

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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PARADISE AND HELL IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

By *Protopresbyter George D. Metallinos, Dean of the Faculty of Theology, University of Athens, Greece; from Orthodox Tradition, Volume XXVII, No. 3, (2010), pp. 12-19.*

On the Sunday of Meatfare “we commemorate the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and His impartial Judgment.” This phrase in the *Synaxarion*, “we commemorate,” affirms that the Church, as the Body of Christ, experiences the Second Coming of Christ in her worship as an “actuality” and not as something to be awaited in the course of history. This is because through the Eucharist we are translated to the Heavenly Kingdom, to that which transcends history. It is from this perspective that the question of Paradise and Hell is to be approached in an Orthodox spirit.

Mention is made in the Gospels of the *kingdom* and *eternal fire*. (Mt 25:31-46). In the Gospel passage which is read at the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of Meatfare, the *kingdom* is man's Godward destiny. The *fire* is prepared for the Devil and his angels (the demons), not because God so wills, but because they are unrepentant. The *kingdom* is prepared for those who are faithful to the will of God. The *kingdom* (uncreated glory) is Paradise, whereas the (eternal) *fire* is Hell (*everlasting punishment*, Mt 25:46). At the dawn of history, God calls man to Paradise, to communion with His uncreated Grace. At the end of history, man faces Paradise and Hell. What this means, we shall see in what follows. We hasten to add, however, that what follows is the most central theme of our Faith, the touchstone of Orthodox Christianity.

Paradise and Hell in the New Testament

Paradise and Hell are frequently mentioned in the New Testament. In Luke 23:43, Christ says to the thief: *Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*. However, the thief also refers to Paradise when he says: *Lord, remember me...in thy kingdom*. (Lk 23:42). According to St. Theophylact of “Ohrid,” *the thief is in Paradise, that is, the Kingdom*. The Apostle Paul confesses that already in this world *he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*. (2 Cor 12:4). In the Apocalypse we read: *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God*. (Rev 2:7). According to the interpretation of Arethas of Caesarea, *Paradise is to be understood as blessed and everlasting life*. Thus, Paradise, eternal life, and the Kingdom of God are identical.

Regarding Hell, see the following passages from the New Testament: Matthew 25:46 (*into everlasting punishment*); 25:41 (*everlasting fire*); 25:30 (*outer darkness*); 5:22 (*hell [Gehenna of] fire*); I John 4:18 (*...because fear hath torment*). These are all ways of expressing what we mean by the term “Hell.”

The “Location” of Paradise and Hell

Paradise and Hell are not two different places. Such an interpretation is idolatrous. They are two different states (modes of existence), which derive from the same uncreated source and are apprehended as two different experiences. Or rather, they are the same experience, apprehended differently by man in proportion to his internal state. This experience is the vision of Christ in the uncreated light of His Divinity: in His *Glory*. After the Second Coming, and throughout unending eternity, we

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men will all see Christ in His Uncreated Light. And then *shall come forth they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* (Jn 5:29). In the presence of Christ, men will be separated (*sheep and goats*, to His right and left respectively); that is, divided into two groups: those who see Christ as Paradise (*exceedingly beautiful splendor*) and those who see Him as Hell (*a consuming fire*, Heb 12:29).

Paradise and Hell are the same reality. This is shown by the iconographic depiction of the Second Coming. From Christ there flows a river as radiant as golden light at the upper end, where the Saints are, and fiery at the lower end, where the demons and the unrepentant are (*those who have never repented*, as one of the *Stichera* at the Praises for this day says). For this reason, in Luke 2:34 it is said of Christ that He *is set for the fall and rising again of many*. For some, those who have received Him and followed the cure of the heart proffered by Him, Christ becomes the resurrection unto His eternal life; but for others, who have rejected Him, He becomes their downfall and Hell.

See the following Patristic testimonies: St. John of Sinai (of the *Ladder*) says that the Uncreated Light of Christ is a *fire that consumes and a light that illumines*. St. Gregory Palamas observes: "*He, it says, will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire (Mt 3:11); fire, that is, which has the capacity to illuminate and to chastise, each person receiving what is appropriate according to the merit of his own disposition.* And elsewhere: the light of Christ, *although single and participable by all, is partaken of not uniformly, but differently.*

Consequently, Paradise and Hell are not simply a recompense or a punishment (condemnation), but the way in which each of us experiences the vision of Christ, in accordance with the state of his heart. In essence, God does not punish,

though for pedagogical reasons Scripture does talk in terms of punishment. The more spiritual one becomes, the more correctly does he understand the language of Scripture and of our Tradition. It is our human condition (pure vs. impure, repentant vs. unrepentant) that determines whether we shall receive the Light of Christ as Paradise or as Hell.

Seeing Christ as Paradise

The anthropological issue in Orthodoxy is how man will see Christ eternally as Paradise and not as Hell; that is, how he will participate in His heavenly and eternal "Kingdom." And it is here that the difference between Orthodox Christianity and various other religions becomes evident. The latter promise some kind of "happiness," and especially after death. Orthodoxy is not a quest for happiness, but a cure for the sickness of religion, as the late Father John Romanides, in the spirit of the Fathers, constantly preached. Orthodoxy is an open hospital within history (a *spiritual infirmary*, according to the Divine Chrysostomos) that provides a cure for the heart (*purification*), in order that, through progressive *illumination* of the heart by the Holy Spirit, one might ultimately attain to *deification*, the unique destiny of mankind. This process, which has been very fully described by Father John Romanides and Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, is the healing of mankind as experienced by all of our Saints.

This is the meaning of life in the Body of Christ (the Church). This is the Church's *raison d'être*. This is the end at which all of Christ's redemptive work aims. St. Gregory Palamas says that the pre-eternal counsel of God for mankind is that he should *contain the majesty of the Divine Kingdom*, that man should attain to deification. This is the purpose of creation. And St. Gregory continues: *As well, His Divine and ineffable self-emptying, His Theandric way of life, His salvific sufferings, and all of the mysteries* [i.e., the

work of Christ on earth] *were providentially and all-wisely foreordained for this end.*

Responding to Christ's Invitation

It is, however, significant that not all people respond to Christ's invitation, and thus not everyone participates in His uncreated Glory in the same way. Christ teaches this in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. (Lk 16:19-31). Man spurns Christ's offer, becomes an enemy of God, and rejects the salvation offered by Christ. (This is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, since it is in the Holy Spirit that we receive Christ's calling.) Such are those, mentioned in the hymn, *who have never repented* (hymn from the Sunday of the Last Judgment, *Idiomela of the Praises*). *God is never at enmity*, observes the Divine Chrysostomos; it is we who become His enemies and reject Him. The unrepentant man becomes demonized by his own choice. God does not will it. According to St. Gregory Palamas: *...this is not My antecedent will; I did not create you for this purpose, nor did I prepare the fire for you. The unquenchable fire was kindled beforehand for the demons, who have an immutable disposition for evil; you are joined to them by a similarly impenitent resolve*"; *your dwelling with the evil angels is a matter of free choice*. In other words, it is something that man freely chooses.

The rich man and Lazarus behold the same reality, God in His uncreated Light. The rich man attains to the Truth, to the vision of Christ, but cannot participate in it as Lazarus does. Lazarus is *comforted*, whereas the rich man is *tormented*. (Lk 16:25). Christ's statement that *they have Moses and the prophets* (Lk 16:29), regarding those who are still in this world, means that all of us are without any excuse, since we have the Saints, who possess the experience of deification and summon us to enroll in their way of life and to achieve deification as they did. Thus, those in torments, like the rich man, have no excuse.

One's attitude towards his fellow man is indicative of his inner state and is, for this reason, the criterion of the Judgment at the Second Coming. (Mt 25:31-46). This does not mean [of course] that a man's faith and fidelity to Christ will be disregarded. The latter are prerequisites, since our attitude towards others reveals whether or not we have God within us. Compare this with certain related expressions in the Greek language, which is imbued with Orthodoxy: «ἀθεόφοβος» ("accursed, ungodly," or "scoundrel, rascal"; literally, "one who has no fear of God"); «δὲν ἔχει Θεὸν μέσα του» ("he does not

have God in him"), etc. The [themes] of the first Sundays of the *Triodion* revolve around our attitude towards our fellow man. On the first Sunday, the Pharisee (outwardly pious) justifies himself (appears holy) and disdains (disparages) the publican. On the second Sunday, the "elder" brother (a replica of the seemingly pious Pharisee) grieves over the return (salvation) of his brother. Likewise outwardly pious, he had a false piety that did not engender love. On the third Sunday (Meatfare), this attitude extends to the judgment seat of Christ and proves to be the criterion of eternal life.

The Experience of Paradise or Hell

The experience of Paradise or Hell is beyond language and the senses. It is an uncreated reality, not a created one. The Franks forged the myth that Paradise and Hell are created realities. It is a myth that those in torment will not see God, as is the concept of the absence of God. The Franks (e.g., Dante) also understood the fire of Hell as created. Orthodox Tradition remains faithful to Scripture, which says that those in torment will see God (e.g., the rich man in the parable), but as a *consuming fire*. The Frankish Scholastics understood Hell as punishment and privation of the rational vision of the Divine essence. In Biblical and Patristic terms, however, Hell represents man's failure and his refusal to cooperate with Divine Grace in order to attain to the *illuminating* vision of God (Paradise) and selfless love. ([*Love*] *seeketh not her own*—I Cor 13:8). Consequently, there is no such thing as the absence of God, but only His presence. This is why the Second Coming is fearful.

(*How shall it be in that hour...*, as we chant at the Praises on the Sunday of Meatfare.) It is an ineluctable reality, towards which Orthodoxy is permanently oriented (*I look for the resurrection of the dead...*).

Those in torment, whose hearts are hardened like those of the Pharisees ([*Jesus was*] *grieved for the hardness of their hearts*, Mk 3:5), eternally see salvation as fire, for their condition does not admit of any other form of salvation. They, too [like the righteous], *come to the end*—to the end of their journey—but only the righteous end up being saved. Those in torment end up being punished. Salvation for them is Hell, since in this life they pursued only happiness. The rich man in the parable *received his good things*, whereas Lazarus endured *evil things*, without a murmur. (Lk 16:25). This point is expressed by St. Paul: *Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall*



try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (1 Cor 3:13-15) The righteous and the unrepentant pass through the uncreated fire of the Divine presence. The former, however, will pass through unscathed, whereas the latter will be burned. The latter, too, will be saved, but in the way that one passes through a fire. Evthymios Zigabenos (12th century) observes in this regard: [*Paul sees*] *God as fire illuminating and brightening the pure, but burning and darkening the defiled.* Theodoretos of Kyros writes concerning [the words] *he shall be saved: He shall be saved through fire, being himself tried,* that is, as one who passes through fire. If he has a suitable covering, he will not be burned; otherwise, while he is saved, he is nonetheless scorched.

Consequently, the fire of Hell has nothing in common with the Frankish [notion of] "Purgatory," being neither created nor a punishment nor any kind of intermediate state. Such a conception represents a transfer of responsibility to God. It is, however, entirely our own responsibility whether we accept or reject the salvation (cure) offered by God. *Spiritual death* is the vision of the uncreated Light, the Divine Glory, as fire. St. John Chrysostomos comments, in his 9th Homily on I Corinthians: *The punishment is eternal..., sinners "shall be punished with everlasting destruction" [2 Thess 1:9]. ...As for the expression 'shall be burned,' this means that the sinner will not endure the force of the fire.* And he continues: *What he [Paul] means is this: the person himself will not be destroyed like his works, passing into nothingness, but he will abide in the fire. St. Paul calls this state salvation... For we, too, are accustomed to saying, "saved in the fire," with regard to materials that are not directly consumed.*

The scholastic understandings and interpretations which, via the work of Dante ("The Divine Comedy"), have become pervasive in our own sphere have consequences that lead to idolatrous interpretations. For example, the separation of Paradise and Hell into two different places; this occurs because no distinction is made between the created and the uncreated. Similarly, the denial of the eternity of Hell, in the sense of the "restoration" of all things or in the sense of a "good God" (*Bon Dieu*). God is truly good (Mt 19:17) since He offers salvation to everyone. He will have all men to be saved. (1Tim 2:4). The words of Christ that we hear at funerals, moreover, are striking: *I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.* (Jn 5:30) In addition, the concept of "theodicy" as applied in this case is misleading.

Everything is ultimately ascribed to God (He will save or punish), without taking into account synergy (cooperation) as a factor in our salvation. Salvation is possible only within the framework of man's synergy or cooperation with Divine Grace. According to the Divine Chrysostomos, *The greatest*

part, indeed nearly everything, belongs to God; yet He has left us a little something. This something is our acceptance of God's invitation. The thief was saved by using as a key, "Remember me!" (*Synaxarion* for Great Friday). Equally idolatrous is the idea that God is angry against sinners, whereas God, as we have seen, is never at enmity. This is a juridical view of God, which also leads to the understanding of "penances" in Confession as punishments and not as remedies (means of healing).

Paradise and Hell in This Life

The mystery of Paradise and Hell is also experienced in the life of the Church in the midst of the world. The believer's participation in Grace is deified in the Mysteries, so that Grace might be activated in our life as we journey towards Christ. Especially in the Holy Eucharist, the Uncreated—Divine Communion—becomes within us either Paradise or Hell, depending on our condition. It is primarily our partaking of Divine Communion that constitutes our participation in Paradise or Hell in the context of history. This is why we entreat God, before Divine Communion, that the Precious Gifts be within us *not unto judgment, or unto condemnation and not unto eternal punishment.* For this reason, partaking of Divine Communion is bound up with the believer's entire spiritual journey. When we approach for Communion impure and unrepentant, we are punished (burned). Divine Communion becomes inside us *Hell* and *spiritual death*, not, of course, because it is transformed into any such thing, but because our impurity cannot receive it as *Paradise*. Given that Divine Communion is called *the medicine of immortality*, there occurs precisely what occurs with any medication. If our organism does not have the necessary capacity to accept it, then the medicine will produce side effects and will kill instead of curing. In this case, it is not the medicine itself that is responsible, but the condition of our organism. It must be said that if we do not accept Christianity as a therapeutic regimen and the Mysteries as spiritual remedies, then we end up transforming Christianity into a religion; in other words, we turn it into a form of idolatry. This, unfortunately, happens most often when we understand Christianity as a "religion."

Furthermore, the present life is to be evaluated in the light of the dichotomy of Paradise and Hell. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness* (Mt. 6:33), Christ advises us. *We do all things in preparation for the next life*, St. Basil tells the young. Our life must be a continuous preparation for our participation in Paradise, that is, for communion with the Uncreated, which begins already in this world. Hence, the Apostle Paul says: *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* (2 Cor 6:2). Each moment of our life is endowed with *soteriological* significance: either we gain eternity, eternal communion with God, or we lose it. This is why Far Eastern religions and cults which preach reincarnation do mankind a disservice, since they shift the issue to other (obviously non-existent) lives. There is, however, only one life, in which we are either saved or lost. Thus, St. Basil

continues: *We maintain that we must cherish and pursue with all our might those things which conduce for us to this life, while we must disregard those which are of no avail for it as being devoid of value.* This is the criterion of Christian life. The Christian constantly chooses that which contributes to his salvation. It is in this life that we either gain Paradise or lose it and wind up in Hell. This is why St. John the Evangelist says: *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.* (Jn 3:18).

Conclusion

The task of the Church is not to “send” man to Paradise or Hell, but to prepare him for the Last Judgment. The work of the clergy is therapeutic, and not moralistic or character-forming in the worldly sense of the term. The essence of life in Christ is preserved in monasteries—provided, of course, that they are Orthodox, that is, Patristic in spirit. The purpose of the cure offered by the Church is not to create “good” and fundamentally “useful” citizens, but citizens of the Heavenly (Uncreated) Kingdom. Such are the Confessors and Martyrs, the true faithful, the Saints.

This, furthermore, is the litmus test of our mission. To what are we calling people? To the Church understood as a hospital or clinic, or to an ideology that is Christian only in name? All too often we seek a secure place in “Paradise” instead of a cure. As such, we are preoccupied with rituals and not with therapy. This certainly does not mean that we should reject worship. But without *ascesis* (the ascetical life, practical therapy) worship cannot sanctify us. The Grace that flows from it remains inert within us. Orthodoxy does not promise to send man to any kind of Paradise or Hell, but has the capacity, as is evident from the incorrupt and wonder-working Relics of the Saints (*incorruption = deification*), to prepare man to behold the Uncreated Grace and Kingdom of Christ eternally as Paradise and not as Hell.



You've become scattered. It's time to steady yourself, to put aside everything else and sit within your heart. Think about lent and compare it with your present state. What a difference! Take up reading and avoid company. Your situation is ruining you! Arrange an orderly schedule of prayer, reading and handiwork. Cut down on socializing. Just you and God—how good that is! But when this will be, we'll let the Lord decide. It's better to let things take their own course, because then they are not ordered by human wisdom but by God's allowance. And see the result! You are responsible for involving yourself in acquaintanceships and amusements. This is not a trifling matter. Today, tomorrow—who knows when death will come. And there they won't be dealing cards to see what our fate should be.

St. Theophan the Recluse

MAN AFTER ORTHODOX BAPTISM

By Fr. John S. Romanides of blessed memory (+2001), from “Man and His True Life: According to the Greek Orthodox Service Books.”

Baptism is the undertaking of a life-long struggle against the dividing powers of the devil by dying to the ways of the world and uniting one's own self to the corporate life of a definite local community living in Christ. Because of this Holy Sacrament's nature, the Church was never in any great hurry to baptize its Catechumens. It was only after careful examination that one was accepted as a Catechumen. If accepted he was “made a Christian” on the first day (canon 7 of the 2nd Ecumenical Council) by having the *prayer for making a Christian* read over him by the bishop and having his name written in the books of the community. (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*, 1). On the second day he was made a Catechumen; the “prayer for making a Catechumen” was read in the name of the Holy Trinity in order to liberate the new disciple of Christ from the power of the devil and to open to him in due time the doors of life and love in Christ by writing his name in the book of life and uniting him to the Church. And, beginning with the third day, exorcisms were periodically read over him until the time for baptism, Holy Saturday. (Canon 7 of the 2nd Ecumenical Council, *The Service of Baptism*, Trembela, p. 18).

A person was thus considered a Christian before Baptism because he had become a disciple of Christ. As a Catechumen he began to have faith. But this faith alone was not what made him a member of the body of Christ. The difference between a Catechumen and a baptized person was that the Catechumen had not yet died in the waters of Baptism and was not yet ready to share in the inner corporate life of selfless love in the Sacraments.

As indicated above, during the period of the *catechesis* (beginning with the third day), the exorcisms were read periodically until the day of Baptism (*The Service of Baptism*, Trembela, p. 20-21). The exorcisms were obviously intended to liberate the candidate for Baptism from any machinations of Satan by cleansing his heart (the will) from selfishness and egocentricism which may darken his understanding and pervert his conception of true membership in the Church. The prayers of exorcisms clearly have as their object the avoidance of easy entrance into the Church of people who are not entirely liberated from wrong motives inspired by the devil. Thus anyone baptized in time of emergency because of severe sickness cannot enter the clergy because his Baptism was motivated by necessity and not by free choice. (Canon 12 of the Council of Neocaesarea, 315, A.D.)

It is interesting to note that in the entire service of Baptism there is not one statement made about the forgiveness of any kind of guilt that may have been inherited from Adam. In the entire set of prayers for making a Christian, for making a Catechumen, and in the exorcisms, there is no mentioning of forgiving the sins of the one being prepared for the day of Baptism. In the prayer

of the baptismal service itself, forgiveness of sins is mentioned only three times and always in the plural and within the context of many other petitions. The idea of original sin in terms of inherited guilt, as is common to the West, is completely foreign to the baptismal texts under consideration. There is no juridical forgiveness of a sin. Man is going through a process of being liberated from being captive to the devil who is the power of sin and corruption.

Baptism and Chrismation

To try to apply to the Sacrament of Baptism an *ex opera operato* type of interpretation whereby a person becomes a member of the body of Christ in terms of being with the original sin of guilt one moment and then without it the next moment, because a magical formula was recited, would be doing violence to the text of the service itself. (*Ex opera operato* means “from the work worked,” referring to the efficacy of the Sacraments deriving from the action of the Sacrament as opposed to the merits or holiness of the priest or participant, *Ed.*) The process whereby an individual is liberated from the devil is very difficult and requires a long period of prayer, fasting, and instruction in the teachings of the prophets and Christ. The heart must be turned from evil and converted to Christ. It must be turned from self-concern and emptied out in the desire to die with Christ in Baptism. Before Baptism, there must take place a spiritual progress which in degrees prepares one for the death of Baptism and acceptance of the seal of the spirit. Baptism, therefore, is not a moment from which one emerges only forgiven for a sin and differing from his previous existence only in terms of having accepted Christ and some vague principles of good conduct. It is rather the reaching of that stage at which one can freely choose to die with Christ to the vanity of the ways of this world and live within the love of the corporate life in the body of Christ.

The biblical conception of the solidarity which exists between man and creation is clearly seen in the prayers for the blessing of the waters. Sin and the devil *entered the world through one man* (Rom 5:12) and creation was *made subject to death and corruption* (Rom 8:20-22). Because man is inseparably a part of and in constant communion with creation and is linked through procreation to the whole historical process of humanity, the fall of creation through one man automatically involves the fall and corruption of all men. Thus the restoration of our communion in the life of God must also come through the purification of fallen creation which is also under the sway of death and corruption. Since man is part of nature, his communion with the life of God can only be



restored through nature. Both man and creation are being saved together. The waters of Baptism, therefore, must also be exorcised and cleansed of all demonic powers before anyone makes his entrance into them for Baptism. The former communion with death and corruption through nature must be transformed into a communion with the life of God. Upon passing through the death of Baptism one is resurrected to the new life by the vivifying seal of the gift of the Spirit which is the positive adoption of man by God Whose indwelling through His Spirit enables man to participate in the corporate life of the Eucharist.

Man after Baptism

According to the presuppositions found in the baptismal rite of the *Euchologion*, as well as in the New Testament writings, it is clear that man after Baptism, although a member of the Body of Christ on both sides of death, is still subject to the possibility of falling into the hands of the devil and being cut off from the body of Christ. Thus, after the newly

baptized emerges from the baptismal waters, having by his spiritual death defeated the devil, the Church again prays to God to «ρῦσαι ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων αὐτοῦ» [*rescue him (her) from the evil one and all of his vocations*, Trembela, p. III, 3, 4]. The re-establishment of communion with God and neighbor through baptismal death and the seal of the gift of the Spirit is no

magical guarantee against the possibility that man can again become a slave to the devil and be cut off from the body of Christ. (1 Cor 5:1-13; Rom 11:21; 2 Thes 3:6; 3:14; 2 Tim 3:5.) In Baptism unconditional war is declared against the devil and his powers of division and corruption. This war is continued in the corporate life of the Eucharist. To give up this fight entails damnation.

The unity of selfless love with Christ in His body and the saints on both sides of death is an end in itself and not a means to any other end. To put any other motivations before this unity in selfless love is to be still living under the power of the devil. Therefore the life of love in the Eucharist cannot be considered as a means to something else. The Eucharist is an end in itself because it is here where the life of selfless love with each other in Christ and the saints is continued and it is at the Eucharistic gathering that the dividing and destructive powers of the devil are continuously being defeated. *For when you assemble frequently «ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό» (in one place) the powers of Satan are destroyed and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith.* (St. Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, ch. 13.) Anyone, therefore, who does not hear

the Spirit within him calling him to the Eucharistic assembly for the corporate life of selfless love is obviously under the sway of the devil. *He, therefore, who does not assemble with the Church, has even by this manifested his pride and condemned himself...* (Ibid., ch. 5.)

It is more than evident from the basic principles of the baptismal services, from the prayers of the liturgies, and from the canons of the Church, that to be a member of the body of Christ meant to take part not only in the corporate prayers of the Church, but also to share in the body and blood of Christ. Both prayer and communion could not be understood individualistically because it was the whole body of the local Church which prayed «Ἐν ἑνὶ στόματι καὶ μιᾷ καρδίᾳ» (*with one mouth and one heart*), it was the whole Church which said «ἀμήν» (*amen*) to the Eucharistic prayer (1 Cor 14:16), and it is the whole body that is called to communion by Christ. (St. John Chrysostom, 3rd Homily on Ephesians).

Man does not have life of himself. He can have life only by dying to this world and living a life within the Eucharistic life of the community. His salvation, therefore, cannot come by an individualistic piety. It comes only by Grace and the measure by which he fights the devil and struggles to empty himself of self-concern within the life of Christ whose body is made up of real people. The condition for taking communion is not to be perfect, for then salvation would come from one's own worthiness and not as a free gift from God. The only condition possible for communion is a corporate realization of a continuous struggle against the dividing forces of the devil and a continuous attempt at a corporate and selfless love. In this twofold struggle communion is not taken as a crowning reward for a self-complacency that may come from a period of fast or from doing good works. Rather communion is a free gift from God given to the whole body of Christ gathered to receive it. It is not intended for individualistic consumption. The body and blood of Christ are offered as the common food of life in unity so that by this unity the dividing powers of the devil may be continuously destroyed [«Ἡμᾶς δὲ πάντας, τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς Ἄρτου καὶ τοῦ Ποτηρίου μετέχοντας, ἐνώσαις ἀλλήλοις εἰς ἑνὸς Πνεύματος Ἁγίου κοινωνίαν ...» (*And unite us all to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and the Cup in the communion of the one Holy Spirit...*), Communion prayer, Lit. of St. Basil]. It is only by the uniting force of life and love in Christ that the destructive powers of death are kept outside the body of Christ.

The dominion of the body of Christ can be limited, therefore, to a local community living in full the sacramental life. Outside this life *Satan and his powers* are still ruling humanity.

(Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 2:6; 2:12; 11:32; 2 Cor 2:11; 4:3; 11:14; Gal 1:4; Eph 2:1-3; 6:11-17; 2 Thes 2:8.) These powers of division and destruction can be defeated only by those who are passing their lives united with each other in Christ and in the consummation of their unity in love. Because the body of Christ is in a continuous process of becoming, it cannot be identified with any kind of organization in terms of extra sacramental institutionalism. The Holy Spirit is not the possession of individuals, but is always being sent upon the Church at its Eucharistic Gatherings. (*Epiklesis*). Although Christians are temples of the One Holy Spirit and members of the One Body of Christ, they are corporately and constantly becoming what they are through the unity of love in Christ. It is only within the life of this unity that the Seal of the Spirit can remain unbroken.

A proper appreciation of the meaning of being a member of



the body of Christ in terms of becoming can be gained by considering the fact that even during times of intense persecution **Christians of the first centuries risked their lives in order to be present at the Eucharist** (Dix, *Shape of the Lit.* p. 141-155.) Although they were partaking by themselves at home daily of the reserved Sacrament they still had to be at the corporate meeting of the Church because **it is at this meeting that the body of Christ is continuously being formed by the Father Who sends the Spirit to form the body of Christ.** To be absent from the invocation of God to send His Spirit and to make the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ is to break the seal of the Spirit and to be cut off from the body of Christ. To be

absent from this gathering because of fear would be illogical because one had already died to the world in baptism. Hence the Church practice of excommunicating non-participants in Eucharistic worship and communion even during times of persecution. (Canons 9, 10 of the Holy Apostles; Canon 2 of the Council of Antioch; Canon 2 of Trullo).



When a person disobeys a commandment of God, only that person is responsible to Him. But when something which goes against the commandments of the Gospel is made into law by the State, then the wrath of God comes upon the whole nation in order to be pedagogically taught a spiritual lesson.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ON CONFESSION AND SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTING

A letter by Elder Ephraim of Arizona.



This confession of yours gave my soul much joy, because God and the angels, who were awaiting it, rejoiced. You succeeded in putting the devil to shame, who greatly rejoices when someone hides his thoughts from his spiritual father. When a snake leaves its lair, it rushes to hide somewhere because it feels as if it will be struck—the same thing happens with a diabolical thought, which is like a poisonous snake. When such a thought leaves a person's mouth, it disperses and disappears, because confession

is humility, and since Satan cannot even bear the smell of humility, how could he possibly remain after a humble, sincere confession?

My child, I wish you a good beginning and cautious progress. Don't be ashamed before me. Don't see me as a man, but as a representative of God. Tell me everything, even if you have a bad thought about me, because I am experienced with demonic influences, and I know how the devil fights man. I know that spiritual children have simple hearts and that if evil thoughts come to them, it is due to the devil's malice and the spiritual child's ego, who is permitted to fall and have such thoughts against his Elder, so that the spiritual child may be humbled more. Therefore, don't worry. I will always rejoice when you speak freely and sincerely to me, for without frank confession, there will be no spiritual progress.

My child, have no worries. I have taken up your burden. I only beg you to be at peace. Your words may be just on paper, but I feel the power, the meaning, and the essence of what you write; I enter into the spirit of your words. I entreat you to be at peace from now on. You are forgiven everything with the confession you made. Satan perceived your character and torments you, but without anything serious having occurred. Everything you write (that is, the thoughts that torture you) is a trick of the evil one to make you despair, be distressed, and so forth. Throw everything that happened to you into the depths of the sea. Map out a new course in your life. If you keep thinking the same way, know that you will become the laughing-stock of the demons.

I beg you, just be obedient to me. After your confession, everything has been forgiven, so let bygones be bygones. Don't scratch a wound that made you suffer so much. Don't be deceived by the thought that it is your fault. If you hadn't taken him to the doctors, etc., then such thoughts would

rightfully fight you. Whereas, as things are now, you have fulfilled your duty. God wanted to take him, for a reason that only His infinite wisdom knows, while you are thinking you killed him! Be careful with this thought, or else it might lurk in your heart. It is a ruse of the devil to harm you, as he knows how. This skilled trickster has drowned in the depths of hell countless multitudes with despair. When something happens and the devil sees that a person is upset by it, his trick is to pile on a multitude of supposedly legitimate thoughts in order to lead the poor person to a great storm and drown him. (As the saying goes, a fox loves a scuffle). And when the storm passes, he sees that he was in danger of drowning in just a spoonful of water.

Humble yourself, and from now on confess, for confession contains most holy humility, without which no one is saved. The devil greatly rejoices when he manages to persuade a person to hide diabolical thoughts. This is because he will achieve his premeditated, soul-destroying goal.

I have written to you about the conscience, that we must be careful not to do something that will make it reproach and condemn us. Bear in mind that God sees everything and that nothing is hidden from His eyes. So how could I tell lies before God? Don't you know that lies are from the devil, and that by not being careful, it becomes a practice, then a habit, and then a passion, and don't you know that liars will not inherit the Kingdom of God? (cf. Rev 21:8). Fear God. God is not pleased with material offerings when we neglect attending to our inner heart. But it is necessary to do these also without leaving the others undone. (cf. Mt 23:23). Attend to your conscience, for we do not know the hour of our death. And if we do not repay our creditor (our conscience, that is) everything we owe him, he will accuse us vehemently, without holding back. Then—alas!—our mouth will be silenced, not having any answer to give.

Every night, review how you passed the day, and in the morning review how the night passed, so that you know how your soul's accounts are doing. If you see a loss, try to regain it through caution and forcefulness. If you see a profit, glorify God, your invisible helper. Do not let your conscience prick you for long, but quickly give it whatever it wants, lest it take you to the judge and the prison (cf. Mt. 5:25). Does your conscience want you to attend to your prayer rule* and regain prayer? Give it these things, and behold, you are delivered from going to the judge. Do not weaken the saving voice of your conscience by disregarding it, because later you will regret it to no avail.

See to it that you are sincere in your deeds as well as in your words, and especially in confession. For God searches out *the hearts and reins* (Pss 7:9), and nothing remains obscure in the sight of His sleepless eye. Fear God; *God is not mocked* (Gal 6:7); He is not fooled. He chastises severely when He does not see sincerity; so be careful. When you are disobedient

and commit a secret sin, counteract it by openly revealing it in confession. Do not let your ego overcome you and make you hide the truth and remain uncorrected and passionate. Correct everything now if you want to see good days of dispassion*** and peace.

† † †

* Prayer rule (κανών): A prayer rule consists of the prayers and metanoias** (prostrations) which one does daily, under the guidance of one's spiritual father.

** Metanoia (μετάνοια): In its primary sense, «μετάνοια» (pronounced "meh-tah-nee-ah") means repentance, literally, "a change of mind." However, it can also mean the specific act of making the sign of the cross, followed by a bow either down to the ground or to the waist. It is a gesture of reverence, worship, respect, or repentance. A typical prayer rule includes a number of metanoias done while saying the Jesus prayer. Some translators use the word "prostration" for this term.

*** Dispassion (ἀπάθεια): Dispassion is achieved when all three aspects of the soul (i.e., the intelligent, appetitive, and incensive aspects) are directed towards God. It is the transfiguration of the passionate aspect of the soul (i.e., the aspect of the soul which is more vulnerable to passion, namely, the appetitive and incensive aspects), rather than its mortification. Thus dispassion in this context does not signify a stoic indifference, but rather, a transfiguration and sanctification of the powers of the soul and eventually of the body also.



The voice you heard saying to you: "Christ has purged you of your sins and deadened your passions," is from the devil. It is the first stepping-stone that leads man to delusion and destruction. If one listens and pays attention to him and his heart is sweetened and he accepts these words of the devil as true, immediately the devil comes more tangibly to him, and gradually he is overcome. Then it takes much toil to be freed.

This is why, my child, you did well not to pay attention to that voice, and to criticize yourself instead. Next time you hear something, say: "I will tell it to my Elder and will do whatever he tells me." The devil greatly fears confession to one's Elder, because he knows that all his traps will be ruined!

You should realize, my child, that thoughts of conceit (of pride, in other words) have sprouted within you, and this is why this happened to you. Be careful. Have much humility. Every day entreat God to grant you a spirit of humility. Just as nothing grows on a trodden path, likewise no delusion grows in a trodden humble spirit.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

NIGHT WATCH OF THE HERMIT

From "A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain."

Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street. [Lam 2:19]

† † †



An old monk wearing a worn-out, patched-up black *nasso* wakes up in the middle of the night, and rises from the floor of his cave in Katounakia, Mount Athos, Greece, to pray.

His meal the previous evening consisted of a piece of dried stale hard bread and some rain water collected in an aluminum can. He has been rising for prayer for the last forty years and his legs no longer allow him to stand without pain but he is undeterred. His callous arthritic shaking hand reaches out for some matches which he is able to find, always in the same place, in spite of the stark darkness that shrouds him, and he lights up what remains of the candle he used the previous night.

The Spartan conditions of his dwelling are intimidating. The cave is cold and narrow. Its jagged walls are naked and the floor where he stands consists of the dirt and loose rocks of the cave. Years ago he managed to gather some thrown away wood, by the monasteries not so near him, and he was able to put together an *iconostasis* and an altar. The paper icons are few and damaged but the faces of the saints encourage him.

As the monk begins the prayers with the opening benediction of the Midnight Office, he considers himself to be the most blessed of men, *Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages*. The flickering candles communicate warmth, light and spiritual depth to this sacred space. This cave is Heaven! When the time for the Divine Liturgy comes, the priest-monk is already rapt in God, his face radiant, like Moses, as one who clearly beholds the other world.

Metropolitan Hierotheos was once blessed to be present in a cave like this one during one of these Divine Liturgies: "There were only a few oil lamps lighting the church, enough to show the icons of the Saints and the Most Holy Mother of God and of Christ. The three disciples with their Geronda, stood motionless on the old pews and lived the Mystery. They were not simply attending, but they were celebrating the Liturgy with me! Their faces looked like the faces of the Saints in iconography. It was as if they had come down from the walls and were living the resurrection. Their voices were soft, weak, stifled by their compunction. Their chanting was coming out of a heart wounded by divine love; it was coming out of the depths of their soul, which has been pierced by divine love..."

WHO ART THOU THAT JUDGEST?

By Protopresbyter James Thornton. Sermon on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (13:11-14:4), Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare Sunday).

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof. Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. (Rom 13:11-14:4).

† † †

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, tomorrow we Orthodox Christians begin the Great Fast. We now enter an extended period of approximately seven weeks of more intense prayer and fasting until we reach Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, the Feast of Christ's Resurrection. This is a period of golden opportunity for each of us wherein we may look deeply within ourselves and determine what, from a spiritual point of view, is unwholesome or deficient. We may then, during this time, begin the work of excising from our lives that which is unhealthy and, at the same time, augmenting that which is truly sound and truly pleasing to God.

I run the risk here of sounding prosaic and platitudinous when I recall the popular saying, "You are what you eat." Yet I shall take the risk: you are indeed what you eat. It is quite obvious that if we eat luxuriously, if our diet is exclusively confined to the most extravagant foods, exotically flavored and rich in fats, spices, and sugars, as is typical of the contemporary American diet, our individual physiologies will sooner or later bear the marks of those habits, either in various aspects of outward appearance or in the functioning of our bodily systems, or in both.

Moreover, our individual characters, personalities, and temperaments will be marked, and, likewise, and most importantly, our souls. An obsession with the worldly impresses

itself on the whole of our beings. By way of contrast, more prudent choices in our diets, as prescribed during the Fast by our wise Mother the Church, will do the opposite, and may make us physically healthier, and most assuredly will make us spiritually healthier.

Some religious writers of a modernist or fundamentalist bent enjoy drawing our attention to the alleged fact that in early Christianity—primitive Christianity, as it is sometimes called—there were no Holy Canons regarding fasting, no Great Lent, practically no fasting rules at all. Holy Canons and fasting periods are seen by these writers as latter-day and, by implication, needless accretions, even "monkish" accretions in the estimation of many of them.

In today's Epistle reading, St. Paul writes of a difference of opinion between those who believe that they may eat all things and those who *eateth herbs* (i.e., vegetables), as he puts it. We see from this passage that even at this earliest stage, just a few decades after Christ's Ascension, questions about fasting from certain

foods were already present and were already the subject of discussion. So, fasting was not unknown in the Apostolic Church. In fact, Orthodox historians maintain that the Wednesday and Friday fasts are of Apostolic origin and it is likely that, while the Lenten fasts were not codified in their current form until after the Apostolic period, that codification nonetheless reflected an already established, though not always uniform, tradition.

Consequently, what the modernist and fundamentalist writers say is true only to the very limited extent that, in St. Paul's day, certain details about fasting had not yet appeared and would take time to unfold. As with medical science or, let us say, the science of physics, the science that is Orthodox theology required time to mature.

The comparison here between the natural sciences and theology is apt, yet it is imperfect in one respect. In the case of the natural sciences, new discoveries that radically alter the body of fundamental knowledge are always possible. The discovery of the connection between bacteria and disease by nineteenth-century medical science or the displacement of classical physics by quantum physics in the twentieth century are examples of this. In the case of Orthodox theology, that cannot happen.

All knowledge needed for salvation has been given us by Christ; the body of fundamental knowledge remains fixed and changeless. No radical discoveries about this knowledge are possible. But a growth in the understanding of the application of that



body of knowledge to our lives is possible, and that growth, that maturing, has characterized the history of Orthodoxy.

As the grave risk to life and limb that was associated with membership in the primitive Church abated in the early fourth century, it became safe, even fashionable, to belong to the Church. It was then that other methods for forging the spiritual character became an urgent necessity, and for this reason fasting took on an increased importance at that time. When one lives by day and by night under the terror of persecution; when crucifixion, burning alive, being devoured by wild animals, or being sentenced to a life of forced labor, are genuine possibilities for the followers of Christ; when one's outlook is colored by continuous fear of the knock at the door—in those circumstances, it may be argued, the most rigorous type of fasting is not as indispensable as in more tranquil times.

Therefore, those who argue that we ought to return to the more primitive practice of fasting, in which it was somewhat less comprehensively regulated, should understand that if membership in Christ's Church is to achieve anything positive for us at all, then with this less stringent regimen in fasting there must also come a desire for trials of the most severe kind elsewhere in our lives. If membership in Christ's Church is to make us more like Christ, either one or the other is indispensable. Considered that way, we can see that fasting from animal products is not so difficult after all.

Now, let us enter more fully into the message of today's Epistle reading. In writing of the disputations in the early Roman Church between those who did not fast so strictly and those who did, St. Paul offers this admonition: *Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.* What wonderfully beneficial words these are!

St. Paul is telling us that whatever fasting discipline we or others follow, the crucial thing is that we address the matter of our own relationship with our Master, Jesus Christ, and not judge the relationship of our neighbor with Him. When we each face the question as to whether we need to fast more stringently to strengthen our commitment to our Faith, our answer to that question, and the way our answer manifests itself in our lives, will ultimately be judged by the Master Whom we serve, when we stand before His "dread judgment seat." So it is also in all the things we choose. It is not for us to make judgments about our Christian brothers and sisters. For several reasons we do not judge them:

1. To judge another is to usurp the place of God; as St. Paul says: *Who art thou that judgest?*

2. To judge another is to take one's focus off the place where it should be, and must be, to save one's soul, which is on one's own spiritual imperfections.

3. To judge another is to incur the danger of an additional sin, misjudging, since we cannot see into another man's heart and cannot know all of the circumstances of his life. St. Dorotheos of Gaza observes that while one can see another man's sins, one cannot know about that man's standing with God, about his secret prayers of supplication for mercy and forgiveness. *You may well know about the sin, the great Saint writes, but you do not know about the repentance.*

4. To judge another brings further dissension and strife into the Church, a place where peace and love should be the primary attributes.

5. To judge another is to bring on the temptation of an even worse sin, one of the worst among sins, which is gossip.

6. Finally, and most significantly, to judge another is to bring judgment upon ourselves; Christ Himself warned, *judge not, and ye shall not be judged.*

We are repeatedly warned as Christians not to judge other men and women. Does this require that we completely abandon our critical faculties when it comes to our dealings with other people? If we should know of a man who is a notorious embezzler, do we do right in judging him unfit to be the custodian of the public treasury? If we should encounter a man whom we know to be a psychopathic murderer, do we properly judge it unwise to invite him over to dinner? The answer to both questions, obviously, is yes.

Let us take some less extreme and more likely examples. If we learn that a particular friend or companion exerts an unhealthy influence on us as Christians, or if we believe that a friend or companion of our children may lead those children astray, may we make the appropriate judgment in those cases and terminate such associations? Again, the answer is yes. Of course we may do that. We would be held accountable by Christ for not making these kinds of judgments.

What we are forbidden as Christians to do is to judge another person's ultimate state before God, or to employ our critical faculties to enhance, in our own minds, our own rank or station or footing, in what we fancy are the eyes of God, at the expense of another human being. We are forbidden, in other words, to regard ourselves as "holy" by comparison with someone we regard as "sinful." The Holy Gospel teaches us that Christ God judged the outwardly holy men of His country, the Pharisees, very harshly, while the Good Thief (a most unlikely candidate for salvation, one would think) was assured everlasting happiness. St. John of the Ladder declares that, *[T]he beginning and sum of the passions... [is] unholy self-esteem.* Let us therefore not fasten our gaze upon the imagined inadequacies of other men and women during the Great Fast but examine with the most penetrating contemplation possible our own spiritual failures, that these may be swiftly amended. For most, if not all, of us, that task is sufficient to fill a lifetime.

THE PRODIGAL SON'S BROTHER

By Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, from "The River of Fire."



Now if anyone is perplexed and does not understand how it is possible for God's love to render anyone pitifully wretched and miserable and even burning as it were in flames, let him consider the elder brother of the prodigal son. Was he not in his father's estate? Did not everything in it belong to him? Did he not have his father's love? Did his father not come himself to entreat and beseech him to come

and take part in the joyous banquet?

What rendered him miserable and burned him with inner bitterness and hate? Who refused him anything? Why was he not joyous at his brother's return? Why did he not have love either toward his father or toward his brother? Was it not because of his wicked, inner disposition? Did he not remain in eternal torment because of that? And what was this eternal torment? Was it any separate place? Were there any instruments of torture? Did he not continue to live in his father's house?

What separated him from all the joyous people in the house if not his own hate and his own bitterness? Did his father, or even his brother, stop loving him? Was it not precisely this very love which hardened his heart more and more? Was it not the joy that made him sad? Was not hatred burning in his heart, hatred for his father and his brother, hatred for the love of his father toward his brother and for the love of his brother toward his father?

This is eternal torment: the negation of love; the return of hate for love; bitterness at seeing innocent joy; to be surrounded by love and to have hate in one's heart. This is the eternal condition of all the damned. They are all dearly loved. They are all invited to the joyous banquet. They are all living in God's Kingdom, in the New Earth and the New Heavens. No one expels them. Even if they wanted to go away they could not flee from God's New Creation, nor hide from God's tenderly loving omnipresence. Their only alternative would be, perhaps, to go away from their brothers and search for a bitter isolation from them, but they could never depart from God and His love.

And what is more terrible is that in this eternal life, in this New Creation, God is everything to His creatures. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, in the present life the things we have relations with are numerous, for instance: time, air, locality,

food and drink, clothing, sunlight, lamplight, and other necessities of life, none of which, many though they be, are God; that blessed state which we hope for is in need of none of these things, but the Divine Being will become all, and in the stead of all to us, distributing Himself proportionately to every need of that existence. It is plain, too, from the Holy Scriptures that God becomes to those who deserve it, locality and home and clothing and food and drink and light and riches and kingdom, and everything that can be thought of and named that goes to make our life happy.

In the new eternal life, God will be everything to His creatures, not only to the good but also to the wicked, not only to those who love Him, but likewise to those who hate Him. But how will those who hate Him endure to have everything from the hands of Him Whom they detest? Oh, what an eternal torment is this, what an eternal fire, what a gnashing of teeth!

Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the everlasting inner fire of hatred, saith the Lord, because I was thirsty for your love and you did not give it to Me, I was hungry for your blessedness and you did not offer it to Me, I was imprisoned in My human nature and you did not come to visit Me in My church; you are free to go where your wicked desire wishes, away from Me, in the torturing hatred of your hearts which is foreign to My loving heart which knows no hatred for anyone. Depart freely from love to the everlasting torture of hate, unknown and foreign to Me and to those who are with Me, but prepared by freedom for the devil, from the days I created My free, rational creatures. But wherever you go in the darkness of your hating hearts, My love will follow you like a river of fire, because no matter what your heart has chosen, you are and you will eternally continue to be, My children. Amen.



What is the human soul? It is the one same soul or the one same breath of God which God breathed into Adam, and which until now is diffused from Adam upon the entire human race. Therefore all men are as though one man, or one great tree of mankind.

From this comes the most natural commandment, founded upon the unity of our nature: *'You shall love the Lord your God (your Prototype, your Father) with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor (for who can be nearer to me than the man who is like me, of the same blood as me?) as yourself'* (Mk 12:30-31). To fulfill these two commandments is a natural necessity.

St. John of Kronstadt (+1908)

Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή τοῦ 1954 στήν Πόλη Μία πραγματική ἱστορία μέ Κρυπτο-Χριστιανούς τῆς Πόλης

Ἀπό τό βιβλίον «Ὁ Κήπος τοῦ Παπποῦ», Ἀγιορειτικές διηγήσεις
Ἀρχμ. Γαβριήλ Διονυσιάτου (+1983).

Σέ μία Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Γαλατᾶ στήν Πόλη, ὅπου συχνάξουν οἱ ναυτικοὶ καί ταξιδιωτὲς ν' ἀνάψουν τὸ κεράκι τους γιὰ τοὺς δικούς τους καί τὸ καλὸ ταξεῖδι πρὸς τὶς φουρτουνιασμένες θάλασσες τοῦ Πόντου. Ἐκεῖ, τὴ Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή τοῦ 1954 πῆγε νὰ λειτουργήσῃ καί νὰ ξομολογήσῃ τοὺς Χριστιανούς κάποιος Γέρων Πνευματικὸς (πρόκειται γιὰ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν γράφοντα, **Συντ.**), γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ἐπισκεπτόμενος τὴν Πόλη.

Ὁ τακτικὸς ἐφημέριος, ἐξυπηρετῶν καί ἄλλην Ἐκκλησίαν εἰς γειτονικὸν Ἁγίασμα, ἀφοῦ τὸν κατετόπισε εἰς τὰ τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Βήματος, τοῦ ἔδωσε καί μερικές δεκάδες ὀνομάτων «ζώντων καί τεθνεώτων», τὸν ὠδήγησε εἰς συνεχόμενον σκοτεινὸν Παρεκκλήσιον, καί ἀφοῦ τοῦ ἔδειξε μικρὰ κλίμακα ἀνερχομένην ἐλικοειδῶς τὰ κατηχούμενα τοῦ Ναοῦ, τοῦ εἶπεν ἐμπιστευτικῶς, ὅτι τὸν περιμένουν ἐπάνω καμμιὰ δεκαριά ἄνθρωποι γιὰ νὰ ἐξομολογηθοῦν. Εἶναι ἀνάγκη ν' ἀνεβῆ νὰ τοὺς ἐξομολογήσῃ καί νὰ μεταλάβουν εἴτα εἰς τὴν Λειτουργίαν, διότι ἐπείγονται νὰ φύγουν τὸ βράδυ μέ τὸ πλοῖον τῆς γραμμῆς· εἶναι ξένοι ἀπὸ μακρὰ. Ἀνέβαινε ὁ Γέρων συλλογιζόμενος τὸ δύσκολον ζήτημα τῆς συνεννοήσεως μετ' αὐτῶν, ἐφ' ὅσον ἦσαν ξένοι ἀπὸ μακρὰ· αὐτὸς δὲ πλὴν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς, δὲν ἐγνώριζεν ἄλλην γλῶσσαν.

Ἐκεῖ, εἰς τὸ ἡμίφως τοῦ ὑπερώου διέκρινε δεκάδα ἀνδρῶν χωρικῶν μεγάλης ἡλικίας, οἵτινες εἰς τὸ ἀντικρυσμᾶ του, τοῦ ἔβαλον ὅλοι μετάνοιαν καί ὁ γεροντότερος τοῦ εἶπεν εἰς Ποντιακὴν διάλεκτον:

—Ἡμεῖς Χριστιανοί, πάτερ, ἃ σὸν Πόντον, καί λαλούμεν (φιλοῦμεν) τὰ πόδα σου, νὰ ξαγουρευούμεν καί μεταλάβομεν σήμερον καί ἀπὲς νὰ λέομεν στήν ἀγιωσύνην σου ντὸ θέλομεν ἓνα κι ἄλλον.

Εὐτυχῶς ὅτι ὁ Γέρων συναναστραφεὶς πρὸ ἐτῶν μετὰ Ποντίων προσφύγων ἐν Μακεδονίᾳ ἐνεθυμείτο ἀρκετὰ τῆς ἀπηρχαιωμένης αὐτῆς Ἑλληνικῆς διαλέκτου καί ἐνόησε τί ἦθελον, καί τί θὰ τοῦ ἔλεγον ἐξομολογούμενοι.

Ἐμαθε λοιπὸν παρ' αὐτῶν ὅτι ὀλόκληρον τὸ χωρίον των εἶναι κρυπτο-Χριστιανοὶ ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐτῶν, καί εἰς

τὴν ἀνταλλαγὴν δὲν τοὺς ἐπετρέπη νὰ φύγουν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα, διότι τὰ «νεφούζια» τους (ταυτότητες) ἦσαν μέ Τουρκικὰ ὀνόματα, ὅτι στὸ φανερὸ εἶναι Ὅθωμανοὶ καί Τοῦρκοι, καί στὸ κρυφὸ εἶναι Χριστιανοὶ καί Ἑλληνες καί περιμένουν νὰ τοὺς γλυτώσει ὁ Θεὸς ἀπὸ τὴν σκλαβιά. Στὰ φανερὰ λέγονται Χασάνηδες καί Μεμέτηδες, καί τὰ πραγματικὰ ὀνόματά τους εἶναι Γεώργιος, Παναγιώτης κ.λ.π. Ἔχουν ἓνα δικὸ τους δῆθεν Χότζα, ἀλλὰ οὔτε περιτομὴ κάνουν, οὔτε ραμαζάνια καί Μπαϊράμια τουναντίον, μυστικὰ σὲ ὑπόγειες Ἐκκλησίες ἐορτάζουν Χριστιανικὰ τὸ Πάσχα, τὰ Χριστούγεννα, τῆς Παναγίας.

Πρὶν τῆς «ἀνταλλαγῆς» ἔπαιρναν παπᾶ ἀπὸ γειτονικὰ χωριά καί τοὺς βάπτιζε, τοὺς στεφάνωνε, τοὺς λειτουργοῦσε τὶς μεγάλες ἐορτές καί μετελάμβανον. Ἀλλὰ τώρα δὲν ὑπάρχει πουθενὰ παπᾶς καί ἀναγκαστικῶς ἔρχονται στήν Πόλη ἐκ περιτροπῆς γιὰ δουλειές δῆθεν καί γίνονται Χριστιανοί.

Ὁ Γέρων Πνευματικὸς τὰ ἤκουσε σασιτισμένους, τοῦ ἐφαίνετο ὅτι διάβαξε συναξάριον τῆς ἐποχῆς τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ καί δὲν ἠμποροῦσε νὰ συγκρατήσῃ τὰ δάκρυα ἀπὸ τὴν συγκίνηση.

Ἐξομολογήθηκαν βιαστικά, καί ὅλοι μαζί κατέβηκαν ἀθόρυβα εἰς τὸ σκοτεινὸ Παρεκκλήσι, ἀπ' ὅπου θὰ ἤκουον τὴν Λειτουργίαν τῶν Προηγιασμένων, χωρὶς

κάνεις νὰ τοὺς βλέπῃ. Καί ὅταν μετὰ τὴν λῆξιν ἐμετάλαβον οἱ ἄλλοι ἐκκλησιαζόμενοι, ἐγένετο ἡ ἀπόλυσις καί ἔφυγε καί ὁ κανδηλάπτης, ἔμεινε δὲ μόνος ὁ λειτουργὸς Πνευματικὸς μέ τὸν γνωστὸν σκοπὸν τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως, τότε κλείσας ἔσωθεν τὰς θύρας καί λαβὼν τὰ Ἅγια εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὸ Βῆμα τοῦ Παρεκκλησίου καί ἐκάλεσε τοὺς μαρτυρικοὺς Κρυπτοχριστιανούς, ἵνα «μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ, πίστεως καί ἀγάπης προσέλθωσι».

—Μεταλαμβάνει ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ Θεοῦ, Γιορίκας-Γεώργιος, τὸ τίμιον καί πανάσπιλον καί ζωοποιὸν Σῶμα καί αἷμα τοῦ Κυρίου καί Θεοῦ καί Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καί εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον. Ἀμήν.

—Μεταλαμβάνει ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ Θεοῦ, Ἀναστάς-Ἀναστάσιος εἰς....

Μετὰ τὴν «Εὐχαριστίαν» καί τὴν ἀπόλυσιν, εἶπον εἰς τὸν Πνευματικόν:

—πάτερ, νὰ κάνης μᾶς ἄλλον κι' ἓναν χάριν, ἔχομεν ἀδὰ σὴν Πόλιν καί τὰς καρίδας (γυναίκας) καί τέσσαρα



παιδιά μου, καὶ τὸ πουρνὶν (αὔριον) νὰ βαπτίξης τὰ παιδιά, νὰ μυρώνης τά, πάτερ, κουρμπὰν πάτερ (ἅγιε πάτερ, **Συντ.**), ποῖσον τὰ Χριστιανούς. Ὁ πουπὰν ἀδὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας φοβόσκετεν, πάτερ, τοὺς Τουρκᾶδες κ' ἐβάπτιζε τά. Ντὸ νὰ κάνουμεν, πάτερ, σεμέτερον τὴν Ἑλλάδα κ' ἀφήνουν μας νὰ δεβαίνουμεν. Στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ στὴν Παναγίαν τὴν Σουμελᾶν ὀρκίζομεν σε, πάτερ, ποῖσον τὸ καλὸν ἃ σὲ μᾶς τὰ παιδιά σου.

—Μὰ ὁ παπᾶς ἀδὰ εἶπε μέ, πὼς θὰ φύγετε τὸ βράδυν μὲ τὸ παπόρ.

—Νὰ συγχωρῆς μας, πάτερ, λέομεν ψεματίας, ὡσὰν νὰ λάσκομεν τὲς δουλειῆς μας. Ντὸ νὰ κάνουμεν, πάτερ; Ὁ Θεὸν νὰ λυπᾶται τὰ μέτεραν τὰ βάσαναν.

Ἔμειναν σύμφωνοι νὰ ἔλθουν τὸ βράδυν μὲ τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ τὰ παιδιά, νὰ μείνουν στὸ δωμάτιο τοῦ παπᾶ, ὁ ὁποῖος ὑπὸ μίαν πρόφασιν θὰ ἔλειπε, καὶ τὴν νύκτα μυστικὰ θὰ γινόταν ἡ βάπτισις ὄλων τῶν παιδιῶν κ.λπ.

Ἦλθον τμηματικὰ καὶ μὲ προφυλάξεις τὸ βράδυν πρὸς τὸ σουρούπωμα, ἕως ὅτου καθησυχᾶση ὁ κόσμος. Ἐξωμολογήθηκαν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες, καὶ πρὸ τοῦ μεσονυκτίου ἐγένετο καὶ ἡ βάπτισις, τὸ μύρωμα καὶ ὁ Ἐκκλησιασμὸς τῶν παιδιῶν εἰς τὸ Παρεκκλήσιον.

Μετὰ τὸ νεοβάπτισμα κοιμηθῆκανε ἐπάνω ὑπὸ τὴν φύλαξιν μίας γυναίκος, οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι ἐξημερώθηκαν εἰς τὸν Ναόν... Ὁ Γέρων Πνευματικὸς τοὺς ἔκαμε εὐχέλαιον, κατόπιν τοὺς ἔκανε καὶ παράκλησιν τῆς Παναγίας, καὶ ἐνόσω αὐτὸς ἐδιάβαζεν καὶ ἔψαλλεν, **αὐτοὶ ὅλοι, ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες γονατιστοὶ** ἐψιθύριζον τὸ «Κύριε ἐλέησον» καὶ «Παναγία Θεοτόκε, σῶσον ἡμᾶς».

Ὅταν ἐξημέρωσε, τοὺς εἶπε νὰ μὴ φύγουν, νὰ πᾶνε νὰ ἡσυχάσουν καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἡμέραν τὴν Παρασκευὴν θὰ κάμη πάλιν Λειτουργίαν νὰ μεταλάβουν αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ τὰ νεοβάπτιστα παιδιά. Τοὺς ἄφησε καὶ εἰσήλθε εἰς τὸ Ἱερόν, ἵνα ρίψη ὀλίγον νερὸ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπόν του εἰς τὸν «Νιπτῆρα» καὶ ἀνανήψη ἐκ τῆς ἀγρυπνίας. Αὐτοὶ ἀνέβηκαν ἐπάνω καὶ σὲ λίγο κατέβηκαν πάλιν δύο, οἱ γεροντότεροι καὶ τοῦ εἶπαν:

—Ἄ τώρα, πάτερ, νὰ λέομεν σὲ ἕναν κ' ἄλλον τὰ ἀμέτεραν τὰς δουλειᾶς. Τὰ πόδα σου νὰ λαλεύομεν, κουρμπὰν πάτερ, ν' ἀκούης μας, σ' ἐμέτερον τὸ χωρίον πουπὰν κ' ἔχουμεν, ἀνάστασιν καὶ ξερομεν ἀδὰ στὰ τράντα χρονίας. Ντὸ ψυὴν νὰ δίομεν σὸν Θεόν, πάτερ; Τὰ παιδιά μου ἀντρέβουν χωρὶς πουπὰν,

στεφὰν ποῖον νὰ θέκη τὰ στὸ ἀφκάλι; Γκουρτσουλὰν (οἱ καϋμένοι) παποῦδες μας καὶ χασταληδες (ἄρρωστοι) ποθαίνουν χωρὶς Λειτουργίαν, πάτερ. Ἄχ! Ἀφωρισμένον σκλαβίαν. Ἐνέγκαμεν, πάτερ, ἕνα σακὶν μικρὸ, χῶμα τεμέτερον τὸ κοιμητήρ, νὰ διαβάξης τό, νὰ ρίξωμεν ἐκεῖ καὶ σὴν τάφοιν του. Νὰ διῆς μας, πάτερ, λειτουργίαν, νὰ δίομεν σαμέτερα τα παιδιά, Πάσχα ἔρχετεν, πάτερ, καὶ νὰ κάνης μας καὶ ἵνα ἀνάστασιν, ν' ἀκούσουμε «Χριστὸς ἀνέστη». πάτερ, κ' ἀπὲς ἃς πεθάσκομεν.

Τοὺς εἶπεν ὁ Πνευματικὸς νὰ ἔλθουν πάλιν καὶ τὸ βράδυν ὅλοι τους, ὅπως καὶ ἔγινε. Καὶ ἀφοῦ κοιμήθηκαν τὰ παιδιά, τοὺς εἶπε ὅσα ἠδύνατο περὶ τῆς θρησκείας μας, τοὺς συνεβούλευσε νὰ εἶναι σταθεροὶ εἰς τὴν πίστιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ ἔχουν εἰς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐλπίδα τους, ὅτι μία μέρα θὰ τελειώσουν τὰ βάσανά τους. Τὸν διέκοπταν μὲ ἐρωτήσεις σπαρακτικές:

—Ντὸ κάνουν ταμέτερα τὰ παιδιά, πάτερ, στὴ Πατρίδα μας τὴν Ἑλλάδα; Ντὸ κάνει ὁ Βασιλέαν ὁ Κωνσταντῖνον;...

Τοῦ ξέφυγε καὶ τοὺς εἶπε μὲ δάκρυα στοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὅτι ὁ Κωνσταντῖνον ὁ Βασιλέαν ἀπέθανεν!... Ὅλοι τους ἤρχισαν τὰ κλάματα, καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες περισσότερον νὰ κλαίγουν λέγοντας:

—Ὁ Κωνσταντῖνον μας κ' ἐπεθαίνει, ὁ Βασιλέαν μας ζῆ, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνον μας θὰ παίρνη μᾶς νὰ

δεβαίνουμεν στὴ Πατρίδα, ἀοῖκον λόγον χαπάρ κ' ἔχουμε, πάτερ.

Τοὺς καθησύχασε λέγοντας, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς θὰ στείλῃ ἄλλον Κωνσταντῖνον νὰ τοὺς ἐλευθερώσῃ καὶ νὰ τοὺς πάγῃ ὅπου αὐτὸς θέλει, καὶ μόνον ὑπομονὴν καὶ ἐλπίδα νὰ ἔχουν καὶ ἀγάπη μεταξὺ των. Μετὰ κατέβηκαν στὴν Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ὁ Γέρων Πνευματικὸς ἀνέγνωσε τὴν νεκρώσιμον ἀκολουθίαν μὲ τὰ ὀνόματα των «τεθνεώτων» ἐπὶ τοῦ χῶματος, ἔπειτα τοὺς ἔδωσε καὶ τὸ κλειδίον τοῦ ἄλλου δωματίου, ὅπου ἔμενον αὐτὸς καὶ τοὺς ἔστειλε νὰ ξεκουραστοῦν, καὶ τὸ πρῶν θὰ τοὺς ξυπνοῦσε ὁ ἴδιος.

Ὁρθρου βαθέος ἀνέβηκε καὶ τοὺς ἐξύπνησε, καὶ ἕως ὅτου αὐτοὶ ἐτοιμαστοῦν, ἔψαλλε τὸν κανόνα τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου «Κύματι θαλάσσης», κατέβηκαν καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ γράμματα κατάλαβαν, ὅτι θὰ τοὺς κάνῃ τὴν Ἀνάστασιν.

Ἐκάλεσε τὸν γεροντότερον καὶ τοῦ εἶπε νὰ πάρῃ ἀπὸ τὸ παγκάρι κηρία, ὅσες ψυχές εἶναι εἰς τὸ χωρίον των καὶ νὰ μοιράσῃ εἰς ὅλους ἀνὰ δέκα. Εἰσελθὼν δὲ εἰς



τὸ Ἅγιον Βῆμα καὶ φορέσας λευκὰ ἄμφια ἐξήλθεν εἰς τὴν ὥραϊαν Πύλην μὲ ἀναμμένη λαμπάδα καὶ εἶπε μὲ φωνὴν παλλομένην:

—*Δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς, δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς, δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς ἐκ τοῦ ἀνασπέρου φωτὸς καὶ δοξάσατε Χριστὸν τὸν ἀναστάντα ἐκ νεκρῶν...*

Τοὺς εἶπε καὶ ἤναψαν ὅλα τὰ κηρία, ἀνέγνωσεν ἔπειτα τὸ Β' ἑσθινὸν «*Διαγενομένου τοῦ Σαββάτου*» καὶ μετὰ τὸ «*Δόξα τῇ ἀγία καὶ ζωοποιῷ καὶ ἀδιαιρέτῳ Τριάδι...*» ἔψαλλε τὸ «*Χριστὸς ἀνέστη*» ἐκ τρίτου. Καὶ ὅτε ἔστρεψε ἵνα εἶπη εἰς αὐτοὺς νὰ ψάλλουν καὶ αὐτοί, ὅλοι τους ἦσαν ἀγκαλιασμένοι καὶ ἔκλαιον καὶ κατεφιλοῦντο. Ἦρπασε καὶ αὐτὸς εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας του τὰ μικρὰ νεοφώτιστα καὶ τὰ ἐφίλησε, εἶτα τοὺς εἶπε παρηγορητικούς λόγους, ὅτι:

—Καὶ τὸ Γένος θ' ἀναστηθῆ μίαν ἡμέραν ὁλόκληρον, καὶ ἠνωμένον θὰ ἐορτάζη πλεόν τὴν Ἀνάστασιν τοῦ Κυρίου, ὡς μία οἰκογένεια!

Τοὺς συνέστησε ἔπειτα νὰ σβήσουν τὰ κηρία, καὶ ὅταν ὑπάγουν εἰς τὸ χωρίον των τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ Πάσχα νὰ τὰ μοιράσουν εἰς ὅλους νὰ τὰ ἀνάψουν βαπτισμένοι καὶ ἀβάπτιστοι, νὰ ψάλλουν τὸ «*Χριστὸς ἀνέστη*», καὶ ὅτι ὅσοι εἶναι βαπτισμένοι καὶ στεφανωμένοι νὰ μεταλάβουν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγίαν Κοινωνίαν, ποῦ θὰ τοὺς δώση αὖριον νὰ πάρουν μαζί τους.

Ἔως ὅτου ξημερώση καλά, ἐδιάβαζεν εἰς ἐπήκοον πάντων τὴν Ἀκολουθίαν τῆ Μεταλήψεως, εἶτα τὴν συγχωρητικὴν εὐχὴν. Ὅλοι τους εἰσηλθον εἰς τὸ Παρεκκλήσιον, ἀφ' ὅπου ἤκουον τὴν Θεϊαν Λειτουργίαν. Εἰς τὸ τέλος μετέδωκε πρῶτον τὰ ἄχραντα Μυστήρια εἰς τὰ νεοφώτιστα παιδιά, εἰς τὰς γυναῖκας ἔπειτα, καὶ κατόπιν εἰς τοὺς ἄνδρας.

Ἐκεῖνοι ἐδίσταζαν:

—Ἴνεται, πάτερ, ἓναν καὶ ἄλλον κοινωνίαν;

—Γίνεται, τοὺς εἶπε, «*Σῶμα Χριστοῦ μεταλάβετε, πηγῆς ἀθανάτου γεύσασθε*».

Ὅλα ἔγιναν ἐν τάξει. Καὶ ὅταν μετ' ὀλίγον ἀνέβηκε εἰς τὸ δωμάτιον καὶ ἐπρόκειτο νὰ χωρισθοῦν, ἵνα πρὸς τὸ ἐσπέρας φύγουν μὲ τὸ πλοῖον, θρηῆνος καὶ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὀδυρμὸς πολὺς, ἀλλὰ σιωπηλὸ κατέκλυσε τὴν αἴθουσα: Αὐτοὶ δὲν ἤθελον νὰ τὸν ἀφήσουν, καὶ αὐτὸς δὲν ἠμποροῦσε νὰ τοὺς ξεπροβοδίση πέραν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, διότι φοροῦσε τὰ ρᾶσα... καὶ ἡ ... «πολιτισμένη» αὐτὴ χώρα δὲν τὰ ἐπιτρέπει.

—Νὰ λαλεύομέν σε, πάτερ... νὰ μνημονεύης, πάτερ, ντὸ νὰ λέομεν σέ, πάτερ;

—Νὰ εἰπῆτε τὰς εὐχὰς μου στοὺς Χριστιανούς μας, νὰ εἶναι καλοὶ Χριστιανοί, νὰ πιστεύουν στὸν Χριστὸν μας καὶ στὴν Ἑλλάδα μας καὶ ὁ Θεὸς θὰ τοὺς εὐλογῇ, ἡ Πατρίδα μας θὰ τοὺς σκέφτεται πάντοτε καὶ ἐγὼ δὲν θὰ σὰς λησμονήσω ποτέ.

Καὶ πῶς νὰ τοὺς λησμονήσῃ, ὅπου τὰ δάκρυά των κατέβρεξαν τὰς χεῖρας του, πῶς νὰ μὴν ἐνθυμῆται τὴν ἄκραν εὐλάβειάν των καὶ τὰ περιστατικά των, ὅμοια πρὸς τὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν τῶν πρώτων αἰώνων, πῶς νὰ ξεχάσῃ τὴν κατακόμβην τοῦ Παρεκκλησίου τῆς Γοργοεπηκόου; Πάντοτε τοὺς ἐνθυμείται καὶ ἀρκεῖται ἤδη ἐν γῆρει εἰς τὸ ψαλμικόν:

—*«Μνήσθητι, Κύριε, τῆς ταλαιπωρίας τῶν πτωχῶν καὶ τοῦ σπαραγμοῦ τῶν πενήτων Κύριε, ἐπίφανον τὸ πρόσωπόν σου καὶ σωθησόμεθα».*

Πῶς νὰ λησμονήσω τὰ βάσανα τῆς ἐκλεκτῆς αὐτῆς Φυλῆς, ποῦ βρέθηκε γεωγραφικῶς μεταξὺ λαῶν βαρβάρων τὴν ψυχὴν, λαῶν ἀνεπίδεκτων πραγματικοῦ πολιτισμοῦ, λαῶν μὲ θηριώδη ἐνστικτα!...



Ἡ Μεγίστη Δωρεὰ

Πηγή: «*Διδαχαὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ*». Ἑβδομαδιαία Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἐφημερὶς «*Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος*», τεύχη 1823-1827.

Μερικὲς βασικὲς ἀλήθειες τῆς πίστεώς μας ἄλλοτε τὶς ἀγνοοῦμε καὶ ἄλλοτε δὲν τὶς στοχαζόμεστε ὅσο πρέπει. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ μένουμε χωρὶς συναισθηματικὴ φόρτιση. Καὶ ὅταν ἀκόμα γιορτάζουμε τὰ μεγάλα γεγονότα τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν Ἁγίων, μένουμε δίχως γόνιμη συγκίνηση. Ἀσχολοῦμαστε πολὺ μὲ τὰ ἐξωτερικὰ καὶ ἐλάχιστα μὲ τὰ οὐσιώδη.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς, ἀναφερόμενος στὴν ἐνανθρώπησιν τοῦ «*γλυκύτατου αὐθέντη καὶ δεσπότη*» Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, λέει ὅτι «*ἀπὸ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην ὅπου ἔχει εἰς τὸ γένος μας, σιμὰ εἰς τὸ ἄπειρο χάρισμα (δῶρα) ὅπου μᾶς ἐχάρισε καὶ μᾶς χαρίζει καθ' ἐκάστην ἡμέραν καὶ ὥραν καὶ στιγμὴν ἐκαταδέχθη καὶ ἔγινε καὶ τέλειος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ καθαρῶτατα αἵματα τῆς Δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας, διὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐκβάλλῃ ἀπὸ τὰς χεῖρας τοῦ Διαβόλου, νὰ μᾶς κάμῃ υἱοὺς καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας του, νὰ χαιρώμεσθιν πάντοτε εἰς τὸν Παράδεισον μαζί μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ νὰ μὴ καιώμεσθιν εἰς τὴν Κόλασιν μαζί μὲ τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς καὶ τοὺς διαβόλους».*

Ὁ Χριστὸς ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας. Δίδαξε καὶ θαυματούργησε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας. Σταυρώθηκε καὶ ἀναστήθηκε γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀνοίξῃ τὴ βασιλεία Του, τὸ ἀπάνεμο λιμάνι τῆς αἰώνιας μακαριότητος. Πολὺ μεγάλη ἡ δωρεὰ. Ὅποιος τὴ στοχάζεται μὲ εὐλάβεια, τὴ θεωρεῖ μεγίστη καὶ συνεχῶς αὐξανόμενη.

Χαίρε Σταυρέ τῶν Δολίων Πολιτικῶν τὸ Τραῦμα

Γράφει ὁ Δρ. Κωνσταντῖνος Βαρδάκας.

Ἡ παραπάνω εὐχή δὲν ἀναφέρεται σὲ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἐλάχιστους ποὺ κόσμησαν ταπεινὰ τὴν πολιτικὴ ἀλλὰ σὲ δόλιους πολιτικούς καὶ στὰ παρακολουθήματά τους.

Μήπως δὲν ἔχουμε τέτοιους καὶ δὲν τὸ ξέρουμε; Ὁ λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ παγκόσμιος Ὑψωση τοῦ Τιμίου καὶ Ζωοποιοῦ Σταυροῦ ἐν μέσω τοῦ θηριώδους ἀποκορυφώματος τῆς ἀντιχρίστου Παγκοσμιοποιήσεως. Βάλθηκαν οἱ ἀντίχριστοι νὰ «ἀγιάσουν» ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη καὶ μὲ μᾶς ἔγιναν σταυρωτὲς καὶ σήκωσαν τὰ λάβαρα τῆς ἥττας τους δηλ. Σταυροὺς μὲ ἀθώα θύματα ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία μέχρι τὴν Οὐκρανία καὶ κανεῖς δὲν ξέρει ποῦ ἄλλοῦ σε λίγο.

Ἔτσι, ἡ φετινὴ Ὑψωση τοῦ Τιμίου καὶ Ζωοποιοῦ Σταυροῦ ἀποκτᾶ μιὰ ἰδιαίτερη σημειολογία μέσα στὴν καθημερινότητα καὶ μᾶς δείχνει ἄπειρες σταυρικὲς διαδρομὲς συνανθρώπων μας ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἐθνῶν ποὺ καταλήγουν στὸ ἴδιο το σημεῖο τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ. Καὶ πᾶμε στὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς καὶ στὸν μνημονιακὸ Γολγοθᾶ τῆς ἔρημης Πατρίδας. Πρὶν ἀνέβει ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη τῆς Συρίας στὸν Σταυρὸ τῆς ἀνέβηκε ἡ μάνα Ρωμηοσύνη-Ἑλλάδα καὶ παραμένει μέχρι τὴν σήμερον «καρφωμένη» ἐκεῖ.

Ποιοὶ τὴν ἀνέβασαν πάνω στὸ Σταυρικὸ Ἰκρίωμα γιὰ νὰ παρακολουθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ ὕψος τοῦ Σταυροῦ τῆς τοὺς «σταυρωτὲς-τοκογλύφους» νὰ ξεδιψοῦν τὴν ἀγωνία καὶ τὰ ἀδιέξοδά της μὲ ὄξο καὶ χολή; Πῶς τὴν ἀνέβασαν; Ἀφοῦ πρῶτα τὴν παραπλάνησαν μὲ ψεύτικες ὑποσχέσεις καὶ λόγια μεγάλα καὶ ξαφνικὰ ἀπὸ τὴν παραδεισένια ζωὴ τοῦ Εὐρώ βρέθηκε ἀναρτημένη στὸ «σταυρὸ τῶν μνημονίων».

Ἦταν ἄραγε ἓνα στιγμιαῖο ἀτύχημα στὴν Ἐθνικὴ ζωὴ μας τὸ ὁποῖο προσπαθεῖ σήμερον νὰ τὸ διαχειρισθεῖ ἡ κυβερνητικὴ ἐξουσία; Μὴν γελιόμαστε; ἡ δυστυχία ποὺ εἰσάγεται μὲ ἔξωθεν ὀδηγίες δὲν διαχειρίζεται καὶ μάλιστα ὅπως τὴν βιώνει ἡ παιδικὴ ψυχὴ ποὺ καθημερινὰ τὴν ψηλαφᾷ μέσα στὴν ἀνεργὴ οἰκογένεια μὲ πείνα καὶ ἀνέχεια.

Ὁ Σταυρικὸς θάνατος ὅμως ἔχει μιὰ ἰδιαιτερότητα: Ὁ Ἐσταυρωμένος Ἑλληνισμὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν μας ἀπὸ τὸ ὕψος τοῦ ἰκριώματος βλέπει τοὺς σταυρωτὲς τοῦ τοκογλύφους ἀπὸ ψηλά, ἐνῶ αὐτοὶ ἀτενίζουν τὴν «σταυρωμένη ἀδικία» τους ἀπὸ τὰ χαμηλά. Ἔστω καὶ σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν δύσκολη συγκυρία αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ θέση τοῦ Ἑλληνα, ἐκεῖ ψηλὰ μὲ ὅλη τὴν ἱστορικὴ σημειολογία της. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ σημειολογία τοῦ γεγονότος αὐτοῦ εἶναι ἀνώτερη γιατί προσεγγίζουμε θεολογικὰ Αὐτὸν τὸν Ἴδιον

τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο Κύριο ποὺ ἔκανε τὴν Ἀρχὴ καὶ ἀποτελείωσε τὸ κέντρο τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τὴν ἀδικία τῶν διαχρονικῶν τοκογλύφων ὄλων των ἐποχῶν. Ἔτσι πλέον ἡ ἐπώδυνη αὐτὴ γνώση τῆς ὕψωσης τοῦ Ἐθνικοῦ μας Σταυροῦ εἶναι καὶ τὸ πνευματικὸ νίκος καὶ τὸ κλειδί τῶν ἐπερχομένων ἐξελίξεων.

Ἄς προσπαθήσουμε νὰ προσεγγίσουμε αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονὸς μὲ τὴν Πνευματικὴ καὶ τὴν οἰκονομικὴ διάστασή του ἀνάμεσα στὶς ὁποῖες μπορεῖ νὰ τοποθετηθεῖ καὶ ἡ κοινωνικὴ συνέπεια. Πῶς μᾶς βάλανε στὴν διαφημιζόμενη ζώνη τοῦ Εὐρώ καὶ μᾶς ἔσυραν σὲ αὐτὴν τὴν κατάντια; Κάποιοι ἰσχυρίζονται μὲ νοθευμένα καὶ παραποιημένα στοιχεῖα.

Νὰ λοιπὸν πῶς τὰ παραποιημένα αὐτὰ στοιχεῖα ἔγιναν τὰ καρφιά τῆς μελλοντικῆς σταύρωσής μας. Ὁ Σταυρικὸς θάνατος ἦταν (πρὶν τὸ Χριστό), θάνατος αἰσχύνης καὶ μὲ αὐτὸν θανατώνανε τοὺς κακούργους καὶ τοὺς ἀπατεῶνες. Ἔτσι καὶ οἱ σύγχρονοι τοκογλύφοι δανειστὲς βρῆκαν τὶς ἀμέτρητες περιπτώσεις διαφθορᾶς-διαπλοκῆς καὶ κακουρηματικῆς ἀπάτης τοῦ νέοελληνικοῦ μορφώματος δῆθεν σὰν τὴν καταλληλότερη δικαιολογία γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀναρτήσουν πάνω στὸ ξύλο τῆς αἰσχύνης τοῦ Σταυροῦ.

Μὲ τὴν μόνη διαφορὰ δὲν σταύρωσαν τὸν ὑπεύθυνο κακούργο Βαραββᾶ-δόλιο πολιτικὸ ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀθῶο λαὸ τῆς Ἑλλάδας. Καὶ τώρα τί γίνεται; Κάποιοι λένε νὰ βγάλουμε τὰ καρφιά δηλ. νὰ βγοῦμε ἀπὸ τὶς μεταρρυθμίσεις τῶν μνημονιακῶν δεσμεύσεων καὶ νὰ κατεβοῦμε ἀπὸ τὸν Σταυρὸ μόνον μας. Ἄλλοι ἀντιδιαλέγουν ὅτι ἂν βγάλουμε τὰ καρφιά αὐτὰ θὰ πεθάνουμε ἀπὸ αἱμορραγία οἰκονομικὴ. Ποιὸς μπορεῖ νὰ βγάλει ἄκρη ὅταν κάποιος ἐδῶ καὶ χρόνια δούλεψαν γιὰ νὰ μᾶς φέρουν σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ προμελετημένο ἀδιέξοδο.

Ἄν κατορθώσουμε σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν συγκυρία νὰ πιάσουμε τὴν ἄκρη τοῦ νήματος ἀπὸ τὸ μερδεμένο κουβάρι τῆς ζωῆς μας καὶ νὰ ἀρχίσουμε νὰ ξεπλέκουμε τοὺς κόμπους μπορεῖ νὰ συλλάβουμε τὴν πραγματικότητα ποὺ μᾶς στέρησαν. Ψήγματα πραγματικότητας μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ ψεύτικη Ἑλλάδα τῆς διαφθορᾶς καὶ τῆς λαμογιᾶς ἀργοπεθαίνει καὶ θὰ πεθάνει. Τὰ λαμόγια ἤδη κρύβονται καὶ στὸ ἄκουσμα τῆς λέξης μόνον, ὅλοι εἶναι σὲ θέση μάχης ἄσχετα ἂν στὸ παρασκήνιο ἐξακολουθοῦν νὰ προάγουν τὴν συνήθειά τους στὴν ἀρπαχτή. Αὐτὰ τὰ πολιτικὰ ὄντα δίκην λαμογιῶν ἔγιναν συσταυρωτὲς μας μαζί μὲ τοὺς τοκογλύφους καὶ «ἐπὶ τὸν ἱματισμὸ τῆς πατρίδας ἔβαλαν κλήρον».

Καὶ τί δὲν ἔχει αὐτὸς ὁ ἱματισμὸς; Ἀπὸ ἐνεργειακὰ οἰκόπεδα, ἀκίνητα φιλέτα, ὠραῖες παραλίες, ὄρυκτὸ πλοῦτο, κ.ἄ. Ὅμως αὐτοὶ ἀπὸ μόνον τους μᾶς ἀνέβασαν στὸν Σταυρὸ ἢ οἱ ἴδιοι δώσαμε δικαιώματα σὲ δόλιους πολιτικούς γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀνεβάσουν στὸν Σταυρὸ καὶ αὐτοὶ μὲ τὴν σειρὰ τους ἐφώνηξαν καὶ Ρωμαϊκὴ

κουστωδία τοκογλύφων; Μόνοι μας λοιπόν άνεβήκαμε, άπλως αυτοί μās κάρφωσαν με έπώδυνα καρφιά και ή Ρωμαϊκή κουστωδία τών τοκογλύφων επί τέσσερα και χρόνια μās ποτίζει με δξος και χολή.

Σταυρωθήκαμε μόνοι μας γιατί άπεμπολήσαμε τις άξιες και τα ιδανικά της ράτσας μας και δώσαμε το δικαίωμα σε άσχετους να χειραγωγήσουν τις ζωές τών οίκογενειών μας, δηλ. ή **Σταύρωση μας είναι πρώτα πνευματική-κοινωνική και μετά οικονομική**. Όπως άνεβήκαμε με εύκολοπιστία στους «Σταυρούς τών μνημονίων» μπορούμε και να κατεβούμε εύκολα. Άρκει να βγάλουμε με προσοχή τα καρφιά που είναι και το πιό έπώδυνο μέρος.

Αυτοί οι Σταυροί έγιναν οί πνευματικές έμπειρίες του καθενός μας μέσα στην άβίωτη καθημερινότητα τών τελευταίων τεσσάρων έτών. Αυτές τις Σταυρικές έμπειρίες μας τις έπισκιάζει σήμερα ή Θεοφόρος Σκια του Τιμίμου και Ζωοποιου Σταυρου του Κυρίου ήμών που ύψώνεται θαρρετά στις Έκκλησιές έν μέσω φοβερών παγκόσμιων γεγονότων. Και ή ίδια Θεοφόρος Σκια μās καλεί τώρα με αυτούς τους προσωπικούς Σταυρούς να τροπώσουμε τα σμήνη τών δαιμόνων-τοκογλύφων που δέν λένε να ξεκουμπιστούν από την πεφλημένη πατρίδα...



Λόγια Ενός Γέροντος

Μέσα σε αυτή την μεγάλη κρίση και άναμπουμπούλα που επικρατεί άκούγονται συνεχώς ή διαβάζετε στο διαδίκτυο για προφητικά λόγια του Άγιου Κοσμά του Αιτωλου, ή του γέροντος Παΐσιου. Αυτά μιλάνε για Ελλάδα έλεύθερη, δυνατή, Χριστιανική, αλλά μετά από μία δύσκολη περίοδο. Μεγάλοι άνδρες, με παρηρησία ένώπιον του Θεού.

Αλλά άς σκεφτούμε την Έλλαδίτσα μας τα τελευταία χρόνια, (μη πηγαίνουμε πολυ πίσω). Περάσαμε πολέμους, κατοχή, πείνα. Τώρα να άναλογιστούμε γιατί τα περάσαμε όλα αυτά; Για τις άμαρτίες μας. Οί άνθρωποι ζητούν μία ζωή όχι όπως ο Χριστός μās παρέδωσε αλλά μία ζωή εύκολη, τρυφηλή. Θέλουν άνέσεις, πολλά χρήματα, λίγη δουλειά, θέλουν να διασκεδάσουν, να χαρούν την ζωή τους. Κάνουν το πάν γι' αυτή τη ζωή, και νομίζουν ότι με την ανθρώπινη καταξίωση είναι σωστοί και ότι έπιτέλεσαν το έργο τους έδω πάνω στη γη. Και όταν λέω κάνουν το πάν το έννοω. Πατάνε στο πτώμα του διπλανού τους για να ίκανοποιησουν το θέλημά τους. Μη νομίζεις ότι τα λόγια αυτά είναι ύπερβολικά γιατί θα σου μιλήσω για τη ζωή του ανθρώπου από τη γέννησή του μέχρι το θάνατό του.

Ανάλυση Εύχης Όσιου Έφραϊμ του Σύρου

Αλέξανδρος Σμέμαν, από το βιβλίο «Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή», εκδόσεις «Ακρίτας».

Ανάμεσα σε όλες τις προσευχές και τους ύμνους της Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστής μπορεί να όνομαστέι ή προσευχή της Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστής. Η Παράδοση την άποδίδει σε έναν από τους μεγάλους δασκάλους της πνευματικής ζωής, τον Άγιο Έφραϊμ το Σύρο. Να το κείμενο της προσευχής:

«Κύριε και Δέσποτα της ζωής μου, πνεύμα άργίας, περιεργείας, φιλαρχίας και άργολογίας μη μοι δῶς.

Πνεύμα δέ σφροσუნης, ταπεινοφροσύνης, ύπομονής και άγάπης, χάρισάι μοι τῷ σῷ δούλῳ. Νάι, Κύριε Βασιλεῦ, δώρησαι μοι του όραν τα έμα πταισματα, και μη κατακρίνειν τον άδελφόν μου, ότι εύλογητός εί, εις τους αιῶνας τών αιῶνων.

Άμήν.»

Τούτη ή προσευχή λέγεται δύο φορές στο τέλος κάθε άκολουθίας της Μεγάλης Σαρακοστής από τη Δευτέρα ως την Παρασκευή. Την πρώτη φορά λέγοντας την προσευχή κάνουμε μία μεάνοια σε κάθε αίτηση. Έπειτα κάνουμε δώδεκα μεάνοιες λέγοντας: «Ό Θεός, ιλάσθητι μοι τῷ άμαρτωλῷ, και έλέησόν με». Όλόκληρη ή προσευχή έπαναλαμβάνεται με μία τελική μεάνοια στο τέλος της προσευχής.

Η Σημαντική Θέση της

Γιατί αυτή ή σύντομη και άπλη προσευχή κατέχει μία τόσο σημαντική θέση στην όλη λατρεία της Μεγάλης Σαρακοστής;

Διότι άπαριθμεί, με ένα μοναδικό τρόπο, όλα τα άρνητικά και τα θετικά στοιχεία της μεάνοιας και άποτελεί, θα λέγαμε, ένα «κανόνα έλέγχου» του προσωπικού μας άγώνα στην περίοδο της Μεγάλης Σαρακοστής. Αυτός ο άγώνας σκοπεύει πρώτα από όλα στην άπελευθέρωση μας από μερικές βασικές πνευματικές ασθένειες που διαμορφώνουν τη ζωή μας και μās κάνουν πραγματικά άνίσχυρους ακόμα και για να κάνουμε άρχη στροφής στο Θεό.

Η Άργία

Η βασική ασθένεια είναι ή άργία. Είναι ή παράξενη εκείνη τεμπελιά και ή παθητικότητα όλόκληρης της ύπαρξής μας, που πάντα μās σπρώχνει προς τα «κάτω» μάλλον παρὰ προς τα «πάνω» και που διαρκώς μās πείθει ότι δέν είναι δυνατό να αλλάξουμε και έπομένως δέ χρειάζεται να έπιθυμούμε την άλλαγή. Είναι ένας βαθιά ριζωμένος κυνισμός που σε κάθε πνευματική πρόκληση άπαντάει με το «γιατί;» και καταντάει την ζωή μας μία άπέραντη πνευματική φθορά. Αυτή είναι ή ρίζα όλης της άμαρτίας γιατί δηλητηριάζει κάθε πνευματική ενεργητικότητα στην πιό βαθιά της πηγή.

Ἡ Λιποψυχία

Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς «ἀργίας», εἶναι ἡ «λιποψυχία». Εἶναι μία κατάσταση δειλίας πού ὄλοι οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὴ θεώρησαν τὸ μεγαλύτερο κίνδυνο τῆς ψυχῆς. Ἡ λιποψυχία, ἡ ἀποθάρρυνση, εἶναι ἡ ἀνικανότητα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ βλέπει καθετὶ καλὸ ἢ θετικό. Εἶναι ἡ ἀναγωγή τῶν πάντων στὸν ἀρνητισμὸ καὶ στὴν ἀπαισιοδοξία. Εἶναι στὰ ἀλήθεια μία δαμονικὴ δύναμη μέσα μας γιατί ὁ Σατανᾶς εἶναι βασικᾶ ἕνας ψεύτης. Ψιθυρίζει ψευτιὲς στὸν ἄνθρωπο γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ γιὰ τὸν κόσμο, γεμίζει τὴ ζωὴ μὲ σκοτάδι καὶ ἀρνητισμὸ.

Ἡ λιποψυχία εἶναι ἡ αὐτοκτονία τῆς ψυχῆς, γιατί ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος κατέχεται ἀπὸ αὐτὴ, εἶναι ἐντελῶς ἀνίκανος νὰ δεῖ τὸ φῶς καὶ νὰ τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσει.

Ἡ Φιλαρχία

Πνεῦμα φιλαρχία! Φαίνεται παράξενο πὼς ἡ ἀργία καὶ ἡ λιποψυχία εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ἐκεῖνα πού γεμίζουν τὴ ζωὴ μας μὲ τὸν πόθο τῆς φιλαρχίας. Μολύνοντας ὅλη μας τὴν τοποθέτηση ἀπέναντι στὴ ζωὴ, κἀνοντας τὴν ἄδεια καὶ χωρὶς νόημα, μᾶς σπρώχνουν νὰ ἀναζητήσουμε ἀντιστάθμισμα σὲ μία ριζικὰ λανθασμένη στάση ἀπέναντι στὰ ἄλλα πρόσωπα.

Ἄν ἡ ζωὴ μου δὲν εἶναι προσανατολισμένη πρὸς τὸν Θεό, ἂν δὲν σκοπεύει σὲ αἰώνιες ἀξίες, ἀναπόφευκτα θὰ γίνῃ ἐγωιστικὴ καὶ ἐγκεντρικὴ, πράγμα πού σημαίνει ὅτι ὄλοι οἱ ἄλλοι γίνονται τὰ μέσα γιὰ τὴ δική μου αὐτοϊκανοποίηση. Ἄν ὁ Θεὸς δὲν εἶναι ὁ «Κύριος καὶ Δεσπότης τῆς ζωῆς μου», τότε τὸ ἐγὼ μου γίνεται ὁ κύριος καὶ δεσπότης μου, γίνεται τὸ ἀπόλυτο κέντρο τοῦ κόσμου μου καὶ ἀρχίζω νὰ ἐκτιμῶ καθετὶ μὲ βάση τὶς δικές μου ἀνάγκες, τὶς δικές μου ιδέες, τὶς δικές μου ἐπιθυμίες καὶ τὶς δικές μου κρίσεις.

Ἔτσι ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς φιλαρχίας γίνεται ἡ βασικὴ μου ἁμαρτία σὲ τὶς σχέσεις μὲ τὶς ἄλλες ὑπάρξεις, γίνεται μία ἀναζήτησις ὑποταγῆς τους σὲ μένα. Δὲν εἶναι πάντοτε ἀπαραίτητο νὰ ἐκφράζεται ἡ φιλαρχία μου σὰν ἐντονὴ ἀνάγκη νὰ διατάζω καὶ νὰ κηδεμονεύω τοὺς «ἄλλους». Μπορεῖ ἐπίσης νὰ ἐκφράζεται καὶ σὰν ἀδιαφορία, περιφρόνησις, ἔλλειψη ἐνδιαφέροντος, φροντίδας καὶ σεβασμοῦ. Καὶ εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ἡ «ἀργία», μαζὶ μὲ τὴ «λιποψυχία» πού ἀπευθύνονται αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ἔτσι συμπληρώνεται ἡ πνευματικὴ αὐτοκτονία μὲ τὴν πνευματικὴ δολοφονία.

Ἡ Ἀργολογία

Τέλος εἶναι ἡ ἀργολογία. Ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ δημιουργήματα μόνον ὁ ἄνθρωπος προικίστηκε μὲ τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ

λόγου. Ὅλοι οἱ Πατέρες βλέπουν σ' αὐτὸ τὸ χάρισμα τὴν ἀκριβὴ «σφραγίδα» τῆς Θείας Εἰκόνας στὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιατί ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεὸς ἀποκαλύφθηκε σὰν Λόγος (Ἰωάν. 1:1).

Ἀλλὰ ὄντας ὁ λόγος τὸ ὑψιστὸ δῶρο, ἔτσι εἶναι καὶ ὁ ἰσχυρότερος κίνδυνος. Ὅπως εἶναι ἡ κυρίαρχη ἔκφρασις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τὸ μέσο γιὰ τὴν προσωπικὴ του πλήρωσις, γιὰ τὸν ἴδιο λόγο, εἶναι καὶ τὸ μέσο γιὰ τὴν πτώσις του, γιὰ τὴν αὐτοκαταστροφὴ του, γιὰ τὴν προδοσία καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτία. Ὁ λόγος σώζει καὶ ὁ λόγος σκοτώνει ὁ λόγος ἐμπνέει καὶ ὁ λόγος δηλητηριάζει. Ὁ λόγος εἶναι τὸ μέσο τῆς Ἀλήθειας ἀλλὰ εἶναι καὶ μέσο γιὰ τὸ δαμονικὸ ψέμα.

ἔχοντας μία βασικᾶ θετικὴ δύναμη ὁ λόγος, ἔχει ταυτόχρονα καὶ μία τρομακτικὰ ἀρνητικὴ. Ὁ λόγος δηλαδὴ δημιουργεῖ θετικὰ ἢ ἀρνητικὰ. Ὅταν ἀποσπᾶται ἀπὸ τὴ Θεία καταγωγή καὶ τὸ Θεῖο σκοπὸ τοῦ γίνεται ἀργολογία. «Ἐνισχύει» τὴν ἀργία, τὴ λιποψυχία, καὶ τὴ φιλαρχία καὶ μετατρέπει τὴ ζωὴ σὲ κόλασι. Γίνεται ἡ κυρίαρχη δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας.

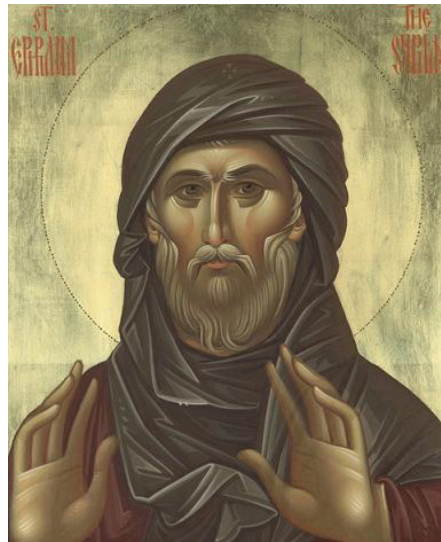
Αὐτὰ τὰ τέσσερα σημεῖα εἶναι οἱ ἀρνητικοὶ «στόχοι» τῆς μετάνοιας. Εἶναι τὰ ἐμπόδια πού πρέπει νὰ μετακινήθουν. Ἀλλὰ μόνον ὁ Θεὸς μπορεῖ νὰ τὰ μετακινήσει. Ἀκριβῶς γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ πρῶτο μέρος τῆς προσευχῆς αὐτῆς εἶναι μία κραυγὴ ἀπὸ τὰ βάθη τῆς καρδιάς τοῦ ἀβοήθητου ἀνθρώπου.

Στὴ συνέχεια ἡ προσευχὴ κινεῖται στοὺς θετικοὺς σκοποὺς τῆς μετάνοιας.

Ἡ Σωφροσύνη

Σωφροσύνη! Ἄν δὲν περιορίσουμε—πράγμα πού συχνὰ καὶ πολὺ λαθεμένα γίνετα—τὴν ἔννοια τῆς λέξης «σωφροσύνη» μόνον στὴ σαρκικὴ σημασία της, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ γίνῃ κατανοητὴ σὰν τὸ θετικὸ ἀντίστοιχο τῆς λέξης «ἀργία». «Ἀργία», πρῶτα ἀπὸ ὅλα, εἶναι ἡ ἀδράνεια, τὰ σπάσιμο τῆς διορατικότητας καὶ τῆς ἐνεργητικότητάς μας, ἡ ἀνικανότητα νὰ βλέπουμε καθολικά, σφαιρικά. Ἐπομένως αὐτὴ ἡ ὀλότητα εἶναι τὸ ἐντελῶς ἀντίθετο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀδράνεια.

Ἄν συνηθίζουμε μὲ τὴ λέξη σωφροσύνη νὰ ἐννοοῦμε τὴν ἀρετὴ τὴν ἀντίθετη ἀπὸ τὴ σαρκικὴ διαφθορὰ εἶναι γιατί ὁ διχασμένος χαρακτήρας μας, πουθενὰ ἀλλοῦ δὲν φαίνεται καλύτερα παρὰ στὴ σαρκικὴ ἐπιθυμία, πού εἶναι ἡ ἀλλοτρίωσις τοῦ σώματος ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὸν ἔλεγχον τοῦ πνεύματος. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἐπαναφέρει τὴν «ὀλότητα» (τὴ σωφροσύνη) μέσα μας καὶ τὸ κάνει αὐτὸ ἀποκαθιστώντας τὴν ἀληθινὴ κλίμακα τῶν ἀξιών, μὲ τὸ νὰ μᾶς ὀδηγεῖ πίσω στὸ Θεό.



Ἡ Ταπεινοφροσύνη

Ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὑπέροχος καρπὸς τῆς σωφροσύνης εἶναι ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη. Πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα εἶναι ἡ νίκη τῆς ἀλήθειας μέσα μας, ἡ ἀπομάκρυνση τοῦ ψεύδους μέσα στὸ ὁποῖο ζοῦμε. Μόνο ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη εἶναι ἄξια τῆς ἀλήθειας· μόνο με αὐτὴ δηλαδή μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ δεῖ καὶ δεχτεῖ τὰ πράγματα ὅπως εἶναι καὶ ἔτσι νὰ δεῖ τὸ Θεό, τὸ μεγαλεῖο Του, τὴν καλωσύνη Του καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη Του στὸ καθετί. Νὰ γιατί, ὅπως ξέρουμε, ὁ Θεὸς «*ὑπερηφάνοις ἀντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσι χάριν*».

Ἡ Ὑπομονή

Μετὰ τὴ σωφροσύνη καὶ τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνη, κατὰ φυσικὸ τρόπο, ἀκολουθεῖ ἡ ὑπομονή. Ὁ «φυσικὸς» ἢ «πεπτωκῶς» ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἀνυπόμονος, γιατί εἶναι τυφλὸς γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του, καὶ βιαστικὸς στὸ νὰ κρίνει καὶ νὰ καταδικάσει τοὺς ἄλλους. Μὲ διασπαρμένη, ἀτελὴ καὶ διαστρεβλωμένη γνώση τῶν πραγμάτων ποὺ ἔχει, μετράει τὰ πάντα με βάση τὴς δικῆς του προτιμήσεις καὶ τὴς δικῆς του ιδέας. Ἀδιαφορεῖ γιὰ τὸν καθένα γύρω του ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτό του, θέλει ἡ ζωὴ του νὰ εἶναι πετυχημένη τώρα, αὐτὴ τὴ στιγμή.

Ἡ ὑπομονή, βέβαια, εἶναι μία ἀληθινὰ Θεϊκὴ ἀρετή. Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι ὑπομονετικὸς ὄχι γιατί εἶναι «συγκαταβατικὸς», ἀλλὰ γιατί βλέπει τὸ βάθος ὅλων τῶν πραγμάτων, γιατί ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ πραγματικότητά τους, τὴν ὁποία ἐμεῖς με τὴν τυφλότητά μας δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ δοῦμε, εἶναι ἀνοιχτὴ σὲ Αὐτόν. Ὅσο πιὸ κοντὰ ἐρχόμαστε στὸ Θεὸ τόσο περισσότερο ὑπομονετικοὶ γινόμαστε καὶ τόσο πιὸ πολὺ ἀντανακλοῦμε αὐτὴ τὴν ἀπέραντη ἐκτίμηση γιὰ ὅλα τα ὄντα, πράγμα ποὺ εἶναι ἡ κύρια ιδιότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἡ Ἀγάπη

Τέλος, τὸ ἀποκορύφωμα καὶ ὁ καρπὸς ὅλων των ἀρετῶν, κάθε καλλιέργειας καὶ κάθε προσπάθειας, εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη ποῦ, ὅπως ἔχουμε πεῖ, μπορεῖ νὰ δοθεῖ μόνο ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό, εἶναι τὸ δῶρο ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ σκοπὸ ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ σκοπὸ γιὰ κάθε πνευματικὴ προετοιμασία καὶ ἄσκηση.

Ἡ Ὑπερηφάνεια

Ὅλα αὐτὰ συγκεφαλαιώνονται στὴν τελικὴ αἴτηση τῆς προσευχῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐφραίμ με τὴν ὁποία ζητᾶμε: «*...δώρησαι μοὶ τοῦ ὁρᾶν τὰ ἐμὰ παιίσματα, καὶ μὴ κατακρίνειν τὸν ἀδελφόν μου...*». Ἐδῶ τελικὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει παρὰ μόνο ἓνας κίνδυνος: ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια. Ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια εἶναι ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ κακοῦ καὶ ὅλο το κακὸ εἶναι ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετὸ γιὰ μένα νὰ βλέπω τὰ «ἐμὰ παιίσματα» γιατί ἀκόμα καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ φαινομενικὴ ἀρετὴ μπορεῖ νὰ μετατραπῆ σὲ ὑπερηφάνεια.

Τὰ πατερικὰ κείμενα εἶναι γεμάτα ἀπὸ προειδοποιήσεις γιὰ τὴν ὑπουλὴ μορφὴ ψευτοευσέβειας ἢ ὁποία στὴν πραγματικότητά με τὸ κάλυμμα τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης

καὶ τῆς αὐτομεμψίας μπορεῖ νὰ ὀδηγήσει σὲ μία πραγματικὰ δαιμονικὴ ὑπερηφάνεια. Ἀλλὰ ὅταν βλέπουμε τὰ δικὰ μας σφάλματα καὶ δὲν κατακρίνουμε τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας, ὅταν με ἄλλα λόγια, ἡ σωφροσύνη, ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη, ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη γίνονται ἓνα σὲ μᾶς, τότε καὶ μόνο τότε ὁ αἰώνιος ἐχθρὸς—ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια—θὰ ἀφανιστεῖ μέσα μας.

Στὴ συνεχῆ καὶ δύσκολη προσπάθεια τῆς πνευματικῆς ἀνάρρωσής μας, ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν ξεχωρίζει τὴν ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα. Ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος ἀπομακρύνθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό· ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ ἀνορθωθεῖ, ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ γυρίσει. Ἡ καταστροφή τῆς ἀμαρτίας ὑπάρχει ὅταν νικάει ἡ σὰρκα—τὸ ζῶδες, τὸ παράλογο, ἡ σαρκικὴ ἐπιθυμία μέσα μας—τὰ πνευματικὸ καὶ τὸ Θεῖο. Ἀλλὰ τὰ σῶμα εἶναι δοξασμένο, τὸ σῶμα εἶναι ἅγιο, τόσο ἅγιο ποῦ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεὸς «*σὰρξ ἐγένετο*».

Ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ μετάνοια, ἐπομένως, δὲν εἶναι ἡ περιφρόνηση τοῦ σώματος οὔτε ἡ παραμέλησή του, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἀποκατάσταση τοῦ σώματος στὴν πραγματικὴ του λειτουργικότητα ποὺ εἶναι ἡ ἔκφραση καὶ ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ πνεύματος, ὁ ναὸς τῆς ἀνεκτίμητης ἀνθρώπινης ψυχῆς.

Ἡ Χριστιανικὴ ἀσκητικὴ εἶναι ἀγώνας ὄχι κατὰ ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος—ψυχὴ καὶ σῶμα—μετανοεῖ. Τὸ σῶμα παίρνει μέρος στὴν προσευχὴ τῆς ψυχῆς καθὼς αὐτὴ προσεύχεται μέσα στὸ σῶμα καὶ διὰ τοῦ σώματος. Ἔτσι οἱ γονυκλισίες, τὰ «ψυχοσωματικὰ» δείγματα τῆς μετάνοιας, τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης, τῆς λατρείας καὶ τῆς ὑπακοῆς, εἶναι μία ἱεροτελεστία κατ' ἐξοχὴν τῆς Μεγάλης Σαρακοστῆς.



Εἶναι θανάσιμο ἀμάρτημα νὰ κουραζόμεθα γιὰ τὸ Θεό, καὶ ὕστερα νὰ μετανιώνουμε καὶ νὰ γογγύζουμε. Κατάλαβέ το καλά. Χωρὶς σωματικὸ κόπο, δὲν κερδίζεται ἡ ἀρετὴ, ξάπλα στὸ κρεβάτι! Ὁ σωματικὸς κόπος εἶναι τὸ μεγαλύτερο δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας. Γιὰ τὴν ἀπόκτηση τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ ἄλλοι με χαρὰ ἐδέχοντο ἐξευτελισμοὺς, κόπους, κι ἐσὺ ὑποφέρεις; Ἡ μεγαλύτερη ἀμαρτία εἶναι, ἐνῶ κοπιᾶζουμε γιὰ τὸ Χριστό, ὕστερα νὰ μετανιώνουμε καὶ νὰ ὑποφέρουμε.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει θάνατος, μὴ φοβᾶσαι τὸ θάνατο. Ὅποιος πέθανε γιὰ τὸ Χριστό, δὲν ὑπάρχει γι' αὐτὸν θάνατος. Κι ἂν δὲν πέθανες, νὰ πεθάνεις.

Ὅσιος Πορφύριος ὁ Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

Τὸ Ἀντιεκκλησιαστικὸ καὶ Ἀντιμοναχικὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς Δύσης

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τοῦ Γερομονάχου Σάββα Ἀγιορείτου «Τὰ Ἀσκητικά τῆς Ἑνορίας».



Πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν αἵρε-
τικὴ ἐκτροπὴ,
στὸ Δυτικὸ Ρωμαϊκὸ
κράτος ἐπικρατοῦσε
ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία. Πρέ-
πει νὰ τονισθεῖ
ὅτι ἡ Παράδοση
τοῦ φωτισμοῦ μὲ
νοερὰ προσευχὴ
καὶ ἡ Παράδοση

τῆς θεώσεως ὑπῆρχε ἰσχυρῶς ριζωμένη στὴν Δυτικὴ Ρωμηοσύνη, ὅταν οἱ Γερμανικὲς φυλὲς τὴν κατέκτησαν. Παρὰ ταῦτα, ἡ Παράδοση ἐξαφανίστηκε ἀπὸ τὴν λεγομένη σχολαστικὴ θεολογία τῶν φυλῶν αὐτῶν. Ἡ ἀλλοίωση τῆς θεολογίας ἐπέφερε καὶ τὴν ἀλλοίωση τῆς ζωῆς.

Στὴν Δύση, μετὰ τὴν ἀποκρυστάλλωση τῆς αἵρεσης καὶ τὴν ἀποκοπὴ τῆς ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξο Ἐκκλησία, τὴν μόνη ἀληθινὴ Ἐκκλησία, ὁ δυτικὸς ἄνθρωπος ἔχασε τὴν Θεία Χάρη. Ὡς γνωστὸν ἡ Θεία Χάρη παρέχεται μόνο στὴν Ἐκκλησία στὴν Ὅποια ἐντάσσονται καὶ παραμένουν ὅσοι πιστεύουν ἀλλὰ καὶ ζοῦν Ὁρθόδοξα.

Ἡ ἀλλοίωση-ἀπώλεια τῆς δογματικῆς ἀλήθειας ὁδηγεῖ στὴν ἀπώλεια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος μᾶς εἶπε ὅτι «Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ἡ Ἀλήθεια». Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ κατ' ἐξοχὴν Πρόσωπο καὶ Πρότυπο μᾶς. Ἡ Δύση, μὲ τὴν ἀλλοίωση τοῦ δόγματος (εἰσαγωγὴ τοῦ filioque καὶ πολλῶν ἄλλων αἱρέσεων), ἔχασε τὸ πρότυπο τοῦ αὐθεντικοῦ ἀνθρώπου, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ δυτικοὶ ἄνθρωποι ἀλλοτριώθηκαν. Ἡ Δύση ἔχασε τὸν Θεάνθρωπο.

«Ἐξὼ ἀπὸ Ἐκεῖνον» θὰ μᾶς πεῖ ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς «ὁ ἄνθρωπος μετατρέπεται σὲ φάντασμα, σὲ σκιάχτρο, σὲ κάτι ἀνοημάτιστο. Ἔτσι, στὴ θέσι τοῦ... ἀνθρώπου θὰ βρεῖτε ὑπολείμματα ἀνθρώπου, ἀποσπάσματα ἀνθρώπου, τεμάχια ἀνθρώπου. Ἐνεκα τούτου καὶ ἡ ἀληθινὴ ἀνθρωπιὰ βρίσκεται μονάχα στὴν Θεανθρωπότητα».

Ἡ ζωὴ (τὸ ἦθος) στὴ Δύση ἀπομακρύνθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ ἦθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Λόγω τῆς δογματικῆς νόθευσης, μὲ τὴν σειρὰ τους νοθεύθηκαν καὶ ἀπαξιώθηκαν τόσο ἡ μοναχικὴ ὅσο καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ θεολογία. Δὲν ἀνέπαυε πλέον τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἡ Δυτικὴ θεολογία καὶ ἡ σύστοιχη μ' αὐτὴν ζωὴ γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι στὴν Δύση στράφηκαν ἐναντίον τῆς μὲ τὴν Μεταρρύθμιση καὶ τὸν Διαφωτισμό.

Τὸ ἀντιμοναχικὸ καὶ ἀντιεκκλησιαστικὸ (ἀντι-κληρικὸ) πνεῦμα κυριάρχησε στὸν Δυτικὸ κόσμον καὶ μὲσω τῶν νεοελλήνων διαφωτιστῶν ἤλθε καὶ στὴν Ρωμηοσύνη ποὺ πάλευε νά... ἐλευθερωθεῖ. Τελικὰ ἐλευθερώθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους καὶ σκλαβώθηκε στοὺς ἀπογόνους τῶν Φράγκων!

Ἡ παιδεία, τὸ Πανεπιστήμιο ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ θεολογικὲς σχολὲς στὸ νέο Ἑλληνικὸ κράτος θεμελιώθηκαν μὲ βάση τὶς δυτικὲς ἀρχὲς τοῦ Διαφωτισμοῦ, τῆς αὐτονόμησης ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τῆς ἀποθέωσης τῆς ἀνθρώπινης λογικῆς καὶ δύναμης.

Χαρακτηριστικὸς εἶναι ὁ εἰδωλολατρικὸς ὄρκος ποὺ δίνουν οἱ ἀπόφοιτοι τῶν ἀνωτάτων ἐκπαιδευτικῶν ἰδρυμάτων μας. Ὁ ἄλλοτε Ὁρθόδοξος λαὸς μας— μὲ τὴν συμβολὴ καὶ «συμβουλὴ» τῆς ἀντορθόδοξης παιδείας καὶ τῆς ἄθειας «διαφώτισης»—συνέλαβε τότε στὸ ὑποσυνειδητό του τὸ ἔκτρομα τῆς Δύσης: τὸ ἀντιμοναχικὸ-ἀντικληρικὸ πνεῦμα ποὺ διαπιστώνουμε νὰ ὑπάρχει σήμερον σὲ πάρα πολλοὺς νεοέλληνες.

Ὡστόσο, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, ἀπὸ τότε μέχρι σήμερον δὲν ἔπαυσαν νὰ ὑπάρχουν καὶ οἱ ὑγιεῖς φωνές: οἱ Ἁγιοί μας, οἱ ὁποῖοι μὲ στεντορεία φωνὴ φανέρωναν καὶ φανερῶνουν αὐτὴν τὴν ἀλλοτριώση τοῦ Ὁρθό-δοξου ἠθους.

Ἡ ἐπιστροφή στὴν Ἱερὰ Ὁρθόδοξη Παράδοσή μας θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἔξοδος ἀπὸ τὸ ἀδιέξοδο τῆς Δυτικῆς ἀλλοτριώσης ποὺ βιώνουμε.



Ὁ Ἄμμοῦν, νέος κι ἀρχάριος, ἀκόμη μοναχός, πῆγε νὰ συμβουλευθῆ τὸν ὄσιο Ποιμένα:

—Ὅταν ἔρχεται κανένας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς στὸ κελλί μου ἢ ἐγὼ πηγαίνω στὸ δικό του γιὰ δουλειά, ἀποφεύγομε τὶς συζητήσεις ἀπὸ φόβο μὴ πέσωμε σ' ἀργολογία, τοῦ εἶπε.

—Καλὰ κάνετε, ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Γέροντας. Ἡ νεότης ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ πολλὴ προσοχή.

—Τί ἔκαναν οἱ Πατέρες σὲ τέτοια περίπτωσι; Ζήτησε νὰ μάθῃ ὁ Ἄμμοῦν.

—Ἐκεῖνοι παιδί μου, οὔτε στὸ στόμα οὔτε στὴν καρδιά εἶχαν τίποτε περιττό, γιὰ νὰ συζητήσουν. Ἔτσι δὲν εἶχαν φόβο νὰ πέσουν σ' ἀργολογία.

—Ὅταν βρεθῶ στὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ κουβεντιάσω μὲ κάποιον, ρώτησε πάλι ὁ νέος, τί εἶναι καλλίτερα νὰ πῶ; Λόγια τῆς Γραφῆς ἢ τῶν Πατέρων;

—Ἄν δὲν μπορῆς νὰ σωπάσης,—πράγμα ὀρθότερο γιὰ τοὺς νέους—προτίμησε τοὺς λόγους τῶν Πατέρων, ποὺ εἶναι πρακτικώτεροι, ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Ὅσιος. Τὰ λόγια τῆς Γραφῆς, οὔτε εὐκόλα οὔτε ἀντιληπτά εἶναι ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς.

Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸν

THE MYTH OF THE OCTOPUS

By Photios Kontoglou, originally published in 1949 (translated from Greek by the staff of "Orthodox Heritage").



In our days many new forms of "religions" have appeared; these religions are created by and often represent the unbelievers and the atheists. One of them is tourism; yes, tourism. Tourism was born out of the time-wasting, empty and void-of-any-value curiosity of men who want to "scratch and learn" without giving any credence or importance

to what they hear or see. Most tourists are indeed bored with their lives and want to spend their time neither contemplating about the ancient monuments nor the history lessons provided to them by their travel guides. The whole scene reminds one of a host who prepares a banquet, invites to a table, and cares for dinner guests who are suffering from anorexia. What the tourist guides tell them enters from one ear and exits from the other.

Who, however, has the courage to address with honesty and (apparent) disrespect this new goddess of our age, the tourist industry and her entertainment value; After all, she brings along with her a big dowry! This complete lack of courageous feedback is very characteristic of our age; our world sanctifies and eulogizes whatever brings in money. Who could possibly dare say anything against them? You have insulted Mohammad, you have insulted Mammon.

And as if it was not enough that tourism has filled the museums with a crowd of people of every race, who stare in space with a brochure in hand and with a camera hanging from their shoulders; and as if it was not enough that every isolated mountain that has two broken columns or a carved marble on it, has been stepped upon and trashed; and as if it was not enough that there has not been any hidden mystery of the ancient world left unbothered; nor tomb which has not been opened so that the sleepy sightseers could look in; nowadays they also enter into our churches and remote chapels, in which our people pray! They stand there, with complete indifference and reverence, without making the sign of the Cross, with their hands behind their backs; all these unfortunate people are fully indifferent, unconcerned and insensitive as to their whereabouts and the holy ground upon which they are standing and by which they are surrounded.

Tourism has taken over everything and commands all. In its royal presence all doors have been opened in order to be

welcomed, doors of castles which have never been conquered by warriors, doors of monasteries which have been locked a thousand times, cells, caves and hermitages where holy men once lived, hidden away from the world. Holy altars, baskets for the holy bread, Communion cups, and reliquaries with holy relics have unashamedly been taken out into the open in order that curious tourists can "see" them and snap photographs.

Lastly, the great fortress of Orthodoxy, Mount Athos, our Holy Mountain has surrendered to tourism as well. In this garden of the Virgin Mary, where in accordance with Her will, a feminine foot has never dared step upon it, either human or animal, now come and go thousands of men from all races. Men who arrive with pipes in their mouths, others with short pants, yet others half-naked, talking, laughing, and with complete lack of comprehension about the holiness of the ground upon which they are standing. They are there to "have fun," to get some rest, away from their tiring jobs, their businesses, machinery, trains, from planes, ships, cars, theaters, steam baths, hotels, and everything else that they are involved in back at their homelands. Unfortunately, their arrival brings along with them the stench of all these things and thus, unable to feel anything; they are non-contrite, and remain totally alien to the ancient miraculous mysteries which are concealed within the Holy Mountain.

And it all becomes too clear: there exists no way for anyone to convey and pass forward that spiritual fragrance to tourists who in their absolute majority are completely void of any spiritual awareness. How can they possibly feel what they see and hear since such feelings are the super-substantial fruits and the revelations of piety, of prayer, of compunction, of the mystery of divine *theoria*? And it is certainly not the fault of the visiting tourists; many of them are innocent and humble men and with the best intentions. But they are totally removed from the spiritual state that allows one to realize with absolute clarity that this place is not a place for recreation, walking, or fun and learning; instead, it is a place that is best described with the following inscription written all over it: *This is a place of frightful respect! For this is nothing else but the house of God and the gate of heaven.* These unfortunate people remain unaware of the spiritual reality of that what they see and hear, for such awareness is not comprehended through one's mind. How could they possibly achieve such a state, in such a short time, when even their local tourist guides remain foreign to these concepts? They are equally unable of comprehending the true significance and despite the knowledge they have acquired about the Holy Mountain and its holy contents, such knowledge remains superficial, mechanical, shallow and artificial, because *one's relationship with God can only be accomplished through spiritual awareness and the blessings of prayer and true sacrifice.*

This is not a place to find answers brought forth through ordinary and sinful human curiosity; it is instead a place where people have forsaken the world and where they are spiritually struggling, engaged in spiritual warfare. They subject their bodies to continuous suffering, turning themselves over completely to God's will with non-stop fasting, with their hands held up high towards the heavens, remaining speechless for years, with their hearts securely shut towards any outside worldly contact. It is by mistake that you tourists found your way here. You are looking to please your senses and your body, but here, where your travel guides have brought you, is a place of joyful mourning. All those who lived and still live here cannot and will not bring you the joy that you seek, because they live with the constant pain of the heart, and they are made warm only through their zeal towards the salvation of their souls. Why is it then that you have come here, as if you have arrived and sat at a wedding banquet table, while in reality this is a place whose inhabitants maintain the constant memory of death and their sighs are those of a sad calling out to God?

The current enemies of our religion are more dangerous than the old ones, because they deceive us with their peaceful mannerisms and thus seem innocent and unable of inflicting any harm upon us or our families. This is how the so called "goods of modern civilization" are, the many conveniences which make life easy. They are poisoned traps and they are many: the modern arts and cinemas, the many other forms of entertainment, tourism itself, etc. These enemies seem innocent and unable to harm us, because they are not savages and do not reveal their intentions but are surreptitious and do their harm without being noticed. From the first enemies you can protect yourself but from the latter you cannot, until it is too late and they have completely swallowed you in their modern ways. This is best exemplified by the following old sea legend:

There was a mother octopus resting with her little child octopus at the bottom of the sea. There, the little octopus is being caught with a fishing spear and is being taken up. The little octopus calls out to his mother:

--They have caught me mother! She replies to him: Do not be afraid my child! The little octopus calls out again:

--They are taking me out from the water mother! Do not be afraid my child!

--They are frizzling me mother! Do not be afraid my child!

--They are cutting me with a knife! Don't be afraid!

--They are boiling me in a pot! Don't be afraid!

--They are eating me, they are chewing me! Do not be afraid my child!

--They are swallowing me! Do not be afraid!

--They are drinking wine, mother! Oh! I lost you my child!...

The myth wants to say that all the hard ordeals which were

inflicted on the octopus, did not cause death: neither the catching, neither the frizzling, neither the cooking, neither the chewing. But when his mother heard that the people who caught and ate him were drinking wine in order to digest him, she called out: "I lost you, my child!" The wine, which seems to be the tamest thing when compared with the knife and the chewing, in reality becomes the biggest enemy for the octopus.

This is also how things are for us Greeks. Many devastating whirlwinds have passed from our land, all sorts of savages, murderers with swords, spears and every kind of weapon. The enemies were many: Persians, Germans, Franks, Arabs, Turks and so many others. They slaughtered us, they cut us in pieces, they hanged us, they have put us on stakes; but we did not die because our struggle made us solid as steel, we returned fire to fire, and we did so with all of our savage enemies which could be seen or realized, throughout our multi-thousands year history.

But now, in today's world, the enemies have changed appearance, they have become surreptitious, with a smile on their lips, deceiving friends, that seem harmless, and even pose as our benefactors and with many good intentions. These are the goods that we reaped through the many gifts of modern society, machinery and all other twentieth century conveniences, electric washers, airplanes, cinema, radio, nudity and others which stand to paralyze us and leave us without religion, without tradition, without family, without anything of ours.

One of these surreptitious goods of our world is tourism, which stands to serve as the innocent wine that kills the octopus, while neither the knife, nor the teeth managed to truly subdue him.



Our Lord calls blessed all those who are opposed to worldly possessions, saying: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Why to the words, *Blessed are the poor*, does He add, *in spirit*? So that by this would be shown that He considers blessedness to be the humility of the soul.

Why did He not say, "blessed are the poor-spirited"—and thus would be demonstrated the humility of thinking—but rather He says, *poor in spirit*? By this He wants to teach us that bodily poverty is also a blessedness, in that through this one can receive the kingdom of heaven, when it is done for the sake of the humility of the soul. This is the case when bodily poverty is united with the humility of the soul, and when it is for the person the principle of humility of the soul. Having called blessed *those poor in spirit*, He demonstrated in a wonderful way what are the root and cause of the visible poverty of the saints—that is, their spirit.

St. Gregory Palamas

THE WEDDING GARMENT

By Pope Saint Gregory the Great.

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. [Mt 22:11]

† † †

What is meant, brethren, by this wedding garment? It cannot signify either baptism or faith, because who can enter this marriage feast without baptism or without faith? Because undoubtedly the mere fact of not believing excludes one from the Church.

So what can we understand by this wedding garment but charity? We must suppose then, that this man enters without a wedding garment who is a member of our Holy Church by reason of his faith, but who lacks charity. It is so called with good reason because our Maker wore it when He came as a bridegroom to unite Himself to the Church. There was no other means than God's love by which the Only-begotten could unite the souls of the elect with Himself. This is why John tells us: *God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son* (Jn 3:16). He who came to men for love's sake, calls this love the wedding garment.

All of you, then, who are members of the Church and believe in God have indeed come to the marriage, but you are without a wedding garment if you discard the cloak of charity. If any of you is invited to an earthly wedding, he changes his dress so that he may show the groom and bride his participation in their joy; he would be ashamed to appear shabbily dressed among the guests and merry-makers. We assist at God's marriage feast and nevertheless, we are loath to undergo a change of heart. The angels rejoice when they see God's chosen ones admitted into heaven. How do we visualize this spiritual banquet, those of us who lack that festive garment which is the only one that gives us beauty in God's sight?

We must remember that, as a cloth is woven between two wooden frames, one above and the other below, thus also charity is founded on two precepts: the love of God and the love of our neighbor. For it is written: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength ... and thy neighbor as thyself.* (Mk 12:30). It is worth noting here that a limit and measure is set to the love of our neighbor, as we read: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.* The love of God, however, is

marked by no limit, as we are told: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength.* We are not told, then, how much we must love, but the manner in which we must do so: with everything we have. For only he truly loves God who does not think of himself.

It is necessary to observe these two precepts of charity if we desire to be found wearing the wedding garment. This is what the prophet Ezekiel means when he tells us that the front of the gate of the city built on a mountain measures *two cubits* (Ezek 40:9); for undoubtedly we cannot enter the heavenly city if in this church, which is called the gate because it is outside that city, we have no love for God or man. As we see also in the book of Exodus that it is prescribed that the curtains destined for the tabernacle should be dyed twice *in scarlet* coloring (Exod 26:1). You, my brethren, you are



the curtains of the tabernacle, veiling by virtue of your faith the heavenly mysteries in your hearts. But the curtains of the tabernacle must be twice dyed in scarlet. That is a color like fire. And what is charity, if it is not fire? But this charity must be twice dyed, that is, steeped in the love of God and in the love of our neighbor.

The man who loves God so that his contemplation leads him to forget his neighbor has indeed the color of scarlet, but not twice dyed. Again, he who loves his neighbor, but whose love leads him to forget God, has the color of scarlet but with a single dye. In order that your charity may be steeped in both, you must be inflamed with love of God and of your neighbor, so that compassion for your fellow-man does not induce you to abandon contemplation of God, nor an excessive desire for that contemplation make you cast aside all pity. So, every man who lives among other men should seek God, the object of his longings, but in such a fashion as not to abandon his neighbor; and he should help his neighbor in such a way that it will never check his progress towards God to Whom he speeds.

We know that the love which we owe to our neighbor is sub-divided into two precepts, as we read in Scripture: *See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another* (Tob 4:16), and Christ tells us: *As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them.* (Mt 7:12). If we act towards our neighbor as we should like him to act towards us, and avoid doing to others what would be displeasing to us ourselves, then we observe the law of

charity. But no one should think that he observes this law merely because he loves his neighbor; he must examine first the motive behind his love. For he who loves others, but not for God's sake, has not charity, even though he may think he has.

True charity lies in loving our friend with and in God, and our enemy for God's sake. He loves for God's sake, who loves even those by whom he is not loved. Charity is usually proved only by the opposing trial of hatred. So that our Lord says, *Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you.* (Lk 6:27). The man who loves his avowed enemies is following this command.

Great and sublime are these precepts and often hard to obey; nevertheless they constitute the wedding garment. And that man who is without it has good grounds to fear that the king, at his coming, will cast him out. For we are told: The king went in to see the guests; and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment. It is we, brethren, who attend the marriage of the Word; who believe in the Church, are nourished by the Scriptures, and rejoice in the union of God with the Church. I would have you consider very carefully whether you attend the feast in the wedding garment. Weigh your actions in your heart one by one; whether you foster hatred of anyone, whether you envy the good fortune of others or through malice seek to injure them.

See the King entering the feast, see how He scrutinizes the disposition of our heart. To that man whom He finds stripped of charity, He says in rapid anger: *Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment?* It is striking, dearly beloved, that He calls this man "friend" at the same time as He reproves him, as if His real meaning were: Friend and no friend; friend by faith and no friend by his actions. But He was silent, since—with what pain we must say it—in that final judgment no word of excuse can help us, for He who accuses us outwardly is also He who accuses the soul's interior depths, who is a Witness of our conscience. And yet we cannot forget that, if anyone has this garment of virtue, although not perfectly woven, he should not despair of obtaining the forgiveness of this merciful King when He comes, since He Himself gives us this hope when He says through the Psalmist, *Thine eyes did see my imperfect being, and in thy book all shall be written.* (Pss 138:16). We have said these words for the consolation of those who have charity, although weak.

We must speak now of those who lack it altogether. The Gospel continues: *Then the king said to the waiters: Bind him hand and foot ... and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* (Mt 22:13). That rigorous sentence will bind the hands and feet of those who do not restrain themselves now from wicked actions by amending their life. In other words, suffering will bind hereafter those

whom guilt binds here. The feet which refuse to visit the sick, the hands which refuse to help the needy, are now voluntarily unbound to any good works. Therefore the willing slave of vice here upon earth will hereafter be the unwilling prisoner of endless torments.

It is apt to say that he is cast into the outer darkness. Interior darkness is the blindness of the heart, while the outer darkness belongs to the everlasting night of damnation. That man is damned, then, who is banished into outer, not interior, darkness for he is expelled against his will into the night of condemnation who, in this life, fell willingly into blindness of heart. It is said that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth; the teeth of those who satiated themselves in their intemperance on earth will be set on edge in hell; their eyes will weep because in life they satisfied them with the sight of unlawful things. In this way, each member will suffer a particular torment as here it was used for the satisfaction of a particular vice.

But now that one man has been expelled, one who represents all the various types of evil, a general warning to all is given: *Many are called, but few are chosen.* (Mt 22:14). This is indeed a terrible sentence, my dear brethren. Consider that all of us have been called, by faith, to the marriage of the Heavenly King. We all believe and confess the mystery of His Incarnation, sharing in the banquet of the divine Word. But at a future date the King of Judgment is to come. We know that we have been called; we do not know whether we have been chosen. It is all the more necessary, therefore, that we abase ourselves with humility, since we have not this certainty.

There are some who never tried to do good; there are others who, although they began once, failed to persevere. We see one man pass nearly all his life in wickedness, but as he nears its end he returns to God by repentance and true penance. Another may seem to live the life of a saint, but end his days by falling into error and malice. One begins well and ends better; another plunges into evil from an early age and goes from bad to worse throughout his days. Each man, then, must live in fear, for he does not know what is to come, since we must never forget, but rather often repeat and meditate on the words: *Many are called but few are chosen.*



He who busies himself with the sins of others or judges his brother on suspension has not yet even begun to repent or examine himself, so as to discover his own sins.

St. Maximos the Confessor

COUNT THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST: “666”

By Rassophore-monk Vsevolod, Holy Trinity Monastery, 1998.

From the Editor: *The subject article is, in our opinion, completely in line with other Orthodox commentaries (e.g., St. Andrew of Ceasarea). The author inserts his opinion relative to the “mark” as if it is fact; there exist several other interpretations, including the one, for example by St. Paisios the Athonite. St. Paisios, as well as many other 20th century Fathers of the Church, insisted that the mark of the beast shall be in line with current technological developments such as the well publicized RFID. In our next issue, we will include an article by St. Paisios so that a balanced view on this greatly important topic is presented. As far as the subject article, we agree with the author’s recommendation that the faithful avoid falling into fatal extremes on this matter and instead, focus upon spiritual growth, faith and readiness towards the great temptations that are ever-increasing all around us.*

† † †

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

Saint Hippolytus of Rome, “Discourse on the End of the World and on Antichrist”

† † †

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

of Antichrist, everyone will be offered to receive the mark of the beast, and therefore Christians ought to know the essence of what this means and just what this number signifies.

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

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

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

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



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

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

These confessions may be said to contain fragments of true revelation. If Satan did not exist, one could say that these pagan peoples revered the true God-in-Trinity, even though their concepts of just Who this is were in many ways distorted. But because the world of dark spirituality is in fact a distorted representation of the Divine world, and the devil in his actions imitates God in a distorted fashion, it follows that the distorted divinity of the pagans is a false god, endeavoring to pass for the true God. Through the lips of the Prophet David, the Church warns us that *all the gods of the heathen are devils* (Pss 95:5). It is evident that, under the guise of these pagan “trinities,” Satan himself is concealed together with his minions. This is iconographically supported: In the Christian art of Europe and Abyssinia one finds three-headed, three-faced or three-horned depictions of Satan, symbols of the Satanic false trinity. Two thousand years ago, as Christianity spread throughout the world, it disarmed and bound the religion of Satan, as this was manifest in numerous pagan cults. In the time of Antichrist this religion of evil will again, in one form or another, come to dominate the world.

In what will the religion of Antichrist consist? It is enigmatically expressed for us by the Apostle as the number 666. As we see, this number is composed of three sixes: six hundreds, six tens and six ones. If we turn to Holy Scripture, we see that the number six rarely figures in either the Old or New Testaments, whereas the number seven is used in the Bible as a symbol of completeness, of fulfillment, of perfection, of wholeness (often in the sense of absolute perfection). In Christ, humanity is shown an example of *the fullness of the Godhead*

(Col 2:9). The Antichrist, by contrast, will unite in himself all incompleteness, all imperfection, and deficiency. The symbol of imperfection—that seeks to appear as perfection—is none other than the number six. In the number of the beast this imperfection is raised to its extreme: it is not merely six, but six hundred, sixty-six!

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

The “moral” teaching of Satan can also be expressed as a type of triune evil: evil reasoning, evil feelings, and evil will. This anti-moral teaching can also be symbolically expressed by the name of the beast, more precisely, by the tripartite number of this name. For this reason, the acceptance of this name of Antichrist in the form of some seal will in fact be a denial of Christ and His Church.

The son of perdition, the Antichrist, inasmuch as he is a man, will give the devil the possibility—through him—to act openly in the world, and, with the help of the false prophet, to deceive and destroy people. The greater part of humanity will gladly accept this proud message of the man-god, whose principal postulates will be: “Man! Know that your ‘I’ is a part of the divinity. You are truly a god! You are a law unto yourself. No one has any authority over your ‘I.’ An example for you is your messiah [Antichrist], a great man, who knows that he is a god!” The false religion of Antichrist can be characterized as a humanist religion, in the sense that it is not divine; it is vain, transitory. This is why the number of the beast is called in the Apocalypse, *the number of a man* (Rev 13:18). The number of a man is the name of the man-Antichrist, who will reveal himself to be a god, but who in essence will be merely a pathetic slave of the fallen angel.

Let us say now a few words about that close unity of the three persons of the false-trinity. According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, the whole life and activity of Antichrist will be connected in one way or another to Satan, to whom he will be in conscious and voluntary submission. Antichrist will be close to the devil as no other person in the history of the world. He will be a real instrument of Satan. In turn, the false prophet, who is called in the Scriptures the second beast, will be Antichrist’s closest ally. Through Antichrist, Satan will give enormous power and authority to the false prophet, who will act with all the authority of the first beast, and will compel all the earth and all those living upon the earth to bow down before him. Through the miracles that the beast will grant the

false prophet to perform, the latter will deceive many, telling them to *make an image to the beast* (13:14): *And he will be given power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should all be killed.* (Rev 13-15). From the second verse of the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation, one can conclude that it is precisely thanks to the false prophet that many people will accept the mark of the beast. However, three and a half years later the reign of lawlessness will come to an end, for the Lord Jesus Christ will appear in glory and overwhelm all the enemies of God. *And the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.* (Rev 20:10).

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

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

The iconographic tradition of the Orthodox Church supports this supposition. In the iconographic sketch, illustrating the

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



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

Let us return now to the two groups of people whom we mentioned at the beginning of this article, and see how they will react to the mark of the beast. It is very likely that both those who are indifferent to the question of accepting the stamp and those who zealously study marks on currency, documents and manufactured goods, endeavoring to detect the mark of Antichrist, both groups will be found outside Christ's Church. The first because, even in accepting the mark of Antichrist, they will console themselves with the thought that this is merely some innocuous, ecumenical rite. And the second, because even before the placing of the marks (or even before the coming of Antichrist), they will accuse the earthly part of Christ's Church with having accepted the mark of Antichrist, although in fact this will be simply some credit card or new type of personal document. Furthermore, such zealots “not according to knowledge” will proclaim that their group alone—which has rejected these “marks” (cards, documents, products with certain symbols, etc.)—is the true Church. Clearly, this will be nothing but a new schism or sect. Already now we find many sad examples of such splinter groups, and they will only increase in the last times.

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

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

Just listen to the logic: “Why do you refuse to take part in this measure that involves all of humanity, that is being instituted worldwide? After all, it symbolizes unity and the brotherly love of all peoples. It is a symbol of our unity under the aegis of a lawful global authority that has been given to all men from above. Are you against peace and order? Do you want a reign of chaos and enmity? If you are people of good will, you must take part in these cultural enactments that concern all mankind.”

Of course, it will turn out that one such “innocent” enactment will be, in fact, the rite of bowing down before the God-hating Antichrist. Only a discerning vigilance, illumined by the grace of God, will be able to preserve us from such subtle deception of the last times. What will be the consequences of accepting the mark of Antichrist? They will be truly horrific, destroying human souls. The fruit of denying God is always dreadful, for life without God is death.

Will one be able to repent after having accepted the mark of the beast? On the one hand, there is little hope that a person who does not have enough faith and spiritual strength to refuse the mark will be able to repudiate it once he has voluntarily accepted it. On the other hand, our attitude towards the mark of the beast must be free of all unorthodox fatalism and fetishism, for no seal or mark, in and of itself, can have any power over a man. The powers of evil behind this mark have power only over those who personally submit to them, who deny Christ. According to the Orthodox teaching, the power of Christian repentance is stronger than the power of evil. The history of the

Church knows numerous examples of people who accepted the spiritual seal of Satan himself, people who signed a pact with the devil, voluntarily entrusting their souls to him. And here we have a testimony of God's love for mankind: even some of these apostates repented and became saints. The Lord, by His authority, annulled their pact with Satan. We have only to recall the life of Saint Cyprian, a formidable Satanist who became a saint after repenting and turning to Christ.

The Orthodox Church teaches us that, up to the time of his physical death, each person, by God's mercy, has the possibility to repent. Therefore, we would deny God's mercy were we to say that people who accept the mark of Antichrist will have no further possibility of repentance. While they are still alive, this possibility will be available to them. Desiring their repentance, the Lord will send down upon them dreadful pestilences, as final, decisive measures for their spiritual restoration. (cf. Saint Andrew of Caesarea, Commentary on the Apocalypse). But, alas, **Sacred Scripture clearly states that those who consciously accept the mark of Antichrist will no longer have any desire to repent.** They will *bite their tongues from pain*, but even so *they will not cease blaspheming God and they will not repent of their deeds.* (Rev 16:10-11). If, among those who bow down before the beast, there should be some isolated cases of repentance, this conversion and repentance can be regarded only as a miracle of God.

The conscious acceptance of the soul-destroying stamp under the assumption that one can later repent is a terrible and unforgivable sin in the eyes of God. Therefore, while there is yet time, let us prepare ourselves for the coming trials. Such preparation consists in fulfilling all the soul-saving precepts and ordinances of our Mother, the Orthodox Church. While we still have the opportunity and spiritual strength, let us tirelessly entreat the Merciful God with the words of the Lord's Prayer, as the Saviour intentionally ordained: **Our Father ... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.**



The goal of reading is the application, in our lives, of what we read—not to learn it by heart, but to take it to heart; not to practice using our tongues, but to be able to receive the tongues of fire and to live the mysteries of God. If one studies a great deal—in order to acquire knowledge and to teach others—without living the things he teaches, he does no more than fill his head with hot air. At most, he will manage to ascend to the moon using machines. The goal of the Christian is to rise to God without machines.

Saint Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ST. PAISIOS THE ATHONITE ON ECUMENISM

With the canonization of one of the greatest saints of our days, we wish to publish an article of great interest for all Orthodox faithful.

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mount Athos has been canonized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, during the session of the Holy Synod on Tuesday, January 13th, 2015. Saint Paisios had already been accepted as a Saint from the faithful and it was a matter of time for his canonization. His feast day has been established as July 12th, the day of his repose. God is wondrous among His Saints! May we have his blessing!

Apolytikion in the First Tone

The offspring of Farasa, and the adornment of Athos, and the imitator of the former righteous, equal in honor, O Paisios let us honor O faithful, the vessel full of graces, who hastens speedily to those who cry out: glory to Him Who gave you strength, glory to Him Who crowned you, glory to Him Who grants through you healings for all.

Kontakion in the Plagal of the Fourth Tone

The most-famed ascetic of the Holy Mountain, and the newly-enlightened light of the Church, let us praise him with hymns with all our heart, for he leads the faithful towards a perfect life, filling them with rivers of gifts, therefore we cry out: Hail, O Father Paisios.

Synaxarion

On this day (July 12th), the memory of our venerable Father Paisios the New, of the Holy Mountain, who reposed in peace in the year 1994.

Verses

Paisios, the tree of Mount Athos, You were shown to be full of fruit, O Most-venerable one. On the twelfth, Paisios reposed.

Megalynarion

Rejoice the communicant with the Venerable, the pride of Athos, the adornment of Monastics, Rejoice the new teacher of the Church, O godly-minded Paisios, our boast.

† † †

A PRIVATE LETTER CONCERNING ECUMENISM

This is the last known epistle sent by the Ever-memorable Elder Paisios. Archimandrite Haralambos Vasilopoulos was the Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Petraki, Athens, and founder of the Pan-Hellenic Orthodox Union and its organ "Orthodoxos Typos."

The Holy Mountain, January 23, 1969

Reverend Father Haralambos, In as much as I see the great uproar which is happening in our Church because of the various movements of groups in favor of unification [of churches], as well as the interaction of the Oecumenical Patriarch with the Pope, I was pained

as Her child, and considered it good, besides my prayers, to send a small thread (which I have as a poor monk), that it too may be used as a means of stitching together the multipart garment of our Mother. I know you will show love and share it only with your religious friends. Thank you.

First of all, I would like to ask forgiveness from everyone for being bold to write something when I am neither holy nor a theologian. I trust everyone will understand me, that my writing is nothing more than an expression of my deep pain for the unfortunate stance and worldly love of our father Patriarch Athenagoras.

It appears he loved another modern woman—which is called the Papist Church—because our Orthodox Mother has not made an impression on him at all, for She is so modest. This love, which was heard from Constantinople, caused a sensational impression of sorts among many Orthodox, who nowadays live in an environment of such meaningless love, in cities across

the entire world. Moreover, this love is of the spirit of our age: the family will lose its divine meaning from just such kinds of love, which have as their aim breakup and not union.

With just such a worldly love the Patriarch takes us to Rome. While he should have shown love first to us his children and to our Mother Church, he unfortunately sent his love very far away. The result, it's true, delighted the secular children who love the world—who have this worldly love—, but completely scandalized us, the children of Orthodoxy, young and old, who have fear of God.

With sadness I must write that among all the "unionists" I've met, never have I seen them to have either a drop or shred

of spirituality. Nevertheless, they know how to speak about love and union while they themselves are not united with God, for they have not loved Him.

I would like tenderly to beseech all our unionist brothers: Since the issue of the union of the Churches is something spiritual, and we have need of spiritual love, let's leave it to those who greatly love God and are [genuine] theologians, like the Fathers of the Church—not the legalists—who have offered up and continue to give themselves in service to the Church (instead of just buying big candles), and who were and are lit by the fire of love for God rather than by the lighter of the church sacristan (church caretaker).

We should recognize that there exist not only natural but also spiritual laws. Therefore, the future wrath of God is not averted by a convocation of sinners (for then we shall receive double the wrath), but by repentance and adherence to the commandments of the Lord.



Also, we should know well that our Orthodox Church does not have even one shortcoming. The only apparent insufficiency is the shortage of sober Hierarchs and Shepherds with a Patristic foundation. “Few are chosen.” This should not, however, be upsetting. The Church is Christ’s Church, and He governs Her. It is not a Temple built by the pious from rocks, sand and mortar, which is then destroyed by the fire of barbarians; the Church is Christ Himself. “And whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” (Matt. 21:44-45)

When He must, (e.g., at the right time) the Lord will bring forth the Mark of Ephesuses and Gregory Palamas, so as to bring together all our scandalized brethren, to confess the Orthodox Faith, to strengthen the Tradition, and to give great joy to our Mother, the Church.

In times past we see that many faithful children of our Church, monastics and laymen, have unfortunately broken away from Her on account of the unionists. In my opinion, separation from the Church each time the Patriarch makes a mistake is not good at all. From within, close to the Mother Church, it is the duty and obligation of each member to struggle in their own way. To cease commemoration of the Patriarch; to break away and create their own Church; and to continue to speak insultingly to the Patriarch: this I think, is senseless.

If, for this or that occasional deviation of the Patriarchs, we separate ourselves and make our own Churches—may God protect us!—we’ll pass up even the Protestants. It is easy for one to separate but difficult to return. Unfortunately we have many “churches” in our times, created either by big groups or even just one person. Because there happened to be a church in their kalyve (I am speaking about things happening on the Holy Mountain), they figured they could create their own independent Church.

If the unionists gave the Church the first wound, the aforementioned give the second.

Let’s pray that God will illumine all of us, including our Patriarch Athenagoras, that union of these “churches” will come about first; that tranquility would be realized within the scandalized Orthodox fold; so that peace and love would exist among the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Then let’s think about union with other “Confessions”—and only if they sincerely desire to embrace Orthodox Dogma.

I would further like to say that there does exist another, third group, within our Church. They are the brethren who remain as Her faithful children, but who don’t have spiritual

concord between themselves. They spend their time criticizing one another, and not for the general good of the struggle. The one monitors the other (more than himself) to see what he will say or write so as to ruthlessly nail him. However, if this person had said or written the same thing, he’d certainly have supported it with numerous passages from the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers.

Great harm comes of this; for while the one injures his neighbor, the other strikes him back before the eyes of all the faithful. Oftentimes, disbelief is sown in the souls of the weak, because they are scandalized by such people. Unfortunately, some from among us make senseless claims against the others. We want them to conform to our own spiritual character. In other words, when someone else doesn’t harmonize with our own character, or is only mildly tolerant—or even a little sharp—with us, immediately we jump to the conclusion that he is not a spiritual person.

We’re all needed within the Church. All the Fathers, both the mild and the austere, offered their services to Her. **Just as the sweet, sour, bitter and even pungent herbs are necessary for a man’s body (each has its own flavor and vitamins), the same is true of the Body of the Church. All are necessary.** The one fills up the spiritual character of the other, and all of us are duty bound to endure not only the particular spiritual character, but even the human weaknesses we each have.

Again, I come sincerely asking pardon from all for being so bold to write. I am only a simple monk, and my work is to strive, as much as I am able, to divest myself of the old man, and to help others and the Church, through God, by prayer. But because heart-breaking news regarding our Holy Orthodoxy has reached even my hermitage, I was greatly pained, and thus considered it good to write that which I felt. Let’s all pray that God grants His Grace, and may each of us help in his own way for the glory of our Church.

With much respect to all,

Monk Paisios



We must not compel others to follow the spiritual struggle. You can not compel him if he does not have the disposition. It is like what happens with food. If one is not disposed to eat and we give him food under compulsion, he will vomit it up.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



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† † †

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THE BEGINNING OF GREAT LENT

By St. John (Maximovitch) of Shanghai and San Francisco.



The doors of repentance are opening, Great Lent is beginning. Every year Great Lent is repeated, and each time it brings us great benefit if we spend it as we should. It is a preparation for the life to come and, more immediately, a preparation for the Bright Resurrection.

Just as a stairway is built into a tall building in order to enable one, by climbing the steps, to easily reach the top, so too, the various days in the year

serve as steps for our spiritual ascent. This is especially true of the days of Great Lent and Holy Pascha.

By means of Great Lent we cleanse ourselves of the filth of sin, and at Holy Pascha we experience the blessedness of Christ's Kingdom that is to come. In climbing a high mountain, one tries to eliminate all unnecessary weight. The less a person carries, the easier it is for him to climb and the higher he is able to climb. So, too, in order to ascend spiritually, it is necessary first of all to free oneself from the weight of sin. This weight is lifted from us through repentance, provided that we banish from ourselves all enmity and forgive each person whom we consider to be at fault before us. Once cleansed and forgiven by God, we then greet the Bright Resurrection of Christ.

And what a priceless gift of God we receive, at the culmination of our Lenten struggle. We already hear about this in the first hymns of the daily Lenten *stichera*: *Our food shall be the Lamb of God, on the holy and radiant night of His Awakening: the Victim offered for us, given in communion to the disciples on the evening of the Mystery. (Aposticha sticheron, Sunday of the Last Judgment).*

Communing of the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ, unto life eternal—this is the aim of the holy *Quadregesima* [Forty Days]. Not only on Pascha do we commune, but during Lent also. On Pascha those people should commune who have fasted, confessed and received the Holy Mysteries during Great Lent. Just before Pascha itself there is little opportunity for a proper and thorough confession; the priests are very busy and most of the time occupied with the Passion services. Rather one must prepare ahead of time.

Each time one receives the Mysteries of Christ, one is united with Christ Himself; each time it is a soul-saving act. Why, then, is such significance attached to receiving Holy Communion on the night of Holy Pascha, and why are we all called to do so?

Then, especially, we are given to experience the Kingdom of Christ. Then, especially, we are illumined with the Eternal Light and strengthened for the spiritual ascent.

This is an irreplaceable gift of Christ, an incomparable good. Let no one deprive himself of this joy and, instead of receiving Holy Communion on Pascha night, hasten to eat meat and other foods. Communing of the Holy Mysteries on that night prepares us for the banquet in the eternal Kingdom of God.