

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

OUR NEW LIFE: THE NATIVITY OF OUR SAVIOR

By Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky, +1936), first Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. This was his 1906 Nativity homily to his flock.

This new life is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is now born in Bethlehem, as He Himself said during the last days of His earthly life: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.* (Jn 14:6).

What is this new life, brothers, and why do people long for it? Because before Christ, people were dissatisfied with their former life, and even now all those who separate themselves from Christ are dissatisfied; they are dissatisfied because earthly life does not correspond to their desires. They want to be healthy and full, but life burdens them with sicknesses and hunger; they want riches and high ranks, but poverty and dishonor goad them, and if they do not fall into these disasters, they still remain dissatisfied with what they have, and desire more good things.

Still, people have not all sought outward prosperity; there have always been those who were burdened by their own lawless life—both by their

own and that of the whole world; the same people who were burdened by not knowing what would happen to them after death; who lamented the defeat or destruction of their fatherland; complained that there was no righteousness on earth, but rather deception and violence. For such people life was yet more burdensome than for lovers of self; the latter sought a consolation for their woes, albeit temporary, in drunkenness, debauchery, fighting and robbery, but the better people did not

see a ray of light anywhere; their soul was burdened by their own and others' sins and then, after repentance, their evil will drew them again into sin.

Little by little sacred hope and good desires were eaten away from

their souls, and at last sinful passions gradually enslaved them, but they still did not give them full satisfaction, because all the admonitions cannot rejoice an elevated soul, but only increase its inner torment. These people were filled with a grief of a similar kind when they studied the people's way of life; they saw that there is never any human justice on earth, as the wise Solomon said: *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men*



The Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes our readers a blessed and prosperous 2019. We completed our sixteenth year of publication, in spite of the challenges we have faced and ONLY through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers worldwide. We humbly wish to remind you that this publication is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2019 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.

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

PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688
USA

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

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of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. (Eccl 9:11). And it is usually the sly, flatterers, cheats and robbers who take advantage of this chance.

One could bring forward many more pictures from life in order to show how little life without Christ corresponds to our desires, be they good or bad. Because of this you find ordinary life burdensome, especially when you know human malice and have understood how impossible it is for people to hope for a more reasonable, just life. Laws against evildoers have been thought up to punish them, and they have contrived to have the innocent punished, deceiving the judges or else buying them with bribes or threats. People were punished for theft, so instead of theft they have started making each other drunk, so that the victim of their malice would make himself surrender his good to them, and his soul should also perish in wine; people tried to teach each other reason through philosophy, but the subtle malice of deceivers penetrated even here, and, under the name of philosophy, has taught youths the foulest concepts, convincing them that there is no good or evil on the earth, but only advantage and disadvantage. This is how people were languishing, like a bird with his leg tied: he flaps his wings, wants to fly, but falls down again because of the string.

Now you will understand why the Holy Apostle John hastens to rejoice those who listen to and read his epistle, assuring them that a new life has appeared in the Savior Who has been born. All the believing Jews had long been awaiting such an Envoy, or Messiah, and the wisest of the pagans had been waiting also. They hoped that the Messiah would both make the path of virtuous life easier for each person, and also establish righteousness on the earth, so that the sinners would no longer dominate over the righteous,

nor the pagans over the rightly believing Jews; they hoped, on the contrary, that the manifested Son of God would Himself become a righteous king-conqueror, subdue the pagans and establish righteousness and general happiness on earth, and, in general, bring a new, blessed life to the earth.

And really, He both brought new life and called Himself the life of all. And those who have accepted His life, followed in His footsteps and united themselves with Him, have really ceased to experience that satisfaction with life which oppressed and still oppresses people who have not come to know Christ.

What? Did they immediately become rich, famous, healthy, free from sinful passions? No, brothers, they became poorer and more inglorious than all; remaining in labor and fasting, they did not know the pleasure of bodily health, and increased the warfare with passions yet more, because they were now also struggling with such desires and thoughts as they had formerly not even counted as sins—self-love, anger and lustful desire, for example.

In what way did they become blessed? From what afflictions did the grace of Christ deliver them, and what condition of happiness did it bring them?

One condition for happiness, brothers: willingly to refuse happiness, riches, glory, the desire for health, rest. They turned their hearts away from everything towards which people had formerly striven, except for virtue, and came to love everything; they were reconciled with everything that people had formerly considered to be their greatest sorrow, except sin and vice. And when they disposed their hearts like this, sin ceased to be so alluring, virtue ceased to be burdensome. On the contrary, they began gradually to find in it that source of joy which the pagans had found only in earthly pleasures.

This is the meaning of the Lord's words: *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek ... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.* (Mt. 6:31-33).

It is not said in vain, brothers, that Christ brought new life to the earth. We see that he turned the human soul around completely; changed its nature, as it were. Formerly people accumulated wealth, now they have started to give it away; formerly they feared prisons and torments, now the Apostles exultantly thank God for them; formerly they feared afflictions, now St. James writes to the Christians: *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.* (1:2). On earth, as before, there is injustice, and sickness, and poverty, and all kinds of offences, and the more time passes, the more of this there will be, as the Lord predicted, as well as the Holy Apostles Peter, Jude, Paul and John. But the souls of Christians were not overwhelmed or crushed by all these afflictions. They came to know another blessedness—inner and spiritual—and if they grieved about anything, then it was only about their falls into sin and the sins of their neighbors.

How, through what acts of His life, did our Savior change the whole essence of our souls, or our lives?

First of all, by His very Nativity. That transformation of the human soul and life, which He accomplished in Himself, was reflected in all its clarity in the town of Bethlehem. This little town in those days reflected the entire life of the whole human race.

The life of man is a universal struggle for comfort and earthly advantages. The multitude of people who had gathered in Bethlehem was crowded into various dwellings on a cold night; probably the poor envied the rich in their comfort, the rich harshly drove unwanted lodgers out of their homes, and became angry when the overcrowding forced them unwillingly to share their accommodation with others. At least, that is how it always is when a lot of people are crowded together.

Look what happens according to the customs of the new life. He to Whom all the houses, all the towns, and the whole universe belong, deprives Himself of the last human dwellings and takes up His abode together with beasts, committing

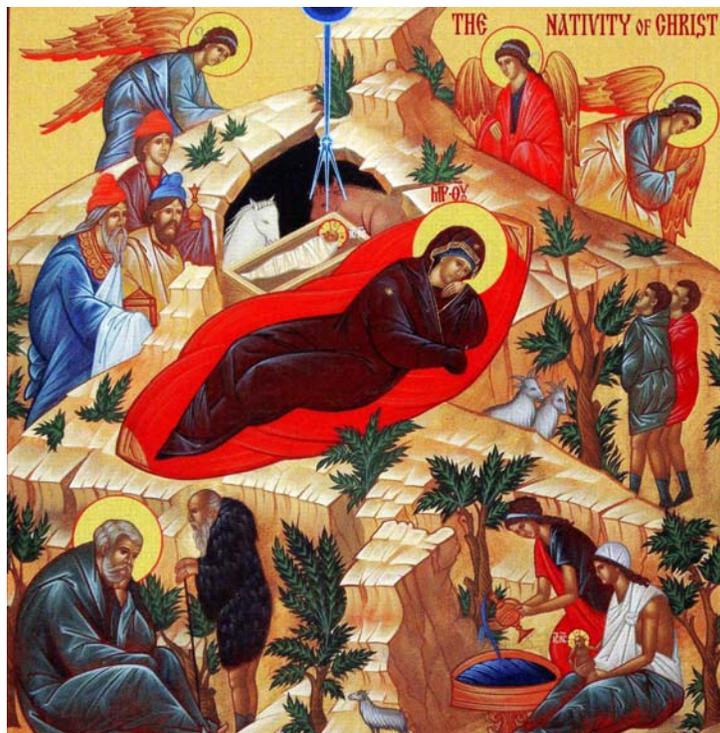
Himself to an irrational manger instead of the throne of Cherubim. O people! Is it for you to struggle and torment each other for preference in honor, cleanliness and comfort, when God does not spurn not being allowed in to where people are and is satisfied with an animal shed!

Man! You murmured about your poverty, you looked with an envious eye on the rich and famous, you lamented the poverty of your own hut, you grieved that you are accounted as one of the simple folk. Go down yet lower in your station in life, and you will be accounted to be with God! You considered it a great honor to approach the doorstep of a lord, but look how easily you can obtain a dwelling equal to God's house. You look at palaces with desire, because kings live in them or have lived in them; look rather at the stall where the incarnate Son of God dwelt. You can see the be-

ginning of the new teaching, of the new life, of the new customs. If you follow after Christ in this way, no place will be crowded for you. If everyone takes to heart the image of Christ's life, then there will be plenty of room and no offence for anyone.

But you may say: I would not grieve about poverty, but I am crushed by my heavy daily labor. I sow and reap bread, but other people eat it, I herd the flock, but the landlords drink the milk, I tailor the cloth, but others wear it.

Perhaps the enemy also tempted the Bethlehem shepherds with just such thoughts, when they were keeping watch by night outside the town which was plunged in sleep, and herded the townspeople's flocks; but if they had accepted such thoughts, they would not have become the most blessed of people. There were then many people in the town who were rich, famous and not occupied with anything, but it was not to them that the angel appeared, announcing the birth of the pre-eternal One; it was not they, but these paupers deprived of their night's sleep who were granted the heavenly vision. They taught the whole world to sing those blessed words which resounded in the heavens: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will among men.* (Lk 2:14). They were the first people, after Her Who had given birth to the super-essential One, who were granted to behold Him and worship Him and glorify the Most Pure Mother of the Lamb and the Shepherd.



And further, Christian, go over in your mind everything that the Gospel reading about the Nativity of Christ has proclaimed to us. All our customs, all concepts changed into the new life of the whole of human nature.

Are you grieving over the fact that you have been subject to unjust persecution? But surely you are not more righteous than Christ, Who was pursued by the impious Herod. Are you grieving over exile or banishment? Remember the flight into Egypt. Do you find the yoke of the law burdensome? Gaze on the circumcision of the Lord and His presentation in the Temple on the 40th day. Or are you distressed at having to submit to one who is worse than you, while you yourself are more enlightened and better than others? But Jesus was far more superior than you to the elder Joseph and, however, He submitted to him. Do you consider your advisor or superior has acquired his authority unworthily and by chance? But the Lord Jesus revered His imagined father as a real one.

And so understand that the burden of life is not in the labor, not in the poverty, not in obedience, not in bearing offences or even persecution—no, but it is in considering that one has need of idleness and riches, self-will and constant pleasure. All this takes the joy of existence away from man, all this is also what causes evil passions and vices in him and nourishes them, and the Lord has delivered us from all these errors, enlightening both poverty and bearing offences, and heavy labour and abasement by His Nativity. This is why the whole world is now chanting: “*Thy Nativity, O Christ Our God, has shone upon the world with the light of knowledge.*”

Those who consider that in envy, they just cannot understand this; nor can those understand it who have received sufficiency and honour in this world, but do not want to give up even a small part of it to others of their own free will; they instead oppress the poor, degrade their subordinates, afflict strangers and make fun of simple folk. Miserable people! You are more unfortunate than those whom you are mocking: they are purified by their afflictions and come close to the Savior Who has been born, but you are removing yourselves from His new life and remain in your former death, as it is said: *He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.* (1 Jn 3:14).

And so, the new life in Christ consists in willingly renouncing worldly goods and not grieving when they are taken away by force. Perhaps you cannot direct your mind this way at once. But to the extent that you willingly deprive yourself of earthly enjoyments, however reluctantly, fast; offend yourself by giving to the poor or giving way to others; do not become angry or take revenge for oppression. Instead, bear offenses in silence. To the extent that you crucify the old man in yourself, to this extent will a new fount of grace-filled life flower out of your heart. *He that*

believeth on Me, says the Lord, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (Jn 7:38).

It is no longer either riches, or health, or glory, or the destruction of enemies that will make you rejoice, but, just as a farmer rejoices over a ripening field, or a hunter over a lot of wild fowl fluttering about, or an artist over the beauty of a sunset—so you will rejoice over prayer, spiritual reading and the opportunity to be kind to your neighbor, either by giving, or consoling one who is grieving, calming one who is angry, or bringing a villain to his senses.

The impious Jews did not want to accept this new life: they wanted earthly happiness, and the destruction of enemies, and human glory, and vain riches. It is the same thing which their foolish pupils want even now, Europeans of various nationalities. They have forgotten Christ, have come to hate Christ's abasement and love the treasures of the land of Egypt, not like the great Moses (Heb 11:26), but *like the ancient foolish people in the wilderness.*

Such people are not only returning themselves to the former pagan madness, but they are also trying to turn ardent youths and our people from the path of the Gospel, and in their blindness they promise them universal riches and happiness through confiscating property from the rich for common use. (The author is referring to communism, *Ed.*) If this division of riches were even possible, even then, what peace, what happiness are possible among the envious? And if people saw their happiness in sufficiency of this kind, then they would not be people, but beasts, who need nothing except satiety and rest.

These people know that they have gone against the Gospel, although they even deny it hypocritically; they deny it, but they feel that for them there is no teaching more hostile than the teaching of Christ. This is just like the Jewish scribes who roused the people against the Romans in quest of their own power, riches and honor. It is not justice, but envious malice that they are sowing on the earth, and, striving for rights, they multiply unrighteousness.

Christ God taught us, brothers, to teach others not to seek for rights, but to renounce them, not to demand equality with the gentry, but self-abasement, not to fight, but to give way, not to commit crimes, but to bear offences. This is how the manifest Sun of Righteousness *hath given us light and understanding* (1 Jn 5:20), has opened for us the path to eternal and blessed life; this is what all righteousness in human society is based on. Then let us, brothers, glorify the Lord Who has appeared, rejoice in His Nativity! Nothing will take this joy away from us—neither poverty, nor offences, nor labour day and night. He has blessed all this, and magnified it, and sanctified it with Himself in the town of Bethlehem. Let us draw instruction from here, and to Him, Who has loved us, glory and honour, power and worship, with the Father and the Spirit for ever. Amen.

THE DEMOCRACY OF HELL

By Fr. Zechariah Lynch, Archangel Michael Orthodox Church, Pueblo, CO.

Hell is a democracy, the Heaven is a Kingdom

[St. John of Kronstadt]

† † †

There is no area of human life which is outside of the governing principles of Truth revealed by God. Humanity may reject Truth but this does not nullify its potency. Truth remains, believed in or not.

When men attempt to construct a mode of existence outside of God they simply begin to participate in hell. Lucifer was the first to cast a vote against God. He refused, of his own will, the Kingdom freely offered by God. He voted no.

When Christians concede that there is some “mythical” realm of the “secular” world which is somehow “independent” from the Truth of Christ, then they are on the way to becoming savorless salt. Secular government then becomes the government of hell. For it is a principle of hell to be insisting on one’s “freedom” from God. Hell is the place that desires to operate without God.

True Christianity has always viewed every aspect and facet of human existence as under the divine guidance of God. There is no area of human life that is outside of the governance of God.

St. John of Damascus says, *Practical philosophy ... is concerned with the virtues. It governs manners and shows how one must behave in society. If it lays down laws for the individual man, it is called ethics; but, if for the entire household, then it is called domestic economy; while, if for cities and countries then it is called politics.*

In Orthodox Christian thought the totality of human existence must be harmonious. Ultimately there can be no true politics without proper and true ethics. As St. John indicates they are inseparably bound together. Truth and proper social order and government are inseparable. Thus, there is no supposedly “secular” area of life that is unaffected by Truth. The only place demanding autonomy from Truth is hell.

And there can be no true ethics without God. For without God there are no ethics at all. There can be no standards of “right and wrong.” For a denial of God is a

denial of ethics and morals. One cannot even speak of them without God.

True governance comes only from God. Humans do not make the rules according to majority vote. Truth is immutable and transcends the limits of fallen humanity. Thus, humanity is not the “master” of its destiny and the maker of its own rules, as vainly as it attempts to be.

The unquenchable flames of the passions become the driving force of freedom from God. They burn all the more and drive humanity deeper and deeper into the pit of anti-reason. The more humanity attempts to vote God out, the more it simply forges the chains of its own servitude. For freedom from God means slavery to hell.

For the True Christian, Truth is the only guiding principle. Truth is revealed by Jesus Christ – The Way, the Truth, and the Life. Without this foundation human society is doomed to hell. For without God one only has hell.

Yet, we are generally arrogant and have vainly believed that we will build a world of equality, freedom, peace, brotherhood, and so forth without Truth, without God. In mass, the modern world is a rejection of the Kingdom of Heaven and a vote for the democracy of hell. We have no king but Caesar! We have no guiding principles but our wandering lusts and passions!

Sadly, even many in the Church (not the Church

Herself in Her essential reality) have swallowed the lie that faith is but a “personal/individual” matter. Many have been more than willing to allow the “secular” powers to lead in matters that even touch on the holy things of God. Such is a great tragedy. For such we must repent.

Thus a false reality is presented, “that is fine in the civil sphere but we don’t do that in the church ...” “We can’t demand that everyone live by our standards ...” “We just need to follow government guidelines ...” Thus, self-proclaimed members of the Church Herself philosophically deny Her potency to the world. The Church, in such a thought, only has relevance for Herself and Her “own” and is therefore irrelevant to the world. And we wonder why the “world” is rejecting it

The Church has much more to offer, indeed, She is the only one who is able to, in Christ Her Lord, speak the Truth. When we fail to uphold the Truth as the only guiding factor to any crisis or social issue then we reveal our disconnect with the essential reality of the Body of Christ.



In fact, we do great harm to the world around us, for only the Truth of Christ is capable of healing and saving humanity.

The Church is the Body of Christ Himself, the Logos, the Governing Principle and Reason of everything. She is in truth an eternal reality and She transcends every earthly authority, indeed it is by this standard of Truth that humanity will thrive in the truest sense. Although She works with earthly authority She is superior to it. Her laws are eternal and true ones, they are supreme and immutable. Only through this revealed standard may earthly edicts be weighed as “good” or “evil,” “just” or “unjust.” Outside of Truth one cannot even speak of these things.

The Church is an eternal Kingdom, in Her God reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Wherever we may find ourselves, the most profitable thing we can offer to our countries is to hold unabashedly to the Truth of the Gospel. In doing so, you will be the most loyal and faithful citizen. A Christian who sacrifices the Truth of the Gospel to appease the wanderings of civil authority is indeed one who betrays his earthly nation together with the Heavenly Kingdom, which he claims to proclaim.

For all those who choose with Lucifer the rejection of the Kingdom of God, the only place left is hell. It will be freely and self-chosen by all who are there, it will be most democratic.

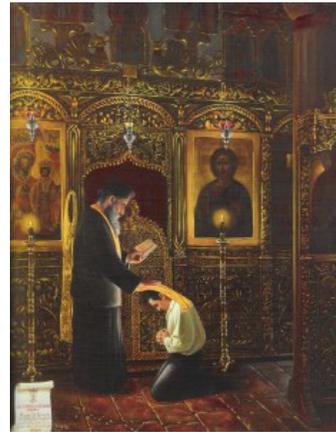


St. Anthony the Great affirms: *If a person places the burden on himself, he finds rest. The moment he casts it on someone else, he will feel troubled internally.* Try it when the opportunity arises. If, during a temptation, you blame the other person, internally you will feel troubled, distressed—a mess! On the other hand, as soon as you think: “The other person is not at fault, I am to blame. Why am I speaking about another person? Have I forgotten who I am? I have made so many mistakes and sins ... hence, I should not be speaking at all,” you will feel as if you are landing on solid ground and are no longer in danger of falling. Whereas previously, when you were soaring high, you were fearful and uneasy: “I am about to fall at any moment.” Once you descend low, and set foot on solid ground, you no longer have anything to fear.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona (+2019)

A LAMENT FOR SIN

By St. Basil the Great.



Weep over your sin: it is a spiritual ailment; it is death to your immortal soul; it deserves ceaseless, unending weeping and crying; let all tears flow for it, and sighing come forth without ceasing from the depths of your heart.

In profound humility I weep for all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, covert and overt, great and little, committed by word and deed,

in thought and intention, day and night, at every hour and minute of my life.

I weep over my pride and my ambition, my self love and my boastfulness; I weep over my fits of anger, irritation, excessive shouting, swearing, quarreling and cursing;

I weep for having criticized, censured, gossiped, slandered, and defamed, for my wrath, enmity, hatred, envy, jealousy, vengeance and rancor;

I weep over my indulgences in lust, impure thoughts and evil inclinations; covetousness, gluttony, drunkenness, and sloth;

I weep for having talked idly, used foul language, blasphemed, derided, joked, ridiculed, mocked, enjoyed empty gaiety, singing, dancing and every pleasure to excess;

I weep over my self indulgence, cupidity, love of money and miserliness, unmercifulness and cruelty;

I weep over my laziness, indolence, negligence, love of comfort, weakness, idleness, absent-mindedness, irresponsibility, inattention, love of sleep, for hours spent in idle pursuits, and for my lack of concentration in prayer and in Church, for not observing fasts and not doing charitable works.

I weep over my lack of faith, my doubting, my perplexity, my coldness, my indifference, my weakness and unfeelingness in what concerns the Holy Orthodox Faith, and over all my foul, cunning and reviling thoughts;

I weep over my exaggerated sorrow and grief, depression and despair, and over sins committed willingly.

I weep, but what tears can I find for a worthy and fitting way to weep for all the actions of my ill fated life; for my immeasurable and profound worthlessness? How can I reveal and expose in all its nakedness each one of my sins, great and small, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, overt and covert, every hour and minute of sin? When and where shall I begin my penitential lament that will bear fitting fruit?

Perhaps soon I may have to face the last hour of my life; my soul will be painfully sundered from my sinful and vile body; I shall have to stand before terrible demons and radiant angels, who will reveal and torment me with my sins; and I, in fear and trembling, will be unprepared and unable to give them an answer; the sight and sound of wailing demons, their violent and bold desire to drag me into the bottomless pit of Hell will fill my soul with confusion and terror. And then the angels of God will lead my poor soul to stand before God's fearful seat of judgment. How will I answer the Immortal King, or how will I dare, sinner that I am, to look upon My Judge? Woe is me! I have no good answer to make, for I have spent all my life in indolence and sin, all my hours and minutes in vain thoughts, desires and yearnings!

And how many times have I taken the Name of God in vain!

How often, lightly and freely, at times even boldly, insolently and shamelessly have I slandered others in anger; offended, irritated, mocked them!

How often have I been proud and vainglorious and boasted of good qualities that I do not possess and of deeds that I have not done!

How many times have I lied, deceived, been cunning or flattered, or been insincere and deceptive; how often have I been angry, intolerant and mean!

How many times have I ridiculed the sins of my brother, caused him grief overtly and covertly, mocked or gloated over his misdeeds, his faults or his misfortunes; how many times have I been hostile to him, in anger, hatred or envy!

How often have I laughed stupidly, mocked and derided, spoke without weighing my words, ignorantly and senselessly, and uttered a numberless quantity of cutting, poisonous, insolent, frivolous, vulgar, coarse, brazen words!

How often, affected by beauty, have I fed my mind, my imagination and my heart with voluptuous sensations, and unnaturally satisfied the lusts of the flesh in fantasy! How often has my tongue uttered shameful, vulgar and blasphemous things about the desires of the flesh!

How often have I yearned for power and been gluttonous, satiating myself on delicacies, on tasty, varied and diverse foods and wines; because of intemperance and lack of self-control how often have I been filled past the point of satiety, lacked sobriety and been drunken, intemperate in food and drink, and broken the Holy Fasts!

How often, through selfishness, pride or false modesty, have I refused help and attention to those in need, been uncharitable, miserly, unsympathetic, mercenary and grasped at attention!

How often have I entered the House of God without fear and trembling, stood there in prayer, frivolous and absent-minded, and left it in the same spirit and disposition! And in prayer at home I have been just as cold and indifferent, praying little,

lazily, and indolently, inattentively and impiously, and even completely omitting the appointed prayers!

And in general, how slothful I have been, weakened by indolence and inaction; how many hours of each day have I spent in sleep, how often have I enjoyed voluptuous thoughts in bed and defiled my flesh! How many hours have I spent in empty and futile pastimes and pleasures, in frivolous talk and speech, jokes and laughter, games and fun, and how much time have I wasted conclusively in chatter, and gossip, in criticizing others and reproaching them; how many hours have I spent in time-wasting and emptiness! What shall I answer to the Lord God for every hour and every minute of lost time? In truth, I have wasted my entire life in laziness.

How many times have I lost heart and despaired of my salvation and of God's mercy or through stupid habit, insensitivity, ignorance, insolence, shamelessness, and hardness sinned deliberately, willingly, in my right mind, in full awareness, in all goodwill, in both thought and intention, and in deed, and in this fashion trampled the blood of God's covenant and crucified anew within myself the Son of God and cursed Him!

O how terrible the punishment that I have drawn upon myself!

How is it that my eyes are not streaming with constant tears?.. If only my tears flowed from the cradle to the grave, at every hour and every minute of my tortured life! Who will now cool my head with water and fill the well of my tears and help me weep over my soul that I have cast into perdition?

My God, my God! Why hast Thou forsaken me? Be it unto me according to Thy will, O Lord! If Thou wouldst grant me light, be Thou blessed; if Thou wouldst grant me darkness, be Thou equally blessed. If Thou wouldst destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy righteous judgment; and if Thou wouldst not destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy boundless mercy!



Thou art ashamed and blushest when it is necessary to tell thy sins. It is better to be ashamed to sin than to confess. Consider: If confession is not offered here, then everything will be confessed there before the whole world. Where is there more torment? Where is there more shame? In doing the deed, we are bold and shameless, but when we ought to confess, then we are ashamed and slow.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

ON THE CAUSES OF THE RUSSIAN CATASTROPHE OF 1917: THE REAL REASONS THE COMMUNISTS WON

By Archbishop Averky of blessed memory (+1976).



A great many different, more or less weighty and plausible, ideas have been and continue to be expressed on the causes of the terrible, bloody catastrophe which befell our motherland Russia in 1917. Usually and most frequently causes of an economic and political nature are presented for consideration, and people think, that it all is satisfactorily and completely explained by them. But for us,

Russian believers, there cannot be the slightest doubt that these causes, if they in fact existed, were only secondary, derivative, attendant causes, but certainly not the chief, the fundamental, or the basic ones.

The chief cause of all the woes which befall a man and deprive him of peace and prosperity is his departure from the Single Source of life and well-being, our Creator, Provider, and Savior, God, and his flouting of the Divine laws and rules which are man's only salvation.

This is what was written by the great teacher of all Christian Russia, Bishop Theophan, in the 60's of the last century (i.e., 1860s, *Ed.*):

"Do you know how gloomy my thoughts are? And not without good reason. I meet people who call themselves Orthodox, but who in spirit are followers of Voltaire, naturalists, Lutherans, and all sorts of freethinkers. They are neither stupid nor evil, but in regard to the Faith and the Church they are worthless. Their fathers and mothers were pious; the damage was done during the time of their education outside their parents' homes. The memory of their childhood and of the spirit of their parents still keeps them within certain bounds. What will their children be like? And what will keep them within the proper bounds? I conclude from this that in one, at the most two, generations our Orthodoxy will wither." ("Letters on the Christian Life," p. 78).

"We must be punished," he wrote in another letter, "God and His manifest works have been blasphemed. Someone wrote me that in some newspaper named "Light," No. 88, blasphemies against the Mother of God were printed. The

Mother of God has turned away from us; because of Her, so has the son of God; and because of Him, so have God the Father and the Spirit of God. Who is for us when God is against us?! Alas!" ("Collected Letters," vol. 7, p. 206).

We can only dare to think completely seriously about the salvation of Russia when we have become different. We must force ourselves to change in the most fundamental way to cease being what we were when we, willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or in ignorance, by our own hands or just by indifference, cast Russia into that terrifying, bloody abyss in which it remains even until now. (This was written while the Soviets were still in charge, i.e., prior to the Fall of the Soviet Union, *Ed.*)

Constantly forming new political parties and organizations with platforms full of high-sounding promises and with constant quarrels and mutual attacks on each other unworthy of the name of Russian; organizing "days" and "evenings of Russian culture"; "charity" balls, theatrical performances and concerts, especially on the eves of Sundays and feasts; anniversary celebrations, especially in the spirit of the one now being prepared to honor Leo Tolstoy, who was excommunicated from the Church for his unbelievably blasphemous and vicious outbursts; banquets with very patriotic speeches; assemblies for "days of irreconcilability" with fierce anti-Communist statements; even formal attendance at official prayer and requiem services on days of special commemoration—none of this will ever be able to save Russia.

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and then everything else shall be added unto you. (Mt 6:33). It was precisely this course of seeking above all the Kingdom of God and His righteousness that our Orthodox Russian nation followed throughout the whole course of its history. It was precisely in this way that Great Russia was built in which the Faith and the Church were always in the first place.

But when the Russian nation, under the influence of atheistic agitators who came to us from the apostate West, began to turn away from this, its true historical course, then that terrible, bloody catastrophe broke over us; as a result of it we ended up in exile, and the rest of the Russian nation is under the yoke of a horrible, unparalleled slavery.

For this reason it is so sad to see how Russian Orthodox people who have endured so much and even lost their homeland and who now are themselves here in exile do not give any thought at all to their spiritual renewal, but rather continue to live with the same godless and anti-Church views, interests and attitudes that led to such terrible misfortunes for our unfortunate homeland Russia.

They naively think that Russia can be saved without their full and total return to God, without their bringing their lives under the genuine spirit of the Church, but that it can be done by means of nothing but political activity. And they

even want to subjugate our Church itself to their politics and make it a tool of their political intrigues, a toy of their political passions.

They want to subject the eternal to the temporal, the heavenly to the earthly, the holy to the sinful...

What could be more awful, more hopeless, more criminal than such spiritual blindness, such extreme lack of understanding, which is only one step removed from the very depths of hell?

How many times did the Most Holy Theotokos save Her faithful Byzantium with its imperial city of Constantinople by Her all-powerful protection until it was overcome by the spirit of materialism and apostasy from the Faith which appeared so clearly at the Council of Florence in 1439? And then Byzantium, which had betrayed the true Faith, was handed over to its downfall, falling finally under the blows of the Mohammedan Turks in 1453.

Like Byzantium the New Rome, our homeland Moscow, the Third Rome, experienced the miraculous protection of the Fervent Intercessor for the Christian race an uncounted number of times. But our unfortunate Russian nation also did not remain firm on the heights of its calling, and the same spirit of materialism and apostasy led it to its terrible, bloody downfall.

And now the whole world is gripped not just by the spirit of materialism and apostasy, but of cruel enmity to God, a terrible and rash challenge to God; and it is on the edge of destruction in its senseless blindness, a destruction prepared by its own hands.

This 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 Church.



Deliver me O Lord, from the deceptions of the God-hating and evil antichrist, whose coming is at hand, and shelter me from his snares in the secret desert of Thy salvation. Grant me, O Lord, strength and courage to firmly confess Thy Most Holy Name, that I may not abandon You because of the devil's fear and that I may not deny Thee my Saviour and Redeemer, nor Thy Holy Church. But grant me O Lord, cries and tears for my sins, and spare me O Lord, in the hour of Thy dread judgement.

St. Anatoly (Younger) of Optina
Prayer of the Christians of Latter Days

DEFENDING THE DE-CHRISTIANIZATION OF CHRISTMAS: WAS CHRIST BORN ON DECEMBER 25TH

By John Eidsmoe and Ben DuPre, from WorldNetDaily, 12/24/2009.

The secularizers commonly defend the de-Christianization of Christmas by noting that America is a much more diverse nation than we used to be, that we shouldn't offend others, that saying "Merry Christmas" might be bad for business and that public Christmas observances might even violate the First Amendment. Then they deliver their crowning blow: "Besides, everybody knows Jesus wasn't born in December."

But saying "everybody knows" begs the question, as saying "all scholars agree" defines anyone who does not agree as a non-scholar. At the risk of flying in the face of this collective modern wisdom, we suggest that there is substantial, though not conclusive, evidence that Jesus was born in December.

The Biblical Evidence

What does the Bible say about the date of Jesus' birth? Luke 2:6 tells us that *the days were accomplished that she should be delivered* so we assume Jesus was a full-term baby, born nine months after His conception. Luke 1:26 says the angel Gabriel announced the conception of Jesus to Mary in the sixth month of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. So Jesus was conceived about six months after John the Baptist was conceived.

So when was John the Baptist conceived? That is more difficult, but the Scriptures suggest some answers. John's father was Zacharias, a Levite priest of *the course of Abia [Abijah]* (Lk 1:5). According to I Chronicles 24:7-19, King David had divided the priests into 24 orders, and these orders took turns serving in the temple for a period of eight days twice a year, separated from their wives and children. During their time Zacharias and the other priests of the course of Abia served during the 10th and 24th weeks of the Jewish year.

The angel of the Lord spoke to Zacharias *while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course* (Lk 1:8), that is, while he was performing his service in the temple. After his course was finished he left the temple, returned to his wife, Elizabeth, and John was conceived (Lk 1:23-24). If this was after the second course, that is, the 24th week of the year, John would have been conceived around September or October and born around June or July. Jesus' conception six months later would have occurred around March or April and His birth around December or January.

There is no certainty to this theory, especially given that the Jewish calendar (of only 360 days) may have been different from King David's time to Jesus' time. But based on the scriptural account of Zacharias' service in the temple, it is well within the realm of possibility that Jesus was born in December.

The Extra-Biblical Evidence

St. John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), argued strongly for a December 25th birthdate because of the course of Zacharias' priestly service. But he also based his conclusion on the findings of Pope Julius. Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (348-386 A.D.) had asked Pope Julius to ascertain the date of Christ's birth *from the census documents brought by Titus to Rome* after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Julius then determined the date of Christ's birth to be December 25th.

Julius, Cyril and Chrysostom were not alone in their reliance upon the census documents. St. Justin the Martyr (100-165 A.D.), in a detailed statement of the Christian faith addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, stated that Jesus was born in Bethlehem *as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing*. (Apology, I, 34). Likewise, Tertullian (160-250 A.D.) wrote *of the census of Augustus—that most faithful witness of the Lords nativity, kept in the archives of Rome*. (Contra Marcion, Bk 4, 7).

Unfortunately, we do not have access to these census records today. But perhaps the better part of wisdom bids us to assume that these Church Fathers had access to information that we do not possess, and that they knew quite well what they were talking about.

Some have said that Jesus could not have been born in December because shepherds did not keep their sheep in the fields past late autumn. But Alfred Edersheim, in his classic work "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah" (1883), cites ancient Jewish sources to the effect that flocks of sheep "remain in the open alike in the hottest days and in the rainy season, i.e., all the year round." (Book 2, p. 186). There was also a special class of Levitical shepherds who kept sacrificial lambs in the field all year round because they were used for sacrifice every month of the year.

Winters can be cold in Palestine, but they vary greatly, and some Decembers are rather mild. A recent study of stalagmites and stalactites in caves near Jerusalem strongly suggests that the average annual rainfall dropped nearly 50 percent from about 3 feet in 100 A.D. to about 1.6 feet in 700 A.D. Average winter temperatures may have varied as well. If Mary could have given birth to a baby in a Bethlehem stable, then hardy shepherds could have watched their flocks in the fields at the same time.

Edersheim thus concludes, "There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of this date (December 25th). The objections generally made rest on grounds which seem to me historically untenable."

How about the "Old" Calendar?"

It also seems that Christmas is only truly celebrated on December 25th according to the Julian reckoning.

We must, at this point, acknowledge, the unilateral bond of the lunar calendar with the Julian in the Orthodox Christian *Paschalion*.

Having studied our *Paschalion*, we are irresistibly penetrated with awe at the ingenious work of the Alexandrian scientists who attained, in the *Paschalion*, an unalterable bond of the lunar with the solar Julian calendar. Alexandrian astronomers of the third century well knew the retardation of the Julian calendar from the sun. Nevertheless, they did not reject the Julian calendar, but wisely made use of its errors for a stable concordance with the lunar year, which lies at the basis of our *Paschalion*. The Julian calendar remains behind the true solar time, and the lunar one also remains behind together with the Julian calendar. "The lunar year is found to be eternally tied to the Julian one and a perpetual retardation of the former from the latter is not possible. The lag of the Julian year is equal to the lag of the lunar one. The equinox retards equally in both chronologies."

The difference between the lunar and our Julian calendar does not exceed an hour and a half in the lapse of a thousand years. We can see for ourselves how all the Paschal full-moons calculated for thousands of years ahead in our *Paschalion* fall precisely on all the indicated dates of the Julian calendar, but do not at all coincide with the Gregorian calendar.

The unalterable tie of the lunar calendar with the Julian is made especially vivid by the following constant, periodical phenomena: we know that the lunar cycle equals 19 years while the solar cycle equals 28 years. Let us analyze these numbers by primary multipliers: $19=1 \times 19$; $28=4 \times 7$. What happens when we cross-multiply them? $19 \times 4=76$, i.e., that period of 76 years upon whose lapse the beginning of the lunar year coincides in precision with the beginning of the Julian one (as shown in chapter three).

Now, if we multiply 76 by 7, we arrive at 532, i.e., that period upon whose lapse, Pascha again occurs on the same days and months on which it was celebrated from the very beginning and during the whole length of the indiction.

In view of such a stable bond of the lunar year with the Julian, there can be no talk of any change from the Julian calendar, for otherwise there would unavoidably occur a violation of the entire well-formed and harmonious system of our *Paschalion* and the introduction of a great confusion in all Paschal calculations.

Sorrowfully, the light-minded experiment of changing the Julian calendar was made in Rome and now one can see its pitiful consequences. (It has made obedience to the holy canons, given to the Holy Church by the Holy Spirit, impossible for Rome which was forced, by the new calendar to abandon the canonical *Paschalion*).

In the end, no one's Christian faith should depend upon whether December 25th is the date of Jesus' birth, nor do such questions give us any reason to take Christ out of Christmas.

And Merry Christmas, one and all—on December 25th, of either calendar!

ARE WE CHRISTIANS WITHOUT CHRIST?

By Photios Kontoglou.

When one holds a discussion with pseudo-Christians about hard asceticism of the body and spirit for the love of Christ, they become angered, calling you a hoaxter, a pagan or a barbarian.

If you want to test the faith of a Christian, talk to them about asceticism. The faithful will feel compunction, while the lukewarm, those who are fake and faithless, will protest.

What is then one to make of the following proclamations by Christ? *Blessed are they who have left all and followed Me*, or *The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*, or *In the world you will have sorrow*, or *Tight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life*.

We want to be Christians without Christ, without spiritual sorrow, without lifting the difficult cross, and would rather to walk along the wide road. Such false Christians, when you speak to them about a hard and impoverished life, about sacrifice, about asceticism, reply that Christ does not want such things, and that such things are antics.

But, O foolish man, in Christianity nothing can be overdone. For all human things one could say they are antics, but it is only within Christianity that antics do not exist. What antic is there in loving the one who killed your father? What antic is there in turning the other cheek? What antic is there in hungering and thirsting contempt, in doing what God asks of you, such as loving your neighbor, talking sweetly to one swearing at you, not judging the one who judges you, to be humble before the most destitute people, and while doing all these things you say that you are a *worthless slave*?

What antic is there in believing that our bodies will be raised as immortal at the blink of an eye, and how the whole world will change at once, and that a new world without corruption will come about? So is there anything in Christianity that is an antic?

Christianity is the most implausible of all that is outrageous, the most unbelievable of all things unbelievable.

This is why the door by which one enters the exotic country of Christ is only one—Faith. And in Faith there are no antics; unbelief, on the other hand, has sly prudence, moderation and compromise. This is why such pseudo-Christians cannot withstand the fire of Faith and have turned Christianity into a moral system, beneficial for worldly life, which is why it does not entirely need Christ. Because the unbeliever is scared, but whoever believes is *bold as a lion*, according to the Prophet.

Whoever loves God, is ablaze without showing it, rejoices without laughing, is crushed in the depths of their selves. The love taught to us by Christ is something else besides so-called philanthropy. This is why philanthropists do not taste of this

love of Christ, which is *water that wells with eternal life*. The philanthropy people make today is a social debt. These philanthropists, and whoever is a practical person, are not Christians.

Whoever loves Christ and His Gospel, loves that which is worth loving above everything else. In Christ they can find all worthwhile things: love, humility, pain, gentleness, spiritual sorrow and spiritual joy—which are both sweet when done in the name of Christ.

Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Give us rest? We do not want to even hear it. We want to be saddled with our passions, with our enemies, with our wars, with our cares for ambition, for the flesh, with contaminated blood, with pistols, with cannons, with bombs. What will we do without these things, Mr. Peacemaker? How can we live in rest? With what will we fill our emptiness, since for us life is only these things?

You give us peace, but peace is our death, because it is the death of our beloved passions! If You said “I will load you with other such burdens, that you do not recognize; I will enrich your souls with other such riches, that you may have no peace,” then we would come near You, and receive You as our God.

People nowadays want gods that will load us, vindictive ones, like Aries, Zeus, Cronos and deceivers like Hermes, and others. They want to live in wickedness, for it is alive and strong.

Yes, come Lord! cries out John with joy to Him who comes on the clouds at the Second Coming. You must be a saint, righteous and perhaps like John in order to rejoice at the coming of Christ and wait for Him. We, on the other hand, cry out “do not come Lord.” Because we are sinners, and the wrath of the Lord is coming upon us.

With the prevalence of the “atom bomb” we are now forced to consider such things. Once learned, fear comes upon every heart. Blessed are those who are ready at all times! But alas! Who is ready like John, the holiest of the saints?

All of us fear that You will come *as a thief in the night*. If you curse or slander people, or if you write something bad to them, there will come a time when they will forgive you. (Will they? Unlikely, brother, forget it!). One who does not forgive you for such a deed will hate you, and they live in such a way that they are embarrassed about their own life; may the voyage of your life be a rebuke of their own. Whoever has wholeheartedly tasted Christ’s peace does not torture himself for being poor, since they willfully desire and accept poverty; such a person loses his joy when he acquires something beyond what is needed, even if it is the most worthless thing. And whatever is humble and poor and prudent, they love it secretly within their heart without saying anything to anyone, because **the humble people always love silence and obscurity**.

The Lord is near those who sorrow in their hearts. When temptations are scattered and the door to false joy and rest is opened, the door to true joy closes. True Christians feel this clearly.

WITH MY OWN EYES

By Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand

Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand is an evangelical minister who spent fourteen years in Communist imprisonment and torture in his homeland of Romania. In 1945, when the Communists seized Romania and attempted to control the churches for their purposes, Richard Wurmbbrand immediately began an effective "underground" ministry to his enslaved people and the invading Russian soldiers. He was eventually arrested in 1948. Richard spent three years in solitary confinement, seeing no one but his Communist torturers. Pastor Wurmbbrand was released in a general amnesty in 1964. What follows is a small part of the many experiences he had with Orthodox clergy while he was imprisoned.

† † †

My former fellow-prisoner the Romanian-Orthodox Deacon John Stanescu, suffered in jail for his faith.

Colonel Albon, director of the slave labor camp, was informed that someone had dared to preach in a cell. He entered the cell carrying a cane and demanded to know the culprit. When no one responded, he said, "Well, then all will be flogged."

He commenced at one end of the cell, and there was the usual yelling and rising in tears. When he came to Stanescu, he said, "Not ready yet? Strip this minute!"

Stanescu replied, "There is a God in heaven, and He will judge you."

With this, his fate was sealed. He would surely be beaten to death. But just at that moment, a guard entered the cell and said, "Colonel, you are called urgently to the office. Some generals have come from the Ministry."

Albon left, saying to Stanescu, "We will see each other again soon." However, the generals arrested the colonel (Communists hate and jail each other for no reason), and after an hour Albon was back in the cell, this time as a prisoner.

Many inmates jumped to lynch him. Now Stanescu defended the defeated enemy with his own body, receiving many blows himself as he protected the torturer from the flogged prisoners. Stanescu was a real priest.

Later I asked him, "Where did you get the power to do this?" And he replied, "I live Jesus ardently. I always have Him before my eyes. I also see Him in my enemy. It is Jesus who keeps him from doing even worse things." Beware of a faith without a cross!

When I was in jail I fell very, very sick. I had tuberculosis of the whole surface of both lungs and four vertebra were attacked by tuberculosis. I also had intestinal tuberculosis, diabetes, heart failure, jaundice, and other sicknesses I can't even remember. I was near to death.

At my right hand was an Orthodox priest by the name of Iscu. He was Abbot of a monastery. This man, perhaps in his 40's, had been so tortured he was near to death. But his face

was serene. He spoke about his hope of heaven, about his love of Christ, about his faith. He radiated joy.

On my left side was the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest almost to death. He had been arrested by his own comrades.

And so it happened that the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest nearly to death had been tortured nearly to death by his comrades. And he was dying near me. His soul was in agony.

During the night he would awaken me saying, "Father, please pray for me. I can't die, I have committed such terrible crimes."

Then I saw a miracle. I saw the agonizing priest calling two other prisoners. And leaning on their shoulders, slowly, slowly he walked past my bed, sat on the bedside of his murderer, and caressed his head – I will never forget this gesture. I watched a murdered man caressing his murderer! That is love – he found a caress for him.

The priest said to the man, "You are young; you did not know what you were doing. I love you with all my heart." But he did not just say the words. You can say "love," and it's just a word of four letters. But he really loved. "I love you with all my heart."

Then he went on, "If I who am a sinner can love you so much, imagine Christ, Who is Love incarnate, how much He loves you! And all the Christians whom you have tortured, know that they forgive you, they love you, and Christ loves you. He wishes you to be saved much more than you wish to be saved. You wonder if your sins can be forgiven. He wishes to forgive your sins more than you wish your sins to be forgiven. He desires for you to be with Him in heaven. He is Love. You only need to turn to Him and repent."

In this prison cell in which there was no possibility of privacy, I overheard the confession of the murderer to the murdered. Life is more thrilling than a novel – no novelist has ever written such a thing. The murdered – near to death – received the confession of the murderer. The murdered gave absolute to this murderer.

They prayed together, embraced each other, and the priest went back to his bed. Both men died that same night. It was Christmas Eve. But it was not a Christmas Eve in which we simply remembered that 2000 years ago Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It was a Christmas Eve during which Jesus was born in the heart of a Communist murderer.

These are the things I have seen with my own eyes...

† † †

Christ is born; glorify Him!

Christ comes from Heaven; go to meet Him!

Christ is on earth; be exalted!

Sing to the Lord, all the earth!

And praise Him in gladness, O people;
for He has been glorified!

Χριστός Γεννᾶται

Άγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος, ἀποσπάσματα ἐκ τῆς Ὀμιλίας ΛΗ΄.

**Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐξ Οὐρανῶν ἀπαντήσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς ὑψώθητε.
Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ,
καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί·
ὄτι δεδόξασται!**

† † †

Ὁ Χριστὸς γεννιέται, δοξάσατε. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ συναντήσατε (τον). Ὁ Χριστὸς ἐπάνω στὴν γῆ ὑψωθείτε. Τραγουδήσατε γιὰ τὸν Κύριο ὅλη ἡ γῆ καὶ νὰ γιὰ νὰ πῶ καὶ τὰ δυὸ μαζί: Νὰ εὐφρανθοῦν οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ νὰ ἀγαλλιᾶσαι ἡ γῆ γιὰ τὸν ἐπουράνιο, ἐπειτα ἐπίγειο.

Καὶ ἐγὼ θὰ φωνάξω τὴν δύναμη (σημασία) τῆς ἡμέρας: Ὁ ἄσαρκος σαρκώνεται. Ὁ Λόγος γίνεται ὑλικός. Ὁ ἀόρατος ὁράται. Ὁ ἀναφῆς ψηλαφιέται. Ὁ ἄχρονος ἀρχίζει, «*Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς χθὲς καὶ σήμερον ὁ ἴδιος καὶ στοὺς αἰῶνες*».

Ἐνα (πρόσωπο) ἀπὸ δυὸ ἀντίθετα (φύσεις), σάρκα (ἀνθρώπινη φύση) καὶ Πνεῦμα (Θεῖα φύση). Ἀπὸ τίς ὁποῖες ἡ μιὰ (ἡ Θεῖα) ἐθέωσε, καὶ ἡ ἄλλη (ἡ ἀνθρώπινη) ἐθεώθηκε. Ὡ τῆς καινούριας μίξεως! Ὡ τῆς παραδόξου συνθέσεως! Ὁ Ὄν δημιουργεῖται καὶ ὁ ἀχώρητος χωρεῖται διὰ μέσου νοερῆς ψυχῆς ποὺ μεσιτεύει στὴν Θεότητα καὶ (διὰ μέσου) τῆς ὑλικότητας τῆς σάρκα. Καὶ ὁ πλουτίζων πτωχεύει. Ἐπειδὴ πτωχεύει (λαμβάνοντας) τὴν δική μου σάρκα, γιὰ νὰ πλουτήσω ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν δική του Θεότητα...

Καὶ ὁ πλήρης ἀδειάζει, ἐπειδὴ ἀδειάζει ἀπὸ τὴν δόξα του γιὰ λίγο, γιὰ νὰ μεταλάβω ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν πληρότητά του. Ποιὸς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀγαθότητας; Τί εἶναι αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον (ποὺ ἔγινε) γιὰ μένα; Μετάλαβα τὴν εἰκόνα (του) καὶ δὲν τὴν ἐφύλαξα. Μεταλαμβάνει τὴν δική μου σάρκα, καὶ γιὰ νὰ σώσει τὴν εἰκόνα καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἀθανατήσει τὴν σάρκα. Δεύτερη πραγματοποιεῖ κοινωνία, πολὺ παραδοξότερη τῆς πρώτης (τῆς δημιουργίας). Τότε μετέδωσε τὸ καλύτερο (τὴν εἰκόνα του), ἐνῶ τώρα μεταλαμβάνει τὸ χειρότερο (τὴν σάρκα μου). Αὐτὸ

εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸ προηγούμενο θεοπρεπέστερο. Αὐτὸ εἶναι σὲ ὅσους ἔχουν νοῦ ὑψηλότερο.

«*Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε, Χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀπαντήσατε, Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθηκε. Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ...*» Μ' ἓνα λόγο: Ἄς εὐφραίνωνται οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἄς ἀγάλλεται ἡ γῆ γιὰ τὸν ἐπουράνιο, ποὺ κατοπιν ἔγινε ἐπίγειος. Ὁ Χριστὸς παρουσιάζεται μὲ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, ἀγαλλιᾶσθε μὲ τρόπο καὶ χαρὰ. Μὲ τρόπο γιὰ τὴν ἐνοχὴ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ μὲ χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς σωτηρίας...

Πάλι διαλύεται τὸ σκοτάδι, πάλι ὑπάρχει τὸ φῶς. Πάλι τιμωρεῖται μὲ σκοτάδι ἡ Αἴγυπτος καὶ πάλι ὁ ἰσραηλιτικὸς λαὸς φωτίζεται μὲ τὸν πύρινο στύλο. Ὁ λαὸς ποὺ καθόταν στὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἀγνοίας, ἄς δῆ τὸ μεγάλο φῶς τῆς θεογνωσίας. «*Τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρήλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονε τὰ πάντα καινά*».

Τὸ νεκρὸ γράμμα ὑποχωρεῖ. Τὸ πνεῦμα ἐπικρατεῖ. Οἱ σκιεὺς τοῦ νόμου περνοῦν. Ἡ ἀλήθεια θριαμβεύει. Ὁ Μελχισεδέκ, ποὺ ἦταν ἓνας τύπος, τώρα δείχνει ποιὸν προεσήμαινε, δηλαδὴ τὸν Χριστό. Αὐτὸς, ποὺ ὡς Θεὸς δὲν ἔχει μητέρα, γεννιέται χωρὶς πατέρα. Γιατί στὸν Δημιουργὸ τῆς φύσεως δὲν ἰσχύουν οἱ φυσικοὶ νόμοι. Ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη χειροκροτήσατε, γιατί «*παιδίον ἐγεννήθη ἡμῖν, υἱὸς καὶ ἐδόθη ἡμῖν, οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄμοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ καλεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελος*». Ἄς φωνάξῃ δυνατὰ ὁ Ἰωάννης Βαπτιστῆς: «*Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν Κυρίου*». Καὶ ἐγὼ θὰ φωνάξω τὴν δύναμη καὶ τὴ σημασία τῆς μεγάλης αὐτῆς ἡμέρας (τῶν Χριστουγέννων).

Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι ἀναρχος καὶ αἰώνιος, τώρα λαμβάνει ἀρχή. Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι ἀθύπαρκτος, δημιουργεῖται. Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι ἄπειρος, χωρεῖται στὴν περιορισμένη ἀνθρώπινη φύση. Αὐτὸς ποὺ πλουτίζει μὲ τὰ ἀγαθὰ Του τὸν κόσμον, γίνεται φτωχὸς, παίρνοντας ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, γιὰ νὰ πλουτήσω ἐγὼ μὲ τὴν θεότητά Του. Ποιὸς μπορεῖ νὰ παραστήσει πόσος εἶναι ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀγαθότητός Του; Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ σὺ μαζί μὲ τὸν Ἀστέρα τρέξε καὶ μαζί μὲ τοὺς Μάγους φέρε Του γιὰ δῶρα, χρυσὸ καὶ λιβάνι καὶ σμύρνα. Τίμησέ Τον ὡς Βασιλέα καὶ Θεὸ καὶ ὡς Λυτρωτῆ, ποὺ νεκρώθηκε γιὰ σένα. Μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ποιμένες δόξασέ Τον, μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους ὑμνήσέ Τον, μὲ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους σκίρτησε ἀπὸ χαρὰ. Ἄς εἶναι κοινὴ ἡ πανήγυρις τῶν οὐρανίων καὶ τῶν ἐπιγείων δυνάμεων.



Τὰ Χριστούγεννα τῆς... Νέας Κατοχῆς

Ένα ἄρθρο ἀπὸ τὴν «Χριστιανικὴ Ἑστία Λαμίας», Δεκέμβριος 2011. Ἄν καὶ τὸ ἄρθρο ἐγράφη λόγῳ τῆς «οἰκονομικῆς κατοχῆς τοῦ 2011» τὸ περιεχόμενό του ἰσχύει ἀκόμα περισσότερο στὶς μέρες τῆς «κατοχῆς τοῦ κορονοϊοῦ».

Ὅτὰ ἠχήσουν καὶ πάλι οἱ γλυκόλαλες καμπάνες τῶν Χριστουγέννων. Ὁ κόσμος θὰ τρέξει στὶς ὀλοφώτιστες Ἐκκλησιές, γιὰ νὰ γιορτάσει τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Θεανθρώπου. Μία ἀπὸ τὶς μεγαλύτερες γιορτὲς τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης, τὰ Χριστούγεννα, θὰ συνάξει γύρω της τὸ λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ νὰ μεταγγίσει στὶς καρδιές τὴν εὐλογία καὶ τὴν εἰρήνη. Μικροὶ καὶ μεγάλοι θὰ ψάλουν καὶ θὰ κοινωνήσουν. Γιορτὴ τῆς Οἰκογένειας καὶ τῶν παιδικῶν χρόνων, χαρακτηρίστηκαν τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Γιορτὴ τῶν παιδιῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν παιδιῶν ὅλου του κόσμου. Εὐλογημένη ἀτμόσφαιρα, χαριτωμένες ψυχές, ζεστὸ περιβάλλον, ζωηρὰ γέλια, πλούσια δῶρα, γεμάτα τραπέζια, καρδιές ἐνωμένες στὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα. Ἔτσι ἦταν πάντοτε τὰ Χριστούγεννα...

Πάντοτε; Μακάρι νὰ ἦταν πάντοτε ἔτσι! Ὑπῆρξαν ὁμως καὶ δύσκολα Χριστούγεννα. Τὰ Χριστούγεννα στὶς Κατακόμβες, στοὺς διωγμούς. Βγαίνοντας οἱ πρῶτοι Χριστιανοὶ τότε ἀπὸ τὴν ὑπόγεια λατρεία τῶν Χριστουγέννων δὲν ἤξεραν ἂν θὰ συναντήσουν τὴ ζωὴ ἢ τὸν θάνατο! Τὰ Χριστούγεννα στὸ ἔξομο τὸ Μεσολόγγι! «Βάστα καυμένο Μεσολόγγι!» Χριστούγεννα στὶς τάπιες καὶ τὶς πολεμίστρες περιμένοντας τὴ βραδινὴ χριστουγεννιάτικη ἐπίθεση τῶν φανατικῶν καὶ ἀσεβῶν μουσουλμάνων. Νηστικοὶ καὶ ξεθεωμένοι περιμέναν οἱ ὑπερασπιστὲς τῆς Ἱερῆς πόλης τοῦ Μεσολογγίου νὰ σώσουν τὴν Πατρίδα. Χριστούγεννα στὴν Τουρκοκρατία! Οἱ ραγιαδες γρήγορα καὶ σιωπηλά, χωρὶς πανηγυρικὲς κωδωνοκρουσίες, σκυφοὶ ἔμπαιναν στὶς χαμηλοτάβανες πετροχτιστὲς ἐκκλησιές γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτελέσουν τὰ θρησκευτικὰ τους καθήκοντα καὶ κράταγαν ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι σφιχτὰ τὰ παιδιά τους μὲ τὸ φόβο μήπως τὰ ἐπόμενα Χριστούγεννα δὲ θὰ τὰ εἶχαν γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Ποτήριο.

Χριστούγεννα στὰ βουνὰ τῆς Β. Ἠπείρου, πολεμώντας τοὺς Ἰταλοὺς. Μὲ λίγο χαλβὰ καὶ λίγο ξερὸ ψωμί. Μὲ νερὸ γιὰ χιόνι. Γιὰ Ἐκκλησία, τὸ χαράκωμα, καὶ γιὰ προσκυνητάρη, ἓνα κονσερβοκουτί γιὰ καντήλι καὶ μία χάρτινη εἰκόνα γιὰ νὰ ἀσπασθοῦν οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι μαχητὲς τῶν ἐλληνικῶν συνόρων. Χριστούγεννα τῆς... Γερμανικῆς Κατοχῆς στὴν Ἀθήνα! Τὰ φοβερότερα Χριστούγεννα! Ὁ νέος Ἡρώδης, ὁ Χίτλερ, εἶχε σκορπίσει τὸ θάνατο στὰ παιδιά τῆς Ἀθήνας. Ζωντανὸ νεκροί! Μία λέξη ἄκουγες σπαραχτικὰ νὰ βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὰ ἀδύνατα καὶ ἀρρωστημένα πνευμόνια μικρῶν καὶ μεγάλων: «πεινάωωω...».

Χριστούγεννα φριχτά! Καμμιά ὀργανικὴ οὐσία δὲν ὑπῆρχε μέσα στὸ ἀθηναϊκὸ σπíti! Μόνο τὸ νερὸ τῆς βρύσης! Γιόρταζαν τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Θεοῦ Βρέφους καὶ ἔκλαιγε ὁ κόσμος τὸ θάνατο τῶν βρεφῶν καὶ νηπίων. Ποτὲ πιά τέτοια Χριστούγεννα! εἶπαν οἱ λαοί. Ποτὲ πιά πόλεμο! εἶπε ὁ κόσμος. Ποτὲ πιά Κατοχή! εἶπαν οἱ Ἕλληνες...

Ἀπὸ τότε πέρασαν πολλὰ Χριστούγεννα. ἤρθαν βεβαίως καὶ Χριστούγεννα μοναχικά, φυλακισμένα, νοσοκομειακά, φτωχικά καὶ λιτά, πένθιμα, ξενιτεμένα. Δηλαδή, πέρασαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι Ἕλληνες, κάποιοι Ἕλληνες, κάποια Χριστούγεννα, μὲ φτώχεια, μὲ ἀρρώστεια, στὴ φυλακὴ ἢ στὸ νοσοκομεῖο, μὲ πένθος καὶ ἀδικία, μὲ στενοχώρια καὶ μοναξιά, στὴν ξενιτεία καὶ στὸν κίνδυνο. Δύσκολα Χριστούγεννα, χωρὶς πολλὰ πράγματα καὶ πολὺ κόσμο. Ναί, ἀλλὰ ἦταν κάτι τὸ περιορισμένο καὶ προσωρινό, τὸ ἀτομικὸ καὶ μεμονωμένο. Κάποιοι δὲν εἶχαν, ἄλλοι ὁμως, οἱ περισσότεροι, βοηθοῦσαν καὶ κάπως περνοῦσε ἡ μεγάλη μέρα. Ἀκόμη καὶ στὴ γερμανικὴ κατοχή, ἡ ἐπαρχία δὲν πείνασε τόσο!

Δύο ὁμως Χριστούγεννα βρίσκονται στὴν κορυφὴ τῆς ἀνάγκης καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ ὄριο τῆς φτώχειας, τηρουμένων ἀσφαλῶς τῶν ἀναλογιῶν. Τὰ Χριστούγεννα τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας στὴ Βηθλεὲμ πρὶν 2011 χρόνια καὶ τὰ Χριστούγεννα τῶν Ἑλλήνων τὸ 2011! Τὰ Χριστούγεννα δὴλ. τῆς ἀπογραφῆς τοῦ Καίσαρα καὶ τὰ Χριστούγεννα τῆς νέας γερμανικῆς Κατοχῆς φέτος. Ἐκεῖνα, τότε, ἔστειλαν τὴν ἀγία «οἰκογένεια» στὸ σπήλαιο τῆς Βηθλεὲμ! Σὲ συνθήκες ἀπερίγραπτα φτωχῆς! Τὰ τωρινὰ ὁμως στὴν Ἑλλάδα ἔστειλαν τὴν ἐλληνικὴ οἰκογένεια στὴν ἀπόγνωση καὶ τὴ θλίψη. Μπορεῖ ἴσως νὰ φταίμε καὶ μεῖς, οἱ πολίτες, ποὺ εἶχαμε μάθει νὰ ταυτίζουμε τὰ Χριστούγεννα μὲ τὸ πλούσιο μεσημεριανὸ τραπέζι καὶ τὸ Πάσχα μὲ τὸν ὄβελια. Ἀλλὰ τὰ φετινὰ Χριστούγεννα δὲν συγκρίνονται μὲ κανένα ἀπὸ τὰ προηγούμενα. Εἶναι τὰ Χριστούγεννα τῆς σκληρῆς, ἀπάνθρωπης, προκλητικῆς καὶ γενικῆς Νέας Κατοχῆς.

Δὲν ὑπάρχουν πλέον δάκρυα, γιὰ νὰ κλάψει κάποιος πονόψυχος τὶς περιπτώσεις. Δὲν ὑπάρχουν πονόψυχοι πλέον, ἀλλὰ πονεμένοι. Δὲν ὑπάρχουν πλούσιοι νὰ βοηθήσουν. Ἐλάχιστοι ἀπέμειναν ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ δὲν προσβλήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν ἰδὸ τῆς μεθοδευμένα ἐπιβληθείσης φτώχειας. Οἱ γνωστοὶ ἄγνωστοι τῶν προαστείων καὶ τῆς Βουλῆς. Οἱ ἄλλοι βρίσκονται σὲ ἀνάγκη καὶ παρακάλεση σὲ Θεὸ καὶ ἀνθρώπους. Δὲν ὑπάρχει πρωτεύουσα πιά ποὺ νὰ πεινᾷ καὶ ἐπαρχία, ποὺ τὰ βγάξει πέρα. Ὅλη ἡ Ἑλλάδα ἔγινε μία φτωχοεπαρχία τῆς Εὐρώπης.

Τί νὰ ποῦμε γιὰ τὰ φετινὰ Χριστούγεννα τῆς ὀρφανῆς Ἑλλάδας! Σχολεῖα χωρὶς πετρέλαιο, παιδιά

πού λιποθυμοῦν στὰ ἔδρανα χωρὶς πρωϊνό, μαθητὲς πού διαβάζουν σκεπασμένοι μὲ κουβέρτες, σπίτια ὅπου τρῶνε μία φορὰ τὴ μέρα, οἰκογένειες πού δὲ δουλεύει κανένας ἀπὸ τὰ μέλη τους, συντετριμμένοι ἄποροι γονεῖς, αὐτοκίνητα ἀκίνητα, χωρὶς πινακίδες, ἀπλήρωτοι καθυστερημένοι λογαριασμοί, ἀκατάβλητες τραπεζικὲς δόσεις, ληγμένα γραμμᾶτια, πληρωμένα φάρμακα, ζυμαρικὰ καὶ ὄσπρια στὸ τραπέζι καθημερινά, κοιμμένα ρεύματα καὶ νερά, σταματημένα φροντιστήρια τῶν παιδιῶν, χρῆ πού τρέχουν καὶ ἐνοίκια πού περιμένουν, δῆμοι καὶ περιφέρειες χωρὶς πόρους, ναοὶ πού μετρᾶνε πλέον τὰ χάλκινα κέρματα τοῦ παγκαρίου γιὰ νὰ καλύψουν τρύπες καὶ γύμνιες καὶ νὰ χορτάσουν ἄδειες κοιλιές. Ἄνεργοι νέοι, κλειστὰ μαγαζιά, ἀκινήσια στὴν ἀγορά, μελλοντοφροὶ στὴν ἀναμονή, μαραζωμένοι συνταξιούχοι, ἀδιαθεσία παντοῦ, αὐτοκτονίες συχνές, «ὁ πλοῦς ἐν νυκτί, φῶς οὐδαμοῦ», ἀπολυμένοι καὶ ἀνασφάλιστοι, ἀγανακτισμένοι καὶ διαμαρτυρόμενοι. Ἀγρίεψε τὸ μάτι τοῦ λαοῦ. Μία πατρίδα στὰ ὄρια τῆς ἀπόγνωσης καὶ τῆς γενικῆς ἀνάφλεξης.

Χριστούγεννα 2011. Κι ὅμως «οὐδὲν κακὸν ἀμιγὲς καλοῦ». Αὐξήθηκαν φέτος οἱ προχριστουγεννιάτικες φιλανθρωπικὲς προσπάθειες. Κάποιοι δῆμοι ὀργάνωσαν κάτι γιὰ τὰ παιδιά. Δόθηκαν περισσότερα δέματα ἀγάπης σὲ φτωχοὺς. Ἔγιναν πὶο πολλές ἐπισκέψεις συμπαράστασης. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ μεγάλη μάννα τῶν ὀρθοδόξων, μαζεύει καὶ πάλι τὰ παιδιά τῆς κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ προστατευτικὰ φτερά της. Αὐξήθηκαν τὰ συσσίτια καὶ τὰ ἐπιδόματα. Κάτι ἔγινε καὶ μὲ τὸν Ἔρανο τῆς Ἀγάπης. Λίγα πράγματα βέβαια. Εἶναι πλέον ὁ ἴδιος ὁ λαὸς πού δίνει ἀπὸ τὸ ὑστέρημά του.

Στὴ Γερμανικὴ Κατοχὴ τοῦ 1941 ἔβγαινε ἡ μερίδα τοῦ φτωχοῦ, μία κουταλιά ἀπὸ κάθε πιάτο, κι ἔβγαινε ἕνα ἀκόμη πιάτο. Ἐβδομήντα χρόνια μετά, τὸ 2011, ὁ φιλότιμος λαός μας, ὁ καταδικασμένος στὸν ἐξευτελισμὸ τῶν τραπεζικῶν μεθοδεύσεων, τῆς πολιτικῆς ἀβουλίας τῶν βουλευτῶν του καὶ τῆς κυβερνητικῆς ἀναξιότητος τῶν ἐκλεγμένων ἀρχόντων του, βγάζει κι ἕνα πιάτο γιὰ τὰ παιδιά τῶν ὀρφανοτροφείων, γιὰ τοὺς γέροντες τῶν γηροκομείων, γιὰ τὶς στρατιῆς τῶν ἀνέργων καὶ ἀστέγων, γιὰ τὶς ὀρδὲς τῶν ἀπατημένων λαθροφερμένων μεταναστῶν, γιὰ τοὺς τροφίμους τῶν φυλακῶν, γιὰ τοὺς ξεχασμένους τῶν ἀσύλων. «Ἄχ, Ἑλλάδα, πόσο σ' ἀγαπῶ!» «Προώριστα νὰ ζήσης καὶ θὰ ζήσης διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας», γλυκεῖά μας Πατρίδα.

Χριστούγεννα ἀπελπισίας τὰ φετινά! «Οὐδεὶς οἶδε τί τέξεται ἢ ἐπιούσα». Πολλοὶ ξαναφέρνουν στὴν ἐπικαιρότητα θρούλους καὶ προφητείες. Τί θὰ γίνεῖ ἄραγε; Ἕνας χειμῶνας δύσκολος. Βαριά μελανιασμένα σύννεφα στὸν ὀρίζοντα. «Ποῦ εἶναι ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς

τῶν Ἰουδαίων;» Ψάχνουμε καὶ μεῖς χωρὶς ἀστέρι καὶ φῶς ἐλπίδας στὴν ἀφιλόξενη πλέον Ἑλλάδα. Γιατί συμβαίνουν ὅλα αὐτά; Τί κάνει ὁ Θεός; ρωτοῦν πολλοί. Ἡ εἴμαστε πολὺ ἁμαρτωλοὶ καὶ μᾶς τιμωρεῖ, ἢ εἴμαστε ἀκαλλιέργητοι καὶ μᾶς παιδαγωγεῖ ἢ εἴμαστε πολὺ ἅγιοι καὶ μᾶς δοκιμάζει ἢ πολὺ ὑπομονητικοὶ καὶ κάτι μᾶς ἐτοιμάζει! Δὲν ἐξηγεῖται ἄλλοιῶς. Ὅ,τι καὶ νάμαστε μὴ χάσουμε τὴν προσδοκία μας, τὴν ἐλπίδα μας καὶ τὴ χαρὰ μας.

Χριστούγεννα τῆς Νέας Κατοχῆς τοῦ 2011. «Σώπα, ὅπου νάναί θὰ χτυπήσουν οἱ καμπάνες». Δὲ χάθηκε ἡ ἐλπίδα. Γεννιέται ἕνα Παιδί. Κι αὐτὸ τὸ Παιδί εἶναι ὁ Χριστός! Ὁ Ἐμμανουήλ, ὁ Θεὸς μαζί μας! «Ἀνατολὴ ὄνομα Αὐτῶ». Κάτι καινούριο ξεπροβάλλει! Ἄν κάποιος, λοιπόν, λαοὶ καὶ ἄρχοντες, ἀρέσκονται στὴν ἀπάτη, ἐμεῖς ἄς ὑπηρετήσουμε τὴν Ἀγάπη. Ἄν κάποιος προωθοῦν τὴ διαπλοκή, ἐμεῖς ἄς ἐπιμείνουμε στὴν Προσευχή. Ἄν ἄλλοι μεθοδεύουν τὴν ἐκμετάλλευση, ἐμεῖς αὐξήσουμε τὴν ἀλληλεγγύη. Ἄν κάποιος ἀνέχεται καὶ μεθοῦν, «ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρεπόμενος καὶ Θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενος», ἐμεῖς ἄς ἀγρυπνοῦμε κοντὰ στοὺς ἀναγκασμένους. Ἄν κάποιος σχεδιάζουν στὰ σκοτεινὰ γραφεῖα τοὺς τὸν φόνο «ἀπὸ διетуὺς καὶ κατωτέρω» τῶν παιδιῶν τῶν Ἑλλήνων, ἐμεῖς ἄς μείνουμε πιστοὶ στὴ Ζωὴ πού γεννιέται. Ἄν, τέλος, δικοὶ μας καὶ ξένοι ψεύδονται καὶ μᾶς ἐμπαίζουν, ἐμεῖς ἄς προσκυνήσουμε ταπεινὰ τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ ὁ Καλὸς Θεὸς θὰ μᾶς βγάλει ἀπὸ ἄλλο δρόμο, γιὰ νὰ ξαναβροῦμε τὴ χαμένη Πατρίδα μας καὶ τὴν ἀποσταμένη ἐλπίδα μας. Ἕνα εἶναι σίγουρο: δὲ θὰ πεθάνουμε, δὲ θὰ χαθοῦμε! «Ζεῖ Κύριος» καὶ μεῖς ζοῦμε!



Δὲν ξέρω ἐσεῖς πῶς ἐτοιμάζετε γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Ἄν ἐτοιμάζετε μόνο ὑλικῶς, μὲ ὄλο τὸ φορτίο τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν σας δηλ. ἀνεξομολόγητοι, κάνετε πολὺ λάθος. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ προετοιμάζεται γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα καὶ πνευματικῶς, νὰ ἐξομολογεῖται δηλ. καὶ νὰ βρίσκεται ἐν μετανοία. Διότι ὁ Χριστὸς ἦρθε στὸν κόσμον, νὰ «μαζέψει» τὶς ἁμαρτίες τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ νὰ καταργήσῃ τὸν θάνατον, πού προκαλεῖ ἡ ἁμαρτία.

Ἐὰν λοιπὸν θέλουμε, τὰ φετινὰ Χριστούγεννα νὰ εἶναι Χριστούγεννα Θεοῦ, φροντίστε νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖτε τὶς ἁμαρτίες σας, εἰρηνεύσετε μὲ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἀγαπήστε - συγχωρέστε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, πεῖτε τὴν «καλημέρα» τοῦ Θεοῦ, γράψτε, τηλεφωνεῖστε καὶ μετὰ πάτε στὴν Βηθλεὲμ, γιὰ νὰ ἀκούσετε τὸ «ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκία» ἀπὸ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμον γιὰ τὸν ἄλλον.

Δημήτριος Παναγόπουλος, Ἱεροκήρυκας

Τὸ Κλείσιμο τῶν Ναῶν

Ἡ Ζ' Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος ἀπαγορεύει στοὺς Ἐπισκόπους νὰ δέχονται τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν Ναῶν ὅποιαδήποτε αἰτία κι ἂν ὑφίσταται!

Γράφει ὁ Ἰωάννης Χατζηδigenής, θεολόγος.

«Οἱ τὰ πάντα καλῶς διαταξάμενοι θεῖοι Πατέρες» ἀπαντοῦν στὰ περὶ κλεισίματος τῶν Ἱερῶν Ναῶν!

† † †

Αγιοὶ ἱεράρχες, γνωρίζετε καλῶς πὼς ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐνεργοῦσα ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι «ἐκλείσει καλῶς καὶ ἀπολύτως» ὅλες τὶς ὁπὲς διαρροῆς καὶ ὑπεκφυγῆς ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς Παραδόσεως, στὴν ὁποία περιέχεται καὶ ἡ κοινὴ Θεία Λατρεία. Ἔνα εἶναι τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, ποὺ φωτίζει τοὺς Ἁγίους καὶ μᾶς ἀποκαλύπτουν ἅπασαν τὴν Ἀλήθειαν. Συνεπῶς δὲν ὑπάρχει περιπτώση ὑπεκφυγῆς ἀπὸ αὐτὴν, διότι εἶναι καὶ βεβιωμένη καὶ καταγεγραμμένη. Ἐν τοιαύτῃ περιπτώσει, μὲ τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν ναῶν, καταφεύγουμε καὶ σήμερα στὴν ἀσφαλὴ πηγή, γιὰ νὰ φανεῖ ἡ παρανομία ἢ ὁποία ἐπιτελεῖται, καὶ ἐσεῖς ὡς σῶμα ἱεραρχικὸ τὴν ἀποδέχεσθε!

Οἱ «λόγοι προστασίας τῆς υἰεῖας» εἶναι ἡ δικαιολογία τῶν πολιτικῶν γιὰ νὰ λαμβάνουν ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ μέτρα. Προφανῶς καὶ οἱ περισσότεροι ἐπίσκοποι υἰοθέτησαν τὴν λογικὴ τῆς σωματικῆς υἰεῖας ὡς ὑπέρτατο ἀγαθὸ γι' αὐτὸ καὶ συμφωνοῦν μὲ τοὺς πολιτικοὺς σὲ ὅλα. Εἶναι ὅμως ἡ σωματικὴ υἰεῖα ὑπέρτατο ἀγαθὸ, κρίνοντας τὰ πράγματα ἀγιοπατερικά; Βέβαια τὸ σῶμα ὀφείλουμε νὰ μὴν τὸ καταστρέφουμε ἀλλὰ ἕως ποιοῦ σημείου; Ὅταν ἡ προστασία τοῦ βλάπτει τὴν ψυχὴ;

Ἡ Ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία ὡς ἀποκλειστικὸ Πηδάλιο, Πυξίδα καὶ Ὁδηγὸς, εἶχε καὶ θὰ ἔχει τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ τὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοση. Τὴν Διδασκαλία δηλαδὴ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὴν βιωμένη ἐμπειρία τῆς Διδασκαλίας αὐτῆς ἀπὸ τὸ Κυριακὸ Σῶμα, τοὺς Πιστοὺς. Κανεὶς ἄλλος δὲν κατηύθυνε, οὔτε μπορεῖ νὰ κατευθύνει τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Συνεπῶς δὲν γίνεται νὰ τῆς ἐπιβληθοῦν πρακτικὲς ποὺ βρίσκονται ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ τὴν Πατερικὴ Διδασκαλία, δηλαδὴ τὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοση. Στὸ «Πηδάλιο» ποὺ ἔχει συντάξει ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης, περιέχεται ὁ τέταρτος Κανὼνας τῆς ἐβδόμης Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι ξεκάθαρος σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν



Ἱερῶν Ναῶν. Ἀπαγορεύει ρητῶς στοὺς Ἐπισκόπους νὰ ἐπιτρέπουν τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν Ναῶν, ὅποιαδήποτε αἰτία κι ἂν ὑφίσταται!

Διαβάστε προσεκτικὰ τὸν κανόνα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὶς ἐπεξηγήσεις τῶν ἐρμηνευτῶν:

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ «Σύνταγμα Θεῶν καὶ Ἱερῶν Κανόνων», τῶν Ράλλη - Ποτλή, τόμος Β', ἐκδόσεις «Γρηγόρη» Κανῶν Δ' τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Οἰκουμενικῆς Ἑβδόμης (Ζ') Συνόδου τῆς ἐν Νικαίᾳ: «*Εἴ τις οὖν δι' ἀπαίτησιν χρυσοῦ, ἢ ἑτέρου τινός εἶδους, εἴτε διὰ τινα ἰδίαν ἐμπάθειαν, εὐρεθείη ἀπειργων τῆς λειτουργίας, καὶ ἀφορίζων τινὰ τῶν ὑπ' αὐτὸν κληρικῶν, ἢ σεπτὸν ναὸν κλείων, ὡς μὴ γίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ τὰς τοῦ Θεοῦ λειτουργίας, καὶ εἰς ἀναίσθητον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ μανίαν ἐπιπέμπων, ἀναίσθητος ὄντως ἐστί, καὶ τῇ ταυτοπαθείᾳ ὑποκείμεται, καὶ ἐπιστρέφει ὁ πόνος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ, ὡς παραβάτης ἐντολῆς Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν Ἀποστολικῶν διατάξεων...*».

Ἀπόδοση τοῦ κανόνου στὴν νεοελληνικὴ: «*Εἴαν λοιπὸν θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ εἶχε βρεθεῖ κάποιος ἐπίσκοπος, ποὺ νὰ ἀπαγορεύσει τὴν τέλεση τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας, ἀπαιτώντας χρυσὸ ἢ κάποιο ἄλλο εἶδος ἢ ἀκόμη γιὰ λόγους κάποιου προσωπικοῦ πάθους καὶ μάλιστα νὰ ἀφορίσει κάποιον ἀπὸ τοὺς κληρικούς, ποὺ ὑπάγονται στὴν δικὴ του ἐκκλησιαστικὴ δικαιοδοσία ἢ ἂν κλείσει κάποιον ἱερὸ ναό, ὥστε νὰ*

μὴν γίνονται σ' αὐτὸν οἱ Θεῖες Λειτουργίες τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ μὲ ἀναίσθησιν ἐπιρρίψει τὴν μανία του μὲ τιμωρίες, εἶναι ὄντως ἀναίσθητος καὶ θὰ ὑποστεῖ καὶ αὐτὸς τὰ ἴδια ποὺ ἔχει κάνει. Ὁ πόνος ποὺ ἔδωσε, θὰ ἐπιστρέφει στὸ δικό του κεφάλι, διότι ὑπῆρξε παραβάτης τῆς ἐντολῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν Ἀποστολικῶν διατάξεων...».

Ἐρμηνεῖα Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου Ἁγιορείτου, Ἱερὸν «Πηδάλιον», σελίδα 266: «*Ὅποιος λοιπὸν Ἀρχιερεὺς εὐρεθῆ νὰ ἀργίξῃ ἢ νὰ ἀφορίξῃ τινὰ ἱερέα, ἢ Κληρικόν, ἢ νὰ κλείῃ Ἐκκλησίας διὰ νὰ πάρῃ ἄσπρα ἢ διὰ καμμίαν του ἄλλην ἐμπάθειαν, οὗτος ἄς παθαίνη ἐκεῖνο ὁποῦ κάμνει, ἢτοι ἄς ἀργίξεται, καὶ ἄς ἀφορίζεται, Ἐπίσκοπος μὲν ὄν ἀπὸ τὸν Μητροπολίτην του, Μητροπολίτης δὲ ὄν ἀπὸ τὸν Πατριάρχην του.*».

Ἐρμηνεῖα Ζωναρά: «*Εἴ τις ἐπίσκοπος κλείσει ναόν, ὥστε μὴ γίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ τὰς λειτουργίας, εἰς ἀναίσθητον, τὸν ναόν, δηλαδὴ τὴν ὄργην αὐτοῦ, ἢν μανίαν, διὰ τὸ πάνυ σφοδρὸν καὶ παράλογον ὠνόμασεν, ἐπιπέμπων, ἀναίσθητός ἐστί, φησί, καὶ τῇ ταυτοπαθείᾳ*

ὑποκείται, ἡγουν ἀφορισθήσεται, καὶ ὁ ἐποίησε πάθη, ὁ μὲν ἐπίσκοπος παρὰ τοῦ μητροπολίτου αὐτοῦ, ὁ δὲ μητροπολίτης παρὰ τοῦ πατριάρχου, οἷς ὑπόκεινται καὶ ἐπιστρέφει ὁ πόνος αὐτοῦ εἰς κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ, ὡς παραβάτου ἐντολῆς Θεοῦ, καὶ τῶν ἀποστολικῶν διατάξεων...».

Ἐρμηνεία Βαλσάμωνος: «Ὁ γὰρ κλείων ναοὺς Ἐπίσκοπος ἐξ οἰουδήποτε εὐλόγου, ἢ παραλόγου τρόπου, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, κολασθήσεται».

Ἀπόδοση τοῦ Βαλσάμωνος στὴν νεοελληνική: «Ὁ ἐπίσκοπος ποὺ κλείνει ναοὺς μὲ ὁποιαδήποτε λογικὴ ἢ παράλογη ἀφορμὴ, ἔχω τὴν γνώμη πὼς θὰ κολασθεῖ».

Ἐρμηνεία Ἀριστήνου: «Εἰ τις οὖν Ἐπίσκοπος... διὰ τινὰ ἰδιοπάθειαν, εὐρεθεὶ ἀπειργων τῆς λειτουργίας, ἢ ἀφορίζων τινὰ τῶν ὑπ' αὐτὸν κληρικῶν, ἢ σεπτὸν ναὸν κλείων, μὴ γίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ τὰς ἱερὰς τοῦ Θεοῦ λειτουργίας, τῇ ταυτοπαθείᾳ ὑποκείται...».

Ἀπόδοση τοῦ Ἀριστήνου στὴν νεοελληνική: «Εἴαν θὰ μπορούσε νὰ βρεθεῖ κάποιος ἐπίσκοπος νὰ ἀπαγορεύσει τὴν Λειτουργία... ἐξαιτίας ἰδίου πάθους ἢ ἂν ἀφορίσει κάποιον κληρικὸ τῆς δικαιοδοσίας του (ἐν. γιὰ τὸν λόγο αὐτό) ἢ κλείσει ἱερὸ ναὸ, ὥστε νὰ μὴν γίνονται μέσα οἱ ἱερὰς λειτουργίες τοῦ Θεοῦ, θὰ ὑποστῆ τις ἀνάλογες βαριεὲς τιμωρίες».

Ὅσο γιὰ τὴν θεληματικὴ ἢ ὄχι συναίνεση τῶν Ἐπισκόπων, δὲν τὸ λέμε ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι ὅτι θέλουν τὰ μέτρα περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὸν Μητροπολίτη γιὰ τὸ φοβοῦνται μὴν κολλήσουν καί, Θεὸς φυλάξει, πεθάνουν!

Πῶς λοιπὸν μπορούμε μὲ διάφορες προφάσεις, νὰ ἀποκόπτουμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας ἀπὸ τὸ Σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ ἀκρωτηριάσουμε τὴν ἐκκλησία; Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ κανόνες τῆς ἐκκλησίας εἶναι ἰδιαίτερα αὐστηροί. **«Πάντας τοὺς εἰσιόντας πιστοὺς καὶ τῶν γραφῶν ἀκούοντας, μὴ παραμένοντας δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ ἀγίᾳ μεταλήψει, ὡς ἀταξίαν ἐμποιοῦντας τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἀφορίζεσθαι χρὴ».** (9^{ος} Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼν).



Ἀπόψε εὐχομαι νὰ Τὸν δοῦμε τὸν Χριστὸ μέσα μας νὰ γεννιέται, καὶ νὰ γίνῃ ὁδηγὸς μας μέχρι τῆς ἐσχάτης μας ἀναπνοῆς. Καλὴ ἀγρυπνία: δύναμι νὰ μᾶς δώσῃ ἢ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἄγγελοι καὶ Ἀρχάγγελοι καὶ Ἐξουσαίαι θὰ χοροστατοῦν ἀπόψε. Νοερῶς νὰ εἴμαστε γονατισμένες στὴ Βηθλεέμ, στὴ Φάτνη, στὸν Ἀστέρα, ἐκεῖ ὅπου μὲ δόξα θὰ γίνεταί ἀγρυπνία ὁλονύχτια. Νὰ Τὸν ἀγκαλιάσουμε, τὸν Τὸν χαϊδέσουμε τὸν Χριστοῦλη, ὅπως ἡ Παναγία. Νὰ σκιρτήσῃ σὰν βρέφος στὴς ψυχές μας. Νὰ Τοῦ δεῖξουμε τὴν ἀγάπη μας καὶ νὰ γίνῃ ψυχικὴ καὶ σωματικὴ ἀναγέννησι. Χρόνια πολλὰ σὰς εὐχομαι, εὐλογημένα παρὰ Κυρίου.

Γερόντισσα Μακρίνα (+1995)

Περὶ Ὑποκρισίας

Τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Πληγὴ στὸ σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ αἰτία πολλῶν δεινῶν εἶναι ἡ ὑποκρισία, ποὺ διακρίνει πολλοὺς κληρικούς, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοὺς Χριστιανούς. Μιὰ κατάσταση, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι ἀπαράδεκτη, ἀφοῦ ἐμφανίζεως θεοφιλὲς ἐκείνο, ποὺ εἶναι ἁμαρτωλὸ καὶ κατακριτέο.

Ἡ ὑποκρισία προϋποθέτει ἀσεβεία πρὸς κάθε τί ἱερὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ θρασύτητα. Ὁ ὑποκριτὴς εἶναι ἐρείπιο πνευματικὰ, θέλει ὅμως νὰ ἀπολαμβάνει τὶς τιμὲς καὶ τὰ ἐγκώμια τῶν ἄλλων γιὰ «ἀρετές», ποὺ ὑποκριτικὰ ἐμφανίζει. Ἡ παρουσία του ἀνάμεσα σὲ γνωστοὺς εἶναι ἰδιαίτερα ἐνοχλητικὴ. Οἱ περισσότεροι τὸν ἀνέχονται μὲ ἐπικριτικούς ψιθύρους καὶ δὲν νιώθουν κοντὰ του εὐχάριστα.

Ἡ στάση αὐτὴ βέβαια ἀπέναντι στὸν ὑποκριτὴ δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἐνδεδειγμένη. Χρειάζεται δυναμικὴ ἀντίδραση. Πρέπει νὰ ἀποκαλυφθεῖ ἡ ὑποκρισία, γιὰ νὰ κλονιστεῖ ἡ ἐμπιστοσύνη ἐκείνων, ποὺ ἔχουν ἐξαπατηθεῖ καὶ νὰ στραφοῦν πρὸς τοὺς ἀληθινὰ ἐναρέτους ἀνθρώπους προκειμένου νὰ ὠφεληθοῦν πνευματικὰ.

Ὁ ὑποκριτὴς δὲν γίνεται γνωστὸς γρήγορα καὶ εὐκόλα. Συνήθως περνάει χρόνος καὶ μόνο ὅταν χρειαστεῖ νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει κάποια σοβαρὴ κατάσταση ἢ κάποιο πρόβλημα, ἀρχίζει νὰ καταστρέφεται τὸ προσωπεῖο του καὶ νὰ φαίνεται τὸ πραγματικὸ του πρόσωπο. Ἡ εὐλάβεια, ἡ πραότητα, ἡ ταπείνωση, ἡ ἀνεξικακία, ποὺ τὸν «κοσμοῦσαν», χάνονται καὶ φαίνεται ὁ ἀσεβὴς, ὁ ὀργίλος, ὁ ὑπερήφανος καὶ ἐμπαθὴς, ποὺ δηλητηρίαζε τὸν περίγυρό του, χωρὶς νὰ τὸν ὑποψιάζονταν πολλοὶ καλοπροαίρετοι, μὲ τοὺς ὁποίους ἐρχόταν σὲ ἐπαφὴ καὶ εἶχε συνεργασία.

Εἶναι γνωστὴ ἡ στάση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπέναντι στοὺς ὑποκριτὲς τῆς ἐποχῆς του, δηλαδὴ στοὺς Γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαίους. Χρησιμοποίησε ἀποκαλυπτικὴ γλώσσα, γιὰ νὰ προφυλάξῃ τὸ λαό, ὁ ὁποῖος παρασυρόταν ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἀκολουθοῦσε.

Οἱ ὑποκριτὲς εἶναι ἐπικίνδυνοι, ἰδίως ὅταν δραστηριοποιοῦνται στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, γιὰ τὴν δημιουργοῦν ψεύτικες ἐντυπώσεις καὶ προκαλοῦν σκανδαλισμὸ καὶ ἀπογοήτευση. Συνηθισμένη περίπτωση εἶναι μερικοὶ ὑποψήφιοι ἱερεῖς, ποὺ ἐμφανίζονται ὡς εὐλαβέστατοι, μὲ ἱερατικὴ κλίση καὶ ἱερὸ ζῆλο καὶ μετὰ τὴ χειροτονία τοὺς ἀποβάλλουν τὸ προσωπεῖο τῆς εὐλάβειας καὶ ἀπογοητεύουν τοὺς ἐνοριτὲς τοὺς.

Μακάρι κάποτε νὰ ἐκλείψῃ ἡ ὑποκρισία ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ οἱ ἐκδηλώσεις τοὺς νὰ εἶναι ἀληθινές. Νὰ ξέρεις ποιοὺς ἔχεις μπροστά σου, νὰ βλέπεις τὶς ἀρετὲς τοὺς καὶ νὰ χαίρεσαι ἢ νὰ βλέπεις τὶς ἀδυναμίες τοὺς καὶ νὰ τοὺς βοηθᾷς ἀνάλογα.

Οἱ Προφητεῖες Ἐγίναν Εἰδήσεις!

Γράφει ὁ Ἡλίας Δ. Καλλιώρας, καθηγητῆς Διεθνολόγος, συγγραφέας, πρώην βουλευτῆς. Ἀπὸ τὸ «Στύλος Ὁρθοδοξίας», Νοέμβριος 2020, Ἀριθμὸς Φύλλον 226.

Αρχὲς Αὐγούστου ἔγραφα στὸν Στύλο Ὁρθοδοξίας: «Φωτισμένος γέροντας μᾶς τόνισε ὅτι ἡ Ἑλλάδα καὶ οἱ Ἕλληνες θὰ δεχθοῦν καὶ νέα ραπίσματα οὐράνιας διαπαιδαγώγησης ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο. Διότι, ὅπως εἶπε ὁ γέροντας, «οἱ Ἕλληνες ξέχασαν τὸν Τριαδικὸ Θεὸ καὶ ἀποστάτησαν μαζικά. Πολλοὶ Ἕλληνες, μαζὶ μὲ τὶς ἑλληνικὲς κυβερνήσεις, φτάνουν στὸ φοβερὸ ἐκεῖνο σημεῖο νὰ πολεμοῦν εὐθέως τὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Βασίλειό Του.

Γράφουν νόμους ποὺ εἶναι Χριστομάχοι. Χριστοπόλεμοι. Ἀντίθεοι. Βέβηλοι. Θυμίζουν ἀρχαία Βαβυλώνα. Οἱ Ἕλληνες ἀμαρτάνουν ὑπέροτρα σὲ τέσσερις κυρίως τομεῖς ἢ πνευματικὰ πεδία: Ἐκτρώσεις, παρὰ φύση ἀμαρτήματα, μαγεῖες καὶ βλασφημίες κατὰ τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος».

Ἐπίσης, ἔγραφα τότε: «Σὲ ἄλλη ἐρώτηση πρὸς τὸν γέροντα, γιὰ τὸ τί πρέπει νὰ κάνουμε ὅταν ἴσως ἔρθει ἓνα δευτέρου κύμα ἢ β' φάση τοῦ κορωνοϊοῦ καὶ κλείσουν ἴσως καὶ πάλι οἱ Ἐκκλησίες ἢ ἀρχίσουν παρόμοιοι ἢ καὶ ἀκόμα χειρότεροι διωγμοὶ κατὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς Θείας Μετάληψης, τῶν ἱερέων καὶ τῶν πιστῶν, ὁ ἴδιος μᾶς ὑπογράμμισε μὲ ἰδιαίτερο νόημα:

«Νὰ διαβάσετε πολὺ προσεκτικὰ τὸ βιβλίον «Τὸ Ὀδοιπορικὸ Ραβδί» τοῦ Νιχηφόρφ-Βόλγιν. Νὰ τὸ διαβάσετε καὶ νὰ τὸ προτείνετε ἐπίσης καὶ σὲ ἱερεῖς τοῦ Ὑψίστου: Διότι, οἱ παραδοσιακοὶ παπάδες θὰ ἔχουν τὸ μεγαλύτερο βᾶρος, ρόλο καὶ πρόβλημα καὶ θὰ πρέπει νὰ βροῦν τρόπους καὶ μεθόδους «πνευματικῆς ἐπιβίωσης» ὁ καθένας γιὰ τὸ δικό του ποίμνιο. Ἴσως πᾶμε σὲ ..κατακόμβες γιὰ μία ἀκόμη φορὰ. Γιὰ 6 μὲ 7 μῆνες. Ἄς θυμηθοῦμε τοὺς πρωτοχριστιανικοὺς χρόνους, ὅπου οἱ ἱερεῖς τοῦ Κυρίου μας ἔβαζαν τὸ ἀντιμῆνσιο στὸν ντορβά τους καὶ ἔτρεχαν πόρτα-πόρτα, στὰ σκοτάδια, μέρα-νύχτα, κρυφίως καὶ μὲ τὸν «φόβο τῶν Ἰουδαίων» σὲ ἓνα πρὸς ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ πρόβατά τους. Σπίτι-σπίτι. Ἀχυρώνα-ἀχυρώνα. Γιὰ νὰ παντρέψουν, βαπτίσουν, κηδέψουν, κλπ».

Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Μόρφου Νεόφυτος εἶπε τὸν Μάιο τοῦ 2019: «Οἱ προφητεῖες τελειώσαν, θὰ τὰ βλέπουμε ὅλα στὶς εἰδήσεις».

Ἐλεγε ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος: «Σήμερα τὸ νὰ διαβάσει κανεὶς τοὺς προφήτες εἶναι σὰν νὰ διαβάσει ἐφημερίδα». Τόνιζε, ἐπίσης, ὁ ἴδιος ἀγιορείτης ἅγιος: «Τὸ καλύτερο

πρακτορεῖο εἰδήσεων εἶναι οἱ προφητεῖες τῶν ἁγίων». Μᾶς προειδοποιοῦσε: «Τόσα σᾶς λέω, τόσο σκληρὰ ἔχω μιλήσει! Ἄν δὲν ἔβλεπα τὰ δύσκολα χρόνια ποὺ ἔρχονται, δὲν θὰ ἀνησχοῦσα τόσο. Ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ ποὺ βλέπω εἶναι ὅτι ἀργότερα θὰ δυσκολευτεῖτε πολὺ. Δὲν μὲ καταλαβαίνετε. Τότε θὰ μὲ καταλάβετε».

Γιὰ νὰ προσθέσει ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος: «Εἶθε νὰ μὴν ἐπιτρέψῃ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ ἔρθουν δύσκολες μέρες, ἀλλὰ ἂν ἔρθουν, μὲ ἓνα μικρὸ σεισμό, μὲ ἓνα τράνταγμα, θὰ σωριάσουν ὀλόκληρες ἀδελφότητες, ὀλόκληρα μοναστήρια, γιὰτὶ ὁ καθένας θὰ πᾶν νὰ σώσῃ τὸν ἑαυτό του καὶ θὰ τραβήξῃ τὴν πορεία του. Χρειάζεται πολλὴ προσοχή, γιὰ νὰ μὴ μᾶς ἐγκατάλειψῃ ὁ Θεός... Θὰ γίνῃ μεγάλο τράνταγμα».

Κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιο Παῖσιο: «Μεγαλύτεροι Μάρτυρες ἦταν οἱ Προφῆτες! Πιὸ μεγάλοι Μάρτυρες ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς Μάρτυρες, παρ' ὅλου ποὺ δὲν πέθαναν ὅλοι μὲ μαρτυρικὸ θάνατο. Γιατὶ οἱ Μάρτυρες γιὰ λίγο ὑπέφεραν, ἐνῶ οἱ Προφῆτες ἔβλεπαν μία κατάσταση καὶ ὑπέφεραν συνέχεια. Φώναζαν-φώναζαν, καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τὸν χαβά τους. Καὶ ὅταν ἔφθανε ἡ ὥρα καὶ ἔρχόταν ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐξ αἰτίας τους, βασανίζονταν καὶ ἐκεῖνοι μαζὶ τους. Δὲν ἔχουμε συνειδητοποιήσει ὅτι ὁ διάβολος βάλθηκε νὰ καταστρέψῃ τὰ πλάσματα τοῦ Θεοῦ».

Ὁ ἴδιος ἀγιορείτης ἅγιος ὑπογράμμισε ἀκόμη: «Ὁ κόσμος καίγεται! Τὸ καταλαβαίνετε; Ἐπесе πολὺς πειρασμός. Τέτοια πυρκαγιά ἔχει βάλει ὁ διάβολος, ποὺ οὔτε ὅλοι οἱ πυροσβέστες ἂν μαζευθοῦν, δὲν μποροῦν νὰ κάνουν τίποτε, ἀναγκάζονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ στραφοῦν στὸν Θεὸ καὶ νὰ Τὸν παρακαλέσουν νὰ ρίξῃ μία βροχὴ γερῆ, γιὰ νὰ σβῆσῃ. Ἔτσι καὶ γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ πυρκαγιά ποὺ ἄναψε ὁ διάβολος, μόνον προσευχὴ χρειάζεται, γιὰ νὰ βοηθήσῃ ὁ Θεός. Ὁλος ὁ κόσμος πᾶει νὰ γίνῃ μία περίπτωση. Γενικὸ ξεχαρβάλωμα! Δὲν εἶναι νὰ πῆς: «Σ' ἓνα σπίτι χάλασε λίγο τὸ παράθυρο ἢ κάτι ἄλλο, ἄς τὸ διορθώσω.» Ὅλο τὸ σπίτι εἶναι ξεχαρβαλωμένο. Ἐχει γίνῃ χαλασμένο χωριό».

Ναί, ἔτσι ἔχουν τὰ πράγματα στὶς μέρες μας. Ὁ κόσμος ξεχαρβαλώθηκε. Ξέφυγε. Ξέχασε τὸν Κύριο. Δὲν τὸν ἔχει ἀνάγκη πιά. Ἐγινε ὁ ἄνθρωπος ... θεός! Πῆρε ἢ μπῆκε στὴ θέση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Βλέπετε πὼς λόγω ἡδονῶν, σαρκικῶν παθῶν, καλοπέρασης, κλπ, δὲν τὸν «συμφέρει» πλέον νὰ δεῖ, νὰ ἀκούσῃ καὶ νὰ ἐπικοινωνήσῃ μὲ τὸν Τριαδικὸ Θεό. Δὲν ἔχει πλέον καμμία ἀνάγκη τὸν Κύριο. Ὅλα τὰ κάνει μόνος του. Δὲν χρειάζεται κανέναν. Οὔτε κἂν τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Δημιουργό του. Ἀποστάτησε. Ὁ ἐγωϊσμός τὸν κάνει νὰ νιώθει

Ἐπενθυμίζουμε τὶς προφητεῖες παλαιῶν καὶ συγχρόνων ἁγίων προκειμένου νὰ συνειδητοποιήσουμε ὅλοι τὰ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν!

γίγαντας! Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὑπάρχει γενικὸς συσκοτισμὸς μέσα στὶς καρδιές τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Γιὰ τὴ Δύση, εἰδικότερα, ὅπως εἶπε καὶ ὁ μέγας παγανιστὴς Φ. Νίτσε: «Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι νεκρός».

Μπροστὰ σὲ ἐμᾶς καὶ σὲ ὅσα κάνουμε ἢ βιώνουμε στὶς μέρες μας, τὰ Σόδομα καὶ τὰ Γόμορρα φαντάζον, πνευματικὰ καὶ ἱστορικὰ, μικρὰ πταισίματα καὶ ἀσήμαντες καταστάσεις ἢ γεγονότα μίας ἄλλης ἐποχῆς. Διότι τότε οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶχαν πέσει μὲν στὴν ἀσωτία, στὸν ἠδονισμό, στὰ σαρκικὰ πάθη καὶ στὶς παρὰ φύσει ἀνωμαλίες καὶ βιωτὴ, χωρὶς, ἐν τούτοις, νὰ ὑπάρχουν σχετικοὶ νόμοι καὶ διατάξεις ποὺ νὰ ἐπιτρέπουν, καλλιεργοῦν, νομιμοποιοῦν καὶ νὰ ἐνθαρρύνουν τὸν σοδομισμὸ, τὴν ἀνωμαλία καὶ τὴν ἀποστασία μας ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο, ὅπως συμβαίνει στὰ δικὰ μας χρόνια.

Αὐτὴ τὴ γενικὴ μας ἀποστασία εἶναι ποὺ θέλει ὁ Κύριος νὰ τὴν ἀλλάξει μὲ τὸν τρόπο Του καὶ νὰ τὴν διορθώσει μὲ τὶς δικές Του εὐλογίες-παραχωρήσεις ὁ Κύριος. Καὶ ὄχι, ὅπως θὰ ἤθελε ὁ Ἰδιος μὲ δικές Του εὐλογίες-εὐδοκίες. Ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ Ὅσιος Μάρκος ὁ Ἀσκητῆς: «Τὰ ὀδυνηρὰ γεγονότα χαρίζουν μνήμη Θεοῦ στὸν συντετὸ ἄνθρωπο καὶ προκαλοῦν ἀντιστοιχῶς θλίψη σ' ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἔχει ξεχάσει τὸν Θεό». Βλέπετε, ὁ Σωτῆρας μας δὲν θέλει νὰ μᾶς ἀφαιρέσει τὴν ἐλευθερία τοῦ αὐτεξοφύσιου ποὺ μᾶς δώρισε ἀπὸ ἀγάπη καὶ πατρικὴ φροντίδα. Θέλει ὁ Ἰδιος ἐμεῖς νὰ Τὸν ἐπιλέξουμε, ἐλεύθερα, μὲ ἐπίγνωση καὶ ἀπὸ καρδιάς γιὰ Πατέρα καὶ Θεό μας.

Καὶ ἐδῶ εἶναι ποὺ ὑπαισέχεται ἡ δικὴ μας ἔμμεση πρόσκληση τῶν ἐπερχόμενων, ἀσύλληπτων καὶ φρικτῶν γεγονότων: Τοῦ προ τῶν θυρῶν Γ' Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου. Μὲ τὴ γενικὴ μας ἀποστασία, οἱ ἴδιοι ἐμεῖς καλοῦμε, ζητοῦμε καὶ προκαλοῦμε τὴν παρέμβαση τοῦ Κυρίου. Γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τῶν ψυχῶν μας, ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς οἰκουμένης δὲν ἀφήσαμε κανένα ἄλλο περιθώριο ἢ ἐπιλογή στὸν Κύριο παρὰ μόνον τὸν ἐπίγειο ἄρμαγεδδώνα. Τὸν Γ' Γενικὸ Πόλεμο. Τὸν πυρηνικὸ ὄλεθρο. Αὐτὸν τὸν παγκόσμιο πόλεμο ποὺ ἤδη ἄρχισε στὴ Συρία στὶς 15 Μαρτίου τοῦ 2011.

Βεβαίως, ἡ μετάνοια, οἱ δεήσεις, οἱ παρακλήσεις καὶ οἱ προσευχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ εἰδικὰ τῶν ἀγίων, κάνουν τὸν Κύριο νὰ σταματᾷ ἐντελῶς κάποια γεγονότα, ὅπως ἐγινε λχ στὴ Νινευί, ἢ νὰ ἀλλάξει τόσο τὴν ἔνταση ὅσο καὶ τὸν χρόνο διάρκειας κάποιων γεγονότων, καταστάσεων καὶ συμβάντων. Σᾶς θυμίζω, γιὰ παράδειγμα, τὸν σεισμὸ τοῦ Ἰουλίου 2019 στὴν Ἀθήνα.

Ὅπως εἶδαν πνευματικῶς, μὲ τὰ μάτια τῆς ψυχῆς τους, κάποιες θεοφόρες καὶ χαρισματικὲς ψυχές, ὁ ἐν λόγω σεισμὸς ἦταν ἀρχικὰ νὰ ἔχει ἔνταση πάνω ἀπὸ 8 Ρίχτερ, ἀλλά, ὁ Κύριος ἐπέτρεψε μόνον τὸ τελικὸ 5,1 Ρίχτερ. Νὰ πῶς οἱ καρδιακὲς προσευχὲς, καὶ πρωτίστως

τῶν ἀγίων, μποροῦν νὰ σταματήσουν, νὰ ἀλλάξουν, νὰ τροποποιήσουν καὶ νὰ μεταθέσουν χρονικὰ γεγονότα καὶ καταστάσεις.

Λόγου χάρι, ρώτησαν τὸν Ἅγιο Παῖσιο: «- Γέροντα, θὰ γίνῃ πόλεμος; - Ἔσεῖς κάνετε προσευχή; Ἐγὼ ἔχω ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνοιξημέχρι τὸ φθινόπωρο ποὺ κάνω ἐπιστράτευση προσευχῆς, ἀθόρυβα, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς λυπηθῇ ὁ Θεός, νὰ ἀποφύγουμε τὴν ἐπιστράτευση καὶ τὸν πόλεμο. Εἶχα πληροφορία. (Εἰπώθηκε τὸν Νοέμβριο τοῦ 1983. Ἡ πληροφορία δὲν ἦταν ἀνθρώπινη ἀλλὰ Θεϊκὴ): «Κάνετε πολλὴ προσευχή, γιὰ νὰ ἐμποδιστοῦν οἱ Τοῦρκοι, διότι ἔχουν σκοπὸ νὰ μᾶς χτυπήσουν.»»

Σεμῖα ἄλλη περίσταση, ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος εἶχε ἀναφέρει: «Οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ κάνουν μόνον μία πρόκληση στὴν Ἑλλάδα, ποὺ θὰ ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὴν αἰγιαλίτιδα ζώνη. Καὶ ἐμᾶς θὰ μᾶς πιάσει πείνα. Θὰ πεινάσει ἡ Ἑλλάδα. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ θὰ κρατήσει αὐτὴ ἡ μπόρα κάποιο διάστημα, μῆνες θὰ εἶναι, «θὰ ποῦμε τὸ ψωμὶ ψωμάκι.»»

«- Γέροντα, πῶς θὰ καταλάβουμε ὅτι θὰ εἴμαστε κοντὰ στὸν πόλεμο; - Ὅταν θὰ ἀκούσεις στὴν τηλεόραση νὰ γίνεταί θέμα γιὰ τὰ μίλια, γιὰ τὴν ἐπέκταση τῶν μιλίων (τῆς αἰγιαλίτιδας ζώνης) ἀπὸ 6 σὲ 12 μίλια, τότε ἀπὸ πίσω ἔρχεται ὁ πόλεμος. Κοίταξε, μετὰ τὴν πρόκληση τῶν Τοῦρκων, θὰ κατεβοῦν οἱ Ρῶσοι στὰ Στενά. Ὅχι γιὰ νὰ βοηθήσουν ἐμᾶς. Αὐτοὶ θὰ ἔχουν ἄλλα συμφέροντα. Ἀλλὰ χωρὶς νὰ τὸ θέλουν, θὰ βοηθᾶνε ἐμᾶς. Τότε, οἱ Τοῦρκοι γιὰ νὰ ὑπερασπισθοῦν τὰ Στενά, ποὺ εἶναι στρατηγικῆς σημασίας θὰ συγκεντρώσουν ἐκεῖ καὶ ἄλλα στρατεύματα. Παράλληλα δέ, θὰ ἀποσύρουν δυνάμεις ἀπὸ δικὰ μας καταληφθέντα ἐδάφη... Ἐπειδὴ στὴν Ἑλλάδα ὁ κόσμος θὰ φοβηθεῖ, πολλοὶ θὰ στραφοῦν πρὸς τὴν Ἐκκλησία, Θεό, καὶ θὰ μετανοήσουν.» (Γέροντας Παῖσιος, Μαρτυρίες Προσκυνητῶν, Νίκ. Ζουρνατζόγλου).

Πέραν αὐτῶν, τόσο ὁ Γέροντας Παῖσιος ὅσο καὶ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς ἔχουν προφητεύσει ὅτι «θὰ ξεσηκωθεῖ τὸ ρέμπελο (λαθρο-μετανάστες) καὶ μετὰ οἱ πολίτες». «Τότε», ἀναφέρει ὁ ἅγιος Πατροκοσμᾶς, «θὰ ὑπάρχει κυβερνήση καὶ θὰ εἶναι σὰν νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχει». Ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς ἔχει πεῖ ἀκόμη ὅτι, πρὶν φθάσει ἡ σύγκρουση μὲ τοὺς Τοῦρκους: «Ἐνας μεγάλος σεισμὸς θὰ κάνει πολὺ κακὸ καὶ μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὸν θὰ ἐπιτεθεῖ ὁ Τοῦρκος καὶ θὰ φθάσει μέχρι τὰ ἑξαμίλια».

Ἐξήγησε ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος: «Ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς εἶχε δίκιο ποὺ εἶπε γιὰ τὰ «ἑξαμίλια», διότι τὰ «ἑξαμίλια» δὲν εἶναι οὔτε χωριά, οὔτε πόλεις, ἀλλὰ εἶναι τὰ ἑξὶ ναυτικὰ μίλια, ἡ ζώνη τῶν ἑξὶ μιλίων ποὺ περιβάλλει τὰ παράλια τῆς Ἑλλάδας καὶ κάθε νησί μας. «ἑξαμίλι» εἶναι κάθε σημεῖο ποὺ ἀπέχει ἑξὶ μίλια ἀπὸ τὶς ἀκτὲς τῆς Ἑλλάδας, χερσαῖες ἢ νησιωτικὲς. Ἐκεῖ, λοιπόν, θὰ γίνετ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλός».

Γιὰ νὰ προσθέσει ὁ ἁγιορείτης ἅγιος Παΐσιος: «Ὅταν ὁ τουρκικὸς στόλος ξεκινήσει νὰ κατευθύνεται κατὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ φθάσει στὰ ἑξὶ μίλια, πράγματι θὰ καταστραφεῖ. Θὰ εἶναι ἡ ὥρα πού θὰ ἔχουν τὰ κόλλυβα στὸ ζωνάρι τους. Ἀλλά, αὐτὸ δὲ θὰ γίνῃ ἀπὸ ἡμᾶς. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τὸ “Ἐξαμίλι” θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ τέλους... Μετὰ θὰ ἀρχίσουν ὅλα τὰ γεγονότα, πού θὰ καταλήξουν στὸ νὰ πάρουμε τὴν Πόλη.»

Ὁ ἴδιος ἅγιος μᾶς ἐξηγεῖ: «Τὴν Πόλη θὰ μᾶς τὴ δώσουν... Θὰ γίνῃ πόλεμος μεταξὺ Ρωσίας καὶ Τουρκίας. Στὴν ἀρχή, οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ νομίσουν ὅτι νικᾶνε, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ θὰ εἶναι ἡ καταστροφὴ τους. Οἱ Ρῶσοι, τελικά, θὰ νικήσουν καὶ θὰ πέσει ἡ Πόλη στὰ χέρια τους. Μετὰ θὰ τὴν πάρουμε ἡμεῖς. Θὰ ἀναγκασθοῦν νὰ μᾶς τὴ δώσουν. Δὲν ἤθελα τίποτα ἄλλο. Νὰ μὲ κρατοῦσε ὁ Θεὸς ἀκόμη λίγα χρόνια στὴ ζωὴ, γιὰ νὰ ἔβλεπα τὴν πατρίδα μου μεγαλωμένη. Θὰ μεγαλώσει.

Οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ καταστραφούν. Θὰ σβήσουν ἀπὸ τὸ χάρτη, διότι εἶναι ἓνα ἔθνος, τὸ ὁποῖο δὲν προέκυψε ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους τὸ 1/3 θὰ πάει ἀπὸ ὅπου ξεκίνησαν, στὰ βᾶθη τῆς Τουρκίας, τὸ 1/3 θὰ σωθεῖ, διότι θὰ ἔχει ἐκχριστιανισθεῖ καὶ τὸ τελευταῖο 1/3 θὰ σκοτωθεῖ στὸν πόλεμο αὐτόν». Ἡ Τουρκία θὰ διαλυθεῖ καί, μάλιστα, θὰ τὴ διαλύσουν οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ σύμμαχοι. Τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη οἱ Ἕλληνες πρέπει νὰ τὴ φυλάξουν. Καί, ἔτσι, ὁ Θεὸς θὰ τὴ χαρίσει σέ μᾶς. Θὰ μᾶς βοηθήσει ὁ Θεός, γιατί εἴμαστε Ὁρθόδοξοι».

Γιὰ νὰ προσθέσει ἀκόμη ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος: «Ἄντε, ἄντε, δὲ θὰ εἶμαι νὰ σὲ καμαρώσω στὴν προέλαση, ὅταν θὰ προελαύνει ὁ ἑλληνικὸς στρατὸς γιὰ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ἡ Τουρκία θὰ διαμελισθεῖ. Ὁ διαμελισμὸς αὐτὸς σίγουρα μᾶς ἱκανοποιεῖ καὶ μᾶς συμφέρει ὡς κράτος. Ἔτσι θ' ἀπελευθερωθοῦν τὰ χωριά μας, οἱ ἀλύτρωτες πατρίδες. Ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη θὰ ἐλευθερωθεῖ, θὰ ξαναγίνει ἑλληνική. Θὰ ξαναλειτουργήσει ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία.

Ἡ Τουρκία θὰ διαμελισθεῖ σὲ 3-4 κομμάτια. Ἦδη ἔχει ἀρχίσει ἡ ἀντίστροφη μέτρηση. Ἡμεῖς θὰ πάρουμε τὰ δικά μας ἐδάφη, οἱ Ἀρμένιοι τὰ δικά τους καὶ οἱ Κοῦρδοι τὰ δικά τους. Τὸ κουρδικὸ θέμα ἔχει ἤδη δρομολογηθεῖ. Θὰ μᾶς παραχωρήσουν τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ὄχι γιατί μᾶς ἀγαπᾶνε, ἀλλὰ γιατί αὐτὸ θὰ συμπλέει μὲ τὰ συμφέροντά τους.

Αὐτὰ θὰ γίνουν, ὄχι τώρα, ἀλλὰ σύντομα, ὅταν θὰ πάψει αὐτὴ γενιὰ πού κυβερνάει τὴν Τουρκία καὶ θὰ ἀναλάβει νέα γενιὰ πολιτικῶν. Τότε θὰ γίνῃ

ὁ διαμελισμὸς τῆς Τουρκίας. Πολὺ σύντομα οἱ προσευχὲς πού γίνονται κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιφάνεια τῆς γῆς, θὰ γίνονται ἐπάνω στὴ γῆ καὶ τὰ κερᾶκια πού ἀνάβονται κάτω, θὰ ἀνάβονται ἐπάνω (ἐννοοῦσε τοὺς Κρυπτοχριστιανούς). Πίστη καὶ ἐλπίδα στὸ Θεὸ νὰ ὑπάρχει καὶ θὰ χαροῦν πολλοί. Ὅλα αὐτὰ θὰ γίνουν μέσα στὰ χρόνια αὐτά. Ἔφτασε ὁ καιρὸς».

Γι' αὐτὸ συμβούλευε: «Νὰ ἔχετε ἓνα κτηματάκι καὶ λίγο νὰ τὸ καλλιεργήτε. Κοντὰ σὲ σᾶς, θὰ βοηθήσετε καὶ κάποιον πού δὲ θὰ ἔχει.. Οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ μᾶς χτυπήσουν, ἀλλὰ ἡ Ἑλλάδα δὲ θὰ πάθει μεγάλη ζημιά. Δὲ θὰ περάσει πολὺς καιρὸς μετὰ τὴν ἐπίθεση τῶν Τούρκων στὴ χώρα μας καὶ τότε οἱ Ρῶσοι θὰ χτυπήσουν τοὺς Τούρκους καὶ θὰ τοὺς διαλύσουν. Ὅπως ἓνα φύλλο χαρτί πού τὸ χτυπᾶς καὶ διαλύεται, ἔτσι καὶ οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ διαλυθοῦν.

Μετὰ τὴ διάλυση τῆς Τουρκίας, ἡ Ρωσία θὰ συνεχίσει τὸν πόλεμο μέχρι τὸν Περσικὸ Κόλπο καὶ θὰ σταματήσουν τὰ στρατεύματά της ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν

Ἱερουσαλήμ. Τότε οἱ δυτικὲς δυνάμεις θὰ δώσουν προθεσμία στοὺς Ρώσους γιὰ νὰ ἀποσύρουν ἀπὸ τὰ μέρη αὐτὰ τὰ στρατεύματά τους, τόσο χρόνο ὅσο χρειάζεται γιὰ νὰ γίνουν τὰ λάχανα, δηλαδὴ ἑξὶ μῆνες.

Ἡ Ρωσία, ὅμως, δὲ θὰ ἀποσύρει τίς δυνάμεις της. Καὶ τότε οἱ δυτικὲς δυνάμεις θὰ ἀρχίσουν νὰ συγκεντρώνουν στρατεύματα, γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτεθοῦν στοὺς Ρώσους. Ὁ Πόλεμος πού θὰ ξεσπάσει θὰ εἶναι Παγκόσμιος καὶ θὰ ἔχει ὡς συνέπεια νὰ χάσουν οἱ Ρῶσοι. Θὰ ἀκολουθήσει μεγάλη σφαγή. Ὅμως, θὰ δοῦν τότε τὰ ἄλλα κράτη τῆς Εὐρώπης, συγκεκριμένα ἡ Ἀγγλία, ἡ Γαλλία, ἡ Ἰταλία καὶ ἄλλα ἑξι-ἑφτά κράτη τῆς Ε.Ο.Κ., ὅτι ἡ Ρωσία θὰ ἀρπάξει μέρη, ὅποτε θὰ ποῦν: “Δὲν πᾶμε κι ἡμεῖς ἐκεῖ πέρα, μήπως πάρουμε κανένα κομμάτι;” Ὅλοι, ὅμως θὰ κυνηγοῦν τὴ μερίδα τοῦ λέοντος. Ἔτσι θὰ μποῦν καὶ οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι στὸν πόλεμο.

Οἱ μεγαλοπόλεις θὰ γίνουν παραγκουπόλεις. Ἡμεῖς, οἱ Ἕλληνες, δὲν θὰ συμμετάσχουμε στὸν παγκόσμιον πόλεμο. Ἡ διοίκηση τῆς Πόλης, ἀπὸ μᾶς, θὰ εἶναι καὶ στρατιωτικὴ καὶ πολιτικὴ. Ἐσὺ (εἶπε σὲ νεαρὸ φοιτητὴ τοῦ Πολυτεχνείου Ξάνθης), ὡς πολιτικὸς μηχανικός, θὰ συμβάλεις στὴν ἀνοικοδόμηση τῆς Πόλης, γιατί ἡ Πόλη θὰ ἀνοικοδομηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχή» (Νικολάου Ζουρνατζόγλου «Γέροντας Παΐσιος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης, 1924-1994», ἐκδόσεις Ἁγιοτόκος Καππαδοκία).



THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

By Saint Porphyrios. This is Part 1 of 2 of this article; the second part will be included within our next issue.

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception

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A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. The embryo hears and feels in its mother's womb. Yes, it hears and it sees with its mother's eyes. It is aware of her movements and her emotions, even though its mind has not developed. If the mother's face darkens, it darkens too. If the mother is irritated, then it becomes irritated also. Whatever the mother experiences—sorrow, pain, fear, anxiety, etc.—is also experienced by the embryo.

If the mother does not want the child, if she does not love it, then the embryo senses this and traumas are created in its little soul that accompany it all its life. The opposite occurs through the mother's holy emotions. When she is filled with joy, peace and love for the embryo, she transmits these things to it mystically, just as happens to children that have been born.

For this reason a mother must pray a lot during her pregnancy and love the child growing within her, caressing her abdomen, reading psalms, singing hymns and living a holy life. This is also for her own benefit. She thus makes sacrifices for the sake of the embryo so that the child will become more holy and will acquire from the very outset holy foundations. Do you see how delicate a matter it is for a woman to go through a pregnancy? Such a responsibility and such an honor!

I will tell you something about other animate and non-rational beings and you will understand what I mean. In America the following experiment was carried out: in two identical rooms, which were kept at exactly the same temperature, flowers were planted in identical soil and watered in exactly the same way. There was, however, one difference: in the one room gentle, soothing music was played. And the result? The flowers in that room displayed an enormous difference in relation to the flowers in the other room. They had a quite different vitality, their colors were more attractive and they grew incomparably better.

What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves

to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, patience and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower grace on their children.

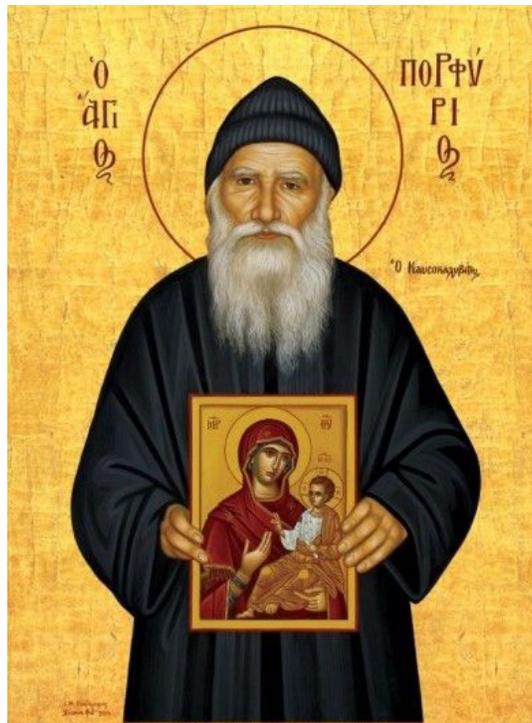
Generally, parents are to blame for the bad behavior of the children. And their behavior is not improved by reprimands, disciplining, or strictness. If the parents do not pursue a life of holiness and if they do not engage in spiritual struggle, they make great mistakes and transmit the faults they have within them. If the parents do not live a holy life and do not display love towards each other, the devil torments the parents with the reactions of the children. Love, harmony and

understanding between the parents is necessary for the upbringing of children. This provides a great sense of security and certainty.

The behavior of the children is directly related to the state of the parents. When the children are hurt by the bad behavior of the parents towards each other, they lose the strength and desire to progress in their lives. Their lives are constructed shoddily and the edifice of their soul is in constant danger of collapsing. A psychological state is created in a child as a result of its parents that accompanies it throughout its life. Its later behavior and its relationships with others are directly connected with the experiences that it carries with it from its childhood years. The child grows up and develops, but in reality, he or she does not change.

This is manifested even in the smallest expressions of life. For example, you get a craving for food and want to eat. You take something and eat it, then you see something else and you want that. You feel hungry and think that if you do not eat you will feel faint and you will start to tremble. You are afraid you will lose weight. This is a psychological state that has its explanation. Perhaps you never knew your father or your mother, and you feel deprived and hungry, poor and weak. And this psychological reality is expressed by way of reflex as a weakness of the body.

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. For children to be released from their various inner problems, it is not enough for them to receive good advice, or to be compelled by force; nor do logical arguments or threats do any good. These things rather make matters worse. The solution is to be found through



the sanctification of the parents. Become saints and you will have no problems with your children. The sanctity of their parents releases the children from their problems. Children want to have saintly people at their side, people with lots of love who will neither intimidate them nor lecture them, but who will provide a saintly example and pray for them. You parents should pray silently to Christ with upraised arms and embrace your children mystically. When they misbehave you will take some disciplinary measures, but you will not coerce them. Above all you need to pray.

Parents, especially the mother, often cause hurt to a child for some act of misbehavior by scolding it excessively. The child is then wounded. Even if you do not scold the child outwardly but bristle with anger inwardly or look fiercely at the child, the child understands. The child believes that its mother does not love it and asks, "Do you love me, mommy?" The mother answers, "Yes, dear," but the child is not convinced. It has been wounded. The mother loves it, she will caress it later, but the child will pull its head away. It refuses to be caressed, regarding this as hypocrisy because it has been wounded.

Over-Protectiveness Leaves Children Immature

Another thing that harms children is over-protectiveness, that is, excessive care or excessive anxiety and worry on the part of the parents.

A mother used to complain to me that her five-year-old child was disobedient. "It is your fault," I told her, but she did not understand. Once I went for a walk by the seaside with this mother along with the child. The little boy let go of his mother's hand and ran towards the sea. There was a sand dune there and the sea came in directly behind it. The mother immediately reacted with anxiety and was about to rush towards the boy who was standing on top of the dune with outstretched arms trying to keep his balance. I calmed her down and told to her to turn her back on the boy while I kept an eye on him askance. When the boy despaired of provoking his mother's attention and causing her to panic and scream as usual, he calmly climbed down and walked towards us. That was the end of it. Then the mother understood what I meant.

Another mother used to complain that her little boy would not eat all his food, especially his yoghurt. The little one was about three years old and tormented his mother every day. I said to her:

"What you should do is this. Empty the refrigerator completely and then fill it with some yoghurt. When lunchtime comes you will give Peter his yoghurt. He will refuse to eat it. In the evening you will give him it again and the same the next day. In the end he will get hungry and will try some. He will throw a tantrum, but you will just put up with it. Thereafter he will eat it quite happily."

That is just what happened and yoghurt became Peter's favorite food.

These things are not difficult, but many mothers are unable to do them and the result is that they give their children a very bad upbringing. Mothers who are always standing over their children and pressurizing them, that is, over-protecting them, have failed in their task. You need to leave the child alone to take an interest in its own progress. Then you will succeed. When you are always standing over them, the children react. They become lethargic and weak-willed and generally are unsuccessful in life. This is a kind of over-protectiveness that leaves the children immature.

A few days ago a mother came here in a state of despair because of her son's repeated failures in the university entrance exams. He had been an excellent pupil in elementary school and all the way through high school. But in the end he failed repeatedly and showed indifference and had strange reactions.

"It is your fault," I said to the mother, "educated woman though you are! How else did you expect the boy to react? Pressure, pressure, pressure all these years, 'Make sure you are top of the class, do not let us down, get yourself an important position in society...'" Now he has thrown in the towel; he does not want anything. Stop this pressure and over-protection and you will see that the boy will regain his equilibrium. He will make progress once you let him be."

A Child Needs to Be Surrounded by People Who Pray and Pray Ardently

A child needs to be surrounded by people who pray and pray ardently. A mother should not be satisfied by giving her child a physical caress, but should also coddle it with the caress of prayer. In the depths of its soul the child senses the spiritual caress that its mother conveys to it and is drawn to her. It feels security and certainty when its mother mystically embraces it with constant, intense and fervent prayer and releases it from whatever is oppressing it.

Mothers know how to express anxiety, offer advice and talk incessantly, but they have not learned to pray. Most advice and criticism does a great deal of harm. You do not need to say a lot to children. Words hammer at the ears, but prayer goes to the heart. Prayer is required, with faith and without anxiety, along with a good example.

One day a mother came here distraught about her son, George. He was very mixed-up. He stayed out late at night and the company he kept was far from good. Every day things were getting worse. The mother was overcome by anxiety and distress.

I said to her:

"Do not say a word. Just pray."

We agreed that between ten and ten fifteen every evening we would both pray. I told her to say not a word and to leave her son to stay out till whatever time he wanted, without

asking him, “What sort of time is this to come home? Where were you?”, or any such thing. Instead she would say to him as lovingly as possible, “Come and eat, George, there is food in the fridge.” Beyond this she was to say nothing. She would behave towards him with love and not stop praying.

The mother began to apply this tactic, and after about twenty days had passed the boy asked her:

“Mother, why do not you speak to me?”

“What do you mean, George, that I do not speak to you?”

“You have got something against me, Mother, and you are not speaking to me.”

“What strange idea is this that you have got into your head, George? Of course I speak to you. Am I not speaking to you now? What do you want me to say to you?”

George gave no reply.

The mother then came to the monastery and asked me:

“Elder, what was the meaning of this that the boy said to me?”

“Our tactic has worked!”

“What tactic?”

“The tactic I told you—of not speaking and simply praying secretly and that the boy would come to his senses,”

“Do you think that is it?”

“That is it,” I told her. “He wants you to ask him ‘where were you? What were you doing?’ so that he can shout and react and come home even later the next night.”

“Is that so?” she asked. “What strange mysteries are hidden!”

“Do you understand now? He was tormenting you because he wanted you to react to his behavior so that he could stage his little act. Now that you are not shouting at him he is upset. Instead of you being upset when he does what he wants, now he is upset because you do not appear distressed and you display indifference.”

One day George announced that he was giving up his job and going to Canada. He had told his boss to find a replacement because he was leaving. In the meantime I said to his parents:

“We will pray.”

“But he is ready to leave... I will grab him by the scruff of the neck!” said his father.

“No,” I told him, “do not do anything.”

“But the boy is leaving, Elder!”

I said: “Let him leave. You just devote yourselves to prayer and I will be with you.”

Two or three days later early one Sunday morning George announced to his parents:

“I am going off today with my friends.”

“Fine,” they replied, “do as you want.”

He left, and along with his friends, two girls and two boys, he hired a car and set off for Chalkida. They drove around aimlessly here and there. Then they went past the church of

Saint John the Russian and from there to Mantoudi, Aghia Anna and beyond to Vasilika, They had a swim in the Aegean Sea, they ate, drank and had a fine time. At the end of it all they set off on the road home. It was already dark. George was driving. As they were passing through Aghia Anna the car hit the corner of a house and was badly damaged. What could they do now? They managed to bring the car back to Athens at a crawling pace.

George arrived back home in the early hours of the morning. His parents said nothing to him and he went off to sleep. When he woke up he came and said to his father:

“Do you know what happened?... Now we will have to repair the car and it will cost a lot of money.”

His father said:

“Well, George, you will have to find a solution to this yourself. You know I have got debts to pay and your sisters to look after...”

“What can I do, father?”

“Do whatever you like. You are grown-up and you have got a brain of your own. Go off to Canada and make some money...”

“I cannot do that. We have to repair the car now.”

“I have no idea what you should do,” said his father. “Sort it out yourself.”

So, seeing that further dialogue with his father was pointless, he said no more and left. He went to his boss and said:

“I had an accident with a car. I do not want to leave now, so do not hire anyone else.”

His boss said:

“That is all right by me, lad.”

“Yes, but I would like you to give me some money in advance.”

“That is fine, but you were wanting to leave. If you want money, your father will have to sign for it.”

“I will sign for it myself. My father does not want to get involved. He told me so. I will work and I will repay it.”

Now is not that a miracle?

When the boy’s mother came again to see me I said to her:

“The method we employed worked and God heard our prayer. The accident was from God and now the boy will stay at home and will come to his senses.”

That is what happened through our prayer. It was a miracle. The parents fasted, prayed and kept silent and they were successful. Some time later the boy himself came and found me—without any of his family having said anything to him about me. George became a very fine man and now works in the air force and is married and with a lovely family.

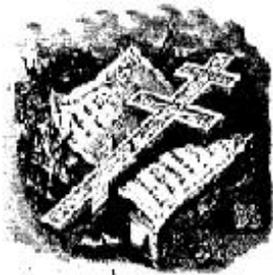
With children what is required is a lot of prayer and few words. All things are achieved through prayer, silence and love. Have you understood the effects of prayer? Love in prayer, love in Christ. That is what is truly beneficial. As long as you love your children with human love—which is

often pathological—the more they will be mixed-up, and the more their behavior will be negative. But when the love between you and towards your children is holy and Christian love, then you will have no problem.

The sanctity of the parents saves the children. For this to come about, divine grace must act on the souls of the parents. No one can be sanctified on his own. The same divine grace will then illuminate, warm and animate the souls of the children. People often telephone me from abroad and ask me about their children and about other matters. Today a mother phoned me from Milan and asked me how she should behave towards her children. What I said to her was this:

“Pray, and when you have to, speak to your children with love. Lots of prayer and few words. Lots of prayer and few words for everyone. We must not become an annoyance, but rather pray secretly and then speak, and God will let us know in our hearts whether the others have accepted what we have said. If not, we will not speak. We will simply pray mystically. Because if we speak we become an annoyance and make others react or even infuriate them. That is why it is better to speak mystically to the heart of others through secret prayer rather than to their ears.”

When the children are traumatized and hurt on account of some serious situation, do not let it affect you when they react negatively and speak rudely. In reality they do not want to, but cannot help themselves at difficult times. They are remorseful afterwards. But if you become irritated and enraged, you become one with the evil spirit and it makes a mockery of you all.



Meekness means having a heart that is humbled and peaceful. Children are meek. This is why the Lord says, *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 18:3). A proud person is never satisfied. Everything bothers him, and he follows his own will. We must be obedient to the will of God, in order to learn humility and meekness while we are still in this life—while there is still time.

The Holy Fathers say that he who is born meek has already received his reward; but his reward will not be as great as that of the man who was born with a quick temper, and who has learned meekness through humility. Such a person will receive a great reward indeed.

Blessed Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR A SAVING CONFESSION?

By Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow, from Orthodox Life, vol. 38, no. 4 (July-August, 1988), pp. 20-22.

What is Confession? Confession is the oral avowal of one's sins which lie heavy upon the conscience. Repentance cleanses the soul and makes it ready to receive the Holy Spirit, but confession, so to speak, only empties the soul of sins.

Let us present a simple analogy and comparison to confession. For example, suppose you had only one vessel of some kind, which you through negligence or laziness let reach a stage where little by little it accumulated all sorts of dirt so that your vessel became not only unusable but even unbearable to look at without repugnance.

But what if a king wanted to give you as a gift some sort of fragrant and precious balm, one drop of which could heal all infirmities and protect—what then? Would you refuse such a valuable gift only because you had no other clean vessel in which to put it? No! It would be very natural for you to accept such a gift and you would try to clean your vessel. How would you begin to clean your vessel? No doubt, before anything else, you would rid it of all uncleanness; you would begin by washing it with water and, perhaps would even burn it out so that it no longer retained any of its former odors. Is that not so?

Now let the vessel represent the soul given to you by God, which you have brought to such a state that it has been filled with all kinds of transgression and iniquities; let the sweet-smelling balm, given by the king, signify the Holy Spirit, Who heals all infirmities and afflictions, Whom the King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, freely bestows upon us.

To examine your vessel signifies feeling your guilt before God and recalling all sins, which have stolen into your heart.

To clean out the vessel typifies the confession of your sins before your spiritual father, and washing with water and burning with fire signifies a sincere and even tearful repentance and a voluntary resolve to endure all unpleasantness, needs, afflictions, misfortunes, and even calamities that befall us.

Now tell me: Is Confession profitable or needful? Certainly it is profitable and even essential; because, just as it is impossible to cleanse a vessel without ridding it of all uncleanness, so it is impossible to purge your soul of sins without confession.

But tell me, is confession alone enough for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Certainly not, because in order to receive the sweet-smelling and precious balm into a defiled vessel it is not enough to just empty it, but it is necessary to wash it with water and refine it with fire. Just so, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, it is not enough just to confess or

recite your sins before a spiritual father, but it is necessary together with this to purge your soul with repentance or contrition and grief of soul, and burn it out with voluntary endurance of afflictions. So then, this is what confession and repentance mean!

What does a true and correct confession consist of?

When we wish to cleanse our conscience of sins in the Mystery of Repentance: Before everything else it is necessary to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and firmly hope that He is ready to forgive all sins, no matter of what magnitude, if only the sinner repents open-heartedly; it is necessary to believe and hope that the God of all wants and seeks our return.

Of this He assures us through the prophet thus: *As I live, saith the Lord, i. e., I assure and "swear" by My life, in desiring I do not desire, i.e., I do not at all desire, the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion.* (Ezek 18:32).

It is necessary to have a broken heart. Who is God? And who are we? God is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth; He is the awful and righteous Judge. And we? We are weak and insignificant mortals. All people, even the greatest people, are less than dust before God, and we can never imagine how disgusting to God is any sin and how any transgression offends Him.

And we, insignificant and weak, we mortals endlessly benefited by our God, dare to offend Him—the All-Good One? Oh! This is so horrible! We are such debtors before God, such transgressors, that not only should we not dare to call ourselves His children, but are not even worthy of being His lowliest servants.

Therefore, picturing all this, you see what contriteness, what lamentation it is necessary to have then, when we want to purge ourselves of sins. And such a feeling must be had not only before confession and during confession, but also after confession. And even more important, do you want to offer a sacrifice to God such as will be acceptable to Him? Naturally we all gladly want this and as far as possible we offer it. But what can we offer Him really acceptable? A broken heart. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled, here is an offering to God more priceless than all offerings and oblations!

It is necessary to forgive all our enemies and offenders all the harmful and offensive things they have done to us. Forgiveness—what does it mean to forgive? To forgive means never to avenge, neither secretly nor openly; never to recall wrongs but rather to forget them and, above all, to love your enemy as a friend, a brother, as a comrade; to protect his honor and to treat him right-mindedly in all things. This is what it means to forgive.

And who agrees that this is difficult? So, it is a hard matter to forgive wrongs, but he who can forgive wrongs is for this reason great—truly great, both before God and before

man. Yes, it is a hard matter to forgive your enemies; but it is necessary to forgive, otherwise God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: *If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your trespasses. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you yours.* (Mt 6:14-15).

On the contrary to this, though you pray to God every hour, though you have such faith that you can move mountains, even though you give away all of your belongings to the needy, and give your body to be burned, if you do not practice forgiveness and do not wish to forgive your enemy, then all is in vain; for in such circumstances neither prayer, nor faith, nor charity, will save you; in short, nothing will save you.

But if it is needful to forgive our enemies, so likewise it is indispensable to ask also forgiveness of those people whom we have offended. Thus, if you have offended anyone by word, ask forgiveness of him, come and bow down at his feet and say, "Forgive me." Have you offended by deed? Endeavor to expiate your guilt and offenses and recompense his damage, then be certain that all of your sins, no matter how heavy they be, will be forgiven you.

It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, "For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?" Certainly God knows all of our sins, but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution.

Finally, it is necessary to set forth a firm intention to live prudently in the future. If you want to be in the kingdom of heaven, if you want God to forgive your sins—then stop sinning! Only on this condition does the Church absolve the penitent of his sins. And he who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, *I forgive and absolve*, the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!



During the time of one's confession not only the person who makes his confession is judged, but the confessor as well. In the past, confessors were practical. They did not judge on the basis of the seriousness of a transgression, but rather on the intent. They did not concentrate so much on the sins being confessed as on thinking of how to treat the repentant person's soul.

**An Athonite Gerontikon
by Archimandrite Ioannikios (Kotsonis)**

AN ORTHODOX MOTHER'S VOICE

A spirit-filled letter by an Orthodox mother in light of the various "bishopric innovations" among practically all of the US Orthodox jurisdictions that faithful are confronting as they attempt to maintain any liturgical life in the midst of the Covid-19 "phenomenon." This letter was written in May 2020 and somehow escaped our attentiveness. It is as valid today as it was back in May.

I am an Orthodox mother. I have been Orthodox for the last thirty years and my husband is cradle Orthodox, born and raised in the OCA. We have four children here, and one in Heaven. In the last three months, I have not heard one bishop, or directive from a bishop, speak about our children. Not one. The ONLY reference to children has been that if they cannot distance themselves properly, they will need to remain home.

I am deeply grieved by this and, quite frankly, angry and I believe rightly so. My husband and I, like many other Orthodox parents, have struggled and done the hard work, week after week, year after year, for twelve years now, to take our children to church and teach them our Faith.

And with one virus, that we are learning is not nearly as deadly as it was reported to be, they have pulled the thread out of not only our twelve years of work but thousands of years of work combined, by all Orthodox parents, all diligently working to pass on our precious and unique faith to our children, as our parents and grandparents did to us. This is all wrong.

I took my children with me to Church throughout the nine months before they were born. I crossed my belly with the sign of the cross because they could not do it for themselves. They were with me as I stood in the choir while I sang. Through me, they *heard* the prayers and they *partook* of communion until they were born and then baptized in a Church full of the faithful, surrounded by love.

After they were born, I stopped singing in the choir to tend to them. When they were antsy or tired, I walked with them around the church as they kissed icons on the walls. The ones they could not reach, I had them kiss their hand and reach up high to put their kisses on the icons above. When they were old enough, they would toddle up to the tall icon stands, and although they could not reach the icons above, they kissed the wooden cross, at their level, the one their father built with his own hands before they were even born.

I still watch children do this because they instinctively recognize the things which represent God and they recognize them devoid of fear.

In the years that followed, week after week, our family would stop what we were doing on Saturday's to prepare for Vespers. We took them to venerate the icons **every single time**. We took them to communion **every single time**.

We got up early on Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, with not one, not two, not three, but *four* children. We got them dressed in their church clothes, drove them to Church and persevered through the services, walking in and out of the church with them, lunging at them to stop them from running into the Altar, taking them to the potty, shushing them during the gospel, and teaching them they are not to speak when Father is speaking. Godparents held them, without fear, also taking them around to kiss the icons to give me a break. I missed hundreds of sermons walking outside with a tired toddler and I did this week after week after week.

We also took them to communion week after week, year after

year. **Patiently, consistently, faithfully, because that is how you pass our Faith onto our next generation. They are learning from us!** They are learning from all that they see and all that they do, more than what they hear, for years.

Parents do not do this because it is easy. No parent does this for "fun" or for show. It's too much work. It's hard, relentless, diligent work.

So, to have our bishops and priests, across so many jurisdictions, establish every contradictory protocol we can imagine is **catastrophic**.

They now want me to **sign up** to bring my children to church, where all the adults are now wearing masks, which to a child is very scary. They are required to sanitize their hands upon arrival because they are looked upon as walking germ factories where, God forbid, they should cough or sneeze. Two of my children wear masks and two do not due to their ages. None of them are permitted to kiss the icons or get a hug from their godparents or grandparents or friends, who perhaps are so scared by all this, might even retreat if my children were to approach them.

Then, I take them to communion where the priest changes spoons after they consume it, **after dipping it into the Body and Blood of Christ**, which is the most purifying thing we have access to in this world. As we leave the Church, speaking to no one, I am left wondering if this is what I have to show my children after twelve years of diligent work and teaching.



May God have mercy on all those making these devastating decisions. The damage they are doing to the faith of our children is unmeasurable.

If I have “unreasonable faith” as one bishop described it to me back in March, perhaps his grandparents and parents had “unreasonable faith,” too, and perhaps *that* is what led him to the priesthood and years of service in our church.

Why is having FAITH suddenly becoming so unreasonable? And why are they scolding devout Orthodox, calling us overly pious in a derogatory way, implying we have no care for our fellow parishioners if we do not embrace their new directives? If they believe this is the case, it is a flat out lie.

Over the years, as a mother, I have missed countless liturgical services because my children were sick and had to remain home. Now, we who are healthy and not afraid, are being told we must forgo our practice of Faith to accommodate people who **are afraid**. We are to alter our faith so **they** can feel “safe.” My own faith, and the faith of my children, is negotiable and dismissible. Yet I am the one scolded for being unloving.

If those that fear the practice of our Faith want to partake, our parishes should make accommodations for them so our priests can minister to them where they are comfortable. But they should not rewrite the Faith due to a passing virus. This is not love. I do not know what this is, but it is not love.

It is wrong and I hope more parents and good priests and faithful will speak up and stand up for our Orthodox children and our Faith and fight for what we know to be pure and true and right.

We will not take our children to any church where they see adults in face masks, are not allowed to kiss icons, or see different spoons used for communion. I have no explanation for this to my children. None. **This is not Orthodoxy. It is not our Faith.**



If we want to be totally released and freed from our passions, we have to learn to cut off our will; and so, with God’s help, we gradually progress until we reach freedom from desire. For nothing does men so much good as to cut off their own will. Indeed, man progresses from that more than by exercising any other virtue. And as it is with a person who—following a road—gains time by taking a shorter route when he finds it, so it is with the person that follows the road of cutting out his will; since, with the cutting of one’s own will, one reaches freedom from desires, and—having attained this—he comes close to God in perfect dispassion.

St. Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

“WITHOUT THIS SUFFERING I AM NOTHING”

Fr. George Calciu (+2006), from “Familia Ortodoxă” no. 11(70) / 2014, translated by NS.



My life here in Romania has been full of events, some better and some worse. I do not accuse anyone; I blame absolutely nobody because all of these things were sent by God to benefit my soul. Somebody once asked me if my sufferings in prison helped me in any way. I answered, “It is not that they helped me in some way, but I am the product of these sufferings.”

If I do something, if I am something, if somebody sees anything in me, know that it is due to suffering. Without this suffering I am nothing! It is possible that, of all the difficult questions any human may be asked, the one on suffering is the most inexplicable. Why is suffering necessary? I lived an experience of suffering which enriched my soul, and I believe that suffering was and is necessary for me. But it is very difficult to accept it.

When I was in prison, we were asking each other, all of us brothers, “Why are we suffering? Why us? Out of all the millions of Romanians, why were we chosen to suffer? Where is the sense in it all?” And God did not reveal any of His intentions to us. We cried out to Him every day to decrease our sufferings, but it seemed that He loaded us with more instead. Ever since I was released from prison I have carried with me this sign of pain which seems to have marked my entire life.

After my second imprisonment, I left for the West, I traveled throughout all the countries of Europe, and I went to America to speak about what happened in Romania. My intention was this: I cannot keep silent for as long as there exists in Romania suffering, injustice, communism, and the destruction of churches and of the human personality. During my pilgrimage I arrived at a Catholic monastery and slept in the monastery library. There I found, among so many books, a small booklet containing Christian maxims. I opened it by chance to a page where I saw words of Paul Claudel, a famous French writer. He said this: “God did not come into the world to eradicate suffering; He did not come even to explain it. God came into the world to fill human suffering with His presence.” Did you hear that? To fill human suffering with His presence! Then I understood that during the moments in which we were crying, or when we were revolting, or when we were shouting, “Lord, what are You doing with us?!” He was in us more than in all the

others, even with all of our sins and weaknesses. He filled our suffering with His presence. Then I understood exactly the deep meaning of this suffering: God is present in us!

“Thus God Dwells In Us”

Your relationship with God—if you feel that God has answered you—is a special bond which cannot be explained. However if I tried to define faith, prayer, and the mercy of God, I would be using words of human reasoning which have nothing to do with God Who is above all reasoning. God is outside of the world—He is only found in love. I cannot explain all of these things to you because they cannot be explained. They form part of a mystical relationship of man with God, which someone may feel or may not feel, may practice or may not practice. There is no middle way.

It is not possible to speak today with God, tomorrow to curse Him, the next day to praise Him, and so on. You need to have a direct line in your relationship with God: a line of faith, of your nothingness before God, and of understanding that you are nothing before God because of your sinfulness, not because God did not create you pure. God created you pure, but you have defiled yourself with sins, you have wallowed in all sorts of filth, and you have damaged your heart, soul, and mind. Your mind works against the good, your heart has grown cold towards God, and it no longer loves anyone—you are hardened. All of these things change your relationship with God; they wear it out and break it.

We need to repair this bond through love, striving, and prayer. Let us have love for God and for our neighbor because it is not possible for someone to say that he loves God, Whom he has not seen, and not to love his neighbor whom he has seen (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). It is impossible to love God and not our neighbor. Our relationship with God has one end in our heart and one end in His hand. Through this relationship of faith, love, and good works, we enter into the will of God, and God abides in us. It is, as I have said, difficult to explain. Only those who have faith, who have striven on the road of life to at least do some good, little-by-little, and to strengthen themselves in faith, they are the one who have established this relationship. However, such a relationship is not permanent. It may be broken through our sins; nevertheless, a spiritual channel always remains through which we can speak with God.

I remember when I was little: there were eleven of us children and times were difficult. My mother would pray to God just as I am speaking with you. She would complain that one of the children became sick, the cow did not produce any milk or it did not have babies, the chicken did not lay eggs . . . She would tell everything to God as if she was in a direct relationship with Him. And know that God answered her. Mama knew that God is with us, and she spoke to Him as we speak to each other, as friends. You tell your pain to your brother or friend, even to the finest detail. God knows about it, but we are still

obligated to tell it to Him and to give Him praise. I want you to understand that it is possible to have a familiar relationship with God, as between son and father or as between friends, more or less. This type of relationship is what God requests of us. In silence, in simplicity, and in humility we can establish this relationship with God, so that we will have somewhere to turn to when we are in trouble and when no one else receives us. When everybody abandons us, when our life seems to be lost, God remains there and still opens His arms and receives us. This is an extraordinary mystery.

This I say to you: try to pray! Try to speak with God unceasingly!



St. John Chrysostom writes thusly against those who, in church create a disturbance in church and who depart from church before the completion of the Divine Liturgical Service of God. *“Some do not approach Holy Communion with trembling but with commotion, shoving one another, burning with anger, hollering, scolding, pushing their neighbor, full of disturbance. About this, I have often spoken and will not cease to speak about this. Do you not see the order of behavior at the pagan Olympic games when the Arranger passes through the arena with a wreath on his head, dressed in a lengthy garment, holding a staff in his hand and the Crier declares that there be silence and order? Is it not obscene that there, where the devil reigns there is such silence, and here where Christ invites us to Himself there is such an uproar? At the arena, silence: and in church, uproar! On the sea, calm and in the harbor, tempest! When you are invited to a meal, you must not leave before the others, even though you are satisfied before the others, and here while the awesome mystery of Christ is being celebrated, while the priestly functions are still continuing, you leave in the middle of it and exit? How can this be forgiven? How can this be justified? Judas, after receiving Communion at the Mystical Supper that final night, departed quickly while the others remained at the table. Behold, whose example do they follow who hurry to depart before the final thanksgiving?”*

**By St. Bishop Nikolai of Zhicha
Homily on the Feast of the Theophany**



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THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NOUS AND THE INTELLECT

By Hieromonk Alexios (Trader) of Karakallou Monastery, Mount Athos.

If we reflect upon the Parable of the Good Samaritan carefully, we will find that it has much more to offer us than merely an admonition to help our neighbors, whoever they may be. Among the myriad of theological and spiritual truths contained in this gem of the Gospel and summary of the divine economy, we see an example of two approaches to life and two sources for thoughts represented by the two figures who stand in such stark contrast to one another: the lawyer and the good Samaritan. Let us posit for purposes of this article that the lawyer represents those who approach religious issues from a merely rational, intellectual perspective, while the Good Samaritan represents those who approach faith and the spiritual life through that highest part of the soul that is in touch with God, the noetic faculty or the spiritual heart. Let us look at the Gospel for a moment and see where each approach leads.

The Gospel tells us that *a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* It is interesting that the Gospel relates that the lawyer posed the question in order to tempt Jesus—implying the lawyer knew full well the answer to the question. He posed the question in order to demonstrate his education, his erudition, and his knowledge of the law. In the safe world of his own abstractions, the lawyer always won. And yet Christ did not allow the lawyer to remain with a hollow, easy victory by his smug recitation of the law to *love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.* Jesus called him out of the ivory tower of his mind and into life, telling him, *this do and live.* Out of his comfort zone and desiring to protect himself, the lawyer then asks *who is my neighbor?* The Lord then poses a parable to the lawyer in which he introduces the Samaritan, an outcast, to the lawyer and relates to him that everyone is his neighbor. And among the many things, Christ taught the lawyer in the teaching that the way to spiritual perfection is not by memorization, careful reasoning, or a quick wit, but by another kind of sensitivity within the human soul.



How different was the Samaritan! He neither spent time reasoning, nor questioning, but acted without hesitation. The Gospel relates, *and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.* He did not think, he did not calculate, but instead he saw, he sensed, and he knew. It was not a matter of conception, but perception. There were no aligning of syllogisms and arguments. There were no speculations about religious issues, selfish concerns, or even human rights. Rather, from an awareness of God's presence in his own heart, the Samaritan was aware of the divine presence in another wounded human being. There was no need for him to refer to the Law or the Prophets, for the Spirit of God that inspired the Law and the Prophets inspired the Samaritan, so that he noetically grasped what was presented to him and acted. In the Gospel, it is quite clear that this Samaritan chose the better part.

There is a place for reasoning and careful thought in human life and human endeavors, but in the spiritual life, there is a time when such reasoning needs to be left behind, for the sake of something higher that can give sure direction, unflinching hope, and love unashamed. All too often our Western culture bids us for rational proofs for the existence of God or the basis for prayer and the spiritual life. Yet, this web of rationalizations causes us to be trapped by our own automatic thoughts, our passions, and our desires to control and manipulate our lives and the lives of others. The nous or spiritual heart has no such pre-occupations, for it is only concerned with being in contact with God in the present moment through the stillness in which God abides if we are humble and repentant. The Samaritan, just because he was a Samaritan, had no social, political or economic status, yet he recognized an opportunity to encounter God in helping a fellow human being. His movements were simple without any unnecessary calculations or deliberations. These are characteristics of someone whose nous or spiritual heart is in control of life. As Elder Sophrony would point out, *his head was deeply rooted in his heart*, where it should be.



If we wish our salvation, we will find it only in repentance and in our return to God, from whom we departed. If we truly repent, like the Ninevites, we will also be saved, if we do not repent, we will be sent to perdition.

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

TIMELY REFLECTIONS

From "Against False Union," by Dr. Alexander Kalomiros (Seattle, WA: St. Nectarios Press, 1990 [1967]), pp. 53-56. Translated from the Greek by Mr. George Gabriel.

Pseudo-Bishops

It is imperative that Christians realize that the Church has sacramental and not administrative foundations; then they will not suffer that which has happened to the westerners who followed the pope in his errors because they thought that if they did not follow him, they would automatically be outside the Church.

Today the various patriarchates and archdioceses undergo great pressures from political powers which seek to direct the Orthodox according to their own interests. It is known that the Patriarchate of Moscow accepts the influence of Soviet politics. But the Patriarchate of Constantinople also accepts the influence of American politics. It was under this influence that the contact of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the similarly American-influenced, Protestant, World Council of Churches was brought about, and its servile disposition toward the pope started to take on dangerous dimensions and even to exert over-bearing pressure upon the other Orthodox churches.

America thinks that it will strengthen the western faction against communism if, with these artificial conciliations, it unifies its spiritual forces. But in this way the Church becomes a toy of the political powers of the world, with unforeseeable consequences for Orthodoxy.

Are the Orthodox people obliged to follow such a servile patriarchate forever? The fact that this patriarchate for centuries held the primacy of importance and honor in the Christian world cannot justify those who will follow it to a unifying capitulation with heresy. Rome also once had the primacy of importance and honor in the Christian world, but that did not oblige Christians to follow it on the road of heresy. The communion with and respect for one church on the part of the other churches remains and continues only as long as that church remains in the Church, that is, as long as it lives and proceeds in spirit and truth. When a patriarchate ceases to be a church, admitting communion with heretics, then its recognition on the part of the other churches ceases also.

The Orthodox people must become conscious of the fact that they owe no obedience to a bishop, no matter how high a title he holds, when that bishop ceases being Orthodox and openly follows heretics with pretenses of union "on equal terms." On the contrary, they are obliged to depart from him and confess their Faith, because a bishop, even if he be patriarch or pope, ceases from being a bishop the moment he ceases being Orthodox. The bishop is a consecrated person, and even if he is openly sinful, respect and honor is due him until synodically censured. But if he becomes openly heretical

or is in communion with heretics, then the Christians should not await any synodical decision, but should draw away from him immediately.

Here is what the canons of the Church say on this: *So that if any presbyter or bishop or metropolitan dares to secede from communion with his own patriarch and does not mention his name as is ordered and appointed in the divine mystagogy, but before a synodical arraignment and his [the patriarch's] full condemnation, he creates a schism, the Holy Synod has decreed that this person be alienated from every priestly function, if only he be proven to have transgressed in this. These rules, therefore, have been sealed and ordered concerning those who on the pretext of some accusations against their own presidents stand apart, creating a schism and severing the unity of the Church. But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, that is, because he publicly preaches heresy and with bared head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these not only are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honor among the Orthodox. For not bishops, but false bishops and false teachers have they condemned, and they have not fragmented the Church's unity with schism, but from schisms and divisions have they earnestly sought to deliver the Church.* (Canon XV of the so-called First and Second Council).

At the End of Time

The world and the devil are leading the Church to such frightening trials that the day might come when all the bishops of the land will enter into communion with the heretics. What will the faithful do then? What will the few do who have the heroism not to follow the masses, not to follow their kin, their neighbors, and their fellow citizens?

All the faithful will have to understand that the Church is not there where it appears to be. Liturgies will continue to be performed and the churches will be filled with people, but the Church will have no relation with those churches or those clergy and those faithful. The Church is where the truth is. The faithful are those who continue Orthodoxy, that work of the Holy Spirit. The real priests are those who think, live, and teach as the Fathers and the Saints of the Church did, or at least do not reject them in their teaching. Where that continuity of thought and life does not exist, it is a deception to speak of the Church, even if all the outward marks speak of it.

There will always be found a canonical priest, ordained by a canonical bishop, who will follow the Tradition. Around such priests will gather the small groups of the faithful who will remain until the last days. Each one of these small groups will be a local catholic Church of God. The faithful will find in them the entire fullness of the grace of God. They will

have no need of administrative or other ties, for the communion that will exist among them will be the most perfect there can be. It will be communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, communion in the Holy Spirit. The golden links of the unalterable Orthodox Tradition will connect those churches among themselves as well as with the churches of the past, with the Church triumphant of heaven. In these small groups the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church will be preserved intact.

Of course, it is wonderful that order and coordination should exist in the outward functionings of the various churches, and that the less important churches should receive their direction and guidance from the more important churches, the way it is now between dioceses, metropolises, archdioceses, and patriarchates. But in the last days, such outward relations and contacts will be impossible most of the time. There will be such confusion in the world that one church will not be able to be certain of the orthodoxy of another because of the multitude of false prophets who will fill the world and who will be saying, *Here is Christ*, and *There is Christ*. There might even be misunderstandings among the really Orthodox churches because of the confusion of tongues which exists in the contemporary Babel. But none of that will sever the essential unity of the Church.

A contemporary example of that condition is presented by the Russians of the dispersion who have been divided into three opposing factions. One group wishes to belong to the Patriarchate of Moscow. Another, in order to be free from Soviet political influence, belongs to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and is influenced by pro-Papal politics. The third and most down-to-earth group, the Russian Synod Abroad, remains independent. And the three groups, at least up to the present, are Orthodox with full essential communion among them. Formal intercommunion and external contacts, however, they do not have, and this because they have been lost in the web of legalistic concepts and debates about which patriarchate should govern them.

Such a mentality is wrong in its very basis since there is no essential need for dependence on a patriarchate, particularly at a time when immense distance and frontiers of nations separate them from these patriarchates. Nothing impedes an Orthodox church in Paris, for example, from being in essential communion with the Patriarchate of Moscow or with the Church of Constantinople, even though it has no jurisdictional dependence upon them. The notion that the interruption of jurisdictional dependence of a local church from a patriarchate cuts this church off from the Orthodox Church is not Orthodox but papal. Besides, even the existence of jurisdictional dependence of churches upon one patriarch is of papal inspiration.

An Orthodox patriarch is a president, a coordinator of efforts, an adviser of great importance, but he is not a despot,

not a sovereign. He can do nothing beyond the bounds of his diocese without the agreement of all the other bishops (Apostolic Canons).

It is possible, then, in the last days when the various churches and religions will have been united and will appear as a single whole, that the genuine Orthodox Church will appear disintegrated, fragmented into small, scattered, sparse parishes, so that it is even possible that one will suspect the other from lack of confidence, just as soldiers suspect each other when it is learned that the enemy is wearing the same uniform.

In the last days all will claim to be Orthodox Christians, and that Orthodoxy is as they understand it to be. But in spite of all this, those who have a pure heart and a mind enlightened by divine grace will recognize the Orthodox Church despite the apparent divisions and utter lack of external splendor. They will gather around the true priests, and they will become the pillars of the Church. Let the people of the world do whatever they will. Let there be ecumenical conferences; let the churches be united; let Christianity be adulterated; let the Tradition and life be changed; let the religions be united. The Church of Christ will remain unaltered, as Chrysostom says, because if even one of her pillars remains standing, the Church will not fall. *Nothing is stronger than the Church. She is higher than the heavens and broader than the earth. She never grows old; she always flourishes.*

A pillar of the Church is every true believer who adheres to the Tradition of the Fathers in spite of all the frightful currents of the world which attempt to pull him away. Such pillars will exist until the end of the world, whatever might happen. Besides, when these things come to pass, the coming of the Lord will not be far off. That state of affairs will be the most fearful sign that His coming is approaching. Precisely then will the end come.

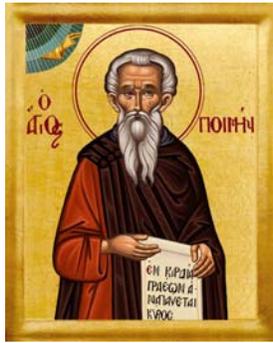


The state of our Church here (i.e., in the U.S.) is almost that of a dead man's last breath... A good and austere monastic life is the only thing that can show us the way out of this miserable state of Orthodoxy in America. If it is undertaken by monks of the Holy Mountain, we shall have the *typikon* of the Holy Mountain—with vigil services and so on. And they will be a strong missionary center, which will invade Satan's kingdom, and cleanse the atmosphere of the demons with incense and spiritual vigilance... So here, where for so many years Satan has ruled unopposed, he must be fought.

Fr. John Romanides of blessed memory

[He wrote this over 50 years ago! This entire quote is from over 50 years ago]

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688



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POIMEN@MAIL.COM

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ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΓΕΝΝΑΤΑΙ, ΔΟΣΑΓΑΤΕ!

CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

ON VENERATION OF ICONS AND SANTA CLAUS

By Hierodeacon Makarios.

It's been snowing heavily since noon in Gardner; the roads were in terrible condition. Tired, physically and mentally (8 hours of teaching), I hardly could see the man at the roadside behind the pile of snow. I stopped; he was going to Heywood Hospital. Not far, but at such speed would take a while.

I turned the heat on full blast, and the man leaned forward, towards the flow of hot air. He looked neither young nor healthy. I wonder how long he'd been waiting for a ride.

"Are you Catholic?" he asked as he was looking at a tiny icon on the dashboard.

I was totally disinclined to a serious road conversation.

"No," I said simply, "I am Orthodox," although many Orthodox would say "Yes, Catholic, but not Roman-Catholic," which is quite accurate.

Then he started his story. It was a long and complicated one, about his relatives of different persuasion, what they would say, and how they would do something totally different, and how it all ended in nothing. I nodded and said "Yea," "Sure," "Unbelievable" at the right moments, but then the story came to the end, and it was clearly my turn to speak. I had no clue what to say, pretending to be fully involved in pushing through the piles of snow around the hospitals' entrance.

Finally I turned off the ignition. He was silent. I looked at the icon.

"Do you know Santa Claus?" I asked.

"Sure," he replied.

"No, not that clown who works for retail sales; the real one!"

"What do you mean, 'real'?"

"Yes, the real one. The one on this icon."

"Is this Santa Claus???"

"Yes. St. Nicholas, Sanctus Nicolaus, became Santa Claus. He was a bishop in a small town, in what is now land that is occupied by Turkey; he lived over fifteen hundred years ago. Never made a big deal of himself. But his secret kindness and generosity made him famous all over Christian Europe, and his name became linked with the charity to the poor and gift giving. However, when it was about the defense of the Christian faith against imposters and 'reformers' of all sorts, he was totally different. Through the efforts and struggle of people like him, today we have the true, in-corrupt faith of Christ. That's why we remember them and stay in communion with them, like a good family does."

The man was looking at the icon. I turned the dome light on.

"May I look at it?" he asked hesitantly.

I took the icon off the dashboard.

"Take it," I said, "It's your gift, for Christmas."

He nodded thankfully, said good-bye and opened the door. It was dark outside, but I noticed him touching the icon with his lips before hiding it in the pocket.