

## *Fire & Light*

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

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✠ **January 11, 2015** ✠

**Sunday after Theophany**

**The Postfeast of Theophany**

**St. Theodosius the Great (529)**

*Christ is Born! Christ is Baptized!*



✠ **Wed. January 14, 6:30pm ~ Inquirer's Class (also meeting Jan. 21 and 28)**

### **United Appeal Sunday – Next Sunday**

- An extra basket will be out next Sunday. The money collected goes to the United Appeal Fund, and then can be sent to IOCC, or to other charity needs.
- A Christian's life is a ceaseless, Christ-centered Theophany: the Holy Spirit, through the Holy Mysteries and the holy virtues, transmits Christ the Savior to each believer, renders him a living tradition. ~ St. Justin Popovich (1979)

### **A Unity of Grace**

✠ "The Church is not a multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but a unity of the grace of God, living in a multitude of rational creatures, submitting themselves willingly to grace.... The unity of the Church is not imaginary or allegorical, but a true and substantial unity, such as is the unity of many members in a living body."

- Aleksei Khomiakov, Russian Theologian (19<sup>th</sup> C)

✠ "Our worship of God reaches its highest expression in the spiritual gathering of the faithful, and especially in the sacred mystery of the divine Eucharist. "

- Archbishop Anastasios of Albania

### **St. Ambrose of Milan's teachings on Luke 2:7**

✠ "He was a Baby, He was a Child, so that you may be a perfect man; He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, that you may be loosed from the snares of death; He was in a manger, so that you may be in the Altar; He was on earth, that you may be in the stars. He had no other place in the inn, so that you may have many mansions in the Heavens [John 14:2]. 'He', it says, 'being rich, became poor for your sakes, that through His poverty you might become rich' [II Corinthians 8:9]. Therefore, His poverty is my inheritance; and the Lord's weakness is my virtue. He chose to lack for Himself, that He may abound for all. The sobs of that squalling Infancy cleanse me, those tears wash away my sins."

✠ If you see someone greedy for many things, you should consider him the poorest of all, even if he has acquired everyone's money. If, on the other hand, you see someone with few needs, you should count him the richest of all, even if he has acquired nothing.

~ St. John Chrysostom

## ***This and That***

### **Un-Modern**

Christianity—we should admit it—is un-modern. Or, rather, it is modern in the sense that it encompasses all eras: past, present, and future. What we might call the “modern spirit” is in fact detached from the Christian spirit.

– William Murchison

### **Mystery**

The Orthodox Church is very fond of the word mystery. We refer to Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist as mysteries. God is the Mystery; we live in a world of mystery, and the relationship of love that unites us is a mystery. For the Orthodox, mystery is not a problem that we must solve, but an atmosphere that we can breathe deeply in order to find our peace. Knowing that the ultimate reality of things is beyond us is not a threat; it is where we live, move and have our being. Christ's miracles point toward this Mystery, quantum physics also points toward this Mystery. We are not stuck in a clockwork universe. Being free of all determinism, we enter into the Mystery, which is the very life of God.

Fr. Silouan at St. Michael's Skete, Canones, NM

### **Lemme Alone!**

"Holiday" means "holy day." Holy for what reason? For the reason that Christ was born: absent which occasion the stores wouldn't be bidding you to, 'Come, max out your credit cards'...

Free-market capitalism, God bless it, not only maximizes prosperity but encourages the personal autonomy and fragmentation that have become our moral hallmarks. In other words, our popular creed, instead of "Jesus Saves!" seems to be 'Lemme Alone, Hear?'"

High expectations for human performance really don't inform the new creed, which, unlike traditional Christianity, isn't long on moral reasoning, with its encouragements, restraints and, indeed, prohibitions. To the degree you suggest to someone else how life should rightly be lived, you invite the angry retort or the indifferent stare. 'Lemme alone! Get outta my face!'"

But the nature of Christianity -- the creed of Christmas -- is about unpleasant realities like human deficiency and humbling ones like redemption: all in accordance with divine directives. To be wished a Merry Christmas is to be wished a closer walk, a nearer relationship, with the God whose only begotten Son, as the story goes, came to earth at this season. The manger thing, you know -- angels, shepherds, wise men. Oh, so entangling! As it was meant to be."

– William Murchison

Multiculturalists say Christmas celebrations cause "non-Christians to feel 'left out.' I am skeptical, but even if the multiculturalists are right," says Tom Piatak, "how much should we worry about those who feel left out. ... We cannot forever shield non-Christians from the reality that they are a minority in America, and suppressing the observances of the majority seems a high price to pay to allow overly sensitive souls to live in comfortable delusion."

But, as multiculturalists know, the result of free choice would be the almost-universal celebration of Christmas in public. And this they cannot abide, for their agenda is to purge from public life the Christian faith that gave birth to Western civilization. For they believe Western civilization was a blight upon mankind.

"Ultimately," writes Piatak, "we should be free to celebrate Christmas publicly and joyously, because it is a great holiday, and because it is our holiday and one of the crowning glories of Western culture that gave birth to America and sustains us still." – Patrick Buchanan

"Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin."

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

# Vanishing Sea of Faith

## European Islam & the Doubtful Future of Christian Europe

by William Murchison, October 2005, Touchstone Magazine Archives

### Christianity Unwanted

The plight of Christianity in Europe, if not yet in America, has become the topic of the moment in religious as well as secular circles, and the modern Christian establishment professes bewilderment. What goes on? No one wants the product the Churches profess to be selling? In statistical, as well as anecdotal terms, that would appear to be the case. Consider:

- Just 21 percent of Europeans (according to a recent European Values Study) call religion of any kind “very important.” Only 15 percent worship even once a week.
- On average, only 41 percent of Europeans claim belief in a personal God. In Britain the percentage of believers has fallen from 77 percent in 1968 to 44 percent today. That’s “believers,” as opposed to the distinctly smaller class of believer-practitioners who on Sundays put their posteriors where their minds are. **The number of Muslims at Friday prayers in Britain reportedly exceeds the number of Anglicans at Sunday worship.** A recent *Wall Street Journal* article referred to Tony Blair as “the Christian leader of a pagan country.”
- In Ireland—Ireland!—just half the population reportedly goes to Mass now, compared with 84 percent in the early 1990s. To quote one bored member, “It’s the repetition. After you’ve heard it enough, you feel like you already know what they’re going to say, so why do you have to go there?” Yes, why, Brendan, Brigid, Patrick?—the whole lot of you who saw participation in Christ’s sacrifice as the holiest of privileges.
- The European Union in 2004 notoriously declined entreaties from religious leaders to include in its 70,000-word constitution some acknowledgement of the continent’s Christian heritage.
- The papal biographer George Weigel, who has lately written a deft little book on the subject, *The Cube and the Cathedral*, sees a continent gripped by “metaphysical boredom,” its high culture actually “Christophobic” in content. “European man,” Weigel asserts, “has convinced himself that in order to be modern and free, he must be radically secular.”

Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour! And maybe, for good measure, Luther, Calvin, Augustine, Aquinas, and C. S. Lewis. Not excluding Hilaire Belloc, who at the end of World War I saw all this coming: the “dissolution of standards,” the “melting of the spiritual framework.”

In *Europe and the Faith*, Belloc wrote glumly of how “authority, the very principle of life, loses its meaning, and this awful edifice of civilization which we have inherited . . . trembles and threatens to crash down.” Then the closing, well-remembered grace note: “Europe will return to the Faith, or she will perish. The Faith is Europe. And Europe is the Faith.”

### Crescent Europe

Read a certain way, Belloc’s warning calms and soothes. All this was 85 years ago—eight and a half decades. Nor did the Faith, in this time span, really recede from view. Maybe it won’t now. You could put the matter that way, yes. Yet spinning will not conceal European Christianity’s undoubted perplexities and hardships. In recent decades another perplexity has arisen: that of a large and increasingly aggressive Muslim population, especially in France, Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands.

The historically minded—excluding a large number of public education's most recent products—will recall how relatively few years it has been since Muslim armies and navies were trying to bring Christian Europe under the star and crescent. What repelled them, at Lepanto and at the outskirts of Vienna? Military might, marshaled by the conviction that Europe, being Christian, had to remain so. There was something then to fight for.

What is there now? The European constitution, with its silence concerning the Faith? The 35-hour workweek? Pensions? Soccer? Rock concerts? Homosexual "marriage" and all those alternative sexual practices unavailable (at least in public) in Islamic countries?

Yes, and what happens when Muslim immigrants refuse secular identity with their new homelands? When, for instance, as happened recently, a Dutch Muslim murders in broad daylight a prominent, indeed obstreperous, critic of Islam? The Muslim who sees himself as a Muslim first and a Dutchman second or third or fourth—to the extent he sees himself as affiliated in any urgent way with a secular nation and people—is clearly not playing by the secular rules of secular Europe.

Those rules specify tolerance for diverse viewpoints as crucial to modern citizenship. The secular European easily accedes to this viewpoint. Not so the newcomer who asserts the hard, burning faith of the desert in preference to the kind thoughts and good wishes of the housing development.

Drawing on the fate of **Byzantium** nearly 700 years ago, Weigel proposes in *The Cube and the Cathedral* the once-unimaginable scenario of a Europe overwhelmed by its ancient adversaries: "The muezzin summons the faithful to prayer from the central loggia of St. Peter's in Rome, while Notre-Dame has been transformed into Hagia Sophia on the Seine—a great Christian Church become an Islamic museum."

What indeed would it mean for Notre-Dame to become Hagia Sophia on the Seine? The victory of Mohammed over Christ is what it would mean; the Incarnate Son of God displaced by the desert seer with the multiple wives.

### **Swept Away**

That should give us pause. Centuries of Christian belief swept away in a great cosmic sorting-out; history stood on its head. A wispy fantasy after all, these tales of a holy man with power to transform loaves and fishes; a faith worthy in intention but empty inside. No God-Man, then; no worshipful wise men or empty tomb, no Holy Ghost, no forgiveness of sins, no coming again in glory; only the wind from the desert penetrating the deepest places of consciousness, sweeping away—never to return—the delusions and distractions of 2,000 years. Gone, all gone!

I want to pose two questions: (1) Why? and (2) What then?

"Why?" is the tough one. If Europe is the Faith and the Faith is Europe, this thing—this ongoing eclipse of Christianity in Europe—shouldn't be possible. Except that we look the thing right in the eye and glimpse its painful possibilities. Hagia Sophia on the Seine. Why?

"Why not?" is one way of answering. If you don't believe a thing is true, or vital, or relevant, in due course you quit acting as though you did, notwithstanding any sentimental attachment you might have to the outward forms and symbols of the old belief structure...Europe has long been looking elsewhere for the satisfactions Christianity once supplied.

What do we suppose has been going on there anyway these past couple of centuries—a heart-clutching, hand-clapping revival of Wesleyan proportions? Not a bit of it. What's been going on is Marxism, Freudianism, and Darwinism. The three dominant intellectual movements of the past two centuries, far from reinforcing Christianity, have pitied, confronted, or persecuted it—in the name of Man: his itches, his intuitions, his lusts.

## The Promise

And so we come to my second question: What then?

We don't quite know the answer. We know the promise, nonetheless. It is more bracing by far than anything we see around us. "The gates of hell shall not prevail . . ."! "At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee . . .!"

All this needs looking at with vast seriousness, for two distinct yet closely related reasons.

The first is a strong suggestion in the Lord's words that what's wanted from the Church of God, in its relationship to the world, is stark clarity, and a certain boldness. What kind of religious enterprise are a bunch of fishermen likely to get going in the Greco-Roman world, lacking some confidence in the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ the Messiah over Jupiter and Apollo and Venus and the whole marble-visaged crew positioned atop the physical and metaphysical heights of that world? Yes, where was this Christ business going? Couldn't it cause trouble—such as getting you nailed head-down to a cross or treated to other imperial inducements to religious quietism?

If anything could be said of the Church in the ensuing years and decades and centuries, it was that the Church spoke and acted boldly—with divine recklessness, even. Why? Because so it was commanded. The same Gospel that relays to us the news of Peter's commission moves the matter briskly along, some chapters later: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations."

**What the Church said, essentially, over and over again, to whomever might be listening, was: "You need this. Upon it depends everything. Life, death, everything."** What came more naturally, in this event, than invocations that have not even now lost the capacity to inspire? "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the Cross of Jesus, going on before. . . ."

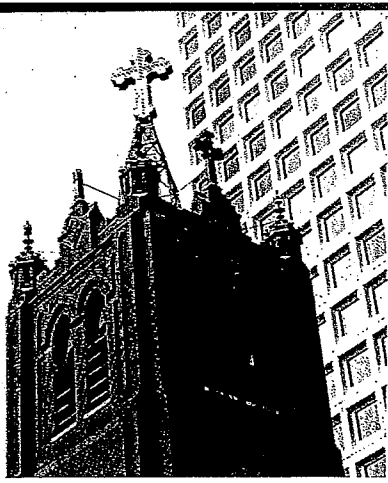
It is the kind of approach we have come to think of, in the twenty-first century, as "intolerant" and "exclusivist." Only a minor part of the reason for Islam's rise in Western Europe has to do with the large-scale immigration of Algerians, Turks, and so on, and their subsequent non-amalgamation into the general population. The larger point is that the Muslims who came and began to populate the continent with their own kind found there a steadily enlarging spiritual vacuum.

The cathedrals and Churches were open for business, yes; but it was tourists who more and more filled them, and not in a spirit of worship either. More like a mood of dutiful curiosity. An increasingly secular Europe has for decades seen Islam not as an oppositional force in cultural and spiritual terms, but, rather, as one more mode of expression: all the more deserving of tolerance, possibly, on account of onetime Christian proclivities for butting in with the Gospel, wherever and whenever.

## A Cheering Alarm

The second, and final, point I would make regarding this gates-of-hell business is with a more cheerful: not quite "What, me worry?", but not particularly distant from that sentiment either. We find in Christ's words a rather alarming promise—alarming to adversaries of the Faith. It is that nothing they can do will polish off his Church. Nothing. That would include, I imagine, multi-cultural instruction in schools, prohibitions of religious symbols, the extirpation of Christmas festivities on public property, even the forced emptying of the Churches themselves. Persecution, nakedness, and the sword will likewise fail. I think I am right in declaring this to be the consistent witness of the Church, in all times, all places.

*William Murchison is Radford Distinguished Professor of Journalism at Baylor University. He is a long-time syndicated columnist (his columns can be found at [www.townhall.com](http://www.townhall.com)) and editor of the Dallas Morning News. An Episcopalian, for many years he edited Foundations, the magazine of Forward in Faith/North America.*



# State Religion and the American Remnant

By Ray Nothstine

Secularization and moral relativism are rapidly transforming a nation that once embodied the best ideals of Western freedom based on a Biblical worldview. And while secularization of society has reached new heights in America, we will always have religion and faith as strong components. An important question is how healthy a role will faith play in the public square and who is given a seat at the table?

At the 2014 Evangelical Leadership summit sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute, Russell Moore declared: "If we do not have religious liberty, it does not mean we have a purely secular state, but it means we have a more religious state." Moore, who was interviewed in the Fall 2013 issue of *Religion & Liberty*, explained that we are headed to "a state that is dictating religious terms."

"The American framers warned against government compulsion of religion and set up a republic intent on protecting the free exercise of religion."

Language like "freedom of worship," only further ghettoizes religious liberty by

walling it off inside churches and other houses of worship so as not to interfere with cultural relativism – today's dominant state religion. The American framers warned against government compulsion of religion and set up a republic intent on protecting its free exercise. However, a repaganizing of the West demands that the Church be removed as a buffer between the individual and the state. We've come a long way since Martin Luther King, Jr., declared the Church the "conscience of the state."

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia summed up what the future holds when he wrote in his dissent in the striking down of the Defense of Marriage Act: that the court is now saying opposition to moral relativism equals "enemies to the human race." During the 1st Century reign of Nero, the Roman historian Tacitus noted that Christians were persecuted and killed for their "hatred against mankind."

That the new state religion is being pushed with missionary zeal is clearly an ominous sign for dissenters. In 2014, the public university system of California, which consists of 23 schools, is banning all InterVarsity Christian ministries from recognition as a student organization. Other schools are following California's lead. The crime of the dissenters is creedal Christianity. The same crime outlawed under paganism and the 20th Century rise of totalitarianism. An ironic twist since many University mottos proclaim the motto *Veritas*, which means "truth," reflected in Christ's *I am*

statement: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Universities, an invention of European Christendom, now demand its persecution.

Those calling for political change in the country often don't realize the culture has largely passed them by. America has largely been a source for good, prosperity, and peace, but its current economic and cultural trajectory is one of decline, even if is not yet catastrophic.

It's likely that dark days are ahead for American Christians, but those who are true to their conscience and the Word may be able to reclaim a more powerful and magnified witness. Some of the methods of the American Civil Rights Movement serve as a model of dissent and peaceful disobedience. "One word of truth outweighs the world," declared Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

The church of the relativistic government is proving itself bankrupt. It has largely become bankrupt of protecting the very purpose of government, to protect natural rights. It's essential that the Church, which has the answers for what ails the culture, speaks up. The decline of America and the West has long been predicted and prophesied but it's wise to echo the Protestant minister J. Vernon McGee, who told his listening audience at the height of the Red Menace: "It is dark in the world just now – never too dark for [a] child of God."

# Orthodox Truth in an Age of Relativism

by Gabriel Martini, August 7, 2014

It is not loving to affirm a person in their sin.

It is not loving to affirm a person in their rebellion against both God and His created, natural order—not “supernatural,” or “unnatural,” but the way nature was always intended to be, revealed most perfectly in Jesus Christ and the Mother of God and all the Saints.

It is not loving to affirm a person in their beliefs or perspectives that run contrary to the blessings offered us in both Christ and His one, holy Church.

It is not compassionate to ignore truth in order to affirm a person in lies.

It is not compassionate to let people live a life contrary to the author of Life.

It is not compassionate to revise, ignore, or trample under foot the essential truths of our Church in order to curry favor with public opinion, the winds and waves of doctrine, cultural trends, the fools—for the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God—of the Academy, and those with the largest checkbooks.

## **It is not loving to affirm a person in their sin.**

It is not compassionate to tell God’s people that asceticism, restraint, and self-control somehow only apply to one gender, or even one “sexual orientation.” There are no “orientations”; there are choices and free will, as we are all created after the Image of God (let’s be plain: to deny this is Christological heresy). Some struggle with one sin more than others, but we are all called to a life of asceticism and repentance, no matter our lot in life (this is simply lived out and expressed in unique, and varying ways, according to our portion and place). It is not loving, nor is it compassionate, to only say things and believe things that you know will receive a favorable response. This is called being a coward and even a charlatan. We should not be ashamed of the Gospel. This applies doubly to our clergy, but no less to us laity.

## **It is not compassionate to ignore truth in order to affirm a person in lies.**

In all of this, we can act, speak, and believe in a manner that is not only loving and compassionate, but also fully in line with the commandments of Christ, and the traditions of our one, holy Church (and there is only one, true Church—this is also tied to orthodox Christology).

There is no need for compromise;

there is no need for false accusations of extremism;

there is no need for being unloving or overly critical;

there is no need for false dichotomies;

there is no need for looking at the sins of others more than our own;

there is no need for cynicism alone;

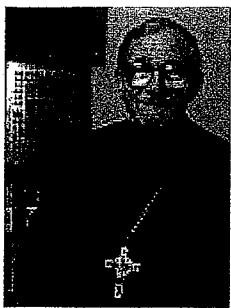
there is no need for ignoring the clear commands of Christ and the Apostles to judge—and be judged—by those within the House of God.

## **It is not loving to affirm a person in their rebellion against both God and His created, natural order**

Ignoring all the cliches, categories, and politics of our age, there is only a need to be unapologetically, lovingly, and charitably Orthodox. Regardless of what the world thinks or says, and regardless of what this means for our success, fame, and fortune. Truth is not a spectrum of opinions, perspectives, and paradigm shifts; it is not culturally conditioned; it is not relative for each new age, thought, or situation. Truth is a Person. Truth is the Logos, the Divine Word and Truth of God, even our Lord Jesus Christ—who is the same yesterday, today, and unto ages of ages.

***“A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, “You are mad; you are not like us.” ~ St. Anthony the Great***

## Fr. Thomas Hopko's 55 Maxims



1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied
6. Make some prostrations when you pray
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days
8. Practice silence, inner and outer
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day
10. Do acts of mercy in secret
11. Go to liturgical services regularly
12. Go to Confession and Holy Communion regularly
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly
15. Read the Scriptures regularly
16. Read good books, a little at a time
17. Cultivate communion with the Saints
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby
22. Exercise regularly
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself
25. Be faithful in little things
26. Do your work, then forget it
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first
28. Face reality
29. Be grateful
30. Be cheerful
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small
32. Never bring attention to yourself
33. Listen when people talk to you
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone
42. Don't judge anyone for anything
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything
44. Don't defend or justify yourself
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice
50. Be merciful with yourself and others
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame