

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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PEACE FROM GOD CHRIST IS BORN!

By the saintly Patriarch Pavle of Serbia (+2009), given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade at Christmas, 1999.

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. [Jn 6:68]

† † †



Persons and events come and go with the relentless march of time. That which today seems important and crucial may be completely forgotten tomorrow. Persons

regarded by their contemporaries as influential and powerful are forgotten, as if they never existed. History brings and then carries away everything with itself, it concocts and then abandons to oblivion. Everything appears temporary and relative, even we ourselves. Man can carry on in various ways with the pessimism of history, but it is far more important how God sees history. By His constant presence and action in history God, through what only appears like a meaningless course of events, prepares the way that leads toward a predetermined goal. By His entering into history He has transformed history so that particular events are not relative and temporary, but on the contrary, they are unique, unrepeatable and of crucial importance both for God and for man. God's presence in history cures history itself of its natural pessimism.

And precisely today, here and now, for the two thousandth time we celebrate and remember the event that divides history in two; the event so significant that we count the years from it and now

complete the second millennium. Two thousand years have passed since that night when history's greatest miracle took place in that cave near Bethlehem, when the Son of God Himself came and put on flesh and became like one of us and dwelt among us. (Jn 1:14). He is none other than the eternal and uncreated Son, the Word or Logos of God, through Whom all things were made. Since that night nothing in human life and history is as it was before. The *Sun of Righteousness* (Mal4:2) was born to us and all the depths of human fallenness and struggle against God have been filled by His warmth and light. From that night on, all human life and the history of every nation comes down to only one dilemma, to one simple question: Are you for or against Christ? One simple question, but a question so crucial that our entire life and the future of our people hinges upon it. That question overshadows and defines every historical period of the past twenty centuries.

For or against Him? Earlier periods that were, at least for the most part, "for Christ," brought forth fruit that stands as an example and a starting point for all times. That fruit is called Christian culture. It represents an attempt to Christianize every segment of personal, social and national life, so that nothing remains outside or apart from Christ. We call it an attempt, since nothing in history is absolute and final. But the value is truly in the deeply Christian attempt, since a basic characteristic of Christianity is its all-inclusiveness—that Christ be all in all.

Let us simply remember how the writer of the life of the Serbian ruler Stefan Lazarevic said of him, that he wished that "life throughout his land truly be like the Church of God." The fruits of life directed in this way are magnificent.

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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Christianity was poured into the everyday way of life. It Christianized every soul and created the atmosphere in which all personal and social life developed. No matter what area of life in that period we examine, we always find at its core a Christian vision and understanding of life and the world. It was an inexhaustible source of vitality and, most importantly, optimism for the age that declared itself *for Christ*. Even the tragedies that occurred, such as our Kosovo, could take on a Christian character in the national consciousness. Historical periods cannot be repeated, neither can models from the past be transplanted into the present. But what remains as an example for all times is the creative effort to base all of life on Christ, so that there are no spheres of life or activities that honor laws or rules other than Christian ones. Epochs that were *for Christ* well understood His words that *no one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and mammon.* (Mt 6:24). But then come dark times, times that struggle against God and Christ, regardless of whether they come from conquering foreign peoples or from the actions of our own people. The goals and methods are always the same: Kill Christ in the souls of the people, throw Him out of every area of life, and erect and proclaim new gods. In every such time Christians answered in the same way—with their blood. In such times the history of the whole Church, as well as of our Serbian Orthodox Church, is written in blood. From Kosovo to Jasenovac all the martyrs and new-martyrs witnessed that there is no life without Christ, and they did not fear those who could kill only their bodies but could not harm their souls. Their blood is our foundation, and we are accountable to it, that we not betray Christ even at the price of our lives, much less for our positions or careers. Their blood will be the measure of our salvation.

For or against Christ? On the basis of this yardstick, how can we grade the century we are leaving behind? Wars and a whole ocean of spilled Serbian blood. Suffering and misfortunes characterize the past century, but its grade can be summed up in only one word—failure. So much war, so much blood, and so little peace. Even the peace we did have during the past hundred years was not really peace, since we used those times to create the groundwork for new conflicts and wars. Governmental and ideological adventurism during the twentieth century cost the Serbian Church and people dearly. And in the end, what is left is that we are beginning the new century and the new millennium in a state of total crisis. Many are the names and characteristics of the crises in which we find ourselves, but fundamentally what we have is that deepest and most difficult of all possible crises—the crisis of humanity. Wrong has become right for us, falsehood has become truth, and we can only cry out with the Psalmist David, *Help, Lord, for there is no longer anyone who is godly! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. They speak lies every one to his neighbor; with lying lips and deceitful hearts they speak.* (Pss 12:1-2).

The twentieth century constantly preached with the lips of its demonic “wisdom” that human lives are the cheapest of all merchandise. In the number of its victims it far surpassed all other centuries of human history. The tyrannies to which it gave rise have nothing comparable in any other time of history. The ideological dictatorships which arose during this time, especially in Orthodox countries, were unprecedented attacks on human freedom and human life. In the name of ideologies millions lost their lives simply because they wished to think and live differently.

What is man, and what is he worth? The twentieth century said that man is nothing, but this feast today tells us, just as that day two thousand years ago told us, that man is sacred. And that applies not only to his spirit or his soul, but also to his body. The whole of man, body and soul together, is an inviolable shrine of incalculable and eternal worth. Today's feast tells us this, the day on which the Bodiless becomes embodied and on which the Son of God becomes the Son of man. This precisely is what is radically new in our faith.

That the soul is holy is suggested by other religions, but that the body is equally sacred is found nowhere else. During the whole first eight centuries of Christianity, which were characterized by struggles against heresies, the Church unyieldingly defended this truth: that the whole of man, both body and soul, is holy. And that applies to every human being, regardless of his religion or nationality. Every murder, every disrespect for human personality and freedom, is sin, even more so when it is justified on ideological or nationalistic grounds.

In contrast to this dismal picture of the twentieth century, today we see before us a young mother holding her newly-born Child to her bosom, and are moved to feel one of the greatest of human virtues and attributes: a warm heart. The motherly love of the Most Holy Theotokos permeates today's entire event and radiates a warm feeling within us. Christmas is the feast of warmth and of warm human hearts. If it seems that there is no place today a person can "warm" himself, it is because human hearts have grown cold. They have become hard and unfeeling even towards the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters who in recent years have been left homeless, exiled from their birthplaces, and some even without their loved ones. That life is hard is not the exception but the rule. Only the twentieth century has brought the simple-minded dream that life should be easy and leisurely, which it never has been throughout history. *In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread*, the Lord tells Adam (Gen 3:19), and that is the law of human life. But afflictions and difficulties and limitations are easier to bear when we have warmth in us and amongst us. For in the day of His second coming, the Lord will not ask us what kind of times we lived in, but how we related to our neighbor. Was he our "hell" or our "heaven?" We ourselves build either heaven or hell in our own hearts out of the momentary circumstances we are given, and the warmth of the human heart is able to transform any situa-

tion, even to make a cave in Bethlehem the most beautiful palace and birthplace of the King of kings.

It is hard to be a human being. To be a human being who spreads human warmth is even harder, but it is a task to which we are suited and which the Lord Himself has entrusted to us—to be human, even during inhuman times. Let us look around us. See how many families are governed by coldness, where there is no more love and which are disintegrating. There are more and more such families. See how many ties of kinship, neighborliness, friendship and *kumstvo* (godparenthood, *Ed.*) have been broken and enveloped in coldness. We will be completely immobilized by the ice of discord and intolerance, of disunity and envy, if we do not bring Christ into our hearts and especially into the hearts of our children. He is the only One able to bring together the disunited and reconcile the alienated, to warm our hearts and give peace to our lives.

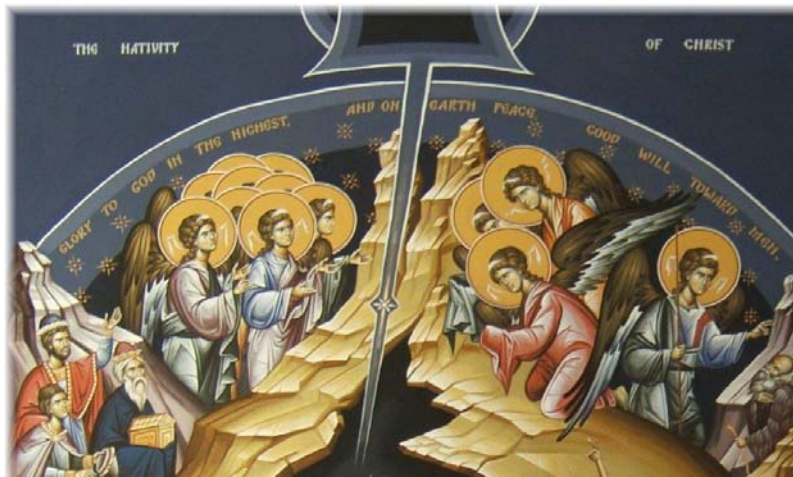
So what is to be done now, in the new century and new millennium? We pose this question to ourselves. We pose this question to our brothers throughout the world who care about us. The future is hidden and unknown. There are many roads before us, but they are not all the right roads. Some of them lead to destruction. But the future which lies before us is not simply something we must await, but it is a road we, first of all, must construct. We are responsible for our future no less than for our past. It is revealed to us as a possibility which we must responsibly and consciously create. And overshadowing the future is the same question we have already asked—For or against Christ?

If the Lord has not revealed the near future to us, leaving it up to us to create it, He has revealed to us the final and ultimate truth—that no matter what, He will triumph. He revealed that good is far stronger than evil, and that every triumph of evil is temporary and illusory. The weeds and the wheat grow together, but only until the harvest. For or against Christ—this is the question that will determine both our future and the future of all nations. As we gather here today around the Divine Infant Christ celebrating His birth, we hope and we pray to Him that He will be reborn in our hearts, in our neighbors, in our people and our country, and in the hearts of all people and all nations.

Peace from God—Christ is Born!

Your intercessors before the cradle of the Divine Infant:

Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and Serbian Patriarch PAVLE



O FOOLISH ONES AND SLOW OF HEART... [LK 24:25]

By the late Avgoustinos N. Kantiotos, bishop of Florina, Greece (+2010), from "Follow Me," translated by Asterios Gerostergios, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts, pp. 242-250.

All of us, at one time have wondered why the Lord allowed Peter to fall. And there is a very distinct reason for it. This fall, which Peter would remember for the rest of his life—it is said that whenever he heard a cock crowing, he shed tears—this great fall kept him humble. It nearly cost him eternity. He would have been lost forever, but the Lord prayed for him and his faith did not perish.

How now could he not be thankful to the Lord for his salvation? How could he not be sympathetic with sinners, who, drawn by strong passions, committed serious sins? A "righteous man," a Pharisee, would have condemned such mercilessly and would have sunk them in despair. Peter—sympathetic with sinners. How many times during his apostolic career had he comforted sinners who came to him crying for their sins! "My child," the Apostle would tell each of them, "do not despair. God's mercy is infinite, and I also sinned before the Lord. I sinned greatly. Even if the rivers would become tears, they would not be able to wash away my sin. Each time I remember it I am shattered, but the Lord forgave me. And you, whenever you repent and are sorry for your sins, the Lord will forgive you. Don't despair, then, but give thanks and glorify God."

Peter's intentions were good. He deeply loved Christ, and therefore Christ saved him from that fall and he came out with priceless spiritual prizes: self-knowledge, humility, and empathy. God's mysteries! That divine grace somehow knows how to make spiritual gain from the sins into which chosen souls have unwittingly fallen! Just as the omniscient God knows how to extract sweet flowers from a dunghill, so from the dunghill of sin, when there is sincere repentance, He extracts flowers of virtue. Truly, *all things work together for good to those who love God.* (Rom 8:28).

Brothers and sisters, fellow sinners, do not misconstrue these words and say in your hearts, "Since good comes from sin, let us then sin." Peter did not say "I'll deny the Christ so that grace may come upon me." No, his sin was not premeditated, but a terrible whirlwind which, for reasons we gave above,

found him weak and nearly destroyed him. Meditate, I ask, on Paul's words in Romans 3:5-8: *But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.*

It is easy for a person to change and go from the heights of innocence to the depth of corruption and depravity, as the following anecdote shows.

An artist was once passing through a quarter of an Italian city. He saw a small child in whose face shone pure joy and innocence. He painted the child and took the picture to his studio, and whenever he was taken by melancholy, he looked

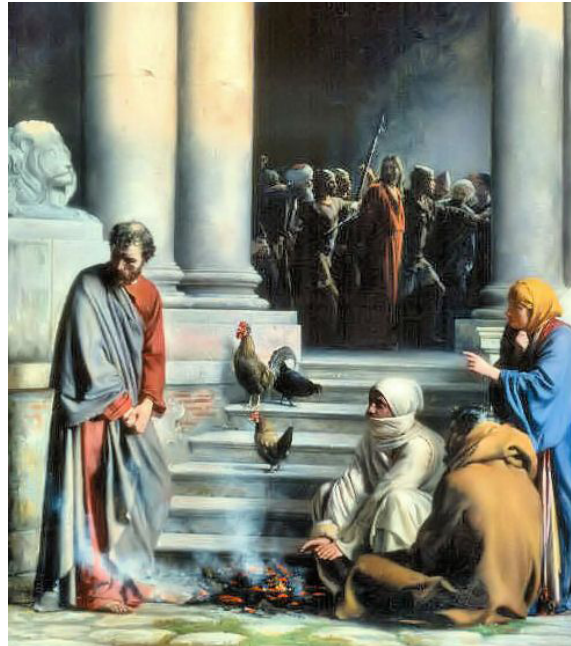
at the bright form of the child on the picture and his melancholy passed.

After many years, the same artist visited a jail to paint the wicked form of a criminal. He found it in the face of one prisoner who had committed a horrible crime. He painted the criminal's face and placed this picture next to the one of the innocent child, and beneath them wrote the epigram, "The Beauty of Heaven and the Ugliness of Damnation." But to the painter's astonishment, he discovered that the innocent child and the horrible criminal were one and the same person! Who knows what circumstance changed this innocent child

into that abominable wrong-doer. The two paintings are now in the Museum of Tuscany.

How easily we are transformed! Therefore, St. Augustine is heard to say somewhere in his Confessions, *Lord, we have seen souls who for their virtues near the stars of heaven, yet for pride and an unwatchful life fall and wallow in the dung of earth.*

Thus, brethren, we, too, can draw a lesson from Peter's fall. From what heights the Apostle fell! Perhaps someone superficially judging the events would condemn Peter for his denial and say that if he were in his place, he would not have denied the Lord. You see, it is easy to make ourselves heroes in words, but how words differ from reality! We live in times of peace. Immediate danger of death does not prevent us from confessing our faith; but, how many times when, without the threat of execution, does our duty come into conflict with our baser behavior and we prefer the voice of conceit and stifle the voice of our conscience, which is the voice of God? When



it comes to the test and we perjure ourselves for money or fear of a mighty person or for love or a relationship, denying the truth, do you not think that at that moment a voice like Peter's repeats: *I do not know the man*?

If we look at our lives, how many "little denials" of Christ do we see and how we would groan over our conceit, over our fear, and over our opportunism, which makes us deniers of righteousness and truth! And these, I say, in peaceful times, in a democratic state where we can freely express our ideas and feelings. If tomorrow brings a whirlwind and our democracy is swept away and an anti-Christian tyranny comes to power threatening to persecute the Faith, then we would see how many would be ready to sacrifice their good life and their bodies for the Lord. How many would leave sacred meetings? How many would not seek to erase their names from the records of religious societies and brotherhoods? How many would swear and anathematize themselves, saying that they have no relationship with religious life or movements?

This occurred during the persecutions of the first centuries; could it not be repeated now on a grander scale?

Addressing Gospel workers who continue Christ's work in our age, we say that they, too, must taste the bitter cup of denial in evil times. Let's mention an example from our religious movement today.

In a provincial city the author had a student in his catechetical school who showed eagerness and zeal, but when he grew up and tried to find work, he happened to be asked by a powerful person, hostile to missionary work, if he knew me. The young man was afraid, perhaps, that if he said he knew the author and that he was his student, the man would be displeased and his hope of arranging things would perish. He therefore answered, "I never heard of him," and so got on the good side of the agent.

But the young man, scolded by his conscience for what he had done, came crying to me and said, "Father, I have denied you." "My child, do not groan," I told him, "to deny me and not Christ is a small matter." "No," responded the young man, "it does matter, for I know you not as a mere man, but as a Gospel preacher."

Gospel workers will hear: *I do not know the man*. They will come across people whom they have taught and helped spiritually—as well as materially—but when these same persons are persecuted by a modern-day Annas or Caiaphas, they will deny knowing their Gospel worker to have the goodwill and protection of the powerful of the day, both in Church

as well as state. "Renounce that preacher publicly," once said a bad bishop to a novice theologian, "and you will have all my favor and protection."

But you, honored Gospel worker, do not lose heart. In the life of a preacher and every faithful follower of Christ, repeating His life in the smallest possible miniature, such painful things will happen. Always hold fast to Christ, and have courage and boldness. He who enables every living thing and all creation to preach to Him and sing His praises, was denied by His most fiery disciple, Peter. Many denied Him throughout the Ages and still do today, so what is so strange if they deny you, a mere earthling?

† † †

A school was opened near Lake Gennesaret, a model school. There were twelve students at the start, and its instruction was lofty. It astounded everyone. Nowhere was heard nor ever will be heard a higher teaching. The lessons were not confined to the narrow circle of the Twelve as specialized instruction, secret, which no one else could know, but was meant to be known all over the world. The Lord said: *Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.* (Mt 10:27).

The truth was meant to be known by the Apostles who made disciples of all nations. For the Twelve to make disciples of the whole world, they first had to become disciples themselves. They had to be enlightened; then they could enlighten. They had to be sculpted in the workshop of divine instruction to become living statues of virtue. They had to be purified and

polished to become mirrors that reflected Christ's glory. They had to become spiritual suns which dispelled the darkness of error and sin.

Was this an easy task? It is said of a famous sculptor that, when he saw a block of marble submerged in mud, he pulled it out, carved it, and one day a shining angel appeared! The muddy block had been transformed into a marvelous work of art. Teaching is like stone-cutting. One sculpts marble; the other sculpts raw minds. There is a difference, however, in the object of the two professions. Marble puts up no opposition; it is worked to the desire of the sculptor. People, however, as living and free beings, put up opposition, and teaching, desiring to shape people, is made difficult. There are hard minds which frustrate every attempt to instruct them.

Every teacher encounters difficulties, but no teacher ever found as many difficulties in his work as Christ did. His



teaching, as we said, was lofty; however, His disciples' minds, influenced by the Judaic superstitions deeply entrenched in the consciences of many, were incapable of understanding the new teaching of the Nazarene. Their doubts came one after the other. Their ideas about the Messiah's mission were low and earthly. They dreamed of an earthly kingdom with Christ as an all-powerful king and themselves in prominent positions. They certainly quarreled over attaining rank for first place. Jealousy stung their hearts. Intolerance and vengeance disturbed their spirits. Clouds of melancholy and gloom darkened the skies of their souls. Little faith came into their souls, narrowing the range of belief. Terror seized their hearts. Strangers did not denounce their failings; Christ revealed them. These same men admitted their weaknesses in the Gospels. St. Chrysostom observes, "For with this object He reveals their deficiencies, that after these things thou mightest know what manner of men they became by grace."

The Apostles did not attempt to justify or diminish the impression, as if to tell us, "This is what we are—people with weaknesses and failings. How far we are from the spirit of Christ! He told us about the heavenly kingdom and we thought about crowns on earth. He called us to martyrdom and we fought over places of honor. Foolish and unlearned disciples, how much sadness we caused in Jesus' holy heart! One of us denied Him before a servant girl, the other betrayed Him for a most meager reward. The others forsook Him at the most critical moment. The Lord was right to rebuke us and tell all of us what He told Luke and Cleopas: *O foolish ones and slow of heart!*"

Truly, before His enemies abused Him, before the nails of His crucifiers penetrated His holy body, before the soldier's lance pierced Him, the disciples He loved more than anything else in the world made Him drink the bitter cup. Many times, He was a stranger to those around Him, and the mere presence of Judas served to be a source of constant affliction for Jesus.

He bore these afflictions, however. He did not dissolve the circle; He did not send the disciples back to their homes as incapable of instruction or spiritual advancement. No, He held them close, and as time passed and the end of His earthly life drew near, He spoke still more fervently to them. Despite their imperfections; they would be the ones who continued His work in the world.

Certainly as God He did not need them. He could have transmitted the gospel by other means. He could have sent angels and archangels into the world, who as fiery spirits would traverse the earth, but He chose human beings. The foolish things of the world—the rough, the base, and the nobodies—He chose to accomplish the great miracle of feeding the world on God. Truly, no beginning could have been more negligible than the beginnings of Christianity, but it is also the proof that our religion is of God, Mighty and All-powerful.

Spiritual fathers and Church teachers, from your pulpits you preach to the masses and many people hear you. Thank God for this blessing, but you should not be satisfied with this alone. Seek out those few cultivated souls in your audience who will be able to continue your spiritual work. The discovery and education of young people for missionary service should be your first priority. Have you found such individuals? Have they approached you? Have they stated their desire to follow naked the naked, crucified Lord? Kneel and give thanks to the Lord, for in your generation there are still missionary callings.

These young people, however, do not become missionaries overnight. They need enlightened instruction and a brilliant example. They will also pass tests, as do all Gospel workers. You must be armed with patience and love. Until the time they throw out the worldly views, errors, and superstitions of our times—until the time they build up brave and lofty minds—O what you will endure! There will be times when you will weep. The shadow of a Peter who denies or a Judas who betrays will become your greatest cross. Get up, my brother, your labors to promote Gospel workers will not be in vain. When it is time for you to dawn in the other world, there will dawn on the horizon of the Church new Gospel workers, new stars lighting the world.



I think of how, with such love, All-good God, You created man in the blessedness of Paradise. Not only did you create me in order to give form to my earthly being, but to give to me Your own divine breath. But I listened to the enemy and was deceived, and chose the path which led me far from You. And it was a way filled with pain and anguish, inconsolable and desolate—without hope, without end.

Until You returned. But now, with my earthly form. Because it was right to fulfill the debt of my own nature. Out of much love, You assumed that which I had lost. You came as such a small, quiet and humble infant, self-silenced lest You frighten me. You, Almighty God.

And it only remains for me now to make the great decision, to open my heart and let You nestle inside. That You may place therein Your throne, that You may stay longer with me; and, by Your Presence, renew me as a member of the Mystical Body of Your Church, to foretaste from now the Kingdom of the Heavens.

This is the greatest joyous event, Lord: Your coming to the Earth and into my heart.

May You make me worthy to remain always a welcoming manger, to accept You and to have everything for Christmas in my heart with You.

An Anonymous Expression of our Lord's Nativity

DUTIES OF PASTORS AND OF THE FLOCK

By St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, bishop of Voronezh (+1783). From "Journey to Heaven, Counsels On the Particular Duties of Every Christian." Translated by Fr. George D. Lardas, published by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY (1991).

On the Duty of Pastors



Pastors are here taken to mean bishops and priests. The very name pastor indicates of what sort they must be. For they shepherd not irrational, but rational, sheep of Christ, people created in the image of God and redeemed with the blood of Christ, the Son of God. Heed this, then, beloved pastor!

1. You should not seek this rank or honor, but await the calling.

2. When you are called, consider whether you are able to take up such a burden; and if you cannot bear it, do not approach it lest it weigh you down and plunge you into the abyss. He who would correct others must correct himself, he who would teach others must first teach himself. He who would shepherd and save others must watch over himself. He who would keep watch over and guard others must be good himself. He who would be a leader and show the way to others and lead them to the heavenly home must go on before himself. He by whom all should be enlightened must be a light to the world, the salt of the earth, and so on. He who would be an intercessor for others to God must first be pure and blameless himself. His own conscience must not reproach him who would reprove others for sin, lest he hear, *Physician, heal thyself!* (Lk 4:23). Consider these things, beloved, and do not approach burdens greater than your strength.

3. A pastor must without fail teach people, lead them to true repentance, plant the fear and love of God in men's hearts, put the fear of God's judgement in reckless and unrepentant sinners, encourage the troubled and doubtful and those inclined to despair with the mercy of God and the consolation of the Gospel, and root out superstition; schism and heresy. He must draw all this teaching from the wellsprings of Israel, the sacred books of the word of God, and transmit it to the people under him.

4. The place of teaching is the holy church; however, the pastor can and must impart his teaching in every place, wherever there may be a gathering, whenever occasion per-

mits. In this we have as an example to all pastors Christ the Saviour of the world, Who taught not only in the temple of Solomon, but also in homes, and in the desert, and in other places. Occasion will give the diligent and clever pastor a time and place to speak, as we see even in the Gospel. While sitting at table, he might speak of the table of the Kingdom of Heaven, and so on.

5. You must consider beforehand whatever you have to say to people, and think on it well, and then you may set it before the people. Food is sprinkled with salt before it is cooked, and then it is set on the table, and it is both pleasing and useful to those that sup. Thus a pastor must first prepare the food of the word of God within his heart, and sprinkle it with the salt of reason, and then set a spiritual table for his hungry people, otherwise the pastor might easily sin in word.

6. Because there are two kinds of people—those that live recklessly, and those that are humbled with the fear of God's judgement and hunger for consolation—then the pastor has an obligation to set forth in his words to those without fear the Law of God and God's judgement, and thereby lead them into true repentance and contrition; and he must give the Gospel consolation to those that are contrite and sorrowful and troubled in conscience. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.* (1 Tim 1:15).

7. Sometimes a word of reproof (the act of reproving, censuring, or rebuking, *Ed.*) must be spoken to all in general, and sometimes to some particular person. When reproof is given in general, then one may speak strictly and sharply, that sinners listening might feel the lash of fear in their hearts, and so be wakened as from the sleep of sin. We see this in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. But when you wish to say a word of reproof to a particular person, and it concerns a sin known both to you and to him, in that case speak carefully, lest while you treat one sore you do not open a greater wound. Seek a time and an occasion for this. There is no better occasion than when he himself confesses his sin to you. Then you may tell him everything, only speak soothingly and with sympathy, and not with anger, so that he may know that you speak out of love, and that you sincerely desire his salvation.

8. When people, whoever they may be, commit iniquity and you know it openly, take extreme care not to be silent, but everywhere reprove their iniquity in your speech, lest you be like a dumb dog that does not bark when thieves break into a house and loot it, and wolves fall upon the flock and devour it.

Stand firm, beloved, and show your pastoral work even though you must necessarily suffer. In this work you have as your examples the prophets, apostles and luminaries of Christ who lived in times of old.

9. Keep from flattering rich and exalted people that live in the luxury and pride of this world, and keep from minimizing their vices, or even worse than that, from making them out as nothing, lest instead of being a teacher you are a flatterer; but reprove every vice plainly and bear witness to the truth in every place and at all times, for you speak the word of God as a messenger of God. Let all such people know that you are their pastor and teacher, and that you must give account for them to the just Judge.

10. Avoid speaking the word of God for the sake of praise and human glory, lest you sin before God, appropriating to yourself that which is not yours. The word of God is given for the sake of men's salvation and for the glorification of God's name. One must preach it for this end. When you fittingly discharge your pastoral duty, then you will have praise though you may not wish it, however not from all. Those that are good and zealous for their salvation will love and praise you, but those that are wicked and neglectful of their salvation will hate you and revile you. You will not, then, please everyone.

11. Whatever you teach the people under you, you must first do yourself. Thus you will teach in word and deed when your manners and life are in agreement with your word. You sit in a high place and stand before all. All look at you, then, and observe what you do and say. Therefore, teach them goodness by your word and example, that they may hear from your lips a useful word, and see the example of your good life, and so they will profit by your word and life.

Beloved! Be a light to your people in word and life. Be their salt, be a leader into that homeland, and not merely a signpost by the roadside showing them the way, but go on before yourself. Guard them as a watchman, and guard yourself. Proclaim the word of God to them, but first do so yourself. Invite them to the great supper of eternal blessedness, but go on before yourself.

12. Without the help of God, the efforts of the pastor himself as well as those of the people will not be discharged or meet with success. For this reason the pastor has an obligation to pray diligently to God for himself and for the people, that He help both himself and all the people.

The Apostle portrays the virtues a pastor must be adorned with and how diligent he must be, in his First and Second

Epistles to Timothy and in the Epistle to Titus. Read them for yourself and you will see. Worthy of all acceptance is his saying, *A bishop, and a priest, must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well in his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)* (1 Tim 3:2-5).

On the Duty of the Flock toward the Pastor

1. First, because the pastor speaks the word of God, then to whatever he teaches, pay diligent heed, O Christian, and do it. Concerning this the Apostle says, *Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they must watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.* (Heb 13:17).

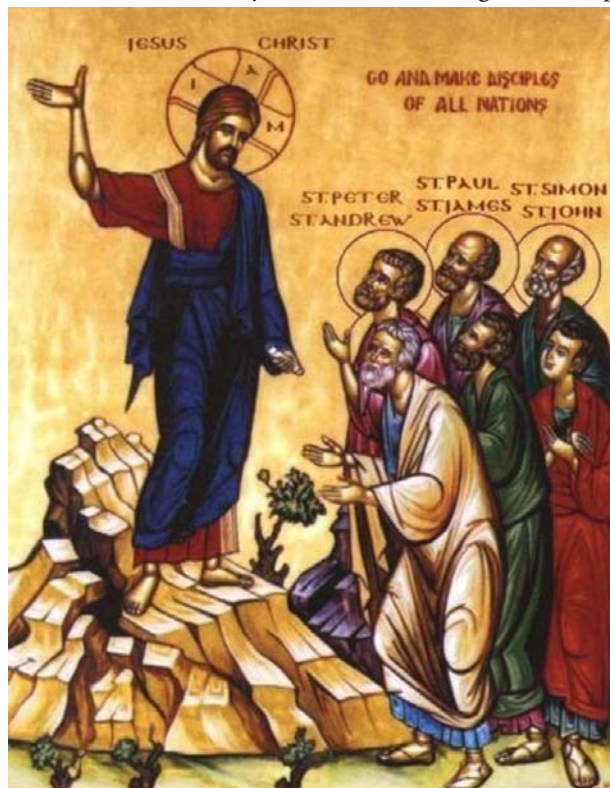
2. Second, the pastor is the messenger of God who is sent to you by God, and he proclaims to you the way of salvation and invites you in the name of God into His eternal Kingdom. For this reason, revere him as the messenger of God that proclaims to you such great good things, and who invites you to them. *He that receiveth you receiveth Me,* (Mt 10:40) says the Lord. Receive, then, and revere the pastor as the messenger of Christ.

3. Third, because the pastor provides for the common good, and as he looks after you as well

as for all so that all may receive eternal salvation, then love him as your father and benefactor, and be grateful to him. You call him father, that is well: he begets you as well as others, not to the temporary, but to eternal life. Love him, then, as so great a father to you. You love your father according to the flesh, how much more ought you love this father.

4. Fourth, as he takes care and provides for all and for you, do not leave him in need, but help him in his requests and supply his needs, that he may have time to take care and look after the common good. Thus by mutual love and benefaction the common good will not be without success.

5. Fifth, because many among the people are not men of goodwill and as they do not love pastoral reproof but wish to live according to their own will, they invent and broad-



cast no little slander against the pastor. Then when you hear such slander and ill report against the pastor, do not believe it and guard your lips, lest you say anything about it to anyone else. Otherwise you will sin gravely, as you will return evil for good, which is a great iniquity. It is a serious thing to slander and dishonor a simple person, how much more so a pastor. From this great discord follows among the people, and disregard and disobedience to the pastor, and thus his labor may end without profit. Pay careful attention to this, avoid evil gossip against the pastor. Most of all do not spread evil gossip about him, lest you feel the avenging hand of God upon you.

6. Sixth, if you see in the pastor such weaknesses as occur even among the people, do not be scandalized and do not judge him, but understand that the pastor is a man, just like everyone else, and that he has the same weaknesses as do the rest of the people.

7. Seventh, because the pastor is subject to many temptations, and the devil and his evil servants war against him most especially, therefore he also needs the special help and support of God. Then, you, and all the people as well, must pray to God for him that He may help him and strengthen him.

The happiness of the household depends on a good householder, the happiness of soldiers depends on a good commander, and the happiness of a sailing ship depends on a good helmsman. Then pray that the pastor may be wise and good, and that Christian Society may be happy.

8. When the pastor himself does not do what he teaches, but lives contrary to his teaching, heed the word of Christ which He spoke concerning such pastors, *The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do: but do not ye after to their works: for they say, and do not.* (Mt. 23:2-3).



He comes not as a fierce man of war, threatening all things living with death, but as a newly born babe, bringing the hope of rebirth and life into the entire realm of death; He comes—but the land of destruction does not meet, does not embrace, does not praise, does not even see its Saviour, and does not hear the Word of God keeping silence in a manger. Virtually in vain does *the glory which Jesus Christ had with God the Father before the world was* (Jn 17:5) on the lips of the angels, follow Him descending into the world and pursuing Him, attain even unto the earth.

St. Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow (+1867)

A HYMN

By St. Ephraim the Syrian.



I fall in adoration at your feet,
Lord!

I thank you, God of goodness;
God of holiness, I invoke you,
on my knees, in your sight.

For me, an unworthy sinner,
You have willed to undergo the
death of the cross,
setting me free from the bonds
of evil.

What shall I offer in return for your generosity?

Glory to you, friend of men!

Glory to you, most merciful!

Glory to you, most patient!

Glory to you who forgive sin!

Glory to you who have come to save us!

Glory to you who have been made man in the womb of a
Virgin!

Glory to you who have been bound!

Glory to you who have been scourged!

Glory to you who have been derided!

Glory to you who have been nailed to the cross!

Glory to you, laid in a sepulcher, but risen again!

Glory to you who have preached the Gospel to men and
have been believed!

Glory to you who have ascended to heaven!

Glory to you, seated at the right hand of the Father

and who will return with him, in majesty, among the angels,
to judge those who have disregarded your passion!

The powers of heaven will be shaken;
all the angels and archangels, the Cherubim and Seraphim
will appear in fear and trembling before Your glory;
the foundations of the earth will quake
and all that has life will cry out before Your majesty.

In that hour let your hand draw me beneath Your wings,
and save me from the terrible fire, from the gnashing of teeth,
from the outer darkness and from despair without end.

That I may sing to Your glory:

Glory to Him who through His merciful goodness
has deigned to redeem this sinner.

† † †

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus
Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us!

Amen!

ON THE GOD-PLEASING LIFE A PASSAGE FROM ABBA POIMEN THE GREAT ABOUT THE GOD-PLEASING LIFE, THE CONQUEST OF THE PASSIONS AND THE SOWING OF THE VIRTUES

Source: "The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It," by St. Theophan the Recluse, translated by Alexandra Dockham, *The Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, AZ (1996), Letter Sixty-Nine, pp. 254-259.*



Who got you interested in St. Poimen so that you want to know more about him? No matter who it was, I am glad of it. You will find who St. Poimen was and how he lived

in the *Menaion* under August 27th, and also in the *Sayings Concerning the Ascetic Deeds of the Saints and Blessed Fathers*. You will find a number of his sayings in these places.

He was from a simple family and was uneducated, but the experiences of spiritual life and grace so enlightened his mind that because of his astute, precise knowledge of the laws of the rising up to perfection of spirit, it is fitting to place him among the first of the instructive Fathers wise in the ways of God.

Until you get to reading about him, I will write for you the most important points from his teaching and sayings that relate to what I have been explaining to you for a long time.

Repentance and grieving over one's sins is the beginning of the Divine path. This is what you encounter in St. Poimen.

He saw a woman who was sitting on a grave and weeping bitterly, and he said, "If all the pleasures of the world were to appear here, they would not free her soul from grief. We too must continually grieve thus." (Saying 26).

The 72nd saying also recounts a similar situation, and the words of St. Poimen are quoted in this way: "I assure you that if man does not do away with all fleshly desires and does not thus weep, he cannot become one with God. This woman's entire soul and life were absorbed in grief."

A person who repents and grieves over his sins naturally shuns evil and does good. Until he is this way, he may not undertake to do evil by deed, but he cannot be free from wicked thoughts. That is why his shunning of evil consists almost entirely in struggle with the thoughts. This is what St. Poimen talks about.

One of the brothers went to Abba Poimen and said to him, "Father! I have many thoughts, and I am in danger because of them." The old man took him outside and said, "Expand your chest and do not inhale!" "I cannot do that," answered

the brother. "If you cannot do that, then neither can you stem the flow of the thoughts," said the old man. "But your job is to resist them" (Saying 28).

Your job is to resist them, but how? First of all, be attentive to yourself and be sober. A brother said that when he was with others, he would amuse himself and return to his cell not the same as when he left it. He asked how he should act. The elder told him, "When you return to your cell, do you want to find yourself the same as when you left? Maintain vigilance over yourself both at home and outside the home" (137). "In general," Abba Poimen would say; "the thing you need most is a sober mind" (135).

When maintaining vigilance over yourself, as soon as you observe the passionate, immediately pray and it will go away. A brother asked Abba Poimen about the struggle with rebellious thoughts, and the Elder answered him: "This situation is like a man who has fire on one side, and a cup of water on the other. When the fire begins to scorch, he takes water from the cup and puts it out. Fire is the suggestion of the enemy (the passions), while water is earnest prayer to God." (146)

To suffer less from passionate thoughts, it is necessary to remove oneself from occasions that arouse them. One must remove himself from everything passionate, said Poimen. A man who is close to something that could engender passion is like someone standing over a deep precipice into which the man's enemy may easily throw him. But the man who removes himself from that which is capable of arousing passion is like someone standing far from the precipice. Let the enemy drag him so as to toss him into the abyss, but while he is dragging him along by force, the man will call out to God and God will help him. (59)

The most important thing is to try in every way possible not to give in to the thoughts. For encouraging this, we read the following in the sayings about St. Poimen: "A brother asked him whether a person could always suppress his thoughts without yielding to the enemy in a single one? The elder answered, 'There are those that suppress ten but yield one.' That very same brother asked the same thing of Abba Sisoës, and he said, 'Indeed, there are those who yield nothing to the enemy.'" (88, 89)

Another: Abba Anoub asked Abba Poimen about pure thoughts that are engendered in the human heart, and about vain desires. Abba Poimen answered him: *Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?* (Isa 10: 15). Do not give them a hand, and they will not do anything." (15)

What then will come of this unyielding? The passions will die away. That is what Abba Poimen told Abba Isaiah when the latter asked him about impure thoughts. He said: "If a trunk full of clothing is not looked after, then in time the clothing will disintegrate. So too will the thoughts, if we do not in fact carry them out, vanish in time, as if they disintegrated." (20)

Abba Joseph asked Abba Poimen about the same thing, and he said, "If someone were to place a snake and a scorpion in a jar and close it up, then in time, of course, the creatures would suffocate. So too will bad thoughts that come from the demons die away, if we resist them patiently and do not feed them." (21)

However, in shunning evil through such ruthless opposition to passionate thoughts and desires, one must at the same time do good, cultivating every sort of virtue within oneself. Through both these things the heart will soon be purified. There are many lessons in St. Poimen about cultivating virtue. Here are the most important ones.

He quotes a saying of Abba John the Dwarf, who said, "I desire to possess every virtue, if only to a small degree." (46) Further on he offers his own lesson about this, saying, "When a man decides to build a house, he gathers many different materials for construction. So too must we acquire all the virtues, if only to a small degree." (130)

There are, however, virtues that are fundamental and provide guidance, and that is why one must direct all efforts toward them. St. Poimen often indicates which ones these are. For example: "Maintaining self-vigilance, being attentive to one's self and discernment are the three virtues that guide the soul." (35)

"Fall down before God, humble yourself and reject your own will; these are the working tools of the soul!" (36) "In the Scriptures it is written, *Though these three men, Noah Daniel and Job, were in it, as I live, they shall deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.* (Ezek 14:14, 14:20). "Noah represents poverty; Job, patience; Daniel, discernment. If a man has these three virtues, then the Lord dwells in him." (60)

"The three fundamental virtues are the fear of God, prayer, and charity toward one's neighbor." (160)

Abba Poimen had a layman tell the brothers the following: "I do not know how to speak from the Scriptures, so I will tell you a parable. A man said to his friend, 'I want to go see the king. Come with me.' The friend answered him, 'I will go with you half-way.' He said to another friend, 'Take me to the king.' He said, 'I will take you as far as the king's palace.' The man said to a third person, 'Come with me to the king.' 'Let's go,' replied the third friend, 'I will go with you to the king's palace, bring you inside, announce your arrival and present you to him.' Abba Poimen asked the layman, 'What does this parable mean?' He replied, 'The first friend is asceticism, which leads you to the true path; the second is purity, which takes you to Heaven; the third friend is almsgiving, which will fearlessly bring you to the King Himself, God.'" (109)

When, in this way, you do not yield to the passions on the one hand, and you cultivate the virtues on the other hand, the heart gradually softens (182), warms up and receives within itself the Divine flame, which you have only to look after to be safe. Abba Poimen says concerning this: "When a pot is

warmed by a fire, then no fly or other creature can touch it; but when it becomes cold, then they perch on it. It is the same way with the soul: So long as it is in a state of spiritual activity (enthusiasm of the spirit for God), the enemy cannot affect it." (111)

These excerpts are sufficient for you. You will find for yourself the other things that are necessary and valuable for you in St. Poimen. I just wanted to use these excerpts to refresh your memory about all that we have talked about earlier. Here is the entire path that you have set out on. Indeed, no matter which Father you begin to read, you will find essentially the same thing in each, although they differ in their portrayal and explanation.

May you become wise! Lord give the blessing!



Two philosophers came to an elder and asked him to say something beneficial to them. The elder remained silent. Again the philosopher spoke, "Will you not answer us, father?" The elder said to them, "That you are skilled in the use of words, I am fully aware; but I do testify to you that you are not truly philosophers. How long will you cultivate the art of speech, you who have no understanding of what it is to speak? Let the object of your philosophy be always to contemplate death, possessing yourselves in silence and tranquility."

Abba Palladios told us of something that happened in Arsinoe, a city of the Thebaid. A man was arrested there for murder. After suffering many tortures, he was finally condemned to be beheaded. As he was being taken to where he had committed the murder—a point about six miles outside the city—there was a monk following behind, apparently with the intention of seeing how he would be decapitated. As he passed along the way to his execution, the condemned man saw the monk who was following and said to him, "Well now, Abba, have you no cell, sir, nor any work to occupy your hands?" The monk answered, "Of course I have a cell, brother, and also something to occupy my hands." The man rejoined, "Then why do you not stay in your cell and weep for your sins?" The monk replied, "Ah, brother, I am very negligent of my soul's health—and that is precisely why I am coming to see how you die, that by this means I might come to have some compunction." The condemned man said to him, "Go your way, Abba. Remain in your cell and give thanks to God who saved us. It was because He was made man and died for us that man dies no more the eternal death."

John Moschus, "*Leimonarion*"

TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY

By Metropolitan Philaret (+1985).

Once long ago, nearly two thousand years in the past, at the dawn of Christianity, the pre-eminent Apostle Paul, one of the greatest preachers of the Christian Faith, wrote in his epistle to his beloved disciple Timothy: *Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh* (1 Tim. 3:16).

And the holy Gospel, relating to us how this, the greatest event in the history of humanity, the manifestation of God in the flesh took place, says that the angel who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds of Bethlehem told them: *I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:10-11).

Great joy... Behold, the Holy Church, solemnly celebrating the great and splendid feast of the Nativity of Christ, renews this great joy in our sight from year to year, reverently and joyously pondering and reminding us of the wondrous accomplishment of the merciful and co-suffering love of Him Who descended from the unapproachable and dread throne of His divine glory and appeared on our sinful earth, "for us men and for our salvation..." The saintly Theophan the Recluse says that there can be no greater joy for the Christian soul than the joy which the angel proclaimed on the blessed night of the Nativity of Christ, and which he said would be a great joy for us, for all people.

O Christian! Does your heart rejoice on this splendid feast day? Behold, before us is the world which surrounds us, which does not know the beauty and light of Orthodoxy. The children of this world, for all appearances, also celebrate the Birth of Christ. But what is their "Merry Christmas!" which thousands and millions of their post-cards and greetings say? Having torn themselves away from the fundamental laws of the Church, having lost all connection in fact with ancient Christian piety, they have reduced the celebration of the great and splendid feast to greetings, gifts and brightly-colored lights. Yet there would be nothing foolish in all of this if it were warmed from within with the truth and joy of the great solemnity of our holy and saving Faith. But do we not see that their entire celebration is but decorative in character? On the outside it is elegant, but within there is spiritual emptiness...

Nay, the joy of the Nativity of Christ lies not in gifts and greetings, but in the news that the Omnipotent Creator of all that exists appeared on earth, dwelt among men, gave them His marvelous evangelical law and the wondrous example of spiritual life in God and love for God and neighbor; by His redemptive and salvific sufferings He has freed us from sin, the curse and death, and has opened for us a path to His heavenly kingdom and to everlasting joy in God and with God.

On the night of the Nativity of Christ, the holy angels chanted: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men* (Luke 2:14); And He Who was born on that night, bidding farewell to His beloved disciples on another night, the night of His redemptive sufferings, confirmed the angel's words, saying: *Peace I leave with you. My Peace I give you*—yet to this He added—*not as the world giveth, give I to you* (John 14:27).

This is the holy peace of Christ, His precious gift to each soul which believes in Him, and it now overshadows all such faithful souls, despite all the bloody chaos and foolishness which we see in the world today. But do there not now come to mind other dread words of the Lord, which He spoke through His prophet: *Peace, peace; and where is peace?* (Jer 6:14). Yea, there is no peace, nor will there be, all the pitiful attempts and efforts of contemporary "peace-makers" to bring about "peace in this world" notwithstanding. For the awful threat of monstrous, fratricidal war hangs over this world, and the world will not escape this horror if it does not come to its senses and return to the path of Christ's truth. But will it? Is not the fulfillment drawing nigh to us of the dreaded prophecy of the Apostle, who says that the ancient world was inundated with water (the universal deluge), and the present world will perish through fire, the earth also, and the works that are in it, *shall be burned up*, as we are told in the second Epistle of the holy Apostle Peter (3:10)...

But enough of this. The radiant feast quickly approaches! Let every Christian soul rejoice on these splendid days of festival. What awaits us in the future, the Lord alone knows. The Elder Ambrose of Optina, that great righteous man of the Russian land, said: "What will be, will be; what will be, will be what God grants." And God does everything well...

I greet you all with the feast!

Christ is Born? Give Ye Glory!



The incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.

St. Athanasios the Great

Ήταν... Άνθρωπος!

Φυλλάδιο Γεροῦ Ναοῦ Ἀγίας Κυριακῆς Ἀμφιθέας-Παλαιοῦ Φαλήρου.

Μὲ τὴν πρώτη ματιὰ ἔβλεπε κανεὶς ἀπλῶς μία γριούλα. Ἔσερνε τὰ βήματά της στὸ χιόνι, μόνη, παρατημένη, μὲ σκυμμένο κεφάλι. Ὅσοι περνοῦσαν ἀπὸ τὸ πεζοδρομιο τῆς πόλης ἀποτραβοῦσαν τὸ βλέμμα τους, γιὰ νὰ μὴ θυμηθοῦν ὅτι τὰ βάσανα καὶ οἱ πόνοι δὲ σταματοῦν ὅταν γιορτάζουμε Χριστούγεννα. Ἐνα νέο ζευγάρι μιλοῦσε καὶ γελοῦσε μὲ τὰ χέρια γεμάτα ἀπὸ ψώνια καὶ δῶρα καὶ δὲν πρόσεξαν τὴ γριούλα. Μία μητέρα μὲ δυὸ παιδιά βιάζονταν νὰ πάνε στὸ σπίτι τῆς γιαγιάς. Δὲν ἔδωσαν προσοχή. Ἐνας παπᾶς εἶχε τὸ νοῦ του σὲ οὐράνια θέματα καὶ δὲν τὴν πρόσεξε.

Ἄν προσεχαν ὅλοι αὐτοί, θὰ ἔβλεπαν ὅτι ἡ γριὰ δὲ φοροῦσε παπούτσια. Περπατοῦσε ξυπόλητη στὸν πάγο καὶ τὸ χιόνι. Μὲ τὰ δυὸ της χέρια ἡ γριούλα μάζεψε τὸ χωρὶς κουμπιὰ παλτό της στὸ λαμό. Φοροῦσε ἕνα χρωματιστὸ φουλᾶρι στὸ κεφάλι, σταμάτησε στὴ στάση σκυφτὴ καὶ περιέμενε τὸ λεωφορεῖο. Ἐνας κύριος ποὺ κρατοῦσε μία σοβαρὴ τσάντα περιέμενε κι αὐτὸς στὴ στάση, ἀλλὰ κρατοῦσε μία ἀπόσταση. Μία κοπέλα περιέμενε κι αὐτὴ, κοίταξε πολλὲς φορὲς τὰ πόδια τῆς γριούλας, δὲ μίλησε.

Ἦρθε τὸ λεωφορεῖο καὶ ἡ γριούλα ἀνέβηκε ἀργὰ καὶ μὲ δυσκολία. Κάθισε στὸ πλαῖνὸ κάθισμα, ἀμέσως πίσω ἀπὸ τὸν ὁδηγό. Ὁ κύριος καὶ ἡ κοπέλα πῆγαν βιαστικὰ πρὸς τὰ πίσω καθίσματα.

Ὁ ἄντρας ποὺ καθόταν δίπλα στὴ γριούλα στριφογύριζε στὸ κάθισμα κι ἔπαιζε μὲ τὰ δάχτυλά του. «Γερωντικὴ ἄνοια», σκέφτηκε.

Ὁ ὁδηγὸς εἶδε τὰ γυμνὰ πόδια καὶ σκέφτηκε: «Αὐτὴ ἡ γειτονιὰ βυθίζεται ὅλο καὶ πιὸ πολὺ στὴ φτώχεια. Καλύτερα νὰ μὲ βάλουν στὴν ἄλλη γραμμὴ, τῆς λεωφόρου».

Ἐνα ἀγοράκι ἔδειξε τὴ γριὰ. «Κοίταξε, μαμά, αὐτὴ ἡ γριούλα εἶναι ξυπόλυτη». Ἡ μαμὰ ταράχτηκε καὶ τοῦ χτύπησε τὸ χέρι. «Μὴ δείχνεις τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, Ἄντρα! Δὲν εἶναι εὐγενικὸ νὰ δείχνεις».

«Αὐτὴ θὰ ἔχει μεγάλα παιδιά», εἶπε μία κυρία ποὺ φοροῦσε γοῦνα. «Τὰ παιδιά της πρέπει νὰ ντρέπονται». Αἰσθάνθηκε ἀνώτερη, ἀφοῦ αὐτὴ φρόντισε τὴ μητέρα της.

Μία δασκάλα στὴ μέση του λεωφορείου στερέωσε τὰ δῶρα ποὺ εἶχε στὰ πόδια της. «Δὲν πληρώνουμε ἀρκετοὺς φόρους, γιὰ νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζονται καταστάσεις σὰν αὐτές;» εἶπε σὲ μία φίλη της ποὺ ἦταν δίπλα της. «Φταῖνε οἱ δεξιοί», ἀπάντησε ἡ φίλη της. «Παίρνουν ἀπὸ τοὺς φτωχοὺς καὶ δίνουν στοὺς πλούσιους».

«Ὅχι, φταῖνε οἱ ἄλλοι», μπῆκε στὴ συζήτηση ἕνας ἀσπρομάλλης. «Μὲ τὰ προγράμματα πρόνοιας κάνουν τοὺς πολίτες τεμπέληδες καὶ φτωχοὺς». «Οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρέπει νὰ μάθουν ν' ἀποταμιεύουν», εἶπε ἕνας ἄλλος ποὺ ἐμοιάζε μορφωμένος. «Ἄν αὐτὴ ἡ γριὰ ἀποταμίευε ὅταν ἦταν νέα, δὲ θὰ ὑπέφερε σήμερα». Καὶ ὅλοι αὐτοὶ ἦταν ἱκανοποιημένοι γιὰ τὴν ὀξύνοιά τους ποὺ ἔβγαλε τέτοια βαθιὰ ἀνάλυση.

Ἄλλ' ἕνας ἔμπορος αἰσθάνθηκε προσβολὴ ἀπὸ τὶς ἐξ ἀποστάσεως μουρμούρες τῶν συμπολιτῶν του. Ἐβγαλε τὸ πορτοφόλι του καὶ τράβηξε ἕνα εικοσάρι. Περπάτησε στὸ διάδρομο καὶ τὸ ἔβαλε στὸ τρεμάμενο χέρι τῆς γριούλας. «Πάρε, κυρία, ν' ἀγοράσεις παπούτσια». Ἡ γριούλα τὸν εὐχαρίστησε κι ἐκεῖνος γύρισε στὴ θέση του εὐχαριστημένος, ποὺ ἦταν ἄνθρωπος τῆς δράσης.

Μία καλοντυμένη κυρία τὰ πρόσεξε ὅλα αὐτὰ καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ προσεύχεται ἀπὸ μέσα της. «Κύριε, δὲν ἔχω χρήματα. Ἀλλὰ μπορῶ ν' ἀπευθυνθῶ σὲ σένα. Ἐσὺ ἔχεις μία λύση γιὰ ὅλα. Ὅπως κάποτε ἔριξες τὸ μάννα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ τώρα μπορεῖς νὰ δώσεις ὅ,τι χρειάζεται ἡ κυρούλα αὐτὴ γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα».

Στὴν ἐπόμενη στάση ἕνα παλικᾶρι μπῆκε στὸ λεωφορεῖο. Φοροῦσε ἕνα χοντρὸ μπουφάν, εἶχε ἕνα καφεῖ φουλᾶρι καὶ ἕνα μάλλινο καπέλο ποὺ κάλυπτε καὶ τὰ αὐτιά του. Ἐνα καλῶδιο συνέδεε τὸ αὐτί του μὲ μία συσκευὴ μουσικῆς. Ὁ νέος κουνοῦσε τὸ σῶμα του μὲ τὴ μουσικὴ ποὺ ἄκουε. Πῆγε καὶ κάθισε ἀπέναντι στὴ γριούλα. Ὅταν εἶδε τὰ ξυπόλυτα πόδια της, τὸ κούνημα σταμάτησε. Πάγωσε. Τὰ μάτια του πῆγαν ἀπὸ τὰ πόδια τῆς γιαγιάς στὰ δικά του. Φοροῦσε ἀκριβὰ ὀλοκαίνουρια παπούτσια. Μάζευε λεφτὰ ἀρκετὸ καιρὸ γιὰ νὰ τὰ ἀγοράσει καὶ νὰ κάνει ἐντύπωση στὴν παρέα.

Τὸ παλικᾶρι ἔσκυψε καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ λύνει τὰ παπούτσια του. Ἐβγαλε τὰ ἐντυπωσιακὰ παπούτσια καὶ τὶς κάλτσες. Γονάτισε μπροστὰ στὴ γριούλα. «Γιαγιά, βλέπω ὅτι δὲν ἔχεις παπούτσια. Ἐγὼ ἔχω κι ἄλλα».

Προσεκτικὰ κι ἀπαλὰ σήκωσε τὰ παγωμένα πόδια καὶ τῆς φόρεσε πρῶτα τὶς κάλτσες κι ὕστερα τὰ παπούτσια του. Ἡ γριούλα τὸν εὐχαρίστησε συγκινημένη.

Τότε τὸ λεωφορεῖο ἔκανε πάλι στάση. Ὁ νέος κατέβηκε καὶ προχώρησε ξυπόλυτος στὸ χιόνι. Οἱ ἐπιβάτες μαζεύτηκαν στὰ παράθυρα καὶ τὸν ἔβλεπαν καθὼς βιάζετο πρὸς τὸ σπίτι του.

«Ποῖς εἶναι;», ρώτησε ἕνας. «Πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἅγιος», εἶπε κάποιος. «Πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἄγγελος», εἶπε ἕνας ἄλλος. «Κοίτα! Ἐχει φωτοστέφανο στὸ κεφάλι!» φώναξε κάποιος. «Εἶναι ὁ Χριστός!» εἶπε ἡ εὐσεβὴς κυρία. Ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγοράκι, ποὺ εἶχε δείξει μὲ τὸ δάχτυλο τὴ γιαγιά, εἶπε: «Ὅχι, μαμὰ τὸν εἶδα πολὺ καλὰ: **ἦταν ...ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΣ!**»

Τὰ Χριστούγεννα... Γεννήθηκε ὁ Χριστός!

Γράφει ὁ Γεώργιος Ἐξάρχος, Φιλολόγος.

«Τὰ Χριστούγεννα γεννήθηκε ὁ Χριστός!». Αὐτονόητο; Ἴσως γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους. Ὅμως καὶ αὐτὸ πλέον συζητεῖται.

Πολλὲς φορὲς κατὰ τὸ πᾶρελθον ἐπιχειρήθηκε νὰ καταργηθεῖ ἡ ἐορτὴ τῶν Χριστουγέννων διὰ τῆς βίας ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστιανικὸ πλῆρωμα τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Τὸ 1644 στὴν Βρετανία, ὁ Ὀλιβερ Κρόμγουελ καὶ τὸ κόμμα τῶν πουριτανῶν, θέλησαν νὰ καταργήσουν μὲ νόμο τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Ἔτσι ἡ ἡμέρα ἀπαγορεύθηκε νὰ εἶναι ἀργία, ἡ δὲ Βουλὴ συνεδρίαζε κάθε χρόνο τὴν ἡμέρα τῶν Χριστουγέννων γιὰ περισσότερο ἀπὸ μία δεκαετία.

Τὸν περασμένο αἰῶνα στὴν κομμουνιστικὴ Ῥωσσία εἶχαν ἀπαγορευθεῖ τὰ Χριστούγεννα

ἀπὸ τὸ 1917 ὡς τὸ 1990 ὁπότε καὶ κατέρρευσε τὸ καθεστῶς. Ἐπὶ κυβερνήσεως δὲ Στάλιν εἶχαν ἀντικατασταθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ σταλινούγεννα!

Ἡ χειρότερη ὅμως πολεμικὴ τῶν Σιωνιστῶν εἶναι αὐτὴ τῆς ἐκκοσμικεύσεως τῶν Χριστουγέννων, ἡ ὁποία μεταβάλλει τὸ ὑπερκόσμιον γεγονός σὲ ἐγκόσμιον καὶ ὑλιστικόν. Φθάσαμε σήμερα, νὰ προβάλλουμε μίαν ἐντελῶς εἰδωλολατρικὴν ἀτμόσφαιρα στὰ σπίτια μας καὶ ὡς ἐκ τούτου καὶ στὴν κοινωνία μας, ἀφοῦ ἔτσι μᾶς προτιμᾷ ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση.

Στὶς ΗΠΑ, οἱ λεγόμενοι «πολιτικὰ ὀρθοὶ Ἀμερικανοί», ὑπὸ τὸ πρόσχημα τῆς μὴ προσβολῆς τάχα τῶν ἀλλοθρήσκων (βλέπε καὶ τοὺς ἐν Ἑλλάδι διανοουμένους...) ἔχουν ἐπιδοθεῖ σὲ ἕναν ἀγῶνα ἀπαλείψεως κάθε ἀναφορᾶς στὰ Χριστούγεννα.

Ὅμως καὶ στὴν Ὁρθοδόξη πατρίδα μας εἶναι δυσεῦρετες πλέον οἱ εὐχετήριες κάρτες ποὺ ἀναγράφουν «καλὰ Χριστούγεννα», ἀφοῦ βεβαίως ὁ νεοέλληνας μόνον ὡς ἀπλὲς γιορτὲς ἢ διακοπὲς ἐκλαμβάνει τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Ἀκόμη καὶ ἡ «ΑΤΤΙΚΗ ΟΔΟΣ» συγχρονισμένη σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ὄχι στὸ Ἑλληνορθόδοξο (Ῥωμαϊκόν) γράφει ἀπὸ τὰ Χριστούγεννα τοῦ 2004 σὲ ὅλες τὶς φωτεινὲς ἐπιγραφὰς τῆς «καλῆς γιορτῆς».

Ἐπιπροσθέτως κατάφερε δυστυχῶς ἡ παγκοσμιοποίησις νὰ πιστέψουμε πὺς Χριστούγεννα χωρὶς δένδρο δὲν ὑφίστανται!!! Τὸ δένδρο κατέληξε νὰ

εἶναι τὸ παγκόσμιον σύμβολον τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ ταυτοχρόνως κατέληξε νὰ βρίσκεται στὸ ἐπίκεντρο τῆς ἐορτῆς, μετατοπίζοντας τὴν προσοχή μας καὶ ἀπὸ Αὐτὸ τὸ Θεῖο Βρέφος. Τὸ ἔθιμον αὐτὸ δὲν ἔχει καμμία σχέση μὲ τὶς Ἑλληνορθόδοξες παραδόσεις μας, πρὶν ἀπὸ δύο αἰῶνες ἦταν τελείως ἄγνωστο σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον πλὴν τῆς Γερμανίας καὶ ἔχει παντελῶς παγανιστικὰς ρίζες.

Γράφει ὁ π. Θ. Ζήσης, καθηγητὴς πανεπιστημίου στὴν Θεολογικὴ σχολή: «Ἀπὸ τίς πληροφορίες τῶν πηγῶν, τῆς βιβλιογραφίας καὶ τῆς ζωντανῆς ἐμπειρίας καὶ παραδόσεως δὲν ἀπομένει ἴχνος ἀμφιβολίας περὶ τοῦ ὅτι τὸ χριστουγεννιάτικον δένδρο εἶναι ξενόφερτον ἔθιμον. Ἀποτελεῖ αὐτὸ κατασταλαγμένη καὶ ἀμάχητη γνώσις.» Ὅπως ἔγραψε καὶ ὁ καθηγητὴς λαογραφίας Δ. Λουκάτος ἐμφανίστηκε γιὰ πρώτη φορά τὸ 1833 στὸ Ναύπλιο ἐπὶ Ὀθωνος, καὶ τὰ Χριστούγεννα τοῦ 1843

στὴν Ἀθήνα, στὸ σπίτι τοῦ Ἰ. Παπαρηγοπούλου, τοῦ προξένου τῆς Ῥωσσίας.

Τὸ περιστατικὸν διασώζει καὶ ὁ στρατηγὸς Μακρυγιάννης. Εἶχε προσκληθεῖ ὁ ἴδιος τὴν ἡμέρα τῶν Χριστουγέννων ἀπὸ τὸν γνωστὸ Ἀθηναῖον πρόξενον τῆς Ῥωσσίας. Φθάνοντας στὸ σπίτι τοῦ Παπαρηγοπούλου μαζὶ μὲ τὸν φίλον του καὶ συναγωνιστὴν του Κῶτσο Λιδωρικιώτη, ὁ



στρατηγὸς μὲ ἐκπλήξις εἶδε ἕνα δίμετρο ἔλατον στὸ σαλόνι τοῦ προξένου, κούνησε τὸ κεφάλι του καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Ὁραῖο εἶναι κύρ-Γιάννη. Καὶ τοῦ χρόνου νὰ εἴμαστε καλά. Ἀλλὰ τὰ δένδρα μου ἐγὼ δὲν τ' ἀφήνω νὰ φυτρώνουν μέσα στὴν καμᾶρα!... Μόνον τ' ἄρματα μου φυτρώνουν ἐκεῖ!...»

Ἀπὸ τότε τὸ Δένδρο ἐπεκτάθηκε στὶς λίγες ἀριστοκρατικὰς οἰκογένειες τῶν Ἀθηνῶν. Ἐναν αἰῶνα μετὰ, κατὰ τὴν γερμανικὴν κατοχὴν, ἐπεκτάθηκε καὶ στὰ εὐρύτερα λαϊκὰ στρώματα. Μετὰ τὴν ἀπελευθέρωσιν καὶ μάλιστα μετὰ τὸ 1950 διεδόθηκε περισσότερο ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἄγγλους καὶ τοὺς Ἀμερικανοὺς ποὺ παρέμειναν στὴν Ἑλλάδα.

Κι ἂν δὲν νοοῦνται Χριστούγεννα χωρὶς δένδρο, ὁμοίως δὲν νοοῦνται Χριστούγεννα χωρὶς «Ἀη-Βασίλην!». Ἀκόμη καὶ ὡς πρὸς τὸ ὄνομά του ἡ παγκοσμιοποιημένη ἐκδοχὴ τοῦ Ἀη-Βασίλη προκαλεῖ σύγχυσιν. «Σάντα Κλάους» τὸν λένε οἱ Δυτικοί, ὄνομα ποὺ παραπέμπει στὸν Ἅγιον Νικόλαον. Ὑπάρχει ὅμως σύγκρισις; Ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑσπερία (Σκανδιναβία) ὁ ἕνας, ἀπὸ

τὴν Ῥωμανία (Βυζάντιο) ὁ ἄλλος, Λίαν στρουμπουλὸς ὁ ἕνας, μᾶλλον ἀσκητικὸς καὶ ὀλιγαρχικὸς ὁ δεύτερος. Γέρος μὲ λευκὴ γενειάδα ὁ Φράγκος, νέος μὲ μαῦρα μακριὰ γένεια ὁ δικὸς μας.

Ὅταν κάποιοι μιμοῦνται τὴν ζωὴ ἐνὸς Ἁγίου κατὰ τὴν προτροπὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας μας «ἐορτὴ Ἁγίου, μίμησις Ἁγίου», κάποιοι ἄλλοι ντύνονται μὲ τὴν στολὴ τοῦ «χονδροβασίλη» καὶ κυκλοφοροῦν στοὺς δρόμους σὰν καρνάβαλοι, διότι δὲν ὑπάρχει κάτι ἀνώτερο νὰ τοὺς ἐμπνεύσει!

Ὁ «Ἀη-Βασίλης» ὅμως συνεπάγεται καὶ πολλὰ δῶρα! Στὶς ΗΠΑ ὑπολογίζεται ὅτι τὰ δῶρα ὑπερβαίνουν τὸ 0,5% τοῦ ΑΕΠ. Στὴν Ν. Ὑόρκη, μάλιστα, ἡ τελετὴ τῆς ἀφῆς τοῦ χριστουγεννιάτικου δένδρου, ἐγκαινιάζει ἐπισημῶς μία περίοδο ξέφρενων ἀγορῶν ποὺ τελειώνουν μὲ τὶς ἐκπτώσεις στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ χρόνου! Ἡ ὑπερκατανάλωση, δηλαδή, σὲ ὅλο της τὸ μεγαλεῖο!

Τὸ χειρότερο ὅμως εἶναι ὅτι ἡ παραδοσιακὴ Θεία Λειτουργία τῶν Χριστουγέννων ἀντικαθίσταται ἀπὸ τὰ ξενύχτια, τὰ «ρεβεγιὸν» καὶ τὴν χαρτοπαιξία. Τόσο ὅμως ὁ 43^{ος} κανόνας τῶν Ἀποστόλων, ὅσο καὶ ὁ 50^{ος} τῆς ΣΤ' Οἰκουμενικῆς Σύνοδου καταδικάζουν μὲ ἀφορισμὸ τοὺς πιστοὺς ποὺ παίζουν μὲ χρήματα! Συνεπῶς, στὴν «ὄλη μαγεία τῶν Χριστουγέννων» εἶναι ἐντεταγμένα καὶ τὰ παιχνίδια τῆς τύχης, τὰ ὁποῖα μαζὶ μὲ ὅλα τὰ παραπάνω, θὰ μᾶς κάνουν νὰ νοιώσουμε ὡραῖα καὶ κάπως διαφορετικὰ ἀπὸ τὶς ἄλλες μέρες! **Πραγματικά, μὲ πόσο κατώτερα ἀλλὰ καὶ πόσο ἐπιβλαβῆ πράγματα ἐπιχειρεῖται νὰ ὑποκατασταθῇ ἡ Πίστις τοῦ Χριστοῦ!**

Ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση, ὅμως, καὶ ἡ Νέα Ἐποχὴ δὲν θὰ παύσουν νὰ παραγάγουν ἐορτὲς δῆθεν Χριστιανικῆς (ὅπως τοῦ υπάρχοντος βεβαίως Ἁγίου Βαλεντίνου, μὲ διαφορετικὴ ὅμως χοροῖα) ἢ καὶ νὰ προσπαθοῦν νὰ καταργοῦν μὲ τὸν τρόπο τους τὶς Χριστιανικῆς (ὅπως αὐτῆ τῶν γενέθλιων μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἐπιχειρεῖται ἡ κατάργησις τῆς ὀνομαστικῆς ἐορτῆς). Ἡ μίμησις ἐξάλλου ποὺ ἀκριτῶς, ἀκατακριτῶς καὶ ἀδιακριτῶς ποὺ «τιμοῦμε» ὡς νεοέλληνες, μᾶς κάνει νὰ πιθηκίζουμε! Ἔχουν καλλιεργηθεῖ στὸν λαὸ μας σὲ ὑπερβολικὸ βαθμὸ συναισθήματα μειονεξίας ἐναντὶ τῶν Εὐρωπαίων.

Ἐν κατακλείδι, ὅταν ἀποδίδουμε στὰ Χριστούγεννα τὸ πραγματικὸ τους νόημα καὶ ὅταν τὰ ἐορτάζουμε πνευματικά, τότε ἐπιτυγχάνεται καὶ ὁ μέγας σκοπὸς τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὸ λεγόμενον χριστουγεννιάτικο κλίμα, δὲν ἔχουμε ἀνάγκη τὰ ξενόφερτα-Φράγκικα ἔθιμα. Πῶς μπορούμε νὰ ἐρμηνεύσουμε τὸ γεγονός ὅτι τὰ Χριστούγεννα τιμῶνται καὶ στὴν Κίνα, στὴν Ἰνδία, στὴν Κορέα μέχρι καὶ σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν Ἀφρική; Τιμῶνται βεβαίως σὲ ὅλες αὐτὲς τὶς ἀλλόθρησκες περιοχὲς, διότι δὲν τιμοῦν

τὴν Γέννησι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ μίαν γιορτὴν καθαρὰ ὕλιστικὴ καὶ παγκοσμιοποιημένη.

Ἄντὶ τοῦ στολισμοῦ ἐνὸς δένδρου ἂς καταφύγουμε στὸν στολισμὸ ἐνὸς καραβιοῦ, ὅπως ἔκαναν καὶ οἱ πρόγονοί μας, τὸ ὁποῖο συμβόλιζε τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. Ἄς ψάλλουμε τὰ κάλαντα, μιμούμενοι τὰ κάλαντα τῶν ἀγγέλων, ποὺ ἐκεῖνο τὸ βράδυ στὴν Βηθλεὲμ ἀνήγγειλαν τὸ χαρμόσυνο γεγονός τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἄς κόψουμε τὴν βασιλόπιττα τιμώντες ἔτσι τὸν Μέγα Βασίλειο. Μὰ πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα **ἂς προσευχηθοῦμε νὰ γεννηθῇ καὶ φέτος ὁ Χριστὸς στὴν καρδιὰ μας...**

Ἄπὸ τοῦδε καὶ στὸ ἐξῆς ἂς ζήσουμε τὰ Χριστούγεννα πιό... Ῥωμαίικα, σκεπτόμενοι πῶς **τὰ Χριστούγεννα γεννήθηκε ὁ Χριστός!!!**



Καλά, θὰ πεῖ κανεὶς, καλὰ οἱ Τοῦρκοι, καὶ οἱ Ἀμερικάνοι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι δὲν θέλουν νὰ βλέπουν τοὺς ἱερεῖς μας νὰ φοροῦν ράσο, ἀλλὰ οἱ Ἕλληνες, ποὺ ξέρουν τί πρόσφερε στὴν πατρίδα τὸ ράσο, ποὺ στοὺς δρόμους καὶ στὶς πλατεῖες βλέπουν ἀγάλματα ἱερέων καὶ ἱεραρχῶν, ποὺ θυσιάστηκαν γιὰ τὸ γένος, οἱ Ἕλληνες πῶς τολμοῦν νὰ περιφρονοῦν καὶ νὰ ὑποτιμοῦν τὸ ράσο;

Τὸ ράσο, ἡ ἰδιαίτερη αὐτῆ ἐνδυμασία τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων κληρικῶν, ἔχει τὴν ἱστορία του, μίαν ἱστορία ζυμωμένη μὲ δάκρυα καὶ αἵματα, μίαν ἱστορία ποὺ δὲν πρέπει ποτὲ νὰ τὴν ξεχνᾶμε. Μ' αὐτὰ ποὺ λέμε δὲν θεωροῦμε τὸ ράσο δόγμα τῆς πίστεώς μας κάτι δηλαδή τὸ ἀμετάβλητο. Ἀλλὰ κι ὅσοι νομίζουν, πῶς καταργώντας τὸ ράσο καὶ ντύνοντας τοὺς ἱερεῖς μὲ μοντέρνα ἐνδυμασία θὰ ἐκσυγχρονισθεῖ καὶ θὰ προοδεύσει ἡ Ἐκκλησία, σφάλουν οἰκτρά.

Δὲν φταίει τὸ ράσο γιὰ τυχὸν ἀποτυχίες καὶ σκάνδαλα τῶν σημερινῶν κληρικῶν. Αὐτὰ, ἂν καταργηθεῖ τὸ ράσο, ὄχι μόνον δὲν θὰ λιγοστέψουν, ἀλλὰ καὶ θὰ ἀυξηθοῦν. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας στὶς μέρες τὶς πονηρῆς, ποὺ ζοῦμε, δὲν ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἐξωτερικῶν μεταρρυθμίσεων, ἀλλ' ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἐσωτερικῶν ἀλλαγῶν. Ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἁγίων καὶ ἐμπνευσμένων κληρικῶν, ποὺ θὰ φορέσουν καὶ θὰ τιμήσουν τὸ ράσο καὶ θὰ τὸ κάνουν λάβαρο τῶν πιὸ ὡραίων ἀγώνων γιὰ τὴ θρησκευτικὴ, ἠθικὴ καὶ ἐθνικὴ ἀναγέννησι τοῦ Γένους μας.

Μητρ. Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης (+2010)

«Ὁ Κύριος θὰ Παρουσιάσῃ τοὺς Μάρκους τοὺς Εὐγενικούς καὶ τοὺς Γρηγορίου Παλαμάδες, γιὰ νὰ Ὁμολογήσουν τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Πίστη καὶ νὰ Στερεώσουν τὴν Παράδοση...»

Ἀγίου Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο: «Μὲ Πόνο καὶ Ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν Σύγχρονο Ἄνθρωπο», Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου, Λόγοι Α΄, ἐκδ. Ἠσυχαστήριον «Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος», Σουρωτὴ Θεσσαλονίκης.

Πολλοὶ ἅγιοι Μάρτυρες, ὅταν δὲν ἤξεραν τὸ δόγμα, ἔλεγαν: «**Πιστεύω ὅ,τι θέσπισαν οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες.**» Ἄν κάποιος ἔλεγε αὐτό, μαρτυροῦσε. Δὲν ἤξερε δηλαδή νὰ φέρῃ ἀποδείξεις στοὺς διώκτες γιὰ τὴν πίστη του καὶ νὰ τοὺς πείσῃ, ἀλλὰ εἶχε ἐμπιστοσύνη στοὺς Ἅγίους Πατέρες. Σκεφτόταν: «*Πῶς νὰ μὴν ἔχω ἐμπιστοσύνη στοὺς Ἅγίους Πατέρες; Αὐτοὶ ἦταν καὶ πιὸ ἐμπειροὶ καὶ ἐνάρετοι καὶ ἅγιοι; Πῶς ἐγὼ νὰ δεχθῶ μία ἀνοησία; Πῶς νὰ ἀνεχθῶ νὰ βρίζῃ ἓνας τοὺς Ἅγίους Πατέρες;*»

Νὰ ἔχουμε ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοση. Σήμερα, δυστυχῶς, μπήκε ἡ Εὐρωπαϊκὴ εὐγένεια καὶ πάνε νὰ δεῖξουν τὸν καλὸ. Θέλουν νὰ δεῖξουν ἀνωτερότητα καὶ τελικὰ πάνε νὰ προσκυνήσουν τὸν διάβολο μὲ τὰ δύο κέρατα. «Μία θρησκεία, σοῦ λένε, νὰ ὑπάρχη» καὶ ἔτσι τὰ ἰσοπεδώνουν ὅλα.

Ἦρθαν καὶ σ' ἐμένα μερικοὶ καὶ μοῦ εἶπαν: «Ὅσοι πιστεύουμε στὸν Χριστό, νὰ κάνουμε μία θρησκεία». «Τώρα εἶναι σὰν νὰ μοῦ λέτε», τοὺς εἶπα, «χρυσὸ καὶ μπακίρι, χρυσὸ τόσα καράτια καὶ τόσα ποὺ τὰ ξεχώρισαν, νὰ τὰ μαζέψουμε πάλι καὶ νὰ τὰ κάνουμε ἓνα. Εἶναι σωστὸ νὰ τὰ ἀνακατέψουμε πάλι; Ρωτήστε ἓναν χρυσοχόο: «Κάνει νὰ ἀνακατέψουμε τὴν σαβούρα μὲ τὸν χρυσό;» Ἔγινε τόσος ἀγώνας, γιὰ νὰ λαμπικάρῃ τὸ δόγμα.»

Οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες κάτι ἤξεραν καὶ ἀπαγόρευσαν τὶς σχέσεις μὲ αἰρετικὸ. Σήμερα λένε: «Ὅχι μόνο μὲ αἰρετικὸ ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ Βουδιστὴ καὶ μὲ πυρολάτρη καὶ μὲ δαμιονολάτρη νὰ συμπροσευχηθοῦμε. Πρέπει νὰ βρίσκονται στὶς συμπροσευχές τους καὶ στὰ συνέδρια καὶ οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι. Εἶναι μία παρουσία». Τί παρουσία; Τὰ λύνουν ὅλα μὲ τὴν λογικὴ καὶ δικαιολογοῦν τὰ ἀδικαιολόγητα. Τὸ Εὐρωπαϊκὸ πνεῦμα νομίζει ὅτι καὶ τὰ πνευματικὰ θέματα μποροῦν νὰ μποῦν στὴν Κοινὴ Ἀγορά.

Μερικοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους ποὺ ἔχουν ἐλαφρότητα καὶ θέλουν νὰ κάνουν προβολή, «Ἱεραποστολή», συγκαλοῦν συνέδρια μὲ ἑτεροδόξους, γιὰ νὰ γίνεαι ντόρος καὶ νομίζουν ὅτι θὰ προβάλουν ἔτσι τὴν Ὁρθόδοξία, μὲ τὸ νὰ γίνουν δηλαδή ταρταμοσαλάτα μὲ τοὺς κακοδόξους. Ἀρχίζουν μετὰ οἱ ὑπερ-ζηλωτὲς καὶ πιάνουν τὸ ἄλλο ἄκρο· λένε βλασφημίες γιὰ τὰ Μυστήρια

τῶν Νεοημερολογιτῶν κ.λ.π. καὶ κατα-σκανδαλίζουν ψυχές ποὺ ἔχουν εὐλάβεια καὶ Ὁρθόδοξη εὐσυστησία.

Οἱ ἑτεροδόξοι ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη ἔρχονται στὰ συνέδρια, κάνουν τὸν δάσκαλο, παίρνουν ὅ,τι καλὸ ὑλικὸ πνευματικὸ βρίσκουν στοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους, τὸ περνᾶνε ἀπὸ τὸ δικὸ τους ἐργαστήρι, βάζουν δικὸ τους χρῶμα καὶ φέριμα καὶ τὸ παρουσιάζουν σὰν πρωτότυπο. Καὶ ὁ παράξενος σημερινὸς κόσμος ἀπὸ κάτι τέτοια παράξενα συγκινεῖται, καὶ καταστρέφεται μετὰ πνευματικά. Ὁ Κύριος ὅμως, ὅταν θὰ πρέπη, θὰ παρουσιάσῃ τοὺς Μάρκους τοὺς Εὐγενικούς καὶ τοὺς Γρηγορίου Παλαμάδες, ποὺ θὰ συγκεντρώσουν ὅλα τὰ κατασκανδαλισμένα ἀδέλφια μας, γιὰ νὰ ὁμολογήσουν τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη καὶ νὰ στερεώσουν τὴν Παράδοση καὶ νὰ δώσουν χαρὰ μεγάλη στὴν Μητέρα μας Ἐκκλησία.

Ἐὰν ζούσαμε πατερικά, θὰ εἶχαμε ὅλοι πνευματικὴ ὑγεία, τὴν ὁποία θὰ ζήλευαν καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἑτεροδόξοι, καὶ θὰ ἄφηναν τὶς ἀρρωστημένες τοὺς πλάνες καὶ θὰ σώζονταν δίχως κήρυγμα. Τώρα δὲν συγκινοῦνται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγία μας Πατερικὴ Παράδοση, γιατί θέλουν νὰ δοῦν καὶ τὴν Πατερικὴ μας συνέχεια, τὴν πραγματικὴ μας συγγένεια μὲ τοὺς Ἅγίους μας. Αὐτὸ ποὺ ἐπιβάλλεται σὲ κάθε Ὁρθόδοξο εἶναι νὰ βάζῃ τὴν καλὴ ἀνησυχία καὶ στοὺς ἑτεροδόξους, νὰ καταλάβουν δηλαδή ὅτι βρίσκονται σὲ πλάνη, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀναπαύουν ψεύτικα τὸν λογισμό τους, καὶ στερηθοῦν καὶ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴ τὶς πλούσιες εὐλογίες τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ τὶς περισσότερες καὶ αἰώνιες εὐλογίες τοῦ Θεοῦ.



Διὰ τὰς πολλὰς ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίας κινδυνεύουν νὰ ἐξημώσουν ὅλα τὰ Πατριαρχεῖα, Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρείας. Ἀλλὰ διὰ ποίαν αἰτίαν; Ἡ αἰτία εἶναι ἡ ἁμαρτία. Ἐγίναμεν καὶ λαὸς καὶ κληρὸς σκότος. Ὅταν δὲ τὸ φῶς γίνεαι σκότος, τὸ σκότος πόσον;...

Ζητῶ ὡς ὁ Διογένης μὲ τὸν φανὸν τῆς πίστεως ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλ' ὅμως δὲν εὐρίσκω. Διατί; Διότι πάντες ἐξέκλιναν καὶ ἐξαχρειώθησαν, καὶ διότι ἡ παροῦσα γενεὰ, ὡς γενεὰ ἁμαρτωλός, διεστραμμένη καὶ πονηρά, γεννᾷ τέκνα ἁμαρτωλὰ καὶ πονηρά.

Ἄς μὴ ἀπελπιζώμεθα ὅμως, ἀλλὰ ἄς παρακαλοῦμε τὸν Κύριον μετὰ πίστεως καὶ δακρύων νὰ ἐγείρῃ τέκνα ἐκλεκτὰ διὰ νὰ μὴ ἀπωλεσθοῦμε. Νὰ γίνουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς τέκνα φωτός, διὰ νὰ φωτίζουμε τοὺς εὐρισκόμενους εἰς τὸ σκότος...

«Ὁρθόδοξος Φιλόθεος Μαρτυρία», τευχ. 64, Ἰαν. - Μάρτ. 1996, σελ. 59. [Σημείωσις: ἐγράφη τὸ 1962!]

Ἡ Ἀλήθεια γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα καὶ ἡ Μυθοποίηση τῶν Χριστουγέννων

Τοῦ πρ. Γεωργίου Μεταλληνού, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο: «Παρεμβάσεις Ἱστορικές καὶ Θεολογικές», ἐκδ. «Διήγησις», Αθήνα 1998.

Ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως εἶναι ἡ θέωση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου:

—«Ἄνθρωπος γίνεται Θεός, ἵνα Θεὸν τὸν Ἀδὰμ ἀπεργάσῃται.» (Τροπάριο Χριστουγέννων).

—«Αὐτὸς ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν.» (Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος).

—«Ἄνθρωπος γὰρ ἐγένετο ὁ Θεὸς καὶ θεὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος.» (Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος).

Στὴ λογικὴ ἐνὸς ἠθικιστοῦ ὁ ὅρος «θεοποιηθῶμεν», πού χρησιμοποιοῦν Πατέρες, ὅπως ὁ Μ. Ἀθανάσιος, εἶναι σκάνδαλο. Γι' αὐτὸ μιλοῦν γιὰ «ἠθικὴ θέωση». Διότι φοβοῦνται νὰ δεχθοῦν ὅτι μὲ τὴ θέωση μεταβάλλεται «κατὰ χάριν» αὐτὸ πὸν ὁ Τριαδικὸς Θεὸς εἶναι «κατὰ φύσιν» (Ἄκτιστος, Ἄναρχος, Ἀθάνατος). Τὰ Χριστούγεννα εἶναι, γι' αὐτό, ἅμεσα συνδεδεμένα καὶ μὲ τὴ Σταύρωση καὶ τὴν Ἀνάσταση, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν Ἀνάληψη καὶ τὴν Πεντηκοστή.

Ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν, Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς-Θεάνθρωπος χαράζει τὸ δρόμο, πὸν καλεῖται νὰ βαδίσει κάθε σωζόμενος ἄνθρωπος, ἐνούμενος μαζί Του. Ὁ Εὐαγγελισμὸς καὶ τὰ Χριστούγεννα ὁδηγοῦν στὴν Πεντηκοστή, τὸ γεγονὸς τῆς θεώσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν Χριστῷ, μέσα δηλαδὴ στὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἄν τὰ Χριστούγεννα εἶναι ἡ γέννηση τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς ἀνθρώπου, ἡ Πεντηκοστή εἶναι ἡ τελείωση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὡς Θεοῦ κατὰ χάριν. Μὲ τὸ βάπτισμά μας μετέχουμε στὴ σάρκωση, τὸ θάνατο καὶ τὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ζοῦμε καὶ μεῖς τὰ «Χριστούγεννά μας», τὴν ἀνάπλασή μας. Οἱ Ἅγιοι δέ, πὸν φθάνουν στὴν ἔνωση μὲ τὸ Χριστό, τὴ θέωση, μετέχουν στὴν Πεντηκοστή καὶ φθάνουν ἔτσι στὴ τελείωση καὶ ὀλοκλήρωση τοῦ ἀναγεννημένου ἐν Χριστῷ ἀνθρώπου. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ἐκκλησιαστικὰ πραγμάτωση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἐκπλήρωση δηλαδὴ τοῦ σκοποῦ τῆς ὑπάρξεώς του.

Ὅσο καὶ ἂν εἶναι κουραστικὸς ὁ θεολογικὸς λόγος, καὶ μάλιστα στὸν ἀμύητο θεολογικὰ σύγχρονο ἄνθρωπο, δὲν ἐκφράζει παρὰ τὴν πραγματικότητα τῆς ἐμπειρίας τῶν Ἁγίων μας. Μέσα ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν ἐμπειρία καὶ μόνον μποροῦν νὰ κατανοηθοῦν ἐκκλησιαστικά, δηλαδὴ Χριστοκεντρικά, τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Ἀντίθετα,

ἡ ἀδυναμία τοῦ μὴ ἀναγεννημένου ἐν Χριστῷ ἀνθρώπου νὰ νοσηματοδοτήσῃ τὰ Χριστούγεννα ἔχει ὁδηγήσει σὲ κάποιους γύρω ἀπ' αὐτὰ μύθους. Οἱ ἄγευστοι τῆς ἀγιοπνευματικῆς ζωῆς, μὴ μπορῶντας νὰ ζήσουν τὰ Χριστούγεννα, μυθολογοῦν γι' αὐτά, στὰ ὅρια τῆς φαντασίας καὶ μυθοπλασίας, χάνοντας τὸ ἀληθινὸ νόημά τους. Ὅπως μάλιστα θὰ δοῦμε, ὁ ἀποπροσανατολισμὸς αὐτὸς δὲν συνδέεται πάντοτε μὲ τὴν ἄρνηση τοῦ μυστηρίου, ἀλλὰ μὲ ἀδυναμία βιώσεώς του, πὸν ὁδηγεῖ ἀναπόφευκτα στὴν παρερμηνεία του.

Μία πρώτη μυθολογικὴ ἀπάντηση στὸ ἐρώτημα τῶν Χριστουγέννων δίνεται ἀπὸ τὴν αἵρεση, τὴ στοχαστικὴ καὶ ἀνέρευση—ἀνεμπειρικὴ δηλαδὴ—θεολόγησι. Ὁ δοκητισμὸς, ἡ φοβερότερη αἵρεση ὅλων τῶν αἰώνων, δέχθηκε κατὰ φαντασίαν νάρκωση τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου (δοκεῖν-φαίνεσθαι). Φαινομενικὴ, δηλαδὴ, παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν ἐνδοκοσμικὴ πραγματικότητα. Γιὰ ποῖο λόγο θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ἐρωτήσῃ κανεὶς. Οἱ Δοκῆται ἢ Δοκηταὶ κάθε ἐποχῆς δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἀνεχθοῦν, στὰ ὅρια τῆς λογικῆς τους, τὴ σάρκωση καὶ τὴ γέννηση τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς ἀνθρώπου. Μεταβαλλόμενοι σὲ αὐτόκλητους ὑπερασπιστὲς τοῦ κύρους τοῦ Θεοῦ, ντρέπονται νὰ δεχθοῦν κάτι πὸν ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεὸς ἐπέλεξε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας. Τὸ δρόμο τῆς μητρότητας.

Νὰ γεννηθεῖ δηλαδὴ ἀπὸ μία Μάνα, ἔστω καὶ ἂν αὐτὴ δὲν εἶναι ἄλλη ἀπὸ τὸ καθαρότερο πλάσμα ὅλης τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἱστορίας, τὴν Παναγία Παρθένο. Ὅλοι αὐτοὶ μποροῦν νὰ καταταχθοῦν στοὺς «ὑπεράγαν» Ὁρθοδόξους (κατὰ τὸν Ἅγ. Γρηγόριο τὸ Θεολόγο). Γιατί ὁ Δοκητισμὸς ὁδήγησε στὸ Μονοφυσιτισμὸ, στὴν ἄρνηση τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Εἶναι οἱ συντηρητικοί, οἱ τυποκράτες, οἱ εὐσκανδάλιστοι. Γι' αὐτοὺς ὅλους εἶναι σκάνδαλο ἢ ἀλήθεια, ἡ πραγματικότητα, ἡ ἱστορικότητα. Ἐνῶ ἄλλοι ἀπορρίπτουν τὴ Θεότητα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, αὐτοὶ ἀρνοῦνται τὴν Ἀνθρωπότητά του.

Καὶ ὅμως, ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία ὡς Χριστιανισμὸς στὴν αὐθεντικότητά του, εἶναι ἡ «ἱστορικότερη θρησκεία», κατὰ τὸν ἀείμνηστο π. Γεώργιο Φλωρόφσκυ. Ζεῖ στὴν πραγματικότητα τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας καὶ τίς δέχεται μὲ τὸ ρεαλισμὸ τῆς Θεοτόκου: «Ἴδου ἡ δούλη Κυρίου, γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ρῆμα σου.» (Λουκ. 1:38)! «Καὶ ὁ Πιλάτος στὸ Σύμβολο» λέγει μία ὠραία σερβικὴ παροιμία. Διότι ὁ Πιλάτος, ὁ



πιὸ ἄβουλος ἀξιωματοῦχος τῆς ἱστορίας, ὡς ὑπαρκτὸ ἱστορικὸ πρόσωπο, βεβαιώνει τὴν ἱστορικότητα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου. Εἰς πείσμα ὅμως τῶν Δοκητῶν, ὁ Θεὸς-Λόγος «σὰρξ ἐγένετο—δηλαδὴ ἄνθρωπος—καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ (τὸ ἄκτιστο φῶς τῆς Θεότητάς Του)» (Ἰωάνν. 1:14). Διότι «ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς» (Κολ. 2:9), εἶναι δηλαδὴ τέλειος Θεὸς καὶ τέλειος ἄνθρωπος.

Ἡ σάρκωση καὶ γέννηση τοῦ Θεανθρώπου εἶναι σκάνδαλο γιὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη σοφία, ποὺ αὐτοκαταργούμενη καὶ αὐτοαναιρούμενη σπεύδει νὰ χαρακτηρίσει «μωρία» τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ κορυφώνεται στὸν Σταυρικὸ Του θάνατο (Α΄ Κορ. 1:23). Εἶναι δυνατὸν ὁ Θεὸς νὰ φθάσει σὲ τέτοιο ὄριο κενώσεως, ὥστε νὰ πεθάνει πάνω στὸ Σταυρὸ ὡς Θεάνθρωπος; Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ σκάνδαλο γιὰ τοὺς σοφοὺς τοῦ κόσμου. Γι' αὐτοὺς οἱ «θεοὶ» τοῦ κόσμου τούτου συνήθως θυσιάζουν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους γι' αὐτούς, δὲν θυσιάζονται αὐτοὶ γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

Πῶς θὰ δεχθῶν τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Ἀνιδιοτέλειας; «Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν κόσμον ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλὰ ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον. ... ἵνα σωθῇ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ.» (Ἰωανν. 3:16-17). Στὰ ὄρια τῆς «λογικῆς» ἢ «φυσικῆς» θεολογήσεως χάνεται τελικὰ τὸ Θεῖο στοιχεῖο στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ μένει τὸ ἀνθρώπινο, παρανοημένο καὶ αὐτὸ καὶ παρερμηνευόμενο. Διότι **δὲν ὑπάρχει ἱστορικὰ ἄνθρωπος-Χριστός, ἀλλὰ Θεάνθρωπος.** Ἡ ἔνωση Θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπου στὸ πρόσωπο Θεοῦ-Λόγου εἶναι «ἀσύγχητη» μέν, ἀλλὰ καὶ «ἀδιαίρετη». Οἱ «λογικῆς» ἐρμηνεῖες τοῦ Προσώπου τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀποδεικνύονται παράλογες, διότι ἀδυνατοῦν νὰ συλλάβουν μὲ τὴ λογικὴ τὸ «ὑπερλόγο».

Ἡ νομικὴ-δικανικὴ συνείδηση ζεῖ καὶ αὐτὴ στὸ Χριστὸ τὸ σκάνδαλό της. Ἀναζητεῖ σκοπιμότητα κοινωνικὴ στὴ Σάρκωση καὶ καταλήγει καὶ αὐτὴ στὸ μῦθο, ὅταν δὲν αὐτοπαρὰδίδεται στὸν Θεῖο Λόγο. Οἱ Φράγκοι κατασκεύασαν, μέσω τοῦ διακεκριμένου σχολαστικοῦ τους Ἀνσέλμου (11^{ος} αἰ.), τὸ μῦθο τῆς «ικανοποιήσεως τῆς θείας δικαιοσύνης». Ὁ Θεὸς-Λόγος σαρκούται, διὰ νὰ σταυρωθεῖ-θυσιασθεῖ καὶ δώσει ἔτσι ἱκανοποίησι στὴν προσβλήν ποὺ προξένησε στὸ Θεὸ ἢ ἀνθρώπινη ἁμαρτία! Τὰ κρατοῦντα τότε στὴ φραγκικὴ φεουδαρχικὴ κοινωνία προβάλλονται (μυθολογικὰ) στὸ Θεό, ποὺ παίρνει τὴ θέση στὴ φραγκογερμανικὴ φαντασία ἐνὸς ὑπεραυτοκράτορα. Ἄς φωνάξει ὁ Ἰωάννης: «Οὕτως ἠγάπησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν...» (3:16), ἢ ὁ Παῦλος: «*Συνίστησι δὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ Θεὸς, ὅτι ἔτι ἁμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν*

Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανε.» (Ρωμ. 5:8). Ὅχι! «Γιὰ νὰ πάρει ἐκδίκηση» καὶ «ζητώντας ἱκανοποίησι» θὰ μάθει νὰ φωνάξει ὁ δυτικὸς (ἢ δυτικοποιημένος) ἄνθρωπος.

Ἔτσι πλάσθηκε ἓνας «Χριστιανισμὸς» ἄλλου εἴδους, ποὺ δὲν διαφέρει ἀπὸ μυθοπλασία, ἀφοῦ προβάλλει στὸ Θεὸ τὴ φαντασία καὶ τὶς προλήψεις μας. **Ἡ ἐκλογίκευση καὶ ἡ ἐκνομίκευση τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ Θεανθρώπου εἶναι ὁ μεγαλύτερος κίνδυνος τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ στὴν ἱστορία.**

Ἡ θρησκευτικὴ (τυπολατρικὴ) συνείδηση ζεῖ τὸ «σκάνδαλο» τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως καταφεύγοντας στὴ θρησκευτικοποίησι τῆς Πίστεως. Ἐξαντλεῖ τὸ νόημα τῶν Χριστουγέννων στὶς τελετὲς καὶ χάνει τὸν ἀληθινὸ σκοπὸ τους, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ «υἰοθεσία» (θέωση). «*Ἴνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν...*» (Γαλ. 4:5). Εἶναι τὸ σκάνδαλο τοῦ φαρισαϊσμοῦ, ἔστω καὶ ἂν λέγεται Χριστιανισμὸς.

Εἶναι ὅμως οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ «Παιδίου» ποὺ βιώνουν τὸ σκάνδαλο τῆς ἐξουσίας. Ὁ Ἡρωδισμὸς! Οἱ κρατοῦντες ἢ μᾶλλον «δοκοῦντες ἄρχειν...» (νομίζοντες ὅτι κυβερνοῦν) (Μάρκ. 10:42), ὅπως ὁ Ἡρώδης, βλέπουν στὸν νεογέννητο Χριστὸ κάποιον ἀνταγωνιστὴ καὶ κίνδυνο τῶν συμφερόντων τους. Γι' αὐτὸ «*ζητοῦσι τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου*» (Ματθ. 2:20). Παρερμηνεύουν ἔτσι τὸν ἀληθινὸ χαραχτήρα τῆς βασιλικῆς ιδιότητος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς ὁποίας «*οὐκ ἔσται τέλος*». Ὁ Χριστὸς ὡς Βασιλεὺς ὅλης τῆς κτίσεως εἶναι ὁ μόνος ἀληθινὸς Κύριός της, ὁ δημιουργὸς καὶ σωτήρας της καὶ ὄχι ὡς οἱ Ἡρώδες τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, ποὺ ἀδίστακτοι δολοφονοῦν, γιὰ νὰ κρατήσουν τὴν ἐξουσία τους.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος προσφέρει δυνατότητα ὀρθῆς προσεγγίσεως τῶν Χριστουγέννων, δηλαδὴ ἀγιοπνευματικῆς: «*Τοῖνυν ἐορτάζομεν μὴ πανηγυρικῶς, ἀλλὰ θεϊκῶς μὴ κοσμικῶς, ἀλλὰ ὑπερκοσμίως μὴ τὰ ἡμέτερα, ἀλλὰ τὰ τοῦ ἡμετέρου (=ὄχι δηλαδὴ τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς μας, ἀλλὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ἃς τιμᾶμε...): μᾶλλον δὲ τὰ τοῦ Δεσπότην μὴ τὰ τῆς ἀσθενείας, ἀλλὰ τὰ τῆς ἰατρείας μὴ τὰ τῆς πλάσεως, ἀλλὰ τὰ τῆς ἀναπλάσεως.*



Ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς ἀγαπάει πολὺ, μᾶς ἔχει στὸ νοῦ Του κάθε στιγμή καὶ μᾶς προστατεύει. Πρέπει νὰ τὸ καταλάβουμε αὐτὸ καὶ νὰ μὴ φοβούμεστε τίποτε.

Μόνον ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ, μόνον ἡ ἀληθινὴ ἀγάπη μας, ποὺ θυσιάζεται μυστικὰ γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, μπορεῖ νὰ σώσει καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ μᾶς.

Ἁγίου Πορφυρίου Κουσοκαλυβίτου

Έρχεται «Διωγμός!» Καὶ οἱ Ἐκκλησίες καὶ οἱ Ἐπίσκοποι θὰ Ἐξαλείψουν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο...

Προφητικά Λόγια τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Γέροντος Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης πρ. Ἀγίουστίνου Καντιώτη (+2010).



Γέρος πλέον ἐπίσκοπος, τώρα πὸν βρίσκομαι στὸ τέλος τῆς ἐπιγείου ζωῆς μου, ὕστερα ἀπὸ πολυπλαγκτὸν καὶ ἄκρως περιπετειώδη δρᾶσιν σαράντα ἐτῶν στὴν πατρίδα μας, σᾶς συνιστῶ, παιδιά μου: Ἄν ἔρθει ἐποχὴ πὸν θὰ ἀκούσουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς, ὄχι στὸ θέατρο ἀλλὰ στὴν πραγματικότητα, «διωγμός!» καὶ ἀκουστεῖ ἡ λέξι «διωγμός» ἐναντίον τῶν πιστῶν Χριστιανῶν,

νὰ μὴ φοβηθεῖτε, καὶ νὰ μὴ δειλιάσετε.

Ἐγὼ δὲν θὰ ζῶ πλέον, θὰ βρίσκομαι ὑπὸ τὸν τάφο, θὰ βρίσκομαι στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ. Ἐσεῖς θὰ ἀκούσετε νὰ φωνάζουν, ἀπ' ἄκρου εἰς ἄκρου, «διωγμός». Καὶ οἱ ἐκκλησίες καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ οἱ ἐπίσκοποι θὰ ἔξαλείψουν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, γιὰ νὰ κηρυχθεῖ νέον «εὐαγγέλιο». Καὶ ὅτι γίνεται στὴν Ἀλβανία καὶ ὅτι γίνεται σὲ χώρες μακριά, θὰ γίνεῖ καὶ στὴν Ἑλλάδα—προφητεύω.

Ἀλλὰ ἓνα πρᾶγμα νὰ ξέρετε πολὺ καλὰ ὅτι δὲ θὰ νικήσουν οἱ ἄθεοι, ἀλλὰ οἱ πιστοί. Προσευχῆ λοιπόν. Στὰ ὄπλα καὶ στὰ γόνατα. Γιατὶ θὰ ἔρθει ἡ ὥρα πὸν θὰ γίνεῖ ἐρείπωση. Τότε ἐσεῖς, ποῦ θὰ μαζεύεστε γιὰ νὰ ἀκοῦτε λόγον Χριστιανικόν; Εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸ ἓνα χάρισμα.

Ἐρώτηση: Γέροντα, τι πρέπει νὰ κάνουμε γιὰ νὰ μὴ μᾶς πιάσει ὁ φόβος καὶ ὁ πανικός, ἐκεῖνες τὶς δύσκολες ἡμέρες;

Ὅχι, ὄχι, δὲν θὰ μᾶς πιάσει πανικός. Νὰ ἔχουμε θάρρος, ὅμως νὰ μὴν τὸ ἐπιδεικνύουμε, ἀλλὰ νὰ περιμένουμε τὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή γιὰ νὰ τὸ δεῖξουμε. Γιατὶ ὅταν ἐκδηλώνει κανεὶς τὸ θάρρος του τὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή, ἔχει μεγάλη σημασία. Ἀγωνίζεσθε λοιπόν τὸν καλὸν ἀγώνα καὶ μία μέρα θὰ συναντηθοῦμε στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Ἐκεῖ θὰ γίνεῖ ἡ συνάντηση ὄλων τῶν πιστῶν. Πᾶτε στὸ καλὸ καὶ νὰ προσεύχεστε.

Θὰ νικήσετε!!! Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ζεῖ καὶ θὰ ζήσει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Διότι ἰδρυτὴς τῆς εἶναι ὁ Χριστός, παιδιά. Εἶθε νὰ κρατήσετε μέσα σας ἀναμμένη τὴν λαμπάδα τῆς πίστεως. Φῶς νὰ εἴστε ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ

τούτῳ. Μέσα στὸ σκοτάδι πὸν ὑπάρχει (ἄλλοι εἶναι προτεστάνται, ἄλλοι καθολικοί, ἄλλοι διαφόρων ἄλλων ὀνομάτων καὶ καταστάσεων, ἄλλοι βλάσφημοι κ.λ.π.), ἐσεῖς παιδιά μου, ὅσο λίγοι καὶ ἂν μείνετε μετὰ τὸ Χριστὸ μὴ φοβηθεῖτε, θὰ νικήσετε. Καὶ ἂν ἀκόμα, παιδιά μου, παιδιὰ τοῦ κατηχητικοῦ σχολείου, παιδιὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος, τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, τοῦ Πόντου καὶ τῆς Μακεδονίας, καὶ ἂν σὲ ἀρνηθεῖ ἡ μάνα σου καὶ ὁ πατέρας σου καὶ μείνεις ἓνας μέσα στὴν πόλη σου ἢ στὸ χωριὸ σου, νὰ μὴ δειλιάσεις. Καὶ ἂν ὅλη ἡ κοινωνία γονατίσει μπροστὰ στὸ διάβολο, ἐσὺ μὴ γονατίσεις καὶ ἐσὺ ὁ ἓνας θὰ νικήσεις.

Τὸ λέω καὶ τὸ τονίζω. Μπορεῖ νὰ γονατίσουν ἄλλες πολιτεῖες ἀλλὰ ἡ πόλη αὐτή, πὸν εἶναι βαμμένη μετὰ τὸ αἷμα τῶν μαρτύρων καὶ τῶν ἡρώων, δὲν θὰ γονατίσει ποτέ. Στὶς φλέβες μικρῶν καὶ μεγάλων ρεεῖ αἷμα μαρτύρων τῆς Νικομήδειας, τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καὶ τοῦ Πόντου. Θὰ μείνουμε κάστρο τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θὰ ἀποδείξουμε γιὰ μία ἀκόμη φορὰ, πρὸς πείσμα τῶν δαιμόνων, ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἀπέθανε ἀλλὰ ζεῖ εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων.



Ας ἀποκτήσουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς ἀγάπη, ἄς ἀποκτήσουμε εὐσπλαγχνία γιὰ τὸν πλησίον. Καὶ ἔτσι θὰ ἀποφεύγουμε νὰ καταλαοῦμε, νὰ κατακρίνουμε, νὰ ἐξουθενώσουμε τοὺς ἄλλους. Ἄς βοηθήσουμε ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλον σὰν νὰ εἴμαστε μέλη τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος. Ποῖος εἶναι ἐκεῖνος πού, ἐπειδὴ ἔχει μία πληγὴ στὸ χέρι του ἢ στὸ πόδι του ἢ σὲ κάποιο ἄλλο μέρος τοῦ σώματός του, σιχαίνεται τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ἢ κόβει τὸ μέλος του καὶ ἂν ἀκόμη σαπίσει, καὶ δὲν προσπαθεῖ μᾶλλον νὰ τὸ καθαρίσει...

Καθένας ἄς ὑπηρετεῖ τὸ σῶμα ἀνάλογα μετὰ τὴν δύναμή του. Καὶ φροντίστε πάντοτε νὰ βοηθεῖ ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλο εἴτε διδάσκοντας καὶ βάζοντας τὸ λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν καρδιὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, εἴτε παρηγορώντας, ὅταν ὁ ἄλλος εἶναι λυπημένος, εἴτε δίνοντας ἓνα χέρι καὶ βοηθώντας τὸν ἀδελφό. Φροντίστε νὰ ἐνωθεῖτε μεταξύ σας. Γιατὶ ὅσο ἐνώνεται κανεὶς μετὰ τὸν πλησίον, τόσο περισσότερο ἐνώνεται μετὰ τὸν Θεό.

Ἀββᾶς Δωρόθεος

Νὰ μέμφεσαι τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου, νὰ περιφρονεῖς καὶ νὰ κόβεις τὸ θέλημά σου καὶ νὰ θέτεις τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου κάτω ἀπὸ ὅλη τὴν κτίση. Καὶ ἄς μάθει ἡ ἀγάπη σου ὅτι ὅλη ἡ πάλη τοῦ διαβόλου εἶναι νὰ μᾶς χωρίσει τὸν ἓνα ἀπὸ τὸν ἄλλο.

Ἀββᾶς Βαρσανούφιος

Αὐτὰ Εἶναι Χριστούγεννα

Τοῦ ἀρχιμανδρίτου πατρός Ἰακώβου Κανάκη.

Στὶς μεγάλες πόλεις σημειώνεται ἡ ἀπόλυτη ἀντίθεση. Ζεστή ἀτμόσφαιρα στὰ μαγαζιά καὶ στὰ ἐστιατόρια καὶ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὶς πόρτες καὶ τὰ παράθυρά τους ἄστεγοι, νηστικοὶ καὶ παγωμένοι ἄνθρωποι. Χαμόγελα στοὺς ἀνέμελους θαμῶνες τους καὶ ἔξω ἄνθρωποι ἀπογοητευμένοι σχεδὸν «ἡμιθανεῖς». Ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ἀναζητοῦν «τὸ πνεῦμα τῶν Χριστουγέννων» καὶ ἄλλοι ποὺ εἶναι μόνοι τους «χριστοί», ἀλλὰ ἀόρατοι γιὰ τοὺς πρώτους.

Μία κοινωνία μὲ τόσες ἀντιθέσεις, σὲ τέλεια σύγχυση, ποὺ αἰμορραγεῖ καὶ πλέον φαίνεται. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κρυφτεῖ μὲ τίποτα. Ἐντονα πλέον τὰ σημάδια ποὺ γίνονται τραύματα μέρα μὲ τὴν ἡμέρα, μιᾶς κατὰ βάση πολὺπλευρης πνευματικῆς κρίσης. Ὑπάρχει ὅμως μέσα σ' αὐτὴν τὴν τεταμένη ἀτμόσφαιρα μία εὐκαιρία ἀκόμη ἐφέτος, νὰ ἔρθουμε πιὸ κοντὰ στὰ Χριστούγεννα, νὰ τὰ βιώσουμε πραγματικά. Μία κίνηση, ἓνα βλέμμα, ἓνα νεῦμα σὲ ὅσους πάσχουν, ἀποτελεῖ τὴν μέγιστη ἐλεημοσύνη. Ἡ συμπαράσταση στὸν διπλανὸ ἄνθρωπο, σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο, ὁδηγεῖ στὰ Χριστούγεννα.

Ἐνα ἐλάχιστο ἐνδιαφέρον πρὸς τὸν πλησίον καὶ ἀμέσως ἡ ψυχὴ ἐνεργοποιεῖται, ζωντανεύει, χαίρεται καὶ μπαίνει στὸ πραγματικὸ πνεῦμα τῶν Χριστουγέννων. Τῶν Χριστουγέννων ὄχι μόνο τῶν παιδιῶν, ὅπως κάποιοι λένε, ἀλλὰ ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ κυρίως αὐτῶν ποὺ ἀναζητοῦν μία φάτνη. Ὅντως, ἐκούσια ἢ ἀκούσια, μία φάτνη ζητᾷ ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ νὰ ξαναγεννηθεῖ σὲ μία νέα κατάσταση, σὲ μία νέα κοινωνία, ὄχι ὅπως τὴν κατέστησαν οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ οἱ δυνατοὶ στὸ παρελθόν. Ὅλοι μία φάτνη ἀναζητοῦν ἀλλὰ συχνὰ μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴν φάτνη ἐκείνη τῆς Βηθλεέμ.

Ὅμως νὰ ποὺ ἡ προέκταση αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορικῆς φάτνης δὲν περιορίζεται χρονικὰ καὶ τοπικά.

Ἡ προέκταση ὑφίσταται καὶ σήμερα. Ἡ φάτνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε ἀναζητοῦσε καὶ ἀναζητᾷ αὐτοὺς ποὺ θὰ τὴν προτιμήσουν, ἄσχετα μὲ τὸ πότε καὶ τὸ ποῦ ἔζησαν καὶ ζοῦν. Μία φάτνη ποὺ ἀφορᾷ σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο, ὅπου καὶ νὰ γεννηθῆκε, ὅποια γλώσσα καὶ ἂν μιλάει, ποὺ ἀφορᾷ στὸ παρελθόν, στὸ παρὸν καὶ στὸ μέλλον. Αὐτὴν ἀναζητοῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι γιὰτὶ γι'

αὐτὴν εἶναι προορισμένοι. Θὰ λύγιζαν καὶ οἱ πιὸ σκληροὶ ἂν διάβαζαν, ἂν γνώριζαν, ἂν αἰσθάνονταν τὴν ἔνταση τῆς ἀγάπης μὲ τὴν ὁποία μᾶς ἀναζητᾷ ὁ Θεὸς ποὺ σπαργανώνεται «σήμερον».

Στήριξη ζητοῦν ἰδιαίτερος οἱ ἄνθρωποι σήμερα περισσότερο ἀπὸ ποτέ. Τὰ σπιτικά τους καὶ οἱ καρδιές τους ζητοῦν ζεστασιά γιὰτὶ ἔχουν μεγαλύτερη παγωνιά ἀπὸ αὐτὴν ποὺ ἔχουν οἱ ἄστεγοι τὸν χειμῶνα. Ἄνθρωπο ζητοῦν καὶ ἄνθρωπο δὲν ἔχουν. Ἀλήθεια, ποῖον νὰ λυπηθεῖς τέτοιες μέρες ἀλλὰ καὶ κάθε μέρα; Ἐκείνους ποὺ ζοῦν στὸ δρόμο ἢ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἔμειναν «ἄστεγοι» ἀγάπης καὶ ἐπικοινωνίας μέσα στὸ «ζεστό τους» σπίτι. Φαινόμενο στὶς μέρες μας ἡ ἀποξένωση, ἡ μοναξιὰ καὶ ἡ ἀπογοήτευση. Φαινόμενο καὶ ἡ τόση ἀδιαφορία.

Ἐρχονται Χριστούγεννα, ποὺ γιὰ τὸν καθένα τελικὰ σημαίνουν κάτι ἐντελῶς διαφορετικὸ. Χριστούγεννα

εἶναι τὸ νὰ βγεῖς ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτό σου. Χριστούγεννα σημαίνει δόσιμο καὶ ἂν ἔτσι τὰ ζήσεις, ζεῖς τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ πληρότητα καὶ αὐτὸ γίνεται κάθε φορᾷ ποὺ θὰ κινεῖσαι στὰ ὄρια τῆς προσφορᾶς γιὰ τὸν ἄλλον. Χριστούγεννα ἔρχονται, ἄς κάνουμε ὄχι τὸ δεδομένο ἀλλὰ μία ὑπέρβαση, τὸ κάτι παραπάνω καὶ τὸ διαφορετικὸ. Καὶ αὐτὸ



βιώνοντάς το προσωπικὰ καὶ μυστικά.

Ἄς βοηθήσουμε μὲ τρόπο μυστικὸ, κάποιον ποὺ μάθαμε ὅτι εἶναι μόνος τούτη τὴν χρονιά, ποὺ εἶναι στὸ νοσοκομεῖο, ποὺ πενθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατο κάποιου ἀνθρώπου. Αὐτὸς ἄς γίνε γιὰ μᾶς Χριστούγεννα καὶ ὁ «καλὸς μας χρόνος». Δύο κορυφαῖες συναντήσεις ἄς γίνουν αὐτὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα: μιὰ μὲ τὸν Ἐνανθρωπήσαντα Χριστὸ στὸ κοινὸ ἅγιο Ποτήριο καὶ ἄλλη μιὰ μὲ τὸν κάθε «χριστὸ» δίπλα μας.

Αὐτὰ εἶναι ἀληθινὰ, πραγματικὰ Χριστούγεννα, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν πολλὰ φῶτα ἀλλὰ τὸ «*φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν*»!



Χριστούγεννα! Περίχαρα ἢ καμπάνα κρᾶζει κι ἡ Μάνα τὸ παιδὶ καὶ τὸ παιδὶ «Χριστούγεννα» στὴ Μάνα κι ὁ κόσμος ὅλος τραγουδεῖ.

Κωστὴς Παλαμᾶς

NATIVITY EPISTLE OF 1962

By Saint John, Archbishop of Shanghai.

Thou, Who art the God of peace and the Father of compassions, didst send unto us the Angel of Thy great Counsel, granting us peace.

† † †



The Angel-Messenger of the pre-eternal Counsel of the Holy Trinity comes to the earth. This is not an ordinary messenger; it is the Only-begotten Son of God Himself. He brings peace to men. *Peace be unto you*, He said more than once to His disciples. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*, He says to the apostles at the

Mystical Supper, *not as the world giveth, give I unto you*. And appearing after His Resurrection, again He says: *Peace be unto you*.

For He is our peace, the holy Apostle Paul says concerning Him. *He came to the earth to reconcile man unto God by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And having come, He preached peace to those afar off and to those near, because through Him we both have access unto the Father*.

The wall that separated heaven and earth is destroyed; the sword that barred the way to the tree of life disappears. Unto man that had sinned comes his Creator, calling him into His embrace! By the mouths of the apostles, the Holy Spirit cries out: *In Christ, be ye reconciled to God*. You that had sinned came not to God, but the Son of God, before Whom you sinned, came to you! He calls everyone to Himself; He gives forgiveness to everyone who merely thirsts for this. For without the desire of man himself, without at least his little effort, God's peace cannot settle in him. The Lord forces no one to come to Him, but calls everyone: *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. Come all ye who are heavy laden with sins, who are exhausted from your labors and who do not find rest. You shall find that inner peace, which you will find nothing on earth more desirable than. The soul will feel unearthly peace and joy.

The Magi who worshipped the Babe experienced that joy; the shepherds, finding Him lying in a manger, also felt it. But neither peace nor joy touched the heart of Herod and those who wanted to destroy the Babe. For

evil desire and malice are incompatible with inner peace. And whoever does not have inner peace, also sows strife and malice about.

The Church now calls us to meet Christ Who comes from heaven. What can we do in order to meet Him like the Magi, and not like Herod? *Ye that desire life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it*. It tends to be hard to do this; we are weak when it comes to everything good. But the Son of God even came for this: in order to strengthen us. Not for naught was He born in Bethlehem, which signifies *house of bread*. He feeds us with heavenly food, His flesh. *God, the Lord and Creator of all, as a babe in the flesh, is worshipped in a poor manger, crying out: eat My body and through faith be made steadfast*. These words of the divine Babe are directed to us.

Let us hearken to His call! Let us follow the Magi; let us hasten with the shepherds! Our churches are now that cave of Bethlehem. Not illusory, but in reality does He, Who is now being born in His most pure flesh, rest in them. Let us worship Him; let us offer as a gift our thoughts and desires; let us confess our sins, and let us taste of His immaculate Body and Blood. Whoever did not do this earlier, let him at least accomplish it now, when the star of Bethlehem is already shining! Our minds will be enlightened and the heart will hear:

Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!



Thus the immaculate fruition issuing forth from the womb occurred from an infertile mother, and then the parents, in the first blossoming of her growth brought her to the temple and dedicated her to God. The priest, then making the order of services, beheld the face of the girl and of those in front of and behind, and he became gladdened and joyful, seeing as it were the actual fulfillment of the Divine promise. He consecrated her to God, as a reverential gift and propitious sacrifice and, as a great treasury unto salvation, he led her within the very innermost parts of the temple. Here the Maiden walked in the upright ways of the Lord, as in bridal chambers, partaking of heavenly food until the time of betrothal, which was preordained before all the ages by Him Who, by His inscrutable mercy, was born from her, and by Him Who before all creation and time and expanse Divinely begat Him...

St. Andrew of Crete
Homily on the Nativity of the Theotokos

THE VALUE OF TIME

(THE NUMBER 8,760)

By the Rev. Metropolitan Avgoustinos of Florina (+2010), from the weekly bulletin "Kyriaki" («Κυριακή», "Sunday"), January 1, 2005 [translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen].



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

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

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

My brethren, this is where my simple parable ends. Now who is this loving king? He is our God. Who are these

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

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

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

intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and all of Your saints, have mercy upon me!

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

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

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

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During these hours were there any of the most significant

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

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

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

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

What is it then that we should do, you ask. Why are you asking me or any of your clergy? The answers lie elsewhere, in black and white, as written by St. John the Evangelist. What does he have to tell us? One simple word that is the one and only key: Repent! (*Repent ye: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand*, Mt 3:2). In other words, change your mind, your behavior, your life, your daily spiritual path; the road that our ultra-progressive society has carved for the citizens of our days leads the faithful to the deep, dreaded canyon of eternal damnation, Hell. That is the destination towards where most of us are marching; unless we choose here and now to change, re-program our lives, use wisely every minute granted to us by our Lord. Let us stop wasting time now, let us stop throwing our gold coins senselessly into the river.

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



Truly never before has the cross of each person who wants to be a true Christian been as heavy as in this time of the triumph of falsehood which we are experiencing.

Never before on this earth has there been such a huge number of people who freely and easily, without any shame, without any pangs of conscience *call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* (Isa 5:20).

Archbishop Averky of Blessed Memory (+1976)

DEALING WITH THE SECULARIZATION OF CHRISTMAS

From "The Veil," Vol. 12, No. 3 (Nativity Fast, 2005).

Question: I hate the secularization of Christmas. How can I and my family keep the Nativity Fast and celebrate Christmas without getting into all the commercialization that surrounds it in society?

Answer: Almost all of what can be said in reply to this question is very obvious and simple, but can be difficult to implement. For those with families, it would be advisable to talk over all these points together and to encourage each other in adhering to everything as we draw nearer and nearer to the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. If a beginning in the following suggestions has not already been made, it is never too late to start.

First of all, be sure to keep the fast! In following the fast as we should, many of the intrusions which the world makes into our homes during this time will automatically be eliminated. Remember, a "fasting" day or period is not limited only to food, but includes vain entertainment as well.

With this in mind, we would like to stress that no one should look at "fasting" as something negative: "we can't do...", "we can't eat...", "we can't go." Instead we need to redefine the way we see a fasting period, such as this time before the Nativity of the Lord. This is a preparation period and a time for spiritual growth—and this idea is certainly not something negative!

The world in which we live is constantly intruding into our innermost lives as it attacks all of the bodily senses; this is never more obvious than during this time of the year. We are encouraged to see, hear, taste, touch and smell all sorts of things that take our minds off of traveling the road to Bethlehem for the birth of Christ.

Obviously, for those who are either single, widowed or have no young children in the home, all of what we need to do to make the Nativity Fast a true time of spiritual growth is much easier. The target for so much of the advertising during this period is aimed directly at those who are most vulnerable—the children—and the things which are advertised are usually the very things that we need to avoid. Each household is a unique situation, and this will have to be kept in mind when trying to implement the suggestions we would like to make.

Those with children at home often find the actual fasting from foods difficult during this time when it seems that so many rich, enticing and definitely non-fasting foods are pushed at us. It often helps to have special Lenten foods that the family enjoys and which are served only during this and other fasting periods. We do not, however, want to dwell only on the culinary aspects of the fast in this article;

we assume that all reading this are indeed adhering to this aspect of the fast, since it is not optional.

A fast only from specific foods is certainly not the sum total of our preparation for the Nativity. Fasting includes avoiding entertainment—another thing which abounds during this season. It is possible in almost all circumstances to avoid office parties and other gatherings by truthfully stating that as Orthodox Christians we do not begin to celebrate until the Feast has arrived. If attendance at such an event absolutely cannot be avoided, then it is always possible to find things to eat that do not break the fast, and also to simply excuse yourself early.

This is certainly a time when we should be intensifying our reading and daily prayers. We find a number of great saints whose feast days fall within this fast: St. Nicholas on December 6th, Saint Spiridon on December 12th, St. Herman on December 13th, St. Ignatius on December 20th to name just a few. Read their lives and truly pray to them. Also, within the time of this fast there are quite a few of the prophets whose feast days are also commemorated: read their prophecies as well from the Old Testament. The *Katavasia* of the Nativity are sung beginning on November 21st—whether you are a singer or not, get the words and music from your priest and learn them, singing them throughout the day when you are alone or with your family. They are very beautiful and uplifting.

These are just a few of the things that can be read as a family, as well as individually, and our daily prayers can—and should—include a petition to God to keep us from all which would harm the soul.

Many parishes offer a retreat or seminar during this time. If your own parish is not having something like this, there is a good chance that a surrounding parish is! Speak with your priest and ask him about this. If there is not a retreat or seminar (and even if there is!) it would be a good idea for several people, like yourself, who want to redirect their priorities during the Nativity Fast to meet together in a reading group. Accountability always tends to make us read and pray more!

The so-called “Christmas specials” on television and the bombardment of commercials that tell us of all the things we absolutely must have or must buy to be a good mother, father, brother, relative, friend, etc., are enough reason for everyone to turn off the television! The “Christmas specials” seem to emphasize that the “true meaning of Christmas” involves being loving, caring, self-giving, etc (sandwiched in between commercials which appeal to greed) and mention nothing of the fact that God has become flesh in His love for mankind in order to restore us to that image that was lost!

Now we finally come to the most obvious aspect of the secular celebration of Christmas—presents. While it is now too late to implement this suggestion, it is certainly some-

thing that can be remembered and acted upon for next year purchase gifts before the Fast begins!

Limit gifts to a minimum. Certainly everyone has said at one point or another that the proverbial “next year” will be different and more simple. Begin now. There are so many ways in which this can be done, and again, every situation is unique. Most people like gift certificates or a donation made to their favorite charity in their name. Within families, it can be as easy or as difficult to limit the frenzy of gift-giving as you decide to make it.

Above everything, remember that we begin to celebrate when the world around us is finished celebrating! On December 25th we hear non-Orthodox people saying, “Well, that was a nice Christmas, but I’m glad it’s over.” For us, having fasted and anticipated the Lord’s birth for forty days, we are just beginning to celebrate, to sing carols and to comfort our weary bodies with richer foods.

Let us celebrate the feast of the Lord’s Incarnation with spiritual joy instead of being so tired and burned out that we echo the sentiments of those outside the Faith who are glad to see these days, which are so holy to us, come to an end.

Christ is born, glorify Him! Christ is come from the heavens, receive Him! Christ on the earth. Rejoice, all the earth, sing to the Lord, for He has covered Himself in glory!



Now the day of mercy has shown forth! Let no one persecute his neighbor with revenge for the wrong he has caused him! The day of joy has arrived! Let no one be guilty of causing sorrow and grief to another person. This is a cloudless and bright day!

Let anger be stilled for it disturbs peace and tranquility. This is the day in which God descended to sinners! Let the righteous man be ashamed to exalt himself over sinners. This is the day when the Lord of creation came to servants! Let the master of the house humble himself in similar love to his servants. This is the day on which the Wealthy One became poor for our sake! Let not the rich be ashamed to share their table with the poor.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

He who sits at the right hand of the Father goes without shelter at the inn, that He may for us prepare many mansions in the house of His heavenly Father... He was born, not in the house of His parents, but at the inn, by the wayside, because through the mystery of the Incarnation He is become the Way, by which He guides us to our home.

Venerable Bede

ST. MARK OF EPHESUS AND THE FALSE UNION OF FLORENCE

By Archimandrite Amvrossy Pogodin (+2014). Father Ambrosius was a prolific writer, translator, and scholar, and he regularly contributed articles and translated works of the Greek Fathers to various learned Russian periodicals and also published Russian translations of a variety of Greek historical material. This article, albeit lengthy, is mandatory reading for all Orthodox Christians during these dark days of Ecumenism and the papal-like behaviors of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the architect of today's great schism within His Bride

The Conclusion of the False Union

To the other afflictions which the Orthodox delegation suffered in Florence was added the death of the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Patriarch was found dead in his room.

On the table lay (supposedly) his testament, *Extrema Sententia*, consisting in all of some lines in which he declared that he accepted everything that the Church of Rome confesses. And then: "In like manner I acknowledge the Holy Father of Fathers, the Supreme Pontiff and Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Pope of Old Rome. Likewise, I acknowledge purgatory. In affirmation of this, I affix my signature."

There is no doubt whatever that Patriarch Joseph did not write this document. The German scholar Frommann, who made a detailed investigation of the "Testament" of Patriarch Joseph, says: "This document is so Latinized and corresponds so little to the opinion expressed by the Patriarch several days before, that its spuriousness is evident." The "Testament" appears in the history of the Council of Florence quite late; contemporaries of the Council knew nothing of it.

And so the Greek delegation lost its Patriarch. Although the Patriarch was no pillar of Orthodoxy, and though one may reproach him in much, still one cannot deny that with his whole soul he grieved for Orthodoxy and never allowed himself or anyone else to injure St. Mark. Being already in deep old age, he lacked the energy to defend the Church of which he was head, but history cannot reproach him for betraying the Church. Death spared him from the many and grievous humiliations which the Orthodox Church subsequently had to endure. And on the other hand the absence of his signature on the Act of Union later gave occasion for the defenders of Orthodoxy to contest the pretension of the Council of Florence to the significance and title of "Ecumenical Council," because the Act of every Ecumenical Council must be signed first of all by the Patriarchs.

After the death of the Patriarch, as Syropoulos informs us, Emperor John Paleologos took the direction of the Church into his own hands. This anticanonical situation, although often encountered in Byzantine history, as well in a positive as in a negative manifestation, was strictly condemned by St. Mark in one of his epistles, where he says: "Let no one dominate in our faith: neither emperor, nor hierarch, nor

false council, nor anyone else, but only the one God, Who both Himself and through His Disciples has handed it down to us."

Let us set forth in brief the further history of the negotiations between the Orthodox and the Latins—or, to speak more truly, the history of the capitulation of the Orthodox. The Orthodox were obliged to accept the Latin teaching of the *filioque* and acknowledge the Latin dogma of the Procession of the Holy Spirit, in the sense of His Existence, from the Two *Hypostases*. Then the Orthodox were obliged to declare that the *filioque*, as an addition within the Symbol of Faith, had always been a canonical and blessed act. By this alone there were reduced to naught all the objections of the Greeks from the time of Patriarch Photios, as well as the works of St. Mark of Ephesus and the interdictions for changing the Symbol of Faith which had been made at the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils. One should also note that not all the Roman Popes had approved of the *filioque*, and several had considered its introduction into the Symbol of Faith completely uncanonical. But now all this was forgotten. Everything was sacrificed to the demands of Pope Eugenius and his cardinals.

Further, it was demanded of the Orthodox to accept the Latin teaching concerning the consecration of the Holy Gifts and renounce their own as expressed in the performance of the Divine Liturgy of the Eastern Church. Besides, this was expressed by the Latins in disdainful declarations concerning the Liturgical practice of the Eastern Church.

Finally, the Orthodox were obliged to sign and acknowledge a confession of Papism, expressed thus: "We decree that the Holy Apostolic Throne and Roman Pontiff possess a primacy over the whole earth, and that this Roman Pontiff is the Successor of the blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and is the true Vicar of Christ, the Head of the whole Church, Pastor and Teacher of all Christians; and that our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of St. Peter has given him full authority to shepherd, direct and rule the whole Church, as is likewise contained in the acts of the Ecumenical Councils and in the holy canons." The Orthodox were likewise forced to acknowledge purgatory.

And so Orthodoxy was to cease to exist. Something even more painful was the fact that Orthodoxy had been sold, and not merely betrayed. For when a majority of the Orthodox delegates had found that the Vatican's demands were completely unacceptable, certain warm partisans of the Union had asked the Pope to inform them openly what advantages Byzantium would derive from the Union. The Pope grasped the "business" side of the question and offered the following: (1) The Vatican would provide the means to send the Greeks back to Constantinople. (2) 300 (!) soldiers would be maintained at Papal expense in Constantinople for the defense of the capital against the Turks (3) Two ships would be maintained on the Bosphorus for defense of the city.

(4) A crusade would go through Constantinople. (5) The Pope would summon the Western sovereigns to the aid of Byzantium. The last two promises were purely theoretical. However, when the negotiations came to a dead end, and the Emperor himself was ready to break off further negotiations, the whole affair was settled by four metropolitans, partisans of the Union; and the affair was concluded with a lavish entertainment given by the Pope; theological disputes concerning the privileges of the See of Rome were conducted over wineglasses.

The end came at last. An Act of Union was drawn up in which the Orthodox renounced their Orthodoxy and accepted all the Latin formulas and innovations which had only just appeared in the bosom of the Latin Church, such as the teaching on purgatory. They accepted also an extreme form of Papism, by this act renouncing the ecclesiology that was the essence of the Orthodox Church. All the Orthodox delegates accepted and signed the Union, whether for themselves or, in the case of some, for the Eastern Patriarchs, by whom they had been entrusted to represent them. The signing, on July 5th, 1439, was accompanied by a triumphant service, and after the solemn declaration of the Union, read in Latin and Greek, the Greek delegates kissed the Pope's knee.

Administratively speaking, the whole Orthodox Church signed: Emperor John, the metropolitans and representatives of the Eastern Patriarchs, the Metropolitan of Kiev Isidore, and the Russian Bishop Abraham. **Only one hierarch did not sign. It would be superfluous to mention his name: St. Mark of Ephesus.** But no one paid the least attention to him. What was one man, and he humiliated and fatally ill, in comparison with the all powerful Vatican, headed by the mighty Pope Eugenius IV? What was this one Greek in comparison with the whole multitude of Greek dignitaries headed by Emperor John, and the Greek metropolitans?

There is a Russian proverb: "One alone on the field is no warrior." However, **in this one man was represented the whole might of the Orthodox Church.** This one man represented in himself the whole Orthodox Church. He was a giant of giants, bearing in himself all the sanctity of Orthodoxy and all its might! And this is why, when Pope Eugenius was

solemnly shown by his cardinals the Act of Union, signed by all the Greek delegates, he said, not finding on it the signature of St. Mark: "And so we have accomplished nothing." All the success of the Vatican was illusory and short-lived. The Pope attempted by every means to compel St. Mark to sign the Union, a fact that is attested both by Andrew of Rhodes and Syropoulos. The Pope demanded that St. Mark be deprived of his rank then and there for his refusal to sign the Act of Union. But Emperor John did not allow him to be harmed, because in the depths of his heart he respected St. Mark.

Syropoulos relates the final meeting of St. Mark with the Pope. "The Pope asked of the Emperor that St. Mark appear before him. The Emperor, having summoned him beforehand, persuaded him, saying:

'When the Pope asks you to appear before him already two and three times, you must go to him; but have no fear, for I have spoken and requested and arranged with the Pope so that you will be given no offense or injury. And so, go and listen to everything he says, and reply openly in whatever manner will seem to you the most suitable.' And so Mark went to appear before the Pope, and finding him sitting informally in his own quarters with his cardinals and his bishops, he was uncertain in what fashion he should express respect to the Pope. Seeing that all who surrounded the Pope were sitting, he said: 'I have been suffering from a kidney ailment and severe gout and have not the strength to stand,' and proceeded to sit in his place. The Pope spoke long with Mark; his aim was to persuade him also to follow the decision



of the Council and affirm the Union, and if he refused to do this, then he should know that he would be subject to the same interdictions which previous Ecumenical Councils laid upon the obstinate, who, deprived of every gift of the Church, were cast out as heretics. To the Pope's words Mark gave an extensive, commanding reply. Concerning the interdictions with which the Pope threatened him, he said: *The Councils of the Church have condemned as rebels those who have transgressed against some dogma and have preached thus and fought for this, for which reason also they are called "heretics"; and from the beginning the Church has condemned the heresy itself, and only then has it condemned the leaders of the heresy and its defenders. But I have by no means preached my own*

teaching, nor have I introduced anything new in the Church, nor defended any foreign and false doctrine; but I have held only that teaching which the Church received in perfect form from our Saviour, and in which it has steadfastly remained to this day: the teaching which the Holy Church of Rome, before the schism that occurred between us, possessed no less than our Eastern Church; the teaching which, as holy, you formerly were wont to praise, and often at this very Council you mentioned with respect and honor, and which no one could reproach or dispute. And if I hold it and do not allow myself to depart from it, what Council will subject me to the interdiction to which heretics are subject? What sound and pious mind will act thus with me? For first of all one must condemn the teaching which I hold; but if you acknowledge it as pious and Orthodox, then why am I deserving of punishment? Having said this and more of the like, and listened to the Pope, he returned to his quarters.”

After the Council

St. Mark returned to Constantinople with Emperor John on February 1st, 1440. What a sorrowful return it was! No sooner had the Emperor managed to set foot on land than he was informed of the death of his beloved wife; after this the Emperor out of sorrow did not leave his quarters for three months. None of the hierarchs would agree to accept the post of Patriarch of Constantinople, knowing that this post would oblige one to proceed with the Union. The people who met them, as the Greek historian Doukas testifies, asked the Orthodox delegates who had signed the Union: “How did the Council go? Were we victorious?” To which the hierarchs replied: “No! We sold our faith, we bartered piety for impiety (i.e., Orthodox doctrine for heresy) and have become azymites.” The people asked then: “Why did you sign?” “From fear of the Latins,” “Did the Latins then beat you or put you in prison?” “No. But our right hand signed: let it be cut off! Our tongue confessed: let it be torn out!”

A painful silence set in. Despite the Great Lent, the season most filled with prayer, churches were empty and there were no services: no one wished to serve with those who had signed the Union. In Constantinople revolution was ripening. St. Mark alone was pure in heart and had no reproach on his conscience. But he too suffered immeasurably. Around him united all the zealots for Orthodoxy, especially the monks of the Holy Mountain (Athos) and the ordinary village priests. The whole episcopate, the whole court—all was in the hands of the Uniates, in absolute submission to the representatives of the Vatican, who came often to inspect how the Union was being carried out among the people. The Church was in extreme danger; as St. Mark wrote: “the night of Union encompassed the Church.”

St. Mark became weak in body, but in spirit he burned, and because of this, as John Eugenikos writes, “by Divine Providence he miraculously escaped danger, and the radiant one radiantly returned and was preserved for the father-

land, being met by a universal enthusiasm and respect.” The Byzantine people did not accept the Union: while all the exhortations of the partisans of the Union were ignored, the flaming sermons of St. Mark found an enthusiastic response, as Professor Ostrogorsky notes. Contemporaries of these events, passionate Uniates, note with indignation and perplexity St. Mark’s activity for the harm of the Union. Thus Joseph, Bishop of Methonensis, writes: “Having returned to Constantinople, Ephesus disturbed and confused the Eastern Church by his writings and addresses directed against the decrees of the Council of Florence.” Andrew of Rhodes calls the letters of St. Mark, which he sent out for the strengthening of Orthodoxy, “most noxious” and “seductive.” And present-day Church historians, both Orthodox and Latin, acknowledge that the shattering of the Union of Florence was due to the writings and activity of St. Mark.

St. Mark did not remain long in Constantinople, but soon, without informing the Emperor, left for Ephesus, his see, which it is possible he had not yet visited, since immediately after his consecration in Constantinople he had left for the Council in Italy. Two reasons, it would appear, impelled St. Mark to leave Constantinople for Ephesus: pastoral concern for his flock, which found itself under the Turks in the most woeful circumstances; and the desire to unite spiritually around himself those who were zealous for Orthodoxy, in so far as in Constantinople he had actually been under house arrest. It would appear that it is precisely from Ephesus that St. Mark sent his letters, his confession of faith, and his account of his activity at the Council of Florence. All these documents are to be found in my book in Russian translation.

Concerning the activity of St. Mark in Ephesus, John Eugenikos writes briefly thus: “Actively traveling everywhere throughout the regions of the great Evangelist and Theologian John, and doing this over long periods and with labor and difficulty, being sick in body; visiting the suffering holy churches, and especially constructing the church of the metropolis with the adjoining buildings; ordaining priests; helping those suffering injustice, whether by reason of persecution, or of some trial from the side of the unrighteous; defending widows and orphans; shaming, interdicting, comforting, exhorting, appealing, strengthening; he was, according to the divine Apostle, everything for everyone.” John Eugenikos further declares that inasmuch as the Saint had sufficiently sacrificed himself for his flock, while his constant desire had been monastic solitude and seclusion, he finally desired to go to the Holy Mountain. But there was yet another reason, a more weighty one, about which John Eugenikos was silent for political reasons; St. Mark himself relates this in one of his letters: he had no mandate from the authorities and for this reason his stay in Ephesus was as it were illegal, and he was compelled to leave his flock, this time forever.

The ship on which St. Mark sailed to Athos put in at the island of Limnos, one of the few islands that still belonged to Byzantium. Here St. Mark was recognized by the police authorities and, by a directive which they already possessed from Emperor John Paleologos, was arrested and imprisoned. For the space of two years St. Mark suffered in confinement. John Eugenikos thus informs us of this period in the Saint's life: "Here who would not deservedly marvel, or would not acknowledge the greatness of soul and enduring of misfortunes which he showed: suffering in the burning sun and struggling with privations of the most necessary things and tormented by diseases that came one upon the other, or enduring painful confinement while the fleet of the impious Moslems surrounded the island and inflicted destruction." Once the island was threatened by imminent disaster from a Turkish fleet which surrounded the island. But the danger unexpectedly passed, and the saved inhabitants ascribed their salvation to the prayers of St. Mark, imprisoned in the fortress.

St. Mark never complained about his miserable condition; only in one letter can we see how he suffered and how he was wanting in support from people. He writes thus to the previous Abbot of Vatopedi Monastery: "We have found great consolation from your brothers who are here, the most honorable ecclesiarch and the great economos and others, whom we have seen as inspired images of your love and piety; for they have shown us love and have calmed and strengthened us. May the Lord grant you a worthy reward for their labor and love!"

Finding himself in such painful circumstances, St. Mark continued his battle for the Church, as he writes in one of his letters: "I have been arrested. But the word of God and the power of Truth cannot be bound, but all the stronger flow and prosper, and many of the brethren, encouraged by my exile, overthrow the reproaches of the lawless and the violators of the Orthodox Faith and the customs of the fatherland." He knew that his confession was indispensable, because, as he wrote: "If there had been no persecution, the martyrs would not have shone, nor would the confessors have received the crown of victory from Christ and by their exploits strengthened and gladdened the Orthodox Church." In two years Emperor John ordered St. Mark released and allowed to go where he wished. This liberation occurred on the day when the Seven Martyr-Youths of Ephesus are commemorated, and St. Mark dedicated to them a poem of thanksgiving. St. Mark no longer had the physical strength for ascetic labors on the Holy Mountain; he had become quite feeble, and so he left for his home in Constantinople.

The last year and a half or two years of his holy life, St. Mark spent in painful circumstances of disease and persecution by the Uniate episcopate and Court. At this time he restored

many to Orthodoxy by his personal influence. Especially beneficial for the Church was the return of George Scholarios, who subsequently occupied the position of leader in the battle for Orthodoxy; after the fall of Constantinople, he was elected Patriarch of Constantinople.

During this time, i.e., the last two years of St. Mark's life, much happened. The Eastern Patriarchs condemned the Council of Florence and named it "tyrannical and foul," and refused to recognize the Union. When Metropolitan Isidore, one of the most unprincipled betrayers of Orthodoxy, appeared in Moscow preceded by the Papal cross, he was arrested by the Grand Prince of Moscow Vassily Vassilievich, and subsequently he was helped to flee to Rome, where he received a cardinal's hat. A tradition is preserved that St. Mark was much gladdened by the conduct of the Grand Prince of Moscow and set him up as an example to the Byzantine authorities.

In Constantinople itself, however, the Union was being significantly strengthened. One may say that the Union not only became the State Church of Byzantium, but also gradually took possession, through the episcopate, of the whole of Church life. Only certain individuals, grouped around St. Mark, represented at that time the Orthodox Church. Permanent representatives of the Vatican, including Cardinal Isidore, saw to the official loyalty to the Union of the Byzantine Church and Court, placing in connection with this the fulfillment also of the Papal promises to Byzantium. The danger to the Church was immense, and St. Mark was aware of this. He was aware that before everything else should be placed the battle for Orthodoxy, for, as he said, "murdered souls which have been tempted concerning the sacrament of Faith." And he, the leader of the battle, marching at the head of the army, was scarcely able to walk, exhausted by disease and harassed by the wiles of men. But the power of God is accomplished in weakness!

The Death of St. Mark

St. Mark died on June 23rd, 1444, at the age of 52. George Scholarios writes thus of St. Mark's death: "But our sorrow was increased yet more by the fact that he was taken away from our embrace before he had grown old in the virtues which he had acquired, before we could sufficiently enjoy his presence, in the full power of this passing life! No defect nor cunning had the power to shake his mind, nor to lead astray his soul, so strongly was it nourished and tempered by virtue! Even if the vault of heaven should fall, even then the righteousness of this man would not be shaken, his strength would not fail, his soul would not be moved, and his thought would not be impaired by such difficult trials."

He suffered terribly for fourteen days before his death. Of St. Mark's death itself there has been preserved the account of his brother, the Nomophilax John, who relates: "Thus, having lived with love of God and in everything excelled

in his sojourn from his youth to the divine Schema: in the most holy Schema, in the degrees of priestly service, in the hierarchal dignity, in arguments concerning the Orthodox Faith and in devout and passionless confession, having attained fifty-two years of bodily age, in the month of June on the twenty-third day he fell asleep; he departed rejoicing to Him to Whom he wished, according to Paul, to be dissolved to be with Him, Whom he glorified by good works, Whom he theologized in Orthodox fashion, Whom he pleased his whole life long. He was sick for fourteen days, and the disease itself, as he himself said, had upon him the same effect as those iron instruments of torture applied by executioners to the holy martyrs, and which as it were girdled his ribs and internal organs, pressed upon them and remained attached in such a state and caused absolutely unbearable pain; so that it happened that what men could not do with his sacred martyr's body was fulfilled by disease, according to the unutterable judgment of Providence, in order that this Confessor of Truth and Martyr and Conqueror of all possible sufferings and Victor should appear before God after going through every misery, and that even to his last breath, as gold tried in the furnace, and in order that thanks to this he might receive yet greater honor and rewards eternally from the Just Judge."

Although his agony was painful in the extreme, death itself came easily, and the Saint joyfully gave to God his blessed and radiant spirit. John Eugenikos tells us this: "Long before his death, he gave instructions and like a father gave commands to those present concerning the correction of the Church and our piety and open preservation of the true dogmas of the Church, and concerning turning away from innovation; and adding his final words: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, into Thy hands I commit my spirit*, he thus departed to God." Before the end, on the very day of his death, St. Mark gave over to his former student and spiritual son the leadership of the Orthodox Church, although George Scholarios was at that time still a secular prince. St. Mark was buried in the Mangana Monastery in Constantinople. "Amidst a throng of people and guards with numerous marks of respect, there was placed in the sacred monastery of Mangana dedicated to the divine Martyr George, with honor, as a

treasure, the sacred and greatly honored vessel of a sanctified soul and a temple to the glory of God, Who is glorified and wondrous in His Saints."

From the funeral address of George Scholarios we may see the depth of the sorrow that overcame Orthodox people with the loss of such a great pillar of the Church and such a good and noble man, such a meek and approachable and such a learned man, who, in the expression of John Eugenikos, drew all to himself as a magnet attracts iron. But the triumph of Orthodoxy was accomplished only after the death of St. Mark. The successor of Emperor John, his brother Constantine, openly announced his desire to preserve Orthodoxy in its purity. Not long before the Fall of Constantinople, a Council was convoked at which the Union and its promoters were triumphantly condemned and the Union itself overthrown, and the memory of St. Mark honored by all. This Council was more nominal than actual, and was composed of a quite small number of participants; historically it did not present itself as much, but as an expression of the Orthodox Church it has a great significance as the triumphant conclusion of the battle that St. Mark waged, as a Council of the Orthodox Church, however small she may have been at that time.

Commemoration and Miracles of St. Mark

The solemn commemoration of St. Mark of Ephesus belonged at first to the family Eugenikos. Every year, probably on the day of the Saint's death, the Eugenikos family celebrated a "Service" (*Akolouthia*) and a

synaxarion was read consisting of a short Life of the Saint. It should be noted that in Byzantium the *Akolouthia* was not necessarily connected with a canonization of the dead; it was simply a eulogy of the dead. *Akolouthiai* were written by students to their teachers, to their benefactors and to people close to them, who were of righteous life. These *Akolouthiai* were for domestic use, and they exist for many who were never canonized by the Church; there is one dedicated to Emperor Manuel II Paleologos that was probably written by St. Mark himself.

And so the solemn commemoration of St. Mark of Ephesus was celebrated at first in the Eugenikos family circle. A wider glorification of St. Mark was aided by George Scholarios



The Three Pillars of Orthodoxy

in his capacity of Patriarch of Constantinople. Decades passed, and then centuries, and the memory of St. Mark ever more broadly became glorified among devout people, in holy monasteries and churches; and finally, nearly 300 years after the death of the Saint, in 1734, the Holy Synod of the Church of Constantinople, under the presidency of Patriarch Seraphim, brought out a decree of canonization of St. Mark of Ephesus January 19th was instituted as the date of the Saint's commemoration. As a result, to the two ancient services that already existed (translated in our book into Church Slavonic for use in Church services), were added six more services, but they are inferior to the ancient services to the Saint.

In the book of Doukake, *Iapsis Tou Noetou Paradeisou* for the month of January there is found the following miracle performed by St. Mark many years after his death. "A very honorable man named Demetrios Zourbaios had a sister who became grievously ill. Wherefore he called in all the doctors of Mesolongion and spent much money on them. They, however, brought no benefit to his sister, but rather she became worse. For three days she lost all speech and movement, being totally unconscious, so that even the doctors decided that she was going to die. Then he and the rest of her relatives began preparing the necessities for the funeral. However, most unexpectedly, they heard a voice and a great groan coming from her, and turning towards them she said, 'Why don't you change my clothes, since I have been drenched?'

Her brother became overjoyed upon hearing her speak, and running to her he asked what was the matter and how she became so wet. She answered, 'A certain bishop came here, took me by my hand, and led me to a fountain and put me inside a cistern. After he had washed me, he said to me: Return now; you no longer have any illness.' But her brother again asked her, 'Why didn't you ask him that granted you your health who he was?' And she said, 'I asked him: Who are you, your holiness?, and he told me: I am the Metropolitan of Ephesus, Markos Eugenikos.'

And having said these things, she arose immediately from the bed without any remnant of illness. When they took her to change her clothes, they were all amazed—O, the wonder!—seeing that not only were her clothes soaked, but even the bed and the other blankets upon which she had lain. After this miracle, the above-mentioned woman made an icon of St. Mark for a memorial of the miracle, and having lived piously for fifteen more years, she departed to the Lord."

We shall conclude our short sketch of the life and activity of St. Mark of Ephesus with the invocation with which the ancient biographer of the Saint ends his Synaxarion:

By thy prayers of St. Mark, Christ our God, and all Thy holy Fathers, Teachers and Theologians, preserve Thy Church in Orthodox confession unto the ages!

THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Source: The web pages of the "Orthodox Christian Information Center," (<http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/>)—in our view the finest English Orthodox website.

On January 1st, eight days after the Holy Nativity of our Lord, we celebrate His Circumcision, one of the Feasts of the Lord, on which—in accordance with Hebrew tradition—He received the name "Jesus": *And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the Angel before He was conceived in the womb* (Lk 2:21).

The name "Jesus," which our Lord received at His Circumcision, means *Savior*; that is, in Greek, the name of our Lord is "Soter—σωτήρ," i.e., *Savior*. (Mt 1:21): *For this name (Jesus), when translated into the Greek language, is rendered 'salvation of God'; 'Jesus,' therefore, is translated as 'Soter' ['Savior']*. (St. Theophylact, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CXXIII, col. 704AB).

The true descendants of the Patriarch Abraham were separated from the other nations by the sign of circumcision (a prefigurement of Baptism: *the circumcision made without hands*. [Col 2:11]) and thereby became members of the God-ruled community of the Old Testament; that is, through circumcision, they entered among the chosen People of God.

Christ was now *made under the law*, being conformed to the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law (Gal 4:4) and *fulfilling the Law* (Mt 3:15), in order to elevate the Church of the Law into a Church of Grace, into a new *Israel of God* (cf. Gal 6:16), into a Theanthropic organism—into His Body.

The Circumcision of our Lord inspired our Holy Church to institute a beautiful and deeply symbolic custom for the newborn children of Christians: at eight days, the Priest reads the *Prayer for the Signing of a Child Who is Receiving a Name on the Eighth Day After His Birth* (see the *Small Evchologion*); in such a way the first "Seal" of Grace is given to the infant: *Let the light of Thy countenance be signed upon Thy servant (name), and let the Cross of Thine Only-begotten Son be signed in his heart and his thoughts...* A worthy thing it would be were parents not to neglect this most blessed tradition of our most Holy Orthodox Church, so that newborn children might immediately be "sealed" in Christ through the blessing of a Priest.

It is truly a pity that the profound symbolism of this Feast should be "lost" in the "worldly tumult" and secularized celebrations of the twelve-day period between the Nativity and Theophany, and particularly on New Year's Day; and that we should lose, as well, an opportunity for us to enter more deeply into the *circumcision made without hands* of our Holy Baptism.

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ON APOSTASY

By Archbishop Averky of Blessed Memory (+1976)

We have neither the strength nor the authority to stop Apostasy, as Bishop Ignatius stresses: “Do not attempt to stop it with your weak hand...” But what then should we do? “Avoid it, protect yourself from it, and that is enough for you. Get to know the spirit of the times, study it so that you can avoid its influence whenever possible” This is what the same Bishop Ignatius teaches us.

And do not his words, written more than 100 years ago and so obviously related to our time, exude genuine prophetic inspiration and undoubted enlightenment from on high: “Judging by the spirit of the age and the intellectual ferment, one must suppose that the structure of the Church, which has long been wavering, will collapse terribly and quickly. There is no one to stop or oppose this. The means adopted to support it are borrowed from the elements of the world which are hostile to the Church and will hasten its fall rather than prevent it. May the merciful Lord defend the remnant of those who believe in Him. But this remnant is tiny, and it becomes more and more so.”

Thus we evidently have lived to see this “terrible and quick collapse of the structure of the Church!” The enemy of the human race is employing all his efforts and all his means to pull it down, and he is widely supported in this by open and secret apostates from the true faith and Church, including even those who have

betrayed their high vocations and oaths as clergymen and even as hierarchs heading certain individual churches.

In truth, we are experiencing a terrible time, a time such as has never before been seen in the history of Christianity, in the history of mankind! A time of almost total instability!

And insofar as we wish to remain faithful to true Orthodoxy, many obligations are placed upon us. We must, as Bishop Ignatius instructs us, avoid and protect ourselves from the Apostasy which is growing so rapidly in the world. We must defend ourselves against the corrupting spirit of the times to avoid its influence.

And to this end we must first of all understand and never forget: that at the present time not everything that bears the most holy and most dear name of Orthodoxy really is Orthodoxy. **There now also exists pseudo-Orthodoxy, which we must fear and from which we must flee as from fire;** that true Orthodoxy is only that which does not accept and does not permit in anything, either in teaching or in church practices, any sort of innovations opposed to the Word of God and the decrees of the Universal Church; that true Orthodoxy does not bless and does not indulge modern fashion—the morality and customs of the modern, corrupt world, which, even more than in Apostolic times, is lying in evil, for it is a world which has abandoned God; that true Orthodoxy considers only pleasing God and saving souls, not arrangements for temporary, earthly happiness, a career, and earthly advantages and possessions; that true Orthodoxy is spiritual, not natural and carnal, not attached to the earth—to earthly feelings and experiences.