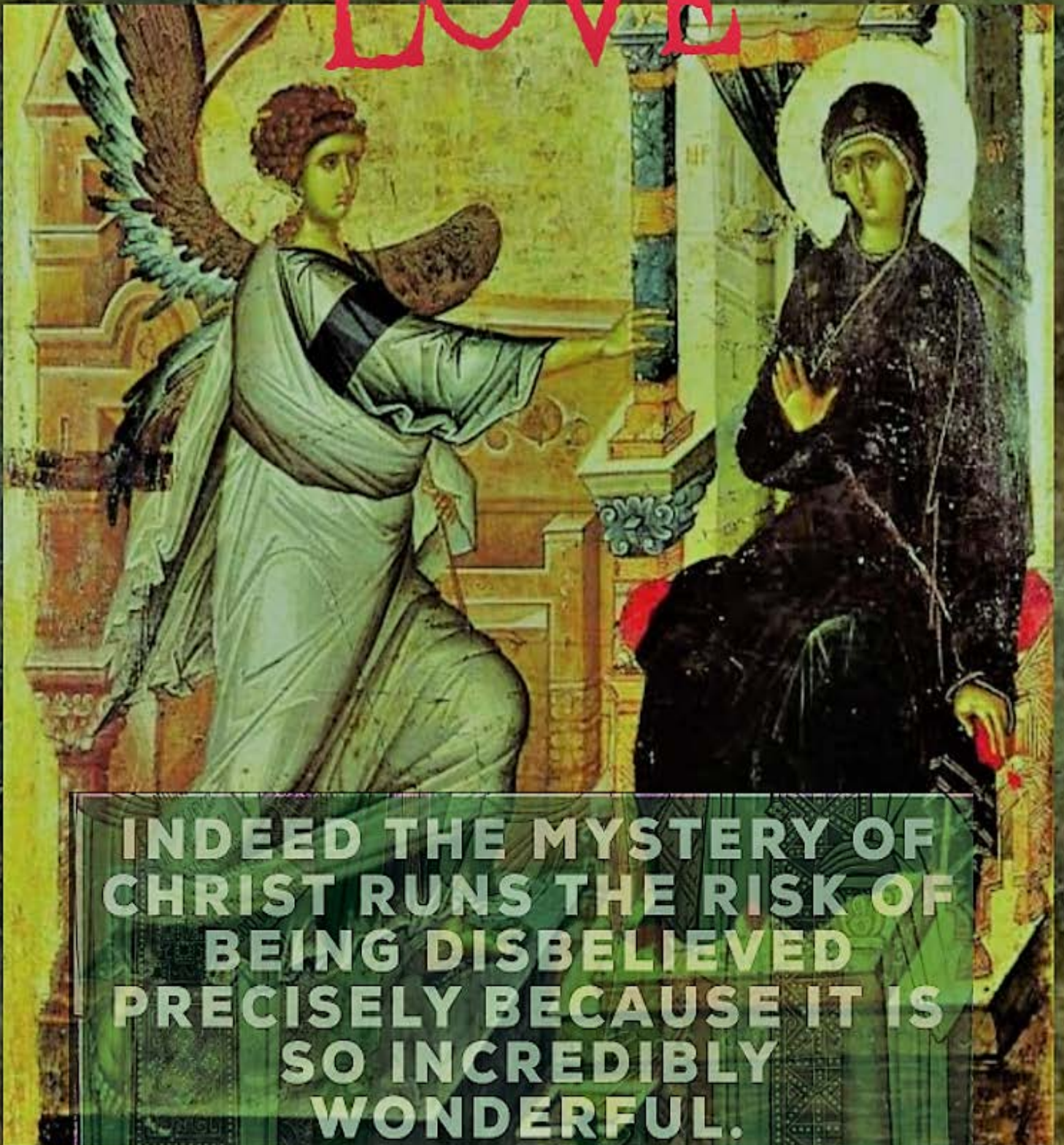


WOUNDED BY LOVE



INDEED THE MYSTERY OF
CHRIST RUNS THE RISK OF
BEING DISBELIEVED
PRECISELY BECAUSE IT IS
SO INCREDIBLY
WONDERFUL.

ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA



Making God the Centre of your Life

A lady came
complaining to
me about her

son. "For the last

few days", she told me, "I had been scolding
him for doing something wrong, saying,
"Don't do that.""

But he kept on answering me, "No, I will do
it."

The mother said, "I told him, 'Dear, that's
wrong.'"

"But he insisted, "I will do this. I will do it."

The next day, as I was joking around with
him, I asked him, "What's your opinion
about what you were doing yesterday?"

He answered, "Hmm. . .I know that what I
did was wrong."

I asked him, "Then why did you insist on
doing it even though you knew that it was
wrong?" He answered immediately, "I had to
do this, otherwise my personality would be

weak! Whatever I want to do, I'll do, even
if it's wrong!"

His answer surprised me because this was a
kid who wasn't even six years old.

Most of us can relate to this child. *If we
face something that does not fit into our
paradigm, then we will be blind to it or
simulate it into our worldview.*

A worldview is a set of mental paradigms
with which we evaluate our experiences. It
is the way
we think.

It is the
way we look
at things
and

process the information. Our worldview
then becomes our paradigm that governs
our life.

**Our worldview is the result of our self-
will.** Self-will has damaging effects on a
person that estranges and separates a
person from God. **It alienates him from his
Creator, Whom every person is obliged to
serve and obey.** This estrangement is not
the only consequence of self-will. Self-will
also wastes all the gifts of God given to
mankind freely. This is because *there is no
limit* to human desires.



An extortionist is never content with a rate of return on loan. If possible, he would claim for himself all the riches of the world. But



even
this
would
hardly
please
his
self-will.

He would continue to pursue his self-will to the extent of attacking his own Creator. That is, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. (Psalm 13:1)". And when anyone says that there is the no God, then it is equalling to saying 'I have no God', thus leading to atheism.

Our self-will is the source of all evil. We feed our self-will when we do not choose to do the things that God wills (Isaiah 65:12). We see in St. Mathew 8:26 that even the winds were obedient to the will of God.

The following arguments are the result of the worldview we form. We are always pleasing ourselves. *Our self-will does not allow us to believe that everything in the world occurs by God's command and His will. We have to accept everything that God sends us without complaint. We have to submit ourselves to His will. We are*

born into Orthodox families. We are responsible to live the Orthodox way of living, but we reject it by saying:

Your faith or belief is cool, but it's just not my thing. It's okay for you, but it's not for me.

I'm not ready to give up things that I am doing. I don't see anything wrong with it, until and unless I am going wayward and harming others. I am already a good person. I like things to be simple, and God is also a simple God. I do not understand your complicated orthodox faith and theology. Let me be the way I am.

These arguments are a result of the worldview of making things around us perfect without God. In other words, a utopian worldview is the only reality we perceive. Our expectations revolve only around this perception of reality. Thus, our worldview determines our expectation of reality.

Similarly, different people attempt to discover themselves in different ways. Some will derive answers from the amount of material wealth they own. Thus, they will argue that they have more value than others based on what they have. Others may base

their identity on physical appearance. They go to extraordinary extremes to improve their appearance. They will argue that this could establish some sort of better self-worth and identity. Still, others will seek psychiatrists and psychologists hoping to discover who they are. For many people, they will find answers in the sciences.

So, we observe that one's area of interest forms his/her worldview of how he/she should take his life ahead. These are inappropriate for Christians and should be rejected outright.



As he gets surrounded by noise, tension, television, radio, and continuous information about this and that, he may not realise that he is on the wrong path. He may seek to forget with drugs; not to think, not to worry never realising that he has strayed from his purpose. Thus, for most people, their belief system is that invisible force that influences their behaviour.

Our resistance towards God is because of

a) **Our bad habits:** This happens when we develop a habit of sin for long years. From evil-will grows evil desires. When a person fulfils his/her desires often, it turns into a habit. Then the habit turns into a necessity. The habit becomes for the person a necessity and in feeding that desire, he/she becomes a slave to his/her passions. All this takes place outside of our realization. In ignorance, we do not wash away these sins through repentance. Then these become habitual sins that are hard to root out.

b) **Lack of patience:** We become frustrated when we have an ardent desire to get something, and it fails. We immediately become angry, complain and even become like beasts. We often hear impatient people yelling: "I want this to happen immediately, and if it does not, then all hope is lost!" Patient endurance is a great virtue. It has a great power to give us our desired gift, which is to achieve the peace of Christ in our hearts, even after a very long

time. Refer to Sirach 2:4, 10, 14-15.

c) **Our fickle will and its desires:**

We change our desires every hour. In the morning we desire one thing, but by evening we want something completely different. We are not the same person at any given moment. If we take the example of Job, he was a true man. St. Jerome interprets that Job did not vacillate between right and left. He was never appearing inconstant but was firm and unassailable. Whereas we, on the other hand, are not 'true men'. We are weak and unsteady in our good deeds. *If we were truly obedient to the will of God, then we would bear all our sorrows with joy and a generous heart.*

It is imperative to realize that we should have spiritual qualities [as described by the traditions of the Church and the holy fathers] to be a follower of Christ and His divine will. **All of man's desires should be in active agreement with the will of God.** To this end, it is important that we examine ourselves to make sure of our stand in relation to God's will and our will. **He/she**

should pay attention to oneself to become adept at aligning all their desires and actions to the will of God. [An article on spiritual qualities is in the pipeline]. Once a person learns about the necessary spiritual qualities, he/she **must labour to preserve them in oneself. He/she should not suppress them by their passionate attachments.**

When you start labouring for such a life, an Orthodox way of life, you will be exposed to different thoughts and circumstances. These will put your current belief system into question. You are likely to experience emotions like anxiety, anger, confusion, shock and frustration with a new intensity.

In very extreme circumstances, your core beliefs get affected.

Core beliefs are those that are at the very centre of your own sense of self. These beliefs are central to who you are. Putting those into question would mean that you even start to question your own existence.

We will be able to observe that a culture shock, for example, can happen to a person who enters a different cultural environment. Culture shock is an ordinary condition that describes such a situation.

It describes a situation like this—when being exposed to a different worldview; the exposure is sudden and beyond comprehension. On a different scale, such situations force us to question some of the most central assumptions we had made about life so far.

The good news is, a disruption of your belief system is a chance for growth

Facing such a situation disrupts our belief



system. We could face very negative emotions for an extended period of time such that we tend to think that there is something wrong with us.

Facing long periods of negative emotions need not be a sign that you have a problem.

It is a result of external influences that question some of your core beliefs, disrupting your belief system. In such circumstances, it will take time for you to process this new information. This will go on till it becomes integrated into your belief system. Eventually, your existing beliefs will rearrange themselves. The rearrangement happens in a way that the system reaches unity once again.

That is when real personal growth happens.

When we start becoming a notably different person than who we used to be. There will be a drastic change in our beliefs which people around us will notice. People may or may not be able to comprehend this change.

We claim that God is the centre of our lives. We protest that we are sincere Orthodox Christians. But we cannot deny the fact that the worldview of humanism is influencing our behaviour. It affects us visibly or invisibly.

Humanism is the worldview according to which humankind is the measure of all things. Its roots lie in the evil of self-will. This is the opposite of the Christian worldview. In the Christian worldview, **God is the measure of all things. God is the ultimate source of value as revealed in the**

Scripture, the Fathers, the sacramental Mysteries, the Liturgy and the lives of the Saints. We can make God the center of our lives only when we labor in spiritual qualities with a sincere prayer "Not my



will, but Your be done (Luke 22:42)".

Humanism is about individual autonomy. To be in charge of one's own life and to have the

freedom to make one's own choices is the most perfect action in humanism. Humanism promotes secularisation. Secularism dilutes our way of life and true faith. It is linked to passions and, naturally, has been lurking in the Church since the beginning of its existence.

Dear youths, many times, we have the same attitude as the kid mentioned in the story. We read further the causes and effects of this attitude in our life. Most of us feel a strong personality is the one who insists on his own opinion and not others. We need to listen to those who love us especially our

parents and our spiritual elders who desire for our spiritual growth.

A strong personality is the one who believes and seeks God's will. Such a person understands that the reason for all things is the will of God. It is imperative to realise that whoever seeks another power or authority will not know the essence of God.

It's at this point that the social struggle of Christians differs from every other struggle. The society which humanist systems (idealistic and materialistic) wish to create is anthropocentric. The means used by the humanists also are anthropocentric (man-centred). Whereas, the society of Christians is centred on the incarnate Lord. So, the means used by Christians is theocentric (God-centred).

The basis of Christian socialism (fellowship and community) is humility. **Humility is the opposite of self-confidence or even excessive self-confidence.** *But, at the foundations of the humanist version, we find pride, self-sufficiency and the exclusion of God. This is a repetition of the sin of Adam: the quest for divinity without God.*

It was said about our Lord Jesus Christ that he was "subject to them" (Luke 2:51). That

is, to St. Mary and St. Joseph. And he is not only their Creator but is the Wisdom of God Himself!

Adhere to the Lord so that you may carry the spirit of humbleness. This spirit will support your will in Him and grant you the right personality. It allows you to learn to deal with each person and benefit from the experience of many!

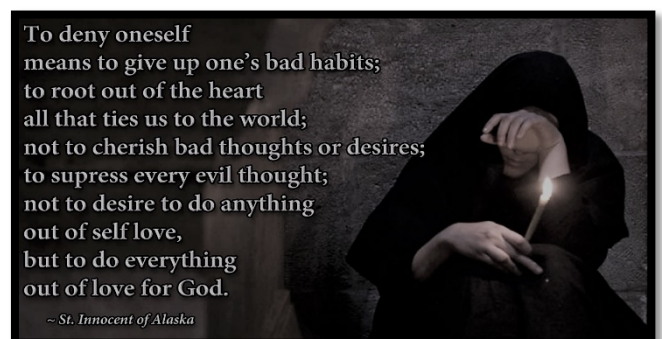
The questions below will challenge your worldview. Each one can take up this challenge with the help of your spiritual father/priest/or a good Orthodox Christian. It provides an entry to start looking into the Orthodox Christian worldview.

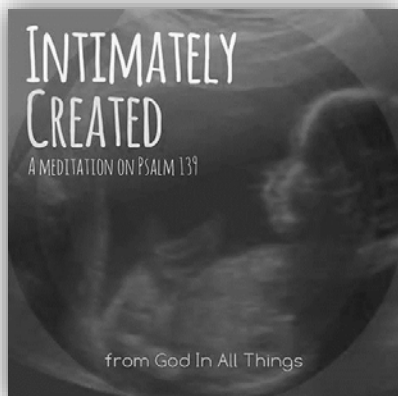
Ask these questions to yourself:

- Who was I until now? Who am I right now? Who do I want to become?
- Which were my core beliefs that I am now starting to question? Why have I started questioning them?
- Are the beliefs, ideas and habits that I am exposed to recently in line with the true Orthodox way of living. Do I really want to grow towards Theosis, which is the goal of every Orthodox Christian?

- Which beliefs do I hold that are stopping me from making progress in the direction towards Theosis?
- Which environment should I expose myself to during this period, to help me grow in the direction of who I want to become? We should remember that when we were baptised, we became sons and daughters of God.

This challenge might lead to a disruption in your belief system. But as mentioned earlier in the article, **A disruption of your belief system is a chance for growth, a growth towards theosis by exposing yourself to the right thoughts, words and actions of Orthodoxy through the examples of the Early Fathers and Mothers of the Orthodox Church.**





Making God Real in our lives

The holiness of a person's life is continually striving toward perfection for the duration of his life (1 Peter 1:16). It is about the gathering of all possible virtues together with God's will. **Our success in the Christian life depends on how well we submit our will to the will of God.** The more complete our submission to the divine will, the more fruitful and successful will our life be.

Everyone knows the fact that a Christian finds perfection through his love for God and fellow men. All the books in the Holy Scripture gives proof to this—St. Mathew 22:37-40; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 3:14.

All that is within the will of God for all men and myself, may that be done in me. All that is outside of His will, may those stay away from me. This is the ultimate expression of love and nothing is more powerful than this. All the Holy Fathers hold this opinion.

But what do we see today? The secular spirit of the world inspires the Christian. Though members of the Church, many of us hold the view that we are at the center or the most important element of existence (anthropocentric view) rather than God as the center of our existence (the theocentric view). We have mentioned this in the first article of the issue.

Today, social usefulness is determined to be the primary role of the Church. The Church is looked upon as a mere decorative element. They need the Church to decorate various ceremonies and to brighten/excite them with its presence. Or they may believe that Church's presence is required to show a broad social consensus. We can observe that even atheists reject such a church. Thus, a secularised



Even an atheist rejects a secular church

Church is occupied with progressive ideas that are secular in nature.

The real and true Church, though, is like the correct medicine. A surgeon does not meditate or philosophise in front of his patient. He wants to cure and bring his

patient back to full health. Likewise, the Church, which has a patient in front of her, can never meditate or philosophise. The Church itself experiences the mystery of Christ's Cross. Therefore, the Church assists man in experiencing the same in



Role of the Church

his/her personal life.

The main point is that the Church is Christ's body. It is *not* a human organisation but the God-man body of Christ. We have also said that the Church is divine. This means that her purpose is to guide its members to divinisation/Theosis. This is the principal aim of man's creation.

Secularism, elaborated further down in the article, is the loss of the true life of the Church. The Church members alienate themselves from the genuine Church spirit. Secularism is the rejection of the ecclesiastic ethos (principles of the Church). It is about filling our life by the so-called worldly spirit.

We should emphasize the fact that **secularism of the Church members is the gravest danger**. The Church has several "enemies". The worst and most dangerous one is secularization *which eats up the marrow of the Church*. The Church itself, of course, is under no real danger, since it is the blessed Body of Christ. **The threat exists for the members of the Church.**

Secularism mostly started after the cessation of the persecutions. During persecutions, Christians believed and lived in truth. When Christianity became the official Roman state religion, there began unwanted and impure additions to the Christian faith and way of living. Monasticism developed as a reaction to this secularization.

All Christians in the ancient Church (first 4 centuries) lived a monastic life. Holy Scriptures illustrate this, especially in the Epistles of the Holy Apostles. Monasticism is not something alien to the Church. It is a life according to the Gospel. Some Christians wanted to live in perfection and thus elected this way of living. *All Christians, whether married or unmarried, can choose this ascetical form of living (ascetism).* It is *not* meant only for

celibates. We often hear arguments as the following:

We are ordinary lay faithful. We have not studied theology. Saints who lived monastic/ascetical lives have a special calling by God to be so. We call out to these Saints to help us through their prayers to carry out our daily living. God did not call us to be like them.

Such arguments become grave excuses that arise out of our ignorance or laziness. A Christian who admits that he is a member of the Church should know that *he is* also responsible for the Church.

Why is this so?

The "people of God" is the Church, which is the body of Christ. They are those who take part in the Holy Eucharist as the Body of Christ. The people of the one true God are the *guardians of truth and His doctrine*.

The
prototype
of church
in the Old
Testament
is the Ark
of Noah,



which protected and saved the human race

and the animal world at the time of the deluge. Also, the prototype of church in the Old Testament is the people of Israel who suffered so much to preserve the Law and perpetuate the faith of the One True God. God's holy people under the leadership of Moses were guided to the Promised Land and liberated. Likewise, today, **the Church, as the people of God, continues to offer this ministry to the world known as the Great Commission.**

Thus, each person as a part of the Church has to respond individually by an act of personal faith. *He has to strive towards Christian perfection to be the guardian of truth. This incorporates him into the Community of believers (the Early Church). And this is the pattern of Christian existence till today. One should believe and confess, and then he is baptized, baptized into the Body.*

Is baptism alone sufficient to become a member of the Body, the Church? What does it mean?

It means that each individual must strive towards Christian perfection (Mathew 5:48). It *becomes an obligatory task* for him/her. **Each individual's willingness towards the worldly spirit and an unwillingness towards Christian perfection**

poses a threat to him/her alone. Each one will lose his/her opportunity and not the Church as a whole. For, as individuals, each one owns his/her thoughts, words and actions. He/she cannot blame the Church or any other person for his thoughts, words and actions. (Romans 14:12).

What is this so-called worldly spirit or the definition of the world?

The word cosmos (world) has two meanings in the Bible and the works of the Holy Fathers. The first is that cosmos is the creation of God, the entire creation.

In the Orthodox tradition, we say that the world is a positive work of God. In the Creed, we say, "I believe in one God, Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of everything visible. **While the world is God's creature, it can become a deceit by the evil one.** The evil one deceived Adam in Paradise through the world, through the creation. That is why the Lord sums it up: "for what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Matthew 16:26).

Thus, the word 'world' also means the passions and all that describes the spirit of the flesh. "**World**" means sin or the spirit of

the flesh that lacks the Holy Spirit's life and energy.

In St. Paul's Epistles, the world is the desire of the eyes and the arrogance of life. It is all the external things that become the evil one's deceit and deceive us. The world is the passion of the soul.

We often pursue a life with such passions, deep-rooted in us and try to be theologians in the Church. Isn't it? This is called secularism.

Secularism is

- life's estrangement from God.
- our attachment to earthly matters.
- our viewing of all things and issues in our life away from God's will.
- our not pursuing communion and unity with Him.

One could claim that secularism is a synonym to anthropocentrism. As pointed out in the first article, secularism is choosing our self-will over God's will.

How does one cure the soul of the spirit of secularism?

St. Paul was captured "up to the third heaven" (2 Corinth. 12:2). According to St. Maximos the Confessor's interpretation, the three heavens are the three stages of spiritual life. They are purification, illumination and deification (Theosis). *Purification of the heart is the expulsion of all thoughts from the heart. Illumination is to have ceaseless inner prayer. Deification is when one reaches, as is possible, the knowledge of God's mysteries.* A detailed article on three stages of spiritual life is coming soon.

This is the path followed by all the holy Fathers. This made them unmistakable theologians in Church and worthy Shepherds of the people of God. But the heretics tried and still try to distort theology by other means. Please refer to the previous issue of the youth journal for more information on heresies.

Blessed Augustine says, "Believe in God without doubt, and give yourself to Him. Do not desire ever, to belong to yourself or to have full jurisdiction over yourself. Consider yourself to be a slave of the all-merciful and compassionate God."

Some bring offerings to the Church—wax for candles or oil for the lamp. These are monetary offerings, and so they are not enough nor are they especially virtuous. Some give God an oath never to drink wine—never to get drunk! —while others are generous to the poor and the needy. **These are genuinely worthy gifts, but these are no greater oaths. For in what way can the poor alone or these offerings bring a change to the state of your soul?**



Not my will, let Thy will be done

God has redeemed your soul. It means He has turned it away from sin, saved it from its evil effect, and turned it to the path of virtue. Thus, bring Him as a gift that which He has already redeemed. Bring Him your soul as an offering.

You may ask, "How can I offer my soul if it is already in His power?"

Listen: Bring your soul, that is, your own self, in your good manner of life, in your pure thoughts, in your good deeds. This is

the nature of Hannah's offering her son Samuel, Joachim and Anna's offering the Mother of God at the temple. There are many such examples, one such example is the life of a saintly monk described below.

A certain writer mentions, in his letters, an encounter with a God-inspired monk. The monk's clothes also used to heal the sick with only a touch. For this reason, the sick had great honour and respect for him.

This surprised his fellow-monks as he was not remarkable for any extreme feats of ascetism. He was a monk like all the others. He was in no way different from others. He did not keep strict fasts; he did not limit his sleep overmuch; he did not labor in excess physically.

He had only one rule, which he did without fail. **He never allowed himself any passionate attachment to anything or anyone except to God. In other words, he eagerly accepted everything that happened to him and thanked God for it.**

Once when he was healing the sick. He did it with no medicines at all. The abbot (head of the monastery) asked him; what means did he use to heal the sick?

The monk answered,

I am amazed that I can return health to them. I am even ashamed that my clothing has power. I did not come to deserve such a gift from God through any ascetic labors. I am hardly equal to my brother monks, and in no way do I transcend them.

"Yes, this is very true," said the abbot. "We see that you are an unremarkable man and are in no way better than the others." He then continued to ask him questions. The abbot had the desire to find out the monk's other qualities and reveal the secrets of the monk's heart.

The virtuous monk answered,

I know that God gave me His grace to always agree with His will concerning me. So, I never have even a thought contrary to God's will. I never fear any mishap that can disturb my mind or weaken my heart. I do not complain about my sorrow or even reveal it to anyone.

I greet all successes in the same way. I never allow them to give me such sweet pleasure that I find more joy in them than in any other day of my life. I accept everything that God sends me—both positive and negative. I never ask God to arrange anything by my will. Instead, I

desire that everything occurs by God's will. That is, I wish everything to be as it is.

As such, nothing pleases me too much, nothing grieves me too much, and nothing makes me so happy as doing God's will. I only ask one thing in my prayers to God. Let His divine will be done in me and in His creation always.

The abbot was astounded by all this, and asked the monk, "Beloved brother! Tell me, what were your thoughts yesterday, during the fire we suffered? Did you not also grieve with the rest of us when that evil man burnt down our monastic building? How did you feel when all the grain we gathered and all the cattle we owned was lost?"

I want you to know, holy father. Since I have the habit of thanking God for both sorrowful and joyful occurrences, none of these losses brought me any sorrow, whatsoever. I am sure that **everything that occurs with us is part of God's providence and is for our benefit. So, I do not worry** about the grain we have lost for our sustenance. **I am firmly convinced that God can make each one of us satisfied** with a crumb as well as a loaf. So, joyfully and cheerfully, I live this life with no worries.

The abbot pressed further asking questions to this monk to explain his frame of mind.

By offering myself as a sacrifice every day to the altar of God's will, I have become so adept at submitting to it. Even if I were to find out in advance that God had decreed to send me to hell, I would not oppose Him even in this. For, I would know that *this is pleasing to God* and God desires this. I would only pray that He give me His grace to strengthen me for the ages and ages never to think of anything contrary to His will.

Thus, *whatever is pleasing to God, let it be pleasing to you, O Christian.* Whatever God does not wish, stay away from them at all costs. While following His holy commandments and in every moment of doubt, you must say to God in your heart, "Lord, You have commanded this. I will do it immediately."

When God forbids something, say, "Yes, Lord, I eagerly abandon this, and I will do nothing abhorrent to You." By willingly submitting our will to God's, we express complete humility before God. The God to Whom we have to worthily and righteously submit in all things, according to the words of the prophet, "Doth not my soul waits still

upon God? For of Him cometh my salvation."
(Psalm 61:1).

Yes, my soul will submit to Him. *He is the consolation of my soul, and He is my salvation. He is my foundation, my safe haven, and I will never waver in my obedience to Him.*

For to God, as to the Creator, every creature is obedient except for man. God desires that each of us, gifted with reason, submit to Him willingly.

We need to purify ourselves from the worldly arguments/thoughts that we read as examples in both the articles of this youth journal issue. We need to strive every day to achieve the goal of deification.

This way we make God real

in our everyday life and will be able to accomplish what is said in Mathew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."



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