαρακτηρισθοῦν Οἰκουμενικὲς. Τέτοιες εἶνε ἐκεῖνες ποὺ συνήλθαν στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολι τὰ ἔτη 1341, 1347 καὶ 1351 ἐναντίον τῶν κακοδοξιῶν τῶν Βαρλαάμ καὶ Ἀκινδύνου καὶ τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἰωάννου Καλέκα. Καὶ οἱ τρεῖς αὐτὲς δικαίωσαν τὸν πρόμαχο τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας ἅγιο Γρηγόριο τὸν Παλαμᾶ. Ἀλλὰ μήπως καὶ ἐκεῖνες ποὺ συνήλθαν τὰ ἔτη 1482, 1593 καὶ 1642 καὶ κατεδίκασαν κακοδοξίες παπικῶν καὶ διαμαρτυρομένων-προτεστάντων δὲν μποροῦν νὰ χαρακτηρισθοῦν Οἰκουμενικὲς;

Μερικοὶ θὰ προβάλλουν τὴν ἔνστασι: Ἀφοῦ μετὰ τὸ σχίσμα ὁ χριστιανισμὸς διασπάθηκε, οἱ Σύνοδοι αὐτὲς δὲν μποροῦν νὰ χαρακτηρισθοῦν Οἰκουμενικὲς, ἐφ' ὅσον σ' αὐτὲς δὲν μετεῖχαν οἱ παπικοὶ καὶ οἱ διαμαρτυρόμενοι· πανορθόδοξες ναί, οἰκουμενικὲς ὄχι. Ἀπαντώντας σ' αὐτὸ λέμε ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἔλεγε ὁ κορυφαῖος

θεολόγος Χρῆστος Ἀνδροῦτσος: Ἐμεῖς ὡς Ἐκκλησία ἀναγνωρίζουμε καὶ ὁμολογοῦμε μόνο τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία· οἱ ἐκτὸς τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας λεγόμενες Ἐκκλησίες δὲν εἶνε παρὰ σχίσματα καὶ αἱρέσεις. Συνεπῶς μία Σύνοδος, στὴν ὁποία ἀντιπροσωπεύεται ὅλη ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία, μπορεῖ νὰ χαρακτηρισθῇ Οἰκουμενικὴ.



### Μὴ Φοβηθεῖτε Μὴ Δειλιάσετε... Θὰ Νικήσετε!

Προφητικὰ λόγια τοῦ Γέροντα ἐπισκόπου, ποὺ βρισκόταν στὸ τέλος τῆς ἐπιγείου ζωῆς του ὕστερα ἀπὸ πολυπλαγκτὸν καὶ περιπετειώδη δράσιν σαράντα ἐτῶν στὴν πατρίδα μας.

Σὰς συνιστῶ, παιδιά μου: Ἄν ἔρθῃ ἐποχὴ ποὺ θὰ ἀκούσουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς ὄχι στὸ θέατρο ἀλλὰ στὴν πραγματικότητα, «διωγμὸς» καὶ θὰ ἀκουστεῖ ἡ λέξι «διωγμὸς» ἐναντίον τῶν πιστῶν Χριστιανῶν, μὴ φοβηθεῖτε, μὴ δειλιάσετε. Ἐγὼ δὲν θὰ ζῶ πλέον, θὰ βρισκομαι ὑπὸ τὸν τάφο, θὰ βρισκομαι στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ. Ἔσεῖς θ' ἀκούσετε νὰ φωνάζουν, ἀπ' ἄκρου εἰς ἄκρου, «διωγμὸς». Καὶ οἱ ἐκκλησίες καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ οἱ ἐπίσκοποι θὰ ἐξαλείψουν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, γιὰ νὰ κηρυχθεῖ νέον «εὐαγγέλιο».

Καὶ ὅτι γίνεται στὴν Ἀλβανία καὶ ὅτι γίνεται σὲ χῶρες μακριά, θὰ γίνῃ καὶ στὴν Ἑλλάδα—προφητεύω. Ἀλλὰ ἓνα πράγμα νὰ ξέρετε πολὺ καλά: Ὅτι δὲν θὰ νικήσουν οἱ ἄθεοι, ἀλλὰ οἱ πιστοί.

Προσευχὴ λοιπόν. Στὰ ὄπλα καὶ στὰ γόνατα. Γιατὶ θὰ ἔρθῃ ἡ ὥρα ποὺ θὰ γίνῃ ἐρείπωσις. Τότε ἐσεῖς, ποὺ θὰ μαζεύεστε γιὰ νὰ ἀκοῦτε λόγον Χριστιανικόν; Εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸ ἓνα χάρισμα.

**Ἐρώτηση:** Τί πρέπει νὰ κάνουμε γέροντα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ μᾶς πιάσει ὁ φόβος καὶ πανικός, ἐκεῖνες τῆς δύσκολης ἡμέρας;

**Ἀπάντηση:** Ὁχι, ὄχι, δὲν θὰ μᾶς πιάσει πανικός. Νὰ ἔχουμε θάρρος, ὅμως νὰ μὴν τὸ ἐπιδεικνύουμε, ἀλλὰ νὰ περμιένουμε τὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή γιὰ νὰ τὸ δεῖξουμε. Γιατὶ ὅταν ἐκδηλώνῃ κανεὶς τὸ θάρρος του τὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή, ἔχει μεγάλη σημασία.

Ἀγωνίζεσθε λοιπόν τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ μία μέρα θὰ συναντηθοῦμε στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Ἐκεῖ θὰ γίνῃ ἡ συνάντησις ὅλων τῶν πιστῶν. Πᾶτε στὸ καλὸ τῶρα καὶ νὰ προσεύχεσθε.

**Μητροπολίτου Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου**

## Μαρτυρία Ἁγίων Παΐσιου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου καὶ Ἀρσενίου τοῦ Καππαδόκου γιὰ τὸ Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο

Στέλιος Κοῦκος.

Τὶ ξέρουν οἱ Κορεάτες ποὺ ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἕλληνες ἀγνοοῦμε; Ὁ Νίκος Γαβριήλ Πεντζίκης θεωροῦσε ὡς τὸ καλύτερο θρησκευτικὸ βιβλίο ποὺ γράφτηκε μετὰ τὸ 1821 τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Ἀγιορείτη μοναχοῦ πατρὸς Παΐσιου (1924-1974)—πλέον Ἁγίου Παΐσιου—ποὺ πρωτοκυκλοφόρησε μὲ τὸν τίτλο «Ὁ πατὴρ Ἀρσένιος ὁ Καππαδόκης». (Μετὰ καὶ τὴ δική του ἀγιοκατάταξη (1986), ποὺ βεβαίως προηγήθηκε τοῦ Ἁγίου Παΐσιου, κυκλοφορεῖ μὲ τὸν τίτλο «Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀρσένιος ὁ Καππαδόκης»). Τὸ βιβλίο, ποὺ κυκλοφόρησε στὰ μέσα τῆς δεκαετίας τοῦ '70, ἀποτελεῖ ἔκδοση τοῦ Ἡσυχαστήριου Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος, ποὺ βρίσκεται στὴ Σουρωτὴ Θεσσαλονίκης. Ἐχει κάνει πάρα πολλές ἐπανεκδόσεις, ἐνῶ ἔχει μεταφραστεῖ σὲ 11 ξένες γλώσσες· ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτὲς καὶ στὴν Κορεατικὴ!

Ὁ Πεντζίκης τόσο πολὺ ἀγαποῦσε τὸ βιβλίο, ποὺ πάρα πολὺ συχνὰ ἀναφερόταν σ' αὐτό. Πολλὲς φορὲς μάλιστα τὸ χάριζε σὲ συνομιλητὲς του διανοούμενους, καλλιτέχνες, φοιτητὲς. Ἐνας πολὺ γνωστὸς σκηνοθέτης μάλιστα ἐνδιαφέρθηκε νὰ τὸ μεταφέρει καὶ στὴν ὀθόνη.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀρσένιος, ὁ Χατζηφεντής ὅπως τὸν ἀποκαλοῦσαν στὸ χωριὸ του, τὰ Φάρασα τῆς Καππαδοκίας, πολλὰ χρόνια πρὶν ξεριζωθοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ μέρη τους τοὺς εἶχε... προειδοποιήσει γιὰ τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτό. Ὁ ἴδιος ἦταν ὁ ἱερέας, ὁ δάσκαλος ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ γιατρὸς τῆς περιοχῆς. Γιατρὸς γιατί μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ του γινόταν ἀμέσως καλὰ ὁ ἀσθενής. Καὶ μάλιστα δὲν ρωτοῦσε νὰ μάθει ἂν ὁ ἄρρωστος ἦταν Τούρκος ἢ Ἕλληνας. Ἡ φήμη του ἔμεινε στοὺς πληθυσμοὺς τῆς Τουρκίας πολλὰ χρόνια καὶ μετὰ τὸν ξεριζωμὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

Ἀλλὰ ἂς ἔλθουμε στὴν ιδιότητά του ὡς δασκάλου. Ὁ ὀρφανὸς Θεόδωρος, αὐτὸ ἦταν τὸ βαπτιστικὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀρσενίου, ἔμαθε τὰ πρῶτα γράμματα στὴ Νίγη καὶ στὴ συνέχεια, ὅταν εἶδαν ὅτι ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα ἔξυπνος, τὸν ἔστειλαν στὴ Σμύρνη. Ὅταν μάλιστα ἐπέστρεφε τὰ καλοκαίρια στὰ Φάρασα γιὰ διακοπές, μάζευε τὰ παιδιά τοῦ χωριοῦ καὶ τοὺς μάθαινε γράμματα. Μετὰ τὶς σπουδὲς του στὴ Σμύρνη, σὲ ἡλικία

26 χρονῶν ἔγινε μοναχὸς στὴν ἱερὰ μονὴ Φλαβιανῶν. Πολὺ σύντομα ὅμως ὁ μητροπολίτης Παΐσιος ὁ Β', ἕνας ἱερωμένος μὲ ἰδιαίτερη κοινωνικὴ δράση, τὸν ἔστειλε πίσω στὸ χωριὸ του γιὰ νὰ μάθει γράμματα στὰ Ἑλληνόπουλα.

Ὅπως ἀναφέρει στὸ βιβλίο του ὁ συγγραφέας, ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος, ὁ διακο-Ἀρσένιος «προχωροῦσε τὸ ἔργο του μὲ διάκριση μεγάλη, παρ' ὅλο ποὺ ἦταν νέος. Εἶχε ἐτοιμάσει αἶθουσα γιὰ σχολεῖο καὶ ἀντὶ γιὰ θρανία, δέρματα ἀπὸ κασίκες ἢ ἀπὸ πρόβατα μὲ τὸ τρίχωμά τους, καὶ ἐπάνω στὰ δέρματα γονατισμένα τὰ παιδιά παρακολουθοῦσαν τὰ μαθήματα. Μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν σοφὸ τρόπο δὲν ἐρέθιζε τοὺς Τούρκους καὶ ὅταν ἀκόμη τύχαινε νὰ τὰ βλέπουν τὰ παιδιά, διότι νόμιζαν πὼς προσεύχονται. Τὶς περισσότερες δὲ φορὲς συγκέντρωνε ὁ Πατὴρ τὰ παιδιά στὸ ἐξωκλήσι τῆς Παναγίας (στὸ Κάντσι) ποὺ ἦταν ψηλὰ στὸν Βράχο μέσα σὲ σπηλιὰ καὶ τὸ εἶχε γιὰ κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο».



Ὅποτε κάποιος μπορεῖ νὰ διαλέξει καὶ νὰ πάρει. Κρυφὸ σχολεῖο μέσα στὸ κέντρο τοῦ χωριοῦ καὶ ἀπόκρυφο ἐν ὄρει, ἐν σπηλαίοις καὶ ταῖς ὀπαῖς τῆς γῆς. Νὰ λοιπὸν ποὺ ὄχι μόνον κρυφὸ σχολεῖο ὑπῆρχε ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπόκρυφο, γιατί δὲν ὑπῆρχε περίπτωση κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας νὰ μὴν ὑπῆρχε κρυφὸ σχολεῖο.

Ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἀναπαγωγὴ τοῦ ἰδίου τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ «συναφιοῦ» θὰ ἔπρεπε κάποιον νὰ ἐκπαιδεύουν τοὺς ἄλλους, ἱερεῖς, διακόνους,

ψάλτες, ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ κάποιους γραμματικούς. Ἡ ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ προσωπικὸ μεράκι. Γιὰ νὰ μάθει καὶ νὰ διδαχτεῖ ἢ καὶ νὰ διδάξει κάποιος. Νὰ δώσει καὶ σὲ ἄλλους τὶς γνώσεις του. Ἄς μὴν ἀναφερόμαστε λοιπὸν μόνον στὰ μεγάλα ἀστικά κέντρα, στὰ ὁποῖα λειτουργοῦσαν σχολεῖα. Δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνᾶμε καὶ τὶς δυσκολίες τῆς μετακίνησης τῆς ἐποχῆς ἐκείνης.

Καὶ ἂν κάποιον πιστεύουν ὅτι μὲ τὴν «κατάρριψη τοῦ μύθου» τοῦ κρυφοῦ σχολεῖου καταρρίπτεται καὶ ἡ συμβολὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στὴν ἀναγέννηση τοῦ ἔθνους, τότε θὰ φέρουμε ὡς παράδειγμα τὸν Ἀγιορείτη ἱερομάρτυρα Κοσμᾶ τὸν Αἰτωλό. Ἡ δράση του δὲν ἀμφισβητεῖται ἀπὸ κανέναν. Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὰ σχολεῖα τῶν ἀστικῶν περιοχῶν σχολάρχες καὶ καθηγητὲς ἦταν συνήθως ἄνθρωποι τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Γι' αὐτὸ ἂς μὴν προσπαθοῦμε νὰ κάνουμε σκορδαλιὰ χωρὶς σκορδο. Ἄλλωστε τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ εἴθισται νὰ τρώμε μπακαλιάρο μὲ σκορδαλιὰ. Χρόνια πολλὰ λοιπόν...

## Τὸ Συλλεΐουργο στὴν Ἱ. Μ. Μεγίστης Λαύρας καὶ τὰ Φοβερά Γεγονότα ποὺ Ἀκολούθησαν...

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Περιστατικά γιὰ τὴν Ἀλήθεια τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Πίστεώς μας καὶ τὴν Πλάνη τῆς Παπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας» (Ι. Μ. Γρηγορίου, Ἅγιον Ὅρος).

Ἀπὸ τὸν Μέγα Συναξαριστὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς 4<sup>ης</sup> Ἰανουαρίου (Ἀθῆναι 1978, ἔκδοσις ἕκτη) διαβάζουμε κατὰ λέξιν τὰ ἑξῆς: «Οὗτοι οἱ λατινόφρονες ἐλθόντες εἰς τὴν Λαύραν ἐγένοντο διὰ τὸν φόβον τῆς καταδίκης τοῦ θανάτου δεκτοὶ ὑπὸ τινων Μοναχῶν αὐτῆς, εἰς τοὺς ὁποίους καὶ ἔδωσαν πολλὰ ἱερά σκευή, δηλαδὴ Ἅγια Ποτήρια, Εὐαγγέλια, θυμιατήρια καὶ λοιπά, ἅτινα ἐξ ἄλλων ἱερῶν Μονῶν ὡς ληστὰι ἐσύλησαν. Ἐκείνοι δὲ οἵτινες συνεκοινώνησαν μετὰ τῶν ἀνωτέρω λατινοφρόνων μετὰ θάνατον ἔμειναν τυμπανιαῖοι καὶ τὰ ἄθλια αὐτῶν σώματα, μαῦρα ὄντα καὶ ἀποπνέοντα ὁσμὴν δυσώδη, δὲν ἐτάφησαν ἐν τῷ κοινῷ κοιμητηρίῳ, ἀλλ' ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ εἰς ἓν ὑπόγειον σπήλαιον τὸ ὁποῖον περιέφραξαν, ὡς ἀλλότρια καὶ ξένα τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀνατολικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ὀρθῶν δογμάτων αὐτῆς».

Σύμφωνα μὲ χειρόγραφο τοῦ μακαριστοῦ μοναχοῦ Λαζάρου Διονυσιάτου (+1974) ποὺ ὑπάρχει στὴν Μονὴ Διονυσίου στὴν Λαύρα συλλειτούργησαν ἱερομόναχοι καὶ διάκονοι μὲ τοὺς Λατίνους κληρικούς, συνολικὰ ἑπτὰ ἄτομα. **Μετὰ τὴν κοίμησίν τους τὰ πτώματά τους παρέμειναν τυμπανιαῖα.** Τὸ 1937, σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ μνημονευθὲν χειρόγραφο, συνέβη τὸ ἑξῆς περιστατικό: τὰ πτώματα τῶν τυμπανιαίων πατέρων τὰ εἶχαν τοποθετήσει στὸν νάρθηκα τοῦ κοιμητηρίου τῆς Μονῆς, σὲ κοινὴ θέα πρὸς διδασκαλία καὶ σωφρονισμὸ τῶν ἀπογόνων τους.

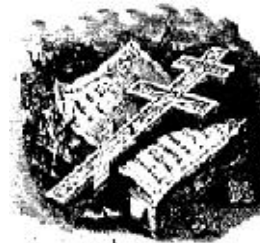
Ἐνα βράδυ μία ομάδα ἐργατῶν, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ἔτρωγαν καὶ ἀστειεύοντο εἶπε ἓνας στοὺς ἄλλους: «Ὅποιος θὰ μπορέσει νὰ πάη αὐτὴ τὴν νύκτα στὰ ἀφωρισμένα πτώματα, χωρὶς νὰ φοβηθῆ, θὰ πάρη αὐτὸ τό στοίχημα. καὶ κανόνισαν τὴ χρηματικὴ ποσὸ θὰ πάρη. Σηκώθηκε ἓνας καὶ εἶπε ὅτι δὲν φοβᾶται καὶ θὰ πάη νὰ σταθῆ δίπλα στὰ πτώματα. Ἐπήγε λοιπὸν ἐκείνη τὴν νύκτα, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τὸν φόβο του ἔπαθε συγκοπὴ καρδίας καὶ ἀπέθανε.

Τὸ θλιβερὸ αὐτὸ γεγονὸς εἶχε σάν ἀποτέλεσμα ἡ Σύναξις τῆς Μονῆς νὰ μεταφέρει τὰ πτώματα σ' ἓνα ἀπόκρημνο παραθαλάσσιο σπήλαιο μετὰ τὴν Λαύρα καὶ Ρουμανικῆς Σκήτης καὶ ἀφοῦ τὰ τοποθέτησε ἐκεῖ, ἔδωσε διαταγὴ καὶ κτίσθηκε τὸ στόμιο τοῦ σπηλαίου. Ἐκτοτε ἀπὸ τότε τείνει νὰ ξεχασθῆ αὐτὸ τὸ περιστατικό. Εὐτυχῶς ποὺ τὸ διέσωσε ὁ μακαριστὸς π. Λάζαρος Διονυσιάτης, ὁ ὁποῖος, ὅσο ζοῦσε, συγκέντρωνε διάφορα περιστατικά ἀπὸ τὴν ζωὴ τῶν

Μονῶν καὶ τῶν Πατέρων τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους καὶ ἄφησε στὴν Μονὴ του τέσσερα μεγάλα χειρόγραφα βιβλία.

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Παπισμὸς» τῆς κ. Οὐρανίας Λαμπάκη, ἔκδοσις 1964, σελ.154-157 διαβάζουμε: «Ἄς ἴδωμεν καὶ εἰς τὴν Μεγίστην Λαύρα, ὅπου τοὺς ὑπεδέχθησαν μετὰ κωδωνοκρουσιῶν. καὶ ἐκεῖ βλέπομεν ὅτι ἐπηκολούθησαν φοβερῶτερα, φρίκης καὶ τρόμου γέμοντα, καθὼς ἡ ἀψευδὴς παράδοσις διέσωσεν... Ὁ μὲν ἱεροδιάκονος Λαυριώτης, ὁ συλλειτουργήσας ἐν τῇ θεῖα Λειτουργίᾳ, ὑπὸ θεηλάτου ὀργῆς καταληφθεὶς, τὸ ζῆν ἐξεμέτρησεν, ἀναλύσας ὡς κηρὸς φλεγόμενος ὑπὸ πυρὸς, οἱ δὲ συλλειτουργήσαντες ἱερομόναχοι ἑπτὰ (κατ' ἄλλους 11) μετὰ θάνατον εὐρέθησαν ἄλυτοι, τυμπανιαῖοι, τῶν ὁποίων τὰ λείψανα μέχρι τέλους τοῦ 19<sup>ου</sup> αἰῶνος εἶχον εἰς τὸν νάρθηκα τοῦ κοιμητηρίου...εἰς κοινὴν θέαν..., πρὸς διδασκαλίαν καὶ σωφρονισμὸν τῶν ἐπιγενομένων...». Ἐν συνεχείᾳ ἐξιστορεῖται ὅτι, «λόγω ἐπισυμβάντων θλιβερῶν γεγονότων ἐκ τῆς ἀπαισίας θέας τῶν ἀλύτων τούτων λειψάνων οἱ μοναχοὶ τὰ μετέφερον εἰς ἓν σπήλαιον δυσανάβατον καὶ ἀπόκρημνον εἰς τὰ παράλια τῆς Ρουμανικῆς Σκήτης, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἐκεῖ οἱ περίεργοι μετέβαινον, ἐνέφραξαν ἐσχάτως διὰ κτιστῶν λίθων τὴν θύραν τοῦ σπηλαίου, καὶ οὕτως ἔγινε τοῦτο ἀγνώριστον...».

Μία ἄλλη παρόμοια προφορικὴ μαρτυρία ἔχουμε ἀπὸ τοὺς παλαιοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς τοῦ Ὁσίου Γρηγορίου. Συγκεκριμένα ὁ μοναχὸς Ἡσύχιος, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε ἔλθει νὰ μονάσῃ στὴν Μονὴ μας τὸ 1924 μᾶς ἔλεγε: «Ἐχουν περάσει ἀπὸ τὴν Μονὴ μας μοναχοὶ καὶ λαϊκοὶ καὶ εἶδαν τὰ πτώματα τῶν ἀφωρισμένων. Ἦθελα κι ἐγὼ νὰ πάω στὴν Λαύρα νὰ τὰ ἰδῶ, ἀλλὰ μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγα χρόνια ἔμαθα ὅτι τὰ ἐξαφάνισαν. Δὲν ξέρουμε ποὺ τὰ ἔβαλαν».



Ὁ καλύτερος ὁρος καὶ κανόνας τῆς ἐγκρατείας, ὅς εἶναι ὁ ἀκόλουθος: Νὰ μὴ ἀποβλέπουμε στὴν σαρκικὴ ἀπόλαυση, οὔτε στὴν κακοπάθεια τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ νὰ ἀποφεύγουμε καὶ στίς δυὸ περιπτώσεις τὴν ἀμετρία, δηλ. τὴν ἔλλειψη μέτρου, ὥστε νὰ ταράζεται ἡ σὰρκα μὲ τὴν πολυσαρκία, οὔτε νὰ ἀρρωσταίνει καὶ νὰ μὴ μπορῆ νὰ ἐπιτελέσῃ τὴν ἐργασία τῶν ἐντολῶν.

**Μέγας Βασίλειος**

## Τὸ Νόημα τῆς Ζωῆς

Γέρ. Μωυσῆς Ἀγιορείτης (+2014), Ἐφημερίς «ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑ», 28 Αὐγούστου, 2011.

Μερικοὶ λένε πὼς ἡ ζωὴ μᾶς εἶναι ἀρκετὰ σύντομη. Νομίζουμε ὅμως πὼς ἀπὸ μόνοι μας συντομεύουμε τὸ χρόνο τῆς ζωῆς μας ἀπὸ τὴν κατάχρηση, τὴν παράχρηση καὶ τὴν ἠθοφθορία.

Ἄν τὴ ζωὴ τὴ χρησιμοποιήσουμε μὲ σεβασμό, περίσκεψη καὶ φειδῶ εἶναι σίγουρα ἀρκετὰ μεγάλη. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος γενικὰ δὲν ἐκτιμᾷ τὸν χρόνο, τὸν ἀφήνει νὰ κυλᾷ ἀνεκμετάλλευτα, τὸν σπαταλᾷ εὐκόλα, δὲν τὸν ἀξιοποιεῖ, δὲν τὸν χρησιμοποιεῖ χρήσιμα. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ζοῦν συχνὰ ὡς ἐπιγεῖως ἀθάνατοι. Δὲν ἐξαγοράζουν τὸν καιρὸ, παρὰ τὸ ὅτι οἱ ἡμέρες εἶναι ἀρκετὰ πονηρές. Ὁ χρόνος μακραίνει ὅσο ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐξάνεται πνευματικά, ὅσο πλησιάζει τὸ βάθος καὶ τὴν ἱερότητα τοῦ νοήματος τῆς ζωῆς.

Μερικοὶ γέρασαν χωρὶς νὰ ζήσουν ὄντας γέροι καὶ νέοι γέρασαν προτοῦ νὰ μεγαλώσουν. Φοβοῦνται τὸν θάνατο, παρότι δὲ γνωρίζουν νὰ ζήσουν. Χάνουν τὴ ζωὴ μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τους δίχως νὰ τὴ ζήσουν. Δὲν ξέρουν οὔτε τί εἶναι ζωὴ, οὔτε τί εἶναι θάνατος, οὔτε πιδ εἶναι τὸ οὐσιαστικὸ νόημα τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Τὸν θάνατο πιδ πολὺ τὸν φοβοῦνται ὅσοι ἐλέγχονται ἀπὸ τὴ συνείδησή τους, ὅσοι δὲν βελτίωσαν τὴν πνευματικὴ τους ταυτότητα, ὅσοι παρασύρθηκαν ἀπὸ τὶς ἡδονὲς τοῦ βίου. Ἡ πνευματικότητα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀντιστέκεται ἰσχυρὰ στὴ φθορὰ καὶ στὴ βλαπτικότητα ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ προκαλέσει ὁ χρόνος. Ἡ γαλήνη στὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μπορεῖ νὰ σκηνώσει μόνιμα μόνον κατόπιν σκληροῦ διωγμοῦ τῆς κακίας. Ἡ ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴ Θεία πρόνοια θὰ συνδράμει σημαντικὰ σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐπίτευξη.

Ὁ φιλόσοφος Σενέκας λέγει πὼς «τὸ θέμα ὅμως δὲν εἶναι ὅτι ἔχουμε λίγο χρόνο ζωῆς, ἀλλὰ ὅτι σπαταλᾷμε μεγάλο μέρος του». Ἄν ὁ ἄνθρωπος παρασυρθεῖ στὸ κυνηγητὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς, τῆς πολυτέλειας, τῆς δόξας καὶ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας δὲν θὰ καταλάβει πὼς πέρασε μία ὀλόκληρη ζωὴ. Ἡ ἀκόρεστη φιλοχρηματία, ἡ μέθη, ἡ ὀκνηρία, ἡ φιλοδοξία, ἡ ἀπληστία, ἡ ραδιουργία ταλαιπωροῦν πολὺ τὸν ἐραστή τους. Τὰ πάθη δὲν ἀφήνουν τὸν ἐργάτη τους νὰ δεῖ τὴν ἀλήθεια.

Οἱ ἀπολαύσεις καθηλώνουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο χαμηλὰ καὶ δὲν τὸν ἀφήνουν νὰ ἀνυψωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ γήινα. Πολλοὶ θαυμάζουν τοὺς πλούσιους, δὲν γνωρίζουν ὅμως τί φουρτουνιασμένες θάλασσες κουβαλοῦν μέσα τους. Πολλοὶ λίγοι θὰ μποροῦσαν ἄνετα νὰ ποῦν πὼς εἶναι εὐχαριστημένοι μὲ τὸν ἑαυτὸ τοὺς ἀρκετά. Δὲν τοῦ ἔδωσαν τὸν χρόνο ποὺ δίκαια ἤθελε, δὲν τὸν ἄκουσαν προσεκτικά, δὲν τὸν εἶδαν κατάματα, δὲν τὸν ἀνέκριναν αὐστηρά, δὲν τὸν γνώρισαν ποτὲ καλά.

Γιὰ αὐτὸ δὲν ἦσαν ἥρεμος, ἀτάραχος, ἄφοβος καὶ ὑπομονετικός. Λησμονήσαμε γιὰ τὰ καλά ὅτι εἴμαστε θνητοὶ καὶ περαστικοὶ ἀπὸ ἐδῶ.

Ὅσο καὶ ἂν ξεγελᾷ μὲ διάφορους τρόπους ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν ἑαυτὸ του, πάντα κατὰ βάθος θὰ ζητᾷ τὴν πραγματικὴ ἀνάπαυση. Ἐνας σοφὸς Ρωμαῖος αὐτοκράτορας χαιρόταν καὶ μόνο στὴ σκέψη τοῦ πότε θὰ ἀπαλλαγεῖ τοῦ μεγαλείου τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ γιὰ νὰ ἀναπαυθεῖ ἀληθινὰ. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀσχολεῖται μὲ πολλὰ, μεριμνᾷ καὶ τυρβάξει, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ συγκεντρωθεῖ κάπου καὶ νὰ ἀποδώσει, δὲν ἔχει καιρὸ νὰ ζήσει ἐλεύθερα. Πολὺ συχνὰ οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι κουρασμένοι ἀπὸ τὸ παρελθὸν καὶ τὸ παρόν. Προσπαθοῦν νὰ ζήσουν ἕνα καλύτερο μέλλον, δίχως νὰ κάνουν ὅμως τίποτε τὸ σημαντικὸ γι' αὐτό. Ἡ ζωὴ κυλᾷ καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος βυθισμένος στὶς πολλὲς ἀσχολίες του δὲν τὸν παρατηρεῖ. Ἀπορεῖ πὼς πέρασαν τόσο γρήγορα τόσα χρόνια. Πιδ σύντομη βρίσκουν τὴ ζωὴ σίγουρα οἱ πολυάσχολοι ἄνθρωποι.

Στὴ ζωὴ δίνουμε ἐξετάσεις. Ἄν νικήσαμε τὰ πάθη μας, ἂν ἀγαπήσαμε τὴν ἀγάπη, ἂν μισήσαμε τὴν κακία, ἂν γνωρίσαμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας, ἂν συναντήσαμε τὸν Θεό. Τότε ἔχουμε βρεῖ τὸν σκοπὸ, τὸν στόχο, τὸ νόημα τῆς ζωῆς. Ἐχουμε κερδίσει τὶς ἐξετάσεις. Αἰσθανόμεθα μύρο αἰωνιότητος. Δὲ φοβόμαστε τὸν θάνατο. Δὲ μᾶς κουράζει ἡ ζωὴ. Μετανοοῦμε. Ἐλπίζουμε. Χαιρόμαστε.



Ὁ φυσικὸς σαρκικὸς πόλεμος ὑποχωρεῖ μὲ τὴν νηστεία, ἀγρυπνία, προσευχή, ὅταν δὲν ὑπάρχει ὑπερηφάνεια. Οἱ βλάσφημοι λογισμοὶ εἶναι ὅλοι τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ ὄχι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Μὲ βλάσφημους λογισμοὺς βασανίζει ὁ διάβολος συνήθως τοὺς εὐαίσθητους ἀνθρώπους, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς θλίβει καὶ νὰ τοὺς φέρνει σὲ ἀπόγνωση.

Μετὰ τὴ νηστεία τὸ ψωμὶ εἶναι γλυκό. Μετὰ τὴν ἀγρυπνία ὁ ὕπνος εἶναι γλυκός. Καὶ μετὰ τὴν κούραση καὶ ἡ σκληρὴ πέτρα μᾶς ξεκουράζει καλύτερα καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν πολυθρόνα.

Ὅταν ἀδικεῖσαι νὰ μὴ λές «Νὰ τὸ βρεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό», γιατί τότε καταριέσαι μὲ εὐγένεια.

Ἡ κάθε καλὴ ἰδέα ποὺ ἔρχεται στὸν ἀνθρώπινο νοῦ εἶναι ἀπὸ ἄνω ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Μόνον ὅτι κατεβάξει ἡ μύτη μας μὲ τὸ συνάχι εἶναι δικό μας.

Ὁ σωστὸς ἄνθρωπος δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ λείει σωστὲς κουβέντες, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ζεῖ καὶ σωστά, Εὐαγγελικά.

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης

## ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS ARE DUTY-BOUND TO HAVE ORTHODOX BISHOPS!

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**W**hat can we do? These are our bishops. We know that they have betrayed Orthodoxy and that they are breaking the Holy Canons that tell us that we must avoid all prayers with the heterodox. We know that they believe in the Anglican Branch Theory and practice "eucharistic hospitality," and that they preach "Marxist Christianity," and that their joys and sorrows are one with their theistic overlords. We know that they are wolves in sheep's clothing, that they are traitors to Orthodoxy, and disdainers of the writings of the holy Apostles and the holy fathers of the Church. But what can we do? Willingly or unwillingly one is forced to remain with the hierarchy that has been given us, for without a bishop there is no Church. We have to obey our bishops, don't we?

† † †

Orthodox Christians are duty bound to have Orthodox bishops. They are obliged to obey their bishops only if their bishops obey Holy Tradition, as it is embodied in the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Canons and the teachings of the Church Fathers. If the bishops are not obedient to the Church, we are not obliged to be obedient to them. Indeed, how can one demand obedience to disobedience? Why should one show reverence to irreverence?

The Orthodox Church has criteria by which the Orthodoxy of all—bishops, clergy and lay people alike—is evaluated. These criteria are the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition, as it is expressed in the Holy Canons and writings of the saints of God and the holy Church Fathers. As a result, there is no room here either for anarchy or for despotism. There is no danger of slipping into dictatorial Papism or into free-for-all Protestantism. On many occasions, when discussing such matters with Roman Catholic priests or monks, we have made it abundantly clear to them

that, "All Orthodox bishops are infallible—until they make a mistake..."

Our Orthodox bishops know exactly where they stand and they know they must stand there correctly or they will have to answer to God and to the people of God. At their ordination to the episcopacy, they make three solemn declarations and vows before God and the Orthodox faithful. In the first declaration, the candidate recites the Creed wherein, among other things, he declares his belief not in the Anglican Branch Theory, but in the Undivided Church which is *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*. He professes that the Holy Spirit proceeds *from the Father*—not "from the Father and the Son" as the heretical denominations aver. In the second declaration he pronounces the Orthodox Catholic faith regarding the Person of the Son of God, and here he denounces the doctrines of Sables, Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Dioscorus and all the other Monophysites and Monothelites. In the third declaration, the

candidate professes the Orthodox Faith concerning the Holy Trinity, adding also the words, *I believe also in the One, Catholic and Apostolic Church's traditions and interpretations concerning God and things divine*. Furthermore, he denounces those who do not accept the holy icons as the Church has accepted them. And at the end of the declaration, he states, *I anathematize and openly proclaim with a great voice: To every heretic anathema. To all heretics, anathema!* [*Great Euchologion* (Venice, 1862), pp. 166-76].

These are indeed very strong and frightful words. The candidate for the episcopacy is here proclaiming before God and the people of God that he will uphold and defend every aspect of the Orthodox Faith, and he calls the Church's anathema and excommunication upon

those who refuse to obey the voice of Christ Who has spoken in His holy Church: *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* (Mt 18:18).

Of course, like every other mortal, bishops too have failings—for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Rom 3:23). But, like all other mortals, they too struggle with their weaknesses and try as best as they can to overcome them. Like everyone else, they are not always successful. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they too have human flaws, as long as



**The Three Pillars of Orthodoxy**  
Sts. Gregory Palamas (+1359), Photios the Great (+891)  
and Mark of Ephesus (+1444)

they uphold and defend and teach the Orthodox faith, they are being faithful to the confession of faith and the vows that they made at their ordination. We do not revere our bishops; they too are mortal, and therefore have failings like the rest of us. We revere and love them because, though mortals and, therefore, possessing human failings, they have taken upon themselves the heavy task of: (1) Defending and propagating the Holy Orthodox and Catholic Faith, (2) striving to cultivate an increase in the piety and fervor for God of the flock with which they have been entrusted, and (3) seeking by all means to increase that flock.

They are the living icons of Christ our Savior. It is by their authority that all the Holy Mysteries are performed in the Church. Furthermore, since they are the true icons of Christ our Lord and Teacher, it is their duty to rightly divide the Word of Truth and to observe and uphold the Holy Canons, to maintain and extend that Truth of which they are icons, and to see to it that their flock does the same. The English word “bishop” comes from the Greek word *episcopos*, which means “overseer,” and this term describes their duties and obligations well; if they fulfill these obligations, we revere and honor them as our fathers and tutors in Christ. Such holy bishops, **faithful to their commitment towards observing and upholding the Holy Canons**, came together in the Ecumenical and Local Councils in defense of the Orthodox Catholic Faith. As Chrysostom Stratman expressed it:

These authentic shepherds of the Lord’s flock had but one concern, the welfare and safety of those entrusted to them. Guiding, nourishing, and protecting their sheep was their one earthly occupation and preoccupation. They lived for Christ’s flock and many died for it, as did the great and holy St. John Chrysostomos... [The Ecumenists (Oak Park, Ill.), p.7]

Granted that not all bishops are saints, and perhaps a few are totally unworthy of their calling; what does Our Savior teach us in regard to this point? Our Lord and God taught us that those religious leaders who do not observe the laws of God stand convicted of hypocrisy, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old. Nevertheless, as long as they continue to teach us the law of God—even though they themselves do not observe it—we are to obey them. Our Savior said:

*The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.*

*ren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. [Mt 23:2-10].*

Here too, in our Savior’s words, we find the key to understanding the difference between human sin and blasphemous heresy: Sin is a transgression of the Gospel’s precepts. Heresy, on the other hand, is an **alteration** of those precepts.

So, as long as our hierarchs sit in the seat of Moses, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Church Fathers, and Saints—that is to say, as long as they continue to teach the Orthodox faith correctly and without alteration—we are to obey them, even though they themselves, perhaps, are not in order personally. On the other hand, if they openly and without shame teach heresy—that is, change the teachings that have been delivered unto us by the Saints of God—then we are not under any obligation whatsoever to listen to them or to obey them. They no longer sit in the seat of Moses.

What, then, should one do if one is faced with the possibility that one’s bishop has gone astray in matters of the faith?

“We are just simply, Orthodox Christians. What do we know about theological matters anyway?”

This is a typical statement, heard too often. The answer, of course, is that **we are the rational flock of Christ**. As conscientious Orthodox Christians, we are expected to know our Orthodox Faith well and to live it. This means that we have been attending and listening carefully to the Divine Services. We have been reading the Holy Scriptures together with the commentaries of the Holy Fathers. We have been studying the Lives of the Saints, the Holy Canons and Church History. We have been keeping the holy fasts and cultivating the life of prayer. We have been trying to keep the commandments, struggling with our passions, and striving to grow in true love for God and man. If we have not been doing these things, we are not conscientious, practicing Orthodox Christians. We are not a rational flock.

This is what the *Apostolic Constitutions* say about what kind of flock we are supposed to be:

*The sheep and rams are rational, and not irrational, so that no layman may ever say that. “I am a sheep, and not a shepherd, and I give no account of myself, but the shepherd shall see to it, and he alone shall pay the penalty for me.” For even as the sheep which follows not the good shepherd shall fall to the wolves unto its own destruction, so too it is evident that that which follows the evil shepherd shall acquire death, for he shall utterly devour it. [Apostolic Constitutions, 2:19 (PG 1.633)]*

Nor should we forget what the Orthodox Patriarchs of the East wrote in their *Answer to Pope Pius the IX* in 1848, “...the guardians and defenders of the faith is the very body of the Church, that is, the people...” (J.Karmiris, ed., *Ta Dogmatica kai Symbolica Mnemeia* [Athens, 1953], vol.2, p. 920).

Let us return now to the question we mentioned above. What does an Orthodox Christian do when he ascertains

beyond a shadow of a doubt that his bishop is openly and stubbornly preaching heresy? Fortunately, we have an abundance of examples that tell exactly how we must proceed should such a dire and grievous situation ever arise. Church History, the Lives of the Saints, the writings of the Church Fathers and the Holy canons all provide guidance for us.

To begin with, the first thing an Orthodox Christian must do—once he is sure his bishop no longer preaches Orthodoxy—is to find the nearest bishop who does preach Orthodoxy.

Although this is the first, and easiest, solution to the problem, things do not always work out so simply. There have been occasions when the entire hierarchy of an area fell into heresy, as occurred in all North Africa during the Arian controversy in the fourth century, and in the Polish occupied territories with the so-called Union of Brest during the seventeenth century. There have been other occasions in the Church's history when the Orthodox Christians did not know who the nearest Orthodox bishop was. Such was the plight of the Orthodox Christians during the iconoclast period. What did they do when all the bishops known to them were iconoclast? There simply were no Orthodox bishops at the head of the dioceses in the Byzantine Empire at that time. The Orthodox bishops who had not died at the hands of their tormentors were languishing in prisons and exile, and the Orthodox Christians hardly knew where they were or if they were alive or dead.

What did the Christians do then? They simply commemorated "our Archbishop" or "Metropolitan" or "Bishop" without mentioning any name, and by this they meant the nearest true and faithful Orthodox bishop whose name, at the moment, was unknown to them (the bishop who still teaches the Orthodox faith correctly and without alteration.) This practice is used to this day by the zealot fathers of the Holy Mountain who refuse to commemorate the Patriarch Bartholomew (and Demetrius before him) of Constantinople, and who instead use the formula "for every episcopate of the Orthodox which rightly divideth the word of truth."

The life of Saint Maximus is also instructive for us. Saint Maximus, though only a simple monk, resisted and cut off communion with every patriarch, metropolitan, archbishop and bishop in the East because of their having been infected with the heresy of Monothelism. During the first imprisonment of the Saint, the messengers from the Ecumenical Patriarch asked him:

"To which church do you belong? To that of Byzantium, of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, or Jerusalem? For all these churches, together with the provinces in subjection to them, are in unity. Therefore, if you also belong to the Catholic Church, enter into communion with us at once, lest fashioning for yourself some new and strange pathway, you fall into that which you do not even expect!"

To this the righteous man wisely replied "Christ the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the Faith. It was for this confession that He called Peter blessed, and He declared that He would found His Church upon this confession. However, I wish to know the contents of your confession, on the basis of which all churches, as you say, have entered into communion. If it is not opposed to the truth, then neither will I be separated from it."

The confession which they were proposing to the Saint was not Orthodox, of course, and so he refused to comply with their coercions. Furthermore, they were lying about the See of Rome which, in fact, had remained Orthodox. Sometime later, at his last interrogation by the Byzantine authorities, the following dialogue took place:

The Saint said, "They [the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria and all the other heretical bishops of the East] have been deposed and deprived of the priesthood at the local council which took place recently in Rome. What Mysteries, then, can they perform? Or what spirit will descend upon those who are ordained by them?"

"Then you alone will be saved, and all others will perish?" they objected.

To this the Saint replied: "When all the people in Babylon were worshipping the golden idol, the Three Holy Children did not condemn anyone to perdition. They did not concern themselves with the doings of others, but took care only for themselves, lest they should fall away from true piety. In precisely the same way, when Daniel was cast into the lion's den, he did not condemn any of those who, fulfilling the law of Darius, did not wish to pray to God, but he kept in mind his own duty, and desired rather to die than to sin against his conscience by transgressing the Law of God. God forbid that I should condemn anyone or say that I alone am being saved! However, I shall sooner agree to die than to apostatize in any way from the true faith and thereby suffer torments of conscience."

"But what will you do," inquired the envoys, "when the Romans are united to the Byzantines? Yesterday, indeed, two delegates arrived from Rome and tomorrow, the Lord's day, they will communicate the Holy Mysteries with the Patriarch."

The Saint replied, "Even if the whole universe holds communion with the Patriarch, I will not communicate with him. For I know from the writings of the holy Apostle Paul: **The Holy Spirit declares that even the angels would be anathema if they should begin to preach another Gospel, introducing some new teaching.**"

As history had demonstrated, Saint Maximus—who was only a simple monk and not even ordained—and his two

disciples were the ones who were Orthodox, and all those illustrious, famous and influential Patriarchs and Metropolitans whom the Saint had written against were the ones who were in heresy. When the Sixth Ecumenical Council was finally convened, among those condemned for heresy were four patriarchs of Constantinople, one Pope of Rome, one Patriarch of Alexandria, two Patriarchs of Antioch and a multitude of other Metropolitans, Archbishops and Bishops. **During all those years, that one simple monk was right, and all those notable bishops were wrong.**

In the Life of Saint Hypatius of Rufinianus (commemorated on June 18<sup>th</sup>), we find the following account:

When Nestorius came from Antioch in order to become Patriarch of the illustrious Imperial City of Constantinople (he was brought there by Dionysius, who had become *magister militum per orientem*—a Roman honorary military title of significance), Saint Hypatius saw a vision, at the very moment in the holy Church of the Capital that some laymen installed him (Nestorius) upon the throne; and immediately a voice announced, “In three and a half years this tare will be uprooted.” Thus Saint Hypatius began to say to certain persons and particularly to the brethren of his monastery, “I have great anxiety over this man who has come, my children, for I have seen that he will turn aside from the faith; but he will reign only three and a half years.”

Thus, when he passed by the Saint’s monastery, Nestorius did not wish to go to meet him—he had accidentally learned what the Saint had said—although he had hitherto visited everywhere, including all the monasteries and Church dignitaries and abbots, as he made his way to the Capital. When he had entered the Capital and had become Patriarch, he immediately sent clergymen to Saint Hypatius with the message, “Go say to that dreamer: ‘I shall reign for twenty years in the City and where are your dreams?’”

Saint Hypatius replied to them, “Tell the Patriarch that if it comes to pass as I discerned it, it was a revelation; if not, it was a dream and I, as a man, imagined it.” Thus embarrassed by the answer which they brought back to him, Nestorius sometime after sent other people in order to ensnare him in certain of his words. But after having tempted him with troublesome and useless questions, they were not only unable to trap him in his words, but they left his presence filled with admiration for him, having understood that the Saint possessed great intelligence. It was for this reason that Nestorius left him in peace and did not send anyone else to him.

The three years having passed, little by little the evil treasure of his heart began to show itself. For in his sermons he said abominable things about the Lord which were to fall again upon his own head, and which are not permitted for us to repeat. This evil man did not know

the Holy Scriptures, which say, “Who shall declare his generation?”, and, “Search not into things too deep for thee.” When he understood that Nestorius held opinions contrary to those which should be acknowledged, Saint Hypatius immediately, in the church of the Apostles, erased his name from the *diptychs*, so that it should no longer be at the Oblation (the Eucharist offering).

When the most pious Bishop Eulalis learned of this, he was anxious about the outcome of the affair. And seeing that it had been noised abroad, Nestorius also ordered him to reprimand Hypatius. For Nestorius was still powerful in the city. Bishop Eulalius spoke this to Hypatius: “Why have you erased his name without understanding what the consequence of it would be?” Saint Hypatius replied, “From the time that I learned that he said unrighteous things about the Lord, I have no longer been in communion with him and I do not commemorate his name; for he is not a bishop.” Then the bishop, in anger, said, “Be off with you! Make amends for what you have done, for I shall take measures against you.” Saint Hypatius replied: “Do as you wish. As for me, I have decided to suffer anything, and it is with this in mind that I have done this.”

Now when Nestorius had left for Ephesus, and the Council had assembled, on the day when he should be deposed, Saint Hypatius saw in a vision that an angel of the Lord took hold of Saint John the Apostle, and led him to the most pious Emperor and said to him, “Say to the Emperor: ‘Pronounce your sentence against Nestorius.’” And he, having heard this, pronounced it. Saint Hypatius made note of the day, and it was verified that Nestorius was deposed on that very day, the three and a half years having passed, as the Lord had foretold the Saint. And some days later the decree of the deposition was brought. It was read in the presence of all the clergy and people, Bishop Eulalius and Saint Hypatius being present together in Church.

The significant point in this account is that the Saint ceased commemorating Nestorius even **before** any Synodal decision had been made against the latter. Furthermore, the Saint declared, “I am no longer in communion with him and I do not commemorate his name; **for he is not a bishop.**” All this was said and done **before** any Church Council had condemned Nestorius’ heresy. And indeed, heresy is heresy whether or not a Council condemns it. It is not, after all, the decision of the Council that makes the heresy a heresy. Rather, following in the path of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, the Church Councils openly proclaimed the true Orthodox doctrine, while at the same time demonstrating in what points heresy had deviated from that doctrine.

The Holy Canons are not silent in this regard either. Here is what the 15<sup>th</sup> Canon of the First and Second Council sets forth:



If any presbyter or bishop or metropolitan dares to secede from communion with his own patriarch and does not mention his name as is ordered and appointed in the divine mystagogy, but before a synodical arraignment and his [the patriarch's] full condemnation, he creates a schism, the Holy Synod has decreed that this person be alienated from every priestly function, if only he be proved to have transgressed in this. These rules, therefore, have been sealed and ordered concerning those who on the pretext of some accusations against their own presidents [i.e., prelates] stand apart, creating a schism and severing the unity of the Church. **But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, that is, because he publicly preaches heresy and with bared head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these not only are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honor among the Orthodox.** For not bishops, but false bishops and false teachers have they condemned, and they have not fragmented the Church's unity with schism, but from schisms and divisions have they earnestly sought to deliver the Church.

Regarding this matter, the following is noted in the book *Against False Union*:

The communion with and respect of one church on the part of the other churches remains and continues only as long as that local church remains in the Church, that is as long as it lives and proceeds in Spirit and Truth. When a patriarchate ceases to be a church, admitting communion with heretics, then its recognition on the part of the other churches ceases also.

**The Orthodox people must become conscious of the fact that they owe no obedience to a bishop, no matter how high a title he holds, when that bishop ceases being Orthodox and openly follows heretics with pretenses of union "on equal terms."** On the contrary, they are obliged to depart from him and confess their Faith, because a bishop, even if he be patriarch or pope, ceases from being a bishop the moment he ceases being Orthodox. The bishop is a consecrated person, and even if he is openly sinful, respect and honor is due him until synodically censured. But if he becomes openly heretical or is in communion with heretics, then the Christians should not await any synodical decision, but should draw away from him immediately.

As we saw from the few examples cited above—and there are countless others—the Orthodox faithful did not mince words, nor were they afraid to take immediate action when they ascertained that their bishop had strayed from Orthodoxy. Inevitably, there were those who found fault with this

“extreme” course of action. The latter were not so much disturbed by the heresy of their bishop as they were by the words and actions of the “zealots,” as they usually labeled the conscientious flock. These “super-correct” extremists were disturbing the peace of the Church and fomenting schism, said they. How did those “unhealthy elements” dare to rebuke the bishop and cut off communion with him **before** any Synodal clarification? As we have seen, Saint Hypatius and Saint Maximus the Confessor gave us two concrete examples of how they dared. Saint Theodore the Studite and Saint Mark of Ephesus also dared, and today the church honors and reveres them for doing so.

The Church—which had just weathered the century long onslaught of iconoclasm—saw that there were often occasions when, for one reason or another, there was no possibility of calling an Orthodox Council. Precisely for this very reason, therefore, the First and Second Council which convened in Constantinople in 861 formulated the Fifteenth Canon, which merely articulated and gave canonical expression to the ancient practice of the Church, to wit, that the Orthodox Christians should **“wall themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification.”** Thus, should the Orthodox faithful ever find themselves in an extreme situation—doctrinally speaking—they were encouraged and protected by this canon—no matter what they were called by others, and no matter what sanctions and actions the erring bishop threatened to take against them. Actually, church History has demonstrated repeatedly that the believers who were the first to react against heresy were wholly justified in their course of action on every occasion.

This, then, is the Orthodox understanding and the ancient practice of the Church in this matter. As we mentioned in the beginning, there is room here neither for anarchy, nor for despotism. We have criteria, and these criteria are the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers, the Lives of the Saints, Church History, and the Holy Canons.

This witness, this Faith is sealed with the blood of the martyrs and confessors of the Church. And truly, since the Church is built upon this rock, how is it possible for the gates of Hades to prevail against Her?

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



**W**e observe, however, that nobody in a higher position than our own is raising his voice; and this fact constrains us to speak out, lest at the Last Judgment we should be responsible for having seen the danger of Ecumenism threaten the Church, and yet not having warned her Bishops.

Metropolitan Philaret of New York (+1985)

## HOLY PASCHA!

*By Melito of Sardis. The author was the bishop of Sardis near Smyrna in western Anatolia, and a great authority in early Christianity. Melito held a foremost place in terms of Bishops in Asia due to his personal influence on Christianity and his literary works, most of which have been lost but of what has been recovered has provided a great insight into Christianity during the second century.*

Christ rose up from the dead, and cried aloud with this voice: *Who is he who contends with me? Let him stand in opposition to me. I set the condemned man free; I gave the dead man life; I raised up the one who had been entombed. Who is my opponent?*

*I, He says, am the Christ. I am the one who destroyed death, and triumphed over the enemy, and trampled Hades under foot, and bound the strong one, and carried off man to the heights of heaven.*

*I, he says, am the Christ.*

*Therefore, come, all families of men, you who have been befouled with sins, and receive forgiveness for your sins. I am your forgiveness. I am the Passover of your salvation. I am the lamb which was sacrificed for you. I am your ransom. I am your light. I am your Saviour. I am your resurrection. I am your king. I am leading you up to the heights of heaven. I will show you the eternal Father. I will raise you up by my right hand.*

This is the one who made the heavens and the earth, and who in the beginning created man, who was proclaimed through the law and prophets, Who became human through the virgin, Who was hanged upon a tree, Who was buried in the earth, Who was resurrected from the dead, and Who ascended to the heights of heaven, Who sits at the right hand of the Father, who has authority to judge and to save everything, through whom the Father created everything from the beginning of the world to the end of the age.

This is the Alpha and the Omega. This is the beginning and the end—an indescribable beginning and an incomprehensible end. This is the Christ. This is the King. This is Jesus. This is the General. This is the Lord. This is the One who rose up from the dead. This is the One who sits at the right hand of the Father. He bears the Father and is borne by the Father, to Whom be the glory and the power forever.

Amen.

## CHRIST IS RISEN, TRULY HE IS RISEN!

*By St. Gregory the Theologian*

It is the day of the Resurrection and my beginning has good Lauspices.<sup>1</sup> Let us then keep the Festival with splendor, and let us embrace one another. Let us say “Brethren” even to those who hate us; much more to those who have done or suffered aught out of love for us. Let us forgive all offences for the Resurrection’s sake: let us give one another pardon; that He Who today rose again from the dead may renew (us) also by His Spirit; and clothing (us) with the New Man, may give me to His New Creation, to those who are begotten after God, as a good modeler and teacher for Christ, willingly both dying with Him and rising again with Him.

Yesterday the Lamb was slain and the door-posts were anointed, and Egypt bewailed her firstborn, and the Destroyer passed up over, and the Seal was dreadful and reverend,<sup>2</sup> and we were walled in with the Precious Blood. Today we have clean escaped from Egypt and from Pharaoh; and there is none to hinder us from keeping a Feast to the Lord our God—the Feast of our Departure; or from celebrating that Feast, not in the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but in the unleavened bread of *sincerity and truth* (1 Cor 5:8), and carrying with us nothing of ungodly and Egyptian leaven.

Yesterday I was crucified with Him; yesterday I died with Him; today I am quickened with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him; today I rise with Him. But let us offer to Him Who suffered and rose again for us—you will think perhaps I am going to say gold, or silver, or woven work or transparent and costly stones, the mere passing material of earth, that remains here below, and is for the most part always possessed by bad men, slaves of the world and of the Prince of the world. Let us offer *ourselves*, the possession most precious to God, and most fitting; let us give back to the Image what is made after the Image. Let us recognize our Dignity; let us honor our Archetype; let us know the power of the Mystery, and for what Christ died.

Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become gods for His sake, since He for our sake became Man. He assumed the worse that He might give us the better; He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich



(2 Cor 8:9), He took upon Him the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty; He came down that we might be exalted; He was tempted that we might conquer; He was dishonored that He might glorify us; He died that He might save us; He ascended that He might draw to Himself us who were lying low in the Fall of sin. Let us give *all*, offer *all*, to Him Who gave Himself a Ransom and a Reconciliation for us. But one can give nothing like oneself, understanding the Mystery and becoming for His sake all that He became for ours...

*Christ Is Risen!*

*Truly, He Is Risen!*

† † †

[1] This homily by St. Gregory was shortly after he was ordained. The omitted parts of the sermon are references to his ordination—omitted for the sake of space.

[2] This introduces us to the theme of the sermon: The Israelites were delivered from death by the sign of the blood of the sacrifice and redeemed from bondage in Egypt. This is a type of the Crucifixion of Christ and the Resurrection; Christ did not die to fulfill some sort of vengeance of God (as the sectarians teach in their pagan “Doctrine of Atonement”), but He died as a sacrifice of love to deliver man from death and free him from bondage of Satan (cf. Heb 2:15). Christ did not redeem man from God’s anger but from Satan’s power: death. From this sermon, the clear dogmatical essence of our Orthodox Christian expression *Pascha* is seen. The word *Pascha* itself reveals the true meaning of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.



We too, beloved brothers, even if we do not put up with chains, beatings, prison, other bodily punishments, persecution at the hands of our fellow human beings for righteousness’ sake, nevertheless we are capable of receiving the Savior’s chalice and obtaining the palm of martyrdom if we take care to chastise our bodies and subdue them; if we accustom ourselves to supplicating the Lord in the spirit of humility and with a contrite heart, if we attempt to accept with a calm mind insults inflicted by our neighbor; if we rejoice in loving even those who hate us, who inflict injustice upon us, and in doing good to them and praying earnestly for their lives and safety; if we exert ourselves to be adorned with the virtue of patience and also with the fruits of good works. Indeed, if we live our lives in this way and, according to the Apostle’s words, display our bodies as a living sacrificial offering, holy [and] pleasing to God, He will with heavenly condescension deign to see to it that we are rewarded with the same glory as those who have given their bodies up to death for the Lord’s sake. Just as their death is precious in the sight of the Lord, so will our lives become precious [in His sight].

The Venerable Bede (+735)

## PREACHER OF DIVINE LOVE

By Elena Konstantinovna Hellige, from “Orthodox America,” issue no. 154, Feb. 1998, originally translated from “Pravoslavnaya Rus,” 1976, issue no. 4.

Saint John, the beloved disciple of Christ, called *the Theologian* because of his lofty teaching concerning the Son of God, God the Word, was the son of the Galilean fisherman Zebedee and his wife, Salome, and the brother of the Apostle James. The Lord Jesus Christ loved all His disciples, but He had a particular love for John, who was the youngest of the apostles, and who was an innocent and pure youth, aflame with boundless love for his Divine Teacher. John was that apostle of whom the Gospel says, *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. It was the Lord’s will that he shine longer than all the other apostles on the horizon of the apostolic age; he reposed at the beginning of the second Christian century.

The Lord expressed His particular love and trust in John especially powerfully and clearly in the final moments of His earthly life, when, from the Cross, He entrusted him with the care of His Most Pure Mother, and gave him to His mother to be adopted as a son. In so doing, the Lord confirms His profound love and special trust in John. He says, as it were, *Only to thy love, My beloved disciple, do I entrust My most precious treasure. Care for her as a son, for you are worthy of that kinship*. In taking upon himself the great and holy task of a son’s care for the Most Holy Virgin Mary, John wholly devoted himself to the fulfillment of this lofty responsibility.

Very little is actually known concerning the life and activity of this holy apostle. It is certain only that after the Dormition of the Theotokos (c. AD 47), Saint John left Palestine. According to the tradition of the Church, he preached the Gospel in Rome, for which he was subject to torture. Afterwards he settled in the city of Ephesus, and this capital of Asia Minor became the center of his apostolic activity. From Ephesus the Apostle oversaw the life of many surrounding church communities, making frequent personal visits.

Ephesus was at that time the center of intellectual life for the whole of Asia Minor and western Asia, and was in close contact with Alexandria, famed for its philosophical schools. The latter attracted many who, not satisfied with a simple and straightforward understanding of Christianity, began to analyze and expound it from a philosophical perspective, thereby distorting the Gospel truth, falling into error, and even denying Christianity altogether. Such persons Saint John called “antichrists,” and he directed much of his inspired preaching against them. At the head of these false teachers stood a certain Cerinth, who combined elements of Christianity with elements of Judaism and paganism—to the extent that he formed a new, thoroughly heretical teaching that was a complete repudiation of Christianity. In refuting

the false teaching of this antichrist, Saint John clearly set forth the evangelical teaching, saying, *Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is an antichrist.*

The bishop of the Church at Ephesus was Timothy, a disciple of the Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, it was Saint John who had principal oversight over the church and to whom all the Christians—pastors and flock—were devotedly submitted.

In the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (AD 81-96), a cruel persecutor of Christians, Saint John was slandered as an enemy of the regnant polytheist religion, an especially dangerous and pernicious enemy, and the saintly man was taken for trial to Rome, where he was subjected to harsh beatings, forced to drink poison, and, finally, thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. But the Lord preserved His chosen servant, and even the most frightful tortures left him unharmed. Unable to comprehend God's wonderworking power, the outraged pagan emperor exiled the holy Apostle to the deserted island of Patmos. Saint John, however, did not remain long in exile. In AD 96 Domitian was murdered and all his decrees were rescinded by his successor on the imperial throne, the Emperor Nero. Saint John returned to Ephesus, where he remained until his blessed repose.

Having experienced in himself the extraordinary effect of the all-illuminating Divine love, John zealously taught other Christians how to assimilate this Divine feeling. He himself was wholly penetrated and was aflame with self-sacrificing love towards his spiritual children.

#### **Greater Love Hath no Man!**

During one of his rounds of visits to the surrounding churches, in the city of Smyrna, the holy Apostle noticed among his listeners a youth of fair countenance and an evidently lively intelligence. Turning to the local bishop, Saint John said to him: "I am entrusting you with this youth in the presence of the entire church, and I call to witness Jesus Christ." The bishop accepted this charge and promised diligently to look after the youth's welfare.

The Apostle returned to Ephesus, and the youth was instructed in the law of God and was baptized. The bishop, thinking that he was thereby relieved of any further concern for the youth, slackened his attention, and soon lost track of the boy. Meanwhile, some corrupt peers drew the youth into their company. He began attending their revelries and taking part in their nocturnal raids. Eventually he became the ring-leader of his own band of thieves.

Some time passed and the affairs of the Church brought Saint John again to Smyrna. When these were settled, the Apostle turned to the bishop: "Return to me the pledge with which Jesus Christ and I entrusted you in the presence of your church." The disconcerted bishop did not straightway understand just what the Apostle meant by this, but then he tearfully confessed that the youth had died to God; he had given himself over to sin, and had become the leader

of a band of outlaws, with whom he was hiding in the mountains. On hearing these words, the Apostle rent his garments and groaned. "Indeed, I thought I left the soul of my brother with a good watchman. Give me a horse and a guide."

Without losing any time, he headed for the mountains, where he was soon seized by some of the band's lookouts. "Take me to your leader," insisted the Saint. "I have come here purposely to see him." When John was brought into the presence of the ataman, the latter recognized him immediately. He was so taken aback that he turned to run away in shame. The Apostle, disregarding his advanced years, took after him, shouting, "My son! Why are you running away from your father? I am old and unarmed. Have pity on me! My son! Do not be afraid of me. You can still hope in salvation. I would willingly die for you, just as Christ died for us. I would give my soul for you. Believe me. I am sent by Christ!"

The young man stopped. He hung his head, threw aside his weapon, and with tears threw himself into the Apostle's embrace, trembling with emotion. He asked his forgiveness, weeping bitterly and trying to find in his tears a second baptism. The Apostle fell with love to the feet of the brigand, kissed his right hand, a hand defiled with many murders and crimes, and promised to plead on his behalf that the Lord would forgive him. Together with the repentant criminal, the holy Apostle prayed and fasted, and he instructed, encouraged and consoled him with citations from Holy Scripture. Together they returned to the city, where Saint John led the brigand chief into the church as a remarkable example of repentance and of the quickening triumph of his apostolic love.

This apostle was wholly permeated by love for his neighbor. His zeal for the salvation of those who were perishing knew no obstacles. And the meekness, humility, and kindness of this great apostle were so amazing and touching, that he seemed to be not a man but an angel incarnate. His entire life was a life of love. In deep old age, when his physical strength had spent itself so that he could move about only with difficulty, he continued nevertheless, with the assistance of his disciples, to attend the Christian gatherings, teaching and edifying the flock.

At the end of his life, the holy Apostle limited his preaching to the brief exhortation: Children, love one another! When asked why he repeated one and the same thing over and over, the holy Apostle replied, "This is the command of the Lord, and if you fulfill it, it is sufficient."

The holy Apostle and Evangelist John reposed in the year AD 105, having surpassed ninety years of age. He was buried in Ephesus, where his grave became a place of pilgrimage for Christians desiring to bow down before the holy remains of *"the disciple whom Jesus loved."*

## THE SUFFERING OF INFANTS

*By Blessed Augustine, from a letter of Blessed Augustine (+430) to St. Jerome, reprinted from "A Treasury of Early Christianity," edited by Anne Fremantle.*

When we come to the penal sufferings of infants, I am embarrassed, believe me, by great difficulties, and am wholly at a loss to find an answer by which they are solved; and I do not only speak here of those punishments in the life to come, which are involved in that perdition to which they must be drawn down if they depart from the body without the sacrament of Christian grace. I also speak of the sufferings which are to our sorrow endured by infants before our eyes in this present life, and which are so various that time rather than examples would fail me if I were to attempt to enumerate them. They are liable to wasting disease, to racking pain, to the agonies of thirst and hunger, to feebleness of limbs, to privation of bodily senses, and to vexing assaults of unclean spirits.

Surely it is incumbent on us to show how it is compatible with justice that infants suffer all these things without any evil of their own as the procuring cause. For it would be impious to say, either that these things take place without God's knowledge, or that He cannot resist those who cause them, or that He unrighteously does these things, or permits them to be done. We are warranted in saying that irrational animals are given by God to serve creatures possessing a higher nature, even though they be wicked, as we see most plainly in the Gospel that the swine of the Gadarenes were given to the legion of devils at their request; but could we ever be warranted in saying this of men? Certainly not.

Man is, indeed, an animal, but an animal endowed with reason, though mortal. In his members dwells a reasonable soul, which in these severe afflictions is enduring a penalty.

Now God is good, God is just, God is omnipotent; only a madman would doubt that He is so. Let us then believe that the great sufferings which infant children experience be accounted for by some reason compatible with justice. When older people suffer such trials, we are accustomed, certainly, to say, either that their worth is being proved, as in Job's case, or that their wickedness is being punished, as in Herod's. And, from some examples, which it has pleased

God to make perfectly clear, men are enabled to conjecture the nature of others which are more obscure; but this is in regard to persons of mature age.

Tell me, therefore, what must we answer in regard to infant children; is it true that, although they suffer so great punishments, there are no sins in them deserving to be punished? For, of course, there is not in them at that age any righteousness requiring to be put to the proof. What shall I say, moreover, as to the difficulty which besets the theory of the creation of each soul separately at the birth of the individual in connection with the diversity of talent in different souls, and especially the absolute privation of reason in some? This is, indeed, not apparent in the first stages of infancy, but being developed continuously from the beginning of life, it becomes manifest in children, of whom some are so slow and defective in memory that they cannot learn even the letters of the alphabet, and some (commonly called idiots) so imbecile that they differ

very little from the beasts of the field.

Perhaps I am told, in answer to this, that the bodies are the cause of these imperfections. But surely the opinion which we wish to see vindicated from objection does not require us to affirm that the soul chose for itself the body which so impairs it, and, being deceived in the choice, committed a blunder; or that the soul, when it was compelled, as a necessary consequence of being born, to enter into some body, was hindered from find-

ing another by crowds of souls occupying the other bodies before it came, so that, like a man who takes whatever seat may remain vacant for him in a theater, the soul was guided in taking possession of the imperfect body not by its own choice but by its circumstances. We, of course, cannot say and ought not to believe such things. Tell us, therefore, what we ought to believe and to say in order to vindicate from this difficulty the theory that for each individual body a new soul is specially created.

In my discussions on "Free Will," I have said something, not in regard to the variety of capacities in different souls, but, at least in regard to the pains which infant children suffer in this life. The nature of the opinion which I there expressed, and the reason why it is insufficient for the purposes of our present inquiry, I will now submit to you, and will put into this letter a copy of the passage in the discussion to which I refer. It is as follows:



“In connection with the bodily sufferings experienced by the little children who, by reason of their tender age, have no sins—if the souls which animate them did not exist before they were born into the human family—a more grievous and, as it were, compassionate complaint is very commonly made in the remark, ‘What evil have they done that they should suffer these things?’ as if there could be a meritorious innocence in anyone before the time at which it is possible for him to do anything wrong!

“Moreover, if God accomplishes, in any measure, the correction of the parents when they are chastised by the sufferings or by the death of the children that are dear to them, is there any reason why these things should not take place, seeing that, after they are past, they will be, to those who experienced them, as if they had never been, while the persons on whose account they were inflicted will either become better, being moved by the rod of temporal afflictions to choose a better mode of life, or be left without excuse under the punishment awarded at the coming judgment, if, notwithstanding the sorrows of this life, they have refused to turn their desires towards eternal life?

“Moreover, who knows what may be given to the little children by means of whose sufferings the parents have their obdurate hearts subdued, or their faith exercised, or their compassion proved? Who knows what good recompense God may, in the secret of His judgments, reserve for these little ones? For although they have done no righteous action, nevertheless, being free from any transgression of their own, they have suffered these trials. It is certainly not without reason that the Church exalts to the honorable rank of martyrs those children who were slain when Herod sought our Lord Jesus Christ to put Him to death.”



One elder passed seventy weeks in fasting, eating food only twice a week, as he begged the Lord to reveal to him the meaning of a passage in Holy Scripture. But God would not reveal it to him. Seeing this, the elder said to himself, “I have labored long and hard, and I have accomplished nothing. I will go to my brother and ask him.”

When he had left his cell and locked the door behind him, an angel from the Lord appeared and said to him: “Seventy weeks of fasting did not bring you nearer to God. Now, however, when you have humbled yourself and resolved to go to your brother with your question, I have been sent to you to explain the meaning of this passage.” And fulfilling this, the angel departed.

From the “*Paterikon*” of Bishop Ignatius

## CANONICAL VS. NON-CANONICAL?

An excerpt from “*Christian Union? An Orthodox Christian’s Guide to Ecumenism: Past, Present and Future*,” by the Saint Edward Orthodox Brotherhood.

In the sense that this question uses it, “canonical” means “official” or “in communion with world Orthodoxy.” Churches that are not in communion with official Orthodoxy are therefore accused by these “official” churches of being “non-canonical.” However, the word “canonical” actually means “obeying the canons of the Church Councils,” so the words “canonical” and “ecumenical” are not mutually exclusive.

It is not the decision of a Patriarch or his synod that creates and guarantees “canonicity,” but, on the contrary, it is the canonicity of the decision that gives it its true authority and power. Truth, and not power, is the criterion, and the canons, not different in this from the dogmas, express the truth of the Church. And just as no power, no authority can transform heresy into orthodoxy and make white what is black, no power can make canonical a situation which is not canonical.

It is not power or official recognition that defines Orthodoxy, but the exact keeping of the saving Orthodox Faith. St. Mark of Ephesus, in rejecting the false union of the Council of Ferrara-Florence, found himself outside official Orthodoxy as the only Orthodox bishop left at the Council who did not sign the agreement of union between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Papacy. Denounced as a heretic by the Pope, Saint Mark answered:

“I express not my opinions, I introduce nothing new into the Church, neither do I defend any errors. I keep the doctrine which the Church, having received from Christ our Saviour, has kept and still keeps. This doctrine was also held by the Church of Rome, unanimously with the Eastern Church, until the start of the Schism. Even during this present synod, you have praised this exact pious worship of the past. No one can censure or condemn this pious teaching. Therefore if I remain firm in this doctrine, and do not wish to reject it, how is it possible to accuse me of being a heretic?”

**Orthodox Christians who wish to remain faithful to traditional Orthodoxy do not need to explain or justify their position because the faith they hold is not a modern innovation, but the Orthodox Faith.**

† † †

[\*] **Ecumenical is not the same as being an Ecumenist.** Ecumenical is the saving Truth of Orthodoxy expressed throughout Her universality as only known and experienced by the Self-Revelation by the God-Man, the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Whereas, being an Ecumenist denies the exclusivity of The Orthodox Church and Her saving efficacy, as revealed historically and therapeutically (applied) by the Lord Jesus Christ, and transmitted to His holy Apostles, Hierarchs, Saints, Martyrs and all the Faith children of the Lord!

## THE END OF OUR LENTEN JOURNEY

*From the Lenten Triodion, supplementary texts, Monastery of the Veil of the Mother of God, Bussy-en-Othe, France, 1979.*

With grateful souls let us accept the Fast: for by the power of the Spirit it makes the stubborn passions to wither, and gives us strength to do the works of God; it makes our mind ascend to heaven, and gains for us the forgiveness of our sins from the God of all mercy.

As Christ has taught us in the Scriptures, a pure fast means the putting away of sin, the rejection of the passions, love for God, attentiveness in prayer, tears of compunction, and acts of mercy to the poor.

Let us kill the passions by abstinence, and through fasting let us make our spirit mount on wings to heaven; and let us cry with contrite hearts: We have sinned against Thee, O God; in Thy compassion forgive us.

O my soul, because of fasting Moses beheld God: because of fasting Elijah rode in the chariot of fire, and Paul was taken up to heaven. Therefore, let us fast from evil and we also shall be taken up on high, gaining freedom from passions.

Restraining the passions with the bridle of pure fasting, let us all strive to raise our mind in perfect faith to holy contemplation. Let us despise the pleasures of this earthly life, that we may gain the heavenly life and divine illumination.

The holy Fast enriches our heart, and makes it by the power of God increase in virtue, like a full ear of wheat. Let us therefore fast with gladness in these holy days, and so receive sanctification.

In thine idleness, my soul, why art thou become a slave of sin? And in thy sickness why dost thou not run to the Physician? Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the true day of salvation. Rise up and wash thy face with tears of repentance, and make thy lamp burn brightly with the oil of good deeds, so that Christ our God may grant thee cleansing and great mercy.

The grace of the Fast shines upon us, driving out the darkness of sinful self-indulgence. Behold, now is the accepted time and the day of salvation. Let us bring forth fruits of repentance and we shall live.

Elisha, so it is written, after fasting brought the dead child back to life: let us also fast, killing all our carnal thoughts, that in the Age to Come we may receive eternal life. Keeping a spiritual fast, O brethren, let us speak no lies with our tongue, not giving our brother cause for scandal; but through repentance let us make the lamp of our soul burn brightly, and let us cry with tears to Christ: Forgive us our trespasses in Thy love for mankind.

O miserable soul, abstain from the passions and be saved. For abstinence from food is not acceptable as a fast, unless we also correct our faults. In this season of repentance, let us stretch out our hands in works of mercy; and then the ascetic struggles of the Fast will bring us to eternal life. For nothing saves the soul so much as generosity to those in need, and almsgiving combined with fasting will deliver a man from death. Let us do all this with gladness, for there is no better way, and it will bring salvation to our souls.

The judgment is at hand: give heed, my soul. Be attentive to thy conscience, doing what is right, and it will always keep thee uncondemned. For if we have ourselves exercised judgment in this present life, we shall not lack witnesses to plead on our behalf at the Judgment in the Age to Come, when the guilty are condemned.

Come, ye people, and strengthened like Samson by fasting, let us destroy the demon of gluttony as he destroyed the lion; but let us take care lest the Delilah of our passions deceive us and laugh us to scorn.

As David armed himself with faith, so let us arm ourselves with humility; and as he overthrew Goliath, so let us overthrow our arrogant mind, and cut down the hosts of passions.

Putting off the loathsome garment of self-indulgence, let us put on the shining robe of abstinence, and so in joy and glory let us come to the brightness of the Redeemer's Resurrection.

By fasting Elisha gave back to the Shunammite her child alive. From this let us learn, O brethren, how great a blessing is the Fast, and how it is a grace given by God.

Moses, having found in fasting a means of purification, spoke with God who alone is pure. O my soul, be purified by fasting, and so draw near to the God of love.

O brethren, let not one of us be sunk in idleness and sloth. This is the time for work, the hour of solemn festival. Who, then, is wise and in one day will gain eternal life?

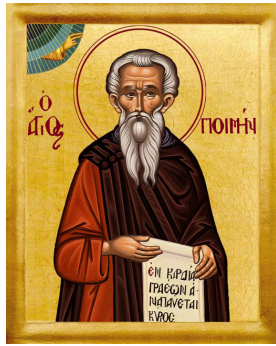
Keeping in mind the fearful judgment seat, my wretched soul, always guide thy steps to the accomplishment of the Redeemer's will.

Once in Babylon fasting made the Children stronger than the fire. Be not fainthearted, O my soul, but follow their example, and thou shalt quench the fire of sensual pleasure with the dew of the Spirit.

Roll back from my humble soul, O Christ the Word, the heavy stone of grievous slothfulness, and raise me from the tomb of insensitivity, that I may glorify Thee.

Having completed the forty days that bring profit to our soul, we beseech Thee in Thy love for man: Grant us also to behold the Holy Week of Thy Passion, that in it we may glorify Thy mighty acts and Thine ineffable dispensation for our sakes, singing with one mind: O Lord, glory to Thee.

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ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!

CHRIST IS RISEN!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

## THE MYSTERY OF BAPTISM

*By St Cyprian of Carthage, from a Letter written to a new convert, 246 A.D.*

I promise to share with you the grace God in His great mercy has shown me, and to tell you as simply as I can what I have experienced since I was baptized. Until that time, I was still living in the dark, knowing nothing of my true life. I was completely involved in this world's affairs, influenced by all its changing moods and troubles, and exiled from the light of truth.

I had indeed been told that God offered a second birth, by which we could be saved, but I very much doubted that I could change the kind of life I was then living. Frankly, I could not see how a person could cast off his fallen nature, and be changed in heart and soul while he still lived in the same body as before. How was it possible, I asked myself, to change the habits of a lifetime instantaneously? How can one suddenly rid oneself of accumulated guilt and break with sin that has become so deeply rooted in one's life? Can a man whose life has been characterized by feasting and luxury, learn frugality and simplicity in a single moment? A person who craves public distinction and honor cannot bear to be passed over and unnoticed.

Another who is accustomed to throngs of flattering attendance, takes it a terrible penance to be left alone. Is every species of temptation suddenly to lose its force? Should we no longer feel the enticement of wine and good living, where pride no longer swells our heads or anger blazes our breasts? Shall we no longer be troubled by covetousness or cruelty or ambition or lust?

These were my thoughts. My past life was so burdened with so many sins, that I saw no way ever to be rid of, that I had grown

accustomed to giving way to my weakness. I despaired of ever being any better. Consequently, I simply humored my evil inclinations, and made no attempt to combat them.

But at last I made up my mind to ask for the Holy Sacrament of Baptism. I went down into those life-giving waters, and all the stains of my past were washed away. I committed my life to the Lord. He cleansed my heart and filled me with His Holy Spirit. I was born again, a new man. And then in a most marvelous way, all my doubts cleared up, I could now see what had been hidden from me before. I found that I could do things that had previously been impossible.

I saw that as long as I had been living according to my lower nature, I was at the mercy of sin, and my course was set for death. But that by living according to my new birth in the Holy Spirit, I had already begun to share God's eternal life. You know, as well as I do, what sins I died to at that moment, just as you know the gifts the Holy Spirit gave me with my new life. I have no desire to boast, but it is surely right to thank God for His free gift. It was through faith in Him that I received the power to break with the sins into which my own folly had led me.

We have received the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our task now is to preserve the integrity of what we have received by living a truly Christian life. We must give time to prayer, and to the study of scripture. Now speaking to God; now listening to His word to us, and letting His teaching mold us. He has enriched us with a treasure no one can take away.

We have eaten and drunk at His heavenly banquet, and can never again know the pinch of poverty.



# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

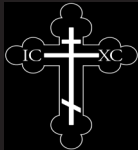
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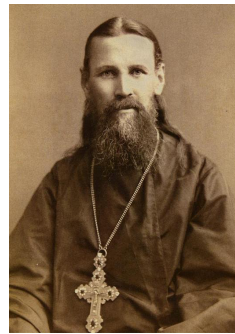
## THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

By St. John of Kronstadt.

*Magnify O my soul, the honourable Translation of the Mother of God from earth to heaven.*

[Refrain for the 9<sup>th</sup> Ode of the Canon]

† † †



Let us all be happy, beloved brothers and sisters that we belong to the Holy Orthodox Church, worthily and rightly glorifying the Most Holy Sovereign

Theotokos on this eminent day out of all the days of the year with special solemnity.

There exist on earth many societies and entire governments that do not consider the need nor the obligation to call upon and glorify the Queen of heaven and earth, the Mother of Our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, and other saints and angels; to submissively serve her lovingly, as the true Mother of God. Sadly nowadays we have heretics (among us) who actively dishonor the Mother of God, the saints, their icons, their relics and their festivals. O, if only they also unanimously with us glorified the worthy Queen of heaven and earth!

Today the Holy Church solemnly glorifies the honorable Dormition or translation of the Mother of God from earth to heaven. A wonderful translation—she died without serious illness, peacefully. Her soul is taken up in the divine hands of her Son and carried up into the heavenly abode, accompanied by the sweet singing of angels. And then, her most pure body is transferred by the apostles to Gethsemane

where it is honorably buried, and on the third day it is resurrected and taken up to heaven.

You see all this on the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos. On it is represented the life-bearing body of the Theotokos laying on a bier, surrounded by the apostles and hierarchs, and in the center of the icon the Lord holding in His hands the most pure soul of the Theotokos. The translation of the Mother of God is a paradigm of the translation in general of the souls of Christians to the other world.

We say that our dead have “fallen asleep” or “passed away.” What does this mean? This means that for the true Christian there is no death. Death was conquered by Christ on the cross. But there is a translation, i.e. a rearrangement of his condition, i.e., his soul is in another place, in another age, in another world beyond the grave, eternal, without end, that is what is meant by “falling asleep.” It is as if it were a temporary dream after which, by the voice of the Lord and the fearful yet wonderful trumpet of the Archangel, all the dead shall live and come forth each to his place: *either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of condemnation* (Jn 5:29). This is what the Christian means by translation. We should be ready for this translation, for the day of the general resurrection and judgment, for this indescribable world event, recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

This preparation for the meeting of the heavenly King before the dread judgment seat, after death, is essentially the person's preparation throughout the whole of his life. This preparation means a change in all his thoughts, and the moral change of all his being, so that the whole man would be pure and white as snow, washing clean everything that defiles the body and

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20<sup>th</sup> century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate **\$24 per annum (\$48 for those outside of the US)**. This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

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spirit, so that he is adorned with every virtue: repentance, meekness, humility, gentleness, simplicity, chastity, mercy, abstention, spiritual contemplation, and burning love for God and neighbor.

Our preparation for meeting the heavenly King, and for the inheritance of eternal life in heaven, should consist of these things. The heavenly King desires souls adorned with immutable virtue, souls prepared so that the Very Lord Himself could abide in them. Do not marvel that the Very Lord wants to live in us. In fact the human soul is more spacious than the heavens and the earth, for it exists in the image of God. And if one removes sins from the soul, the Lord of all will settle in it and will fill it with Himself. "We will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (John 14:23), says the Lord about the souls who love Him.

And so, ye participants in the Christian feasts, and especially the present feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, ye who are brightly adorned with every virtue and translated to the heavenly kingdom, to her Son and God, proclaim to each and every one about preparing their souls to be the dwelling place of the Lord, about continual repentance, and about the incorruptible adornment of Christian virtue. Let your death also be unashamed and peaceful,

serving as the pledge of a good answer at the dread judgment seat of Christ.

### Comforting Truths

#### Inherent in the Feast of Dormition

Blessed is God for having granted us this great day, in which from ancient times and with triumphant hymns the universal Church accompanies heavenward into supreme Zion

the incorruptible body of the Mother of God together with her soul, and allows us to take pleasure in the spiritual fragrance of her indescribable holiness and in all the virtues with which she was endowed by the Holy Spirit and by the Son of God, Who had issued from her by taking on human nature!

With what tenderness, joy, and piety did the apostles and all the other elect enjoy the wondrous vision of the reposing Theotokos' visage, all shining with heavenly light, and the



indescribable heavenly fragrance of her God-bearing body, and the contemplation of the brightest visage of her Son and God, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who had come to take His holy Mother's soul into His hands! O, this was a celestial vision on earth, never seen before! Even the heavenly angels were visibly present here together with their King and Master.

Only three days did the Most-pure body of the Theotokos, buried by the apostles in Gethsemane, remain in the

tomb, only three days did it stay there, and afterwards it was resurrected by the Lord and united with her soul, and she was taken up together with her body into heaven. For only three days was she fated to repose in the sleep of death, just as the Lord Himself remained in His tomb for three days and afterwards arose to confirm the universal resurrection of mankind. Death, having been vanquished by the resurrected Christ, became for the faithful a dormition, a passage, a step towards immortality and eternal life, provided we die in faith, repentance, and virtue.

Let us venerate the Most-glorious Mother of God, higher than the heavens and purer than sunlight, who delivered mankind from its curse, i.e. from God's damnation.

But what exactly is God's curse? It is the consequence of God's righteous wrath upon criminal, sinful mankind, so ungrateful to its Creator and Benefactor, for which it had been deprived of God's mercy, eternally rejected from the face of God, condemned to the eternal torment of hell or to eternal death with the fallen angels, the evil spirits. Eve, our foremother, was responsible for this damnation together with Adam through the sin of disobedience—and even to this day its consequences continue to overshadow sinners who do not know God, their Saviour.

But the Theotokos, through her humility, obedience, meekness, God-like purity, acceptance of the Archangel's tidings, and above all through her wondrous bearing of the Son of God in her womb, attracted God's blessing upon the world by giving birth to the Saviour of the world and obtaining the benevolence of the Heavenly Father towards all the faithful. Another consequence of God's damnation of mankind was death, but Christ, the Son of God, Who was born of the Theotokos in flesh, Who suffered and died for the sins of mankind, took upon Himself our damnation, vanquished our death by His death, and removed the curse from us by crucifying our sins on the cross and granting us incorruptibility, resurrection, and immortality.

Such are the comforting truths which the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos brings us: it assures us that Christ the Saviour, born from the Most-pure Virgin Mary, removed from us the curse of our sins and granted to all of us resurrection from the dead on the last day of the world. Is this not comforting for every Christian believer?

And having such an expectation of a general resurrection from the dead, let us try throughout our entire life to become worthy of the glorious resurrection into eternal life by means of constant repentance, battle with our passions and the temptations of the flesh and the world, and strive for success in all virtues, in order to eternally enjoy the infinite, incorruptible, surpassing all understanding, all feeling and all expectation—the blessings of the Heavenly Kingdom, together with God, the Mother of God, the holy angels, and all the saints. Amen.

## IS THE TERRIBLE JUDGMENT REAL?

By Archbishop Averky (Taushev) 1906-1976.

In our time we have become witnesses of a completely new teaching, so far unheard-of in our Church, to the effect that the Second Coming of Christ and the Terrible Judgment must be understood somehow in an "allegorical" way, and not literally, and that the Terrible Judgment will in essence be not at all terrible.

In propagandizing this "teaching," they affirm with great aplomb and authority that everything we expounded "has been thought up by dark fanatical monks," and that contemporary "enlightened Christians" cannot and must not believe in it all. (But how, we may ask, can we not believe in that which has been clearly and definitively said in the Sacred Scriptures, or by the great Fathers of the Church or the glorious, Spirit-bearing ascetics who have been glorified by the Holy Church?) For Christ Himself, they say, said that *He came not to judge the world, but to save it* (and then references are made to John 12:7, Matthew 18:11 and Luke 9:56).

Already a long time ago we were warned that the cunning of Satan and his servants, especially in the last times, will be manifest also in the fact that, in order to destroy people, they will also begin skillfully to use even the texts of the Sacred Scriptures, interpreting them in a distorted manner. (After all, on such distorted interpretations are based all the numerous contemporary sects.) And it is like that in the given case: Christ truly came to earth the first time in order to save the world, but the second time He will come no longer to save, but to judge the world. Moreover, the measure of this Judgment, as He Himself said, will be the word uttered by Him: *The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day* (Jn 12:48), that is: he who does not observe the teaching brought by Christ the Savior to the earth will be subjected to condemnation at the Terrible Judgment.

To whom could this not be clear? Only to a mind that is ill-intentioned! But how can one distort that which is said so clearly in the Sacred Scriptures? *Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.* (Rev 1:7; cf. Acts 1:11). *Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his works.* (Rev 22:12), says the Lord Himself. What could be clearer or more comprehensible than these words? And so there will undoubtedly be the Terrible Judgment, and there will be the reward of each according to his works, and there will be hell and the everlasting torments for the impenitent sinners. This will be demanded by the Highest Divine Justice, which is so clearly felt and whose inexorable necessity is recognized by every human heart that is uncorrupted, not poisoned by lying pseudo-wisdom...

## A MODEL FOR PRIESTS: ST. JOHN OF KRONSTADT (1829-1908)

By Fr. Edward Pehanich.

*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*

[Hebrews 13:7]

† † †



The holy Apostle instructs us to “remember our leaders, those who speak to us the word of God, to consider the outcome of their lives and to imitate their faith.”

As we reflect on the Lives of the Saints and seek to imitate their faith, one of the challenges, especially for priests, is that the vast majority of Orthodox saints were either martyrs who suffered and died for

Christ or were monks and nuns. Very few of our canonized saints were married men and women who raised families, and even fewer were married priests. How can I, as a priest, lead a holy, Christ-centered life since I have a wife and a family and cannot spend hours each day in daily prayer nor undertake feats of asceticism as many of the saints? One great exception is St. John of Kronstadt, a married Russian priest, who with the exception of St. John Chrysostom, may likely be one of the most popular saints among Orthodox priests.

St. John was born in 1829 in the north of Russia to pious parents; his father Elias was the sacristan at the village church. While completing his seminary studies at the St. Petersburg Academy, he dreamt of becoming a missionary to the natives of Siberia or Alaska but observing the conditions of society in St. Petersburg he realized that there was much missionary work needed in Russia. He suffered from a long period of depression while at the Academy and later said he was only freed from this darkness by long prayer.

As he struggled over which direction to take in life he had a dream in which he saw himself as a priest at St. Andrew’s Cathedral in the city of Kronstadt, which is near St. Petersburg. Graduating from the Academy, he married Elizabeth, the daughter of a priest, and was ordained a priest in 1855. Appointed to St. Andrew’s Cathedral in Kronstadt, he was deeply moved when he entered the church for the first time and realized it was the church he had seen in his dream. His relationship to Elizabeth was more the relationship between a brother and sister since he devoted himself to virginity.

The city of Kronstadt was the place to which criminals from St. Petersburg were routinely deported and, as a port city, it was teeming with sailors, unskilled workers working the docks, and crowds of homeless people living in shacks and dugouts around the city. It was among these people that Father John began his ministry. Knowing of his generosity, crowds of beggars would flock outside his home and church and became known as Father John’s regiment.

Father John at first gave money and food to all who came to him but soon realized this was only temporary help and sometimes harmful to the poor. In 1873 he opened a House of Industry consisting of a number of workshops, a dormitory, a dining area, a health clinic, a library, and an elementary school. Here the poor were not simply given hand-outs but were helped to rise out of their poverty by learning a trade and receiving an education.

Serving as the pastor of a large city parish, serving the needs of the poor who flocked around him, and teaching religion in the local schools had Father John working from early morning to late evening each day. In the midst of his exhausting ministry he devoted careful time to his inner life of prayer and kept a diary in which he set down his thoughts, feelings, and prayers. This diary has been published in English under the title *My Life in Christ* and reveals the source of Father John’s strength to endure the many demands on him. For Father John, the center of his life was celebrating the Liturgy and receiving the Lord in Holy Communion, which he did daily.

He wrote in his diary: “I die when I am not celebrating the Liturgy... There is no true life in us without the Source of Life—Jesus Christ. The Liturgy is the source of true life, because God Himself is in it; the Lord of life gives Himself as food and drink to the believers, gives to His communicants life in abundance, as He himself says: *He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.* (Jn 6:54).”

One person who observed Father John celebrating a Divine Liturgy wrote his impressions: “After having celebrated the Divine Liturgy and received Holy Communion, Father John’s face has changed. No longer is there in it even a trace of that fatigue and any kind of grief or sorrow which could have been seen when he first entered the church. An extraordinary spiritual joy, extraordinary peace and heavenly rest, extraordinary strength and power were now reflected in each trace of his features. His face was as if glowing, was as if giving off some sort of light. Father John was ready to once again work without tiring from morning to middle of night, he had supplied himself with a store of strength for all the daily tasks and worries which lay before him.”

Father John’s devotion to the Holy Eucharist led him to encourage frequent reception of the Holy Mysteries among his people, an “unusual” practice at the time since for most Russians Holy Confession and Holy Communion were done

once a year as merely an obligation. He expressed his dismay at such attitudes: “How meagerly you take Communion, and how necessary it is to partake more frequently! Your soul is parched with hunger and thirst for grace. Think of the Samaritan woman and Jesus Christ and know how to seek the living water of grace.”

Father John also devoted much time and energy to renewing the Sacrament of Holy Confession, which at that time had also become reduced to a once a year formality. He spent hours in individual confessions, writing in 1859: “What a wonderful thing! I heard people’s confessions yesterday from 4 to 11 p.m., and even though I was a little tired, I went to bed at midnight, and having gotten up at 4:30 a.m., felt brisk and healthy! How good it is to work for the Lord! How He strengthens one—it is marvelous!”

One penitent recorded his memories of confession with Father John: “He was not content with a simple, formal confession, but embarked on an entire education, testing, and examination of the feelings of the soul and of the penitent’s religious knowledge. Sometimes he would spend hours with the penitent and, postponing the absolution, made him return again and again. As the years went by the number of penitents grew tremendously.”

By the 1890’s so many people flocked to him for Confession that Father John instituted the radical practice of group, public confessions. Accounts of those mass confessions speak of thousands of people crowded into the Cathedral around Father John who weeping would speak to the people and lead the prayers of Confession. The crowd of penitents too would be weeping, screaming, shouting out their sins in repentance, falling prostrate on the floor. It is recorded that such public Confessions would go on for two or more hours.

Also, by 1890 Father John had acquired a reputation throughout Russia not only as a holy, generous priest but as a miracle worker. In 1883 sixteen people published a letter in a local newspaper thanking God for their healing through the prayers of Father John. From that time on, thousands of the sick and suffering descended on Kronstadt seeking his help in their healing.

In his diary and letters that have been preserved, Father John reveals that all in his life was not successful and all were not supportive of his ministry. He speaks of conflicts with his Metropolitan Isidor and the church hierarchy who were suspicious and cautious of his spreading celebrity. He also wrote of jealousy and envy on the part of fellow clergy who were reluctant to allow him to serve in their churches and disagreements with his wife who resented the women who demanded his attention. Predicting the calamity of the coming Russian Revolution of 1917, he was resented by many of the intelligentsia for his increasing number of sermons which warned Russia of a coming terrible judgment of God and the need for repentance.

Father John’s health began to decline in 1906 but he continued to celebrate his daily Divine Liturgy until December 10, 1908. He fell asleep in the Lord on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1908 having received the Lord in Holy Communion till his last day. Father John was buried in the women’s monastery he had founded in St. Petersburg after a massive, public funeral. He was officially glorified as a saint by the Orthodox Church in Russia in 1988. This writer had the blessing, several years ago, of visiting the tomb of St. John in St. Petersburg, located in a basement chapel of the convent he founded. The nuns of the monastery informed me that Father John’s relics are not in the tomb but were hidden from the Communists during the Revolution and their location is unknown. The nun added: “We know his body is somewhere nearby, we feel his presence and miracles still take place here.”



Never despair in God’s mercy by whatever sins you may have been bound by the temptation of the Devil, but pray with your whole heart, with the hope of forgiveness; knock at the door of God’s mercy and it shall be opened unto you. I, a simple priest, am an example for you: however I may sometimes sin by the action of the Devil, for instance, by enmity towards a brother, whatever the cause may be, even though it may be a right cause, and I myself become thoroughly disturbed and set my brother against me, and unworthily celebrate the Holy Sacrament, not from wilful neglect, but by being myself unprepared, and by the action of the Devil; yet, after repentance, the Lord forgives all, and everything, especially after the worthy communion of the Holy Sacrament: I become white as snow, or as a wave of the sea, by the blood of Christ; the most heavenly peace dwells in my heart; it becomes light, so light, and I feel beatified. Then, indeed, I forget all troubles, anxieties, and the oppression of the enemy, I become entirely renewed, and as though risen from the dead. Do not then despair, brethren, whatever sins you may have committed, only repent and confess them with a contrite heart and humble spirit. Glory, O Lord, to Thy mercy! Glory, O Lord, to Thy long-suffering and forbearance!

The priest must be higher than the lordly haughtiness of well-born and coddled and not cringe before or fawn upon this haughtiness; he must not lower himself, not be cowardly before the powerful of this world, but hold himself with an awareness of his clerical dignity, gravely, evenly, in a pastoral manner—and serve unhurriedly, not so as to please people. He must denounce caprices, lordly arrogance, and any coldness to matters concerning the faith.

**St. John of Kronstadt**

## TRUE WISDOM

*Hieromartyr Onuphry of Kolyma (1938) Tobolsk, 1928. An ageless article that certainly applies to our life in today's world of materialism and comforts.*

One local Orthodox priest in his sermon said: "In the first centuries of Christianity, in times of persecution, the faithful prayed in the catacombs, hidden in the damp underground. Faithful Christians came to these catacombs to offer prayers despite the darkness, dampness, and frightful cold, away from their persecutors... Presently, in this church where we are praying it is warm and bright, even when it is dark and freezing outside. We are able to peacefully sing hymns of praise to God, have discussions on lessons of faith, and to partake of the Communion of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ. However, in these days of peace and quiet our churches are becoming devoid of people."

This is how Batiushka spoke, and I was struck by the truth and simplicity of his words! Really, what justification can lazy and light-minded Christians possibly have to depart from God the Source of all that is great and beautiful? What can the empty, sinful world give them? There is nothing more beautiful or perfect than God! The Word of Truth is in the Orthodox Church!

But outside of it are lies and, at best, futile and deceitful philosophies. In the world outside we find emptiness, a spirit of languor, as well as dissension, hate, and instability. Here, in the Christian world, we find tenderness, truth, love, joy which is real and stable for all time.

The light-mindedness of this Batiushka's parishioners became more apparent when I compared them to those in other cities. Here in the town of Tobolsk, for twenty thousand residents there are more than ten Orthodox churches. But in Kharkov, where I lived before, for half a million residents there were but two tiny Orthodox churches. In Sverdlovsk, the capital of the Ural provinces, there is also but one Orthodox church. On feast days, when I served in Kharkov, crowds of the faithful had to stand outside in the rain and frost, while those inside were fainting from lack of oxygen... and so many believers did not have the good fortune to be able to attend an Orthodox church at all!

For a period of seven months I was not able to pray in the temple of God. For this reason I understand from experi-

ence how criminal and terrible it is for those unfortunate light-minded people to neglect this great Sacred House of God, so valuable and easily attainable for them! My thoughts are then transported to people of other faiths, who are still unaware of the beauty of Orthodox services, the truth of Her teachings, and the joy of life in the Grace of the Church, which is freely given to the faithful in the Seven Mysteries of God through the Orthodox Church. And I came to the conclusion that, were they to accept Orthodoxy, people of other faiths would value Orthodoxy much more than we do. The unwitting words of our Saviour come to mind: *And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* (Mt 8:11-12).



There can be no justification for the negligence of these parishioners. Right here in these Orthodox churches that same Christ God proclaims His teachings and offers to partakers His Most Holy Body and Blood. Here, in the town of Tobolsk, a mere ten years ago people could not help but see true miracles with the revelation of the relics of Saint John, Wonderworker of Tobolsk and all Russia. I hear the echoes of other, frightening words of our God and

Saviour to these lazy servants: *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin... If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin.* (Jn 15:22, 24). The Lord uses all possible means to unite people to His Church and eternal blessedness, but people remove themselves from His Truth, and thus from eternal happiness.

Amid the turmoil and instability of our lives, amid major and minor events, amid human joys and sorrows there occurs, my beloved, an unseen spiritual process by which some people approach God's Kingdom, and by which others fall away from His Kingdom, according to their own volition; this is the most important activity of our earthly lives. **The world exists as long as there are still people who are able to attain eternal life.** The word of God clearly tells us that the present world will cease to exist specifically when the number of faithful Christians dwindles to a minimum: *When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Lk 18:8).

Many people have forgotten God and have become immersed in today's culture outside the Church. They do not know, poor souls, they do not understand what is most important: the word of God and Christian life. Undoubtedly man's genius will, with time, produce great achievements in the realm of science and culture. Yet how confused and horrified will all those unbelievers be when, at the very height of man's culture—Alas!—at a time of total scarcity of faith on the earth, all their achievements will be destroyed and will perish with the rest of the world. They will see the advent and the glory of that Son of man, of Whom they did not want to know, Who is and always was the Master of heaven and earth.

His Apostles, while they were alive, as well as the pastors of the Church, perpetually spoke of this: *All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.* (Mt 28:18). Blessed and truly wise is he who, with the eyes of faith, sees this inner process of people joining God and His eternal kingdom, who responds to the call of God, hastens to join His Holy Church and, with Her guidance, with the help of the Grace of God, endeavors with fear and trembling to fulfill Christ's commandments, who sees the ways of evil and in every way turns away from them (cf. Pss 1:1-4).

In this is true wisdom! But being oblivious to and straying from the path of Christ, becoming immersed only in humanistic thoughts and deeds, is ignorance and eternal death for mankind. That true man of wisdom and ascetic of Christ, the Venerable Anthony the Great says: *People are generally called intelligent through a wrong use of this word. The intelligent are not those who have studied the sayings and writings of the wise men of old, but those whose soul is intelligent, who can judge what is good and what is evil; they avoid what is evil and harms the soul and intelligently care for and practice what is good and profits the soul, greatly thanking God. It is these alone who should properly be called intelligent.*



Those who really speak about the end times are those who practice hesychasm, not relaxation. Genuine Orthodox eschatology is hesychasm.

Fr. John Romanides (+2001)

The things of the past are shadow; those of the present icon; the truth is to be found in the things of the future.

St. Maximus the Confessor

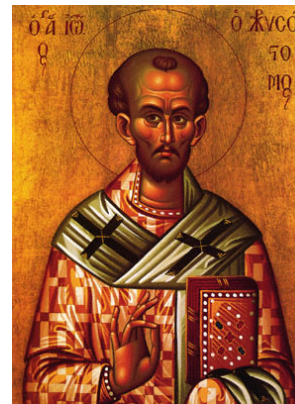
## ON THE ANTICHRIST

By Saint John Chrysostom, his explanation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. epistle of Apostle Paul, Chap. 2 verses 3-12.

*Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

[2 Thes 2:3-12]

† † †



He tells us: *Let no one of you be deceived by any means, that if the apostasy does not appear first to reveal the man of sin, the son of perdition, the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is God or that is worshipped, so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

Here he talks about the antichrist and reveals great mysteries. What is this *falling away*, this *apostasy*? The antichrist himself he calls apostasy, because he will lead many to perdition and separate them from the faith, so that, he says, if possible to scandalize even the elect. He also calls him *man of sin*. Because he will perform uncountable sufferings but he will also induce others to do the same. He calls him also son of perdition, for he will be led to perdition.

But who is he really? Is he Satan? Of course not, but a man who will receive all his energies. *And the man will be revealed* he says, *who exalted himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped* meaning the antichrist. For he will not bring some idolatric religion but he will be anti-God and he will remove all Gods and he will command that he

be worshipped as God and he will move in the temple of God, not only the one in Jerusalem, but he will be trying to prove that he is God. For he will perform great deeds and wondrous signs.

Later, wishing to show who he is, whose appearance will happen through the energies of Satan, he says *by all means, signs and monstrous lies*. In other words, he will demonstrate all manner of miraculous capabilities, but nothing will be true but they will all be done to deceive. These things he foretold, that the Christians of his time, not be deceived. “And monstrous lies he says, meaning that with miracles they will be led to lies. *And by every deception of injustice to perdition.*”

Why would God permit—one could ask—such an event to happen? And what type of divine economy is this? What would be the gain from the appearance of that antichrist, since he will come to hurt us? Fear not, my dear, but listen to him who says that he will have authority only on those who will be lost anyway, who even if he did not come (the antichrist) they would not have believed.

You ask therefore what would be the gain? He comes therefore to screen them. So that they may not say, that because Christ was saying that He is God—even if nowhere did He say so openly—but because He was declared to be so by His followers, “that is why we did not believe. Because we heard that God is one by whom everything was created, that is why we did not believe in Christ.” The antichrist will therefore exactly refute their excuse. For when he will come and they shall believe in him as he does not represent anything right but everything unlawful, they will then be silenced. For if you do not believe in Christ, so much more you should not have believed in the antichrist. For He said He was sent by the Father, he (the antichrist) however the opposite. That is why Christ said, *I came in the name of the Father and you did not receive Me. If someone else will come in his name, him you will receive.* (Jn 5:43).

But they will say, we have seen signs. However even by Christ many and great signs were made. So much more you should not have believed in him (the antichrist). Of course much has been foretold, that he will be unlawful, the son of perdition, that his presence will be through the energies of Satan, while about Him the contrary that He is the Saviour, and the bearer of good works...

For they would not receive the love of truth, to save themselves. For this, God will send them deceit to believe in falsehood, to judge all those who did not believe in the truth but prosper in injustice. *That they be judged.* He did not say “that they be cursed” for even without Him they were cursed but *to be judged* namely to be condemned in front of the dread seat of judgment for they will be unrepentant. Who would they be these people? He explained it Himself, adding *those who did not believe in the Truth. For they* He says, *did not accept the love of Truth.* For **it was both love and truth.** For these two He came to this world and because He is a lover of mankind and to reveal the truth...

The antichrist instead will come to fault the people and to destroy them. And what does he then intend to do? He will agitate everything and he will shake everything and because of them that he will shake and because of them that he will be ordering and because of the fear he will create. He will be fearsome to all, by his authority, by his brutality, by his illegal orders.

Fear not though, his authority will be in force, He tells them, on those that are doomed to be lost. For then will come Elijah to protect the faithful. This was told by Christ: *Elijah will come and restore everything...* Exactly as John was the forerunner of the first appearance of Christ, so would Elijah will be the forerunner of His second glorious appearance

and for this he has not died but is preserved.



There will be a part that holds the true faith as it was passed down by the Holy Apostles and is preserved in the Orthodox Church, but even of these a not inconsiderable part will be **Orthodox only by name**, but in their hearts they will not have that order that is demanded by faith, but they will love the present age. Although the name of “Christian” will be heard everywhere, and everywhere there will be seen churches and church orders, all this will be only appearance, while within there will be complete apostasy. On this soil the kingdom of the Antichrist will be born—and it will grow in the same spirit of appearance.

St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)



## ON CREMATION INCINERATING EVERY HUMAN TRACE OF OUR DEARLY DEPARTED...

*A "scorching" sermon by the Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus.*



It is a known fact that certain indigenous circles of internationalist mockery, who, ignoring the long-standing Christian tradition of our spotless Faith have been penetrating every form of mass communication and through them, the conscience of contemporary man, poisoning it and buckling the bases of the Faith. As such, the indifference regarding the Faith and the Christian traditions, under the influence of the aforementioned, is sending roots into the morally listless and religiously sickly consciences.

Having perceived the signs of the times, and the twists and turns of those moving suspiciously against Her, and in order to safeguard the Orthodox tradition today that the procedure of cremation of the deceased is being fully materialized and suitably prepared, our Holy Church, as a caring mother, has enlightened Her Christ-named flock in an appropriate manner, for *the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.* (Eph.4:12). She has stressed to Her members the spiritual dimensions and the consequences of such a choice in the spiritual life of the faithful, by having rejected the cremation of the deceased as an act that is incompatible to Her tradition, thus demarcating Her faith and Her respect for the human person, and by extension, for the human body, which is a temple and a dwelling of the Most Holy Spirit.

The human body is an icon of the immortal soul and a projection of eternity in this world. The burning of the body constitutes an iconoclastic act, which offends the faith in the eternity of the Church. The process of a body's deterioration should be a natural one, and never a forced one. Nature undertakes the deterioration of the body. Burning it perpetrates an act of violence on the body. The experience of the Church, which originates from the honoring of holy relics, convinces that relics are spiritually alive, which is why the Church regards burial as an eternal value, whereas cremation is not regarded as a personal right for the faithful members of the Church; it

is considered a clearly nihilistic act that denotes the end of a person, whereas on the contrary, burial marks the hope and the expectation of the Resurrection.

Regardless of the arguments it may be based on, the cremation of the deceased resides outside the Orthodox truth which has been defined by the Apostolic word: *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It (the body) is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written: The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam (Christ) was made a quickening spirit.* (1 Cor 15:42-45).

With the cremation of the deceased, society has subscribed to its nullification. What kind of relationship can a society have with Life, when a society does not accept man in his sickness, his weakness and his death; when a society incinerates its dead; when a society destroys the remembrance of their lives and the reminder to Her members; when a society regards man's beginning an artificial and selective one and his death a final and irrevocable one; when a society denies the breath of the eternal and entraps itself in the asphyxiation of the ephemeral? There have been atheists who have

**C**remation is a grave sin and a nihilistic act. Even atheists have been accentuating the remembrance of their own terrestrial "gods" by preferring to embalm their bodies—as in the cases of Lenin and Mao Zedong.

**Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus.**

sought to preserve their societies' memory of their terrestrial "gods," by actually embalming their bodies, as in the cases of Lenin and Mao Zedong.

The result of humanism without God, of civilization without values, of nihilism without a purpose, and the result of athe-

ism's confusion, has been the riddance of the person—the incineration of even the last vestige of him. The cremation of the deceased leads to the cremation of human dignity. Most assuredly, the re-kindling of this "push" (political, social, or otherwise) to accept cremation will lead to an attempt to gradually deaden people's sensor of faith.

The meaning of "eternity" is becoming distanced from our life experience. Every single thing that reminds one of it and discreetly underlines it is gradually becoming undesirable to accept and bothersome in practice. A contemporary thinker has asserted in an article of his—with regard to the anti-metaphysical furor which is being observed—that the professed, modernizing mentality of recent years is an "anti-metaphysical, monomaniacal complex" seated within a "tortuous psychological insecurity."

The practical and the utilitarian perceptions have prevailed, and have numbed the spiritual and experiential dimensions of events. The true and the beautiful have become subjugated to the nakedness and the harshness of rationalistic practice.

The detailed reference that is also made by the four Evangelists on the interment of our Lord's Godly Body proves its importance in an undeniable manner. The same is observed in the hymnography and the hymnology for the Most Holy Mother's Dormition, for Basil the Great, St. Ephraim, the Holy Martyrs—and naturally for all the faithful—in the sublime funeral services.

The celebrations for the translation of precious relics and the tradition and experience of the Church are unshakeable proof of the respect shown to the human body, which comprises a human being's one hypostasis. As such, incineration of that body is evidence of a latent disdain for it, as well as disbelief in the resurrection of dead bodies, an exo-Christian belief in *metempsychosis* (reincarnation) or the denial altogether of the existence of the soul. Consequently, our Holy Church is justified in proclaiming that the incineration of the deceased body is an actual denial of the Resurrection and a provocative proclamation of a nihilistic hue.

The funeral service is inextricably linked to the visible presence of the human body, not a heap of ashes. All of the Troparia hymns speak of the "reposed" or "asleep" person not an incinerated one when bidding them the last farewell, and when burying their body, not ashes. Hence it is easily deduced that it is not possible to perform a funeral service, either prior to a cremation, or after it, given that in the former case a burial will not follow, and in the latter, there will be no body to bury.

Uninfluenced by the secular spirit, the Church will continue to inter and bury the bodies of Her faithful, which may well also be relics, given that the incorruptibility of relics and their potential to work miracles are both proof of man's *theosis* (deification), since the Grace of God can also permeate the entire human body.

**The choice of cremation is a sin, and is proof of our erroneous relationship with the Church.** Every deviation from Her teaching is an alienation from the Grace of the living God. For those who choose cremation of their dead body—and more so with a public statement of disbelief in the eternal life, or with disrespect and disregard for the Church—we are justified in asserting that **there is absolutely no reason for the performing of a funeral service or a memorial supplication**, because what the Church is obliged to respect is the rejection of Her teaching by the deceased himself, and not the relatives' possible desire (usually for social reasons) to hold a funeral or memorial service.

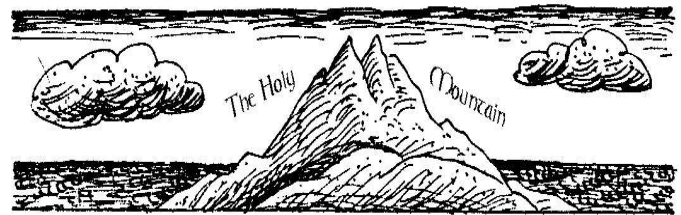
These services presuppose faith and hope in the afterlife by the deceased, and his respect for the Church. Services are not held for social purposes; they entail prayers and extensive supplications before God by the Church, who expresses Her love for the departed person as faith in the Lord, as hope for salvation, as desire for his partaking in the resurrection

for eternity, and as Her petition for the forgiveness of his sins by the Lord.

How can we chant *Blessed is the path that you walk on...* to someone who declares faith in his post-mortem nonexistence? Consequently, it is impermissible for our Most Holy Church to diminish the absolute character of this teaching of Hers, given that any possible related act would weaken Her relationship with the Truth.

Accordingly, in our God-saved Metropolis and with absolute respect—both towards the free choice of free persons, but also towards the commandments and the dogmas of our Most Holy Church—we hereby make known to everyone that **we will not be permitting the performing of funeral or memorial services to whoever wittingly chooses the cremation of his body**, thus actually denying the Resurrection of the dead. This is the most silencing response to all the sycophantic rumors that the Church's negative stance supposedly involves financial reasons.

+ Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus



Consider those nightmares and turmoil to be a storm roused by the devil's jealousy. The devil wants to intimidate you in the beginning of your spiritual journey, so that you say, "If in the beginning of my journey I encounter such temptations that are beyond my strength, who could possibly endure until the end?" In this way, Satan works his evil craft with experience and skill, making thus a long list of damned souls. But we know his traps through experience. In the beginning the journey is difficult, but afterwards come repose, joy, and high hopes of salvation. *Beholding the sea of life rising with the surging waves of temptations, I fly to Thy calm haven and cry to Thee: Raise my life from corruption, O most merciful One.* (Eirmos from the Ochoechos, plagal second tone.) Tempests and fair weather, war and peace, health and illness, gain and loss—these characterize the journey of every soul. The end of this journey is death.

So, blessed soul, do not lose heart along the road of your salvation. Together we shall walk the road, helping each other. The grace of God, which heals weaknesses and makes up for deficiencies, will be with us, girding our flaccid thoughts and anointing us with patience, until the command comes from the Ruler of All that we leave our body here and that our soul ascend to the heavens.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou  
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

## HOMOSEXUALITY & ENDORSERS

By Anthony of the Desert (for more of Anthony's material please visit [Churchfathertheology.com](http://Churchfathertheology.com)).

A few weeks ago, conservative Mormon lawmakers, in Salt Lake City, voted to enact a pro-homosexual ordinance. Top musical acts (such as Bruce Springsteen and Pearl Jam) cancelled concerts in North Carolina due to the passage of a so-called anti-homosexual law (they were joined by major corporations pulling jobs and business from the state). During ice hockey's early round of the Stanley Cup playoffs, a player had to issue a public apology and was suspended for one game after uttering a homosexual slur. Given this rampant adoption of homosexuality into the fabric of American culture, we need to acknowledge God's teaching.

Modern society asserts that the Bible merely damns homosexuality in Old Testament books. How this would somehow obviate the authoritative denunciation of said sexual immortality functions as fictional absurdity; Scripture is unequivocal: *You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination.* (Lev 18:22, emphasis added). Moreover, in furtherance of the fact that homosexuality is heinous there resides both the sentence of death—*If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both committed an abomination. They shall be put to death.* (Lev 20:13—and the well-known narrative involving Sodom and Gomorrah: *Now before they went to sleep, the men of the city, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. Thus they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.' But Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, 'By no means, my brethren, do not act wickedly. I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men.'... Now the men said to Lot, 'Have you anyone else here in the city: son-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone?—then take them out of this place! For we will destroy this place, because their outcry has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.'... Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah.* (Gen 19:4-8, 12-13, 24).

Let us observe several keys within these passages:

[1] male residents of Sodom demanded sexual conduct with other men (v.5) and were known as Sodomites (v.4, a reference to not only their geographical domain but also to their engagement in sexual deviancy),

[2] in response to this monstrous requisition Lot offered his two virgin daughters for sexual molestation (v.8),

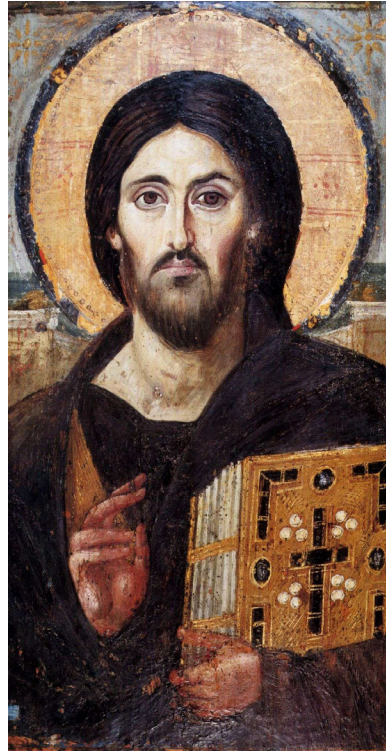
[3] the "men" who warned Lot about the destruction of Sodom, due to its rampant homosexuality, were angels (vv.1, 12-13) who acted under the Lord Jesus Christ's commands (v.13), and

[4] the Son of God utterly destroyed Sodom (v. 24), both as a consequence of homosexual behavior and the city's toleration of this wickedness. This last point is crucial: Condemnation from God befalls not only the homosexual act but also applies to its acceptance.

As if to cement the utter damnation of homosexuality, there dwells a second account of condemnation in Old Testament verse: *As they were comforting their heart, men of the city, sons of lawlessness surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man saying, 'Bring out the man who entered your house, that we may know him!' But the man, the master of the house went out to them and said to them, 'No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this foolishness. Look, here is my virgin daughter and the man's concubine, I will lead them out now. Subdue and control them, do with them what is good in your eyes; but to this man do not do such a thoughtless thing.'* (Jdgs 19:22-24).

Proponents of homosexuality further seek to minimize Sacred Scripture's categorical proscription via false assertion that only a sole New Testament passage dooms homosexuality; even if accurate, would not an unqualified scriptural prohibition suffice? In Romans we find: *"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness..."* (Rom 1:26-29). Stronger verbiage cannot be employed to expose homosexuality as: *vile passions* (v.26), *against nature* (v.26), *shameful* (v. 27), *error* (v.27), *debased mind* (v.28), *not fitting* (v.28), *unrighteousness* (v. 29), *immorality* (v. 29), *wickedness* (v. 29), *evil-mindedness* (v. 29), et al.

The New Testament then continues the condemnation of homosexual acceptance:



1. The sexual immorality that is homosexuality, encompassing also a sin against one's own body, is amongst the worst sin (1 Cor 6:18).

2. The abomination of one act of homosexuality causes tens of thousands to fall (1 Cor 10:8).

3. The homosexual, and toleration of homosexuality, prevents salvation (1 Cor 6:9; also, Gal 5:19, 21 and Eph 5:5).

4. We must not even associate with homosexuality (1 Cor 5:9).

5. We must not even speak about homosexuality (Eph 5:3).

6. Approving of others "being who/what they are," in terms of homosexuality, functions the same as if engaging in a homosexual act: *Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.* (Rom 1:32).

Sacred Scripture states: *Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions you were taught, whether by word or our epistle* (2 Thess 2:15). We **must** love the person and absolutely condemn the sin.



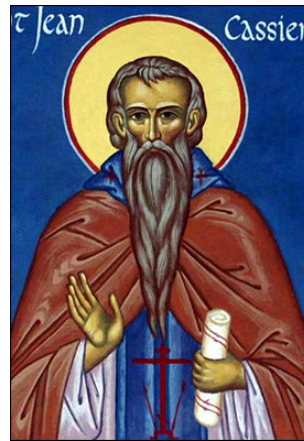
Jesus Christ is the faithful witness or the faithful martyr for two more reasons. The first one is because He gave witness to the Truth, as for example when Pilot asked Him, *Who are you?* and He answered, *For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.* (Jn: 18:37). Poor Pilate asks, *What is truth?* (18:38) and Christ does not answer. Some have ventured to say that Pilate should have asked, "Who is the truth?" and that he would have probably received a response.

At any rate, the truth is a great subject. This is why we are struggling, to come to the truth. Poor Pilate had the entire Truth in front of him. The Truth is not some abstract idea or thought. The Truth is a Person. I am the Truth, Christ announced. He did not say, "I came to tell you a few nice things about the truth to help you along." He said; *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life!* (Jn 14:6)

Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

## ON AERIAL POWERS

St. John Cassian ca. 360-435, *Conferences* 8.12.



The atmosphere which extends between heaven and earth is ever filled with a thick crowd of spirits, which do not fly about in it quietly or idly, so that most fortunately the divine providence has withdrawn them from human sight. For through fear of their attacks, or horror at the forms, into which they transform and turn themselves at will, men would either be driven out of their wits by an

insufferable dread, and faint away, from inability to look on such things with bodily eyes, or else would daily grow worse and worse, and be corrupted by their constant example and by imitating them.

Thus, there would arise a sort of dangerous familiarity and deadly intercourse between men and the unclean powers of the air, whereas those crimes which are now committed among men, are concealed either by walls and enclosures or by distance and space, or by some shame and confusion; but if they could always look on them with open face, they would be stimulated to a greater pitch of insanity, as there would not be a single moment in which they would see them desist from their wickedness, since no bodily weariness, or occupation in business or care for their daily food (as in our case) forces them sometimes even against their will to desist from the purposes they have begun to carry out.



**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.**

## Ἡλίας ὁ Θεσβίτης, ὁ Πύρινος Ἅγιος

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου, ἀπὸ τὸ «Γίγαντες Ταπεινοί», ἐκδόσεις «Ἀκρίτας» 2000.



Σήμερα 20 Ἰουλίου εἶναι ἡ μνήμη τοῦ προφήτη Ἡλία. Αὐτὸς ὁ ἅγιος ξεχωρίζει ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἄλλους ἅγιους, καὶ μὲ ὅλο πὸν ἦτανε ἄνθρωπος, φαίνεται σὰν κάποιον ὑπερφυσικὸ καὶ μυστηριώδες πλάσμα, πὸν ἔρχεται καὶ ξανάρχεται στὸν κόσμον. Οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι περιμένανε νὰ ξανάρθει στὸν κόσμον, γιὰ τοῦτο θαρρούσανε πὸς ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος

ἦτανε ὁ Ἡλίας. Καὶ τότε πὸν ρώτησε ὁ Χριστὸς τοὺς μαθητὲς του «Ποιός, λένε, πὸς εἶμαι, οἱ ἄνθρωποι», τοῦ ἀπαντήσανε πὸς λέγανε πὸς ἦτανε ὁ Ἡλίας ἢ κάποιος ἄλλος ἀπὸ τοὺς προφήτες.

Ὁ προφήτης Μαλαχίας, πὸν ἔζησε πολὺ ὕστερότερα ἀπὸ τὸν Ἡλία, λέγει: «Τάδε λέγει Κύριος παντοκράτωρ καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστελῶ ὑμῖν Ἡλίαν τὸν Θεσβίτην, πρὶν ἢ ἔλθειν τὴν ἡμέραν Κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ», καὶ πολλοὶ το ἔξηγήσανε πὸς ὁ Ἡλίας θάρθη πάλι στὸν κόσμον πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία καὶ θὰ μαρτυρήσει. Σὲ ὅλα μοιάζει μ' αὐτὸν ὁ Πρόδρομος, γι' αὐτὸ οἱ ἀπόστολοι κ' οἱ ἄλλοι Ἑβραῖοι ὑποπτευόντανε μὴπως ἦτανε ὁ Ἡλίας ξαναγεννημένος.

Ὑστερα ἀπὸ τὴ Μεταμόρφωση, σὰν κατεβήκανε ἀπὸ τὸ βουνὸ οἱ τρεῖς μαθητάδες μὲ τὸν Χριστό, τὸν ρωτήσανε: «Οἱ γραμματεῖς λένε πὸς ὁ Ἡλίας πρέπει νάρθει πρῶτα. Ἐσὺ τί λές;» Κι' ὁ Χριστὸς τοὺς ἀποκρίθηκε: «Ὁ Ἡλίας ἔρχεται πρῶτα καὶ θὰ τ' ἀποκαταστήσει ὅλα ἀλλὰ σὰς λέγω πὸς ὁ Ἡλίας ἦρθε κιόλας, καὶ δὲν τὸν γνωρίσανε, ἀλλὰ τοῦ κάνανε ὅσα θελήσανε· τὰ ἴδια μέλλεται νὰ πάθει καὶ ὁ Γιὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπ' αὐτούς.» Τότε καταλάβανε οἱ μαθητὲς πὸς γιὰ τὸν Ἰωάννη τὸν Βαπτιστὴ τοὺς εἶπε. Ρωτήσανε οἱ μαθητὲς τὸν Χριστὸ γιὰ τὸν Ἡλία, ἐπειδὴ τὸν εἶχανε δεῖ πρὶν ἀπὸ λίγο, ἀπάνω στὸ Θαβῶρ, νὰ φανερώναται μαζί μὲ τὸν Μωυσῆ, τὴν ὥρα πὸν μεταμορφώθηκε ὁ Χριστὸς, καὶ νὰ μιλά μαζί του, μὲ ὅλο πὸν εἶχε ζήσει σ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμον πρὶν ἀπὸ 800 χρόνια. Ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὴ Σταύρωση, σὰν φώναξε ὁ Χριστὸς «Ἡλί ἡλί, λαμὰ σαβαχθανί», κάποιοι ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἑβραῖους πὸν στεκόντανε κοντὰ στὸ σταυρὸ λέγανε πὸς θὰ φώναζε τὸν Ἡλία νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει: «Τινὲς δὲ τῶν ἐκεῖ ἐστώτων ἀκούσαντες ἔλεγον ὅτι

Ἡλίαν φωνεῖ οὗτος.» (Ματθ. 27:47). Παντοῦ πλανιέται ὁ ἴσκιος του.

Ὁ προφήτης Ἡλίας γεννήθηκε πρὸ 2.770 χρόνια. Πατρίδα του ἦτανε ἓνας τόπος πὸν τὸν λέγανε Θεσβίτη. Στὰ σύνορα τῆς Ἀραβίας, κ' ἀπὸ τοῦτο λέγεται Θεσβίτης. Τὸν πατέρα του τὸν λέγανε Σωβάκ, ἀπὸ τὸ γένος τοῦ Ἀαρῶν. Τὴ νύχτα πὸν γεννήθηκε εἶδε ὁ πατέρας του πὸς πῆγανε νὰ τὸν χαιρετήσουνε κάποιοι ἄνθρωποι μὲ ἄσπρα ρούχα καὶ πὸς φασκιώσανε μὲ φωτιά τὸ νήπιο καὶ τοῦ δίνανε νὰ φάγει φωτιά. Σὰν μεγάλωσε, ἔγινε ἓνας ἄντρας τρομερὸς κ' ἔτρεχε παντοῦ καὶ ξόρκιζε τοὺς Ἑβραῖους νὰ γυρίσουνε στὸν ἀληθινὸ Θεὸ πὸν εἶχανε ἀρνηθεῖ καὶ προσκυνούσανε τὸν Βάαλ. Φωτιά ἔβγαινε ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα του καὶ δὲν στεκότανε μέρα-νύχτα, ἀλλὰ ὀλοένα μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὴν πίστη τ' ἀληθινοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ τοῦτο ὀνομάσθηκε «ζηλωτής»: «**Καὶ ἀνέστη Ηλίας προφήτης ὡς πῦρ καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ ὡς λαμπὰς ἐκαίετο.**» (Σοφ. Σειρᾶχ 48:1). Φωτιά ἔτρωγε νήπιο, μὲ φασκιὲς ἀπὸ φωτιά ἦτανε τυλιγμένος, φωτιά ἔβγαινε ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα του, φωτιά ἔπεσε στὸ θυσιαστήριο μὲ τὴν προσευχή του, φωτιά ἔκαψε τὴ γῆ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνεβροχιά ἐπειδὴ τὸ ζήτησε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ, φωτιά ἦτανε τ' ἀμάξι πὸν τὸν ἄρπαξε στὸν οὐρανὸ.

Τὸν καιρὸ ἐκεῖνον ἦτανε βασιλιάς τῶν Ἑβραίων ὁ Ἀχαάβ, ἄνθρωπος ἀσεβῆς, πὸν προσκυνούσε τὸν Βάαλ, κ' εἶχε γυναίκα τὴν Ἰεζάβελ, μία τίγρη αἰμοβόρα πὸν κυνηγοῦσε τὸν Ἡλία νὰ τὸν σκοτώσει, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἔπαυε ἐλέγχοντάς τὴν γιὰ τὴν ἀπιστία της καὶ γιὰ τὰ κακουργήματα πὸν ἔκανε. Καὶ σὲ τοῦτο μοιάζει ὁ Ἡλίας μὲ τὸν Πρόδρομο, πὸν τὸν κατάρχευε ἡ Ἡρωδιάδα. Γιὰ νὰ φανεῖ ἡ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν παρακάλεσε ὁ Ἡλίας νὰ μὴ βρέξει. Καὶ σφαλίσθηκε ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ δὲν ἔπεσε σταλαγματιὰ στὴ γῆ. Κ' ἔγινε λόγος Κυρίου στὸν Ἡλία νὰ πάγει νὰ κρυφθεῖ σ' ἓνα ξεροπόταμο πὸν τὸ λέγανε Χοράθ. Κι' ὁ Ἡλίας πῆγε στὸ ξεροπόταμο, καὶ τὰ κοράκια τοῦ πηγαίνανε ψωμὶ καὶ κρέας κ' ἔτρωγε, κ' ἔπινε ἀπὸ τὸ νερὸ πὸν στεκότανε στὶς λακκοῦβες τοῦ ξεροπόταμου.

Ὑστερα ἀπὸ λίγες μέρες ξεράθηκε ὀλότελα τὸ ξεροπόταμο καὶ τοῦ λέγει ὁ Θεός: «Σήκω καὶ σύρε σὲ μία πολιτεία πὸν τὴ λένε Σάρεφθα κοντὰ στὴ Σιδώνα, κ' ἐγὼ θὰ προστάξω μία χήρα γυναίκα νὰ σὲ θρέφει.» Πῆγε λοιπὸν καὶ στάθηκε ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν καστρόπορτα, καὶ βλέπει μία γυναίκα πὸν μάζευε λίγα ξυλαράκια, κ' ἔκραξε ὁ προφήτης καὶ τῆς εἶπε: «Σύρε καὶ φέρε μου μία στάλα νερὸ νὰ πιῶ.» Καὶ πηγαινάμενη ἡ γυναίκα νὰ φέρει τὸ νερὸ, τῆς φώναξε ὁ Ἡλίας: «Φέρε μου καὶ λίγο ψωμὶ νὰ φάγω.» Τοῦ λέγει ἡ γυναίκα: «Ὁ Θεὸς ξέρει πὸς δὲν ἔχω ἄλλο τίποτα παρὰ μονάχα μία δρᾶκα (μονοχειρῖα) ἀλεύρι στὴν κρήνα (σεντουκάκι) καὶ λίγο λάδι στὸ λαδικὸ, καὶ μαζεῦω τώρα λίγα ξύλα νὰ κάνω μία μικρὴ πίτα νὰ φάγω ἐγὼ καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ

μου κ' ὕστερα νὰ πεθάνουμε.» Τότε τῆς λέγει ὁ Ἥλι-  
ας: «Μὴ φοβᾶσαι, μόνο σύρε καὶ κᾶνε καθὼς εἶπα,  
ἀλλὰ φέρε μου πρῶτα ἓνα κομμάτι πίτα, κ' ὕστερα νὰ  
φᾶς ἐσὺ καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ σου· γιατί, νὰ τὶ λέγει ὁ Κύριος:  
Ἀπὸ τὸν κουβά σου δὲν θὰ λείψει τ' ἀλεύρι κι' ἀπὸ  
τὸ λαδόμπρικό σου δὲν θὰ λιγοστέψει τὸ λάδι, ὡς τὴν  
ἡμέρα ποὺ θὰ στείλω βροχὴ ἀπάνω στὴ γῆ.»

Πῆγε λοιπὸν ἡ γυναίκα κ' ἔκανε ὅπως τῆς παραγγέλιε  
ὁ Ἥλιος, καὶ τὸν πῆρε στὸ σπίτι τῆς, κι' ἀπὸ κείνη τῆ  
μέρα δὲ λιγόστεψε τ' ἀλεύρι μῆτε τὸ λάδι σώθηκε, κατὰ  
τὸ λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀφοῦ πέρασε καιρὸς, ἀρρώστησε  
βαρεῖα ὁ γυιὸς τῆς χήρας καὶ πέθανε. Κ' ἡ μάνα του ἡ  
καημένη, ἀπὸ τὴν πίκρα τῆς, εἶπε στὸν Ἥλια: «Ἄνθρωπε  
τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἦρθες στὸ σπίτι μου γιὰ νὰ τοῦ θυμίσεις τὶς  
ἁμαρτίες μου καὶ νὰ πάρει τὸ παιδί μου;» Τῆς λέγει  
ὁ Ἥλιος: «Δῶσε μου τὸ γυιό σου.» Τὸν πῆρε λοιπὸν

στὴν ἀγκαλιά του καὶ  
τὸν ἀνέβασε στ' ἀνώγι  
ποὺ κοιμότανε, καὶ τὸν  
ἔβαλε ἀπάνω στὸ στρω-  
σίδι ποὺ κοιμότανε ὁ ἴδι-  
ος καὶ φύσηξε τρεῖς φορὲς  
στὸ πρόσωπό του κ' ἔκρα-  
ξε στὸ Θεὸ κ' εἶπε: «Ἄς  
γυρίσει πίσω ἡ ψυχὴ σὲ  
τοῦτο τὸ παιδάριο.» Κ'  
ἔγινε καθὼς εἶπε, καὶ ζω-  
ντάνεψε τὸ παιδάριο. Τό-  
τε φώναξε τὴ μητέρα του  
καὶ τῆς τόδωσε, λέγοντάς  
τῆς: «Νά, ζεῖ πάλι ὁ γυιὸς  
σου.» Κ' εἶπε ἡ γυναίκα:

«Τώρα κατάλαβα πὼς εἶσαι ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ, κι' ὁ  
λόγος τοῦ εἶναι ἀληθινὸς στὸ στόμα σου.»

Σὰν περάσανε τρία χρόνια, εἶπε ὁ Θεὸς στὸν Ἥλια:  
«Πῆγαινε στὸν Ἀχαάβ καὶ παρουσιάσου μπροστά του,  
καὶ θὰ δώσω βροχὴ στὸ πρόσωπο τῆς γῆς.» Τράβηξε  
λοιπὸν ὁ Ἥλιος καὶ πῆγε στὰ μέρη τῆς Σαμάρειας, κ'  
ἦτανε μεγάλῃ πείνα. Ὁ Ἀχαάβ εἶχε ἓναν οἰκονόμο τοῦ  
παλατιοῦ του ποὺ τὸν λέγανε Ἀβδιού, ἄνθρωπο ποὺ  
πίστευε στὸ Θεὸ καὶ ποὺ προστάτευε τοὺς λίγους ποὺ  
προσκυνούσανε τὸν ἀληθινὸ Θεό, κ' εἶχε κρύψει ἓκατὸ  
παπάδες σὲ δυὸ σπηλιές καὶ τοὺς ἔθρεφε κρυφά. Εἶπε  
λοιπὸν μία μέρα ὁ βασιλιάς στὸν Ἀβδιὸν νὰ βγοῦνε μαζὶ  
στὸν κάμπο ἴσως βροῦνε λίγο χορτάρι γιὰ τ' ἄλογά τους  
νὰ μὴν ψοφήσουνε. Ὁ Ἀχαάβ τράβηξε ἄλλοῦ, κι' ὁ Ἀβδι-  
οῦ τράβηξε σ' ἄλλο μέρος. Καὶ κεῖ ποὺ περπατοῦσε ὁ  
Ἀβδιού, βλέπει τὸν Ἥλια, καὶ σὰν τὸν εἶδε τὸν γνώρισε  
κ' ἔπεσε χάμω καὶ τὸν προσκύνησε κ' εἶπε: «Ἐσὺ εἶσαι,  
ἀφέντη μου, ὁ Ἥλιος;» Τοῦ λέγει ὁ προφήτης: «Ἐγὼ  
εἶμαι· μόνο σύρε καὶ πὲς στὸν ἀφέντη σου τὸν Ἀχαάβ  
πὼς θέλω νὰ τὸν ἀνταμώσω.»



Κι' ὁ καημένος ὁ Ἀβδιὸν στενοχωρήθηκε καὶ τοῦ  
λέγει: «Ἀφέντη μου, τόσο ἀψηφᾶς τὴ ζωὴ σου καὶ  
θέλεις νὰ δεῖς τὸν Ἀχαάβ; Αὐτὸς δὲν ἄφησε τόπο  
ποὺ νὰ μὴ στείλει νὰ σὲ ζητήσῃ. Καὶ καλὰ νὰ πάγω  
νὰ τοῦ πῶ πὼς τὸν θέλεις, μὰ ἂν ἔρθῃ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ  
Θεοῦ καὶ σὲ ἀρπάξῃ καὶ δὲν σὲ βρεῖ ὁ Ἀχαάβ καὶ  
πεῖ πὼς τοῦ εἶπα ψέματα, θὰ μὲ σκοτώσῃ.» Τοῦ λέ-  
γει ὁ Ἥλιος: «Στ' ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ, πῆγαινε νὰ κάνεις  
ὅπως σου εἶπα καὶ μὴ φοβᾶσαι.» Κι' ὁ Ἀβδιὸν πῆγε  
νὰ βρεῖ τὸν Ἀχαάβ.

Καὶ σὰν εἶδε ὁ βασιλιάς ἀπὸ μακριὰ τὸν Ἥλια, τοῦ  
φώναξε: «Ἐσὺ εἶσαι ποῦ παραπλανᾶς τὸ λαό;» Τοῦ  
λέγει ὁ Ἥλιος: «Δὲν εἶμαι ἐγὼ ποὺ παραπλανῶ τὸ  
λαό, ἀλλὰ ἐσὺ κ' οἱ δικοί σου ποὺ ἀρνηθήκατε τὸν  
Κύριο καὶ προσκυνᾶτε τὸν Βάαλ. Λοιπὸν στείλε τώρα  
καὶ σύναξε ὅλους τοὺς παπάδες τῶν εἰδώλων, τοὺς

παπάδες τῆς ντροπῆς,  
νάρθουνε στὸ βουνὸ  
Καρμήλι.» Κι' ὁ βασι-  
λιάς ἔκανε ὅπως τοῦπε  
ὁ Ἥλιος. Καὶ σὰν μα-  
ζευθήκανε οἱ ἀλλαξό-  
πιστοι, γυρίζῃ καὶ τοὺς  
λέγει ὁ Ἥλιος: «Ὡς πότε  
θὰ κουτσαίνετε πότε  
ἀπάνω στόνα ποδάρι  
καὶ πότε ἀπάνω στάλλο;  
Ἄν εἶναι Θεὸς ὁ Κύριος,  
πηγαίνετε ξοπίσω του,  
κι' ἂν εἶναι θεὸς ὁ Βάαλ,  
πηγαίνετε μαζί του.» Κι'  
ὁ λαὸς δὲν εἶπε τίποτα.

Τοὺς λέγει πάλι ὁ Ἥλιος: «Ἐγὼ ἀπόμεινα ὀλομόναχος  
προφήτης τοῦ Θεοῦ, κ' οἱ παπάδες ποὺ προσκυνᾶνε  
τὸν Βάαλ εἶναι χίλιοι διακόσοι. Φέρτε λοιπὸν δυὸ  
μοσχάρια, κι' ἄς πάρουμε ἀπὸ ἓνα κι' ἄς τὰ σφάξουμε  
κι' ἄς κάνουμε προσευχὴ, ὁ καθένας στὸ θεὸ του, κι'  
ὅποιος θεὸς ρίξει φωτιὰ καὶ κάψει τὸ βόδι, ἐκεῖνος  
εἶναι ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεός.» Κι' ὁ λαὸς φώναξε: «Σωστὸς  
εἶναι ὁ λόγος σου.»

Πῆραν λοιπὸν τὸ ἓνα το βόδι οἱ χοτζάδες τοῦ  
Βάαλ καὶ κάνανε θυσιαστήριο καὶ τὸ σφάξανε καὶ  
τριγυρίζανε γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θυσιαστήριο ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶν  
ὡς τὸ μεσημέρι καὶ βγάζανε μεγάλες φωνές καὶ λέγανε:  
«Ἄκουσέ μας, Βάαλ, ἄκουσέ μας καὶ ρίξε φωτιὰ.» Μὰ  
ἀδιαφόρετα. Τότε τοὺς λέγει ὁ Ἥλιος: «Φωνάξτε πιὸ  
δυνατά, γιατί μπορεῖ ὁ θεὸς σας νὰ κοιμᾶται ἢ νάχει  
πιᾶσει κουβέντα.» Καὶ κείνοι κράξανε καὶ ἰδρώννα-  
νε καὶ κόβανε τὰ κρέατά τους μὲ τὰ μαχαίρια καὶ μὲ  
τὰ χαντζάρια, ὡς τὴν ὥρα ποὺ κόντευε νὰ βασιλέψῃ  
ὁ ἥλιος. Τότε τοὺς λέγει ὁ Ἥλιος: «Παραμερίσατε νὰ  
κάνω κ' ἐγὼ τὴν προσευχὴ μου.» Πῆρε δώδεκα πέτρες,

κατὰ τὶς δώδεκα φυλὲς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, κ' ἔχτισε θυσιαστήριον, κ' ἔσκαψε λάκκον βαθὺν ὀλόγυρον, καὶ λιάνισεν τ' ἄλλο βόδι καὶ τόβαλε ἀπάνω στὰ ξύλα καὶ λέγει στὸ λαό: «Πάρετε τέσσερες καρδιάρες νερὸ καὶ χύσετε τὶς ἀπάνω στὸ βόδι καὶ στὶς σχίζεις τὰ ξύλα.» Καὶ τὸ κάνανε. Κ' εἶπε: «Δευτερώσατε», καὶ δευτερώσανε. Κ' εἶπε: «Τριτέψετε», καὶ τριτέψανε. Καὶ γέμισεν νερὸ ὁ λάκκος καὶ ξεχειλίσει.

Καὶ τότε γύρισε ὁ Ἥλιος κατὰ τὸν οὐρανὸ κ' εἶπε: «Κύριε, ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ Ἀβραάμ καὶ τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ τοῦ Ἰακώβ, ἄκουσέ με σήμερον καὶ ρίξε φωτιά, γιὰ νὰ γνωρίσει ἐτοῦτος ὁ λαὸς πὼς ἐσὺ εἶσαι Κύριος ὁ ἀληθινὸς Θεός, καὶ πὼς ἐγὼ εἶμαι δοῦλος δικός σου, καὶ πὼς γιὰ σένα ἔκανα ὅ,τι ἔκανα. Ἄκουσε μέ, Κύριε, ἄκουσε μέ καὶ ρίξε φωτιά, γιὰ νὰ καταλάβει ὁ λαὸς ὅτι εἶσαι ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ἀληθινὸς καὶ πὼς ἐσὺ γύρισες τὴν καρδιά του πρὸς ἐσένα.» Καὶ παρευθὺς ἔπεσε φωτιά ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ κατάφαγε τὸ βόδι, τὰ ξύλα καὶ τὸ νερὸ καὶ τὶς πέτρες, ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ χῶμα ἔγλειψε ἢ φωτιά. Τότε ὁ λαὸς ἔπεσε καὶ προσκύνησε καὶ φώναξε: «Ἀληθινὰ αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ ἀληθινὸς Θεός.»

Κι' ὁ Ἥλιος ἔφυγε ἀπὸ κεῖ, ἐπειδὴ ἡ Ἰεζάβελ ἔστειλε νὰ τὸν σκοτώσουνε, καὶ τράβηξε μέσα ἀπὸ βουνὰ καὶ πέτρες νὰ πάγει στὸ βουνὸ Χωρήβ, ποὺ εἶναι κολλημένο μὲ τὸ Σινά. Κι' ἀπὸ τὴν κούραση ἔπεσε μισοπεθαμένος καὶ κοιμήθηκε κάτω ἀπὸ ἕνα δεντρί ποὺ τὸ λέγανε οἱ ντόπιοι ραθμῶν κ' οἱ Ἕλληνες τὸ λέγανε ἄρκευθο, κ' εἶναι σὰν τὸ κέδρο. Καὶ πῆγε ἕνας ἄγγελος καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Σήκω καὶ φάγε, γιατί ἔχεις πολλὴν δρόμον νὰ πάρης.» Καὶ σὰν σηκώθηκε, εἶδε κοντὰ στὸ μέρος ποῦχε βάλει τὸ κεφάλι του, ἕνα κριθαρόψωμο κ' ἕνα λαγῆνι νερό, κ' ἔφαγε κι' ἀποκοιμήθηκε πάλι. Τρεῖς φορὲς τὸν σήκωσε ὁ ἄγγελος. Καὶ φτάνοντας στὸ Χωρήβ, βρῆκε ἕνα σπήλαιον κοντὰ στὸ μέρος ποὺ εἶχε δεῖ τὸν βᾶτο ὁ Μωυσῆς ὅπου ἄναβε χωρὶς νὰ καίγεται, καὶ μπῆκε μέσα. Κι' ἄκουσε φωνὴ νὰ τοῦ λέγει: «Τί κάθεται αὐτοῦ, Ἥλιος;» Κ' εἶπε ὁ Ἥλιος: «Ἀγάπησε ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν Κύριον Παντοκράτορα, γιὰτὶ σὲ ἀφήσανε οἱ γιοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, γκρεμίσανε τὶς ἐκκλησίες σου, σκοτώσανε τοὺς παπὰδες σου, κ' ἐγὼ ἀπόμεινα καταμόναχος καὶ ζητᾶνε νὰ πάρουνε τὴ ζωὴ μου.» Τοῦ λέγει ὁ Κύριος: «*Ἀὔριο θάβγεις νὰ σταθεῖς μπροστά μου στὸ βουνὸ ἐτοῦτο καὶ θὰ σηκωθεῖ ἄνεμος δυνατός, ποὺ θὰ χαλᾶ τὰ βουνὰ καὶ τὶς πέτρες, ἀλλὰ δὲν θάμει ἐκεῖ μέσα ὕστερα θὰ γίνῃ σεισμός, μὰ κ' ἐκεῖ δὲν θάμει κ' ὕστερα θὰ γίνῃ φωτιά, κι' οὔτε ἐκεῖ θάμει κ' ὕστερα θὰ σφυρῖξῃ ἕνα λεπτὸ ἀγέρι, κ' ἐκεῖ θάμει.*»

Καὶ σὰν τάκουσε αὐτὰ ὁ Ἥλιος, βγῆκε ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴ σπηλιὰ καὶ σκέπασε τὸ πρόσωπό του μὲ τὴν προβιά ποὺ φοροῦσε. Κι' ἄκουσε πάλι τὴ φωνὴ καὶ τὸν πρόσταξε νὰ γυρίσει πίσω καὶ νὰ πάγει στὴ Δαμασκό. Κ' ἐπίασε νὰ περπατᾶ στὴν ἔρημον σὰν ἀγρίμι. Καὶ φτάνοντας

στὴν Παλαιστίνη, εἶδε ἕνα ζευγολάτη ποὺ ὄργωνε τὸ χωράφι του, κι' ὁ Ἥλιος ἔρριξε τὴ γούνα τοῦ ἀπάνω του. Κι' ὁ ξοχάρης ἄφησε τ' ἀλέτρι καὶ τὰ βόδια καὶ πῆγε μαζί μὲ τὸν Ἥλιον. Αὐτὸς ἦταν ὁ Ἐλισσαῖος ποὺ γίνηκε μαθητὴς του, καὶ καταστάθηκε μέγας προφήτης, καὶ δὲν ἀποχωρισθῆκανε ὡς τὴ μέρα ποὺ ἄρπαξε τὸ δάσκαλό του ἕνα πύρινον ἀμάξι, καὶ τούριξε τὴ γούνα του μὲ τὴν ὁποία χτύπησε τὸν Ἰορδάνη καὶ πέρασε χωρὶς νὰ βραχεῖ.

Ὁ προφήτης Ἥλιος εἶναι πολὺ τιμημένος ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς τοὺς Ἕλληνες. Ὅπου νὰ πᾶς θὰ δεῖς ρημοκλήσια τοῦ ἀπάνω στὶς κορφὲς τῶν βουνῶν, ἀπὸ τὰ μικρὰ ὡς τὰ μεγάλα. Ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος φυλάγει τὴ θάλασσα κι' ὁ προφήτης Ἥλιος τὰ βουνὰ. Μέσα στὰ ρημοκλήσια τοῦ εἶναι ζωγραφισμένοι ἀπὸ κείνους τοὺς παληοὺς μαστόρους σὰν τσομπάνος μὲ τὴ φλοκάτα, μὲ μαλλιά καὶ γένια ἀνακατεμένα καὶ στριφτὰ σὰν ἀγοριόπρινος, γερακομύτης σὰν ἀητός, μὲ μάτια φλογερά. Κάθεται ἀπάνω σε μία πέτρα, μπροστά σε μία σπηλιά, σὰν τὸ ὄρνιο στὴ φωλιά του. Ἔχει ἀκουμπισμένο τὸ κεφάλι του στὴν ἀπαλάμη του, καὶ κοιτάζει κατὰ πίσω, σὰν νὰ ἀκούγει τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ ποὺ τοῦ μιλά μέσα σὲ κείνα τὰ ἄσπλαχνα κράκουρα. Ἀπὸ πάνω του πετὰ ὁ κόρακας μ' ἕνα κομμάτι κρέας, καὶ χυμίζει κατὰ κάτω νὰ τοῦ τὸ δώσει.

Ὅπως εἶναι ζωγραφισμένος μέσα στὸ ρημοκλήσι του, θαρρεῖς πὼς βρῖσκεσαι ἀληθινὰ μέσα στὴ σπηλιὰ του, καὶ ἀκοῦς τὸν ἀγέρα ποὺ βουίξει στὰ χορτάρια καὶ τὰ ὄρνια ποὺ κρᾶζουνε κὸβοντας γύρους ἀπὸ πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ βουνό. Κανένα παμπάλαιο θυμιατήριον εἶναι κρεμασμένο δίπλα τοῦ ἀπάνω στὸν καπνισμένον τοῖχο, κανένα κερὶ σβηστὸ στέκεται μπηγμένο στὸν ἄμμο σ' ἕνα μανουάλι βουνίσιο σὰν τὸν ἅγιο ποὺ εἶναι ὁ νοικοκύρης ἐκείνου τοῦ ρημοκκλησιοῦ. Κάθε χρόνον, στὶς 20 Ἰουλίου, ἔρχονται ἀποβραδὺς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ἀπὸ τὸ χωριὸ μὲ τὸν παπά, καὶ τὸν προσκυνᾶνε τὸν προφήτη Ἥλιον, ἀνάβουνε τὰ καντήλια, θυμιάζουνε, καὶ ψέλνει κανένας γέρος καὶ λέγει τὰ στιχηρὰ τῆς μνήμης του, καὶ κείνος ἀκούγει μὲ τὸ ἄγριο κεφάλι τοῦ ἀκουμπισμένο στὸ χέρι του, κι' ὁ κόρακας βαστᾶ τὸ ἴσιο μὲ τὴ βραχνὴ φωνὴ του: «*Χαίροις ἐπίγειε Ἄγγελε καὶ οὐράνιε ἄνθρωπε, Ἥλιε μεγαλώνυμε. Χαίροις Ἥλιε ζηλωτά, τῶν παθῶν αὐτοκράτωρ. Ὡ τοῦ θαύματος! Ὁ πῆλινος ἄνθρωπος, οὐρανοὺς τοῦ βρέχειν ὑετὸν οὐκ ἔδωκεν, καὶ οὐρανοὺς ἀνατρέχει ἐν πυρίνω ἄρματι.*» Καὶ τὴν ἄλλη μέρα, ἅμα τελειώσει ἡ λειτουργία, φεύγουνε οἱ ἄνθρωποι, κι' ὁ Ἥλιος κάθεται πάλι ὀλομόναχος «μιονώτατος», βουβός, τυλιγμένος στὴν προβιά του, σὰν ἀγιούπας κουρνιασμένος. Χιλιάδες χρόνια κάθεται ἔτσι, ἄλλες πολλὲς θὰ κάθεται, ἕως τοῦ ἐλθεῖν τὴν ἡμέραν Κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ.

## Νοσοκομείο πού «Νοσεῖ» πῶς Μπορεῖ νὰ Σώσει;

Γράφει ὁ *Ἡλιάδης Σάββας*, δάσκαλος, *Κιλκίς*, 2-2-2016.

Ὁ ἐκτὸς Ἐκκλησίας ἄνθρωπος τῆς Δύσης εἶναι ἀφώτιστος. Καὶ ἀφοῦ δὲν ἔχει ἐμπειρίες καὶ δὲν καταδέχεται νὰ ἀκούσει τὴν ἀλήθεια ἀπὸ τοὺς γνήσιους θεόπτες, τοὺς ἀγίους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ καταλάβει τι σημαίνει ἀλήθεια. Ἐπιχειρεῖ νὰ σχετικοποιήσει τὰ πάντα περὶ τὴν ἀλήθεια. Θέλει νὰ προωθήσει, σχετικοποιώντας ἢ ἀμφισβητώντας, τὴ γνησιότητα καὶ τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἢ ὅποια τὸν ἐνοχλεῖ καὶ μπαίνει ἐμπόδιο στὸ ἀμαρτωλὸ θέλημά του καὶ στὴν προσπάθεια νὰ κάνει πονηροὺς ἐλιγμούς, μὴ ἐλεγχομένου ἀπὸ τὴν ὁδὸ τῆς ἀλήθειας.

Λέει πῶς χρειάζεται ἐξαγιασμὸ ἢ Ἐκκλησία. Ποιὸς ὅμως θὰ τὴν ἀγιάσει ἔτι περισσότερο τὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ μὲ ποιά προσόντα. Ὁ ἀσθενὴς θὰ διδάξει στοὺς γιατροὺς καὶ στοὺς νοσοκόμους πῶς νὰ ἀποκτήσουν τὴν ὑγεία τους; Εἶναι δυνατόν; Δὲν εἶναι πλήρης παραλογισμὸς; Αὐτὸ ἐννοεῖ τὸ μήνυμα τὸ ἐξ Ἑσπερίας προερχόμενο. Τὸ πλάσμα θὰ διορθώσει, θὰ διδάξει, θὰ συμπληρώσει τὸν Δημιουργό...

Ἀλήθεια, ὅταν κάποιος ἀρρωσταίνει, τι νοσοκομεῖο ἀναζητᾶ, γιὰ νὰ θεραπεύσει τὸ σῶμα του; Μήπως νοσοκομεῖο ἀμφιβόλου ἱστορικοῦ ὡς πρὸς τὰ θεραπευτικά του ἀποτελέσματα ἢ ἀμφιβόλου καθαρότητας καὶ ἰκανότητας τῶν γιατρῶν καί... τῶν μέσων θεραπείας πού διαθέτει; Καθόλου, βέβαια. Κι ἂν ἀντιληφθεῖ κάτι τέτοιο, τὸ ἀποφεύγει ἢ ἂν χρειαστεῖ, τὸ καταγγέλλει στὶς ἀρμόδιες ὑπηρεσίες. **Φεύγει μακριά**, διότι ὑπάρχει κίνδυνος, ἀντὶ νὰ θεραπευθεῖ, νὰ μολυνθεῖ θανατηφόρα.

Πόσο μᾶλλον καὶ ἀπείρως περισσότερο ἰσχύει αὐτὸ γιὰ τὸ νοσοκομεῖο τῶν ψυχῶν, πού ἔχει τὴν «εὐθύνη» νὰ τὶς ὀδηγήσει ἐνώπιόν τοῦ Θεοῦ, στὴν αἰώνια μακαριότητα. Πού τὸ ἐμπιστεύονται οἱ ψυχὲς μὲ κάθε βεβαιότητα, πληροφορημένες ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγίους γιὰ τὶς ἀγιοπνευματικὲς ἐμπειρίες, γιὰ τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ μέσα σ' αὐτήν. Πού γεύονται ἀπὸ ἐδῶ τὴ βεβαιότητα τῆς σωτηριώδους δυνάμεως τῆς. Πῶς μπορεῖ αὐτὴ «ἢ *Κιβωτὸς Σωτηρίας*» νὰ «μπαίνει»;

Εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ ἔκανε «μισὲς δουλειές» ὁ Θεὸς Λόγος; Ἀπὸ τὴ μιὰ νὰ ἐνανθρωπίσει ὡς ὁ ἔσχατος πάντων τῶν ἀνθρώπων, νὰ ταπεινωθεῖ μέχρι ἐσχάτων, νὰ πάθει, νὰ σταυρωθεῖ, νὰ ταφεῖ κι ὅλα αὐτὰ γιὰ τὸ ἀγαπημένο του δημιούργημα, τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιὰ νὰ τὸν ἐπαναφέρει στὴν παλιά του δόξα κι ἀκόμη πῶς ψηλὰ κι ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη νὰ τὸν ἀφήσει σὲ μιὰ «τρύπια κιβωτῶ» μέσα στὸν ὠκεανό, γιὰ νὰ ἐλπίζει στὴ σωτηρία του; Εἶναι δυνατόν ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ μᾶς ἄφησε Ἐκκλησία ἔστω καὶ ἐλαφρῶς «λερωμένη», ἀκάθαρτη, ἐλαττωματικὴ

καὶ νὰ χρειάζεται ἐξαγιασμὸ, καθὼς ὁ «ἡγέτης τῆς παποσύνης» διαφαίνεται;

Δὲν μάθανε οἱ αἰρετικοὶ πῶς ἢ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἢ Μία Ἁγία Καθολικὴ Ὁρθόδοξη καὶ Ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι «*ἰατρεῖο ψυχῶν καὶ σωμάτων*»; Εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ μὴν ἔχει τὸν πλήρη ἀγιασμὸ, γιὰ νὰ μπορεῖ νὰ ἀγιάσει; Εἶναι δυνατόν τὸ νοσοκομεῖο, στὸ ὁποῖο ἐρχόμαστε νὰ θεραπευθοῦμε, νὰ εἶναι μολυσμένο καὶ νὰ μὴν ἔχει πλήρως καθαριστεῖ καὶ ἀπολυμανθεῖ; Τὸ λερωμένο δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ καθαρίσει κάτι ἄλλο, διότι ἀπλῶς θὰ μεταδώσει τὴ λέρα του καὶ τὰ μικρόβιά του. Εἶναι δυνατόν, ὁ ἐνανθρωπίσας Υἱὸς καὶ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς, νὰ μᾶς ἄφησε «ἐλαττωματικὴ», «λερωμένη» Ἐκκλησία; Νὰ θυσιάστηκε, νὰ ἔχυσε τὸ αἷμα του γιὰ τὰ παιδιά Του καὶ νὰ ἄφησε παρακαταθήκη ἓνα ψεύτικο καὶ «νοσοῦν» Νοσοκομεῖο; Ὁχι. Ἄφησε τὸ πλέον ἐγγυημένο καὶ ἀγιασμένο σωστικὸ θεῖο ἐγκαθίδρυμα.

Ἡ Πεντηκοστὴ εἶναι ἡ γενέθλιος ἡμέρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Στὴν ὑμνολογία τῆς ἡμέρας διαβάζουμε τροπάρια, πού ἀποδίδουν μὲ ἀκριβεία καὶ σαφήνεια τὸ νόημα τῆς ἐορτῆς:

(1) «*Τὴν μεθέορτον πιστοί, καὶ τελευταίαν ἐορτήν, ἐορτάσωμεν φαιδρῶς αὕτη ἐστὶ Πεντηκοστή, ἐπαγγελίας συμπλήρωσις, καὶ προθεσμίας ἐν ταύτῃ γὰρ τὸ πῦρ, τοῦ Παρακλήτου εὐθύς, κατέβη ἐπὶ γῆς, ὡσπερ ἐν εἶδει γλωσσῶν, καὶ Μαθητᾶς ἐφώτισε, καὶ τούτους οὐρανομύστας ἀνέδειξε. Τὸ φῶς ἐπέστη, τοῦ Παρακλήτου, καὶ τὸν κόσμον, ἐφώτισε.*» (Κάθισμα τοῦ Ὁρθρου).

(2) Ἐπαγγελίας καὶ προθεσμίας συμπλήρωσις: Κατὰ τὴν Πεντηκοστὴ ἔγινε ἡ συμπλήρωσις, ἡ ἐντελής πλήρωσις (ἢ τέλεια ὀλοκλήρωσις) τῆς ὑπόσχεσης ὅτι θὰ κατέβει τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ στὸν καθορισμένο χρόνος: «*Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ.*» (Ἰω. 15:26). Στὴν Ἐκκλησία εἶναι παρὸν τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ μαρτυρεῖ στὶς ψυχὲς τὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴν πληρότητά της.

(3) «*Καθὼς τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐδίδου*» (Πράξ. 2:4), γράφει γιὰ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους. Τοὺς καθοδηγοῦσε καὶ τοὺς ἔλεγε στὸ λόγο τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Ἦταν θεόπνευστοι οἱ λόγοι τους. Εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ ἀφήνει κενὰ στὶς «πληροφορίες» πού παρέχει σὲ κάθε καλοπροαίρετη καὶ καθαρὴ ψυχὴ;

(4) «*Πάντα χορηγεῖ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, βρῦει προφητείας, ἱερέας τελειοί, ἀγραμμάτους σοφίαν ἐδίδαξεν, ἀλιεῖς θεολόγους ἀνέδειξεν, ὅλον συγκροτεῖ τὸν θεσμόν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, Ὁμοούσιε καὶ Ὁμόθρονε, τῷ Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ Υἱῷ, Παράκλητε, δόξα σοι.*» (Ἰδιόμελο τοῦ ἐσπερινοῦ τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς). Ἀπόδοσις: «*Ὅλα τα παρέχει πρὸς σωτηρία τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Ἀναβλύζει τὸν προφητικὸ λόγον, τελειοποιεῖ τοὺς ἱερεῖς, Διδάσκει τὴν ἄνωθεν σοφία στοὺς ἀγραμμάτους. Ἀνέδειξε*



ἀληθινούς θεολόγους τούς ψαράδες. Καταρτίζει με κάθε πληρότητα και τελειότητα τὸ θεῖο καθίδρυμα, τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἐσὺ ποὺ ἔχεις τὴν ἴδια οὐσία και κάθεσαι στὸν ἴδιο θρόνο με τὸν Πατέρα και τὸν Υἱὸ, Παράκλητε, Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, δόξα σὲ σένα.» (Παράκλητος=Αὐτὸς ποὺ παρέχει βοήθεια, στήριξη και παρηγοριά, ὁ παρήγορος, ὁ διδάσκαλος).

(5) «Τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, φῶς, και ζωή, και ζῶσα πηγὴ νοερά, Πνεῦμα σοφίας, Πνεῦμα συνέσεως, ἀγαθόν, εὐθές, νοερόν, ἡγεμονεῦον καθαῖρον τὰ πταίσματα, Θεὸς και θεοποιοῦν, πῦρ, ἐκ πυρὸς προῖόν, λαλοῦν, ἐνεργοῦν, διαιροῦν τὰ χαρίσματα· δι' οὗ Προφηταὶ ἅπαντες, και Θεοῦ Ἀπόστολοι, μετὰ Μαρτύρων ἐστέφθησαν. Ξένον ἄκουσμα, ξένον θέαμα, πῦρ διαιρούμενον εἰς νομὰς χαρισμάτων.» (Ἰδιόμελο τῶν αἰῶνων).

Θὰ μείνουμε στὴ φράση: «Δι' οὗ Προφηταὶ ἅπαντες, και Θεοῦ Ἀπόστολοι, μετὰ Μαρτύρων ἐστέφθησαν.» Μᾶς λέει ξεκάθαρα πὼς ὅλοι οἱ Προφῆτες, οἱ Ἀπόστολοι και ὅλοι οἱ ἅγιοι, ποὺ εἶναι μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, στεφανώθηκαν με τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Αὐτοί, βέβαια, εἶναι οἱ στυλοβάτες στὴν Παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ φορεῖς τῶν ἐμπειριῶν. Αὐτοὶ μας διδάσκουν, πὼς ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας εἶναι χώρος και τόπος ἀγιότητας και ποτὲ δὲν εἶπαν ἢ ἐνόησαν πὼς χρειάζεται κάτι γιὰ νὰ συμπληρωθεῖ. Διότι οἱ ἴδιοι, οἱ Ἀπόστολοι, τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη «ἐπλήσθησαν ἅπαντες Πνεύματος ἁγίου.» (Πράξ. 2:4).

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς παρατεινόμενος στοὺς αἰῶνες και, ὅπως ἦταν Ἐκεῖνος ἀναμάρτητος: «Τις ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐλέγχει με περὶ ἁμαρτίας;» (Ἰω. 8:46), ἔτσι και ἡ Ἐκκλησία του συνεχίζει νὰ εἶναι καθαρὴ, ἄσπιλη, ἀμόλυντη: «Οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας ἑαυτῶν, καθὼς και ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησε τὴν ἐκκλησίαν και ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσει καθαρῶς τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι, ἵνα παραστήσει αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ ἐνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπίλον ἢ ρυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ' ἵνα ἡ ἀγία και ἄμωμος.» (Ἐφ. 5:25-27).

Μετέχοντας τῶν χαρίτων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὁ ἄνθρωπος, μετέχει τῆς θεότητος κατὰ χάρι. Εἶναι ἔτοιμος νὰ συγκατοικήσει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνες με τὸ Θεὸ πρόσωπο πρὸς πρόσωπο, καθὼς λέει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «Βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς και ἐπεγνώσθην.» (Α' Κορ. 13:12). Πὼς θὰ δοῦμε πρόσωπο πρὸς πρόσωπο, ὅταν δὲν ἔχουμε καθαρῶς ἀπὸ ἐδῶ; Κι ὅταν τὸ καθαρῶς ποὺ πλενόμαστε εἶναι τελείως καθαρὸ και ἀπολυμασμένο, μόνο τότε θὰ βγοῦμε καθαρὸι γιὰ τὴν ἄλλη ζωή, νὰ συναντήσουμε τὸ Φῶς τῆς αἰωνιότητος, δηλαδὴ τὸ Χριστό. Γιατί, ὅσο κι ἂν προσπαθοῦμε μόνοι μας, δὲν

γίνεται ἡ κάθαρση, παρὰ μέσα στὴν ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία, με τὰ ἐγγυημένα ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστὸ καθαρῶς και θεραπευτικὰ μέσα ποὺ διαθέτει.

Στὴν ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία ὅλα εἶναι τέλεια. Στὸν ἄνθρωπο μένει και στὴν προαίρεσή του, νὰ πλησιάσει, νὰ μπεῖ, νὰ δοκιμάσει, νὰ ἀγιαστεῖ και νὰ φωνάζει ἀσταμάτητα σὲ κάθε ἀμφιβάλλοντα νοῦ: «**Ἔρχου και ἴδε.**» (Ἰω. 1:47).



## Ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ

Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελμίροβιτς.

Ρωτᾶτε: «Γιατί ὁ Θεὸς κατέστρεψε τὰ Σόδομα;» Μὰ δὲν σὰς κατέστη σαφὲς ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴ Γραφὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ: «Εἶπε δὲ Κύριος κραυγὴ Σοδόμων και Γομόρας πεπλήθυνται πρὸς με, και αἱ ἁμαρτίαι αὐτῶν μεγάλαι σφόδρα.» (Γεν. 18:20). Και ὅτι ἡ ἁμαρτία Σοδόμων ἦταν ὄντως πολὺ μεγάλη και σφοδρὴ, φαίνεται και ἀπὸ τὸ ὅτι δὲν εἶχαν βρεθεῖ οὔτε δέκα δίκαιοι. Διότι στὴν ἐρώτηση τοῦ δίκαιου Ἀβραάμ, ἐὰν θὰ καταστρέψει τὴν ἁμαρτωλὴ πόλη, σὲ περίπτωσι ποὺ βρεῖ σ' αὐτὴ δέκα δίκαιους, ὁ Κύριος ἀπάντησε και εἶπε: «οὐ μὴ ἀπολέσω ἐνεκεν τῶν δέκα.» (Γεν. 18:32). Ἀλλὰ δὲν βρέθηκαν οὔτε δέκα. Ὅλοι οἱ πολῖτες ἦταν σὲ πόλεμο ἐναντίον τοῦ Θεοῦ και ἐναντίον τῆς φύσης. Οἱ ψυχὲς τους ἦταν νεκρὲς ἐνῶ τὰ σώματα ἐκφυλισμένα. Γι' αὐτὸ χτύπησε «θεῖον, και πῦρ» (Γεν. 19:24), τὸ σύμβολο τῆς βρώμας και τῆς ἔξαψης τῶν παθῶν τους, και ἀπὸ τὰ Σόδομα δὲν ἔμεινε τίποτα πλὴν τοῦ κακοῦ ὀνόματος και τῆς φρικιαστικῆς ἀφήγησις.

Ὅμως δὲν ἔπεσε ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ μόνο στὰ Σόδομα, ἀλλὰ και σὲ πολλὲς ἄλλες πόλεις, ὅπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἶχε κάνει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δύσμορφους σὲ τέτοιο βαθμὸ, ὥστε νὰ μὴν μοιάζουν καθόλου πια με τὸ ἔργο τοῦ οὐράνιου Δημιουργοῦ. Και ἐφόσον ἔτσι ἔγινε με τὴν κακὴν πόλιν, στίς ὁποῖες δὲν εἶχε ἀκουστεῖ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, πὼς μάλλον μπορεῖ νὰ συμβεῖ με τὴν χριστιανικὴν πόλιν τὴν ἐφάμιλλαν ἢ παρόμοιαν ὡς πρὸς τὸ κακὸ με τὰ Σόδομα—τὴν βαπτισμένην σὲ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ;

Διαβάστε τὴν ἀπειλὴ τοῦ Σωτήρα πρὸς τὴν πόλη Καπερναοῦμ: «Και σὺ Καπερναοῦμ, ἡ ἕως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὑψωθείσα ἕως ἄδου καταβιβασθήσῃ ὅτι εἰ ἐν Σοδόμοις ἐγενήθησαν αἱ δυνάμεις αἱ γενόμεναι ἐν σοί, ἔμειναν ἂν μέχρι τῆς σήμερον.» (Ματθ. 11:23).

Και πράγματι, ἡ προφητεία ἐκπληρώθηκε: ἐκεῖ ὅπου κάποτε στεκόταν ἡ ὑπερήφανη πόλη τῆς Καπερναοῦμ τώρα εἶναι ἀδιαπέραστος θαμνώδης τόπος, πέτρες και φωλιὰς φιδιῶν. Με τὰ μάτια τους τὸ εἶδαν και με τὴν καρδιά ἔτρεμαν ὅλοι οἱ προσκυνητὲς τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων.

## Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ὡς Μία Διαρκῆς Πεντηκοστή

Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς (+1979).



**Π**οιὸς εἶναι ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός; Ποιὸς εἶναι σὲ Αὐτὸν ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ποιὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος; Πῶς γνωρίζεται ὁ Θεὸς στὸν Θεάνθρωπο καὶ πῶς ὁ

ἄνθρωπος; Τὶ ἐδώρησε σὲ μᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὁ Θεὸς ἐν τῷ Θεανθρώπῳ; Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ φανερῶνει σὲ μᾶς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ «Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας.» Μᾶς ἀποκαλύπτει δηλαδὴ ὅλη τὴν ἀλήθεια γιὰ Αὐτόν, γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ ἐν Αὐτῷ καὶ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ γιὰ τὸ τί χάρισε σ' ἐμᾶς μ' ὅλα αὐτά. Αὐτὸ ἐπίσης ἀπειρώς ξεπερνᾷ κάθε τι ποὺ οἱ ἀνθρώπινοι ὀφθαλμοὶ εἶδαν καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν αὐτῶν ἠκούσθη καὶ ἡ καρδιά αὐτῶν κάποτε αἰσθάνθηκε.

Μὲ τὴν ἔνσαρκη ζωὴ του στὴ γῆ ὁ Θεάνθρωπος ἐγκαθίδρυσε τὸ Θεανθρώπινο τοῦ Σώματος, τὴν Ἐκκλησία, καὶ μὲ αὐτὴν προετοιμάζει τὸν γήινο κόσμον γιὰ τὴν ἔλευση καὶ τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὴ δραστηριότητα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος στὸ Σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὡς ψυχῆς Αὐτοῦ τοῦ Σώματος.

Τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα κατήλθε ἐξ οὐρανοῦ στὸ Θεανθρώπινο σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ γιὰ πάντα παρέμεινε σὲ Αὐτὸ σὰν Παν-Ζωοποιὸς ψυχὴ Αὐτοῦ. Αὐτὸ τὸ ὄρατο Θεανθρώπινο σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας συγκροτοῦν οἱ Ἅγιοι Ἀπόστολοι μὲ τὴν πίστη των στὸν Θεάνθρωπο Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ ὡς Σωτῆρα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ ὡς τέλειον Θεοῦ καὶ ὡς τέλειον Ἀνθρώπου. Καὶ ἡ κάθοδος καὶ ἡ σύνολη δραστηριότητα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος στὸ Θεανθρώπινο σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔρχεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεάνθρωπο καὶ ἐξαιτίας τοῦ Θεανθρώπου.

Κάθε τι στὴν Θεανθρώπινη Οἰκονομία τῆς σωτηρίας προῆλθε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεανθρώπινο πρόσωπο τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τέλος, ἀκόμη ὅλα συνοψίζονται καὶ ὑπάρχουν στὴν κατηγορία τῆς Θεανθρωπότητος ἀκόμη καὶ ἡ δραστηριότητα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Κάθε ἐνεργητικότητα Αὐτοῦ στὸν κόσμον εἶναι ἀχώριστη ἀπὸ τὸ Θεανθρώπινο ἀνδραγάθημα τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου. Ἡ Πεντηκοστὴ μὲ ὅλες τὶς αἰώνιες δωρεὲς τῆς Τριαδικῆς Θεότητος καὶ Αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος προσδιόριζε τὴν Ἐκκλησία τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων δηλαδὴ τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀποστολικῆς πίστεως, τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀποστολικῆς παράδοσης, τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀποστολικῆς ἱεραρχίας, ἀκόμη καὶ κάθε τι Ἀποστολικῶς ποὺ εἶναι Θεανθρώπινο.

Ἡ Ἅγία πνευματικὴ ἡμέρα ἡ ὁποία ἄρχισε μὲ τὴν Ἅγία Πεντηκοστὴ ἀδιάκοπα συνεχίζεται στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μὲ ἀνείπωτη πληρότητα ὅλων τῶν Θεϊκῶν δωρεῶν καὶ ζωοποιῶν δυνάμεων. Κάθε τι στὴν Ἐκκλησία ὑπάρχει ἐν Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ πολὺ μικρὸ καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπερμέγεθες. Ὅταν ὁ ἱερεὺς θυμιάζοντας στὴν Ἐκκλησία παρακαλεῖ τὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ νὰ καταπέμψῃ τὴν χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅταν τὸ ἀνέκφραστο θαῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἢ Ἅγία Πεντηκοστὴ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν χειροτονία τοῦ ἐπισκόπου ἐπαναλαμβάνεται καὶ δίδει ὅλο τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς χάριτος καὶ μὲ αὐτὸ πασιφανῶς μαρτυρεῖ ὅτι ὅλη ἡ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας συγκροτεῖται ἐν τῷ Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία ὅτι ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶναι μὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι μὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο στὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦ Χριστό. Ὁ Κύριος εἶναι ἡ κεφαλὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα τῆς καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον εἶναι ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ ἤδη τῆς Θεανθρώπινης οἰκονομίας τῆς σωτηρίας τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο συνδέθηκε μὲ τὸ θεμέλιο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δηλαδὴ μὲ τὸ θεμέλιο τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ «*τοῦ Λόγου κτίσας τὴν σάρκωσιν.*»

Στὴν πραγματικότητα κάθε ἅγιο μυστήριον καὶ ὅλες οἱ θεῖες ἀρετὲς εἶναι μία Ἁγιοπνευματικότης. Τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο διὰ μέσου αὐτῶν ἔρχεται σὲ ἐμᾶς καὶ ἐντὸς ἡμῶν. Αὐτὸ κατέρχεται οὐσιωδῶς ποὺ σημαίνει ἀληθινὰ καὶ οὐσιαστικὰ μὲ ὅλες τὶς θεϊκὲς του σημαντικὲς ἐνέργειες. Αὐτὸ—ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς θεότητος. Αὐτὸ—τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς χάριτος. Αὐτὸ—ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ κάθε ὑπάρξεως. Εἶναι αἰώνιον καὶ Διαθηκικὸ Εὐαγγέλιον. Ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα κατοικεῖ σὲ μᾶς καὶ ἐμεῖς σ' Αὐτόν. Αὐτὸ καὶ μόνον μαρτυρεῖ τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος σὲ μᾶς. Ἐμεῖς μὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο ζοῦμε ἐν Χριστῷ καὶ Αὐτὸς σὲ μᾶς. Μάλιστα αὐτὸ τὸ γνωρίζουμε «*ἐκ τοῦ Πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν.*» (Α΄ Ἰω. 3:24).

Μὲ μία λέξη ὅλη ἡ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας σὲ ὅλες τὶς δικὲς τὶς ἀναρίθμητες Θεανθρώπινες πραγματικότητες ὁδηγεῖται καὶ χειραγωγεῖται ἀπὸ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο τὸ ὁποῖο πάντοτε εἶναι τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεανθρώπου Χριστοῦ (Γαλ. 4:6). Γι' αὐτὸ ἔχει γραφεῖ στὸ Ἅγιο Εὐαγγέλιον: «*Εἰ δὲ τις Πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, οὗτος οὐκ ἔστιν Αὐτοῦ.*» (Ρωμ. 8:9).

Ὁ χερουβικὰ μνηθεὶς στὸ Θεανθρώπινο μυστήριον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας σὰν τὸ πιὸ ἀγαπητὸ παν-μυστήριον τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος διακηρύσσει τὸ παναληθές καὶ χαρμόσυνο μήνυμα: «**Τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο ἀρχιτεκτονεῖ Ἐκκλησία Θεοῦ.**»

## Ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου

Ἀγίου Λουκά Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κριμαίας (+1961).

Τὸν καθένα ἀπὸ μᾶς τὸν βασανίζει τὸ ἐρώτημα: τί θὰ γίνῃ με μᾶς καὶ τί μᾶς περιμένει μετὰ τὸ θάνατο; Μία σαφὴ ἀπάντησις σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἐρώτημα μόνοι μας δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὴν βροῦμε. Ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ μυστικὸ μᾶς ἀποκαλύπτουν ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή, ὁ λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἐπίσης τὸ ἀπολυτικίον καὶ τὸ κοντάκιον τῆς μεγάλης αὐτῆς γιορτῆς τῆς Κοιμήσεως τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ ὕμνοι ποὺ ψάλλονται σ' αὐτὴ τὴ γιορτῆ.

Θέλω ὅλοι σας νὰ καταλάβετε, γιατί ὁ θάνατος τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου λέγεται Κοίμησὴ τῆς. Ὁ μέγας ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος, στὸ 20<sup>ο</sup> κεφάλαιο τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως, μιλάει γιὰ τὸν πρῶτο καὶ τὸ δεύτερο θάνατο. Ὁ πρῶτος θάνατος εἶναι ἀναπόφευκτος γιὰ ὅλους μας, καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ τοὺς δικαίους. Ἀλλὰ ὁ δεύτερος, ὁ φοβερὸς καὶ αἰώνιος θάνατος, περιμένει τοὺς ἀμετανόητους ἁμαρτωλοὺς, οἱ ὅποιοι ἀρνήθηκαν τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ εἶναι καταδικασμένοι νὰ βρίσκονται αἰώνως σὲ κοινωνία μετὰ τὸ διάβολο καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους του.

Στὸ Εὐαγγέλιον διαβάζουμε τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι πολὺ στενὰ συνδεδεμένα μετὰ ὅσα γράφει ἡ Ἀποκάλυψις: «*Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με ἔχει... ζωὴν αἰώνιον καὶ εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ ἔρχεται, ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν.*» (Ἰωάν. 5:24). Τὸ ἀκοῦτε, τὸ καταλαβαίνετε; Ὅλοι ὅσοι ὑπακούουν στὸν λόγο τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ πιστεύουν στὸν Οὐράνιον Πατέρα του, μετὰ τὸ θάνατό τους, θὰ περάσουν στὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ. Δὲν ὑπάρχει λόγος νὰ δικαστοῦν αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἔχουν ζωντανὴ πίστη στὸν Θεὸ καὶ ὑπακούουν στὶς ἐντολές του.

Καὶ στοὺς μεγάλους δώδεκα ἀποστόλους εἶπε ὁ Κύριος: «*Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὑμεῖς οἱ ἀκολουθήσαντές μοι, ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ, ὅταν καθίσῃ ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ, καθίσεσθε καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐπὶ δώδεκα θρόνους κρίνοντες τὰς δώδεκα φυλάς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ.*» (Ματθ. 19:28). Δικαστὲς καὶ κατήγοροι θὰ εἶναι κατὰ τὴν Φοβερὰ Κρίσιν τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Βεβαίως, εἶναι τελείως ἀδύνατον νὰ φανταστοῦμε νὰ δικάζονται ἡ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος καὶ Ἀειπάρθετος Μαρία, ὁ Βαπτιστὴς τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰωάννης, οἱ μεγάλοι προφῆτες τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Ἡλίας καὶ ὁ Ἐνὼχ τοὺς ὁποίους ζωντανούς τοὺς πῆρε ὁ Θεὸς στὸν Οὐρανόν, ὅλο τὸ ἀμέτρητο πλῆθος τῶν μαρτύρων τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ οἱ δοξασμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ ἅγιοι ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ θαυματουργοί.

Εἶναι ἀδύνατον ἀκόμα καὶ νὰ περάσει ἀπὸ τὸ μυαλό μας ἡ σκέψη πὼς θὰ δικαστοῦν αὐτοί, οἱ ὅποιοι ἄκουσαν ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ: «*Ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν.*» (Λουκ. 17:21). Σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς

μεγάλους ἀγωνιστὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, σὰν σὲ πολῦτιμους ναοὺς κατοικοῦσε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Ἀκόμα καὶ ζώντας στὴ γῆ, αὐτοὶ βρισκόταν στὴν ἄμεση κοινωνία μετὰ τὸν Θεόν, ἐπειδὴ ἔτσι εἶπε ὁ Κύριός μας Ἰησοῦς Χριστός: «*Εάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με, τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτόν, καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλευσόμεθα καὶ μονὴν παρ' αὐτῷ ποιήσομεν.*» (Ἰωάν. 14:23).

Ἡ Ὑπεραγία Παρθέτος Μαρία ὑπῆρξε ἄχραντος ναὸς τοῦ Σωτῆρος καὶ σ' αὐτὴν κατοίκησε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἁγιότατη μήτρα τῆς ἔλαβε τὸ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ σωματικὸς τῆς θάνατος δὲν ἦταν θάνατος ἀλλὰ Κοίμησις, δηλαδὴ ἓνα ἄμεσο πέρασμα ἀπὸ τὴ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴ Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν καὶ τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ.

Μοῦ ἤρθε τώρα στὸ μυαλό καὶ κάτι καινούριο. Νὰ πιστεύουμε, ὅτι καὶ τὸ σῶμα τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου μετὰ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔγινε ἄφθαρτο καὶ ἀνελήφθη στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Αὐτὸ μᾶς λέει καὶ τὸ κοντάκιον τῆς μεγάλης γιορτῆς τῆς Κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου: «*Τὴν ἐν πρεσβείαις ἀκοίμητον Θεοτόκον, καὶ προστασίαις ἀμετάθετον ἐλπίδα, τάφος καὶ νέκρωσις οὐκ ἐκράτησεν ὡς γὰρ ζωῆς Μητέρα, πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν μετέστρεψεν, ὁ μήτρανοικήσας ἀειπάρθενον.*»

Προσέξτε: «**Τάφος καὶ νέκρωσις οὐκ ἐκράτησεν.**» Σκεπτόμενοι αὐτό, ἅς θυμηθοῦμε καὶ τί γράφει ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή γιὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ μεγαλύτερου προφήτη τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, τοῦ Μωυσῆ: λέγει ὅτι πέθανε σύμφωνα μετὰ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸ ὄρος Νεβὼ καὶ τάφηκε στὴ γῆ Μωάβ. Ὁ τάφος τοῦ μεγάλου αὐτοῦ προφήτη ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι γιὰ πάντα τόπος προσκυνήματος γιὰ ὅλο τὸ λαὸ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ. Ὅμως στὴ Βίβλο διαβάζουμε, ὅτι «*οὐκ οἶδεν οὐδεὶς τὴν ταφὴν αὐτοῦ ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης.*» (Δευτ. 34:6). Ὅμως κατὰ τὴ Μεταμόρφωση τοῦ Κυρίου στὸ ὄρος Θαβὼρ ἐφανίστηκε ὁ Μωυσῆς στὸν Κύριον μαζί μετὰ τὸν προφήτη Ἠλία, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀρπάχτηκε ζωντανὸς στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Νομίζω ὅτι δὲν θὰ εἶναι ἁμαρτία ἂν θὰ ποῦμε, ὅτι τὸ σῶμα τοῦ μεγάλου Μωυσῆ, ὅπως καὶ τὸ σῶμα τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου, μετὰ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἔμεινε ἄφθαρτο. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ τάφος του εἶναι ἄγνωστος.

Νὰ σκεφτόμαστε, ἀδελφοὶ καὶ ἀδελφές μου, τὴν μακάρια Κοίμησις τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Παρθέτου Μαρίας καὶ νὰ θυμόμαστε τὰ λόγια τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ: «*Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον, καὶ εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ ἔρχεται, ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν.*» (Ἰωάν. 5:24).

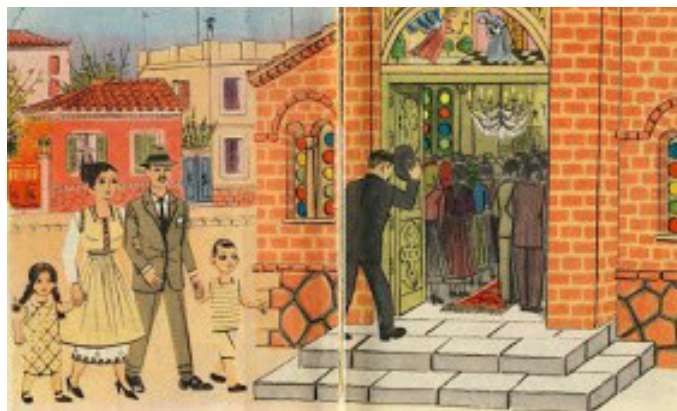
Νὰ μᾶς ἀξιώσει ὁ Θεὸς νὰ γευθοῦμε καὶ ἡμεῖς οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ τὴ μεγάλη αὐτὴ χαρὰ, μετὰ τὴ χάρις καὶ τὴ φιλανθρωπία τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος σὺν τῷ ἀνάρχῳ αὐτοῦ Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ Παναγίῳ Αὐτοῦ Πνεύματι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν.

## Ξύπνα Ραγιά...

Ιστολόγιο-Ομάδα Εκπαιδευτικών «Ο Παιδαγωγός».

Θυμάμαι τότε...

Ποῦ οἱ Ἕλληνες πήγαιναν ἐκκλησιά (στὴν εὐλογημένη Ὁρθόδοξη ἐκκλησιά καὶ δὲν μποροῦσε



κανεῖς νὰ φανταστεῖ συλλεῖτουργα μὲ τοὺς αἰρετικούς παπικούς)...

Τότε ποῦ ὑπῆρχαν ἄντρες καὶ γυναῖκες καὶ ὄχι μία κοινωνία μὲ ντύσιμο καὶ ὁμιλία unisex...

Ποῦ ὁ ἄντρας ἐξέπεμπε σεβασμὸ καὶ ἡ γυναῖκα καλοσύνη...

Ποῦ ἡ γυναῖκα εἶχε σεμνότητα (προσέξτε τὸ μακρὸ φόρεμα)...

Ποῦ οἱ γυναῖκες στὴν ἐκκλησιά φοροῦσαν μαντήλα καὶ οἱ χῆρες φοροῦσαν μαῦρα...

Τότε ποῦ τὰ κοριτσάκια περιποιόταν τὰ μαλλιά τους κάνοντας κοτσιδάκια (ἀπλό, ἀπέριττο καὶ ὄμορφο) καὶ δὲν ὑπῆρχαν κομμωτήρια...

Τότε ποῦ τὰ ἀγοράκια δὲν ἄλλαζαν κούρεμα σύμφωνα μὲ τὶς ἐπιταγὲς τῆς μόδας...

Τότε ποῦ ἡ οἰκογένεια ἦταν ἀκόμη οἰκογένεια, ποῦ σκεφτόταν καὶ ἀγαποῦσαν πραγματικά τα παιδιά



τους καὶ δὲν χώριζαν μὲ τὶς πρῶτες δυσκολίες γιὰ «νὰ ζήσουν» τὴν ζωὴ τους μὲ κάποιον ἄλλον...

Τότε ποῦ ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς γονεῖς, τὴν διαπαιδαγώγηση τῶν παιδιῶν ἔκανε ὁ παππούς, ἡ γιαγιά, ὁ παπὰς καὶ

ὁ δάσκαλος τοῦ χωριοῦ καὶ ὄχι ἡ τηλεόραση καὶ τὰ μικρο-διαβολοκούτια ποῦ κρατοῦνε στὰ χέρια τους καὶ κοιτάζουν ἀκατάπαυστα...

Τότε ποῦ στὰ σχολεῖα μάθαιναν γιὰ ἁγίους καὶ ἥρωες καὶ ὄχι γιὰ τὸ «ρατσισμό» καὶ τὴν λεγόμενη «διαπολιτισμικότητα»...

Τότε ποῦ στὰ σχολεῖα μας φοιτοῦσαν Ἑλληνόπουλα...

Τότε ποῦ ἡ μάνα ξαγρυπνοῦσε ὑπομονετικά δίπλα στὸ ἄρρωστο παιδί καὶ δὲν τὸ ἄφηνε στὴν «γιαγιά» γιὰ νὰ πάει στὴ δουλειά, γιὰ καφέ ἢ γιὰ ψώνια...

Τὰ θυμάμαι ὅλα αὐτὰ... κι ἀναρωτιέμαι μήπως πρέπει νὰ ἀναθεωρήσουμε τὶς ἀξίες καὶ τὰ ἰδανικά (ὑπάρχουν;;;;) τοῦ δυτικοῦ τρόπου σκέψης ποῦ μᾶς ἐπέβαλε ἡ καθημερινὴ πλύση ἐγκεφάλου ἀπὸ τὶς τηλεπρεσόνες καὶ τοὺς ἐρμαφρόδιτους στὴν τηλεόραση.

Διαφορετικά, ὅτι σπείραμε (παιδιά χωρὶς ἐγκράτεια, ἄσκηση, ἀρχὲς καὶ ἀξίες), γιὰ μία ἀκόμη φορὰ αὐτὸ καὶ θὰ θερίσουμε (ὕλισμός, καλοπέραση, κατανάλωση, ναρκωτικά, χούλιγκανς, ἀθεία, ἀναρχία, μι-



ζαδόροι, διαπλοκὴ καὶ τελικὰ ὑλική, ἠθικὴ καὶ πνευματικὴ χρεοκοπία).

Ἄνδενμετανοήσουμε οἱ ἴδιοι, ὅσα κερδιὰ κι ἂν ἀνάψουμε, δὲν μᾶς σώζει οὔτε ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος, οὔτε ὁ Ἅγιος Πορφύριος, οὔτε οἱ προφητεῖες οὔτε τὰ ἅγια λείψανα.

Ἡ ἐπιλογὴ γιὰ τὴν κόλαση ποῦ ζοῦμε, εἶναι ΔΙΚΗ ΜΑΣ.

Ξύπνα Ραγιά!

Ξύπνα, καὶ πάρε τὶς τύχες τῆς οἰκογένειας, τῆς πατρίδας καὶ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας στα χέρια σου!

Ἄρκετὰ ἀνέχτηκες προδότες, κίναιδους καὶ λαμόγια καὶ στὴν πολιτικὴ καὶ στὴν ἐκκλησία.

Ξύπνα Ραγιά, ΞΥΠΝΑ καὶ ΑΓΩΝΙΣΟΥ!



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

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE JUNE COUNCIL

*By Fr. George Maximov, April 27, 2016, translated by Jesse Dominick.*

*On April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016 a conference was held at St. Tikhon's University in Moscow on the topic "The Pan-Orthodox Council: Opinions and Expectations," in which numerous hierarchs, priests, and theologians participated; among them was also Fr. George Maximov, a well-known missionary priest in Moscow. Fr. George offered a presentation titled "Misgivings Regarding the Upcoming Pan-Orthodox Council." In his talk he addresses what he sees as some problematic theological points arising from the Council documents, as well as problems with the Council's procedural regulations.*

† † †

Your Eminences, dear fathers and brothers,  
I studied some of the draft documents of the Council and would like, on one hand, to present as an example one of the problematic points there, and on the other hand to highlight the danger that arises from the peculiarities of the Council's approved regulations.

In the draft of the document, "The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World", the assertion that, "as in the old Adam was contained the entire human race, so in the New Adam is gathered the entire human race" is accompanied by a citation from Eusebius of Caesarea. Eusebius, as we know, is NOT a holy father of the Church, and is well-known to have had Arian sympathies. I think for all of us here it is obvious that to cite an Arian in an Orthodox document is nonsense.

The idea which they are trying to justify with the quote from Eusebius, is in and of itself, to put it mildly, suspect, insofar as it directly implies that the entire human race is already in some way gathered in Christ, the New Adam. But insofar as the entire human race does not belong to the Orthodox Church, it turns out that they are talking about some means of union with Christ other than the Church, and this union has already occurred for all men.

At this point they also provide a quote from St. Cyril of Alexandria, for vindication, but this quote is reproduced incorrectly; the holy hierarch himself, as is obvious in context, speaks about the union of the entire human race with Christ as occurring exclusively through participation in the mystery of the Eucharist. That is, the union is exclusively inferred for members of the Church only. However, in the quote provided by the Council's organizers, it appears in a truncated form, thus giving the impression that he is speaking generally about the whole human race. Conclusively, in this document we are served with: a dubious idea, a link to a heretic, and an incorrect quote from a saint.

To delete or correct this point without any harm to the basic meaning of the document is not at all difficult. I can easily suggest some specific edits for how to safely remove

these heretical statements, or, we could say more softly, statements allowing for heretical understandings. However, when I had an appeal to His Holiness the Patriarch on this account, with full confidence that he would not leave such problems unresolved, it was pointed out to me that according to the "regulations" only those amendments which are supported by the representatives of all the Local Churches can be introduced into the text.

It turns out that even if such amendments were gathered as a result of today's work and voiced by His Holiness at the Pan-Orthodox Council, they have very little chance of approval. After all, even if our amendments were supported by almost all the Local Churches, but only one did not support them, then, according to the regulations, the amendments would not be accepted. In my opinion this represents a great threat; this is because it was clearly stipulated during the preparation phase for the Council that the representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople were rather "unenthusiastic" about any amendments by the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church. It turns out that they have a method for blocking any amendments to the documents. Conclusively, there is a clear danger that these drafts, with their references to Arians (and all other problematic content which others have pointed out) will be accepted, because our amendments shall never gain the consensus of all the representatives of the Church. I thus submit that it is a very worthwhile matter to give serious attention to such danger.

Furthermore, I would like to comment on the words of a previous presenter in which he expressed the thought that our diplomatic relationships with the non-Orthodox do not allow the use of the terms "heretic" or "heresy," and on the basis of this postulated the inappropriateness of their use in the documents of the Pan-Orthodox Council.

We can agree that, in the diplomatic sphere and in the vast majority of worldly situations, the use of the words "heresy" and "heretic" are likely inappropriate. But when this (political) approach, which should exclusively pertain to the rather narrow and private sphere of "ecclesiastical diplomacy," is in turn extended to the general sphere of our Orthodox understanding as to who and what is heretical, then it is completely erroneous and incorrect. I have had the opportunity to hear some Church officials of lower rank express their opinion that now, generally, it is forbidden to say that Catholics are heretics; and, such restrictions are applied to even Orthodox in conversation with other Orthodox—not just in an official message to the Pope or some high-ranking Catholic. For example, we have found such "ecclesiastical political correctness" within books intended for Orthodox readers and for internal Church distribution. Many of the faithful as well as the clergy are now sincerely persuaded that we are not in the right to use

these traditional, patristic terms even in our personal documents, texts, and conversations. I do not think this is either proper or correct. Such views have no theological basis and as they are contrary to patristic teachings and must receive no dissemination whatsoever.

In conclusion, the observation that the document of the Pan-Orthodox Council about attitudes towards the heterodox could stand to introduce the term “heresy” does not seem at all to me ridiculous or preposterous. If these documents are first of all intended for an Orthodox reader, then it is perfectly natural to lean upon the theological tradition which was developed and became the standard in the Orthodox Church, firmly entrenched in Her Tradition. If this text is a diplomatic letter addressed to non-Orthodox then it should have a different status and should hardly be entertained at a Pan-Orthodox Council, and should be titled differently, for example: “A message to Members of Heterodox Confessions” or something like that.

This is what I considered prudent to bring forth about these very problematic points. Thank you for your attention.



*Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

[Rev 3:11, the last words of St. Philaret of New York]

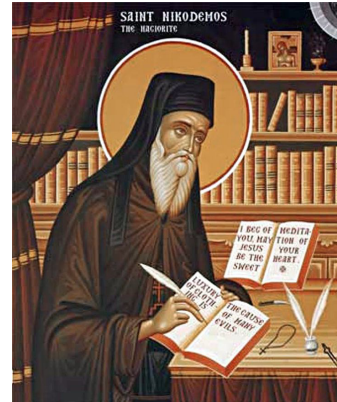
† † †

These words have a particular significance in our time, our greatly sorrowful and wicked days which are full of temptation. They remind us of that priceless spiritual treasure that we possess, as children of the Orthodox Church. Yes, we are rich. This spiritual wealth is that which the Holy Church possesses. This is the wealth which belongs to all her faithful children... The teaching of the Faith! Our wonderful, salvific Orthodox Faith! The countless living examples of the lives of people who have lived according to the Faith and according to the lofty principles and laws which the Church sets before us. Those who have attained that spiritual purity and exalted state that is called sanctity, the beauty and magnificence of our Orthodox divine services, and a living participation in them through faith and prayer. The fullness of the spiritual life of grace which is accessible to each and every one. And, what is the crown of all, the unity of the children of the Church in that love of which the Savior said: *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* (Jn 13-35).

**St. Philaret, Metropolitan of New York**  
First Hierarch of ROCOR (+1985)

## MANY EVILS ENSUE WHEN WE DO NOT ADVISE OTHERS

*By St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite.*



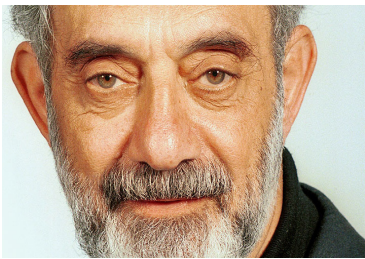
You should realize, my dear brothers, that if all of us were interested in contributing to the salvation of our fellow brothers, then in a short time evil people would correct their ways, and relatively quickly our cities would become free of evil and sin. This is certainly the case, because if one single person alone possessing a heart filled with godly zeal and filled with love for his fellow man is capable of correcting an entire nation, how much more so can large numbers of Christians—when of course they decide to lay hold of zeal and are determined to implant brotherly love within their souls—correct people who are living in sin?

Truly, the sole reason for the perilous plight of contemporary sinful people, the primary cause that has allowed immorality to increase in our days and permitted the devil to reign within present-day society is none other than we ourselves. For when we witness our fellow [Orthodox] brothers and [Orthodox] Christians sinning openly and carrying out various evils, we do not take the initiative to collectively go to them in an attempt to help them and correct them with brotherly advice and even reproof, if necessary. On the contrary, each one of us comes up with various excuses, we all remain silent, we quietly withdraw to ourselves, and thus we allow others to continue carrying out all the sin they choose and all the evil they desire.

Behold how the gold-tongued St. John Chrysostomos precisely confirms these truths: *Therefore, let us not say these things. Rather, let us display proper solicitude for our brethren. I promise with all exactitude, and I guarantee you, that if all of you who are present here resolve to secure the salvation of all who inhabit this city, everything will speedily be restored to good order ... Let us then take an interest in the salvation of our brothers and sisters. One man filled with zeal is sufficient to correct an entire city! Hence, when not one, or two, or three, but such a great multitude is capable of contributing in the correction of them who live carelessly, and yet the majority are perishing and falling, it is from no other cause other than our own laziness—not our weakness. Isn't it irrational for us to hasten to lend a hand and help raise up an animal that has fallen, yet to neglect and show no concern for our fellow human beings who are perishing?*

## THE INFALLIBILITY OF (TRUE) COUNCILS AND ECUMENICAL SYNODS

*Source: "Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church according to the spoken teaching of Fr John Romanides," Volume 1, Dogma, Ethics, Revelation, by Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos. Fr. John is the one theologian of our days whose writings constitute a modern day legacy, artfully, simply and succinctly emphasizing the deep gulf separating the hesychastic Orthodox dogma from the intellectualist and juridical expressions of Western dogmas (and heresies). The quoted text is from Fr. John's writings-lectures.*



It is well known that the Orthodox Faith was defined first in Local Councils, but later also in Ecumenical Councils through dogmas and sacred canons, by the Church's Holy Fathers, who convened these

Councils in order to deal with heretics.

The Ecumenical Councils are infallible, but this has to be interpreted in an Orthodox way:

"Today we have the teaching about the infallibility of the Ecumenical Councils. This teaching on the infallibility of the Ecumenical Councils, as it is described nowadays, is as though there were an institution called 'Ecumenical Council,' which has infallibility in the Church. In all the years that I have been reading the Fathers, I have never found that idea anywhere. Such a perception does not exist in the Fathers. The Ecumenical Council is definitely infallible, but it is not an infallible institution and it is not a permanent institution. The Church existed for three hundred and twenty-five years before the First Ecumenical Council and lived without an Ecumenical Council; and from the ninth Ecumenical Council in 1341 until today there has been no Ecumenical Council."\*

The divine inspiration of the Ecumenical Councils is connected with the presence at them of the Church's Holy Fathers who were divinely inspired. The Council is not divinely inspired as an institution, but because **glorified people** take part in it.

"What makes an Ecumenical Council divinely inspired? Or, what makes a Local Council divinely inspired, and what is divine inspiration? When the Fathers of a Council, be it Local or Ecumenical, assemble to condemn a heresy, what constitutes the authority and the divine inspiration for this Council? For the bishop who takes part in a Council, together with all the other bishops, whether we take them singly or as a group, when does divine inspiration begin and when does it cease?

"I, for one, have never found anywhere the view that the Fathers of a Council are divinely inspired because they have come together in an Ecumenical council, and so at that time

they are divinely inspired. Whether there is a Local Council or an Ecumenical Council, the views are the same as far as the Fathers of the Church are concerned. The difference is the universal nature of the one and the local nature of the other, which is not a matter of the Churches but a matter of the way they were convened.

"If we had one hundred and fifty bishops who were not divinely inspired before they went to the Council, would those who were not inspired before the Council become divinely inspired after the inaugural prayer of the Council? And would they cease to be divinely inspired after the end of the Council? What is happening here? Was the Apostle Paul divinely inspired before he picked up his pen to write the Epistle to the Romans, and did he cease to be divinely inspired when he wrote the Amen at the end? When did his divine inspiration begin and when did it end? The same can be asked of all the books of Holy Scripture.

"That is why I, for one, offered the view that divine inspiration in the Church is no different from the inspiration that scientists have."

The bishops, who attained to the vision of God, beheld God and were in communion with Him, thus became the Fathers, who are the basis of the Ecumenical Councils.

Those who are guided by their experience are divinely inspired. Naturally this experience is of two kinds: the experience of illumination and the experience of glorification. These empirical Fathers are the basis of the Ecumenical Councils.

The glorified bishops reached the state of union with God and divine vision and have sure knowledge of God. The Holy Spirit acts through them. The Holy Fathers lived in various parts of the world, but through the Holy Spirit they had acquired experience of God, and when they gathered in Ecumenical Councils they also acquired a common terminology.

"Without there being any Pope of Rome among the Fathers to dictate what the dogmas were, all the Fathers together completely spontaneously always supported the same truth. These were people who were separated by vast geographical distances, which in those days were equivalent to the distance from us to the moon, because someone living in one part of the Empire was as far apart from someone else living in another part of the empire as if they were living on two different planets. As they had the same experience, however, they reached common decisions."

There are, unfortunately, some people today who overlook the glorified Fathers and value the Councils more highly than the Fathers, whereas the opposite is the case. The Councils themselves call upon the teaching of the God-seeing Fathers.

"Orthodox people today do exactly the same. 'The Church says,' or 'Holy Scripture says,' or 'the Ecumenical Council says.' This is strange, because we learn from contemporary Orthodox Christians that the Ecumenical Council has great

authority in the Church and they are doubtful about the authority of the Fathers of the Church. They put the Council above the Fathers of the Church.

“When you read the record of the proceedings of the Councils, the Ecumenical Council invokes the Fathers of the Church. They say, ‘The three hundred and eighteen Fathers said,’ ‘The one hundred and fifty Fathers said,’ ‘The six hundred Fathers said.’ When we think of an Ecumenical Council, for us it is Council of Fathers of the Church. It is an assembly of Fathers who teach these things...”

### An Analogy to the Sciences of Astronomy and Medicine

In this section we will examine this issue by taking examples from two sciences: astronomy and medicine.

First of all, it should be stressed once more that the Church’s tradition is the experience of the God-seeing saints, Prophets, Apostles and Fathers. They lived this experience by the revelation of God and conveyed it to their spiritual children, and it is recorded in their writings. Thus three factors are very closely linked: the saints who behold God, their illuminated *nous*, by means of which they share in the experience of revelation, and their writings, in which the experience is recorded in created words and concepts. The basic elements of the tradition are the glorified saints (glorified=*theosis*), who are the bearers of the tradition.

“The Fathers of our Fathers in the Old Testament, the Prophets, had glorification (*theosis*) without the human nature of Christ. Afterwards, the Apostles also had glorification, with the human nature of Christ. And, after Pentecost we have another kind of glorification, with the experiences that they have after glorification, because the same experience of Pentecost continues within the Church and has not come to an end. Given that the experience of Pentecost has not come to an end, the bishops, who have this experience, are led to the same experience and know what they are talking about.

“Because of the continuity of this tradition, the Orthodox patristic tradition resembles modern biology, chemistry, astronomy and medical science. In this way the tradition of the Church is continued empirically. What experience, ultimately? The fact that cures continue and people are cured. People continue to learn the truth from astronomy, medical science, biology, in other words, from the experience of purification, the experience of illumination, which is the cure of the human personality, and the experience of glorification, which is the telescope and microscope of Orthodox theology. This is why we believe that we are on the right path and are still within the tradition.”



Those who behold God are like scientific astronomers, who examine the star-filled sky and discover stars that are invisible to the naked eye by using telescopes. Whatever they see they record in their writings. The saints do the same.

“We find this tradition dotted here and there throughout the writings of the Fathers, but mainly in the writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian, all his disciples and among those referred to as hesychasts. What is this tradition? It is extremely simple, as simple as can be.”

It is divine vision of the uncreated energy of God and guiding people on the basis of this experience. The vision of the inexpressible reality takes place by means of a special organ, the *nous*, which is illumined by the Holy Spirit. Those who behold God are in the state of illumination. They reach the state of glorification, participate in the Light and see the Light. *In Your light we shall see light*. On this point they resemble astronomers who see stars that are invisible to the naked eye by using special instruments called telescopes. Also, anyone who wishes to confirm the observations of

astronomers has to use the same instruments. This means that any Christian who wishes to verify the experience of the God-seeing saints has to acquire an illuminated *nous*.

“When there are doubts concerning astronomical writings, we take telescopes and by means of telescopes we confirm the correct interpretation of the books concerning astronomy. One looks, another looks, a third one looks and so it goes on. And all those who check with telescopes, radio telescopes, etc., say, ‘Ah! That is what those notes mean. Did you see it when you looked through the telescope? That is the explanation.’

“And the correct interpretation continues down the years, because there are people who see and know how to use telescopes and radio telescopes and the equipment with which they measure distance analogous with the speed of light—spectrographs, spectrograms—they even know how to measure material composition, they can even measure speed with them.”

This example shows that astronomers are closely linked with telescopes and writings. In the same way, doctors are closely associated with equipment and operating theatres and with curing people.

If, however, astronomers lose their telescopes and start to imagine stars or to speculate about them, they become astrologers. The same can happen to doctors, who, if they lose their equipment, become charlatans.

“If astronomers lose their telescopes and no longer know how to handle the various pieces of astronomical equipment,

those who behold God are like scientific astronomers, who examine the star-filled sky and discover stars that are invisible to the naked eye by using telescopes. Whatever they see they record in their writings. The saints do the same.



they are reduced to being astrologers instead of astronomers. And, given that they have become astrologers, and the others have become sham doctors and pseudo-biologists and so on, are those who are no longer able to handle the scientific equipment of Orthodox theology astronomer-theologians or astrologer-theologians?"

In other words, true theologians are those who see God, who are like astronomers. When, however, without their *nous* being illuminated, they theologize by using speculation and their imagination instead, they turn into speculative thinkers and scholastics. Subsequently, when the astronomer, who has turned into an astrologer because he does not have the right equipment but uses speculation, takes part in a conference of astronomers, his participation in the conference does not in itself convert him into a scientific astronomer.

"This is the major question from the scientific point of view: Can someone who has become an astrologer, because he does not know how to use astronomical equipment, consider that this weakness is compensated for by the fact that he attends conferences? If astronomers forget about astronomical equipment and simply preserve the books about astronomy and misinterpretations begin, will they interpret the books about astronomy correctly, because they have gathered at a conference? I am simply posing the question. Will the conference produce correct astronomy? Will it upgrade astrology to astronomy? Is it the conference that will achieve this? Or will it be a conference of astrologers?"

The same can be observed in respect of doctors who are unable to use their instruments and equipment or operating-theatres in order to treat the sick. They are unable to cure people, and cannot be regarded as doctors merely because they attend medical congresses.

"Doctors have inherited the equipment of medical science, all the tools for surgical operations, from the past. We have X-ray equipment, hospitals, operating rooms and so on. What if the doctors who know how to use all this equipment disappeared, and untrained women who dabbled in practical medicine came in from the villages? And if the state made these untrained women responsible for the Universities and they taught the students, as the students were involved in strikes and politics, and these untrained women ended up being accepted by medical science, then they would start to be dangerous.

"Let us suppose that doctors have reached the point of no longer knowing how to use these tools, but use them at random. If the radiologist graduated from the University of Thessaloniki in 1870, so he does not know how to read X-rays and makes bad diagnoses, and the doctor performs bad surgical operations, and so on. So instead of people being cured, 90% die and 10% are cured. Whereas in America, France, England, Switzerland and Germany 60% are cured, in Greece 10% are cured. Well, if the Greek doctors have a

conference will the success rate increase to 90% or 100%? What is the use of a conference of doctors who do not know medical science? What good does it do? Do you follow what I am trying to say?"

**By analogy, the same happens with bishops who do not have the suitable equipment, an illuminated nous, when they participate in the Council. They cannot be real theologians and they are unable to know the tradition. They are not illuminated simply because they take part in a Council. Illumination comes first.**

"As a researcher I raise a topic: This bishop has received his diploma, but would never have received it except that his Metropolitan continuously phoned up all his professors, and he received his diploma with five marks, whereas he deserved no marks at all. If he, together with seventy such bishops, gathers in a conference of bishops called a Council, will they make correct decisions? Because the Holy Spirit descended? Or is this a parallel situation with the situation in all the other positive sciences? What is the difference between theology and the other positive sciences? Do you follow my argument?"

"I am afraid that I am telling you things that are rather shocking. How can I put it? I am, however, obliged as a researcher and historian—because my own special subject is history—as a historian I am obliged, when I undertake historical research and find certain things, I am obliged to inform you."

From this point of view, if the Orthodox bishops, who are disciples of those theologians who are not followers of the patristic tradition, ever gather in a Council, will the fact that they are meeting together in a conference make them Fathers of the Church? And if we call the conference an Ecumenical Council, can it ever reach a correct decision?

Only if they copy Holy Scripture and the patristic texts to the letter, without adding a word of their own, only then is there any hope of them reaching an Orthodox decision, only then. If, however, they add words that are not in Holy Scripture and the patristic tradition, it is almost certain that they will produce a decision that is dogmatically incorrect. It is almost certain. Guaranteed! Guaranteed!"

Scientific astronomers have criteria in order to verify their conclusions. Of course there are books, but there are also telescopes that confirm their observations. The astrologers, who rely on speculation and imagination, have no criteria to separate which group of astrologers are genuine and which are not.

"If there is a group of astrologers, do they have the right to denounce another group of astrologers? Can one group say, 'We are better astrologers than the others', and the other group say, 'We are better than you', and someone else to say, 'No, we are better than you' and so on, and can the astrologers argue among themselves? With what criteria?"

This happens in Orthodox theology too. The God-seeing saints, like scientific astronomers, have secure criteria and, like true doctors, they have successes, because they use suitable instruments and are part of the Orthodox tradition. Heretics, by contrast, resemble astrologers who do not have secure criteria, as each one uses his own speculation, and they do not achieve success.

“I want to emphasize the fact that every science is judged by the end result, not just by the means. Because if a doctor appears and begins to carry out surgical operations, and other doctors follow the traditions, and he begins to do a surgical operation, the others say, ‘But he will kill the patient by doing that. What is he doing? We have never seen anyone doing an operation in that way before,’ and people are indignant, because they know that surgical operations are not usually performed in that manner, but are done differently. However, they see that he cures the patient. Then he repeats the same method once again. When they see good results produced five or six times, will the doctors continue to say that the method is no good? Then the doctors will not say that it is not a good method. Because if it were not a good method, how would it achieve so many successes?”

In the Orthodox tradition those who see God—the Prophets, Apostles and saints—are closely associated with their illuminated *nous* and their divinely inspired writings. That is why people are cured. There are successful cures, people continue to be sanctified, to reach illumination and glorification. Also, the interpretation of divinely inspired writings requires divinely inspired commentators, who have the same illuminated *nous* and the same tradition as the divinely inspired writers of Holy Scripture and the patristic books.

**In the Orthodox Church we have both God-seeing saints, whose nous is illumined, and writings, so Holy Scripture is linked with Holy Tradition. When the ‘astronomers’ (God-seers) and the ‘telescopes’ (illuminated nous and glorification) are lost, the writings are also misinterpreted. Then the astronomers turn into astrologers who speculate, and their conference becomes a conference of astrologers instead of astronomers.**

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[\*] From the “Orthodox Heritage” Editor: The esteemed Fr. John Romanides makes a clear recognition herein of the Church’s 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Councils, both held in Constantinople, albeit not “officially” recognized yet as Ecumenical. A short reminder of these Holy Synods’ focus is as follows:

The 8<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council. This was the fourth Council of Constantinople, (879-880); restored St. Photius the Great to his see in Constantinople and anathematized the Latins’ heresy of *filioque* as well as any who altered the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, abrogating the decrees of the Robber Council of 869-870. This council was at first ac-

cepted as ecumenical by the West but later repudiated in favor of the robber council in 869-870 which had deposed Photius.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council. This was the fifth Council of Constantinople, (1341-1351); affirmed *hesychastic* theology according to St. Gregory Palamas and condemned the Westernized philosopher Barlaam of Calabria and his associated heresies and blasphemy relative to the “created” energies of God.

Our Brotherhood considers it an unfortunate (deliberate) “miss” that the recently completed Council of Crete did not proceed with such official recognition. Given, though, the strong ecumenist motivations and spirit of the Cretan council, we can “understand” why such recognition was not deemed worthy by its organizers. It is our prayer and hope that a truly Pan-Orthodox Council in the future shall proceed with this recognition while concurrently condemning ecumenism, the heresy of all heresies.



The Divine Liturgy is not a matter of texts and editions, but a living tradition. The service is not learned from books, but from [empirical] experience, from serving with one’s fathers and preceptors in the Faith.

As Orthodox clergy become more removed from established centers of piety, especially those in *diaspora* from traditional homelands, the need for guidance from detailed liturgical texts becomes the more important, both for the instruction of the newly ordained and for the continued guidance of those already familiar with the divine services. This is especially true of English translations which guide those who may have little familiarity with texts in the original languages.

It is hazardous to take older and more recent editions and to draw conclusions about modifications and changes in practice. It would be wrong to take such an array of variations and to assemble one’s own technique of serving, though one might quote precedents and give convincing arguments for each variation. It is necessary to understand these variations lest we become adamant about practices which have undergone change. It is important to study and to understand the history of liturgies that we might the better distinguish a variation from an innovation which is theologically incorrect, that we might avoid some of the changes one finds in recent editions which seem generated by nothing more than a striving after originality.

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## WHAT IS HOLINESS?

By Hieroschemamonk Ambrose (formerly Fr. Alexey Young), a spiritual child of Fr. Seraphim Rose.

In order to talk about holiness, we need to talk about the saints, who are our best examples of holiness. For this purpose, we must say that a saint does not exist outside of Orthodoxy. Of course there are outstanding people—Mother Theresa for example, but in the precise Orthodox understanding **sainthood is limited to the Orthodox Church.**

It is a requirement for holiness to confess the Orthodox faith. False doctrine inhibits our movement towards God. It slows us down and prevents us from going the whole way to Him, whereas authentic doctrine illumines our path to God.<sup>[1]</sup> St. Theophan the Recluse notes that false doctrine can result in profound inner unhappiness and emotional distress.

A saint is not simply one who has cultivated the virtues or one who controls himself through asceticism, but rather is the one who has Christ Himself living with him. Sainthood infers a completely organic relationship with Christ. A saint is one who is not separated from Him in any way. The saint has gone through the stages of repentance and purification to attain a remarkable state of union with Christ. This is the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*. To become one with Christ is the purpose of life.

Self-help and self-improvement groups prove ultimately meaningless when you consider that, in the end, you will die. As Fr. Seraphim was wont to remind me—all things pass away except for Jesus Christ. When we truly confront this reality, and the reality of death, then many things we thought were important begin to take a back seat. But, death has been transcended. Death has been transfigured.

We feel unholy and unworthy when we hear in the Liturgy *Holy things are for the holy!* but the Church understands this and replies *One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.* It is because of this Holy One that we have our hope. From Him comes forth all holiness.

Baptism and Chrismation enter us into the communion of the saints, into a new way of living, thinking, seeing, hearing, tasting, and touching. We join the ranks of those who have sought and found Christ and heard *I Am He*.

The saints debase themselves with startling humility. They had no pretensions about themselves, but we who are not saints sometimes pretend to be holy and righteous and hereby debase others, whereas a true saint makes us, the insignificant, feel loved. There was always a sense of stillness and peacefulness about Fr. Seraphim. Problems resolved themselves in his presence. Fr. Seraphim always accepted a person as he was, but could knock him down a peg when he was a fake.

We ought to struggle, repent, seek mercy, try to learn patience, try to have more love and humility, and so on. In doing so something begins to happen within us—we begin to realize that we have a quietness within us that did not originate from

within us. This is the beginning of *theosis*. Christ says: *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* (Jn 7:38). It begins as a trickle and then flows out through our whole being.

When we approach a saint we feel that he loves us and does not exploit us. Saints are “little christs.” If we enter into a relationship with a saint by asking for his intercessions we will find there a beginning of warmth, and a sense that the saint is present and listening to us.

St. Gregory Palamas writes that God and His saints have the same glory and splendor because God deigns to share it with us. The saint reminds us that God loves us, and that he too was weak but that we all have the strength of being loved by Christ. We can return and find God, but if we abandon God then we become slaves of self-love, which destroys us and those around us.<sup>[2]</sup> The saints reproach us.

A man dominated by self-love will soon be dominated by all the passions, sins, and temptations. One-by-one they will find a home in him. The solution is modeled for us by the saints—that is, living for Christ and not ourselves. Only then do we become real people. We learn real theology from being in the presence of a saint who is a clear icon of Christ before us. St. John of Damascus speaks of the saints as full of grace, which does not depart at death, and thus we have relics, and icons and such spiritual “artifacts.” God rests in His saints.

We can come to understand Who God is and who we are through the saints who are aflame with love for God. They remind us that something never ceases or passes away. God cannot hate, and God cannot get angry. God is only loving; and unless we reach a state of only loving, God will be Hell for us. Metropolitan Hierotheos says that contact with the saints reveals the hurt child within us.

But how can we experience the saints? It is not enough just to ask their intercessions. To have a deeper, more meaningful relationship with a saint we must already imitate him in some way—to have contrition and a feeling of disillusionment in our own ability to accomplish spiritual tasks. Humility is the beginning of a true sense of reality—that is, that we have long way to go to reach God.

There are six kinds of saints, or six types of holiness, listed here in relative importance for the Church:

1. Apostles: their teaching is the foundation of the Church
2. Martyrs and confessors: they are an example to us of supreme sacrifice
3. Prophets: they foretold the coming of Christ
4. Hierarchs and teaching saints: they preserve unity among the faithful; this includes saints such as St. John of Damascus and St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain
5. Monastics: they have died in peace praying for the world
6. Righteous: they have attained holiness in the world by keeping the commandments, participating in the liturgical

life of the Church, etc.; this includes saints such as Abraham and Sarah, Joachim and Anna, St. Joseph, etc.

St. Kosmas of Aetolia says that the martyrs are in Paradise with their blood, and the monastics with their ascetic life—and how shall we who beget children attain Paradise? By hospitality, relieving the poor, the blind, the lame (like St. Joachim), by almsgiving, love, and fasting which causes us to be enriched in body and soul.

The Righteous includes Fools-for-Christ who hide their virtues and endure contempt to achieve humility and patience. All these paths have the common basis of asceticism and spiritual work—that is, an athleticism of the spirit. The Orthodox saint is already a citizen of Heaven and helps us achieve that goal.

In Paradise, before the Fall, Adam had constant remembrance of God. His sin deeply darkened this, which was passed on to the rest of humanity. We bear signs of this corruption and decay and spiritual nature that are darkened by forgetfulness of God. The saints are those who have remembered God and are anxious to teach us to do the same.

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**Question:** Could you elaborate on your statement that there are no saints outside of Orthodoxy?

**Answer:** For instance, there is a striking difference between Francis of Assisi and Orthodox saints. Francis identified himself with Christ many times when he experienced *stigmata*. (*Stigmata*—singular *stigma*—body marks, sores, or sensations of pain in locations corresponding to the crucifixion wounds of Jesus Christ, such as the hands, wrists, and feet. *Ed.*) We do not identify with Christ but are saved by Him. We focus more on the Resurrected Christ. Francis saw himself as especially singled out by Christ, but an Orthodox saint always sees himself as the least of all. Once, when Francis was sick, his doctor told him to eat meat, which was against the rule of the Franciscans. He felt so guilty that he went into the market, dumped ashes on himself, proclaimed his sin to all, loudly talking about how much of a wretch he was. Our saints never draw such attention to themselves.

**Question:** Could you elaborate on God not getting angry?

**Answer:** We must remember that the Old Testament is not the full revelation of God. We only see Christ angry once, when He drives the money-changers out of the Temple, which is an example of righteous anger because he was angry for the honor of the Father. The Old Testament is more about how the Jews perceived God, and they were in a very imperfect relationship with Him. It is not for us to judge those outside the Church, but we know that Orthodoxy is the fullness of truth.

**Question:** If we are new to Orthodoxy, how do we discern what our distortions are?

**Answer:** It is very important to read the lives of the saints. We have to start at a pre-school level before reading the Philokalia. Fr. Seraphim recommended that people read

Dickens to show them normal life, to overcome hardness of heart. These writings show a living theology. We can watch and learn from others. We do not need to know why everything is done, but just do it. Holiness needs to be studied in action. Read less theology and more lives of the saints.

**Question:** Could you compare and contrast Western asceticism and the western worldview with Orthodoxy?

**Answer:** Generally in the West asceticism came to be seen as an end in itself, but in Orthodoxy it is only a means to an end.

**Question:** Do saints continue to grow in holiness after death when they are united to Christ?

**Answer:** Yes, although we do not know very much about this. We know our prayers for the reposed are beneficial in some way—they are unable to pray or give alms for themselves, so we can do it for them. This implies continuing growth and change. And remember, a person is not a saint until they die—he can always fall.

† † †

[1] Amongst the sayings of the desert fathers we find this story of Abba Agathon: “It was said concerning Abba Agathon that some monks came to find him having heard tell of his great discernment. Wanting to see if he would lose his temper they said to him: ‘Aren’t you that Agathon who is said to be a fornicator and a proud man?’ ‘Yes, it is very true,’ he answered. They resumed, ‘Aren’t you that Agathon who is always talking nonsense?’ ‘I am.’ Again they said ‘Aren’t you Agathon the heretic?’ But at that he replied ‘I am not a heretic.’ So they asked him, ‘Tell us why you accepted everything we cast you, but repudiated this last insult.’ He replied ‘The first accusations I take to myself for that is good for my soul. But **heresy is separation from God**. Now I have no wish to be separated from God.’ At this saying they were astonished at his discernment and returned, edified.”

[2] Self-love can be said to be the root of all sin, as it was self-love or self-willing that moved Adam and Eve towards sin. “The passions are planted by self-will, when a person wants to live according to his own will, and not God’s,” writes the Hieromartyr Daniel Sysoev, *A Sobering book. Explanation of the Book of Ecclesiastes*, p. 36.



In these apocalyptic times it is difficult, or rather impossible, for many hierarchs of the local Orthodox Churches, to confess correctly in this Ecumenical Synod, which eventually is going to be convened, the Orthodox dogmas and the correct truths, according to the teachings of the holy Fathers, because of human weaknesses.

St. Justin Popović (+1979)

## ON THE CONCLUSION OF THE CRETAN “COUNCIL”

By George Karras, “Orthodox Heritage” Editor, Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen, June 26<sup>th</sup> 2016.

The long awaited “Pan-Orthodox” Council of Crete, planned for well over 90 years, highly anticipated and promoted by the ecumenists (and of great concern to Orthodoxy’s traditionalists) has come to its close. Discussing it with various Orthodox brethren and reading whatever has been published among the various Orthodox electronic news media and discussion forums, one thought prevails among most: “So what... What was this all about? What purpose did this multi-decade effort produce?”

We shall make an effort to answer these questions, providing our Brotherhood’s views and opinions.

### Has the Council Accomplished Anything?

This is a question that, sadly, is not as simple to address as the faithful might have hoped or expected. The Council’s conclusive statement has the appearance of a United Nations proclamation and very little that resembles the writings of our Holy Fathers (or past Ecumenical Synods or Local Councils). The topics addressed by the Council and the spirit of the attendants (not all of them Orthodox...) most certainly provide the reader of the final documents with content that does not appear to be aligned with our Holy Patristic Tradition. We implore our readers to access the documents of this Council and place them side-to-side with the documents from Councils or Synods of earlier eras.

The persistence of the Ecumenical Patriarch to hold this Council (in spite of having lost its Pan-Orthodox identity when four Churches refused to participate) had become the source of primary concern. Why was it necessary to hold it now? Why the refusal to postpone it when four different Patriarchs and dozens of hierarchs from all over the Orthodox world requested?

Great Councils have been utilized by the Church to address immediate or impending heretical views or clear heresies and emphatically and succinctly declare Orthodox positions and values, always patristically-based, never with any regard to political correctness or governmentally-motivated views of the past, present, or future age. That is clearly not the case for the Cretan Council of 2016.

First and foremost, there existed no “declared” heresy that was the topic of the Council nor any complex Church dogma that the hierarchy clarified for the faithful. The Council not only did not confront ecumenism, the heresy of all heresies plaguing the faithful and the Church in our days, but it did not even dare imply its existence. As a matter of fact, we dare suggest that its highly publicized agreed upon and signed position papers offered nothing of value whatsoever. Concurrently, it

is our most definitive view that its statements water down the Faith, and its organizers have attempted to take Orthodox a few steps closer to the unholy goals of the ecumenists. Time, as well as the views of the knowledgeable flock and clergy, shall determine whether their efforts carried any success beyond the customary circles of watered-down, lukewarm parishes and the clergy who have already been compromised by the message of the “unity with other faiths at ‘most’ costs.”

In support of the aforementioned position, we turn to the saintly hierarch of our days, bishop Avgoustinos of Florina, who late in his life, often spoke about this topic, despite his advanced age. He openly and clearly expressed the reason for his objection to the convocation of this synod. If Ecumenical Synods were convened, he said, it was to address heresy. Indeed, he saw an urgent reason to convene a new Ecumenical Synod if only in order to condemn contemporary heresies, particularly the heresy of Ecumenism, called “the heresy of heresies”. But he realized that **it would not be possible to condemn this arch-heresy, when the overwhelming majority of our hierarchs either openly promote it or tacitly accept it.**

The Council did issue several position papers, none of them providing any breakthrough on any issues except one. Its greatly discussed paper on “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World” wherein recognition is given to the heterodox (to “other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions”). The statement’s authors promote relations with these “churches and confessions” that should be based “...on the speediest and objective clarification possible of the whole ecclesiological question, and most especially of their more general teachings on sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession.” The paper includes several paragraphs justifying the continuation of dialogues and the ecumenical movement, and the need for continued participation in the World Council of Churches (WCC) for the “advancement of theological dialogues.” Of course, none of them have ever dared to address the fruits of all these dialogues during the past several decades of WCC participation—they have caused more damage to our Faith and not a single “Christian denomination” has inched towards Orthodox *ethos* and dogma, not one...

### What the Council Did NOT Achieve

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople was anxious to proclaim the Council’s happy results to the world and all Orthodox that were paying attention. We hold great reservations to anything that the Council and its architect, Patriarch Bartholomew, proclaim relative to the results and instead turn to history awaiting the characterization that she will grant to the Cretan gathering. We do objectively note, however, that the Council failed in its pre-stated primary goal of Orthodox unity and its desire to be Pan-Orthodox.

As all are aware by now, not one, but four of the Local Orthodox Churches refused to participate for well-documented and fully justifiable reasons. Among them are the Churches of

Antioch and Russia representing both a significant number of faithful as well as Orthodox tradition and history. We admire the firm and Orthodox positions taken by the Churches of Georgia and Bulgaria, so clear and succinct in their exemplification of true Orthodox values and principles. We have also been informed that the decisions to not participate in the Council were unanimous by the hierarchy of those two Churches! We pray *for many years of life* for the bishops of these Churches and plead that they maintain their Orthodox posture, irrespective of the many political pressures to which they have and continue to be subjected by their pro-western governments.

To the best of our knowledge (and we have read nothing to the contrary) the traditional requirement to recognize the Church's seven Ecumenical Synods and read their decisions, did not take place. Is it perhaps because some of these decisions stood in contrast with the objective of this Council?

The council missed the greatest opportunity in the last several decades to unite Orthodox who are painstakingly separated from the 14 Local Churches; it failed to open its arms and appeal for a return to the Orthodox children separated from the plurality of Orthodoxy—the Old Calendarists. The Ecumenical Patriarch, in his efforts to draw closer to the west and the Latins, drew further away from Orthodoxy's separated children. He had repeatedly implied and stressed his goals to serve as the uniting force in Orthodoxy; however, rather than bring closer, as a good and loving father, to the bosom of unity those who separated due the calendar issues (and the ecumenist movements of his predecessors), he created a larger rift among the Orthodox. It is very likely that he has placed such true Orthodox unity beyond any reach whatsoever.

The Council did not seek the continuation of operating within the confines and in protection of the one holy Orthodox faith, but instead marched closer to the west and was preoccupied in its efforts to harmonize with the heterodox and their worldly spirit. This is best demonstrated by the Council's refusal to confess two previous councils with an Ecumenical identity (879-880 with Saint Photios the Great and the council of 1351 with the Saint Gregory Palamas), which upheld the stature of Ecumenical Councils in the conscience of true Orthodox faithful everywhere.

As the Council was taking place, the Turkish government proceeded to convert Aghia Sophia, the greatest temple of Orthodoxy, into a mosque, for the 30 days of Ramadan, and the Koran was read daily until July 5. Not a word of protest by

any of the Council officials, including the Ecumenical Patriarch and his Synod, all of whom are Turkish citizens.

The Council invited and insisted upon observers; heterodox observers in the Orthodox Council! Prominently featured members of the Latins, the Protestants and the Monophysites were there not to comprehend Orthodox dogma and theology but instead “monitor” progress and report details of the proceedings to the heads of their “churches.” For what purpose and since when do we allow wolves in sheep's clothing among the shepherds of His flock? To call this outrageous would be minimalist—instead it is further evidence of the aforementioned desire of harmonizing with the worldly spirit in which all heterodox operate, far away from true Orthodox dogma and certainly the patristic *phronema*.

Peace was preached and written about in the final documents, in a vague manner and certainly with no direct reference to the on-going turmoil in the Middle East and elsewhere. The Council did not confront the violence preached and practiced (yes, preached and practiced) by Islam, and not just by ISIS. (It is preached, and practiced, for example, by the current Turkish government as exemplified by the genocide they are inflicting upon the Kurds and their continuing support to the ISIS terrorists.) It was an intentional miss of convenience, once again in the name of political correctness.

**Islam is not a religion of peace.** One may easily find articles within the electronic media containing the various teachings on the Koran—those which today's politicians choose to ignore as they call Islam a religion of peace... Nothing is further from the truth.

We appreciate some sections of the statement on Marriage and the fact that feared compromises to Church dogma did not take place, other than the continued *oikonomia* for marriage of Orthodox with heterodox. However, there was a huge opportunity missed; there was not any clear and succinct statement of condemnation for the legalization of gay “marriage” by the governments of most western nations. The Council failed to issue the warranted strong language that needs be used for this (and other) unacceptable forms of “family” lifestyle that make an absolute mockery of the Church's Holy Sacrament.

Lastly, the Council also failed to emphasize that Orthodoxy shall never compromise any of Her dogmas or any part of Holy Tradition and water it down to what the heretics have now established within their “churches,” whether that is questionable priesthood practices, improper fasting or marriage



The heterodox “observers” of the Cretan Council

between men and women who are not Orthodox. An opportunity missed to remind the faithful that the Holy Orthodox Church is the only church of yesterday, today and tomorrow and there has never existed any “completeness of faith” outside this church established by and belonging to Him.

### Some Conclusive Thoughts

The Cretan Council, in our opinion, rather than being a gathering that spread joy and unity, succeeded in further dividing and confusing the flock and spreading the fear of schisms among various Local Churches. We heard and observed, in several of the “Council press briefings” the deteriorated (and we dare call them treacherous and treasonous) words and behaviors of some of Orthodoxy’s hierarchy; we have read statements that exemplify the repeated compromises to the heterodox, and we saw the efforts to water down our Faith. Most importantly, rather than confronting the arch-heresy of ecumenism, the attending hierarchy glorified it (directly and indirectly), both in their statements as well as their discussions.

St. Paisios the Athonite had expressed his sorrow over the ecumenism movement with great pain in his heart: “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.” Some years later, Fr. Charalambos Vasilopoulos in his “Ecumenism Unmasked”, tells us that “... the ecumenists will attempt to validate the modernism they are trying to promote within the Church ... **They want it to be a synod that will eventually tear down the decisions of the previous Ecumenical Synods.**”

It is indeed the latter that worries the Orthodox circles whom the ecumenists nowadays have termed as “fundamentalists and fanatics.” Yet the hierarchy that has (as its majority) aligned itself with the ecumenist movement, is slowly losing their Orthodox flock as they pursue followers among the heterodox; as correctly pointed out by an Athonite in a recent conversation, “**they want to unite with the heterodox but they will end up losing the Orthodox.**”

The bishops in Orthodoxy are first and foremost, before any other pastoral interest, the guardians of the holy and Orthodox faith. Their council can only be holy if it knows how to preserve the purity of the Orthodox faith. It was a brave and a blessed avowal expressed by some Local Churches’ Orthodox Synods in discussing their decision on whether or not to participate in this council, for instance, the declaration of the Bulgarian Church: “**Outside the Holy Orthodox Church there are no other churches, there are only heresies and schism. Calling these churches is an absolute mistake, theologically, dogmatically and canonically.**”

As we await the true outcome of this Council, we remain firm in our opinion that this was the first of more Councils to be called by the Ecumenical Patriarch (or his successor), until

the Faith is adequately “watered down” for a true Sacramental union with the heterodox. That is the unholy goal of the ecumenists.

One question, though, troubles the traditional hierarchy and the traditional Orthodox theologians of our Church: Will there be immediate schisms forthcoming? Great fears for such a horrific outcome are being expressed among various circles, especially since a rumor is prevailing that the four Local Churches absent from the Cretan Council intend to call their own Council and follow a more traditional inclusion formula, more along the lines and rules applied during the Church’s Seven Ecumenical Synods. Would such an event lead us into a schism? How would the Ecumenical Patriarch respond?

While we believe that Sacramental union of the ecumenists with the heterodox is indeed their pursuit, we are all too aware that this Sacramental union is already happening in some parishes—it just has not been officially declared and it certainly is not being addressed by bishops who know that it is taking place. Some priests are communing the Monophysites openly, the sacrament of marriage is being mocked by Church officials who (in the name of “love”) compromise Church beliefs and dogma towards homosexuality; new Orthodox from Protestant “branches” that carry zero resemblance to any type of Christianity, are being refused the sacrament of baptism, and (even though the recent Council re-affirmed that “marriage between Orthodox and non-Christians is categorically forbidden in accordance with canonical *akriveia*”) some clergy is allowing the Sacrament of marriage to take place between Orthodox and Jews or followers of other religions.

Yet, among this confusion and uncertainty, we are encouraged to hear that there are still several hierarchs and clergy that remain faithful to the faith; several of the hierarchs attending the Council refused to sign the documents on “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World,” and it was not just the beloved bishops Athanasios of Limmasol and Hierotheos of Nafpaktos—there were quite a few more. It is exactly these men and their spiritual leadership, along with the resistant non-attending Local Churches and the many elders and monastics across the Orthodox world that give strength to the faithful. And we are among them, remaining in absolute belief in His words: *And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* (Mt 28:20).

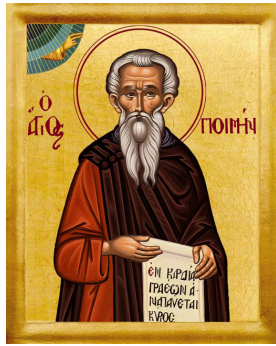
*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*



One should not seek among others the truth that can be easily gotten from the Church. For in her, as in a rich treasury, the apostles have placed all that pertains to truth, so that everyone can drink this beverage of life. She is the door of life.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, “Against Heresies”

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## SIN HAS BECOME FASHIONABLE!

*By St. Paisios the Athonite (feast day July 12<sup>th</sup>).*

The greatest barbarianism in the world is not war, but moral catastrophe. People are deteriorating both spiritually and physically. Some people try to justify the situation by saying that sinful life did not begin in our times. “Look at what was going on in ancient Rome!”—they say.

True, but the people in Rome were pagans and worshipped idols. And Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans addressed himself to these pagans, who had become baptized, but had not yet foresworn their bad habits.

We should not follow the examples of the greatest decadence in each epoch. Just think—we are Orthodox people, and where have we landed! About other people nothing can be said at all. But the worst thing is that modern people, while engaging in sin on a wholesale basis and seeing that someone is not following the spirit of the times and is not sinning, but demonstrates an iota of piety, they call such a person backward, a retrograde. These people are upset that someone is not sinning. They equate sin with progress. And that is absolutely the worst thing.

If modern people, living in sin, would at least recognize it, God would have mercy upon them. But they try to justify that which has no justification, and they laud sin. Moreover, to count sin as progress and to say that morality has outlived its time is, beside everything else, a most horrible blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if someone living in this world engages in spiritual endeavor and keeps his life pure,

that lifestyle has great value. Such people are due to be immensely rewarded,

In olden times a lecher or a drunkard was ashamed even to go to the market-place, because people would have started laughing at him. One can say that this situation served to place a certain restraint upon sin. Yet today, if someone lives righteously, particularly a maiden, people say about her: “Well, well, did she come from another planet?” In general, when lay people committed sin in former times, the poor wretches felt their sinfulness and became a little humbler. They did not mock those who lived spiritually, but on the contrary, they admired them. In our times, however, those who sin do not feel guilty. They likewise have no respect for others. Everything has been flattened down to the ground. If a person does not live in a worldly manner, sinners make a mockery of him.

However, in trying to justify that which has no justification, people feel tormented in their souls and do not find peace anywhere. They are all internally unnerved, and so the miserable ones seek amusement for themselves, they run around in bars and discos, get drunk, watch television incessantly... In other words, their conscience bothers them, and in order to forget about it they engage in trivialities.

**Every person has a conscience.** Conscience is the very first Holy Scripture, given by God to the first-created people. No matter how much an individual tries to override his conscience, it will always denounce him from within. There is nothing sweeter than a peaceful and tranquil conscience. Such a person feels himself internally uplifted.



# 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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## SERMON ON THE EXALTATION OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS OF THE LORD

By St. John Maximovitch (Shanghai, "Exaltation of the Cross," 1947).

### THE CROSS PRESERVES THE UNIVERSE



In the Prophet Ezekiel (9:4-6), it is said that when the Angel of the Lord was sent to punish and destroy the sinning people, it was told him not to strike those

on whom the "mark" had been made. In the original text this mark is called "tau," the Hebrew letter corresponding to the letter "T," which is how in ancient times the cross was made, which then was an instrument of punishment. [And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity. Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women; **but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary.**]

So, even then, it was foretold the power of the Cross, which preserves those who venerate it. Likewise, by many other events in the Old Testament the power of the Cross was indicated. Mo-

ses, who held his arms raised in the form of a cross during the battle, gave victory to the Israelites over the Amalekites. He also, dividing the Red Sea by a blow of his rod and by a transverse blow uniting the waters again, saved Israel from Pharaoh, who drowned in the water, while Israel crossed over on the dry bottom. [And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. (Exod 14:21). And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. (Exod 14:26-27).]

Through the laying on of his hands in the form of a cross on his grandsons, Jacob gave a blessing to his descendants, foretelling at the same time their future until the coming of the *expectation of the nations, ... and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.* (Gen 48:19).

By the Cross, the Son of God, having become man, accomplished our salvation. *He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross.* (Phil 2:8). Having stretched out His hands upon the Cross, the Savior with them as it were embraced the world, and by His blood shed on it, like a king with red ink, He signed the forgiveness of the human race.

The Cross of the Lord was the instrument by which He saved the world after the fall into sin. Through the Cross, He descended with His soul into hell, to raise up from it the souls who were awaiting Him. By the Cross Christ opened the doors of Paradise which had

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20<sup>th</sup> century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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been closed after our first ancestors had been banished from it. The Cross was sanctified by the Body of Christ which was nailed to it when He gave Himself over to torments and death for the salvation of the world. Then it was filled with life-giving power. By the Cross on Golgotha *the prince of this world was cast out* (Jn 12:31) and an end was put to his authority. The weapon by which he was crushed became the sign of Christ's victory.

The demonic hosts tremble when they see the Cross, because the kingdom of hell was destroyed by the Cross. They do not dare to draw near to anyone who is guarded by the Cross.

The whole human race, by the death of Christ on the Cross, received deliverance from the authority of the devil, and everyone who makes use of this saving weapon is inaccessible to the demons.

When legions of demons appeared to St. Anthony the Great and other desert-dwellers, they guarded themselves with the sign of the Cross, and the demons vanished.

When there appeared to St. Symeon the Stylite, who was standing on his pillar, what seemed to be a chariot to carry him to Heaven, the Saint, before mounting it, crossed himself and it disappeared. The enemy, who had hoped to cast down the ascetic from the height of his pillar, was put to shame.

One cannot enumerate all the various incidents of the manifestation of the power of the Cross. Invisibly and unceasingly, Divine grace that gushes from it saves the world.

The sign of the Cross is made at all the Mysteries and prayers of the Church. With the making of the sign of the Cross over the bread and wine, they become the Body and Blood of Christ. With the immersion of the Cross the waters are sanctified. The sign of the Cross loosens us from sins.

**When we are guarded by the Cross, we oppose the enemy, without fearing his nets and barking.** Just as the flaming sword in the hands of the Cherubim barred the entrance into paradise of old, so the Cross now acts invisibly in the world, guarding it from perdition.

The Cross is the unconquerable weapon of pious kings in the battle with enemies. Through the apparition of the Cross in the sky, the dominion of Emperor Constantine was confirmed and an end was put to the persecution against the Church. The apparition of the Cross in the sky in Jerusalem in the days of Constantius the Arian proclaimed the victory of Orthodoxy. *By the power of the Cross of the Lord, Christian kings will continue to reign until Antichrist, barring his path to power and restraining lawlessness.* (St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on II Thes 2:6-7).

The *sign of the Son of Man* (Mt 24:30), that is, the Cross, will appear in the sky in order to proclaim the end of the present world and the coming of the eternal Kingdom of the Son of God. Then all the tribes of the earth shall weep, because they loved the present age and its lusts, but all who have endured persecution for righteousness and called on the name of the Lord shall rejoice and be glad. The Cross then will save all who conquered temptations, from eternal perdition by the Cross, who crucified their flesh with its passions and lusts, and took up their cross and followed after Christ.

However, those who hated the Cross of the Lord and did not engrave the Cross in their soul will perish forever. *For the Cross is the preserver of the whole universe, the Cross is the beauty of the Church, the Cross is the might of kings, the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful, the Cross is the glory of angels and the scourge of demons.* (Octoechos: Exapostilarion, Monday Matins).

## THE APPEARANCE OF THE CROSS NEAR ATHENS IN 1925

*From Orthodox Life, Vol. 22, No. 2 (March-April, 1972), pp. 18-20, published by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York.*

**From the Editor:** The inclusion of this article within our publication is not intended to support or refute the cause of calendar polemics, of either side. We do consider that the differing calendars amongst the 14 Local Orthodox Churches is a tragic anomaly that has brought more harm and (likely) no benefit whatsoever. While Local Churches which follow the traditional calendar, such as the Churches of Russia and Serbia (and the Holy Mountain), continue to be in communion with those who have adopted the Gregorian calendar, such as the Church of Greece and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, that is not universal and as we all know, divisions have occurred and persist to our day. The calendar-based division(s) amongst the Orthodox faithful, along with the intensifying push towards ecumenism, constitute the greatest harm of our days. These divisions have perpetuated and at times intensified, and continue to divide families, communities, cities, etc. We do consider the traditional, calendar to be the one that all Orthodox churches should return/follow, and we pray that, along with the condemnation of the pan-heresy of ecumenism, a declaration along these lines becomes the foundation of a renewed unity among all Orthodox, world-wide.

† † †

In the early 1900's, and especially in the 1920's, there were strong anti-Church and secularist forces in power in Greece and in the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Among the actions of these forces, there was introduced, by force, the Gregorian calendar. The Gregorian calendar is adequate for the functions of business, the stock-exchange, and other worldly, secular activities. Liturgically, however, it is practically useless, even harmful. It is in no way possible to reconcile the Gregorian calendar with our canonical, Orthodox Christian Paschalion. Moreover, the introduction of a Church calendar change by a local church created an unacceptable liturgical disunity within the Church Itself.

Vast numbers of the people of Greece refused to accept these anti-canonical, anti-Church changes being forced upon them by state police power. Such people suffered imprisonment and deprivation at the hands of secular police powers. But the spiritual eyes of true Orthodox Christians saw clearly even if, at the time, they did not completely comprehend

the evil of the new calendar. It was a forerunner and a sign of the greatest heresy in the history of the world—Ecumenism. Many people, however, became confused. Some began to waver. Just as the Arians were in control of the worldly power in 351 and were able to force their heresy upon the empire, so now, the calendar renovationists controlled the worldly power of Greece. In such a troubled and dangerous time, the All-Merciful God heeded the needs of His people. Again, as in 351, God sent a wondrous apparition of the sign of the All-Honourable Cross to seal the truth and put the false teachers to shame.

The appearance of the sign of the Cross took place in this manner:

In 1925, on the eve, of the feast of the Exaltation of the All-Honourable and Life-giving Cross of our Saviour, 14 September according to the Orthodox Church calendar, the all-night vigil was served at the church of St. John the Theologian in suburban Athens. By 9 o'clock that evening, more than 2,000 of the true-Orthodox faithful had gathered in and around the church for the service, since very few true-Orthodox churches had been accidentally left open by the civil authorities. Such a large gathering of people could not, however, go unnoticed by the authorities. Around eleven P.M. the authorities dispatched a battalion of police to the church "to prevent any disorders which might arise from such a large gathering." The gathering was too large for the police to take any direct action or to arrest the priest at that time and so they joined the crowd of worshippers in the already over-flowing courtyard of the church.

Then, regardless of the true motives for their presence, against their own will, but according to the Will which exceeds all human power, they became participants in the miraculous experience of the crowd of believers.

At 11:30 p.m., there began to appear in the heavens above the church, in the direction of North-East, a bright, radiant Cross of light. The light not only illuminated the church and the faithful but, in its rays, the stars of the clear, cloudless sky became dim and the church-yard was filled with an almost tangible light. The form of the Cross itself was an especially dense light and it could be clearly seen as a Byzantine cross with an angular cross bar toward the bottom. This heavenly miracle lasted for half an hour, until midnight, and then the Cross began slowly to raise up vertically, as the cross in the hands of the priest does in the ceremony of the Elevation



Η Γ' ΘΕΙΑ ΕΜΦΑΝΙΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΤΙΜΙΟΥ ΣΤΑΥΡΟΥ ΤΗΝ 14η  
ΣΕΠΤΕΜΒΡΙΟΥ 1925 (ΠΑΤΡΙΩΝ ΕΟΡΤΟΛΟΓΙΩΝ), ΑΝΘΩΝ ΤΗΣ  
ΙΕΡΑΣ ΜΟΝΗΣ ΑΓ. ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΥ ΣΤΟΝ ΥΜΗΤΤΟ

of the Cross in church. Having come straight up, the Cross began gradually to fade away.

The human language is not adequate to convey what took place during the apparition. The entire crowd fell prostrate upon the ground with tears and began to sing prayers, praising the Lord with one heart and one mouth. The police were among those who wept, suddenly discovering, in the depths of their hearts, a childlike faith. The crowd of believers and the battalion of police were transformed into one, unified flock of faithful. All were seized with a holy ecstasy. The vigil continued until four A.M., when all this human torrent streamed back into the city, carrying the news of the miracle because of which they were still trembling and weeping.

Many of the unbelievers, sophists and renovationists, realizing their sin and guilt, but unwilling to repent, tried by every means to explain away or deny this miracle. The fact that the form of the cross had been so sharply and clearly that of the Byzantine Cross (sometimes called the Russian Cross), with three cross-bars, the bottom one at an angle, completely negated any arguments of accidental physical phenomenon.

The fact that such an apparition of the Cross had also occurred during the height of the first great heresy must strike the Orthodox with an especial sense of the magnitude of the importance of the calendar question and of all that is connected with it. No sensible person can discuss this issue lightly, with secular reasoning or with worldly arguments. Renovationists, like the Arians in 351, were thus left without extenuation or mitigation.



## ON ANTICHRIST

By St. John of Damascus.

It should be known that the Antichrist is bound to come. Everyone, therefore, who confesses not that the Son of God came in the flesh and is perfect God and became perfect man, after being God, is Antichrist, for the denial of the perfect Divinity of Christ is an act of being as Antichrist, anti-Christ as it were. But in a peculiar and special sense he who comes at the consummation of the age is called Antichrist. First then, it is requisite that the Gospel should be *preached among all nations*, as the Lord said (Mt 24:14), and then he will come to refute the impious Jews. For the Lord said to them: *I am come in My Father's name and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.* (Jn 5:43). And the Apostle says, *Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion that they should believe a*

*lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* (II Thes 2:10-12) The Jews accordingly did not receive the Lord Jesus Christ Who was the Son of God and God, but (will) receive the imposter who calls himself God. For he will assume the name of God, the angel teaches Daniel, saying these words: *Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers.* (Dan 11:37). And the Apostle says: *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day of the Lord shall not come except there come the apostasy first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.* (II Thes 2:3-4). In the temple of God he said; not our temple, but the old Jewish temple. For he will come not to us but to the Jews: not for Christ or the things of Christ: wherefore he is called Antichrist.

First, therefore, it is necessary that the Gospel should be *preached among all nations.* (Mt 24:14) *And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.* (II Thes 2:8-10). The devil himself, therefore, does not become man in the way that the Lord was made man. God forbid! But he becomes man as the offspring of fornication and receives all the energy of Satan. For God, foreknowing the strangeness of the choice that he would make, allows the devil to take up his abode in him.

He is, therefore, as we have said, the offspring of fornication and is nurtured in secret and of a sudden he rises up and rebels and assumes rule. And in the beginning of his rule, or rather tyranny, he assumes the role of sanctity. But when he becomes master he persecutes the Church of God and displays all his wickedness. But he will come *with signs and lying wonders* (II Thes 2:9), fictitious and not real, and he will deceive and lead away from the living God those whose mind rests on an unsound and unstable foundation, so that *even the elect* would, if it were possible, be made to trip. (Mt. 24:24).

But Enoch and Elias the Tishbite *shall be sent* and shall *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,* (Mal 4:6; Rev 11:3) that is, the synagogue to our Lord Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Apostles: and they (Enoch and Elias) will be destroyed by him (Antichrist). And *the Lord shall come out of heaven* (II Thes 1:8), just as the holy Apostles beheld Him *going into heaven* (Acts 1:2), perfect God and perfect Man, with glory and power and will destroy the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, with the breath of His mouth.. **Let no man therefore, look for the Lord to come from the earth, but only out of heaven as He Himself has made certain.** (II Thes 1:8).

## ON MUSIC

By Photios Kontoglou (+1965).



Photios Kontoglou of blessed memory (1895-1965) played a major role in the glorious return of traditional Byzantine iconography to the Greek Orthodox world in the twentieth century. He was also an accomplished chanter and a spiritual writer who inspired countless souls to embrace the unadulterated traditions of the Orthodox faith. This article consists of selections from his writings translated in the book “*Byzantine Sacred Art*” by Dr. Constantine Cavarinos, who was one of his disciples.

† † †

Music is of two kinds (as are the other arts also)—secular and ecclesiastical. Each of these has been developed by different feelings and different states of the soul. Secular music expresses worldly (i.e., carnal) feelings and desires. Although these feelings may be very refined (romantic, sentimental, idealistic, etc.), they do not cease being carnal. Nevertheless, many people believe that these feelings are spiritual. However, spiritual feelings are expressed only by ecclesiastical music. Only ecclesiastical music can truly express the secret movements of the heart, which are entirely different from those inspired and developed by secular music. That is, it expresses contrition, humility, suffering and godly grief, which, as Paul says, *worketh repentance to salvation*. (II Cor 7:10). Ecclesiastical music can also evoke feelings of praise, thanksgiving, and holy enthusiasm. Secular music, on the other hand—even the purest—expresses carnal emotions, even when it is inspired by suffering and affliction. This type of suffering, Paul calls “worldly grief,” which *worketh death*. (II Cor 7:10).

Thus, two kinds of music were formed, the secular, which arouses emotion—any kind of human emotion—and ecclesiastical music, which evokes contrition. St. John Chrysostom strongly condemned the various attempts that were made by some of his contemporaries to introduce into the Church secular music, the music of the theatre and the mimes.

Only the arts which were developed by devout motives since the early years of Christianity have given expression to the spiritual essence of the religion. These alone can be called liturgical, that is, spiritual, in the sense that religion gives to the term spiritual. The *spiritual odes* of which Paul speaks were works of such art. [Eph 5:19 (*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*) and Col 3:16 (*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*)]. All the liturgical arts express the same thing: architecture, hymnody, iconography, embroidery, and even writing, the manner of walking, and in general the movements and gestures of the priests, the chiming of the bells, and so forth.

That these arts are truly of unique spirituality has been realized by many non-Orthodox, especially clergymen, whose sense-organs have been exposed, from youth on, to formative influences different from those in which



Orthodox Christians have been brought up. Nevertheless, they confess that our icons and psalmody evoke in them contrition—of course, when executed by inspired and pious artists.

Thus, the value of the liturgical arts is not merely conventional, but real, extending beyond the limited conceptions that are due to nurture, habit, and taste, since even persons who are not of the Orthodox faith recognize that the arts of

the Orthodox Church reflect the spirit of the Gospels and for this reason lift the soul above the earthly realm. And how could it be otherwise, inasmuch as these arts have been developed by sanctified hearts, which felt deeply the liturgical element in speech and music? Liturgical music is the natural musical garb of liturgical speech. Both sprang up together; they are one and the same thing. Essence and expression here have an absolute correspondence, even more exact than that of an object and its reflection in a mirror, for the objects of which we speak here belong to the spiritual realm. The profound and apocalyptic spirit of Christian religion and its mysteries could not be expressed faithfully and worthily except by these arts, which are called liturgical and spiritual, and which were developed by that same profound spirit. Only this music, and none other, uniquely expresses the spirit of our religion, because

only this music has an absolute and most exact correspondence with it. This is testified to, I repeat, by certain men whose spiritual upbringing, religious training, phyletic and other heritage have no relation to that of the Orthodox. *The Spirit bloweth where it listeth*, (Jn 3:8) and is transmitted to souls by means of sounds which the same Spirit formed, by illuminating the souls of the holy writers of hymns.

The Fathers of the Church ordained that Christians use the voice alone in execution of hymns, chanting as did our Lord Himself and His disciples. St. John Chrysostom says: "Our Savior chanted hymns just as we do." The Apostolic Constitutions forbid the use of musical instruments in the church. From the time of the Apostles, psalmody was monophonic, or homophonic, as it is to this day in our churches [in Greece].

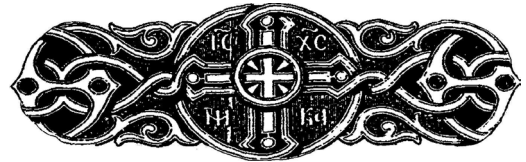
The Western Church, in order to gratify people and flatter their tastes, put instruments inside the churches, disobeying what was ordained by the Fathers. They did this because they had no idea what liturgical music was and what secular music was, just as they did not know the difference between liturgical painting and secular painting. But the Byzantines distinguished the one from the other, and this shows how much more spiritual they were in comparison with the Westerners and how much more truly they experienced the spirit of Christianity. Byzantine music is, in comparison with the music of the West, exactly as Orthodox iconography is in comparison with the religious painting of the West.

How divine, indeed, is the psalmody of the Orthodox Church! It seems sweeter and sweeter each year to the Christian—a new wine that fills the heart with joy and makes it soar to the ethereal region of immortal life.

Byzantine music is peaceful, sad but consoling, enthusiastic but reserved, humble but heroic, simple but profound. It has the same spiritual essence as the Gospels, the hymns, the psalms, the books of the lives of the saints, and the iconography of Byzantium. That is why Byzantine music is monotonous for one to whom the Gospels are monotonous, naive for one to whom the Gospels are naive, circumscribed for one to whom the Gospels are circumscribed, mournful for one to whom the Gospels are mournful, antiquated for one to whom the Gospels are antiquated. But it is joyful for one to whom the Gospels are joyful, filled with compunction for one to whom the Gospels are filled with compunction, enthusiastic but humble for one to whom the Gospels are enthusiastic but humble, and peaceful for one who experiences the peace of Christ.

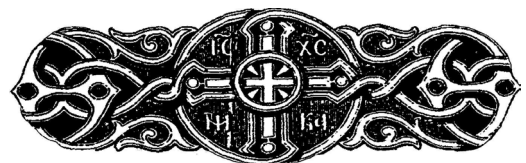
Byzantine art is spiritual, and it is necessary that a man have spiritual depth in order to understand its mystical treasures. Byzantine music expresses "gladdening sorrow" (vid. *The Ladder*, Step 7:9), that is, that spiritual fragrance which only the spiritual senses are capable of experiencing.

Its melody is not unholy, ostentatious, despondent, shallow, tasteless, or aimless; it is meek, humble, sweet with a certain bitter-sweetness, and full of contrition and mercy. It bestows an unfading spiritual glory upon souls that have become worthy of the eternal mysteries and the compassion of God. It expresses thanksgiving; it causes the flow of tears of gratitude and spiritual joy. This music is the warmest, the most direct, and the most concise expression of the religious feeling of faithful Orthodox people.



Repentance is endless. All the virtues, by the grace of God, may be perfected by man, but no one can perfect repentance, since we need repentance until our last breath, for we err in the twinkling of an eye. Therefore, repentance is interminable. Oh, how good God is! Justly will my fellow sinners be punished, for they have ignored the infinite compassion of the heavenly Father. Although we err as humans, we are sluggish to say, "I have sinned!" But how can we say this, since we (and I, above all) are forgetful and lazy and proud, too—mighty obstacles on the road to humility! Christ showed this road to us through His Cross, but unfortunately we voluntarily turn a deaf ear to Him, to our great regret. Time flies, the years roll by, and we are drawing nearer and nearer to eternity. We see this, yet a mental numbness has bound us until we (and I, first) are thrown into hell! My God, Who has delivered the human race from the enemy's slavery, deliver us also from the future condemnation when You come to judge the world and render to each according to his works (*I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be*, Rev. 22:12). Through your prayers, may I find mercy when my wretched soul is judged, for I am afraid to meet the fearsome Judge because my conscience reproaches me.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona



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## ANGELS, DEMONS & SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Source: "Empirical Dogmatics," Vol. 2, "According to the Spoken Teachings of Protopresbyter John S. Romanides," by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos.

The patristic teaching about the difference between time, the age and eternity is empirical: it is the result of the revelation-based *theoria* granted to the glorified saints.

The God-seers, who share in the illuminating and glorifying energies of God, see angels and departed saints in the glory of God and discern another dimension of time. They called this higher level of time *the age*, and differentiated it from the perceptible time of the creation in which they lived before the experience of seeing God, but also from the inapproachable Light in which God dwells, which they called *eternity*. St. Gregory the Theologian says that *the age is time that will stop moving, and time is the age that is measured while in motion*. What is clear is that the age is another level of time, and is distinct from eternity, which is exclusively ascribed to God.

### Angels of Light

The angels, the noetic spirits created by God, live in the ages. Therefore, angels are themselves called *ages*. The holy Apostle Paul writes in a characteristic passage: [God] *hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds* [in Greek τῶν αἰῶνας, literally: *the ages*] (Heb 1:2). The time of the angels is in the ages without end, as angels are not restricted by matter. Thus angels move in intervals of time that do not resemble our own. Man, on the other hand, has a slight conception of what time is, but he understands almost nothing about the ages, unless he reaches glorification and has spiritual insight, and sees an angel himself. Then he has the experience of an angel.

As angels are creations of God and came from non-being into being, they have a beginning and are created. The Old Testament speaks in parallel of the uncreated Angel, the Angel of Great Counsel, who is the Word, and of the created angels, who are creations of God. There is an interpretative rule that St Basil the Great expresses very clearly: *Wherever the Angel in the Old Testament is called God—because there are different kinds of angels, there are created angels as well—wherever the Angel who appears to the Prophets is called God, He is Christ*.

St. Paul sets out the difference between the uncreated Word and created angels: *For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.*

*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.* ("Sceptre" or "scepter" is a symbolic ornamental staff or wand held in the hand by a ruling monarch as an item of royal or imperial insignia, Ed.), (Heb 1:5-9).

The Word of God sits on the right hand of the Father, whereas the angels are ministering spirits who serve: *But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?* (Heb. 1:13-14). As creatures of God the angels are material beings, but they are of subtler matter than our own. They are not referred to as immaterial beings, as God is immaterial Spirit, but they are described as *ethereal beings*.

The Fathers of the Church not only say that the soul is corporeal—the soul is material—but so are the angels. Remember that well-known passage from St. John of Damascus that says that, compared with visible things, the angels are bodiless. Why do we call the angels bodiless? Because they are invisible. In comparison with God they are dense matter. Thus, the Fathers do not accept the existence of immaterial things. Only God is immaterial and immortal by nature; the angels and the soul are not.

Being created is linked with matter and mortality. Only God is uncreated, immaterial and immortal, whereas human beings and angels are by nature created, material and subject to death. The Fathers explain that only God is immortal by nature, and man and the angels are not immortal by nature. The teaching of the Fathers of the Church is, therefore, that the angels are material beings, at least in comparison with God. They are not purely immaterial spirits. This is based on the patristic distinction between *created* and *uncreated*. **Only what is uncreated is by nature immortal: God Himself, Who is uncreated.**

Thus the angels and human souls are *mortal by nature*, but *immortal by grace*. Because everything that has a beginning also has an end. This does not mean that at some time angels and human beings will cease to exist, as God has willed that they should remain immortal. The angels are also called *noetic beings*, because they have a noetic faculty (*energy*), but not a rational faculty (*logiki*). Man has both noetic and rational faculties (energies), whereas angels only have a noetic faculty. **Man is the summary of creation and God's most perfect creation.** For that reason, in order to save humankind and sanctify creation, the Word of God assumed human, not angelic, nature.

Apart from the rational faculty (*energy*), the Fathers speak about a noetic faculty (*energy*). They made a clear distinction, saying that the angels are noetic beings, whereas human beings have reason (*logos*). Man has reason and the angels have nous. So the noetic faculty is different from the rational faculty. The Fathers of the Church continuously make this

distinction. St. Dionysios the Areopagite, when speaking about human beings, every time he says *reason* (*logos*) also says *nous*, and every time he says *nous* also says *reason*. When he talks about angels, he usually calls them *noetic beings*. They are *noetic beings*, *noetic powers*. We are *rational beings* but also *noetic beings*, because we have both, whereas the angels are solely *noetic*.

Furthermore, it is a basic principle of patristic teaching that there are no immutable beings; all things are in motion. Even in the other life there will be no fixed state. St. Dionysios believes in eternal motion, that perfection is eternal motion. He rejects immobility. He believes in growth in perfection, that even the Cherubim, the Seraphim, the Powers and all the angels are always ascending from glory to glory in ceaseless upward progress, despite the fact that they are glorified and behold the glory of God.

In the Platonic tradition, by contrast, perfection is immobility and immutability. In the Greek philosophers we find immutability as the fulfilment of human perfection. Whereas in the Father of the Church who is allegedly the most Hellenizing and philosophical of them all, we find ceaseless motion as the foundation of glorification.

Thus, even the highest order of angels, despite their constant motion, can never attain to knowledge of the essence of God and can never become uncreated. *Not even angels know the essence of God.*

### Demons of Darkness

Apart from the angels [bodiless hosts] there are demons. The Prophets, Apostles and Fathers have experience of this fact and describe the presence of demons. Appearances of demons are described throughout Holy Scripture, and St. John the Evangelist actually declares that the purpose of the Christ's incarnation is *that He might destroy the works of the devil*. (1 Jn 3:8).

The demons were originally angels, because God did not create evil, but through their pride they fell away from God's glory and became demons. Christ said: *I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*. (Lk 10:18).

We shall draw attention to a few points that are relevant to the existence of the demons and their method of warfare.

As creatures of God and spirits, the demons are *ethereal beings*, but on account of their fall they do not participate in the glory of God as Light, so they are **dark beings**. All creation shares in the creative and sustaining energy of God, and this includes the demons. Even the devil has a share in the uncreated energy of God, that is to say, in His uncreated creative and sustaining energy; not in the glorifying energy of God but in the punitive energy.

As a noetic spirit the devil is not bound by time and place, but he is not present everywhere, as is God. He moves at great speed. The devil, for example, moves so quickly that he can bother a million people, so he will be here, there and in China,

though without being present everywhere. Because of his immense ability to move he can be both here and elsewhere. His speed of movement is not restricted by matter. So he is not restricted either by our human body or by our dimensions.

God loves the whole creation, but not everyone shares in the same way in this love. It depends on the therapeutic treatment that each one undergoes. The devil, however, cannot be cured, because he generated evil. God "loves" the devil as well. The devil, however, is not going to be saved. God loves everyone. The issue is not that I shall be saved if God loves me. The issue is whether someone undergoes the treatment necessary to enable him to reach the state of illumination, so that, when he stands in sight of the glory of God, he will see the glory of God as Light and not as everlasting fire and outer darkness.

In the West they believe the opposite. The teaching that Christ loves the devil as well is something that Augustine cannot accept even in his dreams. It is so far from his thoughts.

Certainly this love does not lead to salvation, because it does not meet with a positive and free response. The Fathers have ample knowledge of the existence and energy of the demons from experience. Since they have been freed from the passions and their souls have become subtle, they see both angels and demons. The Fathers are not speculative thinkers. When they speak about *theoria* they speak with very great precision. They know exactly what they are saying about theology, dogmas and the wiles of the devil.

### Our Spiritual Warfare

The glorified know the demons' thoughts and actions from experience. The Apostle Paul writes: *For we are not ignorant of his devices*. (II Cor 2:11). If someone becomes a specialist in the struggle against the devil he is very well aware of how the devil and the demons work. The devil knew God before the Fall and still sees the glory of God. However, as he is incurable, his nature is darkened and he sees fire. That is why iconographers depict him as dark or black. **The devil is the greatest "negative theologian," because he sees the glory of God as darkness and fire.**

The devil knows Holy Scripture and interprets it from his own perspective, as we clearly see in the temptations of Christ, when he used scriptural passages in accordance with his own opinions. For the Fathers illumination does not mean that someone has studied and knows the Old and New Testaments by heart. The devil also knows the Old and New Testaments by heart. It is not only Christians who know them. The devil can interpret Holy Scripture as much as he likes.

Thus, the devil becomes a catechist to those who accept him. Perhaps the best catechist and the greatest catechumen who existed then—when catechism was simply intellectual and not purification of the heart — was the devil himself.

The devil's warfare against human beings takes many different forms. When someone reads the Fathers of the Church



he finds there an excellent strategy, according to the devil. The devil knows nothing about immutable laws as criteria for legal ethics, truth and so on; he did not take account of any laws. He is not someone who wages war as we do today, so to speak. As you know, the Geneva Conventions say that when someone is taken prisoner he must be provided with medical care, that he should eat three times a day, that he should have clean sheets every two to three days and that he should have a pillowcase and not sleep on the floor. And all states have accepted these regulations internationally and war is now waged on the basis of legislation.

Well, before those Conventions, when nations went to war there were no rules. Everyone attacked the enemy as he wished. There were no regulations. The war waged between human beings and the devil is something like that. The devil does not recognize any rule of good behavior in his conflict with man. For that reason, it is extremely difficult for someone to become an Orthodox theologian. Why?

The best guide on this subject is St. Symeon the New Theologian, who gives detailed descriptions of these matters. He says that the devil's first concern is without doubt that we should not even hear the name of Christ or anything about the name of Christ. If, contrary to the devil's hopes, we hear something about Christ and it begins to attract our interest, he then changes tactics. Having lost that battle, he has other strongholds. He wages another type of war, because he has another strategy afterwards for someone who has become a catechumen. He teaches him, "Stop fasting now." Then he says, "Your spiritual father gave you this interpretation for that passage, but there is another better interpretation." The devil begins teaching him how to interpret Holy Scripture and how to teach about the Person of Christ, and he becomes a teacher of Christianity.

If someone progresses from *purification* to *illumination*, the devil then begins to introduce his own way of enlightening man. "Leave that now. It is not the nous that should be illuminated: the rational faculty should be illuminated. Set the nous aside and don't pay much attention to those who say that purification means purification of the nous. Purification means purification of the rational faculty. So you ought to go and study, become highly educated, learn philosophy and so on."

If someone reaches *illumination*, the devil has his technique at every level. Even if a monk arrives at *glorification* he will still try to destroy him then. The Fathers mention examples

of glorified people who were brought down. That is why the icon in the *Ladder* of St. John Climacus shows a monk at the very top with one foot in Paradise and the devil is dragging him down by the other foot.

I thus ask the students at the university now, "Which of you, when you finish your theology degree, will be that kind of theologian?" Because theology and the *troparia* of the Church draw a parallel between learning theology and strategy and sport. In sport, particularly in those days, when someone entered the contest, there were no rules of good behavior like those that we have now in competitions. Now we have the umpire with his whistle, who calls "foul," "out," and so on. In those days sport was like war, without rules of behavior and without an umpire. And the devil has no umpire, so the Christian is an athlete and a soldier.

When someone is going to become a theologian he really ought to take an interest in strategy and sport rather than philosophy. Generally speaking, he will learn more

about the struggle from how the generals wage war than he will learn from philosophers. From all this it is clear that no distinction exists in the Fathers between theologians and spiritual fathers. **Theologians are spiritual fathers and spiritual fathers are theologians.**

The devil also creates various inspirations and brings thoughts (*logismoi*) or even good feelings. There are

some people who think that, when they feel well disposed towards someone, for instance, when they see someone who is poor and they feel sympathy for him; these are human feelings. And [they think that] when someone has good feelings, we should say that they are inspired by God. Yes, but good feelings can also be inspired by the devil.

Inspirations come from many different sources. According to patristic tradition the only unerring feeling that can exist in man is when the Holy Spirit prays within him. And good feelings can proceed from the devil as well, not only from God.

### Distinguishing Divine Gifts from Demonic Influences

We can distinguish the faith that is a gift of the Holy Spirit from the faith that comes from the devil. Faith saves. But which faith? The faith that the Holy Spirit gives us. Not the faith that we offer to God. Because we offer our own faith; we give God our works, everything. Then God comes and gives these same things back to us through the Holy Spirit, and from then on they become spiritual and not demonic. A faith that is not spiritual faith has to become spiritual.



A work that is not a spiritual work eventually becomes a demonic work. What was the work of the Pharisee? **If the Pharisee were alive today he could be the best Christian in our parishes**, the way our parishes have ended up.

Situations that arise within the Church can also be demonic. If we have music in Church that provokes demonic feelings, then it is demonic. Not that what provokes erotic love is demonic in itself, but that is not the purpose of the Church. We cannot have “romantic relationships” with the saints, Christ and the All-Holy Virgin.

The ecstatic states observed among Neoplatonists are demonic. For the Fathers of the Church Neoplatonic ecstasy is a reality, but it is a gift from the devil, not from the Holy Spirit. The Fathers emphasize this. For that reason, we find the Fathers condemning Neoplatonists and religiosity, because they are overwhelmed by demonic energies. That is why they have those strange experiences. Nowadays, of course, serious people do not concern themselves with Platonic mysticism. There are, however, many religious people in the West who are involved in spirituality in that way. Thus, success in Platonism is a demonic act, for us at least, by our criteria.

Some ascetic acts may be demonic. When the Fathers speak about asceticism and self-control, self-control is not only for single people but also for those who are married. That is why we have fasts: so that sometimes we practice self-restraint. Married people also practice self-control, at least by mutual agreement, according to the Apostle Paul's exhortation, because if it is one-sided this abstinence can be dangerous, as St. Paul says. The devil has many tricks, so it has to be by agreement. In addition, asceticism that does not make progress and stands still becomes demonic because it eventually leads to pride.

Without a doubt the devil actively attacks people, but he can only produce negative results if they cooperate and respond to the devil's wiles. Someone becomes the devil's victim when he retains evil thoughts (*logismoi*) within himself.

In the extremely varied warfare waged by the devil, man needs to learn to distinguish simple thoughts from complex thoughts, God's energy from demonic energies, and the appearance of God's Light from the devil's light. Something that may be considered demonic from the Orthodox standpoint may be considered healthy from another point of view. What Orthodox theology regards as originating from the devil, the mass media may regard and identify it as good for people. The problem for Orthodox Christians is knowing what the criterion should be. The most important skill to be learnt is the ability to distinguish the energies of the devil, so that we can discern which energy influencing him is from God and which energy is from other created things and particularly from the devil. This ability to discern between created and uncreated energies is the basis of the spiritual gift of discerning spirits. One has to distinguish between the energies of the evil spirit and of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes the devil *transforms himself into an angel of light*. (II Cor. 11:14). Demonic light is different from the Light of God. The uncreated Light never comes from outside. It always comes from within. The demon is external and the light of the devil is external. When the devil reveals light to someone it comes from outside. When the devil appears to man, he appears in conjunction with him, never merged with him. The created light of the devil cannot merge with man. For that reason, when the devil appears he always appears with shape and color, and he is always outside man. It is a light that co-exists, say the Fathers. The devil's light exists alongside man. When it is the uncreated Light, however, it is without shape, form or color and amorphous, and it is seen through merging.

Thus, someone who is glorified is within the Light and everything around him is within the Light. And the Light shines from everywhere and the Light is pervasive. The devil's light is limited to one place and is also colored. Anyone who has the gift of discernment can immediately perceive delusion and is not deluded. That is why in patristic language the glorified are described as *un-erring*, which means that they do not go astray.

### The Role of a Spiritual Father

Discerning spiritual fathers play an important role on this spiritual journey. In any case, **a spiritual father ought to be a theologian, in the charismatic sense of the term, as theology is knowledge of God and whoever acquires this knowledge can discern the spirits, whether they are of God.** (I Jn 4:1).

The fact that the spiritual father has noetic prayer signifies that he has the gift of discerning spirits and knows the wiles of the devil beyond all doubt. He knows the energies of the devil with amazing accuracy. He is a spiritual father. But this is Orthodox theology. Consequently, this means that the spiritual father is inevitably Orthodox; it is impossible for him not to be Orthodox.

Obviously the spiritual father ought to be a guide, not someone who speculates about these issues. He should have precise knowledge of these matters and guide his spiritual children with precision. If he speculates he is lost and his followers will be lost. This is inevitable. From the patristic point of view this is virtue. This is also why **heresy leads people to Hell**.

### The Source of Death and Man's Salvation

The devil incited Adam and Eve to sin, to disobey God's will, with the result that death came about. This means that the devil, not God, is the creator of death. From that time onwards the devil has dominated man through death. St. Paul, referring to the purpose of Christ's incarnation, when He assumed a mortal body subject to suffering but free from sin, writes: *He Himself [Christ] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of*

*death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.* (Heb 2:14-15).

It is clear that the devil is closely linked with death and dominates man, because through fear of death man lives carnally, he is in the grip of selfish love and acquires the passions of love of praise, love of pleasure and love of money. Satan, who is himself the origin of sin, through death and corruption implicates the whole of humankind and creation in sin and death. To be in the power of death, according to St. Paul, is to be a slave to the devil and a sinner, because of the inability of the flesh to live in accordance with the law of God, which is unselfish love.

Christ was victorious over the devil, death and sin through His Cross and Resurrection. As death entered man's body at the instigation of the devil, victory over the devil and death cannot come about through speculations and rational thoughts, only through the Cross, Tomb and Resurrection of Christ.

It is clear that for the Apostle Paul, the bodily Resurrection of Christ is the destruction of the devil, death and corruption. Christ is the first to rise from the dead. If there is no Resurrection, there can be no salvation. As death is a consequence of the interruption of communion with God's life and love, and for that reason man and the creation are held captive by the devil, only a real resurrection can destroy the power of the devil. Central to biblical and patristic thought is a Christology of actual union, which depends on biblical teaching about Satan, death, corruption and human destiny. Satan rules by means of death, completely and physically. His defeat has to be complete and physical. The reinstatement of communion ought not to come about only in the realm of the noetic dimension, but more significantly through the creation of which man is an integral part.

Consequently, Christians overcome the devil, death and sin when they share in Christ's victory, when they are members of the Church, members of the risen Body of Christ. Death is the devil's greatest power and is destroyed within the Body of Christ, where the faithful continuously fight against Satan and struggle to acquire unselfish love. This battle against the devil and this struggle for unselfish love are centered on the collective Eucharistic life of the local parish.

### **The Struggle of the Church**

The Christian's struggle is essentially against the devil: inwardly against thoughts (*logismoi*) and passions, and outwardly. This is also the struggle of the Church. The Church's struggle is not only inward, namely, that it strives against the devil and temptations to enable everybody to attain to illumination. The Tradition itself continuously comes into conflict with things outside the Church. But it is difficult to define what these things outside the Church are. An officer in the Emperor's army may not be baptized, and may have one foot inside the Church and the other foot outside.

The boundaries between the Church and the world are not clear for us Orthodox. We cannot accept as Orthodox the view that Augustine expresses in *The City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*), that there is the role of the devil and here is the role of grace. Until we depart to the Lord the devil is with us continuously and struggles to swallow us up.

The Christian must be set free from the energies of the demons. This used to happen during catechism, which is why the catechumen used to learn this art of war against the devil. The Fathers laid down the readings from the Gospel from this perspective. During the period of *purification*, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke were read. In fact, the Gospel of Mark speaks about fighting demonic energies and its dominant theme is *purification*. This *purification* took place in the period of Great Lent, through the exorcisms, for candidates for baptism, the catechumens. After baptism, which took place on Great and Holy Saturday, the Gospel of John was read, which pays almost no attention to the devil.

Salvation for humankind and creation cannot come about by means of a simple act of forgiveness of any legalistic record of sins. Nor can it come about by rendering satisfaction to the devil or to God. Salvation can come about through the destruction of the devil and his power. Anyone who fights the devil by the power of Christ and overcomes him understands his wiles and becomes a real theologian. Orthodox theology is "polemical" and it is interpreted by means of "the art of war."

**Being a theologian means first and foremost that someone is an expert in the wiles of the devil.** *Illumination* and particularly *glorification* transmit the gift of discerning spirits so that the devil may be put to shame, especially when he resorts to teaching theology and spirituality to those who are beginning to slip out of his hands.

Any sort of theology that does not know the wiles of the devil is heretical and under the influence of the devil. The enemy of life and death (the devil) can only be destroyed when Christians are able to say with certitude, *For we are not ignorant of his devices.* (II Cor. 2:11). Any kind of theology that cannot define precisely the methods and deceptions of the devil is clearly heretical, as such a theology has already been deceived by the devil. That is exactly why the Fathers could affirm that heresy is the work of the devil.

In any case, participation in the glory and rule (*vasileia*) of God depends on warfare against the demons. Otherwise one cannot experience the glory and rule of God. The glory and rule (*vasileia*) of God reaches man through the expulsion of demons. We have *purification*, which is essentially the expulsion of demons. When the demons are driven out the glory and rule of God comes.

It follows that *every saint of the Church represents the triumph of faith over the powers of the devil.*

## STRUGGLE & REPENTANCE

Elder Joseph the Hesychast (+1959).



I received your letter, my child, and I saw your anxiety. But don't be sad, my child. Don't worry so much. Even though you have fallen again, get up again. You have been called to a heavenly road. It is not surprising for someone running to stumble. It just takes patience and repentance at every moment.

Therefore, always do a *metanoia* when you are wrong and don't lose time, because the longer you wait to seek forgiveness, the more you allow the evil one to spread his roots within you. Don't let him make roots to your detriment.

Therefore, don't despair when you fall, but get up eagerly and do a *metanoia* saying, "Forgive me, my dear Christ. I am human and weak." The Lord has not abandoned you. But since you still have a great deal of worldly pride, a great deal of vainglory, our Christ lets you make mistakes and fall, so that you perceive and come to know your weakness every day, so that you become patient with others who make mistakes, and so that you do not judge the brethren when they make mistakes, but rather put up with them.

So every time you fall, get up again and at once seek forgiveness. Don't hide sorrow in your heart, because sorrow and despondency are the joy of the evil one. They fill one's soul with bitterness and give birth to many evils. Whereas the frame of mind of someone who repents says, "I have sinned! Forgive me Father!" and he expels the sorrow. He says, "Am I not a weak human? So what do I expect?" Truly, my child this is how it is. So take courage.

Only when the grace of God comes does a person stand on his feet. Otherwise, without grace, he always changes and always falls. So be a man and don't be afraid at all.

Do you see how that brother you wrote about endured the temptation? You, too, should do likewise. Acquire a brave spirit against the temptations that come. In any case, they will come. Forget about what your despondency and indolence tell you. Don't be afraid of them. Just as the previous temptations passed by the grace of God, these, too, will pass once they do their job.

Temptations are medicines and healing herbs that heal our visible passions and our invisible wounds. So have patience in order to profit every day, to store up wages, rest, and joy in the heavenly kingdom. For the night of death is com-

ing when no one will be able to work anymore. Therefore, hurry. Time is short.

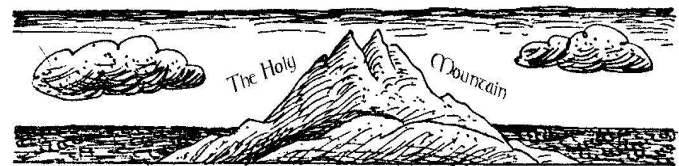
You should know this too: A victorious life lasting only one day with trophies and crowns is better than a negligent life lasting many years. Because one man's struggle, with knowledge and spiritual perception that lasts one day, has the same value as another man's struggle, who struggles negligently without knowledge for fifty years.

Without a struggle and shedding your blood, don't expect freedom from the passions. Our earth produces thorns and thistles after the Fall. We have been ordered to clean it, but only with much pain, bloody hands, and many sighs are the thorns and thistles uprooted. So weep, shed streams of tears, and soften the earth of your heart. Once the ground is wet, you can easily uproot the thorns.



You may find yourself hampered by someone who sows tares of despondency. He tries to prevent you from climbing to such heights of holiness by discouraging you with various thoughts. For instance, he will tell you that it is impossible for you to be saved and to keep every single one of God's commandments while you live in this world. When this happens you should sit down in a solitary place by yourself, collect yourself, concentrate your thoughts and give good counsel to your soul, saying: *Why, my soul, are you dejected, and why do you trouble me? Put your hope in God, for I will give thanks to Him; for my salvation lies not in my actions but in God.* (Pss 42:5). Who will be vindicated by actions done according to the law? (Gal 2:16). *No living person will be vindicated before God* (Pss 143:2). Yet by virtue of my faith in God I hope that in His ineffable mercy He will give me salvation. *Get behind me, Satan!* (Mt 16:23). *I worship the Lord my God* (Mt 4:10) and serve Him from my youth; for He is able to save me simply through His mercy. Go away from me. The God who created me in His image and likeness will reduce you to impotence.

St. Symeon the New Theologian



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

## Ντροπή, Έλληνες!

*Ένα συγκλονιστικό απόσπασμα από τὰ «Ἀπομνημονεύματα» ἑνὸς πραγματικοῦ Ἑλληνα, τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη. Τὸ παρουνιάζουμε εἰς ἀναγνώριση τοῦ προσφάτου συμβάντος ὅταν ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς λαὸς, πέρα ἀπὸ κάθε διάκριση καὶ σύνεση, ψηφίσει στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Βουλὴ τὴν ἀνέγερση τζαμιοῦ στὴν Ἀθήνα, καὶ μάλιστα μὲ χρήματα τοῦ Δημοσίου!*

Τότε, ἐκεῖ πὺν καθόμουν εἰς τὸ περιβόλι μου καὶ ἔτρωγα ψωμί, πονώντας ἀπὸ τὶς πληγές ὅπου ἔλαβα εἰς τὸν ἀγῶνα, καὶ περισσότερο πονώντας διὰ τὶς μέσα πληγές ὅπου δέχομαι διὰ τὰ σημερινὰ δεινὰ τῆς Πατρίδος, ἦλθαν δύο ἐπιτήδριοι, ἄνθρωποι τῶν γραμμάτων, μισομαθεῖς καὶ ἄθρησκοι, καὶ μοῦ ξηγῶνται ἔτσι: «Πουλᾶς Ἑλλάδα, Μακρυγιάννη».

Ἐγὼ, στὴν ἄθλια κατάστασίν μου, τοὺς λέγω: «Ἀδελφοί, μὲ ἀδικεῖτε. Ἑλλάδα δὲν πουλάω, νοικοκυραῖγοι μου. Τέτοιον ἀγαθὸν πολυτίμητον δὲν ἔχω εἰς τὴν πρᾶματιαν μου. Μὰ καὶ νὰ τὸ ἴχα, δὲν τὸ ἴδινα κανενός. Κι ἂν πουλιέται Ἑλλάδα, δὲν ἀγοράζεται σήμερις, διότι κάνατε τὸν κόσμον ἐσεῖς, λογιώτατοι, νὰ μὴ θέλη νὰ ἀγοράσῃ κάτι τέτοιο».

Ἐφυγαν αὐτοί. Κ' ἔκατσα σὲ μίαν πέτραν μόνος καὶ ἔκλαιγα. Μισὸς ἄνθρωπος...

Καταστάθηκα ἀπὸ τὸ ντουφέκι τοῦ Τούρκου, τσακίστηκα εἰς τὶς περιστάσεις τοῦ ἀγῶνα καὶ κυνηγιέμαι καὶ σήμερον. Κυνηγῶνται καὶ ἄλλοι ἀγωνιστὲς πολὺ καλύτεροί μου, διότι ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ τελευταῖος καὶ ὁ χειρότερος. Καὶ οἱ πιδὸ καλύτεροι ὄλων ἀφανίστηκαν. Αὐτοὶ πὺν θυσιάσαν ἀρετὴ καὶ πατριωτισμὸν, γιὰ νὰ εἰπωθῇ ἐλεύτερη ἡ Ἑλλάδα, κ' ἐχάθησαν φαμελιές ὀλωσδιόλου, εἶπαν νὰ ζητήσουν ἕνα ἀποδειχτικὸν πὺν νὰ λέγῃ ὅτι ἔτρεξαν κι αὐτοὶ εἰς τὴν ὑπηρεσίαν τῆς Πατρίδος καὶ Τούρκου δὲν ἄφηκαν ἀντουφέκιγο.

Πῆγε νὰ νεργήσῃ ἡ Κυβέρνηση, καὶ βγήκαν κάτι τσασιῖτες καὶ σπιγοῦνοι, πὺν δουλεύουν μῖσος καὶ ιδιοτέλεια, καὶ εἶπαν «ὄχι», καὶ εἶπαν καὶ βρισιές παλιές διὰ τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς, γιὰ νὰ μὴν πάρουν τὸ ἀποδειχτικὸν, ἕνα χαρτὶ πὺν δὲν κάνει τίποτε γροῖσια.

Πατρίδα, νὰ θυμάσαι ἐσὺ αὐτοὺς ὅπου, διὰ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν λευτερίαν σου, δὲν λογάρισαν θάνατο καὶ βάσανα. Κι ἂν ἐσὺ τοὺς λησμονήσῃς, θὰ τοὺς θυμηθοῦν οἱ πέτρες καὶ τὰ χώματα, ὅπου ἔχυσαν τὰ αἵματα καὶ τὰ δάκρυά τους.

Θεέ, συχώρεσε τοὺς παντίδους, πὺν θέλουν νὰ μᾶς πάρουν τὸν ἀγέρα πὺν ἀναπνέομεν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν πὺν μὲ ντουφέκι καὶ γιαταγάνι πήραμε. Ἐμεῖς τὸ χρέος, τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν, ἐπράξαμεν. Καὶ αὐτοὶ βγήκαν σήμερον νὰ προκόψουν τὴν Πατρίδα. Μᾶς γέμισαν φατρία καὶ διχόνοιαν. Καὶ τὴν Πατρίδα δὲν τὴν θέλουν μητέρα κοινὴ ἀμορόζα (=ἀγαπητικιά) εἰς τὰ κρεβάτια τους τὴν θέλουν. Γι' αὐτὸ περνοῦν κ' ἐρεθίζουν τὸν κόσμον μὲ τέχνες καὶ καμώματα. Καὶ καζαντίσαν αὐτοὶ πουγγιὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ, καὶ ἀφήκαν τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς, τὶς χῆρες καὶ τὰ ὄρφανὰ εἰς τὴν ἄκρην. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ ἀνθρώπινοι λύκοι, πὺν φέραν δυστυχήματα καὶ κίντυνον εἰς τὸν τόπον. Ἄς ὄψωνται.

Τότε πὺν ἡ Τουρκία ἐκατέβαινε ἀπὸ τὰ ντερβένια καὶ ὀλίγοι ἔτρεχαν μὲ ὀλίγα ντουφέκια, μὲ τριχὲς δεμένα, νὰ πολεμήσουν, θέλοντας λευτερίαν ἢ θάνατον, οἱ φρόνιοι ἀσφάλιζαν τὶς φαμελιές τους εἰς τὰ νησιὰ κι αὐτοὶ τρέχαν εἰς ρεματιές καὶ βουνά, μὴ βλέποντας ποτὲ Τούρκου πρόσωπον. Κι ὅταν ἀκοῦγαν τὰ ντισμπάρκα τῶν Τούρκων, τρέχαν μακρύτερα. Τώρα θέλουν δικὴν τους τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ κυνηγοῦν τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς.

Ἐγίνανε θηρία πὺν θέλουν κριγιάτα (=κρέατα) ἀνθρωπινὰ νὰ χορτάσουν. Καὶ χωρίζουν τὸν κόσμον σὲ πατριώτες καὶ ἀντιπατριώτες. Αὐτοὶ γίναν οἱ σημαντικοὶ τῆς Πατρίδος καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι νὰ χαθοῦν. Δὲν ξηγιῶνται

γλυκότερα νὰ φυλάξωμεν Πατρίδα καὶ νὰ δοῦμεν λευτερίαν πραγματικὴν. Ρωμαίγιον δὲν φτειάχνεται χωρὶς οὔλοι νὰ θυσιάσουν ἀρετὴν καὶ πατριωτισμὸν καὶ χωρὶς νὰ πάσῃ ἡ μέσα, ἡ δικὴ μας τυραγνία.

Καὶ βγήκαν τώρα κάτι δικοὶ μας κυβερνήτες, Ἑλληνες, σπορὰ τῆς ἐβραίουργιᾶς, πὺν εἶπαν νὰ μᾶς σβήσουν τὴν Ἁγία Πίστι, τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, διότι ἡ Φραγκιά δὲν μᾶς θέλει μὲ τέτοιο ντύμα Ὁρθόδοξον.

Καὶ ἐκάθησα καὶ ἔκλαιγα διὰ τὰ νέα παθήματα. Καὶ ἐπῆγα πάλιν εἰς τοὺς φίλους μου τοὺς Ἁγίους. Ἄναψα τὰ καντήλια καὶ ἐλιβάνισα λιβάνιν καλὸν ἀγιορεῖτικον. Καὶ σκουπίζοντας τὰ δάκρυά μου τοὺς εἶπα: «Δὲν βλέπετε πὺν θέλουν νὰ κάμουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα παλιόψαθα; Βοηθήστε, διότι μᾶς παίρνουν, αὐτοὶ οἱ μισοἔλληνες καὶ ἄθρησκοι, ὅ,τι πολυτίμητον τζιβαῖρικὸν ἔχομεν. **Φραγκεμένους μᾶς θέλουν τὰ τσογλάνια τοῦ τρισκατάρτου τοῦ Πάπα.** Μὴν ἀφήσετε, Ἁγιοί μου, αὐτὰ τὰ γκιντὶ πουλημένα κριγιάτα τῆς τυραγνίας νὰ μασκαρέψουν καὶ νὰ ἀφανίσουν



τοὺς Ἕλληνας, κάνοντας περισσότερα κακὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ ποὺ καταδέχθηκεν ὁ Τοῦρκος ὡς τίμιος ἐχθρὸς μας».

Ἐνας δικός μου ἀγωνιστὴς μοῦ ἔφερε καὶ μοῦ διάβασεν ἓνα παλαιὸν χαρτί, ποὺ ἔγραψεν ὁ κοντομερίτης μου Ἅγιος παπᾶς, ὁ Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλός. Τὸν ἐκρέμασαν εἰς ἓνα δέντρον Τοῦρκοι καὶ Ἑβραῖοι, διότι ἔτρεχεν ὁ εὐλογημένος παντοῦ καὶ ἐδίδασκεν Ἑλλάδα, Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Γράμματα.

Ἐγραφεν ὁ μακάριος ἐκεῖνος ὅτι: «Ἐνας ἄνθρωπος νὰ μὲ ὑβρίση, νὰ φονεύσῃ τὸν πατέρα μου, τὴν μητέρα μου, τὸν ἀδελφόν μου καὶ ὕστερα τὸ μάτι νὰ μοῦ βγάλῃ, ἔχω χρέος σὰν Χριστιανὸς νὰ τὸν συγχωρήσω. Τὸ νὰ ὑβρίσῃ τὸν Χριστόν μου καὶ τὴν Παναγία μου, δὲν θέλω νὰ τὸν βλέπω».

Τὸ χαρτί τοῦ πατέρα Κοσμᾶ ἔβαλα καὶ μοῦ τὸ ἐκαθαρόγραψαν. Καὶ τὸ ἐκράτησα ὡς Ἅγιον Φυλαχτόν, ποὺ λέγει μεγάλην ἀλήθειαν. Θὰ πῶ νὰ μοῦ γράψουν καλλιγραφικὰ καὶ τὸν ἄλλον ἀθάνατον λόγον του, «τὸν Πάπαν νὰ καταρᾶσθε ὡς αἴτιον». Θέλω νὰ τὸ βλέπω κοντὰ στὰ κονίσματά μου, διότι τελευταίως κάποιοι δικοί μας ἀνάξιοι λέγουν ὅτι, ἂν τὰ φτειαζοῦμε μὲ τὸν δικέρατον Πάπαν, θὰ ὀλιγοστέψουν οἱ κίντυνοι, τὰ βάσανα καὶ ἡ φτώχεια μας, τρομάρα τους.

Καὶ εἶπαν οἱ ἄθρησκοι ποὺ ἐβάλαμεν εἰς τὸν σβέροκο μας νὰ μὴ μανθάνουν τὰ παιδιὰ μας Χριστὸν καὶ Παναγίαν, διότι θὰ μᾶς παρεξηγήσουν οἱ ἰσχυροί. Καὶ βγήκαν ἀκόμη νὰ ποτάξουν τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, διότι ἔχει πολλὴν δύναμη καὶ τὴν φοβοῦνται. Καὶ εἶπαν λόγια ἄπρεπα διὰ τοὺς παπᾶδες.

Ἐμεῖς, μὲ σκιάν μας τὸν Τίμιον Σταυρόν, ἐπολεμήσαμεν ὀλοῦθε, σὲ κάστρα, σὲ ντερβένια, σὲ μπογάζια καὶ σὲ ταμπούργια. Καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Σταυρὸς μᾶς ἔσωσε. Μᾶς ἔδωσε τὴν νίκη καὶ ἔχασε (=ὠδήγησε σὲ ἦττα) τὸν ἄπιστον Τοῦρκον. Τόση μικρότητα στὸν Σταυρό, τὸν σωτήρα μας!

Καὶ βρίζουν οἱ πουλημένοι εἰς τοὺς ξένους καὶ τοὺς παπᾶδες μας, τοὺς ζυγίζουν ἀναντροὺς καὶ ἀπόλεμους. Ἐμεῖς τοὺς παπᾶδες τοὺς εἶχαμε μαζὶ εἰς κάθε μετερίζι, εἰς κάθε πόνον καὶ δυστυχίαν. Ὅχι μόνον διὰ νὰ βλογᾶνε τὰ ὄπλα τὰ ἱερά, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ μὲ ντουφέκι καὶ γιαταγάνι, πολεμώντας σὰν λεοντάρια.

Ντροπή, Ἕλληνες!

Στρατηγὸς Μακρουγιάννης



**Τ**ὸ δικό μου καὶ τὸ δικό σου, ὁ ψυχρὸς αὐτὸς λόγος, ποὺ φέρνει στὴ ζωὴ μας ὅλες τὶς συμφορὰς καὶ προκαλεσε τοὺς ἀναρίθμητους πολέμους... Τὸ δικό σου καὶ τὸ δικό μου, αὐτὴ ἀκριβῶς εἶναι ἡ αἰτία, ποὺ ἀνατρέπει καὶ ἀναστατώνει τὰ πάντα.

**Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος**

## Ἡ Ἀδυναμία τοῦ Σατανᾶ

*Ὅλοι γνωρίζουμε τὸν μεγάλο πόλεμο, ποὺ κάνει ὁ σατανᾶς στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ἐχει ὁμως δύναμη ὁ σατανᾶς; Μπορεῖ νὰ κἀν κακὸ στὸν ἄνθρωπο; Καὶ πότε μπορεῖ; Λέγει ὁ Ἀπ. Παῦλος: «Ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἀναλαβόντες τὸν θυρεὸν τῆς πίστεως, ἐν ᾧ δυνήσεσθε πάντα τὰ βέλη τοῦ πονηροῦ τὰ πεπυρωμένα σβέσαι» (Ἐφ. 6:16).*

Ἐλεγε κάποτε ὁ Μέγας Ἀντώνιος:

Ἀκοῦστε τί μοῦ συνέβη: Κάποτε κτύπησε κάποιος τὴν πόρτα τοῦ κελλιοῦ μου. Βγήκα καὶ ἀνοιξά. Ἀμέσως τότε εἶδα μπροστά μου ἓνα ὑψηλὸ κατὰ τὸ ἐξωτερικὸ φαινόμενο. Τοῦ λέγω:

- Ποιὸς εἶσαι;

Καὶ μοῦ ἀπαντᾶ:

- Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ σατανᾶς.

- Τί ζητεῖς ἐδῶ;—Τὸν ρωτῶ.

- Γιατὶ—μοῦ ἀπαντᾶ—μὲ κατηγοροῦν ἄδικα οἱ Μοναχοὶ καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἄλλοι Χριστιανοί; Γιατὶ μὲ καταριοῦνται κάθε ὥρα;

Τοῦ εἶπα τότε ἐγώ:

- Γιατὶ καὶ σὺ τοὺς ἐνοχλεῖς;

- Δὲν τοὺς ἐνοχλῶ ἐγώ—μοῦ ἀπαντᾶ—μόνοι τους ταράσσουνται. Ἐγὼ πλέον τελείως ἐξησθένησα. Δὲν διάβασαν αὐτὸ ποὺ ἀναφέρει ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή: «Τοῦ ἐχθροῦ ἐτελείωσαν πλέον τὰ σπαθιά καὶ τὶς πόλεις κατεκρήμνισες;» (Ψαλμ. 9:7). Δὲν ἔχω πλέον τόπο, δὲν ἔχω βέλος, οὔτε πόλη. Παντοῦ εὐρίσκονται Χριστιανοὶ καὶ ἡ ἔρημος ἀκόμη γέμισε ἀπὸ Μοναχοὺς. Λοιπὸν, ἂς περιφρονοῦν τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς τους καὶ ἂς μὴ μὲ καταρῶνται ἄδικα.

Τότε ἐγώ, ποὺ ἄκουγα κατάπληκτος τὰ λόγια τοῦ διαβόλου, θαύμασα τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τοῦ εἶπα πάλι:

- Πάντοτε εἶσαι ψεύτης. Τώρα ὁμως εἶπες τὴν ἀλήθεια, χωρὶς νὰ τὸ θέλῃς. Διότι ὁ Χριστὸς μετὰ τὸν θεῖο ἐρχομὸ Του στὸν κόσμον σὲ ἐξησθένησε καὶ σὲ ἀπογύμνωσε, ἀφοῦ σὲ κατετρόπωσε.

Μόλις ἄκουσε ὁ διάβολος τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ, ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ μόνον κατεκαίετο, ἐξηφανίσθη ἀμέσως.

Ἐφ ὅσον λοιπὸν—λέγει ὁ Μέγας Ἀντώνιος—καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ διάβολος ὁμολογεῖ ὅτι τίποτα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κατορθώσῃ, ἐμεῖς ὀφείλομε νὰ καταφρονήσουμε τελείως αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς δαίμονές του.

Αὐτὸ εἶναι μιὰ ἀπάντηση καὶ στὴν σημερινὴ ἐποχὴ σὲ ὅποιους τρέχουν, γιὰ νὰ λύσουν τὰ τυχὸν προβλήματά τους στὶς μάγισσες, στοὺς μάγους, στὰ μέντιουμ, στὶς ὀραματίστριες, στοὺς ὄνειροσκόπους, στοὺς χειρομάντιες καὶ γενικὰ σὲ αὐτούς, ποὺ παραδίδουν τὴν ψυχὴ τους στὸν διάβολο ποὺ τοὺς κοροϊδεύει. Μόνον ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ἐπιτρέπῃ, ὅπως στὴν περίπτωση τοῦ Ἰώβ, μπορεῖ νὰ κἀν ὅ,τι τοῦ ἐπιτρέπει ὁ Θεός.

## Ἀρχὴ τοῦ Χρόνου τῆς Ἀνατολῆς

Νινέττα Βολουδάκη, «Ενοριακὴ Εὐλογία», Τεύχος 168-169, Τερὸς Ναὸς Ἁγίου Νικολάου, Πευκακίων, Αθηνών.

Ὁ χρόνος! Ἐνα «πράγμα» ποὺ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ δοῦμε, δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ ἀγγίξουμε, δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ κλείσουμε σὲ ἕνα σωλῆνα καὶ νὰ τὸ βάλουμε κάτω ἀπὸ ἕνα μικροσκόπιο νὰ τὸ ἐξετάσουμε. Δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ ἀγοράσουμε καὶ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ πουλήσουμε, δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ ἀπειλήσουμε καὶ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ νικήσουμε. Δὲν ἔχει χρώμα, δὲν ἔχει ἄρωμα, δὲν ἔχει ὄγκο, δὲν ἔχει βάρος, δὲν ἔχει σκιά. Ὅμως βαραίνει πάνω μας, δεσπόζει στὴ ζωὴ μας καὶ τὴν καταδυναστεύει, ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμή ποὺ θὰ γεννηθοῦμε, μέχρι τὴ στιγμή ποὺ θὰ ἀφήσουμε αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμο πίσω μας.

Ἔτσι καὶ ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα στὸ σύνολό της, ἄρχισε ἀπὸ πολὺ νωρὶς νὰ ψάχνει τρόπους νὰ προσπαθεῖ νὰ καταλάβει καὶ νὰ ὑπολογίσει, αὐτὸ τὸ φευγαλέο καὶ ἄπιαστο στοιχείο. Καὶ εἶναι φυσικό, στὴ μέτρηση τοῦ χρόνου νὰ χρησιμοποιηθοῦν οἱ δύο σταθερές τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς, τὸ φῶς καὶ τὸ σκοτάδι, ἡ μέρα καὶ ἡ νύχτα, ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη. Ἄλλοι λαοὶ στηρίχτηκαν στὸν ἥλιο, ἄλλοι στὴ σελήνη, ἄλλοι—οἱ περισσότεροι—καὶ στὰ δύο. Ἦδη ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ χαλκοῦ ἔχουν σωθεῖ ἡμερολόγια τῶν Αἰγυπτίων καὶ τῶν Σουμεριῶν ὅπως καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ σιδήρου, τῶν Βαβυλωνίων τὸ Ζωροαστρικὸ ἡμερολόγιο τῶν Περσῶν καί, βέβαια, τὸ Ἑβραϊκόν.

Οἱ ἀρχαῖοι Ἕλληνες διαμόρφωναν μὲ διάφορες παραλλαγές τὴ μέτρηση τοῦ χρόνου μέχρι τὴν κλασσικὴ περίοδο καί, μὲ τὶς κατακτήσεις τοῦ Μ. Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ τὴν Ἑλληνιστικὴ περίοδο ποὺ ἀκολούθησε, οἱ γνώσεις τους στὸ θέμα ἐπηρέασαν καὶ τοὺς λαοὺς τῆς Ἀνατολῆς καὶ τοὺς Ρωμαίους. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ ἡμερολόγια, ἦταν προσαρμοσμένα στὴ λατρεία τῶν θεῶν κάθε λαοῦ, στὶς γιορτές τους, στὰ φαινόμενα ποὺ ἦταν σημαντικὰ γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ τους, ὅπως π.χ ὁ θεὸς Νεῖλος καθώριζε μὲ τὶς πλημμύρες του τὶς Αἰγυπτιακές ἐποχές.

Μέχρι ποὺ ὁ Ἰούλιος Καίσαρας ἦρθε νὰ δώσει ἕνα πιδὸ κοσμικὸ χαρακτήρα στὴ μέτρηση τοῦ χρόνου, εἰσάγοντας ἀπὸ τὸν πρῶτο χρόνο τῆς διακυβέρνησής του τὴν Ἰνδικτο, ποὺ γι' αὐτὸ στὴν ἀρχὴ ὀνομάστηκε καὶ Καισαρική. Ἡ Ἰνδικτος ἦταν τὸ διάγγελμα, ἡ ἐντολή,

γιὰ τοὺς φόρους σὲ εἶδος—τρόφιμα καὶ ρουχιισμό—ποὺ πλήρωναν κάθε χρόνο οἱ πολῖτες γιὰ τὴ συντήρηση τοῦ Ρωμαϊκοῦ στρατοῦ καὶ ἔτσι ξεκίνησε γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ἡ οἰκονομία καὶ ἡ φορολογία νὰ διαμορφώνει τὴ ζωὴ τῶν πολιτῶν, ἕνας πρόδρομος, δηλαδή, αὐτοῦ ποὺ ἐμεῖς ὀνομάζουμε οἰκονομικὸ ἔτος.

Ἀρχικά, ἡ πρωτοχρονιά ἦταν στὶς 24 Σεπτεμβρίου, δηλαδή τὴ μέρα τῆς φθινοπωρινῆς ἰσημερίας, καὶ διαχωριζόταν ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτικὴ πρωτοχρονιά, δηλαδή τὶς Καλένδες τοῦ Ἰανουαρίου. Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως ὁ Ὀκταβιανός-Αὔγουστος (ὁ διάδοχος τοῦ Καίσαρα καὶ πρῶτος ποὺ ἀνακηρύχτηκε αὐτοκράτορας) εἶχε τὰ γενέθλιά του στὶς 23, ἡ πρωτοχρονιά μετατέθηκε γιὰ τὴν 23<sup>η</sup> μέρα τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου. Οἱ μεταρρυθμίσεις τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ (284-305), ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει τὴ μεγάλη οἰκονομικὴ κρίση τῆς παρηκμασμένης Ρώμης, προσάρμοσαν τὴ φορολογία στὴν πενταετῆ θητεία ποὺ ἦταν ὑποχρεωτικὴ στὸ στρατὸ καὶ ἔτσι ἀπὸ τὸ 287 θεσμοθετήθηκε ἡ Ἰνδικτιῶν, ποὺ μετροῦσε κύκλους πέντε χρόνων. Σὰν πρώτη μέρα τοῦ κύκλου τῆς Ἰνδικτιῶνος ὀρίστηκε ἡ πρώτη μέρα τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου χωρισμένη καὶ πάλι ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτικὴ (Ἰνδικτιῶν) πρωτοχρονιά τῆς πρώτης μέρας τοῦ Ἰανουαρίου. Μὲ τὰ χρόνια, ἡ στρατιωτικὴ θητεία ἔγινε ἀπὸ πέντε, δεκαπέντε χρόνια καὶ μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ διάστημα κατέληξε ὀριστικὰ νὰ ὑπολογίζεται ἡ Ἰνδικτιῶν.

Ὁ Μέγας Κωνσταντῖνος ὥρισε τὸ 312 σὰν πρώτη Ἰνδικτο τῆς πρώτης Ἰνδικτιῶνος τῆς βασιλείας του, ποὺ ὀνομάστηκε Κωνσταντίνειος Ἰνδικτιῶν. Ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς εἰσήγαγε τὴ μέτρηση αὐτὴ σὲ ὅλα τὰ κρατικὰ καὶ δικαστικὰ ἔγγραφα καὶ ἡ **Ἀνατολικὴ Ρωμαϊκὴ αὐτοκρατορία κράτησε τὴν πρώτη μέρα τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου σὰν ἀρχὴ καὶ τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ καὶ τοῦ πολιτικοῦ ἔτους, μέχρι τὴν πτώση της, τὸ 1453.**

Στὴ Δύση, ἡ μέτρηση τῶν Ἰνδικτιῶνων τοὺς πρώτους αἰῶνες συμβάδιζε μὲ τὴ μέτρηση τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Μόνον οἱ Ἀγγλο-Σάξονες κράτησαν τὴν 24<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου, μέρα τῆς φθινοπωρινῆς ἰσημερίας, σὰν πρώτη μέρα τῆς Ἰνδικτου, λόγω τοῦ ὅτι εἶχαν—καὶ ἔχουν—προσήλωση στὶς ἰσημερίες, σὰν κατάλοιπο τοῦ εἰδωλολατρικοῦ παρελθόντος τους. Ὁ Καρλομάγνος, τὸν 8<sup>ο</sup> αἰῶνα, ἐγκατέστησε καὶ στὴ Γαλλία τὴ μέτρηση ποὺ ἔμεινε μέχρι τὸν 16<sup>ο</sup> αἰῶνα.



Ἄν κανεῖς ἀκολουθήσει τὸν κύκλο τῶν ἐποχῶν, ἡ πρώτη Σεπτεμβρίου εἶναι ἡ ἰδανικὴ μέρα γιὰ νὰ ἀρχίσει ὁ νέος κύκλος τοῦ χρόνου. Ἰδίως τότε ποὺ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀκολουθοῦσαν τὴ φυσικὴ συνέχεια τῶν ἐποχῶν καὶ τὸ καλοκαίρι ἦταν ἐποχὴ σκληρῆς δουλειᾶς—ὄχι ξάπλας στὴν παραλία—καὶ σκληρῶν πολέμων, ἀφοῦ οἱ ἐκστρατεῖες ἀρχίζαν τὴν ἀνοιξη. Ὁ θερισμός τέλειωνε, ὅπως τέλειωνε καὶ ἡ συγκομιδὴ τῶν καρπῶν, τὸ νέο κρασὶ ἔμπαινε στὰ βαρέλια, ἡ νέα σπορὰ ἐπεφτε στὴ γῆ γιὰ νὰ κοιμηθεῖ ὅλο τὸ χειμῶνα, μέχρι νὰ ἔρθει ἡ ἀνοιξη νὰ τὴν ξυπνήσει. Κι οἱ ἄνθρωποι προετοιμάζονταν κι αὐτοὶ σιγὰ σιγὰ, περιμένοντας τὶς βροχές, τὸ κρῦο, τὸ χιόνι, ποὺ θὰ τοὺς μάξευαν μέσα στὰ σπίτια τους καὶ γύρω ἀπὸ τὶς φωτιές τους. Ἀκόμα καὶ σήμερα, ποὺ ἡ ζωὴ μας ἔχει γίνεῖ τόσο διαφορετικὴ, τὸ καλοκαίρι ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ καταλήγει μὲ τὴν ἴδια ἡρεμία στὸ φθινόπωρο, ὅπως ἡ μέρα ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ κλίνει στὸ δειλινό.

Οἱ Πάπες ὅμως, γιὰ κάποιον ἀνεξήγητο λόγο, φάνηκαν νὰ προτιμοῦν ἤδη ἀπὸ τὸν 7<sup>ο</sup> αἰῶνα τὴν πρώτη Ἰανουαρίου σὰν ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου. Ἔτσι, μὲ τὸν καιρὸ, ὀρίστηκαν δύο εἶδη Ἰνδίκτου: ἡ **Καισαρικὴ**, δηλαδή ἡ παλαιὰ Ρωμαϊκὴ μὲ ἀρχὴ τὴν πρώτη Σεπτεμβρίου καὶ ἡ **Παπικὴ**, ἡ ὁποία ἀρχίζει πρῶτα τὴν 25<sup>η</sup> Δεκεμβρίου καὶ μετὰ, τὴν πρώτη Ἰανουαρίου. **Ἡ Ἀνατολὴ κράτησε τὴν Καισαρικὴ, ἡ Δύση υἱοθέτησε τὴν Παπικὴ.**

Τελικά, σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, ἐπεκράτησε ἡ Παπικὴ προτίμηση καὶ σήμερα ὅλοι γιορτάζουμε τὴν πρωτοχρονιά στὶς Καλένδες τοῦ Ἰανουαρίου. Μόνον ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἔχει κρατήσει σὰν ἀρχὴ τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους τὴν πρώτη Σεπτεμβρίου, διατηρῶντας τὴν ἀνάμνηση μιᾶς ἐποχῆς καὶ μιᾶς ζωῆς ποὺ πέρασε ὀριστικά.

Φαντάζομαι, πῶς ἂν ὁ Χρόνος εἶχε πρόσωπο, ὅπως ζωγραφίζεται σὲ κάποιες παλιές τοιχογραφίες, θὰ παρακολουθοῦσε ὅλες τὶς προσπάθειες τῶν ἀνθρώπων νὰ τὸν αἰχμαλωτίσουν καὶ νὰ τὸν μετρήσουν καὶ νὰ τὸν συγκεκριμενοποιήσουν, χαμογελῶντας εἰρωνικά. Γιατί, ὅποτε κι ἂν γιορτάζουμε τὴν πρωτοχρονιά, ὅσα ψηφιακὰ ρολόγια κι ἂν κατασκευάζουμε, ὅσο κι ἂν κυνηγάμε καὶ τὸ δευτερόλεπτο, ὁ χρόνος διαγράφει τὴν τροχιά του πάνω καὶ πέρα ἀπὸ τὴ δική μας κατανόηση.

Ἔστωσο, σὲ κάποιον ποὺ παρατηρεῖ τὰ ἴχνη τοῦ χρόνου πάνω στὴ ζωὴ τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ μὴ γεννηθοῦν κάποιες ἐρωτηματικά. Καὶ ἓνα ἀπὸ αὐτὰ εἶναι τὸ πῶς καὶ τὸ γιατί, ὅλος ὁ κόσμος, ὅλοι οἱ λαοὶ ἀκολούθησαν καὶ ἀκολουθοῦν τὴν Παπικὴ ἀπόφαση νὰ μετρηθεῖ ὁ χρόνος ἔτσι καὶ ὄχι ἀλλιῶς, ὅπως κι ἂν εἶναι αὐτὸ τὸ ἀλλιῶς. Ὑπάρχουν τόσοι λαοί, μὲ τὶς δικές τους πρωτοχρονιές, μὲ τὶς δικές τους μετρήσεις τοῦ χρόνου, λαοὶ ὅπως οἱ Κινέζοι, μὲ τέτοια

ἱστορία, τέτοιο πολιτισμὸς, τέτοια φιλοσοφία, ποὺ ποτέ τους δὲν ἐνδιαφέρθηκαν νὰ τὴν ἐπιβάλλουν στὸν ὑπόλοιπο κόσμο. Καὶ θὰ μπορούσαν, πολὺ εὐκόλα, νὰ ἐπιβληθοῦν, καὶ μόνο μὲ τὴν ἀριθμητικὴ ὑπεροχὴ τους. Αὐτοὶ ὅμως κράτησαν—καὶ κρατοῦν—τὴ ζωὴ τους κλειστή, τὴν πρωτοχρονιά τους γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό τους καὶ τὸν τρόπο ζωῆς τους—καλὸ ἢ κακὸ—δικό τους.

Τὶ ἀκριβῶς ἔχει ὁ δυτικὸς κόσμος, ὁ δυτικὸς πολιτισμὸς, πού, ἐνῶ ἀποτελεῖ μειοψηφία στὸ σύνολο τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας, ἐπιβάλλεται καὶ «διαβρώνει» καὶ παραμερίζει ὅλους τοὺς ἄλλους πολιτισμοὺς καὶ διαμορφώνει, ὄχι μόνο τὴ μέτρηση τοῦ χρόνου, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁλόκληρη τὴν ἐξέλιξη τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου εἴδους;

Ἴσως οἱ ἱστορικοὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος, ὅταν ἡ ἐποχὴ μας θὰ ἔχει παρέλθει, νὰ μπορέσουν νὰ δώσουν μιὰ ἐξήγηση στὸ φαινόμενο. Μέχρι τότε—καὶ ἐλπίζω γιὰ πάντα—ἡ Ἐκκλησία μαζεῦει ὅλους τοὺς νοσταλγοὺς, νὰ ξεκινήσουν τὴ νέα Ἰνδίκτο, συνταιριάζοντας τὸ χθές μὲ τὸ σήμερα, ἐνώνοντας τὸ χρόνο μὲ τὸ ἄχρονο, καλῶντας καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ δὲν ἦρθαν ἀκόμα ἀλλὰ θὰ ἔρθουν στὸ χρόνο, νὰ μὴ μᾶς ξεχάσουν, ὅπως δὲν ξεχνοῦμε κι ἐμεῖς οὔτε αὐτοὺς ποὺ προηγήθηκαν, οὔτε καὶ ὅσους θὰ ἀκολουθήσουν.



*Πρὸς τὸν Καθηγ. Ἰ. Μ. Γρηγορίου Ἁγίου Ὁρους  
Ἀρχιμ. Βησσαρίωνα*

Ἐν Πάρῳ, 22<sup>α</sup> Φεβρουαρίου 1971

**Π**ιστεύω καὶ ἐλπίζω, ὅτι ὁ ἰδρυτὴς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὁ Ἀρχηγὸς τῆς σωτηρίας ἡμῶν, ὁ κραταῖος καὶ δυνατὸς ἐν πολέμοις, πάντας τοὺς πολεμοῦντας τὴν Νύμφην Αὐτοῦ Ἐκκλησίαν, τὴν καθαρὰν καὶ ἄσπιλον, τὴν ὁποῖαν περιποιήσατο μὲ τὸ Τίμιον Αἷμα Του, θὰ τοὺς συντρέψῃ ὡς σκευὴ κεραμέως καὶ θὰ διαφυλάξῃ καὶ διασώσῃ Αὐτὴν καθαρὰν. Ὑμεῖς δὲ οἱ ἐναπολειφθέντες στήτε καλῶς, στήτε μετὰ φόβου, στήτε ἀνδρείως καὶ μὴ κλίνετε γόνυ εἰς τὸν ἀντίχριστον Πάπαν καὶ εἰς τοὺς ὀπαδοὺς αὐτοῦ φιλοπαπιστὰς οἰκουμενιστὰς, Ἀθηναγόραν, Ἀμερικῆς Ἰάκωβον, Χαλκηδόνο Μελίτων καὶ λοιποὺς δειλοὺς καὶ προδότας. Στήτε μέχρι τέλους, μέχρι θανάτου, ἵνα λάβητε τὸν ἄφθαρτον στέφανον ἐν Οὐρανοῖς...

Ἐν Ἱερομονάχοις ἐλάχιστος,  
† **Ἀρχιμανδρίτης Φιλόθεος Ζερβάκος(+1980)**



## Σχίζετε τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, Παναγιώτατε!

*Ἐπιστολὴ Γέροντος Σάββα Λαυριώτη πρὸς τὸν Οἰκουμενικὸν Πατριάρχην Κωνσταντινουπόλεως κ.κ. Βαρθολομαῖον, ἐδημοσιεύθη στίς 16 Σεπτεμβρίου, 2016.*

**Π**αναγιώτατε, ὡς πιστὸ τέκνο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, σεβόμενος τοὺς θεσμοὺς καὶ τὴν τάξιν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ θέλοντας νὰ παραμείνω Ὁρθόδοξος μέχρι τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς μου, σὰς καταθέτω τὰ ἑξῆς:

Μέχρι τώρα ἀπευθυνόμασταν καθηκόντως εἰς τὴν Ἱερά Κοινότητα καὶ στὰ Μοναστήρια ὅπου ἀνήκουμε, διὰ νὰ δηλώσουμε τὴν ἀντίθεσίν μας μὲ τὰ δικὰ σας οἰκουμενιστικὰ φρονήματα, τίς δηλώσεις σας καὶ τίς πράξεις σας.

Ἐξαντλήσαμε κάθε ἀνθρώπινη δυνατότητα μέσω γραμμάτων, ὁμιλιῶν καὶ παρεμβάσεων νὰ ἐπισημάνουμε τὸν ὀλισθηρὸ δρόμο πὸν ἀκολουθεῖτε ἐσεῖς καὶ ἡ ἀδιαφόρος χειραγωγούμενη, ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς, μοναστηριακὴ διοίκηση τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους, παρὰ καὶ τὴν προσφάτως δημοσίευση τῶν πρακτικῶν τῆς Διπλῆς Συνάξεως τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους τοῦ 1979, ὅπου σύσσωμοι τότε οἱ Ἁγιορεῖτες ἀπορρίπτουν συλλήβδην τὴν ὑπαρξὴ χάριτος στοὺς Παπικοὺς ἀπευθυνόμενοι πρὸς τὸ Πατριαρχεῖο. Καταδειξάμε ἐξαντλητικὰ τὸν ρόλο σας, ὡς πρωτεργάτη τῆς οἰκουμενιστικῆς ἀντίχριστης αἵρεσης. Ἀπειληθήκαμε, ἐκβιαστήκαμε καὶ ἐξοριστήκαμε, γιὰτὶ ἀντιστεκόμαστε στὴν πνευματικὴ χολέρα καὶ τὸν ψυχικὸ θάνατο πὸν ἐμβάλλετε στὸ ποίμνιο τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μέσω τῆς ἀντίθετης κακοδοξίας πὸν ἐπιμόνως ὑπηρετεῖτε.

Τὸ ἄηθες, ἀντιπατερικὸ καὶ ἀνίερο πνεῦμα πὸν διαπνέει ἐσᾶς καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τῆς αὐλῆς σας καὶ πὸν κορυφώθηκε μὲ τὴν ψευδοσύνοδο τοῦ Κολυμπαρίου, δὲν σὰς ἐπιτρέπει οὔτε κἂν νὰ μᾶς περάσετε ἀπὸ Συνοδικὸ δικαστήριον, ὅπου θὰ διαφαινόταν τὸ πόσο ἀντιστρατεύεστε τὸν Χριστό, τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Παρακαταθήκην. Φοβᾶστε, Παναγιώτατε, ὅτι ἂν τὸ κάνατε, ὁ ὑπνωτισμένος λαὸς ἴσως ξυπνοῦσε καὶ σὰς πετοῦσε στὸν Βόσπορο, ὅπως ἔγινε καὶ μετὰ τὴν Φερράρα-Φλωρεντία. Ὡς εὐστόχως τὸ διετύπωσε κάποτε ὁ μακαριστὸς πατὴρ Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδοδώπουλος ἀπευθυνόμενος προσωπικῶς πρὸς τὸν ἐγκωμιαζόμενον ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς σήμερον ἀλλὰ τεκμηριωμένως γνωστὸ μασόνο Πατριάρχην Ἀθιναγόρα καὶ συνετάχθησαν σὲ αὐτὸ σήμερον ἀγωνιστὲς Ἱεράρχες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας: «Παναγιώτατε, μυριάκις προτιμότερον νὰ ἐκριζωθῆ ὁ ἱστορικὸς τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Θρόνος καὶ νὰ μεταφυτευθῆ εἰς ἔρημόν τινα νησίδα τοῦ πελάγους, ἀκόμη δὲ καὶ νὰ καταποντισθῆ εἰς τὰ βάθη τοῦ Βοσπόρου, ἢ νὰ ἐπιχειρηθῆ ἔστω καὶ ἡ ἐλαχίστη παρέκκλισις ἀπὸ τῆς

χρυσῆς τῶν Πατέρων γραμμῆς, ὁμοφώνως βοώντων: **Ὁὐ χωρεῖ συγκατάβασις εἰς τὰ τῆς Πίστεως».**

Σύρετε τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία στὰ ὑπόγεια τῶν ἀσεβῶν διαβουλιῶν πὸν πάντα τὴν μισοῦσαν. Σχίζετε τὴν Ἐκκλησία κατασκανδαλίζοντας τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο ποίμνιο. Μετατρέπετε τὸ Ἅγιο Ὄρος—διὰ τῆς τυφλῆς καὶ βίαιης ὑπακοῆς πὸν ἐπιβάλλετε—σὲ νεκρὸ ὄστρακο ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει φύγει ὁ Μαργαρίτης.

Δὲν γνωρίζετε, Παναγιώτατε, ὅτι ὅποιος σχίζει τὴν Ἐκκλησία, δὲν τὸν ξεπλένει ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν ἁμαρτία οὔτε τὸ αἷμα τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ὡς λέγει ὁ Χρυσορρήμων Πατὴρ, τοῦ ὁποῖου τὸν θρόνον κατέχετε; Περιμέναμε ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς, Παναγιώτατε, νὰ ὀρθοτομήσετε τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας. Νὰ σταθεῖτε ἀντάξιος τοῦ ὑπουργήματός σας. Ἐσεῖς, ἀντὶ νὰ στηριξετε τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους στὴν Πίστην μας, προτρέπετε τοὺς αἵρετικούς νὰ παραμείνουν στὴν πλάνη τους, ὀδηγώντας ἔτσι τοὺς μὲν στὸν βόρβορο τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ, τοὺς δὲ στὴν αἰώνια καταδίκη νὰ παραμείνουν ἀφώτιστοι καὶ ἔτσι νὰ ὀδηγηθοῦν ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο στὴν αἰώνια κόλαση. Ἀμφοτέρων τὸ αἷμα τῶν ψυχῶν αὐτῶν θὰ ζητηθῆ ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια σας. Μετανοῆστε ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων, πρὶν αὐτὸ γίνεῖ ἀναπόφευκτα ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἦστατη ἰκεσία σὰς ἀπευθύνουμε, νὰ γίνετε Πατὴρ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ ὄχι πατὴρ τῶν ἐχθρῶν της. **Ἀπολογηθεῖτε στὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἢ ἀπαρνηθεῖτε τίς «γυμνῆ τῆ κεφαλῆ» βλάσφημες κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος θέσεις σας:**

1. Ὅτι «ὄλες οἱ θρησκείες εἶναι ὁδοὶ σωτηρίας».
2. Ὅτι τὸ Κοράνιο (καὶ οἱ Γραφεὲς τῶν ἄλλων θρησκειῶν) εἶναι «ἴσο μὲ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ ἱερὸ ὅπως αὐτὴ» καὶ ὅτι οἱ Μουσουλμάνοι μποροῦν νὰ πᾶνε στὸν παράδεισο χωρὶς νὰ πιστεύουν στὸν Χριστό.
3. Ὅτι πολλὲς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι προσωρινές.
4. Ὅτι εἶναι «εὐλογημένη» ἡ Συναγωγὴ τῶν Ἑβραίων, πὸν ἀπεκήρυξε ὁ ὑπ' αὐτῶν σταυρωθεὶς Κύριος.
5. Ὅτι ἡ βασικὴ ἀρχὴ τῆς Μασονίας, δηλαδὴ ἡ ἄποψη ὅτι: «ἕκαστος νὰ λατρεύῃ τὸν Ἕνα Θεὸν ὡς [=ὅπως] προτιμᾷ...». «Ὁ Θεὸς εὐαρεστεῖται εἰς τὴν εἰρηνικὴν συμβίωσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ μάλιστα, αὐτῶν οἱ ὁποῖοι τὸν λατρεύουν ἀνεξαρτήτως τῶν διαφορῶν, αἱ ὁποῖαι ὑπάρχουν εἰς τὴν πίστιν μεταξὺ τῶν τριῶν μεγάλων μονοθεϊστικῶν θρησκειῶν», εἶναι ἀποδεκτὴ.
6. Ὅτι οἱ Ἱ. Κανόνες εἶναι: «Τείχη τοῦ αἵχους».
7. Ὅτι ἡ Ρωμαϊκὴ «ἐκκλησία» εἶναι κανονικὴ, τὰ μυστήριά της ἔγκυρα καὶ ὁ Πάπας κανονικὸς Ἐπίσκοπος. Ὅτι ὁ Πάπας γιὰ ἐσᾶς εἶναι: «Προφητικὸς ἀρχηγὸς ὄχι μόνο τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου» καὶ «πρότυπον» καὶ «ἀδαπάνητος θησαυρὸς καὶ ὁδοδείκτης».
8. Ὅτι οἱ συλλειτουργίαι καὶ συμπροσευχῆς μὲ τοὺς αἵρετικούς εἶναι «ἀγάπη». Κάτι πὸν, ὄχι μόνο δὲν

δίδαξε ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, ἀλλὰ ἔπραξε τὸ ἀντίθετο μὲ στρατιῆς μαρτύρων.

9. Ὅτι οἱ καταδικασμένοι, ἀπὸ τὴν Δ΄ Οἰκουμενικῆ Σύνοδο, Μονοφυσίτες εἶναι «Ὁρθόδοξοι».

10. Ὅτι οἱ χειροτονίες τῶν Ἀγγλικανῶν εἶναι ἔγκυρες.

11. Ὅτι ἡ Οὐνία εἶναι ἀποδεκτή.

12. Ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία εἶναι μία, ἀνάμεσα στὶς 348 «ἐκκλησίες»—μέλη τοῦ Παγκοσμίου Συμβουλίου Ἐκκλησιῶν (Π. Σ. Ε.)—οἱ ὁποῖες διευθύνονται ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα.

13. Ὅτι: «Οἱ κληροδοτήσαντες εἰς ἡμᾶς τὴν διάσπασιν (τὸ Σχίσμα) προπάτορες ἡμῶν ὑπῆρξαν ἀτυχή θύματα τοῦ ἀρχεκάκου ὄφους καὶ εὐρίσκονται ἤδη εἰς χεῖρας τοῦ δικαιοκρίτου Θεοῦ!»

**Ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς περιμένουμε:**

(1) Νὰ καταδικάσετε τὸν Οἰκουμενισμό, ὡς τὴν χειρότερη αἵρεση ὄλων τῶν αἰώνων.

(2) Νὰ καταδικάσετε τὸ Π. Σ. Ε.



## Περὶ Προσευχῆς

*Ἁγίου Λουκά Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κριμαίας.*

Πάντα μὲ πολλὴ παρρησία πρέπει νὰ πλησιάζουμε τὸν Θεό, νὰ Τὸν ἱκετεύουμε σὰν τὰ μικρὰ παιδιὰ ποὺ περιμένουν βοήθεια ἀπὸ τὴν μητέρα τους καὶ ἀπλώνουν πρὸς αὐτὴν τὰ μικρὰ χεράκια τους. Νὰ Τὸν ἱκετεύουμε σὰν ἕνα φτωχὸς ποὺ πεθαίνει τῆς πείνας καὶ ἤρθε νὰ παρακαλέσει τὸν Ἄνθρωπο ποὺ εἶναι γνωστὸς γιὰ τὴν εὐσπλαχνία Του νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει. Νὰ Τὸν ἱκετεύουμε σὰν τὴν Χαναναία γυναῖκα ποὺ μὲ ἐπιμονὴ παρακαλεῖ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ σηκώνει σ' Αὐτὸν τὰ χεῖρα της. Τὸν ἱκετεύει μὲ παρρησία γιατί πιστεύει καὶ ξέρεи ὅτι θὰ λάβει αὐτὸ ποὺ ζητᾶ. Πιστεύει καὶ γι' αὐτὸ παίρνει βοήθεια.

Βλέπουμε λοιπὸν ὅτι δύο προϋποθέσεις ὑπάρχουν γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ δεκτὴ ἡ προσευχή μας ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Πρῶτ' ἀπ' ὅλα χρειάζεται βαθεῖα καὶ μεγάλη πίστη στὸν Κύριο, μὲ ὅλη μας τὴν καρδιά νὰ πιστεύουμε σ' Αὐτὸν ποὺ ἱκετεύουμε. Καὶ τὸ δεύτερο, νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχει οὔτε ἴχνος ἀμφιβολίας, κανένας δισταγμὸς στὴν καρδιά, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἡ πίστη, ἡ πίστη στό ἄπειρο ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Μόνον ἡ προσευχὴ ποὺ βγαίνει ἀπὸ καρδιά ποὺ εἶναι γεμάτη ἐλπίδα καὶ πίστη ἀκούγεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Ἐκτὸς ἀπ' αὐτὸ ἡ προσευχὴ θέλει ἐπιμονή. Πρέπει νὰ ξέρουμε ὅτι δὲν θὰ λάβουμε ἀμέσως αὐτὸ ποὺ ζητᾶμε.

Τι σημαίνει νὰ προσευχόμαστε ἀδιάκοπα; Δὲν ἔχουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς τὶς δικῆς μας βιοτικῆς φροντίδες; Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀσχολούμαστε μόνον μὲ τὴν προσευχή; Ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτὴ φαίνεται ἀπραγματοποίητη. Καὶ ὁμως

εἶναι ἐφικτὴ καὶ ἐφαρμόσιμη, διότι τίποτα τὸ ἀνέφικτο δὲν ζητᾶται ἀπὸ μᾶς ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός.

Πῶς ὁμως μποροῦμε νὰ ἐφαρμόσουμε στὴ ζωὴ μας αὐτὴ τὴν ἐντολὴ ποὺ ἰσχύει γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς Χριστιανούς; Τὸ νὰ προσευχόμαστε ἀδιάκοπα δὲν σημαίνει μόνον νὰ διαβάζουμε τὶς εὐχές, νὰ κάνουμε γονυκλισίες καὶ νὰ πηγαίνουμε στὴν ἐκκλησία. Δὲν εἶναι ἔτσι τὰ πράγματα. Νὰ προσευχόμαστε ἀδιάκοπα μποροῦμε πάντα καὶ ὅπου καὶ ἂν βρισκόμαστε.

Τὸ μόνον ποὺ χρειάζομαστε εἶναι νὰ ἔχει ἡ καρδιά μας διάθεση γιὰ προσευχή. Νὰ εἶναι ταπεινὴ καὶ νὰ θρηνεῖ ἀδιάκοπα τὴν ἀναξιοτήτα καὶ τὴν ἀμαρτωλότητά της. Γεμάτη φόβο μπροστὰ στὴν μεγαλοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν Ὅποιο προσβάλλουμε μὲ τὶς ἀμαρτίες μας. Σὲ κάθε μας ἔργο μποροῦμε νὰ προσευχόμαστε, μόνον νὰ ὑπάρχει διάθεση γιὰ προσευχή, νὰ ποθεῖ ἡ καρδιά μας τὸν Κύριο καὶ τότε ἡ ἐντολὴ ποὺ μᾶς ἔδωσε ὁ ἀπόστολος μπορεῖ εὐκόλα νὰ πραγματοποιηθεῖ.

Δὲν ἀκούει ὁ Θεὸς ἐκεῖνες τὶς προσευχὲς ποὺ δὲν τοῦ εἶναι εὐάρεστες. Δὲν δέχεται τὶς παρακλήσεις ποὺ στρέφονται κατὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Δὲν τὶς δέχεται ὅταν, γιὰ παράδειγμα, Τοῦ ζητᾶμε νὰ τιμωρήσει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς μας. Γιατί, πολλὲς φορὲς ἀσυνείδητα ζητᾶμε στὶς προσευχὲς μας κάτι βλαβερὸ γιὰ τὸν πλησίον. Τέτοιες εὐχὲς ὁ Θεὸς δὲν τὶς εἰσακούει.

Ἡ οὐσία τῆς προσευχῆς εἶναι, νὰ παραδινόμαστε ὀλοκληρωτικά, μὲ ὅλη τὴν καρδιά μας νὰ ἱκετεύουμε τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἡ προσευχὴ νὰ εἶναι γεμάτη πίστη καὶ ἀκράδαντη ἐλπίδα. Ἔτσι ὁμως προσεύχεται ἡ πλειοψηφία τῶν ἀνθρώπων; Ἀσφαλῶς ὄχι. Ἡ δικὴ μας προσευχὴ εἶναι μόνον ἐπανάληψη κάποιων λέξεων, ποὺ ἔχουμε ἀποστηθίσει καὶ ἐνῶ τὰ διαβάζουμε, τὸ πνεῦμα μας δὲν προσεύχεται, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνουμε μηχανικά, χωρὶς νὰ σκεφτόμαστε αὐτὰ ποὺ ζητᾶμε. Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἴδιοι δὲν ἀκοῦμε τὶς προσευχὲς μας καὶ ἂν δὲν τὶς ἀκοῦμε ἐμεῖς, τότε πῶς θέλουμε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ ἀκούσει αὐτὰ ποὺ ζητᾶμε;

Πρέπει νὰ ξέρουμε ὅτι, ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς στέλνει μιὰ συμφορὰ ποὺ πλήττει ὀλόκληρο τὸν λαό, τότε ὁλος ὁ λαὸς πρέπει νὰ Τὸν ἱκετεύει γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία του. Πρέπει ὅλοι νὰ κάνουν αὐτὸ ποὺ ἔκαναν κάποτε οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Νινευί, ὅταν ἔμαθαν ἀπὸ τὸν προφήτη Ἴωνᾶ πῶς ἀποφάσισε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ καταστρέψει τὴν πόλη. Τι ἔκαναν αὐτοὶ τότε; Ὅλος ὁ λαὸς τρεῖς μέρες καὶ τρεῖς νύχτες προσευχόταν ὁμόψυχα. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ προσεύχονταν ὅλοι ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς ἔλεψε.

Λοιπὸν, νὰ προσευχόμαστε ἀδιάκοπα καὶ νὰ χτυπάμε ἀκούραστα τὴν θύρα τῆς Θεῖας εὐσπλαχνίας. Νὰ Τὸν ἱκετεύουμε ὄχι μόνον γιὰ μᾶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ γι' αὐτοὺς ποὺ δὲν προσεύχονται. Τότε, ἀσφαλῶς, θὰ εἰσακουστοῦν οἱ προσευχὲς μας καὶ ὁ Κύριος θὰ μᾶς ἀποδώσει κατὰ τὸ μέγα Του ἔλεος.

## Ποιές Είναι οι Αιτίες του Μελλοντικού Πολέμου

Από το βιβλίο «Πόλεμος και Βίβλος», του Αγίου Νικολάου Βελμίροβιτς, εκδόσεις «Παρθένια».

**Η** κουλτούρα ως είδωλο ανήκει στις μέρες μας στα πιδ τυφλά είδωλα. Απορρίπτοντας τὸ Θεὸ πού εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς ἐμπνευστὴς καὶ ὑποκινητὴς τοῦ πλέον εὐγενοῦς πολιτισμοῦ τόσο τῆς ψυχῆς ὅσο καὶ τοῦ σώματος, οἱ ἀθεϊστὲς ἄρχισαν νὰ λατρεύουν τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὶς κατασκευὲς τους τὰ ὅποια ὀνομάζουν μὲ μία λέξη: κουλτούρα. Ὅμως τὸ νὰ λατρεύεις τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἔργα εἶναι τὸ πλέον μισητὸ πρᾶγμα ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς στὶς ἐντολὲς Του ἀπαγόρευσε αὐστηρὰ στοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ λατρεύουν τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν κτίση Του, ἀπὸ τὰ ὅποια, καὶ τὸ πλέον ἀσημαντὸ, εἶναι τελειότερο ἀπὸ τὴν τελειότερη ἀνθρώπινη κουλτούρα. Καὶ ἐφόσον ὁ πολιτισμὸς τοποθετήθηκε σὲ ἐξάρτηση μὲ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα είδωλα πού ἀναφέραμε ἐδῶ, ἰδιαίτερα μὲ τὰ ὑλικά ἀγαθὰ, εἶναι ἐπειδὴ καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπηρετεῖ δυναμικὰ τὴν κουλτούρα τῶν πολεμικῶν μικροβίων πού πρὶν ἢ μετὰ ὀδηγοῦν... στὴ γέννηση τῆς πολεμικῆς ἀνάφλεξης.

Ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ πέντε είδωλα τὰ δύο μποροῦν νὰ ὀνομαστοῦν ἀνόητα καὶ τὰ τρία ὑποκριτικά. Ἀνόητα εἶναι ὁ ἐθνικισμὸς καὶ ἡ κουλτούρα, ἐπειδὴ πολλοὶ φωνάζουν καὶ αὐτοδηλώνονται. Ὑποκριτικά είδωλα εἶναι ὁ ὕλισμὸς, ὁ ἱμπεριαλισμὸς καὶ ὁ ἐγωισμὸς, ἀφοῦ κρύβονται καὶ ψεύδονται παρουσιαζόμενοι κάτω ἀπὸ ἄλλα ὀνόματα. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ είδωλα θὰ μποροῦσαν νὰ ἀποκαλεστοῦν στὴ γλώσσα τοῦ Ντοστογιέφσκι ὡς μανιακά.

Φυσικὰ αὐτὰ καὶ τὰ πέντε κάποτε ἀποτελοῦσαν κάποτε πραγματικὲς ἀξίες, πού καὶ πάλι θὰ μποροῦσαν νὰ γίνουν ἔτσι. Αὐτὲς εἶναι πραγματικὲς ἀξίες, ὅταν φωτίζονται ἀπὸ τὴν πίστη στὸ Θεὸ, τὸν Ἐναν καὶ Ζῶντα καὶ ὅταν βρίσκονται ὑπὸ τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ· μὲ μία λέξη, ὅταν τελοῦν στὴν ἀπόλυτη ὑπεξουσιότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὑπηρετοῦν τὴ δόξα τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἡ ὕλη προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ δόθηκε στοὺς ἀνθρώπους γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ὑπηρετεῖ καὶ ὄχι γιὰ νὰ κυριαρχεῖ στὶς ψυχές τους. Αὐτοκρατορίες παρέχει ὁ Θεὸς σὲ κάποιους χαρισματικοὺς λαοὺς πὸν ὡς δυνατότεροι ἀδελφοὶ ὑπηρετοῦν τοὺς πιδ ἀδύναμους καὶ λιγότερο χαρισματικοὺς λαοὺς, ὅπως ὁ δυνατότερος ἀδελφὸς τὸν ἀσθενέστερο. Τὸ ἔθνος μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ἓνα περιορισμένο, ἀλλὰ ἐξαιρετικὰ ὁμορφο καὶ ὀρθὸ πεδίο ὑπηρεσίας πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

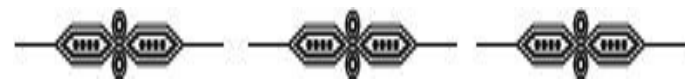
Τὸ πρόσωπο (τὸ ἐγὼ) εἶναι δηλαδὴ μία λογικὴ ψυχή, τὸ δώρισε ὁ Θεὸς σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο ὡστε μὲ τὴ διακονία καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη νὰ τὸ ὑψώσει στὸ καθ' ὁμοίωση μ' Αὐτόν, τὸ δημιουργό του. Τὴν κουλτούρα

ὁ Θεὸς τὴν ἐμπνέει, ὡστε μέσω αὐτῆς ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ψυχή νὰ ἐκφράσει τὴν κυριαρχία της πάνω στὸν ὕλικὸ κόσμον καὶ τὴν ὑποταγή της στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ τὰ πέντε αὐτὰ λαμβάνουν ἀγγελικὸ πρόσωπο μέσω τῆς διακονίας καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ὅπως διευθέτησε καὶ πρόσταξε ὁ Κύριος Χριστὸς. Ἀλλὰ ὅμως, ὅπως τὸ Σεραφεῖμ πού ἔπεσε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ, κάποτε ὀνομαζόταν Ἐωσφόρος καὶ μεταμορφώθηκε ἀκαριαίᾳ σὲ διάβολο, ἔτσι καὶ ὅλες αὐτὲς οἱ πέντε ἀξίες ἀποκοιμένες ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ καθίστανται είδωλα καὶ μανιές.

Προσέξτε τώρα πὼς ὁ σχετικὸς κορεσμὸς αὐτῶν τῶν πέντε είδῶλων ὀδηγεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὡς τὴν ὀκνηρία, τὴν ἀλλοίωση, τὴ σήψη καὶ τὴν ἀπέχθεια πρὸς ὅλα, τὴν ἀνοησία καὶ τὴν αὐτοκτονία (ὅπως καὶ λίγο πρὶν τὸ τέλος τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς αὐτοκρατορίας). Μὰ ὅμως αὐτὴ ἡ ἀδηφαγία ὀδηγεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους μέχρι τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς πικρίας, τῆς ζήλιας, τῆς μεμψιμοιρίας, τῆς ἀσυνειδησίας καὶ τῆς κάθε είδους βίας καὶ πάλι στὴν αὐτοκτονία. Καὶ στὶς δύο περιπτώσεις ὅλα τὰ είδωλα ἀποπνέουν μίσος καὶ περιφρόνηση γιὰ τὸν πρᾶο καὶ ἀγαθὸ Κύριο Χριστὸ καὶ συνεπῶς ὀδηγοῦν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους στὸν πόλεμο.

Καλύτερα νὰ μὴν εἰσέρθουμε στὴν ἀπαρίθμηση ὄλων τῶν βαριῶν τραυμάτων πού ἄνοιξε στὸν ὀργανισμὸ τῆς Εὐρώπης καὶ τῆς Ἀμερικῆς αὐτὴ ἡ πενταπλὴ είδωλολατρία, γιὰ τὴν θὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνουμε μέρα μὲ τὴ μέρα αὐτὸ πού ἐπαναλαμβάνεται στὶς στήλες ἐγκλημάτων καὶ ἐγκλημάτων, καθὼς καὶ σὲ ἄλλες στήλες πού θὰ μποροῦσαν νὰ ἀποκαλεστοῦν: **Ἀδιαφορία γιὰ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τὶς ἐντολές Του.** Εἶναι σαφὲς ἀπὸ ὅσα μέχρι τώρα εἶπαμε, ὅτι οἱ Χριστιανικοὶ λαοὶ οἱ ὅποιοι βρίσκονταν σὲ πνευματικὸ γάμο μὲ τὸ Χριστὸ, ἀπίστησαν καὶ παραδόθηκαν σὲ χαμηλοὺς δεσμοὺς μὲ τὴν μηδαμινότητα, μὲ τὴ σκόνη, μὲ τὶς στάχτες καὶ τὶς σκιές.

Ὅμως καθέννας πού ἀπιστεῖ δὲ ζεῖ ἄραγε ὑπὸ συνεχῆ φόβο καὶ στὴν ἀνησυχία γιὰ τὴν ὑπεράσπιση καὶ τὴν ἐξασφάλιση τῆς ζωῆς του; Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ εἰκόνα καὶ ὁ καρπὸς τῆς σύγχρονης είδωλολατρίας, ὁ φόβος, καὶ λόγω τοῦ φόβου ὁ ἀκραῖος ἐγωισμὸς, ἡ σπασμωδικὴ προσκόλληση στὴν ὄλη καὶ ἡ ἀρπαγὴ τῶν ὕλικῶν ἀγαθῶν. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ γιὰ τὸ ἓνα καὶ τὸ ἴδιο ὕλικὸ ἀνταγωνίζονται πολλοὶ λαοί, αὐτὸ ἀναπόφευκτα σημαίνει σύγκρουση καὶ πόλεμο.



**Κ**άποιος ρώτησε τὸν ἀββᾶ Ποιμένα: «Τί εἶναι μετάνοια γιὰ τὴν ἁμαρτία;» Καὶ εἶπε ὁ γέροντας: «Τὸ νὰ μὴν τὴν ξανακάνεις πιά. Γι' αὐτὸ, ἄλλωστε, ὀνομάστηκαν ἄμωμοι οἱ δίκαιοι, γιὰ τὴν ἔπαψαν ν' ἁμαρτάνουν καὶ ἔγιναν δίκαιοι».

## ON OUR PASSIONS

By Anthony of the Desert, from his pamphlet "On Depression." For more of this author's writings see <http://www.churchfathertheology.com/>.

A major constituent of passion is that as long as the soul is sick with passions—the word passion not only means an intense or overpowering emotion but also comes from the Latin *passionis*, meaning “to suffer”—not only are we more susceptible to the illness of depression but the soul can only learn about what is spiritual from secondary means (e.g., hearsay, reading, etc.). Thus, to both compel a return from depression's evil clutches and to pursue what is godly we must be healed from the disease of passion, a recovery that requires knowledge of God existing as our freedom from enslavement to passion as well as an exact understanding of passion's nature.

In order to apprehend passion's anatomy, we must recall how disobedience to God infected man with passion and initiated the expulsion from Paradise as well as the falling into a state contrary to nature (one that is subject to sin, ambition, love of worldly pleasure, etc.). This bespeaks of how humanity became mastered by and enslaved to passions, a circumstance wherein ignorance of God becomes the norm. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who rescued us from this depravity, who provided the capacity to restore our corrupted senses and defiled human nature to the condition intended by God—which was to deliver us from the power of the Evil One, a conservancy that includes liberation from the infernal poison that is depression. As such, the Lord has provided us with the potential for purification from passion (for a freedom from those tendencies that lead us toward evil and into depression).

Moreover, to understand the nature of passion, and the passion of depression in particular, we must realize that, while interrelated, sin is one thing and passion is quite another beast. That is, sin functions as the gratification of passions such as pride, anger, sexual desire, hatred, and greed. This discordant state of affairs (one wherein man is motivated by irrational desire rather than by love for, or pursuit of, God) exists as an acquiescence to passion that culminates in the turning of what is natural into passion; such as the perversion of child-bearing into fornication or anger against Satan into rage toward neighbors. Thus, passion exists as an exaggeration or distortion of something natural, as a transference of what God intended for our purification into that which belongs to fallen human nature.

Now, it must be said that this understanding of passion's nature intends to illustrate that in order to achieve a life that is free from depression we must first and foremost cultivate that part of the soul which discerns and discriminates. This can be accomplished as we gain an awareness of the three movements that lead to passions:

1. Natural movement, that which is inherent in the body and produces nothing sinful or burdening; hunger is an example.
2. Movement that has been excited by far too much food and drink, this stimulates the body to fight against the soul (urges us toward sin).
3. Movement prompted by evil spirits, those infernal beings who try to tempt us, to weaken us, and to lead us astray.

Thus, movement toward passion emanates from an innocent expression of the body's natural appetites, to involuntary thoughts that come from having overfilled the appetite, to acting upon the thought (a consent of the will that gives birth to passion). Once we mentally or bodily indulge in a passion then evil spirits seize upon our absence of vigilance to suggest even greater sins and to steer us into the darkness of depression.

Moreover, it must be understood that out of all the demons who work against us the three who stand at the forefront of the battle are lust, gluttony, and greed (of both love of money and human glory); other demons follow behind and continue the assault. Aiding these three passions are the demons of ignorance, forgetfulness, and laziness (indifference)—through these all of the other passions (including depression) grow and strengthen. Overall, the Holy Fathers generally agree that there exist the eight principle passions of: gluttony, fornication, covetousness (love of money), anger, dejection, despondency, vainglory, and pride. With this in mind, let us now embark upon a discussion of four of these passions and their antidotes (the understanding and curing of passions being our key to healing depression).

**Gluttony:** This is the door of passions; remember, the Evil One seduced Eve with food. As such, gluttony does not have to involve large quantities (viz., Eve and merely one piece of fruit), it often encompasses the temptation to have just a “little taste,” that which can succeed in enslaving us to the devil and lead to being captured by depression. This evidences how gluttony proceeds from the heart, poisons all senses, and makes the soul a den of evil.

Also of import is that there exists two kinds of gluttony: (1) the seeking of only pleasing food without desiring to eat too much (only consuming what pleases the appetite) and (2) being overcome by a compulsion to eat a lot, that is, wanting to eat and eat without any care for what food is being consumed. Either form of gluttony causes blindness to the things of God; as one panders to the belly so too, in the same measure, will he deprive himself of purification and become susceptible to the demon of depression.

Antidotes for gluttony include realizing that our objective with food must be to simply sustain life, pleasure ought not to be our end. Also, we must never omit thinking of God while eating, we must keep in mind that God provides food for sustaining nutritional needs and focus concentration on thanks to Him. To achieve these curatives it helps to choose

whatever food is easy to obtain and is cheap, and whenever a lust for food arises then we should confine ourselves to bread and water for a while (this will make us grateful for even a thin slice of bread).

**Lust:** One consequence of the Fall involved the perpetuation of the human race via physical means (sexual intercourse); meaning that sex is a function of fallen human nature, as is hunger (the precursor to gluttony). Neither sex nor hunger are evil when exercised as God intends, however, just as hunger can become gluttony so can sex become ungodly lust; interestingly, there exists a direct cause and effect relationship between gluttony and lust in that overeating can stimulate lust and lust can activate gluttony.

Consequently, the antidote to lust resides in keeping the stomach hungry so that shameful thoughts will not enter the heart. This foreclosure of licentious thinking occurs because the commonplace shameful urges and unseemly fantasies that accompany overeating have been cut off. Assuredly the antidote to a pandering of the flesh is fasting, lust is extinguished by hunger.

**Vainglory:** There exists a glory that comes from God (cf. Gen 22:15-18) and there is a “glory” that follows us diabolically (viz. Lk 6:26), one that most often manifests as hoping that others are watching our “good” actions (the passion of desiring recognition from others). This effort to have our deeds acknowledged by others is clothed in piety, is quite subtle and extremely hard to detect; that is, vainglory as a precursor to depression evidences how quickly we can become blindsided by its (depression’s) blackness.

Vainglory initially springs from a lack of faith and is then followed by envy, hatred, flattery, jealousy, quarrelling, hypocrisy, and other dark passions; all of which culminates in depression. The result can only be our detachment from heaven, our being chained to earth and unable to look up and see the True Light (the dark clouds of depression obstruct the mind’s ascent to God). This demonstrates how vainglory is intimately connected with countless other passions; for instance, as we puff ourselves up with vainglory we are led rapidly to the constant presence of carnal thoughts (lust), a quick temper (anger), and the desire to immediately possess everything that we crave (covetousness), all of which ends in a mind that has gone completely astray. Of course, once our desires remain unfulfilled we fall prey to additional passions, such as despondency and dejection, which results in deep depression. This sordid state of affairs cannot be destroyed in a short time, these infernal passions must undergo the

excruciatingly painful process of being torn out by the roots from the depths of the soul.

Antidotes to vainglory include looking straight up to God, rather than to seek the praise of created beings, as well as taking control of the mouth, calling to mind repeatedly the multitude of our sins, and maintaining a remembrance of death.

**Anger:** This passion results from a lack of self-control and is the quickest passion of them all, hardening the soul more and more. Some of anger’s results involve the nursing of grievances, an itching for vengeance, the constant pursuit of “repayment” from those who have offended us, and so on. Quite simply, nothing noble can be produced while the pernicious serpent of anger eats us inside and all too often an overwhelming depression is the result.

Furthermore, once anger has successfully banished our pursuit of God it then gains dominion over the soul and makes us completely bestial. The tongue becomes unbridled and speech is unguarded, physical violence likely results, and the one who is angry and/or the victims of such a person suffer untold injury. The angry person has been deeply wounded in his heart, argues bitterly, speaks with arrogance, and thusly provides the serpent with added strength to further infect inner space; one who has become enslaved by anger eventually lives for sin and becomes totally dead to the truth, the soul has been devoured.



It must be said that nothing is more ruinous and harmful than an uncontrolled tongue, and once our tongue has inflicted offense upon others at some point we experience regret and then begin to slip down the slope and into the pit of depression; obviously, this is wholly destructive and robs us of the soul’s treasure. Whatever one manages to build is destroyed by anger, whatever has been collected with great labor the soul dissipates through anger.

The antidote for anger requires taming and transforming it into gentleness (meekness) by courage and mercy. We achieve this virtue by counting our sins and by mourning and weeping over them (there can be no anger where there is mourning). We can also repress the violent and frenzied movements of the soul by emulating the examples of saints and by humbling the heart via prayer.

Further antidotes involve not thinking that we deserve any rewards or acclamations and not perceiving anyone else as inferior. This is to humble the heart when it howls with rage and compels the passions to honor humility (we curb anger by keeping it bridled to humility). Anger has been designed to help us in waging war with the devil and his demons and

to aid our struggle against sin so is beneficial when allied with humility; that is, as with other passions, the passion of anger serves a salvific and purifying purpose when employed for the reasons intended by God.

Having considered several specific passions, let us now turn to some Church Father teachings on warfare against passion. To begin with, our struggle against passion and depression will be furthered as we recognize that the Lord Jesus Christ (1) showed us by His life on earth how to be cleansed from passions, (2) provided examples of how to judge between what is edifying and what is hurtful, (3) awakened our consciousness from sleep, and (4) revealed the causes of sin. Moreover, as Christians we have been set free by Holy Baptism and have had our sins forgiven, that is, Christ Jesus has provided us with the medicine needed to be able to obey His commandments and to thusly become free from enslavement to passion. Truly, Christ Jesus is the Physician of Souls, He knows all and applies the correct remedy for every illness; for instance, for vainglory He prescribes humility, for love of pleasure He commands temperance, almsgiving is applied for avarice ... each disease has its proper remedy via a particular commandment of the Lord.

Also of great import to the struggle with passions is the Body and Blood of Christ, which when received with full confidence has the power to extinguish every disease. This weapon can then be combined with the careful hearing of Sacred Scripture and the giving of alms so that we can battle every passion.

Yet another weapon against the passions is acquiring zeal and this may be done through (1) fear of losing the blessings that we have gained, (2) concern about an ability to generate watchfulness in all directions, (3) diligently guarding against hostile attacks within and without, and (4) an intense longing for virtue. We can then labor toward applying sobriety in all things so that whatever we confront will not become a cause of harm and/or deception—an objective that requires trusting in the Lord and not in ourselves. To sobriety we then add patience because when we possess long-suffering then the darts of the enemy will not wound us. Along with these virtues comes remembrance of death as a way by which to generate the exclusion of all cares and vanities. In these ways we are able to nurture a guarding of the mind, ceaseless prayer, non-attachment to bodily desires, and an abject hatred of sin. This will lead to the practice of continence, to the complete avoidance of everything that tends toward the harmful pleasures or passions.

Please know full well that the struggle against passions and depression is the most difficult warfare that any one of us can experience and has been likened to the bearing of a cross; an ordeal that must involve both enduring bodily privation and meditating on God (an abiding in prayer)—bodily cross bearing purifies the passionate part of the soul while contempla-

tion brings light to it. However, be forewarned that the great temptation for beginners is to skip the bodily struggle, a pitfall that the Church Fathers sternly warn against by instructing that anyone who pursues contemplation without having first perfected training in bodily struggle is merely attracted to delights and is motivated by laziness.

Additionally, to avoid discouragement at the outset of our struggle against passions we must not allow memory of past sin to arise (this is because no passion can be born without a movement of thoughts). Also, please be advised that trials during our battles against passions will tempt us toward despondency and will inflict a sense of weariness; thus, we must ever remind ourselves that there exists a longing for an impure and shameful life, a condition that is born out of the demonic temptation to avoid repentance. We combat these disruptive tendencies by cultivating an orderly and thoughtful approach to our warfare against passions, one that must include not trusting in self but which instead seeks to learn from and to obey a spiritual father.

In more specific terms, and by way of example, one proven way to confront passions is by first endeavoring to not swear or speak evil and then by learning not to give in to a chosen passion (such as envy or lust) so that instead, things of the spirit can be pursued via the practice of continence, temperance, neglect of the belly, and righteousness—we join these one with another and thusly write them upon the soul. So initially practice something basic, such as not swearing, and then progress to passions and no matter how many setbacks never despair or give up; simply persevere!

The goal of warfare with passions, in addition to thwarting depression, is to foster dispassion (*apatheia*). Dispassion is pursued by first renouncing self-will so that we become lovers of God and participate, however imperfectly, in His passionlessness. This requires striving toward guiding thoughts far away from every passion at the very moment of provocation and toward contemplation of the Divine with greater clarity. However, it must be remembered that no matter how successful we become on this path we will always possess a fallen nature, one wherein temptation toward passion will ever remain as an integral part. That is, passionlessness does not mean never being attacked by demons but rather involves not being conquered whenever we are attacked.

In conclusion, dispassion exists when the mind no longer seeks to keep attention on passions and is instead filled with divine pursuits and contemplation. This is a state wherein whenever passions begin to move (are excited) the mind is immediately lifted away from them via the perception of the Divine. Thus, dispassion is the inner heaven of the mind—*the kingdom of God is within you* (Lk 17:21). The truly dispassionate person has raised his mind above created things and has subdued all senses, which is to keep the soul in God's presence; in such a state passion and depression cannot exist.

## BEARING OUR CROSS

By St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) of Caucasus (+1867). From "Writings of Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, Ascetic Sermons," Vol. IV, published by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York, 1984, pp. 90-96.



**W**hosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me, the Lord said to His disciples, calling them to Himself, as we heard in today's Gospel (Mk 8:34).

Beloved brethren! We too are disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, because we are Christians. And we have been called to stand in the presence of the Lord in this holy church in order to hear His teaching. We stand before the face of the Lord; His eyes are fastened on us. Our souls are laid bare before Him; our secret thoughts and hidden feelings are manifest to Him. He sees all our intentions. He sees the righteous and unrighteous things that we have done from our youth. He sees our entire life, both the past and the future; what we still have not done is already recorded in His book. He foresees the hour of our passing into the unfathomable eternity, and for our salvation He proclaims to us His all-holy commandment: *Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

With the power of living faith, let us raise our mental eyes to the Lord, and we will see Him! We will see Him, Who is everywhere present, actually with us. Let us open our heart, rolling away from its entrance the heavy stone of bitterness; let us hearken to, let us consider, let us accept, and let us assimilate in ourselves the teachings of our Lord.

What does it mean, *to deny oneself*? To deny oneself means to leave one's sinful life. Sin, the means by which our fall was accomplished, as it embraced our whole nature and became almost natural for us. The renunciation of sin has become the renunciation of nature; the renunciation of nature is the renunciation of one's self. Eternal death, having penetrated our soul, has turned to us for sustenance. It requires its nourishment—sin; its enjoyment—sin. By means of such food and such enjoyment, eternal death strengthens and preserves its dominance over a man. But fallen man considers the strengthening and development of the mystery of sin in himself to be the progress and success of life. Thus he who is infected by a fatal disease is dominated by the forceful demands of that disease and seeks the food which strengthens the disease; he seeks it as

something most necessary, as an indispensable and most pleasant enjoyment.

In opposition to this eternal death which presents itself as life to mankind, ailing from the terrible fall, the Lord pronounces His sentence: *For whosoever will save his life, developing the life of fallen nature or eternal death, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's, deadening within oneself sinful desires and rejecting sinful pleasures, the same shall save it.* (Mk 8:35). Indicating the entire world present before our eyes, with all its beauties and attractions, the Lord says, *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* (Mk 8:36). What profit is there for a man, what gain, if he acquires, not something of little importance, but even all the visible world? This visible world—merely a temporary guesthouse for man! There is not one thing on earth, no kind of property which we can call our own. Inexorable and inevitable death will take everything from us, and often even before death, unforeseen circumstances and calamities take them away. Our body itself we will lay down at the hidden threshold to eternity. Our possessions, our property and treasure—this is our soul, and only our soul. *What shall man give in exchange for his soul?* says the word of God. (Mk 8:37). Nothing will compensate for the loss of the soul, when eternal death kills it, seductively pretending to be life.

What does it mean to take up one's cross? The cross was the instrument of shameful punishment for common people and criminals deprived of civil rights. The proud world, the world hostile to Christ, deprives the disciples of Christ the rights by which the sons of the world enjoy. *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you... They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.* (Jn 15:19; 16:2:3). To *take up one's cross* means to magnanimously endure the ridicule and derision which the world showers on the followers of Christ, those sorrows and persecutions by which the sin-loving and blind world persecutes the followers of Christ. The holy Apostle Peter says: *For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. ... In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* (I Pet 2:19, 21; Jn 16:33).

To bear one's cross means to courageously endure severe unseen difficulty, unseen oppression and martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel, in the struggle with one's passions, with sin living within us, with evil spirits who with frenzy rise up against us and with cruelty oppose us when we endeavor to

throw off the yoke of sin and submit to the yoke of Christ, *for we wrestle not against flesh and blood*, says the Apostle Paul, *but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* (Eph 6:12). *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.* (II Cor 10:4-5). Gaining victory in this unseen but arduous battle, the Apostle exclaimed: *But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.* (Gal 6:14).

To take up one's cross means to submit with obedience and humility to those temporary sorrows and calamities which it pleases Divine Providence to allow for the cleansing of our sins. Then the cross serves as a ladder for man from earth to Heaven. The thief commemorated in the Gospel ascended on this ladder; he ascended from the midst of the most horrible crimes to the brightest dwelling of Paradise. From his cross he pronounced words filled with humility. Through humility he received knowledge of God and through the knowledge of God he obtained Heaven, *We receive the due reward of our deeds*, he declared. *Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.* (Luke 23:41-42). And we, beloved brethren, when sorrows surround us, let us repeat the words of the thief, words which purchased Paradise; or like Job, let us bless the Lord who is just as well as merciful. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, this sufferer asked, and shall we not receive evil? As it seemed good to the Lord, so it has come to pass; *blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21). May the unerring promise of God be fulfilled in us: *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.* (Jas 1:12).

To take up one's cross means to voluntarily, and with fervor, submit to deprivation and struggles by which the irrational strivings of our flesh are bridled. The holy Apostle Paul referred to such a crucifixion of the flesh: *But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* (I Cor 9:27). *They that are full in the flesh*, that is, those who do not bridle their flesh, but allow it to rule over the spirit, *cannot please God.* (Rom 8:8). And therefore,

while living in the flesh, we must not live for the flesh! *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die with death eternal; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live eternally, with a blessed life.* (Rom 8:13). The flesh essentially is bridled by the spirit; but the spirit can reign over the flesh and direct it only when the flesh has been prepared for submission by being crucified. The flesh is crucified by fasting, vigil, prostrations, and other bodily labors laid on it, in moderation and with understanding. Prudent and moderate bodily labors free the body from heaviness and obesity, refine its powers, and keep it constantly light and ready for action. *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with affections and lusts.* (Gal. 5:24).

What does it mean to take up the cross, and specifically, his cross? This means that every Christian must patiently bear, namely, those insults and those persecutions from the world which befall him, and none other. This means that every Christian, with obedience, with submission to the will of God, with the belief in the justice and mercy of God, and with thanksgiving to God, must bear precisely those sorrows and deprivations which Divine Providence allows him, and not some others which are portrayed or suggested to him by proud imagining. This means that one should be content with those bodily labors which correspond to our physical strength, which are necessary to our body to stay healthy. In no way does



it mean to strive for intensive fasting, vigils, and excessive asceticism, being attracted by "vainglorious zeal," according to the expression of St. John of the Ladder, thereby destroying physical health and leading the spirit into conceit and self-deception.

All mankind labors and suffers on this earth; but how diverse is this suffering! How varied are the passions which war against us! How many are the sorrows and temptations which God sends us for our healing, for the cleansing of our sins! What a difference there is in the physical strength and health of people! Precisely, every man has his own cross. Every Christian is commanded to receive his cross with self-renunciation and to follow Christ. He who has taken up his cross and denied himself and has come to peace with himself, with his circumstances, with his position, outwardly and inwardly, only such a person can wisely and correctly follow Christ.

What does it mean, to follow Christ? It means to study the Gospel, to have the Gospel as the only guide for the actions



of the mind, the actions of the heart, and the actions of the body. It means to borrow one's manner of thought from the Gospel, to attune the feelings of the heart according to the Gospel and to serve as an expression of the Gospel in all one's actions, in all movements, seen and unseen. Capable of following after Christ in such a manner, we repeat, can be only such a *person who has fled from self-deception through voluntary humility* (Col. 2:18), and who has sought to acquire true humility where it truly abides—in obedience and submission to God. Having entered into obedience to God, into that obedience which is united with complete self-renunciation, he has taken up his cross, and acknowledged and confessed this cross to be his own.

My beloved brethren! While making prostrations before the Cross today, in accordance with the customs of the holy Church, let us also make a spiritual prostration! Let us honor the venerable Cross of Christ—the instrument of victory and banner of the glory of Christ—each one confessing from his cross, ***I have received the due reward for my deeds! Remember me, O Lord, in Thy kingdom!*** With acknowledgement of our sinfulness, with gratitude to God, and submission to the will of God, let us make our cross, instead of an instrument of punishment and a sign of dishonor, an instrument of victory and a sign of glory, like the Cross of the Lord. With the Cross let us open Paradise for ourselves.

Let us not allow ourselves to complain maliciously, and let us especially give no place to soul-destroying criticism which is often heard from the mouth of the blind, embittered sinner, who is being tortured and flogged on his cross, vainly struggling to escape from his cross. With complaining and criticism, the cross becomes an unbearable burden, drawing down to hell the one crucified on it. “What have I done?” the thoughtless sinner cries out, as he reproaches the injustice and mercilessness of the just and merciful God. He blames and rejects the providence of God. Seeing the crucified Son of God, he mockingly and maliciously demands of him, *If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.* (Mt 27:40).

But our Lord Jesus Christ *willingly was pleased to ascend the cross in the flesh and to endure death* in order to reconcile mankind with God, by death to save mankind from eternal death. At the appropriate time the Lord revealed to the Apostles that He would be betrayed into the hands of sinners, would suffer much, and would be killed and would rise again, thereby preparing the Holy Apostles for that great event which was to take place, the redemption of the human race through the suffering and shameful death of the God-man Incarnate. Such a prophecy seemed strange and impossible. Then the Lord summoned to Himself His disciples and said to them, ***Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.*** Amen.

## THE GRAMMAR OF FAMILY LIFE

*By Archpriest Pavel Gumerov, translated by Jesse Dominick, from the webpages of <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/> (“Orthodox Christianity”), September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Top of Form Fr. Paul speaks about what is most important in family life, which rules are necessary to obey to live long and happily, and what to follow and what to avoid.*

I greet you, dear readers! Today we will be speaking directly on what is family life and how to fine-tune it, to paraphrase the famous words of St. Theophan the Recluse.

The purpose of the Christian life generally, and of family life in particular is to serve God and to serve your loved ones, and this is a task of paramount importance. All that we do, as the Apostle Paul writes, *whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* (1 Cor 10:31). And all can be considered from the point of view of the salvation of our souls and from the point of view of service to God and to our loved ones, and family life has the same main task.

Very often we observe that when people are unable to develop a family life, they dedicate all their unspent love and desire to serve other people towards various social projects; they take up volunteering, visiting hospices and cancer wards, helping the homeless at the railway stations ... It's all very good if your family life does not suffer from it, because you must first put your own home in order, help your family and loved ones, and then you will be able to help others. As St. Paul says in his letter to Timothy: *But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith.* (1 Tim 5:8).

Today I would like to present a few principles which I employ in my personal family life and about which I advise people who come to me, as vital components for building a happy Christian marriage.

Here are the principles. First I will name them and then I will explain each one:

1. Never forget what is most important.
2. Your family is you.
3. Try to communicate more.
4. Discuss vital problems, communicate.
5. Respect one another.
6. Do not try to remake or re-educate your other half, but be able to see the good, bright side in your beloved and in your family life.
7. Give no place to anger and other negative emotions.
8. Do more to please your family.
9. Give help and mutual assistance.

### Never Forget What Is Most Important

A person often strives for different goals in his life: career, creativity, a family... There are especially many issues that should be resolved in the first year of spousal life. The first year of marriage is quite difficult; we have to settle some material problems, develop relationships with relatives, find

an apartment, then follows the birth of your first child and so on and so on. Of course, at first people do not have experience with any of this, which comes with the years. And in this commotion it often happens, as they say, that we “throw the baby out with the bathwater,” that is, to forget about the most important thing: Why we united ourselves into a family. And why did we? To love one another, to rejoice, to serve one another. We should especially remember this in difficult circumstances. We joined into a family not at all in order to prove who is right, who is to blame, or to solve some problems immediately; we want it today, we want it now. Of course, we will not be able to solve everything immediately. And with any problem or family conflict we must always give room for the most important thing and pursue it.

### Our Family Is Us

Whether we like it or not, our spiritual wellbeing, and physical as well, depends now on who is near us. I will speak about myself: At a certain point I stopped separating myself from my family, in general. I had the feeling that I had always had a wife and children, and they were even always of the same age as now. It was somehow forgotten that there was a period where I was unmarried, when I had no one near me that I cared for.

Being a family man, you must align the orientation of your soul and all your actions with other people—it is very important—to try so that everything is good not just for you, or not just for someone else. If something detrimental occurs, you will reconcile yourself to it, and continue to do so endlessly; if a resolution is not forthcoming, you will not be able to endure it and—you will explode; or you will habituate someone else to dependence, or maybe even to tyranny...

In family life we must forget the pronoun “I” and remember the pronoun “we.” This refers both to minor issues and to those more important. Everything must be spoken about and discussed.

### Try to Communicate More

In one American university, if I am not mistaken, they did some research to determine why marriages fall apart, and it turns out that the majority of marriages break up not from infidelity, not because people have different personalities, not from economic problems, but from a lack of communication between the spouses! People do not find this unity which is so necessary in marriage. It probably was there at first, but then somehow got lost, or always, even before marriage, the partners barely spoke with one another... He and she begin

to live their own lives, and it's very grievous when people do not perceive their family as “we.”

It sometimes happens: Some kind of a “crack” in the relationship appears and begins to grow, but they do not want to get a divorce, and there are already children and they live under one roof essentially as two people, strangers to one another, to each his own life, one not interested in the other... Once a woman complained to me that she and her husband had nothing left in common (they were already middle-aged) except joint housing and children. I began to question her about what and how. She told me that her husband is unchurched, with his own secular interests, and she is a practicing Orthodox. I asked what kind of music he likes, which books, and in general what kinds of hobbies he has. “He listens to Boris Grebenshikov.” And I said: “Then you should go with him to a Grebenshikov concert. What's the big deal?” “How's that? No. Why would I go to a concert?!” You understand, this person does not want to make any steps towards the other! And it is all quite sad.



A common occurrence: Spouses spend their vacations separately—she goes to a resort with the kids, and he, for example, goes to their summer house or somewhere else. I know very many couples who began to live this way—every man for himself. They were united simply at some point to quickly start a family and have kids. It is even possible that they begin to live in separate apartments. Of

course, such a disconnection does not appear immediately, and, thank God, if the people realize it in time, they can recover their family unity—communicating with one another. But for this you must make an effort!

My grandfather and grandmother gave me an example of a nearly ideal family life. They were already quite old but they were strong for seventy. Visiting them in Ufa, my native city, I was always amazed that these people, who it would seem already exhausted every topic, whose children were grown, whose grandchildren were already married, were so interested in one another. Grandpa would return from the garden and begin to tell Grandma something. They spent hours talking about the day's events! I was amazed at how they could discuss something! Was it about the news that they saw on TV? Not at all. **They found one another more interesting.**

I recall one *batiushka* who was always very caring for his *matushka*, and even when he stayed to sleep in the church house in-between services, he always took the phone to call her and ask: “How are you? How are you feeling?” He gave

her such attention, such gentle care, the kind that we usually see in young people.

Neglecting communication is forbidden, because in communication is born community—that community which is binding and cementing in the beginning of marriage, for lack of which, as researchers say, marriages break up.

After a hard day, when the kids have already gone to bed, discuss the day's events with your spouse over a cup of tea. This is especially for wives, who, as a rule, sit at home with the kids, waiting for their husbands to share with him her experiences, joys, and fears that occurred that day.

Now many spend their leisure time surfing the web, hanging around on social media, playing computer games, and it is all very sad. We must not forget about simple human communication!

### **Discuss Vital Problems, Communicate**

This is, properly speaking, an unfolding of the previous point: Spousal communication and dialogue over very serious issues helps to prevent conflicts I would even say. We would manage to avoid many problems if we had discussed them beforehand. For example, a husband bought his wife a trip to a resort, wanting to make her happy. He wants her to be able to go there to relax in some warm country. So he bought this ticket and he goes home quite content; but it turns out that his wife is allergic to the sun and she cannot travel to the south. Or, for example, he wanted to surprise her, having hung new wallpaper in the bedroom while she was at the country house, but it turns out he chose some color which his wife cannot tolerate due to some psychological trauma from her childhood. And so there will be conflict and resentment. Such resentments, however, could be avoided quite elementarily, if these things were thoroughly discussed beforehand. We must discuss stuff—from something small like the color of the wallpaper, to the most important things: How to live—with the wife's or husband's parents or to build your own home, how many kids to have, etc. This communication should already be there before marriage, and in marriage it is very important to consult with one another. The final word, of course, belongs to the husband, but he should understand that if he somehow "goes too far," always insisting on his way, then he will seriously ruin the relationship with his other half.

Family is always a search for a compromise. To discuss the important issues is a must. Love and concord is the foundation of a family.

Mutual respect is also imperative. A wife came to me once with a difficult family situation, and I advised her: "You should respect your husband if you want him to be the head of the family." And I heard from her: "But my husband really does not like this word—'respect.'" Apparently, it seems to him taken from the vocabulary of some alcoholics. Then I said: "But there are other words—'reverence,' 'esteem.'" They are very important words! And by the way, it is not

only the wife who is commanded to reverence her husband, but a husband should tenderly relate to his better half, with reverence and devotion. And children should see this esteem and reverence, because the example of how mama reveres and respects papa is how they themselves will build their relationship with their father.

### **Do not Try to Remake Your Spouse**

You must, at all times, be able to see the good, bright side in your beloved and in your family life!

Do you know which marriages are the strongest, the most durable, the most, we can say, truly happy in the greater sense of the word? Not those with some idealistic situation, the spouses having common interests, compatible personalities, and so on. No! The most durable and strongest marriages are those where the people know how to value and see the good sides of their spouses and the good sides of their family lives, and can rejoice in these gifts which the Lord has given them. This is what happiness is.

Happiness is not some kind of state of earthly prosperity, not a "social package:" Country house, car, obedient children, and some other components. Happiness is precisely the ability to see and value that which the Lord gives us. To everyone He gives some kind of such happiness, according to their strength and possibility, and happiness is in our hands. "Look for the keys to happiness in your own hands," as our Russian familial proverb goes.

To re-educate or re-make your other half in some way is a completely empty task, good-for-nothing. We can "influence" another person only if we ourselves change our attitude towards him, if we change our behavior. Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher, said: If you cannot solve a problem, change your attitude towards it, and you will see that some kind of solution to the problem is found.

I strongly advise you wives who want to remake and reeducate their husbands, to read the book *The Charm of Femininity*. It's a wonderful book! It's an American *Domostroy* (a 16<sup>th</sup> century Russian set of household rules, instructions and advices pertaining to various religious, social, domestic, and family matters of Russian society). An American female psychologist wrote it, but with Protestant Christian views; although it is written by a non-Orthodox person there are no Protestant heresies in it. I read the whole thing from cover to cover; there are in it, of course, American obsessions and self-promotion, but the book is very good. It is about how to become the ideal wife, how to overcome all your inadequacies, right down to your external appearance and the preparation of food, to really please your husband and how, having changed your behavior, to influence his behavior, to encourage him to become the head of the family and to learn how to take responsibility to himself.

Be aware that seeking idealization examples, looking around at other families or our parents' families or to films or books,

never brought anything good. We must remember that nothing ideal exists, that every person has his strengths and weaknesses. You know, sometimes they give those getting married such advice: On one half of a piece of paper write down all of your spouse's strengths and on the other all of his weaknesses. Then cut the sheet and the half with the weaknesses either tear up or burn it, and the half with his strengths—re-read it more often, preferably every day.

I repeat: Every person has an abyss of good and also many shortcomings, and we all know perfectly well that it is better to see your own shortcomings. Nothing ideal exists. If it seems to you that your best friend's husband is so attentive and nice, think about that he most certainly has his own problems which are either concealed or we just do not know about them, and your family does not have such problems and your husband does not have such inadequacies. To make your husband give you flowers every day because your friend's husband does it is completely wrong. Every person has his strengths which we should discern in him.

#### **Give No Place to Anger and Negative Emotions**

Angry people are always wrong, because when a person is blinded by anger he can neither examine a conflict situation, nor correctly resolve it. And generally in anger a person is inept and in a state of some kind of passion.

How can we fight against anger? The habit of getting annoyed, and the habit of making comments and nagging another person are very bad habits. We very often see how a husband and wife already living in marriage for a long time literally torment one another, turning life—for both of them—into hell, often over wholly insignificant trifles and for completely unimportant reasons.

Anyone who wants to build a happy family life should take this rule: Rise in the morning, pray, supplicate God: *Lord, help me this day to live without anger, without irritation, without various empty comments.* And you will see how one, two, three... days pass. In this way, little by little you train your soul, attune it to a peaceful disposition, and the Lord will, naturally, grant you aid that the day might bring you joy.

#### **Do More to Please Your Family**

The word "joy," "to delight" is used 211 times in Holy Scripture! The Lord calls us to joy; He did not create us for suffering but for joy; usually we create suffering ourselves through our relationships, and even sorrow. We must follow the rule to rejoice as a counterweight to irritation, melancholy, resentment, and grievances.

Modern man is surrounded on all sides by negative information crushing him: The internet, television, radio, stress, traffic... So at least when someone gets home they should get something smart, good, eternal, and bright from family and loved ones. And it is truly not hard: Say kind words, compliment your wife, give her chocolates, flowers, please her with the small things. These are all easy things to do. It is also not

hard for the wife to give her husband words of encouragement, to compliment him, not to meet him at the doorstep with talk of your problems, but with a cup of hot tea at least if you cannot quickly make dinner. You can please someone with various, absolutely simple small things—for the path is not gifts, but loving attention. It is not the magnitude of things that someone does for us, but constant attention that is most necessary.

#### **Give Help and Mutual Assistance**

Of course every member of a family has his own range of responsibilities, but to lend one another a hand and to help out is the task of this body we call the family. We know, for example, that when someone has a seriously hurting right hand, he develops his left. It's the same in family life. It's very important, I repeat, having our own tasks to do at home, to always be ready to help someone else.

I think of my family life. When my wife and I got married I had already lived on my own in the seminary dorm, and knew how to cook some stuff, how to do things by hand, but my wife is the only child in her family and she was bad with this kind of stuff. It weighed on me that I was doing everything quickly, but I would give her a task: For example, tomorrow is my birthday—here is the groceries list, please prepare something—and she could not handle it. I became seriously annoyed by it, which was not good for our family life. But in one moment I realized: I just need to help her, and after a while she had learned how to do everything.

Now our family feasts are celebrated with joy. We prepare the table together. For example, I cut up one salad and she does the second; I prepare the main dish and she does dessert. Together it is quite easy, and it became even easier when we had kids because you can give your kids some tasks to do. It is important to distribute responsibilities, so the family feels like one team in one boat. We do common tasks and there is no bickering whatsoever.

In conclusion, it is important to always remember the first thing—why did we become a family? We became a family for happiness, joy, love, peace and to find joy together in mutual communication.

May God help you all! Take care of one another!



Anyone who does not have his own experience of the vision of God and does not rely on the experience of the God-seeing saints who represent authority within the Church, is deluded, because he is forced to philosophize and imagine God, with terrible consequences.

**Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos**  
From "*Empirical Dogmatics*"

## ON SUICIDE

*By Sister Barbara Khopovo, October 1943 (originally published in English in Orthodox Life vol. 59, no. 4, July-August 2008).*

The near total ignorance of the sin of suicide among contemporary young people is shocking. “You mean it’s a sin to kill yourself? I can understand about killing someone else, but life now is so difficult and ugly.”

These are the thoughtless words of the young. One young woman who had been beset with grief recently admitted to me: “I wanted to poison myself. I have no one particularly near or dear to me on this earth. I just wanted to go be with my mother and my sister who died of tuberculosis at an early age. She was like an angel.” I replied: “After committing the terrible sin of suicide were you really expecting to meet your deeply religious mother who patiently bore her cross to the end of her life, and your meek, angelic sister in the next life and to be with them in that blessed place?”

“But I didn’t know that suicide was a great sin.”

“Didn’t they explain the gravity of that sin to you in school, in your catechism class?”

“Believe it or not, they didn’t. Or maybe they did explain it in passing, but if so they did it so unconvincingly that, as you see, I didn’t remember it.”

Others simply say: “Surely you don’t think that if a person cannot bear the pain of living and kills himself that God will punish him severely for that? You monastics imagine God as some kind of disciplinarian. The Lord is immeasurably kind.”

Such are the inexperienced thoughts of the young. One young woman, a believer, admitted to me that on several occasions she planned to kill herself without giving a thought to the fact that by killing her body, she would be handing her soul over to unspeakable torment.

One woman told me: “When I was eight years old, a young officer poisoned himself with morphine right before my eyes. First he made the sign of the Cross many times, then he began to take the doses of morphine powder very quickly, one after another. His behavior seemed very strange to me and so I asked him ‘Serge, what are you doing?’ ‘I have a terrible headache and I’m taking the powder for my migraine,’ answered the young officer.” The girl believed him and a few minutes later Serge fell asleep forever.

One young man was found shot to death by his own hand in front of an icon lamp he had just lit.

One officer shot himself over an open Gospel book. I knew him personally in Kuban in 1918. He was a modest, quiet, religious young man, twenty-one years of age.

It is somewhat possible to comprehend irreligious suicide, motivated by insanity or by haughty rejection of God. But many believing people commit suicide out of ignorance. They often say “If I killed myself, I wouldn’t be doing any harm

to anyone else. No one would mourn my passing.” But what about to yourself? To your eternal soul?

“How do you know? I believe in ‘the world to come,’ but no one knows how souls fare there or what state they are in. No one has ever been in the world to come.”

And so I am obliged to explain that I know, and know for certain, that it is extremely bad for the souls of suicides “over there.” Perhaps it was so that I could write these words for the benefit of young people and people in general who do not understand the gravity of the sin of suicide that the Lord revealed to me certain things, including the very grave spiritual condition of those souls.

I can relate the following: About ten years ago, a nun of our monastery, Mother A., told me about the tragic death of her relative, the daughter of her husband’s sister, who killed herself back in Saint Petersburg. Marina (that was her name) was mentally unstable and had a bad family history (her father was an alcoholic). Marina was given to fits of extreme melancholy. Marriage did not change this. About two weeks before killing herself, she came to visit her aunt, now Mother A. (at that time Mother A. was still living in the world). Her aunt was planning to leave for Moscow to visit her sister. Marina said to her “Auntie, when you return, I won’t be alive anymore.” “What do you mean?” said her aunt in amazement. “Are you seriously ill with some sickness?” “No, I am completely healthy, I’m just tired of living. I went to a fortune teller and she told me that I was going to live a long life. But I don’t want to live.”

Her aunt was shocked by Marina’s thoughtless, senseless words and said to her very seriously: “But you recently had Confession and Holy Communion from Father Alexander (a friend of Father John of Kronstadt); how can you even think about suicide? It is a terrible sin. Take pity, if not on yourself, then on your mother—you’ll kill her. She has devoted her entire life to you. She tried to bring you up in the faith. What are you going to do to her?” Marina thought for a moment and then quickly said “Yes, you’re right, you’re right. But I’m still tired of living and so don’t forget to bring lilies and roses and my poems to my grave.”

Two weeks after this conversation she asked her husband to go look for a dacha for their summer vacation. As they learned later, before committing suicide she bought a book of anatomy and thoroughly studied the region of the heart. While her husband was away, Marina threw a party and assembled a group of young people at her house. In the midst of the festivities she left her guests in the living room and went to her bedroom. A few minutes later, the lighthearted young people were shocked by the sound of a sudden gunshot. They rushed to Marina’s room. She was lying on the rug with a gunshot wound in her heart. Next to her on the floor lay her beloved dog Collie.

The mother of this unfortunate twenty-three year old woman who had cut short her young life suffered inexpressible

pain. The deeply religious mother naturally was painfully aware of the terrible seriousness of her daughter's sin: "It was my Golgotha, my crucifixion and with all my being, with my whole heart I felt the dreadful weight of my Marina's sin," said the grief-stricken mother. "I suffered the torments of her soul in the afterlife myself and day and night thought only of how to alleviate her suffering. I went to the Optina Hermitage and asked them to serve a *Panikhida* for my Marina in the monastery, but they refused to do so because of the strict Church rules forbidding prayers for suicides." This refusal by the monks crushed the already grief-stricken mother. She returned to Petersburg in despair: The Church had rejected her unfortunate daughter. But the Merciful Lord inspired her to go to the holy and great intercessor for the Russian land, Father John of Kronstadt.

The grace-filled elder, full of love for the suffering, listened to the whole tale of the mother's inexpressible grief with deep compassion. Upon hearing of Marina's bad family history, he said "The poor, poor girl, may the mercy of God be upon her. I will pray for her." And thus the poor mother received some consolation from the All-Merciful Lord through the great luminary of the Russian land. The last luminary of Russia took pity on the mother who was overwhelmed with grief and understood her grief in his all-embracing soul.

After hearing Mother A.'s story, I wrote Marina's name in my book of commemoration and began to pray "May God's will be done with the handmaid of God Marina."

And so several years passed. Once, before the Midnight Office, I had an unusual dream which I will never forget. I was sleeping in a cell made from a passageway, behind a curtain. Into my cell area came a young woman, blonde, with her hair piled high on her head and very sad gray eyes; her pretty face and her entire appearance showed great sorrow. I greeted her as if I had known her for a long time: "Hello, Marina, have a seat, although I don't know where I can find a place for you to sit. How about here, on the edge of the bed?" Marina remained standing, deep in grief and in thought. "How are you, Marina?" I asked. "Why are you asking me about that?" answered a voice full of bitterness. "Surely it can't be well with us." Marina emphasized the word "us" so that I would understand that it meant "all suicides." "You know very well how I took my own life; we are all held strictly

accountable for our deeds. We all experienced the preaching of the Holy Gospel. We can never be happy or joyous." I asked "What about when you are commemorated?" (By that I meant "When they pray for you at the Proskimedia.") "Then we have to look at the house" she said. "What house?" I asked. "I can't reveal that to you... You wouldn't understand now, but later (I believe that Marina meant after death) you will learn everything."

I looked at the deeply sorrowful young woman who was standing clearly before me and thought, "What nonsense am I dreaming? It's a dream, and nothing more. How could I be seeing Marina, whom I had never known in my life? It's all nonsense. It is not possible that Marina appeared to me." And while I was thinking this, I clearly heard a stern voice above me say *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* (Lk 16:31).

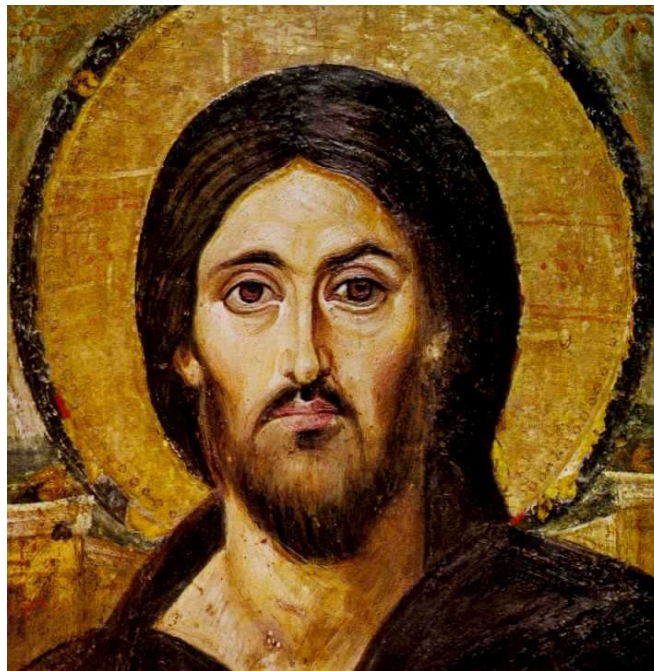
These words from the Gospel were spoken not in Church Slavonic, but in Russian, as if to better instruct me.

I became ashamed of my doubts and with complete faith that it was Marina standing before me I asked her "Surely it won't always be so bad with you?" I was pierced with a feeling of the hopelessness of eternal, spiritual suffering. "I don't know," came the sad answer. "Whatever God wills." Marina added fervently "Please remember, Mother B., that we are held especially strictly accountable for our deeds. We all (she pronounced the last words with emphasis) experienced the

preaching of the Holy Gospel, we know what the truth is. We all (I understood her to mean: suicides who knew the Good Tidings of Christ) are judged very severely."

At those last words of Marina's, I awoke. After the Midnight Office I went to Mother A. and asked, "Was Marina blonde, with her hair done up high on her head, with a pretty, round face?" "Yes, that's exactly what my unfortunate Marina looked like, but how did you know that?" she answered. And I told Mother Anastasia about my unusual dream.

We can only understand in part the dreadful spiritual torments those who commit suicide suffer. Marina was spiritually ill, but not to such an extent that she was completely unaware of what she was doing, and now she had to endure the lawful punishment for the dreadful sin of suicide. In killing the body which was fashioned in wisdom by the Great Eternal Author of life, the person who commits suicide condemns his



or her soul to inexpressible sorrow. **Suicides are condemned as transgressors of the Law of God.**

Once I learned of the death of a former officer, whom I had known. Right away I asked the priest of our monastery to commemorate the newly departed officer for forty days. A few days after I learned of his death, we nuns were to prepare for and receive Holy Communion. After we received Holy Communion and the service ended, an elderly nun gave me a book and asked "Read us a spiritual instruction from here. I'll tell you which one."

I was surprised, because after Holy Communion we never read any spiritual instruction in church, but each nun reads whatever instruction she felt she needed in her cell, or prayed instead. I took the book and began to read the instruction she had indicated: "My days have flown by like birds, they have wound up like a scroll, they have vanished like smoke. All my youth I spent forgetful of God, in unprofitable waste of time." As I read, I thought "And why did Mother I. chose such an inappropriate instruction for the sisters? All the communicants had come to the convent in their early youth and had spent their youth in hard labors for the Lord's sake. This instruction is appropriate for me alone."

I continued reading: "I stand before the face of the Dreaded Judge." I was looking at the book, of course, standing on the kliros, when I was struck by a vision, as if by lightning. I looked into the book and saw clearly as if with some other eyes: In the narthex, across from the commemoration table stood the newly departed officer, whom we were commemorating for forty days. He was standing with his head bowed low, bent over with his hands tied behind his back. He was standing like a criminal who had committed some terrible offense. I saw the newly departed for only an instant, like an ominous flash of lightning. I told my spiritual father about my vision of the soul of the newly departed one. "He has been condemned by God, as a transgressor of His law," my spiritual father answered sternly. "He must have committed some terrible sin," I had the sudden thought "Could he have committed suicide?" I made inquiries in a letter, trying to find out the cause of the death of the newly departed. I received the answer: "He poisoned himself with barbitol."

In his prime he had violently cut short his life, given to him according to the great mercy of the Author of the Universe. Was that officer an unbeliever? No, he both believed and did good deeds for others. He poisoned himself at a difficult moment in his life. Several years before his suicide, while sitting by the grave of his older brother, who had also committed suicide, he had said: "I sense his soul here. How could he have done such a thing? And can the Lord possibly forgive him for it?"

This was a clear acknowledgement of the sin of suicide. It is easy to fall into the power of Satan, who can darken the mind of a believing person, lead him into a state of delirium and, at a difficult, seemingly desperate moment, make him

cut short his precious life which was given to him by the Lord according to His great mercy

*But of mercy and judgment will I sing to Thee O Lord.* The Lord is merciful, but he is also the Righteous, Chastising Judge! Remember, young people: **Suicide is one of the most dreadful of sins, and unfortunately it is very widespread in our extremely difficult times.**

### **St. John of Kronstadt's Advice**

I knew from Mother A.'s account that Father John of Kronstadt had great boldness before the Lord to intercede for certain suicides. And so I began to pray to the saint and ask on behalf of the unfortunate soul of the former officer of the White Army: "Righteous Father John, pray to God for the soul of this unfortunate suicide."

Once, I was reading the rule before Holy Communion for the children of our convent's orphanage on a Saturday, since the children were to receive Holy Communion the next day. During the reading of the Canon for the Departed, I prayed for my relatives and friends, and I called upon Father John of Kronstadt in prayer to ask him to pray for the unfortunate former officer of the White Army who had recently committed suicide.

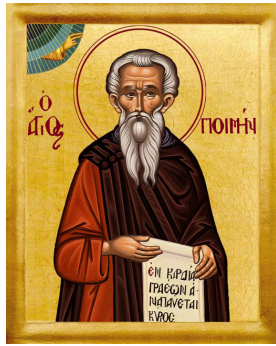
I finished reading the prayer rule for the children and came out of the church when one of the nuns gave me a letter. I opened the envelope. It was from an acquaintance of mine, who wrote: "I recently became acquainted with a priest who knew our great intercessor, Father John of Kronstadt personally. This luminary of the Russian land said to my acquaintance: 'If anyone should see a departed person in a dream or while awake (the latter case is extremely rare), then he must read the Psalter or the Holy Gospel for the repose of this person for forty days. He must light at least the smallest wax candle for the repose of the soul of the departed and pray for him until the candle burns out. If a person is busy and cannot pray for long, then he may do so piecemeal, by day or by night.'"

I read these words and thought: "Great and holy was the last luminary of the Russian land, and he is near to all who call upon him."

### **Spiritual Suicide**

There is another form of suicide: killing not of the body, but of the soul. A man who falls away from the truth of the Orthodox faith commits the dreadful sin of spiritual suicide. A soul that falls away from the eternal Truth, from the Great Light of the Orthodox faith is immediately covered in darkness and becomes dead, lifeless, becomes Satan's property and his servant. He who falls away from the Church becomes estranged from the Savior of mankind and is deprived of the grace to do God's will, and instead does Satan's will. Having fallen from the path of salvation, he reaches the abyss of arrogance. Outside of the true Church, the Ark of salvation, he drowns in the ruinous waves of the sea of life. And a man destroys his soul through sins he fails to repent of, by failing to correct his sinful life.

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## WHAT IS THE SECOND COMING?

*By Fr. Paul Papadopoulos, translated by the staff of "Orthodox Heritage."*

Some 2,000 years ago humanity was blessed with the first appearance of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on earth. And how did such an event take place? Quietly, humbly, under the starry sky in a small manger, within a cave, born of the Virgin Mary. The Second Coming, however, shall not take place in the same manner!

How will the Second Coming take place? Christ himself informs us: When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. (Mt 25:31). So, He shall arrive not quietly as before, but rather with all His glory; and not only that... While at the time of His first arrival only a few people witnessed and comprehended His coming, the three magis and a few shepherds, now His Second Coming shall draw before Him all nations.

If, my dear brethren in Christ, we were ignorant of any of the Church's teachings or the inspired writings of the Holy Orthodox Fathers and we wanted to exclusively learn about the Second Coming, we would likely arrive at an impression that the Second Coming is the "End of the World," that it very likely means the destruction of everything. Truth be told, one needs only do a simple internet search and will quickly arrive at a rather paradoxical conclusion: the writings of many (among them even Orthodox theologians) as well as the various films, pictures, a plethora of Orthodox writings and just

about everything related to this subject matter, all present the Second Coming of our Lord as something absolutely awful, the absolute end of all, the obliteration and complete destruction of humanity.

Yet it is not so. As intelligent beings created in His image, and as Orthodox Christians, we need to contemplate: Did God, after all, create this world so that He can destroy it? Of course not. God created this world "very much right and well." And after His salvific First Coming, His Crucifixion on behalf of man and His Holy Resurrection, He now returns to fulfill (so to speak) the perfection of His creation through its complete renewal. Thus, the day of His Second Coming, the exact moment of His return with all of His glory, does not continue an end but rather the true beginning of the world. It is the demise and destruction of all, but in essence the renewal of His creation, its evolution and the transformation of all that now must be perfected in and by Christ.

The hour and moment of this event is truly majestic yet concurrently fearful and terrible to some; for the day of the Second Coming shall be the time when all attains their true, their righteous meaning. Everything (and everyone) shall pass through Christ's Presence which shall renew or assign a place and a purpose to everyone and to everything.

And when shall such a great event take place? No one knows, not even the His angelic creation. Nobody! And this is good for us all, because if we did know when His Second Coming shall take place.... Woe to us all.



# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

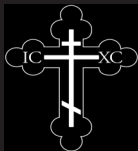
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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## BEGINNING OF THE NATIVITY FAST

*By Metropolitan Longin Of Saratov and Volsk, Russian Orthodox Church.*

Dear brothers and sisters! We have entered the days of the Nativity Fast, that period of preparation for one of the greatest feasts of the Orthodox Church: the radiant and joyful day of the Nativity of Christ. In his daily life, modern man is immersed in his usual earthly deeds, cares, and concerns. It can be difficult for him to put aside all earthly things and turn to the heavenly, eternal, and Divine. The law of the Gospel is known and accessible to all, but man in his weakness often stumbles and commits sin. The more his soul is burdened, clinging to the earth, the more difficult it becomes for him to perceive the spiritual.

The Church, therefore, has wisely established a time of fasting for Christians: a time of penitential introspection, of work on oneself, and of conforming oneself to the traditions, foundations, and rules of the Church, including the ecclesiastical canons. In this regard, modern society's attitude towards the fast is no exception: one hears questions about whether it is necessary, about whether one can forego, mitigate, or shorten it. But it is characteristic of the true Christian to be completely obedient to the Mother Church, accepting that which it has established and which

has been observed by its faithful children for centuries.

People with an inadequate conception of church life often perceive the fasts as being concerned exclusively with limitation in food, in both quantity and quality. But fasting is primarily a spiritual matter. Today the spirit of sacrifice and the capacity for self-denial are dying out. Fasting is the best means of reviving this spirit, through restraining the flesh and resisting its insistent demands.

Yet it should go without saying that bodily fasting alone, such as abstaining from foods of animal origin, is incomplete and incorrect. Spiritual fasting is essential: the rejection of entertainments, amusements, and of everything that in ordinary, non-fasting, times might sting a Christian's conscience. In order to understand

the fast's essence, its true content, one should spend as much time as possible in church throughout the duration of the fast and be more diligent in fulfilling one's personal rule of prayer. During this time, it is especially important to live to the fullest possible extent within the mysteriological, grace-filled life of the Church by approaching the Mysteries of Confession and Communion more frequently.

I know well how difficult fasting can be for Christians living amidst the world. They often meet with incomprehension from friends and colleagues – and not only incomprehension, but rejection



Church of the Nativity Altar Bethlehem

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Please visit our website for our mission and other useful information.

Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20<sup>th</sup> century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate \$24 per annum (\$48 for those outside of the US). This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

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and even ridicule. This sometimes causes the cowardly desire to abandon the fast, so as not to appear strange in people's eyes or to stand out from their surroundings. But it should be firmly understood that the steadfast observance of church rules by Christians, although it might seem unusual to non-churchgoers, will command their involuntary respect. Our fasting itself can become a wordless sermon for many, reminding them of our faith and of that great and majestic event for which we are preparing by means of this fast.

I sincerely wish you to complete the course of this fast with spiritual profit, peering attentively into your souls and hearts during these days in order to cleanse them of everything that could hinder God—Who became Man for our sake and our salvation by descending from heaven to earth—from entering and making His abode in them. We will render to the Lord only the small labor of abstinence that is within our powers, and He will grant us His great and incomparable spiritual joy—the joy of the living knowledge that God has appeared unto us in order to be with us always, never leaving those who have put their trust in Him, through the joy of Christ's radiant Nativity.



**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.**

## FROM THE EDITOR...

The Presidential election is upon us at a time that our Nation is as polarized as it has ever been, allegations of improper behaviors are abundant, the world is in social and economic upheaval, wars rage, and uncertainty among all is apparent, irrespective of political persuasion or social status. The continuing degradation of morals, ethics, and values has fully penetrated the campaigns of politicians throughout our Nation. The electorate is no longer surprised by ANY revelation of impropriety and, for the most part, struggles to determine who might be the candidate that will allow our Nation to return back to its glory days and the Founders' values.

It is likely that this *Orthodox Heritage* issue will not make it to our readers until after the election is held; we anticipate some to be disappointed. We shall, once again, reiterate a self-reflective anecdote from our Church's Holy Tradition, which we uncovered within the Greek periodical *Athonite Witness*, in one of their 1990 issues:

When the Emperor Fokas the Tyrant had taken over the reins of Byzantium (602 AD), he inflicted upon his people several atrocities and massacres with the aid of the evil "Vonosos the Tormentor." During that same time, there was a certain pious monk in Constantinople, a holy man, who having much boldness towards God and as if he was being afflicted by Him, kept asking with great simplicity, *Lord, why did You give us such a king?* And then, after asking this for quite a few days, a voice from God came to him, which said: *Because I could find none worse...*

We continue to insist that our humble publication cannot and will not engage in political matters. We are reminded by His Divine Word: *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.* (Rom 13:1).

## WHY DO WE GO TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY?

By Hieromartyr Daniel Sisoyev, translated by Priest Sergii Alekseev.

*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. [Pss 121:1]*

People often ask priests: “Why should we go to church every Sunday?” And then they begin to justify themselves: “We need our sleep, then, we need to spend time with the family, do things around the house, etc. And you want us to get up and go to church. What for?”

Of course, in order to justify one’s laziness one can come up with various objections. But first we have to understand the meaning behind the weekly trips to church and only then to measure it against our self-justification. It is so obvious that the requirement of frequent church attendance is not man-made, but it was one of the Ten Commandments: *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.* (Exod 20:8-11).

In the Old Testament, violation of the fourth commandment was punishable by death, as was murder. In the New Testament, Sunday became the greater holy day because Christ, having risen from the dead, sanctified that day. According to the church rules, whoever violates this commandment is subject to excommunication. As stated in the 80<sup>th</sup> canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council: *In case any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or anyone else on the list of the clergy, or any layman, without any graver necessity or any particular difficulty compelling him to absent himself from his own church for a very long time, fails to attend church on Sundays for three consecutive weeks, while living in the city, if he be a cleric, let him be deposed from office; but if he be a layman, let him be removed from Communion.*

It is rather unlikely that the Creator would give us ridiculous commands, or that the church canons were written to make people’s lives unbearable. Then what is the meaning of this commandment?

Everything in Christianity has its origin in the self-manifestation of God the Trinity, Who is revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Entering His inner life and participation in His Divine glory is the goal of our life. Since *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him,* by the word of Apostle John (1 Jn 4:16), we can enter into communion with Him only through love.

As affirmed by the word of the Lord, the entire Divine Goal can be reduced to two commandments: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* (Mt 22:37-40).

Can we truly fulfill these commandments without going to church? If we love someone, do not we try to see this person as often as possible? Is it possible to imagine two people in love who are avoiding seeing one another? Yes, they can talk on the phone; but it is far better to talk face to face. The same goes for the person who loves God—he wants to come closer to God. May King David be an example for us. He, being a ruler of his people, fighting numerous wars with enemies, executing judgment, used to say: *How beloved are Thy dwellings, O Lord of hosts; my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtledove a nest for herself where she may lay her young, Even Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; unto ages of ages shall they praise Thee. Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee; he hath made ascents in his heart, in the valley of weeping, in the place which he hath appointed. Yea, for the lawgiver will give blessings; they shall go from strength to strength, the God of gods shall be seen in Sion. O Lord of hosts, hearken unto my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob. O God, our defender, behold, and look upon the face of Thine anointed one. For better is one day in Thy courts than thousands elsewhere. I have chosen rather to be an outcast in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of sinners.* (Pss 83).

When he was in exile, he would tearfully cry every day over the fact that he cannot enter the house of God: *These things have I remembered, and I poured out my soul within me, for I used to go to the place of the wondrous tabernacle, even to the house of God, with a voice of rejoicing and thanksgiving, yea, of the sound of them that keep festival.* (Pss 41:5).

It is exactly this attitude that gives rise to the need of going to God’s temple and makes it essential for the person.

And this is not surprising! The eyes of the Lord are always directed towards God’s temple, the church. In the church, He Himself is present in His Body and Blood. In the church, He revives us in Baptism, therefore the church is our lesser motherland. In the church, God forgives us our sins in the Mystery of Confession, He gives us His own self in the most holy Communion. Where else can we find such sources of incorruptible life? According to the word of an ancient ascetic, they who throughout the week fight against the devil, hasten on Saturdays and Sundays to church to partake from the sources of the living water of Communion, in order to quench the thirst of their hearts and to be cleansed of the filth of their defiled conscience.

Ancient legends tell us that deer hunt snakes and eat them; but when the poison starts burning their interior parts they run to a spring of clear water. So also we have to hasten to the church, in order to cool the irritation of our hearts with the communal prayer. As Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer said: *Try to gather together more frequently to celebrate God's Eucharist and to praise him. For when you meet with frequency, Satan's powers are overthrown and his destructiveness is undone by the unanimity of your faith. There is nothing better than peace, by which all strife in heavenly and earthly spirits is cast out.* (Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer, Epistle to the Ephesians, 13).

People forget that only church prayer can save man from the devil's attacks, for he is trembling before the power of God and is unable to harm the person who abides in Divine love.

King David chanted: *Though a host should array itself against me, my heart shall not be afraid; though war should rise up against me, in this have I hoped. One thing have I asked of the Lord, this will I seek after: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may behold the delight of the Lord, and that I may visit His holy temple. For He hid me in His tabernacle in the day of my troubles, He sheltered me in the secret place of His tabernacle, upon a rock hath He exalted me. And now, behold, He exalted my head above mine enemies. I went round about and I sacrificed in His tabernacle a sacrifice of praise and jubilation; I will sing and I will chant unto the Lord.* (Pss 26:3-6).

Besides the fact that in His temple the Lord protects us and gives us strength, He also teaches us, for the Divine Service in its entirety is a true school of Divine love. In God's holy temple, we hear His word, we bring to mind his marvelous acts, we learn about our future; indeed, *In God's temple everything uttereth His glory.* (Pss 28:9); as if before our very eyes there takes place feats of the martyrs, the victories of the ascetics, courage of kings and priests; we learn about the mystical nature of God, about the salvation which Christ has granted us; here we rejoice at Christ's Radiant Resurrection. It is not accidental that we refer to Sunday Divine Service as a "lesser Pascha." Often it seems to us that everything around us is terrible, awful and hopeless, but the Sunday Divine Service reveals to us our extreme hope. It was not without reason that Prophet David said that: *We have thought, O God, of Thy mercy in the midst of Thy temple.* (Pss 47:10).

Sunday Divine Service is the best weapon against those numerous depressions and sorrows which inhabit our gray everyday life. This service is a brightly shining rainbow of God's covenant amidst the fog of the everyday bustle.

In the heart of our festal Divine Service is prayer and contemplation of the Holy Scripture, the reading of which in the church possesses a unique power. One ascetic saw tongues of fire rising up from the mouth of the deacon reading the word of God at the Sunday Divine Service. They were purifying the

souls of the praying people and were ascending to Heaven. Those who say that reading the Bible at home is sufficient and, therefore, they do not need to go to church to hear the Word of God are mistaken. Even if they do open the Book at home, their distancing themselves from the assembly of the faithful in the church will prevent them from fully understanding the sacred text. It has been confirmed that those who do not partake of the Holy Communion are practically unable to understand God's will. No wonder!

The Scripture is nothing other than instruction on how to receive Heavenly Grace. But if we simply read a set of instructions and do not try to, let us say, put a bookcase together or use a computer program, the set of instructions will remain un-mastered and will be soon forgotten. It is well-known that our mind quickly filters out any unused information. Therefore, the Scripture is inseparable from the church community, for it was given solely to the Church.

And vice versa, those who attend the Sunday Divine Liturgy and then read the Scripture at home will comprehend meaning in it that they would never have comprehended otherwise. Often, it is precisely on the Church Feast Days that people learn the will of God about themselves. According to the words of St. John of the Ladder: *Although God always endows His servants with gifts, He does even more so on the yearly feasts of the Lord and the Mother of God.* ("To the Pastor," 3:2).

It is not surprising that those who regularly attend church are somewhat different, both in outward appearance and in the disposition of their souls. On one hand, to them virtues become natural, while on the other hand, frequent confessions prevent them from falling into serious sins. In the life of a Christian, passions can intensify, for Satan does not want us—who were made from dust—to ascend to Heaven from which we had been cast down. For this reason, Satan attacks us as his enemies. We, however, should not fear him; we should fight him and overcome him, for only *he that overcometh shall inherit all things, says the Lord.* (Rev 21:7).

If the person says that he is a Christian but does not pray with his brothers, what kind of Christian is he? In the words of the greatest expert on Church canons, Patriarch Theodore Balsamon of Antioch: *Such a person either does nothing regarding fulfillment of the Divine commandment about prayer and singing hymns to God, or he is not a believer. Otherwise, why would he for twenty days not want to be in church with Christians and have communion with God's faithful people?* (This is reference to Church canons which stipulate that Christians who were absent from church on three consecutive Sundays are to be excommunicated. **Trans.**).

It is no accident that people we consider model Christians: Christians of the apostolic Church in Jerusalem, were together, and had all things common... *And all that believed were together, and had all things common. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man*

had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:44-47). Their inner strength was a result of their being in one accord. They abided in the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit which was poured forth upon them in response to their love.

It is no coincidence that the New Testament directly forbids one to neglect assembling in church: *We shall not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but we shall exhort one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day [of the assembly] approaching.* (Heb 10:25).

All the best things which made Russia holy, and which sustain other Christian nations, are provided by the Divine Services. In church we are delivered from the yoke of our vanity and we can break through from the shackles of crises and wars into God's peace. And this is the only correct decision: not curses and revolutions, not malice and hatred, but church prayer and virtues can change the world. *For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.* (Pss 10:3-4), and the righteous one flees to the Lord to find refuge. This is not cowardice but wisdom and courage. Only a fool is going to try to stand up by himself against the onslaught of the evil of the entire world, be that terrorism or a natural disaster, revolutions or wars. Only the Almighty God can defend His creation. This is why a church has always been considered a place of safety.

Indeed, a church is Heaven's embassy on the Earth where we pilgrims looking for the Heavenly city, receive support: *How Thou hast multiplied Thy mercy, O God! Let the sons of men hope in the shelter of Thy wings. They shall be drunken with the fatness of Thy house, and of the torrent of Thy delight shalt Thou make them to drink. For in thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light shall we see light.* (Pss 35:8-10).

I think it is clear that love for God is the reason for one's striving to frequently visit the house of the Lord. But the second commandment demands the same—to love our neighbor. Where else can we give our attention to what is most beautiful in a person? In a store, in a movie theater, or in a hospital? Obviously not. Only in the house of our common Father can we meet our brothers. Our communal prayer is going to be heard by God sooner,

too, than any prayer of a proud loner. For Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said: *That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* (Mt 18:19-20).

In church we distance ourselves from the hustle and bustle and are able to pray both about our own troubles and about the entire universe. In church, we pray to God asking Him to heal the diseases of our relatives, to free the captives, to preserve the travelers, to rescue the perishing. In church we are also in communion with those who have left this world but have not left Christ's Church. Whenever the departed visit the living they beg them to pray for them in churches. They say that every such a commemoration is like a birthday to them, but we often neglect that. Where then is our love? Let us imagine their condition. They have no bodies, they cannot receive communion, and they cannot do any good

deeds (alms), either. They are waiting for support from their friends and relatives, but what they are getting are just excuses. It is the same as saying to your hungry mother: "Please forgive me, I am not going to give you anything to eat, because I badly need a nap." Do we not know that the church prayer is true food to the departed?

Besides, holy righteous men and women, worthily glorified, await us in the temple. Holy icons allow us to see them,

their words are proclaimed during the service, and they themselves often visit the house of God, especially on their feast days. They pray together with us to God, and their powerful hymnology like eagles' wings bring up the church prayer directly to the Divine altar. And not only people but bodiless angels also participate in our prayer. People chant angelic hymns, such as the *Trisagion*, while angels chant along with us, *It is truly meet to bless Thee, O Theotokos.*

According to the Church Tradition, an angel always stands over the Altar within any consecrated church, sending the prayer of the Church up to God, while a blessed spirit stands at the church entrance, watching over the thoughts of people entering and exiting the church. This presence is rather palpable. For it is not without reason that many unrepentant sinners do not feel good in the temple—it is the power of God rejecting their sinful will and the angels punishing them for their lawlessness. Such people, instead of ignoring the church, must repent and receive forgiveness in the Mystery of Confession and then remember to thank the Creator.



## THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ABSURD

*By Fr. Seraphim Rose (+1982).*

The present age is, in a profound sense, an age of absurdity. Poets and dramatists, painters and sculptors proclaim and depict the world as a disjointed chaos, and man as a dehumanized fragment of that chaos. Politics, whether of the right, the left, or the center, can no longer be viewed as anything but an expedient whereby universal disorder is given, for the moment, a faint semblance of order; pacifists and militant crusaders are united in an absurd faith in the feeble powers of man to remedy an intolerable situation by means which can only make it worse. Philosophers and other supposedly responsible men in governmental, academic, and ecclesiastical circles, when they do not retreat behind the impersonal and irresponsible facade of specialization or bureaucracy, usually do no more than rationalize the incoherent state of contemporary man and his world, and counsel a futile “commitment” to a discredited humanist optimism, to a hopeless stoicism, to blind experimentation and irrationalism, or to “commitment” itself, a suicidal faith in “faith.”

But art, politics, and philosophy today are only reflections of life, and if they have become absurd it is because, in large measure, life has become so. The most striking example of absurdity in life in recent times was, of course, Hitler’s “new order,” wherein a supposedly normal, civilized man could be at one and the same time an accomplished and moving interpreter of Bach (as was Himmler) and a skilled murderer of millions, or who might arrange a tour of an extermination camp to coincide with a concert series or an exhibition of art. Hitler himself, indeed, was the absurd man par excellence, passing from nothingness to world rule and back to nothingness in the space of a dozen years, leaving as his monument nothing but a shattered world, owing his meaningless success to the fact that he, the emptiest of men, personified the emptiness of the men of his time.

Hitler’s surrealist world is now a thing of the past; but the world has by no means passed out of the age of absurdity, but rather into a more advanced—though temporarily quieter—stage of the same disease. Men have invented a weapon to express, better than Hitler’s gospel of destruction, their own incoherence and nihilism; and in its shadow men stand paralyzed, between the extremes of an external power and an internal powerlessness equally without precedent. At the same time, the poor and “underprivileged” of the world have awakened to conscious life, and seek abundance and privilege; those who already possess them waste their lives in the pursuit of vain things, or become disillusioned and die of boredom and despair, or commit senseless crimes. The whole world, it almost seems, is divided into those who lead meaningless, futile lives without being aware of it, and those who, being aware of it, are driven to madness and suicide.

So it is too with absurdism; it is the negative side of a positive reality. There is, of course, an element of incoherence in our world, for in his fall from Paradise man brought the world with him; the philosophy of the absurd is not, therefore, founded upon a total lie, but upon a deceptive half-truth. But when Camus defines absurdity as the confrontation of man’s need for reason with the irrationality of the world, when he believes that man is an innocent victim and the world the guilty party, he, like all absurdists, has magnified a very partial insight into a totally distorted view of things; and in his blindness has arrived at the exact inversion of the truth. Absurdism, in the end, is an internal and not an external question; it is not the world that is irrational and incoherent, but man.

If, however, the absurdist is responsible for not seeing things as they are, and not even wishing to see things as they are, the Christian is yet more responsible for failing to give the example of a fully coherent life, a life in Christ. Christian compromise in thought and word and negligence in deed have opened the way to the triumph of the forces of the absurd, of Satan, of Antichrist. The present age of absurdity is the just reward of Christians who have failed to be Christians.

And the only remedy for absurdism lies at this, its source: we must again be Christians. Camus was quite right when he said, “We must choose between miracles and the absurd.” For in this respect Christianity and absurdism are equally opposed to Enlightenment rationalism and humanism, to the view that reality can be reduced to purely rational and human terms. We must indeed choose between the miraculous, the Christian view of things, whose center is God and whose end is the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, and the absurd, the Satanic view of things, whose center is the fallen self and whose end is Hell, in this life and in the life to come.

We must again be Christians. It is futile, in fact it is precisely absurd, to speak of reforming society, of changing the path of history, of emerging into an age beyond absurdity, if we have not Christ in our hearts; and if we do have Christ in our hearts, nothing else matters.

It is of course possible that there may be an age beyond absurdity; it is more likely, perhaps—and Christians must always be prepared for this eventuality—that there will not be, and that the age of absurdity is indeed the last age. It may be that the final testimony Christians may be able to give in this age will be the ultimate testimony, the blood of their martyrdom.

But this is cause for rejoicing and not for despair. For the hope of Christians is not in this world or in any of its kingdoms—that hope, indeed, is the ultimate absurdity; the hope of Christians is in the Kingdom of God which is not of this world.

## ABOUT THE ANTICHRIST

Source: "In General About the Close of the Age, the Antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ," Orthodox Kypseli Publications, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Prior to the Second Coming of Christ to the world, according to the Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Orthodox Church, the Antichrist will precede—a most impious man activated by Satan. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem informs us that the Antichrist *is coming... when the close of the world is approaching*, that he will reveal all his murderous disposition against the Church, and *against all (people) especially against us Christians*. According to Saint John Chrysostom, the Antichrist will be a person accepting all the energy of Satan. *What will he not work then? He will move all, he will disturb all..., for he will work a million things and prepare others to work hardships.* (P.G. 62, 482). "When the Antichrist becomes prevailing," says the sacred Chrysostom, *he will persecute the Church of God and reveal his wickedness...* Among many other things, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem makes known to us the following also about the Antichrist: *Daring such things for only three and a half years, he will then be abolished by the second glorious coming from the heavens of the only begotten Son of God, of our true Lord and Savior Christ Who, defeating the Antichrist with the breath of His mouth, will hand him over to the fire of Gehenna.* (Catech. 15, Ch. 12).

Hate amongst brothers, according to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, will give ground to the Antichrist; because the Devil prepares the schisms of peoples, so that he who is coming can become acceptable. St. Cyril places above all martyrs, those who at the time of the Antichrist will witness with piety for the name of Christ; this is because the former struggled only with people, whereas the martyrs of the Antichrist's time will fight with Satan himself in person!

The temptation to define the time of the events of the revelations is limited by the terms of Saint Irenaeus, who says: *It is safer and less dangerous, to await the outcome of the prophecy, rather than to ponder and guess at the name.* (Contra Hares. 30:3). And, elsewhere he tells us: *Every prophecy before being fulfilled is an enigma and something irrational to people. When, however, the time comes and that which has been prophesied is realized, then it achieves*

*the most precise explanation.* While Saint Andrew of Caesarea says: "Time and experience will reveal to those who are vigilant."

The Antichrist will precede the Second Coming of Christ. He will preach on earth a worldwide persecution against the faithful, and for this reason great attention and spiritual wakefulness is demanded; so that *we not be deceived* in any way, as the Apostle Paul proclaims to the Thessalonians. The Antichrist will be a natural person, who will place himself against the God-man Christ, His teaching and His Orthodox Church. Antichrist means he who is coming instead of Christ and is opposed to Christ. He is essentially the opponent, according to the Apostle Paul, of Christ and His world-saving work.

The Evangelist John tells us: *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.* (1 Jn 2:22). While Saint John Damascene assures us, that *he who does not confess the Son of God having come in the flesh and that he is perfect God and has become a perfect man, after being God, is Antichrist* (P.G. 94, 1216). Whoever, that is, rejects the incarnation of Christ is Antichrist. Whoever again are enemies of Christ's Faith, opponents of the Gospel of the Lord, are Antichrists. There existed many forerunners of the Antichrist in the past, but also very many who are working today in his own plans, as are the heresies (especially ecumenism), sorceries, and many international political and financial organizations.

Additional signs of the last days will be: the appearance of many false prophets; the increase of destructive wars; hunger; dreadful and mortal illnesses; earthquakes in places; and the scandals of lay people and clergymen. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem writes in relation: *Bishops against bishops and clergymen against clergymen and peoples against peoples unto blood.* The Holy Father urges us not to pay attention to those things which are happening, but to those which have been written; nor should the per chance evil conduct of the clergy be a cause for our own perdition.

Another eschatological sin is the lessening of love and the increase of hating brothers before the coming of the Antichrist. *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold,* as the Evangelist Matthew mentions (Mt 24:12). Another sign is the preaching of the Gospel to



all the world, independently of whether the people believe or not: *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* (Mt 24:14).

The rumored planned super-inflation will aid in the nations being subjected to the electronic money system. All exchanges and buying/selling will occur through the electronic means of exchanging values, and will be conducted with the *mark*: *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 Antichrist's coming is being prepared by his forerunners, who with impious and sinful works will lead humanity to great apostasy and uselessness; and to idolatry, in order to accept the Antichrist. They will pursue the joining of the currents of politics, of economy and of religion with the aim of the creation of a worldwide state with a worldwide Governor-Dictator, and a pan-religion with the Antichrist as God.

The heresies, many satanic organizations, as well as the atheistic material systems are all forerunners of the Antichrist; they all cause confusion, disbelief in Christ's Church, and lead unsupported people to perdition. With all these things they strive to wound Orthodoxy, in order to work un-battered for Satan and his ungodly instruments. The most effective manner of facing the forerunners of the Antichrist, and of the Antichrist himself, are to know Christ and place Him correctly inside us with such intensity, that we will love Him first and above all; so that, henceforth, it is not possible for anything to separate us from Him.

The par excellence Antichrist will be him whom God will allow to appear to the world a little prior to the Second Coming of Christ *he who is coming during the close of the world*, according to St. John Damascene, *to fight the Church of Christ and the faithful disciples of Christ*. He will perform

in a word whatever Satan dictates to him, as if Satan is acting in person through him. He will be the person through whom Satan will act.

God will allow the Antichrist to come for the unbelieving, the Jews and the believers. According to Saint John Chrysostom he will not be powerful on the believers alone, but also on all those who follow the road of perdition, as well as all "unrepentant" believers. Saint Ephraim the Syrian tells us in relation, that *by the allowance of Holy God, he (the Antichrist) will receive authority to deceive the world; because the impiety of the world has multiplied and everywhere he works hardships*.

Let us forbear, beloved, the satanic violence with bravery in our wicked days, to avoid the Antichrist's deception.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem stresses to us: *So man, guard your own self. You now have all the signs to know before hand of the Antichrist. And do not just think about it, but also tell them and inform the others, as many more as you can. And, while the Son of God, according to Athanasios the Great, coming will destroy him.* (BEPES 35, 150). So, while we don't know the precise year of the coming of the Antichrist, we know from the Holy Scriptures and the God-bearing fathers quite a few things about his dark person and his actions.

In our wicked generation many international organizations work for the more



general plan of people being governed by the Antichrist. The complete giving over of people to the demons is being pursued by the dark powers. So let us be wakeful, because faith is a delicate thing and we should not deny it either with words or actions; so that we not lose the Grace of Holy Baptism.

We are called to pay attention, because whoever accepts the *mark* denies holy Baptism, the faith of Christ; and he can no longer repent. For this reason, a careful Christian life is demanded and great attention; so that we never accept the deceiver Antichrist as true. It is necessary that we be in a state of repentance and spiritual readiness. And we must not forget such sacred words of our Lord as: *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.* (Mt 11:12);



and *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.* (Mt 5:13). The Lord will come again suddenly to judge the world as we also say in the Symbol of Faith: *And He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end...*

The Lord will come as the flood of Noah, that is, suddenly: *But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* (Mt 24:37). He shall also come like a thief: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.* (2 Pet 3:10). His coming shall be seen as lightning: *For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* (Mt 24:27) That is, it will be felt like lightning, and will be seen all over the earth and to all people.

The Lord will come again on earth with the same manner that He left. The angels Who were present with the disciples of the Lord in His Ascension assured this: *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.* (Acts 1:11). Until then, let us cultivate inside us this sweet expectation, with worthy works of repentance and virtue, love and holiness. In chapter 24, verse 30 of the Evangelist Matthew we read: *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven (the precious Cross); and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* While within Revelation is written: *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.* (Rev 1:7).

Christ will not leave His faithful people, so long as we walk the path of the Saints of our Church: To live with the fear of God, with humility, with prayer, with charity, with repentance, with patience, with love. Let us walk the path of truth, of light, of grace, of sanctification, studying the Holy Scripture, patristic works, the lives of our Saints, partaking worthily in the sacramental life of our Church; and the philanthropic and soul-saving Lord will not leave us helpless. Our Lord assured us of this with the following consoling words of His: ***And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.*** (Mt 28:20).

We are called completely to entrust ourselves to God, to strive to serve the truth, to do that which pleases God; and to never forget, neither God's Judgment nor the Recompense. Then, and only then, the peace of God and His divine protection will accompany us and guard us always.

## GIVE AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN TO YOU!

*From "Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters," Thessaloniki, 1999.*

An Athonite elder said: "It is a good thing for people to read spiritual books, but it is even better to apply them by living spiritually."

Elder Savvas of the Monastery of Philotheou (on Mt. Athos) had told me that during the great famine of 1917, the monks of the Monastery of Iveron, seeing stocks in the storehouses running low, had reduced their commitments to hospitality. In fact, there was one miserly supervisor who insisted on putting a stop to hospitality altogether. It was only to be expected that Christ would put a stop to all His blessings, as well.

The fathers then began to starve and complain to Christ and our Most Holy Lady for not taking care of their monastery. Unfortunately, they hadn't realized their mistake.

One day, Christ appeared to the door-keeper of the monastery in the guise of a pauper asking for bread. The door-keeper said to him sorrowfully, "We haven't got any, my brother. That is why we stopped offering hospitality to people. But just wait here a minute and I will go to my cell and bring you the bit I have for myself." He went running off to his cell and returned with his bread and handed it over. He saw the face of the Pauper shining. When the Pauper had taken the bread, He said to the door-keeper, "Do you know why misfortune has befallen the monastery? Because you have cast out two people: the one is called "give" and the other one "it shall be given unto you." Having said this, He disappeared from sight leaving a brightness which blinded the door-keeper.

The monk was astonished and ran off in fear to tell the supervisors of the monastery about the incident. At first, the fathers cudged their brains trying to remember the people they had turned away. Then they realized that the Pauper was Christ Himself and also recognized His words from the Gospel, *Give and it shall be given unto you.* They immediately repented for their error, and as soon as they began to give to the poor some of the little they had left, they were showered by the rich blessings of God.



You should secretly give from what you have to those in need, so that you receive from God, *Who sees in secret, a hundred times more*, as well as life eternal in the age to come (Mt 6:4; Mk 10:30)."

St. Gregory Palamas

## THE MYSTERY OF LOVE

*A Sermon by St. John of Kronstadt on the Nativity of Christ.*

**Great is the mystery of piety: God is manifested in the flesh**

[1 Tim 3:16]

† † †

It is on this day that, throughout the entire inhabited world, the Holy Church brings to our remembrance and observes that most majestic and sublime of mysteries: the Incarnation of God the Word from a Most-pure Virgin through an outpouring of, and an overshadowing by, God's Holy Spirit.

Wondrous, inexpressible and awesome is this mystery, both for the exalted and all-contemplating celestial minds of those who dwell in the heavens: the ranks of the angels. It is equally wondrous, inexpressible and awesome for the minds of all men enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Imagine: the unoriginate God from Whom everything received the commencement of its existence: the Angels, and the human race, and the entire world, both visible and invisible, takes a beginning in His humanity. He Whom the heavens cannot contain is contained in a virginal womb. God becomes an infant, and is borne upon the arms of a Mother. He Who nourishes every breath is now nourished by paps.

The science of astronomy has learned and affirms that, in the order of creation, our earth is but a barely-noticeable point; that millions of worlds around our own fill up the vastnesses of space. And, lo! This single point, this barely-noticeable globe of God's creation, being inhabited by men, has been accounted worthy of the inexpressible honour of bearing upon itself God-in-the-Flesh, the God-Man, Who did deign to dwell amongst men, to teach erring mankind the knowledge of God, to work innumerable miracles of good, to preach repentance and complete forgiveness of sins; to suffer and to die as a holy Sacrifice for the sins of the world, to be resurrected through the power of Divinity from amongst the dead, having vanquished death, which is natural to all men, and to make a gift of resurrection to the entire human race.

Not a single one of the visible worlds, save the earth, has been deemed worthy of this greatest of all honours: for it was only upon the earth that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten of the heavenly Father, had a Virgin-Mother, and He alone was Her Son by way of humanity. Why was the earth given such preference? Why was it only on earth that God appeared in the flesh? This is a great Divine mystery, a mystery of im-

measurable loving-kindness and of God's condescension to perishing mankind.

Thus, God did appear in the flesh: *rejoice and be exceeding glad, O earth; rejoice and celebrate, ye earth-born.* The Creator Himself did come to you, in order to create you anew; to restore you, who were corrupted by transgressions. To you did He come: the almighty Physician Himself—powerful to treat all the inveterate afflictions of sin—in order that He might heal all the passions of the soul and all the infirmities of the body, all of the which He truly did do, as we know from the Gospel and from the history of the Church.

Thus, greet Him joyfully, with pure minds and hearts, with bodies chaste and restrained by fasting and abstinence, which the Holy Church has thoughtfully instituted prior to this great feast in order to prepare us worthily to meet the heavenly King, Who comes to us in order to abide in us.

He came to us with the mercy and good will of His heavenly Father, and from us He demands mercy toward our neighbors; He is the righteous King, and He demands of us all righteousness; for He, too, as a man, *fulfilled all righteousness* (Mt 3:15), showing us an example and providing us with grace and the strength to carry it out. He Himself did suffer for us, having borne the cross; and He taught us to deny ourselves—or our sins and our passions—and to fol-

low after Him, *perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* (2 Cor 7:1). He came to heal our souls, ailing from sin, and commanded all to repent; let us ever, then, be earnestly contrite, correcting ourselves and striving toward holiness and perfection. The holy Angels, at the Nativity of the God-man, did declare *peace unto the world; and unto men, the good will of the Heavenly Father.* Let us then, ourselves, have within us a peaceful conscience, and let us be at peace with everyone, if possible. *Be at peace and be holy with all,* sayeth the apostle (Heb. 12:14), for without this shall none see the Lord. Amen.



My heart only has entrances. It doesn't have exits. Whoever enters remains there. Whatever he may do, I love him the same as I loved him when he first entered into my heart. I pray for him and seek his salvation.

Blessed Elder Epiphanius of Athens (+1989)

## THE MEANING OF FASTING

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov.

***But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life.***

[Lk 21:34]

† † †

It is good for the salvation of our souls during the Nativity Lent not only to oppress our bodies by fasting, but also to speak about fasting; it is for the salvation of our souls for us to direct all the necessary attention to the warning against over-eating and satiation made to us by the Lord Himself: *Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life.*

The institution of fasting is a divine institution. The first commandment given by God to man was the commandment of fasting. (*Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat; Gen 2:17*). It was indispensably necessary for us in Paradise prior to our fall; it is even more necessary after the fall. The commandment of fasting was given in Paradise; it is repeated in the Gospel. Let us lift up our thoughts to the divine institution of fasting and by a consideration of this institution, let us revitalize with our soul the effort of fasting itself.

The effort of fasting neither belongs exclusively nor is it useful and necessary only for the body; it is useful and necessary primarily for the mind and the heart. *Take heed of yourselves that your hearts not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness.* (Lk 21:34). The Savior of the world showed us in these words something worthy of special attention, the effect of the excessive use of food and drink, a terrible consequence, a soul-destroying after-effect. The heart is hardened, coarsens, is weighed down, from pleasing the stomach; the mind is deprived of its lightness and spirituality; man becomes fleshly.

What is meant by a "fleshly man?" Holy Scripture calls fleshly that unfortunate man who is nailed to the earth, who is incapable of spiritual thoughts and feelings. *My Spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is flesh* (Gen 6:3), testifies God. The fleshly man is incapable of the worship of God. Even the spiritual man, once he has subjected himself to satiation, loses his spirituality, loses in some way the very ability to know God and to serve Him. *And Israel waxed fat,*

says Holy Scripture, calling Jacob the true servant of God, *and became stubborn; you became fat, you grew thick and became sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the rock of his salvation.* (Deut 32:15). The saint comes to such a condition when he excludes from his efforts the effort of fasting. Plumpness and laziness passed on to the body by excess and lack of discrimination in food, little by little are passed on by the body to the heart and by the heart to the mind. These spiritual eyes, the heart and the mind, are then deadened; eternity is hidden from them; earthly life appears to the unhealthy sight as endless. Our earthly life is guided by these ideas and feelings and the ill-fated, blinded traveler, together with the serpent who was cast out, walks *on his belly and eats dust all the days of his earthly life.* (Gen 3:14). Breaking the fast threatens the disciple of Christ with falling away from Christ.



Such an effect of intemperance or even imprudent and careless use of food on man, explains the reason why man, in the very state of his innocence, in the midst of the enjoyments of Paradise, needed the commandment of fasting. It was intended to preserve the newly created creation, composed of two natures, the bodily and the spiritual, in a spiritual state. It was intended to keep in balance the two natures and give the preference to the

spiritual nature. With its help, man could always stand in thought and heart before God, could be unapproachable to thoughts and dreams of vanity.

The commandment of fasting is even more necessary for fallen man. A weakness for the earth, for the transitory earthly life, its sweetness, greatness, glories, the very inclination to sin have become the way of life for our fallen nature, just like the feelings and attractions proper to an illness. We are nailed to the earth, attached to it with all our soul and not only with the body: we have become completely fleshly, deprived of spiritual feeling, incapable of heavenly thoughts. The commandment of fasting again is the first commandment necessary for us. Only with the help of fasting can we tear ourselves away from the earth. Only with the help of fasting can we withstand the attractive power of earthly enjoyments. Only with the help of fasting can we break the bond with sin. Only with the help of fasting can our spirit free itself from the heavy chains of the flesh. Only with the help of fasting can our thoughts arise from the earth and look toward God.

As far as we take upon ourselves the blessed yoke of fasting does our spirit acquire greater freedom; it aspires to the realm of spirits akin to it, and begins to turn often to the contemplation of God, to submerge itself in this measureless and wonderful contemplation, to acquire a skill in it. If things in the natural world, enlightened by the rays of the sun, without fail borrow brilliance and shine from it, then how shall our spirit be enlightened once it, having overthrown by means of fasting the coarse and thick curtain of fleshiness, shall stand directly before the Sun of Truth, God? It is enlightened! It is enlightened and changed! In it arise new thoughts, divine ones, to it are opened up mysteries, which before were unknown to it.

*The Heavens* declare to it *the glory of God*; the firmament proclaims the omnipotence of the Hand which created it; all creation, both seen and unseen, loudly proclaim the unspeakable mercy of the Creator. It tastes spiritually and sees spiritually *how good is the Lord!* The blessed lightness and fineness of the spirit is passed on to the body; the body, after the spirit, is attracted to spiritual feelings and prefers imperishable food for which it was created to the perishable food to which it has fallen. At first it submits with difficulty to the healing and violence of fasting; at first it rebels against the institution of fasting, sets our spirit against it, arms itself against it by various rationalizations drawn from falsely-called reason; but, being tamed and healed by fasting, it already feels and thinks differently. Its relationship to satiation is similar to the feelings of a man, who is healed, towards harmful foods, which he used to desire violently during the illness. His relation towards eating are like the attitude towards a detected and evident poison by which mastery over the flesh is taken away from the spirit, by which man is reduced from his likeness and kinship to the Angels to a likeness and kinship with unreasoning animals.

Spiritual soldiers who have gained victory over the flesh by means of fasting, who have stood before the face of the Lord to learn the greatest mysteries and the highest virtues, hear from His lips the teaching of the highest virtue of fasting and are shown the mystery of that condition which little by little takes shape from over-eating and satiation: *Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness.* These conquerors are reminded of carefully keeping near them that weapon by which the victory was won. And the victory is won and the spoils gained by that victory by the very same weapon—fasting.

The ascetic, the hero of Christ, illumined from above and learning from his religious experiences, as he examines the effort of fasting in itself, finds really necessary not only abstinence from satiation and constant eating, but also a strict discrimination in food. The discrimination seems to be excessive only upon a superficial and fleeting look; but, in essence, the quality of food is especially important. In

Paradise, only the quality was forbidden. In our valley of tears on earth, we find that lack of discrimination in the quality produces many more spiritual distresses than excess in quantity. It should not be thought that a cluster of grapes has a way of acting on our mind, on our soul, but every kind of food has its own effect on the blood, the brain, the whole body and through the body, on the soul. Whoever looks after himself attentively, exercising himself in the effort of fasting, will find it really necessary to practice abstinence of the body and soul from the continuous use of meat and even fish; he will greet the regulations of the Church concerning fasting with love and will obey them.

The Holy Fathers called fasting the foundation of all the virtues since our mind is kept in the necessary purity and sobriety, while our heart is preserved in fineness and spirituality by it. He who shakes the foundation of the virtues, shakes the entire building of the virtues.

Brethren! Let us run the course of the holy fast with sincerity and thoroughness. The deprivations to which our body is apparently subjected by the rule of fasting are really nothing in the face of the spiritual worth which the fast is capable of bringing. By means of fasting, let us tear our bodies away from the luxuries and rich table and our hearts from the earth and corruption, from that deep and destructive forgetfulness, by which we separate ourselves from eternity which stands before us and is ready to embrace us. Let us aspire both in body and in soul to God. Let us fear that fleshly condition caused by breaking the fast. Let us fear the complete inability of worshipping God and the Knowledge of God produced by despising the fast. This destructive inability is the beginning of eternal death. This fatal inability is shown in us when, due to scorning the Divine commandment of fasting, we allow *ourselves and our hearts to be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness.* Amen.



The eyes can distract the mind very quickly and cause it in a flash to slip into the place of sin. The eyes look upon something passionately; they fondly dwell upon the idol of beauty; in an instant it is impressed upon the mind; the soul is pleased by the sight of the idol; the mind transmits its appetite and desire to the heart, and the sin is committed without a witness, according to St. Basil. This then is what the Lord meant when He said: *Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (Mt 5:28). This is why Solomon reminded us: *Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids.* (Prov 6:25).

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain

## Τὰ Χριστούγεννα ὡς Ἀφορμὴ γιὰ Πνευματικὸ Προβληματισμὸ

Γράφει ὁ Φώτης Μιχαήλ.

*Καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἔσπαργάνωσεν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτόν ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ κατάλυματι.*

[Λουκ. 2:7].

† † †

Κανένα πανδοχεῖο καὶ κανένας συγγενῆς δὲν φιλοτιμήθηκε νὰ προσφέρει στὸν Νεογέννητο Χριστὸ τόπο γιὰ φιλοξενία. Στὴν μικρὴ Βηθλεέμ, γιὰ ὄλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὑπῆρχε χῶρος. Γιὰ τὸν Πλάστη ὅμως καὶ Σωτήρα, οὔτε μία μικρὴ γωνιά δὲν βρέθηκε, παρεκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ σπήλαιο καὶ τὴν φάτνη!

Σήμερα, στὸ δικό μας κατάλυμα, δηλαδή, στὴν Πατρίδα μας, στὸ χωριό μας, στὶς οἰκογενεῖές μας, στὶς καρδιές μας, ὑπάρχει ἄραγε διαθέσιμος τόπος γιὰ τὸν Ἐνανθρωπήσαντα Χριστό;

(1) Καὶ πρῶτα-πρῶτα ἂς ρωτήσουμε τὸν ἑαυτό μας. Ἐμεῖς, οἱ βαπτισμένοι Ὁρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί, ἔχουμε ἄραγε τόπο γιὰ τὸν Κύριό μας στὸ κατάλυμα τῆς καρδιάς μας; Καθαριζόμαστε ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, ὥστε νὰ γίνῃ ἡ καρδιά μας φάτνη ἄνετη καὶ ζεστή γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, πού γεννιέται;

(2) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς τόπο στὸ κατάλυμα τοῦ δικοῦ μας σπιτιοῦ; Ἐχει θέση ὁ Χριστὸς στὴν οἰκογενειακὴ μας ζωὴ;

(3) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα μέσα στὸν χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Εὐρίσκει τόπο νὰ σταθεῖ στοὺς διαθηρησκειακοὺς διαλόγους καὶ στὶς σχέσεις μας με τοὺς... παπικοὺς καὶ τοὺς προτεστάντες;

(4) Εὐρίσκει σήμερα ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα στὸ πνευματικὸ πανδοχεῖο τοῦ Γένους μας, πού εἶναι τὸ σχολεῖο τὸ Ἑλληνικό; Ποιὰ εἶναι ἡ θέση τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴν ἀγωγή καὶ τὴν ἐκπαίδευση τῆς νεότητος;

(5) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα στὸ μεγάλο «φροντιστήριο» τῆς σύγχρονης Ἑλληνικῆς οἰκογένειας, πού εἶναι ἡ τηλεόραση; Ἐχει τόπο ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ ἀναπαυθεῖ στὰ τηλεοπτικὰ προγράμματα καὶ ιδιαίτερα στὰ προγράμματα ψυχαγωγίας τῶν παιδιῶν;

(6) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα στὶς ὀλόφωτες πλατεῖες τῶν ἡμερῶν τῶν Χριστουγέννων με τοὺς κλόουν, με τὰ ξωτικά καὶ με τοὺς μάγους;

(7) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα στὴν Βουλὴ τῶν Ἑλλήνων; Ὑπάρχει τόπος γιὰ τὸν Σαρκωθέντα Λόγο μέσα στὶς καρδιές τῶν πολιτικῶν μας ἀνδρῶν, στὶς ἀποφάσεις τους καὶ στοὺς νόμους, πού ψηφίζουν;

Ἐὰν ἀποπειραθοῦμε με στοιχειώδη εἰλικρίνεια, νὰ ἀπαντήσουμε στὰ παραπάνω ἐρωτήματα, τότε θὰ καταλήξουμε στὴν θλιβερὴ διαπίστωση, ὅτι καὶ σήμερα στὴν πολύπαθη Πατρίδα μας παραμονές

Χριστουγέννων, συνεχίζουμε κατὰ τὰ φαινόμενα καὶ μιλάμε τὴν γλῶσσα τῆς Βηθλεέμ:

- Δὲν ἔχουμε χῶρο γιὰ Σένα, Χριστέ, στὴν οἰκογένεια.  
- Δὲν μπορούμε νὰ Σε φιλοξενήσουμε στὴν κοινωνικὴ μας ζωὴ.

- Δὲν ἔχουμε γιὰ Σένα κατάλυμα στοὺς νόμους μας καὶ στὰ βουλευτήριά μας.

- Δὲν ἔχουμε τόπο γιὰ Σένα μέσα στὰ σχολεῖα μας.

- Σε θέλουμε ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν προσωπικὴ μας ζωὴ.

- Δὲν μπορείς νὰ μείνεις μαζί μας.

Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ὀφείλουμε νὰ παραδεχθοῦμε ὅτι, ὅπως πάντοτε, ὑπάρχει καὶ σήμερα ἡ μικρὴ μαγιά, πού λαβώθηκε μὲν, ἀλλὰ δὲν πειράχτηκε θανάσιμα ἀπὸ τὰ μικρόβια τοῦ μισόκαλου, δηλαδή τὰ πάθη, τὸν εὐδαμονισμό, τὴν φιλαυτία, τὴν ἐκκοσμίκευση καὶ τὸν οἰκουμενισμό.

Αὐτὴ ἡ μαγιά, με τὴν χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ, δίνει στὶς ἡμέρες μας τὶς πρῶτες μαρτυρίες, ὅτι ὁ Λαὸς μας, **καθήμενος ἐν σκοτει καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου ἐπὶ ἔτη πολλά**, ἀρχίζει τώρα καὶ βλέπει **φῶς μέγα**. Ἀρχίζει καὶ δείχνει τὴν ἀπογοήτευσή του ἀπὸ τὶς φαῦλες ἐπιλογές τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ στρέφει σιγὰ-σιγὰ τὶς ἐλπίδες του πρὸς τὸν Ἐνανθρωπήσαντα Χριστό.

Ὅσο γιὰ τοὺς συνανθρώπους μας ἐκείνους, πού φέρονται τάχα ἀδιάφορα ἢ ἀκόμα καὶ ἐχθρικά ἀπέναντι στὸ γεγονός τῆς Βηθλεέμ, φαίνεται πὼς τώρα ἀρχίζουν καὶ αὐτοὶ—κάτω ἀπὸ τὶς ἀπειλές τοῦ πορτοφολιοῦ— νὰ προβληματίζονται καὶ νὰ συσπειρώνονται γύρω ἀπὸ ἀξίες πατροπαράδοτες, πού λησμονήθηκαν: τὴν ἀλληλεγγύη, τὸ φιλότιμο, τὴν συμπόνια, τὴν ἀνθρωπιά. Ἄλλωστε—ὅπως ἔγραψε κάποιος—**τώρα πού μᾶς τελείωσαν τὰ λεφτά, τί μᾶς μένει ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰ νὰ ἀκουμπήσουμε ἐπάνω Του;**

Ὁ πολυαγαπημένος μας Ἅγιος Παῖσιος, σὲ κάποια ἀπὸ τὰ Χριστούγεννα πού μᾶς πέρασαν, εἶπε:

*Μέγα καὶ παράδοξον θαῦμα τετέλεσται σήμερον. Ἄμα ὁ νοῦς μας εἶναι ἐκεῖ, στὸ «παράδοξον», τότε θὰ ζήσουμε καὶ τὸ μεγάλο μυστήριον τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Εὐχομαι ἡ καρδιά σας νὰ γίνῃ Ἁγία Φάτνη καὶ τὸ Πανάγιο Βρέφος τῆς Βηθλεέμ νὰ σᾶς δώσει ὅλες τὶς εὐλογίες Του.*

Καλὰ καὶ εὐλογημένα Χριστούγεννα σὲ ὄλους μας.



**Μ**ὴ στεναχωρεῖσαι στὶς θλίψεις καὶ τοὺς πειρασμούς, ἀλλὰ με τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μας νὰ ἐλαφρύνεις τὸν θυμὸ καὶ τὴν ἀθυμία. Οἱ πειρασμοὶ ὅσο λίγη εἶναι ἡ ὑπομονή, τόσο μεγάλοι φαίνονται. Καὶ ὅσο συνηθίζει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ τοὺς ὑπομένει, τόσο μικραίνουν καὶ τοὺς περνᾷ χωρὶς κόπο, καὶ γίνεται στερεὸς σὰν βράχος.

**Ἅγιος Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἡσυχαστὴς (+1959)**

## Πρέπει να Έχουμε Απόλυτο Σεβασμό προς την Γλώσσα που Έχει ή Εκκλησία μας!

Τοῦ π. Γεωργίου Δ. Μεταλληνού, Ἐφημερίδα «Ὁρθοδοξία Ἀλήθεια».

**Ἡ** Ὁρθοδοξία, ὡς ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἔχει σώσει τὴν Ἑλληνική μας γλώσσα σ' ὅλη τὴν ἱστορική διαχρονία της, ἀπὸ τὸν Ὅμηρο ἕως σήμερα, στὴ Θεολογία καὶ τὴ λατρεία της. Ἄλλωστε ὁ ἀποστολικὸς καὶ πατερικὸς λόγος διαχέεται συνεχῶς στὰ λειτουργικά μας δρώμενα, ὥστε νὰ γίνεται «ἄκουσμα καὶ λάλημα» τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ σώματος.

Ἡ διάκριση μεταξὺ «ἀρχαίας» καὶ «νέας» Ἑλληνικῆς γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν εἶναι πρόβλημα, διότι τὸν 16<sup>ο</sup> αἰώνα, μὲ τὴν ἐξάπλωση στὴν «καθ' ἡμᾶς Ἀνατολή» τῶν δυτικῶν προπαγανδῶν, παπικῆς καὶ προτεσταντικῆς, ποὺ χρησιμοποιοῦσαν τὴ «δημοτική», τὸ ἔθναρχικό μας Κέντρο (Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο) ἔλαβε μιὰ σημαντικὴ ἀπόφαση: Ἡ μὲν λατρεία νὰ διατηρήσει τὴ γλωσσικὴ μορφή της, τὸ κήρυγμα ὅμως νὰ γίνεται στὴν καθημερινὴ γλώσσα τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἄλλωστε καὶ ἡ γλώσσα τῆς λατρείας, λόγω τῆς συνέχειας τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας, προσφέρει γλωσσικὸ πλοῦτο, ποὺ ἡγεῖ στὰ ὄτα τοῦ λαοῦ ὄχι ὡς κάτι τὸ ξένο καί, συνεπῶς, ἀκατανόητο.

Οἱ Ἑλληνόφωνοι ἔχουμε τὴν εὐλογία νὰ ἔχουμε τοὺς μάρτυρες τῆς πίστεώς μας στὴ γλώσσα μας. Καὶ ἐδῶ ἀκριβῶς τίθεται τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς εἰσηγούμενης ἀπὸ πολλοὺς μετάφρασης τῶν λειτουργικῶν κειμένων μας. Ἡ γλώσσα μας, ἐξάλλου, εἶναι βασικὸς φορέας τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ μας, στὸν ὁποῖο ἀνήκει καὶ ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς χώρος μας. Κάποιος ἔλεγε ὅμως ὅτι σ' αὐτὸ τὸν τόπο εἴμαστε ὅλοι γιατροὶ καὶ θεολόγοι. Γιατί εἴμαστε ἀνὰ πάσα στιγμή ἐτοιμοὶ νὰ ἀποφανθοῦμε γιὰ ἰατρικὰ καὶ θεολογικὰ - ἐκκλησιαστικὰ θέματα, δίνοντας συνταγὲς καὶ ἀπαντήσεις.

Ὅλοι οἱ Ρωμηοί, δηλαδή οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, νιώθουμε τόσο δεμένοι μὲ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴ μας, ὥστε θεωροῦμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας ἰκανὸ νὰ χρησιμοποιεῖ «εὐκαιρῶς ἀκαιρῶς» (Β' Τιμ. 4:2) ἐκκλησιαστικὲς ἐκφράσεις, χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ γνωρίζει τὸ ὀρθὸ νόημά τους, προδίδοντας τὴν ἄγνοιά του. Γι' αὐτὸ τέτοια γλωσσικὰ ὀλισθήματα δὲν περιποιοῦν, ἀσφαλῶς, τιμὴ

κυρίως σὲ ἐπιστήμονες, ποὺ ὀφείλουν νὰ ἔχουν γνώση τοῦ στοιχειώδους ἐπιστημονικοῦ δόγματος, ὅτι κανεὶς δὲν εἰσέρχεται σὲ χώρους ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν εἰδικότητά του.

Θὰ προσπαθῆσω νὰ γίνω σαφέστερος μὲ συγκεκριμένα παραδείγματα:

α) Πανεπιστημιακὸς καθηγητῆς, μιλώντας γιὰ νεκρὸ, γνωστὸ γιὰ τὴν ἄστατη ζωὴ του, ἀπεφάνθη: «Νεκρὸς δεδικαίωται (δηλαδή συγχωρήθηκε), ὅπως λέγει καὶ ἡ Γραφή». Καὶ ἡ μὲν Γραφή (συγκεκριμένα, ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, Ρωμ. 6:7) πράγματι τὸ λέγει, ἀλλὰ ὄχι μόνο αὐτό, συμπληρώνοντας: «Ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας». Ὁ «νεκρὸς δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας» σημαίνει ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος μετὰ θάνατον παύει πιά νὰ ἁμαρτάνει καὶ ὄχι «τοῦ συγχωροῦνται ὅλες οἱ ἁμαρτίες»!

Καὶ θὰ ἔλεγε κανεὶς, μικρὸ το κακό, ἀφοῦ ἀκόμη καὶ θεολόγοι ἔτσι χρησιμοποιοῦμε συχνά τὸ παύλειο αὐτὸ χωρίο. Πιστεύω ὅμως ὅτι τὸ πρόβλημα εἶναι βαθύτερο: Πῶς θὰ δώσω ἐμπιστοσύνη ἐγὼ σὲ κάποιον ποὺ μὲ τόση ἐπιπολαιότητα ἀποφαίνεται περὶ παντὸς

ἐπιστητοῦ; Δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζονται μὲ κάποιον σεβασμὸ καὶ τὰ θέματα τῆς πίστεώς μας; Κάτι ἀνάλογο παρατηρεῖται σὲ συζητήσεις μὲ ἐπιστήμονες ποὺ διατείνονται σὲ ἡμᾶς τοὺς κληρικοὺς ἢ θεολόγους ὅτι διάβασαν ὅλο το Εὐαγγέλιο, τὴν Ἁγία

Γραφή καί, στὸ τέλος, διαπιστώνεται πῶς οὔτε καν τὰ ἔχουν ποτὲ ἀνοίξει.

β) Ἄλλος Συνέλληνας, μέλος τῆς «ὑψηλῆς» λεγομένης κοινωνίας, σὲ συνέντευξή του εἶπε τὰ ἀκόλουθα: «Ὅπως ἤθελε καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔλεγε «πίστευε καὶ μὴ ἐρεῦνα», κάτι ποὺ γιὰ μένα εἶναι ἀντιχριστιανικό». Καὶ ἂν τὸ ἔλεγε αὐτὸ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος δὲν θὰ ἦταν οὔτε Παῦλος οὔτε Ἀπόστολος τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ἀληθείας. Κανεὶς Ἀπόστολος ἢ Ἅγιος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας δὲν εἶπε ποτὲ τέτοιο πράγμα. Εἶναι εὗρημα πολὺ μεταγενέστερο, καὶ μάλιστα δυτικὸ. Θὰ ἤθελα ὅμως νὰ ἐρωτήσω: Ἄν κάποιος κληρικὸς διατυπώσει ἀπόψεις γιὰ κάποιον εἰδικὸ ἐπιστημονικὸν ὄχι, δὲν θὰ τοῦ ὑποδείξουν νὰ περιορισθεῖ στὰ παπαδικὰ του; Τὸ ἴδιο, συνεπῶς, ἰσχύει καὶ γιὰ κείνον, ὅταν ἀποφαίνεται γιὰ εἰδικὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ θέματα, ἀστοχώντας προκλητικότερα.

γ) Ὑπάρχει καὶ μιὰ ἄλλη πρόσφατη περίπτωση, μέσα στὶς πολλὲς φυσικά. Γνωστὸς δημοσιογράφος σχολίαζε σὲ ἄρθρο του καυστικὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία γιὰ



τὴ συχνὰ χρησιμοποιούμενη φράση «Ἅγιος Ἀθηνῶν», «Ἅγιος Πειραιῶς», προκειμένου νὰ δηλωθεῖ κάποιος Ἐπίσκοπος χωρὶς τὸ ὄνομα καὶ τὸν τίτλο του. Καὶ διερωτᾶτο ἂν μπορεῖ κανεὶς πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου του νὰ ὀνομάζει ἔτσι κάποιον, ἔστω καὶ Ἐπίσκοπο! Βέβαια, ἐπειδὴ σέβομαι τὸ πρόσωπο καὶ διαβάζω συχνὰ τὰ κείμενά του, ἔσπευσα—γιὰ νὰ τὸν βοηθήσω νὰ σώσει τὸ κύρος του, κυρίως ὡς ἐπιστήμονος— νὰ τοῦ ὑποδείξω μὲ φιλικὸ σημείωμά μου ὅτι ἡ παρατήρησή του ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι ἔχει πλήρη ἄγνοια τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ζωῆς καὶ γλώσσας. Τοῦ ἐξήγησα, λοιπόν, ὅτι, πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν καθιερωμένη ἔννοια τοῦ ὄρου «Ἅγιος», ποὺ χαρακτηρίζει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ποὺ ἔφθασε στὴ θέωση καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τιμᾶται ἀπὸ τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ σῶμα ὡς κατοικητήριον τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος, ὑπάρχει καὶ μιὰ ἄλλη, καθημερινή. Εἶναι ἡ ἔννοια τοῦ ἀνήκοντος στὴ διακονία τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ του, τοῦ ἀφιερωμένου, δηλαδή, στὸν Θεὸ ἄνθρώπου. Καὶ τοῦ ὑπενθύμισα προσφωνήσεις τόσο γνωστὲς ἀλλὰ τελείως ἄγνωστες σ' αὐτόν: «Ἅγιε ἱεροψάλτα», «Ἅγιε νεωκόρε», «Ἅγιε ἐπίτροπε» κ.λπ., ὅπου τὸ «Ἅγιε» ἀντικαθιστᾶ τὸ κοσμικὸ «κύριε» καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἀποφεύγει, ἔτσι, τὴ γλωσσικὴ ἐκκοσμίκευσή της.

Δὲν θὰ ἐπικαλεσθῶ ἄλλα παραδείγματα, μολονότι θὰ μπορούσε κανεὶς καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα νὰ ἀναφέρει. Συμπερασματικά, θὰ ἔλεγα ὅτι ὑπάρχει χώρος στὸν ὁποῖο αἰσθάνονται ἐλεύθεροι νὰ ἀσυδοτοῦν οἱ πάντες. Καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς ἀγάπης της, ποὺ δέχεται τοὺς πάντες μὲ τὴν ἴδια ἀγάπη. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη, ἐπιβεβαιώνουν καὶ πόσο ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς λόγος ἔχει διαποτίσει τὸν λαὸ μας σ' ὅλα τα ἐπίπεδά του. Σὲ τελευταία ἀνάλυση, τόσο ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ἀφελῶς διαστρεβλώνουν τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ λόγια καὶ πράγματα ὅσο καὶ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ σκόπιμα το κάνουν λησμονοῦν ὅτι κάθε χώρος ἔχει τὴ γλώσσα του, ἱερὴ καὶ ἀπαραβίαστη ἀπὸ κάθε ἀμύητο. Ὑπάρχει, λοιπόν, καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ - θεολογικὴ γλώσσα, ποὺ θὰ ἔπρεπε καὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες σχέση μαζί της νὰ τὴ σέβονται. Εἶναι, τὸ λιγότερο, ζήτημα αὐτοσεβασμοῦ καὶ ἀξιοπρέπειας ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοπροστασίας.



Διῶχνε μακρὰ σου τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πολυλογίας. Γιατὶ σ' αὐτὴν βρίσκονται φοβερὰ πάθη, τὸ ψεῦδος, ἡ θρᾶσύτητα, ἡ ἀστειότητα, ἡ αἰσχρολογία, ἡ μωρολογία καὶ γενικῶς ἔχει λεχθῆ ἀπὸ τὴν πολυλογία δὲν θὰ ξεφύγῃ τὴν ἁμαρτία. Ὁ σιωπηλὸς ἄνθρωπος εἶναι θρόνος τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως.

Ἅγιος Θεόδωρος Ἐδέσσης

## Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος κ' ὁ Παραμορφωμένος Χριστιανισμὸς

Ἀπὸ τὸν κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἢέλω νὰ μιλήσω γιὰ τὸν ἅγιο Βασίλειο, ἀλλὰ νὰ μὴν πῶ τὰ συνηθισμένα ποὺ λένε ὅσοι γράφουνε γι' αὐτὸν τὸν ἀληθινὰ Μέγαν ἅγιο. Προπάντων κάποιον θεολόγοι φραγκοδιαβασμένοι, ποὺ δὲν τοὺς ἐνδιαφέρει σχεδὸν καθόλου ἡ ἀγιότητά του κ' ἡ κατὰ Θεὸν σοφία του, ἀλλὰ ἡ **θύραθεν** σοφία του, ἡ γνώση ποὺ εἶχε στὰ Ἑλληνικὰ γράμματα, στὴ ρητορικὴ καὶ στάλλα ἐφήμερα καὶ ἐξωτερικὰ στολίδια αὐτῆς τῆς βαθειᾶς ψυχῆς, λησμονώντας τί γράφει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος γιὰ τὴν κοσμικὴ σοφία, ποὺ τὴ λέγει **μωρίαν παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ**.

Γιὰ τοὺς τέτοιους, ἡ φιλοσοφία εἶναι σεβαστή, μάλιστα περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴ θρησκεία κ' ἂς θέλουμε νὰ τὸ κρύψουμε, ἡ ἐπιστήμη πιδ πειστικὴ ἀπὸ τὴν πίστη, ἡ ἀρχαιότης πιδ σπουδαῖο οἰκόσημο ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ. Γι' αὐτὸ, ὅλα τα μετρᾶνε μ' αὐτὰ τὰ μέτρα. Ἡ ἀξία τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων δὲν ἔγκειται στὴν ἀγιότητά τους, ἀλλὰ στὸ κατὰ πόσον εἶναι δεινοὶ ρήτορες, δεινοὶ συζητηταί, δυνατοὶ στὸ μυαλό, μ' ἕνα σύντομον λόγο, κατὰ πόσον ἔχουνε ὅσα ἐκτιμοῦσε καὶ ἐκτιμᾷ ἡ ἁμαρτωλὴ ἀνθρωπότητα κ' ὅσα εἶναι ἢ περιττὰ γιὰ τὸ χριστιανό, ἢ βλαβερά, κατὰ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο.

Μὰ δὲν πάει νὰ λέγῃ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο! Αὐτοὶ οἱ διδάσκαλοι τοῦ λαοῦ δὲν ρωτᾶνε τίποτα, αὐτοὶ τραβᾶνε τὸ χαβά τους. Τὸν Παῦλο, ποὺ εἶχε πῆ χίλιες φορὲς καὶ κατὰ χίλιους τρόπους πῶς ἡ γλωσσικὴ ἐπιτηδειότητα δηλ. ἡ ρητορεία, εἶναι ψεύτικη καὶ δὲν τὴ θέλει ὁ Χριστός, αὐτοί, σώνει καὶ καλά, μὲ τὸ ζόρι, τὸν ἀνακηρύξανε «μέγαν ρήτορα», αὐτὸν ποὺ εἶπε λ.χ. **οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλε μὲ ὁ Χριστὸς βαπτίζειν, ἀλλ' εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, οὐκ ἐν σοφία λόγου, ἵνα μὴ κενωθῆ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, καὶ ποὺ γράφει στοὺς Κολοσσαεῖς: **Βλέπετε (προσέξετε) μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης, κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν**. Αὐτοὶ ὅμως ποὺ ἐξηγοῦνε στὸ λαὸ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, εἶναι κουφοὶ καὶ τυφλοὶ, ἡ κάνουνε πῶς δὲν ἀκοῦνε καὶ δὲν βλέπουνε, κ' αὐτὸν ποὺ εἶπε πῶς ἡ φιλοσοφία εἶναι **κενὴ ἀπάτη**, τὸν ἀνακηρύξανε μέγαν φιλόσοφον, στοχαστὴν, τετραπέρατον ἐγκέφαλον **κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν**. Θέλουνε νὰ τὸν κάνουνε **ἐφάμιλλον τῶν ἀρχαίων φιλοσόφων οἵτινες ἐδόξασαν τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα**, ὥστε νὰ ἔχη κ' ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς κάποιους μεγάλους νόας κ' ὄχι μοναχὰ τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ πνεύματι, τὰ

φτωχαδάκια, τοὺς ἀγράμματους Ἀποστόλους, τοὺς ἀπλοϊκοὺς ἀσκητάδες, τοὺς εὐκολόπιστους μάρτυρες καὶ ἁγίους.

Τοὺς τέτοιους ψευτοχριστιανούς τοὺς τρώγει ἡ περηφάνια, ἡ κοσμικὴ ματαιοδοξία, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι αὐτοὶ ποὺ λέγει ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Παῦλος **εἰκὴ φυσιοῦμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες καὶ τὰ σαρκικὰ τιμώντες, θέλουν Θεῷ ἀρέσει.** Τὸν Παῦλο ποὺ εἶπε τὸν φοβερὸ τοῦτον λόγο **πᾶν ὃ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως, ἁμαρτία ἐστίν,** δηλ. **ὅ,τι δὲν προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν πίστη, εἶναι ἁμαρτία,** μετὴ μικρολογη διάνοιά τους, τὸν κατεβάσανε στὰ μέτρα τους, κάνοντας τὸν λογοκόπο ρήτορα, φιλόσοφο, κοινωνιολόγο, πολιτικό, διοργανωτὴ, ψυχολόγο, παιδαγωγό, καιροσκοπο, ἐπειδὴ αὐτὰ καταλαβαίνουνε, κι' αὐτὰ εἶναι οἱ πιὸ μεγάλοι τίτλοι ποὺ μποροῦνε νὰ φανταστοῦνε.

Μὲ πιὸ γερὰ λόγια καὶ πιὸ καθαρὰ, ζωηρὰ καὶ τρανταχτὰ, δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τοὺς πῆ αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα κανένα στόμα, παρεκτός ἀπὸ τὸν Παῦλο, καὶ ὅμως δὲν πήρανε χαμπάρι οἱ καινούριοι γραμματεῖς. Ἄς εἶναι τὰ λόγια του σὰν σφυριὰ ποὺ κοπανᾶνε τὰ ξερὰ καύκαλά τους, ἐκεῖνοι: τὸ γουδὶ τὸ γουδοχέρι. Ἄκουσε πῶς μιλά ὁ Παῦλος γιὰ τὴν ἀρχαία σοφία: **Ἐπειδὴ (γὰρ) ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας (φιλοσοφίας) τὸν Θεόν, εὐδόκησεν ὁ Θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας. Ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖον αἰτούσι, καὶ Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίους μὲν σκάνδαλον, Ἕλλησι δὲ μωρίαν...** Λοιπὸν, ἰδοὺ τί λέγει ὁ Παῦλος καὶ τί διδάσκουνε οἱ ἐξηγητὲς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τοῦ ἴδιου του Παύλου, δηλαδὴ τὴ μεμωραμένη σοφία, ποὺ θεωρεῖ τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μωρία.

Δείχνω μεγάλη ἐπιμονὴ σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ζήτημα, γιατί αὐτοὶ ποὺ θέλουνε νὰ νοθέψουνε τὸ κατακάθαρο νερὸ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, **τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ζῶν τὸ ἀλλόμενον εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον,** μετὰ βαλτόνερα τῆς γνώσης καὶ τῆς ἀρχαίας φιλοσοφίας ποὺ πίνανε κεῖνον τὸν καιρὸ οἱ ταλαίπωροι ἄνθρωποι, **οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα,** χωρὶς νὰ ξεδιψάσουνε, αὐτοὶ λοιπὸν οἱ τυφλοὶ ὁδηγοὶ στραβώνουνε τὸν κόσμον, καὶ γίνονται αἰτία μετὰ τίς θεωρίες τους νὰ πέφτουνε οἱ νέοι στὴν ἀπιστία, γιατί ψυχῆς ποῦ θρέφονται μετὰ τὴν **κενὴ ἀπάτη,** ποῦ θὰ

καταντήσουνε παρὰ στὴν ἀπιστία, ὁμολογημένη ἢ ἀνομολόγητη;

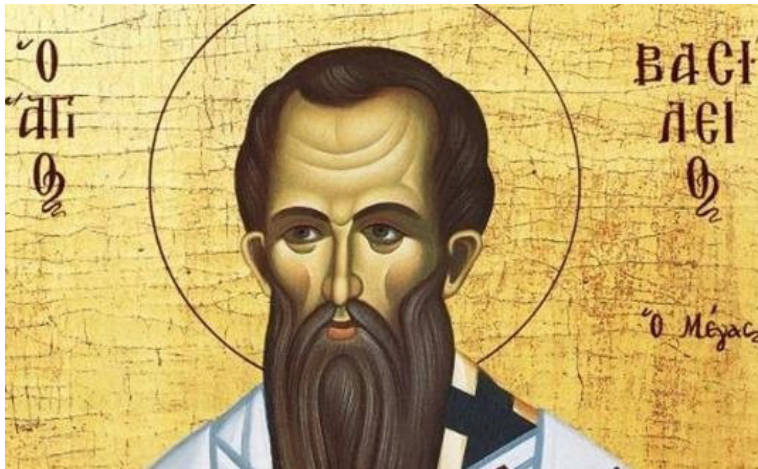
Ἔλα αὐτὰ προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὸν παραμορφωμένο Χριστιανισμὸ ποὺ μαθαίνουν ὅσοι δασκαλεύονται στὰ πανεπιστήμια τῆς Δύσης, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα τοῦ ὀρθολογισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ οὐμανισμοῦ, κ' ὕστερα τὸν φέρνουνε αὐτὸ τὸν ὀρθολογιστικὸ Χριστιανισμὸ σ' ἐμᾶς. Γιατί ἔχουμε τὴν κατάρα νὰ μαθαίνουνε ὅλα τα δικά μας ἀπὸ τοὺς ξένους, ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν ἀρχαία γλώσσα.

Γυρίζω πάλι στὸν Παῦλο, γιὰ νὰ πάρω ἀπ' αὐτὸν κι' ἄλλα θεόπνευστα λόγια ποὺ βγάζουνε ψεῦτες αὐτοὺς τοὺς φραγκοσπουδασμένους οὐμανίστες ψευτοχριστιανούς. Καὶ παίρνω ὅλο λόγια τοῦ Παύλου, γιατί σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἅγιο φανερώνουνε τὴν περισσότερη ἐκτίμησή τους, ἐπειδὴ, μετὰ τὰ μέτρα ποὺ τὸν κρίνουνε, βρίσκουνε σ' αὐτὸν περισσότερη ἐγκόσμια γνώση, κοινωνικὴ δραστηριότητα, ρητορικὴ δεινότητα,

μεθοδικότητα, ψυχολογικὴ εἰσότητα, κι' ἕνα σωρὸ ἄλλα τέτοια ποὺ τὰ ἐκτιμοῦνε πολὺ, χωρὶς νὰ μποροῦνε νὰ δοῦνε οἱ θεότυφοι πῶς ὁ Παῦλος εἶναι ὁ μεγαλύτερος καὶ σφοδρότερος ἐχθρὸς καὶ κατακριτὴς τῆς στραβῆς ἀντίληψης ποὺ ἔχουνε γιὰ τὴν χριστιανικὴ θρησκεία. Γράφει λοιπὸν ὁ

θεογλωσσὸς Παῦλος καὶ ρωτᾷ: **Ποῦ σοφός; Ποῦ γραμματεὺς; Ποῦ συζητητὴς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου;** (δηλ. τῆς κοσμικῆς σοφίας). **Οὐχὶ ἐμώρανεν ὁ Θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου;** Σὰν νὰ λέγη: «Ποιὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς σοφοὺς τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, ἀπὸ τοὺς φιλοσόφους καὶ τοὺς δεινοὺς συζητητᾶς, μετὰ τὴν διαλεκτικὴν τους, θὰ μπορέση νὰ συζητήση, ἢ καν νὰ καταλάβη αὐτὰ ποῦ λέμε ἐμεῖς οἱ μωροί, ἐμεῖς ποῦ δὲν γνωρίζουμε τὰ μαστορικὰ γυρίσματα τῆς διαλεκτικῆς, ἐμεῖς οἱ ἀπαιδευτοὶ ἀνατολίτες, κι' ὄχι κατὰ βάθος ἐμεῖς, ἀλλὰ αὐτὰ ποῦ λέγει τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον μετὰ τὸ στόμα μας;».

Καὶ παρακάτω γράφει: **Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις, σοφίαν δὲ οὐ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, οὐδὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, τῶν καταργουμένων.** Ποιοὶ εἶναι οἱ ἄρχοντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, οἱ καταργούμενοι, παρὰ οἱ φιλόσοφοι κ' οἱ ρήτορες κ' οἱ ἄλλοι λογιῆς-λογιῆς μαστόροι τῆς κοσμικῆς λογοτεχνίας, ποῦ τὰ σκοτεινὰ φῶτα τους, λένε οἱ τυφλοὶ διδάσκαλοι τοῦ λαοῦ πῶς χρειάζονται στὸ Χριστιανό,





σάν νά μὴν τοὺς φθάνη τὸ φῶς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ποὺ λέγει *ἂν τὸ φῶς ποὺ ἔχουνε μέσα τους (οἱ τέτοιοι) εἶναι σκοτάδι, τὸ σκοτάδι τοὺς πόσο πρέπει νὰ εἶναι;*

Λοιπὸν, κατὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τοῦ καταργουμένου ἐορτάζουνε καὶ δοξάζουνε καὶ τὸν ἅγιον Βασίλειον, ὄχι σάν ἅγιον καὶ ἀγωνιστὴ τῆς ἀληθινῆς θρησκείας, ἀλλὰ σάν συγγραφέα *καλλιεπῶν συγγραμμάτων, σοφὸν ἠθικολόγον καὶ παιδαγωγόν, λάτρην τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς σοφίας.*

Ἀλλὰ πόσο σύμφωνος εἶναι ὁ ἅγιος μὲ κείνους ποὺ τὸν δοξάζουνε γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνομάθειά του καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἐκτίμησή του ποὺ εἶχε στὴν ἀρχαία σοφία, τὸ φανερῶνουνε τὰ παρακάτω λόγια ἀπὸ μία ἐπιστολὴ ποὺ ἔγραψε στὸν Εὐστάθιο ἐπίσκοπο Σεβαστείας:

«Ἐγώ, γράφει, ἀφοῦ ξόδεψα πολλὴν καιρὸν στὰ μάταια πράγματα, κι' ἀφοῦ ὅλη σχεδὸν τὴ νεότητά μου τὴ χάλασα μὲ τὸ νὰ κοπιᾶζω γιὰ πράγματα ἀνώφελα (ἀδιαφόρετα), καταγινομένου νὰ μελετῶ τὰ μαθήματα τῆς *παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ μωρανθείσης σοφίας,* ἐπειδὴ κάποτε ξύπνησα σάν νὰ κοιμόμουνα σὲ βαθὺν ὕπνο, καὶ ἄνοιξα τὰ μάτια μου στὸ θαυμαστὸ φῶς τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου κ' εἶδα καλὰ πὼς ἦτανε ἄχρηστη *ἡ σοφία τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τῶν καταργουμένων,* ἀφοῦ ἔκλαψα πολλὴν γιὰ τὴν ἐλεινὴ ζωὴ μου, παρακαλοῦσα τὸ Θεὸ νὰ μὲ χειροκρατήσῃ γιὰ νὰ φωτισθῶ στὰ δόγματα τῆς εὐσέβειας. Καὶ πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλα προσπάθησα νὰ ἀποκτήσω κάποια ἠθικὴ διόρθωση, ἐπειδὴ εἶχε πάθει μεγάλη διαστροφὴ ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἀπὸ τὴ συναναστροφὴ μου μὲ τοὺς κακοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Διάβασα λοιπὸν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, καὶ σάν εἶδα πὼς ἐκεῖ μέσα εἶναι γραμμένο πὼς συντείνει πολλὴ σωτηρία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου το νὰ πουλήσῃ τὰ ὑπάρχοντά του καὶ νὰ τὰ μοιράσῃ στοὺς φτωχοὺς ἀδελφούς του καὶ νὰ ζῆ χωρὶς νὰ φροντίζει καθόλου γιὰ τούτῃ τὴ ζωὴ, καὶ νὰ μὴν προσηλώνεται ἡ ψυχὴ στὰ ἐπίγεια ἀπὸ καμμιὰ συμπάθεια, παρακαλοῦσα νὰ εὕρω κάποιον ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφούς ποὺ νὰ διάλεξε αὐτὸν τὸ δρόμο στὴ ζωὴ του, ὥστε, μαζὶ μ' αὐτόν, νὰ ταξιδέψω καὶ νὰ περάσω τούτῃ τὴν περαστικὴ φουρτούνα τῆς ζωῆς».

Ἀλλὰ ποῖος δίνει σημασία σ' αὐτὰ ποὺ λέγει ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος; Ἡμεῖς κάναμε ἓνα δικό μας Χριστιανισμό, ἓνα βολικό, ἓναν ἀνθρωπινὸ καὶ λογικὸ Χριστιανισμό, ὅπως λέγει ὁ μέγας Ἱεροεξεταστὴς τοῦ Ντοστογιέφσκη, γιατί ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς ποὺ δίδαξε ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ἀνεφάρμοστος, ἀπάνθρωπος. Ἡμεῖς, ἀντὶ ν' ἀνέβουμε πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, ποὺ λέγει *ἐγὼ σάν ὑψωθῶ, θὰ σαῶ τραβήξω ὅλους πρὸς ἐμένα,* τὸν κατεβάσαμε ἐκεῖ ποὺ βρισκόμαστε ἡμεῖς, καὶ κάναμε ἓνα Χριστιανισμὸ σύμφωνο μὲ τὶς ἀδυναμίες μας, μὲ τὰ πάθη μας, μὲ τὶς κοσμικὲς φιλοδοξίες μας, καὶ δώσα-

με καὶ στοὺς ἁγίους τα προσόντα ποὺ ἐκτιμοῦμε καὶ ποὺ θαυμάζει ἡ ὑλοφροσύνη μας, τοὺς κάναμε φιλοσόφους, ρήτορας, πολιτικούς, ψυχολόγους, κοινωνιολόγους, παιδαγωγούς, ἐπιστήμονες κ.λ.π. Ὁ μέγας Ἱεροεξεταστὴς, σάν πήγανε μπροστὰ του τὸν Χριστὸ (ποὺ πρόσταξε νὰ τὸν πιάσουνε, ἐπειδὴ ξανακατέβηκε στὴ γῆ καὶ τὸν ἀκολουθοῦσε ὁ κόσμος), τοῦ εἶπε: «Τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ ἦρθες στὸν κόσμο ἔφερες στοὺς ἀνθρώπους μία θρησκεία σκληρὴ, ἀνεφάρμοστη, ἀπάνθρωπη. Ἡμεῖς τὴν κάναμε βολικὴ, ἀνθρωπινὴ. Τί ξαναἦρθες νὰ κάνης πάλι στὸν κόσμο; Νὰ μᾶς τὴ χαλάσης, μόλις τὴ βάλουμε στὸ δρόμο; Γι' αὐτό, θὰ διατάξω νὰ σὲ κάψουνε ἐν ὀνόματί σου, σάν αἰρετικόν».

Ὁ βολικός, ὁ ἀνθρωπινὸς Χριστιανισμὸς, αὐτὸ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο κατασκευάσμα, εἶναι ἡ συχαμερὴ παραμόρφωση ποὺ ἔπαθε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἀπὸ τὴν πονηρὴ ὑλοφροσύνη τῆς σαρκός.



### ΟΙ «ΦΙΛΟΙ» ΤΟΥ ΜΑΚΡΥΓΙΑΝΝΗ

Αὐτὰς τὰς κρισίμους στιγμὰς, ποὺ ἡ Πατρίς μας περνᾶ, μᾶς θυμίζουν τὸν Μακρυγιάννη ποὺ λέγει εἰς τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματά του:

«Καὶ βγήκαν τώρα κάτι δικοί μας κυβερνήτες, Ἑλληνες, σπορὰ τῆς ἐβραίουργιᾶς, ποὺ εἶπαν νὰ μᾶς σβήσουν τὴν Ἁγία Πίστη, τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, διότι ἡ Φραγκιά δὲν μᾶς θέλει μὲ τέτοιο ντύμα' Ὁρθόδοξον.

Καὶ ἐκάθησα καὶ ἔκλαιγα διὰ τὰ νέα παθήματα. Καὶ ἐπῆγα πάλιν εἰς τοὺς φίλους μου στοὺς Ἁγίους. Ἄναψα τὰ καντήλια καὶ ἐλιβάνισα λιβάνιν καλὸν ἁγιορεϊτικόν. Καὶ σκουπίζοντας τὰ δάκρυά μου τοὺς εἶπα: «Δὲν βλέπετε, ποὺ θέλουν νὰ κάνουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα παλιόψαθα; Βοηθεῖστε, διότι μᾶς παίρνουν, αὐτοὶ οἱ μισοἕλληνες καὶ ἄθρησκοι, ὅ,τι πολῦτιμον τζιβαῖρικόν ἔχομεν.

Φραγκεμένους μᾶς θέλουν τὰ τσογλάνια τοῦ τρισκατάρατου τοῦ Πάπα. Μὴν ἀφήσετε, Ἁγιοί μου αὐτὰ τὰ γκιντὶ πουλημένα κριγιάτα τῆς τυραγνίας νὰ μασκαρέψουν καὶ νὰ ἀφανίσουν τοὺς Ἑλληνες, κάνοντας περισσότερο κακὸ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ ποὺ καταδέχθηκεν ὁ Τοῦρκος ὡς τίμιος ἐχθρός μας».

Εἰς αὐτοὺς λοιπὸν τοὺς φίλους πρέπει καὶ ἡμεῖς νὰ καταφεύγωμεν μετανοημένοι, διότι αὐτοὶ μόνον μποροῦν νὰ μᾶς γλυτώσουν ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν σπορὰν τῆς «φραγκιάς καὶ ἐβραίουργιᾶς», ποὺ τείνει νὰ μᾶς καταβροχθίσῃ.

## Θείον Όραμα

Τοῦ Ἀνδρέα Καρκαβίτσα. Τὸ διήγημα περιέχεται στὴ συλλογὴ «Λόγια τῆς Πλώρης» (1899).

Δὲ λέτε, ρὲ παιδιά, τίποτα νὰ ζεσταθοῦμε;  
Καὶ μὲ τὸ λόγο φάνηκε μαῦρο κορμὶ στὴν ἀνοιχτὴ θυρίδα, κύλησε ἀπὸ τὴ σκάλα κάτω ὁ Κώστας ὁ θερμαστής, βαρτυλιγμένος στὴν πατατούκα του. Ἔκανε κρύο δυνατό. Βοριάς ἐξύριζε τὰ πέλαγα, πάγωνε τ' ἀκρογιάλια, κρουστάλλιαζε τὰ στοιβαγμένα χιόνια στὰ βουνά. Καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα, ναῦτες καὶ θερμαστές, συναγμένοι ὀλόγυρα στὴ θερμάστρα, φρόντιζαν νὰ ζεσταθοῦν μὲ τὴ φασκομηλιά καὶ τὸ ψωμοτύρι.

Ὁ λύχνος, καρφωμένος στὴ μέση ἐνὸς στύλου, φώτιζε καὶ κάπνιζε μαζὶ τὰ περιγύρα σωθέματα. Διπλὰ-τριπλὰ τὰ κρεβάτια κολλημένα στὰ πλευρά, μὲ τὰ μαῦρα τους στρωσίδια, θύμιζαν νεκροθήκες στ' ἀνήλιαστα βάθη τῆς γῆς ταιριασμένες. Κοντὰ ἢ καμαρούλα τοῦ ναύκληρου, ἀνοιχτόπορτη, ἔδειχνε ἄλλο κρεβάτι στρωμένο, δύο-τρεῖς φωτογραφίες παλιές, μιὰ χρωμολιθογραφία χανούμισσας, χρυσοφορεμένης καὶ ξαπλωμένης σὲ πουπουλένια προσκέφαλα. Καὶ ὀλοῦθε κρεμασμένα τὰ ροῦχα, στὸ λάδι καὶ στὸ κάρβουνο βουτημένα. Οἱ μουσαμάδες ξεσχισμένοι καὶ μυριοπαλωμένοι.

Τὰ χοντὰ ποδήματα καὶ τὰ κασκέτα καὶ οἱ χρωματιστοὶ σκοῦφοι ἔδειχναν τὸ χῶρισμα καλογερικὸ κελλί. Ἀλλὰ τὸ φλίφλισμα τοῦ νεροῦ ποὺ ἀκούσταν στὰ πλευρά, ἢ μυρωδιὰ τοῦ κατραμιοῦ καὶ τὰ ψημένα πρόσωπα τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔδειχναν πὼς ἡ ζωὴ ἐδῶ ἀγωνίζεται τὸν τελευταῖο ἀγῶνα τῆς. Γιὰ τοῦτο καὶ κανένας δὲν πρόσεξε... τώρα στὸ ἀστεῖο κατρακύλημα τοῦ θερμαστή.

– Δὲ λέτε, ρὲ παιδιά, καὶ τίποτα νὰ ζεσταθοῦμε; ξαναδευτέρωσε ἐκεῖνος, ἀγκαλιάζοντας τὴ θερμάστρα σὰν ἐρωμένη.

– Τί νὰ εἰποῦμε; ρώτησε μελαγχολικὸς ὁ Κώστας ὁ Ἀξιώτης.

Νυχτιὰ σὰν τὴν ἀποψινὴ δὲ θέλει παραμύθια. Ὅχι, δὲ θέλει παραμύθια! Ἐδῶ στὸν ἄγριο κόρφο ποὺ εἵμαστε κλεισμένοι, τριγυρισμένοι ἀπὸ τὸ μούγκρισμα τῆς Μαύρης Θάλασσας, σαβανωμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν πουπουλένιο θυμὸ τ' οὐρανοῦ, ἅς ποῦμε κατιτὶ θεϊκὸ καὶ παρήγορο. Στὰ παλιὰ χρόνια οἱ γέροντές μας δὲν εἶχαν τὴν καταδίκη ποὺ ἔχουμε ἐμεῖς τώρα. Περνοῦσαν τὶς ἅγιες ἡμέρες κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ στέγη τους, κοντὰ στὴ φωτιά, ἀνάμεσα στὴ φανίλια τους. Ὅπως ὁ ἀμπελοφυτευτὴς τ' ἀμπέλι του, τρυγούσανε καὶ κεῖνοι τὸ καλοκαίρι τὴ θάλασσα καὶ χαίρονταν τὸ χειμῶνα τὰ καλὰ τῆς ἄφοβα. Ἦξεραν τὴ γιορτὴ καὶ τὴν καματερὴ τους. Εἶχαν καιρὸ γιὰ τὴ χαρὰ καὶ

γιὰ τὴ θλίψη τους. Ἐμεῖς τίποτ' ἀπ' αὐτά! Χειμῶνα-καλοκαίρι τ' ὀργώνουμε τὸ κύμα.

Βόδια καματερὰ στὴ βουκέντρα τῆς Ἀνάγκης, ὑποταχτικὰ θ' αὐλακώνουμε τ' ἄρμυρὸ χωράφι, μονάχα τὴ φάκνα μας ἔχοντας γιὰ πληρωμὴ. Γιὰ τοῦτο καλὰ ποὺ ἔτυχε ἢ κακοκαιρία ν' ἀφήσουμε λίγο τὸν κάματο. Δὲ λέω πὼς θὰ μείνουμε τώρα ἡσυχoi. Ὁ ἀφέντης θέλει δουλειὰ ἀπὸ τὸ δουλευτὴ, γιατί φοβᾶται μὴν ὀκνήσῃ μὲ τὴν ἀκαμωσιά. Φαντάσου ὅμως, ἂν ἦταν καλωσύνη, τί δρόμο θὰ παίρναμε τώρα. Ἔτσι τουλάχιστο ἔχω ἐλεύθερο τὸ νοῦ νὰ συλλογιστῶ τὸ σπίτι μου.

Ἄχ, τὸ σπίτι μου! Ἄρχισα τὸ παραπὸνο καὶ κοντεῦω νὰ δακρῶσω σὰν ἄπραγο παιδί. Μὰ δὲ φταίω γῶ. Φταίει αὐτὴ ἡ νύχτα. Φταίει τὸ ἀποψινὸ ἀποσπέρισμα, τ' ἀστέρι τὸ λαμπρὸ ποὺ ἔτρεμε βασιλεύοντας πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ χιονισμένα βουνὰ καὶ τάραξε τὸ εἶναι μου. Ὅπως τοὺς Μάγους ὠδήγησε καὶ μένα πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ βουνὰ καὶ τὰ πέλαγα στὴ Νάξο, στὸ Γρίτι μου τὸ πρασινοντυμένο, τὸ ταπεινὸ μὰ ὀλόχαρο σπιτάκι μου. Καὶ ὄχι ὡς ἐδῶ. Παραμπρός, παραμπρός ἀκόμη. Μ' ἔφερε στὰ παιδιάτικα χρόνια μου, πρὶν ἀφήσω τὴ στεριὰ καὶ πρὶν ταξιδέψω στὴ θάλασσα.

Καθόμαστε ὅλοι στὸ παραγῶνι, διπλοπόδι στὰ μάλλινα στρωσίδια, ντυμένοι μὲ τὰ ζεστὰ φορεματάκια μας, ποὺ τὰ ἔρραψε τῆς μάννας μας ἢ φροντίδα καὶ τῆς ἀδερφῆς μας, τῆς ὁμορφούλας τὰ πιδέξια χέρια. Ὁ πατέρας μου, θεριακωμένος καὶ νιοφάνταχτος γέροντας, καθότανε στὶς προσκεφαλάδες ψηλὰ καὶ ρουφοῦσε ἀπολαυστικὰ τὸ τσιμποῦκι του.

Ὅταν μας ἔβλεπε ἔτσι συναγμένους, τοῦ ἄρσεσε νὰ διηγέται παραμύθια καὶ ἱστορίες τῆς ζωῆς του. Τῆς θάλασσας οἱ κίνδυνοι, τῆς στεριᾶς οἱ χαρές, ὁ τρόμος τῶν κουρσάρων, τὰ ναυτικὰ κατορθώματα τῆς Ἐπανάστασης διάβαιναν ζωντανὰ καὶ ὀλοφώτιστα μπροστὰ μας. Μὰ κεῖνὴ τὴ νύχτα δὲ θέλησε νὰ μιλήσῃ οὔτε γιὰ παραμύθια, οὔτε γιὰ ταξίδια του. Μόλις βάλαμε τὸ λύχνο στὸ λυχνοστάτη καὶ φάγαμε τὴ λειψόπητα, μᾶς ἄρχισε θρησκευτικὲς κουβέντες. Ἦταν θρησκὸς ὁ ἀγιοχώματος καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ βιβλία δὲν τ' ἄφηνε ἀπὸ κοντὰ του. Ἀλήθεια, στὰ ταξίδια του εἶχε πρόχειρα τὰ τροπάρια καὶ τὶς βλαστήμιες. Μὰ τώρα ποὺ ἔπαψε τὸν ἀγῶνα τῆς ζωῆς, φρόντιζε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς του.

– Δὲ μοῦ λές, εἶπε στὸν ἀδερφό μου τὸ μικρότερο, τί ὄραμα εἶδε ἢ Παναγία τὴ νύχτα ποὺ γέννησε τὸν Κύριο ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό;

Κόκκαλο ἐκεῖνος. Ρωτάει ἐμένα, τὸ ἴδιο.

– Ἄ, δὲν τὸ ξέρετε! πρόσθεσε μὲ ἡρεμὴ φωνή. Μὰ δὲν φταίτε σεῖς, φταίω γῶ ποὺ δὲν σᾶς τὸ ἔμαθ' ἀκόμη. Ἔγινε πέρα στὴν Ἀνατολή, στὸν τόπο τὸν παράδοξο. Ποιὸ χρόνο δὲ σᾶς λέω. Φτάνει νὰ μετρήσετε τὸ

φτεινὸ καὶ τὸ βρῖσκετε ἀμέσως. Ἐκεῖνη τὴ νύχτα μία γυναίκα, συντροφιασμένη ἀπὸ τὸν τέχτονα τὸν ἄντρα της, στάθηκε μισοστρατὶς σὲ μιὰ σπηλιὰ καὶ γέννησε ἓνα παιδί. Φτωχὰ ἦταν τὰ ροῦχα της, ἡ ὄψη της πικραμένη· μὰ εἶχε κατιτὶ τόσο λαμπρὸ στὴ ματιά, ποῦ ἔλεγε θ' ἀναστήσει καὶ τὴν πέτρα. Κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ γαλάζιο φόρεμα καὶ τὸ κόκκινο στηθοπάνι, τὸ κορμὶ φάνταζε λυγερό, ἄξιο γιὰ νὰ θρονιασῆ μία πάναγνη ψυχή. Καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν ἄσπρο της κεφαλοδέτη τὰ μυγδαλωτὰ μάτια, τὰ φρύδια τὰ σμιχτά, τὸ λεφαντένιο μέτωπο, λαμπρότερο κι ἀπὸ τὰ χρυσὰ στολίδια του, φανέρωναν τὴν αἰσθαντικὴ πηγὴ ποῦ θὰ σάρκωση τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν Καλωσύνη.

Γέννησε τὸ παιδί, τὸ βύζαξε, τὸ τύλιξε στὸ σάλι της καὶ τ' ἀπίθωσε στὴ φάτνη πάνω στ' ἄχυρα νὰ κοιμηθῆ. Σὲ λίγο ὁ ἀνασασμὸς ἔβγαινε ἀπὸ τὸ στηθάκι του ἤσυχος, σὰν ἀνασασμὸς βαλσαμόδεντρου. Γύρω τὸ σκοτάδι ἀπλωνόταν πίσσα. Κάτω στὸ χῶμα πλαγιασμένα τὰ ζωντανά, βόδια καὶ πρόβατα καὶ ἄλογα μαζί, ἔνιωθαν κάποια φρίκη νὰ χαμοπετᾶ πάνω τους, σύγκρου νὰ τὰ περιγλείφῃ κ' ἔμεναν ἄγρυπνα. Μὰ οὔτε βέλσασμα, οὔτε χλιμίντρισμα, οὔτε βούγεμα ἠχολογοῦσε. Ἡ φάτνη ἔτριζε κάποτε. Ἀλλὰ καὶ κείνη ἔμενε ξερομασσημένη στὸ στόμα τους. Ἀπάνω ἢ σπηλιὰ μὲ τὸν οὐρανὸ τῆς νεροστάλαχτο, μὲ τὰ πλευρὰ τῆς αὐλακωμένα ἀπὸ τὶς νεροσυρμές, πράσινα ἀπὸ τὰ πολυτρίχια, σκισμένα ἀπὸ τὰ νύχια τοῦ ὄρνιου, τρύπια ἀπὸ τοῦ σφαλαγγιοῦ τὸ κεντρί, κλεισμένα μὲ τὸν πλοκὸ τῆς ἀράχνης, ξεθεμελιωμένα ἀπὸ τὸν ποντικὸ, ψήλωνε βουβὴ κι ἀτάραχη. Καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ χαμηλὴ ἔμπατή, τὸ φῶς ἀστροστόλιστης νύχτας χυνόταν στὶς πλαγιὲς καὶ τὰ λακκώματα.

Οἱ κουρμάδες ἐκεῖ ψήλωναν λαμπάδες, μὲ τὰ καμαρωτὰ κλωνιὰ καρποφορτωμένα. Ἐκεῖ τ' ἀμπέλια ἔδειχναν κλαδιὰ ἔτοιμα ν' ἀνοιξοῦν μάτια χλωροπράσινα στὸ πρῶτο φύσημα τῆς ἀνοιξης. Ἐκεῖ ἀσπραργυρανθισμένες οἱ ἐλιὲς λαγάριζαν ἀπὸ τώρα τὸ χυμὸ ποῦ θὰ καὶ θυσία στὸ νεογέννητο. Ἐκεῖ καὶ τὰ σπῖτια τῆς Βηθλεὲμ μικρά, τετράγωνα, μὲ τὸ δῶμα πάνω καὶ τὴν πόρτα στὸ πλάγι, ἔλαμπαν στὸν ἀσβέστη, λὲς καὶ στολίσθηκαν νὰ καλωσορίσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποῦ θὰ τοὺς χαρίσει τὴ δόξα. Βαθιὰ ὁ Ἰορδάνης στέναζε μέσα στὴ χαλκοστρωμένη κοίτη του καὶ πρόσμενε μὲ τρόμο τὸ Θεϊκὸ κορμὶ ποῦ θ' ἁγιαζε

τὰ νερά του. Δεξιὰ στὴ χούνη σὰν κατάρατο πνεῦμα βρουχιόταν ἡ Νεκρὴ θάλασσα, λὲς κ' εἶχε ἀκόμη μέσα της τὰ Σόδομα καὶ τὰ Γόμορα. Ἀριστερά, ἀπάνω ἀπὸ τοὺς ζυγούς, ἐκεῖ ποῦ δὲν ἔφτανε τὸ ἀνθρώπινο μάτι, ἦταν ὅμως ἀσήκωτος ὁ λογισμὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, στὴ χαρὰ καὶ στὴν ἀκολασία παραδομένα οὐρλιαζαν τὰ Γεροσόλυμα, τὸ ἄσμα τῶν Προφητῶν κ' ἡ λατρεία λαοῦ μεγάλου.

Ὁ Ἰωσήφ, μόλις εἶδε κοιμισμένο τὸ παιδί, κατέβηκε στὸ χωριὸ νὰ φροντίσει γιὰ τὴ λεχῶνα. Καὶ κείνη ὀλομόναχη, ἀδυνατισμένη, μὲ τὴ μητρικὴ λαχτᾶρα στὰ στηθὴ, σταύρωσε τὰ χέρια, ἀκούμπησε τὸ κορμὶ σ' ἓνα στύλο κ' ἔκλεισε τὰ ματόφυλλα. Μὰ στάθηκε ἀδύνατο νὰ κοιμηθῆ. Ἡ τύχη τοῦ θεόσταλτου ἦρθε νὰ τῆς τυραννήσῃ τὴν ψυχή. Τί θ' ἀπογένη στοῦ κόσμου τὴν ἀντάρρα ὁ τρυφερός της Κρίνος, Ἐκεῖνος ποῦ τῆς δόθηκε μὲ τὸ χέρι ἀσπροντυμένου Χερουβεὶμ; Ποιὰ θὰ εἶνε ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ποιοὶ τὸ τέλος του; Θὰ περάσῃ



δρόμο πορφυρόστρωτο ἢ θὰ βάψῃ μὲ τὸ αἷμα του τ' ἀγκάθια καὶ τὶς στουρναρόπετρες;

Ὁ κόσμος παραλυμένος δὲν προσέχει πιά στὰ λόγια τῶν Προφητῶν. Ὁ Ἰσραὴλ στενάζει κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ ψέμα τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ τῶν Ρωμαίων τὸ ζυγὸ. Δὲν καθαρίζει ὁ Δαβὶδ οὔτε ἡ Δεβόρρα δικάζει τὸ λαὸ κάτω ἀπὸ τοὺς κουρμάδες. Τοῦ Ἀαρὼν

τὰ τέκνα ληστεύουν. Ἀπιστίας σύγνεφο κάθε-ται στὴν Ἱερὴ Κιβωτὸ καὶ στοῦ Μεγάλου Ναοῦ τὰ ἄδυτα. Πίνει τὸ αἷμα τῶν Μακκαβαίων ἢ γῆ, χωρὶς ν' ἀποδώσῃ ἐλευθερία καὶ δικαιοσύνη. Ὁ Γαυλωνίτης Ἰούδας χάθηκε χωρὶς ν' ἀνορθώσῃ τὸ Νόμο. Ἡ Γῆ τῆς Ἐπαγγελίας, χωρισμένη σὲ βασιλεία καὶ τοπαρχίες, φθίρεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἐμφύλιο σπαραγμὸ, σὰ νὰ τὴ βαραίνῃ ἀκόμη ἢ ἀπειθεία τῶν προγόνων στὴν ἔρημὸ τοῦ Σίν. Κόλαση ἔγινε ὁ κάποτε Παράδεισος! Ἐγωιστὴς καὶ ἐκδικητικὸς καὶ ἄδοξος ὁ περιούσιος λαὸς τοῦ Κυρίου! Πῶς θὰ ζήσει σὲ τέτοιον κόσμῳ τὸ παιδί της;

Ἄξαφνα λύχνος ἡλιοστάλαχτος κρεμάστηκε μπρὸς στῆς μάννας τὴν ψυχή, ἔτοιμος νὰ δείξῃ τὸ μέλλον τοῦ νιογέννητου, ὅπως ἡ νεφέλη ἔδειξε ἄλλοτε τὸν ἄγνωστο δρόμο στὴ φυλὴ της. Καὶ τὸν εἶδε τριαντάχρονο λεβεντονιὸ νὰ μαγνητίζει τὶς ψυχὲς τοῦ λαοῦ. Ψηλός, λυγερός, μὲ σεβαστὴ μελαγχολία στὸ ροδοζύμωτο πρόσωπο, μὲ τὰ καστανὰ μαλλιά

κυματιστά στοὺς ὄμους, μὲ τὸ στόμα γλυκοστάλαχτο καὶ τὰ γαλανὰ μάτια, μιλοῦσε στὸ λαὸ καὶ τὸν ἔπειθε. Ἐκήρυττε στὶς συναγωγὰς καὶ χίλιοι τὸν ἄκουαν ἀνέβαινε στὸ βουνὸ καὶ μύριοι τὸν ἀκολουθοῦσαν. Διαβαίνει ἀνάλαφρα τὴ λίμνη τῆς Γενησαρὲτ καὶ ρίχνονται λαμνοκοπώντας οἱ κόσμοι στὰ βήματά του. Οἱ Προφῆτες ποὺ τὸν προσπερνοῦσαν, τώρα πισωδρομοῦν ὑποταχτικοί του. Ὁ Νόμος τοῦ Μωυσῆ ἀναζῆ στὰ λόγια του καὶ συμπληρώνεται.

Ἡ ἔρημη γῆ ἀναδροσιζέται τ' ἀπελπισμένα στήθη ξαναθαρορεύουν τὰ πλανημένα πρόβατα γυρίζουν πάλι στὴ μάντρα τους. ἡ ἀγάπη τρέχει ἀδαπάνητη ἀπὸ τὰ πλατεῖα στέγνα του καὶ δροσιζέει τὸ καμίνι τῆς κακομοιριάς. Οἱ ἄπιστοι πιστεύουν καὶ σηκώνονται οἱ ταπεινοί, τυφλοὺς φωτίζει, χωλοὺς ὀδηγεῖ. Τὰ Γεροσόλυμα στρώνουν τοὺς δρόμους μὲ βᾶγια νὰ τὸν δεχτοῦν. Σύγκαιρα ὁμως καρφώνουν τὸ σταυρό. Ὁ φθονερός μαθητῆς τὸν παραδίνει μὲ φίλημα. Ὁ δειλὸς φίλος του τὸν ἀρνιέται πρὶν λαλήσῃ ὁ πετεινός. Μὰ Ἐκεῖνος, ἀνώτερος ἀπὸ τὰ τέκνα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, συγχωρεῖ τὴν ἄρνηση καὶ τὴν προδοσία, διαβαίνει πρᾶος μέσα ἀπὸ τὶς κοροϊδίες καὶ τὰ φτυσίματα, πίνει τὸ ξίδι καὶ τὴ χολή, φορεῖ τὸ ἀγκαθερὸ στεφάνι, τὴν περιφρονητικὴ χλαμύδα, κρατεῖ τὸ καλαμένιο σκῆπτρο καὶ ἀνεβαίνει στὸ μαρτύριο.

– Γυναίκα, νὰ ὁ γιός σου, λέει τὴν τελευταία στιγμή.

Καὶ ἀποχαιρετᾶ, μ' ἓνα βλέμμα μελαγχολικό, τὴ μάννα ποὺ τὸν γέννησε, τοὺς φίλους ποὺ τὸν πίστεψαν, τὸ λαὸ ποὺ τὸν τυράννησε, τὴ Γῆ ποὺ εἶδε τὶς πίκρες του καὶ τὸν Οὐρανὸ ποὺ θὰ δεχόταν τὸ Σῶμα του.

Ἡ μάννα ἦταν ἐκεῖ καὶ τὰ ἔβλεπε ὅλα. ἤθελε νὰ φωνάξῃ, νὰ τρέξῃ γιὰ νὰ τὸν σώσῃ ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῶν κακούργων ἀλλὰ δὲ μποροῦσε νὰ βγάλῃ φωνή. Τὸ σῶμα δὲν ἀκολουθοῦσε τοὺς πόθους τῆς ψυχῆς. Μὰ ὅταν εἶδε ἓνα στρατιώτῃ ἀγριοπρόσωπο, ἔτοιμο νὰ λογχίσῃ τὰ πλευρά του,

– Μή! ... Ἐφώναξε μὲ ὅλη της τὴ δύναμη.

Καὶ μὲ τὸ «μή!» ξύπνησε. Δὲν εἶδε ὀλόγυρα της τίποτα ἀπὸ τὸ φριχτὸ δράμα. Τὸ βρέφος κοιμότανε ἀκόμη πλάγι της, μέσα στὴ φάτνη, ἀπάνω στὸ ἄχυρο. Μὰ δὲ βασίλευε ἡ σιγὴ καὶ τὸ σκοτάδι, ὅπως πρὶν. Ἀγγελικὴ ἀρμονία κατέβαινε ἀπὸ ψηλὰ καὶ λαμπρομέτωπο ἀστέρι ἔχυνε θάλασσα τὸ φῶς του στὴ σπηλιά.

Καὶ μπρὸς στὰ πόδια της, οἱ Μάγοι γονατιστοὶ μὲ τὰ δῶρα τους, τὴ σμύρνα καὶ τὸ μόσχο καὶ τὸ λιβάνι, ὠνόμαζαν τὸ γιὸς τῆς βασιλέα καὶ Θεοῦ.

Ἐκεῖνη τὴν ὥρα φάνηκε στὴν ἐμπατὴ χλωμὸς ὁ Ἰωσήφ.

– Νὰ φύγουμε, λέει τρέμοντας στὴ γυναίκα του. Ὁ Ἡρώδης θέλει τὸ παιδί κ' οἱ ἀνθρώποι τὸν ψάχνουν στὴ χώρα. Γρήγορα νὰ φύγουμε!

Ἐκεῖνη ἄρπαξε ἀμέσως τὸ βρέφος, τὸ ἔσφιξε στοὺς κόρφους της καὶ πῆραν δρόμο γιὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτο. Ἡ νύχτα τοὺς ἔκρυψε. Μὰ τὰ αἵματα τῶν ἄλλων παιδιῶν καὶ ὁ θρηγὸς τῶν μαννάδων ἀνέβαιναν ἀπὸ τὰ σπίτια τῆς Γαλιλαίας, πρωτόλουβη θυσία στὸν ἀναμορφωτὴ τοῦ κόσμου.

– Πόσα αἵματα θὰ χυθοῦν ἀκόμη! ψιθύρισε προφήτης ἡ γυναίκα. Πόσα αἵματα!...

Τέλειωσε ὁ Ἀζιώτης τὸ διήγημά του κ' οἱ σύντροφοι ἔμειναν ἀκόμη ἀκίνητοι σὰν ὄνειροπλανεμένοι. Μερικοὶ σταυροκοπήθηκαν ἄλλοι στέναξαν βαθιὰ σὰ νὰ ξύπνησε κάτι παρήγορο μέσα τους. Μὰ ὁ Κώστας ὁ θερμαστής, ἴδιος στ' ἀστεία καὶ στὰ σοβαρά, ρώτησε πονηρὰ τὸ σύντροφό του:

– Δὲ μοῦ λές, βλάμη. Εἶδε ἡ Παναγία στ' ὄνειρό της καὶ τὸν πατριώτη σου τὸ Βαραββᾶ;

Ἐκεῖνος χολοταράχηκε. Φοβερὴ βλαστήμια ἀνέβηκε στὰ χεῖλη του. Μὰ τὴν κατὰπτε. Δὲν ἦταν καιρὸς τώρα νὰ κολαστῆ κανεῖ! Χαμογέλασε, ἔκαμε τὸ σταυρό του καὶ ξαπλώθηκε στὸ ἔρημο κρεβάτι του.

– Καὶ τοῦ χρόνου, παιδιά, στὰ σπίτια μας! Εὐχήθηκε.

– Στὰ σπίτια μας, μὰ θὰ μᾶς θερίξῃ ἡ πείνα, εἶπε ὁ θερμαστής.

Καὶ γέλασε δυνατὰ.



Ὁ Θεός, ποὺ πρόσταξε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ τὸ κάνουν αὐτό, πιδὸ πολὺ δὲν θὰ τὸ κάνῃ ὁ ἴδιος; Διότι ἐπρόσταξε τὸν Πέτρον, λέγοντας: «Ἔως ἔβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ ἄφες τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου». Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς συγχωρεῖ πάντοτε ὅσον καὶ ἂν ἁμαρτήσουμε. Ἀρκεῖ νὰ μετανοήσουμε εἰλικρινὰ καὶ νὰ ζητήσουμε συγχώρηση.

**Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν ὁ Μέγας**

Ὅπως ἡ βροχὴ, ὅσον περισσότερο πέφτει πάνω στὴ γῆ, τόσο τὴν μαλακώνει, ἔτσι καὶ τὴν γῆ τῆς καρδιάς μας τὴν χαροποιεῖ καὶ τὴν εὐφραίνει τὸ ἅγιον ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσον περισσότερο τὸ φωνάζουμε καὶ ὅσον συχνότερον τὸ ἐπικαλούμεθα. Καὶ αὐτὸ γίνεται μὲ τὴν νοερὰ ἢ καρδιακὴ προσευχή, ποὺ λέγεται σιωπηλὰ μέσα μας: «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με».

**Ἅγιος Ἡσύχιος ὁ Πρεσβύτερος**

Ἄγνός δὲν θεωρεῖται ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ ἐφύλαξε ἀρρύπαντον τὸ πλήνιο σῶμα του, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ ὑπέταξε τὰ σωματικὰ μέλη στὴν ψυχὴ, ἐκεῖνος εἶναι τελείως ἄγνός.

**Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης**

## THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

By Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (+2003).

There is anguish when a woman is in labour, but all this is forgotten when the child is born, because a man has come into the world. Someone has come into the world to live, someone has entered into the realm of transitory life in order to grow into life eternal, and the birth of a child is always perceived as the beginning of life and as the beginning of eternity, once more incarnate, once more made real, visible, tangible, become part of human joy and human simplicity.

And yet, when we think of the nativity of Christ, the birth on earth of the Son of God, we see it in a quite different way.

One of the ancient miniatures representing the birth of the Lord, shows us, apart from the habitual features of a cave, of the Mother Virgin, of Joseph, of the familiar animals, the manger standing by, deposited on an altar of sacrifice. And the child is lying on it as probably Isaac laid on the altar which Abraham had built in order to bring him as a blood offering to the Lord. Every one of us is born through temporary life into eternal life; the Eternal One, He who is life itself, is born into the world in order to enter into the realm of death. Eternal, Immortal God enters into the realm of man, not only the created world, but to enter the fallen world where death is the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

When we look at this image of the new-born child, lying on an altar of stones, ready for a sacrifice, brought as an offering, we can well ask ourselves, "Who is he who sacrifices this child?" And we have an answer: it is the Father who gives us His Son that through His death we may live. We see here incarnate, clearly expressed, divine Love, and the measure of this love divine. The Only-Begotten Son is given unto death, delivered unto death for our sakes. Saint Paul ponders on the event, and he exclaims: Hardly would anyone die for a friend, and Christ died for us while we still were enemies of God. [*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Rom 5:8).]

God called us into existence, it was a one-sided act, not of His own powerful will, but of His immeasurable love. He

called us into existence, that we may share with Him not only existence, but life, become partakers of all that He is; we are called, in the words of Saint Peter, to become partakers of divine nature; we are called to be brethren and sisters of Christ, sons and daughters of the Living God. He created us in an act of love and in this act of love, from the first, He gave Himself as an offering to us. And this offering is always a sacrifice. In order to make this offering meaningful, He gave us freedom, the freedom to accept love and to reject love, to love Him in response to His love, or discard His love and, through our deeds, through all our attitude to Him and to life, to proclaim to Him that His love is of no avail to us, that we do not want it, that it is in vain that he has loved us first, it is in vain that He had loved us so much as to give His Only Begotten Son for us.

God gives us the freedom, and we ask very often, "Why?!"



Why have we not been made in such a way that, compelled by a blessed necessity, we would be unable to go wrong, that we should be made in such a way that we always and in all things would respond to the best. But is it not simply because where there is no freedom of love and rejection of love, there is no love? If we gravitated towards one another without any choice, it would be a law of nature, it would not be an act of free gift of oneself and of acceptance of the other. This freedom means love, at least the possibility of love, as it means also the possibility for us to reject

God. But God in His freedom does not reject us. He remains faithful to the last, perfectly generous, heroically faithful.

And when the freedom of man is misused, He uses His freedom to come to us, and to reach out towards us at the very depth of ourselves, at the extreme distance which we reach when we die to love. He enters this very realm which is the realm where there is no love, where there is only dividedness, brokenness and separation, both from God and from one another and within ourselves, the inner brokenness and conflict between mind and heart, between conscience and action: Christ is born into the realm of death we have made through the misuse of freedom, because we have forgotten that freedom culminates, is fulfilled in that love which gives itself perfectly, which is forgetfulness of self, which is the laying down of one's life for the other.

Let us then look at this crib not as we do when we are small children, seeing only an image of a child's birth, miraculous, wonderful; let us look at it with an earnest and adult gaze, and see that this crib is an altar of sacrifice, that this cave where He was born is an image of that cave in which He will be deposited, a young man, killed for God's sake after the agony of the Garden and the agony of the Cross, and let us ask ourselves, "Are we, each of us, a response to love revealed in such a way, revealed to such degree?" Will we find in ourselves a response, or shall we only say, "It was His choice, I have chosen against Him. He has chosen life for me, I have chosen death for Him."

Is that the answer which we will give? Oh, not in words, but in deeds, through our life, through our attitude to our own self, in which our own dividedness is not overcome, through our attitude to one another in which those people for whom Christ lived and died remain to us strangers, irrelevant and can be brushed out of our way, or through our attitude to Him Whom we do not treat as our ever-present invisible neighbor, for Whom we have no thought, no compassion, no charity, no love.

Or are we going to respond to this revelation of love in which the frailty of love is made visible, perceptible to us in the frailty of this little human body deposited on the straw of a crib, respond to the frailty of God by a mature love?

This is the question which now the day of Christmas sets before us, and we have days and months of liturgical unfolding of the year, to grow through it towards a definitive and final answer when we will see love sacrificed on Calvary. We have got this liturgical year to follow step by step, in this year we will discover how the saints of God have responded, and at every step the question will stand before us: "And what about you, what about thee personally, what about us in our togetherness, what is our answer to love?" Amen.



- Tell me, which has greater strength, water or fire?  
 - Uh ... water, Elder, answered a pilgrim.  
 - If we have a great fire, and you pour out a glass of water, will it be put out?  
 - No, Elder. The fire has greater strength.  
 - If you have a little fire, and you pour out a big can of water, will it be put out?  
 - Yes, Elder.  
 - It is neither water nor fire that has the greater strength, but the quantity. So it is also with spiritual things. If the worldly way of thinking prevails within you, that will overcome the spiritual. But if your mind is turned to the spiritual, it will overcome the carnal.

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

## TALKING ABOUT THE DEVIL

*Tribute to Fr. John S. Romanides, by Thomas Shaw, "The Orthodox Reader," January, 1999, no. 17.*

Two decades ago, while still a young Orthodox Christian, I had the privilege of hearing Fr. Alexander Schmemmann speak. I cannot clearly remember now the topic of his talk, but one sentence still rings in my ears: "What surprises those in the ecumenical movement is that, while they are discussing the great project of unification of the churches, the Orthodox are still talking about the Devil."

Orthodoxy is still talking about the Devil because we continue to see his effect on the culture around us and we continue to experience his war upon the Church. Because we are engaged in this unseen warfare, Orthodox theology has always been dynamic. Each generation must discover the truths of the Holy Tradition anew, and in that process of discovery there will be differing understanding of the content of the Tradition. This dynamism has always brought forth controversial theologians within the Church. They are those who step outside the safe formulas and attempt to rephrase the Tradition using unfamiliar guideposts.

One such theologian is Fr. John Romanides. His work, in contrast to today's micro-specialist, presents a strong unified thesis that he applies over vast periods of time and place. His boldness is dismissed as simplistic and overly dogmatic by some. I first encountered Fr. Romanides as a student of theology at the University of Thessaloniki. I was in the last course he taught in Orthodox Dogmatics before his retirement. I took classes from him for three years and have read most of his works including *Franks, Romanism, Feudalism and Doctrine*.

Fr. Romanides is every bit the absentminded professor. His nickname at Holy Cross was Fr. Midnight because he seemed so unaware of his surroundings when he talked. He would always begin a lecture the same way. Sitting down, he would speak in a soft, almost inaudible, voice. Beginning almost in mid-thought, it seemed as if the lecture were already going on in his head. As he warmed to his subject his voice would raise and his eyes would flash. Sometimes he would become very quiet and would even seem to nod off for brief periods. His lectures were always well attended because he was a man with something to say. It seemed odd that even though his area of expertise was dogmatics, his lectures always seemed to be history. The details of the goings-on in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century France and Italy were constantly being related, or the details of 18<sup>th</sup> century France and Russia. He was criticized for this. After all, he was not a trained historian! But as a patristic theologian, he taught that the Fathers cannot be understood without understanding their history.

Fr. Romanides has an over-arching thesis: the purpose of the Church is to heal man of spiritual illness brought on by

the Fall (this spiritual illness is characterized by the quest for happiness) and enable him to know God. His secondary thesis is that dogmatic controversies throughout the history of the Church are caused by those who do not understand the function of the Church as a spiritual hospital. Thus, the real difference with the West is their loss of this understanding which occurred because the Western ecclesiastical institutions were subverted by political forces into mere political institutions. As political institutions they became concerned with man's happiness instead of his glorification; with mere forgiveness of sins, rather than purification.

It is this thesis that is controversial. It is accepted in ecumenical circles that the explanation for the schism of East and West is cultural. According to this concept, the Western, Latin-speaking, Roman Church and the Eastern, Greek-speaking, Byzantine Church became estranged due to cultural and political factors. The essential elements of the "undivided Church" remain the same in both East and West. The task of ecumenical theology is to regain this lost common understanding.

Romanides' thesis attacks these concepts. There never was a "Byzantine" Empire. This was an invention of 18<sup>th</sup> century Western historians. The Roman political institutions remained intact from the founding of New Rome, Constantinople, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century to its fall in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Romanides, then, tells a different story. Not the story of the Greek East and the Latin West, but the story of Romans and Franks. His is a story not of people drifting apart, but of the Romans struggling to assert the truths of Orthodoxy even when faced with impossible opposition. His understanding of the crucial centuries leading up to the schism and the crusades is one of the systematic subjection of the Roman population of the West to the Frankish overlords who eventually were able to capture even the Roman papacy and conform it to their feudalistic scheme.

The truth of his thesis is captured in our language where franchise (to have the rights of a Frank) means to be able to vote and villain (Roman town dwellers) means an evil man. It was not the Roman Empire in the East that was estranged from its roots and traditions, but the Roman Empire in the West which was replaced by feudalism. So, while other theologians discuss the great project of unifying the churches, Romanides keeps talking about the Devil.

It is the story of warfare, seen and unseen. It is the story of the Babylonian Captivity of the Church in the West and the threat to us as Orthodox if we do not understand our

history, our heritage, and our Holy Tradition rightly. If we allow the Holy Orthodox Church to become simply another cultural institution with its peculiar rites and practices, if we allow the Holy Orthodox Church to become a religion, we will be playing the Devil's own game and will subject ourselves to our overlords without a peep.

Because of the controversy surrounding Romanides' secondary thesis, many lose track of his first and primary thesis. Let Fr. John state it himself:

"We are obliged to have a clear picture of the context within which the Church and the State viewed the contribution of the glorified to the cure of the sickness of religion which warps the human personality by means of its search for happiness both in this life and after the death of the body. It is within this context that the Roman Empire legally incorporated the Orthodox Church into its administrative structure. Neither

the State nor the Church saw the mission of the Church as the simple forgiveness of sins of the faithful for their entrance into heaven in the next life. Both the Church and the State knew well that the forgiveness of sins was only the beginning of the cure of the happiness seeking sickness of humanity. This cure begins by the *purification* of the heart, it arrives at the restoration of the heart to its natural state of *illumination* and the whole person

begins to be perfected beyond one's natural capacities by the *glorification* of body and soul by God's uncreated glory (*shekinah*—the English transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "dwelling" or "settling" and denotes the dwelling or settling of the divine presence of God, *Ed.*). The result of this cure and perfection was not only the proper preparation for life after the death of one's body, but also the transformation of society here and now from a collection of selfish and self-centered individuals to a society of persons with selfless love *which does not seek its own.*"



When the evil spirit of pride fights against us, we shall never stop falling. But falls make us aware of our wretchedness and help us attain humility. Then Christ comes, who is humble of heart and meek in soul. Then joy, peace, and sweetness will reign in our soul, and blessedness will warm our heart.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona



## A RECENT GOA OF AMERICA EVENT OF GREAT CONCERN

### THE GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA CONTINUES TO “RECOGNIZE” AND DISSEMINATE AWARDS TO THE ARCHITECTS OF THE PRO- ABORTION MOVEMENT

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas, October 2016.

*In these difficult days, each must do what is in their power,  
and leave what is out of their power to the will of God.*

[St. Paisios the Athonite]

† † †

**M**y Dear and Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, The above words of St. Paisios the Athonite have convicted this impure and passion-filled soul. I am just a sinful and unworthy priest, but it is indeed within my power to ask the following question: **Why was New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo recently given the Patriarch Athenagoras Human Rights Award by my Holy Archdiocese?** See the website below:

[http://www.uocofusa.org/news\\_161017\\_2.html](http://www.uocofusa.org/news_161017_2.html)

To those of us active in the pro-life movement, Governor Cuomo is well known for his outspoken, tenacious and proactive advocacy in support of the pro-death philosophy (erroneously called, pro-choice, since the “choice” involves killing the pre-born child—a living ikon of Jesus Christ). On July 17, 2014, Governor Cuomo referred to the defenders of the pre-born child as: “these extreme conservatives who are right-to-life ... they have no place in the state of New York.”

In 2013, he presented—and worked hard to pass—one of the most expansive abortion bills in American history: the so-called **Woman’s Equality Act**. In the abortion section, a woman would be guaranteed a right to an abortion **throughout the entire nine months that the baby was in her womb**, without restrictions, and a medical person who was not a doctor could even perform the abortion. In his State of the State message in January of 2013, he defended this bill by saying “Because it is her body! It’s her choice!” Governor Cuomo also stated that this law was needed in New York, in case the *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion was overturned. I assume that he wants New York to become a safe haven for anyone seeking an abortion, if federal law no longer protected it. Fortunately, for the citizens of New York and the Governor himself, that provision did not pass.

Please forgive me, but I am trying to understand why such a person was awarded one of the highest honors of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. Based on my little and simple

knowledge of the teachings of our holy Church Fathers, if Andrew M. Cuomo was an Orthodox Christian, out of true love for his severely wounded soul, he would be excommunicated, until he was blessed with tears of repentance for all the innocent blood that is on his hands.

Last year, it saddened me that Vice President Biden, another politician who is openly supportive of abortion, received this prestigious award. I remained silent at that time, but now I feel compelled to speak out.

Today in our Nation, the God-established traditional family unit is being attacked on all fronts: abortion, euthanasia, the adoption of children by gay couples, same-sex marriage and the recent creation of **multiple** genders (a group in New York recently published a list of 31 genders, and placed male and female as numbers 17 and 18 respectively!). May God send down upon us a double helping of his Grace—particularly upon our clergy—so that we will have the courage to be in His “*front lines*” in defense of His Truth, especially within a nation where lie has become its truth, evil has become its good, and darkness has become its light. In the words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: *If therefore the light that is in thee is darkness, how great is the darkness?* [Mt 6:23].

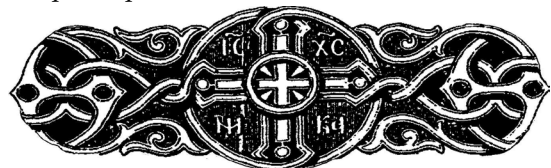
And may the next recipient of the Patriarch Athenagoras Human Rights Award be someone whose words and actions are in harmony with the Orthodox Church’s teachings on the sanctity of **all human life**, which He created in His image, from conception to natural death. The words in this letter belong to me, and no one else is responsible for them.

Your servant in Christ Jesus,

Unworthy priest,

+Demetrios

P. S. – May these additional, Spirit-filled words of St. Paisios the Athonite inspire all of us to do our part and leave the rest to God: *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 not warriors. If the Church keeps silent, to avoid conflict with the government, if the Metropolitan are silent, if the monks hold their peace, then who will speak up?*



**C**owardice is a passion of a sickly soul which is overcome by fear. It is spinelessness, faintheartedness, a lack of the fighting spirit, an instability of the soul that is in turmoil because of coming trials. It makes free people slaves, and it makes those bound to it traitors to their country. It is timidity in the face of danger, a lack of moral fiber, a weakness of the mind and a consent to foul deeds.

St. Nektarios the Wonderworker (+1920)



## STAYING TO THE END OF THE DIVINE SERVICES

By St. Gregory Palamas.

Only John the Virgin acquired as his mother by grace the only Virgin among mothers (*Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.* Jn 19:27). He was especially beloved of Christ, and, more than the other evangelists, he was called *the son of that thunder* with which the Lord went up to heaven and thundered (Mk 3:17). Therefore, he preached more loudly to make absolutely clear to us everything about the Master's resurrection from the dead and to relate how He appeared after His resurrection. Last Sunday in church we heard Him saying through the Gospel he wrote, *The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.* (Jn 20:1-2).

Now we have heard him saying, *But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre.* (Jn 20:11). When John, together with Peter, listened to Mary and ran to the tomb where life began, they saw what they saw, **believed because of the signs**, and went away astonished to their own homes. Mary, on the other hand, remained standing outside the tomb and weeping. This proves that she had not yet received any assurance of the Master's resurrection, even though she had come twice to the tomb with different people. The first time was with the Mother of God, as Matthew relates, writing, *In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre,* and so on. (Mt 28:1). Then she came with Peter and John, who went away marveling, having believed because of what they saw. So she had come twice to the tomb with others, and whereas all her companions had believed and been given assurance, she was crying inconsolably because she had received no assurance at all.

We can see the same happening with regard to virtuous struggles. Grace comes immediately to meet some of those

who strive, giving them assurance of the *earnest of their inheritance* (Eph 1:14), letting them taste the promised prizes, as if stretching out a loving hand to welcome them and anointing them for further struggles. With others, however, grace waits for the end of the struggle, and prepares for them the crown of patience as well. As one of the God-bearing Fathers says, *Some receive holy rewards before their labors, some during labors, and some when they depart.*

This happens because the wise providence of God orders our affairs in many different ways and lovingly bestows on each one of us what is appropriate and profitable both for virtuous deeds and the mysteries of faith. Arranging matters for Mary Magdalene in His love and wisdom, the Master deemed it right that she should not yet at that point have received assurance of His resurrection, leading and encouraging future generations in the direction of patience through her example. Let us hear what she was afterwards accounted worthy of because she persevered and continued to wait by the tomb. *As she wept,* it says, *she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.* (Jn 20:11-12).

Her act of bending down and turning her eyes with extreme longing to the tomb was the result of her excellent disposition. Firstly, we must consider that, although it was still dark, as the evangelist said earlier (Jn 20:1), she clearly distinguished, even from outside, everything and everyone inside the cave. This shows that even though it was still dark outside, since the full light of day, as visible to our eyes, had not yet come, that cave was full of the light of the resurrection. Mary saw this light with God's help, and it increased her longing for Christ even more, and enabled her eyes to perceive a vision of angels. Not only did she see them but she was also able to speak with them. Such was that light.

She saw them arrayed in white, not just because of the purity and brilliance of their angelic nature, but because they were illuminating and clarifying the mystery of the resurrection, while at the same time actually celebrating with us the truly radiant day of the Master's resurrection. They were sitting down so that she would realize that they had not just come, but had been there before, even though previously they had not been visible. In this way she would understand their rank as she considered who these who had



been invisibly present could be. I think it was the desire to be as near as possible to the place where the Master's body had lain that made them sit down. As if they were clinging lovingly to the tomb, they were sitting one at the head and the other at the feet, showing that Christ's divinity, as symbolized by the place where His head lay, was equally beloved and precious to the angels as His incarnation, represented by the place of His feet. *And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?* (Jn 20:13).

You see that the cave has become heaven, or rather a heavenly temple, instead of an earthly tomb and a prison. Instead of human guards it is full of heavenly angels who magnify it exceedingly as the place of the life-giving God, and joyfully tend it now that it is empty. But you, woman, why are you weeping? They did not ask because they were unaware of what was the matter with her, but to alleviate her grief, make her the mistress of her thoughts and find an opportunity to accomplish their own work. The task of the angels sitting by the tomb of the giver of life was to proclaim the glory of the risen Lord. But when she was asked by the angels, she replied, *Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back.* (Jn 20:13-14). What made Mary suddenly turn around? Obviously that the angels bowed like servants to the Lord as He appeared and paid heed to Him. Mary called Him just "**my**" Lord, and suspected that His body had been stolen and taken away showing that her soul was inclined towards Him, but she did not think of Him in a way worthy of God. They, by contrast, proved by their actions that He was Lord even of God's angels. Before He arrived they were sitting beside the tomb, but when the Master suddenly appeared opposite them, they immediately arose and earnestly turned their attention to Him with piety and admiration, in the manner of servants.

When Mary turned round to see what had amazed the angels just by appearing, she *saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus* (Jn 20:14), not having heard yet about the resurrection and finding it difficult to accept. Since the daylight outside was still dim and the Lord did not yet reveal to her His divine radiance that He might be recognized as He who had suffered, Mary did not know who He was, but thought that the Husbandman of our souls, the Creator of all, was the gardener for the plants in that place. When He made Himself known by calling her by name, *Mary*, she changed her mind and replied, *Rabboni*, which means, Teacher. Though she saw Him alive, no thought of His divinity occurred to her, and she regarded Him simply as a man of God and a teacher. She was inspired by love not just to fall down before Him but to lay hold of His feet, and heard the words, *Touch me not.* (Jn 20:17). *Since, He said, your mind has not grasped the height of the mystery concerning me, that,*

*being God, I am appearing now for your sake in a body which is now Godlike, do not touch me.*

The honor of being the only woman after the resurrection to touch the body of Him who for our sake was made man of her, had to be reserved for the Mother of God, and Matthew relates how this happened. He says of her that she came and *held Him by the feet* (Mt 28:9), whereas the Lord said to Mary Magdalene, *Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.* (Jn 20:17). These words are closely linked with the words He subsequently spoke to His disciples, *I ascend unto my Father, for I am not yet ascended.* (Jn 20:17). He said this to make them concerned and more earnest, and to stir them up to long and seek to see Him. This applies to Mary Magdalene too for He says, *Touch me not, for this body in which I am now clothed surpasses fire in its upward haste and power, and can not only ascend to heaven, but to the Father above the heavens. However, I have not yet ascended to my Father, because He had not yet shown Himself to His disciples after rising from the dead.*

*Go to those brethren of mine, for we all come from the one Father, although not in the same way. I am His True Son, of one nature with Him, whereas they have been made sons of His through Me. Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.* (Jn 20:17). He is our Father by grace through *the Spirit of adoption* (Rom 8:15), but His Father by nature on account of His divinity. Similarly, He is our God as the Creator of our human nature, but His God by reason of the dispensation whereby He became man. He made these distinctions so that we might understand the difference. By this message, that He was ascending to the Father, He led them to understand that His body was such that it could go about on earth forever as it had before, and be with them always.

Mary Magdalene, whom we extol in hymns as one of Christ's myrrh-bearers, into whom, once the *seven evil spirits had been cast out* by Christ (Mk 16:9), the sevenfold operation of the Spirit's grace clearly entered and was counted worthy to see and talk to angels, **because she continued to stand by the tomb.** She saw the Lord Himself and became His apostle to the apostles. Having been taught by His divine mouth and having finally found full assurance, she went to the apostles and told them, *that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.* (Jn 20:18).

Let us consider, brethren, how far Mary Magdalene was from the dignity of Peter, the leader of the apostles, and John, Christ's beloved theologian, and yet at that time she was counted worthy to experience much greater things than they did. When they ran to the tomb, they saw only the linen cloths and the napkin, whereas she, **by reason of the determined and patient endurance with which she remained to the end standing at the door of the cave,** saw not just the angels but also the Lord of the angels risen from the dead in

the flesh, before the apostles saw Him. She heard Him with her own ears and became a minister of the commandments from His divine mouth.

This temple, this Orthodox church, is a figure of that cave. Or rather, it is more than a figure, being almost another such cave, for it has a place where the Master's body is laid, the area within the veil and the most holy table there. Anyone who is determined to hasten to that truly divine cave that holds God, stand there and remain to the end, gathering his thoughts and lifting them up to God, will not only recognize the words of divinely inspired Scripture proclaiming, like angels, the divinity and humanity of the Word made man for our sake, **he will also certainly see the Lord with the eyes of his mind and, we can say without exaggeration, his bodily eyes.** For if anyone looks with faith at the mystical table and the bread of life placed upon it, he sees the person of the Word of God, *Who was made flesh for our sake and dwelt among us.* (Jn 1:14). If he shows himself a worthy receptacle, he will not only see but become a partaker of Him, receive Him to dwell within him, and be filled with His divine grace. Just as Mary saw what the apostles at that time longed to see, so he is accounted worthy to see and enjoy things that *the angels*, according to the apostle, *desire to look into* (1 Pet 1:12), and by contemplating them and sharing in them, he is rendered completely Godlike.

Wherefore, brethren, lift up towards virtue the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, *and make straight paths for your feet*, walking in the Lord's straight roads of righteousness, chastity, love, humility and truth (cf Heb 12:12-14). Hatred, falsehood, deception, envy, acquisitiveness, pride and their like are, by contrast, distorted, winding roads. Even if someone does not do these things but just loves them and thinks about them with his mind, they make him worthy of God's aversion. For whereas man regards the outward person, *God looks at the heart*, and He it is who searches hearts and thoughts (cf Rev 2:23).

While we are gathered together in Christ's Temple, *Gird up the loins of your mind*, as Peter, the chief apostle, says, *be sober to the end, and hope for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (1 Pet 1:13). It is impossible for anyone who stands in God's holy Church collecting his thoughts, lifting His mind to God, occupying his understanding with the sacred singing from the beginning until the end and waiting patiently, not to undergo a

divine change, in accordance with his attention to God and His teachings. Through this attention a certain warmth is born in the heart which chases away evil thoughts like flies, creates spiritual peace and comfort in the soul and bestows sanctification on the body, according to him who said, *My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned.* (Pss 39:3). One of the God-bearing Fathers also taught us this, saying, *Strive as hard as you can to ensure that your inner labor is according to God's will, and you will conquer the outward passions.* The great Paul, too, urged us towards this, saying, *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.* (Gal 5:16).

Somewhere else Paul exhorts us, *Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.* (Eph 6:14). When our thoughts revolve around divine subjects and abide in God's truth, holding back and taking care of the desiring part of the soul and driving away the body's desires, carnal thoughts leave us.



Then the grace of the Spirit takes possession of the quiet soul, and gives it a taste of the unspeakable good things to come, which no passionate and negligent *eye has seen, nor ear hear*, neither have entered into the heart of such a man (cf 1 Cor 2:9). This taste is the earnest of these good things, and the heart which accepts these pledges becomes spiritual and receives assurance of its salvation. So

anyone who wishes to gain this assurance and understand exactly about these spiritual pledges should conduct himself as today's words have guided and taught him. In this way he will become a fellow citizen with God's saints and share in the eternal unspeakable good things promised to them.

To which may we all attain by the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory, might, honor and worship, together with His Father without beginning and the life-giving Spirit, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.



**N**ever confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him: because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.

St. John of Kronstadt

## THE DESERT AS SPACE

*Protodeacon John Chryssavgis, "In the Heart of the Desert."*

Why did so many saintly elders choose the desert as their area of domicile in the first place? What was the significance of the desert? What is the power of its suggestion?

"Desert" (ἔρημος) literally means "abandonment;" it is the term from which we derive the word "hermit." The areas of desertedness were where the demons bred. In the Book of Leviticus, the desert is the place that is accursed (Lev 16:21-22). There is no water in the desert, and in the mind of the Jews that was the ultimate curse. No water also meant no life.

The desert signified death: nothing grows in the desert. Your very existence is, therefore, threatened. In the desert you will find nobody and nothing. In the desert, you can only face up to yourself and to every aspect of yourself, to your temptations, and to your reality. You confront your own heart, and your heart's deepest desires, without any scapegoat, without any hiding place. It is in the desert that Jacob battled; and it is in the desert that you do battle with the unruly forces of your nature within and without. The desert was filled with the presence of the demonic.

Abba Elias informs us that an old man was living in a temple of the desert, and the demons came to him, saying: "Leave this place; it belongs to us!"

Yet, the desert was also endowed with sacred significance for Jews and Christians alike. The Israelites had wandered in the desert for forty years. It was there that Moses saw God. It was there that John the Baptist preached the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, it was in the desert that Jesus Himself began His ministry; it was in the wilderness that He was first tempted by the demons (Mt 4:1-10); and it was in the craggy areas of the Judaeon mountains that He periodically withdrew to be alone and to pray (Mt 14:23). In fact, the early monks believed that a reference in the Letter to the Galatians may also imply a brief sojourn by Paul in the desert of Arabia immediately following his conversion: *When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.* (Gal 1:15-17)

So the desert, while accursed, was never seen as an empty region. It was a place that was full of action. It was not an area of scenic views, in the modern sense of a tourist attraction. It was a space that provided an opportunity, and even a calling, for divine vision. In the desert, you were invited to shake off all forms of idolatry, all kinds of earthly limitations, in order to behold—or, rather, to be held before—an

image of the heavenly God. There, you were confronted with another reality, with the presence of a boundless God, whose grace was without any limits at all. You could never avoid that perspective of revelation. After all, you cannot hide in the desert; there is no room for lying or deceit there. Your very self is reflected in the dry desert, and you are obliged to face up to this self. Anything else would constitute a dangerous illusion, not a divine icon.

Abba Alonios states this quite simply: "If one does not say in one's heart, that in the world there is only myself and God, then one will simply not gain peace."

The desert is an attraction beyond oneself; it is an invitation to transfiguration. It was neither a better way, nor an easier way. The desert elders were not out to prove a point; they were there to prove themselves. Anthony the Great advises complete renunciation in this effort to hold God before one's eyes at all times: "Always have the fear of God before your eyes. Remember Him who gives death and life. Hate the world and all that is in it. Hate all peace that comes from the flesh. Renounce this life, so that you may be alive to God. Remember what you have promised God, for it will be required of you on the Day of Judgment. Suffer hunger; suffer thirst; suffer nakedness; be watchful and sorrowful; weep and groan in your heart; test yourselves, to see if you are worthy of God; despise the flesh, so that you may preserve your souls."

Nothing should be held back in this surrender. It is all or nothing. The abandonment to God is absolute. As a result, the rewards are either fruitful or else frightening.

A brother renounced the world and gave his goods to the poor. However, he kept back just a little for his personal expenses and needs. He went to see Abba Anthony. When he told him of this, the old man said to him: "If you want to be a monk, go into the village, buy some meat, cover your naked body with this meat, and then come here like that." The brother did so. And the dogs and birds tore at his flesh. When he came back, the old man asked him whether he had followed his advice. The brother simply showed Abba Anthony his wounded body. Saint Anthony said: "Those who renounce the world but choose to keep back even a little for themselves are torn in this way by the demons."

The desert is a place of spiritual revolution, not of personal retreat. It is a place of inner protest, not outward peace. It is a place of deep encounter, not of superficial escape. It is a place of repentance, not recuperation. Living in the desert does not mean living without people; it means living for God. Saint Anthony the Great and the other desert dwellers never forgot this. They never sought to cut off their connections to other people instantly. They sought rather to refine these relationships increasingly.

Of course, the desert was, on a deeper level, always more than simply a place. It was a way. And it was not the desert

that made the Desert Fathers and Mothers, any more than it was the lion that made the martyrs. The various stories we read contain many examples that reveal the desert as a spiritual “locale” that was present everywhere, including the large and busy cities.

It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert that there was someone who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession. Whatever he had beyond his needs, he would give to the poor; and every day he sang hymns with the angels.

It is the clear understanding of these elders that one does not have to move to the geographical location of the wilderness in order to find God. Yet, if you do not have to go to the desert, you do have to go through the desert. The Desert Fathers and Mothers always speak from their experience of the desert, even if they do not actually come out of that desert. The desert is a necessary stage on the spiritual journey. To avoid it would be harmful. To dress it up or conceal it may be tempting; but it also proves destructive in the spiritual path.

Ironically, you do not have to find the desert in your life; it normally catches up with you. Everyone does go through the desert, in one shape or another. It may be in the form of some suffering, or emptiness, or breakdown, or breakup, or divorce, or any kind of trauma that occurs in our life. Dressing this desert up through our addictions or attachments—to material goods, or money, or food, or drink, or success, or obsessions, or anything else we may care to turn toward or may find available to depend upon—will delay the utter loneliness and the inner fearfulness of the desert experience. If we go through this experience involuntarily, then it can be both overwhelming and crushing. If, however, we accept to undergo this experience voluntarily, then it can prove both constructive and liberating.

The physical setting of the desert is a symbol, a powerful reminder of a spiritual space that is within us all. In the United States, the grand desert of Arizona can assist us in recalling that inner space where we yearn for God. In Australia, the frightening outback can also guide us in our search for that heavenly “dream-time.” In Egypt, the sandy dunes of the desert resembled the unending search of these abbats and ammas for *abundant life* (Jn 10:10) and *a living spring of water*. (Jn 4:14).



A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

**Abba Poimen the Great**

## SAINT GEORGE THE ELDER, A CONTEMPORARY SAINT COMMEMORATED ON NOVEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup>

*Source: Elder Moses the Athonite, Saint George the Elder with the Gift of Precognition. The text refers to Saint George as “Elder,” because, at the time when Fr. Moses wrote it, the former had not yet been recognized as a saint of the Orthodox Church.*

The blessed Elder George Karslides came from the Black Sea and was orphaned and left on his own very early in life. After being persecuted and imprisoned by the atheist regime in Georgia, he came to Greece where the humble man lived with such asceticism and zealous faith that he was granted the gifts of discretion, perception, precognition and prophecy.

Father George was born in Argyroupolis (Gümüşhane), in the Black Sea region, in 1901. He was orphaned at an early age and his upbringing fell to his devout grandmother. After the death of his grandmother and sister, he and his grandfather left for Erzurum in Greater Armenia. The death of his grandfather and the abuse of his brother took him to the Caucasus. Alone, poor, hurt and needy, accompanied by saints in dreams and visions, he arrived in Tiflis, in Georgia, and was taken by the bishop there to the Holy Monastery of the Life-Receiving Spring. He was clothed in the honorable monastic habit at the age of only nine (that is, he entered a pre-novitiate mode of existence) and would wear it for over half a century.

### His Tonsure

He had loved the ascetic life and prayer since his childhood. On July 20<sup>th</sup> 1919, he was tonsured a monk and his name changed from Athanasios to Symeon. It is reported that at the moment when he was tonsured, the bells began ringing of their own accord.

At the monastery, he met an uncle of the bishop, who helped him spiritually. The atheist regime of the Revolution of 1917 persecuted the Church, the clergy and monasticism. Together with other monks of the monastery, he was imprisoned in a sunless, underground room, through which sewers ran. He withstood dreadful privations, trusting in God. Many of the brethren died martyrs’ deaths there. He himself escaped certain death through the aid of the Mother of God. On September 8<sup>th</sup> 1925, he was ordained to the priesthood and renamed *Giorgi* (George). He conducted services in Georgian.

He soon acquired the reputation of a discerning, perceptive Elder, who had the gift of precognition. Many people came from far and wide to make the young hieromonk’s acquaintance and seek his advice. In 1923 he left Tiflis for Sukhumi. In his frequent liturgies he would commemorate a great many names. In his cell, he studied and prayed continually. Abstinence, asceticism, vigils and fasting were

a constant part of his life. His prophecies were fulfilled, and people began to regard him as a saint. In 1929, he was able to come to Greece.

#### Arrival in Greece

He glorified God for his survival and successful escape away from the Communists. The Black Sea region, Georgia and Russia remained in his memory as places of struggles, hardships and sacrifices. From Thessaloniki, where he arrived on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1929, he moved on to Katerini and then on further to the villages of Alonia, and Koukkos, Mikro Dasos near Kilkis, and finally, in 1930, to Sipsa near Drama. The maltreatment in the prison in Georgia had left him half-paralyzed, very weak and he often had great difficulty in walking; thus, he had to be carried to wherever he needed to go.

His only possessions were a few Church books in Georgian, priest's vestments, icons, and a part of the relics of his sister, Anna. Many people started to come to him for help. Father George, who loved God, the saints, his brethren and all other people, conducted services of intercession, confessed people and admonished them. In 1938, he built the little monastery of the Ascension. There, he would celebrate, confess, preach, foretell, work miracles for twenty years. His cell and the church became a true pool of Siloam for the bodily and spiritual ailments of many people.

He travelled to Jerusalem as a pilgrim and then to the Holy Mountain, where he met holy figures who convinced him to stay where he was, because the faithful had great need of his presence and witness. In 1941, he was miraculously saved from certain death at the hands of the Bulgarians, who had arrested him and wanted to execute him. The whole of his life passed as a continuous series of miracles. With the aid of Saint Nicholas, he was partially cured, at least to the extent that he could support himself.

He was always sparing, simple, fasting, vigilant, sickly and prayerful. He spoke little, was careful, strict and serious. He visited the sick and poor in great need, because he himself had been helped and he knew how to help others.

At the holy *proskomidi* (Office of Oblation), he would remember thousands of names of the living and the departed. Some of them he would make a note of, and, at the end of the Divine Liturgy would summon the relatives privately

and tell them the problems facing their loved ones, living or dead. If they were dead, he would tell the relatives how they had ended their lives.

Pure and innocent people saw him celebrate the Liturgy without his feet touching the ground. At the divine services he was luminous, peaceful and joyful. He co-celebrated with saints. "I rarely celebrate alone" the Elder would say. He was particularly devoted to the Mother of God, the Honorable Forerunner and Saint George. He would send ill and needy people to different saints and, through his prayers, everything would turn out well. Out of humility, he did not wish his unworthiness to be honored, but that God should be glorified by his saints. He used to call the saints "visitors," and he had the gift of being able to see the state of the souls in church.

The Elder observed the Canons of the Church very strictly and was not indulgent as regards inadmissible "dispensations." He was even stricter with the unrepentant. He held the vocation of Spiritual Father in very high esteem and took his responsibilities seriously. He had no desire to surround himself with supporters who would flatter him, but retained a discriminatory severity. His aim was always to bring humility to the persons confessing, along with genuine contrition and repentance, for the salvation of their immortal souls.

#### The Charismatic Pastor

His fervent faith, ascetic existence and pure life brought the humble and worthy servant of the highest gifts of discernment, perception, precognition and prophecy. God enlightened the blessed Elder to the extent that he could see things far away and in the past as if they were close and in the present, even, sometimes, things which were in the future, as many of his spiritual children relate. Some doubted the Elder's gifts, but when they got to know him they were not slow to recognize that he was truly a man of God. The Elder used his gifts for the assistance and salvation of souls, not to expose or shame people or to promote and boast about himself. He spoke with tears about imminent hardships in Greece: the German occupation in 1940, the Bulgarian incursion, and the Civil War. He read people's hearts like an open book. In order to retain his humility, he sometimes feigned stupidity, like foolishness for Christ. Such a virtue takes a great deal of effort to acquire and ample skill to preserve.

In his pastoral work, the Elder showed particular attention to women, who, because of their wealth of sensibili-



ity easily exaggerate the honor to be paid to others. He was “quietly” strict with them. However, he concealed a heart that was full of love for everyone. His almsgiving was always in secret. Once it got dark, he would send some of his confidantes off with clothes and food for the poor. He comforted those who were grieving and cared conscientiously for the departed. He loved children, gave them affectionate advice and shared little gifts with them unstintingly. He always tried to conceal himself and never wanted to be in the limelight or to be honored. The Elder never wanted anyone to leave his monastery hungry. He would cook and bake bread and share his efforts with everyone as a “blessing.” He was hard-working, tireless, charitable and open-handed.

For all of this, the faithful harbored great respect and love for the Elder. He accepted the love of his children, but did not provoke or desire it. He was humble and liked specially to talk about holy humility. In the end, he lived in sacred isolation. Most people did not understand him and some, indeed, misunderstood him. There were only a few who could understand the depth of his spirituality.

#### His Earthy End

He foresaw and foretold exactly the date of his departure from this life. Having been prepared for some time, he awaited it with even greater prayer, giving his final instructions to his spiritual children. Three days before his death, the sacrament of Divine Unction was celebrated. He made his communion. He forgave, blessed and made his farewells to everyone. He fell asleep on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1959. The last words which passed his lips were: *Open to me the gate of loving-kindness, blessed Mother of God.*

An orphaned, grieving and inconsolable body of people accompanied him to his final resting place, behind the church of the Ascension, where he had served for about thirty years. His face was peaceful, joyful and radiant. His dead body was supple, just as is the case of those saintly monks on the Holy Mountain. The two cypress trees at his grave bent, as though in veneration, as he had foretold, and lots of birds gathered at the time of his burial, with no fear of the large crowd of people. Everyone was now certain that they were burying a saint. He had been asked to be buried in his vestments, with his cross and the liturgical books that he had brought from Georgia.

In 2008, Saint George was inscribed among the Saints of the Orthodox Church, in the city of Drama, Greece, and is commemorated on November 4<sup>th</sup>. He is one of few saints known to bear a very clear imprint of the sign of the cross on his skull.

#### Quotes

If you pray without giving alms, your prayer is dead. Your hands should always be open. Give alms to orphans and widows. Alms and prayers go together.

Strive to intensify your faith, and during the Divine Liturgy be un-distracted and attached to the celebration of the service so that you might be granted to behold the majesties of God.

Neither should wealth impress you, nor honor, but always walk justly. Eat your bread with your honorable sweat and not through unjust means. The things you gain honorably, do not squander aimlessly. Live honorably and humbly, and as much as possible extend your hands in charity. Knock on the doors of the poor, the sick, the orphans. You should prefer the homes of the afflicted to the homes of the joyous. If you do good works, you will have a great reward from God.

God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith. Love all your fellow men, even your enemies. This is the most basic thing. Always love not only those who love us, but also those who hate us. Let us forgive them and love them all even if they have done us the greatest evil; then we are truly children of God. Then our own sins are also forgiven. Always preach love. This is the most basic law of God: love and love alone.

Our Panaghia does not want big candles, she wants charity shown to the poor!



The prideful person has no inner substance. He is hollow—like an unripened stalk of wheat that stands tall, while the ripened stalk bends its little head. Not only is he in the dark, he is also inwardly disquiet and outwardly agitated and clamorous. For when there is pride, everything one does is merely a balloon inflated by the devil—who then pierces it with a needle, so that it breaks and makes a lot of noise. Pride is dishonorable, such a terrible thing, as it even turned angels into demons! Pride brought us down from Paradise to earth; and from earth, it is now trying to send us to hell...

St. Paisios the Athonite



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CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

## THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST IS AT HAND

By St. John of Kronstadt.



Beloved, the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is now at hand. Let us take care to meet it in Christian manner, spiritually. I already know how you intend to meet it: you will soon be going to the market place, where you will concern yourselves and prattle about much, about the manifold pleasures of the table; or you will take care only to adorn your body with festive clothing. *But as for the one thing needful* (Lk 10:42), about how

to sweeten your soul for the coming feast with spiritual food, or about how to adorn your soul with luminous thoughts—in short, how to meet and spend the feast worthily—this but rarely comes to anyone's mind.

But, beloved, food is always with us and our clothing is always with us, but the Lord's feast is not always with us; therefore, let us concern ourselves not with food and clothing, but rather with preparing ourselves to meet our Most-Pure Heavenly King. Let us concern ourselves with meeting the approaching feast worthily and spiritually. We have long since been chant-

ing *Christ is born*, which we chant in order to fathom beforehand the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, that is, why the Son of God descended to earth; why He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, becoming man without ceasing to be God.

To what end? *To this end God descended to earth, that He might raise us to Heaven, says the Holy Church.* (*Akathist to the Sweetest Jesus*, Kontakion 8.) Remember this thought, and drive it into your hearts: that the Son of God descended to earth in order to save us from sin and eternal death and to raise us to heaven, that is, to where there is eternal life and eternal blessedness. If Christ descended to us in order to raise us to heaven, then we should ascend thereto beforehand in our thoughts and heartfelt desires, gradually turning our souls away from everything that binds us to the earth, to this country of exile in which there are so many temptations, afflictions, sicknesses, sorrows, with all its brevity, where we see only sin, allurements, and death with all its horrors.

Thus, before the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ arrives, let us adorn our souls with sobriety and purity of heart, that when Christ appears from heaven we might worthily meet His birth. Be attentive to yourselves: soon Christ will be on earth. Then raise your thoughts and hearts from earth to God and let us joyfully sing of the great mystery of the Nativity of the God-Man. If we meet this feast with such thoughts, and with such disposition of heart, then we will meet it worthily, in Christian manner, with benefit to our souls. Amen.