

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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AN INSIGHT TO "MONASTIC WISDOM: THE LETTERS OF ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST"

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos.

I often read the book *Monastic Wisdom*, which is a collection of letters Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller and Hesychast of blessed memory sent to monks, hesychasts, hermits and lay people, and I find it of great spiritual benefit. This book is comparable to the classics of ascetic literature, and its repeated reprints in Greece show the interest it holds for those who love the monastic way of life, but also how beneficial it is for our fellow Christians, monks and lay people.

I did not have the special honor and blessing of knowing Elder Joseph of blessed memory, but I have come to know and love him through the texts published in *Monastic Wisdom*, through the life of his spiritual children and the stories I have heard about him from monks who knew him first hand. I also have the testimony of Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, the great Elder of blessed memory, who knew him on the Holy Mountain when he (Elder Sophrony) was living as an ascetic in *Karoulia* and Elder Joseph was an ascetic living in caves.

It is not easy to record in full my thoughts on reading this most spiritu-

al of books, *Monastic Wisdom*, because when we approach the writings of experienced holy Fathers we feel really helpless, as we are actually drawing near to a land of fire or a colossal nuclear reactor, in which all conventional thermometers shatter. We can only express ourselves appropriately if we share the same perspective as the ever-memorable Elder, hermit and hesychast, or if our life bears some resemblance to his own life in the Holy Spirit. I shall simply attempt, by the prayers of the Elder, to set down a few of my thoughts, while urging the reader not to be con-



tent with them, but to go on and read the wonderful letters of Elder Joseph of blessed memory. Elder Joseph as a Theologian

When we read the letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast, we sense that they exude a fragrance of theology, and that they

are theological texts. Unfortunately we have formed the impression that theology means high-flown theories, academic theological analyses, comprehending theological terms, quoting historical theological events and so on. True Orthodox theology, however, is experience. It is the knowledge of God given to the person whose heart and nous have been purified and illuminated. Theologians, according to the teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian, are those who *are past masters in theoria*, and according to St. Gregory Palamas they are primarily those who behold God. In the New Testament theology is identified with prophecy,

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

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate **\$24 per annum (\$48 for those outside of the US)**. This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

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and the theologian with the prophet who receives glorification and shares in the glory of God.

It is clear from the book we are considering that Elder Joseph of blessed memory is a theologian in this sense. He knows God by experience and unerringly leads people to this knowledge, which is also man’s communion with God. He says something particularly significant: When someone prays notetically, Grace comes in abundance, *like a subtle breeze, like a mighty gust of fragrant wind. It overflows throughout the body and the prayer* [i.e., the Jesus Prayer] *stops; the bodily members cease to move, and only the nous is in theoria within an extraordinary light. A union of God and man occurs. Man is unable to distinguish himself. It is just like iron; before it is thrown into the fire it is called iron, but once it ignites and becomes red-hot, it is one with the fire.*

Elder Joseph’s whole being is theological, as is evident from every word and phrase he uses. Having being reborn spiritually himself, he sees the renewal of the whole of creation. As the empirical theologian that he is, he sees even creation speaking theology, because with his pure heart he beholds the principles (*logoi*) of beings, their spiritual essences, the uncreated energy of God bestowing being and life on creation, as St Maximos the Confessor analyzes so wonderfully. A brief passage from one of Elder Joseph’s letters is typical: *Come now, even if for only one day, to talk about God*

and to theologize; to enjoy what you yearn for; to listen to the rough crags, those mystical and silent theologians, which expound deep thoughts and guide the heart and nous towards the Creator. After spring it is beautiful here—from Holy Pascha until the Panaghia’s day in August. The beautiful rocks theologize like voiceless theologians, as does all of nature. He sees the rugged rocks as mystical theologians, in the way an iconographer portrays them, showing them illuminated by Christ, Who is

at the centre of the icon.

Elder Joseph as an Experienced Teacher

A theological atmosphere, and the fact that his very existence speaks theology, permeate the letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast from the great gift of Grace that he possesses: the gift of discerning spirits. Indeed, the principal characteristic of empirical theology is the ascetic’s ability to distinguish between what is created and what is uncreated, to tell the



difference between demonic energies and the energy of Divine Grace, and to test the spirits. Here we see a discerning monk, theologian and Father.

This is important on two accounts. Firstly, because theology is primarily prayer and the *theoria* of God. Someone who does not pray cannot theologize, even if he writes theological treatises. Secondly, because the spiritual father who is also a theologian is able to identify the spiritual illnesses of his spiritual children, and to cure them through his wise

and experienced guidance, with the Christian remaining, of course, within the sacramental and ascetic life of the Church. This discerning pastoral guidance offered by spiritual fathers who are also theologians is clearly evident in the *Gerontikon* (“Sayings of the Desert Fathers”). Every word uttered by the great Abbas was theological and healed the spiritual ailments of Christians, because their sayings were the energy of God.

There are many examples that we could use from the writings of the great Elder Joseph of blessed memory. In one letter he writes: *The Grace of the priesthood is one thing, the Grace of the great schema is another, the Grace of the Mysteries is different, and the action of Grace in ascesis is also different. They all spring from the same source, but each one differs from the other in eminence and glory.* He recognizes the differences between people, as *there are great differences from man to man and monk to monk*, so each one must be dealt with differently.

Elder Joseph of blessed memory knew personally all the subtle inner processes, so he is an experienced teacher of the spiritual life. He is very familiar with the changes that take place in the soul and body during the spiritual struggle. When the Elder analyzes the subject of delusion he makes the surprising statement that a person falls into delusion mainly by overemphasizing one spiritual gift, such as fasting, vigil, tears, prayer, *hesychia* or the monastic *schema*. He goes so far as to write: *If the Lord does not send the purifying waters of His Divine Grace, we remain without fruit, and our works become food for the demons...So then, above all we need spiritual discernment, and we must arduously seek it from God.*

Elder Joseph as a Neptic Father

The book of the great and ever-memorable Elder Joseph the Hesychast is an important and brilliant summary of the *Philokalia of the Holy Neptic Fathers of the Church*, and can be classified as *Philokalic* literature. It could be emphasized that it is the best introduction to interpreting the *Philokalia*. I remember that from the first times I read this book I realized how valuable it was for understanding the vocabulary of the patristic and *neptic* tradition. In his texts Elder Joseph explains terms with amazing aptitude and unusual ease, in a way that shows he has completely assimilated them. For instance, he explains what “contrary to nature,” “according to nature” and “above nature” mean; what *praxis* and *theoria* are; what noetic prayer is, and how it differs from rational prayer; and what we mean when we speak of God’s purifying, illuminating and deifying energy. Exalted concepts become easy to understand, and these moving texts actually lead the reader to experience such concepts within the furnace of longing and love for God.

I should like to cite a wonderful, divinely inspired passage: *The spiritual life is divided into three stages, and Grace acts in a person accordingly. The first stage is called purification, during which a person is cleansed. What you have now is called the Grace of purification. This form of Grace leads one*

to repentance...The second form of Grace is called the Grace of illumination. During this stage, one receives the light of knowledge and is raised to the vision of God. This does not mean seeing lights, fantasies, and images, but it means clarity of the nous, clearness of thoughts, and depth of cognition...The third stage—when Grace overshadows—is the Grace of perfection, truly a great gift. I shall not write to you about this now, since it is unnecessary.

Elder Joseph knows that the energy of God is one, but according to the effects that it has on each person it is called by different names. Sometimes it purifies, sometimes it illumines and sometimes it makes perfect and deifies, and so it takes the corresponding names. The Elder is plainly aware of which state the recipient of his letter is in. On the one hand he puts the spiritual life in perspective for him, without restricting him to low spiritual levels, because otherwise he would just be moralizing. On the other hand, he shows him what to do in his present state, without explaining the exalted spiritual states to him *since it is unnecessary.*



One cannot love God, and his heart be warmed by the sensation of His love, if he does not first feel within his heart the fear of God. For the power of the fear of God soothes and softens the soul, so that it can attain to a state of forceful and vibrant love for Him.

Precisely those things which are observed in our bodies, also happen to our souls. As long as wounds to the body go without therapeutic attention and become scabbed over, they do not respond to the effects of the medicine which the doctor places on them; however, when they are washed and cleansed, they feel the effects of the medical treatment and thus proceed to quick healing. It is like that with the soul. When it goes without spiritual attention and is wholly covered by the leprosy of sensual pleasure, it is never possible for it to feel the fear of God; even if someone should continually remind it how fearful is the righteous wrath of God, as well as His omnipotence.

He who loves God, with all the warmth of his heart, is known to God as His own; for the more that a man is possessed by God and is filled with the love of God, that is, to the extent that he feels ever more strongly that he loves God, all the more is such a man taken up by the love of God. And so it is that this man, flooded by the light of Divine knowledge, is possessed by the most forceful Divine eros, to the extent that even his bones feel the sacred shuddering of this love; while he himself is no longer aware of his former self --- for he is found totally altered, changed by the action of God’s love.

St. Diadochos of Photiki

THE TRUE STORY OF A REPEN- TANT SINNER

By Claudia Vasilievna Ustignia, as disseminated by the Romanian Orthodox Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Rives Junction, Michigan.

The account of this miracle, which took place 50 years ago [1965], has reached America. It's authenticity is verified by the fact that it records the year, day, hour, city, address, names... etc. Reading it, we behold the great care which God has for the salvation of our sinful souls. Read it with attention, and compare it to the other miracles which are occurring today throughout the world (various weeping icons and apparitions). You will observe that the same message is repeated: We must repent, for the Son of Man will come soon, and then it will be too late for us to be saved even if we wanted to be. Work, while it is light...

† † †

I used to be an atheist mocking God and persecuting the Holy Church. I lived my life in sin, and spiritually I was completely dead. But suddenly, in His great mercy, God called me, His creation, to repentance so that I would not perish.

This is what happened: In 1962 I became ill with cancer and suffered from the disease for three years. The doctors treated me in vain, for my health deteriorated more and more each day; it reached the point where I couldn't even drink water without vomiting. I was transferred to another hospital where two doctors were called in from Moscow to operate on me. That was on February 19, 1965, at 11:00 a.m. They discovered during the operation that my intestines had decomposed. That was when I died.

While they were making their incisions on my body, my soul was standing with the two doctors. I looked on in horror at the disease which affected my body, seeing my stomach full of cancer. As I watched, I thought to myself. "How am I in two places; how am I standing here and lying down at the same time?"

The doctors removed the intestines and placed them on the table, saying that instead of being fleshy and pliable, they were nothing but liquid—in other words, they had already decayed. Then they put all of the rotted tissue in a pile and said: "She couldn't have lived any longer; there was nothing healthy inside of her, everything was decomposed." This operation was performed by Doctor Izrael Igaevici Newman, a professor, who was assisted by ten other doctors.

The doctors decided to give my body to the young interns to practice on, and thus, it was taken to the morgue where I was laid down naked, covered only with a sheet up to my chest.

Just then my brother came in with my son, Andrusha. My little boy came up to me, kissed me on the forehead, and broke out in tears, saying: "Mommy, why did you die? I'm still little, how will I live without you?"

I hugged him and kissed him, but he paid me no attention at all—my "living" presence was sensed by no one in the room. I saw that everyone in the room was crying.

After that, I found myself in my own house. My mother-in-law from my first marriage came in, followed shortly by my sister and her husband. (I didn't live with my first husband—he believed in God.) They began dividing up my belongings. I was well-to-do, but everything which I had was gained by sin, not by honest work. My sister began to take everything which was of any value, and my mother-in-law asked for something for my little boy. My sister then began ranting at her, saying: "The child is not your son's. You aren't even related to him."

While my sister was yelling these accusations, I saw demons, smiling with delight and writing down every word which she said! After that, my sister and mother-in-law left, locking the door, and going home with sacks full of my things.

Just then I, Claudia the sinner, flew very high. I was amazed at the fact that I was flying. I flew over Barnal, and then everything became dark. The darkness lasted for a long time during my journey. Someone showed me the places I had lived while I was young. I didn't know what I was flying on: Through the air? On a cloud? I couldn't tell; but when I reached the first place below Heaven, at first it was overcast, like a gloomy day, then the light became so strong that it was impossible to see.

Someone sat me down on a place which was very high, although during the entire time I was flying, I was lying down—I don't know on what, it seemed like some sort of platform, but whatever it was, it was flexible and black. I started going down a long pathway; on the sides of the path were bushes, not very tall, but they had leaves which were very thin and sharp. In the distance I saw tall trees with beautiful leaves of all colors. Between the trees were small new houses, but I didn't see anyone in them. There was beautiful green grass running along this valley, and I wondered where I was: Was it a village, a city?

There was no one to be seen. But who lived here? I looked about and saw that a short distance away a woman, tall and very beautiful, was approaching. She was wearing a long garment covered by a cape. A young man was following her, weeping uncontrollably. It seemed like he was saying something, asking for something, but she ignored him. I wondered to myself, "What kind of mother can this be; her child begs for something and she doesn't even look at him!"

When the woman came closer to me, she said: "Lord, where should I take her?" She was standing with her hands lifted to her breast, her eyes raised to Heaven.

It was then that I realized with a terrible shock that I had died; my soul was in Heaven, but my body was on earth. At that same time I realized that I had so many sins which I had to answer for. I began to cry bitterly. I looked about to see the

Lord, but couldn't see anyone; yet, I heard the voice of the Lord. He said: "Send her back to earth; it's too soon for her to be here. Her father is compassionate and has been praying to me constantly, and I have decided to have mercy on her."

Then I knew that this woman was the Mother of the Lord, the Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven and earth; and the young man who was crying was my guardian angel.

The Lord went on to say: "I'm tired of her mockery against God, and her foul life. I wanted to wipe her off the face of the earth without any sign of repentance, but her father has prayed so much. Show how her all the places she deserves to be sent to."

Suddenly I was in some water, with the most horrific snakes climbing all over me. They had long tongues with flames of fire coming out of their mouths. There were many other forms of reptiles which all gave off an insufferable stench. These dragons climbed all over me, attaching themselves to me. There were also all kinds of worms wrapping themselves around my neck. They were as thick as a finger, a quarter of a yard long, with spikes on their tails. These worms found their way into my body through every orifice: genitals, eyes, nose, mouth, piercing my insides and fastening themselves to me. They were absolutely revolting and unbearable! I cried out with all my strength, but it was not my voice which I heard. But, there was no mercy to be found in that place, no help from anyone.

While I was there, a woman who died while having an abortion came in. She began to cry out and ask God to have mercy on her. But He answered: "Why didn't you ask me for help while you were alive on earth? You killed an infant in your womb and advised people not to have children, saying that it only made poverty worse. In my eyes, there is not an over-abundance of children. I give children to everyone. In my house, there are many rooms."

The Lord God said to me: "I sent you sickness so that you would repent, but you lived right up to your last moment blaspheming against me. You didn't acknowledge Me until you came here. Now I don't recognize you either."

I felt like the ground was spinning. I flew away from there toward the noisy earth. Then I saw my village church, the very church which I used to ridicule. When the doors of the church opened, a priest dressed in white, with bright rays emanating from him, came out. He stood with his head bowed. Then the voice of God asked me: "Who is this?" I answered that it is our priest.

The Lord said to me: "You used to always say that he is a lazy bum. He is not a bum, not a hired-hand. Whatever he may be personally, above all, he is a servant of the Lord among the little ones. If the priest does not read the prayer of absolution over you, neither will I forgive you."

The priest is living even to this day, serving his office of the priesthood. What I saw there was his soul. That was when I

began to beseech the Lord: "Lord, set me free and let me go back to earth. I have a little boy there; have mercy on him!"

"Look, you have compassion for one single person, but I have innumerable souls to consider. I have compassion for all of you, three thousand times more! But, what path did you choose in life? A wrong path! You work to accumulate riches which you use for all sorts of iniquity. Did you see now how I took away all your possessions? Everything is gone. They took your son to an orphanage, and your sinful soul has come here. You served Satan, an idol, offering him sacrifice, and now you ask me to release you from the punishment which you deserve. All you ever did was amuse yourself, going out to movies, theaters, dances; you gave money to Satan, but didn't so much as want to go into the Church of God. I waited and waited for you to wake up from this sinful state and repent."

After that, the Savior said: "Look after your souls, for there is a short time left. Very soon I will come to judge the world"

Then I asked the Lord: "Lord, how should I pray?"

He answered: "The most precious prayers are not theories which you learned by heart, but rather the prayer which you offer from a pure heart, from the depth of your soul. Say to the Lord, 'Lord, forgive me! Lord, help me!' offering these words with tears." That is what the Lord told me.

Then the Mother of God was near me and I found myself again on that small platform, but now, instead of lying down, I was standing up. The Queen of Heaven said: "Lord, how can I release her, she has short hair!?"

The Lord said: "Put a braid, the same color as her own hair, in her right hand."

When the Queen of Heaven went off to get the braid, I saw that she drew near to some large gates, constructed and sculpted along curved lines, like the Royal Doors of the Altar. They were indescribably beautiful, with a light coming out of them which was so bright that it was not possible to look at it or even explain. As the Mother of God approached, these gates opened on their own, and she went into a palace surrounded by a courtyard. I remained standing in my own place, with my guardian angel, who would not let me see his face, standing next to me. I decided to ask the Lord if I could see Paradise. He said nothing when I asked.

When the Queen of Heaven returned, the Lord said: "Show her Heaven!"

The Queen of Heaven gestured with her hand over me and said: "Earth was your Heaven; this is the place for sinners; look and see what it is like."

She lifted up something like a sheet and then I saw men far off: black, as though they were burned, and they looked like skeletons. There were so many of them, and they gave off an intolerable stench I was terrified that I would be left there. Then all of them, at once, stood up and with parched throats, begged that someone give them at least a drop of water to drink. I was horrified when they said: "This soul has

come to us from the earthly Paradise! There is a sweet smell coming from her. Man, while on earth, has the ability and the time to gain for himself the heavenly Paradise. He has to put forth spiritual effort on earth for the Lord, otherwise he will not escape this place of tortures.”

The King of Heaven said: “For those of you on the earthly Paradise mercy is something so very precious: offer charity to others, giving them water to drink, as much as you possibly can. Do this with a pure heart, as I said in the Gospel: If someone offers at least a cup of cool water in My Name, he will have recompense from the Lord. You not only have an abundance of water, but you also have all kinds of other good things which you much share with those who are in need, offering them water above all. Give water, so that the innumerable people who are suffering here can be relieved! This is the very reason why your rivers and seas are so full and never dry up.”

Then I found that I was in the very depths of hell. This was not just hell, it was worse. There I saw people and fire, and demons came running toward me with documents on which were written all of my sins and evil deeds. They said to me: “Look, we wrote down here that you served us on earth.”

I read all of my sins myself, which were written with large letters, and I was terrified by them. There was fire burning all around the demons, the flames shooting upwards; then suddenly they began beating me on the head and sparks from the fire pierced right into me.

Then, Oh! I heard feeble moans, like the crying of a tiny bird. They were asking for something to drink, and when the fire gave off some light, I saw all of them. They were weak and tortured. They said to me: “See, friend, you came here where we live. Come here to us! From now on you will live here. While we all lived on earth, we had no love for anyone; not for those who served God’s churches, not for the poor, we were just filled with pride. We mocked God, serving only that which was godless, and laughed at the shepherds of the Orthodox Church. We never confessed our sins. We never partook of Holy Communion. The sinners who repented for their sins with their whole hearts, went to church, received strangers, had mercy on the poor, helped those in need, and did other good deeds, all those souls are to be found there, up above.”

I was terrified, trembling with fright. It seemed like I was in this place for a hundred years. I felt completely crushed, but still they went on saying to me: “You will be here with us, you’ll be tormented for all eternity and will live like we do!”

Then the Mother of God appeared. Light shone all around. The demons fell one by one, and all the souls turned toward her with their weeping and began to pray to her: “O Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, don’t abandon us here alone where we are so terribly tormented. We don’t have even a drop of water, and the fire is unbearable.” All of them were weeping bitterly.

The Mother of God also wept and said to them: “When you were living on earth, you didn’t call to me for help; you didn’t pray to my Son and your God. Now I cannot help you; I cannot go against the will of my Son. And He cannot go against the will of the Heavenly Father. This is why I can’t intercede for you. I can show mercy to only those suffering souls in hell who are prayed for in the Church, and for those pilgrims who prayed, who performed deeds of virtue and who were worthy of mercy while they lived on earth.”

While I was in hell I was given all kinds of worms to eat: alive, dead, rotten, putrid. I cried out and said: “How can I eat them? It turns my stomach!”

The demons said: “You didn’t observe fasting periods while you were on earth. You ate meat, not worms. Now, eat worms.” Instead of milk, they gave me all sorts of foul things to drink.

Then, we began going upwards, but they were left in hell and began yelling: “Don’t leave us, O Mother of God!”

We left the darkness behind, and I again found myself on that same platform. After the Queen of Heaven had shown me all of these dreadful places, she lifted her hands to her breast, raised her eyes toward Heaven and asked what she should do with me, where should she take me?

The Lord said: “Let her go back to earth. Take hold of her hair and set her free.”

Immediately twelve wheelbarrows appeared, but they had no wheels. In order for me to move, the Mother of God told me to lean on them with my right foot and push with my left. I did as the Queen of Heaven told me, with her coming along beside me. But when I reached the last wheelbarrow I saw a bottomless abyss. She told me to step down first with my right foot and then with my left, but I told her that I was afraid and feared that I would fall. She answered that it was essential that I not fall, and she put the thick end of the braid of hair in my right hand. When she let go of it I flew toward earth.

While I was flying, I saw cars moving about on earth and people going to work. I was lying down on the platform in the middle of a new outdoor marketplace. I flew gently toward the morgue where my body had been taken. Then, all of a sudden, I was standing on solid ground. It was noon, the third day after I had died.

After the strong light that I had experienced up above, I didn’t like being on earth; but there was nothing I could do about it. I went to the hospital, toward the morgue, but it was locked. I went in and looked around. My body was laying on a table, dead, the head turned a bit to one side, one arm dangling down, and part of my torso was touching another corpse. I don’t know how my soul entered into the body, but I immediately felt cold and pulled away from the other cadaver. I drew my knees together, and just then a dead man whose legs had been severed from his body by a train, was brought

in on a bier. I opened my eyes and moved. Those carrying the bier ran off in all directions. Then the orderlies came in with two doctors. They gave orders to have me taken quickly into the hospital. There, all the doctors gathered quickly and said that my brain had to be warmed beneath the lights.

This took place at 9:00 a.m. on February 23, 1965. There were eight different incisions with stitches on my body; all the doctors had used it for research and study. After two hours, I was warm, I opened my eyes and began to talk. I was fed artificially for twenty days. Then they brought me something to eat; it was bread with sour cream, and coffee, but I told them that I would not eat. The nurse tried to convince me to eat, and everyone in the room turned their eyes toward me. Just then the doctor came in and asked me why I did not want to eat. I told him: "Today is Friday and I will not eat non-lenten food. If you sit down here next to me, I will tell you what I saw and where I was during the time I was dead."

The doctor sat down and listened attentively. I began by saying that whoever refuses to respect the fast of Wednesdays, Fridays, and the prescribed fasting periods throughout the year, in the afterlife will be given worms, snakes and reptiles to eat instead of meat. And instead of milk, he will have to drink the foulest things imaginable. This is the nourishment which is given to everyone who died without repenting before the Holy Altar, before a priest and without Holy Communion. This was the reason I refused to eat cheese and sour cream.

The doctor listened to me, his face turning red, then white, then red again. Other doctors and nurses had gathered there too and listened to what I was saying about what I had seen and heard on the other side of the grave.

After this many people began coming to me and I told them all which had been commanded me from the other side. Later, the secret police started chasing the people away from the hospital, and I was moved to another hospital in the city where I regained complete health.

The doctors were curious to find out how I came back to life, especially since they knew that my intestines were putrid and that other organs were not only diseased but decomposed. More so, after my operation, all my intestines had been removed, falling where they may.

In order to discover what had happened, they decided to operate on me again. When the doctor in charge made this announcement, Valentina Vasilievna said: "Why should we operate on her again? All of her organs are healthy."

I asked them not to give me anesthesia since I felt no pain. The doctors operated and removed the intestines. I was awake, watching in the mirror on the ceiling. I asked the doctors what was wrong with me, and they answered that I was fine, with no disease at all. Just then the doctor who had performed the first operation together with the other doctors came in.

They all looked at me, at my intestines and said: "But where is the disease? Everything in you was rotten before, but now it is all healthy."

All of the medical personnel were amazed and afraid. They ran through the room in all directions, holding their heads, wringing their hands, and all were as pale and colorless as a corpse.

I told them: "God had mercy on me so that I would go and tell others and so that you would also learn something, which you might lead you to believe that Heaven and the Power of the Most High are above us.

They themselves were saying these very same things.

I said to a Jewish doctor: "If you believe all of this, then go, be baptized and have your marriage blessed in the Church." He flushed with confusion.

Valentina Vasilievna, who had operated on me, went out into the hall, collapsed on a sofa, and broke down crying. I asked her why she was crying: did someone die? Did Claudia die? She answered: "No, she did not die, but I am completely stupefied by this miracle which is here before us."

God then helped her to tell me that Professor Newman had tried to convince her to kill me, but she refused completely and was caring for me herself because she was afraid that someone would kill me. She personally prepared my food. The director of the hospital was also amazed, saying that this incident was unique in the history of medicine throughout the world.

When I left the hospital, I called the priest whom I had mocked and accused of being a lazy bum when, quite to the contrary, he was a truly great man. The servant of the Altar of God came, heard my confession in which I laid forth all my sins which I had committed during my entire life; then he administered the Sacrament of Holy Communion to me and blessed my house. Up to that time my home was nothing but a place of filth and indecency, drunkenness, beatings, and things for which there are no words to describe.

The next day I went to the office of the Party and handed over my membership card, since the old Claudia, the atheist and activist, no longer existed. She had died!

I am forty years old. With the help of the Queen of Heaven, and through the mercy of God, I go to Church and live a Christian life. I go to various institutes and tell everyone there about what I saw and heard in the life on the other side of the grave. Many people come to me at my home and I also tell them all about what had happened. Now I advise everyone to repent so that they will not have to experience the tortures which I told them about. Repent for your evil sins and behavior so that you can receive remission from the priest for all your sins, and thus obtain eternal life.

I live at 99 Crupskaja Street, Banial, Altaiul County - I.

The servant of God and a repentant sinner,
Claudia Vasilievna Ustignia.

ORTHODOXY AS THERAPY

By Protopresbyter George Metallinos, Dean of the Athens University School of Theology.

If we wished to conventionally define Christianity, as Orthodoxy, we would say it is the experiencing of the presence of the Uncreated (=of God) throughout history, and the potential of creation (=mankind) becoming God *by Grace*.

Given the perpetual presence of God in Christ, in historical reality, Christianity offers mankind the possibility of *theosis*, just as medical science offers mankind the possibility of preserving or restoring his health through a specific therapeutic procedure and a specific way of life.

The writer is in a position to appreciate the coincidence between the medical and ecclesiastic *poemantic* sciences, because, as a diabetic and a Christian, he is aware that in both cases, he has to faithfully abide by the rules that have been set out, in order to attain both of these two goals.

The unique and absolute goal of life in Christ is *theosis*, in other words, our union with God, so that man—through his participation in God’s uncreated energy—may become *by the Grace of God* that which God is by nature (=without beginning and without end). This is what “salvation” means, in Christianity. It is not the moral im-



provement of man, but a re-creation, a re-construction in Christ, of man and of society, through an existing and an existential relationship with Christ, Who is the incarnate manifestation of God in History. This is what the Apostle Paul’s words imply, in 2 Cor 5:17: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*. Whoever is united with Christ is a new creation.

That is why *Christianically*, the incarnation of God-Logos—this redemptory “intrusion” of the Eternal and the Beyond-time God into Historical time—represents the commencement of a new world, of a (literally) “New Age,” which continues throughout the passing centuries, in the persons of authentic Christians: the Saints. The Church exists in this world, both as the *body of Christ* as well as *in Christ*, in order to offer salvation, through one’s embodiment in this regenerative procedure. This redemptory task of the Church is fulfilled by means of a specific therapeutic method, whereby throughout

history, the Church essentially acts as a universal infirmary. “Spiritual Infirmary” (spiritual hospital) is the characterization given to the Church by the blessed Chrysostom.

Further along, we shall examine the answers given to the following questions:

(1) What is the sickness that Christian Orthodoxy cures?

(2) What is the therapeutic method it implements?

(3) What is the identity of authentic Christianity, which radically separates it from all of its heretical deviations, and from every other form of religion?

The Sickness Cured by Orthodoxy

The sickness of human nature is the fallen state of mankind, along with all of creation, which likewise suffers (*sighs and groans together*, Rom 8:22) together with mankind. This diagnosis applies to every single person (regardless whether they are Christian or not, or whether they believe or not), on account of the overall unity of mankind. Christian Orthodoxy does not confine itself within the narrow boundaries of one

religion—which cares only for its own followers—but, just like God, *wants all people to be saved and to arrive at the realization of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4), since God is *the Saviour of all persons* (1 Tim 4:10). Thus, the sickness that Christianity refers to pertains to all of mankind; *Death has come upon all people, since all of them have sinned* (=they have veered

away from their path towards *theosis*, Rom 5:12). Just as the fall (i.e., sickness) is a pan-human issue, so is salvation-therapy directly dependent on the inner functions of each person.

The natural (authentic) state of a person is (patristically) defined by the functioning inside him of three mnemonic systems; two of which are familiar and monitored by medical science, while the third is something handled by *poemantic* therapeutics. The first system is cellular memory (DNA), which determines everything inside a human organism. The second is the cerebral cellular memory, brain function, which regulates our association with our self and our environment. Both these systems are familiar to medical science, whose work it is to maintain their harmonious operation.

The experience of the Saints is familiar with one other mnemonic system: that of the *heart*, or *noetic memory*, which functions inside the heart. In Orthodox tradition, the heart does not only have a natural operation, as a mere pump that circulates the blood. Furthermore, according to patristic

teaching, neither the brain nor the central nervous system is the center of our self-awareness; again, it is the *heart*, because, beyond its natural function, it also has a supernatural function. Under certain circumstances, it becomes **the place of our communion with God**, or, His uncreated energy. This is of course perceived through the experience of the Saints, and not through any logical function or through an intellectual theologizing.

Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain (+1809), in recapitulating the overall patristic tradition in his work “Hortative Manual,” calls the *heart* a natural and supernatural center, but also a paranormal center, whenever its supernatural faculty becomes idle on account of the *heart* being dominated by passions. The *heart's* supernatural faculty is the ultimate prerequisite for perfection, for man's fulfillment, in other words, his *theosis*, for a complete embodiment in the communion in Christ.

In its supernatural faculty, the *heart* becomes the space where the mind can be activated. In the Orthodox terminology codex, the mind (*νοῦς*—appearing in the New Testament as *the spirit of man* and *the eye of the soul*) is an energy of the soul, by means of which man can know God, and can reach the state of *seeing* God. We must of course clarify that *knowledge of God* does not imply knowledge of His incomprehensible and unapproachable Divine Essence. This distinction between *essence* and *energy* in God is the crucial difference between Orthodoxy and all other versions of Christianity. The energy of the mind inside the *heart* is called the *noetic faculty* of the *heart*. We again stress that according to Orthodoxy, the mind (*νοῦς*) and logic (*λογικὴ*) are not the same thing, because logic functions within the brain, whereas the mind functions within the *heart*.

The *noetic faculty* is manifested as the *incessant prayer* (ref. 1 Thess 5:17) of the Holy Spirit inside the *heart* (ref. Gal 4:6, Rom 8:26, 1 Thess 5:19) and is named by our Holy Fathers as *the memory of God*. When man has in his *heart* the *memory of God*, in other words, when he hears in his *heart* the *voice* (1 Cor 14:2, Gal 4:6, etc.), he can sense God *dwelling* inside him (Rom 8:11). Saint Basil the Great in his 2nd epistle says that the memory of God remains incessant when it is not interrupted by mundane cares, and the mind *departs towards God*; in other words, when it is in communion with God. But this does not mean that the faithful who has been activated by this Divine Energy withdraws from the needs of everyday life, by remaining motionless or in some kind of ecstasy; it means that **his mind is liberated** from these cares, which are items that **preoccupy only his logic**.

To use an example that we can relate to: A scientist, who has re-acquired his *noetic faculty*, will use his logic to tackle his problems, while his mind inside his *heart* will preserve the memory of God incessantly. The person who preserves all three mnemonic systems is the Saint. To Orthodoxy, he is

a healthy (normal) person. This is why Orthodoxy's therapy is linked to man's course towards holiness.

The non-function or the below-par function of man's *noetic faculty* is the essence of his fall. The much-debated *ancestral sin* was precisely man's mishandling—from that very early moment of his historical presence—of the preservation of God's memory (=his communion with God) inside his *heart*. This is the morbid state that all of the ancestral descendants participate in; because it was no moral or personal sin, but a sickness of man's nature; *our nature has become ill of this sin*, observes Saint Cyril of Alexandria (+444), which is transmitted from person to person, exactly like the sickness that a tree transmits to all the other trees that originate from it.

The inactivating of the *noetic faculty* or the memory of God, and confusing it with the function of the brain (which happens to all of us), subjugates man to stress and to his natural environment; it further leads him to the quest for bliss through individualism and an anti-social stance. While ill because of his fallen state, man then uses God and his fellow man to secure his personal security and happiness. Personal use of God is found in “religion” (=the attempt to elicit strength from the divine), which can degenerate into a self-deification of man (*I became a self-idol* says Saint Andrew of Crete, in his “Major Canon”). The use of fellow man—and subsequently creation in general—is achieved by exploiting them in every possible way. This, therefore, is the sickness that man seeks to cure, by becoming fully incorporated in the *spiritual hospital* of the Church.

Orthodoxy's Therapeutic Methods

The purpose of the Church's presence in the world—as a communion in Christ—is man's cure; the restoration of his *heart-centred* communion with God; in other words, of his *noetic faculty*. According to the professor Fr. John Romanides, *the patristic tradition is neither a social philosophy, nor a system of morals, nor a religious dogmatism; it is a therapeutic method. In this context, it is very similar to medicine and especially psychiatry. The noetic energy of the soul that prays mentally and incessantly inside the heart is a natural instrument, which everyone possesses and is in need of therapy. Neither philosophy, nor any of the known positive or social sciences can cure this instrument. This is why the incurable cases are not even aware of this instrument's existence.*

The need for man to be cured is a pan-human issue, related firstly to the restoration of every person to his natural state of existence, through the reactivation of the third mnemonic faculty. However, it also extends to man's social presence. In order for man to be in communion with his fellow man as a brother, his self-interest (which in the long run acts as self-love) must be transformed into selflessness: *Love... does not ask for reciprocation.* (1 Cor 13:8). Selfless love exists; it is the love of the Triadic God (Rom 5:8, 1 Jn 4:7), which gives everything without seeking anything in exchange. That is why Christian

Orthodoxy's social ideal is not "common possessions" but the "lack of possessions," as a willed resignation from any sort of demand. Only then can justice be possible.

The therapeutic method that is offered by the Church is the spiritual life; the life in the Holy Spirit. Spiritual life is experienced as an exercise (*ascesis*) and a participation in the Uncreated Grace, through the Holy Sacraments. *Ascesis* is the violation of our self-ruled and inanimate through sin nature, which is coursing headlong into a spiritual or eternal death, i.e., the eternal separation from the Grace of God. *Ascesis* aspires to victory over our passions, with the intention of conquering the inner subservience to those pestiferous focal points of man and participating in Christ's Cross and His Resurrection.

The Christian, who is practicing such restraint under the guidance of his therapist-spiritual father, becomes receptive to Grace, which he receives through his participation in the sacramental life of the ecclesiastic corpus. There cannot be any un-exercising Christian, just as there cannot be a cured person who does not follow the therapeutic advice that the doctor prescribed for him.

The Authenticity of Orthodoxy

The above points lead us to certain constants, which verify the identity of Christian Orthodoxy:

(a) The Church, as the body of Christ, functions as a therapy center-hospital. Otherwise, it would not be a Church, but a "religion." The Clergy are initially selected by the cured, in order to function as therapists. **The therapeutic function of the Church is preserved today, mostly in monasteries which, having survived secularism, continue the Church of the Apostolic times.**

(b) The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy are the already cured persons. Those who have not had the experience of therapy cannot be therapists. That is the essential difference between the poemantic therapeutic science and medical science. The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy (spiritual fathers and mothers) bring forth other therapists, just as the professors of medicine bring forth their successors.

(c) The Church's confining itself to a simple forgiveness of sins so that a place in Paradise may be secured constitutes alienation and is tantamount to medical science forgiving the patient, so that he might be healed after death! The Church cannot send someone to Paradise or to Hell. Besides, Paradise and Hell are not places, they are ways of existence. By healing mankind, the Church prepares the person so that he might eternally look upon Christ in His uncreated light as a view of Paradise, and not as a view of Hell, or as *an all-consuming fire*. (Heb 12:29). And this of course concerns every single person, because ALL people shall look eternally upon Christ, as *the Judge* of the whole world.

(d) The validity of science is verified by the achievement of its goals (i.e., in medicine, it is the curing of the patient). It is the way that authentic scientific medicine is distinguished from

charlatany. The criterion of *poemantic* therapy by the Church is also the achievement of spiritual healing, by opening the way towards *theosis*. Therapy is not transferred to the afterlife; it takes place during man's lifetime, here, in this world (*hinc et nunc*, here and now). This can be seen in the un-deteriorated relics of the Saints that have overcome biological deterioration, such as the relics of the *Eptanisos* (seven Greek islands in the Ionian sea, *Ed.*) saints: Spyridon, Gerasimos, Dionysios and Theodora Augusta. Un-deteriorated relics are, in our tradition, the indisputable evidence of *theosis*, or in other words the fulfillment of the Church's ascetic therapy.

I would like to ask the medical scientists of our country to pay special attention to the issue of the non-deterioration of holy relics, given that they haven't been scientifically interfered with, but, in them is manifest the energy of Divine Grace; because it has been observed that, at the moment when the cellular system should begin to disintegrate, it automatically ceases to, and instead of emanating any malodor of decay, the body emanates a distinctive fragrance. I limit this comment to the medical symptoms, and will not venture into the aspect of miraculous phenomena as evidence of *theosis*, because that aspect belongs to another sphere of discussion.

(e) Lastly, the Divine texts of the Church (Holy Bible, Synodic and Patristic texts) do not constitute coding systems of any Christian ideology; they bear a therapeutic character and function in the same way that university dissertations function in medical science. The same applies to the liturgical texts, as for example the Benedictions. The simple reading of a Benediction (prayer), without the combined effort of the faithful in the therapeutic procedure of the Church, would be no different to the instance where a patient resorts to the doctor for his excruciating pains, and, instead of an immediate intervention by the doctor, he is limited to being placed on an operating table, and being read the chapter that pertains to his specific ailment.

This, in a nutshell, is Orthodoxy. It does not matter whether one accepts it or not. However, with regard to scientists, I have tried—as a colleague in science myself—to scientifically respond to the question "what is Orthodoxy." **Any other version of Christianity constitutes a counterfeiting and a perversion of it, even if it aspires to presenting itself as something Orthodox.**



Do not be amazed, my child, since you are on a way leading upwards, if sometimes you fall into thorns or mud and at other times the ground is smooth. All those who struggle sometimes fall and sometimes succeed. The great Job said: *Is not the life of man upon earth a state of trial?* (Job 7:1).

Saint Dorotheos of Gaza

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR A SAVING CONFESSION?

By Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow.



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. Isn't that 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:

(1) 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 God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways* (Ezek 33:11), i.e., I do not at all desire the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion.

(2) 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! For as the psalmist says, *the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* (Pss 5:17)

(3) 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; it is necessary to forgive, otherwise God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* (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.

(4) 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!



Do not neglect prostration. It provides an image of man’s fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness. Getting up, on the other hand, signifies repentance and the promise to lead a life of virtue. Let each prostration be accompanied by a noetic invocation of Christ, so that by falling before the Lord in soul and body you may gain the Grace of the God of souls and bodies.

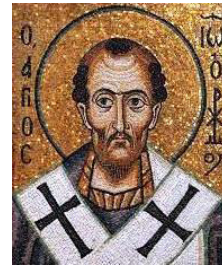
St. Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia (+1322)

ON THE BETRAYAL OF JUDAS

By St. John Chrysostom.

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? (Mt 26:14-15).

† † †



These words seem to be clear and not to hint at anything more, but if you carefully examine each word, you will find deep meaning and a great deal to contemplate.

First, the time. The Evangelist does not indicate it without cause. He does not simply say, *One of the twelve went*, but adds, *Then one of the twelve ... went*. Then. Tell me, when? And why does he indicate the time? What does he want to teach me? He does not say Then for no reason: Speaking by the Spirit, he does not say anything at random or to no end. Therefore, what does this “then” mean?

Before that time, before that hour, a harlot came with an alabaster box of ointment and poured the oil onto the head of the Lord. She displayed great service; she displayed great faith, great obedience, and great piety. She was turned from her former life and became better and wiser. And when the harlot had repented, when she had been drawn to the Master, then the disciple betrayed his Teacher. Thus the Evangelist said then, so that you not accuse the Teacher of weakness when you see the disciple betraying Him. For the power of the Teacher was such that He drew even harlots to proper obedience.

Why then, you say, was He Who won over harlots not able to win over His disciple? He had the power to win over His disciple, but He did not wish to make him good by force or to forcibly draw him to Himself. Then [he] went. In this “went” there is not a little matter for contemplation: for he was not summoned by the chief priests, he was not constrained or forced. Rather, of himself and of his own accord, he gave birth to his intention and brought forth his treachery, without any counselor in his wickedness...



If we have been betrayed by someone close to us—and eventually we all will—our first response should be to cry out to Jesus who loves us, pursues us, and intimately understands the reality of that betrayal. It is hard to cope with betrayal, but we must approach it with prayer, remembering the path that Christ took, calmly, with hope in God’s will.

Archpriest Nicholas Kim

Γιὰ τοὺς Ποιμένους μας

Τοὺς Ποιμένους μας, τοὺς θέλουμε Καθαρόαιμους Ὁρθόδοξους καὶ Ὅχι Προτεσταντίζοντες καὶ Κρυπτοπαπικούς...

Γράφει ὁ Φώτης Μιχαήλ, ἰατρός.



Ἀναρωτιέμαι πολλές φορές, ποιά εἶναι ἡ στάση πού ὀφείλει νὰ κρατήσῃ ἓνας Ρωμηός σὲ περιπτώσεις πού ἡ οὐσία τῆς Πίστεώς μας προσβάλλεται ἀπὸ κάποιους ἀνθρώπους, καὶ μάλιστα ἀπὸ «ἐγκριτοὺς» καθηγητὲς τῶν λεγόμενων θεολογικῶν μας σχολῶν ἢ ἀκόμα καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς γνωστούς μας

«προβεβλημένους» Ἱεράρχες; Ἦ ἀλλιῶς, μέχρι ποῦ σημεῖο ἔχει τὸ δικαίωμα ἓνας Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανός, ἐν ὀνόματι τάχα τοῦ δυτικώφερτου κώδικα καλῆς συμπεριφορᾶς, νὰ σιωπᾷ καὶ νὰ μὴν ὑπερασπίζεται ἢ νὰ ὁμολογῇ τὴν Πίστη τῶν Πατέρων του, ὅταν αὐτὴ ἢ Πίστις περιφρονεῖται ἀπὸ κάποιους ἐπιτήδειους καὶ—τὸ χειρότερο—παραχαράσσεται καὶ ἀλλοιώνεται;

Μερικοὶ θὰ σπεύσουν νὰ ποῦν ὅτι σ' ἐμᾶς τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς δὲν πρέπουν οἱ ἀντεγκλήσεις καὶ ὅτι, πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, μπαίνει ἡ ἀγάπη. Naί, ὄντως, ἡ ἀγάπη εἶναι ὁ πυρήνας τῆς διδασκαλίας τοῦ Κυρίου μας, ἀλλὰ γιὰ ποιά ἀγάπη μιλάμε; Ἐκείνη πού συμβιβάζεται μὲ τὸ ψεῦδος ἢ ἐκείνη πού ἀληθεύει; Ἐκείνη πού διολισθαίνει πρὸς τὴν αἵρεση ἢ ἐκείνη πού διδάσκει ἀνόθευτη τὴν Ἀλήθεια;

Ὅταν ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανός—λαϊκός ἢ ἱερωμένος—ἀποσιωπᾷ σκοπίμως τὴν Ἀλήθεια, κάνει ἐκπτώσεις σὲ θέματα Πίστεως καὶ συμπορεύεται ἀνοιχτὰ μὲ τοὺς αἰρετικούς· τότε σὲ τί ὠφελοῦν οἱ ἀγαπολογίες, οἱ ἀσπασμοὶ καὶ τὰ χαμόγελα;

Πάνω στὸ θέμα αὐτὸ ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος εἶναι σαφέστατος. Μᾶς λέει: «Οὐδὲν ὄφελος βίου καθαρῶ, δογμάτων διεφθαρμένων». Σὲ τίποτε δὲν ὠφελεῖ ὁ καθωσπρεπισμός, ὅταν ἡ Πίστη μας εἶναι ἀλλοιωμένη.

Ὁ κατ' ἐξοχὴν ὑμνητὴς τῆς ἀγάπης εἶναι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. Μήπως δὲν εἶναι ἐκεῖνος, πού μᾶς διδάσκει, ὅτι πρέπει νὰ κρατᾷμε ἀποστάσεις ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀμετανόητους αἰρετικούς; «Αἰρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον μετὰ μίαν καὶ δευτέραν νουθεσίαν παραιτοῦ». (Τίτ. 3:10).

Ἦ μήπως, ὁ Ἰωάννης, ὁ μαθητὴς τῆς Ἀγάπης, δὲν εἶναι ἐκεῖνος πού μᾶς προτρέπει νὰ τοὺς κόβουμε

ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν καλημέρα; «*Εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ταύτην τὴν διδαχὴν οὐ φέρει, μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν, καὶ χαιρεῖν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε· ὁ γὰρ λέγων αὐτῷ χαιρεῖν κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ τοῖς πονηροῖς*». (Β' Ἰωάν. 10-11).

Ἐμεῖς ἀπὸ πότε γίναμε ἀνώτεροι στὴν ἀγάπη ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀπόστολο Παῦλο καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωάννη, τὸν ἡγαπημένον μαθητὴ τοῦ Κυρίου μας;

Ἀπ' ὅτι φαίνεται μᾶλλον δὲν μιλάμε γιὰ τὴν ἴδια ἀγάπη. Ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Παύλου καὶ τοῦ Ἰωάννου εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη ἢ πατρικὴ, ἐνῶ ἡ δικὴ μας—κάποιων δῆθεν ἀνοιχτόμυαλων—εἶναι ἡ «ἀγάπη» τοῦ ἔμμισθου αὐτονομημένου μεταπατερικοῦ παιδαγωγοῦ. Ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Παύλου καὶ τοῦ Ἰωάννου εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη, πού φωτίζει τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ ὀδηγεῖ στὸ Φῶς, ἐνῶ ἡ δικὴ μας, εἶναι μιὰ κάλπικη ἀγάπη, πού θολώνει τὰ πεντακάθαρα νερὰ τῆς Ἀλήθειας καὶ ὀδηγεῖ στὸ σκοτάδι καὶ τὴν ἀπώλεια.

Σὲ ὀλόκληρὸ το Ἐὐαγγέλιο, Ἀγάπη καὶ ψεῦδος δὲν συναπαντῶνται πουθενά. Ἡ ἀγάπη ποτὲ δὲν θυσιάζει τὴν Ἀλήθεια. Ἀγάπη πού κρύβει καὶ συγκαλύπτει τὴν αἵρεση εἶναι ἐωσφορικὴ. Κάποιοι ἄλλοι θὰ μᾶς ὑπενθυμίσουν, ὅτι ὀφείλουμε σὲ ὅλους τοὺς συνανθρώπους μας, νὰ φερόμαστε μὲ ἐπιείκεια καὶ νὰ μὴν ἀποκαλύπτουμε τὰ ἀδύνατα σημεῖα τους.

Naί, ἔτσι εἶναι, ἀλλὰ, ὅπως μᾶς διδάσκουν οἱ Πατέρες, αὐτὸ ἰσχύει μονάχα σὲ ὅτι ἀφορᾷ στὰ πάθη καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες τῶν συνανθρώπων μας καὶ ὄχι σὲ διδασκαλίες αἰρετικὲς καὶ ὀλισθήματα βίου δογματικῆς τάξεως, προερχόμενα μάλιστα ἀπὸ ὑψηλόβαθμους ἱερωμένους ἢ καὶ «ἐπαγγελματίες» τῶν θεολογικῶν μας σχολῶν.

Τοὺς ποιμένους μας, ἐμεῖς οἱ Ρωμηοί, τοὺς θέλουμε καθαρόαιμους Ὁρθόδοξους καὶ ὄχι προτεσταντίζοντες καὶ κρυπτοπαπικούς. Τοὺς Ἱερεῖς μας, καὶ προπάντων τοὺς Ἐπισκόπους μας, τοὺς θέλουμε ἀνύστακτους καὶ αὐστηροὺς φύλακες τῆς πολυτίμητης Ὁρθοδοξίας μας—ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τοὺς θέλουν καὶ οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καὶ οἱ Ἅγιοί μας—καὶ ὄχι δουλικὰ παρατρεχάμενους στὰ διεθνῆ ἰνστιτοῦτα τῆς πανθηρησκείας καὶ τοῦ οἰκουμενισμοῦ.

Πῶς ἀλλιῶς θὰ κρατήσουμε τὴν Πίστη μᾶς ἀνόθευτη; Πῶς θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἀντισταθοῦμε στὶς ἀπανωτὲς ἐπιθέσεις πού δεχόμαστε; Ἦ μήπως δὲν εἶναι ὀλοφάνερη ἢ πρόθεση, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ πολυχρόνιος ἀντιχριστὴ δράση τῶν ποικιλώνυμων αἰρετικῶν, νὰ ξεριζώσουν ἀπὸ τὶς καρδιὲς μας τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ νὰ μᾶς κάνουν σὰν καὶ τοῦ λόγου τους;

Ἡ εὐθύνη ὅλων μας εἶναι μεγάλη. Ἀκόμα πιὸ μεγάλη, ὅμως, εἶναι ἡ εὐθύνη τῶν Ἱεραρχῶν καὶ Ποιμένων μας, ἰδιαίτερα μάλιστα στοὺς δύσκολους καιροὺς πού περνᾷμε.

Διδάγματα από τὰ Σεπτεμβριανά

Γράφει ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Χολέβας, πολιτικός ἐπιστήμων, Σεπτέμβριος 2012.

Τὸ διήμερο 6-7 Σεπτεμβρίου 1955, ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως βίωσε ἓνα ἄγριο «πογκρόμ» μὲ δύο θανατώσεις κληρικών, βιασμούς, προπηλακισμούς καὶ ἀμέτρητες καταστροφές κοιμητηρίων, ναῶν, οἰκιῶν καὶ καταστημάτων. Ὁ ἀφηνιασμένος τουρκικὸς ὄχλος χρησιμοποιήθηκε ἀπὸ τὶς εἰδικές ὑπηρεσίες ἀνορθόδοξου πολέμου τοῦ τουρκικοῦ στρατοῦ γιὰ νὰ τρομοκρατήσῃ τὴν πολυπληθῆ τότε Ἑλληνορθόδοξη κοινότητα καὶ γιὰ νὰ τὴν ὀδηγήσῃ, ὅπως καὶ ἔγινε, στὸν σταδιακὸ ξεριζωμὸ.

Τὰ Σεπτεμβριανά, ὅπως ἔχουν πλέον καταγραφεῖ, ἦταν τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα τοῦ γνωστοῦ καὶ μακροχρονίου σχεδιασμοῦ, τὸν ὁποῖο τηρεῖ μὲ ἀκριβεία τὸ τουρκικὸ κράτος στὰ ἐθνικὰ θέματα, παρὰ τὴν ἐναλλαγὴ κυβερνήσεων.

Ἀπὸ τὸ 1914, ὅταν ἄρχισε ἡ γενοκτονία τῶν Μικρασιατῶν—πέντε χρόνια προτοῦ ἀποβιβαστεῖ ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς Στρατός—μὲ ἀποκορύφωμα τὴ γενοκτονία τῶν Ποντίων Ἑλλήνων (1919-1922), μέχρι καὶ σήμερα ἡ πολιτικὴ τοῦ τουρκικοῦ κράτους κινεῖται σὲ δύο σταθεροὺς ἄξονες:

(α) Τὴ δημιουργία ἐνὸς ὁμοιογενοῦς ἐθνικοῦ κράτους μὲ τὴν ἐξόντωση ἢ ἐκδίωξη τῶν χριστιανικῶν μειονοτήτων.

(β) Τὴν ἐπέκταση τῆς στρατιωτικῆς, οἰκονομικῆς καὶ πολιτικῆς ἐπιρροῆς τῆς Τουρκίας πρὸς ὅλες τὶς κατευθύνσεις καὶ κυρίως πρὸς τὸν ἐδαφικὸ χῶρο τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Χαρακτηριστικὸ παράδειγμα, ἡ εἰσβολὴ τοῦ Ἀττίλα στὴν Κύπρο τὸ 1974.

Στὴν ἐπίτευξη τῶν τουρκικῶν στόχων ἔχει βοηθήσει δυστυχῶς ἡ ἀφέλεια καὶ ἡ ἱστορικὴ ἀμνησία ποὺ ἐπιδεικνύει μερικὲς φορὲς ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ πλευρά. Κάθε ὑποχώρησή μας δὲν ἐκλαμβάνεται ἀπὸ τὴν Ἄγκυρα ὡς φιλικὴ σχέση μεταξὺ γειτόνων, ἀλλὰ ὡς ἔνδειξη ἀδυναμίας. Θυμίζω τὰ ἱστορικὰ γεγονότα: Κατὰ τὴν περίοδο 1928-1932, ὁ Ἑλ. Βενιζέλος καλλιέργησε τὴν

Ἑλληνοτουρκικὴ «φιλία» μὲ τὸν Κεμάλ Ἄτατούρκ. Ἡ ἀνταμοιβή μας ἦταν τὸ «βαρλὶκ βεργκισί». Δηλαδή, κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τοῦ Β΄ Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου, οἱ πολυάριθμοι Ἑλληνες (Ρωμηοὶ) τῆς Πόλης φορολογήθηκαν ὑπέρογκα καὶ ἄδικο. Ὅποιος δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ πληρώσῃ ἀποστελλόταν σὲ κάτεργα γιὰ καταναγκαστικὰ ἔργα καὶ πολλοὶ πέθαναν ἀπὸ τὶς κακουχίες.

Τὸ 1952 ἡ Ἑλλάδα, σὲ ἔνδειξη φιλίας πρὸς τοὺς γείτονες, ἐπέτρεψε τὴ λειτουργία τουρκόφωνου γυμνασίου στὴ Θράκη μὲ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Τούρκου προέδρου τῆς Δημοκρατίας Τζελάλ Μπαγιάρ καὶ ἀνάγκασε—πολὺ κακῶς—ὄλους τοὺς τότε μουσουλμάνους τῆς Θράκης νὰ μαθαίνουν τουρκικά. Ἡ ἀνταμοιβή μας δυστυχῶς ἦταν τὰ Σεπτεμβριανά τοῦ 1955.

Κάτι ποὺ πρέπει νὰ προσέχουμε πάντα εἶναι

ἡ συνήθης τουρκικὴ τακτικὴ τῆς «προβοκάτσιας», δηλαδή τῶν σκηνοθετημένων ἐπεισοδίων.

Τὸν Σεπτέμβριο τοῦ 1955 ὅλα ἄρχισαν ὅταν ἐξερράγη μία βόμβα στὸν αὐλόγυρο τοῦ Τουρκικοῦ Προξενείου στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, ποὺ χαρακτηρίζεται ὡς τὸ σπίτι ὅπου γεννήθηκε ὁ Κεμάλ Ἄτατούρκ. Τὸ κλίμα στὶς σχέσεις τῶν δύο χωρῶν ἦταν φορτισμένο λόγω τοῦ μεγάλου ἐνωτικοῦ καὶ ἀπελευθερωτικοῦ ἀγώνα τῶν ἡρωικῶν Ἑλληνοκυπρίων κατὰ τῶν Βρετανῶν ἀπὸ τὴν 1/4/1955. Σὲ πολὺ ἐλάχιστες ὥρες πολλὲς ἐφημερίδες μέσα στὴν Πόλη κυκλοφόρησαν μὲ πηχταίους τίτλους, ἄρα κάποιον κέντρο ΜΜΕ τοὺς εἶχε εἰδοποιήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἔκρηξη. Ὁ

ὄχλος ἐφοδιάστηκε μὲ ὁμοίομορφους λοστούς, ἄρα ὑπῆρχε συντονισμὸς πίσω ἀπὸ τὴ μεγάλη καὶ μαζικὴ καταστροφὴ Ἑλληνικῶν περιοισιῶν.

Ὅπως ἀπεδείχθη, τὴ βόμβα τὴν εἶχε βάλει σκοπίμως ἓνας ὑπάλληλος τοῦ Τουρκικοῦ Προξενείου, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔπειτα ἀπὸ λίγα χρόνια ἀνταμειφθῆκε μὲ θέση νομάρχου καὶ μὲ ἄλλα ἀξιώματα στὴν Τουρκία. Θυμίζω ὅτι ἡ μέθοδος τῆς σκηνοθεσίας ἐπαναλήφθηκε καὶ τὸν Ἰανουάριο τοῦ 1996, ὅταν ἡ δῆθεν τυχαία προσάραξη ἐνὸς τουρκικοῦ φορητοῦ πλοίου ὀδήγησε στὴν κρίση τῶν Ἴμιων.



Ἀξίζει νὰ διδασκόμαστε ἀπὸ τὶς συνήθειες μεθόδους τῆς τουρκικῆς πολιτικῆς γιὰ νὰ μὴν ξαναβρεθοῦμε πρὸ ἀπροόπτου. Τὸ 1955 ἡ κυβέρνησις τοῦ Ἄντνὰν Μεντερές, μὲ δηλώσεις τοῦ ὑπουργοῦ Ἐξωτερικῶν Ζορλού καὶ ἄλλων ὑπευθύνων, ἔκανε δημοσίως γνωστὴ τὴ σύνδεση τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ μὲ τὰ θέματα τοῦ Αἰγαίου καὶ τῆς Θράκης. Σήμερα ὁ Τοῦρκος ΥΠΕΞ Ἀχμέτ Νταβούτογλου κάνει γνωστὴ μέσω τῶν βιβλίων τοῦ τὴν ἐπιθυμία τῆς Ἄγκυρας νὰ μεταφέρει τὸ «πέιραμα» Κύπρου στὴ δυτικὴ Θράκη.

Δὲν κινδυνολογῶ, ἀλλὰ, ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ ἀείμνηστος τουρκολόγος Νεοκλῆς Σαρρῆς, «ἡ Τουρκία πάντα προαναγγέλλει τὰ σχέδιά της»...

† † † Ἱστορικές Λεπτομέρειες

Ἀπὸ τὸν Θεοφάνη Μαλκίδη.



Μέσα σὲ ἑννέα περίπου ὥρες καταστράφηκαν ὀλοσχερῶς 1000 σπίτια, ἐνῶ ἄλλα περίπου 2500 ὑπέστησαν μεγάλες ζημιές. Καταστράφηκαν ἐπίσης 4350 καταστήματα, 27 φαρμακεία, 26 σχολεῖα, 5 σύλλογοι, οἱ ἐγκαταστάσεις 3 ἐφημερίδων, 12 ξενοδοχεῖα, 11 κλινικές, 21 ἐργοστάσια, 110 ζαχαροπλαστεία καὶ ἐστιατόρια, 73 ἐκκλησίες, ἐνῶ συλήθηκαν πάρα πολλοὶ τάφοι καθὼς καὶ οἱ τάφοι τῶν πατριαρχῶν στὴν Μονὴ Βαλουκλῆ.

Τουλάχιστον 30 Ἕλληνες σκοτώθηκαν καὶ ἑκατοντάδες ἄλλοι κακοποιήθηκαν. Τὸ μῖσος ἐναντίον τῶν ἱερωμένων ἦταν πρωτόγνωρο, ἀφοῦ πολλοὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς ξυλοκοπήθηκαν, ἄλλοι γυμνώθηκαν καὶ διαπομπεύθηκαν, ἐξαναγκαζόμενοι νὰ φωνάζουν: «Ἡ Κύπρος εἶναι τουρκικὴ». Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος Παμφίλου Γεράσιμος καὶ ὁ μοναχὸς Χρῦσανθος Μαντᾶς ξυλοκοπήθηκαν μέχρι θανάτου, ὁ Μητροπολίτης Ἡλιουπόλεως Γεννάδιος παρεφρόνησε ἀπὸ τοὺς ξυλοδαρμούς καὶ ὕστερα ἀπὸ λίγο χρόνο πέθανε, ἐνῶ διάκονος ὑπέστη περιτομή.

Ἐκεῖ ὅμως πού ὁ ὄχλος ἔδρασε ἀνελέητα ἦταν ἐναντίον τῶν Ἑλληνίδων. Σε 2000(!) ὑπολογίζονται

οἱ βιασμοί, ἂν καὶ ἐπισημῶς καταγγέλθηκαν μόνο 200, γιὰ εὐνόητους λόγους...

Ἐπίθεση ἀπὸ ὀργανωμένες ὁμάδες δέχθηκε καὶ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ προξενεῖο στὴ Σμύρνη, τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ περίπτερο στὴν ἔκθεση τῆς πόλης, ὅπου σχίσθηκε ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ σημαία, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἕλληνες ἀξιωματικοὶ πού ὑπηρετοῦσαν στὸ στρατηγεῖο τοῦ ΝΑΤΟ, διασώθηκαν τὴν τελευταία στιγμὴ, ἂν καὶ οἱ γυναῖκες τους, πάλι γιὰ εὐνόητους λόγους, δὲν ἀναφέρθηκε σχεδὸν ποτὲ ὅτι βιάσθηκαν.



Ἡ Πίστη γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ δὲν εἶναι Κάτι Ἀφρημένο...

Τὸ Σέβ. Μητροπολίτου Χόνγκ-Κόνγκ κ. Νεκταρίου.

Δὲν εἶναι ἀποδοχὴ κάποιας ἰδεολογίας ἢ διδασκαλίας. Ἡ πίστη εἶναι συνάντηση, πορεία καὶ συμμετοχὴ.

Τὴν Κυριακὴ μετὰ τὴν Ὑψωση τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ, ἀκούσαμε τὸν Κύριο νὰ λέγει: «Ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι.»

Ἡ πίστη γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ δὲν εἶναι κάτι ἀφρημένο. Δὲν εἶναι ἀποδοχὴ κάποιας ἰδεολογίας ἢ διδασκαλίας. Ἡ πίστη εἶναι συνάντηση, πορεία καὶ συμμετοχὴ. Συνάντηση μὲ τὸν Χριστό. Πορεία μὲ τὸν Χριστό. Συμμετοχὴ στὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ὅλα αὐτὰ συντελοῦνται μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία Του. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Χριστιανὸς συναντᾷ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ ἀποκτᾷ ἐμπειρία τῆς Θεϊκῆς ἀποκαλύψεως. Καὶ μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία πορεύεται, προσπαθώντας μέσω τῶν Μυστηρίων νὰ θεραπεύσει τὴν πεπτωκυῖα φύση του.

Εἶναι δύσκολο γιὰ πολλοὺς νὰ κατανοήσουν ὅτι πίστη στὸ Χριστὸ σημαίνει ἀπαραίτητα καὶ συμμετοχὴ στὴν Μυστηριακὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Κύριος μετὰ τὸ «ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν...» προσθέτει: «ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι...»

Ἄν θέλεις νὰ εἶσαι Χριστιανὸς τότε ἄσε στὴν ἄκρη τὰ δικά σου «νομίζω» καὶ «θέλω», ἀναγνώρισε καὶ ὀνομάτισε τὶς ἀδυναμίες καὶ τὴν φθορὰ πού κουβαλᾷς στὴν ψυχὴ σου καὶ ἀκολούθησε τὸν Χριστό.

Ὅχι μόνο πίστεψε στὸν Χριστό. Ἀλλὰ περπάτησε μαζί μὲ τὸν Χριστό. Ἀπλὰ πράγματα!

Ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους μας, ὁ κυρ- Φώτης Κόντογλου

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτρης Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος-Θεολόγος

«Ὅποτε καθίσω καὶ λογαριάσω τί γερό, τί ἀκατάλυτο ἔχω στὴν βιβλιοθήκη μου, τί θὰ μπορούσα νὰ πιάσω σὲ μίαν ὥρα ἀνάγκης καὶ νὰ στυλωθῶ, πιάνω τὸν Κόντογλου...»

[Γιῶργος Ἰωάννου]

† † †

Στις 13 Ἰουλίου τοῦ 1965 κλείνει γιὰ πάντα τὰ μάτια τοῦ ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους, ὁ «ἀρχαῖος» ἄνθρωπος τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Κατὰ τὸ ξόδι του, ὁ τότε ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν κυρὸς Χρυσόστομος, εἶπε μεταξὺ ἄλλων:

«Τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα προπέμπομεν σήμερον, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρα, ὁ ὁποῖος μπορεῖ νὰ καταταγῆ, χωρὶς ὑπερβολῆν, μεταξὺ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ὁμολογητῶν τῆς Πίστεως.

Διότι οἱ ὁμολογηταὶ τῆς Πίστεως αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς ἔκαμνον, ὅ,τι ἔκαμνε καὶ ὁ ἀείμνηστος Φώτιος. Ἐστάθη εὐθυτενῆς, ἐστάθη γενναῖος ἀπέναντι τῶν πολεμίων τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου ἡμῶν Πίστεως καὶ ἐγκατάλειπεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον αὐτὸν μίαν παράδοσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γραπτὸν λόγον, ἵνα ἡ νεωτέρα γενεὰ ἐκπαιδεύεται εἰς τὰ Ἑλληνοχριστιανικὰ νάματα!».

Ὅταν αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια λέγονται ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου Χρυσόστομου Χατζησταύρου, Μακεδονομάχου, ἀρχιδιακόνου καὶ δεξιὸ χερί τοῦ ἐθνοῖερομάρτυρος Χρυσόστομου Σμύρνης ἀλλὰ καὶ προμάχου καὶ ὑπερασπιστῆ τῆς ἁγίας Ὁρθοδοξίας μας, τότε «τί ἔτι χρεῖαν ἔχομεν μαρτύρων»;

Ὅντως ἔζησε ὀσιακά, ὀρθόδοξα ὁ μαστρο-Φώτης, ποὺ φέτος τιμᾶμε τὰ 50 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὴν κοίμησή του. Ἀφήνουμε ὅμως τὸν ἴδιο νὰ διηγηθεῖ τὸν βίον καὶ τὴν πολιτεία του, σὲ ἐπιστολή του στις 5 Αὐγούστου τοῦ 1964 στὸν ἐπίσης μακαριστὸ γέροντα Θεόκλητο Διονυσιάτη. Περιλαμβάνεται στὴν ἐξαίρετη ἔκδοση τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Κοινοβίου Ὁσίου Νικοδήμου Πενταλόφου Παιονίας Κιλκίς, «Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου στὴν Τρίτη Διάστασή του». (Γουμένισσα 2003, σελ. 64-66):

Εἰς τὴν ζωὴν μου, ποτὲ δὲν ἐσκέφθην διὰ τὴν ἐξασφάλισίν μας οἰκονομικῶς. Μοῦ ἦλθαν καὶ μοῦ ἔρχονται εὐκαιρίαι διὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσω πολλὰ χρήματα (προτάσεις ἀπὸ τὸ ἐξωτερικὸν νὰ ζωγραφίσω ναοὺς

καὶ μέγαρα, δι' ἐκδόσεις βιβλίων—προπάντων κοσμικῆς γνώσεως καὶ τέχνης—διὰ δημοσιεύματα παντὸς εἴδους, ἱστορικά, λαογραφικά, αἰσθητικά, περιγραφικά ταξιδίων, κλπ). Τίποτε δὲν δέχομαι. Θέλω νὰ μείνω ἀκτῆμων καὶ ν' ἀποθάνω τοιοῦτος. Ὁ Χριστιανὸς πρέπει νὰ μὴν συνδέεται μὲ τίποτα μὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον. Οὔτε εἰς τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν δὲν ἐδέχθην νὰ ἔμπω, παρ' ὅλας τὰς προσκλήσεις ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐτῶν. Ὅχι ἀξιώματα. Ὅχι πρωτοκαθεδρία. Ἐπάνω εἰς τὸ ἱκρίωμα ἐργάζομαι σκληρῶς, ἰδρώνω, τσακίζομαι, ἀκόμα σήμερα, μὲ πόδι τσακισμένο.

Πέρασα τὸ ἥμισυ τῆς ζωῆς μου ἐπάνω στὴν σκαλωσιάν, ὡς στυλίτης. Μὲ χαρὰν ὑπηρετῶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ἡ ὁποία ὑπῆρξεν ἀδιάφορος διὰ τὸ ἔργον τῆς ἀγιογραφίας, ἀκόμη καὶ ἐχθρική. Τώρα δέ, μὲ τὰ παπικά, οἱ πλείστοι τῶν προϊσταμένων τῶν ναῶν, ὄντες φιλοπαπικοί, δὲν μὲ θέλουν ὡς ἀγιογράφον καὶ μόλις ζῶ ἀπὸ τὴν μίαν ἐκκλησίαν ποὺ ἔχω, ἐνῶ



τιποτένιοι μπογιατζήδες καὶ ἀνάξιοι μαθηταὶ μου ἔχουν ἐργασίαν ποὺ δὲν προφθάνουν, πλουτίζουν, καθ' ὅσον συναλλάσσονται μὲ τοὺς ἐπιτρόπους καὶ προϊσταμένους τῶν ναῶν καὶ μουντζουρώνουν τοὺς τοίχους, μὴ πατώντες εἰς τὴν λειτουργίαν, συχνὰ δὲ καὶ σαρκάζοντες τὰ τῆς θρησκείας.

Ἐγὼ, εἰς αὐτὰς τὰς ἐπιφορὰς τοῦ σατανᾶ ἀντιτάσσω τὴν πίστιν μου.

Καὶ ἐνῶ διασαλπίζεται ἀνὰ τὸν κόσμον ἡ φήμη μου ὡς «πρυτάνεως» τῆς β.(=βυζαντινῆς) τέχνης κ.τ.(=κ.τ.λπ.), ἐγὼ πολλάκις δὲν ἔχω ἐργασίαν. Οἱ Ζωῖκοί, παρ' ὅτι ποὺ ἔρχονται νὰ μὲ ἰδοῦν, δὲν μὲ χωνεύουν. Οἱ καθηγηταὶ τοῦ Πανεπ. (θεολόγοι) μὲ μισοῦν, καὶ μὲ ἐδίωξαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγιογράφησιν τῆς Καπνικαρέας καὶ πῆραν ἕναν ἄθλιον μαθητὴν μου. Οἱ Οὐνίτες μοῦ πρότειναν νὰ ζωγραφίσω τὴν ἐκκλησίαν των καὶ τοὺς ἐδίωξα, ἀλλὰ ἔσπευσε νὰ τὴν ζωγραφίσῃ ὁ Κοψίδης, πρ. μαθητῆς μου. Οὐδεὶς ἀνθίσταται εἰς τὸν μαμωνᾶν. Βασιλεία αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄχι τοῦ Χριστοῦ...

Λοιπόν, πάτερ Θεόκλητε, δὲν ἀφήνομεν τίποτε ἀπὸ ὅσα κερδίζω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐργασίαν μου, τόσον, ὥστε συχνὰ νὰ δανειζόμεθα διὰ νὰ βοηθήσωμεν ἄλλους. Ὅταν ἐπάθαμεν τὸ δυστύχημα, ἀπεκαλύφθη ἡ ἀπενταρία μας, καὶ ἔτσι ἐπίστευσαν καὶ κάποιοι φίλοι μας ὅτι ὄντως δὲν εἴχαμεν χρήματα. Ἐπιρρίπτομεν τὴν μεριμάν μας ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον τὸν Θεόν μας. Αὐτά, σὰς παρακαλῶ, νὰ φυλαχθοῦν μεταξὺ μας.

Ὁ Κόντογλου ἀνήκει στους λίγους, τους ἐλάχιστους πνευματικούς ἀνθρώπους, πὸν ὅσο ζοῦσε δὲν φιλοῦσε «κατουρημένες» ποδιές, ἀλλὰ μᾶστιζε ἀλύπητα μὲ τὴν μάχαιρα τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς παράδοσης τοὺς Γραικύλους τῆς σήμερον, τοὺς προσκνημένους εὐρωλιγοῦρηδες.

Τρεῖς κυρίως ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογημένη Ἐπανάσταση τοῦ '21 καὶ ἐντεῦθεν εἶχαν συλλάβει ἐναργέστατα καὶ μὲ ἀξιοθαύμαστη συνέπεια λόγου καὶ πράξης τὸν πνευματικό μας ἐξανδραποδισμό: Ὁ Μακρυγιάννης, ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης καὶ ὁ Κόντογλου, σὰν νὰ παρέδιδε ὁ ἕνας στὸν ἄλλο τὴν σκυτάλη τῆς γνήσιας παράδοσης τοῦ Γένους καὶ τὰ ὄπλα γιὰ τὴν ἀπόσπηση τῶν μισμάτων τοῦ Φραγκολεβαντισμοῦ καὶ τῆς δυτικολαγνείας, πὸν σάπισαν—τὸ βλέπουμε στὶς ἡμέρες μας—τὸ «ὀλόδροσο κέντρο τῆς φυλῆς μας».

Γράφει ὁ κυρ-Φώτης γιὰ ὅλους αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαγμένους στὴν σκοτεινὴ καὶ δυσώδη Εὐρώπη, πὸν ἐπιστρέφουν στὴν φτωχὴ πατρίδα καὶ λεηλατοῦν κυρίως τὴν ψυχὴ τῆς:

Οἱ περισσότεροὶ σπουδαστές μας, μόλις πατήσουνε στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀπομένουνε ἐμβρόντητοι ἀπὸ τὶς ψευτοφιλοσοφίες πὸν διδάσκουνε κάποιοι σπουδαῖοι καθηγητές, καὶ μάλιστα σὲ ξένη γλῶσσα. Ἡ ξένη γλῶσσα τοὺς κάνει μεγάλη ἐντύπωση! Κατάπληξη τοὺς κάνουνε καὶ οἱ μεγάλες πολιτείες, οἱ φαρδιοὶ δρόμοι, τὰ μεγάλα χτίρια, οἱ λεωφόροι, τὰ τραῖνα, οἱ λογιζ-λογῆς μηχανές, οἱ ἀγορές, τὸ πολὺ χρήμα, τὰ βλοσυρὰ Πανεπιστήμια. Κι αὐτὸ γίνεται, γιατί οἱ περισσότεροὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαστές εἶναι χωριατόπουλα, πὸν νοιώθουνε μέσα τους ντροπὴ γιὰ τὸ χωριό τους, κι ὅ,τι βλέπουνε κι ἀκοῦνε, εἶναι γι' αὐτοὺς οὐρανοκατέβατο!

Τοὺς ξέρω καλὰ αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαστές, γιατί καὶ ἐμεῖς περάσαμε ἀπὸ κείνες τὶς χώρες, καὶ ζήσαμε σ' αὐτὲς κάμποσα χρόνια. Ὅποτε ἐρχόντανε στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἦτανε, στὴν ἀρχή, σασιτισμένοι καὶ ζαρωμένοι, σὰν καὶ κείνα τὰ μαντρόσκυλα πὸν ἀκολοθῆσανε τὸν τσομπάνο καὶ βρεθῆσανε στὸ κέντρο τῆς πολιτείας, μέσα στὴν ὄχλοβὴ κι ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτοκίνητα, καὶ σαστίσανε, τὰ κακόμοιρα, καὶ βάζουνε τὴν οὐρὰ τους ἀνάμεσα στὰ σκέλια τους, τρομοκρατημένα. Μὰ σὰν γυρίσουνε στὸ μαντρί, τὴν ξανασηκώνουνε περήφανα, καὶ γίνονται θηρία ἀνήμερα.

Μ' αὐτὰ τὰ σκυλιὰ μοιάζανε, στὰ μάτια τὰ δικὰ μας πὸν εἶχαμε ζήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ χρόνια στὶς μεγάλες πολιτείες, ἐκεῖνα τὰ νεοφερμένα Ἑλληνόπουλα, πὸν μᾶς θεωροῦσανε στὴν ἀρχὴ σὰν προστάτες τους. Κ' ἦτανε ταπεινὰ καὶ φρόνιμα. Μὰ μὲ τὸν καιρὸ ξεθαρρεῦανε, καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ παίρνανε στὸ τέλος ἕναν ἐγωϊσμὸ σιχαμερόν, μιλώντας μὲ καταφρόνηση γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα τους. Καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ σὰν γυρίζανε πίσω στὴν Ἑλλάδα, κάνανε τὰ θηρία, κάνανε τοὺς πάνσοφους, κάνανε τοὺς προφέσορας, μιλώντας ὀλοένα γιὰ τὴν Εὐρώπη καὶ γιὰ τὴν κακομοιριὰ τῆ δικῆς μας σὲ ὅλα τὰ πράγματα.

Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω, πὸς ἡ Εὐρώπη εἶναι ἡ δοκιμαστικὴ πέτρα γιὰ κάθε ἕνα ἀπὸ μας, πὸν θὰ πάει σὲ κάποια χώρα τῆς: Ἡ θὰ γίνεϊ πῖθηκος ξενόδουλος, θανατόζοντας

σὰν οὐρανοκατέβατα ὅλα ὅσα βλέπει κι ἀκοῦει σὲ κείνη τὴ χώρα, καὶ θ' ἀρνηθεῖ τὸ γάλα τῆς μάνας του, ἢ θὰ καταλάβει πόσο ψεύτικα εἶναι τὰ φανταχτερὰ στολῖδια τῆς, καὶ πόση βαρβαρότητα ὑπάρχει κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτισμένη ἐπιφάνειά τῆς, καὶ θὰ ἀγαπήσει μὲ πάθος τὸν τόπο του, νοιώθοντας «μὲ ἐπίγνωση», τὴν πνευματικὴ τῆς εὐγένεια καὶ τὴν ὑπεροχὴ μας, μπροστὰ σὲ κείνες τὶς ἀμέτροτες ἀθρωπομερηγκιές. (Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο, ἔκδ. «Ἀκρίτας», σελ. 226-227).

Ἀτίμητη καὶ ἀνυπολόγιστη ὅμως εἶναι ἡ συμβολὴ του στὴν ἀναχαίτιση τῶν παπικῶν καὶ προτεσταντικῶν κακοθηριῶν στὸ ἦθος καὶ τὸ δόγμα τῆς

Ὁρθοδοξίας. «Ὁ παπισμὸς εἶναι ἡ πῖδ σατανικὴ διαστροφή τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Εἶναι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος», θὰ γράφει σὲ ἐπιστολὴ του στὸν Γέροντα Θεόκλητο.

Χωρὶς ὑπερβολὴ ὑπῆρξε ὁ πρῶτος εὐαγγελιστῆς καὶ διδάσκαλος στὴν Ἑλλάδα τῆς βυζαντινῆς ἀγιογραφίας. Ἐπαναφέρει τὴν ἀγιογραφία στὴν ὀρθόδοξη περπατησιά τῆς, γιατί: Ἡ ἀγιογραφία εἶχεν ἀλωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὶς χαλκομανίες τοῦ δυτικοῦ ἀνθρωπισμοῦ, τὶς «γενοβέφες», ὅπως τὶς ἔλεγε, πὸν εἶχαν κυριαρχήσει στὸς ἀγιορεῖτες ἀγιογράφους μέσω τῶν ρωσικῶν παραγγελιῶν. (Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου στὴν Γίτη Διάστασή του, σελ. 204).

Μὲ ἀγωνία διαβλέπει καὶ προφητεύει τὴν ἀλλοτρίωση τοῦ Γένους σ' ὅλες τὶς καλλιτεχνικὲς του φανερώσεις ἐξαιτίας τῆς πνευματικῆς πανούκλας πὸν ὀνομάζεται ἐξευρωπαῖσμός:



Καμαρώστε τί «ἔργα» παρουσιάζουν οἱ «τέχνες» σήμερα. Εἶναι νὰ φράζει κανέννας τὰ μάτια του. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ πασαλείματα ἀπάνω στοὺς μουσαμάδες, ποὺ λέγονται «ἔργα ζωγραφικῆς», ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ παλιοσίδερα ἢ τὰ νταμαροκοτρώνια ποὺ παρουσιάζονται γιὰ «ἔργα γλυπτικῆς» σὲ κάνουνε ὄχι μονάχα νὰ ἀηδιάσεις γιὰ τὸ κατάντημά μας, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ θυμώσεις γιὰ τὴν ἀδιαντροπιὰ ποὺ φανερώνουν αὐτὰ τὰ τερατουργήματα... (Μυστικά Ἄσθη, ἔκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 14).

Δὲν ξεφεύγει ἀπὸ τὸ ἀνύστακτο ἐνδιαφέρον του γιὰ τὸ Γένος καὶ τὸ τυμπανιαίαις ἀποφορᾶς—σήμερα—πτῶμα τῆς Παιδείας:

Τώρα, ἄς ποῦμε καὶ τὰ σημερινά μας. Τὰ σχολειά, ἂν βγάλει κανένας λίγα στὴν μπάντα, τ' ἄλλα ὅλα δουλεύουν γιὰ νὰ βγάλουνε λεβαντίνους κι ὄχι Ἑλληνες, μὲ ὅλα τους τὰ ψευτοελληνικὰ ἐξωτερικὰ πασαλείματα. Οἱ περισσότεροὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ διδάσκουνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας κινήσανε ἀπὸ τὸ χωριό, καὶ πέσανε μὲ τὰ μούτρα στὰ «μοντέρνα». Γινήκανε θεριακλήδες τοῦ μοντερνισμοῦ. Ὁ νοῦς καὶ ὁ λογισμὸς τους, μέρα-νύχτα, στριφογυρίζει στὶς μοντέρνες ἀνοησίες. Τὴν Ἑλλάδα δὲν θέλουνε μὴδὲ νὰ τὴν ἀκούσουνε, τὴν «Ψωροκόσταινα»! Δὲν ὑπάρχει πιὸ ἀντιπαθητικὸ καὶ πιὸ μικρόμυαλο πλάσμα ἀπὸ τὸν ξιπασμένο ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ ἀρνήθηκε τὸ γάλα τῆς μάνας του καὶ ρεμπενύεται κιόλας γ' αὐτὸ τὸ κατόρθωμα.

Λοιπόν, ἀπὸ τέτοιους δασκάλους τί θὰ μάθουνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας, τὰ κακόμοιρα τὰ παιδιὰ μας; Θὰ μάθουνε, πὼς γιὰ νὰ γίνει κανένας σπουδαῖος καὶ γιὰ νὰ φαίνεται πὼς εἶναι ἐξυπνος, πρέπει νὰ μὴν ἔχει τίποτα Ἑλληνικὸ ἀπάνω του. Ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ μόρτικο ὕφος, ποὺ εἶναι σήμερα τῆς μοντέρνας μόδας, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ξενικό, τεντυμποϊκό.

Εἶτε βιβλίο, εἶτε τραγούδι, εἶτε παιδικὸ θέατρο, εἶτε χορὸς, εἶτε προσευχή, ὅλα πρέπει νὰ μὴν εἶναι Ἑλληνικά, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι καλὰ γιὰ τοὺς μαθητὲς τῶν σχολειῶν μας. Στὰ βιβλία, στὰ παιδικὰ θέατρα, στὰ παραμύθια καὶ στὰ βλακώδη ἀναγνώσματα, ὅλα εἶναι ξανθά. Ὅλα! Ἄνθρωποι, ζῶα, σύννεφα, τοποθεσίες. Ἄν ἦτανε μπορετὸ νὰ γίνει κ' ἡ θάλασσα ξανθιά. (Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο, σελ. 183-184).

Δασκάλους «θεριακλήδες τοῦ μοντερνισμοῦ», «ἀναγνώσματα βλακώδη» ἐντοπίζει μὲ ἐκπληκτικὴ διορατικότητά ὁ Κόντογλου στὶς «σημερινές—καὶ διαχρονικές—γάγγραινες τῆς πολυπάθης Παιδείας!

Κορφολογοῦμε, ὡς ἐπίλογο, ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ του ἀνθῶνα τοῦτα τὰ ἐλάχιστα (τίποτε ἄλλο, ἐξάλλου, δὲν «ζωγραφίζει» καλύτερα τὸν Φῶτη Κόντογλου ἀπ' ὅτι τὰ ἴδια τὰ γραψίματά του): **Ὅσοι ἀπομείναμε πιστοὶ στὴν παράδοση, ὅσοι δὲν ἀρνηθήκαμε τὸ γάλα ποὺ βυζάξαμε, ἀγωνιζόμαστε, ἄλλος ἐδῶ, ἄλλος ἐκεῖ,**

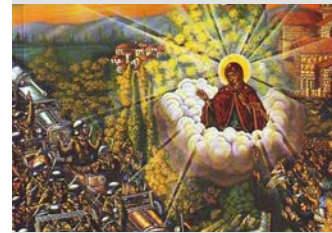
καταπάνω στὴν ψευτιά. Καταπάνω σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ θέλουνε τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἕνα κουφάρι χωρὶς ψυχὴ, ἕνα λουλούδι χωρὶς μυρουδιά. Κουράγιο! Ὁ καιρὸς θὰ δείξει ποιὸς ἔχει δίκιο, ἂν καὶ δὲ χρειάζεται ὀλότελα αὐτὴ ἡ ἀπόδειξη. (Ἡ Πονεμένη Ρωμοσύνη, ἔκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 324).

Κατάντησε ἡ πατρίδα μας κουφάρι ἄψυχο, παίγνιο τῶν Εὐρωπαίων κακεργετῶν. Τὸν δρόμο γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε τὰ φτερά τὰ πρωτινά μας, τὰ μεγάλα, μᾶς τὸν δίδαξε ὁ Φῶτης Κόντογλου: πίσω στὴν Παράδοσή μας. Ἔως πότε θὰ εἴμεθα ἀχαρακτήριστοι Γραικύλοι;



Γιὰ τὴν Παναγία στὸ Ἔπος τοῦ '40

Ἄγγελος Σικελιανός, ἄρθρο στὸ περιοδικὸ «ΝΕΑ ΕΣΤΙΑ», Τεύχος 1ης Νοεμβρίου, 1945.



Στὴ μυστικότερη, στὴν ὑπεροῦσιαν αὐτὴν ὥρα, τῆς μετάστασης τῶν πάντων πρὸς τὶς σφαῖρες τοῦ ὑπέρτατου ἀγνισμοῦ καὶ λυτρωμοῦ ποὺ μᾶς προσφέρει ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς

Χάρης τῆς, ὁ Ἴταλὸς σὰ νᾶθελε νὰ πλήξει ἀντάμα μὲ τὸ ἀκίρητό της σῶμα καὶ τὸ σῶμα τῆς βαθιὰ συναγιασμένης τῆ στιγμῆ ἐκείνῃ Ἑλλάδας, ξαφνικὰ χτυπάει στὴν Τῆνο, δολοφονικὰ καὶ καιρία, τὸ ἱερὸ ἀπ' τὴν ὥρα αὐτὴ πολεμικὸ καράβι μας, τὴν «Ἑλλη».

Ἄργα τ' ἀπόγεμα μονάχα ἦρθε τὸ μήνυμα στὴ Φτέρη. Ὁ ξωμάχος λαὸς ποὺ τόφερε εἶχε κιόλας πάνω στὴ μορφὴ του ὅλη τὴν προεικόνισις τοῦ ἀγῶνα, ποὺ ξεκίναε τόσο δόλια ἀπ' τὰ βάθη τοῦ Ἄδη νὰ προσβάλλει τὶς κορφές τῆς Λευτεριάς του καὶ τῆς ζωῆς του. Ἀλλὰ στὴ μορφὴ του ἀντιφεγγοῦσε κι ὅλας ἀπὸ τότε ἡ Ἀλβανία, ἀντιφεγγοῦσε ἡ κορυφαία του Νίκη. Καὶ τεράστιο Σύμβολο ἀμετάσειστο κι ἀπόρθητο, ἡ Κοιμημένη Παναγία, μετουσιωμένη τώρα στὸν ὑπέρτατον αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἀπ' τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἀναστημένη πιά, βάδιζε μπροστά του, Ἀρχιστρατηγοῦσα, ἀκοίμητη Ὑπέρομαχη, ἀκατάβλητή του Ὁδηγῆτρα.

Ὅταν τὸ ἴδιο βράδυ ὡστόσο ἀποτραβήχτηκα ἀπὸ τὸ λαὸ καὶ γύρισα στὸ σπίτι μου, ἐμπῆκα στὴ μικρὴ μου κάμαρα, ποὺ πάνω ἀπ τὸ κρεβάτι μου κρεμόταν μιὰ παλιὰ εἰκόνα τῆς Θεοτόκου—ἐνωμένη στὴν ψυχὴ μου ἄρρηκτα ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα αὐτὴ μὲ τὴν Ἑλλάδα—κι ὅπως ὅταν εἴμουνα παιδί, κλειδῶθηκα καὶ προσευχήθηκα μπροστά της...

Ἡ Ἑλλάς τοῦ ΟΧΙ ἑορτάζει τὴν Ἑλλάδα τοῦ ΝΑΙ

Γ.Ζ., Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος, 28/10/2011.

ΤΗΝ Ἑλλάδα τοῦ ΟΧΙ ἑορτάζει σήμερον ἡ Ἑλλάς τοῦ ΝΑΙ. Ἀκολουθοῦσα τὸν ὕμνον ἑνὸς φυγσοστράτου συνθέτου καὶ τραγουδοποιοῦ «Λέμε ΝΑΙ», ἡ σημερινὴ Ἑλλάς λέγει ΝΑΙ εἰς ὅλους καὶ διὰ ὅλα. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς φίλους, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἐχθρούς. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς Εὐρωπαίους, ΝΑΙ καὶ εἰς τοὺς τριτοκοσμικοὺς. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς πατριώτας, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς πολιτικοὺς, οἱ ὅποιοι ἀφελληνίζουν τὴν γλῶσσαν, τὴν ἱστορίαν, τὸν Ἑλληνοχριστιανικὸν πολιτισμὸν, τὴν οἰκονομίαν. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς πατριώτας, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς πρακτορίσκους καὶ εἰς ὅσους ὑπονομεύουν τὴν Θράκην, τὸ Αἰγαῖον καὶ τὴν Κύπρον. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς ὀμαλοὺς, ΝΑΙ καὶ εἰς τοὺς ὁμοφυλοφίλους καὶ εἰς κάθε ἀνώμαλον. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς τιμίους, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς κλέφτας.

Ὀλόκληρος ἡ πλήρως χρεωκοπημένη χώρα εἶναι ἓνα ὀρθάνοικτον χαμαιτυπεῖον, τὸ ὁποῖον προσκαλεῖ τοὺς πάντας: «Περάστε, βρωμίστε, μὴ ψεκάσετε, ἀρπάξατε, καὶ ρημάξατε, τελειώσατε». Εἰς ἓνα τοιοῦτον κλίμα δὲν ἔχει οὐδεμίαν θέσιν πανηγυρικὸς διὰ τὴν τότε Ἑλλάδα τοῦ 1940. Ἔχει θέσιν μόνον ἓνας ἐπικηδεῖος διὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα



τοῦ σήμερα. Τὸν συνέθεσε προφητικῶς ἓνας Ἑλληὺν τοῦ χθές. Δημοσιεύομεν ὠρισμένα ἀποσπάσματα ἐκ τοῦ ἐπικηδεῖου αὐτοῦ. Αὐτὰ ἔχουν ὡς ἑξῆς:

«Ἴδου ἡ Ἑλλάς σας. Ἡ Ἑλλάς τῶν δικηγορίσκων, ὑπαλληλίσκων καὶ βουλευτῶν. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ πραγματικὴ Ἑλλάς. Καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάς αὐτὴ, οὔτε μὲ ἀσβεστώματα, οὔτε μὲ μπογιατίσματα, οὔτε μὲ ἀποκεντρώσεις, οὔτε μὲ ἐνθουσυνελεύσεις, οὔτε μὲ κανενὸς εἶδους ἐθνοπαλώσεις διορθώνεται καὶ μὲ μπαλωματῆδες πνευματικῶς ἀνικάνους καὶ ἠθικῶς κατρακυλῶντας κάθε πρωί, δέκα βαθμίδας πρὸς τὴν ἀνηθικότητα.

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ τωρινὴ Ἑλλάς. Καταχρεωκοπημένη πνευματικῶς ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτην ἡμέραν. Καταχρεωκοπημένη πραγματικῶς. Μὲ κράτος γνήσιον ληστρικώτατον. Στριφογυρίζουσα ἀδιεξόδως εἰς τὰ ἴδια καμώματα καὶ τὰ ἴδια ψεύματα, τῶν πρώτων ἡμερῶν τῆς Ἐλευθερίας της, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐβαρύνθησαν καὶ οἱ πέτρες, ἀδυνατοῦσα νὰ σταθεῖ εἰς τὰ πόδια της, ἀδυνατοῦσα νὰ δημιουργήσῃ τὸ παραμικρὸν ἐθνικόν,

ναρκώνουσα καὶ καταπνίγουσα τὴν Τιτάνειον δύναμιν τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἀτόμου.

Ἡ Βουλὴ, αὐτὴ ἡ ἀποτελέσσα τὸν ὅλον ἐγκέφαλον, τὸ ὅλον πνεῦμα, τὴν ὅλην δύναμιν, τὴν ὅλην ἐξουσίαν, τὴν ὅλην κινητήριον καὶ διευθυντήριον μηχανὴν Ἴδεῶν καὶ Πραγμάτων, ἡ ξεκουρδίσασα καὶ ἐξαχρειώσασα τὰ πάντα, ξεκουρδισθεῖσα τέλος καὶ αὐτὴ, πνιγομένη τώρα πλέον ἀπὸ τὴν ἰδίαν τὴν ἀποκτῆνωσιν, λιποθυμοῦσα ἀπὸ τὰς ἀναθυμιάσεις τῆς ἰδίας τῆς ἀποσυνθέσεως. Ἀφοῦ ἐξεπάτωσε ὅλους τοὺς κλάδους, ἀφοῦ ἐξέκαμεν ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἀφοῦ ἐξηχρεῖωσε τὴν κοινωνίαν, ἀφοῦ διέφθειρε καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν οἰκογένειαν αὐτὴ, ἀπεδείχθη ὅτι δὲν ἦτο δυνατὸν παρὰ νὰ εἶναι ἀρχῆθεν καὶ νὰ εἶναι ὅσον ὑπάρχει. Ἐκατομμύρια διὰ τὸν Στρατόν-Κοπρίτην. Καὶ ὄχι μόνον νὰ μὴ ὑπάρχει Στρατός, ἀλλὰ νὰ μὴ εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ὑπάρξῃ ἓνας, μόνον, λόχος σωστός. Ἐκατομμύρια ἐπὶ τῶν ἑκατομμυρίων διὰ Στόλον, καὶ

Στόλος-Ἄστακός; Στόλος ἀνύπαρκτος καὶ ὑπάρχων, μὴ ἀφηνόμενος ἐλεύθερος νὰ κινηθεῖ, μὴ δυνάμενος νὰ κινηθεῖ καὶ κινούμενος δενόμενος ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς εὐεργέτας δανειστὰς, χειροπόδαρα.

Ἐκατομμύρια ἐπὶ τῶν ἑκατομμυρίων διὰ δικαιοσύνην καὶ δικαιοσύνη ἀνύπαρκτος, καὶ εἰς τὴν ὁποῖαν οὐδεὶς δύναται νὰ προσέλθει χωρὶς λόχον

βουλευτῶν. Δικαιοσύνη τσακιζομένη νὰ παράσχει πᾶσαν βοήθειαν πρὸς παρανομίαν, ὅταν τῆς τὸ ζητοῦν οἱ βουλευταὶ της, ἀρνούμενη πᾶσαν συνδρομὴν πρὸς κάθε καταπατούμενον ἀναιδέστατα δίκαιον ὀλοφάνερον, ὅταν ὁ πολίτης παρουσιάζεται μόνος του.

Ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ Περιουσία τοῦ καθενὸς ἐκτεθειμένη εἰς τὴν βίαν καὶ τὴν διαπραγῆν, τὸ Κράτος ληστεῦον τὸν πολίτην, ὁ πολίτης ληστεῦον τὸ Κράτος, τὸ Κράτος πιέζον, ἀδικοῦν, ἐξευτελίζον τὸν ὑπάλληλόν του, ὁ ὑπάλληλος ξεκαρφῶνων, ἐξοντώνων τὸ Κράτος καὶ πληρῶνων μὲ τόκον τὰ ἀντίποινα ἓνας πόλεμος φανερός καὶ ἐξοντωτικὸς μεταξὺ πολίτου καὶ Κράτους. Ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀπελπιστικὸν δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἀζωγράφιστος καὶ ἡ ἀκατανόμαστος αὐτὴ κατάστασις. Τὸ ἀπελπιστικὸν εἶναι ἡ κατάστασις τοῦ Ἑλλαδικοῦ πνεύματος. Οὐδέποτε τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν δαιμόνιον κατήνησεν εἰς τοιαύτην ἀποχαύνωσιν, εἰς τοιοῦτον ἀφανισμόν.

Τὸ Ἑλλαδικὸν πνεῦμα ἀπεκρυσταλλώθη, εἰς ἓνα ἀνυπόφορον βλακόπνευμα. Τὸ καταχρεωκοπημένον Ἑλλαδικὸν βλακόπνευμα, τὸ ναυαγῆσαν καθ’

όλας του άνεξαιρέτως τὰς ἀνάνους ἐπιχειρήσεις, ἀπεκοκκαλώθη: Θρησκευτικός κοιλοτυμπανισμός. Ἐπιστημονιμὸς κομπογιαννιτισμός. Ναυτικὸς φασουλισμός. Κοινωνικὸς σαπισμός. Ἐμπορικὸς σαραφισμός. Ἰδεολογικὸς τζουμπεδισμός. Φιλολογικὸς φουστανελισμός καὶ Καλλιτεχνικὸς πανελλαδικὸς γκαρικτικώτατος γαϊδουρισμός.

Αὐτὸ τὸ Πανεπιστήμιον, τὸ ὁποῖον ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι ἀληθινὸν ἠφαιστειὸν ἀνθρώπων, ἀναστημάτων, χαρακτήρων, ἀνθρωποπλαστῶν καὶ ἰδεοπλαστῶν, φωτεινῶν ἰδεολόγων καὶ ἀνδρείων σηματοφόρων τῆς νεότητος. Κατακόμβη τοῦ πνεύματος, ἐντὸς δὲ ἀνθρωπάκηδες κάμνοντες τὶς δουλίσες τους, μισοτρωκτικοί, βιβλιοκαπιλικοί, δοῦλοι οἰκτρότατοι τοῦ βουλευτοῦ, γυαλισταὶ τῶν παπουτσιῶν τοῦ κόμματος, τρέχοντες διαρκῶς λαχανισμένοι, διὰ τὰ συμφέροντα τοῦ κόμματος ποὺ τοὺς ἔπλασε, τοὺς ἐνοικίασε, τοὺς διατηρεῖ. Ἄκαρδοι, ἄλαλοι, ἄμυαλοι, δηλητηριάζοντες, ἀφιονίζοντες καὶ σαβανώνοντες τὴν νεότητα. Πανεπιστήμιον ἀντὶ ἀναστηρίου, τάφος νεότητος, ἐκβράζον μίαν ἐλεεινοτάτην νέαν ἀνθρωπότητα σακάσισαν, λωβιασμένην, ἄχρηστον, ἀποσαπίζουσαν τὸ κάθε τι.

Τὸ ἐπιστημονικὸν πνεῦμα, μεταβληθὲν εἰς μπακαλικὸν πνεῦμα πρὸς πενταρολογίαν, οὔτε προτότυπος ἐπιστημονικὴ ἐργασία, οὔτε κανενὸς εἶδους ἐργασία πρωτότυπος. Ἐνας πανελλαδικὸς διωγμὸς κάθε ἀξίας. Ἐνας μισονεῖσμός τῶν γέρον. Ἐνα θανατικὸν κάθε ἀνθρώπου καὶ μιὰ ἀπελπιστικὴ ἐπιδημία μακροβιότητος κάθε μηδενικοῦ. Ἐνας σεβασμὸς κάθε ἀρρώστιας, κάθε ξεμωραμένου γεροντάματος, κάθε νερουλιασμένου μισθοφάγου. Δάσκαλοι κουκουβαγιάζοντες, πατριῶται παρομοιάζοντες μὲ πεσμένα βρακιά καὶ κλαίοντες σβέρκους. Ζωγράφοι μπογιατζήδες. Γλύπται μαρμαράδες. Ἀρχιτέκτονες κτίσται. Ἰδεολόγοι ἀεροκοπανίζοντες τὰ αἰώνια προγονικὰ συννεφολογήματα, ἐθνορήτορες πάσχοντες ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνίατον Ἑλλαδικὴν πατριδοουρίαν, φιλόλογοι βατραχιάζοντες, λογοκοποῦντες, λεξοποιοῦντες, πάσχοντες ἀπὸ τὴν γλωσσόλυσσαν.

Ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὁποῖον εἶναι ὁ ἀληθὴς καὶ βαρὺς ἀπελπισμὸς εἶναι ἡ ἐλεινότης τῆς νεότητος. Τῆς σχολιευομένης, τῆς σπουδαζούσης, τῆς στρατευομένης, τῆς Πανεπιστημιακῆς, τῆς διανοουμένης, τῆς καλλιτεχνούσης, τῆς πτωχῆς καὶ τῆς τρισχειροτέρας πλουσίας, τῆς εἰσερχομένης νεότητος εἴτε εἰς τὸν ἰδεολογικὸν εἴτε εἰς τὸν καλλιτεχνικὸν εἴτε εἰς τὸν πρακτικὸν κόσμον: **Τῶν νέων ἀνθρώπων. Νεότης ἄψυχος, ἄκαρδος, ἄμυαλος, ἄνανδρος, ἀνελεύθερος, ἀχαρακτήριστος, μὲ ὅλας τὰς νεανικὰς ἐκδηλώσεις ἀπούσας, μὲ ὅλας τὰς ἀνθρωπίνας ἐκφράσεις καὶ δυνάμεις, κατεβασμένας**

ὑπὸ τὸ μηδέν. Νεότης οὔτιδανή, ΜΙΣΘΟΣ. Νεότης χυδαία, ΨΗΦΟΣ.

Τὰ σχολεῖα ἐκφουρνίζοντα ἀγράμματα καὶ ἀνάγωγα καὶ μισελληνικὰ καὶ Φραγκομανῆ κούτσουρα. Τὸ Πανεπιστήμιον ἐκβράζον «ΝΕΩΝ ΑΝΔΡΩΝ σαπισμένην ἀνθρωπότητα σάπιων δικηγορίσκων καὶ τιποτένιων ἐπιστημόνων, ἓνα ὀξύτατον πανωλικώτατον ἰόν, ἐξολοθρευτικὸν καὶ κοινωνίας καὶ ἔθνους, μεταδίδοντα ὑπὸ τὴν βαρυτάτην της μορφῆς, τὴν ἰδίαν τῆς σαπίαν, ψυχῆς, καρδιάς καὶ νοῦ εἰς ὄλον τὸν Ἑλλαδικὸν ὄργανισμὸν. Κατήντησε ἡ Ἑλλὰς τῶν ΨΗΦΩΝ, τῶν ΜΙΣΘΩΝ, τῶν ΧΑΡΤΟΠΑΙΚΤΩΝ καὶ τῶν ΒΟΥΛΕΥΤΩΝ».

Ὁ προαναφαιρθεὶς ἐπικήδειος τῆς παρακμῆς τὴν ὁποῖαν βιώνομεν ἐγράφη ὑπὸ ἐνὸς Ἑλλήνου τοῦ Χθές. **Ὁ Ἐπικήδειος ἐγράφη τὸ 1906 ἀπὸ τὸν Περικλῆ Γιαννόπουλον,** ἓνα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐξοχωτέρους Ἑλληνας τοῦ εἰκοστοῦ αἰῶνος. Τὸ κείμενον προσφέρει διπλὴν παρηγορίαν εἰς τοὺς ἀκάμπτους πατριώτας τοῦ σήμερα· πρῶτον, διότι πιστοποιεῖ ὅτι καὶ ἄλλοτε ἡ Ἑλλὰς ἐπέρασε παρακμὴν, ὡς τὴν σημερινήν, καὶ δὲν ἀπεβίωσε. Καὶ δεύτερον, διότι οἱ Ἑλληνας τῆς παρακμῆς τοῦ 1906, τρία ἔτη ἀργότερον (τὸ 1909) ἐξηγέρθησαν συμμετέχοντες εἰς τὴν πρώτην μεγάλην ἐπανάστασιν διὰ Ἐθνικὴν Ἀναγέννησιν. Διὰ νὰ ἐπιβεβαιωθῇ καὶ τότε ὁ πάγιος νόμος τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ ὅτι **«ἂν δὲν πληθύνει τὸ κακό, δὲν βρίσκεται τὸ γατρικό!».**



Ἐξέταξε περισσότερον τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου καὶ ὄχι τοὺς ἄλλους. Προτιμότερον εἶναι νὰ σκέφτεσαι τὰ ἔργα σου, παρὰ τὰ χρήματα. Διότι τὰ μὲν προξενοῦν φθορά, ἐνῶ τὰ ἄλλα (τὰ ἔργα) μένουσιν.

Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος

Ἡταπείνωσις, καὶ χωρὶς ἔργα, συγχωρεῖ πολλὰς ἁμαρτίας. Τὰ ἔργα ὅμως, χωρὶς τὴν ταπείνωσιν, ὄχι μόνον εἶναι ἀνωφελῆ, ἀλλὰ προξενοῦν καὶ πολλὰ κακά... Ὅταν ὅμως ἀποκτήσουμε τὴν ταπείνωσιν, αὐτὴ μᾶς κάνει παιδιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ χωρὶς ἀγαθὰ ἔργα, μᾶς παρουσιάζει στὸν Θεόν. Διότι χωρὶς τὴν ταπείνωσιν ὅλα τὰ ἔργα μας καὶ ὅλες οἱ ἀρετὲς καὶ ὅλες οἱ πνευματικὲς ἐργασίες εἶναι μάταιες καὶ ἀνωφελεῖς. Τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς διανοίας (ταπεινοφροσύνη) ζητᾷ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἐμεῖς μὲ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς διανοίας αὐξάνομε πνευματικῶς.

Ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος

WHAT WAS CHRIST WRITING ON THE GROUND?

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956); this article appeared originally in one of our past issues, "Orthodox Heritage," vol. 2, issue no. 6.



Bishop Nikolai, a gifted theologian combining a high level of erudition with the simplicity of a soul steeped in Christ-like love and humility, is often referred to as the "new Chrysostom" for his inspired preaching. As a spiritual father of the Serbian people, he constantly exhorted them

to fulfill their calling as a nation: to serve Christ. During WW II he was imprisoned at the Dachau concentration camp. He later served as a hierarch here in America, where he died.

† † †

And the Scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. [Jn 8:33-11]

† † †

Once, the All-loving Lord was sitting in front of the temple in Jerusalem, nurturing hungry hearts with His sweet teachings. *And all the people came unto Him.* (Jn 8:2). The Lord spoke to the people about eternal bliss, about the never-ending joy of the righteous in the eternal homeland in the heavens. And the people delighted in His divine words. The bitterness of many disappointed souls and the hostility of many of the offended vanished like snow under the bright rays of the sun. Who knows how long this wonderful scene of peace and love between Heaven and earth would have continued, had not something unexpected now occurred. The Messiah Who loves mankind never grew tired of teaching the

people, and pious folk never grew weary of listening to such healing and wondrous wisdom.

But something frightening, savage, and cruel occurred. It originated as even now it often does, with Scribes and Pharisees. As we all know, the Scribes and Pharisees outwardly kept the law, but actually transgressed it. Our Lord frequently chastised them. For example, He said: *Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . . ye . . . outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.* (Matt. 23:27-28)

What did they do? Perhaps they had caught the leader of a band of brigands? Nothing of the sort. They forcibly brought forth an unfortunate sinful woman, taken in the act of adultery; brought her forth with triumphant boasting and crude and deafening cries. Having brought her before Christ, they cried: *Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?* (Jn 8:4-5; cf. Lev 20:10, Deut 22:22).

The case was presented in this way by sinners, who denounced the sins of others and were adept at hiding their own shortcomings. The frightened crowd parted, making way for their elders. Some fled out of fear, because the Lord had been speaking of life and happiness, whereas these loudmouths were clamoring for death.

It would have been appropriate to ask why these elders and guardians of the law did not stone the sinful woman themselves? Why had they brought her to Jesus? The law of Moses gave them the right to stone her. No one would have objected. Who protests, in our day, when the death sentence is pronounced over a criminal? Why did the Jewish elders bring this sinful woman to the Lord? Not to obtain a commutation of her sentence or clemency from Him! Anything but that! They brought her with a premeditated, fiendish plan to catch the Lord in words contradictory to the law, that they might accuse Him as well. They hoped with a single blow to do away with two lives, that of the guilty woman and that of Christ. *What sayest Thou?*

Why did they ask Him, when the law of Moses was clear? The Evangelist explains their intent in the following words: *This they said tempting Him that they might have to accuse Him.* (Jn 8:6). They had lifted their hands up against Him once before to stone Him, but He had eluded them. But now they had found an opportunity to accomplish their desire. And it was there, before the Temple of Solomon, where the tablets of the commandments had been kept in the Ark of the Covenant, it was there that He, Christ, had to say something contrary to the law of Moses; then their goal would be attained. They would stone to death both Christ and the sinful woman. Far more eager were they to stone Him than her, just as they would later with even greater zeal ask Pilate to release the bandit Barabbas instead of Christ.

All of those present expected that one of two things would happen: either the Lord in His mercy, would release the sinful woman and thereby violate the law; or He would uphold the law, saying, *Do as it is written in the law*, and thereby break His own commandment of mercy and loving kindness. In the first instance He would be condemned to death; and in the second, He would become an object of mockery and derision.

When the tempters posed the question, *What sayest Thou?* a deathly silence fell: silence among the crowd which had gathered; silence among the judges of the sinful woman; silence and bated breath in the soul of the accused woman. A great silence falls in large circuses when the tamers of wild beasts bring forth tame lions and tigers and command them to perform various movements, to assume various positions and do tricks at their behest.

But we see before us no tamer of wild animals, but the Tamer of men, a task significantly more difficult than the former. For it is often harder to tame those who have become wild on account of sin, than to tame those who are wild by nature. *What sayest Thou?* Once more they pressed Him, burning with malice, their faces contorted.

Then the legislator of morality and human conduct *stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.* (Jn 8:6). What did the Lord write in the dust? The Evangelist maintains silence concerning this and does not write of it. It was too repulsive and vile to be written in the Book of Joy. However, this has been preserved in our Holy Orthodox tradition, and it is horrible.

The Lord wrote something unexpected and startling for the elders, the accusers of the sinful woman. With His finger He disclosed their secret iniquities. For these who point out the sins of others were experts in concealing their own sins. But it is pointless to try to hide anything from the eyes of One Who sees all.

M (eshulam) has stolen treasures from the temple, wrote the Lord's finger in the dust.

A (sher) has committed adultery with his brother's wife;

S (halum) has committed perjury;

E (led) has struck his own father;

A (marich) has committed sodomy;

J (oel) has worshipped idols.

And so one statement after another was written in the dust by the awesome finger of the Righteous Judge. And those to whom these words referred, bending down, read

what was written, with inexpressible horror. They trembled from fright, and dared not look one another in the eye. They gave no further thought to the sinful woman. They thought only of themselves and of their own death, which was written in the dust. Not a single tongue was able to move, to pronounce that troublesome and evil question, *What sayest Thou?* The Lord said nothing. That which is so filthy is fit to be written only in filthy dust.

Another reason why the Lord wrote on the ground is even greater and more wonderful. That which is written in the dust is easily erased and removed. Christ did not want their sins to be made known to everyone. Had He desired this, He would have announced them before all the people, and would have accused them and had them stoned to death, in accordance with the law. But He, the innocent Lamb of God, did not contemplate revenge or death for those who had prepared for Him a thousand deaths, who desired His

death more than everlasting life for themselves. The Lord wanted only to correct them, to make them think of themselves and their own sins. He wanted to remind them that while they carried the burden of their own transgressions, they shouldn't be strict judges of the transgressions of others. This alone did the Lord desire. And when this was done, the dust was again smoothed over, and that which was written disappeared.

After this our great Lord arose and kindly said to them: *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* (Jn 8:7). This was like someone taking away the weapons of his enemies and then saying, "Now, shoot!" The once haughty judges of

the sinful woman now stood disarmed, like criminals before the Judge, speechless and rooted to the ground.

But the benevolent Saviour, *stooping down again, wrote on the ground.* (Jn 8:8). What did He write this time? Perhaps their other secret transgressions, so that they would not open their closed lips for a long time. Or perhaps He wrote what sort of persons the elders and leaders of the people should be like.

This is not essential for us to know. The most important thing here is that by His writing in the dust He achieved three results: first, He broke and annihilated the storm which the Jewish elders had raised against Him; second, He aroused their deadened consciences in their hardened souls, if only for a short time; and third, He saved the sinful woman from death. This is apparent from the words of the Gospel: *And they [the elders] who heard it, being convicted*



by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (Jn 8:9).

The square before the temple was suddenly empty. No one was left except those two whom the elders had sentenced to death, the sinful woman and the Sinless One. The woman was standing, whereas He remained stooped towards the ground. A profound silence reigned. Suddenly the Lord arose again, looked around, and, seeing no one but the woman, said to her: *Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?*

The Lord knew that no one had condemned her; but with this question He hoped to give her confidence, so that she would be able to hear and understand better what He would say to her. He acted like a skillful doctor, who first encourages his patient and only then gives him medicine. No one has condemned you? The woman regained the ability to speak, and she answered, *No man, Lord.* These words were uttered by a pathetic creature, who just before had no hope of ever uttering another word, a creature, who most likely was feeling a breath of true joy for the first time in her life.

Finally, the good Lord said to the woman: *Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.* (Jn 8:11). When the wolves spare their prey, then, of course, the shepherd does not wish death for his sheep either. But it is essential to be aware that Christ's non-judgment means much more than the non-judgment of humans. When people do not judge you for your sin, it means that they do not assign a punishment for the sin, but leave that sin with and in you. When God does not judge, however, this means that He forgives your sin, draws it out of you like pus and makes your soul clean. For this reason, the words, *Neither do I condemn thee*, mean the same as *Thy sins are forgiven thee; go, daughter, and sin no more.*

What unspeakable joy! What joy of truth! For the Lord revealed the truth to those who were lost. What joy in righteousness! For the Lord created righteousness. What joy in mercy! For the Lord showed mercy. What joy in life! For the Lord preserved life. This is the Gospel of Christ, which means the Good News; this is Joyful News, the Teaching of Joy; this is a page from the Book of Joy.



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

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou & Arizona

FOOD FOR THE SPIRIT

You probably read the story of Jacob and Esau today and thought, I can't believe Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. But let's think beyond birthrights and soup. Is there anything of true value that you are trading for something of lesser worth? In other words, what is your "bowl of soup"?

Have you pursued wealth and a career at the expense of family? Maybe your busy schedule has kept you from spending time with God in His Word each day. Some people become involved in extramarital affairs, trading the well-being of their family for the satisfaction of lustful desires. Others sacrifice their health by consuming harmful or addictive substances, or even by overindulging in food. The list of ways we make foolish, shortsighted choices is endless.

Some of the decisions we make today could rob us of the blessings God wants to give us. When you yield to temptation in a moment of weakness, you're actually sacrificing your future for momentary pleasure. We can't afford to live thoughtlessly, basing our decisions on immediate desires or feelings. Since the principle of sowing and reaping cannot be reversed, we need to carefully consider what we are planting. The harvest will come, and we'll reap what we have sown--and more than we've sown.

Are you contemplating anything that could have serious long-term ramifications if you yield to the yearning? A wise person evaluates choices by looking ahead to see what negative consequences could follow a course of action. Don't let "a bowl of soup" hinder God's wonderful plans for you.

† † †

A monk went to the city to sell his handiwork, and on the way he happened to meet a beautiful young woman, the daughter of a pagan priest; he left himself unprotected, and was so dominated by evil desire that he forgot the promises which he had made to Christ about virginity and chastity, and asked her father to give her to him as his wife.

—I cannot promise her to you, he replied, 'without first asking my god. So he went to the oracle to obtain a response.

—Ask him to deny his God, his Baptism, and his monastic Schema, answered the oracle or, rather, the Devil.

—I deny them, the hapless monk dared to utter, darkened by his irrational desire; he then saw a white dove go out of his mouth and vanish into the immensity of the sky...

But the father of the young woman was not immediately satisfied; he sought a second oracle.

—Do not give him your daughter, said the oracle; his God has not abandoned him, but is still helping him. When the denier heard this, he was shocked and his heart was crushed.

—I, wretch that I am, he cried, 'have denied a God Who never rejects the work of His hands....

Bitterly lamenting his terrible sin, like Peter, he returned to the desert, where he confessed his sin and regained the Grace of the Holy Spirit with the guidance of a Holy Elder.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ON HOMOSEXUALITY

CHURCHES EMBRACING HOMOSEXUALITY PREPARE MEMBERS TO ACCEPT THE ANTI-CHRIST

From *LifeSiteNews* (<https://www.lifesitenews.com/>), Moscow, June 5, 2015.

Churches that have deemed homosexuality morally acceptable have rejected Christianity and are preparing their followers to accept the Antichrist, according to one of the leading figures in the Russian Orthodox Church.

His statement came as the Russian Orthodox Church announced that it is ending “formal contacts” with the United Protestant Church of France and the Church of Scotland over those churches’ abandonment of traditional Christian sexual morality. In its statement, the church said ecumenical dialogue was pointless after France’s United Protestant Church last month voted to allow pastors to officiate at same-sex “marriages” and the Church of Scotland approved ordaining clergy who are in same-sex civil unions.

“The Russian Orthodox Church holds the firm position based on Holy Scriptures and has repeatedly declared that [homosexual ‘marriage’ is] inadmissible for moral teaching,” the statement reads. Churches that offer to “marry” homosexuals “trample upon the principles of traditional Christian morality.”

The statement explains that over a period of years, the Orthodox Church has shared her concerns with these Christian bodies and warned of ecumenical consequences if they adopt same-sex “marriage.”

“Regrettably, the words of warning have not been heard,” Orthodox officials concluded.

Following the decision, the Very Rev. Fr. Dimitry Smirnov—the chair of the Russian Orthodox Church Commission for Family, Protection of Motherhood and Childhood—told one of the leading Russian television stations the new moral teachings place these liberal denominations beyond the pale of Christianity.

“We separated ourselves from them as from the plague, as it’s contagious,” he said. “The Russian Orthodox Church cannot support with its authority something that is just an iniquity from the Biblical point of view.”

“These are not Christian communities anymore. This is another community with its own distinct name of ‘LGBT.’ Its future is simple and clear—the ‘fire of Gehenna’—this is just what the Holy Scripture says,” Fr. Smirnov said.

By rejecting the Christian faith’s immemorial teaching on sexual morality, “the former Christian peoples are preparing themselves for the solemn reception of the Antichrist.”

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow has stated many times that gay “marriage” is incompatible with Christian teaching.

The Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion, explained, “The legalization of same-sex cohabitations,

tolerant attitude to euthanasia and prostitution, disruption of the centuries-old institution of marriage and family, pose a clear threat to the future of humanity.”

Archpriest Jason Kappanadze of the Orthodox Church in America, the “daughter” church of Moscow, called the Moscow Patriarchate’s move “an appropriate statement of moral clarity,” noting that “certain Protestant denominations have crossed the line away from Christianity...making further dialogue impossible.”

Kappanadze was careful to point out that the reason for Moscow’s decision is not hatred but its care and concern for the well-being of all. “We stand with firm love for the salvation of our fellow human beings!”

Father Hans Jacobse of the American Orthodox Institute told *LifeSiteNews*, “People will look at the decision by the Russian Orthodox Church and think it is unfair. One must understand that the Russian Orthodox looks at gay marriage as a grave distortion of God’s design for men and women.”

Fr. Jacobse said the Russian Orthodox Church is concerned with the long-term societal effects of sanctioning homosexuality. “The Russians have always been brilliant long-term thinkers,” he told *LifeSiteNews*. Orthodox leaders believe that “legalizing same-sex marriage will change our understanding of who God created us to be, and that will have destructive ramifications for society down the road.”

The Russian Bishops’ Council of 2013 explained that “Dialogue with confessions which openly defy the Biblical moral norms is impossible.” The Church’s Department for External Church Relations “does not see any prospects in maintaining official contacts” with such groups.

Noting a tragic liberal trend throughout the Protestant world and implying there may be more severing of ties to



come, the Moscow Patriarchate statement read, “We regretfully acknowledge that today we have a new divide in the Christian world, not only regarding theological subjects, but regarding moral issues as well.”

The Russian Orthodox Church previously cut ties with The Episcopal Church in the United States in 2003 after it consecrated an open, practicing homosexual as bishop. Two years later, it severed its ecumenical relationship with the Swedish Lutheran Church after it sanctioned ceremonies for same-sex civil unions in 2005.

The bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, which together are called “the Holy Synod,” have made several public statements against homosexuality. “Homosexuality is to be approached as the result of humanity’s rebellion against God, and so against its own nature and well-being,” one such synodal statement from 1992 explained. “It is not to be taken as a way of living and acting for men and women made in God’s image and likeness.”

Those suffering from same-sex attraction are to be treated in the Orthodox Church with compassion.

“Men and women with homosexual feelings and emotions are to be treated with the understanding, acceptance, love, justice and mercy due to all human beings,” the bishops said. “They are to seek assistance in discovering the specific causes of their homosexual orientation, and to work toward overcoming its harmful effects in their lives.”

However, homosexuals “who still want to justify their behavior” are barred from Holy Communion, “since to do so would not help, but harm them.”



SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE TO AVOID ANXIETY: WORLDLY HAPPINESS CAUSES WORLDLY ANXIETY

By St. Paisios the Athonite.



The more people distance themselves from natural, simple life and embrace luxury, the more they suffer from anxiety. And as they distance themselves from God, they naturally cannot find rest in anything they do.

This is why they go around restless; they even spin around the moon—like the belt of an engine spinning around the “crazy wheel”^(*)—since earth cannot contain all their restlessness.

Worldly stress is the result of worldly happiness, of worldly pleasures and self-indulgence. Educated externally and being full of anxiety, hundreds of people (even young children) are driven to psychoanalysis and psychiatrists. New psychiatric hospitals are being built and young psychiatrists go on for post-graduate studies. Many of them do not even believe in God or accept the existence of the soul. How can these people help the human soul, when they themselves are full of anxiety? How can one feel truly comforted, if he does not believe in God and in the true and eternal life after death? When man grasps the deeper meaning of this true life, stress goes away, Divine consolation comes and he is healed. If someone went to psychiatric hospitals and read the Abba Isaac to the patients, those who believe in God would get well, because they would come to understand the deeper meaning of life.

People try to calm themselves with tranquilizers or with the theories of yoga, and they neglect altogether the true serenity that comes when the soul is humble and God fills it with Divine consolation. And imagine how all those tourists must suffer who come from other countries to Greece, and walk the streets in the hot summer sun, in the dusty and noisy streets! What great pressure they must feel inside, how stressed they must be if they need all this heat and noise to find comfort! It’s like their own selves are driving them away, and all they can see in this trouble is rest!

When we see a person who has everything be stressed, anxious and sad, we must know that God is missing from his life. In the end, even wealth will make people suffer, because the material goods cannot really satisfy them. Theirs is a double affliction. I know wealthy people who have everything and are miserable. They do not even have children but they are still miserable. They are too lazy to lie down or take a walk.

“Fine,” I told someone, “since you have some free time, do something spiritual; read one of the Hours of prayer, read a passage from the Gospel.” “I cannot,” he said. “Then,” I told him, “try doing something good; go to a hospital to visit some sick person.” “Why should I go all the way there,” he says, “what will become of it?” “Go help some poor person in your neighborhood.” “No,” he says, “that does not please me either.”

Can you believe that this person is miserable despite the fact that he has everything: free time, numerous houses and so on? Do you know how many people like this are in society? And these people suffer to the point that they lose their mind. What a dreadful thing! And if they happen to be independently wealthy and do not work, then they are the most miserable of all. If they at least had a job they would feel somewhat better.

† † †

(*) In the old metal shops a “crazy wheel” was one not used for any other purpose, except to feed the belt of the wheel when they wanted to deactivate the wheel.

RESPECT FOR THE DEAD: OUR CEMETERIES ARE GOD'S VINEYARDS

From *"The Spiritual Meadow,"* by John Moschus, ch. 77.

Close to Antioch there once stood a monastery, called the Monastery of the Giants. The humble abbot of this monastic community recounted the following to two famous visitors, St. Sophronius and his blessed teacher, John Moschus:

Not long before your arrival, a young man came to see me.

—For the love of God, accept me into your monastery, said the youth. He looked extremely distraught. Sobbing loudly, he cried torrents of tears.

—Tell me, what is the cause of your grief?

—O father, I am an awful sinner ...

The youth again began to sob, and crying aloud, beat his breast. From his great turmoil and extreme grief, he had no strength to relate his calamity.

—My child, listen to me.

Collect yourself a little bit and tell me what is wrong, and Christ will bring peace to your soul. By His fathomless mercy He did not turn away repentant sinners and endured death on the Cross for our salvation. He will accept you with joy into His embrace, seeing your repentance.

Then, making a great effort, the youth began to speak.

—Father, I am not worthy of Heaven and earth. What

have I done! Not long ago, a lavish funeral was held in the city. A wealthy father was burying his only daughter. He spared nothing. All of the jewels which he had given her were placed in the tomb. The deceased one, as in life, shone with jewels and gold. The father, mortified with sorrow and in tears, walked behind the casket. At that time I came up with the satanic idea of robbing the departed one. For two days I deliberated my intent and set out at night to the lonely tomb outside the city. The silence was inexplicable, as if everything was holding its breath. Only the crescent moon hung down its sharp sickle, lighting up the environs and the marble sepulchre.

The youth sighed and continued:

—Breaking the locks, I entered the inner chamber. A weak light slipped over the dead one. She lay as if alive, a sleeping beauty. Suddenly, I was frightened. A quiet pain entered my heart. Nonetheless I threw myself on the dead girl and in

exasperation began to undress her. I took everything off... I did not even spare the last underclothes, and took those too... I left her naked, as her mother had borne her. I was collecting everything and about to leave. Suddenly, fear gripped me again. My hands shook. My heart beat loudly in my chest. I glanced at the deceased and froze in fright. She arose from her deathbed and grabbing me by the arm, she spoke:

“So foul one, you had to go so far as to undress me? Had you no fear of God? No fear of the final recompense at the Dread Judgment? Have you no compassion for me, who died in the spring of my life? Did you have no natural shame common to all of us? You are a Christian! Is this the way I am to stand before Christ? Did my gender not shame you? Did not a woman give birth to you? Did you not desecrate your own mother along with me? Oh, what answer, what excuse, wretched one, will you bring to Christ’s judgment seat? In life not a single stranger’s eye beheld my countenance, and you, following my death and burial, disrobed me and saw my nakedness. Oh, Mankind! To what depths have you fallen! With what feelings and hands will you approach the holiest Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Jesus Christ?”

—Gasping from terror, I cried out with great effort: “Let me go!... I will never do any such thing again...”

“Yes, you came here of your own will, but it is not up to you to leave this place! This sepulchre will become our common abode—yours and mine... You will not die now, but right here, after countless

sufferings, you will give up your wicked soul in an awful manner...”

—I do not remember much of what else I told her... I besought by Almighty God that she release me, I repented, asked forgiveness...

She then said, “If you wish to rid yourself of this fate, give me your word that you will reject the world and will serve God alone...”

“Not only to what you have said,” I swore, “no, even more, I shall not even return to my own home.”

“Dress me as I was before!”

—As soon as I arrayed her, she fell breathless on her deathbed. Once again the eyes and mouth were closed, and the hand which had clutched me so firmly lay motionless. And I, the wretched one, ran from the tomb, and came to you...

Having heard this, I comforted the youth. Clothing him in a monk’s garb, I enclosed him in a mountain cave. Look



A destroyed Orthodox Monastery in Kosovo

in on him, if you wish, and see: he is now toiling for the salvation of his soul.

† † †

Alexandria long remained the center of Greek scholasticism—up to the time when the Islamic yoke brought its dark clouds to the Orthodox East. Then, it is said, Omar commanded that the Alexandrian library be burned down. Before the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs, not one curious traveler ever passed Alexandria by. With its museums, palaces, libraries, it was still considered the highest center of learning for philosophy, philology, literature, astronomy, and mathematics, as well as alchemy, astrology, magic, and other metaphysical studies for which ancient Egyptians were famous.

There were also humble and self-sacrificing ascetics of Christian thought. Dedicating their lives to study, they did not seek rewards, fame, riches—no. Their studies served as a pathway to an incomparably higher goal—moral perfection. Such a one was Cosmas the Scholastic, who was described briefly but distinctly by an eyewitness, St. John Moschus.

Blessed John Moschus and his pupil Sophronius (who later became more famous than his teacher), in undertaking their great journey, could not pass Alexandria by. Besides visiting Cosmas, they stopped to see other scholars of that time who lived in Alexandria.

It was hot at noon when they headed for the living quarters of the scholar Stephen. He lived close to the church of the Mother of God. For a long time they knocked at the door. Finally, the scholar's daughter looked out of the window and said:

—Wait a while. My father, wearied by his studies last night, has not yet risen.

—What shall we do, Master Sophronius? Let us go to the Tetrapil.

The Tetrapil was a huge portico, surrounded by columns, in four rows. One could always rest there. At the noon hour even the Tetrapil was empty. On the steps between the columns sat three beggars, all of them blind. What can one learn from blind men? However, the travelers quietly came towards them and, placing their books on the marble floor, sat down next to the blind men. They were engaged in a lively conversation.

—How did you lose your eyesight? one asked another.

—I was a sailor in my youth. During a journey from Egypt to Constantinople my eyes began to hurt. It was impossible to treat them aboard the ship, and there was no doctor. The disease progressed too far. White patches grew over my eyes and I am now blind.

—How were you stricken with blindness? the same beggar asked the other one.

—The tragedy was almost instantaneous. I was a glass blower. A flame jumped from the forge covering me with sparks, and burned my eyes.

Saying this, the blind man heaved a great sigh.

—Now you tell us of your misfortune, said both the blind men to their enquiring companion.

—Oh, my misfortune is my own fault! I will tell you the truth: as a youth I was very lazy. No matter how my parents tried, they could do nothing to develop a love of work in me. After their death I spent my fortune in a short time. I knew no trade, and did not like to work. What could I do? I became a thief. Once I had a particularly lucky day. I stole several times successfully, proceeded to finish off an excellent lunch, and then went to look around the town square. Right then I encountered a lavish funeral procession: a well-known rich man was being buried. Instantly, a demonic thought took hold of me: why not rob the deceased one? I followed the procession, which made its way to the church of St. John. Beside the church was a family crypt. When the man was interred, the crowd gradually dispersed. Evening was falling...

The blind man continued:

—Looking around, I decided that no one was watching me. I always carried a chisel and other instruments of my trade. Breaking the lock, I entered the crypt. I remember even now—the damp cold of the tomb encompassed me... The bier stood in the center. Without pausing, I came up to the dead one and took everything from him, then headed home. This will last a long time. Wait, the shroud! It is made from fine cloth and is expensive. Might as well... And I began to undress the dead man. Then—O, terror! He arose, fixed his lifeless gaze upon me—I froze on the spot like a stone. Cold sweat ran down my face. I felt the cold touch of his fingers. He passed them over my face and, stopping at the eyes, plucked them out. Recovering from fright, I threw everything down and ran from the tomb. I cannot describe to you the sorrow which overcame me. I cried unceasingly and considered myself to be lost forever. This is my story.

Glancing at Sophronius, the teacher noted that he was motioning for them to leave. Sophronius was visibly upset. Thank you, abba. Today we shall not attend the lecture: we have already received our lesson.

† † †

While visiting a cemetery, who has not noticed how some tombstones are broken by some daring hand, how crosses and holy images are defiled. What sorrow this brings to the heart! Is it possible that they do not know what a great sin this is? The wrath of the righteous Judge does not always descend immediately, as in the account above, but God's punishment will sooner or later come upon those vultures who have lost their conscience and sense of shame. Be wary of such a heavy sin. Do not disturb the peace and tranquillity of those who have reposed from earthly cares. Cemeteries are God's vineyards from which the angels will harvest the great crop into God's storehouses.

THE AROMA OF REVERENCE

Source: From "Elder Paisios of Mount Athos," by Hieromonk Isaac.

Once, a reclusive ascetic who had heard a lot about Elder Paisios came to visit him. They talked for a while, and he ascertained that Elder Paisios was an exceptionally reverent man. Indeed, the elder had a rare reverence, which he had learned from his parents, and mainly his mother.

While at the monastery, he benefited from many of the fathers, and especially from a particular hieromonk. He would say, "We can't reach the reverence he had—impossible. He would celebrate liturgy every day, and he struggled greatly. Once, for half a year, he ate nothing but half of a small *prosporon* and a few tomatoes dried in the sun." When this reverent priest would serve out in the chapels, like other priests of the monastery, he preferred to have as a chanter the young Father Averkios (as the elder was then called).

The elder had an innate reverence, but he also cultivated it a great deal. He placed such emphasis on it that he once said that "reverence is the greatest virtue, because it attracts the Grace of God." To the elder, reverence was the fear of God and spiritual sensitivity. Reverent people behave carefully and modestly, because they intensely feel the presence of God.

The elder wanted reverence to be unaffected and internal. He turned away from mere external forms. Regarding a group of monks who had great order and discipline in their liturgical life, he commented, "I respect that, if it's something that comes from within." The elder's conduct was reverent, but with a freedom that was alien to dry forms. If he didn't feel something, he wouldn't do it. He distinguished reverence from piety—a word he even avoided saying. He would say that reverence is like incense, while piety is just perfume. ⁽¹⁾

The elder's reverence encompassed not only small and seemingly unimportant matters, but also spiritual and essential issues. "If someone neglects the little things," he taught, "the danger is that he'll start neglecting greater, holier things. And then, without realizing it, rationalizing it all to himself—'This is nothing, that doesn't matter'—he can end up, God forbid, totally neglecting the things of God and becoming irreverent, arrogant, and atheistic."

His reverence could be seen in the way he prayed, venerated icons, received *antidoron* and holy water, partook of

Holy Communion, held icons during processions, chanted, and arranged and beautified the small chapel of his hermitage. He paid attention to details, but in a way that wasn't ritualistic or fastidiously formal. This was his own attitude toward God, which wasn't laid out in advance by any *typikon* of the Church: it was his personal disposition. He felt that his whole hermitage, not just his chapel, was sacred space. He arranged his cell, where he prayed, just like a little church. There was an *iconostasis* with many icons and a lamp that burned continuously, and he would cense and light many candles there. He had constructed his bed so that it was like a coffin, and he would say, "This is the altar of my cell." Icons and holy books never touched his bed, with the exception of an icon at its head.

The icon was rather tattered and faded, and a brother once asked him why it was in this condition. The elder tried to hide the truth, but the monk finally realized that it was like that because of his many kisses and tears. The elder reluctantly admitted, "I can get through an entire vigil that way"; that is, weeping.

He also treated the other areas of his hermitage with reverence—the workshop where he made the little icons, the guest-house where souls were reborn by God's Grace, the balcony, and even the yard. He thought that it was irreverent to have a toilet inside the hermitage. It was partly for ascetic reasons that he kept it at such a distance, but mostly it was out of reverence.

Once, when he was away from the hermitage of the Holy Cross, the fathers of the monastery (out of love, so he wouldn't be uncomfortable) made him a small outhouse, outside but sharing a wall with the hermitage. The elder never used it. At Panagouda, the Athonite location of his hermitage, when his health had deteriorated toward the end of his life and he needed to go out frequently at night—in cold, rain, and snow—his spiritual children began to insist on building him an outhouse just clear of the balcony to make things easier for him. He refused. "That's where the Panaghia appeared," he said. "How can I go to the toilet there?"

The elder's life was fragrant with deep and unaffected reverence, just as the angels in Heaven worship God day and night "with great reverence." This was clear to see from his relationship with God and from the expressions on his face when coming into contact with sacred things. He reacted to sacred objects as though they were alive.



Once, when Elder Paisios was visiting the hermitage of another monk, his hernia was bothering him. The elder of the hermitage begged him to lie down and rest a little, but Elder Paisios declined. He was only able to lie on his left side, and, if he had done that there, the bottom of his feet would have been pointing at some icons, which he thought of as irreverent.

Before entering the holy altar, he would make a prostration to the floor, remove his monastic cap, and kiss the cross on the altar-curtain; and then he would enter by the side door. During the Communion hymn at liturgy, if he intended to commune, he would make full prostrations. For a time, he had it as a rule to eat nothing for thirty-three hours before communing.

Because of his great reverence for the mystery of the priesthood, the elder never assented to ordination, even though, as he once said, “It’s been revealed to me three different times that I could become a priest.”⁽²⁾

Plainly, the elder saw reverence as a fundamental virtue for every Christian—although, rigorous as his criteria were, he considered it something rare. To the elder, reverence

was greater than most of the other virtues. He often used it as a criterion. If a reverent person wrote or said or did something for which he was criticized, the elder, even before forming a clear opinion on the issue itself, would go out of his way to propose mitigating circumstances. He would say, “He’s a reverent man—I don’t believe he’d do something like that.” The elder believed that this quality

preserved a person from making errors, from deceptions and from falling—perhaps in the sense of the verse declaring that the Lord *will carefully guard the way of those who reverence Him.* (Prov 2:8).

The elder considered reverence to be extremely important in all of a Christian’s life and struggles, and especially those of a monk. A person’s reverence, he believed, acts as a steady factor in his life, affecting everything and raising his spiritual level.

He advised monks to take care to acquire reverence. “A new monk, especially, has to be reverent through and through. It helps for him to always have the *Evergetinos* open⁽³⁾ and to spend time with other monks who are reverent.” When a new monk asked the elder what it was that he should pay the most attention to, the elder replied, “Reverence and attention to yourself.”

A Russian bishop, presented with many candidates for the priesthood, once asked the elder whom he should ordain.

“Those who are reverent and pure,” the elder answered—he did not say educated or energetic men, or candidates with good voices.

In chanting and iconography also, reverence was more important to the elder than technique. He was able to discern its presence in chanting or in an icon, and he would say, “If you pay attention to the meaning of a *troparion*, it’ll change you, and you’ll be able to chant in a reverent way. If you’re reverent, you might make a mistake while you chant, but it’ll come out sounding sweet. If you only pay attention to technique—I mean, going note-by-note, without a reverent spirit—then you’ll end up like a lay chanter I once heard: he was chanting *Bless the Lord, O my soul* like a blacksmith striking an anvil. I heard it in a car, and it disturbed me—I told the driver to turn off the tape. When someone doesn’t chant from the heart, it’s like he’s running you out of church. A sacred canon says that people who chant with improper voices should be given penances because they drive people away from church.”

Concerning iconography, he advised, “You should make

an icon with reverence, like we were going to be giving it to Christ Himself. How would we like it if someone gave us a photograph where our face wasn’t right? It’s not right for our Panaghia to be depicted like Saint Anna—I mean, not to show her physical beauty. There has never been a woman as beautiful as the Panaghia was in soul and body. How she transformed people’s



A rare photograph of the reposed St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

souls with her grace!”

Of the icon of the Tenderly Kissing Mother of God, at Philotheou Monastery, he remarked, “technically, it’s not quite perfect, because Christ’s feet are wedge-shaped, but it works miracles and has such Grace and sweetness. It’s probably because God rewarded the iconographer’s reverence.”

“The Grace of God,” observed the elder, “comes to reverent people, and it makes the soul beautiful.” But he observed with sadness that contemporary people pay little attention to such things. “If a person’s not reverent,” he said, “if he scorns Divine things, then Divine Grace abandons him; he’s overcome by temptations, and becomes like the demons. Divine Grace won’t come to an irreverent person—it comes to people who honor it.”

As examples of irreverence, he mentioned the sacrifice of Cain and the behavior of the sons of Eli related in the Old Testament. Their disdain provoked the wrath of God, and they were punished.

The elder considered it irreverent to place icons, ecclesiastical books, *antidoron*, and holy objects in general on the seats of church-stalls, and even more so on chairs or beds (except on a pillow). He suggested that people put the little icons that he would hand out in their chest pockets. Once, he related, a pilgrim came holding his head crooked from neck pain. Through Divine enlightenment, the elder realized that the man had suffered this at the hands of demonic powers, because he had put a cross the elder had given him, which contained a piece of the Precious Cross of the Lord, in his back-pocket. The elder forbade anyone who lived carelessly to carry the Precious Cross.

He once told us about someone who had become possessed because he had spit in an unclean place on a day when he had communed. The same had happened to a woman who had thrown holy water onto excrement. Another time, he related, a young man who was engaged to be married visited a conjurer, who told him to urinate on the wedding rings. Upon following the conjurer's instructions, the young man became possessed, because wedding rings are holy. The elder also gave other, similar examples of careless and irreverent people being abandoned by Divine Grace and becoming possessed.

He didn't think it was right to refer to the holy Fathers of the Church simply by their first names; for example, as "Basil" or "Gregory." "We talk about 'Father so-and-so' and use the term 'Father' for monks and clergy," he commented, "and this is how we're going to talk about the holy Fathers?"

He didn't want people to offer God candles made from impure or artificial beeswax or to fill their lamps with olive oil of poor quality or with seed-oil. On the contrary, he emphasized, "[we should] offer our best to God in worship. We should offer up our best efforts and our pure prayer—not our yawning." He considered it greatly irreverent to use *prosporon* for the liturgy that was tainted with mold. "Christ gives us His Body and Blood," he would say, "and we give Him moldy *prosporon*?" He would walk miles to find *prosporon* for the Divine Liturgy, and when he carried it he would hold it by the side, taking care not to touch the seal.

The elder tried to show gratitude and be pleasing to the One whom he loved. Out of his great love, he offered to God the very best, and he conducted himself with refinement, with spiritual sensitivity and reverence. And God, being pleased, bestowed His Grace on the elder in abundance.

† † †

(1) "Reverence," in Greek *evlavia* (εὐλάβεια); and "piety," *efsevia* (εὐσεβεία). The latter of these two words is used in Greek within the Scriptures and by the Church's holy Fathers to refer to true Christian reverence and correct faith; and, especially in older translations, it has often been rendered as "piety." By the elder's time, the Greek word had taken on a negative meaning in a somewhat similar fashion

as the word "piety" has come to do in English; to many, it was synonymous with pietism and formalism.

(2) Most likely these signs were not commands—rather, he was presented with the possibility of becoming a priest. When he was asked about this, he answered, "Christ gives us gifts. Do we have to accept all of them?"

(3) That is, to study it frequently. [The *Evergetinos* is a collection of anecdotes and teachings from the early Egyptian desert Fathers. Unlike the *Philokalia*, a more advanced spiritual text that treats the way in which "the intellect [nous] is purified, illumined, and made perfect" (vol. 1, p. 13), the *Evergetinos* focuses on the practice of Christian virtues, a necessary precursor to the exalted attainments described in the *Philokalia*.]



ON RELATIONS WITH THOSE WHO DO EVIL

Source: "The *Evergetinos*," book one, hypothesis 23.

We must keep away from those who harm us, even if they are friends or are otherwise quite indispensable.

Abba Agathon said: "Even if someone is extremely dear to me, but I know that he leads me into faults, I cut him loose from myself."

An Elder said: "We must flee from all who work iniquity, even if they be friends or relatives and even if they hold the office of Priest or King; for standing apart from those who work iniquity bestows on us friendship with God and boldness before Him."

The same Elder said: "It is not profitable for us to cling to transgressors, neither in Church, nor in the marketplace, nor in the council, nor in any other realm; rather, we must completely refrain from relations with them..."

A brother asked an Elder: "If my brother scandalizes me, do you want me to make a prostration to him?" The Elder answered: "Make a prostration, but cut yourself off from him; for we have Abba Arsenios, who said: Have love for all men, but keep a distance from all men."

Saint Symeon said: If you really see, how is it that you stumble like a blind man and your whole body and soul are covered with black marks? If you know what is good, how is it that you do evil, as though you did not know? If you know that all visible things are a shadow and all pass away, are you not ashamed of playing with shadows and hoarding transitory things? Like a child you draw water with a bucket full of holes; do you not realize it and take it into account, my dear friend? As though there were nothing more serious than appearance and illusion, as though reality has been taken from them?

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YOUR SINS ARE MY SINS, MY SINS ARE YOUR SINS

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.



Love the sinner as well! Do not fly away from the sinners, but go to them without fear.

After all—whoever you may be—you are not much better than they are. Try to love the sinners; you will see that it is easier to love those whom you despise than those whom you envy.

The old Zosim (from the “Brothers Karamazov”) said, “Brothers, don’t be afraid of the sins of a sinner; but love a sinner also—that is the record of love upon earth.”

I know you love St. Peter and St. John, but could you love the sinner Zachæus? You can love the good Samaritan but love, please, the prodigal son also!

You love Christ, I am sure; but what about Judas, the seller of Christ? He “repented,” poor human creature. Why don’t you love him? [from Mt 27:3, the original Gk word is «μεταμεληθείς», “changed his mind,” or “was remorseful,” i.e. not a true repentance; the Greek word for “repentant” is «μετανοήσας», *Ed.*]

Dostoyevsky—like Tolstoi and Gogol—emphasised two things: first, there is no great man; secondly, there is no worthless man.

He described the blackest crimes and the deepest fall and showed that the authors of such crimes are men just as other men, with much good hidden under their sins.

Servants and vagabonds, idiots and drunkards, the dirty *katorzniki* from the Serbian prisons—all those people are God’s sons and daughters, with souls full of fears and hopes, of repentance and longings after good and justice.

Between *saintliness* and *vice* there is a bridge, not an abyss. The saintliest and the meanest men have still common ground for brotherhood. Your sins are my sins, my sins are your sins.

That is the starting-point for a practical and lucid Christianity. I cannot be clean as long as you are not clean. I cannot be happy as long as you are unhappy. I cannot enter Heaven as long as you are in Hell.

What does that mean? It means that you and I are blended together for eternity, and that your effort to separate yourselves from me is disastrous for you and for me.

As long as you look to the greatest sinner in the world and say: “God, I thank thee that I am not as that man,” you are far from Christ and the Kingdom of God. God wants not one good man only, He wants a Kingdom of good men.

If ninety-nine of us are good and saintly but one of our brothers is far from our solace and support, in sin and darkness, be assured that God is not among us ninety-nine, but He has gone to find our brother whom we have lost and forgotten. Will you follow him or will you stand self-sufficient?