

# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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## WOMAN AS A SYMBOL OF CHRIST

By Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, Orthodox America Issue 107, Vol XI, No. 7

Can you believe that Christ the Saviour portrayed Himself in the guise of a woman in two of His parables? One is that of the woman who took three measures of flour and made dough. But first let us speak of the other one where the Lord tells us about the woman who had ten drachmas and lost one. These are the most mysterious of all the Saviour's parables. As the parable of the lost drachma is short, we quote it in full.

### The Ten Drachmas

*Or what woman, having ten drachmas, if she loses one, does not light a candle and sweep the house and look diligently till she finds it? And after she has found it, she calls in her friends and neighbors and says, Rejoice with me, for I have found the drachma that I lost* (Luke 15:8-9).

The mystery of the universe is revealed in this simple parable. If we take it literally, it evokes bewilderment. The woman lost only one drachma. Even ten drachmas do not represent a great sum; in fact, a woman who has only ten drachmas must be very poor indeed. Let us assume, first of all, that the finding of the lost drachma meant a great gain for her. Yet it still presents a paradox, for how is it that if she is such a poor woman she lights lamps, sweeps the house and calls in all her friends and neighbors to share her joy. And all because of one drachma! Such a waste of time -- lighting a candle and setting the house in order first of all! Furthermore, if she invites her neighbors, she is obliged, according to Eastern custom, to offer them something to eat and drink, no small expense for a poor woman. To fail to do so would be to ignore an unalterable custom.

Another important point to note is that she did not invite only one woman to whom she might have offered sweets, which would not have involved great expense. But she invited many friends and neighbors, and even if she entertained them modestly, the expense would far exceed the value of the drachma she had found. Why then should she seek the drachma so diligently and rejoice at finding it, only to lose it again in another way? If we try to understand this parable in its literal sense, it does not fit into the frame of everyday life, but leaves the impression of something exaggerated and incomprehensible. So let us try to discover its mystical or hidden meaning. Who is the woman? And why is it a woman and not a man, when a man is more likely to lose money in the ordinary routine of life? Whose house is it that she sweeps and fills with light? Who are her friends and neighbors? If we look for the spiritual instead of the literal meaning of the parable, we shall find the answers to those questions. The Lord said, Seek and ye shall find.

The woman represents Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God. The ten drachmas are His. It is He Who has lost one of them and sets out to look for it. The drachmas are not coins of gold or silver. According to Orthodox theologians, the number ten represents fullness. The nine unlost drachmas are the nine orders of angels. The number of angels is beyond the grasp of mortals, for it exceeds our power of calculation. The lost drachma represents mankind in its entirety. Therefore Christ the Saviour came down from heaven to earth, to His house, and lit a candle, the light of the knowledge of Himself. He cleaned out the house -- that is, He purified the world of diabolic impurity -- and found the lost drachma, erring and lost humanity. Then He called

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his friends and neighbors (after His glorious Resurrection and Ascension), that is to say, all the countless hosts of the cherubim and seraphim, angels and archangels, and revealed to them His great joy. Rejoice with Me. I have found the lost drachma! That means: I have found men to fill the void in the Kingdom of Heaven, caused by the fall of the proud angels who apostasized from God. At the end of time the number of these found and saved souls will have grown to billions, or, in the language of Scripture, will be as countless as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

Our Lord described Himself as a woman because women are more careful than men in looking after property, in keeping the house in order, and in receiving guests. If this short parable, which consists of only two sentences, is explained in this way, whose heart will not tremble? for it contains the whole tragedy of the world, visible and invisible. It explains why the Son of God came to earth. It sheds a bright ray of light on the history of mankind and the tragedy of each individual's existence. It confronts us with an urgent decision, because our life is swiftly passing -- a decision as to whether we want to be the lost drachma found by Christ or not. Christ is looking for us. Are we going to hide from him, or let ourselves be found by Him before death hides us from Him, from the world, and from life?

It is a vital question and it lies within our will to accept or reject Him. After death it will cease to be an open question, and then no one will expect an answer from us.

### Three Measures of Flour

And again Jesus said, *To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour till the whole was leavened* (Luke 13:20-21).

This is another of Christ's mysterious parables that many find hard to understand. The actual theme taken from everyday life is simple and clear. From the earliest times housewives have been bakers; they take flour, put it in bowls, prepare leaven,

knead the dough and bake it. It has been the daily task of the housewife in East and West for thousands of years. But it occurred to no one to take this simple work as a figure or symbol of the Kingdom of God. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom nothing was too simple or unimportant, took this familiar chore and used it to explain something stupendous and extraordinary. He could picture to Himself His own mother at work.

I will put the following questions to the reader of the Gospel. Why did Christ take woman as His example, instead of man, when men have been bakers throughout the centuries? And why the leaven, when unleavened bread was also commonly used? And why did the woman take three measures, and not one or two or four? Finally, what connection or similarity is there between the reign of God and the kitchen work of a housewife?

If these questions cannot be answered, how can we understand the parable? Yet to answer them without a spiritual key would only lead to further difficulties. All the parables deal with the superficial, but their real meaning lies deep down. They appeal to the eye and seem obvious enough, but they concern the spirit and the spiritual.

This parable has a twofold spiritual interpretation. The first has to do with the three principal races of mankind, the second with the three main faculties or powers of the human soul. In brief, what is outstanding and unusual in this parable is the historical and personal process of man's salvation.

After the Great Flood, there stemmed from the sons of Noah -- Shem, Ham, and Japheth -- three races of mankind, the Shemites, Hamites, and Japhethites. These are the three measures of flour into which Christ puts His heavenly leaven, the Holy Spirit. That means He came as Messiah and Saviour to all the races and nations of mankind without exception. Just as with leaven a woman can transform natural flour into bread, so Christ, through the Holy Spirit, transforms natural

men into the children of God, into immortal inhabitants of the Heavenly Kingdom. That is why, according to Orthodox teaching, holy men are called earthly angels or heavenly men, because, being "leavened" by the Holy Spirit, they are no longer common flour or unleavened biscuits that lie on the earth, but they are leavened bread that has risen. According to the Bible, unleavened bread was the bread of slaves, while leavened bread was for free men, God's children. So for that reason, the Orthodox Church uses leavened bread at Holy Communion. The process of leavening began on that first Trinity Sunday or Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven onto the apostles. From that day forth this process has continued down to the present day, and it will continue till the end of time when all will be leavened. This, then, is the historical interpretation of the enigmatic parable about the woman baker.

The second interpretation is psychological and personal, and concerns the three main faculties or powers of the human soul: intellect, heart, and will, or, in other words, the power to think, the power to feel, and the power to act. These are the three unseen measures of the soul of the inner man. These three powers either remain totally unleavened, like the bread of slaves, or they are leavened with the leaven of malice and hypocrisy. Therefore, Christ told His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy, because that is the worldly and human leaven, which weakens all the powers of the soul and leaves it crippled and sick. But Christ the Saviour brought to earth a new leaven to raise the powers of the soul. Those who receive this new heavenly leaven through Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity are called the sons and daughters of God, the heirs of the eternal Kingdom. They will not die, for even when they leave the body, they will be alive and will live for ever. This heavenly leaven fills them with the light of reason, the warmth of divine love, and the glory of good works. All three powers of the soul grow together in harmony, and ascend to heaven, to perfection. As the Lord said, Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Woman has been taken as a paragon and not man, and Christ has compared Himself to a woman baker, because woman, as wife and mother, prepares bread for the family in a loving manner, whereas the man baker bakes bread to sell for gain. Everything that Christ has done for mankind was done out of pure love, and therefore He compares Himself to a woman baker. This is the second interpretation, but both interpretations of this parable are correct. The historical and the psychological meaning derived from this simple parable is like a branching oak that grows out of an acorn, for it is truly majestic in its historical breadth and profound in its psychological depth.

## ON SIN AND CONFESSION

*By Blessed Elder Cleopa of Sihastria (+1998)*

If someone wants to sin, he sins; if he does not want to sin, he doesn't. The devil only puts the ideas in our minds, so if someone is foolish and deceived, he commits sin. Can you say on the day of judgment, 'Lord, the devil took me into the bar, the devil made me sin with that woman, the devil made me a drunkard, the devil made me have an abortion, etc.' If so, then the devil will say, 'Lord show me a witness who saw me drag this person into a bar, or into the fornication or murder'... However, through frequent confession, the devil's nest is destroyed.

The first benefit of frequent confession is that sin does not have time to put down roots in us, and the nest which the devil seeks to weave in us is destroyed. The devil, seeing that you confess often, that you repent, pray, and disclose his wiles, says, 'It is useless for me to work on him since he is constantly going to the priest and confessing, receiving absolution, and thus I gain nothing. It is better for me to go to those who are lazy spiritually, who don't care about their salvation, who confess rarely, if at all, because those do not work against me as this one does!' When someone confesses often, he is more aware of his sins and does not become careless about them. When he has not confessed for a few days, he says, 'What have I been doing!' Immediately he remembers. But when he lets a month or two, or maybe a year go by, how can he remember all his sins?

When someone confesses often, all he has to do is remember his shame before his spiritual father and the penance that he will surely be given, and he will do all he can to keep himself from sin.

Man has so much strength to use against sin; even if all the devils from hell were to come, they would be powerless to do anything to him if he would just oppose sin. This strength to overcome the temptation of the devils is given to each of us by God at the time of our baptism. If man did not have this strength to oppose sin, then hell would not exist to punish sin.

In God's immeasurable goodness, He knows our weaknesses and that we transgress both willingly and unwillingly, in knowledge and in ignorance. There is not a single moment in which we do not err before the Lord. But, no one knows the nature of man better than God, for He created us out of nothing.

When we turn to Him with tears, with a sorrowful heart, and with a pure confession, He forgives us. Whoever has more serious sins has to have a penance, for God is always ready to receive us and forgive us since we are His creation.

## ON THE HERESY OF REINCARNATION

*By Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose), "The Soul After Death", St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1980*

Among the occult ideas which are now being widely discussed and sometimes accepted by those who have "out-of-body" and "after-death" experiences, and even by some scientists, is the idea of reincarnation: the soul after death does not undergo the Particular Judgment and then dwell in heaven or hell awaiting the resurrection of the body and the Last Judgment, but (evidently after a longer or shorter stay on the "astral plane") comes back to earth and occupies a new body, whether of a beast or of another man.

This idea was widespread in pagan antiquity in the West, before it was replaced by Christian ideas; but its spread today is largely owing to the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism, where it is commonly accepted. Today the idea is usually "humanized", in that people assume their "previous lives" were as men, whereas the more common idea both among Hindus and Buddhists and among ancient Greeks and Romans is that it is rather rare to achieve "incarnation" as a man, and that most of today's "incarnations", are as beasts, insects, and even plants.

Those who believe in this idea say that it accounts for all of the many "injustices" of earthly life, as well as for seemingly unexplainable phobias: if one is born blind, or in a condition of poverty, it is as a just reward for one's actions in a "previous life" (or, as Hindus and Buddhists say, because of one's "bad karma"); if one is afraid of water, it is because one drowned in a "previous existence."

Believers in reincarnation do not have any very thorough philosophy of the origin and destination of the soul, nor any convincing proofs to support their theory; its main attractions are the superficial ones of seeming to provide "justice" on earth, of explaining some *p s y c h i c* mysteries, and of providing some semblance of "immortality" for those who do not accept this on Christian grounds.

On deeper reflection, however, the theory of reincarnation offers no real explanation of injustice at all: if one suffers in this life for sins and mistakes in another lifetime which one cannot remember, and for which (if one was "previously" a beast) one cannot even be held responsible, and if (according to Buddhist teaching) there is even no "self" that survives from one "incarnation" to the next, and one's past mistakes were literally someone else's--then there is no recognizable justice at all, but only a blind suffering of evils whose origin is not to be traced out. The Christian teaching of the fall of Adam, which is the origin of all the world's evils, offers a much better explanation of injustices in the world; and the Christian revelation of God's perfect justice in His judgment of men for eternal life in heaven or hell renders unnecessary and trivial the idea of attaining "justice" through successive "incarnations" in this world.

In recent decades the idea of reincarnation has achieved a remarkable popularity in the Western world, and there have been numerous cases suggesting the "remembrance" of "past lives"; many people also return from "out-of-body" experiences believing that these experiences suggest or instill the idea of reincarnation. What are we to think of these cases?

Very few of these cases, it should be noted, offer "proof" that is any more than vaguely circumstantial, and could easily be the product of simple imagination: a child is born with a mark on his neck, and subsequently "remembers" that he was hanged as a horse thief in a "previous life"; a person fears heights, and then "remembers" that he died by falling in his "past" life, and the like. The natural human tendency of fantasy renders such cases useless as "proof" of reincarnation.

In many cases, however, such "previous lives" have been discovered by a hypnotic technique known as "regressive hypnosis," which has in many cases given striking results in the recall of events long forgotten by the conscious mind, even as far back as infancy. The hypnotist brings a person "back" to infancy, and then asks: "What about before that?" Often, in such cases, a person will "remember" his "death" or even a whole different lifetime; what are we to think of such memories?

Well-trained hypnotists themselves will admit the pitfalls of "regressive hypnosis." Dr. Arthur C. Hastings, a California specialist in the psychology of communication, notes that "the most obvious thing that happens under hypnosis is that the person is extremely compliant. If you ask them to go to a past life, and they don't have a past life, they will invent one for you!"

But what of those cases, publicized widely of late, when there is "objective proof" of one's "previous life"--when a person "remembers" details of time and places he could not possibly have known by himself, and which can be checked by historical documents?

Such cases seem very convincing to those already inclined to believe in reincarnation; but this kind of "proof" is not different from the standard information provided by the "spirits" at séances (which can also be of a very striking kind), and there is no reason to suppose that the source is different. If the "spirits" at séances are quite clearly demons, then the information on one's "previous lives" can also be supplied by demons. The aim in both cases is the same: to confuse men with a dazzling display of seemingly "supernatural" knowledge, and thus to deceive them concerning the true nature of life after death and leave them spiritually unprepared for it.

The early Christian Church fought the idea of reincarnation, which entered the Christian world through Eastern teachings such as those of the Manicheans. Origen's false teaching of the "pre-existence of souls" was closely related to these teachings, and at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553, it was strongly condemned and its followers anathema-

*[Cont'd on page 9]*



## Αγιότητας, Άρετή, Αγώνας

ΠΗΓΗ: “Γέροντας Έφραϊμ Κατουνακιώτης”, Έκδοση Από Τò Περιβόλι τής Παναγίας, www.topervoli.gr



**Α**νθρωπος ό όποι-  
ος έπαινει τον πλη-  
σίον του και κατακρίνει  
τον έαυτό του, φθάνει σε  
μέτρα αγιότητας. Άν ζητάς  
έσθ από τον άλλο, έπει-  
δη σε λύπησε, να σου βάλ-  
ει μετάνοια, δεν είσαι κα-  
λά, δεν είσαι έντάξει, δεν  
βαδίζεις στο δρόμο τής κα-  
λογοερικής.

Φθάσαμε, πατέρες, σ' ένα  
τέτοιο σημείο, πού μπορώ  
να πώ ότι, όταν ήμασταν  
κοσμικοί, ήμασταν καλύτε-

ροι. Τώρα δεν σηκώνουμε λόγο.

Τα πατερικά βιβλία λένε ότι ό άββας Νισθερώ απέκτη-  
σε φήμη αγίου άνδρός. Και πήγε άλλος και του λέει: «Τί  
άρετή έκανες, πάτερ, κι έφθασες σ' αυτά τα μέτρα;» Λέ-  
ει: «Άφότου μπήκα στο μοναστήρι, είπα, έγω και τò γα-  
ϊδοῦρι ένα είμαστε. Όσο μιλάει τò γαϊδοῦρι, όταν τò  
δέρνεις, τόσο θα μιλήσω κι έγω». Αυτό ήταν τò θεμέλιο,  
ότι και να τόν δείρουνε, «εὐλόγησον». Τώρα έμεις φθά-  
σαμε στο σημείο πού δεν σηκώνουμε λόγο πια.

Ό άνθρωπος, εφόσον ζεί, πρέπει πάντοτε να αγωνίζε-  
ται. Και ό πρώτος αγώνας είναι να νικήσει τόν έαυτό  
του. Ό πρώτος και ό κυριότερος έχθρός του ανθρώπου  
δεν είναι ό διάβολος, όχι. Είναι ό ίδιος ό άνθρωπος εις  
τόν έαυτό του έπίβουλος. Και τούτο διότι δεν άκούει  
τόν άλλον, άκούει τί του λέει ό λογισμός του. Ένώ έχου-  
με τόσους αγίους Πατέρες να τούς μιμηθοῦμε διαβάζον-  
τας τὰ συγγράματά τους, έντούτοις όμως τò έγω μας  
κυριεύει πολλές φορές. Όταν ό άνθρωπος νικήσει τόν  
έαυτό του, είναι ό μεγαλύτερος μεγαλομάρτυρας και  
τροπαιοφόρος και νικηφόρος ένώπιον του Θεού!...

...Γι' αυτό πολλές φορές, να σάς πώ, πατέρες, έφοβήθη-  
κα τήν κρίση του Θεού. Είναι σύμφωνος ό Θεός με μένα-  
νε ή μήπως αλλάζει ό Θεός; «Εμνήσθην τών κριμάτων  
Σου και παρεκλήθην» (Ψάλμ. 118,12· 52). Έτσι είναι.

Ό Σταυρός δεν λείπει. Γιατί; Γιατί έφ' όσον κι ό άρχη-  
γός μας άνέβηκε στο Σταυρό, κι έμεις θ' άνεβοῦμε, να  
ποῦμε. Άλλά άπ' τή μία πλευρά είναι γλυκός και έλα-  
φρός, άπ' τήν άλλη μεριά είναι πικρός και βαρύς. Κα-  
τά τήν προαίρεσή μας. Άν πάρεις με άγάπη τόν Σταυ-

ρό του Χριστού, είναι πολύ έλαφρός, είναι σφουγγάρι,  
φελλός. Άν τò πάρεις, δηλαδή, από τήν άλλη πλευρά,  
τότες είναι βαρύς και άσήκωτος.

Γι' αυτό, και μένα ή πείρα αυτό με δίδαξε. Τò θέλη-  
μα του Θεού να γίνει. Ήταν άπ' τò Θεό έτσι. Και ειρη-  
νεύεις, να ποῦμε. Άν πείς με γιατί έτοῦτο, εκείνο, δεν  
ειρηνεύεις, δεν ειρηνεύεις. Δεν ήταν τò θέλημα του Θε-  
ού να φύγω τήν Κυριακή, ήταν τή Δευτέρα. Δεν ήθελε  
ό Θεός τήν Τρίτη, ήθελε να φύγω τήν Τετάρτη. Έε, ό  
Θεός έτσι τὰ 'φερε. Άν τὰ πάρεις άπ' τήν άλλη πλευρά  
με τήν κρίση τή δική σου, θα σφάλεις και μισθόν δεν  
έχεις. Μισθόν δεν έχεις!

Μέσα σου να βράζει ή χαρά, να μη φαίνεται μέσα σου  
να βράζει ή λύπη, ή κόλαση αλλά μην τò έξωτερικεύεις.  
Αυτός είναι ό καλόγηρος. Ειδάλλως, έσθ κι έγω έδώ,  
και να προσευχώμεθα· να μην άκούει ό ένας τόν άλλο-  
νε. Αυτό είναι κατά Θεόν. Άμα τò έξωτερικεύεις, είτε  
ύπερηφάνεια θα σε πιάσει, ή... θα τò χάσεις.

Γι' αυτό λέω ότι, όπου κι άν εύρεθεί ό άνθρωπος, να  
μην άπελπίζεται. Να μην τὰ χάνει, να μην τὰ σαστίζει.  
Για τόν άλφα και τόν βήτα λόγο, ό Θεός γνωρίζει, σε  
δοκιμάζει. Σε δοκιμάζει: Μπορείς να κρατήσεις αυτήν  
τή θλίψη; Μπορώ. Θα σου δώσω χάρισμα. Δεν μπορείς;  
Κι αυτό πού σου 'δωσα, θα τò αφαιρέσω. Έγω δεν θέ-  
λω δειλούς ανθρώπους. Όχι όπως έστειλε ό Μωϋσής  
τούς κατασκόπους, λέει: «Έωράκαμεν υίους γιγάντων  
και ήμεν ένώπιον αυτών ώσει ακρίδες» (Άριθ. 13,34).  
Έτσι; Ναι, αλλά ποιός τò λέει αυτό; Ποιός τò λέει; «Δει-  
λός άποσταλείς εις ύπακοήν, λέγει λέων κατά τήν όδόν  
και φονείς κατά τās πλατείας» (Παροιμ. 26,13). Δειλός  
άνθρωπος δεν άξίζει τίποτες. Ένώ τολμηρός πάντα βγαί-  
νει νικητής. Βλέπει;

Η δικαιολογία δεν είναι γραμμένη στη Γραφή. Οι  
άγιοι όχι μόνο δεν δικαιολογούνται, αλλά ύποφέρουν  
έκουσίως για τούς άλλους.

Πάτερ, όχι έτσι. Έσθ να διορθώσεις τόν έαυτό σου, όχι  
να περιμένεις τούς άλλους. Έσθ να σταθείς από κάτω,  
να σε πατάν όλοι. Τότες είσαι έν τάξει. Ειδάλλως...

Έσθ να άρματωθείς στην ύπομονή. Ό δρόμος ό του  
Σταυρού αυτός είναι.

Ό άνθρωπος, όσο και σοφός να είναι, να συμβουλευέ-  
ται και λιγάκι. Δεν είμαστε έμεις θεοδίδακτοι. Ούτε ό  
Θεός και σύ· μπορείς να πάρεις πληροφοριάν από τò  
Θεό; Δεν είμαστε σ' αυτή τήν κατάσταση. Ά, να ρωτή-  
σουμε και κάνα άλλο. Να ρωτήσουμε, να συμβουλευ-  
τοῦμε. Έε, δεν έχεις κανέναν άνθρωπο καλύτερό σου;

Θα κάνεις ύπομονή στα δικά σου τὰ πάθη, θα κάνεις  
και στα δικά μου. Έτσι θα γίνεις άγιος.

## Ἡ Φιλία: Δῶρο Τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἀνεκτίμητο

ΠΗΓΗ : Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδης, Θεολόγος, «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», τεύχος 1474.

Ὅσο κι ἂν ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ζωὴ σημαδεύεται ἀπὸ τὶς γκρίζες ζῶνες τῶν θλίψεων καὶ τῶν καταθλίψεων, ἡ φιλία —δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀνεκτίμητο— ἀνακουφίζει καὶ παρηγορεῖ. Ὁ καλὸς φίλος μοιάζει σὰν τὸ λιμάνι στὸν ὠκεανὸ καὶ σὰν τὴν ὄαση στὴν ἔρημο.

«Φίλος πιστὸς σκέπη κραταιά, ὁ δὲ εὐρῶν αὐτὸν εὖ-ρε θησαυρόν. Φίλου πιστοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντάλλαγμα» (Σοφ. Σειρ. στ' 14-15).

Ὁ καλὸς φίλος εἶναι θησαυρὸς πολύτιμος. Εἶναι προστασία καὶ σκέπη, ἀγάπη καὶ παραμυθία, ἐνίσχυση καὶ στηριγμός, δύναμη καὶ ἀσφάλεια, ἐνότητα καὶ ἐπιτυχία, χαρὰ καὶ εὐλογία.

Τὴν ἔχει ἀνάγκη τὴ φιλία ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ προπάντων ὁ νέος. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν εἶναι χωρὶς σημασία ἡ προτροπὴ τοῦ σοφοῦ Παρομμιαστῆ: «Εἰς πάντα καιρὸν φίλος ὑπαρχέτω σοί» (Παρομμ. ιζ' 17). Οἱ ἄνθρωποι κάποτε ἔχουν πιότερη ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ φίλους, παρὰ ἀπὸ ψωμὶ καὶ χρήματα. Ὁ Σωκράτης ρωτοῦσε:

«Πρὸς ποῖον κτῆμα τῶν ἄλλων παραβαλλόμενος φίλος ἀγαθὸς οὐκ ἂν πολλῶ κρείττων φανείη».

Θεωροῦσε τὸν καλὸ φίλο ἀνώτερο καὶ καλύτερο ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ ἀγαθὰ τοῦ κόσμου. Ὁ δὲ Κικέρων δὲ δίσταζε ν' ἀποκαλεῖ τὸν φίλο alter ego, «ἕνα ἄλλο ἐγώ», μὴ δευτέρη ὑπαρξὴ μας. Ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος ἐκφράζεται τόσο ὁμορφα γιὰ τὴ φιλία, ὥστε τὰ λόγια του μοιάζουν μὲ τραγούδι καὶ ὕμνο:

«Καὶ τοῦ φωτὸς αὐτοῦ, ποθεινότερος φίλος τὸν γνήσιον λέγω. Καὶ μὴ θαυμάσης βέλτιον γὰρ ἡμῖν σβεσθῆναι τὸν ἥλιον, ἢ φίλων ἀποστερηθῆναι: βέλτιον ἐν σκότῳ διάγειν, ἢ φίλων εἶναι χωρὶς... Πατέρας καὶ υἱοὺς ὑπερβαίνουνσι φίλοι, φίλοι οἱ κατὰ Χριστόν».

Κι ἀπ' τὸ φῶς εἶναι πιὸ ποθητὸς ὁ γνήσιος καὶ καλὸς φίλος. Εἶναι προτιμότερο νὰ σβῆσει ὁ ἥλιος παρὰ νὰ στερηθοῦμε τοὺς καλοὺς φίλους. Οἱ καλοὶ φίλοι εἶναι ἀπ' τοὺς γονεῖς καὶ τὰ φυσικὰ ἀδέρφια ἀνώτεροι.

Θαυμαστὲς φιλίες ἀναγράφει ἡ ἱστορία, ὅπως τοῦ Δάμωνα καὶ τοῦ Φιντία, τοῦ Δαβὶδ καὶ τοῦ Ἰωνάθαν, τοῦ Φίλιππου καὶ τοῦ Ναθαναήλ, τοῦ Παύλου καὶ τοῦ Βαρνάβα, τοῦ Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου καὶ τοῦ Μ. Βασιλείου καὶ ἄλλες πολλὲς στὰ μεταγενέστερα χρόνια. Ψυχὲς μὲ ἀγάπη καὶ ἀλτροῦισμό· ψυχὲς «ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι καὶ μία καρδιά»· ψυχὲς μὲ τὴν ἴδια πίστη καὶ τὰ ἴδια ἰδανικά.

Πόσο ὑπέροχος καὶ μεγαλειώδης ἐκεῖνος ὁ «θρήνος» τοῦ Δαβὶδ στὸ θάνατο τοῦ φίλου του Ἰωνάθαν! Ἔνα, ἴσως μοναδικὸ θρηνητικὸ τραγούδι ἀγάπης καὶ φιλίας στὴν παγκόσμια λογοτεχνία, εἰπωμένο, ἄλλωστε, ἀπ' τὸν ἔξοχο ποιητὴ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ μουσικὸ καὶ προφη-

τάνακτα, τὸν Δαβὶδ. Ἔνα πένθιμο ἔλεγείο, γεμάτο λυρισμὸ καὶ τρυφερότητα.

«Μέσα ἀπὸ τὰς φράσεις τοῦ ἄσματος ἀναπηδοῦν τὰ πλέον εὐγενῆ αἰσθήματα τῆς φιλοπατρίας, τῆς φιλίας καὶ τῆς πολεμικῆς ἀρετῆς». «Ὅταν μελετῶμεν τὸ κεφάλαιον αὐτό, μένωμεν ἐκπληκτοὶ ἐμπρὸς εἰς τὸ ψυχικὸν μεγαλεῖον τοῦ Δαβὶδ» (Ἰθ. Φραγκόπουλος, Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, ἔκδ. «Ὁ Σωτήρ», τόμ. 5, σελ. 194, Γεωργίου Ψαλτάκη).

Μερικοὶ στίχοι τῆς ὠδῆς αὐτῆς εἶναι χαρακτηριστικοί (Β' Βασ. 17-27):

«Καὶ ἐθρήνησε Δαβὶδ τὸν θρήνον τοῦτον ἐπὶ Σαοὺλ καὶ ἐπὶ Ἰωνάθαν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ... Πῶς ἔπεσαν οἱ δυνατοί; Σαοὺλ καὶ Ἰωνάθαν, οἱ ἀγαπημένοι καὶ ὠραῖοι... Πῶς ἔπεσαν οἱ δυνατοὶ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ πολέμου; Ἰωνάθ ἐπὶ τὰ ὕψη σου τραυματίας. Ἀλγῶ ἐπὶ σοί, ἀδελφέ μου Ἰωνάθαν. Ὁρραϊώθης μοὶ σφόδρα, ἐθαυμαστώθῃ ἡ ἀγάπησίς σου ἐμοὶ ὑπὲρ ἀγάπησιν γυναικῶν. Πῶς ἔπεσαν δυνατοὶ καὶ ἀπώλοντο σκευὴ πολεμικά;»

«Οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν κτῆμα βέλτιον φίλου», ὁμολογεῖ ἀπ' τὴν πείρα τῆς ζωῆς του ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος. Καὶ προσθέτει: «Πιστοῦ φίλου νόμιζε μηδὲν ἄξιον». Ἡ ἀληθινὴ φιλία δὲν σπάει μὲ τίποτε. «Οὔτε χρόνου πληθός, οὔτε ὁδῶν διάστημα, οὔτε ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων οὐδὲν ψυχῆς φιλίαν διακόψαι δύναται ἄν», διακηρύττει ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος.

Ἡ πιὸ ὑπέροχη καὶ ἀληθινὴ καὶ γνήσια καὶ αὐθεντικὴ φιλία εἶναι ἡ χριστιανικὴ φιλία. Ὁ φίλος του Θεοῦ εἶναι καὶ ὁ καλύτερος φίλος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ὁ ἐχθρὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐδέποτε μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ ἀληθινὸς φίλος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἡ χριστιανικὴ φιλία, κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Ἰσίδωρο τὸν Πηλουσιώτη, εἶναι ἐκεῖνη στὴν ὁποία συνυπάρχουν «ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ φόβος καὶ ὁ τῶν φίλων πόθος».

Συχνὰ οἱ φιλίες τοῦ κόσμου δὲν εἶναι παρὰ συνωμοσῆς στὸ κακό, ἢ συντροφίες γιὰ διασκέδαση καὶ γλέντι. Ὅπως ὠραία τὸ εἶπε κάποιος: «Φιλία δὲν θὰ πεῖ νὰ βλέπουμε ὁ ἕνας τὸν ἄλλο στὰ μάτια, ἀλλὰ νὰ βλέπουμε μαζὶ στὴν ἴδια κατεύθυνση». Νὰ ἔχουμε, δηλαδή, τὸν ἴδιο στόχο. «Δὲν ὑπάρχει φιλία, παρὰ ἐκεῖνη ποὺ σφυρηλατεῖς Ἐσύ, Θεέ μου, μὲ τὸν δεσμὸ τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἀγάπης», λέγει προσευχητικὰ ὁ ἱερὸς Αὐγουστίνος.

Πόσο μᾶς συγκινεῖ ὁ λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου: «Ὑμεῖς φίλοι μου ἐστὲ, ἐὰν ποιῆτε ὅσα ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν!» (Ἰω. ιε' 14). Ὁ Ἰησοῦς μᾶς ἀποκαλεῖ «φίλους» Του. Ὑψίστη τιμὴ καὶ μέγα προνόμιο. Ἐμεῖς ἀνταποκρινόμεστε στὴ θεϊκὴ Του φιλία; Εἴμαστε πιστοὶ τηρητὲς τοῦ θελήματος Του; Ἐφαρμόζουμε τὸν ἅγιο νόμο Του; Ὅμορφα τραγουδάει ὁ Βερίτης τὴ φιλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ:

«Εἶν' ὁ Χριστὸς μου φίλος μου, ὁ φίλος ὁ μεγάλος... Πάντα μαζὺ στὰ δύσκολα, πάντα μαζὺ μὲ Σένα».

Μὲ τέτοιο Μεγάλο φίλο, ὠραία καὶ χαρούμενη εἶναι ἡ ζωή.

## Τὰ Αἴτια τῆς Πτώσης τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας

Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Γεωργίου Μεταλληνού

**Η** πτώση τῆς Πόλης τὸ 1453 δὲν ἔγινε ἀπροσδόκητα, οὔτε μὲ αὐτὴν ἄρχισε ἡ τουρκοκρατία. Στὶς 29 Μαΐου 1453 ἓνα μεγάλο μέρος τῆς Ρωμανίας ἦταν ἤδη κάτω ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὀθωμανοὺς, τοὺς Ἀραβες καὶ τοὺς Βενετούς. Ἀπὸ τὸ 1204 ἡ Πόλη δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ ἀναλάβει τὴν πρώτη της δύναμη καὶ ὅλα ἔδειχναν πὼς βαδίζει στὴν τελικὴ πτώση. Τὸ φραγκικὸ πλῆγμα ἐναντίον της ἦταν τόσο δυνατὸ, ποὺ ἀπὸ τὸ 13ο αἰῶνα ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη ἦταν “μια πόλη καταδικασμένη νὰ χαθεῖ”. Ἡ ἄλωση ἦταν ἐξάλλου ἡ κατάληξη μιᾶς μακροχρόνιας ἀποσύνθεσης τῆς πολιτικῆς καὶ οἰκονομικῆς ὑπόστασης τοῦ Γένους.

Ἀπὸ τὸ 13ο αἰῶνα ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς εἶχε διασπαστεῖ καὶ διαμοιραστεῖ, στὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος του, σὲ ξένους δυνάστες. Οἱ διεισδύσεις, ἔπειτα, μισθοφόρων στὸ στρατὸ καὶ ἀλλοφύλων στὸ διοικητικὸ μηχανισμὸ τοῦ εἶχαν προκαλέσει τὴν ἐθνολογικὴ του ἀλλοίωση. Οἱ ἐμφύλιοι πόλεμοι (1321-1328, 1341-1355), καὶ ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ ἀναρχία εἶχαν ἐπιφέρει τὴ δημογραφικὴ του συρρίκνωση. Σοβαρὰ λάθη στὴν οἰκονομικὴ πολιτικὴ τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων, ὅπως ἡ συνεχὴς αὔξηση τῆς μεγάλης ιδιοκτησίας σὲ βάρος τῶν μικρῶν, ποὺ πιέζονταν ἀπὸ τὴ δυσβάστακτη φορολογία, ἡ καταχρηστικὴ ἐπέκταση τοῦ θεσμοῦ τῶν “προνοιαρίων” καὶ ἡ ὑπερβολικὴ, πολλὰς φορὲς, αὔξηση τῶν μοναστηριακῶν κτημάτων δημιούργησαν μιὰν οἰκονομικὴ ὀλιγαρχία σὲ βάρος τῶν μικροκαλλιεργητῶν τῆς γῆς, μὲ ἀπώλξη τὴν οἰκονομικὴ κρίση. Τὸ ἐμπόριο εἶχε περιέλθει στὰ χέρια τῶν δυτικῶν καὶ οἱ δυνατότητες γιὰ οἰκονομικὴ ἀνάκαμψη περιορίστηκαν σημαντικά.

Ὑπῆρχαν ὅμως καὶ πνευματικὰ αἴτια τῆς πτώσης. Οἱ θρησκευτικὲς, κοινωνικὲς καὶ ἰδεολογικὲς ἀντιθέσεις προκάλεσαν βαθεῖα σύγχυση, ποὺ λειτούργησε διαλυτικὰ στὸ σῶμα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἰδιαίτερα οἱ δυτικὲς ἐπιρροὲς καὶ οἱ συνεχεῖς ὑποχωρήσεις τῶν πολιτικῶν στὶς δυτικὲς (παπικὲς) ἀπαιτήσεις, γιὰ τὴν ἀναμενόμενη στρατιωτικὴ βοήθεια, ὀδήγησαν στὴν πνευματικὴ ἀλλοίωση τοῦ Βυζαντίου, μὲ ἄμεσο κίνδυνο ἀπώλειας τῆς πνευματικῆς καὶ πολιτιστικῆς ταυτότητάς του. Γιατί, ἂν τὸ Βυζάντιο ἔπαυε νὰ διατηρεῖ τὴν πνευματικὴ καὶ πολιτιστικὴ ἰδιαιτερότητά του, ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν δὲν ἔπεφτε στὰ χέρια τῶν Τούρκων, θὰ καταλυόταν ἐσωτερικά, μεταβαλλόμενο σὲ πνευματικὸ προτεκτοράτο τῆς Φραγκιάς. Ἡ πτώση - κατὰ τοὺς ἀνθενωτικοὺς - ἦλθε ὡς σωτηρία, γιατί κράτησε τὴν πνευματικὴ καὶ πολιτιστικὴ καθαρότητα τοῦ Γένους, τὸ ὁποῖο στὴ δουλεία, παρὰ τὶς ταλαιπωρίες του, μπόρεσε νὰ ἀνασυνταχτεῖ καὶ νὰ ἐπιβιώσει.

Τὸ γεγονὸς τῆς ἄλωσης εἶχε τεράστια σημασία πρῶτα γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνισμὸ καὶ τὴν κατοπινὴ του πορεία. Γιὰ τοὺς Ἕλληνες ἡ ἄλωση ὑπῆρξε μιὰ κρισιμότερη στιγμή στὴν ἱστορία τους. Γιατί ἄρχισε γι’ αὐτοὺς μιὰ περίοδος μακρᾶς δοκιμασίας μὲ μειωμένους οἰκονομικὰ καὶ πολιτικὰ τὶς δυνάμεις τους. Ἄν οἱ ψυχικὲς καὶ πνευματικὲς δυνάμεις τους δὲν ἦσαν ἀκμαῖες, εἶναι ἀμφίβολο, ἂν θὰ μπορούσε τὸ Γένος νὰ ξεπεράσει τὶς συνέπειες τῆς πτώσης, ὅπως συνέβη μὲ ἄλλους λαοὺς στὴν ἱστορία. Ἡ ἐμμονὴ ὅμως στὴν ὀρθόδοξη παράδοση, καὶ μέσω αὐτῆς καὶ στὴν ἑλληνικότητα, κρατοῦσε δεμένο τὸ Γένος μὲ τὶς ζωτικὲς πηγές του.

Ἡ ἀπώλεια εἰδικὰ τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης ὑπῆρξε σημαντικότερο γεγονός. Ἡ Πόλη ἦταν ἡ συνισταμένη ὅλων τῶν ἐλπίδων τῶν Ρωμηῶν. Ἡ διατήρηση τῆς ἐλευθερίας της, παρὰ τὴν τρομακτικὴ συρρίκνωση τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, ἔτρεφε τὴν αὐτοπεποίθησή τους καὶ συντηροῦσε τὸν ψυχισμό τους.

Ὅπως ὑπογράμμισε πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλωση ὁ λόγιος μοναχὸς Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος: “Ταύτης τῆς πόλεως ἰσταμένης, συνίσταται πὼς αὐτὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις ἀκράδαντος. Ἐδαφισθείσης δὲ ἡ ἀλούσης, ἄπερ, Χριστέ μου, μὴ γένοιτο, ποῖα ἔσται ψυχὴ κατὰ πίστιν ἀκλόνητος;” (δηλαδή: Ὅσο στέκεται ὀρθία αὐτὴ ἡ πόλη, μένει μαζί της ἀκλόνητη καὶ ἡ πίστη. Ἄν ὅμως κατεδαφιστεῖ ἡ ἄλωθεί, ποῦ νὰ μὴ γίνε, Χριστέ μου, ποῖα ψυχὴ θὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν πίστη της ἀσάλευτη;)

Μετὰ τὴν πτώση τῆς Πόλης ἡ δύναμη ἀντίστασης μειώθηκε σημαντικά, ὅπως δείχνουν οἱ ἀλλαξοπιστίες καὶ ἡ μοιρολατρικὴ στάση πολλῶν ἀπὸ τὸν κληρο καὶ τὸ λαό. Τὸ Γένος χρειαζόταν κάποια δύναμη, ποὺ θὰ ἐμπόδιζε τὴν ἀλλοτριώσή του καὶ, θὰ ἐξασφάλιζε τὴν ἐπιβίωση καὶ ἀνάκαμψή του. Αὐτὴ τὴ δυσκολότερη, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀναγκαιότερη ἀποστολὴ θὰ ἀναλάβει ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ὡς Ἐθναρχία.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τοὺς Ὀθωμανοὺς ἡ ἄλωση εἶχε ἀνάλογη σημασία. Μὲ αὐτὴ νομιμοποιήθηκε ἡ νίκη τους πάνω στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ αὐτοκρατορία, ἡ ὁποία μὲ τὸ πάρσιμο τῆς Πόλης ἔγινε καὶ τυπικὰ Ὀθωμανικὴ. Ἡ κατάκτηση τῶν ὑπόλοιπων ρωμαϊκῶν ἐδαφῶν (Τραπεζούντας, κυρίως Ἑλλάδας) δὲν ἦταν παρὰ ἡ ὀλοκλήρωση τῆς ὑποκατάστασης τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὀθωμανοὺς στὴν αὐτοκρατορία τους.

Τὸ σπουδαῖο ὅμως εἶναι, ὅτι τὸ ἄλλοτε βάρβαρο τουρκικὸ φύλο τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν μέσα σὲ σύντομο χρόνον μπόρεσε νὰ συγκροτηθεῖ σὲ μιὰ πανίσχυρη αὐτοκρατορία καὶ νὰ ἐνταχθεῖ στὸ σύστημα τῶν Εὐρωπαϊκῶν κρατῶν. Μέσα στὰ ὅρια τῆς Ὀθωμανικῆς αὐτοκρατορίας θὰ ἀγωνιστεῖ στὸ ἐξῆς ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς, μαζί μὲ ὅλη τὴ Ρωμηοσύνη, νὰ βρεῖ τὸ δρόμο του στὴ νέα γι’ αὐτὸν πραγματικότητα.



## 13 Ιουνίου, ἡ Ἐπέτειος τοῦ Θανάτου τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλέξανδρου

Γεώργιος Καρῶς, Συντάκτης τῆς Orthodox Heritage

Ἦταν 13 Ιουνίου 323 π.Χ. ὅταν ὁ Μέγιστος τῶν Ἑλλήνων Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μακεδόνας ἄφησε τὴν τελευταία του πνοή, πρὶν προλάβει νὰ ὀλοκληρώσει τὸ φιλόδοξο σχέδιό του, ἀλλὰ ἔχοντας κατακτήσει ὅλον τὸν τότε γνωστὸ κόσμο. Ὅτι καὶ νὰ πεί κανεὶς γιὰ τὸ ἔργο καὶ τὴν προσφορά τοῦ Ἀλέξανδρου στὸν ἑλληνισμό καὶ στὴν ἀνθρωπότητα σίγουρα θὰ εἶναι τὸ ἐλάχιστο. Ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἦταν ὁ μόνος κατακτητὴς στὴν ἱστορία ποὺ οἱ «κατακτημένοι» λαοὶ τὸν δέχθηκαν ὡς ἐλευθερωτὴ τους καὶ πολλοὶ τὸν λάτρεψαν ὡς θεό. Αὐτὸ δὲν ἔγινε τυχαῖα καθὼς ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος σεβάστηκε ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς καθὼς καὶ τὶς παραδόσεις τους, τὰ ἦθη, καὶ τὰ ἔθμά τους. Ἀνακηρύχθηκε ὄχι ἀπλὰ Μέγας, ἀλλὰ Μέγιστος.

Ἦταν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος αὐτὸς ποὺ διέδωσε τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα στὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονός βοήθησε καὶ στὴν διάδοση τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ μέσω τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλῶσσας. Ἦταν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος αὐτὸς ποὺ κατάφερε νὰ ἐνώσει γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ὅλους τοὺς Ἕλληνες. Αὐτὸ ὅμως ποὺ πρέπει νὰ θυμόμαστε σήμερα καὶ νὰ παραδειγματιζόμαστε, εἶναι τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ξεκίνησε μόνο μὲ 30.000 στρατιῶτες ἐναντίων τῶν ἑκατομμυρίων Περσῶν. Ἐγγεῖρημα ποὺ σήμερα ὁ καθένας θὰ θεωροῦσε ἐπιχείρηση αὐτοκτονίας. Καὶ ὅμως τοὺς συνέτριψε! Αὐτὸ γιὰ κάποιους ποὺ σήμερα λένε ὅτι ὅποιαδήποτε σύγκρουσή μας μὲ τὴν Τουρκία εἶναι χαμένη καθὼς οἱ βάρβαροι Τοῦρκοι εἶναι 60 ἑκατομμύρια, κ.λ.π.. Ἐχνοῦν τὸ κατόρθωμα τοῦ Λεωνίδα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ '21, ποὺ ξυπόλυτοι γονάτισαν ὀλόκληρη Ὀθωμανικὴ αὐτοκρατορία, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ '40 ὅταν ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς Στρατὸς ἔτρεψε σὲ φυγὴ τὶς «8 ἑκατομμύρια λόγχεις» τοῦ Μουσολίνι.

Ὁ Μέγιστος τῶν Ἑλλήνων Ἀλέξανδρος πρέπει πάντοτε νὰ εἶναι στὴν ψυχὴ μας ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ καλύτερο πρότυπο γιὰ τὴν νεολαία μας, σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὰ «πρότυπα» ποὺ προβάλλει ἡ ὑποκουλτούρα τῆς Νέας Τάξης. Καὶ ΠΑΝΤΑ νὰ θυμόμαστε τὰ λόγια ἐνὸς μεγάλου φιλέλληνα, τοῦ Χ. Μπέγκστον:

«Οὔτε ἡ Ρωμαϊκὴ κοσμοκρατορία, οὔτε ἡ θριαμβευτικὴ πορεία τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ τοῦ ὁποίου οἱ κοινότητες ἀπλώνονταν κατὰ τὸ τέλος τῆς ἀρχαιότητος στὸν εὐρύτατο ἀπὸ τὴν Ἰρλανδία μέχρι τὶς Ἰνδίες χώρο, οὔτε ἀκόμη ἡ Βυζαντινὴ αὐτοκρατορία καὶ ὁ Ἀραβικὸς πολιτισμὸς θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ δημιουργηθοῦν χωρὶς τὸν Μέγα Ἀλέξανδρο καὶ τὸ κοσμογονικὸ του ἔργο.»

## Μὴ Κρίνετε, Ἴνα Μὴ Κριθῆτε (Ματθ. 7, 1)

Ἀπὸ Τὸ Μέγα Γεροντικὸν

Ἔλεγαν γιὰ τὸν ἄββᾶ Μάρκο τὸν Αἰγύπτιο ὅτι ἔμεινε τριάντα χρόνια χωρὶς νὰ βγεῖ ἀπ'τὸ κελί του. Ὁ πρεσβύτερος συνήθιζε νὰ πηγαίνει καὶ νὰ τοῦ κάνει τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία. Ὁ διάβολος ὅμως βλέποντας τὴν ἐνάρετη ὑπομονὴ τοῦ ἀνδρός, σοφίστηκε νὰ τὸν ρίξει στὸν πειρασμὸ τῆς κατάκρισης. Ἔτσι ἔκανε κάποιον δαμονισμένο νὰ πάει στὸν Γέροντα γιὰ νὰ τοῦ ζητήσῃ τάχα τὴν προσευχή του. Αὐτὸς λοιπὸν ὁ δαμονισμένος πρὶν ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλο λόγο εἶπε στὸν Γέροντα: «Ὁ πρεσβύτερός σου μυρίζει ἁμαρτία. Μὴν τὸν ἀφήσεις ἄλλη φορὰ νὰ ἴρθῃ κοντά σου». Καὶ ὁ θεόπνευστος ἄνθρωπος τοῦ εἶπε: «Παιδί μου, ὅλοι τὴ βρωμιὰ τὴν πετοῦν ἔξω καὶ ἐσύ μοῦ τὴν ἔφερες ἐδῶ; Ἡ Γραφή λέει: Μὴν κρίνετε γιὰ νὰ μὴν κριθεῖτε (Ματθ. 7,1). Ἀλλὰ ἂν εἶναι ἁμαρτωλὸς ὁ Κύριος θὰ τὸν σώσει. Εἶναι μάλιστα γραμμένο στὴν Ἁγία Γραφή: Νὰ προσεύχεστε ὁ ἕνας γιὰ τὸν ἄλλον γιὰ νὰ θεραπευθεῖτε (Ἰακ. 5,16)». Καὶ πάνω στὸν λόγο αὐτό, προσευχήθηκε καὶ ἔδιωξε τὸν δαίμονα ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τὸν ἔστειλε ὑγιή.

Ὅταν λοιπὸν ἦρθε ὁ πρεσβύτερος, ὅπως συνήθιζε, τὸν ὑποδέχθηκε ὁ Γέροντας μετὰ χαρᾶς. Ὁ Θεὸς ποὺ γνωρίζε τὴν ἀκακία τοῦ Γέροντα, τοῦ ἔδειξε θαυμαστὸ σημάδι. Ὅταν ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ σταθεῖ ὁ πρεσβύτερος μπροστὰ στὴν ἁγία Τράπεζα, ὅπως ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Γέροντας τὸ περιέγραψε, «εἶδα ἄγγελο Κυρίου νὰ κατεβαίνει ἀπὸ ψηλὰ καὶ ἔβαλε τὸ χέρι τοῦ στοῦ κεφάλι τοῦ κληρικοῦ καὶ ἔγινε ὁ κληρικὸς σὰν ἕνας στύλος φωτιᾶς. Καὶ ἐγὼ καθὼς ἔμεινα ἐκπληκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ θέαμα, ἄκουσα μία φωνὴ νὰ μοῦ λέει: Ἄνθρωπε γιατί ἐκπλήττεσαι μ'αὐτὸ ποῦ γίνεται; Ἐὰν ἕνας ἐπίγειος βασιλιάς δὲν θ'ἀφήσει τοὺς μεγιστάνες του νὰ στέκονται μπροστὰ του ρυπαροί, ἀλλὰ μόνο ἂν ἔχουν ἐπίσημη περιβολὴ πόσο περισσότερο ἡ θεία δύναμις δὲν θὰ καθαρῖσει τοὺς λειτουργοὺς τῶν ἀρρήτων μυστηρίων, ὅταν στέκονται μπροστὰ στὴν ἄφατη δόξα;»

Ἔτσι ὁ γενναῖος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀθλητῆς, ὁ Μάρκος ὁ Αἰγύπτιος, ἔγινε ἄξιος τοῦ χαρίσματος αὐτοῦ, ἐπειδὴ δὲν κατέκρινε τὸν κληρικὸ.

**Εἶπε ἕνας Γέροντας: «Μὴν κρίνετε τὸν πόρνο, ἐὰν ἐσὺ εἶσαι σῶφρων. Κι ἐσὺ εἶσαι παραβάτης τοῦ νόμου ὅπως κι ἐκεῖνος. Γιατί Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶπε νὰ μὴν πορνεύσεις (Ματθ. 5, 27), εἶπε καὶ νὰ μὴν κρίνετε (Ματθ. 7, 1)».**



## ON THE HERESY OF REINCARNATION

[Cont'd from page 4]

tized. Many individual Fathers of the Church wrote against it, notably St. Ambrose of Milan in the West (*On Belief in the Resurrection*, Book II), St. Gregory of Nyssa in the East (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*), and others.

For the present-day Orthodox Christian who is tempted by this idea, or who wonders about the supposed “proof” of it, it is sufficient to reflect on three basic Christian dogmas which conclusively refute the very possibility of reincarnation.

1. *The resurrection of the body.* Christ rose from the dead in the very body which had died the death of all men, and became the first-fruits of all men, whose bodies will also be resurrected on the last day and rejoined to their souls in order to live eternally in heaven or hell, according to God’s just judgment of their life on earth. This resurrected body, like that of Christ Himself, will be different from our earthly bodies in that it will be more refined and more like the angelic nature without which it could not dwell in the Heavenly Kingdom, where there is no death or corruption; but it will still be the same body, miraculously restored and made fit by God for eternal life, as Ezekiel saw in his vision of the “dry bones” (Ezek. 37: 1-14). In heaven the redeemed will recognize each other. The body is thus an inalienable part of the whole person who will live forever, and the idea of many bodies belonging to the same person denies the very nature of the Heavenly Kingdom which God has prepared for those who love Him.

2. *Our redemption by Jesus Christ.* God took flesh and through His life, suffering, and death on the Cross redeemed us from the dominion of sin and death. Through His Church, we are saved and made fit for the Heavenly Kingdom, with no “penalty” to pay for our past transgressions. But according to the idea of reincarnation, if one is “saved” at all it is only after many lifetimes of working out the consequences of one’s sins. This is the cold and dreary legalism of the pagan religions which was totally abolished by Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross: the thief on His right hand received salvation in an instant through his faith in the Son of God, the “bad karma” of his evil deeds being obliterated by the grace of God.

3. *The Judgment.* It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Human life is a single definite period of trial, after which there is no “second chance,” but only God’s judgment (which is just and merciful) of a man according to the state of his soul when this life is finished.

In these three doctrines the Christian revelation is quite precise and definite, in contrast to the pagan religions which do not believe either in the resurrection or in redemption, and are vague about judgment and the future life. The one answer to all supposed experiences or remembrances of “previous lives” is precisely the clear-cut teaching of Christianity about the nature of human life and God’s dealings with men.

## A TRUE STORY FROM HOLY RUSSIA’S PRISON SYSTEM

Translated from *Raiskie Tsveti Russi Zmli*, Reprinted by the Russian Orthodox Youth Committee, Baldwin Place, NY, 1984.

During his stay in Moscow in the spring of 1707, Tsar Peter Alexeevich commissioned Prince Feodor Yurevich Romodanovsky to organize the penitentiary system. And so, Romodanovsky set out on an inspection of the Moscow prisons. In the convict prison, accompanied by an inspector and a guard, he walked along all the corridors, looking into each cell and inquiring about the prisoners.

Suddenly, one of the convicts addressed him: “Esteemed Prince! We know that you are a pious and God-fearing man, that you venerate the memory of the saints, especially that of our hierarch St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. For his sake, the merciful one, show thy generous mercy and let me go home for a visit, just for two days.”

“What?!” exclaimed the astonished Romodanovsky. “Are you crazy to think of asking such a thing?”

“I am fully aware and of sound mind,” replied the convict. “I shall add that in my part of the country the feast of St. Nicholas is particularly honored. There in the village church is an altar dedicated to him. And besides, I long to see my young wife and my little children. I want to embrace and to kiss them. Let me go...”

“What kind of a man is this?” asked the prince.

“He murdered one of the tsar’s soldiers,” answered the guard.

“What kind of soldier?”

“One of the Preobrazhensk regiment. True,” added the guard, “it was committed in a fit of anger.”

The prisoner continued:

“Merciful prince! It’s true, I’m a great criminal. I repent of my deed before God and man. Nevertheless, I’d like to go home for a visit. I’m asking for two days only, and be assured that on the third day I shall return here on my own.”

The convict’s frankness impressed the prince, and he asked him, “Who will act as surety for you?”

“St. Nicholas the Wonderworker,” answered the prisoner. “He will secure me against any temptation.”

Here Romodanovsky looked the prisoner straight in the eyes, and something warmly compassionate moved in his soul.

“Unfetter him and release him for two days,” he ordered, pointing to the prisoner.

“Your honor,” said the inspector, “I dare say he will deceive you. He has only to make it out of the prison and there’ll be no trace of him. Nothing in the world is sacred for these criminals. They are masters of fine speech.”

Romodanovsky pondered these words...

“It’s true,” he thought. “Once he leaves the prison, where would one look for him? Maybe he isn’t even interested in



going home but just wants to be released and do what he pleases... Obviously, I wasn't thinking when I gave the order. But once said, there's no turning back; a Romodanovsky doesn't take back his words."

The prince looked once again into the open face of the convict and repeated:

"Release him from prison for two days! I have faith that he will return at the appointed time. His holy surety will guarantee it."

The prisoner threw himself at the feet of the kind prince, while the inspector, sullen and pessimistic, ordered the guard to unfetter him.

... Twenty versts from Moscow, in the village of Nikolsk, the feast of the ninth of May\* was in full swing. At the end of the Liturgy the people spilled out from the church onto the market square. There a colorful picture of a fair presented itself. The temporarily released prisoner mingled happily in the midst of the crowd. In his arms he held a beautiful child who clung tightly with his pudgy arms around the neck of his father. Beside them walked a slender young woman, holding by the hand a lively boy.

"My poor, unfortunate husband," said the woman, "don't leave us orphaned. See how agreeable life is in freedom. But there -- prison, fetters. True, you killed one of the tsar's soldiers. But you did so without evil motive, unintentionally, by accident. Why must you torment yourself in eternal imprisonment and ruin your unhappy family!"

"I can't, my dear," answered the prisoner. "I promised..."

"As a prisoner, I'm sure you promised many things," continued his wife. "If you don't return, no one will be able to do anything. Let's hurry away from here, let's go to the Don. There we can live a free life. Our sons will grow up to be brave Cossacks and will serve our Tsar-batiushka for you."

The prisoner considered the tempting words of his wife. To go away to the Don, to live in freedom... But will it be like that? Will it really be good there? And the conscience? That holy sponsor, who is more powerful than any prison or earthly exile... What shall I do if I deceive his sacred memory? Everything will be lost: there will be neither success, nor joy, nor happiness. I shall pine away worse than a captive slave. It was not in vain that the prince said the Saint would not permit deception.

Under the persuasive arguments of his beloved wife, however, the unfortunate man again began to waver, and he was close to giving in to the decision to run away with his family. But there in the depths of his soul something powerful stopped him, turning his mind towards what was just and true. The prisoner listened to this and thought, "No, Saint Nicholas won't allow it! I must act according to my conscience."

Taking leave of his family the next day, he said to them: "Although it is difficult for me to part with you, I nevertheless feel

that my conscience is at peace. And I trust that he who is my surety will save me from further troubles and misfortunes."

In two days time he was already in Moscow and arrived at the prison an hour before Rodomanovsky drove up. "I was passing by," said the prince to the inspector who met him, "and I remembered about the convict who called upon Saint Nicholas to act as his surety. His term of release is up. Has he returned?"

"Yes, your honor," replied the inspector. "An altogether extraordinary case. He returned within the allotted time and is back in prison."

"Most commendable!" exclaimed the prince. "Today I'm to see the Tsar and I shall tell him about this rare case."

The next day the convict prison was buzzing with the news that in the morning a messenger had come from the Tsar and had taken the prisoner to the palace. When the prisoner returned, everyone impatiently asked him what the Tsar-batiushka had said to him.

"Our majesty," replied the prisoner, "wished to know about the crime for which I was sentenced. Then, having mercifully heard my admission, he said that he is reducing my term."

Here the prisoner crossed himself and added with emotion:

"Glory to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker who, in a critical moment, helped me to vanquish my temptation."

And within a short time, the prisoner was set at liberty.

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(\* ) ed. note -- In Russia many Saints are also celebrated on special days set aside for them in the summer, such as the translation of their relics. This is because winter weather does not permit the long processions of which Russians are so fond on feastdays.



**O**ur distresses are notorious... The doctrines of the Fathers are despised; apostolic traditions are set at naught; the devices of innovators are in vogue in the Churches; now men are rather contrivers of cunning systems than theologians; the wisdom of this world wins the highest prizes and has rejected the glory of the Cross. Shepherds are banished, and in their places are introduced grievous wolves harrying the flock of Christ... The elders lament when they compare the present with the past. The younger are yet more to be extended compassion, for they do not know of what they have been deprived.

St. Basil the Great, "Lives of the Three Great Hierarchs"

## A GREAT SPEECH WHICH NEVER MADE IT ON THE NEWS

*On Thursday, May 27, 1999, Darrell Scott, the father of Rachel Scott, a victim of the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado, was invited to address the House Judiciary Committee's subcommittee. What he said to our national leaders during this special session of Congress was painfully truthful. They were not prepared for what he was to say, nor was it received well. It needs to be heard by every parent, every teacher, every politician, every sociologist, every psychologist, and every so-called expert! His words are powerful, penetrating, and deeply personal. The following is a portion of the transcript, as circulated through electronic media.*

Since the dawn of creation there has been both good and evil in the hearts of men and women. We all contain the seeds of kindness or the seeds of violence. The death of my wonderful daughter, Rachel Joy Scott, and the deaths of that heroic teacher and the other eleven children who died must not be in vain. Their blood cries out for answers.

The first recorded act of violence was when Cain slew his brother Abel out in the field. The villain was not the club he used. Neither was it the NCA, the National Club Association. The true killer was Cain, and the reason for the murder could only be found in Cain's heart.

In the days that followed the Columbine tragedy, I was amazed at how quickly fingers began to be pointed at groups such as the NRA. I am not a member of the NRA. I am not a hunter. I do not even own a gun. I am not here to represent or defend the NRA, because I don't believe that they are responsible for my daughter's death. Therefore, I do not believe that they need to be defended. If I believed they had anything to do with Rachel's murder, I would be their strongest opponent. I am here today to declare that Columbine was not just a tragedy: it was a spiritual event that should be forcing us to look at where the real blame lies! Much of the blame lies here in this room. Much of the blame lies behind the pointing fingers of the accusers themselves.

I wrote a poem just four nights ago that expresses my feelings best. This was written way before I knew I would be speaking here today.

Your laws ignore our deepest needs,  
Your words are empty air.  
You've stripped away our heritage,  
You've outlawed simple prayer.  
Now gunshots fill our classrooms,  
And precious children die.  
You seek for answers everywhere,  
And ask the question 'Why?'  
You regulate restrictive laws,  
Through legislative creed.  
And yet you fail to understand,  
That God is what we need!

Men and women are three part beings. We all consist of body, soul, and spirit\*. When we refuse to acknowledge a third part of our makeup, we create a void that allows evil, prejudice, and hatred to rush in and reek havoc. Spiritual influences were present within our educational systems for most of our nation's history. Many of our major colleges began as theological seminaries. This is a historical fact. What has happened to us as a nation? We have refused to honor God, and in so doing, we open the doors to hatred and violence. And when something as terrible as Columbine's tragedy occurs, politicians immediately look for a scapegoat such as the NRA. They immediately seek to pass more restrictive laws that contribute to eroding away our personal and private liberties. We do not need more restrictive laws.

Eric and Dylan would not have been stopped by metal detectors. No amount of gun laws can stop someone who spends months planning this type of massacre. The real villain lies within our own hearts. Political posturing and restrictive legislation are not the answers. The young people of our nation hold the key. There is a spiritual awakening taking place that will not be squelched! We do not need more religion. We do not need more gaudy television evangelists spewing out verbal religious garbage. We do not need more million dollar church buildings built while people with basic needs are being ignored. We do need a change of heart and a humble acknowledgment that this nation was founded on the principle of simple trust in God!

As my son Craig lay under that table in the school library and saw his two friends murdered before his very eyes, he did not hesitate to pray in school. I defy any law or politician to deny him that right! I challenge every young person in America, and around the world, to realize that on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School, prayer was brought back to our schools. Do not let the many prayers offered by those students be in vain. Dare to move into the new millennium with a sacred disregard for legislation that violates your God-given right to communicate with Him. To those of you who would point your finger at the NRA, I give to you a sincere challenge. Dare to examine your own heart before casting the first stone! My daughter's death will not be in vain! The young people of this country will not allow that to happen!"

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(\* ) ed. note -- When St. Paul the Apostle refers to "body, soul, and spirit", the word "spirit" is used to denote the nous. We do not have two souls as the phrase might somehow suggest. But here, the author is referring not to the nous, but to the breath of God instilled in every man.





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## HOW DID WE SURVIVE?

Well, some of you are over 40 or close to it. And it gets a bit sentimental, but so what? It's after Pascha and summer is here...

We lived as children in the 50s and 60s or before. Looking back, it's hard to believe that we have lived as long as we have!

As children, we would ride in cars with no seat belts or air bags. Riding in the back of a pickup truck on a warm day was always a special treat. Our baby cribs were covered with brightly colored, lead-based paint, and we had no padded crib protectors to keep us from sticking our heads through the slats.

We could sleep on our backs, our sides, or our stomachs.

We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors, or cabinets, and when we rode our bikes, we had no helmets. (Not to mention hitchhiking to town as a young kid!)

We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle.

We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps of wood and old wheels or roller skates and then rode down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times we learned to solve the problem.

We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on. No one was able to reach us all day. No cell phones. No pagers. Unthinkable!

We played dodge ball and sometimes the ball would really hurt. We got cut and broke bones and broke teeth and there were no lawsuits from these accidents. They were accidents. No one was to blame but us. Remember accidents?

We had fights and punched each other and learned to get over it. And sometimes we made up and became best friends.

We ate cupcakes, bread and butter, and drank sugar soda; but we were never overweight: we were always outside playing.

We shared one grape soda with four friends, from one bottle, and no one died from this.

We did not have Playstations, Nintendo 64, X Boxes, video games of any sort, 699 channels on cable, video tape and DVD movies, surround sound, PCs, internet chat rooms, ...we had real live friends. We went outside and found them. We rode bikes or walked to a friend's home and knocked on the door, or rung the bell or just walked in and talked to them. Imagine such a thing. Without asking a parent! By ourselves!

We made up games with sticks and tennis balls and ate worms, and although we were told it would happen, we did not put out very many eyes, nor did the worms live inside us forever.

Little League had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't had to learn to deal with disappointment.

Some students weren't as smart as others, so they failed a grade and were held back to repeat the same grade. Tests were not adjusted for any reason.

We walked to school or at the very least to the bus stop without our parents taking us because it rained or snowed.

The idea of a parent bailing us out if we broke a law was unheard of. They actually sided with the law. Imagine that!

Our generation has produced some of the best risk-takers and problem solvers and inventors, ever. We had freedom, failure, success, and responsibility, and we learned how to deal with it all.

Family and friends were the most important things in our lives.

And somehow, all of us survived!