

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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ON THE CHURCH

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On entering into the uncreated Church we come to Christ; we enter into the realm of the uncreated ... the mystery of faith is great!

† † †

The Church is without beginning, without end and eternal, just as the Triune God, her founder, is without beginning, without end and eternal. She is uncreated just as God is uncreated. She existed before the ages, before the angels, before the creation of the world—*before the foundation of the world* as the Apostle Paul says. (Eph 1:4). She is a divine institution and *in her dwells the whole fullness of divinity*. (Col 2:9). She is an expression of the richly varied wisdom of God. She is the mystery of mysteries. She was concealed and was revealed *in the last of times*. (1 Pet 1:20). The Church remains unshaken because she is rooted in the love and wise providence of God.

The three persons of the Holy Trinity constitute the eternal Church. The angels and human beings existed in the thought and love of the Triune God from the beginning. We human beings were not born now, we existed before the ages in God's omniscience.

The love of God created us in His image and likeness. He embraced us

within the Church in spite of the fact that He knew of our apostasy. He gave us everything to make us gods too through the free gift of grace. For all that, we made poor use of our freedom and lost our original beauty, our original righteousness and cut ourselves off from the Church. Outside the Church, far from the Holy Trinity, we lost Paradise, we lost everything. But outside the Church there is no salvation, there is no life. And so the compassionate heart of God the Father did not leave us exiled from His love. He opened again for us the gates of Paradise in the last of times and appeared in flesh.

With the divine incarnation of the only-begotten Son of God, God's pre-eternal plan for the salvation of mankind was revealed again to men. In his epistle to Timothy the Apostle Paul says: *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory*. (1 Tim 3:16). The words of the holy Apostle Paul are dense in meaning: divine, heavenly words!

God in His infinite love united us again with His Church in the person of Christ. On entering into the uncreated Church, we come to Christ, we enter into the realm of the uncreated. We the faithful are called to become uncreated by grace, to become participants in the divine energies of God, to enter into the mystery of divinity, to surpass our worldly frame of mind,

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to die to the “old man” and to become immersed in God. (cf. Col 3:9. Rom 6:6, Eph 4:22). When we live in the Church we live in Christ. This is a very fine-drawn matter; we cannot understand it. Only the Holy Spirit can teach it to us.

In the Church We Are All One, and Christ is the Head

The head of the Church is Christ and we humans, we Christians, are the body. The Apostle Paul says: *He is the head of the body, of the Church.* (Col 1:18). The Church and Christ are one. The body cannot exist without its head. The body of the Church is nourished, sanctified and lives with Christ. He is the Lord, omnipotent, omniscient, everywhere present and filling all things, our staff, our friend, our brother: the pillar and sure foundation of the Church. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the basis—He is everything. Without Christ the Church does not exist. Christ is the Bridegroom; each individual soul is the Bride.

Christ united the body of the Church with heaven and with earth: with angels, men and all created things, with all of God’s creation—with the animals and birds, with each tiny wild flower and each microscopic insect. The Church thus became *the fullness of Him who fills all in all* (Eph 1:23), that is, of Christ. Everything is in Christ and with Christ. This is the mystery of the Church.



Christ is revealed in that unity between His love and ourselves: the Church. On my own I am not the Church, but together with you. All together we are the Church. All are incorporated in the Church. We are all one and Christ is the head One body, one body of Christ: *You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.* (1 Cor 12:27). We are all one because God is our Father and

is everywhere. When we experience this we are in the Church. This is our Lord’s wish for all the members of the Church, as expressed in His great high-priestly prayer: *that they may be one.* (Jn 17:11, 22). But that is something you can only understand through grace. We experience the Joy of unity, of love, and we become one with everyone. There is nothing more magnificent!

The important thing is for us to enter into the Church—to unite ourselves with our fellow men, with the joys and sorrows of each and everyone, to feel that they are our own, to pray for everyone, to have care for their salvation, to forget about ourselves, to do everything for them just as Christ did

for us. In the Church we become one with each unfortunate, suffering and sinful soul.

No one should wish to be saved alone without all others being saved. It is a mistake for someone to pray for himself, that he himself may be saved. We must love others and pray that no soul be lost, that all may enter into the Church. That

is what counts. And it is with this desire one should leave the world to retire to a monastery or to the desert.

When we set ourselves apart from others, we are not Christians. We are true Christians when we have a profound sense that we are members of the mystical body of Christ, of the Church, in an unbroken relationship of love—when we live united in Christ, that is, when we experience unity in His Church with a sense of oneness. This is why Christ prays to His Father saying, *that they may be one.* (Jn 17:11, 22). He repeats the prayer again and again and the apostles emphasize it everywhere. This is the most profound aspect, the most exalted meaning, of the Church. This is where the secret is to be found: for all to be united as one person in God. There is no other religion like this; no other religion says anything of this sort. They have something to say, but not this mystery, this exquisite point of the mystery which Christ demands and tells us that this is how we must become, that he wants us to be His.

We are one even with those who are not close to the Church. They are distant on account of ignorance. We must pray that God will enlighten them and change them so that they too may come to Christ. We see things in a human light, we move on a different plane and imagine that we love Christ. But Christ, who *sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous* (Mt 5:45), tells us: *Love your enemies.* (Mt 5:44). We need to pray that we may all be united, united in God. Then, if we live out this prayer, we will achieve the corresponding results; we will all be united in love.

For the people of God there is no such thing as distance, even if they be thousands of miles apart. However far away our fellow human beings may be, we must stand by them. Some people regularly telephone me from a town on the edge of the Indian Ocean—Durban is what it is called, if I am pronouncing it correctly. It is in South Africa, two hours drive from Johannesburg. Indeed, a few days ago they came here. They were taking a sick person to England and they came here first to ask me to read a prayer over him. I was very moved.

When Christ unites us, distances do not exist. When I leave this life it will be better. I will be closer to you.

In the Church We Progress towards Immortality

The Church is the new life in Christ. In the Church there is no death and no hell. Saint John the Evangelist says:

Whoever keeps my word will never taste death. (Jn 8:52). Christ does away with death. Whoever enters into the Church is saved; he becomes eternal. Life is one, an unbroken continuity: there is no end, no death. Whoever follows Christ's commandments never dies. He dies according to the flesh, according to the passions, and, starting from this present life, is accorded to live in Paradise, in our Church, and thereafter in eternity. With Christ, death becomes the bridge which we will cross in an instant in order to continue to live in the unsetting light.

From the moment I became a monk I believed that death does not exist. That is how I felt and how I always feel—that I am eternal and immortal. How magnificent!

In the Church which possesses the saving sacraments there is no despair. We may be deeply sinful. But we make confession, the priest reads the prayer, we are forgiven and we progress towards immortality, without any anxiety and without any fear.



When we love Christ, we live the life of Christ. If, by the grace of God, we succeed in doing this, we find ourselves in a different state, we live in another, enviable state. For us there is no fear: neither of death nor of the devil nor of hell. All these things exist for people who are far from Christ, for non-Christians. For us Christians who do His will,

as the Gospel says, these things do not exist. That is, they exist, but when one kills the old self *along with the passions and the desires* (Gal 5:24), one gives no importance to the devil or to evil. It does not concern us. What concerns us is love, service to Christ and to our fellow man. If we reach the point of feeling joy, love, worship of God without any fear, we reach the point of saying, *It is no longer I who live; Christ lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). No one can prevent us from entering into this mystery.

The Church is Paradise on Earth

With the worship of God you live in Paradise. If you know and love Christ, you live in Paradise. Christ is Paradise. Paradise begins here. The Church is Paradise on earth, exactly the same as Paradise in heaven. The same Paradise as is in heaven is here on earth. There all souls are one, just as the Holy Trinity is three persons, but they are united and constitute one.

Our chief concern is to devote ourselves to Christ, to unite ourselves to the Church. If we enter into the love of God, we enter into the Church. If we do not enter into the Church, if we do not become one with the earthly Church here and

now, we are in danger of losing the heavenly Church as well. And when we say “heavenly” do not imagine that in the other life we will find gardens with flowers, mountains, streams and birds. The earthly beauties do not exist there; there is something else, something very exalted. But in order for us to go on to this something else, we must first pass through these earthly images and beauties.

Whoever experiences Christ becomes one with Him, with His Church. He experiences a mad delight. This life is different from the life of other people. It is joy, it is light, it is exultation, yes indeed: it is exaltation. This is the life of the Church, the life of the Gospel, the Kingdom of God: *The Kingdom of God is within us.* (cf Lk 17:21). Christ comes within us and we are within Him. This occurs just in the way a piece of iron placed in the fire becomes fire and light; once it is removed from the fire it becomes iron again, black and dark.

In the Church a divine intercourse occurs, we become infused with God. When we are with Christ we are in the light; and when we live in the light there is no darkness. The light, however, is not constant; it depends on us. It is just like the iron which becomes dark when removed from the fire. Darkness and light are incompatible. We can never have darkness and light at the same time. Either light or darkness. When you switch on the light, darkness vanishes.



Listen to me, people of all nations, men, women, and children, all of you who bear the Christian name:

If any one preach to you something contrary to what the [Orthodox] Catholic Church has received from the holy Apostles, Fathers and Councils, and has kept down to the present day, do not heed him. Do not receive the serpent’s counsel, as Eve did, to whom it was death. If an angel or emperor teaches you anything contrary to what you received, shut your ears. I have refrained so far from saying, as the holy Apostle said, *Let him be anathema* (Gal. 1:8), in the hope of amendment.

St. John Damascene

[Apologia Against Those Who Decry Holy Images, II]



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

PATERNAL COUNSELS ON CONDEMNATION

Source: “Counsels from the Holy Mountain: Selected from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim,” St. Anthony’s Monastery, Florence, AZ (1999), pp. 207-210.

Slander is a great evil. Just as the little rudder steers the whole ship wherever it wants, likewise the tongue leads a person either to good or to evil. The holy fathers greatly censure judging other people’s sins, faults, or evil habits.

1. When we judge our brother, we condemn ourselves to a great sin. But when we cover our brother, God will also protect us from great sins. When we expose our brother, we drive the grace of God away from us and He permits us to fall into the same sins so that we learn that we are all weak and that the grace of God supports us. Whoever guards his tongue guards his soul from great sins and grievous falls.

The chief cause of criticism and slander is pride and egotism, because one considers oneself better than the others. For this reason it is very beneficial for a person to think of himself as below everyone, so that he considers his brother better than him in order that, with the help of God, he may be delivered from this evil.

2. If something pushes you to criticism in any matter regarding a brother or the monastery, try to pray about the matter instead, without passing it under the judgment of your reason. If you turn within yourself through prayer, humility, and mourning, you will find a spiritual treasure—just keep pride and criticism far from you.

3. Be attentive, my child, that you not judge any soul. For God permits the one who judges his neighbor to fall, so he learns to have sympathy for his weak brother. The mercy of God supports all of us, but if we become proud, God will remove His grace and we shall become worse than the others.

It is one thing to condemn someone and another to be fought by thoughts of condemnation. To condemn is a terrible passion, but to be fought by such thoughts and to fight back—this is an occasion for crowns.

4. Each person must bear the weaknesses of others. Who is perfect? Who can boast that he has kept his heart undefiled? Hence, we are all sick, and whoever condemns his brother does not perceive that he himself is sick, because a sick person does not condemn another sick person.

Love, endure, overlook, do not get angry, do not flare up, forgive one another, so that you resemble our Christ and are counted worthy to be near Him in His kingdom. My children, avoid condemnation—it is a very great sin. God is greatly saddened when we condemn and loathe people. Let us concern ourselves only with our own faults—for these we should feel pain. Let us condemn ourselves and then we shall find mercy and grace from God.

5. Love one another, and do not be embittered out of egotism. Humility is a sure guide; it does not let the one who possesses it hit the reefs of carelessness and be shipwrecked, but as a luminous guide it leads him faultlessly on sure ground.

Egotism is the most evil of evils; it causes all our lapses through unsubmitive thoughts. Fear this and strive to get rid of it, for the more it remains within us, the more it will wound us with the proportionate pain.

I beg that you not criticize one another, for this is downright egotism. Excuse your brother's fault; this is evidence of humility and love. The brother who acts thus will find much grace from God, but he who judges and scandalizes his neighbor should know that not only will he not find grace, but even if he has something he will lose it, so that he may learn the lesson of humility through suffering.

Be particularly afraid of inner criticism, that is, thoughts of criticism, because it does not come to light through the spoken word, in which case it is likely to be corrected by someone who hears it. Be careful, I say, about criticism from within, which imperceptibly makes us fatally guilty and deprives us of the life of divine grace and offers as a most bitter drink the death of the soul. I pray that love and freedom from criticism will reign in every expression among you, so that the Holy Spirit may rest in your souls.

6. Experience has shown that it is wrong to accuse and condemn someone without letting him defend himself. As also the sacred Gospel says: *Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?* (Jn 7:51).

If we are not attentive, many sins of condemning others heap up within us, and then repentance is needed. How often a person repents because he spoke! Let us bear in mind the words of Abba Arsenios: *I have often repented for speaking, but I have never repented for keeping silent.*

If we are often deceived by the sense of touch, how much more so we are by people's words. Therefore, much attention is needed, for the devil prowls around roaring

to devour us. (cf 1 Pet 5:8). A Christian ought to be like the many-eyed Cherubim, for evil has multiplied greatly, especially the sin of condemnation, which is as common as "bread and cheese." May God cleanse us and sanctify us for His glory.

Do not let the sun go down on the wrath of your brother. (Eph 4:26). That is, let no one be angry and enraged against his brother past the setting of the sun.

Have you heard about that brother who was negligent and lazy, who did not go to the all-night vigils and did not do his duties, whom the brethren knew to be a negligent monk? When he fell ill and the hour of his death drew near, the brethren gathered to hear something beneficial, or to comfort him, or in case he wanted to say something to them, but they saw him joyful, cheerful. One brother was scandalized and said, "What is this we see in you, brother? We see that you are joyful even though you are approaching death. But we have the thought that you were not a violent ^[1] monk, so how do you have such courage and a cheerful face? How do you justify yourself?"

"Yes, brethren," he said, "indeed I was a negligent person and I did not fulfill my duties. But I achieved one good thing, by the grace of God: not to condemn any brother

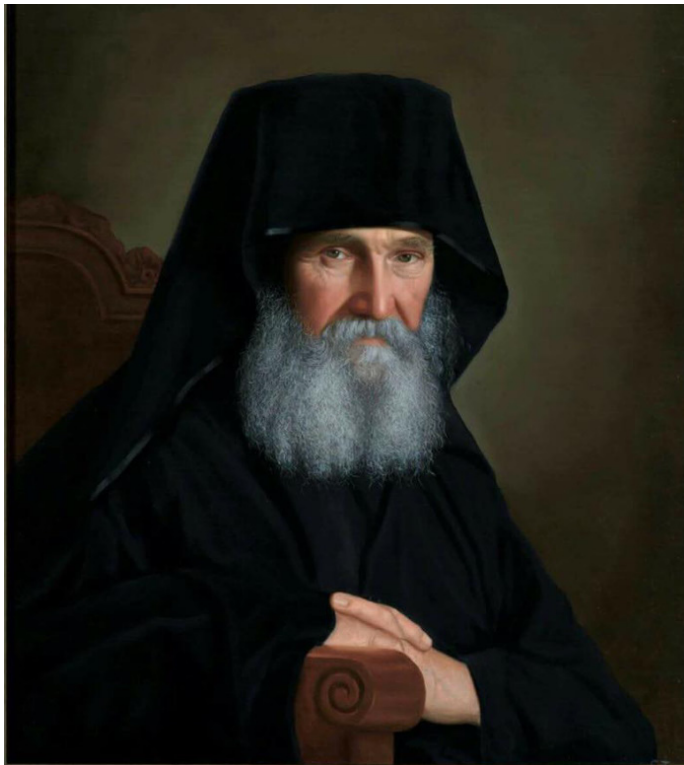
and not to scandalize anyone; and never did I let my heart have something against any brother of the monastery when the sun set. And inasmuch as I did not judge any brother, I believe that God will not judge me either, for He said, *Judge not, that you be not judged* (Mt 7:1), and since I did not judge, I will not be judged."

The brethren marveled and said, "Brother, you found the way of salvation very easily." And the brother died with much joy.

Do you see how the Fathers struggled and how they found the way of salvation?

† † †

[1] A "violent" or "forceful" monk or person is one who strives vigorously to *do violence to his nature constantly* (Ladder 1:4), for "*the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*" (Mt 11:12).



**Holy Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona,
The Enlightener of America (+2019)**

NO WEDDING VOWS?

By the V. Rev. Stephen Freeman, Pastor Emeritus of the St. Anne Orthodox Church OCA parish, Knoxville / Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

Few things differ more clearly between Eastern and Western Christianity than the service of Holy Matrimony. There are things found in Western Christian Marriage ceremonies that cannot be found in the East just as there are things in the East that cannot be found in the West. In many languages of the Eastern Churches, the service for a marriage is referred to as the *Crowning*—named for the central act within the ceremony—the crowning of the bride and groom. However nothing separates the marriage ceremonies of East and West like the place of marriage vows: **there are no wedding vows in an Orthodox wedding.**

Those unfamiliar with Orthodox weddings are often taken aback by this fact—how can there be a wedding without vows? How can a couple actually be married if they make no promises? I have heard it observed wryly that in Orthodoxy, we do not require the bride and groom to perjure themselves on their wedding day! But the absence of vows points to more than ceremonial differences—the theology of marriage differs greatly—and it is a difference worth pondering.

In the Orthodox wedding the couple is first *betrothed* with the exchange of rings. Led into the center of the Church, the priest offers prayers. In the course of those prayers, in something of an *epiclesis* (the calling down of the Holy Spirit to accomplish a particular purpose—present in all the sacraments of the Church), the priest asks God to be present; to bless the marriage; to preserve their bed unassailed; to give them the dew of heaven; to fill their houses with every good thing; to send down heavenly grace to bless, preserve and remember the bride and groom; and just prior to the crowning:

Stretch out now also Thy hand from Thy holy dwelling place, and unite this Thy servant, N. and this Thy handmaiden, A.; for by Thee is the husband joined unto the wife. Unite them in one mind; wed them into one flesh, granting to them the fruit of the body and the procreation of fair children.

And then the priest crowns the couple (three times), saying each time: *Crown them with glory and honor!* (Pss 8:5)

In contrast, the marriage in the West finds its focus within the exchange of vows. “Do you...take this woman...to have and to hold, to love and to cherish...etc. as long as you both

shall live?” I was taught, when I was an Anglican, that the “ministers” of the sacrament of marriage are the couple themselves. The priest witnesses, and prays for God’s blessing.

This centerpiece of marriage in the West has been a subject of great creativity in the last number of decades. “Writing your own vows,” has been an essential undertaking for many couples (and probably the source of more than a little angst). I have seen examples of beauty and examples of triteness beyond description.

The role of vows in Western marriage is also bearing some very strange fruit.

Our culture, following the logic of vows, views marriage as a *contract* between two people. Specific promises concerning performance (and non-performance) are offered. These details of the contract are “witnessed” (for that is the language of the license itself). A Church offers a blessing, but the essential nature of a civil ceremony and a religious ceremony are found only in music and the trappings, not in the ceremony itself. I have often wondered whether the state would declare Orthodox marriages to be null and void if it were to learn that there are no promises made or accepted.

This contract view of marriage has become problematic in the current civil discussions of same-sex marriages. If marriage is a contract, how can anything be an essential problem to any two people entering such a contract? If they are both willing to acknowledge the requests and requirements expected of them, how can anyone say they have no right to have such an arrangement? Marriage as contract is wide-open.

However, there is **no contract** in an Orthodox marriage. A couple present themselves to God within the Church and it is there that the sacrament occurs. The power of God comes upon the lives of a man and a woman and *unites* them in one mind and *weds* them in one flesh. **The sacrament is a union, not a contract.**

Not all people can be united. St. Paul warns of false or corrupted unions:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who



commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor 6:15-20).

Paul moves seamlessly in this short exhortation between sexual union with a harlot and spiritual union with Christ. Clearly, for St. Paul, union is *union*. **But in neither case is union a contract.**

It would seem obvious that if marriage is a contract, then almost any contract is theoretically possible (perhaps much less than advisable, but not impossible). However, in the Orthodox understanding, the union of a marriage is fulfilled most commonly in procreation. It is fulfilled mystically in the “one flesh” (of which procreation is but one example). Not every marriage union is blessed with children, but such a fulfillment is considered normative. Couples beyond the age of conception have certainly conceived children within Orthodox tradition (Abraham and Sarah, Joachim and Anna, etc.). But attempts to create a union out of what *cannot* be a union, nor bears even the most remote *possibility* of union, are outside the bounds of matrimony. There is no denying that relationships and even contracts might be created, but a union is something entirely different. St. Paul does not use the argument of union to oppose same sex relationships—**for union there is not possible**. His objections (and those of the Church) rest on other grounds.

In some ways, it would make sense for Orthodoxy to object to *all* marriage in the Western model because of its contractual basis. However, such objections have never been made. As civil societies continue to experiment with new definitions, however, such objections might be worth considering. The objection would not be an effort to declare marriage as a contract to be null and void, but simply woefully misunderstood.

The obligations of marriage are not enjoined by the terms of a contract—they are rather the obligations enjoined by our own “flesh and bones.” I do not need a contract with the atmosphere in order to breathe—I need to breathe in order to live. The analogy is not perfect, but is not inapt.

Pondering all of this, I once wondered if we should stop using the word “sex” to describe what a man and woman have with one another. Instead, I wondered how it would be if we called that activity “marriage”? “Have you had marriage with that girl?” Perhaps such a shift in language would better help people understand the nature of sexual activity.

Words and ceremonies matter, particularly when their nature and the context changes. The language and concept of contract served the West for many centuries. I believe that it created an overly legal understanding of a relationship that

would have been better described in organic terms. Today, contract has triumphed over organic objections and the language (and ceremony) seem to be coming up short.

The language of the understanding of marriage within the Eastern model might suggest possible ways for other Christians to think as well. It certainly behooves Orthodox Christians to ponder deeply the substance of the Tradition that is theirs. It would make good sense if Orthodox Christians were to rid themselves of the confusion of contractual imagery that might have been inadvertently absorbed.

Crown them, O Lord, with glory and honor!



Marriage, as we commonly understand it in our fallen condition, is a God-given concession to man's weakness. It is a divine indulgence to man in his fallen condition, and thus had no relevance in Paradise. Therefore, St. John [Chrysostom] is careful neither to exalt it unduly (since it is for fallen man) nor to denigrate it (since it has a divine origin). However, just as there exists a paradisaical virginity, so there exists a paradisaical union of man and woman; and just as the substance of paradisaical virginity differs greatly from that which exists outside of Paradise, the same may be said of the union of man and woman.

St. John Chrysostom uses the word “marriage” with reference to “earthly marriage,” and does not employ the word when he is describing the union of man and woman in Christ in Paradise, and in the coming Kingdom. The paradisaical condition of Adam and Eve is a mysterious union of the first man with his unique and co-equal helpmate, divinely provided to him for conversation, consolation, and to “share the same being.” Eve was formed from the rib of “her man.” Their union did not involve the many aspects of earthly marriage commonly associated with that state in the fallen age.

When God had completed creating the entire cosmos, He fashioned man, for whom He had made everything. When man lived in Paradise “there was no need for marriage.” Chrysostom is clear that in Paradise mankind lived “as in heaven” and was without marriage. In fact, all of the classical by-products of marriage extolled through the ages in all great civilizations, such as large populations, developed cities, crafts, homes, etc., did not exist in Paradise, and yet this in no way diminished the happiness of that original state. These extolled realities are superfluous and ought not to be greatly valued by man as in any way belonging to the essence of true happiness.

Marriage and Virginity according to St. John Chrysostom,
by Archpriest Josiah B. Trenham

ON ATHEISM: THE GREAT BOAST OF OUR AGE

By the ever-memorable Photios Kontoglou.



Atheism! Great title and boast of the contemporary man. Whoever receives it (to receive it you only need to be “tonsured a monk of the faithless”) he appears to others as wise, even if he is illiterate; serious, even if he is ridiculous; official, even if he is insignificant; important, even if he is unimportant; scientist even if he is incompetent.

I do not refer to the person who truly wishes to believe but cannot, even if the deep rooted reason of unbelief is always pride, this viper that hides so cunningly in man, that he cannot understand. Whatever it may be, the people who struggle and fight against their faithless self, they have our sympathy. For them we, who believe, beg God to help them believe as He did to the father with his sick child, by begging Christ to heal him. And He replied *If you believe, everything is possible to the believer*. And the father cried loudly and with tears replied, *I believe Lord. Help me in my little faith*.

The unbelievers we refer to here are not so. They not only never cried before to open with pain and contrition the closed door, the door of repentance, as that tormented father did, as written in the Bible but were not even moved neither felt any bitterness from their unbelief, nor assumed any responsibility or blame. All the blame is God’s who does not appear to them to tell them, “Come, poke me, touch me, talk to me as you talk between yourselves, analyze me with your chemistry, dissect me with your anatomy blades, weigh me, measure me, satisfy your faithless feelings, and satiate your insatiable logic.”

These self-appointed unbelievers, when they show off their smartness, pumped up by airs of pride and the cunning agility of their brains, are not in a position to understand how silly and narrow minded they appear to those who believe. Because to believe, they demand certain proofs that make the believer pity them for their limited view they have on the spirit and spiritual matters.

The believer is well aware how far the pondering of the unbeliever can get, for he too as a person has the same logic, the logic of the flesh, the worldly logic. While the unbeliever is unaware of what is within the believer, and what is beyond practical knowledge, namely the mysteries that are hidden from the eyes and because of this he believes they do not

exist. With his foolishness he feels smug, and talks with disdain for those that are in a position to feel the deeper meaning of the world, while the unfortunate one is blind and deaf and believes he can hear everything.

The believer has spiritual sight and spiritual hearing as well as some type of “super feeling.” The unbeliever, how could he comprehend that mystical world with the coarse means at his disposal, namely the bodily feelings? How could he touch the fine and odd messages of the world, when the poor one does not have the aerials that are needed to receive them?

Apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, in his way known only to himself, writes about what it is possible for a believer to sense and what can an unbeliever sense. We preach, he says, the wisdom of God that is embedded in mystery and is hidden; the wisdom that God destined before time, for our glory and none of the rulers of this world came to know (namely, the wise men of worldly wisdom). And He uncovers it, that which according to the scriptures no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor has ascended to the heart of any man, the things that God prepared, for those that love Him. For us, God revealed them through His Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit probes everything, even the depth of God.

What man knows the means of man but only the spirit of man that is within him? Likewise the mysteries of God no one knows but only the Spirit of God. We did not receive the spirit of the world (namely the philosophy and worldly knowledge) but the Spirit of God to understand all the things that He gave us. And these (the gifts) are not expressed with words that human wisdom uses but words that the Holy Spirit teaches, speaking spiritually with spiritual people. Unfortunately, a man of worldly knowledge (rational) does not accept what is spoken by the Spirit of God, because he believes it to be nonsense and is thus not in a position to understand how to examine it spiritually. The spiritual man examines every person while he cannot be examined by anyone.

The unbelief existed always. However today with the atrocious vanity that consumes us, we display it as if it accords us great value. Whoever believes in God and the revealed truth is ignored as narrow minded and foolish, and is the brunt of all jokes. He is looked at as “defective” by most people, especially the people that know how to achieve in this life, they are “successful,” make money and have a good time, giving not a cent to anyone, according to the saying, “Let’s eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” For this, he who believes in God needs to be courageous and ignore the worldly honours and material interests.

For the one that boasts that he believes in nothing: (1) The world has him in high regard and respect, even so the more of a non-believer he claims to be, that much more regard

and respect is shown to him by the clever and serious world. Such a man frowns upon others, is of few and heavy words, is short tempered and gruff, and is seen as a “positive man,” a “strong man.” (2) Everything happens to him conveniently and is neither bothered nor is he worried for anything. He has no responsibilities or is pestered by anything. He says to himself and all that listen to him: “Down here is both hell and paradise. Life is to be enjoyed, for us clever ones. Those sleeping or drugged, well, let them die...”

So you see, there is indeed no easier thing than to be an unbeliever! Just press one switch and everything comes conveniently. Did the devil not tell Christ, “kneel and worship me and the stones will become bread”?

Thus, the smart atheist proudly proclaims: “For man to sit with four hundred brains, waste time with stupidity like the old women, with gods, with hell and paradise, with candles, censings, with chalices, priests and nuns! And at what age? In our age where science sends men to planets! Listen my friend can you believe how stupid is the world?” That is what they say about the believers, the smart ones and the honourable of this world, who are applauded by many, who regard them as sensible in everything because they do not chase shadows but are strong minded and succeed in everything they try.

Yes, they succeed in short, for unbelief is “a wide gate, and a broad road” which the unbelievers do not believe “it leads to perdition” as Christ said, but “to worldly prosperity.” Where belief is “a narrow gate and a grief-stricken road” which the unbelievers do not believe “it leads to life” but “to worldly unhappiness and disdain.” The words of our Lord proclaim clearly: *Many are they that enter through the wide gate* according to our Lord, and *few are those who find the narrow gate.*

All the unbelievers say that if they witness a miracle they would believe. However, belief does not happen by force but with the involvement of the soul. For this, to all who ask for a miracle to believe it is not granted, according to our Lord’s address to the Pharisees: “This evil and adulterous generation, demands for a sign to be given it.” However, even if an unbeliever witnesses a miracle, his pride would not allow him to believe for he fears that he may be seen as gullible and become disdained.

Some time ago I wrote five or six brief articles on the miracles that were happening in a village on the island of Mytelene, with the title “Amazing Mysteries.” Many readers were moved a lot, especially the humble and illiterate people, “the babes of the world and the weak ones.” The clever ones however paid no attention to it and a few of them mocked me and wrote me that I write nonsense. But “God is not mocked.” From then to now the miracles have not ceased and progressively became more numerous and terrifying. People that see them, write me about them in detail and I

compile them in a book that will be like a hot iron for the unbelieving mouths.

During this age, discoveries are made of ancient churches with relics of those who appear living to simple people, in their sleep or while they are awake or in icons and other heirlooms. Everything could have been found and could have quickly and completely uncovered this terrible crater, that would have swept the unbelievers with its sacred lava, if there were greater means at the disposal of the poor ones who dig with fire like faith.

However, whatever it may be, with God’s grace “the healer of the sick and the replenisher of those lacking,” it will come to a good end, this blessed task and will triumph our indestructible faith, and will be heard to the ends of the world with a thundering voice saying: *Who is God as great as our God? You are the God who alone does marvels.*



We must pay close attention to our tongue (to know when we must speak and what we should say), because we are not spiritual people and we continually err. *To slip upon a pavement (i.e., from a height) is better than to slip with the tongue.* (Sir 20:18). A person is better off falling from a great height and breaking his head and his legs, which are body parts that can be healed, than falling from the tongue, which commits grave mistakes and which is capable—with a single word—to lead another person even to suicide. When we criticize and ridicule someone, we can push him to despair. Additionally, with a single word from us, he can take the path leading to sin. We often argue: “That’s all I said...” Yet, look at what resulted from this one word.

A possessed man once visited the Monastery of Simonopetra (on Mount Athos). After the vigil, the fathers stepped out for a short break onto the deck, and he was there as well. In order to lay blame on a virtuous ascetic from Katounakia, the devil succeeded in doing the following. The possessed person approached the monk and said: “My thoughts are telling me to jump off the balcony.” The monk took this as a joke and responded: “Why don’t you go ahead and jump then?” That’s all it took! The possessed person leaped off the balcony and killed himself! The monk assumed that he was joking, when—in fact—he was speaking seriously. Thereafter, the monk’s conscience bothered him for years on end. The devil would have killed him one way or another, but he tricked the monk in order to torment him for the rest of his life. See how a single word alone caused him such anguish!”

Holy Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona
The Enlightener of America
 From “The Art of Salvation”

WHAT YOGA REALLY IS

By Johannes Aagaard, Professor of Religious Studies at Aarhus University of Denmark. This short article provides an excellent exposé of this very popular “meditation” technique, that is unfortunately being adopted by Orthodox faithful who become its regular practitioners for all of the wrong reasons.

The philosophy of yoga can be expressed as follows: “Ashes are fire, ashes are water, ashes are earthy, everything is ashes, mind, sight, and the other senses are ashes.” (Atharva Siras)

All things in life are transitory, and pain, suffering, and death lurk behind everything. All of life with its omnipresent suffering and death goes on and on in an eternal cycle (*samsara* or the reincarnation cycle) from which no one escapes. Life is an endless wandering through relentless and insurmountable suffering. The future holds only further rebirths, and whether one is inching towards a better life or sinking into worse life makes little difference.

For All Life Is Ashes

Hinduism in all its various forms is first of all an attempt to escape from this relentless cycle of rebirth. It is not a death wish because the aim is to escape death as well as life. Hindus wish to escape from life with good reason—for life on the Indian subcontinent is hard. Sickness of every kind, famine due to drought or flood, war and oppression make life an unbearable succession of suffering and defeat. The religious faith of the Hindus which grows out of their painful experience of life finds its foremost expression in the god *Shiva* and his consort *Kali*.

Fear of Death

The various Hindu techniques for liberation are attempts to be free of both life and death. Even those who fail to reach the ultimate goal can at least reduce their involvement with life. This is the aim of yoga. By practicing yoga one can reduce suffering and defer death by reducing or completely halting the normal life

An Important Text of Hatha Yoga Expresses It This Way

[92] As long as *prana* is held in the body, so long consciousness (*cittam*) (is) free from disease. What cause is there for fear of death so long as the sight (resins fixed) between the eyebrows

[93] Therefore, from the fear of death, *Brahma* (is) intent on *pranayama*, as are also Yogis and sages. Therefore, one should restrain the *prana*. (Gozaksa Sataka).

As expressed in this text the source of yoga is the fear of death, and the way to avert death is to hold back breathing. The same *hatha* yoga techniques will hold back and immobilize other life functions.

Hatha Yoga Techniques

Hatha yoga breathing exercises (*pranayama*) are not intended to lead to better breathing, but to the reduction or complete cessation of breathing! In the same way *hatha* yoga body postures (*asanas*) are intended to immobilize the whole body. Practicing them will enable the body to become completely motionless and hardened in fixed positions. Meditation words (*mantras*) serve to immobilize the consciousness. Mantras are usually the names of gods used for worship. Symbolic body movements (*mudras* and *bandhas*) in yoga are designed to close all “nine doors of the body,” so that no sense perception from the outside penetrates into the mind. When all outer sensation is shut off, the body itself will create as compensation sense perceptions of an inner kind, an inner light, an inner sound, an inner smell, an inner pleasure.

So the objective of yoga is not to affirm people’s lives, but to create another inner life as a substitute for the life one wants to escape. A whole inner new universe, an internal new dimension awaits those who meditate, those who are willing to become a disciple and follow the path of a guru. That is



the ultimate aim of the techniques taught in all yoga schools and yoga classes throughout the world.

In yoga there are no neutral techniques. The entire discipline from beginning to end is intended to lead toward an escape from life and death and to serve the so-called higher aims of yoga.

Tantra Yoga

This higher yoga has many names. Distinctions can be made between the yoga of the emotions (*bhakti*), the yoga of action (*karma*), and the yoga of knowledge (*jnana*). However more important than all of these is the greater or higher yoga called *Tantra* yoga. *Tantra* yoga itself can be called *kriya* yoga, *laya* yoga, *kundalini* yoga, and *raja* yoga. The three classic yogic disciplines of *bhakti*, *karma*, and *jnana* demand many reincarnations for training in order to break free from the cycle of life and death. In contrast, *tantra* yoga is the direct but also the most dangerous path. Most yoga schools teach that mankind is in a state of decay (*kali yuga*) and our desperate situation requires a desperate remedy. *Tantra* yoga is the desperate remedy, and most yoga schools and gurus are *tantric* in one way or another.

While the classic yogic systems either reject or play down sexuality, *Tantra* does completely the opposite. Along with the classic systems *Tantra* desires to escape from the *samsaric* cycle and perceives life as a poison, but *Tantra* intends to drive out evil with evil, poison with poison. This is where sexuality enters into *tantra* yoga. This is not immediately apparent to a newcomer, because like many other oriental religions, yoga functions at two levels, showing one face outwardly and a completely different face inwardly. This is why yoga is couched in what Hindus call “twilight language” which hides as much as it reveals, and is deliberately ambiguous. Thus the key concepts in yoga, such as *bindu* (semen) and *prana* (life force) have both a physical and a symbolic meaning.

Semen Mysticism

It is a basic tenet of *Tantra* yoga that normal sexual activity uses up the life force and exposes the individual to sickness and death. Consequently it is not only *prana* in the sense of breathing that must be held back, but first and foremost *bindu* (semen) which must be conserved. The holding back of breath and all other techniques in *Tantra* yoga serve the ultimate aim of retention of semen. Retention of semen can lead to immortality or at least rejuvenate man in a way which holds off death. For this to happen semen must be transformed in to nectar, ambrosia, soma, the elixir of life, the drink of immortality. This is the deepest core, the very center of all that yoga is concerned with.

The Kundalini Serpent

The full details cannot be explained in a short presentation, but the culmination of yogic practice is ritual sexual intercourse (*maithuna*) using the various techniques of *hatha* yoga. Yoga uses the orgasm as the determining experience for both liberation from the *samsaric* cycle of life and death and confusion with the divine. In reality what takes place is the “divinization” of the human.

This takes place through meditation on the *kundalini* serpent. *Prana* or life force is identical with sexuality and is portrayed by the *kundalini* or coiled serpent which resides behind the human genitals. She (the life force/serpent is seen as feminine) must be awakened and forced from her spot at the bottom of the spinal column into a canal within the spinal column and then up through this canal. On the way up she will pass through a number of points called *chakras*. At each *chakra* she receives more and more energy and becomes more and more divine.

This process of divinization should manifest itself in supernatural powers for the person meditating. For example, the meditator could levitate, or walk through walls, or be in two places at one time. The acquisition of supernatural power is called *siddha* yoga and is found all over the world. *Siddha* yoga is represented by TM which promises its meditators the power to levitate, but of course only upon the payment of a large fee...

The Great Death—Immortality

After all the difficult *hatha* yoga techniques and exercise are put into practice, the serpent is forced to the top of the brain and a cosmic culmination takes place with a super-orgasm. What occurs in reality is an orgasmic experience which when coupled with strongly hallucinogenic feelings, has an extremely violent character. Symbolically, the experience is explained as sexual intercourse between the god *Shiva*, who reigns supreme in the human brain, and his consort *Kali*, who is his potency and identical with the *Kundalini*.

This orgasmic experience is understood as the Great Death by which one escapes the manifold world, and by which one experiences the great freedom. From this experience only the “chosen” come back, as gurus who devote themselves to the liberation of others. Ordinary people according to yogic doctrine should die within three weeks of this experience of full liberation. This death—and no other—leads away from all life and all death, to total freedom.

Escape from Death to Death

It is ironic that a religiosity so driven by fear of death should culminate in the Great Death. This is because yoga is founded not only on the fear of death, but on the fear of life as well. Yoga therefore seeks to go beyond life and death to what can be called eternal Death, free from sickness, suffering, and all that is transitory.

A thorough reading of the central texts of yoga reveals that the root of yoga resides in the problem of old age. Yoga was developed as an old man’s attempt to stop the decay of the body, to put off death and at the same time to prepare the individual for death by a gradual withdrawal from life. This withdrawal is social, as an elderly man would leave his own environment to live in isolation in the forest or mountain. But the withdrawal is also mental and physical, as the individual draws back from ordinary life functions. The latter can even be accomplished while one remains in the same social environment. The truth of the matter is that yoga was first of all developed for elderly men. This sexist aspect of yoga is also seen in the centrality of semen mysticism.

Yoga for Health

Many people who practice yoga will object that they are not interested in such theoretical rubbish, for from their own experience they know that yoga does them good. They have become healthier with it. This attitude should be respected, but also correctly understood.

A comparison can make this clear. It is a fact that it has done many young men good to have been soldiers. They have been taught discipline and self-control and have become stronger and more healthy. This fact does not alter another fact, that the army itself has a completely different aim, namely to teach people to kill. In the same way it can be said that the aim of yoga is not identical with its side effects and it is a fact that many meditating people, after a period with positive

results, experience extremely alarming “harmful” results. We call these results “harmful” but they are in fact the desired effect. What happens is that one gradually loses the ability to lead an active, open extroverted life centering on loving interdependent relationships with others. The meditator gradually withdraws into himself and is less able to relate with other people. Slowly the meditator accepts this as valid – for as time goes on the practice of yoga leads to an acceptance of the theory of yoga.

One Is Taken Where One Does not Want To Go

If a person practices yoga with the intention of becoming a Hindu this is of course their choice; our culture is founded upon the necessity for freedom of religion, and people (usually) practice their religion according to their convictions. However the vast majority of people who practice yoga are taken where really they had no intention of going. They are transformed into people with new values, they become Hinduized, and this was not at all their intention. They began to practice yoga because it was presented as an art of life, when in reality it is an art of death developed to help first of all elderly men cope with the end of their lives.

If a person intends to escape from a normal life of social interaction and intends to “establish oneself as a god,” then yoga is the way. If one wants to abandon one’s Christian faith and its love for others and for life itself, then yoga is the best way. But most people are unsuspectingly drawn into yoga. **Even some Christians defend yoga because they are ignorant of its factual reality.** It is, therefore, necessary to expose the facts concerning yoga, not in order to deprive yoga teachers of their livelihood or gurus of their disciples, but to provide guidance for those who cannot comprehend the real situation when they approach yoga.

For those who have a need to meditate, there are many methods of Christian prayer. Christian prayer (and especially the Jesus prayer, *Ed.*) is diametrically opposed to yoga. It will not free us from life and death, but will bring us to God who through his resurrection saved us from the dilemma of which yoga is itself an expression.



HOW THE JESUS PRAYER DIFFERS FROM THE HINDU MANTRA

By Dionysios Farasiotis, an excerpt from “*The Gurus, The Young Man, and Elder Paisios.*”

One of the greatest spiritual gifts that Elder Paisios gave me was his guidance along the mystical path of the Jesus Prayer. This started at the beginning of our acquaintance and continued until his repose twelve years later. The Jesus Prayer

consists of the repetition of the phrase *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.* The Jesus Prayer is not recited as a Mantra, but as a prayer to the Person of Christ.

Prayer, as I learned, is a relationship between God and man, who move towards each other. Thus, the swiftness or slowness with which a person advances in prayer depends on both the human and divine wills. Neither the freedom of God in His sovereignty nor the freedom of man in his free choice are ever violated. For his part, man offers his good intention, his labors, and his desire to draw near to God. God, in turn, offers His grace...

When yogis claim that the Jesus Prayer resembles their own mantras, they are in fact trying to fit the Jesus Prayer into their own Procrustean bed. Of course, there are similarities, but there are also enormous differences—both a table and a horse have four legs, but to conclude that they are consequently the same would be an error of the crudest sort. But this is just the kind of error the yogis make when they claim that the Jesus Prayer is a kind of mantra. A brief examination of the essential differences between the Jesus Prayer and a mantra should provide those with an open mind the wherewithal to draw the proper conclusions.

First, consider how the Orthodox tradition understands the meaning of the Jesus Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.* The word *Lord* is the name for God most frequently encountered in the Old Testament in the oft-repeated formula *Thus saith the Lord ...* or in the commandments: *I am the Lord thy God.* When Orthodox Christians call Jesus Christ, *Lord*, they are confessing that He is the God of the Old Testament Who spoke to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Word is the Person who gave the law to Moses. In other words, the One who spoke to the prophets was none other than the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who later took flesh and was united with human nature in the Person of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, when we say *Lord Jesus Christ*—with faith, with all our heart’s strength—we come under the influence of the Holy Spirit, as Saint Paul says: *No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit.* (1 Cor 12:3).

Having recognized the existence of the true personal God outside and beyond his own self, from this God a Christian asks *mercy.* The elder once told me: “*Mercy contains all things. Love, forgiveness, healing, restoration, and repentance all fit within the word “mercy.”* It is the mercy of God that brings about repentance, *purification* from the passions, the *illumination* of the *nous*, and, in the end, *theosis.* From my journey I have learned that salvation comes from the mercy of Christ, the unique Savior of mankind, rather than from my intelligence, my prideful endeavors, or the techniques of yoga. Salvation and *theosis* are so very precious that it is impossible for anyone to make any effort or do any ascetic labor that would be equivalent to even the smallest fraction of their value.

Indeed, from my conversations with other fathers who were laborers in the Jesus Prayer and from my own experience, I know full well that prayer is a gift from God. Nothing is accomplished by human labor alone, for Christ said: *Without Me ye can do nothing* (Jn 15:5), and as the Apostle James bears witness: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* (Jas 1:17). Even as God granted us existence, in the same way He gradually grants us to know Him and be united with Him through prayer, leading us ultimately to life eternal.

Now, consider how the yogis view a mantra. First of all, there are many mantras, and each refers to one of the many gods of the Hindu pantheon such as Krishna, Rama, Vishnu, or the goddess Kali. There is not one standard explanation given by yogis for the mantras; rather, their explanations are tailored to the receptivity of each listener. For beginners who are not disposed to worship idols, yogis give a pseudo-scientific, mechanistic explanation: they claim that the benefit accrued by repeating the mantra is due to certain frequencies produced by its pronunciation, which cause spiritual vibrations that activate spiritual centers within man. (However, the existence of such centers in man can only be taken on faith—if someone willingly chooses to believe such a claim.)

For those who are inclined towards psychological interpretations, the yogis present the repetition of a mantra as a type of auto-suggestion that enables the practitioner to program his inner world according to positive models. When addressing those who have become more involved with Hinduism and now believe in many gods, the yogis claim that the worshipper receives the blessing of whatever god is being invoked.

What constitutes the infinite distance separating the Christian Jesus Prayer from the Hindu mantra, however, is that which lurks behind the name of the god being invoked in a mantra and invited into the soul. Through the mouth of the Holy Prophet David, God declares, *All the gods of the nations are demons* (1 Pss 95:5)—In other words, behind the names Krishna, Rama, or Shiva are demons lying in wait. Once they are invoked by the use of the mantra, the door is open for the devil to begin his theatrical productions, using sounds, images, dreams, and the imagination in general in order to drag the practitioner deeper into deception.

Another significant difference between the Christian Jesus Prayer and the Hindu mantra is the diametrically opposed viewpoints of the two faiths regarding techniques and the human subject. I recall a conversation I had with Niranjana after he had given me permission to begin to practice some supposedly powerful yoga techniques. I said to him: “It’s fine practicing the techniques, but what happens to the human passions of greed, lust for power, vainglory, and selfishness? Aren’t we concerned about them?” “They disappear,” he replied, “through the practice of the techniques.”

“Do they just disappear like that, on their own?” I asked. “Yes, they disappear automatically, while you are practicing the techniques.”

What an astonishing assertion: physical exercises can wipe out the inclinations that a person’s soul acquired in life through conscious choices. But, in reality, man, as a self-determining and free moral agent, can change the conscious aspect of his personality and his moral sense only by the use of his own free will to make conscious decisions in real-life situations. Any external means to automatically induce such a change in a person’s consciousness without his consent circumvent man’s free will, obliterate his volition, and destroy his freedom, reducing man to a spineless puppet manipulated by a marionettist’s strings. Hinduism’s relentless insistence on properly performed techniques with automatic results degrades man by depriving him of his most precious quality: the self-governing free will. It restricts the boundless human spirit within a framework of mechanical methods and reflexes.

Orthodox Christian Faith, on the contrary, recognizes and honors the gift of human freedom as a divine trait. This recognition and approach help man to be actualized as a free being. Precisely on account of the human freedom to choose, man’s often unpredictable responses can’t be limited to the mechanical reflexes of a closed system, but can innovatively turn in any spiritual direction that he, as a free subject, wills. This is why Orthodoxy is not adamant about techniques and methods. In freedom and with respect, Orthodoxy seeks the human heart, encouraging the individual to do what is good for the sake of the good, and pointing out the appropriate moral stance of the soul before God, which an individual can then freely choose to embrace.

Genuine spiritual development entails a deepening familiarity with God and with one’s own self, acquired through moral choices that a person freely makes in the depths of his heart. Spiritual progress is a product of man’s way of relating to himself, to his fellow man, and to God by the good use of his innate moral freedom. This is why Christ calls out: *If any man wills to come after Me, let him freely deny himself* (Mt 16:24)—that is, without being deceived, without being psychologically compelled, and without being forced, all of which are inappropriate to the spiritual nobility of Christian life.

Saint Porphyrios had a small parrot that he taught to pray in order to illustrate the absurdity of some Christians’ empty repetition of the words of prayer, as well as the ridiculousness of the opinion commonly presented in Eastern religions that someone can make moral advances by physical exercises or breathing techniques. Every so often, the parrot would mechanically say, “Lord, have mercy.” The elder would respond, “Look, the parrot can say the prayer, but does that mean that it is praying? Can prayer exist without the conscious and free participation of the person who prays?”

Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σὲ Πολυχρονίζει!

Ἀπὸ Μία Ἀνατολίτικη Ἱστορία: Παρακαλῶ τὸ Θεὸ νὰ σὲ πολυχρονίζει γιατί αὐτὸς ποὺ θὰ ἔρθει ὕστερα ἀπὸ σένα θὰ εἶναι ἀκόμα χειρότερος...

Γράφει ὁ Σάββας Ἡλιάδης, δάσκαλος - Κιλκίς.

Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, στὸ βιβλίο «Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο» καὶ στὸ κείμενο μὲ τίτλο: «Τυποποιημένη Ζωή», πάντοτε ἐπίκαιρος, γράφει, «ἄκων προφητεύων», πρὶν ἀπὸ πολλὲς δεκαετίες, γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ σκλαβιά, ποὺ εἶχε ἀρχίσει νὰ ἀπλώνεται μὲ δόλιο τρόπο στὴν Πατρίδα μας καὶ ποὺ σήμερα ἔγινε ἡ ὄντως πραγματικότητα καὶ κατατρῶει τὰ σωθικὰ τῆς ὑπαρξῆς τοῦ Γένους μας. Τὸ πήραμε πολὺ νωρὶς τὸ «νεκροδάνειο» ἀπὸ τὴν Δύση καὶ τὸ «συγκεφαλαιώσαμε» στὸ «Κεφάλαιο» Ρωμιοσύνη, ἀλλοιώνοντας μὲ τὸν χρόνον τὸ περιεχόμενό της καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα της. Ἀποτέλεσμα: Ἐκδυτικισμὸς καὶ ἐκκοσμίκευση.

Γράφει ὁ Κόντογλου: «Τί μεγαλειώδης λεωφόρος προόδου ποὺ διανοίγεται εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα! Χαῖρε, ἄνθρωπε, χαῖρε κι ἐσὺ πιδὸ πολὺ, Ἑλληνα, τυποκῆρυκα καὶ τυποποιημένε!... Ὅλα μας σιγὰ σιγὰ γίνονται τυποποιημένα, κουρντισμένα, τὸ περπάτημά μας, ἡ κουβέντα μας, οἱ ιδέες μας, οἱ συνναστροφές μας, ἡ χαρὰ μας, ἡ λύπη μας. Χάνεται πιά κάθε πρωτοτυπία ποὺ ἔχει ὁ δροσερὸς κι ἀπροσπάθητος ρυθμὸς τῆς ζωῆς. Ὅλα εἶναι ὀρισμένα ἀπὸ πρὶν. Ἀπὸ πρὶν ξέρεις τί θὰ ἀκούσεις ἀπὸ κάθε στόμα, τί θὰ δεῖς στὰ μάτια τοῦ κάθε ἀνθρώπου καὶ στὰ κινήματά του».

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ κύρια χαρακτηριστικὰ αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποτέλειας στὴν ἀρχόμενη τότε καὶ ἐπιβληθεῖσα ἤδη ἐν πολλοῖς παγκοσμιοποίησι ἦταν, γιὰ τὸν Κόντογλου, ἡ τυποποίηση τῆς ζωῆς. Ὁ ἔλεγχος τῶν κινήσεων, ὁ περιορισμὸς τῆς ἐλευθερίας, ἡ ἀπαξίωση καὶ ἰσοπέδωση τῆς ἰδιομορφίας τῶν λαῶν, ἡ ταπείνωση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἡ προσπάθεια κονσερβοποίησης σὲ ὅλους τοὺς τρόπους ἔκφρασης τῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ κυρίως σ' αὐτοὺς τῆς τέχνης, ποὺ εἶναι, γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνα, οἱ κατ' ἐξοχὴν ἀντιπροσωπευτικοὶ πυλώνες στήριξης τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς παράδοσης, ὥστε αὐτὴ νὰ μεταβιβάζεται ἀνόθευτη ἀπὸ γενιὰ σὲ γενιὰ. Μὴν ξεχνάμε πὺς ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κόντογλου, ὡς πολυτάλαντος καλλιτέχνης, γράφει ἐξ ἰδίας πείρας, καθὼς, ὅπως ὁμολογεῖ ὁ ἴδιος, δεχόταν ἄμεσα, προκλητικὰ καὶ μὲ ποικίλους τρόπους τὶς προσβολὲς τοῦ πειρασμοῦ, γιὰ συμπόρευση μὲ τὴν κοσμικὴ ζωὴ.

Γράφει χαρακτηριστικὰ: «Ὅλα τὰ Ἑλληνόπουλα θὰ γίνουνε φωνόγραφα, κουρντισμένα μὲ κάποιο ἐλατήριο, ποὺ ἔρχεται ἀπὸ τὸ ἐξωτερικόν: «Τὰ-τὰ-τά, τὰ-τὰ-τά!» Ἐνας κατακτητὴς τῆς Εὐρώπης, πρὶν

ἀπὸ 150 χρόνια, ἤθελε, σὰν θὰ ἔλεγε αὐτὸς «Α.», ὅλος ὁ κόσμος νὰ λέει «Α.» Ἄν ζοῦσε τώρα, θὰ ἔβλεπε πὺς κοντεύουμε νὰ φτάξουμε σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ὠραῖο ρομποτισμὸ καὶ θὰ χαιρότανε».

Μήπως αὐτὴν τὴν χαρὰ δὲν τὴν ἀπολαμβάνει σήμερα ὁ κατακτητὴς, ποὺ λέγεται ἄθεη Δύση, μὲ τὴν συνδρομὴ τῶν ἐντὸς τῶν τειχῶν «κουρντισμένων φωνογράφων τῆς»;

Καὶ συνεχίζει: «Τὸ τί θ' ἀκούσω γι' αὐτὰ ποὺ γράφω ἀπὸ ἓνα σωρὸ ὑμνητῶν τῆς τυποποιημένης ἑλληνικῆς ζωῆς, τὸ ξέρω. Θὰ μὲ ποῦνε σκουριασμένη ἄγκουρα, φουνταρισμένη καὶ γαντζωμένη ἀπάνω στὴν ξέρα τῆς Παράδοσης, ἀλλὰ «οὐ φροντίς, Ἰπποκλειδῆ» (Παρομιώδης φράση ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχαιότητα, ποὺ σημαίνει: δὲν τὸν νοιάζει τὸν Ἰπποκλειδῆ).

Ἡ τυποποίηση στὴν Ἑλλάδα, μ' ὅλα ποὺ εἶπα, εἶναι ἀκόμα στὴν ἀρχή. Ὑπάρχει κάμποση ἀτυποποίητη ζωὴ καὶ μ' αὐτὴν παρηγοριόμαστε λίγο ἐμεῖς οἱ «καθυστερημένοι» κι οἱ «ἀσυγχρόνιστοι». Μὰ σὰν συλλογισθῶ τί θὰ γίνεῖ ὕστερα ἀπὸ τριάντα - σαράντα χρόνια, λέγω: «Πάλι καλά, μπροστὰ σὲ ἄλλες χώρες. Βαστὰ ἀκόμα ἡ βλογημένη φύτρα».

Πέρασαν τὰ χρόνια καὶ σαράντα καὶ ἐξήντα καὶ ἑκατό. Τίποτε δὲν σταματᾷ τὸν κατήφορο ποὺ πήραμε. Ὁ προφητικὸς Φώτιος ἐπαληθεύεται. Ἡ λίγη παρηγορία ποὺ ἔπαιρνε στὰ χρόνια του χάθηκε σήμερα ὁλότελα.

Παρεμπιπτόντως, ὀφείλουμε νὰ δεχθοῦμε πὺς τὰ διαλαμβανόμενα ἔργα πάσης μορφῆς καὶ ἐπιπέδου σήμερα, εἶναι αὐτονόητο ἐπακόλουθο ἐντὸς αὐτῆς τῆς πραγματικότητας καὶ μάλιστα δίχως νὰ εἶναι προβλεπόμενο τὸ μέγεθος τῆς καταστροφῆς τους καὶ ὁ χρόνος λήξης τους. Τὸ βλέπουμε νὰ γίνεται ὁρατὸ μὲ τὶς ἀλλεπάλληλες ἀποφάσεις τῶν κυβερνήσεων, ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὶς πολιτικὲς καὶ ἰδεολογικὲς τους ἀποκλίσεις, ἀφοῦ εὐθυγραμμίζονται ἀπόλυτα πάνω σ' αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα, ὡς νὰ τοὺς κατευθύνει κάποια κοινὴ ἀόρατη δύναμη. Ἀλλὰ, **ἀνεπιφύλακτα μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε πὺς τὸ ἴδιο ἰσχύει καὶ γιὰ τὴν διοικοῦσα Ἐκκλησία, ἡ ὁποία, ἀδυνατώντας νὰ ὀρθώσει φωνὴ ἀληθείας, ἐμπλέκεται σὲ ἀλυσιδωτὲς οἰκουμενιστικὲς συμπαιγνίες, ἐξυπηρετώντας τὰ καπρίτσια τῶν αἰρέσεων καὶ τῶν ἀθέων κέντρων τῆς Δύσης.**

Πάντοτε ἀπλὸς καὶ γλαφυρὸς στὶς περιγραφὰς του ὁ Κόντογλου, ἀποτυπώνει στὴν καρδιά τοῦ ἀναγνώστη μὲ περίτεχνο καὶ εὐγενικὸ τρόπο τὸ περίσσειμα τῆς δικῆς του καρδιάς. Κλείνει τὴν ἐνότητα αὐτῆ μὲ μία ὠραία ἀνατολίτικη ἱστορία, ἡ ὁποία ἐπιβεβαιώνει μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ διάβα τοῦ χρόνου τοὺς φόβους καὶ τὶς προβλέψεις του:

«Μία φορὰ ἦτανε ἓνας σουλτάνος αἰμοβόρος καὶ τὸν καταριότανε ὅλος ὁ κόσμος. Τὴν νύχτα γινότανε

“τεπτίλι,” δηλαδή, έβαζε ξένα ρούχα και γύριζε μέσα στα σοκάκια και στα μαγαζιά, για να δει τί έλεγε ο κόσμος γι’ αυτόν. Από παντού άκουγε κατάρες και βλαστήμιες. Μά δεν απελπιζότανε. Δύο τρία χρόνια έβγαينه στη βόλτα, μά δεν άκουσε μήτε έναν άνθρωπο να πει καλόν λόγο για τόν σουλτάνο. Άπάνω στα τρία χρόνια, εκει πού περπατούσε ένα βράδυ σ’ έναν δρόμο, μία γριά, πολν γριά, τόν γνωρίσε και είπε:

—Πολυχρονεμένη μου σουλτάνε, μέρες να κόβει ο Άλλάχ από μένα, χρόνια να σοϋ τίς δίνει.

Ο σουλτάνος παραξενεύτηκε, πώς βρέθηκε ένας άνθρωπος να τόν ευχηθεί και ρώτησε την γριά τί καλό είχε δει από αυτόν και τόν ευχιότανε. Κι ή γριά του είπε:

—Έγώ θα σοϋ πώ την αλήθεια και δέν με μέλει αν με σκοτώσεις, γιατί είμαι γριά. Έγώ έφταξα τρεις σουλτάνους, τόν παππού σου, τόν πατέρα σου κι έσένα.

—Λοιπόν, τής λέγει ο σουλτάνος, τί άνθρωπος ήτανε ο παπούς μου;

—Ο παπούς σου, λέγει ή γριά, ήτανε κακός άνθρωπος. Κρέμαζε, παλούκωνε, έσφαζε.

—Κι ο πατέρας μου; τή ρωτά ο σουλτάνος.

—Ο πατέρας σου ήτανε χειρότερος από τόν παππού σου, λέγει ή γριά.

—Κι εγώ, τή ρωτά ο σουλτάνος, τί άνθρωπος είμαι;

—Έσοϋ είσαι πιδ παλιάνθρωπος από τόν πατέρα σου.

—Και τότε γιατί με πολυχρονίζεις; τή ρωτά πάλι ο σουλτάνος.

—Σε πολυχρονίζω, επειδι ή ο πατέρας σου ήτανε χειρότερος από τόν παππού σου κι έσοϋ χειρότερος από τόν πατέρα σου, παρακαλώ τόν Θεο να σε πολυχρονίζει, γιατί αυτός πού θα έρθει ύστερα από σένα, θα είναι ακόμα χειρότερος!»

Κλείνουμε με την εισαγωγική φράση του κειμένου όπου, ποτισμένος μέχρι τα βάθη τής ύπαρξής του από τα βιώματα τής έν Χριστώ έλευθερίας, ως γνήσιος Ρωμιός, ο κυρ-Φώτης Κόντογλου διαχωρίζει με απόλυτο τρόπο την θέση του απ’ αυτήν την κολαστική ματαιότητα και ζητά να παραμείνει έλευθερος, έξω και μακριά από μία τέτοια ζωή: «Αυτά τα γράφει ένας άνθρωπος, πού δέν μπορεί και δέν θέλει να γίνει τυποποιημένος, δηλαδή, ένας άνθρωπος ξένος από τη σημερινή ζωή και τους πόθους της!»



Αυτοί οι τρεις κανόνες ζωής είναι χρήσιμοι, τδ να αφοβάσαι τόν Θεόν, τδ να προσεύχεσαι αδιάλειπτα και τδ να κάνης τδ καλόν στον πλησίον σου.

Άββας Ποιμην ό Μέγας

Οί Ημέρες Είναι Πονηρές

Του Μακαριστου Επισκόπου Φλωρίνης Αυγουστίνου Καντιώτη (+2010). Δημοσιεύθηκε στο περιοδικό «Σταυρός» με τίτλο «Εξαγοραζόμενοι τόν Καιρόν»(τ. 59/1966, σσ. 1-4) και περιελήφθη στο βιβλίο «Ο Χρόνος και αι Τέσσαρες Εποχαι» με τδ νέο τίτλο «Αί ημέραι Πονηραι» (Αθήναι 1966, σσ. 138-147), 20-11-2019.

«Εξαγοραζόμενοι τόν καιρόν, ότι αι ημέραι πονηραι είσιν».

(Έφ. 5:16)

Οί άνθρωποι, αγαπητοί μου, εκτιμούν την αξία του χρήματος. Άλλά την αξία του χρόνου πόσοι την εκτιμούν όπως πρέπει; Και όμως ο χρόνος, πού τρέχει ασταμάτητα, σαν τδ ρεύμα του ποταμού, και μάς φέρνει γρήγορα από τη νηπιακή στην παιδική ηλικία, κι από την παιδική στην έφηβική κι από την έφηβική στην άνδρική κι από την άνδρική στη γεροντική και τέλος μάς αρπάξει και μάς ρίχνει στην αιωνιότητα, είναι πολύτιμος. Είναι χρήμα ανεκτίμητο. Αξίζει ασυγκρίτως περισσότερο από βουνά χρυσού. Και αν τώρα δέν τόν εκτιμούν οι άνθρωποι, αλλά τόν αφήνουν και διαορθεί ασκοπα, μην αμφιβάλλετε, ότι θά’οθη καιρός πού θα κλάψουν πικρά για τδ χαμένο χρόνο, και θ’ άναζητήσουν λίγο χρόνο, λίγες μέρες, λίγες ώρες—τί λέω—, λίγα λεπτά, μά δέν θα τα έχουν.

Ο χρόνος φεύγει ανεπιστρεπτεί, σαν τδ ρεύμα του ποταμού πού δέν γυρίζει πίσω. Και όμως πόσο άπερίσκεπτα τόν μεταχειρίζονται οι άνθρωποι!

Μία παραφροσύνη. Κάποτε, léνε, άνοιξε τδ παράθυρο ένδς άρχοντικού, βγήκε κάποιος πού κρατούσε ένα σάκκο γεμάτο χρυσά νομίσματα κι άρχισε ένα - ένα να τα πετάη έξω, μέχρι πού τα έρριξε όλα κι ο σάκκος άδειασε. Έτρεξε κόσμος και μάζεψε τα νομίσματα... Τί είχε συμβη; Ο άνθρωπος αυτός είχε τρελλαθη και δέν ήξερε τί κάνει.

Σπάνιο, πολν σπάνιο, θα πήτε, να συμβη κάτι τέτοιο. Άλλά τδ σπάνιο, άνθρωπος πού παραφρονεί και πετάει τα χρήματά του και γελάει και διασκεδάζει, αυτή ή άπίθανη περίπτωσι, είναι παράδειγμα - εικόνα μιās πραγματικότητας στην όποία ζη τδ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τής ανθρωπότητας. Δέν είναι βέβαια όλοι αυτοί παράφρονες, είναι λογικοί. Και όμως αυτοί οι λογικοί, πού δέν αποκλείεται να’νε και έπιστήμονες και διεθνούς φήμης, διαπραττουν μιā άφροσύνη χειρότερη από του παράφρονος πού είπαμε. Γιατί σας έρωτώ· τί είμαστε όλοι εδώ στη γη; Ίδιοκτητες; Αιώνιοι κάτοικοι; Όχι, αλλά «πάροικοι και παρεπίδημοι». (Α΄ Πέτρο. 2:11).

Λίγο θα μείνουμε. Η Γη είναι ένα μεγάλο ξενοδοχείο, ένα άρχοντικό, πού μένουμε προσωρινά. Δόθηκε στον καθένα μας ώρισμένος χρόνος. Αυτός ο χρόνος

είναι ὅπως ὁ σάκκος μὲ τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα τοῦ παράφρονος. Χρυσᾶ νομίσματα εἶναι οἱ ὥρες τῆς παρουσίας ζωῆς. Ἄνθρωπε θνητέ, μὲ μία καὶ μόνο ὥρα, ἂν τὴν χρησιμοποιήσης σωστά, ἀγοράξεις τὸν Οὐρανό! Πρόσεξε λοιπὸν πῶς θὰ χρησιμοποιήσης τὶς ὥρες τῆς ζωῆς σου. Ἀλλὰ τί βλέπουμε; Οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἀντὶ νὰ κάνουν καλὴ χρῆσι τοῦ χρόνου τους, τὸν σπαταλοῦν ἀπερίσκεπτα. Ἀνοίγουν κι αὐτοὶ τὸν σάκκο τῶν χρυσῶν νομισμάτων, καὶ πετοῦν πρὸς τὰ ἔξω ἀσκόπως ὄλο τὸν πλοῦτο τους.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ σπαταλάει ἄσκοπα καὶ μάταια τὸ χρῆμα, λέγεται ἄσωτος. Ὅλοι τὸν κακίζουν. Ἄκοῦς ἐκεῖ τὸν ἄθλιο! Λένε, νὰ κληρονομήση ἀπ' τὸν πατέρα του τόσες λίρες καὶ νὰ τὶς σπαταλήση! Αὐτὸς θέλει κρέμασμα... Ἀλλὰ μεγαλύτερος ἄσωτος καὶ ἄξιος μεγάλης τιμωρίας εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ποὺ σπαταλάει μάταια ὄχι χρῆμα ἀλλὰ τὸ χρόνο. Διότι χρῆμα ποὺ ἔχασες μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ ξαναποκτήσης, ἀλλὰ χρόνο ποὺ ἔφυγε σὲ ματαιότητες καὶ τρέλλες, εἶναι ἀδύνατον. Ἄνθρωποι, μὴν κλαῖτε τὰ χρήματα ποὺ χάσατε· κλάψτε πικρὰ τὸ χρόνο ποὺ σπαταλήσατε. Σεῖς, οἱ σπάταλοι τοῦ χρόνου, εἴστε οἱ μεγαλύτεροι ἄσωτοι.

Ὅχι ἄλλο ἀνεμοδείκτες καὶ χαμαιλέοντες. Τὴν ἀξία τοῦ πολυτίμου χρόνου ὑπογραμμίζει καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος μὲ τὰ λόγια «Ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσι». (Ἐφ. 5:16). Τί σημαίνει τὸ «ἐξαγοραζόμενοι»; Ὅχι, ὅπως τὸ ἐρμηνεύουν οἱ ἰδιοτελεῖς καὶ καιροσκόποι, νὰ κάνουμε δηλαδή ἀβαρίες στὴ συνείδησί μας, συμβιβασμοὺς μὲ τὴν ἀδικία καὶ τὴν παρανομία, νὰ προσποιούμεθα καὶ νὰ ὑποκρινώμαστε, νὰ γινώμαστε ἀνεμοδείκτες σὲ κάθε πνοῇ ἀνέμου γιὰ νὰ τὰ βολεύουμε καὶ νὰ περνᾶμε καλὰ τὴ ζωὴ μας, ἀπολαμβάνοντας τὰ ἀγαθὰ μὲ ἄνεσι καὶ εἰρήνη γιὰ πολλὰ χρόνια μὲ εὐτυχία. Ὅχι. Δὲν μᾶς θέλει ὁ Θεὸς νὰ εἴμαστε «ποικίλοι καὶ παντοδαποί», ὅπως ὁ χαμαιλέον, τὰ γνωστὸ ἐρπετὸ ποὺ ἀλλάζει χρῶμα ἀνάλογα μὲ τὸ ἔδαφος ποὺ βρῖσκεται. «Ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν» σημαίνει, νὰ μὴν κοιμώμαστε, νὰ εἴμαστε πάντα σὲ πνευματικὴ ἐγρήγορσι, νὰ μένουμε ἄγρυπνοι φύλακες τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς, καὶ πνευματικὰ πάνοπλοι

νὰ κατοπεύουμε τὸν περίγυρό μας, νὰ βλέπουμε «τὰ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν» (Ματθ. 16:3), νὰ κάνουμε φρόνιμη καὶ συνετὴ χρῆσι τοῦ χρόνου.

Ἄς ἐξηγήσουμε λίγο πιὸ ἀναλυτικά, ποιές εἶναι οἱ «πονηρὲς ἡμέρες».

Καθὼς ὁ χρόνος κυλάει, φέρνει εὐκαιρίες γιὰ πνευματικὴ πρόοδο, γιὰ ἐκτέλεσι καλῶν ἔργων. Γίνεται π.χ. στὴν πόλι μας κήρυγμα; Περνάει ἀπ' τὸ χωριό μας ἱεροκήρυκας ἢ πνευματικὸς ποὺ μᾶς καλεῖ σὲ μετάνοια καὶ ἐξομολόγησι; Βρῖσκονται περιπτώσεις ἀσθενῶν καὶ φτωχῶν ἀδελφῶν μας ποὺ χρειάζονται ὕλικὴ καὶ ἠθικὴ βοήθεια; Ἡ ὑπάρχει κάποια ἐργασία ποὺ πρέπει νὰ τὴν κάνουμε πάση θυσία; Αὐτὰ εἶναι εὐκαιρίες· προσοχὴ μὴ μᾶς ξεφύγουν. Ὅπως ὁ κυνηγὸς προσέχει καλὰ τὶς ἐποχὲς ποὺ περνᾶνε ἀπὸ τὰ νησιὰ καὶ τ' ἀκρωτήρια τὰ πουλιὰ καὶ τρέχει ἐγκαίρως στὰ περάσματα αὐτά, ἔτσι κι ὁ Χριστιανὸς πρέπει νὰ κυνηγᾷ τὶς εὐκαιρίες καὶ ἄγρυπνος νὰ ἐκμεταλλεύεται ὅλα ἐκεῖνα ποὺ συντελοῦν στὴν πνευματικὴ του πρόοδο καὶ στὸ καλὸ τοῦ πλησίον· νὰ γίνῃ κυνηγὸς ἄγρυπνος ποὺ θὰ περιμένῃ τὸ θεϊκὸ κυνήγι, καὶ ὄχι κυνηγὸς ἀμελῆς ποὺ κοιμᾶται κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ σκιά τοῦ δέντρου τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ἀπὸ πάνω τοῦ περνοῦν ὀλόκληρα κοπάδια πουλιῶν.

Ἀλλὰ ὁ χρόνος δὲν φέρνει μόνο εὐκαιρίες γιὰ τὸ καλὸ· παρουσιάζει καὶ σκάνδαλα καὶ δυστυχίες καὶ τραγικότητες. Ὅχι ὅτι φταίει ὁ χρόνος γιὰ τὰ σκάνδαλα, τὶς δυστυχίες καὶ τραγικότητες τῆς ζωῆς ὄχι.

Τὸ κακὸ δὲν τὸ φέρνει ὁ χρόνος, δὲν ὑπάρχουν «ἀποφράδες» ἡμέρες καὶ ὥρες ποὺ πρέπει κανεὶς ν' ἀποφεύγῃ. Δημιουργὸς τῶν κακῶν δὲν εἶναι ὁ χρόνος, ἀλλὰ ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Αὐτὸς μὲ τὶς καλὲς ἢ τὶς κακὲς πράξεις του κάνει καλὲς ἢ κακὲς τὶς ἡμέρες. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος μπορεῖ καὶ τὴν πιὸ λαμπρὴ ἡμέρα τοῦ χρόνου, τὴν ἑορτὴ τοῦ Πάσχα, νὰ τὴ μεταβάλλῃ μὲ τὰ κακουργήματά του σὲ ἡμέρα συμφορᾶς καὶ δυστυχίας. Αὐτὸς δίνει περιεχόμενοςτὸ χρόνο καὶ τὸν γεμίζει ἢ μὲ ἀρετὴ ἢ μὲ τὴν κακία του.

Καὶ ἂν σὲ μία περίδο οἱ κακοί, οἱ ἀσεβεῖς καὶ παραβάτες τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχουν ἀύξηθῇ κι ἀποτελοῦν τὴν πλειονότητα τῆς κοινωνίας καὶ



Μητροπολίτης Φλωρίνης Ἀγιοστίνο
Καντιώτης
(20 Ἀπρ. 1907 - 28 Αὐγ 2010)

κυριαρχούν σὲ ὅλους τοὺς τομεῖς, καὶ κατατρέχουν κάθε εὐσεβῆ καὶ ἐνάρετο, τότε ἡ ἐποχή, οἱ ἡμέρες ποὺ τὸ κακὸ θριαμβεύει στὸν κόσμο, λέγονται «*ἡμέραι πονηραί*». Τότε τὸ πεδίο δράσεως τοῦ καλοῦ περιορίζεται: τὸ καλὸ, ἡ πίστι καὶ ἡ ἀρετὴ, καταδιώκεται, ἔχουμε διωγμοὺς εὐσεβῶν καὶ αἵματα μαρτύρων καὶ σταυροὺς καὶ κρεμάλες δικαίων.

Νὰ φυλάξουμε τὴν πίστι. Σὲ περίοδο τέτοιων πονηρῶν ἡμερῶν ἄς προσέξουν οἱ πιστοὶ γιὰ νὰ «ἐξαγοράζουν τὸν καιρὸ». Πῶς; Κάνοντας φρόνιμη (=μυαλωμένη) καὶ συνετὴ (=σοφὴ) χρῆσι τοῦ χρόνου κατὰ τὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ Κυρίου: «*Γίνεσθε φρόνιμοι ὡς οἱ ὄφεις καὶ ἀκέραιοι ὡς αἱ περιστεραί.*» (Ματθ. 10:16). Ἡ φρόνησις τοῦ φιδιοῦ ὅταν τὸ χτυπήσουν εἶναι νὰ προφυλάξῃ τὸ κεφάλι του, καὶ ἡ φρόνησις τοῦ πιστοῦ σὲ καιρὸ διωγμοῦ εἶναι νὰ προφυλάξῃ τὸ σπουδαιότερο ἀπ' ὅλα, αὐτὸ ποὺ ἂν τὸ χάσῃ ἔχασε τὸ πᾶν καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ πίστις του. Τὴν πίστι του δὲν θὰ τὴν προδώσῃ ἐπ' οὐδενὶ λόγῳ· θὰ τὴν φυλάξῃ μὲ κάθε θυσία.

Καὶ ὅπως ὅταν πιάσῃ φωτιὰ σ' ἓνα σπίτι καὶ καίγωνται τὰ πάντα, ὁ ἰδιοκτήτης θὰ προσπαθήσῃ νὰ σώσῃ ὅ,τι εἶναι τὸ πολυτιμότερο ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ τὰ ἄλλα, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ πιστὸς. Ὅταν ὁ διάβολος βάλῃ φωτιὰ καὶ καίει τὰ πάντα, ὁ πιστὸς θὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν πίστι του καὶ θὰ διαφύγῃ μέσ' ἀπ' τὴν φλόγῃς τοῦ κόσμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἀπιστίας ποὺ καίγεται. Καὶ ὅπως ὅταν κάποιος ληστής μπῆ μέσα σ' ἓνα σπίτι καὶ ἀπειλήσῃ μὲ θάνατο τὸ νοικοκύρη, αὐτὸς γιὰ νὰ σώσῃ τὴ ζωὴ του τοῦ παραδίδει ὅλα τὰ χρήματα, ἔτσι καὶ ὅταν ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὅλων μας κακοποιοὶ καὶ ἀσεβεῖς καὶ ἄπιστοι κυριαρχοῦν καὶ ἐξουσιάζουν, τότε ὅλα μποροῦμε νὰ τοὺς τὰ δώσουμε, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν πίστι καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴ.

Αὐτὸ συμβουλεύει ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός: «*Τοῦτο σᾶς λέγω καὶ σᾶς παραγγέλλω κἂν ὁ οὐρανὸς νὰ κατέβῃ κάτω, κἂν ἡ γῆ νὰ ἀνέβῃ ἐπάνω, κἂν ὁλος ὁ κόσμος νὰ χαλάσῃ, καθὼς μέλλεινὰ χαλάσῃ, σήμερον - αὔριον, μὴ σᾶς μέλη τί ἔχει νὰ κάμῃ ὁ Θεός. Τὸ κορμὶ σας ἄς τὸ καύσουν, ἄς τὸ τηγανίσουν τὰ πράγματά σας ἄς τὰ πάρουν μὴ σᾶς μέλει. Δώσατέ τ'α' δὲν εἶναι ἰδικά σας. **Ψυχὴ καὶ Χριστὸς σᾶς χρειάζονται.** Αὐτὰ τὰ δύο, ὁλος ὁ κόσμος νὰ πέσῃ ἐπάνω σας, δὲν ἔμπορεῖ νὰ σᾶς τὰ πάρῃ, ἐκτὸς καὶ τὰ δώσετε μὲ τὸ θέλημά σας. Αὐτὰ τὰ δύο νὰ φυλάγετε, νὰ μὴ τὰ χάσετε... Τώρα χρειάζεται ἡ πίστις. Διὰ τοῦτο, ἀδελφοί μου, καλότυχοι καὶ τρισμακάριοι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ὁποῦ πιστεύουν τώρα, καὶ ἀλλοίμονον εἰς τοὺς ἀπίστους. Καλύτερα ἂν μὴ εἶχον γεννηθῆ εἰς τὸν κόσμον».*

(Βλ. ἡμέτ. βιβλ. Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός, Διδ. Δ', ἔκδ. «Σταυρός», Ἀθῆναι 2013, σσ. 180-181).

Ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα μας. Κανεῖς, ἀγαπητοί μου, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀρνηθῆ ὅτι ζοῦμε σὲ ἡμέρες πονηρῆς. Τὸ κακὸ ἔχει ὑψώσει τὸ κεφάλι μὲ θράσος. Μεγάλα πολιτικὰ καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ σκάνδαλα συνταράσσουν τὸν τόπο. Ἡ πατρίδα σείεται ἐκ θεμελίων. Καὶ μόνο ἡ Ἑλλάδα; Ὁλόκληρη ἡ οἰκουμένη συνταράσσεται. Οἱ πιστοὶ ἀνὰ τὸν κόσμον ἀποτελοῦν μία ἐλάχιστη μειονότητα. Ἄς προσέχουν λοιπὸν πολὺ. Ἄς προσέχουμε νὰ μὴν ἀφομοιωθοῦμε μὲ τὸν κόσμο, ἀλλά, διατηρώντας ἀφθορη τὴ συνειδήσί μας μὴ παύσουμε νὰ ἀγωνιζώμαστε. Κάθε εὐκαιρία ποὺ παρουσιάζεται ὑπὲρ τοῦ καλοῦ ἄς τὴν ἀρπάξουμε.

Ἄς γίνουμε ἔμπειροι ψαράδες καὶ κυνηγοὶ τῶν θειοτέρων πραγμάτων. Ἔστω καὶ ἂν μᾶς μισοῦν, μᾶς χτυποῦν, μᾶς διώκουν καὶ μᾶς σταυρώνουν ἀκόμα, μὴ χάσουμε τὸ θάρρος. Ἄς ἐξαγοράζουμε κάθε στιγμή, κάνοντας καλὴ, θεάρεστη χρῆσι τοῦ χρόνου. Νὰ ἔχουμε πίστι στὸν Κύριο.

Οἱ πονηρῆς ἡμέρες θὰ τελειώσουν ὅπωςδήποτε. Λαμπρὲς ἡμέρες θὰ ἔρθουν, ἂν ὄχι ἐδῶ στὴ γῆ, ἀσφαλῶς ἐκεῖ στὸν οὐρανό. Μὴ λησμονοῦμε ποτέ ὅτι εἴμαστε «*ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*». (Ἐβρ. 11:13. Γέν 23:4). Μὴν περιορίσουμε μόνο ἐδῶ, στὰ στενὰ ὄρια τοῦ παρόντος βίου, τοὺς πόθους μας γιὰ ἓνα καλύτερο αὔριον, γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχουμε βεβαίως χρέος νὰ ἐργαζώμεθα· ἄς ἀτενίζουμε μὲ τὴν πίστι μακριά, πολὺ μακριά, καὶ ἄς λέμε κ' ἐμεῖς ὅ,τι ἔλεγε καὶ ὁ ἀρχαῖος φιλόσοφος Ἀναξίμανδρος δείχνοντας τὰ ἀστέρια: «*Ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα μου*»...

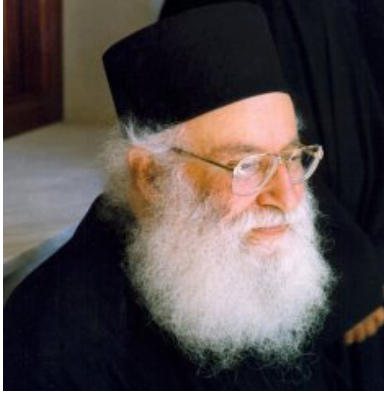


Δύσκολον εἶναι χωρὶς ἄσκησις νὰ δεσμευθῆ ἡ νεότης στὸν ζυγὸ τῆς καθαρότητος. Ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ σκοτεινιάσματος τοῦ νοῦ πηγάζει, κατὰ πρῶτον ἀπὸ τὴν ὀκνηρία, ἡ ὁποία ἐκδηλώνεται στὴν πνευματικὴ ἐργασία καὶ στὴν προσευχὴ. Διότι ἄλλη ὁδὸς πλάνης δὲν ὑπάρχει στὴν ψυχὴ, παρὰ τὸ νὰ ἐκπέσῃ προηγουμένως ἀπὸ τὴν πνευματικὴν ἐργασία καὶ τὴν προσευχὴ. Ἐπειδὴ πέφτει εὐκόλα στὰ χέρια τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς ἡ ψυχῆ, ὅταν στερηθῆ τὴν βοήθειαν τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ πάλιν ξαναλέγω ὅτι, ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ δὲν φροντίζει γιὰ τὰ ἔργα τῆς ἀρετῆς, εὐκόλα ἔλκεται ἀπὸ τὰ ἐνάντια τῶν ἀρετῶν.

Ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος

Ἔχουσιν Οὗτοι τοὺς Οἴκους, Ἡμεῖς τὸν Ἐνοικον

Ἀπόσπασμα Ὁρθόδοξης Χριστιανικῆς Ὁμιλίας τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Γέροντος π. Ἀθανασίου Μυτιληναίου (1927 – 2006).



Ὅταν κατέκτησε ὁ Δαυὶδ τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ ἔκρινε ὅτι ἐκεῖ ἔπρεπε νὰ χριστεῖ ὁ ναός. Βέβαια καθ' ὑπόδειξη τοῦ Θεοῦ, διότι ποτὲ δὲν ἔκανε ὁ Δαυὶδ τίποτε ἂν δὲν ἔπαιρνε τὴν πληροφορία ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Ἦτανε πιστὸς στὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ

Θεοῦ, ἐν ἀντιθέσει μὲ τὸν Σαοὺλ, ὁ ὁποῖος δὲν ἦτο πιστός.

Ὡστε, λέγει ὁ Ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, οὐκ ἦν ναὸς ἄχρι τότε: Ὡστε λοιπὸν δὲν ὑπῆρχε μέχρι τότε ναός.

καίτοι καὶ τὰ ἔθνη ἐξέωστο, παρ' ὅτι, λέει, εἶχαν ἐξωσθεῖ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη, οἱ ἐθνικοί,

τοσαῦτα θαύματα, καὶ οὐδαμοῦ ναὸς. τόσα θαύματα ἐγίνοντο, κι ὅμως δὲν ὑπῆρχε πουθενὰ ναός. Θαύματα ἐννοεῖται ἐπεμβάσεις τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν ἱστορία τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.

Ἄρα ὁ ναός δὲν μπορούσε νὰ ἔχει ἀπόλυτην ἀξία ἀλλὰ σχετική, ἀφοῦ εἶχαν μείνει περίπου τέσσερις αἰῶνες μὲ τὴν εἴσοδό τους εἰς τὴν γῆν Χαναάν χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχει αὐτὸς ὁ ναός.

Καὶ ὕστερα, ὅπως βλέπουμε καὶ θὰ ἰδοῦμε, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν ἐβιάζετο νὰ ἀνοικοδομήσει ναόν, οὔτε ἐξάλλου τὸ ἐξήτησε ὁ Θεὸς αὐτό. Τὸ λέγει ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεός. Θὰ τὸ δοῦμε λίγο πιδ κάτω. Τοῦτο τὸ ἐξήτησε ὁ Δαυὶδ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν. Καὶ πάλι ὁ Θεὸς δὲν βιάζεται, ἀλλὰ ἀναθέτει τὸ θέμα εἰς τὸν Σολομώντα. Θὰ τὸ δοῦμε καὶ αὐτὸ λίγο πιδ κάτω ποὺ τοῦ λέει, ὄχι, ἐσὺ θὰ πεθάνεις καὶ κατόπιν ὁ ἀπόγονός σου θὰ εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὁ ὁποῖος θὰ μοῦ χτίσει ναόν.

Συνεπῶς, ὁ Στέφανος—μὴν ξεχνᾶμε ὅτι ἀπολογεῖται ὁ Στέφανος—ποὺ θεωροῦσε σχετικὴ τὴν ἀξία τοῦ ναοῦ, δὲν σήμαινε ὅτι ἐβλασφήμει κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου, δηλαδή κατὰ τοῦ ναοῦ. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀπολυτοποίησις τοῦ ναοῦ ἐκ μέρους τῶν Ἑβραίων, τὸ ὅτι δηλαδή ὁ Θεὸς μένει μόνο στὸ ναό, κατὰ περιεργὸν τρόπον ἀγαπητοῦ μου μένει σὰν ἀντίληψη μέχρι σήμερα. Εἶδατε καὶ τὴν περασμένη καὶ τὴν προπερασμένη φορὰ πόσο ἐπιμένουμε στὸ θέμα τοῦ ναοῦ. Ὅπως ἐπιμένει καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Στέφανος. Ἴσως πεῖτε ὅτι ἐπιτέλους, ὁ Ἅγιος Στέφανος ἀπολογεῖται. Ἀγαπητοῦ μου, ἔχει πολλὴ σημασία, θὰ τὸ δεῖτε ἀμέσως τώρα.

Οἱ Ἑβραῖοι θέλουν τὸν Θεὸ ἐγκλωβισμένον μέσα στὸν ναὸν κατὰ ἀποκλειστικότητα δική των. Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι δικός μας, λέει. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀνήκει σὲ κάποιον ἄλλον. Ἀφοῦ λοιπὸν εἶναι δικός μας, ἄρα εἶναι ἐγκλωβισμένος μέσα στὸν ναὸ ποὺ θὰ τοῦ χτίσουμε ἢ ποὺ τοῦ χτίσαμε ἢ ποὺ θὰ τοῦ ξαναχτίσουμε.

Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀποκλειστικότητα πολλὲς φορές φάνηκε καὶ μάλιστα ὅταν κατοπινὰ ὁ Παῦλος ἀπελογεῖτο, ἐκεῖ ὅταν πῆγε στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ ἔγινε πολὺ φασαρία νὰ τὸν λιντζάρουν. Καὶ ἀπολογεῖται μπροστὰ στὸν Λυσία τὸν Χιλίαρχον—ἐννοεῖται ἀπολογεῖται εἰς τοὺς Ἑβραίους ὄχι εἰς τὸν Λυσίαν. Ἐκεῖ ὀμιλεῖ καὶ λέγει πολλὰ. Ὅμιλεῖ περὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποὺ τὸν περιέμενε ὁ λαὸς καὶ φθάνει εἰς τὸ ἐξῆς σημεῖον. Καὶ αὐτὸς, λέγει, ὁ Μεσσίας ὁ Ἰησοῦς, μοῦ εἶπε νὰ πάω εἰς ἔθνη μακράν.

Ἦταν αὐτὸ ἦτανε ποὺ τοὺς ἐδαμόνισε. Διότι αὐτὸ δὲν μπορούσαν νὰ χωνέψουν... ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι δικός μας.

Εἶναι ἐκεῖνο ποὺ λέμε κι ἐμεῖς καμιά φορὰ, περιέργως μάλιστα σὲ ἐθνικὲς ἐορτὲς ποὺ ἐλέγοντο παλαιότερα, σὲ κάτι ὀμιλίες, «ὁ Θεὸς τῆς Ἑλλάδος». Εἶναι πάρα πάρα πολὺ τραβηγμένο, «ὁ Θεὸς τῆς Ἑλλάδος». Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου ὅλου καὶ δὲν εἶναι μόνο ὁ Θεὸς τῆς Ἑλλάδος. Περιέργο πρᾶγμα. Παθαίνουμε βλέπετε κάτι ἀγκυλώσεις περιέργες, αὐτὲς ποὺ πάθαιναν ἱστορικὰ καὶ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι.

Ἔτσι, ἀποδοκιμάζουν τὸν Παῦλον, ἀποδοκιμάζουν καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν. Πετοῦνε χώματα στὸν ἄερα, σχίζουν τὰ ροῦχα τους, τὰ πετᾶνε στὸν ἄερα. Αἶρε τὸν τοιοῦτον, δηλαδή, σκότωσέ τον νὰ φωνάζουν εἰς τὸν Χιλίαρχον τὸν Λυσία καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς.

Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ λόγος ποὺ διατηροῦν ἀκόμη τὴν ἴδια νοοτροπία, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι δικός τους. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀνήκει στοὺς ἐθνικούς. Ἦταν τότε ποὺ ἔφτασαν νὰ καταδικάσουν τὸν Στέφανον καὶ σήμερα ποὺ ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ ξαναχτίσουν τὸν ναόν των γιὰ νὰ αἰσθανθοῦν ὅτι πάλι ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι μαζί τους, κατὰ μία σύγχρονη διακήρυξή τους ποὺ σᾶς διάβασα τὴν περασμένη Δευτέρα. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἐδημοσιεύθη εἰς τοὺς Times τῆς Νέας Ὑόρκης. Καὶ ἐκεῖ λέει, ὁ Θεὸς ἔφυγε ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς. Γιατί ἔφυγε ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς; Γιατί δὲν ἔχουμε ναό. Πρέπει λοιπὸν νὰ ξαναχτίσουμε τὸν ναὸ γιὰ νὰ ἔλθει ὁ Θεός. Πῶς νὰ περμιένη ὁ Θεὸς τώρα 20 αἰῶνες πότε οἱ Ἑβραῖοι θὰ χτίσουν τὸν ναόν των γιὰ νὰ πάει νὰ ἐγκαθιδρυθεῖ μέσα εἰς τὸν ναόν.

Αὐτὸ χτυπάει ὁ Στέφανος καὶ δὲν ἔχει βεβαίως κανέναν σκοπὸ νὰ στραφεῖ ἐναντίον τοῦ ναοῦ. Αὐτὸ θὰ λέγαμε καὶ γι' αὐτὸν τὸν ναὸ καὶ γιὰ ὅποιοδήποτε ναὸ ἀγαπητοῦ μου. Αὔριο τὸν καταστρέφουν τὸν ναὸν αὐτόν, τὸν μεταβάλλουν σὲ μουσεῖο ἢ στάβλο

στην χειροτέρα έκδοση ἂν θέλετε ἢ χορευτικὸ κέντρον, αἶθουσα συναυλιῶν καὶ δὲν ξέρω, ᾧ μὴ γένοιτω. Ἄλλὰ γιατί; Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ ἐπιτρέπει ὁ Θεός. Μήπως ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ναὸς τοῦ Σολομῶντος δὲν μετετρέπη σὲ ὅ,τι μετετρέπη ποῦ νὰ χαρακτηρίζεται βδέλυγμα; Τὸ βδέλυγμα ἦταν τὸ ἄγαλμα τοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος ποῦ στήθηκε ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ.

Τί νομίζετε; Ἀλλὰ ἐμεῖς τότε τί θὰ κάνουμε; Βέβαια θὰ λυπούμεθα. Βέβαια θὰ ὀδυρόμεθα. Ὅχι ὅμως κατὰ τρόπον φοβερὸν ὅπως οἱ Ἑβραῖοι. Ἀλλὰ τί; Ὅ,τι συνέβη στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη κάποτε ὅταν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ κατέλαβαν ὅλους τοὺς ναοὺς— ἦταν οἱ Ἀρειανοὶ—καὶ δὲν εἶχε μείνει παρὰ ἓνας μικρὸς ναῖσκος τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας. Ἄν ἦταν τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας ἢ ὀνομάστηκε τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖ ἀνεστήθη ὁ Ὁρθοδοξία, ἄλλο αὐτό. Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος ποῦ ἐξεφώνει ἐκείνους τοὺς περιφήμους θεολογικοὺς τοῦ λόγους περὶ τῆς θεότητος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶπε τὴν περιφνημὴ ἐκείνη φράση: **Ἄς μείνουν οἱ οἴκοι εἰς τοὺς αἰρετικούς κι ἃς ἔχομε ἐμεῖς τὸν οἰκοῦντα. Νὰ ἔχομε ἐμεῖς Ἐκεῖνον ποῦ κατοικεῖ, δὲν ἔχομε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὸν ναόν.**

Εἶδατε; Εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Στεφάνου, εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Παύλου, εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς καὶ τῆς Παλαιᾶς καὶ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης. Πῆραν τὸν ναόν. Αὐτὰ ὅλα εἶναι σχήματα τοῦ παρόντος αἰῶνος. Τὸν πῆραν. Τὸν πῆραν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ. Ἐμεῖς ὅμως ἔχομε Ἐκεῖνον ποῦ κατοικεῖ εἰς τὸν ναόν καὶ κατοικεῖ σὲ μᾶς. Αὐτοὶ πῆρανε τὰ ντουβάρια, τίποτε ἄλλο.

Βλέπετε λοιπόν, ἂν ἀγαπητοί μου τότε οἱ Ἑβραῖοι ἐπέιθοντο εἰς τὸν Στέφανον μὲ ὄλην αὐτὴν τὴν θεολογικὴν κατοχύρωση ποῦ τοὺς κάνει, δὲν θὰ ἔφθαναν οἱ ταλαίπωροι νὰ ὑποδεχθῶν, ἀναμένοντες ἐννοεῖται, τὸν Ἀντίχριστον ποῦ θὰ ἐκπληρώσει τὴν ἐπιθυμία τους γιὰ νὰ ξαναχτιστεῖ ὁ ναός.

Εἶναι ἀκόμη ἀξιοπρόσεκτον ὅτι τὸ φόντο ὄλων αὐτῶν τῶν γεγονότων εἶναι αἰῶνες ὀλόκληροι. Πότε ὁ ναὸς κατεστράφη; Τὸ 70 μετὰ Χριστόν. Δέκα περίπου χρόνια μετὰ τὴν ὀλοκλήρωσή του. Στὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀκόμη ὁ ναὸς δὲν εἶχε τελειοποιηθεῖ. Ἔμεινε τόσο λίγο ὁ ναὸς αὐτός. Ἔ, τὸ 70 κατεστράφη. Ἐθεωρήθηκε μεγίστη συμφορὰ. Ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἕλληνες θεωρήσαμε μεγίστη συμφορὰ ὅτι χάσαμε τὴν Ἁγία Σοφία; Δὲν ἔχομε βεβαίως ἐκεῖνον τὸν ναόν. Ποιὸς δὲν θὰ ἤθελε νὰ τὸν ἔχει; Τί θὰ λέγαμε ὅμως; Τὸ ὅτι θὰ στερηθοῦμε τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία ἐπειδὴ χάσαμε τὸν ναὸν τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη; Καὶ ποιὸς δὲν θὰ ἤθελε νὰ τὸν ἐπανακτήσουμε; Ἀλλὰ μόνο ἐθνικοὶ λόγοι ἢ συναισθηματικοὶ λόγοι. Κι ἂν δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ ναός, μία παράγκα, κι ἂν δὲν

εἶναι μία παράγκα, μία κατακόμβη, ἓνα δωμάτιο. Κι ἂν δὲν ὑπάρχει αὐτό, τὸ δάσος, ἢ νύχτα ποῦ θὰ σκεπάξει μὲ τὰ πέπλα τῆς γιὰ νὰ μὴν φαίνονται ἐκεῖνοι ποῦ θὰ λατρεύουν τὸν Θεό.

Δὲν μᾶς ἐμποδίζει τίποτα νὰ λατρεύουμε τὸν Θεό. Ἐπιμένω πάρα πολὺ στὸ σημεῖο αὐτό. Δὲν ξέρω τί μέρες ἔρχονται. Ἐπιμένω πάρα πολὺ. Μὴν νομίζετε ὅτι θὰ διακοπεῖ ἢ λατρεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μὴν νομίζετε ὅτι θὰ διακοπεῖ ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ—ὁ ἐμφανῆς θὰ διακοπεῖ ἀναμφισβήτητα ἀλλὰ ὁ κρυφὸς δὲν θὰ διακοπεῖ ποτέ. Μὴν νομίζετε ὅτι θὰ σταματήσει ἢ θρησκευτικότητα τοῦ λαοῦ μας. Μὴν τὸ πιστέψετε ποτέ αὐτό. Ποτέ, ποτέ. Γιατί ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ριζωμένος μέσα στὶς ἀνθρώπινες καρδιές κι ὅ,τι κι ἂν ἐπικρατεῖ, ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ πάντοτε καρποφορεῖ.



Μακάριος πραγματικῶς εἶναι ἐκεῖνος, ποῦ ἔχει κολλήσει τὴν «εὐχή» τοῦ Ἰησοῦ στὴν διάνοιά του (Τὸ «*Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με*») καὶ φωνάζει πρὸς Αὐτὸν ἀκατάπαυστα μέσα στὴν καρδιά του, ὅπως εἶναι ἐνωμένος ὁ ἀέρας μὲ τὰ σώματά μας ἢ ἡ φλόγα μὲ τὸ κερί. Ὅταν περνᾷ ὁ ἥλιος πάνω ἀπὸ τὴν γῆ φέρνει τὴν ἡμέρα. Καὶ τὸ ἅγιον καὶ σεβάσιμον ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου, ὅταν λάμπη συνεχῶς μέσα στὸν νοῦ μας, θὰ γεννήσῃ ἀναρίθμητες ἔννοιες, λαμπρὲς σὰν τὸν ἥλιο.

Ἅγιος Ἡσύχιος ὁ Πρεσβύτερος

Ἐὰν ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς συναφθῇ μὲ τὸν Θεὸν μὲ προσευχὴ καὶ ἀγάπη, γίνεται σοφὸς καὶ ἀγαθός. Ὅταν ὅμως ἀπομακρυνθῇ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸν γίνεται ἢ κτηνώδης σὲ φιληδονία ἢ θηριώδης καὶ ἀντιμάχεται ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

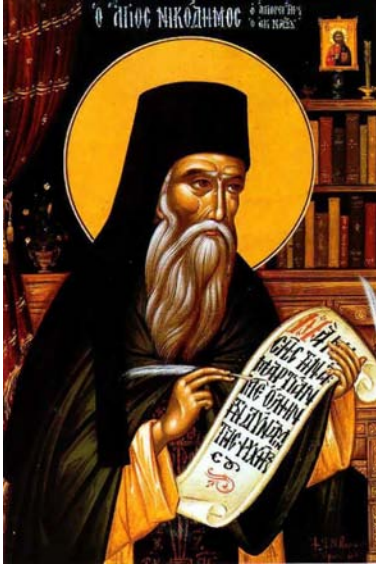
Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς

Ἡ ψυχὴ σου νὰ εἶναι καθαρὴ ἀπὸ πονηρὰς ἐνθυμήσεις καὶ νὰ φωτίζεται ἀπὸ ἀριστες ἔννοιες ἔχοντας πάντοτε στὸν νοῦ σου ἐκεῖνο, ποῦ ἔχει λεχθῆ, ὅτι ἡ φιληδονία καρδιά εἶναι φυλακὴ καὶ ἀλυσίδα τὴν ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου. Ἡ φιλόπονη ὅμως καὶ πρόθυμη στὸ καλὸ εἶναι πόρτα ἀνοιχτή. Πράγματι, τίς καθαρὰς ψυχές, ὅταν βγαίνουν ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ἄγγελοι τίς ὀδηγοῦν, σὰν νὰ τίς κρατοῦν ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι, πρὸς τὴν μακαρία ζωὴ. Ἐνῶ τίς λερωμένες καὶ ἀμετανόητες ψυχές, ἀλοῖμονο, δαίμονες θὰ τίς παραλάβουν.

Ἅγιος Θεόδωρος Ἐδέσης

Προετοιμασία κατὰ τὸν Καιρὸν τοῦ Θανάτου

Πηγή: «Αόρατος Πόλεμος», Μέρος 2^ο — Άγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἀγιορείτης).



Ὁλη μας ἡ ζωὴ εἶναι ἕνας παντοτινὸς πόλεμος πάνω στὴ γῆ καὶ πρέπει νὰ πολεμοῦμε πάντοτε μέχρι τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς. Ὅμως ἡ κύρια κι ἡ πιὸ σπουδαία ἡμέρα τοῦ πολέμου εἶναι κατὰ τὴν τελευταία ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου. Διότι ὅποιος πέση κατὰ τὴν ὥρα ἐκείνη δὲν μπορεῖ πλέον νὰ σηκωθῆ. Καὶ γι' αὐτὸ μὴ θαυμάσης. Γιατὶ ἂν ὁ ἐχθρὸς τόλμησε νὰ πάη στὸν ἀναμάρτητο Κύριό μας στὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του, ἴσως γιὰ νὰ βρῆ καὶ σὲ αὐτὸν κάποιο σφάλμα, ὅπως τὸ εἶπε μόνος ὁ Κύριος, «ἔρχεται ὁ ἄρχοντας τοῦ κόσμου, ἂν καὶ δὲν ἔχει πάνω μου καμμία ἐξουσία» (Ἰω. 14:30), πολὺ περισσότερο τολμᾷ νὰ ἔρχεται στὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς μας ἐναντίον μας ποὺ εἴμαστε ἀμαρτωλοί.^{1*}

Γι' αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ πρέπει νὰ κάνης γιὰ νὰ βρεθῆς τότε καλὰ ἐτοιμασμένος, εἶναι τὸ νὰ πολεμῆς μὲ ἀνδρεία αὐτὸ τὸν καιρὸ τῆς ζωῆς ποὺ σοῦ δόθηκε: γιὰτὶ ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πολεμεῖ καλὰ στὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ μὲ τὴν καλὴ συνήθεια ποὺ ἔχει ἀποκτήσει, εὐκόλα κερδίζει τὴν νίκη κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου. Ἀκόμη νὰ σκέπτεσαι πολλές φορές τὸν θάνατο μὲ προσοχή. Γιατὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ θὰ φοβηθῆς λιγότερο καὶ ὁ νοῦς σου θὰ εἶναι ἐλεύθερος καὶ πρόθυμος γιὰ τὸν πόλεμο. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ κόσμου ἀποφεύγουν τὸ λογισμὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τὴν μνήμη τοῦ θανάτου, γιὰ νὰ μὴ κόψουν τὴν ὄρεξι καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμία ποὺ ἔχουν στὰ γήινα πράγματα, στὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι προσκολλημένοι καὶ λυποῦνται ἂν σκεφθοῦν ὅτι θὰ τὰ ἐγκαταλείψουν. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν λιγοστεύει ἡ ἄτακτη κλίσι ποὺ ἔχουν στὰ πράγματα, ἀλλὰ ἀποκτάει περισσότερη δύναμη. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὅταν πρόκειται νὰ χωρισθοῦν ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ τόσο ἀγαπητά τους πράγματα, αἰσθάνονται μεγάλη καὶ ἀνεκδιήγητη λύπη καὶ δοκιμάζουν ἕνα μεγάλο πόνο.

Λοιπὸν γιὰ νὰ κάνης ἐσὺ καλύτερα αὐτὴν τὴν ἀπαραίτητη προετοιμασία, πρέπει μὲ τὸ λογισμὸ σου νὰ βρεθῆς μόνος σου μερικὲς φορές, χωρὶς

καμμία βοήθεια, ἐκτεθειμένος μέσα στὶς στενοχώριες τοῦ θανάτου καὶ νὰ σκεφθῆς ἐκεῖνα ποὺ μποροῦν νὰ σὲ πολεμήσουν τὸν καιρὸ ἐκεῖνο. Ἐδῶ θὰ σοῦ μιλήσω γιὰ τὴν θεραπεία αὐτῶν, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσης νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσης καλύτερα ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταία στενοχώρια. Γιατὶ τὸ κτύπημα ἐκεῖνο κι ὁ πόλεμος ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πρόκειται νὰ γίνῃ μία φορά, ὅποιος πρόκειται νὰ τὸν κάνῃ, πρέπει νὰ τὸν γνωρίζῃ καλά, γιὰ νὰ μὴ σφάλῃ κατὰ τὴ στιγμὴ ἐκείνη, διότι **μετὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει τόπος γιὰ διόρθωσι.**

† † †

[*]: Λέγει καὶ ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος στὴν ἐρμηνεῖα τοῦ 7^ο ψαλμοῦ (7:3) ἐξηγώντας τὸ «*μήποτε ἀρπάσῃ ὡς λέων τὴν ψυχὴν μου, μὴ ὄντος λυτρομένου μηδὲ σόζοντος*», ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ γενναῖοι ἀθλητῆς, ὅσοι πάλαιψαν μὲ τοὺς δαίμονες σὲ ὅλη τους τὴ ζωὴ καὶ γλύτωσαν ἀπὸ τὶς παγίδες καὶ τὶς ἐπιθέσεις τους, στὸ τέλος ὅμως τῆς ζωῆς τους ἐξετάζονται ἀπὸ τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος, καὶ ἂν βρεθοῦν νὰ ἔχουν κάποιες πληγὲς ἢ μολυσμοὺς ἢ ρύπους τῆς ἀμαρτίας, κρατοῦνται ἀπὸ αὐτόν ἂν ὅμως βρεθοῦν χωρὶς πληγὲς καὶ μολυσμοὺς, ἀναπαύονται ὡς ἐλεύθεροι ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστό. Μερικοὶ πάλι καὶ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Θεὸς στὸν ὄφι, τὸ «*σὺ τηρήσεις αὐτοῦ (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) πτέρναν*», τὸ ἐνόησαν ἀλληγορικὰ ὡς ἐξῆς: Ὅτι ὁ Διάβολος παρατηρεῖ πάντοτε τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ προσπαθεῖ νὰ βρῆ κάποιο ἀμάρτημα γιὰ νὰ τὸν παραλάβῃ. Σημαίνει δηλαδὴ ἡ πτέρνα τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς, γιὰτὶ καὶ αὐτὴ εἶναι τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ ἄκρο τοῦ σώματος.



Ὅπως ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς αἰσθήσεις καλύτερη εἶναι ἡ ὄρασις ἔτσι καὶ ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς ἀρετὲς ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι ἡ πιὸ θεία καὶ ἱερή. Ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεὸν συνομιλεῖ πάντοτε μαζί του ὡς γιὸς πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα καὶ ἀποστρέφεται κάθε ἐμπαθῆ σκέψη.

Νὰ σκέπτεσαι ὑπομένοντας τὸν κόπον, νὰ προσεύχεσαι μὲ ἔνταση καὶ ἐπιμονὴ καὶ νὰ ἀποστρέφεις τὶς φροντίδες καὶ τὶς σκέψεις, ποὺ ἦρθαν. Γιατὶ σὲ ταράζουν καὶ σὲ θορυβοῦν, γιὰ νὰ παραλύσουν τὴν δύναμη καὶ τὴν ἔντασή σου. Μὴ λυπᾶσαι, γιὰτὶ δὲν παίρνεις ἀμέσως ἐκεῖνο, ποὺ ζητᾷς ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν, γιὰτὶ θέλει νὰ σὲ εὐεργετήσῃ περισσότερο μὲ τὸ νὰ ὑπομένης καρτερικὰ στὴν προσευχὴ.

Τί ἀνώτερον ὑπάρχει ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ πλησιάσῃς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ νὰ ἀσχολῆσαι σὲ συνομιλία μαζί του;

Ὅσιος Νείλος ὁ Ἀσκητῆς

ON THE ANTICHRIST AND THE THREE LEVELS OF APOSTASY

Source: "Archbishop Averky: One Man in the Face of Apostasy," from "Orthodox Word"—1986; on the teachings of the ever-memorable Holy Hierarch Archbishop Averky (+1976) of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery.

Editor's Note: Archbishop Averky of blessed memory was one of Orthodoxy's great 20th century theologians. When Saint John the Wonderworker of Shangai and San Francisco was asked a related theological question, his response was: "For the answers on all theological questions which may appear, ask Vladyka Averky for instruction, for with him I have complete spiritual unity."

† † †

What Is Meant by "Antichrist?"

Archbishop Averky viewed the Antichrist in a spiritual way, without any "doomsday" sensationalism. In order to recognize the Antichrist and that which even now prepares his coming, one must look beyond what *appears* to be good and evil, just and unjust. (*Judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgement—* Jn 7:24).

One must understand the principle behind the Antichrist, which is the principle of *imitation* of all that is Christ's. Since his very name means the one who is "in place of Christ" or looks like Christ, the Antichrist will be the final, most deceptive embodiment of Satan's age-old attempt to "copy" Christianity, to make a new, this-worldly form of it. "The Antichrist will appear," writes I. M. Kontzevitch ("Antichrist and the Present Times"), "...not as an absolute atheist or as a follower of that which is connected with it, Bolshevism, since the latter has shown to the world every horror which results from atheism." Rather, as St. Ephraim the Syrian states, he *will come as a robber, in a manner such as to deceive all: he will be as one humble, meek, a hater (as he will say of himself) of unrighteousness, despising idols, giving preference to piety, good, lover of the poor, beautiful to an extreme degree, constant, gracious to all. He will especially esteem the Jewish race, since the Jews will await his coming. But together with all this he will work signs and*

miracles and dreadful spectacles with great authority; and he will use sly means to please all, so that people will quickly fall in love with him. He will not accept bribes, speak with anger, show a gloomy countenance, but with a decorous exterior he will take to deceiving the world, until he has become king. ("Concerning the Coming of the Lord").

With his philosophical, patristic understanding of the reality of Antichrist, Archbishop Averky understood that one need not live during his actual reign to be—in a figurative yet very real sense—his follower. One may be drawn to that which the Antichrist represents—the counterfeit of Christianity—by that which one has in common with him: an inward absence of Christ.

The purpose of all that Christ gives is to prepare people for His Heavenly Kingdom, while the motive of Antichrist is to bind people in every way possible to this earth. This distinction, though simple and clear-cut, may not be so



The Holy Hierarch Archbishop Averky of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery (1906-1976)

easily seen since Antichrist himself—like many of his predecessors—will in fact be very "spiritual," binding people to earth even with the external manifestation of things which are intended to lead them to heaven. The imitation of Christianity will only be discerned by those who have preserved a "feel" for what is intrinsically earthly and corruptible and what is heavenly and eternal. The "apostasy" of which Archbishop Averky spoke is precisely *the loss of this discernment and this desire*. Again, St. Ephraim the Syrian writes that, when the Antichrist actually comes, he will not be seen for what he actually is by *him who has his mind on the affairs of this life who is always tied to the matters of this life, although he even hears, he will not believe, and will despise him who says these things. But the saints will be strengthened, because they scorned every care for this life.*

A Christianity without "savour" is filled with *worldliness that masquerades itself as spirituality*. And to make Christianity "worldly" is to make it vulnerable to the temptation of Antichrist.

The Three Levels of Apostasy

In studying Archbishop Averky's writings on the apostasy, one can discern three levels of which he spoke, these levels

progressing from the most obvious to the most difficult to detect.

The First Level

At the first level is the loss of Christianity's "savour" by Christendom *in general*. The roots of this are found in the schism of East and West and in the medieval West's gradual formation of a "new Christianity," in which man's fallen reason—rather than divinely revealed tradition—became the criterion of truth. In essence, it was this change in perspective from the spiritual to the natural that led, through Renaissance and "Enlightenment," to the blatant materialism of our own times—a materialism that is spiritually blinding modern man. *There can be discerned*, wrote Archbishop Averky, *some kind of rationally acting black hand which is working to bind people as tightly as possible to this temporary, earthly life by forcing them to forget the future life, the eternal life assuredly awaiting us all.*

Materialism, Archbishop Averky understood, corrupts the faith of Christians without their even knowing it. Even their ostensible stand "against worldliness" or their talk of heaven may be filled with worldly conceptions if they have lost the right understanding of the "world" that is opposed by basic Christianity. Moreover, that which would, from an Orthodox viewpoint, be considered immoral, becomes permissible to a Christianity infected with worldliness. Archbishop Averky wrote:

Of what sort of genuine union of all Christians in the spirit of Christian love can we speak now when the Truth is denied by almost everyone, when deceit is in control almost everywhere, when a genuinely spiritual life among people who call themselves Christians has dried up and been replaced by a carnal life, an animal life which has nonetheless been placed on a pedestal and concealed by the idea of pretended charity which hypocritically justifies any sort of spiritual excess, any sort of moral anarchy. Indeed, it is from this that are derived all these numberless "balls," various kinds of "games," "dances" and amusements, toward which, despite their immoral and anti-Christian nature, even many modern clergymen have a tolerant attitude, sometimes even organizing them themselves and participating in them.

In losing touch with the essence of its faith—which is, in a word, *otherworldliness*—Christendom deprives believers of living contact with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Christians must therefore find substitutes for this grace by inducing, through self-persuasion, "spiritual experiences." At the same time they seek a substitute, in this world, for the other world that is no longer tangible to them. Of these "neo-Christians," Archbishop Averky wrote:

They want blessedness here in this world, burdened

with its multitude of sins and iniquities; and they await this blessedness with impatience. They consider one of the surest ways to attaining it to be the "ecumenical movement," the union and unification of all peoples in one new "church" which will comprise not only Roman Catholics and Protestants, but also Jews, Moslems and pagans, each retaining its own convictions and errors. This imaginary "Christian" love, in the name of the future blessedness of men on earth, cannot but trample upon the Truth.

Archbishop Averky termed the belief in future blessedness on earth "neo-chiliasm"—chiliasm being the ancient heretical belief in a thousand-year reign of Christ as an earthly king. He foresaw that the outward "ecumenical unity" sought by the "neo-chiliasts" would be nothing else than an official unity supported and approved of by Antichrist.

For Archbishop Averky, the modern "ecumenical movement" was indicative of something else: the widespread disbelief in absolute Truth. Through this comes an unwillingness to take a stand for anything and a weak-willed acceptance or even justification of evil, all in the name of the most superficial ideas of "Christian love" and "peace." Archbishop Averky expressed it thus:

In our times, when there are such strong doubts about even the existence of Truth, when every "truth" is considered relative and it is considered legal for each person to hold to "his own truth," the struggle for the Truth acquires a particularly important meaning. And the person who does not sympathize with this struggle, who sees in it only a manifestation of "phariseism" and suggests "humbling oneself" before falsehood by falling away from the Truth, should naturally be recognized as a betrayer of the Truth, whoever he might be, whatever he might call or consider himself.

Those who place all their hope in this world must of necessity either give into despair or blind themselves to the rising degeneracy in all forms of public life. Their relativistic and irresolute attitude only helps to unleash the forces of Satan in the last times. As Archbishop Averky pointed out:

The "ministers of Satan," or, which is the same thing, the servants of the coming Antichrist, make use of this spiritual blindness of the majority of modern people and stubbornly and insistently do their work with genuinely satanic energy. With special efforts and with all available means, with the aid of all the resources under their control, they bind forcibly to themselves others who are wittingly or unwittingly, willingly or unwillingly, cooperating with them in creating in the world circumstances and conditions appropriate for the

very near appearance of the Antichrist as the ruler of the whole world and the master of all mankind.

In another place, Archbishop Averky wrote more on this same theme:

The fundamental task of the servants of the coming Antichrist is to destroy the old world with all its former concepts and “prejudices,” in order to build in its place a new world suitable for receiving its approaching “new owner” who will take the place of Christ for people and give them on earth that which Christ did not give them... One must be completely blind spiritually, completely alien to true Christianity, not to understand all this!

The Second Level

At the second level of the apostasy described by Archbishop Averky, the Orthodox churches—in “keeping in step with the times”—leave behind some of the Church’s traditional forms and ecclesiological positions which they consider “outdated,” and thus they too cut themselves off from the tradition that retains the “savour” of basic Christianity. This is one of the ways in which Orthodoxy becomes a worldly “pseudo-Orthodoxy.” The essence of Orthodoxy cannot be transmitted when the very context of receiving it is all but gone.

Archbishop Averky explained why the Orthodox Church, as St. Athanasios the Great once said, must not serve the times:

*The Church never conforms to the world. Indeed not, for the Lord said to His disciples at the Last Supper, “You are not of this world.” We must hold to these words if we are to remain faithful to true Christianity—the true Church of Christ has always been, is and will always be a stranger to this world. Separated from it, she is able to transmit the divine teachings of the Lord unchanged, because that separation has kept her unchanged, that is, **like the immutable God Himself.***

Once in the early 1960’s a seminarian heard Archbishop Averky pacing for a long time in the monastery corridor. Finally he went up to the bishop and asked him what was wrong. “Brother,” replied the righteous hierarch, contemplating, “the term ‘Orthodoxy’ has become meaningless

because *unorthodoxy* is disguising itself behind the external mask of Orthodoxy. Thus there is a need to coin a new phrase for that which we call Orthodoxy, just as there once had been a need to coin the term ‘Orthodox.’—And that is not so easy.”

Archbishop Averky perceived that, for whatever reason, Orthodox churches and church leaders have not treasured the otherworldly basis of Orthodox tradition as passed on from father to son uninterrupted through the centuries. About this he wrote:

Wherever the inherited spiritual link of grace going back to the Holy Apostles and their successors the Apostolic Men and Holy Fathers has been broken, wherever various innovations have been introduced in faith and morals with the aim of “keeping step with the times,” of “progressing,” of not getting out-of-date and of adapting to the demands and

fashions of this world lying in evil—there can be no talk of the true Church.

These “innovations” are sometimes introduced in order to make Orthodox life less of a struggle or to make it appear less “odd” in the eyes of the world. Archbishop Averky wrote that the very concept of doing this is heterodox, since the Orthodox Faith teaches *how to construct life according to the demands of Christian perfection*, whereas heterodoxy

takes from Christianity only those things which are, and to the degree to which they are, *compatible with the conditions of contemporary cultural life*. To lower Orthodoxy’s standard of ascetic struggle is to deny Christians a means of self-purification, to deny them even the chance of soul-saving repentance when they fall short of this standard—in spirit if not in letter. It is to weaken the very foundation of Orthodoxy, which, as Archbishop Averky stated, *is an ascetic faith that calls to ascetic labor in the name of the uprooting of sinful passions and the implanting of Christian virtues.*

In other cases, traditions are dissected and changed in order to feed the pride of contemporary “theologians” who, cut off from the direct, living transmission of tradition, strive to find “new ways of Orthodox theology,” to intellectually “master history” and “restore” Orthodox practice to some kind of artificial purism. They clamor, Archbishop Averky



Icon of the Ark of Salvation
The Orthodox Church amidst Persecutions
and Heresies

wrote, about how essential it is to “renew the Orthodox Church,” about some sort of “reforms in Orthodoxy,” which allegedly has become “set in its ways’ and ‘moribund’... This new breed of “Orthodox” are really no more than modern “scholastics.” They “theologize” without the proper “feel” for the traditional church atmosphere in which saints have been raised.

By their fruits shall ye know them (Mt 7:20): Traditional Orthodoxy, with all its alleged “cultural accretions” and “impurities,” has nurtured saints even in our own times; “restored” or “rediscovered” Orthodoxy, with all its claims of being more pure and better informed, has produced at best, clever men. The spiritual impotence of the latter is the result of its “theologians” “knowing better” than the modern, living repositories of Orthodox sanctity.

Churches, in “keeping step with the times,” will also lose the “savour” of Orthodoxy by being caught up in the spirit of the fashionable “ecumenical movement” which, as we have seen, is a manifestation of the process of world apostasy. Thus, Archbishop Averky stated in different places:

The destructive spirit of Apostasy has already penetrated even our Orthodox Church, extremely prominent hierarchs of which openly are proclaiming the approach of some sort of “new era” and cynically are proposing being done with all the past as they assemble to create some kind of completely “new Church” in close “ecumenical” contact and unanimity with all apostates from the true faith and Church²⁷...For a long time we have heard that they [Orthodox clergy] belong to this movement in order “to witness to the peoples of other confessions the truth of holy Orthodoxy,” but it is difficult for us to believe that this statement is anything more than “throwing powder in our eyes.” Their frequent theological declarations in the international press can lead us to no other conclusion than that they are traitors to the holy Truth.

The Third Level

Finally, the third level of the apostasy that Archbishop Averky warned about is reached when Orthodox churches, even while preserving all the traditions of what they call “true Orthodoxy,” also lose the precious “savour” of their faith and become infected with a worldly spirit disguised as spirituality. This occurs through (1) the loss of basic Christian love, without which all the traditions become *condemning* rather than *grace-bearing*, and (2) the use of outward forms and supports of faith (which are intended to evoke remembrance of the other world) for worldly ends. Through these factors arises another form of “pseudo-Orthodoxy,” this time more subtle because it may be cloaked in all the right externals.

THE JESUS PRAYER

On the Prayer of Jesus, by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, Saint John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, Tennessee (1995), pp 17-23.

In beginning to speak of the prayer of Jesus, I invoke the aid of the all-good and almighty Jesus that He may assist my dullness. In beginning to speak of the prayer of Jesus, I recall the righteous Symeon’s utterance concerning the Lord: *Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against* (Luke 2:34).

Just as the Lord was and is a true sign, a sign that is spoken against, an object of dispute and disagreement between those who know Him and those who do not, so too prayer in His all Holy name, which in the fullest sense is a great and wonderful sign, has become a subject of dispute and disagreement between those who practice it and those who do not. A certain father justly remarks that this way of prayer is rejected only by those who do not know it; they reject it through prejudice and through false ideas that they have formed of it.

Without paying any attention to the outcries of prejudice and ignorance, trusting in the mercy and help of God, we offer, beloved fathers and brothers, our poor treatise (lit. “word”) on the prayer of Jesus on the basis of Holy Scripture, on the basis of Church tradition, on the basis of the writings of the fathers in which the teaching of this all-holy and all-powerful prayer is expounded. *Speechless be the deceitful lips which speak iniquity against His just and magnificent name with arrogance and contempt*, in their profound ignorance and abuse of God’s wonders. As we consider the greatness of the name of Jesus and the saving power of prayer in that name, we cry with spiritual joy and amazement: *How great is the multitude of Thy goodness, O Lord, which Thou hast hid for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that hope in Thee before the sons of men.* (Pss 30:18-20).

The prayer of Jesus is said like this: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* Originally it was said without the addition of the word sinner: this word was added to the other words of the prayer later. This word, remarks St. Nil Sorsky, which implies a consciousness and confession of the fall, is fitting for us and pleasing to God Who has commanded us to offer prayers in acknowledgment and confession of our sinfulness. The fathers allow beginners, in deference to their weakness, to divide the prayer into two halves, and sometimes to say, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner*, and sometimes, *Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* But this is only a concession or indulgence, and not at all an order or rule requiring unflinching compliance. It is much better to say constantly the same, whole prayer, without distracting and bothering the mind with changes or with concern about changes. Even he who finds a change necessary for his weakness should not allow it often. For

example, the first half of the prayer can be prayed till dinner, and the other after dinner. St. Gregory the Sinaite forbids frequent change, saying: *Trees that are often transplanted do not take root.*

Praying by the prayer of Jesus is a divine institution. It was instituted not by means of an apostle or by means of an angel; it was instituted by the Son of God and God Himself. After the mystical supper, among other sublime, final commandments and orders, the Lord Jesus Christ instituted prayer by His name. He gave this way of prayer as a new, extraordinary gift, a gift of infinite value. The apostles partly knew already the power of the name of Jesus; they healed incurable diseases by it, they reduced devils to obedience, conquered, bound and expelled them by it. This most mighty, wonderful name the Lord orders us to use in prayer. He promised that such prayer will be particularly effectual. *Whatsoever ye shall ask*, He said to the holy apostles, *the Father in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* (Jn 14:13-14). *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* (John 16:23-24).

What a wonderful gift! It is a guarantee of unending, infinite blessings! It came from the lips of the unlimited God, clothed in limited humanity and called by the human name of Savior. The name by its exterior form is limited, but it represents an unlimited object, God, from Whom it borrows infinite, divine value or worth, the power and properties of God.

O Giver of a priceless, incorruptible gift! How can we sinful mortals receive the gift? Neither our hands, nor our mind, nor our heart are capable of receiving it. Do Thou teach us to know, as far as we are able, the greatness of the gift, and its significance, and the ways of receiving it, and the ways of using it, that we may not approach the gift in a sinful manner; that we may not be punished for indiscretion and audacity, but that for the right understanding and use of the gift, we may receive from Thee other gifts, promised by Thee, known only to Thee.

From the Gospels, the Acts and the Apostolic Epistles we see the unbounded faith of the holy apostles in the name of the

Lord Jesus and their unbounded reverence for this name. By the name of the Lord Jesus they performed the most striking miracles. There is no instance from which we can learn how they prayed in the name of the Lord. But that is certainly how they prayed. How could they do otherwise when that prayer was given and commanded them by the Lord Himself, and when the order was confirmed by a twofold repetition of it? If Scripture is silent about it, it is silent only because this prayer was in general use and was so well known that it needed no special mention in Scripture. Even in the monuments of the first ages of Christianity that have come down to us, prayer in the name of the Lord is not treated separately but is only mentioned in connection with other matters.

In the life of St. Ignatius the God-bearer, Bishop of Antioch, who was crowned in Rome with a martyr's death under the emperor Trajan, we read the following: "When they

were taking him to be devoured by wild beasts, and he had the name of Jesus constantly on his lips, the pagans asked him why he unceasingly remembered that name. The saint replied that he had the name of Jesus Christ written in his heart and that he confessed with his mouth Him Whom he always carried in his heart. After the saint had been eaten by the wild beasts, by the will of God among his bones his heart was preserved intact. The infidels found it, and then remembered



what St. Ignatius had said. So they cut that heart into two halves, wishing to know whether what they had been told was true. Inside, on the two halves of the heart that had been cut open, they found an inscription in gold letters: Jesus Christ. Thus St. Ignatius was in name and in fact a God-bearer, always carrying Christ our God in his heart, written by the reflection (or meditation) of his mind as with a reed."

St. Ignatius was a disciple of the holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Divine, and was privileged in his childhood to see the Lord Jesus Christ personally. He was that blessed child of whom it is said in the Gospel that the Lord placed him among the apostles who had been arguing about priority, took him in His arms and said: *Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 19:3-4, cf Mk 9:36).

Certainly St. Ignatius was taught the prayer of Jesus by the holy Evangelist and practiced it in that flourishing period of Christianity like all other Christians. At that time all Christians learned the prayer of Jesus, firstly on account of the great importance of the prayer itself, and then on account of the scarcity and costliness of the handwritten holy books, on account of the rarity of literacy (most of the apostles were illiterate), and on account of the convenience, satisfaction and very special action and power of the prayer of Jesus.

In Church history we read the following incident: "A soldier called Neokorus, a native of Carthage, was in the Roman garrison guarding Jerusalem at the time when our Lord Jesus Christ suffered His voluntary passion and death for the redemption of the human race. Seeing the miracles worked at the Lord's death and resurrection, Neokorus believed in the Lord and was baptized by the apostles. After finishing his term of service, Neokorus returned to Carthage and shared the treasure of faith with his whole family. Among those who accepted Christianity was Callistratus, Neokorus' grandson. On reaching the required age, Callistratus joined the army. The detachment of soldiers to which he was drafted consisted of idolaters. They watched Callistratus and noticed that he did not worship the idols but spent a long time in prayer at night alone. Once they eavesdropped while he was praying and heard that he constantly repeated the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. So they reported him to the commanding officer. Saint Callistratus, who confessed Jesus alone in the dark at night, also confessed Him publicly in the light of day, and sealed his confession with his blood."

Teaching on the prayer of Jesus appears in Church writers of the fourth century such as St. John Chrysostom and St. Isaiah the Solitary. A writer of the fifth century, St. Hesychius of Jerusalem, already complains that the practice of this prayer has greatly declined among monks. As time went on, this decline increased more and more. So the holy fathers tried by their writings to encourage the practice. The last writer on this prayer was the blessed elder, Hieromonk Seraphim of Sarov. The elder himself did not write the instructions bearing his name; they were written down from his words by one of the monks under his direction, but they are written with remarkable unction. Now the practice of the prayer of Jesus has been almost abandoned by monks and nuns. St. Hesychius names carelessness as the cause of this neglect. It must be admitted that this accusation is just.

The gracious power of the prayer of Jesus is contained in the divine name itself of the God-man, our Lord Jesus Christ. Although there is abundant evidence in Holy Scripture proving the greatness of the name of God, yet the importance of this name was explained with special precision by the holy Apostle Peter before the Jewish Sanhedrin, when the council asked the Apostle *by what power, or by what name*, he had given healing to a man lame from birth. *Then Peter, filled*

with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:7-12). This witness is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle's mouth, tongue, and voice were merely the Spirit's instruments.

Another organ of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle of the Gentiles, gives similar evidence. *Whosoever, he says, shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* (Rom 10:13). *Christ Jesus ... humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.* (Phil 2:5-10).

Seeing the distant future, David, an ancestor of Jesus according to the flesh, sang the greatness of the name of Jesus, and vividly described the effect of this name, the struggle by means of it with the principles of sin, its power to deliver those who pray by it from captivity to the passions and demons, and the triumph of those who win a spiritual victory by the name of Jesus. Let us listen to inspired David! *O Lord our Lord, he cries, how wonderful is Thy name in all the earth! For Thy magnificence is lifted high above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou perfected praise, because of Thine enemies, to destroy the enemy and avenger.* (Pss 8:2). Exactly! The greatness of the name of Jesus is beyond the comprehension of rational creatures of earth and heaven. The comprehension of it is incomprehensibly grasped by child-like simplicity and faith. In this same disinterested spirit we must approach prayer in the name of Jesus and continue in that prayer. Our perseverance and attention in prayer must be like the constant striving of an infant for his mother's breasts. Then prayer in the name of Jesus will be crowned with complete success, the invisible foes will be defeated, and the enemy and avenger will be finally crushed. The enemy is called the avenger because he tries to take from those who pray (especially at times, not incessantly) after prayer what they have obtained during prayer.

In order to win a decisive victory unceasing prayer and constant vigilance are indispensable.

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Editor's Note: This article is written from one perspective; the thonite tradition, on the other hand, is "*Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me.* Orthodox Christians must follow the pattern assigned to them by their spiritual father.

ON THE THRICE-HOLY HYMN: “HOLY GOD, HOLY MIGHTY, HOLY IMMORTAL, HAVE MERCY UPON US”

By the saintly bishop of Florina Augoustinos N. Kantiotes (+2010), from “Orthodox Homilies on the Divine Liturgy,” vol. One, translated from Greek by Asterios Gerostergios, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts (1986), pp. 196-199.



The hymns which are chanted following the Small Entrance, and we hear the exclamation of the priest: *For Thou our God art holy, and to Thee we ascribe glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, unto ages of ages.* The Thrice-Holy hymn is then chanted: *Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us.*

This hymn has great importance for the Church. A historian of Byzantium, Theophanes, mentions the following event concerning this hymn. When Proclus (433 A.D.), a student of St. John Chrysostom, was Patriarch of Constantinople, the city was shaken by earthquakes continuously for four months. The inhabitants, terrified, ran outside the walls of the city to a place called Campoi, and there prayed, and with tears in their eyes asked God to stop the earthquakes.

One day, when the earth was trembling and the people were crying, *Lord have mercy*, an unseen power carried off a child from the midst of the people, raising him towards heaven. And when the child came back to earth, he said that he heard a divine voice which ordered him to tell the bishop that intercessions must be chanted as follows: *Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us.* Patriarch Proclus ordered that this hymn be chanted. And when they began chanting it, the earthquakes stopped.

With prayer, with the *Holy God...*, the earthquakes stopped. Perhaps someone who is educated, and boasts of his science, will laugh upon hearing this, and say: “What’s this you’re saying to us? An earthquake is a natural phenomenon and has nothing to do with God...” But the word of God assures us that earthquakes and all the other natural phenomena which take place in the world are dependent on God’s power. The psalm says: *Who looketh on the earth and maketh it tremble, Who toucheth the mountains and they smoke.* (Pss 103:35). St. John Chrysostom says that the cause of earthquakes is God’s wrath, and the cause of God’s wrath is the sins which people do continuously, young and old, clergy and laity.

The faithful, therefore, chanted the *Holy God...* with great contrition during the terrible earthquake of Constantinople, and the miracle took place. We also chant this hymn today in church. It is chanted by fine voiced chanters who try with all their skill to chant beautifully in order to gratify the people. He who can prolong his chanting for a very long time is considered a chanter of renown. But we ask: What is the spiritual benefit of this? Does God listen to these voices? Does He become merciful of our sins because of this chanting? It is possible that because of these ostentations of the chanters, and the lack of piety and contrition of us all, we sin in the church and provoke God’s anger. Alas! How far we, contemporary Christians, are from the worship of God *in spirit and truth.* (Jn 4:23).

There is a need to return to the piety of our ancestors. We must return to the ways of ancient times, when Christians chanted the Thrice-Holy Hymn with tears in their eyes. For when the Christian is taught, and knows what is meant by all that is said and takes place in the Divine Liturgy, there is the hope that this Christian shall feel the grandeur of sacred worship.

Let us therefore see briefly what the *Thrice-Holy Hymn* means.

Holy God. We spoke about the Saints in previous homilies. But by comparison with God, what is even the most holy man? One drop in comparison with an endless ocean. One ray in comparison with the sun. God only is holy in an absolute degree; God is the source of holiness and sanctification. Man is enlightened by God and receives the power (from God) in order to live a life of holiness, which no matter what great heights it reaches, is small and unimportant in comparison with the infinite holiness of God. No one is holy like God.

Holy Mighty. Power is another attribute of God. Man is also called mighty. But man’s power, no matter how great it is, no matter what mighty things he can do—even if he flies to the stars of the heavens—is small and unimportant in comparison with the all-mightiness of God. The Lord of power is God. From Him comes every power and energy in the world. As a certain poet says, “One of God’s looks has the power to shake the earth;” it is possible for the universe to dissolve into the elements “from which it was made” and a new world to be created.

Holy Immortal. Another attribute of God is immortality. God is immortal. What does immortality mean? While all things waste away and are destroyed, God remains unaltered, imperishable, eternal, immortal. He is life. He is the source of life. And if man is immortal, he is immortal not because of himself, not, that is to say, because of his own power, but because God created him *according to His image and likeness* and gave him the gift of immortality. Man is immortal in soul, perishable in body, because of sin. But

this perishable body shall become imperishable and eternal in the kingdom of heaven.

In the Thrice-Holy Hymn, the word *Holy* is repeated three times. This threefold repetition is done purposely to show the three Persons of God, that great mystery of our faith that God is three *Hypostases* (or Persons). We worship and glorify one Divinity in three Persons. These three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are one Divinity. That is why we do not say in the Thrice-Holy Hymn: “You (plural) have mercy on us,” but “have Thou (singular) mercy on us.”^[1] The three attributes we have mentioned—holiness, mightiness, and immortality—are attributes of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *As Father, as Son, as Holy Spirit, O Holy Trinity, glory to Thee!*

My dear readers! We have seen the miracle that took place in Constantinople. We have seen the meaning of the Thrice-Holy Hymn. Priests, chanters, and laity: let us be careful during the time of the Thrice-Holy Hymn, and let us pray to the Triune God with pious contrition and a spirit of humility.

† † †

[1]: In the Greek, from which we translate this, the author uses a plural construction which cannot be directly reproduced in English, except by indication: you (plural). and thou (singular). In the Thrice-Holy Hymn as given to the Church by this miraculous occurrence, the thou form is used, and definitely has a singular character.



Asaving medicine for the cure of your wounded soul is sincere repentance, done with humility and contrition of heart, with tears and sighs, with hate and aversion towards sin, and a firm decision to no longer sin... God's compassion is greater than your sins...

Have courage, faith, hope and love in God, with patience unto the end, to gain your immortal soul which the whole world is not equal to.

The most easy, brief and safe path to heaven is humility. This is the only safe and un-dangerous path... All saints through humility were elevated, honored, glorified, made wondrous and sanctified by God. If you take away humility no one would be a saint... Inner and real humility is for one to feel, that whatever he has, life, health, wealth, wisdom all are foreign, are gifts of God.

Blaspemy brings the wrath of the Lord upon the rulers, the armies and the nations... the blasphemers are the most impious and sinful of all... It is an absolute need that the wound of blasphemy be completely wiped out from the Nation in order for it to have good fortune, to be glorified and uplifted.

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

THE ORTHODOX SCIENTIST TODAY

By Fr. George Metallinos of blessed memory (+2019), professor emeritus at the School of Theology of the University of Athens, Greece.



According to its epistemological definition, a scientist is the one who is (and is rightly acknowledged as) the one who has mastered a science, pursuant to specialized studies. More specifically, scientists are those who “stand above”—that is, who possess a full and certain knowledge, but also possess

the prerequisite of experience in the area of that knowledge. One might also add to the scientist's prerequisites his performance in research. His studies and the diploma that he attains is merely that person's introduction into the sphere of the science that he has been studying. His specialization in conjunction with his research within a sphere of science is that which entitles someone to be characterized as Scientist.

The non-expert is not a scientist, but rather a thinker, who relies on an arbitrary opinion—that is, on a mere conjecture. That is why we must not be surprised when improvable positions are propagated by “scientists,” especially in the realm of History. This happens, because an unsupported “knowledge” is being produced and reproduced for the deception of many – which may be embraced by the semi-literate, but not by the specialized scientist.

Science, as Defined by our Holy Fathers

The blessed Chrysostom: *There is also human wisdom (that is, in parallel to divine wisdom), which is the experience that pertains to art and to the useful things in life.* Also, according to Gregory the Theologian: *Science presupposes “study” and “intelligence.”* In other words, he acknowledges an inherent and an acquired element. Scientific knowledge is not without prerequisites. Alongside the inherent elements (intelligence, inclination) there must also be study, diligence, perseverance.

I usually tell my students that ranks and statuses are for the few; however, scientific knowledge belongs to everyone. *And your joy no-one will take away from you...* (Jn 16:22). So, in the absence of intelligence, acquired knowledge will not transform a person into a “scientist.” Knowledge presupposes the natural foundation—intelligence—which is not produced simply by studying.

A number of years ago, a University professor had published a work titled “How Even Dopes Acquire Diplomas”! Moreover, intelligence is amplified and enriched only through life experience; as an example of this statement I could mention our national hero, General Theodore Kolokotronis, who had not received any significant education. Once, while he was

sitting atop a rock outside the Athens University building that was still under construction, the (then young) king Otto arrived on horseback. The general apologized for being seated in the king's presence. Otto asked him in a friendly tone: "What were you thinking about?" Kolokotronis pointed towards the Palace (which was in plain view at the time, unobstructed as it is today, by high-rise buildings), and he circumspectly replied: "My king, I was thinking that one day, this house (the University building) will devour yours"! He did not need a degree or diploma, to have made that politically astute observation....

Furthermore, regardless of how high-level a scientific instruction may have been, it will not, on its own, either create or build human personality, as that exists independently of education. Examples are Saint Basil the Great and Saint Anthony the Great. It is History, which has "anointed" both of them as "Great." The former had (also) acquired the entirety of human wisdom, while the latter had no school education; however, their experience with uncreated divine Grace (divine wisdom) is what made them both share the characterization of "Great." Genuinely wise are only the saints. To them, human (natural) knowledge can be rendered useful only in the exercising of their *poemantic opus* (roughly translated as "pastoral work," *Ed.*). Its absence, however, does not diminish their personality or their contribution to mankind.

On the other hand, school knowledge can be linked to various moral concerns; for example, it can generate or breed ambitious plans and objectives such as a "successful career" and human "glory"—egocentrically— aspiring to recognition and financial success and ultimately to power and "the good life." This morbid mentality is expressed by a popular expression that is frequently used and reveals the weaker aspects of our civilization: "He became someone," we say of the one who rises socially; and specifically, of the one who has become wealthy. But what is oftentimes not examined is **how** that came to be!

It so happens, that those who ascend socially and financially with science as their springboard sometimes forget the purpose of their studies, which is to minister to the whole of society—to which we are lifelong debtors, given that the body of the populace (the Homeland) has provided our education and we are obliged to pay back that debt by utilizing the knowledge we acquired. Our objective, therefore, cannot be for personal recognition and relish; it should be our elevation to becoming a healthy member of the societal corpus, which functions on the basis of the principle of collaboration and reciprocation, per the Apostle Paul's teaching regarding the Church as the *body of Christ*. (1 Cor 12:27).

A Healthy Conscience

That is why building a healthy conscience is imperative for the avoidance of knowledge-related pathologies, whose basic signs are the following:

(a) The perverted use of knowledge and warping of the truth. A characteristic example is the atom bomb and the use thereafter of atomic energy for the enforcement of universal domination. The fact that one of the basic creators of the atomic bomb—Julius Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967)—recanted his participation in the misuse of atomic energy is immensely significant. "Pater Kosmas" the Saint (1714-1779) used to speak of "godless letters," while the great Feodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) had said that "without God, everything is permissible"!

(b) Puffing up, arrogance (1 Cor 8:1, *knowledge puffeth up*), which seals the behaviors of many of us. That is why James, the Lord's brother, checks us (3:13): *Who is wise and with knowledge among you? Let him show his works, by his good conduct, in the meekness of wisdom.*

Conversely, true science seeks the Truth in order to minister to fellow-man and to society. According to Clement of Alexandria (215), the whole of Hellenic philosophy is about "the seeking of truth." Thus was the meaning of science—as given by Hellenism—recognized by a Christian intellectual. This is the distinctive mark of a true scientist. According to St. Basil the Great: *The more that one examines in depth the reasons by which beings are created and how their existence is regulated by Providence, the more he will perceive the majesty of the Lord and will all the more magnify the Lord.* In other words, he spontaneously arrives at the Psalmist's confession when acknowledging the Creator: *How magnified are Your works, Lord; in wisdom You have made everything.* (Pss 103:24). However, the Saint adds: *It is not possible with a blurred eye to claim as accurate the understanding of what is viewed and nor with a blurred heart arrive at the understanding of the truth.*

Furthermore, Job had said: "To abstain from evils, that is science" (28:28), which will be repeated in the quote ascribed to Plato: "Science that is separate from virtue... cunning, not wisdom." The scientist who is honest and self respecting acts orthodoxically, unawares.

The Orthodox Scientist

Here too we can perceive what an "orthodox scientist" is. It is the one who transcends the simple scientist and his morality—which can of course exist—and who seeks to reach the in-Christ charismatic ethos with his incorporation in an in-Christ, Holy Spiritual way of life, on which he rests his entire course and his presence. He is not satisfied with a formal relationship with the Faith and with being Christian only in name; instead, he struggles to become a carrier of the tradition: that is, prophetic, apostolic and patristic. He also aligns his science (his research) with the course towards *theosis* (deification), ascribing to it a soteriological content. He believes all that the Saints do, and his conscience (*phronema*) is what shapes and determines his entire life and his scientific ethos. He lives within Grace,

with his spiritual living. The secular scientist, moving—in the best case—within the boundaries of morality, is content with moral achievements. The Orthodox scientist seeks the grace of God and surrenders his entire scientific opus to Him, as his feat of piety and philanthropy.

What, therefore, is the self-awareness of an Orthodox scientist?

1. He lives his science as a potential for *theosis* (deification). Science becomes one of the means within that course. According to the Apostle Paul: *Whether you eat, or whether you drink, or whether you are doing anything, do everything for the glory of God.* (1 Cor 10:31); in other words, so that God is glorified with your labours and you partake of His Grace.

2. He has the awareness of one who is the recipient of a gift, as admitted by Moses in Exodus (31:3): *And I have filled him with a divine spirit of skill and intelligence and knowledge in every work...* (referring to the architect). This is expounded by Basil the Great in his own way: *For this, woe be to the one who does not attribute the cause of prudence and knowledge (science) to God... Given that wisdom is the science of divine and human things, let him attribute the cause of these to the Holy Spirit.*"

3. The scientific opus thus acquires a spiritual character, shaping a spirit of humility and prudence. *Tell me, therefore, why you boast*—observes Basil the Great—*about good things as though they are yours, instead of confessing the giver of those gifts?* Whatever good thing we have is a gift of God. *Every perfect gift descends from above, by the Father of Lights.* (Divine Liturgy). Why then do we boast? This is what the Apostle Paul had also said: *Therefore what do you have, which you had not received? And if you had received, why do you boast as if you were not a recipient?* (1 Cor 4:7) The blessed Chrysostom is even blunter: *Why, O man, O smoke, O futile one, do you think so grandiosely?*

Allow me at this point to—confessedly—reveal a purely poemantic method of confronting the danger of vanity, as implemented by my ever-memorable Spiritual Father in Kerkyra, the humble Father George Savvanis. On the one hand, he would encourage the disposition for learning, except that he would give it an altruistic content. As he used to say, "Learn as much as you can, so that you can take the side of the one who is not learned." On the other hand, he would check one's tendency for self-importance: "You know, cleverness is a very fragile thing. If a single drop of blood seeps into the brain, even the cleverest person becomes an imbecile!" I assure you that these guidelines continue to be operative in my life to this day, with analogous dynamics along my course. May his memory be eternal!

4. The Orthodox scientist sees everything through the prism of eternity. This was also indicated by Basil the Great, in "To the Young," when evaluating human media from within the perspective of salvation: *Whichever things contribute towards it* (he is referring to one's embarking on another lifestyle—the

Christian one), *we say that one must love and pursue them, with all their might; whereas those that do not lead there, being of no value, should be disregarded.* That is, he recommends those aspects of life which have the power to reinforce one's course towards *theosis* (deification).

5. He is also aware that with his scientific opus he is participating in God's creative opus in the world—in fact, not only as a researcher, by tracing the essence of beings, but also as a teacher, by introducing his students to it. That is how every science and art is elevated, as were the scientific progress of our Holy Fathers: Basil the Great's broad scientific knowledge, Saint Gregory the Theologian's poetry, the blessed Chrysostom's rhetorical powers, the historical-critical opus of the blessed Photios, John the Damascene's extensive musicological knowledge, the scientific achievements of Eugenios Voulgaris and Nicephorus Theotokis, etc... All the Fathers and Theologians of the Church were discerned for their worldly wisdom also, except that they had made sure to incorporate it in their path towards sanctification—both their own, as well as their fellow men's.

More especially, the natural scientist (who is the most "vulnerable" to temptations that can lead to a sense of self-importance and centrifugal tendencies in matters of the Faith) has the most potential to attain knowledge pertaining to creation—to the natural world; however, if he responds as an Orthodox faithful, he knows that he is not at risk of any conflict between Faith and his science inside him. Why? Because there are two gnosiologies: of the created and the Uncreated; of the natural and the supernatural. Moreover, natural knowledge has intellect/logic as its instrument. **Supernatural knowledge (*theosis*) has the "nous" inside the heart, as our Hesychast tradition teaches us.** This is what Basil the Great elucidates: *There is wisdom, the science of divine and human things and the causes thereof... and there is human wisdom, the experience of the things of life, where we call "wise" those who are scientists of each of the useful things.*

The topic is however elucidated further by the great Eugenios Voulgaris, from within his own experience (Against Latins): *What does the wisdom of the world have in common with the wisdom of God? The wisdom of the world is a delusion, it is folly, it is moronic, according to Paul, when it is separated from the wisdom of God, which is the true Faith. This is actual wisdom: the unerring, faultless wisdom, the upright wisdom. One learns the other wisdom in the contemporary Academies, and this wisdom in the ancient Church; the other wisdom in philosophers' books, this wisdom in the writings of the Fathers; the other one with the sharpness of acumen, this one with the fervor of a pure and intimate soul; the other one with complicated cogitations of cunning arguments, this one with the simple and steadfast consent of an unhesitating faith; the other one with curious research and examination, this one with a carefree, captivity of the nous.*

Professors in natural science are the specialized scientists, but in supernatural knowledge, they are the Spiritual Fathers-Elders and finally the Saints. **Conflict occurs, only when the one type of knowledge is judged by the other one's criteria.** In our tradition however, the coexistence of both types of knowledge in the same person is possible, as is the case with many of our Saints who had also received the highest level of secular education. This is what our Church chants for the mathematician Saint Catherine: *Having received the wisdom of God since childhood, the Martyr also learnt higher studies well.*

Saint Gregory the Theologian has given us the most classic position on this matter in his Funerary Homily to Basil the Great. He first rebuts the rejection of secular wisdom: *For education is not a dishonorable thing, just because some believe so...* then adding: *...thus, we have accepted the inquisitive and theoretical element (of secular wisdom), but as for whatever leads to demons and to the depths of delusion and perdition, we have rejected it... because with these too we have benefited piety-wise, since we learned of the better from the worse, and have made their weakness the strength of our word.* This means that benefit can be derived, even from the negative elements of secular education—that is, the problem rests in the inner prerequisites, and with what conscience one views things.

6. The Orthodox scientist assists Science in transcending all the pseudo-dilemmas, by giving it a proper orientation. For example, in Mechanical Genetics priority is given to the worth of humanity and it does not absolutize research, knowing that all institutions exist for the ministering to mankind: *The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath.* (Mk 2:27). In other words, he learns to look at man and the things of man, from within the perspective of the holy Fathers, like St. Gregory of Nyssa when proclaiming to the scientists of his time that man may be an “animal,” a living being, but he is a “deifiable animal:” an animal that can become a god through grace, deified, whereas no ordinary animal can attain that height.

And it is at this precise point that the essential difference between man and animals lies, and not in quantitative differences—for example in the brain. Because, like his brother, St. Basil the Great used to say that only man is *called upon to be a god.* He has inside him the divine commandment to become a god by grace. How, then, can an Orthodox scientist not respect Man, but instead use him as a guinea pig for his research, or ruthlessly slaughter him with abortions?

This is also why he knows there is self-restriction in his research or in the exercise of his “profession.” He does not seek to substitute God, since he cannot create *ex nihilo*, (“out of nothing,” *Ed.*) but learns to preserve balances and hierarchies. Divine knowledge produces a Holy-Spiritual ethos, thus elevating science to an inter-human ministry, and the scientist to a ministrant of the Most High, inasmuch

as he is the one who can officiate in the mystery of divine philanthropy.

7. This type of scientist, who fulfils our traditional prerequisites, is especially necessary in our day and age, with the spreading of exploitation-use of science, conceitedness and the anti-human spirit and arbitrariness in the implementation of science—always to the detriment of man, who is always the victim. That was why Gregory the Theologian noted: *For, the said wise man is not—to me—a wise man; nor is the one who may have a versatile tongue, but has an unstable and untrained soul... but rather, he who speaks little about virtue, but is exemplary by his many acts, and additionally whose word is trustworthy throughout his life...* In other words, according to the holy Father, a wise man is the one who possesses a purity of heart – in which case, he does not exhaust himself with garrulous speeches about virtue, but instead proclaims it with his way of life, which then makes him trustworthy—in other words, justifies his scientific worth. The in-Christ ethos avouches the scientist.

This type of scientist becomes the *leaven, that leavens the entire lump* (of dough) (1 Cor 5:6). He becomes the *light and the salt* of the scientific family and more broadly, of society (Mt 5:13). What is important, however, is that he thus acquires the potential to exert his influence on the environment “for the good.” Why, indeed, do we invoke the viewpoints of important scientists? It is because they can influence society. So, just as an “atheist” scientist can demolish consciences by propagating his denial, likewise the Orthodox scientist builds up consciences, indirectly exercising a missionary opus through his confession—his witness of scientific truth—which remains theocentric.

This is how the ever-memorable Von Braun used to theologize, when saying: “There is no conflict between Faith and Science, since Faith is confessed with the Creator and Science with the created.” On the other hand, a scientist who dares to argue that there is no room in research for creation and Creator—since everything (according to him) “originates from nothing and ends up in nothing”—can “kill” one’s conscience. He of course does not realize that this stance of his is not Science, because Science does not possess special instruments for capturing God; it is Metaphysics, in which case, he is negating himself as a scientist! I was however impressed recently, when reading a statement by our important anthropologist, Ms. Katerina Harvati: “Science gives replies to the how, and religion to the why”!

And you too, Ladies and Gentlemen, my Colleagues in Science, by making use of all the means and potentials that are available to you (journalism, mass media), but also in discussions both public and private, can, beyond the scientific truth, also offer society the divine truth.

Thus, **the more patristic you are, the truer you become.** Do not forget that!

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CONFESSION MUST BE PREPARED AND SHOULD BE MADE BEFORE EXPERIENCED SPIRITUAL FATHERS

From the writings of St. Nicodemus the Agiorite, an "Orthodox Kypseli" publication.



First of all you should examine to find out who the best spiritual father is. As Basil the Great says, people do not reveal (expose) their bodily wounds and pains to everyone but only to experienced doctors who know how to cure them. Similarly sins should be revealed only to those who can cure them... But even when you confess all your sins and hide one, out of shame, you should know that not only the sins you have confessed remain unforgiven but you also add up one more for yourself for hiding one, as is said in the confessor's book by Chrysanthos of Jerusalem. Therefore you are wisely advised by a Teacher that if you want to defeat the devil—who brings you shame for a sin—you should confess first the sin for which you feel the greatest shame. If you know how to write, brother, note down your sins on a piece of paper so as not to forget them.

You should also know that unless you properly examine your sins before confession, the sins you may have forgotten remain unforgiven through your willful forgetting. And all of this is so because

you had failed to examine your sins before confession. However, if you prepare properly before confession and happen to forget a sin, being human, this sin, some say, is forgiven along with the others you have confessed because this kind of forgetfulness is considered as a involuntary and not as a willful one.

If you prepare yourself and happen to forget this sin, after the confession you should return to your confessor to reveal even this sin. As we read in the patristic books, a certain abba could see the souls going to Hades in the same way snow comes down to earth in winter. Why was this happening? Not because Christians do not confess their sins but because they do not confess them properly without making up their minds not to repeat the same sins and also because they do not tear their hearts out, a decisive pain for correction; instead, they rend their garments, according to the prophet, falsely; *Rend your heart and not your garments.* (Joel 2:13).

There is no point, my brother, in simply saying *I have sinned for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord*, or *I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood*. This is what Saul (1 Sam 15:24) and Judas said (Mt 27:4). However, it was of no avail to them. **The most important thing in repentance is deciding to change your life.** Do not say; "If I can, I will be better," or that "I would not like to sin again." Do not say that. Instead, say; "I have decided to correct myself, I do not want to sin any more in the same way I do not want to drink a cup full of poison, in the same way I do not want to fall from a precipice, in the same way I do not want to kill myself."