

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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In This Issue:

- On Conservatives and Liberals (p. 5)
- On Church Scandals (p. 6)
- Orthodoxy is not a Religion (p. 8)
- Living the Monastic Life in the World (p. 11)
- A Timely Revelation (p. 13)
- Are G.O. Christians in Canada Fanatics? (p. 21)
- On Yoga (p. 23)
- On Repentance (p. 25)
- The Mystery of Integrity (p. 27)
- In the Culture of Death, Abortion Is a Sacrament (p. 29)



- Σημεῖα Καιρῶν (σελ. 14)
- Λεπρὸι Κοινωνοῦν (σελ. 16)
- Ὁρθόδοξα Μαργαριτάρια (σελ. 17)
- Ὁ Πόλεμος κατὰ τῆς Πλάνης (σελ. 19)
- Περὶ Ἀνεξικακίας (σελ. 20)

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SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM COVID-19

By Archpriest Geoffrey Korz; Fr. Geoffrey is a parish priest of the Orthodox Church in America, in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

There is no event in living memory that has shaped the life and outlook of people worldwide as much as the coronavirus outbreak of 2020. Some have likened it to the psychological and political impact of a world war. While this may be true, these are still passing considerations: the bigger—and much more important—lessons of the coronavirus for the timeless Orthodox Church and for the world at large are the spiritual lessons. It is the spiritual lessons which, if they are learned, will heal the souls of individuals and nations in a way that will endure into eternity. If they are not learned (as the old adage reminds us), God through history will replay them, again and again if necessary, to awaken the souls of mankind using the most common and effective means God has always used: repentance through suffering.

Here, we will discuss five major lessons of the coronavirus for the spiritual lives of the faithful, and for the life of the Orthodox Church as a whole.

Does My Faith Live at My Home?

Most people lived restricted lives because of the coronavirus. Isolated at home, life laid bare what we had and what we lacked in terms of spiritual roots. While electronic and online resources provided some help, these are not alive: they all depend on real people to put them to use in active ways.

This exposes all sorts of gaps in our Christian life: do we pray as a normal part of our day? Do we even know the prayers? Do I make the effort to con-

tact my priest when I cannot simply drop in to the church? When I cannot hear a Sunday sermon, where am I getting spiritual teaching? Online? Is the source faithful, or even really Orthodox? Is going to church the only time we really pray or even think about God and the real purpose of our life? Do we live as if God and His purpose are real? Does spiritual life and practice permeate our family?

For those who have family responsibilities, if we have not invested the time and effort to shape our home in this way, what is our plan now to change that? **This first critical, personal lesson—does my faith live at my home?—is grossly impeded by the reality that for many people, the period of the coronavirus crisis was spent in a combination of physical inactivity, or in recreation and escapism.** Far from being a time that was ideal for gaining spiritual strength (despite the fact that it occurred in the midst of Great Lent), too often, the period of the virus saw people neglect their spiritual condition, falling victim to the Internet, comfort food, video games, and movies. For all the talk of turning each home into a “little church,” too often this time at home became a lost opportunity—although not a lost lesson, for those who would learn from it.

Do We have Any King but Caesar?

The start of the pandemic saw the Orthodox world divide into two groups: those determined to keep churches open and services functioning as long as possible—even if it meant standing up to the state—and those who anticipated the spirit of the moment, and quickly closed churches and banned services.

In general, a divide might be drawn between countries with an Orthodox

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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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majority which had recent experience of totalitarian governments, versus those in the liberal, secular West who cannot envision such a regime ever being possible. Those who come from former or current totalitarian countries—the former Soviet states, the Balkans, Greece, Romania, Georgia, China, and others—seem to have no problem recognizing the great responsibility for and need for leadership from shepherds of the Church in times like these. In general, people born and raised in the West have not learned the same lesson.

While few would argue against the need for health precautions against a worldwide pandemic, the Orthodox Church is left with a critical question which draws on its own recent experience with persecution: at what point would Church leaders (hierarchs and priests) take a position calling repeatedly on a civil government in defense of religious freedom? Would it require a ban on hospital visits for this to happen? Would it require churches to be shut down for three months? For six months? For a year?

And if it would take Church leaders this long to recapture the spirit to stand up to civil authorities, would it even happen at all? Are Orthodox Christians in the West simply too much at ease with any “new normal” that anyone within the Church who took such a stand would not only be unusual, but would in fact be criticized and attacked by those within the Orthodox Church in the West?

It is not the burden of the faithful to show that public Liturgies and the Holy Mysteries are essential: it is the burden of the hierarchs to defend the faithful. This is especially true in cases where the state gradually and increasingly encroaches on that freedom.

All crises are opportunities. There are those in Orthodox circles who invest much energy in dialogues with the het-

erodox at other times. A crisis such as this was and is the perfect opportunity to cooperate on a deep and fundamental question of religious freedom: the opening of churches. Orthodox bishops could have taken (and still should take) the initiative and stood together with the Roman Catholics and others and demand that the same rules that apply to opening liquor stores and lotto services apply to churches. Why do they not do so now?

Our second spiritual lesson from the coronavirus must be this: **is God our King, or is Caesar—our civil government?** And when our civil government opposes the free exercise of the historic Christian faith, will we rally our Christian courage and confront it, or will we simply join the call to be “good citizens”?

Do We Fear Death More than God?

Fear has been the single biggest motivator during the coronavirus crisis: not faith, not politics, and not even science. Yet fear—especially the fear of Death—is the exact opposite of the Lord’s teaching: *And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have nothing further they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him who after He kills, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!* (Mt 10:28).

The panic among leaders and decision-makers—including those in the Church—has been embarrassing, but why has it happened? We should expect this from secular-minded people who do not believe in God, or who believe that this life is all that people are given. Yet Christians know this is not true—our whole life and all our decisions are based on hope in eternal life. This is the reason we draw our bishops from among the monastics, and have them advised by a council of other bishops who are also monks—not a staff

of insurance reps, lawyers, administrative assistants, medical experts and lifetime bureaucrats.

At least, that is the way it is supposed to be.

In the midst of the coronavirus, many Church jurisdictions leaned heavily on insurance reps, lawyers, administrative assistants, medical experts and lifetime bureaucrats to make decisions about Church life, without a circle of seasoned spiritual elders in sight. The result? Our council of secular experts advised our authorities—both political and within the Orthodox Church—to fear death more than God, and to plan accordingly.

That is just what they did.

The third lesson we might draw from the coronavirus is this: the council of secular experts will not be of any help before the Throne of Judgement—and they may even be wrong about things in this life. We are all going to die soon, whatever happens. The only question is whether we act like Christians or not while we are here.

Hard Evangelism, Hard Conversion

The virus tested the seriousness of Orthodox Christians. During this time, many faithful strengthened their prayers at home, received the Holy Mysteries as best they could, and sought out ways to serve the Lenten services without interruption. In contrast, there are many stories of those who moved completely to “viewing services online,” becoming spectators of the Great Fast rather than participants. This suggests that, when the time of the virus ends, two groups will emerge in the Church: one that is deeper, stronger, and better rooted in the traditional practice of their Orthodox faith, more prepared to survive the challenges of the years ahead, and a second group who are uncomfortable when Orthodox life does not resemble comfortable, secular life—easily accessible online, in shops, without struggle or endurance, and with the click of a button.

The implications for evangelism to the Orthodox Church are obvious.

The period of the virus has revealed just how few people in Western society are really up for the work it entails to be a Christian. In recent decades, much time and effort has been put into making churches comfortable to those who might be interested in joining: the Protestant “seeker sensitive” movement of the 1990s was based on such an idea. Such sentiment has infected many parts of the Orthodox Church, too, where there is no price that is too high to pay

to avoid giving offense to visitors or inquirers. This stands in sharp contrast to the three-year Catechism period of the early Church, in which those preparing for baptism were not only taught, but trained to have such a deep root of faith in Christ, that they would be prepared to face martyrdom.

Today, we too often live in an environment that hesitates to make visitors find the Church any different than their home family room.

Church life without entertainment is difficult: it demands something of each person. Closed churches during Holy Week meant Orthodox people had to take up the Cross of praying the services themselves: those who did can attest to the great blessings this brought. They also know how few of their friends and family are up for making such a spiritual journey: it is much easier to “sell” people on viewing a link on YouTube. One can already see the emergence of a cheap, substitute pseudo-Orthodoxy, which will be very appealing to people with modern habits and tastes. The virus shutdown made this eminently clear. Sadly, it will be tempting for



Greek Orthodox Pascha services held virtually in empty churches amid Covid-19

clergy and laity alike to try to sell this plastic Orthodoxy to outsiders as an easy and less demanding way to “enter the Church”—thinking they are getting the fullness of the faith of the saints and martyrs, but for a fraction of the personal cost.

The fourth lesson the coronavirus teaches us is, the Church necessarily includes those who are seasoned by struggle—and also necessarily loses those who refuse it. This will mean churches will be smaller, and Her clergy and faithful will have to get used to inquirers who walk away from Orthodox Christianity when they do not get their own, easy way.

Is the Orthodox Church Useless?

A church that is deemed useless in a time of crisis like this is also useless in normal times.

What is the purpose of a church during normal times? There are better places to have a social club, an intellectual chat group, a school, or a centre to alleviate poverty. The distinctive function of the church is the place where the Holy Mysteries are offered, in order to heal souls (prayers go along with this: if churches were for prayers alone, one could pray at home and sell off the church buildings).

Most of modern society already feels the central function of the Church—the Holy Mysteries—has no practical use, and is ineffective for anything but making people feel better, psychologically. For this reason, many Orthodox parishes follow the Protestant model to make themselves

“relevant” to secular people by offering functions (such as rentals, clubs, classes, and charitable works) which secular people would believe makes the Church “useful.” Some Orthodox people (even priests) spend the majority of their energy on activities such as these, leading them to believe that they are very active Orthodox Christians—when in fact, they are not, at least not without the Liturgical life of the Orthodox Church.

Historically, Orthodox Christians did everything they could to assemble to receive the Holy Mysteries. Even in the darkest days of the Soviet Union or the Ottoman Empire, the enemies of the Church allowed at least a few churches to operate. Those too fearful to attend might arrange to have the Holy Mysteries smuggled out to them, receive Holy Baptism in a private home, or meet in a remote forest for Holy Unction. Even during times of plague, Church authorities would not close the churches: on the contrary, they made the Holy Mysteries more accessible—taking certain precautions if lives were at risk—but always using the Heavenly Power of Christ’s Church for its true function.

Authorities—both Church and secular—achieved during the few weeks of the coronavirus what pagan Rome, the Muslim Turks, the Soviets, and the Fascist Ustache could only have dreamed of doing: closing down every single Orthodox church in a matter of days. Orthodox nations refused this; Orthodox in the West generally complied, or even cooperated.

This very foolish (or wicked) compliance will likely have an unanticipated consequence, a message sent to people inside and outside the Church that unlike every single example given by the saints at a time of plague or crisis, there are those in the Orthodox Church today who believe the power of God in the Church is useless against this great evil.

This is of course a lie. Yet it is the implicit message.

What message is sent when Orthodox churches are closed in the midst of a social disaster of any kind? Whether to the faithful or the secular, the message when this is done is clear: **the single unique function of the Church—the Holy Mysteries—is not essential or even useful in the midst of a crisis.**

Orthodox hierarchs, clergy, and faithful in some other countries understand this. **This fifth lesson is perhaps the most fundamental lesson Orthodox Christians in the West—especially in North America—have yet to learn. Until we do, we cannot say we think like or like as Orthodox Christians.**

Whether the coronavirus lock-down will be enough to teach it to the faithful here—or whether God will permit several more rounds of such lessons for us to learn it—remains to be seen.

FROM THE EDITOR...

Another U.S. Presidential election just completed at a time that our Nation is in a chaotic turmoil, more polarized than it has ever been, allegations of election fraud and improper behaviors are abundant, the world is in social and economic upheaval, wars continue to rage, and uncertainty among all is apparent, irrespective of wealth, political persuasion or social status. Concurrently, State-mandated lock-downs are still keeping churches closed in several regions, all over the world.

What was distinct in this last election was the divisiveness on some key moral issues, many of which transcend fundamental dogmatic beliefs of our Orthodox Faith. The continuing degradation of morals, ethics, and values has fully penetrated the campaigns and views of many politicians throughout our Nation. The electorate is no longer surprised by ANY revelation of impropriety and, for the most part, struggles to determine who might be the candidate that will allow our Nation to return back to its glory days in accordance with the Founders’ values. Sadly, citizens have concurrently become numb to the continuing censuring of news by “self-appointed” high tech company CEOs or immensely corrupt media and reporters. As this issue of *Orthodox Heritage* makes it into our readers’ hands, we are quite certain that some, perhaps many are quite disappointed with either specific elected officials or the overall course that the new U.S. Congress shall pursue for this Nation. We shall, once again, reiterate a self-reflective anecdote from our Church’s Holy Tradition, which we uncovered within the Greek periodical *Athonite Witness*, in one of their 1990 issues:

When the Emperor *Phocas the Tyrant* (depicted as a villain by Byzantine and modern historians alike) had taken over the reins of Byzantium (602 AD), he inflicted upon his people several atrocities and massacres with the aid of the evil *Vonosos the Tormentor*. During that same time, there was a certain pious monk in Constantinople, a holy man, who having much boldness towards God and as if he was being afflicted by Him, kept asking with great simplicity, *Lord, why did You give us such an Emperor?* And then, after asking this for quite a few days, a voice from God came to him, which said: ***Because I could find none worse...***

We entreat our readers that, as Orthodox Christians, all of us must take into account politicians’ views and positions on the sacredness of all human life, from conception to natural death; the preservation of the traditional, God-established family unit; and defending our constitutional freedom of worship. We all must communicate to our representatives our personal positions on these issues and insist that they vote any new legislation accordingly. Lastly, all of us must increase our heart centered prayers on behalf of our Nation and its citizenry.

As we all observe newly elected politicians assume their appointed offices, we are reminded by His Divine Word: *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.* (Rom 13:1).

ON CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS

By Fr. John Romanides of blessed memory, from "From Patristic Theology - The University Lectures of Fr. John Romanides," ch. 29, pp. 108-111.

In their mudslinging campaign, the opponents of the hesychast revival have now called the supporters of this tradition 'conservative.' But what does the word 'conservative' mean in the West? In the West, a conservative is someone who still identifies the Bible with God's revelation to mankind and the world, because in the old days Protestants and Roman Catholics believed in the literal inspiration of Holy Scripture. In other words, they believed that Christ dictated the Bible word for word to the prophets and writers of the gospels by means of the Holy Spirit, so that the writers of the Bible were like scribes who wrote down whatever they heard the Holy Spirit say.

But now Biblical criticism has come along and discredited this line of thought, dividing those in the Protestant world into conservative and liberal camps. For example, the Lutherans are divided into conservative and liberal factions. In America, there are separate Lutheran churches—one church for liberals, and the church of the Missouri Synod for conservatives. One faction does not accept the Bible as revelation on absolute terms, while the other faction does. One can also observe the same phenomenon with the Baptists. The liberal Baptists do not accept the Holy Scripture as literally inspired revelation, while the others embrace it as revelation that is inspired word for word. You can also find the same division among the Methodists. In fact, this split between liberals and conservatives over the issue of Holy Scripture can be seen in all the Protestant denominations in America.

Now, ask yourself whether this division can be applied to Orthodox tradition. Are there conservative Fathers and liberal Fathers with respect to the Bible? Is there a single Church Father who teaches the literal inspiration of Holy Scripture? Is there a single Church Father who identifies the Holy Scripture with the experience of theosis itself? No, there is not one, because God's revelation to mankind is the experience of theosis. In fact, since revelation is the experience of theosis, an experience that transcends all expressions and concepts, the identification of Holy Scripture with revelation is, in terms of dogmatic theology, pure heresy.

Can someone who accepts this Patristic teaching on theosis be characterized as conservative, based on the split over Scripture in the Protestant world? When liberal Protestants hear about this Patristic principle, they say, "Oh yes, that's liberalism!" while conservative Protestants say, "No, it's heresy!" In other words, when we follow the Fathers, we Orthodox are heretics as far as conservative Protestants are concerned.

You may well ask, "who are the Orthodox liberals and the Orthodox conservatives?" They are those who do theology in a way that corresponds to the theology of Protestant liberals and conservatives. This is the reason why certain theologians in Greece have been divided into liberal and conservatives camps. The liberals follow liberal Protestants on these subjects while the conservatives follow their conservative counterparts.

But can we classify Patristic tradition using such characterizations and buzzwords? Of course not. Nevertheless, a hesychast theologian of the Eastern Church will be viewed as a liberal in the West, because he refuses to identify the written text of Holy Scripture, including its sayings and concepts, with revelation.

Since revelation is the experience of theosis, it is beyond comprehension, expression, and conceptualization. This means that the labels 'conservative' OR 'liberal' should not be applied to those who adhere to Orthodox tradition. Based on what is meant by revelation, the Fathers are neither liberals nor conservatives. Simply put, there are Church Fathers who are saints of the Church who have only reached illumination and there are saints of the Church who have also reached theosis and are more glorious than the former class of saints.

This is the Patristic tradition—either you attain to illumination or you attain to theosis once you have already passed through illumination. Orthodox tradition is nothing other than this curative course of treatment through which the nous is purified, illumined, and eventually glorified together with the entire man, if God so wills. Therefore, is there such a thing as an illumined liberal or an illumined conservative in this context? Of course not. You are either illumined or you are not. You have either reached theosis or you have not. You have either undergone this treatment, or you have not. Apart from these distinctions, there are no others.



They thought that by closing the churches they would stop the virus...Lord have mercy! Is this the first outbreak of a virus? From what I know, during epidemics the churches are open day and night and the Liturgy is offered nonstop. Some have attempted to create doubt about Holy Communion, that it can impart infection. Do you know what is the Divine Liturgy? The Body and Blood of the Resurrected Christ. Do you know of a God who defeats death but transmits sicknesses? And there are Hierarchs who tell you to change the *lavida* (Holy Communion spoon) and to dip it in disinfectant... God forbid!

Metropolitan Neophytos of Morphou (Cyprus)

CONCERNING CHURCH SCANDALS

Source: "Follow Me," by the late Augustinos N. Kantiotes (+2010), bishop of Florina, Greece. Translated and foreward by Asterios Gerostergios (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1989), pp. 370-378.

One reason young people are not attracted to missionary work is the sad state of the Church today. One has to be blind not to see it. Must we bring to mind all that the *Christianike Spitha* and other Church publications and religious periodicals have written in the past decade?

How can our young people be attracted to serve the Church when they see—unfortunately, holy fathers, they have eyes and do see—devious and vile persons who offer no essential service to the Church or community, who by the most evil means succeed in jumping into the flock and climb to the highest places, pushing aside the faithful and talented? Or when they see that such people, taking the tiller of Church government in their hands in our democratic homeland, exercise almost absolute authority and treat Christians as irrational beasts? Or when they see that faithful men and women are held in ill favor, but flattery and worldly minded relatives surround the bishop and comprise the select staff of his Metropolis? Or when they see that a metropolitan's tour reaps a golden harvest? Or when they see that the ranks of the Church, coming from the poorest of families, are carried around in gleaming limousines, which even statesmen and generals envy? Or when they see that luxury reigns in certain metropolitan palaces in which magnates are welcomed and are amazed at the life of ecclesiastic rulers? Or when they see in the middle of Athens apartments and palaces that are the personal property of bishops and their relatives? Or when they hear that sisters and nieces are given generous dowries taken from despotic treasuries or that elite grooms are bought for them with sacred monies? Or when they hear that metropolitans do not happily stay in small or poor metropolises but, after tasting the demon of greed and vanity, leave no stone unturned in their efforts to be transferred to palaces and richer sees, neither fearing God nor shamed by man? Or when they see that preachers of the Gospel, faithful people, are persecuted to extinction for condemning illegal and uncanonical practices by the leaders of the Church? Or when they see that no war or battle is waged against the powerful of the day, who by anti-Christian word and deed offend the laity? Or when they hear that scandals of a moral nature break out in the halls of archbishops and are circulated throughout the entire region without the official Church becoming alarmed or disturbed? Or when they hear that dying bishops leave enormous amounts in their wills to their blood relatives and other dear persons, and the heirs, like blackbirds, gather round these wretched wills, coming to blows and going to civil court to settle their differences?

My dear Church, how can I express all the sufferings that the Mystical Body of Christ has endured at the hands of the evil shepherds, who have not entered into your holy flock by the gate, but another way?

So, when our youth are witnesses by eye and ear of the reigning disorder and wretchedness within the Church, how do you expect them to be attracted by missionary ideals and make the decision to serve the Church in extreme selflessness? There are no educated young people with high interests in life today because there are no models, no heroic examples among our priests. Youth is attracted by heroes; it worships its heroes from whatever walk of life they come. Through his example, a heroic general inspires the officers and soldiers under him and leads them to victory, glory, and honor. On the other hand, a cowardly general can disappoint even the bravest men, and create a spirit of defeatism, leading to shameful defeat. A lion can lead deer to victory, but a deer commanding lions leads to defeat. So when Christian orders are devoid of leaders who are equal to the task of holy mission, nothing grand or high can be accomplished. The mission will vegetate.

As Church history bears witness, holy bishops and priests have a following of young people with holy desires who are eager to strive for missionary work, but bad bishops do not attract such youth. Wretched people gather around the axle of episcopal authority of bad shepherds, ready to take over wealthy parishes. Their goals are the episcopal thrones, which they strive to attain through vanity and greed, faithful copies of the bishops over them. As they destroy honorable Gospel workers, they load down their favorites with crosses and monastic garb and call them missionaries, into whose hands they place preaching and *catechesis*. Wolves shepherding the laity! No wonder there has been a breakdown of preaching, religious instruction, and confession in Greece. *This is the charge against the leaders of the Jews*, said St. Chrysostom, *that shepherds were truly shown to be wolves. Not only did they not direct the masses, but ruined their ability to do so.* (Homily 32 on Matthew's Gospel, Migne 57:379).

Therefore, the catharsis of metropolitan halls of their vile elements—of God-peddlers and Christ-sellers in the garb of apostolic shepherds—is and must be the most serious duty of every honorable Church worker, every believer who, according to Gregory of Nazianzus, is a follower and imitator of Christ, guiding by all his generation, from manger to Golgotha. He is also called to take the three-pronged lash and chase the money-changers from the Temple. Let everyone understand this. **Without cleansing the Church, without the clean, surging wind of the Holy Spirit, there can be no serious reason for mission, here or abroad.** It is a joke to think that by technical means, by decrees and regulations, we can create a spiritual life and change every bishopric into an upper room at Jerusalem, from which issue fiery men for the spiritual edification of the world.

One final reason why the ranks in all but the fewest missionary centers are not sustained by an influx of new stock is the same one that St. Chrysostom observed in his own time (of all the Church Fathers, he had the most active passion for missions). The reason is this: There are faithful young men and women who could offer much to a missionary movement; however, these people (who are so scant yet so precious) do not stay in the world and struggle under the Cross to help their spiritual fathers and teachers whom they see groaning through lack of help—they leave. Where do they go? They go to the desert or to the mountains and lead a monastic life. The brilliance of Tabor's light draws them. Let us let St. Chrysostom (who himself groaned under his same abandonment) speak to these faithful beings, who could stay and help in missionary work and save souls, yet leave their spiritual fathers and teachers to carry out the difficult struggle in this generation alone:

Paul the Apostle, for one, went from Jerusalem to Illyricum, another Apostle to the land of India, another to the land of the blacks, and others to various parts of the world; yet we do not dare venture out from the borders of our own homeland, but look for luxury, nice homes, and every other abundance. Who of us ever hungered for the word of God? Who has ever undertaken a tiring journey for the Gospel? Who is in the wilderness? Who has gone to a far-off country? Which of our teachers ever worked to help others who were hungry or suffering? Who has died a daily death?... And if one were to be found having traces of that apostolic life and behavior, he leaves the cities, markets, the company of the world and his duty to work the salvation of others, to order their lives through teaching the Gospel, and goes off to the mountains. And if one were to ask him the reason for his departure, he will start giving excuses. But his excuses contain no pardon. For what does he say? "That I, too, not be destroyed, that I not be drawn into the wave of evil, that my spirituality and virtue not be diminished, I therefore abandon the world and flee to the mountains." However, would it not be better to lose something of your spirituality that others may gain some, instead of fleeing and seeing your brothers being lost from afar? So, when some are indifferent to virtue and others who are zealous and concerned for virtue flee far from the crowd, far from the holy war being waged in the world, I ask you how will we conquer the enemies of faith and virtue?

Truly these are golden words that have great significance, for they proceed from an Ecumenical Father of the Church who like few others loved the monastic life!*

O chosen young people, the genuine preaching of the Gospel pulled you from the depths of sin into spiritual life, and loving fathers and teachers for years prepared you for missionary work. They had many golden hopes in you, but now you are leaving for the mountains. You leave with empty excuses. You leave in hard days, when the Anti-Christ is raging in the world; souls are lost every day, and your fathers and teachers

struggle hard for the sacred and holy. You leave them alone. Go then to Mt. Tabor and there rejoice in your spirits. But we ask you, "Is your conscience at rest?" Before you answer, meditate a second and third time on the golden words of St. Chrysostom. They were written for you!***

† † †

[*] In his sixth homily on Ephesians, St. Chrysostom stresses that one cause for falling away from Church life is that pious people, endowed with their gift of working in the world as missionaries, flee to the mountains and stay there forever and thus leave the ecclesiastical stage free to be taken by lazy and insufficient elements. This is what he says in a related passage: *They, who were living virtuously, and who under any circumstance might have confidence, have taken possession of the tops of the mountains, and have escaped out of the world, separating themselves as from an enemy and an alien and not from a body to which they belonged. Plagues too, teeming with untold mischiefs, have lighted upon the Churches.* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 13, Philip Schaff, ed., Eerdmans Publications, Grand Rapids, p. 78. See also, K. Kontogones, *Ekklesiastike Historia*, Athens: 1876, vol. 1, p. 480).

[**] What we wrote here we do not wish to be misinterpreted. **We are not against monastic life, an ancient order of the Church that has offered resplendent fruit of the Holy Spirit.** We believe that we are not sinning in stressing that monastic life, as it presents itself today, is going through a crisis in Greece and is in need of renewal to re-attain its ancient grandeur (see our book, *National Anniversary*, Athens, 1970, pp. 37-63). Monastic life, renewed according to the ancient prototypes, can offer so much to Church life and community. It is impossible not to well forth from its bowels again missionary men who will continue the work of Cyril and Methodios, Cosmas the Aitolean, and so many other monks known and unknown, who for the sake of saving souls looked beyond their own spiritual interests and threw themselves into the furnace of the world and underwent hardships. And by flaming love for humble humanity everywhere they took up what Paul said, *For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh* (Rom 9:3), as elsewhere he says, *Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being* (1 Cor 10:24), a saying which significantly had an influence on the soul of St. Cosmas the Aitolean, who left the monastery to do missionary work, that from the hesychasm which he had practiced for sixty years he went out to missionary activity and the famous monk Christophoros Papoulakos during a dramatic interview with the champion of the Orthodox Faith, Phlamiatos (see K. Bastia, *Ho Papoulakos*, Athens, 1963, ed. 4, pp. 112-20).

St. Chrysostom sighs in lack of missionary zeal for saving souls and cries, *Woe is me, that I have not known how much it takes to gain souls.* (see homily 18 on the Acts of the Apostles, Migne 60, 149).

ORTHODOXY IS NOT A RELIGION

By Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001), from "Orthodoxy and Religion," edited for length.

Many people are under the impression that Orthodoxy is one of many religions and that it is primarily concerned with preparing the members of the Church for life after death; that is, with securing a place in Paradise for every Orthodox Christian. Thus, they reckon that Orthodox doctrine offers an additional guaranty (because it is Orthodox), and that if someone does not believe in Orthodox doctrine, this serves as just one more reason for this person to go to Hell—apart, that is, from the fact that his personal sins will, in all probability, send him there. Any Orthodox Christian who believes that such a thing is Orthodoxy has associated Orthodoxy exclusively with the future life. Such people do not do much in this life, but rather wait to die in order to go to Paradise, since in their lifetime they were Orthodox Christians!

Another portion of the Orthodox are active within the domain of the Church, being interested not in the next life, but primarily in the present life. In other words, what interests them is how Orthodoxy will help them to live well in this life. Such Orthodox Christians pray to God, have priests say prayers, bless Holy Water, read supplicatory Canons, and anoint them with Holy Oil, etc., so that God will help them to have a pleasant life, to avoid falling ill, to provide for their children, to secure a good dowry and a good husband for their daughters, to have their sons find nice girls with good dowries to marry, to have their work go well, and even to help them with their stocks or businesses, etc. So we see that these Christians do not differ significantly from the faithful of other religions, who also do pretty much the same things.

In other words, from the foregoing, one sees Orthodoxy as having these two points in common with all of the other faiths: Firstly, it prepares the faithful for life after death so that they might go to Paradise, as each one imagines it; secondly, it ensures that Christians do not pass through sorrows, worries, disasters, illnesses, wars, etc., in this life—that is, God takes care of everything according to their needs or desires. Thus, for the second group of Christians, religion plays a major role in this life, and especially in everyday life.

Deep down, however, who, among all of the aforementioned Christians, is interested in whether God exists or not? Who is seeking Him? For such people, whether or not God exists is not an issue, since it would simply be better if God *did* exist, so that we can call upon Him and ask Him to satisfy our needs, that our jobs might go well, and that we might have some happiness in this life. Thus, we see that man has a very strong proclivity to want God to exist and to believe that God exists, because it is a human need for God to exist,

in order that He might secure for him all of the things we have mentioned. Well then, since it is a human need for God to exist, *ergo*, God exists!

If man had no need of a God and could self-sufficiently secure a livelihood for himself in this life in some other way, then no one knows how many people would believe in God. Such is frequently the case, even in Greece.

We see, then, how many people, though previously indifferent with regard to religion, become religious towards the end of their lives, perhaps after having been frightened by some event. For they can no longer live without calling upon some God to help them—that is, out of superstition. For these reasons, human nature helps man to become religious. This does not apply to Orthodox Christians alone; it applies to the faithful of all religions. Human nature is the same everywhere. Thus it is that man, after his fall—darkened as he is by nature, or, rather, contrary to nature—inclines towards superstition.

How About True Faith?

We now face the question: Where does superstition end and true faith begin?

The Fathers have clear positions and teachings on this subject. A person who follows (or rather believes that he follows) the teaching of Christ and simply goes to Church every Sunday, communes at regular intervals, and makes use of priests for blessings of the waters, anointments, etc., without exploring these things in greater depth, abiding in the *letter of the law* and not the *spirit of the law*—does such a person benefit in any particular way from Orthodoxy? Next, another person who prays exclusively for the next life, for himself and for others, while being totally indifferent to this life—does he, again, benefit in any particular way from Orthodoxy?

The first tendency is personified by a parish priest and those gathered around him with the aforementioned spirit, while the latter tendency is personified by a monastery Elder (usually an Archimandrite), who is retired and waiting to die, with a few monks around him. To the extent that these two tendencies are not centered around *purification* and *illumination*, from a patristic viewpoint they are at fault as to the thing they are pursuing. On the other hand, to the extent that they are centered around *purification*, *illumination* and the implementation of the Orthodox patristic ascetic regimen for the acquisition of *noetic prayer*, only then are things placed on a proper foundation.

These two tendencies incline towards opposite extremes. They do not have a *common axis*. The common axis that upholds Orthodoxy and holds it together, its one and only *axis*, on all of the questions that concern Orthodoxy, and which puts everything on a correct foundation, when taken into account, is the axis: *purification, illumination, deification*.

The Fathers are not *exclusively* interested in what will happen to a person after his death; what is of primary interest to them is what a person will become in this life. After death,

there is no *treatment of the mind*, so the *treatment* must begin in this life; for “there is no repentance in Hades.” This is why Orthodox theology is not “other-worldly,” futurological, or eschatological, but is purely “this-worldly.” For the solicitude of Orthodoxy is for man in this world, in this life, not after death.

Now, why are *purification* and *illumination* necessary? So that a person will go to Paradise and escape going to Hell? Is that why we need them? What constitutes *purification* and *illumination* and why do the Orthodox seek after them?

In order for one to find the reason and give an answer to this question, he must have the basic key in his possession, which is: All people on earth share the **same end**, from an Orthodox theological viewpoint. Whether a person is Orthodox, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic or atheist, or whatever he may be (that is, every person on earth), **he is destined to see the Glory of God**. He will see the Glory of God at the **common end** of mankind during the Second Coming of Christ. All people will see the Glory (Uncreated Light) of God, and from this viewpoint they have the **same end**, but with one difference: The saved will see the Glory of God as a most sweet and never-setting **Light**, whereas the damned will see the same Glory of God as a consuming **Fire** that will burn them.

That we will all see the Glory of God is a true and expected fact. Beholding God—that is, His Glory, His Light—is something that will happen whether we want it or not. The experience of this Light, however, will be different from one person to another. Thus, the task of the Church and the clergy is not to help us to see this Glory, because this will come to pass one way or another. The work of the Church is focused on *how* each person will see God, not on *whether* he will see God. In other words, the task of the Church is to proclaim to people that there is a true God, that God is revealed as either **Light** or a consuming **Fire**, and that all people will see God at the Second Coming of Christ, and to prepare its members so that they might see God not as **Fire**, but as **Light**.

The Essence of Orthodoxy

This preparation of the members of the Church, and also of all people who want to see God as Light, is essentially a *therapeutic treatment*, which must begin and end in this life. The *therapy* must take place and be completed *in this life*. For *after death, there is no repentance*. This therapeutic treatment is the essence and primary content of Orthodox Tradition, as well as being the principal concern of the Orthodox Church. It is composed of the following three stages of spiritual ascent: *Purification* from passions, *illumination* by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and *deification*, again by the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

It is also the case that **if someone does not at least arrive at the state of partial illumination in this life, he is unable to see God as Light either in this life or in the next**. It is, therefore, clear that the Fathers of the Church concern themselves

with man as he is today, *at this moment*. And the one needing *treatment* is each person, who has the responsibility before God to begin this task today, *in this life*, because in this life he is able to do so; not after death. And this person himself will decide if he will follow this *therapeutic* path or not.

Christ said: *I am the way*. The Way towards what? Not only towards the next life. Christ is primarily the *Way* in this life. Christ is the *Way* to His Father and to our Father. Christ is revealed to man first in this life, and He shows him the path to His Father. This path is Christ Himself.

What Is Religion then?

The question, now, is: Is religion equated with a teaching concerning the immortality of the soul, and also with a teaching concerning the existence of God for the future life? Likewise, is it equated with the victory of full justice? That is, do we need religion because there must be a Just God, Who will pronounce the final judgment on all people, so that the unjust might be punished in Hell and the just (*the good children*) be rewarded in Paradise?

If the answer is yes, well then, religion must exist, first of all so that justice might ultimately prevail and, secondly, so that man's desire for bliss will not remain unfulfilled. Is it possible, in other words, for the *good child* **not** to live a blissful life after death? It is not possible! And let us say he was wronged in this life. In other words, is it possible for all of these wronged people, that is, the *good children*, not to be vindicated in the future life? It is not possible! And should they not lead a pleasant existence there, a life of bliss? Of course! But for this to happen, there has to be life after death, as well as a good and just God, Who must make a good and just distribution! Is it not so? There has to be [such a God], according to the understanding of the Middle Ages, that is, of Western theology.

With regard to all of these things, however, modern psychology comes along and explodes everything. It tells us that these perceptions are *psychological*; for man has inside him a sense of justice, which is what demands that the *bad children* be punished and the *good children* be rewarded! And since the rewarding fails to take place in this life, human imagination puts forth the idea that these things must be fulfilled in another life, for which reason a weak person, as well as one who loves justice and has profound and earnest feelings about justice, becomes religious and believes the doctrines of the religion that he follows. In other words, he believes because the doctrine in which he believes serves his psychological need for justice to be rendered. This reason does not have philosophical—that is, metaphysical—foundations, but only *psychological foundations*.

What is correct, however, about the foregoing line of thought is that if justice and bliss will ever prevail for good people, they will have to prevail in this life. For such people do not know if they will have another life, since the arguments we

mentioned for the existence of another life are purely *psychological arguments* and not *scientific arguments*—that is, arguments founded on *experience* and the *scientific method*. Thus, these people believe in a life after death simply because they want to believe. And this is why the essence of their religion is the existence of another life where injustice is punished and justice rewarded.

For these reasons, then, one sees that sober people today in Europe and America no longer accept these foundations of religion and have been led to agnosticism, while others have been led to atheism. On the other side, there are churchgoers who continue to believe in life after death because, as we explained, they want to believe, without having scientific arguments to support their beliefs. This is the general situation.

Now, what is the Orthodox position on all of these issues?

The Metaphysical Concept of Religion

Orthodoxy is first and foremost concerned with this life, here. The Fathers stress that *there is no repentance after death*. Modern Greek theologians, however, following their teacher, Adamantios Koraes, have a metaphysical understanding of the subject and have copied the methodology of the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in the matter of religion.

At the time when these people left to study theology in Europe and Russia, and also in America after the war, the great conflict had already begun years before between the *empiricists*, on the one hand, who are the heirs to the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution of 1789, and the *metaphysicians*, on the other hand. The basic difference between *empiricists* and *metaphysicians* is that the essence of the *empirical* approach is observation, while that of *metaphysics* is *philosophical speculation*.

At that time, all religious people were followers of metaphysics—and have been so even until recently—whereas all empiricists were agnostics, and some of them atheists. Why? Because the essence of the empirical approach is not even philosophy. Certainly, it is presented as empirical philosophy, as the philosophy of empiricists. They prevailed over the metaphysicians in America and accomplished a great deed for Orthodoxy. They were, however, devastating for Modern Greek theology.

Nowadays, in Greece, all Marxists are empiricists, without being aware of it, of course. This is because Greek Marxist ideologists do not know what the family tree of Marxism is, as do their counterparts in Europe and America; for, here, they have merely learned their lessons mechanically, by rote, like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

I believe that it is a great tragedy—not an Aeschylean one, but a shameful one—that there are no powerful intellectual Marxists in Greece. Of course, this is fortunate for the right-wingers, as well as for Modern Greek theologians, but it is unfortunate for the search for truth. For Marxism started out on empirical bases and ended up where it has ended up.

The foundation of Marxism and the foundation of Patristic Theology, from a scientific point of view, are the same; thus, between the two of them, the Marxists and the Patristic theologians could have come to an understanding. Marxism, however, clashed with religion. Yes, but with what religion? Not with Revelation, but rather with the religion that is equated with metaphysics.

Now, as for the atheist, why does he not believe? Because he does not have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of *inward faith*. As for those who say that they believe, are they really believers? Not all; for example, the Calvinists, who often say that they believe because they are *predestined* [to believe]. In this way, however, they tread an anti-scientific path; that is, one that is not supported by any empirical reality. Nor do they have any metaphysical support for what they believe. They are, of course, aware of this, because they are intellectuals and know how things are, but they continue to act in this way.

This is why it has been observed that both Calvinists and Lutherans take refuge in existentialism. The same thing occurs with American Protestants, who also add emotionalism to the foregoing. American Protestants are very emotional both in their worship and in their behavior.

Orthodoxy as the Official Religion of the Roman State

Bearing these things in mind now, we see why the Byzantine State sought to have Orthodoxy as its official religion and why it made so many efforts to preserve Orthodox doctrine intact. Why did it do so? Simply to preserve doctrine as doctrine? Or perhaps because Orthodox doctrine in particular was a precondition for the cure of its citizens, which cure would occasion a social restoration to health through the healing of the personality of each and every citizen? More likely the latter.

What was the **national anthem** of the Byzantine Empire? Was it not *Save, O Lord, Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance; grant victories to the emperors over barbarians, and through Thy Cross preserve Thou Thy commonwealth*? This *hymn* expresses the ideology—if we can call it that—of the implementation of Orthodox teaching, faith, and life within the State; that is, on a nationwide scale.

Since the State foresaw the contribution to society and the benefit that would result from the Orthodox *therapeutic teaching and method*, if it were implemented, it instituted and promoted the Orthodox Faith as the official State religion, such that the State would be filled with parishes in which Priests would practice this *therapeutic regimen*. Thus, the parishes would grow with time into [communities of] healthy citizens, as would the State itself, by extension. The Church naturally did not refuse this, but rather worked in consort with the State.

It so happened, however, that this power given to the Church, together with the requisite ecclesiastical adminis-

trative organization, created a public service problem as a necessary evil. That is, many who coveted public positions pretended to be Orthodox, though they were not, and the Church began to be secularized.

Aside from all of these things, the Church had as its parallel task to protect the State from quack doctors, that is, from heretics. The local and OEcumenical Synods attended to precisely this. In the Acts of the OEcumenical Synods, we find the phrase: *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...* Those present at the Synods said this because they possessed *noetic prayer*, by which they were inwardly informed concerning the truth of the Decrees that they formulated.

Today, on the other hand, when the practice of *noetic prayer* has grown rare among Bishops, if a Synod of Bishops were to come together and they were to stand up at the opening and all say together: *O Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things...* would the Holy Spirit illumine them without fail? That is, simply because they are canonical Bishops, assemble at a Synod, and say a prayer? The Holy Spirit does not work this way—that is, under these conditions; others are needed. The one praying needs to have *noetic prayer* already working inside him, when he attends a Synod, for the Grace of God to illumine him. Those attending false synods did not have this prayerful state.

The Bishops of old, however, did have such spiritual experience, and when they would come together as a Body, they knew what the Holy Spirit was informing them in their hearts on a particular matter. And, when they issued resolutions, they knew that their resolutions were sound. For they were in a state of *illumination*, and certain of them had even reached *glorification*, that is, *deification*. Thus, we see that in the ancient Church the charismatic element prevailed (that is, its members were governed by gifts of the Holy Spirit), and the institutional elements (that is, formal ecclesiastical and administrative qualifications) followed.

This is very clear in the New Testament, in the ancient Church, and in the great Fathers of the OEcumenical Synods, from the First OEcumenical Synod (fourth century) through the Ninth OEcumenical Synod, which took place under St. Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century). This kind of testimony of the Holy Spirit within the *heart* is well known only to those who have *noetic prayer* working in their hearts.

Noetic prayer is an empirical verification and assurance that a person's mind has been cured. Such a cure is feasible for all people, as long as the spiritual preconditions of the *therapeutic method are met*. In other words, this method is not destined or designed only for certain monastics—that is, for certain people wearing *rasa*—but for all people. For nowhere in Holy Scripture does any distinction seem to be made between *monastic spirituality* and *lay spirituality*. Holy Scripture speaks of only one spirituality. Have you ever found a passage in Holy

Scripture that speaks separately about the spirituality of lay people and the spirituality of the clergy? There is no such thing in Holy Scripture. **Spirituality in Christ is the same for all of the faithful.**

This Christian spirituality is essentially a *therapeutic regimen*, which is offered by Christ to all people. It is designed for all people. It is not just for monastics, or the clergy, or the educated, or intellectuals, because there is no intellectualism whatsoever contained therein. Nor does it deal with the outer and visible aspects of man, but rather with the inner and hidden aspects.



LIVING THE MONASTIC LIFE IN THE WORLD

From "The Veil," Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer, 2005). The Veil is a publication of the Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Monastery.

Question: I want to give my life completely to Christ, but do not want to go to a monastery. Is it really necessary to be in a monastery to lead a monastic life? Can't I live as a monastic in the world?

Answer: This is a question that comes up quite often, except that it is usually in the form of a statement. May God bless your humility in asking this instead of informing and declaring that a monastery is not necessary for one who desires a monastic life!

First, you must realize that God's grace is present everywhere, but it is especially felt in a monastery. When people visit a monastery, they feel that it is a holy place where God is present. Paradoxically, the monastics who dwell in that monastery more often feel the intense spiritual warfare that the evil one is waging against them. When visitors came to one monastery and said to one of the nuns, "It is so peaceful here," she replied, "You feel the peace, we see the warfare."

Anyone who strives to fulfill the Gospel commandments, who tries to live truly according to the teachings of the Church, feels both of these aspects to some degree: both the grace of God in their lives, but also the intense battle that the devil and his legions wage against him. The more intensely we strive to serve God, the more the evil one seeks to deter us from our path. This is most true in the life of one who renounces the world and seeks to live completely for Christ.

So, can this be done while living in the world? Yes. And no. One can certainly, with God's help, live according to the Gospel commandments and the teachings of the Church in the world, maintaining a job, being faithful in the Church,

living according to the “little holy trinity” of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, reading the lives of the saints and other soul edifying books, etc. This is all what the Church requires of all her faithful. This is all according to the commandments. Such a person may participate in some “worldly” activities which are not harmful—certain and limited sports, wholesome entertainment, etc., without losing his focus on God.

The monastic life takes in what the fathers refer to as the “Evangelical advice.” Remember the rich young man in the Gospel who asked the Lord, *What must I do to inherit eternal life?* The Lord told him to keep the commandments, which the man stated that he had done since his youth. Then the Lord said, *One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.* (Mk 10:21).

It is not mandatory for salvation to give up everything, only “if we want.” These were the words which St. Anthony heard and which led him to begin his monastic life. We know that his early monastic life was spent at first with an elder on the edge of the town, and that later he went off into the desert.

The world holds many temptations for us. Some of the pleasures of worldly life are not bad: marrying and having children are certainly blessed by Christ who worked His first public miracle at the wedding of Cana in Galilee. Being with other people—even those who are not of our faith—is not bad in itself, but it can lead one down a wrong path if one is not careful. Certain entertainments, as we mentioned above, are not bad in themselves, as long as they do not become passions. But the monastic is the one who chooses the narrower path. In order to follow this path, he must have others who are experienced in the dangers, pitfalls and perils along the way. You can find this only in a monastery with others who are struggling (while falling and getting back up again) on that same path.

If you are trying to walk that narrow path in the world with all its temptations and you fall (and you will fall), who will help to lift you up again? More than likely, those who are falling in the same pits as you will encourage you to remain and wallow in the mire. In the monastery, not only do you have the more experienced who can guide and reprimand you when you stray, but that great grace from God also surrounds you and assists you in these struggles. The very monastic garment itself is holy and guards the monastic.

Let us take an innocent example to illustrate how important the habit is: Let us say you are driving through a rather desolate area and are very thirsty. You come upon a small settlement that has a few houses and a bar, but no gas station or grocery store or other place where you could find a cup of coffee or soft drink or tea. (There are many such towns in the west!) You stop your car and go in the bar to get a non-alcoholic drink. There is nothing wrong with that in itself. Yet when you are saying your prayers, you remember the things you saw in the bar, perhaps lewd jokes, inappropriately dressed people, etc. Even

though you did nothing wrong, still, your prayer is disturbed by these remembrances.

The monk or nun who would be traveling along that same road and who is equally thirsty would not go into such an establishment. The habit itself would be as the walls of the monastery protecting him from doing so, for as innocent as his intention would be in wanting a glass of ice tea, he could not bring scandal upon the Church by going into such a place.

There is another pitfall which catches everyone who tries to live the monastic life in the world. Pride. This is not to say that pride does not assail those in the monastery! It certainly does, however in the monastic setting, when one begins to fall into pride, there are elders who are quick to cut off that sin in the novice. You are not somebody in the monastery because you are fasting and praying—everyone is doing that! You are not considered as “pious” because you struggle to obtain the virtues—that is what is expected. But when you say, “I can lead the monastic life in the world and not bother going into the monastery” you are declaring already quite proudly that you already know it all! Then, instead of all your efforts going toward your salvation, you will have lost everything.

There is no question that there are monastics who live as anchorites. That life cannot be compared to what you are requesting. Those who live such a monastic life do so only after many years in a monastery and only with the blessing of their monastic elder. When a brother would ask Elder Cleopa for a blessing to go off into the forest alone to live, the Elder would tell him, *after you have been in obedience for thirty years, then come back to me and we will think about it!*

Do not dismiss that grace which works invisibly in the monastery. It is very powerful and without it no one in a monastery would be saved. The holy fathers say that when you are saved you are saved in community; but when you fall, you fall alone.

If you want to be saved in the world, follow the commandments; if you want to as a monastic, go to a monastery and submit to the abbot or abbess of that monastery and to its rules.



What does it indicate when we criticize others and consider ourselves flawless? This is why the Lord commands: *Judge not, that you not be judged.* And He adds: *For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged.* [Mt 7:1-2]. To criticize others is an extremely serious sin, although we indulge in it like bread and butter, and as a *sin which so easily besets us.* [Heb 12:1]. A besetting sin is one that takes place at every opportunity and all the time.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona

HE WHO HAS EARS, LET HIM HEAR!

An extremely timely message from the last saint of our days, Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona (+2019). The content of this message has been confirmed by our Brotherhood directly with the spiritual father of the lady that is referred within this article.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou, who lived as an ascetic and fell asleep in Arizona, appeared to a woman who was with her daughter-in-law, not in the woman's sleep but actually while she was in a state of alertness.

At one point the woman was unresponsive, as if in ecstasy, and this lasted for about 10 minutes, according to her daughter-in-law who was watching her. She herself did not comprehend the time duration, i.e., for how long the vision lasted.

It was something new for her (the content of the conversation because she had already seen the Elder after he fell asleep, both in her sleep as well while she was awake). Due to all this (her awe and shock), she contacted her spiritual father and asked whether this experience was real or a deception by the evil one.

She saw elder Ephraim who was very sad and was trying to change Christ's mind so that the ongoing events be interrupted-stopped (all these of course go hand in hand with what the elder said to many while he was alive). And he told her:

“Repentance, repentance, repentance! Christ is very angry.

We people today should not be in our current spiritual state.

Huge tribulations are coming, you can not imagine how bad these will be. Alas to all of you for what awaits you. Repent while there is time.

You must kneel and cry, you must shed tears of repentance lest Christ soften.

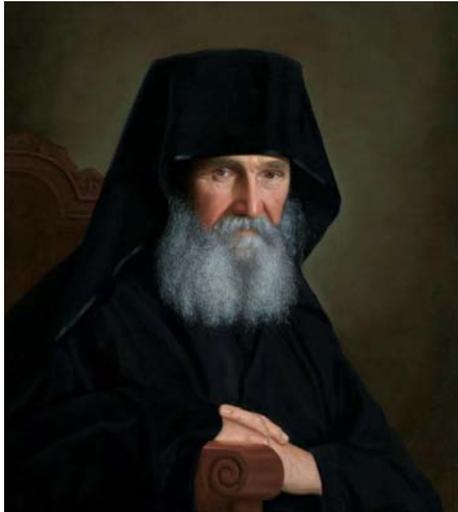
This has to do with what is happening in the United States as well.

Many people will depart through all that is to come, many people will depart (i.e., they will die).

You have no mercy among you. You show no mercy to each other. You are tough towards each other, you stand ready to eat (consume-destroy) each other.

All this you must convey to your spiritual father and to others.”

The pious lady who saw the vision had been a spiritual daughter of Elder Ephraim for many years and she was in close communication with the Elder until his last days.



Ὁ Ἐχων Ὦτα Ἀκούειν Ἀκούετω!

Ἐνα ἔγκαιρο μήνυμα ἀπὸ τὸν τελευταῖο ἅγιο τῶν ἡμερῶν μας, τὸν μακαριστὸ Γέροντα Ἐφραίμ τὸν Φιλοθεΐτη καὶ Ἀριζονίτη (+2019). Τὸ περιεχόμενο τοῦ μηνύματος ἔχει ἐπικυρωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀδελφότητά μας κατευθεῖαν μὲ τὸν πνευματικὸ τῆς κυρίας ποὺ ἀναφέρεται στὸ ἄρθρο.

Ο Γέροντας Ἐφραίμ ὁ Φιλοθεΐτης ποὺ ἀσκήτεψε καὶ ἐκοιμήθη στὴν Ἀριζόνα, ἐφανίστηκε σὲ μία γυναίκα ποὺ βρισκόταν μαζί μὲ τὴν νύμφη της, ὄχι στὸν ὕπνο της γυναίκας ἀλλὰ σὲ κατάσταση ἐγρηγόρσεως.

Κάποια στιγμή ἡ γυναίκα χάθηκε καὶ αὐτὸ διήρκησε 10 λεπτὰ περίπου, ὅπως εἶπε ἡ νύμφη της ποὺ τὴν παρακολουθοῦσε. Γιατὶ ἡ ἴδια δὲν κατάλαβε πόσο χρόνο ἦταν ἡ ὄπτασία.

Ἦταν κάτι πρωτόγνωρο γιὰ τὴν ἴδια (τὸ περιεχόμενο τῆς συνομιλίας γιὰ τὸν Γέροντα τὸν ἔχει ξαναδεῖ μετὰ τὴν κοίμησή του καὶ καθ' ὕπνον καὶ ξύπνια) καὶ γιὰ αὐτὸ φυσικὰ πῆρε τὸν πνευματικὸ της συγκλονισμένη, γιὰ νὰ ρωτήσῃ ἐὰν αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶδε ἦταν πλάνη ἢ ἐὰν ἦταν πραγματικότητα.

Εἶδε τὸν Γέροντα Ἐφραίμ ὁ ὅποιος ἦταν πολὺ λυπημένος καὶ προσπαθοῦσε νὰ μεταπείσῃ τὸν Χριστὸ γιὰ τὰ γενόμενα (αὐτά, βέβαια, συμβαδίζουν καὶ μὲ ὅσα ἔλεγε ὁ Γέροντας ὅσο ἦταν ἐν ζωῇ). Καὶ τῆς εἶπε:

«Μετάνοια, μετάνοια, μετάνοια! Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι πολὺ θυμωμένος.

Δὲν ἔπρεπε οἱ σημερινοὶ ἄνθρωποι νὰ εἶμαστε σὲ αὐτὴν τὴν πνευματικὴν κατάσταση ποὺ βρισκόμαστε.

Ἔρχονται πολὺ μεγάλα κακά, δὲν μπορεῖτε νὰ φανταστεῖτε πόσο... Ἀλλοίμονο τί σᾶς περιμένει! Μετανοεῖστε ὅσο ὑπάρχει καιρὸς.

Νὰ γονατίζετε καὶ νὰ κλαίετε, νὰ ρίξετε δάκρυα μετανοίας μήπως ὁ Χριστὸς μαλακώσει.

Αὐτὸ ἔχει νὰ κάνει καὶ μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ γίνονται στὴν Ἀμερική.

Πολὺς κόσμος θὰ φύγει μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔρχονται, πολὺ κόσμος θὰ φύγει [=θὰ πεθάνει].

Δὲν ἔχετε ἔλεος ἀναμεταξύ σας, δὲν ἔχετε ἔλεος. Εἶστε σκληροί, ὁ ἕνας νὰ φάει τὸν ἄλλον.

Αὐτὰ νὰ τὰ πεῖς καὶ στὸν πνευματικὸ σου, καὶ στοὺς ἄλλους.»

Ἡ κυρία ποὺ εἶδε τὸ ὄραμα ἦταν πνευματικοκόρη τοῦ Γέροντα Ἐφραίμ ἀπὸ παλιά, καὶ εἶχε ἐπικοινωνία μὲ τὸν Γέροντα μέχρι τῆς τελευτῆς του.

Σημεία Καιρών

Οι Άνθρωποι Καπατήσανε σάν Άδεια Κανάπια, και Προσπαθούν νά Γεμίσουν τόν Ήαυτό τους, Ρίχνοντας Μέσα Ένα Σωρό Σκουπίδια!

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου, «Οἱ Λίγοι Καθυστερημένοι Ανάμεσα στοὺς Σημερινούς Άνθρώπους», συλλογή «Μυστικά Άνθη», ἐκδόσεις Παπαδημητρίου.

Ὅπως ὁ φυλακισμένος ἔχει γυρισμένα τὰ μάτια του κατὰ τὴ στενὴ θυρίδα τῆς φυλακῆς του γιὰ νὰ πάρει λίγη ἐλπίδα ἀπὸ μία μικρὴ ἀχτίνα τοῦ ἡλίου, ἔτσι κι ἐμεῖς φέτος, ὕστερ' ἀπὸ τὴ βαρυχειμωνιά, μὲ τὶς παγωνιές, μὲ τὰ χιόνια, μὲ τὶς βροχές, μὲ τὰ μαῦρα σύννεφα ποὺ καταπλακώνουν ἀκόμα τὴν ἀτμόσφαιρα καὶ σφίγγουνε τὴν ψυχὴ μας, περιμένουμε ἀνυπόμονα νὰ δοῦνε τὰ μάτια μας λίγον γαλανὸ οὐρανό, καὶ νὰ χαρεῖ ἡ καρδιά μας τὸ χρυσὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. Μὰ ἐκεῖνα τὰ σύννεφα στιβάζονται τόνα ἀπάνω στ' ἄλλο, ἑκατομμύρια σύννεφα, ἴδια μὲ βαρειοὺς βράχους, καὶ μποδίζουνε μὲ πείσμα τὸν ἡλιο νὰ μᾶς δεῖξει τὸ χαροποῖδὸ πρόσωπό του, λες καὶ εἶναι

κακὰ καὶ ζηλόφθονα δαμόνια. Γιὰ μία στιγμή παραμερίζουν κι ἀνοίγει ἓνα μικρὸ παράθυρο σ' αὐτὸ τὸ σκυθρωπὸ καὶ μολυβένιο κάστρο ποὺ κρύβει τὸν οὐρανό, μὰ ὡς νὰ προφτάξει τὸ μάτι νὰ χαρεῖ λίγη γαλανὴ ἐλπίδα, σμίγουνε πάλι σάν μελανὲς κοτρώνες, ποὺ κατρακυλᾶνε καὶ χάνεται μονομιᾶς ἐκεῖνη ἢ μικρὴ γωνιά τοῦ παράδεισου, ποὺ φάνηκε γιὰ μία στιγμή, κι ἀπομένουμε μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα πῶς θὰ τὴν ξαναδοῦμε.

Μὰ περνᾶνε οἱ μέρες καὶ δὲν ἀλλάζει τίποτα. Τὰ ἄσπλαχνα σύννεφα, σκεπάζουνε ἀδιάκοπα τὸν οὐρανό, μέρα - νύχτα, σάν τὰ παπλώματα, ποὺ σκεπάζουνε τὸν ἄρρωστο ποὺ δὲν ἔχει ἐλπίδα νὰ δεῖ τὴν ὑγεία του καὶ νὰ τὰ πετάξει ἀπὸ πάνω του.

Αὐτὸ τὸ βορεινὸ θέαμα παρουσιάζει ὁ οὐρανὸς μας τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια καὶ κάθε χρόνο γίνεται χειρότερο. Χάσαμε τὴν παρηγοριὰ ποὺ μᾶς χάριζε ὁ χαρούμενος οὐρανὸς μας. Ἔγινε κι αὐτὸς βαρὺς καὶ καραμουτζωμένος, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι σύμφωνος μὲ ὅλη τὴν κατάσταση τοῦ κόσμου, μὲ τὴν ἄχαρη ζωὴ μας ποὺ τὴν μασᾶνε καὶ τὴν κομματιάζουνε οἱ ἄγριες μασέλες τῆς μηχανῆς, μὲ τὴν σασιμάρα καὶ μὲ τὴν ταραχὴ ποὺ ἔχει τὸ μυαλό μας, μὲ τὴν ἀγωνία ποὺ ἔχει ἡ καρδιά μας.

Φαγώθηκε ὁ ἄνθρωπος μὲ τὴν καινούργια θρησκεία του, τὴ μηχανικὴ ἐπιστήμη, καὶ τώρα ἀπολαμβάνει τὰ καλὰ τῆς, κι ἀπὸ μέσα του κι ἀπ' ἔξω του. Μὲ τὰ ἀεροπλάνα τὰ λεγόμενα ἀεριωθούμενα, ποὺ κάνουν σάν διαβόλοι, καὶ λιανίζουν τὴν ἀτμόσφαιρα καὶ τὴν κάνουνε κιμά, μὲ τοὺς ἀσύρματους, μὲ τὰ ραντάρ, μὲ τοὺς πύραυλους, καὶ μὲ τ' ἄλλα τὰ διάφορα σατανικὰ ἐφευρήματα, γίνηκε κόλαση ὁ κόσμος, μ' ὄλο ποὺ ἔλεγε ἡ περηφάνειά μας πῶς αὐτὸ θὰ κάνει τὴ γῆ ἓναν παράδεισο. Νά, λοιπόν, ποὺ τὴν ἔκανε παράδεισο, ἀλλὰ ἓναν παράδεισο δίχως φῶς, δίχως χαρὰ, δίχως εἰρήνη, δίχως ἀγάπη, δίχως ἐλπίδα, δίχως ἐμορφιά.

Στὸν φυσικὸ κόσμο ἐξώντωσε τὸν ἡλιο, μὲ τὰ βρωμομανιτάρια ποὺ βγαίνουνε ἀπὸ τὶς ἀτομικὲς μπόμπες καὶ ποὺ ἀνεβαίνουνε στὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ τὸν καπλαντίζουνε μὲ φαρμακεροὺς ἀτμούς κι ἀντάρες. Φαρμάκωσε ὅλες τὶς θροφές τ' ἀνθρώπου μὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμη τοῦ σατανᾶ, τὴ χημεία, φαρμάκωσε τὰ λάχανα, τὰ χόρτα, τὰ δέντρα, τὰ ζῶα, τὰ πουλιά, τὰ ψάρια, ἔτσι ποὺ τὸ κρέας τους νὰ εἶναι ἄρρωστο καὶ νὰ σαπίζει σὲ μία μέρα καὶ νὰ εἶναι ἄνοστο σάν κανένα

λάστιχο. Κι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ τρώγει αὐτὰ τὰ κατασκευάσματα, πῶς μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει ὑγεία, πῶς νὰ μὴ σαπίσει ἀπὸ τὶς ἀρρώστειες, πῶς νὰ μὴν ἐκφυλιστεῖ; Τ' ἀποτελέσματα αὐτῆς τῆς φοβερῆς παραμόρφωσης ποὺ ἔχει πάθει ὁ φυσικὸς κόσμος, εἶναι ἢ παραμόρφωση ποὺ ἔρχεται στὸ πνεῦμα καὶ στὴν ψυχὴ καὶ ποὺ ἀποκορυφώνεται μὲ τὴν τρέλλα ποὺ φανερώνεται

στὶς ἀμέτρητες θεωρίες καὶ στὰ λαμπρὰ ἔργα τῆς τέχνης.

Κυττάξετε γύρω μας, τί κάνουνε οἱ σημερινοὶ ἄνθρωποι στὶς τέχνες, ποὺ ἄλλη φορὰ χαροποιούσανε καὶ ξεκουράζανε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γι' αὐτὸ κι οἱ Ἕλληνες λέγανε «τέχνη ἐστὶ τέρψις» καὶ «ἀτυχήσασι τέχνη παρηγορία». Σ' αὐτὸ τὸ χάος τῆς ἀπελπισίας ποὺ κατάφερε νὰ κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν ἀπόμεινε τίποτα ποὺ νὰ μὴν ἔχει ἀπάνω του τὴ φριχτὴ σφραγίδα τῆς τρέλλας καὶ τῆς φρίκης. Ἡ πολιτικὴ κατάσταση εἶναι μαύρη καὶ σκοτεινὴ, ἡ γνώση, ἡ ἐπιστήμη κι οἱ διάφορες θεωρίες τους εἶναι κι αὐτὲς σάν βραχνάδες, τὸ ἴδιο καὶ χειρότερο εἶναι καὶ ἡ τέχνη, ποὺ ἦταν ἡ τελευταία ἐλπίδα καὶ παρηγοριὰ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Καμαρώσετε τί «ἔργα» παρουσιάζουν οἱ



«τέχνες» σήμερα. Είναι να φράζει κανένας τὰ μάτια του. Όλα αυτά τὰ πασαλείμματα ἀπάνω στους μουσαμάδες, πὸν λέγονται «ἔργα ζωγραφικῆς», ὅλα αυτά τὰ παλιοσίδερα ἢ τὰ νταμαροκοτρώνια πὸν παρουσιάζονται γιὰ «ἔργα γλυπτικῆς» σὲ κάνουν ὄχι μονάχα νὰ ἀηδιάσεις γιὰ τὸ κατάντημά μας, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ θυμώσεις γιὰ τὴν ἀδιαντροπιὰ πὸν φανερώνουν αυτά τὰ τερατουργήματα. Γιατί, ἓνα χαρακτηριστικὸ τοῦ καιροῦ μας, πὸν ὑπάρχει μέσα σὲ ὅλα, εἶναι ἡ ἀδιαντροπιὰ. Μπορεῖ κανένας πολὺ σωστὰ νὰ πεῖ γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ μας πὸς εἶναι ἡ ἐποχὴ τῆς τρέλλας καὶ τῆς ἀδιαντροπιᾶς. Γιατί, ἂν δὲν εἶναι κανένας ἀδιάντροπος, πὸς θὰ κάνει τέτοια «ἔργα», σὰν κι αὐτὰ πὸν εἶπαμε παραπάνω;

Ἀλλὰ καὶ τί ἄλλο ἀπὸ ἀδιαντροπιὰ φανερώνουν καὶ τὰ μᾶτς μὲ τὴ θεὰ μπάλλα, πὸν τὴν κλωτσᾶνε ἓνα σωρὸ χασομέρηδες, γιὰ νὰ διασκεδάσουνε τὶς μυριάδες «φίλαθλους», πὸν δὲν εὐρήκαν ἄλλο τίποτα γιὰ νὰ νιώσουν ἀγωνία καὶ χτυποκάρδι, ἀλλὰ μόνο τὴ «μπάλλα»; Καὶ γίνονται σοβαρὰ συνέδρια γιὰ τὴ μπαλλα, μὲ ἀντιπροσωπεῖες, μὲ συζητήσεις, μὲ ἀνακοινωθέντα, μὲ δημοσιογράφους. Σὲ τέτοιο δυσθεώρητο ὕψος δὲν ἔφταξε ποτὲ ἡ ἀνοησία.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι καταντήσανε σὰν ἄδεια κανάτια, καὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ γεμίσουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους, ρίχνοντας μέσα ἓνα σωρὸ σκουπίδια, μπάλλες, ἐκθέσεις μὲ τερατουργήματα, ὀμιλίες καὶ ἀερολογίες, καλλιστεῖα, πὸν μετριέται ἡ ἔμορφιὰ μὲ τὴ μεζούρα, καρνάβαλους ἡλίθιους, συλλόγους λογιῆς-λογῆς μὲ γεῦματα καὶ μὲ σοβαρὲς συζητήσεις γιὰ τὸν ἴσκιο τοῦ γαϊδάρου, συνδέσμους ἀφιερωμένους στοὺς ἀποθεωμένους ἄνδρας τῆς Εὐρώπης κι ἓνα σωρὸ ἄλλα τέτοια.

Αὐτὴ, μὲ μιὰ ματιὰ, εἶναι ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος σήμερα, πὸν νὰ μὴν ἀβασκαθεῖ! Ποῦ νὰ βρεῖ κανένας καταφύγιο;

Ἐκείνους τοὺς λίγους πὸν δὲν εἶναι ἐνθουσιασμένοι ἀπὸ «τὰ θαύματα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας», οἱ ἄλλοι (αὐτὴ ἡ μερμηγκιά πὸν ἔκανε αὐτὸν τὸν παράδεισο καὶ πὸν τὸν χαίρεται), τοὺς λέγει τρελλοὺς, ὅπως θὰ λέγανε παλαβοὺς κάποιους ἀνθρώπους μὲ σωστὰ μυαλὰ οἱ ἄρρωστοι τοῦ φρενοκομείου, βλέποντάς τους ἀνάμεσα τους.

Δόξα στὸν Θεό, πὸν ὑπάρχει ἀκόμα κάποιον καταφύγιο γιὰ μᾶς πὸν δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουμε «τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς ἐποχῆς μας». Δόξα στὸν Θεὸ πὸν ὑπάρχουν ἀκόμα βουνά, χωράφια καὶ κάποιον τόποι πὸν δὲν τοὺς ἐξήρανε αὐτὴ ἡ φυλλοξήρα πὸν λέγεται πολιτισμός.

Τράβα, λοιπόν, μακρὰ ἀπὸ τὶς σφηγγοφωλιές πὸν τὶς λένε πολιτεῖες, γιὰ νὰ γλυτώσεις ἀπὸ τὸ μαράζι, γιὰ νὰ νοιώσεις ἀπάνω σου τὴ ζωογόνα πνοὴ τοῦ θεοῦ. Ἀλλά, αὐτὸ δὲν φτάνει. Πρέπει νὰ ἔχεις μάτια ἀγνὰ γιὰ νὰ

βλέπεις, αὐτιὰ ἀγνὰ γιὰ ν' ἀκοῦς, καρδιὰ ἀγνὴ γιὰ νὰ αἰσθάνεσαι, κι ὄχι χαλασμένη. Γιατί ἀπὸ τὶς πολιτεῖες τρέχουνε γιὰ νὰ φύγουνε, ὅποτε μπορέσουνε, κι ἐκεῖνοι πὸν κανχιοῦνται πὸς ἡ ἐποχὴ μας εἶναι θαυμάσια, μὰ, φεύγοντας ἀπὸ τὶς σφηγγοφωλιές, κουβαλᾶνε μαζί τους καὶ τὴν παραμορφωμένη ψυχὴ τους. Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώθουνε τὴν ἔμορφιὰ ἐνὸς βουνοῦ, παρὰ μόνο σὰν ὄρειβάτες, μ' ἄλλα λόγια δὲν νοιώθουνε τίποτα, μῆτε ἓνα δέντρο εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ χαροῦνε, μῆτε τὸ μυστήριο πὸν ἔχει τὸ κύμα, μῆτε τὸ θρησκευτικὸ πανηγύρι τῶν λουλουδιῶν. Κι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ αἰτία πὸν τρέχουνε σὰν τρελλοὶ μὲ τ' αὐτοκίνητα γιὰ νὰ μὴ δοῦνε τίποτα, νὰ μὴν αἰσθανθοῦνε τίποτα, νὰ μὴν ἀγαπήσουνε τίποτα. Αὐτὸ τὸ λένε «φυσιολατρία!» Ὅπως καταντήσανε τὰ πάντα, οἱ ιδέες, οἱ τέχνες, οἱ θρησκείες, ἔτσι κατάντησε κι ἡ φυσιολατρία.

Ἐμεῖς ὅμως «οἱ καθυστερημένοι», περπατᾶμε καὶ χαιρόμαστε σὰν βλέπουμε ἓνα κομμάτι γαλανὸν οὐρανὸ, ἀνάμεσα στὰ σύννεφα, καὶ κανένα χελιδόνι πὸν πετᾶ ἀπὸ πάνω μας καὶ πὸν θαρρεῖς πὸς θὰ τρυπώσει μέσα στὸ γαλάζιο ἐκεῖνο παραθύρι. Νοιώθουμε τὴ μυρουδιά πὸν βγάζουνε τ' ἀγριολούλουδα καὶ τ' ἀγιασμένα χορτάρια, καθὼς καὶ τὸ χῶμα τῆς βλογημένης γῆς μας. Ἀναστηνόμαστε ἀπὸ τ' ἀγεράκι πὸν φυσᾶ, σὰν νᾶμαστε βαρυποινίτες πὸν δραπετέψαμε ἀπὸ τὴ φυλακὴ, καὶ δοξάζουμε τὸν Κύριο πὸν δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουμε τὴν ἐξαίσια ἐποχὴ μας καὶ τὰ καλὰ τῆς...



Ἀδύνατο νὰ ἀποφύγουμε τὶς εἰς βάρος μας διαβολές.
Τὶς διαβολές καὶ τὶς κατηγορίες κανένας δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποφύγει. Εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ζεῖς στὴν κοινωνία, νὰ δραστηριοποιεῖσαι καὶ νὰ μὴ βρεθοῦν κακοπροαίρετοι καὶ κακόψυχοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι θὰ σὲ βυθίσουν στὴ θλίψη.

Ἡ κατάσταση ἀντιμετωπίζεται δύσκολα καὶ ἡ ἀντιπαράθεση μὲ τοὺς συκοφάντες εἶναι ἄκαρπη. Εὐκολότερα γίνονται τὰ πράγματα, ὅταν κάποιος εἶναι ἀθῶος καὶ δὲν δίνει ἀφορμές. Μένει ἀπαθής, ἀφοῦ ἔχει τὴ συν εἶδησή του ἡσυχῆ, καὶ δὲν λαμβάνει ὑπόψη του τί λένε οἱ κατήγοροί του, ἀλλὰ τί λέει ὁ Θεὸς γι' αὐτόν. Σχετικὰ ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος τόνιζε: «Εἶμαι πεπεισμένος ὅτι εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολο, γιὰ νὰ μὴ πῶ ἀδύνατο, νὰ ἀποφύγει κανεὶς τὶς διαβολές. Τὸ νὰ μὴ παρέχουμε ὅμως ἐμεῖς οἱ ἴδιοι καμιά λαβὴ οὔτε σὲ ἐκεῖνους, πὸν ψιλοκοσκινίζουν τὰ πράγματα οὔτε σὲ ἐκεῖνους, πὸν παραμονεύουν γιὰ τὰ ὀλισθήματά μας καὶ δυνατὸ εἶναι καὶ γνώρισμα ἀποτελεῖ ἐκεῖνων, πὸν περνοῦν τὴ ζωὴ τους μὲ σύνεση, ἔχοντας ὡς σκοπὸ τὴν εὐσέβεια».

Μεγάλου Βασιλείου

Λεπροὶ καὶ Θεία Κοινωνία

«Παπά, στὸ τέλος θὰ μὲ κοινωνήσεις καὶ ἐσὺ μετὰ θὰ κάμεις τὴν κατάλυση καὶ δὲν θὰ φοβηθεῖς τὴ λέπρα μου!»

Ἀπὸ τὶς ιστοσελίδες «Ρωμαίικο Ὀδοιπορικό», <http://www.orthodoxia-ellhnismos.gr/>.



Ἔγινε πάρα πολλὸς λόγος γιὰ τὸ νησί τῆς Σπιναλόγκα.

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ διάφορα ἱστορικά στοιχεία τὰ ὁποῖα καὶ πληροφοροῦμαστε εἶναι

ὅτι οἱ χανσενικοὶ ποὺ κατοικοῦσαν στὴ Σπιναλόγκα ἦταν ὀργισμένοι μὲ τὸν Θεό, γιὰ τὸ λόγο ὅτι ἡ ἀσθένειά τους ἦταν μία μεγάλη καὶ ἀφόρητη δοκιμασία. Ἐνας Γεραπετρίτης παπᾶς τόλμησε νὰ τοὺς ἐπισκεφθεῖ κάποτε καὶ νὰ λειτουργήσει στὸν Ἅγιο Παντελεήμονα, ποὺ ὑπῆρχε καὶ ρήμαζε στὸ νησί, συντροφιά μὲ τοὺς νέους τοῦ κατοίκους. Λένε πὼς στὴν πρώτη Λειτουργία δὲν πάτησε ψυχὴ.

Οἱ λεπροὶ ἄκουγαν πεισιμωμένοι ἀπὸ τὰ κελιά τους τὴν ψαλμωδία, κι ἄλλοτε τὴν σκέπαζαν μὲ τὰ βογκητὰ τους κι ἄλλοτε μὲ τὶς κατάρες τους.

Ὁ ἱερέας ὅμως ξαναπῆγε. Στὴν δευτέρη τούτη ἐπίσκεψη ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς πρόβαλε θαρρετὰ στὸ κατῶφλι τοῦ ναοῦ.

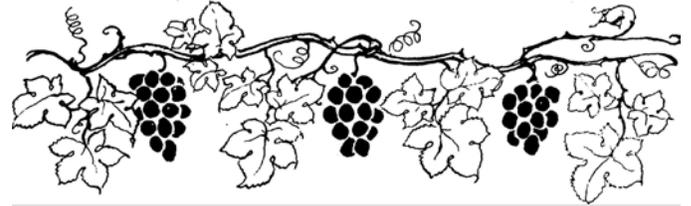
Παπά, θὰ κάτσω στὴν Λειτουργία σου μ' ἕναν ὄρο ὅμως. Στὸ τέλος θὰ μὲ κοινωνήσεις. Κι ἂν ὁ Θεός σου εἶναι τόσο Παντοδύναμος, ἐσὺ μετὰ θὰ κάμεις τὴν κατάλυση καὶ δὲν θὰ φοβηθεῖς τὴ λέπρα μου.

Ὁ ἱερέας ἔγνευσε συγκαταβατικά. Στὰ κοντινὰ κελιά ἀκούστηκε ἡ κουβέντα κι ἄρχισαν νὰ μαζεύονται διάφοροι στὸ πλάι τοῦ ναοῦ, ἐκεῖ ποὺ ἦταν ἕνα μικρὸ χάλασμα, μὲ λιγοστὴ θέα στὸ ἱερό. Παραμόνευσαν οἱ χανσενικοὶ στὸ τέλος τῆς Λειτουργίας κι εἶδαν τὸν παπὰ δακρυσμένο καὶ γονατιστὸ στὴν Ἱερὴ Πρόθεση νὰ κάνει τὴν κατάλυση.

Πέρασε μῆνας. Οἱ χανσενικοὶ τὸν περιμέναν. Πίστευαν πὼς θὰ ῥθει τούτη τὴ φορὰ ὡς ἀσθενὴς κι ὄχι ὡς ἱερέας. Ὅμως ὁ παπᾶς ἐπέστρεψε ὑγιὴς καὶ ροδαλὸς κι ἄρχισε μὲ ἠθικὸ ἀναπτρωμένο νὰ χτυπᾶ τὴν καμπάνα τοῦ παλιοῦ ναΐσκου. Ἐκτοτε καὶ γιὰ δέκα τουλάχιστον χρόνια ἡ Σπιναλόγκα εἶχε τὸν ἱερέα της. Οἱ χανσενικοὶ ἀναστύλωσαν μόνοι τους τὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ συνάμα ἀναστύλωσαν καὶ τὴν πίστη τους. Κοινωνοῦσαν τακτικὰ καὶ πάντα κρυφοκοίταζαν τὸν παπὰ τους τὴν ὥρα τῆς κατάλυσης, γιὰ νὰ βεβαιωθοῦν πὼς τὸ «θαῦμα τῆς Σπιναλόγκα» συνέβαινε ξανὰ καὶ ξανά.

Τὸ 1957, μὲ τὴν ἀνακάλυψη τῶν ἀντιβιοτικῶν καὶ τὴν ἴαση τῶν λεπρῶν, τὸ λεπροκομεῖο ἔκλεισε καὶ τὸ

νησί ἐρημώθηκε. Μόνο ὁ ἱερέας ἔμεινε στὸ νησί ὡς τὸ 1962, γιὰ νὰ μνημονεῦει τοὺς λεπροὺς μέχρι 5 χρόνια μετὰ τὸ θάνατό τους. Ἰδοῦ, λοιπόν, ἕνας σύγχρονος ἀθόρυβος ἥρωας, ποὺ δὲν τιμήθηκε γιὰ τὸ ἔργο του ἀπὸ κανέναν, καὶ ποῦ—ἂν προσέξατε—δὲν παραθέσαμε τὸ ὄνομά του γιὰτὶ ἀπλὰ δὲν τὸ γνωρίζουμε! Τὸ γνωρίζει ὅμως—σίγουρα—ὁ Θεός! Κι αὐτὸ μᾶς ἀρκεῖ!



Πόδια, χέρια στὴν δουλειά νὰ δίνετε, καρδιά νὰ μὴ δίνετε. Ἐννοῶ νὰ μὴ δίνετε καρδιά στὰ ὑλικά πράγματα.

Εἶναι μερικοί, πού δίνονται ὀλόκληροι στὰ ὑλικά. Περνοῦν ὅλη τὴν ἡμέρα μὲ τὸ νὰ ἀσχολοῦνται πὼς θὰ κάνουν καλὰ μιὰ δουλειά καὶ δὲν σκέφτονται καθόλου τὸν Θεό. Νὰ μὴ φθάνουμε ἐκεῖ. Νὰ χρησιμοποιῆται τὰ χέρια καὶ τὰ πόδια στὴ δουλειά, ἀλλὰ νὰ μὴ ἀφήνετε τὸν νοῦ σας νὰ ξεφύγῃ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Νὰ μὴ δίνεται ὅλο τὸ εἶναι σας, ὅλο τὸν δυναμισμό μαζί μὲ τὴν καρδιά σας, στὰ ὑλικά. Ἔτσι γίνεται κανεὶς εἰδωλολάτρης. Ὅσο μπορεῖτε στὶς δουλειές καρδιά νὰ μὴ δίνετε χέρια, μυαλό νὰ δίνετε. Καρδιά νὰ μὴ δίνετε σέ χαμένα, ἄχρηστα πράγματα. Γιατί μετὰ πὼς θὰ σκιρτήσῃ ἡ καρδιά γιὰ τὸν Χριστό; Νὰ ἀξιοποιήτε τὴν καρδιά σας νὰ μὴ τὴν σπαταλᾶτε.

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης

Πὼς θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἀπομακρύνουμε τοὺς ἄλλους ἀπὸ τὴν εἰδωλολατρία, χωρὶς νὰ ἀπομακρύνουμε τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς μας ἀπὸ αὐτῆ; Ὅταν δὲν πείθομε τὸν ἑαυτό μας, πὼς θὰ πείσομε τοὺς ἄλλους; Πὼς θὰ μπορέσει νὰ διορθώσει ἄλλους ἐκεῖνος, πού δὲν φροντίζει οὔτε γιὰ τὴν δική του ψυχὴ;

Γιατί μὴ μοῦ πεῖς ὅτι δὲν προσκυνεῖς χρυσὸ εἶδωλο, μὴ μοῦ πεῖς ὅτι δὲν κάνεις αὐτὰ πού προστάζει ὁ χρυσός; Γιατί πραγματικά ὑπάρχουν διάφοροι τρόποι εἰδωλολατρίας ἄλλος θεωρεῖ κύριο τὸν πλοῦτο, ἄλλος θεωρεῖ θεὸ τὴν κοιλιά, ἐνῶ ἄλλος κάποια ἄλλη ἐπιθυμία πιο φοβερή. Θὰ μοῦ πεῖς ὅτι δὲν θυσιάζεις σέ βόδια, ὅπως οἱ Ἕλληνες; Κατασφάζεις ὅμως τὴν δική σου ψυχὴ, πού εἶναι πρᾶγμα πολὺ πιο φοβερό. Ἀλλὰ δὲν γονατίζεις καὶ δὲν προσκυνεῖς; Μὲ μεγαλύτερη ὅμως ὑπακοή κάνεις ὅλα, πού θὰ προστάξουν καὶ ἡ κοιλιά σου καὶ ὁ πλοῦτος καὶ ἡ τυραννία τῆς ἐπιθυμίας. Ἀλλὰ, ἐάν δὲν κατασκευάζεις εἶδωλα ἐσὺ, ὅπως οἱ Ἕλληνες, ὑποκύπτεις ὅμως μὲ πολλή προθυμία στὰ ἴδια πάθη, κάνοντας τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ μέλη πόρνης καὶ βυθίζοντας τὸν ἑαυτό σου στὶς ἄλλες παρανομίες.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος

Ὁρθόδοξα Μαργαριτάρια

Παραθέτουμε μερικά πολύτιμα κείμενα για τις δύσκολες μέρες που ὄλοι μας διανύουμε.

Τέσσερα Πράγματα Δημιουργούν Ἀμαρτωλούς Ἐρεθισμούς στο σῶμα. Ποιά Εἶναι Αὐτά;

Σιμωνοπετρίτης Ἀρχ. Αἰμιλιανός, Λόγοι Ἀσκητικοί, Ἑρμηνεία στον Ἀββᾶ Ησαΐα.

Τὸ κοιμηθῆναι εἰς κόρον, ὅταν κοιμᾶται κανεὶς πολὺ.

Πράγματι, μὲ τὸν πολὺ ὕπνο θρέφεται ἡ σάρκα καὶ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ζήσει καθαρὴ ζωὴ. Ἀποκτᾶ τότε μία νωθρότητα ὁ μοναχὸς καὶ χάνει τὸ ἄοκνο, χάνει τὴν ἀγρυπνία, χάνει τὴν μελέτη. Ὁ πολὺς ὕπνος βλάπτει κάθε ἄνθρωπο ποὺ θέλει νὰ ἐπιτύχει κάτι στὴν ζωὴ του.

Καὶ φαγεῖν εἰς πλησμονήν, καὶ τὸ νὰ τρώγει τόσο, ὥστε νὰ χορταίνει.

Ἡ ἐντολὴ τῶν Πατέρων εἶναι νὰ τρώγει κανεὶς τόσο μόνον, ὅσο χρειάζεται για νὰ συνεχίσει τὴν ζωὴ του, καὶ πάντοτε νὰ πεινᾷ. Ἡ πείνα εἶναι στοχεῖο μνήμης τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀντιθέτως, ἡ πλησμονὴ τῆς γαστρὸς εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὁποῖος ζεῖ χωρὶς Θεόν, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι νωθρὸς στὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ του καὶ δὲν ἔχει πνευματικὴ ἢ ἄλλη δημιουργία. Δὲν ζεῖ φυσικὰ καὶ ὀμαλά, γι' αὐτὸ προσπαθεῖ νὰ ἀναπληρώσει τὴν φυσικότητα τῆς ζωῆς του μὲ τὸ πολὺ φαγητό. Ἰδιαιτέρως, ἂν τὸ φαγητὸ μᾶς ἀρέσει, τότε ἐκεῖ ὑπάρχει τέλεια ἁμαρτία.

Καὶ ἀπὸ εὐτραπείας.

Εὐτραπελία εἶναι ὄχι ἀπλῶς νὰ λέγει κανεὶς ἀνάρμοστους λόγους, ἀλλὰ νὰ εἶναι καὶ εὐκόλος στὸ νὰ τρέπεται σὲ λόγους. Ἄνθρωπος ἐπιρροεπὴς στοὺς λόγους, καὶ ἂν δὲν εἶναι ἐν πορνικαῖς διαθέσεσι, ἔστω καὶ καλυμμένες κάτω ἀπὸ μύρια καλύμματα, θὰ περιπέσει ὀπωσδήποτε. Διότι τὸ ἐπιρροεπὴς στοὺς λόγους εἶναι ἀπὸ τὰ πιὸ βασανιστικὰ στοιχεῖα για τὴν ζωὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ θέλουν νὰ ἀφιερωθοῦν στὸν Θεὸν καὶ ἀποκαλύπτει τὴν σκληρότητα τῆς καρδιάς καὶ τὴν ἀπουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅταν ἔχεις ἐνώπιόν σου τὴν αἴσθησι κάποιου μεγάλου, δὲν μιλάς, μόνον τὸν βλέπεις καὶ ἀκοῦς ἢ ἀπαντᾷς σὲ ὅ,τι σὲ ρωτᾷ. Τὸ ὅτι ὀμιλῶ, φανερώνει ὅτι δὲν ἔχω μπροστά μου τὸ ὄραμα τοῦ Θεοῦ, δὲν ἔχω προοπτικὴ ποὺ μὲ ὀδηγεῖ στὸν οὐρανό. Τὰ λόγια εἶναι σημάδια ποὺ κρύβουν ὅλες τὶς ἁμαρτίες, ἐσωτερικὲς καὶ ἐξωτερικὲς, διότι καὶ ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ καρδιὰ καὶ ἡ κρίσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου συγχύζονται. Μιλώντας ἢ ἀκούγοντας ἄλλους νὰ μιλοῦν, συμφύρεσαι μὲ ὄλον τὸν κόσμον, τὸν ὁποῖον φέρνεις μπροστά σου ἢ σοῦ τὸν φέρνουν. Ἐρημώνει τότε ἡ ψυχὴ σου, ξεγυμνώνεται

τὸ πνεῦμα σου, καὶ μένει πλέον ἢ σάρκα ἀνίκανη, νὰ ἀντισταθμίσει τὸ καλὸ, ὅποτε τί θὰ κάνει; Θὰ πέσει σὲ ὅλες τὶς δυσωδίες.

Καὶ ἀπὸ κοσμήσεως.

Κόσμησις εἶναι ἡ φροντίδα καὶ ἡ περιποίηση τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μας, τοῦ περιβάλλοντός μας, οἰουδήποτε πράγματός μας, τὸ νὰ θέλωμε νὰ γίνονται ὅλα ὁμορφα. Ἰδιαιτέρως ἡ κόσμησις τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μας—τὸ πλύσιμο, τὸ χτένισμα, τὸ περιποιημένο ροῦχο—, ὅσο καὶ νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι μᾶς τὴν ἐπιβάλλει ὁ χρόνος ἢ ὁ χῶρος, στὴν πραγματικότητα δείχνει ἐσωτερικὴ κοσμικότητα.

Τὸ ὑπερβολικὸ λοιπὸν φαγητό, ὁ ὑπερβολικὸς ὕπνος, ἡ εὐτραπελία καὶ ἡ κόσμησις πληθύνουν τὴν πορνεία ἐν τῷ σῶματι.

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Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος, ὡς Διάδοχος καὶ Εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Πρέπει νὰ Ζῆ ὡς Μάρτυς καὶ Ὁμολογητής!

Γερομονάχου Γρηγορίου. Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Ἡ Ἱερωσύνη» Ἱερὸν Κουτλουμουσιανὸν Κελλίον Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου, Ἁγιον Ὀρος.

Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος, ὡς διάδοχος καὶ εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πρέπει νὰ ζῆ ὡς μάρτυς καὶ ὁμολογητής, καὶ νὰ εἶναι για τοὺς πιστοὺς κανὼν πίστεως, δηλαδὴ ἀφ' ἑνὸς νὰ γνωρίζη καὶ νὰ ἀποδέχεται τὴν πίστι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ ἀφ' ἑτέρου νὰ τὴν ὁμολογῇ καὶ νὰ τὴν διδάσκη μὲ ἔργο καὶ λόγο στὸ ποίμνιό του. Αὐτὴ τὴν πίστι ἀναλαμβάνει νὰ διαφυλάξῃ ὁ χειροτονοῦμενος ὡς κόρη ὀφθαλμοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸ ὁμολογεῖ ἐνώπιον τῆς εὐχαριστιακῆς συνάξεως.

Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ πρῶτος Μάρτυς καὶ Ὁμολογητής, ὁ μαρτυρήσας ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου τὴν καλὴν ὁμολογίαν. Μὲ τὸν λόγο αὐτὸ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος φέρει στὸν μαθητὴ του Τιμόθεο ὡς παράδειγμα τὸν Χριστό, καὶ τὸν παρακινεῖ σὲ ἀγῶνες: «*Μαρτύρησε ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ ἔγινε πρωτομάρτυς. Χρωστοῦμε λοιπὸν κι ἐμεῖς, οἱ μαθητὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Ἀπόστολοι, νὰ Τὸν μιμούμαστε καὶ νὰ μαρτυροῦμε τὴν θεότητα Του*».

Ἡ ὁμολογία ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶναι Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχει ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ μένη ὁ Θεὸς στὴν καρδιὰ τοῦ ὁμολογοῦντος, καὶ ἀντιστρόφως νὰ μένη αὐτὸς στὸν Θεό, κατὰ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Ἰωάννου: «*Ὅς ἂν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ Θεῷ*». Συμπεραίνεται λοιπὸν ὅτι τὸ νὰ ὁμολογῇ κάποιος μὲ τὸ στόμα για νὰ πιστεῦῃ μὲ τὴν καρδιὰ ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶναι ἀληθινὰ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἢ πίστι καὶ ἡ ὁμολογία αὐτὴ τοῦ προξενεῖ ὀπωσδήποτε ἓνα πολὺ μεγάλο στεφάνι καὶ ἓναν ὑπερφυσικὸ μισθό: τὴν

ενοίκηση, δηλαδή, και διαμονή του Θεού στην καρδιά του πιστεύοντος και όμολογούντος, και αντιστρόφως τὸ νὰ μένη αὐτὸς στὸν Θεό».

Σε παλαιότερους χρόνους, τὴν στιγμή αὐτὴ γινόταν ἡ ἐξέταση τοῦ ὑποψηφίου γιὰ τὸ ὑγιὲς τῆς πίστεως ἀπὸ τρεῖς Ἀρχιερεῖς ξεχωριστά, πρὶν τὴν ἐπικύρωση τῆς ἐκλογῆς. Ὅταν κάθε Ἀρχιερεὺς λάμβανε ἱκανοποιητικὴ ἀπάντηση, εὐλογοῦσε τὸν ὑποψήφιο λέγοντας: «*Ἡ χάρις τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος εἶη μετὰ σου.*» Ἡ ἐπικύρωση τῆς ἐκλογῆς γίνεται μετὰ τὴν χάρι τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἀφοῦ καὶ ἡ πίστη τοῦ ὁμολογεῖ ὁ ὑποψήφιος εἶναι καρπὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Διότι «*χρειάζεται ἡ χορήγηση τοῦ Ἁγίου πνεύματος, γιὰ νὰ ἀνεβῆ κάνεις στὸ ὕψος τῆς πίστεως*».

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος συμβούλευε τὸν ἐπίσκοπο Τιμόθεο νὰ ἔχη πίστιν καὶ ἀγαθὴν συνείδησιν, «*ἦν τινες ἀπωσάμενοι περὶ τὴν πίστιν ἐνανάγησαν.*» Δηλαδή: Νὰ ἔχῃς πίστη, ὥστε νὰ ὀρθοτομῆς τὸν λόγο τῆς ἀληθείας. Νὰ ἔχῃς καὶ ἀγαθὴ συνείδηση, δηλαδή νὰ ἀποκτήσης ἀκατηγόρητη ζωὴ. Ἐπειδὴ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀκατηγόρητη ζωὴ γεννιέται καὶ ἡ ἀγαθὴ συνείδηση. Αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγαθὴ συνείδηση ἔχασαν μερικοὶ, καὶ ἐν συνέχειᾳ ἔχασαν καὶ τὴν πίστη... Διότι **ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ζοῦν ζωὴ ἀκάθαρτη καὶ ἀμαρτωλὴ, γιὰ νὰ μὴν βασανίζονται ἀπὸ τὸν φόβο τῆς μελλούσης κολάσεως, πείθουν τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους ὅτι ὅλες οἱ διδασκαλίαι τῶν Χριστιανῶν εἶναι ψέμματα καὶ ἔτσι ναυαγοῦν.**

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**Ἀπὸ Ἐναν Ἁγιον Κληρικὸ, Χιλιάδες Ἦμποροῦν
νὰ Ὁφεληθοῦν καὶ νὰ Σωθοῦν, Ὅπως καὶ
ἀπὸ Ἐναν πού δὲν Ἀγωνίζεται, Χιλιάδες νὰ
Ζημιωθοῦν καὶ νὰ Ἀφανισθοῦν**

Ὁσίου Γέροντος Γερωνίου Αἰγίνης.

Εἰς Διάκονο: Πρόσεχε! Εἶσαι καλὸς τώρα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄγγελοι πέφτουν. Νὰ κλείνεις στὸ δωμάτιό σου, νὰ μελετᾷς, νὰ προσεύχεσαι. Ἄν δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη, νὰ μὴ βγαίνεις ἔξω. «*Κάθου εἰς τὸ κελλίον σου*», λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ «*καὶ αὐτὸ θὰ σὲ διδάξῃ τὰ πάντα*». Ἡ Ὅσια Μαρία ἡ Αἰγύπτια, τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη, ἔζησε εἰς τὴν ἔρημον καὶ πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπου δὲν εἶδε. Ξέρεις τί ἔπαθε; Ἀγίασε!

Εἶσαι Ἱερεὺς; Νὰ προσέχῃς, δὲν ἀνήκεις εἰς τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου. Εἶσαι σὰν μία βελόνα στὰ χέρια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Νᾶσαι καλὸς, νὰ μὴν εἶσαι σὰ τὴ σκουριασμένη βελόνα ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει τὴ δουλειά της. Διὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου, δηλ. ἀδυναμίες, πάθη κλπ. νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχεις. Τὸ ρᾶσον, ἡ συνθήκη σου εἶναι μετὰ τὸν Θεόν, νὰ σὲ συγκλονίζει καὶ νὰ λές, τί θέλει τοῦτο, τί μοῦ λέγει τοῦτο; Ναὶ ν' ἀγαπῶ τὸν Θεὸν καὶ νὰ ἐργάζομαι εἰς ὅτι με ἔταξε.

Εἰς Κληρικὸ: Ὅσο μπορεῖς ἀπόφευγε τὰ ἔξω. Κλείσου στὸ δωμάτιό σου. Σφίξε τὸν νοῦν σου ν' ἀνοίξει νὰ δεῖς πνευματικὸν φῶς. Νὰ λέγεις πότε νὰ φθάσεις στὸ δωμάτιό σου καὶ νὰ κλειστῆς. Μελέτησε, προσευχήσου. Ἄν δὲν θὰ εἶσαι ἐνισχυμένος, πῶς θὰ ἐνισχύσεις ἄλλους; Καὶ ὁ κόσμος τρέχει, ζητᾷ τὴν δίψα τῆς ψυχῆς νὰ ἱκανοποιήσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἀπὸ τὰ ὄργανά της, ἀπὸ τὸ ρᾶσο. Τί θὰ δώσεις ἂν δὲν ἔχεις καὶ πῶς θὰ ἔχεις ἂν δὲν ζητήσεις ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν; Νὰ κοπιᾷς στὴν προσευχὴ καὶ μελέτῃ καὶ θὰ ἐνισχύεσαι.

Ὁ κληρικὸς πρέπει σὰν τὰ πολυόμματα νὰ εἶναι, δηλ. ἀπὸ παντοῦ μάτια νὰ ἔχει, νὰ εἶναι ἀκέραιος, δυνατὸς στὸν νοῦν, σοφός, ἅγιος.

Ἐνας εὐλογημένος (ιερέας) ἄρχιζε τὸ βράδυ προσευχὴ καὶ μέχρι τὸ πρωὶ δὲν χόρταινε. Στὴν ἔκκλησία, στὰ «*Τὰ Σὰ ἐκ τῶν Σῶν*» ἔκλαιγε τόσο πολὺ, ποὺ δὲν συνέχιζε γιὰ ὦρα καὶ ὅταν τὸν ρωτούσαμε, μᾶς ἔλεγε: «*Πῶς νὰ συνεχίσω ποὺ βλέπω τόσους ἀγγέλους γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θυσιαστήριον καὶ μέσα στὸ Ποτήριον τὸν Κύριό μας νὰ λάμπει.*»

Ὁ Γέροντάς μου, ὁ Μισαήλ, πρὶν νὰ ἀνατεῖλει ὁ ἥλιος, ἀνέβαινε στὸ βουνό. Μετὰ τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ ἡλίου σήκωνε τὰ χέρια του καὶ ἔτσι ἔμενε μέχρι ποὺ βασίλευε. Οὔτε ἐκάθητο, οὔτε τὸ ἕνα, οὔτε τὸ ἄλλο. Καὶ τὸ βράδυ τὰ ροῦχα του ἔσταζαν ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ δάκρυα. Εἶχε ζῆλο καὶ ἐπιμέλεια.

Ποτὲ μὴ κοινωνήσεις ἄνθρωπον, ἂν δὲν ἀκούσης τὸ ὄνομά του. Ἐπίσης νὰ προσέχῃς νὰ παίρνεις ὀλίγον Μαργαρίτη, ὄχι μεγάλον τεμάχιο.

Τὸν Ἱεροκήρυκα νὰ τὸν ἀκοῦτε, ἀλλὰ μὴ ζυγώνετε πολὺ. Ὅλοι ἄνθρωποι εἴμεθα. Πιθανὸν νὰ διαπιστώσετε ἀδυναμίες καὶ νὰ πεῖτε ἄλλα λέει καὶ ἄλλα πράττει.

Ἡ ἐλεεινὴ ἀσθένεια τῶν ἱερέων εἶναι ἡ φιλαργυρία. Ἀλλοίμονον! Ὅταν ὁ ἱερεὺς εἶναι φιλάργυρος, τότε θὰ πέσει καὶ σὲ πολλὰ ἄλλα.

Ὁ διάβολος παντοῖους τρόπους μεταχειρίζεται γιὰ νὰ βλάψῃ τὸν κληρικὸ, διότι ἀπὸ ἕναν ἅγιον κληρικὸ, χιλιάδες Ἦμποροῦν νὰ ὠφεληθοῦν καὶ νὰ σωθοῦν, ὅπως καὶ ἀπὸ ἕναν πού δὲν ἀγωνίζεται, χιλιάδες νὰ ζημιωθοῦν καὶ ἀφανισθοῦν.



Εἰς περιστάσεις κατὰ τὰς ὁποίας περιφρονεῖται καὶ ὑβρίζεται ἡ Ἁγία Ὁρθόδοξος Πίστις ἡμῶν ἐπιτρέπεται ἔλεγχος ἀκόμη καὶ θυμὸς δίκαιος δικαιοῦτος, ἀπαγορεύεται δὲ ἡ σιωπὴ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἔλεγχος νὰ γίνεται μετὰ διάκρισιν καὶ σύνεσιν ὄχι μετὰ ταραχὴν καὶ θυμὸν ὑπερβολικόν, νὰ γίνεται μετὰ θυμὸν Θεϊκόν!

Γέρον Φιλόθεος Ζερβακος

Ὁ Πόλεμος κατὰ τῆς Πλάνης κατὰ τὸν Ὅσιο Σιλουανὸ τὸν Ἀθωνίτη

Αρχιμ. Χρυσοστόμου Μαϊδώνη.

Στὴν πλάνη πέφτει κάποιος εἴτε ἀπὸ ἀπειρία εἴτε ἀπὸ ὑπερηφάνεια. Καὶ ἂν εἶναι ἀπὸ ἀπειρία, ὁ Κύριος θεραπεύει γρήγορα αὐτὸν ποὺ πλανήθηκε, ἂν ὅμως εἶναι ἀπὸ ὑπερηφάνεια, τότε θὰ πάσχει γιὰ πολὺν καιρὸ ἢ ψυχὴ, ὥσπου μάθει τὴν ταπείνωση, καὶ τότε θὰ θεραπευθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο.

Οἱ Κίνδυνοι

α. Οἱ Λογισμοὶ καὶ τὰ Δαιμόνια

Ὅπως οἱ ἄνθρωποι μπαίνουν στὸ σπίτι καὶ βγαίνουν, ἔτσι καὶ οἱ λογισμοὶ ἔρχονται ἀπὸ τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ πάλι μπορεῖ νὰ φύγουν, ἂν δὲν τοὺς δεχόμαστε.

Ἄν ὁ λογισμὸς σου σὲ λέει κλέψε, καὶ σὺ ὑπακούσεις, δίνεις μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο στὸ δαιμόνιο ἐξουσία ἐπάνω σου. Ἄν ὁ λογισμὸς σου λέει φάγε πολὺ, ὥσπου νὰ χορτάσεις, καὶ σὺ φᾶς πολὺ, τότε πάλι σὲ ἐξουσιάζει τὸ δαιμόνιο. Κι ἔτσι, ἂν ὁ λογισμὸς κάθε πάθους σὲ νικᾷ, θὰ καταστήσεις κατοικία δαιμόνων.

β. Τὸ Ἐπικίνδυνο Φῶς

Ἄν δεῖς φῶς μέσα σου ἢ γύρω σου, μὴν πιστέψεις σ' αὐτὸ ἂν δὲν ἔχεις συγχρόνως κατάνυξη γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἀγάπη καὶ γιὰ τὸν πλησίον. Μὴν φοβηθεῖς ὅμως ἀλλὰ ταπεινώσε τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐκεῖνο θὰ ἐξαφανιστεῖ.

Ἄν δεῖς κάποιο ὄραμα ἢ εἰκόνα ἢ ὄνειρο, μὴν τὸ ἐμπιστεύεσαι, γιατί ἂν εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, θὰ σὲ φωτίσει γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Κύριος. Ψυχὴ, ποὺ δὲν γεύθηκε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ διακρίνει ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔρχεται τὸ ὄραμα. Ὁ ἐχθρὸς δίνει στὴν ψυχὴ μία «γλυκεῖα αἴσθηση» ἀνακατεμένη με κενοδοξία, καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ γίνεται φανερὴ ἢ πλάνη.

Οἱ Πατέρες λένε ὅτι, ὅταν ἡ ὄραση εἶναι ἐχθρική, ἢ ψυχὴ αἰσθάνεται σύγχυση ἢ φόβο. Αὐτό, ὅμως, συμβαίνει μόνο στὴν ταπεινὴ ψυχὴ ποὺ θεωρεῖ τὸν ἑαυτὸ της ἀνάξιο γιὰ δράση. Ο κενοδόξος, ὅμως, μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν αἰσθανθεῖ οὔτε φόβο οὔτε σύγχυση, γιατί ἐπιθυμεῖ τίς ὁράσεις καὶ θεωρεῖ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ἄξιο, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τὸν ἐξαπατᾷ εὐκόλα ὁ ἐχθρὸς. Τὰ οὐράνια γνωρίζονται μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ τὰ ἐπίγεια μὲ τὴ φυσικὴ διάνοια. Πλανᾶται ὅποιος ἐπιχειρήσει νὰ γνωρίσει τὸν Θεὸ μὲ τὸν φυσικὸ νοῦ, μὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμη, γιατί ὁ Θεὸς γνωρίζεται μόνο μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα.

Ἡ Ἀντιμετώπιση

Ὁ Ἅγιος Σιλουανὸς ἀκολουθεῖ τὴν στάση τῶν Πατέρων στὴν θεραπεία τῆς ἀσθένειας τῆς πλάνης. Μιλᾷ ὅμως καὶ ἀπὸ προσωπικὴ πείρα. Μετάνοια, ταπείνωση, ἐξομολόγηση στὸν πνευματικὸ πατέρα

εἶναι τὰ ἀποτελεσματικὰ ὄπλα γιὰ τὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τῶν λογισμῶν καὶ τῶν πειρασμῶν, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ παρασύρουν σὲ πλάνη.

Λέει γιὰ τὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τῆς πλάνης:

α. Ἡ Μετάνοια

Ἄν ἀρχίσεις μὲ τὴν πρέπουσα μετάνοια, τότε οἱ δαίμονες θὰ ἀρχίσουν νὰ τρέμουν καὶ θ' ἀναγκαστοῦν νὰ φύγουν.

β. Ἡ Ταπείνωση

Νὰ πολεμᾷς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς μὲ τὴν ταπείνωση.

Ὅταν δεῖς, ὅτι κάποιος ἄλλος νοῦς παλεύει μὲ τὸ νοῦ σου, ταπείνωσε τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου καὶ θὰ πάψει ὁ πόλεμος.

Ἄν σοῦ συμβεῖ νὰ δεῖς δαιμόνια, μὴ φοβηθεῖς, ἀλλὰ ταπεινώσε τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου, καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια θὰ ἐξαφανιστοῦν. Ἄν ὅμως σὲ πιάσει ὁ φόβος, δὲν θὰ ἀποφύγεις κάποια βλάβη. Νὰ εἶσαι ἀνδρεῖος. Νὰ θυμᾶσαι ὅτι ὁ Κύριος σὲ βλέπει, ἂν στηρίζεις τὴν ἐλπίδα σου σὲ Αὐτόν.

Γιὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσει, ὅμως, ἡ ψυχὴ ἀνάπαυση ἀπὸ τὰ δαιμόνια, πρέπει νὰ ταπεινώνεται καὶ νὰ λέει: Εἶμαι χειρότερη ἀπ' ὅλους, εἶμαι πιὸ ἄθλια ἀπὸ κάθε κτῆνος καὶ ἀπὸ κάθε θηρίο.

γ. Ὁ Πνευματικὸς

Ἄν βλέπεις μὲ τὸ νοῦ σου δαιμόνια, ταπεινώσου καὶ προσπάθησε νὰ μὴ βλέπεις καὶ τρέξε ὅσο πιὸ γρήγορα γίνεται στὸν πνευματικὸ σου γέροντα, στὸν ὁποῖο παραδόθηκες. Πές του τα ὅλα, καὶ τότε ὁ Κύριος θὰ σὲ ἐλεήσει καὶ θὰ σωθεῖς ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη. Ἄν, ὅμως, νομίζεις ὅτι ἐσὺ γνωρίζεις περισσότερα γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ καὶ πάψεις νὰ τοῦ λὲς τί σοῦ συμβαίνει, ἐξαιτίας αὐτῆς τῆς ὑπερηφάνειας, θὰ παραχωρηθεῖ ἀναπόφευκτα κάποιος πειρασμὸς, γιὰ νὰ σὲ συνετίσει.

Πέφτουμε στὴν πλάνη, ὅταν νομίζουμε ὅτι εἴμαστε πιὸ φρόνιμοι καὶ ἔμπειροι ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους, ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ μας πατέρα. Ἔτσι σκέφτηκα κι ἐγὼ μὲ τὴν ἀπειρία μου καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὑπέφερα. Κι εὐχαριστῶ ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά μου τὸν Θεό, γιατί μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ μὲ ταπείνωσε καὶ μὲ νουθέτησε καὶ δὲν ἀπέσυρε τὸ ἔλεός Του ἀπὸ μένα.

Καὶ τώρα σκέφτομαι ὅτι, χωρὶς ἐξομολόγηση στὸν πνευματικὸ δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦμε ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη, γιατί στὸν πνευματικὸ ἔδωσε ὁ Θεὸς τὴ χάρη τοῦ δεσμεῖν καὶ λύειν.

Ἡ παρουσίαση τῆς πλάνης ἀπὸ τὸν Ὅσιο Σιλουανὸ εἶναι μία ἀκριβὴς ἀκτινογραφία τοῦ πλανημένου, τῆς ἀρρώστιας τῆς πλάνης καὶ τῆς θεραπείας της, ὠφέλιμη γιὰ ὅσους ἀγωνίζονται νὰ ἀπελευθερώσουν ἐξαρτημένους ἀπὸ τὸ «πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης» (Α' Ἰωάν. 4:6) καὶ ἐνεργοῦνται ἀπὸ τὴν «ἐνέργεια τῆς πλάνης» (Β' Θεσσ. 2:11).

Ὁ Δρόμος τῆς Ἀνεξικακίας

Πρεσβ. Διονύσιος Τάτσης.

Ἡ ἄρετὴ τῆς ἀνεξικακίας ἀπελευθερώνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιατί ξεριζώνει ἀπὸ τὴν ψυχὴ του τὴν ἐπιθυμία τῆς ἐκδίκησης ἐκείνων, ποὺ μὲ τὸν ἓνα ἢ τὸν ἄλλο τρόπο τὸν ἔχουν βλάψει. Παρόλο ποὺ ἡ μνήμη του τὸν παρακινεῖ σὲ ἀντεπίθεση, πολλές φορὲς καὶ μὲ καθυστέρηση ἐτῶν, μὲ τὴν ἀνεξικακία ἀκολουθεῖ τὴν ὁδὸ τῆς ὑπέρβασης καὶ τῆς θεοφιλοῦς ἀντιμετώπισης τῶν ἐχθρῶν του. Ἡ ἀνεξικακία πρωτίστως εἶναι μίμηση Θεοῦ. Ὅπως ὁ Θεὸς ἀνατέλλει τὸν ἥλιο ἐπὶ πονηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους, ἔτσι καὶ αὐτὸς ὅλους τοὺς βλέπει μὲ τὸ ἴδιο μάτι. Καὶ τοὺς φίλους καὶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς.

Ὁ ἀνεξικακὸς δὲν λησμονεῖ μόνο τὶς εἰς βάρος του πράξεις τῶν ἐχθρῶν του, ἀλλὰ μένει ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἀπέναντι σὲ ἐκείνους, ποὺ ὄφειλαν νὰ τοῦ κάνουν τὸ καλὸ, ἀλλὰ ἀδιαφόρησαν. Τὸ δεύτερο εἶναι ἐπίσης δύσκολο. Ἡ ἀπουσία τοῦ καλοῦ ἐκ μέρους τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ ἰσοδυναμεῖ μὲ ἐχθρικὴ πρᾶξη. Αὐτὸ πολλές φορὲς δὲν τὸ προσέχουμε ἢ δὲν τὸ θεωροῦμε ἁμαρτία. Καὶ ὁμως ἡ ἀπουσία τοῦ καλοῦ πληγώνει περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν παρουσία τοῦ κακοῦ.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι συνήθως ἀποκοιμίζονται μὲ τὴν ἰδέα ὅτι δὲν ἔχουν κάτι κακό, ἐνῶ θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶχαν κάνει πολλά καλὰ καὶ νὰ στέκονται στὸ πλευρὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν. Ἡ ἀνεξικακία πρὸς αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἐξ ἀμελείας εἶναι δυσκολότερη ἀπ' ὅ,τι πρὸς τοὺς φανεροὺς ἐχθροὺς καὶ τοῦτο γιατί ἐκείνοι γνωρίζουν τὰ χριστιανικά τους καθήκοντα, ἔχουν χριστιανικὴ ζωὴ, βλέπουν τὸν πόνο τῶν ἀδελφῶν τους, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἐκδηλώνουν τὴν ἐμπρακτὴ ἀγάπη τους. Καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι πολὺ ἐνοχλητικό.

Τὸ μεγαλύτερο παράδειγμα ἀνεξικακίας μᾶς τὸ ἔδωσε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ τῆς σταύρωσής Του ἔλεγε «Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς οὐ γὰρ οἶδασι τί ποιοῦσι». Ζητοῦσε ἀπὸ τὸν οὐράνιο Πατέρα Του νὰ συγχωρήσει τοὺς σκληροὺς καὶ ἀμετανόητους σταυρωτῆς Του. Κάτι παρόμοιο ἔκανε καὶ ὁ Πρωτομάρτυς Στέφανος ἀκολουθώντας τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Κυρίου. Ὅταν οἱ Μάρτυρες κατηγορίας ἐξαγριωμένοι καὶ τρίζοντας τὰ δόντια τους τὸν λιθοβολοῦσαν, αὐτὸς γονατιστὸς προσευχόταν μὲ δυνατὴ φωνὴ καὶ ἔλεγε «Κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ταύτην».

Τὴν ἀνεξικακία δίδαξε ὁ Χριστὸς καταργώντας τὴν παλιὰ ἐντολὴ «ὄφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὄφθαλμοῦ καὶ ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος»: «Ἐγὼ σᾶς λέω νὰ μὴ ἀντιστέκεστε στὸν κακὸ ἄνθρωπο· ἀλλὰ ἂν κάποιος σὲ χτυπήσει στὸ δεξιὸ μάγουλο, γύρισέ του καὶ τὸ ἄλλο». Καὶ συμπλήρωσε: «Ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθρούς σας, εὐεργετεῖτε ὅσους σᾶς μισοῦν· δίνετε εὐχὲς σ' ὅσους σᾶς δίνουν κατάρες,

προσεύχεστε γι' αὐτούς, ποὺ σᾶς κακομεταχειρίζονται». Ἠγάπη καὶ

ἡ εὐεργεσία πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς καταπολεμεῖ τὴν μνησικακία καὶ ἐνισχύει τὴν ἀνεξικακία. Μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ δυναμικὸ θὰ ἔλεγα τρόπο πρέπει νὰ

ἀντιμετωπίζονται ὅλοι ὅσοι μᾶς ἐνοχλοῦν, μᾶς βλάπτουν καὶ μᾶς διώκουν. Αὐτὸ ἀναφέρει καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στοὺς Ρωμαίους: «*Νὰ προσεύχεστε γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τῶν διωκτῶν σας, νὰ ζητᾶτε τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ γι' αὐτοὺς καὶ ὄχι νὰ τοὺς καταριέστε*». Ὁ Χριστιανὸς τὸ κακὸ πρέπει νὰ τὸ ἀντιμετωπίζει μὲ πνευματικὸ τρόπο, χωρὶς πνεῦμα ἐκδίκησης: Νὰ λησμονεῖ, νὰ ἀγαπᾶ καὶ νὰ εὐεργετῆ γενικὰ ὅλους τοὺς συνανθρώπους του.

Ἰδιαίτερα μᾶς ἐντυπωσιάζει ἡ ἀνεξικακία τῶν Ἀποστόλων, οἱ ὁποῖοι στὸ ἔργο τους συνάντησαν τὶς ἀντιδράσεις σκληρῶν καὶ κακοπροαίρετων ἀνθρώπων. Ἡ στάση τους ἦταν ἀξιοθαύμαστη. «Μέχρι αὐτὴ τὴν ὥρα πεινάμε, διψᾶμε, γυρνᾶμε μὲ κουρέλια, ξυλοδαρμένοι, ἀπὸ τόπο σὲ τόπο χωρὶς σπίτι καὶ μοχθοῦμε νὰ ζήσουμε δουλεύοντας μὲ τὰ ἴδια μας τὰ χέρια».

Στοὺς ἐμπαιγμοὺς ἀπαντᾶμε μὲ καλὰ λόγια, στοὺς διωγμοὺς μὲ ὑπομονή, στὶς συκοφαντίες μὲ λόγια φιλικὰ. Καταντήσαμε σὰν τὰ σκουπίδια ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, μέχρι αὐτὴ τὴν ὥρα θεωροῦμαστε τὰ ἀποβράσματα τῆς κοινωνίας».

Ὁ Ἰερὸς Χρυσόστομος χαρακτηρίζει τὴν ἀνεξικακία ὡς μητέρα ὅλων τῶν ἀγαθῶν. Ὁ ἀνεξικακὸς εἶναι ἀνώτερος ἄνθρωπος. Ἡ συμπεριφορὰ του δὲν ἔχει καμιά σχέση μὲ τὴν συμπεριφορὰ καὶ νοοτροπία τῶν κοσμικῶν. Ὁ Ἅγιος ἀπευθυνόμενος στὸν Χριστιανὸ ἀναφέρει: «*Κι ἂν λοιπὸν κάποιος σὲ βροῖσει, ὑπόφερε μὲ γενναιότητα γιατί ἔβρισε τὸν ἑαυτό του καὶ ὄχι ἐσένα. Κι ἂν σὲ χτυπήσει ἀκόμα, μὴ ἀπλώσεις τὸ χέρι, γιὰ νὰ τοῦ ἀνταποδώσεις γιατί αὐτὸς εἶναι ποὺ δέχεται τὸ χτύπημα χτυπώντας ἐσένα μὲ τὸ χέρι, χτυπάει τὸν ἑαυτό του μὲ τὸ θυμὸ καὶ ἀποκτάει ἀπὸ ὅλους πολὺ κακὴ φήμη*».

Στὴν ἄγρια συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ ἄλλου ὁ ἀληθινὸς χριστιανὸς μένει ψύχραιμος καὶ πράος. Τοῦ εἶναι ἀδιανόητο νὰ ἀντιδράσει μὲ θυμὸ.

Τὴν ἐπιθετικὴ συμπεριφορὰ του τὴ βλέπει ὡς ναυάγιο, στὸ ὁποῖο ὁ ἴδιος δὲν θέλει νὰ ὀδηγηθεῖ. Προτιμᾶ νὰ μένει στὴν ξηρὰ, μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸ θυμὸ καὶ τὴν ἐκδίκηση.

Ὁ ἀνεξικακὸς ἄνθρωπος εἶναι πάντα ἐπιεικὴς, ἥπιος, ὑπομονετικὸς καὶ συγκρατημένος. Δὲν θέλει νὰ ἐπιδεινώνει δυσάρεστες καταστάσεις οὔτε καὶ ἐπιδιώκει τὴν κοσμικὴ δικαιοσύνη. Ἡ ὅποια ἀνταπόδοση εἶναι μελλοντικὴ ὑπόθεση τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὄχι δική του.

ARE GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN CANADA FANATICS?

By "Orthodox Reflections" (<https://orthodoxreflections.com/>), a collaborative effort by converts to the Orthodox Christian faith.

Indeed, why won't Orthodox Bishops, not just in California, but in all of North America, fight for the Church, for Truth, for Christ? After all, did they not commit their whole lives to the Church, to Truth and to Christ?

Not only are they not fighting, but some of them, to justify their passivity, such as Archbishop Sotirios of Canada, even attack the faithful who are fighting by labeling them as "fanatics". During his Greek sermon on August 24th at the Divine Liturgy that celebrated the feast day of St. Kosmas Aitolos at the Canadian Monastery in King City that bears the saint's name, Archbishop Sotirios came down hard on the modern day "fanatics" in the Greek Orthodox Church by stating that St. Kosmas, despite his fiery faith, was never a fanatic. He goes on to say that fanaticism stems from arrogance and pride; and pride is the well-spring of every type of sin.

According to the dictionary, fanaticism is extreme devotion or zeal. Fanaticism often begins with a sudden, dramatic shift in world-view, often due to an overwhelmingly disturbing experience that is not readily explainable using "ordinary" or familiar frameworks. This sounds very much like St. Paul's Damascus experience which certainly changed his world view. Afterwards, St. Paul certainly displayed extreme devotion and zeal in serving Christ by almost single-handedly Christianizing the entire Greco-Roman Gentile world. Was St. Paul a fanatic?

In Revelations 3:15-16, Christ says to the Church in Laodicea, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." "Hot" and "cold" are metaphors for a passionate commitment to or against Christ. Obviously, Christ wants us to be passionately committed to Him. Isn't passionate commitment the same thing as extreme devotion or zeal? Is someone who is passionately committed to Christ a fanatic?

When Jesus was asked about the most important commandment, He said, "You must love the Lord your God

with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." Then he added, "The second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus made it simple by breaking down the whole law into two to-dos, but just because something is simple doesn't mean it's easy. Jesus showed us how difficult it was to live these laws when He, Himself, loved His Father with all His heart, soul, mind and strength and when He loved us, not as Himself, but more than Himself, by dying a most violent and shameful death on the cross. This act of love was pretty extreme. In fact, nothing is more extreme than the Creator dying for His creation. So, when Jesus did that, was He a fanatic?

Furthermore, Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow Him. Is He inviting us to be fanatics too? Well, if a

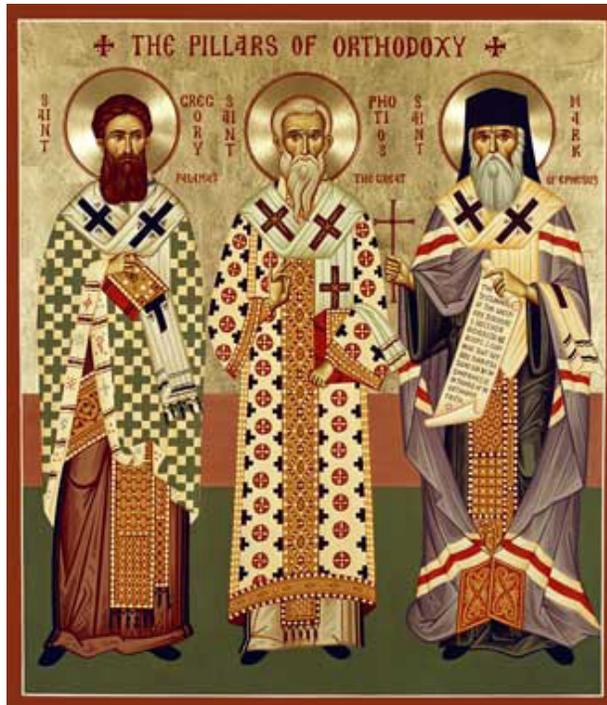
fanatic, according to the definition, is someone with extreme devotion or zeal, then the answer must be yes, He is inviting us to be that way and He actually prefers us that way. Those of us who do love Christ with all our heart, soul and mind, or at least try to, have no problem being fanatics for Him; but Archbishop Sotirios has a big problem with it. His problem with it is big enough to arbitrarily redefine a fanatic as someone with extreme arrogance or pride, even though there is no such description in the definition of the word.

Of course, someone who has extreme devotion or zeal can be a fanatic for good, or a fanatic for evil. I can certainly understand

how a fanatic for evil can have arrogance or pride, but if St. Paul and Christ, Himself, were fanatics for good (by definition of the word), is Archbishop Sotirios characterizing St. Paul and Christ (just to name a few Christians who gave their lives for us and for the faith) as arrogant and proud?

In his sermon on August 24th, Archbishop Sotirios, praises those Greeks who gave their lives to end the tyranny of the Turks in order to support freedom, Hellenism and the Orthodox Church; but interestingly, he does not label them as fanatics. Did these people who willingly died not have extreme devotion and zeal for what they were fighting for? Of course they did! But if they were not fanatics, what were they?

Very simply, when someone has extreme devotion or zeal which is to our benefit, we call them a hero. However, if their extreme devotion or zeal is not to our advantage, we call



them a fanatic! “Fanatic” is a dirty modern-day word that implies disruptive, destructive, unreasonable, and extreme; but that is not what the word actually means.

Because our extreme devotion and zeal to Christ is preventing us from doing the bidding of Archbishop Sotirios and taking Holy Communion with multiple spoons; because we are not obedient to this heresy, and instead, we are obedient to Christ, it suits his Eminence to bully us into obedience by brandishing his multiple spoons while calling us fanatics; or to shame us into obedience by calling us arrogant.

He then continues his masterful mind game by chastising our so-called arrogance. He refers to the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, and compares us to the Pharisee who puts himself and his self-righteousness above everyone else, to the point that God should be obligated to him for being so good, rather than the Pharisee being obligated to God. These are his words.

It is sad beyond any words that his Eminence, has arbitrarily imposed multiple communion spoons so easily without any attempt to clarify any laws against Holy Communion, (which do not exist), or to pacify any local public health authorities. It is horrifying to hear him preach that St. Kosmas would partake of the multiple spoons if he were alive today. It is disappointing that he persists in misinterpreting the canon regarding the vessels people would bring to the church to receive the Body of Christ, by which manner he continues to deliberately confuse the faithful. It is frightening that he has dared to elevate himself above the synod of our Patriarch; above the instructions of the Patriarch, himself, not to deviate from the single spoon; above the Canadian national and state laws which do not interfere with our communion methods, thereby creating his own communion laws; above past Holy Ecumenical Synods; above Holy Tradition; above the words of St. Paul who said, “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15); and even above Christ Himself, by trying to convince us that although the Body and Blood of our Lord cannot transmit disease, the Holy Lavida and the Holy Chalice can contaminate us even while coated by the Holy Eucharist – something which has not happened during any plague in 2000 years!

Who, then, is the arrogant Pharisee? Who is the disruptive, destructive, unreasonable and extreme fanatic who has more confidence in his own misplaced judgement, rather than the power of God in the Holy Eucharist? If, rather than imposing the multiple spoons, Archbishop Sotirios had spent half as much of his time and energy emulating the Greek freedom fighters whom he admires so much, by fighting for the Orthodox Church, for Truth and for Christ, then everyone would be united as one family, no one would call him ANAXIOS and everyone would call him “father,”

as he says he wishes to be called in his sermon. I feel certain that he would like very much to be called an AXIOS father, but one must first be AXIOS and behave as a father to be called as such.

Someone should tell Archbishop Sotirios that an AXIOS father fights for the Church and not against the Church. Someone should remind him that the Church is the Body of Christ and the Body of Christ is US, the laity. He should therefore, fight for US. An AXIOS Orthodox father becomes the ultimate example of obedience and humility and does not try to impose these virtues on others in order to control and manipulate them, because these are demonic methods that do not work on those who have put on Christ. Those who have put on Christ know right from wrong and cannot be fooled by Machiavellian manipulations and lies. A true Bishop teaches by example and not by force. He teaches with love and not with insults.

It seems that his Eminence and his Bishop peers who will not fight for the Church, all need a refreshing example of a Bishop who does fight. This example will be provided very soon. I hope to God it makes a difference and brings them back from their indifference and their apostasy.

May the prayers of our most Holy Theotokos save us.



Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Mt 5:6). It is nothing bodily, nothing earthly, that this hunger, this thirst seeks for; but it desires to be satiated with the good food of righteousness, and wants to be admitted to all the deepest mysteries, and be filled with the Lord Himself.

Happy the mind that craves this food and is eager for such drink; which it certainly would not seek for if it had never tasted of its sweetness. But hearing the Prophet’s spirit saying to him: *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.* (Pss 34:8); it has received some portion of sweetness from on high, and blazed out into love of the purest pleasure, so that spurning all things temporal, it is seized with the utmost eagerness for eating and drinking righteousness, and grasps the truth of that first commandment which says: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* (Mk 12:30); since to love God is nothing else but to love righteousness.

St. Leo the Great

ON YOGA

Based on some recent inquiries we have received on the practice of "Yoga," we are including two pertinent articles that can answer questions which our readers may have. An additional article was published in the Jan-Feb 2020 issue of "Orthodox Heritage."



IS YOGA EXERCISE?

An encyclical (no. 14) issued on June 4, 2013 by Metropolitan Markos of Chios on Christians who practice Yoga and whether or not it is merely a physical exercise. He basically explains that the Hindu religious practice of yoga was established for the sole purpose of entering into a spiritual state, and never had anything to do with exercise until a few decades ago when Hindu yogis explained it this way when they were trying to win converts in the West.

To the sacred clergy and pious people of our sacred Metropolis.

My brethren,

A key feature of our time is the confusion observed in various aspects of human life. A characteristic example of this spiritual and existential confusion is the fact that yoga is fundamentally a religious technique of Hinduism, advertised in our country, in Europe and in the United States as an exercise-fitness solution which is offered to release us from the numerous problems stemming from a stressful lifestyle.

But what is yoga? The word yoga comes from the Sanskrit word *yujwhich* which means "to unite," meaning the union of the individual soul with the impersonal Absolute One of Hinduism (see P. Schreiner, *Yoga: Wörterbuch des Christentums*, 1995, p. 1376). This union is considered a liberation and redemption of mankind from karma, that is, from the consequences that result from our choices and actions in supposedly previous lives. Moreover, concerning the term yoga, we must stress that it is used as a qualifying term of one of the six classical orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy (see H. Baer, "Yoga," in the *Lexikon der Sekten, Sohdergruppen und Weltanschauungen*, 7th Ed, 2001, pp. 1166-1174).

But is yoga exercise? Can one isolate the practical exercise from its religious content and background? Can one ignore the purpose for which it is used? Unquestionably no. And what about the claim of various centers, institutes, schools, groups, journals and gyms, that present it as lacking a religious nature, alleging it to be a "scientific" psychosomatic practice, or a practice for a simple existence and spiritual

self-knowledge? Without doubt these assertions are inaccurate. They oftentimes misinform and confuse using an extremely attractive vocabulary (see R. Hauth, (Hrsg), *Kompaktlexikon Religionen*, 1998, p. 366).

On the contrary, yoga is a religious systematic theory, technique and method that evolves in stages and practices, one of which is meditation, which leads those who use it, with the guidance of a teacher (guru), to a singular life joined to the impersonal Absolute of Hinduism. In this way a person is redeemed and atones for the errors and mistakes made during the source of all supposedly previous incarnations.

From the above, therefore, we observe that the view of yoga simply as an exercise is incorrect. And this 1) because it is a fundamental feature of the Hindu system, 2) it cannot be stripped of its religious character according to the conditions of the content and purpose of exercise, 3) it is intrinsically linked to the anti-Christian concept of reincarnation, and 4) because it constitutes a humanistic effort towards redemption through techniques and exercises.

Why are the various techniques of yoga dangerous? The answer is given to us in an article on yoga from an authoritative encyclopedia Δομή. It

says there: "It is known that the practice of yoga creates for the individual not entirely physiological properties—and parapsychological—because it reverses certain physical and mental functioning." (Δομή, vol. 4, p. 199).

To conclude this brief offering of ours on whether or not yoga is exercise, we must again remind all of the obvious.

The value of our identity as Orthodox Christians is incompatible with the use of Hindu religious practices in any aspect of our lives.

The salvation of man which is freely housed within the Church, is the work and offering of the love and grace of our Christ. For us does Paul say with all gravity: *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* (Gal 3:26-27), and: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* (2 Cor 6:14-15).

With warm fatherly prayers,

+Bp. Markos

The Metropolitan of Chios, Psara and Oinousses



PRACTICING YOGA CONSTITUTES BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

By the Orthodox-minded and courageous Metropolitan Seraphim, of Piraeus (Greece), an encyclical to all of his priests, with the instruction that it is to be read from the pulpit. This was issued in response to the United Nations declaring June 21st to be International Yoga Day. [NOTE: This U. N. proclamation took place in 2014. In specific, "... recognizing its universal appeal, on 11 December 2014, the United Nations proclaimed 21 June as the International Day of Yoga by resolution 69/131," Ed.]

Within the framework of respect for religious freedom, (which is constitutionally established in Greece) and of pastoral responsibility towards avoidance of religious syncretism, on the occasion of the recent establishment of June 21st as "international yoga day" by the UN and the related announcement of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece which reminds the Christian laity that: "Yoga constitutes a fundamental chapter of the Hindu religion, it has a multitude of schools, branches, practices, and trends, and it DOES NOT CONSTITUTE some kind of gymnastics and therefore yoga is completely incompatible with our Orthodox Christian faith and it does not have any place in the life of Christians."

The Holy Metropolis of Piraeus, due to the existence of yoga centers within its geographical boundaries, additionally states that:

1. Etymologically, yoga comes from the sanskrit "yuj" which means "union" of man with the impersonal Absolute One of Hinduism and other eastern religions. Therefore, yoga is not a simple and innocent method of relaxation, it is not a method of stress relief, it is not a method of bodily well being, as advertised, but a level of hinduistic contemplation which is connected with the anti-Christian theory of reincarnation and the demonic deities Visnu, Krishna and Shiva. The world recently learned, from international news agencies, that in India there was a human sacrifice by decapitation of a five year old child to the demonic pseudo goddess Kali of the Hinduistic pantheon. In Hinduistic Nepal, a few days prior to the devastating earthquake of 7.8 Richter, there was religious crime of sacrificing 250,000 animals to the Hindu pseudo-gods, which are really demons.

In the various yoga schools, we notice the direct dependence of the practicing people to the Hindu teacher (guru or yogi) who guides them and changes their Orthodox name. The various yoga techniques have no relation with science, on the contrary they have characteristics of magic. The practice of yoga is dangerous for soul and body.

2. The "new age of Aquarius" which wages war on our One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, our Orthodoxy, is flooding our country with the promotion of yoga to deceive,

with their demonic dogma, that all religions are similar paths that lead to the same purpose.

3. In the various stages of yoga, the practicing one abandons every action, will and motion with specific demonic techniques. That way he/she is isolated from the external world, and thinks that he/she turns towards his/her internal world, and tries to cut off any other sensation.

While in the first stages, the one practicing demonic yoga sustains some elements of consciousness. He/she loses consciousness in the later stages, does not sense color, smell, sound, touch, himself or any other person. This is what yoga considers "liberation."

During yoga exercises, the practicing person may experience paranormal phenomena of demonic origin such as telepathy, meteorism, communication with evil spirits, etc. All this confirms that the areas of parapsychology, yoga, and—in general—the various forms of contemplation that support each other, are based on occultism or demonic possession.

We call all Orthodox Christians, and especially the youth, to resist the ideological callings of the New World Order, to connect with their parish and their priests so that they can learn Orthodox asceticism and spirituality.

The practice of yoga for Orthodox Christians is incompatible with the teachings and dogmas of our Faith, as it constitutes: denial of the Orthodox Faith, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and it leads to demonic possession.

With warm paternal wishes,

The Metropolitan

O Peiraios Seraphim



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

People try to calm themselves with tranquilizers or with theories of yoga, and they neglect altogether the true serenity that comes when the soul is humble; and God fills it with divine consolation.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ON REPENTANCE

From: "Repentance and Confession," by Hieromonk Gregorios, translated by Stelios Zarganes.

Repentance is man's return to God. It is a change-of-heart in the *nous* from the darkness of sin to the light of Christ. The beginning of this journey is "the awareness of our errors, which is a great opportunity for us to attract divine mercy. This is why the Prophet David says to God: *Have mercy upon me... For I am conscious of my iniquity.* (Pss 50:1:3)." (St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul* 28:12). We acknowledge that we are responsible for our condition, and we humbly seek God's mercy.

The repentant soul sheds heartfelt tears and offers fervent supplication to the benevolent Christ: *Bow yourself down to the groanings of my heart.* (Orthros of Holy Wednesday, *Doxastikon of the Aposticha*, trans. by Arch. Ephrem Lash). Subsequently, man experiences the magnitude of divine forbearance and, justifiably, wonder and awe arise in his soul: *Who can search out the multitude of my sins and the depths of your judgments, my Savior, savior of souls?* (Orthros of Holy Wednesday, *Doxastikon of the Aposticha*, trans. by Arch. Ephrem Lash).

This article speaks about repentance, the healing of the wounds of sin, and about holy Confession, the Sacrament through which man's repentance is accomplished. Particular emphasis is placed on preparation for the Sacrament, as well as on the fruits of repentance that accompany it.

It is the author's humble prayer that the words of the God-bearing Fathers will help us all experience the miracle of repentance so that we may savor, from this day forward, the resurrection of our soul and the new life in Christ.

Repentance is Medicine

Holy Baptism is man's rebirth into Christ. However, since we are wounded by sin after our Baptism, the Lord offers us the medicine of repentance. "Sin is the wound and repentance the medicine. As wounds and medicine are to the body, so sins and repentance are to the soul." (St. John Chrysostom, *On Repentance*, 8:2). All of us, without exception, need the healing effect of repentance: "The medicine of repentance is beneficial for all. Since nobody

is free of sin, it is clear that everyone is in need of repentance." (Ibid., *On the Repentance of the Ninevites*).

The medicine of repentance is available to all of us, we only have to ask for it. It cures every spiritual illness, no matter how grave: "Let no one despair, because the medicine of repentance is potent." Because this treatment is effected by the benevolent Lord "there is no sin that does not surrender and retreat in the face of the strength of repentance or, rather, before the power of the power of Jesus."

The painless treatment applied by Christ is a gift that restores health quickly. The Lord grants medicine for wounds according to the zeal and disposition of the penitent. The soul that is heavily wounded by sin, begs the Lord: *Heal the wound of my soul, Lord!* (*Service of Preparation for Holy Communion, Ode. 4*, trans. Arch. Ephrem Lash). And the Lord, seeing its repentance, heals it immediately saying: *Behold, you have become well. Sin no more...* (Jn 5:14).

The Beginning of Repentance

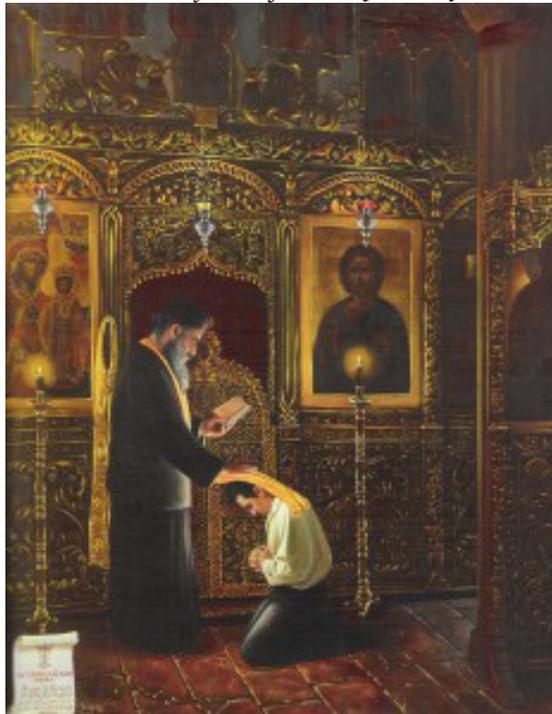
When a man lives in sin he is not in his right mind. In order to repent, he must first come to his senses. Consciousness of one's sins is the starting point for the return to the benevolent Father.

In our lives we often see how our loving God, in His prescient wisdom, leads us to consciousness of sin and to repentance. There are countless ways used by God to bring us to this awareness: some misfortune with our health, an accident, an encounter with a man of God, or a book that we happen upon.

One of the dangers we face after becoming aware of our spiritual condition is **despair**, however, our unshakable hope in God's mercy protects us. No matter the number, or the severity of our sins, they cannot prevail over God's compassion. "Even if someone falls into mortal sin, as long as he turns away from it wholeheartedly, abstains from it, and returns to the Lord in deed and truth, he may have courage and great hope that he shall not fail to obtain eternal life and salvation." (St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily on the Sunday of the Forefathers*, 57:11).

The decision to repent follows an awareness of one's sin. This is the critical point in man's journey: now he decides if he will remain in the darkness of sin or return to God.

God, through the mouths of the prophets, calls all men to return to His love, not superficially, but with heartfelt



repentance: *Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.* (Joel 2:12-13).

God desires man's return and salvation, but not under duress because He respects his freedom.

How does the Benevolent Father Receive us?

The Parable of the Prodigal Son describes how God's love works to draw all those who have sinned near to Him again.

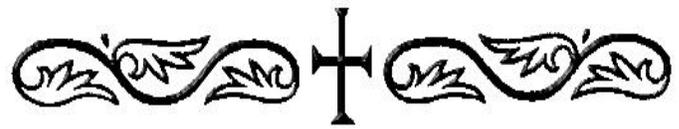
The prodigal son left the compassionate Father and traveled to a far country. The Father's love, however, reaches as "far" as his beloved child had gone: *But while he was still at a distance, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. He ran, and embraced his son, and kissed him.* (Lk 15:13, 20) The charitable Father does not wait for the arrival of His child, but while he is still at a distance, He runs to receive him.

The compassionate Father received the prodigal "with open arms...because he was a father and not a judge. Dancing and banquets and feasts were arranged and the whole household was merry and joyful...The elder son was angered with these things, but the Father cajoled him gently, saying: 'When you must save the one who is lost, it is not the time for judging, but rather for loving-kindness and pardon...And even if he should have been punished, he was sufficiently punished while living in that foreign country...You are looking at a brother, not a stranger. He has returned to his father, and his father cannot remember anything of the past. Better yet, he remembers only the things that arouse in him sympathy, mercy, affection and fatherly compassion.' This is why the Father did not allude to what the prodigal had done, but what he had suffered. He did not remember that he had squandered His wealth, but instead that he had fallen victim to countless misfortunes." (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Repentance*). The older brother was thinking in accordance with the laws of human justice, but the benevolent Father was acting according to His compassionate fatherly heart.

The holy Fathers emphasize that "God in His loving goodness receives and loves those who repent." (St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses*, 10:10-11). St. Basil the Great says: "The Father stands and waits for your return from delusion. You only have to come back, and while you are yet far off, He will run to you, fall on your neck and embrace and kiss you lovingly, now that your soul is already cleansed by repentance. And He shall clothe the soul, which has stripped off the former man and his acts, with the first robe... He shall place a ring on his hands... and shoes on the feet that have returned

from the evil road to the way of the Gospel of peace. He shall announce a day of delight and joy to those who are His own, Angels and men, and will celebrate your salvation in every possible way." (St. Basil the Great, *Letter to a Fallen Virgin*, 46:6).

This heavenly joy for the penitent's return is the dominant element in the parables of the lost sheep, of the lost drachma and of the prodigal son. The good Shepherd carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing! *Coming home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, telling them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'* (Lk. 15:5-6) In all three parables the Lord assures us *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.* (Lk 15:10)



There was a devout scholar from Antioch who pestered a hermit, urging him to receive him and make him a monk. The old man said to him, "If you want me to receive you, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor according to the Lord's commandment, and then I shall receive you." Therefore, he went away and acted accordingly. After this the hermit said to him, "You have another precept to keep, that you not speak." He took heed and for five years did not speak. Some people began to praise him, and his Abba said to him, "It is not good for you to be here, so I will send you to a coenobium in Egypt," and he sent him off. When he sent him, the hermit failed to say whether he was to speak or not to speak, so he continued to obey the command and did not speak.

The abbot who received him, seeking a test to determine whether or not he was mute, sent him on an errand while the river was in flood, so that he would be forced to say, "I cannot cross it." The abbot sent a brother after him see what he did. As he approached the river, he knelt down, being unable to cross, and behold, a crocodile came and took him up and bore him across to the other side. When he had performed the errand and returned to the river, the crocodile again bore him across. The brother who had been sent after him, having come along and seen this, told the abbot and the brothers and they were astonished.

It happened that some time later he died, and the abbot sent a message to the old man who had sent him, saying, "That man you sent to me may not have been able to speak, but he was like an angel of God."

The hermit then replied, saying, "It is not that he was unable to speak, but obeying the command which I gave him at the outset, he remained silent." And they all marveled and gave glory to God.

From *Leimonarion* (The Spiritual Meadow)

THE MYSTERY OF INTEGRITY

By Fr. Nectarios Trevino, an archpriest at Fr. Nectarios formerly served at the Nativity of Our Lord Church, located in Manassas, VA, but after 16 years, he left this parish (that is under the Ecumenical Patriarchate and because of its illegal actions in the Ukraine), and was officially accepted into ROCOR by its ruling bishop, His Eminence, Metropolitan Hilarion, and initially attached to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Washington, D.C. A former Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Air Force, Fr. Nectarios is a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center (Juris Doctor) and has honorably served his country's military. He is currently serving the Holy Innocents & St. Nina ROCOR parish in Bristow, VA.



Humanity has grappled with the mystery of integrity for ages. The question begged by the preceding statement is, “Integrity to what?” The historical integrity of man is fluid. All too often, integrity depended on an individual or a mob’s passions and whims.

As an example, history tells us that Rutilius Rufus (a Roman statesman, soldier, orator and historian) was charged with crimes which he did not commit, yet he was convicted and exiled. Despite his singular attempt to maintain a life of truth, he was falsely accused and cast into oblivion. He incurred the hatred of powerful enemies within the Roman Empire. There are a multitude of similar examples of innocent men being devoured by evil.

By the time of Jesus, the power of a mob was evident.

Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; but they shouted out, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will, therefore, chastise him and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. (Lk 23:20-24)

Pilate acceded to the mob.

History is replete with the martyrdom of Christians.

During the French Revolution, which so many still hail, the mob further increased in power, killing innocent religious such as the Martyrs of Compiègne. A similar type of mob pursued Orthodox clergymen during the Soviet Communist regime when more than a hundred and seventy thousand were arrested in 1917–1943; a hundred and fifteen thousand were shot.

Each mob throughout history was led by men of power, pursuing vain and perfidious self-interested acts.

True leaders have no need or want of mobs because they know that crowds cannot be controlled. If anyone doubts

the preceding he should read of Maximilien Robespierre. (Robespierre was an extremely radical Jacobin leader, the most famous political group of the French Revolution, and one of its principal figures. In the latter months of 1793 he came to dominate the Committee of Public Safety, the principal organ of the Revolutionary government during the Reign of Terror, but in 1794 he was overthrown and executed. *Ed.*)

Mobs need not be large, only a few are necessary to be aroused to act by a person of perceived stature who dominates his crowd. I know because I was the subject of such a mentality wherein a villain said that I “should be shot for abandoning my post” and departing for the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Such acclamations are absent civility and context and reflect a greater evil in our world. Such acts are reflective of the *secularization of Christianity* and devoid of truth. Truth in today’s society means little. And when it creeps into Orthodox Christianity, irrespective of the level, its corroding effect is eternal lest it is expelled.

The broad spectrum of Christianity is today divided into three camps, as depicted and expressed by Ross Douthat at the Touchstone Conference of October 2019:

(1) *the secular*—evident by a lack of religious basis or institutions, albeit the moral foundations of secularism may have Christian roots;

(2) *the fragmented individualization of society* wherein one relies on self-interest, perhaps best captured in the book, *Eat Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert; (this extremely secular book chronicles the author’s trip around the world after her divorce and what she discovered during her travels, *Ed.*), and

(3) *the tradition of traditions*, a biblical basis in which people conform to long-held traditions as opposed to traditions submitting to the individual.

It is the latter category, *the tradition of traditions*, to which I belong because I have seen the other two groups crucify men and women to serve the needs of the mob’s and individual’s vainglorious want. And, if I am to be crucified, I want it to be for my beliefs *in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church* and not in ostentatious contemptible behavior wherein boundaries of a legitimate alliance with God and the illegitimate became impossible to separate—creating a spiritual *mauvais pas* (an area that is dangerous or difficult to negotiate.).

The latter category, *the tradition of traditions*, is wherein Orthodox Christianity resides, alone and besieged, and now, apparently, malleable in the Hellenic world.

Orthodox Christianity is besieged by the former two categories to varying degrees, more by the secular than by the anarchic fragmented individualization of society. In the latter—the anarchic, we find the heresies of Joel Osteen and Oprah Winfrey, both richly indulgent and accountable to no one. The movement they represent is broad and variable

in beliefs, allowing for great apostasies and New Age movements. The meaning of life is embedded in today and not eternity. Experience is fluid and absent coherency.

The secular movement that is grounded in laws—moral and state—both of which have Christian institutional roots. However, institutional Christianity is generally absent if not avoided, perhaps except for baptisms, marriages, and funerals. The Christian norms may be given a head-nod in many areas, except sex. Nothing is permitted to place boundaries on sexual behavior, which is self-defined as nothing more than a transaction—the transaction replaced the spiritual relationship. And sexual behavior is, today, defined as including the right to commit infanticide.

The danger of the preceding two ways of life—the secular and anarchic—is its permitting of darkness to abound. Obedience is to self. The very definition of integrity is to self, not to the Risen Christ.

The preceding two groups raise the question, “What is real?”

A profound danger exists when the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church* begins to assimilate the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of either the secular and anarchic individualization of society. When men can lie and be supported in their lies by other men expecting earthly impunity, eschewing accountability to God, then a mob has been created. Delusions abound.

This deliberate syncretism undermines the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*. It undermines its credibility and integrity to the outside observer as well as those within the apostolic Church. As one individual so aptly stated, “I believe everything my Church teaches. I’m not certain my Church believes in the Church.” (Paraphrase of Pastor Russell Moore, President of Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.) A significant reason for the preceding statement is the toleration of ambiguity. Ambiguity, which the Roman Catholic Church is presently experiencing, will nullify its apostolicity and possibly pillars of our Orthodox Christian faith.

Conflicts of power based on hypocrisy and self-promotion are antithetical to the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*. Orthodox Christianity must be courageous in a cosmic sense, beyond this life, to have real meaning.

It takes courage for the Church to be the Church in the face of militant individuals and mobs (for example, the French Revolution), atheistic (for example, Communism, Marxism, liberation theology and its new incarnation of “liberation ecology”), and secular powers. It is cowardice that succumbs to the powers of this world and the night it offers.

International politics or powers cannot solve the challenges facing us. Political forces can give you many things—as it has done for one local Orthodox Christian Church, but they

cannot provide that specific local Church or its adherents meaning. The secular and anarchic individualization of society by their very nature deny meaning. The Church will lose sight of its *raison d’être*—the *only* Truth.

Knowledge of truth is thin. No one—not the hierarch who deemed I should be shot—nor a single local church has a singular claim on reality. That is why the local churches must operate in unison.

The adherents to the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church* must educate its members, be a vibrant witness to the world, have healthy and vibrant families of apostolic integrity, and welcome others into God’s true fold. Our apostolic Church must eschew endless wars between the local churches, but always remember that *the obligation of self-defense is permanent against the assaults of evil*.



There was a Greek, Photios Kontoglou, a good writer from Asia Minor who became a refugee in Greece and a fine iconographer, who wrote an article in which he said: “Why did the Pope choose the Apostle Peter as the patron for his infallibility? If he had spoken of some Apostle who might not have sinned, then this might still have made some sense. But Peter made 300 mistakes.” Of course, the Lord chose Peter as His foremost disciple, but always as equal to the others, since Peter was a human being, understood human weaknesses, and indulgent to others. If He had chosen an angel, St. John Chrysostom says, the angel would not have understood someone who sinned, twice, three times, seven times, seventy-seven times. The angel would have had enough!

It is recorded that the following marvelous event took place on the Holy Mountain of Athos in the sixteenth century. There was a sinful man, a poor thing, who had a weakness of the body; he renounced it many times, beseeching God that he would not sin. He went to church, wept, made promises to the Savior, and then left—and once again sinned, and once again returned. This went on for a long time. Once many years later, he came and wept before the Lord, repenting: “O Lord, help me; I will stop!” Suddenly the devil could stand it no longer, and said to Christ from the porch of the church; “That’s how you are; You don’t understand a thing! This one swears and weeps to You while he’s here, but as soon as he leaves he’s mine and will do whatever I want. Why do you put up with him?” Then the Lord answered from the icon: *Why do you come to him when he is Mine? I do not bother you when he is yours. I accept a man in the condition in which I find him.* And at that very moment this man died.

This is how the Lord took him. Such is the Lord’s patience!
Bishop Atanasije (Jevtic)

From a talk on *The Heart is Deep: St. Gregory Palamas and the Essence of Hesychasm*

IN THE CULTURE OF DEATH, ABORTION IS A SACRAMENT

Sean Fitzpatrick is a senior contributor to the "Crisis" magazine and headmaster of Gregory the Great Academy, at Elmhurst Twp, PA.

From the Editor: We continue to be scandalized by the lack of any voice of significance by most of the Orthodox hierarchy against the despicable crime of abortion, the greatest genocide being committed of modern man. It is even more scandalous when one hears of Orthodox hierarchs and clergy in support of pro-death political platforms and especially the presence of a GOA hierarch in the 2020 Democratic convention, wherein the pro-death party took the strongest ever position in favor of abortions. We find it astonishing and immensely audacious how such clergy dares approach the Divine mysteries while concurrently supporting (directly or indirectly) the death of His Innocents. May our Lord work on all of us to become the loudest ever proponents in the pro-life movement, both in words as well as in deeds.

† † †

The feminist writer Florynce Kennedy once said, "If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament." She didn't give the left enough credit. Abortion *has become* a kind of "sacrament" because women *can* get pregnant. Abortion has morphed from a taboo tragedy to a constitutional right: a *sine qua non* of the Democratic Party, who fight for it religiously. Abortion is a deathly lifeline for progressives, a central column supporting the political platform of narcissistic relativism. It is the unholy sacrament.

Liberals assign a pseudo-sacramental significance inherent in the "right" to kill an unwanted child which causes, like a sacrament, an existential attitude through its symbolic reality. A sacrament is not just a religious idea or holy practice; it is something far more than its external nature suggests. The Sacraments of the Church are institutions of Jesus Christ to give mystical gifts to those of proper disposition. They are efficacious signs of grace, which contain, cause, and confer the thing signified. The word "sacrament" might be applied analogously to those things that both characterize and cause a human condition, and abortion is a dark participant in that analogy.

When *Roe v. Wade* gripped the nation in 1973, current presidential-hopeful Joe Biden protested that the law went too far. "I don't think that a woman has the sole right to say what should happen to her body," Biden said in a 1974 interview. But being a bad politician and a good Democrat, he soon fell in lockstep with his party's iron-fisted position that sanctified abortion rights in the leftist canon. Earlier this year, Biden finally relinquished his support for the Hyde Amendment (the legislative provision that prevents the application of federal funds for abortions, except in cases of rape, incest, or to save the

life of the mother). In the words of Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia:

The unborn child means exactly zero in the calculus of power for Democratic Party leaders, and the right to an abortion, once described as a tragic necessity, is now a perverse kind of "sacrament most holy." It will have a candidate's allegiance and full-throated reverence... or else.

Joe Biden has evolved in his stance just as abortion acceptance has evolved, for abortion bolsters a cultural concept of egotistical control and license that is essential for life as the left would have it. In this way, abortion bears a sacred importance that parodies the sacramental. While a sacrament relieves people from the burden of death through Life, abortion relieves people from the so-called burden of life through death, and, as such, it is the very antithesis of a sacrament. But it is revered as one, and we may take heart at hearing of priests who will withhold the Blessed Sacrament from those who publicly venerate abortion—as happened to Joe Biden on the campaign trail in South Carolina.

The modern determination to dictate moral consequences with dogmatic force is a slippery slope that grows more cliff-like with every year. "Safe and legal" abortions led to Kermit Gosnell's Philadelphia house-of-horrors clinic, where fetal suction tubing did double-time as oral-airway assistance and tiny, mangled corpses were stuffed in plastic bags, milk jugs, juice cartons, and cat food containers. The abortion trade is not known to attract the best physicians, nor to operate under much regulatory oversight. It does not take much for this "sacrament" of self-centered, self-empowering society to proclaim its sacrilege even as it is proclaimed sacrosanct. Despite the lies, euphemisms, posturing, and sophistry in our culture, abortion is never safe and always harmful to women. As Ben Shapiro put it:

The Democratic "safe, legal and rare" formulation regarding abortion was logically and morally untenable: If Democrats wanted abortion to be rare thanks to its inherent immorality, there was no reason for it to be legal. Democrats have finally come around: They're now "shouting" their abortions, proclaiming them from the rooftops, suggesting that there is a moral good achieved by abortion.

Abortion is for both sides of the aisle a matter of life and death, hence the divisive and vitriolic nature of the debate. Hearings late last month involving Planned Parenthood representatives and Missouri officials will soon determine whether that state will withhold licensing and close its one and only abortuary. Such a ruling would make Missouri the only state without a single legal abortion option—and the only state where the all-holy "right to choose" is overruled. This last-standing abortion mill in Missouri was found to have "deficient practices" in safety standards, causing the state to

deny its license renewal. Missouri's assistant attorney general described several "failed" abortions, botched jobs where a half-dozen procedures were necessary to complete a single murder, or where twins were not initially detected, requiring a second impromptu procedure.

Planned Parenthood is fighting these concerns for human health in the name of "women's health," questioning whether abortion clinics should meet the legal standards of health and safety as required in outpatient clinics. If the ruling in Missouri goes against Planned Parenthood, it might uphold, albeit incrementally, the right to life in a way that may eventually challenge the right to choose. A similar struggle is underway over the only abortion clinic in the Dayton, Ohio area because of failure to secure a written patient-transfer agreement from local hospitals, as the law requires. Alabama's bill is another dramatic resistance, legislating that a doctor who performs an abortion is punishable with life in prison. Even though this bill and others like it are essentially unenforceable as long as *Roe v. Wade* is the law of the land, such efforts could serve as pathfinding precedents back to the Supreme Court and stop the slaughter of innocent children behind a sanctimoniously silvered façade of civil rights.

One way that abortion *is* something of a sacramental avenue is in the baptism of blood: the droves of dead are martyrs for truth and justice. They are the new Holy Innocents, silently slaughtered in the name of self-interest and the false repose that dismisses the challenge of charity. The only thing sacred is that nothing is sacred.

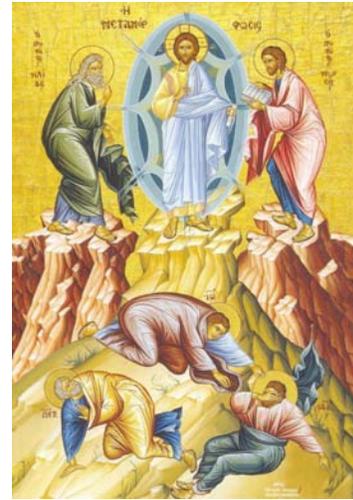


Today's shepherds should listen and imitate St. Symeon the New Theologian's virtue so that they too may share in and partake of the grace which he received from above. Unlike shepherds and teachers nowadays, the whole object of that blessed man's attention was not to fulfill his every wish for bodily pleasures in this life. Rather it was to suppress the things that kindle desire and not give in to the soul's propensity for the worse, but only to assent to the better and follow the divine will. Accordingly he fled men's praise as something that leads to punishment. Nor did he soften from the fault of so many people who, because they are unable to appear worthy of the respect of others by the loftiness of their virtue, pretend to be formidable to their subordinates by their haughty attitude and demeanor. Instead he would imitate his God and Master by observing the same moderation in all things with his disciples, and thus he embraced blessed poverty and the lack of possessions as secure wealth. For this reason he was also properly humble minded and always contrite in spirit.

St. Nikitas Stethatos

AND HIS REIGN SHALL HAVE NO END

By Hieromonk Alexios of Mount Athos.



In a previous article concerning the importance of precise terminology, I noted the value of communicating with clarity especially on spiritual matters. This is manifestly evident in today's article concerning the creedal statement: *His Reign shall have no end*, which is often poorly translated into English as *His Kingdom shall have no end*.

Although the term for kingdom (βασιλεία) appears in the Greek Old Testament that relates the vicissitudes of the Jewish nation, it does not appear even once in the original Greek of the New Testament. Instead, another related Greek word meaning reign or sovereign rule (βασιλεία) is employed 162 times in such passages as the Lord's Prayer, *Thy Reign come*, or the familiar *Repent, for the Reign of God is at hand*. Since it is also the word used at this point in the Creed, we need to properly understand it if we are to grasp what this article of Faith seeks to convey.

Even on a linguistic level, the connotations of kingdom and reign differ in significant ways. On the one hand, the English term "kingdom" is a substantive word connoting a geographical locus or place. It may also be understood as a nation, a place of political authority or power. On the other hand, the term "rule" or "reign" describes an activity conveying a sense of dominion or sovereignty over a people or a nation.

Father John Romanides correctly notes that translating *basileia* as kingdom, instead of rule, makes the text of Scriptures opaque and along side the Scriptures, this article of the Creed as well. He writes, "Another example is the phrase 'kingdom of God' which makes it a creation of God instead of the uncreated ruling power of God. What is amazing is that the term 'kingdom of God' appears not once in the original Greek of the New Testament. Not knowing that the 'rule' or 'reign of God' is the correct translation of the Greek *Basileia tou Theou*,... even many Orthodox today do not see that the promise of Christ to his apostles in Matthew 16:28, Luke 9:27 and Mark 9:1, i.e. that they will see God's ruling power, was fulfilled during the Transfiguration which immediately follows in the above three gospels.

“During the Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John see Christ as the Lord of Glory, i.e. as the source of God’s uncreated ‘glory’ and ‘*basileia*’ (i.e. uncreated ruling power), denoted by the uncreated cloud or glory which appeared and covered the three of them during the Lord of Glory’s Transfiguration. It was by means of His power or Glory that Christ as the pre-incarnate Lord (Yahweh) of Glory had delivered Israel from its Egyptian slavery and lead it to freedom and the land of promise. The Greek text does not speak about the ‘*basileion (kingdom) of God,*’ but about the ‘*Basileia (rule or reign) of God,*’ by means of His uncreated glory and power.

“At His Transfiguration Christ clearly revealed Himself to be the source of the uncreated Glory seen by Moses and Elijah during Old Testament times and who both are now present at the Transfiguration in order to testify to the three apostles that Christ is indeed the same Yahweh of Glory, now incarnate, Whom the two had seen in the historical past and had acted on behalf of Him.”

This linguistic clarification is not a merely academic distinction. It has salvific import for each and every Christian who confesses Christ as Lord and Savior. Christianity is not about us creating a utopia or holy kingdom in Christ’s name. It is not even about God creating one. Isn’t that the meaning of *Neither shall they say, ‘Lo here! or, lo there!’ for, behold, the ruling power of God is within you* (Lk 17:21)? No, the reign of God is about the Uncreated God ruling the hearts of the faithful, filling them with His Uncreated Light, and transfiguring them into His very likeness and image. God’s sovereign rule or reign is His uncreated divine grace and glory that Christ spoke of as *the glory I had with Thee before the world was.* (Jn 17:5). The sovereign rule of God is what the Apostles experienced on Mount Tabor and caused the Apostle Peter to say “it is good to be here.” The sovereign rule of God is what the Apostles experienced at Pentecost that led to the baptism of three thousand souls after Saint Peter spoke to the multitudes. And this sovereign rule that transfigures, that glorifies, and that shapes anew will have no end.

When we hear or say the article of faith, *His reign will have no end*, all the references to this reign should come to mind. That the *reign of God is within you* means we need to look to our souls and inner life if we hope to experience God guiding us and ruling us. Seeking *first the reign of God and His righteousness* means that God respects our freedom and will not rule over our souls unless we seek it. The likening of *the reign of God* to a treasure hid in a field and to a pearl of great price indicates not only that there is nothing more precious than for God to rule our hearts, but also that we must give everything we have and offer up everything we are in order for our hearts to be open and prepared for the God of all to bestow on us and in us that rule, that glory, that

divine life in God. And that the Gospel begins with *Repent, for the reign of heaven is at hand* shows us that repentance is the door that leads to God ruling our hearts. For God’s rule to come, we need to be purified of the passions, illumined by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and deified in Christ.

This *reign* or *rule* of God is creative, redeeming, and sanctifying. It is also eternal, unchanging, and never ending. It is more than a gift that is offered, for the gift is the Giver Himself. It is “*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit* (2 Cor 3:14) abiding in the heart. Being uncreated, being divine, the rule of God in the heart of man is ultimately beyond any description: “*As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*” (1 Cor 2:9). It is the purpose, the goal, and the final destination of the entire Christian way of life and faith that begins with repentance and culminates in the revelation of God’s glory, God’s rule, and God’s love upon the Tabor of the human heart and in the upper room of the human soul.

If *His Reign will have no end* becomes a core belief, keeping God’s commandments, repenting for our sins, and seeking to be united with Him in prayer will be the endless pursuit of our lives. It begins now and it has no end. Thanks be to God.



Beware of Lukewarm Clergy. A lukewarm clergy lulls the people to sleep, leaves them in their former condition so they won’t be upset. “Look”, they say. “By all means don’t say that there will be a war, or the Second Coming, that one must prepare oneself for death. We must not make people alarmed!”

And others speak with a false kindness, saying: “We mustn’t expose heretics and their delusions, so as to show our love for them.” Today’s people are water-soluble. There’s no leaven in them.

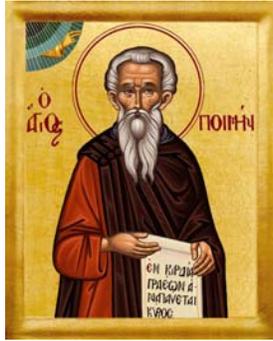
Spiritual meekness is one thing, and softness and indifference are quite another.

If I avoid upsetting myself to protect my fleshly comfort then I’m indifferent to holiness! Spiritual meekness is one thing, and softness and indifference are quite another. Some say: “I’m a Christian and therefore I have to be joyful and calm.” But they’re not Christian. They’re simply indifferent. And their joy is only a worldly joy.

He in whom these worldly seeds are present is no spiritual person. A spiritual person consists of nothing but pain. In other words, he’s in pain at what’s going on, he’s in pain for people’s condition. And divine comfort is bestowed upon him for his pain.

St. Paisios the Athonite

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STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER STAND UP TO THE MARXIST EVIL ATHEISM THREATENING AMERICA

By the Very. Rev. Abbot Tryphon, an Orthodox Christian priest at All-Merciful Saviour Monastery on Vashon Island, Washington. The Monastery is under the omophore of Archbishop Kyrill of San Francisco and Western America, of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. July 4, 2020.

Stand up to those who would destroy our nation's heritage. Earlier today it was announced that the statue of Christopher Columbus that has long stood before the state capital in Columbus, Ohio, has been removed. But what really shocked me was hearing that they are now considering changing the name of their city, seeing Christopher Columbus as responsible for the genocide of indigenous peoples.

That we Americans are allowing ANTIFA Marxists to dictate the destruction of national symbols of our history is unbelievable. That there are leftists demanding the removal of the presidential images on Mt. Rushmore, the toppling of statues, not only of Confederacy, but even of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, all in the name of social justice, is appalling to me. The fact that some of these Marxists have even gone so far as to demand all images of Jesus Christ, and His Holy Mother, be destroyed as symbols of white supremacy, is beyond belief.

All this while the world is witnessing the triumphal rise of Orthodox Christianity in the country of Russia, with over one

hundred Orthodox churches built this year alone, in Moscow. While Columbus, Ohio considers changing the name of their city, the Russians long ago returned the name of Saint Petersburg to their historic city, while dumping the communist inspired Leningrad.

As we celebrate our nation's founding on this 4th of July, the State of California has just announced that churches are forbidden to allow singing, all the while allowing for protestors in the streets to continue shouting their hate filled protests throughout the state, "not wanting to interfere with the 1st Amendment rights of her citizens".

Added to the madness, we are witnessing the leftist demand that our nation's police departments be defunded, or even completely disbanded. That these fine men and women, who on a daily basis put their lives on the line that all of us remain safe from violent intruders, thugs, and murderous individuals who care nothing about us average citizens, be free to continue their evil lawlessness.

All this smacks of a **Marxist plot to destroy the very Christian foundations of this country**, while breaking down the economy, displacing every trace of our nation's history, all the while providing thousands of disgruntled young people, having lost all hope for their future, to angrily take to the streets, demanding a bland One World government devoid of every trace of our true heritage.

With love in Christ,
Abbot Tryphon