

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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THE DORMITION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

By Saint John of Kronstadt.

Magnify O my soul, the honorable Translation of the Mother of God from earth to heaven.

[Refrain for the 9th Ode of the Canon]

† † †

Let us be happy, beloved brothers and Sisters, that we belong to the Holy Orthodox Church, worthily and rightly glorifying the Most Holy Sovereign Theotokos on this eminent day out of all the days of the year with special solemnity. There exists on earth many societies and

entire governments that do not consider the need nor the obligation to call upon and glorify the Queen of heaven and earth, the Mother of Our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, and other Saints and Angels; to submissively serve Her lovingly, as the True Mother of God. Sadly, nowadays we have heretics (among us) who actively dishonor the Mother of God, the Saints, their holy icons, their holy relics and their feast days. O, if only they also unanimously with us glorified the worthy Queen of heaven and earth!

Today the Holy Church solemnly glorifies the honorable Dormition or translation of the Mother of God from earth to heaven. A wonderful translation—she died without serious illness, peacefully. Her soul is taken up in the divine hands of Her Son and

carried up into the heavenly abode, accompanied by the sweet singing of Angels. And then, her most pure body is transferred by the Apostles to Gethsemane where it is honorably buried, and on the third day it is resurrected and taken up to heaven. You see this on the holy icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos. On it is represented the Life-bearing body of the Theotokos laying on the bier, surrounded by the Holy Apostles and hierarchs, and in the center of the icon the Lord holding in His hands the Most Pure soul of the Theotokos. The translation of the Mother of God is a paradigm of the translation in general of the souls of Christians to the other world.



We say that our dead have “fallen asleep” or “passed away.” What does this mean? This means that for the True Christian there is no death. Death was con-

quered by Christ on the Cross. But there is a *translation*, i.e., a rearrangement of his condition, i.e., his soul is in another place, in another age, in another world beyond the grave, eternal, without end, by the voice of the Lord and the fearful yet wonderful trumpet of the Archangel, all the dead shall live and come forth each to his place: *they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* (Jn 5:29).

This is what the Christian means by translation. We should be ready for this translation, for the day of the

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

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General Resurrection and Judgment, for this indescribable world event, recorded in the Holy Scripture.

This preparation for the meeting of the Heavenly King before the dread judgment seat, after death, is essentially the person's preparation throughout the whole of his life. This preparation means a change in all his thoughts, and the moral change of all his being, so that the whole man would be pure and white as snow, washing clean everything that defiles the body and spirit, so that he is adorned with every virtue: repentance, meekness, humility, gentleness, simplicity, chastity, mercifulness, abstinence, spiritual contemplation, and burning love for God and neighbor.

Our preparation for meeting the Heavenly King, and for the inheritance of eternal life in heaven, should consist of these things. The Heavenly King desires souls adorned with immutable virtue, souls prepared so that the very Lord Himself could abide in them. Do not marvel that the Very Lord wants to live in us. In fact the human soul is more spacious than the heavens and the earth, for it exists in the image of God. And if one removes sins from the soul, the Lord of all will settle in it and will fill it with Himself. "We will come to him and make our dwelling" (St. John 14:23), says the Lord about the souls who love Him.

And so, ye participants in the Christian feasts, and especially the present feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, ye who are brightly adorned with every virtue and translated to the heavenly Kingdom, to Her Son and God, proclaim to each and every one about preparing their souls to be the dwelling place of the Lord, about continual repentance, and about the incorruptible adornment of

Christian virtue. Let your death also be unashamed and peaceful, serving as the pledge of a good answer at the dread judgment seat of Christ.

Amen.



Thus thou art also the fountain of true light, the inexhaustible treasury of life itself, the most fruitful source of blessing, who has won for us and brought up all good things—though for a while thou was covered corporeally with death; nonetheless, thou dost pour out pure and inexhaustible streams of immense Light, immortal life and true happiness, rivers of grace, fountains of healing and everlasting blessing."

St. John of Damascus

The Most Holy Mother of God prays for us ceaselessly. She is always visiting us. Whenever we turn to her in our heart, she is there. After the Lord, she is the greatest protection for mankind. How many churches there are in the world that are dedicated to the Most Holy Mother of God! How many healing springs where people are cured of their ailments have sprung up in places where the Most Holy Theotokos appeared and blessed those springs to heal both the sick and the healthy! She is constantly, by our side, and all too often we forget her.

Elder Thaddeus

When the Church tells us in her hymns and icons that the Apostles were miraculously gathered from the ends of the earth in order to be present at the repose and burial of the Mother of God, we as Orthodox Christians are not free to deny this or reinterpret it, but must believe as the Church hands it down to us, with simplicity of heart."

St. John Maximovich

THE DAY OF THE LORD DRAWS NEAR

By St. Gregory the Great.

St. Gregory (540-603) abandoned a political career to become a monk. He was elected Pope of Rome in 590 and is considered one of the greatest Holy Fathers of the Church.



Our Lord and Redeemer, desiring to find us prepared, warns us of the evils that are to accompany the end of the world, so that He may keep us from the love of it. He makes known the disasters that will herald its approaching end, so that should we be unwilling to serve God in times of tranquility, we may, made fearful by these happenings, at least be anxious concerning the judgment now at hand.

For a little prior to this passage of the holy Gospel which you, my brethren, have just heard, the Lord forewarned us, saying: *Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.* (Lk 21:10-11). Then having said certain other things in between, He adds this warning which you have just now heard: *And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring* (Lk 21:25). From among all these things we now see that some have already come to pass; the others that now fill us with dread are to come in the future.

For we behold nation rising against nation, and their distress prevails upon the earth, more now in these our times than we have read of in history. You are aware how frequently we have heard from other parts of the world that earthquakes have devastated innumerable cities. Pestilences we suffer without ceasing. Signs in the sun and moon and stars we have not yet clearly beheld: but that these are not far off we gather from the alteration of the heavens.

Just as before Italy was given over to be smitten by the heathen sword, we beheld fiery hosts in the sky, and saw Him glittering there who was afterwards to shed the blood of humanity. Extraordinary confusion of the waves has not yet risen. But since much that was foretold has happened, we cannot doubt that the events which remain shall come in time, for the witness of what has been fulfilled is the pledge of that which is to follow.

We tell you these things, dearest brethren, in order that your souls may awaken to an eagerness for security, and lest you become torpid in a security that is false, and become lax through ignorance of Christian truth, but rather that you may become solicitous, and that anxiety may strengthen you in doing good, reflecting on this which the voice of the Redeemer added: *Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.* (Lk 10:26).

Whom else does the Lord call by the name of Powers of heaven unless the Angels, the Archangels, the Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, and Powers, who at the coming of the Just Judge will then appear visibly to our eyes, to the end that they may sternly exact an account of that which the Invisible Lawgiver now patiently suffers? Whereto is added: *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.* (Lk 21:27). As though He were openly to say: They shall see Him come in power and majesty to Whom, present in lowliness, they turned a deaf ear, and so the more sharply will they then feel His severity, the more they now refuse to humble their hearts before His patience.

Since these words were directed at the reprobate, He then turns to speak words of comfort to the elect. For He says: When these things come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth nigh. It is as if the Truth openly warns His Elect by saying: When the evils of this world mount up, when dread of the judgment is shown even by the trembling powers, lift up your heads, that is, be joyful in your hearts, because the world, of which you are not friends, is drawing to its end; the redemption you have been seeking is coming close. In Scripture the head is often used for the soul, because as the members are ruled by the head, so thoughts are governed by the soul. To lift up your heads therefore means to raise the heart to the joys of the heavenly fatherland.

They, therefore, who love God, are bidden to be glad, and to rejoice, because of the end of the world; since soon they will meet Him Whom they love, and that is passing away which they have never loved. Far be it then from any of the faithful who desire to see God that they should grieve over the stricken world, which we must know will end in these catastrophes. For it is written: *Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* (Jas 4:4). Who therefore does not rejoice at the approaching end of the world, testifies that he is its friend, and by this he is revealed as an enemy of God. But let this be far from the faithful, far from the hearts of those who believe through their faith that there is another life, and who love it in very deed. Let them grieve over the ruin of the world who have planted the roots of their hearts deep in the love of it, who neither look for the life to come, nor are even aware that it is. But we who have learned the joys of our heavenly home must hasten to it as speedily as we may. We should desire to go there with all haste, and to arrive by the shortest way. And with what miseries does not the world urge us forward? What sorrow, what misfortune is there, that does not press upon us? What is this mortal life but a way? And what folly would it be, let you carefully consider, to be weary with the fatigue of the way, and yet not eager to finish the journey!

That the world is to be trodden on, and despised, Our Redeemer then teaches us, by a timely similitude: *Behold the*

fig tree and all the trees: when they now shoot forth, ye see and know that summer is now at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand (Lk 10:29-31). This is as if He were openly to say: as from the fruit on the trees you know that summer is near, so from the ruin of the world you may know that the kingdom of God is likewise near. From which it may be truly gathered that the fruit of the world is ruin. To this end it arises, that it may fall. To this end it germinates, that whatever it has brought forth from seed will be consumed in disaster. But happily is the Kingdom of God compared to summer, because then the clouds of our sadness will pass away, and the days of our life shall be resplendent in the glory of the eternal Sun.

The world is oppressed by new and ever-increasing miseries. How many survive of the innumerable multitude of men you may see, yet each day new scourges beset them, sudden disasters fall on them, new and unheard-of disasters arise. Just as the body in youth is vigorous, the heart strong and steady, the shoulders upright, and the lungs vigorous, but in old age the figure is no longer upright, the shrunken neck is bowed, the chest labors with frequent sighs, strength fails us, and the speaker is impeded by a faltering breath. Although feebleness is yet absent, yet infirmity in our bodily senses is now our normal state of health. So in its early years, the world flourished as in its pristine strength, vigorous to propagate the offspring of mankind, blooming in the health of its bodies, fat with the richness of life. Now it is falling into its own old age, and, as if near to death, is oppressed with growing miseries.

Do not then, my brethren, love that which you know cannot endure. Keep before your minds the apostolic counsels wherein we are admonished: *Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* (I John 2:15). The day before yesterday, brethren, you heard that an ancient plantation was uprooted by a sudden storm, that houses were destroyed, churches razed to their foundations. How many were there, safe and well on the previous evening, who believed that in the morning they would fulfil some task, yet that very night were they of a sudden overtaken, caught in the trap of this disaster? But we must carefully keep in mind that in the doing of these things it is the Invisible Judge that moves the breath of the faintest breeze, that awakens the storm from even one small cloud, or razes the foundations of so many buildings. But what shall happen when the Judge shall visibly appear, and when His anger burns against the wicked, if we cannot now endure His wrath when He inflicts upon us the least tempest? Before the face of His wrath what flesh shall stand, if He it is that moves the wind, and shakes the earth, incites the storms, and lays low so many buildings? Paul reflecting on this severity of the Judge to come, says to us: *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* (Heb 10:31). The Psalmist gives voice to the same reflection: *God, our God, shall come openly, and shall*

not keep silence: a fire shall be kindled before Him, and round about Him there shall be a very great tempest. (Pss 49:3). Tempest and fire shall accompany the severity of this justice, because the tempest shall search out those whom the fire will burn.

Beloved brethren, keep that day before your eyes, and then whatsoever may seem burdensome will become light in comparison. Of that day is it said by the mouth of the Prophet: *The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.* (Zeph 1:14-16). Of this day the Lord has spoken by the mouth of the prophet Haggai: *I shall shake the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land* (Hag 2:22).

Behold, as we have said, He moves the tempest, and the earth cannot endure it. What will it do when He moves the heavens? What can we say of the terrors we now see, except that they are but heralds of the wrath to come? And let us keep in mind that these present afflictions are as far below the last tribulations, as is the person of the herald below the majesty of the judge he precedes. Reflect with all your mind upon this day, my dearest brethren. Remedy what is now defective in your present life. Amend your ways. Conquer evil temptations by standing firm against them. Repent with tears of the sins you have committed. For the more you make ready against the severity of His justice by serving Him in fear, the more serenely shall you behold the Coming of that Eternal Judge, Who with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth, world without end. Amen.



It is good to be at peace with all, but [only] when they are of one mind with us as regards piety; for peace with that which is just and proper is a most excellent and profitable possession; but when it is with that which is evil or enslaving, then it is most disgraceful, and of all things the most shameful and harmful. For there is an evil concord and a good discord; there is a good severance, and an evil concurrence. And if friendship becomes a cause of perdition for some, then hatred becomes a virtue for them. Better is division for dispassion's sake than concord effected for the passions' sake.

Joseph Bryennios

[*The teacher of Saint Mark Evgenicos, head of the Patriarchal Academy and its professor of scriptural interpretation—rigidly Orthodox and with no sympathy for the humanistic tendencies of western thought*]

THE MONASTIC VOWS

By Archbishop Averky (+1976).

Even in Orthodox nations (such as Greece or Serbia or Russia), with their thousands of monasteries and sketes, it is not uncommon to find people of the opinion that monastic life is essentially different from ordinary Christian life. All the more do we hear people today on the subject of fasting and long services: "Oh, that's just for monastics." In this essay by the late Archbishop Averky, "On Monasticism," it is clear that the difference is one of degree and not of kind.

† † †

No matter how strict the monastic vows we examined, after acquainting ourselves with their essence we cannot fail to see the error of those laymen who, according to the words of Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, separate themselves unduly from monastics in matters of morality and spirituality. After all, laymen give vows at their baptism which are no less strict than the monastic vows except that they are of a more general character.

In the face of the All-seeing God and in the presence of witnesses, each layman, before being submerged into the baptismal font and thereby being reborn into a new grace-filled and holy life, gives a solemn promise to renounce Satan and all his works and all his angels and all his service and all his pride,



and to unite himself unto Christ, believing in Him as King and God. Not only does he give a promise, but then and there he categorically affirms it, resolutely and irrevocably, when he answers the second question of the priest: *Hast thou renounced Satan?* with *I have*. And to the question: *Hast thou united thyself unto Christ?* he answers with the same resoluteness: *I have*.

In comparison with this vow, which is made by all Christians without exception, the monastic vows simply appear to somehow particularize, reinforce and deepen the vows of baptism. This is why the rite of tonsure into the *small schema* is called a second baptism, and in performing the *small schema* the same joyous and exultant chant is sung: *As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. (Gal 3:27). And among our God-wise Fathers and teachers of the Church there is the opinion that the monastic tonsure is not only a rite but a sacrament, namely, the sacrament of a second baptism in which the vows of renunciation of Satan and the commitment to Christ are repeated and deepened.

The monk gives a vow of virginity, promising to preserve chastity. Are not laymen committed to chastity before marriage, and within the married state to mutual fidelity and a special marital chastity which, according to the Holy Fathers, consists of a temperate alienation of the spouses from the enslavement of their souls to sensual passion? Also, one should not forget that our Church, while blessing the first marriage of every Christian with a triumphal celebration, has quite a negative attitude and rather unwillingly blesses a second marriage, while for a third marriage there does not even exist a special ceremony, and it is permitted only because it is looked upon as a state preferable to fornication. Those who enter upon a third marriage are denied the Holy Mysteries by the Church for five years, in accordance with the penance set for the sin of sexual excess.

A monk gives a vow of non-acquisitiveness. But are laymen, according to the Gospel, permitted to hoard riches

in order to spend them on their own whims and live for their own pleasure? Does not the Gospel condemn the foolish rich man who all his life only dressed himself in fancy clothes and daily entertained his friends, giving no thought to the fate of the unfortunate poor man Lazarus who lay covered with sores at the gate of his house. Another rich man, who was getting ready to

enjoy his wealth, told his soul: "Friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. No, take it easy; eat, drink and be merry!" He did not hear God's strict reproach: *Fool! Tonight you die. Then who will get all your wealth?* (Lk 12:16-22). Again, is the Lord's stern warning: *Verily, I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven*. (Mt 19:24), meant only for monks and not for all Christians?

Are not all Christians told: *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth; where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but store them in heaven where they will never lose their value, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*. (Mt 6:19-21). This is perfectly understandable, for he who hoards his wealth and whose heart becomes attached to it relies more on the power of his wealth than on God, and his wealth occupies that place in his heart which should belong to God. It becomes his idol, a false god instead of the true God. One who loves wealth is a traitor to God: *You cannot serve God and Mammon*. (Mt 6:24).

A monk gives a vow of obedience, renouncing his own will. But are laymen permitted always to follow their own sinful, uninhibited will? Are they not obliged to be obedient to God's commandments, to their spiritual fathers and teachers, and generally to their elders and persons in authority—not only in spiritual but also in secular life? What would happen if each layman began to live according to his own will, his own desires? Indeed, it was not to monks but to all Christians that St. Paul directed his exhortation: *Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves.* (Heb 13:17). And likewise, St. Peter's exhortation: *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.* (1 Pet 2:13-14).

The layman also, if he wants to be a true Christian and succeed in spiritual life, must choose a spiritual father whom he trusts; he must open his whole soul to him, as a monk before his elder, and guide his entire life with all its actions according to the counsel of his spiritual father. Indeed, that is how all believing laymen acted in better days.

And so, from what has been said, it is quite clear that the monastic vows are not something new in Christianity, something unusual, unnatural, creating an abyss between monks and ordinary Christian laymen—not at all. The monastic vows are simply a repetition, together with a refinement and at the same time a deepening of the baptismal vows which each Christian gives in more general words and expressions in approaching the Sacramental Holy Baptism, when he promises to *renounce Satan and all his works and all his angels and all his service and all his pride*, and to unite himself unto Christ.



ON REPENTANCE

Excerpts from the Evergetinos.

Our holy Father John, who lived in asceticism on a mountain near the city of Lycus and about whom details are cited in another chapter, relates to us this about the need [for monks] to avoid many interactions with women [or nuns with men].

There once lived in the city, it was said, a young man who committed many and frightful sins. However, this young man was piercingly censured by his conscience, on account of his manifold sins, and, with the help of God, came to repentance. Under the power of repentance, he went to a cemetery, where he established himself in one of the tombs and lamented for his former life, falling down with his face to the earth and continually groaning from the depths of his heart.

When he had passed a week in this state of unrelenting and persistent repentance, demons, who had before brought his

life to destruction, gathered around one night making noise and shouting: "Who is this impious man, who used to pass his time in lustful things and immorality and now wants us to think that he is sober and a doer of good deeds? And he wants to be a Christian and become virtuous, now that he can no longer have fun and fulfill his pleasures? What good can he expect in his life, since he is filled with our evils?"

"Hey you! Will you not get up from there at all? Will you not come with us to your customary places of sin and depravity? Fallen women and wine await you; will you not come to indulge your desires? After all the sins that you have committed up to this day, all hope for salvation is lost to you, and therefore, O struggler, you will only march on full speed to your damnation if you continue killing yourself this way. Why are you so intent and in such a hurry to be damned? Whatever transgression that there is, you committed it; together with us, you fell to every sin. Yet now you dare to flee our company? Do you not agree? Will you not go along with our offers?"

Meanwhile, however, the young man persisted in the sorrow of repentance and, appearing not to hear the exhortations of the demons, did not answer them at all. So the demons, seeing that they had accomplished nothing with their words, fell upon him, beat him cruelly, and, when they had wounded him all over, left him half-dead. But still the youth remained immovable in his place, groaning, and steadfast in his obdurate repentance.

During this time, the young man's relatives sought him out, finally finding him. Having learned the reason for his appearance—that is, of the brazen attack of the demons—they tried to take him with them to their home. He, however, refused to abandon the place of his repentance.

The following night, the demons again attacked him and tormented him even more greatly. His relatives visited him for a second time, though without persuading him to leave his place of punishment and follow them. To their proposals on the matter, he answered patiently and with resignation: "Do not pressure me. I prefer to die than to return to my former prodigal life."

The third night he almost died from the cruel torments of the demons, who attacked him with greater severity than all of the other times.

After that, the demons, having accomplished nothing with their threats and torments—for the young man would not change his mind at any scare tactic—departed and left him alone. Fleeing from him, they cried madly:

"He conquered us! He conquered us! He conquered us!"

From that time on, nothing bad happened to the youth; rather, with a clean conscience he came to realize every virtue. Until the end of his life, he remained in the tomb, which he made his hermitage, coming to be honored by God with the gifts of miraculous doings.

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY

From the spiritual journal of a monk of Optina Monastery in 19th century Russia.

We have been given an Apostolic command: *Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.* Christian love does not require that we entirely overlook the weaknesses of our brother; this would demand closing our eyes. But it does require that without good reason we should not pay much attention to the sins and weaknesses of our neighbor; that having such a strong inclination to notice the mistakes of our brother, we should rather have regard to his good qualities. We should remember that from the very last, from the most wretched—to all appearances—of creatures, God can make for himself a vessel unto his glory. We must often bring to mind our own shortcomings.

Finally, we should remember that true love covers everything, endures everything—even the worst offense. Love knows that disdain towards others expresses itself in harshness and pride which are opposed to the Spirit of God. The grace of God does not despise what often appears to be wretched in the eyes of men. It is longsuffering because according to His unfathomable designs, God often brings good out of evil. Neither prideful aversion, nor excessive severity and impatience shown to a man who has made some mistakes, are consistent with the activities of God's grace. No kind of human depravity, if it can thus be expressed, is surprising for grace, because everywhere outside of God it sees only utter wretchedness and sin.

Should we cut off or lessen our good disposition towards a man simply because he has become subject to certain weaknesses? We complain that we are forced to endure offenses from others, but do we ourselves not offend others? Seeing another's deficiencies we show our dissatisfaction; but are we ourselves really so perfect in everything? Would we not be terrified of all those whom we have offended at some time should come to us and demand satisfaction for these offenses? Although it might seem that we are honest and just enough in everything, still God, Who knows our least and most hidden deeds, cannot but accuse our guilt before Him and perhaps before those same people whom we consider guilty before ourselves? And so, let us be careful lest God, on the day of the Universal Judgement, should ask of us why we were not merciful to our brethren when He has poured out upon us His mercy so abundantly.

The path of condescension to the weaknesses of one's neighbor has been indicated by our Lord Jesus Christ when He said: *Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart.* He instructs us by His own example: He came down from heaven to earth, took up the weak and fragile body of man, died on the Cross

in order to accuse our pride. He Who is everything for us humbled Himself to the most shameful and cruel death; but we, who have no significance at all, wish to be everything; or, at least, we wish that people would ascribe to us what we do not have.

The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that He is meek and humble; it is enough for us to imitate His example. And who will refuse to follow Him? Could a sinner do this who by his ingratitude to the Lord, has already many times deserved to be struck by the lightning of Divine righteousness?

Humility is the fount of true meekness. Conversely, pride is always arrogant, impatient, irritated. A man who is inwardly conscious of his own weaknesses, willingly endures offenses from others. A man who thinks he has nothing good in himself is not offended if he must bear insults from others. True evangelical meekness is not simply the outcome of some natural meek qualities of the soul; it is the fruit of self-denial.

The Lord Jesus Christ was meek and humble of heart. This means that humility is not determined only by a rational realization of one's sinfulness and unworthiness before God. Humility is a feeling of the heart. It is the kind of self-debasement in which the will participates. This does not shame a man, but even pleases him because he sees in it a means to glorify God. Humility is the heartfelt awareness of one's utter poverty before God. It consists in casting aside any reliance upon one's own natural strengths. It sees God as the only Physician able to heal the wounds of the soul. But to see the true state of one's soul and to fail into despair—this is not what it means to be humble. Despair is the fruit of pride. It is worse than pride itself.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth!



“Anytime there are temptations and troubles, there are also laurels of victory,” the pious Elder Gregorios would say to Hieromonk Ioakim Spetsieris, and then he would add: “If it were possible to find a monastery filled with angels, and they placed you as one of the brothers in it, still you would not be saved, because no one would bother you, and you would be living an easy life and this saying would be suitable to your situation: *In your lifetime you received your good things.*”

“My father, I am losing the battle in a carnal war,” hieromonk Ioakim Spetsieris told Elder Gregorios once; “I cannot rest either day or night!”

“Do not despair,” he replied. “This is a sign that rewards are near. Do not be afraid. Our Christ does not allow for us to be tempted more than we can endure.” And soon after he blessed him, he was freed from the temptation.

From the “Athonite Gerontikon”

THE HOLY PROPHET, FORE-RUNNER AND BAPTIST JOHN

By Protopresbyter James Thornton, from "Of Whom the World was not Worthy."



We end our series of discussions on the Patriarchs and Prophets with the Holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John [the "Baptizer," one who Baptizes (from the Greek *Baptistes*)], a towering figure who bridges the Old and New Testaments and who reveals, more precisely than his forebears, the object, the aim, the goal, the purpose of the preceding two-thousand year history of the Hebrew people: namely, the advent of

the Messiah, the God-man, the Savior, Jesus Christ. That was so since, as Saint Nicholas of Ochrid and Zica writes, Saint John especially differs from all of the other prophets in that he had the privilege of being able, with his hand, to show the world Him about Whom he prophesied. [Prologue, Vol I, p. 34].

To discover the miraculous origin of Saint John the Forerunner, we read the following account in the opening pages of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke: "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. [Lk 1:5-14].

The Angel further promised that the soon-to-be-born son would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb [Lk 1:15], and that he would go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. [Lk 1:17]. Saint Zacharias,

stunned by the appearance of a Holy Angel and by the news that his wife would bear a son despite her advanced age, was somewhat incredulous. He answered with the words, *Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.* [Lk 1:18]. In other words, what you say seems impossible for a man and wife so old. The Holy Angel responded, *I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.* [Lk 1:19-20].

Saint Zacharias, staggered by his vision, came out of the inner Temple. Just as the Holy Angel Gabriel had said, the Saint could not speak. And, sometime later, his wife, Saint Elisabeth, who was a cousin of the Most Holy Theotokos, conceived. Nine months later, the promised son was born. Her friends and kinsfolk rejoiced at God's mercy, at the miracle that had allowed a woman well along in years to bear a child. When, eight days after his birth, the infant was to be circumcised, neighbors gathered together for the occasion. It was assumed by all that he would be given the name Zacharias, after his father, however Saint Elisabeth announced that he would be called John.

Saint Luke's Gospel relates, *And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.* [Lk 1:61-64]. Saint Zacharias sang a hymn of thanksgiving to God, saying about his new son, *And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.* [Lk 1:76-79]. The Gospel tells us that ... *the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.* [Lk 1:80].

We next read of the Saint, at the beginning of his prophetic ministry, that *the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.* [Lk 3:2-3] Saint Nicholas of Žiča writes that Saint John was of such moral purity that, in truth, he could be called an angel. [The Prologue of Ohrid, Vol I, p. 28] It is evident that from the time Saint John was of sufficient age to understand he chose the path of purification from all evil, which path leads to spiritual enlightenment of the things of God. Saint Matthew refers to his asceticism, noting that he *had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was shoots and wild honey* [Mt 3:4], which reminds us of those

rugged and God-loving men of later ages, the Desert Fathers. Thereby purified, his mission was to prepare the Judean people for the message that would be brought forth by Christ Jesus, who was soon to begin His own public ministry.

Saint John's preaching gained a significant following. Great throngs of people journeyed to the wilderness around the Jordan River to hear his words and to undergo his Baptism. The Saint spoke bluntly, as the Holy Prophets are wont to do, calling his listeners a *generation of vipers* [Lk 3:7], and warning them of God's wrath and the need to repent, that is, to turn completely away from sin: *Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* [Mt 3:2], was his relentless admonition. The people, much moved and impressed, suggested that perhaps Saint John was the Messiah, but the Saint rebuffed them, saying, *I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.* [Lk 3:16].

Let us turn for a moment to the subject of the Baptism of Saint John. Saint John's Baptism was a symbolic, or ritual, act of purification, signifying that the person immersed in the waters of the Jordan had chosen to repent and had committed himself to turn around his life towards God and away from sin. Thus, Saint Paul refers to Saint John's Baptism as the *baptism of repentance.* [Acts 19:4]. It was not the same as the Holy Mystery [*i.e.*, Sacrament] of Orthodox Christian Baptism, which, in addition to cleansing the person being baptized of all sin, mysteriologically infuses the Grace of God into that person, making him a member of the Church, an adopted child of the Almighty, and an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, it was that in the earliest days of the Church, those who had been baptized by Saint John were required nevertheless to receive the Holy Mystery of Christian baptism. [Acts 19:5].

At the very beginning of His public ministry, Christ Himself underwent Saint John's baptism, though He was sinless. He condescended to do so as an act of humility and as an example to the people of His concurrence with the preaching of Saint John. When Christ approached Saint John to be baptized, the Holy Forerunner first exclaimed, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* [Jn 1:29]. Holy Scripture explains that Saint John was at first reluctant to Baptize Christ saying that *I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?* [Mt 3:14]. His exclamation upon seeing Christ, and his words of hesitation at the notion that he should baptize Christ, tell us that the Saint, enlightened by his life of purity, knew exactly with Whom he was speaking. Yet, Christ Jesus insisted, and the Saint complied. Holy Scripture describes the event as follows: *Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* [Mt 3:16-17].

Saint John was as outspoken as the Holy Prophets of earlier centuries, since his mission was one of obedience to God to preach God's word, whatever the cost. Consequently, he was not the least hesitant to speak against Herod Antipas, the Roman-appointed Tetrarch (ruler or governor) of Galilee, when Herod took as his wife Herodias, the former wife of his half-brother, Philip (whom she had divorced), and the daughter of another of Herod's half-brothers, Aristobulus. Such a union was plainly incestuous, according to Mosaic Law. Since Herod was nominally of the Judean religion, his marriage to Herodias caused tremendous scandal, and so the Saint commenced preaching against this marriage publicly. Herod was enraged, and ordered the Saint seized. He would have liked to have had Saint John executed at once, but, aware of the Saint's popularity among the people, imprisoned him instead. The Tetrarch then made an unwise, indeed a reckless, oath.

Saint Matthew records: *But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger [a platter]. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.* [Mt 14:6-10]. So it was that the vengeful, vicious, and scheming Herodias brought an end to the life of the last of the Holy Prophets.

Saint John the Theologian writes of the Holy Forerunner in these words: *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.* [Jn 1:6-8].

He bore witness to the Light that is Christ, the first and unique witness of that Light. He was followed by countless witnesses, who witnessed for Christ by their words and deeds, many giving their lives for Christ's sake (the word "martyr" in Greek, "*mártys*," means witness).

We, all of us, are called upon to be witnesses to the Light. That is why we are Christians. To call oneself a Christian but to fail to witness for Christ is an exercise in futility, a waste of time, since the Church was not founded for purposes of entertainment, or to preserve certain ethnic cultures, or for any other secular purpose whatever. It was founded to teach each of us a particular way of life, a life in Christ, to teach it to each of us and to guide us in living it. Anything less than that is sheer emptiness, without spiritual content or meaning. Therefore, my beloved Children in Christ, be mindful of what it truly means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ. Learn from the Holy Scriptures and from other spiritual works what Christ asked of you when He brought you into His Church, what He asks of you now, and what His Way of Life requires. Then, assiduously follow that prescription for everlasting happiness with Him.

THE EIGHT DEADLY SINS AND THEIR SUBDIVISIONS

By St. Ignaty Bryanchaninov (+1867), from the on-line catalogue of the "Transfiguration of Our Lord" Russian Orthodox Church, Baltimore, MD -- USA.

1. Gluttony

Overeating, drunkenness, not keeping the fasts, eating in secret, over-indulgence, extreme love of one's body and bodily comforts, which leads to egoism and indifference to God, the Church and virtue.

2. Lust

Sexual desires in the heart and soul. The entertainment of impure thoughts, delight in them, acceptance of them. Sexual fantasies and enthrallment. Inappropriate physical contact. Foul language and the reading of sexually inflaming literature. Sins of natural sex (fornication and adultery) and unnatural (sodomy and bestiality).

3. Avarice

Love of money and material possessions. The desire to enrich oneself and thoughts of how to achieve it. Greed and cupidity. Lack of faith in God's Providence. Addiction to and unhealthy love for earthly possessions, which keep the soul in bondage. Love of gifts. Misappropriation. Usury. Hard-heartedness towards the needy. Theft. Piracy.

4. Wrath

Hot temper, angry and revengeful thoughts, irritability, seething of the heart and mind with rage; quarreling, indecent shouting, use of obscenities and cruel words, beating, pushing, murder. Malice, hate, enmity, revenge, slander, the passing of judgment on others, giving offense to others.

5. Despair

Chagrin, despondency, loss of faith in God, doubt of God, ungratefulness towards God for everything that happens in one's life, faint-heartedness, impatience, taking offense, grumbling, renunciation of one's cross, the attempt to give it up.

6. Idleness

Indolence towards all good deeds, especially prayer. Abandonment of church and home prayers. Abandonment of constant prayer and spiritual reading. Indifference to and hastiness in praying. Negligence. Impiety. Slothfulness. Excessive abandonment to sleep and other bodily comforts. Idle talk. Improper jokes. Sacrilege. Abandonment of spiritual labors. Forgetfulness of one's sins. Forgetfulness of Christ's commandments. Carelessness. Bitterness. Loss of the fear of God.

7. Vanity

Vainglory. Bragging. Desire and seeking after earthly and vain honors. Love of beautiful clothing and things. Excessive attention to the attractiveness of one's body. Shame in confessing one's sins. Deceitfulness. Self-justification. Contradiction. Hypocrisy. Lying. Flattery. Sycophancy. Envy. Humiliation of others. Moral relativism. Shamelessness. Demonic lifestyle.

8. Pride

Contempt for others. Self-preferment. Defiance. Clouding of the mind and heart. Exclusive reliance on earthly things. Blasphemy. Disbelief. False intellect. Disobedience of the law of God and the Church. Imposing of one's own will. Reading heretical, profane and vain books. Revolt against authority. Mockery. Abandonment of humility and silence. Loss of simplicity. Loss of love for God and one's neighbors. Death of the soul.

Such are the sins which constitute the great curse - the mortality of Adam, which sprang from his fall. The prophet Isaiah speaks of this great curse, saying: "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in him; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Isaiah 1:6). According to the holy fathers, this means that the curse - sin - is not local, i.e., striking only one bodily member, but affects the entire being; envelops the body, envelops the soul, takes possession of all the faculties of a person. God called this great curse - death, when He forbade Adam and Eve to taste of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, saying: "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Immediately upon eating the forbidden fruit the forefathers experienced eternal death; they felt an earthly sensation in their eyes; they saw that they were naked. The knowledge of the nakedness of their bodies reflected the nakedness of their souls, which had lost the beauty of chastity granted them by the Holy Spirit Himself. In their eyes there was this new physical sensation, while in their souls there was the feeling of shame, which comprised all their new sinful feelings: pride, uncleanness, sorrow, despondency, despair. Death becomes the great curse; irremediable is the mortality which came with the loss of the Divine image! The Apostle Paul calls this great curse the law of sin, the body of death (Romans 7:23-24), because the mortified mind and heart have turned completely towards the earth, slavishly serve the lowly desires of the flesh, have become dark and heavy, have themselves become flesh. This flesh is no longer able to communicate with God (Gen. 6:3). This flesh is unable to inherit eternal, heavenly bliss (1 Cor. 6:50). The great curse has spread upon all mankind, has become the ill-fated legacy of each and every person.

Looking upon this great curse of mine, I am filled with bitter sorrow! I ponder what to do. Shall I follow the example of ancient Adam, who, upon seeing his nakedness, hastens to hide himself from God? Shall I attempt to justify myself, as he did, throwing the blame upon sin? It is futile to hide from the All-seeing One! It is futile to justify oneself before the One Who always wins in judgment (Psalm 30:7)! Instead of fig leaves let me dress myself in tears of repentance; instead of justification let me bring to Him my sincere penitence. But, dressed in penitence and tears, can I present myself before my God?

O, sinful descendant of Adam, take heart! A great light has shone forth in your prison: God has descended into the land of your exile, in order to bring you up into the heavenly homeland which you had lost. You wished to have knowledge of good and evil. He allows you to retain this knowledge. You wished to become like God, and because of this your soul has become like the demons and your body like the animals; but God, joining you to Him, makes you godlike through grace. He forgives your sins. And that is not all! He extracts the root of evil from your soul, the very pestilence of sin, and grants you anodyne (*pain and distress "reliever"*) against sin for the entire course of your earthly life, no matter how many times you sin through your frailty. This anodyne is the confession of sins. Do you wish to take off the mortality of Adam? Do you wish to attain freedom from your enslavement to sin? Immerse yourself in humility! Overcome the shame of vanity, extract your sins, engage in battle with your sins by means of sincere confession. This anodyne must precede all others; without it the anodynes of prayer, tears, fasting and all other means will be insufficient, unsatisfactory, unstable. Go, proud one, to your spiritual father, find at his hands the charity of the Heavenly Father. Only sincere and frequent confession can free us of sinful habits, make our repentance fruitful, our correction lasting and sincere.



Without the Lord's assistance, we are unable to do anything good. Therefore, we need much humility to find repose for our souls. The evil one will never cease shooting at us with his flaming arrows and trying to overcome and dominate us. But we also have many deadly weapons. In particular, the prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me* literally burns him. This is why he tries to fight us in an indirect manner. But our Christ enlightens us with His holy commandments to fight him. The devil is using that person to fight you and make you transgress God's holy commandments, and in this way to harm not only you, but primarily to grieve and fight God through your transgressions. Whereas, on the contrary, if we struggle to keep the word of God persistently, we not only save our souls, but also we become the means by which God is glorified. *Those who glorify me shall I glorify* (1 Kings 2:30). Therefore, my child, struggle with love, patience, and humility to disable the traps of the devil with God's help. Perhaps through you, He will enlighten this person to repent. *Overcome evil with good.* (Rom 12:21).

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY & THE TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

From *"The Authentic Seal: Spiritual Instruction and Discourses,"* by Archimandrite Aimilianos, former Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras, Holy Mountain.

Introduction

A great deal is made nowadays of "the technological revolution," as seen from both sides, those in favor and those who are very much against. In the realm of Orthodox theology, however, is there really any essential difference between the age-old problem of technology and today's reality? We could, of course, talk about the last century with the industrial revolution and all its consequences: social, political, moral, religious and so on. When people speak of a new era in the history of mankind, of the third, technological revolution, are they not perhaps exaggerating the extent of the undoubted change in the conditions under which we live? Would it not be more realistic, instead of talking about a revolution, to recognize a process which began long before the industrial revolution and reached its culmination in the developments and consequences thereof?

The basic feature which is new, however, in modern technology, is that it has turned everything on its head. While in former times people attempted to use science to improve their dominion over nature, it has now infiltrated into the very innermost laws of nature, with results likely to prove positive but also with terrible and limitless opportunities for intervention in these laws themselves. And where might this inversion bring us? To the further extension of these opportunities or to voluntary restrictions to ensure the sovereignty, dignity and survival of nature?

For this reason, the problem is not, in essence, that of the relationship between Man and Nature, but rather that of our felicity in choosing among what might be infinite possibilities, so that we do not fall victim to the works of our hands. Why mention this? Because with justification we recall the words of Job: *She has hardened herself against her young, as though not bereaving herself, she has laboured in vain without fear.* (Job 39:16). In other words, our era acts with harshness and indifference towards its children, as if they were not its own. And its indiscriminate and foolhardy attitude reduces every attempt and effort to naught, and, in the end, misfires.

Finally, it is not our function to note the revolutionary changes, but rather to point out to our contemporaries the true purpose of technology and to propose Orthodox theological and moral criteria.

Let us now see when technology begins.

A. Anthropology and Technology

Adam in Paradise was *naked in simplicity and artless in life* (St. Gregory the Theologian, PG 36, 632C), unclad and without "art". His call, his essential occupation was contempla-

tion, gazing upon God, sought and found in supervision of the tree of knowledge. Which is why He made Man *a farmer of immortal plants* (ibid.), so that through agriculture in Eden, he would be constantly occupied with God.

Technology, therefore, makes its appearance after the Fall.

Adam's first-born son (Gen. 4:1-26), Cain, was a farmer; Abel was a shepherd; both of them, therefore, bound up with nature. The third son, Enoch, became a mason and a builder of cities. Of the other descendants, Jobel founded the nomadic way of life. His brother, Jubal was the inventor of stringed instruments with the psaltery and harp. Thobel was a smith, forging iron and copper.

Finally, the son of God-fearing Seth, Enos, loyal to the name of God, set up the first public congregation, thus instituting the worship of God, so that all these technologist descendants of Adam could find both a place and means of gazing upon God and could work wherever they went, until they achieved dominion over the earth.

Through the blessings of God and wearisome toil, the gradual appearance of technology from agriculture through to industrialization thus provides Man with the opportunity to retain his position as lord over nature, despite the ancestral Fall. Technology is occasioned by Man's powers of reason and is a way of compensating for his weakness, as against animals, which have sufficient strength to survive, as against the forces of nature, the necessities of life (Gregory of Nyssa, PG 44, 140D-144AB) and so on.

We might mention here that for the ancients and for Scripture, no distinction was made between art and artifacts (technology), which, if they corresponded to the needs of our nature, could hardly be foreign or hostile to "beauty." Art precedes mechanics, being of greater necessity, while technology developed, not to serve the highest concerns of Man, but with the aim of greater production and profit.

In the course of its development, then, if Man is to live as overlord, technology in general must remain discreetly within a certain logical framework. It should not be an end in itself, but rather a disposition, a means to an end, and a conduit into the innermost laws and elements, not only of the earth, but of that which is above the earth. Because, according to Gregory of Nyssa, people have *an upright bearing, stretch up towards heaven and look upwards. In the beginning, these things and their regal worth are noted.* (op. Cit., PG 44, 140D-144AB).

B. Control over Technology

The automation of the industrial age and, particularly, the information technology of the post-industrial age, together with the ecological crisis, pose a single question: Why should we be served by modern technology, which is a gluttonous idol of worship, a machine beyond our control? Why should the whole of our society be organized technologically, simply to feed the machine? A distinguished Russian hierarch (Filaret, Metropolitan of Minsk), for example, has revealed that

the entire production of the enormous iron mines was put to no other purpose than to make new mining equipment for the same mines!

It is natural that the rapid progress in nuclear physics and in genetics should open up new scientific horizons, but also create problems and dangers for the human race, so it is obvious that there is an imperative need for moral intervention in the field of technology. What is worrying is the absurd and "carefree" optimism of many scientists and political agencies. According to them, technological development contains within itself the solution to the problems which it causes, and hence it ought not to be trammelled, so that "technical solutions" to the various problems can arise. For example, who can exercise control in an ideological regime, when they are deliberately seeking to create a type of technological man? The saying of Saint Paul applies here: *Let us do evil, that good may come.* (Rom 3:8).

There are also those, on the other hand, who, using historical arguments and invoking our inability to predict the way in which inventions will evolve in the future, reject all moral intervention.

Technology per se is not, of course, harmful, being the fruit of the reasoning and intellect of Man, who was formed in the image of God. But when, unrestrained and unbridled, it rushes headlong towards its destination, then it becomes Luciferous, though not bearing light but rather pitch darkness. The danger for us is the absence of accountability in the way in which technology is administered and exploited, a way which has as its aim the stifling domination of human life and the solution of problems by technical means, regardless of moral and metaphysical principles.

Finally, however, let us hear the voice of our Orthodox Tradition.

C. The Position of the Church Regarding This Particular Problem

The Church of Christ retains in unadulterated form the Orthodox Tradition, a real, unique force, on which it draws from its life and experience, as well as from a never-failing spring of asceticism and the voice of its treasury of monastic tradition, which is always profound and vital.

Monastic tradition can give applicable criteria of behavior to the members of the Church as regards technology. The Church and monasticism are not hostilely disposed towards technological progress. On the contrary, monks over the centuries have proved to be powerful agents of scientific and technical invention.

In the Medieval West, the monks restored civilization, which had been destroyed in the barbarian invasions. The monasteries became focal points for the natural sciences, where mathematics, zoology, chemistry, medicine, and so on developed. The most important inventions of the monasteries formed the basis of industry. Likewise, through their reclamation of

large tracts of land, the monks created the opportunity for agricultural development.

So that there would be no need for monks to miss services, our own saint Athanasios the Athonite built, on the Holy Mountain, a mechanical kneading device, which was driven by bullocks. This instrument, says the Life of the saint, *was the best, both in terms of attractiveness and art of manufacture.* (Life of Blessed Athanasios on Athos, I, 179, Noret, p. 86, I, 46). The same was true throughout the lands where Orthodox monasteries were established.

The Orthodox monastery always lived as an eschatological reality and a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven, and was therefore also a model for an organized society with a way of life faithful to the Gospel, embracing human dignity, freedom and service to one's fellows.

Given this, the holy Fathers subjected technology in the monastery to two criteria, as Basil the Great characteristically remarks concerning work and the choice of technical applications.

(a) Restraint

With this criterion in mind, those technical applications are chosen which preserve "the peace and tranquility" of monastic life, so that both undue care and torturing effort are avoided. Let us have as our aim "moderation and simplicity." For Basil the Great, technology is *necessary in itself to life and provides many facilities* (PG 31, 1017B), provided the unity of the life of the brotherhood is preserved, undistracted and devoted to the Lord.

In general terms, our watchword should be: *Let the common aim be the meeting of a need.* (PG 31, 968B). And Saint Peter the Damascan adds: *For everything which does not serve a pressing need, becomes an obstacle to those who would be saved; everything, that is, which does not contribute to the salvation of the soul or to the life of the body.* (Philokalia, vol. III, p. 69, II. 32-34).

These principles are certainly not for monasteries alone. They could be guidelines for control over technology, unless we want to be exterminated.

(b) Spiritual Vigilance

The most dreadful enemy created by post-industrial culture, the culture of information technology and the image, is cunning distraction. Swamped by millions of images and a host of different situations on television and in the media in general, people lose their peace of mind, their self-control, their powers of contemplation and reflection and turn outwards, becoming strangers to themselves, in a word mindless, impervious to the dictates of their intelligence. If people, especially children, watch television for 35 hours a week, as they do according to statistics, then are not their minds and hearts threatened by Scylla and Charabdis, are they not between the devil and the deep blue sea? (Homer, Odyssey, XII, 85).

The majority of the faithful of the Church confess that they do not manage to pray, to concentrate and cast off the cares of the world and the storms of spirit and soul which are to the detriment of sobriety, inner balance, enjoyable work, family tranquility and a constructive social life. The world of the industrial image degenerates into real idolatry.

The teachings of the Fathers concerning spiritual vigilance arms people so that they can stave off the disastrous effects of the technological society. *For the weapons of our warfare... have divine power to destroy strongholds* (2 Cor. 10:4), according to the Apostle Paul. Spiritual vigilance is a protection for everyone *containing everything good in this age and the next* (cf. Hesychius the Elder, PG 93, 1481A) and *the road leading to the kingdom, that is and that of the future.* (Philotheos the Sinaite, Philokalia, vol. II, p. 275). Spiritual vigilance is not the prerogative only of those engaged actively in contemplation. It is for all those who are conscientiously *dealing with this world as though they had no dealings with it.* (1 Cor. 7:31).

In the industrial era, people became consumers and slaves to things produced. In post-industrial society, they are also becoming consumers and slaves to images and information, which fill their lives.

Restraint and spiritual vigilance are, for all those who come into the world, a weapon made ready from the experience of the monastic life and Orthodox Tradition in general, one which abolishes the servitude of humanity and preserves our health and sovereignty as children of God.



Dogma and theology are medicines. When we become well, we stop taking medicines. We take medicines when we are ill. Man is ill because he is not in a position to see God. He is not ready, because he does not have love. The fact that he does not have love means that he is ill.

When Holy Scripture says, *man is saved by faith alone* (Eph 2:8), it does not mean that he is saved merely by the faith of acceptance. There is, however, another kind of faith, the faith of the heart. It is referred to in this way because this kind of faith is not found in the human reason or intellect, but in the region of the heart. This faith of the heart is a gift of God that you will not receive unless God decides to grant it. It is also called *inner faith*, which is the kind of faith that the father of the young lunatic in the Gospel asked Christ to give him when he said, *Lord, help my unbelief.* (Mk 9:24).

Protopresbyter John S. Romanides

Ὁ Κόσμος τῆς Φθορᾶς καὶ ὁ Κόσμος τῆς Ἀφθαρσίας

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Βαθειὰ μελαγχολία αἰσθάνεται κανένας, βλέποντας μὲ πόση ἀγάπη καὶ μὲ τί ζῆλο καταγίνονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ χτίσουνε τὰ σπίτια τους καὶ τὰ ἐξοχικά τους, νὰ τὰ στολίσουνε ἀπ' ἔξω καὶ ἀπὸ μέσα, νὰ βάλουνε ἔμορφα ἐπιπλα, ἀκριβὰ χαλιά, βιβλιοθήκες, ἔργα τῆς τέχνης, πολυέλαια καὶ πολύφωτα, νὰ φυλάξουνε στὰ ντουλάπια τὰ καλὰ τὰ ροῦχα τους, τὰ δικά τους καὶ τῶν παιδιῶν τους, νὰ στολίσουνε τὶς κάμαρες μ' ἕνα σωρὸ ἀγαπημένα πράγματα, ποὺ τὰ ξεσκονίζουμε μὲ προσοχὴ μὴν τύχει καὶ πάθουνε τίποτα, νὰ περιποιηθοῦνε τοὺς κήπους τους, μ' ἕναν λόγο νὰ εἶναι ἀφοσιωμένοι, οἱ καημένοι, μ' ὅλη τὴν ψυχὴ τους στὸ νὰ κάνουνε τὴν κατοικία τους εὐχάριστη, γιὰ νὰ περάσουνε καλὴ ζωὴ μὲ τὴν οἰκογένειά τους καὶ μὲ τοὺς φίλους τους.

Σὰν καθήσουνε στὸ τραπέζι μὲ τὰ καλὰ τὰ φαγητὰ καὶ μὲ τὰ πιοτὰ, λάμπουνε τὰ πρόσωπά τους, τὰ στόματά τους δὲν σωπαίνουνε ἀπὸ τὴ χαρὰ ποὺ νοιώθουνε, καὶ σὰν ἀποφᾶνε, πιάνουνε τὰ τραγούδια καὶ τὰ ἀστεῖα. Πολλοὶ παίζουνε χαρτιὰ ὅλη τὴ νύχτα, καὶ τὸ πρῶν εἶναι σὰν ἄρρωστοι. Ἄλλοι ἔχουνε μανία μὲ τὶς πίπες, ἄλλοι μὲ τ' αὐτοκίνητα, ἄλλοι μὲ τὸ ψάρεμα, ἄλλοι μὲ τὸ κυνήγι, ἄλλοι μὲ τὰ θέατρα, ἄλλοι μὲ τὰ ἀθλητικὰ καὶ ἄλλοι μὲ ἄλλα.

Στὴ συνοικία ποὺ κάθουμαι, τὸ κάθε σπίτι ἔχει καὶ ἕναν κήπο, μικρὸν ἢ μεγαλύτερον. Καμμιά φορὰ κἀνω ἕναν μικρὸν περίπατο καὶ ἐκεῖ ποὺ σιγοπερπατῶ, κυττάζω τὰ διάφορα σπίτια. Τὸ καθένα ἔχει τὴ φυσιογνωμία του. Τὰ περισσότερα εἶναι περιποιημένα, βαμμένα μὲ ἔμορφα χρώματα, μὲ καλοκαμωμένες πόρτες καὶ παράθυρα, μὲ ἀερικὲς βεράντες, καὶ ἂν εἶναι κανένα παράθυρο ἀνοιχτό, βλέπεις ἀπὸ μέσα, σὲ κάποια ἀπ' αὐτὰ, κανένα συμπαθητικὸ ἐπιπλο, καμμιά παλιὰ βιβλιοθήκη, δύο τρία κἀντρα καλὰ, ποὺ ἀνάμεσά τους βρίσκεται καὶ καμμιά προσωπογραφία. Κι ἀπ' ὅλα τοῦτα νοιώθεις πὼς ἐκεῖ μέσα ὑπάρχει οἰκογενειακὴ ἱστορία, πὼς περάσανε κάποιοι ἄνθρωποι ποὺ δὲν ζοῦνε, αὐτοὶ ποὺ φτιάξανε ἐκείνη τὴ ζεστὴ φωλιὰ μὲ τὰ καθέκαστά της, ποὺ τ' ἀγαπήσανε πολὺ, μὰ ποὺ μ' ὅλη τὴν ἀγάπη τους καὶ τὴν εὐτυχία ποὺ τοὺς δίνανε, ἤρθε μίαν μέρα ποὺ τ' ἀφήσανε καὶ φύγανε βιαστικά, δίχως νὰ κυττάξουνε πίσω τους.

Σὰν ἀρχίζει ἡ ἀνοιξὴ ξώλαμπρα καὶ ἡ καρδιά μας καταλαβαίνει πὶδ γλυκὰ τὴ ζωὴ, στέκουμαι γιὰ μίαν στιγμὴ κοντὰ στὸν τοῖχο τοῦ κήπου κανενὸς σπιτιοῦ, ποὺ ἔχει πολλὰ λουλούδια ποὺ μοσχοβολᾶνε. Ἄν εἶναι Κυριακὴ ἢ γιορτὴ, ὁ σπιτονοικοκύρης σκάβει, κλαδεύει, ποτίζει, περιποιεῖται τὰ λουλούδια, ἀφωσιωμένος στὴ δουλειὰ του, εὐτυχισμένος. Πολλὲς φορὲς τὸν βοηθᾶ ἡ γυναίκα του, ὁ γυιὸς του ἢ ἡ κόρη του. Βλέπεις καὶ

χαίρεσαι τὴν εἰρηνικὴ ζωὴ ἐκείνων τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀπὸ μέσα σου παρακαλεῖς τὸν Θεὸ νὰ τοὺς ἀφήσει νὰ τὴ χαροῦνε.

Μὰ, τὴν ἴδια στιγμὴ, ἔρχεται στὸν νοῦ σου ἡ σκέψη πὼς ὅλα αὐτὰ στέκονται στὸν ἀγέρα, καὶ φτάνει ἕνα φύσημα γιὰ νὰ ἐξαφανισθοῦνε ὅλα καὶ τ' ἀναπαυτικὰ σπίτια καὶ οἱ ὠραῖοι κήποι καὶ οἱ χαρούμενες συναναστροφές καὶ τὰ πλούτη, μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ τάχουνε. Μία μαύρη ἀντάρρα σκεπάζει τὴν καρδιά μου, ἡ σκέψη τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ τοῦ θανάτου, καὶ θολώνει τὰ μάτια μου καὶ μὲ δακρυσμένα μάτια κυττάζω ἀνάμεσα ἀπὸ τὰ λουλούδια τοῦ μαντρότοιχου ἐκείνους τοὺς εὐτυχισμένους ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ εἶναι ἀφωσιωμένοι στὴν εὐτυχία τους, ἀνύποπτοι ἀπ' ὅ,τι συλλογίζουμαι καὶ ἀπ' ὅ,τι γίνεται γύρω τους. Μπορεῖ νὰ περάσω ἀπὸ δῶ ὕστερ' ἀπὸ λίγες μέρες καὶ νὰ δῶ κολλημένο δίπλα στὴν πόρτα ἐκεῖνο τὸ χαρτὶ μὲ τὴ μαύρη κορνίζα.

Λοιπὸν, πὼς νὰ μὴν ἀναστενάξεις, πὼς νὰ ψευτογελάσεις τὸν ἑαυτό σου, ἀφοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὅλα ὅσα κάνει καὶ ὅσα ἀγαπᾶ σὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον εἶναι κρεμασμένα ἀπάνω σ' ἕνα ἀνεμοδαρμένο καλάμι μὲ μία τριχὰ τῆς ἀράχνης; Ἀλλοίμονο! Δὲν ὑπάρχει τίποτα σίγουρο σὲ τοῦτον τὸν ψεύτικο τὸν κόσμον! Καλὰ τὰ εἶπαν ὅλα ἴσκιους, ὄνειρα, φαντασίες, ξεγελάσματα. Τὴ ματαιότητά τους τὴν παρᾶστησε καλὰ ὁ προφήτης Δαυὶδ καὶ πιδ καλὰ ἀκόμα ὁ γυιὸς του ὁ Σολομώντας. «Ἐγὼ, λέγει, ἔγινα βασιλιάς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἔδωσα τὴν καρδιά μου στὸ νὰ ἐρευνήσω καὶ νὰ ἐξετάσω μὲ σοφία ὅλα ὅσα γίνονται κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ. Γιατί ὁ Θεὸς ἔδωσε μίαν πικρὴ συλλογὴ ποὺ τρώγει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Εἶδα λοιπὸν ὅλα τὰ χτίσματα ποὺ ἔγιναν κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν ἥλιο καὶ νά, ὅλα ἦτανε ματαιότητα καὶ πόθος τῆς ψυχῆς... Κι ἐγὼ ἔχτισα παλάτια, φύτεψα ἀμπέλια, ἔκανα κήπους καὶ περιβόλια καὶ ἔβαλα μέσα κάθε λογῆς δέντρο. Ἔκανα βρούσες, συντριβάνια, ἀπόκτησα ὑπηρέτες καὶ ὑπηρέτριες καὶ κοπάδια ζῶα τόσα πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα, ποὺ δὲν τὰ εἶχε κανένας ἄνθρωπος πρὶν ἀπὸ μένα. Μάζεψα χρυσάφι καὶ ἀσήμι, πλοῦτη πολλῶν βασιλιάδων. Εἶχα τραγουδιστάδες καὶ τραγουδίστριες ποὺ εὐφραίνονε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, κεραστὲς καὶ κεράστριες ποὺ κερνούσανε τὰ πιοτὰ. Ἔγινα μέγας βασιλιάς καὶ μεγάλωσα παραπάνω ἀπ' ὅσους σταθήκανε πρὶν ἀπὸ μένα στὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ ἀπόκτησα καὶ σοφία. Κι ὅ,τι ζητήσανε τὰ μάτια μου δὲν τοὺς τὸ στέρησα καὶ τὴν καρδιά μου δὲν τὴν μπόδισα ἀπὸ καμμιά εὐχαρίστηση καὶ ἀπολαψή. Καὶ γύρισα καὶ κύτταξα ἐγὼ ἀπάνω σὲ ὅλα ὅσα ἔκανα καὶ νά, ὅλα ἦτανε ματαιότητα».

Ναί. Ὅλα χάνονται, ὅλα τρίβονται, ὅλα γίνονται σκόνη. Ὅλα τὰ καταπίνει ὁ θάνατος. Τίποτα δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ γλυτώσει ἀπὸ τὰ δόντια αὐτῆς τῆς ρόδας ποὺ γυρίζει βουβὰ καὶ ἀλέθει τὰ πάντα.

Καλὰ γιὰ τοῦτα τὰ σπίτια καὶ γιὰ τὰ χειροπιαστὰ ὑπάρχοντά μας, ποὺ χάνονται καὶ σβήνουνε σ' ἓνα ἀνοιγοκλείσιμο τοῦ ματιοῦ. Μὰ σάμπως ἀντέχουνε περισσότερο στὸ φύσημα τοῦ θανάτου τὰ λεγόμενα πνευματικὰ ἔργα μας, ποὺ θέλουμε νὰ βροῦμε σ' αὐτὰ ἀποκοῦμι καὶ παρηγοριά, ἀπελπισμένοι ἀπὸ τὰ ἄλλα, τὰ ὑλικά, τὰ χειροπιαστά; Ὡστόσο, καμμία διαφορὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀνάμεσα σὲ τοῦτα καὶ σὲ κείνα! Τὰ πάντα ματαιότης! Τίποτα δὲν θὰ γλυτώσει ἀπὸ τὴν καταβόθρα. Μῆτε οἱ φιλοσοφίες, μῆτε τὰ ποιήματα, μῆτε τὰ σοφὰ βιβλία, μῆτε τὰ θαυμαστὰ χτίρια, μῆτε τὰ ἐξαισία ἀγάλματα, μῆτε οἱ λαμπρὲς ζωγραφιές, ὅλα τοῦτα ποὺ τὰ λέμε ἀθάνατα, μῆτε οἱ ἐξουσίες κι οἱ ἄρχοντες, μῆτε ἡ δόξα καὶ τὰ φημισμένα ὀνόματα, ποὺ θαρροῦνε ὅσοι τ' ἀποχτήσανε πὼς γινήκανε ἀθάνατοι, πὼς γλυτώσανε ἀπὸ τὴν ἐξαφάνιση! Ξεγελάσματα καὶ ψευτοπαρηγοριές. Μέσα στὴν καταβόθρα ποὺ τὰ ρουφᾶ ὅλα, θὰ χαθοῦνε μία μέρα κι οἱ Μεγάλοι Ἀλέξανδροι κι οἱ Ὀμηροὶ κι οἱ Αἰσχύλοι κι οἱ Εὐριπίδηδες κι οἱ Φειδίεες κι οἱ Πολύκλειτοι καὶ μαζί τους θὰ ἐξαφανιστοῦνε κι οἱ Παρθενῶνες κι οἱ ἁγίες Σοφίεες κι οἱ Ἰλιάδες κι οἱ Ὀδύσειεες, μ' ἓναν λόγο ὅ,τι βρίσκεται στὸν κόσμον καὶ στὴ θύμησιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἄβυσσο βουβὴ κι ἄσπλαχνη θὰ τὰ καταπιεῖ καὶ μὴν περιμένεις καμμία παρηγοριά. Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι πασιζίζουμε νὰ σώσουμε κάτι ἀπὸ τὴ φοβερὴ καταδίκη, γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἔχουμε γιὰ παρηγοριά, ὅπως κάνουμε μὲ τὰ λεγόμενα μεγάλα ἔργα τῆς τέχνης μας, καὶ τὰ λέμε, οἱ δυστυχεῖς, ἀθάνατα, γιὰ τὴ διατηροῦμε στὴν ὑπαρξιν ἢ στὴ μνήμην μας χίλια εἴτε δύο χιλιάδες χρόνια, ποὺ εἶναι σὰν τίς λίγες μέρες ποὺ παίρνει χάρη ὁ κατάδικος, ὡς ποὺ νὰ ἔρθει ἡ ὥρα του.

Ὁ κακόμοιρος ὁ ἄνθρωπος φράζει τὰ μάτια του γιὰ νὰ μὴ δεῖ τί τὸν περιμένει. Δὲν ὑπάρχει πιὸ θλιβερὸ πρᾶγμα ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατον ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ποὺ τὸν θεωροῦνε μεγάλον καὶ ἀπέθαντον καὶ τοῦ ψέλνουνε «Αἰωνία ἢ μνήμη!». Αὐτὸ τὸ «Αἰωνία ἢ μνήμη» τὸ ἀκοῦμε σὰν νὰ λέγει: «Αἰωνία ἢ λήθη καὶ ἢ ἐξαφάνισις».

Βλέποντας λοιπὸν πρῶτα τὸν ἑαυτὸ μου κι ὕστερα τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, νὰ καταγινόμαστε ὅλοι μὲ πρόσκαιρα καὶ ψεύτικα πρᾶγματα καὶ μάλιστα μὲ τέτοιο ζῆλον σὰν νὰ ἔχουμε νὰ ζήσουμε αἰώνια, κάθουμαι καὶ συλλογίζομαι: Ἄραγε, μοναχὰ αὐτὰ τὰ ψεύτικα καὶ τὰ πρόσκαιρα πρᾶγματα ὑπάρχουνε στὸν κόσμον ἢ ὑπάρχουνε καὶ κάποια ἀληθινὰ καὶ σίγουρα; Τόση ἀγάπη, τόση ἀφοσίωση νὰ δίνεται ἀπὸ τὸν κακόμοιρον τὸν ἄνθρωπον σὲ κάποια πρᾶγματα ποὺ εἶναι ἔτοιμα νὰ χαθοῦνε σὲ κάθε στιγμὴ, δὲν εἶναι κρῖμα; Ἄν ἤξερε λοιπὸν πὼς ὑπάρχουνε καὶ κάποια ἀληθινὰ καὶ σίγουρα πρᾶγματα, πόση θὰ ἦταν ἢ εὐτυχία του καὶ τότε ἢ ἀγάπη του σὲ κείνα τὰ ἀληθινὰ δὲν θάτανε ἀκόμα πιὸ μεγάλη;

Ναί, ἀλλὰ οἱ πολλοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι δὲν πιστεύουνε πὼς ὑπάρχουνε ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τοῦτα τὰ προσωρινὰ, κάποια ποὺ βρίσκονται σὲ ἓναν ἄλλον ἀληθινὸν κόσμον, ποὺ τὸν νομίζουμε γιὰ ψεύτικον οἱ δυστυχησμένοι ποὺ εἶναι γαντζωμένοι στοὺς ἴσκιους, γιὰ τὸν δὲν πιστεύουνε πὼς ὑπάρχει κάτι ποὺ εἶναι πιὸ σίγουρον ἀπὸ τοὺς ἴσκιους.

Ὡ! Πόσο ἀξιολύπητοι εἶναι οἱ τέτοιοι ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ δίνουνε ὅλη τὴ φροντίδα τους στὸ τίποτα! Αὐτοὶ εἶναι «οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα», ποὺ λέγει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, καὶ ποὺ δὲν τὸν πιστέψανε, ἀκούγοντάς τον νὰ λέγει: «Ὁὐκ ἔχομεν ὧδε μένουσαν πόλιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐπιζητοῦμεν», «Δὲν ἔχομε, ἐδῶ, σὲ τούτη τὴ ζωὴ, πολιτεία ποὺ νὰ μείνει, νὰ βαστάξει ἐπὶ πολὺν καιρὸ, ἀλλὰ ζητοῦμε ἐκεῖνη ποὺ βρίσκεται στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ». Δὲν ὑπάρχουνε ἐδῶ, σὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον, μῆτε πολιτείες, μῆτε παλάτια, μῆτε ἄλλα χτίρια, μῆτε χτήματα, μῆτε παπῶρια, μῆτε πλοῦτη, μῆτε τίποτα, ποὺ νὰ μὴν εἶναι πρόσκαιρον, ἔτοιμον νὰ χαθεῖ σὲ μία στιγμὴ. Ὑπάρχει ὅμως ἓνας ἄλλος κόσμος ποὺ ὅλα σ' αὐτὸν εἶναι ἀληθινὰ, σίγουρα, αἰώνια, γιὰ τὸν ἀντέχουνε στὴ φθορὰ, ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖ δὲν ὑπάρχει μῆτε καιρὸς, μῆτε ἡ κόρη του ἢ φθορὰ, ἀλλὰ ὅλα ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἄφθαρτα, ἀκατάλυτα, αἰώνια, παντοτινὰ καινούρια, παντοτινὰ νέα.

Καὶ ποῖα εἶναι αὐτὰ; Εἶναι ἐκεῖνα ποὺ «μάτι δὲν τὰ εἶδε κι αὐτὶ δὲν τὰ ἄκουσε καὶ ποὺ δὲν τὰ ἔνοιωσε ἢ καρδιὰ κανενὸς ἀνθρώπου, ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἔτοιμασε ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ πιστέψανε στὰ λόγια του καὶ τὸν ἀγαπήσανε». Αὐτοὶ δὲν καταγίνονται μὲ «μάταια καὶ ψευδῆ», μὲ ἴσκιους καὶ μὲ ξεγελάσματα, ἀλλὰ χιτίζουνε ἀπὸ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον σὲ κείνον τὸν ἄλλον ἄλλος σπῆτι, ἄλλος παλάτι, ἄλλος πολιτεία, ἄλλος φυτεῦει ἀμπέλι, ἄλλος περιβόλι, ἄλλος κῆπο, ποὺ δὲν χάνεται ποτέ. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι «οἱ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα», γιὰ τοῦτο ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος τὴ λέγει «μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα», ἐπειδὴ, ἀληθινὰ, ὅποιος τὴν ἔχει αὐτὴν τὴν ἐλπίδα, εἶναι μακάριος. Αὐτὸς πατεῖ ἀπάνω στὴ στερεὴ πέτρα ποὺ δὲν θὰ σαλευθεῖ στὸν αἰῶνα.

Ὡστόσο, ὅσοι καταγίνονται μοναχὰ μὲ τὰ πρόσκαιρα τούτης τῆς ζωῆς καὶ δὲν πιστεύουνε στὰ αἰώνια τῆς ἄλλης τῆς ζωῆς, σὰν πεθάνει κανένας Χριστιανὸς ποὺ δὲν ἔδωσε πολλὴ σημασία σ' ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἀφωσιωθήκανε αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄπιστοι, ἀλλὰ προσπάθησε ν' ἀποχτήσῃ τὰ ἀληθινὰ καὶ τὰ σίγουρα, ζώντας μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα τους, σὰν ἀποθάνει λοιπὸν ἓνας τέτοιος ἄνθρωπος, τὸν περιπαίζουμε καὶ λένε πὼς δὲν χάρηκε τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον, ἐπειδὴ εἶχε γυρισμένα τὰ μάτια του στὸν ἄλλον, ποὺ εἶναι ἀνύπαρχτος γιὰ ἐκείνους ὅπου τὸν περιπαίζουμε. Μὰ πολλὲς φορὲς ὁ Χριστιανὸς ποὺ πέθανε μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀγιάζει καὶ φανερῶνεται στοὺς ἄπιστους, ἢ στ' ὄνειρό τους ἢ στὸν ξύπνον τους, ἐρχόμενος ἀπὸ τὸν ἄλλον κόσμον καὶ τότε καταλαβαίνουνε οἱ ἐξυπνοὶ πὼς ἢ ἐξυπνάδα τους ἦταν ἀνοησία καὶ πὼς ὁ περιγελασμένος

ἤξερε καλὰ ποῦ βρίσκεται ἡ ἀλήθεια. Σ' αὐτὰ ἀπάνω, λέγει ὁ Σολομώντας τὰ παρακάτω λόγια:

«Τότε θὰ σταθεῖ ὁ δίκαιος μὲ πολλὴ παρησία μπροστὰ σ' ἐκείνους ποὺ τὸν πικράνανε καὶ ποὺ λέγανε πὼς κοπίαζε μάταια. Σὰν τὸν δοῦνε, θὰ ταραχοῦνε καὶ θὰ φοβηθοῦνε πολὺ καὶ θ' ἀπορήσουνε πὼς γλύτωσε. Τότε θὰ ποῦνε στὸν ἑαυτό τους, μετανοιῶνοντας κι ἀναστενάζοντας: Τοῦτος δὲν ἦτανε ποὺ κάποτε τὸν εἶχαμε γιὰ νὰ γελοῦμε καὶ ποὺ τὸν περιπαίζαμε ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄμναλοι; Τὴ ζωὴ του τὴ θεωρήσαμε γιὰ τρέλλα καὶ τὸ τέλος του γιὰ ἄτιμο; Πὼς λοιπὸν λογαριάσθηκε ἀνάμεσα στὰ τέκνα τοῦ Θεοῦ κι ἡ κληρονομία του μὲ τοὺς ἀγίους; Ὡστε πλανηθήκαμε ἀπὸ τὸ δρόμο τῆς ἀλήθειας καὶ τὸ φῶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης δὲν ἔλαμψε ἀπάνω μας κι ὁ ἥλιος δὲν ἀνατειλε γιὰ μᾶς. Γεμίσαμε ἁμαρτίες, περπατήσαμε στοὺς δρόμους τοῦ χαμοῦ καὶ πορευθήκαμε σὲ ἐρημιὲς ἀπάτητες, ἀλλὰ τὸν δρόμο τοῦ Κυρίου δὲν τὸν γνωρίσαμε. Σὲ τί μᾶς ὠφέλησε ἡ περηφάνεια; Καὶ τί κερδίσαμε ἀπὸ τὰ πλούτη κι ἀπὸ τὴν ἀλαζονεία μας; Ὅλα ἐκεῖνα περάσανε σὰν ἴσκιος καὶ σὰν τὴ φωνὴ ποὺ σβήνει καὶ χάνεται. Σὰν τὸ καρᾶβι ποὺ σκίζει τὸ κυματιστὸ νερὸ καὶ ποὺ σὰν περάσει, δὲν μπορεῖ κανένας νὰ βρεῖ κανένα σημάδι του, μήτε τὸ αὐλάκι τῆς καρίνας του μέσα στὰ κύματα. Ἦ σὰν τὸ ὄρνιο ποὺ πετᾶ στὸν ἀγέρα καὶ δὲν ἀφήνει πίσω του κανένα σημάδι ἀπὸ τὸ πέρασμά του, παρὰ χτυπᾶ δυνατὰ τὸν ἀγέρα μὲ τὶς φτεροῦγες του καὶ τὸν σκίζει μὲ βουητὸ καὶ πίσω του δὲν φαίνεται κανένα χνάρι ἀπὸ τὸ πέρασμά του. Ἔτσι κι ἐμεῖς, γεννηθήκαμε καὶ σβήσαμε καὶ κανένα σημάδι ἀπὸ καλὴ πράξη δὲν εἶχαμε νὰ δεῖξουμε, ἀλλὰ ξοδέψαμε τὴ ζωὴ μας μέσα στὴν κακία μας. Γιατί ἡ ἐλπίδα ποὺ ἔχει ὁ ἀσεβῆς εἶναι σὰν τὸ χνούδι ποὺ τὸ παίρνει ὁ ἄνεμος καὶ σὰν τὴν πάχνη ποὺ τὴ σκορπᾶ ἡ ἀνεμοζάλη».

Ἀλλὰ μ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ποὺ μᾶς λέγει ἡ Ἁγία Γραφὴ γιὰ τὴ ματαιότητα τούτης τῆς ζωῆς, ἐμεῖς δὲν τὰ πιστεύουμε, καὶ πᾶμε, ἀληθινά, σὰν τοὺς στραβοὺς στὸν Ἄδη. Ἄς φωνάζει ἡ πονετικιὰ φωνὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποὺ ἀκούγεται ἀπὸ τὴ μία ἄκρη τοῦ κόσμου ὡς τὴν ἄλλη: «Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει, καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορῦσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν. Θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ, ὅπου οὔτε σὴς οὔτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει, καὶ ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορῦσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν. Ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρός σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδιά σου.» (Ματθ. 6:19-21). «Ὅπου, λέγει, βρίσκεται ὁ θησαυρός σας, δηλαδὴ τὰ πράγματα ποὺ εἶναι γιὰ σᾶς πολῦτιμα καὶ τ' ἀγαπᾶτε, ἐκεῖ θὰ βρίσκεται κι ἡ καρδιά σας».

Πιὸ καθαρὰ καὶ πιὸ ἀπλὰ δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ παρασταθῇ ἡ ματαιότητα τούτου τοῦ κόσμου, ἀπ' ὅσο τὴν παρέστησε ὁ Κύριος μὲ τὴν παραβολὴ τοῦ πλούσιου ποὺ καρπίσανε τὰ χτήματά του καὶ ποὺ ἔλεγε στὸν ἑαυτό του: «Ψυχὴ

μου, ἔχεις πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ γιὰ πολλὰ χρόνια, ἀναπαύου, φάγε, πιές, εὐφραίνου». Μὰ μία νύχτα, ἀναπάντεχα, τοῦ εἶπε ὁ Θεός, ποὺ δὲν τὸν λογαρίαζε ὀλότελα ὁ πλούσιος: «Αὐτὴ τὴ νύχτα ζητοῦνε τὴν ψυχὴ σου ἀπὸ σένα. Κι ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἐτοίμασες, ποιὸς θὰ τὰ χαρεῖ;». Καὶ λέγει ἔπειτα ὁ Κύριος: «Αὐτὰ θὰ πάθει ὅποιος θησαυρίζει γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του σὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον, καὶ δὲν φροντίζει ν' ἀποχτήσει τὸν ἄφθαρτο πλοῦτο τοῦ Θεοῦ», δηλαδὴ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ πίστη σὲ ὅσα λέγει ὁ Κύριος.

Κι ἀκόμα πιὸ ζωηρὰ καὶ καταλεπτῶς μίλησε ὁ Χριστὸς μὲ τὴν παραβολὴ τοῦ πλούσιου καὶ τοῦ φτωχοῦ Λαζάρου. Ἐνας πλούσιος, εἶπε, ντυνότανε μ' ἀκριβὰ καὶ μὲ λαμπρὰ φορέματα καὶ διασκέδαζε κάθε μέρα. Ἦτανε κι ἕνας φτωχὸς λεγόμενος Λάζαρος, ποὺ κειτότανε πεταγμένος κοντὰ στὴν πόρτα τ' ἀρχοντικοῦ, πληγιασμένος καὶ πολεμοῦσε νὰ χορτάσει ἀπὸ τὰ ψίχουλα ποὺ πέφτανε ἀπὸ τὸ τραπέζι τοῦ πλουσίου. Ὅπως βλέπεις, τὸν πλούσιο δὲν τὸν λέγει ὁ Κύριος μὲ τ' ὄνομά του, ἀλλὰ λέγει «ἕνας πλούσιος», ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς ὁμοίους του, ἐνῶ τὸ φτωχὸ τὸν τιμᾶ καὶ τὸν λέγει μὲ τ' ὄνομά του, καὶ τ' ὄνομά του εἶναι Λάζαρος, δηλαδὴ τ' ὄνομα τ' ἀγαπημένου φίλου του ποὺ τὸν ἀνάστησε ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκροὺς, γιὰ νὰ δεῖξει τὴν ἰδιαίτερη ἀγάπη του σ' αὐτόν.

Καὶ δὲν ἔφθανε πὼς ἦτανε πεινασμένος ὁ δυστυχισμένος ὁ Λάζαρος, ἀλλὰ εἶχε καὶ τοὺς σκύλους ποὺ γλείφανε τὶς πληγές του.

Τὸ λοιπὸν, πέθανε ὁ φτωχὸς ὁ Λάζαρος καὶ τὸν πήγανε οἱ ἄγγελοι στὴν ἀγκάλη τοῦ πατριάρχη Ἀβραάμ. Πέθανε κι ὁ πλούσιος καὶ θάφτηκε. (Ὁ Κύριος λέγει ἀπότομα καὶ μ' ἕναν λόγο πὼς θάφτηκε καὶ τοῦτο, γιατί ἦτανε ἄνθρωπος σαρκικὸς κι ἡ σάρκα θάβεται). Καὶ κεῖ ποὺ βρισκότανε στὸν Ἄδη καὶ βασανιζότανε, σήκωσε τὰ μάτια του καὶ βλέπει ἀπὸ μακρὰ τὸν Ἀβραάμ καὶ τὸν Λάζαρο στὴν ἀγκάλη του. Καὶ τότε φώναξε: «Πάτερ Ἀβραάμ, ἐλέησέ με καὶ στείλε τὸν Λάζαρο νὰ βουτήξει τὸ δάχτυλό του στὸ νερὸ καὶ νὰ δροσίσει τὴ γλώσσα μου, γιατί βασανίζομαι σὲ τούτῃ τὴ φλόγα». Τοῦ ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Ἀβραάμ: «Τέκνο μου, θυμήσου πὼς ἐσὺ ἀπόλαιψες τὰ καλὰ στὴ ζωὴ σου κι ὁ Λάζαρος τὰ κακά. Τώρα, τοῦτος παρηγοριέται κι ἐσὺ βασανίζεσαι. Ἀλλὰ, παρεκτὸς ἀπ' αὐτό, ἀνάμεσα σ' ἐμᾶς καὶ σ' ἐσᾶς ὑπάρχει ἕνα μεγάλο χάσμα κι ἔτσι ὅσοι θέλουνε νὰ ἔρθουνε ἀπὸ δῶ σὲ σᾶς δὲ μποροῦνε, μήτε ὅσοι θέλουνε νὰ περάσουνε ἀπὸ κεῖ σὲ μᾶς δὲν εἶναι μπορετὸ νὰ τὸ κάνουνε». Τότε εἶπε ὁ πλούσιος: «Σὲ παρακαλῶ, νὰ στείλεις τὸν Λάζαρο στὸ σπῆτι τοῦ πατέρα μου, ἐπειδὴ ἔχω πέντ' ἀδέρφια, νὰ τοὺς πεί τί τραβῶ ἐδῶ χάμω, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἔρθουνε καὶ κείνοι σὲ τοῦτον τὸν τόπο μὲ τὰ βασανιστήρια». Τοῦ λέγει ὁ Ἀβραάμ: «Ἔχουνε τὸν Μωϋσῆ καὶ τοὺς προφήτες. Ἄς ἀκούσουνε τί λένε». «Ὅχι, πάτερ Ἀβραάμ, μὰ ἂν κανένας ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκροὺς

παρουσιασθεῖ σ' αὐτούς, θὰ μετανοήσουνε». Τότε ὁ Ἀβραὰμ τοῦ εἶπε: «Ἄν δὲν ἀκοῦνε τί λένε ὁ Μωϋσῆς κι οἱ προφῆτες, μήτε ἂν ἀναστηθεῖ κανένας ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκρούς, θὰ πιστέψουνε».

Πόσο καθαρά, μὲ πόση ἀπλότητα μιλά τὸ γλυκύτατο στόμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας, ὥστε νὰ τὸν καταλαβαίνει ὁ κάθε ἄνθρωπος! Καὶ εἶδες πὼς στὸ τέλος λέγει ὁ δίκαιος Ἀβραὰμ στὸν πλούσιο πῶς: «Ἄφοῦ τ' ἀδέρφια σου δὲν πιστεύουνε σὲ ὅσα εἶπανε ὁ Μωϋσῆς κι οἱ προφῆτες, μήτε κι ἂν σηκωθεῖ κανένας πεθαμένος καὶ τοὺς πεί για ἄλλη ζωὴ καὶ για κόλαση καὶ για παράδεισο, μήτε τότε θὰ πιστέψουνε». Ὁ Κύριος ὁ παντογνώστης ἤξερε καλὰ τί σκληρὸ πρᾶγμα εἶναι ἡ ἀπιστία καὶ πὼς ἀπ' αὐτὴ χάνονται οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Για τοῦτο, τότε ποὺ μίλησε στοὺς Ἀποστόλους πρὶν ν' ἀναληφθεῖ, στέλνοντάς τους νὰ κηρύξουνε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, εἶπε: «Ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται». Ὅποιος πιστεύει στὸν Θεὸ καὶ στὰ λόγια του, θὰ σωθεῖ, γιατί θὰ κάνει αὐτὰ ποὺ παραγγέλλει ὁ Κύριος, ἐνῶ ὅποιος ἀπιστήσῃ, θὰ κατακριθεῖ, θὰ κολασθεῖ, γιατί, ἀφοῦ δὲν πιστεύει, θὰ κάνει ὅ,τι εὐχαριστᾷ τὸ σῶμα του καὶ τὴ σαρκικὴ ὄρεξί του, ὅπως ἔκανε ὁ πλούσιος τῆς παραβολῆς.

Μὰ ὁ ἄπιστος ἔχει τὰ αὐτιὰ τῆς ψυχῆς του βουλωμένα καὶ δὲν ἀκούει αὐτὰ ποὺ λέγονται για τὴ σωτηρία της. Για τοῦτο ὁ Χριστὸς συγχόελεγε: «Ὁ ἔχων ὧτα ἀκούειν, ἀκουέτω». Κι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἔλεγε: «Τί σημασία ἔχει λοιπὸν τὸ ὅτι δὲν πιστέψανε κάποιοι; Μήπως ἡ ἀπιστία τους θὰ καταργήσῃ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Θεοῦ; Ὁ Θεὸς θὰ βγεῖ ἀληθινός, ἐνῶ ὁ κάθε ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ψεύτης, κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένο: «Ὅπως ἂν δικαιωθῆς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σου καὶ νικήσῃς ἐν τῷ κρίνεσθαί σε», (Ρωμ. 3:3), ποὺ εἶναι λόγια τοῦ προφήτη Δαυὶδ, ὅπου λέγει στὸν Θεὸ πῶς: «Ἐσὺ Κύριε, θὰ δικαιωθεῖς για τὰ λόγια ποὺ εἶπες, καὶ θὰ νικήσεις σὰν κριθεὶς μαζί μὲ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ θὰ βγεῖ ψεύτης». Κι ἀλλοῦ λέγει ὁ ἀγγελόγλωσσος Παῦλος: «Οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος. Τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη. Διότι τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς Θεόν. Τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται». (Ρωμ. 7:5). Καὶ πάλι ὁ ἴδιος Ἀπόστολος λέγει: «Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστὶ, τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις Θεοῦ ἐστίν». (Α' Κορινθ. 1:18). Μωρία, ἀνοησία, λέγει, εἶναι ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ για ὅσους πηγαίνουνε στὸν χαμό τους, γιατί, ἂν ἦτανε ἀλλοιῶς, θὰ πιστεύανε σ' αὐτὸν καὶ θὰ προσπαθοῦσανε νὰ σωθοῦνε.

Καὶ παρακάτω πάλι λέγει τὸ ἴδιο: «Ψυχικὸς (σαρκικὸς) ἄνθρωπος οὐ δέχεται τὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μωρία γὰρ αὐτῷ ἐστίν». (Α' Κορινθ. 2:14). Καὶ σὲ ἄλλο μέρος λέγει: «Εἰ δὲ καὶ ἔστι κεκαλυμμένον τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον

ἡμῶν, ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις ἐστὶ κεκαλυμμένον» (Β' Κορινθ. 4:13). Δηλαδή: Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶναι καθαρὴ καὶ ἀπλὴ καὶ μοναχὰ για ὅσους εἶναι ἄπιστοι (χαμένοι), γι' αὐτούς εἶναι σκεπασμένη καὶ σκοτεινὴ. Παρακάτω λέγει: «Τὰ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια». (Β' Κορινθ. 4:18). «Ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος, τὸ δὲ Πνεῦμα κατὰ τῆς σαρκὸς. Ταῦτα δὲ ἀντίκειται ἀλλήλοις, ἵνα μὴ ἂν θέλητε, ταῦτα ποιῆτε». (Γαλάτ. 5:17). «Ὁ σπεύρων εἰς τὴν σάρκα ἑαυτοῦ ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς θερίσει φθορὰν, ὁ δὲ σπεύρων εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος θερίσει ζωὴν αἰώνιον». (Γαλάτ. 6:8). «Ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ», λέγει στοὺς Ἐφεσίους, «πὼς ἕναν καιρὸ ἤσαστε χωρὶς Χριστό, ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, μὴν ἔχοντας ἐλπίδα καὶ ἄθεοι στὸν κόσμον». (Ἐφεσ. 2:11). Στὸν Τίτο γράφει: «Ἐπεφάνη γὰρ ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡ σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, παιδεύουσα ἡμᾶς, ἵνα, ἀρνησάμενοι τὴν ἀσέβειαν καὶ τὰς κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας, σωφρόνως καὶ δικαίως καὶ εὐσεβῶς ζήσωμεν ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι, προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν». (Τίτ. 2:11). «Ἀπόκειται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαξ ἀποθανεῖν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο κρίσις». (Ἐβρ. 9:27).

Κι ὁ ἅγιος Ἰάκωβος ὁ Ἀδελφόθεος λέγει: «Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι, κλαύσατε ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις. Ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπε καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν, ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατίωται καὶ ὁ ἴδς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ». (Ἰακώβου 5:1). Κι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος γράφει: «Ἦξει δὲ ἡ ἡμέρα Κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς ἐν νυκτί». (Β' Πέτρ. 3:10).

Τέλος, ὁ Ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης γράφει: «Ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν». (Α' Ἰω. 3:14).

Βλέπετε, ἀγαπητοί, πόσα εἶναι γραμμένα στὰ ἅγια βιβλία τῆς θρησκείας μας, αὐτὰ κι ἄλλα πολλά, για νὰ πιστέψουμε στὴ μέλλουσα αἰώνια ζωὴ καὶ νὰ μὴν εἴμαστε προσκολλημένοι σὲ τούτη τὴν πρόσκαιρη; Πῶς, λοιπόν, θὰ βροῦμε ἀπολογία στὴν ἀπιστία μας; Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε: «Εἰ μὴ ἦλθον καὶ ἐλάλησα αὐτοῖς, ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ εἶχον. Νῦν δὲ πρόφασιν οὐκ ἔχουσι περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν». (Ἰω. 15:22). «Ἄν δὲν ἐρχόμυνα, λέγει, καὶ δὲν μιλοῦσα, ἁμαρτία δὲν θὰ εἶχανε οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Ἀλλὰ τώρα δὲν ἔχουνε πρόφαση για τὴν ἁμαρτία τους».

Μαθαίνουμε τόσα καὶ τόσα μάταια πρᾶγματα, ἡ περιέργειά μας δὲν ἀφήνει τίποτα χωρὶς νὰ τὸ ἐξετάσει καὶ μόνο τί λέγει τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο για τὴ σωτηρία μας δὲν βρίσκουμε καιρὸ νὰ τὸ διαβάσουμε καὶ νὰ τὸ μάθουμε. Για νὰ γιαιτρέψουμε τὴν πιὸ παραμικρὴ ἀρρώστεια τοῦ κορμιοῦ μας, ψάχνουμε καὶ βρίσκουμε τὸν γιαιτρὸ καὶ τὸ γιαιτρικὸ, μὰ για τὸ τί θὰ γίνῃ ἡ ψυχὴ μας σὰν πεθάνουμε καὶ μὲ τί τρόπο θὰ τὴ γλυτώσουμε ἀπὸ τὴν καταδίκη, δὲν

δίνουμε καμμιὰ προσοχή κι ούτε νοιαζόμαστε καθόλου. Καταγινόμαστε με ψευτιές, ενώ την αλήθεια που μας φανέρωσε ο Χριστός και που πρέπει να ζητούμε να τη μάθουμε όπως τρέχει να βρεί το νερό ο διψασμένος, δεν έχουμε καιρό να τη γυρέσουμε! Για τούτο είμαστε άξιοι να καταδικαστούμε πολλές φορές και σαν θα παρουσιαστούμε μπροστά στον Κύριο, τρέμοντας, κατά τη Δευτέρα Παρουσία και μας ρωτήσει αν τον ξέρουμε, θα πούμε τότε με κλάμματα: «Πότε σε είδαμε, Κύριε;». Κι Έκείνος θα μας πει: «Κάγώ, ούκ οίδα ύμās», «Κι εγώ, δεν σās γνωρίζω».

«Ζητήσατε τον Κύριον, ὃ κατάδικοι και κραταιώθητε τη ἐλπίδι, ζητήσατε τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ διὰ μετανοίας και ἀγιασθήσεσθε τῷ ἀγιασμῷ τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ και τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν ἀποκαθαρισθήσεσθε. Δράμετε πρὸς Κύριον ὅσοι ἐν ἁμαρτίαις ὑπεύθυνοι, τὸν δυνάμενον συγχωρεῖν ἁμαρτήματα. Μεθ' ὄρκου γὰρ εἶρηκε διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγων: Ζῶ ἐγώ, λέγει Κύριος. Οὐ βούλομαι τὸν θάνατον τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ, ὡς τὸ ἐπιστρέψαι και ζῆν αὐτόν. Και πάλιν: Ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν διεπέτασα τὰς χεῖρας μου πρὸς λαὸν ἀπειθοῦντα και ἀντιλέγοντα. Ὅλη τὴ μέρα ἄπλωνα τὰ χέρια μου στοὺς ἀνθρώπους που δεν θέλανε νὰ ἀκούσουνε τὰ λόγια μου».



Ἀόρατοι Ἐρημίτες στὴν Κρήτη!

Τὸ κείμενο προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὶς ιστοσελίδες «Πεμπτουσία». Τὸ ἀρχικὸ κείμενο εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τοῦ Νίκου Τσιγκάκη «Ἡ Ἱερά Μονὴ Ὁδηγήτριας και τὰ Παρεκκλήσια τῆς» και ἀναδημοσιεύεται στὴν ἐκδοση «Οἱ Ἀόρατοι Ἐρημίτες τοῦ Ἀθῶνα, τὸ Μυστήριον τῆς Ἀθωνικῆς Ἐρήμου», που ἔγραψε ὁ μοναχὸς Βλάσιος Ἀγορείτης, (ἐκδόσεις Τέρτιος).



Περὶ τὰ μέσα του 19^{ου} αἰώνα (περίπου τὸ 1850) ὁ τότε ἡγούμενος τῆς Μονῆς Ὁδηγήτριας (βρίσκεται στὰ Ἀστερούσια Ὁρη, τοῦ νομοῦ Ἡρακλείου) εἶχε δώσει ἐντολή ὅλοι οἱ βοσκοὶ και οἱ ἐργάτες, που δούλευαν γιὰ τὸ μοναστήρι, κάθε Σάββατο βράδυ νὰ ἀφήνουν τὶς δουλειές τους και νὰ παρακολουθοῦν τὴν Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Ἑσπερινοῦ και κάθε Κυριακὴ πρῶτὴ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία, και ἔπειτα νὰ φεύγουν γιὰ τὶς δουλειές τους.

Τὰ αἰγοπρόβατα τοῦ μοναστηριοῦ τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη τὰ εἶχαν στὴν κορυφὴ τοῦ Κεφαλιοῦ. Οἱ βοσκοὶ ἔμεναν στὴν τοποθεσίαν «Ἅγιος Γεώργιος» που βρίσκεται στοὺς πρόποδες τοῦ Κεφαλιοῦ. Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς βοσκούς ἦταν και ὁ γέρο-Λαμπάκης, ὁ ἀνθρωπος που εἶχε ἀνακαλύψει τὴν ἐκκλησία τῆς Παναγίας στὸ Μάρτσαλο.

Κάποιο Σάββατο ἀπόγευμα ἔφυγαν ὅλοι οἱ βοσκοὶ γιὰ τὴν Ὁδηγήτρια και ἔμεινε αὐτὸς ὁ τελευταῖος. Καθὼς βάδιζε ἀργά, ἐπειδὴ ἦταν γέρος, πρὸς τὸ μοναστήρι στὴν τοποθεσία «Φασουλὴ Ἀρόλιθος», βλέπει νὰ ἔρχεται ἕνας καλόγηρος ἀπὸ τὴν μεριά τοῦ μοναστηριοῦ κρατώντας ἕνα πρόσφορο.

Ὅταν ἀντάμωσαν, λέγει ὁ καλόγηρος στὸν Λαμπάκη: – Μὴν πās, Μπάριμπα, στὸ μοναστήρι νὰ λειτουργηθεῖς, γιατί εἶναι μακρῶν, μόνον ἔλα μαζί μου. Ἐκεῖ που θὰ πάω θὰ γίνεῖ λειτουργία και θὰ λειτουργηθεῖς κι' ἐσύ.

Ὁ Λαμπάκης νομίζοντας ὅτι θὰ λειτουργοῦσαν σὲ κάποιο ἐξωκκλήσι ἀκολούθησε τὸν καλόγηρο. Πέρασαν ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιο Γεώργιο και πήραν τὸν δρόμο πρὸς τὴν κορυφὴ τοῦ Κεφαλιοῦ.

Στὴν τοποθεσία «Σπορὰ» ἔφυγαν ἀπὸ τὸν δρόμο και κατέβηκαν σ' ἕνα γκρεμῶ. Ἐκεῖ σὲ μία σπηλιὰ μέσα εἶδαν πολλοὺς καλογήρους. Ἐνας ἀπ' αὐτοὺς λέγει στὸν Λαμπάκη μετὰ τὸν Ἑσπερινό:

– Κοιμήσου ἐδῶ και τὸ πρῶτὸ που θὰ ἀρχίσει ἡ λειτουργία θὰ σὲ ξυπνήσουμε.

Πράγματι κοιμήθηκε ὁ Λαμπάκης σὲ μία ἄκρη τῆς σπηλιᾶς-ἐκκλησίας και τὸ πρῶτὸ τὸν ξύπνησαν και ἔγινε τὴ λειτουργία. Μόλις τελείωσε πήρε τὸ ἀντίδωρο και, ὅταν ἔφυγε, χαιρέτησε τοὺς καλογήρους οἱ ὁποῖοι τοῦ εἶπαν:

– Ἐδῶ λειτουργοῦμε κάθε Κυριακὴ και νὰ ἔρχεσαι ἐδῶ και ἐσύ. Μὴν τὸ πεις ὅμως σὲ κανένα διότι δεν θὰ μās ξαναδεῖς.

Καθὼς ὅμως ὁ Λαμπάκης δεν εἶχε πάει στὸ μοναστήρι νὰ λειτουργηθεῖ τὸ Σαββατόβραδο, τὸν κάλεσε ὁ ἡγούμενος και τοῦ ζήτησε ἐξηγήσεις. Τότε αὐτὸς βρῆκε ὀρισμένες δικαιολογίες. Εἶπε ὅτι εἶχε χάσει μερικὰ ζῶα και ἤθελε νὰ τὰ βρεῖ. Καθυστέρησε γι' αὐτὸν τὸν λόγο νὰ ξεκινήσει, ἦταν ἤδη νύχτα και καθὼς ἦταν ἡλικιωμένος δεν μποροῦσε νὰ προχωρήσει.

Ὁ ἡγούμενος, ἀφοῦ τὸν ἄκουσε, τοῦ ἐπισήμανε ὅτι αὐτὸ δεν ἔπρεπε νὰ ἐπαναληφθεῖ. Ὅμως ὁ Λαμπάκης τὸν παράκουσε. Τρία συνεχόμενα Σαββατόβραδα δεν πήγαινε στὴν Ὁδηγήτρια ἀλλὰ παρακολουθοῦσε τὴν λειτουργία ἐκεῖ που τοῦ εἶχε ὑποδείξει ὁ ἄγνωστος καλόγηρος.

Στὸ τέλος, ἐκνευρισμένος ὁ ἡγούμενος ἀπὸ τὴν συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ κάλεσε τὸν Λαμπάκη και τὸν ρώτησε γιατί παρακούει τὶς ἐντολές του. Ἔτσι αὐτὸς φοβισμένος τοῦ διηγήθηκε τὰ καθέκαστα. Τότε ὁ ἡγούμενος τοῦ ζήτησε νὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσει στὸ μέρος ἐκεῖνο που γινόταν ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία.

Πήγαν, λοιπόν, ἔψαξαν νὰ βροῦν τὴν σπηλιὰ-ἐκκλησία χωρὶς ὅμως ἀποτέλεσμα. Πῆγε και ὁ Λαμπάκης μόνος του ἄλλη μιὰ φορὰ ἀλλὰ παρ' ὅλες τὶς προσπάθειές του δεν βρῆκε τίποτα...

Ὁ Δεκαπενταύγουστος τῶν Ἑλλήνων

Τοῦ Μοναχοῦ Μωυσῆ, ἐφημερίς «ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑ», 7 Αὐγούστου, 2011.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Θεσσαλονίκης, μέγας θεολόγος, εἶδε τὴν Παναγία σὲ ὄραμα καὶ γράφει: Ποιὸς ἀνθρώπινος λόγος μπορεῖ ἄραγε νὰ περιγράψει τὴν θεοφώτιστη ὠραιότητά σου, Θεοτόκε Παρθένε; Οἱ χάρες σου εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ προσδιοριστοῦν οὔτε μὲ λόγια οὔτε μὲ σκέψεις. Μόνη ἡ θεία ὄψη της χαρίζει αἴγλη, εὐφροσύνη καὶ ἀγαλλίαση. Ἡ ὠραιότητα τοῦ προσώπου της πηγάζει ἀπὸ τὴν ὠραία ψυχὴ της καὶ τὴν καθαρὴ καρδιά της. Σὰν φῶς ποῦ χύνεται ἀπὸ τὰ μέσα πρὸς τὰ ἔξω καὶ χαρίζει αὐτὴ τὴν ἀπαράμιλλη εὐπρέπεια, τὴν πάγκαλη καλλονή. Ἡ ὠραιότητα, ἡ προερχόμενη ἀπὸ τὴν καθαρότητα, τὴν σεμνότητα καὶ ταπεινότητά της, ἤλκυσε τὸ μάτι τοῦ Θεοῦ πάνω της καὶ τὴν ἔκανε μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων

Ὁ θεοφόρος ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἄγιορείτης προτρέπει ὅλους νὰ ἐνστερνωθοῦν τὸ ἅγιο θεομητορικὸ φρόνημα. Νὰ εὐπρεπίσουμε κατὰλληλα τὴν καρδιά μας, ὥστε νὰ κατασκηνώσουν οἱ ἀρετὲς τῆς Παναγίας, ὥστε βλέποντάς τες πάνω μας νὰ μᾶς χαρίσει πλούσια πνευματικὲς χάριτες καὶ οὐράνια ἀγαθά.

Ἐφθασε ὁ θεομητορικὸς Δεκαπενταύγουστος. Ὁ χρόνος μέχρι τώρα ἔδωσε νεκροὺς στὴν Ἰαπωνία, στὴν Συρία, στὴν Αἴγυπτο, στὴν Λιβύη, στὴν Κύπρο, στὴν Νορβηγία καὶ ἄλλοῦ. Καθημερινὰ μᾶς τηλεφωνοῦν καὶ μᾶς γράφουν νὰ μνημονεύουμε βαριά ἀσθενεῖς καὶ νεκροὺς, ἀπὸ καρδιά, ἀπὸ καρκίνο, ἀπὸ διάφορα ἀνίατα νοσήματα, ν' ἀνάψουμε κερί στὴν Παναγία. Ἡ Παναγία πόνεσε πολὺ καὶ γνωρίζει καλὰ νὰ συμπονᾷ, νὰ συμπαρίσταται καὶ νὰ παρηγορεῖ.

Στοὺς θερμοὺς ἐσπερινοὺς τοῦ ὠραίου Αὐγούστου οἱ παρακλήσεις σὰν βάλαμο θωπεύουν τὶς πονεμένες καρδιὲς κι αἰσθάνονται δρόσο γλυκιά ἐξαίσιας ἀναψυχῆς. Οἱ θαυματουργὲς πολλὲς εἰκόνες της, μὲ τὰ ἀκοίμητα καντήλια, τὶς ἄσβεστες λαμπάδες ἀπὸ μελισσοκέρι, τὰ μύρια ἀφιερῶματα, τ' ἀσημένια περὶτεχνα πουνάμισα, τὶς μετάνοιες, τὰ δάκρυα, τοὺς ἀσπασμούς, τὰ τάματα, τὶς ὑποσχέσεις, τὶς παρακλήσεις καὶ τὶς εὐχαριστίες. Νηστεύουν, ἐξομολογοῦνται, μεταλαμβάνουν πολλοί. Σαγηνεῦει τὸ ἱερὸ καὶ ὠραῖο πρόσωπο τῆς Θεοτόκου. Σὲ κάνει

νὰ καταθέσεις τὸ βάρος σου, τὸν πόνο σου, τὸν πικρὸ λογισμό σου, τὴν ἀθυμία, τὴν κόπωση, τὸν στεναγμὸ καὶ τὴν στεναχώρια σου.

Γεμάτη ἡ Ἑλλάδα, ἡ Κύπρος, ὅλη ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία, ἀπὸ ἐκκλησιᾶς της, μονῆς, ἡσυχαστήρια, προσκυνήματα στὴν χάρι της. Χιλιάδες οἱ προσκυνητές. Στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, τὸ θαυμαστὸ περιβόλι της, ἄπειροι ὕμνοι στὴν Οἰκονόμισσα, τὴν Παραμυθία, τὴν Πορταίτισσα, τὴν Τριχεροῦσα, τοῦ Ἀκαθίστου, τὴν Φοβερὰ Προστασία, τὴν Γλυκοφιλοῦσα, τὴν Γοργοῦπήκοο, τὴν Μυροβλύτισσα, τὴν Γαλακτοτροφοῦσα, τοῦ Ἄξιόν Ἔστι. Πανηγυρίζει ὁ πάνσεπτος ἱερὸς ναὸς τοῦ Πρωτάτου στὴν Κοίμηση, ἡ μονὴ τῶν Ἰβήρων, πολλὰ κελιά. Τὸ θεομητροφροῦρητο Ἅγιον Ὅρος ἀγάλλεται. Ἡ θεομητροσκέπαστη Ἑλλάδα εὐφραίνεται.

Ἡ ὠραιότατη στὴν ὄψη καὶ τὴν καρδιά, ἡ πανυπέραγνη, ἡ τιμιωτέρα τῶν Χερουβεὶμ Παναγία, εἶναι πάνω ἀπ' ὅλους τοὺς ἁγίους. Δὲν ὑπῆρξε πιὸ ἅγιος ἄνθρωπος, πιὸ καλὴ γυναίκα. Κόσμημά της ἡ καθαρότητά της, ἡ σεμνότητά της, ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη της, ἡ σιωπὴ της. Δίδασκει ὠραία μὲ τὸ παράδειγμά της, μὲ τὸν ἐνάρετο βίον της. Οἱ καιροὶ μας ἔχουν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ ἐμπνευσμένες καὶ ἀπὸ καθοδηγητικὲς μορφές. Ἡ φλυαρία, ἡ ἀναίδεια, ἡ ξετσιπωσιά, ἡ ὑψηλοφροσύνη, ἡ ἀσχήμια, ἡ βρομιά, ἡ ἀδιαφάνεια κούρασε πολὺ. Ὅλοι πλέον διψοῦν γιὰ διαφάνεια, ἐντιμότητα, αἰδῶ, σιγή, σοβαρότητα, καθαρότητα, γνήσια ταπείνωση.

Ὁ ἀρχόμενος Δεκαπενταύγουστος ἄς ὀδηγήσει σὲ περισυλλογὴ, σὲ συνάντηση μὲ τὴν Θεοτόκο, μὲ τὴν πρόσληψη τῶν ἔνθεων ἀρετῶν της, μὲ τὸν ἀσπασμὸ τῆς εἰκόνας της, μὲ τὴν ἀκρόαση τοῦ βίου της, μὲ τὴν συμπαλμῶδηση τοῦ ὠραίου παρακλητικοῦ της κανόνος.



Ὁ ἄνθρωπος λαχταρᾷ μία μόνιμη, ἀληθινὴ χαρὰ, ἀλλὰ δὲν τὴν βρίσκει. Οἱ χάρες ποῦ τοῦ προσφέρει ὁ κόσμος εἶναι ψευδεῖς, μάταιες καὶ συντόμου διαρκείας. Ἄν ὅμως περπατῆ κανεὶς ἀξίως τῆς χριστιανικῆς κλήσεως, θὰ βρῆ τὴν χαρὰ ποῦ ποθεῖ ἢ ψυχὴ του, τὴν χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν ὁποία πλάστηκε.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κρονστάνδης



Ὁ Πόθος μας γιὰ τὴν Μητέρα Τοῦ Θεοῦ μας

Δημ. Νεαπολίτης, «Ἐνοριακὴ Εὐλογία», Τεύχος 168-169, Τερός Ναός Ἁγίου Νικολάου, Πευκακίων, Ἀθηνῶν.



Ὅπιδὸ γλυκὸς καὶ ὁμορφος μῆνας, ὁ μῆνας τῆς ξεκούρασης καὶ τῆς χαρᾶς, τῆς ἀναψυχῆς καὶ τῆς ἀνάτασης, ὁ μῆνας ποὺ ξεκουράζει καὶ μᾶς ὁδηγεῖ στὸ Φθινόπωρο καὶ τὸ Χεμῶνα δὲν θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ χρησιμοποιηθεῖ γιὰ κάτι ἄλλο παρὰ γιὰ τὸν ὕμνο καὶ τὴ δοξολογία τῆς Παναγίας μας. Ὅ,τι ἐκλεκτότερο, ὅ,τι

ἀνώτερο, ὅ,τι πολυτιμότερο ἀνήκει καὶ πρέπει νὰ φυλάσσεται γιὰ Ἐκείνην.

Παλαιότερα δὲν ὑπῆρχε ἄνθρωπος στὸν πλανήτη μας, ἀκόμα καὶ σὲ εἰδωλολατρικοὺς λαοὺς καὶ σὲ ἀδιάφορους θρησκευτικὰ ποὺ νὰ μὴ σεβόταν τὴν Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μουσουλμάνοι, εἰδωλολάτρες, ἀλλόθρησκοι, ὅλοι ἐσέβοντο τὴν Παναγία μας. Μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν εἶχαν τὴν ἀληθινὴ καὶ ἀκριβῆ εἰκόνα γιὰ τὸ Ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ Θεός. Στὴν Παναγία Μητέρα Του ὅμως ὅλοι ἔτρεφαν θαυμασμὸ καὶ ὑπέβαλλαν τὸ βαθύτατο σεβασμὸ τους. Στὴν ἰδιαίτερα περιέργη ἐποχὴ ποὺ ζοῦμε, ὑπάρχουν πολλὲς ἐξαιρέσεις αὐτοῦ τοῦ κανόνα. Ὅμως ἀκόμη κι ἂν δὲν τὸ γνωρίζουν σήμερον κάποιοι, ὅλοι ἔχουν τὴν ἀνάγκη Τῆς Παρουσίας Τῆς.

Ὁ πόθος γι' Αὐτὴν ποὺ ἀνθῆσε «ὡσὰν μηλιὰ στὰ δέντρα τοῦ δρυμοῦ» εἶναι μεγάλος. Κάνει νὰ ξεχνᾶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος κάθε ἀνημπόρια του.

«Τὶς αὐτὴ ἡ ἀναβαίνουσα λελευκανθισμένη, ἐγκύπτουσα ὡσεὶ ὄρθρος, καλὴ ὡς σελήνη, ἐκλεκτὴ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος;» Ποιὰ εἶναι αὐτή; Ποιὰ εἶναι τὸ «ἄνθος τοῦ ἀγροῦ», «τὸ κρῖνον ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἀκανθῶν;» Ποιὰ «ἠγάπησαν αἱ νεάνιδες καὶ ἔδραμον εἰς ὁσμὴν μύρου» Τῆς; Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ «σκῆνωμα τοῦ Ὑψίστου», τὸ Ὅποιο Ἐκεῖνος «ἠγάσασε» καὶ ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ «ὄρος τοῦ Θεοῦ», τὸ πλούσιο βουνὸ ὅπου εὐδόκησε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ κατοικήσει σ' αὐτό;

Ὡ, πόσο ὁμορφὴ ἀποδημία, ἀφοῦ χαρίζει τὴ συνάντησιν μὲ τὸν Θεό! Πῶς ὑποδέχτηκε ὁ οὐρανὸς Αὐτὴν ποὺ στάθηκε Πλατυτέρα ἀπὸ τοὺς οὐρανοῦς! Πῶς δέχτηκε ὁ τάφος Αὐτὴν, ποὺ δέχτηκε τὸ Θεό! Ναί, τὴ δέχτηκε, ναὶ τὴ χώρεσε, γιατί δὲν ἔγινε πλατύτερη ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ μὲ τὸ σωματικὸ Τῆς ὄγκο. Γιατί πῶς ἓνα σῶμα τρεῖς πῆγες, ποὺ ὄλο καὶ φυραίνει, θὰ παράβγαινε μὲ τὰ πλάτη καὶ τὰ μήκη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; Μὲ

τὴ Χάρη ὅμως ξεπέρασε κάθε ὕψος καὶ πλάτος, γιατί τὸ θεϊκὸ εἶναι πέρα ἀπὸ κάθε σύγκρισιν.

Παρέδιδε τὸ ἱερόν καὶ ἀμόλυντο Σῶμα στὸν ἅγιόν Τῆς τάφο καὶ οἱ ἅγιοι ἄγγελοι ἔτρεχαν μπροστά, Τὴν κυκλώνανε, Τὴν ἀκολουθοῦσαν. Ὑπῆρχε τίποτε ποὺ νὰ μὴν ἔκαναν γιὰ νὰ ὑπηρετήσουν τὴ Μητέρα τοῦ Κυρίου τους;

Καθὼς, ὅταν ἀποθέσῃ κάποιος ἀκριβὸ μῦρο σ' ἓνα ροῦχο ἢ κάποιον μέρος καὶ μετὰ τὸ πάρει, ἀπομένει κάποια εὐωδιὰ ἀκόμα κι ὅταν τὸ ἄρωμα λείψῃ, ἔτσι καὶ τώρα τὸ Ἅγιο Σῶμα, τὸ ἱερόν, τὸ πεντακάθαρον, ποὺ εὐωδιάζει θεϊκὰ ὀλόκληρον, ἀφοῦ κατέβηκε στὸν τάφο καὶ κατόπιν ἀνέβηκε σὲ μέρη ὑψηλὰ καὶ ὁμορφα, δὲν ἐγκατέλειψε τὸν τάφο χωρὶς δῶρον ἀλλὰ τὸν γέμισε μὲ τὴ Θεία Τῆς καὶ ἄρρητη εὐωδιὰ καὶ ἔκανε τὸ μνήμα βρῦση γιαιτρειᾶς, πλημμύρα χάριος, ἀδιάκοπη εὐλογία γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς ποὺ Τὴν ἐπικαλοῦνται.

Ἀπὸ Αὐτὴν καὶ μεις σήμερον κρατιόμαστε ὡσὰν ἐλπίδα, σὰν τὴν πιὸ γερὴ καὶ ἀρράγιστη ἄγκυρα, παραδίδοντας σ' Αὐτὴν τὸ νοῦ, τὴν ψυχὴ, τὸ σῶμα, ὄλο μας τὸν ἑαυτό, δοξολογῶντας Τὴν «ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς» ὅσο μποροῦμε ἀφοῦ ὅσο ἀξίζει εἴμαστε ἀνήμποροι κι οὔτε ἔχει ἀνάγκη τὴ δικὴ μας δόξα, ἡ Μητέρα Τοῦ Βασιλέως τῆς Δόξης.

«Ἄπορεῖ πᾶσα γλῶσσα εὐφημεῖν πρὸς ἀξίαν, ἰλιγγιᾶ δὲ νοῦς καὶ ὑπερκόσμιος» ὑμνεῖν τὴ Χάρη Τῆς.

Πῶς νὰ μὴν ποθεῖ ὀλόκληρη ἡ καρδιὰ μας τὴν Τιμὴ Τῆς; Πῶς νὰ μὴν τὴν προτιμοῦμε κι ἀπ' αὐτὴ ἀκόμη τὴν ἀπαραίτητη ἀναπνοή μας, ἀφοῦ ἐγέννησε Τὴν Ζωὴ γιὰ ὅλους ἐμᾶς;

Αὐτὴ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς δὲν ἐκπλήρωσε κανένα θέλημά Τῆς, ἔβλεπε μόνο τὸ θέλημα Τοῦ Θεοῦ, γι' αὐτὸ ὅλα τὰ θελήματα, ὅλα τὰ αἰτήματα καὶ οἱ χάρες περνοῦν ἀπὸ Αὐτὴν, εἶναι δικὰ Τῆς. Αὐτὴ ἀναφέρει τὰ αἰτήματα πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τὰ ἐκπληρώνει. Θυσιάστηκε καὶ θυσιάζεται γιὰ μᾶς, γιὰ τὸν καθένα, γιὰ ὅλη τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα. Ὅλη ἡ κτίσις Τῆς ἀνήκει, παρότι δὲν εἶναι ἀντάξιά Τῆς.

Αὐτὴ τὴν εὐχαριστήρια κατάθεση τῶν σκέψεών μας θέλουμε νὰ Τῆς προσφέρουμε ὡς μηδαμινὴ ἔκφραση εὐγνωμοσύνης, μὲ τὴ βοήθεια καὶ τὴς ἐκφράσεις τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννη ποὺ καταγόταν ἀπὸ τὴ Δαμασκὸ, σὰν τὸν πιὸ διαλεχτό μας λόγο, ὅ,τι καλύτερον μπορεῖ νὰ προσφέρει τὸ φτωχὸ μας μυαλὸ ποὺ κινήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν πόθο γιὰ Ἐκείνη. Ὁ πόθος ξεπερνᾶει τὴ δύναμή μας, αὐτὸ ποὺ μποροῦμε νὰ κάνουμε. Γι' αὐτὸ τὴν Δέσποινα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ Κυρία μας, Τὴν γεμάτη καλοσύνη, παρακαλοῦμε νὰ μὴν παρίδῃ τὴν εὐτέλειά μας ἀλλὰ νὰ ἔχει πάνω μας τὰ μάτια Τῆς, νὰ μᾶς πηγαίνει ὅπου θέλει, νὰ κόψει τὴς ὀρμὲς τῶν παθῶν καὶ νὰ μᾶς ἀξιώσει τῆς γλυκειᾶς λάμψεως τοῦ Προσώπου Τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ Τῆς.

ATTENTIVENESS AND DIGITAL CULTURE

By Fr. Maximos Conostas, Senior Research Scholar, International Conference on Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care, Athens, 7-9 May, 2015.

The Distracted Life

Having promised us a technological utopia, our ubiquitous and intrusive cyber-culture has instead precipitated a spiritual crisis in which human experience has been systematically fragmented and the coherence of the self increasingly threatened. Living in a culture of organized distractions, our thoughts are isolated and disconnected, preventing us from seeing and experiencing the wholeness of life. Distraction and fragmentation have negative consequences for the organization of knowledge; they prevent us from engaging our spiritual depth, and render us incapable of engaging the spiritual depth of others, for having lost touch with our own personhood, we can receive neither the personhood of our neighbor nor of God.

Beginning in 2009, the New York Times ran a series of articles called “Driven to Distraction,” focusing on accidents and fatalities involving distracted drivers. The series expanded to include “Distracted Doctoring,” reporting on the large number of surgeons who are placing personal calls during surgery; on medical technicians who are texting while running cardio-pulmonary bypass machines; and anesthesiologists who are shopping online for airline tickets.

Distractions created by social media in the work place cost the American economy \$650 billion per year, with social media interruptions occurring every ten minutes, and with workers spending 41% of their time on Facebook. In the US alone, over 12 billion collective hours are spent browsing on social networks every day. The average college student spends 3 hours a day checking social sites, but only 2 hours a day studying. Alongside the official statistics, there is an abundance of anecdotal evidence, such as the September, 2013 report concerning train passengers in San Francisco who were too distracted by their smartphones and tablet computers to notice the presence of an armed gunman, who had been brandishing his weapon in plain view for several minutes before he shot and killed a 20-year old commuter (the entire episode was caught on the train’s surveillance camera).

In addition to the financial costs and loss of human life, there are spiritual costs that the New York Times and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are not competent to diagnose, namely, the loss of human agency, the fragmentation of human subjectivity, and the growing incoherence of the self. In his recent book, *The World Beyond Your Head*, Matthew Crawford has referred to this situation as a “crisis of self-ownership,” arguing that we

are now living in an “attentional economy” in which “our attention is not simply ours to direct where we will,” making “the effort to be fully present” an intractable struggle. Crawford claims that our insatiable need for endless distractions means that the *content* of our distractions has become largely irrelevant, revealing a deeper crisis of values. According to Crawford, we have become “agnostic” on the question of *what* to pay attention to, which means we no longer know what to value. As a result, our inner lives become “shapeless,” and we become susceptible to what is presented to us by powerful commercial forces that have taken the place of traditional cultural authorities.

To be attentive, on the other hand, is the first step in claiming our humanity, our agency and self-determination as human beings. We choose what to pay attention to, and, in a very real sense, this determines what is real for us; what is actually present to our consciousness. By contrast, distraction and fragmentation reveal an ethical void at the center of our existence, prompting Crawford to call for an “ethics” and “ascetics” of attention for our time, grounded in a realistic account of the human mind.

Crawford’s previous book was an essay on the importance of labor, lamenting the loss of manual competence in digital cultures, which, he believes, have distanced human beings from actual tools and the physical world those tools were designed to engage. Unsurprisingly, his proposal for an “ethics” and “ascetics” of attention is similarly focused on participation in a skilled craft or practice, an activity that requires the craftsman to grapple directly and attentively with, and thus to be fully present to, objective reality.

Being Attentive

Without wishing to minimize the importance of skilled craftsmanship (which the Holy Mountain has been practicing and supporting throughout its long history), I would like to focus on the logically prior moment of “attentiveness” itself, independent of any (logically sequent) activity for which it might be deemed necessary or useful. As we shall see, attentiveness offers us a profound and effective response to our modern culture of organized distractions. To be sure, the “ethics and ascetics of attention” that Crawford is seeking are central to Orthodox anthropology and moral psychology, namely: the practice of “attentiveness” (προσοχή) or “attending (*or* giving heed) to thyself” (προσέχειν σεαυτῷ).⁶

This phrase—which is only superficially related to the Socratic injunction to “know thyself” (γνῶθι σεαυτόν) occurs in various forms in the New Testament, but is in fact derived from Deuteronomy 4:9: “Attend (*or* Give heed) to thyself, and keep thy heart diligently” (πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ καὶ φύλαξον τὴν ψυχὴν σου σφόδρα), or, alternately, from Deuteronomy 15:9: Attend to thyself, that there be no hidden, iniquitous word in your heart (πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ μὴ γένηται

ρήμα κρυπτόν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ἀνόμημα). The phrase, which is an ethical imperative, has a long and rich history, from which only a few examples can be cited here.

In the fourth-century *Life of Anthony* 3.1, we are told that Anthony's first ascetic practice, which he undertook before entering the desert, was to "attend to himself." Anthony's younger contemporary, Basil of Caesarea, wrote what is likely the first homily devoted exclusively to Deuteronomy 15:9 (*On the Words, Give Heed to Thyself*). Though the *Life of Anthony* does not describe the practice of attentiveness in any detail, Basil describes it at length. Far from mere external "self-observation," and having nothing to do with any kind of solipsistic self-absorption, "attentiveness" is comprehensive in scope, being at once:

(1) the awakening of the rational principles that God has placed in the soul;

(2) vigilant stewardship over the movements of the mind, which govern the movements of the body and society as a whole;

(3) the awareness of the mind's (or soul's) priority over the body, and of the beauty of God over sensory pleasure;

(4) an engagement with reality and a rejection of mental fantasies;

(5) self-examination and the refusal to meddle in the affairs of others; and

(6), not least, the very knowledge of God, insofar as the "self" is the image of God, a connection with which Basil concludes the entire sermon: *Give heed, therefore, to thyself, that you may give heed to God* (πρόσεχε οὖν σεαυτῷ, ἵνα προσέχης Θεῷ).

The practice of attending to the self, firmly established by the fourth century, remained central to Christian anthropology and ethics. Subsequent generations of writers and practitioners developed the concept, generally aligning attentiveness with cognate practices such as "stillness" (ἡσυχία) and "vigilance" (νήψις). In this more comprehensive form—already suggested by Basil—it was given a foundational role in Christian life, and was ultimately considered a necessary presupposition or pre-condition for salvation.

The extraordinary emphasis given to attentiveness is explained, not simply because the human mind is prone to distraction, but because the disintegration of our inner life began precisely with the fall, when humanity separated itself from God. "Distraction," from this point of view, has rightly been called "the original sin of the mind."

The notion of the primal transgression as a fall from attentiveness into distractions is a central element in the theology of the fifth-century writer, St. Diadochos of Photiki: *Divine knowledge teaches us that our natural perceptive faculty is single, but that it split into two different modes of operation as a result of Adam's disobedience*. Created with a single,

simple, and undivided consciousness, the fall shattered the integrity of the self into two conflicting activities, one drawn to divine realities, and the other dragged outward into the surface appearances of the visible world through sense perception, and subject to a process of ongoing fragmentation.

We find similar views in the writings of St. Gregory of Sinai, who argues that the human mind, created in a state of rest, became agitated and distracted when it fell from grace by choosing corporeal sensation over God, and subsequently found itself lost and wandering among the things of the world. St. Gregory Palamas, perhaps alluding to the teaching of St. Gregory of Sinai, states that: *A great teacher has said that after the fall, our inner being naturally adapts itself to outward forms*, and urges the reader to *attend to himself*, citing Deuteronomy 15:9 directly.

Forgetting God and grasping at the world, we become subject to unhealthy desires and addictive behaviors, driven by a continuous preoccupation with and pursuit of nothing. Being fixated on the superficial appearances of things, we have no awareness of their deeper meanings or mutual relatedness, but seek only that part of an object or person that can temporarily satisfy our desire for pleasure. Habitually surrendering to our irrational drives and impulses, the mind becomes enslaved to sensations (bodily or psychological); we splinter into isolated fragments, leading double and triple lives, being self-divided into numberless, unrelated acts, so that our pursuit of pleasure contributes, not to the unity of the self and the world, but to the disintegration and disorganization of both. Divided into unrelated acts of irrational sensation, the mind receives only the fleeting impression of something finite and isolated from everything else.

This condition has been diagnosed and described by Orthodox spiritual and ascetic writers, who call it the "scattering" or "dispersal" of the mind. For example, Niketas Stethatos, the disciple of St. Symeon the New Theologian, contends that: *To the extent that our inner life is in a state of discord and dispersed among many contrary things, we are unable to participate in the life of God. We desire opposing and contrary things, and we are torn apart by the relentless warfare between them, and this is called the "discord" of the mind, a condition that divides and destroys the soul. As long as we are afflicted by the turmoil of our thoughts, and as long as we are ruled and constrained by our passions, we are self-fragmented and cut off from the divine Unity.*

Yet, if attentiveness is the answer to the dilemma of human fragmentation and disintegration, the aim is not a return to a presumed Edenic form of consciousness, but rather to the grace of the Holy Spirit, placed in our hearts at the time of our baptism. This sacramental focus is central to the spiritual theology of Diadochos, for whom healing begins with the gift of the Holy Spirit, while the duality

of the fallen self is unified through the invocation of the Jesus Prayer. It follows that the primary motivation for the practice of inner attention, the purpose of turning inward and entering the heart, is to encounter the indwelling Holy Spirit, a principle that was consistently and indeed systematically reaffirmed by the later Byzantine Hesychasts.

We find essentially the same teaching in Scripture. The Prodigal Son left his home and went into a faraway place, where the Gospel says he *dispersed* (or “scattered”) his *substance* (διεσκόρπισεν τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ) (Lk 15:13). On one level this means that he squandered all his money, but the deeper meaning is the wealth of the soul, our spiritual inheritance, since our “substance” is the spirit that God has placed within us, and in which, through Holy Baptism, He has planted His own grace, clothing us in *our original garment of glory* (cf. Lk 15:22), and *sending forth His own Spirit into our hearts*. (Gal 4:6). But when we separate ourselves from this grace, we lose our spiritual unity and become fragmented.

Conclusion

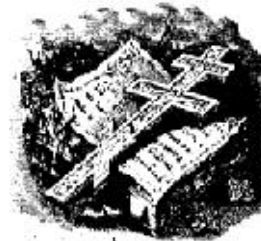
The fallen human mind is fragmented, prone unceasingly to distractions, and scattered across a troubled infinity of disconnected thoughts and sensations. Our minds are always elsewhere than our bodies. Rather than working to alleviate this constitutive weakness, we have built a culture of organized distractions, aiding and abetting the mind in its fallen condition. It can be argued that the computer itself is a fallen mind, a powerful extension of our own dubious desires, created after our own image. Lingered unregenerately in a realm of illusions; mesmerized by the images flitting about on our computer screens, we become “dull, predatory flies buzzing on the chamber window,” desperate to consume all the futility of the world.

Yet we are not the predators, but the prey. We are not the users of information technologies and social media, but rather are being used, manipulated, and exploited by them. In our culture of distractions, public and private spaces are saturated with technologies designed to arrest and appropriate our attention; our interior mental lives, like our bodies, are merely resources to be harvested by powerful economic interests. (Crawford suggests that distractibility is to the mind what obesity is to the body.) Our focus, then, should not be on technology and digital culture alone, but on the interests and motivations that guide their design and promote their dissemination into every aspect of our life.

Throughout its long history, Christianity has often been subservient to the prevailing political and economic structures, forgetting that the Gospel is not derivative of human culture, but generative of a new way of life. We need to recover the power of the Gospel as a counter-cultural force, not with the aim of destabilizing society, but in order to create life-affirming communities. We need to rediscover, not simply

that our faith and vocation to holiness set us apart from the world, but that they also engender a new, alternative world; not a virtual reality, but the reality of virtue.

In order to realize our calling, attentiveness must be our fundamental attitude and ethos. Without attentiveness there is no prayer, and without prayer, there is no communion with God, no participation in divine life. The practice of inner attention, of descending with the mind into the heart, is both an activity and a way of life that locates us in authentic existence, that is, in our relationship to God. This is why attentiveness is so often said to be equivalent to the recollection of God, the conscious awareness of the grace of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Taking heed of, and attending to, ourselves is the most effective method for reclaiming ownership of our self-determination from those who wish to take it from us. Transfigured by grace, attention will discover new objects of attention, because it will have its source in a new subject, no longer conformed to the form of the world, but *transformed in the renewal of its mind* (Rom 12:2), possessing and possessed by *the mind of Christ*. (1 Cor 2:16).



A true friend prays to God for his friend. A true friend is concerned about the salvation of the soul of his friend. To dissuade a friend from false paths and to direct him on the path of truth, that is precious friendship. The saints of God are the best friends of mankind. Two youths, Barnabas and Paul, were friends while together they were attending the school of Gamaliel. When Barnabas became a Christian, he persistently and tearfully prayed to God that He would also enlighten the mind and turn the heart of Paul in order that he becomes a Christian. Barnabas often spoke to Paul about Christ the Lord but Paul ridiculed him and considered him as one led astray. However, the Good Lord did not leave the prayers of Barnabas without fruit. The Good Lord appeared to Paul and turned him from the path of falsehood to the path of truth. The converted Paul then fell before the feet of his friend and cried out: “O Barnabas, teacher of truth, I am now convinced that everything which you spoke to me about Christ is the truth!” Barnabas wept with joy and embraced his friend. Barnabas, the friend saved the soul of his friend by his fervent prayer. If Barnabas has succeeded to place Paul as the emperor of Rome, he would have done less for him than what he succeeded in doing with prayer to bring him to the truth.

St Nikolai (Velimirovic) of Zhicha

ON REGIME AND DISORDER

By Elder Joseph of Vatopedi, "The Elder Joseph the Hesychast (+1959) Struggles, Experiences, Teachings."

Among the duties which the ever-memorable Elder taught us during the first days of our life under him was that of good order and keeping to a regime, while he described disorder to us in the blackest of colors. He often quoted to us the saying of St. Ephraim the Syrian, *Those who have no guidance fall like leaves*—which signifies, as he told us, the lack of any regime. He was also in the habit of referring to various incidents in the lives of more recent Elders and particularly of the Elder Theophylact from the hermitage of St. Artemios, who was renowned for his virtue and spiritual gifts.

Elder Theophylact lived his whole life as an ascetic and hesychast, keeping a strict fast; he did not even eat oil. At one time he accepted a disciple, the future Father Arsenios, and told him laconically—because this blessed father was temperate even in his speech—"Listen, my boy: if you are going to stay with me, I want you to have order and regime in your life, because without these you will never become a monk. Look

round at our things as I show them to you. There's our jug, there's the cup, there are the bowls, there are the rusks and so forth, as you can see. I want them always to be in those places. If you happen to make a mistake, the first time I'll remind you of their proper place according to our rule, but I won't tolerate it a second time. If you continue this disorder a third time, I shall ask you to take your things and go so that at the least you won't trouble me, even if you yourself don't want to profit at all."

The ever-memorable Elder told us that he had heard of the Elder Theophylact that he was a man of watchfulness, and his intellect was often caught up into visions because of the purity of his mind and his spiritual state. "Once," he told us, "I heard that the demons seized him and took him out of his cell in winter time when it was snowing. They dragged him about naked in the snow all night long till morning, and then returned him home safely. That day other fathers brought back some of his clothes, which they had found where the evil spirits had flung them. Perhaps they had done it to interrupt his mind in its contemplation, as they often used to do with earlier Fathers."

Once, it is said, a roebuck came to the Elder Theophylact's cell at night and knocked on the door. When the Elder an-

swered the door, it showed him its leg which was broken, and he bandaged it up and told it to come back in eight days, which it did, at the same hour. The Elder changed the dressing, re-bandaged the roebuck's leg and repeated his instruction to come again in eight days' time. When it came back the next time, the Elder saw that its leg was healed and told the roebuck not to come again, and it obeyed!

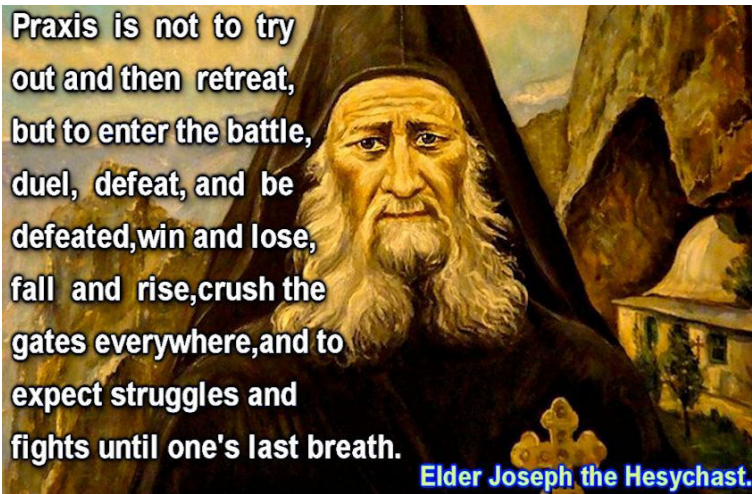
One of the main characteristics of these blessed spiritual warriors was their strictness in keeping their rule of life. We could see this also in our own Elder, and he demanded the same of us. He told us that the beginning of acquiring character and personhood lies in insistence on following an ordered and systematic way of life. By making the decision to maintain an invariable regime, man acquires resolve and bravery, something very important and essential in our life since our contest is a struggle and, indeed, a fierce one. The serpent who *prouls round like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour* (1 Pet 5:8)—and not just to injure somewhat—can be confronted only with bravery and strength of resolve.

There is another equally imperative reason for order in keeping to a regime: the mutability of man's unstable character since the fall of Adam. The general sinfulness which each of us carries with us also dulls our courage and resolve. Equally, inexperience, ignorance, the unknown form of the invisible war and the inequality of this struggle naturally increase one's discouragement. No other human factor is such an aid to success as our firm and steady resolve and a carefully worked out regime.

Particularly characteristic in the lives of the Holy Orthodox Fathers is their insistence on order and the *typikon* as the principal elements in their way of life. Our Elder was particularly attached to the book of St. Isaac the Syrian, which he used almost as a guidance manual. He would recite whole chapters to us by heart, particularly those concerning order and rule in our monastic life, from introductory "action" to the contemplation even of perfection itself as far as is possible for man. I remember how many things he reminded us of from the seventh discourse, on order among beginners, and their state, and what pertains to these. The main thing, which I still remember now is this noteworthy sentence: "Wherever you are, consider yourself less than your brethren, and their servant."

From the beginning, the Elder had inclined towards the life of hesychasm and isolation, and it was only natural that this

Praxis is not to try out and then retreat, but to enter the battle, duel, defeat, and be defeated, win and lose, fall and rise, crush the gates everywhere, and to expect struggles and fights until one's last breath.



Elder Joseph the Hesychast.

should dictate a generally more austere manner of living. This is, of course, commonplace in those who live permanently as hesychasts, whose situation and manner and the means they use are different from those of the common coenobitic form of life pursued by most monks. Even in earlier days, as the Holy Fathers write, people of this sort always seemed austere at first sight. As a result, mildness in behavior is not in their character; this probably comes about without their noticing, as a result of being isolated and somewhat anti-social. I remember something of this kind in the “Life of Abba Palamon,” to whom St Pachomius went as a novice, and under him he later became great in virtue and the founder of systematic coenobitic monasticism.

We asked the Elder a few times about the austerity of his own regime, and he responded with positive examples from the lives of the ancient Fathers. Those ancient Fathers were in no way unaware of the duty of loving one’s neighbor, yet they gave priority to love for God and the form of their particular watchfulness in the hesychastic way of life. Since we were making our way towards the same end, he often quoted to us the words of Abba Isaac, that the essential precondition for the monk to make progress is *to collect himself in one place and to fast always*.

I paid more attention, however, to another point of orderliness, which though it may seem elementary, it held great significance for our first beginnings. This was the help afforded by precise observance of the *typikon*, which we maintained wherever we were, regardless of place. By not contravening the *typikon* at all, our fervor was not decreased, nor our ardor, nor our prayer, nor our (generally) inspired state. However, when it happened that we did contravene our usual rule, whether of diet or of silence or of being on our guard in general, then everything was thrown into turmoil and we had great difficulty holding onto our usual practice. After a number of mishaps, this finally became a clear lesson to us.

From time to time, in our childish naivety, we overstepped the bounds of propriety and on one occasion, we asked the Elder: “Since in character you aren’t strict with other people, but very sympathetic, how is it that you seem so harsh in the regime of our *typikon*, which creates an obstacle for people?” He smiled and said to me: “I never expected you to have the courage to ask me that, but I’ll tell you. Testing and experience have convinced me to act in this way: otherwise, I would not be able to continue what God has led me to. St Paul says, *If I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.*” (1 Cor. 9:17). The Elder told us this with some effort, but he firmly believed that his dedication to his hesychastic regime was not fortuitous, but a vocation from on high.

As he told us, “To accept people’s demands with no restrictions is the common path of the all the Fathers, and this, by the grace of God, is abundant in this sacred place. Anyone

can easily find a response anywhere. However, our duty of serving as hesychasts in the sacred tradition of stillness is not known to all nor attainable by all.” While St. Gregory Palamas was concerning himself with stillness during his days here on Athos, he would run away and hide and dig holes in the ground, and do everything he could to achieve isolation. Whom did he receive then, or whom did he meet? It is incontrovertible proof that regulation in life is the main factor in spiritual progress.

This is the purpose of the laws and commandments which have been given to human life since the most ancient times, whether by God or by men. The disturbance in the integrity of our character following the Fall of our first parents called for legislation to restore equilibrium to the faculties of soul and body which had been split apart. And when are law and commandments and regulation not necessary? Answer: when man regains his personhood through divine grace and *the mortal puts on immortality* (1 Cor 15:54) in St Paul’s words, and *what is mortal is swallowed up—so to speak—by life.* (2 Cor. 5:4). Then, and then indeed, *no law is laid down for the just.* (1 Tim 1:9).



The spirit of lukewarmness reigns. There’s no manliness at all. We’ve been spoiled for good. How does God still tolerate us? Today’s generation is the generation of indifference. There are no warriors. The great majority are fit for parades and feasts only. ... Even people who’ve got something inside have begun to grow cool saying, “Can I really do anything to change the situation?” We have to witness our Faith with boldness, because, if we continue to remain silent, we’ll have to answer in the end. In these difficult days, each must do what is in their own power. Leave what’s out of their power to God. In this way, our conscience will be clear.

What I see around me would drive me insane, is I did not know that no matter what happens, God will have the last word.

When there is a respect for small things, there will be an even greater respect towards the bigger things. When there is no respect for small things, then neither will there be for the bigger ones. This is how the Fathers maintained Tradition.

St. Paisios the Athonite

THE IMAGINATIVE FACULTY, FANTASY AND IMAGINATION [PART 1 OF 2]

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from "The Science of Spiritual Medicine: Orthodox Psychotherapy in Action."

According to the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church, imagination is one of the faculties of the soul that plays an important role in the action and development of passions. It forms the image of a person or thing within us, then provokes sensual pleasure to capture our nous. Once taken captive we commit sin.

We ought, therefore, to study the significant role of imagination and fantasy in committing sins and also how important it is to be delivered from fantasy in order to lead a Christian life. This is one of the basic themes of ascetic teaching in the Orthodox Church. The holy Fathers, as experts on the ascetic way of life, help us to see this issue clearly.

Terms Used by the Holy Fathers

The holy Fathers, who took an interest in this subject and wrote about it, did not start by doing psychological research or attempting to study man's inner world scientifically. We know from the teaching of the Orthodox Church that the Fathers were not desk-bound academics, but Shepherds of the people of God. They knew from experience how God's grace works in human beings.

The holy Fathers were experts on the state of man's soul following the devastating event of the Fall, and subsequently they learnt what the soul and man's whole inner world is like when regenerated by God's grace. Their observations on the subject of fantasy and imagination were not motivated by scientific research in psychology, but by their own experience through the Holy Spirit. Their aim was to lead people to salvation. They were aware of how fantasy and imagination function in fallen human beings and in those who are spiritual and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

For example, when the holy Fathers used the terminology of the philosophers and scientists of their time, they did not completely accept their views. St. Gregory Palamas writes: *If one of the Fathers utters something the same as those outside, this is just a matter of the words; with regard to the meanings there is a great difference. According to Paul, the Fathers have the mind [nous] of Christ, whereas those outside speak from human understanding, if nothing worse.* This

passage is worth noting. It shows that, although some of the Fathers used the same terminology as the philosophers, there is a great difference between them. The holy Fathers, with their pure nous, spoke from revelation whereas the philosophers spoke from their own understanding and their own human speculation.

I mention this because, when speaking about fantasy or imagination, we ought not to give these words the same meaning as modern psychologists and psychoanalysts concerned with this subject give them. There is a vast difference between people who have experience of the Holy Spirit and those who are concerned in an anthropocentric way with fantasy and imagination. Even if they occasionally use the same terminology, it refers to different things.

Elder Sophrony Sakharov writes about fantasy and imagination: *I cannot hope satisfactorily to treat so difficult and complex a theme. As my principal task is to offer the reader an expose of a definite and concrete experience, I shall restrict myself to examining the views and conceptions obtaining to this day on the Holy Mountain—views and conceptions which Elder Silouan*

likewise held. Contemporary psychological theories may be left aside as having little in common with the approach of Orthodox anthropological concepts.

In the discussion of fantasy and imagination that follows no comparisons will be drawn between the teaching of the holy Fathers and the views of contemporary psychologists and psychoanalysts. I shall describe how the holy Fathers speak about fantasy and imagination in the light of contemporary

experience preserved and guarded in the Church and lived by monks of our own day, who are grounded in the therapeutic method of the Orthodox Church.

As we know, the holy Fathers are not just interested in man's psychological equilibrium, but in his theosis. To reach this point, a person must be delivered from using his imagination, even if it works positively. In order for the nous to attain to theoria of God, it must be completely free of all mental images, however good they may be, and even of thoughts and reasoning, regardless of whether they are beneficial for cultural development or our integration into society.

Although there may sometimes be some similarity between expressions and terms used by the holy Fathers and those used by psychologists, psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, the meaning of each of these expressions and terms is very different. In my opinion, it is wrong to attempt to interpret patristic texts in accordance with modern psychology and



psychoanalysis, just as it is wrong to regard psychological phenomena as spiritual experiences.

To be sure, the action of the Holy Spirit in a person's heart also has repercussions on the psychological level and affects his behavior as a human being. In the same way, the absence of the Holy Spirit from someone's heart has many consequences for his whole personality, including psychological symptoms. Nevertheless, psychological effects are not the same as spiritual experiences.

Defining the Imaginative Faculty and Fantasy

St. John Climacus defines imagination or fantasy as follows: *Fantasy is an illusion of the eyes when the mind is asleep. Fantasy is ecstasy of the nous, when the body is awake. Fantasy is the vision of something which does not exist in reality.* Fantasy is a vision of something with no real existence, something unfounded. Fantasy is activated when the mind is idle. This is obvious from dreams, when the mind is not alert. However, fantasy is also present when we are awake, and then it is possible for the nous to come out of itself.

A clear distinction should be made between the imaginative faculty, on the one hand, and fantasy and imagination, on the other. The imaginative faculty is a natural power of the soul, whereas fantasy and imagination are the activation of this faculty with various images and scenes that come from outside. The imaginative faculty lies between the nous and the senses. It is not a straightforward faculty of the nous, nor a faculty of the senses. St. Gregory Palamas writes, *This imaginative faculty of the soul is on the border between the nous and the senses in human beings.* According to St. Gregory, the imaginative faculty is on the dividing line between the nous and sense perception, and the activities of the imagination (fantasies) did not exist in Adam before the Fall, as we shall see below. They belong to man's fallen state.

St. John of Damascus, in a very succinct passage, distinguishes between the faculty of imagination, the thing imagined, fantasy and illusion. He writes: *The power of imagination is a faculty of the unreasoning part of the soul. It is brought into action through the organs of sense and is spoken of as a sensation. Something is imaginable and perceptible when it falls within the scope of the faculty of imagination and the senses. In a similar way, sight is the visual faculty itself, but something is visible when it comes within the scope of the faculty of sight, whether it be a stone or anything else. Fantasy is a passive experience of the unreasoning part of the soul, which is occasioned by something imagined. An illusion, however, is a passive experience of the unreasoning part of the soul that is not occasioned by anything imagined. The organ of imagination is the anterior ventricle of the brain.*

This extract shows that the *imaginative faculty* is a power of the unreasoning part of the soul that works through the senses. This means that it functions when the sensory organs function. Something is *imaginable* (or perceptible) if it

falls within the scope of the imagination or the senses. *Fantasy* or *imagination* is a passive experience produced in the unreasoning part of the soul by something imagined, whereas an *illusion* is not caused by anything imaginable. Thus there is an organ called the *imaginative faculty*, which is a power of the unreasoning part of the soul. There are *imaginable* things, which fall within the scope of the imaginative faculty. There is *fantasy* or *imagination*, which is linked with the senses, and *illusion*, which is created in the imaginative faculty without any input from the sensory organs.

Sometimes the terms "imaginative faculty" and "fantasy" are used in patristic texts with the same meaning. They refer to fantasy or imagination as the imaginative faculty, and vice versa, because of the interaction between them.

Commenting on St. Dionysios the Areopagite, St. Maximos the Confessor writes that fantasy and imagination are not the same as thinking. This difference is clear from the different ways in which they work: *Thinking is active and creative, whereas fantasy or imagination is passive, being the imprint of an image representing something that is, or could be, perceptible to the senses.* Thinking is an activity of the nous and reason, and is concerned with concepts, whereas fantasy and imagination are passive and reflect something perceptible to the senses. This is the difference between thinking, on the one hand, and fantasy and imagination, on the other.

It is in this sense that we should understand the teaching of the Holy Fathers, that the imagination or imaginative faculty is a natural power of the soul. Imagination is a natural capability of the soul that acts between the nous and senses. Since the Fall, this power has deviated from its natural course and acts unnaturally in all sorts of fantasies and imaginings. When a person attains to theosis he is released from all these. The statement by Kallistos and Ignatios of Xanthopoulos, *The soul of itself naturally has the ability to imagine*, has to be seen from this perspective. Just as the body has five senses, so the soul has five powers or faculties: nous, understanding, opinion, imagination and perception. Thus, *Imagination is one of the soul's faculties, by which the soul forms mental images.* Here "imagination" is used in the sense of "imaginative faculty." St. Gregory of Sinai makes the same point when he writes: *For by nature the nous readily invents fantasies and forms mental pictures of things it has not yet attained.*

St. Maximos the Confessor writes on the subject of fantasy or imagination: *Passion and pain were not originally created together with the flesh; nor forgetfulness and ignorance together with the soul; nor the ever-changing impressions of the forms of created things together with the nous. All these came into existence through the Fall. He who removes pleasure and pain from his flesh has achieved practical virtue. He who rids his soul of forgetfulness and ignorance has successfully attained natural theoria. He who frees his nous from its multitude of impressions has been initiated into mystery of theology.* Just as the flesh did

not have pleasure and pain from the outset and the soul did not have forgetfulness and ignorance from the beginning, so the nous did not have an inner world of imaginary images.

In order to gain a clear understanding of this passage from St. Maximos the Confessor, we should place it in the context of his whole theology, according to which there are three stages in the spiritual life: practical philosophy, natural theoria and mystical theology. When a person is delivered from pleasure and pain, he experiences practical philosophy. When he is freed from forgetfulness and ignorance, he experiences natural theoria, which means unceasing noetic prayer. And when his nous is released and liberated from images and fantasies, it is led towards theoria, which is inseparably linked with theology. Like pleasure, pain, forgetfulness and ignorance, fantasy and imagination are a phenomenon that appeared after the Fall, so in order to arrive at theosis, we must be delivered and set free from all these things. From this perspective St. Isaac the Syrian says: *All the images the nous is accustomed to construct about these things are fantasy and imagination, not the truth... The images created by the imagination are due to the sickness of the nous, not its purity.*

When we read these extracts from the holy Fathers and other relevant passages, we realize that, although the imaginative faculty exists as an energy of the unreasoning part of the soul, the act of fantasizing and imagining, particularly when linked with the passions, is a product of man's Fall and defiles the nous. In its natural state, the nous is free of fantasies and imaginings. As we shall see later on, someone who, after thorough purification, attains to illumination of the nous and theoria, is completely freed from using his imagination. This is why we maintain that a person must get rid of fantasies and imaginings and completely purify his nous. Thus, we understand why the Fathers speak about deliverance from fantasy and imagination, because the imaginative faculty, which is a faculty of the unreasoning part of the soul, is rendered inactive in pure theoria.

We see this in Christ. Because His divine nature assumed human nature in its entirety, and human nature was united with divine nature in the Person of the Word, it follows that Christ also turned the soul's imaginative faculty. However, the imaginative faculty, as a faculty of the unreasoning part of the soul, did not function in Christ as it does in us who are dominated by the passions. We could compare the imaginative faculty in Christ with a television set, which, although it is a device for communicating various images, does not do so

when it is turned off. So, although Christ had an imaginative faculty, in Him it did not function.

St. John of Damascus, speaking about the natural and blameless passions that Christ assumed, says: *We confess, then, that He assumed all the natural and innocent passions of man. For He assumed the whole man and all man's attributes save sin. Because sin is not natural, nor is it sown in us by the Creator, but arises voluntarily by our own free will as the result of a second sowing by the devil, and cannot prevail over us by force.* It should be noted, however, that even these blameless passions had no power over Christ, but were in His power. As St. John of Damascus says, the natural passions existed in a natural and supranatural way in Christ. *They acted in Him after a natural manner when He permitted the flesh to suffer what was proper to it: but they were above nature because that which was natural did not in the Lord assume command over His will.*

We can say the same of the imaginative faculty of Christ's soul. Although it existed as a faculty of the soul that He assumed, because *what is not assumed is not healed*, nevertheless it did not act as it does in us. Therefore, Christ did not imagine things. This is the sense in which we should examine the passages from the writings of the Fathers and St. Nicodemus the Hagiogrite, according to which Christ was free from fantasy and imagination.

What happened in Christ also happened, to a lesser degree and by grace, in the saints of the Church. After suitable training and treatment, when a person is healed by all-embracing repentance and his nous is freed from imaginary images, the imaginative faculty becomes inactive. Thus, the nous stays free from fantasy or form, as the Fathers say. This is a matter of experience, and in our fallen state, it is difficult for us to understand or explain it.

Everything perceptible to the senses is also imaginable and falls within the scope of the imaginative faculty, and so imagination and fantasy come into being, according to St. John of Damascus. This fantasy, as the Fathers tell us, is like scales covering the nous and preventing it from seeing God clearly. In order to attain to theoria of God, the nous has rid itself of these scales and appears before God in purity. The imaginative faculty is associated with imagination and fantasy in the language of the holy Fathers, and when they write that we must be cleansed from fantasy and imagination, they mean that we must also cleanse the imaginative faculty. In other words, we must render our soul's imaginative faculty inactive. The saints beheld God and experienced Him with their pure



nous, not through their imaginative faculty, which is why psychiatrists are unable to interpret the saints and their holy visions psychologically.

The imaginative faculty, which is a natural energy of the soul, is distinct from imagining, which is the function of this faculty, and fantasies. The entire ascetic tradition advises us not to attempt to envisage God. Instead, we should strive to purify the soul's imaginative faculty and free ourselves from accursed fantasy. When the nous prays it should remain *formless* and *free from fantasy*, so that we can guard ourselves against forming images of God.

Imagination and Fantasy as a Phenomenon of Man's Fallen State

Since the Fall, man's imaginative faculty has run wild and is full of fantasies. Apart from man, the devil also has imagination. For precisely this reason fantasy and imagination are an efficient conductor of satanic energy and the devil uses them to ensnare people. Fantasy and imagination are a bridge between man and the demons, which the demons cross to trouble him.

Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos write: *Fantasy, which takes as many forms as the mythical Daedalus, and has as many heads as the Hydra, is said by the saints to act as a bridge for demons. These murderous destroyers go back and forth over it, communing and mixing with the soul in some way, and making it a hive of drones and an abode of barren and passionate thoughts...* In other words, imagination is a bridge by which the demons come into contact with the soul and mingle with it and make man the dwelling-place of sterile and passionate ideas.

According to St. Maximos, fantasy, imagination and all the images they offer are scales obscuring the soul's vision. Anyone who has these scales is unable to see God or be convinced by teaching about God and divine things. Impressions and ideas that come from fantasy *are indeed scales, blinding the soul's clear vision and blocking access to the pure word of truth*. These scales covering the soul prevent it from reaching the truth and knowing God's will. This is why St. Maximos the Confessor teaches that, when the nous shakes off the ideas and images that result from fantasies, *then the word of truth is clearly proclaimed to it, giving it the precepts of true knowledge*. A person can only become an unerring and sure theologian when he is freed from fantasies and images. Otherwise, he may speak about God under the influence of demons, as the demons will offer ideas about God and other truths of the Faith through his imagination. The holy Fathers say that a person must get rid of these scales obscuring the soul's clear vision, and also that the saints speak about God *like fishermen* (like the Apostles) and not *like Aristotle*. Their theology comes from a pure heart, and not from their power of reasoning (St. Gregory the Theologian).

Although there is only one faculty of imagination, it has three divisions, according to Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos.

The first is the ability to depict ideas, to make them perceptible, to turn ideas and concepts into perceptible images. The second is the ability to represent things *from the remnants left over*, to recall and linger on the images produced by the first type of imagination. The third *consists of pleasure and imaginary images of apparently good or distressing things*, in other words, all the pleasure and sadness caused by the existence of those images which the senses present to the soul's imaginative faculty. So the three divisions of imagination are: firstly, the ability to conceive and inwardly assimilate an image; secondly, the retention of the idea and its image in the soul's imaginative faculty and the recollection of it; and thirdly, the pleasure or sorrow caused by seemingly good or bad images that linger in the soul's imaginative faculty.

As imagination is a natural function in fallen human beings and fantasies are scales that have obscured the soul's clear vision since the Fall, the nous is in its natural condition when it rids itself of all forms of fantasy and imagination. As St. Hesychios the Priest teaches, *When there are no fantasies or images in the heart, the nous is in its natural state* and is ready to be directed towards any delightful spiritual theoria pleasing to God.

The more spiritually sick a person is, the more he is dominated by all kinds of fantasy and imagination. The healthier he is spiritually, the freer he is from fantasies and imaginings. Even what are referred to nowadays as psychological problems are produced and retained in our souls by fantasies. The more we are freed from their oppression, the more we are healed from various psychological problems. This is why St. John Cassian the Roman writes that a sign that someone has acquired the virtue of holiness and chastity is that his soul pays no attention at all to imagination or fantasy, even when asleep. *It ignores those images which defiled fantasy produces during sleep*.

Certainly, it is not a sin to have offensive dreams while asleep, but *they are an indication that the soul is ill and has not been freed from passion*. They prove that the soul is sick and is not yet free of passion. This is why, as St. John Cassian teaches, obscene fantasies that appear in dreams during sleep are proof of our soul's idleness and illness.

This is the context in which anything we write about fantasy and release from its tyranny and effect has to be understood. When we write that imagination is a phenomenon of fallen human beings and that we must be freed from the imaginative faculty as well, we mean that our imaginative faculty must be rendered inactive. We must rid ourselves completely of fantasy and imagination, so that our nous is "imageless," "formless" and "free from fantasy." This is the only way to reach theosis and acquire communion with God.

All in all, fantasy and imagination have absolutely no place in pure knowledge of God. Knowledge of God exceeds every idea and concept. It is a vision of God to which the nous set free from fantasy attains.

Four Kinds of Imagination

As mentioned above, it is clear from the teaching of the holy Fathers that the path to theosis inevitably passes through purification of the heart and liberation from fantasy, when the imaginative faculty is freed from images and impressions. St. Gregory Palamas analyzes the whole course of this journey in one of his homilies on the Entry of the Mother of God, in which he describes how the Mother of God arrived at deification. In this sense, we are taught that the saints spoke about God without fantasy or imagination and that pure theology has nothing to do with imagination.

Within the Church, there are Christians at various stages of development. Some are in an infantile state, others are in their spiritual childhood and others are spiritual adults. Thus, every Christian's struggle is different. We should take care not to rely on fantasy or imagination, because this is not the basis of spiritual life, but something that distorts it.

We shall now refer to the teaching of a contemporary spiritual father, Archimandrite Sophrony, who was experienced in spiritual matters and a living witness of this way of life. On the subject of imagination he writes: *The world of the human will and imagination is the world of mirages. It is common to man and the fallen angels, and imagination is, therefore, often a conductor of demonic energy.*

Such demonic images and those conjured up by man may influence people, altering or transforming them, but one thing is inevitable—every image, whether created by man himself or suggested by demons, and accepted by the soul, will distort the spiritual image of man created in the image and after the likeness of God. This “creation” in its ultimate development leads to the self-divinization of the creature—that is, to the affirmation of the divine principle as contained in the very nature of man. Because of this, natural religion—religion of the human mind—may fatefully assume a pantheistic character.

Both demonic images and those conjured up by man may acquire very considerable force, not because they are real in the ultimate sense of the word, like the Divine strength which creates out of nothing, but in so far as the human will is drawn to and shaped by such images. However, the Lord liberates him who repents from the sway of passion and imagination, and the Christian thus liberated laughs at the power of images.

He is not referring here to what is nowadays called fantasizing and is an abnormal state, but to imagination itself and to every imaginary image which a person regards as significant.

Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov mentions, among other things, that there are four kinds of imagination.

The first kind is *connected with the grosser passions of the flesh*. Someone in this state continually accepts images and fantasies connected with the carnal passions.

The second kind of imagination is day-dreaming or reverie. This kind of fantasy is connected with images from the real

world. *A poor man may imagine that he is an emperor, a prophet, a great scientist.*

The third kind of imagination is associated with artistic and cultural creativity. *Pondering the solution of some problem, a technical one, for instance, sets the imagination working, together with the memory. This kind of intellectual activity is of immense significance in human culture, and essential to man's development.*

The fourth kind of imagination could be called theological creativity. *When the intellect attempts to penetrate the mystery of being and apprehend the Divine world. Such endeavors inevitably involve the imagination, to which many are inclined to give the high-flown label, theological creativity.*

He goes on to analyze, on the one hand, how much evil is caused to a person's spiritual and general state by the development of fantasy and imagination, and, on the other hand, how the ascetic lives his spiritual life without the expression or action of fantasy or imagination.

Christians, especially monks, fight hard in the beginning to be freed from the first kind of imagination (fantasizing about base carnal passions), and then go on to be liberated from the other three types. They refrain from all conjecture and day-dreaming. They avoid speculating about things or pondering on concepts about God. No one can acquire prayer of the nous in the heart and knowledge of God by means of the imaginative faculty. Only the purification of the imaginative faculty by profound repentance brings true knowledge of God.

It is essential for Christians living in society to get rid of the first kind of fantasy (carnal passions). They must at all costs avoid day-dreaming and reverie, which are the source of many psychological problems, and limit the third kind of imagination, referred to as artistic or cultural creativity. When they try to make something, they should do it mostly by copying, as monks do when they paint icons. They must also try to avoid intellectual activity concerning God. They can, however, make use of the teaching of the holy Fathers about God. They should not give their own opinions, but should put forward the teaching of the holy Fathers concerning God and everything to do with the spiritual life. Also, when they pray their nous should dwell on the phrases of the prayer and their meaning, and should not imagine pictures and scenes.

It is very significant that reading literary works develops and stimulates our soul's imaginative faculty, whereas reading the works of the holy Fathers crucifies our imaginative faculty. This shows that the holy Fathers speak without fantasy or imagination, as they have acquired spiritual health. One way of being delivered from fantasy and imagination is by prayerfully reading the various teachings and homilies of the holy Fathers.

Nevertheless, the existence of fantasy and imagination in those beginning the spiritual life is not a sign of delusion. If, however, it lingers on in their spiritual life for a long time, it causes many psychological abnormalities.

[continued on next issue]

PROCLAMATION OF PERSONHOOD

A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America, January 14, 1988.



America has given a great gift to the world, a gift that drew upon the accumulated wisdom derived from centuries of experiments in self-government, a gift that has irrevocably

changed humanity's future. Our gift is twofold: the declaration, as a cardinal principle of all just law, of the God-given, unalienable rights possessed by every human being; and the example of our determination to secure those rights and to defend them against every challenge through the generations. Our declaration and defense of our rights have made us and kept us free and have sent a tide of hope and inspiration around the globe.

One of those unalienable rights, as the Declaration of Independence affirms so eloquently, is the right to life. In the 15 years since the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, however, America's unborn have been denied their right to life. Among the tragic and unspeakable results in the past decade and a half have been the loss of life of 22 million infants [*now 57.5 million*] before birth; the pressure and anguish of countless women and girls who are driven to abortion; and a cheapening of our respect for the human person and the sanctity of human life.

We are told that we may not interfere with abortion. We are told that we may not "impose our morality" on those who wish to allow or participate in the taking of the life of infants before birth; yet no one calls it "imposing morality" to prohibit the taking of life after people are born. We are told as well that there exists a "right" to end the lives of unborn children; yet no one can explain how such a right can exist in stark contradiction of each person's fundamental right to life.

That right to life belongs equally to babies in the womb, babies born handicapped, and the elderly or infirm. That we have killed the unborn for 15 years does not nullify this right, nor could any number of killings ever do so. The unalienable right to life is found not only in the Declaration of Independence but also in the Constitution that every President is sworn to preserve, protect, and defend. Both the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments guarantee that no person shall be deprived of life without due process of law.

All medical and scientific evidence increasingly affirms that children before birth share all the basic attributes of human personality -- that they in fact are persons. Modern medicine

treats unborn children as patients. Yet, as the Supreme Court itself has noted, the decision in *Roe v. Wade* rested upon an earlier state of medical technology. The law of the land in 1988 should recognize all of the medical evidence.

Our nation cannot continue down the path of abortion, so radically at odds with our history, our heritage, and our concepts of justice. This sacred legacy, and the well-being and the future of our country, demand that protection of the innocents must be guaranteed and that the personhood of the unborn be declared and defended throughout our land. In legislation introduced at my request in the First Session of the 100th Congress, I have asked the Legislative branch to declare the "humanity of the unborn child and the compelling interest of the several states to protect the life of each person before birth." This duty to declare on so fundamental a matter falls to the Executive as well. By this Proclamation I hereby do so.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim and declare the unalienable personhood of every American, from the moment of conception until natural death, and I do proclaim, ordain, and declare that I will take care that the Constitution and laws of the United States are faithfully executed for the protection of America's unborn children. Upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God. I also proclaim Sunday, January 17, 1988, as National Sanctity of Human Life Day. I call upon the citizens of this blessed land to gather on that day in their homes and places of worship to give thanks for the gift of life they enjoy and to reaffirm their commitment to the dignity of every human being and the sanctity of every human life.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan, President of the USA



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

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ON THE MEDIATRESS OF OUR RACE

By St. Hierotheos, from "Extract from the Ecomium at the Dormition of the Theotokos."

When was such a wonder of wonders ever seen by men? How does the Queen of all lie breathless? How has the Mother of Jesus reposed? Thou, O Virgin, wast the preaching of the prophets; thou art heralded by us. All the people venerate thee; the angels glorify thee. Rejoice, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee, and through thee, with us. With Gabriel we hymn thee, with the angels we glorify thee; and with the prophets we praise thee, for they announced thee.

Habakkuk beheld thee as an overshadowed mountain, for thou art covered with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Daniel beheld thee as a mountain from whom, seedlessly, the solid and strong King, the Christ, issued forth. Jacob saw thee as a ladder upon Whom Christ came down to eat and drink with us. And although we, His slaves, contemplate ascending into the heavens, yet thou hast ascended before all. Rejoice, O Virgin, for Gideon beheld thee as a fleece. David saw thee as the virgin daughter of the King. Isaias called thee Mother of God and Ezekiel a gate. All the prophets prophesied thee!

What shall we call thee, O Virgin? Paradise. It is meet, for thou hast blossomed forth the flower of incorruption, Christ, Who is



the sweet-smelling fragrance for the souls of men. Virgin? Verily, a virgin thou art, for without the seed of man thou gavest birth to our Lord Jesus Christ. Thou wast a virgin before birth and virgin at birth and still a virgin after. Shall we call thee Mother? This is meet too; for as a Mother thou gavest birth to Christ the King of all. Shall we name thee Heaven? This thou art also for upon thee rose the Sun of righteousness. Wherefore, rejoice O Virgin, and hasten to thy Son's rest and dwell in the tents of His beloved. Hasten there and make ready a palace and remember us and all thy people also, too. O Lady Mother of God, for both we and thyself are of the race of Adam. On account of this, intercede on our behalf; for this supplicate thy Son Whom thou hast held in thine embrace, and help us in our preaching and then afterwards that we may find rest in our hopes.

Go forward, O Virgin from earth to heaven, from corruption to incorruption, from the sorrow of this world to the joy of the Kingdom of the heavens, from this perishable earth to the everlasting Heaven. Hasten, O Virgin to the heavenly light, to the hymns of the angels, to the glory of the saints from all the ages. Hasten, O Virgin, to the place of thy Son, to His Kingdom, to His power, where the angels chant, the prophets glorify and the Archangels hymn the Mother of the King, who is the lit lampstand, wider than the heavens, the firmament above, the protection of Christians, and the mediatress of our race.