

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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THE STRUGGLE OF GREAT LENT

By Elder Ephraim of Arizona (a transcribed homily).



At this time, we are entering the great spiritual arena of the blessed Great Lent. Holy and Great Lent is a time of compunction, repentance, and tears; it is time for a change in ourselves, for a new stage in our spiritual life. Like an affectionate mother caring for Her children, us Orthodox Christians, the Church has designated this time of Lent as dedicated to the struggle, in order to help Her children fight harder, so that they can purify themselves, and thus draw closer to God; it is the time that they undergo these trials so that they can be counted worthy of celebrating the great day of the radiant Resurrection.

Orthodox Christians, especially monks, have always paid particular attention to this spiritual arena and have thought of it as especially sacred because it is a period which focuses and contemplates upon both spiritual and bodily struggles. There is the struggle of fasting, the struggle of vigils, the struggle of purification and the struggle to fulfill one's spiritual duties which are many more than at any other time of the year. There is a spiritual "defragmentation" and people pay greater attention to the voice of their conscience in order to correct what they have perhaps neglected and to improve spiritually.

The Church assists us with Her penitential hymns and services, as well as

with a myriad of teachings. These serve so as to "oil" us up for the fight towards the purification of our souls.

We have the penitential evening divine liturgies of the Presanctified Gifts. The Presanctified Liturgy is extremely beneficial. Its Cherubic Hymn is full of spirituality, contemplation, and angelic presence. That is why we should come to these liturgies during Great Lent with even greater compunction. We, who consume the Body and Blood of Christ, must be pure and clean, straight in both body and soul so that divine grace can have its effect. For this reason we must lead very careful lives. Both in our homes or cells and in church we must wet our face with tears so as to wash our souls and be worthy to take Holy Communion.

Of course, the devil often brings us various temptations and desires during these moments of compunction. This intensifies the struggle and it means that we cannot have both tears and concurrent evil thoughts. Evil thoughts and the sinful images that accompany them must be rejected as soon as they make their appearance. And when we have wicked thoughts or our soul is cold towards one of the brethren, let us not approach the God of true love, Who is so pure and beyond holy.

Throughout this period, at every service in Great Lent, we say the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, which is as follows: *Lord and Master of my life, do not give me the spirit of sloth, inquisitiveness, lust for power or idle talk, but give rather the spirit of sobriety, humility, patience and love to me, your servant. Indeed, Lord King, grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for you are blessed to the ages of ages. Amen.*

With these words, the saint wishes to make us understand very clearly, that, apart from our pursuit of various virtues

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we also need to address our self-censure and eliminate criticism of our brethren, for without true love for our fellow human beings there is no chance of making even the slightest progress towards our spiritual purification. If we do not pay vigilant attention towards our thoughts, our words and our heart, there is no benefit in fasting. Fasting is of benefit when it is combined with love for our neighbor and when we do not criticize others. When we do not criticize our fellows and instead criticize ourselves, then we are marked by love for others and love for our soul, concern for purification and the fulfillment of the great commandment, that of love of God and one's neighbor. Love for God and our fellow brethren are the two great virtues which support the whole of our Lenten spiritual structure; if they are absent, then others cannot take form. For *God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.* (1 Jn 4:16).

Another area which demands that we push ourselves as hard as possible is prayer. We should continually pray in the name of Christ, without neglecting any opportunity and without any waste of time. During our personal vigil within our bedroom or cell, we should push ourselves to new limits, not letting sleep overcome us, and with neither any neglect nor any sign of idleness; we should willingly engage in deeds that enhance and support our spirituality. As soon as we wake up, prayer should command first place, accompanied with awareness of our Lenten prayer rule, our prayer-rope, spiritual study and

the continuous contemplation of God. We need to attend Church services with great readiness and we shall thus reap the best possible results from our presence within the arena of spiritual struggle and purification.

Apart from this, fasting together with bodily exertion supports awareness of and the forgiveness of our sins. *Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.* (Pss 24:18). When we labor while fasting, with kneeling, with prayers, with a true effort from our heart and mind, such godly exertion is



holy and is richly rewarded by God because it makes people worthy of the crown of glory and honor. The demons fear the fast greatly, because it keeps them laying low: *Howbeit this kind (of demon) goeth not out but by prayer and fasting., said the Lord.* (Mt 17:21). **This is why the holy fathers always began any godly task with a fast.** They considered a fast to be very powerful and they (rightfully) believed that the Holy Spirit does not provide His protection to people when they are replete with food and

their stomachs are full. And any Christian who desires purification has to start from this same foundation which is fasting, prayer and vigilance. When these three are combined, many people of God have acquired great stature.

In olden times, the Church's fathers had a holy custom. On the eve of Lent, they would leave the monasteries and go deeper into the desert, where they lived in great asceticism until Lazarus Saturday, when they returned in order to celebrate Palm Sunday all together. Some would take a few of

the basic essentials as far as food was concerned, others would eat only green plants, in order to struggle more fiercely in the desert. Thereafter they would spend all the days of Holy Week together in church, existing on just a piece of rusk and a few nuts per each day. We were also afforded the great blessing and the grace of knowing other, more extreme ascetic elders who spent not only Great Lent in such fasting and spiritual struggle but also their entire life!

Our departed elder, Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller, kept an extremely strict fast during Great Lent. And, of course, he imposed such a fast upon us as well. From Monday to Friday, five days of the week, there was no real food to be consumed except a handful of flour, from which we made a batter with just water. That was it. A small flour batter plate every twenty-four hours. Concurrently, we worked hard, lifting loads on our back during the day and during the whole night we performed hundreds of prostrations and many hours of prayer, getting minimal rest. Such a struggle so that we be given the opportunity to purify the inner person, to make ourselves cleaner, more honorable in the eyes of God, in order to acquire boldness before God and thus be able to pray for the whole world. This is because the world at large, people everywhere, need the prayers of saints, particularly those of ascetic saints. St. Anthony the Great supported the whole world with his prayers.

Of course, we must keep the fast only as far as we are able, with discretion, as we are not all the same. *Unless the good be done well, it is not good.* In other words, unless good is done in a good way, method, time and amount, but instead is done without discretion, then it will do more harm than good. Fasting is certainly extremely necessary, it is good, but it is a means rather than an end to a goal. The means has an end and that is humility. This is why we need to arrange everything in accordance with the discretion of a spiritual father, someone illumined by the Holy Spirit. Your spiritual father will tell you how much to fast, how often to receive Holy Communion, where to strike at the enemy, what you should do here and what you must do there. And then, through the discretion of your spiritual father, you can put your spiritual house in order. We should not do more than is appropriate, we need moderation in all things, because immoderation cancels out any benefit. So fasting is holy, but it is a means. We should adjust it according to what our spiritual father says and what our psychosomatic powers allow and only as long as there is good will. Basil the Great says there is as much difference in resilience among people as there is between iron and grass.

St. Synklitiki fell ill towards the end of her life with a throat disease. Her blessed throat, which had always spoken the word of God, festered on the inside. Her mouth had saved countless people. The devil had asked permission to test her and God had granted it. The stench from her rotting flesh became so bad that the nuns had the greatest difficulty in seeing to her needs. They used the most pungent perfumes to try and bring her a little rest

in her sickness. When her mouth and throat had been healthy, she had spoken and brought benefit to many, but when she fell ill, she was able to preach even more strongly. How could a silent and rotting mouth possibly preach? She noiselessly declared her great patience and endurance in God's trial. She made a titanic effort to deal with the devil of impatience, of complaint, of the labor and toil of sickness. What reason then could she possibly have in following the need for fasting?

This is exactly why illness is regarded as involuntary asceticism. One person has cancer, another diabetes, and somebody else has various troublesome health problems. How will these people purify themselves? How will they see God's light? Through patience and giving thanks to Him. These make up for the fast which, because of their illness, they are unable to keep, and, in fact, often struggle in their physical pain ten times harder than if they were fasting.

During this period, we really have to struggle to purify ourselves. From the ascetic tradition we have hermits who spent the whole of their lives in the desert, with labors, toil, fasts, tears, sleeping on the ground and deprivation of every other kind of pleasure. And all this effort, together with the struggle of the soul against all kinds of thoughts concerning the rebellions of the flesh, engendered sanctity. Thus, every Orthodox Christian or monk who wishes to experience purification has the right to labor and to, in turn, not be deprived of his equitable reward. Purity brings great boldness towards God, because He Himself is pure, the Mother of God is most pure and St. John the Theologian lived his life as a virgin, as did so many other saints. The whole beauty of the Church is founded on purity and spotlessness. When our heart is pure and beautiful it will exude fragrance and loveliness. But if people have filth in their hearts, filth is what they will expel. Let us struggle to cleanse the inside of our glass, our heart, so that we can it turn be pure and pleasing in God's eyes.

We have instances from Church history of many people "in the world" (not monastics, that is), who pleased God and became great. Abba Paphnutius of Thebes, an ascetic of great gifts (and disciple of St. Antony the Great), once prayed to God:

— God, who have You placed me with? With whom do I share the same measure of virtue?

And he heard a voice, saying to him:

— Down in Alexandria there is a poor man, a cobbler, down in a basement. You have the same amount of virtue as he does.

He responded:

— But I have been a hermit in the desert from childhood and I am equal in virtue with a lay person, a married man?

God responded:

— Yes, you are equal to him.

Next day, the saint picked up his bag, put in some dry rusks, and set off for Alexandria. He went down into the city, found the layman and said to him:

— What do you do here, friend?

The layman responded:

— What should I do, father? I am a sinner, the worst person in the world.

— Can we talk?

— Certainly.

— What is the virtue that you're working on acquiring?

— Virtue, me? I live "in the world" and am completely mixed up. Now you, you have got virtues.

— No, you are doing something.

— I am not doing anything.

— God showed me, so you cannot tell me lies. I prayed and He told me that we share the same measure of virtue. There must be something about you.

— Sorry, Father. If what I do can be considered something, I'll tell you. I married, and from the moment I put on the crown, I said to my wife: "If you love me, we'll live apart, like brother and sister and work for the sanctification of our souls. Do you agree?" She responded "I agree." And since then we have lived in purity and virginity.

In the desert, Blessed Paphnutius tried to cleanse himself through the ascetic life, and restraint, in which he was greatly assisted by the condition of his way of life. The other man lived "in the world," with a wife, with all the challenges of secular life and, with God's help, he had reached the stature of a saint. And his struggle was greater

than that of the hermit. Proof that he was indeed great in the eyes of God.

After that, something else happened which has to do with this cobbler. One day a Christian went to the Blessed Paphnutius and said:

— Father, I quarreled with a priest and I do not know how he reacted, whether he cursed me or swore at me, but he is now departed this life and we were not reconciled. What do I do now?

— There is nothing I can do in this case, but there is a holy man to whom I shall send you to and he will help you. Go down to Alexandria, to a basement where there is this cobbler. Tell him I sent you, mention the problem and he will help.

The Christian said to himself: "For goodness' sake. A hermit cannot help and a layman can?" Nevertheless, out of obedience to the hermit, he did as he was told. The cobbler told him to wait until night fell and then took him to a church in the city. After again telling him to wait, the cobbler went up

to the large door made the sign of the cross and it opened. The inside of the church was bathed in light and there was heavenly music. The cobbler told the man:

— Go in there and look at the choirs on the left and right. You'll see the priest there.

The man went in, saw the priest in the left choir and knelt down and received his forgiveness...

Do you see what a true ascetic effort can achieve? What the soul's true and honest struggle can do? What did that layman do to purify his soul? When he told the girl he had married that they should live like brother and sister, was that an end to it? No, they fasted and kept vigil together, they made prostrations and read the Gospel. They read Patristic books, went to church, confessed, took Holy Communion, chased away evil thoughts and struggled assiduously. And that is how they became saints "in the world."

So here is proof that even "in the world," when Christians take on the struggle with good will, the grace of God does not exclude anyone. But we all make excuses for ourselves and say that because we are "in the world," we cannot. Desires and passions get the best of us. What do we need to do? Fight in the body and in the soul. In other words, control our thoughts. Thoughts come, sinful fantasies, images, faces, idols and scenes. We must get rid of them immediately with *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me*. When the mind is careful not to accept all of that

and has the divine weapon ready to use, the name of Christ, then every enemy of our soul is slain, whether it be the devil, sordid fantasies or repulsive thoughts. Then, if we guard our soul, mind and heart in this manner, our inner self will remain clean and pure.

Let us struggle now, and the rewards shall be great. Nobody finds grace unless they make the effort. If a farmer does not tend his crops, he will not see any yield. When our fast is accompanied, reinforced and flanked by prayer, study, vigilance, church attendance, Confession, Communion, good works—especially almsgiving—then the beauty of the preparation of the soul for the reception of Holy Week is complete. Then we shall truly experience the Holy and Sacred Passion of Christ more intensely, because our heart will soften, it will alter and it will realize how great God's love for mankind is. Then, within us, we shall experience very forcibly the Holy Resurrection, we shall celebrate it in a way befitting to God and we shall celebrate Holy Pascha together with the angels. Amen.



THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH

By St. Justin Popovich, originally published in "Orthodox Life," vol. 31, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1981), pp. 28-33. Translated by Stephen Karganovic from "The Orthodox Church & Ecumenism" (in Serbian), by Archimandrite Justin (Popovich) (Thessalonica: Chilandar Monastery, Holy Mountain, 1974), pp. 64-74.

The attributes of the Church are innumerable because Her attributes are actually the attributes of the Lord Christ, the God-man, and, through Him, those of the Triune Godhead. However, the holy and divinely wise fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council, guided and instructed by the Holy Spirit, reduced them in the ninth article of the Symbol of Faith to four—*I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*. These attributes of the Church—*unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity*—are derived from the very nature of the Church and of Her purpose. They clearly and accurately define the character of the Orthodox Church of Christ whereby, as a theanthropic institution and community, She is distinguishable from any institution or community of the human sort.

The Unity and Uniqueness of the Church

Just as the Person of Christ the God-man is one and unique, so is the Church founded by Him, in Him, and upon Him. The unity of the Church follows necessarily from the unity of the Person of the Lord Christ, the God-man. Being an organically integral and theanthropic organism unique in all the worlds, the Church, according to all the laws of Heaven and earth, is indivisible. **Any division would signify Her death.** Immersed in the God-man, She is first and foremost a theanthropic organism, and only then a theanthropic organization. In Her, everything is theanthropic: nature, faith, love, baptism, the Eucharist, all the holy mysteries and all the holy virtues, Her teaching, Her entire life, Her immortality, Her eternity, and Her structure. Yes, yes, yes; in Her, everything is theanthropically integral and indivisible Christification, sanctification, deification, Trinitarianism, salvation. In Her everything is fused organically and by grace into a single theanthropic body, under a single Head—the God-man, the Lord Christ. All Her members, though as persons always whole and inviolate, yet united by the same grace of the Holy Spirit through the holy mysteries and the holy virtues into an organic unity, comprise one body and confess the one faith, which unites them to each other and to the Lord Christ.

The Christ-bearing apostles are divinely inspired as they announce the unity and the uniqueness of the Church, based upon the unity and uniqueness of Her Founder—the God-man, the Lord Christ, and His theanthropic personality: *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* (1 Cor 3:11).

Like the holy apostles, the holy fathers and the teachers of the Church confess the unity and uniqueness of the Orthodox

Church with the divine wisdom of the Cherubim and the zeal of the Seraphim. Understandable, therefore, is the fiery zeal which animated the holy fathers of the Church in all cases of division and falling away and the stern attitude toward heresies and schisms. In that regard, the holy ecumenical and holy local councils are preeminently important. According to their spirit and attitude, wise in those things pertaining to Christ, the Church is not only one but also unique. **Just as the Lord Christ cannot have several bodies, so He cannot have several Churches.** According to Her theanthropic nature, the Church is one and unique, just as Christ the God-man is one and unique.

Hence, a division, a splitting up of the Church is ontologically and essentially impossible. A division within the Church has never occurred, nor indeed can one take place; apostasy from the Church, on the other hand, has and will continue to occur after the manner of those voluntarily fruitless branches which, having withered, fall away from the eternally living theanthropic Vine—the Lord Christ (cf. Jn 15:1-6). From time to time, heretics and schismatics have cut themselves off and have fallen away from the one and indivisible Church of Christ, whereby they ceased to be members of the Church and parts of Her theanthropic body. The first to fall away thus were the Gnostics, then the Arians, then the Macedonians, then the Monophysites, then the Iconoclasts, then the Roman Catholics, then the Protestants, then the Uniates, and so on—all the other members of the legion of heretics and schismatics.

The Holiness of the Church

By Her theanthropic nature, the Church is undoubtedly a unique organization in the world. All Her holiness resides in Her nature. Actually, She is the theanthropic workshop of human sanctification and, through men, she sanctifies the rest of creation. She is holy as the theanthropic Body of Christ, whose eternal head is the Lord Christ Himself; and Whose immortal soul is the Holy Spirit. Wherefore everything in Her is holy: Her teaching, Her grace, Her mysteries, Her virtues, all Her powers, and all Her instruments have been deposited in Her for the sanctification of men and of all created things. Having become the Church by His incarnation out of an unparalleled love for man, our God and Lord Jesus Christ sanctified the Church by His sufferings, Resurrection, Ascension, teaching, wonder-working, prayer, fasting, mysteries, and virtues; in a word, by His entire theanthropic life. Wherefore the divinely inspired pronouncement has been rendered: *Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.* (Eph 5:25-27).

The flow of history confirms the reality of the Gospel: the Church is filled to overflowing with sinners. Does their pres-

ence in the Church reduce, violate, or destroy Her sanctity? Not in the least! For Her Head—the Lord Christ, and Her Soul—the Holy Spirit, and Her divine teaching, Her mysteries, and Her virtues, are indissolubly and immutably holy. The Church tolerates sinners, shelters them, and instructs them, that they may be awakened and roused to repentance and spiritual recovery and transfiguration; but they do not hinder the Church from being holy. Only unrepentant sinners, persistent in evil and godless malice, are cut off from the Church either by the visible action of the theanthropic authority of the Church or by the invisible action of divine judgment, so that thus also the holiness of the Church may be preserved. *Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.* (1 Cor 5:13).

In their writings and at the Councils, the holy fathers confessed the holiness of the church as Her essential and immutable quality. The fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council defined it dogmatically in the ninth article of the Symbol of Faith. And the succeeding ecumenical councils confirmed it by the seal of their assent.

The Catholicity of the Church

The theanthropic nature of the Church is inherently and all-encompassingly universal and catholic: it is theanthropically universal and theanthropically catholic. The Lord Christ, the God-man, has by Himself and in Himself most perfectly and integrally united God and Man and, through man, all the worlds and all created things to God. The fate of creation is essentially linked to that of man (cf. Romans 8:19-24). In Her theanthropic organism, the Church encompasses: *All things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.* (Col. 1:16). Everything is in the God-man; *He is the Head of the Body of the Church.* (Col. 1:17-18).

In the theanthropic organism of the Church everyone lives in the fullness of his personality as a living, godlike cell. The law of theanthropic catholicity encompasses all and acts through all. All the while, the theanthropic equilibrium between the divine and the human is always duly preserved. Being members of Her body, we in the Church experience the fullness of our being in all its godlike dimensions. Furthermore: in the Church of the God-man, man experiences his own being as all-encompassing, as theanthropically all-encompassing; he experiences himself not only as complete, but also as the totality of creation. In a word: he experiences himself as a god-man by grace.

The theanthropic catholicity of the Church is actually an unceasing christification of many by grace and virtue: all is gathered in Christ the God-man, and everything is experienced through Him as one's own, as a single indivisible theanthropic organism. For life in the Church is a theanthropic catholicization, the struggle of acquiring by grace and virtue the likeness of the God-man, christification, theosis, life in the Trinity, sanctification, transfiguration, salvation, immortality, and churchliness. Theanthropic catholicity in the Church is reflected in and achieved by the eternally living Person of Christ, the God-man Who in the most perfect way has united God to man and to all creation, which has been cleansed of sin, evil, and death by the Savior's precious Blood (cf. Col. 1:19-22).

The theanthropic Person of the Lord Christ is the very soul of the Church's catholicity. It is the God-man Who always preserves the theanthropic balance between the divine and the human in the catholic life of the Church. The Church is filled to overflowing with the Lord Christ, for She is *the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.* (Eph 1:23). Wherefore, She is universal in every person that is found within Her, in each of Her tiny cells. That universality, that catholicity resounds like thunder particularly through the holy apostles, through the holy fathers, through the holy ecumenical and local councils.

The Apostolicity of the Church

The holy apostles were the first god-men by grace. Like the Apostle Paul each of them, by his integral life, could have said of himself: *I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.* (Gal 2:20). Each of them is a Christ repeated; or, to be more exact, a continuation of Christ. Everything in them is theanthropic because everything was received from the God-man. Apostolicity is nothing other than the God-manhood of the Lord Christ, freely assimilated through the holy struggles of the holy virtues: faith, love, hope, prayer, fasting, etc. This means that everything that is of man lives in them freely through the God-man, thinks through the God-man, feels through the God-man, acts through the God-man and wills through the God-man. For them, the historical God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the supreme value and the supreme criterion. Everything in them is of the God-man, for the sake of the God-man, and in the God-man. And it is always and everywhere thus. For them immortality is in the time and space of this world. Thereby they are, even while on this earth, partakers of the theanthropic eternity of Christ.



This theanthropic apostolicity is integrally continued in the earthly successors of the Christ-bearing apostles: in the holy fathers. Among them, in essence, there is no difference: the same God-man Christ lives, acts, enlivens and makes them all eternal in equal measure, He Who is *the same yesterday, and today, and forever*. (Heb 13:8). Through the holy fathers, the holy apostles live on with all their theanthropic riches, theanthropic worlds, theanthropic holy things, theanthropic mysteries, and theanthropic virtues. The holy fathers in fact are continuously apostolizing, whether as distinct godlike personalities, or as bishops of the local churches, or as members of the holy ecumenical and holy local councils. For all of them there is but one Truth, one Transcendent Truth: the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Behold, the holy ecumenical councils, from the first to the last, confess, defend, believe, announce, and vigilantly preserve but a single supreme value: the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The principal Tradition, the transcendent Tradition, of the Orthodox Church is the living God-man Christ, entire in the theanthropic Body of the Church of which He is the immortal, eternal Head. This is not merely the message, but the transcendent message of the holy apostles and the holy fathers. They know Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ ascended. They all, by their integral lives and teachings, with a single soul and a single voice, confess that Christ the God-man is wholly in His Church, as in His Body. Each of the holy fathers could

rightly repeat with St. Maximus the Confessor: *In no wise am I expounding my own opinion, but that which I have been taught by the fathers, without changing aught in their teaching.*

And from the immortal proclamation of St. John of Damascus there resounds the universal confession of all the holy fathers who were glorified by God: “*Whatever has been transmitted to us through the Law, and the prophets, and the apostles, and the evangelists, we receive and know and esteem highly, and beyond that we ask nothing more... Let us be fully satisfied with it, and rest therein, “removing not the ancient landmarks (Prov. 22:28),” nor violating the divine Tradition.* And then, the touching, fatherly admonition of the holy Damascene, directed to all Orthodox Christians: *Wherefore, brethren, let us plant ourselves upon the rock of faith and the Tradition of the Church, removing not the landmarks set by our holy fathers, nor giving room to those who are anxious to introduce novelties and to undermine the structure of God’s holy ecumenical and apostolic Church. For*

if everyone were allowed a free hand, little by little the entire Body of the Church would be destroyed.

The holy Tradition is wholly of the God-man, wholly of the holy apostles, wholly of the holy fathers, wholly of the Church, in the Church, and by the Church. The holy fathers are nothing other than the **guardians of the apostolic tradition**. All of them, like the holy apostles themselves, are but **witnesses** of a single and unique Truth: the transcendent Truth of Christ, the God-man. They preach and confess it without rest, they, the **golden mouths of the Word**. The God-man, the Lord Christ is one, unique, and indivisible. So also is the Church unique and indivisible, for She is the incarnation of the Theanthropos Christ, continuing through the ages and through all eternity. Being such by Her nature and in Her earthly history, the Church may not be divided. It is only possible to fall away from her. That unity and uniqueness of the Church is theanthropic from the very beginning and through all the ages and all eternity.

Apostolic succession, the apostolic heritage, is theanthropic from first to last. What is it that the holy apostles are transmitting to their successors as their heritage? The Lord Christ, the God-man Himself, with all the imperishable riches of His wondrous theanthropic Personality, Christ—the Head of the Church, Her sole Head. If it does not transmit that, apostolic succession ceases to be apostolic, and the apostolic Tradition is lost, for there is no longer an apostolic hierarchy and an apostolic Church.

Holy Tradition

The holy Tradition is the Gospel of the Lord Christ, and the Lord Christ Himself, Whom the Holy Spirit instills in each and every believing soul, in the entire Church. Whatever is Christ’s, by the power of the Holy Spirit becomes ours, human; but only within the body of the Church. The Holy Spirit—the soul of the Church, incorporates each believer, as a tiny cell, into the body of the Church and makes him a *fel-lowheir* of the God-man (Eph. 3:6). In reality the Holy Spirit makes every believer into a God-man by grace. For what is life in the Church? Nothing other than the transfiguration of each believer into a God-man by grace through his personal, evangelical virtues; it is his growth in Christ, the putting on of Christ by growing in the Church and being a member of the Church. A Christian’s life is a ceaseless, Christ-centered theophany: the Holy Spirit, through the holy mysteries and



the holy virtues, transmits Christ the Savior to each believer, renders him a living tradition, a living life: *Christ who is our life*. (Col 3:4). Everything Christ's thereby becomes ours, ours for all eternity: His truth, His righteousness, His love, His life, and His entire divine Hypostasis.

Holy Tradition? It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man Himself, with all the riches of his divine Hypostasis and, through Him and for His sake, those of the Holy Trinity. That is most fully given and articulated in the Holy Eucharist, wherein, for our sake and for our salvation, the Savior's entire theanthropic economy of salvation is performed and repeated. Therein wholly resides the God-man with all His wondrous and miraculous gifts; He is there, and in the Church's life of prayer and liturgy. Through all this, the Savior's philanthropic proclamation ceaselessly resounds: *And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*. (Mt 28:20). He is with the apostles and, through the apostles, with all the faithful, world without end. This is the whole of the holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church of the apostles: life in Christ = life in the Holy Trinity; growth in Christ = growth in the Trinity.

Of extraordinary importance is the following: in Christ's Orthodox Church, the Holy Tradition, ever living and life-giving, comprises: the holy liturgy, all the divine services, all the holy mysteries, all the holy virtues, the totality of eternal truth and eternal righteousness, all love, all eternal life, the whole of the God-man, the Lord Christ, the entire Holy Trinity, and the entire theanthropic life of the Church in its theanthropic fullness, with the All-holy Theotokos and all the saints.

The personality of the Lord Christ the God-man, transfigured within the Church, immersed in the prayerful, liturgical, and boundless sea of grace, wholly contained in the Eucharist, and wholly in the Church—this is holy Tradition. This authentic good news is confessed by the holy fathers and the holy ecumenical councils. By prayer and piety holy Tradition is preserved from all human demonism and devilish humanism, and in it is preserved the entire Lord Christ, He Who is the eternal Tradition of the Church. *Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh*. (1 Tim 3:16). He was manifest as a man, as a God-man, as the Church, and by His philanthropic act of salvation and deification of humanity He magnified and exalted man above the holy Cherubim and the most holy Seraphim.



We are convinced that nothing is more sacred, nothing more wise than the Patristic tradition and we hope to run this course under faithful leaders.

Gennadios II Scholarios (+1473)
Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, 1454-1464

WILL THERE BE A TERRIBLE JUDGMENT?

By Archbishop Averky (Taushev) 1906-1976.

In our time we have become witnesses of a completely new teaching, so far unheard-of in our Church, to the effect that the Second Coming of Christ and the Terrible Judgment must be understood somehow in an "allegorical" way, and not literally, and that the Terrible Judgment will in essence be not at all terrible. In propagandizing this "teaching," they affirm with great aplomb and authority that everything we expounded above "has been thought up by dark fanatical monks," and that contemporary "enlightened Christians" cannot and must not believe in it all.

But how, we may ask, can we not believe in that which has been clearly and definitively said in the Sacred Scriptures, or by the great Fathers of the Church or the glorious, Spirit-bearing ascetics who have been glorified by the Holy Church? For Christ Himself, "they" say, said that He came not to judge the world, but to save it (and then references are made to Jn 12:47, Mt 18:11 and Lk 9:56).

Already a long time ago we were warned that the cunning of Satan and his servants, especially in the last times, will be manifest also in the fact that, in order to destroy people, they will also begin skillfully to use even the texts of the Sacred Scriptures, interpreting them in a distorted manner. After all, on such distorted interpretations are based all the numerous contemporary sects. And it is like that in the given case: Christ truly came to earth the first time in order to save the world, but **the second time He will come no longer to save, but to judge the world**. Moreover, the measure of this Judgment, as He Himself said, will be the word uttered by Him: *The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day* (Jn 12:48), that is: he who does not observe the teaching brought by Christ the Savior to the earth will be subjected to condemnation at the Terrible Judgment.

To whom could this not be clear? Only to a mind that is ill-intentioned! But how can one distort that which is said so clearly in the Sacred Scriptures? *Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen*. (Rev 1:7; cf. Acts 1:11). *Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his works* (Rev 22:12), says the Lord Himself.

What could be clearer or more comprehensible than these words? And so there will undoubtedly be the Terrible Judgment, and there will be the reward of each according to his works, and there will be hell and the everlasting torments for the impenitent sinners. This will be demanded by the Highest Divine Justice, which is so clearly felt and whose inexorable necessity is recognized by every human heart that is uncorrupted, not poisoned by lying pseudo-wisdom...

WHAT UNITY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

THOSE WHO DEPARTED FROM THE CHURCH ARE HERETICS AND SCHISMATICS!

By His Eminence Athanasios, Metropolitan of Limassol, Cyprus; excerpts from his letter to the Holy Synod of Cyprus on the upcoming Holy and Great Orthodox Synod, arranged by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and currently scheduled to take place on the day of Pentecost this year. (Translated by Fr. Kristian Akselberg). Accessed through the web pages of Romfea.gr.



There are serious gaps in the theological and canonical discussions at the upcoming meeting of the Pan-Orthodox Synod, notes Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol.

In a letter to the Holy Synod of Cyprus, the eminent hierarch does not consider there to be any problem of restoring the unity of Christians, since this, in his opinion, was never disrupted. Rather, certain Christians chose a path different to the one we follow, that of the original Orthodox truth. There are no churches or confessions. Rather, these have cut themselves off from the Church and must be considered heretics and schismatics, notes His Eminence, expressing confusion as to why such an important issue has been ignored.

The stance of His Eminence, who invokes the right of each hierarch to express his opinion regarding such an important event, is sure to cause discussion and debate within Orthodoxy.

“Since, in agreement with regulations sent to us regarding the organization and operation of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, and in particular article 12, paragraphs 2 and 3, indicate that we are entitled first to express our views at our local Synod, I, having examined my conscience, humbly submit to the Holy and Sacred Synod of our holy Church my views and opinions regarding the following matters,” the Reverend Metropolitan Athanasios underlines in his letter.

In his letter, His Eminence Athanasios speaks about the text of the 5th Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference held in Chambesey in October entitled “Decision - Relations of the Orthodox Church to the rest of the Christian world,” stating the following: “I am in total agreement with the first three articles of the text. However, at article 4 onwards, I have made the following observations: The Orthodox Church has always prayed ‘for the union of all’—I believe this to mean the return to and union with Her of all those who broke away and distanced themselves from Her, of heretics

and schismatics, once they have renounced their heresy and schism and flee from those things with repentance and are integrated and joined – united – with the Orthodox Church in accordance with the teachings of the sacred canons,” remarks His Eminence Athanasios.

His Eminence continues: “The Orthodox Church of Christ never lost the ‘unity of faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit’ and does not accept the theory of the restoration of the unity of those ‘who believe in Christ,’ because it believes that the unity of those who believe in Christ already exists in the unity of all of Her baptized children, between themselves and with Christ, in Her correct faith, where no heretics or schismatics are present, for which reason She prays for their return to Orthodoxy in repentance.”

His Eminence completes his letter thusly: “I believe that what is stated in article 5 regarding ‘the lost unity of Christians’ is incorrect, because the Church as God’s people, united among themselves and with the Head of the Church which is Christ, never lost this unity and therefore is not in need of rediscovering or seeking it, because it always was, is, and will be just as the Church of Christ has never ceased nor will cease to exist.”

His Eminence Athanasios adds that, “what happened is that groups, peoples or individuals left the body of the Church and the Church prays, and is required to try through mission, that they all return in repentance to the Orthodox Church via the canonical route. In other words, there do not exist other Churches, only heresies and schisms, should we wish to be more precise in our definitions.”

“The expression ‘towards the restoration of Christian unity’ is incorrect because the unity of Christians – the members of the Church of Christ – has never been broken, as long as they remain united to the Church. Separation from the Church and flight from the Church have unfortunately happened numerous times due to heresies and schisms, but there was never a loss of the internal unity of the Church,” His Eminence continues in his letter.

Elsewhere, His Eminence Athanasios states: “I question why the text contains multiple references to ‘Churches’ and ‘Confessions’? What difference and which element allows us to call some Churches and others Confessions? Which is a Church and which a heresy and which a schismatic group or confession? We confess one Church and that all the others are schisms and heresies. I maintain that giving the title ‘Church’ to heretical or schismatic communities is entirely incorrect from a theological, dogmatic and canonical perspective because the Church of Christ is one, as also stated in Article 1, and we cannot refer to a heretical or schismatic community or group outside the Orthodox Church as ‘Church.’”

“At no point does this text state that the only way that leads to union with the Church is solely the repentant return of heretics and schismatics to the One, Holy, Catholic

and Apostolic Church of Christ, which according to Article 11 is our Orthodox Church. The reference to the 'understanding of the tradition of the ancient Church' gives the impression that there is an ontological difference between the ancient Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and the genuine continuation of the same until the present day, namely our Orthodox Church. We believe that there is absolutely no difference between the Church of the 21st century and the Church of the 1st century, because one of the attributes of the Church is the fact we also confess in the Symbol of Faith, namely that it is Apostolic," stressed the Metropolitan of Limmassol.

The Bishop subsequently underlines that in Article 12, the impression is given that the Orthodox are looking to restore the right faith and unity, giving cause for an unacceptable view: "Article 12 states that the common purpose of the theological dialogues is 'the final restoration of unity in correct faith and love'. This gives the impression that we Orthodox are seeking our restoration to correct faith and the unity of love, as if we had lost the right faith and are seeking to discover it through the theological dialogues with the heterodox. I maintain that this theory is theologically unacceptable for us all," underlines Metropolitan Athanasios.

Elsewhere, His Eminence expresses objections to the text, stressing that "the reference of the text to 'the World Council of Churches' gives me the opportunity to make a complaint against occasional syncretistic events which took place therein, but also against its title, since it regards the Orthodox Church as 'one of the Churches' or a branch of the one Church which seeks and strives for Her realization at the World Council of Churches. For us, however, the Church of Christ is one and unique, as we confess in the Symbol of Faith, and not many."

His Eminence further states: "The view that the preservation of the genuine Orthodox faith is guaranteed only through the synodical system as the only 'competent and final authority on matters of faith' is exaggerated and ignores the truth that many synods throughout Church history taught and espoused incorrect and heretical doctrines, and it was the faithful people which rejected them and preserved the Orthodox faith and championed the Orthodox Confession. Neither a synod without the faithful people, the fullness of the Church, nor the people without the synod of Bishops, is able to regard themselves as the Body of Christ and Church of Christ and to correctly express the experience and doctrine of the Church."

Addressing the Archbishop of Cyprus and the members of the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan of Limassol stresses: "Use of hard or insulting language cannot be made in ecclesiastical encyclicals of this kind, nor do I think anyone desires the use of that form of expression. However, the truth must be expressed with precision and clarity, though naturally with

pastoral discernment and genuine love towards all. We owe it also to our brothers who find themselves in heresy or schism to be entirely honest with them, and with love and pain to pray and do everything possible to bring about their return to the Church of Christ."

"I humbly maintain that texts of such importance and prestige as those of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church must be very carefully formulated with theological and canonical precision in order that these ambiguities or untested theological terms do not also give rise to incorrect expressions which could lead to misconceptions and distortions of the correct attitude of the Orthodox Church. Moreover, in order for a Synod to be valid and canonical, it must not depart in any way from the spirit and teaching of the Holy Synods which preceded it, the teaching of the Holy Fathers and Holy Scriptures, and it must be free from any ambiguity in the precise expression of the correct faith," adds His Eminence Athanasios.

Elsewhere, invoking the Holy Fathers, His Eminence Athanasios stated: "Never did the holy Fathers nor ever in the holy canons or rulings of the sacred Ecumenical or Local Synods, are heretical or schismatic groups referred to as churches. If the heretics are indeed churches, where is the single One Church of Christ and the Apostles?"

The Metropolitan of Limassol also expressed his strong opposition, stressing that those who do not have the right to vote and participate in the Synod are merely ornamental: "I humbly express my disagreement with the fact that the practice of all Sacred Synods until the present of allowing each bishop a vote is abolished. There was never before a system of 'one Church, one vote,' which renders the members of the Holy and Great Synod, with the exception of the primates, mere decorative items by refusing them the right to vote," His Eminence Athanasios says in his letter.

In closing, the courageous and Orthodox-minded Hierarchy of the Church of Cyprus states that: "I do not want to upset anyone with what I wrote, nor do I want to be seen to be teaching judgement of my brothers and fathers in Christ. I simply feel the need to express what my conscience requires me to."

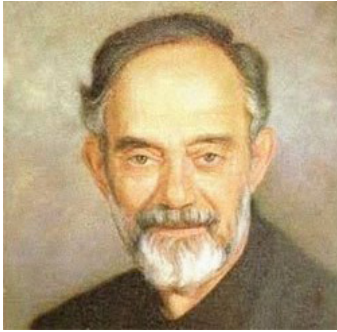


A Synod that does not differentiate *between the profane and holy* (term of the Seventh Ecumenical), Orthodoxy and heresy, the truth of Christ and demonic delusion, and thus ecclesiastically normalizes heresy, can not truly be Orthodox, but, rather, must be considered a pseudo-synod.

Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus

ON MENTAL ILLNESS

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001).



Everyone is mentally ill according to the Patristic meaning of mental illness. You do not have to be schizophrenic in order to be mentally ill. The definition of mental illness from a Patristic point of view is that people are mentally ill when the noetic energy they have

inside them is not functioning properly. In other words, being mentally ill means your nous is full of thoughts (*logismoi*), not only bad thoughts, but good thoughts as well.

The term used within patristic terms is *logismos* (plural *logismoi*), which is the technical term in ascetic literature for a thought combined with an image. According to St. Maximos, a *logismos* can be simple (dispassionate) or composite (passion-charged: e.g., a memory combined with a passion). According to St. Isaac the Syrian, four causes generate *logismoi*: Firstly, from the natural will of the flesh; secondly, from imagination of sensory objects in the world which a man hears and sees; thirdly, from mental predispositions and aberrations of the soul; and fourthly, from the assaults of demons who wage war with us in all the passions. Although *logismoi* first appear on the horizon of the mind, they are immediately transmitted to the heart, so that we feel as though they arise from the heart. The Lord Himself referred to this saying, *for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.* (Mt 15:19).

In its physiological prayerful state, noetic energy moves cyclically like an axle turning within the heart. In its ailing state, noetic energy does not turn like an axle cyclically, but while being rooted in the heart, it unfolds and cleaves to the brain and creates a short-circuit between the brain and the heart. So, the concepts of the brain that are all from the environment become concepts of noetic energy always rooted in the heart. Thus, the sufferer becomes a slave of his environment. The undefeatable weapon against the devil is the healing of this short circuit between the heart's noetic energy and the brain's reason. The healing consists of the limitation of all concepts in the brain, whether they be good or bad, which is achieved only when the noetic energy of the heart returns to its physiological cyclical movement by means of unceasing noetic prayer. Those who maintain that it is possible to cast out bad concepts and keep only good ones in the brain are naive. One must know the concepts of the devil with precision to defeat him. This is achieved by means of the cyclical movement of prayer in the heart.

Based on the above, anyone who has thoughts in his heart, whether they are good thoughts or bad, is mentally ill from the Patristic perspective. It makes no difference whether these thoughts are moral, extremely moral, immoral, or anything else. In other words, according to the Church Fathers, anyone whose soul has not been purified from the passions and who has not reached the state of illumination through the grace of the Holy Spirit is mentally ill, but not in the psychiatric sense. It should be noted that for a psychiatrist, being mentally ill is an entirely different topic. It means suffering from psychosis or being schizophrenic. For Orthodoxy, however, if you have not been purified of the passions and have not reached a state of *illumination*, are you normal or abnormal? That is the question.

Who is considered a normal Orthodox Christian in the Patristic tradition? If you want to see this, read the service of Holy Baptism, read the service of Holy Chrism that is held at the Patriarchate of Constantinople on Holy Thursday, read the service for the consecration of Church sanctuaries. There you will see what it means to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. There you will see who is truly *illuminated*.

In all of the Church services as well as the ascetic tradition of the Church, three spiritual states are mentioned: the state in which the soul and body have been *purified* from the passions, the state in which the human nous has been *illuminated* by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the state in which the human soul and body experience *theosis*.¹ For the most part, however, they speak about *purification* and *illumination*, since the Church services are expressions of reasonable worship.² So, who is the normal Orthodox Christian? Can someone who has been baptized but not *purified* be considered normal? What about someone who has not yet been *illuminated*? Or is it someone who has been *purified* and *illuminated*? Naturally, someone in the last category, the person who is *purified* and *illuminated*, is the normal Orthodox Christian.

So, what makes normal Orthodox Christians different from the rest of the Orthodox? Is it dogma? Of course not! Take the Orthodox in general. They all share the same dogma, the same tradition, and the same common worship. A Church sanctuary, for example, might hold three hundred Orthodox Christians. Of that number, however, only five are in a state of *illumination*, while the rest of them are not. The rest of them have not even the slightest idea what *purification* is. So this raises the question: How many among them are normal Orthodox Christians? Unfortunately, out of the three hundred only five are.

All the same, *purification* and *illumination* are specific conditions of healing that experienced and *illuminated* spiritual fathers can recognize. So, after all, we do have here clearly medical criteria. Or maybe you are not convinced that these criteria are strictly medical? Consider the fact that the *nous* is a physiological human organ that everyone has. It is not

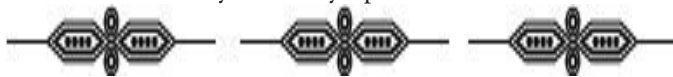
only Greeks and Orthodox that have a *nous*, so do Muslims, Buddhists, and everyone else. So all human beings have the same need for *purification* and *illumination*. And there is only one true therapeutic treatment—the one offered by the Holy Orthodox Church.

† † †
NOTES

(1) Although many Orthodox theologians who write in English translate the Patristic term *theosis* as *deification*, that translation is problematic, because the wider public associates *deification* with the imperial cult of Rome. Toward the end of the republic, the Senate would formally “deify” certain emperors. Although this practice began in Rome with the “deification” of Romulus as the god Quirinus, it was common to ancient and oriental monarchies as a form of ancestor worship, reverence, or even flattery. The Classical Greek term for this kind of “deification” was *apotheosis* (the term *theosis* was seldom used prior to the Patristic period). It implies polytheism and the notion that some individuals can cross the line separating the created and the uncreated. This *deification* was condemned and mocked by early Christian apologists such as St. Justin Martyr and Tertullian.

In his English writings, Fr. John consistently avoids the term *deification*, sparingly uses the term *theosis* as it is (although he uses it frequently in Greek), and prefers the term *glorification*. The value of a term such as *glorification* is that it reflects both the Biblical continuity and the nature of the experience. According to the will of God, the prophets could see God’s glory, the Apostles could see Christ’s glory at the Transfiguration, and the saints still can see the glory of the Resurrected and Ascended Lord.

(2) Worship associated with texts formulated by the reason that is illumined by the Holy Spirit.



ON “EPISCOPAL SYNODS”

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001).

Some people are convinced that sacred tradition is guarded by “episcopal synods.” But contemporary synods in the Orthodox Church are not like the local or ecumenical councils of bishops in the age of the early Christians, because the early councils were composed of bishops who had mastered the Church’s therapeutic method. Their aim in coming together as a council was not merely to safeguard the Church’s doctrine and liturgical order, as is the case today. No, their aim was **to preserve and protect the Church’s therapeutic method.** So a proper bishop is a **master of the therapeutic method of the Church.** During those early years, the work of a bishops’ synod was absolutely vital, more so than today. Their task was to preserve and protect the Church’s therapeutic method and curative treatment.

But when the bishops’ synod would safeguard this method, they would struggle along two fronts. The inner front involved taking care to safeguard sound ascetic culture and practices within the Church. The outer front consisted in safeguarding doctrinal teachings for the cure of the soul. Another aspect of the inner front was protecting dogmas from heresies, which always have their source in people who have not mastered the proper therapeutic method. Whenever an innovation appears within the Church, it always means, from the very moment it appears, that the person introducing the innovation not only fails to view doctrine properly, but he also fails to be in a healthy spiritual state.

Some of the greatest Fathers of the Church were systematizers who situated their understanding of doctrine in the context of the therapeutic method. They include St. John of Damascus, St. Maximos the Confessor, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Dionysios the Areopagite, and the disciples of St. Gregory Palamas among others. Moreover, we also find all these basic principles present and organized in the works of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, as well as in the works of St. Ignatios the God-bearer, because this is an unbroken tradition dating back to the first century. The same basic principles are also present throughout St. Paul’s epistles, as well as throughout the entire Old and New Testament. If we have the proper criteria, we can discover the presence of these basic principles and locate them in texts that contain them.

St. Makarios of Egypt carefully explains these issues by setting forth a coherent body of principles. He claims that *Christians who do not have noetic prayer are not intrinsically different from believers in other religions.* The only factor that makes such Christians different from believers of other religions is that these Christians intellectually believe in Christ and merely accept Christian doctrine, while the believers in other religions do not accept Christian doctrine. But such Christians do not gain anything from this kind of intellectual faith, because it does not heal them or purify their hearts from the passions. In terms of healing the human personality, they remain without benefit and with behavior that does not differ from that of non-Christians. This can be seen in their way of life.

Consider an Orthodox Christian whose soul is sick, but who not only fails to struggle to be healed, but does not even imagine that the Church has an effective therapeutic strategy for curing his sickness. What is the difference between such a nominal Orthodox Christian and a Muslim, for example? Does doctrine make him different? But what good is doctrine when it is not used as a pathway towards healing? **What good is doctrine when it is merely kept hung up in the closet so that it can be worshipped?** In other words, what is the point of worshipping the letter of the dogma and ignoring its spirit, hidden within the letter?

Ἡ Κυρὰ - Σαρακοστή

Γράφει ὁ Πρωτ. π. Θεμιστοκλῆς Μουρτζανός.

Όταν ἦμουν μικρὸ παιδὶ καὶ ἔφτανε αὐτὴ ἡ λεγόμενη Καθαρὴ Ἑβδομάδα, στὸ σχολεῖο μᾶς μιλοῦσαν γιὰ μίαν παράξενη γυναίκα μὲ 7 πόδια! Τὴ γυναίκα αὐτὴ τὴ λέγαμε Κυρὰ-Σαρακοστή! Μᾶς ἔβαζαν καὶ τὴ ζωγραφίζαμε καὶ κάθε βδομάδα τῆς σβήναμε ἀπὸ ἓνα πόδι! Ἔτσι περνούσαμε τὸ διάστημα αὐτὸ μὲ τὴν ἀναμονὴ τοῦ Πάσχα, ὅταν θὰ σβήναμε καὶ τὸ τελευταῖο πόδι της. Θυμᾶμαι μὲ πόση χαρὰ περιμέναμε αὐτὸ τὸ διάστημα καὶ γιὰ τὰ κούλουμα καὶ γιὰ τὰ Σαρακοστιανὰ, τὴν ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ φαγητοῦ!

Βέβαια, κάπου μᾶς πείραζε τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι δὲν μπορούσαμε νὰ φᾶμε τὰ σχολικὰ ἐδέσματα, ἀπὸ τὴν τυρόπιτα μέχρι τὴ σοκολάτα, καὶ περιοριζόμεσταν στὸ ἀπλὸ καὶ ταπεινὸ κουλουράκι, ὅμως κανένας ἀπὸ μᾶς δὲν ἔλεγε νὰ ὑποκύψει στὸν πειρασμὸ καὶ ἐφόσον ἡ μητέρα μας δὲν ἦταν μπροστὰ νὰ κάνουμε μίαν μικροπαράβαση τοῦ τῆς νηστείας κανόνα! Ἀντίθετα, ἦμασταν περήφανοι ποὺ νηστεύαμε καὶ χαιρόμασταν φοβερὰ τὴ Πασχαλιάτικη μαγειρίτσα ποὺ ἔρχονταν μετὰ ἀπὸ μίαν ὑπέρβαση τοῦ συνηθισμένου γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία ζήλου!

Καὶ σήμερα πολλοὶ ἀνθρώποι νηστεύουν, ὄχι μόνον τὴ Σαρακοστή, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὶς ἄλλες νηστείες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ Τετάρτη καὶ ἡ Παρασκευή. Ὅμως ἡ νηστεία τῆς κυρὰ-Σαρακοστῆς παραμένει ἡ πιὸ σπουδαία νηστεία τοῦ χρόνου γιὰτὶ συνδυάζεται μὲ κάποια ἄλλα στοιχεῖα πολὺτιμα καί... γιὰ τὸ σύγχρονο ἄνθρωπο. Νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι 40 εἶναι οἱ ἡμέρες τῆς νηστείας γιὰτὶ τόσες μέρες νήστεψε ὁ Χριστὸς στὴν ἔρημο, μετὰ τὴ Βάπτισή Του, ἐνῶ οἱ 40 ἡμέρες εἶναι περίπου τὸ 1/10 τοῦ χρόνου, κι αὐτὸ τὸ 1/10 ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ ἀφιερώνει στὸ Θεό;

Δυστυχῶς, ὅπως ὅλα τὰ θρησκευτικὰ στοιχεῖα, ἔτσι κι ἡ Σαρακοστή ἔχει ἀπολέσει τὸ βαθύτερο νόημά της σήμερα, ἴσως μὲ εὐθύνη καὶ τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν ἀρχῶν. Κι αὐτὸ γιὰτὶ ἔχει τονιστεῖ ὑπὲρ τὸ δέον τὸ θέμα τῆς σωματικῆς νηστείας καὶ καθόλου δὲν τονίζονται τὰ συμπαρομαρτούντα της, τὰ ὁποῖα προσδίδουν καὶ τὴν οὐσία της. Γιὰτὶ ἡ Σαρακοστή εἶναι ἡ ἀφορμὴ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο τοῦ 21^{ου} αἰῶνα νὰ ἐπαναδιατυπώσει μέσα του τὸ νόημα τῆς ζωῆς.

Σαρακοστή σημαίνει πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα νηστεία ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀπὸ ὅ,τι δηλαδὴ μᾶς ἀσχημίζει ἐσωτερικά. Ὁ σύγχρονος ἄνθρωπος ἔχει πολλὰ πάθη καὶ ἀδυναμίες, τὰ ὁποῖα δυστυχῶς τὰ ὠραιοποιεῖ καὶ τὰ θεωρεῖ φυσικά. Τὸ πρῶτο καὶ κυριότερο πάθος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ὁ ἐγωισμὸς, ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο πάσχουμε ὅλοι ἀνεξαιρέτως. Ἡ σωματικὴ νηστεία μᾶς βοηθᾷ νὰ περιορίσουμε τὸ νὰ θέλουμε διαρκῶς, κάνοντας ἐγκράτεια στὰ φαγητὰ ταυτόχρονα κάνουμε ἐγκράτεια στὴ διαρκὴ ἱκανοποίηση τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν μας! Σκεφτεῖτε τὴ πρόταση ζωῆς προβάλλει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας: Στὴν καταναλωτικὴ ἀδηφαγία καὶ ἐγωιστικὴ αὐτάρκεια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μιᾶ γιὰ τὸν περιορισμὸ τῶν ἀναγκῶν καὶ τὴν ταπείνωση καὶ τοῦ σώματος καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς!

Σαρακοστή ἀκόμα σημαίνει ἐπαναβίωση τοῦ λατρευτικοῦ στοιχείου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἡ κατάνυξη στὶς Προηγιασμένες Λειτουργίες, ἡ προσευχὴ στὴν Παναγία

μας μὲ τοὺς Χαιρετισμοὺς της, ἐκεῖνες οἱ ὠραιότατες λειτουργίες τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου κάθε Κυριακῆ, τὸ Μεγάλον Ἀπόδειπνον καὶ ὁ θρηνητικὸς Μεγάλος Κανόνας, ποιητικὰ κείμενα ὑψίστης ἀξίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρουσίας ἐνὸς τρόπου ζωῆς ποὺ ἀπεικονίζει τὴ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Στὸν σύγχρονο κόσμον τῆς κραιπνῆς, τοῦ φτηνοῦ ἐντυπωσιασμοῦ, τῶν δυνα-



τῶν ἡχῶν καὶ τῆς χειρίστης ποιότητος μουσικῆς, ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ λατρεία μιᾶ στὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μυστικά, μὲ τοὺς κατανυκτικοὺς βυζαντινοὺς ψαλμοὺς της, τὸ ἰλαρὸν φῶς τῶν κεριῶν, μὲ τὴ μετοχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα στὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Παναγίας, μὲ τὴν μετοχὴ στὸ χρόνο τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀποφυγὴ τοῦ ἄγχους τῆς γῆς. Στὸν κόσμον ποὺ προβάλλει ὡς ἰδανικὸ του τὴν τάση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ τὰ προλαβαίνει ὅλα καὶ τὴν παντοκρατορία τῆς τεχνολογίας καὶ τῶν νέων ὄπλων, ἡ Ἐκκλησία προβάλλει τὴν προσευχὴ ὡς ἔκφραση ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τὸ συνάνθρωπο, τὴν εὐχαριστία πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ γιὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸ τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴν πρόνοιά Του γιὰ μᾶς! Ἡ φράση τῶν Πατέρων «**Κύριε ὅπως ξέρεις καὶ ὅπως θέλεις, ἐλέησόν με...**» εἶναι ἡ ἐπανάσταση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στὸν ἀκτιβισμὸ τοῦ κόσμου!

Ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχει κι ἓνα τρίτο στοιχεῖο στὴ Σαρακοστή ποὺ τῆς προσδίδει οὐσία. Εἶναι τὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς χαρμολύπης! Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας

αὐτὴ ἡ περίοδος εἶναι ἡ ἀποτύπωση τῆς πραγματικῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ καθενὸς ἀνθρώπου. Λύπη γιὰ τὴν ἐξορία μας ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο ποὺ γιὰ μᾶς δὲν εἶναι τίποτε ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν κοινωνία μὲ τὸ Θεό, λύπη καὶ μετάνοια γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας, λύπη γιὰ τὰ ἐπικείμενα πάθη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ ὅ,τι μᾶς βασανίζει στὴ ζωὴ μας, ἀλλὰ ταυτόχρονα καὶ χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴ ζωὴ μας, χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν ξαναγεννημένη ἐπιθυμία γιὰ τὸ Θεό, εἰρήνη γιὰ τὴν ἐπιστροφή μας στὸ σπῆναι Του ποὺ εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία, εἶναι ἡ χαρὰ τῆς ἐπικείμενης Ἀνάστασης ποὺ δεσπόζει ἀκόμα καὶ στὶς πένθημα κατανυκτικές Ἀκολουθίες τῆς κυρά-Σαρακοστής!

«Πάντα τὴ Μεγάλῃ Παρασκευῇ, νᾶ ὄσαι μόνος σὸν τὸ Χριστὸ προσμένοντας τὸ τελευταῖο καρφί, τὸ ξύδι, τὴ λόγγη. Τὶς ζαριές ν' ἀκοῦς ἀτάραχα σὸ μοῖρασμα τῶν ὑπαρχόντων σου, τὶς βλαστήμιες, τὶς προκλήσεις, τὴν ἀδιαφορία. Πρὶν τὴν Παρασκευῇ δὲν ἔρχεται ἡ Κυριακῇ, ποὺ τότε λησιμονᾶς τὰ μαρτύρια τῶν δρόμων τῆς Μεγάλῃ Παρασκευῆς τῆς ζωῆς μας. Μὴν ξαφνιαστεῖς, μὴ φοβηθεῖς σ' ἀπρόσμενο σουρούπωμα. Οἱ μπόρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ δὲ στερεοῦν. Ἡ ξαστεριά θὰ ἔρθει τὸ Σαββατόβραδο. Τότε λησιμονᾶς τὰ μαρτύρια τῶν δρόμων τῆς μεγάλῃ Παρασκευῆς τῆς ζωῆς μας.» (Μοναχὸς Μωϋσῆς).

Εἶναι ὁμορφὴ ἡ κυρα-Σαρακοστή γιὰ τὴν μᾶς φέρνει κοντὰ στὴν Ἀνάσταση. Κι ὅταν αὐτὴ θὰ ἔρθει θὰ λησιμονήσουμε τοὺς κόπους καὶ τὸ δάκρυ, καὶ θὰ γευτοῦμε τὴ χαρὰ καὶ τὸ φῶς τῆς καινούργιας ζωῆς! Στὴ βουὴ τοῦ κόσμου, στὰ πάθη τῶν ἀνθρώπων, στὸ χάος τοῦ τίποτα ἕνα νόημα ζωῆς, ἕνας κόσμος βασισιμένος στὴν ἀγάπη, τὴν προσευχή, τὴν κάθαρη ἀνατέλλει μπροστὰ μας. Ἄς τὸν γευτοῦμε κι ἂς τὸν περπατήσουμε! Τὸν ἔχουμε ἀνάγκη...

Καλὴ Σαρακοστή!



Ἡ κάθε καλὴ ἰδέα ποὺ ἔρχεται στὸν ἀνθρώπινο νοῦ εἶναι ἀπὸ ἄνω ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Μόνο ὅτι κατεβάξει ἡ μύτη μας μὲ τὸ συνάχι εἶναι δικό μας.

Ὅσοι γεννήθηκαν ἀνάπηροι ἢ ἔγιναν ἀνάπηροι ἀπὸ ἄλλους ἢ ἀπὸ δική τους ἀπροσεξία, ἂν δὲν γογγύζουν ἀλλὰ δοξάζουν ταπεινὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ζοῦν κοντὰ στὸν Χριστό, μὲ τοὺς ὁμολογητὲς θὰ τοὺς κατατάξει ὁ Θεός.

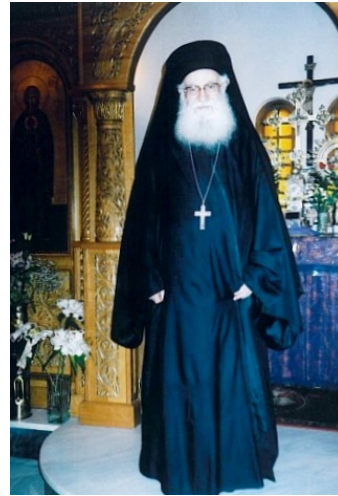
Ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δέχονται τὶς πλούσιες εὐλογίες τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ λίγοι εὐχαριστοῦν τὸν Θεὸ καὶ εἶναι εὐχαριστημένοι καὶ χαρούμενοι κοντὰ στὸν Χριστό. Πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι τὰ ἔχουν ὅλα ἀλλὰ ἔχουν καὶ λύπη γιὰ τὸν τοὺς λείπει ὁ Χ ρ ι σ τ ὁ ς.

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης

Προφητικὴ Ὁμιλία τοῦ 1981!

Γιὰ τὸν Πρόδρομο τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου ποὺ εἶναι Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς, τοὺς Μουσουλμάνους καὶ τὴν Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἐνωση.

Ἀπὸ τὴν ὁμιλία τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ π. Ἀθανασίου Μυτιληναίου, στίς 15.11.1981, ἐπὶ τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης «Δανιὴλ».



Νὰ ξέρετε ὅμως, ὅτι ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς εἶναι ὁ τελευταῖος πρόδρομος τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου· διότι ὅταν θὰ γίνῃ μιὰ ἰσοπέδωσις θρησκευτικὴ καὶ πολιτικὴ, κυβερνητικὴ, καὶ θὰ ὑπάρξῃ ἕνας μόνον ποὺ θὰ κυβερνήσῃ τὸν κόσμον, αὐτὸς ὁ ἕνας κατὰ τὴν Ἁγίαν Γραφήν καὶ τοὺς Πατέρες, αὐτὸς θὰ εἶναι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος.

Προσέξτε σ' αὐτὸ τὸ σημεῖο· ἴσως ἐδῶ θὰ

καταλάβετε τὸ κλειδί, τὸ γιὰ τὴν ἐδιώκοντο οἱ Χριστιανοί. Εἶναι ἕνα πάρα πολὺ σημαντικό σημεῖο, ποὺ πιθανῶς νὰ σᾶς λυθῇ μιὰ ἀπορία. Βέβαια πολλοὶ ἄρχοντες μετὰ τὸν Ναβουχοδονόσορα τὸ εἶχαν ἐπιχειρήσει αὐτό, ὅπως καὶ οἱ Ρωμαῖοι τὸ εἶχαν ἐπιχειρήσει, ὅπως καὶ σήμερα ἐπιχειρεῖται αὐτό. Ξέρετε πὼς ἐπιχειρεῖται αὐτὸ σήμερα; μὲ τὸν Οἰκουμενισμὸν!

Ὅταν ἐπὶ παραδείγματι λέμε: «Τὶ θὰ πῆ εἴσατε Ὁρθόδοξοι; τί θὰ πῆ εἴσατε Ρωμαιοκαθολικοί; τίποτα. Μποροῦμε νὰ τὰ βάλωμε αὐτὰ σ' ἕνα χαρμάνι καὶ νὰ βγάλωμε ἕνα καινούργιο πρᾶγμα». Μάλιστα, ἐσχεδιάζετε νὰ γίνῃ στὴν Ἀμερικὴ ἕνας ναός, ὁ ὁποῖος θὰ εἶχε μίαν σκεπὴν, ἀλλὰ μέσα θὰ ἦταν τρεῖς ναοί, ἢ τέσσερες ναοί, ἴσως πέντε. Ἀκοῦστε· θὰ ἦταν οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, οἱ Ρωμαιοκαθολικοί, οἱ Πρωτεστάνται, οἱ Μωαμεθανοὶ καὶ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι. Ὅλοι θὰ ἦσαν κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ ἴδια κεραμίδια, κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδιαν σκεπὴν.

Αὐτὸ ἦταν ἕνα ἐπιχείρημα, νὰ δοθῇ σὰρκα καὶ ὀστᾶ στὴν ἰδέα τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ. Καὶ σήμερα ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς ὑπερ-ὑπάρχει, καὶ ὅπως θὰ γνωρίζετε εἶναι ὁ ὑπ' ἀριθμὸν ἕνα ἐχθρός, ὄχι μόνον τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἀπλῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ γενικὰ τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ.

Δέν εἶναι πολλὰ χρόνια, λίγο μετὰ τὸ 1970, ὅταν στίς ἐφημερίδες ἐγράφοντο κάτι ἄρθρα ὑπὲρ τοῦ Μωαμεθανισμοῦ. Καὶ μάλιστα σὲ μιά, θὰ λέγαμε, διπλωματικὴ σχέσι μετὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτο, ὅτι ἡ ἡμέρα ποὺ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ θὰ ἐνωθοῦν μὲ τοὺς Μωαμεθανοὺς εἶναι πολὺ κοντὰ. Ἀκούσατε;... Εἶναι ἀπίθανο, εἶναι

δηλαδή άδιανόητα πράγματα. Αυτά, έπιχειρούνται και τελεσιουργούνται αυτήν την στιγμή. Είναι ήγεμονική τελεσιουργία αυτή.

Ποιός ό σκοπός; Βέβαια είναι σχέδια του παγκοσμίου Σιωνισμού, ώστε με τον Οικουμενισμό να δημιουργήσουν μία θρησκευτική ένότητα των λαών, δήθεν εν όνόματι της ειρήνης, ενώ στην πραγματικότητα είναι δια την ύποταξη του κόσμου σε μία παγκοσμία κυβέρνηση. Μάλιστα την πρωτοχρονιά του 1980, ένας πολιτικός της Ελλάδος, είχε μιλήσει γι' αυτήν την παγκοσμιά κυβέρνηση, ότι δεν άργεί ή ήμερα που θα έρθη αυτή ή παγκοσμία κυβέρνηση.

Ξεκινούν όμως από τον θρησκευτικόν τομέα, γιατί, όπως ξέρετε, ό θρησκευτικός τομέας είναι εκείνος ό οποίος χωρίζει τους λαούς, και αυτή τη στιγμή, έπι παραδείγματι, είδατε πώς κινούνται οι Άραβες; Δεν πολιτικολογώ μ' αυτά που λέγω. Θέλω να σας δώσω να δήτε τó φόντο των πραγμάτων διότι είναι Μουσουλμάνοι και στρέφονται έναντίον των Χριστιανών. Αντιθέτως οι ίδιοι θέλουν να είναι ήνωμένοι, άλλο άν δεν τó καταφέρουν αυτό τó πράγμα: έτερον έκατερον. Λέγονται άδελφοί Μουσουλμάνοι, όπως θα λεγόμαστε έμεις άδελφοί Χριστιανοί.

Να ξέρετε όμως, ότι ό Οικουμενισμός είναι ό τελευταίος πρόδρομος του Άντιχρίστου διότι όταν θα γίνη μια ίσοπέδωσις θρησκευτική και πολιτική, κυβερνητική, και θα ύπάρξη ένας μόνον που θα κυβερνήση τον κόσμο, αυτός ό ένας κατά την Αγίαν Γραφήν και τους Πατέρες, αυτός θα είναι ό Άντίχριστος.

Έτσι ό Οικουμενισμός χαρακτηρίστηκε άντίχριστον σύστημα, από τους μεγαλύτερους θεολόγους της έποχής μας, όπως από τον μακαρίτην τον π. Ίουστίνο Πόποβιτς, Σέρβο, άλλα και από άλλους έπιφανείς θεολόγους Όρθοδόξους. Χωρίς δηλαδή περιστροφές.

Έτσι εδώ ό Ναβουχοδονόσορ θέλει να δημιουργήση έναν θρησκευτικόν οικουμενισμόν. Δηλαδή βλέπει κανένας ότι οι ρίζες πραγμάτων που έπιχειρούνται στην έποχή μας δεν είναι καινούργιες είναι παλιές, είναι πολύ βαθιές, ανήκουν μέσα στην Ίστορία.

Άλλα ό Ναβουχοδονόσορ ήθελε να επιτύχη και κάτι άλλο: ήθελε να επιτύχη μίαν έθνική ένότητα: και αυτή ήταν, άν όλοι οι ύπο κατοχήν λαοί, έλάτρευαν τον θεόν Μαρδούχ, και έτσι δεν ήτανε πολύ εύκολο να ύπάρξη μία έπανάστασις εκ μέρους ενός λαού, ό οποίος σιγά-σιγά, αφού θα έλάτρευε τον Μαρδούχ, τον πολιούχον της Βαβυλώνος, θα ήσθάνετο ότι στρέφεται έναντίον της Βαβυλώνος ως εις τον θεόν της Βαβυλώνος.

Ξέρουμε ότι οι Ρωμαίοι αυτοκράτορες θεοποιούσαν τον έαυτόν τους. Η θεοποίησις των αυτοκρατόρων δεν έχει άπλως θρησκευτικόν χαρακτήρα, άλλα και πολιτικόν: διότι μόλις άνευρησσετο ένας αυτοκράτωρ, άμέσως έφτιαχναν άγάλματά του σ' όλη την ρωμαϊκήν

έπικράτεια, και διετάσσοντο όλοι οι ύπο κατοχήν λαοί να προσκυνούν τó άγαλμα του θεού αυτοκράτορος και να προσφέρουν εις αυτό θυσίες. Γιατί; Χάριν πολιτικής ένότητος. Είναι κάτι άνάλογο που σήμερα συμβαίνει με την Εύρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ε. Ε. ή Ε.Ο.Κ.). Προσέξτε να ιδήτε.

Σας είπα δεν είναι καινούργια πράγματα: είναι πολύ-πολύ παλιά αυτά. Η Ε. Ε. είναι ένας οικονομικός όργανισμός. Φαινομενικά είναι ένας οικονομικός όργανισμός, όμως είναι κάτι πολύ περισσότερο. Αν ανοίξετε την παλιά έγκυκλοπαίδεια του Πυρσοϋ, ύπάρχει ένα πολύ μεγάλο άρθρο που αναφέρεται σ' αυτήν την άπόπειρα της Ήνωμένης Εύρώπης, εϋθύς μετά τον Α' παγκόσμιον πόλεμον, με ξεκίνημα την οικονομικήν ένότητα της Εύρώπης και με τέλος, την πολιτικήν ένότητα της Εύρώπης.

Άς ύποθέσουμε ότι ύπάρχει ένας συνεταιρισμός σιταριού και πηγαίνουν όλοι οι παραγωγοί τó σιτάρι τους εκεί. Αυτός ό συνεταιρισμός ν' άρχιση, (πέρα από την περίπτωσι συλλογής σίτου), να λήη στους άνθρώπους, τους παραγωγούς, και να όρίξη έναν τρόπο ζωής που να είναι όμοιος στα σπίτια τους. Θα σας φαινόταν παράξενο αυτό; Δηλαδή να έξαγγέλλη μέτρα ό συνεταιρισμός που να προσαρμόζονται όλοι οι συνεταιίροι κάτω από τα μέτρα του συνεταιρισμού. Είναι άδιανόητον! Ό συνεταιρισμός δεν ενδιαφέρεται παρὰ μόνον να παραλάβη τó σιτάρι. Τι θα κάνης σπίτι σου έσύ, τι θα φάς, πώς περνάς με τη γυναίκα σου και τα παιδιά σου, τι πιστεύεις, αυτό δεν ενδιαφέρει τον συνεταιρισμό.

Άλλα τον οικονομικόν συνεταιρισμόν που λέγεται Ε. Ε. ενδιαφέρει. Γι' αυτό έρχεται και λείει στη Βουλή των Έλλήνων ότι θα εισαχθή αυτός ό νόμος, εκείνος ό νόμος κ.τ.λ... Φέρ' είπειν: Οι Χιλιασταί θα κινούνται έτσι, οι όμοφυλόφιλοι, θα γίνη νόμος και θα άμνηστευθούν, ή μοιχεία θα άμνηστευθή, οι άμβλώσεις, οι έκτρώσεις θα γίνη νόμος να άμνηστευθούν, δεν θα καταδικάζεται πλέον ούτε ό γιατρός ούτε ό άνθρωπος, ή γυναίκα που κάνει άμβλωσι, έκτρωσι: όχι. Αυτά γιατί; Λείει για να έχωμε προσαρμογή από νομοθετικής πλευράς με την Εύρώπη! Γιατί; Για ποιόν λόγο; Για να 'χωμε Ήνωμένη Εύρώπη: για να πρέπη να σκεφτώμαστε όλοι τó ίδιο!...

Οι ρίζες αυτών των καταστάσεων ανήκουνε πολύ παλιά! Να μια πρώτη: ό Ναβουχοδονόσορ, με τó χρυσό αυτό άγαλμα, και καλεί όλους τους διοικητάς, τοπάρχας, ύψηλά πρόσωπα και τα λοιπά, να έρθουν να προσκυνήσουν τó χρυσό αυτό άγαλμα, την χρυσή εικόνα. Δόθηκε ή έντολή ως έξης: όταν θα έπαιζαν μουσικά όργανα, θα έπεφταν όλοι να προσκυνήσουν τον Μαρδούχ...

Ό έχων όπα άκούειν άκουέτω!

Ἡ Ἐπανάσταση τοῦ 1821

Ἡ Ἑλληνική Ἐπανάσταση εἶναι ἡ πῶς πνευματική ἐπανάσταση πού ἐγίνε στὸ κόσμο. Εἶναι ἀγιασμένη!

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἡ ἐπανάσταση γίνεται τις περισσότερες φορές ἀπὸ κάποιες ὑλικές αἰτίες, πὸν εἶναι ἡ σκλαβιά, ἡ στέρηση, ἡ κακοπέραση, τὰ βασανιστήρια, ἡ περιφρόνηση. Ἡ λευτεριά εἶναι ἡ θεότητα πὸν λατρεύει ὁ ἐπαναστάτης, καὶ γι' αὐτὴ χύνει τὸ αἷμα του. Μὰ τὴ λευτεριά, πολλές φορές, σὰν τὴν ἀποχτήσῃ ὁ ἐπαναστάτης, δὲν τὴ μεταχειρίζεται γιὰ πνευματικούς σκοπούς, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ χαρεῖ τὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ μονάχα. Κοντὰ στὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ ἔρχεται κ' ἡ πνευματικὴ, μὰ τις περισσότερες φορές γιὰ πνευματικὴ ζωὴ θεωροῦνε οἱ ἄνθρωποι κάποιες ἀπολαύσεις πὸν εἶναι κι αὐτὲς ὑλικές, κι ἄς φαίνονται σὰν πνευματικές.

Ἐνας ἐπαναστάτης τῆς Γαλλικῆς ἐπανάστασης, νὰ ποῦμε, θεωροῦσε γιὰ πνευματικὰ κάποια πράγματα πού, σι' ἀλήθεια, δὲν ἦταν πνευματικὰ. Αὐτὸς ἤθελε ν' ἀποχτήσῃ τὴ λευτεριά, γιὰ νὰ κάνει αὐτὰ πὸν νόμιζε πὸς εἶναι σωστὰ καὶ δίκαια γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμον μοναχά, δηλαδὴ γιὰ τὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ τους, μὴ πιστεύοντας πὸς ὑπάρχει τίποτ' ἄλλο γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἐπιδιώξῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω πὸς, γιὰ τις περισσότερες ἐπαναστάσεις, οἱ αἰτίες πὸν τις κάνανε νὰ ξεσπάσουνε σταθήκανε ὑλικές, καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία πὸν ἐπιδιώξανε ἦταν προορισμένη νὰ... ἰκανοποιήσῃ μονάχα ὑλικές ἀνάγκες.

Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ὅμως Ἐπανάσταση εἶχε μὲν γιὰ αἰτία καὶ τις ὑλικές στέρησεις καὶ τὴ κακοπάθησῃ τοῦ κορμιοῦ, ὅπως ἡ κάθε ἐπανάστασις,

ἀλλά, ἀπάνω ἀπ' αὐτὲς τις αἰτίες, εἶχε καὶ κάποιες πὸν εἶναι καθαρὰ πνευματικές. Καὶ πνευματικὸ, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, ἀληθινὰ πνευματικὸ, εἶναι ὅ,τι ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὸ πνευματικὸ μέρος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, μὲ τὴ ψυχὴ του, δηλαδὴ μὲ τὴ θρησκεία.

Ἡ σκλαβιά πὸν ἔσπρωξε τοὺς Ἕλληνες νὰ ξεσηκωθοῦνε καταπάνω στὸ Τουρκο δὲν ἦταν μοναχά ἡ στέρηση καὶ ἡ κακοπάθησῃ τοῦ κορμιοῦ, ἀλλά, ἀπάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, τὸ ὅτι ὁ τύραννος ἤθελε νὰ χαλάσῃ τὴ πίστη τους, μποδίζοντάς τους ἀπὸ τὰ θρησκευτικὰ

χρῆμα τους, ἀλλαξοπιστίζοντάς τους καὶ σφάζοντας ἢ κρεμάζοντάς τους, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἀρνιόντανε τὴ πίστη τους γιὰ νὰ γίνουνε μωχαμετάνοι. Γιὰ τοῦτο πίστη καὶ πατρίδα εἶχανε γίνῃ ἓνα καὶ τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα, καὶ ἡ λευτεριά πὸν ποθοῦσανε δὲν ἦταν μονάχα ἡ λευτεριά πὸν ποθοῦνε ὅλοι οἱ ἐπαναστάτες, ἀλλὰ ἡ λευτεριά νὰ φυλάξουνε τὴν ἀγιασμένη πίστη τους, πὸν μ' αὐτὴν ἐλπίζανε νὰ σώσουνε τὴ ψυχὴ τους. Γιὰ τὸ, γι' αὐτούς, κοντὰ στὸ κορμί, πὸν ἔχει τόσες ἀνάγκες καὶ πὸν μὲ τόσα βάρη γίνεται ἡ συντήρησῃ του, ὑπῆρχε καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, πὸν εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς πὸς ἀξίζει περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ὅσο περισσότερο ἀξίζει τὸ ροῦχο ἀπ' αὐτό.

Ἐκεῖνες οἱ ἀπλὲς ψυχές, πὸν ζούσανε στὰ βουνὰ καὶ στὰ ρημοτόπια, ἦτανε διδαγμένες ἀπὸ τοὺς πατεράδες τους στὴ πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ γνωρίζανε, μ' ὅλο πὸν ἦτανε ἀγράμματα, κάποια ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια του,

ὅπως εἶναι τοῦτα: «*Τί θὰ ὠφελήσῃ ἄραγε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἂν κερδίσῃ τὸν κόσμον ὅλο, καὶ ζημιωθῇ τὴ ψυχὴ του;*» Ἡ: «*Τί θὰ δώσει ἄνθρωπος γιὰ πληρωμὴ τῆς ψυχῆς του;*» Καὶ «*Ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι πῶς πολύτιμη ἀπὸ τὴ τροφή, ὅπως τὸ κορμί ἀπὸ τὸ φόρεμα!*» κ. ἄ.

Γιὰ τοῦτο, κατὰ τὰ πικρὰ χρόνια τῆς σκλαβιάς μας, χιλιάδες παλληκάρια σφαχτήκανε καὶ κρεμαστήκανε γιὰ τὴ πίστη τους, ἀψηφώντας τὴ νεότητά

τους, καὶ μὴ δίνοντας σημασία στὸ κορμί τους καὶ σὲ τοῦτῃ τὴ πρόσκαιρη ζωὴ. Στράτευμα ὀλάκερο εἶναι οἱ ἅγιοι νεομάρτυρες, πὸν δὲ θανατωθήκανε γιὰ τὰ ὑλικὰ ἀγαθὰ τούτης τῆς ζωῆς, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὴ πολύτιμη ψυχὴ τους, πὸν γνωρίζανε πὸς δὲ θὰ πεθάνει μαζί μὲ τὸ κορμί, ἀλλὰ θὰ ζῆσει αἰώνια. Ἀκούγανε καὶ πιστεύανε ἀτράνταχτα τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πὸν εἶπε: «*Μὴ φοβηθεῖτε ἐκεῖνον πὸν σκοτῶνει τὸ σῶμα, καὶ πὸν δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει τίποτα παραπάνω. Ἀλλὰ νὰ φοβηθεῖτε ἐκεῖνον πὸν μπορεῖ νὰ θανατώσει καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴ ψυχὴ.*»

Ἡ ἐλευθερία, πὸν γι' αὐτὴ θυσιάζονταν, δὲν ἦτανε κάποια ἀκαθόριστη θεότητα, ἀλλὰ ἦτανε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς, πὸν γι' αὐτὸν εἶπε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «*Ὁπου το Πνεῦμα τοῦ Κυρίου, ἐκεῖ εἶναι καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία.*» Κι ἄλλοῦ λέγει: «*Σταθεῖτε στερεὰ στὴν ἐλευθερία πὸν σὰς χάρισε ὁ Χριστὸς, σταθεῖτε καὶ*



Ὁ Παλαιὸν Πατρὸν Γερμανὸς ὑψώνει τὴ σημαία τῆς Ἀνεξαρτησίας

μὴν πέσετε πάλι στὸ ζυγὸ τῆς δουλείας. Γιατί γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία σᾶς κάλεσε. Ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία μὴν τὴν παίρνετε μονάχα σὰν ἀφορμὴ γιὰ τὴ σάρκα σας».

Γιὰ τοῦτο εἶναι ἀγιασμένη ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάσταση, κι ἀγιασμένοι οἱ πολεμιστές της, ὅπως ἦταν ἀγιασμένοι ὅσοι πολεμήσανε μαζί μὲ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Παλαιολόγο, πρὶν ἀπὸ τρακόσα ἐξηνταοχτῶ χρόνια, κατὰ τὸ πάρσιμο τῆς Πόλης, καταπάνω στὸν ἴδιο ὄχτρο τῆς πίστες τους.

Στὴν ἐπανάσταση τοῦ Εἰκοσι-ἑνα, ὅπως καὶ στὴν πολιορκία τῆς Πόλης, μαζί μὲ τοὺς λαϊκοὺς πολεμοῦσανε πλῆθος ρασοφορεμένοι, καλόγεροι, παπάδες καὶ δεσποτάδες, καὶ τραβούσανε μπροστὰ μὲ τὸ σταυρὸ στὸ χέρι, κι ἀπὸ πίσω τους χίμιζε κλαίγοντας ὁ λαός, κ' ἔφελνε: **«Γιὰ τῆς πατρίδος τὴν ἐλευθερία, γιὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν πίστη τὴν ἁγία, γι' αὐτὰ τὰ δύο πολεμῶ, μ' αὐτὰ νὰ ζήσω ἐπιθυμῶ, κι ἂν δὲν τὰ ἀποκτήσω, τί μ' ὠφελεῖ νὰ ζήσω;»**

Στὴ Πόλη κρεμάστηκε ὁ πατριάρχης Γρηγόριος, ἀνοίγοντας πρῶτος τὸ μαρτυρολόγιο τῆς Ἐπανάστασης. Ὁ Θανάσης Διάκος πολέμησε σὰν νέος Λεωνίδα, καὶ σουβλίστηκε γιὰ τὴ πίστη του. Ὁ Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανός, ὁ Ἡσαΐας Σαλώνων, ὁ Ρωγῶν Ἰωσήφ, ὁ Παπαφλέσσας, ὁ Οὐμῖος Βλαχάβας, κι ἄλλοι πολλοί, πολεμήσανε γιὰ τὴν ἀγιασμένη πατρίδα τους.

Στὴ Τριπολιτσὰ κλειστήκανε στὴ φυλακὴ κατὰ τὴν Ἐπανάσταση οἱ δεσποτάδες τοῦ Μοριά, κ' οἱ περισσότεροι πεθάνανε μὲ ἀβάσταχτα μαρτύρια. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ στὴ Πόλη, φυλακωθήκανε καὶ κρεμαστήκανε πολλοὶ δεσποτάδες.

Παρακάτω βάζω λίγα λόγια ἀπὸ τὸ ἡμερολόγιο τοῦ ἀντιναύαρχου Γεωργίου Σαχτούρη: «Παρασκευή, 25 Δεκεμβρίου. Ἐορτὴ τῶν Γενεθλίων τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀραγμένοι εἰς Ντάρδιζα μὲ ἡσυχον ἀέρα τῆς τραμουντάνας, πλὴν μὲ χιόνια. Αὐτὴν τὴν ἡμέρα, διὰ τὸ χαρμόσυνόν τῆς ἐορτῆς, τὸ πρωί, ὑψώνοντας τὴν σημαίαν μας, ἐρρίχθη καὶ μία κανονιά, καθὼς καὶ ὅλα τα ἑλληνικὰ ἐδῶ ἀραγμένα τὸ αὐτὸ ἔπραξαν. Κυριακή, 15 Αὐγούστου. Ἐορτὴ τῆς Θεοτόκου. Ἐξημερώθημεν ἀραγμένοι. Ὑψώσαμεν τὰς σημαίας καὶ ἐρρίξαμεν καὶ ἀπὸ μίαν κανονιάν διὰ τὸ χαρμόσυνόν τῆς ἡμέρας».

Ὁ ναύαρχος Κουντουριώτης ἔκανε τὴ προσευχὴ του, σὰν τοὺς παλιούς, νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει ἡ Παναγία στὴ ναυμαχία τῆς «Ἑλλης», κι ὅπου ἄλλοῦ τὸν καλοῦσε τὸ χρέος του. Τὸ ἴδιο κάνανε καὶ κάνουνε ὅλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες στὸ πόλεμο.

Κατὰ τὴν καταστροφὴ τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, πρῶτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς θρησκείας πληρώσανε μὲ τὴ ζωὴ τοὺς τὸ καινούργιο χαράτσι στὸν ὄχτρο τῆς πίστες μας. Ὁ μητροπολίτης τῆς Σμύρνης Χρυσόστομος

κρεμάστηκε, ὁ δεσπότης τῶν Κυδωνιῶν Γρηγόριος θάφτηκε ζωντανός, ὁ Μοσχονησίων Ἀμβρόσιος θανατώθηκε ἄσπλαχνα, κι ὅλοι οἱ παπάδες κ' οἱ καλόγεροι περάσανε ἀπὸ τὸ σπαθί.

Οἱ Γερμανοὶ κ' οἱ Ἴταλοὶ θανατώσανε κι αὐτοὶ τοὺς ρασοφορεμένους τῶν χωριῶν, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀπομείνουν παραπίσω ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους θεομάχους.

Ναί! Πίστη καὶ Πατρίδα εἶναι γιὰ μᾶς ἓνα πράγμα. Κι ὅπως πολεμᾷ τὸ ἓνα, πολεμᾷ καὶ τ' ἄλλο, κι ἂς μὴν ξεγελιέται.

Ἡ μάννα μας ἡ πνευματικὴ εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας, ποὺ ποτίστηκε μὲ πολὺ κι ἀγιασμένο αἶμα. Κανένας λαὸς δὲν ἔχυσε καὶ δὲν χύνει ὡς τὰ σήμερα τὸ αἶμα του γιὰ τὴ πίστη, ὅσο ὁ δικός μας. Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη εἶναι ὁ θησαυρὸς ὁ κρυμμένος κι ὁ πολύτιμος μαργαρίτης ποὺ λέγει ὁ Χριστός.



Νὰ παύση ἡ συστηματικὴ περιφρόνησις τῆς θρησκείας ἐκ μέρους πολιτικῶν ἀνδρῶν, ἐπιστημόνων, λογίων, δημοσιογράφων καὶ ἄλλων. Ἡ λεγομένη ἀνωτέρα τάξις νὰ συμμορφωθῇ μὲ τὰ ἔθιμα τῆς χώρας, ἂν θέλῃ νὰ ἐγκλιματισθῇ ἐδῶ. Νὰ γίνῃ προστάτις τῶν πατρίων καὶ ὄχι διώκτρια. Νὰ ἀσπασθῇ καὶ νὰ ἐγκολληθῇ τὰς ἐθνικᾶς παραδόσεις. Νὰ μὴ περιφρονῇ ἀναφανδὸν ὅ,τι παλαιόν, ὅ,τι ἐγχώριον, ὅ,τι Ἑλληνικόν. **Νὰ καταπολεμηθῇ ὁ ξενισμὸς, ὁ πιθηκισμὸς, ὁ φραγκισμὸς...** Νὰ μὴ χάσκωμεν πρὸς τὰ ξένα...

Ἡμύνθησαν περὶ πάτρης οἱ ἄστοργοι πολιτικοί, οἱ ἐκ περιτροπῆς μητροιοὶ τοῦ τάλαιπώρου ὠρφανισμένου Γένους... Ἄμυνα περὶ πάτρης δὲν εἶναι αἰ σπασμωδικαί, κακομελέτητοι καὶ κακοσύντακτοι ἐπιστρατεῖται, οὐδὲ τὰ σκωριασμένης ἐπιδεικτικότητος θωρηκτά. Ἄμυνα περὶ πάτρης θὰ ἦτο ἡ εὐσυνείδητος λειτουργία τῶν θεσμῶν, ἡ ἐθνικὴ ἀγωγή, ἡ χρηστὴ διοίκησις, ἡ καταπολέμησις τοῦ... ξένου ὑλισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ πιθηκισμοῦ, τοῦ διαφθείραντος τὸ φρόνημα καὶ ἐκφυλίσαντος σήμερα τὸ ἔθνος, καὶ ἡ πρόληψις τῆς χρεωκοπίας. Τις ἡμύνθη περὶ πάτρης; Καὶ τί πταίει ἡ γλαῦξ, ἡ θρηνοῦσα ἐπὶ ἐρείπιων; Πταίουν οἱ πλάσαντες τὰ ἐρείπια. **Καὶ τὰ ἐρείπια τὰ ἔπλασαν οἱ ἀνίκανοι κυβερνῆται της...**

**Κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης
(1851-1911)**

Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία Εἶναι Ἀήτητη!

Τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010), Ἰ. Ναὸς Ἁγ. Παντελεήμονος Φλωρίνης, 18-3-1973.

«Λέγει αὐτῷ Φίλιππος· ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε.»

(Ἰωάν. 1:47)



Σήμερα, ἀγαπητοί μου, εἶνε ἑορτὴ μεγάλη καὶ ἔνδοξος. Δὲν ἑορτάζει ἕνας ἢ δύο ἅγιοι, ὅπως τὶς ἄλλες ἡμέρες· ἑορτάζει ὅλη ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία μας.

Ποιός μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφωνήσῃ λόγο ἀντάξιο

τῆς μεγάλης ἑορτῆς; Θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ βρισκεται ἐδῶ ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἁγίους ἀγγέλους ἢ τοὺς πατέρας καὶ διδασκάλους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἢ τοὺς μάρτυρες ποὺ ἔχυσαν τὸ αἷμα τοὺς γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Ἐμεῖς λίγες σκέψεις θὰ διατυπώσουμε ἐπὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ εὐαγγελίου.

Ὅμιλεῖ τὸ εὐαγγέλιο γιὰ κάποιον Ναθαναήλ, ποὺ εἶχε μικρὰ ἰδέα γιὰ τὸ Χριστό. Ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καταγόταν ἀπὸ ἄσημο χωριὸν (τὴ Ναζαρέτ), ἐπειδὴ γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ πτωχὴ μητέρα καὶ ὑπὸ ταπεινὲς συνθήκες, κρίνοντας ἀπ' αὐτὰ εἶπε· «*Ἐκ Ναζαρέτ δύναται τι ἀγαθὸν εἶναι.*» (Ἰωάν. 1:47). Ἐἶνε δυνατόν ἀπ' τὸ χωριὸν αὐτὸ νὰ βγῆ κάτι καλὸ, νὰ βγῆ ὁ Σωτὴρας τοῦ κόσμου;

Ἄλλ' ὅπως τότε ὁ Ναθαναήλ εἶπε τὸν περιφρονητικὸν αὐτὸν λόγο, ἔτσι καὶ σήμερα ὑπάρχουν «Ναθαναήλ», ποὺ μιλοῦν περιφρονητικὰ γιὰ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ γιὰ τὸ ἔργο του. Λένε κι αὐτοί, κατ' ἄλλο τρόπο βέβαια· «*Ἐκ Ναζαρέτ δύναται τι ἀγαθὸν εἶναι.*», καὶ θεωροῦν ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας εἶνε πλέον κάτι ξεπερασμένο, ἕνας θεσμὸς χρεωκοπημένος, ἀνάξιος λόγου, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ μπῆ στὸ μουσεῖο. Τί ἔχουμε νὰ ποῦμε σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς «Ναθαναήλ»; Θ' ἀπαντήσουμε μὲ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Φιλίππου· «*Ἐρχου καὶ ἴδε.*» Ἄπιστοι καὶ ἄθεοι, ἐλάτε νὰ θαυμάσετε σήμερα, τὴν ἁγία αὐτὴ ἡμέρα, τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ἐπάρχουν, ἀγαπητοί μου, πολλὰ ἀξιοθαύμαστα. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, στὸν ἀρχαῖο κόσμος ἦταν οἱ κρεμαστοὶ κῆποι τῆς Βαβυλῶνος, οἱ πυραμίδες τοῦ Χέοπος, ὁ Κολοσσὸς τῆς Ῥόδου, ἡ Ἀκρόπολις τῶν Ἀθηνῶν· καὶ σήμερα πολλὰ ἐπιτεύγματα τῆς ἐπιστήμης καὶ τῆς τεχνικῆς εἶνε θαυμαστά. Ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀνώτερο ἀπὸ ὅλα, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ προκαλεῖ τὸ θάμβος τῶν αἰώνων, εἶνε ἡ ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία. Ἐορτάζει σήμερα ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ἀλλὰ τί εἶνε Ἐκκλησία; Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἀγαπητοί μου, δὲν εἶνε τὸ κτήριον τοῦ ναοῦ· ὄχι. Τοὺς ναοὺς μπορεῖ μιὰ μέρα ἕνα ἄθεο καθεστῶς νὰ τοὺς γκρεμίσῃ, ὅπως ἔγινε στὴ Βόρειο Ἡπειρο ἐπὶ Ἐμβερ Χότζα. Ὁ ναὸς γκρεμίζεται, ἡ

Ἐκκλησία δὲ γκρεμίζεται· ἐδῶ εἶνε ἡ μεγάλη διαφορά. Γιατὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν εἶνε τὰ ντουβάρια· ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶνε κάτι βαθύτερο καὶ ὑψηλότερο, κάτι ἅγιο καὶ πνευματικὸ καὶ ἀθάνατο. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶνε τὸ σύνολο τῶν ψυχῶν ποὺ πιστεύουν. Τί πιστεύουν· ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν εἶνε ἀπλῶς ἕνας ἄνθρωπος, ἕνας φιλόσοφος ἢ κοινωνιολόγος, ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς μεγάλους ἄνδρες τῆς ἱστορίας· ὁ Χριστὸς εἶνε παραπάνω ἀπὸ ἀγγέλου, ἀρχαγγέλου, ἁγίου, παραπάνω ἀπ' ὅλο τὸν οὐράνιο κόσμον· εἶνε αὐτὸς ὁ Θεός. Αὐτὴ εἶνε ἡ πίστι μας, τὴν ὁποία διακηρύττει σήμερα ἡ ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία. Καὶ ὅσοι πιστεύουν στὸ Χριστὸ ὡς Θεό, αὐτοὶ ἀποτελοῦν τὸ σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας του.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶνε τὸ βασίλειον—ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς ὁποίας «οὐκ ἔσται τέλος» (Λουκ. 1:33 καὶ Σύμβ. Πίστ.).

Ποιὰ ἦταν ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς; Ξεκίνησε ἀπὸ δώδεκα ψαράδες. Σ' αὐτοὺς εἶπε ὁ Χριστός· Σᾶς στέλνω νὰ σαλπύσετε τὸ κήρυγμά μου σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον· ἕνα κήρυγμα ἀντίθετο μὲ τὶς ἐπιθυμίες τοῦ ὄχλου, συγκρουόμενο μὲ ὅλο τὸν ἀρχαῖο εἰδωλολατρικὸν κόσμον, ἀνατρεπτικὸν τοῦ κατεστημένου. Πῶς ἔγινε ἡ ἐξάπλωσις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Ἐὰν ῥίξουμε μιὰ ματιὰ στὴν ἱστορία, θὰ δοῦμε ὅτι ὠρισμένοι ἴδρυσαν βασιλεῖες καὶ αὐτοκρατορίες μεγάλες, ὅπως εἶνε λόγου χάριν τὸ Μακεδονικὸ κράτος τοῦ Μ. Ἀλεξάνδρου, ἡ Ῥωμαϊκὴ αὐτοκρατορία, τὸ κράτος τοῦ Μ. Ναπολέοντος, ποὺ ἔφθασαν ὡς τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς. Ἐφθασαν· ἀλλὰ πῶς ἔφθασαν; Ὁ μὲν Ἀλέξανδρος μὲ τὶς περίφημες φάλαγγες ποὺ ἐξώπλισε, ὁ Καῖσαρ μὲ τὶς λεγεῶνες του, ὁ Ναπολέων μὲ τὶς στρατιές του.

Ἡ βασιλεία ὅμως τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν ἐπεβλήθη μὲ ὄπλα. Πῶς ἀπλώθηκε; Ἐδῶ εἶνε τὸ θαυμαστό. Ποῦ εἶνε οἱ φάλαγγες, οἱ λεγεῶνες, τὰ στρατεύματά της; Ποῦ εἶνε τὰ ὄπλα καὶ τὰ πυροβόλα της; Τί μέσα μεταχειρίστηκε λοιπόν; Χρῆμα; Οἱ ἀπόστολοι δὲν εἶχαν στὶς τσέπες τοὺς τίποτα. Ὅπλα; Ἐνα σουγιὰ εἶχε ὁ Πέτρος, καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦ ἀπηγόρευσε νὰ τὸν ἔχη κι αὐτόν. Σοφία καὶ γνῶσι; Ἀγράμματα ἦταν. Καὶ ὅμως, χωρὶς λεφτά, χωρὶς ὄπλα, χωρὶς γνώσεις καὶ ἐπιστήμες, ξεκίνησαν οἱ δώδεκα ψαράδες καὶ ἐξέτειναν στὸν κόσμον τὴν μεγαλυτέρα βασιλεία, τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας.

Τὶς δυσκολίες αὐτὲς τὶς γνώριζε ὁ Χριστός, γι' αὐτὸ τοὺς εἶπε· «Ἴδου ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω ὑμᾶς ὡς πρόβατα ἐν μέσῳ λύκων»· σᾶς στέλνω σὰν πρόβατα ἀνάμεσα σὲ λύκους (Ματθ. 10:16). Πρόβατα οἱ ἀπόστολοι, λύκοι ὁ κόσμος τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων, τῶν διωκτῶν, τῶν Νερῶνων. Γιὰ φανταστήτε τώρα τὸ χεμιῶνα νὰ πάρῃς δώδεκα πρόβατα καὶ νὰ τὰ σπρώξῃς μέσα σ' ἕνα ἄγριο δάσος γεμᾶτο λύκους. Τὶ περιμένετε, ποῖο θὰ εἶνε τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα; Ἐκατὸ τοῖς ἑκατὸ τὰ πρόβατα θὰ γίνουν βορὰ τῶν λύκων. Καὶ ὅμως ἐδῶ τὰ πρόβατα

δὲν ἐξωλοθρεύθησαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ νίκησαν τοὺς λύκους! Καὶ μόνο αὐτό; Ἐκαναν καὶ τοὺς λύκους πρόβατα! Εἶνε ποτὲ δυνατὸν ὁ λύκος νὰ γίνῃ πρόβατο; Ἐν τούτοις ἔγινε· οἱ ἀποστολοὶ κατώρθωσαν νὰ κάνουν Χριστιανοὺς καὶ πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς διώκτες των.

Ποιά ἡ δύναμι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Φαίνεται, ὅτι παραπάνω ἀπὸ τὰ ὄπλα, τὰ χρήματα, τὴ σοφία, ὑπάρχει μιὰ ἄλλη δύναμι, ἀόρατη. Ἄς μὴ πιστεύουν οἱ ἄπιστοι· δὲ νικοῦν τὰ ὑλικά μέσα. Μιὰ χούφτα ἀνθρώπων κατώρθωσε νὰ νικήσῃ ὁλόκληρο τὸν κόσμο. «Αὕτη ἡ ἀλλοίωσις τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ Ὑψίστου.» (Ψαλμ. 76:11). Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο ἐκπορεύεται μιὰ ἀήττητος δύναμις, πὸν νικᾷ τὰ πάντα.

Ἐὰν λοιπὸν ἀποβλέψουμε στὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἐὰν ἀποβλέψουμε στὴν ἐξάπλωσί της, ἐὰν δοῦμε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς πὸν ἀντιμετώπισε, παντοῦ βλέπουμε τὸ θαῦμα. Ἀξιοθαύμαστη ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, ἀήττητη. Κανεὶς δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ τὴν καταβάλῃ. Ἡ ἱστορία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶνε ἱστορία ἀλλεπαλλήλων θαυμάτων. Ἀναφέρω δύο μόνο.

Τί ἐορτάζουμε στὶς 25 Μαρτίου; Πῶς σώθηκε ἓνας λαὸς πὸν ἦταν 400 χρόνια σκλάβος. Πῶς σώθηκε; Ἐρώτημα μεγάλο. Ἄλλα ἔθνη, μέσα σὲ 50 - 60 χρόνια δουλείας, ἀφωμοιώθηκαν καὶ ἔσβησαν. Πῶς ἐδῶ τέσσερις ὁλόκληροι αἰῶνες δὲν κατώρθωσαν νὰ διακόψουν τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ ἔθνους μας; Τί ἀπαντᾷ ἡ ἱστορία; Ὅχι οἱ πλαστογράφοι τῆς ἱστορίας, ἀλλὰ ἡ πραγματικὴ ἱστορία; Καὶ οἱ λίθοι ἀκόμα καὶ οἱ πέτρες φωνάζουν, ὅτι τὸ γένος τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀνωρθώθηκε καὶ σώθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Αὕτη στάθηκε ἡ κιβωτός, μέσα στὴν ὁποία διατηρήθηκε. Αὕτη τὸ κράτησε στὶς ἀγκάλες της ὅπως ἡ μάνα τὸ νήπιο. Αὐτὸ ἔκανε τὸν ποιητὴ Κώστα Κρυστάλλη νὰ γράψῃ:

Ὡ Ἐκκλησία! Θρησκεία! Γλυκειὰ μάνα, τί ὁμορφὴ δίνεις ἐσὺ λαλιὰ καὶ στὴν καμπάνα, καὶ πόσο ἐκείνη ἡ λαλιὰ σαλεύει τὴν καρδιά μας! Πόσες, ἐκεῖνος ὁ σταυρὸς ἀπ' τὰ καμπαναριά μας, στὴν ἀντηλιάδα χύνοντας τόσες χρυσὲς ἀχτίδες, χύνει βαθειὰ μας, στὴν ψυχὴ, γλυκὲς χρυσὲς ἐλπίδες!

Θέλετε ἄλλο θαῦμα; Ρίξτε ἓνα βλέμμα στὴ Ῥωσία. Τὸ 1917 ἔγινε τὸ πείραμα. Ἄθεο καθεστῶς ἔβαλε μπροστὰ νὰ ξεῤῥιζώσῃ τὴν πίστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Κάψανε, γκρεμίσανε, καταστρέψανε· ἔστειλαν σὲ στρατόπεδα, βασάνισαν, θανάτωσαν. Τελικὰ τί κατώρθωσαν; Στὸ Στάλινγκραντ καὶ στὴ Μόσχα λαὸς πολὺς, καὶ ἄντρες καὶ παιδιὰ καὶ γέροντες, καὶ ἐπιστήμονες καὶ ἄνθρωποι τῶν γραμμάτων, πηγαίνουν στὶς ἐκκλησίες καὶ πιστεύουν περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅ,τι πιστεύουμε ἐμεῖς. Ὡ Ἐκκλησία ἀήττητος! Κανεὶς μὰ κανεὶς δὲ θὰ μπορέσῃ ποτὲ νὰ σὲ κλονίσῃ. Ἀγαπητοί μου!

Εἴμεθα παιδιὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. Δὲν εἴμεθα χιλιασταί, δὲν εἴμεθα μασόνοι, δὲν εἴμεθα

ὀρθοτριαντοί, δὲν εἴμεθα ὀπαδοὶ τοῦ ἀθέου ὑλισμοῦ, δὲ λατρεύουμε τὰ εἶδωλα. Ἀνήκουμε στὴν μία, ἁγία, καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία, στὴ μητέρα Ἐκκλησία.

Τὸ συμπέρασμα ποῖο εἶνε; Γράψατέ το: Ὅποιος τὰ βάζει μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ γίνῃ στάχτη. Θὰ ὁμολογήσῃ καὶ αὐτός· «Νενίκηκάς με, Ναζωραῖε». Τὸ εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ ὁ λόγος του εἶνε ἀληθινός· «Πύλαι ἄδου οὐ κατισχύουσιν αὐτῆς.» (Ματθ. 16:18). Ὅλοι οἱ δαίμονες δὲ μποροῦν νὰ κλονίσουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Σ' αὐτὴν ἀνήκουμε, καὶ εἶθε ὁ Κύριος νὰ μᾶς ἀναδεικνύῃ πάντοτε πιστὰ καὶ ἀφωσιωμένα τέκνα της, διὰ πρεσβειῶν τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων ἀμῆν.

† ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος



Οἱ Σαρρικοὶ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι πὸν καταγίνονται ἀποκλειστικὰ μὲ τὶς ἡδονὲς καὶ τὶς ἀπολαύσεις τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῆς. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι, πὸν εἶναι προσκολλημένοι στὰ πάθη τους, ἐκεῖνοι πὸν ἔχουν ἀποκτηνωθεῖ καὶ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ καταλάβουν ὅτι ὑπάρχουν πνευματικὲς ὁμορφιές, κι ὅλο ἀγωνίζονται, κι ὅλο φροντίζουν μόνο γιὰ χρήματα, γιὰ δόξα, γιὰ ἡδονή.

Οἱ **Ψυχικοὶ** ἄνθρωποι τοποθετοῦνται ἀνάμεσα στὴν ἀρετὴ καὶ τὴν κακία. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ ἀποβλέπουν στὴν καλὴ διατήρησι τοῦ σώματός τους καὶ στοὺς ἐπαίνους τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἀποφεύγουν τοὺς πόνους τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἀλλὰ ἀποφεύγουν καὶ τὶς σαρκικότητες, γιὰτὶ θέλουν νὰ μὴ χάσουν τὴν ἐκτίμησι τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Οἱ «ψυχικοὶ» αὐτοὶ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι πολὺ φίλαυτοι καὶ θέλουν νὰ ἀσχολοῦνται μόνο μὲ τὸν ἑαυτό τους.

Τέλος οἱ **Πνευματικοὶ** ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἐντελῶς διαφορετικοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς προηγουμένους δυὸ τύπους. Εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, πὸν ἀγωνίζονται μὲ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ μὲ τὴν ἄσκησίν τους νὰ καθαρῖσουν τὴν καρδιά τους ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη. Καὶ τὸ πετυχαίνουν αὐτὸ καὶ καθαίρονται καὶ θεώνονται.

Σεβασμιώτατος Μητροπολίτης Γόρτυνος καὶ Μεγαλοπόλεως Ἱερεμίας Φούντας
Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ «**ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΚΑΤΗΧΗΣΗ**»

ON THE 2016 HOLY GREAT ORTHODOX SYNOD

SET TO TAKE PLACE IN CRETE ON PENTECOST,
JUNE 19TH, 2016.

By George Karras, "Orthodox Heritage" Editor.

Over the last few weeks, we have received several questions relative to the upcoming 2016 "Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church," organized under the leadership of the Constantinople Patriarchate. In response to such inquiries (and in the unfortunate absence of any concise document which the faithful may review) we are attempting to provide our readers various views relative to the purpose, agenda and potential outcomes of this gathering.

Most of what is presented within this article has been extracted from various opinions or writings by well-known and respected, traditional Orthodox bishops and theologians.¹ We especially relied on a recently broadcasted three-hour interview of Dr. Dimitrios Tselengidis (professor of Dogmatics at the School of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) on the radio station of the Metropolis of Piraeus, Greece. This program was a most enlightening presentation of the aforementioned topics and the concerns that exist among many relative to the potential outcome for the faithful and Orthodoxy at large. (For those of our readers who are fluent in Greek, the entire three-hour interview is available at "http://www.orthodoxia-ellhnismos.gr/2016/03/blog-post_4.html?m=1.") Professor Tselengidis and several hierarchs have also written letters of concern to several Local Orthodox Churches (including those of Greece, Russia, Serbia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Alexandria, and Antioch); some of these have been translated into English and are available within the web pages of "<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/>."

Our presentation is made based on the various questions which have been posed to us or ones which we have seen posted within various Orthodox web logs.²

Is this Orthodoxy's "Eighth" Ecumenical Synod?

While it does not utilize this term, the title certainly implies that its organizers, through the Pan-Orthodox participation of sorts, desire that it be recognized as ecumenical in nature. This targeted recognition among the Orthodox faithful would certainly go a long way in the flock's acceptance of the Synod's decisions, as such decisions "resolve" the open items which are being included by the organizers within the currently planned agenda.

There has not been an Ecumenical Council since 787, when the Second Council of Nicaea resolved the heresy of iconoclasm. The organizers have been quoted as desiring to consider the Holy and Great Council as a continuation of the early ecumenical councils of the first Christian millennium. If this is the case, as part of its agenda and presentation, any

Ecumenical council must commence with the reading and acceptance of the detailed decisions of the past seven ecumenical councils. Doing this, however, leads the participants in supporting past decisions which clearly stand against current agenda items such as the one relative to the all-important *de facto* recognition of heterodox "churches," which appears to be a primary agenda topic, as discussed below.

Our readers should be aware that the term "Holy and Great" was preserved for the Church's Ecumenical Synods and that the decisions of such Synods have been deemed as absolute and of no question by any of the Orthodox faithful whatsoever. Thus, one can surmise that the Synod's organizers have an implied need in portraying the decisions of 2016 as "binding" for the universal Orthodox world.

There is also a concern that the term Ecumenical is not utilized so as to not offend the schismatic "churches," more specifically the Roman Catholics and Protestants. The Synod's organizers are thus overly concerned about the term "ecumenical" being preserved only for the Synods that include representatives from all other heterodox "churches." This is in direct contrast of past Ecumenical Synods; more specifically, every Synod after the Fourth have excluded all heretics and schismatics, and still referred to themselves as Ecumenical, both in their accepted composition as well as their decisions. Thus, by the Synod's title, we see that a significant motive for this Pan-Orthodox gathering is the recognition of the ecumenist movement and the other heterodox. This topic is discussed in detail by His Eminence Athanasios, Metropolitan of Limassol, Cyprus, in the article that is presented on page 9 of the current issue.

The Synod's Invitees, Composition of Attendees

While the Synod aspires to be considered as Pan-Orthodox (and Ecumenical, in its decisions) unlike other Ecumenical Synods, it has not included all Orthodox Bishops within its invitation list. The invited Orthodox Primates of the various, world-wide Orthodox churches (14 in number), are to be accompanied by 23 members. As a result of this "stipulation," the Churches of Greece and Russia, for example, will see most of their bishops absent from this all-important gathering, and (again) in direct contract of all past Ecumenical Synods. The Orthodox Church of Russia has some 350 bishops and less than 10% of them will be in attendance. Thus, **the exclusion of bishops automatically precludes it from being truly characterized as Holy and Great.** It is best that we think of it as an "expanded" Orthodox Synod of the Heads of the 14 Local Orthodox Churches. Another important point is the selection of the 23 intended attendees—no information has been provided for such a selection basis. The representation of the views of the non-attending bishops becomes problematic and the selection of the 23 directly classifies the non-selected bishops into a lesser, secondary class, clearly in violation of Orthodoxy's Canons.

In contrast, all Orthodox hierarchs, even within the limitations of transportation during the first 10 centuries of Christianity, were invited and participated (with very few, justifiable exceptions) in the first seven Ecumenical Synods. At a time that technological advances enable travel and communications in an immensely more efficient manner, the world-wide participation of Orthodox hierarchy should have been a fundamental cornerstone of this gathering. And, of course, no reason has been provided by the organizers for such limited participation.

The Proceedings of Preparatory Meetings

The records and meeting minutes of all preparatory meetings (which have been held for several decades, at least five, and ended with the one that took place in Geneva, earlier this year) are not being made available. As a matter of fact, requests made by Orthodox bishops of the Church of Greece for such documents have been declined; the proceedings are being deemed by the Synod's organizers as confidential and not open to the faithful or the Orthodox hierarchy at large. One thus wonders the reason for such secrecy and certainly provides the impression of its organizers wishing to hide information.

The Voting Protocol

The consensus of the Great Synod will be limited to one vote for each Local Autocephalous Church; all 14 Local Churches are planning to participate. Individual disagreements—should they happen among a minority of a given Local Church—will be set aside as “their internal affair,” something which is ecclesiological unacceptable to any Pan-Orthodox Synod, when, indeed, the disagreement is over a subject of a doctrinal nature. And, the potential for minority views on vital topics, even among the “carefully selected” attendees, is very probable. Imagine if the theological positions of great saints who were in the minority circle (such as Sts. Athanasios the Great or St. Basil the Great or St. Photios the Great) were to be set aside for their “objections” to be addressed within or by their “Local Churches” and away from the audience of the truly Pan-Orthodox Synod of their time; the Arian heresy might have prevailed or the anathematizing of St. Photios by the Roman Catholic pope in the 869 Constantinople Council could have remained with the obvious repercussions for Orthodoxy.³

Most importantly, the exclusion of the great majority of Orthodox hierarchs excludes the ability of too many hierarchs to express and vote on any item is excluded. This is contrary to the Orthodox Canons of equality of views and votes amongst all Orthodox bishops, including the heads of the Church; **the votes of the absolute majority of the Orthodox hierarchy shall not be a factor for any Synodical decisions whatsoever.** Thus the cornerstone of ecclesiastical and spiritual foundation of the Orthodox Synodical system is violated; in clearer terms, the spiritual foundation of Orthodox Holy Tradition and Patristic spirituality (through the presence of the Holy

Spirit that governed all past truly Pan-Orthodox Ecumenical Synods) are being dissolved and invalidated.

The planned composition and voting standards of the subject Synod are commonly found amongst the Roman Catholics. Their Synods (such as the Vatican II gathering) are characterized by the presence of absolute power in the hands of a few cardinals and the pope; thus, as in the cases of Catholicism, the conduct and subsequent decisions of the planned Holy and Great Synod are being based upon Caesar-like human authority instead of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, to this date, there exists no announcement as to how voting even amongst the participants shall take place. It appears that each Church in attendance shall have but one vote. As such, the views of every attending bishop, albeit already minimized, shall never be known or expressed within any voting structure. In other words, the heads of each Orthodox Church appear to be the voting members and represent the “majority views” of the other 23 members. Utilizing this method in past Ecumenical Synods would have (for example) excluded and robbed Orthodoxy of the views of Sts. Athanasios the Great, Basil the Great, and Nicholas of Myra who clearly represented the minority position against Arianism, at least at the onset of the First Ecumenical Council. It has been often that the minority views are the ones that preserved Orthodoxy through the last 2,000 years.

The only “hope” in the voting on any controversial topic is the possibility that one of the 14 Local Churches votes against any favorable decisions that stands against past Orthodox canons or Holy Patristic views. Should one of the represented Churches vote against a measure, that agenda's item is set aside and no decisions around that topic can be made. Of course, even this is not definitive and one wonders what will truly transpire amongst the various Orthodox Church leaders, especially behind closed doors.

In summary, our concern evolves as to how this Pan-Orthodox Holy Great Synod will confess the one faith of the Church, *with one mouth and with one heart?* How will the fathers of the Synod be able to say, *it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us?* How will they demonstrate that they have *the mind of Christ*, as did the God-bearing Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils of our Church?

The Synod's Agenda

The agenda has been decided exclusively by the “appointed” representatives of the 14 Local Orthodox Churches. The selected items were never presented to their respective local synods for discussion or acceptance. Thus, it was their decision on what topics the Synods shall address and their respective Church heads adopted it absent of any discussions amongst their fellow bishops. This again reminds us of the ways and practices of Roman Catholics.

The proposed agenda has seen its topics move in and out over the last several months, with very little information being

issued publically. As a matter of fact, the most accurate data that we have seen in writing is the one presented within the “U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops” website! That alone alarms us greatly—there has been immense attention by the pope and his “bishops” towards the agenda and wishes for the successful outcome of the Orthodox Synod. As St. Kosmas Aitolos taught us, **any Orthodox must be alarmed upon the receipt of any wishes from the Latin pope.**

Here are the current agenda items and some thoughts on them:

The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World: The contribution of the Orthodox Church to the attainment of peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood and love between peoples and the removal of racial and other discrimination. Clearly a “social” topic on its first view and one that would normally be unworthy of a Pan-Orthodox Synod, but one that could introduce ecumenist dimensions in the efforts to (supposedly) normalize current social needs and norms. For example, one cannot ignore the evil forces of homosexual agendas that have penetrated many heterodox circles to not just mere acceptance and condoning but also extending into glorifying its existence. Any effort to normalize Pan-Orthodox views on social issues in today's world could compromise fundamental dogmatic truths such as the one that involves homosexuality. The danger is rather apparent. In our view, the gospel of His Truth and the teachings of the Church's Holy Fathers have divinely addressed the world's social need over the last 2,000 years; and most certainly can do so for the rest of human history.

The Orthodox Diaspora: It shall be proposed that “Episcopal Assemblies” of all canonically recognized bishops in each region should be created (or founded) in the Diaspora regions which include the Americas as well as Australia/New Zealand regions and several western European countries. The “problem” of the Orthodox Diaspora is desired to be resolved as quickly as possible, and that it be organized in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church. However, that shall come later. In the meantime, the “Episcopal Assemblies” shall serve the primary goal of supporting the unity of Orthodoxy within their respective, assigned geographical jurisdictions, through a series of actions.

Autonomy and the Means of Proclaiming It: The ecclesiological, canonical and pastoral aspects of the institution of autonomy shall be discussed, the method of initiation and completion of the process of proclaiming autonomy and implications arising from the proclamation of autonomy.

The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments: There is no question that the institute of family is threatened today by such phenomena as extreme secularization and a complete degradation of family and society's moral values. The sacral nature of marriage (only between a man and a woman) is a fundamental and indisputable doctrine of the Orthodox

Church, as has also been the position of disallowing any mixed marriage whatsoever. Current positions, as formulated within Synodical documents relative to the “practice church *oikonomia* in conformance with the principles established in church canons” most certainly appears to be the start of watering down the dogmatic posture of Orthodoxy relative to the Sacrament of marriage, starting with the creation of “allowances for marriages with non-Orthodox.” It is indeed incomprehensible for anyone to attempt justifying the basis for the acceptance of any such union with a non-believer through the sacramental energy of the Holy Spirit, be it for *oikonomia* or any other reason. The Mysteries of His Church are exclusively for Her faithful children; they can never be held or canonically accepted with non-faithful parties of whatever other non-Orthodox religious persuasion.

Concerning the impediments to marriage due to whatever possible situation (kinship by blood, kinship by affinity and adoption, spiritual kinship, marriage of priests, etc.) these have been well defined by the Church's Canons and any re-affirmation equally carries the suspicion that some may be “worthy of re-visiting.” More specifically, special dispensation for mixed marriages with the heterodox and permission for the second marriages for priests due to “certain circumstances” had been topics in draft form; it is believed that disagreement(s) by members of some Local Churches led to this latest proposed topic.

The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today: Fasting is God's commandment; the Synod is supposed to affirm the obligatory character of Nativity, Apostles', and Dormition fasts. Who has ever doubted the extreme value of fasting to warrant it as worthy of becoming a topic of discussion in the 21st century? Perhaps there is a movement to “lessen it,” as has been repeatedly rumored. Indeed, ecclesiastical circles have reported that the initially intended topic was for the re-consideration of our current fasting rules; and, that it was altered to its current topic title of “The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today,” after strong disagreement(s) by members of some Local Churches. One, though, wonders as to whether an effort of sorts may still take place during Synodical discussions to introduce a fasting morphology or tropology that differs from what has been established and passed to us by Holy Tradition and the Church's Holy Fathers.

Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World: This is greatest area of concern by many respected theologians (refer to one such view that we presented in our article on page 9 of the current issue). Who or rather what faith(s) compose this “Rest of the Christian World?” It is apparent that the Synod agenda shall discuss relations with what we commonly term as heterodox, i.e., those who neither believe nor are conforming with accepted Orthodox standards, dogmas or beliefs. This topic's introduction thus becomes a clear matter of accepted Orthodox ecclesiology; in other words, an eminently theological problematic issue at

its onset: It is not theologically permissible for this Synod to lead or eventually adopt any decisions which will essentially recommend the Protestant “branch theory.” Their current position legitimizes the status of the heterodox “churches” which in turn leads to the acceptance of the many different and often contradicting doctrines that the west has invented over the last ten plus centuries.

This topic’s main implication, as judged from a theological perspective, yields the clear realization that there is no discussion whatsoever of the return of the heterodox to the Orthodox Church, the only Church. Rather, **the baptism of the heterodox is considered an accepted fact from the outset—and this without any Pan-Orthodox decision.** In other words, the pre-Synodical proceedings clearly endorse the “Baptismal Theology.” Simultaneously, released pre-Synodical texts providing the basis for this topic deliberately ignore the historic fact that the contemporary heterodox of the west (Roman Catholics and Protestant) have not one, but heaps of dogmas that differ from the Orthodox Church (besides the *filioque*, created grace in the sacraments, the primacy of the pope, papal infallibility, the rejection of icons, and the rejection of the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, etc.).

The introduction of this topic alone signifies the Pan-Orthodox acceptance of the long-held ecumenist dialogues and meetings with the heterodox over acceptance of the heterodox baptism and the implied equality of the various Christian faiths. **The Truth of Orthodoxy is thus watered down and mixed with the lies of the various western heresies and served to the faithful in the spirit of “brotherhood and common good.”** Any decision towards this agenda topic by this Synod will constitute the *de facto* acceptance of the ecumenist agenda towards recognition of the heterodox. As such, it is worthy of **not just re-formatting its intended content but pure and unequivocal condemnation!** Its continued presence in this Synod’s agenda represents **an absolute dilution of the Orthodox Church’s conscience and identity as the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ.**

Of note is the fact that these agenda items became known to the Orthodox hierarchy after the fact, as this Synod’s list of discussion topics progressed. And, as correctly noted by several respected Orthodox theologians, it is possible that new topics may make it within the agenda, either during last minute amendments or once the Synod’s doors close and the proceedings commence, away from any public view or observation. Other than the introductory and concluding sessions, it has been announced that all other sessions shall take place behind closed doors, a truly outrageous and unacceptable method in deciding anything that is expected to be abided by the entire Orthodox faithful and clergy, world-wide.

A question as to the Synod’s conduct is whether it shall review and accept (or at least recognize in totality) the decisions of all past Orthodox Ecumenical Councils and Synods upon whom current Orthodox Canon law is based. Such

an act would of course create a potential rift with the topics formulated for discussion and the above mentioned implied ecumenist, western-influenced positions.

Concerns-Conclusive Thoughts

The aforementioned canonical irregularities, secrecy in the agenda development and preparatory discussions, reduced participation, an agenda that seems to have only one topic of primary “concern” (interestingly placed as the last agenda discussion topic), the proposed voting scheme, the closed doors sessions, and the strength of the current ecumenist movement create a sense of uncertainty, anxiety, and unnecessary stress among the members of His flock.

Best case scenario is that objections prevail which nullify anything in the participating ecumenist proponents plans and the Synod terminates with no decisions or with very few decisions along the Diaspora and Autonomy issues. Even in this case, however, it is our clear opinion and concern that this Synod will have follow-up sessions. It is very likely that other, future “Holy Great Orthodox Synods,” will further promote the various pro-western and anti-Patristic thoughts of those who wish to modernize His Church along the Latins’ ways and means. Once the “leaders” of these Synods deem it ready, they could eventually call their version of a “true Eighth Ecumenical Council” whose intended outcome shall be the full and open union with all heterodox. May we be proven wrong and may this Synod be the last that maintains the peculiarities and character that we bring to our readers’ attention.

Worst case scenario is that the ecumenists are successful in developing decisions that are accepted by the heads of the participating 14 Local Orthodox Churches and that such decisions “push” Orthodox towards the eventual recognition of the Latins and Protestants as “true churches,” much quicker than our aforementioned hypothesis. It is certain, though, that any serious deviation from the way of Truth and the Holy Fathers, whether now or later, shall concurrently create a response of wrath amongst the traditional arm of Orthodoxy. Such wrath **may result in not just mere misunderstandings among the faithful but also lay the foundation for the creation and strengthening of schisms.** It is for this exact reason we sincerely hope and pray that, through God’s providence, this Synod gets cancelled since it truly can serve no good purpose that would further enhance Orthodoxy along the path set by the Holy Fathers and can only create damage instead of good.

The most disconcerting aspect of the released pre-Synodical texts is their stern warning that Synodical decisions must be accepted by all and adopted in the Church’s life (and in turn Orthodoxy’s values, irrespective as to whether any impending decisions contradict pre-existing Church dogma or canons). This warning is being issued especially towards those whom the organizers and ecumenists view as “zealots.” Implications are being made of a strong response towards any voice of

subsequent dissention, albeit specifics are not being provided. We view this behavior and posture as clearly authoritarian, totalitarian, papal and extremely non-Orthodox. Unlike the western heterodox, and especially the Roman Catholics, His Holy Orthodox Church is not in the hands of a few. Hierarchy, monastics, clergy, and laity, all of them comprise His Bride and all have a responsibility towards the preservation of His Truth.²

We apologize to those of our readers who find our position as absolute or consider this article as the source of any anxiety. We are believers in the steadfast nature of His Church and the Canons, writings and Holy Tradition that 2,000 years of spiritual leadership by His Bride's Holy Fathers have set forth in eternity. We continue to believe that, no matter what transpires, His true Church, the one and only Holy Orthodox Church shall prevail whatever temptations are presented. Her Creator the Almighty commissioned and assured us: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* (Mt 28:19-20).

† † †

NOTES

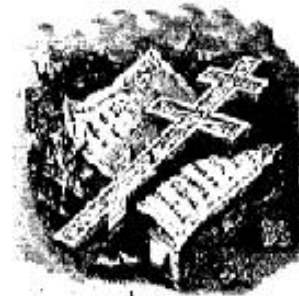
(1) The web site of the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Grand Junction, CO, has established an Internet locale where the various views, concerns, positions by hierarchs and theologians as well as other useful information are presented. We strongly encourage our readers to consider visiting these web pages and educate themselves beyond the weak presentation that we attempted to provide within this article. These pages are located at: "http://www.denver.goarch.org/saintnicholasgj/Great_and_Holy_Synod_2016/."

(2) It is very possible that, being mere Orthodox laymen (and as we have experienced in the past), our voice of objection towards this Synod will be considered by some as criticism towards the leadership of the Orthodox Church and as such inappropriate. As Dr. Dimitrios Tselengidis points out (in his position as a world-respected professor of Orthodox Dogmatics) **the various warnings that have already been issued towards the "zealot believers" of our Faith who may react to the ecumenist decisions of this Synod have no dogmatic basis whatsoever;** instead, they are there reminding us of the absolute exercise of power by the Roman Catholic pope and how the ecumenist movement within our Church strives for the exact same authoritarian standards for the Orthodox. As Dr. Tselengidis states, in Orthodoxy and as in the days of St. Mark of Ephesus, **the lay people have the right and obligation to defend and voice positions of dissention in matters that involve the patristically-based dogmatic Truth of our Faith:** The flock at large constitutes the dogmatic conscience of the Church, and not just the clergy; in other words, it is the condensed

spiritual experience of the flock that preserves the faith, which is nothing else than the energy of the Holy Spirit operating among the faithful that are Sacramentally in union with Him and with each other.

A historical reminder that demonstrates this dogmatic truth is as follows: It was the "zealot" lay people who sided with the only voice of dissention, that being of St. Mark of Ephesus, at a time when the rest of the many representatives of Orthodox Hierarchy agreed and signed for the 1439 (False) Union of Florence. Around St. Mark united all the "Orthodox zealots," many lay people and especially the monks of the Holy Mountain and the ordinary village priests. The whole episcopate and the whole imperial court of Constantinople—all were in the hands of the Uniates, in absolute submission to the representatives of the Vatican. Together, St. Mark and the "simple" crowd of Orthodox faithful and clergy, secured the Faith which we have been blessed to now believe and defend; equitably, it is every Orthodox believer's obligation since that time to safeguard Orthodoxy, unaltered and pure, for future generations. Lastly, let us also remind ourselves of the words of the Apostle of love: *There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.* (Gal 1:7-8).

(3) We encourage our readers to research and read about the life and works of St. Photios the Great and his role in preserving Orthodoxy through the serious threats posed during his time. There exists ample material available within Orthodox web sites that allow the faithful an appreciation of another struggle in the preservation of our Faith in the 10th century.



Do you not notice that, in his mania for culture, European man has transformed Europe into an idol-factory? Almost every cultural item has become an idol. Our era is, above all, an era of idol-worship. No other continent is so engulfed by idols as is contemporary Europe. Nowhere else are material things so revered, nowhere else do people live for them as much as in Europe. This is idol-worship of the worst kind, for it is the worship of clay. Tell me, does a man not worship clay when he selfishly loves his earthen flesh of clay, and persistently asserts: I am flesh, and flesh alone? Tell me, does European man not worship clay when he takes as his ideal a class, a nation or mankind as a whole?

St. Justin Popovich (+1979)

OUR CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos (edited for length).

Young Samuel in the Temple

The holy Prophet Samuel was a great Prophet, who never distressed or annoyed God (to speak in human terms); God rested upon him. He also played an important role in the life of Israel.

Samuel was the son of God's good pleasure and his life was connected with the great events in the history of the people of Israel. He anointed Saul as King of the Israelites, and later, when Saul lost God's grace, he anointed David as King. Following him from his childhood until his death, one observes the afflictions he suffered, but also the lamentation of his people, when they lost this great Prophet.

As soon as Samuel was weaned, when he was around three years old, he was offered and dedicated to God by his devout mother, Hannah. Holy Scripture tells us that *Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest.* (1 Sam 2:11). His mother dedicated him to God, leaving him in the Temple before the Lord and Eli the priest.

Holy Scripture goes on to describe Samuel's presence in the Temple: *Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.* (1 Sam 2:18). He stayed in the Temple wearing a kind of

priestly vestment made of linen, which covered his shoulders, chest and back. With it he wore a little coat, which his parents brought him each year when they came up to the Temple to offer sacrifice to God. Samuel lived apart from his family, residing in the Temple. From an early age he had the great privilege of experiencing life beyond the family. Transcending the biological family and belonging to another, spiritual family develops and expresses unselfish love.

As time went by, Samuel became more and more devout and dear to God and other people. Holy Scripture says, *And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.* (1 Sam 2:26).

The three verses that we have quoted show Samuel and his work in the Temple during his childhood years. Three main points stand out. The first is indicated by the phrase *before the Lord*, and is connected with the Temple, where God dwelt. The second is Samuel's work and ministry in the Temple, as shown by the phrase [he] *was serving before the Lord*. The third is linked with the presence of holy people. Samuel grew up with the priests, such as Eli. Holy Scripture says, *and the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest*. This gives

us the opportunity to refer to the Temple, the worship and ministry that took place within it, and also the significance of the holy Fathers for our life.

The Temple and its Importance

The Greek word *naos*, which signifies both *temple* and *church building*, comes from a verb meaning "to dwell," and denotes the place in which God dwells. The Christian church building evolved from the Tabernacle of Witness and from the Temple, which Solomon built at God's command and with His blessing. As we know, every religion has its temples, the special places where worshippers fulfil their religious duties and pray to God.

The whole of the Old Testament clearly shows that the worship of God is linked with a particular place, where God's good pleasure is expressed. In the beginning this function was performed by the altars where sacrifices were offered. We know about Abel's altar, upon which he offered sacrifice to God, and God smelt the sweet savour and was pleased. We also find altars in the lives of Noah, Abraham and Jacob.

At God's command, Moses constructed the Tabernacle of Witness, which was the model for Solomon's Temple, to be constructed later.

In the beginning the Church used houses for prayer, later the Catacombs, then, once the persecutions ceased and the Christian Church was free, special places began to be built, which were dedicated

to God. There the bloodless sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered, as well as the daily prayers of Christians to God.

Of course, from a theological point of view we can state that God does not have a particular location, as He is the place where everything is. The whole earth belongs to God. *The earth is the Lord's and its fullness, the world and all who dwell therein.* (Pss 24:1). However, as St. John of Damascus says, we can describe God's place as being where *His energy is manifested*. Just as in ancient times God's energy was manifested at the altars and in other places, so now the same happens within Christian church buildings. The sacred building or temple becomes a *place where His glory appears*.

It is repeatedly made clear in the New Testament that Christians, who are members of the Church and members of the Body of Christ, are temples of the All-Holy Spirit. *You are the temple of the living God* (2 Cor 6:16), says the Apostle Paul. This has two meanings. The first is that every Christian who is a member of Christ is a temple of the All-Holy Spirit. This does not actually apply to every Christian, but to those who share in God's *illuminating* and *deifying* energy. St. Basil the Great underlines this important truth. He says that someone



is a temple of the All-Holy Spirit when his *nous*, which is the principal part of the soul, is not troubled by cares and unexpected passions. When someone's *nous* has unceasing prayer and remembrance of God, he is a temple of the All-Holy Spirit. St. Nicholas Cabasilas stresses that *nothing visible can truly be God's temple and His altar except human nature*. The second meaning is that all those who make up the Church, the Body of Christ, taken together as a whole, are called the temple of the All-Holy Spirit. Since these Christians, who are God's real temple, assemble in a special place to worship God, that place is also called a temple and a church.

It is in this second meaning that a place of worship is called a temple or church. St. Symeon of Thessaloniki, commenting on the church or temple, says that, although it is made of inanimate material, nevertheless it is the house of God, because it is sanctified through divine grace and the prayers of the bishop. It is not like other, ordinary buildings, but is dedicated to God: *It is rich in God's grace, as He Himself dwells in it, with His glory, power and grace*. Because the house of God has been sanctified, it is called a holy House. In fact, St. Symeon of Thessaloniki says more. Because every church is dedicated and consecrated in the name of a particular saint, it is not only God's dwelling-place, but also in some way the dwelling-place of the saint whose name it bears. The saint to whom the church was dedicated, *lives there from then onwards as though in his own home. He dwells there in an immaterial way through his soul, but often he also dwells there through his holy relics, which are placed there, and works miracles by means of God's power and grace through the relics as well. Because we too are twofold [soul and body] we receive gifts twice over*. Since the grace of God also enters material objects, *we see very clearly that truly divine powers act in church buildings. Angels and saints appear, wonders are worked, requests are granted and cures are bestowed*.

Speaking about the parable of the unforgiving servant, St. Gregory Palamas says that it can be interpreted in ecclesiological terms. The place where the ruler stands and settles accounts with his servants is the sacred church building, specifically the sanctuary, where the bishop's throne is situated. The saint says that Christ, *has His royal throne within the holy veil, as in the heavenly dwellings*, and sits and converses with His servants, the Christians.

We cannot understand these things rationally, but the saints experience them. If we acquire pure spiritual senses, and especially if our *nous* is *illuminated*, we shall grasp these realities. We shall realize that the church building is not simply a structure or somewhere ordinary, but the house of God, and the house of the saints to whom it is dedicated.

The saints are aware of the presence of God in churches, which is why St. John Chrysostom calls them *harbours in the ocean*. Our life is often storm-tossed and churches are spiritual havens. St. John of Kronstadt says ecstatically: *O sacred church, how comfortable and pleasant it feels to pray under your*

domes! Where can prayer be more ardent than in church, before the throne of God and beneath His gaze? In church the soul is softened by contrite prayer and abundant tears flow down... The Church is the school of faith and worship, founded by God Himself. It is the treasury of heaven on earth... In the holy temple we ourselves become the temple of the Holy Spirit through the prayers, the words of God and the Mysteries.

Unfortunately, most of us lack this awareness. We are not overwhelmed by longing and eagerness to be in God's house. David said, *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness*. (Pss 83:11). St. John Chrysostom, rebuking us for being lazy about going to God's house, says that, if someone invited us to go to *lawless theatres*, many would eagerly rush. When, however, they invite us to the house of prayer, *many hesitate*. He actually says that this mentality shows that we are worse and lazier than the Jews, who had a great longing to go to the house of God.

Samuel was *before the Lord*, because the Temple was the place where God's glory was manifested.

Worship and Children

It is said of Samuel that he did not simply stay in the Temple but *performed the services before the Lord* from his early childhood. This ought to be interpreted as meaning that he took part and helped in the services, as is clear from the clothes that he wore. He also prayed in the Temple. This shows his complete participation in the worship of God.

God was worshipped in the Temple. As in ancient times, so also in the life of the Church, children are not excluded from the worship of the people of God. Through holy Baptism, children too are members of the Church. Not only did children always take part in gatherings for worship, but they also took part in prayers of repentance. We have many examples of this.

The Prophet Joel announces to his contemporaries a great divine visitation on account of the sins of the people. At the same time, however, he exhorts them to repent, in the hope that this terrible trial may perhaps be averted. In particular, he urges them all, including infants still at the breast, to offer penitent prayer. He writes: *Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, call out the elders, and gather the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom go out from his bedchamber and the bride out of her bridal chamber. Between the porch and the altar, the priests of the altar, ministering to the Lord, will each be weeping and will say, 'O Lord, spare Your people...'* (Joel 2:16-17).

The participation of infants in this prayer of repentance has a twofold significance. Firstly, it shows that no sin is simply a personal event, but has cosmic dimensions. Thus the whole community ought to pray to God. Secondly, the prayer of infants, who pray in their own way, may be heard by God. Additionally, and equally important, it has another profound purpose: Children learn what their real family is and who its members are. They also acquire experiences of worship of God, and these childhood experiences will play an important

role in their later development. We see in the Psalms of David that God prefers praise *from the mouths of babies and nursing infants* (Pss 8:2) and accepts their prayers.

The New Testament preserves an account of the participation of a child in worship, specifically in worship at night, combined with teaching. In Troas, after the celebration of the Mystery of the Eucharist, the Apostle Paul, because he was going to depart the next day, *continued his message until midnight*. Then a certain young man called Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, *was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third storey and was taken up dead.* (Acts 20:7-9). Eutychus not only took part in the Divine Liturgy but also attended the Apostle Paul's long talk, which lasted until midnight. This sets an example to parents, that they cannot and should not deprive their children of services in church, even vigils and talks, although the children may not understand rationally, because they acquire experiences in a way beyond our comprehension.

Patristic theology states that all human beings have a *noetic faculty*, as all are created in the image of God. Children too have a *noetic faculty*, including infants. **In fact, because their noetic faculty has not yet been polluted, it is purer than our own.** Their rational faculty, however, is not yet developed, so they do not pray with our own received forms and images. Babies also pray to God, but in their own fashion. As time passes, and as all their mental powers develop, they understand things differently, but usually their *nous* is darkened and obscured by the darkness of their surroundings. It is possible for the presence of children in worship to be more intense than our own presence. They may pray better than adults.

From his infancy, Samuel was found worthy by God to minister to Him in His Temple. He took part in all the services there. He acquired a sense of worship and liturgy. He was kept pure in both body and soul. As he grew older, his *nous* was not darkened by the surrounding darkness, but was kept pure. For that reason, he was counted worthy of experiencing great things. He received a great revelation from God because, as we said earlier, even babies and small children have a *noetic faculty* and are able to receive divine revelations. In fact, a contemporary monk of the Holy Mountain says that, sometimes when infants laugh and we do not know why, it is because they see their angel, whom all of us have but cannot see.



St. Gregory Palamas says that the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Holy of Holies, developed this *noetic faculty*, lived hesychasm intensively, directed her *nous* into her heart and from there was caught up to God. She attained to *deification* and so was found worthy to become the Mother of Christ. At the same time, however, she participated in the services, listened to the problems and sorrows of the people who came to the Temple, and so felt compassion for the suffering and afflicted.

We could say that the same applied to Samuel, with certain differences. In addition, Samuel met holy people who came to the Tabernacle of Witness, and would no doubt have had significant experiences as a result of these encounters. On the Holy Mountain venerable old Elders used to tell me how much they benefited when, in the early stages of their monastic life, they met Elders who spoke wisely and whose words were the fruit of their personal experience.

Three factors, therefore—the Temple, worship in the Temple and holy people—played an important role in Samuel's life. When someone lives in this way, without great theories and teachings, he develops naturally and his whole personality is formed. It is as though he were in his mother's womb. The unborn baby increases in size in its mother's womb without making great efforts. It grows precisely because it sits and waits, and eventually the moment comes for it to be born. The same happens in the spiritual womb of the Church, which is the place of worship and the whole liturgical and eucharistic community. Without formulating exalted theories or taking part in endless discussions, one grows spiritually by participating in gatherings for worship, and helps one's children to develop even more.

Bringing Up Children in the Church

Everything we have said so far, prompted by Samuel's presence in the Temple, gives us the opportunity to look at the elements that contribute to the good upbringing of children in the Church. This is a burning issue for parents. We shall emphasize certain points that are indispensable for bringing up children well in the Church.

Children's ecclesiastical training begins before they are conceived, with the ecclesiastical training of their parents, at the time of their conception, during pregnancy, and after they are born. Upbringing in the Church is very different from any other sort of humanistic and even religious training. I make the distinction between ecclesiastical upbringing and religious

upbringing because the Church is something different from all the religions that exist today. Parents pray for the child that will come. They pray when it has been conceived. In particular, the mother, who carries it in her womb, prays and takes Holy Communion, and subsequently nurtures the child with prayer. A contemporary spiritual father says something very significant: in order for someone to learn to pray, he must also have the blood of parents who pray. Once the child is born, the parents do everything laid down in the Church's *typikon*: naming, offering in church on the fortieth day after the birth, Baptism, Holy Communion and taking part in the gatherings of the faithful for worship. In accordance with the earlier analysis, however, all these things can be summed up in three elements that are essential for Orthodox upbringing. The first is the place of worship, the second is worship, and the third is holy people and saints.

Children ought from the earliest age to love the church, the place where God dwells and where the glory of God is manifested. We all retain many such experiences from our childhood, when we were asked to clean the church, to help with rebuilding or decorating it. I can add that, pointless as they may seem, even the games that children play in the area around the church have much to offer and leave indelible impressions on their soul. In fact, without attempting to say too much, various experiences of this sort during childhood help people in later life.

The Russian ascetic, St. Theophan the Recluse, who wrote many books on asceticism, said that he owed much to the services and vigils that he attended in church as a child, but also to the games that he played outside the church.

Father Gheorghiu, a Romanian priest in Paris, describes in one of his books his childhood experiences of his life in church. He was the son of a priest and had the blessing of seeing the church continuously and taking part in the services held there. He writes that, in church he gradually experienced the dogmatic truth of the Church. Seeing the icons, he experienced the presence of God and communion with the angels and saints. He did not learn about the priesthood from books, but from his father, who was a priest. Through the services he experienced the fact that the Church is the Body of Christ. And through frequent visits to the cemetery he realized that the Church is the mother of the dead and the living. He describes most eloquently how he reached the point of understanding the mission of the priest, who is everyone's father, and not only exclusively his own father.

In church the child will live the Church's life of worship. Worship will play a major role in his later development. It will leave him with lasting impressions, which will not easily be lost. Personally, I retain the best impressions of when I used to help the priest in the sanctuary to celebrate the Divine Eucharist, of later when I took part in the church choir, and when I stood with the choir and we chanted Byzantine hymns. Even today I vividly remember many pieces of music, the services on Good Friday, litanies, vigils, attending nocturnal Liturgies in monasteries, and so on.

The presence of children in worship is not merely a matter of form, but essential. According to tradition, the Thrice-Holy Hymn, *Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal have mercy upon us*, was the inspiration of a child who, during a litany in Constantinople for deliverance from an earthquake, heard this hymn sung by angels. He told St. Proclus, and thus it became customary to sing it in church during the Divine Liturgy.

Children should attend church with their parents and their

whole family. In this way they feel that they belong to a worshipping community, which is their wider family. It is very important for them to pray with their parents, not at separate Liturgies. Of course, this may happen sometimes, when a child attends the Divine Liturgy with pupils from his school. But these Liturgies for schoolchildren cannot and should not be separated from the Liturgies of the eucharistic community



and regarded as independent. Attending church services ought not to be associated absolutely with school, lest it should cease when school ends.

There is, of course, a problem when babies and young children cause a disturbance in church during the service. It ought, however, to be emphasized, that we who are older should be more patient. We should be more aware of the fact that infants too are members of the Church and make their presence felt in worship by crying. This ought not to annoy us. We too as children caused a problem by being restless, and others were patient with us. All the same, mothers should use their discretion. When they see that the child is tired, they ought to try everything, perhaps even temporarily leaving the church to soothe him. Clearly we should all realize the value of the whole family gathering together for worship, including the older generation, parents, children and infants.

Apart from the place of worship and the services, at which they will take Holy Communion and in which, depending on their age, they will take part personally, another essential ele-

ment in bringing up children in the Church is acquaintance and contact with holy people. When we refer to holy people and saints, we mean those who are associated with Christ, who are dwelling-places of the All-Holy Spirit, living icons of Christ and tabernacles of God's glory. Holiness does not have a moral meaning, but a spiritual one. It is participation in the life of Christ and sharing in the uncreated energies of God. The saints participate in Pentecost. It is a matter of great significance to meet someone holy during our life.

We all appreciate the importance of St. Gregory Palamas in our Church, as well as the importance of his theology for Orthodox ecclesiastical life. However, we should not forget that he was the child of holy parents, who brought him up completely within the atmosphere of Orthodox Tradition. His parents also made sure he had a spiritual father. In fact, his biographer, St. Philotheos Kokkinos, describes a miracle performed by the Saint's father when they were on their way to visit a holy ascetic, who was the family's spiritual father. St. Gregory must also have been impressed by the lessons given by St. Theoleptos of Philadelphia, who was his teacher, but also practiced noetic prayer and the Orthodox hesychastic life. If we add to this the climate then prevailing in Constantinople, which influenced St. Gregory Palamas, we can complete the picture of his life as a child, and see the important role it played in his later development.

Another typical example is St. Basil, who expresses his great gratitude to his grandmother, Macrina. He praises Macrina, because from her he learnt *the words of the most blessed Bishop Gregory*. St. Gregory, Bishop of Neocaesarea, was the spiritual father of Macrina, St. Basil's grandmother. She brought up her grandchildren with the teaching and recollections of that holy man.

An elderly man in the region of Kozani was asked what had made the most impression on him in all his years of life. He replied: *When, as I was a little boy, I was counted worthy to kiss the hand of St. Kosmas Aitolos*. This made such a great impression on him that it determined the whole of his life.

St. Symeon the New Theologian says that for a time, when he was young, he went far away from God and the Church. What restrained him, however, was that he used to visit his spiritual father, even though he did not follow his advice. Only love and veneration for his spiritual father helped him to return to the Church and become a great saint.

I know many men with families who try to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain every year with their sons, because they want to bring them into contact with holy spiritual fathers, so they will have people to rely on in the future course of their life.

This also means that children associate with and love bishops, who are canonical shepherds of the Church; priests who serve in church; deacons, and all those who exercise a pastoral ministry in the Church. Parents ought to invite devout priests to their home, because this is very significant for the life of their children. Such events have left impressions on all of us.

Ecclesiastical Life and the Home

In parallel with all this, good ecclesiastical upbringing requires that the routine at home, where the child is growing up, is inspired as faithfully as possible by the Church's *typikon*. This, to be sure, is problem with wider implications. Everyday life should be linked with the life of the Holy Eucharist. When we attend the Divine Liturgy, we should acquire the liturgical *ethos*, which is sacrificial, an *ethos* of self-offering. We must learn to live in our interpersonal relationships, in the course of everyday life, as we live during the Holy Eucharist, because severing daily life from eucharistic life creates many problems.

The same should happen as regards bringing up children in the Church. A Russian theologian writes on this issue: *We*

loved the church like our mother, like our country, like God. We were inspired by it. For us it was a place of sanctification and a source of enthusiasm. We had nothing more beautiful or better... The Church's typikon regulated life in our home as regards fasts, feasts, services and prayers. For us it was self-evident and inviolable, like a natural law, that we would keep the fasts, especially the



strict rules of Great Lent.

A profound impression is made on children by shared evening prayer, when the whole family says Compline together and all the members, depending on their age, say part of the service. Let no one claim that this is impossible, because I know many families that pray together. If this form of shared prayer is difficult, the pious mother can pray with the children. Let them say *Paraklisis*. A priest could be invited to perform the Blessing of Oil in the home. He could read *Paraklisis* or bless the house. Devout parents can think of many things to do in order to adapt, to some extent, the routine of the home to the *typikon* of the Church. At the very least, they can pray before and after meals. In this way the children will understand that God sends the food, and we ought to thank Him. They will also realize that we must have God's blessing for all the actions in our life.

Metropolitan Dionysios of Kozani observes: *What comes first in people's lives is always upbringing, in this case, upbringing in the Church... our Christians must be taught what is said and done in Church, and learn to love the people and things of the Church. Unless we start from here, we do not make Christians,*

because, if we do not have people with the mind of the Church, we do not have Christians.

The significant comment has been made that young people who learn to attend church, visit monasteries, venerate holy icons, sing the Church's hymns, love iconography, and generally enjoy and understand the Church's art, will not easily distance themselves from the Church, even if they go through difficulties and are cut off from ecclesiastical life for a while. Parents ought to bring up their children in such a way that they can easily return after their temporary departure. It is very important that the children should retain a good memory and image of God and the maternal affection of the Church.

If parents are aware of the Church as a mother, they will inspire this attitude in their children. If they feel differently about the Church, the children will adopt the same attitude.

Imitating Hannah and inspired by the Prophet Samuel, who spent his childhood years in the Temple, we should be careful to instill an ecclesiastical way of thinking in children. We should involve children with the church, with worship and with holy people and saints. We should also attune the routine of the home to the *typikon* of Church. Then our own efforts will be easier and less laborious and painful.



We should accept every tribulation without argument, with the thought of the wise thief that we justly receive these sorrows for our sins, for the cleansing and salvation of our souls. With this attitude, every sorrow takes on the quality of sorrow for the Lord's sake, and our personal cross is transformed into the Cross of Christ. And through this we find salvation.

Elder Nikon, *Letters to Spiritual Children*

Grumbling is caused by misery and it can be put aside by doxology. Grumbling begets grumbling and doxology begets doxology. When someone doesn't grumble over a problem troubling him, but rather praises God, then the devil gets frustrated and goes off to someone else who grumbles, in order to cause everything to go even worse for him. You see, the more one grumbles, the more one falls into ruin.

St. Paisios the Athonite

ON FASTING

By an Orthodox Monk.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

[Rom 13:12-14]

† † †

From the time of the Apostles, Prophets and Fathers till our own day, it is evident from the life of the Church that fasting is part of our *armor of light*; it is a mighty weapon against the enemy given into our hands by the Saviour Himself, Who is a type and example for us in all things and Who fasted in the flesh in order to teach us to fast. To those weak and ill, it is a medicine and antidote—a bath in which to be washed and cleansed.

Armored with holy fasting, St. Elias the Tishbite withstood Ahab and his army singlehandedly and called down fire from the heavens. By fasting St. Moses, the seer of God and the elder of Israel, prepared to ascend the mountain in the desert and behold the Glory of God. By fasting the Three Children were shown forth to be fairer than the other children in Babylon in the house of the king, and Daniel was shown forth to be a shepherd of lions.

Fasting, therefore, should always be understood as a thing most necessary in our battle with the evil one. Only a man who has lost his mind would put down his weapons, strip himself naked of his armor and then jump into the line of fire to do battle with the enemy. Such a one would be committing suicide. A man who calls himself an Orthodox Christian and does not fast, is such a man.

In the final analysis he who does not fast does not believe in God, for he does not really believe in the existence of the enemy and the great victory gifted to us over him by our Saviour. He who does not fast does not believe in Him Who said to the enemy: *Man shall not live by bread alone.* (Mt 4:4 and Lk 4:4). This is why Apostolic and Patristic canons proclaim that all who do not keep the fasts have fallen away from the Faith (i.e., have become self-excommunicated), and our Holy Father St. Seraphim of Sarov instructs us not even to speak with such persons.

Those who fell away from our Holy Faith through schism and heresy, by distorting the dogmas and truth of Holy Orthodoxy, in consequence distorted the life of the Church also, and especially the teaching concerning fasting. Thus, to the Latins, fasting became primarily a means of atonement, satisfaction, retribution, payment for sins committed or for earning merits, wages, favor, etc., when all sins had been paid for. The Protestants correctly abhorred the use of fasting as

“works” which won merits which, in turn, were banked as surplus in the treasury of the Popes to be dispensed to “poor souls” in purgatory; the few that continued to fast, however, were not able to free themselves from the error of Anselm concerning atonement and punishment. Thus, after some centuries of keeping fasts as “a pious and ancient custom,” yet having lost the correct understanding and position of fasting in the life of the Church, both Latins and Protestants have totally abandoned fasting!

Now we see that even those that were “nearer” to Holy Orthodoxy in Liturgy and practice—the Copts, Armenians, Jacobites, etc.—in their last gathering in Addis Ababa have “reformed” their rules concerning fasting. This was to be expected, since they have fallen into heresies and are separated from the Holy Church. But now we hear even from those who bear the name Orthodox similar trends and aspirations. For us sinful folk, who nevertheless are still Orthodox in our

Faith, this is one more indication that these people are despisers of and apostates from Orthodoxy. They are only proclaiming to all that have ears to hear that they no longer wish to walk in the way and tradition of our Saviour, the Apostles, Prophets, and Fathers, but rather wish to make *provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof*. Of them the Psalms say: *They were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works*. (Pss 105:35); and the Holy Apostle says: *They have a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away*. (2 Tim 3:5).

St. Abba Isaac the Syrian instructs us that: *Our Saviour began the work of our salvation with fasting. In the same way, all those who follow in the footsteps of the Saviour build on this foundation the beginning of their endeavor, since fasting is a weapon established by God. Who will escape blame if he neglects this? If the Lawgiver Himself fasts, how can any of those who have to obey the law be exempt from fasting? This is why the human race knew no victory before fasting, and the devil was never defeated by our nature as it is: but this weapon has indeed deprived the devil of strength from the outset. Our Lord was the Leader and the first example of this victory, in order to place the first crown of victory on the head of our nature. As soon as the devil sees someone possessed of this weapon, fear straightway falls on this adversary and tormentor of ours, who remembers and thinks of his defeat by the Saviour in the wilderness; his strength is at once destroyed and the sight of the weapon given us by our Supreme Leader burns him up. A man armed with the weapon of fasting is always afire*



with zeal. He who remains therein, keeps his mind steadfast and ready to meet and repel all violent passions.

Those who do not fast—especially clergy—teach that fasting consists in not thinking and doing evil and quote from our Saviour, the Apostles and Fathers to support their views. They usually forget that our Saviour, the Apostles and Fathers all fasted the physical fast as well as the spiritual fast.

When man partakes of the glory of God, he does not partake of it in the spirit only, but physically also—in a complete sense. When one praises God, he does not praise Him only in the Spirit, but with physical voice also in chant and prayer. When one worships God, he does not worship him noetically only but physically also—the body participating by standing in prayer, by making prostrations and using the fingers and hand to seal itself with the sign of the Cross. When one communicates God, he does not communicate in spirit only but eats the very Body and drinks the very Blood of the Lord unto

healing of soul and body.

Thus one praises God and is united with God not in part, but completely as one whole—soul and body. When one labors in virtue, one labors not only noetically but physically also, even unto blood, in order not to deny our Saviour. Our Holy Martyrs did not witness just by words and thought, resisting evil in their hearts and minds, but gave their

bodies up to torments and their heads to be cut off, that they might remain with our Saviour.

Thus, since we are not just spirits, but “wear flesh and live in the world,” we cannot possibly fast spiritually only and not fast physically also. There is a unity and interaction between the body and the soul. They cannot be separated while we are still in the body. In the Ladder of Divine Ascent, St. John writes *Satiety of food is the father of fornication; an empty stomach is the mother of purity*. He who always keeps his stomach full and he who fasts know the strength of this saying.



If leather bottles are kept supple, they can hold more; but they do not hold so much if they are neglected. The man who stuffs food into his stomach expands his insides, whereas the man who fights his stomach causes it to shrink, and once it has shrunk there is no possibility of overeating, so that henceforth one fasts quite naturally.

St. John Climacus

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IS THERE A JUDAS WITHIN US?

By Fr Seraphim Rose (+1982).

As our Lord prepared for His Passion, a woman came and anointed Him with very precious ointment; and it is very touching how our Lord accepted such love from simple people. But at the same time Judas—one of the twelve who were with Him—looked at this act, and something in his heart changed. This was apparently the “last straw;” Judas was the one in charge of the money and he thought that this was a waste. We can see the logical processes going on in his mind. We can hear him think the ideas which the devil put in his mind about Christ: “I thought this man was somebody important. He wastes money, he doesn’t do things right, he thinks he’s so important...”. And this passion (love of money), led him to betray Christ. He did not “mean” to betray Him; he simply wanted money; he had been unable to crucify his passion of avarice.

Anyone of us can be exactly in that position. We have to look at our hearts and see which passion of ours will the devil utilize and lead us to betray Christ. If we think that we are something superior to Judas we are quite mistaken. Like Judas, everyone of us has several passions within his heart. Let us examine ourselves: we can be caught with love for neatness, for correctness, for a sense of beauty: any of our little faults which we cling to can be a thing that the devil can catch us with. Being caught, we will begin to justify this condition “logically,” on the basis of our passion. And through such a “logical” process, we can betray Christ. We have but one remedy: watchfulness and realization as to how we are filled with passions—each one of us is a potential

Judas. When the opportunity comes—when the passion begins to operate in us and logically begins to develop from a passion into betrayal—we should stop right there and whisper: *Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!*

We must not look at life through the glasses of our passions, nor see how we can “fit” life into being what we would like it to be—whether this is a life where there is peace and quiet or where there is a lot of noise and excitement. If we try to make life “fit” like this, a total disaster will result. In looking at life, we should accept all the things which come to us as God’s providence, knowing that they are intended to wake us up from our passions. We should pray to God to show us some God-pleasing thing that we can do. When we accept what comes to us, we begin to be like the simple woman in the Gospel who heard the call from God and was thus able to be His minister. She was proclaimed to the ends of the world, as our Lord says, because of the simple thing she did—pouring out the ointment upon Him. Let us be like her: sensitive to watching God’s signs around us. These signs come from everywhere: from nature, from our fellow men, from a seeming chance of events... There is always, everyday, something that indicates to us God’s will. We must be open to this.

Once we become more aware of our passions and commence our warfare against them, we will not let them begin the process which was seen in Judas. Judas started from a very small thing: being concerned for the right use of money. And from such small things we betray God the Saviour. We must be sober, seeing not the fulfillment of our passions around us, but rather the indication of God’s will: how we might this very moment wake up and begin to follow Christ to His Passion and save our souls. Amen.