



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **June 14, 2015** ✠

All Saints of America

Holy Prophet Elisha (9th B.C.)
St. Methodius the Confessor,
Patriarch of Constantinople (847)

As the bountiful harvest of Thy sowing of salvation, the lands of North America offer to Thee, O Lord, all the Saints who have shone in them. By their prayers keep the Church and our land in abiding peace! Through the Theotokos, O most Merciful One!

~ Troparion – Tone 8

➤ Tomorrow – Inquirer's Class – 6:30pm > The Apostles Fast continues...

18th All-American Council – July 19-25, Hilton Downtown Atlanta

– See oca.org. You can attend for a day or two at any time of the week. There will be morning and evening services each day and all kinds of Orthodox stores and exhibits. It's an extraordinary experience as well to be together with so many Orthodox clergy and faithful.

✠ There are three things I cannot accept: non-dogmatic faith, non-ecclesiological Christianity and non-ascetic Christianity. These three – the Church, dogma, asceticism – constitute one single life for me. ~ Elder Sophrony of Essex (1993)

✠ We need to take refuge in the Church, to drink milk at her breast, to be fed with the Scriptures of the Lord. For the Church has been planted in the world as a paradise. ~ St. Irenaeus of Lyons (150 AD)

From the Day of Pentecost

✠ "On the day of Pentecost our Lord solemnly sent down to the disciples in a tempestuous wind the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which alighted on each of them and entered within them and filled them with the fiery strength of divine grace which breathes bedewingly and acts gladdeningly in souls which partake of its power and operations (cf. Acts 2:1-4). And this same fire-infusing grace of the Holy Spirit which was given to us all, the faithful of Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, is sealed by the Sacrament of Chrismation on the chief parts of our body as appointed by the Holy Church, the eternal keeper of this grace. It is said: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." On what do we put this seal if not on vessels containing some very precious treasure?" **St. Seraphim of Sarov**

✠ The Lord did not require ten talents from him who had received only two; and as He distributed them according to the strength of each, so He also collected them according to the strength of their upbringing. And we, as merciless torturers of each other, often ask from our fellow creatures that which we cannot even fulfill ourselves, and certainly would not have fulfilled if we had been in their place. And so, seek any correction first of all in yourself; and when with the help of God's blessing you attain to this in proportion to your strength, then surely you will see your fellow creatures, i.e., all your sisters, as favorable, good, and kind: *First cast the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt 7:5).*

Abbess Thaisia of Leushino (+1915) - *Letters to a Beginner*

The Holy Prophet Elisha ~ June 14

The Prophet Elisseus, the son of Saphat, was from the town of Abel-me-oul and had been a husbandman. In the year 908 B.C., at God's command, the Prophet Elias anointed him to be Prophet in his stead. This happened while Elisseus was plowing his land, having twelve oxen under yoke. Straightway, Elisseus slew the oxen and cooked them, using the wooden plough and the other instruments of husbandry as firewood; then he gave the oxen as food to the people. Bidding farewell to his parents, he followed Elias and served him until the latter was taken up as it were into Heaven (see July 20). When Elisseus received his teacher's mantle and the grace of his prophetic spirit twofold, he demonstrated whose disciple he was through the miracles he wrought and through all that is related of him in the Fourth Book of Kings. He departed full of days and was buried in Samaria, about the year 839 B.C. But even after his death God glorified him; for after the passage of a year, when some Israelites were carrying a dead man for burial and suddenly saw a band of Moabites, they cast the dead man on the grave of the Prophet. No sooner had the dead man touched the Prophet's bones, than he came to life and stood on his feet (IV Kings 13:20-21). Mentioning this, Jesus the Son of Sirach says, "He did wonders in his life, and at his death his works were marvelous" (Ecclus. 48:14). It is because of such marvels that the faithful have reverence for the relics of the Saints (see also Jan. 16). His name means "God is savior."

The Holy Prophet Amos ~ June 15

The Prophet Amos was from the city of Thekoue of the land of Zabulon. He was an unlearned man, a shepherd of goats and sheep, as he testifies concerning himself (Amos 7:14-15). He began to prophesy two years before the earthquake, which some say took place in the twenty-fifth year of the reign of Ozias, King of Judah, about the year 785 B.C. (Amos 1:1). Later, however, Amasias, the false priest of Bethel, brought about his death. His book of prophecy, divided into nine chapters, is ranked third among the minor Prophets. This Amos is different from the Prophet Esaias' father, who also was called Amos. His name means "bearer of burdens."

Yet in the End...

✘ Just think how many people have preached, written, and dogmatized; they filled the world with books, as did Origen who wrote many books and saved many people and strengthened a multitude of others to become martyrs; yet in the end he was labeled as the founder of a heresy and fell away from God.

Elder Ephraim

✘ Abba Abraham of Iberia asked Abba Theodore of Eleutheropolis, "Father, which is right? Ought I to seek glory for myself, or dishonor? The Elder answered, "As far as I am concerned, I prefer to seek glory rather than disgrace. If I do something good, and praise myself for it, I can condemn my thoughts by saying to myself that I do not deserve the praise, but disgrace comes from evil deeds. How then can I appease my conscience if men have been shocked because of me? It is better, therefore, to do good and be praised for it."

✘ When God wishes to take pity on a soul and it rebels, not bearing anything and doing its own will, he then allows it to suffer that which it does not want, in order that it may seek Him again.

Abba Isaiah

✘ The acquisition of Christian books is necessary for those who can use them. For the mere sight of these books renders us less inclined to sin, and incites us to believe more firmly in righteousness.

✘ Reading the Scripture is a great safeguard against sin...It is a great treachery to salvation to know nothing of the divine Law...Ignorance of the Scriptures is a precipice and a deep abyss.

St. Epiphanius of Cyprus

Sunday of All Saints of North America

In 1908, Father Leonid Turkevich, the rector of the new Minneapolis theological seminary and later Bishop of Chicago (1933 - 1950) and Metropolitan of our Church (1950 - 1965), wrote to the well-established Russian Orthodox parish in London asking for help in finding English language materials for his teachers and students. Recognizing that the seminarians would be exercising their future ministries in an English-speaking North American culture, it had been decided to hold classes in English. We do not know if Father Eugene Smirnoff, at the head of the London parish, was able to fulfill the request, although he was very willing to do so. He wrote back to Fr Leonid: *I read your letter with great joy and I will attempt to fulfill your request with heartfelt readiness. I also once served in America and I have read not a little about the religious and church situation in the United States. I still continue to follow the successes of the Orthodox Church on the other side of the Atlantic with fervent interest. Her every victory in that country which is wild and alien to us in spirit gives me joy and fills me with prayerful compunction. For a long time I have been insisting on the necessity of forming in America an Orthodox clergy educated in full accord with the local conditions, in order to consolidate the successes of Orthodoxy for the future.* [Embassy, Emigrants, and Englishmen: The Three Hundred Year History of a Russian Orthodox Church in London. Christopher Birchall. (Holy Trinity Publications, 2014) p.169]

America was 'wild and alien in spirit' in many ways. Here, the Church had no state support, for example, and although the Russian Empire was in fact a highly diverse, pluralistic society, American pluralism, coupled with freedom of speech, of movement, of pursuing one's own interests, of economic opportunities, posed complex and unsettling pastoral questions. The American Orthodox leadership, with its old world experience and a set of religious and social expectations arising from the relative stability of an Orthodox culture - institutions, popular piety, and moral vision - was faced with very serious challenges in this powerfully attractive, seductive new world. The previous year, in his first sermon on arriving in New York to administer the American Mission, Archbishop Platon had pointedly addressed the tension between Orthodoxy, if lived authentically, and the seemingly pervasive false new world values of materialism, consumerism and moral relativism.

On this Sunday of All Saints of North America we note that, at least for all the known American saints, the center of gravity, the well-spring of spiritual formation, the measure of lived faith, the world-view that informed their sense of what it meant to live as Orthodox believers, was rooted in this old world experience of Orthodoxy. It is sobering to ask: Has the new world experience of Orthodoxy revealed and glorified a sanctity of its own? It seems to me that our joyous veneration of the North American Saints is an affirmation of continuity rather than of exceptionalism, of relationship more than autonomy. This day is the celebration of the local, continental instance of the great continuity of the community of faith and communion of the Saints.

Today we give thanks to God for the great gift of sanctity and personal holiness revealed and encountered in our North American Saints: known and unknown, proclaimed officially or intuited locally. They are our much loved heavenly intercessors. Their struggles inspire us and give us hope. What was for them the new world is, for us, simply our world. The challenges have not lessened. They may have even increased.

- Fr. Andrew Morbey, Minneapolis, MN

Excerpts from *Civilization without Religion?* ...by Russell Kirk, cited by Fr. Johannes Jacobse

Man is the only creature possessing culture, as distinguished from instinct; and if culture is effaced, so is the distinction between man and the brutes that perish. "Art is man's nature," in Edmund Burke's phrase; and if the human arts, or culture, cease to be, then human nature ceases to be.

From what source did humankind's many cultures arise? Why, from cults. A cult is a joining together for worship - that is, the attempt of people to commune with a transcendent power. It is from association in the cult, the body of worshippers, that human community grows.

Once people are joined in a cult, cooperation in many other things becomes possible. Common defense, irrigation, systematic agriculture, architecture, the visual arts, music, the more intricate crafts, economic production and distribution, courts and government - all these aspects of a culture arise gradually from the cult, the religious.

American civilization of our era is rooted, strange though the fact may seem to us, in tiny knots of worshippers in Palestine, Greece, and Italy, thousands of years ago. The enormous material achievements of our civilization have resulted, if remotely, from the spiritual insights of prophets and seers.

...Worship of the state, or of the national commonwealth, is no healthy substitute for communion with transcendent love and wisdom.

Nor can attempts at persuading people that religion is "useful" meet with much genuine success. No man sincerely goes down on his knees to the divine because he has been told that such rituals lead to the beneficial consequences of tolerably honest behavior in commerce. People will conform their actions to the precepts of religion only when they earnestly believe the doctrines of that religion to be true.

In short, the culture can be renewed only if the cult is renewed; and faith in divine power cannot be summoned up merely when that is found expedient. Faith no longer works wonders among us: one has but to glance at the typical church built nowadays, ugly and shoddy, to discern how architecture no longer is nurtured by the religious imagination. It is so in nearly all the works of twentieth century civilization: the modern mind has been secularized so thoroughly that "culture" is assumed by most people to have no connection with the love of God.

How are we to account for this widespread decay of the religious impulse? It appears that the principal cause of the loss of the idea of the holy is the attitude called "scientism"-that is, the popular notion that the revelations of natural science, over the past century and a half or two centuries, somehow have proved that men and women are naked apes merely, that the ends of existence are production and consumption merely; that happiness is the gratification of sensual impulses; and that concepts of the resurrection of the flesh and the life everlasting are mere exploded superstitions. Upon these scientific assumptions, public schooling in America is founded nowadays, implicitly.

This view of the human condition has been called by C S. Lewis, in particular - reductionism: it reduces human beings almost to mindlessness; it denies the existence of the soul. Reductionism has become almost an ideology. It is scientific, but not scientific: for it is a far cry from the understanding of matter and energy that one finds in the addresses of Nobel Prize winners in physics, say.

More than forty years ago, that remarkable historian Christopher Dawson, in his book *Religion and Culture*, expressed this hard truth strongly. "The events of the last few years," Dawson wrote, "portend either the end of human history or a turning point in it. They have warned us in letters of fire that our civilization has been tried in the balance and found wanting - that there is an absolute limit to the progress than can be achieved by the perfection of scientific techniques detached from spiritual aims and moral values.... The recovery of moral control and the return to spiritual order have become the indispensable conditions of human survival. But they can be achieved only by a profound change in the spirit of modern civilization. This does not mean a new religion or a new culture but a movement of spiritual reintegration which would restore that vital relation between religion and culture which has existed at every age and on every level of human development."

...In short, it appears to me that our culture labors in an advanced state of decadence; that what many people mistake for the triumph of our civilization actually consists of powers that are disintegrating our culture; that the vaunted "democratic freedom" of liberal society in reality is servitude to appetites and illusions which attack religious belief; which destroy community through excessive centralization and urbanization; which efface life-giving tradition and custom.

On Evolution

by Fred Reed, March 5, 2005 (excerpt)

I was about fifteen when I began to think about evolution. I was then just discovering the sciences systematically, and took them as what they offered themselves to be, a realm of reason and dispassionate regard for truth.

There was a hard-edged clarity to them that I liked. You got real answers. Since evolution depended on such sciences as chemistry, I regarded it as also being a science.

The question of the origin of life interested me.

The evolutionary explanations that I encountered in textbooks of biology seemed a trifle weak, however. They ran to, "In primeval seas, evaporation concentrated dissolved compounds in a pore in a rock, a skin formed a membrane, and life began its immense journey." I saw no reason to doubt this. If it hadn't been true, scientists would not have said that it was.

Remember, I was fifteen.

In those days I read *Scientific American* and *New Scientist*, the latter then still being thoughtfully written in good English. I noticed that not infrequently they offered differing speculations as to the origin of life. The belief in the instrumentality of chemical accident was constant, but the nature of the primeval soup changed to fit varying attempts at explanation.

For a while, life was thought to have come about on clay in shallow water in seas of a particular composition, later in tidal pools with another chemical solution, then in the open ocean in another solution. This continues.

Recently, geo-thermal vents have been offered as the home of the first life. Today (Feb 24, 2005) on the BBC website, I learn that life evolved below the oceanic floor. ("There is evidence that life evolved in the deep sediments," co-author John Parkes, of Cardiff University, UK, told the BBC News website.") The frequent shifting of ground bothered me. If we knew how life began, why did we have so many prospective mechanisms, none of which really worked? Evolution began to look like a

theory in search of a soup. Forty-five years later, it still does.

Questions Arise

I was probably in college when I found myself asking what seemed to me straightforward questions about the chemical origin of life. In particular:

(1) Life was said to have begun by chemical inadvertence in the early seas. Did we, I wondered, really know of what those early seas consisted? Know, not suspect, hope, theorize, divine, speculate, or really, really wish. The answer was, and is, "no." We have no dried residue, no remaining pools, and the science of planetogenesis isn't nearly good enough to provide a quantitative analysis.

(2) Had the creation of a living cell been replicated in the laboratory? No, it hadn't, and hasn't. (Note 1, at end)

(3) Did we know what conditions were necessary for a cell to come about? No, we didn't, and don't.

(4) Could it be shown to be mathematically probable that a cell would form, given any soup whatever? No, it couldn't, and can't. (At least not without cooking the assumptions.) (Note 2) Well, I thought, sophomore chemistry major that I then was: If we don't know what conditions existed, or what conditions are necessary, and can't reproduce the event in the laboratory, and can't show it to be statistically probable—why are we so very sure that it happened? Would you hang a man on such evidence?

My point was not that evolutionists were necessarily wrong. They simply had not shown that they were right. While they couldn't demonstrate that life had begun by chemical accident, I couldn't show that it hadn't. An inability to prove that something is statistically possible is not the same as proving that it is not statistically possible. Not being able to reproduce an event in the laboratory does not establish that it didn't happen in nature. Etc. I just didn't know how life came about. I still don't. Neither do evolutionists.

Signs from Science

Rod Dreher, December 30, 2014

The American Conservative

Eric Metaxas kindly lets us know that atheism is just about the unlikeliest thing in the universe: Today there are more than 200 known parameters necessary for a planet to support life—every single one of which must be perfectly met, or the whole thing falls apart. Without a massive planet like Jupiter nearby, whose gravity will draw away asteroids, a thousand times as many would hit Earth's surface. The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing.

Yet here we are, not only existing, but talking about existing. What can account for it? Can every one of those many parameters have been perfect by accident? At what point is it fair to admit that science suggests that we cannot be the result of random forces? Doesn't assuming that an intelligence created these perfect conditions require far less faith than believing that a life-sustaining Earth just happened to beat the inconceivable odds to come into being?

There's more. The fine-tuning necessary for life to exist on a planet is nothing compared with the fine-tuning required for the universe to exist at all. For example, astrophysicists now know that the values of the four fundamental forces—gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the “strong” and “weak” nuclear forces—were determined less than one millionth of a second after the big bang. Alter any one value and the universe could not exist. For instance, if the ratio between the nuclear strong force and the electromagnetic force had been off by the tiniest fraction of the tiniest fraction—by even one part in 100,000,000,000,000—then no stars could have ever formed at all. Feel free to gulp.

Multiply that single parameter by all the other necessary conditions, and the odds against the universe existing are so heart-stoppingly astronomical that the notion that it all “just happened” defies common sense. It would be like tossing a coin and having it come up heads 10 quintillion times in a row. Really?

Of course this doesn't prove that God exists, nor does it tell us anything about the nature of God (Is He the God of the Jews? The Christians? The Muslims? The Hindus? Etc.). But it does tell us that

all of this is extremely unlikely to have come into existence by chance. Some scientists posit the multiverse theory to account for our unlikely existence, but that cannot be tested, so we must move it into the category of a religious belief. Anyway, which hypothesis strikes you as more plausible: that a practically infinite number of universes exist, and we just happen to dwell in the one capable of supporting life; or that a superior intelligence caused the creation of our universe?

I would recommend a few books on this topic. First, theologian David Bentley Hart's *The Experience of God* is a highly readable introduction to theism and its plausibility. Hart is a Christian theologian, but he doesn't write as any sort of sectarian. He writes in a philosophical mode, about the reasonability of the existence of a Higher Power, a Supreme Being. Second, the cosmologist Paul Davies, who is not a Christian, has a couple of books out for popular audiences, both on the questions raised by Metaxas in his essay: first, *The Mind of God*, and then its sequel, *The Goldilocks Enigma*. Finally, Eric Metaxas's new book *Miracles*, which I have not yet read, but Eric is an old friend, and I believe in him and his work.

We must not make the mistake of confusing knowing about God with knowing God. To experience God in the realm of the ideal, of the intellect, is not the same things as experiencing him. In my case, my healing depended on getting out of my head to a significant degree, and learning how to feel God more than to think about God.

Over the holiday weekend, I re-read *The Manticore*, the second book of Robertson Davies's *Deptford Trilogy*. ... The analyst in the book, Dr. von Haller, loses patience at one point with the rationalism of her patient, David, a lawyer, when he denies that there is any such thing as the Unconscious. David is startled by the strength of her pushback. Dr. von Haller says:

“There comes a time when one must be strong with rationalists, for they can reduce anything whatever to dust, if they happen not to like the look of it, or if it threatens their deep-buried negativism. I mean of course rationalists like you, who take some little provincial world of their own as the whole of the universe and the seat of all knowledge.”

All of us do this, rationalist or not: mistake our own part for the whole of reality. But the rationalists hold a privileged position in our culture.

The Person of Elder Justin of Romania

June 1, 2013 by Matushka Constantina

Here is a very beautiful word about the very loved and revered Romanian elder Justin Pârnu by one of his spiritual daughters.

Today (June 1) was St. Justin's Day [the Philosopher and Martyr]. And along with the Martyr-philosopher of the first centuries, we celebrate St. Justin Popovich, the Serbian Elder who fell asleep in the Lord in 1979.

About Father Justin (Parvu) one cannot really speak with words.

A few days ago when he left for the monk's monastery, I was able to take a glimpse of him for a few moments. We were very near each other. I closed my eyes as that was how much he was shining. It was like his body became compact light. I thought of Tabor. I was heartbroken [with] regret that I might have ever upset him with something. However, I felt I was flying...

When I first met him I knew that the Spirit of God was dwelling in this man, to a greater extent than in any other Romanian in a radius of several centuries. Naturally, I followed [him]. The world with all its riches and glory cannot be compared to the joy of the Gospel written in a human heart.

Last week, for the 30 seconds during which I had the honor and happiness to be allowed to see him on the bed of suffering, I had proof that vertical eternity is really close to the human heart. I saw a prince of Truth crucified on the nation's cross and embraced tightly by the Risen Christ. Beyond amazement, while doing the due prostration, I lived to a total intensity that for that particular moment, I was worth being born – to see the union between God Himself and a great martyr, to understand the beyond nature fullness of love, to look at the indescribable greatness of martyrdom is definitely the biggest honor I've ever lived. It's good that we are eternal, so that we have the time to thank God!

Whilst kissing father Justin's hand it was as if I had reached the source of music, the prototype of harmony for which the universe was created towards man, I was only able to say in my mind: I love you father, with my whole being...!

Among Christians there is no separation: the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ unite us all in the Father, without time and space in the greatest happiness. Glory to Thee, Who alone does wonders!

May you live in us, Blessed Father, as God lives in you!

{A spiritual daughter of Father Justin Pârnu from Paltin (Maple) Monastery.}

St. Theophan on Prayer: "I won't conceal the fact that, though once you prayed from the heart, it is hardly possible to pray that way constantly. Such prayer is given by God or is inspired by your Guardian Angel. It comes and goes. It does not follow, though, that we should give up the labor of prayer. Prayer of the heart comes when one makes an effort; to those who do not strive, it will not come. We see that the Holy Fathers made extraordinary efforts in prayer, and by their struggles they kindled the warm spirit of prayer. How they came to this prayerful state is illustrated in the writings they have left us. Everything they say about striving in prayer makes up the science of prayer, which is the science of sciences."

Pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17)

Make sure that you do not limit your prayer merely to a particular part of the day. Turn to prayer at anytime. (St. John Chrysostom)

In everything they (the Apostles) did, they thought of God and lived in constant devotion to Him. This spiritual state was their unceasing prayer. (St. Basil the Great)

Rising in the morning stand as firmly as possible before God in your heart, as you offer your morning prayers and then go to the work apportioned to you by God, without withdrawing from Him in your feelings and consciousness....When there is no inner activity occupying a person, one must develop a *habit* of a continual repetition of a short prayer. This will eventually repeat itself and will bring one to constant remembrance of God, thus rejecting other thoughts of no profit. However, habit of the tongue is one thing, establishment in the heart is another. (St. Theophan the Recluse)

Those who have truly decided to serve the Lord God should practice the remembrance of God and uninterrupted prayer to Jesus Christ, mentally saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." (St. Seraphim of Sarov)

The most important weapon to use against the devil is the Holy Cross, of which he is terrified. But make the sign of the Cross correctly: with the three fingers of the right hand joined together, touch your forehead, your abdomen, your right shoulder and finally your left shoulder. The sign of the Cross may be made in conjunction with prostrations. (Elder Porphyrios)

Elder Paisios – On Excuses

"Excuses have nothing to do with the spiritual life. I must understand that when I try to justify myself with excuses, I'm in a wrong state of mind. I cut off my communication with God, and I am deprived of divine Grace; because divine Grace does not come to one who is in a wrong state."

"The moment a person justifies the unjustifiable, he is separated from God. Can an electric current pass through insulation? No. Isolation. Isolation from God and man. There is no stronger barrier to the grace of God than excuses! It is like building a wall and separating yourself from God; by making excuses, you cut off all ties with Him."

"It is the humble acknowledgement of one's mistake, without knowingly attempting to justify himself, when he is at fault and when people reprimand him. But when he does not stand up for himself even when he is wrongly accused, well then, that's when he gets an excellent grade."

One who justifies himself with excuses makes no progress in the spiritual life, nor can he find any inner peace. God will not condemn us for a mistake we have made, but we must not try to justify ourselves for that mistake; and consider it to be a natural thing."

"You don't excuse others, but you excuse yourself? Next time, Christ Himself will not excuse you. It is quite possible - in a moment - for a man's heart to become hard as a rock, when he acts out of malevolence; and, on another occasion, to become very tender, when acting out of love. You should seek to acquire a maternal heart. You see, a mother forgives everything; and sometimes pretends not to even see certain things."