

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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THE HOLY NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR

By St. Theophan the Recluse.

Glory to Thee, O Lord! Once again we greet the awaited bright days of Christ's Nativity. Let us be glad and rejoice.

In order to raise our festivities to a higher level in these days, the Holy Church has intentionally instituted a fast before them—a certain amount of constraint, so that as we enter the festive period we might feel as though we were coming out into freedom. Nevertheless, the Church in no way desires that we give ourselves over to mere sensual delights and fleshly pleasures. Since the Church has from olden times called these days *sviatki* (“holy days”), they require that our

very rejoicing on these days be holy, as they are holy. So that those who rejoice might not forget themselves, the Church has placed a short hymn upon our lips to glorify the newborn Christ, by which the flesh is settled down and the soul is uplifted, showing the proper occupations for these days: *Christ is born, give ye glory*, and the rest.

Glorify Christ; glorify Him, so that by this doxology your heart and soul might delight, and thereby silence any urge for various other deeds and occupations that might promise some kind

of pleasure. Glorify Christ: this does not mean that you have to compose lengthy songs of praise to Christ—no. But if when contemplating or hearing about the birth of Christ the Savior, you involuntarily cry out from the depths of your soul, *Glory to Thee, O Lord, that Christ is born!*—this is sufficient. This will be a quiet hymn of the heart, which will nevertheless pass through to heaven and enter into God Himself. Repeat a little more clearly to yourself what the Lord has wrought for us, and you will see how natural this exclamation now is.

So that this might be easier for us, we shall compare it to the following incident:

A king promises freedom to a man who is imprisoned in a dungeon and bound with fetters. The prisoner waits a day, then another, then months, and years. He sees no fulfillment of the promise, but does not lose hope, and

believes in the king's words. Finally, he sees signs that it is coming soon. His attention increases—he hears a noise; someone is approaching with cheerful words. Now the locks fall and the liberator enters. *Glory to Thee, O Lord!* the prisoner involuntarily cries. “The end of my imprisonment has arrived, and soon I will see God's light!”

Or another incident: A sick man is covered with wounds and paralyzed in all his members. He has tried all medicines and has changed doctors many times. His endurance is exhausted, and



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he is ready to give himself over to despair. He is told, “There is one more very skilled doctor, who heals everyone from those very illnesses that you have. We have asked him to come, and he has promised to do so.” The patient believes them, hope springs up in him, and he waits for the promised one... One hour passes, then another, and anxiety again begins to torment his soul. Finally, at evening, someone arrives... The door opens, and the desired visitor enters... *Glory to Thee, O Lord!* the sick man shouts.

Here is another example: A thundercloud hangs over the face of the earth, and it is covered with darkness. Thunder shakes the foundations of the mountains and lightening tears the sky from one end to the other. All are in fear, as if the end of the world had come. When the thunder passes and the sky clears, everyone breathes freely, saying, *Glory to Thee, O Lord!*

Bring these examples closer to yourself and you will see our whole history in them. The threatening clouds of God’s wrath were over us. The Lord—the Peacemaker—has come, and has dispersed the cloud. We were covered with the wounds of sins and passions; the Healer of souls has come and healed us. We were bound by the fetters of slavery; the Liberator has come and released our fetters. Bring all of these examples closer to your heart and take them in with your senses, and you will not be able to refrain from exclaiming, *Glory to Thee, O Lord, that Christ is born!*

I will not try to convey this joy to you with my words; it is inexpressible by any words. The work that was accomplished by the Lord Who is born touches each one of us. Those who enter into communion with Him receive from Him freedom, healing, and peace; they possess all of this and taste of its sweetness. There is no reason to say, *Rejoice!* to those

who experience this within themselves, for they cannot help but rejoice. But to those who do not experience it, why say, *Rejoice?* They cannot rejoice. No matter how much you say, “Rejoice at your deliverance,” to one bound hand and foot, he will not rejoice. Whence can the joy of healing come to one who is covered with the wounds of sin? How can one who is threatened by the thunder of God’s wrath breathe freely? You can only say to him, “Go to the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger, and seek deliverance by Him from all the evils that encompass you, for this Infant is Christ, the Savior of the world.”

I would like to see everyone rejoicing with this very joy, and not wanting to know any other joys; but not everything that comes from Israel is Israel. Now there will begin empty, wild merriment that inflames the passions... No matter how much you tell these people to calm down, they only shut their ears and pay no heed. And they always bring these bright days of the Feast to such a point that the merciful Lord is compelled to turn His eyes from us and say: *All of your solemnities are an abomination unto Me.* (cf. Isa 1:13-14)!

Truly, many of our social festivities are really pagan abominations; that is, some of them are brought to us straight from the pagan world, while others, though they appeared later in time, are penetrated with the spirit of paganism. And it is purposely contrived for such festivities to appear in great quantities during the Feasts of Nativity and Pascha. By getting caught up in them we give the prince of this world—our tormentor, the enemy of God—an excuse to say to God, “Look what You’ve done for me with Your Nativity and Resurrection! They’re all coming to me!” But let the words of the Fiftieth Psalm be repeated more often in the depth of our hearts: *That*

Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and prevail when Thou art judged (Pss 50:4).

Enlightened Europe is attracting us. Yes, the abominations of paganism that were almost completely cast out of the world were first restored there; they have now come from there to us. Having breathed in that hellish poison, we run around like madmen, forgetting our own selves. But let us remember the year of 1812—why did the French come to us then? God sent them to wipe out all the evil that we had imitated from them. Russia repented then, and God had mercy on her. But now it seems that we have forgotten that lesson. If we come to our senses, of course, nothing will happen. But if we do not come to our senses, who knows?

Perhaps the Lord will again send similar teachers, so that they would bring us to our senses and place us on the path of correction. Such is the law of God's righteousness: to cure someone from sin with the thing that enticed him into it. These are not empty words, but a matter that has been confirmed by the voice of the Church.

Know, ye Orthodox, that God is not mocked. And knowing this, make merry and rejoice during these days with fear. Illumine the bright Feast with bright deeds, occupations, and festivities, so that all who look upon us would say, "They have holy days—not the kind of amusements practiced by impious and profligates who don't know God."



Let there now be one common festal celebration in both Heaven and on earth. Let everything now celebrate: that which is in the world and that beyond the world. Now is made the created temple for the Creator of all; and creation is readied into a new Divine habitation for the Creator. Now our nature, having been banished from the land of blessedness, does receive the principle of *theosis* and does strive to rise up to the highest glory. Now Adam does offer from us—and for us—elements unto God, the most worthy fruit of mankind: Mary, in Whom the New Adam is rendered Bread for the restoration of the human race. Now is opened the great bosom of virginity, and the Church, in the matrimonial manner, does place upon it a pure pearl truly immaculate. Now human worthiness does accept the gift of the first creation and returns to its former condition; the majesty darkened by formless sin—through the conjoining by His Mother by birth of *Him made beautiful by Goodness*, man receives beauty in a most excellent and God-seemly visage... Now a barren one is become—beyond expectation—a mother, and the Birth-giver has given birth without knowing man, and she does sanctify natural birth.

St. Andrew of Crete

FAITH & HOPE IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867).

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov stands out as one of the greatest patristic writers of the nineteenth century. This great saint left to Orthodox Christians a compass by which we can check our direction as we traverse the complex path of spiritual life, to avoid the dark forests and pitfalls of spiritual delusion and pride.

There is no such thing as blind happenstance (a circumstance especially that is due to chance, *Ed.*)! God rules the world, and all that happens in heaven and under the heavens happens according to the wise and omnipotent God, unfathomable in His wisdom and omnipotence, and unfathomable in His governance.

If there is not a single event that is secret from God, then we must glorify God for everything that happens.

It is necessary to assure ourselves that God governs the fate of world and of each person. Life experiences are not long to prove and confirm this Gospel teaching.

All things pass—both the bad and the good—and neither men, nor demons can do anything if God does not allow it.

Why does our soul rebel against God's will and allowances? Because we have not revered God as God...

From living faith in God is born complete submission to God, and from submission to God is born peace in our thoughts and calm in our hearts.

From seeing God's Providence, in the soul develops profound meekness and unflinching love of neighbor, which no winds can disturb or agitate.

God watches over the times, events in society, and personal fates.

The vision of God's Providence preserves and grows our faith in God.

The Christian who keeps his gaze fixed upon God's Providence preserves constant courage and unshakable steadfastness, even amidst terrible misfortunes.

Before the sight of God's Providence, not only can temporary sorrows not stand, but also those that await a person when he crosses the threshold into eternity beyond the grave.

A Christian should never and for no reason worry, for God's Providence carries him in its arms. Our only care should be that we would ever remain faithful to the Lord.

That one soldier has fallen does not mean the entire army is defeated.

Salvation consists in the restoration of our communion with God.

Unhappy is he who is satisfied with his own human righteousness, for he does not need Christ, Who says of Himself: *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Mt. 9:13); men, who believe in Him and are transformed in accordance with Him, gods by grace.

THE HUMILITY AND PIETY OF ST. PORPHYRIOS OF KAVSOKALYVIA

Commemorated on December 2nd.



On December 2nd the holy Orthodox Church commemorates the recently-glorified God-bearing elder of our times, St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia, who reposed on this day in 1991. He was known as a humble ascetic with the gift of foresight who always served the Divine Liturgy with compunction. In his memory we offer below his final letter.

While at the Holy Skete of Kavsokalyvia on Mt. Athos, the Elder Porphyrios had given orders for his grave to be dug. Through a spiritual child of his, he dictated a farewell letter of advice and forgiveness to all his spiritual children.

Here is the letter as it was sent from the Holy Convent of the Transfiguration of the Savior. It was found amongst the monk's garments that were laid out for his burial on the day of his departure. This letter is a profound example of the humility of the saints who have acquired the likeness of God through their humble ascetic offerings.

† † †

My dear spiritual Children,
Now that I am still in charge of my faculties, I want to give you some advice.

Ever since I was a child, I was always in sin. When my mother sent me to watch the animals on the mountain, (my father had gone to America to work on the Panama Canal for us his children, because we were poor), there, where I shepherded the animals, I slowly read, word by word, the life of St. John the Hut-dweller and I loved St. John very much. I said a lot of prayers, like the young child that I was, twelve or fifteen years old, I don't remember too well. I wanted to follow his example. So, with a lot of difficulty, I secretly left my parents and came to Kavsokalyvia on the Holy Mountain. I became obedient to two elders, the true brothers, Panteleimon and Ioannikios.

They happened to be very devout and full of virtue, I loved them very much and because of that, with their blessing, I gave them absolute obedience. That helped me a lot. I also felt great love for God and got along very well. However, because of my sins, God allowed me to become ill, and my elders told me to go to my parents in my village of St. John, in Evia. Although I had sinned a lot from when I was a small child, when I returned to the world I continued to commit

sins, which today are very many. The world, however, thought highly of me, and everyone shouts that I'm a saint.

I however, feel that I am the most sinful person in the world. Of course, whatever I remembered I confessed, and I know God has forgiven me. But now I have the feeling that my spiritual sins are very many and I ask all those who have known me to pray for me, because, for as long as I lived, I humbly prayed for you, too. Now that I'm leaving for heaven, I have the feeling that God will say to me, *What are you doing here?* I have only one thing to say to him, "I am not worthy of here, Lord, but whatever your love wills, it'll do for me." From then on, I don't know what will happen. I however, wish for God's love to act.

I always pray that my spiritual children will love God, Who is everything, so that He will make us worthy to enter His earthly uncreated Church. We must begin from here. I always made the effort to pray, to read the hymns of the Church, the Holy Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints. May you do the same. I tried, by the grace of God, to approach God and may you also do the same.

I beg all of you to forgive me for whatever I did to upset you.

Hieromonk Porphyrios

Kavsokalyvia, June 4/17 1991



The life of the parents is the only thing that makes good children. Parents should be very patient and "saintlike" to their children. They should truly love their children. And the children will share this love! Parents themselves are usually responsible for the bad attitude. The parents don't help their children by lecturing them and repeating to them "advices," or by making them obeying strict rules in order to impose discipline. If the parents do not become "saints" and truly love their children and if they don't struggle for it, then they make a huge mistake. With their wrong and/or negative attitude the parents convey to their children their negative feelings. Then their children become reactive and insecure not only to their home, but to the society as well.

Love Christ and put nothing before His Love. He is joy, He is life, He is light. Christ is Everything. He is the ultimate desire, He is everything. Everything beautiful is in Christ.

Somebody who is Christ's must love Christ, and when he loves Christ he is delivered from the Devil, from hell and from death.

This is the way we should see Christ. He is our friend, our brother; He is whatever is good and beautiful. He is everything. Yet, He is still a friend and He shouts it out, *"You're my friends, don't you understand that? We're brothers. I don't hold hell in my hands. I am not threatening you. I love you. I want you to enjoy life together with me..."*

St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia (+1991)

AMERICAN CHRISTMAS AND ORTHODOX NATIVITY

By ROCA Archbishop Seraphim (Ivanov) of Chicago (+1987). A timeless article for all Orthodox Christians that guides us to contrast the gentle image of the Holy Child with that of a jolly old Santa Claus.

On American Christmas, some of you more, some of you to a lesser extent, celebrate, have parties, give presents to each other, etc. Alas, American Christmas is acquiring a more and more pagan character: so much time is wasted on shopping, often unnecessarily, for clothing, for everything exterior, while inner spiritual concerns remain almost in oblivion.

The Nativity of the God-Child Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, is hardly given any thought whatsoever. The kind, gentle image of Christ is supplanted by that of jolly old Santa Claus—a distressing, blasphemous caricature of one of God's greatest saints—Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker of Mira, whom the Roman Catholics contrived to exclude from their order of saints some years ago.

The psychology of the masses is infectious. We, the zealots of religious piety, understand this and, in a fatherly way, for the sake of love, look askance, although not without sadness, at this chaotic tribute in the country which gave shelter to our flock. At the same time, we sincerely ask all members of our Russian Church Abroad: having given notice to the secular world, when the embers of the American festival have died, give some attention to your inner self—prepare yourself spiritually, in the Orthodox way, for our Orthodox Feast of the Nativity of Christ. First of all, for at least the remainder of Lent—*fast*. After all, there are not many fast days left. Whoever is able, prepare yourselves with fasting. On the holy eve of the feast, make certain that you come to church: the Nativity services are so beautiful! On the day of Nativity, try your best to get leave from work or school, even if you must lose a day's wages. Give them to God!

Keep holy, sanctify in a special way, this whole day of the Great Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. Do not do anything thoughtless on the Nativity. It is traditional on this day to visit the clergy, family or friends, to somehow reinforce the joy of the Festival. It is not sinful on this day to have guests or go out, within reason of course, so as not to lose the image of God, which we carry. It is certainly blessed for families and those of means (who have more of this world's goods) to invite people who are alone to their

Nativity dinner, especially those in poverty, to warm them with kindness and attention. How good this is and pleasing to God!

On this great day we can and must celebrate, especially spiritually. Too often this celebration is substituted with uncontrolled drunken parties. It is not a crime to be merry and celebrate a Festival, but not wildly. Examine the Holy Gospels. There the word *joy* appears nearly twenty times, but the word *gladness* appears only once, and even then in conjunction with the word *joy*. I will introduce the text: *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth* (Lk 1:13-14).

On the Feast day of the Nativity it has become customary, seemingly from the Three Wise Men, to give each other gifts, especially the poor and needy. This is a good and holy custom! In America, we may divide it into two parts: on

American Christmas give gifts to family and friends, and on our Nativity to do good deeds; that is, send care packages to needy people, churches and charitable organizations.

In this way, we can pay tribute to the customary American Christmas as well as to our Great Orthodox Feast of the

Nativity of Christ. God grant that this advice would find its way to your hearts!

As pastors, we understand how, when all around people are celebrating, it is difficult not to be caught up in the festivities. However, blessed are those who maintain their fasting and prayer throughout the whole period of the Nativity Fast, leaving aside all celebration until our Orthodox Nativity.



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.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

THE THREE GIFTS OF THE ORTHODOX SPIRITUAL FATHER

By Bishop Kallistos Ware.

Three gifts in particular distinguish the spiritual father.

Insight and Discernment

The first is *insight* and *discernment* (*diakrisis*), the ability to perceive intuitively the secrets of another's heart, to understand the hidden depths of which the other is unaware. The spiritual father penetrates beneath the conventional gestures and attitudes whereby we conceal our true personality from others and from ourselves; and beyond all these trivialities, he comes to grips with the unique person made in the image and likeness of God. This power is spiritual rather than psychic; it is not simply a kind of extra-sensory perception or a sanctified clairvoyance but the fruit of grace, presupposing concentrated prayer and an unremitting ascetic struggle.

With this gift of insight there goes the ability to use words with power. As each person comes before him, the *starets* knows—immediately and specifically—what it is that the individual needs to hear. (*Starets* is an elder of a Russian Orthodox monastery who functions as a spiritual father and teacher. Elders or spiritual fathers are charismatic spiritual leaders whose wisdom stems from God as obtained from ascetic experience. *Geronda* in Gk, *Ed.*). Today, we are inundated with words, but for the most part these are conspicuously *not* words uttered with power. The *starets* uses few words, and sometimes none at all; but by these few words or by his silence, he is able to alter the whole direction of a man's life. At Bethany, Christ used three words only: *Lazarus, come out* (Jn 11:43) and these three words, spoken with power, were sufficient to bring the dead back to life. In an age when language has been disgracefully trivialized, it is vital to rediscover the power of the word; and this means rediscovering the nature of silence, not just as a pause between words but as one of the primary realities of existence. Most teachers and preachers talk far too much; **the *starets* is distinguished by an austere economy of language.**

But for a word to possess power, it is necessary that there should be not only one who speaks with the genuine authority of personal experience, but also one who listens with

attention and eagerness. If someone questions a *starets* out of idle curiosity, it is likely that he will receive little benefit; but if he approaches the *starets* with ardent faith and deep hunger, the word that he hears may transfigure his being. The words of the *staretsy* (plural for *starets*, *Ed.*) are for the most part simple in verbal expression and devoid of literary artifice; to those who read them in a superficial way, they will seem jejune and banal (naïve/simplistic, and lacking in originality, *Ed.*).

The spiritual father's gift of insight is exercised primarily through the practice known as *disclosure of thoughts* (*logismoi*). In early Eastern monasticism the young monk used to go daily to his father and lay before him all the thoughts which had come to him during the day. (This practice is still maintained amongst authentic Orthodox monasteries, throughout the world, *Ed.*). This disclosure of thoughts includes far more than a confession of sins, since the novice

also speaks of those ideas and impulses which may seem innocent to him, but in which the spiritual father may discern secret dangers or significant signs. Confession is retrospective, dealing with sins that have already occurred; the disclosure of thoughts, on the other hand, is prophylactic, for it lays bare our *logismoi* before they have led to sin and so deprives them of their, power to harm. The purpose of the disclosure is not juridical (relating to "judicial" proceedings and the administration of the "law," *Ed.*), to secure absolution from guilt, but self-knowl-



edge, that each may see himself as he truly is.

Endowed with discernment, the spiritual father does not merely wait for a person to reveal himself, but shows to the other thoughts hidden from him. When people came to St. Seraphim of Sarov, he often answered their difficulties before they had time to put their thoughts before him. On many occasions the answer at first seemed quite irrelevant, and even absurd and irresponsible; for what St. Seraphim answered was not the question his visitor had consciously in mind, but the one he ought to have been asking. In all this St. Seraphim relied on the inward light of the Holy Spirit. He found it important, he explained, not to work out in advance that he was going to say; in that case, his words would represent merely his own human judgment which might well be in error, and not the judgment of God.

In St. Seraphim's eyes, the relationship between *starets* and spiritual child is stronger than death, and he therefore urged his children to continue their disclosure of thoughts to him even after his departure to the next life. These are the words which, by his own command, were written on his tomb: "When I am dead, come to me at my grave, and the more often, the better. Whatever is on your soul, whatever may have happened to you, come to me as when I was alive and, kneeling on the ground, cast all your bitterness upon my grave. Tell me everything and I shall listen to you, and all the bitterness will fly away from you. And as you spoke to me when I was alive, do so now. For I am living, and I shall be forever."

Ability to Love Others and to Make Others' Sufferings His Own

The second gift of the spiritual father is *the ability to love others and to make others' sufferings his own*. Of Abba Poimen, one of the greatest of the Egyptian *gerontes*, it is briefly and simply recorded: *He possessed love, and many came to him. He possessed love*—this is indispensable in all spiritual fatherhood. Unlimited insight into the secrets of men's hearts, if devoid of loving compassion, would not be creative but destructive; he who cannot love others will have little power to heal them.

Loving others involves suffering with and for them; such is the literal sense of compassion. *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* (Gal 6:2). The spiritual father is the one who *par excellence* bears the burdens of others. "A *starets*," writes Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "is one who takes your soul, your will, unto his soul and his will...." It is not enough for him to offer advice. He is also required to take up the soul of his spiritual children into his own soul, their life into his life. It is his task to pray for them, and his constant intercession on their behalf is more important to them than any words of counsel. It is his task likewise to assume their sorrows and their sins, to take their guilt upon himself, and to answer for them at the Last Judgment.

All this is manifest in a primary document of Eastern spiritual direction, the *Books of Barsanuphius and John*, embodying some 850 questions addressed to two elders of 6th century Palestine, together with their written answers. "As God Himself knows," St. Barsanuphius insists to his spiritual children, "there is not a second or an hour when I do not have you in my mind and in my prayers ... I care for you

more than you care for yourself ... I would gladly lay down my life for you." This is his prayer to God: *O Master, either bring my children with me into Your Kingdom, or else wipe me also out of Your book*. Taking up the theme of bearing others' burdens, St. Barsanuphius affirms: "I am bearing your burdens and your offences ... You have become like a man sitting under a shady tree ... I take upon myself the sentence of condemnation against you, and by the grace of Christ, I will not abandon you, either in this age or in the Age to Come."

Readers of Charles Williams will be reminded of the principle of "substituted love," which plays a central part in his *Descent into Hell*. The same line of thought is expressed by Dostoevsky's *Starets Zosima*: "There is only one way of salvation, and that is to make yourself responsible for all men's sins... To make yourself responsible in all sincerity for everything and for everyone." The ability of the *starets*

to support and strengthen others is measured by his willingness to adopt this way of salvation.

Yet the relation between the spiritual father and his children is not one-sided. Though he takes the burden of their guilt upon himself and answers for them before God, he cannot do this effectively unless they themselves are struggling wholeheartedly for their own salvation. Once a brother came to St. Anthony of Egypt and said: "Pray for me." But the Old Man replied: "Neither will I take pity on you nor will God, unless you make some effort of your own."

When considering the love of a *starets* for those under his care, it is important to give full meaning to the word "father" in the title "spiritual

father." As father and offspring in an ordinary family should be joined in mutual love, so it must also be within the "charismatic" family of the *starets*. It is primarily a relationship in the Holy Spirit, and while the wellspring of human affection is not to be unfeelingly suppressed, it must be contained within bounds. It is recounted how a young monk looked after his elder, who was gravely ill, for twelve years without interruption. Never once in that period did his elder thank him or so much as speak one word of kindness to him. Only on his death-bed did the Old Man remark to the assembled brethren, "He is an angel and not a man." The story is valuable as an indication of the need for spiritual detachment, but such an uncompromising suppression of all outward tokens of affection is not typical of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, still less of Sts. Barsanuphius and John.



Power to Transform the Human Environment

A third gift of the spiritual father is *the power to transform the human environment*, both the material and the non-material. The gift of healing, possessed by so many of the *startsy*, is one aspect of this power: More generally, the *startets* helps his disciples to perceive the world as God created it and as God desires it once more to be. “Can you take too much joy in your Father’s works?” asks Thomas Traherne. “He is Himself in everything.” The true *startets* is one who discerns this universal presence of the Creator throughout creation, and assists others to discern it. In the words of William Blake, “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything will appear to man as it is, infinite.” For the man who dwells in God, there is nothing mean and trivial: he sees everything in the light of Mount Tabor. “What is a merciful heart?” inquires St. Isaac the Syrian. “It is a heart that burns with love for the whole of creation—for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons, for every creature. When a man with such a heart as this thinks of the creatures or looks at them, his eyes are filled with tears; an overwhelming compassion makes his heart grow! Small and weak, and he cannot endure to hear or see any suffering, even the smallest pain, inflicted upon any creature. Therefore he never ceases to pray, with tears even for the irrational animals, for the enemies of truth, and for those who do him evil, asking that they may be guarded and receive God’s mercy. And for the reptiles also he prays with a great compassion, which rises up endlessly in his heart until he shines again and is glorious like God.”

An all-embracing love, like that of Dostoevsky’s *Starets Zosima*, transfigures its object, making the human environment transparent, so that the uncreated energies of God shine through it. A momentary glimpse of what this transfiguration involves is provided by the celebrated conversation between St. Seraphim of Sarov and Nicholas Motovilov, his spiritual child. They were walking in the forest one winter’s day and St. Seraphim spoke of the need to acquire the Holy Spirit. This led Motovilov to ask how a man can know with certainty that he is *in the Spirit of God*:

Then Fr. Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said: “My son, we are both, at this moment in the Spirit of God. Why don’t you look at me?”

“I cannot look, Father,” I replied, “because your eyes are flashing like lightning. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and it hurts my eyes to look, at you.”

“Don’t be afraid,” he said. “At this very moment you have yourself become as bright as I am. You are yourself in the fullness of the Spirit of God at this moment; otherwise you would not be able to see me as you do... but why, my son, do you not look me in the eyes? Just look, and don’t be afraid; the Lord is with us.”

After these words I glanced at his face, and there came over me an even greater reverent awe. Imagine in the center of the sun, in the dazzling light of its mid-day rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes and you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders, yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his body, but only a blinding light spreading far around for several yards and lighting up with its brilliance the snow-blanket which covers the forest glade and the snowflakes which continue to fall unceasingly.

Such are, by God’s grace, the gifts of a *startets*, an Orthodox spiritual father.



Since we have pride—whether apparent or hidden without realizing it—God, desiring to purify us from this stinking condition, raises a storm in order to cast out all the “dregs” which have accumulated mainly in a time of spiritual negligence.

All kinds of rubbish and refuse are thrown into the sea, especially in the harbor, and if there were no storms, the sea would become a source of pestilence. But the fact that the sea is pure and wholesome is due to the occasional storms.

Spiritually, the same thing happens with our soul: with the sea of our soul. Refuse accumulates little by little from our various passions and careless deeds, and the devil throws in his own trash, too. We do not see how much refuse has accumulated. God knows, however, and since He wants to purify us, He stirs up storms in proportion to the accumulation of refuse, and thus He purifies the sea of our soul. Sometimes, after we pass through a temptation with patience, we see that our soul is calmed, joyful, and light as air. On our part, we must be careful not to accumulate refuse, so that storms of corresponding magnitude do not become necessary.

Storms are stirred up also in saints, but those are of another nature, they have another purpose: sometimes a trial helps them become more holy, or it is for their greater glory, or it is so that they may glorify God more, or it has to do with the storms raised against Orthodoxy, etc.

See to it, my child, that you have much humility, obedience to the advice of your Elder, love for all, and that you never trust your thoughts, but follow faithfully all of your Elder’s suggestions.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou & Arizona
From *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*

HOW TO SAVE THE SOUL

By St. Theophan the Recluse.



What does one say to the person who asks: “How can I save my soul?”

This: Repent, and being strengthened by the power of grace in the Holy Mysteries, walk in the path of God’s commandments, under the direction which the Holy Church gives you through its God-given priesthood. All of this must be done in a spirit of sincere faith which has no reservations.

What then is faith?

Faith is the sincere confession that God, Who is to be worshipped by all, the Trinity, Who created all things and provides for all, saves us who are fallen, through the power of the death on the Cross of the incarnate Son of God and by the grace of the Most Holy Spirit in His Holy Church. The beginnings of renewal, which are established in this life, will appear in all their glory in the future age, in a way that the mind cannot comprehend nor the tongue express.

O our God, how great are Thy promises!

How then does one walk in the path of the commandments unswervingly? This cannot be answered in one word, for life is a complex matter. Here is what is necessary:

a) Repent, and turn to the Lord, admit your sins, weep for them, with heartfelt contrition, and confess them before your spiritual father. Vow in word and in your heart before the face of the Lord not to offend Him further with your sins.

b) Then, by abiding in God in mind and heart, endeavour to fulfil in body the duties and affairs which your station in life imposes upon you.

c) In this labor most of all guard your heart from evil thoughts and feelings—pride, vainglory, anger, judging of others, hatred, envy, scorn, despondency, attachment to things and people, scattered thoughts, anxiety, all sensual pleasures and everything that separates the mind and heart from God.

d) In order to stand firm in this labor, resolve beforehand not to withdraw from what you recognize to be necessary, even if it may, mean death. To achieve this, when you first resolve to do so, offer your life to God in order to live not for your own sake, but for God alone.

e) A support for life in this manner is a humble offering of one’s self to the will of God, and not depending on one’s self; the spiritual arena in which this life is accomplished is patience or an unswerving stand in the ranks of redeemed

life, with a cheerful endurance of all the labors and unpleasantness that are linked with this.

f) A support for patience is faith, or the assurance that, working in this way for God, you are His servant and He is your Master, Who sees your efforts, is gladdened by them and values them; hope that the help of God which is ever protecting you, is always ready and waiting for you, and will descend upon you in your time of need, that God will not forsake you to the end of your life, and preserving you as one faithful to His commandments here, among all temptations, He will lead you through death to His eternal Kingdom; love, which meditates day and night upon the beloved Lord, in every way strives to do only what is pleasing to Him, and avoids everything that might offend Him in thought, word or deed.

g) The weapons of such a life are: prayers in church and at home, especially mental prayer, fasting according to one’s strength and the rules of the Church, vigilance, solitude, physical labors, frequent confession of sins, Holy Communion, reading of the Word of God and the writings of the Holy Fathers, conversations with God-fearing people, frequent consultation with one’s spiritual father about all the events of one’s internal and external life. The foundation of all these labors in measure, time and place is wisdom, with the counsel of those who are experienced.

h) Guard yourself with fear. For this remember the end—death, judgment, hell, the heavenly Kingdom. Most of all be attentive to yourself: preserve a sober mind and an untroubled heart.

i) Set as a final goal the kindling of the fire of the spirit, so that the spiritual fire will burn in your heart and, gathering up all your strength into one, will begin to build your inner man and finally burn up the tares of your sins and passions.

Arrange your life in this manner, and with God’s grace you will be saved.



Provided they live a worthy life, both those who choose to dwell in the midst of noise and hubbub and those who dwell in monasteries, mountains and caves can achieve salvation. Solely because of their faith in Him God bestows great blessings on them. Hence those who because of their laziness have failed to attain salvation will have no excuse to offer on the day of judgment. For He who promised to grant us salvation simply on account of our faith in Him is not a liar.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

THE ORTHODOX CITY HERMIT

ALEXANDROS PAPADIAMANDIS (+ JANUARY 3RD, 1911), GREECE'S FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY AND CHARLES DICKENS

Source: "A Short Biography of Alexandros Papadiamandis," *From the first Chapter of A. Keselopoulos, "Greece's Dostoevsky: The Theological Vision of Alexandros Papadiamandis,"* (2011).

One of the greatest figures in modern Greek literature, Alexandros Papadiamandis was born on the Greek island of Skiathos on March 4th, 1851, "on the second Sunday of Lent and the feast day of Gregory Palamas, while they were chanting the *triadiká* in church" (as we are informed by his fellow countryman Papa-George Rigas, distinguished scholar of folk traditions and specialist of the liturgical *typicon*).

While this first intimation of God's favor appeared during Papadiamandis' birth, the second took place during his Baptism: He was baptized on the Monday of Bright Week and named Alexandros. Something unusual happened while the priest, Papa-Nicholas, performed the Baptism; as he poured the oil in the baptismal font, the oil immediately made the form of the cross on the water. Papa-Nicholas interpreted this strange phenomenon, saying, "This child will be great."

His father was the pious priest Adamantios Emmanuel. Papadiamandis writes that he was "a beneficent guide in all ecclesiastical questions and a sublime adornment of ecclesiastical celebrations" in the church of the Three Hierarchs and in the country chapels of Skiathos.

From an early age, Alexandros followed his father around the island helping him, sometimes in the altar and sometimes at the lectern as chanter. With his exceptional sensitivity, Alexandros treasured his experiences of sharing this liturgical service with his father. His heart was filled with and his *nous* was instructed by images from the priestly life and the Church's services. He was so influenced by them that most of the scenes he chose to paint as a child were taken from the life of the Church. Reflecting on this time, he writes in his autobiographical memoir, "When I was young I would paint saints, or I would write [hymnographical] verse."

From his childhood years, Alexandros had the opportunity to live the tradition of the *Kollyvádes* fathers [the *Kollyvádes* (Greek *Κολλυβάδες*) were the members of a movement in Eastern Orthodoxy that began in the second half

of the eighteenth century among the monastic community of Mount Athos, which was concerned with the restoration of traditional practices and opposition to unwarranted innovations, and which turned unexpectedly into a movement of spiritual regeneration. *Ed.*] This tradition had been preserved on Skiathos through the presence of a monastery built by the *Kollyvádes*, the Monastery of the Annunciation. Although the monastery was in decline during Papadiamandis' later years, the diligently preserved *Kollyvadian* tradition remained alive in the inhabitants of the island. He would later write, "In this small monastery (of the Panagia of Kounistras in Skiathos) at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, six of my relatives were priest-monks." Papadiamandis gives an account of the monastery's spiritual life and foundation on Skiathos:

Papa-Gregory...the ascetic, descended from the heights of Athos together with his elder, Papa-Niphon, and thirty other monks. They sailed to the island of Gregory's birth

[Skiathos], and there, in the gorge of Angalianou, they built a beautiful, awe-inspiring monastery—patriarchal, *Stavropegic*, and coenobitic—with an exquisite, very fine church, built with great care. It was so beautiful that during those years, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was famous and enjoyed great respect among the monasteries of Athos. These ascetics were the so-called *Kollyvádes*, who were under persecution on the Holy Mountain, as they insisted on *precisionx*

(regarding frequent communion), and on many other things.

The renowned Elder Dionysios was a distinguished spiritual father and learned priest-monk who lived on Skiathos, whose roots were in the *kollyvadian* tradition. Papadiamandis knew him personally and did not hide his admiration for him. He was the inspired spiritual father in the small monastery of the Prophet Elijah. Papadiamandis had such monks and monasteries in mind when he wrote, "the rule of prayer should be complete, following all the old *typicons*, with the vigils and pre-dawn Matins, with all the appointed verses and readings from the Psalter."

Papadiamandis was initiated into this *kollyvadian*—the genuine Orthodox—tradition, in his own home by his father, Papa-Adamantios, and by the broader world of the Church in Skiathos. In an unsigned obituary for his father, he wrote that "Papa-Adamantios, like all of the older priests of the island, was taught how to celebrate the Mysteries by those venerable *Kollyvádes*, who, at the end of the last century,



established the Monastery of the Annunciation... which became a seedbed of humble priests for our island, priests who were lovers of the divine services. Simple and virtuous, they enjoyed the love and respect of the inhabitants, having no affectations or hypocrisy, and displaying no vanity as they lived their lives as priests.”

Seeds of spiritual struggle that had been planted in Papadiamandis during his childhood and adolescence at home and in the wider environment of Skiathos were brought to fruition when he went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain for a few months at the age of twenty-one. In one of his stories, we read about some of the events of his visit, mainly at the Skete of Xenophontos, and we perceive how the charm of the Holy Mountain was an inspiration for him. While there, he met many ascetics and hesychasts and became familiar with the liturgical life of the monks. He was enthralled by the vigils of the monastics and recorded in his heart not only the strict *typicon* and the Byzantine melodies but also the spirit that governed it all. In this way, Athos and its traditions affected the path his life took and enriched it with unforgettable memories.

Given his rich spiritual upbringing, experiences, and heritage, it is only natural that Papadiamandis would choose to spend his life within this rich Orthodox tradition, preserving the Orthodox liturgical ethos through his writings and life. The critics of his age believed that there was little value in a detailed description of “how a village priest went to celebrate the liturgy in a country chapel for a little community of peasants or shepherds, who and how many took part in the festival, and what their customs were like.” Papadiamandis, however, did not regard the celebrations as mere holidays, but himself lived the events and the life of the Church as the center and foundation of all events and all life.

Papadiamandis moved within this ecclesiastical environment and within the wider Greek tradition. He lived both aspects of this tradition, Ancient and Byzantine, in a diachronic unity, which spanned the ages. He had utter integrity, both as a person and as a Greek, within whose Hellenism was Byzantium and in whose love for Byzantium might be discerned Hellenism. In his texts, Ancient Greece resembles a flower

that, wilting from its desire for the truth, then bears great fruit in the warmth of the Sun of Righteousness [Christ]. When history is viewed as a progression toward the discovery of the fullness of the truth of Orthodoxy, tradition truly lives, and history is kept from being fragmented. Other important figures in modern Greek literature such as Photios Kontoglou and, even more so, Nikos Gabriel Pentzakis would act from this perspective later on, with both their pens and their brushes. Together with our author, they are regarded as solid links in this tradition.

God favored Papadiamandis with many gifts, and he struggled to use them in a way that would bear the most God-pleasing fruit. The reverent and liturgical ethos expressed through Papadiamandis’s writings and life bear witness to the successful cultivation of his gifts.

It was in 1887 that he found what could be described as his spiritual bolt-hole in the turbulent and often harsh world of the metropolis: the small church of the Prophet Elisha, set in the courtyard of a private house in the old part of the city, under the rock of the Acropolis. There Papa-Nicholaos Planas, a simple priest born in the same year as Papadiamandis, a man of prayer and of great spiritual gifts, would regularly hold vigil services, gathering people from all walks of life into the crucible of the little church. Papa-Nicholaos was canonized in 1992.

Papadiamandis never married. He was a shy and retiring man, as the few extant photographs of him testify, a man seemingly

not of this world despite his acute observations of it. He also had to provide for his unmarried sisters at home. But despite his introspective nature he had a small circle of close friends, including Pavlos Nirvanas and Yannis Vlachoyannis, well-known Athenian men of letters who on various occasions undertook the role of literary agents and helped him during hard times.

Papadiamantis’ longest works were the serialized novels “The Gypsy Girl,” “The Emigrant,” and “Merchants of Nations.” These were adventures set around the Mediterranean, with rich plots involving captivity, war, pirates, the plague, etc. However, the author is best remembered for his scores of short stories. Written in his own version of the then official language of Greece, *katharevousa* (a “pur-



ist” written language heavily influenced by ancient Greek), Papadiamantis’ stories are little gems. They provide lucid and lyrical portraits of country life in Skiathos, or urban life in the poorer neighborhoods of Athens, with frequent flashes of deep psychological insight.

Papadiamantis’ deep Christian faith, complete with the mystical feeling associated with the Orthodox Christian liturgy, suffuses many stories. Most of his work is tinged with melancholy, and resonates with empathy with people’s suffering, regardless of whether they are saints or sinners, innocent or conflicted.

His work is seminal in Modern Greek literature. It is a body of work, however, that is virtually impossible to translate, as the magic of his language is founded on the Greek *diglossia*: elaborately crafted, high *katharevousa* for the narrative, interspersed with authentic local dialect for the dialogue, and with all dialectical elements used in the narrative formulated in strict *katharevousa*, and therefore in forms that had never actually existed.

Papadiamantis’ desire to glorify God is shown even more in the way he ended his life and in his attitude toward death. In a prayer he offered at the end of a poem entitled, “To the Little Panagia in the Turret,” he beseeches her, “comfort me, as well, my Panagia, before I depart and will be no more.” In a letter written by Papa-George Rigas, we learn about the last moments of Papadiamantis’s life on earth:

His repose took place as follows: He became ill on the 29th of November 1910. On the third day of his illness, he fainted. When he revived, he asked, “What happened to me?” “It’s nothing, a small fainting spell,” his three brothers who were at his side told him. “I haven’t fainted,” Alexandros said, “in so many years; doesn’t it seem that it’s a prelude to my repose? Get the priest immediately and don’t delay.” Soon after, having been called [by his brothers], the priest and the doctor arrived at the same time. Papadiamantis was, above all things, a pious Christian. So, as soon as he saw the doctor, he asked him, “What are you doing here?” “I came to see you,” the doctor told him. “Keep quiet,” the sick man told him. “I will first follow the ecclesiastical path [and call upon the help of God], and then you can come later.”

He had control of his faculties until the end and wanted to write a story. Until the end, his mind was dedicated to God. On his own, a few hours before his repose, he called for the priest to come so he could partake of Holy Communion. “Perhaps later on I won’t be able to swallow!” he explained. It was the eve of his repose and, as irony would have it, it was the day they told him that he would receive the medal of the Cross of the Savior. On the eve of his repose, on the 2nd of January, he said, “Light a candle [and] bring me an [ecclesiastical] book.” The candle was lit. The book was about to be brought. However, Papadiamantis wearily said, “Don’t worry about the book; tonight I will chant whatever

I remember by heart.” And he began to chant in a trembling voice, *Thy Hand Touching* (a *troparion* from the Hours of the eve of Theophany).

Papadiamantis chanted this final hymn and, as day broke between the second and third of January of his sixtieth year, he wearily fell asleep. After passing through the furnace of pain and trials and tasting many of the bitter dregs of life while faithfully living the liturgical life of the Church, he now stretched out his strong wings to fly to the upper chapel of the angels, toward which he had oriented his whole life. It snowed on the following day and, like Uncle Yiannios in the story, “Love in the Snow,” Papadiamantis lay down his worn-out body, presenting himself, his life, and his work before the Judge, the Ancient of Days, the Thrice-Holy. This was, finally, the only judgment with which he was concerned as he passed through life. Though his life and struggle in this world have ended, his work will continue to give witness to his devotion to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church for generations to come.



On Theophany, that is, the Day of the Lord’s Baptism, every year a great miracle is performed. The Holy Spirit, coming down upon the water, changes its natural properties. It becomes incorrupt, that is it does not spoil, remains transparent and fresh for many years, receives the grace to heal illnesses, to drive away demons and every evil power, to preserve people and their dwellings from every danger, to sanctify various objects whether for church or home use. Therefore Orthodox Christians with reverence drink Holy Water, a great *Agiasma* (*holy thing*), as the Greeks call it.

One should always have at home enough Theophany water so that it will last the whole year, and make use of it at every need; in cases of illness, leaving on a journey, whenever one is upset, students when going to examinations. They do well who daily, before eating any kind of food, drink a little Holy Water. It strengthens the powers of our soul—if it is done, of course, with prayer and reverence, and one does not merely expect from it a mechanical result.

Every priest should take care to bless a sufficient quantity of water for his church, so that it will be on hand for the course of the whole year for every need and to be given out to those who ask for it; and parishioners should provide for themselves at Theophany with Holy Water for the whole year and even so that it can be kept for future years.

St. John Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco

Χριστούγεννα στη Σπηλιά

Φώτης Κόντογλου.

Χριστούγεννα παραμονές. Χριστούγεννα και χιονιάς πάντα πάνε μαζί. Μά εκείνη τη χρονιά οί καιροί ήτανε φουρτουνιασμένοι παρὰ φύση. Χιόνι δὲν ἔρριχνε. Μοναχὰ πὸν ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα ἦτανε θυμωμένη, καὶ φυσούσανε σκληροὶ βοριάδες μὲ χιονόνερο καὶ μ' ἀστραπές. Καμμιά βδομάδα ὁ καιρὸς καλωσύνεψε καὶ φυσούσε μία τραμουντάνα πὸν ἄρμενιζότανε. Μά τὴν παραμονὴ τὰ κατσούφιασε. Τὴν παραμονὴ ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶν ὁ οὐρανὸς ἦτανε μαῦρος σὰν μολύβι, κ' ἐπίασε κ' ἔρριχνε βελονιαστὸ χιονόνερο.

Σὲ μία τοποθεσία πὸν τὴ λέγανε Σκρόφα, βρισκότανε ἓνα μαντρὶ μὲ γιδοπρόδατα, ἀπάνω σε μία πλαγιὰ τοῦ βουνοῦ πὸν κοίταζε κατὰ τὸ πέλαγο. Τὸ μέρος αὐτὸ ἦτανε ἄγριο κ' ἔρημο, γεμάτο ἀγριόπρινα, σκίνους καὶ κουμαριές, πὸν ἦτανε κατακόκκινες ἀπὸ τὰ κούμαρα. Τὸ μαντρὶ ἦτανε τριγυρισμένο μὲ ξεροτρόχαλο [=ξερολιθιά].

Οἱ τσομπάνηδες καθότανε μέσα σὲ μία σπηλιὰ πὸν βρισκότανε παραμέσα καὶ πιὸ ψηλὰ ἀπὸ τὴ μάντρα καὶ πὸν κοίταζε κατὰ τὴ νοτιὰ. Μεγάλη σπηλιὰ, μὲ τρία-τέσσερα χωρίσματα, κὶ ἀψηλὴ ὡς τρία μπόγια. Τὰ ζωντανὰ σταλιάζανε κάτω ἀπὸ τὶς χαμηλὲς σάγιες, πὸν ἔσκυβες γιὰ νὰ μπεῖς μέσα. Σωροὶ ἀπὸ κοπριά στεκόντανε ἐδῶ κ' ἐκεῖ, καὶ βγάζανε μία σπιρτόζα μυρουδιά. Χάμω, τὸ χῶμα ἦτανε σκουπισμένο καὶ καθαρὸ, γιατί οἱ τσομπάνηδες ἦτανε μερακλήδες, καὶ βάζανε τὰ παιδιά καὶ σκουπίζανε ταχτικά μὲ κάτι σκουῦπες κανωμένες ἀπὸ ἀστοιβιές.

Ἀρχισέλιγκας ἦτανε ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Μπαρμπάκος, ἓνας ἄνθρωπος μισάγριος, γεννημένος ἀνάμεσα στὰ γίδια καὶ στὰ πρόβατα. Ἦτανε μαῦρος, μαλλιαρὸς, μὲ γένεια μαῦρα κόρακας, σγουρὰ καὶ σφιχτὰ σὰν τοῦ κριαριοῦ. Φοροῦσε σαλβάρια κοντὰ ὡς τὸ γόνατο, σελάχι στὴ μέση του, ζουνάρι πλατὺ, βαριὰ τζεσμέδια στὰ ποδάρια του. Τὸ κεφάλι του τὸ εἶχε τυλιγμένο μ' ἓνα μεγάλο μαντίλι σὰν σαρίκι, κ' οἱ μαρχαμάδες [= τὰ κρόσια] κρεμόντανε στὸ πρόσωπό του. Ἀρχαῖος ἄνθρωπος!

Εἶχε δυὸ παραγιοῦς, τὸν Ἀλέξη καὶ τὸν Δυσσέα, δυὸ παλληκαρόπουλα ὡς εἴκοσι χρονῶν. Εἶχε καὶ τρία παιδιά, πὸν τοὺς βοηθοῦσανε στ' ἄρμεγμα καὶ κοιτάζανε τὸ μαντρὶ νὰ ἴναι καθαρὸ. Αὐτὲς οἱ ἔξι ψυχὲς ἐξοῦσανε σὲ κείνο τὸ μέρος, κρυφὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Ἀνάγια βλέπανε ἄνθρωπο.

Ἡ σπηλιὰ ἦτανε καπνισμένη κὶ ὁ βράχος εἶχε μαυρίσει ὡς ἀπάνω ἀπὸ τὴν καπνιὰ πὸν ἔβγαине ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τῆς σπηλιᾶς. Ἐκεῖ μέσα εἶχανε τὰ γιατάκια τους, σὰν μεντέρια, στρωμένα μὲ προβιές. Στοὺς τοίχους τῆς σπηλιᾶς εἶχανε μπηξέει παλούκια μέσα στὶς σκισμάδες τοῦ βράχου, καὶ κρεμόντανε καρδάρες, τυροβόλια, μαγιές, τουφέκια καὶ μαχαίρια, λὲς κ' ἦτανε λημέρι τῶν ληστῶν. Ἀπ' ἔξω φυλάγανε οἱ σκύλοι, ὅλοι ἄγριοι σὰν λύκοι.

Ἡ ἀκροθαλασσιὰ βρισκότανε ὡς ἓνα τσιγάρο ἀπόσταση ἀπὸ τὴ μάντρα. Ἦτανε ἔρημη, κὶ ἄλλο δὲν ἀκούγότανε ἐκεῖ πέρα παρὰ μοναχὰ ὁ ἀγκομαχητὸς τοῦ πελάγου, μέρα - νύχτα. Μὲ τὸν βοριά ἀπαγκίαζε, καὶ καμμιά φορὰ πόδιζε κανένα καίκι. Ἀλλιῶς δὲν ἔβλεπες βάρκα πουθενά. Ἀπὸ τὸ μαντρὶ ἀγνάντευε κανένας τὸ πέλαγο ἀνάμεσα στὰ δέντρα, καὶ τὸ μάτι ξεχώριζε καθαρὰ τα βουνὰ τῆς Μυτιλήνης.

Τὴν παραμονὴ τὰ Χριστούγεννα, εἶπαμε πὼς ὁ καιρὸς χάλασε, κὶ ἄρχισε νὰ πέφτει χιονόνερο. Οἱ



τσομπάνηδες εἶχανε μαζευτεῖ στὴ σπηλιὰ κὶ ἀνάψανε μία μεγάλη φωτιὰ καὶ κουβεντιάζανε. Τὰ παιδιά εἶχανε σφάξει δυὸ ἄρνια καὶ τὰ γδέρνανε. Ὁ Ἀλέξης ἔβαλε ἀπάνω σ' ἓνα ράφι μυτζήθρες καὶ τυρὶ ἀνάλατο μέσα στὰ τυροβόλια, ἀγίζι καὶ γιαοῦρτι. Ὁ Δυσσέας εἶχε μία παλιὰ Σύνοψη, κ' ἐπειδὴ γνῶριζε λίγο ἀπὸ ψαλτικά κ' ἤξερε καὶ πέντε γράμματα, διάβαζε τὶς Κυριακάδες κὶ ὅποτε ἦτανε γιορτὴ κανένα τροπάρι καὶ λιγοστὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐξάψαλμο. Ἐκείνη τὴν ὥρα φυλλομετροῦσε τὴ Σύνοψη, γιὰ νὰ δεῖ τί γράμματα ἦτανε νὰ πεῖ.

Θᾶ ἴτανε ὥρα σπερινοῦ. Κεῖνη τὴν ὥρα ἀκούσανε κάτι τουφεκιές. Καταλάβανε πὼς θᾶ ἴτανε τίποτα κυνηγοί. Τὸ ἓνα παιδί, πὸν εἶχε πάγει νὰ φέρει ξύλα μὲ τὸν γάϊδαρο, εἶπε πὼς τὸ πρῶν εἶχε ἀκούσει τουφεκιές κατὰ τὴν ἀπὸ μέσα θάλασσα, κατὰ τὴν Ἅγια-Παρασκευή. Οἱ σκύλοι πιάσανε καὶ γαβγίζανε ὅλοι μαζί καὶ πεταχτήκανε ὄξω ἀπὸ τὴ μάντρα.

Σὲ λίγο φανερωθῆκανε ἀπὸ πάνω ἀπὸ τὴ σπηλιὰ δυὸ ἄνθρωποι μὲ τουφέκια, καὶ φωνάζανε τοὺς τσομπάνηδες νὰ μαζέψουνε τὰ σκυλιὰ, πὸν χυμήξανε ἀπάνω τους. Ὁ Σκούρης ἄφησε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους κὶ ἄρπαξε ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ ζαγάρια πὸν ἔχανε οἱ κυνηγοὶ καὶ τὸ ξετίναζε νὰ τὸ πνίξει. Ὁ κυνηγὸς ἔρριξε ἀπάνου του, καὶ τὰ σκάγια τὸν πονέσανε καὶ γύρισε πίσω, μαζί μὲ τ' ἄλλα μαντρόσκυλα, πὸν πηγαίνανε πισώδρομα

ὅσο κατεβαίνανε οἱ κυνηγοί. Τέλος πάντων, ἐβγήκε ὁ Μπαρμπάκος μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ πιάσανε τὸν Σκούρη καὶ τὸν δέσανε, διώξανε καὶ τ' ἄλλα σκυλιά.

«Ὡρα καλή, βρὲ παιδιά!» φώναξε ὁ Παναγῆς ὁ Καρδαμίτσας, ζωσμένος μὲ τὰ φουσεγκλίγια, μὲ τὸ ταγάρι γεμάτο πουλιά.

Ὁ ἄλλος, ποὺ ἦτανε μαζί του, ἦτανε ὁ γυιὸς του ὁ Δημητρός.

«Πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη!» Ἀποκριθῆκανε ὁ Μπαρμπάκος κ' ἦ συντροφιά του. «Καλῶς ὀρίσατε!»

Τοὺς πήγανε στὴ σπηλιά.

«Μωρέ, τ' εἶν' ἐδῶ; Παλάτι! Παλάτι μὲ βασιλοποῦλες!» Εἶπε ὁ μπαρμπα-Παναγῆς, δείχνοντας τὶς μυτζιθρες ποὺ ἀχνίζανε.

Τοὺς βάλανε νὰ καθήσουνε, τοὺς κάνανε καφέ. Οἱ κυνηγοὶ εἶχανε κονιάκι. Κεραστήκανε.

«Βρὲ ἀδερφέ», ἔλεγε ὁ μπάρμπα-Παναγῆς, «ποιὸς νὰ τὸ ἔλεγε, χρονιάρια μέρα, πὼς θὰ κάνουμε Χριστούγεννα στὸ σπήλαιο ποὺ ἐγεννήθη ὁ Χριστός! Ἐχτὲς περάσαμε στὴν Ἅγια - Παρασκευή, νὰ κυνηγήσουμε λίγο. Ἄ, δικός μας εἶναι ὁ ἡγούμενος, κοιμηθήκαμε στὸ μοναστήρι, καὶ σήμερα τὴν αὐγὴ βγήκαμε στὸ κυνήγι.

Βλέποντας πὼς φουρτούνιασε ὁ καιρὸς, εἶπαμε πὼς δὲ θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ περάσουμε τὸ μπουγάζι μὲ τὴ σαπιόβαρκα τοῦ μπαρμπα-Μανώλη τοῦ Βασιλέ. Κ' ἐπειδὴ ξέραμε ἀπ' ἄλλη φορὰ τὸ μαντρί, καὶ μὲ τὸ κυνήγι πέσαμε σὲ τοῦτα τὰ σύνορα, εἶπαμε νὰ ῥθουμε στ' ἀρχοντικό σας... Μωρέ, τί σκύλο ἔχετε; Αὐτὸ εἶναι θηρίο, ἀσλάνι καὶ καπλάνι!

Μπρέ, μπρέ, μπρέ! Τὸ ζαγάρι τὸ πετσόκοψε! Γιὰ κοίταξε τί χάλια τὸ ἔκανε!»

Καὶ γύρισε σὲ μία γωνιὰ τῆς σπηλιάς, ποὺ κλαμουρίζε τὸ σκυλὶ κ' ἔτρεμε σὰν θερμισμένο.

«Ἐλα δῶ, Φλόξ! Φλόξ!»

Μὰ ἡ Φλόξ ἀπὸ τὴν τρομάρα τῆς τρύπωνε πιὸ βαθιά.

Ἄμα ἤπιανε δυὸ-τρία κονιάκια, ὁ μπαρμπα-Παναγῆς ἄρχισε νὰ μασᾶ τὰ μουστάκια του, καὶ στὸ τέλος ἐπίασε νὰ τραγουδᾶ:

Καλὴν ἐσπέραν, ἀρχοντες, ἂν εἶναι ὀρισμός σας,

Χριστοῦ τὴν θεῖαν γέννησιν νὰ πῶ στ' ἀρχοντικό σας.

Ἔστερα ὁ Δυσσέας ἔψαλε τὸ «Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε».

Ἐκεῖνη τὴν ὥρα ἀκούσανε πάλι τὰ σκυλιά νὰ γαβγίζουνε. Στείλανε τὰ παιδιὰ νὰ δοῦνε τί εἶναι. Ὁ ἀγέρας εἶχε μπουρνιασει κ' ἔρριχνε παγωμένο νερό. Κρύο τάντανο!

Σὲ λίγο πάψανε τὰ σκυλιά, καὶ γυρίσανε πίσω τὰ παιδιὰ. Ἀπὸ πίσω τους μπήκανε στὴ σπηλιά τρεῖς ἄντρες, ποὺ φαινότανε πὼς ἦτανε θαλασσινοί, καὶ δυὸ καλόγεροι, βρεμένοι ὅλοι καὶ ξυλιασμένοι ἀπ' τὸ κρύο. Τοὺς καλωσορίσανε, τοὺς βάλανε καὶ καθήσανε.

Μόλις πήγε κοντὰ στὴ φωτιὰ ὁ πρῶτος, ὁ καπετάνιος, τὸν γνώρισε ὁ Μπαρμπάκος κ' ἔβγαλε μία χαρούμενη φωνή. Ἦτανε ὁ καπετάν-Κωσταντῆς ὁ Μπιλικιτσής, ποὺ ταξίδευε στὴν Πόλη. Εἶχε περάσει κι ἄλλη φορὰ ἀπὸ τὴ Σκρόφα, κ' εἶχανε δέσει φιλία μὲ τὸν Μπαρμπάκο, ποὺ δὲν ἤξερε τί περιποίηση νὰ

τοὺς κάνει. Οἱ ἄλλοι δυὸ ἦτανε γεμιτζῆδες κι αὐτοί, ἄνθρωποι τοῦ καϊκιῦ του.

Ὁ ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς καλόγερους, ἕνας σωματώδης μὲ μαῦρα γένεια, ὁμορφάνθρωπος, ἦτανε ὁ πάτερ-Σιλβέστρος Κουκουτός, καλογερόπαπας. Ὁ ἄλλος ἦτανε λιγνός, μὲ λίγες ἀνάριες τρίχες στὸ πηγούνι, σὰν τὸν

Ἅγιο Γιάννη τὸν Καλυβίτη. Τὸν λέγανε Ἀρσένιο Σγουρηῆ.

Ὁ καπετάν-Κωσταντῆς ἐρχότανε ἀπὸ τὴν Πόλη καὶ πήρε στὸ καῖκι τὸν πάτερ-Σιλβέστρο, ποὺ εἶχε πάγει στὴν Πόλη ἀπὸ τ' Ἅγιον Ὄρος γιὰ ἐλέη, κ' ἤθελε νὰ κάνει Χριστούγεννα στὴν πατρίδα του. Ὁ πάτερ-Ἀρσένιος εἶχε ταξιδέψει μαζί του ἀπὸ τὴ Μονὴ τοῦ Παντοκράτορα στὸ Ὄρος, κ' ἦτανε ἀπὸ τὴ Θεσσαλία.

Ταξιδέψανε καλά. Μὰ σὰν καβατζάρανε τὸν Κάβο-Μπαμπά, ὁ ἀγέρας μπουρνιασε, κι ὅλη τὴ μέρα ἀρμενίζανε μὲ μουδαρισμένα πανιά καὶ μὲ τὸν στάντζο, ὡς ποὺ φτάσανε κατὰ τὸ βράδυ ἀπ' ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ Ταλιάνι. Ὁ καιρὸς σκύλιαξε κι ὁ καπετάνιος δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ μπεῖ στὸ μπουγάζι, νὰ κάνουμε Χριστούγεννα στὴν πατρίδα.

Ἀποφάσισε λοιπὸν νὰ ποδίσει, καὶ πήγε καὶ φουντάρισε στ' ἀπάγκειο, πίσω ἀπὸ ἕναν μικρὸν κάβο, ἀπὸ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ μαντρί. Κ' ἐπειδὴ θυμήθηκε τὸν φίλο του τὸν Μπαρμπάκο, πήρε τοὺς γέροντες καὶ τοὺς δυὸ ἄλλους νοματέους καὶ τραβήξανε γιὰ



τὸ ἀγίλι [=μαντρὶ]. Στὸ τσερνίκι εἶχανε ἀφήσει τὸν μπαρμπ' - Ἀπόστολο μὲ τὸν μοῦτσο.

Σὰν εἶδανε πὼς στὴ σπηλιὰ βρισκότανε κι ὁ κὺρ-Παναγῆς μὲ τὸν κυρ-Δημητρός, γίνηκε μεγάλη χαρὰ καὶ φασαρία.

«Μωρὲ νὰ δεῖς», ἔλεγε ὁ κὺρ-Παναγῆς, «τώρα ψέλναμε τὸ τροπάρι, κι ἀπάνω ποὺ λέγαμε «ἐν αὐτῇ γὰρ οἱ τοῖς ἄστροις λατρεύοντες ὑπὸ ἀστέρος ἐδιδάσκοντο...», φτάξατε κ' ἐσεῖς οἱ μάγοι μὲ τὰ δῶρα! Γιατί βλέπω μία νταμιζάνα κρασί, βλέπω λακέρδα, βλέπω χαβιάρια, βλέπω παξιμάδια, μπακλαβάδες, «σμύρναν, χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον»!

Χά! Χά! Χά! — γελοῦσε δυνατὰ ὁ κὺρ-Παναγῆς, μισομεθυμένος καὶ ψευδίζοντας, καὶ χάιδευε τὴν κοιλιά του, γιατί ἦτανε καλοφαγὰς.

Στὸ μεταξὺ ὁ πάτερ Ἀρσένιος ὁ Σγουρῆς ζωντάνευε ὁ καίμενος, κ' εἶπε σιγανὰ χαμογελώντας καὶ τριδοντας τὰ χέρια του:

«Δόξα σοι ὁ Θεός, Κύριε ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ποὺ μᾶς ἐλύτρωσες ἐκ τοῦ κλύδωνος!» κ' ἔκανε τὸν σταυρό του.

Ὁ πάτερ- Σίλβεστρος εἶπε νὰ σηκωθοῦνε ὄρθιοι, κ' εἶπε λίγες εὐχές, τὸ «Χριστὸς γεννᾶται», κ' ὕστερα μὲ τὴ βροντερὴ φωνή του ἔψαλε:

«Μεγάλυνον ψυχὴ μου, τὴν τιμιωτέραν,
καὶ ἐνδοξοτέραν τῶν ἄνω στρατευμάτων
Μυστήριον ξένον, ὁρῶ καὶ παράδοξον!
Οὐρανὸν τὸ Σπήλαιον, θρόνον Χερουβικόν,
τὴν Παρθένον, τὴν φάτνην χωρίον,
ἐν ᾧ ἀνεκλίθη ὁ ἀχώρητος, Χριστὸς ὁ Θεός,
ὄν ἀνυμνοῦντες μεγαλύνομεν.»

Ὑστερα καθίσανε στὸ τραπέζι. Τέτοιο τραπέζι βλογημένο καὶ χαρούμενο δὲν ἔγινε σὲ κανένα παλάτι. Τρώγανε καὶ ψέλνανε. Καὶ τοῦ πουλιοῦ τὸ γάλα εἶχε ἀπάνω, ἀπὸ τὰ μοσκοβολημένα τ' ἄρνια, τὰ τυριά, τὰ μανούρια, τὶς μυτζήθρες, τὶς μεκκάτσες καὶ τ' ἄλλα πουλιὰ τοῦ κυνηγιοῦ, ὡς τὴ λακέρδα καὶ τ' ἄλλα τὰ πολίτικα ποὺ φέρανε οἱ θαλασσινοί, καθὼς καὶ κρασί μπρούσικο.

Ὅξω φουσομανοῦσε ὁ χιονιάς, καὶ βογγούσανε τὰ δέντρα κ' ἡ θάλασσα ἀπὸ μακριά. Ἀνάμεσα στὰ βουίσματα ἀκουγόντανε καὶ τὰ κουδούνια ἀπὸ τὰ ζωντανὰ ποὺ ἀναχαράζανε. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὴ σπηλιὰ ἔβγαине ἡ κόκκινη ἀντιφεγγιὰ τῆς φωτιάς μαζί μὲ τὶς ψαλμωδίες καὶ μὲ τὶς χαρούμενες φωνές. Κι ὁ κὺρ-Παναγῆς ἔκλεβε κάπου-κάπου λίγον ὕπνο, ρουχάλιζε λιγάκι κ' ὕστερα ξυπνοῦσε κ' ἔψελνε μαζί μὲ τὴ συνοδεία.

Ἀληθινὰ, ἀπὸ τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν ἔλειπε τίποτα. Ὅλα ὑπῆρχανε: τὸ σπήλαιο, οἱ ποιμένες, οἱ μάγοι μὲ τὰ δῶρα, κι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς ἦτανε παρὼν μὲ τοὺς δύο μαθητές του, ποὺ εὐλογοῦσαν «τὴν βρῶσιν καὶ τὴν πόσιν».

Μίας Οικονομικῆς Κατάρρευσης Προηγείται ἡ Πνευματικὴ Ἥττα

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτριος Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος.

Πλησίασε κάποτε ἓνας Εὐρωπαῖος, ἓνας Φράγκος, τὸν τροπαιοῦχο νομπελίστα μας ποιητὴ, Γιῶργο Σεφέρη, πειράζων αὐτὸν καὶ λέγων:

—Μά, πιστεύετε σοβαρὰ ὅτι εἶστε ἀπόγονοι τοῦ Λεωνίδα, τοῦ Θεμιστοκλή;

Ἀπάντησε ὁ ποιητής:

—Ὅχι, εἴμαστε ἀπόγονοι μονάχα τῆς μάνας μας, ποὺ μᾶς μίλησε Ἑλληνικά, ποὺ προσευχήθηκε Ἑλληνικά, ποὺ μᾶς νανούρισε μὲ παραμύθια γιὰ τὸν Ὀδυσσεά, τὸν Ἡρακλή, τὸν Μαρμαρωμένο Βασιλιὰ καὶ τὸν Παπαφλέσσα, ποὺ ζύμωνε κάθε Πρωτοχρονιὰ τὴν βασιλόπιτα καὶ ἔνιωθε τὴν ψυχὴ τῆς νὰ βουρκώνει τὴν Μεγάλη Παρασκευή, μπροστὰ το ξόδι τοῦ νεκροῦ Θεανθρώπου.

Βαθιὰ θεολογικὴ ἢ ἀπάντηση τοῦ ποιητῆ. Τὸ ἐρώτημα εἶναι πόσοι ἀπὸ μᾶς μποροῦν νὰ δώσουν σήμερα τὴν ἴδια ἀπόκριση.

Χριστούγεννα σὲ λίγες μέρες. «*Ἡ πασῶν τῶν ἑορτῶν ἐπεδήμησεν ἑορτῆ, καὶ τὴν οἰκουμένην εὐφροσύνης ἐπλήρωσεν ἑορτῆ ἢ τῶν καλῶν ἀπάντων ἀκρόπολις, ἢ πηγῆ καὶ ῥίζα τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀγαθῶν, δι' ἧς ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀνεώχθη, πνεῦμα κατεπέμφθη, τὸ μεσότοιχον ἀνῆρέθη, ὁ φραγμὸς ἐλύθη, τὰ διεστῶτα ἠνώθη, τὸ σκότος ἐσβέσθη, τὸ φῶς ἔλαμψεν, οὐρανὸς ἐδέξατο τὴν φύσιν τὴν ἀπὸ γῆς, γῆ τὸν ἐπὶ τῶν Χερουβιμ καθήμενον οἱ δοῦλοι γεγόνασιν ἐλεύθεροι, οἱ ἔχθροὶ υἱοί, οἱ ἀλλότριοι κληρονόμοι...*» Εἶναι λόγια τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννη τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου. (Λόγος ΛΔ', «Εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ Γέννησιν»). Ἀπὸ ἐχθροί, λέει ὁ ἅγιος, χάρις στὴν ἐνανθρώπιση τοῦ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ, γίναμε υἱοί. Ὅμως τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια ἐγκαταλείψαμε τὸν πατρικὸ οἶκο καὶ περιπλανιόμαστε στὶς Λόντρες καὶ τὰ Βερολίνα.

Ἄλλους ἢ στείρα προγονολατρία, ἄλλους ἢ ξενομανία καὶ ὁ ἄκρατος πιθικισμὸς, ἄλλους ὁ παρασιτικὸς καταναλωτισμὸς καὶ τὸ διογκωμένο σύμπλεγμα κατωτερότητας μᾶς ὀδήγησαν στὴν περιφρόνηση τοῦ μοναδικοῦ αὐτοῦ θησαυροῦ, τῆς παράδοσης τῆς Ρωμαιοσύνης. Γιορτάζουμε τὰ Χριστούγεννα χωρὶς Χριστό.

Μιὰς οἰκονομικῆς κατάρρευσης καὶ κρίσης προηγείται μιὰ πνευματικὴ ἥττα. Ἥττηθήκαμε, γιατί ξεχάσαμε τὸ Ρωμαῖκο ἦθος. Τὸ ἦθος αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ «ἐντιμος πενία» τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη, τὸ καθαρὸ μέτωπο τῶν γονέων μας, τὸ δόξα τῷ Θεῷ τῶν παππούδων μας, τὸ χιλιοτραγουδισμένο φιλότιμο τοῦ λαοῦ μας. Ἥττηθήκαμε, μὰ ὁ πόλεμος δὲν χάθηκε. «Ἡμεῖς νικῶμεν, νικῶντων τῶν ἄλλων». (Ἅγιος Νικόλαος Καβάσιλας).

Ρώτησαν έναν άγιορείτη μοναχό. Γέροντα ή κρίση θα περάσει; Και αυτός άπάντησε: «Δυστυχώς παιδί μου θα περάσει». Τα όλονύχια ρεβεγιόν, τα πανάκριβα δώρα, τα διακοποδάμεια, τὸ φάγωμεν, πίνωμεν δὲν εἶναι Χριστούγεννα. Ὁ πρὸ αἰώνων Θεὸς τῆς ταπεινῆς φάτνης, ἄλλα μᾶς διδάσκει.

«Τιμήσατε τὸν Θεὸν πλεον τῆς σννηθείας» λέει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος. Ἡ κρίση εἶναι καὶ εὐκαιρία νὰ ἐπιστρέψουμε στὸ σπίτι τοῦ Πατέρα μας, στὴν ἠλιόλουστη Ὁρθοδοξία μας, νὰ βροῦμε τὸν ἑαυτό μας, νὰ ξαναγίνουμε Ρωμιοί. «Ὅλα τα ἔθνη γιὰ νὰ προοδεύσουν πρέπει νὰ βαδίσουν ἐμπρὸς πλὴν τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ποὺ πρέπει νὰ στραφεῖ πίσω» ἔλεγε ὁ σοφὸς Ἀθηναιογράφος Δημ. Καμπούρογλου. Πίσω, ὄχι ὡς στεῖρος συντηρητισμὸς, ἄλλα ὡς ἀναζητήση τῆς πηγῆς ἐξ ἧς ρεεὶ τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ἀλλόμενον εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, ὁ Χριστὸς.

Καί, ἄς μου ἐπιτραπεῖ ἡ φράση, πολλὰ ρουσφέτια ζητήσαμε ἀπὸ διάφορους τα προηγούμενα χρόνια. Γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους μόνο ἓνα ρουσφέτι μᾶς ἐπιτρέπεται. «**Ταῖς προσβείας τῆς Θεοτόκου, Σῶτερ σῶσον ἡμᾶς**». Τὴν μεσιτεία, τὸ «πνευματικὸ ρουσφέτι» τῆς Θεομάνας μας, ἄς ζητήσουμε γονυπετῶς.

Ἡ Παναγία μᾶς εἶναι Ἑλληνοσῶτρια. Διαβάζω τὴν ἀφήγηση τοῦ Γάλλου Ἱησοῦίτη, περιηγητῆ Richard στα μέσα του 17ου αἰώνα, γιὰ τὴν ζωὴ τῶν ὑπόδουλων Ρωμηῶν.

«Πολλὲς φορὲς ἀπορῶ πὼς κατόρθωσε νὰ ἐπιβίωση ἡ Χριστιανικὴ πίστη στὴν Τουρκία καὶ πὼς ὑπάρχουν στὴν Ἑλλάδα ἑκατομμύρια Ὁρθόδοξοι. Καὶ νὰ σκεφθεῖ κανεὶς ὅτι οὐδέποτε ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Νέρωνος, τοῦ Δομητιανοῦ καὶ τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ ἔχει ὑποστῆ ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς διωγμοὺς σκληρότερους ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς, ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζει σήμερα ἡ ἀνατολικὴ Ἑκκλησία... Καὶ ὁμως οἱ Ἕλληνες εἶναι εὐτυχησμένοι ποὺ παραμένουν Χριστιανοί. Νομίζω πὼς αὐτὸ ὀφείλεται στὴ λατρεία ποὺ τρέφουν στὴν Παναγία... Σε ὅλα τα σπύτια βλέπεις εἰκόνες τῆς Παναγίας. Εἶναι ὁ φρουρὸς ἢ καλύτερα ἡ νοικοκυρὰ τοῦ σπιτιοῦ. Σ' αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα στρέφουν τὸ βλέμμα, ὅταν τοὺς συμβεῖ κάτι κακό, ἰκετεύοντας τὴ βοήθειά της. Σ' αὐτὴν ἀπευθύνονται γιὰ νὰ εὐχαριστήσουν τὸ Θεό, ἂν μὲ τὴ δική της μεσολάβηση ἔλθει κάτι καλὸ στὸ σπιτικό τους... Ὁ ἴδιος διαπίστωση μὲ πόση

φυσικότητα, μὲ πόση εὐγλωττία καὶ συγκίνηση μιλοῦν στὶς οἰκογενειακὲς τους κουβέντες γι' αὐτὴ τὴ βασίλισσα τῶν Οὐρανῶν». (Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους, τόμ. 10, Ἀθήνα 1974, σ. 150).

Στὰ σχολεῖα, ἄς ἀφήσουν οἱ δάσκαλοι τὶς «Φρικαντέλες τὶς μάγισσες, ποὺ μισοῦν τὰ κάλαντα καὶ διώχνουν τὰ σκουπιδόπαιδα ποὺ τὰ ψέλνουν» (βιβλίο γλώσσας Ε' Δημοτικοῦ, α' τεῦχος, σελίδα 26-27), τὶς «συνταγὲς μαγειρικῆς» κι ἄς συλλαβίσουν στοὺς μαθητὲς τοὺς τὰ μυρίνοα ἄνθη τῆς παράδοσῆς μας. Νὰ τοὺς μάθουν καὶ κάποιο «τραγούδι τοῦ Θεοῦ», ὅπως μᾶς κανοναρχεὶ καὶ ὁ μπάριπα-Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης, τὸ ἀπολυτίκιο τῶν Χριστουγέννων, τὸ ἐξαίσιο κοντάκιον «Ἡ Παρθένος σήμεραν». Νὰ μπεῖ ὁ Χριστὸς στὶς τάξεις, νὰ «ξεμουχλιάσουν» οἱ αἰθουσες, νὰ διασκορπιστοῦν οἱ ἀναθυμιάσεις τῆς

φραγκοεκπαίδευσης, στὴν ὁποία καταδικάσαμε τὰ παιδιὰ μας. Ἐκπαίδευση ποὺ βγάξει «Ρωμανούς», ἐγωτικά μειράκια, μοσχοαναθρεμμένα ἀπὸ ἀξιολύπητους γονεῖς, «κατάλληλα» γιὰ τὸ παρανοϊκὸ κράτος.

Αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες οἱ μασκαράδες τῆς τηλεοπτικῆς κερδεμπορίας, βάλθηκαν νὰ μαγαρίσουν τὰ παιδιὰ μὲ τὶς βρωμοδιαφημίσεις τρισάθλιων παιχνιδιῶν. Ἄντι

γιὰ τὸ ταπεινὸ σπῆλαιο τῆς Βηθλεέμ, ἄνοιξαν τὰ σπῆλαια τοῦ θεοῦ μαμωνᾶ τῆς κατανάλωσης. Τέτοια μασκαριλίκια βλέπουν κι ἀκοῦνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας, κι ἡ ψυχὴ τους πλάθεται «Ἑλληνοπρεπῶς».

«Κακόμοιρη Ἑλλάδα! Ἄλλες φορὲς παίδευες τὸν κόσμον κι ἔκανες παιδιὰ σου τοὺς ξένους. Μὰ τώρα ἀπόμεινες ἄκληρη, γιὰτὶ καὶ τὰ δικά σου παιδιὰ δὲν θέλουνε νὰ σε ξέρουνε», βροντοφωνάζει ὁ Κόντογλου.

Ἄς προσθέσωκαὶ τὰ προφητικά, ἀπὸ τὸ 1849, λόγια τοῦ περίφημου Μοναχοῦ Κοσμᾶ Φλαμιᾶτου, ποὺ ἔχουν διαχρονικὴ καὶ ἔτεροχρονικὴ ἰσχὺ. Ὁ Κοσμᾶς Φλαμιᾶτος στιγματίζει τοὺς Εὐρωπαίους, τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀνομίας τῆς Δύσεως, ὅπως τοὺς ὀνομάζει, δηλαδὴ τοὺς παράνομους καὶ πονηροὺς Εὐρωπαίους, ὡς τοὺς κύριους αἰτίους κάθε «κρίσης» καὶ γράφει: (Περιέχεται σὲ ὀμιλία ποὺ ἐκφώνησε, τὸ 2013, ἡ ἐξαιρετικὴ καθηγήτρια Μαρία Μαντουβάλου, στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Ὁσίου Νικοδήμου—κάστρο πραγματικὸ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας,



πού δεσπόζει στο ὄρος Πάϊκο τοῦ νομοῦ Κιλκίς—κατὰ τὴν ἐπέτειο τῆς Αλωσης τῆς Πόλης):

«Ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀνομίας τῆς Δύσεως εἶναι ὁ ὑπερόπτης, ὁ ἐπηρμένος, ἀλαζονικὸς καὶ ὑπερφίαλος ἀπατεώνας καὶ χλευαστὴς τῆς Χριστιανικῆς θρησκείας καὶ δραστηριοποιεῖται, μὲ ὑπουλες κινήσεις, ὥστε νὰ ἀνεβάζει σὲ ὑψηλὰ ἀξιώματα καὶ νὰ ἐπιβραβεύει μὲ ἀνταμοιβὲς ἄτομα τῆς ἀπάτης καὶ τῆς διαφθορᾶς. Δὲν ἀναπτύσσει δραστηριότητα μόνο γιὰ νὰ ψηφίζονται νόμοι ὀλεθριότατοι, πού προκαλοῦν καταστροφή, φθορὰ καὶ ἀφανισμό, ἀλλὰ φροντίζει κρυφὰ μὲ ὑπουλες σκέψεις, μηχανορραφίες καὶ δολοπλοκίες νὰ καθιερῶνται πολιτικὰ συστήματα γιὰ τὴν ἀπονέκρωση καὶ τὸν πλήρη μαρασμὸ τῆς γεωργίας, τῆς κτηνοτροφίας, τῆς βιομηχανίας, τῆς ναυτιλίας καὶ τοῦ ἐμπορίου, ὥστε μὲ τὴν γενικὴ ἔνδεια, τὴν ἔλλειψή των πρὸς τὸ ζῆν ἀναγκάσιον, τὴ φτώχεια καὶ τὴν πλήρη καταστροφή, οἰκονομικὴ καὶ ἠθικὴ, αὐτῶν πού ἐπιβουλεύεται καὶ σκευωρεῖ σὲ βάρος τους, νὰ μπορεῖ ὁ δόλιος νὰ ἐνεργεῖ, ὥστε νὰ καταδυναστεύεται ὁ λαός, ἐνῶ αὐτὸς ὑποκρίνεται τὸν φίλο καὶ σύμμαχο προκειμένου νὰ διορθώσῃ τὰ ἐπικείμενα δεινά, τίς ἐπαπειλούμενες συμφορὲς καὶ δραστηριοποιεῖται ἔτσι, ὥστε νὰ φέρνει χρεοκοπία στὰ ταμεῖα, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ ἐνεργεῖ ὑπουλα καὶ δόλια, ὥστε νὰ ἐπιβραβεύονται καὶ νὰ μισθοδοτοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ Ταμεῖο τοῦ κράτους καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἰδρωτὲς τοῦ ἐπιβουλεύομένου λαοῦ πολλὰ ὄργανα τῆς προδοσίας».



Ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὰ πνευματικὰ συμπορεύονται πάντοτε μὲ τὰ πολιτικὰ, πρέπει νὰ ὑπενθυμίσουμε, ὅτι ἡ πνευματικὴ καὶ πολιτιστικὴ ἀποδόμησις τοῦ ἔθνους ἔχει σημαντικὸ ἀντίκτυπο καὶ στὰ ἐθνικὰ θέματα σὲ κάθε περίοδο τῆς ἱστορίας μας. Καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ζοῦμε σήμερα μὲ τὴ νέα κατοχή μας καὶ πάλι ἀπὸ τὴν Φραγκία, ὅπως τὸ 1204! Ἡ διαφορὰ τῆς προϊούσας σήμερα Τρίτης Ἀλώσεως ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνες τοῦ 1204 καὶ τοῦ 1453 εἶναι, ὅτι τότε ἠττηθήκαμε, ἐνῶ σήμερα προχωρήσαμε στὴν ἀλωση μὲ τὴν συγκατάθεσή μας, θεωρώντας τὴν μάλιστα ὡς σωτηρία! ... Εὐτυχῶς ὁμως ὑπάρχει—εἶναι βέβαιο—καὶ ἡ «μαγιά» τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη. Σ' αὐτὴν ἀνήκουν ὄσοι σημερινοὶ Ἕλληνες μένομε πιστοὶ στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία τῶν Ἁγίων μας καὶ τὸν Σωτῆρα μας Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν. Οἱ ἀληθινοὶ πατερικὸι καὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι. Αὐτοὶ μὲ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ μας, θὰ ἀναστήσουν τὸ ἔθνος, σὲ κάποιο νέο '21, ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ἐπιτρέψει!

Πρωτοπρεσβ. π. Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός

Ἵχι Συμπροσευχὲς μὲ «Ἀκοινώνητους»

Ὁ Δέκατος καὶ Ἐνδέκατος Ἀποστολικὸς Κανόνας μᾶς λέει καθαρά: Ἵχι Συμπροσευχὲς μὲ «Ἀκοινώνητους»

Δημητσάνα - Μεγαλόπολη, Κυριακὴ 30 Νοεμβρίου 2014, Κυριακάτικο ἐγκύκλιο κήρυγμα Μητρ. Γόρτυνος καὶ Μεγαλοπόλεως Ἱερεμία.

Στὸ σημερινὸ μου κήρυγμα, ἀδελφοὶ Χριστιανοί, θὰ Σᾶς ἐρμηνεύσω δύο ἱερούς Κανόνες. Τὸν δέκατο καὶ τὸν ἐνδέκατο Ἀποστολικὸ Κανόνα. Ὁ δέκατος Κανὼν λέει ὅτι ἂν ἕνας Χριστιανὸς προσευχηθεῖ, ἔστω καὶ σὲ ἕνα σπίτι, μὲ κάποιον «ἀκοινώνητο», αὐτὸς νὰ ἀφοριζέται. «Ἀκοινώνητο» λέγομε ἐκεῖνον πού ἡ Ἐκκλησία, γιὰ παιδαγωγικὸ λόγο, ἀπέκοψε ἀπὸ τὴν σύναξη τῶν πιστῶν γιὰ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Εἶναι «ἀκοινώνητος» αὐτός, γιὰτὶ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ λάβῃ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Ὁ «ἀκοινώνητος» λέγεται καὶ «ἀφορισμένος», χωρισμένος δηλαδὴ ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα τῶν πιστῶν, πού μετέχουν στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν «ἀκοινώνητο» δὲν ἐπιτρέπεται κανεὶς Χριστιανὸς νὰ προσευχηθεῖ μαζί του. Ἄν τὸ κάνει αὐτό, ὄχι μόνο σὲ Ἱερὸ Ναό, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ ἕνα ιδιωτικὸ σπίτι, αὐτὸς πρέπει νὰ ἀφοριστεῖ, λέγει ὁ Κανόνας μᾶς ἐδῶ.

Ἄς προσέχουμε, ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοί, μήπως ἀπὸ καλὴ διάθεση γίνουμε παραβάτες τοῦ ἐδῶ Κανόνα μᾶς. Γιατὶ μπορεῖ κάποιος νὰ πεῖ: «Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι καλὸ πράγμα. Ἄς κάνω λοιπὸν μιὰ προσευχὴ μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν ἀφορισμένο, πού βρέθηκε στὸ σπίτι μου. Μπορεῖ ἔτσι νὰ τὸν προσελκύσω καὶ νὰ μετανοήσῃ». Ὅποιος τὸ κάνει αὐτὸ εἶναι παραβάτης τοῦ Κανόνα μᾶς ἐδῶ καὶ πρέπει νὰ ἀφοριστεῖ καὶ αὐτός, γιὰτὶ, ὅποιος προσευχηθεῖ μὲ ἀφορισμένο—γνωρίζοντας ὅτι εἶναι ἀφορισμένος—καταφρονεῖ τὴν Ἐκκλησία πού τὸν ἀφόρισε, ὅτι δὴθεν ἄδικα ἔπραξε (ἡ Ἐκκλησία).

Τὸ νόημα τοῦ Κανόνα μᾶς, ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοί, εἶναι ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ κοινωνία μὲ αὐτήν. Ἐὰν ἡ Ἐκκλησία διακόπτει τὴν κοινωνία της μὲ κάποιον, πρέπει καὶ ὁ πιστὸς Χριστιανὸς νὰ διακόπτει τὴν κοινωνία του μ' αὐτόν, γιὰτὶ ἔτσι ἔπραξε ἡ Μητέρα τοῦ Ἐκκλησία. Ὅταν ὁμως λέμε νὰ διακόπτουμε τὴν κοινωνία μὲ ἕναν «ἀκοινώνητο», μὲ ἕναν δηλαδὴ ἀφορισμένο, ἐννοοῦμε νὰ διακόπτουμε τὴν κοινωνία προσευχῆς μόνο μαζί του καὶ δὲν ἐννοοῦμε ὅτι ἀπαγορεύεται νὰ συνομιλοῦμε ἢ νὰ ἐπικοινωνοῦμε ἐπαγγελματικὰ μαζί του.

Κατὰ τὸν Κανόνα μᾶς ἐδῶ καταδικάζεται καὶ ἡ συμπροσευχὴ μὲ τοὺς αἵρετικούς, γιὰτὶ οἱ αἵρετικοί, ἀφοῦ προσεχώρησαν σὲ αἵρεση, ἔπαυσαν νὰ ἔχουν

κοινωνία με την πραγματική Ἐκκλησία, δηλαδή την Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Οἱ αἵρετικοὶ εἶναι «ἀκοινωνήτοι», γιατί δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ λάβουν τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Καὶ ὁ δέκατος λοιπὸν Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼνας ποὺ μελετᾶμε μᾶς ἀπαγορεύει νὰ συμπροσευχώμαστε με ἀκοινωνήτους, ἔστω καὶ σὲ ἰδιωτικὸ σπίτι ἀκόμη, πολὺ περισσότερο μᾶς τὸ ἀπαγορεύει αὐτὸ σὲ Ἱερὸ Ναὸ.

Πονοῦμε πραγματικὰ ὅταν ἀκοῦμε, ὄχι μόνο, ἀλλὰ καὶ βλέπουμε, συμπροσευχῆς μεγαλοσχημῶν ρασοφόρων με τοὺς αἵρετικούς Παπικούς, ἀκόμη καὶ με αὐτὸν τὸν ἴδιο αἵρετικὸ Πάπα. Ὁ ἁγιασμένος Γέροντας Πατὴρ Παῖσιος μᾶς λέγει ὅτι γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθῶμε με κάποιον πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε τὴν ἴδια πίστη με αὐτόν. Ἀλλὰ ὁ Πάπας καὶ οἱ Παπικοί, ὅπως μᾶς τὸ λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς καὶ τόσο ἄλλοι ἅγιοι Πατέρες καὶ Οἰκουμενικὲς Σύνοδοι, εἶναι αἵρετικοί. Ὅσοι κληρικοὶ καὶ λαϊκοὶ συμμετέχουν

στὶς συμπροσευχῆς με τοὺς ἀκοινωνήτους Παπικούς ἢ ἄλλους αἵρετικούς, πρέπει νὰ ἀφορίζονται κατὰ τὸν δέκατο Ἀποστολικὸ Κανόνα. Πῶς ἐγίναμε ἔτσι, ἀδελφοὶ Χριστιανοί; Ἄς μᾶς ἐλεήσει ὁ Θεὸς γι' αὐτὲς τὶς ὥμες παραβάσεις τῶν Ἱερῶν Κανόνων, ποὺ βλέπουμε νὰ γίνονται στὶς μέρες μας.

Στὸ ἴδιο πνεῦμα τοῦ δεκάτου Ἀποστολικοῦ



Πῶς λοιπὸν συμπροσεύχονται με τοὺς ἀκοινωνήτους παπικούς δικοὶ μας μεγαλοσχημονες κληρικοί; Εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ ἀκουστῆ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ μας αὐτὴ τους ἡ προσευχή; Συγχωρήσατέ μας Ἁγιοὶ Πατέρες, γιατί εἴμαστε ἀδιάφοροι σὲ τέτοιες ὥμες παραβάσεις τῶν Ἱερῶν σας Κανόνων καὶ ἱκετεύσατε τὸν Κύριο νὰ μὴν μᾶς τιμωρήσει καὶ

Κανόνος εἶναι καὶ ὁ ἐπόμενος ἐνδέκατος Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼνας, ὁ ὁποῖος λέει ὅτι ὁποῖος κληρικός, ἕνας ἱερέας, «συνεῦξεται», προσευχηθεὶ δηλαδή με ἕναν ἄλλο καθηρημένο ἱερέα, νὰ καθαιρεθεὶ καὶ αὐτός. Ἀλλὰ γεννᾶται τὸ ἐρώτημα: Γιατὶ εἶναι ἁμαρτία νὰ συμπροσευχηθεὶ ἕνας κληρικός με ἕνα ἄλλο καθηρημένο κληρικό; Ὁ καθηρημένος κληρικός ἀνήκει πλέον στὴν τάξη τῶν λαϊκῶν καὶ σὰν λαϊκός—βιώνοντας τὴν μετάνοια βέβαια γιὰ τὴν ἁμαρτία ποὺ διέπραξε καὶ καθαιρέθηκε—μπορεῖ, σὰν λαϊκός, λέγω, νὰ συμμετέχει καὶ στὴν Θεία Λειτουργία καὶ στὴν Θεία Κοινωνία.

Ἐπιτρέπεται λοιπὸν ἕνας Ἱερεὺς νὰ συμπροσευχηθεὶ με ἕναν καθηρημένο κληρικὸ στὴν τάξη τῶν λαϊκῶν εὐρισκόμενο. Γι' αὐτό, ἐκεῖνο τὸ «συνεῦξεται» ποὺ λέγει ὁ Κανὼνας, δὲν πρέπει νὰ τὸ ἐρμηνεύσουμε ὡς νὰ «συμπροσεύχεται», ἀλλὰ ὡς νὰ «συλλειτουργήσει». Ἕνας λοιπὸν κληρικός ἀπαγορεύεται ὄχι νὰ προσευχηθεὶ με ἕναν καθηρημένο κληρικό, ἀλλὰ νὰ συλλειτουργήσει μαζί του. Ἄν ὅμως ἐπιμένουμε

καὶ θέλουμε νὰ ἐρμηνεύσουμε τὸν Κανὼνα μας ὅτι ἀπαγορεύει στὸ κληρικὸ νὰ συμπροσευχηθεὶ με ἕνα καθηρημένο κληρικό, τότε πρέπει νὰ ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι ὁ κληρικός αὐτὸς εἶναι ὄχι μόνο καθηρημένος ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀφορισμένος ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Ἔτσι ἐρχόμαστε στὴν περίπτωση τοῦ προηγουμένου δεκάτου Κανόνα. Ἐὰν λοιπὸν κατὰ τὸν προηγούμενο δέκατο Ἀποστολικὸ Κανόνα ὁ λαϊκὸς ἀφορίζεται, ἂν συμπροσευχηθεὶ με ἀφορισμένο, τότε ὁ κληρικός ὄχι μόνο ἀφορίζεται, ἀλλὰ καὶ καθαιρεῖται, ἂν συμπροσευχηθεὶ με ἕναν καθηρημένο καὶ συνάμα ἀφορισμένο κληρικό. Οἱ παπικοὶ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι αἵρετικοὶ εἶναι, ξαναλέγουμε, «ἀκοινωνήτοι», ἀφοῦ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τελέσουμε μαζί τους τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσουμε μαζί τους ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Ποτήριο. Γι' αὐτὸ λέγονται «ἀκοινωνήτοι» ἐπειδὴ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ μετέχουν στὴν Τράπεζα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσουν μαζί μας.

μᾶς πάρει τὴν Χάρη Του γιὰ τὴν ἀδιαφορία μας αὐτή.

Σεῖς ὅμως, ἀδελφοὶ Χριστιανοί, μὴ βλέπετε τὸ δικό μας κακὸ παράδειγμα, ἀλλὰ νὰ εἴστε ἀγωνιστές καὶ θερμοὶ ὑπερασπιστές τῶν ἱερῶν Κανόνων τῶν Ἁγίων Πατέρων τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Πίστεως μας. Βλέποντας ἐμεῖς οἱ κληρικοὶ σας τὸν δικό σας θερμὸ ζήλο γιὰ τὴν πίστη καὶ τὴν διαμαρτυρία σας καὶ τὸν ἀγώνα σας γιὰ τὶς συμπροσευχῆς δικῶν μας μεγαλοσχημῶν κληρικῶν με τοὺς ἀκοινωνήτους Παπικούς καὶ ἄλλους αἵρετικούς, ξυπνάμε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀδιαφορία μας καὶ ξεχνόμαστε καὶ ἐμεῖς μαζί σας σὲ ἱερὸ ἀγώνα γιὰ τὶς παρατηρούμενες καταπατήσεις τῶν ἱερῶν Κανόνων.

Κάτω ὁ Παπισμὸς καὶ ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς καὶ ψηλὰ τὰ λάβαρα, τῆς ἀμωμήτου Ὁρθόδοξης πίστεως μας τὰ λάβαρα!

Μὲ πολλές εὐχές,

† Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Γόρτυνος καὶ Μεγαλοπόλεως Ἱερεμίας

Περὶ Ἑλληνισμοῦ καὶ Ὁρθοδοξίας

Ἐνα συγκλονιστικὸ ἄρθρο περὶ Ἑλληνισμοῦ καὶ Ὁρθοδοξίας, τοῦ Ν. Γιαννιώτη, ποὺ δημοσιεύθηκε στὶς ἰστοσελίδες τοῦ «Ἡπειρος-Ἑλλάς» (<http://www.epirus-ellas.gr>), 1 Νοεμβρίου, 2012.

Ὁ Ἕλλην εἶναι πλασμένος φιλόσοφος, εἶναι καὶ πλασμένος Χριστιανός, εἶναι πλασμένος νὰ γνωρίζει τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ νὰ τὴν διαδίδει εἰς τὰ ἄλλα Ἔθνη. Naί, ὁ Ἕλλην ἐγεννήθη κατὰ τὴν Θεία Πρόνοια διδάσκαλος τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας.

[Ἅγιος Νεκτᾶριος Πενταπόλεως]

Τὰ ἐξουσιαστικὰ ἱερατεῖα ποὺ ὑπογεῖως κινοῦν τὰ νήματα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ κατευθύνουν σὲ πολὺ μεγάλο βαθμὸ τὴν Γνώση προσπαθοῦν ἐδῶ καὶ πολλοὺς αἰῶνες, πλαστογραφώντας τις πηγὲς ἢ ἀποκρύπτωντας τές, νὰ φέρουν σὲ σύγκρουση τὸν Ἑλληνισμὸ καὶ τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ. Ξέρουν ὅτι ἡ «σύνδεση» αὐτῶν τῶν δυὸ δυνάμεων εἶναι τὸ ἰσχυρότερο ἐμπόδιο γιὰ τὴν ὑλοποίηση τῶν ὑποχθόνων σχεδίων τους. Ξέρουν ὅτι ἂν οἱ Λαοὶ «γαντζωθοῦν» πάνω σὲ αὐτά, θὰ εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ἐφαρμόσουν τὴν νέα τάξη πραγμάτων. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ λόγος ποὺ ἀποκρύπτονται οἱ Προφητεῖες τῶν Ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων οἱ ὁποῖες μιλοῦν ξεκάθαρα γιὰ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Προσπαθοῦν νὰ παρουσιάσουν τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ ὡς ἐβραιογενὴ θρησκεία καὶ ὄλους τοὺς Ἀρχαίους Ἕλληνες ὡς εἰδωλολάτρες.

Ὡστόσο ἔχουν διασωθεῖ κείμενα ποὺ ἀποδυνκνεῖουν ἀκριβῶς τὸ ἀντίθετο. Στὴν Πολιτεία τοῦ Πλάτωνα—βιβλίον ποὺ «τὸ σύστημα» τὸ ἀποδέχεται—περιέχεται μία προφητεία ἰσαξία μὲ αὐτὲς τῶν προφητειῶν τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης (**Συντ:** ὅλα τὰ ἀρχαῖα κείμενα παρουσιάζονται μεταφρασμένα στὴν Νεοελληνικὴν):

«Θὰ ἀπογυμνωθεῖ ἀπ’ ὅλα ἐκτὸς τῆς δικαιοσύνης, διότι φτιάχθηκε ἀντίθετος στὴν ἕως τότε συμπεριφορὰ. Χωρὶς νὰ ἀδικήσει κανέναν θὰ δυσφημισθεῖ πολὺ ὡς ἄδικος ὥστε νὰ βασανισθεῖ γιὰ τὴν δικαιοσύνη καὶ θὰ γεμίσει μὲ δάκρυα ἐξαιτίας τῆς κακοδοξίας... Ἀλλὰ θὰ μείνει ἀμετακίνητος μέχρι θανάτου καὶ ἐνῶ θὰ εἶναι δίκαιος θὰ θεωρεῖται ἄδικος γιὰ ὅλη του τὴ ζωὴ. Ἔχοντας τέτοιες διαθέσεις ὁ δίκαιος θὰ μαστιγωθεῖ, θὰ στρεβλωθεῖ, θὰ δεθεῖ, θὰ ἀνάψουν τὰ μάτια του... καὶ στὰ τελευταῖα του, ἀφοῦ πάθει κάθε κακό, θὰ καρφωθεῖ πάνω σὲ πάσσαλο, καὶ νὰ ξέρεις ὅτι δὲν εἶναι δίκαιο, ἀλλὰ ἀφοῦ ἔτσι τὸ θέλει ἄς γίνεαι». [Πλάτωνος, Πολιτεία Β’, IV-V (361 C-361 D)].

Στὸ ἔργο «Προμηθεὺς Δεσμωτῆς» τοῦ Αἰσχύλου, ὁ Προμηθεὺς, φυλακισμένος στὸν Καύκασο προλέγει ὅτι ὁ λυτρωτῆς του θὰ γεννηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένο Ἰὼ καὶ τὸν Θεὸ (στ.772,834,848)... Θὰ εἶναι δηλαδή, Υἱὸς Θεοῦ καὶ Υἱὸς Παρθένου. Αὐτὸς ὁ Θεάνθρωπος θὰ καταλύσει τὴν ἐξουσία τῶν παλαιῶν Θεῶν καὶ θὰ ἀφανίσει αὐτοὺς καὶ τὴν δύναμή τους (στ. 908, 920).

Ὁ Ἐρμῆς τότε σταλμένος ἀπὸ τὸν Δία προαναγγέλει στὸν Προμηθεὺ τὰ ἐξῆς: «Μὴν περιμένεις νὰ λυτρωθεῖς ἀπὸ τοὺς πόρους προτοῦ Θεοῦ πάρει τὰ πάθια τὰ δικά σου πάνω του καὶ μὲ τὴν θέλησή του κατέβει στὸν Ἄδη τὸν ἀνήλιαγο, στοὺς ἄφεγγους τοῦ Ταρτάρου βυθοῦς...» (στ. 1041,1043).

Ὁ Σωκράτης στὴν ἀπολογία του ἀναφέρει τὰ ἀκόλουθα: «Θὰ μείνετε κοιμισμένοι σὲ ὅλη σας τὴ ζωὴ ἐὰν δὲν σᾶς λυπηθεῖ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σᾶς στείλει κάποιον Ἄλλον» (Πλάτωνος, Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους 18:31α).

Στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος ὑπάρχουν χειρόγραφα ποὺ διασώζουν τὶς προφητεῖες τῆς Σίβυλλας τῆς Ἐρυθραίας—τῆς ἱερείας τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα—γιὰ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Σὲ χειρόγραφο μὲ τὴν ὀνομασία «Υπόμνημα εἰς τὸν Ἅγιον Ἀπόστολον Φίλιππον» ποὺ φυλάσσεται στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Δοχειαρίου ἀναφέρονται τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ὑστερα ἀπὸ πολὺ καιρὸ θὰ φθάσει κάποιος εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν πολυδιηρημένην γῆν καὶ θὰ γεννηθεῖ μὲ σάρκαν ἀμόλυντον. Μὲ ἀνεξάντλητα ὄρια, ὡς Θεότητα θὰ λυτρώσει τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀπὸ τὴν φθορὰν τῶν ἀνιάτων παθῶν... καὶ θὰ φθονήσει ἄπιστος λαὸς καὶ θὰ κρεμασθεῖ ψηλὰ ὡς κατὰδικος εἰς θάνατον. Ὅλα αὐτὰ θὰ τὰ ὑποφέρει μὲ πραότητα...»

Στὸ ἴδιο χειρόγραφο ἀναφέρεται μία ἀνατριχιαστικὴ προφητεία γιὰ τὴν Θεανθρώπινη φύση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γιὰ τὸ ἐκούσιο πάθος Του, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του: «Ἐνας Οὐράνιος μὲ πιέξει ἰσχυρὰ, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι φῶς Τριλαμπές. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ παθὼν Θεός, χωρὶς νὰ πάθει τίποτε ἢ Θεότης Του, διότι εἶναι συγχρόνως Θνητὸς καὶ Ἀθάνατος. Αὐτὸς εἶναι συγχρόνως Θεὸς καὶ Ἄνθρωπος ποὺ ὑποφέρει ἀπὸ τοὺς θνητοὺς τὰ πάντα... δηλαδή τὸν σταυρό, τὴν ὕβριν, τὴν ταφή. Αὐτὸς κάποτε ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια Του ἔχυσε δάκρυα θερμὰ. Αὐτὸς πέντε χιλιάδες χόρτασε μὲ πέντε ἄρτους, κάτι ποὺ ἤθελε δύναμη Θεϊκή...»

Σὲ ἄλλη περικοπὴ ἀναφέρεται: «Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ δικός μου Θεός, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐσταυρώθει εἰς τὸ ξύλον, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐξέπνευσε, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐκ τοῦ τάφου ἀνήλθεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.»

Οἱ παραπάνω προφητεῖες ἀναφέρονται καὶ σὲ ἄλλα χειρόγραφα ποὺ βρίσκονται σὲ ἄλλες Μονές τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὅρους ἢ ἀλλοῦ. (π.χ. στὴν Μονὴ Σινᾶ). Παρατίθενται ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ σύγχρονο βιβλίον, στὸν «Μέγα Συναξαριστὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας» τοῦ Ἀρχιμανδριτοῦ Βίκτωρος Ματθαίου.

Καὶ γιὰ αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἴσως ἀμφισβητήσουν ὅτι τὰ παραπάνω εἰπώθηκαν πράγματι ἀπὸ τὴν Σίβυλλα τῆς Ἐρυθραίας καὶ ἰσχυριστοῦν ὅτι εἶναι ἐπινοήσεις κάποιων Χριστιανῶν Μοναχῶν... ἀρκεῖ τὸ ἐξῆς ἀδιαμφισβήτητο γεγονός: Ἀπὸ διάφορες πηγὲς ἔχει διασταυρωθεῖ πὼς τὶς προφητεῖες αὐτὲς ἀλλὰ καὶ

ἄλλες—εἴτε τῆς Σίβυλλας εἴτε ἄλλων σοφῶν Ἑλλήνων—χρησιμοποίησε ἡ Αγία Αἰκατερίνη.

Συγκεκριμένα, τὸ 305 ἡ Αγία Αἰκατερίνη ἡ Ἀλεξανδρινὴ ἔλεγε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Μαξιμίνου γιὰ τὴν εἰδωλολατρικὴ του πολιτικὴ. Ὁ τελευταῖος συγκέντρωσε τότε τοὺς σοφότερους εἰδωλολάτρες τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας γιὰ νὰ τὴν μεταπείσουν καὶ νὰ τὴν κάνουν παγανίστρια. Στὸν διάλογο ποὺ ἀκολούθησε, αὐτὴ ἡ πάνσοφη καὶ σπουδαγμένη στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ παιδεία γυναίκα, στὴν προσπάθειά της νὰ ἀποδείξει ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς Θεὸς ἀνέφερε—μεταξὺ ἄλλων—καὶ τὶς προφητεῖες τῆς Σίβυλλας. Καὶ γιὰ νὰ προληφθεῖ ἡ κάθε ἀπερίσκεπτη «σκέψη», δὲν ὑπάρχει καμιά περίπτωση νὰ ἔπλασε αὐτὲς τὶς προφητεῖες ἡ ἴδια ἡ Αγία γιὰ τοὺς ἐξῆς βασικότατους λόγους: Δὲν θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ πεί ἓνα τόσο μεγάλο ψέμα σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν ἰέρεια τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα μπροστὰ στοὺς σοφότερους ἐκπροσώπους τῆς ἀρχαίας θρησκείας διότι ἀμέσως ὅλοι θὰ διαπίστωναν τὸ ψέμα της. Ὅμως ὄχι μόνο κανεὶς δὲν τὴν κατηγόρησε γιὰ ἀναλήθειες, ἀλλὰ ἀντιθέτως οἱ σοφοὶ εἰδωλολάτρες παραδέχθηκαν τὴν λεκτικὴ τους ἡττα καὶ ὅλοι ἀμέσως ἀσπάστηκαν μὲ τὴν θέλησή τους τὸν Χριστιανισμό, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα ὁ αὐτοκράτορας νὰ τοὺς θανατώσει.

Σὲ ἄλλο χειρόγραφο ποὺ βρῖσκεται στὴν Ἀγιορείτικη Μονὴ Διονυσίου, ἀναφέρεται ἄλλη μία προφητεία τῆς Σίβυλλας: «Σὰς προφητεύω ἓναν τρισυπόστατο Θεὸν στὰ ὕψη ἐκτεινόμενο τοῦ ὁποῖου ὁ αἰώνιος Λόγος σὲ ἀνυποψίαστο κόρη θὰ κυφορηθεῖ, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τὸ φέρον φωτιὰ τόξο, τὸ μέσον του κόσμου διαπερνώντας... Ὅλο τὸν κόσμον ἀφοῦ ἐπαναφέρει στὴν ζωὴ, καὶ στὸν Πατέρα θὰ τὸν προσφέρει σὰν δῶρο. Μαρία θὰ εἶναι τὸ ὄνομα Αὐτῆς.»

Ὁ μεγάλος ἐκκλησιαστικὸς συγγραφέας Κλήμης ὁ Ἀλεξανδρεὺς (2^{ος} αἰώνας μ.Χ.) στὸ ἔργο του «Στρωματεῖς (5:13)» δηλώνει ἀπερίφραστα: «Δὲν εἶναι δυνατόν, νομίζω, νὰ προαναγγελθεῖ σαφέστερα ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἑλληνες ὁ Σωτῆρας μας».

Καὶ μόνο αὐτὲς οἱ λίγες προφητεῖες ποὺ ἀναφέρθηκαν (σὲ σχέση μὲ τὸ πλῆθος ποὺ ὑπάρχει ἀλλὰ βρῖσκεται κρυμμένο ἐδῶ καὶ αἰῶνες) ἀρκοῦν νὰ καταρρίψουν τὴν γελοῖότητα ἐκείνη ποὺ δυστυχῶς παρασέρνει πολλοὺς καὶ ποὺ ψευδῶς κυροῦται ὅτι ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς εἶναι ἓνα ἐβραϊκὸ κατασκευάσμα, ὅλοι οἱ ἀρχαῖοι Ἑλληνες ἦταν εἰδωλολάτρες καὶ πῶς ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς καὶ ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς εἶναι δυὸ ἐντελῶς ἀντικρουόμενοι κόσμοι.

Γιὰ νὰ τελειώσουν τὰ ψέματα, ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς δὲν εἶναι ἐβραιογενὴς θρησκεία. Δὲν εἶναι κατασκευάσμα τῶν Ἑβραίων ἀλλὰ οὔτε κανενὸς ἄλλου λαοῦ. Εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ θρησκεία ποὺ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἀνεξαιρέτως σὲ ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς τῆς γῆς. Τὸ ὅτι ἀποκαλύφθηκε

πρῶτα στοὺς Ἑβραίους δὲν σημαίνει σὲ καμιά περίπτωση ὅτι εἶναι ἐβραιογενὴς θρησκεία. Ἄλλωστε λίγες δεκαετίες μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς πέρασε στὰ χέρια τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ ἀπομακρύνεται ἀπὸ τὰ ἐβραϊκὰ στεγανὰ γιὰ νὰ ἀπλωθεῖ σὲ ὅλη τὴ Γῆ.

Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη βλέπουμε ὅτι οἱ σοφοὶ Ἑλληνες τῆς ἀρχαιότητος ὄχι μόνο πίστευαν στὸν ἓνα Θεὸ ἀλλὰ μίλησαν κιόλας γιὰ τὴν Τριαδικότητά Του, γιὰ τὴν διττὴ φύση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γιὰ τὴν Σταύρωση καὶ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του.

Ὅλα τα Εὐαγγέλια γράφτηκαν στὰ Ἑλληνικά, σὲ χέρια Ἑλλήνων πέρασε ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη στιγμή ἡ Ἐκκλησία, Ἑλληνες Πατέρες διατύπωσαν τὶς αἰώνιες Ἀλήθειες. Στὸ αἶμα χιλιάδων Ἑλλήνων μαρτύρων στερεώθηκε τοὺς πρώτους αἰῶνες ἡ Ἐκκλησία, Ἑλληνες Αὐτοκράτορες καὶ κληρικοὶ ἀνέλαβαν ἐπὶ Βυζαντίου τὴν διάδοση τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τὸν ἐκχριστιανισμὸ τῶν ὡς τότε βάρβαρων λαῶν.

Ἐπομένως ὄχι μόνο δὲν συγκρούονται ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς καὶ ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς ἀλλὰ ἀντιθέτως συνδέονται τόσο στενά, σὲ σημεῖο ὁ Ἅγιος Νεκτάριος Πενταπόλεως νὰ γράψει στὸ ἔργο τοῦ «Περὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φιλοσοφίας ὡς προπαιδείας εἰς τὸν Χριστιανισμὸν» τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ὁ Ἑλληὴν εἶναι πλασμένος φιλόσοφος, εἶναι καὶ πλασμένος Χριστιανός, εἶναι πλασμένος νὰ γνωρίζει τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ νὰ τὴν διαδίδει εἰς τὰ ἄλλα Ἑθνη. Naί, ὁ Ἑλληὴν ἐγεννήθη κατὰ τὴν Θεῖα Πρόνοια διδάσκαλος τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀποστολή του, αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ξεχωριστὸ κάλεσμα μεταξὺ τῶν Ἑθνῶν. Ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Ἑθνος ἦταν πλασμένο διὰ τὸν σκοπὸν αὐτόν. Ὁ Θεὸς διέπλασε τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Ἑθνος ὡς ὄφθαλμὸν εἰς τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος».

Οἱ ἀρχαιοελληνικὲς προφητεῖες ἀποδεικνύουν περὶτρανα ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς Θεός. Πολλοὶ ἀνόητοι κατὰ καιροὺς λένε πῶς οἱ Ἑβραϊκὲς προφητεῖες γράφτηκαν ἀπὸ Χριστιανούς μετὰ Χριστὸν γιὰ νὰ ἰσχυροποιήσουν τὴν πίστη τους. Ψέμα μεγάλο μιᾶς καὶ ἔχουν βρεθεῖ χειρόγραφα τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης γραμμένα στὰ Ἑλληνικά (ἀπὸ τὴν μετάφραση τῶν ἐβδομήκοντα) ποὺ χρονολογοῦνται τὸν 2^ο μὲ 1^ο αἰῶνα πρὶν τὸν Χριστό.

Χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ μόνος Θεός, ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία εἶναι ἡ Κιβωτὸς τῆς Ἀλήθειας, καὶ τὸ Γένος τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐπιφορτισμένο μὲ τὸ ἱερὸ χρέος νὰ κρατᾶ τὴν δάδα τῆς ἀληθινῆς Πίστης ἄσβεστη μέχρι τὰ ἔσχατα. Ὅπως μᾶς λέει καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος, «ὅποιος μπορεῖ νὰ πεί τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ δὲν τὸ κάνει, θὰ κατακριθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό.

Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Α καὶ τὸ Ω, λέγει Κύριος ὁ Θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

[Ἀποκ. 1:8]

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

By St. John of Kronstadt.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

[Lk 2:14]

† † †



This great hymn to the incarnate God, the Infant Christ, was sung by the angelic hosts on earth at His Nativity. It is a brief song, but its meaning and significance are wise and full of substance. In it is contained and revealed to us the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of the world. This mystery, in the words of the Church, amazed all

the angelic powers.

But where is this peace on earth, which the angels announced to the Bethlehem shepherds?

In Jerusalem itself, the city of David, where was the temple of the living God, there was no peace. When the magi who came from the East to Jerusalem asked, “Where is the King of the Jews Who is born?” King Herod was enraged just to hear it, as was all of Jerusalem with him. In the world empire of Rome, there was no peace. Contemporaries describe in dark colors the moral degradation of the nations, and the deformation of God’s image in people. All manner of defilement and iniquity was practiced then. Idol worship replaced the worship of the one God. Iniquity, shame, satiety, and drunkenness were what comprised mankind’s earthly happiness, aim, and striving. Enmity, civil strife, and disorder reigned everywhere. Pride, inhumanity, and all manner of vice corrupted social and family life.

The period that followed was no better. Terrible persecutions against those who believed in Christ drenched the world in blood over the course of three centuries: brother betrayed brother to torture, husbands betrayed their wives and children, children betrayed their parents. Human relations, blood ties, and family were all profaned and scorned. And in Jerusalem itself, there was the abomination of desolation.

In our times also, societies and kingdoms are also being shaken, international and civil wars and dissention continue, there are heresies and schisms, conspiracies and criminally

destructive teachings are intensifying to topple age-old state institutions and foundations of family, civilian, and religious community.

Evil raises its sacrilegious hand against the anointed of God, to whom God Himself has entrusted nations. The savages want to install unbelief atop the sacred remains, destroy the state, the family, and law in the guise of equality and brotherhood.

Where is the peace on earth that the angels proclaimed? Where is the peace brought to earth by the God-man? Where is the peace proclaimed by the Gospels and the Apostles’ preaching that reached to the ends of the earth, to all nations and kings? It is not in the world, for *the whole world lieth in wickedness*, said the Apostle (1 Jn 5:19).

This is the mystery sung by the angels: with the coming of the Son of God on the earth, peace began to reign at first in the small, chosen flock—His Church, in the Apostles whom He often taught this peace, and later in the whole kingdom of grace, His Church, which spread throughout the world.

Yes, brothers, a whole kingdom of God’s world is established by the Lord—a kingdom which is eternal, universal, and orderly; with laws, rules, and sacraments; with an order



of services, guidelines for life and inter-personal relationships. This kingdom is the holy, Orthodox, Apostolic Church, where there ever abides peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father.

True, the Church of God on earth was always under the cross, always persecuted,

and hated. But nevertheless, it always possessed an inner grace-filled peace—even during the cruelest persecutions, for God has always been and always will be in it, delivering it from all calamity according to His word that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. (Mt. 16:18).

Therefore, every truly believing person who keeps Christ’s commandments, every truly repentant sinner has the peace of Christ within himself, and no external troubles of this world can destroy it—if only that person does not will to step once more upon the path of iniquity and sin.

Therefore, if earthly kingdoms and civil societies in general wish to attain and establish the peace brought to earth by the King of righteousness, peace, and love—our Lord Jesus Christ, then they should be closely united with the kingdom of the Lord, or His holy Church on earth; they should submit themselves to the commandments of Jesus Christ and the rules of His Church. Should these commandments be

broken, they should quickly straighten themselves out, after a sincere admission of their mistakes and iniquity. Members of a state that confesses the Christian faith should be kind, honest, and sincerely dedicated members of the Church. Disruption of this union between the Church and state, that is, its citizens, neglect of faith, the commandments, and the Gospels give birth to unbelief and all social disorder and vice, cause moral or political impotence in that society, and deprive it of the blessing of heaven.

Russia as a great nation was always closely tied with the Church; and only within this union was it able to grow, strengthen, and ascend to the heights of its might and glory. May God grant that this union of the state and the Church—this kingdom of peace—always continue! Then Russia will be a kingdom of peace, and God's blessing will be upon it. Then no sedition will be frightening, because it will not find a place to settle in.

May our Lord Christ reign in our hearts, and may peace and blessing reign with Him! Amen.



DEATH IS UNNATURAL

By Saint Nikolai Velimirovich.



Death is not natural; rather it is unnatural.

And death is not from nature; rather it is against nature.

All of nature cries out: "I do not know death! I do not wish death! I am afraid of death! I strive against death!"

Death is an uninvited stranger to nature.

All of nature bristles at this uninvited stranger and is afraid of it because it is like a thief in somebody else's garden who

does not just steal and eat the fruit, but also who tramples, spoils, breaks and uproots what is planted and the more it ravages, the more it becomes satisfied.

Even when one hundred philosophies declare that "Death is Natural!" all of nature trembles in indignations and shouts: "No! I have no use for death! It is an uninvited stranger!"

And the voice of nature is not sophistry.

The protest of nature against death outweighs all excuses thought up to justify death.

And if there is something that nature struggles to express in its untouched harmony, doing so without expectation in unison of voices, this it is a protest against death. It is its unanimous, frantic, and heaven-shaking elegy to death.

If in fact death is unnatural, if it is not natural and against nature, then a question arises: why is it so and whence does death enter nature?

Not a single kingdom of light and life accepts death as its native. It must have sneaked into the world's life secretly—crawling on its belly and staying out of sight so that it would not be spotted and exposed—from some bottomless abyss where even it was too cold and lonely.

When death was under the stinger of a snake, it was dead for itself and nobody in the world knew about good and evil—only the bliss existed; and nobody heard of knowledge and ignorance—there was only wisdom; and nobody knew of life and death—there was only the state of blissfully wise existence.

But because of an occasion, which is more dreadful than the most horrible nightmare, the mouth of the snake opened and the stinger full of venom appeared out of it—and death entered the first-created nature... This intrusion could be likened to the way a tiny worm penetrates the spine of a man without him even sensing the invasion so that the man continues to blossom and feel merry. Then he will feel the worm as a pleasant itching; he might rub his back, smile and say: "It is nothing." And this will go on until the moment the worm grows big, multiplies and exhausts the spine so that the man becomes like a hollow cane which mindlessly whistles a hymn of madness and death.

What doctor would say to this madman with a dried up spine when he, in the doctor's presence, like a hollow cane whistles a triumphal hymn to death: "Go and sin no more, and you will be whole."? Not a single doctor in this world. Perhaps only that doctor who is not different than his patient.

Why is it that the sickly-sweet upholders of ethics, with their sickly-sweet theories do not depict the devil on the front page? Why do they not say to say sinner: "Go and sin no more."? That is: Go and do not let more worms into your spine!

What a joy must feel the worm that has already burrowed into one's spine when it hears such counselors! Truly it rejoices with joy of a hungry one who has enough food for himself and knows that it will not have to be shared with anybody.



He who has love, lays down his life for his neighbor. If one should hear an offensive word, and is himself able to respond with similar words, yet does not utter them, or if he is wronged, yet endures it and does not repay the one who has wronged him, then such a one lays down his life for his neighbor.

Abba Poimen

THE POWER OF THE ENEMY

Source: "Orthodox America," issue no. 88, March '89. Translated and slightly abridged from "Sila Bozhiya i Nemoshch Chelovecheskaya" by S. Nilus; *St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood*, 1979.

The following account comes to us from 19th century Russia. Although some distance away in time and space, it offers some striking parallels to our own day when we see materialism giving way before a growing fascination with spiritism. How will it end? Tragically, if the world continues to ignore the lessons which history has so generously provided. . .

Back in my early childhood I heard frightful tales of terrifying manifestations of the powers of unclean spirits over people, who cooperated through willfully, serving sin and the devil. My memory, even to this day when I am approaching the sunset of my life, has preserved in its treasure house recollections of those impressions gathered under the influence of my old nanny and those other elderly women to whom even relatively recently the doors to the nurseries of houses belonging to the old Russian nobility stood open. They had not yet lost their ties with the vast crowd of simple people, with its simple, guileless and childlike faith. What mysteries of the unseen world were revealed to this faith! How much in this foreign world was accessible to the eyes of these "children"! Who among us, whatever his profession or rank, was not acquainted in his formative years with that mysterious unseen world—full of wonders and also fearful—where the unclean powers operated and worked on the destruction of the Orthodox soul? Who does not remember all these "wood demons," "water sprites," "house spirits" (a "fantasy" according to the wisdom of this world) and their agents and slaves from the human race—"sorcerers," "witches" and their unclean colleagues of the same ilk?

What child's heart did not tremble, listening to these stories in the dim light of an autumn or winter evening, illumined by the flickering of a vigil lamp? And how it believed them! How it beat from a dread perturbation—it seemed it could burst were it not for the old nanny's calm and triumphant assurance that her charge had nothing to fear, for the powers of evil could not touch him because he was protected; this protection was by his Guardian-Angel, his pure, child's soul and its prayers and, finally, by all that grace present—in the form of Theophany water, Athonite incense, holy oil from the relics of God-pleasers, and various other holy things—in her icon corner which flickered with the flame of her perpetually burning vigil lamp. Yes, and what child's soul, sensitive to every truth, would not believe these stories, when the nanny herself and her interlocutors were even more convinced of them than her young listener; some of them were half-dead with fright having witnessed that which they related.

And I, too, believed them with all my young heart—until the spirit of the times, the spirit of skepticism all but suffo-

cated any faith in that which "smart" people called them "old wives tales." I had to submit to the directive of the "smart" people, and for a long time, in place of my childhood belief in the spiritual world, to set up another faith in other gods and in other idols before whom the "smart" people themselves bowed down. . . But what a struggle in my soul I had to pay for my disenchantments and the acquisition of that desired truth which was so simply given and so simply accepted by the "ordinary" folk in the Orthodox Church, through her Sacred Scripture, Tradition and Lives of God-pleasers.

My soul stubbornly refused to be satisfied with materialism alone, which tried to substitute for the life of the spirit the "liberation" movement or the "great" reforms of the '60's and the ensuing years. During this intense struggle in my soul, I became aware of a sharp discord: at the same time that the entire spiritual world was subject to scorn and derision (and later even denial), "smart" people, who stood at the head of the "social" movement, by some totally illogical jump, leapt from "transmutation of species" and "cells and proto-plasmas," into that very sphere which they had ostracized: materials extended a hand to spiritism, and "smart" people considered it possible to join these "un-joinables" into a general "kasha" (soft food made from cooked buckwheat or similar grain, *Ed.*). They "ate this kasha, licked their spoons and said 'Thanks'." What powerful, unseen hand threw the very cream of educated society, even professors toward spinning tables and saucers, and turned yesterday's despairing materialists into today's materializers of unseen spirits?

And now, for the first time since my evening sessions with nanny, I heard from the lips of educated people—who scoffed at nanny's prejudices and superstitions—convincing stories about that which was familiar to me from my childhood: "haunted" houses, premonitions, the influence of the dead upon the living; how in "haunted" houses dishes and glasses floated about in the air; knockings were heard at night; someone's footsteps sounded, bringing chills to the spine. Policemen and frightened inhabitants were not the only ill-fated witnesses of these outrageous happenings; entire streets, blocks and even whole towns crowded around to stare at the mysterious events.

"Smart" people, familiar with the phenomenon of mediums, attributed these appearances to the activity of "playful spirits"; ardent nihilists—to pranksters; simple people of simple heart and faith—to an unclean power. Thus, the majority were in favor of spirits, and in my eyes this confirmed by childhood beliefs which were destroyed by this same majority in the days of my youth—when I arrogantly scorned aloud simple people.

At once the forgotten world of children's stories and the stories of nanny was resurrected in my memory. But how much more complete was the unlearned world view of my dear old nanny—a worldview illumined and made intelligible by the light of faith—than the chaos in which the educated and

“enlightened” conducted their examinations of spiritist and mediumistic spheres. My nanny knew of such occurrences, and with her all the common Russian people, at a time when there was as yet no talk of psychic “science” and these occurrences were attributed to the activity of the man-destroyer, God’s arch-enemy and man-hater, the devil. They knew the purpose behind these occurrences: **the destruction of God’s creation, man’s soul, and its eternal torment in that place prepared by Satan and his army...**

Just look dear reader, at what the loss of this knowledge has cost humanity! Take a look around you, and if your soul isn’t yet devoid altogether of the ability to respond to the activities of your contemporaries with grief at the loss of Christian faith, then you will understand that nothing could have benefited the Evil One more than this, and that it is now he who is in reality the king of a depraved and possessed humanity. For how long? *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.* (Rev 12:12)

From one of the elders of the great Optina Hermitage, God granted me to receive a manuscript which, already in the days of the great Optina Elder Ambrose of blessed memory, was under his care and editing. The person from whom I obtained the manuscript assured me that it was destined by the Elder himself to be printed for the edification of contemporaries, but for some reason it wasn’t done. By God’s unfathomable providence it is only now, fifteen years later, after the death of Elder Ambrose, that the time has come for it to be brought to light. Perhaps it will shed a little light on the darkness of the evils and distresses under which our land now groans. Here it is—the manuscript, already yellowed with age. In a fine hand there is set forth the following:

I

Among simple people one not infrequently hears stories such as might seem strange and even unbelievable. One such story, which we recorded from the words of an eye-witness, we offer to the reader. The extraordinary nature of the story makes it hard to believe, but neither can one completely dismiss it, because hundreds of people were eyewitnesses of the events we describe. We purposely indicate the place where this event took place and give the names of those persons who in whatever way were involved in order that those who are curious and who have the opportunity, can themselves verify what happened.

The case we describe is not unique. He who is interested may hear similar stories among the common people, and if he listens to them carefully and without bias, he will find good reason to believe them.

There was in the province of Novgorod, in the village of Mindiukin, a boy Michael belonging to the family of the serf (an agricultural laborer bound under the feudal system to work on his lord’s estate, *Ed.*) Trudnikov. He was a healthy and fun-loving lad, though rather naughty at that. In 1850,

or perhaps a year earlier, when Michael turned 15, the poor parents thought of sending him to be a shepherd; but the boy, being accustomed only to pranks and childish amusements, to whom even the slightest bit of serious work was a trial, began to grumble loudly against his mother when she announced her intention. The boy’s grumbling turned into impudence which in turn awoke fierce indignation in the heart of his mother. In a fit of anger the unthinking peasant woman cursed her son and harassed him as was possible only under such provocation. Willingly or unwillingly, Michael finally had to yield to his mother’s demand. He was soon sent to his appointed task, 35 versts from his village, to the country village of Lentevo in the province of Ustiug. [A verst is a Russian measure of length, about 0.66 mile (1.1 km), *Ed.*].

II

The boy lived there for some days. Time passed in its usual course without any particular incidents, and one could assume that he had come to terms with his unenviable destiny.

One day the head shepherd, Ivan, left his flock in the care of his young assistant. The day was drawing to a close and Ivan returned to his flock, only to find Michael gone. He began calling for him loudly but only an ominous echo came in reply.

Near the place where the flock was pastured was a lake on whose shore stood a small boat. Perhaps Michael was there, thought Ivan. The boy—spoiled—probably thought of taking a boat-ride. What if he had met with some calamity! With such thoughts Ivan went to the place where the boat was moored. There, not far from shore, he saw on the surface of the water the corpse of the unfortunate Michael, already devoid of any signs of life. Stunned by this tragedy, the shepherd ran to his village, a distance of four versts, with the story of his comrade’s wretched fate. News of the drowning soon spread throughout the entire village and brought the curiosity-seekers—both old and young—to the scene of the disaster. The corpse, already stiff as a board, was taken out of the water. It was arranged to inform the local militia and Michael’s mother who took no time in coming: the first—to conduct an investigation of the accident, and the second—to certify the truth of the matter and to mourn the unfortunate death of her son.

The cause of Michael’s death was evident to all and therefore, without further ado, the deceased was given the usual Christian burial. The corpse, judging from the age of the deceased, was not large and did not give the impression of weighing much. For this reason all those accompanying the drowned boy to the village were amazed that the horse was exerting such great effort in pulling him, as if the cart held an enormous load. All wondered at such an unusual circumstance and no one could offer any explanation.

Meanwhile, according to the statutes of the Holy Church, the burial service was performed over the deceased and his body was returned to the earth.

The poor mother wept over the remains of her Misha, and the witnesses of her unexpected grief also mourned and returned home, preserving a sorrowful remembrance of the tragic event.

III

Time had not yet succeeded in calming Mme. Trudnikov's agitation when one night her son revealed himself in a dream and related something so frightful and unbelievable concerning his supposed death that had there not already been examples of such occurrences in people's minds, it would have been difficult to believe. Here is what happened.

Night fell. Mme. Trudnikov went to bed and in a heavy sleep she saw her son Michael. He approached her as if alive and said:

"Mother, do not think that I have died; I am alive, but because you cursed me I am presently under the control of demons. If you want me to return to you, repent of your sin, pray to God for me more often and give alms for my sake."

Mme. Trudnikov saw this dream on three consecutive nights.

The great anguish over the loss of her son, the terrifying news of his death as a result of her curse, hope—although slight—of seeing him again among the living, all this led Mme. Trudnikov to seek the advice of a certain wise peasant who was deemed trustworthy by all the peasants in the area.

"Do not believe," he counseled, "that your son is alive, but to pray to God for him, to give alms for his sake and repent of your sin—this is your duty. Whether your son is dead or alive, in any case your repentance, prayers and almsgiving will benefit both you and him."

The counselor had reason to speak thus; stored in his memory was the following case:

In the village of Kurilov in the province of Cherepovets, there lived two merchant brothers, one of good character and the other given over to a dissolute life. Such a contrast in their characters led to their separation. The kindly brother began to prosper, while the other soon became completely rotten. Once the latter went for some reason to his brother's and found him with a serf, distributing a rather large sum of money. Noticing this, he lay in wait for this serf one evening in the woods through which there was a desolate path to his house, robbed him of the money, killed him and, as though nothing had happened, went to get drunk at a bar. The peasant, however, had not been mortally wounded. Upon recovering, he made his way to his village and told the proper authorities what had transpired. The crime was revealed, and the guilty one imprisoned.

The criminal had a wife. When this misfortune befell her, the unhappy woman wept for days on end. But then, as if to comfort her, her husband began to come to her at night. In response to his wife's astonishment—how this was possible for him, a prisoner—he answered:

"My friendship with the prison guard has given me total freedom. But why I come at night—this is so that people wouldn't see; if they don't see they won't imagine things."

In time the wife herself thought of visiting her husband. During the meeting she asked him about the night-time visitations. The husband at once suspected that something wasn't right. Leaving his wife's question unanswered, he wrote a letter and asked her not to delay in delivering it to his brother. Returning home, she postponed fulfilling her husband's behest until the morrow. In the morning a crowd was drawn by the cries of the young daughter; they found the poor woman dead. Upon being questioned, the young girl said that some man had come to them at night and had strangled her mother. On the icon stand they found the husband's letter which had never reached the brother and which confirmed the daughter's testimony concerning the secret nightly visitations to the deceased by some personage taking upon himself the image of the strangled woman's husband.

The counselor related this story to Mme. Trudnikov and persuaded her not to trust in nighttime visions, but to pray and give alms for the soul of her son. The mother heeded the good advice and began to pray to the Lord for her son and to give alms to the poor, as much as her scanty means would allow.

A year passed and then another. She again began to have dreams similar to that described above, although no longer as clear as before. The mother sincerely repented of her sin and did not cease to pray to God and give alms.

Twelve whole years passed since Mme. Trudnikov had been overtaken by grief. Not a word was heard about the son; even the dreams themselves, offering a glimmer of hope about his return, had long since ceased.

IV

At this time, 70 versts from the village of Mindiukin, not far from the town of Cherepov, there appeared from out of the blue a very strange young man from the peasant class. He was of medium height and very lean, what you would call "skin-and-bones"; his clothing consisted of rags. But what astonished everyone the most was his extraordinary savagery; truly he was a creature from some other world. He was afraid of everyone, tried to hide from everyone, and only extreme necessity—so as not to die of hunger—forced him to go to the houses of some peasants. "He comes," related eyewitnesses, "and stands by the door, not saying a word. And so he stands for several minutes. If he's given something to eat, he eats, if not—he just leaves, likewise without saying anything."

This mysterious stranger directed his steps towards the village of Mindiukin. About four versts from Mindiukin he stopped for a rest in the town of Vоротishin at the house of the peasant Vasily Yakovlevich, where he was received and comforted in a way in which until quite recently the common Russian people knew how to receive strangers, God's people. The heart of the old Russian peasant, always compassionate towards his neighbor's distress, lead the host to offer the stranger a meal and to treat him to whatever God had

provided. Since Vasily Yakovlevich had just heated the bathhouse, he offered his guest a bath.

And here in the bathhouse, the host was struck and even frightened by the strangeness of his guest: first he would let loose a very spooky laugh, then he would begin as if to hide from someone, crawling under the benches, behind the stove. Having somehow washed himself, he dressed, left the bathhouse and ran off somewhere. While running he made such enormous leaps that it appeared as though he were not running but flying through the air. Each leap lifted him three fathoms into the air.

Soon, however, this astonishing phenomenon ceased and he headed towards Mindiukin, leaving his kind host, it must be said, utterly terrified and bewildered.

Now I would ask my dear reader to forgive me if I interrupt the account of the manuscript lying before me and turn to some personal recollections.

Although a faithful copier of the document entrusted to me, I cannot but feel that the event described herein is so unusual, so terrifying, that to the reader who is ill-prepared to take in such stories of the mysterious otherworld, it may produce not only bewilderment but, God forbid, suspicion. I hasten to assure you, my dear reader, I not only believe in that which is here brought to your amazed consideration, but I recall from my childhood a conversation which I by chance overheard between my late mother and her sister, also now deceased.

They were both brought up in the liberal spirit of the gentry in the '40's; both were educated according to the latest word in education; they tasted and even got their fill of the materialism of the '60's, and, of course, did not believe in anything supernatural or miraculous. Nevertheless, I heard from their own lips about a boy of 6 or 7—it must have been my mother's brother, my uncle—who fell into some mysterious state during which he had the most amazing and incredible visions: without knowing how to play any instrument, he took into his hands the violin belonging to the first violinist of grandfather's home orchestra and played—to the astonishment and even fright of all—the most exquisite, hitherto unheard-of melodies; he spoke in foreign languages of which he had no knowledge or understanding; he would jump from one bank to another of a stream several yards wide and, in general, did such highly unusual things (not only for his age but for anyone) that he baffled all those around him. The simple people among the servants were horrified, seeing—as they firmly believed in the simplicity of their hearts—this evidence of an unclean power. The educated and learned, of course, thought differently, but just what it was they thought didn't make much sense—they couldn't explain it themselves. Afterwards, when people became absorbed in spiritism, "smart" people came to the idea of a "fourth dimension." But here, it seems, they came against a wall.

This is what I heard in my childhood.

And what is now going on in the realm of spiritist appearances, which "smart" people have given themselves over to,

not knowing with whom they are dealing—there, perhaps, you would come across stories even less credible than Mme. Trudnikova's. But they believe those stories, they are followed up, written about, talked about; intelligent people—professors even—are given over to them, heart and soul; they put their complete faith in them. It's amazing. They don't believe those cases when devils act openly as devils under their own clearly devilish guise, but they place their entire faith in these same devils when they appear as "angels of light," the light of psychic "sciences"—in spiritism, mediumism, motivism, or social sciences—"freedom, equality, brotherhood"...

Forgive me, dear reader, for this involuntary digression. I shall resume my story.

V

It was a Sunday before the Apostles' Fast in the year 1863. In front of the cottage of the Mindiukin peasant Feodor Ivanovich Grishin, his young children were playing about with their companions. Here also was Feodor himself with one of his elderly neighbors. They were approached by the mysterious and silent stranger.

"Where are you from?" asked Feodor.

"I'm a native of these parts," came the answer. "I know you, old man."

"And who are you?" Feodor continued.

"Did you ever know Misha Trudnikov?" asked the stranger.

"What do you mean, of course I knew him!"

"Well, that same Misha—that's me."

"How's that? Misha drowned; his body is buried."

"No, I didn't really drown," the stranger replied assuredly.

They began to examine the stranger's face and actually found a resemblance to the face of him who had drowned long ago. The only difference was that he had grown from a boy into a big fellow and on the bridge of his nose he had a scar, as if from some injury.

News of this unheard-of occurrence spread quickly through the entire village, and a large crowd gathered around Michael. Not believing their own eyes, the astonished peasants and especially the playful children, vied with each other in climbing over to him, each with his own probing question:

"And what's my name?" "And mine, and mine?..."

That's all that could be heard in the crowd. Michael answered all questions accurately. The crowd's astonishment reached a high pitch of intensity. Then a certain Grishkinskaya stepped up:

"And do you know me?"

"How could I not know you," replied Michael.

"In your family you have a blind old woman who knows only how to complain about everyone, and for this reason 'we' were often at your house and did all sorts of mischief."

"And what kind of scar have you there on your nose?" someone asked.

"I came by this scar when I was walking in the woods with 'Gramps.' Suddenly I remembered about God. As a punish-

ment for this ‘Gramps’ grabbed me by the legs and struck me so hard against a pine tree that even now the scar remains.”

“How did all this happen to you? Tell us, tell us!”

“Well then, listen.” And in this way Michael began his story.

“After my mother cursed me—this was the principal reason for my misfortune—I was sent off to herd sheep. As you yourselves know, the Lord endured my sins only one short week. The week went by. Suddenly there came up to me some old man with a long, grey beard and said to me: ‘Your own mother cursed you, and this maternal curse has given me full power over you.’ Here he began to strip me of all my clothes until I was completely naked. The only thing I had left on me was my cross; the old man was unable to touch it and told me to remove it myself. Willing or unwilling, I had to submit to him. Then he took an aspen log, lying nearby, put all my clothes on it, and instantly there where my face should be (on the log) he drew a face—the resemblance to my own was like two drops of water—and threw this log into the lake. I saw how the people came running to look at the corpse, how the militia arrived and how my mother came. I saw everyone’s amazement at the horse’s great difficulty in dragging the dead body. And do you know the reason for this?”

“What was it?”

“It was because,” continued Michael, “there were about twenty such as myself sitting on the cart in addition to our ‘Gramps.’ [*] And since then, since the old man stripped me, I became like a bodiless one. Right up to the burial of my supposed body, I stayed near it. I saw all the people who were there, heard all their conversations, but no one saw me. Since that time I no longer felt either hunger or cold and, although I sometimes ate and drank in great quantities, I did so only out of habit. I ate and drank, just as those like me, where people drink and eat without saying prayers or without the sign of the cross. This gave us the opportunity to defile the very dishes in which the food was served. The people couldn’t understand why the food and drink didn’t taste good; they would have had no cause for surprise had they known that we had defiled the dishes.

“I could fly over great distances in an instant; nothing could obstruct my path. Like a bird, I flew over sleeping forests and inaccessible mountains; I walked on water as if on dry land. And I shall tell you: there are a fair number of people like me. I remember that at one place up to a thousand of us gathered. Our favorite places to get together were various kinds of parties and indecent spectacles, and likewise where there were quarrels and abuse—in a word, wherever people sinned without any fear [of God]. During such gatherings I chanced more than once to meet with a blind girl from the village of Lipenki of the Ustiug province, who also took part in all our roguery. [**]

“In our actions and our wicked campaigns against people a certain order was observed. When we gathered, ‘Gramps’ divided us into squadrons and gave each squadron a spe-

cial assignment designed to harm people. We were always zealous in executing the promptings of human passions and lusts, and speedy collaborators in people’s wickedness and misfortunes. For example, should someone think of drowning or strangling himself, we would help him by all means available to us. Here’s the case of Akulina Potapova (six versts from Mendiukin in the village of Supranov), who for some trivial reason began to grow despondent, and from despondency she strangled herself in her cottage. Her children, in order to avoid suspicion and trouble with the law, secretly took her dead body out of the noose, drove it into the forest and there hung it on a birch tree. And in this case we were also participants. We were also present at fires and tried to intensify the disaster. By the way, if the houses of pious people were burning and the fire was not the result of God’s chastisement—allowed because of sin, we could in no way interfere. If the opposite was the case, we very actively participated. For example in the village on Zimnin a peasant woman was carrying a light as she went to feed the sheep one night, and she dropped a small spark. She was quarrelling with her father-in-law and this gave us power to blow the spark into a great fire which destroyed their entire property. Vorotishino burned in the same way. I recall it was in the morning; the weather was fine, calm, but during the fire such a whirlwind blew up as to scatter whole logs in different directions. We tried to do all this.

In general, we had access everywhere where the Name of God and the sign of the Cross were disregarded. Blasphemy and the deliberate scorn of what was holy gave us power to enter into communion with people who did this, and mock them just as we wanted and our state allowed. By the way, prayer itself and the sign of the cross received their power only with people of good Christian morality, while a sinner who had no desire to abandon his sin couldn’t save himself from us either through prayer or the sign of the cross. It happens occasionally that even a pious peasant will forget about prayer or the sign of the cross. However, we could not get to such a person; it was not ours even to know the houses of such people. For example, we couldn’t enter the village of Vanskoe. Why? Because there was a pious old woman there who had the custom every evening of going around her village praying.”

“And you no longer prayed to God?” someone asked.

“We prayed; we had a daily rule of prayer, morning and evening. But the prayers we recited were a blasphemous mockery of your prayers. The Lord’s Prayer, for example, we read as follows: Father who isn’t ours, may Thy Name not be hal- lowed...and other prayers, all in the same spirit.

“So this is how the Lord punished me for my brazenness and rebellion against my parents’ will. For twelve whole years I led this miserable life, and I should never again have seen God’s light as a Christian if the prayers and almsgiving of my mother hadn’t helped to save me from perdition.

“When the time drew near for my release from the power of the devil, our ‘Gramps,’ unwilling to let such a prey out of his hands, intended to do me in. He prepared a noose and told me to get into it myself. But no matter how bad my life was, I still had no desire to die. Well, I thought, they might shove me into a noose against my will—but no matter what the consequences I won’t climb into it myself for anything. I don’t know how it all would have ended if at the last minute there hadn’t appeared to defend me a kindly old man; he was wearing a pointed cap with a cross. ‘The mother’s threads [***] have pulled him out from your power,’ said the old man to ‘Gramps,’ and pushed him away from me. ‘Gramps’ disappeared.

“Then my benefactor turned to me and said: ‘Your mother cursed you, your mother prayed you out!’ And with these words he put a cross around my neck. After this I no longer saw the old man, and found myself in a field. I had no clothes on and began to feel cold—not once in the past twelve years had I experienced this. Fortunately, just then some women passed by. They took me for a crazy man and, taking pity on me, took me to their village and gave me some clothes. And then the Lord helped me to find my way here.”

“Why don’t you go home?” his stupefied listeners asked.

“I’m afraid!” answered the poor man.

VI

Meanwhile, news of Michael’s miraculous return reached his mother, and as soon as she heard about it she rushed to her son.

At the sight of his mother, Michael was seized with a kind of terror and some unseen power shook him, as it happens with one possessed. The mother immediately recognized the stranger to be her son and took him home.

Having recovered from his terror, Michael asked those near him to send quickly for the parish priest, Fr. Alexey, in the village of Grishkino. His desire was fulfilled.

On learning from the messengers all that had happened with Michael, the priest was thrown into bewilderment by such an extraordinary occurrence. “Could it be that a demon, appearing in the guise of a man, is fooling the people?” the priest wondered, and he hastened to Mme. Trudnikov’s.

There the priest read over Michael the prayers of exorcism from Peter Mogila’s Book of Needs [*Trebnik*], but could discover no evidence of an evil spirit present in him. The only strange thing was that ever since Michael had seen his mother, a certain timidity had not left him. To be perfectly certain that Michael had no demon, that he himself was not an evil spirit simply taking the form of a man, the priest took him into church and there served a service of intercession to the Saviour, to the Mother of God and to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker; and in the altar he had Michael make before the Lord a full-hearted repentance of all his sins, according to the rite of the Orthodox Church. From a sincere heart Michael confessed to his spiritual father all that he could remember

from his former life, when his mother’s curse weighed upon him. The prayer was read absolving him of all sins.

All this time the priest was expecting this “vision” to disappear, but Michael remained Michael. Nevertheless, even after all this the priest was not freed of doubt, and he was afraid of allowing Michael to receive the Holy Mysteries. Soon afterwards Michael was taken to the nearby Modensky Nikolaevsky monastery and there, having twice more confessed his sins—first in front of the superior and then before the monastery’s father confessor—he was granted, finally, to approach the Fearful Mysteries of Christ.

VII

The curiosity of Michael’s mother, and even more the desire to assure herself of the truth of her son’s appearance, led her to Lentevo, to the grave of the one she had buried as her son. She wanted to ask that the grave be opened and to see what lay there, but time had worked its own: there where the body—or that which had passed for the body—of Michael had been buried some buildings had been constructed and the grave could not be found.

For three weeks after his appearance Michael lived at home. Then he was called to the district police for questioning—was he really the person he claimed to be? Here also Michael held fast to his story, and in order to convince the police more strongly of its veracity he began in front of all those present to list the policeman’s secret sins. The peasants, before whom Michael revealed the policeman’s dark secrets, affirmed that he spoke the truth and were only amazed how he could know all this, but the policeman was so offended by the truth that he ordered his accuser to be beaten with rods and then shackled him like a criminal.

Having completed the trial and investigation, the policeman went to Mendiukin to check up on Michael’s story.

“Is this your son?” he asked Michael’s mother.

“Mine!” she answered firmly.

“Is this your resident?” he asked the other Mendiukin peasants.

“Ours!” answered the crowd in one voice.

“Oh, you fools, you fools!” admonished the policeman. “It’s time now to go to work: you’ll all go into the fields and he’ll set fire to your village. Then you can claim him as yours. You’ll repent, but it will be too late.”

The peasants lost courage; they scratched their heads and no one said a word. Alexis Kuptsov, the wealthiest peasant in Mendiukin, was the first to reject Michael; others followed. One by one everyone joined Kuptsov, and in a short time Michael was hidden away in a home for the insane.

The day after he had renounced Michael, Kuptsov fell ill and soon died of dropsy. The Mendiukin residents immediately saw here God’s chastisement, but, of course, they didn’t lift a finger to have Michael released from the crazy house. Nevertheless, there is a proverb, “The voice of the people is the voice of God.” Yes, and it is also said that the proverb itself

will never be destroyed, but those who scorn God's truth and righteous judgment are destroyed and wrecked like rotten boats, like decayed trees.

Here ends the manuscript.

In those same years of the '60's, if my memory does not fail me, in the magazine *The Pilgrim*, there was printed the case of a coachman from the village of Kostin, Petersburg province. This coachman was leading his horses to a river for a drink when suddenly, to his unspeakable terror, he saw that the branches of some trees on the bank were bowed down with what looked like a countless flock of ravens—they were demons. On account of their weight the branches bent down to the very surface of the water. Out of his mind with fright, the coachman left his horses and ran as fast as he could to the village, while the devils called out after him: **"Our time, our will! Our time, our will!"**

Whether he related this to his spiritual father or to another, what is certain is that in its day the story appeared in the religious press. But, of course, it was soon forgotten through the careless memory of contemporaries; and with them we, too, forgot.

One of our contemporary righteous men, Father Ambrose of Optina of blessed memory, revived this story in the minds of those few observant people who looked with sorrowful eyes at the events taking place in the world and begotten in Orthodox Russia. These events were born since the evil days of the '60's, but the spirit of faith penetrated the secret of their lawlessness and trembled before its threat. Father Ambrose did not comfort his widespread flock, his children according to the spirit, with hopes for the enlightenment of Russia's horizon, for even then Russia was troubled by the rotten breath of wind from the West. Calling to mind the Kolpinsk coachman, he gravely repeated the ominous demonic threat of the victory of the demonic will, demonic times.

And when you now lift from the earth your gaze, downcast and sorrowful, when you look around with fright at that demonic activity to which the young energies of this country are given over, a country which only recently was Orthodox, only through the story of Michael Trudnikov, related here, will you be able to explain the satanic hold upon our unfortunate, perishing, destructive youth.

Is it not upon it and upon us, their fathers and mothers, that there lies heavy the almost universal curse of our fathers and mothers, whose will and obedience we repudiated with such cruel hatred, scorning and trampling all that was holy, all that they lived by, all they believed and prayed and upon which they built in bygone days that which we destroyed with such furious hatred—a destruction we are now in the process of completing? But in Michael Trudnikov the demonic power which took possession of him through his mother's curse acted secretly, concealing for twelve whole years both itself and its weapons; now it acts openly: then it operated in the carelessness of a "backward" mass of simple people, but with

fear before the light of [this people's] faith; now it operates in the "educated" crowd and its leaders, openly and boldly in the darkness of its apostasy and disbelief. But Satan and his dark powers are still the same as they were 7,500 years ago. Alas! Those people who have been seduced by them, who have fallen away from Christ, are also the same, and just as once in Paradise before their expulsion, so also now they sell the blessedness of eternity for the fruit of knowledge—of evil.

Wretched, pitiable, blind, foolish Michael Trudnikovs! Who is there to pray for you? Whose "thread," offered for you in Christ's name, can tear you from the devil's claws? The majority of your fathers and mothers have forgotten how to pray, how to believe!...

Have mercy on us, O Lord! Lord, have mercy!

Nikola-Babeyvsky Monastery, July 13th, 1906

Epilogue

I hadn't had time to prepare my manuscript for the printer before there burst upon the unfortunate Sizran a terrible misfortune: The large flourishing city with its fifty thousand inhabitants was enveloped by flames and in a single night burnt to the ground, carrying away in its destruction many human victims. Let us look at the following excerpt from the official news story of a Count A. Tolstoy:

"A part of the city was burning, but although this was a great disaster it was not a catastrophe. Suddenly, about five o'clock in the afternoon, there appeared over the city, travelling from north to south, a tornado, a cyclone or hurricane—in a word, something unimaginable. It flattened haystacks in the fields and carried metal sheets from the roofs of houses a distance of fifteen versts from the city. It is hard to say what meteorological phenomenon this storm should be classified as, but the testimony of the stunned inhabitants in this case is unanimous—it was something altogether unimaginable. Lifting all the dust and heat from the burning part of the city, the hurricane in some 30 minutes set fire to the entire central part of the city simultaneously, so that within an hour the whole city was enveloped in flames..." "It seems to me," writes the author of this news story, "that this brief description is sufficient to convince the reading public that this catastrophe should be attributed to the category of elemental disasters..."

And you, dear reader, to which category of disasters or meteorological phenomena would you assign Sizran's punishment after having read my manuscript? Do you not hear in the belfries' booming alarm, floating over the scene of the conflagration, the mischievous satanic laughter: **"Our time, our will! Our time, our will!"**...

Have mercy, O Lord! Lord! Have mercy!...

Repent, O ye people, or you all will likewise perish!

† † †

[*] In the Life of Elder Shema-hieromonk Ambrose [of Optina], there is described an incident in which a massive chain fastened to the beam of the Optina ferry snapped and

flew up, hitting in the head a gentleman who was crossing on the ferry in a carriage. Everyone was amazed how such a chain could possibly break. Fr. Ambrose settled their bewilderment with these words: "Many of them (demons) sat on it."

[**] About this blind girl the local residents related the following. Cursed by her parents, she, like Michael, fell under the power of evil spirits and suddenly disappeared. The increased prayers of her parents did not allow her to remain long under this dreadful power: About two months after her disappearance, she was discovered abandoned in a field; it was winter and both her legs froze. When she was asked where she had been during those two months, she told a story similar to Michael's. At that time hers was a unique case in those parts, and no one believed the girl.

[***] Being poor, Mme. Trudnikov's principal form of charity was to give passing soldiers thread that she had spun.



A PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE LAWLESSNESS

From a letter of the Optina Elder (and New Martyr) St. Anatoly the Younger (+1922).

From that heresies will spread everywhere and deceive many people. The enemy of the human race will act with cunning in order to draw into heresy, if possible, even the elect.

He will not begin by crudely rejecting the dogmas of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ and the virtue of the Theotokos, but he will begin imperceptibly to distort the teachings and statutes of the Church and their very spirit, handed down to us by the Holy Fathers through the Holy Spirit.

Few will notice these wiles of the enemy, only those more experienced in the spiritual life. Heretics will seize power over the Church and will place their servants everywhere; the pious will be regarded with contempt. He (the Lord) said, *by their fruits ye shall know them*, and so, by their fruits, as well as by the actions of the heretics, strive to distinguish them from the true pastors.

These are spiritual thieves, plundering the spiritual flock, and they will enter the sheepfold (the Church), climbing up some other way, using force and trampling upon the divine statutes. The Lord calls them *robbers* (cf. Jn 10:1). Indeed, their first task will be the persecution of the true pastors, their imprisonment and exile, for without this it will be impossible for them to plunder the sheep.

Therefore, my son, when you see the violation of patristic tradition and the divine order in the Church, the order estab-

lished by God, know that the heretics have already appeared, although for the time being they may conceal their impiety, or they will distort the Divine Faith imperceptibly, in order to succeed better in seducing and enticing the inexperienced into the net.

The persecution will be directed against not only pastors but against all servants of God, for all those ruled by heresy will not endure piety. Recognize these wolves in sheep's clothing by their proud dispositions and love of power. They will be slanderers, traitors, everywhere sowing enmity and malice; therefore the Lord said that by their fruits you will know them. True servants of God are humble, love their neighbor and are obedient to the Church.

Monastics will be greatly oppressed by the heretics and monastic life will be scorned. Monasteries will become scarce, the number of monastics will decline, and those who remain will endure violence. These haters of monastic life, however, having only the appearance of piety, will strive to attract the monks to their side promising them protection and worldly goods, and threatening those who oppose them with expulsion.

These threats will cause great despair among the fainthearted, but you, my son rejoice that you have lived until that time, for then the faithful who have not shown any other virtues, will receive crowns merely for *standing firm in the faith*, according to the word of the Lord (cf. Mt 10:32).

Fear the Lord my son. Fear to lose the crown prepared (for you), fear to be cast by Christ into the outer darkness and eternal torment. Stand bravely in the faith, and if necessary, endure persecution and other sorrows, for the Lord will be with you... and the holy martyrs and confessors, they will look upon you and your struggle with joy.

But woe to the monks in those days who will be bound with possessions and riches, who because of love of peace will be ready to submit to the heretics. They will lull to sleep their conscience, saying, "We are preserving and saving the monastery and the Lord will forgive us." The unfortunate and blind ones do not at all consider that through heresy the demons will enter the monastery and then it will no longer be a holy monastery, but merely walls from which grace will depart.

God, however, is more mighty than the enemy, and He will never leave His servants. True Christians will remain until the end of this age, only they will choose to live in secluded, deserted places. Do not fear sorrows, rather fear pernicious heresy, for it strips us of grace and separates us from Christ. This is why the Lord commanded us to consider the heretic as a pagan and a publican.

And so my son strengthen yourself in the grace of Jesus Christ. Hasten to confess the faith, to *endure suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ* (cf. 2 Tim 2:13), Who has said, *Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* (Rev 2:10).

To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be honor, glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

By St. Peter Chrysologus (+450).



A Virgin conceived, bore a son, and yet remained a Virgin. This is no common occurrence, but a sign; no reason here, but God's power, for He is the cause, and not nature. It is a special event, not shared by others; it is divine, not human. Christ's birth was not necessity, but an expression of omnipotence, a sacrament of piety for the redemption of men. He who made man without generation from pure clay made man again and

was born from a pure body. The hand that assumed clay to make our flesh deigned to assume a body for your salvation. That the Creator is in his creature and God is in the flesh brings dignity to man without dishonor to him who made him.

Why then, man, are you so worthless in your own eyes and yet so precious to God?

Why render yourself such dishonor when you are honored by Him?

Why do you ask how you were created and do not seek to know why you were made?

Was not this entire visible universe made for your dwelling? It was for you that the light dispelled the overshadowing gloom; for your sake was the night regulated and the day measured, and for you were the heavens embellished with varying brilliance of the sun, the moon and the stars. The earth was adorned with flowers, groves and fruit; and the constant marvelous variety of lovely living things was created in the air, the fields, and the seas for you, lest sad solitude destroy the joy of God's new creation.

And the Creator still works to devise things that can add to your glory. He has made you in His image that you might in your person make the invisible Creator present on earth; He has made you His legate, so that the vast empire of the world might have the Lord's representative. Then in his mercy God assumed what He made in you; He wanted now to be truly manifest in man, just as He had wished to be revealed in man as in an image. Now He would be in reality what He had submitted to be in symbol.

And so Christ is born that by his birth He might restore our nature. He became a child, was fed, and grew that He might inaugurate the one perfect age to remain forever as He created it. He supports man that man might no longer fall. And the creature He had formed of earth He now makes heavenly; and what He had endowed with a human soul He now vivifies to become a heavenly spirit. In this way He fully raised man to God, and left in him neither sin, nor death, nor travail, nor pain, nor anything earthly, with the grace of our Lord Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever, for all the ages of eternity. Amen.