

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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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

HOLY THEOPHANY

By Fr. Seraphim Holland, St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney (Dallas area) Texas, 1999.

Today we celebrate a day that is called by many names: the Baptism of our Lord, Theophany, and it is also called *Illumining*. We commemorate our Lord's baptism today in the Jordan. Theophany is the appearance of God, where indeed the Holy Trinity manifested Himself after Our Lord's baptism. Why would we call it *Illumining*? It is because through baptism we are indeed *illuminated*.

God had a plan for man. The primeval plan was for us to grow in knowledge and in wisdom, according to how we could bear it, in purity, without any knowledge of evil at all. But man didn't choose that plan. So God, in His wisdom knowing this, sent his only-begotten Son.

Salvation is the knowledge of God, but only the pure can know the pure. We can even see this in our daily lives. There are people whom we just don't completely understand, and we know this because we understand that they're somehow more pure and more humble than us. And we think: "I don't understand how that person can take such abuse from her husband, or his son, or his co-worker, or some other person, and be so humble about it." We know people like that. Hopefully there are people that speak about us in those kinds of tones, because we are supposed to be a light to the rest of the world.

Only the pure can know the pure. But we're dirty, and we *need* purification. And what's more, we don't have any way to become pure. We don't have any way to clean ourselves. And our flesh, what is more, wars against us. Even if we wished to clean ourselves, (and we don't have the means, without God's help, mind you), we cannot. We don't have the strength, the ability, we don't have the knowledge, we don't have the grace. We cannot understand God without Him revealing himself to us. So, that is why our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came incarnate of a Virgin, into the midst of us—to invigorate us and make us able to live, but not only that; also to give us an example.

His ministry was two-fold. Being God, He taught us all the things that were necessary for our salvation, by His example, by how He lived, by how He spoke, by His demeanor. And He transmitted this faithfully and carefully to his disciples. And this is only to be found—this *mind of Christ* is only to be found—in the Orthodox faith, and it has been transmitted carefully and perfectly, throughout the ages, by the Church.

He showed us not only by His teaching, but also by how He lived. And He was a man, as well as being God, so He was subject to the things we are subject to, even unto death. So therefore, when He told us to be baptized, later on, after His resurrection, his words certainly have weight, because He subjected himself to baptism. He was not the kind of leader, or the kind of king, who would tell his

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

PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688
USA

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

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subjects to do something that He wasn't willing to do. In fact, he said to James and John, that you cannot drink the cup that I will drink and be baptized with the baptism I will be baptized with. They could not bear what our Lord bore for us.

He will do more for us than He requires of us and expect more of Himself. And indeed, that is a principle of leadership. A leader, whether he be a father, a mother, or a priest, or an employer, or someone who teaches children, such as many of the men in this church, must lead by example. All the men in this church should be teachers of our boys, and all of the women, of our girls, and you teach them by being selfless, and emptying yourself as Christ emptied Himself. He taught us how to do it, and gave us the blueprint of how to do it.

Today we observe an amazing event before us. He who created the waters submits to being baptized in them. He who created the heavens and the earth and saw that it was good and not any whit evil, submits to cleansing in waters. He Who is the Regenerator regenerates our flesh, He descends in the flesh into regenerating waters. And he does this to show us how necessary it is for baptism.

To know Christ we must be like Him. You cannot know somebody unless you become like that person—it is not possible. So our Christian life in the flesh is to try to acquire the virtues, to be a good husbandman, to acquire the Holy Spirit, as my patron, St. Seraphim of Sarov, said, *By fasting,*

by diligence, by care, by prayers, by weeping, by repentance, by the whole Christian life. That is the whole reason for ascetical exercises. It's not because they're rules to be followed. It's because they are **Life!**

A person who sees a way of life that leads to eternal life, would be crazy, blind, not to follow such a life. Thus, our Lord taught us many principles of how to live, but the most important aspect of His ministry is that He made us **able** to live this way. I can tell you many things about the teaching of the Church, but I cannot invigorate you or make you able to live this way. That is only possible through your submission to the God-man Jesus Christ and the All-Holy Holy Trinity, Who makes a man able to live. So the God-man, when He preached, preached with authority, because He was able to back up his words like nobody else can.

Baptism is also an image; it's an *image of death and of life*. The Church says it over and over and over again. When we descend into the waters, we die. Our old man, with its lusts, dies in the waters. When we ascend out of the waters, we are reborn a new creature. This is a hard thing to understand. We cannot fathom it. We do not know how a man is reborn of water and the Spirit, we just know how we are told to begin the Christian life.

Baptism is the first mystery, although perhaps one would say the first mystery is really the incarnation of the Son of God,



which made everything else possible. In our life, our entrance into the Christian life is through baptism. Without it, we are not able to progress one whit in the knowledge of God. **And the knowledge of God IS salvation, brothers and sisters.** But remember, **one cannot progress in the knowledge of God without progressing in purity at the same time.**

We have no “armchair theologians” in the Orthodox Church. He who is a theologian—who studies God—lives as God wishes him to live, and is enlightened. We have had theologians that have not been able to read or write. Or even, and this is hard for us in our industrialized society to understand, they might not even have been intelligent, as we would think of intelligence. But they were intelligent in the ways of God, because they lived a life in accordance with His grace.

I hope you understand now why our Lord was baptized. There was no **need** for Him to be baptized. In fact, what does it say after He was baptized? *Straightway He came up out of*

the water. To the fathers this is crystal clear, and therefore to us it will be now, too. He came straightway out of the water because He has no sin. In those days St. John was baptizing for repentance, a baptism of repentance, but not for remission of sins, because he cannot remit sins. People would, when they came out of the water—(and how would you like this, some of you have been baptized in streams that are cold!)—they were held in the water. They came up partway,



and they confessed their sins right then and there. And then they were released out of the water. That’s how it was done. But our Lord had no need to do so, He had no sins to confess. In fact, when He went into the water, the demons fled. You see the icon? You see the demons in there? The demons are fleeing from the water, because they could not bear to be in the same place as the God-man Jesus Christ.

How can anyone stand against this mystery when our Lord endorses it so emphatically? And also, if we have an understanding of how water was treated, throughout the whole history of the Church—now I mean the history of the Church from Adam, you know, because God had a salvific plan from that time. There is a cute bumper sticker, but it’s not quite true: “Founded AD 33, Christian Church.” It was reborn, and recreated in AD 33, but the plan had been in place since Adam and Eve.

Let’s take a look, a little bit, at these short scriptures we read today: *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to*

be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest thou to me?” And Jesus said unto him, “suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. (Mt 3:13-15).

It’s a little bit of a riddle; what is He talking about, *all righteousness?* The Lord had no need for baptism or anything else to act upon Him in order to be righteous. He was able to save His human flesh by His own ability, but **our human flesh requires baptism.** He was baptized in order to change the nature of water so that, in those who believe, and by the grace of God, in the Church, it can make a person capable of being saved, that is, to be perfected and know God intimately. We can therefore give a rather free paraphrase of our Lord’s words as “Suffer it to be so now, because without baptism, you cannot become righteous.”

It was also tradition, a strong tradition, a God-inspired tradition, of the Jewish people, that when a prophet said something, you did it! Jesus obeyed a prophet. John was the greatest of the prophets; our Lord Himself said so. So He obeyed a prophet, by being baptized. John did not mean for the God-man to be baptized, and he wanted to tell him, “No, I can’t. I am unworthy. I want to be baptized of you.” He therefore was obedient, showed us an example, and later, after His resurrection, he issued us the command to be baptized.

Our Lord does not tell us to do anything we are not capable of doing. He does not tell us to do anything in the flesh that we cannot do in the flesh, and that he did not already do in the flesh. He told us that our flesh should become pure. His flesh was always pure; he made his flesh completely invigorated with the Godhead. And indeed, that will happen to us, because He did it to Himself. He promises us that we will rise from the dead. Well, he did it to Himself, so we are capable. He commands us to be baptized; He did it himself. He turned the other cheek when he was slapped by the arrogant Pharisees and by their henchman, the Roman soldiers. And He commands us to turn our cheek when we are slapped. He commands us to forgive, and He forgave.

There is nothing, there is no commandment that the Lord gave that He did not fulfill Himself in the flesh. And He even told us to be perfect, and He was perfect—in the flesh and as God. So all those things we are capable of doing because He did them for us and made us able to. He led by example, and He led by power and grace and mercy.

Then He suffered him. And Jesus, when He was baptized went up straightway out of the waters and lo! The heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him. And a voice from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased" (Mt 3:14-17). We already said what it means that He went *straightway out of the water*. John was in the water trembling, as a man before God. And God comes out of the water, and the Holy Spirit descends upon His shoulder, Jesus' shoulder, so as not to confuse the two. And the voice says, *This is my son, in whom I am well-pleased*.

And the heavens are opened. Why? This is because the heavens are opened to us through baptism. And also the heavens are opened to us through something else. Right away after the baptism, St. Mark barely catches his breath, I don't think he even has to dip his pen again in ink, and he starts to write, *"and straightway He was led out by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days."* (Mk 1:12).

There is a reason why he writes with such haste, why he doesn't even finish talking about baptism and wham! He is talking about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, because this happens to us. Right after our baptism we are tempted. During the whole of our life we're tempted, and sometimes we feel that we are in a barren place, a rocky desert, with no water and no comfort, and we get despondent. Our Lord had the same things happen to Him; He became hungry as a man, tired as a man, He wept as a man. And right after His baptism He shows that we all should expect to be in a life or death struggle.

Immediately upon being baptized we are enlisted as soldiers. Not as conscripts, mind you, but as willing men, willing to put on the armor of faith and of righteousness. We are willing to fight the good fight, because we have stated so, whether it was as an infant when our godparents stated for us and we grew to maturity and we learned of the Church, or whether it is, in the case of others, where we spoke for ourselves and agreed to the tenets of the Christian faith before we were thrust down into the water and out of it three times.

About Holy Water

The Church today, (and yesterday by the way), blesses water. This is called the great blessing, and in it we read amazing passages from the Old Testament about water and its salvific qualities. And then we take this water and we sanctify everything with it. And you should listen closely to the services—especially I can remember some things from last night—they talk about how our Lord cleanses the water, casting out demons from it, and making it pure and wholesome. It is good to drink, to anoint ourselves with, good to bless and sanctify everything. And we indeed bless and sanctify water because our Lord blessed and sanctified water.

I am always amazed how our faith involves all of our life, everything! All of our senses—sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste—everything! And every aspect of our life—nothing is

untouched by the holy Church. In a pious Christian life, nothing is secular; everything is sacred.

So after we bless the water today, and bless the inside of the church, and go around and bless the outside precincts, you will take water home. You should drink this water in the morning, with the sign of the cross, and also eat a small piece of *antidoron*, before you eat or drink anything else. And you should also drink this water if there is a temptation or a difficulty in your life. You should anoint yourself with the water. You should sanctify things in your home.

I have had the custom of going around all the rooms of my house with a censer, with all the rest of the family carrying candles and singing the Theophany Troparion, to bless everything with holy water on a regular basis. I do not do it as much anymore—I guess I am more distracted and busy than I should be—but this is an important task. Anyone can do this. The demons see the water, even after the water dries on the walls and you cannot see it; you have marked your house as a dwelling of Christians. But of course, if you do this, then you must live as a Christian. What happened to the man who had the demons taken out of him, and the demon went around deserts and rocky places, and desolate areas, and then found no place to dwell? What did the demon do? He got seven other demons worse than himself, and he went back to the man. They found his soul was all swept and garnished inside, but since the man had not lived a virtuous life since his deliverance from the one demon, and the demons were able to make their abode in him, the last state of the man became worse than the first!

There is responsibility placed upon us, brothers and sisters, because of the grace we have been given—because of our baptism. Also because of the All-Holy mysteries which all of you should desire to receive today, and the services of the Church, and all the mind of the Church. Everything that you do is sacred, and it makes you responsible, for living according to how you have promised to live. The good news is that you are **able** to do it, because the God-man made you able to do it!

God revealed Himself, and continues to reveal Himself to us, as we are able to understand Him. As we become more pure, He reveals more of His purity to us. And we ascend like eagles! That is the meaning of Theophany. That is the meaning of the *illuminating*. May it be that all of us are illumined and follow Him in all ways. Amen.



You receive the Cup which seemingly comes from the hands of man. What is it to you whether the bearer of the Cup acts righteously or unrighteously? As a follower of Jesus, your concern is to act righteously; to receive the Cup with thanksgiving to God and with a living faith; and courageously to drink it to the dregs.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

EUROPE'S GREAT MORAL AND SPIRITUAL VACUUM

DOES THIS VACUUM INVITE ACTS OF TERRORISM?

By Ms. Iben Thranholm. This article examines political and social events with focus on their religious aspects, significance and moral implications. Ms. Thranholm is one of Denmark's most widely read columnists on such matters. She is a former editor and radio host at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), at which she created a religious news program that set a new standard for religious analysis in the newsroom. She has traveled extensively in the Middle East, Italy, the United States and Russia to carry out research and interviews. She has been awarded for her investigative research into Danish media coverage of religious issues.

The media, for several weeks after the terrorist attacks in Paris, continued to overflow all of its avenues with comments and analyses. One particular angle is consistently ignored—or banished: religion. This is a curious omission since the terrorists themselves issue statements that indicate that religion is their motivation.

The statement in which IS accepts responsibility for the attacks in Paris is made in the name of Allah and the killings are referred to as “a blessed battle whose causes of success were enabled by Allah.” It states that Paris was targeted because it is “a capital of prostitution and vice” and “the lead carrier of the cross in Europe.”

IS is consistently referring to the Parisians as “crusaders”—the audience at the Bataclan, however, are called “pagans gathered for a concert of prostitution and vice.” The statement closes with a terror threat to strike those who “dare to curse the Prophet and boasts about their war against Islam.”

A further look at the character of the attacks reveals with ever-increasing clarity their symbolic significance. They were carried out on a Friday, the Muslim holiday. The victims at the Bataclan were listening to music, which is banned in fundamentalistic Islam, and the first targets to be shot were guests at the bar drinking alcohol. The symbolism assumed a new dimension when the perpetrators started firing on the audience of a performance by the band “Eagles of Death Metal” of its popular tune “Kiss the Devil.”

A series of images taken moments before the massacre started, members of the audience are seen making the hand sign used for devil worship, their index and little finger lifted in preparation for singing along with the lurid lyrics:

Who'll love the Devil?
Who'll sing his song?
Who will love the Devil and his song?
I'll love the Devil
I'll sing his song
I will love the Devil and his song

What diabolical irony: the audience in the concert hall sings to the devil and is then butchered in cold blood by Jihadists claiming to serve Allah by annihilating pagans celebrating and invoking the Devil.

The Parisians seem devoid of any sense of the spiritual reality they are inviting. Yet their invocation was heard and answered.

What a heart-breaking scene. Servants of Allah and pagan revelers becoming a devilish blood sacrifice.

In spite of IS' own constant and unambiguous references to Allah as the motivation for their terrorist acts, politicians

and mass media alike consistently refuse to acknowledge religion, let alone mention it. Instead, they contort their rhetoric into fantastical figures of unreality by stressing that the world is not at war with Islam, supported by claims that IS/ISIS/ISIL is not Islamic, and for this purpose they have adopted the new brand name Daesh, ostensibly to express denial of Islamism as a religious faith.

When Francois Hollande spoke at the Congress at the Versailles shortly after the attacks, he refused to link the atrocities with Islam with even a single word. Obama has also said time and again that the West is not at war with Islam.

Religion is thus a total taboo in the narrative of the fight on terror. There are two reasons. One is political correctness: the ideology of secularism propounds the doctrine that religion is irrelevant, as it is not one of the ideals of the Enlightenment and must therefore be ignored, except in so far as it is made the object of derision and scorn. The other, and more significant, reason is that there is little sensibility to religion and spirituality in Europe—and none whatever among the political elite.

This is the root of the problem. Irrespective of the way one chooses to interpret the desire of the jihadists to strike “pagans gathered for a concert of prostitution and vice” and the audience's invocation of the devil, it provides a strong picture, or perhaps rather a sign, of what creates and nurtures terrorism. The driving force is spiritual rather than political. The decline of Christianity in the West has created a spiritual and moral vacuum of colossal proportions. It is this vacuum that gives Islamism momentum and nourishment.



The West simply no longer understands spirituality and has lost touch with its spiritual foundations by abandoning Christianity, now banished also from the EU Treaty. Several countries have removed Christian and all religious symbols from public spaces. By removing God they have created an empty space for evil to fill. This has been combined with morally bankrupt foreign policies that have accepted the slaughter and beheading of Christians, which is tantamount to a destruction of Europe's own spiritual foundations to achieve geopolitical gains, the latest of which is regime change in Syria by removing the country's democratically elected president.

The monster created by the rejection of Christianity is gaining power, as terrorism has grown from a de-christianized culture. Secularism and Islamism are two faces of the same destructive spirituality, two parasites nurturing each other. While justice and mercy combine in the virtues that spring from Christianity, the destructive justice of Islamism becomes glaringly demonic. There is no longer a spiritual counterweight of grace, forgiveness and charity, only a political counterpoint, which is clearly inadequate.

Secularism, relativism of values, materialism and democracy as a new religion (idolatry devoid of a deity) constantly prove their feeble inadequacy when facing Islamism. The post-Christian ideologies possess no core of spiritual strength—surveillance and military hardware is what they offer. It takes more to win a war. It takes moral strength. The West has lost its moral strength, amply evident in its approach to foreign policy by supporting so-called moderate terrorist groups that show little moderation when it comes to beheadings and literally eating the hearts of their victims.

The orgy of death at the Bataclan shows with superb clarity what happens when a people turn their backs on Christianity, invoke diabolical forces intending to use them for their own purpose and reap the bitter harvest of a reality they should have foreseen.

Unless Europe acknowledges the religious pivot of terrorism, Europe will perish clueless of the identity of its real enemy. Europe will remain fatally feeble. A spiritual revival is the single and sole hope for Europe to muster the strength to stand up to IS. The spiritual vacuum is also a vacuum of true values: patriotism, honor, virile virtues, masculine values like valor, courage, self-sacrifice, and strong faith in a good and loving God. All this is urgently needed if Europe is to defeat terrorism and radical Islam. Such a spiritual revival, a resurgence of Christianity, has been sweeping through Russia after the end of the Cold War. This provides Russia with a much clearer sense of what it takes to defeat terror and evil: the correct calibration of the moral compass, which allows you to know where you are and where you need to go.

Europe has prevailed against Islam several times through history. It did so in Spain, France, in Austria in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, and all of these victories were won at a time

when Christianity was the explicit and acknowledged foundation. Now, for the first time in history, Europe must face Islam in mortal battle without the rock of Christianity to provide the foundation to stand on and without identifying the enemy, and without admitting it is at war. No compass to show where it is, where it should go, or why.

If Europe is to win this battle, it must rediscover Christianity. French Foreign Minister and founder of the EU Robert Schumann once made the statement: "Europe will not live and will not be saved except to the degree in which it has awareness of itself and of its responsibilities, when it returns to the Christian principles of solidarity and fraternity."

If Europe persists in rejecting Christianity, it must abandon all hope of ever being able to stand up to Islam and its Islamic terrorism.



However, when the Day of Judgment comes, when the resurrection of the dead comes—and this book talks about the resurrection of the dead, over a thousand years before Christ—when the sinners see the righteous shining like the sun, they will be in dreadful fear, and in anguish they will groan and say, this is the man whom we once held in derision! We thought that His life was madness! We are the fools! We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction, and we journeyed through trackless deserts. What good has our boasted wealth profited us? We were deceived. We were deceived. These two chapters of the Wisdom of Solomon [refers to expanded content of homily] present us with a tremendous picture of the psychology of the ungodly—the mind of the worldly man—who will discover his deception on that day.

The Apostle Peter also talks about all these things. These are exceedingly important—let's look at this. *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!* (2 Pet 3:11-12).

So why are we wasting ourselves dealing only with earthly matters in a world that is about to be pulverized, to dissolve and collapse, a world that is going to be renovated? How should we spend our lives, knowing all this? Shouldn't we be characterized by holy conduct? And see what he says, ... *yearning for and hastening...* yearning and hastening with a joyous expectation, and racing towards that day of the coming of the Lord.

Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios(+2006)

ST. JOHN MAXIMOVITCH AND THE DOVE

By Fr. Herman Podmoshensky, co-founder with Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and first abbot of the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery in Platina, California (+2014).

When I came to San Francisco to be close to the saintly Archbishop John Maximovitch, I heard a lot of fascinating accounts of his ascetic life. Frequently I visited St. Tikhon's Orphanage, founded by this Saint, and run then by his long-time assistant, Mrs. Maria Alexandrovna Shakhmatova (+1967). Archbishop John was a very busy man, and I did not dare to be often in his presence.

The orphanage was no longer just a place where children were sheltered. Within its walls was Archbishop John's tiny office, which was so small that even a bed would not fit, where he both lived and had his prayer-room and office. I would visit him there, and have long constructive talks that shaped my life.

One day I came to see Mrs. Shakhmatova, and she, as usual, insisted that I stay for tea, even though I never liked tea. She would get me into her kitchen, almost next to Archbishop John's office, and ask, almost in the form of an interrogation, about my whereabouts, what I had done that week, what I had read, etc. Usually she scolded me for not visiting her more often and not being closer to her "orphans," who by then were already leading their own married lives.

This particular day I noticed a white pigeon with a reddish pattern in its feathers, making pigeon noises outside the window on a specially built ledge. It was pacing back and forth, obviously not intending to fly away, but, as I assumed, waiting to be fed. As it seemed no stranger to her, I paid little attention then.

On that particular feast day of the Baptism of the Lord, I chanced to be in St. Tikhon's for the Blessing of Water. The service was performed in the little courtyard right under the kitchen window, which had a separate gate from the street through which I had entered. To my great surprise, as St. John was blessing the water, a dove flew right out into the courtyard. It flapped its wings and actually soared over the basin of holy water, while all of us vigorously sang: *When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore wit-*

ness unto Thee, calling Thee the beloved Son, and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed His word as sure and steadfast ...

I was amazed, as I had never seen such a service with a live dove hovering over this holiness.

The sight was unforgettable. St. John stood there with lifted hands, holding a huge golden Cross high above his mitered head, and the bird flew high about the building next door, and then with a swift graceful glide descended upon the Saint and sat on his shoulder. Then, loudly flapping its wings, it flew way up into the air, only to descend again, to the utter joy of all there, and it did this several times. St. John, apparently oblivious to the bird's spectacular maneuvers, continued deep in prayer. It seemed so natural, as if it were all a standard part of the holy ceremony. A similar event occurred in the life of St. Basil the Great, when a dove was seen by St. Ephraim the Syrian to be "whispering holy words into St. Basil's ear."

After the service I was invited to drink a lot of the water inside St. Tikhon's Orphanage, and to partake of tasty treats. Archbishop John was there, and the bird was outside the window on



St. John blessing a garden

his ledge, apparently feeding. There I learned the following touching story of Archbishop John's "heavenly bird."

Once Archbishop John came home to discover that a pigeon was hurt, his wing was damaged, and was sitting outside the window. He opened the window and let it in. The bird could barely flutter, and Archbishop John bound its wing and fed it. That was enough to make it feel adopted. The bird stayed around, especially

when the Saint would arrive and would feed it. Actually it remained a mystery how both of them conversed. But one thing we knew: the pigeon reacted to the words of St. John as if it understood what he said. I was told that both of them would sit facing each other, the man softly speaking and the bird making its pigeon sounds in agreement and peacefully walking to and fro, as if memorizing what it was taught.

This company Archbishop John kept for a long time, until his death. The pigeon lived on that window ledge and would often fly around in the kitchen and the main visiting room, and in the little corner office of Mrs. Shakhmatova in the northwestern corner of the house. I saw the bird fly around, and wondered why they had no cage for it, as for a canary. But I was told, "It is Archbishop John's friend and companion." It was a friendly bird, often eating from his hands.

Once I came and saw Archbishop John sitting silently next to the window, his head in his hand, thinking, watching the bird; and the bird was sick. I never learned what was the

matter, but there was silent contact between the dove of the Baptism of the Lord and John its “Baptist.” (The altar boys said that, by sprinkling the bird during the blessing of the water, Archbishop John had baptized the pigeon, and that it was a “baptized” bird.) Mrs. Shakmatova later told me that the bird was a sort of messenger of mysteries for Blessed John, but I never pried for an explanation. On the day Archbishop John died, the bird began to pace the window and flutter in agony, as if knowing about its master.

One frequenter of St. Tikhon’s Orphanage wrote: “We all learned to love that little friendly bird, who became a close friend to man. It never flew too far from the house and never chased other birds, as if its little heart sought warmth from people; and it had no greater joy than to fly into the house and sit quietly on some corner of an armchair. Often when Archbishop John would drink coffee in the kitchen, the bird would knock at the window pane begging to be let in and then it would sit on the Saint’s shoulder and watch his hands as he blessed the bird.

“When the death knell announced the earthly end of Archbishop John, the bird was frantic. It fluttered in agony, missing the Saint, and its little heart also stopped a few months afterwards, to our deep sorrow.

“I remember how someone said firmly that one should not cry over a bird, it is sinful. How harsh this resounded in my ears! Why is it a sin when a quiet sadness touches a heart over the loss of the little ones given to us by the Lord Himself to protect, who also are capable of giving us love. I remember Archbishop John’s words to me when I used to complain that in some cities birds are removed from the streets: *Yes, now throughout the whole world, attacks are carried out against all living beings that surround us.*”

At that time there was a veritable persecution of pigeons in San Francisco, due to the assumption that they carried some disease, and hundreds of them were poisoned or shot. I do not know these details. But I do remember vividly the beautiful white-feathered creature flying about the little bent-down figure of the precious Saint, who not only loved this God-sent bird, but had some mystical contact with it. The bird appeared in his life when he endured the greatest of his earthly trials; it forbade his ascent to the other world, and some other mysteries I was told about. That feathered little creature of God was sent as a consolation to the sorrowing man of God, rendering him greater solace than men could do, who at that time were inflicting upon him his greatest pain. Men who hate men cannot understand how animals could be truly God-sent consolers.

A spiritual daughter of Archbishop John, Olga Skopichenko, recalling this dove, even wrote a lovely poem, in which she hinted that the appearance of the bird, damaged by cruel men, was for our Saint a little window through which he gazed into Heaven.

LIFE ACCORDING TO THE HOLY GOSPELS

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+ 1867).

Do not be content with a mere fruitless reading of the Gospel; strive to fulfill its commandments, and read it with your deeds. This is the Book of Life, and it must be read by life.

We will be judged according to the Gospel commandments at the judgment established by God for us Orthodox Christians ... we will be judged according to the Gospel, that carelessness in fulfilling the Gospel commandments is an active rejection of the Lord Himself.

The Gospel is the image of the qualities of the new man, who is *the Lord from the heavens* (1 Cor 15:47). This new man is God by nature. He makes His holy tribe of men, who believe in Him and are transformed in accordance with Him, gods by grace.

Humility, love, meekness, and so it would follow, all the holy commandments of Christ are a throne and resting place, so to say, for the Holy Spirit.

Take counsel with the Gospels concerning your own thoughts as well as your neighbor’s thoughts and advice.

The Gospel beatitudes are a spiritual state that is revealed in the Christian from his fulfillment of the Gospel commandments; beatitudes are revealed one after the other, one giving birth to another.

The Holy Spirit effects purification in a person who expresses by his life the will for purification.

Confessing God with the lips without confessing Him through deeds and the hidden life of the heart, through only a few external church rites and institutions, is recognized as empty, soul-destroying hypocrisy.

The Commandments should be the soul of each Christian, and of Christian society.

Spiritual discernment is acquired by reading the Holy Scriptures, first and foremost the New Testament, and reading the holy Fathers whose writings correspond to the type of life the Christian lives.

It is necessary that reading be assisted by a way of life: *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* (Jas 1:22).

Our abode in the sonship of God received through holy Baptism is upheld and continued by a life according to the Gospel commandments. This abiding in sonship is lost by departing from a life according to the Gospel commandments.

It is necessary for salvation that the one who has been baptized into Christ should live according to the laws of Christ.

Damage to humanity consists in the mixing of good with evil; healing consists in the gradual removal of evil, when it begins to act more than good in us.

DELUSION AND DECEPTION

By St. Paisios the Athonite, from "Elder Paisios' Spiritual Counsels: Spiritual Struggle," vol. 3, ch. 4.

*But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse,
deceiving, and being deceived.*

[2 Tim 3:13]

† † †

Regarding the Delusion of the Pentecostals

– Elder, the things that are said by those who go over to the Pentecostals—that is, about seeing visions, speaking in tongues, etc.—are those things from their own imagination, or from demonic influences?

– They are energies of demonic influences; because when they go over to the Pentecostals and are re-baptized, they are actually disregarding, denying the Holy Baptism : *I confess **one** Baptism, in absolution of sins...* as the Creed declares, in which case, they un-baptize themselves and become susceptible to demonic influences and then they ... jabber-jabber, supposedly in tongues. "It is the Holy Spirit of the Pentecost talking" they tell us. But it is not the Holy Spirit; it is a whole mess of unclean spirits.

What tongues? They are merely uttering gibberish, which not even they can comprehend. They even record that gibberish and then produce statistics and reach conclusions: "That tongue has so many *hallelujahs* in it, and there are so many in the other tongue..." Well, it's to be expected, among so much jabber-jabber, you will surely hear something that resembles the word *hallelujah* in one of the languages of the world! And so you can see, while it is something demonic, they actually believe that demonism to be the energy of the Holy Spirit, and that they are supposedly experiencing what the Apostles had experienced on the day of the Pentecost! It is blasphemies that they believe, which is the reason why they become demon-possessed.

– Elder, why are they re-baptized?

– Because they claim: "When I was baptized, I was young and didn't know; now I am baptized and fully aware." They are re-baptized, and thus justify their sins. If the Church didn't have infant Baptism, what would happen to infants in case of death before their Baptism? That is why a godparent becomes the child's guarantor and recites the Creed and bears responsibility for the child until it is of age. Is the child treated unfairly, simply for being baptized young? No; on the contrary, it is helped because it receives Holy Communion. And when the child has grown up and is already baptized, even if any sin is committed, there is always repentance and confession, which can wash away any committed sin, without the need of being baptized again.

Regarding "Fire-Walking"

– Elder, they say that the fire-walkers on the feast-day of Saint Constantine trample across a patch of glowing coals

on the ground and yet they don't suffer any burns. What is that about?

– It is both demonic as well as a deception. The fact that they dance holding an icon or the Cross is impudence on their part—it is a denial of faith. The grace of God withdraws from them, which is why the devil assists them. Is it possible for the devil to not help them, after such behavior? Of course not; they are "entitled" to receive his assistance! However, it is also their own cunning that helps. They go beforehand to prepare the spot; in other words, they burn wood taken from plane trees—wood that leaves a lot of ash behind—and they also know where they tread, when they dance. Why don't they choose wood that will retain the burning embers? Let someone else prepare the fire, and THEN let them go there and dance on it!

Someone once said to me: "It's a miracle! The fire-walkers are standing on the fire and aren't being burnt!" "Is that what you're admiring?" I replied; "Demons have been standing inside the fires of hell for entire centuries and haven't been burnt; that's what you should be admiring, and not these people here, who are treading lightly over some coals and ashes without being burnt..."

Reincarnation

– Elder, how can people—even educated people—believe in reincarnation?

– Reincarnation "accommodates" certain people, especially the atheists, the unbelievers. This is the devil's greatest trick. The devil keeps them living the life of sin, by inspiring the thought that the soul comes back again and again in this world. "Eh, even if you don't succeed this time around (says the devil), you will come back to life and succeed the next time; and if again you don't succeed, you will again come back, again and again... you will evolve..."! So those people say to themselves "It doesn't matter if I commit this sin also..." and they throw caution to the wind; they live carelessly, they don't repent. See how the devil blinds them, and gets them hooked in hell? I have never seen bigger cunning and artfulness by the devil, for the purpose of getting people into hell! And if the devil gets his hooks into you once, do you think he will let you turn back? This is the worst theory of all the Hinduist theories.

Late one afternoon, a young man came by the my hut. "You know, around this time of day, I normally read Vespers" I told him. "Do you still preoccupy yourself with those things?" he said, and walked off. The next day he came around again and told me about his visions. "Did you smoke hash before?" I asked him. "I used to. Yes. But when I saw the visions, I hadn't smoked any." "Did you perhaps read anything about reincarnation?" "Yes" he replied. Well, that's where he was snagged. He had read about reincarnation, egotism entered the scene and it fashioned dreams that thousands of years ago, he was an important man, and wealthy! Then he saw in

another vision that he went up to heaven but he wasn't listed there, so he was told to go back down. The devil created that condition in him. So I remarked: "All of this is just fairytales, and you actually believe it?"

And unfortunately there are even educated people who believe in such foolishness. There was a donkey near my hut which they had named Nasser, because he was such a frisky animal. One day, a Greek man who lived in Switzerland came to visit, and he heard me calling out to the donkey with the name Nasser. When he came to visit again after some time, he brought with him a box of plain sweets and another box with special sweets. "These are for you" he said, handing me the plain sweets. "These special sweets are for Nasser" he said. "I recognized him from the last time I visited that it was Nasser. When I went up to the donkey, it looked at me with a sad gaze that broke my heart"! He actually believed that Nasser (of Egypt) was reincarnated and had become a donkey! He actually believed it! "Are you out of your mind?" I said to the man. "I named the donkey Nasser because it was such a lively creature!" But the man simply couldn't be convinced.

And that's nothing! Let me tell you of another incident: Years ago, some Germans went to Crete to perform a memorial service for the Germans who were killed during the Occupation in Greece. During the service, a Cretan local passed by with his donkey that was laden with his goods. When the donkey spotted all the people gathered there, he began to bray. One of the Germans thought that the donkey was his brother who had been killed in the war and was reincarnated! Apparently the donkey had recognized him and was greeting him with its braying! The German stood at attention, and—snap! —greeted it in military fashion!... He then broke into tears!... so, he immediately went over to the Cretan and said to him: "How much do you want, so I can buy it?" "Get lost!" the Cretan replied... But the German was counting his money: "This much? This much?" "Go away, leave me alone" the Cretan kept saying. Finally, another local said: "You moron, he's paying you the value of a Mercedes for the donkey, just give it to him!" So the Cretan unloaded the donkey, removed its saddle, set it free, and the German took it with tears in his eyes, and brought it back to Germany with him!

– Seriously, Elder?

– It's a fact! If I hadn't heard it from a reliable witness, I wouldn't have believed it either.

Regarding the Hindus' "Ascesis"

– Elder, do Hindus achieve a certain self-control because they are helped by the severe ascesis that they perform through yoga?

– They strive and they strive, and what do they achieve with it? Orthodox self-restraint and spiritual ascesis in general always aspire to a loftier spiritual purpose: the sanctification of the soul. Their satanic, worldly ascesis is only implemented to give them a flexible body so that they can contort arms

and legs like a paper puppet, and so that other foolish people might admire them and the silly demons can ridicule them. From early childhood they learn to twist their legs and place the one leg over one shoulder and the other leg over the other shoulder, and that's how they "pray." They practice by punching their fist for many hours against a sack of gravel, and then they are enabled to break stones, wood, etc.

But, even all the things they say that they feel have an explanation. For instance, they drag their tongue until it touches their nose or they suck it in until it touches their throat, and this causes an aggravation, the feel a certain sweetness—a tickling—and they say "This is nectar"... Then they press down on certain nerves near their ears and they hear a "hummmm" sound like music. Or they press their eyes and this makes them see little stars! They sit staring at the sun with eyes wide open and when they close them, they can see light! "There! We did it! We saw uncreated light!"

So the devil says: "Oh, so you want lights? Let me give you lights!" and he then cultivates their imagination so that afterwards, without pressing their eyes or holding them open to the sun, they will be able to see lights. The devil often tries to seduce us without being provoked, by presenting lights, etc., but we turn our backs to him, so just imagine what would happen if we provoked him! All he needs is an excuse to act!

– In other words Elder, the devil presents them with various images?

– Yes. He cultivates their imagination to a large degree and then he leads them to delusion. Some of our own people go to the Indians (the holy Elder is referring to the people of India, not to American Indians, *Ed.*), the Indians teach them to utter some vile remarks in their language about Christ, about the Holy Mother, about the saints—unbeknownst to them—and they become demon-possessed. Then they begin to utter all sorts of ineffable words. They reach a wild state and others who observe them think that they are in a spiritual state! But it is a demonic state.

Hinduism Has Caused Severe Damage

The Indians, who are an extremely intelligent people, while having metaphysical concerns and lots of heart, preoccupy themselves with supposed philosophy, with delusions and with sorceries. They wreak havoc among Europeans with their theories. And you can see how their leaders are as fit as bulls, while the others in India are dying of hunger! They come to Greece also, and they fool people with nirvana, with laziness, with reincarnations... meantime in their books they even use quotes from the Holy Bible, from the Philokalia, from the Fathers, and thus attract people. In olden times, the Orthodox would in no way believe in Hinduist theories! Now—how can one say it—there are even some very correct people who support such nonsense and who give a whole lot of money. Hinduism has caused severe damage.

– Elder, are there any Indians who are Orthodox Christians?

– Very few. There were a few who remained from the Church that the Apostle Thomas had established, but they were abandoned. Others became (Roman) Catholics, others Protestants. Today, the Orthodox there are very few.

The things that other religions or para-religions present as miracles have nothing in common with the miracles of our Faith. Christ wants us to be honorable; He does not want us to love Him because He is Omnipotent. If He wanted, He could work a miracle and make the whole world believe instantly. But that way, He would be confining man's freedom. That is why He said *Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.* (Jn 20:29).

Orthodoxy has the miracle and divine grace. Hinduism has magic and philosophy. It replaces the miracle with magic, and divine Grace with philosophy. The devil gives powers to the gurus, the sorcerers, etc., because they have given the devil the right. That is why they can perform supposed miracles, and the others who see them admire them. From the moment someone realizes that the one performing such fake miracles is in no way related to Christ, he must understand that whatever he does is a deception of the devil, who is never able to say the truth but instead lies and deceives God's creatures. Those who have a positive predisposition—after having become a little bit familiar with Orthodoxy—are somewhat hesitant, because they can see that the life of such sorcerers is not a clean one; it is a mixed-up one, whereas in Orthodoxy they will find a clean life and superiority. They find people who possess sanctity and who perform true miracles.

In Orthodoxy, kindness is the overflowing of man's love; love for God and for one's neighbor. All the kindnesses that are displayed by persons of other religions or by deluded persons, etc., do not contain any in-Christ elements, although they may have certain positive human elements. Whoever lives the Orthodox life correctly has humility, love, and he gives himself wholly to the other—he sacrifices himself. And the asceticism, the fasting and the all-night vigils that he pursues are again out of love for the Lord, and not so that he might get some kind of pleasure out of it.

Christ came into the world to be crucified out of love for His creature. First He was crucified, and then He was resurrected. It is a cheap thing for one to merely ask for spiritual favors; it is another thing, if Christ Himself gives one a taste of the celestial sweetness. Thus, while they, for instance, are preoccupied with Hinduistic philosophies, with yoga, etc., with the things that they do, they aspire to attaining a supposed spiritual state, an ecstatic state. They do this to either feel a form of pleasure or to become "superior" to others. But, whatever their reason may be, they do it without showing any actual concern for others.

Let's assume that a Hinduist is sitting on a shore meditating. If during that time someone at sea is in danger and is crying

out for help, he will remain steadfastly indifferent; he will not budge from his place, so that he won't deprive himself of that pleasure that he is feeling. If it was an Orthodox monk there at the time saying the Prayer, he would have dropped his prayer-rope and dived into the water to save him.

People Being Misled

– Elder, when the Prophets Elijah and Enoch come back in order to preach repentance, will people understand what is happening, and come back to their senses?

– Those who have a good predisposition will understand. Those who aren't positively predisposed will not understand and will be misled. Our Lord had warned us that we must be very careful, because *false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders, to deceive, if possible, even the elect.* (Mk 13:22).

There are some who mistake certain deluded persons for prophets. Several years ago, there was a Protestant who constantly wandered around with a leather briefcase which had an inscription on it, written in English: "I am the Prophet Elijah"! He wore a short-sleeved shirt, he had a Bible in English and he claimed to have descended from heaven!

When they asked him what he believes in and what religion he belongs to, he said "Eh, they are obsolete things. Religions didn't exist then!" See? To him, everyone—Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, all the heresies and all the branches of heresies are the same to him. Is it not obvious then what his true state was? And oh, how many letters did that person send me! He would write down various passages from the Holy Bible and all his positions were Protestant... he would also send a whole lot of letters to various other people, sometimes from England and sometimes from other places. There were those who believed the things he wrote and they wanted to publish in a magazine that the Prophet Elijah had come. "Are you in your right minds? What on earth are you about to do?" I said to them.... Poor people....they are so confused!

A person sins just through listening to what such deluded people have to say. There are some who say: "If you believe that it will happen that way, then it will." This is pure belief in themselves, but behind them is the little imp (mythological demonic-looking creature, *Ed*). Thus, they deify themselves and they strip themselves of divine Grace. It is with theories like these that they strive to fool people.

A 45-year-old man presented himself as a graduate of the Halki Orthodox Seminary and yet discussed all sorts of Hinduist philosophies. "You" I said to him "are doing damage to yourself and to others, when you expound all that refined nonsense and at the same time you present yourself as a graduate of the Orthodox School of Halki. Watch out, because you'll become demonically possessed."

– Elder, why do the various para-religions in Greece strive to present themselves as unions, etc., and do not admit they are religions?

– They do it in order to disorient others. Notice how St. Constantine abolished idolatry and ordained that Christianity would be the official religion of the entire Empire, and yet, today they are striving to bring back idolatry. They allow the erection of mosques, or gurus having their own monasteries where they can freely give lectures and become centers for proselytism, and where Masons can act freely, and Jehovah's Witnesses the same... Orthodoxy is being attacked by a swarm of theories. But they won't last; they will eventually crumble...

Poor souls... people are fooled, because they have distanced themselves from God and have become dimmed! There were two young men who went to Hebron on a pilgrimage; they were told to put on that little Jewish cap before paying their respects to the graves of Abraham... What's the purpose of a pilgrimage, if you have put on something that the Jews use in their worship? What can one say?... Such confusion...

In Paris, outside a Roman Catholic church there was a sign that said: "Lessons on practicing prayers with the method of yoga." Just look where things have gone! Then the psychological problems begin, and they go mad; they don't know what they want afterwards.

There are some Roman Catholics, Protestants, etc., who are taught that if one is baptized in the Orthodox Church he changes—he becomes reborn—so they think that if they get baptized, their psychological problems will go away. I warned against a certain Protestant who wanted to be baptized Orthodox: "See that you don't baptize him. He should not be baptized." "No" they replied; "if he is baptized, he will be helped." "But he isn't a case for baptism. Don't you understand?"

They paid no attention to what I said; they took him and they went down to the sea, where they baptized him! After 2-3 days, he came along and said to me: "I was baptized, but Baptism didn't solve my psychological problems." "Do you mean to say that you were baptized in the hope that your psychological problems would go away?" I replied. "Look here: if you had felt the need for Baptism, and if you had comprehended its worth and was aiming for that grandeur, then those problems would have gone away. But when you went to be baptized for the sake of ridding yourself of the psychological problems, how do you expect them to leave? Magically?"

They confuse magic with miracle. They can't tell gold from bronze. And you will notice, for example, a Protestant may be baptized Orthodox then becomes a Roman Catholic, then says "I'm not at ease" and thereafter goes back to the Protestants or back to the Orthodox. There was a Catholic who was baptized Orthodox, became a monk and lived nine years in a monastery. He came to my hut and said to me: "I hadn't lived the secular life as an Orthodox, so I want to return to the world and get married"! Did you hear what he said? And

imagine, me telling him all the while how severe a thing he was thinking of doing, and him saying: "Why is it severe? I can't understand."

Return to Orthodoxy

Today's world feels comfortable with weird things, not the correct ones. They know about India—which is at the other end of the globe—because of her "magic," and they go there. But the Holy Mountain—which is in their homeland, very close to them and with the true, mystical, in-Christ life—they are totally oblivious to! A student once told me that he had gone to India and stayed there for three and a half years. He went there looking for the truth in regard to religions. Finally, an Indian said to him: "Why did you come here? The thing you're looking for exists in Orthodoxy. That's where the light is. Go to the Holy Mountain and find what you're seeking. (It is a well-known fact that God may reveal His will to a well-meaning person, in various ways. One example is the narration about Barlaam's donkey, who spoke to him in order to avert his actions, which would have been contrary to the divine will. (see Numbers 22:18-35). That's how he returned to Greece and came to the Holy Mountain.

– Elder, when an Orthodox goes to the Hinduists, gurus, etc., and repents afterwards, does he become accepted again in the Orthodox Church?

– He will need a lot of repentance, then Holy Myrrh. If he wishes to return to Orthodoxy and become a member of the Church again, he will normally have to first confirm with a "libel" (from the Latin term *libellus* = booklet, pamphlet, meant a written confession of faith, which was submitted to the Synod or the Bishop of the King); this confirmation is his declaration that he denounces their cacodoxies and confesses the Orthodox faith. Then the Orthodox priest will read the special *prayers for those returning to the true faith* over him (from the *Major Book of Blessings*), and then chrismate him with Holy Myrrh.

I have noticed several youngsters—Greek youngsters—who, without having read a single line from the Gospel, will go and read on Brahmanism, Buddhism, the Koran, etc., and they also go to the Hindus. Then they find they are not at ease, so they return to Orthodoxy, but in the meantime they will have also contracted a whole lot of "spiritual germs." They suffer damage, and it is hard for them to afterwards find the truth.

One must first become acquainted with Orthodoxy and then, if he doesn't like it, he can leave. But he should first get to know Orthodoxy properly, before making any comparisons with the various theories that he has heard. Because, if he gets to know Orthodoxy, he will be able to distinguish between copper and gold, or evaluate how many karats the gold is. He will not be fooled easily, into mistaking whatever glistens as gold. However, I have noticed that only an egotist leaves Orthodoxy when he does get to know it. A truly humble person never leaves...

Χαρακτηρισμοὶ Αἰρετικῶν

Τοῦ κ. Νικ. Σωτηροπούλου, Θεολόγου-Φιλολόγου (+2014).

Τὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο γράφεται γιὰ τοὺς αἰρετικούς γενικῶς, καὶ γιὰ τοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς εἰδικῶς. Οἱ διδάσκαλοι καὶ οἱ ὀπαδοὶ τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ εἶναι οἱ χειρότεροι ἀποστάτες ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, διότι ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς δὲν εἶναι μία μόνον αἵρεσις, ἀλλ' εἶναι παναίρεσις, προχωρεῖ δὲ πέρα ἀπὸ τὶς αἱρέσεις καὶ γίνεται καὶ πανθησκεία. Ἀρχαιοκουμενιστὴς μὲ πολὺ μεγάλα ρᾶσα δήλωσε ὅτι καὶ οἱ ἄλλες Θρησκείες εἶναι σεβαστὲς καὶ σεβάσιμες καὶ δρόμοι σωτηρίας!

Θέμα τοῦ παρόντος ἄρθρου εἶναι τὸ πῶς ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, χαρακτηρίζει τοὺς αἰρετικούς, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον τοὺς παναιρετικούς καὶ πανθησκειακοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς.

Ἄν οἱ κ.κ. Οἰκουμενισταὶ ἔχουν τὴν αἴσθησιν, μᾶλλον ψευδαίσθησιν, ὅτι πιστεύουν στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη, ἃς διαβάσουν τὸ ἄρθρο, γιὰ νὰ ἴδουν πόσο πλανῶνται, καὶ μὲ πόσους καὶ πόσο βαρεῖς χαρακτηρισμοὺς τοὺς χαρακτηρίζει τὸ Θεόπνευστο κείμενο, καὶ ἃς ἀνησυχίσουν γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τους μὲ τὴ μεγαλύτερη ὄλων τῶν ἀνησυχιῶν, καὶ ἃς ἀλλάξουν φρονήματα· ἃς γίνουν ὄντως πιστοί, γιὰ νὰ τύχουν ἐλέους καὶ σωτηρίας παρὰ τοῦ Ἀρχηγοῦ τῆς Πίστεως, τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Στὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς δημοσίας δράσεώς του ὁ Χριστὸς κήρυξε· «Μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ» (Μάρκ. α' 15). Καὶ πρὸς τὸ τέλος, μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασί Του, εἶπε στοὺς μαθητάς Του· «Κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάση τῇ κτίσει. Ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται» (Μάρκ. ιστ' 15-16).

Ἡ πίστις στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Χριστοῦ σώζει, ἡ ἀπιστία καταδικάζει. Ἡ αἵρεσις εἶναι «ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον»,

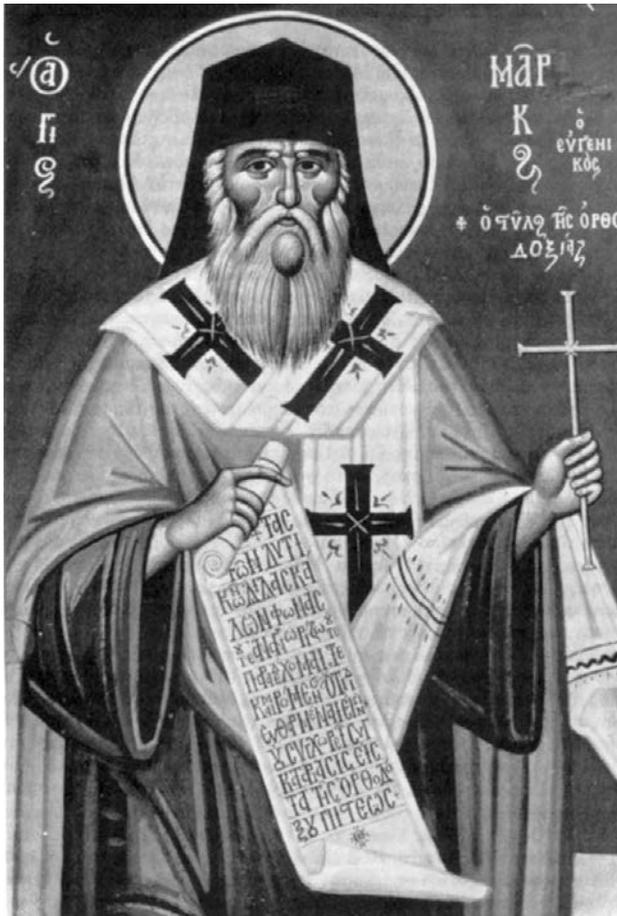
διαστροφή τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Γαλ. α' 6, 7) καὶ δὲν σώζει, ἀλλὰ καταδικάζει. Οἱ διδάσκοντες κατὰ διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἀπὸ τὴν διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀναθεματίζονται! (Γαλ. α' 8-9).

Ἄν οἱ Οἰκουμενισταὶ εἶναι ἐνσυνειδήτως ἄπιστοι, ἄν, μὲ ἄλλες λέξεις, δὲν πιστεύουν στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ διαβάσουν τὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο. Ἄς τὸ διαβάσουν ὅμως οἱ πιστοί, γιὰ νὰ αἰσθανθοῦν πόσο τρομερὸ καὶ βδελυκτὸ εἶναι τὸ φαινόμενο τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ποὺ ὀνομάζεται Οἰκουμενισμὸς, καὶ νὰ τηροῦν ἀποστάσεις ἀπὸ τοὺς χειρότερους ἀποστάτες ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι, τοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς, καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἐλέγχουν καὶ νὰ διαμαρτύρωνται κατ' αὐτῶν, μάλιστα ἂν αὐτοὶ κατέχουν ἐκκλησιαστικὲς θέσεις ἢ ἔχουν θεολογικοὺς τίτλους. Εἶναι ἔλλειψις στοιχειώδους τιμότητος νὰ παρουσιάζονται Οἰκουμενισταὶ ὡς ἐκπρόσωποι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἢ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Θεολογίας!

Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε στοὺς ἰδικούς του· «Προσέχετε ἀπὸ τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν, οἵτινες ἔρχονται πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ἐνδύμασι προβάτων, ἔσωθεν δὲ εἰσὶ λύκοι ἄρπαγες» (Ματθ. ζ' 15). Συμφώνως πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοπροφήται». Στὴν Ἁγία Γραφή «προφήται» μὲ τὴν ἀληθινὴ ἔννοια τῆς λέξεως εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι διδάσκουν μὲ ἔμπνευσιν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ δὲ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται

«ψευδοπροφήται», διότι δὲν διδάσκουν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἰδικὰ τους λόγια, ἢ μᾶλλον λόγια τοῦ Διαβόλου, καὶ ἰσχυρίζονται ψευδῶς ὅτι διδάσκουν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται ἐπίσης «λύκοι ἄρπαγες» «ἐν ἐνδύμασι προβάτων». Ἀπ' ἔξω ἐμφανίζονται ὡς πρόβατα, φρόνιμοι, γλυκεῖς καὶ μελιστάλακτοι. Καὶ ἀπὸ μέσα εἶναι αἰμοβόροι λύκοι, ἔτοιμοι ν' ἀρπάξουν



Τὴν 19^η Ἰανουαρίου ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας τιμᾷ τὴν μνήμην τοῦ ἐν Ἁγίοις Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Μάρκου τοῦ Εὐγενικοῦ, Προμάχου τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας.

Τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ταῖς ἀστραπαῖς, λάμπας ἐν τῇ Δύσει, ἐξεθάμβησας ἐμφανῶς, Δυτικῶν τὰς ὄψεις, τοὺς ὄρους τῶν Πατέρων, ὃ Μάρκε ῥήτορεύων, πυρίνη γλώττη σου.

[Ἄνωτέρω εἰκὼν τοῦ Ἁγίου διὰ χειρὸς Φωτίου Κόντογλου]

καὶ νὰ κατασπαράξουν τὰ λογικὰ πρόβαρα τῆς ποιμένης τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἐφιστᾷ τὴν προσοχή μας νὰ φυλασσωμεθα ἀπὸ τοὺς ψευδοπροφήτες καὶ προβατοσχήμους λύκους, οἱ ὅποιοι στὸν ἐπόμενο στίχον 16 χαρακτηρίζονται «ἄκανθαι» καὶ «τριβόλοι», ἀγκάθια καὶ τριβόλια, ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα δὲν περιμένουμε ἐκλεκτοὺς καρπούς.

Στὸ Ματθ. κδ' 11 ὁ Χριστὸς προλέγει ὅτι θὰ ἐμφανισθοῦν «πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται», καὶ ὅτι «πλανήσουσι πολλούς». Καὶ στὸ Ματθ. κδ' 24 λέγει ὅτι θὰ ἐμφανισθοῦν «ψευδοπροφῆται», οἱ ὅποιοι θὰ κάνουν «σημεῖα μεγάλα καὶ τέρατα, ὥστε πλανήσαι, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς.» (Βλέπε ἐπίσης καὶ Μάρκ. ιγ' 22).

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος στὸ Β' Πέτρ. β' 1-2 γράφει:

«Ἐγένοντο δὲ καὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐν τῷ λαῷ, ὡς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσονται ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι, οἵτινες παρεισάξουσιν αἰρέσεις ἀπωλείας. Ἐδῶ προλέγεται ἡ ἐμφάνισι αἰρετικῶν, οἱ ὅποιοι χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι» συνωνύμως πρὸς τὸ «ψευδοπροφῆται». Οἱ δὲ αἰρέσεις τους χαρακτηρίζονται «αἰρέσεις ἀπωλείας». Οἱ αἰρέσεις ὀδηγοῦν σὲ ἀπώλεια, καταστροφή, καὶ κόλασι. Ὁ δὲ Ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης στὸ Α' Ἰωάν. δ' 1 γράφει, ὅτι «πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον». Καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωάννη λοιπὸν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοπροφῆται».

Στὴν Ἀποκάλυψι ἀναφέρεται «ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης» (Ἀποκ. ιστ' 13, ιθ' 20, κ' 10), ὁ ὑπασπιστὴς τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, ὁ ὁποῖος περιγράφεται ὡς «θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς γῆς», ἔχει «κέρατα δύο ὅμοια ἀρνίῳ» καὶ ὁμιλεῖ «ὡς δράκων» (Ἀποκ. ιγ' 11). Θεωροῦμε εὐστοχη τὴν ἐρμηνεία, ὅτι μὲ τὸ χαρακτηρισμὸ «ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης», ἐνάρθως, ὁ κατ' ἐξοχὴν ψευδοπροφήτης, χαρακτηρίζεται ὁ μεγαλύτερος τῶν αἰρεσιάρχων, ὁ Πάπας. Τὰ δύο κέρατά του σημαίνουν τὶς δύο ἐξουσίες του, τὴ θρησκευτικὴ καὶ τὴν πολιτικὴ. Καὶ ἡ ὁμοιότης του πρὸς τὸ ἀρνίον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὸν δράκοντα, σημαίνει τὴ μεγάλη ὑποκρισία του. Φαίνεται ὡς Χριστιανὸς ἡγέτης, ἀλλ' εἶναι σατανικὸς.

Στὶς ἡμέρες μας ὁ Πάπας συγκαλεῖ συνέδρια ὄχι μόνο διαχριστιανικὰ καὶ παναιρετικά, ἀλλὰ καὶ διαθρησκειακὰ καὶ σατανιστικά, καὶ συμπροσεύχονται γιὰ τὴν εἰρήνην τοῦ κόσμου! Συμμετέχουν δὲ σὲ τέτοια συνέδρια καὶ λεγόμενοι Ὁρθόδοξοι! Ὁ δὲ Πάπας, ἀφοῦ καὶ συγκαλεῖ τὰ συνέδρια καὶ κατέχει τὴν πρώτη

θέσι σ' αὐτά, ἤδη ἀναγνωρίζεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἡμετέρους Οἰκουμενιστὰς ὡς ἔχων τὸ περιβόητο πρωτεῖο, καίτοι στὴν πραγματικότητα, ἀφοῦ εἶναι αἰρετικὸς, δὲν ἔχει ἱερωσύνη, δὲν εἶναι ἐπίσκοπος.

Τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου «ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης», ὁ Πάπας, ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος θὰ εἶναι ἰσχυρότερος ἀπ' αὐτὸν καὶ δὲν θὰ δύναται νὰ διεκδικήσῃ πρωτεῖο, κοσμικῶς καὶ διπλωματικῶς σκεπτόμενος θὰ γίνῃ ὑπασπιστὴς τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, γιὰ νὰ ἔχη τὰ δευτερεῖα τῆς ἐξουσίας. Νὰ τὸν χαίρωνται οἱ Οἰκουμενισταί, οἱ σφόδρα φιλοπαπικοί.

Ὅμοίως πρὸς τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος χαρακτηρίσε τοὺς αἰρετικούς «λύκους βαρεῖς μὴ φειδομένους τοῦ ποιμνίου» λύκους φοβερούς, πὺ δὲν λυποῦνται τὸ ποιμνιο. Προφήτευσε δὲ ὅτι καὶ ἀπὸ



Νικόλαος Σωτηρόπουλος (+2014)
Ὁ γνήσιος Ἑλληνορθόδοξος ὁμολογητὴς

τοὺς ποιμένες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θὰ προέλθουν αἰρετικοί, τοὺς ὁποῖους ἐπίσης χαρακτηρίσε «ἄνδρας λαλοῦντας διεστραμμένα» (Πράξ. κ' 29, 30). Ἀνέφερε δὲ καὶ πρόρρησι τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος γιὰ τὴν ἐμφάνισι ἀποστατῶν ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι, τῶν γνωστῶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία αἰρετικῶν Ἐγκρατιτῶν. Οἱ διδάσκαλοι τῆς αἰρέσεως αὐτῆς ἐμπόδιζαν τὸ γάμο καὶ κήρυτταν ἀποχὴ ἀπὸ τροφῆς ὡς δὴθεν ἀκάθαρτα πράγματα. Χαρακτηρίζονται δὲ «πνεύματα πλάνα» μὲ δαιμονικῆς διδασκαλίης, «ἐν ὑποκρίσει ψευδολόγοι» καὶ «κεκατηριασμένοι τὴν ἰδίαν συνείδησιν» (Α' Τιμ. δ' 1-3).

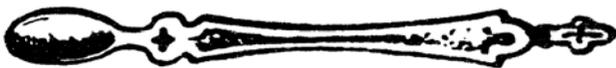
Ὁ ἀδελφόςθεος Ἰούδας στὴν Καθολικὴ Ἐπιστολὴ του, τὸ δυνατότερο ἀνταιρετικὸ κείμενο τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, αἰρετικούς τῆς ἀποστολικῆς ἐποχῆς, τοὺς Νικολαίτες, χαρακτηρίζει μὲ τοὺς ἐξῆς ἐκτὸς ἄλλων χαρακτηρισμοῦς: «Σπιλάδες», δηλαδὴ κηλίδες, δημωδῶς λέρεις: «ἐαυτοὺς ποιμαίνοντες», ἰδιοτελεῖς, πὺ βόσκουν καὶ τρέφουν τοὺς ἐαυτοὺς των: «νεφέλαι ἄνυδροι ὑπὸ ἀνέμων παραφερόμεναι», σύννεφα ἄνυδρα, πὺ παρασύρονται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνέμους: «δένδρα φθινοπωρινά, ἄκαρπα, δις ἀποθανόντα, ἐκρίζωθέντα», δένδρα φθινοπωρινά, χωρὶς καρπούς, δύο φορὲς ξεραμμένα, ξερριζωμένα: «κύματα ἄγρια θαλάσσης ἐπαφρίζοντα τὰς ἐαυτῶν αἰσχύννας», κύματα ἄγρια τῆς θάλασσας, πὺ ἀφρίζουν καὶ φέρουν στὴν ἐπιφάνεια τὶς ἀσχημίης τους: «ἀστέρες πλανῆται, οἷς ὁ ζῶφος τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τετήρηται», ἄστρα σκοτεινά, στὰ ὁποῖα τὸ βαθὺ σκοτάδι διατηρεῖται παντοτινὸ (Ἰούδ. 12-13): «ἐμπαῖκται κατὰ τὰς ἐαυτῶν

ἐπιθυμίας πορευόμενοι τῶν ἀσεβειῶν», ἐμπαίχτες βαδίζοντες συμφώνως μὲ τὶς ἀσεβεῖς ἐπιθυμίες τους «ἀποδιορίζοντες», διακρίνοντας τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς τῶν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ παρουσιαζόμενοι ὡς ἀνώτεροι «ψυχικοί, Πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες», ἄνθρωποι ποὺ κυριαρχοῦνται ἀπὸ φυσικὰ ἔνστικτα, ποὺ στεροῦνται Πνεύματος Ἁγίου (Ἰουδ. 18-19).

Δύο ἀκόμη χαρακτηρισμοὶ τῶν αἰρετικῶν, φοβερῶτεροι τῶν προηγουμένων. «Κατάρως τέκνα!», λέγει μὲ πολὺ μεγάλη ἔμφασι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος. Καταραμένοι ἄνθρωποι! (Β΄ Πέτρ. β΄ 14). Καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης λέγει, «Ἡκούσατε ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασι». Ἀκούσατε ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ τώρα πολλοὶ ἀντίχριστοι ἔχουν ἔλθει (Α΄ Ἰωάν. β΄ 18). Ὁ ἀναμενόμενος Ἀντίχριστος εἶναι ὁ χειρότερος καὶ ὁ ἀπαισιώτερος ὄλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Μὲ τὸ ὄνομα δὲ ἐκείνου ὁ Ἀπόστολος ὀνομάζει τοὺς αἰρετικούς τῆς ἐποχῆς του, καὶ ὄλων βεβαίως τῶν ἐποχῶν. Καὶ «ἀντίχριστοι» λοιπὸν χαρακτηρίζονται οἱ αἰρετικοί. Naί, ἀντίχριστοι, διότι φρονοῦν καὶ πράττουν ἀντίθετα πρὸς τὸ Χριστό, καὶ προετοιμάζουν τὸ ἔδαφος γιὰ τὸν κατ' ἐξοχίαν Ἀντίχριστο.

Γιὰ τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη ἐκφράζεται μὲ συμπάθεια. Ἀλλὰ γιὰ τοὺς αἰρετικούς ἐκφράζεται μὲ τὰ φοβερῶτερα λόγια, λόγια θεόπνευστα καὶ ἀρμόζοντα σ' αὐτούς, καὶ μάλιστα στοὺς παναιρετικούς καὶ πανθηρησκειακοὺς Οἰκουμενιστάς. Δὲν φοβοῦνται αὐτοὶ ἀπὸ τὰ φοβερὰ καὶ θεόπνευστα λόγια, ἔστω καὶ ἂν φοροῦν μεγάλα ράσα καὶ ἐγκόλπια καὶ ἔχουν τὶς μεγαλύτερες εὐθύνες; Οἱ πιστοί, οἱ συνειδητοὶ Χριστιανοὶ φοβοῦνται καὶ ἀγωνίζονται καὶ θὰ ἀγωνίζονται μέχρι τέλος γιὰ «τὴν ἄπαξ παραδοθεῖσαν τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστιν» (Ἰουδ. 3). Εἶναι βεβαίως πάντοτε ὀλίγοι οἱ ἀγωνισταί, ἀλλὰ τελικῶς αὐτοὶ νικοῦν, διότι Ἀρχηγός τους εἶναι ὁ Χριστός, ὁ ὁποῖος διακήρυξε: «**Ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον**» (Ἰωάν. ιστ' 33).

Ἡ ἱστορία ἀποδεικνύει τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἀληθές. Παρὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν αἰρέσεων καὶ τὴν ὅλη πολεμικὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, τοῦ μεγάλου ἐχθροῦ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἡ ὀρθὴ πίστι ἔφθασε μέχρι σήμερα. Καὶ θὰ φθάσῃ μέχρι τῆς συντέλειας τοῦ κόσμου. Διότι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ θέλησι τοῦ Χριστοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν πιστῶν.



Ἄν δὲν κυριευθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἔρωτα τῶν οὐρανίων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν πόθον τῆς ἄνω Ἰερουσαλήμ (ποὺ εἶναι ἡ Βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν), ἀλλὰ μένουμε προσκολλημένοι στὴν ἐπίγεια ζωὴ, κυλιόμενοι μέσα στὸν βοῦρκο τῶν κοσμικῶν φροντίδων, δὲν θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἀπολαύσουμε τὴν οὐράνια πατριδα!

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος

Θεολογικὴ Θεώρησις τοῦ Χρόνου

ὑπὸ τοῦ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Χίου, Ψαρῶν καὶ Οἰνουσσῶν κ. Μάρκου.



Στὴ χαρὰ τῶν ἑορτῶν τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ τοῦ νέου ἔτους, ἡ ἐμπειρία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας ψηλαφεῖ τὴν παρέμβαση τοῦ ἄχρονου Θεοῦ στὴν δική μας μετρούμενη ροὴ καὶ διαδοχὴ τοῦ χρόνου, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι πλήρως συνυφασμένη μὲ τὴν φθορὰ καὶ τὴν ματαιότητα. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἔρχεται νὰ ἀνακαινίσῃ τὴν διάστασι τοῦ χρόνου, ἐλευθερώνοντάς τὴν ἀπὸ τὴν περατότητα καὶ τὴν φθοροποιὸν φορὰ. Μὲ τὴν ἐνανθρώπησι τοῦ Κυρίου μας, ὁ χρόνος φθάνει στὸ «πλήρωμά» του, ἀποκτώντας μίαν ἐντελῶς νέα προοπτικὴ. Στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Χριστοῦ, παύει νὰ ἀποτελεῖ πιά ἐμπόδιο, τὸ ὁποῖο ὀριοθετεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τὸν κόσμον ὡς πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Ἡ ἐνσάρκωσις τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ πραγματοποιεῖται ἐν χρόνῳ καὶ ὁ «ἀεὶ ὼν» ἐνοικεῖ στὸ «νῦν». «Αἰώνια» ζωὴ δὲν εἶναι, ὑπ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἔννοια καὶ μὲ συμβατικούς ὅρους, ἡ χρονικὰ ἀτελεύτητη, ἀλλὰ ἡ «πλήρωσις» τοῦ μετρητοῦ χρόνου μὲ τὴν βίωσίν του ὡς διαρκοῦς καὶ ἀδιάστατου παρόντος κοινωνίας μὲ τὸν Θεό.

Ὁ χρόνος, τὸν ὁποῖο βιώνουμε ὡς δημιουργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχει ἀρχή, δηλαδὴ αἰτιώδη ἑναρξή, καὶ δὲν εἶναι «ἄναρχος». Ἐπίσης εἶναι πεπερασμένος καὶ ἔχει ὅρια, δὲν εἶναι οὔτε ἄπειρος οὔτε αἰώνιος («οὐκ αἰδίδος»). Ὁ χρόνος ξεκινᾷ μὲ τὴ δημιουργία καὶ πορεύεται μαζί μὲ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ ὀλόκληρη τὴν κτίσι σὲ ἕνα σκοπὸ, στὴ «συντέλεια τῶν αἰώνων», δηλαδὴ στὴν ὀλοκλήρωσίν τους στὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Αὐτὴ ἡ καινὴ κτίσι, ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ τὴν προσημονία τῶν πιστῶν καὶ εἶναι ἐτοιμασμένη «ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου» (Ματθ. 25:34), βρίσκεται ἤδη παροῦσα «ἐν μυστηρίῳ» στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Δὲν εἶναι σωστὸ νὰ τὴν νιώθουμε ἀπομακρυσμένη σ' ἕνα ἀπροσδιόριστο τέλος τοῦ κόσμου, γιὰ τὴν ἔτσι ἡ πίστι μας καὶ ἡ προσδοκία τῆς «ζωῆς τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος» ἀτονοῦν καὶ δὲν νιώθουμε τὴν πληρότητα τῶν λέξεων «**Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία Σου**».

Ὅσον ἀφορᾷ στὴν φύσι τοῦ χρόνου, οἱ φωτισμένοι Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας προηγήθηκαν κατὰ αἰῶνες τῆς σύγχρονης ἐπιστήμης, ὅταν δίδασκαν ὅτι ὁ χρόνος καὶ ὁ χρόνος εἶναι ἄρρηκτα συμφυεῖς, συνιστώντας μίαν ἐνιαία πραγματικότητα. Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος σημειώνει ὅτι ὁ χρόνος εἶναι «**τσιμπαρεκτεινόμενον τῇ συστάσει τοῦ κόσμου διάστημα**» (Κατὰ Εὐνομίου, PG 29, στ. 560):

δεν θα μπορούσε να βρεῖ κανείς τελειότερη διατύπωση για τὴν διαστολὴ τοῦ κοσμικοῦ χωροχρόνου, σύμφωνα μὲ τίς πιστοποιήσεις τῆς σύγχρονης φυσικῆς.

Ἀντιστοίχως, ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς χρόνος δὲν βιώνεται ἐκτὸς τοῦ τόπου καὶ τοῦ χρόνου ποὺ ζοῦμε. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, στὴν ἐπίγεια διάστασή της, ἀποδέχεται καὶ ἀγκαλιάζει τὴ ροὴ τοῦ χρόνου, παρὰ τὴ φθαρτότητα καὶ τὴ συμβατικότητα, οἱ ὁποῖες τὴν συνοδεύουν. Ἔτσι ἀκολουθεῖ, στὴν ἐτήσια κυκλικὴ ὁργάνωση τῆς λειτουργικῆς ζωῆς, τὰ χρονικὰ μέτρα, τὰ ὁποῖα ὀρίζονται μὲ βάση τὰ ἀστρονομικὰ στοιχεῖα καὶ ἄλλες ἀνθρωποκεντρικὲς ἡμερολογιακὲς συμβάσεις. Ὅμως, ταυχοχρόνως ὑπερβαίνει αὐτὴ τὴν κατάταξη τοῦ χρόνου, ὅπως καὶ τὴν διάκρισή του σὲ παρελθόν, παρὸν καὶ μέλλον.

Στὴν Ἐκκλησία μας οἱ ἡμέρες συναντοῦν τὰ ἱερὰ γεγονότα, καθιστώντας δυνατὴ τὴν μέθεξη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου

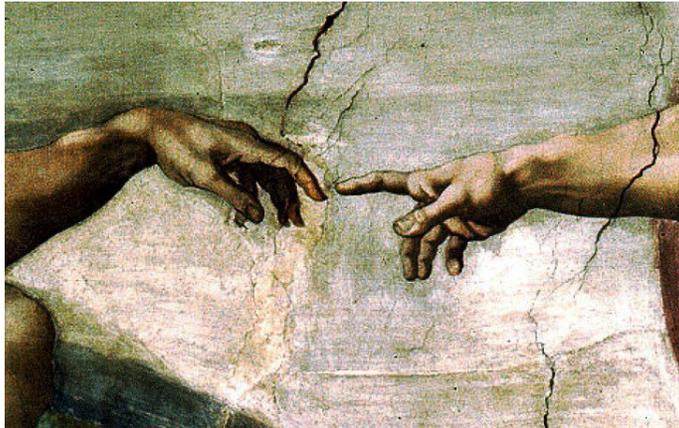
σὲ αὐτά. Μὲ αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο, τὸ παρελθὸν γίνεται συγχρόνως ἑορταστικὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ συμμετοχικὸ παρὸν, γεγονός ποὺ δηλώνεται μὲ τὴν διαρκῆ ὑμνολογικὴ χρῆση τοῦ ἐνεστωτικοῦ «*Σήμερον*» στίς λειτουργικὲς συναθροίσεις (ὅπως εἰς τὰ «*Ἡ Παρθένος σήμερον τὸν ὑπερούσιον τίκτει*», «*Σήμερον ὁ Δεσπότης τέμνεται τὴν σάρκα ὡς βρέφος, πληρῶν τὸν Νόμον*», «*Σήμερον ὁ Δεσπότης σαρκὶ περιετιμήθη, καὶ Ἰησοῦς ἐκλήθη*», «*Σήμερον ὁ Δεσπότης τὸ βάπτισμα λαμβάνει*»). Ὁ Θεὸς γίνεται σημεῖο ἀναφορᾶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου σὲ κάθε ὥρα, ἡμέρα καὶ ἑορτῆ, ὥστε κάθε στιγμή τοῦ χρόνου μας νὰ εἶναι γεμάτη μὲ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁ χρόνος «*τοῦ παρόντος βίου*» νὰ γίνεται «*ἐνιαυτὸς Κυρίου δεκτός*».

Στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὴν Θεολογία μας ὁ χρόνος αὐτὸς δὲν εἶναι κάτι τελείως διακριτὸ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον τῆς Βασιλείας τῶν Οὐρανῶν, ἀλλὰ περιλαμβάνει τὴν προτύπωση καὶ τὴν πρόγευσή του. Μὲ τὸν Χριστὸ ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀρχίζει ἐντὸς τῆς ἱστορίας καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον προσφέρεται στὸ παρὸν, μὲ τὴν προοπτικὴ τῆς «*αἰωνιότητος*». Αὐτὸ φανερώνει καὶ ἡ δοξολογικὴ ἀναφορὰ μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἀρχίζει κάθε Θεῖα Λειτουργία: «*Εὐλογημένη ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*».

Τὸ χρονικὸ κορυφώνεται στὸ αἰώνιο ἤδη ἐδῶ καὶ τώρα, μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας νὰ γίνεται ὁ μαζὶ μὲ ἑμᾶς καὶ «*ὄλω τῷ κόσμῳ συμπαρεκτεινόμενος*»

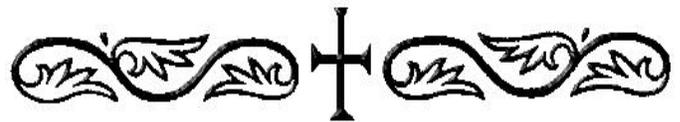
Χριστὸς στὸν χρόνο καὶ τὴν ἱστορία. Ὁ χρόνος, ποὺ ἔλαβε τὴν ἀρχὴ ἀπὸ τὸν Δημιουργὸ Υἱὸ καὶ Λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀγιάζεται, καὶ βρίσκει τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ πλήρωμά του στὸν ἴδιο ὡς σαρκωθέντα Χριστό, τὸν «*Εμμανουήλ*» «*Θεὸν μεθ' ἡμῶν*» καὶ «*πάλιν Ἐρχόμενον*». Στὸ Πρόσωπό Του, ὁ «*Παλαιὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν*» γίνεται «*Νεὸς τῶν ἐσχάτων χρόνων*», καὶ ὁ προαιώνιος καὶ ὑπεράχρονος Θεὸς Λόγος, ἀπαρχὴ τῆς καινῆς κτίσεως.

Στὴν λατρεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, οἱ χρονικὲς συναρτήσεις, τὸ παρελθόν, τὸ παρὸν καὶ τὸ μέλλον, χωρὶς νὰ καταλύονται, συναίρουσιντα σὲ διαρκῆ παρὸν τῆς σωτηρίας. Ἡ πίστη τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ ἡ ἐλπίδα τοῦ μέλλοντος συνδέονται καὶ βιώνονται μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη στὸ παρὸν. Ἡ Θεῖα Λειτουργία εἶναι ὁ ἄχρονος χρόνος τῆς πίστεως, τῆς ἐλπίδας καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ἐν Χριστῷ. Ἄν ὁ ἐπίγειος χρόνος γίνεται παλαιός, γεροντὰ καὶ φθείρει, ἢ βαθύτερη ὑπόσταση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μένει ἀνεπηρέαστη κατὰ τὴν δυναμικὴ ἀνταπόκριση στὴν σχέση του μὲ τὸν Θεό. Γιατὶ «*ἂν ὁ ἐξωτερικὸς σ' ἐμᾶς ἄνθρωπος φθείρεται, ὁ ἐσωτερικὸς ἀνανεώνεται ἡμέρα μὲ τὴν ἡμέρα*» («*ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ' ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαι-*



νοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα»), μᾶς διδάσκει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Κορ. Β', 4:16).

Μὲ τὴν ἐνσάρκωσή Του ὁ Κύριός μας καινοτομεῖ τὸν χρόνο, γιὰ νὰ χορηγήσει «*ζωὴν τὴν ἄχρονον τοῖς ἐν γῆ καὶ λῆξιν αἰώνιον καὶ δόξαν τὴν ἀκήρατον*».



Ἡ τελικὴ νίκη ἀνήκει στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησία Του καὶ ὄχι στὸ Ἰσλάμ, στὸ φῶς καὶ στὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ ὄχι στὸ σκοτὸς καὶ στὴν πλάνη τοῦ Κορανίου, στὴν σαρκωμένη Ἀγάπη καὶ ὄχι στὴν βαρβαρότητα καὶ τὴν ἀπανθρωπία. Μέχρι τότε ἐμεῖς οἱ Ὀρθόδοξοι Ἕλληνες ἀπ' αὐτὴν ἐδῶ τὴν γωνιὰ τοῦ πλανήτη, ποὺ λέγεται Ὀρθόδοξη Ἑλλάδα, δὲν θὰ παύσουμε νὰ προσευχόμαστε πρὸς τὸν Κύριο τῶν Δυνάμεων, τὸν Βασιλέα τῶν Βασιλευόντων καὶ Κύριο τῶν Κυριευόντων: «*Ἀνάστα ὁ Θεὸς κρίνων τὴν γῆν ὅτι Σὺ κατακληρονομήσεις ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν*» (Ψαλμ. 81:8).

+ Ὁ Πειραιῶς ΣΕΡΑΦΕΙΜ

Όταν οι Νέοι Μάθουν ν' Αγαπούν...

Του Μητροπολίτου Λεμεσού Αθανασίου.

Μητροπολίτης Λεμεσού Αθανάσιος: «Τὸ "λάθος" ἦταν ὅπιν δὲν ἀνπληφθῆκαμε ὅπιν αὐτὸ τὸ ὅπιο ἔπρεπε νὰ δώσουμε στὰ παιδιὰ μας ἦταν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ»

† † †

Στὴν Ἐκκλησία ἀγωγή σημαίνει ὁδήγία, ὁδήγηση τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὄχι πρὸς συγκεκριμένες ιδέες ἢ ἀξίες ἢ ἰδανικά, ἀλλὰ ὁδήγηση τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀγωγή στὴν Ἐκκλησία σημαίνει νὰ μάθει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰτὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ζητούμενό της.

Μία ἐκκοσμικευμένη ἀντίληψη τῆς θρησκείας, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, μιᾶ γιὰ τὴν πίστη στὸν Θεὸ καὶ μόνο αὐτῆ. Ἐνῶ τὸ τέλει στὴν Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη ἢ ὅποια θὰ παραμείνει στοὺς αἰῶνες, ἀφοῦ τόσο ἡ πίστη ὅσο καὶ ἡ ἐλπίδα θὰ καταργηθοῦν στὴν ἐσχάτη ἡμέρα καὶ ἐκεῖνο πὸν θὰ ἀπομείνει θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη. Ἐπομένως τὸ ζητούμενο στὸν ἄνθρωπο εἶναι νὰ μάθει νὰ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεό.

Τὸ νὰ πιστεύει στὸν Θεὸ εἶναι ἓνα βασικὸ σκαλί, εἶναι τὸ πρῶτο, τὸ ὅποιο τὸ πατὰ καὶ ἀνεβαίνει στὸ ἐπόμενο καὶ στὸ ἐπόμενο. Δὲν μένει σ' αὐτὸ μόνο, γιὰτὶ ἓνας ἄνθρωπος, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ παραδώσει τὴ ζωὴ του ὀλόκληρη σὲ κάτι τὸ ὅποιο ἀπλῶς τὸ πιστεύει. Ἄν εἶναι τόσο ἰδεολόγος, μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ κάνει, ὅπως γίνεται σὲ ἄλλες περιπτώσεις στὴν καθημερινότητα πὸν βλέπουμε γύρω μας. Ἀλλὰ ὅμως στὴν Ἐκκλησία αὐτὸ τὸ ὅποιο ὑπάρχει εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Σὲ μᾶς ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ ζητούμενο. Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς, ὁ ὅποιος εἶναι ὁ Διδάσκαλος τοῦ κάθε ἀνθρώπου.

Βλέπετε πόσο ὠραία ὁ Κύριος στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο μᾶς λέει: «Μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ...». Δηλαδή ὁ ἄνθρωπος μαθαίνει ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό, ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Χριστό, ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ προπάντων ἀπὸ τὴν ἐμπειρία τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ μέσα του. Γι' αὐτὸ αὐτῆ ἡ ἐμπειρία εἶναι τόσο δυνατὴ πὸν νικᾷ ὅλες τὶς ἀγάπες τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

Δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετό, ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ λέμε στὰ παιδιὰ μας γιὰ τὶς ιδέες τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετὸ νὰ λέμε ὅτι τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι τὸ καλύτερο πὸν μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ τοὺς δώσει, ὅτι εἶναι ὠραία ἢ ἀγάπη, ἢ χαρὰ, ἢ ἐλευθερία, ἢ δικαιοσύνη. Βέβαια εἶναι ὠραία ὅλα αὐτά, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνο πὸν χρειάζεται ὁ νέος ἄνθρωπος σήμερα εἶναι νὰ μάθει νὰ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Χριστό. Νὰ μάθει ὅτι αὐτὸ πὸν τοῦ δίδει ἢ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς, καὶ αὐτὸ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τοῦ δώσει ὁ κόσμος. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος μπορεῖ παντοῦ νὰ μάθει νὰ σέβεται τοὺς συνανθρώπους του, νὰ τοὺς ἀγαπᾷ, νὰ εἶναι τίμιος, εὐλικρινής, δίκαιος, δημοκρατικός, φιλελεύθερος καὶ ὅλα αὐτά.

Δὲν χρειαζόταν ἢ Ἐκκλησία γιὰ νὰ μᾶς μάθει αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα, πὸν μᾶς τὰ διδάσκει ἢ ἴδια ἢ φύση μας. Γιὰτὶ ἄλλωστε ὁ ἀνθρώπινος ἑαυτὸς μας καὶ ἢ ἀνθρώπινῃ μας ὑπόσταση, μᾶς διδάσκει τὴν ἐλευθερία, τὴ δικαιοσύνη, τὴ δημοκρατία, τὸν σεβασμό, τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους.

Ἐκεῖνο πὸν ἢ Ἐκκλησία ἔχει νὰ μᾶς πεί εἶναι γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Κι ἐδῶ, νὰ μοῦ ἐπιτρέψετε, νὰ σᾶς πῶ ὅτι εἶναι τὸ σημεῖο στὸ ὅποιο σκοντάφουμε ἐμεῖς οἱ σημερινοὶ Χριστιανοί, γιὰτὶ θεωροῦμε τὴν Ἐκκλησία ὡς ἓνα σύστημα ἰδεολογικὸ καὶ εἶναι ἀρκετὸ γιὰ μᾶς νὰ εἴμαστε καλοὶ ἄνθρωποι. Εἶναι ἀρκετὸ γιὰ μᾶς νὰ τηροῦμε τὰ καθήκοντά μας. Εἶναι ἀρκετὸ τὰ παιδιὰ μας νὰ ἔχουν τὰ ὄριά τους. Νὰ μὴν κάνουν ἀταξίες. Νὰ μὴν κάνουν ἄσχημα πράγματα. Λένε καμιά φορὰ πράγματα πὸν τ' ἀκοῦμε, χαμογελοῦμε βέβαια μὲ ἐπιείκεια, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἐκφράζουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Τὶ λένε: «Παρὰ νὰ εἶναι κάποιος στὰ ναρκωτικά, καλύτερα στὴν Ἐκκλησία». «Παρὰ νὰ εἶναι κάποιος στὴ φυλακὴ, καλύτερα στὴν Ἐκκλησία». Λες καὶ ἢ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι τὸ ἀντίθετο τῶν ναρκωτικῶν καὶ τῆς φυλακῆς. Θὰ ἔλεγε κανεὶς, ὅπως ἔλεγε καὶ ἢ καμήλα: «Καλὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἴσιος δρόμος, μέσος δρόμος»; Δηλαδή ἢ ναρκωτικά ἢ Ἐκκλησία; Δηλαδή ὅποιος δὲν εἶναι στὴν Ἐκκλησία εἶναι στὰ ναρκωτικά; Ἀσφαλῶς ὄχι! Μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν εἶσαι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ νὰ εἶσαι τίμιος, σωστός, εὐλικρινής, καλὸς σύζυγος, καλὸς πατέρας, καλὸς μαθητῆς κι ὅλα τὰ καλὰ νὰ ἔχεις πάνω σου.

Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ καταλάβουμε πολλὲς φορὲς γιὰτὶ τὰ παιδιὰ μας ἔχουν μίαν ἄλλη σχέση μὲ τὸν Θεό. Γιὰτὶ ἐμεῖς οἱ μεγαλύτεροι δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ καταλάβουμε. Λέμε: «Γιὰτὶ θέλεις αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα; Δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετὸ γιὰ σένα ὅτι ἔγινες καλὸς ἄνθρωπος καὶ καλὸς ἐπιστήμονας κι ἔχεις τὴ δουλειά σου καὶ προσφέρεις στὸν κόσμο καὶ στὴν κοινωνία; Τὰ περισσότερα τὶ τὰ θέλεις; Αὐτὰ εἶναι ὑπερβολές, εἶναι φανατισμοί, ἐκκεντρικότητες, ἄρρωστα πράγματα». Γιὰτὶ ὅμως ἐκφράζουμε τέτοιες ἀπόψεις; Διότι μετροῦμε τὴ ζωὴ μας ὄχι μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν καθηκοντολογία. «Τὸ καθήκον σου νὰ κάνεις καὶ εἶναι ἀρκετό».

Ἀλλὰ ἢ ἀγάπη, ἀδελφοί μου, δὲν ἔχει ὄρια. «Όταν ἀγαπᾶς τὸν Θεό, δὲν ἔχει ὄρια. Ὅπως καὶ ὅταν ἀγαπᾶς ὅποιονδήποτε ἄνθρωπο. Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾶς ἓναν ἄνθρωπο, θέλεις νὰ εἶσαι μαζί του, νὰ ἐνώσεις τὴ ζωὴ σου μαζί του. Μπορεῖς νὰ βάλεις ὄρια σ' αὐτῆ τὴν ἀγάπη; Ἡ ἀγάπη εἶναι φωτιὰ πὸν καίει μέσα στὴν καρδιά τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Δὲν μπαίνει σὲ ὄρια καὶ σὲ καλούπια τῆς λογικῆς, ἀλλὰ ἐνεργεῖ ἀπὸ μόνη της, γιὰτὶ ἐνεργεῖ καρδιακὰ κι ὄχι ἐγκεφαλικά. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία διδάσκει καὶ καλεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἀγαπήσει τὸν Χριστὸ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα.

Ξέρετε, παρατηρούνταν παλαιότερα τὸ φαινόμενο στὴν Ἐκκλησία νὰ ὑπάρχουν πάρα πολλὰ παιδιά. Θυμόμαστε, ὅσοι εἴμαστε μεγαλύτεροι, ὅτι μέχρι μία ἡλικία σχεδὸν ὅλα τὰ παιδιά πῆγαιναν στὸ κατηχητικό, στὴν Ἐκκλησία, εἶχαν σχέση μετὰ τὸν Θεό. Ἀπὸ μία ἡλικία καὶ ὕστερα χάνονταν. Στὰ δεκατέσσερα, στὰ δεκαπέντε ἢ τὰ δεκαοχτώ. Ἐρχόταν ὁ στρατός, τὸ πανεπιστήμιο, ἐξαφανίζοταν ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ προσπάθεια τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τῶν κατηχητῶν, τῶν κύκλων, τῶν συνάξεων, τῶν πάντων. Γιατί, νομίζετε; Ποῦ ἦταν τὸ λάθος; Ἐντάξει βέβαια ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ἀδυναμία, οἱ ἀνθρώπινες προκλήσεις, τὰ αἷτια τὰ ὁποῖα πληθαίνουν, ὅταν μεγαλώνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Ἀλλὰ τὸ «λάθος», ἃς τὸ πῶ ἔτσι ἐντὸς εἰσαγωγικῶν, «τῆς Ἐκκλησίας», ὄχι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καθαυτό, ἀλλὰ ἐμᾶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἦταν ὅτι, δυστυχῶς, δὲν ἀντιληφθήκαμε ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ἔπρεπε νὰ δώσουμε στὰ παιδιά μας ἦταν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τοὺς μαθαίναμε τὶς ιδέες τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου: «Νὰ'σαι καλὸ παιδί, τίμιο παιδί, ν'ἀγαπᾶς τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, νὰ κάνεις ἐλεημοσύνες, νὰ'σαι σωστὸς ἀνθρωπος», ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν μιλούσαμε.

Ἐπειδὴ καὶ γιὰ ἐμᾶς ἡ θεολογία ἦταν ιδεολογική, φιλοσοφική, ἀνθρωποκεντρική. Ἄγνοοῦσαμε τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸ τί σημαίνει ν'ἀγαπᾶς τὸν Χριστό. Γι'αὐτὸ τὸν λόγο δὲν ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα σημαντικό γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ μάθουν νὰ νηστεύουν, νὰ ἀγρυπνοῦν, νὰ κοινωνοῦν, νὰ ἐξομολογοῦνται, νὰ διαβάζουν τοὺς βίους τῶν Ἁγίων. Ὅχι. Ἦταν ἀρκετὸ νὰ διαβάζουν ἄλλα βιβλία. Οἱ βίοι τῶν Ἁγίων παραμερίστηκαν. Ἡ ἀσκητικὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας παραμερίστηκε. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὁ ὁποῖος καλοῦνταν νὰ βιώσει τὸν Χριστὸ μέσα στὸ μυστήριο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἦταν περιθωριοποιημένος. Ἐμπαιναν ἄλλα πράγματα μπροστά.

Γι'αὐτὸ τὸν λόγο χάναμε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τὸν ἕναν μετὰ τὸν ἄλλο, μόλις πλησίαζαν στὴν ἐφηβικὴ ἡλικία. Γιατὶ βέβαια ἡ ἁμαρτία ἔχει δύναμη καὶ εἶναι ἐμπειρία. Εἶναι κάτι τὸ ὁποῖο ἐλκύει τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τὸν αἰχμαλωτίζει. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη πλευρά, τί θὰ τραβήξει τὸν ἄνθρωπο πέρα; Οἱ ιδέες; Οἱ ιδέες εἶναι νεκρὲς σκιὲς τῶν πραγμάτων. Δὲν μπορεῖ μία ιδέα νὰ σὲ κρατήσει, ὅσο ἰδεολόγος καὶ νὰ εἶσαι. Εὐτυχῶς παρήλθε ἡ ἐποχὴ αὐτὴ καὶ σήμερα βλέπουμε ὅτι ἀνακαλύψαμε, ξαναβρήκαμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας, τὶς ρίζες μας, τὴν παράδοσή μας. Καὶ βλέπουμε νέους ἀνθρώπους στὴν Ἐκκλησία, βλέπουμε νέους ἀνθρώπους νὰ ἀγαποῦν τὸ Θεό, νὰ μπαίνουν στὴν Ἐκκλησία μετὰ νέα δεδομένα, μετὰ νέες προϋποθέσεις. Μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχουν τὶς δυσκολίες τους, τὰ προβλήματα τους, τὶς πτώσεις τους, τὶς ἀδυναμίες τους, ὅπως κι ὅλοι μας. Ἀλλὰ ἀκοῦν γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κι αὐτὸ εἶναι ποῦ πρέπει, ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ λέμε στὰ παιδιά μας. Νὰ μάθουν νὰ ἀγαποῦν τὸν Θεό.

Ὅταν ἀγαποῦν τὸν Θεό, τότε ἀνακαλύπτουν μέσα τους τὴ μεγάλη ἐμπειρία τῆς ἀγάπης Του. Τότε μαθαίνουν καὶ ἀποκοτῶν ἕνα ἰσχυρὸ πνευματικὸ ἀντίσωμα μέσα τους, τὸ ὁποῖο εἶναι ἕνα ἀντίβαρο στὸ βάρος τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Καὶ ὅτι, κι ἂν πληγωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἡ παρουσία τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Χριστοῦ παρηγορεῖ τὴν καρδιά του. Ξέρει ὅτι δὲν θὰ σωθεῖ ἀπ'τὶς δικές του δυνάμεις, δὲν θὰ σωθεῖ μετὰ τὰ δικά του δεδομένα. Ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, μετὰ τὴν εὐσπλαχνία τοῦ Θεοῦ, μετὰ τὴν ἐλεημοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ, μετὰ τὴ θυσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ πάνω στὸν Σταυρὸ γιὰ μᾶς ὅλους. Ἄν μιλοῦμε γιὰ ἀγωγή σήμερα στὴν Ἐκκλησία, μιλοῦμε ἀκριβῶς γι'αὐτὴ τὴ μύηση, γι'αὐτὴ τὴν ὁδηγία. **Νὰ βοηθήσεις τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἀγαπήσει τὸν Θεό.**



Ἡ Ἀθεΐα Καλπάζει Παγκοσμίως!

Ἀνωνύμου συγγραφέως.

Ἡ ἀθεΐα εἶναι ἡ τρίτη «θρησκεία» στὸν κόσμο! Αὐτὸ τουλάχιστον ἰσχυρίζεται ἕρευνα σχετικὰ μετὰ τὶς θρησκείες τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας. Μετὰ τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς (ὅλων τῶν δογμάτων) καὶ τοὺς μουσουλμάνους, ἡ πλειονότητα τῶν ἀνθρώπων σήμερα παγκοσμίως εἶναι ἄθεοι. Ὁ ἕνας στοὺς ἑξὶ ἀνθρώπους δηλώνει ἄθεος!

Εἶναι ὀλοφάνερο πὼς τὰ ἀποτελέσματα τοῦ ἀθεϊσμοῦ ἀπὸ τὰ χρόνια τοῦ «διαφωτισμοῦ» ὡς τὰ σήμερα ἄρχισαν νὰ φαίνονται στὶς ἡμέρες μας. Ὁ λεγόμενος δυτικὸς «πολιτισμὸς» μετὰ τὰ παράγωγά του, ὅπως τὸν ἄκρατο φιλελευθερισμὸ, τὸν μηδενισμὸ, τὸν μαρξισμὸ καὶ ἄλλα παρακλάδια τους, κατόρθωσε νὰ ἐμβολιάσει τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα μετὰ τὴν ἐπικίνδυνη καὶ θανατηφόρα πνευματικὴ τοξίνη τῆς ἀθεΐας.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅπου δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ ἐδραιώσει τὴν ἀθεΐα, ἐγκαθιστᾷ τὴν πλάνη καὶ τὴν αἵρεση, μετὰ ἀποτέλεσμα σήμερα νὰ διατελεῖ ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα στὴν χειρότερη πνευματικὴ κατάπτωση ὅλων τῶν ἐποχῶν. Εἶναι ὄντως τραγωδία νὰ δηλώνουν τόσο μεγάλο ποσοστὸ ἀνθρώπων ὡς ἄθεοι, διότι στὸ παρελθὸν ἡ ἀθεΐα ἦταν σπάνιο φαινόμενο καὶ περιορισμένο.

Ἄν μὴ τὶ ἄλλο μπορεῖ νὰ σημαίνει τὸ φαινόμενο αὐτό, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν προφητευμένη ἀποστασία τῶν ἐσχάτων; Κρατήστε ἀδέλφια τὴν πίστη μας, μόνο αὐτὴ μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς σώσει διότι «αὕτη ἡ πίστις τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐστήριξεν» κατὰ τὸ «συνοδικό» τῆς ἁγίας Ζ' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου!

Τέτοιος Λαός, Τέτοιοι Άρχοντες

Από τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Ν. Φαρουδάκη «Μαῦροι καὶ Ἀσπροι».

Πέθανε κάποτε ὁ ἄρχοντας μιᾶς πολιτείας κι οἱ κήρυκες καλέσανε τὸ λαὸ νὰ παραστεῖ στὴν ἐκλογή τοῦ καινούριου. Ἡ ἐκλογή γινότανε μὲ ἓνα ἐντελῶς πρωτότυπο τρόπο. Μαζεύονταν οἱ ὑποψήφιοι— ὑποψήφιος μποροῦσε νὰ ἦταν ὅποιος ἤθελε, ἀκόμα κι ἀγράμματος καὶ κουρελῆς—μπροστὰ ἀπὸ τὰ Ἀνάκτορα καὶ περιμέναν. Στὴν ὀρισμένη ὥρα ἔβγαινε ὁ ἀρμόδιος ὑπάλληλος στὸν ἐξώστη καὶ πετοῦσε στὸ πλῆθος τῶν ὑποψηφίων ἓνα μῆλο ποὺ κρατοῦσε στὸ χέρι του. Ὅποιον χτυποῦσε τὸ μῆλο, αὐτὸς γινόταν ἄρχοντας, μὲ ἀπεριόριστα δικαιώματα πάνω σ' ὅλη τὴ χώρα.

Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ὑποψηφίους, αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ, ἦταν καὶ δυὸ τσομπαναραῖοι, ποὺ παρατήσανε τὴ στάνη καὶ τὰ γίδια τους πάνω στὰ κατσάβραχα κι ἦρθανε στὴ μεγάλη πόλη, γιὰ νὰ δοκιμάσουν κι αὐτοὶ τὴν τύχη τους στὴν ἐκλογή τοῦ νέου ἄρχοντα. Τὸν ἓνα τὸν λέγανε Γιάννο καὶ τὸν ἄλλο Μῆτρο. Οἱ τσομπαναραῖοι αὐτοὶ ἦταν παιδικοὶ φίλοι, μέχρι ποὺ παίζανε καρπαζιὲς καὶ κάνανε καὶ διάφορα ἄλλα ἀστεῖα, ποὺ ἔδειχναν τὴν μεγάλη οἰκειότητα, ποὺ εἶχανε μεταξὺ τους. Στὸ δρόμο ποὺ πηγαίνανε γιὰ τὴν ἐκλογή συζητούσανε καὶ λέγανε τὰ σχέδιά τους, γιὰ τὸ τί θὰ ἔκανε καθένας σὲ περίπτωση ποὺ θὰ τὸν εὐνοοῦσε ἢ τὴν τύχη καὶ θὰ γινότανε ἄρχοντας.

Λέει ὁ Γιάννος: Ἐγώ, ἐάν ἐκλεγῶ, θὰ καταργήσω ὅλους τοὺς φόρους, θὰ δώσω δικαιοσύνη σ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, θὰ ἐξαλείψω τὴ φτώχεια, θὰ ἀνοίξω σχολεῖα νὰ μαθαίνουν ὅλοι γράμματα δωρεάν, θὰ χτίσω σπίτια σ' ὅλους, θὰ καταργήσω τὸ στρατιωτικὸ καὶ γενικὰ θὰ κάνω ὅ,τι εἶναι καλὸ καὶ εὐχάριστο στὸν κόσμο.

Λέει κι ὁ Μῆτρος: Ἐγώ, ἐάν ἐκλεγῶ, θὰ κάνω ἐντελῶς τὰ ἀντίθετα. Θὰ κάμω ὅ,τι μπορῶ, γιὰ νὰ καταστρέψω καὶ νὰ ἐξαχρειώσω τοὺς ἀνθρώπους...

Ἔτσι συζητώντας φθάσανε μπροστὰ στὰ Ἀνάκτορα. Ἀνακατευθῆκανε μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους ὑποψηφίους καὶ περιμένανε. Βγαίνει σὲ λίγο ὁ ὑπάλληλος στὸ μπαλκόνι, πετάει τὸ μῆλο, καὶ κείνο πηγαίνει κατευθεῖαν, σάν συστημένο, καὶ χτυπάει, ποῖον νομίζετε;— τὸν Μῆτρο!... Ὅλοι στραφήκανε καὶ κοιτάξανε ζηλόφθονα τὸν ἄγνωστο τσομπάνη, ποὺ μύριζε τραγίλα, μὰ ποὺ ὥστόσο ἦτανε πιά ὁ ἄρχοντας τῆς Πολιτείας!

Οἱ δυὸ φίλοι ἀποχαιρετηθῆκανε κι ὁ μὲν Γιάννος γύρισε στὴ στάνη του, ὁ δὲ Μῆτρος ἀνέβηκε τὰ σκαλιὰ τοῦ παλατιοῦ καὶ σὲ λίγες ὥρες γίνηκε ἀγνωρίστος μὲ τὰ χρυσοῦφанта φορέματα καὶ τὸ ἀδαμαντοκόλλητο στέμμα τῆς ἐξουσίας. Σωματοφύλακες τὸν παράστεκαν, γραφιάδες στέκαν προσοχὴ καὶ περιμένανε νὰ γράψουνε τοὺς καινούριους νόμους καὶ τίς καινούριες διαταγές.

Ἐβγαλε λοιπὸν διαταγὴ ὁ νέος ἄρχοντας ποὺ ἔλεγε τὰ ἐξῆς: Ἀπὸ σήμερα κλείνουν ὅλα τὰ σχολεῖα, τὰ γράμματα ἀπαγορεύονται ὡς περιττὰ καὶ ἐπιζήμια. Ἀμέσως νὰ γκρεμισθοῦν ὅλα τὰ γεφύρια σ' ὅλο τὸ κράτος καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ περνᾶνε μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ νερό. Ἀπαγορεύεται νὰ φορτώνονται τὰ ὑποζύγια. Ὅποιος θέλει νὰ μεταφέρει πράγματα, θὰ τὰ μεταφέρει στὴν πλάτη του. Ὅσοι πεθαίνουν στὸ σπίτι τους, δὲν θὰ τοὺς βγάζουν ἀπὸ τὴν πόρτα, ἀλλὰ θὰ γκρεμίζουν τὴ σκεπὴ καὶ θὰ τοὺς βγάζουν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ! Καὶ ἄλλα τέτοια παρόμοια διέταξε ὁ νέος ἄρχοντας καὶ τὸ σπουδαιότερο, ὅποιος παρουσιασθεῖ γιὰ νὰ κάμει ὀποιοδήποτε παράπονο, νὰ ἀποκεφαλίζεται ἀμέσως!

Διάβασε ὁ λαὸς κι οἱ προύχοντες τίς νέες διαταγές καὶ μείνανε κόκκαλο.

—Τρελλὸς ἄρχοντας μᾶς βγῆκε, σκέφτονταν, μὰ ποῖος τολμοῦσε νὰ πάει νὰ κάνει παράπονο; Ἡ φρουρὰ εἶχε ἐντολὴ νὰ τὸν ἀποκεφαλίζει ἀμέσως.

Ἔτσι τὰ πράγματα βαδίζανε στὸ ἀπροχώρητο. Γκρεμίστηκαν τὰ γεφύρια, καὶ τὰ ποτάμια πνίγανε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Δὲν ἀρκεῖ ποὺ ἔχανε κανεὶς τὸν ἀνθρώπο του, τοῦ γκρέμιζαν καὶ τὸ σπίτι του. Ὁ λαὸς ἄρχισε νὰ μὴ ὑποφέρει τὴν κατάσταση. Κάποια λύση ἔπρεπε νὰ βρεθεῖ. Τότε οἱ προύχοντες θυμηθῆκανε τὸν Γιάννο, τὸν τσοπάνο, τὸν φίλο τοῦ ἄρχοντα.

—Μονάχα αὐτὸς μπορεῖ νὰ πάει νὰ πει μιὰ κουβέντα στὸν ἄρχοντα καὶ νὰ μᾶς σώσει, εἶπανε καὶ στείλανε καὶ τὸν φέρανε ἀπὸ τὸ βουνό.

Παρουσιάσθηκε ὁ Γιάννος, ὁ τσοπάνος, στὸν φίλο του τὸν Μῆτρο, τὸν ἄρχοντα, γνωρίσθηκαν, μίλησαν ἐγκάρδια μεταξὺ τους καὶ ρώτησαν ὁ ἓνας γιὰ τὰ νέα τοῦ ἄλλου.

—Ἐγώ, εἶπε ὁ Γιάννος, περνῶ τὸ ἴδιο ὅπως πάντα. Τὰ ξέρεις δὲ τὰ καλὰ τὰ τοῦ χωριοῦ. Πότε οἱ λύκοι μᾶς τρῶνε τὰ πρόβατα, πότε ἡ ξηρασία, πότε τὰ χιόνια, ὅλο καὶ κάτι βρίσκεται, γιὰ νὰ μὴ βλέπουμε πρόσωπο Θεοῦ. Ἐσὺ πῶς τὰ περνᾶς;

—Ἐγώ, εἶπε ὁ Μῆτρος, εἶμαι μιὰ χαρά. Ὅ,τι θέλω λέω κι ὅ,τι λέω γίνεται. Σκέφτομαι πολλές φορές, τί κουτοὶ ποὺ εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι! Θέλουνε κάποιον νὰ τὸν λένε ἀφέντη, νὰ εἶναι αὐτοὶ δοῦλοι, νὰ νιώθουν ἥσυχοι!

—Καλὰ εἶναι αὐτά, τὸν διακόπτει μὲ ἀφέλεια ὁ τσοπάνος, μὰ αὐτὲς οἱ διαταγές ποὺ ἔβγαλες εἶναι σωστὸ τρελλοκομεῖο! Ὁ κόσμος βρίσκεται σὲ ἀναστάτωση...

—Ἐπειδὴ εἶσαι ὁ μόνος φίλος μου, τὸν διακόπτει μὲ αὐστηρὸ ὕφος ὁ ἄρχοντας, γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ θὰ γλυτώσεις τὸ κεφάλι σου. Ἐάν ἄλλη φορὰ ἔλθεις γιὰ παράπονα, κανεὶς δὲ θὰ μπορέσει νὰ σὲ γλυτώσει. Τὶ λέγαμε ὅταν ἐρχόμασταν γιὰ τὴν ἐκλογή; Ἐσὺ εἶχες πει πῶς θὰ ἔκανες ὅ,τι μποροῦσες γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἐγώ εἶχα πει πῶς θὰ ἔκανα τὸ ἀντίθετο. Πῶς θὰ ἔκανα δηλαδὴ

ὅ,τι μπορούσα γιὰ τὸ κακὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Εἶναι ἔτσι ἢ δὲν εἶναι; Γιατὶ λοιπὸν τὸ μῆλο δὲν χτύπησε σένα, ἀλλὰ χτύπησε μένα; Αὐτὸ σημαίνει, ἀγαπητέ μου, πὼς τέτοιος λαός, παράνομος καὶ δυσσεβής, ποὺ λέει κι ὁ παπᾶς, τέτοιο ἄρχοντα θέλει. Ἄν ἦταν ἄξιος γιὰ καλύτερο ἄρχοντα, νὰ εἶσαι βέβαιος πὼς ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἔφευγε τὸ μῆλο σὲ σένα κι ὄχι σὲ μένα...

—Κι ὕστερα, γιατί ἔχουν ἀπαίτηση νὰ ἔχουνε καλὴ διοίκηση, ἀφοῦ οἱ ἴδιοι δὲν εἶναι ἐντάξει; Μιλᾶνε γιὰ γράμματα. Κι ὅμως, ποῖς ἔγινε καλύτερος μ' αὐτά; Μαθαίνουνε γράμματα οἱ πονηροὶ καὶ γίνονται πονηρότεροι! Παραπονιοῦνται ποὺ σηκώνουν τὶς ἀποσκευές τους στὴν πλάτη τους. Κι ὅμως καθένας τους τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν σκέφτεται παρὰ τὸ πὼς νὰ καθήσει στὸ σβέροκο τοῦ ἀλλουνοῦ καὶ νὰ ζεῖ σὲ βάρος του! Φωνάζουν πού, ὅταν πεθάνει κανεὶς, τοῦ γκρεμίζουν τὸ σπίτι του. Κι ὅμως αὐτοὶ τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν κάνουνε σ' ὅλη τους τὴ ζωὴ παρὰ νὰ γκρεμίζουν τὴν τιμὴ, τὴν γαλήνη, τὴν ἐργασία, τὴ ζωὴ, ὁ ἕνας τοῦ ἄλλου!

—Ὅπως βλέπεις λοιπὸν, ἀγαπητέ μου, ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἄρχοντας ἀπολύτως στὰ μέτρα τους. Γι' αὐτὸ νὰ μὴ μιλάει κανεὶς. Ὅ,τι ἄξιζαν, αὐτὸ βρῆκαν. Πήγαινε, λοιπὸν, καὶ σὺ στὰ γίδια σου κι ἄσε καὶ μένα στὰ δικὰ μου. Γιδο-πρόβατα ἐσύ, γιδο-λαὸ ἐγώ...

† † †

Ἡ ἱστορία, ὅπως βλέπετε, ἀγαπητοὶ ἀναγνώστες, εἶναι πολὺ ἀπλή. Χρειάζεται ἄραγε σχόλιο; Ἄς φροντίσουμε ὅλοι νὰ γίνουμε ἄξιοι καλύτερων ἀρχόντων, καλύτερων νόμων, καλύτερης πολιτείας, ἄρα καὶ καλύτερης ζωῆς. καὶ τότε αὐτὰ μόνον τους θὰ ἔλθουν.

Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο εἶναι ἡ μόνη σωτηρία καὶ γιὰ τὸ ἄτομο καὶ γιὰ τὸ σύνολο. Σ' ἕνα Χριστιανικὰ ξυπνημένο λαὸ εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ σταθοῦν ἄρχοντες διεφθαρμένοι, ἄθεοι, φαταούληδες, μασόνοι. Γι' αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ ξυπνήσει ὁ λαός...



Ο Μοναχισμὸς διέσωσε καὶ θὰ διασώσῃ καὶ πάλι τὴν ἀκεραιότητα τῆς Πίστεως καὶ τὴν Θεογνωσία, διὰ τῆς ἐμπειρίας τῆς προσωπικῆς κοινωνίας μὲ τὸν Θεό. Προασπισταὶ πάντοτε τῶν Δογμάτων καὶ τῶν Ἀληθειῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας οἱ Μοναχοί, πολέμιοι τῶν αἱρέσεων καὶ θεματοφύλακες τῆς Παραδόσεως, θὰ ἀποτελέσουν καὶ σήμερα, **μὲ τὸ γνήσιο Ὁρθόδοξο αἰσθητήριό τους καὶ μὲ τὸ ὁμολογιακὸ φρόνημά τους**, τὴν προφυλακὴν στὸν ὑπουλο κίνδυνο τοῦ συγκρητισμοῦ καὶ σὲ κάθε ἐπιβουλή κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας.

**Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν καὶ πάσης Ἑλλάδος
Χριστόδουλος (+28 Ἰαν. 2008)**

Ὁ Ἅγιος Γέροντας Πορφύριος Μᾶς Μαθαίνει νὰ Λέμε τὴν Εὐχή

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Ἀνθολόγιο Συμβουλῶν» Ἁγίου Γέροντος Πορφυρίου.

Ενα ἀπόγευμα ξεκινήσαμε μιὰ παρέα γιὰ τὰ Καλλισία. Ἐξω ἀπὸ τὸ κελλὶ τοῦ Γέροντα, στὴν αὐλή, συναντήσαμε πλῆθος προσκυνητῶν ποὺ περιμέναν. Ἦμασταν τελευταῖοι. Ὅταν ἦλθε ἡ σειρὰ μας, εἶχε νυχτώσει. Τὸν εἶδαμε ἕνας-ἕνας κι ὅταν τελειώσαμε, ὁ Γέροντας μᾶς ξεπροβόδισε ὡς ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ Μοναστήρι. Ἄν καὶ κατάκοπος, ἔδειχνε εὐδιάθετος. Ἦταν μιὰ ὁμορφη καλοκαιρινὴ νύχτα. Τὸ ἀεράκι φουσοῦσε ἀνάλαφρα καὶ ἡ πανσέληνος εἶχε ἀνατείλει ἀπ' τοὺς ἀντικρινοὺς πευκόφυτους λόφους.

Μέσα σ' αὐτὸ τὸ εἰδυλλιακὸ τοπίο, ποὺ τὸ ἀσήμωνε τὸ ὠχρὸ φῶς τοῦ φεγγαριοῦ καὶ μεταμόρφωνε ἀπόκοσμα ὅλα τὰ γύρω, ἔμψυχα καὶ ἄψυχα, ὁ Γέροντας θεώρησε κατάλληλη τὴ στιγμή νὰ μᾶς μιλήσῃ γιὰ τὴν προσευχή. Δὲ μᾶς μίλησε θεωρητικά, ἀλλὰ πρακτικά. Πάντοτε ὁ Γέροντας «πράττων ἐδίδασκε».

Ἦμασταν τέσσερις τῆς παρέας, κι ὁ Γέροντας πέντε. Μᾶς τοποθέτησε, μὲ μέτωπο στὴν ἀνατολή, δυὸ στὰ δεξιά καὶ δυὸ στὰ ἀριστερά του, στὸ μέσον ἐκεῖνος. Καὶ μᾶς εἶπε: «Τώρα θὰ κάνουμε νοερὰ προσευχή. Θὰ λέω ἐγὼ πρῶτα τὰ λόγια κι ὕστερα θὰ τὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνετε ἐσεῖς. Ἀλλὰ προσέξτε, χωρὶς βία καὶ ἄγχος. Θὰ τὰ λέτε ἡρεμα, ταπεινά, μὲ ἀγάπη, μὲ γλύκα».

Ἄρχισε ὁ Γέροντας, μ' ἐκείνη τὴ λεπτὴ, τρυφερή, ἐκφραστικὴ φωνή του: «Κύριε, Ἰησοῦ, Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με». Τὸ ἔλεγε ἀργὰ ἀργὰ, μία μία λέξη, χωρὶς καθόλου βία, σὰν νὰ εἶχε μπροστά του τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ νὰ τὸν παρακαλοῦσε, κάνοντας μιὰ μεγαλύτερη παύση στὸ «Χριστέ» καὶ χρωματίζοντας παρακαλεστικὰ τὸ «ἐλέησόν με». Κι ἐμεῖς, κάθε φορὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνουμε, προσπαθώντας νὰ μιμηθοῦμε τὴ στάση του, τὸ χρῶμα τῆς φωνῆς του, κι ἂν ἦταν δυνατό, τὴν ψυχικὴ του διάθεση.

Κάποια στιγμή ὁ Γέροντας σταμάτησε νὰ λέει μεγαλόφωνα τὴν προσευχή καὶ συνέχισαν νὰ τὴν ψιθυρίζουν τὰ χεῖλη του. Κάνανε κι ἐμεῖς τὸ ἴδιο. Πόσο κράτησε αὐτὴ ἡ νυκτερινὴ προσευχή μας; Δὲν θυμᾶμαι. Τὸ μόνον ποὺ θυμᾶμαι εἶναι μιὰ συγκίνηση, ποὺ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ τὴν ἐκφράσω μὲ ἀνθρώπινα λόγια.

Κάποτε διέκοψε τὴ θεία ἐκείνη σιγή, λέγοντας: «Ἄς σταματήσουμε ἐδῶ τὴν κοινὴν προσευχή. Συνεχίστε τὴν μόνοι σας. Ἄντε τώρα νὰ πᾶτε στὸ καλὸ στὰ σπίτια σας». Καθὼς ἀπομακρυνόμασταν, γύρισα πίσω τὸ κεφάλι καὶ διέκρινα κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ σελιγνόφως, τὴ σεβάσμιμα σιλουέτα τοῦ Γέροντα, ποὺ στεκόταν ὄρθιος κοντὰ στὰ βράχια, μὲ τὸ χέρι ὑψωμένο, καὶ μᾶς εὐλογοῦσε...

THE VALUE OF TIME

[THE “NUMBER” 8,760]

By the late Rev. Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kantiotis of Florina (+2010), from the weekly bulletin “Kyriaki” («Κυριακή», “Sunday”), January 1, 2005 [translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen]. Originally published in *Orthodox Heritage*, vol. 04, issue no. 12, pp. 1-3.



On midnight of December 31st, when the clocks reach exactly 12:00, one full year—with all of its joys and sorrows—is fully erased, and a new year rises. The previous year becomes part of history; all of its 365 days are left behind, a simple memory.

My dear brethren, did you ever think, I mean truly contemplate about the time period of these 365 days that on each December 31st becomes part of our own history? What have we truly accomplished during its duration? Let me assure you that all of us are immensely indebted for all of these days. In an effort to provide a notion of our responsibility as well as accountability for each year of our earthly lives, I will draw you a picture and provide you a comparative example; I will present a small parable.

There was a king with many subjects who carried great fondness and devotion for all of his kingdom’s citizenry. He loved them all very much, every single one of them, without any exception. One day, he decided to give them all a gift. He prepared and distributed purses filled with gold coins, one to each citizen. The grateful subjects opened the purses up and begun counting the coins within. They each counted them, over and over, again and again... All of them had the exact same quantity of gold within their respective purse: 8,760 coins! This was a significant amount of gold. The good and loving king gave it to them out of his goodwill and love, so that they could each use it for their own benefit and the benefit of their fellow men. And do you know what each of them did with their respective small fortune? You could have never guessed it! Instead of using this blessed inheritance for their home, neighbor or society, they each went by the river bank, opened up their purses and began throwing the gold coins away into the deep river water, one by one, until all of their small fortune was completely gone and their purses stood empty. If any one of us had been there observing them, what might we have said? Surely all of us would have assumed that they had all gone mad.

My brethren, this is where my simple parable ends. Now who is this loving king? He is our God. Who are these senseless citizens? We are the King’s citizenry. And what is

this 8,760 number? Grab a pencil and paper and figure it out. Every day that passes by has 24 hours and all of the year has 365 days. If we multiply the 365 days with the 24 hours of each day, we then determine that an entire year contains 8,760 hours; these are then the hours that each year of our life has to offer. From January 1st of each year to the next December 31st that follows 8,760 hours will have passed. I thus repeat my question: What have we truly accomplished during the duration of the year we are about to leave behind? Have we made it a worthwhile year? Did we add any value? Or, perhaps we are all like those foolish citizens that threw away all of their 8,760 gold coins. Let us then make an examination, each one of us on our own, and let us evaluate and estimate the usefulness of last year’s 8,760 hours that are about to draw to a close.

Among all of these hours, was there any time set aside for listening to the divine word of God and for the study of Holy Scriptures? Were there any days that we ran to a Church to listen to sermons or attend Church services? How about opening and studying the Bible? Did we do that? If the answer is yes, then we may consider ourselves blessed. This is how the Psalter begins. We read that “blessed” is that person, happy and with good fortune. Who does the Psalmist refer to? Is it the person that has lots of money, apartment buildings, businesses, limousines, and enjoys the finest of worldly entertainment? Not quite; the Psalmist says: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* (Ps 1:1-2). Blessed is he who takes time to place the Holy Bible in his hands and read it. I thus ask all of us: During the year that is coming to an end, did our angel see us hold the Holy Gospel in our hands and read it on a regular basis? Christ Himself tells us: *Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.* (Lk 11:28).

We are coming to the close of this year’s 8,760 hours. I ask another question: During this entire year, were there hours regularly devoted to prayer? During the earlier years of Christianity, the faithful would dedicate hours upon hours for the purpose of prayer. Does our angel ever “catch us” on our knees, in prayer to our Heavenly Father? Oh if we only knew the great power of prayer and how much we truly lose by not making prayer a companion to our daily life. There would have been so many unsolved problems (personal, family, professional, etc.) that would simply find rapid solutions if, and only if, we used this invaluable key to unlock such solutions; the key of prayer is just another valuable gift granted to us by our God and Creator. What great comfort and consolation can be found when we whisper *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and all of Your saints, have mercy upon me!*

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During this time, were there any hours or days of fasting? There are certain days such as Wednesdays and Fridays, and others that are even more significant, such as Holy Friday, that must be days of fasting for all of us. A politician dedicated 15 straight days for his campaign, and vested several towns. When he returned to his office, he pridefully announced: "I traveled for 15 days straight and toured 15 different towns, In every single one I was treated and fed as royalty; freshly slaughtered meat every single day..." And one of the villagers that heard him, a shepherd, asked him in a soft tone: "Your Excellency, how can there be no Wednesday and no Friday for 15 days straight? Was every day a Pascha?..." You see, my brethren, fasting is nowadays not even a "custom" among many of our faithful—there is no desire or will to fast even on Great Friday! Satan has gotten hold of the special eraser and wiped out fasting from the daily lives of Christians.

This year's 8,760 hours are ending. Among these hours was time set aside for repentance and confession? These hours would have been the year's most blessed ones for that is the time that we placed the devil on the ground and stampeded him while angels in Heaven are singing divine victory hymns. It was during those hours that we the sinful ones, full of contrition and in utmost humility, knelt in front of our spiritual father and opened up our lips to whisper not words of criticism and condemnation but the ones that our Lord thrives to listen to: I sinned my Lord, please, grant your mercy upon me the wretched one... And all of us have so many sins to repent for and confess... So, I ask all of us, during this last year, did we manage to spend time with our confessor, to open our heart, to tearfully confess our sins and then say *God be merciful to me a sinner* and *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom*? (Lk 18:13 & 23:42). Did we do this? If not, we better ask ourselves why not.

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. Is it possible that we might have also forgotten the other golden hours of the year that are coming to a close? Which hours are these, you ask? These are the hours of almsgiving and mercy towards our fellow man. Did you reach into your pocket and silently, secretly and with as little attention as possible place a few crumbs from your many blessings into the hands of a less fortunate man? Did you dedicate a few moments in prayer for a neighbor or a colleague who was in a moment of crisis? Did you spend a few dimes from your earthly blessings towards a Christian mission or cause? Never forget that the hands that spread goodness and alms are the hands of God, the hands of Christ!

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During these hours were there any of the most significant and spiritually highest moments, the moments of receiving Holy Communion, our Lord's holy Body and most precious Blood? These are indeed blessed moments; once we

repent and confess our sins, once we are cleansed with tears of true repentance, once we embrace and make peace with our enemies, we approach the Royal Gate with the look of the thief on the cross and receive the Holy Mysteries: *Take, eat; this is my body... Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* (Mt 26:28). These are the moments that carry a unique and incomparable weight and significance; there is no price for them and can neither be purchased nor sold. They are truly above all other hours of our life.

So now we all need to ask: Were there such hours for any of you my brethren, and most pointedly for me the wretched one? I am greatly afraid that in reality we have no such hours. Our hours are almost exclusively hours of sin, the devil's hours; they are everything and anything except one thing; hours of God. Let us not kid ourselves; we waste each year's hours like all those who threw their gold coins into the river.

We truly are inexcusable. Our Holy Gospel says that, during the time of our Lord's time on earth, the citizens of Jerusalem showed great interest in spiritual matters. When they heard that a preacher and confessor came to the area, St. John the Forerunner, they closed their shops, took their wives and children, walked for several miles past the Jordan river, and came to the desolate desert to listen to his sermons and confess their sins. And all of them *were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins* (Mk 1:5). In comparison with the faithful of those days, most of the so-called Orthodox Christians today remain completely indifferent on such matters. The bells ring yet they stay away from Churches. In the not-too-distant past, when the faithful could find no confessor in their area, they would travel for days to go to the Holy Mountain to find a spiritual father and partake of the Holy Sacrament of confession. In our days, this is an extremely rare occurrence for most of our neighbors and friends.

One year is comprised of 8,760 hours and each week has 168 hours. My fellow brethren, let us dedicate to God a couple of hours each week and make our way to our local Church so we can at least attend Liturgy. We anxiously throw away so many hours each week on worldly matters; is it not proper to devote at least a couple of hours for our God? We have completely forgotten Him and have literally pushed Him out of our lives. Putting it simply, we have forgotten Him. We are an adulteress generation, like trees that bear no fruit and are fit to be only fuel for fire. Our Lord represented this type of condition very accurately during His homily at the mountain: *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* (Mt 7:19).

What is it then that we should do, you ask. Why are you asking me or any of your clergy? The answers lie elsewhere, in black and white, as written by St. John the Evangelist. What does he have to tell us? One simple word that is the one and

only key: Repent! (*Repent ye: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand*, Mt 3:2). In other words, change your mind, your behavior, your life, your daily spiritual path; the road that our ultra-progressive society has carved for the citizens of our days leads the faithful to the deep, dreaded canyon of eternal damnation, Hell. That is the destination towards where most of us are marching; unless we choose here and now to change, re-program our lives, use wisely every minute granted to us by our Lord. Let us stop wasting time now, let us stop throwing our gold coins senselessly into the river.

My dear brethren, if we could hear the repeated petitions of those judged to eternal damnation, those countless souls in Hades, do you know what we would hear them ask? To return to life for a little time, a few moments, a few seconds, so that they can emphatically pronounce: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son and Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Lk 15:21 & 23:42). Let us therefore waste no more time. Let us all comprehend how much we have lost, the countless hours we have wasted. Let us repent, let us shed tears of contrition and kneel in the sight of a spiritual father, let us confess our sins. Starting with this January 1st, let us commit to make full use of our God-granted time, let us not waste a single one of next year's precious hours. Let us promise God that this year, we will not grant or allow the devil to take possession of even a single hour. All of next year's hours, all of next year's days, all of next year's weeks, and all the days of our lives will be spent near God, near His angels, near His Most Holy Mother so that we can be worthy of the blessings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ unto the ages of ages. Amen.



Keept the eyes of your soul wide open; guard your senses, both those of the body (primarily the eyes) as well as those of the soul (especially by keeping the mind from wandering). This is necessary because it is through these senses that all the poisonous germs of spiritual diseases creep in. And thus, in time, the careless Christian contracts many diseases and loses the invaluable health of his immortal soul.

Adultery of the soul occurs very easily when we allow filthy thoughts with their corresponding fantasies within us to overcome us. My child, be careful with your eyes if you want to conquer the demon of lust. Likewise, it is no less dangerous to look at indecent images, newspapers, magazines, etc.

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

AN EARTHQUAKE OF SORTS IS TAKING PLACE IN AMERICA

By Maria Stroganova, 06 July 2015. An Interview with Archpriest Victor Potapov, Rector of St. John the Baptist in Washington D. C., a cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, regarding the reaction to the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States. This is a translated article from "Pravmir.com. Orthodox Christianity and the World, The Daily Website on How to be an Orthodox Christian Today."

Father Victor, please tell us how the Orthodox of America reacted to the decision of the US Supreme Court recognizing the legitimacy of same-sex marriage throughout the country?

– To tell you the truth, we feel like we are in mourning. Of course, no one was surprised that it happened. We all understood that the majority of the Supreme Court would vote in favor of the decision to register same-sex marriages. It all started a long time ago, and over a year ago, the Supreme Court declared the Marriage Protection Act illegal. Now this is the result.

Of course, homosexuals claim that they are looking for equality in civil life and they want gay husbands and wives to have the right to visit each other in the hospital, inherit property, to have children, and the rights which are provided to traditional couples. I think, though, they actually are pursuing other goals. Just this morning, I read an interview with a rather famous Russian emigrant, Masha Gessen, who has long been an activist in the LGBT movement. She, of course, is an anarchist, but they listen to her opinion in America, and she said: "Our goal is to destroy marriage as an institution, so that there is no longer the concept of marriage." Her words need to be taken very seriously.

I am also very concerned about what will happen next. What group will now demand equality. Now someone might say: Why not, for example, legalize polygamy? This already occurred in American history among Mormons, and now people are talking about it again. Why can't a man have several wives,—and a woman a few husbands? Moreover, isn't it, in some sense, more natural than same-sex marriage? So who knows what awaits us—and what will they now teach our children and grandchildren in school?

It is really disturbing for all of us, because now, homosexuality is considered the norm, it will be introduced into the school curriculum, children will grow up with it, and will get used to it. It is still being debated in the school boards of various regions of America. In some places they defend the traditional approach to teaching children about gender and others, who are more liberal, have simply told children, that a child may have two fathers, without a mother, and non-traditional families are presented as the norm.

We know what will then happen. Now that same-sex marriage has been legalized in the country, it has just become a matter of time before propaganda will be promoted throughout the schools. Parents who are unhappy and have other views can homeschool children or send them to religious schools, but in ordinary schools, everything will be “under the law.”

Are the Orthodox of America united in having a negative opinion of the law?

– So far they are virtually united, but already in some Orthodox jurisdictions priests are beginning to take positions. For example, a priest of the Orthodox Church in America in Boston is talking about the possibility of accepting same-sex couples.

Unfortunately, over the last fifteen years, homosexual propaganda has been being circulated and many have already been influenced. Even some Orthodox say: “Well, it is not that bad. Let them do what they want. It doesn’t concern us.” That earthquake of sorts that is occurring, though, is changing the order established by God. It is terrible that we are encroaching on the will of God.

Of course, to a certain extent, we Christians are to blame for what happened. I see that marriage is not revered in Russia or in America. Young people are fine to live together, and only after 5 or 6 years decide to have a church marriage, but prayer in the wedding rite is addressed to a chaste couple. Can you imagine, we, priests, marrying people who already have children. I am not talking about the older generation that did not know the Church, but about the current generation of young people. We do not honor marriage properly as a Divinely established institution.

That said, of course, Patriarch Iliya of Georgia and the Mid-American Diocese of ROCOR condemned the decision of the Supreme Court, also remembering that we have to despise the sin, but are required to love the sinner.

There is another danger, though. We recently learned that in the UK, a rich gay couple is suing the Church of England, wanting the opportunity to marry. So, an attack on the Church has already begun. In general, people are afraid to say anything bad about the homosexual lifestyle, because anyone who is against it is immediately accused of homophobia and misanthropy. Our freedom of speech has already been limited and I am afraid that in time, it will become worse and worse.

Have you had such a precedent, so that this sort of couple has come and asked to be married?

– No, there hasn’t been. There was, however, a so-called Orthodox Christian who leads this way of life and he asked if he could get married in our church. Of course, we told him that it is absolutely impossible. This, though, was the only instance—and of course, if such efforts are made in the future, we will flatly refuse.

Every person is a child of God, and everyone deserves to receive attention and pastoral care. After all, we help the infirm and mentally ill and don’t turn anyone away. We all need God’s help, but cannot allow sin.

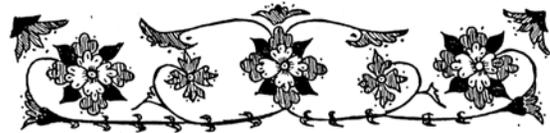
Is such a development in America possible, that eventually pressure will be put on the Church and the Church will be required to accept gay marriage?

– Yes, it is possible. Nothing surprises me. Of course, I can’t predict this, but could we have expected 15 years ago that same-sex marriage would be legalized? It’s mind boggling, especially so quickly.

The other day I was listening to an interview with a representative of the gay movement, and the interviewer asked: “What’s next?”

“Next, we are going to set out to other countries. We are going to carry out our policy in other countries where it is prohibited.”

Last year, I was in Georgia and when gay parades were organized there, the Orthodox were outraged and resisted. Now, though, if they want to join the European Union, it will simply require them to hold gay parades legally and to give the country’s homosexuals full rights. Now it’s just a normal requirement.



A brother visiting Abba Poimen asked him: “My Father, how will I defend myself against the influence of thoughts?” Abba Poimen replied: “A person may have fire to his right and a vessel of water to his left. So, when the fire gains strength, let him take water from the vessel to extinguish it. By the fire, I mean the seed of the Enemy, that is, a shameful thought; by the water, I mean the capability of throwing ourselves before God and seeking His help.”

A brother asked an ascetic Father: “My Father, what am I to do; for the thoughts that war against me are many, and I do not know how to defend myself against their attacks?” The Elder replied: “My child, do not war against all of them together; but against one, the chief one. All of the thoughts that bother us have one common head: a commander, on whom they are dependent. We must, therefore, learn who this commander is, and fight against him with vehemence; whereupon, when he has been vanquished, the remaining thoughts are humbled together with him.”

An Elder, skilled in instruction, expressed the following opinion: “However long you offer strands of material to Satan, he will weave ropes; for he is a rope-weaver.” He meant by this one’s thoughts: the more you pay attention to them—that is, accept them—the more they will multiply and tie themselves to you.

From the “Evergetinos”

ON THE CREATION OF THE HUMAN BODY

By Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos.

The Human Body According to Ancient Greek Philosophy

From ancient times, the mystery of man engaged philosophers who, as expected, studied man in relation to the “He who Is,” God. The questions of what man is, what the body is and what motivates the body are questions of utmost significance and importance.

According to one interpretation, in Greek the word body *sōma* (σῶμα) derives from the word *sēma* (σημα) meaning, “sign.” Among many other meanings, the latter word, *sēma* means a pointer showing a grave. Therefore, in this sense, the word *sōma* refers to ancient Greek philosophy, which viewed the body as a *sēma*—the grave of the soul.

Indeed, in ancient Greek tradition, there was a prevalent view of a naturally immortal soul and a naturally mortal body. Several ancient philosophers believed that man’s soul is unborn and previously belonged to the impersonal world of ideas, but when it moved from this prosperous world, God punished it and enclosed it within the body, which has constituted the prison, the grave of the soul ever since. Thus, according to this view, the salvation of the soul consists in its release from this prison and its return to the unborn world of ideas, from whence it fell, so that it would return to the prosperity of the ideal world.

In the myth of the cave, Plato demonstrates that the entire perceptible world is a bondage house, a prison, in which human souls perceive the shadows of the archetypes as reality per se. Thus, the souls have to escape the bondage house and return to the light. This is Platonic Eros. Plato himself describes the drama of the Fall of naturally eternal souls to bodies.

The middle Platonic and the Neo-Platonic philosophers, as well as other ancient systems, were influenced to varying degrees by these theories and for this reason denigrate the body. There were also other systems that overrated the beauty of the body, disregarding the value of the soul.

Many views and theories have been articulated about the world, in relation with God and man, by various philosophical and religious systems. His Eminence the Metropolitan of Pergamon John summarizes the basic teachings of ancient philosophers (and of some Christians that were influenced by philosophy) and sorts them to five views.

The first set of teachings is the theories of Gnosticism, according to which the world we live in is permeated with evil, and therefore, it is not possible for God to be its creator. Between God the Father and the world there is a hierarchy of “ages,” of which the last is the creator of the world.

The second view contains the ideas of the Neo-Platonist, Plotinus, according to which God had the world within him

and at some point brought it out to the surface. The ideas exist in God and, based on them, he creates the world from pre-existing matter. But the world created by God is not perfect, because matter and space oppose what God wished to create. The perfect world is the world of ideas.

A third view is the ideas of Philo, a Jew, who tried to combine his biblical faith with Plato. According to him, God created matter, implying that matter did not preexist. But the ideas are the thoughts of God. This view influenced Neo-Platonism, which believed that the world is an emanation from the One God, i.e. it is an extension of the thoughts of the One.

Fourth, are the theories of Origen, who was influenced by Platonic views: According to the teaching of Origen, there are two Creations: one is the eternal Creation, which includes the creation of souls, the other is Creation in time, when this eternally present world takes material form. Origen considers this creation as a fall.

It is clear that Plato’s views influenced, to varying degrees, the Gnostics, the Neo-Platonists, Jewish and Christian theologians, and those theories that diverged from Orthodox teaching on the creation of the world and of man.

Lastly, the doctrine of reincarnation is conjoined to the creation of the world. According to the doctrine of reincarnation, souls belonged to the eternal and unborn world of ideas, but afterwards, either through sin or through emanation from this world they were enclosed in the body for punishment and prison. Hence, if man is unable to purify himself and be liberated from the body, he must come back anew in other successive bodies, even animal bodies, until his soul is completely rid of sin and returns to the eternal world of ideas. Such a view denigrates the body by not considering man as a single psychosomatic unity.

Orthodox Christianity Concerning the Body

Christian teaching on the body and on man in general differs from all metaphysical theories. The creation of man is discussed in the first books of the Bible. We read: *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.* (Gen. 1:26-28).

Some basic truths are manifested in this passage. First, it can be seen that God who created man is a Person (three Persons), not an ideal nor impersonal. He is not an assemblage of impersonal ideas.

Then it declares that man is created according to the image and likeness of God. If this passage is linked with another passage (which mentions that God formed the body from the dust of the ground and then breathed into him and thus the soul was created) it is clear that man was directly created by God in a positive way. This means that the soul did not previously live in an eternal and unborn world of ideas, but was created by God at that moment. It also means that the body is not the prison of the soul, but was formed by God at that moment, and man was formed in this way in a unity of soul and body. That is to say, the body did not exist before the soul, and the soul did not exist before the body. Man is not simply a soul or simply a body. The soul is the soul of a human person and the body is the body of a human person, i.e., man is always both, because he consists of both soul and body.

Furthermore, this passage shows the truth that man was created by God to be king, the ruler of all creation.

Therefore, the body is not the prison of the soul, but was created together with the soul in a positive way by God. Both soul and body must have a common course towards God.

However, in studying the human body from a Christian point of view we can look at five phases.

The first phase refers to how the body functioned before man's fall. Right after man's creation, the body had the grace and energy of God.

That is, the soul was in communion with God and this brightened, gave glory, to the body as well, and through the body this brilliance was extended to the whole of nature. Nicholas Cabasilas says that the soul is a looking glass or mirror. Since the soul received the energies of the light of God, it radiated this through the body to the whole of creation. This is why Adam and Eve felt no shame even though they were naked. This is an indication that the body is not to blame for what followed.

The second phase is what took place after man's Fall. As soon as man lost his communion with God, the mirror was shattered, and as a result great darkness fell upon all creation. Then Adam and Eve saw that they were naked and felt ashamed, so they tried to cover their nakedness. The body became untamed, because of sin, and all bodily passions appeared, and this means that death entered into man. The body suffered a great catastrophe, diseases appeared, and

it became weak and needed more food and clothing to be protected from changes in the weather. The body that we know today is not the body received at creation. It is not the same body as that which was created by God; rather it is the body that accepted the consequences and the results of sin, that is, death.

The third phase of the body starts with Christ's Incarnation. The Word of God assumed the human body, indeed, a mortal body, in order to bring it back to its former glory and raise it beyond where it was in the person of Adam. The Transfiguration of Christ, when His face shone like the sun and his tunic turned as white as light, shows the glorification of the human body. So, our God is not simply an idea, He is not just a Person, but the Theanthropos, both God and man, the God-man. The human body acquired great glory in the Person of the Word. We also have the opportunity to live within the Body of Christ. We are reborn

through the holy mysteries (sacraments) of the Church, the holy Baptism, the holy Chrismation, and we give glory to the body through Holy Communion. With asceticism, that is, with fasting, abstinence, etc., we do not hate and underrate the body, rather we try, with God's help, to restore it to that original condition of Adam and Eve and to raise it up even further. As the holy Fathers say, with *ascesis* (the practice of severe self-discipline) we become killers of the passions not killers of

the body, that is, we mortify the passions.

The fourth phase of the body begins with the soul's exit from it. Despite the separation of the soul, man's unity remains intact, the person, the hypostasis, remains. If someone manages with God's Grace to balance the relationship between soul and body, then his/her body becomes a holy relic. In the Orthodox Church we have several holy relics, namely bodies, which remain incorruptible, give off fragrance, and make miracles. This means that these bodies, without undergoing any chemical process, without being in certain, suitable, climate conditions, are maintained incorruptible, an indication that God's Grace is within them. Such incorruptible whole relics can be found in Corfu (St. Spyridon), Cephallonia (St. Gerasimos), Zakynthos (St. Dionysios) and in many of our Church's Monasteries. Their incorruptibility is shown by the fact that the cells in the saint's body, remain incorruptible, the saint's body has not decayed and disintegrated.



The fifth phase of the body will start with the Second Coming of Christ, when the bodies of all human beings will be resurrected. Ancient Greek philosophy did not believe in the resurrection of the body, because, as we saw before, it taught the distinction between a naturally immortal soul and a naturally mortal body. Therefore, according to this philosophy, man's salvation is the exodus of the immortal soul from the mortal body, which will disappear afterwards.

Christianity, however, does not accept this. Christianity's basic teaching is that bodies will be resurrected through the energy of God, the souls will enter their bodies and man will live eternally having both body and soul in a single unity. Of course, the bodies will be different from our present ones, i.e., they will not have corruption, mortality, or diseases; they will have a better form than the body that they had in Paradise after the Creation. St. Paul writes in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.* (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Therefore, in the Christian tradition, the body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul teaches: *Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* (1 Cor 6:19)

The Created and the Uncreated

Orthodox Theology talks about the difference and distinction between what is created and what is uncreated. God is uncreated and the whole of nature, including man, is created.

God is not simply the Creator but also the Maker of the world. This is said because the word "create" means to construct and beautify something from pre-existing matter. But the whole of creation was made from non-existing matter. God did not make the heavens and the earth out of pre-existing matter, but He spoke and they were born, *He commanded, and they were created.* (Psalm 148:5). The evil that exists in the world does not originate from its own nature and its creation. It originates from its separation from God through the Fall of man.

As we saw above, the Orthodox Church does not believe in the distinction between a naturally eternal soul and a naturally mortal body. In other words, it does not believe that the soul used to belong to the unborn and eternal world of ideas and that the body is the prison of the soul. Instead, it believes that God created the soul and the body simultaneously and thus the whole of man was formed. The soul did not exist before the body, nor did the body exist before the soul. Therefore, man's body was created in a positive way by God and was joined with the soul. The soul is not

located in a specific part of the body but is throughout the entire body as energy.

From this perspective, the Orthodox Church rejects the theory of reincarnation, because man constitutes a unity of soul and body. There is a psychosomatic unity in man from the creation of Adam and Eve and from each man's birth. Man constitutes a person, a hypostasis, which means that the body does not vanish and that it is not the garment of the soul, which the soul has to throw away in order to assume something else. After man's death, that is, the exodus of the soul from the body, the hypostasis and the person is maintained, yet at the future resurrection of bodies, each soul will return to its own body. This constitutes a true scandal for ancient (pagan) philosophy.



A mind far from God becomes either like a beast or a demon, and once it has gone beyond the bounds of nature it desires what belongs to others and cannot satisfy its greed for gain. Such a man surrenders himself to the lusts of the flesh and recognizes no limit to self-indulgence. He dishonors himself through his deeds, but desires to be revered by all. It is his wish that everyone should flatter him, agree with him and assist in putting his ideas into practice, and if this does not happen—for how could it?—he is filled with uncontrollable rage. In his anger and aggressiveness towards his fellows he resembles a snake. The man becomes a murderer, and he who was made in God's image and likeness comes to resemble Satan, who *was a murderer from the beginning* (Jn 8:44).

St. Gregory Palamas



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OUR HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH

By the New Martyr Patriarch Tikhon (+1925). Translated from Pravoslavnaya Rus', No. 16, 2000, where it was excerpted and reprinted from Vechnoye, June 1964. From various sermons delivered while he was Bishop of North America and the Aleutian Isles.

And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains ... and all nations shall flow unto it ... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks ... neither shall they learn war anymore. But they shall sit every man under his vine; and none shall make them afraid...

[Isa 2:2, 4; Mic 4:3-4]

† † †

This kingdom of peace on earth, foretold by the Old Testament prophets, is the Church of Christ, and it is in her that one must seek peace. It is here that a man is given peace with God, for it is through the Holy Mysteries that he is cleansed of sin and becomes a beloved child of the Lord. Here in the Divine services, in the Mysteries, in the life of the Church, a Christian acquires peace and joy and tranquility for his soul; his nature is regenerated, renewed, and in this meek, gentle, submissive, merciful and loving soul, there comes to abide the God of peace and love. And then the Christian experiences the highest degree of blessedness, which surpasses any and every earthly good. Nothing, no suffering can cloud this blessed peace within the Christian soul. On the contrary, we know from the history of the Church that holy people even rejoiced in sufferings and boasted of their trials, of being bound and imprisoned. In deserts and in caves and in the face of all manner of deprivation they were as content and serene as perhaps never are people who live with all manner of comfort and sufficiency. Even death did not frighten them; they serenely anticipated its approach and in peace departed to the Lord.

In Christ's Church peace is spread abroad. Here we pray for the peace of the whole world, for the union of all; here everyone calls one another brother, they help one another. Christians are called to love everyone; they even forgive their enemies and do good to them. And when Christians are obedient to the voice of the Church and live according to its precepts, then they truly experience peace and love. Let us only recall the first Christians, who had *one heart, one soul, who even owned what they had in common* (Acts 4:32). By contrast, when people distance themselves from the Holy

Church and live according to their own will, then there reigns self-love, divisions, discord, wars.

Ought we not to rejoice and thank the Lord that He, in His merciful kindness, regards His Church and preserves her unharmed and invincible even to this very day? After all, it was not only in the first centuries of her history that Christ's Church endured various troubles and was subject to persecutions, and it was not only during the time of the Ecumenical Councils that she was attacked by false teachers, who elevated their minds above the mind of God. From the first days of its existence and to the end of time she will be like a ship with passengers, sailing upon a tempestuous sea that is ready at any minute to capsize the ship and swallow its cargo. And it seems that the further the ship sails, the more fiercely the waves lash against it.

In the early centuries the Christians endured persecution from without, from the pagans. But when the Church proved victorious over them, an even greater danger arose, this time from another side: while troubles from the pagans ceased, there arose troubles from her own, troubles from false brothers, attacks from within. From within the bosom of Christianity itself there appeared one heresy and schism after another. Of course, the truth of God vanquished human falsehood, but members of the Church can never retire their weapons. They must wage war no longer against ancient heretics, but against new enemies: against unbelievers, against those who deny the truth, against those who pretend to be representatives of a powerful science. And we cannot say that with the passage of time this war has abated; no sooner does the Church manage to conquer one foe, than she is confronted with a new antagonist. Evil is like some hydra; as one head is decapitated, another appears in its place.

In the last times, evil will significantly intensify all its forces and in the person of Antichrist it will engage the Church of God in the most violent battle. In those days there will be a *great tribulation* for the Church, *such as never was since the world began* (Mt 24:21). And just as in the past some flourishing and formerly renowned local Churches became impoverished and desolate, before the end there will be an even greater falling away. But there never was a time, and we believe, in accordance with the word of the Lord, that there will never come a time when the entire universal Church of Christ will disappear from the face of the earth. No: *the foundation of God standeth sure* (2 Tim 2:19). Christ's Church is *founded upon an immovable rock, and the gates of hell will not prevail against her* (Mt 16:18). The more furiously the



waves beat against this immovable rock, the farther they recoil from it.

At times, the enemies of Christ's Church are ready to celebrate a complete victory over her; it seems to them that they have put an end to her. But what do they discover? Just as swelling waves beat against a ship only to fall back into the sea to merge and become indistinguishable from other waves, so, too, the enemies of Christ, having launched an attack against the Church, again return to that nothingness from which they emerged, while the ship of the Church continues as before to advance in its victorious voyage. Every year that passes serves to affirm the certainty that the truth of the Lord abideth forever, and that even *the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's Church*.

How can we not rejoice on seeing that Christ's Church—a kingdom not of this world, a kingdom that has no worldly means at its disposal, no earthly enticements; a kingdom that is despised, persecuted, powerless—has not only not perished in this world, but has grown and has conquered the world. How can we not rejoice at the thought that in spite of all manner of coercion, attacks, and opposition, the Orthodox Church has preserved the faith of Christ as a precious treasure, in its original purity and entirety, unharmed, so that our faith is the faith of the apostles, the faith of the fathers, the Orthodox faith.

The holy Apostle Paul wisely compares the Church of Christ to a body. Now, in a body there is *not just one member but many* (I Cor 12:14), and *these members do not all have the same function* (Rom. 12:4), but each has its own: the eye has its function, the hand its function, and each member is necessary and cannot manage without the other; they *all contribute to the good of one another, and there is no division within the body* (I Cor 12:25-26). *Even so are you, brothers, the body of Christ and members in particular* (v. 27). *Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ* (Eph. 4:7) for the perfecting of the saints, *for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ* (v. 12). Therefore, do you all with unfeigned love grow up into Him, *From Whom the whole body fitly joined together by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love* (v. 16).

Again, Saint John Chrysostom said, *Do not cast all responsibility upon the religious; you yourselves are capable of a great deal, you know one another better than we...* Therefore, brethren, edify one another, *warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men* (I Thess 5:14-15). *And the God of all grace, ... make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.* (I Pet 5:10-11). Amen.

THE THEOLOGIAN

By Protopresbyter Michael Azkoul.

Before we examine Orthodox theology, we must consider another related matter: the man who has traditionally explained the doctrine of God to us: the theologian.

St. Gregory the Theologian tells us that the study of theology is a privilege and an awfully serious responsibility. It is not a subject for academic debate, nor a sport, nor should it be part of a casual after-dinner conversation. Neither should everyone presume to discourse on it; not before every audience or under any circumstances. The subject of theology is not *so cheap and common*. Only he should *speak or philosophize or theologize about God* who is a *past master of theoria* and, if not purged completely of his passions, is at least *being purified*. *It is not safe, I say, for the impure to touch the pure, even as it is unsafe to fix weak eyes on the rays of the sun.* (Theol. Ora. 1:4).

Theology is not a matter of speculation and research; it is not a "science" nor a "discipline." Theology is a *knowledge* which leads to *union with God* (*henosis tou Theou, ένωση του Θεού*). Moreover, theological knowledge is a special kind of knowledge to which the name *gnosis* is given. *Gnosis* is not a knowledge which comes by the senses; it is not a reasoned knowing which is proper to the scientist, mathematician and logician; nor is *gnosis* what philosophers call "intuition" or the immediate certainty about the thing felt or perceived or conceived. *Gnosis* is a *spiritual or noetical knowledge*, an experience of the human heart (*kardia, καρδιά*) or "mind" (*nous, νοῦς*) or "spirit" (*pneuma, πνεῦμα*), all synonyms for the cognitive aspect of the human soul. By *gnosis* the human mind enters the spiritual world and obtains directly a knowledge of God (*theognosis, θεογνωσις*).



When you cut down a tree, all its branches immediately wither. Conversely, when a tree is watered at the roots, its branches stand strong and healthy. Parents resemble a tree. The father and mother comprise the roots of the children. When a father and mother are watered with fasting, prayers, almsgiving, and other virtuous deeds, then God protects the children...

When an apple tree produces sour apples, what is to blame? Will we lay blame on the apple tree or the apples? Obviously, the problem lies in the tree. Therefore, you the parents, who constitute the apple tree, must live correctly and virtuously so that the apples that are produced also become sweet.

St. Kosmas Aitolos

WE LIVE IN PROPHETIC TIMES!

By Archpriest Andrew Phillips, November 30, 2015. Fr. Andrew is an English parish priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), rector of St. John of Shanghai Orthodox Church in Colchester, Essex, in the United Kingdom.

The shooting down of an anti-terrorist Russian airplane by Turkey's anti-Kurdish, NATO-run forces has implications far beyond the obvious one—that it was preventing the terrorist organization ISIS from selling cheap oil to Turkey's corrupt businessmen-politicians and therefore had to be destroyed.

First of all, it reminds us that Western secularism has always allied itself with militant Islam against Russia. It was thus in the thirteenth century when St. Alexander Nevsky fought simultaneously against the Teutonic Knights, who stabbed Christian Russia in the back while it was already fighting the Mongol Tartars from the East. It was thus in the nineteenth century when Imperial Britain fought against the liberation of the Balkan Christians by Russia, and allied itself with the Muslim Ottoman oppressors.

It was thus in 1915 when Germany's ally, Turkey, massacred a million Armenians, who had been protected by Russia alone. It was thus in the 1970's when the US and the UK allowed Turkey to invade and occupy northern Cyprus, wrecking its Christian shrines. It was thus in the 1980's when the Western-created, funded, trained and armed Al-Qaida in Afghanistan and in the 1990's when its Western-funded and protected offshoots fought Serbia in the Balkans and Russia in the Caucasus. It is thus today in Libya and Syria. Western secularism and Islamic fundamentalism are simply the two sides of the self-same coin.

Secondly, it reminds us of the prophecies of the saints, of St. Cosmas of Aitolia and, more recently, of St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994), who foresaw the war between Russia and Turkey, the Russian liberation of Constantinople from its physical enemies and also from internal enemies who, though Orthodox in name, are in fact apostates from the Faith, being rather paid agents of the Washington-Vatican axis. These prophecies speak of bloodshed, of a third of Turks converted to Orthodoxy, a third being driven away to Mesopotamia and a third dying.

Thirdly, it reminds us that Eden, Paradise, was *in the east*, somewhere in Mesopotamia, and that anti-Eden, anti-Paradise, is also in the east, in today's blood-drenched Iraqi Mesopotamia. It reminds us that the war that is going on in western Syria, created by the West, is dangerously close to the place called Armageddon and that the war that is continuing there is a war against those who hate Christ and His teachings, including those who are planning to rebuild the Temple on Zion, ready for the enthronement of their master Antichrist.

The consequences are far-reaching. The Church meeting that the ecumenist-minded and Western-guided Phanariots want for next year may now not happen. How can Russian delegates even enter Turkey? Does this mean that the Russian Church will hold a real Council for all free Orthodox? The situation in the Ukraine, on the northern shores of the Black Sea, just across from Turkey, is also concerned. The Western-installed and funded junta in Kiev looks ever more discredited, as it welcomes the illegal Turkish aggression, but it is also fragile and bankrupt. How can the weak Western world still support the junta when isolated Western Europe is faced by mass Muslim invasion and the isolated USA by the joint might of Russia, China and India?

Today the minority of Orthodox, for so long undecided and ambivalent on the fringes of the Church, as well as all others who call themselves Christians, are being asked to face reality and decide whom they support: the pro-Islamic Western elite and its bandit consumerism, or resurgent Russia. No more so in the Paris Jurisdiction, whose Archbishop Job has just been removed. Those on the fringes can hesitate no longer. Are they "Halfodox" apostates from Orthodox Christianity, or are they patriots of the worldwide Holy Russia that is, by the grace of God, being born?

Today is the time of St. John the Baptist. We are being called on to prepare the way for the enthronement of the new Emperor of the Christian Empire of Russia. He will be, by the grace and anointing of the Church, the only protector of Christians from those who are preparing the coming of Antichrist on Zion, even arranging in Paris the largest gathering of world leaders in history. Our destiny is to fight in the mystical battle against spiritual impurity and slander.

Last week I prayed in Odessa as a pilgrim at the grave of the humble Elder Jonah (+2012). Are his prophecies regarding the Ukraine and all Russia in 2016 to be realized? All depends on our repentance. All the fragments of Holy Russia, *the footstool of the Kingdom of Heaven*, in the words of St John of Kronstadt, are to be guarded, propagated and gathered together before the end. All Orthodox of all nationalities who know what is prophesied in the holy book of Esdras*, the enthronement of the last Christian Emperor before the end, are to repent and show the way.

† † †

[*] The books of Esdras, 1 and 2, are part of the Apocrypha books of the Bible. The article's author refers herein to the 2nd book wherein the seer is instructed by the archangel Uriel of seven revelations. The two books are hypothesized to have different authors and they are not treated consistently amongst all Orthodox traditions, the Greek Orthodox focus primarily on the 1st book while the Russian use both books amongst the Apocrypha writing of the Russian Orthodox Bible. The prophesy relative to the last kingdom is contained within the 12th chapter of the 2nd book. **Ed.**)

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† † †

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ISAIAH'S PROPHECY OF ST. JOHN THE FORERUNNER

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

The voice of one that cries in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God
[Isaiah 40:3]

When a king wants to visit a certain place, he sends before him in advance his heralds. To an unusual king an unusual herald is appropriate. The herald of Christ the King in the wilderness was Moses; in Jerusalem, the Prophets; in Nazareth, the Archangel; in Bethlehem, the Magi of the East; on the Jordan, St. John the Forerunner. Not one king in the history of mankind has had such heralds.

St. John the Baptist was also as unusual and special as were the other heralds of Christ. He was the voice crying in the twofold wilderness: in the wilderness of Jordan and in the human wilderness. Just as the wilderness of Jordan was fruitless and dry, so the wilderness of the human spirit, was unfruitful and dry. John was not able to make the human wilderness green and fruitful, but he cleared and plowed it and, in that way, was preparing the earth and leveled it [the earth] for the great Sower Who, by His com-

ing, brings with Him the seed and the rain to sow the seed of knowledge and the rain of grace from on high to make it green and be fruitful.

By repentance, John prepared the way and by baptism in water, made the path straight. The way and the paths these are the souls of men. By repentance, the souls of men were prepared to receive the seed of Christ and by baptism in water to bury that seed deep in the earth of

their heart. The proud and the lowly when they are immersed naked in the water are all as one, equal in their nothingness before the majesty of the All-glorious Christ the Savior: *Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low* (Isa 40:4). The word here is not about earthly valleys and hills but of lowly and proud men. As corpses in the grave are all the same before the eyes of a living man, thus all sinners, lowly and proud, slaves and masters are equal before the living God.

Such a wondrous vision was seen by Isaiah, the son of Amos, the prophet of the living God, the one and true God.

O Lord, Heavenly King, to Whom the heavenly hosts worship day and night, look down once again upon our nothingness and because of Your humiliation and passion for us, save us. Amen.

