

# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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## THE LAST JUDGMENT

By St. Augustine, from "The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers," by Phillip Schaff.

Intending to speak of the day of His final judgment, and to affirm it against the ungodly and incredulous, we must first of all lay, as it were, in the foundation of this elaborate concept the divine declarations. Those persons who do not believe such declarations do their

best to oppose to them as false and illusive sophisms of their own, either contending that what is cited from Scripture has another meaning, or altogether denying that it is an utterance of God's. For I suppose no man who understands what is written, and believes it to be communicated by the supreme and true God through holy men, refuses to yield and consent to these declarations, whether he orally confesses his consent, or is from some evil influence ashamed or afraid to do so; or even, with an opinionativeness closely resembling madness, makes strenuous efforts to defend what he knows and believes to be false against what he knows and believes to be true.

That, therefore, which the whole Church of the true God holds and professes as its creed, that Christ shall come from heaven to judge quick and dead, this we call the last day, or last time, of the divine judgment. For we do not know how many days this judgment

may occupy; but no one who reads the Scriptures, however negligently, need be told that in them "day" is customarily used for "time." And when we speak of the day of God's judgment, we add the word *last* or *final* for this reason, because even now God judges, and has judged from the beginning of human history, banishing from paradise, and excluding from the tree of life, those first men who perpetrated so great a sin.



*The Last Judgment*  
Fresco at the Holy Monastery of Megisti  
Lavra, Holy Mountain

He was certainly exercising judgment also when He did not spare the angels who sinned, whose prince, overcome by envy, seduced men after being himself seduced. Neither is it without God's profound and just judgment that the life of demons and men, the one in the air, the other on earth, is filled with misery, calamities, and mistakes. And even though no one had sinned, it could only have been by the good and right judgment of God that the whole rational creation could have been maintained in eternal blessedness by a persevering adherence to its Lord.

He also judges not only in the mass, condemning the race of devils and the race of men to be miserable on account of the original sin of these races, but He also judges the voluntary and personal acts of individuals. For even the devils pray that they *may not be tormented* (Mt. 8:29), which proves that without injustice they might either be spared or tormented according to their deserts.

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Men are punished by God for their sins often visibly, always secretly, either in this life or after death, although no man acts rightly save by the assistance of divine aid; and no man or devil acts unrighteously save by the permission of the divine and most just judgment. For, as the apostle says, *There is no unrighteousness with God* (Rom 9:14) and as he elsewhere says, *His judgments are inscrutable, and His ways past finding out.* (Rom 11:33).

In this lecture, then, I shall speak, as God permits, not of those first judgments, nor of these intervening judgments of God, but of the last judgment, when Christ is to come from heaven to judge the quick and the dead. For that day is properly called the Day of Judgment, because in it there shall be no room left for the ignorant questioning why this wicked person is happy and that righteous man unhappy. In that day true and full happiness shall be the lot of none but the good, while deserved and supreme misery shall be the portion of the wicked and of them only.

#### **The Passages in Which the Savior Declares that There Shall Be a Divine Judgment in the End of the World**

The Savior Himself, while reproofing the cities in which He had done great works, but which had not believed, and while setting them in unfavorable comparison with foreign cities, says, *But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you.* (Mt 11:22). And a little after He says, *Verily, I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.* (Mt 11:24). Here He most plainly predicts that a day of judgment is to come. And in another place He says, *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching*

*of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the words of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.* (Mt 12:41–42). Two things we learn from this passage, that a judgment is to take place, and that it is to take place at the resurrection of the dead. For when He spoke of the Ninevites and the queen of the south, He certainly spoke of dead persons, and yet He said that they should rise up in the Day of Judgment. He did not say “They shall condemn,” as if they themselves were to be the judges, but because, in comparison with them, the others shall be justly condemned.

Again, in another passage, in which He was speaking of the present intermingling and future separation of the good and bad—the separation which shall be made in the day of judgment—He adduced a comparison drawn from the sown wheat and the tares sown among them, and gave this explanation of it to His disciples: *He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.* (Mt 13:37). Here, indeed, He did not name the judgment or the day of judgment, but indicated it much more clearly by describing the circumstances, and foretold that it should take place in the end of the world.

In like manner He says to His disciples, *Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Mt 19:28). Here we learn that Jesus shall judge with His disciples. And therefore He said elsewhere to the Jews, *If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.* (Mt 12:17).

We ought not suppose that only twelve men shall judge along with Him, though He says that they shall sit upon twelve thrones; for by the number twelve is signified the completeness of the multitude of those who shall judge. For the two parts of the number seven (which commonly symbolizes totality), that is to say four and three, multiplied into one another, give twelve. For four times three, or three times four, are twelve.

There are other meanings, too, in this number twelve. Were not this the right interpretation of the twelve thrones, then since we read that Matthias was ordained an apostle in the room of Judas the traitor, the Apostle Paul, though he *labored more than them all* (1 Cor. 15:10), should have no throne of judgment; but he unmistakably considers himself to be included in the number of the judges when he says, *Know ye not that we shall judge angels?* (1 Cor 6:3).

The same rule is to be observed in applying the number twelve to those who are to be judged. For though it was said, “judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” the tribe of Levi, which is the thirteenth, shall not on this account be exempt from judgment, neither shall judgment be passed only on Israel and not on the other nations. And by the words “in the regeneration,” He certainly meant the resurrection of the dead to be understood; for our flesh shall be regenerated by incorruption, as our soul is regenerated by faith.

Many passages I omit, because, though they seem to refer to the last judgment, yet on a closer examination they are found to be ambiguous, or to allude rather to some other event—whether to that coming of the Saviour which continually occurs in His Church, that is, in His members, in which comes little by little, and piece by piece, since the whole Church is His body, or to the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem. For when He speaks even of this, He often uses language which is applicable to the end of the world and that last and great day of judgment, so that these two events cannot be distinguished unless all the corresponding passages bearing on the subject in the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are compared with one another; this is because some things are put more obscurely by one evangelist and more plainly by another. Thus, it becomes apparent what things are meant to be referred to one event and what to the other. It is this which I have been at pains to do in a letter which I wrote to Hesychius of blessed memory, bishop of Salon, and entitled, “Of the End of the World.”

I shall now cite from the Gospel according to Matthew the passage which speaks of the separation of the good from the wicked by the most efficacious and final judgment of Christ: *When the Son of man, he says, shall come in His glory, ... then shall He say also unto them on His left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* (Mt 25:34–41). Then He in like manner recounts to the

wicked the things they had not done, but which He had said those on the right hand had done. And when they ask when they had seen Him in need of these things, He replies that, *inasmuch as they had not done it to the least of His brethren, they had not done it unto Him*, and concludes His address in the words, *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

Moreover, the evangelist John most distinctly states that He had predicted that the judgment should be at the resurrection of the dead. For after saying, *The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father: he that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him*; He immediately adds, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death to life.* (Jn 5:22–24). Here He said that believers on Him should not come into judgment. How, then, shall they be separated from the wicked by judgment, and be set at His right hand, unless judgment be in this passage used for condemnation? For into judgment, in this sense, they shall not come who hear His word, and believe on Him that sent Him.

Amen.



Jesus Christ is the faithful witness or the faithful martyr for two more reasons. The first one is because He gave witness to the Truth, as for example when Pilate asked Him, *Who are you?* And He answered, *For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.* (Jn 18:37). Poor Pilate asks, *what is truth?* (18:38) and Christ does not answer. Some have ventured to say that Pilate should have asked, “Who is the truth?” and that he would have probably received a response. At any rate, the truth is a great subject. This is why we are struggling, to come to the truth. Poor Pilate had the entire Truth in front of him. The Truth is not some abstract idea or thought. **The Truth is a Person.** I am the Truth, Christ announced. He did not say, “I came to tell you a few nice things about the truth to help you along.” He said; *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life!* (Jn 14:6)

Elder Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

From the 100 homilies on the book of the Revelation,  
translated by Constantine Zalalas



## GOD'S CALL TO SALVATION

By Rev. Fr. Antony Diachenko (+1970).

*Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

(Mk 1:15).

† † †

What a blessed time it was when, from the very lips of the Saviour Himself, the word sounded forth: *Repent*. Fortunate were those who heard this teaching. This sermon was not that of an ordinary teacher, nor even of a prophet—but of the sweetest Jesus, a sermon of incarnate Love.

How could one not listen to such a sermon! How was it possible for one's heart not to be moved, not to shed tears of repentance? My dear brethren, what if this blessed time were with us now? What if the Saviour appeared amidst us now and said: *Repent*. I think every one of us would fall down to His most pure feet, and, washing them with tears of contrition and covering them with fervent kisses of burning love, would only repeat with heartfelt sighs: *O Lord, I repent; accept my repentance. Lord, I repent; remember not my sins...* Would this not be so, my dearly beloved ones? Oh, if this could only be! But do not forget that the Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever, remember that now, just as then, He ceaselessly calls out to us: *Repent!*

Do our hearts readily respond to this voice of Divine love? *Repent!* Our inattentiveness sometimes reaches the point that we do not hear it, although this voice of the Lord, calling us to Himself, speaks out to us everywhere and at all times. Here we are not talking about the holy temples where the voice of God is clearly heard; neither are we talking about the Holy Gospel in which we are so plainly given to know the will of God. We need only to look carefully at ourselves and our surroundings, or to attentively observe the nature which surrounds us; both here and there we can hear the voice of the Lord calling us to Himself.

The Lord calls us to Himself through our own selves. *Know ye not*, says the Apostle, *that ye are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* (1 Cor 3:16). And if this is so, what further need have we to show that the Lord calls us to Himself through our very nature? *For in Him we live, and move, and have our being* (Acts 17:18), possessing as *His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness* (2 Pet 1:3). What then can we say about all our good thoughts and kind feelings? Are these not signs of the Spirit of God? And the unearthly which gladdens our

heart after a good deed or the pangs of conscience which torment us for our sins; those sighs which sometimes tear from our breast, or tears of contrition which at times fill our eyes—what is all this if not the powerful voice of Him Who says of Himself: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me.* (Rev 3:20).

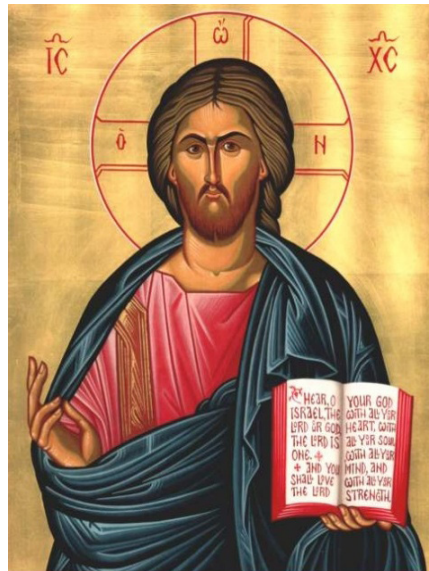
St. Barbarus was a frightful thief; three hundred souls perished at the hands of this cut-throat, including two priests! Who could have thought that such a man, hardened by all these killings, could ever come to repentance? Sin is powerful, but the grace of God within us is yet more powerful. In the midst of all the murders and noisy carousing with his comrades, Barbarus did not hear the voice of God within himself, but when he remained alone in the cave, when he entered the chamber of his heart, then within himself, so loud and powerful did the convicting voice of God sound

in the reproaches or his conscience, that Barbarus was at once converted. Likewise the righteous David and Moses the Black were changed from angels of darkness to angels of light—by hearing the voice of God.

My dear brethren, this voice of God sounds within us too, but to our great misfortune, it frequently produces no action; just as in church, the words of God are often spoken, but sometimes they do not penetrate our hearts, and even pass by our ears. The Lord once called to our fallen ancestor: *Adam, where art thou?* Adam heard the voice of God, but instead of answering with contrition of heart and acknowledging

his guilt, he thought to hide from the Omnipresent One amongst the trees of paradise. Don't we do the same? Sometimes we hear in our hearts, *Adam, where art thou?*—sinner, where are you? Another step, and you will fall into the abyss; take heed, stop. But instead of taking heed and stopping, we run from the warning voice of our conscience and think to muffle its soul saving voice with the noise of worldly distractions and pleasures. And the voice of God in us remains fruitless.

The Lord calls us to Himself through various circumstances of our lives. Our life is a school in which the Lord acts upon us as a wise educator upon his students. In order that the students might succeed in their lessons, both of science and morality, the instructor at times praises them and at times punishes them, or brings them into contact with someone who could have a beneficial influence upon them. A similar thing happens to us. The Lord pours upon us His mercy: He gives us wealth, clothes us with strength, crowns us with



honor and glory—for what other reason than that we might turn more often to Him with a thanksgiving prayer, that We might share our abundance with His lesser brethren, that we might use our strength to defend the innocent and our power to wipe away the tears of those less fortunate. Is all this not His calling out to us: Follow me! *Good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things; enter, thou into the joy of thy Lord.* (Mt 25:23).

The righteous Melania of Rome knew neither the amount nor the value of her riches; but she did know for what reason the Lord showered her with such wealth, and what her right hand received from Him, her left hand distributed to His brethren. In this way St. Melania's wealth was a trumpet by which the Lord called her into His heavenly kingdom.

Concerning poverty and want there is little need to say anything. As the saying goes, "if there were no thunder, the people wouldn't cross themselves." *But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day* (2 Cor 4:16) says the Apostle. And who has not experienced this? When are we more humble, more devout, more moderate in our desires than in times of sorrow and need? When the Prodigal Son, as the Gospel relates, had his father's inheritance, he only drank, ate, and made merry in a far country, taking no thought of his father or his homeland; but when he had dissipated his riches, when he became hungry and could scarcely obtain husks fed to swine—let alone beg a piece of bread—only then did he feel the whole import of his situation; then he remembered his father and threw himself into his embrace. Oh, if only we were more mindful of all the various circumstances of our lives, how often we would hear the Lord saying to us: *Repent.*

And have you paid sufficient attention to those persons with whom the Lord has brought you into contact? Children: You have parents who have given you life and upbringing. Parents: You have children preparing for you rest and consolation in your old age. Husband: You have a wife who shares your joys and your sorrows. Friends: You have close ones who give you good advice, who are concerned about your happiness and comfort you in sorrows...

Tell me; are not these obvious messengers who loudly proclaim that the Lord Himself, by the power of love, is entwined in the bosom of your family, that He sent you such people for which you must eternally thank and glorify Him? Are these not our earthly guardian angels, through whom the Lord Himself guards and sustains us on the slippery path of life?...

St. Niphont [*Ed., Russian Orthodox saint, +1156, commemorated on April 21<sup>st</sup>*], in the flower of youth, at first amazed everyone by his rapid successes in learning and virtues, but later, he gradually became so accustomed to a debauched life that he was unrecognizable; idle talk, drunkenness, stealing,

fighting, profligacy—these became his favorite occupations. He was reproached, threatened, but he was hardened like a rock, But the Lord is merciful! One day Niphont's old friend Nikodim met him and looking into his face, so altered by his debauched life, said to him in astonishment: "My friend! I hardly recognize you; your face—it's frightful!" He didn't say much, but his words had such profound effect on the youth, that he changed his life, and pleased God by such a righteous life that he was vouchsafed by God numerous revelations. In a similar manner the Lord called to Himself the holy martyr Justin and the righteous martyr Eudocia. And so He calls to Himself each of us, sending us kind people and guides.

The Lord also calls us to Himself through nature which surrounds us. During His earthly life, He Himself often pointed out things in nature as though it were a book which contained many useful lessons for us. We need only to look at it in the right spirit of piety and before us is opened up a whole school of righteousness. For this reason one Holy Father said, "I have no need of books. I have one large book in which everything needful is written—this book is nature." This is why, when the holy martyrs Sts. Christina and Barbara looked attentively upon the magnificence of the heavens, they at once abandoned their faith in the false gods and confessed the One True God.

Let us, dear brothers and sisters, open our ears and hearken to the voice of God calling us ever closer to Himself. And let us not overlook those seemingly insignificant means by which God calls, remembering the example of Elijah who heard the voice of God not in the wind, neither in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in a still small voice.



Yes, my dearly beloved children, truly we lack this most holy virtue, humility. Egotism, this evil wickedness, has caused all the sufferings of man. Indeed, humility is holiness!

Why do we clash over a trifle? Because we do not have humility. He who has humility wards off troubles. Without true humility, troubles remain intact and increase, such that all hope of correction is lost. A humble person does not remember any past wrongs which his neighbor did to him, but with all his heart forgives and forgets everything for the love of God. Beg our humble Jesus in your prayers to give you a spirit of humble-mindedness and meekness.

**Elder Ephraim of Filotheou**

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

## THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

By Fr. Michael Pomazansky (+1988).

*Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Likewise, His Body, the Church, proclaims the same faith, adheres to the same dogmas and performs the same Mysteries as those instituted by the Apostles and preserved by God's grace through the members of the Church to the present day.*

*With so much talk today among the heterodox concerning the "unity of the Church" and the "coming together of the Body," it is important that Orthodox understand the teaching of the Church on this matter. Below is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, Dogmatic Theology, by Fr. Michael Pomazansky which gives a concise explanation of the Orthodox definition of the "oneness" of the Church and contrasts this with popular misconceptions of those outside the Church.*

† † †

*The unity of the Church follows of necessity from the unity of God; for the Church is not a multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but a unity of the grace of God, living in a multitude of rational creatures, submitting themselves willingly to grace...*

*Alexei Stepanovich Khomiakov*

*[Russian intellectual and religious writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century]*

† † †

The ninth Article of the Symbol of Faith indicates the four basic signs of the Church: *We believe ... in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.* These attributes are called essential, that is, those without which the Church would not be the Church.

In the Greek text the word "in One" is expressed as a numeral (εἰς μίαν, eis mian). Thus the Symbol of Faith confesses that the Church is one: (a) it is one as viewed from within itself, not divided; (b) it is one as viewed from without, that is, not having any other beside itself. Its unity consists not in the joining together of what is different in nature, but in inward agreement and unanimity. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* (Eph 4:4-6).

Depicting the Church in parables, the Saviour speaks of one flock, of one sheepfold, of one grapevine, of one foundation stone of the Church. He gave a single teaching, a single baptism, and a single communion. The unity of the faithful in Christ comprised the subject of His High-Priestly Prayer before His sufferings on the Cross: the Lord prayed *that they all may be one.* (Jn 17:21).

The Church is one not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Outwardly its unity is manifested in the harmonious confession of faith, in the oneness of Divine services and Mysteries, in the oneness of the grace-giving hierarchy, which comes

in succession from the Apostles, in the oneness of canonical order.

The Church on earth has a visible side and an invisible side. The invisible side is: that its Head is Christ; that it is animated by the Holy Spirit; that in it is performed the inward mystical life in sanctity of the more perfect of its members. However, the Church, by the nature of its members, is visible, since it is composed of men in the body; it has a visible hierarchy; it performs prayers and sacred actions visibly; it confesses openly by means of words, the faith of Christ.

More than any other aspect of the Church, the close bond between the Church of Christ on earth and the Church of Christ in heaven distinguishes the Orthodox Church from all other Christian confessions. For how can one speak of a single body if its members are not in harmony one with another? And this harmonious existence is not only with those present bodily in the Church today, but also with those who have gone before and who now belong to the Church triumphant.

The Apostle instructs those who have come to believe in Christ and have been joined to the Church as follows: *Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant.* (Heb 12:22-24). We are not separated from our dead brothers in the faith by the impassable abyss of death: *they are close to us in God, for all live unto Him.* (Lk 20:38). The Church hymns this relationship in the kontakion of the feast of the Ascension of the Lord: *"Having accomplished for us Thy mission and united things on earth with things in heaven, Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, being nowhere Separated from those who love Thee, but remaining ever present with us and calling: I am with you and no one is against you.*

The holy Apostles, departing from this world, put off the earthly body, but have not put off the Church body. They not only were, but they also remain the foundation of the Church. The Church is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.* (Eph 2:20). And, being in Paradise, they continue to be in communion with believers on earth.

In this bond of the Church with the saints, and likewise in the Headship of the Church by the Lord Himself, may be seen one of the mystical sides of the Church. *By Thy Cross, O Christ, there is a single flock of angels and men; and in the one assembly heaven and earth rejoice, crying out, O Lord, glory be to Thee.* (Wednesday Matins, Tone 1).

The Orthodox teaching of the Church, which in itself is quite clear and rests upon Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, is to be contrasted with another concept which is widespread in the contemporary Protestant world and has penetrated even



into Orthodox circles. According to this different concept, all the various existing Christian organizations, the so-called “confessions” and “sects,” even though they are separated from each other, still comprise a single “invisible Church,” inasmuch as each of them confesses Christ as the Son of God and accepts His Gospel. The dissemination of such a view is aided by the fact that side by side with the Orthodox Church there exists outside of her a number of Christians that exceed by several times the number of members of the Orthodox Church. Often we can observe in this Christian world outside the Church a religious fervor and faith, a worthy moral life, a conviction—all the way to fanaticism—of one’s correctness, an organization and a broad charitable activity. What is the relation of all of them to the Church of Christ?

Of course, there is no reason to view these confessions and sects as on the same level with non-Christian religions. One cannot deny that the reading of the word of God has a beneficial influence upon everyone who seeks in it instruction and strengthening of faith, and that devout reflections on God the Creator, the Provider and Saviour, have an elevating power there also. We cannot say that their prayers are totally fruitless if they come from a pure heart, for *in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* (Acts 10:35).

The Omnipresent Good Provider God is over them, and they are not deprived of God’s mercies. They help to restrain moral looseness, vices, and crimes; and they oppose the spread of atheism. However, all this does not give us grounds to consider them as belonging to the Church. Already the fact that one part of this broad Christian world outside the Church, namely the whole of Protestantism, denies the bond with the heavenly Church, that is, the veneration in prayer of the Mother of God and the saints, and likewise prayer for the dead, indicates that they themselves have destroyed the bond with the one Body of Christ which unites in itself the heavenly and the earthly. Further, it is a fact that these non-Orthodox confessions have “broken” in one form or another, directly or indirectly, with the Orthodox Church, with the Church in its historical form; they themselves have cut the bond, they have “departed” from her. Neither we nor they have the right to close our eyes to this fact.

The teachings of the non-Orthodox confessions contain heresies which were decisively rejected and condemned by the Church at her Ecumenical Councils. In these numerous branches of Christianity there is no unity, either outward or inward—either with the Orthodox Church of Christ and/or between themselves. The supra-confessional unification (the “ecumenical movement”) which is now to be observed does not enter into the depths of the life of these confessions, but has an outward character. The term “invisible” can refer only to the Heavenly Church. The Church on earth, even though it has its invisible side, like a ship a part of which is

hidden in the water and is invisible to the eyes, still remains visible, because it consists of people and has visible forms of organization and sacred activity.

All of such “uniting” and “equalizing” views indicate a forgetfulness of the principle that there can be many teachings and opinions, but there is only one truth. And authentic Christian unity—unity in the Church—can be based only upon oneness of mind, and not upon differences of mind. *The Church is the pillar and ground of the Truth.* (I Tim. 3:15).

Note also that in speaking of the Church, we must be careful not to pass judgment either on those within her fold, nor on those still outside, for God alone knows the secrets of the hearts of men. In his book, “The Church Is One,” Alexei Khomiakov writes:

“Inasmuch as the earthly and visible Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord has appointed to appear at the final judgment of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits; and, according to the words of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:12) does not judge the rest of mankind; and He only looks upon these as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of mankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgment of the Great Day. The Church on earth judges for herself only, according to the grace of the Spirit, and the freedom granted her through Christ, inviting also the rest of mankind to the unity and adoption of God in Christ; but upon those who do not hear her appeal she pronounces no sentence, knowing the command of her Saviour and Head, *not to judge another man’s servant.* (Rom 14:4).”



By means of the priesthood God accomplishes great and redeeming works among mankind: He purifies and sanctifies people, animals, and elements; He delivers people from the villainous works of the devil; He renews and strengthens; He converts bread and wine into the purest Body and Blood of the God-Man Himself; He marries people and makes marriage honorable and the nuptial bed pure; He absolves sins, heals illness, converts earth into heaven, unites heaven with earth, the human being with Himself; He joins angels and men in one gathering. What do they not lack, the people who have no priesthood? They are deprived of salvation. It is not in vain that the Lord, the Accomplisher of our salvation, is called the Chief Priest.

St John of Kronstadt (+1908)

## THE ESSENCE OF HUMILITY

By Bishop Alexander (Mileant), translated by Fr. Sergiy Kisselev.

The Holy Scripture teaches that humility is the essential virtue, without which it is impossible to bear any good fruit at all. Our Lord Jesus Christ began His Sermon on the Mount with a call to humility, saying: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 5:3). As the common poor realize they are in need of everything, so does the one poor in spirit see himself as imperfect and in need of divine assistance. Being conscious of this, in turn, attracts God's mercy, which makes him abundantly rich.

Unfortunately, most "worldly" people underestimate and even despise the virtue of humility. They tend to think that while preaching humility, Christianity is degrading the human person and obliterating one's natural feeling of dignity. Humility, they say, deprives one of an active attitude in life, extinguishes all initiative and nurtures a servile mindset. Such an erroneous notion of humility is only rooted in a lack of spiritual knowledge.

The essence of humility is best illustrated in the Gospel. Let's take the example of the healing of the Roman centurion's servant. In one of His visits to Capernaum, Jesus Christ was approached by a Roman centurion (an officer in modern terms), who had the following request: *Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented,* to which the Saviour, Who never declined anyone's wish, promised that He would visit his home and heal the servant. Every believing person would have rejoiced at such a promise. But the centurion's reaction was far from average: *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.* The centurion's profound faith and humility moved the Lord to such an extent that not only did He immediately heal his servant, but also made him an example for others, saying: *I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.* (Mt 8:6-13).

Having heard of the numerous healings that the Saviour had performed, the centurion acquired an intense faith in His almightiness. Without denigrating his dignity in any way, he realized, at the same time, that he was **unworthy to demand** any kind of special attention toward his person, all the more so being a pagan and a foreigner. He also remembered that if he, being a common man, is unquestionably obeyed by his minors, so much the more everything will obey the will of the One sent by God. The acknowledgment of the **divine almightiness**, on the one hand, and of one's **imperfection**, on the other, are the basis of the attitude which is called humility.

When man, led by a deep faith, encounters the Creator's infinite power, he cannot help perceiving his smallness and weakness, seeing himself as a tiny insect on the shore of a boundless ocean. This is why in the presence of God humility

is but the most natural feeling. Vanity and pride can only exist in the one who, being removed far from God, is comparing himself to other minute creatures like himself.

Sound faith, according to the word of the Saviour, is capable of *moving mountains* (Mt 17:20)—not due to some kind of supernatural power that comes along with such faith, as certain sectarians will teach, but because it is capable of **attracting the divine power**—and the latter can do the impossible. For this reason all known examples of a firm and wonder-working faith are, at the same time, examples of a profound humility: the woman suffering from hemorrhage (Mk 5:25-28), the mother from Canaan (Mt 15:22-28), and many others. The stronger one's faith is, the more humble he is; and vice versa, a proud person cannot possess a profound faith, being all absorbed in one's self. Being spiritually weak, he is therefore unquiet and easily scared, although he might do his best in order to conceal it.

Spiritual and lay literature alike have known many examples of great and gifted personalities. Many gifted people realized that they were only too far from the measure of perfection or knowledge that they were capable of achieving. Knowing this did not, to the least extent, make them feeble or low-spirited. On the contrary, it gave them more incentive to pursue excellence. To think that humility kills one's initiative, giving him an inert and servile disposition, is to miss the essence of Christianity. The latter's decisive trait is that it calls the man to perfection by way of ascension from the present state, which is damaged by sin, to a likeness of God, as is said: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* (Mt 5:48). The self-sufficient proud man is in fact the most wretched one, because he is so blind he cannot even perceive his misery (Rev 3:17).

Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Who had descended from the skies, the word of Whom was the immediate law for the whole of nature and for the immaterial spirits as well, Who brought the dead back to life, is, at the same time, the greatest example of humility. Who could ever be higher than Him, the Creator of everything visible and invisible alike? And yet He was always the example of obedience towards His earthly "parents," He was obedient towards the lay authorities, He paid taxes, and He meekly forgave His enemies. Striving towards humility, we are doing so in the steps of our Saviour, Who left us His commandment: *Take My yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* (Mt 11:29).

The Elder Siluan wrote: "When the soul sees the Lord in the Holy Spirit, how much He is meek and humble, then she becomes humble herself. It is a special state that no one is able to describe, since it is only known by experience in the Holy Spirit."

According to the holy Abba Dorotheos, there exist two types of humility: "The initial humility consists of consid-



ering one's neighbor more clever and better than oneself... The other kind consists in that one should attribute all his accomplishments and benefits to God and not to himself—this is the perfect humility of the saints. It is found naturally within the soul due to the fulfilment of God's commandments. The branches of a tree that have a lot of fruit hanging on them bow downwards. A branch devoid of fruit is stretching right up. There are also trees that bear no fruit while their branches grow straight up, but as soon as someone, by tying a stone to the branch, bows it down, then it will start bearing fruit. So does the soul, when it humbles itself, become fruitful, and the more it bears the fruit of good deeds, the more does it humble itself. The saints give us the same example: the more they got close to God, the more they saw themselves as sinful and unworthy."

Thus, humility is the most precious virtue without which it is impossible to achieve anything righteous. The holy John of the Ladder says: "If pride has turned some of the angels into demons, than there is no doubt that **humility can make angels out of demons**. Therefore, have courage, ye the fallen, placing your hope in God!"



On the day of Pentecost our Lord solemnly sent down to the disciples in a tempestuous wind the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which alighted on each of them and entered within them and filled them with the fiery strength of divine grace which breathes bedewingly and acts gladdeningly in souls which partake of its power and operations (cf. Acts 2:1-4). And this same fire-infusing grace of the Holy Spirit which was given to us all, the faithful of Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, is sealed by the Sacrament of Chrismation on the chief parts of our body as appointed by the Holy Church, the eternal keeper of this grace. It is said: *The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit*. On what do we put this seal if not on vessels containing some very precious treasure?

St. Seraphim of Sarov



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## AN ELDER'S COUNSELS TO ALL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS LIVING IN THE WORLD

Translated from "Vera i Zhizn," no. 16, 1977, St. Elias Publications, Forestville, CA; original in "Sviatinya pod Spudom," by S.A. Nilus.

My beloved child:

1. In moments of despair, know that the Lord is not abandoning you; rather, you are abandoning the Lord. In the name of God, here is how I would order you to live when you are alone: even if you are weighed down by grief, even if you don't want to—always, from your heart, mentally call upon the Lord Jesus Christ, Who dwells in your soul.

2. Followers of Christ must have in mind not their own will but God's will, which forbade the Apostles and us likewise from investigating the future, which God placed under His own control.

3. If you live with others, serve them as you would God Himself, and do not demand love in return for love, praises for humility, gratitude for service.

4. Don't do anything that might stumble or offend those close ones living with you; if they should offend you, accept this not as an offense but as a tool, prepared for you by the Lord God, which, if you so desire, you can use to uproot all filth from your heart.

5. Before you say anything, think carefully: will your word or action offend God or your neighbor?

6. Do not judge another man's servant, whether he is standing or falling; he has God Who has power to keep him from falling and to raise him up from a fall.

7. Bear in mind that the minute which laziness has stolen from you may be the last minute of your life; after it comes death and the judgment. Abandon all idleness.

8. Do not hurt anyone and do not repay abuse with abuse, hurt with hurt; and in the book of life your name will be written together with the righteous.

9. I ask you, my friends, do not disdain any means by which you may please God. These are numerous. For example, being kindly affectionate towards others, consoling the sorrowful, interceding for someone who has been unjustly treated, giving alms to the needy, turning one's gaze away from what is unclean, withstanding unclean thoughts; forcing oneself to pray, patience, merciful kindness, fairness, and the like. In the performance of these virtues you will draw to yourself God's all-powerful aid, and with this you will overcome all difficulties which before seemed insurmountable.

10. Resist by all means losing your temper, and, with God's help it will surely weaken. If it happens that you become irritated or angry, then be all the more careful not to say anything; either step away or close your lips that no fierce

flame should escape and singe your soul and cause rebellion in the soul of the other person; only when the flame dies out and your heart is at peace, then you can say something by way of correction.

11. Strive by all means to avoid getting angry. No calamity visits us of itself; it is allowed by God's Providence for those soul-saving purposes for which the holy Apostle Paul was beset by calamities suffered a *shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.* (2 Cor 11:26).

12. Knowing this, pay no attention to who it is who offends you and why. Just remember that no one could have caused you such offense if the Lord had not willed to allow it. It is better to thank the Lord that through the afflictions visited upon you, He clearly shows that you are no stranger to Him and that He is leading you into the Kingdom of Heaven. Holy Scripture says: *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?* (Heb 12:7).

13. Always avoid sternness, and before the Lord you will be like innocent children in your relations with others.

14. Rest in God's love, learn of it, breathe it: God is love and whosoever abides in love, he is in God, and God is in him. With God's love even a life of affliction is sweet.

15. Salvation lies not in an abundance of talk, but in absolute vigilance towards oneself.

16. Avoid quarrels; by agitating the heart they deprive us of peaceful disposition of soul. Oppose all quarrelsome thoughts with the Jesus Prayer. Don't believe in prejudices.

17. Suspicion is by no means a Christian characteristic; do not make a habit of it. Through the Holy Scripture God Himself requires of us wisdom, vigilance and purity: *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and innocent as doves.* (Mt 10:16).

18. Always hold to the middle path: extremes are never praiseworthy.

19. Always be devoted to the will of God: it is altogether soul-saving.

20. Be loving and cheerful towards others. Love them, serve them; they are valuable; the Saviour's blood was shed for them; they are members of Christ. Do not offend them, even in ways that are scarcely noticeable.

21. Gain salvation by conducting yourself in a way pleasing to the Lord God, pleasing Him by all kinds of love. Make this your sole concern—to grow rich in love. He who has love has God within him.

22. Notice, you are perfectly satisfied with everything when you have patience, humility of wisdom, submissiveness and love for all.

23. Do not reproach that which is in the past, otherwise the Lord God will call you to account for that which He already forgave you.

24. When despondent, force your heart and your lips to pray: Lord, save me—I am perishing!

25. When making a request of someone, ask with the patience of the Canaanite woman.

26. It is a sin to believe another's faults; avoid such sinful certainty.

27. If in some way you offended your servant, do what you can to help him forget the offense.

28. Do everything scrupulously, without haste, so that your undertaking might meet with success.

29. Conquer evil with good; bad cannot be corrected with bad.

30 Without cutting off one's will one cannot lay a foundation for salvation, let alone attain it. My children, entreat the Lord to grant you self-denial; it is essential for salvation.

31. If you're thinking of visiting someone close to you, make a firm resolve to preserve the same love and disposition toward him as you have when you go to see him, even if during your visit he somehow offends you.

32. Whenever something unpleasant happens in your relations with those closest to you, turn first of all to yourself: in a strict examination we nearly always find that we ourselves gave cause for the unpleasantness.

33. When your temper flares up, keep silent and say the Jesus Prayer.

34. Do not justify yourself, do not argue, take into account a person's character and age. Comfort one and all however you can; do not judge anyone; do not repay evil with evil; love everyone, forgive everyone, be a servant to all.

35. Consider yourself as the least and most selfish of all.

36. Love the Lord God and pray to Him as to the Father; humble yourself before all Christians; and the Lord your God will love you, and your pastor will rejoice over you.

37. Endure impatience, confusion, rudeness, hotheadedness—all without contradiction.

38. When you conceive an involuntary feeling of animosity towards someone, try to conquer this sinful feeling; force yourself to pray: *Save, O Lord, Thy servant (name) and by his holy prayers grant peace to my heart.* Make yourself be considerate to this person, and the Lord seeing your good intention, will not only uproot from your heart your sinful animosity, but He will fill it with love.

39. If you receive no comfort from prayer, know that it is preparing for you divine consolation and sweetness in due time: *I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.* (Pss 39:1).

40. Throughout your life, in all that you do, guide yourself by the following Christian reasoning: "Is what I have thought of doing contrary to God's will? Is it harmful to my soul? Will

it offend my neighbor?" If, after a strict examination, your conscience does not prick you, then follow through with your intention. But if it does prick you, refrain from acting on it.

41. Do not trouble yourself with another's honor, but use your tongue only for praising God and for another's benefit and edification. When you are tempted to say something bad, recall those sins you committed from your youth and reproach yourself.

42. Do not complain about life; it is unbearable only for the wicked. For those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who trust in Him and love Him, it is always bearable.

43. Life is given to us only that we might glorify God, do good to our neighbor and attain the eternal kingdom by following the narrow path indicated in the Gospel—not in order to have fun: *Blessed are those that mourn*, not those who laugh.

44. The source of humility is the Lord Jesus Christ Who humbled Himself; it is the crown and beauty of all virtues. What water is to parched earth, so humility is to the human soul.

45. Humility is a virtue in which God Himself delights: *To whom will I have respect*, says the Lord, *is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* (Isa 66:2).

46. What constitutes humility? It seems to me that it consists in a man's thinking that he is a greater sinner than anyone else, he does not demean or hurt anyone, does not judge, looks only at himself; he seeks neither wealth, nor glory, nor praise, nor honor, considering himself unworthy of these; he bravely endures humiliations, abuse, reproaches, acknowledging in his heart that he deserves this; he treats everyone equally, is ready to serve everyone with love, does not see his own good deeds and doesn't talk about them unnecessarily. I am entreating such humility for you from the Lord God, my children, because it will not only deliver you from sin, but it will lead to the love of Him Who humbled Himself unto death, even the death on the cross.

47. Love covers a multitude of sins. If you are sad, it serves to comfort; unhappy, to ease your grief; it is a help to the poor, father and mother to the orphan, a comfort to the sick, kindness to the servant, to the lost it serves as a guide to salvation, and for all Christians it is a zealous servant. If you have such love towards the lesser brothers and members of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only will your sins be smoothed away, but you will see the Lord face to face and rejoice for evermore.

48. Guard your lips, train your heart in the Jesus Prayer, be temperate in all things, and you will receive a priceless gift, the gift of the love of God towards you.

49. Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. While attending to externals, to what concerns your life in society, offer yourself up to God continually in your heart, and thus live in this Babylon—this world—ceaselessly thinking upon your heavenly Jerusalem and upon your predestination.

50. Exchange your material well-being for slavery to the Lord Jesus Christ. Resist indulgence, avoid luxury, don't exalt yourself in front of your servants: they are, in fact, your equals, because our Lord calls them also to His Holy Supper, with the same words as He calls you: *Come, eat, this is My Body.....Drink from it all of you, this is My Blood, which is shed for you and for many..*

51. The valleys below are nearly always fertile and fruitful, while the high mountains are for the most part dry and unsuitable for agriculture. Similarly, an ear of wheat which stands with its head up is always empty, whereas the one bent down has many grains. Have a humble heart, and you will be enriched with all that is needed for salvation.

52. Rain falls onto a fruitful valley directly from the clouds and from the mountains: so, too, humility. By rain here I mean God's grace, which is given to the humble directly from God and also through people who in this life have been raised up by the Lord, like the mountains. If your inner life is humbly given over to God's will and closed to His enemies, then, the Teacher, the Holy Spirit, will come to you and abide in you.

53. Forget about the broad way: the Lord, according to His merciful kindness, is leading you through the narrow gates into the Heavenly Kingdom, while the other way leads to eternal destruction.

54. For you, and for myself in this life, I desire only the cleansing of sins, and I ask the Lord God that He do with us whatever is pleasing to Him in order to cleanse our sins and wash away our iniquities, even if this means dishonor. You and I must live according to God's commandments, and not by human logic.

55. For the benefit of your soul, love solitude and, submitting entirely to the injunction of the Heavenly Father, train your heart to ceaselessly perform the Jesus Prayer. Having the Lord God abiding within you, you will become more patient, more loving and more humble.

56. Take care that laziness does not undermine your strength for spiritual labors: laziness is the first enemy for those living far from the Father; but neither should you despair of salvation, nor be overly grieved if sometimes you grow weak in your spiritual struggles.

57. Works, of themselves, will not save us; rather, it is God's mercy, if only we do good deeds in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. May He not deprive you, my friends, of His mercy all the days of your life. Whether you are weak, ugly—it matters not; run to the merciful Lord Jesus Christ and firmly trust in Him: this hope will never, ever let you down.

58. Do not scorn my words, nor consider them hard to fulfill: for the Lord and with the Lord all that is difficult is not difficult, and all that is grievous is not grievous, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

The grace of our Lord be with you!



## CONFRONTING HOMOSEXUALITY WITHIN THE FAMILY: A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

*An Anonymous contribution to "Orthodox Heritage."*

I am the father of a large family. I converted to Orthodoxy in college. I was born and raised in a Roman Catholic family and I was the youngest of six children.

When my oldest brother attended the eighth grade in a Roman Catholic private school, he was sexually abused by one of his teachers, who was a Roman Catholic priest. My parents did not know about the abuse at the time and the school was eventually closed due to other cases of sexual abuse. As result of this experience, my brother identified himself as a homosexual. In another situation (now so common, it's a cliché), when my sister was in high school, her female PE instructor introduced her to homosexuality. As a result, my sister began identifying herself as a homosexual.

Even though, as minors, they both suffered inappropriate behavior from adults to whom they had been entrusted, they deny that these experiences were causative regarding their homosexuality. My siblings reject any suggestion that outside influences led them to homosexuality. Having been brought up in the same household, however, I can attest that these incidences were THE formative experiences that lead them to embrace homosexual identities.

My siblings are in their 50s now and homosexuality remains part of their identity. These incidents, occurring in their youth—perpetrated and betrayed by people under whom they had been entrusted—affected the course of their entire lives. I can't maintain the conceit that my children would be somehow immune to such a tragedy simply because they are baptized Orthodox. On the contrary, I am convinced that, while my children are under our care, my wife and I have the responsibility to actively and vigilantly ensure that such incidences don't influence our children.

Increasingly overt homosexuality in our society directly challenges our Orthodox life. That challenge is direct and unavoidable when a family member is openly homosexual. My siblings bring their partners to all family events. The homosexual siblings and their partners are treated like married couples by my family. The rest of my family declare homosexual unions acceptable, normal, and held up as morally equal to heterosexual marriage. They believe that a person can be a "Christian homosexual." And tragically, children easily get caught up in the error.

Before my wife and I had children, I witnessed my sister explaining to one of our nieces—who was six years old at the time—that my sister's relationship with her female "partner" was like a husband and wife. That incident precipitated our decision to permanently remove our children from that environment. In the end, because the rest of my immediate family

so completely embraced homosexuality as normal and acceptable, I was forced by the circumstances to end all participation in family gatherings on my side of the family and refused to allow my homosexual siblings to visit our home. To date, I am committed to that policy and will remain so until they come to true repentance, acknowledge that homosexuality is a sin, and reject that lifestyle.

I love my brother and sister and their absence from my life pains me. But my primary responsibility as an Orthodox Christian parent is to protect my children from anything and anyone who would lead them away from Christ, even if that person is a member of my earthly family. I believe this is what Christ meant when he said *Anyone who loves mother or father, sister or brother more than Me is not worthy of Me.*

I reject the common accusation that this fails to demonstrate Christian love. The culture at large currently reflects the view that homosexuality is normative. Since my side of the family completely embraces and reflects this view, my absence from my siblings' lives is the ONLY way I can witness to them that homosexuality is wrong. Participating in their delusion in any way would convey tacit acceptance and assist the enemy in the destruction of their souls as well as risk the salvation of my children.

In spite of my family background, it has been possible, by a great gift of God's mercy, to raise my own children away from many of the overt and increasingly prevalent perversities of the contemporary culture. They have been afforded a relatively innocent and happy childhood. We give glory to God for the life He has given us.

An excellent resource for understanding the truth about homosexuality is a DVD video documentary produced by the American Family Association entitled "It's Not Gay." It can be purchased online from the American Family Association website. This video interviews many people who have lived the homosexual lifestyle and then later rejected it and abandoned their homosexual identity. These people give testimonies regarding what influenced them to begin practicing homosexuality and how it affected their lives and the lives of their families. It is an excellent film. I would strongly recommend it for anyone directly exposed to homosexuality and for all parents who are putting their children on school campuses, whether that be the junior high, high school, or college campus. This film would also be beneficial for church youth group leaders. There is some explicit content that is not appropriate for younger children, so parents should preview the film in order to determine if it is appropriate for their teens to view.

Another good resource for teens (and adults) on the subject of homosexuality and all sexual sins is the collection of audio recordings produced by St. Nicodemos Publications Society. The three series that deal with sexuality and sexual sins are titled: "The Ten Commandments," "Tobit," and "Questions and Answers."

## Ὁ Ἅγιος τῶν Ἡμερῶν μας - Πλανᾶς ὁ Νικόλαος

Συντεθημένο ἀπὸ τὸν Μητροπολίτη Πατρῶν κυρὸ Νικόδημο.



Ἢ μπορούσαμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἡ ἐποχή μας εἶναι μία ἐποχή διχασμοῦ τῆς καρδιάς, σύγχυσης, χάους, φόβου (ὄχι τοῦ ὑπαρξιακοῦ), ἀπληστίας, παραζάλης καὶ ἀνησυχίας. Δὲν ὑπάρχει καμιὰ δίψα ἀλήθειας. Καὶ οὔτε ἀμείλικτα ἐρωτήματα ζωῆς ἀναζητοῦν κάποια ἀπόκριση ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἐνῶ ἡ λαχτάρα γιὰ μάθηση καὶ χορτασιμὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ νοῦ σχεδὸν ἔχει νεκρωθεῖ. Συνάμα ἡ «ἀπολυταρχία τοῦ λογικοῦ» τείνει νὰ ἐπικρατήσῃ σ' ἓνα σιδερένιο αἰῶνα.

«Στὴν ἐποχή μας», γράφει ὁ Ἰω. Θεοδωρακόπουλος, «ἔγιναν ὅλα μηχανικὰ καὶ ἀπρόσωπα, δηλαδὴ ἀνόνομα, ἐξωτερικὰ· ἔχασαν δηλαδὴ τὴν ἐσωτερικότητά τους. Καὶ ἡ ἀνωνομία αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ κύρια πηγὴ τῆς σύγχρονης διαφθορᾶς». Ὑπάρχει λοιπὸν στὸν κόσμο ἡ ἀγωνία τοῦ ἀδιέξοδου, ἔτσι ὅπως τὴ δίδαξαν ὁ Νίτσε, ὁ Σάρτρ, ὁ Καζαντζάκης καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔβγαλαν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀπὸ τὴ σιγουριά τῆς ἐγκοσμιότητος καὶ τοῦ φόβου τοῦ Θεοῦ;

Ὡστόσο ὁ «Ἐκκλησιαστικὸς» λέει: «Τὸν Θεὸ φοβοῦ καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ φύλασσε, ὅτι τοῦτο πᾶς ἄνθρωπος» (ἔχει καθῆκον κάθε ἄνθρωπος). Ποῦ θὰ πεῖ ὅτι ὁποῖος συνειδητὰ ζεῖ μέσα στὸ ἔδαφος καὶ στὸ πνεῦμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ συνάμα βιώνει σωστὰ τὴν ὀρθόδοξη πνευματικότητα, καμιὰ ὑπέρμετρη τραγικότητα, θλίψη, ἀδιέξοδο καὶ ἀπειλὴ δὲν πρέπει νὰ φωλιάζῃ στὴν καρδιά του. Κανένα δίλημμα δὲν πρέπει νὰ κάμψῃ τὸ φρόνημα καὶ τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη τοῦ χριστιανοῦ στὸ Θεό. «Μὴ φοβοῦ, ἀλλὰπίστευε» μᾶς παραγγέλλει ὁ Κύριος.

Βέβαια, τοῦτοι οἱ καιροί, ἔνεκα τῆς μεγάλης πνευματικῆς τους καθίτησης ἀπαιτοῦν μία ξεχωριστὴ κατάθεση προσωπικῆς καὶ συλλογικῆς προσπάθειας, ἀφοῦ ἀκόμα καὶ ἡ ἀγιότητα ἀποτελεῖ ἓνα «λησιμονημένο ὄραμα». Καὶ εἶναι ἀρκετοὶ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ νομίζουν ὅτι μποροῦν νὰ ἔχουν ποιότητα ζωῆς δίχως τρολὲ (τὴν κεραία ποὺ ἀπὸ ἠλεκτροφόρο σύρμα δίνει κίνηση στὸ ὄχημα). Ἀλλὰ εἶναι φανερὸ πιά, ὅτι τίποτα τὸ δημιουργικὸ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κινηθεῖ δίχως πίστη καὶ μάλιστα στὸν ἀληθινὸ Θεό. «Δίχως Θεὸ ὅλα ἐπιτρέπονται» λέει ὁ Ντοστογιέφσκυ, καὶ βλέπουμε

ποῦ πάει ὁ κόσμος σήμερα!

Ἐπίσης εἶναι γνωστὸ ὅτι τὸν ἀγῶνα γιὰ τὴν κίνηση καὶ διατήρηση τοῦ τρολέ μὲ τὸν ἠλεκτροφόρο οὐρανὸ, δὲν μπορεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ τὸν κάνει πάντα μόνος του! Εἶναι ἀνίσχυρος ὑποκειμενικὰ καὶ συγκυριακὰ. Γι' αὐτὸ χρειάζεται βοήθεια. Θέλει διαλεκτικὴ ἐνίσχυση ἀπὸ φωτισμένες μορφές, ταπεινοὺς σηματοδοτές, ταγοὺς καὶ ἀγίους. Οἱ ὁποῖοι μὲ τὴ βαθιὰ πίστη καὶ τὴν ἔμπρακτη, χριστιανικὴ διδαχὴ τους, δίνουν ἐγγυημένες λύσεις στὰ πνευματικὰ καὶ ὑλικὰ προβλήματα τῆς καθημερινῆς ζωῆς.

Ἄλλωστε «ἡ πίστη μας χωρὶς αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀγίους παύει νὰ ὑφίσταται». Καὶ «ἂν λησιμονήσουμε αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγιότητα δὲν ἀπομένει ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία παρὰ ὁ ταυτισμὸς τῆς μὲ τὸν κόσμο», γράφει ὁ Μητροπ. Περγάμου Ἰω. Ζηζιούλας.

Μιὰ τέτοια μορφὴ, ἐπίκαιρος ἀναφορᾶς γιὰ τοὺς καιροὺς μας, εἶναι καὶ ὁ ἀπλοϊκός, ταπεινὸς καὶ φτωχὸς (ἔως πένης) παπα-Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς. Ὁ ὁποῖος βίωσε τὸ σκάνδαλο καὶ τὴ μωρία τῆς πίστεως ὅπως τὴ χαρακτηρίζει ἡ Γραφή ὄχι γιὰ τὶς κηρυχτικὲς, συγγραφικὲς, πατερικὲς ἢ θύραθεν γνώσεις του, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὴν ἀδιατίμητη ταπεινότητά του, τὴν ἀγάπη του πρὸς τὸν πλησίον, καὶ κυρίως γιὰ τὴ λιτότητα τοῦ βίου του. Ἦταν ἓνας ἀληθινὸς «φίλος τῆς ὑπακοῆς» στὸ θέλημα καὶ μόνον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὑπόδειγμα χριστιανικοῦ βίου καὶ ποιμένα ὁ ὁποῖος, στ' ἀλήθεια, «τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων».

Ὁ καλὸς αὐτὸς λευίτης ἔζησε καὶ ἐργάστηκε στὴν Ἀθήνα περισσότερα ἀπὸ ἑξήντα χρόνια καὶ κοιμήθηκε στὶς 2 Μαρτίου τοῦ ἔτους 1932. Θεωροῦσε ὅμως πάντοτε τὸν ἑαυτὸ του Νάξιο καὶ περηφανευόταν γι' αὐτό. Ὁ Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς γεννήθηκε στὴ Νάξο τὸ 1851 ἀπὸ γνωστὴ καὶ πολὺκλαδὴ οἰκογένεια τῆς Χώρας. Καὶ μεγάλωσε πλάι στὸ σπίτι τοῦ ὀνομαστοῦ τέκνου τῆς Ναξίας Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτη, μέσα σ' ἓνα κλίμα μυστικῆς ἔξαρσης ποὺ καλλιεργοῦσαν τότε ἔντονα οἱ Κολλυβάδες, οἱ πατέρες τοῦ Ἄθω καὶ οἱ Γέροντες τοῦ Ἡσυχασμοῦ. Ἄλλωστε καὶ ὁ παπποὺς τοῦ Νικόλα Πλανᾶ ἀπὸ τὴν μητέρα του ἦταν ὀφφικιοῦχος τῆς τοπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὁ οἰκονόμος Γεώργιος Μελισσουργός.

Μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ πατέρα του στὰ 1868, ὁ Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς μᾶζι μὲ τὴ μητέρα του Αὐγουστίνα καὶ τὴ μικρὴ ἀδελφή του Σουσάνα «μετανάστεψε» στὴν Ἀθήνα. Ἀφοῦ στὸ μεταξὺ, φέροντας μέσα του τὰ πλοῦσια βιώματα τῆς γενέθλιας γῆς καὶ τῆς οἰκογενειακῆς παράδοσης, εἶχε ἀποφασίσει τὴ σταδιοδρομία του!

Ὅταν ὁ Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς ἔφυγε ἀπὸ τὸν λειμῶνα τῆς ναξιακῆς γαλήνης καὶ ἦρθε στὴν Ἀθήνα, βρέθηκε ξαφνικὰ μέσα στὴ βαβούρα καὶ τὸ ἐγκόσμιο σκόρπισμα μιᾶς νέας Βαβυλώνας. Σ' ἓνα κλίμα πρωτευουσιάνικης ἀσύνδετης, ταραγμένης καὶ ἀσυνάρτητης ζωῆς. Ἡ



όποια δίχως συγκεκριμένη ταυτότητα, συνεχιζόταν πάνω στα χνάρια της βαναρικής και όθωνικής άρνησης και άμετροέπειας (μεγαλοστομίας).

Οί κάτοικοι τής Αθήνας, ως ένας άθλιος συρφετός, προσπαθοῦσαν, μιμούμενοι τὰ εὐρωπαϊκὰ κακέκτυπα ζωής, συμπεριφορᾶς και φιλοσοφίας, νὰ συγκροτήσουν μία άτομική και συλλογική συνείδηση. Σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τής πρωτεύουσας ἀναφέρεται ὁ Κονδυλάκης με τοὺς «Ἄθλιους τῶν Ἀθηνῶν», ὁ Σουρής, ὁ Συνοδινός και πολλοὶ ἄλλοι συγγραφεῖς.

Ἀκόμα και ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης πού ἔγραψε πικραμένος: «Φεῦ. Τίς μοι δώσει ὕδωρ και δάκρυα; Ἀπὸ τὸν τόπον τής δοκιμασίας και τὸν τόπον τής μικρῆς ἀναψυχῆς, ἦλθα εἰς τὸν τόπον τής καταδίκης, ὅπου ἀπὸ πολλοῦ σύρω τὸν σταυρόν μου, μὴ ἔχων πλέον δυνάμεις νὰ τὸν βαστάξω εἰς τὴν πόλιν τής δουλοπαροικίας και τῶν πλουτοκρατῶν. Ἐφθασα εἰς Ἀθήνας...»

Ἀλλὰ και ὁ Κωστής Μπαστιάς δὲν φεῖδεται παρησίας γιὰ νὰ περιγράψει τὴν κατάσταση τής πλάνης και τής ἀσυναρτησίας πού ἐπικρατοῦσε στὴν ἀλλοπρόσαλλη Ἀθήνα. «Ὅ,τι ἱερὸ φυλάξαμε», γράφει, «τετρακόσια χρόνια σκλαβιάς ποδοπατιέται, ὅ,τι μᾶς κράτησε ὄρθιους, σὰν ἀσάλευτο ἀντιστήλι, γκρεμίζεται. Σὲ τέτοιο γιουρούσι τοῦ σατανᾶ, κάθε ὑποταγή εἶναι ἄρνηση τής πίστες και παράδοση στὸ διάβολο».

Σ' αὐτὸ τὸν κόσμο ἦρθε ὁ Νικόλας Πλανᾶς νὰ ζήσει και νὰ καταθέσει τὸ ὑστέρημα τής καρδιάς του. Νὰ στηριξοῖ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἀξιοπρέπεια μέσα ἀπὸ ταπείνωση και ἀγάπη και νὰ ἀνατρέψει πολλές κατεστημένες συνήθειες μέσα στὸ κέντρο τής ἀθηναϊκῆς ἀδιαφορίας και τοῦ κυνικοῦ ἀθεϊσμοῦ. Νὰ ξαναδώσει τὴν ἱερότητα και τὸν χαμένο ἐνθουσιασμό στὸν κόσμο τής θρησκευτικῆς, χριστιανικῆς λατρείας. Καὶ παρὰ τοὺς διωγμοὺς και τίς λοιδορίες νὰ ἐγκαινιάσει μαζί με τὸ φίλο του Παπαδιαμάντη και τοὺς ἄλλους «Συμποτικούς» συντρόφους του, ἕνα νέο πνεῦμα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς καθαρότητας στὰ τέλη τοῦ 19<sup>ου</sup> και στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 20<sup>ου</sup> αἰώνα.

Γ' αὐτὸ και ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης σὲ ἄρθρο του μοναδικό, με τίτλο: «Ἱερεῖς τῶν πόλεων και ἱερεῖς τῶν χωρίων» πού δημοσιεύθηκε στὸ λεύκωμα «Ἡ Ἑλλάς κατὰ τοὺς Ὀλυμπιακοὺς Ἀγῶνας τοῦ 1896», μεταξὺ τῶν ἄλλων ἔγραψε: «Γνωρίζω ἕνα ἱερέα εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας. Εἶναι ὁ ταπεινότερος τῶν ἱερέων και ὁ ἀπλοϊκότερος τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Εἶναι ἀξιαγάπητος. Εἶναι ἀπλοϊκός και ἐνάρετος. Εἶναι ἄξιος τοῦ πρώτου τῶν μακαρισμῶν τοῦ Σωτήρος».

Ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ τὸν Νικόλα Πλανᾶ ὁ ὁποῖος, ἀφοῦ πρώτα στεφανώθηκε, στὶς 14 τοῦ Ἀπριλίου τοῦ 1879 και τὸν Ἰούλιο χειροτονήθηκε διάκονος στὴ Μεταμόρφωση τοῦ Σωτήρος Πλάκας, ἔμεινε γιὰ λίγα χρόνια νὰ ὑπηρετεῖ με ξεχωριστὸ ἦθος στὸν ἴδιο Ναό. Καὶ στὴ συνέχεια, στὶς 2 Μαρτίου τοῦ 1884, χειροτονήθηκε σὲ

Πρεσβύτερο στὸ ἐκκλησάκι τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐλισαίου ὡς «Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς Ἱερεὺς ἐκ Νάξου» και τοποθετήθηκε στὸν Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη Βουλιαγμένης. Ἐνεκα ὅμως τοῦ ὅτι σὲ ὅλη τὴν περιοχὴ εἶχε μόνο τρεῖς οἰκογένειες ποιμένων ὡς ἐνορίτες, λειτουργοῦσε τακτικότερα στὸν Ἅγιο Ἐλισαῖο, στὸ Μοναστηράκι, με ψάλτες τὸν Ἀλέξανδρο Παπαδιαμάντη και τὸν Ἀλέξανδρο Μωραϊτίδη.

Εἶχε τὴν «ἰερὴ συνήθεια» νὰ κάνει σχεδὸν καθημερινὲς λειτουργίες και ἀγρυπνίες σὲ ὅλα τὰ ἐκκλησάκια τής Ἀθήνας και ἔξω ἀπ' αὐτή. Ἰδιαιτέρα στὸ ἐκκλησάκι τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐλισαίου ὅπου τὸ τυπικὸ ἦταν ἀγιορεῖτικο, πλούσιο σὲ κατάνυξη, συγκεντρώνονταν πάρα πολλές ἀπὸ τίς ἐκκλησιαστικὲς μορφές τής ἐποχῆς, οἱ ὁποῖες ἀργότερα ἔπαιξαν μεγάλο ρόλο στὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸ βίو τής Χώρας, ὅπως ἦταν: ὁ Νεκτᾶριος Κεφαλᾶς, ὁ Φιλόθεος Ζερβάκος, ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, πολλοὶ Ἐπίσκοποι και ἀγιορεῖτες Γέροντες. Οἱ ὁποῖοι στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ παπα-Νικόλα Πλανᾶ, τοῦ ὀλιγογράμματος και ταπεινοῦ ἱερέα, ἔβρισκαν και βίωναν τὴν «πρόγευση τῶν ἐσχάτων». Τὴν ἀγιότητα ὡς ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἐμπειρία. Ποῦ σημαίνει ὅτι μέσα στὸ μικρὸ ἐκκλησάκι ὑπῆρχε εἰκονισμὸς τής Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ και μετοχὴ στὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ και στὴ νοητὴ θέωση τῶν «μυσταγωγικῶς παρισταμένων».

Γιὰ τὸν παπα-Νικόλα Πλανᾶ δὲν ὑπῆρξε ποτὲ θέμα ὕλικῶν ὠφελιμάτων. Ἐνιωθε πάντοτε πλούσιος και μόνο ὅτι ὑπηρετοῦσε τὸ Θυσιαστήριο ὡς ἱερέας Χριστοῦ και ἀγίαζε τὸν κόσμο. Ζοῦσε σ' ἕνα ταπεινὸ δωματιάκι στὸ σπίτι τής νύμφης του ἀπὸ τὸ γιό του Ἰωάννη, κάπου στὸ Κουκάκι (Γαργαρέττα). Φοροῦσε μόνιμα τὸ ἴδιο τριμμένο ρασάκι ἕως τὴν τελευτὴ τοῦ βίου του. Ἡ ὁποία ἔγινε, δίχως νὰ ἀρρωστήσει, τὴν Τσικνοπέμπτη τοῦ 1932, ἐνῶ εἶχε ξαπλώσει γιὰ νὰ κοιμηθεῖ.

Ἀργότερα γιὰ τὴ μοναδικότητα και ἀγιότητα τοῦ Παπακαλόγερου Νικόλα Πλανᾶ, διαμορφώθηκε ἡ συνείδηση στὸ λαὸ ὅτι θαυματουργοῦσε. Καὶ ὅτι αὐτὸ συνέβη ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ὅσιος Νικόλας Πλανᾶς δὲν εἶχε τίποτ' ἄλλο στὸ νοῦ του ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ και τὴ διακονία τῶν συνανθρώπων του μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Κατὰ τὴν κηδεῖα του, πού ἔγινε στὸν Ἅγιο Γιάννη Βουλιαγμένης, ὅπου ὁ ἀγαθὸς Πρεσβύτερος ὑπηρετήσε ἐπὶ πενήντα ἔτη, ἀκούστηκαν πολλοὶ ἐπαινετικοὶ λόγοι και γράφτηκαν στὸν Τύπο κείμενα πού μιλοῦσαν γιὰ τὴν ἀφιλοκερδεία, τὴν ἀπλότητά του και τὴν ἀπόλυτη καλοσύνη του. Τὸν ἐπικήδειο ἐκφώνησε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος κυρὸς Χρυσόστομος Παπαδόπουλος. Καὶ τὸ μεγάλο πλῆθος τοῦ λαοῦ ἀπαίτησε νὰ γίνεῖ ἡ περιφορὰ τοῦ σκηνώματός του σὲ ὅλη τὴν Πλάκα τής Ἀθήνας ὅπου ἔζησε και διακόνησε.

Στὶς μέρες μας, ὅσο ποτὲ ἄλλοτε, ἡ μνήμη τοῦ Ὁσίου Νικολάου Πλανᾶ, εἶναι ἐπίκαιρη και παραδειγματικὴ



για τὸν Κλήρο καὶ τὸ Λαό. Ἡ αὐτάρκειά του ἦταν πνευματική. Καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦ ἔδινε τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ αισθάνεται πλούσιος ἐνῶ ἦταν φτωχός. Νὰ ἔχει μόνιμα τὸν τρολὲ ἐνωμένο μὲ τὸν Οὐρανὸ καὶ δίχως κανένα φόβο νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζει ὅλες τὶς ἐξωτερικὲς συγκυρίες, οἱ ὁποῖες καὶ στὰ χρόνια του ἦταν πολὺ σκληρὲς καὶ πιεστικὲς, ὅπως καὶ στὶς μέρες μας! Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, μετὰ τὴν ἀγιοκατάταξή του, δίκαια ψάλλει:

«Πλανᾶς ὁ Νικόλαος,  
ὁ ταπεινὸς προεσβύτερος  
ᾧφθη ἐκλεκτὸς Χριστοῦ ἐργάτης,  
μικρὸς τὸ δέμας,  
πεφωτισμένος τὸν νοῦν,  
πίστει σοφῶν ὑπερετρῶν,  
ὄρθρω καὶ νυχθημερῶν τῷ φωτὶ ἀνγαζόμενος.»

Καὶ ἐπίσης ψάλλει τό:

«Ὡ τοῦ παραδόξου θαύματος.  
Τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ὁ Θεὸς ἐπέλεξε,  
τὴν δ' ἔπαρσιν τῶν σοφῶν τούτοις κατήσχυνεν.  
Εὐφραίνου ἡ ταπεινὴ Νάξος,  
γενέθλη Πλανᾶ χρηματίσασα  
Νικόλαον τὸν ἀπλοῦν  
ἐν ἱερεῦσι Χριστοῦ ἡ ἐκθρέψασα.»



## Ἀνήκω σὲ Μία Χώρα Μικρή!

*Ἡ ὁμιλία τοῦ Γιώργου Σεφέρη στὴν τελετὴ παραλαβῆς τοῦ Βραβείου Νόμπελ Λογοτεχνίας, 11 Δεκεμβρίου, 1963.*

**Ἀ**νήκω σὲ μία χώρα μικρή. Ἐνα πέτρινο ἀκρωτήριο στὴ Μεσόγειο, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει ἄλλο ἀγαθὸ παρὰ τὸν ἀγῶνα τοῦ λαοῦ, τὴ θάλασσα, καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. Εἶναι μικρὸς ὁ τόπος μας, ἀλλὰ ἡ παράδοσή του εἶναι τεράστια καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα ποὺ τὴ χαρακτηρίζει εἶναι ὅτι μᾶς παραδόθηκε χωρὶς διακοπή.

Ἡ ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα δὲν ἔπαψε ποτὲ τῆς νὰ μιλιέται. Δέχτηκε τὶς ἀλλοιώσεις ποὺ δέχεται καθετὶ ζωντανό, ἀλλὰ δὲν παρουσιάζει κανένα χάσμα.

Ἄλλο χαρακτηριστικὸ αὐτῆς τῆς παράδοσης εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τῆς γιὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπιά, κανόνας τῆς εἶναι ἡ δικαιοσύνη. Στὴν ἀρχαία τραγωδία, τὴν ὀργανωμένη μὲ τόση ἀκριβεία, ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ ξεπερνᾷ τὸ μέτρο, πρέπει νὰ τιμωρηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὶς Ἑρινύες. Ὅσο γιὰ μένα συγκινούμαι παρατηρώντας πῶς ἡ συνείδηση τῆς δικαιοσύνης εἶχε τόσο πολὺ διαποτίσει τὴν ἑλληνικὴ ψυχὴ, ὥστε νὰ γίνεῖ κανόνας τοῦ φυσικοῦ κόσμου.

Καὶ ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς διδασκάλους μου, τῶν ἀρχῶν τοῦ περασμένου αἰώνα, γράφει: «...θὰ χαθοῦμε γιὰτὶ ἀδικήσαμε...». Αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἦταν ἀγράμματος. Εἶχε μάθει νὰ γράφει συναπτὰ τριάντα πέντε χρόνια

τῆς ἡλικίας του. Ἀλλὰ στὴν Ἑλλάδα τῶν ἡμερῶν μας, ἡ προφορικὴ παράδοση πηγαίνει μακριὰ στὰ περασμένα ὅσο καὶ ἡ γραπτὴ. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ ἡ ποίηση.

Εἶναι γιὰ μένα σημαντικὸ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ Σουηδία θέλησε νὰ τιμήσει καὶ τούτῃ τὴν ποίηση καὶ ὅλη τὴν ποίηση γενικά, ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν ἀναβρῦζει ἀνάμεσα σ' ἕνα λαὸ περιορισμένο. Γιατί πιστεύω πῶς τοῦτος ὁ σύγχρονος κόσμος ὅπου ζοῦμε, ὁ τυρρατισμένος ἀπὸ τὸ φόβο καὶ τὴν ἀνησυχία, τὴ χρειάζεται τὴν ποίηση. Ἡ ποίηση ἔχει τὶς ρίζες τῆς στὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἀνάσα—καὶ τί θὰ γινόμασταν ἂν ἡ πνοή μας λιγότευε; Εἶναι μία πράξη ἐμπιστοσύνης—κι ἕνας Θεὸς τὸ ξέρεῖ ἂν τὰ δεινά μας δὲν τὰ χρωστάμε στὴ στέρηση ἐμπιστοσύνης.

Παρατήρησαν, τὸν περασμένο χρόνον γύρω ἀπὸ τοῦτο τὸ τραπέζι, τὴν πολὺ μεγάλη διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα στὶς ἀνακαλύψεις τῆς σύγχρονης ἐπιστήμης καὶ στὴ λογοτεχνία, παρατήρησαν πῶς ἀνάμεσα σ' ἕνα ἀρχαῖο ἑλληνικὸ δράμα καὶ ἕνα σημερινό, ἡ διαφορὰ εἶναι λίγη. Ναί, ἡ συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δὲ μοιάζει νὰ ἔχει ἀλλάξει βασικά. Καὶ πρέπει νὰ προσθέσω πῶς νιώθει πάντα τὴν ἀνάγκη ν' ἀκούσει τούτῃ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φωνὴ ποὺ ὀνομάζουμε ποίηση. Αὐτὴ ἡ φωνὴ ποὺ κινδυνεύει νὰ σβήσει κάθε στιγμὴ ἀπὸ στέρηση ἀγάπης καὶ ὀλοένα ξαναγεννιέται. Κινηγημένη, ξέρεῖ ποὺ νὰ βρεῖ καταφύγιο, ἀπαρνημένη, ἔχει τὸ ἔνστικτο νὰ πάει νὰ ριζώσει στοὺς πιὸ ἀπροσδόκητους τόπους. Γι' αὐτὴ δὲν ὑπάρχουν μεγάλα καὶ μικρὰ μέρη τοῦ κόσμου. Τὸ βασιλεῖο τῆς εἶναι στὶς καρδιὲς ὄλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῆς γῆς. Ἐχει τὴ χάρη ν' ἀποφεύγει πάντα τὴ συνήθεια νὰ κρίνει μία χώρα ἀπὸ τὸ μέγεθός της, τὴν γλῶσσα της, τὸν πλοῦτο, ἢ τὴν βιομηχανία της.

Χρωστῶ τὴν εὐγνωμοσύνη μου στὴ Σουηδικὴ Ἀκαδημία ποὺ ἔνιωσε αὐτὰ τὰ πρᾶγματα, ποὺ ἔνιωσε πῶς οἱ γλῶσσες, οἱ λεγόμενες περιορισμένης χρήσης, δὲν πρέπει νὰ καταντοῦν φράχτες ὅπου πνίγεται ὁ παλμὸς τῆς ἀνθρώπινης καρδιάς, ποὺ ἔγινε ἕνας Ἄρειος Πάγος ἰκανὸς νὰ κρίνει μὲ ἀλήθεια ἐπίσημη τὴν ἄδικη μοῖρα τῆς ζωῆς, γιὰ νὰ θυμηθῶ τὸν Σέλλεϋ, τὸν ἐμπνευστή, καθὼς μᾶς λένε, τοῦ Ἀλφρέδου Νομπέλ, αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ποὺ μπόρεσε νὰ ἐξαγοράσει τὴν ἀναπόφευκτη βία μὲ τὴ μεγαλοσύνη τῆς καρδιάς του.

Σ' αὐτὸ τὸν κόσμον, ποὺ ὀλοένα στενεύει, ὁ καθένας μας χρειάζεται ὄλους τοὺς ἄλλους. Πρέπει ν' ἀναζητήσουμε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ὅπου καὶ νὰ βρισκεται. Ὅταν στὸ δρόμο τῆς Θήβας, ὁ Οἰδίπους συνάντησε τὴ Σφίγγα, κι αὐτὴ τοῦ ἔθεσε τὸ αἰνιγμὰ της, ἡ ἀπόκρισή του ἦταν: Ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Τούτῃ ἡ ἀπλὴ λέξη χάλασε τὸ τέρας. Ἐχομε πολλὰ τέρατα νὰ καταστρέψουμε. Ἄς συλλογιστοῦμε τὴν ἀπόκριση τοῦ Οἰδίποδα.

## Ἀπαιτῶ!

Ἀπὸ ἓνα Ἑλληνορθόδοξο φυλλάδιο.

**Τ**ὸ θαῦμα ποῦ θὰ ἐξιστορηθεῖ τώρα, δυστυχῶς, ὅπως ἔδειξαν τὰ πράγματα, δὲν ἔγινε κατ' εὐδοκίαν Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ κατ' ἀπαίτηση κάποιας μητέρας, ποῦ θεώρησε ἢ δυστυχῆς τὴν δική της γνώμη καὶ ἐπιθυμία πιδ σωστὴ ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία ἀπόφαση ποῦ εἶχε ληφθεῖ γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τοῦ παιδιοῦ της. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ μπαίνουντας στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Παναγίας μαζί με ἄλλους συμπροσκυνητές, διότι εἶχε ἔρθει με πούλμαν ἀπὸ ἓνα μεγάλο χωριὸ τοῦ Νομοῦ Ἀχαΐας, φώναζε:

- Ἀπαιτῶ, Παναγία μου, τὸ παιδί μου νὰ γίνη καλά!

Ὅταν τῆς ὑπεδείχθη ὅτι δὲν πρέπει νὰ λέει στὴν Παναγία «ἀπαιτῶ», ἐκεῖνη εἶπε: «Τὸ ἀπαιτῶ, γιὰ τὸ παιδί μου εἶναι 28 χρονῶν καὶ ἔχει μικρὸ παιδάκι καὶ οἱ γιατροὶ εἶπαν ὅτι σὲ 15 ἡμέρες θὰ πεθάνει, γιὰ τὸ ὄλικο καρκίνιο».

Ὅσοι τὴν ἄκουσαν νὰ προσεύχεται κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο, προσπάθησαν νὰ τὴν συμβουλεύσουν καὶ τῆς εἶπαν πὼς στὴν προσευχὴ πρέπει νὰ παρακαλοῦμε καὶ ὄχι νὰ ἀπαιτοῦμε, γιὰ τὸ Θεός, ὁ πραγματικὸς Πατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀγαπᾷ τὸ πλάσμα Του ἀπείρως περισσότερο ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ μιὰ μάννα. Ἐπὶ πλέον τῆς εἶπαν νὰ ἀφήσει τὸ παιδί της στὰ χέρια τῆς Παναγίας νὰ τὸ σώσει, γιὰ τὸ Ἐκεῖνη δίνει τὴν βοήθειά Της κατὰ τὸ συμφέρον τοῦ κάθε ἀνθρώπου. Αὐτὴ ὅμως δυστυχῶς πιδ ἐξαγριωμένη φώναζε:

- Ἀπαιτῶ, ἀπαιτῶ, Παναγία μου, τὸ παιδί μου νὰ γίνη καλά!!!...

Δὲν ἤθελε νὰ καταλάβει πὼς κανεὶς δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἀπαιτεῖ, γιὰ τὴν Παναγία, σὰν στοργικὴ Μάννα, ξέρετε καλύτερα ἀπ' ὅλους μας τί εἶναι καλύτερο πρῶτα γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς μας. Ὁ Κύριός μας Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς μᾶς ἔδωσε τὸ ὑπόδειγμα τῆς σωστῆς προσευχῆς: «*Πάτερ μου, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστὶ, παρελθέτω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο· πλὴν οὐχ ὡς ἐγὼ θέλω, ἀλλ' ὡς σὺ*». (Ματθ. 26:39). Τὴν τελευταία ἀπόφαση τὴν ἀφήνουμε στὴν ἀλάνθαστη καὶ σωτήρια κρίση τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓνα περιόπου χρόνον, κάποιος ἀπὸ τοὺς προσκυνητὲς ποῦ εἶχαν ἔρθει με τὴν ἐν λόγῳ μητέρα, ξαναἦλθε νὰ προσκυνήσει τὴν Χάρη Της καὶ ἔλεγε μεγαλοφώνως μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας:

- Παναγία μου, τὸ θέλημα Σου νὰ γίνεταί, μὰ τὸ κακὸ ποῦ εἶδα στὸ χωριό μου!

Ὅταν ρωτήθηκε τί ἔγινε στὸ χωριό του, ἀπάντησε καὶ διευκρίνησε πότε εἶχε ἔρθει καὶ γιὰ ποῖο περιστατικὸ μιλοῦσε. Ἀναφερόταν στὴν περίπτωση τῆς κυρίας ποῦ φώναζε τὸ «ἀπαιτῶ». Τότε ἡ Ἠγουμένη τὸν ἐρώτησε:

- Τί ἔγινε ὁ γυιὸς τῆς κυρίας;

- Ἐγινε καλά, ἀλλὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει οὔτε αὐτὸς οὔτε οἱ γονεῖς του.

Στὴν ἀπορία «γιατί;» ἀπάντησε ὁ προσκυνητὴς με θλίψη:

- Ὅταν ὁ γυιὸς της ἔγινε καλά, πῆγε σὲ ἓνα νυκτερινὸ κέντρο καὶ συνεδέθη με τὴν ἐκεῖ τραγουδίστρια. Ἐφυγε ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι του καὶ ἔμεινε με τὴν τραγουδίστρια. Οἱ γονεῖς του ποῦ στενοχωροῦντο γιὰ τὴν παράνομη αὐτὴ συμπεριφορὰ του, ὅταν τὸν συναντοῦσαν τὸν συμβούλευαν νὰ ἀλλάξῃ τακτικὴ. «Δὲν κάνει, παιδί μου, τοῦ ἔλεγαν, ἔχεις γυναῖκα καὶ μικρὸ παιδί. Γύρισε σπίτι σου». Ἐπειδὴ ἐνοχλεῖτο ὁ γυιὸς ἀπὸ τὶς συμβουλὲς τῶν γονέων του, μιὰ μέρα ποῦ θύμωσε ἐναντίον τους πολὺ, πῆρε τὸ κυνηγετικὸ του ὄπλο (γιατὶ ἦταν καὶ κυνηγός), σκότωσε τὴν μάννα του καὶ τὸν πατέρα του καὶ ἐν συνεχείᾳ αὐτοκτόνησε!

Ὅσοι ἄκουσαν τὸ περιστατικὸ φρίκισαν. Μητροκτόνος, πατροκτόνος καὶ αὐτόχειρας!

Δὲν ἦταν ἀπείρως καλύτερα νὰ φύγει με ἓναν φυσιολογικὸ θάνατο, καὶ μάλιστα ἐξιλεωτικὸ, ὅπως γίνεται ὅταν ὑπομένει ὁ ἀσθενὴς τὴν ἀρρώστια του; Ἡ Παναγία δὲν ἤξερε καλύτερα;

Ἡ σαρκικὴ του μάννα ἀπαιτοῦσε τὴν ὑγεία τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἀγνοοῦσε τὸν κίνδυνον τοῦ χαμοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ παιδιοῦ της, ποῦ τώρα εἶναι αἰώνιος. Ἐνῶ ἡ στοργικὴ Παναγία, γνωρίζοντας τὸν κίνδυνον, προσπάθησε νὰ τὸν ἐξιλεώσει με τὴν ἀρρώστια, γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ του. Ἡ παράλογη ἀπαίτηση τῆς μάννας τὸν κατεδίκασε αἰώνιος.

Εἶθε με ἀπόλυτη ἐμπιστοσύνη νὰ ἀναθέτουμε κάθε πρόβλημά μας, χωρὶς ὑποδείξεις λύσεως στὴν Παναγία καὶ Ἐκεῖνη, νὰ πιστεύουμε ἀπόλυτα ὅ,τι ἐπιτρέψει θὰ εἶναι καὶ ἡ καλύτερη λύση τῶν προβλημάτων μας κατὰ τὸ «*γεννηθῆτω τὸ θέλημά Σου*».



**Ἡ** πείρα ἀποκτιέται ἀπὸ τὰ πυρὰ τῶν δαιμόνων, ποῦ δέχεται ὁ στρατιώτης τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴν πνευματικὴ μάχη.

**Γ**ιὰ νὰ ἐξαγισθεῖ ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ καρδιά, πρέπει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ μὴ δέχεται πονηροὺς λογισμοὺς, ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ ὁ ἴδιος νὰ σκέφτεται πονηρά. Νὰ ἐνεργεῖ δὲ ἀπλὰ καὶ ταπεινὰ καὶ νὰ ἀγωνίζεται φιλότιμα.

**Ὅ**σο ἀπομακρύνονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὴν φυσικὴ ζωὴ, τὴν ἀπλὴ καὶ προχωροῦν στὴν πολυτέλεια, αὐξάνουν καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο ἄγχος. Καὶ ὅσο προχωρεῖ ἡ κοσμικὴ εὐγένεια, τόσο χάνεται καὶ ἡ ἀπλότητα, ἡ χαρὰ καὶ τὸ φυσικὸ ἀνθρώπινο χαμόγελο.

**Ὅ**σσοστος ἄνθρωπος δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸς ποῦ λέει ὁσσοστος κουβέντες, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος ποῦ ζεῖ καὶ σωστά, Εὐαγγελικά.

Γέρων Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης (+1994)



## Ὁ Πολιτισμὸς τῆς Εὐχέρειας

*Χρήστου Μαλεβίτση, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τὸ «Τὰ Μῆλα τῶν Ἑσπερίδων», ἑκδ. Imago. Δημοσιεύθηκε στὸ ἀφιέρωμα «Οἰκονομία σὲ Κρίση - Τὸ Ἐχειν καὶ τὸ Εἶναι» τοῦ περιοδικοῦ «Πειραϊκὴ Ἐκκλησία», τ. 217, Ἰούλιος 2010.*

Οἱ Δυτικὲς κοινωνίες εἰσέρχονται πλησίστιες στὸν πολιτισμὸ τῆς εὐχέρειας. Ἐνῶ ὅλοι οἱ μέχρι τώρα πολιτισμοὶ ἦσαν πολιτισμοὶ τῆς δυσχέρειας. Ἡ διαφορὰ εἶναι κρίσιμη. Διότι ἡ δυσχέρεια συνθέτει τοὺς πολιτισμούς, ἡ δὲ εὐχέρεια τοὺς ἀποσυνθέτει.

Βέβαια, ὁ πολιτισμὸς ἔγινε ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο γιὰ νὰ μετατρέψει τὴ δυσχέρεια σὲ εὐχέρεια. Οἱ παλιοὶ πολιτισμοὶ τὸ καταφέρανε τοῦτο σὲ περιορισμένο βαθμὸ καὶ γιὰ περιορισμένο ἀριθμὸ ἀνθρώπων. Μόνον ὁ δικὸς μας πολιτισμὸς στὴ δεύτερη φάση του, σὲ αὐτὴν τῆς καταναλωτικῆς κοινωνίας, ἐπέτυχε νὰ μεταστοιχειώσει τὴ δυσχέρεια σὲ εὐχέρεια σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ καὶ γιὰ μεγάλο ἀριθμὸ ἀνθρώπων. Μὲ τὸν καιρὸ δὲ αὐξάνει καὶ ὁ βαθμὸς τῆς εὐχέρειας καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ τὴν ἀπολαμβάνουν. Αὐτὸ ὄνειρευόταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπὸ καταβολῆς τοῦ? τώρα τὸ ἐπέτυχε? δὲν νιώθει εὐτυχῆς;

Ἐδῶ ἀκριβῶς βρίσκεται ἡ μεγάλη ἀποκάλυψη: ὅτι στὸν πολιτισμὸ τῆς εὐχέρειας ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν αἰσθάνεται εὐτυχῆς. Ἀλλὰ καὶ κάτι παραπάνω: δὲν αἰσθάνεται ἀσφαλῆς. Καὶ τὴν πλέον ταπεινὴ συνείδηση τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ τῆς εὐχέρειας τὴν ἔχει σταυρώσει ἡ κατῆφεια καὶ τὴν ἔχει χαράξει ἡ ὑποψία, ἡ καὶ ἡ βεβαιότητα τῆς ριζικῆς ἀνασφάλειας.

Πράγματι, αὐτὸ τὸ τελευταῖο εἶναι πολὺ ἀπογοητευτικό· ἀτενίζομε πλέον καὶ στίς ἀμέτοχες συνειδήσεις τὸν κατοπτρισμὸ τῆς ματαιότητος τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ μας. Ἦταν νοητὴ ἡ συζήτηση γιὰ τὴν κρίση τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ μεταξὺ ἱστορικῶν ἢ φιλοσόφων ἢ κοινωνιολόγων. Τώρα ὅμως ἡ συζήτηση αὐτὴ διεξάγεται ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἀνθρώπους ἀπλοϊκοὺς ἢ νέους, μὲ τὶς ἐλάχιστες ἀκόμη ἐμπειρίες ζωῆς. Καὶ ἡ συνείδηση ἀμχανεῖ πρὸ τοῦ μεγάλου κακοῦ, βλέποντας πὼς τὸ ψυχὸς τῆς ἱστορικῆς αὐτοσυνειδησίας κατῆλθε ὡς τοὺς ἀνθισμένους λειμῶνες καὶ τοὺς καταψύχει προῶτως. Καὶ ἀποδεικνύεται πλέον μὲ ἐνάργεια μεσημεριοῦ πὼς πράγματι ὁ πολιτισμὸς μας τελεῖ σὲ κρίση—διότι ἡ κρίση τοῦ κλονίζει καὶ τὶς ἀγεώργητες, καὶ τὶς ἄγουρες συνειδήσεις. Δὲν πρόκειται πλέον περὶ θεωρητικῆς ἐκδοχῆς, ἀλλὰ περὶ καθεστῶτος ἐδραίου.

Πηγὴ τῶν πολιτισμῶν εἶναι ἡ δυσχέρεια τοῦ βίου. Βιοτικὴ δυσχέρεια, βεβαίως, ἀντιμετωπίζουν καὶ τὰ ζῶα. Μόνον ποὺ αὐτὰ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἀπαντήσουν στὴν πρόκληση τῆς δυσχέρειας καὶ παραμένουν ἐσαεὶ δέσμιά της. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπελευθερώνεται ἀπὸ τὴν δυσχέρεια ἀπαντώντας δημιουργικὰ στὴ πρόκλησή

της. Ἡ ἀπελευθέρωση εἶναι σχετικὴ· μὲ τὸν Δυτικὸ ὅμως πολιτισμὸ μας πᾶει νὰ γίνῃ ἀπόλυτη. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ μετασηματίζεται στὸν πρῶτο πολιτισμὸ τῆς εὐχέρειας στὴν ἱστορία.

Ἡ πενία, δηλαδὴ ἡ δυσχέρεια, δὲν κατεργάζεται μόνο τέχνες, κατὰ τὸ λόγιο. Κατεργάζεται καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα, τὸν ἐσωτερικὸ πλουτισμὸ, τὰ αἰσθήματα, τὶς συγκινήσεις, τὶς ἀγάπες, τὶς θρησκείες, τὶς φιλοσοφίες, τὶς ἰδεολογίες. Ὅχι μόνον ὁ ὑλικὸς πολιτισμὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ πνευματικὸς πολιτισμὸς εἶναι προϊόντα τῆς δυσχέρειας. Καὶ τοῦτο τὸ τελευταῖο μᾶς ἐνδιαφέρει ἀκόμη περισσότερο. Δὲν θὰ ὑπῆρχε πνευματικὸ ἔργο χωρὶς τὴν δυσχέρεια τῆς ὑπάρξεως.

Ἦλη ἡ Ὀδύσεια εἶναι ἡ βιοτικὴ δυσχέρεια ἐνδὸς ἀνθρώπου. Καὶ ὅλη ἡ Ἰλιάδα εἶναι ἡ ἀγωνιστικὴ δυσχέρεια ἐνδὸς λαοῦ. Ἡ ριζικὴ δυσχέρεια τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ὑπαρξῆς, ποὺ εἶναι ὁ θάνατος, συνιστᾷ τὸ σημεῖο ἀφετηρίας τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ. Καὶ ἡ διὰ βίου προσκόλλησι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὴ θρησκεία τοῦ συστοιχεῖται πρὸς τὸν διὰ βίου χειμασμὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὸν κόσμον τοῦτο. Ἡ ζωὴ τελεῖ πάντοτε ὑπὸ ἀπειλῆ καὶ καταφεύγει στὸ ἔργο τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ γιὰ νὰ ἀσφαλισθεῖ ὑλικῶς καὶ πνευματικῶς. Ὡστόσο, τοῦτο δὲν σημαίνει πὼς οἱ πνευματικὲς καταφυγὲς τῆς ζωῆς εἶναι προσχήματα ἄμυνας χωρὶς αὐτόνομη ἐσωτερικὴ ἀξία—δηλαδὴ δὲν πρόκειται γιὰ ἐξορκισμούς. Ὅχι. Ναὶ μὲν ἡ δυσχέρεια τοῦ ζῆν ἀναγκάζει τὸν ἄνθρωπο στὸ νὰ ψάξει γιὰ πνευματικὰ ἐρείσματα, δὲν πρόκειται ὅμως γιὰ ἐπινοήματα, παρὰ γιὰ γνήσιες ἀποκαλύψεις πραγματικότητων, ἀγνώστων μέχρι τότε. Ἡ διάνοιξη τῆς συνείδησης, ὠθημένη ἀπὸ τὴν δυσχέρεια, εἶναι πραγματικὴ καὶ κοσμοϊστορικῆς σημασίας. Ἄλλωστε, ἐπειδὴ ἀκριβῶς αὐτὲς οἱ πραγματικότητες ὑπάρχουν, τὶς ἀντιτάσσει ὁ ἄνθρωπος στὴν δυσχέρεια, γιὰ τὴν ὑπέρβασή της. Ἄν δὲν ὑπῆρχαν, δὲ θὰ τὶς εὑρίσκε· θὰ τοῦ ἦταν ἴσως ἀκατόρθωτο καὶ νὰ τὶς ἐπινοήσει. Καὶ μάλιστα θὰ ἦταν πιὸ δύσκολο, ἂν ὄχι ἀδύνατο, νὰ τὶς ἐπινοήσει παρὰ νὰ τὶς ἀνακαλύψει.

Ὅσο ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπαλλάσσεται ἀπὸ τὴν δυσχέρεια τοῦ ζῆν τόσο ἀπαλλάσσεται καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ καταφύγει στὸν προφήτη, στὸν ἅγιο, στὸν ποιητὴ, στὸν φιλόσοφο. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ στὸν πολιτισμὸ τῆς εὐχέρειας τὰ ἐπάγγελα αὐτὰ ὀλοένα καὶ περισσότερο παραμένουν ἀζήτητα. Διότι οἱ ἐπαγγελίες τους γιὰ σωτηρία (θρησκευτικὴ, αἰσθητικὴ, γνωστικὴ) δὲν ἐνθουσιάζουν κανέναν. Ἡ εὐχέρεια ἀποσαθρώνει τὴν πνευματικὴ σκευὴ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Βέβαια, ἡ ὑπαρξὴ εἶναι καταστατικῶς δυσχερῆς στὸν κόσμον τοῦτο, ἀφοῦ ἡ κατ' ἐξοχὴν δυσχέρεια, ὁ θάνατος, δὲν ἀναιρεῖται ἀπὸ κανέναν πολιτισμὸ. Ὅμως ἡ ἀναίρεση τῆς βιοτικῆς μέριμνας (τροφὴ, ἐνδυσση, στέγη, φάρμακα) ἀπαλύνει τὶς ὑψηλότερου βαθμοῦ δυσχερείες



μέχρις ἀμβλύνσεως τῶν, δεδομένου ὅτι οἱ «πλατιῆς μάζες» ποῦ συνιστοῦν τὸ μόνο ὑποκείμενο τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ τῆς εὐχέρειας, νιώθουν νὰ εὐδαιμονοῦν μέσα στὴ θαλπωρὴ τῆς ὑλικῆς τους εὐμάρειας. Δὲν εἶναι ἀσήμαντο πράγμα ἡ ικανοποίηση τῶν ἄμεσων καὶ ἐπιτακτικῶν βιοτικῶν ἀναγκῶν. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς καὶ ἡ λύση ποῦ δόθηκε κατακυριάρχησε καὶ παραμέρισε ὅλες τὶς ἄλλες λύσεις τῶν ἄλλων δυσχερειῶν.

Ὅλα ὁμῶς τοῦτα ἰσχύουν βραχυπροθέσμως. Δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἰσχύουν μακροπροθέσμως. Μακροπροθέσμως ὁδηγοῦν εὐθέως πρὸς τὴν κατάρρευση τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Ἐπειδὴ ἡ εὐχέρεια ἀπορρυθμίζει τοὺς μηχανισμοὺς συντηρήσεως καὶ ἐπεκτάσεως τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Ἴσως στὸ τέλος ἀναλάβει τὸν μόχθο αὐτὸ μιὰ ἀποφασισμένη μειοψηφία. Ὅποτε θὰ περάσουμε σὲ ἄλλες ἱστορικὲς μορφὲς χαρούμενης, πλέον, δουλείας τῶν πολλῶν τῆς εὐχέρειας στοὺς λίγους τῆς δυσχέρειας.

Ὡστόσο, ὁ πολιτισμὸς μας ἤδη κρούεται στὰ ὅρια τῆς ὑλικῆς του εὐχέρειας, ποῦ εἶναι τὰ ὅρια ἀντοχῆς τοῦ φυσικοῦ μας περιβάλλοντος. Στὸ μεταξὺ ὁμῶς ἡ εὐχέρεια, ποῦ ἡ Δύση ἔχει ἀπολαύσει σὲ πρωτοφανῆ βαθμὸ καὶ γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ στὴν ἱστορία, ἔχει πράξει τὸ κακό. Ὑπονόμευσε ὅλη τὴν πνευματικότητα καὶ ὅλη τὴν ἐσωτερικότητα ποῦ εἶχαν δημιουργήσει οἱ πολιτισμοὶ τῆς δυσχέρειας.

Σ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμο τὰ πάντα ἔχουν τὸ ἀντίρροπὸ τους. Ἡ ὑλικὴ δυστυχία ἀντιζυγίζεται μὲ πνευματικὴ εὐτυχία. Ἡ ὑλικὴ εὐτυχία ἀντιροπεῖται μὲ πνευματικὴ δυστυχία. Ἡ δυσχέρεια τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἐδημιούργησε τὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, τὸν Λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἡ εὐχέρεια τῆς Δύσεως προετοιμάζει τὸν Λόγο τοῦ Δαιμονικοῦ. Ἦδη τὸν ἀκοῦμε εὐκρινῶς... ὅλοι μας...



**Ἡ** γενεολογία τῆς πολιτικῆς εἶναι συνεχῆς καὶ γνησίᾳ κατὰ τοὺς προγόνους. **Ἡ ἀργία ἐγέννησε τὴν πενίαν. Ἡ πενία ἔτεκε τὴν πείναν. Ἡ πείνα παρήγαγε τὴν αὐθαιρεσίαν. Ἡ αὐθαιρεσία ἐγέννησε τὴν ληστείαν. Ἡ ληστεία ἐγέννησε τὴν πολιτικὴν. Ἴδου ἡ αὐθεντικὴ καταγωγὴ τοῦ τέρατος τούτου.**

Τότε καὶ τώρα πάντοτε ἡ αὐτὴ. Τότε διὰ τῆς βίας, τώρα διὰ τοῦ δόλου καὶ διὰ τῆς ...βίας. Πάντοτε ἀμετάβλητοι οἱ σχοινοβάται οὗτοι οἱ Ἀθίγγανοι, οἱ γελωτοποιοὶ οὗτοι πίθηκοι (καλῶ δ' οὕτω τοὺς λεγομένους πολιτικούς). Μαῦροι χαλκεῖς κατασκευάζοντες δεσμὰ διὰ τοὺς λαοὺς ἐν τῇ βαθυζόφω σκοτίᾳ τοῦ αἰωνίου ἐργαστηρίου των...

**Κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης**  
**Ἀπὸ τὸ «Ἐμποροὶ τῶν Ἐθνῶν»**

## Ἀμαρτία: Ἡ Ἐσχάτη Μέθη!

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, θεολόγου.

**Ἔ**τσι τὴν εἶπε καὶ τὴ χαρακτήρισε ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, τὴν ἀμαρτία: «Ἐσχάτη μέθη». Καὶ τέτοια εἶναι κάθε παράβαση τοῦ θεοῦ Νόμου.

Ἡ ἀμαρτία μοιάζει μὲ μέθη. Ὅσο πιὸ πολὺ κρασί πίνει κανεὶς, τόσο καὶ ὁ ὀργανισμὸς του τὸ ἀποζητάει. Κι ὅσο τὸ ἀποζητάει, τόσο καὶ περισσότερο μεθάει. Ἡ μέθη δὲν ἔχει ποτὲ κορεσμό. Ὁ νοῦς θολώνει, ἡ θέληση χαλαρώνει καὶ χάνει τὴ δύναμή της, κι ὁ ἄνθρωπος τότε δένεται στὰ σκλαβόσχοινα τοῦ πάθους του.

«Ἐσχάτη μέθη καὶ κακὸν ἔσχατον» εἶναι ἡ ἀμαρτία. Ποιδὲς ἦρθε στὸν κόσμο καὶ φόρεσε σάρκα καὶ δὲν εἶδε τὴν ἀμαρτία νὰ τοῦ γλείφει τὰ πόδια; Ποιδὲς ἀνάπνευσε τὸν ἀέρα καὶ δὲ μύρισε τὴ δυσωδία τῆς κακίας; Ποιδὲς πάτησε τὸ πόδι του σὲ τοῦτο τὸν πλανήτη καὶ δὲ σκουντούφλησε στὰ χαλίγια καὶ δὲν τὸν τρύπησαν τ' ἀγκάθια τῆς παρανομίας; «*Τὶς γὰρ καθαρὸς ἔσται ἀπὸ ρύπου, ἀλλ' οὐδεὶς, ἐὰν καὶ μία ἡμέρα ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.*» (Ἰώβ 4:5). Τὸ κακὸ λοιπόν, εἶναι κληρονομικό. «*Ἴδου γὰρ ἐν ἀνομίαις συνελήφθην, καὶ ἐν ἀμαρτίαις ἐκίσσησέ με ἡ μήτηρ μου.*» (Ψαλμ. 50:7).

Ἡ ὑπαρξη τοῦ ἠθικοῦ νόμου εἶναι ὁ ρυθμιστὴς τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς. Ὅπως οἱ ὠροδείκτες καὶ λεπτοδείκτες σοῦ δείχνουν τὴν ὥρα καὶ τὸ χρόνο τῶν ἐνεργειῶν σου, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος—τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ νόμος—σὲ καθοδηγεῖ στὴν ὀρθὴ πορεία τῶν πράξεων τῆς ζωῆς σου.

Ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελμύροβιτς λέγει ὅτι: «Ὅλα γίνονται κατὰ τὸ συνειδητὸ καὶ λογικὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸ τί ἐπιτρέπει πάντοτε σὲ συνάρτηση μὲ τὴν ἠθικὴ ἢ ἀνῆθικη συμπεριφορὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς νόμος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Κύριος Δημιουργὸς καὶ Παντοκράτορας καθοδηγεῖ τὸ σύμπαν, τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς φύσης καὶ τὶς μοῖρες τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν λαῶν». Βέβαια, συμπληρώνει ὁ ἴδιος: «ὑπάρχουν καὶ οἱ φυσικοὶ καὶ οἱ ἠθικοὶ νόμοι, ἀλλὰ δὲ ἀλληλοαποκλείονται καὶ δὲ συμπίπτουν, ἀλλὰ κινοῦνται παράλληλα».

Ἐνας, βέβαια, εἶναι ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος, ἀλλ' ἡ φωνὴ του μεταδίδεται ἀπὸ δύο ἡγεῖα: τὸ ἓνα ἡγεῖο μεταδίδει τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ ἔμφυτου νόμου, καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἡγεῖο μεταδίδει τὸν τέλειο καὶ ἀποκαλυμμένο νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ ἀμαρτίες μοιάζουν μὲ τὰ φάλτσα μιᾶς χορωδίας ἢ μιᾶς ὀρχήστρας. Καὶ ὅπως ὁ μαέστρος εἶναι εὐαίσθητος καὶ στὰ πιὸ μικρὰ φάλτσα—δηλαδή, στὰ μουσικὰ λάθη καὶ τὶς παραφωνίες—κατὰ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο καὶ ὁ Θεὸς γνωρίζει καὶ ἀναγνωρίζει τὰ ἐλαφρότερα τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων.

Ἡ ἁμαρτία μοιάζει μὲ ἐπιδημικὴ ἀσθένεια, πού δὲν ἀναχαιτίζεται, παρὰ μὲ μετάνοια. Ἡ ἁμαρτία εἶναι καὶ δόλωμα καὶ δηλητήριον. Ἔχει γεύση ἐλκυστικὴ καὶ ἀποτέλεσμα θανάσιμον. Ἔχει γοητεία, πού ἐξαπατᾷ. Εἶναι τραγούδι, πού σβήνει σύντομα. «Ὁ τυφλὸς δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ δεῖ τὴ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα σ' ἓνα ἀριστούργημα τοῦ Γκρέκο καὶ ἐνὸς ἀπλοῦ τοπίου. Ὁ κουφὸς δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ διακρίνει τὸν ἦχο ἐνὸς συριγμοῦ καὶ ἐνὸς ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ὄργάνου ἢ ἐνὸς Μπάχ. Καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει ἀκριβῆ ἰδέα τὶ κακὸ πρᾶγμα εἶναι ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, τοῦ ὁποίου ὅλα τὰ δημιουργήματα εἶναι τέλεια» (Ryle).

Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος μεθᾶι στὴν ἁμαρτία, πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸ ν' ἀντικρύσει τὸ Θεό; Μήπως ὁ ἄνθρωπος, στὸ μεθύσι του ἐπάνω, μπορεῖ ν' αὐτοσυγκεντρωθεῖ ἢ νὰ κοιτάξει στὰ μάτια τὸν ἄλλο; Κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον τρόπο, λέγει ὁ Θεόφιλος Ἀντιοχείας, «ἐπὶν ἡ ἰδὸς ἐν τῷ ἐσόπτρῳ, οὐ δύναται ὁρᾶσθαι τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῷ ἐσόπτρῳ, οὕτως καὶ ὅταν ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, οὐ δύναται ὁ τοιοῦτος ἄνθρωπος θεωρεῖν τὸν Θεόν». Ἐὰν συμβεῖ, δηλαδή, νὰ χαλάσει ἡ διαφάνεια τοῦ καθρέφτη, δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ἰδεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ πρόσωπό του, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ ἀχρεΐωση πού προκαλεῖ ἡ ἁμαρτία, δὲν ἀφήνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἰδεῖ καὶ νὰ νιώσει τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Φοβερὴ σκουριά, ἡ ἁμαρτία. Ἀμαυρώνει τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ μειώνει τὴν ἀντίσταση τῆς ἐλευθερίας. Σκοτίζεται ὁ νοῦς καὶ τὸ ἔρεβος μένει νὰ κυβερνᾷ τὸν ἐσωτερικὸ ἄνθρωπο. Ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὡς παράβαση καὶ παραβίαση τοῦ νόμου τοῦ Θεοῦ, δημιουργεῖ τύψεις καὶ πολλές ἀνεπιθύμητες καταστάσεις, πού ἀφαιροῦν τὴν εἰρήνη καὶ ψυχραίνουν τὴ φλόγα τῆς πίστεως. Αὐτὸ ἐκφράζει καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅταν λέγει: «*Θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν... δόξα δὲ καὶ εἰρήνη παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τὸ ἀγαθόν*» (Ρωμ. Β' 9:10).

Εἶναι ἐκφραστικὴ καὶ διδακτικὴ ἡ σκέψη τοῦ Billy Graham: «Ἡ ἁμαρτία ὑπόσχηται πορφύρα καὶ δίδει σάβανο, ὑπόσχηται ἐλευθερία καὶ φέρει δουλεία, ὑπόσχηται νέκταρ καὶ προσφέρει χολή!» Δὲ νομίζω ν' ἀμφισβητεῖ κανεὶς, ὅτι ὅλη ἡ βία, ὁ πόνος, ἡ θλίψη, ἡ αἰσχύνη καὶ ὅλες οἱ τραγωδίαι τῆς ζωῆς, συνοψίζονται σὲ τούτη τὴ μικρὴ λέξη, πού λέγεται «ἁμαρτία».

Ὁ μέγας τῆς οἰκουμένης διδάσκαλος καὶ κήρυκας, ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, πάντοτε στὰ κηρύγματά του τόνιζε πῶς, «οὐδὲν δεινὸν τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δεινῶν, ἀλλ' ἡ ἁμαρτία μόνον». Ἄλλοτε πάλι ἔλεγε ὅτι, «μία συμφορὰ χριστιανῶ μόνη, τὸ προσκροῦσαι Θεῷ».

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μεγαλύτερη συμφορὰ στὸν ἄνθρωπο, τὸ νὰ βρῆται σὲ μετωπικὴ σύγκρουση μὲ τὸ Θεό.

Πράγματι, «οὐδὲν δυσωδέστερον», «οὐδὲν ἐπαχθέστερον», οὐδὲν πλέον «ἀκάθαρτον»... Ἀλλά, θὰ πεῖ κανεὶς: Ὅλοι μας εἴμαστε ἁμαρτωλοὶ καὶ ἁμαρτάνουμε κάθε ὥρα καὶ κάθε στιγμή. Λοιπόν; Νὰ παραμείνουμε στὴ λάσπη καὶ στὴ δυσωδία τῆς ἁμαρτίας; Ὅχι, βέβαια.

Ἐπάρχει ἐλπίδα. Ἐπάρχει σωτηρία. Ἐπάρχει μετάνοια. Ἐπάρχει Θεὸς τοῦ ἐλέους καὶ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν. Ὁ παράδεισος εἶναι γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς, πού μετανοοῦν.



## Ὅταν Ἀρχίσει τὸ Κακὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία...

Ἀπὸ πνευματικὸ τέκνο τοῦ μακαριστοῦ παπα-Γιάννη Καλαϊδῆ.

**Ε**πέστρεψα πρὶν λίγο ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ μου, πνευματικὸ τέκνο τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Ἀντωνίου Μητροπολίτου Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης, τὸν ὁποῖο τιμοῦν οἱ περισσότεροι ὡς σύγχρονο Ἅγιο. Ὁ πατὴρ εἶναι προσηλωμένος στὴν σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ μόνο, ἀποφεύγοντας τὶς ἀναφορὲς γιὰ τὸ τί μέλλει γενέσθαι, ἀλλὰ συζητώντας γιὰ τὸν μακαριστὸ Ἐπίσκοπο, ἀπεκάλυψε μερικὰ πράγματα, τῶν ὁποίων ὑπῆρξε μάρτυρας ὁ ἴδιος καὶ δείχνουν ὅτι ὁ μακαριστὸς πέραν ὅλων τῶν χαρισμάτων πού εἶχε, ἔγινε δέκτης μεγάλων ἀποκαλύψεων ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό.

«Μᾶς ἔλεγε, συνέχεια καὶ πολλές φορὲς μὲ στενοχώρια, τὸν καιρὸ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας «μεγάλῃ πείνᾳ θὰ πέσει στὴν Ἑλλάδα, παιδί μου, μεγάλη πείνα...» κι ἐμεῖς δυσκολευόμασταν νὰ τὸν πιστέψουμε...

Τὸν καιρὸ δὲ πού ἦταν στὸ νοσοκομεῖο στὰ τελευταῖα του, μετὰ τὴν τελευταῖα ἐγχείρηση πού ἔκανε, μόλις τὸν φέρανε στὸ δωμάτιο κοιτοῦσε ἀπέναντι τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου Χριστοῦ καὶ ἔκλαιγε σὰν μικρὸ παιδί λέγοντας μὲ τὴν γνωστὴ ταπεινότητά του «πῶς μὲ ἀξίωσες Χριστέ μου, ἐμένα καὶ μοῦ ἀπεκάλυψες αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα!», προφανῶς κάτι σοβαρὸ εἶχε δεῖ πιὸ μπροστά... Ὅταν τὸν ρωτήσαμε «τί εἶδες Δέσποτα;» μὲ δυσκολία μᾶς ἀπάντησε, γιατί εἶχε πρόβλημα μὲ τὴν φωνή του, «ὅταν ἀρχίσει τὸ κακὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία νὰ ἀρχίσετε νὰ προσεύχεστε!» καὶ τὸ ἐπανέλαβε πολλές φορὲς «ἐκεῖ, ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία ὅταν ξεκινήσει...» ἐννοώντας ὅτι μετὰ θὰ πιάσει ἡ μπόρα καὶ ἐμᾶς... Τὸν ξαναρωτήσαμε «τί ἄλλο εἶδες Δέσποτα;» καὶ μᾶς εἶπε «θὰ σᾶς πῶ μετὰ...» ἀλλὰ μετὰ ἐκοιμήθη...

Αὐτὸ ἦταν προφανῶς τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου...



## Δυὸ Περιστατικά Ἐκτρώσεων

Απὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Πολύτεκνη Οἰκογένεια» τῆς Πανελληνίας Ἐνώσεως Φίλων τῶν Πολυτέκνων, Ἀθηνῶν.



### Βλέπω Τέσσερα Μικρὰ νὰ μὲ Κυνηγοῦν!

**Μ**ία κυρία γύρω στὰ ἐξήντα εἶχε κόρη παντρεμένη ἐφτὰ χρόνια, ποὺ δὲν ἔκανε παιδιά, καὶ τελικὰ χώρισε γ' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο. Κλαίγοντας ἡ μάνα τῆς ἀποκάλυψε:

Δικές μου ἁμαρτίες πληρώνει τὸ κορίτσι μου. Παντρεύτηκα τὸ 1940, μὲ τὸν Πόλεμο. Ὁ ἄντρας μου πολέμησε καὶ γύρισε τραυματισμένος, μὰ εὐτυχῶς σώθηκε. Ὑστερα ἦρθε ἡ Κατοχὴ μὲ τὴ φοβερὴ πείνα. Ἐμείνα τέσσερις φορὲς ἔγκυος. Ὅμως ὅλες τὰ ἔρριξα, δυὸ θηλυκὰ καὶ δυὸ ἀρσενικά. Λιγοψύχησα. Πῶς θὰ τὰ μεγάλωνα μέσα στὴν Κατοχὴ καὶ τὴν πείνα;

Τούτη τὴν κόρη τὴ γλύτωσα ἀπὸ τὸ μαχαίρι τοῦ δήμιου γιανοῦ ἀπὸ Θαῦμα. Τὴν παραμονή, ποὺ θὰ γινόταν τὸ ἔγκλημα, εἶδα στὸν ὕπνο μου μίαν γυναίκα μαυροφόρα, γλυκεία στὴν ὄψη. Τὴν παρομοίασα μὲ μίαν Εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας, ποὺ εἶχα ἀπὸ τὴ μακαρίτισσα τὴ μητέρα μου. Μοῦ εἶπε αὐστηρά:

-Σκληρὴ γυναίκα, ὀλιγόπιστη. Τὸ κορίτσι εἶναι δικό μου καὶ μὴν τολμήσεις νὰ τὸ χαλάσεις! Ἀνατρίχιασα, φοβήθηκα καὶ ἔτσι γλύτωσα τὴ Μαρία μου.

Οἱ τύψεις ὅμως δὲν μ' ἀφήνουν νὰ ἡσυχάσω. Κάθε τόσο μὲ ταράζει τὸ ἴδιο ὄνειρο. Βλέπω τέσσερα μικρὰ νὰ μὲ κυνηγοῦν, σὰν νὰ θέλουν νὰ μὲ πιάσουν, μὰ δὲν μποροῦν, εἶναι τυφλά! Ξυπνάω συγκλονισμένη. Παρακαλῶ τὴν Παναγία νὰ μοῦ πάρει τὸν ὕπνο, νὰ μὴ βλέπω αὐτὸ τὸ συνταρακτικὸ ὄνειρο...

### Ἔνα Τυφλὸ Ἀγοράκι Ἔτρεχε νὰ μ' Ἀγκαλιάσει!

**Μ**ία ἄλλη κυρία, γύρω στὰ τριάντα τῆς χρόνια, ἀποκάλυψε ἐπίσης:

Ἔχω δυὸ κοριτσάκια, ἕξι κι ὀχτὼ χρονῶν. Ἐμείνα ξανὰ ἔγκυος. Πιάσαμε μεγάλη γκρίνια μὲ τὸν ἄντρα μου.

-Νὰ ρίξεις τὸ παιδί. Δὲν τὰ βγάζω πέρα μὲ τρία παιδιά. Βλέπεις ὅτι βασανίζομαι νὰ θρέψω τόσα στόματα. Ἔχουμε καὶ τοὺς γέρους. Δὲν ἀντέχω ἄλλο...

Στὴν ἀρχὴ ἀντιστάθηκα. Ἄκουγα μὲ φρίκη νὰ μὲ σπρώχνουν σὲ τέτοιο ἔγκλημα. Δυστυχῶς, μὲ πίεζαν καὶ τὰ πεθερικά. Ὁ ἄντρας μου ἔγινε πολὺ σκληρός, μὲ ἀπειλοῦσε μὲ διαζύγιο. Ἀπελπίστηκα καὶ ὑποχώρησα ἀγανακτισμένη. Τὸ κακὸ ἔγινε. Τὸ παιδί ἦταν ἀγόρι. Ὅλοι στενοχωρήθηκαν. Τιμωρία ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό, σκέφτηκα, μὰ ἦταν πλέον ἀργά.

Πῆγα σὲ Πνευματικὸ καὶ ἐξομολογήθηκα. Μοῦ ἔβαλε Κανόνα.

-Πέντε χρόνια ἀκοινώνητη καὶ μὲ ἐπιείκεια, γιατί τὸ ἔκανες χωρὶς τὴ θέλησή σου.

Μὲ ὑπομονὴ δέχθηκα τὸν Κανόνα. Ὅμως πονοῦσε ἡ ψυχὴ μου, ὅταν τὶς Μεγάλες Γιορτὲς ὄλοι στὸ σπίτι πῆγαιναν καὶ κοινοῦσαν, ἀκόμα καὶ ὁ αἴτιος τοῦ κακοῦ, ἔστω ἀπὸ συνήθεια. Μὲ πλήγωναν καὶ τὰ κοριτσάκια μου, ὅταν μὲ ἀφέλεια μὲ ρωτοῦσαν:

-Μαμά, ἐσὺ δὲν θὰ κοινωνήσεις;

Ἔπρεπε κάθε φορὰ νὰ σκεφτῶ ψεύτικες δικαιολογίες. Ἡ μικρὴ μου κορούλα μου ἔλεγε συχνά:

-Μανούλα, ἦθελα κι ἐγὼ νὰ ἔχω ἓνα ἀδελφούλη. Θὰ τὸν ἀγαποῦσα πολὺ.

Μία φορὰ μου εἶπε:

-Μαμά, εἶδα στὸν ὕπνο μου ἓνα ἀγοράκι. Μοῦ εἶπε πῶς εἶναι ὁ ἀδελφούλης μου ποὺ ἀγαπῶ. Μὰ πῶς δὲν ἔχει μάτια νὰ μὲ δεῖ;

Μὲ πῆραν τὰ κλάματα, γιατί τὸ ἴδιο ὄνειρο ἔβλεπα κι ἐγώ. Ἔνα τυφλὸ ἀγόρι ἔτρεχε νὰ μ' ἀγκαλιάσει, μὰ δὲν μποροῦσε, ἦταν τυφλό. Σκέφτηκα, ἄχ παιδάκι μου! Ἐγώ σου ἔβγαλα τὰ ματάκια σου, γιατί δὲν εἶχα δύναμη νὰ φωνάξω: ΟΧΙ στὸ ἔγκλημα τῆς Ἐκτρώσεως, ποὺ ἔκαμε δυστυχισμένο κι ἐσένα, μὰ πιὸ πολὺ ἐμένα.



### Ἐρχονται Δύσκολοι Καιροὶ Ἐπειδὴ Λιγότεψε ἡ Πίστη

**Ἐ**ρχονται δύσκολοι καιροὶ ἐπειδὴ λιγότεψε ἡ Πίστη. Ἐξ' αἰτίας τῆς φτώχειας, οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ πουλήσουν τὴν ψυχὴ τους γιὰ τροφὴ καὶ ροῦχα. Ὁ κόσμος θὰ γίνῃ κακός, θὰ ἐξαφανιστεῖ ἡ ἀγάπη καὶ τὸ ἔλεος μεταξὺ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἱερεῖς καὶ λαικοὶ θὰ γίνουν ἓνα καὶ δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχει κάποιος νὰ καθοδηγήσει τοὺς πιστοὺς. Οἱ πιστοὶ δὲν θὰ μποροῦν νὰ βροῦν τὸν ποιμένα, οὔτε καὶ τὸν σωστὸ δρόμο. Θὰ κυβερνάει τὸ χρῆμα καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία νὰ κάνουν περιορισίες.

Κανεὶς δὲν θὰ φροντίζει γιὰ τὶς ψυχὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ὅλα θὰ περιοριστοῦν σὲ μίαν ἀπλὴ συναλλαγὴ. Ὅλοι θὰ ἀδιαφοροῦν γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τους, γιὰ τὴν πίστη, δὲν θὰ ἔχουν φόβο Θεοῦ, τὸ καθήκον, ἡ ὑποχρέωση, ἡ εὐθύνη θὰ εἶναι ἄγνωστες ἔννοιες. Ὅλα θὰ περιστρέφονται γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ χρῆμα. Ὁ ἓνας θὰ πουλάει τὸν ἄλλον, ἡ κακία στὸν κόσμο θὰ εἶναι ἀνυπόφορη. Θὰ ζήσουμε τοὺς ἔσχατους καιροὺς. Δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ φανταστοῦμε πόσο δύσκολα θὰ εἶναι. Δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ φανταστοῦμε τί περιμένει ἐμᾶς καὶ τὰ παιδιά μας. Τὰ παιδιά μας σὲ αὐτοὺς τοὺς δύσκολους καιροὺς θὰ εἶναι ἀνέτοιμα νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσουν τὶς καταστάσεις, ἐπειδὴ οἱ γονεῖς σήμερα δὲν διδάσκουν στὰ παιδιά τὸν φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ντροπὴ πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

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Ἔνας μεγάλος σύγχρονος Ρουμάνος Γέροντας



## THE ANGELIC PATH

### AN OUTLINE OF ORTHODOX MONASTICISM

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*If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hadst, and give to the poor, and come, follow Me [Mt 19:21].*

† † †

From the beginning these words of Christ have been a clear call to all Christian monks that they have felt impelled to obey to the letter.

Although Christ lived and worked among men, participated in the functions of His day, counted women among His friends, and although He instituted no monastic order, monasticism may well be considered the sum and substance of His teaching. Once He had entered upon His mission, He had no family life—in fact, He denied blood relationships (Mt 12:48-50). He spent many hours in the wilderness in solitary communion with His Father. He said: *If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.* (Lk 14:26)

The advice of Jesus to the young man who sought a greater perfection, beyond that of following the ten commandments, was to *sell all he had and to follow Him* (Mt 19:21). Another man He challenged to follow Him without delay, without even taking time to attend to his father's funeral (Lk 9:60). These are hard sayings for people in the world, but admirably suited to monks and nuns.

Let us here explain what we mean by "the world." St. Isaac the Syrian defines it as: "...the extension of a common name to distinct passions ... passions are a part of the current of the world. Where they have ceased, the world's current has ceased." In other words, people in the world are held by the pull of their emotions into a vortex of preoccupations; they disperse and scatter abroad, as it were, their soul's integrity, diversifying its primal simplicity."

The ideal of a life entirely given over to God can be found on many pages of the New Testament. St. Paul held virginity in high esteem and advocated it for those who could bear it (1 Cor 7:1, -7, -37, -40). We find many examples in Holy Scripture of men and women giving their lives unreservedly to God and to the service of the Church. In the first

instance there were the Apostles and the Seventy and the women who followed and ministered unto Jesus; then there were the deacons and men like St. Luke and St. Barnabas, and women such as Dorcas and Phoebe, who worked with St. Paul. Nevertheless, it was only toward the beginning of the fourth century that Christian monasticism appeared as a definite institution.

### The Development of Monasticism

Christian monasticism originated in the East, in the Egyptian desert. Following the official recognition of Christianity in 313 AD by the Roman Emperor St. Constantine, there arose the danger—which has not lessened with the passage of time—that men might confuse the earthly kingdom with the Heavenly Kingdom. Then, as now, it was the monks who kept alive the concept that the Kingdom of God is not of this world. Men, and women too, fearing that the lure of comfort and security would divert them from their search for unity with God, left all behind and made their way into the desert, at first singly, then in loosely formed groups. By the mid-fourth century there could already be distinguished the three forms of monastic life still found in the Orthodox Church today.

### The Eremitic Life

The life of a hermit, who lives alone in a cell difficult of access, is entirely devoted to prayer and severe asceticism. The hermit's

prototype is St. Paul of Thebes, whose life was written by St. Jerome. St. Paul settled in the desert several years before St. Anthony (251-356), who is generally regarded as the father of monasticism. The story of the encounter of these two holy men, after long years of solitude, is one of the most touching in the history of the Desert Fathers. It is clear from St. Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony* that monasticism was already well known when St. Anthony, having previously entrusted the care of his orphaned sister to a group of virgins near Alexandria, entered the desert.

### The Cenobitic Life

The cenobitic or community life, was first established by St. Pachomius of Tabennisi (c. 315-320), where men lived together under a common rule in a regularly constituted monastery. There were also communities of women following this same rule. It is this rule which was used to a great extent by St. Benedict in forming his monastic rule upon which all other Western monastic rules are based.



St. Basil the Great (329-379) was a strong advocate of the community life. Because of his two books, the Shorter and the Longer Rules, his influence in Orthodox monasticism is profound, although he did not found an order as such. Separate monastic “orders” or “congregations,” as found in the Roman monastic tradition, are unknown in the Orthodox Church. Quite simply, all those who live in the monastic life are accepted as members of the great Brotherhood of Ascetics, and the same rule is used and the same habit is worn by both men and women, forming an integral and inseparable part of the Church’s Body. Very close to St. Basil stood his sister, St. Macrina, who founded a community for women in Cappadocia before her more illustrious brother founded his on the banks of the Iris.

### The Semi-Eremitic Life

The semi-eremitic (also known as skete) life, or middle way, is based upon a loosely knit group of small settlements, each practicing asceticism independently, though under the direction of an abbot, the first of whom was Ammon of Nitria. Their focal point is, as it is for all forms of monastic life, the Holy Eucharist, for which they regularly assemble.

The pinnacle of Orthodox monasticism, where all three forms of monastic life coexist to this day, is Mount Athos, the “Holy Mountain,” with its over 1,000 years of uninterrupted spiritual activity. It alone gave the Church 26 patriarchs and 144 bishops. All Orthodox countries are represented there, the monks living in their own monasteries or grouped in one or another of the great Lavras, or as hermits.

“There is a great richness of forms of the spiritual life to be found within the bounds of Orthodoxy, but monasticism remains the most classical. One could say broadly that Eastern monasticism was exclusively contemplative, if the distinction between the two ways, active and contemplative, had in the East the same meaning as in the West. In fact, for an Eastern monk, the two ways are inseparable. The one cannot be exercised without the other. Interior prayer receives the name of spiritual activity. If the monks occupy themselves with physical labors, it is above all with an ascetic end in view.” [From *Sermons and Addresses of the Metropolitan Philaret, Moscow, 1844, Part II, p. 87*].

As we have said, monasticism originated in Egypt, but by degrees its leadership shifted to Palestine where it flowered

under St. Euthymius the Great (d. 472) and especially under his disciple St. Sabbas (d. 532) who greatly influenced the monastic rule; at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, it shifted to Constantinople where St. Theodore was abbot of the great and influential monastery of Studium, founded in 463. To this age belongs the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, founded by Emperor Justinian in 560, which is still functioning, harboring a great treasure of manuscripts and holy icons which escaped the ravages of the iconoclastic wars.

With time, there developed in all Orthodox countries a rich and distinctive monastic tradition. Each could boast of important spiritual centers which spread their light over all the Orthodox world. Foremost among them were the Kiev Caves Lavra and Optina Monastery in Russia, Mount Athos and Patmos in Greece, Tismana and Neamtu in Romania, and Ochrid in Serbia. There were countless monasteries,

convents and hermitages in these countries in pre-communist times.

Monasticism has always been regarded as a voluntary form of martyrdom. It developed and blossomed forth in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, after the bloody persecution of Christians had dwindled. During the communist rule, monastic life, like all church life, was stifled. In these places there came to be thousands of unknown martyrs, crowding prisons and concentration



camps. It is calculated that in Russia alone more people died for their faith in the first 30 years since the Revolution than died in the first 300 years of Christianity. There seems to have been a balance between the cessation of persecution and the growth of monasticism. If this is so, then we should be seeing in the Free World a resurgence of monastic vocations, especially of the more ascetic form.

Although the emphasis in Orthodox monasticism has always been on spiritual activity aimed above all at union with God in complete renunciation of this present world, it would be incorrect to imply, as some do, that Eastern monks care nothing for the needs of others and have had little or no influence upon the course of events. In the East as in the West, it was the monks, sometimes hidden in caves, who kept the torch of civilization burning during the dark ages of barbaric incursions. And later, it was in the cloister that Christian and national culture was kept alive during the many centuries of Tartar and Moslem-Turkish invasions and occupations, a trial which their Western brethren were spared. Many bishops (all

Orthodox bishops are monks) played leading roles in their countries' state councils, as for example St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), who was also a great mystic. There was also St. Sergius of Radonezh (1314-1392), one of Russia's greatest saints, and many others up to the present day, such as Patriarch Miron Christea who was regent (1927-1930) for the young king of Romania. They advised, admonished, encouraged or opposed their princes when necessary.

Although Orthodox monks never played such spectacular roles as did the Abbots of Cluny at one time, nevertheless, throughout history their influence was considerable. In the Byzantine Empire they were powerful in quelling heresies and fighting immoralities. None were more active in this battle than St. John Chrysostom (d. 407). Later, in the Russian Empire, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (d. 1783) was similarly renowned.

Although they functioned primarily as communities of prayer, Orthodox monasteries also engaged in charitable activities: feeding the hungry, housing the homeless and caring for the sick. Many of them grew very large, comprising several hundred or even thousand monks or nuns. Some had vast estates which they farmed. While this occasionally tended towards excessive wealth and had to be curtailed, it enabled these prosperous monasteries to rescue whole regions from famine.



### Where do Orthodox Monks and Nuns Come From?

Orthodox monks and nuns come from all walks and manner of life. In former times the greater number were of peasant stock, but at the same time many a great name lay hidden under the humble black habit and the new Christian name received at tonsure. Certainly there were to be found many unlettered and uncultured monks, because the cloister was and is open to all, regardless of social rank or education. But if one reads the daily offices and grasps their scriptural and theological wealth, and if one hears the readings from the Holy Fathers—all of which are the monk's daily fare, one begins to think twice about the intellectual superiority of their critics. It must not be forgotten that it was the monks who translated these services and writings into their native tongues, a continuing labor in which nuns also take part.

There are also spiritual writings that are unique to each nation—the beauty of which is unsurpassed in secular compositions—but which are little known outside the cloister. In

monasteries were painted world famous icons and from them came exquisite embroideries and priceless illuminated manuscripts. All were written, painted and worked anonymously for the greater glory of God, reflecting humility, which is the keynote of all Christian monasticism.

### The Monastic Daily Life

The devotional pattern of the monastic day is based upon the words of the Psalmist: *Seven times a day do I praise Thee because of Thy righteous judgments.* (Pss 119:64). Consequently, there are seven praises (lauds) in each 24-hour cycle. These are arranged as follows: 1) Midnight Office; 2) Matins together with 3) First Hour; 4) Third and Sixth Hours; 5) Ninth Hour; 6) Vespers and 7) Compline. They are called praises or lauds because they mirror the Saviour's redemptive work for mankind, as well as various events in His divine life and in the life of the Holy Apostles and the Church. Let us examine each:

1) The **Midnight Office** is said at or after midnight and is a reminder of the Resurrection which took place "early in the morning," and also of the Second Coming, *the hour of which no man knows* (Mark 13:33, 35). It likewise recalls the parable of the bridegroom who came at midnight and the five foolish virgins whose lamps had gone out: *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.* (Mt 25:13).

2) This is followed by **Matins** which ends at dawn, reflecting the dawn of our salvation,

3) The **First Hour** is then read, praising the beginning of the new day in which we join our hymns to those of the angels, together bringing them before God.

4) The **Third and Sixth Hours** are read before the Divine Liturgy, In the Third Hour the death of our Lord was plotted; also at this hour the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles. The Sixth Hour commemorates the Passion and Crucifixion of our Lord. If there is no Liturgy, the Typica is read which gives a sketch of the Liturgy.

5 & 6) In the evening the **Ninth Hour** is read. Its prayers recall the hour in which the Lord laid down His life for the redemption of the world. Without pause there begins the service of **Vespers** which tells of the creation, of God's love for the world, of man's fall into sin, his expulsion from paradise and of the Redeemer's coming upon earth,

7) Before retiring, **Compline** is sung, bringing thanks for the coming of night with its rest and the remembrance of



death for which we must always be prepared. This is followed by evening prayers.

Within the framework of this daily cycle flows the monk's life so that it may be filled with holiness, with grace from above, and hope of eternal blessedness, whatever his task—be it manual or intellectual work or the practice of hesychasm towards which all monastic life is directed.

### The Stages of Monastic Life

The person, man or woman, who enters monastic life, tries to leave his or her old self behind, with all the old joys and sorrows, virtues and sins, and starts a new life, seeking to find a new relationship to all things and people in Christ, to Whom he vows his life. The taking of the monastic vow and habit are but a repetition and amplification of the baptismal vows.

At first there were no stages along the monastic path; there were no postulants or novices but simply monks. Today, however, monastics generally progress from one stage to another: the postulant looks forward to becoming a novice, the novice to receiving the habit and going on to full profession—which may take years or which he may never reach. There is no prescribed time period for each stage, but at least three years must elapse before full profession. The intermittent stages may even be dispensed within certain



cases; in communist times, for example, where the normal flow of monastic life is impossible. There is also no obligation to advance from one stage to the next; should a novice not feel ready or not wish to progress for reasons of humility, he/she is free to remain in the monastery as he is. Monks who become priests are called hieromonks; this does not affect their monastic status.

1) **Novice.** One begins as a postulant who may be permitted, after three months or so, to wear a portion of the habit (tunic and belt), which is regarded as a tacit expression of his/her determination to abide in the monastic life of asceticism, subject to the approval of the abbot (abbess). In becoming a novice, the aspirant receives in addition to the tunic (podriasnik) and belt, the monastic head covering, called “skoufos” for men and “apostolnik” for women.

2) **Rassophore.** When the superior thinks fit, the novice may ask to receive the rassa or habit, an over-garment with wide sleeves and reaching to the ankles, and also the monastic head covering with veil (in Russian—klobuk; in Greek—kamelos).

This portion of the habit is given with the appropriate rite in church by a hieromonk. The new monk or nun takes no vows at this time, but should a rassophore leave the monastery and wish to marry, he or she must receive written permission of the bishop, without which he could incur excommunication.

3) **Stavrophor,** from the Greek “stavros” (cross) and “phoro” (to wear), so called because the monk/nun wears a wooden cross on the chest tied under the habit to a paramnydas or paraman. The paraman is a small square piece of fabric embroidered with representations of the Cross, spear, reed, sponge, the pillar of scourging, Adam's skull and the cock which crowed at the time of Peter's denial. At the same time he/she receives the mandyas or mantia, a flowing cloak without hood, which reaches to the ground in long narrow pleats, and which is worn only in church. This profession takes place

according to an impressive and solemn rite; the vows are made before a hieromonk. The profession is made publicly in church and the vows of Stability, Obedience, Poverty and Chastity are given by the candidate before he/she receives the tonsure, the paraman and mantia which are new added to the habit. The officiating priest bestows a new name upon the monk in recognition of the beginning of his new life. The monk does not choose this name himself but accepts it as his first act of obedience.

The Orthodox attitude towards monasticism is best summed up in the collect of the Prodigal Son with which the ceremony of profession opens:

*Make haste to open Thy fatherly arms*

*Unto me who have wasted my life like the prodigal.*

*Despise not a heart now grown poor*

*O Saviour Who hast before Thine eyes*

*The boundless riches of Thy mercies.*

*For unto Thee, O Lord, in compunction do I cry:*

*O Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee...*

(Here the monk is a penitent)

And the verse which is sung during the clothing part of the ceremony:

*My soul shall rejoice in the Lord*

*for He hath put on me the garment of salvation;*

*And with the tunic of gladness hath He clothed me.*

*He hath put upon me a crown as upon a bride groom,*

*And as a bride hath he adorned me...*

(Here the monk is the betrothed of God)

4) **Megaloschema**, from the Greek “megas” (great) and “schema” (habit), or in Russian, “skhmnik.” The difference between the Stavrophor and the Megaloschemos lies in the degree of asceticism which, for the latter, is very strict and not something of which everyone is capable. In addition to the habit of the Stavrophor, the Megaloschemos wears the analovos which is rather like the Western scapular in shape, although there is no symbolic or historical connection between them. The analovos is embroidered with the cross which the monk is to take up daily in following Christ. The same representation figures on the koukoulion, a thimble-shaped kamelos. These are given according to a rite, similar to that of stavrophor, in which the original vows are repeated with yet greater solemnity. These two rites are also referred to respectively as the receiving of the Little and the Great Habits.

The distinctive color of the monastic raiment is black which symbolizes that the second Baptism is more laborious than the first whose symbolic color is white; for the second is a baptism of repentance, which will end only with the end of this present deceitful life.

#### The Monastic Rule

The Rule or “Typicon” governing Orthodox monastic life is based upon that of St. Basil the Great, which he synthesized from the tradition of the early Desert Fathers. This Rule was later adapted by various great fathers of monasticism throughout the centuries: St. Sabbas the Sanctified in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, St. John Climacus in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, St. Theodore the Studite at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and others. It likewise provided the foundation for the great Athonite tradition which evolved in the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the revival of monasticism in Russia and Moldavia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century under the inspiration of St. Paisius Velichkovsky. Today St. Basil’s Rule remains an important part of the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church.

The monastic Rule is too complex to be expounded here in any detail. Basically, its purpose is to safeguard the monk in his daily life, helping him, through obedience, to keep unceasing vigil within his soul and thereby guiding him into a union of heart and spirit through which is acquired, as far as this is possible in this world, union with God.

Effort without discipline leads nowhere. It is only by patient and deliberate striving that the soul can hope to perfect itself and come closer to God. Therefore, the keeping of the monastic Rule is very important, whether it concerns the eremitic or the cenobitic life, and the monastic benefits from

it to the degree that he or she is obedient to its precepts. Of necessity, the Rule is more complex for the cenobitic life where it must regulate the services read in common as well as order a community life with all the different characters and diverse backgrounds of the individuals gathered under the same roof.

A monastery or convent is a community of monks or nuns living under a common rule and governed by an abbot (abbess) or superior chosen from among the professed monks. He rules like a loving father over his children, often assisted by a council of monks to whom he delegates certain responsibilities.

Monks work for their livelihood and the common upkeep of the monastery—in the fields and gardens, painting and carving icons, making church vestments, translating or writing and printing books on the spiritual life. Apart from its life of prayer, which remains at all times its essential focus, a monastery may harbor—as circumstances dictate—the sick, the aged, the orphaned and homeless, or perform any work of Christian charity. It is customary for a monastery to have a guest house in which the pilgrim can stay three nights free of charge. Although Orthodox monks are not cloistered, as monastics are in some Western orders, monks and visitors only mix at certain times and in designated places. The great schema monks lead a more strictly secluded life.



#### The Elder or “Starets”

We shall briefly describe here the position of elder (“starets” in Russian) which, although rarely encountered today, is frequently mentioned in Orthodox literature. Properly understood, eldership is not a position or rank but a gift granted by God to those of exceptional spiritual caliber and therefore not limited necessarily to monks. Eldership cannot be taken upon oneself; an elder is one recognized by others as possessing outstanding spiritual discernment and wisdom, someone to whom both monastics and lay people come for guidance. The elder, or eldress, must not be confused with the hermit, although frequently an elder will have spent time in the eremitic life before blossoming forth with the gift of eldership.

#### The Monastic’s Service to the World

Monks are often accused of egotism because they concentrate upon the salvation of their own souls. This is putting the accent in the wrong place: the monk seeks the ways of perfection, directing all his strength towards following Christ.

The monk's ideal is entirely to forget himself, to "lose his life," and to truly worship God and *love Him with all his heart and all his soul and all his mind, and his neighbor as himself.* (Mt 22:37).

But where does this "angelic life," as monasticism is called (by virtue of its aspiration to imitate the angels who are always praising and magnifying God), touch the outside world, the earth, the earthly?

In many ways. A monastery is primarily a center of prayer, and prayer is something the world has always needed, never more so than today when people are so busy and find it difficult to give proper time to prayer. The monk prays not only for himself but for everybody, living and dead. Just as a soldier is a specialist in war, the monk is a specialist in prayer. Therefore, as V. Lossky writes: "the spiritual work of a monk living in a community or a hermit withdrawn from the world, retains all its worth for the entire universe even though it remains hidden from the sight of all."

The monastery gate is always open wide to all of man's needs, ready with comfort and sustenance—both spiritual and physical—for anyone who may knock at its door, saint or sinner. The monk sees in every man the image of Him Who said: *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.* (Mt 25:40).

The man of the world may look upon the man of the cloister with misgiving, somehow feeling him to be a living reproach to worldliness, an unnatural man, almost inhuman. This is far from true. The monk is simply a man who has laid all aside, completely and for good, to follow Christ wherever He may lead.



Question yourself as to whether this faith is within you, or perhaps you are led by worldly wisdom. And if you leave all things in the hands of God, behold! You have acquired faith and undoubtedly, without any question, you will find God to be your helper. And so, even should you be tried a myriad of times and should satan tempt you to abandon faith, prefer death a thousand times more and don't obey worldly wisdom. In this way the door of the mysteries will be opened to you and you will be amazed how the chains of worldly wisdom previously bound you. Now you will fly with divine wings above the earth and breathe the new air of freedom, which, of course, others are deprived of. If, however, you see that within you, you are governed by worldly wisdom, and in the smallest danger you lose hope and despair, know that you have not yet acquired faith, and consequently also hope, in God.

**St. Joseph the Hesychast**  
From "Precious Vessels of the Holy Spirit"

## THE NEW IDEAL IN EDUCATION

*A timeless article by St. Nikolai Velimirovich. This is part of an address given on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1916, by Fr. Nikolai Velimirovich, Ph.D.; the saint was canonized in 2003.*

Nature takes sufficient care of our individualistic sense,  
leaving to Education the care of our panhumanistic sense.

† † †



Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we do not want war we must look to the children. There is the only hope and the only wise starting point. It is not without a deep prophetic significance that Christ asked children to come unto Him. In all the world-calamities, in all wars, strifes, religious inquisitions and persecutions, in all the hours of human misery and helplessness, He has been asking, through centuries,

the children to come unto Him.

I am sure, if anybody has ears for His voice today, amidst the thunderings of guns and passions and revenges, one would hear the same call: *Let the children come unto Me!*—Not kings and politicians, not journalists and generals, not the grown-up people, but children. And so today also, when we ask for a way out of the present world-misery, when we in a profound darkness today ask for light, and in sorrow for tomorrow ask for advice and comfort, we must look to the children and Christ.

### Why not Kings?

Why does Christ not ask the kings to come to Him—the kings, and politicians, and journalists, and generals? Because they are too much engaged in the wrong state of things and because they are greatly responsible themselves for such a wrongful state; consequently, it is difficult for them to change their ways, their hearts and their minds. It would be very hard for Napoleon and Pitt to kneel together down before Christ and to embrace each other. It would be almost impossible for Bismarck and Gambetta (*Ed., on opposing sides during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870*) to walk together. Not less it would be impossible for the Pope and Monsieur Loisy or George Tyrrel (*Ed., controversial Catholic priests*) to pray in the same bench.

Every generation is laden with sins and prejudices. That is the reason why Christ goes only a little way with every generation, and then He becomes tired and asks for a new generation—He calls for children. Christ is always new and fresh as children are. Every generation is spoiled and corrupted by living and struggling.

But for a new generation the world is quite a wonder. God is shown only to those for whom the world is a new thing, a wonder. No one, who does not admire this world as a wonder,



can find God. For the old Ernst Haeckel (*Ed., controversial German philosopher, atheist*), no God exists, just because for him no wonder exists. He pretends to know everything. Christ means for him nothing. Every foolish child, believing in God and in this wonderful world, has more wisdom than this materialistic professor from Germany. Christ is getting tired of an old generation. Sadly He calls for a new one—for children. In our distress today, I think, we should multiply His voice, calling for Him, for a new generation and for a new education.

### The Education Which Makes for War

This type of education has a very attractive name: the individualistic education. The true name of it is selfishness, or egotism. No religion of Asia ever boasted of having been the birthplace of such an education. It is born in the heart of Europe, in Germany. It was brought up by Schopenhauer and Goethe. It was subsequently supported by the German biologists, by the musicians, sculptors, philosophers, poets, soldiers, socialists and priests, by the wisest and by many madmen beyond the Rhine. Unfortunately France, Russia and even Great Britain have not been quite exempt from this pernicious theory of individualistic education.

The sophistic theories of Athens of old have been renewed in Central Europe—the individuum is the ultimate aim of education. A human individuum is of limitless worth, said the German interpreters of the New Testament. Materialistic science, contradicting itself, agreed on that point with modern theology. Art, in all its branches, presented itself as the sole expression of one individuum, i.e., of the artist. The modern socialism, contradicting its own name, supported individualism very strongly in every department of human activity. Consequently modern Pedagogy, based upon the general tendencies, put up the same individualistic ideal as the aim to be achieved by the schools, church, state, and by many other social institutions.

### The Results of the Old Ideal

War is the result of the aforementioned old ideal of education. I call it old because it is over forever, I hope, with this latest war. (*Ed., how unfortunate that the saint was not correct in his hopes of WWI being the "last" war.*) The old European ideal of education was so called individualistic. This ideal was supported equally by the churches and by science and art. Extreme individualism, developed in Germany more than in any other country, resulted in pride, pride resulted in materialism, materialism in pessimism

Put upon a dangerous and false base every evil result followed quite naturally. If my poor personality is of limitless value, without any effort and merit of my own, why should I not be proud? If the aim of the world's history is to produce some few genial personalities, as Carlyle taught, why should I not think that I am such a personality for my own generation, and why should I not be proud of that? Once filled with

pride I will soon be filled also with contempt for other men. Selfishness and denial of God will follow my pride; this is called out by a scientific word: materialism.

Being a materialist, as long as I possess a certain amount of intellectual and physical strength, I will be proud of myself. But as soon as my body or spirit are affected by any illness (it may be only a headache or toothache), I will plunge into a dark pessimism, always the shadow and the end of materialism. Modern Germany was, as you know, the hearth of individualism, and consequently also of pride, materialism, atheism and pessimism. The worship of strong personalities (Kaiser William and Hindenburg) holds the whole of Germany in unity during this war, which is not the case either in France or in Great Britain or Russia, where the common cause inspires the unity.

### The Education Which Makes for Peace

When will wars really stop in the world's history? As soon as a new ideal of education is realized. What is this new ideal of education which makes for peace? I will give it in one word: Panhumanism. This word includes all I wish to say.

Individualism means a brick, Panhumanism means a building. Even the greatest individuality (may it be Caesar, or Raphael, or Luther) is no more than a brick in the panhuman building of history. The lives of individuals are only the points, whereas the life of mankind is a form, a deep, high and large form.

If a great and original individuality were the aim of history, I think history should stop with the first man upon earth, for our first ancestor must have been the most striking individual that ever existed. Men coming after Adam have been like their parents and each other. Kaiser William is not nearly as interesting and striking a creature as the first man was. When Kaiser William opens his mouth to speak, he speaks words that are known. When he moves or sits, when he eats or prays—all that is a nuance only of what other people do, all is either from heritage or imitation, and quite an insignificant amount is individual. Whereas every sound that the first man uttered was quite new for the Universe; every movement striking and dramatic; every look of his eyes was discovering new worlds; every joy or sorrow violently felt; every struggle a great accumulation of experiences. And so forth.

Well, if one striking individuum is the aim of history, history should have closed with the death of Adam. But history still continues. Why? Just because it was not Adam that was its aim, but mankind; not one, or two, or ten heroes, but millions of human creatures; not some few great men, but all men, all together, all without any exception.

From this point of view we get the true ideal of education. The purpose of education is not to make grand personalities, but to make bricks for the building, i.e., to make suitable members of a collective body and suitable workers of a collective work.

## SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: HOW DID WE GET HERE? AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

By Archpriest Lev Semenov, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

*President Barack Obama recently affirmed his personal support for the legalization of same-sex marriage. For a perspective from Russia on this momentous development, we offer the following commentary by Archpriest Lev Semenov, Dean of the Faculty of Further Education at St. Tikhon's Orthodox University and cleric of the Church of St. Nicholas in Kuznetskaya Sloboda, both in Moscow.*



† † †  
The political heavyweight of the Western world has taken a step towards the abyss. If we are to believe the news report broadcast on the radio, and later confirmed in the press, President Barack Obama has made his first public statement in support of the legalization of same-sex marriages.

One can only sympathize with the citizens of this country who hold the Christian faith, just imagining

how they must have felt when they heard this statement from their head of state. There are quite a few Orthodox in the United States (my internship at New York University in 1999, when I met clergy and laity of four Orthodox jurisdictions, convinced me of this) and I think they were not pleased by the President's statement.

In connection with this shocking news, two questions naturally arise: How could this have happened? And what comes next? It seems obvious that the willingness of the leader of a major world power to recognize same-sex marriage as normal, destroying all grounds of traditional morality and familial structure, has its distant origins rooted in the process of secularization that began to gain strength at the threshold of the modern era.

The pinnacle of its manifestation is now the West's general fascination with such notorious idols as "political correctness" and "tolerance," all the while misconstruing them; as a result of which, in defiance of common sense, everything is being turned upside down: human rights are being turned against humans, causing irreparable harm to their freedoms, including their freedom of conscience. One does not need to look far to find examples. "Old Lady Europe" has long been in training to break the records of political correctness. But the New World has since begun to catch up with it.

This tendency towards secular extrapolation began to show itself most clearly with regard to the historical past, an example of which are the attempts at silencing the very place

of Christianity in the history of European culture. Thus, despite Christianity's enormous role in its formation and development over many centuries, contemporary European community legislators, as is well known, have removed the very mention of the Christian roots of European culture from the constitution of the European Union.

Instead of ensuring human rights as regards freedom of conscience, people are in fact deprived of the right to demonstrate their religious identity in even the most restrained manner. In Italy the courts examined the question of the permissibility of having crucifixes on the walls of educational institutions. In Great Britain, the new edition of the Oxford Junior Dictionary, designed to expand the vocabulary of school children, has eliminated the words "abbey," "altar," "bishop," "chapel," "christen," "monk," "monastery," "novice," "saint," and a host of other Biblicisms. A stewardess for a British airline was fired because a Christian cross was visible in the neckline of her uniform. In the United States serious intentions have been expressed, on the grounds of having a politically correct attitude towards non-Christians, officially to change the terms Christmas and Easter to "winter" and "spring" holidays.

This epidemic of fundamentally shattering the millennia-old traditional family, which began in Europe some time ago and has now spread to the United States, threatens the moral health of society, the stability of the monogamous family, and the interests of children growing up in families.

It would be interesting to hear from gays and lesbians preparing to form marital unions (if one can call it that), who often express the intention of acquiring children for such "families" by adopting orphans, what kind of upbringing the unfortunate children of such "families" will receive if same-sex marriage is legalized. Are the democratic societies of Western countries prepared for the prospect, in the very near future, of the mass reproduction, through the upbringing received in such "families," of entire generations with a similar sexual orientation?

It would be naïve to suppose that those taking the bit between their teeth in this mad rush towards destroying the traditions of Western society will stop here. Elementary logic dictates that, following the rejection of the commandment *thou shalt not commit adultery*, the violation of other commandments will ensue; then, surpassing all the horrors of Kafkaesque absurdity, the rejection of the commandment *thou shalt not kill* will arrive. It is not difficult to imagine how "civilized" (read: secularized) humanity, having desired to free itself from the burden of Christian moral values as being too burdensome for their perverse aspirations, would one morning wake up to hear that an American president has expressed his support for the "inalienable" right of every person... to commit murder.

May God grant that this nightmarish dystopia never come into being! But only fidelity to those traditional religious foundations upon which all world culture has been built can serve to bar the way to its realization.

## LOVE OF GOD

From "Life of Monk Herman of Valaam" by Yanovsky, 1868.

Once the Elder (St. Herman of Alaska) was invited on board a frigate that had come from St. Petersburg. The captain of the frigate was a man quite learned, highly educated; he had been sent to America by Imperial command to inspect all the colonies. With the captain were some 25 officers, likewise educated men.

In this company there sat a desert-dwelling monk of small stature, in an old garment, who by his wise conversation brought all his listeners to such a state that they did not know how to answer him. The captain himself related: "We were speechless fools before him!"

Father Herman gave them all one common question: "What do you, gentlemen, love above all, and what would each of you wish for his happiness?" Diverse answers followed. One desired wealth, one glory, one a beautiful wife, one a fine ship which he should command, and so on in this fashion.

"Is it not true," said Father Herman at this, "that all your various desires can be reduced to one—that each of you desires that which, in his understanding, he considers best and most worthy of love?" "Yes, it is so," they all replied. "Well, then, tell me," he continued, "can there be anything better, higher above everything, more surpassing everything and in general more worthy of love, than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who created us, perfectly adorned us, gave life to all, supports all, nourishes and loves all, who Himself is love and more excellent than all men? Should not a person then love God high above all and desire and seek Him more than all else?" All began to say: "Well, yes! That is understood! That speaks for itself!"

"And do you love God?" the Elder then asked. All replied: "Of course, we love God. How can one not love God?" "And I, sinful one, for more than forty years have been striving to love God, and cannot say that I perfectly love Him," answered Father Herman; then he began to show how a person should love God.

"If we love someone," he said, "we always think of him, strive to please him, day and night our heart is occupied with this subject. Is it thus that you, gentlemen, love God? Do you often turn to Him, do you always think of Him, do you always pray to Him, and fulfill His holy commandments?" It had to be acknowledged that they did not! "For our good, for our happiness," concluded the Elder, "at least let us make a promise to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this very moment we shall strive to love God above all, and fulfill His holy will!" Behold what an intelligent, superb conversation Father Herman conducted in society; without doubt this conversation must have imprinted itself on the hearts of his listeners for their whole life!

## FLEEING SIN'S DESTRUCTIVE WAYS

By St. Theodore the Studite.

A physical harbour is not like a harbour of the mind. When someone comes to anchor in the former, they ease off and have no worries about the storms and dangers of the sea. In the latter on the contrary, the passions become more ferocious with the relaxation of the flesh, and the spirits of wickedness join in the assault like storms: the spirit of fornication, the spirit of gluttony, the spirit of avarice, the spirit of despondency, the spirit of dejection, the spirit of pride. The fear is that we may be sunk in harbour. David once looked unguardedly on Uriah's wife, and readers know what he suffered. *Jacob ate and was filled*, says Scripture, *and the beloved kicked*. [Deut 32,15].

Take care, you who are listening to this. *Flee the destructive places and ways of sin*. Govern your sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, your food, drink and sleep, that you may keep from being overwhelmed by the tempest of the passions.

This is worth remembering: someone who sails across the physical sea is subject to storms and tempests without their wanting it, while someone who crosses the water of the mind is lord of tempest and of calm. For if they manfully shake off unseemly thoughts, they are filled with calm, having the Holy Spirit as the companion of their voyage. Someone touched without meaning to and they were enflamed to lust and gave birth to iniquity.

But one whose senses are unbridled and who lets in desires like streams, stirs up a most dreadful storm for themselves. Unless the person does not swiftly smooth out their tempestuous thoughts, will end by repeating those miserable words, *I entered the depths of the sea, and a tempest drowned me*. [Pss 68:2]. Therefore let reason be in control, and let the better not be dragged down by the worse, but let the spirit be master and act for the better. Or don't you know what sin produces? Didn't it introduce death into the world? Didn't it destroy the earth? Hasn't it filled the inhabited world with graveyards and tombs from the beginning of time until now? For humanity was incorrupt before the fall and none of the things I have mentioned would have started if the first-formed had steadfastly observed the commandment that had been given. Sin is the cause of the everlasting punishments, the fuel of the unquenchable fire of Gehenna, the food of the undying worm; sin that has made humanity, that was in honour, be compared to the unreasoning beasts.

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



## TWO HOLY FATHERS ON THE CALENDAR ISSUE

ELDER EPHRAIM OF KATOUNAKIA AND ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST

From "Elder Ephraim of Katounakia", by Holy Hesychasterion "St. Ephraim" Katounakia, *Holy Mountain*, p.56.

When the New Calendar entered into the life of the Church after 1924, the entire Holy Mountain, for reasons of tradition, maintained the use of the Old Calendar, without severing communion with and maintaining dependency upon the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and consequently, with the other Orthodox Churches.

Because of this calendar change, some Athonite Monks—the self-titled "zealots"—broke their spiritual communion with the Patriarchate and the rest of the Holy Mountain. They would participate neither in Liturgies, nor in festal celebrations, nor even communicate with the rest of the fathers.

Katounakia was one of the centers of the zealots and papa-Ephraim was one of them. Moved by spiritual zeal, both he and Elder Joseph the Hesychast initially joined the extremist party of the so-called "Matthewites." When an issue arises concerning the faith, naturally fanaticism will rise up.

The grandiose Matthew, who so occupied Athonite monasticism, proceeded from another Matthew, a Cretan monk. Matthew had obvious rebellious tendencies, and thus they readily induced him to take hold of some authority on account of the calendar disorder. Increasing the degree of fanaticism surrounding the calendar change, and depicting the Church as lapsed, Matthew created that which pleased him. He became "super-orthodox" and worked up his followers with sermons and demonstrations. This still occurs today with some of his followers—a fresh wound to the bosom of the Church.

As always, every source of scandal creates fanaticism and unrest—mostly from ignorance—until the true state of affairs is revealed. It was natural for the fathers in the desert areas to be found among the fanatics, since anxiety and ignorance were prevalent, and because they had an acute fear that perhaps they would betray their faith.

Then, in opposition to the Matthewite harshness, the Florinite moderation appeared. The Florinites avoided the severity of the Matthewites, maintaining a milder stance, even though they were still "zealots." The two fathers then turned towards this faction. They chose the "lesser of two evils" as the better, even though they were still not at peace with this.

The living Church, unjustly cast aside, was protesting with their consciences, causing them unrest. The solution for the elders was prayer.

Elder Joseph the Hesychast turned with insistence to his sure refuge of prayer, seeking an answer from on high. *And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me* (Pss 49:15), was something that the blessed Elder knew well from his ascetic life. Falling to his face with tears, pain of heart, and deep humility, he pleaded:

"We have sinned and trespassed against You, O Lord, and we have betrayed Your Most Holy will. Justly You have turned Your face from us, for we have confused and mocked the light of Your Truth. We have closed our eyes to the bedrock of the Truth, Your unswerving and unshakable Church, Your All-Holy Body, which You established amongst us through Your own presence, and which we have handed over to the conjectures of human thoughts and speculation. Remember, All-Good One, Your compassion and mercy towards us, for they are from the ages unto ages."

With pain and persistence, he continued knocking on the doors of God's compassion and mercy, and the All-Good One did not turn away from his humble supplication. As our blessed Elder Joseph related to us:

"During this intense petition, I was overcome by sleep. I discovered myself suddenly alone on one piece of the mountain of Athos that was separated from the rest. It stood in the oceans trembling from moment to moment, in danger of sinking into the sea. I was

frightened and thought to myself, "Since this has broken off from the whole and is trembling, in a little while it'll sink and I'll be lost. Then, with one mighty leap, I found myself on the stable part of the mountain. Sure enough, the small section of rock that I had been standing on was swallowed up by the sea, and I glorified God Who had saved me from destruction! Immediately, I tied in the dream with the issue that had been occupying me and about which I had been petitioning the Lord not to allow me to be deceived in my judgment."

Similarly, while he was praying, papa-Ephraim of Katounakia heard a voice that told him, "In the person of the Florinites, you have renounced the entire Church."

The fathers found peace with this revelation that the Church had not ceased in its living presence. Afterwards, Elder Joseph also heard a divine voice inform him that, "the Church is found in the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople." When, at the suggestion of Elder Joseph, they left the zealots and returned to communion with the rest of the Athonite Fathers, they truly came to know the power of Grace in the Mysteries they celebrated.

Papa-Ephraim always used to see Divine Grace consecrating the venerable gifts into the body and blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy. For the entire time he was with



the zealots, he saw something like a veil in front of him, hindering him from seeing this Divine Grace distinctly. This veil was withdrawn when he returned to the living Church.

In speaking about this, Elder Ephraim said: “First I, then Old Joseph, received revelations spiritually regarding the calendar scandal; that is, that the living Church is in Constantinople and not in the faction of the so-called zealots. We returned then to the living Church, where the rest of the Holy Mountain also is.”

After being reconciled with the Church once again under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in 1952 they went to the neighboring brotherhood of Danielaioi to celebrate Pascha. The fathers welcomed them with much love: “Welcome, welcome. Elder Joseph, please take the stasidion [chair in church reserved for the elders]. Father Ephraim, please come and celebrate the Liturgy for us.”

“The Danielaioi chanted the hymn ‘Theotoke Parthene’ (O Virgin Theotokos) on the solea and I, standing in the sanctuary, could almost see the Mother of God; so great and so tangible was the grace I was feeling,’ the Elder confessed with nostalgia.

But Father Nikephoros (a companion of the elders), accustomed to their zealot neighbors, started grumbling and getting very upset. The Elder found himself in a difficult position. While praying, he felt that the will of God opposed him. He was frightened then. He consulted Elder Gabriel, the Abbot at the Monastery of Dionysiou, as well as Father Gerasimos, the Hymnographer. They told him: “My brother, obey your spiritual father.” In prayer it was even harder. He felt that God had imposed a penance on him. The dilemma was whether to maintain obedience or follow the Church. He was forced to choose the first option, which made us realize that obedience is fundamental to the Church; for the divine founder of the Church “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a Cross” (Phil. 2:8).

Then, he went through a crisis of conscience of another kind. He, who had been informed that he was subject to the Patriarchate, and that the word “Church” means love, which he found in the warm behavior of Danielaioi; he whose heart leapt for joy when he said the word “Church” like a child’s heart leaps when it needs its mother’s hug; he who considered Elder Joseph and his brotherhood his own beloved family; how could he now abandon them? Fortunately, these doubts lasted only a few days. He then thought: “In spirit I will always be with the Church, but with my body I will be with the Zealots for a while, as long as my elder is alive.”

Thus he made peace with himself. He waited patiently until 1975, i.e. for 23 years. He never gave anyone the right to criticize him. When he finally established his own brotherhood, he left the Zealots forever with great humility.

## ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

By Elder Porphyrios (+1991).

*A large part of the responsibility  
for a person’s spiritual state lies with the family.*

† † †



A child’s upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. The embryo hears and feels in its mother’s womb. Yes, it hears and it sees with its mother’s eyes. It is aware of her movements and her emotions, even though its mind has not developed. If the mother’s face darkens, it darkens too. If the mother is irritated, then it becomes irritated also. Whatever the mother experiences—sorrow, pain, fear, anxiety, etc.—is also experienced by the embryo.

If the mother doesn’t want the child, if she doesn’t love it, then the embryo senses this and traumas are created in its little soul that accompany it all its life. The opposite occurs through the mother’s holy emotions. When she is filled with joy, peace and love for the embryo, she transmits these things to it mystically, just as happens to children that have been born.

For this reason a mother must pray a lot during her pregnancy and love the child growing within her, caressing her abdomen, reading psalms, singing hymns and living a holy life. This is also for her own benefit. She makes sacrifices for the sake of the embryo so that the child will become more holy and will acquire from the very outset holy foundations. Do you see how delicate a matter it is for a woman to go through a pregnancy? Such a responsibility and such an honor!

I will tell you something about other animate and non-rational beings and you will understand what I mean. In America the following experiment was carried out: in two identical rooms which were kept at exactly the same temperature flowers were planted in identical soil and watered in exactly the same way. There was, however, one difference: in the one room gentle, soothing music was played. And the result? The flowers in that room displayed an enormous difference in relation to the flowers in the other room. They had a quite different vitality, their colors were more attractive and they grew incomparably better.



**We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.**

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We sincerely apologize for the delay in the development and dissemination of the subject issue. We were confronted with various computer hardware issues that resulted in the loss of some of our work.

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

## A HIDDEN TREASURE

Source: From Ch. 33 of Palladius' Paradise of the Fathers.

When someone says or does something mean to us, or hurts our feelings in some way, how do we react? Do we get angry and think up some way to pay the person back, to “get even”? Or do we use this as a chance to grow closer to God by obeying the Gospel commandment to *turn the other cheek*, to forgive one another, even those whom we might consider to be our enemies? If we practice Christ’s teaching and bravely endure the hurts we feel as a result of another’s actions or words, without developing hard feelings towards that person, we shall gradually acquire a great treasure in our hearts, as the following example illustrates.

St. Theophan the Recluse (in Unseen Warfare), tells us to *force ourselves to rejoice when you are insulted, blamed or scorned. For this ill treatment and dishonor conceals a great treasure, and if we willingly accept it you will soon become rich in spirit.*

Long ago, when monasticism was still quite young, there lived in the Egyptian desert a community of nuns. Now among them dwelt a certain sister who purposely made herself an object of ridicule and scorn as a means of training her soul and speeding her climb up the ladder of perfection. For, as St. John of the Ladder (Step 8) wrote: *Perfection (if it is possible) is to regard dishonor as praise.*

On her head this nun wore an old ragged piece of cloth, while the other nuns had nicely made monastic veils. They looked down upon her and treated her like the lowest servant, not even allowing her to eat with them. They would yell at her and order her about as she waited on tables, and she became, as it were, the broom of the nunnery. But she never complained or got angry or answered back at their harsh words. Keeping her mind firmly set

on her goal, she rejoiced when the other nuns made fun of her or insulted her, taking it as an opportunity to exercise herself in the Christian virtues of humility, patient endurance of wrongs, forgiveness and love for those who hurt you.

At the same time there lived not far away a monk called Piteroum. He was wounded by the prideful thought that he was better than many because of his strict way of life. To cure him of his pride, the Lord sent Piteroum an angel who said to him: “Go to the nunnery in Tabenna. There you will find a woman wearing on her head a rough piece of cloth. She is far ahead of you on the ladder of perfection, for although she is busy serving the needs of others, her mind is constantly with God on high. You may spend hours in the solitude of your cell but your mind is off wandering in other countries.”

At once Piteroum went to Tabenna and asked to see the nuns. They knew him to be a holy man and all came to receive his blessing, all but the ill-treated sister, the servant of all. “Is there no other nun here?” He asked. “Master,” came the reply, “we have one more, but she is quite worthless; she is in the refectory.”

Piteroum asked to see this nun, and when he saw the cloth on her head, he knew her to be the one described by the angel. He bowed down before her: “Bless me, Mother.” And she fell down at his feet: “Bless me, Master.” The other nuns were astonished, but Piteroum revealed to them the treasure of virtues hidden in her soul. Hearing this from the blessed man, the nuns fell down at their sister’s feet, begging forgiveness for the shameful way they had mistreated her. And even after Piteroum had left they continued to repent before her and showered her with honor and praise. But the woman feared that all this attention would injure her soul by opening it to pride, and within a few days she departed from the community. Where she went and where she died no one knew.