

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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Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis &
Kostas Matsourakis

THE LITURGICAL STRUCTURE OF LENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUNDAYS OF PREPARATION

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

Pre-Lenten preparation includes four consecutive Sundays preceding Lent.

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

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

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688
USA

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)

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

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

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

Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meat Fare)

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

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

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

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

Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheese Fare)

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

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

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

THE CANON OF ST. ANDREW OF CRETE

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

LENT WEEKDAYS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

NON-LITURGICAL DAYS

THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS

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

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

SATURDAYS OF LENT

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

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

SUNDAYS OF LENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

† † †

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

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

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



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

Blessed Elder Iakovos of Evia (+1991)

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY: THE FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This wavering and shaking of the Orthodox faith is due to those very persons who ought to be strengthening and supporting it in the souls of the faithful. Those who should be pillars of *Holy Orthodoxy* high ranking hierarchs, including the heads of certain Local Churches, are departing from the Truth of *Holy Orthodoxy*. It is terrible to have to say that even the head of the Church of Constantinople, which is known as the Ecumenical Church, the man considered to be the first hierarch of all Orthodoxy, has set out this path! On all of this there undoubtedly lies the print of the Apostasy about which the Holy Apostle Paul foretold [II Thess 2:3] the apostasy of Christians from Christ: *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.*

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

St. Symeon the New Theologian

BID FAREWELL TO THE THINGS OF THE WORLD

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

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

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

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



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

St. John Chrysostom

ON THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE STEADFASTNESS OF HOLY ORTHODOXY

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

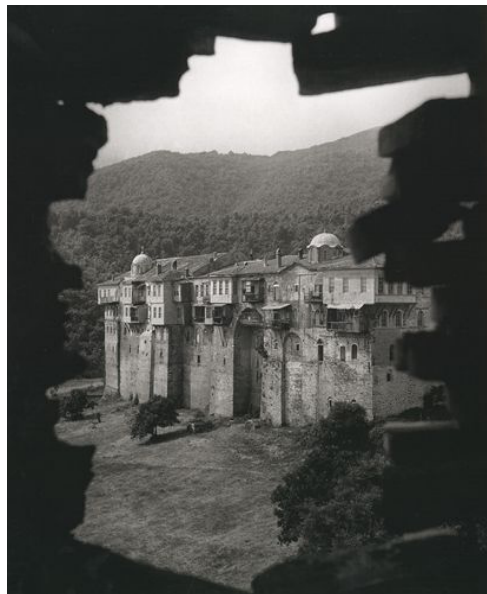
What a strict law! And though it sounds in the consciences of all pastors during their election and consecration, when a heavy yoke is put on them, namely the instruction of the flock of Christ that He entrusted to them, big or small, not only to guide it but also to preserve it. How could anyone be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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Ilias the Presbyter

ON MASONIC ECUMENISM

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

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

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

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

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

LOVE OF GOD

By Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867).



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

famous Elder Lev of Optina Hermitage.

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

† † †

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Elder Ephraim
"Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

SALVATION OF THE SOUL

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



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

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

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

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

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

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἡ Πνευματικὴ Ἀντίσταση ἐπὶ Τουρκοκρατίας

Τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Χολέβα, πολιτικοῦ ἐπιστήμονος.

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

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

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

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

Ἡ Διαφύλαξη τῆς Πίστεως καὶ τῆς Ἐθνικῆς Συνειδήσεως

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ἡ Παιδεία, Κρυφὴ καὶ Φανερὴ

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Τὸ Κοινοτικὸ Σύστημα

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ὁ Ἀθῶς Κατηγορούμενος

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Ὁ Ἰούδας Ξαναζει

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, θεολόγου.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Καθαρθώμεν τὰς Αἰσθήσεις καὶ Ὁψόμεθα

Φώτη Κόντογλου.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Γέρων Γερμανὸς Σταυροβουნიώτης (+1982)

Πρὸς Φιλοπαπικούς Ἀρχιερεῖς

Τοῦ Μοναχοῦ Βλασίου, Βίγλα Ἁγίου Ὁρους.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ἡ Μεταστροφή Ἐνὸς Ἄθεου!

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Συνοδοιπόρος», Νοέμβριος 2010.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Πρ. Εὐσέβιος Μαθόπουλος

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

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

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

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

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

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

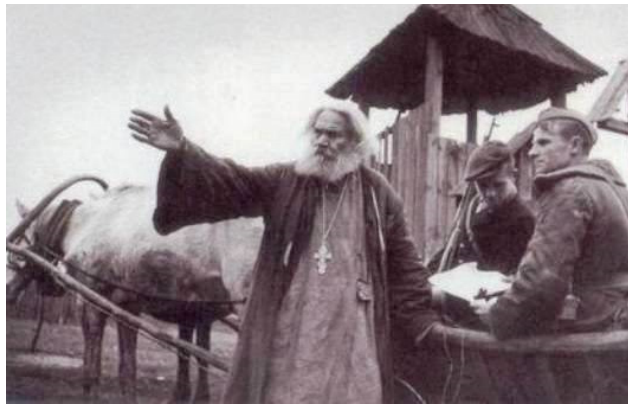
Not a year had passed and Fr. Simeon engaged a group of artists who covered the interior with frescoes depicting scenes from the Gospel. Batiushka also intended to purchase a better quality set of bells, but his untimely death

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

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

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

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



Fr. Simeon's family consisted of four souls: first—his matushka, Eulalia Stepanovna, a tall, dignified older lady. She had a northern accent with its very pronounced, rounded "o's". The eldest son we nicknamed Absalom, because of his thick crop of hair and his endless quarrels with his father. He was a university student and related to his father with a distinct feeling of his own superiority. The second son was a surveyor, and there was a daughter who was a student. All of them loved their father dearly, but little did they understand him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS: ORTHODOXY'S WARRIOR

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

† † †

Apolytikion

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

Kontakion

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



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.

Once in Thera (Santorini), on the day of the commemoration of St. Gregory Palamas (on 2nd Sunday of the Great Fast), some Latins were sailing on a certain boat for recreation. They placed their children on a separate boat, who then began to clap their hands saying: "Anathema to Palamas! If Palamas is a Saint, then let him drown us." With such things were the little Franks blaspheming, and O the strange wonder, my brethren! O the Saintliness and the boldness before God of divine Gregory! At the same time as they were uttering their blasphemies, without a single disturbance of the waters, and in calm weather, the boat sunk together with all those who were in it. This happened for the blasphemy they uttered, saying: "If he is a Saint, let him drown us." And while the bodies of the blasphemers sunk in the ocean, their profane souls sunk into the eternal fires of hell, confirming the sainthood of divine Gregory.
Nektarios, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1660-1669)

THE LIFE IN CHRIST

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



The sacred task that faces Orthodoxy today, and in particular its youth, who are often lost in the liberalism of past generations, is the rediscovery of the Paschal victory in the daily life of the Church.

The common faith and worship of the Apostles and the Fathers remains essentially unchanged in our liturgical and canonical books, but in practice, in the spirit of clergy and faithful, there is great confusion, no doubt due to a lack of spiritual understanding of the very nature of the work of Christ in the Church. Thus, many people who claim to be Orthodox and who sincerely want to be, conceive of the life of the Church according to vague personal sentiments and not according to the spirit of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church. What is lacking is a living acceptance (*acceptation vivante*) that presupposes the sacramental life of the Church.

This lack of understanding explains to a large extent the weaknesses of the Church in the Western world and, in particular, characterizes its attitude toward various schisms and heresies. Those who cannot understand that *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God* (Rom 8:16) cannot preach the truth, but must ask themselves the question: Are not they themselves outside the Truth and, therefore, dead members of the Church?

Presuppositions of Sacramental Life

In contrast to most Western religions that generally accept death as a normal phenomenon, or even regard it as a result of a legal decision of God to punish the sinner, the Patristic Tradition of the [Christian] East takes very seriously the fact that *death is intrinsically linked to sin* (I Cor 15:56) and that it is *under the power of the Devil* (Heb 2:14). The Fathers of the [Christian] East rejected the idea that God is the author of death, that the world is “normal” in its current condition, and that man can live a “normal” life solely based on following natural laws that are assumed to govern the universe.

The Orthodox conception of the universe is incompatible with a static system of natural moral laws. The world is, on the contrary, seen as a field of action and struggle of living persons. A living and personal God is the originator of creation in its entirety. His omnipresence does not exclude, however, other wills, themselves established by Him even with the power to dismiss the will of their Creator. Thus, the Devil is not only able to exist, but also to aspire to the de-

struction of works of God. He does this by trying to lure the creation toward the nothingness from which it was formed. Death, which is a *return to nothingness* (St. Athanasius, *Incarnatio Verbi*, 4-5), constitutes the very essence of *demonic power in creation* (Rom 8:19-22). The resurrection of Christ in the very reality of *his flesh and his bones* (Lk 24:39) not only serves as proof of the “abnormal” character of death, but also designates it as *the true enemy* (I Cor 15:26). But if death is an abnormal phenomenon, there can be nothing resembling a “moral law” inherent in the universe. The Bible, at least, does not know of one (Rom 8:19-22). Otherwise, the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself in vain *for our sins so that we might uproot this present evil age*.

The destiny of man has been perfection since his origin, and is the same today: to *become perfect, as God is perfect* (Eph 5:1, 4:13). The achievement of this perfection was rendered impossible by the *coming of death into the world* (Rom 5:12), for *the sting of death is sin* (I Cor 15:56). Once submitted to the power of death, man can only concern himself with the *sufficiency of the flesh* (Rom 7:14-25). His instinct for *self-preservation* saturates his everyday life and often leads him to be unfair to others for personal gain (I Thes 4:4). A man subjected to the *fear of death* (Heb 2:15) cannot live the life of love of the Creator and be an *imitator of God* (Eph 5:1). Death and the instinct for self-preservation are at the root of sin that separates man from unity in love, life, and divine truth.

According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, death is the enemy that prevents man from loving God and neighbor without anxiety or concern for his own security and his own comfort. For fear of becoming valueless and meaningless, man seeks to demonstrate to himself and to others that he is really worth something. He is then obliged to make himself appear, at least from a certain point of view, superior to others. He loves those who flatter him and hates those who insult him. An insult profoundly affects a man who is afraid of becoming insignificant! Whoever the world sees as a “natural man” almost always lives a life of half-lies and of disappointments. He *cannot love his friends* who give him a sense of security, while his instinct for self-preservation, both moral and physical, causes him to *hate his enemies* (Mt 5:46-48; Lk 6:32-36).

Death is the source of individualism: it has the power to enslave the free will of man completely to the *body of death* (Rom 7:18). It is death which, by reducing mankind to self-centeredness and egotism, blinds men to the truth. And the truth is rejected by many, because it is too difficult to accept. Man always prefers to accept a truth that satisfies his personal desires. Mankind seeks security and happiness rather than the *sufferance of a love* that is a self-offering (Phil 1:27-29). The natural man seeks a sentimental religion of security in moral precepts and simple rules that generate feelings of comfort, but require no effort at self-denial in *death with Christ to the elements of the world*. (Col 2:20). The Apostles and Fathers

do not transmit to us a faith accomplished in *feelings of piety or comfort*. Instead, on every page they raise a cry of victory over death and corruption. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is your victory? ... Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (I Cor 15:55-57).

The victory of Christ over the devil *has destroyed the power of death* that separated man from God and neighbor (Eph 2:13-22). This victory over death and corruption has been accomplished *in the flesh of Christ* (ibid. 2:15), as well as among the just ones who have died before (I Pet 3:19). *Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.* (Paschal Hymn). *The Kingdom of God is already established*, both beyond the grave and on this side of it (Eph 2:19). *The gates of hell cannot prevail over the Body of Christ* (Mt 16:18). The power of death cannot seize the kingdom of life. Each day the Devil and his kingdom moves a little closer to their *final defeat* (I Cor 15:26), which is assured in the Body of Christ.

Sacramental Participation in the Victory of the Cross

Participation in the *victory of the Cross* is not only a hope for the future, but a present reality (Eph 2:13-22). It is given to those who are *baptized* (Rom 6:3-4) and grafted into the *Body of Christ* (Jn 15:1-8). There is nevertheless no magical guarantee of salvation and of continued participation in the *life of Christ* (Rom 9:19-20).

Christ came to destroy the power of disunity, uniting those who believe in him in his own Body. The external sign of the Church is *unity of love* (Jn 17:21), while the center and the source of this unity is the Eucharist: *Since there is one bread, we who are several, are one body, because we are all part of one Bread.* (I Cor 6:19-20). Baptism and Chrismation grafts us to the Body of Christ, while the Eucharist keeps us alive in Christ and united with each other by the *inhabitation of the Holy Spirit in our body* (I Cor 6:19-20). Faith is insufficient for salvation. The catechumens who were already “believers” had to stay vigilant before receiving baptism in rejecting anything that the world sees as “normal life” in the corrupt body of sin and death, to be resurrected in the unity of the Spirit, that is to say, to be united with other members of a local community in Christ and the communal life of love. Orthodoxy knows nothing of a sentimental love for humanity. It is with concrete individuals that we must be united to live in Christ. The only way that leads to the love of Christ is that of a real love for others. *I tell you the truth, whenever you have done these things to one of these, my brethren, it is to me that you have done them.* (Mt 15:20).

Love in the Body of Christ does not consist in vague abstractions expressing the need to serve ideologies or human causes. Love, according to the image of Christ, consists in being crucified to the world and is the liberation of the self from all vague ideas in order to live in the complexity of communal

life, seeking to love Christ in the body of brethren who have a very real existence. It is easy to talk about love and goodness, but it is very difficult to enter into sincere and intimate relationships with people of diverse origins. It is, however, the death and resurrection in Christ that has established a community of saints who think not of themselves, nor of their own opinions, but continually express their love for Christ and other men, seeking to humble themselves as Christ was humiliated. What was not possible under the law of death has become possible through unity in the Spirit of life.

How We Today Achieve the Victory of the Cross

Throughout its history, the Church has had to fight sin and corruption within its own members, and often within its clergy. However, in every epoch, She knew how to implement the appropriate means, as She always remained able to recognize the enemy. The Church exists in the truth not because all its members are without sin, but because the sacramental life is always present in Her and against Her the Devil is defenseless. *When you often assemble in one place, the power of Satan is destroyed.* (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians, 13).

Whenever members of a community gather to celebrate the Eucharist and are in the condition to exchange the kiss of peace to commune together in the Body and Blood of Christ, the devil is defeated. However, when a member of the Body of Christ communes unworthily, *he eats and drinks damnation* (I Cor 11:29). When a Christian does not commune at all with the Body and Blood of Christ in every Eucharist, he is *spiritually dead* (Jn 6:53). The Church has categorically refused to endorse the practice whereby a large number of Christians attend the Eucharist, while a few commune. Guidance, participation in prayer and communion are inseparable (7th Apostolic Canon; St. John Chrysostom, 3rd Homily On Ephesians). *Let no one be deceived: if somebody is outside the sanctuary, he is deprived of the Bread of God... he who does not gather together with the Church has shown his pride and has condemned himself.* (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Eph. 5).

The Biblical and Patristic tradition is unanimous on one point: The one who is a living member of the Body of Christ is one who is dead to the power of death and who lives in the renewal of the Spirit of life. For this very reason, those who denied Christ during persecution, even after hours of torture, were considered excommunicated. Once a Christian died with Christ in baptism, he was expected to be ready to die anytime in the name of Christ. *Whoever denies me before men I will deny also before my Father in heaven.* (Mt 10:33). The 10th Canon of the First Ecumenical Council does not merely prohibit the ordination of anyone who has denied Christ during the persecution, but declares the automatic invalidation of any such ordination, even if it took place in

ignorance of the ordainer. All who have performed such an ordination are themselves deprived of the priesthood.

What serious breakers of the vows of baptism are those who are too lazy to go to church. The approval that our clergy today gives our sacramental practice is even more unacceptable! If the Christian was excommunicated for having denied Christ after hours of physical torture, those who week after week excommunicate themselves are all the more condemnable.

The character and methods of the Devil have not changed. He has remained similar to himself, as Paul described, capable of *transforming into an angel of light*. (2 Cor 11:15). The power of death in the world remains the same. The means of salvation, the death of baptism and the life of the Eucharist, have thus remained the same (at least in the liturgical books of the Church). The canons of the Church were never changed. We always read the same Scriptures approved by the Fathers. How then can we explain our modern weaknesses? They have never been so evident.

There can be only one answer to this question. The members of the Church are not fighting evil in the spirit of the Bible. Too many Christians employ the Church for their own interests and interpret the doctrine of Christ according to their own feelings. The essential task of the Orthodox youth today must be to return to the truth of the Apostles and the Fathers and to not walk according to the laws of the prince of darkness and the elements of this world. It is for this reason that Christ died. To deny this is to deny his Cross and the blood of martyrs.

Before criticizing the “inflexibility” of patristic doctrine, the modern Orthodox must return to the presuppositions of life in Christ in Scripture and be careful not to pervert the doctrine of Christ.



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

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

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

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

A LITTLE GIRL’S DREAM

By Galina Deinitzina.

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

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

“You just wait. I’ll show you.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where am I?” asked Natasha shyly.

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

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

“Where is my flower?” whispered Natasha.

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

“Why are you crying?” Inquired the Lady.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros (+1980)

THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE CHURCH

By New Martyr Patriarch Tikhon.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

St. John Chrysostom

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Source: Palladius, Historia Lausiaca.

There was a presbyter who was discerning. While coming into the church to complete the synaxis, he saw a number of demons outside the cell of one of the brothers. Some had taken the form of women who were speaking indecently, and others of blasphemous youths; others were dancing while still others were trying on different outfits.

The old man sighed and said, "The brother persists in negligence in every way, and because of it the wicked spirits surround his cell in this disorderly manner." Therefore, when he had completed the synaxis, he returned and entered the cell of the brother, and said to him, "I am suffering, brother. I have faith in you, and if you pray for me, God will completely relieve my heart from suffering."

The disciple was ashamed, and said, "Father, I am not worthy to pray for you." The old man persisted, pleading and saying, "I will not leave unless you promise me that you will say one prayer for me every night." The brother obeyed the old man's command. The old man did this because he wanted a new way to ensure that the brother would pray at night.

Therefore, when the brother rose in the night, he said the prayer for the old man. After finishing the prayer, he was struck with contrition, and said to himself, "Wretched soul, you pray for the old man, but you do not pray for yourself." Therefore he offered one prayer for himself. He did this for a week, offering two prayers each night, one for the old man and one for himself.

On Sunday, while the old man was going to the church, he saw the demons once again standing outside the brother's cell, looking glum, and the old man knew that the demons were grieved because the brother prayed. He was filled with joy and went to the brother, saying, "Have charity and offer another prayer for me each night." After saying the two prayers for the old man, he was struck again with contrition, and said to himself, "O miserable one, offer another prayer for yourself."

He did this for a whole week, offering four prayers each night. When the old man came again, he saw the demons glum and silent, and gave thanks to God, and went in again to the brother and urged him to offer another prayer for him. The brother also offered one for himself, and said six prayers at night.

When the old man came again to the brother, the demons were angry with the old man, furious about the salvation of the brother. The old man gave glory to God and after entering his cell and exhorting him not to be negligent but the pray unceasingly, let him alone. The demons, seeing the brother's perseverance in the prayers and in soberness, by the grace of God left him.

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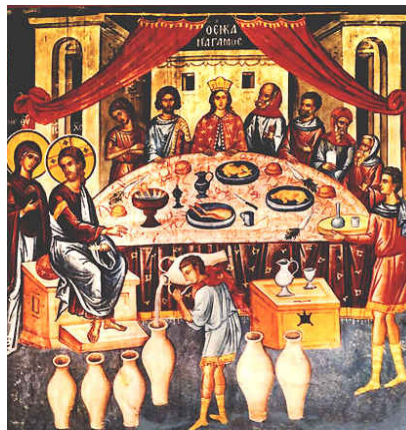
THE TWO-FOLD GREAT MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

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

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

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



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

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

O my brethren, this is a great mystery! It is revealed to us according to the measure of our love toward Christ and of our fear of Christ's judgment.

O Lord, Gentle Savior, cleanse us, save us and adorn our souls that we may be worthy of the immortal and indescribable unity with You in time and in eternity.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.