

# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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## THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST: THE FEAST OF RENEWAL

By St. John of Kronstadt.



We are approaching, beloved brethren, the world-saving feast of the birth in the flesh of our Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. For several days before the feast, the holy Church will celebrate this wondrous mystery in the spiritual hymns of her daily services. These hymns remind us of our divine birthright, and the squandering of our sonship through sin; of its restoration through repentance of our common spiritual kinship and of the spirit of love and care for one another.

In order that we celebrate this feast of God's limitless love and His extreme condescension, not in a worldly but, in a spiritual manner, let us briefly consider the following: Why did God become man while remaining God? And what does God's incarnation require of us?

Having set forth these two questions, I shall answer the first one with the words of the Archangel to Joseph, the betrothed of the Holy Virgin: God became man to *save His people from their sin*. (Mt 1:21). For this reason He is called Jesus, which means *Saviour*. And so, it was for our salvation that

the Lord came to earth and became man, for the regeneration in us of the image of God which had fallen. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to make us sons of God who were the children of wrath and eternal damnation. In the words of the Holy Apostle John the Theologian: *that we should be called the sons of God* (I Jn 3:1); *Now God became man, that He may make Adam a god.* (Stichera for lauds of Annunciation).

O the unutterable love of God! O the unspeakable compassion of the Lord! And He, the Most Holy, did this: He deified mankind in His chosen ones, cleansed them from all evil both of soul and body, sanctified, glorified, led them from corruption to everlasting life, made them worthy to stand in blessedness before the terrible throne of His glory. And He deified us also, brothers and sisters; He gave us a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit, sanctified us, made us His sons, gave us the promise of eternal life and eternal blessings, surpassing all telling and imagining. And in confirmation, as a surety of the future blessings, He gave to us, still here on earth, the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts: God *hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.* (Gal 4:6) writes the Apostle.

And so, my brothers, the feast of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God, that we are sons of God, that we have been saved from sin and that we must live for God and not sin; not for flesh and blood, not for the

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*whole world which lies in evil and wickedness* (1 Jn 5:19), not for earthly corruption. We must live for *an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you* (1 Pet 1:4), and for which the Lord Himself will give you a sign; *behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.* (Isa 7:14).

You who are preparing yourselves to meet the feast of Christ's Nativity, ask yourselves: Have you preserved that spiritual birth from God which we each received in baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children? Have you loved one another as befits children of God? Have you despised ugly, evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue? Have you loved immortal and eternal life prepared in a land which will not pass away and to which we are called by Him Who now has come to our corrupt earth? These are questions which we must ask ourselves now and decide; our decisions cannot be only with our minds, but above all, with our hearts and with our very deeds.

In general, we should not allow ourselves to celebrate any Christian feast without seriously considering: What is its meaning and what is its purpose? What is our responsibility towards it? We must know the Christian meaning behind every feast. Then the feast will become profitable for our soul's salvation. Otherwise, the enemy of our salvation will snatch us and turn the feast of God into a feast of the flesh, of lawlessness, as so often happens.

Having resolved the first question on "why did God become man?", We came also to the resolution of the second: What does the Incarnation of the Son of God require of

us? It requires of us to remember and hold in sacred honor the fact that we are born of God, and if we have sullied and trampled upon this birthright with our sins, we must restore it by washing it with tears of repentance; we must restore and renew within us the image of God which has fallen and the union with God of blessedness, truth and holiness which has been destroyed.

The incarnation of the Son of God requires from us, above all, mutual love, humility, that we help and serve one another; for how can we not love one another when we see the love that God has towards us? How can we not be humble, seeing such humility, such voluntary condescension for our sake of the Son of God? How can we not help one another in every way possible, when the Son of God Himself *came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many?* (Mt 20:28).

Like the wisemen, let us, brothers, also prepare gifts for the new-born King. Instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, let us bring Him the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Amen.



**T**oday Christ is born of the Virgin in Bethlehem. Today He who knows no beginning now begins to be, and the Word is made flesh. The powers of heaven greatly rejoice, and the earth with mankind makes glad. The Magi offer gifts, the shepherds proclaim the marvel, and we cry aloud without ceasing: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.

Lauds for Nativity

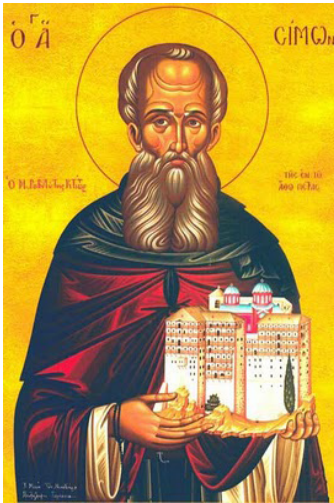
## ST. SIMON THE MYRRH-GUSHER FEASTDAY: DECEMBER 28<sup>TH</sup>

From the "Athonite Paterikon".

*And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

[Mt 2:9-10].

† † †



On December 28<sup>th</sup>, shortly after the Feast of the Nativity, the Church celebrates the memory of St. Simon the Myrrh-Gusher through whom the Lord wrought great wonders. A star, like that which led the Magi to Bethlehem, miraculously revealed to the saint the site upon which, by divine command, he was to found a monastery. The monastery was appropriately dedicated to the Feast of the Nativity and was named New Bethlehem. Today, seven centuries later, it is still one of the flourishing monasteries on Mt. Athos.

The life of the venerable Simon was arrayed with mighty ascetic feats and miracles not only during his lifetime, but even after his repose when there gushed forth from his relics an abundant fount of myrrh in a manner similar to that of the Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki. Where he came from, who his parents were, and where he began his monastic labors, no one knows. Some time in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, he arrived on the Holy Mountain. Recalling the saying of the Fathers that without obedience one cannot be saved, the venerable Simon sought before all else to find a spiritual elder, one to whom he could entrust his soul without reserve, an elder who would be not only a faithful guide unto salvation and a radiant model of ascetic perfection, but also strict in bodily discipline.

After looking all over the Holy Mountain, he finally chose out of the multitude of monks leading virtuous lives, an unknown elder, perfect in all respects in the ascetic life. He labored in complete submission to his elder, fulfilling all his obediences with love and zeal and soon attained to such great spiritual heights that he became known all over the Holy Mountain for his irreproachable life.

Finally, the time came when the elder was convinced that his period of trial was over. Casting aside his paternal kindness towards the venerable Simon, he decided to dwell with him as with a brother and on several occasions he even asked for his advice and counsel. But instead of rejoicing over the

benevolence and honor bestowed upon him by his elder, Simon was utterly grieved. He decided to leave, seeking for himself total reclusion. Expressing his intention to his elder, he asked his blessing amidst a shower of tears, desiring with heartfelt sorrow that the elder would grant his consent. In this way, he took leave of his dear elder for whom he had already become not so much a disciple as another mighty co-struggler in the angelic life.

For a long time St. Simon searched all over the Holy Mountain for a secluded hermitage where no one would know of his existence and no one would find him. Finally, with God's help, he found a deserted mountainside with caves on the southern part of the Holy Mountain. Knowing that before him lay the relentless struggle of unseen warfare, the saint clothed himself with spiritual armor with the help of the Holy Spirit, taking the cross, prayer, faith, patience, fasting, and everything that could crush the wily schemes of the demons and raise a man to angelic purity and childlike simplicity. It is difficult to recount the fierce schemes and hidden traps with which Satan tormented and tried to catch Saint Simon unaware. The holy ascetic, however, boldly trampled upon the brazen arrogance of his adversary and crushed all his plans. For many years, St. Simon remained secluded within his cave where he manfully endured the constant battle with the unseen enemies of his soul. He lived in sorrows and utter deprivation, lacking even the assurance of his own salvation.

Meanwhile, hearing of the severity of his life and in particular of his spiritual discernment and insight, many monks on the Holy Mountain began to come to him and to receive great spiritual benefit from his soul-profiting counsel, thus fulfilling the word of God: *A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.* (Mt 5:14). Together with those who came to him, Simon was accounted worthy to receive from the Lord the gift of foreknowledge. However, through his humility he grew weary of such earthly honor, and he sought refuge from the disturbance created by all those who came to him. He was burdened by the stream of visitors which, it seemed to him, only served as a hindrance to his desire for a life of seclusion. He yearned, therefore, to abandon his dwelling for a yet more isolated one. But God, desiring the well-being and salvation of each and every one, prevented the realization of his desire in the following way:

One night, while persevering in prayer, the righteous one saw outside his cave, as if before his very eyes, the effulgence of a divine light; an ineffable fragrance spread all around him and he heard a loud voice: *Simon, Simon, thou faithful friend and servant of my Son! Do not go away from here. I shall glorify this place; you shall be its guiding light, and your name shall be glorified.* Out of caution, Simon chose at first not to believe this vision, not desiring to fall into the nets of the evil one; for he knew, according to the word of the



Apostle, that Satan could transform himself into an angel of light. Nevertheless, he continued to ponder upon the actual source of the voice. This took place shortly before the Feast of the Nativity of Christ. Then, one night, walking outside his cave, he saw a strange apparition: A star descended from the heavens and came to rest just above the rocky cliffs where later the holy monastery was to be situated. This same vision repeated itself on the following evenings; but the venerable Simon was still fearful. Was it possible that this was solely one of the consequences of his intense spiritual warfare? And he continued to distrust the vision.

When the Eve of the Nativity of Christ arrived, he saw in a dream a brilliant star and heard a divine voice: *Simon! You must build a monastic dwelling here. I myself shall help you. Cast aside your doubts, or you shall be punished for your unbelief.*

The same voice spoke to him three times. At that time (as he later related to his disciples) it seemed to him that he was in Bethlehem of Judea, in the very place where the shepherds were tending their flocks, and he heard the sweet sound of angelic singing: *Glorry to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Fear not, for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* (Lk 2:14, 10). After this, said the saint, all fear and uneasiness were dispelled from my soul and I rejoiced in spirit, and secretly beheld the scene in Bethlehem; there, before the manger, the Sovereign Lady stood before the Divine Child, lying in swaddling clothes.

Several days after the Feast of the Nativity, three rich men, brothers after the flesh, came to the venerable one. They confessed all their sins and began persuasively to entreat him to permit them to live in obedience under his direction. After a brief period of trial and testing, St. Simon revealed unto them, as to his own sons according to the spirit, the divine vision. More than once he related to them the vision concerning the building of a monastery on the neighboring cliffs, asking them not to speak of this to anyone while he was still alive until the proper time. Hearing all this, the brothers, with love, offered to the saintly elder all of their earthly wealth for the construction of the monastery, and in accordance with the saint's wish and blessing, they offered immediately to prepare everything necessary for such an important and God-pleasing labor.

All necessary preparations were made. They had yet to learn, however, of the exact site for the foundation upon



which the monastery was to be built. When St. Simon directed the brothers to the location where the church and other buildings were to be constructed they were horrified, seeing the sheer cliffs which, according to his orders, were to serve as the monastery's foundation. "Are you trying to fool us, Abba?" they asked the saint, "or are you speaking the truth? How can this be the site, when that cliff might be quite dangerous for the workers and even more so for those that will dwell here. If this is your desire, we shall surely oppose you!"

The matter was left undecided. In the meantime, seeing that he could not convince them to proceed with the work, St. Simon ordered the *trapeza* meal to be served. While they were eating, one of the saint's disciples, who was bringing wine to the table, lost his balance, through the prompting

of a demon, and fell off the cliff into a great abyss; still holding in one hand a pitcher and in the other several glasses of wine. Stricken with horror at this sudden tragedy, the spokesman of the brothers strongly rebuked the venerable one: "Behold, Abba, what has already been wrought by these deadly crags before you have even begun your undertaking. How many similar incidents of such a frightful death will occur if we should agree to

build the monastery here." The saint did not answer but secretly prayed to the Sovereign Lady Theotokos that he would not be put to shame in placing his trust in her intercession. Who can tell of all thy miracles, O Sovereign Lady, and who can praise thy majesty?"

What happened next was entirely unexpected: the brother who had fallen over the precipice suddenly appeared before them. Through the intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos, he was not only perfectly whole and unscathed, but he even held the glasses and pitcher from which not a drop of wine had spilled! Such a miracle brought fear and trembling upon the laborers. They fell to their knees before the saint and beseeching forgiveness said: "Now we know, O father, that you are truly a man of God." With heartfelt sincerity they were all grateful to be numbered among the saint's disciples and were soon accounted worthy of the angelic habit. Then, under the immediate supervision of the venerable Simon himself, his disciples, formerly simple laborers, proceeded with the construction of the Monastery.

The situation, however, was such that before anything else it was necessary to lay the foundation. According to the

instruction of the saint, they were to use a nearby stone of enormous size. The elder ordered them to move it, but they, forgetting about the miracle of the unspilled wine, were of the firm opinion that not only was it impossible for them with their combined efforts to move that massive weight, but that it could not even be budged. They stood there bewildered, not having the slightest idea what to do. Seeing this, the saint approached them and, making the sign of the life-giving Cross on the stone, he single-handedly lifted it upon his shoulder and carried it to the designated site. In this way he demonstrated in actual fact the truth of the word which the Lord spoke unto the Apostles: *Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove.* (Mt 17:20).

That such a man, whose body was weakened by fasting and ascetic labor, should lift such a weight far exceeding human strength, can only serve as a testimony of God's almighty power and His readiness to help those who turn to Him with faith.

Having established the monastery which he named New Bethlehem, and having spent his life in God-pleasing labors, St. Simon reposed on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, 1287. On the morning of the next day, in the presence of the entire brotherhood, the face of the righteous one shone with a wondrous light. After his soul had ascended unto the choirs of the righteous, fragrant myrrh issued forth from his holy relics through which St. Simon worked many miracles to the glory of God, for kings, monks, and laymen.

Many years after the saint's earthly departure, a pious Serbian king helped to greatly enlarge and rebuild the monastery in honor of its founder. Since that time it has been known as *Simonopetra* [see picture on previous page, *Ed.*], or the "Rock of Simon." Today it is perhaps one of the most awe-inspiring architectural monuments in the world, a standing testimony to the power of faith and God's *good will toward men.*



**O**ur life is a spiritual warfare with unseen evil spirits. They arouse us through our weaknesses and passions, they urge us to disobey the commandments of God. When we look with discernment, we will find that for every passion there is a cure—an opposing commandment. Therefore, the enemies of mankind try to keep us from this saving cure.

St. Macarius of Optina (+1860)

## ON SANCTIFICATION AND DISPASSION

Source: "Elder Joseph the Hesychast: Struggles, Experiences, Teachings," by Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi.

**W**e have already said how difficult it is to describe spiritual figures. We repeat this once again, adding that it is a very bold undertaking to try to enter into the depths and breadth of illumined minds and spirit-bearing beings. But this attempt becomes even harder when the person undertaking it is ignorant and inadequate to the task. We have therefore *cast our anxiety upon the Lord* (1 Pet 5:7) in order that, *in the riches of His kindness* (Rom 2:4), He may make known to the hearts of our readers *what is the breadth and depth and height* (Eph 3:18) of the spiritual realm into which *all who are led by the Spirit of God* (Rom 8:14) enter and in which they move, becoming and remaining sons of God. *For to all who received Him... He gave power to become children of God.* (Jn 1:12).

In the spiritual sphere, the human rules of ordinary logic do not apply. This is why St. Paul frees spiritual people from obligations, saying, *the law is not laid down for the just* (1 Tim 1:9). But during the course of the struggle, which is the realm of becoming, there are deficiencies which are evident. Called from ignorance to knowledge—and therefore to faith and repentance—we human beings enter upon a cycle of learning and progress in which the further we advance, the further we reduce the void of our previous deficiency.

We see in part, we make progress in part, we are perfected in part; and this by the grace and mercy of God. In this partial progress which is according to nature it is to be expected that deficiencies should appear, which are not due to our right intention bending or giving way, nor to a deviation "to the left." Rather, it is analogous to something that happens with the sun: When the sun has not yet reached its height, its rays do not light up the back of a body so as to bathe the whole body in light. In other words, the spiritual warrior has not yet arrived directly under the fullness of grace, and for that reason he still has some points which are unillumined and, consequently, some deficiencies; but even so, fullness and perfection are his life-long aim.

An almost total lack of practical experience in the spiritual life leads modern man to ask many questions, which we hear constantly in our daily encounters and conversations. *Sanctification*, in other words perfection in God, and its real meaning are almost always wrongly interpreted by those who are far from true experience. In fear and modesty, let me mention some of the things the Fathers have said on the subject, so as to interpret the meaning and significance of sanctification according to the patristic spirit. In presenting and commenting on some of the sayings of the chief Fathers we shall speak about what is meant by *sanctification*; where



it begins, where it leads and how it is achieved, in order to help provide some sort of orientation.

It is possible for anyone to taste a *partial* form of *sanctification*, because the struggle and journey towards *complete sanctification* passes progressively through several stages. Each person, some less and some more, can and should attain to one or another of these stages. The road that leads to sanctification and perfection in Christ is repentance, since we *all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God*. (Rom 3:23). As one ascends the ladder of repentance, so one encounters the gradations of sanctification. This is the definition of true repentance, when man regains the divine grace that was lost through sin, or of which he was deprived by living far from faith and knowledge of God. The regaining of grace is not something partial but the totality of adoption, which Christ grants to the faithful through His Church. If they desire, the faithful are able to attain to perfection insofar as is possible, which the Fathers divide into three states: those of *purification, illumination* and *perfection*. The third state, perfection, is also called *dispassion*, or divine knowledge, or love for God. It is also referred to as “keeping the Sabbath and rest,” when man rests from the works of repentance, just as God rests from His works on the seventh day.

The great Maximus the Confessor refers to three more general states commonly found in monks, which characterise those who are approaching sanctification. The first consists in *not sinning at all in action*; this is the stage of purification and the spiritual warrior, after *lawful striving* (2 Tim. 2:5), goes beyond the unnatural state. The second is when *the soul does not dally with impassioned thoughts*; this is the state of illumination, characterized chiefly by the capacity to receive divine illumination, so that the intellect controls impassioned thoughts. The third state, that of perfection, is when we can *contemplate dispassionately in the mind the forms of women and those who have given us offence*; in this state the soul succeeds in coming near to freedom, because even if impassioned conceptual images are still present they cannot stir the intellect to be ravished by them, and this more or less is the principal aim of spiritual life. The right use of conceptual images follows the right use of things and thus evil in general is done away with, because *if one does not first sin in the mind, he will never sin in action*, as the Fathers say.

Faith, divine fear, the fervor that results from these things and strict obedience to the commandments mortify soul, which is thus turned in its entirety towards God because, in the words of the Apostle, *what is mortal is swallowed up by life*. (2 Cor 5:4). The senses then function according to the law of need alone; they are obedient to self-control, and thus produce mourning and awareness of our sinfulness.

Even though perfection extends to the levels we have spoken of, it is nevertheless possible to participate partially in dispassion. In these three states, even though man is not yet totally perfected, he has nevertheless come to know the law of freedom, albeit partially, and acquired experience of sanctification. The same person is in a position to describe both positions exactly: those of grace and of error, of virtue and of vice, of struggle and of defeat and, generally, the mysteries of the unseen war.



*The brotherhood of Elder Joseph at New Skete, shortly before his repose: (from left to right) Fr. Athanasios, Fr. Ephraim (later abbot of Philotheou), Fr. Arsenios, Fr. Joseph (later Joseph of Vatopaidi), Elder Joseph the Hesychast, Fr. Theophylactos, and Fr. Charalambos (later abbot of Dionysiou)*

At another point, St. Maximus distinguishes four gradations of dispassion. The first type is abstinence from the body's impulse towards the commission of sin. The second is complete expulsion from the soul of impassioned thoughts. The third is the complete quiescence of passionate desire. The fourth is the complete exclusion from the mind of all sensible images. And St. Paul, too, recognizes two kinds of perfection, considering himself both perfect and not perfect. He says that *not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect and immediately afterwards, let those of us who are perfect be thus minded*. (Phil 3:12, 15).

But we consider that the following patristic passages from the Philokalia will help us to a fuller understanding of the terms sanctification and dispassion. According to St. Maximus the Great, *sanctification is the total complete cessation and mortification of desire in the senses, and dispassion is a peaceful condition of the soul in which the soul is not easily moved towards evil*. According to Abba Thalassios, *the person who is not affected either by material things, or by his memories of them, has attained perfect dispassion*. St. Diadochos, Bishop of Photiki, says that *dispassion is not freedom from attack by demons... but it is to remain undefeated when they do attack*; and elsewhere he gives the definition, *it is not only to cease from evil that brings purity, but actively to destroy evil by pursuing what is good*. And St. Isaac the Syrian says that *dispassion is not that we do not experience the passions, but that we do not accept*

them. For through the many and various virtues that we have acquired, both hidden and manifest, the passions have grown weak within us and cannot easily rebel against the soul, and the intellect does not always need to pay attention to them. And again Mark the Ascetic says that *an intellect which by God's grace accomplishes acts of virtue and has come near to knowledge feels little from the evil and senseless part of the soul. For its spiritual knowledge snatches it up on high and makes it a stranger to everything that is in the world.* St. Ephraim the Syrian also says that *those who are dispassionate, stretching insatiably towards the ultimate attainable, make perfection endless, because there is no end to the eternal good things.*

These definitions, which are not the only ones, describe as far as is possible for human beings the perfection which in fact remains without end because—as the Apostle says—*here we see in part and we know in part*; and only when in the future the final perfection comes, *then the partial will pass away.* (1 Cor 13:10).

This much is the duty of all humans as rational beings, in which nature requires them to stand firm. Infringing these terms reduces rationality to the position of the irrational and unnatural. For man not to sin and to act righteously is a law of nature, and in consequence a duty. The laws of grace begin from here on; they are on the one hand a continuation of what has gone before, but are not prescribed for all people, being hard to achieve and rare especially under the conditions of life in society. When our Lord was asked what one must do to be saved, He initially cited the keeping of the commandments, as did the great Forerunner as the preacher of repentance. Only to those seeking the highest perfection did He command renunciation, and to follow Him with exactitude. (Mt 19:21).

Standing firm at the first position, the keeping of the commandments, the righteous from all ages were called pure and blameless. Paul often calls them *saints*. In the second letter to the Corinthians he refers to all the *saints* who were in Achaia, while in the letter to the Romans there are several passages where he refers to ministering to the *saints* who were in Jerusalem, and so forth. Luke mentions that the parents of St. John the Baptist were *both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.* (Lk 1:6).

But the coming of God the Word and the assumption by His Godlike majesty of our own nature raised man to the fullness of his perfection, to his original destiny. To be *in the image and likeness*, as the basis of personhood, was now given to man as his inheritance. From that time on noble beings, Godlike intentions, purposes divine in form—with our Lord Jesus as the prototype—have surpassed the law of duty, the *law of commandments* (Eph 2:15), and entered into the dogma of love, having received from the Prototype

the grace and power to *do greater works than this* (Jn 14:12), ruled and guided by Him.

The noble rivalry to enter within the innermost veil where Jesus, the focus of their love, has entered, has become and remained their chief concern. Detached from the causes and occasions by means of which our fallen nature is led astray, they continue this incomparable struggle and—according to Abba Isaac—*wander about in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground, being ordered in the midst of unruliness.* On the basis of a comprehensive self-denial, these lovers of God bound for heaven did not only deny the world and everything to do with it, but even their own souls. And thus, naked of anything of their own *whether within, or without, or around them*, they are given over totally to the grace of the Lord and to *lawful striving*, under the guardianship of their teachers in God. During this life-long contest of their sojourn here they keep *their loins girded and their lamps burning* (Lk 12:35), according to the Lord's command, and await *power from on high* and the promise of the Father (Lk 24:49). *Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.* (Jn 17:17). *I in them and Thou in me... that the love with which Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.* (Jn 17:23, 26).



**B**lessed are all who believe in God, in the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ showed God to the world.

If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus Christ and you will receive the answer. God is as Jesus Christ is. This means that God is all-powerful, all-wise, all-gentle. His power cannot be resisted. His wisdom cannot be contradicted. All malice must submit to His gentleness.

If you wish to be able to come running to God, if you desire wisdom, entrust yourself to God. If you desire the blessing of either wisdom or goodness or love, hold fast to God. Know and remember that only weakness, foolishness and malice rise up against God. But all rebellion against God is condemned in the end to defeat and destruction, while all that remains with God in the end is exalted and rejoices, living eternally.

This is all shown by the person and destiny of the Lord Jesus Christ, and also through the destinies of His followers and His enemies. And therefore we say: *Blessed are all who believe in God in the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ showed God to the world.*

St. Nikolai Velimirović (+1956)



## THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI

By St. Innocent (Borisov), Archbishop of Kherson, translated by Maria Belaeff, from a leaflet published by the Vladimir Mother of God Convent, San Francisco.

*And when they had opened their treasures they presented unto Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

[Mt 2:11]

† † †



Not without reason, my brethren, were there three gifts at the manger of Christ; three—no more, no less. Was this a sign of the Most Holy Trinity as the essence of the Godhead? Or, did it symbolize the triune nature of Christ's future ministry, i.e., prophetic, royal, priestly? Or was it perhaps an expression of the three parts of the nature of man, spirit,

soul, and body? We leave it up to your faith and reasoning to consider this question. Here our attention rests upon the gift-bearing magi.

One could say that these pilgrims of the Orient stood before the manger of Christ for all mankind. Their gifts represent symbolically all that we, followers of the Saviour, bring to Him. The gold signifies material gifts; the frankincense, immaterial gifts, gifts of the spirit; and the myrrh represents those gifts that are at once both spiritual and material.

There are, accordingly, persons who bring the Lord gold; there are those who bring frankincense; still others bring myrrh; lastly, some bring several gifts together. Who are these individuals? In examining this question, we shall see how we too, like the magi, can serve our Lord and Saviour.

Who brings the Lord gold?

Gold is brought by those who, for the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbor, offer anything of their labors and possessions. For example, you bring gold to the Lord if you build, renew or adorn God's temple. Your gift pleases Him, for even though He sits now on the throne of glory, for the sake of our salvation He continues at the same time to appear in the manger as well. This manger is present in church upon the table of oblation, where at every Liturgy

He is, as it were, born again so as to offer Himself anew as a sacrifice for our sins. How often He suffers want in this manger. Here, He needs both clothing and shelter, light and warmth. Therefore, if you do anything for the benefit of the church, your offering delights the Lord—as much as did the gift of the magi who brought Him gold.

How much of this gold is brought to the Lord? Oh, if we were to compare what is brought with that which is spent to answer the demands of the passions, for the satisfaction not only of our needs, but of our very whims—or even with that which is patently surrendered for the flesh and the world to consume—then it shall turn out to be the very smallest part... Before us a poor man shakes from bitter cold, hunger, and disease; we either rebuff him harshly or give him a measly pittance, and that same day we are ready to exhaust half our fortune in a senseless game, or to display our munificent squandering at some gaudy spectacle. Such is our gratitude to Him Who, *though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.* (II Cor 8:9).

Who brings the Lord frankincense?

These are they who apply their abilities, knowledge, and talents to the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbors; for these are immaterial gifts of greater value than gold or silver. These are gifts which God gives to men, but they also are—and should be made—men's gifts to God.

This costly frankincense is offered to the Lord by each one who, sparing not himself, serves his neighbor. Frankincense is offered to the Lord by that shepherd of the Church, who faithfully stands alert guarding souls and hearts against the confusions and temptations of the age, who ardently proclaims the ways of the Lord, who guides those who have lost their way, comforts those in despair, instructs all. Frankincense is brought to the Lord by that mother who does not rely upon servants, who does not spend time in idleness and vain amusements, but rather devotes her time and abilities to the rearing of her children in the fear of God, to nurturing in them the habit of self-denial, the spirit of meekness, of prayer, and of love for mankind. Permeating the home, the fragrance of this frankincense is thereafter diffused everywhere by those who received in that home a pious upbringing. Frankincense is brought to the Lord by that artist who does not utilize his tal-





ents to pander to human lust in keeping with the spirit of the time, but rather, strives to turn all his creative powers into means of disseminating—with the refined and beautiful—what is true and good. This frankincense envelops many with its heavenly fragrance. And just as there is no-one who does not possess abilities or talents of some kind, neither is there anyone who is unable to bring the Lord frankincense by using his abilities to the glory of God and the true profit of his neighbors.

The third gift to the Lord from the magi was myrrh. This was the last gift and therefore more exalted than gold or even frankincense. What kind of gift is this, and why is it so important? Like frankincense, myrrh exudes a heavenly fragrance, but its distinguishing quality lies in its great bitterness; for this reason it represents our trials and sorrows, our tears and sufferings.

Now it is clear who brings to the Lord the gift of myrrh. They bring it who patiently bear trials in life and suffer blamelessly without giving in to bleak despair, nor fainthearted complaining, nor useless sighing; those who, in enduring their trials, are moved neither to prideful scorn towards others, nor to the desperate stifling in themselves of all human feeling, but to a lively hope in the living God—to the thought that through suffering he or she is cleansed from sins, made perfect in virtue, and, what is even more gladdening, made like unto their Saviour, Who died for them upon the Cross. Such endurance, in the spirit of faith and love, of the tribulations and sorrows of the age is also a gift to the Lord, a gift more precious than gold and of a sweeter savor even than frankincense.

May all those who suffer cruelly hear this, and may they come to fathom the advantage of their condition which is seemingly bitter, but actually not without its sweetness if only they consider their faith and the Cross of Christ. May they hasten to bring their myrrh to the Lord as a gift. Those who are satisfied in this world cannot do this; unacquainted with want, they seem to lack nothing; but they have no

myrrh. Many of those who possess frankincense—that is, exceptional talents, also cannot do this; they have no heavy trials to bear, no myrrh.

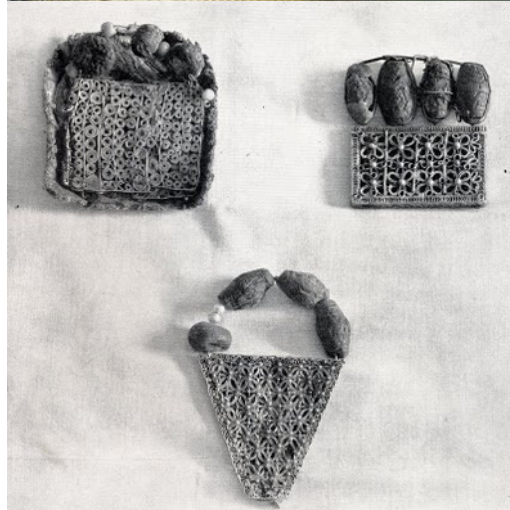
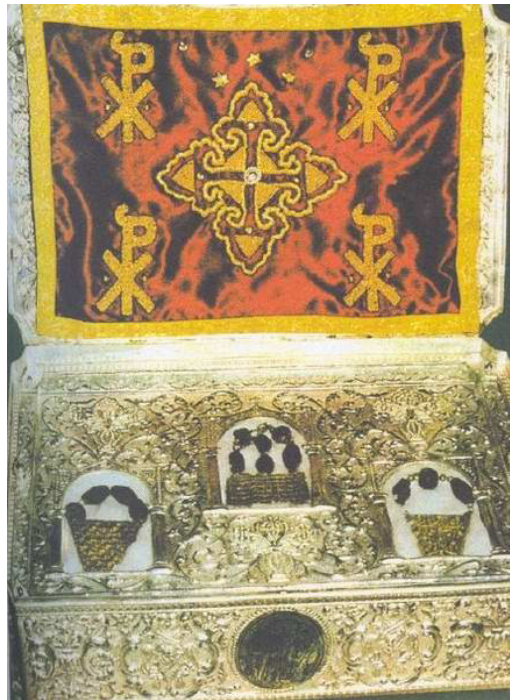
It is all with you, God's bloodless passion-bearers; you, who through no guilty act of your own—whether by the lot of your birth or by the perversity of circumstance, by human malice or by our corruptible physical nature—greet virtually every day, and also end it, with sighs; and who, it may be, this very morning greeted Christ's holy feast day with tears. Those who look upon you disdain your hardship; you yourselves, perhaps, stumble at times beneath the weight of earthly trial. But we, in the name of our Saviour, greet you with the precious likeness of His Cross! Cherish the precious myrrh which you have received as your portion; do not exchange it for frankincense, and even more guard against trading it for mere gold. And do not rob it of its heavenly fragrance by complaint or fainthearted murmuring.

**What is the use of complaining? The Lord sees everything without it.** Each of your tears counts with Him, each of your sighs knows its weight—and in time you shall receive for all of these a hundredfold. Amen.

† † †

**Apolytikion of the Precious Gifts**

*Three boasted Gifts the Magi, rulers from Persia, gave to You. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh, seeing You as a babe O Christ, and faithfully worshipped You and were sanctified, venerating Your holy treasures. We all receive grace, and offer a hymn to Your Nativity, O Lord.*



**Picture and a close-up of the authentic Gifts of the Magi, at the Holy Monastery of St. Paul, in Holy Mountain**



In human nature, pleasure has a dual character. In the soul, it is activated by dispassion and in the body, by passion. The one which our free will chooses will dominate over the other.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

## KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ACCORDING TO ST. GREGORY PALAMAS

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, from his book "Orthodox Psychotherapy."



We must pray fervently for God to grant us to reach this knowledge of God. The exhortation is clear: Come, let us ascend unto the mountain of the Lord, even to the house of our God, and behold the glory of His transfiguration, glory of the Only-begotten of the Father. Let us receive light from His light, and with uplifted spirits let us forever sing the praises of the

consubstantial Trinity.

When a person rises from bodily knowledge to the soul's knowledge and from that to spiritual knowledge, then he sees God and possesses knowledge of God, which is his salvation. Knowledge of God, as will be explained further on, is not intellectual, but existential. That is, one's whole being is filled with this knowledge of God. But in order to attain it, one's heart must have been purified, that is, the soul, nous (intellect) and heart must have been healed. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* (Mt 5:8).

Let us look at things more analytically.

Barlaam insisted that knowledge of God depends not on vision of God but on one's understanding. He said that we can acquire knowledge of God through philosophy, and therefore he considered the prophets and apostles who saw the uncreated light, to be below the philosophers. He called the uncreated light sensory, created, and "inferior to our understanding."

However, St. Gregory Palamas, a bearer of the Tradition and a man of revelation, supported the opposite view. In his theology, he presented the teaching of the Church that uncreated light, that is, the vision of God, is not simply a symbolic vision, nor sensory and created, nor inferior to understanding, but it is deification. Through deification man is deemed worthy of seeing God. And this deification is not an abstract state, but a union of man with God. That is to say, the man who beholds the uncreated light sees it because he is united with God. He sees it with his inner eyes, and also with his bodily eyes, which, however, have been altered by God's action.

Consequently *theoria* (vision of God) is union with God. And this union is knowledge of God. At this time one is granted knowledge of God, which is above human knowledge and above the senses.

St. Gregory explains this whole theology in places throughout his writings. But since it is not our intention to make a systematic exposition of his whole teaching about the knowledge of God, we shall limit ourselves to analyzing the central point in it as it is presented in his basic work "On the Holy Hesychasts," known as the Triads. Again we must add that we shall not present the whole teaching as it is set out in that book, but only the central points.

Here is a characteristic passage in which he briefly presents this teaching:

*One who has cleared his soul of all connection with things of this world, who has detached himself from everything by keeping the commandments and by the dispassion that this brings, and who has passed beyond all cognitive activity through continuous, sincere and immaterial prayer, and who has been abundantly illuminated by the inaccessible light in an inconceivable union, he alone, becoming light, contemplating by the light and beholding the light, in the vision and enjoyment of this light recognizes truly that God is transcendently radiant and beyond comprehension; he glorifies God not only beyond his nous' human power of understanding, for many created things are beyond that, but even beyond that marvelous union which is the only means by which the nous is united with what is beyond intelligible things, imitating divinely the supra-celestial minds.*

We find the central teaching of St. Gregory in this passage. In order to attain vision of the uncreated light, a person must cut off every connection between the soul and what is below, detach himself from everything by keeping Christ's commandments and through the dispassion which comes from that, he must transcend all cognitive activity *through continuous and sincere and immaterial prayer*. Therefore he must have been healed already, through keeping Christ's commandments and through freeing his soul from all sinful connection with created things. He is illuminated by the inaccessible light *abundantly through an inconceivable union*. He sees God through union. Thus he becomes light and sees by the light. Seeing the uncreated light, he recognizes God and acquires knowledge of Him, because now *he recognizes truly that God is above nature and beyond comprehension*.

St. Gregory also develops this teaching at other places in the Triads.

The vision of God, *theoria* of the uncreated light, is not a sensory vision but a deification of man. Speaking of Moses' vision of God *face-to-face and not in enigmas*, he recalls the passage in St. Maximus the Confessor that says:

*Deification is an en-hypostatic and direct illumination which has no beginning but appears in those worthy as something exceeding their comprehension. It is indeed a mystical union with God, beyond nous and reason, in the age when creatures will no longer know corruption.*



So the vision of the uncreated light is man's deification. He sees God through deification and not through cultivating intelligence. The vision of uncreated light is called a deifying gift. It is not a gift of created human nature, but of the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory concludes: *Thus the deifying gift of the Spirit is a mysterious light which transforms into light those who receive its wealth. He not only fills them with eternal light but also grants them knowledge and life appropriate to God.*

Thus the vision of God is not external but comes through deification. This deification is union and communion with God. According to St. Gregory: *Vision of the uncreated light is not simply abstraction and negation, it is a union and a divinisation which occurs mystically and ineffably by the grace of God, after the stripping away of everything from here below which imprints itself on the nous, or rather after the cessation of all noetic activity; it is something which goes beyond abstraction.*

The contemplation of uncreated light is *by the divinising communion of the Spirit. So the contemplation of this light is a union, even though it does not endure in the imperfect: but is the union with this light other than a vision?*

St. Gregory also speaks of ecstasy. But this ecstasy, in patristic teaching, has nothing to do with the ecstasy of Pythia and the other religions. Ecstasy comes when, in prayer, the nous abandons every connection with created things: first *with everything evil and bad, then with neutral things.*

Ecstasy is mainly withdrawal from the opinion of the world and the flesh. With sincere prayer the nous *abandons all created things.*

This ecstasy is higher than abstract theology, that is, than rational theology, and it belongs only to those who have attained dispassion. But it is not yet union. That is to say, the ecstasy which is unceasing prayer of the nous, in which one's nous has continuous remembrance of God and has no relation with the "world of sin" is not yet union with God. This union comes about when the Paraclete *illuminates from on high the man who attains in prayer the stage which is superior to the highest natural possibilities and who is awaiting the promise of the Father, and by His revelation ravishes him to the contemplation of the light.*

Illumination by God is what shows His union with man. Vision, deification and union with God are the things which offer man existential knowledge of God. Then man possesses real knowledge of God. The deifying gift of the Holy Spirit, which is a mysterious light, transforms into divine light those who have attained it and not only fills them with eternal light, *but also grants them a knowledge and a life appropriate to God.*

In this state a person possesses knowledge of God. In reply to Barlaam's teaching that God is known by the greatest contemplators, the philosophers, and that knowledge of God transmitted *by noetic illumination... is by no means true, St.*

Gregory Palamas declares: *God makes Himself known not only through all that is but also through what is not, through transcendence, that is, through uncreated things, and also through an eternal light that transcends all beings.* This knowledge, he says, is offered today as a kind of pledge to those who are worthy of it and which *illuminates them unendingly in the unending age.* That is just why the saints' vision of God is true, *and he who calls it false has strayed from the divine knowledge of God.*

Thus anyone who ignores and disregards the vision of God, which offers true knowledge, is in reality ignorant of God. Conclusively, the vision of God, deification, union and knowledge of God are closely bound together. They cannot be understood apart from one another. Breaking this unity takes man further away from knowledge of God. The basis of Orthodox epistemology is illumination and God's revelation within the purified heart of man.

As we have seen, knowledge of God is beyond human knowledge. Vision of the uncreated light surpasses all epistemological activity and is *beyond sight and knowledge.* Since vision of the uncreated light is offered to the hearts of the faithful and perfect, that is why *it is superior to the light of knowledge.* And not only is it superior to the light of human knowledge "from Hellenic studies," but also the light of this theoria differs from *the light that comes from the Holy Scriptures,* since the light of the Scriptures may be compared to *a lamp that shines in an obscure place, whereas vision of the uncreated light resembles the morning star which shines in the day, that is to say, the sun.* The grace of deification thus transcends nature, virtue and human knowledge.

The vision of the uncreated light and the knowledge that comes from this are not an unfolding of the rational power, they are not perfection of rational nature, as Barlaam asserted, but they are superior to reason. They are knowledge offered by God to the pure in heart. Anyone who asserts that the deifying gift is a development of the rational nature puts himself in opposition to Christ's Gospel. If contemplation were a natural gift, then all people should be gods, one less and another more. But *the deified saints transcend nature,* they are engendered by God, as He gave them power to become *children of God.*

The vision of the uncreated light, which offers knowledge of God to man, is sensory and suprasensory. The bodily eyes are reshaped, so they see the uncreated light, *this mysterious light, inaccessible, immaterial, uncreated, deifying, eternal, this radiance of the Divine Nature, this glory of the divinity, this beauty of the heavenly kingdom.*

Palamas asks: *Do you see that light is inaccessible to senses which are not transformed by the Spirit?* St. Maximus, whose teaching is cited by St. Gregory, says that the Apostles saw the uncreated Light *by a transformation of the activity of their senses, produced in them by the Spirit.*

Vision of the uncreated Light and the knowledge which comes from it transcend not only nature and human knowledge, but virtue as well. Virtue and the imitation of God prepare us for the divine union, but the mysterious union itself is effected by grace.

Thus deification, which is the goal of the spiritual life, is a manifestation of God to the pure heart of man. This vision of the uncreated Light is what creates spiritual delight in the soul. For, according to St. Gregory, evidence of that light is that the soul ceases to give itself over to wrong pleasures and passions, and that it acquires peace and stillness of thoughts, and rest and spiritual joy, contempt for human glory, humility joined with secret rejoicing, hatred of the world, love of heavenly things, or rather love of the God of Heaven alone, and a vision of uncreated light even if one's eyes should be covered or plucked out.

From what has been said it is clear that the end of man's cure is vision of the uncreated light. But since we are speaking about theoria, we may also look at Palamas' teaching that there are many degrees of theoria.

He says that this theoria has a beginning, and the things that follow on from this beginning differ in degrees of darkness or clarity, but there is never an end, for its progress, like that of the rapture in revelation, is infinite. Illumination is one thing and continuous vision of light is another, and still another is the vision of things in that light whereby even things far off are accessible to the eyes, and the future is shown as already existing. So, there are degrees of theoria, and with it, degrees of knowledge.

At this point we may also look at the teaching of St. Peter of Damascus about the eight stages of theoria (Philokalia 3:108). The first seven belong to this age, while the eighth belongs to the age to come.

The **first** theoria is knowledge of the trials and tribulations of this life. The **second** is "knowledge of our own faults and of God's bounty." The **third** is knowledge of the terrible things before and after death. The **fourth** is deep understanding of the life led by our Lord Jesus in this world and of His disciples and the other saints, that is to say, the words and actions of the martyrs and the holy Fathers. The **fifth** is knowledge of the nature and flux of things. The **sixth** is theoria of created beings, or knowledge and understanding of God's visible creation. The **seventh** is understanding of God's spiritual creation, that is to say, of the angels. The **eighth** is knowledge concerning God, or what we call *theology*.

Consequently theoria has many stages and degrees, and many must come before vision of the uncreated light, which is *the beauty of the age to come, the food of the heavens*. Among the degrees of theoria are remembrance of death, which is a gift from God, unceasing prayer, the inspiration to keep Christ's commandments fully, knowledge of our spiritual

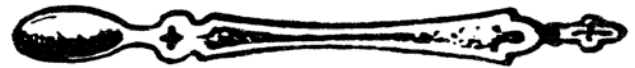
poverty, that is to say, understanding of our sins and passions, and the repentance following it.

All these things come about through the operation of divine grace. Certainly perfect theoria is vision of the uncreated light, which itself is differentiated into vision and continuous vision, as Palamas says.

So the purification which takes place by the grace of God creates the necessary preconditions for attaining that theoria which is communion with God, deification of man, and knowledge of God. The ascetic method of the Church leads to this point. It is not based on human criteria and it does not aim to make the person "nice and good," but to heal him perfectly and for him to achieve communion with God. As long as a man is far from communion and union with God, he has not yet attained his salvation. The spiritually trained person who sees the uncreated light is said, in the language of the Fathers, to be "deified."

This expression is used by St. Dionysios the Areopagite, St. John of Damascus, and repeatedly, as we have seen, by St. Gregory Palamas. The healing of the soul, nous and heart leads a person to the vision of God and makes him know the divine life. This knowledge is man's salvation.

And, *You were transfigured upon the mountain, O Christ our God, showing to Your disciples Your glory as much as they could bear. Do also in us, sinners though we be, shine Your everlasting light, at the intercession of the Theotokos, O Giver of light. Glory to You.* (Apolytikion for the feast of Holy Transfiguration).



**G**lory to His holy name, because we came to know Him and worship Him as much as we are able, and we shun the confusion and vanity of this age. *Glory to God Who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.* (Rev 1:5).

Know, my child, that when the heart is free from the things of this world and occupies itself with the study of the divine Scriptures, vain thoughts flee, and the nous is confined to thinking divine thoughts. It is not interested in this present life, but by the great pleasure of continuous meditation it is lifted up to God. Through the continuous invocation of the name of God by means of the unceasing prayer, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*, man receives a sense of the other life, of the age to come, and of the hope which is stored up for the righteous. He foretastes the magnificence of that life and says with astonishment, *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of the unsearchable God!* (Rom 2:33)—for He has prepared another world that is so wondrous in order to bring into it all the prudent people to keep them there in life everlasting.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou  
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"



## Τὸ Παιδίον Ἰησοῦς Κύριος τοῦ Κόσμου καὶ τῆς Ἱστορίας

Μήνυμα Χριστουγέννων τοῦ καθηγουμένου τῆς Ἱ. Μονῆς Γρηγορίου Ἀγ. Ὁρους Ἀρχμ. Γεωργίου Καψάνη (23-12-2011).

**«Προσκυνοῦμεν σου τὴν Γένναν Χριστέ».**

† † †

**Μ**ὲ τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους Χριστιανοὺς ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου θὰ κληθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησία νὰ προσκυνήσουμε ὡς «παιδίον» εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας τῆς ἁγίας Μητρὸς Του Αὐτόν, ποὺ εἶναι «ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος» (Ἀποκ. 1:8), ὁ «μεγάλης βουλήs ἀγγελος», ὁ «ἐξουσιαστήs», ὁ «ἄρχων τῆς εἰρήνης», ὁ «πατήρ τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος» (Ἦσ. 9:6).

Ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ συμμετέχουν εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν προσκύνησιν. Ὅπως ψάλλει ἡ Ἐκκλησία: «Οἱ ἄγγελοι (προσφέρουν) τὸν ὕμνον, οἱ οὐρανοὶ τὸν ἀστέρα, οἱ μάγοι τὰ δῶρα, οἱ ποιμένες τὸ θαῦμα, ἡ γῆ τὸ σπῆλαιον, ἡ ἔρημος τὴν φάτην» καὶ τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων «μητέρα Παρθένον», στὸν νηπιάσαντα Κύριο τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς. Καὶ τοῦτο, διότι τὸ βρέφος αὐτό, τὸ φαινομενικὰ ἀδύνατο, εἶναι ὁ Παντοκράτωρ, ὁ Λυτρωτής, ὁ Σωτήρ, ὁ Θεάνθρωπος.

Θεωροῦντες τὰ πράγματα διὰ τῆς πίστεως γνωρίζομε ὅτι τὸ ἀδύνατο αὐτὸ βρέφος εἶναι ὁ «πρὸ αἰῶνων Θεός», ὁ Κύριος τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τῆς ἱστορίας. «Μέγα τὸ μυστήριον».

Τὸ «μόνον καινὸν ὑπὸ τὸν ἥλιον», κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Δαμασκηνό. Δὲν ἔχει προηγούμενο οὔτε μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπαναληφθῇ. Βλέποντες τὴν ἱστορία μὲ τὴν προοπτικὴ αὐτή, μποροῦμε νὰ ἐλπίσουμε ὅτι Αὐτός, ὁ σαρκωθεὶς Θεός, θὰ βοηθήσῃ τὸν λαόν Του νὰ ὑπερβῇ τὴν παροῦσα κρίσι.

Εἶναι πολλὰ τὰ κοινὰ σημεῖα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας μὲ τὴν ἐποχὴ, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία ἐγεννήθη ὁ Χριστὸς ἐπὶ «Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου», «ἐν Βηθλεὲμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας». Καὶ τότε ὑπῆρχε μία μορφή παγκοσμιοποιήσεως ἀνάλογη μὲ αὐτήν, ποὺ ἐπιχειρεῖται σήμερα. Ἡ φορολογία ἦταν ἀπάνθρωπη. Τὸ ἀνθρώπινο πρόσωπο συνετριβετο, προκειμένου νὰ ἐπιτευχθοῦν οἱ στόχοι τοῦ Καίσαρος. Εἶναι γνωστοὶ οἱ ἐξανδραποδισμοὶ καὶ τὰ βασανιστήρια, ποὺ

ὑφίσταντο οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τοὺς τότε δυνάστας. Ἀκόμη εἶναι γνωστὰ τὰ ἔκλυτα ἤθη τῆς τότε κοινωνίας, ἀντίστοιχα πρὸς τὴν φαυλότητα τῶν «θεῶν», ποὺ ἐλάτρευαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι.

Καὶ σήμερα ἡ κρίσις ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζομε δὲν εἶναι μόνον οἰκονομικὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἠθικὴ καὶ θεολογικὴ. Κρίσις οἰκονομικὴ, διότι ἡ πτωχεῖα καὶ ἡ ἀνέχεια μαστιζεῖ πολλοὺς ἀδελφούς μας. Κρίσις ἠθικὴ, διότι ὁ πολιτισμὸς μας ὅλο καὶ περισσότερο ἐδράζεται στὴν φιλαυτία καὶ ὄχι στὴν ἀγάπη. Κρίσις θεολογικὴ, διότι μεταίρονται ὄρια αἰῶνια, τὰ ὁποῖα ἔθεσαν οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες (πρβλ. Παροιμ. 22:28), καὶ ἀντικαθίστανται ἀπὸ ξενόφερτες «θεολογίες». Αὐτὲς οἱ «θεολογίες» ἄδειασαν τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν τῆς Εὐρώπης καὶ κινδυνεύουν νὰ ἀδειάσουν καὶ τοὺς δικούς μας Ναοὺς, ὅπως εἶπε

Προτεστάντης θεολόγος, **διότι καλλιεργοῦν τὸν ὀρθολογισμὸ καὶ τὸν σκεπτικισμὸ.**

Ὅπως στὸν εὐρισκόμενον «ἐν χώρα καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου» κόσμῳ τῆς ἐποχῆς ἐκείνης «φῶς ἀνέτειλεν αὐτοῖς» (Ματθ. 4:16), ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, προσφέροντάς του τὴν λύτρωσι, ἐλπίζομε ὅτι καὶ στὴν παροῦσα κρίσιμη φάσι τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ ἔθνους μας ὁ Παντοκράτωρ Κύριος δὲν θὰ μᾶς στερήσῃ τὴν Χάρι Του καὶ τὴν εὐλογία Του καὶ δὲν θὰ ἀφήσῃ νὰ χαθῇ τὸ πολυπαθὲς Ἔθνος μας. Ὁ Ἅγιος Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ὡς Κριτῆς τοῦ κόσμου, μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπέμβῃ γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία μας. Μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπέμβῃ καὶ νὰ ἐνεργήσῃ. Σεβόμενος ὁμως τὴν ἐλευθερία μας περιμένει καὶ τὴν δική μας συνέργεια, ποὺ ἐκφράζεται μὲ τὴν μετάνοια καὶ τὴν προσευχή μας. Ἐκεῖνος θὰ ἐνεργήσῃ τὴν σωτηρία μας, ἐὰν ἐμεῖς συνεργήσουμε.

Εἶναι πάντοτε ἐπίκαιροι οἱ λόγοι τοῦ μεγάλου Σέρβου Ἱεράρχου, Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελμιρόβιτς, ὁ ὁποῖος τὸ 1929 ἔγραφε: «Μέχρι πότε θὰ διαρκέσει ἡ κρίσις; Ὅσο τὸ πνεῦμα τῶν ἀνθρώπων παραμείνει δίχως ἀλλαγὴ. Ὅσπου οἱ ὑπερήφανοι ὑπαίτιοι αὐτῆς τῆς κρίσεως νὰ παραιτηθοῦν μπροστὰ στὸν Παντοδύναμο. Ὅσπου οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οἱ λαοὶ νὰ θυμηθοῦν, τὴν ἀκαταλαβίστικη λέξι «κρίσις», νὰ τὴ μεταφράζουν στὴ γλώσσα τους, ὥστε μὲ ἀναστεναγμὸ καὶ μετάνοια νὰ φωνάξουν: «ἡ Θεία δίκη!» («Δρόμος δίχως Θεὸ δὲν Ἄντέχεται...», σελ. 35-36).

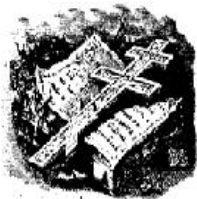


Ὅλος ὁ λαὸς καλούμεθα σὲ μετάνοια καὶ προσευχή, γιὰ νὰ ἐπέμβῃ ὁ Θεός, ὅπως ἔγινε στὴν Νινευὶ (Ἰωνᾶ 3:10). Ἄλλ' ἐὰν δὲν μετανοοῦν καὶ δὲν προσεύχονται οἱ πολλοί, τοῦλάχιστον ἂς μετανοοῦμε καὶ ἂς προσευχώμεθα οἱ ὀλίγοι πιστοί, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς σώσῃ, ὅπως θὰ ἔσωζε τὰ Σόδομα καὶ τὰ Γόμορρα, ἐὰν ὑπῆρχαν ἔστω καὶ δέκα δίκαιοι. (Γέν. 18:20-32).

Πιστεύουμε ὅτι, ἂν ἔτσι ἐνεργήσουμε, ὁ Φιλάνθρωπος Κύριος, ὄχι μόνο θὰ μᾶς βοηθήσῃ νὰ ὑπερβοῦμε τὴν παροῦσα κρίσι, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἐξαγάγῃ ἀπὸ τὴν πικρίαν τῆς δοκιμασίας αὐτῆς καρποὺς γλυκεῖς καὶ σωτηρίους, ὅπως χαρακτηριστικὰ λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητής: «Καὶ τοῖς γενομένοις κακοῖς ἀγαθοπρεπῶς κέχρηται πρὸς διόρθωσιν ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός». (PG 4 305 D).

Προσκυνοῦμε τὸ Θεῖον Βρέφος μὲ πίστι καὶ ἐλπίδα, ὅτι θὰ ἐπιβλέψῃ εὐμενῶς εἰς τὸν λαόν Του.

Εὐλογημένα καὶ Ἅγια Χριστούγεννα!



## Ὁ Ἄγιος Ἱερεὺς

*Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Διονυσίου Τάτση.*



**Ἡ** πνευματικὴ ἀποστολὴ τοῦ ἱερέα εἶναι μεγάλη, ἀλλὰ λίγοι ἱερεῖς τὴν ἔχουν συνειδητοποιήσει. Λείπει, δυστυχῶς, ἢ κατὰ Θεὸν καλλιέργεια, τὴν ὁποία, ὅπως ἔχει διαπιστωθεῖ, δὲν παρέχουν οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικὲς καὶ θεολογικὲς σχολές, οὔτε φυσικὰ καὶ οἱ ἱερατικὲς συνάξεις, ποὺ κάνουν οἱ Μητροπολίτες.

Ἀναγκαία προϋπόθεση, γιὰ νὰ πετύχει ἓνας ἱερέας

εἶναι ὁ ἱερὸς ζῆλος. Νὰ θέλει νὰ προσφέρει ἀπὸ ἐλεύθερη προαίρεση καὶ μὲ φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐὰν δὲν ὑπάρχει ἱερὸς ζῆλος, ἡ ἱερωσύνη καταντᾶει ἐπάγγελμα καὶ αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ θεωρεῖται ὀλέθριο. Ὁ ἐπαγγελματίας ἱερέας θὰ χάσει τὴν ψυχὴ του.

Ὁ Γέροντας Παΐσιος ἔλεγε ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι σήμερα δύο πράγματα θέλουν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱερεῖς. Νὰ εἶναι ἀφιλοχρήματοι καὶ νὰ ἔχουν ἀγάπη. Ὅταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦν αὐτὰ τὰ δύο στοὺς ἱερεῖς, ἐκδηλώνουν τὸ σεβασμὸ τους, τοὺς θεωροῦν ἁγίους

καὶ τρέχουν στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Τὸ τραγικὸ ὅμως εἶναι ὅτι στὴν ἐποχὴ μας δὲν βλέπουν συχνὰ τέτοιους ἱερεῖς. Ἡ φιλοχρηματία κατεδαφίζει καὶ ἐξαφανίζει κάθε θετικὸ, ποὺ ἐνδέχεται νὰ ἔχει ἓνας ἱερέας. Μπορεῖ γιὰ παράδειγμα νὰ εἶναι καλλίφωνος καὶ νὰ λειτουργεῖ μὲ ἐντυπωσιακὸ τρόπο, νὰ εἶναι ἐκπαιδευμένος στὶς κοινωνικὲς σχέσεις, νὰ κηρύττει μὲ χάρισμα καὶ νὰ ἔχει χρυσοκέντητα ἄμφια κ.λπ., ἂν ὅμως εἶναι φιλοχρήματος, ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶναι περιττά, γιὰ νὰ μὴ πῶ προκλητικὰ καὶ ἀπωθητικὰ. Ἐπίσης ἐὰν λείπει ἡ ἀγάπη στὴν ὁποία ποιμαντικὴ δραστηριότητα ἔχει, πάλι τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα εἶναι μηδενικὸ. Ὁ ἱερέας δίχως ἀγάπη μοιάζει μὲ πουλί, ποὺ ἔχει κομμένα φτερὰ καὶ μὲ μεγάλη δυσκολία διανύει μικρὲς ἀποστάσεις.

Ἡ φιλοχρηματία καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη δὲν συμβαδίζουν. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ ἀγαπάει τὸ χρήμα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀγαπήσῃ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Κἀτ' ἀναλογία, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀγάπης δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι φιλάργυρος καὶ πλεονέκτης. Αὐτὸ ἰσχύει περισσότερο γιὰ τὸν ἱερέα, ποὺ καλεῖται νὰ ὀδηγήσῃ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους στὴ σωτηρία.

Ὁ Γέροντας Παΐσιος, ὅταν ἐπικοινωνοῦσε μὲ ὑποψήφιους ἱερεῖς ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ ἱερεῖς, μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὴν ἐργασία, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ κάνουν στὸν ἑαυτό τους, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι φωτεινὸ παράδειγμα στοὺς ἐνοριῖτες τους. Δίχως πνευματικὸ πλοῦτο—ποὺ ἀποκτᾶται μὲ τὴν τήρηση τῶν ἐντολῶν καὶ τὴν ἄσκηση—δὲν μποροῦν νὰ βοηθήσουν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸς ὁ λόγος τοῦ Γέροντα: «Ἡ μυστικὴ ἐργασία ἔχει τὴν ιδιότητα νὰ κηρύττει μυστικὰ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ μέσα στὶς ψυχὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. **Ὁ χαριτωμένος ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ μεταδίδει θεῖα χάρη καὶ ἀλλοιώνει τοὺς σαρκικοὺς ἀνθρώπους.** Τοὺς ἐλευθερώνει ἀπὸ τὴν σκλαβιά τῶν παθῶν καὶ τοὺς πλησιάζει μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπον στὸν Θεὸ καὶ σφύζονται».

Μακάρι κάποτε ὅλοι οἱ ἱερεῖς νὰ ἀποδεχτοῦμε τὸ λόγο τοῦ Γέροντα Παΐσιου καὶ νὰ ἀρχίσουμε τὴ μυστικὴ ἐσωτερικὴ ἐργασία, ἢ ὁποία θὰ μᾶς δίνει τὰ ἀπαραίτητα ἐφόδια, γιὰ νὰ εἴμαστε ἀποδοτικοὶ στὸ ἔργο, ποὺ καλούμαστε νὰ ἐπιτελέσουμε.



**Ὁ** Χριστὸς εἶναι νέα ζωὴ. Πῶς τὸ λέω; Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ Πᾶν. Εἶναι ἡ χαρὰ, εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ, εἶναι τὸ φῶς, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸ, ποὺ κάνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ χαίρεται, νὰ πετάει, νὰ βλέπει ὅλα, νὰ βλέπει ὅλους, νὰ πονάει γιὰ ὅλους, νὰ θέλει ὅλους μαζί του, ὅλους κοντὰ στὸ Χριστό.

**Γέρον Πορφύριος Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)**



## Μία Απάντηση πρὸς τὴν Φιλοπατρικὴν «Ἀγαπολογία»

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου «Μυστικά Ἀνθη», ἐκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 51-53.



**Μ**εγάλο, πολὺ μεγάλο καὶ σπουδαῖο εἶναι ἓνα ζήτημα, πὺν δὲν τοῦ δώσανε σχεδὸν καθόλου προσοχὴ οἱ περισσότεροι Ἕλληνες. Κι αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ὅτι ἀπὸ καιρὸ ἀρχίσανε κάποιιοι δικοὶ μας κληρικοὶ νὰ θέλουν καὶ νὰ ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ

δέσουν στενὲς σχέσεις μὲ τοὺς παπικοὺς, πὺν ἐπὶ τόσοις αἰῶνες μᾶς ρημάξανε.

Γιατί, στ' ἀληθινά, δὲν ὑπάρχει πιδὸ μεγάλο ἀντίμαχος τῆς φυλῆς μας, κι ἐπίμονος ἀντίμαχος, πὺν, σώνει καὶ καλά, θέλει νὰ σβῆσει τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Οἱ δεσποτάδες, πὺν εἶπα πὺς τοὺς ἔπιασε, ἄξαφνα κι ἀναπάντεχα, ὁ ἔρωτας μὲ τοὺς Λατίνους, λένε πὺς τὸ κάνουνε ἀπὸ «ἀγάπη». Μὰ αὐτὸ εἶναι χονδροειδεστάτη δικαιολογία καὶ καλὰ θὰ κάνουνε νὰ παρατήσουνε αὐτὰ τὰ ροσόλια τῆς «ἀγάπης», πὺν τὴν κάνανε ρεζίλι. Ὁ διάβολος, ἅμα θελήσει νὰ κάνει τὸ πιδὸ πονηρὸ παιγνίδι του, μιᾶ, ὁ ἀλιτήριος γιὰ ἀγάπη.

Ὅ,τι εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς, τὸ λέγει κι αὐτὸς κάλπικα, γιὰ νὰ ξεγελάσει. Τώρα, στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα, τοὺς ρασοφόρους μας στὴν Πόλη, τοὺς ἔπιασε παροξυσμὸς τῆς ἀγάπης γιὰ τοὺς Ἰταλιάνους, πὺν στέκονται, ὅπως πάντα, κρύοι καὶ περήφανοι καὶ δὲν γυρίζουνε νὰ τοὺς δοῦνε αὐτοὺς τοὺς «ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφούς», πὺν ὅσα τοὺς κάνανε ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸ τῶν Σταυροφόρων ἴσα μὲ τώρα, δὲν τοὺς τᾶκανε μήτε Τοῦρκος, μήτε Τάταρος, μήτε Μωμαχετᾶνος. Ἴσως κι οἱ δικοὶ μας νὰ τὸ κάνουν ἀπὸ παρεξηγημένη καλωσύνη.

Ὅπως εἶπα, οἱ περισσότεροι δικοὶ μας δὲν δώσανε καμιὰ σημασία σ' αὐτὲς τῆς φιλοπατρικῆς κινήσεις, πὺν εἶναι θάνατος γιὰ τὸ γένος μας καὶ πὺν τῆς κινήσανε οἱ καταχθόνιες δυνάμεις, πὺν πολεμᾶνε τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ πὺν μὲ τὰ λεπτά τους ἀγοράζουνε ὅλους· δὲν δώσανε λοιπὸν καμιὰ σημασία, γιατί τὰ θεωροῦνε τιποτένια πράγματα, ἂν δὲν εἶναι κι οἱ ἴδιοι ἀγορασμένοι, ἄξια μοναχὰ γιὰ κάποιους στενοκέφαλους παλιοημερολογίτες καὶ φανατικοὺς ἀποπετρωμένους Χριστιανούς. Τώρα τὰ μυαλὰ γινήκανε φαρδειά, καὶ καταγίνονται μὲ ἄλλα, κοσμοϊστορικὰ προβλήματα! «Θὰ καθόμαστε νὰ

κοιτάζουμε τώρα παπάδες κι Ὁρθοδοξίες»; Μὰ αὐτοὺς δὲν τοὺς μέλει κι ἂν ἐξαφανισθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο κάθε Ἑλληνικὸ πρᾶγμα. καὶ θὰ ἐξαφανισθεῖ ὄχι τόσο εὐκόλα μὲ τὸν ἀμερικανισμό, πὺν πάθαμε, ὅσο ἂν γίνουμε στὴ θρησκεία παπικοί. Γιατί γι' αὐτοῦ πᾶμε, παπικὴ Ἑλλάδα θὰ πεῖ ἐξαφάνιση τῆς Ἑλλάδας.

Νὰ γιατί εἶπα πὺς εἶναι πολὺ σπουδαῖο ζήτημα αὐτὲς οἱ ἐρωτοτροπίες, πὺν ἀρχίσανε κάποιιοι κληρικοὶ δικοὶ μας μὲ τοὺς παπικοὺς, κι ἡ αἰτία εἶναι τὸ ὅτι δὲν νοιώσανε τι εἶναι Ὁρθοδοξία ὀλότελα, μ' ὄλο πὺν εἶναι δεσποτάδες. τὸ κακὸ εἶναι πὺς ὁ λαὸς δὲν πῆρε, καλὰ-καλὰ, εἶδηση γιὰ τὴ συνωμοσία. Ποιὸς νὰ τὸν πληροφορήσει ἀφοῦ οἱ γραμματισμένοι τὰ θεωροῦνε αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα ἀνάξια γιὰ τὴ μοντέρνα σοφία τους, καὶ τρέχουν σημαιοφόροι σὲ κάθε νεωτερισμό;

Ἀπὸ τότε πὺν ἀρχίσανε οἱ λυκοφιλίες ἀνάμεσα στοὺς δικούς μας καὶ στοὺς παπικοὺς (καὶ σημείωσε πὺς οἱ δικοὶ μας φαγοθήκανε πρῶτοι νὰ πιάσουνε σχέση μὲ τοὺς Λατίνους σάν νὰ πήρανε ἀπὸ κάπου διαταγή, κι ὀλοένα μιᾶνε γιὰ «τὸν διάλογον» μαζί τους, δίχως νὰ ξέρουνε καλὰ-καλὰ τι λένε), ἀπὸ τότε λοιπὸν, ἀκοῦμε, κάθε τόσο, κάτι πράγματα θεατρικά, ἄνοστα, ἀνόητα, δίχως καμιὰ σοβαρότητα, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ λεγόμενη «Διάσκεψις τῆς Ρόδου», τὰ νέα παρεκκλήσια τοῦ Βατικανοῦ, κ.τ.λ. Στὴ Ρόδο πήγανε οἱ δικοὶ μας μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ πουλήσουν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, γιατί γι' αὐτοὺς εἶναι καθυστερημένη μορφή τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, δηλαδὴ ἓνας βλάχικος Χριστιανισμὸς, καὶ ν' ἀρχίσουν τὸν «διάλογον», πὺν νὰ τὸν πάρει ἡ εὐχὴ αὐτὸν τὸν «διάλογον».

Καὶ τι κάνανε; Τίποτα! Λόγια πολλὰ καὶ χαμένα, πὺν νὰ ντρέπεται κι ὁ τελευταῖος Ἕλληνας Ὁρθόδοξος. Προχθὲς πάλι μάθαμε πὺς ὁ Πάπας ἐγκαινίασε ἓνα νέο παρεκκλήσιο στὸ Βατικανὸ καὶ ἔβαλε γιὰ εἰκόνες (μὴ χειρότερα!) τῆς φωτογραφίης τοῦ Πάπα καὶ τοῦ Ἀθηναγόρα, «ὁ ὁποῖος ἴσταται ὀπισθεν τοῦ Ποντίφηκος»! Φαντασθεῖτε παρεκκλήσιο μὲ φωτογραφίης (τὶ ἀκαλαίσθητα πράγματα!). Ὁ Πάπας λοιπὸν θὰ προσεύχεται μπροστὰ στῆς δικῆς του φωτογραφίης! Δηλαδὴ τρελάθηκαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι! Αὐτὰ δὲν τὰ κάνανε μήτε οἱ ἀραπάδες τῆς Ἀφρικῆς. Συλλογίζομαι πόση σοβαρότητα ἔχουν οἱ Μουσουλμᾶνοι στὴ θρησκεία τους, καὶ πὺν καταντήσανε τὴ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἀθεόφοβοι Ἰταλι ἀνοι, πὺν προσκυνᾶνε ἀγάλματα τῆς Παναγιᾶς μὲ κοκκινάδια, μὲ σκουλαρίκια καὶ μὲ δαχτυλίδια. Κι ἐμεῖς οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, πὺν φυλάξαμε τὸ βαθὺ μυστήριον τῆς εὐσεβείας, τώρα, στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα, πᾶμε νὰ γίνουμε ἓνα μ' αὐτοὺς, πὺν γελοιοποιήσανε τὸν Χριστὸ ὅσο κανέναν ἄθεος.

Ἄλλά, ἀπὸ ποῦ νὰ πιάσει κανένας καὶ ποῦ νὰ τελειώσει; Ὅσοι ἦτανε ἕως τώρα ἀδιάφοροι γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, καὶ ποῦ πολλοὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς τὶς περιπαίζανε μάλιστα, ὅλοι αὐτοὶ γινήκανε ἕξαφνα παπόφιλοι, καὶ μασᾶνε σάν μαστίχι τὴν ψεύτικη λέξη «ἀγάπη». Μεγαλύτερο ρεζιλίκι δὲν ἔγινε. Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄλλοι ποῦ εἴμαστε κολλημένοι ἀπὸ νεότητος στὴν Ἐκκλησία μας, εἴμαστε στενοκέφαλοι, μοχθηροί, γυμνοὶ ἀπὸ ἀγάπη κι ἀπὸ ἀληθινὴ εὐσέβεια. Ἡ μόδα εἶναι τώρα νὰ φαίνεσαι ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ποῦ ἔνοιωσε τὰ «αἰτήματά» της. [...]

Πίστη ἀσάλευτη στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ποῦ ἐμεῖς οἱ προκομμένοι τὴν πήραμε κληρονομία καὶ τὴν πουλάμε «ἀντὶ πινακίου φακῆς» καὶ ἀσπασμοῦ τῆς παντόφλας τοῦ Πάπα! Μὰ σὲ τέτοιο σημεῖο ἐκφυλισθήκαμε; Αἰτία εἶναι ἡ ἔμφυτη ματαιοδοξία μας, ποῦ μᾶς κάνει νὰ θέλουμε νὰ φαινόμεστε ἕξυπνοι, συγχρονισμένοι, προοδευτικοί, κι ὄχι καθυστερημένοι. Μὲ τὴ συναίσθηση τῆς κατωτερότητας, ποῦ ἀποχτήσαμε, φοβόμαστε σάν τὸν διάβολο μήπως μᾶς ποῦνε «παλιὰ μυαλά, παλιοημερολογίτες, καθυστερημένους». καὶ τρέχουμε νὰ πᾶμε πρῶτοι σὲ κάθε κίνηση, ποῦ περνᾶ γιὰ «μοντέρνα», θέλεις μίμηση τῆς «ἀφηρημένης ζωγραφικῆς», θέλεις ἀκαταλαβίστικες «λογοτεχνίες» (καημένη λογοτεχνία, ποῦ κατάντησες!), θὲς φιλοπαπισμὸς, θὲς ἀμερικανισμὸς, στὰ πάντα, στὰ ντυσίματά μας (πρὸ πάντων τῆς νεολαίας), στὸν τρόπο ποῦ μιλάμε καὶ σκεπτόμαστε, ἀκόμα καὶ στὶς χειρονομίες. Δηλαδή, καταντήσαμε μαϊμούδες τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους «ἐν ὀνόματι τῆς προόδου καὶ τῆς θαυμασίας ἐποχῆς μας»...

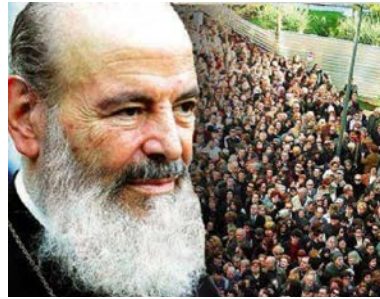


Οἱ ἄνθρωποι καταντήσανε σάν ἄδεια κανάτια, καὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ γεμίσουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους, ρίχνοντας μέσα ἓνα σωρὸ σκουπίδια, ἐκθέσεις μὲ τερατουργήματα, μπάλλες, ὀμιλίες καὶ ἀερολογίες, καλλιστεῖα, ποῦ μετριεῖται ἡ ἔμορφιά μὲ τὴ μεζούρα, ἡλίθιους καρνάβαλους, συλλόγους λογιῆς-λογῆς μὲ γεύματα καὶ μὲ σοβαρὲς συζητήσεις γιὰ τὸν ἴσκιό τοῦ γαϊδάρου, συνδέσμους ἀφιερωμένους στοὺς ἀποθεωμένους ἄνδρας τῆς Εὐρώπης κι ἓνα σωρὸ ἄλλα τέτοια. Αὐτὴ, μὲ μιὰ ματιά, εἶναι ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας σήμερα, ποῦ νὰ μὴν ἀβασκαθῆ! Ποῦ νὰ βρεῖ κανένας καταφύγιο; ... Δόξα στὸν Θεό, ποῦ ὑπάρχει ἀκόμα κάποιο καταφύγιο γιὰ μᾶς ποῦ δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουμε «τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς ἐποχῆς μας». Δόξα στὸν Θεὸ ποῦ ὑπάρχουν ἀκόμα κάποιοι τόποι ποῦ δὲν τοὺς ἐξήρανε αὐτὴ ἡ φυλλοξήρα ποῦ λέγεται σύγχρονος πολιτισμὸς.

**Φώτης Κόντογλου (+1965)**

## Λόγια Προφητικά τοῦ 2001

*Τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἑλλάδος Χριστοδοῦλου (+2008).*



Ποιός, ἀλήθεια, ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς ἐδῶ ἀδυνατεῖ νὰ κατανοήσει στὰ χέρια τίνων θὰ περάσει ὁ ἀπόλυτος ἔλεγχος τῶν media; Μήπως στὰ χέρια δύο-τριῶν Ἀμερικανῶν

ἐπιχειρηματιῶν; Θὰ ἦταν ἀπίστευτα ρομαντικὴ μία τέτοια ὑπόθεση. Σε ποιὸν θὰ περάσει ὁ ἔλεγχος τῆς πολιτικῆς ζωῆς; Στὰ χέρια πέντε-δέκα χορηγῶν τῶν κομμάτων; Αγγίζει τὰ ὄρια τοῦ γελοίου ἡ ἐρώτηση. Ποιοὶ λοιπὸν θὰ εἶναι αὐτοὶ ποῦ θὰ ἐλέγχουν τὴ ζωὴ; Κάποιοι πλούσιοι τραπεζίτες μήπως; Ἄς μὴν τολμήσουμε νὰ ἀπαντήσουμε. Ἄλλὰ ὁ εὐρωπαϊκὸς πολιτισμὸς εἶναι τὸ προῖόν μίας παράλληλης δράσης δύο στοιχείων: τῆς ἐλεύθερης οἰκονομίας καὶ τῆς κοινωνικῆς ἀλληλεγγύης. Πληρώσαμε πάρα πολὺ ἀκριβὰ ὅλοι οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι κάθε προσπάθεια κατάργησης αὐτῆς τῆς παραλληλίας.

Ἐπιπλέον, πρέπει καὶ πάλι νὰ δοῦμε τὴν ἄλλη ὄψη τοῦ νομίσματος: Ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση θὰ ἀνεβάσει στὸ ἐπίπεδο τοῦ Εὐρωπαίου τὸν δυστυχεῖ Ταϊλανδὸ ἐργάτη, ποῦ τώρα δουλεῖ γιὰ ἓνα μικρὸ κομμάτι ξερὸ ψωμί, μήπως, θὰ εἶναι ἀποτελεσματικότερη ἂν κατεβάσει τὸν Εὐρωπαῖο σὲ ἐπίπεδο παρόμοιο μὲ τοῦ Ταϊλανδοῦ;

Ἐλπίζω ὅτι ὅλοι θὰ ἔχουμε σὲ κάποιες ὥρες μας ἀναρωτηθεῖ ποῦ πηγαίνει ἓνας πολιτισμὸς ὅταν ἀναγορεύει τὴν οἰκονομικὴ ἀνάπτυξη σὲ αὐτοσκοπὸ, δίνοντας τῆς τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ γίνεταί βωμὸς τοῦ Μολώχ. Ὅλοι θὰ ἔχουμε ἀναρωτηθεῖ πὼς μπορεῖ νὰ ὀνομάζεται ἀναπτυξιακὴ μία οἰκονομία ποῦ δὲν ὑπολογίζει στὸ κόστος τῆς τὴν καταστροφή τοῦ πλανῆτη καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, δηλαδὴ τοῦ περιβάλλοντος καὶ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ.



**Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοση τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οἰκονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν».**



## Ὁ Πόλεμος, τὸν Ὅποῖον δὲν Βλέπομεν

**Αἰματηραὶ Διώξεις Χριστιανῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰσλάμ, Ὅχι διὰ τὴν Ἐκκαθάρισιν τῶν Ἀπίστων, Ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν Ἐπιβολὴν τοῦ Ἰσλάμ!**

*Τοῦ παλαιμάχου δημοσιογράφου κ. Τηλεμάχου Μαράτου, ἐφημερίδα «ΕΣΤΙΑ», 18<sup>η</sup> Ὀκτωβρίου, 2013.*

*Εἰς τὸ ἄρθρον αὐτὸν ὁ δημοσιογράφος πραγματεύεται τὰς συγχρόνους διώξεις τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ ἰδιαιτέρως ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰσλάμ, ὑπογραμμίζων ὅτι αἱ διώξεις αὐταὶ δὲν γίνονται διὰ τὴν «ἐκκαθάρισιν» ὑπὸ τῶν ἀπίστων, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἐπιβολὴν τοῦ Ἰσλάμ ὡς θρησκείας.*

† † †

**Ἡ** λέξις «Ἰσλαμοφοβία» εἶναι μία ξένη λέξις, ἡμῖα ἀπὸ πολλὰς ποὺ κατασκευάσαν οἱ ἀγγλοσάξονες καὶ οἱ Γάλλοι, μὲ Ἑλληνικὰ στοιχεῖα, τὰ ὁποῖα ὅμως δὲν κατενόησαν πλήρως ἢ εἶχαν ἐλαφρῶς διαφορετικὸν νόημα στὰ ἀρχαῖα, ποὺ ἔμαθαν στὸ σχολεῖο. Ἐμεῖς, ἰδιαίτερα οἱ «πολιτικῶς ὀρθοί», φιλο-αριστεροί, παίρνουμε πίσω τὴν Ἑλληνόμορφη ξένη λέξις καὶ τὴν ἐρμηνεύουμε ὡσὰν νὰ ἦταν Ἑλληνική. Οἱ λέξεις αὐτὲς ὅμως (ἰδίως ἐκεῖνες ποὺ τελειώνουν σὲ «φοβία») ἔχουν μία πολιτικὴ φόρτιση καὶ—συγχρόνως—ἓνα ἠθικὸ πρόσταγμα.

Ἑλληνικὰ «ἰσλαμοφοβία» σημαίνει, βεβαίως, τὸν φόβο τοῦ Ἰσλάμ ἐνῶ ἀγγλικά σημαίνει τὴν ἀπέχθεια, ἀκόμη καὶ τὸ μῖσος, λόγω προκαταλήψεως, καὶ τὸν φόβο ὑπαρκτοῦ ἢ φαντασιακοῦ κίνδυνου ἀπὸ τὸ Ἰσλάμ. Ἡ λέξις δημιουργήθηκε καὶ χρησιμοποιοῦται πάντοτε ὑποτιμητικὰ γιὰ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἔχουν ἐπιφυλάξεις γιὰ τοὺς ἀκρωτηριασμούς, λιθοβολισμούς (γυναικῶν), τὴν «μπούρκα» καὶ τὶς ἄλλες πολιτιστικὰς καὶ θρησκευτικὰς ἰδιαιτερότητες τοῦ Ἰσλάμ. Ἡ ἐπικρατοῦσα «ἀλήθεια» τῆς πολιτικῆς (ἀριστερῆς) ὀρθότητος, μὲ λίγα λόγια, εἶναι ὅτι ἡ «διαφορετικότητα» τῶν μουσουλμάνων πρέπει νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζεται μὲ κατανόηση, γιὰτὶ πάντοτε φταῖμε ἐμεῖς, οἱ δυτικοί, οἱ λευκοί, οἱ Χριστιανοί. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν κορίτσια 9 καὶ 10 ἐτῶν ἀναγκάζονται νὰ παντρευτοῦν μεσήλικες συγγενεῖς τους.

Οἱ σταυροφορίες δὲν θεωροῦνται ἐκστρατεῖες ἀπελευθερώσεως τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων, ποὺ κατεκτήθησαν ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἄραβες, ἀλλὰ πειρατικὲς εἰσβολὰς ὑποδουλώσεως καὶ λεηλασίας. Ἀκολουθοῦν οἱ ἐγκληματικὲς διώξεις αἰρετικῶν, ἢ Ἱερὰ Ἐξέτασις,

ὁ Γαλιλαῖος κ.ο.κ. Ὑπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα οἱ σημερινὲς διώξεις τῶν Χριστιανῶν δὲν προσελκύουν τὰ φῶτα τῆς δημοσιότητος. Ὁ φόνος ἐνὸς μαύρου ἀπὸ ἀστυνομικούς ἔχει μεγαλύτερη κάλυψη ἀπὸ τὴν σφαγὴ ἑκατὸ χιλιάδων Χριστιανῶν. Ὅλων τῶν χρωμάτων.

Ὑπερβάλλω; Καὶ ὅμως ὄχι. Τὴν τελευταία δεκαετία [σύμφωνα μὲ μελέτες ἐπιστημονικῶν (μὴ θρησκευτικῶν) κέντρων παρακολουθήσεως Ἀνθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων στὴν Φρανκφούρτη καὶ στὴ Μασσαχουσέττη] 100.000—ἑκατὸ χιλιάδες—κατὰ μέσο ὄρο, Χριστιανοὶ σκοτώνονται κάθε χρόνο. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι 11 Χριστιανοὶ σκοτώνονται σὲ κάποιο μέρος τοῦ κόσμου κάθε ὥρα, κάθε μέρα, 365 μέρες τὸν χρόνο. (Στοιχεῖα ἀπὸ τὸν «Spectator» τεύχος 5/10/13).

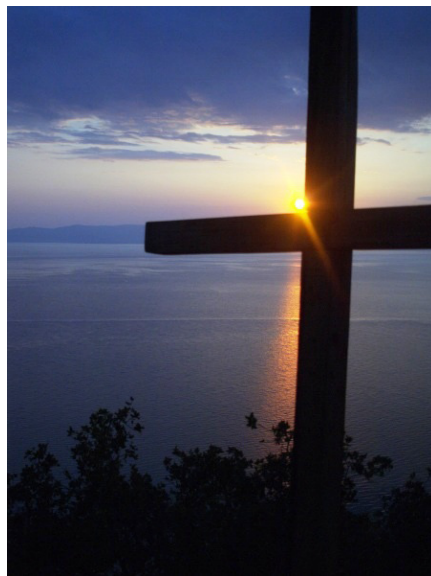
Ὅλοι γνωρίζουμε τοὺς διωγμοὺς τῶν Χριστιανῶν μαρτύρων τοὺς πρώτους αἰῶνες τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ.

Σχεδὸν κάθε ἡμέρα τοῦ ἡμερολογίου εἶναι ἀφιερωμένη σὲ μάρτυρες καὶ ἁγίους. Ὅπως εἶναι φυσικὸ οἱ περιγραφὲς τῶν μαρτυριῶν εἶναι ἐντυπωσιακὲς στὸν «Συναξαριστὴ», καὶ διάφορες παραδόσεις, ποὺ πῆραν τὴν μορφή θρύλου. Ὅ,τι καὶ νὰ ἔγραψαν ὅμως, ὅσο ὑπερβολικὸ καὶ νὰ φαίνεται, ὡχρῖα μπροστὰ σὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ συμβαίνουν σήμερα σὲ μία κλίμακα πρωτοφανῆ στὴν ἱστορία.

Στὸ Ἰράκ τὸ 1991 (πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου) ὑπῆρχαν 1,5 ἑκατομμύρια Χριστιανοί. Σήμερα εἶναι ἀμφίβολο ἂν ὑπάρχουν 500.000. (Σημειωτέον ὅτι περίπου 500.000 ἄσχετοι φαίνεται νὰ σκοτώθηκαν, στὸ ἴδιο

διάστημα ἀπὸ τοὺς φανατικοὺς Σουννίτες, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν συμβιβασθεῖ μὲ τὴν ἰδέα ὅτι ἔχασαν τὴν ἐξουσία, ποὺ ἀπελάμβαναν ἐπὶ Σαντάμ Χουσεῖν, ἂν καὶ μειοψηφοῦσαν). Ἀπὸ τὶς 65 ἐκκλησίες, οἱ 40 ἔχουν ὑποστῆ βομβαρδισμὸ ἢ κατακρεοῦργηση ἱερέων καὶ πιστῶν κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας. Στὴν Νιγηρία τὸ Ἰσλαμικὸ κίνημα Μπόκο Χαράμ εἶναι ὑπεύθυνο γιὰ πάνω ἀπὸ 3.000 θανάτους Χριστιανῶν, ἐνῶ στὸ Πακιστάν, στὸ Σουδάν, στὴν Κένυα, στὶς Φιλιππίνες καὶ στὴν Ἰνδονησία οἱ βομβαρδισμοὶ καὶ οἱ πολυβολισμοὶ ἐκκλησιῶν εἶναι συνεχεῖς.

Τὸ κείμενο αὐτὸ προέβαλε τὸν κίνδυνο τοῦ Ἰσλάμ, διότι αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ σημερινὸς κίνδυνος πλησιέστερα στὴν Εὐρώπη, κυρίως. Οἱ ἀριθμοὶ ὅμως τῶν διώξεων Χριστιανῶν σὲ ἄλλες χώρες, γιὰ πολιτικούς ἢ θρησκευτικούς λόγους, εἶναι τρομακτικοί. Στὴν Βόρεια Κορέα πάνω ἀπὸ 100.000 Χριστιανοὶ ζοῦν σὲ



στρατόπεδα καταναγκαστικής εργασίας, ενώ 300.000 Χριστιανοί έχουν εξαφανισθεί. Στο Ίνδικό κράτος Ὁρίσσα στις διώξεις εξαγριωμένου ὄχλου Ἰνδουιστῶν τὸ 2008, πάνω ἀπὸ 5.000 σπίτια Χριστιανῶν καὶ 350 ἐκκλησίες κατεστράφησαν, ἐνῶ χιλιάδες Χριστιανοὶ κατέφυγαν σὲ καταυλισμοὺς στὴν ἐξορία. Στὴν Βιρμανία περιοχὲς, ποὺ κατοικοῦν Χριστιανοὶ ἔχουν κηρυχθεῖ «μαῦρες ζῶνες», ὅπου τὰ στρατιωτικὰ ἐλικόπτερα πολυβολοῦν κατὰ βούληση.

Ἐπανερχομαι στὴν «Ἰσλαμοφοβία». Σὲ πολλὰ κράτη οἱ Χριστιανοὶ διώκονται καὶ σφαγιάζονται λόγω τῆς θρησκευτικῆς, καὶ πολιτικῆς διαφορᾶς ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπικρατοῦσα θρησκεία ἢ τὸ καθεστῶς ἐκεῖ. Ἔτσι ἦταν πάντα. Ἀπὸ τὴν Ρώμη μέχρι τὴν Σοβιετικὴ Ἑνωσι. Ἡ διαφορὰ μὲ τὸ Ἰσλάμ εἶναι ὅτι αὐτὸ ποὺ ὀραματίζονται δὲν εἶναι ἡ «ἐκκαθάριση» τῆς χώρας τοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς «ἀπίστους». Εἶναι ἡ ἐπιβολὴ τῆς θρησκείας τοὺς στὸν ὑπόλοιπο κόσμον καὶ μετὰ ἡ ἐκκαθάριση. Αὐτὸ φοβάμαι.



## Ψευδόχριστοι καὶ Ψευδομεσσίαὶ ἀπὸ τὸ 1000 μ.Χ. μέχρι Σήμερα

Τοῦ πρωτ. π. Βασιλείου Α. Γεωργοπούλου, Λέκτορος Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Α.Π.Θ.

Ὁ εὐαγγελικὸς λόγος εἶναι σαφῆς, καὶ ἀκριβῆς, καὶ διαχρονικὰ ἐπίκαιρος. Διαβάζουμε στὸ ἱερὸ εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Λουκᾶ: «Βλέπετε μὴ πλανηθῆτε πολλοὶ γὰρ ἐλεύσονται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου λέγοντες ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμὶ καὶ ὁ καιρὸς ἤγγικε μὴ οὖν πορευθῆτε ὀπίσω αὐτῶν». (Λουκ. 21:8, πρβλ. Ματθ. 24:5). Ἐδῶ μᾶς πληροφορεῖ ὁ Κύριος γιὰ ἓνα φαινόμενο πολὺ ἐπικίνδυνον, τὸ ὁποῖο ἐμφανίζεται ἐνδημικὰ μέσα στὴν ἱστορία, καὶ αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐμφάνιση διαφόρων ψευδόχριστων καὶ ψευδομεσσιῶν.

Στὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο μας θὰ κάνουμε μία ἱστορικὴ ἀναδρομὴ καὶ καταγραφὴ τῶν ὀνομάτων τέτοιων ψευδόχριστων καὶ ψευδομεσσιῶν ἀπὸ τὸ 1000 μ.Χ. μέχρι τὴς ἡμέρες μας, τὸ θεωροῦμε μία χρήσιμη ὑπόμνηση σὲ μία περίοδο τῆς παγκόσμιας ἱστορίας, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ δικὴ μας, ποὺ ἡ σύγχυση καὶ οἱ πνευματικοὶ κίνδυνοὶ εἶναι τόσοι πολλοί. Τέτοιον ψευδομεσσιᾶς ὑπῆρξαν:

**1. Fra Dolcino Torielli.** Ἐδρασε στὴν Ἰταλία τὸν 13<sup>ον</sup> αἰώνα. Κήρυττε ὅτι ἦταν ἓνα ἐκλεκτὸ ὄργανο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὀνόμαζε τὸν ἑαυτὸ του «Ἄγγελος τῶν Θυατείρων» (Ἀποκ. 2:18) μὲ ἰκανὸ ἀριθμὸ

ψευδοπροφητειῶν.

**2. Melchior Hofmann** (1495-1543). Ὑπῆρξε ἀκραῖος Ἀναβαπτιστὴς στὰ χρόνια τῆς Μεταρρύθμισης, ποὺ παρουσίαζε τὸ πρόσωπό του ὡς τὸν ἐπανερχόμενο προφήτη Ἡλία.

**3. Augustin Bader.** Τὸ 1529 ὑποστήριξε ὅτι εἶναι ὁ Ἡλίας καὶ τὸ μικρὸ του παιδί ὅτι εἶναι ὁ Μεσσίας καὶ βασιλιὰς τοῦ ἐπίγειου χιλιετοῦς βασιλείου.

**4. Jan Bockelson.** Ἀκραῖος Ἀναβαπτιστὴς στὰ χρόνια τῆς Μεταρρύθμισης, ποὺ τὸ 1534 ἰσχυρίστηκε ὅτι ἦταν προφήτης καὶ βασιλιὰς τῆς Σιών.

**5. Hans Hut** (1490-1527). Ὑποστήριξε ὅτι ἦταν ὁ δεῦτερος Νῶε καὶ ὁ προφήτης τῶν ἐσχάτων χρόνων.

**6. David Joris** (1501-1556). Αὐτοχαρακτηριζόταν, ἐπίσης, ὡς προφήτης τῶν ἐσχάτων χρόνων.

**7. Klauss Ludwig.** Ἀναβαπτιστὴς ποὺ κήρυττε ὅτι ἦταν ὁ ἐρχόμενος Χριστὸς.

**8. David Bahr.** Πέθανε τὸ 1723 καὶ ὑποστήριξε ὅτι ἦταν ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦ Δαβίδ.

**9. Antoinette Bourignon de la Porte** (1616-1680). Διακήρυττε ὅτι ἦταν ἡ γυναίκα ἡ ντυμένη μὲ τὸν ἥλιο, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία γίνεται λόγος στὸ 12<sup>ον</sup> κεφ. τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως.

**10. Anna van Buchel.** 18<sup>ος</sup> αἰώνας. Ὑποστήριξε ὅτι ἦταν ἡ μητέρα τοῦ νέου Μεσσία καὶ ἐνσάρκωση τῆς ἀγαθότητος τῆς θεότητος.

**11. Eva von Buttlar** (1670-1717). Μία ἀκόμη μητέρα τοῦ νέου Μεσσία.

**12. Father Divine.** Ἰδρυτὴς τῆς σέκτας Peace Mission. Παρουσιαζόταν ὡς δεῦτερη ἐνσάρκωση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Πέθανε στίς 10-9-1965.



Νέος μοναχὸς ἀκόμη ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν, ζήτησε νὰ μάθῃ ἀπὸ τὸν Μέγα Ἀντώνιο τί ἔπρεπε νὰ κάνῃ γιὰ νὰ βρῇ τὴ σωτηρία του:

- Νὰ παραδέχεσαι τὰ σφάλματά σου, μὲ συντριμμένη καρδιά, τοῦ ἀποκριθῆκε ὁ Πατὴρ τῶν Πατέρων, καὶ νὰ ταπεινώνεσαι μπροστὰ στὸν Θεό. Νὰ ὑπομένῃς ἐπίσης καρτερικὰ τοὺς πειρασμούς, ποὺ σοῦ συμβαίνουν, καὶ νὰ εἶσαι βέβαιος πὼς θὰ σωθῆς.

Μάθε νὰ ἐξευτελίῃς τὸν ἑαυτό σου καὶ σ' ὅποιο τόπο κι ἂν κατοικήσης, θὰ βρῆς ἀνάπαυση, λέγει ὁ Ὅσιος Ποιμὴν.

Ὅποιος πειρασμὸς κι ἂν βρῇ τὸν ταπεινόφρονα Χριστιανό, λέγει ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν, νικᾷ γιατί σωμαίνει.

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Γεροντικὸν»



## Ἡ Εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Κυρίου στήν Ὁρθόδοξη Τέχνη

Νικολάου Ζία, Καθηγητοῦ Ἱστορίας τῆς Τέχνης.

**Ἡ** Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ μέγα αὐτὸ γεγονός τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ κόσμου, γιορτάζεται ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Ὁρθόδοξο Ἐκκλησία μὲ δοξολογία καὶ κατάνυξη, ποὺ θαυμαστά ἐκφράζονται στὴν ἡδυμελὴ ὑμνογραφία καὶ τὴν εἰρηνόχυτο εἰκονογραφία.

Ἔτσι μέσα στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὁ ἀπλὸς Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανὸς ζεῖ τὸ μυστήριό τῆς σαρκώσεως μὲ τὶς αἰσθήσεις του, ποὺ μεταμορφώνονται, γιὰ νὰ γίνουν μέσα κοινωνίας μὲ τὸ ἄρρητο. Προσκυνώντας τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως «βλέπει» μὲ τὰ μάτια του τὴ θεολογία τῆς Σαρκώσεως καὶ αἰσθάνεται τὴν εὐφροσύνη τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἄγευστος πνευματικῆς ζωῆς μελετητῆς, μπορεῖ κι' ἀπὸ αὐτὴν καὶ μόνο τὴν εἰκόνα ν' ἀντιληφθεῖ τὸ πνευματικὸ μεγαλεῖο, τὸ μυστικὸ βάθος καὶ τὸ αἰσθητικὸ κάλλος τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου τέχνης, ποὺ συνήθως τὴ λέμε Βυζαντινῆ.

Τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως στὴν ὀλοκληρωμένη της μορφή τὴ βρίσκουμε κυρίως στοὺς ἔπειτα ἀπὸ τὴν εἰκονομαχία χρόνους. Στὴν Ἑλλάδα μας ἔχουν σωθεῖ δυὸ ἐκκλησιές τοῦ 11<sup>ου</sup> αἰ., καθολικὰ ἄλλοτε τῶν Μοναστηριῶν τοῦ Ὁσίου Λουκά καὶ τοῦ Δαφνίου, ποὺ στὰ ψηφιδωτὰ τους βλέπουμε τὴν παράσταση τῆς Γεννήσεως στὴν αὐθεντικώτερή της μορφή. Ἄς συνοψίσουμε τὰ βασικὰ στοιχεῖα ποὺ συνθέτουν τὴν εἰκόνα.

Τὸ κεντρικὸ τμῆμα καταλαμβάνει βουνὸ «βραχῶδες, ἀλλ' εὐχαρὶ καὶ φωτεινόχρωμο», ποὺ στὴν κοιλιὰ του ἀνοίγεται σκοτεινόχρωμο σπήλαιο καὶ μέσα φάτνη μὲ τὸν νήπιο Χριστὸ ἐσπαργανωμένο, ἐνῶ ἡ Παναγία Μητέρα του εἶναι στὸ πλάι ξαπλωμένη πάνω σ' ἓνα στρώμα. Ἄλλοτε εἰκονίζεται καθισμένη ἢ γονατιστή. Πίσω ἀπὸ τὴ φάτνη προβάλλουν τὰ κεφάλια τους δυὸ ἀγαθὰ ζῶα, βόδι καὶ ὄναριο ξεσταίνοντας τὸ θεῖο Βρέφος μὲ τὴν ἀναπνοή τους. Ἐξω ἀπὸ τὸ σπήλαιο, στὸ κάτω ἄκρο τῆς εἰκόνας, κάθετα συλλογισμένος ὁ Ἰωσήφ ἔχοντας ἴσως ἀκόμη τὸ σαράκι τῆς ἀμφιβολίας μέσα του. Στὴν ἄλλη ἄκρη τῆς εἰκόνας παριστάνεται τὸ πρῶτο λουτρό, ποὺ ἔκανε ἡ μαία Σαλώμη στὸ Νεογέννητο.

Δεξιὰ κι' ἀριστερὰ ἀπὸ τὸ βουνὸ ἄγγελοι προσκυνοῦν καὶ δοξολογοῦν τὸ Χριστὸ ἢ φέρουν στοὺς ποιμένες, ποὺ ξενυχτοῦν, τὸ χαροποῖδ ἄγγελμα.

Ἐνα τσοπανόπουλο κάθετα διπλοποδισμένο παίζοντας φλογέρα. Ζωγραφίζονται ἀκόμη καὶ ἄλλοι τσοπάνοι μὲ τὰ κοπάδια τους. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη ἄκρη ἔρχονται ντυμένοι μὲ τὶς ἐξωτικές τους φορεσιές οἱ τρεῖς Μάγοι κομίζοντας τὰ βασιλικά τοὺς δῶρα. Ὁ λαμπρὸς ἀστέρας, ποὺ τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε, ἔχει σταθεῖ πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ σπήλαιο, «ὡσὰν δροσοσταλίδα κρεμάμενη ἀνωθεν τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ», ὅπως γράφει ὁ μακαριστὸς Φώτης Κόντογλου. Ὁ ἴδιος ἅγιος γράφος - συγγραφέας ὀλοκληρώνει τὴν περιγραφή τῆς παραστάσεως μὲ τὴ λιτὴ φύση, ποὺ τὴ στολίζει: «Ἄγρια πρινάρια καὶ εὐώδη χόρτα, μυρσίνες, θυμάρια καὶ ἄλλα στολίζουν ταπεινὰ τοὺς βράχους, ὅπως τὰ βλέπει κανένας εἰς τὰ εὐλογημένα βουνὰ τῆς πατρίδος μας».

Εἶπαμε στὴν ἀρχή, ὅτι ἡ εἰκόνα φανερώνει τὴ θεολογία, τὸν πνευματικὸ χαρακτήρα τῆς Γεννήσεως καὶ πρὶν νὰ δοῦμε τὸ καθένα στοιχεῖο τῆς συνθέσεως τί συμβολικὰ ἀποκαλύπτει, ἂς δοῦμε ὀλόκληρη τὴ σύνθεση μαζί καὶ τὴν τεχνοτροπία της. Ἡ σύνθεση στοιχείων ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορικὴ πραγματικότητα (βουνό, σπήλαιο, φάτνη, κ.λ.π.) μὲ τὸ πνευματικὸ στοιχεῖο τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ, ποὺ συμβολίζει τὸ χρυσὸ βάθος τῆς εἰκόνας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ ἀντιρεαλιστικὸς δισδιάστατος χαρακτήρας τῆς ζωγραφικῆς, μᾶς δίνουν ὀπτικά τὴ σύνθεση τοῦ γήινου καὶ τοῦ Θείου, τὴν ἔνωση τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου καὶ τοῦ Θείου· καὶ αὐτὸ γιὰ οὔτε ἀνθρωποποιεῖ τὴν παράσταση σὰν μία παχυλὴ εἰδωλοποίησι στὸν καθρέφτη,

οὔτε ἀφαιρεῖ τὴν ἱστορικότητα τῶν γήινων στοιχείων καὶ συστατικῶν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μεταμορφώνει. Ἡ σύνθεση ἀκολουθεῖ περισσότερο—στὶς λεπτομέρειες ἰδίως—τὴν ὑμνογραφικὴ παράδοση, ποὺ ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὰ λεγόμενα Ἀπόκρυφα Εὐαγγέλια. Ἔτσι ζωγραφίζεται σπήλαιο σκοτεινόχρωμο, σὰν τὴ σκοτεινιά τοῦ προχριστιανικοῦ κόσμου, ὅπου λάμπει κατάλευκο τὸ ἐσπαργανωμένο Βρέφος.

Στὴ Δυτικὴ ζωγραφικὴ ὁ μικρὸς Χριστὸς εἰκονίζεται γυμνός, ἐνῶ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο σαφῶς μας λέει «καὶ σπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ» (Λουκ. 2:6).

Τὰ δυὸ ζωντανὰ μᾶς ὑπενθυμίζουν κάθε φορὰ ποὺ προσκυνοῦμε τὴν εἰκόνα ὅτι «Ἐγὼ βοὺς τὸν κτησάμενον καὶ ὄνος τὴν φάτνην τοῦ Κυρίου αὐτοῦ, Ἰσραὴλ δὲ μὲ οὐκ ἔγνων καὶ ὁ λαός μου οὐκ συνήκεν» (Ἦσ. 1:3).



Τὴν κεντρικὴ θέση στὴ σύνθεση κατέχει μαζὶ μὲ τὸ Χριστὸ ἢ Παναγία καὶ ἔχει κανεὶς τὴν ἐντύπωση, ὅτι ἀποτελοῦν τὸν κεντρικὸ κύκλο δείχνοντας τὴ σημασία τῆς Παναγίας στὸ σχέδιο τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τῆς Παναγίας τονίζεται ἡ σημασία τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους καὶ ἡ συμβολὴ τοῦ στῆ θεία συγκατάβαση.

Ὁ Ἰωσήφ μένει ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ κύκλωμα αὐτό. Ἔτσι ἀμέσως μὲ τὴν πρώτη ματιὰ συνειδητοποιεῖ ὁ πιστὸς ὅτι ἄνανδρος ἢ σύλληψις, καὶ ὁ Ἰωσήφ, καθὼς μάλιστα κάθεται συλλογισμένος, ἐπιβεβαιώνει μὲ τὴν ἄγνοιά του, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἀμφιβολία του τὸ μέγα μυστήριον. Ἐνα τροπάριο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θαρρεῖς ὅτι ὑπομνηματίζει αὐτὴν τὴν ἀμφιβολία: «*Τάδε λέγει Ἰωσήφ πρὸς τὴν Παρθένον Μαρία, τί τὸ δράμα τοῦτο, δ' ἐν σοὶ τεθέσται; Ἀπορῶ καὶ ἐξίσταμαι καὶ τὸν νοῦν καταπλήττομαι.... οὐκ ἔτι φέρω λοιπόν, τὸ ὄνειδος ἀνθρώπων...*».

Ἡ σκεπτικὴ στάση τοῦ Ἰωσήφ δίνει κουράγιο σ' ὅσους ταλαιπωροῦνται ἀπὸ λογισμοὺς ἀμφιβολίας, ὅσον ἀφορᾶ τὴ μυστηριακὴ Γέννηση. Ὅσοι δὲν μποροῦν νὰ δεχτοῦν μὲ ἀπλὴ καρδιά, τὸ μήνυμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ὅπως οἱ καλόκαρδοι ποιμένες, ἐλπίζουν στὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν ὑπέρβαση τῶν ἀμφιβολιῶν καὶ τῶν διαφορῶν δεινῶν λογισμῶν. Γιατί σὲ ἄλλο τροπάριο ὁ Ἰωσήφ θὰ δώσει τὴν ἀπάντησι: «*Εγώ, φησί, τοὺς προφήτας ἐρευνήσας καὶ χρηματισθεὶς ὑπὸ ἀγγέλου πέπεισμαι ὅτι Θεὸν γεννήσει ἡ Μαρία ἀνεργηνεύτως*».

Οἱ Μάγοι - σοφοὶ καὶ καλοπροαίρετοι ἀναζητητὲς τῆς ἀλήθειας τοῦ καιροῦ τους γίνονται ἐδῶ ἐκπρόσωποι ὅλων ὄσων ψάχνουν καὶ πορεύονται δρόμους μακρυνούς, γιὰ νὰ βροῦν τὴν ἔνσαρκο ἀλήθεια, ποῦ εἶναι ὁ τεχθεὶς Χριστός.

Μένει ἀκόμα ἡ τρυφερὴ λεπτομέρεια τοῦ πρώτου λουτροῦ τοῦ Βρέφους. Ἴσως παραξενεύει καμιά φορὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς ἢ σκηνὴ αὐτὴ, ἀλλὰ ἡ Παράδοξη τὴ δέχεται ἤδη ἀπὸ τὸν 6<sup>ον</sup> αἰ. μέχρι σήμερα μὲ σποραδικὰς ἐξαιρέσεις. Στὸ τρυφερὸ αὐτὸ γεγονός, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ μία οἰκειότητα, ποῦ προσδίδουν στὴν εἰκόνα ὀρισμένοι θεολόγοι, βλέπουν μίαν ἀκόμη ἐπίρρωση στὴν πίστη τῆς σαρκώσεως καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ Λόγου. Κι' ἀκόμη μὲ τὸ βύθισμα στὸ λουτρὸ πιστεύουν ὅτι προεικονίζεται ἡ Βάπτισις τοῦ Κυρίου.

Ἄν κάνουμε μία σύγκριση μὲ τὴν εἰκονογραφία στὴ Δύση, ἰδίως μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀναγέννηση, θὰ βροῦμε ἀρκετὰς διαφορὰς, ποῦ μερικὰς σημαίνουν τὴ διαφορὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ἀνάμεσα στὶς δυὸ παραδόσεις. Τὸ σπῆλαιο γίνεται ἕνας στάβλος ἰδωμένος μὲ ρομαντικὴ ματιὰ, ποῦ ὅλο καὶ τὸν ἐξωραίζει. Ἡ Παναγία εἶναι μία ὁμορφὴ χωριατοπούλα καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἕνα χαριτωμένο παχουλὸ μωρὸ, ποῦ εἰκονίζεται μάλιστα γυμνὸ. Ὁ

Ἰωσήφ παίρνει θέση δίπλα στὸ Βρέφος, ἰσάξια μὲ τὴν Παναγία. Ἡ προσκύνησι τῶν Μάγων μετατρέπεται σὲ μία πολυπρόσωπη παρέλασι τῆς ἀριστοκρατίας τοῦ καιροῦ τοῦ ζωγράφου. Ὁ συναισθηματισμὸς μὲ τὶς ρομαντικὰς προεκτάσεις του καὶ κάποτε τὶς κλασικιστικὰς ἀναμνήσεις του παραμερίζει τὸ Μυστήριον, μεταλλάσσοντας τὴ συμβολικὴ ἀπεικόνισι τοῦ ἀρρήτου αὐτοῦ μυστηρίου σὲ ὠραία καταγραφὴ ἐνὸς μυθικο-ιστορικοῦ γεγονότος μέσα στὰ πλαίσια τῆς Οὐμανιστικῆς ἀμορφίας καὶ τῆς καλομελετημένης ἀρμονίας.

Ἐπιστρέφοντας στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως βλέπουμε πράγματα, ποῦ ξεπερνοῦν τὴ λογικὴ καὶ τὴν καλοστημένη τάξι. Βλέπουμε πράγματα γιὰ τὴν κρίσι μᾶς παράδοξα. Ὁ Χριστὸς π.χ. νὰ εἰκονίζεται στὴ φάτνη καὶ συγχρόνως καὶ στὸ λουτρὸ. Οἱ Μάγοι νὰ παριστάνονται δυὸ φορὰς.

Τὸ χρόνο ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος ζωγράφος τὸν χρησιμοποιεῖ ἐλεύθερα, γιατί ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ χρόνο. Γιατὶ κι ἂν σαρκώθηκε καὶ γεννήθηκε σὲ μία ἱστορικὴ στιγμὴ, δὲν παύει νὰ εἶναι χτὲς καὶ σήμερα καὶ αὔριο ὁ Ἰδιος. Αὐτὴ τὴν ὑπέρβαση τοῦ χρόνου, τὸ λειτουργικὸ χρόνο, ὅπου τὰ πάντα εἶναι παρόν, μᾶς παρουσιάζει μὲ τὰ μέσα τῆς ἢ ζωγραφικῆς.

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως μορφοποιεῖ τὴ θεολογία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, βρίσκοντας τὸ μέτρο ἀνάμεσα στὸ Θεϊκὸ καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο, δοξολογεῖ μὲ χρώματα καὶ σχήματα, μὲ τρυφερότητα, ἀλλὰ χωρὶς γλυκερότητα, τὴν ἐνανθρώπησι καὶ προσφέρει στὸν πιστὸ τὴν πύλη γιὰ τὴν εἴσοδο στὸ Μυστήριον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν αἰσθητικὴ χαρὰ καὶ εὐφροσύνη τῆς ἀληθινῆς τέχνης.



**Α**γωνίσου μὲ ὅλη τὴν δύναμι τῆς ψυχῆς σου νὰ κρατᾶς καθαρὸ τὸν νοῦ σου τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ νὰ συγκεντρῶνεις ὅλο σου τὸν λογισμὸ στὴν κατανόησι τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς εὐχῆς ποῦ κάνεις.

**Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης**

**Ὅ**ταν καλλιεργοῦμε τὴν προσευχή, χρειάζομαστε ὅπωςδήποτε τὸν σωματικὸ πόνον ποῦ προξενεῖ ἢ νηστεία, ἢ ἀγρυπνία καὶ τὰ παρόμοια.

**Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς**

**Γ**ιὰ νὰ σταματήσεις τὴ συνεχῆ ἀνακατωσούρα τῶν λογισμῶν σου, πρέπει νὰ δέσεις τὸ νοῦ σου μὲ μία σκέψη, ἢ καλύτερα μὲ τὴ σκέψη τοῦ Ἐνός.

**Ἐπίσκοπος Θεοφάνης ὁ Ἐγκλειστος**



## A PASTORAL EPISTLE ON “SAME-SEX UNIONS”

*A timeless and prescient statement by the Western American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia issued nearly a decade ago, in 2004.*

*What is most important for us, what is most precious, what is the greatest? It is holiness.*

[St. John of San Francisco, (+1966)]

† † †

It is with profound sorrow and great concern for the future that we, the clergy of the Western American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, with our Archpastor, the Most Reverend Kyrill, Archbishop of San Francisco and Western America, view the flagrant disregard for the laws of God and the state with the granting of what are purported to be licenses for marriage to persons of the same gender, and the performing of ceremonies which claim to establish a union that is marriage for these persons. We cannot condone or ignore the defiance of the law in San Francisco, or in municipalities in Oregon, Massachusetts, New York, and New Mexico; nor remain silent, and thereby give implicit consent to this practice.

It is the duty of the Church to direct Her children to obedience to the laws of the state when these do not conflict with the law of God. When the law of the state deviates from the way of righteousness appointed by God, the Church must call attention to the dangers such a departure presents. We are compelled to address our flocks concerning the nature of Holy Matrimony, otherwise known as marriage. *We ought to obey God rather than men.* (Acts 5:29).

Holy Matrimony consists of the union of two persons into one, through the union of their souls and bodies, through mutual submission and obedience, and, most importantly, through the action of God's grace. It is a holy mystery, a sacrament, an avenue of the Grace of God given to us not for the indulgence of our passions, but for the working out of our salvation. For this reason, it cannot be merely a social or civil contract entered into by two persons. Marriage is the God-ordained union of a man and a woman, for the purpose of creating a home, a "little Church," in which the couple, and the children which are their progeny (being the product of the physical affection for one another), are able to work out their salvation. Marriage is a sacrament that is not created by the husband and wife out of their love for one another, or by their pledge of loyalty and mutual submission to one another; marriage is a mystery bestowed by God through the action of the Church upon those who are made one thereby.

The estate of marriage cannot be established by human action alone; it must be bestowed by God alone. Nor can this (or any) grace be bestowed by the state, for it is the gift of God given within the confines of, and subject to the discipline of, the Holy Mother Church. Although the state chooses to recognize this union as beneficial to the stability of society and so bestows certain benefits under law through licensure of this action, marriage is not now, nor has it ever been, an action of the state. The sacrament of Marriage is a divine action subject only to the grace and will of God, which is expressed in the unbroken and pure tradition of the Orthodox Church.

In addition to the salvation of the souls of the husband and wife and of their children, the sacrament of marriage also serves as a guardian and standard of moral behavior. Any lustful activity outside of the bounds of sacramental marriage is damaging to the soul and creates a barrier between man and God. The sacrament defines the limits of physical and emotional intimacy between two persons. These limits include (but are not limited to) the fact that marital relations are only possible between a man and a woman, that the conception, bearing and raising of children is the natural and desired product of marital relations, and that such relations are only permitted within the sanctified bounds of marriage. Any type of intimacy outside of these boundaries is considered to be sinful and constitutes a barrier to the spiritual life and communion with God.

Man is created for the purpose of communion with God. To that end, we are endowed with the image and likeness of God, and any barrier to the fulfillment of that image and likeness runs counter to our created purpose. When we do not act in accordance with God's will, engaging in behavior which is sinful—that is, behavior which prevents the realization of God's image and likeness in us—then we suffer the eternal consequences of those actions.

In the modern culture, much emphasis has been placed on the "culture of the flesh" and the eternal and spiritual nature of man has been minimized. Self-indulgence has become the primary value and is protected by our modern society under the pretext of individual "civil rights." Personal gratification and fulfillment in this world has supplanted the spiritual striving for purity and holiness, which is the true source of joy. The love of God has been replaced by love of self. The desire of eternal bliss has been replaced by the desire for worldly bliss. The fear of eternal punishment has been replaced by the fear of worldly discomfort and condemnation. Man has supplanted God as the measure of all things.

It is said by some that there is no difference between the ban that once made interracial marriages illegal, and the prohibition now in law against allowing same-sex marriages. We do not accept that this is an issue of civil rights, or the

protection of a minority. The decision by a state to extend the provisions of law covering civil marriage to include same-sex unions is irrelevant in God's eyes. Within the Church, the mystery of Holy Matrimony is not a right; it is a calling, intended by God for a specific purpose, and not merely the fulfilling of earthly lusts, or the comfort of a life shared together. The argument that same-sex unions is "natural," while apparently a powerful argument, ignores the truth that our human nature is fallen and corrupted by death, and driven to the satisfaction of the desires of the flesh. The expression of sexual desires without the blessing of the grace of God is not directed to a life that is natural, but is an extension of a death-directed existence. Only by striving to live the life of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, can we begin to understand and achieve a life which is truly "natural."

We, the clergy of the Western American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, having concluded our conference with the celebration of the Presanctified Divine Liturgy of the Precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which we pray for the *purification of souls and bodies, and for the restraint of the passions, reject and decry this erosion of eternal and spiritual values and truths*. We **affirm** that the sacrament of marriage is only obtained from God and within the confines of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. We **affirm** that this marriage is limited to the union of one man and one woman and that the conception, bearing and rearing of children is a normal and desired part of the marital union. We **affirm** that any other "marital" relationship, even though it may bear the sanction of the state or the society at large, cannot be considered marriage and that it is sinful and creates a barrier between God and man and frustrates the purpose of man to enter into union with God.

† † †

*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*

[2 Thess 2:15].



These four principle virtues—justice, moral judgment, self-restraint and courage—govern the three aspects of the soul. When these aspects are properly guided, they keep the senses away from degrading things. Then the intellect, tranquil, its powers with God's help under control and tractable, fights the noetic battle readily and bravely.

St. Philotheos of Sinai

## THE ASCETIC AND THE ROBBER

*From a handwritten Gerontikon of the Sacred Monastery Filotheou of the Holy Mountain, original source: "Hagiorite Witness," a quarterly publication of the sacred monastery of Xiropotamou, Holy Mountain, Issue No.4, June-August 1989.*

Our God is not a "Prosecutor" of His creatures; on the contrary, He seeks opportunities for their salvation. He is a God of love; a God Who deserves to be loved, even though His love is rarely reciprocated. God is also not "fair," at least in the human sense of justice. He "shortchanges" His creatures—and as a matter of fact in a scandalous manner—when He seeks to save them. That is our God! A God Who vindicates a robber out of the excess of His love and Who looks for opportunities in the unlikeliest of places, in order to display a love that annuls our own kind of "justice." The following story best exemplifies this love of our God and Creator.

There used to be an elderly recluse and anchorite, who lived an ascetic life in a desert for seventy long years, with fasting and celibacy and vigil. However, during all those years that he served God, he was not favoured with any vision or revelation by God.

This gave rise to concern, and the following thought entered his mind:

— Could it be that there is a reason I am not aware of, which makes my ascesis unfavorable to God, and my labours unacceptable? That must be the reason I am not able to have any revelation and see any mystery...

With these thoughts in mind, the elder began to beseech and ask the Lord even more fervently, by praying and saying:

— Lord, if my ascesis is favorable to You, and you have accepted my labours, this sinner and unworthy one beseeches You to favour me also, with just a droplet of one of Your gifts, so that I might be informed with the revelation of a mystery that You have heard my prayer, and thus spend my ascetic life informed and with confidence...

Having thus prayed, a voice sent by God came to the saintly elder, saying:

— If you indeed desire to see My glory, then go into the innermost depths of the desert, and mysteries shall be revealed to you.

As soon as the elder heard this voice, he immediately left his cell; but no sooner had he walked for some distance, he was approached by a robber, who, upon spotting the elderly Abba, rushed towards him, with the intent to murder him. As soon as he had grabbed hold of him, he said:

— It is a fortunate moment that I encountered you, old man; now I can complete my business and be saved. Because we robbers have this custom and this particular law and belief—that whoever is able to commit one hundred murders, will definitely go to heaven. Well, after having



strived so hard until this day, I have so far accomplished only ninety-nine murders, and, lacking only one more, I have taken a lot of trouble and care to complete the hundred, in order to be saved. Therefore, I am greatly indebted to you and I thank you, as on this day, because of you, I shall savour Paradise.

On hearing what the robber told him, the elder was taken aback and alarmed at this sudden and unexpected incident. So, he turned his mind's eye upwards towards God, and on thinking over what happened, said the following to Him:

— Was this the glory, my Lord and Master, that You promised to show me, Your servant? Was this the will that You inspired to this sinner—to leave his cell and to inform him with such a terrible mystery? Are You rewarding with such a reward the labours of my ascesis that I have borne for Your sake? Now I have truly realized, Lord, that all my labours were in vain; and that every one of my prayers has been regarded as a detestable abomination. However, I thank You for Your philanthropy, Lord, because you educate my unworthiness the way that You know—as befits me for my innumerable sins—and that must be why you delivered me into the hands of a robber and murderer.

Having said this, and feeling deeply troubled, the old man became thirsty, so he said to the robber:

— My child, because of my sinfulness, God has delivered me into your hands to be murdered, and thus your desire will be fulfilled in the manner that you desire, and I shall be deprived of my life—being the evil man that I am. For this, I beg you to do me one favour and a small errand and bring me a drink of water, then you may cut off my head.

On hearing these words by the elder, and in the desire to fulfil his business, the robber sheathed his dagger—which he had bared—then took out of his bosom a flask, which he took to a stream that was nearby and stooped down to fill it and bring it back to the elder to quench his thirst. And just as he was filling the flask, he drew his last breath and died on the spot.

Well, seeing that quite some time had passed and the robber did not reappear, the elder wondered to himself:

— Perhaps he was tired and lay down and fell asleep, and that is why he is delayed; so I am now permitted to leave and return to my cell. However, because I am also old, I am afraid, as I do not have enough strength to run, and because of my frailty, I shall tire quickly and he will overtake me. Then, having angered him in this way, he will want to torture me mercilessly, cutting me up into many pieces while I am still alive. Therefore I should not leave, but instead, I should go to the stream, and see what he is doing.

So the elder went forth, after making all these thoughts, and he discovered the robber laying dead; upon seeing him, he stood in wonder and surprise. Then lifting his arms up towards heaven he said:

— My merciful Lord, unless You reveal this mystery to me, I shall not lower my arms. Please therefore have pity on my troubles and reveal what this occurrence was about.

And with this prayer of the elder, an Angel of the Lord came to him and explained:

— Do you see this person, Abba, who lays dead before you? It was for your sake that he was gripped by sudden death, so that you would escape from being murdered. Now proceed to bury him as one who was saved. Because the obedience that he showed you—by sheathing his murder weapon in order to bring you a drink of water to quench the fire of your thirst—was the act that appeased God's wrath and rendered him accepted as a worker of obedience. Furthermore, his admission of the ninety-nine murders was taken into account as Confession. Therefore bury him, and count him among the saved. And know by this the ocean of God's philanthropy and compassion. Now return joyfully to your cell, and henceforth be more willing in your prayers and do not sorrow and say that you are a sinner and devoid of revelations. Behold, the Lord revealed a mystery to you. And know this also: that all of the labours of your ascesis are welcome before God, for there is no labour performed for the Lord's sake that does not appear before Him.

On hearing this, the elder buried the dead man as instructed.



We can keep guard over the whole world by keeping guard over the atmosphere of heaven within us; for if we lose the Kingdom of Heaven, we will save neither ourselves nor others. He who has the Kingdom of God within himself will imperceptibly pass it on to others. People will be attracted to the peace and warmth in us; they will want to hear us, and the atmosphere of heaven will gradually pass on to them. It is not even necessary to speak to people about this. The atmosphere heaven will radiate from us even when we keep silent, or talk about ordinary things. It will radiate from us even though we may not be aware of it.

The Lord is present everywhere, and nothing happens without His will or His permission—either in this life or eternity. When we accept this idea, everything is made easier. If God would allow us to do everything the way we desire and when we desire, this would certainly result in catastrophe. One cannot even imagine the chaos that would occur.

**Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)**

## WHAT ORTHODOX ICONOGRAPHY IS

By Photios Kontoglou, from the "Word Magazine," a publication of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, September 1964, pp. 5-6.



The religion of Christ is the revelation, by Him, of the truth. And this truth is the knowledge of the true God and of the spiritual world. But the spiritual world is not what men used to—and still do—call "spiritual."

Christ calls His religion *new wine and bread that cometh down from Heaven*. The Apostle Paul says: *Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things*

*have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

In a religion like this, one that makes the believer into a *new man*, everything is "new." So, too, the art that gradually took form out of the spirit of this religion, and which it invented to express its Mystery, is a "new" art, one not like any other, just as the religion of Christ is not like any other, in spite of what some may say who have eyes only for certain meaningless externals.

The architecture of this religion, its music, its painting, its sacred poetry, insofar as they make use of material media, nourish the souls of the faithful with spirit. The works produced in these media are like steps that lead them from earth up to heaven, from this earthly and temporary state to that which is heavenly and eternal: This takes place so far as is possible with human nature.

For this reason, the arts of the Church are *anagogical*, that is, they elevate natural phenomena and submit them to *the beautiful transformation*. They are also called *liturgical* arts, because through them man tastes the essence of the liturgy by which God is worshipped and through which man becomes like unto the Heavenly Hosts and perceives immortal life.

Ecclesiastical liturgical painting, the painting of worship, took its form above all from Byzantium, where it remained the mystical Ark of Christ's religion and was called *hagiographia* or sacred painting. As with the other arts of the Church, the purpose of *hagiographia* is not to give pleasure to our carnal sense of sight, but to transform it into a spiritual sense, so that in the visible things of this world we may see what surpasses this world.

Hence this art is not theatrically illusionistic. Illusionistic art came into being in Italy during the so-called Renaissance, because this art was the expression of a Christianity which, deformed by philosophy, had become a materialistic, worldly

form of knowledge, and of the Western Church, which had become a worldly system. And just as theology followed along behind the philosophy of the ancients—so, too, the painting which expressed this theology followed along behind the art of the ancient idolators. The period is well named Renaissance, since, to tell the truth, it was no more than a rebirth of the ancient carnal mode of thought that had been the pagan world's.

But just as those theologians were wading around in the slimy swamp waters of philosophy, and were in no position to taste and understand the clear fresh water of the Gospel, *drawn up to life eternal*, so, too, the painters who brought about the Renaissance were in no position to understand the mystical profundity of eastern liturgical iconography, the sacred art of Byzantium. And just as the theologians thought that they could perfect Christ's religion with philosophy, since for them it seemed too simple, they being in no position to penetrate into the depths of that divine simplicity: just so, the painters thought that they were perfecting liturgical art, more simply called Byzantine, by making it "more natural." So they set to work, copying what was natural—faces, clothes, buildings, landscapes, all as they appear naturally—making an iconography with the same rationalism that the theologians wanted to make theology with. But the kind of theology you can get out of rationalism is exactly the kind of religious iconography you can get out of copying nature.

This is why their works have no Mystery, nor any real spiritual character. You understand that you have before you some men masquerading as saints—not real saints. Look at the various pictures of the Mother of God. "Madonnas" who pose hypocritically, and those in tears, weeping, which are even falsier yet! Corpses and idols for shallow men! Our people, who for centuries have received a great and profound nurture from Christ's religion, even though outwardly they seem uneducated, call a woman who pretends to be respectable but who is really not, a *Frankopanaghia*, a "Frankish Virgin," thus making a clear distinction between the "Frankish Virgin" and the true Virgin, the Mother of Christ our God, the austere *Odigitria*, Her *more precious than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim*. In other words, in the simplest way possible they make a neat, sharp distinction between the art of the world and the art belonging to worship.

Western religious painters who wanted to depict the supernatural visions of religion took as models certain natural phenomena—clouds, sunsets, the moon, the sun with its beams. With these they tried to portray the heavenly glory and the world of immortality, calling certain things "spiritual" which are merely sentimental, emotional, not spiritual at all.

In vain, however, because the blessedness of the other life is not a continuation of the emotional happiness of this world,



neither does it have any relation to the satisfaction the senses enjoy in this life. The Apostle Paul, talking about the good things of the blessedness to come, says that they are such that *eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man*. How, then, can that world, which lies beyond everything a man can grasp with his senses—how can that world be portrayed by an art that is “natural” and that appeals to the senses? How can you paint *what surpasses nature and surpasses sense*?

Certainly, man will take elements from the perceptible world, “for the senses’ sake,” but to be able to express *what surpasses sense* he must dematerialize these elements, he must lift them to a higher plane, he must transmute them from what is carnal into what is spiritual, just as faith transmutes man’s feelings, making them, from carnal, into spiritual. *I saw*, says St. John of the Ladder, *some men given over with passion to carnal love, and when they received the Light and took the way of Christ, this fierce carnal passion was changed inside them, with divine grace, into a great love for the Lord*.

Thus, even the material elements which Byzantine iconography took from the world of sense were supernaturally transmuted into spiritualities, and since they had passed through the pure soul of a man who lived according to Christ, like gold through a refiner’s fire, they express, as far as is possible for a man who wears a material body, that which the Apostle Paul spoke of, *which eye hath not seen, neither hath entered into the heart of man*.

The beauty of liturgical art is not a carnal beauty, but a spiritual beauty. That is why whoever judges this art by worldly standards says that the figures in Byzantine sacred painting are ugly and repellent, while for one of the faithful they possess the beauty of the spirit, which is called *the beautiful transformation*.

St. Paul says: *We (who preach the Gospel and live according to Christ) are ... a sweet savour of Christ unto them that are saved and unto them that perish. Unto them that have within them the smell of death (of flesh), we smell of death; and unto them that have within them the smell of life, we smell of life*. And the blessed and hallowed St. John of the Ladder says, *There was an ascetic who, whenever he happened to see a beautiful person, whether man or woman, would glorify the Creator of that person with all his heart, and from a mere glance his love for God would spring afresh and he would pour out on his account a fountain of tears. And one marveled, seeing this happen, that for this man what would cause the soul of another to stink had become a reason for crowns and an ascent above nature. Whoever perceives beauty in this fashion is already incorruptible, even before the dead shall rise in the common Resurrection*.

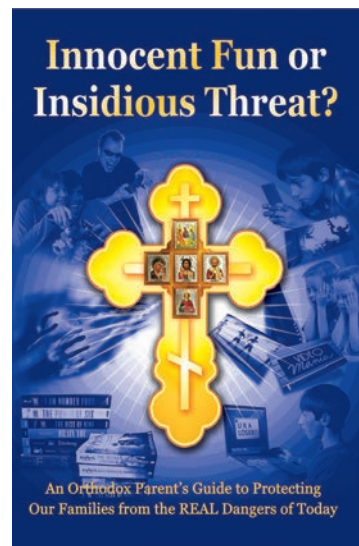
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*Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* [Rom 12:2]

## NEW BOOK: INNOCENT FUN OR INSIDIOUS THREAT

AN ORTHODOX PARENT’S GUIDE TO PROTECTING OUR FAMILIES FROM THE REAL DANGERS OF TODAY

Compiled by Mary Christodoulou; published by the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.



Today evil invades our lives more than ever before. Particularly alarming is how easily it disguises itself as entertainment, religion, and even as a subject in public schools. Unfortunately, the primary targets of this demonic onslaught are our children. The Harry Potter books and movies have initiated millions of young people into witchcraft and wizardry; celebrities promote New Age religions adverse

to Christianity; the Twilight books and movies glamorize vampires; the most popular music, video games, television shows, books, and movies not only bombard our children with images and messages of violence, cruelty, and illicit sex, but also portray demonic phenomena, such as witchcraft and psychic powers, in a way that makes them seem acceptable, and even fun.

All this evil may seem insurmountable, but we must fight against it for the sake of our children. A must-read for every Orthodox Christian, this book examines the shocking extent to which evil has infiltrated our lives, and offers guidance and hope for the struggle against it.

The book will be available to our readers in December, 2013. It can be ordered through the Brotherhood of St. Poimen (see page 31) as well as through *Amazon.com*.

Price: \$10 per copy (144 pages); ePub/Kindle: \$8 per copy.



Nowadays, young people have lost their zest for life. You ask them, “What will give you peace?” “Nothing,” they reply. Such vigorous young men and nothing pleases them. What has happened to us? We believe that we will correct God with our inventions. We turn night into day, so that the hens will lay eggs! And have you seen these eggs? If God had made the moon to shine like the sun, people would have gone mad. God created the night so that we may take some rest, and look at us!

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

## ON FAMILY LIFE

*Glams from the writings of St. John Chrysostom on marriage.*

## A Successful Marriage

A successful marriage is one that regards success in terms of virtue rather than wealth. The husband must have a virtuous soul, goodness, prudence, and fear of God. St. Chrysostom says, *A young woman who is prudent, independent, and cultivates piety, is as valuable as the whole world... Many people who had amassed a great fortune lost it all, for they didn't have a sensible wife capable of preserving it.*

Many men seek after a beautiful wife. Is this enough for a marriage to succeed? The Saint emphasizes that *the beauty of the body, when it is not accompanied by virtue of the soul, can imprison the husband for twenty or thirty days, it won't last longer though, for when she shows her bad side, the love will be destroyed. When, however, women shine from the beauty of their souls, as time passes and increasingly reveals the nobility of their souls, their husbands are drawn ever closer to them.*

Let us see what St. John Chrysostom has to say regarding the responsibilities of the spouses. He directs his words, for the most part, towards husbands. This may be because male egotism is difficult to subdue and many times they act harshly. Chrysostom condemns the use of physical violence and the husband's abuse of his wife. This is something that is still a problem today. On the contrary, what is necessary is for the husband to have a spirit of sacrifice, a willingness to forgive, and not threats and intimidation. Through indulgence and concord, the family's deep peace will be assured, discontent will be kept at bay, and each spouse's dedication to the other will increase. Chrysostom notes that, *there is nothing, nothing more valuable than for one to be loved so much by one's wife and to reciprocate this love.*

St. Chrysostom also refers to a bonding element, which is the foundation of marriage: communication between the spouses. It is the daily influence that one spouse has on the other. Communication takes place with and without words. It is positive or negative. The most important element of communication is discussion. Etymologically, the Greek word for "communicate" (σὺν + ζήτησις) refers to the cooperative search for what needs to be done regarding issues pertaining to the common life and to family life. Discussion needs to take place with familiarity, mutual respect, in a climate of freedom, equality, and love. Then a solution can be found, should a disagreement or contention arise. *For nothing is more bitter than the battle that occurs between people that love one another, and this shows that when one is estranged from his own member, as it is said, this must be caused by a severe bitterness. The role of the husband is to love and the role of the wife is to give way. If each one plays their part, everything will be firm. And the wife will become amicable and loving.*

The mutual display of affection is a necessary aspect of marital love. Love is revealed through tenderness, through politeness, through showing interest. Love is expressed through words. Words are the food of emotions, and inspire love. The secret of a happy family life is often found in simple daily things. Unfortunately, couples today have forgotten this. They forget to express their respect and appreciation for their spouse's gifts, abilities, attempts, and successes. This could even refer to a simple compliment on their appearance, their clothing, or the food they have prepared. The wife's love for doing good increases when she feels loved. The same happens with husbands. In their case, a good sense of self-confidence is encouraged. Love is preserved through the creation of ways to express this love. The satisfaction of particular desires and the tolerance of the weaknesses of the other help in the cohesion of the spouses.

St. Chrysostom, with his emphasis on love, essentially says that spouses need to learn to forgive and to be tolerant of one another. The more mature of the two needs to take the first step. Within a marriage, it does not matter who erred or why they did something. What is important is who attempts to fix the situation in the quickest manner. *Let us be tolerant, the Saint says, of one another, with love. How is it possible to be tolerant if you are angry and foul-mouthed? Save the day, with love. If you can't tolerate your neighbor, how will God tolerate you? If you can't bear the person who is your co-struggler, how will the Lord tolerate you?*

Through love, the alienation of spouses from each other is addressed, as is the death of the relationship, which usually comes with the passage of time, with fatigue, and indifference. Then we are speaking of a marriage of compromise. St. John knows that communication is necessary for dealing with disagreements. This depends on how and what one says. To the question, "What should I say to her?", he provides the following answer. Listen carefully to his counsel:

*Speak words of love to her... Above all, I prefer your love and nothing is more painful for me than to be distanced from you. Even though I might lose everything, and if I'm in danger at the end, I can bear everything, as long as you are all right with me. The children also love me, as long as you love me. Everything belongs to you. This is what Paul told me when he said that the husband does not rule his own body, but his wife rules it. And if I don't have control over my own body, but you have control, how much does everything else belong to you as well.*

And he continues: *Never speak in a mundane fashion, but with compliments, with respect, and with much love. Respect her, and she won't feel it necessary to seek respect from others. Prefer her above all others for all things, for beauty, for her temperance, and compliment her. Make it clear to her that you like her company and that you prefer to stay at home with her, to be with her, than to go out to the marketplace. Prefer*



*her company above that of all of your friends, and the children that she gifted you with, love them out of love for her.*

How well do you communicate? Do you speak with one another? Do you share your thoughts? What do you do for your daily communication? Do you dedicate time, from that which is left, to be together and to speak affectionately? Or perhaps you are indifferent to the interests and the problems of the other and give your mouth free reign? Isn't this the conclusion that one comes to after having read the above text?

### The Upbringing of Children

An aspect of the family that particularly concerned St. Chrysostom was that of children and young people. The older generation is responsible for the good or bad spiritual state of young people. They live, develop, and are shaped in the environment of the older generation.

Chrysostom offers incomparable descriptions and analyses of the state of the young people of his age. He writes, "*Youth is a difficult time of life, when one is unstable and easily tricked, prone to falling, it's an age that requires a very strong bridle... Youth is a wild thing... it is like an untamed horse and a wild beast.* It is a fire that is easily spread and burns up everything. It is like a storm on the open sea, because of its foolishness and natural instability. There are people who do foul things worse than those done by wild donkeys, living as though in a desert and kicking. It is in this state that most young people find themselves. This is why the Saint said, *Our primary concern is the family, the children. All things are secondary to the care of our children.*

According to St. Chrysostom, a parent is not one who brings children into the world, but one who expends the energy to raise them. **Not "child-making" but "childrearing" is the mark of a parent.** *For a person does not become a father simply because he helped to bring about the birth of a child, but by raising the child correctly.* Even then there were complaints about the disconcerting path of young people—disobedient, rebellious, bold, disrespectful, anarchic. Certainly, the contemporary situation is also disconcerting, where sin is largely accepted by society and has nearly become regarded as lawful; and the urging of sin is most felt by the unstable young people! Chrysostom attributes the situation to the absence of care by the older generation and to the lack of direction. *The reason for the overturning of all things is that we aren't caring for our own children. We take care of their bodies, but we ignore the upbringing of their souls.* St. Chrysostom goes on to ask, *Do you want a child that is obedient? From their first steps, feed them on the wisdom and counsels of the Lord.* If we showed the same interest in the spiritual education of children as we do in their education in other spheres, we would forestall many evils.

The development of the child's character takes place through the parents. Checks are necessary, but with discernment.

They need to be done in such a way that the child is able to assimilate them and to acquire the necessary internal structure that will facilitate the development and completion of his personality. As St. John says:

*When the father of a very gentle child only gives him sweets, refreshments, and whatever he likes when he's ill, but not what he actually needs for his sickness; or if a doctor checks him out and confesses, "What can I do? I can't stand to see the child cry." Poor, foolish traitor! The only name I can't give such a person is that of father. How much better it would be for you if you upset your child a little bit so that he might be healthy for all time, rather than making this fleeting pleasure the foundation for continuous sorrow.*

With the satisfaction of the child's every desire, we make him egocentric, and with such a character, he will be unhappy in the world. The Saint encourages to *be like sculptors and make every effort to make your children wonderful sculptures that look like God. It will happen if you take away everything that is unnecessary, if you add whatever is necessary, and if you check daily to see what physical defects they have that you can fix.*

Good teachers work like farmers, who cut away some plants and leave others to grow. Some times they punish the bad, while they encourage and facilitate the good. The child that is given the observation and the reproach must understand that the person that is reproaching him does it out of love and not to sadden him. Then he accepts the words, not as though they came from anger, but from the concern of a concerned father.

The Saint counsels, *If you punish (the child), sometimes looking at him severely, sometimes with bitterness and disrespect, and sometimes with nice words and promises... If there are threats that are not followed through on, the child does not understand that they are threats. Threats work when the child believes that they are going to be realized. If the child who has made a mistake understands that you are threatening him, without following through, he will become indifferent. He should be expecting punishment, without actually being punished, so that he does not lose the fear of punishment.* He continues: *This is exactly the characteristic of the educator, who is not in a hurry to punish, but seeks the child's correction, and is hesitant to punish.*

St. Chrysostom considers it unconstructive to teach the child to separate himself from, and to reject his anger. We should instead teach him ways to creatively channel his anger. He tells parents: *Let's consider the very significant action of the soul, that of anger. We should neither uproot it completely from the child, nor allow the child to use it anywhere, without discernment. We need to educate young people from a young age in such a way that, when they are treated poorly, to endure and not get angry. At the same time, if they see someone else being treated poorly, they should boldly intervene to support them in*

*an appropriate way.* The child must learn to not be irritable and to be able to accept disappointment, or the failure to achieve one of his desires, without getting upset. When the child learns to endure small failures and disappointments, later on he will be able to endure larger disappointments, if God allows it.

It's necessary to offer the child ways to have fun that are not harmful, and to lead him to virtuous people, to show him the beauty of nature and of art, and to give him some freedom of movement, as we tell him that immodest and lecherous entertainments have no value. *When we tell him all of these things, the holy father tells us, we need to give him many kisses and to hold him tight, to show him the great love we have for him.*

The child's spiritual development must be the parents' main concern. Children should learn more than letters and arts to earn a living, but need to be fed with *the wisdom and counsel of the Lord.* St. Chrysostom insists, *I'm not telling you to keep your child from getting married and to send him into the desert, or to force him to become a monk. No, this is not what I'm telling you. Certainly, I would be glad for it and my wish is that everyone would decide to become a monk. But because it seems to be heavy, I don't insist. So raise an athlete of Christ and teach him like a person of the world to be pious from an early age.*

St. Chrysostom dedicates many pages to illustrating the value of the example of the older generation. *In whatever ground the plant is put, that's the type of fruit it will bear... How could you fix your son, to give the necessary counsels to someone who is not careful, when you yourself, who are in advanced old age, do such terrible things? I say these things in judgment of the elderly, not to excuse young people from every accusation and reproach, but through the elderly to protect the young... How can the father teach others to restrain their passion, audacity, and anger, when he has not learned to restrain himself?... We probably need teachers, not our children, since their mistakes cannot be very great, while our mistakes are very great... All of the evils of our children come from our own lack of attention and because we didn't guide them from the beginning, from an early age, down the road of piety.*

When one reads St. John Chrysostom, one sees the fullness of his thought and its timeliness. His word spans the ages. He does not leave any aspect of the human soul uninspected. He has in-depth knowledge of the meaning of man's existence. Of course, because of the chronological distance that separates us, the answers he provides can be accepted under a certain set of preconditions. His spirit, however, is always timely and contemporary. Because Christ is at the center of his thought, because it is Christocentric, his teaching transcends time. Essentially, he offered the word of the Gospel to his age, through the Holy Spirit who lived within him and enlightened him. Whenever we read him he always has something

to say regarding the problems of his age, which seem to also be our own contemporary problems.

Our age might seem demanding and perhaps heavy. One could argue that the things he says cannot be implemented today. In his day similar voices were heard. "We won't make our children into monks," some parents shouted. Chrysostom, with holy passion silenced them from the front of the church. *It's not necessary that they become monks, make them good Christians.*

In today's era of the crisis of institutions and values, in this age of the rejection of all things, the institution of marriage is greatly under attack. In northern Europe it has nearly disintegrated. Marriages only take place for the sake of custom, for tradition, so that people can take photographs, and so they can have a party. Many of these marriages last for six months, or a year. Eponymous artists don't merely say that they don't want to have a family, but that their goal is the disintegration of families. These are the role models for today's children.

Modern Greeks face problems and crises of values, of institutions, in society, and existentially when they voluntarily cut themselves off from the Orthodox tradition. For the Orthodox Greek, this tradition is precious, is priceless, is an ancestral inheritance. For this reason, anyone that rejects it is essentially rejecting his ontological being and he faces a great crisis of self-consciousness.

Only he who is in harmony with and lives the Orthodox tradition according to the precepts of our Saints, according to the commandments of Christ, is the mature person who cannot be shaken by any sadness or crisis. He lives the life in Christ outside of every ethical system or sense of obligation. He lives in Christ twenty four hours a day. He lives in God within daily life, in the family, in his work, in society.

We, as Athonites, feel pain and are very concerned for the path of the family today. The advancement of the family in Christ is the request of our humble daily prayers, along with the preservation of God's blessing on marriage. God might have given us the blessing to live outside of the world, to not raise families, but we also came from families. In addition, as spiritual fathers bearing the keys to the hearts of people, we see that many young people are completely ignorant regarding the subjects of our faith and simultaneously approach life with a great frivolity. And we are confronted with the question: How can these people create proper families of their own? What will they tell their children, since they themselves are completely empty?

Unfortunately, a humanistic approach to life rules the world today, whose goal is human prosperity. Many teach that we need to become good people and that this will bring peace and happiness. However this is, essentially, nothing. If we do not become grace-filled people, vessels of divine grace, *we have done nothing.*



## THE JESUS PRAYER

*By Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh, of the Russian Orthodox Church in Great Britain and Ireland (+2003), from "Living Prayer," Templegate Publishers Springfield, IL, 1966, p. 84 – 88.*

Those who have read "The way of a Pilgrim" are familiar with the expression *The Jesus Prayer*. It refers to a short prayer, the words of which are: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*, constantly repeated. The Way of a Pilgrim is the story of a man who wanted to learn to *pray constantly* (1 Thes 5:17). The book remains as the best possible introduction to this prayer, which is one of the greatest treasures of the Orthodox Church.

The prayer is profoundly rooted in the spirit of the gospel, and it is not in vain that the great teachers of Orthodoxy have always insisted on the fact that the Jesus Prayer sums up the whole of the gospel. This is why the Jesus Prayer can only be used in its fullest sense if the person who uses it "belongs to the gospel," i.e., is a member of the Church of Christ.

All the messages of the gospel, and more than the messages, the reality of the gospel, is contained in the name, in the Person of Jesus. If you take the first half of the prayer you will see how it expresses our faith in the Lord: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God*. At the heart we find the name of Jesus; it is the name before whom *every knee shall bow* (Isa 45:23), and when we pronounce it, we affirm the historical event of the incarnation. We affirm that God, the Word of God, co-eternal with the father, became man, and that the *fullness of the Godhead dwelt in our midst* (Col 2:9) bodily in His Person.

To see in the Man of Galilee the incarnate Word of God (in accordance to the prophets of Israel), to see God become man, we must be guided by the Spirit, because it is the spirit of God who reveals to us both the incarnation and the Lordship of Christ. We call Him Christ, and we affirm thereby that in Him were fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. To affirm that Jesus is the Christ implies that the whole history of the Old Testament is ours, that we accept it as the truth of God. We call Him Son of God, because we know that the Messiah expected by the Jews, the man who was called *Son of David* by Bartimaeus, is the incarnate Son of God. These words sum up all we know, all we believe about Jesus Christ, from the Old Testament to the New, and from the experience of the Church through the ages. In these few words we make a complete and perfect profession of faith.

But it is not enough to make this profession of faith; it is not enough to believe. *The devils also believe, and tremble.* (Jas 2:19). Faith is not sufficient to work salvation, it must lead to the right relationship with God; and so, having professed, in its integrity, sharply and clearly, our faith in the Lordship and in the Person, in the historicity and in the divinity of Christ, we put ourselves face to face with Him, in the right state of mind: *Have mercy on me, a sinner.*

These words, *have mercy*, are used in Orthodoxy as the response of the people to all the petitions suggested by the priest. Our modern translation *have mercy* is a limited and insufficient one. The Greek word which we find in the gospel and in the early liturgies is *eleison*. *Eleison* is similar (but not of the same root, *Ed.*) as *elaion*, which refers to the oil from an olive tree. If we look up the Old and New Testament in search of the passages connected with this basic idea, we will find it described in a variety of parables and events which allow us to form a complete idea of the meaning of the word. We find the image of the olive tree in Genesis. After the flood Noah sends birds, one after the other, to find out whether there is any dry land or not, and one of them, a dove—and it is significant that it is a dove—brings back a small twig of olive. This twig conveys to Noah and to all with him in the ark the news that the wrath of God has ceased, that God is now offering man a fresh opportunity. All those who are in the ark will be able to settle again on firm ground and make an attempt to live, and never more perhaps, if they can help it, undergo the wrath of God.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, olive oil is poured to soothe and to heal. In the anointing of kings and priests in the Old Testament, it is again *oil that is poured on the head* as an image of the grace of God that *comes down and flows on them* (Pss 133:2), giving them new power to fulfil what is beyond human capabilities. The king is to stand on the threshold, between the will of men and the will of God, and he is called to lead his people to the fulfilment of God's will; the priest also stands on that threshold, to proclaim the will of God and to do even more: to act for God, to pronounce God's decrees and to apply God's decision.

The oil speaks first of all of the end of the wrath of God, of the peace which God offers to the people who have offended against him; further it speaks of God healing us in order that we should be able to live and become what we are called to be; and as He knows that we are not capable with our own strength of fulfilling either His will or the laws of our own created nature, He *pours His grace abundantly on us.* (Rom 5:20). He gives us power to do what we could not otherwise do. The words *milost* and *pomiluy* in Slavonic have the same root as those which express tenderness, endearing, and when we use the words *eleison, have mercy on us, pomiluy*, we are not just asking God to save us from His wrath—we are asking for love.

If we turn back to the words of the Jesus Prayer, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*, we see that the first words express with exactness and integrity the gospel faith in Christ, the historical incarnation of the Word of God; and the end of the prayer expresses all the complex rich relationships of love that exist between God and His creatures.

The Jesus Prayer is known to innumerable Orthodox, either as a rule of prayer or in addition to it, as a form of devotion,

a short focal point that can be used at any moment, whatever the situation.

Numerous writers have mentioned the physical aspects of the prayer, the breathing exercises, the attention which is paid to the beating of the heart and a number of other minor features. The Philokalia is full of detailed instructions about the prayer of the heart. Ancient and modern Fathers have dealt with the subject, always coming to the same conclusion: never to attempt the physical exercises without strict guidance by a spiritual father.

What is of general use, and God given, is the actual praying, the repetition of the words, without any physical endeavour—not even movements of the tongue—and which can be used systematically to achieve an inner transformation. More than any other prayer, the Jesus Prayer aims at bringing us to stand in God's presence with no other thought but the miracle of our standing there and God with us, because in the use of the Jesus Prayer there is nothing and no one except God and us.

The use of the prayer is dual, it is an act of worship as is every prayer, and on the ascetical level, it is a focus that allows us to keep our attention still in the presence of God. It is a very companionable prayer, a friendly one, always at hand and very individual in spite of its monotonous repetitions. Whether in joy or in sorrow, it is, when it has become habitual, a quickening of the soul, a response to any call of God. The words of St. Symeon, the New Theologian, apply to all its possible effects on us: *Do not worry about what will come next, you will discover it when it comes...*



## THE IMAGE OF THOSE WHO HOPE IN GOD

*By Saint Nektarios of Pentapolis.*

People who hope in God are truly blessed. God is their constant helper and they fear no evil, even if others provoke them. They hope in God and do good. They have set their every hope on Him and they confess to Him with all their heart. He is their boast, their God and they call upon Him day and night. Their mouths direct praise to God; their lips are sweeter than honey and wax when they open them to sing to God; their tongue, full of grace, is moved to glorify God. Their heart is eager to call upon Him, their mind ready to be elevated towards Him, their soul is committed to God and *His right hand has upheld them. Their souls will boast in the Lord.* They ask and receive from God whatever their heart desires. They ask and find whatever they seek. They knock and the gates of mercy are opened.

People who hope in God rest upon untroubled waters. And God grants them His rich mercy. The right hand of God directs their paths and the finger of the Lord guides

them on their way, on every step, and for every day of their earthly lives.

Those who hope in the Lord do not fail. Their hope never dies. God is their expectation, the furthestmost desire of their hearts. Their hearts sigh before Him all the day long: *Lord, do not delay, arise, hasten, come and remove my soul from every necessity, bring my soul out of prison. I will glorify you with my whole heart, Lord. Every word which proceeds from my mouth will be directed to you.*

Those who hope in the Lord bless the Most High, His Redeemer and also sanctify *His holy name.* They hope, and cry to God from the depths of their hearts: *Lord, when shall I come and appear before Your face.*

Those who hope in the Lord will call upon the Lord and enter into His holy place, in order to see and rejoice in His wonders. And the Lord will hear the voice of their supplication.

Those who hope in the Lord enjoy extreme peace; serenity reigns in their heart and their soul is governed by tranquility. When they have God as their helper, what shall they fear? What shall make them quake? Should war arise against them, they will not flounder, for they hope in the Lord. If they are persecuted by evil-doers, they will not fear, for they know that all things are under the control of the Lord. They do not hope in their bow nor their quiver, nor does their salvation depend on the sword, but on their Lord and God, Who is able to wrest them from the hands of those who war against them, from the trap of the sinner and from the tempest. They are convinced of the power of the Lord and of *His high right arm and the Lord will save them.*

Those who hope in the Lord walk calmly in the struggle of life and stride along the path with no concern for tribulations. They toil unceasingly for the good, the pleasing and the perfect, and God blesses their works. They sow with a blessing and reap the rich rewards of their efforts. They have boldness before the Lord and are not diverted by the temptations which surround them. Before the trials of life, they do retreat, but hope, because when things seem at their most dire, that is when God shows the way through. Through their faith, they also await the hope of righteousness.

Those who hope in the Lord do not hope in riches, nor in the extent of their power, but are content with the assistance that the Lord will provide.

Those who hope in the Lord are full of faith and love towards God, they live with confidence in their pure conscience, they appear with the boldness of one of His children before their heavenly Father and call upon Him to send His kingdom to earth and ensure that His will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Those who hope in the Lord are absolutely devoted to Him and raise their hearts to the good and immortal God. They ask of Him the supreme good, and immortality in the kingdom of Heaven. And God hears them.

***Blessed are they who hope in the Lord!***



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## THE WORLDLY MIND

*Soul-Profiting Stories From Monk Savas (disciple of Elder Ephraim of Filotheou) from a homily he delivered at Panagia Prousiotissa Monastery in Lawsonville, NC on Saturday, February 12, 2000.*

The mindset of the world is the cause of much evil and suffering. The worldly mind is worse even than the devil himself, in that it kills the soul slowly. The cause of this is frequent exposure of our minds to the ways of the world.

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain gave the analogy of the frog to demonstrate this. He explained that when you want to cook a frog, you do not directly throw it into a pot of boiling water. Rather, you gently place the frog into a pot of cool water set on a burner and slowly turn up the heat. Unknowingly the frog will adjust itself to the heat and without noticing will become cooked.

The worldly mind works the same upon us. The more we expose ourselves to its flames, the more silent our conscience becomes, and the more we are destroyed. Under such conditions, only a miracle can save us.

A theologian from Africa once told the following fable: Once upon a time there was a cat who was chosen to become King of a particular forest. Overjoyed upon his election, the cat dropped everything he was doing and accepted the great honor. Dignitaries came and sat the cat upon a luxurious carriage, crowned him with a magnificently brilliant crown, and processed the newly elected cat to his castle to be ceremoniously enthroned. Along the way the cat spotted some mice in

the distance. Immediately the cat sprang from his carriage and chased the mice into the dense forest, losing his way back to the procession and the once in a lifetime opportunity to become King.

This is how the worldly mind works. The cat forgot his higher calling by succumbing to his old nature, in turn forfeiting his glorious throne. The mice in the story are vainglory, money, lust, and the pride of life, that is, all those things which prevent us from becoming inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal salvation.

A mother and her young daughter asked Fr. Savas a question one time while he was visiting a monastery in Toronto. The mother had requested Fr. Savas to admonish her daughter that dancing and going to dances were a sin.

Fr. Savas responded: "No, dancing is not a sin." Delighted in her victory, the daughter affirmed to her mother that she can go to dances on the monk's word and that she will be fine. As a last word, Fr. Savas gave an analogy which he learned from Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain. He said that when you take a very wet sponge and place it next to a fire, of course the wet sponge will be fine due to its dampness. Eventually however the sponge will dry up after time and exposure to such heat, and burn.

So it is with frequent exposure to dances. Initially you will be fine. As time goes on, however, and you keep going to dances, you will experience many soul destroying desires and eventually give in. He advised the girl to attend these dances with her parents.