



## The basis of God's Judgement

Even as believing Christians, we must not take the outcome of God's final judgment for granted. In every Divine Liturgy Orthodox Christians pray, "For a good defence before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ, let us pray to the Lord: Lord have mercy," Romans 2:2-16 describes God's righteous judgment, showing how we can prepare ourselves for it. God's judgment will be:

(1) According to truth (Rom. 2.2, 3): Nothing is hidden from God. He sees everything and knows the truth about each of us. One of mankind's great self-deceptions is to say, "Who sees us?" (Is. 29:15) and think there is no judgment.

(2) According to impenitent hearts (Rom. 2:4, 5): An unrepentant or hard heart despises God's goodness, treasuring up the wrath of God at the judgment. A repentant heart, on the other hand, is grateful for God's patience and abides in Christ, practising a lifetime of repentance, which produces confidence before Him at the judgment (1 John 2:28).

(3) According to our deeds (Rom. 2:6-15): The "doing good" referred to in v. 7 is not trying to gain merit with God. Rather, it is the unity of intentions with actions, faith with works. Even unbelievers are rewarded for good works, apart from spiritual understanding (Rom. 2:14, 15). But note the following:

(a) "Doing good" means seeking God's glory, not one's own glory; God's honour, not one's own honour; the eternal reward of immortality, not reward here and now. "Doing good" is seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33).

(b) Good intentions alone, or faith without works, will not save (Rom. 2:13). Simply to hear and not do is religion without reality. Those with true faith, "the doers" of the truth, practice virtue from pure and repentant hearts (James 1:21-27).

(c) "By nature" (Rom. 2:14) people are inspired by and cooperate with God's grace. Therefore, good deeds are natural to us, whereas evil deeds are contrary to nature. Because we all fail, we need God's mercy (Rom. 3:9-19). The presence of God's law in our conscience (Rom. 2:15) condemns anything we do which is contrary to true human nature. Therefore, even Gentiles -- people not under the Law of Moses, those who do not know of Christ -- have an internal law from God, the natural law written in their hearts, according to which God will judge them. Melchizedek, Job, and the Ninevites are Old Testament examples of non-Jews who were judged to be righteous. Jews, then, have two laws from God -- the Law of Moses and conscience -- and are accountable to Him for both (v. 12).

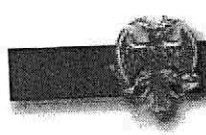
(d) Those who are condemned choose to reject God. There is no automatic, fated condemnation: God's just judgment of us is based on our exercise of free will. Although sin impairs our powers, it does not destroy God's image in us or our free will.

(4) By Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:16): In the day of judgment we are not judged directly by God the Father, whom we cannot see, but by the incarnate Son whom we do see, Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31; see John 3:16-21, 35, 36). Christ will judge on the basis of the light He Himself has given to each of us (John 1:9) and our response to His light (John 3:16-21). "The secrets of men" are "the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## The Last Days

A prophecy of St. Nilus (14th Century)

After the year 1900, toward the middle of the 20th century, the people of that time will become unrecognisable. When the time for the Advent of the Antichrist approaches, people's minds will grow cloudy from carnal passions, and dishonour and lawlessness will grow stronger. Then the world will become unrecognisable. People's appearances will change, and it will be impossible to distinguish men from women due to their shamelessness in dress and style of hair. These people will be cruel and will be like wild animals because of the temptations of the Antichrist. There will be no respect for parents or elders, love will disappear, and Christian pastors, bishops, and priests will become vain men, completely failing to distinguish the right hand way from the left. At that time the morals and traditions of Christians and the Church will change. People will abandon modesty, and dissipation will reign. Falsehood and greed will attain great proportions, and woe to those who pile up treasures. Lust, adultery, homosexuality, secret deeds and murder will rule in society.

At that future time, due to the power of such great crimes and licentiousness, people will be deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which they received in Holy Baptism and equally of remorse.

The Churches of God will be deprived of God-fearing and pious pastors, and woe to the Christians in the world at that time; they will completely lose their faith because they will lack the opportunity of seeing the light of knowledge from anyone at all. Then they will separate themselves out of the world in Holy refuges in search of lightening their spiritual sufferings, but everywhere they will meet obstacles and constraints.

And all this will result from the fact that the Antichrist wants to be Lord over everything and become ruler of the whole universe, and he will produce miracles and fantastic signs. He will also give depraved wisdom to an unhappy man so that he will discover a way by which one man can carry on a conversation with another from one end of the earth to the other. At that time men will also fly through the air like birds and descend to the bottom of the sea like fish.

And when they have achieved all this, these unhappy people spend their lives in comfort without knowing, poor souls, that it is deceit of the Antichrist. And, the impious one! He will so complete science with vanity that it will go off the right path and lead people to lose faith in the existence of God in three hypostases (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

Then the All-Good God will see the downfall of the human race and will shorten the days for the sake of those few who are being saved, because the enemy wants to lead even the chosen into temptation, if that is possible--then the sword of chastisement will suddenly appear and kill the perverter and his servants.

**The Father is my hope; the Son is my refuge; the Holy Spirit is my protector. O All-Holy Trinity, glory to Thee.**



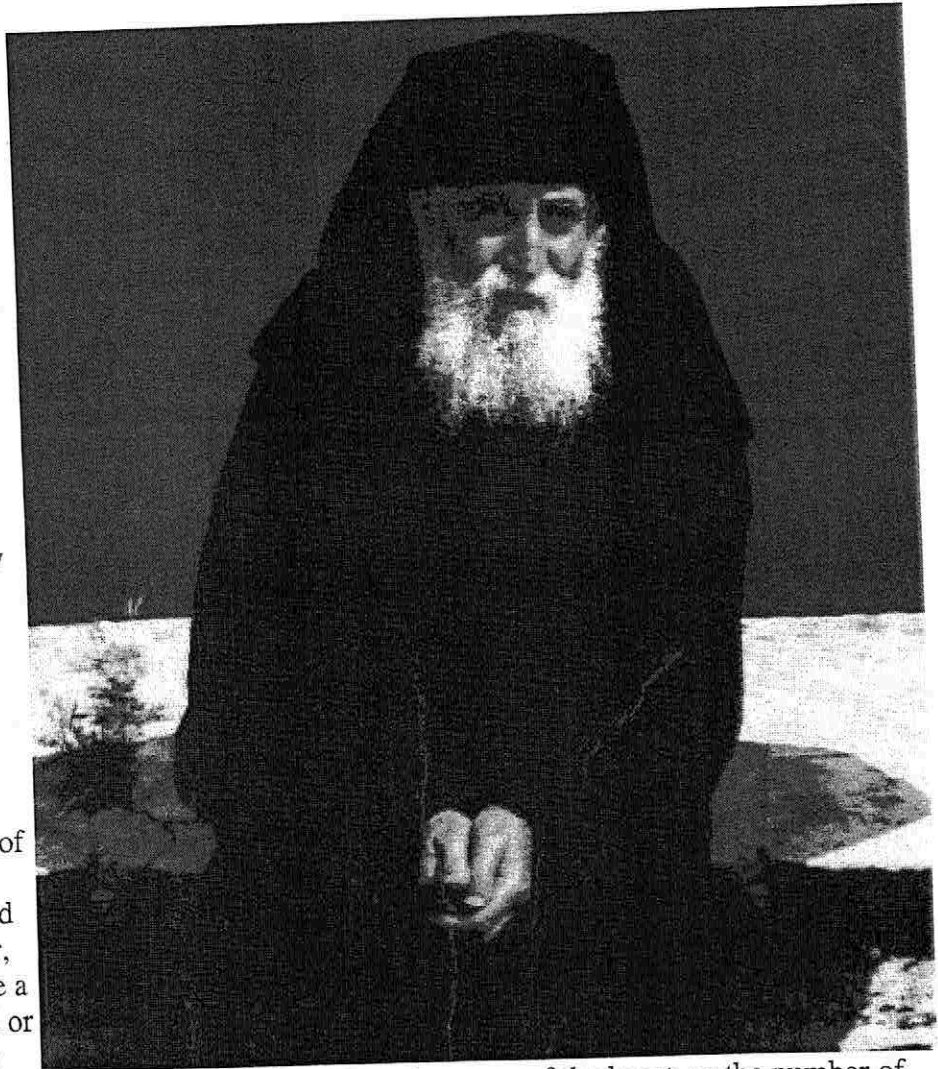
## The sign of the times 666

by Elder Paisios of Mt Athos of ever-blessed memory

After the devil's cataclysm, God's sunshine will appear.

Behind the worldly spirit of today's "freedom," the lack of respect for the Church of Christ, older people, parents and teachers who have fear of God, is hidden spiritual slavery, anxiety and anarchy which lead the world to an impasse, the destruction of man's body and soul.

Therefore, behind the perfect system of the computerised "convenience cards", is hidden the universal dictatorship, the slavery of the Antichrist. Also "he causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: his number is 666" (Rev 13:16-18).



St. Andreas of Caesarea writes, "On the dirty name of the Antichrist. Time and experience will reveal to those who are vigilant the accuracy of the numbers and anything else written about him ... but divine grace did not wish that the name of the scourge be written in the Holy Bible; a lot will be found written on the subject..."

Oddly enough, many spiritual people, apart from the fact that they give their own interpretations on this issue, are afraid of the evolving secular filing-system. They should also be concerned in a spiritual way, however, and help Christians by alerting them positively on the subject and strengthen their faith, so that they can feel God's consolation.

I wonder! Don't they question what is going on? Why don't they put a question mark next to their



mind's interpretations? What if they help the Antichrist in marking more people? How can they sway these people from losing their souls? "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Mk 13:22).

Those who give their own interpretations will be led astray.

Things are very clear. The 'beast-with 666' in Brussels has swallowed almost all the countries in its computers. The card, the identification cards, the introduction to the mark, what do they indicate? Unfortunately, we only listen to the radio when we want to hear the weather report.

What will Christ tell us? "Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times" (Mt 16:3).

After the card, the identification cards and the establishment of the filing-system, they will maliciously proceed to the marking by announcing on Television that someone stole another person's card and withdrew all his money from his bank account. On the other hand, they will advertise the "perfect system", the marking of the Antichrist's name, 666, on the hand and forehead with laser beams which will not be externally detectable.

Unfortunately, some that think of themselves as knowledgeable will swaddle (bind) "their spiritual children, as if they were babies in order to console them by telling them 'it doesn't matter, it's nothing, as long as you have faith inside you'. While we see that St. Peter externally denied Christ, and it was a denial, they deny the holy mark of Christ, which was granted to them through the Holy Baptism - the Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit", by accepting the mark of the Antichrist. These will claim they have Christ inside them!

Unfortunately, some "knowledgeable" people shared the same logic during the years of the holy martyrs and tried to change the minds of the prospective martyrs. St. Basil the Great writes, in his speech on Martyr Gordios, "many people were being irrational by trying to convince the martyr to deny Christ with his words only, and keep his faith in his soul, in his inner disposition, claiming that God does not pay attention to our words but to our disposition. However, martyr Gordios was rigid in his belief and replied, "the tongue, which is created by Christ, cannot bear to utter anything against Him... Do not deceive yourselves, God cannot be mocked, he judges us according to our own mouth, he justifies us by our words, and by our words, he convicts us".

Also, Dekios had issued a decree ordering Christians to avow the religion of paganism; those who did and offered a sacrifice to the idols, were granted a certificate and thus were saved from martyrdom. The Church considers these people who denied Christ, together with those who gave money to the committee of pagans and took the certificate without denying Christ, the so-called "liveloforoi", as being apostates and sinners.

We have many examples, such as the miracle of St. Theodoros that is celebrated every year on the Saturday of the First Week of the Great Lent. "Julian, the Apostate, knowing that Christians are cleansed more by fasting strictly during the First Week of the Great Lent, which for this reason we call Pure Week, chose to pollute them during this specific period. He, therefore, secretly ordered that food, which had been polluted by the blood of the idols' sacrifices, be put out in the market place during this week. By holy appearance Martyr Theodoros appeared to Archbishop of Constantinople Evdioxios in his sleep. The martyr revealed the mystical message to the Archbishop and asked him to gather the faithful people immediately on Monday morning, and alert them not to eat from this food. Instead, he offered them "kolliva" (boiled wheat given at memorial services) to replace the shortage of food. The aim of the Apostate was thus annulled and the devout people were protected and kept pure.

Abstaining from the pollution of the idols is a rule of the Apostles. "...The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter ...abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:6, 20).

Despite what I just reported, unfortunately, we hear today a lot of nonsense from those considered "knowledgeable". Some people say, "I will accept the identification card with the number 666, but I will put the sign of the Cross next to it". Others say, "I will accept being marked on the forehead with the number 666, but I will also put the sign of the Cross next to it". They think that by this way they can be sanctified, but this is only an illusion.

Only what is accepted with Holy Water is sanctified. For instance, water can be blessed and become Holy Water. Urine cannot be sanctified. A stone can be turned into bread by a miracle. Whatever is dirty, cannot be sanctified. Therefore, putting the sign of the cross next to it cannot sanctify the symbol of the Antichrist (devil) on our identification card, our head or hand.

We have the power of the Holy Cross (our holy symbol) and the divine grace of Christ, only as long as we have the holy marking of the Holy Baptism. In other words, we have denied the devil and sided with Christ, and received the Holy Marking (the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit).

May God enlighten us. With lots of pain and love in Christ.  
Amen.

Mount Athos, Panagouda Cell of Koutloumousiou Monastery,  
Saturday, First Week of Lent, 1987.

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# Forgiveness

by Metropolitan Nikitas of Hong Kong

By the grace and love of God, I find myself with you this evening, as I see a worshipping community gathered to praise God's Holy name and to give thanks to God for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us in this life.

It is indeed a wonderful thing to hear and see people come together, not only to give thanks to God, but also to see them live and chant and pray the Liturgy which is given to us.

We come as Orthodox Christians to the Liturgy for a variety of reasons. And as you may know, historically the liturgy developed in time from a variety of services, bringing together especially two elements - The Word (Holy Scripture) and the Eucharist.

And we as Christians - the people of God - are called to study and know His Word. Especially if we look at an example like this evening's Gospel lesson [Luke 6: 27-36]. Because there are those of us in this life - baptized Orthodox Christians, who always ask ourselves 'what am I supposed to do as a Christian?' 'How should I live in this world of difficulty and trials.' 'How am I to respond to the calling that I have? And how do I answer the questions in life?'

This evening's Gospel gives us all of those answers. It is a gospel which makes no sense to the logic of the world. To the rational human individual in society, this Gospel is the extreme!

Because the Gospel tells us "Love those who hate you". In our society we don't know how to *forgive* - we look to get even. Or we say, "I forgive that person, but I won't forget".

**True forgiveness means forgetting, and washing the slate clean.** So, you see with our rational minds to do these things is almost impossible. And yet Christ demands it of each and every person - if we are to be worthy of this calling. And He demands that the *inner* person, the universe within us - the *cosmos* - change. It cannot be that same worldly state - like everything else. We are called to be *transfigured* and *transformed*. To alter our own ego and path, and to place our lives on the path of Jesus Christ.

How does this come about? - by breaking the *ego* - not doing what *I* want and what *I* desire but what God requires that I should do in this life, if I am truly to be one of His disciples. And to not just say that I am that and I live that, but we all have to struggle, and we must walk in the path He has given us.

And as St. John Chrysostom reminds us: "**Certainly it is sinful to fall, but it is devilish to remain fallen**".

No matter where our errors, our trials, our tribulations may lead us, we must always pick ourselves up and continue the journey.

Allow me, please, for a moment to share a story with you. It is a story about two monks. Two brothers who lived far out into the desert for years and years, and had not come into society and had not had any contact with people.

It happened one day that one of the monks said to his brother, "Brother, I will go into the city" (there were some errands to be done). And as he went along his way and entered the city, the monk came upon two people who were arguing - and he was *amazed*. He had never seen such an experience in his life. And he asked the people who were there what was taking place. And they said, "It's an argument". And he followed it with interest and curiosity. And he said to himself, "When I return to the monastery and to my brother, I must share this example of human existence with him". So he went back to the monastery and found his brother monk and said, "I saw the most amazing thing today in the city. I saw an argument".

And the second monk said, "What is this thing you call an argument?" And the first monk said, "I'll explain. Do you see this brick? I'll take this brick and put it between us. And I will say it is my brick, and you will say 'no it is my brick' and we will argue whose brick it really is".

So the first monk took the brick and put it between them and said, "Brother, this is my brick".

The second monk looked at him and said, "If you say so, brother".

Now we chuckle and laugh, but look at the truth and wisdom in that story. Who amongst us in the argument would say, "**if you say so, it must be yours**". The second monk had broken his own will and own desire. He was no longer bound by the things of this world. He had gone to another level, he had grown spiritually. That is what we are all called to do. To grow and to develop spiritually. So that the brick which we may pick up and place somewhere in life is not a brick which builds walls, it is the brick which builds bridges and brings people closer together and unites us and makes us the one body of Jesus Christ. And how do we learn this? From another lesson from the monastics:

There was a young monk who went to his spiritual father and said, "Give me a rule by which I should live". And the old man looked around and found a dead branch. And he dug a hole and planted it in the ground. And said to him, "You see this dry branch, water it faithfully everyday".

And the young monk walked several hours to the river to get water and walked back faithfully and watered the dry branch each and every day - faithfully as he'd been instructed. And after two years, miraculously the dry branch blossomed and brought forth fruit. The old man immediately gathered the fruit from the once dry branch and called all the brethren of the monastery to the church and said, "Come and eat from the fruits of obedience".

**It we are obedient to the word of Christ, we are no longer dead branches in this world.** But we also bear fruit, because God waters us with the Spirit of life. And through us He works miracles. Not miracles that we might hope to see - that we may raise the dead or make the blind have sight. But the simple miracles of life - of giving love to people who need it - of changing society and the course of our world. Look at our world and our world leaders, and where are they taking us, I ask you? The goals of the nations are to produce arms and to gather resources and wealth, and to claim land. And yet the goals of Christians are to love their enemies, to forgive those who have wronged us and to feed the poor and to reach out to those in need. Last night in conversation I gave the wonderful example of Mahatma Gandhi who, in his studies of the world's religions and philosophies, spoke so beautifully and kindly of Christianity. Praising it as perhaps the best of all religions of the world. But he was so sad he never found a Christian.

**The values, the goals, the principals, the truths are not just theory, they are meant to be reality.** And they are meant to be lived by each and everyone of us. So that as the we change the inner person we may also change the outer world. So we do as Christ says: **To forgive those who hate us and to love those who persecute us and to lend to those in need without asking to receive in return. But to give freely because of the love God has instilled in our hearts.**

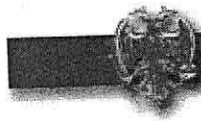
I pray that through this Church, and the Holy Liturgy that was celebrated here tonight, we may all be transformed and changed to God's Holy People, separating ourselves from the ways of the world and bringing ourselves unto union with Christ. Amen.

from a sermon given on 2 October, 1999  
Greek Orthodox Church of St George, Brisbane QLD

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## Repentance and love

by Abbot Vasileios of the Monastery of Iviron

Here is something very characteristic. An old monk, a true ascetic, comes to our monastery from time to time to ask for a little help. With what he receives, he feeds himself and also helps others, older than himself.

One day he came for his usual visit and said to one of the brethren of the monastery,

"I hope I am not being too much trouble for you, coming and asking for your help. If I am too much bother, don't worry yourself, I needn't come again. Don't worry about it; a monk is like a dog. If you give him a kick, that does him good, and if you don't give him a kick, but give him a piece of bread instead, that does him good as well."

This old man, although he is more than seventy five, does not expect anyone to respect him. He thinks of himself as a dog. He bows to everyone and asks their blessing, not only to the monks but also to the novices and to the pilgrims who come to us. But he is full of such inexpressible grace that a sense of joy and celebration runs through the monastery every time he comes.

All of us, monks and pilgrims, gather around him to hear the words of grace which come from his lips, to be encouraged by the joy that his face reflects, without his ever suspecting it.

It is like that Father of the desert who asked God that he might not receive any glory on this earth, and whose face was so radiant that no one could look directly at him.

In humble men like this, who radiate grace, one feels that two great virtues are always at work; the mystery of repentance and the mystery of love.

They are not men who have been converted, who have repented. They are men who are being converted, who are repenting.

The Lord's call to repentance does not mean that we are converted once only, nor that we should repent from time to time (though one ought to begin with that). It means that our whole life should be a conversion, a constant repentance and contrition. We ought not to speak or think or do anything outside that atmosphere, that attitude of penitence and contrition which should fill our whole being.

At every moment this mystery of penitence, of contrition, of being raised up by the power of Another, should be at work in us. At every moment, being cast down, we feel ourselves raised up by Another.

We feel that we are fallen and He is the resurrection, that we are non-being and He is Being itself. It is by His infinite mercy that He brought us from nonbeing to being, and when we are fallen He raised us up, and He continues to raise us up at every moment.

Thus, as the spirit of repentance grows within us, we are led to say with the Apostle;

"We carry in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of the Lord may also be manifest in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:10).

Those who can say this live at one and the same time Good Friday and Easter Day. They constantly live the "life-giving death" of the Lord, the sorrow which brings joy".

What they experience in their repentance, they experience also through sharing the mystery of love. In love also they see the way of sacrifice that leads directly and surely to eternal life. No effort which is offered out of love for God remains in vain. Everything which is offered and given up for love of the brethren is saved, kept intact, multiplied in eternal life.

Our neighbour is not simply an indispensable companion on the way of life. He is an integral part of our spiritual existence. Only in losing himself for God and for his fellow man, his brother, can man find the true dimension of his own life. "He who loses...finds". Only with this can the true glory of the human person be restored to him, a glory at once divine and human, without limits.

Only in this way can a man feel within himself that the foundations on which he builds are unshaken. These foundations are death, annihilation. The anthropological reality in which the new man lives from henceforth is the divine grace which embraces all things.

The reward given for the glass of water offered to our brother is the new Trinitarian consciousness which comes to life within us.

The other one is no longer the frontier which determines our individuality, which closes off our own living space, or simply flatters our complacency. He is not the shroud which envelopes our deadly isolation. He is not Hell. The other is the true place of our life, he is my most dear and irreplaceable self who gives me here and now, through my gift of myself to him, the meaning and reality of eternal life, an eternal life which has already begun. As the beloved disciple says,

"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren" (1 John 3: 14).

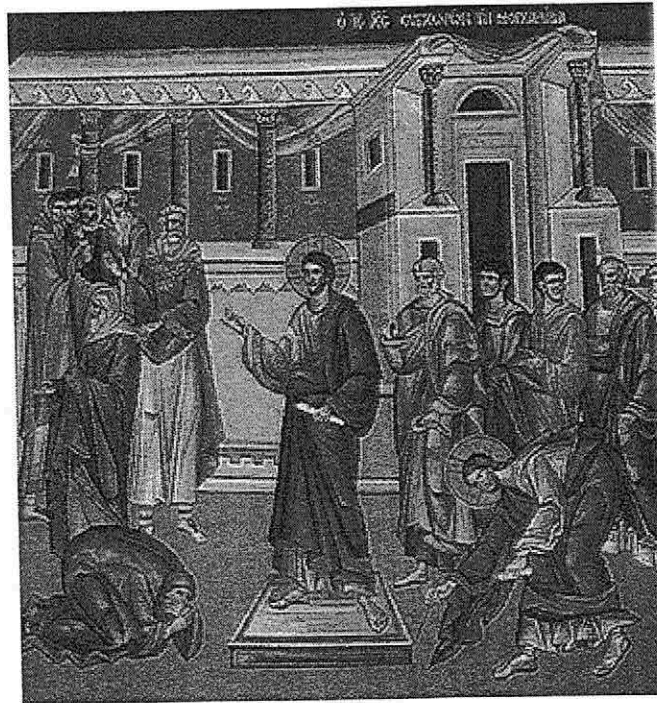
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# True and False Repentance

by St. Clement of Alexandria



If someone is able to escape the excesses of riches, and is able to overcome the difficulties that riches cause in the way of life, he can enjoy eternal good things. But suppose that even though he is sealed ("sealing" refers to baptism) and redeemed, for some reason- because he doesn't know any better or because of circumstances he cannot control- he falls into sins and is quite carried away. What happens? This person is entirely rejected by God.

Everyone who has turned to God with his whole heart will find that the doors are open. The Father gladly receives his truly repentant son. And true repentance is to be no longer bound in the same sins for which the Saviour has denounced death against himself. Rather, it is to eradicate those sins completely from our souls. When those sins are pulled up by their roots, then God makes his home in you again.

It is said that the Father and the angels have great joy and celebration when one sinner turns and repents. (Luke 15:10) God tells us, "I prefer mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13). And "I desire not the death, but the repentance of the sinner" (Ezek. 18:23). And He says, "Though your sins are like scarlet wool, I will make them as white as snow; though they are blacker than darkness, I will wash them and make them like white wool". (Isa. 1:18). Only God has the power to forgive our sins and pardon our transgressions. But he also commands us to daily forgive our brothers when they repent (Matt. 6:14). "And if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts" (Luke 11:13), then how much more it is the nature of the long-suffering Father of mercy and consolation to wait for those who have converted. But to convert means that we really do cease from our sins, and we no longer look behind.

So, God is the one who forgives our past sins. We do this by repenting, by condemning the past deeds, and begging the Father to totally forget them. The Father is the only one who is able to undo what has been done and to blot out our former sins by the dew of the Holy Spirit. He says, "I will judge you by the state in which I find you". So, there may be a person who has done incredibly good

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deeds during his life. But if he runs headlong into wickedness at the end of his life, then all his previous deeds will fail to profit him. At the conclusion of the drama, he has given up his role.

On the other hand, it is possible for the man who once led a wicked and immoral life to eventually repent. During the remainder of his life after his repentance, he may overcome the evil conduct of a long time. But to do so requires great care, because he is like one who has suffered from a prolonged disease and needs to follow a certain regimen. He needs special attention. Thief, do you want to be forgiven? Steal no more. Adulterer, burn no more [with lust]. Fornicator, live purely in the future. You have robbed, give back - and give back more than you took. False witness, practice truth. Perjurer, swear no more. All of you, get rid of the rest of your fleshly passions - wrath, lust, grief, fear. In doing so, at the end of your life, you may be found to have already been reconciled to the adversary during your stay in this world.

It is probably impossible to eradicate all your inbred passions at once. But by God's grace, by the help of the brothers, by sincere repentance, and by constant care, they will be corrected.

I want you to be even more confident that this kind of repentance brings you the certain hope of salvation. So I will tell you a story that has been handed down and committed to memory about the Apostle John.

When the tyrant [Domitian, who had exiled John] finally died, John left the island of Patmos and returned to Ephesus. He was then asked to travel throughout the surrounding provinces. In one place he would appoint overseers. In another, he would set whole churches in order. In still another, he would ordain those who were indicated by the Spirit.

Along the way, he stopped at one of the cities not far from Ephesus. Some have said this city was Smyrna. After he had settled some other matters, he noticed a strong, handsome young man who was enthusiastic and devoted. Looking at the newly appointed overseer, he said, "I commit this youth to you in all earnestness, in the presence of the church, and with Christ as witness". When the overseer accepted the charge and promised to fulfil his obligation, John gave him instructions and testimony. Then John returned to Ephesus.

The elder took the youth who had been committed to him to his own home. He reared him, cherished him, and finally baptised him. After this, he relaxed his stricter care and guardianship. He thought that the seal of the Lord he had set on the youth [i.e. baptism] gave him complete protection. But when the youth obtained this premature freedom, some other young men his age, who were idle, immoral, and adept at evil, corrupted him. First, they enticed him by providing expensive entertainment. Later, when they went out at night and robbed people on the highways, they took him along. Then they dared to pull off bigger things. By degrees, he came to accept their life. He had a strong nature, so once he had left the right path, he was like a hard mouthed and powerful horse. He had taken the bit between his teeth, and he rushed with all the more force down into the depths.

In time, he entirely despaired of his salvation in God. He no longer desired to do small acts of evil but great ones. Since he felt he was lost beyond all hope, he made up his mind to accept the same fate as the others. Taking them and forming a band of robbers, he quickly became the captain of the bandits - the fiercest, bloodiest, and cruelest of them all.

Time passed. Some necessity emerged in the church, so they sent for John to come to them again. When he had settled this other matter, John said, "Overseer, return the deposit which I and the Saviour committed to you in the presence of the church over which you preside". At first, the overseer was puzzled, thinking John was wrongly accusing him of mishandling money. He couldn't believe the allegation, but neither could he disbelieve John. Finally John clarified the matter, saying, "I demand the young man, and the soul of our brother entrusted to you".



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The elderly overseer, groaning deeply, burst into tears and said, "He is dead".

"How did he die?"

"He is dead", the overseer said, "to God. He turned wicked and abandoned the faith. And at last he became a robber. Now he and his band have taken possession of the mountain across the church".

John tore his clothes and pounded his head with a great lament. "I left a fine guard in charge of this brother's soul!" he finally cried.

Recovering, he said, "Someone please bring me a horse. I need a guide to show me the way". He rode away, just as he was, straight from the church. As he approached the robbers' hideout, he was grabbed by their sentry. Neither fleeing nor begging, he cried out, "I came here so that you could waylay me. Lead me to your captain" Meanwhile, the captain, who was fully armed, was waiting. But as soon as he recognised John, he was overcome with shame. He quickly turned and fled. John followed him with all his strength, forgetting his age, and cried out, "Why, my son, do you flee from me, your old and unarmed father? Son, pity me. Do not fear. You still have hope of life. I will give and account to Christ for you. If need be, I will willingly endure your death, as the Lord endured death for us. For you I will surrender my life. Stop! Believe! Christ has sent me".

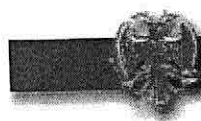
The youth finally stopped, and he stood looking down. He finally threw down his weapons. Then he trembled and began to weep bitterly. When the old man approached, he embraced him. Though the young man could hardly speak because he was crying so much, he expressed his regret for his actions. That day, he was baptised a second time with tears. John assured him an oath that he would find forgiveness from the Saviour. Begging him and falling on his knees, John kissed his right hand, purified by repentance. Then he led him back to the church.

There John prayed profusely, striving beside the young man in continual fasting. Through hours of instruction, he subdued the young man's mind. In fact, John did not depart until he restored the young man to the church. He presented the young man as a great example of true repentance. For at the end of the world, the angels, radiant with joy, singing hymns and opening the heavens will receive those who truly repent into the celestial abodes. On that day, in front of everyone, the Saviour himself will go to meet them and welcome them. Holding forth the eternal light that is without shadow, he will conduct them to the Father's bosom, to eternal life, to the kingdom of heaven.

So believe the prophecies, the gospels, and the apostolic words. By living in accordance with them, lending your ears, and practicing these deeds, when you die, you will see - the fulfilment of these truths. For anyone who welcomes the angel of repentance in this world will not need to repent when he dies. He will not be ashamed when he sees the Saviour approaching in His glory and with His angels. He will not fear the fire.

On the other hand, if you choose to continue to sin perpetually in pleasure - if you prefer to indulge yourself here rather than to seek eternal life, if you turn away from the Saviour who offers forgiveness - blame neither God, nor riches, nor the fallen flesh. Blame your own soul, which voluntarily perishes. For whoever desires salvation and asks for it vehemently and boldly, the good Father in heaven will grant true purification and the changeless life. To Him, by His Son Jesus Christ, the Lord of the living and the dead, and by the Holy Spirit, be glory, honour, power, and eternal majesty, both now and forever, from generation to generation, and from eternity to eternity. Amen.





GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## A prayer of repentance

by Stylianos Kementzetsidis

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities" (Ps 51:7-9).

It is through the sorrow or contrition we have for the sins we commit that, when accompanied with repentance and God's grace, will lead us to salvation. We shall give you an important example of repentance from sin that leads to salvation, because we sin every day in our words, thoughts and deeds.

### St Pelagia

St. Pelagia, who we commemorate on October 8, was a beautiful actress of Antioch during the third century. At that time, the people of Antioch, hearing that the virtuous Bishop Nonnus had come to town to attend a Church council, gathered around St. Julian's tomb to hear him give a homily. Pelagia found the opportunity to provocatively dress and walk amongst the people to display her beauty. She created a spectacle and distracted the people from listening to the Bishop.

Bishop Nonnus, who was moved to tears by her zeal and success in her profession, sorrowfully said, "The efforts this woman has made to be like by men on one occasion, I have not matched in a lifetime's desire to be liked unto God". He continued, "I am also sad for you, because you have left the word of God by looking at that loitering spectacle of vanities". He then prayed to God that Pelagia would repent, and on the next morning, when he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy in the cathedral of Antioch, Pelagia felt the need to pray in Church. On her arrival, the Bishop was giving a sermon on sin, repentance, confession and the Day of Judgement. She felt that the sermon was aimed exclusively to her, and fell to the ground with tears and contrition for her sins.

On conclusion of the sermon, people leaving the Church noticed Pelagia and asked her why she was crying. She then requested to be taken to the Bishop for confession and Baptism. Seeing her, the Bishop said, "These are not the actions of a repentant soul. The first thing that a repentant soul would do is to change the way it looks. The possessed man who was liberated from the demons first put his clothes on and stood by Christ". Pelagia insisted that the Bishop did not pay attention to her, and running away cried out, "My soul unto yours if I die today". Pelagia returned to her house, and cried all night.

During the night, the Bishop saw a horrible vision of himself in Church giving a sermon on philosophy, and while speaking a dirty dove came close and disturbed him. The dove continued to distract him from giving his sermon by fluttering in front of him. He then saw a baptistery containing pure water in the centre of the Church in which he pushed the bird. It was immediately cleansed, and its beauty became stunning. The next day, the Bishop, discussing his vision with the bishops in the council, saw Pelagia and told her, "It would have been better for me to have accepted you, and then told you about chastity". Pelagia asked, "What must I do to save myself?" She was told to repent honestly, give away your treasures gained with sin, release her servants, and seek salvation as a nun.

Pelagia accepted the Bishop's instructions and went to the Mount of Olives dressed as a man, and lived a solitary life until she died towards the end of the third century around 284 AD. She was later the topic of repentance given in a sermon by St. John Chrysostom.

We are not asked why we sin; God knows why and knows that we have turned our backs to Him by being careless. The question is "Why do we remain in spiritual darkness?" St. Chrysostom answers, "To sin is human, to sin and repent is divine, to sin and not repent is diabolical, because we do the work of satan, which damages the soul".

## Mount of Olives

In the fifth century, at the Mount of Olives, satan continuously attacked a desert father in his seventies. The monk told the devil, "You grew old with me, leave me alone". The devil replied, "If you do as I tell you, I will never try you again... Stop calling and honouring her" as he pointed to an icon of the Blessed Ever-Virgin Mary. This is why the heretics are peaceful and quiet, because the devil does not try them hoping to make us believe that they are doing well. The person who tries and battles is tempted and attacked by the devil. You may have noticed that the heterodox churches on Sundays are quiet, whilst Orthodox churches are always noisy. In the heretic environment, the devil does not need to disrupt the services, whereas he always tries to disrupt the Orthodox services.

If you resolve to be more zealous in your worship and regularly pray, study the Bible and writings of the Church fathers, fast, go to confession, and save your money to give to the poor, you will discover that the devil will not leave you alone day or night. Alternatively, if you do not bother to make an effort to live an Orthodox life, the devil will not disturb you making you feel that he does not exist. Do you have courage?

## Soldier

A soldier, respectful of the Holy mother Theotokos, was not spiritually virtuous. One day he asked for the Theotokos' help, because he was very tired, hungry and thirsty. He then saw a graceful lady appear from a mountain, who told him, "You asked for me". He was afraid as she gave him a tray containing food and water. While he noticed that the food and water were filthy, the Lady told him, "It is hard to eat this filthy food even though you are hungry. How do you expect me to stay in your heart, which is full of dirt and sin?" It is essential that we struggle to cleanse our hearts and sow Christian virtues, so that the grace of God remains in us. It is then that our hearts will become a heaven on earth.

## City of Larisa

In the city of Larisa in central Greece, during the time of Turkish occupation, there was a poor father with a few children. One of his boys was in love with a neighbour's poor servant girl, who was noble and very graceful. The father asked the boy, "Why would you marry a rich girl, and not this girl who even though is poor is virtuous?" The boy replied, "I will do as you say, father". The 'wise men' of the town, however, hearing that the boy wanted to marry the poor peasant girl instructed him to marry a rich girl. The son did not listen and proceeded with the wedding, but the so-called wise men actively tried to break the marriage. The girl seeing what was happening told the boy, "I do not want to be an obstacle in your life. Do as you want". The boy told her, "I do not pay attention to their words", but they realised that they will not find any peace. The girl prayed and kissed an icon of the Theotokos and left the town with only what she was wearing. She walked some 70 kilometres to the coast where she asked a sailor to be taken to a deserted island.

She soon realised that she was pregnant and later gave birth alone to a boy, and started begging God day and night to send her a priest to baptise the baby, and take Holy Communion. They lived on grass, water and whatever dried fruit they could find.

Thirty years later, a priest from Constantinople, returning from a meeting in Rome, was forced to go to the island during a disturbance on the ship. He wondered if there was any monastics living there and started to explore the island, whilst praying. As he walked, he noticed a well-worn track, which he followed until he saw a shadow and heard a voice saying, "Father, you have been sent here by God. Go back to the ship and gather all that is necessary to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and perform a Baptism". The priest returned to the ship, collected his vestments and came back to see the woman. He asked her, "Why are you here, and how have you survived here all these years?" She replied, "God has given me and my son, who is at the spring, strength. In the days, we do not feel the heat, and in the nights, we do not feel the cold. My clothes eventually wore out and our hair grew to cover our nakedness, and we have the birds for company". They then went looking for the son at the spring, but he hid himself after seeing the priest, because he never saw a man before. The woman told her son, "Do not be afraid, didn't I tell you that God will send us a priest to Baptise you and give us Communion?" It was at that spring that the Sacrament was performed on the son with a blinding grace as the young man cried with flowing tears. The man left the spring looking like an angel full of grace.

The blinding light of grace is present during the Holy Sacraments, although many do not sense it. Some years ago, for example, an old man who had visited the Holy Mountain for a few months asked to be Baptised. At the time of his Chrismation, someone took a photo. When the film was developed, a dove could be seen above the man's head, although no one saw it during the Sacrament. These sorts of miracles happen to those at the monastery everyday during Communion. The Bishops there have instructed us to spread this story, but not to tell people where the monastery is so that visitors do not inundate it.

It took thirty years before Christ answered the women's prayers and forty years before the Israelites entered the Promise Land. In both cases, those who are with Christ will be supported and will be encouraged in their struggle to find their Promised Land. The fundamental question is "Are we with Christ?" If not, God will be obscured from us. Our greatest insurance is not what you can purchase from a company, but is spiritual in nature.

## Four friends

We have great confusion inside and around us. We can, however, still communicate with people. There were four friends and one became a monk, whilst the other three remained in the world with their families. Eventually the three decided to search for the monk and try to convince him to return to the world. When they first saw him he was filling a bucket with muddy water from a well. The friends asked, "What have you found here, and what have you achieved by being here?" The monk told them "Look at the well; do you see anything?", and they answered "We see our faces". The monk quietly replied, "That is what I have achieved; to recognise and know my internal self-portrait. We know what is in the stars and in books, but we do not know what is in ourselves". They had not explored themselves, and they stayed away from our Saviour Christ. Christ reveals Himself, extends His saving hand to our drowning souls, and yet we refuse to turn to Him. That is the Word, that is the Truth and that is the Life, who is the Doctor of our body and soul.

## St John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom said, "If you do not have money to buy the New Testament, go sell your

body and become a slave to buy the Scriptures". The Scriptures are inexpensive these days. Therefore, it is better to be a slave who owns the New Testament than being a slave to sin.

In 1815, a French historian was in a city of western Greece. He was staying in a motel, where the guests gathered around a log fire for warmth. A boy was there waiting for the guests to fall asleep, and the Frenchman deciding to see what the boy would do pretended to fall asleep. Thinking that everyone had fallen asleep, the boy took some papers from his shirt and started to cry. He was reading handwritten homilies by St. Kosmas. In another paper, written by the poet Regas Ferreos, the boy read "People who raise their children with the ideals of faith can never be terrified". What are the ideals we raise our children with? They do not know the fundamentals of faith, and so suffer as we do.

## The mother

A woman visited a theologian called Panagopolos in Athens and told him that her daughter knew how to play the piano, could speak English, and could put make-up on. The theologian asked, "Does she have possessions, property, or Christ?" The woman answered that her daughter only had Christ, and the theologian said, "...she has a 'unit'. A unit placed in front of 'zeros' will give you an immense treasure".

I ask myself, "Do we have Christ?" Even if we can speak many languages and have large amounts of money, we will go to hell with our possessions. The blessed Fr Paisios said, "The most intelligent man is he who gives alms and is merciful. Such a man will die with his spiritual possessions. The silliest man is he who loves money. He is the greedy man who pays the devil to take him to hell".

We must live a virtuous life now in preparation for death, asking, "Will we be alive tomorrow?" It is a great art to be Orthodox, we must remain Orthodox until our death, and improve every day with our works of virtue. Our Orthodox faith and works of virtue will remain with us, and everything else will be left behind at death.

As is written in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom I pray that each of us will have "Christian ends to our life, painless, blameless, and of good defence before the fearful Judgement Seat of Christ...".

"They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16).

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# **Christian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism**

by  
+Bishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis

## **The founding of the Church**

The Church was founded by our Lord and established throughout the known world by his Apostles. It was a body of people who kept the Faith of Christ and His moral teaching intact. Later, some persons began to change the teaching of Christ and His Disciples by reading into them their own interpretations. The Apostles and their successors, the Bishops, called these individuals together in various cities and pointed out their errors to them. Those who persisted in their erroneous beliefs were declared heretics. In contrast to these heretics, the true adherents of Christ's teachings called themselves Orthodox, a term meaning that they kept the Christian Faith exactly as "the Lord and His Apostles had given it to them. From the very beginning, therefore, the term Orthodox was used to identify the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in its entirety, as opposed to the heretical groups formed by certain individuals who were distorting Christian Truth.

## **The name of the Church**

The Orthodox Church, therefore, is the Church of Christ. It is called One because the Lord founded only One Church.

It is called Holy because its founder is Holy and also because its members, the saints (as the first Christians were called), received Christ's Sanctifying Grace through Baptism and are, thereby, cleansed of sin, equipped to avoid evil works and dedicated to God.

It is also called Catholic (universal as well as one in faith) since it is destined to become the Church of the whole world, and has preserved the Christian Faith unadulterated and entire. Consequently, from this viewpoint, the word Catholic is identical with the word Orthodox.

Lastly, it is called Apostolic because it was established by the Apostles and spread throughout the known world by them and their co workers. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone". (Ephesians 2: 19 20).

## **Ecclesiastical Districts**

This Church, which was named Catholic and Orthodox in order to be distinguished from the heretical churches which had separated from her, continued to branch out in the East and West. Through the initiative of the bishops, priests and deacons, and of pious and learned laymen the



church spread everywhere and convoked councils which she was represented by learned bishops from all corners of the earth.

For administrative reasons, the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Orthodox Church was divided into districts. These districts were five in number: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Since Rome was the seat of the Empire, the Bishop of Rome was honoured by the other prelates as first among equals (*primus inter pares*), solely, however, in deference to his position as the Bishop of the Capital.

In A.D. 330 Emperor Constantine the Great transferred the seat of the Empire from Rome to Byzantium, the city which later was named Constantinople in his honour. As a result, the honour and respect which the Bishop of Rome had enjoyed prior to this change were now bestowed upon the Bishop of the new Capital, which was also known as New Rome. The status given the Bishop of Constantinople was officially recognised by the whole Church at the Fourth Ecumenical Council held in Chalcedon in A.D. 451.

In A.D. 393 Emperor Theodosius divided the Empire into two sections, the Eastern, with Constantinople as its capital, and the western, with Rome as its capital. On the basis of this political division the Church was also divided into two sections. Constantinople became the foremost ecclesiastical seat of the Eastern part of the Church and its presiding Bishop was named Patriarch. Rome became the seat of the western part of the Church and its presiding Bishop was named Patriarch or Pope of the west. Along with these two hierarchs the Bishops of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem were recognised as Patriarchs in as much as the cities which they represented were political, social or commercial centres. In addition, these cities were especially noted for their history, a history intrinsically interwoven with the struggles and achievements of Christendom.

These five Patriarchs constituted administrative sections of the One, Holy, Apostolic, Orthodox Church, which was governed democratically; that is, one section neither infringe upon the jurisdictional rights of the other nor intervened with its affairs. However, when an issue of general scope concerning the Church as a whole presented itself (for example heresy), then a General Council of all the bishops of the church was convoked to discuss the issue at hand and reach a definite decision. The decisions of the Church at the General Councils were infallible, because they were made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with Holy Scripture and Christian Tradition as the basis for discussion and debate. Moreover, the decisions were always in accord with the genuine spirit of the church.

## The Great Separation

For nine centuries the Church of the East and the West was united and governed in a democratic manner. Unfortunately, however, something occurred which separated the Western section of the Church from the Eastern. The following events brought about this separation.

In 858 AD, Photius, the scholarly and venerable Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Eastern Roman Empire, was elected Patriarch of Constantinople. When Pope Nicholas the First was informed of Photius' election he sent a letter to Constantinople in which he stated that the church had no right to elect a Patriarch without asking for his permission, and, especially, a person who had been a layman only six days prior to his elevation to the Patriarchal Throne. Photius then wrote the Pope a friendly and courteous letter mentioning the circumstances which had made his acceptance of the election necessary. Moreover, he stressed that the Pope had no right to elect a Patriarch, because each church was jurisdictionally independent and needed only to conform to the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. Regarding his having been a layman very recently, he cited examples of laymen who had become bishops and had later been canonized saints, even

though their elevation from the laity to the priesthood had been effected in a few days.

Photius was quite correct, for we have many examples of laymen who became heads of their churches in an extraordinarily short time. Let us bring to mind the exceptional instance in Italy. In A.D. 378 Ambrose was elected bishop of Milan though he was still a layman. In fact, he was not even a Christian. At the time of his election he was being instructed in the Faith, he was baptised, and subsequently ordained after he had already been elected to the rank of a bishop.

The Pope remained adamant in his convictions. He wrote to the Emperor of Byzantium and, in his letter, he termed Photius a thief. He refused to recognise his election. Photius ignored the Pope's insults and continued to perform his patriarchal duties. However, when he was informed that the Pope had sent missionaries to Bulgaria his patience was overly taxed. In the first place, Bulgaria had accepted Christianity from missionaries sent by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Secondly, the Pope's representatives introduced teachings to the Bulgarians which were contrary to Orthodox doctrine. They began to teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son; that married priests are not actually canonical; and that priests are not allowed to confirm anyone.

In 867 Photius sent a letter to all the bishops of the East denouncing these teachings. From 867 to 1054 many conferences were held both in Italy and Constantinople, and the main topic for discussion was the "Procession of the Holy Spirit."

For a period of 187 years the Western Church at times agreed and at others disagreed with the Eastern. The Eastern Church refused to accept the Pope as having the right to interfere in the other ecclesiastical districts. Also, it rejected the teachings that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father AND THE SON (Filioque). Therefore, in 1054 the Pope sent representatives to Constantinople to discuss the differences existing between the two sections of the Christian Church. Regrettably, the Papal delegation acted rashly. It placed a bull of excommunication against the Ecumenical Patriarch and his followers upon the holy altar of Saint Sophia. In July of the same year Patriarch Michael Cerularius convoked a special synod consisting of bishops. This synod denounced the delegations action. Eventually, the decision of this council was also accepted by the other Patriarchates of the East. Henceforth, the Western Church was considered schismatic. Thus, in 1054 communion between the East and West virtually ceased to exist.

This separation gave the Western Church the freedom to add manmade teachings and practices foreign to Christian Tradition. These innovations primarily distinguish the two churches today. We find that these differences may be classified under three headings; Dogmatic, Liturgical, and Administrative. First we shall examine the dogmatic divergences (differences in matters of faith).

## **I. Dogmatic differences**

These concern the Holy Trinity, Life after Death, and the Immaculate Conception.

### **(1a). Procession of the Holy Spirit**

The Nicene Creed, which was formulated by the Entire Church, Western and Eastern, at the First and Second Ecumenical Councils, declared that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. No mention of the Second Procession was made. Moreover, according to Holy Scripture the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeded from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15, 26) However, in spite of this, during the eighth and ninth centuries the Roman Church added the phrase "and the Son" (Filioque) to the Creed. When the Bishops of the Eastern

part of the Church learned of this addition they wrote to the Bishop of Rome on this matter through the Patriarch of Constantinople. In this way a great discussion between the Western and Eastern theologians was initiated.

The question of the Filioque is clearly answered by Holy Scripture, as previously mentioned. In support of this contention, the following quotation, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2, v. 33, might be added; 'Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and being received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.'

On the basis of these and other scriptural proofs, the Church formulated the Doctrine that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. Later, Greek Fathers of the Church, philosophers and theologians like Photius and Marcus Eugenius, Bishop of Ephesus, expounded a philosophical and logical analysis of the error of the Western theologians. Thus, the danger of the Filioque was vividly exposed. From 867, when the issue arose, to 1054 many fruitless conferences took place. Unfortunately, Western theologians refused to revert to the teachings of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils on this point.

### **(1b). The Immaculate Conception**

Another dogmatic difference deals with the person of the Holy Theotokos Virgin Mary. Up to 1854 the two Churches did not differ regarding the person of Saint Mary. Both Churches know Mary as the Theotokos, the Ever Virgin, the Mother of Life, the Queen of the Angels, and by many other titles similar to these expressing reverences for her holy person. In 1854, however, at a Council of the Vatican, the Western Church proclaimed that the Virgin Mary was born without the Original Sin; that is, free of the sin of Adam and Eve. This doctrine was named "Immaculate Conception".

The theory of the Immaculate Conception is based neither on Holy Scripture nor on Sacred Tradition. None of the Fathers of the Undivided Church or any of its renowned theologians ever supported this theory. Even theologians of the Western Church, like Thomas Aquinas and Bernard, opposed this teaching.

The question might be asked, "What harm was done by declaring that the Theotokos Mary was free from Original Sin?" Was it not promulgated out of reverence? One might answer, "Yes", but is it reverent to destroy the unique meaning of the Incarnation of our Lord? This is what it brought about by the teaching of the Immaculate Conception, for, since it was possible for someone to be born without the Original Sin then, in a sense, the Incarnation of our Lord was limited in its general scope. No wonder the Fathers of the Church could not conceive and accept a theory of this kind, for it contradicts the uniqueness of our Lord's Redemptive Work. Poetic and rhetorical expressions found in the writings of the Fathers concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary cannot be regarded as Patristic proof in support of this dogma.

Reverence has its limits, especially in this case where the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception raises the person of the Blessed Virgin to the state of having preceded Christ in sinlessness. Thus, the Virgin Mary is deified. On the basis of this error one might expect more acts of deification by the Roman Church, let us say, of certain saints.

For these reasons, our Church teachers, as did the Western Church until 1854, that the Theotokos Mary was born with the Original Sin but was cleansed by the Holy Spirit at the event of the Annunciation. In other words, the Orthodox Church looks upon Mary as a human being who was purified and subsequently gave human flesh to the Son of God. She is, therefore, called All-Holy (Panagia) because she was chosen to become the Mother of God, a unique vessel of Divine Grace.



For the Orthodox World she will always remain the All Holy (Panagia), the most perfect human being, commanding our respect, our love and our devotion. We will always refer to her as Mother, as Mediatrix, as Purity itself, as the Ever Virgin, as Bride Unwedded. Only a person possessing such tributes could ever house the Eternal Word and Son of God. We neither worship nor deify her. However, since she is the Mother of Christ, we beseech her to help in times of affliction and trial. As the Mother of Christ she is in a position to pray for our salvation, for she is closest to the Lord.

### **(1c). Purgatory**

Another dogmatic difference is the doctrine of Purgatory. The Western Church teaches that after death those who have not repented for their sins are condemned to eternal hell. On this point we agree. However, we disagree with its teaching on Purgatory, a state of place entered by those who have not satisfied for their venial, or lesser sins while on earth to be cleansed by some form of punishment (many theologians say by fire) before entering Paradise.

The Greek Orthodox Church does not accept this doctrine because there is no Scriptural foundation whatsoever for it, nor does Sacred Tradition mention it. The Greek Orthodox Church believes that after death the Soul enters what is called the intermediate or transitional stage. While in this stage the Soul, if destined for Paradise, foretastes its happiness as it awaits the final Judgment. If the Soul is destined for hell, then it foretastes the suffering which it will receive in full at the Final Judgment.

Our prayers, which are offered for the departed, are expressions of love, devotion and a continuous association with them. Through these prayers, we beseech merciful God to forgive our departed brothers so that on Judgment Day their state may improve. The Holy Scriptures make mention of this. Our Lord gives the Apostles the right to forgive sins (Matthew 18:18), "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven."

With this brief exposition we put aside the dogmatic differences and proceed to the liturgical.

## **II. Liturgical differences**

These consist of differences in the ritual and order of prayer.

### **(2a). Epiclesis (Invocation)**

The Divine Liturgy of the Western Church has no Invocation, whereas the Liturgy of the Eastern Church includes the invocation as follows:

"Again we offer to Thee this reasonable and bloodless Sacrifice, and we ask and pray and supplicate: send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts here presented. And make this Bread the Precious Body of Thy Christ. And that which is in this Cup, the Precious Blood of Thy Christ, changing (Them) by Thy Holy Spirit, Amen, Amen, Amen. So that They may be to those that receive Them for the purification of the soul, for the remission of sins, for the fellowship of Thy Holy Spirit, for the fulfilment of the Kingdom of Heaven and for boldness to approach Thee. neither unto judgment nor unto condemnation. Again we offer unto Thee this reasonable Service for those who have departed in the Faith, Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Ascetics, and every righteous spirit in faith made perfect."

With this prayer, the celebrant invokes the grace of the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine so that they may be changed in the Body and Blood of Christ. The invocation, which ends with the call to the Commemoration of the Virgin Mary, is found in all the Holy Sacraments includes a prayer of Invocation, without which the Sacrament is not complete.

The Western Church omits the Invocation and makes use only of the words of the Lord: "Take, eat" and "Drink ye all of it." This creates a difficulty in our accepting that the Roman Catholic Church's Liturgy is actually complete.

With the words of the Lord in mind, serving as a historical background, we offer the "Holy Gifts" and with the "Invocation" we entreat the Holy Spirit to change the Gifts in the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Roman Church condemns the Eastern Orthodox Church because it includes the Invocation in the Liturgy, something practiced by the first Christians as well as the Fathers of the Undivided Church. This condemnation by the Roman Church is evidenced by a letter of Pope Pius VII to a Uniate Patriarch of the Melchites dated May, 1822, in which he terms the Invocation superfluous.

Roman Catholics are aware of the fact that the Invocation appears in all the ancient Liturgies, yet inasmuch as they accept the Pope as infallible in matters of faith, they cannot agree with the first Christians; thus the Saints who introduced the Invocation erred and the Pope alone is correct.

## **(2b). The use of unleavened bread in the Sacrament of Holy Communion**

During the first eight centuries the Roman Church performed the Holy Eucharist with leavened bread, a practice which the Eastern Church still maintains. Since the eighth century, however, the Western Church has used unleavened bread in the performance of the Holy Eucharist. This practice is contrary to Holy Scripture, which tells us, be it indirectly, that our Lord performed the Eucharist with leavened bread. 'Me Four Evangelists mention that our Lord ate the Last Supper on the Thursday before the Jewish Passover. We know that the Jews use unleavened bread only during the week of the Passover. Therefore, our Lord used leavened bread during the Last Supper.

In addition, the Sacrament of Holy Communion was instituted for all, Jews as well as non Jews. It is performed not exclusively during Pascha, but on every day of the year.. It is only natural, therefore, that the Holy Eucharist be performed with leavened bread which is used by all, and not with unleavened bread which is used only by the Jews during the Passover. For these reasons our Church has always performed the Holy Eucharist with leavened bread.

## **(2c). Holy Communion**

Another liturgical difference between the two Churches is the fact that the Western Church does not administer Holy Communion to its followers as does our Church and as Holy Scripture decrees. Roman Catholics receive only the body of Christ. The Blood is reserved as a special privilege for the clergy. This practice is contrary to Holy Scripture, which says: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you". (John 6, 53).

This custom of not offering the blood of Christ to the laity originated in the Roman Catholic Church during the Twelfth Century. Most likely it was adopted to make the distinction between priesthood and laity more apparent. In order to justify this mistake, the Western Church invented the term "Concomitantia" according to this theory the Blood of Christ necessarily exists in His Body. If this be so, Why is the Holy Eucharist performed with bread and wine? For in accordance with the meaning of the term "Concomitantia", bread should suffice for the performance of the Holy Eucharist. That the teaching which is derived from this term is false is proven by our Lord



Himself, Who states plainly, "except ye drink my blood. Christ Himself decreed that the Holy Eucharist be given under both species Body and Blood. Any diversion from this decree must be considered a sacrilege. Thus did Pope Gelasius characterised the act of not imparting the Body of Christ to Christians when it was practiced by the heretic Manichaeans.

## **(2d). Aspersio (Sprinkling)**

Another liturgical difference is found in the sacrament of Baptism. The word "baptise" means to immerse something in water. The Undivided Church performed baptism by triple immersion in water. Holy Scripture mentions immersion in passages relating to the baptism of Christ. All the ecclesiastical writers of the Church recognise but one method of baptism triple immersion in the name of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. In the Roman Church, however, baptism is performed by sprinkling. This practice was originated by the Roman Church in the fourteenth century. Many reasons were given in support of baptism by sprinkling. None, however, justifies such an innovation in a sacrament which is basic for the salvation of souls.

## **(2e). Holy Unction**

From the twelfth century the Roman Church has administered the sacrament of Holy Unction only to persons who are in danger of death. This constitutes another liturgical difference between the Roman and Orthodox Churches. This practice, like most other innovations of the Roman Church, is contrary to Holy Scripture. The Apostle James in his epistle recommended Holy Unction for all sick persons who seek to regain their bodily and spiritual health. For this reason, our Church administers Holy Unction not only to the dying, but to persons who are sick bodily or spiritually and who desire to regain the well being of the body and soul through the grace imparted by the Sacrament. "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5, 14 15).

# **III. Administrative differences**

## **(3a). The administrative body of the Church**

By administration we mean the system of government used by the Church. First, let us consider how the Undivided Church was governed.

According to the New Testament, after the Ascension of Christ, the Apostles imparted the Grace of the Holy Spirit to others by the laying on of hands. In that way they ordained Deacons, Priests and Bishops whose task it was to govern the Church, that is, to preach the Word of God, to perform the Holy Sacraments, to offer prayer and to have the power and authority of remitting sin.

This administrative body, with the three orders of the priesthood, exists in both Churches today, since the Churches were from the beginning one and the same.. In conformance with the tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, this clerical body was called "The Shepherding Church" to distinguish it from "The Shepherded Church," i.e. the Christian laity from whom the Apostles chose the Bishops, Priests and Deacons. This clerical body represents the Church and is the instrument through which the infallible teaching of the Church is expressed by the Ecumenical Councils as defined by Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

## **Ecumenical Synods (Councils)**

There were seven Ecumenical Synods (Councils) which convened to define the doctrines of the Church on the basis of Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The Western Church accepts these seven Councils.

The order of these Ecumenical Councils is as follows:

### **First Council**

Place: Nicaea

Date: AD 325

No. of Representatives: 381

Result: The condemnation of the heretic Arius. Arius taught that if the Son is a real Son, then a Father must exist before a Son; Therefore the Divine Father must have existed before the Divine Son; therefore, there was a time when the Son did not exist; therefore, He is a creature, the greatest and eldest in the world and Himself a God, but still created.

### **Second Council**

Place: Constantinople

Date: AD 381

No. of Representatives: 186

Result: The condemnation of the heretic Macedonius, Patriarch of Constantinople. Macedonius denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit..

### **Third Council**

Place: Ephesus

Date: AD 431

No. of Representatives: 200

Result: The condemnation of the heretic Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople. Nestorius preached that the Man Christ was not God; that God only dwelt in Him as in a temple; and that He became God by degrees. In other words, he taught that there were two persons in Christ, the one human and the other divine. Logically, he had to deny that Mary is the Mother of God. He said she should be called Christotokos (Mother of Christ), but not Theotokos (Mother of God).

### **Fourth Council**

Place: Chalcedon

Date: AD 451

No. of Representatives: 630

Result: The condemnation of the heretic monophysite Eutyches. Eutyches denied that Christ had a true human nature. The Human Nature, he maintained, was absorbed by the Divine Nature as a drop of wine in an ocean; hence, Christ had only His Divine Nature. This heresy is called Monophysism, from the Greek mono (one) and physis (nature).

### **Fifth Council**

Place: Constantinople

Date: AD 553

No. of Representatives: 164

Result: The condemnation of the "Three Chapters". This Council anathematized three things: The person and writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia; the writings of Theodoret of Cyrrhus against St Cyril; and the letter of Ibas of Edessa to Moris, Bishop of Hardashir in Persia. At the Council of Chalcedon, Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Ibas of Edessa had been restored to their sees, but they had actually been Nestorians and were therefore condemned together with Theodore of Mopsuestia, the teacher of Nestorius and the spiritual father of Nestorianism.

### **Sixth Council**

Place: Constantinople

Date: AD 680

No. of Representatives: 160

Result: The condemnation of the heresy of the Monotheletes among whom Honorius, Pope of Rome, was included. Yet, this Pope was recognised a posteriori as infallible by the Roman Church. Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople, thought that by declaring that there was only one will (Monotheletism) in Christ, the Syrians and Egyptians, who were monophysites, would give up their schism. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, opposed this teaching as heretical and rightly maintained that it was nothing but disguised Monophysism.

### **Seventh Council**

Place: Nicaea

Date: AD 787

No. of Representatives: 368

Result: It was determined that we do not worship Icons, but venerate them. The Council declared: "The figure of the cross and holy images, whether made in colours or of stone, or of any other material, are to be retained. They are not to become objects of adoration in the proper sense, which is given to God alone, but they are useful because they raise the mind of the congregation to the objects which they represent. It is right to salute, honour and venerate them, to burn candles and incense before them, not only because this is in accordance with the tradition of the Church, but also because such honour is really given to God and His Saints, of whom the images are intended to remind us".

At these Ecumenical Councils the Bishops of the entire Church convened and discussed, decided, defined and presented the teaching of the Church. These teachings, after having been found to be in accord with Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition, were infallible and were so pronounced. From the beginning, therefore, the body which determined and defined Christian Doctrine was the Ecumenical Council, which was guided by the Holy Spirit.

### **(3b). The administrative system of the Church**

To this day the seven Ecumenical Councils are accepted by the Western Church, with the exception of a few canons of the Councils which conflict with the administrative system of the Western Church, which is dictatorial or totalitarian in nature.

What was the system of the Undivided Church? The Bishops, as the successors of the Apostles, were always equal among themselves, having the same spiritual authority and prestige. Being equal among themselves, they respected one another and never interfere in matters of districts belonging to other Bishops. Later, for administrative and political reasons, some of the Bishops received titles and were named Metropolitans, Archbishops, or Patriarchs. Each had his own district, his auxiliary Bishops, his Priests and Deacons. In this manner, the entire Church was divided into the following districts: That of Rome, of Constantinople, of Alexandria, of Antioch and of Jerusalem. Each district was independent of the other from an administrative point of view. This was a democratic form of government.

The Bishops of each district recognized the Bishop who had his seat in the capital of the district as their leader. For example, the Bishops who were in the district of Alexandria recognized the Bishop of Alexandria, who was named Archbishop and Patriarch, as their leader. Incidentally, he initially had the title "Pope". Essentially, as is the case in our Church today, the patriarchs did not differ from other bishops.

These bishops presided only as a matter of honour, because they had their seats in cities where political power was centred, or because these cities were large centres of commerce or were connected with the history of Christianity.

This system has remained unchanged in the Orthodox Church. Take as an example the Church of Antioch or the Church of Serbia. Both of these are Orthodox churches, but administratively they are independent. They have their own bishops who elect a president whom they call Archbishop or Patriarch. Moreover, they have their own synods and are autonomous.

Should any question on dogma arise or should any Bishop, Presbyter or Deacon preach anything opposed to the teachings of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, then a synod may be convoked by the Patriarch of Constantinople at which all the churches are represented. This synod makes the final decision.

### **The Papal system**

In the Western Church a certain trend was cultivated by the Bishops of Rome, a trend which led to the submission of all the district bishops to the Pope of Rome. Gradually, that trend prevailed so that today the other bishops of the Roman Church are not equal to the Pope, but are merely his representatives. He is the Supreme Pontiff (Pontifex maximus) and the others are his instruments and are inferior to him, both spiritually and judicially.

The reason for this superiority is explained thus: "He is the successor of the Apostle Peter and for that reason all other bishops must be his inferiors; he alone should be vested with spiritual and temporal authority".



But were not the Apostles equal? If Peter was superior to the others, why did Paul point out Peter's mistakes in his epistle to the Galatians? (Galatians 2:11-14). If Peter was superior, why didn't the bishops of the entire Church subject themselves to the Bishop of Rome? And why shouldn't the Bishop of Rome alone consider himself the successor of Peter? According to history, Peter was the first Bishop of Antioch. St. Jerome is one of the historical sources proving the Episcopacy of St. Peter in Antioch. Which of the two shall we recognise as successor of Peter? History shows that the Bishop of Antioch has precedence in this claim.

Furthermore, why didn't the Ecumenical Councils declare themselves on this matter? Why didn't the Fathers of the Church accept the decisions of the Bishop of Rome and stop convoking Ecumenical Councils? For the obvious reason that the Ancient Church did not recognise such petty ambitions and visions of grandeur as did the Bishop of Rome, who today is called Supreme Pontiff, a Pagan Roman religious title. The Bishop of Rome was declared "Vicar of Christ on Earth" and "Head of the Church", by Roman Catholic councils. Yet he claims to be superior to these councils, for that is what the teaching of his primacy and infallibility implies.

### **The leader of the Church**

A teaching of the Church which has never changed is: the Church has no visible head, but only the Invisible One, Christ Himself; therefore, the body of its Bishops is the only one which represents the Lord, just as the Apostles did. It was not Peter alone who received power to remit or not remit sin, but the other Apostles as well. Consequently, it was not only Peter who represented Christ, but also the other Apostles. The primacy of the Pope, therefore, served as a wedge to widen the gap between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Against these theories of the West, our Church protested through her Bishops. It can be said that the main cause of the schism which divided Christianity was precisely the aspiration of such an ambition was most severely condemned by Christ.

### **The Infallibility of the Pope**

After the separation of the two Churches in 1054 the Bishops of Rome finally became free of our Church, which had previously held their recurring ambitions in check. This left the Western Church free to put other innovations into effect. One of these was the proclamation of the Infallibility of the Pope by decision of the Synod of Bishops of the Roman Church in 1870. The Church, as a whole, always recognised the General Councils as infallible. Now the Bishop of Rome was placed above the Councils, proclaimed infallible when speaking *ex cathedra* as the Shepherd in matters of faith and morals.

This dogma is strange. It is left to the judgment of each individual to examine it. He will see that from a logical viewpoint this doctrine is unsound and devoid of a scriptural or traditional basis. The Council of the Roman Church which convened at the Vatican in 1870 presents the Bishops of Rome as equal to Christ. The minutes of this Synod read: "Jesus Christ has three existences. His personal existence which Arius denied; His mystical existence in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist which Calvin denied; and His other existence, which completes the two, and through which He lives constantly, namely His authority in the person of His Vicar on Earth. The Council, maintaining this third existence, assures the world that it possesses Jesus Christ".

### **Matrimony**

Supplementing the administrative differences, we add that in the Roman Catholic Church marriage is prohibited in all ranks of Priesthood. Our Church, bearing in mind the First General Council in Nicaea in 325 and the Sixth at Constantinople in 680, permits marriage for priests and

deacons before ordination. However, she chooses her bishops from the celibate clergy.

These briefly, are the Dogmatic, Liturgical and Administrative differences between the Christian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Of these, perhaps the most serious are the Primacy and Infallibility of the Pope. These two differences continually widen the gap of separation and they will keep us apart until the day when the light of Orthodoxy will prevail in order that the words of our Lord, "...and there will be one fold, one shepherd," might be realised.

May our Lord Jesus Christ hasten the coming of that day.

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## Blessed Mary

"For behold, all generations will call me blessed"  
(Luke 1:48)

For two thousand years the Church has preserved the memory of the Virgin Mary, as the prototype of all Christians -- the model of what we are to become in Christ. Mary was truly pure and unconditionally obedient to God. The tradition of the Church holds that Mary remained a virgin all her life.

While lifelong celibacy is not a model for all Christians to follow, Mary's spiritual purity, her wholehearted devotion to God, is certainly to be emulated. Mary is also our model in that she was the first person to receive Jesus Christ. As Mary bore Christ in her womb physically, all Christians now have the privilege of bearing God within them spiritually. By God's grace and mercy we are purified and empowered to become like Him.

The honour we give to Mary also signifies our view of who Jesus is. From early times the Church has called her Mother of God (Gr. Theotokos, lit. God-Bearer), a title which implies that her Son is both fully man and fully God. As His mother, Mary was the source of Jesus' human nature; yet, the One she bore in her womb was also the eternal God.

Therefore, because of her character and especially because of her role in God's plan of salvation, Christians appropriately honour Mary as the first among the saints. The archangel Gabriel initiated this honour in his address to her:

"Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:28).

This salutation clearly indicates that God Himself had chosen to honour Mary. Her favoured status was confirmed when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was then six months pregnant with John the Baptist. Elizabeth greeted Mary with these words:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:42, 43).

And Mary herself, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, predicted the honour that would be paid her throughout history:

"For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).

In obedience to God's clear intention, therefore, the Orthodox Church honours Mary in Icons, hymns, and special Feast days.

We entreat her, as the human being who was most intimate with Christ on earth, to intercede with her Son on our behalf. We ask her, as the first believer and the mother of the Church, for guidance and protection. We venerate her -- but we do not worship her, for worship belongs to God alone!

In Matins, Vespers, and all the services of the hours of prayer, we sing this hymn, which expresses Mary's unique place in creation.

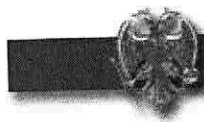
**"It is truly right to bless you, O Theotokos, ever-blessed and most pure, and the mother of our God. More honourable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without defilement you gave birth to God the Word: True Theotokos, we magnify you!"**

from **The Orthodox Study Bible**  
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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## On the Ever-Virginity of the Theotokos (Mother of God)

by Bishop Lazar Puhalo

The Orthodox Church has always proclaimed the Ever-Virginity of Mary, the Mother of our God (**Theotokos**). The verse referring to Mary's "Firstborn" has been misinterpreted by a countless number of the heterodox.

"...and he knew her not up to [*Greek = eos*] her having brought forth her firstborn son..." (Matthew 1:25; Luke 2:7).

This verse seems to be often translated as "he knew her not until after..." This is not, however, what is meant. The Greek original, "eos", indicates the true meaning, of "he had no sexual relations with her prior to her giving birth." The Evangelist makes this statement in order to assure us that Joseph had no part in the conception of Jesus. The term *eos ou* does not require the understanding that he had relations with her after Christ was born. It merely indicates that, as regards the birth of Jesus, Joseph had not had relations with Mary prior to the birth, thus, he was not the father of Jesus. This is merely a usual turn of phrase, the use of a standard and familiar form of expression. This same term and meaning is used elsewhere in the Bible as a standard expression, and it clearly does not indicate what the heterodox (non-Orthodox) claim it does. At 2 Samuel 6:23, for instance, we read, "And Milchal, the daughter of Saul, had no child until [*eos*] her death. Did she, then, have children after her death? Of course not!, and neither did Joseph "know" Mary after the birth of Jesus. At Genesis 8:7, we read that Noah "sent forth a raven; and it went forth and did not return till [*eos*] after the water had gone from off the face of the earth." We know from Scripture that in fact, the raven never returned to the ark. It says that it did not return "until after," but in fact, it never returned at all. The Scripture says that "Joseph knew her not till after...", but in fact, he never "knew" her at all. In another example, the Bible says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until [*eos*] I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (Mark 12:36). Does this mean that Christ will cease to sit at the right hand of the glory of the Father once His enemies have been overcome? Of course not ! Hence, the Bible does not say that "Joseph knew her not until after she brought forth her first born, but then he did." The Bible says, "He did not know her before (up until) she had brought forth her firstborn," meaning simply and clearly, "Joseph was not the father. He had not come together with her before her pregnancy, thus he was not involved in the conception of Jesus."

The Sacred Tradition concerning these matters is certainly derived from Mary's own testimony and, like all things in the Church, it is guided and guarded by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Mary was, in fulfilment of the Mosaic Law, betrothed to Joseph, an older man who was in fact her own uncle (as the Holy Spirit guided Sacred Tradition tells us). Thus their "marriage" was a marriage which, according to the Mosaic Law did not allow for sexual intercourse between them, because she was the bearer of the inheritance, her Firstborn, the Messiah. The term Firstborn means simply that. It does not imply any further births, but simply describes the first. In the Mosaic law the first born of any female (human or even animal) has religious significance, and this is why Jesus as Firstborn is emphasised.

Finally, you might ask "how is it physically possible for Mary to remain a virgin after the birth of Christ ?" The simple answer, as given in the Scriptures is "With men this is impossible, but with

God ALL things are possible." (Matt. 19:26)

## The meaning and identity of the "Brothers of Jesus"

Who were the "brethren of the Lord" (Matthew 12:46-47), and if He had brothers, why do we call the Theotokos "Ever-Virgin" ?

The "brethren" of Jesus are mentioned several times in the New Testament. Four are mentioned by name. To explain who they were is not difficult, because the Scripture itself names four of them and identifies their parentage. Matthew (13:55) and Mark (6:3) list, as brethren of Jesus, James, Joses, Simon and Jude.

We know for certain that James and Joses were not sons of Mary or Joseph, for the Scripture identifies them, as children of a different Mary, who was the wife of Alphaeus-Cleopas (Matthew 27:56 ; Mark 15:40). James is also referred to as the "son of Alphaeus", in the listing of the Apostles (Matthew 10:3 ; Mark 3:18 ; Luke 6:15 ; Acts 1:13). The relationship between these "brethren" (including "sisters") must be seen in the context of Hebrew-Aramaic tradition, according to which even cousins were called brothers and sisters. This is the case also in Greek and Slavic languages and cultures to this day, so we do not have to speculate about it. This is a fact we know very well from our own families and lives. We have a perfect example of this in the Old Testament Scripture. The word used to describe the relationship between Lot and Abraham at Genesis 14:16 is "adelphoi" in the original Greek, which can only be translated as "brother" in English. Nevertheless, we know that Lot was Abraham's nephew. The Greek word "adelphos" and "adelphoi" are only attempts to translate an unknown Aramaic word - and no one has any idea what the actual word was which is rendered in Greek and English as "brothers" or "brethren".

There could have been no "first blood" brothers of Christ, otherwise He would not have given the care of His mother to St. John the Theologian (John 19:26) at the foot of the Cross. Indeed, Christ would have done His 'brothers' great disrespect and harm if He had done this ! The Old Testament prophecies explain the virginal marriage and ever-virginity of Christ's mother, and we also have the testimony of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Church that Mary is "Ever-Virgin".

Further evidence from the Holy Scriptures that in the Hebrew tradition "brothers" and "sisters" are not necessarily siblings. Our Orthodox Tradition teaches us that the Holy Virgin Mary was the only child of Saints Joachim and Anna, but at John 19:25 we read, "Standing near the Cross of Jesus was His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary of Klopas, and Mary magdala." If our Church history is correct, how could Mary have had a sister? The first clue to our answer is that both women are named Mary. ! No family has two daughters and gives them both the same name! Therefore it is evident that the relationship between the two women has to be something different than our modern English concept of "sister". The second clue to our answer is that the Bible clearly identifies this Mary of Klopas (Cleopas in KJV), as the mother of Jesus' "brothers". The name Klopas or Cleopas is the same as Alphaeus in the Aramaic language which Jesus spoke. Therefore the so-called **brothers** of Jesus mentioned at Mark 6:3 are elsewhere clearly identified as the sons of Alphaeus and his wife Mary of Klopas - the "sister" of the Virgin Mary.

Thus the Scriptures show that the "brothers" of Christ are not His brothers, but some relation. There is no scriptural evidence to support the notion that the Virgin Mary bore any other children apart from Jesus Christ our God.

Seeing Him born as an infant in Bethlehem. Let all creation glorify Him!

All Glory be to Jesus Christ our God.

Adapted from  
**The Ever-Virginity of Mary, the Title Theotokos, and the veneration shown to Her**  
published by Synaxis Press

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## Theotokos (Mother of God)

Let us come now, with reverence and awe, to the greatest mystery of all - the virgin birth of Him Who pre-existed all existence, of Him Who is Existence itself. We do not propose to explain the mystery, to tell how the womb of a woman born in like manner as us could "contain Him Whom the whole universe cannot contain." Rather, we hope merely to clear up some of the questions arising from the facts.

Mary is the "mother of God." The title "Theotokos" means, literally, "the one who gave birth to God." At first consideration, and without some prayerful and Scriptural thought about these titles, they may sound shocking. How can a human, born under the fallen nature,



be "the mother of God." Surely we should call her only, "the mother of Jesus," or, "the mother of Christ," When we ask the question, "should we call Mary 'mother of God,' or only 'mother of Christ,' we suddenly realise that this question is not about Mary, but about Jesus Christ Himself. The actual question is this:

"Is Jesus only a special, anointed, Grace-filled servant of God, or is He, in very truth, God incarnate?"

In other words, "Do we believe in the Holy Trinity or not?" If we believe in the Holy Trinity, and Christ is truly God incarnate, then, of course, Mary is the "mother of God", "the Theotokos." If we reject the dogma of the Trinity and we believe that Jesus is only a specially anointed prophet, then we would refuse to call Mary "Theotokos," or "mother of God." We cannot have it both ways without playing blasphemous word games with the nature of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We will not pause to discuss this point at length, for it is simply resolved by the question, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your God and Saviour, or do you consider Him to be only a special human prophet?" We will take time only to repeat that this mystery cannot be grasped without prayerful, Scriptural contemplation of the matter. Some sectarians suggest that it would be better to think of Mary as the mother of only the human side of Jesus, the man.

Such a suggestion is made from weak human emotions and without thought or any form of Scriptural consciousness. If we said that the child in Mary's womb was not the complete Person, the incarnate God, then we are faced with several problems. First, it would mean that, for a time, Jesus was not God, then later, He became God, This is what some of the Gnostic heretics taught, and it is really Theosophy to say this. In the case of most sectarians, however, it is said only from ignorance and lack of serious thought about the matter. The other problem is that in Christian arguments against legalised "cosmetic" abortions, we argue that the fetus is a complete person, body and soul at conception. The teaching that only part of Jesus' nature was present in Mary's womb, and that His nature was completed later, after His birth, would seem to help justify



random abortion, for it means that the fetus is not the complete person. Moreover, if we accept two "births" of Jesus, one in which He was born only as a human, then Jesus was also under the fallen human nature, and Himself in need of redemption. His second "birth" in which God entered Him and made Him half God and half man, would be a completely occult, "new age" type of concept.

Thus, to be an actual Christian, and not a neo-gnostic who only borrows the name "Christian," one must accept that Mary is truly the Theotokos, the mother of God.

from **The Ever-Virginity of Mary, The Title Theotokos, and The Veneration shown to Her**,  
by Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, Synaxis Press, p. 1-2.

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# The Mystery of the Virgin Mary

by Archbishop Stylianos of Australia



The word "mystery" is of Greek derivation, and dates from pre-Christian times. For the ancient Greeks, "mysteries" were those religious rites which involved some process of "initiation", that is to say an introduction into and familiarisation with some "mystical" and hidden truths. The most well known of these rites were the "Eleusinian".

From the verb 'muw' (initiate) - which means "I half close my eyes" so that I can delve more deeply and ponder by limiting the external light which does not allow me to concentrate within - are derived the words "mystery", "mystical", "mystic", "mystagogy" etc, which all refer to the many-faceted and forever unsearchable reality of depth, in contrast to the flat presence of the surface. Christianity borrowed the word "mystery" from here, thereby giving it an even deeper and more sacred meaning. The "mysteries" of the idolaters are as far removed from the "mysteries" of the Church as the truths

of the world are from the truths of God.

The word "sacrament" is often used for mystery in modern Church terminology in order to express the visible "action" in the context of worship with which invisible grace is transmitted to the faithful. Thus we mainly speak of the seven mysteries or Sacraments of the Church without this of course signifying that the salvific grace of God is necessarily or exclusively bound by those concrete "actions".

There is however a more general meaning of the term "mystery" which expresses the undefined total of known and unknown truths which regulate the position and the relationships of the individual person with God and with fellow human beings, within the entire plan of Divine Economy. For, as it has been correctly stated, "no man is an island".

Within this broader and more general meaning, every human person possesses his or her own mystery, just like unique fingerprints, regardless of the external appearance of that person's life.

This mystery, while no doubt unknown to others, remains largely unknown even to the very person concerned.

Yet when the mystery of the individual person has a decisive significance for the salvation of others - and this is mainly true in the case of the Saints - then the personal mystery no longer remains a secret with seven seals. For, as the late Father Paisios had said, "the Saint hides himself, but the Grace of God reveals him". It "reveals" him not of course for the "praise of people", but for the salvation of many.

Thus, the confession and gratitude of those who benefit becomes, without even trying, a revelation and an amazing commentary on the hidden aspects of one's personal mystery.

If this follows in terms of "decoding" the unseen aspect of the mystery of each "chosen vessel" and instrument of divine grace in this world, then it is only natural that this should occur more profoundly in the incomparable "mystery" of the Virgin Mary.

The period of compunction in the first fifteen days of August, with traditional fasting and daily Supplication services, gives us again this year an opportunity to recall a few of the many benefactions of the Mother of God towards the whole human race. These truths however surpass logic, which is why we will appeal to the conscience of the faithful, rather than their logic. And we will recall several of the unique goods which the Virgin Mary, being "full of grace", has secured for us, and which she continues to maintain in our midst through her ceaseless "intercessions".

The leading theologian of the 14th century. St Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, in admiring the unsearchable "mystery" which the Virgin Mary silently crystallised at the centre of the Divine Economy, even goes as far as to say that Mary the Mother of God is "the cause of all those who have gone before her, and the guardian of all those who come after her". No matter how strange this description may seem for a creature of God -even if this is the Virgin Mary- we shall see below that this is not an enthusiastic exaggeration of love, nor a rhetorical device which is called "poetic licence". On the contrary, this statement is a most precise and profound theological definition, worthy of the great Teacher of Orthodoxy.

If theosis i.e. deification of the human person was the "pre-eternal will" of God, which looked towards the Incarnation, it is clear that the "giving" of human nature by the Virgin Mary to the Son and Word of God was the highest goal of the entire Creation. For this reason "all that was before her" are justifiably considered as being directed towards the Virgin Mary, as the "final cause". And precisely because she has such a crucial relationship with all who went before her, she is then the protector "of all who came after her". In this way, the Mother of God is presented as the "key" of all Creation.

Having the supreme and central soteriological event of incarnation as a foundation, we can easily verify various other corresponding features of the Virgin Mary, which give a more detailed account of her incomparable personal mystery and grandeur.

It was precisely this most central position and relationship of the Virgin Mary with the entire plan of the Divine Economy which allowed the Church Fathers to form and develop not only a typological, but also a substantial parallel between the Virgin Mary and the Church in general. The central axis of this parallel is the fact that both are simultaneously Mother and Virgin, having maternity and virginity absolutely, since both are brought about "by the Holy Spirit". The almost complete identification of the mystery of the Virgin Mary with the mystery of the entire Church is perfectly and epigrammatically expressed even in the Psalmic verse "glorious things are spoken of You, O city of God" (Ps 87:3). It is the unique case in all of Creation when one single person "represents" the entire city of God, that is to say the multitude of "people being deified". This image alone would be sufficient to declare for all time the breadth and depth of the mystery of the Virgin Mary, which she herself had confessed with contrition and appreciation when foretelling doxologically: "from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).

The fact that the gestation and incarnation of God the Word from the pure Mother of God was the climax and unique service towards humanity and the entire Creation, did not hinder St Maximos the Confessor from teaching that the unique example of the Virgin Mary must, in some sense, have a continuation and reflection in the life of each of the faithful. Every faithful person must "bring forth" the Word of God in his life and become, in a personal way, a kind of Bearer of God (Theotokos). This of course does not signify a repetition of the "hypostatic union", which would be an unacceptable heresy and blasphemy. However, what is meant here is of course a bringing

forth of the Word of God in a moral sense in each person through the divine grace which is afforded by the communion of the Holy Spirit, with the sacramental life of the Church.

At any rate, we shall approach the mystery of the Virgin Mary in an even better manner by remembering three specific aspects of her historical life, all of which express three fundamental features of her holy person:

- 1) utter humility and obedience
- 2) evervirginity
- 3) the divine Assumption with the Dormition

At first glance, one may tend to believe that the first of the three features above was in fact the cause from which the other two blossomed, as a kind of reward on the part of God. Yet a more careful examination will reveal that all three of these are equivalent or are, in other words, three different perspectives on the same reality with which God endowed her who is "full of grace".

The utter humility and obedience of the Virgin Mary means that she left herself totally in the hands of God. Upon this precise point the "evervirginity" of the Mother of God is founded and sealed for all time, which is also why we should not restrict this only to her bodily integrity, but rather to her entire conscience and person, which never permitted the slightest divergence (or wandering) from the divine will.

And when the rational creature of God, which is His icon, freely chooses utter humility, thereby maintaining the continual virginity with regard to the divine will, then it is clear that such a person has by the grace of God reached incorruptibility, which the Assumption infers.

Only in this way can the tomb be no longer a point of bankruptcy and a grievous end to a tormented life but, on the contrary, the beginning and prelude to the "eighth day", something which allows us to chant within the formal worship of the Church:

"O marvellous wonder!  
The source of life is laid in the tomb,  
and the tomb itself becomes a ladder to heaven..."

For this very reason the early Church considered the "Birthday" not to be one's birth into the world, with all of the uncertainties that would follow, but rather the day of one's falling asleep in the Lord, which definitely sealed not only earthly time, but also the final physiognomy of that person in the Kingdom of God. This is also why the Orthodox, when keeping their Tradition, celebrate namedays rather than birthdays.

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## Miraculous Icon of Axion Esti

by Fr G. Poulos

Within discussions of Orthodoxy, the Holy Mountain of Mt. Athos does get mentioned many times. Mt. Athos itself is what we call a "Spiritual Republic." It is an independent state which pledges allegiance only to Almighty God. Mt. Athos which is perched on a peninsula 20 miles long and seven miles wide is off the Macedonian Coast. The monasteries there are among the oldest in Christendom. Monks, hermits and holy men have lived there since the third century.

During the Byzantine Era, the total population exceeded 50,000. No women have ever been allowed on Mt. Athos. The Blessed Ever-Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, is the "Patron Saint" of the Spiritual Republic of Mt. Athos. In one of the magnificent monasteries there is a huge icon on the Blessed Virgin Mary which has been titled "Axion Esti," meaning **'it is worthy to bless Thee, the Virgin'**. This beautiful icon was painted in the seventh century and has since graced the sacred walls of the Cathedral of Mt. Athos.



Today we commemorate the anniversary of the miracle which took place in front of this icon over 1,000 years ago, on June 11, 980 (A.D.). During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy every Sunday, we hear the beautiful, and inspiring hymn called "Axion Esti" which follows the prayer (as we kneel) called the "Epiklesis." This hymn was written originally in the year 720 by St. Cosmas, one of the greatest hymnographers of the Christian Church. The hymn, however, began with the words "Thee that art more honourable than the Cherubim (Tin Timioteran)." It was well over one hundred years later that this hymn was added to the Divine Liturgy, but with an added beginning as the result of the following miraculous event:

On June 11, 980 A.D. as a group of monks were conducting an all-night vigil before the icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they suddenly noticed a monk standing on the right of the icon whom they did not recognise at all. He was unknown to the monks, and no one could explain his abrupt presence. This unidentified monk began to chant the beautiful hymn written by St. Cosmas, but rather began with the words "Axion Esti os Alethos Makarizin Se Tin Theotokon" which means "It is very meet to bless Thee, Theotokos the ever blessed and most pure Virgin and Mother of God." The monk then explained to the others that he was the Arch-angel Gabriel and that these words should be added to the hymn. The Arch-angel then vanished from their sight, leaving the monks amazed at the power of God. Since that day on June 11, 980 A.D. the additional words to the hymn of St. Cosmas have been sung by all Orthodox Christians around the world. The icon of the Blessed Mother Axion Esti is still venerated today in the Cathedral of Mt. Athos.

"It is meet indeed to bless Thee, the ever-blessed and most pure and Mother of our God. Thee that

art more honourable than the Cherubim, and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim, who without spot of sin didst bear God the Word; Thee, verily the Mother of God, we magnify".

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## The Orthodox veneration of the Theotokos (Mother of God)

by Blessed Archbishop John Maximovitch

The Orthodox Church teaches about the Mother of God that which Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture have informed concerning Her, and daily it glorifies Her in its temples, asking Her help and defence. Knowing that She is pleased only by those praises which correspond to Her actual glory, the Holy Fathers and hymn-writers have entreated Her and Her Son to teach them how to hymn Her. "Set a rampart about my mind, O my Christ, for I make bold to sing the praise of Thy pure Mother" (Ikos of the Dormition). "The Church teaches that Christ was truly born of Mary Ever-Virgin" (St. Epiphanius, "True Word Concerning the Faith").



"It is essential for us to confess that the holy Ever-Virgin Mary is actually Theotokos (Birth-giver of God), so as not to fall into blasphemy. For those who deny that the Holy Virgin is actually Theotokos are no longer believers, but disciples of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (St. Ephraim the Syrian, "To John the Monk").

From Tradition it is known that Mary was the daughter of the aged Joachim and Anna, and that Joachim descended from the royal line of David, and Anna from the priestly line. Notwithstanding such a noble origin, they were poor. However, it was not this that saddened these righteous ones, but rather the fact they did not have children and could not hope that their descendants would see the Messiah. And behold, when once, being disdained by the Hebrews for their barrenness, they both in grief of soul were offering up prayers to God - Joachim on a mountain to which he had retired after the priest did not want to offer his sacrifice in the Temple and Anna, in her own garden, weeping over her barrenness -- there appeared to them an angel who informed them that they would bring forth a daughter. Overjoyed, they promised to consecrate their child to God.

In nine months a daughter was born to them, called Mary, Who from Her early childhood manifested the best qualities of soul. When She was three years old, her parents, fulfilling their promise, solemnly led the little Mary to the Temple of Jerusalem; She Herself ascended the high steps and, by revelation from God, She was led into the very Holy of Holies by the High Priest who met Her, taking with Her the grace of God which rested upon Her into the Temple which until then had been without grace. (See the Kontakion of the Entry into the Temple. This was the newly-built Temple into which the glory of God had not descended as it had upon the Ark or upon the Temple of Solomon). She was settled in the quarters for virgins which existed in the Temple, but She spent so much time in prayer in the Holy of Holies that one might say that She lived in it. (Service to the Entry, second Sticheron on "Lord, I have cried," and the "Glory, Both Now Being adorned with all virtues, She manifested an example of extraordinarily pure life. Being submissive and obedient in all, She offended no one, said no crude word to anyone, was friendly to all and did not allow any unclean thought (abridged from St. Ambrose of Milan,

"Concerning the Ever-Virginity of the Virgin Mary").

"Despite the righteousness and the immaculateness of life which the Mother of God led, sin and eternal death manifested their presence in Her. They could not but be manifested: Such is the precise and faithful teaching of the Orthodox Church concerning the Mother of God with relation to original sin and death" (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, "Exposition of the Teaching of the Orthodox Church on the Mother of God"). "A stranger to any fall into sin" (St. Ambrose of Milan, Commentary on the 118th Psalm), She was not a stranger to sinful temptations. "God alone is without sin" (St. Ambrose, same source), while man will always have in himself something yet needing correction and perfection in order to fulfil the commandment of God; Be ye holy as I the Lord your God am Holy (Leviticus 19:2). The more pure and perfect one is, the more he notices his imperfections and considers himself all the more unworthy.

The Virgin Mary, having given Herself entirely up to God, even though She repulsed from herself every impulse to sin, still felt the weakness of human nature more powerfully than others and ardently desired the coming of the Saviour. In Her humility She considered Herself unworthy to be even the servant-girl of the Virgin Who was to give Him birth. So that nothing might distract Her from prayer and heedfulness to Herself, Mary gave to God a vow not to become married, in order to please only Him Her whole life long. Being betrothed to the elderly Joseph when Her age no longer allowed Her to remain in the Temple, She settled in his house in Nazareth. Here the Virgin was vouchsafed the coming of the Archangel Gabriel who brought Her the good tidings of the birth from Her of the Son of the Most High. Hail, Thou that art full of grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou among women ... The Holy Spirit shall come upon Thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow Thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be holy and shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:28-35).

Mary received the angelic good tidings humbly and submissively. "Then the Word, in a way known to Himself, descended and, as He Himself willed, came and entered into Mary and abode in Her" (St. Ephraim the Syrian, "Praise of the Mother of God"). "As lightning illuminates what is hidden, so also Christ purifies what is hidden in the nature of things. He purified the Virgin also and then was born, so as to show that where Christ is, there is manifest purity in all its power. He purified the Virgin, having prepared Her by the Holy Spirit, and then the womb, having become pure, conceived Him. He purified the Virgin while She was inviolate; wherefore, having been born, He left Her virgin. I do not say that Mary became immortal, but that being illuminated by grace, She was not disturbed by sinful desires" (St. Ephraim the Syrian, Homily Against Heretics, 41). The Light abode in Her, cleansed Her mind, made Her thoughts pure, made chaste Her concerns, sanctified Her virginity" (St. Ephraim the Syrian, "Mary and Eve") "Once who was pure according to human understanding, He made pure by grace" (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, "Exposition of the Teaching of the Orthodox Church on the Mother of God").

Mary told no one of the appearance of the angel, but the angel himself revealed to Joseph concerning Mary's miraculous conception from the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18-25); and after the Nativity of Christ, with a multitude of the heavenly host, he announced it to the shepherds. The shepherds, coming to worship the new-born one, said that they had heard of Him. Having previously endured suspicion in silence, Mary now also listened in silence and kept in her heart the sayings concerning the greatness of Her Son (Luke 2:8-19). She heard forty days later Symeon's prayer of praise and the prophecy concerning the weapon which would pierce Her soul. Later She saw how Jesus advanced in wisdom; She heard Him at the age of twelve teaching in the Temple and everything She kept in Her heart (Luke 2:21-51)

Even though full of grace, She did not yet fully understand in what the service and the greatness of Her Son would consist. The Hebrew conceptions of the Messiah were still close to Her and natural feelings forced Her to be concerned for Him, preserving Him from labours and dangers



which it might seem, were excessive. Therefore She favoured Her Son involuntarily at first, which evoked His indication of the superiority of spiritual to bodily kinship (Matt. 12:46-49). "He had concern also over the honour of His Mother, but much more over the salvation of Her soul and the good of men, for which He had become clothed in flesh" (St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on John, Homily 21). Mary understood this and heard the word of God and kept it (Luke 11:27,28). As no other person, She had the same feelings as Christ (Phil. 2:5), uncomplainingly bearing the grief of a mother when She saw Her Son persecuted and suffering. Rejoicing in the day of the Resurrection, on the day of Pentecost. She was clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). The Holy Spirit Who descended upon Her taught (Her) all things (John 14:26), and instructed (Her) in all truth (John 16:13). Being enlightened, She began to labour all the more zealously to perform what She had heard from Her Son and Redeemer, so as to ascend to Him and be with Him.

The end of the earthly life of the Most Holy Mother of God was the beginning of Her greatness. "Being adorned with Divine glory" (Irmos of the Canon of the Dormition), She stands and will stand, both in the day of the Last Judgment and in the future age, at the right hand of the throne of Her Son. She reigns with Him and has boldness towards Him as His Mother according to the flesh and as one in spirit with Him, as one who performed the will of God and instructed others (Matt. 5:19). Merciful and full of love, She manifests Her love towards Her Son and God in love for the human race. She intercedes for it before the Merciful One, and going about the earth, She helps men.

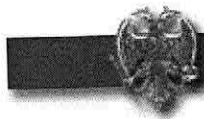
Having experienced all the difficulties of earthly life, the Intercessor of the Christian race sees every tear, hears every groan and entreaty directed to Her. Especially near to Her are those who labour in the battle with the passions and are zealous for a God-pleasing life. But even in worldly cares She is an irreplaceable helper. "Joy of all who sorrow, and intercessors for the offended, and feeder of the hungry, consolation of travellers, harbour of the storm-tossed, visitation of the sick, protection and intercessor for the infirm staff of old age, Thou art the Mother of God on high, O Most Pure One" (Sticheron of the Service to the Hodigitria). "The hope and intercession and refuge of Christians", "The Mother of God unceasing in prayers" (Theotokion of the Third Tone). "She day and night doth pray for us and the sceptres of kingdoms are confirmed by Her prayers" (daily Nocturne).

There is no intellect or words to express the greatness of Her Who was born in the sinful human race but became "more honourable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." "Seeing the grace of the secret mysteries of God made manifest and clearly fulfilled in the Virgin, I rejoice; and I know not how to understand the strange and secret manner whereby the Undefined has been revealed as alone chosen above all creation, visible and spiritual. Therefore, wishing to praise Her, I am struck dumb with amazement in both mind and speech. Yet still I dare to proclaim and magnify Her: She is indeed the heavenly Tabernacle" (Ikos of the Entry into the Temple). "Every tongue is at a loss to praise Thee as is due; even a spirit from the world above is filled with dizziness, when it seeks to sing Thy praises, O Theotokos. But since Thou art good, accept our faith. Thou knowest well our love inspired by God, for Thou art the Protector of Christians and we magnify Thee" (Irmos of the 9th Canticle, Service of the Theophany).

from **The Orthodox veneration of the Mother of God**

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## A prayer to the incorruptible maiden

O Theotokos, Virgin Mary, it is indeed a dread and ineffable mystery, what has been done in you.

For you, indeed, gave birth to the Word, who is the cause of all things, and Who is the cause of all things, and Who was incarnated by the Holy Spirit, beyond any cause or reason.

For from you, who remained unchangeable, He received flesh of His own divine immutable and unaltered nature.

Since in Him coexisted the two natures, the divine and human, in one hypostasis, He was dual in natures, a whole man and a God as well, showing the perfect wholeness and having all the energies of the characteristics of both.

As a mortal He was crucified in flesh voluntarily but as God during His passion, He overcame His passion.

As a mortal He died, but as God He was risen.

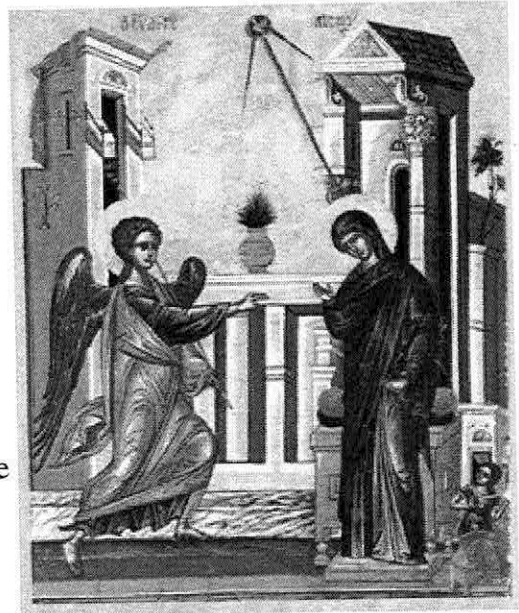
As a mortal He was laid in a tomb, but as God He was in Hades, defeating the power of death and saving men.

Him, O Virgin Mary, most-pure Theotokos, the Saviour and Redeemer of the human race, that He may send down from heaven to us joy and peace.

From you, O Holy Virgin, Christ was born, who was God eternally, but appeared as a man recently.

He kept for Himself, in a divine and unconfusable union, the properties of both natures; He showed the divine with glorious wonders, while He proved the human nature with His sufferings. Therefore, although he was one in one godly-human hypostasis, He dies in the flesh as man, yet He rises from the dead as God.

Him, O Virgin Mary, most-pure Theotokos, as one who has boldness entreat that He may be compassionate and save from condemnation those who praise you unceasingly.



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# A Homily on the Dormition of Our Supremely Pure Lady Theotokos and Ever- Virgin Mary

by St. Gregory Palamas (1296 - 1359 AD)

"Both love and duty today fashion my homily for your charity. It is not only that I wish, because of my love for you, and because I am obliged by the sacred canons, to bring to your God-loving ears a saving word and thus to nourish your souls, but if there be any among those things that bind by obligation and love and can be narrated with praise for the Church, it is the great deed of the Ever-Virgin Mother of God. The desire is double, not single, since it induces me, entreats and persuades me, whereas the inexorable duty constrains me, though speech cannot attain to what surpasses it, just as the eye is unable to look fixedly upon the sun. One cannot utter things which surpass speech, yet it is within our power by the love for mankind of those hymned, to compose a song of praise and all at once both to leave untouched intangible things, to satisfy the debt with words and to offer up the first fruits of our love for the Mother of God in hymns composed according to our abilities.

If, then, "death of the righteous man is honourable" (c.f. Ps. 115:6) and the "memory of the just man is celebrated with songs of praise" (Prov. 10:7). How much more ought we to honour with great praises the memory of the holiest of the saints, she by whom all holiness is afforded to the saints, I mean the Ever-Virgin Mother of God! Even so we celebrate today her holy Dormition or translation to another life, whereby, while being "a little lower than angels" (Ps. 8:6), by her proximity to the God of all, and in the wondrous deeds which from the beginning of time were written down and accomplished with respect to her, she has ascended incomparably higher than the angels and the archangels and all the super-celestial hosts that are found beyond them. For her sake the God-possessed prophets pronounce prophecies, miracles are wrought to foreshow that future Marvel of the whole world, the Ever-Virgin Theotokos (Mother of God). The flow of generations and circumstances journeys to the destination of that new mystery wrought in her; the statutes of the Spirit provide beforehand types of the future truth. The end, or rather the beginning and root, of those divine wonders and deeds is the annunciation to the supremely virtuous Joachim and Anna of what was to be accomplished: namely, that they who were barren from youth would beget in deep old age her that would bring forth without seed Him that was timelessly begotten of God the Father before the ages. A vow was given by those who marvellously begot her to return her that was given to the Giver; so accordingly the Mother of God strangely changed her dwelling from the house of her father to the house of God while still an infant. She passed not a few years in the Holy of Holies itself, wherein under the care of an angel she enjoyed ineffable nourishment such as even Adam did not succeed in tasting; for indeed if he had, like this immaculate one, he would not have fallen away from life, even though it was because of Adam and so that she might prove to be his daughter, that she yielded a little to nature, as did her Son, Who has now ascended from earth into heaven.

But after that unutterable nourishment, a most mystical economy of courtship came to pass as regards the Virgin, a strange greeting surpassing speech which the Archangel, descended from above, addressed to her, and disclosures and salutations from God which overturn the condemnation of Eve and Adam and remedy the curse laid on them, transforming it into a blessing. The King of all "hath desired a mystic beauty" of the Ever-Virgin, as David foretold (Ps.



44:11) and, "He bowed the heavens and came down" (Ps. 17:9) and overshadowed her, or rather, the enhypostatic Power of the Most High dwelt in her. Not through darkness and fire, as with Moses the God-seer, nor through tempest and cloud, as with Elias the prophet, did He manifest His presence, but without mediation, without a veil, the Power of the Most High overshadowed the sublimely chaste and virginal womb, separated by nothing, neither air nor aether nor anything sensible, nor anything supra-sensible: this was not an overshadowing but a complete union. Since what overshadows is always wont to produce its own form and figure in whatever is overshadowed, there came to pass in the womb not a union only, but further, a formation, and that thing formed from the Power of the Most High and the all-holy virginal womb was the incarnate Word of God. Thus the Word of God took up His dwelling in the Theotokos in an inexpressible manner and proceeded from her, bearing flesh. He appeared upon the earth and lived among men, deifying our nature and granting us, after the words of the divine Apostle, "things which angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:12). This is the encomium which transcends nature and the surpassingly glorious glory of the Ever-Virgin, glory for which all mind and word suffice not, though they be angelic. But who can relate those things which came to pass after His ineffable birth? For, as she co-operated and suffered with that exalting condescension (kenosis) of the Word of God, she was also rightly glorified and exalted together with Him, ever adding thereto the supernatural increase of mighty deeds. And after the ascent into the heavens of Him that was incarnate of her, she rivalled, as it were, those great works, surpassing mind and speech, which through Him were her own, with a most valiant and diverse asceticism, and with her prayers and care for the entire world, her precepts and encouragement which she gave to God's heralds sent throughout the whole world; thus she was herself both a support and a comfort while she was both heard and seen, and while she labored with the rest in every way for the preaching of the Gospel. In such wise she led a most strenuous manner of life proclaimed in mind and speech.

Therefore, the death of the Theotokos was also life-bearing, translating her into a celestial and immortal life and its commemoration is a joyful event and festivity for the entire world. It not merely renews the memory of the wondrous deeds of the Mother of God, but also adds thereto the strange gathering at her all-sacred burial of all the sacred apostles conveyed from every nation, the God-revealing hymns of these God-possessed ones, and the solicitous presence of the angels, and their choir, and liturgy round about her, going on before, following after, assisting, opposing, defending, being defended. They labored and chanted together to their uttermost with those who venerated that life- originating and God-receiving body, the saving balsam for our race and the boast of all creation; but they strove against and opposed with a secret hand the Jews who rose up against and attacked that body with hand and will set upon theomachy. All the while the Lord Sabaoth Himself, the Son of the Ever-Virgin, was present, into Whose hands she rendered her divinely-minded spirit, through which and with which its companion, her body, was translated into the domain of celestial and endless life, even as was and is fitting. In truth, many have been allotted divine favour and glory and power, as David says, "But to me exceedingly honourable are Thy friends, O Lord, their principalities are made exceeding strong. I will count them and they shall be multiplied more than the sand" (Ps. 138:17). And according to Solomon, "many daughters have attained wealth, many have wrought valiantly; but she doth exceed, she hath surpassed all, both men and women" (c.f. Prov. 31:29). For while she alone stood between God and the whole human race, God became the Son of Man and made men sons of God; she made earth heavenly, she deified the human race, and she alone of all women was shown forth to be a mother by nature and the Mother of God transcending every law of nature, and by her ineffable childbirth-the Queen of all creation, both terrestrial and celestial. Thus she exalted those under her through herself, and, showing while on earth an obedience to things heavenly rather than things earthly, she partook of more excellent deserts and of superior power, and from the ordination which she received from heaven by the Divine Spirit, she became the most sublime of the sublime and the supremely blest Queen of a blessed race.

But now the Mother of God has her dwelling in Heaven whither she was today translated, for this



is meet, Heaven being a suitable place for her. She "stands at the right of the King of all clothed in a vesture wrought with gold and arrayed with divers colours" (c.f. Ps. 44:9), as the psalmic prophecy says concerning her. By "vesture wrought with gold" understand her divinely radiant body arrayed with divers colours of every virtue. She alone in her body, glorified by God, now enjoys the celestial realm together with her Son. For, earth and grave and death did not hold forever her life-originating and God-receiving body -the dwelling more favoured than Heaven and the Heaven of heavens. If, therefore, her soul, which was an abode of God's grace, ascended into Heaven when bereaved of things here below, a thing which is abundantly evident, how could it be that the body which not only received in itself the pre-eternal and only-begotten Son of God, the ever-flowing Wellspring of grace, but also manifested His Body by way of birth, should not have also been taken up into Heaven? Or, if while yet three years of age and not yet possessing that super- celestial in-dwelling, she seemed not to bear our flesh as she abode in the Holy of Holies, and after she became supremely perfect even as regards her body by such great marvels, how indeed could that body suffer corruption and turn to earth? How could such a thing be conceivable for anyone who thinks reasonably? Hence, the body which gave birth is glorified together with what was born of it with God-befitting glory, and the "ark of holiness" (Ps. 131:8) is resurrected, after the prophetic ode, together with Christ Who formerly arose from the dead on the third day. The strips of linen and the burial clothes afford the apostles a demonstration of the Theotokos' resurrection from the dead, since they remained alone in the tomb and at the apostles' scrutiny they were found there, even as it had been with the Master. There was no necessity for her body to delay yet a little while in the earth, as was the case with her Son and God, and so it was taken up straightway from the tomb to a super-celestial realm, from whence she flashes forth most brilliant and divine illuminations and graces, irradiating earth's region; thus she is worshipped and marvelled at and hymned by all the faithful. Willing to set up an image of all goodness and beauty and to make clearly manifest His own therein to both angels and men, God fashioned a being supremely good and beautiful, uniting in her all good, seen and unseen, which when He made the world He distributed to each thing and thereby adorned all; or rather one might say, He showed her forth as a universal mixing bowl of all divine, angelic and human things good and beautiful and the supreme beauty which embellished both worlds. By her ascension now from the tomb, she is taken from the earth and attains to Heaven and this also she surpasses, uniting those on high with those below, and encompassing all with the wondrous deed wrought in her. In this manner she was in the beginning "a little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:6), as it is said, referring to her mortality, yet this only served to magnify her pre-eminence as regards all creatures. Thus all things today fittingly gather and commune for the festival.

It was meet that she who contained Him that fills all things and who surpasses all should outstrip all and become by her virtue superior to them in the eminence of her dignity. Those things which sufficed the most excellent among men that have lived throughout the ages in order to reach such excellency, and that which all those graced of God have separately, both angels and men, she combines, and these she alone brings to fulfilment and surpasses. And this she now has beyond all: That she has become immortal after death and alone dwells together with her Son and God in her body. For this reason she pours forth from thence abundant grace upon those who honour her -for she is a receptacle of great graces -and she grants us even our ability to look towards her. Because of her goodness she lavishes sublime gifts upon us and never ceases to provide a profitable and abundant tribute in our behalf. If a man looks towards this concurrence and dispensing of every good, he will say that the Virgin is for virtue and those who live virtuously, what the sun is for perceptible light and those who live in it. But if he raises the eye of his mind to the Sun which rose for men from this Virgin in a wondrous manner, the Sun which by nature possesses all those (qualities which were added to her nature by grace, he shall straightaway call the Virgin a heaven. The excellent inheritance of every good which she has been allotted so much exceeds in holiness the portion of those who are divinely graced both under and above heaven as the heaven is greater than the sun and the sun is more radiant than heaven.

Who can describe in words thy divinely resplendent beauty, O Virgin Mother of God? Thoughts and words are inadequate to define thine attributes, since they surpass mind and speech. Yet it is meet to chant hymns of praise to thee, for thou art a vessel containing every grace, the fullness of all things good and beautiful, the tablet and living icon of every good and all uprightness, since thou alone hast been deemed worthy to receive the fullness of every gift of the Spirit. Thou alone didst bear in thy womb Him in Whom are found the treasures of all these gifts and didst become a wondrous tabernacle for Him; hence thou didst depart by way of death to immortality and art translated from earth to Heaven, as is proper, so that thou mightest dwell with Him eternally in a super-celestial abode. From thence thou ever carest diligently for thine inheritance and by thine unsleeping intercessions with Him, thou showest mercy to all.

To the degree that she is closer to God than all those who have drawn nigh unto Him, by so much has the Theotokos been deemed worthy of greater audience. I do not speak of men alone, but also of the angelic hierarchies themselves. Isaiah writes with regard to the supreme commanders of the heavenly hosts: "And the seraphim stood round about Him" (Isaiah 6:2); but David says concerning her, "at Thy right hand stood the queen" (Ps. 44:8). Do you see the difference in position? From this comprehend also the difference in the dignity of their station. The seraphim are round about God, but the only Queen of all is near beside Him. She is both wondered at and praised by God Himself, proclaiming her, as it were, by the mighty deeds enacted with respect to Him, and saying, as it is recorded in the Song of Songs, "How fair is my companion" (c.f. Song of Songs 6:4), she is more radiant than light, more arrayed with flowers than the divine gardens, more adorned than the whole world, visible and invisible. She is not merely a companion but she also stands at God's right hand, for where Christ sat in the heavens, that is, at the "right hand of majesty" (Heb. 1:3), there too she also takes her stand, having ascended now from earth into the heavens. Not merely does she love and is loved in return more than every other, according to the very laws of nature, but she is truly His Throne, and wherever the King sits, there His Throne is set also. And Isaiah beheld this throne amidst the choir of cherubim and called it "high" and "exalted" (Isaiah 6:1), wishing to make explicit how the station of the Mother of God is far stranger than that of the celestial hosts.

For this reason the Prophet introduces the angels themselves as glorifying the God come from her, saying, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His Place" (Ezek. 3:12). Jacob the patriarch, beholding this throne by way of types (enigmata), said, "How dreadful is this Place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven" (Gen. 28:17). But David, joining himself to the multitude of the saved, who are like the strings of a musical instrument or like differing voices from different generations made harmonious in one faith through the Ever-Virgin, sounds a most melodic strain in praise of her, saying: "I shall commemorate thy name in every generation and generation. Therefore shall peoples give praise unto thee for ever, and unto the ages of ages." Do you see how the entire creation praises the Virgin Mother, and not only in times past, but "for ever, and unto the ages of ages"? Thus it is evident that throughout the whole course of the ages, she shall never cease from benefiting all creation, and I mean not only created nature seen round about us, but also the very supreme commanders of the heavenly hosts, whose nature is immaterial and transcendent. Isaiah shows us clearly that it is only through her that they together with us both partake of and touch God, that Nature which defies touch, for he did not see the seraphim take the coal from the altar without mediation, but with tongs, by means of which the coal touched the prophetic lips and purified them (c.f. Isaiah 6:6-7). Moses beheld the tongs of that great vision of Isaiah when he saw the bush aflame with fire, yet unconsumed. And who does not know that the Virgin Mother is that very bush and those very tongs, she who herself (though an archangel also assisted at the conception) conceived the Divine Fire without being consumed, Him that taketh away the sins of the world, Who through her touched mankind and by that ineffable touch and union cleansed us entirely. Therefore, she only is the frontier between created and uncreated nature, and there is no man that shall come to God except he be truly illumined through her, that Lamp truly radiant with divinity, even as the Prophet says, "God is in the midst

of her, she shall not be shaken'(Ps. 45:5).

If recompense is bestowed according to the measure of love for God, and if the man who loves the Son is loved of Him and of His Father and becomes the dwelling place of Both, and They mystically abide and walk in him, as it is recorded in the Master's Gospel, who, then, will love Him more than His Mother? For, He was her only-begotten Son, and moreover she alone among women gave birth knowing no spouse, so that the love of Him that had partaken of her flesh might be shared with her twofold. And who will the only-begotten Son love more than His Mother, He that came forth from Her ineffably without a father in this last age even as He came forth from the Father without a mother before the ages'? How indeed could He that descended to fulfil the Law not multiply that honour due to His Mother over and above the ordinances of the Law?

Hence, as it was through the Theotokos alone that the Lord came to us, appeared upon earth and lived among men, being invisible to all before this time, so likewise in the endless age to come, without her mediation, every emanation of illuminating divine light, every revelation of the mysteries of the Godhead, every form of spiritual gift, will exceed the capacity of every created being. She alone has received the all-pervading fullness of Him that filleth all things, and through her all may now contain it, for she dispenses it according to the power of each, in proportion and to the degree of the purity of each. Hence she is the treasury and overseer of the riches of the Godhead. For it is an everlasting ordinance in the heavens that the inferior partake of what lies beyond being, by the mediation of the superior, and the Virgin Mother is incomparably superior to all. It is through her that as many as partake of God do partake, and as many as know God understand her to be the enclosure of the Uncontainable One, and as many as hymn God praise her together with Him. She is the cause of what came before her, the champion of what came after her and the agent of things eternal. She is the substance of the prophets, the principle of the apostles, the firm foundation of the martyrs and the premise of the teachers of the Church. She is the glory of those upon earth, the joy of celestial beings, the adornment of all creation. She is the beginning and the source and root of unutterable good things; she is the summit and consummation of everything holy.

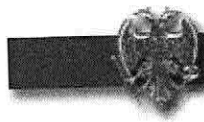
O divine, and now heavenly, Virgin, how can I express all things which pertain to thee? How can I glorify the treasury of all glory? Merely thy memory sanctifies whoever keeps it, and a mere movement towards thee makes the mind more translucent, and thou dost exalt it straightway to the Divine. The eye of the intellect is through thee made limpid, and through thee the spirit of a man is illumined by the sojourning of the Spirit of God, since thou hast become the steward of the treasury of divine gifts and their vault, and this, not in order to keep them for thyself, but so that thou mightest make created nature replete with grace. Indeed, the steward of those inexhaustible treasures watches over them so that the riches may be dispensed; and what could confine that wealth which wanes not? Richly, therefore, bestow thy mercy and thy graces upon all thy people, this thine inheritance, O Lady! Dispel the perils which menace us. See how greatly we are expended by our own and by aliens, by those without and by those within. Uplift all by thy might: mollify our fellow citizens one with another and scatter those who assault us from without-like savage beasts. Measure out thy succour and healing in proportion to our passions, apportioning abundant grace to our souls and bodies, sufficient for every necessity. And although we may prove incapable of containing thy bounties, augment our capacity and in this manner bestow them upon us, so that being both saved and fortified by thy grace, we may glorify the pre-eternal Word Who was incarnate of thee for our sakes, together with His unoriginate Father and the life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the endless ages. Amen."

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# The consequences of the Fall

by Bishop Kallistos Ware

Created for fellowship with the Holy Trinity, called to advance in love from the divine image to the divine likeness, man chose instead a path that led not up but down. He repudiated the Godward relationship that is his true essence. Instead of acting as mediator and unifying centre, he produced division: division within himself, division between himself and 'other men, division between himself and the world of nature. Entrusted by God with the gift of freedom, he systematically denied freedom to his fellows. Blessed with the power to reshape the world and to endue it with fresh meaning, he misused that power in order to fashion instruments of ugliness and destruction. The consequences of this misuse, more particularly since the industrial revolution, have now become hideously apparent in the rapid pollution of the environment:

The 'original sin' of man, his turning from God-centredness to self-centredness, meant first and foremost that he no longer looked upon the world and other human beings in a eucharistic way, as a sacrament of communion with God. He ceased to regard them as a gift, to be offered back in thanksgiving to the Giver, and he began to treat them as his own possession, to be grasped, exploited and devoured. So he no longer saw other persons and things as they are in themselves and in God, and he saw them only in terms of the pleasure and satisfaction which they could give to him. And the result of this was that he was caught in the vicious circle of his own lust, which grew more hungry the more it was gratified. The world ceased to be transparent -- a window through which he gazed on God -- and it grew opaque; it ceased to be life-giving, and became subject to corruption and mortality, 'For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Gen. 3:19). This is true of fallen man and of every created thing, so soon as it is cut off from the one source of life, God himself.

The effects of man's fall were both physical and moral. On the physical level human beings became subject to pain and disease, to the debility and bodily disintegration of old age. Woman's joy in bringing forth new life became mixed with the pangs of childbirth (Gen. 3:16). None of this was part of God's initial plan for humanity. In consequence of the fall, men and women also became subject to the separation of soul and body in physical death. Yet physical death should be seen, not primarily as a punishment, but as a means of release provided by a loving God. In his mercy God did not wish men to go on living indefinitely in a fallen world, caught for ever in the vicious circle of their own devising; and so he provided a way of escape. For death is not the end of life but the beginning of its renewal. We look, beyond physical death, to the future reunion of body and soul at the general resurrection on the Last Day. In separating our body and soul at death, therefore, God is acting like the potter: when the vessel upon his wheel has become marred and twisted, he breaks the clay in pieces so as to fashion it anew (compare Jer. 18:1-6). This is emphasised in the Orthodox funeral service:

Of old thou hast created me from nothing, And honoured me with thy divine image;  
But when I disobeyed thy commandment, Thou hast returned me to the earth whence  
I was taken.

Lead me back again to thy likeness, Refashioning my ancient beauty.

On the moral level, in consequence of the fall, human beings became subject to frustration,



boredom, depression. Work, which was intended to be a source of joy for man and a means of communion with God, had now to be performed for the most part unwillingly, 'in the sweat of the face' (Gen. 3:19). Nor was this all. Man became subject to inward alienation: weakened in will, divided against himself, he became his own enemy and executioner. As St Paul puts it, 'I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells nothing good. I am able to choose with my will, but how I am actually to carry out what is good I do not know. For the good which I choose I do not do; but the evil which I do not choose, that I do... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me?' (Rom. 7:18,19,24). Here St Paul is not just saying that there is a conflict within us between good and evil. He is saying that, all too often, we find ourselves morally paralysed: we sincerely desire to choose the good, but we find ourselves caught in a situation where all our choices result in evil. And each of us knows from personal experience exactly what St Paul means. St Paul, however, is careful to say: 'I know that in my flesh dwells nothing good'. Our ascetic warfare is against the flesh, not against the body as such. 'Flesh' is not the same as 'body'. The term flesh, as used in the passage just quoted, signifies whatever within us is sinful and opposed to God; thus it is not only the body but the soul in fallen man that has become fleshly and carnal. We are to hate the flesh, but we are not to hate the body, which is God's handiwork and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Ascetic self-denial is thus a fight against the flesh, but it is a fight not against but for the body. As Fr Sergei Bulgakov used to say, 'Kill the flesh, in order to acquire a body.' Asceticism is not self-enslavement, but the way to freedom. Man is a tangled mesh of self-contradictions: only through asceticism can he gain spontaneity. Asceticism, understood in this sense as a struggle against the flesh, against the sinful and fallen aspect of the self, is clearly something that is required from all Christians, and not only from those under monastic vows. The monastic vocation and that of marriage -- the way of negation and the way of affirmation -- are to be seen as parallel and complementary. The monk or nun is not a dualist but, to the same degree as the married Christian, is seeking to proclaim the intrinsic goodness of the material creation and of the human body; and, by the same token, the married Christian is called to asceticism. The difference lies solely in the outward conditions under which the ascetic warfare is carried on. Both alike are ascetics, both alike are materialists (using the word in its true Christian sense). Both alike are sin-denying and world-affirming. The Orthodox tradition, without minimising the effects of the fall, does not however believe that it resulted in a 'total depravity', such as the Calvinists assert in their more pessimistic moments. The divine image in man was obscured but not obliterated. His free choice has been restricted in its exercise but not destroyed. Even in a fallen world man is still capable of generous self-sacrifice and loving compassion. Even in a fallen world man still retains some knowledge of God and can enter by grace into communion with him. There are many saints in the pages of the Old Testament, men and women such as Abraham and Sarah, Joseph and Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah; and outside the Chosen People of Israel there are figures such as Socrates who not only taught the truth but lived it. Yet it remains true that human sin -- the original sin of Adam, compounded by the personal sins of each succeeding generation -- has set a gulf between God and man such that man by his own efforts could not bridge.

## No one falls alone

For the Orthodox tradition, then, Adam's original sin affects the human race in its entirety, and it has consequences both on the physical and the moral level: it results not only in sickness and physical death, but in moral weakness and paralysis. But does it also imply an inherited guilt? Here Orthodoxy is more guarded. Original sin is not to be interpreted in juridical or quasi-biological terms, as if it were some physical 'taint' of guilt, transmitted through sexual intercourse. This picture, which normally passes for the Augustinian view, is unacceptable to Orthodoxy. The doctrine of original sin means rather that we are born into an environment where it is easy to do evil and hard to do good; easy to hurt others, and hard to heal their wounds; easy to arouse men's suspicions, and hard to win their trust. It means that we are each of us conditioned by the solidarity of the human race in its accumulated wrong-doing and wrong-thinking, and hence wrong-being. And to this accumulation of wrong we have ourselves added by our own deliberate

acts of sin. The gulf grows wider and wider. It is here, in the solidarity of the human race, that we find an explanation for the apparent unjustness of the doctrine of original sin. Why, we ask, should the entire human race suffer because of Adam's fall? Why should all be punished because of one man's sin? The answer is that human beings, made in the image of the Trinitarian God, are interdependent and coinherent. No man is an island. We are 'members one of another' (Eph. 4:25), and so any action, performed by any member of the human race, inevitably affects all the other members. Even though we are not, in the strict sense, guilty of the sins of others, yet we are somehow always involved. 'When anyone falls', states Aleksei Khomiakov, 'he falls alone; but no one is saved alone.' Should he not have said also that no one falls alone? Dostoevsky's Staretz Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* comes closer to the truth when he says that we are each of us 'responsible for everyone and everything':

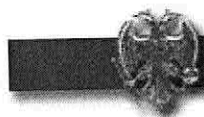
There is only one way to salvation, and that is to make yourself responsible for all men's sins. As soon as you make yourself responsible in all sincerity for everything and for everyone, you will see at once that this is really so, and that you are in fact to blame for everyone and for all things.

from **The Orthodox Way**,  
Mowbray & Co

We suggest you also read about Pain as a consequence of the Fall.

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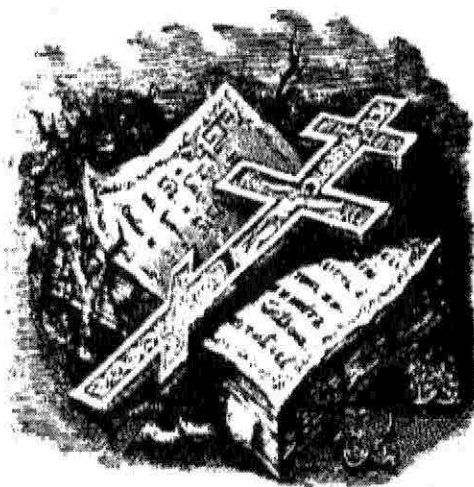


GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## Philosophy does not save

by St. Gregory Palamas (1296 - 1359)  
from **The Triads**

"I have heard it stated by certain people that we also should pursue secular wisdom, and that if they do not possess this wisdom, it is impossible for them to avoid ignorance and false opinions, even if they have achieved the highest level of impassibility; and that one cannot acquire perfection and sanctity without seeking knowledge from all quarters, above all from Greek culture, which also is a gift of God-just as were those insights granted to the prophets and apostles through revelation. This education confers on the soul the knowledge of created beings, and enriches the faculty of knowledge, which is the greatest of all the powers of the soul. For education not only dispels all other evils from the soul-since every passion has its root and foundation in ignorance-but it also leads men to the knowledge of God, for God is knowable only through the mediation of His creatures.



I was in no way convinced when I heard such views being put forward, for my small experience of monastic life showed me that just the opposite was the case; but I was unable to make a defense against them. "We not only occupy ourselves with the mysteries of nature" they proudly claimed, "measuring the celestial cycle, and studying the opposed motions of the stars, their conjunctions, phases and risings, and reckoning the consequences of these things (in all of which matters we take great pride); but in addition, since the inner principles of these phenomena are to be found in the divine and primordial creative Mind, and the images of these principles exist in our soul, we are zealous to understand them, and to cast off every kind of ignorance in their regard by the methods of distinction, syllogistic reasoning and analysis; thus, both in this life and after, we wish to be conformed to the likeness of the Creator".

I felt myself incapable of responding to these arguments, and so maintained silence towards these men; but now I beg you, Father, to instruct me in what should be said in defense of the truth, so that following the Apostle's injunction I may "be ready to give an account of the faith that is in us" (1 Peter 3:15).

By examining the nature of sensible things, these people have arrived at a certain concept of God, but not at a conception truly worthy of Him and appropriate to His blessed nature. For their "disordered heart was darkened" by the machinations of the wicked demons who were instructing them. For if a worthy conception of God could be attained through the use of intellection, how could these people have taken the demons for gods, and how could they have believed the demons when they taught man polytheism? In this way, wrapped up in this mindless and foolish wisdom and unenlightened education, they have calumniated both God and nature. They have deprived God of His sovereignty (at least as far as they are concerned); they have ascribed the Divine Name to demons; and they were so far from finding the knowledge of beings-the object of their desire and zeal-as to claim that inanimate things have a soul and participate in a soul superior to our own. They also allege that things without reason are reasonable, since capable of receiving a human soul; that demons are superior to us and are even our creators (such is their

impiety), they have classed among things uncreated and unoriginate and coeternal with God, not only matter, and what they call the World Soul, but also those intelligible beings not clothed in the opacity of the body, and even our souls themselves.

Are we then to say that those who hold such a philosophy possess the wisdom of God, or even a human wisdom in general? I hope that none of us would be so mad as to claim this, for, as the Lord declared, "A good tree does not produce bad fruit" (Matthew 7:18). In my estimation, this "wisdom" is not even worthy of the appellation "human", since it is so inconsistent as to affirm the same things to be at once animate and inanimate, endowed with and deprived of reason, and it holds that things by nature without sensibility, and having no organs capable of sensation, could contain our souls! It is true that Paul sometimes speaks of this as "human wisdom", as when he says, "My proclamation does not rest on the persuasive words of human wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:13). But at the same time, he thinks it right to call those who have acquired it "wise according to the flesh" (1 Corinthians 1:26), or "wise men become feeble minded" (Romans 1:22), "the disputants of this age" (1 Corinthians 1:20), and their wisdom is qualified by him in similar terms: it is "wisdom become folly" (1 Corinthians 1:20), the "wisdom which has been done away" (1 Corinthians 1:28), "vain trumpery" (Colossians 2:8), the "wisdom of this age", and belongs to the "princes" of this age-who are "coming to an end" (1 Corinthians 2:6).

For myself, I listen to the father who says, "Woe to body when it does not consume the nourishment that is from without, and woe to the soul when it does not receive the grace that is from above!" He speaks justly-for the body will perish once it has passed into the world of inanimate things, and the soul will become enmeshed in the demonic life and the thoughts of demons if it turns away from that which is proper to it.

But if one says that philosophy, insofar as it is natural, is a gift of God, then one says true, without contradiction, and without incurring the accusation that falls on those who abuse philosophy and pervert it to an unnatural end. Indeed they make their condemnation heavier by using God's gift in a way unpleasing to Him.

Moreover, the mind of demons, created by God, possesses by nature its faculty of reason. But we do not hold that its activity comes from God, even though its possibility of acting comes from Him; one could with propriety call such reason an unreason. The intellect of pagan philosophers is likewise a divine gift insofar as it naturally possesses a wisdom endowed with reason. But it has been perverted by the wiles of the devil, who has transformed it into a foolish wisdom, wicked and senseless, since it puts forward such doctrines.

But if someone tells us that demons themselves have a desire and knowledge not absolutely bad, since they desire to exist, live and think, here is the proper reply which I should give: it is not right to take issue with us because we say that Greek wisdom is "demonic" (James 3:15), on the grounds that it arouses quarrels and contains almost every kind of false teaching, and is alienated from its proper end, that is, the knowledge of God; but at the same time recognise that it may have some participation in the good in a remote and inchoate manner. It should be remembered that no evil thing is evil insofar as it exists, but insofar as it is turned aside from the activity appropriate of it, and thus from the end assigned to this activity.

What then should be the work and goal of those who seek the wisdom of God in creatures? Is it not the acquisition of the truth, and the glorification of the Creator? This is clear to all. But the knowledge of the pagan philosophers has fallen away from both these aims.

Is there then anything of use in this philosophy? Certainly; for just as there is much therapeutic value even in substances obtained from the flesh of serpents, and the doctors consider there is no better and more useful medicine than that derived from this source, so there is something of



benefit to be had even from the profane philosophers- but somewhat as in a mixture of honey and hemlock. So it is most needful that those who wish to separate out the honey from the mixture should beware that they do not take the deadly residue by mistake. And if you were to examine the problem, you would see that all or most of the harmful heresies derive their origin from this source.

It is thus with the "iconognosts", who pretend that man receives the image of God by knowledge, and that this knowledge conforms the soul to God. For, as was said to Cain, "If you make your offering correctly, without dividing correctly..." (Genesis 4:7). But to divide well is the property of very few men. Those alone "divide well", the senses of whole souls are trained to distinguish good and evil.

What need is there to run these dangers without necessity, when it is possible to contemplate the wisdom of God in His creatures not only without peril but with profit? A life which hope in God has liberated from every care naturally impels the soul towards the contemplation of God's creatures. Then it is struck with admiration, deepens its understanding, persists in the glorification of the Creator, and through this sense of wonder is led forward to what is greater. According to St. Isaac, "It comes upon treasures which cannot be expressed in words"; and using prayer as a key, it penetrates thereby into the mysteries which "eye has not seen, ear has not heard and which have not entered into the heart of man" (1 Corinthians 2:9), mysteries manifested by the Spirit alone to those who are worthy, as St. Paul teaches.

Do you see the swiftest way, full of profit and without danger, that leads to those supernatural and heavenly treasures?

In the case of the secular wisdom, you must first kill the serpent, in other words, overcome the pride that arises from this philosophy. How difficult that is! "The arrogance of philosophy has nothing in common with humility", as the saying goes. Having overcome it, then, you must separate and cast away the head and tail, for these things are evil in the highest degree. By the head, I mean manifestly wrong opinions concerning things intelligible, divine and primordial; and by the tail, the fabulous stories concerning created things. As to what lies in between the head and tail, that is, discourses on nature, you must separate out useless ideas by means of the faculties of examination and inspection possessed by the soul, just as pharmacists purify the flesh of serpents with fire and water. Even if you do all this, and make good use of what has been properly set aside, how much trouble and circumspection will be required for the task!

Nonetheless, if you put to good use that part of the profane wisdom which has been well excised, no harm can result, for it will naturally have become an instrument for good. But even so, it cannot in the strict sense be called a gift of God and a spiritual thing, for it pertains to the order of nature and is not sent from on high. This is why Paul, who is so wise in divine matters, calls it "carnal" (2 Corinthians 1:12); for, says he, "Consider that among us who have been chosen, there are not many wise according to the flesh" (1 Corinthians 1:26). For who could make better use of this wisdom than those whom Paul calls "wise from outside" (1 Timothy 3:7)? But having this wisdom in mind, he calls them "wise according to the flesh", and rightly too.

Just as in legal marriage, the pleasure derived from procreation cannot exactly be called a gift of God, because it is carnal and constitutes a gift of nature and not of grace (even though that nature has been created by God); even so the knowledge that comes from profane education, even if well used, is a gift of nature, and not of grace-a gift which God accords to all without exception through nature, and which one can develop by exercise. This last point-that no one acquires it without effort and exercise-is an evident proof that it is a question of a natural, not a spiritual, gift.

It is our sacred wisdom that should legitimately be called a gift of God and not a natural gift,

since even simple fishermen who receive it from on high become, as Gregory the Theologian says, sons of Thunder, whose word has encompassed the very bounds of the universe. By this grace, even publicans are made merchants of souls; and even the burning zeal of persecutors is transformed, making them Pauls instead of Sauls, turning away the earth to attain "the third heaven" and "hear ineffable things". By this true wisdom we too can become conformed to the image of God and continue to be such after death.

As to natural wisdom, it is said that even Adam possessed it in abundance, more so than all his descendants, although he was the first who failed to safeguard conformity to the image. Profane philosophy existed as an aid to this natural wisdom before the advent of Him who came to recall the soul to its ancient beauty; why then were we not renewed by this philosophy before Christ's coming? Why did we need, not someone to teach us philosophy-an art which passes away with this age, so that it is said to be "of this age" (1 Corinthians 2:6)-but One "who takes away the sin of the world", and who grants us a true and eternal wisdom-even though this appears as "foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:18) to the ephemeral and corrupt wise men of this world, whereas in reality its absence makes truly foolish those not spiritually attached to it? Do you not clearly see that it is not the study of profane sciences which brings salvation, which purifies the cognitive faculty of the soul, and conforms it to the divine Archetype?

This then, is my conclusion, if man who seeks to be purified by fulfilling the prescriptions of the Law gains no benefit from Christ-even though the Law has been manifestly promulgated by God-then neither will the acquisition of the profane sciences avail. For how much more will Christ be of no benefit to one who turns to the discredited alien philosophy to gain purification for his soul? It is Paul, the mouthpiece of Christ, who tells us this and gives us his testimony."

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## Works of virtue

by Stylianos Kementzetsidis

"In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.  
But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him"  
(Acts 10:34-35).

The weight of one soul, if it could be weighed, is greater than the weight of the world. Our soul is diseased by sin, for sin separates us from our spiritual health and from God. This separation is the greatest misfortune or tragedy that afflicts mankind. The science of the soul, in a spiritual sense, is not concerned with wealth, glory or social positions, but aims at healing the soul. This healing is achieved when Christians live with a personal and loving relationship with God. If this type of relationship is neglected we also neglect our chance for salvation and the devil will not trouble himself with us, because we separate ourselves from God through our sins and non-repentance. If, on the other hand, Christians are at peace with God, they will fear nobody, because the grace of God moves and protects them, making them spiritually mighty.

In the Church, we are all immortal after entering Christ's army through Baptism. Our souls will live, in paradise, after our lives close. From the moment of Baptism until a cross is placed on our tomb, we are obliged to walk and be like God in a careful or watchful life. The devil, through the carelessness of sin and with the help of the devious world, in which we live, wounds us. For this reason, our Church is a spiritual hospital, which remedies the wounds and heals the soul.

There are three types or categories of spiritual health. Some of us are more heavily diseased and do not want Christ, the Church, or a spiritual life. They are in intensive care ready for their imminent spiritual death. Then there are those who are being cured and are following the therapy prescribed by the Church. These people maybe sinners, but they cooperate with the priest by taking the prescribed medicine of the Church. Finally, there are those who are already cured who have been to the spiritual hospital (the Church), have taken their medicine, and are now careful not to become sick again. It is the last category we should be in, with the grace of God. Otherwise we are amongst the dead occupying space in the Church, just like the prodigal son in the Gospels, who was loitering from here to there, and whom Christ called a dead and lost sheep. Of course he was not physically dead, but he was spiritually dead living for sin and not for Christ or virtue.

We must have some education or guidance to be able to follow deep spiritual lessons, because knowledge is not important in our faith. Knowledge is only important for the mind and not the soul; virtue however, when present, beautifies the soul. In the clear or cleansed soul, the grace supports and encourages the child of God. The more we live in virtue, the more we will have a spiritual insight. If gradual steps of virtue do not shape a spiritual life, we will be spiritually ignorant, even if we have immense literary knowledge or are the most intelligent in the world. This type of 'intellectual' knowledge is useless, especially if we are not cleansed of the stains of sin. Conversely, an old lady, with simplicity, humility and the fear of God, who knows how to fast, pray, go to Confession and participate in Holy Communion, understands a lot more about the heart and has greater spiritual knowledge. The greatest misery is the curtailing of the true Christian life.

He who believes and is Baptised is saved. No less important is that teachers must follow their

teaching, and those who are students must act upon the teaching, otherwise they become doers of the law who do not see the light. You see nothing in total darkness, even if you have the best eyes. Our spiritual eyes see clearer when our light is clearer.

The following are some practical examples, which I hope will illustrate the points outlined above.

## **The Titanic**

During April of 1912, the Titanic left England on her maiden voyage to New York in the United States of America. The ship was the biggest and greatest of its time; it was a colossus made of steel. Just before its journey, a director of the company that owned the Titanic said, "The Titanic is impossible to sink". The ship soon departed with the orchestra playing, sailing 2635 people in to history. Messages came from other ships warning of the dangers of icebergs in the north Atlantic Sea. The captain ignored these messages believing that the Titanic could not be sunk. Many similar messages followed, which were disregarded. The captain eventually noticed that the ship was heading towards a huge iceberg and raised the alarm seconds before the ship collided with it. The collision caused a 90 m long split along the side of the ship, which dramatically stopped her. The ship sunk soon afterwards drowning or freezing 1635 people in icy cold water. This is a tragedy of epic proportions, but where are you going in this ocean of life without Christ accompanying you? Are you steaming through an ocean full of icebergs without a map to guide your way, and with the belief that you too can not be sunk?

## **Mediterranean mission**

During the Second World War, an English submarine was in the Mediterranean Sea during surveillance manoeuvres. A member of the crew informed the captain of the ship that they were close to hazardous rocks, as marked on a map of the area; the captain ignored the warning thinking the map was inaccurate. A few minutes later, the ship collided with the rocks, and many of the crew drowned, including the captain who was too proud to escape the submarine. In a similar way, how many of us ignore the spiritual map, known as the Bible that leads us away from dangers and to salvation? We proudly do not use this spiritual map resulting in spiritual disasters.

## **Spider**

There is a spider in Java that puts insects it bites to sleep; sin is analogous to the bite of this spider. Sin gently and gradually deadens our interest for the spiritual, and arouses our corporeal passions. We then become preoccupied with what we eat, drink or wear and lose our direction to paradise.

## **Deer**

The northern American Indians know that the easiest way to catch deer is to wear the hide of a deer and to walk amongst them. The deer, thinking that the Indians were other deer would come close to them. Of course, the unsuspecting deer were killed. In the same way, sin dresses with different disguises intending that we should come near and be killed.

In this day of sin, having surpassed the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, we should not expect refuge and anything without misfortune. The blessed Fr Paisios of the Holy Mountain said that horrible times were coming, when people would actively seek salvation and become Christians, but if you are disrespectful to God He will not listen to you. You must listen to God



and His commandments so that He will listen to you during your prayers.

## **St Martin**

In the first century of Christianity, the merciful St. Martin, in an act of love, offered his overcoat to a poor man. Later that night the saint saw Christ wearing this very coat. On another occasion, beggars and cripples, hearing that St Martin was about to pass on his way to Church, picked up their lot and walked away; they did not want to be cured by the grace of God through St. Martin's charismata. These people used their disabilities to gather alms.

Do you know how many Christians in our century do not go to Church, which is the doctor of their bodies and souls? These people do not go to Christ, the Doctor, through their priest and the Sacrament of Confession, and remain in the dark, although they are 50, 60 or 70 years old and close to death; these people may even diligently cross themselves in Church. Who told these people that Christ needed their candles; what does He need these candles for? He wants our sins confessed with contrition and repentance to deliver us from darkness, and to give us His blessings and spiritual grace.

## **St Moses the Black**

At the beginning of St. Moses the Black's ascetic struggle, he was tried by many temptations that reduced his spiritual faith. He confessed these temptations to his spiritual father, who told him to look westward, where he saw thousands of evil spirits devising traps for the destruction of many people. The Confessor then told St. Moses to look eastward, where he saw thousands of angels, saints and martyrs who were ready to assist those who are willing to fight. These same fighters are ready to assist us if we are willing to ask for their help.

## **The old man**

An abbot in the old days, who had many disciples in the desert, prayed "God grant all of us Your kingdom". One of God's angels answered, "Now that the monastery's name's day is near, sent your disciples ahead to prepare for the celebrations and follow on the day before". On his journey to the monastery on the day before the celebrations, the abbot heard moaning and saw a beaten old man lying on the ground. The old man said, "You can not help me". The abbot then asked if the monks that passed him on their way to the monastery stopped to help him. The old man replied, "They told me that they were too busy to help me, because they were going to an all-night vigil in the monastery and were in too much of a hurry to help me and left me here". The elder understood that unless we follow all the commandments, all our qualifications and our participation in all-night vigils would not help us. The elder then insisted in helping the old man by carrying him on his back to the monastery. The abbot noticed that the old man gradually became lighter as they came closer to the monastery. He stopped and turned around to see a beautiful angel. The angel that God commanded "If you want your disciples to have a place in God's kingdom, then they have to follow your example".

What you say, read or write is not important, but what is important is how you live and treat others. If we believe in Christ, by following His commandment, He will recognise us and save us as one of His own.

## **The Desert Father**

A very old desert father had a small cell about 20 kilometres from a fresh-water spring. One day,

he thought he was getting too old to continue walking the long distance to the spring, and decided to set up a tent closer to it. He immediately saw a man measuring the number of steps the old man usually takes to the spring and asked him, "Who are you and what are you doing?" He responded, "I am an angel sent by God to count the number of steps that you make for the love of Christ". Hearing that even his walk to the water was for the love of Christ, he set up his tent further away from the water.

In these modern days, we want to style our lives as comfortable as possible, making all efforts except for the salvation of our souls. We have all the automation to reduce our labours, but we do not bother to strive for a spiritual life. It is getting to the stage that we can not be bothered to learn about Christ, unless someone is willing to come to our homes when 'we have some spare time'. No saint entered the kingdom of God asleep or without effort. They worked hard to follow the commandments and fought against the passions. It is with fear that we must cultivate our salvation, as St. Paul the Apostle says, yet we allow the passions to drive us further away from salvation.

## St Kosmas Aitolos

In St Kosmas Aitolos' writings there is a story of a bandit called John, who was a member of a group of about 800 thieves. Every day, John would read about the lives of the saints and venerated our Lady Theotokos. The devil, desiring to stop him from reading and veneration the Theotokos, sent a demon to joining the group as a cook and to wait until he stopped reading about the Theotokos for one day, so that he could approach to kill him. God did not want the bandit to die and sent a desert father to help him. The monk told the thieves that God sent him, asking all the thieves to gather near him. He was told that everyone was there except for the cook, who did not want to be present. The thieves then forced the cook to come to the gathering as the monk demanded "In the name of Christ reveal who you are and what you are doing here!" The demon replied, "Even though we can not tell the truth, because the devil has lied from the beginning, due to the power of Christ I am forced to tell you that I am a demon. I have been waiting 14 years for the bandit to stop reading the Akathist to the Lady, so that I can approach him to kill him". The monk commanded the demon to leave, which, on his departure, left a horrible stench. Some of the bandits immediately joined monasteries and became monks.

We do not study the lives of the saints, and we do not learn the Word and commandments of God. Prepare yourselves now, because things will get a lot worse and we will be totally possessed.

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# The Requirements of Love

by V. Berzonsky

"Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrong" (1 Corinthians 13:5).



To follow Jesus it is not enough to pray to Jesus. One must be like Him as much as possible. This means bearing one's cross, which is immeasurably more than wearing a cross on a chain around one's neck

Many are they who are rude, touchy, harbouring a list of offences already years old against those who did them injury in the past, who await the day when all of them will "get what's coming to them" for all the suffering and misery they caused our "Christians," who feel themselves elected to God's Kingdom and have nothing more to do than to go through the unpleasant experience of death in order to reap their reward on the other side.

How simple it would be if we were to heed the call 'Follow me,' assuming we were doing precisely that in our own private ways. That is the gospel, of course; however it follows an important requirement. Christ said just prior to the invitation:

"Take up your cross daily..." (Lk 9:23).

St John Chrysostom reminded us that Jesus is the Shepherd of sheep and not of wolves; therefore, when we turn ourselves into wolves to fight back against vicious attacks, know that we are without Christ. Jesus is not battling with us, since we have chosen to forsake His teachings and example to go it alone, in the way of the world. We move even further away from Christ when we utilise every opportunity to serve ourselves, for this is not the way of the Lord. "Love is not easily angered." When you lose your temper, you lose touch with the indwelling Christ. St Maximos the Confessor, insisted, "Cleanse your mind of anger, grudges, and shameful thoughts. Then you will be able to know the indwelling of Christ."

The modern, weak Christian would prefer to do his Christian witnessing another way. He first acts like a pagan and a savage, losing his temper, throwing a tantrum, leaving the scene of a provocation with bitter, resentful thoughts, then after the fact, he pleads a blessing from the Lord. But the Lord never promised us He would be an indulgent nanny, patching up our ego wounds. Each situation that tests our spirituality is a challenge to our faith. Are we truly Cross-bearers, or are we frauds? Do we have the abiding presence of Christ in each situation of our daily lives, or is our faith something ceremonial, reserved for Sunday mornings and brief snatches of prayer on the margins of the day? Christ is limited by His holiness and purity. He simply cannot abide in us alongside anger, lust, deceit, bitterness, and the like, and we deceive ourselves if we pretend that God's goodness will automatically overcome the sinfulness within us.

On the contrary, we are free beings who are able to choose to serve evil rather than God. We may feel we are with Christ by virtue of our baptism or because of His love for us, but that is not the

case as long as we have not surrendered our wills to the will of the Heavenly Father and have not invited Christ into our hearts. Be sure you comprehend the difference.

from **The Orthodox Messenger**, June-July 1993

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## Make God your strength

by Stylianos Kementzetsidis

Here is the man who did not make God his strength,  
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,  
And strengthened himself in wickedness (Ps 52:7).

We admire Christians who achieve goodness and virtue in their lives, but most people achieve very little in comparison to what can be achieved.

We all know that slaves will show gratitude to those who free them. Similarly we, once the slaves of the devil who is the greatest tyrant known, owe our gratitude to Christ Who bought our freedom with His blood. Do we give Christ the gratitude He deserves?

If St. Paul, who was elevated to the third heaven in his life time, calls himself the least worthy, how are we to look at ourselves (considering that we swim in evil and passions)? Even if we were to follow faithfully the divine law to the letter, we can only say we did our duty and paid our debt.

Many of us realise that the events of the present time in history hint that the end of time is near. Sin and apostasy (or moving us away from God) has led people along the road to destruction and thus ultimate loss. No force other than true repentance can save us from this descent to destruction. True repentance by grace and with faith returns us to God's divine will, and true repentance is the only medicine that leads us to salvation. We can only 'befriend' God when we abandon sin, put on grace, and shelter under the protective umbrella of divine providence. It is joyful to know that if God is with us nobody can be against us.

Every disobedience and deviance from God has received the appropriate punishment throughout history. Angels who became proud were expelled from heaven and became demons. Disobedient and unrepentant people during Noah's time drowned by the flood. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt to death with sulphur because of their unrepentant decadence; evidence for this destruction remains in the dead sea to this day.

How can we remain unrepentant of our sins, evil actions and thoughts, and disobedience to God, and assume we will not be punished (considering what has happened throughout history)?

I will give you a more recent example of the hardships of a people who were proudly unrepentant, which I hope will encourage you to prepare yourself for the trials that will soon be upon us (as described in the Book of Revelations). It is these trials that will destroy those who are unrepentant, and thus take them away from God.

Constantinople was the golden capital of the Roman empire which had lit up the known world with Orthodoxy for a thousand years.

Before the city fell to the Ottoman empire, both the emperor and patriarch could see that things were not well. All people, including the aristocrats and the common people, were spiritually ignorant and were totally devoted to their material comforts. The emperor and the patriarch, recognising the desperate state of the people, decided to invite the wisest and most devout monk

they could find to give sermons that would save their people.

The monk St. Joseph Vryennios was chosen, because he was a great spiritual person. He was also the teacher of Gennadius Scholarios, who became the first patriarch after the fall, and Mark of Ephesus (Evgenicus), who participated in the Council of Ferrara-Florence almost twenty years earlier during 1438-9.

St. Joseph, on arrival to Constantinople, gave sermons in the Palace to the emperor, his entourage, the generals, councils and thousands of people. He was later asked, "are you happy with the thousands of people listening to your sermons?" He answered, "They may be listening, but they neither abandon their sins nor do they repent. They come for entertainment. It is for this reason that I am returning to my cell to cry for my sins and the sins of the people, because the city will become Turkic".

The Grand Duke Doucas Notaras then told the wise monk "it is written in the Old Testament that even if a city has fifty righteous people, God will not destroy it. Wouldn't we find twenty or even ten people in our empire, from all the thousands of monks, nuns and clergy, to hold back the wrath of God?"

St. Joseph replied, "Unfortunately there is not even five".

The Grand Duke protested, but St. Joseph responded, "the emperor is blamed and responsible for the unjust laws in the empire. The patriarch is blamed for elevating many unworthy people to the priesthood who now celebrate the sacraments, consecrate the holy gifts and distribute the sacraments. The generals are blamed for all the unlawful acts, rapes, pillages and discrepancies their armies committed wherever they went. Parents and teachers are blamed for the bad examples they set for their children to follow. Everybody is therefore directly or indirectly responsible for the evil which exists in the empire. I shall now go", said St. Joseph directly to Doucas, "and you shall remember my words when your own children will be slaughtered in front of your eyes".

The monk went back to his cell and slept in the lord shortly before the fall of the city. Constantinople fell in 1453, and Doucas Notaras was captured with all his children. Mohammed II, the Conqueror, when celebrating his victory in the palaces of the Byzantines with his entourage and generals, asked for the children of Doucas to be brought before him. Doucas said that such customs were not allowed by his religion. Mohammed II then ordered to have Doucas' children slaughtered in front of his very eyes (fulfilling St. Joseph's prophecy). It is ironical that at the time of the Council of Ferrara-Florence, Doucas Notaras remarked, "I would rather see the Moslem turban in the midst of the city than the Latin mitre".

Whilst celebrating, the conquerors saw a hand with five fingers flying around the room they were gathered in, but they could not stop or contain it. The Islamic dream-readers could not interpret this vision, so they asked for Orthodox holy men to interpret it. The Roman chosen to interpret the sign happened to be Gennadius Scholarios. Gennadius then fasted for a week with prayer before the sign was revealed to him. He returned to Mohammed II and told him that the sign meant, "Even if there had been five worthy people in the empire, the empire would have been spared".

Mohammed II was aware that Gennadius was against the union with the Latin Church, and being satisfied with Gennadius' interpretation, Mohammed II chose him to be the patriarch and the leader of the Orthodox people. This was part of God's divine plan to preserve Orthodoxy, because the Orthodox people were allowed to continue without interference in the observance of their faith, so long as they submitted quietly to the power of Islam and paid the authorities certain fees. Furthermore, if the Orthodox Church submitted the Council of Ferrara-Florence's decree to

reunite the churches, the Orthodox Church would have disappeared out of existence before the invasion of the Moslems. The third obvious option was that if the Orthodox people repented from their decadence, Constantinople would not have fallen.

During the early occupation of Constantinople, dishonourable Turkish soldiers killed, raped and sold thousands of Orthodox Christians to the slave markets of the east. Other soldiers searched through the houses of the wealthy finding extraordinary opulence and immense quantities of gold buried in their gardens. This hidden gold could have sustained the whole of Europe for many years.

The wealthy people of the city, paying homage to Mohammed II, instructed their children to present offerings of gold bars on trays. Mohammed II became very angry at this display of wealth asking, 'if you had so much gold, why did you not offer it to your emperor when he asked for support to defend the empire?' It were the rich that told the emperor to "sell the holy chalices and other liturgical instruments, and use the gold of the Church to defend the empire". Are these words repeated today in our churches?

We know that God is tolerant and waits patiently, however, He punishes the unrepentant and those who don't shelter in His protective fort (which is the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church).

The descent, we so happily accept by not turning back to God and by not becoming faithful members of the Body of Christ (the Church), will not lead us to comfort. This descent only leads us along many difficult paths that are against the divine will of God and to eternal destruction.

This is the time to repent and trust in the mercy of God.

from a series of talks given in Perth, Australia during December 1997

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## The Saints and the Church speak out on abortion!

The following represents the teaching of the Church from the [early] second century through to the fifth century.... Note that penalties, when they are given, are neither civil nor criminal, but *ecclesiastical* and *pastoral* (excommunication for the purpose of inducing repentance). Also note that these quotes deal with both surgical and chemically induced abortion, both pre- and post-quickenings.

All quotes are from "The Church Fathers on Social Issues", Department of youth Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.

...

### From the Letter to Diognetus

(speaking of what distinguishes Christians from pagans):

"They marry, as do all others; they beget children but they do not destroy their offspring" (literally 'cast away fetuses').

...

### From the Didache

"You shall not slay the child by abortions".

...

### From the Letter of Barnabus

"You shall not destroy your conceptions before they are brought forth; nor kill them after they are born".

...

### From St. Clement

"Those who use abortifacients commit homicide".

...

### From Tertullian

"The mold in the womb may not be destroyed".



...

**From St. Basil the Great**

"The woman who purposely destroys her unborn child is guilty of murder. The hair-splitting difference between formed and unformed makes no difference to us".

...

**From St. Augustine**

"Sometimes their sadistic licentiousness goes so far that they procure poison to produce infertility, and when this is of no avail, they find one means or another to destroy the unborn and flush it from the mother's womb. For they desire to see their offspring perish before it is alive or, if it has already been granted life, they seek to kill it within the mother's body before it is born".

...

**From St. John Chrysostom**

"Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where there are medicines of sterility? Where there is murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gifts of God, and fight with His laws? What is a curse you seek as though it were a blessing. Do you make the anteroom of slaughter? Do you teach the women who are given to you for a procreation of offspring to perpetuate killing?"

...

**Canon XCI of the Orthodox Church**

As for women who furnish drugs for the purpose of procuring abortions, and those who take fetus-killing poisons, they are made subject to penalty for murderers.

...

**Canon II of the Orthodox Church**

"A woman who aborts deliberately is liable to trial as a murderess. This is not a precise assertion of some figurative and inexpressible conception that passes current among us. For here there is involved the question of providing for the infants to be born, but also for the woman who has plotted against her own self. For in most cases the women die in the course of such operations, But besides this there is to be noted the fact that the destruction of the embryo constitutes another murder.... It behooves us, however, not to extend their confessions to the extreme limit of death, but to admit them at the end of the moderate period of ten years, without specifying a definite time, but adjusting the cure to the manner of penitence".

...

**Canon XXI of the Orthodox Church**

"Regarding women who become prostitutes and kill their babies, and who make it their business to concoct abortives, the former rule barred them for life from communion, and they are left without resource. But having found a more philanthropic alternative, we have fixed the penalty at ten years, in accordance with the fixed degrees..."

"As for women who destroy embryos professionally, and those (non-prostitutes) who give or take poisons with the object of aborting babies and dropping them prematurely, we prescribe the rule that they, by economy, be treated up to five years at most".

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos on abortion

by Archbishop Stylianos of Australia

Dearly beloved,

With this letter, I wish to address in particular the sensitivity and charity of all the faithful of our Archdiocese in order to remind the sacredness of human life, which apparently we have not yet taken as seriously as we should.

I do not refer to the daily actions at the expense of the bodily and spiritual health of our fellow human beings or of ourselves, for which we are certainly responsible before God.

I mean rather the hardness and criminality against human life in its still embryonic state, unable to defend itself or protest.

I mean the question of mass abortions which is silently turning our contemporary - supposedly Christian, or at least humanitarian - societies into a field of invisible slaughter without anyone condemning publicly the numbers of victims and magnitude of this cruelty.

Official statistics given by the relevant state authorities claim that in New South Wales alone, during the year 1988-89 31,351 abortions took place. Of these, only 1% were necessitated by medical opinion owing to the immediate danger of the pregnant woman.

These numbers constitute a terrible sign of our behaviour in the most sacred matter in which God calls us to become His close collaborators. However, it unfortunately appears that the issue of abortion in contemporary societies has almost become a matter of routine, without any moral problematic. Otherwise one cannot explain the ease with which one decides about an abortion today, just as one decides to extract a tooth.

We must therefore remember that whatever the reason leading couples to decide to cease in a violent manner an undesired pregnancy, the good of life and of existence lies totally in God's hands, and we must know that any intervention entangles us in a profound mystery.

Our Church, as in all similar moral issues, does not respond with a blind answer of "yes" or "no". The first thing it says is "Stand well!" This means: "Be careful!" And when in this way one realises that one is dealing with a question of life or death - not only of physical death, but also spiritual - then one is in a position to weigh up in the fear of God both the opinion of responsible science and the advice of the spiritual confessor.

I wish and pray fervently that our faithful may see this tremendous moral subject with renewed responsibility and act in each specific case according to the sacredness of the problem.

With paternal love in the Lord

from **Voice of Orthodoxy**, v. 11/1-2, January-February 1990

the official publication of the Greek Orthodox Archbiocese of Australia

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

## Today's holocaust Abortion the indescribable calamity!

By His Grace Bishop Joseph of Arianzos



This Icon is a work of the iconographer Mr. Kostas Vrousgos from Thessaloniki and was painted in Adelaide, South Australia, with the blessing of Bishop Joseph of Arianzos. It was published in thousands of copies. His Grace wrote the following text about abortion and the Icon, printed on the reverse side of the Icon.

"The All-Holy God is the fountain of life. Life belongs to him. His love provides life to all

living organisms and especially to man, whom He created in His own image and likeness. We live and exist because of the overflowing love of God. As in this sacred overflowing love of God which is life, every person has a right which cannot be taken away. The Son and Word of God became human, was crucified and was resurrected so that all "may have life and abundantly they may have" (John 10:10). God's gift of life is inviolable and murder is forbidden by the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition of the Church (Holy Fathers, Synods and Canons). He who takes away life opposes the work of the Life-giving Lord and joins with the devil, who "was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

Human life begins from the moment of conception and fertilisation. The Church believes this, and so does contemporary medicine (Panhellenic Medical Conference 1985). Furthermore the science of embryology, with the assistance of ultrasound and of other admirable technological means which are available, proved that the unborn baby is "certainly a new human being, a new member of human society, inseparable from each and every one of us in any way" (Dr Bernard Nathanson). Therefore, from the moment of conception, the violation of life at whatever stage is murder! As much as the killing of an adult or an adolescent is murder, so much so is the killing of a foetus by abortion at any stage of pregnancy. It is the cowardly murder of an innocent and completely unprotected human being, which has no possibility whatsoever to defend or protect itself.

Despite all these, the various human passions and especially sensuality, hard-heartedness, superficiality and indifference, very often lead to abortion as a "solution" of some "unwanted" or otherwise problematic pregnancy! Nevertheless, this is no solution. It is a manifestation of rage of the above-mentioned fathomless passions, which characterise the souls which are found outside the life of the Church and the fear of God.

I believe that this most beautiful Icon by the talented Iconographer Mr Costas Vrousgos, very clearly expresses all the Church wants to say to Her children about the dreadful subject, the

indescribable calamity of abortion, the contemporary baby-killer Herod. The Iconographer's ability to blend colours, being led by the Spirit of Truth, presents the causes of evil, the murderers of innocent babes, the sadness of the Life-giving Christ, the solution and need for repentance of the mother, the equally responsible and unloving father and perjurer murderer-doctor, and to anyone else associated with the crime. The testimonial cross of the unmarried mother who prefers the cost of social shame rather than the killing of her child. The blessing of the Christian family. The eternal prototype of the mother of God, the all-honoured person of the breast-feeding Mother of the Blessed One. No other comment is needed".

More information on [the Icon](#) and [other anti-abortion resources](#).

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## Madam, you are having a fish

by Elias Bagas

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jeremiah 1:5).

Abortion is death of a living person. The Hon. Ted Cunningham MLA of Western Australia said, on March 17, 1998. "No gynaecologist anywhere in this world will tell a woman "Madam, for the first few months of your pregnancy you are having a fish". Naturally, it is always a baby in the womb. It is beyond any doubt that what has been destroyed is nothing less than a child. Every person ... was once a foetus. Some may say that these are extremely harsh words. They are totally wrong; they are very true words".

Abortion has been opposed since ancient times. The Sumerian Code of about 2000 BC is the oldest known system to outlaw abortion. The foetus was regarded as a human being in the Assyrian Code of about 1500 BC. The Orthodox Church has opposed abortion, regarding it as murder and a serious sin, since the days of the Apostles.

In the early days of Christianity, the Roman Empire was very much like the modern world, where abortion was practiced on demand. The early Church opposed this practice as indicated in the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles (the Didache). The Didache commanded, "You shall not procure abortion, nor destroy a newborn child" (Didache 2:2) St. Hippolytus said around 217 AD, "...women who were reputed to be believers began to take drugs to render themselves sterile, and to bind themselves tightly to expel what was being conceived. See, then, into what great sacrilege that lawless one has proceeded, by teaching adultery and murder at the same time!" (from The Apostolic Tradition). St. Basil the Great reiterated these words in 374 AD when he wrote in the First Canonical Letter, "A woman who has deliberately destroyed a foetus must pay the penalty for murder" (188:2). He also said "those also who give drugs causing abortions are murderers themselves, as well as those who receive the poison which kills the foetus" (188:8) These quotes show that abortion has concerned the Church since Her beginning.

The modern world is madly killing our babies and scarcely anyone sheds a tear for their death. So, end the lives of human beings, conceived often in the cause of sexual freedom and promiscuity or in rare cases tragic circumstances. These children were created in the Image of God (their Father in heaven), only to be discarded, unwanted, dismembered, burned, and not baptised. The remains are either incinerated or flushed down the toilet depending on the size of the child. In some cases, the bodies are sold for profit to soap makers, or medical research establishments where different organs are minced and used for tissue culture or hormone production.

Politicians who are being moved, like mindless puppets, by feminists and so-called 'modern' thinkers are legalising death. These people trivialise the lives of unborn babies for their selfish gains. They try to fool women that they are doing them a favour, adopting euphemistic terms like 'pro-choice' and "problem pregnancies". These people are in fact anti-women, telling them they have no moral courage, and that they are weak and they cannot cope with a 'problem' pregnancy.

Medical doctors, whose profession is to save lives, now knowingly, extinguish lives. The 'pro-

abortion' lobby has developed the myth that these doctors are helping women, but the truth is they do not care for them. Their motives seem to be the large sums of money they receive for murdering about 10,000 defenceless babies every year in Western Australia alone.

Another myth is that births must be planned, perfect and suit the needs of society. Adversity, God's gift of love, between the union of a husband and wife, has now been relegated to convenience.

A third myth is that abortion gives women control of their bodies, implying that babies are lifeless organs. The fact is, the womb is meant to be a safe sanctuary for a baby destined to live separated from its mother. A baby is not a disposable organ in a woman's body, but is a living person.

It is obvious that abortions destroy children and the souls of their mothers. Abortion deprives women of the God-given gift of motherhood, and does not help the grief stricken mothers who live the rest of their lives in guilt. Then, when these women express sorrow for the death of their aborted babies they are told to pull themselves together and accept the 'benefits' that they have worked so hard to achieve. These poor women want to grieve, but are not allowed to! Alas, women are trivialised and denied the grief for the death of their babies.

Children in the womb are precious in the eyes of God and have the right to live. Their greatest disadvantage is that they can not voice their protest against those who are so willing to dissected them into small pieces or 'vacuum clean' them from the womb of their mothers. Yet, 'animal liberation' groups protest loudly at the 'inhuman' treatment of defenceless animals. Remorse, the world trivialises the lives of the defenceless little ones.

Some politicians, encouraged by this 'progressive' society, are madly legalising the murder of our babies. However, are they representing the vocal few or silent majority and do they deny that these babies have the right to live? Death is being legalised because of the loud 'pro-choice' minority that wants to 'enjoy' an active sexual life' and do not want to accept the responsibilities of their 'pleasures'. Woe, our society has turned its back to God and His commandments.

A few weeks ago, a woman had an abortion. The doctor wanted to dispose of this baby in the hospital bin, but she wanted to bury it with dignity and not dispose of it like some garbage. How did she then feel about her baby? Does she now think 'what if this baby was born; what would it have been like?' Does this aborted baby now, haunt her dreams and agonise her with guilt?

If you do not follow the Church's teaching, then you will not follow Her teaching on abortion. These people will say. 'I will do as I like and have sex and abortions when I like. So God can stay out of my life'.

Each of us must come out of our lethargy and promote our pro-life views in the community. No longer can we remain silent hoping that others will do something. We can start by legally lobbying our members of Parliament to hear our convictions for our little ones in wombs. They have to be told that life in and out of the womb demands the respect of this 'civilised, society.

Finally, we now know which politician is pro-abortion and pro-life. We must now vote for those who will preserve the lives of innocent and defenceless babies.

from **The Truth**, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia  
Christian Missionary Society of the Ascension of our Lord publication, Perth, Western Australia.

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## PRESTIGE BUILDING SERVICES

### FRAMING CHECKLIST

<b>PROJECT:</b>		Park Central Stage 2
<b>ADDRESS:</b>		Cnr Hampstead Rd and La Rambla Cres, Campbelltown, 2560
<b>INSPECTED BY:</b>		
<b>ITEM:</b>	<b>Y / N</b>	<b>ACTION / COMMENTS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure trusses are braced	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> All boots bolted / screwed	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Checked for any modified trusses	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Webb stiffeners to floor joists	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Stand and brace all frames as per plans	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Check bracing is secured as per AS1684	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Check fixings prior to brickwork	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Install kitchen nib walls (if any)	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Install and pack straight - windows and doors	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cut out all door openings	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fix all plates securely to floor	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fix all external wall junctions	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Aris leading edge of garage beams	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Check all point loads:	Y / N	
Windows	Y / N	
Girder trusses	Y / N	
Posts		
<input type="checkbox"/> Triple grips all truss / plate connections	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Install valleys - straight	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fix all dutch gables (if any)	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lead flashing to dutch gable	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> All lead flashing max 2m long	Y / N	
<input type="checkbox"/> Check gable studs / nailed	Y / N	
<b>OTHER:</b>		
<b>SIGNED:</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>		



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

# The Orthodox view on Abortion

## The Sixth Commandment (Thou Shalt not Kill)

The sixth Commandment prohibits the taking of life. This commandment, therefore, applies equally to the taking of one's own life (suicide), the taking of another's life (murder) and the taking of the life of the unborn (abortion).

Abortion is one of the most burning issues in contemporary life. Many argue over the ethics of abortion, whether it is "right" or "wrong", and totally ignore the soul of the foetus (unborn child). Although the soul is an independent substance separate from the body, nevertheless it exists side by side with the body. Is it possible, then, to consider the issue of abortion without taking into consideration the soul of the foetus? We can receive a partial answer to this question if we turn to the ancient Christian patristic literature.

The origin of each individual human being's soul is not fully revealed in Sacred Scripture. This is "a mystery," according to the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria, "known to God alone." Therefore, the Church does not propound a strictly defined teaching on this question. She decisively rejected the view of Origen (an ecclesiastical writer of the first Christian centuries) who inherited from the philosophy of Plato the notion that souls pre-exist before conception of the foetus. This teaching of Origen and his followers was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

In the view of some of the Church Fathers, (Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Ephraim the Syrian and others) each soul is created separately by God; moreover, some of them time its joining with the body to coincide with the 40th day of the formation of the body. In the view of other teachers and fathers of the Church (Tertulian, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Macarius of Egypt and others), both substances soul and body receive their beginning and are perfected simultaneously: The soul is created from the souls of the parents, just as the body is created from the bodies of the father and mother. In this way, the parents participate with God in the creation of life. Conception is a sacred gift of God; anyone who encroaches on this gift, anyone who destroys it is breaking God's law.

The Church has always condemned abortion, trying with all Her powers to keep Her children from it. Already in the fourth century, St. Basil the Great, in his 8th canon, called murderers those who by whatever means terminated the life of the foetus. We also find this prohibition in the 91st canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

The Church confesses that each life is created by God, that human life is the supreme gift of the Creator. Human life, according to the Church's teaching, is not given unconditionally by God, but is given to man under the condition that he will be responsible for preserving it. The testimony that God respects life above all else is contained in the words of the Gospel:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Orthodox Christians are called to become like God, as far as is possible. This is known as Theosis, or deification. In so far as God's perfection is beyond our understanding, this process of

becoming like God, the process of developing our person, is unending. It begins from the moment of conception and continues until the very hour of death. In this way, no one can say that he is a "person" or that he has become fully man, in the full spiritual sense of the word, so long as he has not attained the complete Divine Likeness. But each man possesses the potential to become a Godlike person at whatever stage of physical development he is found in his mother's womb, in the prime of life, or on his deathbed.

We can be certain that the potential is present in the embryo to become a person to the fullest extent, not only by proceeding from the Church's concept concerning psychosomatic unity, but likewise if we turn to Sacred Scripture. The Church teaches that Christ became flesh at the moment of conception; and the Virgin Mary's relative, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, testified to the Virgin Mary,

"For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in me for joy" (Luke 1:44).

In other words, the fruit of Elizabeth's womb sensed the approach of the Divine Foetus in the womb of the Virgin Mary and reacted to this approach with a joyful leap.

One of the most widely disseminated arguments in favour of performing abortions is that each woman has the right to control the functions of her body, in whatever way she finds necessary, right up to terminating the life of an unwanted foetus. The Church rejects this argument outright. First of all, the Church points to the sacredness of Godgiven life, and likewise points to the fact that if it is forbidden for the Christian to raise his hand against his own life, all the more so does a Christian not have the right to terminate the life of another, even if this life has the appearance of a still not completely formed embryo. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle Paul teaches; this means that the cessation of the life of any other person is considered to be a crime not only in regard to that person, but likewise in regard to the Holy Spirit.

There are many instances which one might consider which further complicate the picture. What if the life of the mother is threatened by the continuation of the pregnancy? What if the pregnancy was due to rape or incest? The solution to these problems require great spiritual discernment and decisions must not be taken lightly. Only with the spiritual foresight and counsel of a Father Confessor can there be hope for the right decision.

Another difficult question is when the foetus will be born deformed or retarded. In this instance, the Church teaches that such children are also created in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, it is not allowed to terminate their life.

In general, the Church calls upon all of society to sacrificially take part in helping mothers who in one way or another are faced with difficulties connected with bearing children. Each family is a cell of the whole social organism; each cell is answerable for the wellbeing and health of the whole organism; consequently, the whole of society must also take care of each of its individual cells. As the Apostle Paul teaches us, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Finally, it is with special compassion that the Church regards the mother already after having an abortion, frequently performed under pressure from family, society, poverty, etc. Such unfortunates should not be beaten further, but compassionately supported and saved. To this end the woman must consult with her Father Confessor.

Adapted from a sermon by Fr Victor Potapov,  
The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Washington DC

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Read what the Saints of the Orthodox Church say [about abortion](#)  
Click [here](#) to see a contemporary Icon depicting the horror of abortion

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

# The Orthodox Christian view on Euthanasia

## The sixth Commandment is "Thou shalt not kill"

In all societies throughout the history of mankind an extraordinarily important significance has been attached to dying and death. For our ancestors, who lived under the conditions of agricultural societies, death was in the nature of things and was accepted fatalistically. But with the development of contemporary societies the problem of dying acquired a new meaning: the achievements of medical science and technology now permit life to be prolonged. We do not simply live longer; we live much longer than our ancestors. However, in the opinion of many, the additional years often turn out to be not at all the best time of life, that "slow and steady advance into enemy country." For some this experience turns out to be unbearable.

In 1990, Americans were shaken by the following event: Dr. Jack Kevorkian, a retired pathologist, constructed and offered to interested persons a device which journalists christened "the suicide machine." At the request of a 54 year old woman who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, he inserted into one of her veins a syringe connected to this machine. The patient pressed a button, a solution of potassium chlorate began to enter the vein, and within a few minutes her heart stopped.

[Sadly, the same is now occurring on our own shores. Even sadder, is that the difference in the Northern Territory of Australia, where this has now occurred three times, is that there the act is legally sanctioned! - ed.]

In the Netherlands, the sick who experience unbearable sufferings can now ask a physician to help them die. If several physicians testify to the incurability of the illness, the sick person can receive a deadly injection. Opponents of such a kind of medical assistance point out that when such injections are used to execute the death sentence for criminals in American prisons they are frequently called "cruel and inhuman punishment."

Does a person have the right to end his life with dignity? Is it necessary to prolong a person's life when it is obvious that he has no chance to lead a "normal life"? Is it ethical to cut short the life of a hopelessly ill person in order to free him from unbearable torment and suffering? These and similar questions are very timely in our days, as life expectancy keeps increasing and mankind strives to better the quality of its earthly existence. Every physician and priest and each person, who to some extent or other has anything to do with the sick and dying, unavoidably will come up against these questions.

## What is the teaching of the Church concerning "euthanasia" (a Greek word meaning "a good death")?

The Orthodox Church teaches that euthanasia is the deliberate cessation of human life, and, as such, *must* be condemned as **murder**. However, the headlong progress of contemporary medical technology and the various means of artificially sustaining life require that theologians make more precise the Church's approach to the problem of euthanasia and "the right of a person to put an end to his life."

**Euthanasia** is the act of painlessly killing hopelessly ill people. Proponents of euthanasia point

out that the use of contemporary medicine and the means of treating the hopelessly ill does not lead to their recovery, but only agonisingly prolongs their dying. This in turn raises another moral question: Is it murder not to use the good things of contemporary medicine for prolonging the life of the hopelessly ill?

The Fathers of the Church teach that death is unnatural for man, because man was created not for death, but for life. Death, along with suffering and illness, which we talked about in our earlier catechetical discussions, occurs not according to God's will. Concerning this it says in the Book of Wisdom: For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. For he created all things, that they might have their being. (Wisdom 1:13-14). And in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel we read: For I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore, be converted and live (Ezekiel 13:32).

According to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, the meaning of Adam's sin is that man, who was created in the image and likeness of God and infused with breath by His Spirit, when he had appeared on the face of the earth, chose death instead life, evil instead of righteousness. "And so death passed upon all men, for that in him (Adam) all have sinned" (Romans 5:12), says the Apostle Paul. And having sinned, man brought death also to his children, who shared his nature and life.

Spiritual life for the Christian consists of dying with Christ to sin and the world and of passing with Him through the experience of bodily death in order to be resurrected in the Kingdom of God. Christians must transfigure their own death in the affirmation of life, meeting the tragedy of death with faith in the Lord and conquering, according to the words of the Apostle Paul, "the last enemy-death" (I Corinthians 15:26) by the power of one's faith.

**I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die (John 11:25-26).**

The deeply believing Christian must be ready to accept any death, for his faith in the Resurrection and in the infinite goodness of God are measured by his acceptance of death. A Christian is called to have "the remembrance of death," that is, not to forget his mortality, and that the final triumph of light will appear only after the resurrection of the dead. But preparedness for death does not mean that earthly life loses its value. On the contrary, it remains the greatest good, and the Christian is called unto the fullness of the present life, in so far as he is able to fill up each moment of this life with the light of Christ's love.

It follows from this patristic presentation about life and death that a Christian is forbidden to participate in the deliberate cessation of the life of others, including also the hopelessly ill.

At the same time that the Church suffers together with people in extreme misfortune, She cannot at all change her mission to preserve the sacred gift of life. The Church approves the use of various medicines and even narcotics to decrease the physical pain of the sufferer. In instances where it is completely evident that death is inescapable, and the person is spiritually prepared for death by means of confession and communion, the Church blesses that person to die, without the interference of various life-prolonging medical devices and drugs.

The Church tries to instill in the sufferer that his illness is caused by sin - not only his own, but also that of the whole world. If he bears his infirmity righteously, manfully and patiently, that is, with faith, hope and even joy, then he will become the greatest witness to God's salvation in this world. Nothing can compare with such patience, for the glorification of God in the midst of suffering and infirmity is the greatest of all offerings which a man can ever make from his life on

earth.

All the saints suffered from some kind of bodily infirmity. And they all - even those who healed others by their prayers - never asked healing for themselves. And the most obvious example is the example of Jesus Himself. Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, teaches the Apostle Peter in his First Epistle, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (I Peter 4:1-2). The Christian, according to the grace given him by the Lord, must spiritually accept participation in the sufferings of Christ.

At the same time that the Church blesses the hopelessly ill person to consciously prepare for death, not resorting to artificial means of supporting life, She decisively parts from those who consider that in all instances it is necessary, no matter what, to prolong the life of the dying by whatever means are available. In Her prayers "at the parting of the soul from the body," the Church prays God to send to the hopelessly ill "a speedy and painless end," believing that the prolonging of the life of the hopelessly ill enters into conflict with God's plan for that person.

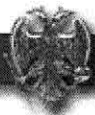
One ought not to generalise about the Church's approach to this question. The problem of maintaining the life of the gravely ill needs an individualised approach - a careful and round discussion in each instance with the relatives of the ill person, his physician and spiritual director. Moreover, this discussion must be accompanied by prayer with the request for God's guidance.

The Church makes a precise differentiation between euthanasia and the decision not to use extraordinary means to maintain life in those instances when a person is hopelessly ill. The Church affirms the holiness of life, and it is the duty of each Christian in every way possible to protect life as a sacred gift of God. The sole form of "a good death," from the Church's point of view, is the peaceful acceptance of the end of earthly life, enriched by faith and trust in God and in the hope of resurrection in Christ.

The original of this page,  
and much more interesting Orthodox reading material can be found at  
[The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Washington DC](#)

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## The humility of the old man and the law



### The old man

The old man is an athlete in prayer, a fool for God, and often enters and demolishes the territory of the devil (with Christ's grace). His heart, extremely sensitive through prayer, recognises the cunning tactics of satan and drives him out; thus bearing the Holy Spirit.

He proceeds in humility, the greatest treasure of all virtues, as pride in prayer is foolishness. He is diligent in avoiding pride, especially when it is vainglory. He knows that vainglory can appear in every virtue - when fasting, when chanting in the Divine Liturgy, and even when praying - opening the soul to the enemy whose aim is to separate us from God's love. The old man illustrates this by saying "sin is a beggar receiving bread and feels proud because he got it".

The narrow path leads to salvation, which is entered "by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction" (Matt 7:13). The narrow path is mourning and obedience, which are closely connected with prayer. The old man is constantly aware of his sinfulness and insignificance, and the hope in the Merciful Christ - he is never deluded by the cliché "once saved always saved". This awareness develops when coming close to God and is illustrated throughout the Old Testament. For example, Abraham called himself "dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27), Job despised himself and repented "in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5), and Isaiah exclaimed "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is 6:5).

The old man starts prayer with love towards God, and obedience to His Holy will remembering the Theotokos who was most obedient to God's will, as it is possible for the devil, disguised as an "angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14), to trick us that we have reached perfection. The greatest danger is to think yourself worthy of the Holy Spirit. Paradoxically, the Holy Spirit brings calm, peace, humility, and the awareness of our wretchedness. Yet, how many people say "I am born-again" without understanding what 'repentance' means?

The old man strives to be like the Theotokos who, with great humility, said to the angel Gabriel "I am the handmaid of the Lord ... let what you have said be done to me" (Luke 1:38); knowing the high cost she must pay to do the will of God. That is why it is said in the litanies, "Remembering our most holy, most pure, most blessed, most glorious Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, with all the Saints, let us commit ourselves and each other and all our lives unto Christ our God". This is how we should live, in conformity to Christ's example, with the will and grace of God, and with faith (cf. Eph 2:10); unlike the Pharisee who prayed, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get". We should also have the modesty of the same tax collector who, with a contrite heart, said "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:11-13).

The fool for God knows that prayer in combination with repentance, abstinence, communion and the reading of God's Word combats evil in the acquisition of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The



fool also knows that salvation is possible only through the Sacraments of the Church, which are: Baptism (Matt 28:16-20), Chrismation or Confirmation (Heb 6 16-17), the Eucharist (Matt 26:26-30), Confession or Repentance (1 Tim 6:12), Holy Orders such as Bishops, Deacons and so on (1 Tim 3:12-18 & Phil 1:1), Holy Matrimony (Heb 13:4), and Holy Unction or the Anointing of the sick (James 5:14). Yet many around us think that the sacraments are not necessary to be a Christian. These people live in defacto relationships, do not go to confession, do not take communion, and are disrespectful to the clergy.

The athlete of prayer concludes his prayers by remembering the Beatitudes; for the poor in spirit are those who realise they have nothing, command nothing and are capable of nothing without God, and praise Him with humility; those who mourn weep with the realisation that there is a great gulf between us and the living God calling for His love as a merciful Father; those who are meek do not promote themselves like the Pharisee, but are like the tax collector; those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are those who constantly quest for God, to worship, love and serve Him, to fast, pray, do good works for His sake and not their's, and keep His commandments; blessed are those who are persecuted for the love of God; and blessed are the peacemakers for peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation actualise the Kingdom of God.

## The law

Jesus was concerned that the religious community did not understand the meaning of the law by saying "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). Yet they did not realise that He personifies the law.

Jesus continued, "But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honour from one another, and do not seek the honour that comes from the only God? Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you - Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (John 5:42-46).

The religious community was more concerned with law-keeping than understanding God. This is powerfully illustrated by Christ's words: "This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:6-8).

They were able to look at Jesus yet they could not see the Word, they did not recognise that this was God who inspired and directed Moses. They were not willing to give up their positions in the community and to understand or discover God. The people were locked into their pride and assumed importance to the community, yet they were nothing more than lost souls. Christ gave them a way out, by saying "sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have the treasure in heaven; and come follow Me" (Luke 18:22).

The above was also observed by St. Paul, when he wrote to the church in Rome, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:2:4).

God must come first in our lives. We have to be prepared to give up all material ties, memories, and our positions in society. Thus we will carry our Cross and follow Christ.

Elias Bagas

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## Show, remorse or repentance?

Elias Bagas

How many times have we heard the quotation, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt 3:2)? What is this repentance? The prophet King David answers this question in Psalm 51.

Psalm 50(51) is one of my favourite Psalms. It is "a prayer of Repentance" and is about God's mercy. It is also a prophesy about salvation through baptism, and a teaching about worship in the spirit and truth. The Psalm does not express sorrowful feelings towards any other person, but it is a realisation and a measure of David's sinfulness or inadequacy in the presence of God. The Psalm depicts David's true repentance and contrition, and his turning to God to ask for His mercy and forgiveness.

Similarly, the prodigal son, when he finally understood that his father always loved him, said to himself 'I will arise and go to my father and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you..."' (Luke 15:18; in the parable of the prodigal son). The prodigal son realised that he sinned against heaven first and against his father second. This parable tells us that God longs and patiently waits for the return of all sinners who ask for His forgiveness; and in His mercy He receives them with open arms.

Christ proclaims that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel". What are we to repent from? Christ is telling us to stop in our selfish ways and to turnaround to face God, because the kingdom of God is a reality and exists now. He is telling us to start a new life's-journey remembering or understanding that Christ our God is in our hearts. This is a life that does not remain fastened to the letter of the Law in any legalistic way, but is centered around the love of and for Christ. This is the life that follows the Law out of love for God and mankind.

The chief priest and elders asked Christ, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" (Matt 21: 23), when He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. Christ refused to answer by Whose authority He cleansed the temple, but told them the parable of a man and his two sons. The sons were asked to work in the vineyard. The first son refused, but repented and went to work. The second son said that he would but did not. How many times have we witnessed this parable replayed in our lives? It seems that the tax collectors and harlots repent whereas the chief priests do not recognise Christ's divinity. The so-called 'holy' people in their very commitment to the temple say 'I will go to work in the vineyard', but remain blind to Who Christ is and hold tightly to the Law; whereas the sinners repent and are welcomed by God's merciful embrace.

The law-keepers were the leaders of God's chosen people, yet as they faced God Incarnate their concerns were in their own security and position. They fasted, prayed and were charitable, but did not stop in their tracks and turn to God. Are we like them?

Jesus tells us about two men who went up into the temple to pray (c.f. Luke 18:10-14; the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican). One was a highly respected Pharisee who was a very devout and religious man. The other was a tax-collector and regarded as the outcast and robber by those

around him.

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess'. He stood upright, looking upward toward God, thinking he was righteous and at the same time despised others. He did not present himself before God, but rather stood there for the sake of display, seeking admiration from others; he prayed with himself and not to God. This is not a turning to God or repentance, but a self-congratulation or self-exaltation.

The tax-collector, who was the outcast in his society, stood alone in shame not even raising his eyes to heaven. He prayed with penance saying, "God, be merciful to me the sinner!" He saw himself as the greatest sinner in front of God Who sees behind all pretenses; in contrast to the Pharisee who saw himself as the only holy man in the world. In the end the humble man who knew he was far from God was the one who came closest to Him. This man only asked for God's mercy, and thus sets an example for us to follow. In fact, these words, "Lord have mercy" are often repeated in the Divine Liturgy or as "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner" in the Jesus Prayer by Orthodox Christians.

Feeling remorse is not repentance. Judas Iscariot was remorseful for betraying Christ, but he didn't turn to God asking for forgiveness. He lacked repentance preferring to hang himself (c.f. Matt 27:3-5).

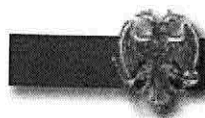
Conversely, the Apostle St Peter wept bitterly when he remembered Christ saying "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Matt 26:75). St Peter began the process of repentance with a 'broken and contrite heart' (c.f. Ps 50(51):17). Earlier, he professed the divinity of Christ, he was chosen to witness Christ's Metamorphoses and professed that he would die for Him, yet in weakness and fear betrayed Him (c.f. Matt 26:6). However, he repented to God with bitter tears and faithfully ended his life in Rome with martyrdom and love for Christ at about the same time as St Paul.

It is with this repentance and faith that the Church is built on. We must not stand in-front of God asking for what we deserve, but come to Him pleading for mercy (Kyrie Eleison). The miracle granted to us is that God is merciful and embraces us in love.

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

# The Publican and the Pharisee: a homily on Luke 18: 9-14 (16th Sunday of Luke)

by Fr. Dimitri Tsakas

As often happens in our society, people who big-note themselves are often the ones who suffer the greatest humiliation. There's a very simple correlation between how far up you put yourself and how far down you come - simply as a result of being human; simply as a result of being a human being in a fallen world,

Today's Gospel reading teaches us many things. It teaches us about attitude to prayer - on how we should pray. It teaches us about self-righteousness, and not to be self-righteous. But let's look at something else...

Two men went up to pray, One was a Pharisee, a respected member of his religious community; one who did all the right things - externally. And yet, when he stands before God, he stands before a mirror. Because, if you noticed, the Gospel says to us "and he prayed to himself thus". So he wasn't praying to God - he was justifying himself. He was justifying his own existence. He was trying to make himself look good, He was trying to convince himself that he was superior to others, and why did he do that?

Simply out of pride. Often we act like that because of low self-esteem. Often we try to convince ourselves that we are something beyond what we are, not only because of pride, but often because we don't have what is good and fruitful self-esteem.

The other man in the parable is a tax collector. Now, a tax collector in first century Palestine collected taxes for the occupying power - the Roman oppressors, Being a Jew himself, you can imagine how this man was treated. He was an outcast, The Jewish community considered him a traitor. Not to mention, that what the tax collectors would do, was that if it was their authority to collect fifty dollars for the Roman authorities, they would collect seventy from you and pocket the other twenty! So, not only did they collect for the enemy, not only did they collect from the people that oppressed your people, but they also stole from you as well!

Now, this tax collector goes up and prays; and he doesn't stand at all close to the altar, He stands far away. (You see, this man has self-esteem, but we'll talk about that later). Then he beats his breast and he wouldn't even look toward the heavens. He doesn't have to convince himself of anything because he knows who he is; and so he talks to God. And he asks God, out of the sincerity of his heart, a simple request that is intimately related to how he sees himself. He says, "Lord God, have mercy. I do these things. This is what I am. I'm fallen. I'm sinful. This is what I am."

Yet the Pharisee looks at the tax collector and says, "Lord God, thank you that I'm not like all these other people: adulterers, murderers, etc." As if this is not bad enough, he doesn't leave it at that general level, but he has to personally attack the person praying behind him. "And thank you, Lord, that I'm not like that man over there - that tax collector."



There's a two-edged sword in this story.

People walk away and say, "See why I don't go to Church? The Pharisee is like the people in Church. They fast, they pray, etc." But, Jesus doesn't say not to come to Church. He doesn't say don't pray. He doesn't say don't fast. He orders those things. Jesus is talking about the attitude with which we do all these things. The other side of this, of course, is the people who don't come to Church and are doing the same kind of things as the people who are. The attitude is the issue. "I don't need to go to Church, I don't lie, I don't steal, I don't do anything to anyone, I say my prayers" (I'd love to listen to them!), You see, hypocrisy is within and without the community. Within the group that always goes to Church, and within the group that never goes to Church. Thus, nobody is justified.

Now, people like the Pharisee may say things like: "I'm not like this tax collector", or "I'm not like the people that go to Church" or "I'm not like the people that don't go to Church",

One may wish to ask the Pharisee, what's the difference between you and the tax collector? Have you got three legs instead of two? He's got two hands, you've got two hands, He's got two legs, you've got two legs. He's got a brain, you've got a brain. He's got emotions, you've got emotions. He's got hardships, you've got hardships. Your life's a mess, his life's a mess.

But, do you know what the Pharisee's real problem was? Beyond the fact that he is talking to himself; beyond the fact that he is trying to convince himself what a great Jew he is; even beyond the fact he's judging another human being - there's something deeper. There's a raging subconscious river here. "I'm

superhuman," he thinks. He's trying to convince himself that he's something beyond the human. He's trying to convince himself that he has self-esteem.

What is self-esteem? Self-esteem is to know what you are. Self-esteem is to be at peace with what you are, knowing that through prayer, through the grace of God, it is being transformed, it is being developed, it is being saved, and being made into something beautiful - and knowing that it is the grace of God that is performing this miracle in your life.

Thus, the tax collector has self-esteem - he knows what he is. He doesn't pretend he's anyone else. The Pharisee is the one with low self-esteem. Because, not only does he have to prove himself against everyone else, but he's standing before God talking to himself, trying to prove something to himself,

So, why does the tax collector have humility? Is humility walking around beating ourselves on the chest, throwing ashes over our heads, and putting ourselves down? Is that what humility is? No. If we look at the experience of the saints, none of them talked about putting yourself down. They talked about being what you are, They talked about being real. That's the aim of Orthodox Christian life - to become a human being. What a paradox! We think that we are! But, we are not yet in the image and likeness of God There's a shadow of it there, but we should be aiming to become truly human. To become honest, sincere, and genuine human beings. That's what our aim is. And what it means to have humility, is simply to know what you are.

The word "humility" comes from humus, the Latin word for "soil". "Human" is the creature that comes from the soil. Humility means to know that you are human - that you come from the soil. You don't need humility to put yourself down. Your sins will do that for you, if you're genuine.

So, to stand like the tax collector before God (but not to stand there trying to convince ourselves we're something we're not) is the hardest thing to do in life - it's easy to say, but it's the hardest