

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]

Vol. 10, Issue 09-10

September-October 2012

Brotherhood of St. Poimen

In This Issue:

- The Beheading of St. John the Baptist (p. 3)
- Suffer the Little Children (p. 5)
- The Pontian Genocide (p. 8)
- On Asceticism (p. 11)
- The Mystical Roots of Crime (p. 22)
- On Halloween (p. 25)
- On Television... (p. 28)
- The Christian Educator (p. 28)



- Τὸ «Ἔχειν» καὶ τὸ «Εἶναι» (σελ. 13)
- Ὁμολογία Ἐναντι τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ (σελ. 15)
- Ἡ Ἁγία Σκέπη καὶ τὸ Ἔπος τοῦ 1940 (σελ. 17)
- Περὶ τῆς Ἐννοίας τοῦ 39^{ου} Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος (σελ. 18)
- Παχεία Γαστήρ Λεπτὸν Οὐ Τίκει Νόον (σελ. 20)



Publisher: St. POIMEN Greek Orthodox Brotherhood

Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis &
Kostas Matsourakis

ARE WE SEEKING CHRIST?

By St. John of Kronstadt.

The holy Apostle of Christ, Andrew the First-called, was originally a disciple of St. John the Baptist who prepared the people to receive the Messiah. When the Saviour came out of the wilderness, the Forerunner told the people: *Behold, the Lamb of God* (Jn 1:36).

Immediately Andrew followed after Him. Turning round and seeing him together with John's other disciples, the Lord asked them: *What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day.* (Jn 1:38-39). Soon after this the Lord called Andrew and his brother Peter to follow after Him and told them that they were to become fishers of men unto the salvation of many. From that time forth, they remained with Christ; they were faithful to Him to the end and gave their very lives out of love for Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, on this day I would ask you the same question: What are you seeking? Why did you come to church today? What are we all seeking in our lives? Are we seeking Christ, as He was first sought by the humble fishermen, among whom was the Apostle Andrew?

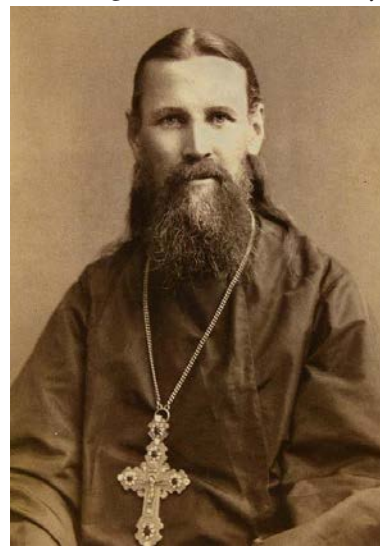
What is it that people seek in life? health, riches, success, acquaintances, friends, prestige, various worldly plea-

ures, vain knowledge... Only a few seek Christ the Saviour. Some may even think it strange to seek Christ. They say, we call ourselves Christians after Christ, we see His holy image both in our homes and at church; we pronounce His sweetest name and hear it in God's temple. It appears we have no need to seek for Christ. People seek that which they don't have, that which they need. But we seem to have Christ.

It's true, we have icons of Christ, but we do not have Christ Himself; we have His name, but only on our lips—not in our hearts; we know Him, but only in word—not in deed. Here, beloved, is a big difference; it is the same difference as between a shadow and the object which casts the shadow. It is, however, precisely with the heart that Christ is truly known, that is, in our inner man—in our soul; because Christ, as God, is Spirit, *Who is everywhere and filleth all things.*

The kingdom of God is within you (Lk 17:21), says the Lord. The holy Apostle Paul earnestly desired that through faith, Christ would dwell in the hearts of Christians. He wrote: *May God grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.* (Eph 3:16-17).

We have to admit that most of us do not have Christ in our hearts. Instead, our hearts are occupied with that which is opposed to Christ—our God and Saviour—that which is opposed to our own good, which hinders the salvation of our souls. And because of this we do not lead a genuine Christian life.



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

PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688
USA

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

Orthodox Heritage is published monthly by the “Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen,” a laity brotherhood.

All correspondence should be addressed to the Brotherhood at the Phoenix address or the e-mail address above.

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What is it that occupies our hearts? Is it God alone, *Who searchest out the hearts and reins* (Pss 7:9), sees what is in our hearts, its attachments? If the Lord granted us to see the full depths of our hearts, we would turn our eyes away in horror from such an overwhelming accumulation of filth. Let each of us look into his heart and say before the witness of our conscience what it is that occupies our hearts most of all. Passions, sins voluntary and involuntary—are these not our heart’s constant inhabitants?

But where does Christ dwell? In pure hearts, hearts that are humble and contrite, there where He is not grieved by doubt or unbelief, by indifference towards Him Who is God and Saviour; there, where men do not prefer the temporal sweetness of sin; where the idols of the passions have been chased out; where crude materiality is not preferred to the kingdom of God; where Christians often turn their thoughts to the heavenly, as those created for heaven, for eternity; there, where they seek God’s truth, where every day and every hour they are attentive to His commandments. That is where Christ dwells. And what does He do there? If only we knew (some, of course, do know) what He does in souls worthy of His abiding presence—what rest, comfort and joy He imparts, what paradisaal bliss He gives them to experience while still on this earth...

Having once embraced Christ, the holy Apostle Andrew became entirely committed to Him, and no matter what difficulties, sorrows, misfortunes and persecutions—unavoidable in preaching the Gospel—came his way, he remained faithful to Christ, enduring everything out of love for Him, even crucifixion.

It is of utmost importance that we seek after Christ—and find Him. Without Christ, who will save us from our sins

which ensnare us every day and hour, and from the eternal torments? Only the Son of God has power on earth to forgive sins; He alone has the keys to hell and death, the keys to the kingdom of heaven and life.

To find Christ is not difficult. He is everywhere, filling the world with Himself. God says to us through His prophet Jeremiah: *I am a God nigh at hand...and not a God afar off.* (Jer 23:23). As soon as He sees our hearts incline to receive His grace, He immediately enters, bringing with Him peace and comfort. *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), says the Lord. Oh, how often He converses with His faithful servants, as with true friends. Christ Himself is seeking you: if you but incline your heart toward Him, you will surely find Him.

But how are we to know if we have found Christ and are close to Him? Those close to Christ often turn to Him in prayer with faith and love; they often pronounce from their heart His sweetest name, often call upon Him for help; they often read or listen to His word with childlike simplicity and love; they seek frequent union with Him in His life-giving Mysteries; they are satisfied with whatever they have and accepting of what happens to them; they strive according to their strength to fulfill Christ’s commandments. It happens that they also experience trials which are allowed by the loving Master—in order that their hearts be cleansed of every sinful impurity. Those who desire to be with Christ must not run away from trials, but even in times of joy, they must not forsake the carrying of their cross.

My dear brothers and sisters! Seek Jesus Christ with faith and love. Do not forget that He gave His life on the Cross

for our sakes, to deliver us from sin and eternal torment, and to dwell in our hearts, that we might have great joy. Do not forget, we have all been bought with the price of His blood, and we should belong to Him, as to our Redeemer.

Our days are numbered. Every stroke of the clock reminds us to seek Him Who created time and Himself stands above the measure of time. He alone is able to pluck us out from the ravaging torrent of time. Every stroke of the clock tells us: Be watchful! You now have one hour less until you must cross the threshold into life after death which knows neither days nor hours. Do not be seduced by the momentary sweetness of sin which vanishes like a dream, leaving the soul empty, ailing, anguishing; it steals away precious time and ruins it forever. Do not waste time in useless occupations or idleness.

Every one of you has a God-given talent to put to use. Busy yourselves in acquiring incorruptible wealth in the kingdom of heaven. Take the example of the thousands who have gone before you, having attained eternal rest and joy through their ceaseless labors in this temporal life, through sweat and tears. Make haste to uproot from yourselves sin in all its various manifestations, through the help of Christ the Saviour. Remember, *man sows what he reaps* (Gal 6:7), according to the immutable law of God's righteousness.

While there is still time, therefore, let us hasten to find Christ and in faith create for Him an abode in our hearts that we not fall prey to the fire of gehenna, as it is written: *If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.* (Jn 15:6).

Amen.



Born into this world, we are bound to it by the strong bonds of kinship. We love the world. Within its bounds we fashion our eternity. But we suffer in it—it cramps the love commanded of us. We cannot fail to love it but this does not mean walking its fallen ways. We cannot help loving the world but when our attraction to it triumphs over our love for God, we must find the strength in ourselves to act like Abraham—take the fire in his hand, and a knife (Gen. 22:6)—and offer in sacrifice all that we hold dear for the sake of the victory of Divine love in us.

Elder Sophrony of Essex (+1993)

THE BEHEADING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

COMMEMORATED AUGUST 29 (SEPTEMBER 11)

By Saint John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Having suffered for the truth, thou hast gone rejoicing to declare to those in hell the good tidings of God having appeared in the flesh.

† † †

The whole life of St. John the Forerunner, from its first days, was entirely dedicated to the One Who came after him. In the days of infant massacres in Bethlehem, he was also sought by Herod, and his mother Elizabeth fled with him into the desert, where she died on the fortieth day. About the same time, his father Zacharias was killed by the servants of Herod, in the Temple. The desert raised John, and he remained there in silence, for thirty years, until the word of God came unto him, commanding him to preach repentance and call on men to prepare the way of the Lord: *The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.* (Lk 3:2-4).

About half a year after the beginning of his ministry, having prepared the Jews to expect the speedy coming of the Messiah, and surrounding himself with disciples, most of whom became the first disciples of Christ, John the Baptist baptized Christ. The mystery of the Holy Trinity was then revealed to him. Having informed those with him, that the *Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world* was present, John gradually faded into the shadows and everyone began to follow the new Teacher.

However, John, rather than grieving over this, rejoiced. When his especially devoted disciples asked him about his lack of concern over his decreasing fame, he replied with words that clearly expressed his personality. *I am not the Christ, but I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: therefore this my joy is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.* (Jn 3:28-50).

Soon after this, his word thundered forth, accusing Herod, so he was cast into a prison, where his earthly life ended. He was beheaded during Herod's banquet. The beheading of St. John the Baptist, which cut off his earthly life, at the same time, started his new and glorious ministry as Forerunner.

The soul of St. John the Baptist, departing his ascetic body, went to hell, the place where the souls of all who died before the Savior's death on the Cross. The souls of everyone beginning from Adam were there.

However, the holy and righteous soul of St. John the Baptist did not go there in order to experience a dark condition of alienation and distance from God. The *friend of the Bridegroom*, who had baptized Him, suffered for his righteousness; he bore the hope of the coming kingdom of God, preached to all preparing the way for Him, was inseparably bound to Him through his devotion, testifying everywhere for Christ, as His messenger, sent before Him.

Having descended to hell, John continued the ministry that he had performed on earth—the preaching about the kingdom of God drawing near. The souls of the righteous ones, from the Old Testament were languishing in hell, awaiting the fulfillment of the coming of the One Who would conquer the serpent, as had been told to Adam by God. The prophets, who had seen beforehand, in spirit, the coming of the Messiah, awaited the fulfillment of the revelations that had been made to them. These souls, deprived of the light of God's glory, tormented with waiting for the fulfillment of their hope. John came, having descended to hell, bringing the Joyful tidings that soon the kingdom of hell would be destroyed. Those who awaited the Redeemer would soon behold Him and be liberated by Him. John testified that the Son of God had already come to earth and that after baptizing Him, he had witnessed the Holy Spirit descending and remaining on Him (John 1:33-34).

The preaching of John concerning the coming of the Messiah was addressed not only to the souls of the righteous, but to all who were in hell. He appeared in hell to prepare the way of the Lord, just as he had prepared it on earth. John the Baptist's descent to hell and his preaching of the Gospel was the proclamation of joy to those who were languishing there.

The souls of all the dead, save for the most inveterate sinners, heeded the preaching of the Baptist. Therefore, when Christ descended to hell after His death on the Cross, He was greeted not only by the Old Testament righteous ones, but also by the souls of those who *once were disobedient* and opposed the *long suffering of God* in the days of Noah and during the rest of the time that sin reigned among men (1 Pet 3:20).

Hell was destroyed by the Christ's soul's descent into it; the dark confinement shone with light; the souls of the reposed were led into the kingdom of heaven. The entryway to this ruin of hell was the descent of the Baptist. Having fulfilled his ministry as Forerunner on earth, he appeared as the Forerunner of Christ, in hell. His beheading is not only the culmination of his earthly exploit, but also the beginning of a new and glorious ministry.

Among them, that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist (Mt 11:11; Lk 7:28), Christ said of him. This is he, of whom it is written, *Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee.* (Lk 7:27).

These words of the Lord Himself, testify of the spiritual greatness of John and his high purpose in the work of the salvation of the human race. He appeared as the servant and preacher of God as no other single man in the world, having begun to preach and praise Christ before his birth, and finishing it even after his death, ascending with Christ into the kingdom of heaven after the destruction of hell. As the greatest of the righteous, a worthy place was prepared for him in the kingdom of his Friend, where he remains now, awaiting its revelation in all glory and the triumphant feast of the Lamb of God in the Second Coming, when *He will gather His wheat into the garner, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* (Mt 3:12; Lk 3:17).

His beheading was his final exploit on earth, and the last step for the receiving of the greatest reward in the kingdom of heaven; while for all those in hell it was the rising of the morning star, before the appearance of the Son of Righteousness.

Just as the nativity of St. John the Forerunner and Baptist is the beginning of the Gospel for the living, so is his beheading the beginning of the Gospel for the dead:

The glorious beheading of the Forerunner is part of a certain Divine dispensation, for he preached to those in hell the coming of the Savior. (Kontakion of the Feast).

Be glad, Baptist, and let thy spirit dance: for thou dost accuse the godless Herod, and dost preach to those in hell, saying: Our salvation hath drawn near. (Canticle 4 of the Canon).

He who came before Thy Birth and Thy Divine Passion is, through a sword, in the nethermost parts of the earth. John, the prophet and messenger of Thy descent there, cries as the voice of the Word: Do ye dead, as Giver of life, do ye blind, as Giver of light, do ye prisoners, as Deliverer, exalt Christ above all forever. (Canticle 8 of the Canon).

Amen.



By its nature, water is soft while a stone is hard. However, when it runs along a watercourse and drips on a stone, it slowly but surely makes a hole in it. Likewise the word of God is soft while our hearts are tough. However, if a person frequently listens to the Word of God, his heart softens and becomes capable to accept the fear of God.

Abba Poimen the Great



SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN...

An excerpt from the diary of Sergei Nilus, "On the Banks of God's River," translated from "Na Beregu Bozhyei Reki," St. Elias Publications, Forestville, CA, 1975. Nilus' diary was first published in 1916 by Holy Trinity-Sergius Lavra. When it was later sent for publication abroad, the author supplied names of people who had died, which he had originally noted simply by initials. The "Vera" within the subject story was in fact Seraphima Nikolaevna Vishnevskaya, from Tambov.

June 1, 1909. Today there left Optina our new acquaintance who, in the brief time she spent at the monastery, became close to us like a sister; closer still, like a true sister in Christ. I shall call her Vera, for her faith is great. [Vera in Russian means "faith", Ed.].

In early January of this year I received a letter from the city of T., in which some womanly Christian soul wrote some warm words encouraging my labors in Christ's vineyard. The letter bore the woman's full signature, but I didn't recognize the name.

On May 25th, my wife and I were at Liturgy. Before the Cherubic Hymn a lady passed by where we were standing; she was modestly dressed and led by the hand a boy of about five. For some reason she attracted our attention. At the end of the service, before the royal moleben (it was the birthday of the Empress Alexandra), we saw her again as she went to get a candle.

Now that's a servant of God! I thought to myself. One of her children from his early years and another still in the womb—both are sanctified by the mother's prayers and holy contemplations. Smart woman! May the Lord and the Mother of God bless her!

At that moment she approached the icon of the Mother of God "Quick to Hear," before which we usually stood in the church of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple, and she kneeled down to pray. By chance I caught sight of her expression, directed at the icon. And what an expression it was, what faith emanated from it, what love for God, for what is divine, what is holy!... Oh, if only I could pray like that!

—Mother of God, my heart prayed for her, answer her prayers according to her faith!

In leaving the church through the north doors, in front of the icon "Surety of Sinners," we again saw the woman. She was holding a prosphora.

—Are you not Sergei Aleksandrovich Nilus? she asked me with a shy smile.

—Yes. With whom have I the honor...?"

It turned out that it was the same woman who wrote to me in January from T. This was that Vera with her five-year old son Seryozha, whom we saw off today from Optina. It's worth focusing one's attention on this God-loving pair, to return love for love, to preserve in our grateful

memory their pure image, with its illuminating rays of otherworldly light.

—Today, said Vera, Seryozha and I will be preparing to receive Holy Communion and Holy Unction tomorrow. After the unction service, allow us to pay you a visit. It is such a joy to find people who share the same spirit. One wants so much to rest from the oppression of the world. Don't refuse us your hospitality.

And what a joy it was, this new acquaintance. We recalled the day we had first met Vera, in front of the icon of the Mother of God, "Surety of Sinners;" my wife and I were walking past the dear graves of Optina's great elders, and we stopped in to venerate them as usual. Entering the chapel over the grave of Elder Ambrose, we found Vera and her Seryozha. The boy stretched his hands in front, palms up, and said:

—Batiushka Amvrossy, bless! Just then the boy's mother noticed us.

—Seryozha and I have this custom. After all, Batiushka Amvrossy is alive and is present here invisibly with us. And one should ask his blessing, as one would of a hieromonk.

I barely restrained my tears...

The next day I stopped by Elder Anatole's cell while he was performing the service of unction. Besides Vera and her son there were about twelve others, slaves of God of various ranks and occupations, who had gathered in Optina from different corners of Russia. One should have seen with what serious concentration the five-year-old boy approached the Mystery of Holy Unction! This is how pious mothers begin right from their breast to prepare the souls of their children for the kingdom of heaven! Is this not how the pious boyars, Kyrill and Maria, raised the soul of him whom the Lord placed as a lamp for all Russia, a pillar of Orthodoxy, St. Sergius [of Radonezh]? [Note: a "boyar" is a member of the highest rank of the feudal Russian aristocracy, Ed.]

—When I am pregnant, Vera told us later, I often partake of the Holy Mysteries and I pray to that Saint whose name I wish to give the child, if he is born of that sex. On the fourth day of Nativity 1905, I lost my firstborn son, Nicholas, who was born on Great Saturday, 1900. When I was still carrying him, I prayed to the great wonderworker St. Nicholas, asking him to take my child under his care. When a son was born he was named in honor of the Saint. Seryozha here was born on Nativity, 1903. I had prayed for him to St. Sergius. There was a lot about his birth that was unusual, even remarkable. He was born at eight months. Due to his godfather, the baptism had to be postponed until Theophany. He was churched on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord. And there was also something unusual with his name. I had prayed for him to St. Sergius, but when the priest asked what name I wished to give him, I hesitated and replied, "I'll tell you at the baptism."

—The reason for this was that that year was the glorification of St. Seraphim, in whom I'd always had great faith.

As a girl I had gone on foot from my village to Sarov, to his grave. And the first time I felt the child in my womb was during the vigil service on the eve of his feast, July 19th. So I didn't know what to do—to call him Sergius, as I'd planned originally, or Seraphim. I began asking the Lord to reveal to me His will. And on the eve of Theophany, when the baptism was scheduled, I had a dream in which I took my newborn to Trinity-Sergius Lavra. And I concluded from this that it was pleasing to the Lord that my son be given the name Sergius. This put me at rest, the more so since St. Seraphim had such love for St. Sergius, and was buried with an icon of this great God-pleaser in his coffin.

As I listened to this quietly bubbling stream of living waters of childlike faith, there beat in my heart the words of the Lord's great promise to His Church: The gates of hell shall not prevail against it! Will not prevail! Truly, they shall not prevail if even in times like ours there are still children such as these to be found in the Church.

Vera continued her inspiring story.

—You seem to like my Seryozha. What would you have thought had you met my Kolya! Even here on earth he was already a citizen of heaven... One night I tucked him



into bed together with the other children. It was about eight o'clock. I heard his voice calling me from the bedroom.

—What is it, child? I asked.

He was sitting up in his bed and whispered to me ecstatically:

—Mama, mama! Just look how many angels are flying about here.

—Good heavens, Kolya, I replied, where do you see them? My heart was pounding, as if driven by a pair of bellows.

—Why, everywhere, he whispered. Mama, they're flying around... Just now they anointed my head. Touch my head; do you see? It's anointed!

I felt his head: the crown was wet, while the rest of the head was dry. I thought perhaps the boy was delirious, but no, he had no fever; his eyes were calm, shining but not feverish. He was healthy, happy, smiling... I felt the heads of the other children—they were all dry, and the children were sleeping; they didn't wake.

—How is it, Mama, that you don't see the angels? There are so many of them. And, Mama, the Saviour sat on my bed and spoke to me.

Just what the Lord said to the child I don't know. Either Vera didn't say, or else I can't remember. It wouldn't have been wise to choke on the torrent of living faith which gushed

forth upon us, its miracles which seemed to transgress the boundary between the earthly and the heavenly.

—Kolya even foretold to me his death, continued Vera, glad that she could pour forth her heart to people willing to listen. He died on the fourth day of Christ's Nativity, having told me about it in September. One day he came up to me and said, out of the blue:

—Mama, soon I'm going to leave you.

—Where will you go, my child?" I asked

—To God.

—How will this be? Who told you about this?

—I'm going to die, Mama! he said, embracing me. But please don't you cry. I'm going to be with the angels, and I will be very happy there.

My heart fell, but I calmed myself at once. After all, could one attach such significance to the words of a child? Of course not. Some time went by and again Kolya interrupted his play to come up to me and tell me not to cry when he dies...

—Mama, it's going to be so nice there, so nice, dear Mama! He repeated insistently, comforting me. But however much I asked him where he got such an idea, who told him about this, he

wouldn't give an answer; he deliberately evaded the question. Perhaps this is what the Saviour told the boy, as the angels were flying around his bed...

—He was such an amazing child, continued Vera. Judge for yourself by the following story.

—There worked in our house an elderly carpenter, and one day he accidentally sliced his finger with an ax. The man ran to the kitchen. I was there at the time and he showed me his finger, which was streaming with blood. Kolya was also in the kitchen. On seeing the carpenter's finger he shrieked and took off running to the dining room where we have an icon of the Holy Trinity. Falling to his knees before the icon and choking through his tears, he began praying:

—Most Holy Trinity, heal the carpenter's finger!

At that moment I came into the dining room with the carpenter. Kolya was so concentrated in his prayer that he didn't even notice us, and he continued tearfully:

—Most Holy Trinity, heal the carpenter's finger!

I went after some medicine and a bandage; the carpenter remained in the dining room. By the time I came back, Kolya had managed to climb up to the vigil lamp for some oil and was anointing the finger of the carpenter, who stood trustfully holding out his wounded hand and weeping with emotion:

—What a child, what a child!

Thinking he was crying from pain, I said to him:

—What are you crying for, old man? You were in the war and you didn't cry, and now...!

—Your son, he said, could make a man hard as nails to cry!

—And what do you suppose? The blood stanced immediately and the wound healed without any medicine, just a bandage. That was my beloved Kolya, extraordinary little boy.

Vera continued:

—Before Nativity my stepfather and the boy's godfather asked if the boy could visit with him in his village. Kolya was his favorite. The trip proved fatal. There, Kolya fell ill with scarlet fever and died.

—Since I learned about my son's illness only through a courier—there were strikes everywhere at the time and I didn't get the telegram—I arrived barely twenty-four hours before he died. When my husband and I reached my stepfather's place, we found Kolya still quite energetic; it appeared as if the scarlatina (scarlet fever, Ed.) had run its course, and it didn't occur to any of us that the boy's final hours were numbered. We asked that a moleben be served for his recovery. During the service Kolya himself prayed earnestly and kept asking to be given icons that he might kiss them. After the moleben he felt so well that, in spite of my request, the priest decided not to give him Holy Communion, saying that he was well and there was no need to commune him.

We all cheered up, and after a bite to eat went off to rest. I sat at Kolya's bedside, far from any thoughts that his last minutes were approaching. Suddenly he said to me:

—Mama, when I die, you will carry me around the church.

—God be with you, my child, I said. We're still going to be alive and together for some time, God willing.

—And godfather will soon follow after me, continued Kolya, paying no attention to my objection.

He was silent for a moment and then said:

—Mama, forgive me.

—What is there to forgive?" I asked.

—For everything, forgive me for everything, Mama!

—God will forgive you, Kolya, I replied. You forgive me; I've been stern with you at times.

I had no idea this was my final farewell with my dying child.

—No, protested Kolya, I have no reason to forgive you for anything. I can only thank you, my dearest Mama.

For some reason I was overcome by a feeling of dread. I awoke my husband.

—Get up," I said. "I think Kolya is dying.

—What are you talking about? He's better; he's sleeping.

Kolya was lying with his eyes closed. On hearing my husband he opened his eyes and with a joyful smile he said:

—No, I'm not sleeping; I'm dying. Pray for me!

He crossed himself and began praying himself:

—Most Holy Trinity, save me! St. Nicholas, St. Sergius, St. Seraphim, pray for me! Make the sign of the cross over me! Anoint me with oil. Pray for me, everybody!

And with these words my dear boy's life on earth came to an end. His face lit up with a smile, and he died.

Vera continued, after a few moments of silence:

—For the first time in my life my heart rebelled. So profound was my grief that there at his bedside and later at his grave I refused to believe that the Lord had taken from me my treasure. I asked, I insisted, I almost demanded that He, for Whom everything is possible, would restore my child to life; I couldn't reconcile myself to the thought that the Lord might not desire to answer my prayer. On the eve of the funeral, seeing that the body of my child continued, in spite of all my entreaties, to be without breath, I all but fell into despair.

—Suddenly, at the head of the coffin where I was standing burdened by my thoughts, I was drawn to take the Gospel and read the first passage I opened up to. It was the sixteenth verse of the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. In it I read: *Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.* (Lk 18:16). For me these words were an answer to my grief from the Saviour Himself. Instantly they softened my heart, and I submitted to God's will.

—At Kolya's funeral, his words were fulfilled. Deep drifts of snow had swept against the church, and in order to get the coffin onto the porch it had to be carried around the whole church. This was for me a sign, and a source of joy. But when they buried my little one in the frozen ground, and a harsh winter covering lay on his grave, my heart was again gripped by anguish, and again I began entreating the Lord for my son. I knew no peace. Day and night I begged God to give me back my consolation and my joy. I was preparing to receive the Holy Mysteries on Kolya's fortieth day. In my grief I reached such a state that I had begun demanding God for a miracle to resurrect my son. And... on the fortieth day I saw my Kolya in a dream, as if alive. He came up to me, happy and bright faced, illumined by some kind of radiance, and he said to me three times:

—Mama, you mustn't! You mustn't! Mama, don't!

—What mustn't I do? I cried out in despair.

—Don't ask that, you shouldn't ask that, Mama!

—Why not?

—Ah, Mama, Kolya replied, you wouldn't even think of asking such a thing if you only knew how splendid it is for me there with God. It's better there, it's infinitely better there, dear Mama!

And with a smile in her face, Vera concluded:

—I woke up, and with this dream all my grief vanished. Three months went by and Kolya's second word came to pass: his godfather followed him into God's heavenly mansions.

The slave of God Vera told me of many wondrous occurrences in her life, but one cannot communicate everything, even to one's notes: there are still people living who could be upset by my words. No one has yet repented of silence: it's better to be silent this time!...

THE PONTIAN GENOCIDE

By Olga Balytnikova-Rakitienskaia, from "Orthodoxy in the World," May 19th, 2010, edited for length.

The Pontian genocide of 1916-1922 is one of the most tragic pages of Greek history. The Pontians had suffered much throughout their history of nearly 3,000 years, but the genocide was the most terrible of their misfortunes, for it deprived the Greeks of the Black sea, their native land, and not just of their friends and relatives. Remembrance of this genocide is necessary not only for the relatives and descendants of the lost; such terrible facts of human history must be known to all. For if people forget about the pain of other people, if they pass it by with indifference, they kill inside their souls a part of their "humanity." This must not be allowed to happen, lest tragedies of this kind be repeated...

Pontian Greeks—A Brief Historical Overview

Euxinos Pontus (Εὐξεινος Πόντος) or just Pontus (Πόντος)—this is how the Greeks used to call the Black sea from ancient times. The first Greek settlements appeared on its southern coast (modern Turkey and the Caucasus) as early as 800 BC. They were founded by Ionian Greeks, natives of Attica, Anatolia, and the islands of the Aegean. The first city, Sinop, was built in 785 BC. Very soon not only the southern, but also the northern Black sea coast was completely Hellenized. Many renowned Greek men of antiquity, such as Diogenes and Strabo, were born and raised in southern Pontus.

In the 4th century BC, an independent kingdom of Pontus was established on the southern coast of the Black sea, headed in 301 BC by king Mithridates I. Since that time, Pontus began to develop independently from all other Greek lands.

The dynasty founded by Mithridates successfully ruled in Pontus until the 1st century BC. The kingdom of Pontus prospered, science and arts flourished in its cities. The last king of the dynasty was Mithridates VI, who ruled from 120 to 63 BC. He resisted the Roman expansion much longer than other Greek rulers, but was finally defeated, and Pontus lost its independence, having become a subject of Rome.

In 35 AD, St. Andrew preached Christianity in Pontus. This marked the beginning of the new, Christian era of Pontian history. Pontus gave to the world many great Saints, such as Saint Martyr Eugene of Trebizond, St. Basil the Great, and St. Philaretus the Merciful. In 386 AD, one of the first Christian monasteries was founded on Mount Melas in western Pontus—the monastery of Our Lady of Soumela (Panagia Soumela, from Pontian "σοῦ Μελᾶ", which means "on the Melas"). In the 9th century, Sts. Barnabas and Sophronius brought to the monastery an ancient miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary from Athens, the Panagia Athinotissa, which, according to the tradition, was painted by St. Luke the Evangelist. From that time, the icon was known as the image of Our Lady of Soumela. It was regarded as the most sacred

belonging of Pontus, and during the terrible years of the genocide, it "went into exile" together with the Pontian people.

In the Middle Ages, Pontus formed a part of the Byzantine Empire. In the end of the 9th century, when almost the entire Byzantine territory of Asia Minor was occupied by the Seljuks, a Byzantine general, St. Theodore Gavras, successfully defended the territory of Pontus, having thereby initiated the process of restoring its independence. And after Constantinople had been sacked by the Crusaders in 1204, a grandson of the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus I Comnenus, Alexius Comnenus, founded a new state on the territory of Pontus, the so-called Empire of Trebizond (named after its capital, the city of Trebizond). This Empire continued to exist under the rule of the Grand Comneni dynasty even after Constantinople had been freed from the Crusaders, until 1461, when the Empire was conquered by the Ottoman Turks.

Throughout the hard years of Turkish occupation, the Pontians spared no effort to keep alive their faith, language, and culture, despite numerous and often very cruel attempts of their conquerors to convert them to Islam and otherwise assimilate the local population. Only a small portion of the Pontians—the inhabitants of Oflu—succumbed to the repressions and became Muslims. But even among these people, most continued to worship Christ in secret, having become the so-called "Crypto-Christians." The Pontians of Oflu continued speaking Pontian and observing Pontian customs as well. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Pontian people could boast of almost three thousand years of continuity of rich political and cultural tradition.

Pontian Language and Culture

The Pontians had been developing almost independently of other parts of the Greek nation since late Antiquity; this was due to historical circumstances as well as to the remoteness of Pontus from continental Greece. Thus, the Pontian people (who call themselves "the Romei") developed their own original culture, which differs in many ways from that of the rest of Greece, although there are many commonalities as well. The dialect of the Greek language spoken by Pontians today also differs greatly from common Modern Greek—the differences are so great that some linguists regard it as a separate Pontian language, and not as a "dialect."

Owing to its partial isolation in the Black sea region, the Pontian language retains many archaic features: its grammar and vocabulary have much more in common with Ancient Greek than with the language of modern Greece. At the same time, owing to the long years of contact with other ethnicities of Asia Minor and the Caucasus, Pontian borrowed many words from Persian, Turkish, and various Caucasian languages. All these make it very difficult—in fact, almost impossible—for a Greek from Greece to understand Pontian. Lastly, the Pontian culture also retains many archaic—Ancient Greek and Byzantine—features.

Genocide: How it Happened

By the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman government seriously feared losing its power over Pontus, as had already happened with Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria. This was aggravated by the fact that a substantial percentage of the Pontian population in Turkey consisted of highly educated intellectuals and successful businessmen, who occupied a prominent position in society and exerted considerable influence upon the Ottoman economy. Therefore “drastic measures” of extermination of the Greek element had been planned by the Turkish government long before—and were put into practice after 1908, when the party of “Young Turks” came into power and advanced the slogan of “Turkey for the Turks.” In September 1911, the participants of the Young Turks conference in Thessaloniki openly discussed the issue of extermination of the ethnic minorities (especially Christians) in Turkey, the most important of which were Greeks and Armenians.

On July 24th, 1909, the German Ambassador Wangenheim, writing to German Chancellor von Bulow, quoted the Turkish Prime Minister Sefker Pasha: “The Turks have decided upon a war of extermination against their Christian subjects.”

The martyrdom of the Pontian people began in 1914, when Turkey entered WWI as an ally of Germany. Under the pretext of being “politically unreliable,” a great number of Pontian men from 18 to 50 years old were convoyed to the so-called “labor battalions” (“amele taburu”) far inland. These “battalions” were in fact concentration camps, where people were forced to work under inhuman conditions, almost without food, water or medical care. For a slightest fault, any worker could be shot dead by the guards. The “amele taburu” became a common grave for thousands of Pontians, as well as other Christian men.

But, contrary to the expectations of the Young Turks, the repressions did not break the spirit of the Pontians—on the contrary, they prompted the Pontian patriots to drastic actions. Many men of Pontus left their homes and formed guerilla troops in the mountains, while among the Pontian intellectuals of the Caucasus (which at that time belonged almost entirely to Russia) the decision to establish an independent Pontian Republic finally matured. Besides the guerilla troops, Pontians also hoped to get help from the Russian Empire, which was engaged in operations against Turkey, as a German ally.

In 1916, the Russian army entered Trebizond. A few days earlier, the Turkish governor Mehmet Djemal Azmi officially handed the city over to Bishop Chrysanthos, with the following words: “Once we took Trebizond from the Greeks, and now we are giving it back.” When Russian troops approached the city, they were welcomed by the Bishop himself and other inhabitants of Trebizond, who carried flowers. Everyone thought that the centuries-old Pontian dreams of freedom were finally coming true.

But the extremely difficult situation at the Austrian-German front hindered the Russians from advancing inland, while the Greek guerillas did not yet possess enough forces and weapons for independent struggle. Therefore, while the Russian troops were in the Trebizond region, the Young Turks government cruelly dealt with the inhabitants of the Pontian territories that still remained under the Turkish control: the Pontians were now officially declared “traitors” and “Russian accomplices.” According to the government plan, all the urban male population of Pontus were to be put to death, and the rest deported inland. This plan was put into practice immediately.

Here is just a little example of the vast documentary evidence of that time: “The entire Greek population of Sinope and the coastal region of the county of Kastanome has been exiled. Exile and extermination in Turkish are the same, for whoever is not murdered, will die from hunger or illness.” (Herr Kuchhoff, German consul in Amisoss in a despatch to Berlin, July 16, 1916).

“On November 26th, Rafet Bey told me: ‘We must finish off the Greeks as we did with the Armenians’... On November 28th, Rafet Bey told me: ‘Today, I sent squads to the interior to kill every Greek on sight.’ I fear for the elimination of the entire Greek population and a repeat of what occurred last year—referring to the Armenian Genocide.” (Herr Kwiatkowski, Austro-Hungarian consul in Amisoss to Baron von Burian, Foreign Minister of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, November 30, 1916).

Pontian Greeks—women, children, and elderly people—were evicted from their houses in 24 hours, not being allowed to take with them anything of their property, and in long columns, under armed convoy, were marched far inland. The deserted villages were plundered and burnt—often before the very eyes of the evicted. On the deportation march, people were treated with utmost cruelty: they received little food, were forced to march forward for hours, days on end, without rest, over the wilderness, under the rain and the snow, so that many of them, unable to endure the hardships, dropped dead from exhaustion and illnesses.

The convoy men raped women and young girls, shot people for the slightest reason, and sometimes without a reason at all. Most of the deported died on the way, but even those who survived the deportation march found themselves in no better situation—the places of destination turned out to be real “white death” camps. In one such place, the village of Pirk, the deported inhabitants of the city of Tripoli were kept. According to the reports of the survivors, out of 13,000 Pontians who had been sent to Pirk, only 800 survived.

In 1917, the October revolution took place in Russia, and power was seized by the Bolsheviks. Immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Russian troops left Trebizond, abandoning its people to the wrath of the Turks. The Turkish army and the “chet” (criminal gangs, unofficially

encouraged by the Turkish government) poured into the city and the surrounding villages, robbing and killing. To escape death, many Pontian families of eastern Pontus fled to the Caucasus.

But the struggle for independence, once started, could not be stopped. On the Russian territory, in the city of Rostov, the local Pontian activists formed the Central Pontian Committee; people donated money and weapons for the struggle, while Constantine Constantinides was sending proclamations from Marseille to the inhabitants of Pontus and the leaders of the European states.

In the meantime, the guerrilla resistance movement in the mountains of Pontus gathered force. The regions of Pafra, Sanda, and Ordu became the main centres of the struggle; soon guerrilla troops appeared in Trebizond and Kars, too. The Pontian palikare (warriors) of the Resistance fought bravely: their deeds became legends. The success of the movement was also favoured by the fact that the troops were headed by leaders of great experience and talent. In the past, some of them had served as officers in the Russian Caucasian army, and had taken part in many battles; for example, Vassil-aga had received a gilded sword from Tsar Nicholas II for his courage. As a leader of Pontian guerrilla troops, Vassil-aga became so famous for his valor and military talent, that often his name alone was enough to put a Turkish detachment to flight.

In 1919, only a year after the end of the World War I, the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922 began. The Greek advance in Asia Minor gave rise to the next stage of extermination of the Pontians—all of them were outlawed. All the fury of the Turks fell upon those who could not put up a resistance: the civilian population of Pontian cities and villages. Unprecedented atrocities—robberies, murders, rapes—started throughout Pontus.

Whole Greek families were shut in churches and schools and burnt alive—for example, in the city of Pafra 6,000 people, mostly women and children, were destroyed in this manner. Of those inhabitants of Pafra who escaped death by fire, about 90% (22,000) were slaughtered; all women and even little girls were raped by Turkish soldiers before being killed, while babies were disposed of by crushing their heads against walls. In the city of Amaseia and the neighbouring villages, 134,000 Pontians out of 180,000 were slaughtered; in the city of Mertzifunda, all the inhabitants were killed; in Tripoli, Kerasounda, Ordu, and many other places almost the entire male population was destroyed... And these facts are but a small part of what was happening throughout Pontus at that time.

The mass deportations continued now on a larger scale and with greater cruelty. Here is, for example, the testimony of Maria Katsidou-Simeonidou, one of the few survivors of those terrible times: "I was born in Mourasoul village, Sevasteia/Sivas district, on August 15th, 1914. I remember the deportations well. In 1918, I was about four years old, when

one day I saw my father in the village square. I ran to him and asked him for the pie he brought me every day from the family-owned mill. He replied: 'O my child, the Turks are going to kill me and you will not see me again.' He told me to tell my mother to prepare his clothes and some food for him. That was the last time we saw him. They killed him along with another ten men.

I remember another time when a Turk warned our village, saying that all the young men should leave because the next day, Topal Osman would be coming. Indeed, those that departed, were saved. They still killed fifteen men, including the teacher, the village president and the priest. Topal Osman had caught three hundred and fifty men from neighboring villages. He had them bound, murdered and thrown into the river that ran through our village. I still remember the echo of the shots. They were hauling the bodies by ox-cart for nine days to bury them. Most of them were unrecognizable, as their heads had been cut off.

In 1920, around Easter, the Turkish Army came and told us to take with us everything we could. We loaded up the animals, but the saddle-bags tore open and most of us were left without food. On the deportation march, the Turkish guards would rape the women. In the Teloukta area, about half our group was lost in a snow storm. From there, they took us to a place without water, Sous-Yiazousou; many died of thirst. Soon afterwards, as we passed a river, all of us threw ourselves at the water; people fell over each other in the rush; many drowned. We reached Phiratrima, which was a Kurdish area and they left us at a village near a bridge. It was here that a pregnant girl gave birth, to twins. The Turks cut the newborns in two and tossed them in the river. On the riverbank, they killed many more of the group..."

The Pontians of the Caucasus, who had access to means of communication, were calling to the leaders of the European states for help. But Greece was preoccupied by political wrangles, as well as by the failures on the Anatolian front; Great Britain occupied a "neutral" (de facto anti-Greek) position, while the rest of the "great powers" openly opposed the interests of the Pontian people. The only hope of the civilian population of Pontus was now the guerilla Resistance. The guerillas were still fighting heroically, but even they, having been left completely without support and lacking even the possibility of being supplied weapons (while the Turkish army of Kemal constantly received money and weapons from the Bolsheviks), could not change the course of the war. It was practically impossible to defend the independence of Pontus at the time when its inhabitants were facing the danger of total extermination. The chief goal of the guerillas was now to save their people from death: they fought against the Turkish army for the life of Pontian Christians and conveyed the refugees outside Pontus. Over 135,000 Pontians who found refuge in the Caucasus region and over 400,000 evacuated to Greece owe their lives to this heroic resistance of the guerillas.

On July 24th, 1923, a year after the defeat of Greece in the war, a peace treaty was signed between Turkey and Greece, which included the convention for the exchange of populations. In accordance with this convention, the remaining Greek population of Pontus was deported to Greece.

This eviction from their homeland did not affect the Muslim Greeks of Oflu, who were considered “co-religionists” by the Turks and therefore escaped persecutions, as well as those few families who managed to pass themselves off as “Turks.” These people had to lead a double existence of “Crypto-Greeks” ever since, finding themselves in an even more difficult position than other Crypto-Christians. On the whole, according to the estimations of contemporary official sources and modern historians, about 350,000 Pontians were slaughtered by the Turks between 1914 and 1923. The survivors were expelled from their homeland and live in exile to this day.

Nowadays, compact groups of Pontians live in the Caucasus (Southern Russia, Georgia, Armenia) and northern Greece (the provinces of Macedonia and Western Thrace). A considerably large Pontian diaspora exists in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Germany, Australia, Canada, and USA; Pontian communities can be found in many other countries around the world.

In Pontus itself, according to Turkish sources, about 300,000 Muslim Greeks live today; approximately 75,000 of them still retain Pontian language and customs (as had been mentioned above, many of these people are Crypto-Christians). One can say with certainty that “Crypto-Greeks” also exist in Turkey, although their numbers, for evident reasons, cannot be estimated. Thus, the total number of indigenous population of Pontus still living in the territory of Turkey approaches several hundreds of thousands of people.

Conclusion

At present, the Pontian Genocide is officially recognized only by Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, Sweden, and the American State of New York. This is not due to any doubts as to the historical fact of extermination of the Pontian people; after all, official documents of those times and testimonies of eye-witnesses of various nationalities provide sufficient evidence for the reality of the genocide. It is instead due to insufficient awareness and (which is even more important) insufficient interest of the international community. The issue of international recognition of the Pontian Genocide has been raised for the first time on the 27th September 2006, at a meeting of the EU Parliament. At present, May 19th has been established as Commemoration day of the Pontian Genocide.

Pontians around the world do not lose hope of restoring historical and human justice. And this means that there is also hope for the Pontian people to return to the land of their ancestors. The activity of Pontian organizations under the slogan “Pontus is alive!” (Ζεῖ ὁ Πόντος!) has this return as a goal. As a Pontian folk song says, “our people will flourish and bear fruit once again.”

THROUGH ASCETICISM, MAN BECOMES IMMATERIAL

Source: Translation from the Book: “Family Life” by Elder Paisios the Athonite, published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist – Souroti, Greece – 2002. Translated by Fr. Luke Hartung – The Dalles, Oregon, U.S.A.



—Geronda, you once had told us: “A blockade is needed in spiritual warfare.” What did you mean?

—In a war they try to blockade the enemy. They surround him, confine him within the city walls, and deprive him of food. Then they cut off his water: for if the enemy is left without basic supplies and ammunition, he will be forced to surrender.

Therefore, I mean to say that in the same way, with fasting and vigil, the devil is disarmed and retreats. *Through fasting, vigil, and prayer, thou didst receive heavenly gifts...*, as the hymn says.

Through asceticism man becomes immaterial. Obviously, one aspiring to a higher, spiritual goal must abstain. If someone practices abstinence in order to lose weight, he is only caring for the well-being of his body. Then his asceticism resembles yoga. Unfortunately, the issue of asceticism has been cast aside even by people of the Church. They say, “I need to eat my food, to enjoy this and that, for God created everything for us.” Do you know what an archimandrite told me once at a dinner he prepared for us? I couldn’t force myself to eat any more because of how much I’d already eaten. He noticed and said, *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.* (1 Cor 3:17)

“Perhaps you have it backwards?” I told the archimandrite. “Is this referring to asceticism or debauchery? The passage refers to those who destroy, who obliterate the temple of God with debauchery or with intemperance; it doesn’t refer to those who practice asceticism out of love for God.” And look: he then proceeded to comfort his own thoughts by saying, “We need to eat, so as not to destroy the temple of God”!

Someone else, after a visit to a certain monastery, told me, “I went to a monastery and the monks were sick from all their fasting. Their vats of oil were untouched. Father, they practice fasting and vigil!”

What can you say? Such people don’t want to suffer at all. They eat their food, their fruit, their sweets, and afterwards, so as to justify themselves, they reproach those who practice asceticism. They haven’t experienced the spiritual joy of asceticism. Someone else will tell you, “I need to drink this much milk. I’ll fast during Great Lent, but afterwards I’ll make up for it, because I need a lot of calcium.” It’s not that his body

needs it, but that he feels entitled to it; his thoughts are thus put at ease that it's OK, that it's not a sin.

Goodness, even thinking in this way is a sin. How far will a man's logic go? He does fine during the fasting periods prescribed by the Church, but don't lament what you are deprived of during the fast. Tell me, how can the Holy Spirit remain after such things?

See what *filotimo* ("responsive gratefulness") some family men have! Once, a very simple man with nine children went to confess. His spiritual father then told him to commune. "Me? How can I commune?" He said. "We put a little oil on our food on strict fast days because my children and I work." "How many children do you have?" His spiritual father asked him. "Nine." "How much oil do you put on the food?" "Two spoonfuls." "And how much of these two spoonfuls is your portion my poor child?" His spiritual father replied. "Now go and commune!" Between the eleven of them they ate only two spoonfuls of oil, and his thoughts troubled him!

I know a layman who became holy with the asceticism he practiced. Yes, not many years ago there was a man and his son who worked for years on the Holy Mountain. Later, a good job opportunity presented itself back in his homeland, and the man decided to leave and take his son with him so that the entire family could be together again. His son, however, had been greatly affected by the ascetic life of the monks; and remembering the worldly life with its many pressures, he didn't want to follow his father and return to the world.

"Father, since you have other children," he told him, "leave just one of them in the Garden of the Panaghia." Because he insisted, his father was forced to leave him. That little warrior was illiterate, but he was very softhearted and had much *filotimo* and simplicity. He considered himself totally unworthy to become a monk because he thought that he wouldn't be able to fulfill his monastic duties. So he found a small *kalyvi* (hut) which had been used in the past for keeping animals.

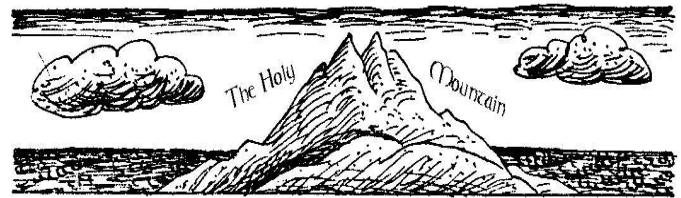
He completely covered the windows and door with rocks and ferns—all except for a small, round opening for squeezing in and out. He could only close the door from inside by using a raggedy old blanket he had found. He didn't even light a fire. The birds' nests were thus in better shape than his "nest," and the dens of the forest animals were nicer than his den. But his soul had a joy that not even those who live in wealthy palaces had; for he was struggling for Christ, and Christ was with him—not only in his *kalyvi*, but within his spiritual house, in his body and his heart. Because of this he lived in Paradise.

From time to time he would leave his little nest and visit the monastic cells where the fathers were doing work in the gardens. He would help, and they would give him a little bit of dry rusk and a few olives. But if they wouldn't let him

work he would refuse these blessings. He always felt that he should repay them for the blessings with double the work. Of course, only God knew his spiritual life; for he lived in obscurity, in a simple way and unobtrusively.

From one incident in his life which became known to me, however, one is able to learn a great deal: Once he passed by one of the monasteries and asked when Great Lent started—even though for him the whole year was basically Great Lent. Afterwards he went and shut himself up in his nest. About three months passed without him realizing it. Then one day he left and went to a monastery to ask if it was Pascha yet. He went in for the service, communed at Divine Liturgy, and afterwards went with the fathers to *trapeza*. At *trapeza* he saw the red eggs—for it was the *Apodosis* (Leavetaking) of Pascha—and he was taken aback. He asked a brother, "My goodness, is it already Pascha?" "What do you mean Pascha?" Answered the brother. "Tomorrow is Ascension!"

In other words, he had fasted all of Great Lent plus the forty days until Ascension! In this same way he struggled until the hour of his death. A hunter found him two months after he had died, and informed the police and a doctor. The doctor told me, "Not only did he not smell, but on the contrary, he exuded a heavenly fragrance."



Because modern conveniences have exceeded all bounds, they have become inconveniences. Machines have multiplied, and so have distractions; man has been turned into a machine. All kinds of machines and inventions now rule over man. This is why human hearts too are turning into steel. All of these modern comforts make the cultivation of conscience in people difficult.

In the old days, people used to work with animals and were more compassionate. If you overloaded an animal, and the poor thing knelt down, you felt bad for it. If it was hungry and looked at you sniveling, it broke your heart. I remember when a cow of ours fell ill, we suffered with it; because we considered it a member of the family. Today, people own lots of devices made of steel, but - unfortunately - even their own hearts have turned to steel.

Is the equipment broke? It is welded together. Is the car not running? It is taken to the repair shop. If it cannot be fixed, then throw it away; they have no feelings for it. After all, it is just a piece of iron. The heart does not take part in these decisions, and this is how selfishness and pride find fertile ground and take root.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

Τὸ «Ἐχειν» καὶ τὸ «Εἶναι»

Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Σύρου κ. Δωροθέου, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΑ ΘΕΜΑΤΑ», τεύχος 46, Αὐγουστος 2012.

Καθώς, ἐπὶ δεκαετίες, εἴχαμε ταυτισθεῖ μὲ τὴν ψευδαίσθηση τῆς αὐτάρκειας καὶ τὴν αὐταπάτη τῆς μόνιμης εὐημερίας, ἡ ἐπέλαση τῶν παρόντων δύσκολων καιρῶν ἀνέτρεψε βίαια καὶ ἀπτόμα τις βεβαιότητες καὶ τις σταθερότητες τῆς ζωῆς μας καὶ κλόνησε τὴν αἴσθηση τῆς ἀσφάλειας καὶ τῆς διαρκοῦς εὐημερίας, μέσα στὴν ὁποία ἐγκλωβισμένοι ζούσαμε τὴ φενάκη μίας ἀληθινὰ νιτσεικῆς παντοδυναμίας.

Ἀπὸ τὴ μία μέρα στὴν ἄλλη, ὅλα ἄλλαξαν! Ἡ ἀνασφάλεια, τὸ ἄγχος καὶ ὁ φόβος μίας ἐπερχόμενης ἀπώλειας, ἡ ἀβεβαιότητα γιὰ τὸ σήμερον καὶ ἡ ἀγωνία γιὰ τὸ αὔριο, μᾶς δημιουργοῦν ἓνα μεγάλο ὑπαρξιακὸ κενό, πὸν μεταφράζεται σὲ παθητικότητα, ἀπελπισία καὶ μειωμένη αἴσθηση ἐλέγχου τῆς ζωῆς, ἐνῶ ἐκδηλώνεται συχνὰ μὲ τάσεις καὶ πράξεις αὐτοκαταστροφῆς.

Αἰσθανόμαστε ὅτι ἡ ζωὴ ἔχει χάσει τὸ νόημα, τὸ περιεχόμενο, τὸ σκοπὸ καὶ τὴν ὁμορφιά της, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ πολλοί, σὲ ἀνησυχητικὸ βαθμὸ πολλοὶ συνέλληνες, ἐπιλέγουν συνειδητὰ τὴν ἄρνησή της καὶ καταφεύγουν στὴν αὐτοκτονία, μία ἐνέργεια ἡ ὁποία ἔρχεται σὲ πλήρη ἀντίθεση ὄχι μόνον μὲ τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὸ νόμο τῆς φύσης, τὸ ἔνστικτο τῆς ἐπιβίωσης...

Δὲν εἶναι, μάλιστα, λίγοι καὶ ἐκεῖνοι πού, ἀντὶ νὰ προσεύχονται γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ὅπως πράττει ἡ Ἐκκλησία, θεωροῦν τὸ φαινόμενο τῶν αὐτοκτονιῶν «παράπλευρη ἀπώλεια» τῆς οἰκονομικῆς συγκυρίας, δικαιολογημένη, ἀν ὄχι καὶ «ἀξιομίμητη» ἔμπρακτη διαμαρτυρία γιὰ τὴν ἐπικρατοῦσα ἀδιέξοδη, πρὸς τὸ παρόν, κατάσταση καὶ τοὺς πραγματικοὺς ἢ ὄχι ὑπευθύνους γι' αὐτήν, ἐνῶ κάνουν ἀναλύσεις καὶ καταγράφουν στατιστικῆς, ἐνίοτε δὲ ἡρωοποιοῦν τοὺς κατὰ τὴν ἄποψή τους «ιδανικοὺς αὐτοχειρες». Ἄλλη μία ἀπόδειξη ὅτι ἡ παροῦσα κρίση δὲν εἶναι τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα, ἀλλὰ ἡ αἰτία μίας πολύχρονης ἀλλοτριώσεως, πὸν ἐπῆλθε στὸν ψυχισμὸ καὶ τὴ νοοτροπία τῶν Ἑλλήνων, οἱ ὁποῖοι, μαγεμένοι ἀπὸ τὴν Κίρρη τῆς ὑλικῆς εὐδαιμονίας, ταύτισαν τὸ «ἔχειν» μὲ τὸ «εἶναι».

Ἀφοῦ ἐπὶ χρόνια ἀφυδατώσαμε τὶς ψυχές μας ἀπὸ κάθε ἰδανικὸ, ἀφοῦ συστηματικὰ πριονίσαμε τὸ κλαδὶ πὸν μᾶς συνέδεε μὲ τὸ ζωοπάρχο δέντρο τῆς

Ἑλληνορθόδοξης παράδοσής μας, ἀφοῦ δυσφημίσαμε κάθε ἀξία καὶ ἀπορρίψαμε κάθε τί τὸ πνευματικὸ, ἡ ζωὴ μας ἔχασε τὸ ἀληθινὸ τῆς νόημα καὶ διαστράφηκε ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς ὑπαρξῆς μας.

Ἐπάρχομε μόνον ἀν ἔχομε καὶ ἀξίζει νὰ ὑπάρχομε μόνον ἀν ἀποκτοῦμε... Ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμή, λοιπόν, πὸν δὲν «ἔχομε» ἢ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ἀποκτήσουμε περισσότερο, ἢ χάνομε αὐτὰ πὸν ἔχομε, γιὰ τὴν ὑπάρχομε;

Ἔτσι, ἡ αὐτοκτονία φαντάζει σὰν φυσιολογικὴ ἀντίδραση, ἀν ὄχι καὶ σὰν πράξη ἀξιοπρέπειας ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου, ὁ ὁποῖος προτιμᾷ νὰ πεθάνει παρὰ νὰ στερηθεῖ, ὄχι τὰ ἀναγκαῖα, ἀλλὰ τὰ περιττά!...

Ἄλλη μία ἀπόδειξη τῆς ἐπελθούσης ἀνατροπῆς τῆς κλίμακας τῶν ἀξιῶν!

Ἄλλοτε θυσιάζαμε τὴ ζωὴ μας γιὰ ιδέες καὶ ἰδανικά, γιὰ τὸ Θεό, τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ τὸ συνάνθρωπο! Σήμερα, θυσιάζομε τὴ ζωὴ μας γιὰ τὰ χρήματα! Στὴ γνωστὴ ἀπειλὴ τῶν ληστῶν «τὰ λεφτὰ σου ἢ τὴ ζωὴ σου», ἀπαντᾶμε «τὴ ζωὴ μου»!

Εἶναι γεγονός, καὶ κανεὶς δὲν τὸ ἀμφισβητεῖ, ὅτι ζοῦμε σὲ καιροὺς δυσχεῖμερους καὶ μέρες χαλεπές, ἀλλὰ ὄχι πρωτόγνωρες καὶ μοναδικές! Ἡ σύγκριση, μάλιστα, τῆς σημερινῆς κατάστασης μὲ τὴν περίοδο τῆς Κατοχῆς εἶναι συντριπτικὰ καταλυτικὴ καὶ ἔντονα ἀποκαλυπτικὴ!

Οἱ τότε Ἕλληνες δὲν αὐτοκτονοῦσαν οὔτε ἐπειδὴ δὲν εἶχαν νὰ φάνε, οὔτε ἐπειδὴ πέθαιναν κυριολεκτικὰ τὰ παιδιά τους ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα, οὔτε ἐπειδὴ ζοῦσαν καθημερινὰ τὴ βία καὶ τὸ θάνατο καὶ τὴν καταπίεση τοῦ κατακτητῆ. Ἀντίθετα, ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ δεινὰ χαλύβδωναν τὴν ἀποφασιστικότητά τους, ἐνίσχυαν τὴν ἀγωνιστικότητά τους καὶ γιγάντωναν τὴ θέλησή τους νὰ ἀγωνιστοῦν καὶ νὰ θυσιαστοῦν γιὰ ἓνα καλύτερο μέλλον, καλύτερο ποιοτικὰ, ὄχι ποσοτικὰ!

Ἡ ἀδυναμία νὰ πληρώσουμε τὰ χρέη μας καὶ ἡ στέρηση λίγων ἢ πολλῶν ἀπὸ τὶς θεωρούμενες ἀπαραίτητες, ἀλλὰ στὴν οὐσία περιττές, ἀνέσεις μας, μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι λόγος γιὰ ἀπελπισία, κατάθλιψη, ἀπομόνωση, γκρίνια, ἀπαισιοδοξία, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι λόγος αὐτοκτονίας!

Ἄν πρέπει κάτι νὰ «σκοτώσουμε» καὶ νὰ ἀρνηθοῦμε εἶναι τὸ σύστημα ἀξιῶν, βάσει τοῦ ὁποῖου ἀξιολογούσαμε μέχρι σήμερον τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας καὶ τὸ περιβάλλον μας! Νὰ μμηθοῦμε τὴ σωτηριώδη μετάνοια τοῦ Πέτρου, ὄχι τὴν ἄσκοπη μεταμέλεια τοῦ Ἰούδα, ὁ ὁποῖος «μεταμεληθεὶς ἀπήγγατο»...



Κι' ἂν αισθανόμαστε «γυμνοὶ» ἀπὸ ὑλικά ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἀνέσεις, ἂν μᾶς πνίγουν τὰ χρέη καὶ οἱ ὑποχρεώσεις, ἄς στρέψουμε τὸ βλέμμα μας πρὸς τὸ Χριστό!

Πάνω στὸ Σταυρὸ δὲν ἔχει ἀπολύτως τίποτε! Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ ἱματισμὸς Του γίνεται ἀντικείμενο κληρώσεως τῶν Ρωμαίων στρατιωτῶν. Κι ὅμως τὴ στιγμή ἀκριβῶς αὐτὴ ἀποκαλύπτεται τὸ «εἶναι» στὴν πιὸ σημαντικὴ του ἐκδήλωση, στὴν προσφορὰ τῆς θυσίας καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης.

Ἴσως, ἔφτασε καὶ γιὰ τὸν καθένα μας ἡ προσωπικὴ του ὥρα, νὰ χάσουμε τὰ περιττὰ καὶ νὰ κερδίσουμε τὰ ἀναγκαῖα, νὰ χάσουμε τὰ πράγματα καὶ νὰ κερδίσουμε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, νὰ χάσουμε τὸν κόσμον καὶ νὰ κερδίσουμε τὴν ψυχὴ μας, νὰ ζήσουμε, μὲ λίγα λόγια, γνήσια καὶ ἀληθινά!

† Ὁ Σύρον Δωρόθεος Β΄



Αγωνίσου μὲ ὅλη τὴν δύναμη τῆς ψυχῆς σου νὰ κρατᾶς καθαρὸ τὸν νοῦ σου τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ νὰ συγκεντρώνεις ὅλο σου τὸν λογισμό στὴν κατανόηση τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς εὐχῆς ποὺ κάνει.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης

Ἡκακία ποὺ γίνεται δεκτὴ μὲ τὸ λογισμό, κάνει τὴν καρδιὰ θυμώδη καὶ ἀπειλητικὴ, ἐνῶ ὅταν πολεμηθεῖ μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα προκαλεῖ μετάνοια καὶ συντριβή.

Ἀββᾶς Μάρκος

Με τὴν ἀνάμνηση τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ συγκέντρωσε τὸν σκορπισμένο σου νοῦ.

Ἅγιος Φιλόθεος ὁ Σιναΐτης

Ἡπροσευχὴ εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὄπλο, χωρὶς τὸ ὁποῖο ὅ,τιδήποτε κι ἂν κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὁσοδήποτε κι ἂν ἀγωνισθεῖ, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κατορθώσει τίποτε. Ὅλα ὅσα κάνει, ἐπιδιώκει, καὶ ἐργάζεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, κατευοδώνονται καὶ πραγματοποιοῦνται μὲ τὴ χάρη καὶ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ

π. Εὐσέβιος Μαθόπουλος

Ἡκαρδιακὴ προσευχὴ βοηθάει ὄχι μόνο τοὺς βοηθάει νὰ ἔρθει ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ καλοσύνη. Ὅταν ἐρχόμαστε στὴν θέση τοῦ ἄλλου, ἐρχεται φυσιολογικὰ ἡ ἀγάπη, ὁ πόνος, ἡ ταπείνωση, ἡ εὐγνωμοσύνη μας στὸν Θεὸ μὲ τὴν συνεχή δοξολογία, καὶ τότε ἡ προσευχὴ γιὰ τὸν συνάνθρωπό μας γίνεται εὐπρόσδεκτη ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τὸν βοηθάει»

Γέροντας Παΐσιος

Ὁ «θεὸς» Σίβα ὡς Προστάτης τοῦ Ἐρευνητικοῦ Κέντρου CERN...

Φυσικά «πιστεύουν» σέ... κάτι, ἀρκεῖ ΝΑΜΗΝΕΙΝΑΙ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ἀλλὰ ἓνας νεοεποχίτικος ἀχταρμάς, διανθισμένος μὲ ἀνατολίτικες μυστηριακὲς «δοξασίες», ποὺ χρησιμεύουν ἀφάνταστα στὴν ΠΑΝΘΡΗΣΚΕΙΑ ποὺ ἐπιδιώκουν! Τοὺς ξεμπροστιάζει ὁ «Ὀρθόδοξος Τύπος».



Ὅποιος ἀμφιβάλλει ὅτι καὶ ἡ ἐπιστήμη ἀκόμη ἔχει ἐπιστρατευτεῖ νὰ στηρίξει καὶ νὰ διαδώσει τὸν ἀποκρυφισμὸ τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς», ἄς προσέξει τὸ ἔξης:

Πολλὸς λόγος ἔγινε τελευταία γιὰ τὸ Εὐρωπαϊκὸ Κέντρο Ἐρευνῶν Μοριακῆς Φυσικῆς, στὴ Γενεύη, τὸ περίφημο CERN καὶ τὰ πορίσματα τῶν ἐρευνῶν του, γιὰ τὸ λεγόμενο σωματίδιο τοῦ Χίγκς.

Γιὰ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ δὲ δόθηκε σημασία ἦταν ἡ ἐξωτερικὴ «διακόσμηση» τοῦ κέντρου. Στήθηκε ἓνα δίμετρο ἄγαλμα τοῦ Ἰνδουιστικοῦ «θεοῦ» Σίβα Νάταρατζ, μὲ τὴ γνωστὴ παράσταση τοῦ «συμπαντικοῦ χοροῦ»! Γιὰ ὅσους δὲ γνωρίζουν τὸν ἐν λόγω «θεό», τοὺς πληροφοροῦμε ὅτι ἀνήκει στὸ πάνθεο τοῦ Ἰνδουισμού καὶ λατρεύεται ὡς ὁ «θεὸς» τῆς καταστροφῆς! Ἐπίσης πληροφοροῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας ὅτι ὁ Ἰνδουισμὸς εἶναι ἡ κύρια πηγὴ ἀποκρυφισμοῦ τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς». Ὁ «συμπαντικὸς χορὸς» τοῦ Σίβα, παραπέμπει ἀβίαστα στὶς περὶ κόσμου δοξασίες τῆς, καθ' ὅτι διδάσκει τὴν ἀϊδιότητα, δηλαδή τὴν αἰωνιότητα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὴν συνεχή του ἀνακύκλωση. Αὐτὸ λοιπὸν τὸ νεοεποχίτικο σύμβολο δὲ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ τοποθετηθεῖ σὲ πιὸ περίοπτη θέση ἀπὸ τὸν περίβολο τοῦ παραπάνω ἐρευνητικοῦ κέντρου, διότι τὰ φῶτα τῆς δημοσιότητας ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου εἶναι στραμμένα σ' αὐτό!

Ἡ «διακοσμητικὴ» ἐπιλογή τοῦ ψευδοθεοῦ Σίβα γιὰ τὴν εἴσοδο τοῦ Κέντρου, δὲν εἶναι λοιπὸν καθόλου τυχαία. Ἀνησυχοῦμε βαθύτατα, διότι δὲν ἔμεινε τομέας, ποὺ νὰ μὴ ἔχει ταχθεῖ στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ σύγχρονου ἀποκρυφισμοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι στὴν οὐσία ἐπέκταση καὶ ἐδραίωση τοῦ κράτους τοῦ διαβόλου. Ἄς εἴμαστε προετοιμασμένοι καὶ γιὰ ἄλλες «μεγαλύτερες» ἐκπλήξεις!



Ἄν δὲν ἔχεις ταπείνωση πνευματικὴ ἢ προσευχὴ πνευματικὴ, ἀπόκτησε ἔστω σωματικὴ. Κι ἀπ' αὐτὴν θὰ σοῦ ἔρθει καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ.

Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸ

Ὁμολογία Ἐναντι τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ

Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀθωνίτου. Ἡ τοιαύτη σοφή καὶ διακριτικὴ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ Γέροντος Παΐσιου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου ἐστάλη στὸν π. Χαράλαμμο Βασιλόπουλο τὸ 1969.

Ἐν Ἁγίῳ Ὄρει τῆ 23ῃ Ἰανουαρίου 1969
Σεβαστὲ πάτερ Χαράλαμπε.

Ἐπειδὴ βλέπω τὸν μέγαν σάλον ποὺ γίνεται εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν μας, ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν διαφορῶν φιλενωτικῶν κινήσεων καὶ τῶν ἐπαφῶν τοῦ Πατριάρχου μετὰ τοῦ Πάπα, ἐπόνεσα καὶ ἐγὼ σὰν τέκνον Της καὶ ἐθεώρησα καλόν, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τίς προσευχῆς μου, νὰ στείλω καὶ ἓνα μικρὸ κομματάκι κλωστή (ποὺ ἔχω σὰν φτωχὸς μοναχός), διὰ νὰ χρησιμοποιηθῆ καὶ αὐτό, ἔστω καὶ γιὰ μία βελονιά, διὰ τὸ πολυκομματιασμένο φόρεμα τῆς Μητέρας μας. Πιστεύω ὅτι θὰ κάμετε ἀγάπην καὶ θὰ τὸ χρησιμοποιήσετε διὰ μέσου τοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ σας φύλλου. Σὰς εὐχαριστῶ.

Θὰ ἤθελα νὰ ζητήσω συγγνώμην ἐν πρώτοις ἀπ' ὅλους, ποὺ τολμῶ νὰ γράψω κάτι, ἐνῶ δὲν εἶμαι οὔτε ἅγιος, οὔτε θεολόγος. Φαντάζομαι ὅτι θὰ μὲ καταλάβουν ὅλοι, ὅτι τὰ γραφόμενά μου δὲν εἶναι τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ ἓνας βαθύς μου πόνος διὰ τὴν γραμμὴν καὶ κοσμικὴν ἀγάπην, δυστυχῶς, τοῦ πατέρα μας κ. Ἀθηναγόρα. Ὅπως φαίνεται, ἀγάπησε μίαν ἄλλην γυναῖκα, μοντέρνα, ποὺ λέγεται Παπικὴ Ἐκκλησία, διότι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Μητέρα μας δὲν τοῦ κάμνει καμμίαν ἐντύπωσι, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι πολὺ σεμνή. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη, ποὺ ἀκούσθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Πόλι, βρῆκε ἀπήχησι σὲ πολλὰ παιδιά του, ποὺ τὴν ζοῦν εἰς τὰς πόλεις. Ἄλλωστε αὐτὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας: ἡ οἰκογένεια νὰ χάσῃ τὸ ἱερὸ νόημά της ἀπὸ τέτοιου εἴδους ἀγάπης, ποὺ ὡς σκοπὸν ἔχουν τὴν διάλυσιν καὶ ὄχι τὴν ἔνωσιν.

Μὲ μία τέτοια περίπου κοσμικὴ ἀγάπη καὶ ὁ Πατριάρχης μας φθάνει στὴ Ρώμη. Ἐνῶ θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ δεῖξῃ ἀγάπην πρῶτα σὲ μᾶς τὰ παιδιά του καὶ στὴ Μητέρα μας Ἐκκλησία, αὐτός, δυστυχῶς, ἔστειλε τὴν ἀγάπην του πολὺ μακριά. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἦταν νὰ ἀναπαύσῃ μὲν ὅλα τὰ κοσμικὰ παιδιά, ποὺ ἀγαποῦν τὸν κόσμον καὶ ἔχουν τὴν κοσμικὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην, νὰ κατασκανδαλίσῃ ὅμως ὅλους ἐμᾶς, τὰ τέκνα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, μικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα, ποὺ ἔχουν φόβον Θεοῦ.

Μετὰ λύπης μου, ἀπὸ ὅσους φιλενωτικούς ἔχω γνωρίσει, δὲν εἶδα νὰ ἔχουν οὔτε ψίχα πνευματικὴ οὔτε φλοιό. Ξέρουν, ὅμως, νὰ ὀμιλοῦν γιὰ ἀγάπην

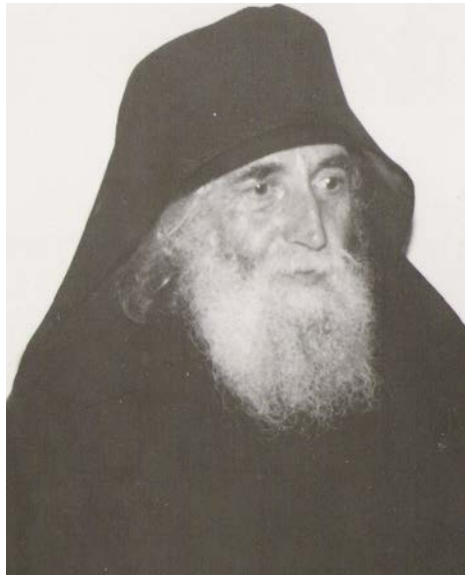
καὶ ἐνότητα, ἐνῶ οἱ ἴδιοι δὲν εἶναι ἐνωμένοι μὲ τὸν Θεόν, διότι δὲν τὸν ἔχουν ἀγαπήσει.

Θὰ ἤθελα νὰ παρακαλέσω θεομὰ ὅλους τοὺς φιλενωτικούς ἀδελφούς μας: Ἐπειδὴ τὸ θέμα τῆς ἐνώσεως τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν εἶναι κάτι τὸ πνευματικὸν καὶ ἀνάγκην ἔχουμε πνευματικῆς ἀγάπης, ἃς τὸ ἀφήσουμε σὲ αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἀγαπήσανε πολὺ τὸν Θεὸν καὶ εἶναι θεολόγοι, σὰν τοὺς Πατέρας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ ὄχι νομολόγοι, ποὺ προσφέρανε καὶ προσφέρουν ὀλόκληρον τὸν ἑαυτὸν τοὺς εἰς τὴν διακονίαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας (ἀντὶ μεγάλης λαμπάδας), τοὺς ὁποίους ἄναψε τὸ πῦρ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὄχι ὁ ἀναπτήρας τοῦ νεωκόρου. Ἄς γνωρίζωμεν ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχουν μόνον φυσικοὶ νόμοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πνευματικοί. Ἐπομένως, ἡ μέλλουσα ὀργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντιμετωπισθῆ μὲ συνεταιρισμὸν ἁμαρτωλῶν (διότι διπλὴν ὀργὴν θὰ λάβωμεν), ἀλλὰ μὲ μετάνοιαν καὶ τήρησιν τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Κυρίου.

Ἐπίσης, ἃς γνωρίσωμεν καλὰ ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία μας δὲν ἔχει καμμίαν ἔλλειψιν. Ἡ μόνη ἔλλειψις ποὺ παρουσιάζεται, εἶναι ἡ ἔλλειψις σοβαρῶν Ἱεραρχῶν καὶ Ποιμένων μὲ πατερικὲς ἀρχές. Εἶναι ὀλίγοι οἱ ἐκλεκτοί. Ὅμως, δὲν εἶναι ἀνησυχητικόν. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Αὐτὸς τὴν κυβερνάει δὲν εἶναι Ναός, ποὺ χτίζεται ἀπὸ πέτρες, ἄμμο καὶ ἀσβέστη ἀπὸ εὐσεβεῖς καὶ καταστρέφεται μὲ φωτιὰ βαρβάρων, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός. «Καὶ ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται»

ἐφ' ὃν δ' ἂν πέσῃ λικμήσει αὐτόν.» (Ματθ. 21:44). Ὁ Κύριος, ὅταν θὰ πρέπη, θὰ παρουσιάσῃ τοὺς Μάρκους τοὺς Εὐγενικούς καὶ τοὺς Γρηγόριους Παλαμάδες, διὰ νὰ συγκεντρώσουν ὅλα τὰ κατασκανδαλισμένα ἀδέλφια μας, διὰ νὰ ὁμολογήσουν τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Πίστιν, νὰ στερεώσουν τὴν Παράδοσιν καὶ νὰ δώσουν χαρὰν μεγάλην εἰς τὴν Μητέρα μας.

Εἰς τοὺς καιροὺς μας βλέπομεν ὅτι πολλὰ πιστὰ τέκνα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, μοναχοὶ καὶ λαϊκοί, ἔχουν, δυστυχῶς, ἀποσχισθῆ ἀπὸ αὐτὴν, ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν φιλενωτικῶν. Ἐχω τὴν γνώμην ὅτι δὲν εἶναι καθόλου καλὸν νὰ ἀποχωρίζωμεθα ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν κάθε φορὰ ποὺ θὰ πταίῃ ὁ Πατριάρχης. Ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ μέσα, κοντὰ στὴν Μητέρα Ἐκκλησία, ἔχει καθῆκον καὶ ὑποχρέωσι ὁ καθένας ν' ἀγωνίζεται μὲ τὸν τρόπον του. Τὸ νὰ διακόψῃ τὸ μνημόσυνον τοῦ Πατριάρχου, νὰ ἀποσχισθῆ καὶ νὰ δημιουργήσῃ ἰδικὴν του Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ νὰ ἐξακολουθῆ νὰ ὀμιλῇ



ύβριζοντας τὸν Πατριάρχη, αὐτό, νομίζω, εἶναι παράλογον.

Ἐὰν διὰ τὴν α΄ ἢ τὴν β΄ λοξοδρομησι τῶν κατὰ καιροὺς Πατριαρχῶν χωριζώμεθα καὶ κάνωμε δικές μας Ἐκκλησίες—Θεὸς φυλάξει—θὰ ξεπεράσωμε καὶ τοὺς Προτεστάντες ἀκόμη. Εὐκόλα χωρίζει κανεὶς καὶ δύσκολα ἐπιστρέφει.

Δυστυχῶς, ἔχουμε πολλὰς «ἐκκλησίες» στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Δημιουργήθηκαν εἴτε ἀπὸ μεγάλες ὁμάδες ἢ καὶ ἀπὸ ἓνα ἄτομο ἀκόμη. Ἐπειδὴ συνέβη στὸ καλύβι των νὰ ὑπάρχη καὶ ναὸς (ὁμιλῶ διὰ τὰ ἐν Ἁγίῳ Ὁρει συμβαίνοντα), ἐνόμισαν ὅτι μποροῦν νὰ κάνουν καὶ δική τους ἀνεξάρτητη Ἐκκλησία. Ἐὰν οἱ φιλενωτικοὶ δίνουν τὸ πρῶτο πλήγμα στὴν Ἐκκλησία, αὐτοί, οἱ ἀνωτέρω, δίνουν τὸ δεύτερο.

Ἄς εὐχηθοῦμε νὰ δώσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τὸν φωτισμὸν Του σὲ ὅλους μας καὶ εἰς τὸν Πατριάρχη μας κ. Ἀθηναγόραν, διὰ νὰ γίνῃ πρῶτον ἢ ἔνωσις αὐτῶν τῶν «ἐκκλησιῶν», νὰ πραγματοποιηθῇ ἡ γαλήνη ἀνάμεσα στὸ σκανδαλισμένο

Ὁρθόδοξο πλήρωμα, ἡ εἰρήνη καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη μεταξὺ τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ἀνατολικῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ κατόπιν ἄς γίνῃ σκέψις διὰ τὴν ἔνωσιν μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων «Ὁμολογιῶν», ἐὰν καὶ ἐφ' ὅσον εἰλικρινῶς ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ ἀσπασθοῦν τὸ Ὁρθόδοξον Δόγμα.

Θὰ ἤθελα ἀκόμη νὰ εἰπῶ ὅτι ὑπάρχει καὶ μία τρίτη μερίδα μέσα εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν μας. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι οἱ ἀδελφοί, ποὺ παραμένουν μὲν πιστὰ τέκνα Αὐτῆς, δὲν ἔχουν ὅμως συμφωνίαν πνευματικὴν ἀναμεταξὺ τους. Ἀσχολοῦνται μὲ τὴν κριτικὴν ὁ ἓνας τοῦ ἄλλου καὶ ὄχι διὰ τὸ γενικώτερον καλὸν τοῦ ἀγῶνος. Παρακολουθεῖ δὲ ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλον (περισσότερον ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸν του) εἰς τὸ τί θὰ εἰπῇ ἢ τί θὰ γράψῃ, διὰ νὰ τὸν κτυπήσῃ κατόπιν ἀλύπητα. Ἐνῶ ὁ ἴδιος ἂν ἔλεγε ἢ ἔγραφε τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα, θὰ τὸ ὑπεστήριζε καὶ μὲ πολλὰς μάλιστα μαρτυρίες τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς καὶ τῶν Πατέρων. Τὸ κακὸ ποὺ γίνεται εἶναι μεγάλο, διότι ἅφ' ἐνὸς μὲν ἀδικεῖ τὸν πλησίον του, ἅφ' ἑτέρου δὲ καὶ τὸν γκρεμίζει μπροστὰ στὰ μάτια τῶν ἄλλων πιστῶν. Πολλὰς φορὰς σπέρνει καὶ τὴν ἀπιστίαν σὲ ψυχὰς τῶν ἀδυνάτων, διότι τοὺς σκανδαλίζει.

Δυστυχῶς, μερικοὶ ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς ἔχουμε παράλογες ἀπαιτήσεις ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους. Θέλουμε οἱ ἄλλοι νὰ ἔχουν τὸν ἴδιο μὲ ἐμᾶς πνευματικὸν χαρακτήρα. Ὅταν κάποιος ἄλλος δὲν συμφωνῇ μὲ τὸν χαρακτήρα μας, δηλαδὴ ἢ εἶναι ὀλίγον ἐπιεικῆς ἢ ὀλίγον ὀξύς, ἀμέσως βγάζουμε τὸ συμπέρασμα ὅτι δὲν εἶναι πνευματικὸς ἄνθρωπος. Ὅλοι χρειάζονται εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Ὅλοι οἱ Πατέρες προσέφεραν τὰς

ὑπηρεσίας των εἰς Αὐτήν· καὶ οἱ ἥπιοι χαρακτήρες καὶ οἱ αὐστηροί. Ὅπως διὰ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ἀπαραίτητα καὶ τὰ γλυκὰ καὶ τὰ ξινὰ καὶ τὰ πικρὰ ἀκόμη ραδίκια (τὸ καθένα ἔχει τὶς δικές του οὐσίες καὶ βιταμίνες), ἔτσι ἀκριβῶς εἶναι καὶ διὰ τὸ Σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας· ὅλοι εἶναι ἀπαραίτητοι. Ὁ ἓνας συμπληρῶνει τὸν πνευματικὸν χαρακτήρα τοῦ ἄλλου καὶ ὅλοι εἴμεθα ὑποχρεωμένοι νὰ ἀνεχώμεθα ὄχι μόνον τὸν πνευματικὸν του χαρακτήρα, ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες ποὺ ἔχει σὰν ἄνθρωπος.

Καὶ πάλιν ἔρχομαι νὰ ζητήσω εἰλικρινῶς συγγνώμην ἀπὸ ὅλους, διότι ἐτόλμησα νὰ γράψω. Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἓνας ἀπλὸς μοναχὸς καὶ τὸ ἔργον μου εἶναι νὰ προσπαθῶ, ὅσο μπορῶ, νὰ ἀπεκδύωμαι

τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ νὰ βοηθῶ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, μέσω τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ τῆς προσευχῆς. Ἄλλ' ἐπειδὴ ἐφθασαν μέχρι τὸ ἐρημητήριό μου θλιβερὰς εἰδήσεις διὰ τὴν Ἁγίαν Ὁρθοδοξίαν μας, ἐπόνεσα πολὺ καὶ ἐθεώρησα καλὸ νὰ

Μετὰ λύπης μου, ἀπὸ ὄσους φιλενωτικὸς ἔχω γνωρίσει, δὲν εἶδα νὰ ἔχουν οὔτε ψίχα πνευματικὴ οὔτε φλοιό. Ξέρον, ὅμως, νὰ ὁμιλοῦν γιὰ ἀγάπη καὶ ἐνότητα, ἐνῶ οἱ ἴδιοι δὲν εἶναι ἐνωμένοι μὲ τὸν Θεόν, διότι δὲν Τὸν ἔχουν ἀγαπήσει...

π. Παΐσιος

γράψω αὐτὰ ποὺ ἐνοίωθα.

Ἄς εὐχηθοῦμε ὅλοι νὰ δώσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τὴν χάριν Του καὶ ὁ καθένας μας ἄς βοηθήσῃ μὲ τὸν τρόπον του διὰ τὴν δόξαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Μὲ πολὺν σεβασμὸν πρὸς ὅλους,
Παΐσιος μοναχός



Ἡ Γιαγιούλα μας

Ανεβοκατέβαινε, παρὰ τὴν μεγάλην ἡλικία της, μὲ μία στάμνα στὸν ὄμο της, σὲς βουνοκορφὰς τῆς Πίνδου, προσφέροντας νερὸ στοὺς μαχόμενους στρατιῶτες τοῦ 1940.

Κάποια στιγμὴ γλίστρησε στοὺς βράχους καὶ κατατσακίστηκε σπάζοντας καὶ τὴ στάμνα.

Οἱ τραυματιοφορεῖς ἔσπευσαν τὴν σήκωσαν καὶ τὴν ἀπόθεσαν στὴν σκηνὴ τοῦ Διοικητῆ. Ἐτρεξε ἐκεῖνος τὴν ἀγκάλιασε καὶ ξέσπασε...

—Γιαγιούλα μου, τῆς εἶπε, τί ἔπαθες, ποῦ πονᾶς, τί θέλεις νὰ σοῦ δώσω; τὴν ἰκέτευε κλαίγοντας.

Τὸν κοίταξε ἐκεῖνη μὲ παγωμένα μάτια, καὶ λίγο πρὶν φύγει, τοῦ ψιθύρισε:

—Στρατηγέ μου ΜΙΑ ΣΤΑΜΝΑ, καὶ σιώπησε γιὰ πάντα...

Ἡ Ἁγία Σκέπη τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ τὸ Ἔπος τοῦ 1940

ΠΗΓΗ: «Πανελλήνιο Σχολικὸ Δίκτυο», δικτυακοὶ τόποι ἐκπαιδευτικῶν.

Τῆς Σκέπης σου Παρθένε, ἀνυμνοῦμεν τὰς χάριτας, ἦν ὡς φωτοφόρον νεφέλην, ἐφαπλοῖς ὑπὲρ ἔννοιαν, καὶ Σκέπεις τὸν λαόν σου νοερώς, ἐκ πάσης τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἐπιβουλής, σὲ γὰρ σκέπην, καὶ προστάτιν, καὶ Βοηθόν, κεκτήμεθα βοῶντές σοι, Δόξα τοῖς μεγαλείοις σου Ἀγνή, δόξα τῇ θεῖα σκέπῃ σου, δόξα τῇ πρὸς ἡμᾶς σου, προμηθείᾳ, Ἄχραντε.

† † †

Ἀκούγεται ἐνδεχομένως παράδοξο ἢ ἀφόρημη γιὰ ἕναν λόγο ἐθνικῆς ἐπετείου νὰ εἶναι ἕνας ὕμνος πρὸς τὴν Παναγία, ὡστόσο, ὅπως θὰ φανεῖ στὴ συνέχεια, ὑπάρχει ἄρρηκτη σχέση ἀνάμεσά τους, καθὼς ὁ λαὸς μας ἔχει συνδυάσει πάρα πολὺ στενὰ αὐτὰ τὰ δύο.

Δὲν εἶναι τυχαῖο ὅτι οἱ δύο σημαντικότερες ἐθνικὲς γιορτὲς τοῦ ἔθνους μας ἔχουν τὸ ιδιαίτερο χαρακτηριστικὸ νὰ συνορτάζονται μὲ μία γιορτὴ τῆς Παναγίας. Τὴν 25^η Μαρτίου γιορτάζουμε τὸν εὐαγγελισμό τῆς Θεοτόκου καί, σήμερα, τὴν 28^η Ὀκτωβρίου τὴν Ἁγία Σκέπη τῆς Θεοτόκου. Ἡ γιορτὴ αὐτὴ μετατέθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας τὸ 1952 ἀπὸ τὴν 1^η Ὀκτωβρίου τὴν 28^η, ὡς ἔνδειξη εὐγνωμοσύνης πρὸς τὴ μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴ Σκέπη καὶ τὴν προστασία της στὸν ἀγῶνα τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀπέναντι στοὺς ἀλαζόνες Ἴταλούς, ἀρχικά, καί, ἀργότερα, σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῆς ἐθνικῆς ἀντίστασης.

Μία ἀντίσταση στὴν ἀπολυταρχικὴ βία, στὴν ἄκρως ἀλαζονικὴ ἀπαίτηση νὰ παραδόσουμε μὲ τὴ θέλησή μας τμήματα τοῦ ἐθνικοῦ ἐδάφους, νὰ προδώσουμε τὰ κεκτημένα μὲ ἀγῶνες καὶ μὲ τὸ αἷμα τῶν προγόνων μας. Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ψυχὴ ὅμως ἔδωσε τὴν ἀπάντηση ποὺ ἔπρεπε, εἶπε τὸ περήφανο ΟΧΙ καὶ ξεκίνησε ἕναν ἀγῶνα γιὰ τὰ ἱερὰ καὶ τὰ ὄσια τῆς πατρίδας μας, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ αἰφνιδιάσει δυσάρεστα τοὺς εἰσβολεῖς, νὰ τοὺς χαρίσει ιδιαίτερα ταπεινωτικὲς ἡττες καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἀναγκάσει νὰ ἀποσυρθοῦν μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀλβανικὰ σύνορα καὶ νὰ περιμένουν ἐκεῖ τὴ βοήθεια τῶν συμμάχων των.

Εἶναι ὅμως ἀπαραίτητο στὸ σημεῖο αὐτὸ νὰ κάνουμε μίαν σύντομη ἱστορικὴ ἀναδρομὴ καὶ νὰ δοῦμε τὰ

γεγονότα μὲ τὴ σειρά. Στὶς 28 Ὀκτωβρίου τοῦ 1940, κατὰ τὶς τρεῖς τὰ ξημερώματα, ὁ Ἴταλὸς πρεσβευτὴς στὴν Ἀθήνα Γκράτσι, ἐπισκέπτεται, στὴν οἰκία του, τὸν πρωθυπουργὸ τῆς Χώρας, Ἰωάννη Μεταξᾶ καὶ τοῦ ἐπιδίδει τελεσίγραφο μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο ζητοῦσε, μέσα σὲ τρεῖς ὥρες, τὴν ἐλεύθερη διέλευση καὶ στάθμευση τῶν ἰταλικῶν στρατευμάτων στὴν Ἑλλάδα. Μὲ τὴ φράση «πόλεμος λοιπὸν», ὁ Μεταξᾶς ἀπορρίπτει τὸ ἰταλικὸ τελεσίγραφο καὶ ἀπευθύνει διάγγελμα πρὸς τὸν Ἑλληνικὸ λαό. Ἀρχίζει ἔτσι ἡ ἰταλικὴ ἐπίθεση κατὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδας, στὸ ἀλβανικὸ μέτωπο, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ὁ λαὸς διαδηλώνοντας στοὺς δρόμους τῆς Ἀθήνας κατὰ τῆς Ἰταλίας, τρέχει μὲ ἐνθουσιασμὸ νὰ καταταγεῖ καὶ νὰ πολεμήσει στὸ μέτωπο.



Σὲ λίγες μόνο μέρες, οἱ εἰσβολεῖς ἐκδιώχθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ ἔδαφος ἀπὸ ἐπιστρατευμένες κυρίως δυνάμεις, μὲ ἀνεπαρκῆ μεταφορικὰ μέσα καὶ ἐφοδιασμὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὴ συνδρομὴ τῶν χωρικῶν τῆς Μακεδονίας καὶ τῆς Ἠπείρου, ποὺ ἔσπευσαν στὸ ἐθνικὸ προσκλητήριο καὶ ἔπαιξαν οὐσιαστικὸ ρόλο στὸν ἀνεφοδιασμὸ. Γιὰ νὰ κάμψουν τὸ ἠθικὸ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ, οἱ ἰταλοὶ ἄρχισαν τὸν βομβαρδισμό Ἑλληνικῶν πόλεων. Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ἀντεπίθεση στὸ μέτωπο, ἄρχισε στὶς 14 Νοεμβρίου καὶ γρήγορα οἱ δυνάμεις μας διέρρηξαν τὴν ἰταλικὴ ἀμυντικὴ γραμμὴ καὶ στὶς 22 Νοεμβρίου οἱ Ἑλληνεὶ στρατιῶτες εἰσέρχονταν στὴν Κορυτσά. Ἡ προέλαση συνεχίστηκε ἀργὰ ἀλλὰ ἀποφασιστικὰ καὶ στὶς 6 Δεκεμβρίου, ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς στρατὸς καταλάμβανε τὸ λιμάνι τῶν Ἁγίων Σαράντα. Στὴ συνέχεια ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς στρατὸς πῆρε στὰ χέρια του τὴν πρωτοβουλία, πέρασε σὲ ὀρμητικὴ ἀντεπίθεση, πέταξε τοὺς ἐπιδρομεῖς ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ ἐδάφη καὶ τοὺς καταδίωξε μέσα στὸ ἀλβανικὸ ἔδαφος, κατατροπώνοντάς τους.

Μήπως ὅμως χρειάζεται νὰ ἀναζητήσουμε κάποια ἐρμηνεία γιὰ ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ γεγονότα; Καὶ ποιά σχέση ἔχουν μὲ τὴν εἰσαγωγικὴ ἀναφορὰ μας στὴν Σκέπη τῆς Παναγίας; Δὲν χωραεῖ ἀμφιβολία ὅτι ἡ ἐποποιία τοῦ 1940 ἀποτελεῖ ἕνα θαῦμα, εἶναι ἕνα ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ θαύματα στὴν ἱστορία τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι καρπὸς ἀποκλειστικὰ ἀνθρωπίνου ἀγῶνα. Ἡ Θεϊκὴ χάρις συνεργάσθηκε μὲ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη προσπάθεια. Καὶ εἶναι δίκαιο ποὺ μαζί μὲ τὰ θριαμβευτικὰ σαλπίσματα πάνω ἀπὸ τοὺς

τάφους τῶν ἠρώων, σήμαναν δοξαστικὲς καμπάνες γιὰ ἓνα «εὐχαριστῶ» στὴν Παναγία, σ' ἐκείνη, στὴν ὁποία ἡ ἐθνικὴ συνείδηση ἀπέδωσε γιὰ μίαν ἀκόμα φορὰ «τὰ νικητήρια»: τὴ Σκέπη τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν, τὴν Ἐλευθερώτρια τῶν σκλαβωμένων.

Γιατί στὰ κρίσιμα χρόνια τοῦ πολέμου, οἱ Ἕλληνες πάντοτε ἐμπιστεύθηκαν στὰ χέρια τῆς Παναγίας τὸν ἀγῶνα τους. Ζήτησαν τὴ μητρικὴ προστασία Τῆς γιὰ νὰ ὑπερασπιστοῦν τὰ δίκαιά τους. Καὶ ἦταν τόση ἡ πίστη τους, ὥστε τὴν ἔβλεπαν νὰ τοὺς ἐμψυχώνει καὶ νὰ τοὺς σκεπάζει, καθὼς πολεμοῦσαν ἀπεγνωσμένα στὰ χιονισμένα βουνὰ τῆς Πίνδου καὶ τῆς Ἀλβανίας. Ἡ ἄλλοτε Ὑπέρομαχος Στρατηγὸς τῶν Ρωμηῶν γίνεται ἡ Ἁγία Σκέπη τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν καὶ τὸ θαῦμα ἐπαναλαμβάνεται. Χάρη στὴν πίστη ποὺ θερμαίνει τὶς ψυχές τους, οἱ μαχητὲς περιφρονοῦν τὴ λογικὴ τῶν ἀριθμῶν καὶ ἀντιστέκονται στὶς σιδερόφρακτες ἐχθρικὲς στρατιές μὲ ἠρωισμό ποὺ κινεῖ τὸν παγκόσμιον θαυμασμό.

Γιὰ τοὺς λόγους αὐτοὺς ἡ Ἐκκλησία σήμερα, δηλαδὴ ὅλοι ἐμεῖς, ἀνυμνοῦμε τὴ Σκέπη τῆς Παναγίας, καὶ τὴν παρακαλοῦμε νὰ μᾶς σκεπάζει πάντα μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη Τῆς καὶ νὰ στέκεται πάντα δίπλα, βοηθὸς καὶ συμπαραστάτης στὸ ἔθνος μας, σὲ κάθε καλὸ ἀγῶνα, γιατί τὴ βοήθειά Τῆς τὴν ἔχουμε τὸ ἴδιο ἀνάγκη καὶ στὸν καιρὸ τῆς εἰρήνης.

Μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχει σήμερα ἄμεση ἐθνικὴ ἀπειλὴ καὶ ἄμεσος κίνδυνος πολέμου, μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχει Χίτλερ ἢ Μουσολίνι, ὑπάρχει ὅμως ἓνας ἄλλος εἰσβολέας, ὁ ὁποῖος ἴσως νὰ εἶναι καὶ πιδὲ ἐπικίνδυνος, ὁ ὁποῖος προσπαθεῖ νὰ ἀλώσει τὶς συνειδήσεις μας, νὰ ξεχάσουμε τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ ἀποσπάσει τὴν προσοχή μας ἀπὸ τὰ σοβαρὰ προβλήματα, προσφέροντάς μας τέρψη μὲ θεάματα καὶ νὰ κάνει μίαν ὄχι στρατιωτικὴ ἀλλὰ μίαν πνευματικὴ τηλεοπτικὴ κατοχή στὶς καρδιές μας.

Ἔχουμε καιρὸ ὅλοι μας νὰ παρακολουθοῦμε μὲ ἀπληστία «σίριαλ», ποὺ μᾶς διδάσκουν πῶς μποροῦμε νὰ χαλάσουμε πολὺ εὐκόλα τὶς οἰκογένειές μας, τὰ κύτταρα τοῦ ἔθνους μας· δὲν ἔχουμε ὅμως καιρὸ νὰ διαβάσουμε τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ γνωρίσουμε μὲ ποιούς ἀγῶνες τῶν προγόνων μας μποροῦμε ἐμεῖς σήμερα νὰ ζοῦμε ἐλεύθεροι ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ διαβάσουμε συγκλονιστικὲς μαρτυρίες ἀγωνιστῶν τῆς ἐθνικῆς ἀντίστασης, οἱ ὁποῖοι στὸν ὑπεράνθρωπο ἀγῶνα τους πάνω στὰ παγωμένα βουνὰ ἔβλεπαν τὴν Παναγία ζωντανὰ καὶ ἔπαιρναν κουράγιο νὰ συνεχίσουν.

Ἄς εἶναι λοιπὸν ὁ σημερινὸς λόγος ἓνα ἔναυσμα νὰ ἀσχοληθοῦμε ὅλοι περισσότερο μὲ τὴν ἱστορία μας, ἓνα μνημόσυνο γιὰ ὅσους ἔπεσαν ἠρωικά στὸν πόλεμο καὶ μίαν ἐλάχιστη τιμὴ εὐγνωμοσύνης στὴν μητέρα μας τὴν Παναγία.

Περὶ τῆς Ἀληθοῦς Ἐννοίας τοῦ ΛΘ' (39^{ου}) Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος

Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Ἐπιφανίου Θεοδοωροπούλου (+1989), «Ἄρθρα, Μελεται, Ἐπιστολαί», τόμος Α', Ἀθήναι 1986, σελ. 212 κ. ἑ.

Τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια ἔχουμε ὅλοι μας γίνει μάρτυρες τοῦ δεσποτισμοῦ τῶν ἐπισκόπων. Ὁ δεσποτισμὸς αὐτός, ποὺ παίρνει διάφορες μορφές, ὅλο καὶ ἰσχυροποιεῖται δεδομένου ὅτι δὲν ἀφορᾷ πλέον μόνο σὲ προσωπικὰ θέματα τῶν κληρικῶν ἀλλὰ ἔχει βαθυτέρους σκοποὺς καὶ στόχους. Στόχος εἶναι πλέον ἡ φήμιση κάθε ἀντιθέτου φωνῆς κάθε ἀντιστάσεως στὰ κατεδαφιστικὰ σχέδια τῆς Νέας Ἐποχῆς ποὺ ἔχει δυναμικὰ εἰσβάλει στὴν «Ἐκκλησία» καὶ προσπαθεῖ μὲ καινοτομίες, καὶ προοδευτικὲς, δηθεν, ἐνέργειες νὰ ἀλλοιώσει τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο φρόνημα καὶ κριτήριον. Οἱ ἐπίσκοποί μας, στηριζόμενοι στὸν ΛΘ' ἀποστολικὸ κανόνα, τὸν μόνο ποὺ φρόντισαν νὰ ἀποστηθίσουν, ἔχουν μετατραπῆ ἀπὸ πνευματικὸν πατέρες σὲ αὐταρχικοὺς διοικητὲς δημοσίων ὑπηρεσιῶν καὶ σὲ ἀκριβῆ ἀντίγραφα τοῦ «Φύρερ». Ἄς δοῦμε ὅμως πῶς ὁ ἅγιος γέροντας π. Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδοωρόπουλος μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὸ θέμα μερικὰ χρόνια πρὶν ὅσο κι ἂν ὁ δεσποτισμὸς δὲν εἶχε ἀκόμα τόσο πολὺ ἐνισχυθεῖ.

Τὸ κείμενον ποὺ ἀκολουθεῖ εἶναι ἓνα ἄρθρον ποὺ ἔγραψε ὁ π. Ἐπιφάνιος στοὺς «Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχες», τὸν Ἰανουάριον τοῦ 1963 καὶ στὸ ὁποῖο δίνει τὴν πραγματικὴ καὶ ὀρθὴ ἐρμηνεία τοῦ παρεξηγημένου καὶ ἐκμεταλενομένου κανόνος.

† † †

Ελάχιστοι ἀναμφιβόλως κανόνες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἡμῶν παρανοοῦνται καὶ παρερμηνεύονται τόσο πολὺ, ὅσον ὁ ΛΘ' Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼν. Ἐπειδὴ δ' ἐσχάτως εἶδον τὸ φῶς δύο ἀκόμη παρανοήσεις τοῦ εἰρημένου Κανόνος, ἐκρίναμεν ἀναγκαῖον νὰ διασαφήσωμεν δι' ὀλίγων τὴν ἔννοιαν αὐτοῦ.

«Οἱ πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ Διάκονοι», λέγει ὁ Κανὼν, «ἄνευ γνώμης τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου μηδὲν ἐπιτελείτωσαν. Αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστὶν ὁ πεπιστευμένος τὸν λαὸν τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν αὐτῶν λόγον ἀπαιτηθόσμενος».

Ποῖα ἄραγε εἶναι ἡ ἔννοια τῆς φράσεως «μηδὲν ἐπιτελείτωσαν»; Τὶ ἀκριβῶς ἐννοεῖ ἐκεῖνο τὸ «μηδέν»; Εἶνε ἀπόλυτος ἡ ἔννοια αὐτοῦ ἢ σχετικὴ καὶ περιορισμένη;

Νομίζομεν, ὅτι ἀρκεῖ νὰ ἔχη τις τὸν κοινὸν νοῦν, ἵνα ἀποκρούσῃ καὶ ἀποκλείσῃ πᾶσαν σκέψιν περὶ ἀπολύτου ἔννοιας. Ἡ ἀπόλυτος ἔννοια θὰ ἦτο καὶ φυσικῶς ἀδύνατος καὶ λογικῶς ἀπαράδεκτος. Διότι, ἐν ἐναντία περιπτώσει, θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ εἴπωμεν, ὅτι ὁ Κληρικὸς χρειάζεται ἀδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου καὶ διὰ νὰ φάγῃ ἢ νὰ πῆῃ ἢ νὰ κοιμηθῇ ἢ νὰ ἐνδυθῇ ἢ νὰ περιπατήσῃ. Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο θὰ ἦτο ἀδιανόητον.

Ούτε όμως και διὰ τὰς καθαρῶς ἐκκλησιαστικὰς ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ χρειάζεται ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου ὁ Κληρικός, ἐφ' ὅσον εὐρίσκεται ἐν τῷ κύκλῳ τῆς ἀρμοδιότητος αὐτοῦ. Σκέψασθε τὴν θέσιν Ἐπισκόπου τινός, οὐ οἱ Κληρικοὶ θὰ ἐξήτουν καθ' ἑκάστην ἡμέραν τὴν ἄδειαν, ἵνα τελῶσι τὰ Θεῖα Μυστήρια ἢ ἄλλας Ἱεράς Ἀκολουθίας, ἢ ἵνα κηρύξωσιν, ἢ ἵνα νουθετήσωσιν καὶ συμφιλιώσωσιν ἀντιμαχομένους, ἢ ἵνα συζητήσωσιν μετὰ αἰρετικῶν, ἢ ἵνα βοηθήσωσιν πτωχοῦς, ἢ ἵνα δημοσιεύσωσιν θεολογικὰς διατριβὰς ἢ γενικῶς θρησκευτικὰ βιβλία ἢ ἄρθρα κ.λ.π; δὲν θὰ ἠδύνατο νὰ ἐπαρκέσῃ εἰς τὸ ἀπαντᾶν, οὔτε καὶ ἐὰν δέκα μόνον Κληρικοὺς εἶχεν ὑπ' αὐτόν!...

Δι' οὐδὲν λοιπὸν τῶν ἀνωτέρω ἀπαιτεῖται ἄδεια τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου. Ἐὰν δὲ τι αὐτῶν δὲν τελεσθῆ ὡς δεῖ, τότε ὑπάρχει βεβαίως εὐθύνη διὰ τὸν Κληρικόν, ἀλλ' εὐθύνη παραβάσεως ἄλλων Κανόνων ἢ παραδόσεων καὶ ἐθίμων, οὐχὶ δὲ τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος. Παράδειγμα: Ἱερεὺς τις, μετὰ τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τοῦ Ἱ. Εὐαγγελίου, ἐρημηθεύει αὐτὸ εἰς τὸν λαόν. Κατὰ τὴν ὁμιλίαν δ' αὐτοῦ ἐκτρέπεται εἰς αἰσχρολογίας ἀφορήτους. Ἀναμφιβόλως πρέπει νὰ τιμωρηθῆ. Θὰ τιμωρηθῆ ὅμως οὐχὶ διότι δὲν ἔλαβε πρὸ τοῦ κηρύγματος ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου (τοιαύτην ἄδειαν δὲν ἐχρειάζετο, ἐφ' ὅσον, α) εἶνε κανονικὸς ἱερεὺς καὶ β) εὐρίσκετο ἐντὸς τοῦ Ναοῦ εἰς ὃν ἀνήκει), ἀλλὰ διότι ἐγένετο, διὰ τῆς αἰσχρολογίας αὐτοῦ, αἷτιος σκανδαλισμοῦ τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἔτερον παράδειγμα: Ἱερεὺς τις δημοσιεύει θεολογικὴν πραγματείαν, ἐν ἣ ὑπάρχουσιν αἰρετικαὶ διδασκαλίας. Καὶ οὗτος θὰ τιμωρηθῆ, οὐχὶ ὅμως ἐπὶ παραβάσει τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος (διότι ἐξέδωκεν βιβλίον ἄνευ ἀδείας τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου!), ἀλλ' ἐπὶ ἀθετήσει τῶν δογμάτων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Τρίτον παράδειγμα: Ἱερεὺς τις φέρει εἰς φῶς φυλλάδιον ἢ ἄρθρον, ἐν ᾧ ἀσκεῖ κριτικὴν ἐπὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῶν πραγμάτων. Εἶνε δυνατὸν νὰ κατηγορηθῆ ἐπὶ παραβάσει τοῦ εἰρημένου Κανόνος, διότι δηλ. δὲν ἔλαβε προκαταβολικῶς ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου; Ἀλλ' ἂν μὴ τι ἄλλο, ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος, ὅστις θὰ διετύπου τοιαύτην κατηγορίαν, θὰ ἐκινδύνευε νὰ ἐγκληθῆ ὑπὸ τοῦ εἰσαγγελέως ἐπὶ παραβιάσει τοῦ Συντάγματος, ὅπερ ἀπαγορεύει τὴν προληπτικὴν λογοκρισίαν καὶ παρέχει ἔλευθερίαν διατυπώσεως τῶν στοχασμῶν ἑκάστου. Ἐὰν δὲ τυχὸν τὸ εἰρημένον κείμενον τοῦ ἱερέως περιέχῃ ὕβρεις ἢ συκοφαντίας ἢ βωμολοχίας ἢ ὅ, τιδήποτε ἄλλο κατάκριτον πρᾶγμα, τότε βεβαίως θὰ ἐγκληθῆ μὲν οὗτος, οὐχὶ ὅμως ἐπὶ παραβιάσει τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῆ βάσει τῶν πρὸς τὸ ἀδίκημα αὐτοῦ συναφῶν Κανόνων.

Εἰς τι λοιπὸν ἀναφέρεται τὸ «μηδὲν ἐπιτελεῖσθω»; Εἰς ὅ,τι ἀνήκει τῇ δικαιοδοσίᾳ τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου! Ἐξ' αὐτῶν πάντων οὐδὲν δύναται νὰ ἐπιτελεσθῇ οἰοσδήποτε Κληρικὸς ἄνευ ἐξουσιοδοτήσεως τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου. Ἴνα

δὲ μὴ νομισθῆ, ὅτι ἡ τοιαύτη τοῦ Κανόνος ἐρημηθεῖα εἶνε ἡμετέρα αὐθαίρετος εἰκασία, ἐπικαλούμεθα τὰς γνώμας τῶν ἐγκυροτέρων Κανονολόγων:

α) Ζωναράς: Τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις καὶ διακόνοις, ὑπὸ τοὺς κατὰ χώραν τελοῦσιν ἐπισκόπους, ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν τι πράττειν οὐκ ἐκκεχώρηται, οἷον ἐπιτιμᾶν καὶ ἀφορίζειν οὓς βούλονται καὶ ὀπηνίκα ἢ λύειν ἀφορισμὸν ἢ μειοῦν ἢ ἐπιτείνειν· ταῦτα γὰρ τῆς ἀρχιερατικῆς εἰσιν ἐξουσίας καὶ εἰ μὴ παρὰ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου τὸ ἐνδόσιμον λάβοιεν, τοιοῦτον τι ποιεῖν οὐκ ἐφείται αὐτοῖς αὐτοῖς. (Γ. Ράλλη -Μ. Ποτλῆ «Σύνταγμα...» κ.τ.λ., τόμ. Β' σελ. 54).

β) Βαλσαμών: Τὸ μηδὲν ἐπιτελεῖν τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ διακόνους ἄνευ γνώμης τοῦ ἐπισκόπου, μὴ εἴπης καθολικὸν εἶναι, ἀλλ' εἰπέ μὴ ἔχειν ἐπ' ἀδείας τούτους ποιεῖν τὸ ὅτιοῦν ἀνήκον τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ, χωρὶς γνώμης αὐτοῦ, οἷον τὸ ἐκδιδόναι ἀκίνητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸ εἰσοδιάζειν τὰ περὶ αὐτήν, τὸ ἐπιτιμᾶν καὶ ἕτερα τοιαῦτα. (Αὐτόθι).

γ) Ἀριστηνός: Ἄτερ ἐπισκόπου ποιεῖν πρεσβύτερος οὐδέν, καὶ διάκονος καὶ γὰρ οὗτος πεπίστευται τὸν λαόν. Οὐκ ἔξεστι πρεσβύτερον ἢ διάκονον, ἄνευ γνώμης τοῦ ἰδίου ἐπισκόπου, ἢ τὸν λαὸν ἀφορίζειν, ἢ αὔξειν, ἢ μειοῦν ἐπιτίμια, ἢ ἕτερον τι τοιοῦτον ποιεῖν, ὡς τοῦ ἐπισκόπου τὸν λαὸν ἐμπιστευομένου, καὶ τὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν αὐτῶν λόγον ἀπαιτηθησομένου. (Αὐτόθι).

δ) Ἅγιος Νικόδημος: Ὁ παρῶν Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼν διορίζει, ὅτι οἱ Πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ Διάκονοι, χωρὶς τὴν γνώμην καὶ ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου των, δὲν ἠμποροῦν νὰ ἐνεργήσωσιν κανένα ἱερατικὸν λειτουργήμα, τόσον ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα ὅπου ἀνήκουσιν εἰς τὴν ἀρχιερατικὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου, ὅσον καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα τῶν ὁποίων ἔχουσι μὲν αὐτοὶ τὴν δύναμιν, διὰ τοῦ Μυστηρίου τῆς χειροτονίας, τὴν δὲ ἐνέργειαν αὐτῶν νὰ ἐπιτελέσωσιν δὲν ἠμποροῦν χωρὶς τοῦ Ἀρχιερέως τὴν γνώμην. Ταῦτα δέ, χάριν παραδείγματος, εἶναι τὸ νὰ μὴ ἐξομολογοῦν μῆτε νὰ συγχωροῦν τοὺς μετανοοῦντας, κατὰ τὸν ς, ζ, καὶ ν τῆς ἐν Καρθαγένῃ· τὸ νὰ ἀφιερῶνσι τὰς παρθένους εἰς τὸν Θεόν, κατὰ τὸν ς τῆς αὐτῆς· τὸ νὰ μὴ χειροθετοῦν καὶ κείρουν Ἀναγνώστας ἢ μοναχοὺς καὶ ἄλλα ΠΑΡΟΜΟΙΑ («Ἱ. Πηδάλιον», ἔκδοσις ς, ἐν Ἀθήναις 1957, σελ. 44).

Συμπέρασμα:

Ἐπίκλησις τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος ἐναντίον κληρικῶν, οἵτινες οὔτε ἐξομολόγησαν ἄνευ ἐπισκοπικοῦ ἐνταλτηρίου, οὔτε ἐπέβαλον ἢ ἔλυσαν ἀφορισμὸν, οὔτε ἔκειραν Μοναχοὺς ἢ Μοναχάς, οὔτε ἔχειροθέτησαν Ἀναγνώστας, οὔτε Ναοὺς ἢ Μονὰς ἴδρυσαν, οὔτε ἀδείας γάμων ἐξέδωσαν, οὔτε ἀκίνητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐπώλησαν, οὔτε ἄλλο τι τοιοῦτον ἐποίησαν, ἐπίκλησις, λέγομεν, τοῦ εἰρημένου Κανόνος ἐναντίον τοιούτων Κληρικῶν, ἐπ' οὐδενὶ λόγῳ δύναται νὰ εὐσταθήσῃ.

«Παχεία Γαστήρ Λεπτὸν Οὐ Τίκει Νόον»

Τοῦ Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Κανσοκαλυβίτου (+1991), ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Βίος καὶ Λόγος», ἐκδ. Τερᾶς Μόνης Χρυσοπηγῆς, Χανιά 2003.



Δὲν γίνεστε ἅγιοι κυνηγώντας τὸ κακό. Ἄστε τὸ κακό. Νὰ κοιτάζετε πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸ κι αὐτὸ θὰ σᾶς σώσει. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ κάνει ἅγιο τὸν ἄνθρωπο εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη, ἡ λατρεία πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, ἡ ὁποία δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφραστεῖ, δὲν μπορεῖ... Καὶ προσπαθεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ κάνει ἀσκήσεις, νὰ κάνει τέτοια πράγματα καὶ νὰ καταπονεῖ τὸν ἑαυτό του γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Κανεῖς ἀσκητὴς δὲν ἁγιάσει χωρὶς ἀσκήσεις. Κανεῖς δὲν μπόρεσε ν' ἀνέλθει στὴν πνευματικότητα χωρὶς ν' ἀσκηθεῖ. Πρέπει νὰ γίνονται ἀσκήσεις. Ἀσκησι εἶναι οἱ μετάνοιες, οἱ ἀγρυπνίες κ.λπ., ἀλλὰ ὄχι μὲ βία. Ὅλα νὰ γίνονται μὲ χαρὰ. Δὲν εἶναι οἱ μετάνοιες ποὺ θὰ κάνουμε, δὲν εἶναι οἱ προσευχές· εἶναι τὸ δόσιμο, ὁ ἔρωτας γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰ τὰ πνευματικά. Ὑπάρχουν πολλοὶ ποὺ τὰ κάνουνε αὐτὰ ὄχι γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ ἀλλὰ γιὰ ἄσκησι, γιὰ ὠφέλεια σωματική. Ὅμως οἱ πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι τὸ κάνουνε γιὰ ψυχική ὠφέλεια, γιὰ τὸν Θεό. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ὠφελεῖται πολὺ, δὲν ἀρρωσταίνει. Πολλὰ καλὰ ἔρχονται.

Μέσα στὴν ἄσκησι, τίς μετάνοιες, τίς ἀγρυπνίες καὶ τίς ἄλλες κακουχίες εἶναι καὶ ἡ νηστεία. «Παχεία γαστήρ λεπτόν οὐ τίκει νόον». Ἐγὼ τὸ γνωρίζω αὐτὸ ἀπ' τοὺς Πατέρες. Ὅλα τὰ πατερικὰ βιβλία μιλοῦν γιὰ τὴ νηστεία. Οἱ Πατέρες τονίζουν νὰ μὴν τρώμε δυσκολοχώνευτα φαγητὰ ἢ λιπαρὰ καὶ παχιά, γιὰτὶ κάνουν κακὸ στὸ σῶμα ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν ψυχὴ. Λένε ὅτι τὸ προβατάκι τρώει τὰ χορταράκια τῆς γῆς κι εἶναι τόσο ἡσυχό. Εἶδατε ποὺ λένε, «σὰν τὸ πρόβατο». Ἐνῶ ὁ σκύλος ἢ ἡ γάτα κι ὄλ' αὐτὰ τὰ σαρκοφάγα εἶναι ὅλα τους ἄγρια ζῶα. Τὸ κρέας κάνει κακὸ στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Κάνουν καλὸ τὰ χόρτα, τὰ φρούτα κ.λπ. Γι' αὐτὸ οἱ Πατέρες μιλοῦν γιὰ νηστεία καὶ κατακρίνουν τὴν πολυφαγία καὶ τὴν ἡδονὴ ποὺ αισθάνεται κανεῖς μὲ τὰ φαγητὰ τὰ πλούσια. Νὰ εἶναι πιὸ ἀπλὰ τὰ φαγητά μας. Νὰ μὴν ἀσχολούμαστε τόσο πολὺ μ' αὐτά.

Δὲν εἶναι τὸ φαγητό, δὲν εἶναι οἱ καλὲς συνθῆκες διαβίωσης, ποὺ ἐξασφαλίζουν τὴν καλὴ ὑγεία. Εἶναι ἡ ἀγία ζωὴ, ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ξέρω γιὰ ἀσκητὲς ποὺ νηστεύανε πολὺ καὶ δὲν εἶχανε καμιὰ ἀρρώστια. Δὲν κινδυνεύει νὰ πάθει κανεῖς τίποτε ἀπ' τὴ νηστεία. Κανεῖς δὲν ἔχει ἀρρωστήσει ἀπ' τὴ νηστεία. Πιὸ πολὺ ἀρρωσταίνουν ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ τρῶνε κρέατα κι αὐγὰ καὶ

γάλατα, παρὰ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ εἶναι λιτοδίαιτοι. Εἶναι παρατηρημένο αὐτό. Νὰ τὸ πάρουμε καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἰατρικὴ ἐπιστήμη τώρα τὸ συνιστᾷ αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα. Οἱ νηστευτὲς νηστεύουν καὶ δὲν παθαίνουν τίποτε· ὄχι ἀπλῶς δὲν παθαίνουν, ἀλλὰ θεραπεύονται ἀπὸ ἀρρώστιας.

Γιὰ νὰ τὰ κάνετε ὁμως αὐτά, πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε πίστη. Ἀλλιῶς σᾶς πιάνει λιγούρα. Ἡ νηστεία εἶναι καὶ ζήτημα πίστεως. Ὅταν ἔχετε τὸν ἔρωτα στὸ Θεῖον, μπορεῖτε νὰ νηστεύετε μὲ εὐχαρίστησι κι ὅλα εἶναι εὐκόλα· ἀλλιῶς σᾶς φαίνονται ὅλα βουνό. Ὅποιοι ἔδωσαν τὴν καρδιά τους στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ μὲ θερμὴ ἀγάπη ἔλεγαν τὴν εὐχὴ, κυριάρχησαν καὶ νίκησαν τὴ λαίμαργία καὶ τὴν ἔλλειψη ἐγκράτειας.

Ὑπάρχουν σήμερα πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ νηστεύουν μιὰ μέρα καὶ τώρα ζοῦν μὲ χορτοφαγία, ὄχι γιὰ λόγους θρησκευτικούς, ἀπλῶς γιὰτὶ πίστεψαν ὅτι αὐτὸ θὰ κάνει καλὸ στὴν ὑγεία τους. Ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ τὸ πιστέψεις, ὅτι δὲν πρόκειται νὰ πάθεις τίποτε, ποὺ δὲν τρῶς κρέας. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος βέβαια εἶναι ἀσθενής, δὲν εἶναι ἁμαρτία νὰ φάει πρὸς στήριξιν τοῦ ὀργανισμοῦ καὶ μὴ νηστήσιμα φαγητὰ.

Τὸ ἀλάτι χρειάζεται στὸν ὀργανισμὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ὑπάρχει μιὰ φήμη ὅτι τὸ ἀλάτι κάνει κακό. Δὲν εἶναι σωστὸ αὐτό. Εἶναι στοιχεῖο ποὺ χρειάζεται. Καὶ εἶναι ὀρισμένοι μάλιστα ποὺ τὸ ἔχουν πολὺ ἀνάγκη.

Ἐγὼ τί ὄνειρα ἔχω! Γιὰ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος δηλαδή. Παρήγγειλα σιτάρι, γιὰ ν' ἀλέθουμε, νὰ φτιάχνουμε ψωμὶ σταρίσιο. Καὶ σκέφτομαι νὰ πάρουμε διάφορα ὄσπρια καὶ νὰ τ' ἀλέθουμε καὶ νὰ τ' ἀνακατώνουμε, σιτάρι μὲ ρύζι, σόγια, σογιάλευρο μὲ φακὲς κ.λπ. Κι ἔπειτα ἔχουμε καὶ τὰ κολοκύθια καὶ τίς ντομάτες καὶ τίς πατάτες κι ὅλα τ' ἄλλα χορταρικά. Καὶ μὲ τὸν πατέρα Ἡσύχιο εἶχαμε ἓνα ὄνειρο. Μιὰ φορὰ λέγαμε νὰ πᾶμε νὰ γίνουμε ἐρημίτες κάπου καὶ νὰ σπεύρουμε σιτάρι καὶ νὰ τὸ μουσκεύουμε καὶ νὰ τὸ τρώμε. Μήπως ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ἐκεῖ, στὴν ἔρημο, ἔτσι δὲν ἔκανε; Ἀλλὰ τώρα ἐμᾶς μᾶς κακοφαίνεται...



Τί νὰ σοῦ κάνουν καὶ οἱ πολιτικοί; Εἶναι μερδεμένοι μὲ τὰ ψυχικά τους πάθη. Ὅταν ἓνας ἄνθρωπος δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ βοηθήσει τὸν ἑαυτό του, πῶς θὰ μπορέσει νὰ βοηθήσει τοὺς ἄλλους; Φταῖμε καὶ ἐμεῖς γιὰ τὴν κατάστασι αὐτή. Ἄν ἦμασταν ἀληθινοὶ Χριστιανοί, θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ στείλουμε στὴ βουλή, ὄχι βέβαια Χριστιανικὸ κόμμα, ἀλλὰ Χριστιανούς πολιτικούς καὶ τὰ πράγματα θὰ ἦταν διαφορετικά.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος

THE “ALCOHOLIC” MONK

Source: From the web pages of «Άγιοθεϊτικό Βήμα» translated by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.



Once on Mount Athos there was a monk who resided in Karyes. He would drink each and every day and it would not take more than two to three glasses of wine before he was intoxicated. His behavior was the source of scandal to other monastics and his actions would often shock the pilgrims.

One day he passed away. His death brought “relief” among the distraught residents of the area. Following his death, a few

pilgrims visiting Elder Paisios mentioned how glad they are that this “huge problem” is finally resolved.

The holy elder replied that he was already aware of the falling asleep of this monk; he had seen an entire battalion of angels arrive to collect his soul.

The pilgrims were shocked by the elder’s response and argued with him; some of them, trying to explain to the holy elder that he may not be aware of whom they were speaking, thinking that he misunderstood them

Elder Paisios recounted:

—This monk was born in Asia Minor. Shortly before the destruction of the Greek cities of that area, and the subsequent slaughter of the Greek families, the Turks commenced their old practice of kidnapping or forcefully gathering all boys away from their families. In order to save their son, the monk’s parents would bring him along to the fields during harvest season. It was necessary, however, that they stop the young baby from crying and thus exposing his presence; they accomplished this by pouring a very small quantity of raki (an unsweetened, anise-flavored hard alcoholic drink) into his milk. The baby would then fall asleep and be saved from abduction by the Turks.

—The prolonged use of this small quantity turned the young lad into an alcoholic. Later on, when his family moved to Greece and he was a young man, doctors advised him against having a family—his alcoholism would be too disruptive for any type of a quality family life. With such advice, along with the young man’s love for God and Panaghia, he collected himself and came to the Holy Mountain to become a monk.

—There he found a wonderful elder and right away he confessed that he was an alcoholic. His elder instructed him into a thorough prayer rule that included many prostrations and prayers each night, along with a regular ap-

peal to the Holy Virgin to assist him in his struggle by helping him reduce his alcohol consumption by just one glass per day.

—After a full year, he had been able to reduce his drinking from 20 glasses per day to 19. His struggle, however, was great and he remained faithful to his elder’s instructions. Thus, through the intercessions of the Theotokos, in his later years he was consuming 3-4 glasses per day. This quantity however, due to his alcoholism, was sufficient to get him intoxicated. Those around him were unaware of his struggle and his prayers and spiritual warfare. Pilgrims and monks alike in Karyes simply observed a drunken monk that would scandalize many. God however, was observing a warrior that was a feisty fighter and a person who was slow making progress towards conquering this unfortunate passion.

—So I ask you: In the absence of any knowledge of why each one of us does what we do and what efforts a man applies to conquer a passion, is it proper for anyone to judge another?



Take refuge often in our Panaghia. I love our Panaghia very much. You love her also. She is the Mediatrix for our salvation. Every object shines under the light of the sun, according to its form. But the mirror reflects the entire sun. Our Panaghia is a mirror: she reflects all the glory of Christ. She has become the Mother of all Christians. For this reason, all men—because we fear to face Christ on account of our many iniquities—take refuge in our Panaghia, that she might intercede for our sins, even as we run to our mother with much boldness.

Everything depends on our will. My hand is not able to steal if I do not wish to. What you do apart from your own will and volition has no value. A small child takes Communion, and afterwards you tell him to spit, he will do it. [The child] doesn’t know, and, consequently, has no responsibility; but he also has no virtue. [He] has to know and not do it, in order to have virtue.

I often marvel at the works of man; the radio, for example. You turn it on, and you hear a voice from America—from the other side of the world. And I think that so it is in the spiritual realm also: we pray to God and He hears us in heaven. This is a great thing, so long as we do not become proud in what we do. We see a beautiful garment. Who gets the praise, the needle or the seamstress? The seamstress, of course. We too are a needle in the hands of God. All things are made by God through us. For this reason, we should not be proud.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

THE MYSTICAL ROOTS OF CRIME

By Fr. Alexey Moroz.

The sharp rise of crime and suicide is further evidence of the tragic influence of godlessness, materialism, and occultism on contemporary society. Rooted in materialist doctrine, professional psychologists and sociologists have been unsuccessful in trying to explain the nature of this phenomenon. People who for the most part are financially stable and from what appear to be happy families, often commit outrageous, bloody crimes, shocking even those who know them well. While professionals conjecture as to its underlying causes, they deny the existence of the soul and the unseen world. And yet it is precisely here, in the human soul and the activities of the unseen world, that the answer to this quandary is to be found.

A holy place is never vacant, and ... *no fountain can yield both salt water and fresh* (Jas 3:12), nor can a man occupy two positions in the spiritual world. His ontological nature requires that he apply himself either to good or to evil, either to God or to the devil.

As a rule, a person who does not know God or His commandments lives in the world according to the law of his passions. He strives to do that which gives him pleasure. And this is basically to satisfy the demands of his physical and/or psychological requirements. This includes eating and drinking what tastes good, having various amorous relationships, getting lots of money, having a prestigious job, enjoying respect, glory, and so forth. All of these desires, if they are not checked by faith and a striving towards God, if they are not subordinated to the principal aim of spiritual perfection, become grossly amplified; they become a goal in themselves and turn into cravings. The person's scope of interests narrows to little more than the satisfaction of the ruling passion or passions: drinking, promiscuity, lust after wealth and/or power, etc.

The demons strive by various means to intensify man's natural passions, for through them they gain access into the soul of a sinner. According to the testimony of the Holy Fathers, St. Gregory the Sinaite specifically, each demon has his own "specialty;" he prefers to operate in a particular passionate milieu, feeding and strengthening himself on energy released by the passion. One type of demon fuels lust, another prefers alcoholism, a third arouses anger, etc.

According to patristic tradition, demons adhere both to a man's intellectual sphere—suggesting to him various thoughts and imaginings, and also to the sensual—by arousing feelings of physical passion, irritation, anger, grief, despair, etc. For this reason, every Christian who desires to lead a spiritual life must be sober, i.e., he must be vigilant to all thoughts and feelings which come to him. One must not allow oneself to

blindly follow after all feelings and desires which seem to be one's own. The touch-stone, on which the quality and origin of thoughts and feelings are tested and determined, besides the innate voice of conscience, is the Sacred Scriptures, Christ's commandments, the experience of the Holy Fathers and their teachings in such matters.

Unbelievers, non-Christians, depend for their moral orientation in life solely upon the voice of conscience, and it is fortunate if it is not distorted and obscured by improper upbringing or a sinful life. Etymologically the word "conscience" is derived from the Latin verb *scire*, "to know," and the prefix "con" meaning "with", "common" or "shared;" i.e., something from the beginning given to the entire human race, and bequeathed to each individual at birth. In other words, this is the voice of God in man's soul, the spiritual/moral matrix, safe-guarding him from corruption and destruction. If a person disregards the promptings of his conscience and continues to do evil, then its voice, under the impact of sin, grows weak and eventually is silenced altogether; and the person is left without any spiritual/moral orientation.

A person who does not lead a Christian way of life is defenseless when confronted by the activity of unclean spirits, who, through the various channels mentioned earlier, find access into the soul and take control of it. As a result the person becomes possessed, i.e., submissively fulfilling the will of the demon, without even being aware of it. The degree of possession or, in other words, the measure of his subjection to another's will is directly proportionate to the degree of his passionateness which, at its apogee, becomes transformed into demon-possession, that state when a person no longer has any control over himself—his body, his words, his actions. The bond between soul and body is destroyed; a foreign, evil will wedges itself in and an unclean spirit begins to command the body. We find numerous examples of such cases in the Gospel (Mt 8:16, 15:28; Lk 6:8, 13:11).

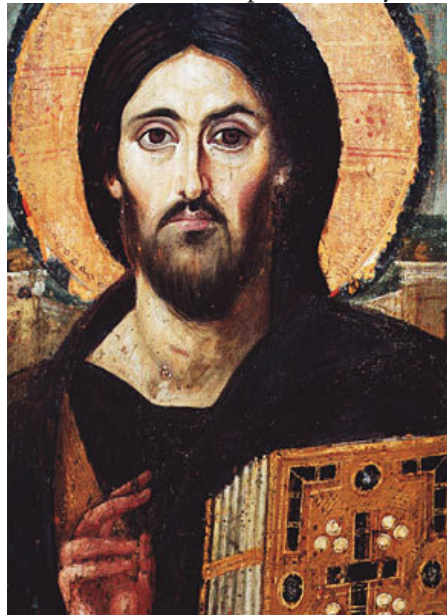
The second cause of possession is found in the involvement in the varied forms of occults. A fascination and involvement in astrology, extra-sensory perception, an interest in contact with poltergeists, UFOs and extra-terrestrials open a person to mystical contact and action on the part of the spirits of wickedness, which ultimately leads to possession of the "contactees" and their spiritual perdition. There are proven facts concerning the growth in geometric progression of the number of "UFO contactees." They have large gatherings, publish magazines, hold conferences. According to V. Davidovtza, at a single conference in Kemerovo there spoke some three hundred "contactees" from the Kuzbask region alone. St. John Chrysostom testifies that a demon does not leave a man who has sold himself to him until he has consumed him or led him to suicide.

This thesis is well supported by our contemporary life. In criminal psychiatry there is a term “*idée fixe*,” which is described as “forced inclination.” In the textbook “Criminal Psychiatry” we read: One can attribute to the disturbance of the will those impulsive states characterized by outbursts of overpowering or hard to resist impulses to do certain things without forethought. It is customary to distinguish several such impulsive states: catatonic impulsive actions are most often characterized by senseless, unmotivated, aggressive and destructive acts. Frequently the victim experiences this as subjugation to a foreign will (the Kandinsky syndrome).

But if a crime is committed contrary to a person’s own will, at the irresistible promptings of something clearly foreign to him, i.e., an outside will, then the question is, whose is this hideous will? Does it not belong to that spirit which we call evil?

In our country there has lately been a noticeable increase in the number of unmotivated murders. It seems that one man kills another for no evident reason whatsoever. In an article, “Who will Kill Me Tomorrow?” author V. Kalita describes three frightful crimes. In the first, twenty-year-old Skorobo-gatov beat up his mother, wounded his father with a knife, and five days later killed a youth trying to defend his father, whom the killer was deriding. The second case involved a tractor driver, Radopupov, who in a drunken stupor monstrously cut up his acquaintances, Anna and Alexander, for no apparent reason. In the third, a certain Zavaruyev took two young children for a drive into the forest, where he was prompted to kill one of the boys in revenge for his older sisters’ refusal to marry him. He monstrously killed both children.

The author, after studying Zavareyev’s personality, writes: He lived and grew up like many rural youth. He went to school, served in the army, then worked in various capacities on the collective farm “Rodina.” Never and nowhere did he spend time with killers or criminals. He was never in prison or in a penal colony or corrective labor camp... And suddenly such a twist of fate: a killer, a criminal. Apart from the shock of the crime, what is even more appalling to me is the ordinariness of the killer; he’s like so many other people. It’s frightful to think that these “many people” live right next to us; they walk around, look, talk... And suddenly, for no reason at all, some hateful feelings “find place” in them and they take a knife and cut the throat of one of us or one of our children.



Commenting on these cases, Kalita writes further that “society is burning in a blaze of crime. What is frightening is that it is so pervasive; it has taken on the dimensions of an outright civil war (son against father, mother; brother against brother; friends killing one another), when each man wars against the other.” The author cites chilling facts, from which he draws accurate generalizations about the lack of motivation behind killings, and about the appearance of a new class of criminals, “who only an hour ago were ordinary people and suddenly they are murderers.” But Kalita cannot explain what has caused this phenomenon. And this is understandable, because it can only be explained from one point of view—mystical.

As has already been pointed out, someone who is not protected by the Christian faith, sacraments and prayer, is defenseless when faced by the net of temptations laid out before him. He falls into one or another mystical trap and, living in this world according to the law of his passions, he is readily controlled by unclean spirits.

As dreadful as this sounds, a majority of people in our society are zombies; that is, people who submissively fulfill the will of an unclean spirit dwelling in them, and this frequently leads them to commit horrible crimes or suicide. The degree of their possession is directly proportionate to the person’s passionateness and lack of faith. Take Kalita’s cases cited above: people who have lost control of their senses, for reasons they themselves cannot explain, decide upon barbarous, senseless acts; into an alcohol-inflamed brain comes an imperative whose voice has long become familiar, identified with the person’s own awareness, whose whims have long ago been uncontrollably and unconditionally satisfied. And here is the result: an irreparable act is committed.

We find clear confirmation of the aforementioned thesis in the article, “Bowing to the Devil.” Here is what it says. Four fifteen-year-old juveniles in the city of Chikment went for a walk to the river with a female classmate. There they cut her with a kitchen knife, drained her blood, and killed her. They buried the body and for a month calmly walked about before the murder was discovered. The youths were all from well-to-do families; there were no alcoholics or criminals among their parents. What were the motives behind the crime?

It turns out that all four were engaged in occultism. To one of them there appeared “a man in black” who ordered the killing of the classmate—a girl who went to church and

to Sunday school. The four juvenile zombies executed the order unquestioningly.

As we see here, young souls unprotected by faith and a Christian conscience, as a result of their involvement in occultism, became possessed and obediently fulfilled a monstrous order. And this is not an isolated case. We can often observe cold, senseless cruelty; bestial malice; blind indifference towards another's sufferings. Alas, all this has become the principal trait of our irreligious society.

We know that man is created in the image and likeness of God; he is called to the lofty aim of love and endless perfection. And when he isolates himself in the depraved circle of satisfying his passions, when he becomes purely carnal and egocentric, his spiritual and physical destruction become inevitable, for in falling away from God he chooses nonexistence. *Even one, who fulfills the will of God, is better than a thousand unrighteous ones*, testifies St. John Chrysostom. *Saints are the salt of the earth; they are the meaning of its existence; they are that fruit for the sake of which it is preserved. And when the earth ceases to bear saints, then that force which holds the world back from catastrophe will be taken away*, states the righteous Silouan. That is, when the measure of evil surpasses the admissible limit, then the society and the people where this occurred will perish. An example of this is the destruction of early humanity from the flood. Likewise we recall Sodom and Gomorrah and their destruction for rampant profligacy. We recall Abraham, who implored the Holy Trinity to spare the city for the sake of even ten righteous men, and who received a promise that if there should be found ten, then for their sake mercy would be shown to that city (Gen 18:32). But ten were not to be found. Righteous Lot was leaving with his family, when the city and its depraved inhabitants were destroyed.

Are we not standing on the brink of such destruction today? That measure of lawlessness which is filling the cup of God's long-suffering and, when it overflows, will call down upon us the inevitable wrath of the Creator of the world—is it not reaching its limit? Will there be found among us ten righteous men able to stave off that retribution ready to pour forth upon our earth on account of man's wickedness?

Look around. Malice, disorder, the spectre of famine, ecological catastrophe, nationalist discord, and so on. Are these not generated by our spiritual bankruptcy, our godless lives? Are these not signs from God that ought to make us stop, think and change ourselves? And if this is so, then without spiritual rebirth neither ecological reforms, nor a wise leader, nor occultists with extraterrestrial beings will help us.

But our faith in Christ the Saviour, our repentance and amendment—this is what can bring us out of our spiritual and moral crisis and give the Light of life to our future.

RESPECT OF THE FAITHFUL FOR THE CLERGY

By Archbishop Athenagoras (Kokkinakis) (+1979)



Orthodox Christians respect and love their clergy. Knowing that the clergy are servants of God and man, devoting their life for the salvation of their flock, the Orthodox people express their gratitude and respect to them on every occasion.

First, the priest is addressed as “Father” by all, for he is the spiritual father of his flock; He is their teacher, confessor, sanctifier and healer.

Second, when people greet their priest they kiss his hand as an expression of respect, as recognition of his priesthood, as a veneration to the holiness of his sacred duties. The fact that the priest handles the Holy of Holies, that is, the Body and Blood of Christ, when he offers the Divine Liturgy, is recognized by the people, at all time throughout the world, as a great and awesome privilege.

Your priest's hands are the hands that touch and offer the Bloodless Sacrifice on the Holy Altar; (the hands that give to us the Body and Blood of Christ; the hands that baptize and anoint us with Holy Chrism; the hands that absolves us forgiveness; the hands that bless our wedlock and anoints our bodies with the healing oil of the sacrament of Holy Unction; the hands that sprinkle upon us the holy water of sanctification; the hands that bless us, alive and dead. These hands are indeed instruments of salvation. For these reasons, Orthodox Christians through the centuries kissed the hand of their priest, as we continue to do in our days. We kiss the hand of our priest when we greet him either when he distributes, at the end of the Liturgy, the blessed bread (Antithoron), or outside the Church whenever we meet him.

We close with the words of St. Paul:

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. (Heb 13:7-9)

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. (Heb 13:13)

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Heb 13:17)

ON HALLOWEEN

By Bishop Kyrill of Seattle, from Orthodox Life, Vol. 43, No. 5, September - October, 1993.

It will shortly be that time of the year when the secular society in which we live is preparing for the festival of Halloween. Because most of us are either newly Orthodox or newly aware of our Orthodoxy, it is absolutely necessary that we carefully examine every aspect of our involvement in the world—it's activities, festivals, associations and societies—in order to discern whether or not these involvements are compatible or incompatible with our holy Orthodox Faith. This is a difficult task which leads to some pain when we realize that there are popular organizations and activities in which we are unable to participate.

Though our schools, our local community organizations, and all forms of entertainment in television, radio, and the press will share in and capitalize upon the festival of Halloween, it is impossible for Orthodox Christians to participate in this event at any level. The issue involved is simple faithfulness to God and the holy Orthodox Christian Faith.

Halloween has its roots in paganism and continues to be a form of idolatry in which Satan, the angel of death is worshipped. As we know, the very foundation of our holy Church is built upon the blood of martyrs who refused under the painful penalties of cruel torture and death to worship, venerate, or pay obeisance in any way to the idols who are Satan's angels. Because of the faithfulness through obedience and self-sacrifice of the holy martyrs, God poured out upon His holy Church abundant grace and its numbers were increased daily, precisely at a time when one would have expected the threat of persecution to extinguish the flame of faith. But, contrary to the world's understanding, humble faithfulness and obedience to God are the very lifelines of our life in Christ, through Whom we are given true spiritual peace, love, and joy, and participation in the miraculous workings of His Holy Spirit. Therefore the holy Church calls us to faithfulness by our turning away from falsehood toward truth and eternal life.

With regard to our non-participation in the pagan festival of Halloween, we will be strengthened by an understanding of the spiritual danger and history of this anti-Christian feast.

The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Great Britain, Ireland and northern

France. These pagan peoples believed that physical life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the "new year" in the fall (on the eve of October 31st and into the day of November 1st), when, as they believed, the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began. A certain deity, whom they called Samhain, was believed by the Celts to be the lord of death, and it was he whom they honored at their New Year's festival.

There were, from an Orthodox Christian point of view, many diabolical beliefs and practices associated with this feast which, it will be clear, have endured to our time. On the eve of the New Year's festival, the Druids who were the priests of the Celtic cult, instructed their people to extinguish all hearth fires and lights. On the evening of the festival a huge bonfire built of oak branches, which they believed to be sacred, was ignited. Upon this fire sacrifices of crops, animals, and even human beings, were burned as an offering in order to appease and cajole Samhain, the lord of death. It was also believed that Samhain, being pleased by their faithful offerings, allowed the souls of the dead to return to homes for a festal visit on this day. It is from this belief that the practice of wandering about in the dark dressed up in costumes imitating ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, fairies, and demons grew up. For the living entered into fellowship and communion with the dead by what was, and still is, a ritual act



of imitation, through costume and activity of wandering around in the dark of night, even as the souls of the dead were believed to wander.

The dialogue of "trick or treat" is also an integral part of this system of beliefs and practices. It was believed that the souls of the dead who had entered into the world of darkness, decay, and death, and therefore into total communion with and submission to Samhain, the lord of death, bore the affliction of great hunger on their festal visit. Out of this grew the practice of begging, which was a further ritual enactment and imitation of what the Celts believed to be the activities of the souls of the dead on their festal visit. Associated with this is the still further implication that if the souls of the dead and their imitators were not appeased with "treats," i.e., offerings, then the wrath and anger of Samhain, whose angels and servants the souls and their imitators had become, would be unleashed through a system of "tricks," or curses.

From an Orthodox Christian point of view, participation in these practices at any level is impossible and idolatrous,

a genuine betrayal of our God and our holy Faith. For if we participate in the ritual activity of imitating the dead by dressing up in their attire or by wandering about in the dark, or by begging with them, then we have willfully sought fellowship with the dead, whose lord is not Samhain as the Celts believed but Satan, the Evil One who stands against God. Further, if we submit to the dialogue of “trick or treat,” we make our offering not to innocent children, but rather to Samhain, the lord of death whom they have come to serve as imitators of the dead, wandering in the dark of night.

There are other practices associated with Halloween which we must stay away from. As was mentioned above, on the eve of the Celtic New Year festival, Druid priests instructed their faithful to extinguish their hearth fires and lights and to gather around the fire of sacrifice to make their offerings to pay homage to the lord of death. Because this was a “sacred fire,” it was from this that the fire of the new year was to be taken and the lights and hearth fire rekindled. Out of this arose the practice of the Jack O’ Lantern (in the USA, a pumpkin—in older days other vegetables were used) which was carved in imitation of the dead and used to convey the new light and fire to the home where the lantern was left burning throughout the night. Even the use and display of the Jack O’ Lantern involves celebration of and participation in the pagan festival of death honoring the Celtic god Samhain. Orthodox Christians must in no way share in this Celtic activity, but rather we should counter our inclinations and habits by burning candles to the Saviour and the Most Holy Mother of God and to all the holy saints.

In the ancient Celtic rite divination was also associated with this festival. After the fire had died out, the Druids examined the remains of the sacrifices in order to foretell, as they believed was possible, the events of the coming year. Since this time the Halloween festival has been the night for participation in all kinds of sorcery, fortune telling, divination, games of chance, and in latter medieval times, Satan worship and witchcraft.

In the days of the early Celtic Church, which was strictly Orthodox, the holy Fathers attempted to counteract this pagan New Year Festival which honored the lord of death, by establishing the Feast of All Saints on the same day (in the East, the Feast of All Saints is celebrated on the Sunday following Pentecost). As was the custom of the Church, the faithful Christians attended a Vigil Service in the evening and in the morning a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It is from this that the term Halloween developed. The word Halloween has its roots in the Old English of “All Hallow’s Even,” i.e., the eve commemorating all those who were hallowed (sanctified), i.e., Halloween.

The people who had remained pagan and therefore anti-Christian and whose paganism had become deeply inter-

twined with the occult, Satanism, and magic, reacted to the Church’s attempt to supplant their festival by increased fervor on this evening. In the early middle ages, Halloween became the supreme and central feast of the occult, a night and day upon which acts of witch craft, demonism, sorcery, and Satanism of all kinds were practiced.

Many of these practices involved desecration and mockery of Christian practices and beliefs. Costumes of skeletons developed as a mockery of the Church’s reverence for holy relics; holy things were stolen, such as crosses and the Reserved Sacrament, and used in perverse and sacrilegious ways. The practice of begging became a system of persecution designed to harass Christians who were, by their beliefs, unable to participate by making offerings to those who served the lord of death. Thus, the Western Church’s attempt to supplant this pagan festival with the Feast of All Saints failed.

The analogy of Halloween in ancient Russia was Navy Dien (old Slavonic for “the dead” was “nav”) which was also called Radunitsa and celebrated in the spring. To supplant it, the Eastern Church connected this feast with Pascha and appointed it to be celebrated on Tuesday of the Saint Thomas’ week (the second week after Pascha). The Church also changed the name of the feast into Radonitsa, from Russian “radost” joy. Joy of Pascha and of the resurrection from the dead of all of mankind after Jesus Christ.

Gradually, Radonitsa yielded to Pascha its importance and became less popular in general, but many dark and pagan practices and habits of some old feasts of Russian paganism (Semik, Kupalo, Rusalia and some aspects of the Maslennitsa) survived till the beginning of our century. Now they are gone forever, but the atheist authorities used to try to revive them. We can also recall the example of another “harmless” feast—May 1st, proclaimed “the international worker’s day.” That was a simple renaming of a very old satanic feast of Walpurgis Night (night of April 30th into the day of May 1st)—the great yearly demonic Sabbath during which all the participants united in “a fellowship of Satan.”

These contemporary Halloween practices have their roots in paganism, idolatry, and Satan worship. How then did something that is so obviously contradictory to the holy Orthodox Faith gain acceptance among Christian people?

The answer to this question is spiritual apathy and listlessness, which are the spiritual roots of atheism and the turning away from God. In today’s society one is continually urged to disregard the spiritual roots and origins of secular practices under the guise that the outward customs, practices and forms are cute, fun, entertaining, and harmless. Behind this attitude lies the dogma of atheism, which denies the existence of both God and Satan and can therefore conclude that these activities, despite their obvious pagan and idolatrous origin, are harmless and of no consequence.

The holy Church must stand against this because we are taught by Christ that God stands in judgment over everything we do and believe, and that our actions are either for God or against God. Therefore, **the customs of Halloween are not innocent practices** with no relationship to the spiritual world. But rather **they are demonic practices**, precisely as an examination of their origins proves.

Evil spirits do exist. The demons do exist. Christ came into the world so *that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil.* (Heb 2:14). It is imperative for us to realize as Christians that our greatest foe is the Evil One, who inspires nations and individuals to sin against mankind, and who prevents them from coming to a knowledge of the truth. Unless we realize that Satan is our real enemy, we can never hope for spiritual progress for our lives. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* (Eph 6:12).

Today we witness a revival of satanistic cults; we hear of a satanic service conducted on Halloween night; everywhere Satan reaches out to ensnare as many innocent people as possible. The newsstands are filled with material on spiritualism, supernatural phenomena, seances, prophecies, and all sorts of demonically inspired works.

It is undoubtedly an act of Divine Providence that Saint John of Kronstadt, that saintly physician of souls and bodies, should have his feast day on the very day of Halloween, a day which the world dedicated to the destroyer, corrupter, and deceiver of humanity. God has provided us with this powerful counterpoise and weapon against the snares of Satan, and we should take full advantage of this gift, for truly *Wondrous is God in His saints.*



If our thoughts are kind, peaceful and quiet, turned only towards good, then we also influence ourselves and radiate peace all around us—in our family, in the whole country, everywhere. When we labor in the fields of the Lord, we create harmony. Divine harmony, peace and quiet spread everywhere. However, when we breed negative thoughts, that is a great evil. When there is evil in us, we radiate it among our family members and everywhere we go. So you see, we can be very good or very evil. If that's the way it is, it is certainly better to choose good!

St. John Chrysostom teaches us that all evil comes first from ourselves and only secondly from the devil. If we keep our minds vigilant and our hearts strong in the Faith, the devil has no access to us.

Blessed Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

A STORY FROM THE “LEIMONARION” (THE “SPIRITUAL MEADOW”)

In the reign of the most faithful Caesar Tiberius Constantine (578-582), we went to the Great Oasis and when we were there, we saw a monk named Abba Leo, a Cappadocian by race, who was great in the eyes of God. Many people told us a multitude of wondrous stories about this monk. When we made contact with him and gained some experience of him, we reaped considerable benefits; especially from his humility, recollection, poverty, and charity which he showed to all.

This ever memorable elder said to us, “Believe me, children, I am going to reign.” We said to him, “Believe us, abba, nobody from Cappadocia ever reigned. This is an ill suited thought you are harboring.” But he said again, “It is a fact, children, that I am going to reign;” and nobody could persuade him to put the idea away from him.

When the Maziques came and overran all of that region, they came to the Great Oasis and slew many monks, while many others were taken prisoner. Among those taken prisoner at the Lavra of the Great Oasis were Abba John, formerly lector at the Great Church in Constantinople, Abba Eustathios the Roman, and Abba Theodore, all three of whom were ill. When they had been captured, Abba John said to the barbarians, “Take me to the city and I will have the bishop give you twenty four pieces of gold.”

So one of the barbarians led him off and brought him near to the city. Abba John went in to the bishop. Abba Leo the Cappadocian was in the city at that time and so were some others of the fathers; that is why they were not captured. Abba John went in and began to implore the bishop to give the barbarian the twenty four pieces of gold, but the bishop could only find eight. He was willing to give these to the barbarian, but the barbarian would not take them. “Either give me twenty four pieces of gold or the monk,” he said.

The men of the fortress had no choice but to hand over Abba John, who wept and groaned, to the barbarian; they took him to their tents. Three days later, Abba Leo took the eight pieces of gold and went out into the wilderness to where the barbarians were camped. He pleaded with them in these words, “Take me and the eight pieces of gold, and let those three monks go. For, as they are sick and cannot work for you, you will only have to kill them. But as for me, I am in good health and I can work for you.” Then the barbarians took both him and the eight pieces of gold of which he spoke, letting the other three monks go free.

Abba Leo went off somewhere with them and when he was worn out and could go no further, they beheaded him. And so, Abba Leo fulfilled that which is spoken in the Scriptures, *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* (Jn 15:13). Then we realized what he was talking about when he used to say, “I am going to reign.” For reign he did, having laid down his life for his friends...

ON TELEVISION

By ROCOR Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal and Canada (+2006),
from "Orthodox Life," Vol. 31, no. 1, January - February, 1981.

We have not yet felt the huge after-shock of the coming of television which in a short time has managed to secure a niche for itself in almost every home. Its powers of persuasion and attraction have proved to be practically supernatural and are coupled with a subtle and awesome ability to corrupt. Today, the priesthood cannot and must not ignore the phenomenon of television, a phenomenon unrivalled in the extent of its influence over the human soul. Without exaggeration, a campaign against it must be our immediate and primary concern because every day and every hour its effects are being felt in our own homes.

Its power can be overcome! All we really need to do is to see it in perspective. It is indisputably a brilliant invention and our chief problem lies in the fact that our conflict is not really with it at all, but with ourselves and our own perpetually debilitated wills. We simply do not have the strength to tear ourselves away from its extraordinarily seductive spell. I am reminded of the words of St. Paul: *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.* (I Cor 6:12).

So let us look at television objectively, see the good and the evil in it, and only then will we be in a position to make use of its positive aspects and to reject the negative.

Firstly, no invention, no mechanism nor electronic device is inherently evil; there is no such thing as intrinsic evil, for evil exists only in the will of those who act contrary to the will of God. Such phenomena as television are rather manifestations of the Divine Wisdom which man has the privilege of discovering within the laws of nature, so that he may all the better and with all his heart give praise and thanks to the Creator. Given nothing else but the sheer quantity of programming, it would be foolish to say that no good at all comes of it. The chief good (and perhaps the only good fully realized) is this: television has brought people home again.

The whole period beginning with the WWI and ending with the 1950's has been singled out by sociologists because of one characteristic, the tendency of people to "go out" in search of stimulation. People may have slept at home and even had their meals at home, but "leisure time" was spent elsewhere. People "went out," coaxed by sports events, movies, dancing, and an endless array of "entertainments." The results, especially for children, were catastrophic. "Home" became not much more than a dormitory and all the former connotations of the word were lost. It had been a place where children first learned to comprehend the things around them and to use their imaginations, a place where the newly-awakened imagination lovingly animated the lifeless forms around it

and first learned to dream. But now, the children were cast out into the streets, completely unprepared for the cruel and bitter realities they encountered, the realities of our times, which so insult the soul.

Suddenly, for the first time in five decades people came home—to watch television. Television was not presenting anything new; we cannot credit it with that. It was simply appealing to the lower instincts of the common man and bringing those same things which he had sought in the streets into his living room. So there is no use speaking of the "morality" of the change that came about, and yet the change itself gives cause for optimism. Amidst the indignity, corruption and temptation that we now live in, we must clutch at straws and hope that they will keep us afloat. Let us concede, then, that television encourages us to stay home and try to build on that. Were we to damn it outright, we would find no one to listen. Such is the power it wields over us.

Conceivably, television could graphically and comprehensively present us with the complex issues confronting science, art and technology and thus increase our knowledge and awareness. Conceivably, it could eradicate ignorance and that peculiar semi-literacy which has always brought the world to grief. Let us for a moment assume that it seeks to do these things, for the sake of the argument, and go on to examine its destructive influence on the soul.

Television keeps us from reading. Why bother when we can both hear and see everything on television? Why strain our imagination when television can do all the work for us? We are handed programs on a platter, masterfully prepared and piquantly sauced—all we have to do is eat.

Television has carried us to the ends of the earth and into space, taken us to the ocean's bottom and into the earth's crust, into factories and operating rooms where we have practically participated in the most complex surgery. It has shown us nations and peoples whom we might otherwise never have seen. And yet, paradoxically, it has made us slothful and apathetic. Television's vast storehouse of audio-visual information has proven to be an indigestible glut which has made us indifferent to the real world around us. When all is said and done, it has nurtured our ignorance.

I will try to explain. When we read, an extremely complex psychological process occurs. It involves first and foremost, an effort of the will. To choose a book and read it through requires a concentrated effort, whereas it takes no effort at all to watch television. No matter how brilliant the author of a given book may be our imagination creates its own images as we read. We create a universe of our own. In fact, we may be drawn to our favorite authors precisely because we participate with them in the mysterious process of creation.

The imagination is only one aspect of the soul. It is the source of creativity and exploration and it is developed through reading. This helps to make us not only useful

members of society but life-loving individuals as well. Television, on the other hand, far from stimulating the imagination, has no need of it. The work of the imagination is completed by the time a program is broadcast, and all we end up doing is looking at the end-product of the imaginations of others, often alien to our own. As we are deprived of our imaginations, so are we deprived of our souls, and our creative powers are paralyzed.

We see God's creation through a glass darkly and forget that *the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.* (Rom 1:20). Very subtly, television turns us into materialists who retain an intrinsic animal ability to see, but lack any inner vision—the vision of the soul. We are being encouraged to look more and more but not to see. We are becoming like the idols which King David the poet and prophet spoke of in his psalms: *They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not. They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.* (Pss 115:5-8). Once we are able to look and yet not see the essence of things and the threads that bind them all together, we have become truly ignorant.

Much has already been written about the corrupting influence of television, but I would like to bring it to mind once more.

No parent would ever take his or her children to any place of dubious repute. If someone suggested a stroll through the slums, it would be taken as a bad joke, a sign of mental instability, or of intoxication. And yet, let us not be hypocritical, all you parents of respected and honorable Orthodox families! Of course you declined the invitation to the slums, but you think nothing wrong in gathering in your living room and with a barely perceptible and innocent flick of the wrist inviting the lowest forms of human society into your homes, the walls of which are probably even graced with icons. You are about to meet every conceivable sort of maniac, murderer and psychopath. You won't even flinch and your conscience will remain clean. But your children will have nightmares; they will grow nervous, irritable and insufferably rude. Even you will not fall asleep as easily as before because of the oppressive burden of the immoral hideousness you have seen.

All of these things are a profanation of your home, which, in the highest understanding of the Orthodox Church, is your church as well. The Apostle Paul often called the Christian home the *church within the house* (Rom 16:5; I Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phil 1:2). You are also profaning your soul and the souls of your children, because your eyes and your ears are the instruments of your soul and the images you see, as well as the things you hear, enter into it. Images are stored in our subconscious like photos in an album and they can profane our heart of hearts. They re-emerge from the disturbed mind at any moment and in any place, in accordance with laws that we know nothing about at present. They interfere with our relationships with other human beings and take away the joy and the immediacy of living. It was with these things in view that the Orthodox Church stated succinctly and without equivocation, *Your eyes see the truth and what the eyes perceive goes directly to influence the soul. Wisdom tells us that this is so.*

Therefore guard your heart above all else you treasure, for the source of life is there. (100th canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople).

What a Mephistophelian joke we have become the brunt of since then! Knowing full well that we Orthodox would never knowingly engage in unlawful assembly, Satan so cleverly and completely clouded our judgment that, with our own hard-earned money, we obtain an electronic device which introduces us

to corruption, debauchery and murder, and turns our home into an insane asylum. Satan has taken away from us that sense of human dignity which the holy prophet David so treasured that he constantly and tirelessly besought the Lord not to let the devil make a laughing-stock of him.

Since we undeniably do see all the above mentioned depravity on television, it becomes important to note another critical consequence of our actions. In our everyday lives we have practical, moral, psychological and social barriers placed between us and the commission of evil. The soul, if only through inertness and laziness, tends never to remove them. But the impact and example of the realism of television effortlessly overcomes these barriers. It familiarizes us with all the approaches to sin as if they were of our own making, and consequently sin comes easily to us. This would explain the waves of appalling crimes which have become endemic in our time and which even our social agencies are concerned about—crimes which cannot be predicted—"motiveless crimes." A young boy, for no apparent reason, murders his parents one morning. A student indecently assaults his teacher. There



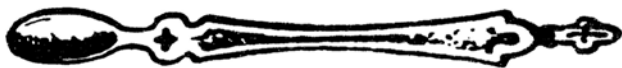
are countless examples in the police records, but it would be inappropriate to cite any more here.

What means of resistance can I suggest, for it is clear that we must resist. First of all, we must work together, both the shepherd and the flock, making this our highest priority. Of course, the best and simplest thing to do would be to sell the television set, and the sooner the better. Let me qualify that: sell it and give the money to the Church for the benefit of the poor. This first suggestion is for those righteous souls who have already taken up the sword, those elect of God whose aim in life is salvation. Even more blessed are those who never acquired the thing in the first place, who never needed it. However, I understand that for the time being this, my first suggestion, will seem too harsh for the majority of the faithful. We have been captivated by television and our wills have become so feeble and sickly that few can respond to such a call. But do not be dismayed—there have always been few heroes and even fewer martyrs. The righteous always seem to be alone.

I would like to remind us all once more, as faithful Christians, of the positive qualities of television, particularly of its ability to keep us at home and together. We have all noticed on many occasions where the family gathers in the evening, with apparent dignity and decorum, before the television set, in the semi darkness. Our struggle against the harmful effects of television comes down to taking advantage of its ability to bring us together and at the same time negating its corrupting influences.

We must revitalize our willpower and establish a firm “modus operandi” in our use of this invention. Firstly, only the parents or some responsible member of the family should be allowed to turn it on. Secondly, it must be given the aura of “forbidden fruit,” and children should be permitted to see only the occasional good movie, solely as a reward for their achievements and good behavior. It is important to accompany every such film with a discussion and one’s own conclusions, putting the subject into an historical perspective and citing related themes from literature. Everything must be seen in the light of Orthodoxy and the teachings of the Holy Fathers.

I would like to believe that those who choose to oppose fervently the corrupting influence of television will also be guided by the Lord who will suggest ways to ward off evil. During all fasts it could be made a rule to disconnect the television or even to remove it altogether. Our diligence will of course depend on the extent of our desire for salvation, on our piety as a community and on our devotion to the Church.



God does not allow the same warfare and temptations to this generation as he did formerly, for men are weaker now and cannot bear so much.

St. Anthony the Great

THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR

By Fr. Vassily Zenkovsky, Director of Religious Education at St. Sergius Institute, Paris, France.

The Christian educator faces a hard yet inspiring task: to awaken and strengthen the religious life of the child. The task is inspiring because religious growth brings forth in a young soul the flowering of all its spiritual gifts, unfolds a perspective of eternal life and brings the radiant image of Christ into a child’s heart. There is an inexpressible beauty in childish faith, in the naive prayers of childhood and as we adults witness the awakening of this new life, we seem to share its brightness. But the task of the educator, penetrating into the world of the child’s religion, is also hard, for almost everything in our present environment is opposed to spiritual life; everything leads the soul away from God and from His eternal truth.

Technical achievements fascinate our young people and they grasp at all the advantages that technical progress puts within their reach. Life itself becomes a kind of technical assignment, for is not the whole world operating according to rational and well organized rules? Is it not sufficient to know these rules, to adjust oneself to them in order to find happiness and solve all conflicts? The tragic element of life is veiled, disguised, removed to some obscure corner, and it is difficult under these conditions to bring to children the message of the Cross, to disclose to them the need for spiritual effort.

In our modern world, we adults are lulled by the sense of our civilization’s environment; we become spiritually drowsy and superficial. The bright inner world of the child’s fantasy is focused from the very beginning on the superficial, external aspects of life. Under such conditions, how can we awaken a thirst for spiritual life? How can we light the fire of a soul’s yearning for eternal truth?

Religious education is often deformed, replaced by an appeal to the external faculties of the human soul—to the child’s intelligence, to his emotions and his activity. Information about God, about Jesus Christ and the Theotokos, about saints and church history, which are necessary as a means of bringing the soul nearer to the other-worldly values, grow to be an end in themselves; i.e., they remain unrelated to the process of coming nearer to God. Of course, this information and knowledge is necessary, for without knowledge our spiritual life cannot mature and take shape. But spiritual life as such does not consist in knowledge.

The Russian philosopher Keslov made a good distinction between knowledge *about* God and knowledge *of* God: knowledge *about* God includes our ideas about God, the way we visualize our Lord’s earthly life, His death and resurrection. But all this is only knowledge *about* God. Knowledge *of* God, on the other hand, is our

life with Him and in Him. All the knowledge we acquire *about* God should merely serve to bring us nearer to him; knowledge *about* God should give shape and expression to those spiritual experiences through which our hearts are drawn nearer to God. But if there is no spiritual life in our heart, then all the knowledge we acquire *about* God remains worthless.

Spiritual life means standing before God. It means a living consciousness of God, a soul's unfolding. Spiritual life is seeking God, and finding Him, it is directing our entire being toward Him; it is living with Him and in Him. We can and should give sufficient attention to the external forms of life, but our soul should be withdrawn in God. We can and should take care of our families, and carry out our social and professional duties, but over and above this we should be constantly conscious of our Heavenly Father Whom we love and to Whom we surrender our soul completely.

Spiritual life is hidden within us. Saint Peter spoke of the hidden man of the heart, of a meek and quiet spirit which is, in the sight of God, of great price. Yes, spiritual life remains hidden in a man's heart. This is precisely why it is possible to slumber spiritually, i.e., to live in such a way that the entire power of our attention, all our spiritual forces are devoted to external values and we remain unconcerned about the need of our spirit to live with God. Many good and kind people remain spiritually asleep and sometimes the moment of awakening comes only with the end of their life.

But if spiritual life remains hidden, it is at the same time unavoidable and indestructible. On the surface of our soul, in our conscious mind, we are completely possessed by externals, but underneath this busy and agitated existence, in the hidden depths of our being, there goes on a process of spiritual life. Unfortunately, it remains inactive and does not influence our conscious life and our behavior. Spiritual life in a human being is determined by the presence in each soul of the image of God.

The radiance of grace is constantly penetrating our soul, but if our spiritual life is suppressed into an air-tight compartment, this power of grace cannot affect us, cannot help us. This is the evil of our times in this secularized world in which our entire culture is separated from God and from his Church. Science, art, economic life, politics, social activity—all these forms of human activity have become autonomous and have drifted away from God.

Under these circumstances, how can we establish a link between the external life of our heart and mind and the hidden life of the spirit? This is the basic and ineffably difficult task that faces the Christian educator. Religious instruction is, after all, only a part of religious education. Religious instruction is important, but it will be fruitful only if a process of spiritual life goes on, however faintly, if the hidden life of the spirit is not completely separated from the rest of

our inner life. The very difficulty of Christian education, its very toil, consists in reestablishing in the human being its spiritual oneness, wholeness, in opposition to the trend of our times. The Christian educator has only one way of achieving this: **his own spiritual life**. Only if the educator lives himself in his own spirit can he awaken, call forth the hidden power of the spirit in a young heart.

We have to "instruct" our children, we have to tell them about God's creation of the world, about man's happy existence in Paradise and his fall, about the promise of the Messiah, about Mary the Mother of our Lord, about the Incarnation of the God of gods, and about the new life He brought us. But all this knowledge, however necessary it is, can remain a dead capital in our heart, without illuminating or vitalizing our spirit. This is the common danger faced by the modern Christian world, by modern culture. Christ is not forgotten, but He is not a living experience; the kingdom of God and His righteousness is not sought after "First", as the Lord taught us. Other, external values are the object of this seeking.

Yes, the path of the Christian educator is hard indeed. It is a difficult task to establish a link between the hidden life of the heart and our external active life, with our superficial emotional experiences. The truth was expressed a long time ago: "Education is first of all self-education." We cannot simply "teach Sunday school," give our children religious instruction, if we ourselves do not live the truth of the Gospel. We can light a fire in the hearts of our pupils only if our own hearts are aglow.

It is a difficult task, but there are few joys greater than the one we feel when we are able to reach the hidden life of a young soul. When we come in touch with it ourselves we gain depth and enlightenment. Anyone who has experienced this joy in his work with children, has found his vocation.

Let the words of St. Paul remain alive in his heart: *Quench not the Spirit!* (I Thes 5:19).



My children, work diligently at the spiritual fragrance—I am speaking of prayer—this holy conversation with Jesus, which abundantly provides His blessings. Yes, children of the Spirit, love prayer with your whole heart so that all of you become a fragrance of grace, and that you smell sweet to those near you and make them say: *truly, monasticism makes monks give off an angelic fragrance through spiritual grace*. So, let the filthy passions be far from you, for they cause a foul smell and make a bad impression.

Elder Ephraim of Philotheou
From *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688



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THE DEATH OF A CIVILIZATION IMMERSED IN SIN

By Luiz Sérgio Solimeo.



The once Christian Western world is gradually sinking into a sea of mud in ever-thickening darkness. Vice and error are glorified as virtue, and truth is persecuted. People no longer boast of moral righteousness and

of the rule of reason but of anarchy, irrationality and the “deconstruction” of the concepts which sustain the life of thought.

The crisis of the family, the perversion of the youth, the growth of random and senseless violence, fruit of an ever more intense criminality, are spreading by the day.

We are witnessing the tenebrous sunset of a civilization; a new invasion of barbarians, not on horseback through the steppes or boldly crossing seas in rickety boats: they are born and raised in this very world they are going to destroy. They are a fruit of the counter-education received from broken homes, schools, society, and a media and entertainment industry gone awry.

No civilization can sustain itself and make progress without being based on logical and coherent thought and on solid and consistent morals. In other words, truth and good are the foundation and pillars sustaining the social, cultural and religious life that give a sense of purpose to the lives of individuals and to

the collective life of peoples. If this is missing there is chaos in people's minds, customs, and in society.

The frantic quest for absolute and unbridled freedom has led man to shake off all restrictions imposed by morals, logic and even nature. Deconstruction of the truth and the good has led him to “deconstruct” the reality of his own body by denying the evidence of his sex stemming from anatomy and physiology; and as a consequence, he plunges himself into the surreal world of the homosexual culture.

Without the truth to guide him and morals to govern him, man has turned into flotsam and jetsam adrift in the vastness of the sea, dragged away by the waves with no defined purpose or direction.

The Renaissance, when Western civilization began to turn its back on the “philosophy of the Gospel” which, in the words of the Latin Pope Leo XIII, characterized medieval Christendom, marked the start of a long process of apostasy that has come all the way to today's virtually atheistic society. (Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, “Revolution and Counter-Revolution”).

By rejecting Christianity, this decadent civilization has rejected Christ; and by rejecting the One who is Truth itself it started to love error and a world of unreality and fantasy. By falling away from truth and good this society began to seek satisfaction in sin, sinking into sin and revolt against God.

This is the reason why this civilization is dying; for, as Saint Paul reminds us, *the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Rom 6:23).