

"Living water" as freedom in a fallen world

Scris de Karamazov
Duminică, 22 Mai 2022 22:05



St. Theophan the Recluse

The Lord said: If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed (John 8:36). Here is where freedom is! The mind is bound with bonds of ignorance, delusions, superstitions, and uncertainties; it struggles, but cannot get away from them. Cleave to the Lord and He will enlighten your darkness (cf. Ps. 18:28) and dissolve all the bonds in which your mind languishes. The passions bind the will, and do not give it space in which to act; it struggles, like one bound hand and foot, and cannot get away. But cleave to the Lord and He will give you the strength of Samson, and will dissolve all the bonds of untruth binding you. Constant worries surround the heart and do not give it peace. But cleave to the Lord, and He will soothe you; then, at peace, and seeing clearly everything around you, you will march in the Lord without hindrance or stumbling through the gloom and darkness of this life, to the all-blessed, complete joy and spaciousness of eternity.

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The Samaritan's woman fellow citizens said to her after two days with the Saviour in their midst, Now we believe not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world (John 4:42). It happens this way with everyone. At first they are called to the Lord by an external word, or as for many now, simply by birth. But when they taste in practice what it is to live in the Lord, they no longer cleave to the Lord through their external affiliation with Christian society, but through their inner union with Him. It is necessary for all who are born in Christian societies to make this a law for themselves; that is, to not limit themselves to mere external affiliation with the Lord, but to seek to unite with Him inwardly, that they may always bear witness within themselves that they are standing in the truth. Why is this necessary? It is necessary to embody within oneself the truth of Christ. The truth of Christ is a restoration of what is fallen. Thus, put off the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which is created after God in righteousness and true holiness (cf. Eph. 4:22–24), and you will know within yourself that the Lord Jesus Christ is in truth the Saviour—not only for the world, but also for you. [underlining added]

- St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

(machine-translated from what might be known as his Orthodox Survival Course in One Lesson, but is simply entitled Archpatorial Appeal on the Release of Peasants from Serfdom, 1859; only a few brief excerpts here, grouped thematically and with intermediary titles added, from a far richer [text](#) :)

Discernment

...A true, God-pleasing doctrine certainly has as its consequence the spiritual fruit depicted by the apostle. If the teaching is not evidenced by this fruit, then it is false, even if the speaker bears the name of a prophet, that is, any important and loud name, combined with the concept of excellent knowledge and learning. This commandment of God requires special consideration, and at the beginning of it the Lord placed the significant word: "Pay attention." Precisely: for execution it requires the most careful attention and reasoning!

False doctrine is very often presented brilliantly and intriguingly. Not everyone can give a false doctrine the proper price by analyzing the thoughts contained in it. But according to its fruits, it is immediately known, exposed, evaluated. Saint Great Barsanuphius said to a certain monk: "Know, my brother, that every thought that is not preceded by the silence of humility does not come from God, but clearly from the left side. Our Lord comes with quietness. Everything that is hostile happens with confusion and rebellion. Although the demons are shown dressed in sheep's clothing, but, being internally ravenous wolves, they are revealed through the embarrassment they produce, as it is said: by their fruits you will know them (Matt. 7; 16). May the Lord enlighten us all so that we are not carried away by their righteousness" (Answer 21).

St. Macarius the Great says: "A person who loves virtue should take great care to distinguish things, so that he knows perfectly the difference between good and evil and can recognize and understand various demonic intrigues with which the enemy usually corrupts under the guise of many ideas offered to the mind; for in all cases it is useful to be careful to avoid dangerous consequences. Due to the weakness of the mind, fearing deception, do not obey the promptings of the spirits, which can be arranged as if they were also heavenly angels. But stand firm, subjecting everything to the most diligent scrutiny, and then, if you see good, accept it, and if evil appears, reject it. For the actions of grace are not unknown, and sin, even if it took the form of a good deed, cannot in any way give them. So, although according to the apostle, Satan can be transformed into a bright angel (2 Cor. 11; 14), in order to deceive a person in this way, but even if he presented bright visions, however, as already mentioned, he will not be able to give a good action. This is the well-known sign of his deeds. For neither love for God or neighbor, nor meekness, nor humility, nor joy, nor peace, nor restraint of thoughts, nor to hate the world, nor spiritual peace, nor desire for heavenly actions, can he give, nor can he tame the passions and lust, which is a clear act of grace. Spiritual fruit, says the apostle, is love, joy, peace, and so on. (Gal. 5; 22). The enemy can especially conveniently instill pride and arrogance in a person, since he is very inclined to this and is very strong in this. So, by the action you will recognize the intelligent light that has shone in your soul - whether it comes from God or from Satan."

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Such is the true and profound teaching of God, the teaching of the Holy Orthodox Church about the principles of good and evil, about the most subtle inexplicable thoughts, explained by their fruits and actions.

Freedom

...The Savior of the world has established His Kingdom on earth, but a spiritual Kingdom that can dwell in any human society, no matter how this society is called by its civil structure - a monarchy, or a republic, or something else. Because the Kingdom of Christ, being not of this world (John 18; 36), has nothing to do with the civil form of states, however, [it is] delivering to every state the most virtuous and therefore the most useful members.

The unfree state of people, which has many different forms, as it should be known and understandable to every educated person, is a consequence of the fall of man into sin....[But] as long as mankind is subject to the influence of sin and passions, power and subordination are still necessary. They will certainly exist throughout the life of the world: they can only appear, they are, they will appear in various forms...

...Our Savior granted mankind spiritual freedom. But not only did He not eliminate any authorities, He Himself, during His earthly wandering, submitted to the influence of authorities that abused power, submitting to the burden that mankind attracted by sin. The Lord avoided any interference in the temporary management of the world, announced that His Kingdom was not of this world, and told His unrighteous judge that he would not have had any power over Him if it had not been given to him from above. The relationship of power and subordination collapses [only] with the end of the world: then dominion and power cease (1 Corinthians 15; 24), then brotherhood, equality, freedom will be established, then the cause of the unity of power and subordination will not be fear, but love...

...The Savior completed the redemption of the human race, completed it for all people, but together completed it only for those who want to accept it actively. The Savior left the sorrows of the earthly wandering of man, including slavery, inviolable, demanding from the people who believe in Him not only heartfelt and verbal, but also active confession of their fall. An active confession that a Redeemer is needed for people - a confession consisting in recognizing earthly sorrows as a just consequence of the fall and in submissive submission to them. The God-Man Himself submitted to these sorrows so that we could submit to them with Him. He demands that His souls - true Christians - conduct their earthly wandering in the way that He did. It is impossible for me to be in a different state from the Body and the Head, from the Church and Christ.

Humility

...One way to alleviate one's difficult situation, to bring peace to the soul, to bring spiritual consolation and pleasure to it, is to recognize oneself as worthy of a difficult situation, and a difficult situation is God's allowance. "There is nothing stronger than humility," said the Monk Abba Dorotheos, "nothing defeats it. If something sad happens to the humble, he immediately turns to himself, immediately condemns himself, that he is worthy of it, he will not reproach anyone, will not lay blame on another, and thus endures what happened without embarrassment, without sorrow, with perfect calmness.

Everyone must correctly recognize himself as worthy of sorrow and punishment. Everyone is conceived in iniquity and born in sin, has sinful passions living and acting within himself, this sinful infection that does not stop giving birth to sin, if not in deeds, then in thoughts and feelings. The Savior of the world said: He who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10; 38).

The cross, according to the explanation of the holy fathers, are those sorrows that God is pleased to allow us during our earthly wandering. Sorrows are diverse, each person has his own sorrows, sorrows most correspond to the passions of each, for this reason each has his own cross. Each of us is commanded to accept this cross, that is, each of us is commanded to recognize himself worthy of the sorrow sent to him, to endure it complacently, following Christ,

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borrowing from Him humility, through which sorrow is endured.

In the above words of the Lord is a terrible sentence on those who do not endure sorrow patiently: the Lord rejects them. They, uttering murmuring and slander from the midst of sorrows, thereby utter a confession that their mind and heart are not illuminated by Divine grace, that the Lord is a stranger to them, for no one else, namely the Lord, teaches humility to His true servants.

Learn - not from an angel, He says, not from a man, not from a book, but - from Me - that is, from My assimilation to you, illuminating you, working in you - for I am meek and lowly in heart, and in thought, and in the way of thoughts - and you will find peace from inner struggle and relief for your souls from thoughts (Matt. 11; 29). Sorrow is called a temptation or trial because it reveals the innermost disposition of the soul.

St. Isaac of Syria says: "Every difficult situation and every sorrow, not accompanied by patience, produces pure torment. The patience of a man resists his misfortunes, and cowardice is the mother of torment. It gives rise in a person to the overwhelming force of despondency, from which one feels a spiritual constriction - this is a foretaste of hell. This induces a spirit of frenzy on a person, from which the darkness of temptations exudes: embarrassment, rage, blasphemy, a complaint against fate, perverse thoughts ...

What is the cure for all this? - humbleness of heart. To the extent of humility of mind, patience is given to you in your misadventures. In proportion to your patience, the weight of your sorrows is lightened for you, and you receive consolation. As you receive consolation, your love for God is exalted. According to your love, your joy, delivered by the Holy Spirit, increases. Our merciful Father, when He deigns to bring His true sons out of temptation, He does not take temptation from them, but gives them patience in temptation, and they receive with the hand of patience all the above-mentioned blessings to strengthen their souls. May Christ God, by His grace, vouchsafe us, out of love for Him, to endure with thanksgiving from the heart all that is cruel."

This is the teaching of the Church! This is the voice of the Church!

Russia

...Russia - from the very beginning of its existence almost to the latest times - is a vast military camp. Its history is the history of uninterrupted war. Russia either attacks neighboring peoples or repels their attacks. For two centuries it has been engaged in incessant internecine war, without stopping the war with its neighbors. Then he fights to overthrow the Tatar yoke, fights to restore the autocracy, fights to enter the limits in which it was under Equal-to-the-Apostles Vladimir. It fights in order to open communication with Europe, in order to take a place among its powers. Finally, he fights against all of Europe for the liberation of Europe.

...Judging by [one-sided] particulars..., one can easily think that the unfree class was formed solely through violence, that the period of landlords' ownership of peasants in Russia was a period of continuous, widespread tyranny, and the nobility always consisted of the most inhumane people, and godless. According to a precise study of statisticians, it turns out quite the contrary. The life of the landlord peasants [serfs], in spite of private abuses, in its general composition is far superior to the life of the peasants in all other European states. Many landlord peasants are equal in wealth to the first merchants. But this way of life is outdated in moral and state relations.

... In the past century, Russia has expanded its borders to an extraordinary extent, entered the ranks of the foremost European states, and was formed in the image of these states. Again, it is natural that, along with the importance of the state, the importance of statesmen and the entire civil servant class has risen. Naturally, in the spirit of European civilization, the Orthodox clergy became even more embarrassed in the circle of their actions.

What awaits us in the future? We see the extraordinary material development of Europe. Russia, in order to harmonize with Europe, to maintain its importance in it, must, according to the necessity of the state and political, introduce European material development in itself. Material development cools people to the Christian faith, allowing the most superficial occupation with it...With such a development of the state, with such a material development, with the invasion of Russia by European teachings, there is no hope that the clergy could return to that significance, both in moral and in material respects, which it had in virgin Russia.

...The moral sign of Christianity is love. By this everyone will know, - said the Savior, - that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35). This holy sign should be primarily the sign of the clergy. Let us acquire love in ourselves, let us show it abundantly to all classes. Then all estates will involuntarily be imbued with reverence for us and satisfy all our needs. A person cannot but pay respect to love when he sees it in his neighbor, especially

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when he sees it in a shepherd: because love is God, before whom all His creatures humble themselves (1 John 4; 16). To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.