



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ **May 3, 2015** ✠

### **Fourth Sunday of Pascha**

*Christ is Risen!*

*Indeed He is Risen!*

St. Theodosius, Abbot of the Kiev Caves Monastery (1074)

Martyrs Timothy and Maura of Egypt (304)

New Martyr Achmed, the Calligrapher, at Constantinople (1682)

O Death, where is thy sting?  
O Hell, where is thy victory!  
You are put to death and  
destroyed by the Risen King!  
You no longer reign,  
for the Mighty One  
has delivered those  
whom it held in bonds!

~ Matins, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday



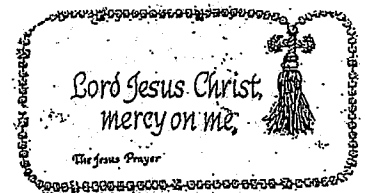
- Note: Inquirer's Class – Tomorrow Night, May 4 – 6:30pm
- Wed. May 6 6:30pm Vespers - Midfeast of Pentecost / St. Alexis

✠ Today: 3:00pm Sacrament of Holy Matrimony ✠  
**Catherine Ritchey and Alexander Fecanin**

- We welcome Father Phillip and Matushka Debra Reese of Christ the Savior Cathedral in Miami, FL. Father Phillip will concelebrate the wedding. He and Matushka Debra Reese are Alexander's Godparents.

### **Looking Ahead:**

- ⇒ Next Sunday, May 10 – Mother's Day
- ✠ Sunday, May 17 - Marriage Blessing – Thomas and Anastasia Taylor
- ✠ Thurs. May 21 – Feast of the Ascension
- ✠ Sunday, May 24 – Sacrament of Marriage – Kassiane Kirchner and Joseph Mabry
- ✠ Sunday, May 31 - Feast of Pentecost
- ✠ Sunday, June 7 - Sacrament of Marriage – Georgia Carter and Euphrosynus Briggs
- Note: Fr. Benedict Crawford will serve Liturgy and the Marriage



### **A Catacomb Pascha**

*The joyous Paschal season is here. We have celebrated the glorious Resurrection of Christ in churches ablaze with lighted candles, the clergy in resplendent vestments greeting us with the life-giving news: "Christ is Risen!" and our jubilant cries filling the air in reply: "Indeed, He is Risen!"*

*Below is a moving account of Gulag prisoners celebrated Pascha in the notorious Solovki Monastery concentration camp during the communist time. For all the lack of outward splendor of these catacomb services, and the difficult conditions under which they were conducted, the inner spiritual joy experienced by these prisoners is perhaps all the more intense.*

"At Solovki, we had several secret Catacomb 'churches,' but our favorites were two: 'the Cathedral Church' of the Holy Trinity, and the church of 'St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. The first was a small clearing in the midst of a dense forest in the direction of the 'Savvaty' Assignment Area. The dome of this church was the sky. The walls were the birch forest. The church of St. Nicholas was located in

the deep forest towards the 'Muksolm' Assignment Area. It was a thicket naturally formed by seven large spruces. Most frequently the secret services were conducted only in the summer, on great feasts and, with special solemnity, on the Day of Pentecost. But sometimes, depending on circumstances, doubly secret services were celebrated also in other places. Thus, for example, on Holy Thursday of 1929, the service of the Twelve Gospels was celebrated in our physician's cell in the 10th Company. Vladika Victor and Fr. Nicholas came to us as if for disinfection.

Then, catacomb style, they served the church service with the door bolted. On Holy Friday an order was read in all labor companies informing that for the next three days no one would be allowed to leave the companies after 8pm, other than in exceptional circumstances and by special written permit of the camp commandant."

"At 7pm on Holy Friday, when we physicians had just returned to our cells after a 12-hour workday, Fr. Nicholas came to us and told us that a burial Shroud with the Icon of Christ) *the size of one's palm* had been painted by the artist R. The service - the Rite of Christ's burial - was to be held and would begin in an hour. 'Where?' Viadika Maxim asked. 'In the great box for drying fish which is close to the forest, next to Camp N. The password: three knocks and then two. It's better to come one at a time."

"In half an hour Vladika Maxim and I left our Company and started out for the indicated 'address.' Twice patrols asked for our permits. We, as physicians, had them. But what about the others? Vladika Victor worked as a bookkeeper in the rope factory. Vladika Nektary was a fisherman; and the others weaved nets. Here was the edge of the forest. Here was the box, about nine yards long, without windows, the door scarcely noticeable. Light twilight, the sky covered with dark clouds. We knock three times and then twice. Fr. Nicholas opens. Vladika Victor and Viadika Hilarion are already here... In a few minutes Vladika Nektary also comes. The interior of the box has been converted into a church. On the floor, on the walls, spruce branches. Several candles flickering. Small paper icons. The small Shroud is buried in green branches. Ten people have come to pray. Later another four or five come, of whom two are monks. The service begins, in a whisper. It seemed that we had no bodies, but were only souls. Nothing distracted or interfered with prayer... I don't remember how we went 'home,' i.e. to our prison companies. The Lord covered us!"

"The bright service of Pascha was assigned to our physician's cell. Towards midnight under various urgent pretexts arranged by the section, without any kind of written permit, all who intended to come gathered, about fifteen people in all. After the Matins, and Liturgy, we sat down and broke the fast. On the table were Paschal cake and cheese, colored eggs, cold dishes, wine (liquid yeast with cranberry extract and sugar). About three o'clock am we parted."

"Control rounds of our Company were made by the Camp Commandant before and after the services, at 11pm and 4am. Finding us four physicians headed by Vladika Maxim, on his last round, the Commandant said: 'What doctors, you're not sleeping? And immediately he added: 'Such a night... and one doesn't want to sleep!' And he left."

"Lord Jesus Christ! We thank Thee for the miracle of Thy mercy and power!' pronounced Viadika Maxim movingly, expressing our common feelings."

"The white night of Solovki was nearing its end. The delicate, rose-colored Paschal morning of Solovki, the sun playing for joy, greeted the Monastery-concentration camp, converting it into the invisible city of Kitezh and filling our free souls with a quiet, unearthly joy."

~ I.M. Andreev, *The Russian New Martyrs*

Note: In pre-communist Russia there was a most interesting practice which took place during Bright Week in a number of the smaller towns: The mayor would open all the prison cells and allow the prisoners to spend Pascha and all of Bright Week with their families in the respective homes! Then, on the eve of the Sunday of Thomas, at sundown, they would all voluntarily return to their jail cells!

## Contemplating Eternity + Metropolitan Augustinos (Kantiotos) of Florina

“For here have we no enduring city, but we seek one to come.” In other words, the here-and-now offers Christians no permanent residence, but rather we are left to long for the day when we will enter into our future abode. Commenting on this very passage, Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite says, we must leave behind this passing, vain world, together with its mindset and passions, and run towards our heavenly, eternal homeland. This is a most beautiful line; a shining star. Here I will attempt to draw out its practical implications for you.

Eternity! My brothers and sisters, the first thing one requires if he wants to take hold of eternity is faith. Do you know what today’s people are like? Until the year 1500 AD, everyone believed that the whole earth was the area in and around the Middle East; that Gibraltar was the world’s end. For thousands of years they were completely ignorant of the existence of America. Thus, when Christopher Columbus appeared on the scene and began talking about the existence of another, new world, they were convinced that he had lost his mind. It was therefore no easy task to persuade the king to give him a ship to make his journey. Imagine how long it took to traverse the Atlantic in a tall ship! Seeing nothing before them but endless sky and water, eventually his own crew began to murmur and complain. Columbus heard them and began to pray, and finally they spotted the coast of the new world! We find something similar going on in our own day: *they* didn’t believe Columbus and *we* don’t believe Christ, who assures us that there indeed exists a world beyond our own. If we don’t believe Christ, if we don’t take him at his word, we will lose eternity – God have mercy!

The other thing we need is concern and cultivation: Christ tells us that we must turn ourselves toward eternity and make it our *concern*. And we must *cultivate* faith in eternal life, asking God to ever increase this faith in us. We must fix our gaze upwards, toward Heaven: “Let us lift up our hearts!” This is what the line, “For here have we no enduring city, but we seek one to come,” means practically. If each of us were to show just a fraction of the concern for eternal life that we show for material things, this world would look entirely different. Sadly, our only desires are material; we lack spiritual aspirations. Materialism and Epicureanism prevail: “...let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.” Let us cultivate faith in eternity, then. Its beauty is indescribable; there are no words to convey it.

But faith and concern alone are not enough; sacrifices are also required if we are to acquire eternity. If we have to make sacrifices for the sake of our earthly homeland, how much more ought we to make sacrifices for our heavenly homeland? Our life will eventually set on this earth, but just like the sun, we rise elsewhere – in eternal life. Thus, eternity is worth every sacrifice.

If we cast the desire for eternity out of Christianity, what is left? A colorless, scentless flower; it will lack the beautiful fragrance of eternity. Thus we find this desire established amongst the twelve fundamental tenets of the faith: the Creed ends with the words, “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen,” does it not?

So as a German philosopher has said, man has many noteworthy characteristics, but chiefly he is a metaphysical being rooted in God, and as the ancient philosopher Plato has said, man is like

a tree whose roots are not below him in the ground, but in the eternal realm, where he desires to be translated.

Also of great important is the *hour of our departure for eternity, the hour of death*. Then the devil fiercely wars against us, but God will send his grace to those faithful who are found worthy of it. Then brilliant, great things often happen. As the ever-memorable Androutsos has said, "Do not lose faith concerning anyone. We do not know what occurs between the soul and God even in the last moment. This is known to God alone."

In older times, when someone lay at home and the time for the departure of his soul drew nigh, everyone knelt down around him and prayed. We in our day have forgotten about this practice, even those of us who are in some sense 'religious.' We have erased the metaphysical world from our minds. "What agony has the soul when it is parted from the body!" sings the Church. Moreover, Christ, when he came to the end of his earthly life, said, "Now is my soul troubled." The soul of every man is troubled. Saint Basil the Great, too, writing about all these things, says that some wrongly put off repentance until the final hours of their life. At that time, brothers and sisters, the soul will be troubled. Holy people, like the Blessed Augustine, often sent those who were close to them away as death approached for it was their desire to be alone with God: 'Farewell world and those things associated with it! Farewell relatives and friends!'

Not one of us has experienced death. At that time the bodily senses give way and man sees and lives another reality. He passes through the toll-houses, he comes face-to-face with, "...dark visions of evil demons." While the minds of great thinkers, as well as the imagination of the laity, have given rise to works centered on the mystery of death and the next life, it must be remembered that whatever is useful for our salvation, God has shown us, God has revealed to us! These things we ought to hold on to, and not seek to penetrate the mysteries of God out of curiosity.

We should not be indifferent towards the world and its blessings, brothers and sisters; God created these things and they are indeed beautiful. However, it is wrong and un-Christian to think that the earth is our permanent residence and that here all the yearnings of the soul are fulfilled. "For here have we no enduring city, but we seek one to come." This is the proper mindset!

This is why all of us – each one of us to ourselves, parents to their children, catechists to the catechetical schools, teachers to their students, spiritual fathers to their spiritual children – need to begin emphasizing the metaphysical world: remember the end times, remember the end of this life, prepare for the future life. Where were we a hundred years ago? In the mind of God. And where will we be in a hundred years? Close to God, in boundless eternity, "For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him."

Thus we ought to live and chasten ourselves with the belief that, "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." Amen.

May we contemplate the great mystery of eternity during these holy days of festal celebration: Christ is risen and death is destroyed!



# Science and Religion

## St. Luke the Surgeon, Archbishop of Simferopol in Crimea

"When we examine contemporary science as developed by scientists such as Lamark and Darwin, we see the antithesis and I would say the complete disagreement that exists between science and religion, on topics that concern the more basic problems of existence and knowledge. For this, an enlightened mind cannot accept at the same time both one and the other and must choose between religion and science".

A well known German Zoologist, Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), who was a good follower of Darwin, wrote these words some 65 years ago, in his book, "The Riddle of the Universe" that was very successful and as it seemed, had proved that faith is absurd. So says Haeckel that every enlightened man must choose between science and religion and should follow either one or the other. He considered it necessary that such men should deny religion because a logical man cannot deny science.

Truly, is this necessary? No, not at all, for we know that many and great scientists were at the same time great believers. For example, such was the Polish astronomer Copernicus who laid the foundation of all contemporary astronomy. Copernicus was not only a believer but was also a cleric. Another great scientist, Newton, whenever he mentioned the word God, he removed his hat. He was a great believer. A great bacteriologist of our time and almost a contemporary, Pasteur, who laid the basis of contemporary bacteriology, he would start every scientific work with a prayer to God. Some 10 years ago a great scientist passed away, who was our countryman, physiologist Pavlov, who was the creator of the new physiology of the brain. He too was a great believer. Would Haeckel therefore dare say that these men did not have enlightened mind because they believed in God?

So what happens now? Why even today there are some scientists, professors at Universities whom I personally know and are great believers. Why don't all the scientists deny religion but only those who think the same as Haeckel? Because these people believe only in materials and deny the spiritual world, they do not believe in the after-death life, they do not accept the immortality of the soul and of course they do not accept the resurrection of the dead. They say that science is capable of everything, that there is no secret in nature that science cannot discover. What can we answer to these?

We shall respond to them this way. You are totally right. We cannot limit the human mind that searches nature. We know that today, science knows only a part of the things we have of nature. We also understand that the possibilities of science are great. In this they are right and we don't doubt it. What then do we doubt? Why don't we deny religion like them and consider it contrary to scientific knowledge?

Just because we believe wholeheartedly that there is a spiritual world. We are certain that apart from the material world there is an infinite and incomparably superior spiritual world. We believe in the existence of spiritual beings that have higher intellect than us humans. We believe wholeheartedly that above this spiritual and material world there is the Great and Almighty God.

**What we doubt is the right of science to research with its methods the spiritual world. Because the spiritual world cannot be researched with the methods used to research the material world. Such methods are totally inappropriate to research the spiritual world.**

How do we know that there is a spiritual world? Who told us that it exists? If we are asked by people who do not believe in the Divine revelation, we shall answer them thus: "Our heart told us". For there are two ways for one to know something, the first is that which is spoken by Haeckel, which is used by science to learn of the material world. There is however another way that is unknown to science, and does not wish to know it. It is the knowledge through the heart. Our heart is not only the central organ of the circulation system, it is an organ with which we know the other world and receive the highest knowledge. It is the organ that gives us the capability to communicate with God and the above world. Only in this we disagree with science.

Praising the great successes and achievements of science, we do not doubt at all its great importance and we do not confine the scientific knowledge. We only tell the scientists "You do not have the capability with your methods to research the spiritual world, we however can with our heart.

There are many unexplainable phenomena which concern the spiritual world that are real (as are some type of material phenomena). There are therefore phenomena that science will never be able to explain because it does not use the appropriate methods.

Let science explain how the prophecies appeared on the coming of the Messiah, which were all fulfilled. Could science tell us how the great prophet Isaiah, some 700 years before the birth of Christ, foretold the most important events in His life and for which he was named the evangelist of the Old Testament? To explain the far sighted grace possessed by the saints and to tell us with which physical methods the saints inherited this grace and how they could understand the heart and read the thoughts of a person they had just met for the first time? They would see a person for the first time and they will call him by his name. Without waiting for the visitor to ask, they would answer on what troubled him.

If they can, let them explain it to us. Let them explain with what method the saints foretold the great historical events which were accurately fulfilled as they were prophesied. Let them explain the visitation from the other world and the appearance of the dead to the living.

They shall never explain it to us because they are too far from the basis of religion - from faith. If you read the books of the scientists who try to reconstruct religion, you will see how superficially they look at things. They do not understand the essence of religion yet they criticize it. Their criticism does not touch the essence of faith, since they are unable to understand the types, the expressions of religious feeling. The essence of religion they do not understand. Why not? Because the Lord Jesus Christ says "No one can come to me unless My Father who sent Me draws him to Me.(John 6:44)

So it is necessary that we be drawn by the Heavenly Father, it is necessary that the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten our heart and our mind. To dwell in our heart and mind through this enlightenment, the Holy Spirit and the ones who were found worthy to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, those in whose heart lives Christ and His Father, know the essence of faith. The others, outside the faith cannot understand anything.

Let us hear the criticism against Haeckel from a French philosopher Emile Boutroux (1845-1921). So says Boutroux, "The criticisms of Haeckel concern much more the ways, than the essence, which (the ways) he observes with such a materialistic and narrow view, that they cannot be accepted by religious people. Thus the criticism of religion by Haeckel is not referred to, not even in one of the principles that constitutes religion".

This is therefore our opinion regarding Haeckel's book "The Riddle of the Universe" which up to day is considered the "Bible" for all those who criticize religion, which they deny and find it contrary to science. Do you see how poor and tasteless arguments they use? Don't become scandalized when you hear what they say about religion, since they themselves cannot understand its essence. You people, who may not have much of a relationship with science and do not know much about philosophy, remember always the most basic beginning, which was well known by the early Christians. They considered poor, the person who knew all the sciences yet he knew not God. On the other hand, they considered blessed the person who knew God, even if he knew absolutely nothing about the worldly things.

**Guard this truth like the best treasure of the heart, walk straight without looking right or left. Let us not bother with what we hear against religion, losing our bearings. Let us hold on to our faith which is the eternal indisputable truth. Amen.**

~ St Luke, Archbishop of Crimea, "Orthodox Kypseli" Publications - Thessaloniki

## ARE CHRISTIANS PREPARED FOR PERSECUTION?

*By James Hitchcock, professor of history at Saint Louis University.*

*From the Editor: Even though this article's author is a non-Orthodox Christian, his views correctly bring to attention the increasingly hostile environment within which Christianity exists today, even in the most democratic of all nations. It is certainly a timely reminder for all those whose duties include leading His flock. Christians all over the world are being subjected to an environment of increasing persecution which is abundantly evident domestically as well. The "free-minded" leaders of this persecutory movements carry on their work with complete disregard as to how this great nation was created and the Christian roots of America's forefathers.*

† † †

Authentic religion, precisely because it penetrates so deeply into the being of its adherents, has the capacity to inspire either great love and devotion or great hatred, sometimes one transforming itself into the other. At certain times in history that suppressed hatred bursts out violently, in systematic and frenzied attempts to, as Voltaire is supposed to have urged, "Crush the infamous thing." Such was the French Revolution, the triumph of Communism in Russia, and other episodes.

While particular justifications are offered for this frenzy of annihilation—the privileges of the clergy, ecclesiastical wealth—beneath it all is something which no degree of "reform," nor attempts by Christians to be accommodating, could ever expunge. This something is the hatred of a system of beliefs which calls each man's life into question at every moment, which reminds people of the infinite God who judges their every action. It is this which finally is intolerable to a certain kind of mind, which senses that it will not be at peace with itself until every vestige of this transcendent claim has been eradicated.

The often sadistic violence of the French Revolution seemingly betrayed the cool rationality which the Enlightenment proposed. But not the least of the Enlightenment's inadequacies was that it did not understand the irrational forces which it was helping to unleash. Today, the tradition of the Enlightenment appears to have reached its end in the murky half-light of "post-modernism." However, classical Enlightenment critiques of Christianity—that it is superstitious and repressive—are now invoked with more effect than at any time in the past two hundred years, and with the same potential for irrational violence.

Among the numerous "stories" which the media ignore are the acts of vandalism directed at churches, occurrences which seem to have become so common as to be treated almost routinely. To date this is about as far as the enemies of religion have gone in inflicting physical harm.

But the frenzied symbolic assaults on religion are numerous and frightening, revealing as they do the barely suppressed violence which its enemies harbor and which, it is fair to judge, they would eagerly act out in life if given the opportunity.

The hateful blasphemies of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in San Francisco are merely one example. Frenzied blasphemy—the mocking of sacred symbols, the association of those symbols with the sickest kind of pornography—reveals the depth of the violent hatred because it represents an assault in some ways worse than the desire to do bodily harm. It aims to annihilate the sacred core of the believer's very being. It is a mentality in which the actual killing of individuals would be almost an anti-climax.

It is one of the supreme ironies of an age awash in ironies that it is Christians who are now routinely accused of being hateful, of fomenting violence, even as the guardians of public opinion carefully conceal from view the true mentality of the anti-Christians. (Thus the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are presented merely as a group of merry pranksters who do what they do in order to raise money for charity.)

One of the results of the style of [Roman Catholic] episcopal leadership which has prevailed in America for three decades is that much, although not all, of this hatred has been diverted away from the Roman Catholic Church and towards those Protestants who can be called Fundamentalists. It is now treated as merely self-evident that the latter are hate-filled and intolerant, while the Roman Catholic Church is assessed in each particular situation, showing promise of change in some areas, intransigent in others. More than one bishop has probably prayed quietly, "Thank God for Pat Robertson. Let them pick on him rather than me."

How is it possible that anti-Christian bigotry is so strong in a society which is apparently the most religious in the Western world? In part the answer is that the very strength of religion inevitably provokes hatred; where it is weak it is simply ignored. On the other hand, Christianity is also not perceived as truly powerful. Thus religion is hated for its alleged oppressiveness but at the same time is not feared, the classic predicament of those Western monarchies where revolution occurred (England in the 1640's, France in the 1790's, Russia in 1917).

The single greatest enemy of a vibrant Christianity in the United States is not its proclaimed opponents but the deep, seemingly ineradicable complacency of its own adherents, a complacency which is to a great extent abetted, even actively fostered, by the clergy themselves. Most American Christians, including some who are ostensibly orthodox, live by the assumption that one espouses a religion in order to make one's life richer and more satisfying. The ultimate test is whether, like everything in the culture is supposed to do, it makes the individual "feel good about himself."

Most professed believers cannot conceive of why it should ever be necessary to make sacrifices for their religion, which is why there is almost total indifference to the fate of persecuted believers during one of the great ages of religious persecution in the history of the world.

Christians are now completely on the defensive in Western society in terms of their beliefs. Public discussion of religion is often casually hostile, and those who profess to believe are often apologetic in the popular sense of that word. As the events at Littleton, Colorado showed, public agencies like schools are tolerant of all kinds of deviant behavior, even as they are increasingly vigilant against the "intrusion" of religion into the public square. While there may be no systematic pattern of discrimination in employment, it would be a brave (or foolish) person who would talk openly in a job interview about deeply held religious beliefs. In the academy, including institutions which are nominally Christian, such discrimination is often taken for granted.

This is merely the beginning of a process which is likely to get worse. Looking at the situation through purely human eyes, it is likely that, as the reality of this hostility finally begins to dawn on comfortable Christians, and the price of their faith keeps getting higher, most will simply fall away, abandoning a faith which has become a handicap instead of a support.

In an important sense the real battle now is not between believers and overt secularists but between orthodox and liberal Christians, a reality which is at its starkest in Protestantism but which is also present in the Roman Catholic Church [*Ed.*, and in the Orthodox Church as well]. Because the Fundamentalists remind them of what they once were, and perhaps ought still to be, liberal Protestant leadership regards their orthodox fellow Christians as the single greatest enemy of the human race. People who boast of their ability to "reach out" towards the despised and rejected have been the most effective soldiers in the war to demonize and marginalize orthodox believers, to the point where the National Council of Churches [*Ed.*, a very liberal organization] is a public apologist for religious persecution throughout the world. Liberal Christianity is finally at the point of abandoning any claim about the unique importance of Jesus Christ in the economy of salvation, and this will merely intensify its view of orthodoxy as dangerous.

Especially in view of the nation's apparent indifference (if not worse) to the scandalous behavior of its president, some orthodox believers are in a state of discouragement, to the point of urging withdrawal from the public square into a kind of monasticism which will try to keep the faith alive for a better day. But in this atmosphere it is well to recall the Church's wisdom that not all are called to the monastic life and that the degree to which the monks of the Dark Ages simply huddled in their monasteries has been exag-

gerated—many of them were missionaries, bishops, even royal officials.

One major argument for believers remaining active in the public sphere is the explanation (excuse?) which Evelyn Waugh gave for his seemingly un-Christian behavior—how much worse it would be if there were no active Christian presence. Those who know the truth have an obligation in justice to, for example, the unborn, which they are not free to abandon.

Those who advocate a strategy of quasi-monastic withdrawal also underestimate the strength of the enemy. Jerry Falwell said all that needs to be said on the subject when he explained that Evangelicals began entering politics because the government would not let them alone. There is no place in the modern world where anyone can hide.

Thus Christians are obligated to continue the public struggle, no matter how much obloquy [*Ed.*, calumny] it continues to bring down on them, even as they are obligated to storm heaven with their prayers. A major need is preparing Christians to live in an environment of hostility, increasing discrimination, possibly even of persecution. But this is perhaps the most severe of the many pastoral tasks presently being neglected.



**A**bove all, do not forget prayer. Kneel at night before the icons to say your prayers. Realize you are condemned by your sins before the feet of Christ, and implore Him: *My Lord, Thou who became man for me, Thou wast reviled, Thou wast mocked, Thou wast spat upon, Thou wast scourged, Thou didst wear a crown of thorns, Thou wast crucified, Thou didst pour out Thy precious Blood, whereas I have defiled Thy image by my sins. I implore Thee and entreat Thee, condemn me not, give me time for repentance and confession, that I may weep for my sins. Help me, O my God, because by myself, without grace, I can do nothing.*

**E**very night, before lying in bed to go to sleep, reflect on how your whole day passed. Think if you pleased or grieved God. Your conscience will inform you. If you are not pleased, say, "since I am not pleased with myself, how shall God be?" And try continuously to correct yourself, so that you will not grieve God. A conscience without censure is either pure, or callous and hardened.

**N**ever despair. For God, there is no unforgivable sin. His compassion and mercy is an abyss. Pride and despair are from the devil. Why despair, since there is a God Who is long-suffering? Despair is a great sin; it is unbelief.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)