

## **Our Spiritual life**

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One of the main tasks of our Movements at the present time is to live in the concrete existence members the very life of God. It is possible to write the most splendid essays on the element which constitute the spirituality of the Eastern Church, but it is not our task here. And we should not on the other hand attempt to represent Orthodox spirituality as being bound necessary to any particular school of thought or to any method, however fruitful it may be.

Generally speaking, it is high time we free ourselves from this nebulous almost esoteric atmosphere, which was created around Orthodoxy. It has become customary nowadays in presenting the spirituality of our Church to use a certain theological and mystic “slang” as if its interior life was inaccessible and if there were a malicious desire to relegate Orthodoxy to the sphere of the history of spirituality.

The notion of spiritual life implies in itself that we belong to God with all our being and that the presence of Christ in us embraces our spirit and soul and our human condition. There cannot be according to the Christian conception a sphere of knowledge in which only our intellect adheres to God and a practical field in which this knowledge is expressed in acts.

Christ in us means that we have access to Him through Faith which transforms our intelligence and place us before the infinite perspective of love. “He is living, the Lord of Hosts before Whom I stand” (I Kings 18,15). This is the Prophet was able to continue: “ And I will show myself unto Him today”. This statement is a confirmation of the actual salvation which the immediate encounter with God offers to me. It is also a confirmation of my faithfulness not to a revolved past, but the one to whom I give myself. We are thus called to avoid the search for any kind of escape, the exile in Time, the enchantment and the emotional ecstasy which is procured by certain form of Orthodoxy.

The dogma itself may become a mere formula to us. God may be transformed into a concept and then become an idol; and thus we can be sure, that we are seeking ourselves in the ideas which we form about God. A great Moslem mystic Al Hallag has warned us even against the memory of God, against the loving mention of God in prayer.

God may thus faint in the past, in the glorious history of Orthodoxy or He may be stifled by the vestments with which we clothe Him, when we present Him to the world. Not only to the expression of God, but also to the cult and the religious activity may thus become stumbling-block to us.

The liturgy which is to highest extent the sphere of God’s presence could drown God by lack, or by excess: by lack of an introduction to the mystery of the

liturgy. Perception of the things of God is impossible without the intellect, which Faith will go beyond and enrich. But the unveiling of the Mystery which God has placed in the cult is absolutely necessary for any encounter with God. In our time the Orthodox world in its entirety shows a resignation of the intelligence.

On the other hand we are suffering an excess of over-emphasis on the structures, as if there were an "absolute". We suffocate under the tyranny of an inadequate Typicon which is a form of alienation. The service is full of verbalism and of emphasis in the "Meneon" and the language is generally outdated. Besides, the contemporary man is incapable of thinking in a language which is not his own. He cannot react to foreign words. Living liturgy makes God living for us. It should be at least a system of words and acts accessible to our mentality as formed by culture.

In other words God cannot be present to the soul except by Incarnation which He adopted for Himself. If God has given himself to us a human condition He can not today communicate Himself with us without using our language in the fullest sense of the word. God is to be received by the modern man, which we have become, by our present sensitivity. He is essentially with us in an attitude of dialogue. He offers Himself to us in His fragility; He courts us in order to solicit a reply of Love.

He binds Himself to us, to a certain extent, in our formulas, in the framework of our prayer and thought, in order to make Himself accessible. And if He enters in this dialogue it is in order to make us capable of presenting ourselves to Him and to become new men by assimilating ourselves to Him. This assumption of our whole existence by His own, establishes the basis of our dialogue with the world.

The presence of Christians in the world has leavened the dough, the evangelical vitality in the world is only possible to the extent that we have died to the world. Our eyes are then turned to the Christ sitting on the right of the Father. The mystery which founds and directs our action in the world is precisely the mystery of the Ascension of the Lord.

The second stumbling-block to which we referred is that of activism. The Orthodox Youth in the world is tempted by the appeal of efficiency. It is impatient of reforms, especially as the weakness of our Church life is more and more evident. The temptation is then to create history, to change the institutions, to strive towards an explosion of the structures which will satisfy this love for reforms. The spirituality of action, a fever which allows us to escape from our own loneliness, a loneliness which we discover one day and which will be an evident sign that we sought the Kingdom of Love elsewhere than in ourselves.

If we do not want to disappear in the past or in the forms, or the concepts, or our own action, if we do not want to be dissolved in ourselves, we have to give ourselves in two directions: to God and to neighbours. Thus, walking in the path of total self-surrender to the Lord, Whom we meet on the face of others. The most important thing is to walk before God like Abraham and "the cloud of Witnesses" (Hebr. 12,1), in faithfulness to the Lord Who was, Who is and Who is coming. It is a spirit of freedom which gives life to this vigilance. We are awake to the voice of the Spirit in order not to stick to the letters which kill. To be always guided by the Spirit,

to be available to God, and to become His instrument in the salvation of the world. This freedom in respect of the world is a condition of our service to the world.

An ever-growing interior freedom which transforms us into vessels of the Spirit and interiors of the eternally new wine of the vivifying grace. God is always there, searching for those who bear Him and whom He therefore calls to save the world with Him. This evangelical spirituality of love is kindled in us by two main sources: the Scriptures and the Eucharist.

1. The Bible. My intention is not to talk you about the excellence of Scriptures but only to insist on the fact that without them there is no spiritual life and thus no youth movement. This idea has been given us by the blessed Hieronymos. He affirms that the man who does not know the Scriptures does not know Christ. The pre-eminence of the scriptures is that they represent the very word of God, that they are for me God Who reveals and manifests Himself. I find the whole truth of God, His whole love, His whole thought in what He has said of Himself from Genesis to the book of Revelation.

Besides, there is essentially in the Bible the special, personal and actual message given to me by God. Because the Holy Spirit Who has written the Scriptures is the same Who communicates them to me today. This is why they are for me the bread of life, the daily food which surpasses every substance and puts me in front of God. Through them I am continually created according to this resemblance because in assimilating the Word I am reformed and formed as He required. My mind tends to the likeness of the divine mind by a movement of adaptation to the Bible. I am modeling myself on this word, but it becomes mine in the sense that it speaks through me and I become myself a word made flesh, a place of prophetic manifestation.

It is by a progressive assimilation of the Gospel that the Lord founds in us life according to the Spirit because the Lord is the Spirit (II Cor. 3,17) and we become the prophets of the New Testament. The prophet is the man whom the Lord wrenches from his normal condition and whose lips He places His Word in order to declare His will to every creature: in order to declaim God's rights in His Church and over history. This man whom God reserves for Himself to root out, to pull down, and to destroy (Jeremiah 1,10) and after that to build up out of the death, this man is then thrown by God among men by the creative force of the Word. And if the youth movements were called in order to kindle the fire and to awake the sleeping consciences, it is clear that this task is only possible if they know intimately the divine thought, the divine mind, the manners of the Lord and all the visitations made by God amongst His People. It is necessary to know all the sign of God's love in His own house which is the Church of the two Testaments. All this is necessary in order to be able to answer God by obedience, love responding to love.

Nothing can replace the Holy Scriptures. The Christian history has only meditated them, supported them by evidence, has transformed them into theology and cult. But nobody has ever pretended that the *lectio divina* could be replaced by a theological library or the Church services which however content a major part of it. That is why every Christian group could not keep its vitality for a long time if it lives through books of piety or through a vaguely Christian reflection about our existence in the world. We who avail ourselves the Fathers, please let us do as the Fathers, i.e.

that our whole theology be loving and praying reading of the Scriptures. A fundamental illusion of the Orthodox is that they think that they can dispense the meditation of the scriptures because they are contained in their Liturgy. In fact however, the Old Testament, except for vigil of the great Feasts is scarcely read during the services. The Sunday lessons are the only ones which are known and the epistle is not practically understood by the majority. The Bible is translated in thousand and thousand different ways in the liturgical texts, but it is clear, in the other hand, that the meditation of Bible is one of the principal keys which unlocks for us the divine services. Experience shows in fact that apprehension of all our liturgical treasures is only possible through a profound study of God's word. These are also two poles of mutual reference, two complementary ways.

2. The Eucharist. We are also here faced by the illusion of the eucharistic piety. Communion is commonly viewed by the Orthodox people as the cause of a religious emotion, the crown after a period of lent or as calming medicine. This an individualistic vision. The Eucharistic is in fact the heart of the world, the expression of our actual and present communion in the Body and the Blood of the Resurrected, with all the men and with the universe. Init the cosmic dimension of the Church is revealed and the unity of the whole creation is manifested and the hard work is effected of bringing to birth what is to become the new heaven and the new earth. In short, the discovery of the world's destiny as being in the Church, the intelligence of the Church as the presence of Christ – expanded to the end of the earth – these are the basic elements of the Eucharistic sense. The entire world has arisen by the fact that matter was integrated in the glorious reality of the Lord. The effort of humanity and the groanings of the creation are taken and assumed by Christ for the final triumph over death.

In a true liturgical reform it is important to insist on the values we have mentioned here. The fact of the practice of frequent communion among the faithful is not necessary the sign of a developed eucharistic conscience. That is important is not to incite the members of the movements or of any parish to communicate more often, but to educate the liturgical sense by a sound theology of the laity and of people of God so that the Eucharistic Communion at each liturgy would constitute even the very substance of our spiritual respiration.

What we need is an Eucharistic vision of life, of the world and of the Church, thus the Liturgy becomes the source of our radiance and our theology and the consecration and the offering of our life. It can be rightly said that the ideal way to know Orthodoxy and to transmit it is to be found in the divine service. However a piety cannot be sound if it is revelled to the liturgical form. The Orthodox are more and more dispersed in places where the administration of Sacraments is impossible. The entire world has become an immense Diaspora and we should so do that the most isolated groups of laymen may have a community life. What is even more important is that Christ be kept in the heart by the Bible, continuous prayer and the spiritual discipline, even when everything is destroyed around us. To be nourished constantly and without fail in the Liturgy and to be able to remain united to the Lord when the world around us will have burnt all the books and destroyed all the Churches. In this eschatological march through the desert the Lord of the Church is the unique necessity.

