

# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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## ON THE APPEARANCE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

By Pouplios Lantoulos & St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite.

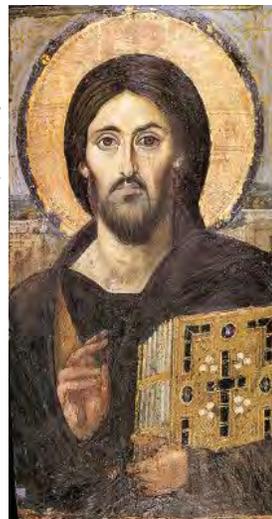
*From the Editor: The subject article is one that we published in our first issue, back in January, 2003. We consider its content to be of immense value for all of us who quite often, succumbing to the weaknesses of our fallen nature, wonder what our Lord and Savior truly looked like and what his contemporaries thought of Him. Our readership has significantly changed over that last eight years and as such, we take the liberty of re-publishing this intriguing article on the appearance of our Lord and Savior.*



Concerning the God-man, the Son and Logos of God, the Evangelists and Apostles wrote about His works in the world in the Divine Gospels. They recorded the accounts of His transfiguration, His crucifixion, His resurrection and His ascension up to heaven. But there were many other private individuals of that period, not followers of Christ, who wrote a more detailed account concerning the life of the Lord. One who wrote about the character, appearances, form and figure of Christ which is worthy of mention, is the Roman Pouplios Lantoulos, who lived during the days of our Lord, residing in Jerusalem at that time. He wrote a letter to the Roman senate which is as follows:

“In those days there appeared a young man, who is still living, a youth that has great power and whose name is Jesus Christ. His populace calls Him a strong

prophet and His disciples call Him Son of God. He raised the dead to life; and cures the sick of every type of disease. The youth is tall but well proportioned. The countenance of His face is both serious and active, so that those who look at Him love Him, and yet in another way, they are afraid of Him. The hair on His head is the color of wine down to the beginning of His ears, lacking brilliance. It is smooth from the beginning of His ears to His shoulders, then twisted and brilliant from the shoulders down, where it hangs divided according to the custom of the Nazarenes. His forehead is smooth and clean, His face, without blemish, decorated with a light pink color. His appearance is polite and joyful, His nose and mouth are altogether blameless. His beard is thick being of the same color as His hair, and is also divided in two, while His eyes are blue and filled with extreme brilliance. When He scolds He is fearful; when He teaches and advises, He is attractive



and beloved. Wonder is the grace of His face and dignified. Not once was He seen laughing, but He was often seen crying. According to the height of His body, His hands being very straight and His arms graceful, and according to His generation, **He is the nicest of all men.**”

St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, in “A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel, the Classics of Western Spirituality Proper Delights of the Mind,” addresses the great delight of envisioning the physical appearance of Christ.

“Let me say this too. Even the mere envision of the physical appearance and the beauty of the divine face of Jesus brings inexpressible delight so that you

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

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will want to say enthusiastically: *You are all sweetness, O Savior; You are all desire and appeal; You are all insatiate; You are all beauty irresistible.* Also you will want to say: *You have attracted me with desire, O Christ, and You have transfigured me with your divine love.* Moreover, you will want to say with St. Paul: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* (Rom 8:35) Also you will want to ask the question of the bride: *Have you seen him whom my soul loves?* (Cant 3:3) And you will want to say many other words of love.

Think of those most pure eyes of Jesus, so calm, so sweet; the straightness of His nose; the somewhat chestnut-colored and at the same time golden hair and beard of His; His great and joyous forehead; the blended color of His calm and royal face; His fine, long fingers and his perfectly shaped hands; His moderate stature, and simply all of the other symmetry and grace, which shone in all His members. Jesus was so beautiful that, as Lentulus, that officer who had seen the Lord with his own eyes in Jerusalem, wrote to the senate in Rome, **there has never appeared on earth another person more beautiful than Jesus.** Foreseeing this beauty, prophet David wrote: *You are the most beautiful of the sons of men.* (Pss 45:2). Aquila rendered this line, *You are adorned with beauty by the sons of men.* Symmachus rendered it: *Among the sons of men You are good in beauty.* The bride in the Song speaks lovingly to Him: *Behold, You are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely* (Cant 1:16) This is why the people could not be satisfied when looking upon Him, nor did they want to take their attention away from Him.

St. John Chrysostom explaining this passage *When Jesus saw great crowds around Him* (Mt 8:18), wrote: *"The people were really attracted to Him and they loved Him and marveled at Him, desiring always to be looking upon Him. Who would*

*want to leave while He was doing these marvelous deeds? Who would not want to simply get a glance at the face and the mouth that as saying such wonderful things? He was not so wonderful only when He was doing wonders, but even when He was just looked upon, simply He was just full of grace.* This is what the prophet David meant when he said that *He was the most beautiful among the sons of man.*

Now if the physical body of sweetest Jesus was so beautiful then when He was bearing a corruptible body, how much more beautiful is it now that it has become incorruptible and glorified and His divine face is shining in heaven infinitely more brightly than the sun? This is why St. John Chrysostom has sought with his eloquent homilies to move us to do everything we can so that we may achieve and enjoy the most sweet vision of the glorified and most beautiful and most desired divine face of Jesus. For if one is to be deprived of the vision of that most beautiful and most desired face of Jesus, this is truly a worse calamity than a thousand hells. For as St. John Chrysostom wrote:

**Even if we experience a thousand hells, none of these will be anything like the experience of seeing the calm face of Jesus and His serene eyes turn away from us as being unable to endure looking upon us."**



**A** man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemn-  
ing others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

Abba Poimen the(+450)

## THE SECOND COMING AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RESURRECTED BODIES

*From the book "Saint Symeon, the New Theologian" by Niketas Stethatos.*

One day, while he (Saint Symeon) was saying his prayers with a pure heart and conversing with God, he noticed that the air began to illuminate his mind; although he remained in his cell, he began to feel as though he was somehow transported within an open space. It was dark outside, the night was already at hand, when a radiance suddenly began to glow from up high, just like the morning light at dawn. What a truly scary vision befell the poor man! And his living quarters—along with everything in them—vanished completely from sight, making him believe that he was not inside his cell.

He was absolutely overwhelmed by a divine ecstasy, and was fully aware of that light with his mind, as it approached him. The light grew steadily stronger, and made the air seem even brighter than before, and he felt that his entire self—along with his body—had now gone beyond all worldly things.

But, because that light continued to shine more and more, making it seem like a sun shining at mid-day, he felt as though he were actually standing inside that light, and that his entire being, together with his body, was filled with joy and tears, that were generated by the sweetness of that light's presence. He also observed that the same light, in some wondrous kind of way, came in contact with his body, and gradually permeated its members. The surprise brought about by this vision drew him away from the previous state of theory and left him feeling only this exquisite sensation that was taking place inside him. He watched as that light slowly penetrated his entire body, his heart and his inner most depths, making his whole existence like a fire and light.

And just as with his living quarters, so did he now lose every sense of form, of place, of weight and of bodily shape, and his tears ceased to fall. Then he heard a voice from within the light, saying to him: *It has been decided, that in this same manner shall the Saints be transformed, who will be living and will still be here, during the hour of the final trumpet, and thus transformed, they will be taken up to the heavens, just as the Apostle Paul says.*

After remaining in this state for many hours, the blessed Symeon in his secret and incessant praise to the Lord, and fully comprehending the glory that had enfolded him, as well as the eternal bliss that was to be bestowed on the Saints, began to wonder and ask himself: "Will I ever return to the previous condition of my body, or shall I live like this continuously?" No sooner had he made this thought, than he immediately began to feel that he was moving

about with his body like a shadow or a spirit. He realized that he had become (as we said, with his body as well) a light without a form; something entirely incorporeal. He continued to feel that he possessed a body, yet without its material dimensions, and more like a spiritual one. In other words, he felt as though he lacked all weight or mass whatsoever, and was amazed, how he could have a body and yet seem bodiless.

And the light that spoke inside him, said to him once again: *Thus will all the Saints be enrobed without the flesh after the resurrection, in the future age, with spiritual bodies that are either lighter and finer and more ethereal, or, denser and heavier and more earthen, which will be the determining factor for each one with regard to their stance, their order and their closeness to God.*

After hearing these things, and having seen the inexpressible divine light, the God-sighting and God-possessed Symeon thanked God, Who glorified our species and made it to partake of divinity and His kingdom, and returned once again to his former state, and found himself again inside his cell, in his previous, human condition. However, he reassured with oaths all those whom he trusted to reveal his secrets, that "for many days after, I could still feel that lightness of body, without feeling any exertion, or hunger, or thirst."

Given that he partook of these things in the Spirit and was filled with the divine charismas of the Spirit (and of course having fully cleared his mind of all impurities), he was given to see such visions and breathtaking revelations by the Lord, as had the Prophets of old.

Thus, with his apostolic mindset (because his existence was guided and moved by the divine Spirit) he was also given the orator's charisma, hence whenever words came forth from his mouth—albeit illiterate—he also theologized. With his divinely inspired writings, he teaches the faithful the precision of the pious lifestyle. Having reached spiritual heights such as these, he began to compose ascetic essays, set out in chapters according to the various virtues and the vices that contravened them, by drawing from his own personal ascetic life and the divine knowledge that was bestowed on him, and describing in detail the monastic life for those who practice it, thus becoming to the Israelite nation of monkhood a river of God, full of spiritual waters.

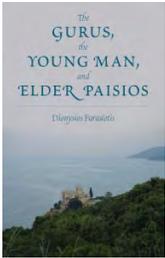


Being slain for the sake of one's brethren is the best possible weapon for delivering them from servitude to the traducer, the devil, and preparing their souls to accept God, Who desires the salvation of all.

**Righteous Elder Sophrony of Essex (+1993)**

## EXPERIENCING GOD

From the book *"The Gurus, the Young Man, and Elder Paisios,"* by Dionysios Farasiotis.



Once I had the great honor and blessing to transport elder Paisios somewhere with my car. In the presence of his great simplicity and humility, I would forget myself and be swayed into an improper familiarity. I could see before me my father and would forget that God permanently dwelt within him. I would forget that he had realized to the uttermost degree the capabilities of human nature and that he had become a god-bearer. I would forget that through his words, he would chase out the demons; that with one word from him, incurable illnesses disappeared; that his face shone like the sun before my eyes; that with unending gifts, he had been honored and adorned by the Holy Spirit, the Grace of God.

I know well all these things, these amazing memories, and I guard them deeply within the depths of my soul and ask God with agony and tears to not ever let my raging enemy, the Devil, steal them from me. And nevertheless, when I was with the elder, many times his simple and unpretentious behavior, full of kindness and humor, would sway me to impolite familiarity; from such familiarity I would slide down to rudeness and audacity, and I thus open my mouth with all my senselessness and my stupidity. And once, during such a moment, I asked him.

“Elder, tell me about God, speak to me, how is he?”

The elder did not speak and I continued to drive, on curvy roads further down on the mountain.

My God! I began suddenly feeling God everywhere. In the car, outside on the mountains, far in the distant galaxies. He was everywhere, He filled everything, but He was nothing of all of these things. An Essence which pierced through all the other ones, without getting mixed up or being confused with these. A Power present everywhere, which nevertheless no one perceives, outside of every viewpoint. Someone cannot discover It with his own ... haughty effort. A Power which only is self revealed. All these mountains, stars, trees, people, existed and were maintained alive thanks to His power. He could in one moment annihilate them, for them to cease existing without noise or thunder or resistance. Just as we turn the switch and in one moment the light disappears.

He’s so almighty and nevertheless so courteous. He does not pressure anyone with his Almightyness or his Presence. He is so near us and so invisible simultaneously, so that we do not feel any burden, some obligation from His presence alone. So that He does not burden us at all, to not create any obligation to us, to leave us completely free, to do whatever

we want. Not for us to be forced by His beauty to some degree. He could easily impose His love, not with fears and power and strength, but simply with the sweetness of His presence, which no one could resist. Yet, He does not do it, out of an infinite..., incomprehensible respect for man’s freedom. He does not do it, out of love for man. He loves us so much, He desires us so strongly that His innards are burned, out of desire and love for us. For this reason He limits Himself, He disappears from our perception and tries in a thousand ways, with infinite wisdom with dreadful attention and interest, as a “raging” lover to draw us to His love. To wake us up, to motivate our interest, to make us understand and love Him.

He sits and occupies Himself with each one of us personally, and simultaneously with the whole universe, the infinitely powerful one. And because He has interest for this infinite universe, the love and interest He has for each one of us personally is not lessened not even to the slightest degree, does not subside even in thought.

God wants our love. He does not demand it. Love is an emotion which is born and lives only in the air of freedom; outside of such freedom, it ceases to exist, it is perverted, altered, it dies. For this reason, God leaves us completely free to gain our love, which can be born only in this freedom.

What is that we have which “makes” God love us? Some beauty, some immense intelligence, some power, some virtue? Nothing of this sort! We are non-existent before Him and His gifts. And not only do we not have anything worthy of such love, but we also have so many things which reek an offensive odor, push away and strongly urge all to turn away from us and to dislike us. We are fainthearted to His generosity. We are of very slight intelligence before His vast intellect. Wicked before His goodness. Grabbers, at the moment when He wholeheartedly offers. That which He grants us richly, overflowing, we rush to grab. We respond to His kindness with grabbing and mockery. Ungrateful to His benefactions. Haughty in behavior before His Almightyness. Sly and insufficient before His Wisdom.

He wants to grant us His Grace, He wants to give us beauty, life, wisdom, power. We do not want to take them as gifts. Our ego destroys them, our pride makes them filthy. We cannot keep any of His gifts due to our evil disposition. And if a reminiscence of these holy gifts remains in our soul, we immediately get puffed up from pride, as if we obtained them on our own and through our miserable existence and value, as if it is not a gift, without toil. We lift up our eyebrow and look down upon our neighbor. The gift is lifted up and reeks a foul odor from our soul. God opposes the prideful, while to the humble He gives grace: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* (Jas 1:17).

What more can I say? Where should I stop? A big bunch of horribleness we are. Our fallen human nature, which voluntarily remains fallen and sunk in the filth of the passions, only regurgitation and asphyxiation it calls forth from its filth.

As the prophet Isaiah says (Isa 1:5-6), ... *the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.* It refers to man's wound which is rotting, the deep wound which man has wholly, from his head to his fingernails; he is one continuous wound. Where and how should one apply a gauze? Where is the medicine? Only through God Himself. Christ was needed to restore us to our beginnings, through His birth and Holy Passion; he restored our nature which voluntarily and with rage was destroyed through our own free will. He arrived in this world, out of kindness and pure love to reform us back to our beginning.

This is human nature today. It was not thus always. We were not created thus, we ended up thus. Our choices formulated us accordingly. We constantly choose evil and thus destroy ourselves. And whereas we were created beautiful, bright, almighty, wise and honored, dominating the material world, immortal, we ended up today mortal, dark, subject to the needs of material life, to pain, to illness, to affliction, to corruption, to death. We do not have knowledge, we do not have wisdom; as blind people we go about in the world, we rip and fall and are wounded and don't know where we tripped. Our ancient enemy ensures we fall; he puts up obstacles to trip us and he tries to throw us into wild valleys and to kill us, so that he can laugh mockingly and celebrate in his wickedness. He is the man hater, the inventor of wickedness, the father of falsehood, the ancient dragon, our very ancient enemy, the devil.

And God loves us. He still loves us. With a love which burns, with a love which trembles with longing, with a love which overlooks the pain which we cause Him, with a love which accepts to enter into our toil, which accepts to suffer from the craziness of our evil. O my God! How much pain do we cause you! God loved us so much, that He accepted to become a man. He moderated His majesty in our humility. He accepted to ascend on the Cross. He accepted to leave the devil with his sly plots to put Him up on the Cross and there, to crush the head of the snake. Henceforth we can

defeat the devil whenever we want. And all these for our sake. For me and for you.

I continued feeling God and comprehending Him with my heart. A deep calmness flooded my existence. Every fear was annihilated. Since the Almighty God exists, since He knows everything, since He is so good, since He is so wise, since He loves me so much, what should I fear? I am in His embrace! I am in His palm. Who can do anything to me? I was certain of the beginning, the course of man's existence, and the end of the world. I rejoiced, because in the end, as always, He will be the victor, and His kindness and holiness will triumph.

God is Spirit! The world is matter. The spirit surpasses matter, supports it in existence, brings it into existence, maintains it in existence, however it is completely different from matter. Matter is destined to disappear. The spirit always exists. Time is a result, a qualitative characteristic of matter. In the matter the spirit exists and time does not exist. Eternity is the manner of existence of the Spirit. Past and future coincide in a vast present. It is simultaneously everywhere from the infinite universe and in my car.

He is very simple in nature, however so mysterious. How deeply my soul was satisfied! How much I rejoiced! How much I was comforted! How much do I want to re-live it again! I rejoice in the thought that when I die I will begin, I hope, to live near Him. So much that... I long to die. I would like to die today, if I knew that I would meet Him. I fear my sin, my evil deeds, that they might separate me from Him. And I remember from the writings of Saint John Damascene:

*We believe in one God, immaterial, unlimited, infinite, without beginning, eternal, almighty, immortal, timeless, noetic light...* (St. John Damascene, "Precise Exposition of the Orthodox Faith").

I don't think that this state lasted a long time. If I judge from the length of road that the car had traveled, I would say it was approximately 3-4 kilometers, albeit I was moving somewhat slowly due to the many curves.

I certainly was not the same before, as I am now that I am writing this passage. I had suffered a change... a very distinct change. Man is altered from many things. From alcohol, from narcotics, from pleasure, from the climate, from water, from pain, affliction, fear, however... this alteration... does not have its match. It is unique. I lived in a form of... ecstasy, a type of intoxication, without however having lost my senses



and my contact with the material world. A *vigilant intoxication* as the ancient ascetics and saints characterize it in their writings. It is as if someone pulled away a curtain from my mind, from my soul, and I began living in the same world on the one hand, but in the whole world, whereas first I lived in only a small part of it.

Imagine a deaf person who suddenly begins hearing. He lived in the same world, but without the sounds. Now he hears too. Imagine a blind person who suddenly begins seeing. The same world now has images and colors too.

So thus I had also lived in the same world before those apocalyptic moments; it is that I had just felt God, and within Him many deep, important, and beautiful things. I was suddenly a partaker of the material and of the spiritual world.

I imagine that this how people must have been in the old days; Adam and Eve in Paradise must have been even much better, because, as the Holy Scriptures inform us, they saw, heard and spoke with God. Human nature had not yet suffered the destruction which I have today. The sensorial spiritual instruments worked well. My own "spiritual eyes" no longer see. They are covered with the thick scales of my evil thoughts and deeds. "My spiritual ears" no longer hear. They are plugged up through the mud of my sin. "My spiritual language" is paralyzed through the sloth of my soul. I am wholly buried within the abundant filth of my passions.

Someone, the holy elder, took me out of this fallen state for just a moment, and I was able to live like a true human. Now, I have again returned to the life of a filthy and sick man, who is deaf, blind and senseless.

Do I truly desire, I wonder, to live in this upper, blessed state? If it was granted to me again, I would accept it joyfully. But now I also know the path to go there on my own. However, if I do not walk on this righteous path, then no one is at fault outside of me and my slothful nature. I know well, that, if I work in the vineyard of my Lord Jesus Christ, I will certainly arrive there. And is my job and task alone to keep His commandments. The keeping of the commandments produces a spiritual path. The soul must apply the needed effort and maintain the required discipline. Through the keeping of our Lord's the commandments, our soul learns many things and simultaneously is cleansed and the spiritual instruments begin to slowly function, bit by bit.

Unfortunately I am incapable of doing that which you might do. And it is for this reason that I am worthy of immense shame and responsible before the whole of humanity; for a great treasure was granted to me and I do not utilize it. This makes me a useless and ungrateful person. The only thing that remains for me to do is to ascertain it, to admit it, to confess it. I do not despair however, because I know of His mercy and love. I hope that one day I will honor his immense love ... perhaps a bit... sometime... with His help.

If I were truly a man with love of honor, with good disposition, I would be struggling now with fervor and zeal, as the elder does. Take note of something else, too. Did you pay attention to the generosity of the elder, who imitates God, our Lord Jesus Christ? What did I ask of him? A few words... How did he respond to my request? With a wholehearted fiery prayer, which moved God, and I the wretched one lived this incalculable experience. What wealth! What generosity! My God, please forgive me! How much must the elder love me to pray so fervently for me?

All these things I write without much toil, without much thought. I am not sitting to carefully construct my thoughts, or create "soap bubbles" of the mind without any meaningful content. Usually the people of our age work with their head. They sit, they think and think, pressure their mind, to produce thoughts and gain ideas and new knowledge.

Because they think the instrument of their knowledge is only their logic. And as they press their brains and logic, they become mixed up, compromised; some to a lesser extend, others much more; and then they run to the psychiatrists, seeking clarity and cures of the mind.

This is all the result of our ignorance and darkness; we are ignorant not only of the outer world but also of the inner world, of our own self. Within each one of us resides another instrument of knowledge: our faith. Through faith one lives many things. He lives them and does not think of them. Afterwards comes the mind, logic to arrange them, to make them thoughts, words, letters, whichever of these can become thoughts and words. Most things cannot be "translated" into human language. The soul is much more wealthy, deeply, penetrating and sensing than any words, in any language.

I pray that all of you will want to live these things. To not just read them, to think of them, to discuss them, to criticize them and to consume them. I pray that you will seek them in your life, as others seek money and glory. If you toil more than a merchant, if you show the same persistence as an athlete or dancer, I believe that you will all achieve them.

The Holy Mountain is a very good door to enter into Orthodoxy; but there also exist "Athonites" outside of the Holy Mountain, great spiritual fathers, people with gifts and love. And, equally, there exist non-Athonites, people outside of the Haghioritic Tradition, inside the Holy Mountain. Prayer, discernment and desire of the divine will be our guides: *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* (Mt 7:7).

I get frustrated and grieve that I cannot describe this experience of mine in its true essence. I read what I wrote in these pages and it does not present even closely the reality I was blessed to experience; not even one-thousandth! How can I describe it? How can I say how true, how deep, how intense, how calm it truly was? It was so joyous, so satisfying, so heal-

ing, so very tender and warm, friendly while also protective, life-giving and joyous and so many other things that words lose the ability to describe... I remember phrases from Christian ancient texts. *God becomes all things for those who love Him: he becomes nourishment, garment, comfort, consolation, knowledge, power... all things.*

Some moments later, I began telling the Elder these things that I was feeling. He was not speaking. And he did not want me to speak of them. He did not want me to realize that he was the cause. What was I, the lost and miserable soul, telling him? Come, dear father, let me to show you your vineyards?

Very slowly, little by little, it went out, it was lost, it pulled back... or rather my perception closed. The gift ended... they were gone... What was left behind? Gratitude, deep satisfaction, but also un-healable thirst for Him. How can a person simultaneously feel deeply satisfied but also grieve His absence? To be so joyous that he met Him, but also saddened that he lost Him?

How poor the yogis and the Gurus seem! How false! How wretched! Sunk in the most basic ignorance, deceived in false imaginations, they praise themselves and get puffed up for these things they know... for their experiences! But if you don't know God, then what do you know? If you don't possess the most basic, the most central thing, then what do you possess? They resemble those gypsies who dress themselves with flashy colors, with loud jewelry, in an ever-obnoxious manner, far from any type of color coordination and fashion. And once they dress so, they move around within their pseudo-aristocratic atmosphere, seeking praise, without any realization of the humiliation and shame they bring upon their own presence.

We have a God Who is a true aristocrat. We have a God Who gave us the right to call him Father. We have a God Who calls us His children. We have a God Who became Man for us, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is not ashamed not to call us, but to become our brother.

The poor yogis and the Gurus have nothing... Just false and lifeless idols, thousands of imaginary deities, theories and practices, which do not lead anywhere. They turn in the emptiness and don't encounter anything except the false sense and the delusion with which the devil keeps them imprisoned. Until he destroys them or makes them his instruments... both resulting in their eternal damnation...



**O**ur words are nothing other than images of what is going on in our souls.

Saint Gregory the Wonderworker

## THE GRACE OF HOLY ORTHODOX PRIESTHOOD

*Orthodox holy fathers discussing that grace acts take place even through unworthy priests.*

**G**race always belongs to God, and the Sacrament belongs to God, while to man (the performer of the Sacrament) belongs the ministry alone. If he is good, then he is in accord with God and acts with God; if he is bad, then through him God performs the visible form of the Sacrament, while He Himself grants the invisible grace. Think not that the Divine Sacraments depend on the morals of men and their actions: they are holy because of Him to Whom they belong.

Blessed Augustine

**I**t happens that laymen live in piety, while priests live in unrighteousness, and therefore, if grace were to seek everywhere only the worthy, neither Baptism nor the offering of the Body of Christ ought to be performed through them. But now the Lord usually acts even through the unworthy, and the grace of Baptism is not in the least injured by the life of the priest. I say this so that anyone strictly examining the life of a priest would not begin to be tempted, reasoning about what he performs in the Sacraments. For a man does not introduce anything from himself, but all this is the work of God's power, and God sanctifies you in the Sacraments.

Saint John Chrysostom

**W**orthy of faith is every [priest] (called) to purify thee, if only he be of the number of those who have received authority for this, who are not manifestly condemned and not alienated from the Church. Thou, who requirest treatment, judge not the judges, look not into the worthiness of those cleansing thee, make not a selection, looking at the parents. Even if one is better and another lower, still every one is higher than thee. Reason thus: there are two rings—one of gold and one of iron—and on both is engraved one and the same royal countenance, and by both are wax seals made. In what way does one seal differ from the other? In no way.

Identify the material on the wax, if thou art wiser than everyone; tell which impression is from the iron ring and which from the gold ring? And why are they identical? For although the material is different, but there is no difference in the seals. So too may every [priest] be a baptizer for thee, for even though one surpasses another by his life, but the force of Baptism is equal, and every [priest] who is instructed in the same faith can equally bring thee to perfection.

Saint Gregory the Theologian

## THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

By Fr. Victor Potapov, St. John the Baptist Russian Orthodox cathedral, Washington, DC.



Throughout the 40 days following the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ, Paschal chants sound within our churches and in the hearts of the faithful. The Risen Christ spent that period of time on earth, demonstrating to His disciples the reality of His Resurrection. But lo, that 40-day period draws to a close, and, the “leave-taking,” as it were, of the Feast of Pascha approaches.

In the vocabulary of the Church, the day of leave-taking is known as the *Apodosis of Pascha*. The service for the *Apodosis of Pascha* is celebrated in the brilliant white of Paschal vestments, illuminated by the light of the Paschal sun, with that same fullness of joy as on the first day of Pascha. And the Feast of the Ascension approaches; that day enters our lives as a spiritual reality: the day on which the Apostles and the Mother of God gathered around the Risen Savior for the last time, on the Mount of Olives; the day on which, while blessing them, He began his departure from the earth, and as St. Luke the Apostle tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, *and a cloud received Him out of their sight*.

Ordinary human consciousness, drawing only on the experience of earthly existence and its physical laws, can no more comprehend Christ’s Ascension than it could His Incarnation or His Glorious Resurrection from the dead. Even the disciples who saw the empty Tomb, who saw the Risen Christ, who witnessed His Ascension, had mixed feelings about everything they had seen. They vacillated between exaltation over the miracles they had witnessed and misunderstanding and doubt. Toward the end of the Gospel according to Matthew, we read that the 11 Disciples saw the Risen One in Galilee, *and when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted*. The laconic words of the Gospel say nothing about the nature of their doubts. But the Apostles’ doubt makes their state close to that feeling familiar to anyone striving to find a conscious and faith grounded in understanding.

The true, religious order, beyond wisdom, reveals itself to us in response to our effort to touch it, but only with the assistance of the grace of God, which heals the infirmities and fills what is growing scant. Only with the miracle of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles that took place ten days after the Savior’s Ascension, were the Apostles

completely freed from their doubts. We see them as fearless and untiring witnesses to, and preachers of, the Word, fearless even in the face of persecution and martyrdom. From a human perspective, they could have been expected to mourn upon their being parted from the Lord. Yet, in the Gospels it says that they *returned to Jerusalem with joy*.

Why did Christ, the Miracle Worker Who had conquered death, not remain on earth to lead and rule over His people? The reply is found in the Gospel according to John, which records for us Christ’s talk with His disciples before His Passion, and His High-priestly prayer to His Father. In speaking to his disciples about his coming departure from them, he had in mind not only His Passion and death on the Cross, but His Ascension to Heaven that was to follow.

As long as Christ was still on earth, the work of the salvation of man and all creation had not been accomplished. For Christ came so that those who are on earth might be united to the heavens and that end of that *podvig* (spiritual struggle, Ed.), which is for us unto salvation, is His Ascension. In it our human existence, having gone through the crucible of suffering, and shown that it is more powerful than death, is brought into the fullness of divine life; in His Ascension, Christ did not become dis-Embodied, dis-Incarnate. He remains forever, perfect God and perfect Man. By His earthly path in obedience to that Truth He had revealed to us, we can unite our life with His perfect and eternal existence, and thereby enter into the Kingdom of Glory which He revealed to us.

In His Ascension, Christ left the world different from what it was when the miracle of His entry into the world, His birth of the Most-pure Virgin Mary, took place. Most of the human race then remained in darkness, and only individual select prophets lived in hope and anticipation of the coming of the Savior and Messiah into the world. Now it was a different world, and a new people of God. That earth had witnessed the miracle of the birth in Bethlehem, had seen Christ’s Transfiguration, and had been illumined by the light of His Resurrection from the dead. It was for that reason that Christ ascended, blessing that earth which He was leaving for a time, but from which He was henceforth to be eternally inseparable. Parting from Christ at His Ascension is at the same time a joyous anticipation of His victorious Second Coming!



Everything is beautiful in a person when he turns toward God, and everything is ugly when it is turned away from God.

Fr. Pavel Florensky (+1937)

## THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

Source: "Elder Cleopa of Sibastria: In the tradition of St. Paisius Velichkovsky," by Ioanichie Balan.

Emperor Nicephorus (Botaniates) of Constantinople reigned from 1078 until 1081. He had decided to build a cathedral that would be almost as grand as St. Sophia. When it was ready, the patriarch of Jerusalem, the patriarch of Alexandria as well as the patriarch of Constantinople were all invited to consecrate the beautiful new church built by the emperor. Announcements had been made about the consecration for several months in advance so that everyone would have time to travel to the great city of Constantinople; remember that during that time there were no cars, planes or trains. Everyone had to travel either in carts pulled by oxen, horses or donkeys, and those from great distances had to cross the sea in boats.

When Nicephorus' cathedral was ready to be consecrated there were three patriarchs, forty metropolitans, and thousands of priests present, since this was an imperial cathedral. Thousands of carts and wagons converged on the city as the faithful came from all around. Everyone brought something for the new cathedral: rugs, barrels of wine, oil, flour, candles, etc. Each person wanted to offer something!

At that time there was a widow named Anastasia who lived in Constantinople. For fifty years she had lived faithfully, going to church regularly and praying to God. She lived on the edge of the city, right along the road on which all the carts and wagons of people had to travel to reach the new church. But Anastasia was very poor. Her house was a dilapidated shack, she had no money, no oil, no flour, nothing that she could offer to the new church. As she saw so many oxen pulling wagons of people toward the new church, she decided to give an armful of grass to the poor animals, since she did possess a small sickle and a pitchfork.

The widow was poor in material things, but very rich in faith! During the winter months she would spin flax and wool for the people of the town, and in the summer she would take her sickle and glean in the fields after the harvesters had left, then she would wrap the wheat in a rug and beat it to make a little flour for herself. Thus, little by little, she was able to provide herself with some flour for her own meager needs. That is how poor this widow, Anastasia, was!

Poor though she was, she had a very merciful heart! What went through her mind as she saw the oxen pulling such heavy loads of goods for the celebration of the new church?

-I don't have any money, or rugs, or oil, nothing. But I can give the animals a little grass.

Still, she was afraid because she did not own land, so where would she get the grass without doing something wrong?

She took a big sack and went into a field where there was a kind of wild grass growing, called "couch-grass" (a perennial

grass that many consider a weed, Ed). She cut a lot of this grass, being careful not to damage the other crops that were growing, and put it into her sack, saying to herself,

- I will give the oxen some grass, even if it is not from my own land.

She took a walking stick and set off with the sack of grass toward the area near the church where many people had gathered. She found a pair of oxen who had finished eating the little bit of feed that had been set out for them; they were looking about for more food, still hungry, but there was none that they could reach.

Anastasia opened her sack of grass and put it in front of the oxen, saying,

-Lord, accept this bit of grass, and forgive me, for I have nothing to bring to the church consecration, and even this is not from my own land!

She wept as she said these words; then when the oxen had finished eating, she also went to the church for the consecration.

She was astounded at what she saw in the church: so many people and such rich adornments for the new temple! The church was prepared like a bride for a wedding with all the embellishments ready for the consecration that was to take place the following day. Anastasia went to an icon in the rear of the church, where women generally would stand; there the poor old woman, her face wrinkled with age, an old scarf on her head, the poorest of sandals on her feet and wearing a raggedy dress, knelt and prayed to the Lord, saying,

- Lord, forgive me, for I have not brought any kind of offering for the church! I have nothing. The emperor is a king on earth and will be great in heaven, but I am so poor and have no money, nothing to offer.

And as she prayed, her tears dropped to the ground.

Then Emperor Nicephorus, with all his entourage and servants, came into the church. His chief minister, Peter was his name, pointed to the dedication plaque—since in churches and monasteries that are historical monuments there are dedication plaques over the doors—and drew the emperor's attention to it. The plaque was made of marble and the golden inscription read "To the glory of the all holy Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, this holy church was built and provided for by me, the Emperor Nicephorus." The emperor fully approved of the way the inscription had been executed, since he was the one who had ordered it.

Thus, the emperor, empress and a crowd of generals and other officials went into the church to see how it was prepared for the big event of consecration the following day. Everything was in order: beautiful frescoes on the walls, icons with golden risas, fine covers for the icon stands and curtains at the royal doors, gold-embroidered vestments, chandeliers, holy vessels for the altar, Gospel book, everything was in perfect order.

While the dignitaries were inspecting everything in the church, the elderly widow Anastasia, who had given an armful of grass to the oxen, was weeping before the icons in the rear of the church. As she prayed, the angel of the Lord changed the inscription on the dedication plaque. The inscription, even more beautifully executed now read, "To the glory of the all holy Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, this holy church was built and provided for by me, the widow Anastasia."

The people in the rear of the church saw the inscription and froze with fear. Before they had clearly read the emperor's name on the inscription. There were people all around, no scaffolding was in the church for someone to reach the plaque and change the writing; thus, no one could explain how this change had happened. The men read the inscription and began to talk among themselves.

- What! What does that say?

- What's there?

- Look, it says that a widow built this church!

- But just a moment ago when the emperor came in, it had his name on it.

- What will the emperor say when he sees this?

Those present were afraid to tell the emperor, so they called the head minister, Peter, and showed the inscription to him. Peter read the inscription and said,

- But this is a miracle! It's all right. I will tell the emperor!

The emperor listened to Peter. What a sight it was: the emperor and empress both had shining gold crowns on their heads and were dressed in all their royal garments, surrounded by soldiers.

- Your Majesty, come into the vestibule a moment.

The emperor came and looked at the plaque in amazement.

- But, when we came into the church, it was my inscription.

- I know that it was yours, Your Majesty. Everyone knows it was yours. But look at what is written there now!

- Oh! What a sinner I am! This is a great miracle! No one could have done this except God Himself! This is a wonderful miracle. I lost the church because I made it in my own pride. Now it has been given to a widow!

The emperor then called all his chief servants and told them,—This church is not to be consecrated until we find this widow! Once she is found, we will do the consecration in her name because she is greater before God than I am.

Then he gave the order to search throughout his entire empire for the widow Anastasia.

Now, it was God's will to reveal this mystery quickly, and He did so through another widow who was about the same age as the blessed Anastasia. This woman was in the crowd, but was not aware that Anastasia was also there. In all the commotion that was going on in the rear of the church, she asked

- What is the matter?

When someone told her that they were looking for a widow by the name of Anastasia, she said,

- I know Anastasia. She lives at the edge of town.

- What! You know her! Come here to the emperor!

The old woman told the emperor where the widow Anastasia lived, and he then immediately sent servants to find her and bring her to the church.

Servants, riders and horses quickly headed off to the edge of Constantinople to find Anastasia and bring her to the emperor. When they reached the place that the old woman had told them, they found some children playing.

- Do you children know where an old woman by the name of Anastasia lives?

One of the older children pointed and said,

- Anastasia lives over there, near the garden.

The men went to the house in the untilled garden. What did they find at the widow Anastasia's door? No lock. No bolts. No latch. When someone has nothing, they are not afraid of thieves. The door was held shut by a string tied onto a nail. It was obvious that the old woman was not home. The few belongings that she had were in plain sight, but there was nothing worth stealing. She had gone to the church for the consecration. The servants said to the children,

- The old woman, Anastasia, is not home.

- No. Anastasia left with an armful of grass to the farm market, the children answered, not knowing that she had gone to the church.

The generals and other men all returned to give their report to the emperor.

- Your Majesty, we went and found the small house on the edge of town. There were some children playing and they said that Anastasia is here, in this crowd, somewhere.

Someone who knew Anastasia heard this and said that she was in the church,

- She is praying to the Savior!

- If she is in church, tell her not to be afraid, since she has never met me, said the emperor. Send some elderly women to her to tell her that at the consecration of the church the emperor is going to make a gift of a cow to all the old women.

Following the emperor's order, they found the elderly Anastasia and brought her before the emperor who said, 'Don't be afraid, Anastasia. You have been found worthy of a great blessing from God! What offering did you bring this morning for the consecration of the church?'

- I did not bring anything, Your Majesty, because I am so poor! She did not consider the armful of grass that she'd given the oxen as any kind of offering.

- 'Please, think, dear Anastasia. You must have brought a great gift because my church has been given to you!'

- I didn't bring any gift because I have no money. I have nothing! All I have is a sickle and a pitchfork. During the winter

I spin wool for people, and in the summer I use the sickle to glean after the harvesters. I manage to get a little wheat from what I glean. Aside from that, I have nothing.

- This is an imperial church and I spent a fortune from my own gold and silver to build it; but look at the inscription that says it was made by Anastasia! What did you give to this church?

- I didn't give anything except for an armful of grass to a yoke of oxen.

- Don't be afraid, Anastasia. The inscription was done by God, not you. God Himself wrote that this church is yours!

And there it was on the inscription, To the glory of the all holy Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, this holy church was built and provided for by me, the widow Anastasia. The men had to read it to her, since she was illiterate.

- You see, dear woman, you say that you did not bring anything, but remember that you did bring an armful of grass!

- I did bring that, but it was not a real offering from me since I cut it from someone else's field.

- Look, Anastasia, your armful of grass was more precious than all the treasures that I gave. See, the angel of the Lord has put the church in your name and it will remain yours forever. We will consecrate the church with all these patriarchs, with all the pomp and celebration as we planned, but the church will be Anastasia's forever. The church will be consecrated with your name since the angel has written that both in heaven and here.

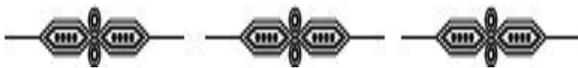
The poor widow was astounded and exclaimed,

- What a miracle!

When the blessed Anastasia from Constantinople died, the emperor buried her in the holy altar, with an inscription above her tomb, **Here, in the church that God miraculously gave her, is buried the widow Anastasia.**

An armful of grass, given in the name of the Lord with humility and a sorrowful heart far surpasses all the wealth of the Emperor Nicephorus. That is what God desires!

St. Ephraim the Syrian says, *God does not look upon the quantity of offerings that you make, but the heart with which you bring these offerings.* However small your offering may be, give it with humility and a sorrowful heart that you cannot offer more. That is true almsgiving.



When holy peace reigns in my soul, then surely the King of Peace dwells within me, the Lord Jesus Christ, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, and then especially I ought to be full of feelings of gratitude to the Lord of Peace, and endeavor with all my strength to preserve this peace within me by means of fervent prayer and by abstaining from every sin, both inward and outward.

**Saint John of Kronstadt**

## LET US HELP THE YOUTH TO FOLLOW THEIR CALLING

*By Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite, from "Family Life."*

The Good God created man free. He is nobly unimposing. He respects man's freedom, freely leaving each person to follow that path which brings him or her comfort. He does not force everyone to stand in the same line with military discipline. For that reason, we should leave youths to themselves, without restraint, in the spiritual realm of their God-given freedom. They are not helped by constant questioning about which life (i.e., married or monastic) they will follow. This is a topic in which they should not be influenced by anyone. Each person has his or her calling.

Again, the parents, the spiritual fathers, the educators, should help youths to choose whichever life is most suitable for them, and to follow that path to which they are truly called, without influencing or hindering their calling. Their choice should be their own. The rest of us should only express our humble opinions. Our only right is to help these souls find their path.

Sometimes when I speak with youths who are troubled by this topic, although I see towards which path the scale tilts I don't tell them, so as not to influence them. I only try, as much as I am able, to do that which helps them find the right path and inner peace. I take away anything harmful from whatever it is they enjoy and find rest within—thus leaving them only with that which is beneficial and holy, in order to live their lives joyously with God, and in the next life even more joyously. Whichever life a young person I know may choose to follow, I will sincerely rejoice, and will always have the same interest for their salvation. It is enough that he is close to Christ and His Church.

Naturally, I especially rejoice in those youths who follow the monastic life. He who follows the angelic life is truly wise, for he flees the hook of the devil who uses the world as a lure. But you can't put all people into the same mold. Christ, you see, did not give Monasticism as a commandment—as much as it is the path of perfection—because He did not want to place this weighty calling on everyone. When the young man asked Him how to be saved, Christ answered him *keep the Commandments*. And when he said that he did keep them and asked *what lack I yet*, Christ said to him, *One thing thou lackest: If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and come and follow me.* In other words, if He found someone with any *flotimo*, then He spoke to him of perfection. He didn't come to cast a noose upon people. He did not even teach Monasticism, for this would have "started a fire" and perhaps many would have run without discernment to become monastics, with bad results. He only threw a spark and, when the suitable time arrived, Monasticism sprang forth.

## THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

*By Saint Cyprian of Carthage, from a letter written to a new convert, around 246 A.D.*



I promise to share with you the grace God in His great mercy has shown me, and to tell you as simply as I can what I have experienced since I was baptized. Until that time, I was still living in the dark, knowing nothing of my true life. I was completely involved in this world's affairs, influenced by all its changing moods and troubles, and exiled from the light of truth.

I had indeed been told that God offered men and women a second birth, by which we could be saved, but I very much doubted that I could change the kind of life I was then living. Frankly, I could not see how a person could cast off his fallen nature, and be changed in heart and soul while he still lived in the same body as before. How was it possible, I asked myself, to change the habits of a lifetime instantaneously.

How can one suddenly rid oneself of accumulated guilt and break with sin that has become so deeply rooted in one's life? Can a man whose life has been characterized by feasting and luxury, learn frugality and simplicity in a single moment? A person who craves public distinction and honor cannot bear to be passed over and unnoticed.

Another who is accustomed to throngs of flattering attendance, takes it a terrible penance to be left alone. Is every species of temptation suddenly to lose its force? Should we no longer feel the enticement of wine and good living, where pride no longer swells our heads or anger blazes our breasts? Shall we no longer be troubled by covetousness or cruelty or ambition or lust?

These were my thoughts. My past life was so burdened with so many sins, that I saw no way ever to be rid of, that I had grown accustomed to giving way to my weakness. I despaired of ever being any better. Consequently, I simply humored my evil inclinations, and made no attempt to combat them.

But at last I made up my mind to ask for Baptism. I went down into those life-giving waters, and all the stains of my past were washed away. I committed my life to the Lord. He cleansed my heart and filled me with His Holy Spirit. I was born again, a new man.

And then in a most marvelous way, all my doubts cleared up, I could now see what had been hidden from me before. I found that I could do things that had previously been impossible. I saw that as long as I had been living according to my lower nature, I was at the mercy of sin, and my course was set for death. But that by living according to my

new birth in the Holy Spirit, I had already begun to share God's eternal life.

You know, as well as I do, what sins I died to at that moment, just as you know the gifts the Holy Spirit gave me with my new life. I have no desire to boast, but it is surely right to thank God for His free gift. It was through faith in Him, that I received the power to break with the sins into which my own folly had led me.

We have received the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our task now is to preserve the integrity of what we have received by living a truly Christian life. We must give time to prayer, and to the study of scripture. Now speaking to God; now listening to His word to us, and letting His teaching mold us. He has enriched us with a treasure no one can take away.

We have eaten and drunk at His heavenly banquet, and can never again know the pinch of poverty.



I want you to know this, that Jesus Christ our Lord is Himself the true Mind of the Father. By Him all the fullness of every rational nature is made in the image of His image, and He Himself is the head of all creation, and of His body the Church: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* (Col 1:15-18).

Therefore *we are all members one of another* (Eph 4:25), and the body of Christ, and the head cannot say to the feet, "I have no need of you;" and if one member suffers, the whole body is moved and suffers with it. But if a member is estranged from the body, and has no communication with the head, but is delighted by the passions of its own body, this means that its wound is incurable, and it has forgotten its beginning and its end.

And therefore the Father of creatures, moved with compassion towards this our wound, which could not be healed by any of the creatures, but only by the goodness of the Father, sent forth to us His Only-begotten, who because of our bondage took upon Himself the form of a bondservant, and gave Himself up for our sins; for our iniquities humbled Him, and by His wound we are all healed. And He gathered us out of all regions, till He should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members one of another.

Therefore we ought greatly to love one another. For he who loves his neighbor, loves God: and he who loves God, loves his own soul.

**St. Anthony the Great (+356)**

## Σταυρωταί και Άνασταυρωταί του Χριστού

Τοῦ κ. Νικολάου Ἰω. Σωτηροπούλου.

**Ἦ**σταύρωσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ τοῦ ἰδίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔγινε ἀπὸ ὑπερβάλλουσα ἀγάπη πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους γιὰ τὴν ἄφεσι τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τους καὶ τὴ σωτηρία τους. Διότι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶνε Θεός, δημιουργὸς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι. (Α΄ Τιμ. β΄ 4).

Ἦσταύρωσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔγινεν ἐκουσίως. Ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, ὁ ἰδεώδης, εἶχε πεῖ: *Ἐγὼ τίθῃμι τὴν ψυχὴν μου, ἵνα πάλιν λάβω αὐτήν. Οὐδεὶς αἶρει αὐτήν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τίθῃμι αὐτήν ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ.* (Ἰωάν. ι' 17-18). Ἐγὼ θυσιάζω τὴ ζωὴ μου, καὶ θὰ τὴν λάβω πάλι. Κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τὴν ἀφαιρέσῃ ἀπὸ μένα, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τὴ θυσιάζω μὲ τὴ θέλησί μου. Ἦσταύρωσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἦταν θυσία, ἢ ὑπερτάτη θυσία.

Ἄλλ' ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ ὠρισμένων ἀνθρώπων ἢ σταύρωσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔγινεν ἀπὸ ἔλλειψι ἀγάπης καὶ περισσευμα κακίας, καὶ ἦταν ἔγκλημα, τὸ μεγαλύτερο ὅλων τῶν ἐγκλημάτων, ἀφοῦ ὁ σταυρωθεὶς εἶνε ἀπολύτως ἀναμάρτητος καὶ ἅγιος, καὶ ὄχι ἀπλῶς ἀνθρώπος, ἀλλὰ Θεάνθρωπος.

Καὶ ποῖοι οἱ ἔνοχοι τοῦ μεγίστου ἐγκλήματος; Ἄνθρωποι, πὸν δὲν περίμενε κανεὶς νὰ προβοῦν σὲ ἔγκλημα κατὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Ἐγκληματίας ἔγινε πρόσωπο, πὸν ἦταν ἐγγιστα στὸν Ἰησοῦ, μαθητὴς, ἀπόστολος καὶ ὁμοτράπεζός του, ὁ Ἰούδας ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης. Ἐπὶ τρία ἔτη ὁ Ἰούδας κοντὰ στὸ Χριστὸ ἄκουσε τὰ ὠραιότερα λόγια, εἶδε τὰ μεγαλύτερα θαύματα, εἶδε καὶ τὴν ἀγιώτερη ζωὴ. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἔδωσε καὶ σ' αὐτὸν τὴν ἐξουσία νὰ κηρύττῃ καὶ νὰ θαυματουργῇ. Καὶ ὅμως τίποτε ἀπ' αὐτὰ δὲν τὸν συγκίνησε. Ἐνα τὸν συγκινοῦσε, τὸ χρῆμα. Τὸ πάθος τῆς φιλαργυρίας τὸν εἶχεν ὑποδουλώσει τελείως. Καὶ γιὰ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια ὁ δοῦλος καὶ δόλιος πρόδωσε τὸ Χριστό, τὸν Κύριο καὶ Διδάσκαλο.

Ἐγκληματίες κατὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἔγιναν οἱ θρησκευτικοὶ ἄρχοντες τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, οἱ συγκροτοῦντες τὸ Μέγα Συνέδριο, τὴν Ἱερὰ Σύνοδο τῶν Ἑβραίων, θὰ λέγαμε, οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς, οἱ πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς. Ἐξαίρεσι ἀποτελέσαν δύο μόνο μέλη τοῦ Συνεδρίου, ὁ Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἀρριμαθαῖος καὶ ὁ Νικόδημος. Οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς Ἄννας, Καϊάφας καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ φορεῖς τοῦ ἀρχιερατικοῦ ἀξιώματος, οἱ ὁποῖοι πρῶτοι ἔπρεπε νὰ ἐγκολληθοῦν τὸν Ἰησοῦ ὡς Μεσσία καὶ Θεὸς τους, ὅπως προφητευόταν στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη καὶ ἀποδεικνυόταν ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια, τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ὅλη ζωὴ του, πρῶτοι τὸν ἀποδοκίμασαν, καὶ μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ τοὺς γραμματεῖς τὸν καταδίκασαν σὲ θάνατο, καὶ μάλιστα στὸ σκληρότερο καὶ ἐξευτελιστικώτερο ὅλων τῶν θανάτων, τὴ σταύρωσι.

Καὶ γιὰ τὴν οἱ ἄρχοντες τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καταδίκασαν τὸν Μεσσία, καὶ διὰ χειρῶν εἰδωλολατρῶν, τῶν Ῥωμαίων, ἔσταύρωσαν τὸν Κύριον τῆς δόξης; (Α΄ Κορ. β΄ 8). Δὲν διάβαζαν τὶς μεσσιτικὲς προφητεῖες τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης; Διάβαζαν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς τύφλωναν τὰ πάθη καὶ τὶς παρερμηνεύαν. Δὲν γνώριζαν, ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦταν πρωτοφανὲς φαινόμενο σοφίας λόγων καὶ τελέσεως θαυμάτων; Δὲν ἄκουσαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀπεσταλμένους των, γιὰ νὰ συλλάβουν τὸν Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδέποτε οὕτως ἐλάλησεν ἀνθρώπος, ὡς οὗτος ὁ ἀνθρώπος; (Ἰωάν. ζ' 46). Δὲν ἄκουσαν τὴν κρίσι ἀνθρώπων τοῦ λαοῦ ὅτι οὐδέποτε ἐφάνη οὕτως ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ; (Ματθ. θ' 33). Δὲν ἤξεραν ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς θεράπευε ὅλες τὶς ἀσθένειες, ἄνοιξε τὰ μάτια τυφλοῦ ἐκ γενετῆς, ἐξέβαλλε δαμιόνια, ἀνέσταινε νεκρούς, καὶ πρὸ ἡμερῶν ἀνέστησεν ἓνα ὀδωδὸς πτώμα, τὸν τετραήμερο νεκρὸ Λάζαρο; Βεβαίως δὲν ἀγνοοῦσαν τὴν πρωτοφανῆ σὲ ὕψος διδασκαλία τοῦ Ναζωραίου, καὶ τὴν πρωτοφανῆ σὲ δύναμι θαυματουργία του. Ἀλλὰ τὰ πάθη τους δὲν τοὺς ἄφηναν νὰ τὸν παραδεχθοῦν, καὶ τοὺς ἐξώθησαν στὴ θανάτωσί του. Προπάντων κυριάρχησαν σ' αὐτοὺς τὰ πάθη τῆς ὑπερηφανείας καὶ αὐταρεσκείας, τῆς φιλαργυρίας, τοῦ φθόνου καὶ τοῦ μίσους.

Οἱ ἐν λόγῳ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὑπερήφανα ὄντα, θεωροῦσαν τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς των ἀγίους, καὶ δὲν ὑπέφεραν τὸν ἔλεγχον, πὸν ἀσκούσε κατ' αὐτῶν ὁ Ἰησοῦς. Ἰδίως δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ ὑποφέρουν ἐκεῖνα τὰ δριμύτατα καὶ καυστικώτατα *Ὅσα ὑμῖν, γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι ὑποκριταί...* (Ματθ. κγ' 13 καὶ ἐξῆς). Ἐπίσης, φιλάργυρα ὄντα, ἐξανίσταντο, διότι ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἤλεγε τὴ φιλαργυρία τους, καὶ ἐπανειλημμένως ὑψωσε φραγγέλλιο καὶ ἐκδίωξε τοὺς ἐμπόρους ἀπὸ τὸ ναό, τὸν ὁποῖον ὁ Ἄννας, ὁ Καϊάφας καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ εἶχαν καταστήσει ἀνώνυμη ἑταιρεία, καὶ πλοῦτιζαν καὶ θησαύριζαν.

Ὁ Ἰησοῦς δὲν σταυρώθηκε στὴ Γαλιλαία, ὅπου ἔλεγε, *Ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ.* (Ματθ. στ' 26 καὶ 28). Ὁ Ἰησοῦς σταυρώθηκε στὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ, ὅπου ἔθιξεν ὑλικά συμφέροντα. Ἐπίσης οἱ θρησκευτικοὶ ἡγέτες τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἀπὸ φθόνου καὶ μῖσος, πὸν γεννᾷ ὁ φθόνος, καταδίκασαν τὸν Ἰησοῦ, διότι δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ ὑποφέρουν, ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦταν ἀνώτερός των. Αἰσθάνονταν ὅτι, ἀφ' ὅτου ἐφανίσθηκε ὁ Ἰησοῦς, αὐτοὶ «ἐξώφλησαν». Δὲν ὑπέφεραν τὴν ὑπεροχὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ!

Ὁ Πιλάτος κατάλαβε ὅτι ἀπὸ φθόνου οἱ θρησκευτικοὶ ἡγέτες τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ παρέδωσαν σ' αὐτὸν τὸν Ἰησοῦ (Ματθ. κζ' 18, Μάρκ. ιε' 10). Σταυρωτὴς τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶνε καὶ ὁ λαός.

Καίτοι ὁ Ἰησοῦς γέμισε τὴν Παλαιστίνη μὲ τὴν ὑψηλὴ διδασκαλία, τὰ θαύματα καὶ τὶς εὐεργεσίες

του, ἀποδεικνύοντας ἔτσι τὴ μεσσιακὴ ιδιότητά του καὶ τὴ θεότητά του· καίτοι ἐπίσης καὶ ὁ Πιλάτος καὶ ὁ Ἡρώδης δὲν βρῆκαν στὸν Ἰησοῦ καμμία αἰτία θανάτου, ἐν τούτοις ὁ λαὸς δὲν πίστευσε στὸν Ἰησοῦ, ἀλλὰ πείσθηκε στοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς, καὶ ζήτησε ἀπὸ τὸν Πιλάτο νὰ ἀπολυθῇ ὁ κακοῦργος Βαραββᾶς, ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς νὰ σταυρωθῇ. Κραύγαζε ὁ λαὸς νὰ σταυρωθῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ φώναξε, τὸ αἷμα του νὰ εἶνε ἐπάνω τους καὶ ἐπάνω στὰ παιδιά τους (Ματθ. κζ' 20, 22, 23, 24, Μάρκ. ιε' 8, 11, 13, 14, Λουκ. κγ' 13-15, 18, 21, 23, Ἰωάν. ιθ' 6, 12, 14-15, Πράξ. β' 22-23, 36, Α' Θεσ. β' 14-16).

Κακῶς ὁ Πάπας τὴ σταύρωσι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀποδίδει μόνο στὴν ἀριστοκρατία τοῦ ναοῦ, καὶ ἀμνηστεύει τὸ λαό, γιὰ νὰ «τὰ ἔχη καλὰ» μὲ τοὺς Ἑβραίους. Κακῶς ἐπίσης κάποιοι ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐπιτάφιο Θρῆνο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπάλειψαν λόγια, ποὺ χαρακτηρίζουν τοὺς Ἑβραίους γιὰ τὴν κακὴ συμπεριφορὰ τους πρὸς τὸ Χριστό.

Δὲν μισοῦμε τοὺς Ἑβραίους ὡς ἀνθρώπους. Ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς δίδαξε ν' ἀγαποῦμε ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Κακίζουμε ὅμως τὴν κακὴ συμπεριφορὰ τους καὶ τὸ Σιωνισμό, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐπιδιώκει τὴν ὑποταγὴ ὄλων τῶν ἐθνῶν στὸ Ἰσραήλ.

Ἀκουέτωσαν ταῦτα πικροὶ ἐπικριταί, ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτικὴ καὶ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἡγεσία, τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Πειραιῶς κ. Σεραφεῖμ, ἀνδρὸς μὲ τὸ θάρρος νὰ ἐλέγχει τὸ Σιωνισμό, καὶ ἄλλες σκοτεινὲς δυνάμεις, καὶ μὲ τὴν παρρησία του νὰ προκαλῆ σεισμὸ σ' ἐνόχους παγκοσμίως.

Σταυρωτῆς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἶνε καὶ ὁ Πιλάτος. Ὁ Ρωμαῖος ἡγεμὼν καὶ δικαστῆς ἦταν ἀνώτερος ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἐχθροὺς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Ἀναγνώριζε τὴν ἀθρότητα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, καὶ ἔκανε ἐπανειλημμένες ἀπεγνωσμένες προσπάθειες, γιὰ νὰ διασώσῃ τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἀπὸ τὴ μανία τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Ὁ Πιλάτος εἶχεν ἀπέναντι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀγαθὴ πρόθεσι. Ἄλλ' ἡ ἀγαθὴ πρόθεσι δὲν ἦταν ἀρκετὴ, διότι δὲν συνωδεύθηκε ἀπὸ ἀγαθὴ πρᾶξι. Καλῶς ἐλέγχθη, ὅτι ὁ δρόμος πρὸς τὴν κόλασι εἶνε στρωμένος μὲ ἀγαθὲς προθέσεις. Ὁ Ρωμαῖος ἡγεμὼν καὶ δικαστῆς κάμφθηκε ἀπὸ τὶς πιέσεις τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τελικῶς ὑπέγραψε τὴν καταδίκη τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Καὶ τοῦτο γιὰ νὰ μὴ διακινδυνεύσῃ τὴ θέσι του. Τυπτόμενος δὲ ἀπὸ τὴ συνείδησί του, λαβὼν ὕδωρ ἀπενίψατο τὰς χεῖρας ἀπέναντι τοῦ ὄχλου λέγων ἀθῶός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ δικαίου τούτου. (Ματθ. κζ' 24).

Ἐνιψε τὰ χεῖρα του ὁ Πιλάτος, ἀλλὰ δὲν καθαρίσθησαν, διότι ὑπέγραψε τὴν ἀδικὴ ἀπόφασι. Ὁ Χριστὸς προγνώριζε τὴν ἀπόφασι καὶ προεῖπε στὸν Πιλάτο τὴν ἁμαρτία του, μικρότερη μὲν ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία τοῦ Καϊάφα καὶ τοῦ Συνεδρίου, ὅπως δὲ ὅποτε ὅμως ἀσυγκρίτως σοβαρώτερη ἀπὸ τὶς ἁμαρτίες ὄλων

τῶν ἄλλων ἀδίκων δικαστικῶν ἀποφάσεων. Ἀφ' ὅτου δὲ ὁ Καϊάφας μὲ τὸ Συνέδριον καὶ ὁ Πιλάτος καταδίκασαν τὸ Χριστό, αἰώνιο στίγμα ἐγκολάφηκε στὸ πρόσωπο τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης δικαιοσύνης.

Ἀγαπητοὶ ἀναγνώστες! Δὲν ὑπῆρξαν μόνο σταυρωταὶ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου. Ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἀνασταυρωταὶ τοῦ σὲ κάθε ἐποχῆ, καὶ ἰδίως στὴ δική μας ἐποχῆ τῆς μεγάλης ἀποστασίας, ἀπιστίας, διαφθορᾶς, διαστροφῆς καὶ ἐγκληματικότητος. Ὑπάρχουν οἱ ἀνασταυροῦντες ἑαυτοῖς τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντες. (Ἑβρ. στ' 6). Ἄνθρωποι, οἱ ὁποῖοι ξανασταυρώνουν ὅσον ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ διαπομπεύουν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅσοι μὲ τὶς αἰρέσεις, καὶ ἰδίως μὲ τὴν παναίρεσι καὶ πανθηρησκεία τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ, προδίδουν τὴν πίστι, προδίδουν ἔτσι τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς πίστεως (Ἑβρ. ιβ' 2) καὶ ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τὸν προδότη καὶ σταυρωτὴ Ἰούδα. Εἶνε σύγχρονοι Ἰουδες.

Ὅσοι ἀρχιερεῖς λαμβάνουν τὸ ἀρχιερατικὸ ἀξίωμα ἀναξίως, χωρὶς πραγματικῶς νὰ πιστεύουν, καὶ ἀντιπαθοῦν καὶ μισοῦν καὶ διώκουν πιστοὺς ἀνθρώπους, κληρικοὺς καὶ λαϊκοὺς, ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τοὺς σταυρωτὰς Ἄννα καὶ Καϊάφα. Εἶνε σύγχρονοι Ἄννης καὶ Καϊάφες.

Ὅσος λαὸς φρονεῖ καὶ ζῆ ἀντιθέτως πρὸς τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁμοιάζει μὲ τὸν Ἰουδαϊκὸ λαό, ποὺ ἀπίστησε στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ ζήτησε τὴ σταύρωσί του. Ἰδιαιτέρως ἐπισημαίνουμε καὶ ὑπογραμμίζουμε, ὅτι, ὅσοι μὲ τὶς ἐκτρώσεις καὶ τὸ νόμο ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐκτρώσεων φονεύουν καὶ κατακρεουργοῦν τὰ ἀθῶα παιδιά, αὐτοὶ ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, οἱ ὁποῖοι σταύρωσαν τὸ Χριστό. Ὅποιος φονεύει ἓνα παιδί, εἶπεν ὁ Ντοστογιέφσκυ, φονεύει τὸ Χριστό.

Ὅσοι ἐπίσης δικασταὶ τῆς Πολιτείας καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας γιὰ διάφορες σκοπιμότητες καταπατοῦν τὴ συνείδησί τους καὶ δικάζουν ἀδίκως καὶ καταδικάζουν ἀθῶους, αὐτοὶ ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τὸν Πιλάτο. Εἶνε σύγχρονοι Πιλάτοι.

Γέμισε ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη κοινωνία ἀπὸ ἀνασταυρωτὰς τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου! Καὶ τί νὰ εἶπῃ κανεὶς γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν ὁποίων σείεται ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη κοινωνία καὶ σκοτίζεται ὁ ἥλιος τῆς καλωσύνης, ὅπως σείσθηκε ἡ γῆ καὶ σκοτίσθηκε ὁ ἥλιος κατὰ τὴ σταύρωσι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἓνα νὰ εἰποῦμε: Ὅσοι δὲν ἔχουν διαστραφῆ ὅπως οἱ δαίμονες καὶ μποροῦν νὰ μετανοήσουν, ἄς μετανοήσουν, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἔχουν τοῦ Ἰούδα, τοῦ Καϊάφα, τοῦ Πιλάτου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων σταυρωτῶν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τὸ τέλος καὶ τὴν ἄνευ τέλους δυστυχία, ἀλλὰ νὰ τύχουν ἐλέους καὶ σωτηρίας ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο.

## Sir Steven Ransiman – (1903-2000)

Άρθρο της Κατερίνας Λυμπεροπούλου από το «ΒΗΜΑ».

**«Χαίρομαι με τη σκέψη ότι στα επόμενα 100 χρόνια η Ορθοδοξία θα είναι η μόνη ιστορική Έκκλησία που θα ύφίσταται...»**

**«Το ποσοστό των Αμερικανών Προέδρων, που έχουν δολοφονηθεί είναι πολύ μεγαλύτερο—σε σχέση με τα χρόνια ύπαρξης των ΗΠΑ—από το ποσοστό των δολοφονημένων Βυζαντινών αυτοκρατόρων κατά τη διάρκεια της αυτοκρατορίας.»**

Σεργ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν

† † †



Ο άνθρωπος που κατάφερε σε μεγάλο βαθμό να απαλλάξει την εικόνα του Βυζαντίου από το στίγμα, που την έννοουσε ως περίοδο παρακμής, διαφθοράς και δολοπλοκίας, ο άνθρωπος που συσχέτισε τη μεσαιωνική έκφανση του Έλληνισμού με τη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα («δὲ νομίζω ὅτι οἱ σημερινοὶ Ἕλληνες εἶναι περισσότερο Ἕλληνες ἀπὸ τοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς!»), ὁ ἄνθρωπος που κέρδισε παγκόσμια φήμη παρουσιάζοντάς τους, μέχρι πρότινος «ἰππότες», Σταυροφόρους ὡς «βαρβάρους», που λεηλάτησαν τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἦταν Βρετανός.

Ο ιστορικός, συγγραφέας, ακούραστος περιηγητής και σαγηνευτικός αφηγητής σερ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν γεννήθηκε στις 7 Ιουλίου του 1903 στη Βόρεια Αγγλία και ἔζησε 97 χρόνια, για νὰ συνδεθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀγαπήσει ὅσοι λίγοι τὴ χώρα μας. Μία ἀπὸ τὶς πρώτες εἰκόνας, που θυμάται, ἦταν ὅταν εἶδε ἀπὸ τὴ θαλαμηγὸ τοῦ παπποῦ του τὸν βράχο τῆς Μονεμβασίας νὰ ἀναδύεται ἀπὸ τὴ θάλασσα μετὸ Βυζαντινὸ κάστρο στὴν κορυφὴ του. Ἦταν τότε 21 ἐτῶν, σπουδαστὴς στὸ Κέμπριτζ, ἤδη γνώστης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς, τὴν ὁποία διδάχθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν ἡλικία τῶν ἐπτὰ χρόνων καὶ ἀφοῦ εἶχε μάθει γαλλικὰ καὶ λατινικὰ.

Ο γιὸς τῶν Φιλελεύθερων νομικῶν με ἐντονὴ πολιτικὴ δραστηριότητα (οἱ γονεῖς του ἦταν τὸ πρῶτο ζευγάρι που κάθισε μαζί στὴ Βουλὴ τῶν Κοινοτήτων) σὲ καμιά περίπτωση δὲν ἦταν ἓνα συνηθισμένο ἀγόρι. Γλωσσομαθὴς, γοητευτικὸς, με κοινωνικὲς γνωριμίες, ὁ νεαρὸς Στίβεν γινόταν τὸ ἐπίκεντρο τῆς προσοχῆς κάθε συντροφιάς. Προτοῦ κλείσει τὰ 30 του χρόνια ἦταν ἤδη καθηγητὴς Πανεπιστημίου στὸ Κέμπριτζ ὡς Βυζαντινολόγος. Ἡ καρδιά του ὅμως ἦταν στὰ ταξίδια καὶ στὴν ἔρευνα. Ὡς «περιπλανώμενος λόγιος»

ἀρχίζει τὰ ταξίδια σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ που ὁ τουρισμὸς δὲν ἔχει ἀκόμη ἐφευρεθεῖ καὶ συναντᾶ ἀνθρώπους μυθικούς: ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐλευθέριο Βενιζέλο ὡς τὸν Που Γί, τὸν τελευταῖο αὐτοκράτορα τῆς Κίνας.

Ὅταν ξεσπᾷ ὁ Β΄ Παγκόσμιος Πόλεμος τοποθετεῖται ἀκόλουθος Τύπου στὴ Σόφια, φυγαδεύεται ἐν συνεχείᾳ στὸ Κάιρο, μεταβαίνει στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, καὶ ὕστερα ἀπὸ πρόσκληση τῆς Τουρκίας πηγαίνει στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Σὲ συνέντευξή του στὸ «Βῆμα» τὸ 1997 διηγήθηκε, πῶς βρέθηκε στὴ πόλη τῶν μελετῶν του. «Ὁ πρόεδρος Ἰνονοῦ περπατοῦσε στὴν πόλη καὶ ρωτοῦσε γιὰ διάφορα κτίρια, που ἔβλεπε καὶ οὐδεὶς γνώριζε νὰ τοῦ πεῖ τίποτε περισσότερο πέραν τοῦ ὅτι ἦταν Βυζαντινά. Πρόσταξε, λοιπόν, νὰ τοῦ βροῦν ἀμέσως ἓναν καθηγητὴ. Ὁ ἄγγλος πρόξενος στὴν Τουρκία ἔτυχε νὰ εἶναι μαθητὴς μου καὶ ἔτσι βρέθηκε νὰ ὀργανώσω ἔδρα Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν στὸ Πανεπιστήμιο τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης».

Τρία χρόνια ἀπὸ τὸ 1942 ὡς τὸ 1945 ὁ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν διδάσκει στὸ λίκνο τοῦ μεσαιωνικοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ Βυζαντινὴ Ἱστορία καὶ Τέχνη. Τὸ 1945 ἔρχεται στὴν Ἑλλάδα, γιὰ νὰ διευθύνει δυὸ χρόνια τὸ Βρετανικὸ Συμβούλιο καὶ νὰ γνωρίσει, μεταξὺ ἄλλων, τὸν Γιώργο Σεφέρη, τὸν Ἄγγελο Σικελιανὸ καὶ τὸν Δημήτρη Χόρν.

Ὁ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν χρίζεται ἰππότης τὸ 1958 ἀπὸ τὴ βασίλισσα Ἐλισάβετ καὶ δίνει διαλέξεις σὲ ὅλα τὰ μεγάλα πανεπιστημιακὰ ἰδρύματα τοῦ κόσμου. Ὅσοι εἶχαν τὴν τύχη νὰ τὸν ἀκούσουν, συμφωνοῦν, ὅτι ἦταν ἓνας ἀξέχαστος ὁμιλητὴς, ὅπως γιὰ παράδειγμα ὅταν διηγούνταν με μελαγχολία ἀλλὰ καὶ σπαραγμὸ τὶς τελευταῖες στιγμὲς μίας χιλιόχρονης αὐτοκρατορίας, καταδικασμένης νὰ χαθεῖ, ἀλλὰ πολὺ περήφανη γιὰ νὰ παραδοθεῖ. Συνεργάζεται ἐπίσης μετὸ Βρετανικὸ Μουσεῖο, τὸ Μουσεῖο Βικτόρια καὶ Ἄλμπερτ, τὴ Βιβλιοθήκη τοῦ Λονδίνου καὶ τιμᾶται μετὰ πολυάριθμα πανεπιστημιακὰ διπλώματα, ἐνῶ καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάδα τοῦ ἀναγνωρίζει τὴ συμβολὴ του στὴ μετάδοση μίας εἰκόνας θετικῆς γιὰ τὴν, ἀπὸ πολλοὺς παραγνωρισμένη, περίοδο τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς ἱστορίας: ὁ ἴδιος ἔχει τιμηθεῖ μετὸ χρυσὸ μετάλλιο τῆς πόλης τῶν Ἀθηνῶν (1990), δρόμοι στὸν Μυστρά καὶ στὴ Μονεμβασίᾳ φέρουν τὸ ὄνομά του, ἐνῶ στὴν ἀπονομὴ τῶν βραβείων Ὠνάση τὸ 1997, ὁ σερ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν μοιράζεται τὸ βραβεῖο γιὰ τὸν Πολιτισμὸ μετὰ τὴν κυρία Ντόλυ Γουλανδρὴ. Καὶ μετὰ μία κίνηση συμβολικὴ διαθέτει τὸ χρηματικὸ ἔπαθλο, που τὸ συνοδεύει, γιὰ τὴν ἀναστήλωση τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ πύργου τοῦ Πρωτάτου στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος.

Ὁ «προπαγανδιστὴς» αὐτοῦ τοῦ κομβικοῦ μέρους τῆς ἱστορίας μας ἦταν πολυγραφότατος. Τὴν ἐκπληκτικὴ μονογραφία του γιὰ τὸν «Αὐτοκράτορα

Ρωμανὸ Λεκαπηνὸ καὶ τὴ Βασιλεία του» (1929) ἀκολούθησαν, μεταξύ ἄλλων, «Τὸ Πρῶτο Βουλγαρικὸ Κράτος» (1930), «Βυζαντινὸς Πολιτισμὸς» (1933) καὶ ἡ τρίτομη «Ἱστορία τῶν Σταυροφοριῶν» (1951-1954), τὸ γνωστότερο ἔργο του, ποὺ ἄλλαξε τὴν ἀντίληψη τοῦ δυτικοῦ κόσμου γιὰ τὶς Σταυροφορίες, κλίνοντας «σαφῶς πρὸς τὴν πλευρὰ τοῦ Βυζαντίου ἔναντι τῆς μισαλλοδοξίας καὶ τοῦ πλιάτσικου στὸ ὁποῖο ἐπιδιδόταν ἡ Δύση», ὅπως ἔγραψε ἡ ἑφημερίδα «The Times». Σημαντικὰ ἔργα τοῦ ἐπίσης εἶναι «Ἡ Ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως» (1965), «Βυζαντινὴ Θεοκρατία» (1977) καὶ ἄλλα.

Ὁ σὲρ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν δὲν παντρεύτηκε ποτὲ καὶ ἔφυγε πλήρης ἡμερῶν τὸ φθινόπωρο τοῦ 2000. Ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ κύλησε περίπου ὅπως ὁ ἴδιος ὄρισε τὴν ἱστορία. «Δὲν εἶναι μία σειρὰ λιμνοῦλες μὲ στάσιμα νερά, ἀλλὰ ἕνας ποταμὸς ποὺ τρέχει ἀσταμάτητα καὶ ὀρμητικά». Αἰωνία του ἡ μνημη!



**Μ**ιλοῦσε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἀδέλφιος, Ἐπίσκοπος Νειλουπόλεως μὲ τὸν Ἀββᾶ Σισώη, γιὰ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἀνθρώπινο καὶ τὸ κατὰ Θεόν. Καὶ ὅταν ὁ λόγος ἔφθασε στὸ θέμα τῆς δόξας, ὁ Ἀββᾶς Σισώης εἶπε: «Ἄν ὁ Θεὸς δὲν δοξάσῃ ἄνθρωπον, ἡ δόξα τῶν ἀνθρώπων τίποτε δὲν εἶναι». Ἄς τὸ ἀκούσουμε καὶ ἂς τὸ καταλάβουμε καὶ κυρίως ἂς τὸ ἀκολουθήσουμε σὰν κανόνα ζωῆς, ὅλοι ἐμεῖς, ποὺ νοιαζόμαστε γιὰ τὸ τί λένε οἱ ἄλλοι γιὰ μᾶς. Ἡ γνώμη τοῦ κόσμου εἶναι ἕνα τίποτε, ἕνα μηδενικό, μπροστὰ στὴν γνώμη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ ἡ γνώμη τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀποτελεῖ τὴν ἀληθινὴ καὶ αἰώνια δόξα γιὰ τὸν πιστὸν ἄνθρωπον.

**Ρ**ώτησαν κάποτε τὸν Μέγα Ἀντώνιο γιὰ τοὺς πολέμους, ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζουν οἱ ἀσκητὲς στὴν ἔρημον, ὅπου ζοῦν. Καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἀποκρίθηκε: «Ὅποιος κάθεται στὴν ἔρημο καὶ ἡσυχάζει, ἀπὸ τρεῖς πολέμους εἶναι ἀπαλλαγμένος: τὸν πόλεμο τῆς ἀκοῆς, τὸν πόλεμο τῆς ὀμιλίας καὶ τὸν πόλεμο τῆς ὀράσεως. Καὶ ἔχει μόνον ἕνα πόλεμον, τὸν πόλεμον τῆς καρδιάς». Ἄρα, ἐμεῖς, ποὺ ζοῦμε μέσα στὸν κόσμο ἔχουμε τέσσερους πολέμους μαζί.

**Π**ῆγε κάποτε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Σισώης καὶ ἐπισκέφθηκε τὸν Ἀββᾶ Ἰωρ καὶ τὸν παρεκάλεσε: «Πῆς μου κάτι ὠφέλιμο». Καὶ ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἰωρ τὸν ρώτησε: «Ἐχεις ἐμπιστοσύνη σὲ μένα;». Τοῦ ἀποκρίθηκε, ναί. Καὶ ὁ Ἀββᾶς τοῦ εἶπε: «Πήγαινε καὶ ὅ,τι μὲ εἶδες νὰ κάνω, κάμε το κι ἐσύ». Καὶ ξαναρώτησε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Σισώης: «Τί βλέπω, πάτερ, σὲ σένα;». Καὶ ὁ Γέροντας τοῦ ἐξήγησε: «Ὁ λογισμὸς μου μὲ θέτει πιδὸ κάτω ἀπὸ ὄλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους». Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ δρόμος τῶν Ἁγίων.

## Ὁ Θρήνος τῆς Πόλης (29<sup>η</sup> Μαΐου, 1453)

«Γιοβάνη», Μεγάλῃ ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια, ἔκδ. 1982, τόμ. 1<sup>ος</sup>, σελ. 95-96).

**Τ**ὸ δημοτικὸ αὐτὸ τραγούδι εἶναι ὁ παλαιότερος Θρήνος γιὰ τὴν κατάληψη τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Πιθανὸν νὰ προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κρήτη. Βρέθηκε σὲ χειρόγραφο τοῦ 15<sup>ου</sup> αἰώνα. Ὁ τίτλος ἦταν: «Ἀνακάλημα τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως». Ἀνήκει στὴ δευτέρη περίοδο (1453-1821) τῆς Νεοελληνικῆς Λογοτεχνίας καὶ στὸ ἱστορικὸ εἶδος.

Στὴν παρακάτω μορφή του δημοσιεύτηκε τὸ 1914 ἀπὸ τὸ Ν. Πολίτη στὴν συλλογὴ του «Ἐκλογαὶ ἀπὸ τὰ τραγούδια τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Λαοῦ». Γιὰ τὴν σύνθεσή του ὁ Ν. Πολίτης χρησιμοποίησε τὴν παραλλαγὴ ποὺ δημοσίευσε ὁ Φωρὲλ καὶ ἄλλοι εἴκοσι τέσσερις. Ὅμως, μόνον ὁ 4ος καὶ 18ος στίχος ἔχουν παρθεῖ αὐτούσιοι ἀπὸ τὴν ἐργασία τοῦ Φωριέλ.

† † †

Σημαίνει ὁ Θεός, σημαίνει ἡ γῆς, σημαίνουν τὰ ἐπουράνια, σημαίνει κι ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία, τὸ μέγα μοναστήρι, μὲ τετρακόσια σήμαντρα κι ἐξήντα δυὸ καμπάνες.

Κάθε καμπάνα καὶ παπάς, κάθε παπάς καὶ διάκος. Ψάλλει ξεροβὰ ὁ βασιλιάς, δεξιὰ ὁ πατριάρχης, κι ἀπ' τὴν πολλὴ τὴν ψαλιμουδιὰ ἐσειόντανε οἱ κολόνες. Νὰμποῦνε στὸ Χειρουβικὸ καὶ νὰ βγεῖ ὁ βασιλέας, φωνὴ τοὺς ἦρθε ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κι ἀπ' ἀρχαγγέλου στόμα: «Πάψατε τὸ Χειρουβικὸ κι ἂς χαμηλώσουν τ' ἅγια, παπάδες πάρτε τὰ ἱερά, καὶ σεῖς κεριὰ σβηστήτε, γιατί εἶναι θέλημα Θεοῦ ἡ Πόλη νὰ τουρκέψη. Μόν' στεῖλτε λόγο στὴ Φραγκιά, νὰ ῥθoύν τρία καράβια, τὸ 'να νὰ πάρει τὸ Σταυρὸ καὶ τ' ἄλλο τὸ Βαγγέλιο, τὸ τρίτο τὸ καλύτερο, τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζά μας, μὴ μᾶς τὴν πάρουν τὰ σκυλιὰ καὶ μᾶς τὴ μαγαρίσουν.»

Ἡ Δέσποινα ταράχτηκε καὶ δάκρυσαν οἱ εἰκόνες.

**Σώπασε, κυρὰ Δέσποινα, καὶ μὴ πολυδακρῶζης, πάλι μὲ χρόνους, μὲ καιροὺς, πάλι δικὰ μας εἶναι.**



**Τ**ὰ παιδιὰ παίρνουν τὰ πρῶτα πνευματικὰ κρυολογήματα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνοικτὰ παράθυρα τῶν αἰσθήσεων τῶν γονέων. Περισσότερο τὰ κρυολογεῖ ἡ μητέρα, ὅταν δὲν εἶναι ντυμένη μὲ τὴν σεμνότητα, καὶ προσπαθεῖ ἀκόμη νὰ «μαδάη» καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ της. Τὰ «πουλάκια» προστατεύονται ἀπὸ τὴν φιλόστοργη μάνα, ποὺ ἔχει φτερὰ σεμνότητας, καὶ τὰ θερμαίνει μὲ τὴν εὐλάβεια καὶ τὸν φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὅταν ὅμως εἶναι «μαδημένη», τὰ ξεπαγιάζει.

**Γέροντας Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης**

## Άλεξ. Παπαδιαμάντης: Ὁ Εὖσμος καὶ Πάναγος Σκιαθίτης

Ἐκατὸ χρόνια ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατόν του (1851-1911). Τοῦ κ. Δημητρίου Κ. Κουτσουλέλου.

**«Στὰ Γράμματά μας τὰ φτωχά,  
μοναδικὸ διαμάντι,  
γενιὲς γενιῶν θὰ σ' εὐλογοῦν,  
σεμνὲ Παπαδιαμάντη»**

**Γ. Βερίτης**

Συμπληρώνονται ἐφέτος 100 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Ἀλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη, ποὺ πάντοτε μᾶς ἀφυπνίζει, μὲ τὸν καθοδηγητικὸ λόγο του, μᾶς ἀνυψώνει, μὲ τοὺς ὑψηλοὺς στοχασμοὺς του καὶ μᾶς διδάσκει μὲ τὸ ὑπέροχο ἦθος του.

Γιὸς ταπεινοῦ ἐφημερίου, ξεκινᾷ ἀπ' τὸ ὠραῖο νησί του, καὶ ὑψώνεται, μέσα στὴ δοκιμασία καὶ στὸν πόνο, στὴ στέρωση καὶ στὴ πικρία, σὲ ἰδεολόγο ἀγωνιστὴ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν Γραμμάτων. Ἡ ζωὴ του ὀλόκληρη εἶναι ἓνα λαμπρὸ παράδειγμα ἀγνότητος καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνης, αὐτοπειθαρχίας καὶ συνέπειας. Ἀγαποῦσε καὶ νοσταλγοῦσε τὴν ἀγνότητα τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ζωῆς, γιατί μέσα του ζοῦσε ἡ αὐστηρὴ παράδοση.

Ἰδιόμορφος στὸ χαρακτήρα, στὸν τρόπο τῆς ζωῆς καὶ στὴν ἕκ φραση τῆς τέχνης του, ζοῦσε πάντοτε σ' ἓνα φτωχικὸ καὶ ἥρεμο περιβάλλον ποὺ τὸ ἀγίαζαν ἡ ἀγαθότητα καὶ ἡ πίστη, ὁ σεβασμὸς καὶ ἡ νοσταλγία, τὸ θρησκευτικὸ δέος καὶ ἡ καλωσύνη. Μὲ τὶς ὑψηλὲς τάσεις στὴν ἠθικὴ πληρότητα τῆς ζωῆς, τὴν ἐνοραματικὴ δύναμη καὶ τὸ δημιουργικὸ πνεῦμα του, ἔγινε ὁ ὑπέροχος ἐκφραστὴς τῆς νεοελληνικῆς πεζογραφίας καὶ ὁ ἀσύγκριτος συγγραφέας τοῦ νεώτερου Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Μὲ τὴ μεγάλη λυρικὴ πνοὴ καὶ τὸ ἔξοχο παράδειγμά του, ἔγινε ὁ μεγάλος ὀδηγὸς τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γενιάς. Νοσταλγὸς τῶν ἐρημοκκλησιῶν καὶ πιστὸς τηρητὴς τῆς οὐσίας τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Θρησκείας, ἀφιέρωσε ὀλόκληρη τὴ ζωὴ του στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ πνεύματος καὶ τῶν ὑψηλῶν ὀραματισμῶν του.

**Καὶ πάλι κίνησα νὰ ῥθῶ,  
Χριστέ μου, στὴν αὐλή σου,  
νὰ σκύψω στὰ κατώφλια σου,  
στά τρισαγαπημένα,  
ὅπου, μὲ πόθο ἀχόρταγο,  
τὸ λαχταρᾷ ἡ ψυχὴ μου.**

Ἡ ζωὴ του μοιράζεται ἀνάμεσα στὴν Σκιαθὸ καὶ στὴν Ἀθήνα. «Ἡ ψυχὴ μου—γράφει—ἦταν πάντοτε πρὸς τὰ μέρη Ἐκεῖνα τῆς Σκιαθου, ἂν καὶ τὸ πλεῖστον χρόνον ἀπεδημιῶν σωματικῶς...». Θυέλλες καὶ καταιγίδες τὸν συνοδεύουν, ὅπως ἀφρίζει ἡ θάλασσα στοὺς βράχους τοῦ Κάστρου.

Οἱ χωρισμοί, ἡ ξενιτιά, τὰ ναυάγια, ἡ φτώχεια, οἱ θάνατοι, ἡ ἀθωότητα, ἡ νοσταλγία, ἡ πίστη

στοιχειοθετοῦν τὸν ἀγαπημένο καὶ οἰκεῖο βιόκοσμο καὶ μᾶς ἀφυπνίζουν τὴ συγκίνηση καὶ τὴ συμμετοχὴ στὴν καρτερία καὶ στὴν ὀδύνη του. Ποτὲ δὲν ἀπομακρύνθηκε ἀπ' τὴ πραγματικότητα τῆς ζωῆς. Ἡ μνήμη του μεταφέρεται διαδοχικὰ ἀπ' τὰ ἔγκατα τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν Σκιαθιτῶν στὶς φτωχογειτονιὲς τῆς Ἀθήνας. Ἀπ' τὸ σκιόφυτο τοῦ ἐξωκκλησιοῦ στὸ δροσερὸν ὑπόγειο τοῦ καπηλιοῦ.

Εἶναι ὁ μεγάλος καημὸς του, ἡ μεγάλη δύναμή του γιὰ τὴν ἐνατένιση τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τὸν τίμιο ἀγώνα γιὰ τὰ δίκαια καὶ τὰ ἀληθινά. Ἐκατὸ μέτρα ἀπὸ τὴν παραλία βρῖσκεται τὸ σπίτι τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη, χωρὶς ἰδιαίτερο ἀρχιτεκτονικὸ ἐνδιαφέρον, πού, τὸ 1965, κηρύχθηκε διατηρητέο μνημεῖο καὶ λειτουργεῖ ὡς Μουσεῖο. Ἡ ἐπίσκεψη σ' αὐτὸ φέρνει πολλὲς συγκινήσεις. Ἐδῶ ἔμεινε, τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια τῆς ζωῆς του. Ὁ ἐπισκέπτης νομίζει ὅτι θὰ δεῖ τὸν «Κοσμοκαλόγερο», σκυμμένο, μὲ πλεγμένα τὰ χέρια του μπροστὰ καὶ τριμένο παλτό του, καὶ τὶς τέσσερες ἀδελφές του: τὴ Χαρίκλεια, τὴ Σοφούλα, τὴν Κυρατσούλα καὶ τὴν Οὐρανία, πρόθυμες νὰ τὸν φιλέσουν καρῦδι καὶ φασκόμηλο. Ἐδῶ, «μετ' στοργῆς, ἐξωγράφιζε τὰ γνήσια ἑλληνικὰ ἦθη, τὴ Σκιαθίτικη φύση καί, μετὰ λατρείας, ὑμνοῦσε τὸν Χριστὸν του», ψάλλοντας τὰ «τραγοῦδια τοῦ Θεοῦ», μὲ τὴν κατανυκτικὴ γλυκεῖα φωνὴ του.

Μέσα στοὺς δύσκολους καὶ ταραγμένους καιροὺς μας, ἡ ζωὴ μας εἶναι προβληματικὴ, ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἀγωνίες καὶ θλίψεις, στεναγμοὺς καὶ πόνους, δοκιμασίες καὶ ἀχαριστίες. Ὁ ψαλμωδὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐλισαίου μᾶς δείχνει τὸ δρόμο, ποὺ ὀφείλουμε ν' ἀκολουθήσουμε. Εἶναι μεγάλος, σὰν τὸ πνευματικὸ ἀνάστημά του. Ἴσως σὰν τὴν ἀκαμπτη ζωὴ του. Λευκός, σὰν τὴν εὖοσμη καὶ πάναγνη πορεία του. τὸν βλέπουμε μπροστὰ μας, σὲ κάθε βῆμα μας, ρακένδυτο καὶ περιφρονημένο, λιθοβολημένο καὶ αὐ τοεξόριστο, εὐαίσθητο καὶ ἄμωμο. Ἐμπνεόμαστε ἀπ' τὸ ἰσχυρὸ πνεῦμα του, ποὺ ἐνσαρκώνει τὸ ἔργο του, ἐπάνω ἀπὸ ἐποχὲς καὶ τεχνοτροπίες.

«Πόσοι ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς νιώθουμε—γράφει ὁ Τ.Κ. Παπατσώνης—πὼς ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης εἶναι καὶ μένει ὁ Συνέκδημὸς μας καὶ ὁ ὑπογραμμὸς τῆς ἐθνικῆς καὶ ἠθικῆς ζωῆς μας. Χωρὶς Σολωμὸ, Κάλβο, Μακρυγιάννη, κινδυνεύουμε νὰ ρίξουμε στὴ λήθη τὶς μνήμες τῆς Λευτεριάς μας. Χωρὶς τὸν Παπαδιαμάντη, χάνουμε τὶς ρίζες τοῦ νέου μας ἐθνισμοῦ, παύουμε νὰ εἴμαστε Ἕλληνες. Μᾶς προτίθεται ἡ ἐκλογή. Ἀλλὰ δὲν πρέπει ὅμως νὰ μᾶς λείψει ἡ συνείδηση, πὼς θεληματικά, ἀποξενωμένοι ἀπ' τὴ ζωντανὴ φλέβα τῆς ἐθνικῆς μας ζωῆς, τραβοῦμε γιὰ περιπέτειες τυχοδιωκτικῆς, σὲ κόσμους, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι δικοί μας.

Ὅταν ἔχει ἓνας Λαὸς κάτι πολῦτιμο, δὲν τὸ ἀπορρίπτει. Καὶ τὸ ἀγνὸ δίδαγμα τοῦ Σκιαθίτη εἶναι πολὺ τίμιο καὶ ἀνεπανάληπτο».

## Ὁ Ἡσαῦ καὶ οἱ Νεοέλληνες

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμ. Μελετίου Ἀπ. Βαδραχάνη.

Περιεργος φαίνεται ἐκ πρώτης ὄψεως ὁ τίτλος τοῦ παρόντος ἀρθρου. Τί σχέση μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει ὁ Ἡσαῦ μὲ τοὺς Ἑλληνας καὶ μάλιστα ὄχι τοὺς ἀρχαίους ἀλλὰ τοὺς Νεοέλληνες;

Γνωρίζουμε ἀπὸ τὴ Γραφή ὅτι ὁ Ἡσαῦ ἦταν υἱὸς πρωτότοκος τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ ἡ γενιά του καὶ ἡ ράτσα του καταγόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς Σημίτες, ἐνῶ ἡ δική μας γενιά προέρχεται ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἰαφεθίτες, τοὺς γνωστοὺς ὡς Ἰνδοευρωπαίους. Σῆμ καὶ Ἰάφεθ ἦταν δύο ἀπὸ τὰ παιδιά τοῦ Νῶε. Λοιπὸν τί σχέση μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρχει; Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ κοινὸ σημεῖο; Τί ὁμοιότητες ὑπάρχουν μεταξὺ τῶν Νεοελλήνων καὶ τοῦ πρωτοτόκου υἱοῦ τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ;

Κι ὅμως ὑπάρχουν ὁμοιότητες. Καὶ μάλιστα τέτοιου εἶδους, ποὺ μπορούμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἐμεῖς οἱ Νεοέλληνες εἴμαστε οἱ πνευματικοὶ ἀπόγονοι τοῦ Ἡσαῦ. Ἔχουμε τὴ νοοτροπία καὶ τὰ φρονήματά του· τὸ πιστεύω του καὶ τὸν χαρακτήρα του. Αὐτὸ φαίνεται ξεκάθαρα στὴ βιβλική ἱστορία. Ἄς τὴ μελετήσουμε γιὰ νὰ τὸ διαπιστώσουμε.

Λέγει ἡ Γραφή (Γέν. 25:27-34) ὅτι ὁ Ἰσαὰκ μετὰ ἀπὸ προσευχὴς εἴκοσι ἐτῶν ἀπέκτησε δύο δίδυμα τέκνα. Τὸ πρῶτο ποὺ ἐξήλθε ἀπὸ τὴ κοιλία τῆς μητέρας του ἦταν ὁ Ἡσαῦ καὶ ἀκολούθησε ὁ Ἰακώβ. Ὁ Ἡσαῦ ὅταν μεγάλωσε ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ ἀγαποῦσε νὰ τριγυρίζε ἔξω καὶ νὰ ἀσχολεῖται μὲ τὸ κυνήγι. Ρωμαλέος, δυνατός, σκληραγωγημένος, μὲ περιπετειώδη διάθεση καὶ σὺν τοῖς ἄλλοις πρωτότοκος ἀπέσπασε τὴν εὐνοία καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ πατέρα του, ὁ ὁποῖος τὸν καμάρωνε καὶ ἦταν περήφανος γιὰ τὸ διάδοχό του.

Ὁ Ἡσαῦ, σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ ἔθιμα τῆς ἐποχῆς, ἦταν ὁ κύριος κληρονόμος τῆς πατρικῆς περιουσίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ κληρονόμος τῆς πνευματικῆς δωρεᾶς, τῆς εὐλογίας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ εἶχε πάρει ὁ παπποῦς του ὁ Ἄβραὰμ καὶ ὁ πατέρας τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ, ὅτι ἀπὸ τὸ σπέρμα τους θὰ βγεῖ ἓνα μεγάλο ἔθνος εὐλογημένο ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ διὰ μέσου τοῦ ἔθνους αὐτοῦ θὰ εὐλογηθοῦν ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς. Τὴν εὐλογία αὐτὴν μαζὶ μὲ τὴν ὑλική του περιουσία τὴν μετέδωσε ὁ Ἄβραὰμ στὸν Ἰσαὰκ καὶ ὁ Ἰσαὰκ θὰ τὴν μετέδιδε στὸν Ἡσαῦ τὸν πρωτότοκο υἱό του.

Μιὰ μέρα ὁ Ἰακώβ, ποὺ ἦταν ἄνθρωπος τοῦ σπιτιοῦ καὶ ἀγαποῦσε τὶς οἰκιακὲς ἀσχολίες, μαγεῖρεψε μιὰ ὥραία καὶ νόστιμη φακὴ. Ἔρχεται τότε ὁ Ἡσαῦ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐξοχὴ κουρασμένος καὶ ξελιγωμένος ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα. Στὴ θέα τῆς φακῆς λέγει στὸν Ἰακώβ· «μοῦ δίνεις νὰ

φάω, ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ κόκκινο φαγητὸ, ποὺ μαγεῖρεψες, πεθαίνω τῆς πείνας»; Γι' αὐτὸ ὀνομάσθηκε καὶ «Ἐδώμ», δηλαδὴ κόκκινος, ἐπειδὴ ἐπιθύμησε τὶς φακὲς, ποὺ ὅταν βράζουν ἔχουν χρῶμα κόκκινο.

Καὶ ὁ Ἰακώβ, ποὺ ἔβλεπε τὸν ἀδελφό του νὰ ἀσχολεῖται μὲ ἔργα κοσμικὰ καὶ νὰ μὴ ἐνδιαφέρεται γιὰ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν ὁποία αὐτὸς ἐπίμονα ἐπιζητοῦσε καὶ διακαῶς ἐπιθυμοῦσε, τοῦ λέγει· «πούλησέ μου τὰ πρωτοτόκια σου κι ἐγὼ θὰ σοῦ δώσω τὴ φακὴ».

«Βρὲ ποιά πρωτοτόκια μοῦ λές, ποὺ ἐγὼ πεθαίνω στὴν πείνα». Ἀπάντησε ὁ Ἡσαῦ.

Ἄλλὰ ὁ Ἰακώβ ἐπέμενε· «ὀρκίσου ὅτι θὰ μοῦ τὰ δώσεις σήμερα».

«Βάλε μου νὰ φάω καὶ σοῦ ὀρκίζομαι νὰ στὰ δώσω» ἀπάντησε ὁ Ἡσαῦ.

Ἔτσι ὁ Ἡσαῦ περιφρόνησε τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ ἓνα πιάτο φακῆ· γιὰ μιὰ στιγμὴ σωματικοῦ κορεσμοῦ. Κι ὁ Θεός, ποὺ εἶδε αὐτὴ τὴν περιφρόνηση, τὸν ἀπέκλεισε τοῦ ἐπιγεῖου σχεδίου του γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου.

Ἀπὸ ὅτι φαίνεται στὴ Γραφή, ὁ Ἰακώβ δὲν πῆρε ἀπὸ τὸν ἀδελφό του τὴν ὑλικὴ περιουσία ποὺ τοῦ ἀνῆκε, λόγω τῶν πρωτοτοκίων του. Πῆρε μόνο τὴν πνευματικὴ εὐλογία, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ἐκεῖνος καθόλου δὲν ἐνδιαφέρονταν. Συνεπῶς δὲν τὸν ἀδίκησε ὁ ἀδελφός του μὲ τὸ τέχνασμά του· ἀπλῶς ἐκεῖνος ἀδίκησε πνευματικὰ

καὶ αἰώνια τὸν ἑαυτό του.

Ὁ Ἡσαῦ μαζὶ μὲ τὸν Κάιν εἶναι ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπεχθῆ πρόσωπα τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, ποὺ χάριν ἐλάχιστης ὑλικῆς ὠφελείας πούλησαν τὰ πνευματικὰ τους δικαιώματα στὸν διάβολο καὶ προεικονίζουν τὸν Ἰούδα τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, ποὺ πούλησε τὸ Χριστὸ γιὰ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια.

Ἄς ἔρθουμε ὅμως στοὺς Νεοέλληνες καὶ ἄς δοῦμε σὲ τί μοιάζουν μὲ τὸν Ἡσαῦ. Εἶναι ἀπόγονοι Χριστιανῶν προγόνων. Προγόνων ποὺ ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς τους δοκιμάσθηκε σκληρότατα τὰ χρόνια τῆς τουρκοκρατίας. Ἔχουν κι αὐτοὶ συνεπῶς ἐπάνω τους τὴν εὐλογία τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπογόνων καὶ εἶναι φορεῖς καὶ θὰ πρέπει νὰ εἶναι καὶ συνεχιστὲς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. Καὶ φαινομενικὰ αὐτὸ συμβαίνει. Εἶναι μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, συμμετέχουν στὰ μυστήρια της καὶ στὸν ἐκ κλησιασμό, ἔστω καὶ κατὰ ἄρραϊά χρονικὰ διαστήματα, καὶ δηλώνουν ὡς θρησκευτὰ τους τὸν Χριστιανισμό.

Κι ὅμως, ἂν παρατηρήσει προσεκτικὰ κανεὶς, θὰ διαπιστώσει ὅτι ἡ ἐπαφή μας μὲ τὸν Χριστιανισμό εἶναι τυπικὴ, ἐπιφανειακὴ καὶ σχετικὴ. Κι αὐτὴ ἡ προσέλευση τῶν Χριστιανῶν στὰ μυστήρια καὶ στίς



μεγάλες γιορτές γίνεται από έθιμο και συνήθεια, χωρίς καμμία ψυχοσωματική προετοιμασία και μετοχή στα όσα τελούνται. Κλασικὸ παράδειγμα ἡ νύχτα τοῦ Πάσχα, ἡ νύχτα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως, ἡ «έορτὴ τῶν έορτῶν καὶ πανηγυρις τῶν πανηγύρεων».

Βγαίνουμε έξω καὶ μόλις πεῖ ὁ ἱερέας τὸ «Χριστὸς ἀνέστη», σκάμε μερικὰ βαρελότα, τσουγκρίζουμε τὸ αὐγό, ἀνταλλάσσουμε ἀσπασμοὺς καὶ φεύγουμε. Ποῦ πᾶμε; Ποῦ πᾶμε; Στὸ σπίτι νὰ φᾶμε μαγειρίτσα! 1 ὥρα ἢ 1 ½ ὥρα νωρίτερα. Καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία μᾶς έτοιμάσε τραπέζι κι ἐμεῖς τοῦ γυρίζουμε τὶς πλάτες μας...

Ὁ Ἰ. Χρυσόστομος εἰς τὸν «Κατηχητικὸν τοῦ Λόγον» φωνάζει: «Οὐκοῦν εἰσέλθετε πάντες εἰς τὴν χαρὰν τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν... Ἡ τράπεζα γέμει, τρυφήσατε πάντες. Ὁ μόσχος πολὺς, μηδεὶς ἐξέληθι πεινῶν. Πάντες ἀπολαύσατε τοῦ συμποσίου τῆς πίστεως. Πάντες ἀπολαύσατε τοῦ πλούτου τῆς χρηστότητος».

Κ' ἐμεῖς—σὰν τὸν Ἡσαῦ—πουλοῦμε τὴ Θεῖα Κοινωνία, τὴ χαρὰ τῆς ἀναστάσεως, τὴ νίκη κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου γιὰ ἓνα πιάτο μαγειρίτσα. Λατρεύουμε τὴν κοιλία μας πάνω ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Δὲν δεχόμαστε νὰ περιμένει οὔτε μιὰ ὥρα.

Στὰ διάφορα γλέντια μας καὶ στὶς κοσμικὲς μας διασκεδάσεις θέλουμε νὰ ὑπερηφανευόμαστε ὅτι ξευχητήσαμε μέχρι τῶν πρωινῶν ὥρῶν. Ἐδῶ ὅμως ἀδημονοῦμε πότε νὰ φύγουμε. Κι ὅμως λεγόμαστε καὶ ἰσχυρίζομαστε ὅτι εἴμαστε Χριστιανοί!

Δὲν ὑπάρχει φοβερῶτερο ἀμάρτημα ἀπ' αὐτὸ ποὺ γίνεται τὴ νύχτα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως, φοβερῶτερη βλασφημία, φοβερῶτερη ἀσέβεια. Λέει ὁ Χριστὸς στὸ 10<sup>ον</sup> κεφάλαιον τοῦ κατὰ Ματθαίου Εὐαγγελίου, ὅτι ὅποιος δὲν δεχθεῖ τοὺς ἀποστόλους, θὰ κριθεῖ φοβερῶτερα τῶν Σοδόμων καὶ τῆς Γομόρρας. Ἐπὼς θὰ κριθοῦμε ἐμεῖς οἱ πνευματικοὶ ἀπόγονοι τοῦ Ἡσαῦ, ὅταν γυρίζουμε τὶς πλάτες στὸν ἀναστημένο Χριστό;



Γενικῶς ἡ διάκρισις εἶναι καὶ γίνεται γνωστὴ, ὡς ἡ ἀσφαλὴς κατανόησις τοῦ θείου θελήματος σὲ κάθε χρόνον καὶ τόπον καὶ πραγματικῶς ὑπάρχει μόνον σ' ἐκείνους, ποὺ εἶναι καθαρὸι στὴν καρδιά καὶ στὸ σῶμα καὶ στὸ στόμα.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης

## Γνώση καὶ Γνώση

Τοῦ κ. Ἀριστοτέλους Παύλου.

Ἡ πρώτη οἰκοδομεῖ στὸ καλό. Μᾶς βοηθεῖ νὰ γνωρίσουμε, τί εἴμαστε, ποῦ πάσχουμε, ποιὲς οἱ ἀδυναμίες μας, ποῖα τὰ προτερήματά μας. Μᾶς ἀφυπνίζει αὐτὴ ἡ γνώση. Μᾶς βοηθεῖ νὰ ἀναθεωρήσουμε ἀπόψεις. Αὐτὴ ὁδηγεῖ στὴν έρευνα, στὴν πολυμαθία, στὸ νὰ γνωρίσουμε τὰ μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τέτοια γνώση, σέβεται τὸ ἀνεξερεύνητο. Παραδέχεται, ὅτι ἡ λογικὴ, δὲν ἔμπορεῖ νὰ τὸ πλησιάσει, τὸ δέχεται ὅμως, ὅτι ὑπάρχει. Αὐτὸ (τὸ ἀνεξερεύνητο) τὸ έρευνᾷ ἡ πίστις.

Αὐτὴ ἡ γνώση ὀπλίζει μὲ φιλόνηρωπα αἰσθήματα, μαθαίνει νὰ δεχόμαστε εὐχαρίστως τὸν έλεγχο τῶν συνανθρώπων μας, γιὰτὶ οἰκοδομεῖ στὸ καλό. τὸ «ἐν οἶδα ὅτι οὐδὲν οἶδα» αὐτὴ ἡ γνώση τὸ διαλαλεῖ. Διδάσκει δηλαδὴ τὴν ταπεινώση. Ὅδηγεῖ καὶ στὴν περιφρόνηση τῆς υγείας. Ἐνεργοποιεῖ τὶς έσωτερικὲς δυνάμεις (τὶς πνευματικὲς), ὥστε σὲ ὦρες κινδύνου, νὰ προβλέπουν τὶς τρικυμίες τῆς ζωῆς, τὰ ἀπρόοπτα, καὶ ἔτσι νὰ μὴ αἰφνιδιάζεται ὁ ἄνηρωπος. Γνώση ποὺ δὲ σιωπᾷ στὰ μεγάλα κοινωνικὰ προβλήματα. Ἐκφράζεται θαρραλέα πρὸς ὅλες τὶς κατευθύνσεις. Γνώση μὲ ἠθικὴ καὶ θεῖο ἄρωμα.

Ἡ ἄλλη γνώση εἶναι ἡ γνώση ποὺ μᾶς φορτώνει μὲ περιττὰ (μᾶς ἀδειάζει τὴν τσέπη). Τίνος γέννημα εἶναι τὸ ἄγχος, ἡ ἀνησυχία, ἡ ἀνασφάλεια, ἡ δουλεία στὶς μηχανές; Τῆς τεχνικῆς ἐξελίξεως παιδι καὶ αὐτό—αὐτῆς τῆς γνώσεως—τῆς ἄψυχης!

Γνώση αὐτὴ ποὺ παράγει συνεχῶς καὶ νέα ὄπλα, ἀκριβῶς γιὰ νὰ καταστρέφονται περιοσιές, νὰ ἀφανίζονται ἀνθρώπινες ψυχές. Γνώση, ἡ ὁποία χαίρεται νὰ βλέπει αἵματα, πείνα, δυστυχία στὴ γῆ. Ἐξυπνη—πανούργα γνώση—έπιστήμη, ἡ ὁποία νὰ κατασκευάζει ἔξυπνα ὄπλα - βόμβες, ὥστε νὰ μὴ ἔμπορεῖ νὰ κρυφθεῖ κανεὶς (νὰ ἀποφύγει τὸν θάνατο). Αὐτὴ ἡ γνώση γέμισε τὸν ἀέρα μὲ καρκινογόνα μικρόβια. Γνώση αὐτὴ, ἡ ὁποία ὑψώνει τὸν ἑαυτὸ της σὲ Θεό. Ὁ ἐγωϊσμός ἐδῶ στὸ ἔπακρο. Ἐωσφορικὴ - Σατανικὴ γνώση.

Τὶ νὰ περιμένει ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα ἀπὸ μιὰ τέτοια ἄθεη γνώση; Ἦδη ἡ φύση μᾶς ἐκδικεῖται, καὶ ἡ αἰτία εἶναι αὐτὴ. Τιμωρεῖ προκλητικὰ ὅλην τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα, χωρὶς καὶ νὰ ἐντρέπεται. Ἀνήθικη γνώση. Γνώση, ποὺ φάσκει καὶ ἀντιφάσκει. Οὔτε ζητεῖ συγγνώμην γιὰ τὶς ἐπὶ χρόνια ἀθλιότητές της στὴ γῆ καὶ στὸ διάστημα. Πῶς νὰ τὸ πράξει, ἀφοῦ ὁδηγεῖ στὴν τύφλωση καὶ ὁδηγεῖται (πορεύεται στὰ τυφλά, ἀφοῦ λείπει ἡ θεῖα φώτιση;).

Ποιὸς θὰ σώσει τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα ἀπὸ μιὰ τέτοια, ἄκρως ἐπικίνδυνη-δαμονικὴ γνώση;

## Τὸ Χτίσιμο τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας

Θρακικὸς θρύλος ἀπὸ το βιβλίον τοῦ Κ. Ρωμαίου «ΕΛΛΑΣ, Λαογραφία-Γεωγραφία-Ἱστορία», τόμ. 2ος, σελ. 653.



**Ε**νας νεοελληνικὸς θρύλος ἀπὸ τῆς Θράκης μᾶς πληροφορεῖ γιὰ τὸ πῶς χτίσθηκε ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία στὴν Πόλη ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Ἰουστινιανὸ μετὰ τὸ 530 π.Χ.

Αὐτὴ λοιπόν, ἡ σχετικὴ παράδοση ἀπὸ τῆς Θράκης μᾶς περιγράφει καὶ μᾶς ἐξηγεῖ ὅτι τὸ σχέδιο, γιὰ νὰ κτισθῆ ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία, ἔγινε γνωστὸ μὲ ἓναν τελειῶς διαφορετικὸν τρόπο ἀπὸ αὐτὸν ποὺ μάθαμε ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία.

Ἀξίζει νὰ προσέξουμε ἰδιαίτερα τὴν παράδοση αὐτή, γιὰτὶ δὲν εἶναι γνωστὴ ἀπὸ ἄλλους τόπους παρὰ σχεδὸν μόνον ἀπὸ τῆς Θράκης. Τὴ διηγούντουσαν στὴ Βιζύη τῆς Θράκης κατὰ τὸν περασμένον αἰῶνα, καὶ ἐκεῖ, στὴν ἰδιαίτερη πατρίδα του, τὴν ἔμαθε μικρὸ παιδί ὁ ποιητὴς Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός. Καὶ σώζοντάς τὴν ἀπὸ τὴν λησμονιὰ καὶ τὸν βέβαιο ἀφανισμό, τὴν περιέγραψε ἔμμετρα τὸ 1884 μέσα στὴν ποιητικὴ συλλογὴ του «Ἀτθίδες Αὔραι». Ἄς δοῦμε λοιπόν αὐτὸν τὸν ἴδιον τὸ Θρακικὸν θρύλον.

«Ἦταν ὁ καιρὸς ποὺ ὁ βασιλεὺς στὴν Πόλη εἶχε ἀποφασίσει νὰ χτίσει τὴν Ἁγία Σοφία. Εἶχε καλέσει τὸν πρωτομάστορα, καὶ ὁ τελευταῖος εἶχε κάμει ἓνα, καὶ ἕστερα ἄλλο, καὶ ἕστερα ἄλλα σχέδια, πῶς νὰ χτιστῆ ἡ μεγάλη ἐκκλησιά. Κανένα ὅμως δὲν εὐχαριστοῦσε τὸ βασιλιά. Ἦθελε κάτι ἄλλο, πολὺ πιὸ σπουδαῖο. Καὶ ὁ πρωτομάστορας ὅλο καὶ σκεφτόταν τί νέο σχέδιον νὰ φτιάσῃ.

Μιὰ Κυριακὴ, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τελείωνε ἡ λειτουργία, ζύγωσε πρῶτος ὁ βασιλεὺς νὰ πάρῃ τὸ ἀντίδωρο, ἐκεῖνο ὅμως τοῦ ξεφεύγει ἀπὸ τὸ χερὶ καὶ πέφτει χάμω. Μιὰ στιγμὴ ἀργότερα παρουσιάζεται μιὰ μέλισσα ποὺ φτεροκοποῦσε πρὸς τὸ ἀνοιχτὸ παράθυρο, κρατώντας τὸ πεσμένον ἀντίδωρο τοῦ βασιλιά. Βγάνει ἀμέσως διαταγὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς, ὅσοι ἔχουν μέλισσα νὰ τ' ἀνοίξουν καὶ νὰ ψάξουν, γιὰ νὰ βρεθῆ.

Ψάχνει καὶ ὁ πρωτομάστορας στὰ δικά του τὰ μελλίσσια καὶ τί βλέπει; Εἶχανε κάτσει οἱ μέλισσες μέρες πρὶν καὶ εἶχανε φτιάξῃ μὲ τὸ κερὶ μέσα στὴν κυψέλη μιὰν ἐκκλησιὰ πανέμορφη καὶ σκαλιστὴ καὶ μεγαλόπρεπη, ποὺ δὲν εἶχε τὴν ὁμοιά της σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴν Οἰκουμένη. Ὅλες οἱ λεπτομέρειες εἶχανε γίνῃ στὴν ἐντέλεια, μέσα κι' ἔξω στὴν ἐκκλησιὰ. Ἡ πόρτα

τῆς ἀνοιχτὴ, ὁ τροῦλος ἔτοιμος, οἱ κολῶνες στὴ θέση τους, ὡς καὶ ἡ Ἁγία Τράπεζα τελειωμένη. Τὴν εἶχαν ἀποτελειώσῃ σ' ὅλα τῆς τὴν ἐκκλησιὰ, καὶ ἀπάνω στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα τῆς εἶχε φέρε ἑκεῖνη ἡ μέλισσα καὶ εἶχε ἀποθέσει τὸ ἀντίδωρο τοῦ βασιλιά.

Εἶδε τὴν ἐκκλησιὰ ὁ πρωτομάστορας καὶ θάμαξε μὲ τὸ τέλειον σχέδιόν της. Τὴν εἶδε κατόπι καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἔγινε ὅλος χαρὰ. Τὸ σχέδιον, ποὺ εἶχανε φτιάξῃ οἱ μέλισσες, ἔγινε τὸ σχέδιον ποὺ χτίστηκε ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία!!!».

† † †

## ΠΑΝΕΛΛΗΝΙΟΙ ΘΡΥΛΟΙ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑ-ΣΟΦΙΑΣ

### Ὁ Μαρμαρωμένος Βασιλεὺς

Ὅταν μῆκαν οἱ Τούρκοι στὴν Πόλη, ἄγγελος Κυρίου ἄρπαξε τὸ βασιλεῖον καὶ τὸν πῆγε σὲ μιὰ σπηλιὰ βαθιὰ στὴ γῆ κάτω, κοντὰ στὴ Χρυσόπορτα. Ἐκεῖ μένει μαρμαρωμένος ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ καρτερεῖ νὰ κατεβῆ ὁ ἄγγελος στὴ σπηλιὰ, νὰ τὸν ξεμαρμαρώσῃ. Καὶ θὰ σηκωθῆ πάλι ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ θὰ μπεῖ στὴν Πόλη καὶ θὰ διώξῃ τοὺς Τούρκους ὡς τὴν Κόκκινη Μηλιά.

### Ὁ Παπὰς τῆς Ἁγία-Σοφίας

Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ μῆκαν οἱ Τούρκοι στὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία δὲν εἶχε τελειώσῃ ἀκόμα ἡ λειτουργία. Ὁ παπὰς ποὺ ἔκανε τὴ λειτουργία πῆρε ἀμέσως τὸ Ἅγιο Δισκοπότηρο, ἀνέβηκε στὰ κατηχούμενα, ἐμπῆκε σὲ μιὰ θύρα καὶ ἡ θύρα ἔκλεισε ἀμέσως. Εἶναι θέλημα Θεοῦ ν' ἀνοίξῃ μόνη τῆς ἡ θύρα, ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἡ ὥρα, καὶ θὰ βγῆ ἀπὸ κεῖ ὁ παπὰς, νὰ τελειώσῃ τὴ λειτουργία στὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία, ὅταν θὰ πάρουμε πίσω τὴν Πόλη.

### Ἡ Ἁγία Τράπεζα τῆς Ἁγία-Σοφίας

Τὴν μέρα ποὺ πάρθηκε ἡ Πόλη, ἔβαλαν σ' ἓνα καράβι τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα τῆς Ἁγία-Σοφίας, νὰ τὴν πάει στὴν Φραγκιά, γιὰ νὰ μὴν πέσει στὰ χερῖα τῶν Τούρκων. Ἐκεῖ ὅμως στὴ θάλασσα τοῦ Μαρμαρὰ ἀνοίξε τὸ καράβι καὶ ἡ Ἁγία Τράπεζα ἐβούλιαξε στὸν πάτο. Στὸ μέρος ἐκεῖνο ἡ θάλασσα εἶναι λάδι, ὅση θαλασσοταραχὴ καὶ κύματα κι' ἂν εἶναι γύρω. Καὶ τὸ γνωρίζουν τὸ μέρος αὐτὸ ἀπὸ τὴ γαλήνη, ποὺ εἶναι πάντα ἐκεῖ, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν εὐωδία ποὺ βγαίνει. Πολλοὶ μάλιστα ἀξιώθηκαν νὰ τὴν ἰδοῦν στὰ βάθη τῆς θάλασσας.

### Τὰ Ψάρια τοῦ Μπαλουκλή

Τὴν ἡμέρα ποὺ ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλη ἓνας γέροντας τηγάνιζε ψάρια, καὶ ὅταν τοῦ εἶπαν «Ἐάλω ἡ Πόλις», εἶπε πῶς γιὰ νὰ πιστέψῃ πῶς ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλη, ἔπρεπε νὰ βγοῦν τὰ ψάρια ἀπὸ τὸ τηγάνι. Καὶ Ὡ! τοῦ θαύματος, ἔτσι ἔγινε. Πότε ἄραγε θὰ ὀλοκληρωθῆ τὸ τηγάνισμα τῶν ψαριῶν ποῦ εἶναι τηγανισμένα μόνον ἀπὸ τὴν μία τους πλευρά;

## ON THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

By Rassophore-monk Inok Vsevolod, translated from Russian by Ms. Mary Mansur.

*I have an opinion as to this number [666], though I do not know for certain, for many names have been found in this number when it is expressed in writing. Still we say that perhaps the scription of this same seal will give us the word "I deny." ... Of such kind, in the time of that hater of all good, will be the seal, the tenor of which will be this: "I deny the Maker of heaven and earth, I deny the baptism, I deny my (former) service and attach myself to thee, and I believe in thee." ... Truly those who are engrossed in the affairs of life, and with the lust of this world, will be easily brought over to the accuser [Antichrist] then, and sealed by him. St. Hippolytus of Rome, "Discourse on the End of the World and on Antichrist."*

† † †

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

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

What is the genuinely Orthodox approach to this subject? We shall try to explain. The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church allow various explanations of the number of the beast. Most often the name is sought in the correspondence between the number of the beast and the sum of letters of this or that name. Thereby people have arrived at many descriptive and even proper names of Antichrist, and likewise his title. They have deduced such names as "Wicked Leader,"

"Ancient Envier," "Truly Malicious," "Unrighteous Lamb," and others.

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

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

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

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

These confessions may be said to contain fragments of true revelation. If Satan did not exist, one could say that these pagan peoples revered the true God-in-Trinity, even though their concepts of just Who this is were in many ways distorted. But because the world of dark spirituality is in fact a distorted representation of the Divine world, and the devil

in his actions imitates God in a distorted fashion, it follows that the distorted divinity of the pagans is a false god, endeavoring to pass for the true God. Through the lips of the Prophet David, the Church warns us that *all the gods of the heathen are devils*. (Pss 95:5). It is evident that, under the guise of these pagan “trinities,” Satan himself is concealed together with his minions.

This is iconographically supported: in the Christian art of Europe and Abyssinia one finds three-headed, three-faced or three-horned depictions of Satan, symbols of the satanic false trinity. Two thousand years ago, as Christianity spread throughout the world, it disarmed and bound the religion of Satan, as this was manifest in numerous pagan cults. In the time of Antichrist this religion of evil will again, in one form or another, come to dominate the world.

In what will the religion of Antichrist consist? It is enigmatically expressed for us by the Apostle as the number 666. As we see, this number is composed of three sixes: six hundreds, six tens and six ones. If we turn to Holy Scripture, we see that the number six rarely figures in either the Old or New Testaments, whereas the number seven is used in the Bible as a symbol of completeness, of fulfillment, of perfection, of wholeness (often in the sense of absolute perfection). In Christ, humanity is shown an example of *the fullness of the Godhead* (Col 2:9). The Antichrist, by contrast, will unite in himself all incompleteness, all imperfection, and deficiency. The symbol of imperfection—that seeks to appear as perfection—is none other than the number six. In the number of the beast this imperfection is raised to its extreme: it is not merely six, but six hundred, sixty-six!

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

The “moral” teaching of Satan can also be expressed as a type of triune evil: evil reasoning, evil feelings, and evil will. This anti-moral teaching can also be symbolically expressed

by the name of the beast, more precisely, by the tripartite number of this name. For this reason, the acceptance of this name of Antichrist in the form of some seal will in fact be a denial of Christ and His Church.

The son of perdition, the Antichrist, inasmuch as he is a man, will give the devil the possibility—through him—to act openly in the world, and, with the help of the false prophet, to deceive and destroy people. The greater part of humanity will gladly accept this proud message of the man-god, whose principal postulates will be: “Man! Know that your ‘I’ is a part of the divinity. You are truly a god! You are a law unto yourself. No one has any authority over your ‘I.’ An example for you is your messiah [Antichrist], a great man, who knows that he is a god!”



The false religion of Antichrist can thus best be characterized as a humanist religion, in the sense that it is not divine; it is vain, transitory. This is why the number of the beast is called in the Apocalypse, *the number of a man*. (Rev. 13:18). The number of a man is the name of the man-Antichrist, who will reveal himself to be a god, but who in essence will be merely a **pathetic slave of the fallen angel**.

Let us say now a few words about that close unity of the three persons of the false-trinity. According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, the whole life and activity of Antichrist will be connected in one way or another to Satan, to whom he will be in conscious and voluntary submission. Antichrist will be close to the devil as no other person in the history of the world. He will be a real instrument of Satan. In turn, the false prophet, who is called in the Scriptures the second beast, will be Antichrist’s closest ally. Through Antichrist, Satan will give enormous power and authority to the false prophet, who will act with all the authority of the first beast, and will compel all the earth and all those living upon the earth to bow down before him. Through the miracles that the beast will grant the false prophet to perform, the latter will deceive many, telling them to make an image to the beast: *And he will be given power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should all be killed*. (Rev 13:11-12, 14-15).

From the second verse of the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation, one can conclude that it is precisely thanks to the false prophet that many people will accept the mark of the beast. However, three and a half years later the reign of

lawlessness will come to an end, for the Lord Jesus Christ will appear in glory and overwhelm all the enemies of God. *And the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.* (Rev 20:10).

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

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

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

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

Let us return now to the two groups of people whom we mentioned at the beginning of this article, and see how they will react to the mark of the beast. It is very likely that both those who are indifferent to the question of accepting the stamp and those who zealously study marks on currency, documents and manufactured goods, endeavoring to detect the mark of Antichrist—both groups will be found outside Christ's Church. The first because, even in accepting the mark of Antichrist, they will console themselves with the thought

that this is merely some innocuous, ecumenical rite. And the second, because even before the placing of the marks (or even before the coming of Antichrist), they will accuse the earthly part of Christ's Church with having accepted the mark of Antichrist, although in fact this will be simply some credit card or new type of personal document. Furthermore, such zealots “not according to knowledge” will proclaim that their group alone—which has rejected these “marks” (cards, documents, products with certain symbols, etc.)—is the true Church. Clearly, this will be nothing but a new schism or sect. Already now we find many sad examples of such splinter groups, and they will only increase in the last times.

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

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

This will be the greatest temptation to overcome, and many will not. Just listen to the logic: “Why do you refuse to take part in this measure that involves all of humanity, that is being instituted worldwide? After all, it symbolizes unity and the brotherly love of all peoples. It is a symbol of our unity under the aegis of a lawful global authority that has been given to all men from above. Are you against peace and order? Do you want a reign of chaos and enmity? If you are people of good will, you must take part in these cultural enactments that concern all mankind.” Of course, it will turn out that one such “innocent” enactment will be, in fact, the rite of bowing down before the God-hating Antichrist. Only a discerning vigilance, illumined by the grace of God, will be able to preserve us from such subtle deception of the last times. What will be the consequences of accepting the mark

of Antichrist? They will be truly horrific, destroying human souls. The fruit of denying God is always dreadful, for life without God is death.

Will one be able to repent after having accepted the mark of the beast? On the one hand, there is little hope that a person who does not have enough faith and spiritual strength to refuse the mark will be able to repudiate it once he has voluntarily accepted it. On the other hand, our attitude towards the mark of the beast must be free of all unorthodox fatalism and fetishism, for no seal or mark, in and of itself, can have any power over a man. The powers of evil behind this mark have power only over those who personally submit to them, who deny Christ. According to the Orthodox teaching, the power of Christian repentance is stronger than the power of evil. The history of the Church knows numerous examples of people who accepted the spiritual seal of Satan himself, people who signed a pact with the devil, voluntarily entrusting their souls to him. And here we have a testimony of God's love for mankind: even some of these apostates repented and became saints. The Lord, by His authority, annulled their pact with Satan. We have only to recall the life of Saint Cyprian, a formidable satanist who became a saint after repenting and turning to Christ.

The Orthodox Church teaches us that, up to the time of his physical death, each person, by God's mercy, has the possibility to repent. Therefore, we would deny God's mercy were we to say that people who accept the mark of Antichrist will have no further possibility of repentance. While they are still alive, this possibility will be available to them. Desiring their repentance, the Lord will send down upon them dreadful pestilences, as final, decisive measures for their spiritual restoration. (cf. St. Andrew of Caesarea, "Commentary on the Apocalypse").

But, alas, **Sacred Scripture clearly states that those who consciously accept the mark of Antichrist will no longer have any desire to repent.** They will bite their tongues from pain, but even so they will not cease *blaspheming God and they will not repent of their deeds.* (Rev. 16:10-11). If, among those who bow down before the beast, there should be some isolated cases of repentance, this conversion and repentance can be regarded only as a miracle of God. The conscious acceptance of the soul-destroying stamp under the assumption that one can later repent is a terrible and unforgivable sin in the eyes of God.

Therefore, while there is yet time, let us prepare ourselves for the coming trials. Such preparation consists in fulfilling all the soul-saving precepts and ordinances of our Mother, the Orthodox Church. While we still have the opportunity and spiritual strength, let us tirelessly entreat the Merciful God with the words of the Lord's Prayer, as the Savior intentionally ordained: *Our Father ... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*

## ABBA SERAPION [COMMEMORATED MAY 14<sup>TH</sup>]

Source: *Palladius, Lausiac History*

The fathers used to tell how Abba Serapion sold himself to some Greek actors in one of the towns for twenty coins. He wrapped up the coins and kept them on himself. He stayed with the actors who had bought him for a long time, until he had made them Christians, and then withdrew from the theater, taking nothing but bread and water. Nor did his mouth ever cease from discussing the Scriptures.

After some time the actor was seized with compassion, then the actress, then their whole family. It was said that for as long as they did not recognize him, he would even wash the feet of both of them. In any case, both were baptized and gave up performing on the stage. They led a holy and pious life, and they had the highest respect for him and told him, "Come, brother, let us set you free, since you freed us from our shameful slavery."

He said to them, "Since God worked grace in your souls and saved you, I may tell you the secrets of my business. I had compassion on your souls. I am a free man, and an Egyptian ascetic, and I sold myself for your sakes so that you might be saved. Now since God brought this about and your souls have been saved through my debasement, take your money so that I may go and help others." They entreated him and gave their assurance that "we will have you as our own father and master; only stay with us!" Still they could not persuade him. Then they told him, "Give the money to the poor, for it is our first pledge of salvation. But at least visit us once a year."

Another brother visited Abba Serapion and the old man invited him to say a prayer. But the other, calling himself a sinner and unworthy of the monastic habit, did not obey. Next, Abba Serapion wanted to wash his feet, but using the same words again, the visitor prevented him. Then Abba Serapion made him eat and he began to eat with him. Then Abba Serapion admonished him saying, "My son, if you want to make progress, stay in your cell and pay attention to yourself and your manual work; going out is not so profitable for you as remaining at home."

When he heard these words, the visitor was offended and his expression changed so much that the old man could not but notice it. So he said to him, "Up to now you have called yourself a sinner and accused yourself of being unworthy to live, but when I admonished you lovingly, you were extremely put out. If you want to be humble, learn to bear generously what others unfairly inflict upon you, and do not harbor empty words in your heart." Hearing this, the brother asked the old man's forgiveness and went away greatly edified.

## THE STRAIT AND NARROW WAY

By Saint Theophan the Recluse.



One frequently hears people say: “The Lord, having created man, led him into Paradise and provided him with everything for his enjoyment. After the fall, although man was expelled from Paradise, his capacity for pleasure and the means for pleasure remained: flowers offered the delight of smell, fruits—taste, the starry sky—sight, the singing of

birds—hearing. Later, along the same lines, man invented music. Everything in nature speaks of the goodness of the Creator. There are those, however, who, in spite of God’s good will, want to place restraints everywhere, limitations. They violate nature; they misrepresent God, holding forth a very distorted image.”

A sad state of affairs indeed! And I, having written you in my last letter that even laymen should not shrink from monastic strictness if they want to be genuine Christians, thought that I had convinced everyone and that all your perplexities had been resolved. But what a muddle we have here! Why on earth have you put yourself in such a quandary—as if truth is on their side. You should say to them: “Go ahead, my friends, have fun, amuse yourselves, open wide all the gates of pleasure and delight, and revel at the banquet of this life... No one is holding you back, no one will place any barriers in your way. Live as you want. You are told only, in the words of the Lord, that there are two paths for the sons of men: the narrow path and the broad path, and that the first leads to life, while the latter leads to perdition.

Read it for yourself, if you will. Here it is straight from the Gospel: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* (Mt 7:13-14).

If you want to hear, then hear, but if you don’t want to hear, then do as you like. This is not some human invention; it is a command of the Lord, nothing less. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate*, says the Lord on another occasion, *for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* (Lk 13:24) “Strive,” i.e., hasten, as if you are racing, competing with others to enter this strait and narrow gate, disregarding others, snatching it away from others: Let me in, let me in! As if fearful that these gates might close.

Why this is so is not for us to judge. The Lord ordained it this way, and that’s that! Yes, and what Lord is this? He, Who, for our salvation, Himself went ahead of us along this narrow path and, after all manner of suffering, gave His soul

to God from the Cross, saying to the crucified thief, *This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.*

He is, after all, our Saviour! All those who wish to be saved must follow after Him. And to follow after Him is possible only by carrying one’s cross: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* (Mk 8:34). This is the way of all those who desired salvation: apostles, martyrs, hierarchs, saints, and all those who attained salvation and who now inhabit God’s city, the heavenly Jerusalem.

So, what’s to be done? Certainly, one cannot be saved otherwise when, among those that are saved, there is not one who attained eternal blessedness by any other path. Is it not better to submit to this necessity, even though it may not be that sweet? After all, to suffer eternally is worse. Let those who wish to be saved somehow constrain themselves, and not seek excuses. It is hard, but what can you do? Not without reason is life called a struggle, a podvig. As Saint Paul says, *Fight the good fight of faith.* (I Tim 6:12). As for those who do not wish to submit, they will do as they please. They should know, however, that the various rules and constraints are not man’s invention; they are commands of God.

A word of explanation might be added here. Why is it that this or that constraint is necessary? Why, for example, do we need to fast, why solitude, why so much prayer, etc.? However, I won’t go into this. Those who follow the salvific path know how necessary all this is, while those who shun this path would rather not hear about it. Concerning those skewed interpretations of Scripture that you had in your letter, I think I’ve already written to you.

In Paradise, it’s true, there were many things that brought man enjoyment, but these constituted but an external adornment of paradisiacal life; they were secondary elements. Man’s primary purpose was not to delight in these but to be in communion with God through the voluntary fulfillment of God’s will. If Paradise had remained man’s dwelling-place, people would certainly have taken pleasure in these externals as well, but they would not have thought anything of it; it would not have been a concern as it would have been a natural adjunct, a shadow of a God-pleasing life.

So you see, even in Paradise, they didn’t discuss or fuss about pleasures, while we, who have lost Paradise, want to set pleasure as the principal goal of life. If delights could lawfully have been the lot of fallen man, the Lord would not have expelled our forefathers from Paradise. By expelling them, He showed that a life of ease and pleasure does not befit fallen man. As you know, through the fall the entire order of things was changed. To man’s life was added a brief period of earthly existence, full of sorrows and troubles designed to enlighten, correct, and cleanse man, to make him worthy of eternal enjoyment in a different, eternal paradise. Man’s true life comes after the grave, or, more precisely, after his

resurrection; while the present life is merely a threshold, a preparation for that future life. It is in the nature of this present life, as ordained by God, to have various external sorrows and misfortunes, and He prescribed for it various strictures as means of cleansing.

Martyrs were flayed with iron claws, and thereby prepared for Paradise. This is an image of man's present life, in which, through these cleansing restrictions or constraints, like scourges, he is prepared for a blessed eternity! If you can get a man to understand well and to take to heart the brevity of this present life and how much benefit there is in its restrictions and confinements for the future, unending life, he will not only cease to shun them but, on the contrary, he will ask for them and strive for them as after something good and positive. This is how all those proceed who properly understand the meaning of this present life.

The fact that, after his expulsion from Paradise, man was not deprived of all means of pleasure, does not mean that there is no place for constraints in the order of the present life. In reaching for an explanation of this point, there come to mind the words of my dear teacher, Y. K. Amphiteatrov.

One day I was walking with him through a grove, and I asked him in passing, "Why are there such disparities in nature? Here is a lovely flower, and next to it is a stinging nettle or jimsonweed. And the sky: sometimes it's clear and sometimes it's overcast and dreary."

"Silly fellow," he replied. "These disparities are no trifling matter in the economy of God's providence concerning our salvation. The merciful God thereby says to you: It is only right that the sweat never leave your brow; it is your lot to be wearied by toil; but I sometimes give you to taste the sweetness of life, I allow your eyes to fill with light, your brow to be smoothed of furrows, and a smile to play upon your lips, so that you not lose hope and fall into despair. It is only right that the earth bring forth thorns and thistles for you, but I have ordained that it sometimes produce for an abundance of delights so that you might not lose the assurance that there still exists the possibility of recovering the lost blessedness. It is only right that in the air above your head and all around you should be nothing but storms, thunder, lightning; but you often see bright sun and enjoy the pleasant coolness of morning and the delightful tranquility of evening—so that you would remember that heaven is not altogether closed for you, that My embrace is always open towards you, and that I am ready to receive you into the heavenly habitations."

This, then, is the reason why certain enjoyments remain in nature, and not so that we might make these crumbs into a life-long party, or build out of these fragments a temple of happiness on earth! But our pleasure-seekers think otherwise. In their opinion, every constraint, every barrier to enjoyment is a violation of man's nature and is contrary to God's will. I have already said that this is not so, that God Himself

ordained that man walk the narrow path. That this is in no way a violation of human nature may be understood from the following.

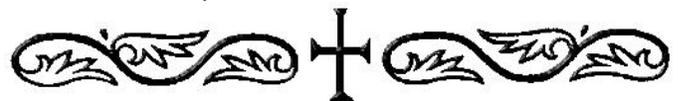
When man fell, he not only fell below his dignity, he also accepted internally some principles foreign to his proper nature, the seeds, as it were, of every kind of evil. Consequently, in fallen man we must differentiate what is proper to his nature and what is alien to it, although this, too, is found in man. All constraining rules and measures, prescribed and established by God, are exclusively aimed against these alien and evil seeds, in order to crush them, to suffocate them, and thereby to set at liberty man's true nature.

So, constraints are not a violation of nature but are like beneficial tools or means. They are what an operation is for the surgical removal of a malignancy, or a plaster for the drawing out of harmful matter. Our nature is in bondage. By placing various restraints upon us, the Lord wants to free our nature. But we resist: "Don't touch! Don't hedge us in with rules!" And thereby, instead of defending we calumniate ourselves.

Pleasure-seekers are lost souls. It's not to say that there is no place in life for pleasure; we should accept everything from the hands of God with thanksgiving. At the same time, we should not strive after enjoyments, nor, all the more, rebel against all kinds of restraining precepts. This is not why the Lord Himself prescribed them. Such rebelliousness manifests not only a lack of understanding of the matter in question, but even a militant antitheism.

You see where it all leads! But they think lightly of it. For the present they may be all right, but what will they find in the next world? Straitness and, against their will, a bitter and wretched straitness, for then it will be of no benefit.

Lord, have mercy and save us!



Struggle, my child, as much as you can to become forceful; force yourself in everything, especially in silence and in mournful tears. When silence is practiced with knowledge and maintained with tears, the foundation stone of monasticism is set, on which the secure house will be built wherein the soul will find spiritual warmth and comfort.

It is a bad omen for the soul's future if silence is not kept, since one who is not silent scatters whatever he gathers; for a monk who is free with his mouth will be disorderly in everything. When we are silent, we have the time for interior prayer, which brings full assurance, and the time for luminous thoughts, which fill the intellect and heart with light. Therefore, my child, compel yourself in everything, for the good beginning is praised, but the negligent beginning is censured, for its end is most lamentable.

Elder Ephraim  
*"Counsels from the Holy Mountain"*

## ON MIRACLES

By Professor Ivan M. Andreyev.

Some scientists (insufficiently educated in philosophy) categorically reject the possibility of miracles and regard a miracle as contradictory to the laws of nature. Very often such scholars assert that miracles appear to be either a fiction, a fraud, or such a phenomenon which science cannot at present explain, but will certainly be explained scientifically later on. What is unintelligible today might be intelligible and explainable tomorrow.

Science, setting for itself the problem of an exact, objective proof of phenomena investigated experimentally, is fully correct in approaching miraculous phenomena in an attempt at scientific enlightenment. It is without doubt true that often so called miraculous phenomena prove to be not at all miraculous. A fiction or deceit in such cases is lawfully revealed through a scientific method of verification. It is also undoubtedly true that many phenomena, not understood at the present time, may be scientifically explained at some future time. But the problem of a miracle is not fully explained by this.

It is necessary, therefore, first of all, to define what in religion is called a miracle. A miracle is a phenomenon which is unexplainable not only at the present time but, in general, can never be fully explained merely from a scientific point of view. The philosophical problem of a miracle, therefore, arrives at the question: Is a miracle possible? In other words, is such a phenomenon possible which cannot be explained from the point of view of science?

Very often, atheistically and materialistically inclined scholars say that every phenomenon of nature and every event occurring in the world can be explained by the laws of nature alone, without the help of God or of miracles. This is not correct. At least two cases are unexplainable by the laws of nature alone: 1) The very existence of the world or nature, and 2) the laws of nature themselves. Therefore, the existence of the world and its laws are miracles.

Who created the world and the laws of nature? There are not and there cannot be any logical obstacles for the belief that the cause of the world and its laws is God.

The English philosopher Berkeley (1685-1753) gave this reasoning concerning, the above. The laws of nature, said he, are those means through which God governs the world, and the actions of these laws of nature are actions of God Himself. As a result, where God finds it necessary according to His

intentions or plans, He can change these constant methods of His activity in the world so that a phenomenon will occur which is unexplainable by the laws of nature alone; that is, an actual miracle will occur. Almighty God, whenever He chooses, can even change “the order of nature.”

Very often we may happen to hear it said that a miracle contradicts the laws of nature, but the word “contradicts” is out of place here. We will try to analyze this question carefully.

Let us suppose that on the earth everything exists except man and his consciousness. In such a world can a steam engine appear? Of course, it is impossible! But why? All the component parts of the steam engine exist in the world of steel, copper, iron, wood, water, etc. Is it possible that by accidental motion of the particles of which a steam engine is composed, during a long period of time, millions of years, that a steam engine could fabricate itself just by chance? No, this is impossible. Actually, for a steam engine to put in an appearance, the intelligence of the man who designed and

made it is a necessity. Without the aid of consciousness, the steam engine is a miracle, even though all its components exist in nature.

As it is, this miracle—the appearance of an engine—does not contradict the laws of nature. All the laws of nature remain inviolate. But they—the laws of inert unconscious nature—are overcome by a new factor, consciousness. In order to explain the miracle of mechanics, a recognition of a “higher factor,” consciousness, is necessary.

Now we turn to consciousness itself. Can consciousness be explained by inert, unconscious laws of nature?

If these laws could not create a steam engine, even less chance would they have to create something incomparably more complicated—consciousness. (Such nonsense is assumed only by materialists who regard consciousness as a product of evolving matter.) Even consciousness cannot explain itself. Consciousness can create a steam engine, but it cannot create itself. It follows, then that consciousness is also a miracle. To explain this miracle it is necessary to accept even a more complicated, higher and more complete principle, which causes such phenomena like consciousness. This higher cause of consciousness (a higher Intellect) is God, faith in Whom is not impeded by anything found in science or philosophy.

If man’s consciousness, meddling with inert and unconscious nature and overcoming it, can make such things (miracles) like steam engines, then the higher, divine Intellect,



having created man's consciousness and inert nature, directly intervening in inert nature and overcoming it (by powers unknown to us of His creative, divine Intellect), can create phenomena even more greatly complicated; for instance, to transform water into wine or to resurrect the dead. In these phenomena the laws of nature are not violated; a miracle does not contradict the laws of nature but overcomes them by higher forces unknown to us.

When scholars came to Newton and expressed perplexity in regard to his belief in the future resurrection of bodies, he answered in the following manner: Taking a pile of copper and steel filings and mixing them together, he offered to separate the steel from the copper. Then he took a large magnet and with its help he quickly separated the steel filings from the copper. The Lord God evidently has forces which are more complicated and unknown to us (special magnets), with the help of which He can perform a resurrection of the bodies of all the dead at the future fearful Judgment. Nothing interfered with Newton's belief in this.



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

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

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

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

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

**Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (+1867)**



**C**hrist the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the faith.

**St. Maximus the Confessor**

## A SAINTLY MAN OF OUR DAYS

*From the book "Elder Porphyrios (+1991): Testimonies and Experiences," by Klitos Ioannides. The subject article is a discussion between the author and Fr. George C. Evthimiou, a professor at the Theological School of the University of Athens.*

**K.I.:** Father George, you lived by the Elder for many years, and the fact that you are with us today to talk about this holy man of our times gives us great pleasure.

**Fr. G.E.:** I thank you very much Mr. Ioannides for I was made worthy to have Elder Porphyrios as spiritual father and guide during a decisive period in my life. The Elder truly played an important role in the development of my personality. I owe much of what I have today to him. Because of that I keep him as a guide in my pastoral ministry which God has made me fortunate to practice.

Elder Porphyrios was a genuine human being created in the image of God. As we know from what he himself told us, burning with the love of God, he secretly left his home in Evia and went to Mt. Athos to the area of Kavsokalyvia. There he became the disciple of two elders, to whom, as he himself told us, he gave absolute obedience. He really was very obedient; whatever the fathers told him to do, he immediately hurried to fulfill the request.

His obedience was an act of freedom, an exceptionally powerful act, that actually frees a man from the passions, faults and weaknesses that dominate him. Through this he was in Christ and lived the freedom of God's children. You could see concentrated in Elder Porphyrios all the personality characteristics which we see in the saints of our Church; love, humility, simplicity and discernment. Precisely because of his complete devotion to God, he was made worthy to receive great spiritual gifts, such as foresight and discernment. As a result of this, he became an outstanding spiritual father, who literally guided the lives of many.

Even in the twilight of his life, in pain, in bed, and suffering from various illnesses, even then, he continued his pastoral duties by phone. Day and night, literally twenty-four hours a day, thousands of people, from the length and breadth of the planet, phoned him for his help, advice and prayers.

Elder Porphyrios had all those features, that made him lovable, desirable and able to attract people like a magnet. This didn't happen in a magical way, but because he had all those characteristics that everyone longs for. He had all those reminders of our divinely created image and of the purpose for which we were created. Let us recall here the teaching of our Church. God, out of His love, and only out of His love, created man for one sole purpose; to make him a partaker of his own happiness. God creates man to make him happy, whole and to live in the fullness of the communion of God.

Elder Porphyrios, like the whole of humanity, received a calling from God. Everyone is called to salvation since this

is the very purpose of our existence. The distinguishing mark of the Elder, as with all the saints of the Church, was that he responded to this calling. He made his choice early on and said, "I want to be with Christ and to live according to Christ." Then he followed Christ; as the Lord says, *Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself take up his cross and follow Me.* (Mk 8:34).

His life was full of turmoil and upset, like all the saints of the Church, in the words of the Lord, *Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way.* (Mt 7:14) that leads to the kingdom of God. Elder Porphyrios also had a life full of ups and downs, with many trials, temptations and thorns in the flesh. He went through the furnace of suffering and sorrow, by which Man is purified of all the passions within him and is offered to God clean and whole. He battled throughout his whole life against that evil serpent the devil, who is *like a roaring lion seeking his prey.* (I Pet 5:8) He also struggled against that other enemy, the old Adam and the world subject to sin. His weapons were vigil, fasting and prayer, through which he was deemed worthy of heavenly gifts.

He was also made a spiritual father by the Metropolitan of Karystia, Panteleimon, at the very young age of twenty-one. Large numbers of people flocked to the monastery of St. Charalambos in Evia, where he was then living. They sought release from their sins, unburdening them upon him.

**K.I.:** How were these special characteristics of Elder Porphyrios expressed?

**Fr. G.E.:** We see in Elder Porphyrios' life all the characteristics of a saint of the Church. At the same time we can see certain distinct characteristics, which bring to mind the consistent teaching of our Church, that the grace of God overshadows Man, enlightens him and directs him, but it does not overwhelm him. That is to say, each saint of the Church retains the unique characteristics of his personality.

I can attest to the love that Elder Porphyrios had, both towards God and towards people, from my own personal experience. His love towards God was wholehearted. He loved Him with all his being and he truly devoted his whole life to him. This love of his towards God, a love that had wounded his heart, sprang forth towards his fellow man. I often witnessed this touching love of his. I remember with how much love and affection he understood and sympathized with our problems when we were in difficult situations. He took these problems upon himself, prayed considerably and struggled alongside us to find the solution.

I will never forget some of the typical phone calls that he made during really critical and difficult moments for me. As I already mentioned, he carried out his pastoral work by phone. He would phone me up at the most unusual hours—once it

was six in the morning! I hadn't even told him my trouble, and yet, he would ask me about that particular problem and give me meaningful advice.

Another attribute of Elder Porphyrios was his extreme humility. So, although he had that wisdom which comes from above, he would always say to us, "You have diplomas, you know things. I am illiterate." He was both self-abasing and self-reproachful, characteristics of a humble man. Something which we come across in the saints of our Church.

Yet another attribute of Elder Porphyrios, of which one was always aware, was his simplicity. He lived extremely frugally in humble surroundings. He was very simple in his dealings with people. He received everyone and refused no one. This was an attribute of his that truly broke the ice and created just the right atmosphere so that people could get close to him, could confess their sins, could tell him their problems and receive answers to them.

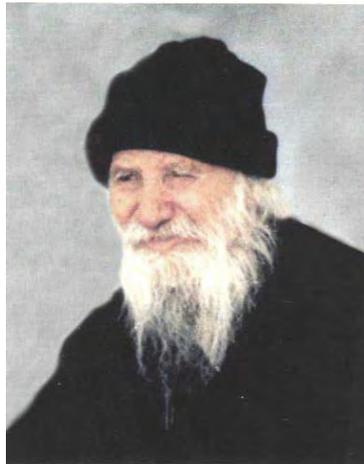
Another of his main attributes was his discernment, which according to the Fathers is *the greatest of all virtues.* Discernment is connected to the principle of individualization. Thus, for Elder Porphyrios, each person as a child of God had absolute worth. He saw each individual as a unique and unrepeatable personality. He confronted each problem of theirs, with its own particular characteristics.

That is why, Elder Porphyrios said different things to different people who may have appeared, at first sight, to have had the same problem. There were different presuppositions in each case, and each person needed different medicine to overcome his problem.

It was for this reason that he often said to us "Don't tell other people what I am now telling you. This is suitable medicine for you, for your situation. Another person, even if his external symptoms are the same, won't get the same beneficial results."

I was often amazed, despite his heavenly wisdom, at the answers of unmarried Elder Porphyrios on matters of marriage, marital relations and childbearing etc. His answers weren't 'cliche,' inflexible, harsh, rigid and 'objective.' They were answers full of truth, love, affection and discernment, corresponding to the situation, the need and the receptiveness of each person, at that particular time. As a man full of the Holy Spirit he guided each person according to the will of Christ, giving to *each according to his measure.* (Eph 4:7) for the welfare of the soul.

At this point I would like to mention an incident which testifies to both the discerning and individual way in which Elder Porphyrios did his pastoral work and the freedom and breadth of his spirit. One day, he had gone for a walk in the adjoining forest with one of his spiritual children. In the



meantime, a young couple wearing shorts had entered the church to pray. When the Elder returned from the forest he met them just as they were leaving by the metal courtyard door. He greeted them and stood there for a long while, talking lovingly and affectionately with them. I didn't hear what he said to them, but the respectful way in which they kissed his hand was a persuasive testimony of the impact he had on them with his words and his demeanor.

**K.I.:** You referred, at some point in our conversation, to the Elder's gift of discernment. Fr. George, may we have your testimony about this gift of his, which you have naturally already mentioned when talking about certain telephone calls he made?

**Fr. G.E.:** This gift of his was very apparent. You could see it with the naked eye. Elder Porphyrios always surprised us telling us things even before we had a chance to confess them.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding I would like to point out the following. Elder Porphyrios, like all the saints of the Church, was rendered worthy of these gifts by God. Our saints are not illumined in themselves but reflect divine light. God possesses everything and it is God who adorns and favors his elected servants with these gifts. These gifts are revocable and at the same time a cross. The retention of these spiritual gifts requires a life of permanent vigilance and intense spiritual struggle, with lots of trials and temptations. There is always a danger of falling from favor, falling because of arrogance and pride.

Elder Porphyrios never used all those gifts that God gave him to impress people or to draw particular benefits from them. On the contrary, he used them with discrimination and according to the particular circumstances. He only had one end in mind, people's salvation and the glory of God.

Elder Porphyrios was a man who lived the truth of the Church. He clearly knew that a human is a psychosomatic being with both spiritual and material needs. He always helped people in this way—neither underestimating one thing nor the other. This fact has great significance because it is an area where most people have conflict. If many so-called "spiritual" people don't fall into the trap of materialism, it is because it is visible to the naked eye and easily avoided. Many however fall into the trap of dissolute spiritualism, and in turn devalue an individual's material or bodily needs, resulting in terrifying problems for the entire person.

We know that all people are composed of both body and soul. We know of the mutual influence, that they have on one another and we know that bodily problems affect the

soul and vice-versa. Thus, Elder Porphyrios, with characteristic discernment, confronted the entire person and his problems. He devalued no one but gave appropriate advice to everyone.

**K.I.:** Could you give us, Fr. George, some of the typical examples about him that you describe so well?

**Fr. G.E.:** Well, he would advise us, for example, where to build our house, in which direction it should face, so that it would have sunlight all day, how to regulate the heating, etc. He also advised us on diet and nutrition. Extremely characteristic was the way in which he dealt with people who suffered from various illnesses and sought his help. At first, he would "X-ray" them with his gift of discernment. After making the diagnosis, he would advise them accordingly. To others he would say, "Eh, you've got nothing physically wrong, its psychological." And he would then recommend the spiritual regimen needed to heal the problem. When he diagnosed physical health problems

he usually directed that person to the proper doctors. Finally, in the interests of the sufferer, he would make them well, as often as it was necessary, with his gift of healing.

**K.I.:** As you told us, you had Elder Porphyrios as a spiritual father and guide for many years.

**Fr. G.E.:** This was really the area in which he shined. Primarily, with his simplicity and

with his affability, he created a climate of ease and trust for each person that approached him. This is indispensable for the sacrament of Repentance and Confession. Here I must mention that many people who found it difficult to confess certain sins to other priests felt at ease in the presence of the Elder and confessed.

Elder Porphyrios listened very carefully to what each person said to him, as he was gifted with pastoral attentiveness. He listened to people carefully first, and spoke afterwards. His words were always few and to the point, based, as we said, on the principle of individualization. Each individual who met the Elder was for him, a unique and unrepeatability, of boundless worth.

He confronted the problems that were put to him with particular care, with a feeling of responsibility and plenty of prayer. It was usual to see him silent during confession and you felt that he was praying and seeking enlightenment from God. It was also quite usual for him not to give quick answers in order to form some more impressions. Sometimes he said to us, "I don't have any information at the moment, I can't answer you now." We would return a second and a third time for the same problem.



He prayed day and night for people and for the solution to their problems. All the people who were honored to have contact with him and to become his spiritual children, acknowledge the fruits of his prayer, which really solved their problems.

The astounding thing was that during our confessions with the late Elder, what he often underlined as the root of the problem was quite irrelevant to the problem. He very often said that the root of our problems was our ego, which he considered to be the basis of all sin and of Man's various problems. There are many things which we could say relating to this. What I would like to mention as indicative of this, is some pieces of advice that the Elder gave, and the methods he used to confront various problems that have a general validity and meaning for people.

**K.I.:** We would very much like to hear about it, Fr. George.

**Fr. G.E.:** We often spoke to him about our children and the problems they face. He answered us in his characteristic way, "You become saints and your children will turn out well." That was something that he constantly repeated.

Concerning the subject of raising children he stressed that we should not pressure them; that is to say, that their upbringing should not be oppressive, as that brings the opposite results. This advice was priceless and helped many parents to change their course, and many children who were literally being mistreated by the oppressive good intentions of their parents, calmed down and found their way in life.

Something which when I heard it made a moving impression on me, was regarding the subject of fasting. It concerns a couple of newlyweds. The husband was used to keeping the fasts. The wife on the other hand, didn't keep the fasts, as that was the way she was brought up. She didn't object to fasting, it's just that she wasn't used to it.

When they put their problem to Elder Porphyrios he advised the husband as follows, "You shall fast as you always have, but you won't talk about fasting to your wife. During times of fasting you'll always keep your refrigerator full of food. Let your wife eat; you can keep your fasts." Truly the time came, as the couple themselves later admitted, that through following the advice of the Elder, the wife also started to fast. It seems she was a well-intentioned woman and wanted to agree and go along with her husband on the issue of fasting.

He often mentioned and advised people about so called "compulsion," the psychological condition where a person compels himself to do different things which he does not believe in and that do not represent him. This is a strange condition, a great inner muddle, which makes a person find himself disturbed inside and in terrible disarray. Elder Porphyrios helped those people who had this problem to admit it. He then told them how to overcome it, by dedication to God, prayer, and life according to God's will.

There is something else that I would like to say, because it has great importance and concerns everyone, especially

Christians. It is the subject of confronting naughty thoughts. We all know about the war the devil makes on us through our thoughts. Personally, I know from my own experience as a spiritual father, which God has made me worthy to become, how many people are confused and really troubled at this point.

When we asked Elder Porphyrios about this problem, he said, "You're continuing along your way. When the devil comes along and tugs at your shirt sleeve to put you off course, don't turn around to start a conversation or dispute with him. You continue on your way. He'll tug at your shirt sleeve, but you continue on your way and somewhere he'll get fed up and he'll leave you alone." Although, *time would fail me* (Heb 11:32), I wish to refer to something which has to do with teachers. It concerns advice the Elder gave to a high-school teacher who had just been appointed and was about to take up her position. He told her, "When you're on your way to school say the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' When you go into the classroom feel as if you're entering a church. Face the children with love and firmness. They'll feel your love and understand your strictness. And if a particular child presents certain problems and creates unpleasant situations, give his name to the priest to remember him during the proskomide."

**K.I.:** You know so many things about Elder Porphyrios, Fr. George. What a blessing it is for us to have you tell us them!

**Fr. G.E.:** I tried to the best of my ability to describe this great figure who truly was a gift from God to the twentieth-century, an exceptional blessing.

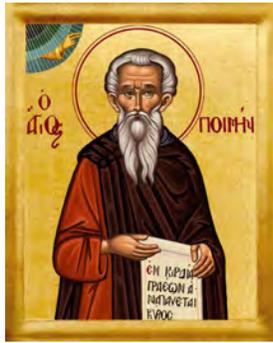
The Elder had received in the eyes of the world very little education. However he was truly a wise man, who has wisdom from on high. Correspondingly he had a natural love of learning; that's why he always read knowledgeably. He asked for and read books on all subjects, apart from theology, which he naturally studied. He read medical books, books on physics, astronomy, etc. He spoke with scientists and academics. With each one he spoke at a high level about the specific areas of their subject. I will mention just two incidents and then end my talk.

The first incident concerns an astronomy professor of international fame, who visited the Elder and discussed subjects of astronomy with him. This professor told me, "The thing that made an impression on me during my discussions with Elder Porphyrios, was that he really knew what he was talking about. He never, but never, made a mistake."

I was present at the second incident. We were with a surgeon, a director of a large hospital in Athens, and Elder Porphyrios started to describe to him how a particular operation is done. The surgeon, amazed at what the Elder said, simply agreed with him.

**K.I.:** We thank you warmly Fr. George, for all of the testimony you have given us. It has helped us visualize yet another side of divine reality, as expressed by Elder Porphyrios.

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

## SALVATION THROUGH CONCESSION

*Source: Life of St. Pachomius (commemorated on May 15<sup>th</sup>).*

There was a small monastery about two miles to the south of Tabennesi. The father of that monastery would often come to see our Elder Pachomius because he loved him very much; and the words of God he heard from his mouth he would repeat to his own monks so that they too might hear God's commandments.

It happened that a brother of his monastery asked for a certain rank, and he replied to that brother, "Our father, Abba Pachomius, warned me not to do this because you are not yet worthy of that thing."

The brother grew angry and dragged him along, saying, "Come, let us go to him, and he shall have to prove that to me." The other followed him in amazement and sorrow wondering what was going to happen. When the two of them and one other came to Abba Pachomius, they found him busy building a part of the monastery wall. The brother approached our father Pachomius and said to him very angrily, "Come down and give me proof of my sin, O liar Pachomius!"

Elder Pachomius, thanks to his long suffering, gave him no word whatever in reply. The other went on and said to him, "Who compelled you to lie, you who pride yourself on clear vision while your light is darkness?" The man of God, Abba Pachomius, understood the wiles of the devil who was in that man, and he said to him respectfully, "I have sinned, forgive me. Do you never sin yourself?" And at once the brother's wicked anger calmed down.

Then our father Pachomius took the father of that monastery aside and questioned him, "What happened to this brother?" He answered him, "Forgive me, my lord father. The fact is that this man asked me for a thing that he does not deserve. I knew that he would not obey me, so I quoted you to him by name so he might perhaps have nothing to say. For I know that nothing is hidden from you. And behold, he has added an evil deed to his wickedness."

Then our father Abba Pachomius said to him, "Listen to me; give him that office so that by this means we may snatch his soul out of the enemy's hands. For if we do good to a bad man, he comes thereby to have a perception of the good. This is God's love, to take pains for one another." When they heard this teaching of our holy father Pachomius, they went away very comforted and giving thanks to God. When they arrived at their monastery, the father of the monastery gave the rank to the brother as he had asked, in accordance with our father Abba Pachomius' instruction.

A few days later, that brother came to regret his fault. Then he went back to our holy father Abba Pachomius, kissed his hands and feet, and said to him, "Truly, O man of God, you are much greater than what we hear of you every day. For the Lord knows that if you had not been patient with me the day I insulted you, sinner that I am, and if you had spoken some harsh word to me, I would have rejected the monastic life and gone back to the world. Blessed are you, O man of God, my lord father, for thanks to your patience and graciousness, the Lord has brought me back to life."