



## ***Fire & Light***

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

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit [stsymeon.com](http://stsymeon.com)

✠ **August 4, 2013** ✠

### **The Dormition Fast**

**The Holy Seven Youths (the "Seven Sleepers")**

**of Ephesus (250 and 446 AD)**

**Martyr Eudoxia of Persia (362)**

Thou wast transfigured  
on the Mount, O Christ God!  
Revealing Thy glory  
to Thy Disciples  
as far as they could bear it!  
Let Thine everlasting Light  
shine upon us sinners!  
Through the prayers  
of the Theotokos,  
O Giver of Light,  
glory to Thee!



### **This Week: Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord and Savior**

- ✠ **Monday, August 5, 6:30pm** Great Vespers with Litiya for the Transfiguration
- ✠ **Tuesday, August 6, 10:00am** Divine Liturgy ~ Feast of the Transfiguration
- ⇒ **Inquirer's Class – Tuesday August 6, 6:30pm**
- ✠ **Wednesday, August 7, 6:30pm** Paraklysis – Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos

### ⇒ **Looking Ahead: Feast of the Dormition**

- ✠ **Wed. August 14, 6:30pm** Vespers / ✠ **Thurs. August 15, 6:00am** Divine Liturgy

### **Three States**

✠ "There are three noetic states into which the mind may enter: states that are according to nature, above nature, and contrary to nature. When one arrives at a state *according to* nature, he finds himself responsible for evil thoughts, confesses his sins to God, and knows precisely the cause of his passions; when he is shifted to a state *contrary to* nature, he then forgets the righteousness of God and disputes with other people, since they supposedly wronged him; and, finally, when he is raised to a state *above* nature, he thenceforth finds the fruits of the Holy Spirit enumerated by the Apostle Paul; namely: 'joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance' (Galatians 5:22-23)."

**-St. Mark the Ascetic**

### **By Means of Wood and Water**

✠ Moses was himself saved by means of wood and water before the Law was given, when he was exposed to the Nile's currents, hidden away in an Ark (Exod. 2:3-10). And by means of wood and water he saved the people of Israel, revealing the Cross by the wood, Holy Baptism by water (Exod. 14:15-31). Paul, who had looked upon the mysteries, says openly, 'They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud' (I Cor. 10:2). He also bears witness that, even before the events concerning the sea and his staff, Moses willingly endured Christ's Cross, 'Esteeming', he says, 'the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt' (Heb. 11:26). For the Cross is the reproach of Christ from the standpoint of foolish men. As Paul himself says of Christ, 'He endured the cross, despising the shame' (Heb. 12:2).

**-St. Gregory Palamas**

### **Above all other faiths**

✠ Do you see then, the inaccessible height of which the Faith of Christ stands above all other faiths and worldly sophistries? He who only thinks about evil, even though he does not commit any evil, is at fault before God and before his own soul, for he offends God and loses his soul. To be a Christian, for sense, means to invest enormous effort on cleansing evil thoughts from one's heart and cleanse oneself from these wicked and impure thoughts, the root of all evil, was the goal of great ascetics, hermits and hesychasts.

**- St Nikolai Velimirovich of Serbia**

# In Rejecting Truth Man Dooms Himself

June 23, 2013 · by Chris Banescu

The increasing darkness, corruption, and delusion we witness all around us are direct and predictable consequences of man's rejection of God and truth. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn warned of the devastating consequences that follow when men forsake God. Dennis Engleman issues a similar warning in his book Ultimate Things: An Orthodox Christian Perspective on the End Times regarding the dangers of man's rejection of truth.

In rejecting truth, man, who was created in the image and likeness of God, denies himself and the godly nature with which he was blessed from the beginning by his Creator. He purposely blinds himself to reality and destroys the very faculty (reason) that allows him to find and discern truth. In rejecting truth, man purposely closes all "doors to authentic understanding" and obliterates the only avenue that can lead him into communion with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).

When man rejects truth he rejects God and destroys himself. In abandoning truth man opens himself to all manner of delusion, falsehood, and corruption. He abandons the narrow road to salvation and wanders in the wilderness of "this world" at the mercy of evil. He forsakes God's wisdom and embraces "worldly wisdom" which always leads down the road to perdition, to despair, suffering, and death.



## What is Truth

Pilate's great question has been dismissed as irrelevant. Truth is no longer a subject of legitimate inquiry. Having willfully closed doors to authentic understanding, mankind's only option is to devise his own "virtual" reality. Modern thought reflects this degeneration, having been reduced, in Father Seraphim Rose's words, to "an experiment of in the possibilities of knowledge open to man, assuming that there is no *Revealed Truth*. ... The conclusion of this experiment is an absolute negation: if there is no Revealed Truth, there is no truth at all."

In rejecting truth, man, being made in God's image, has denied himself. He has willfully blinded himself to reality, the conclusive foolhardy act: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God' "(Psalm 14:1). For if there is no truth (often expressed more palatably as "all truth is relative"), then there can be no Christ God, who alone is "the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

It could be reasoned that the rejection of truth is the heart of all demonic doctrines, for when the serpent contested God's word, saying to Eve, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4), was he not lying as well as claiming God had lied? Jesus called Satan a liar from the beginning, and Saint Paul understood the clear relationship between the false doctrines of demons and the loss of faith: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

People who deny truth, and thus their own nature, inexorably become either suicidal or anarchistic. To all who think through the implications of the Lie, a brutal logic emerges: Why endure the "thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to," as Shakespeare put it, if life has no meaning? If there is nothing beyond the grave, no reward or punishment to come, why exercise self-restraint or show concern for others? Clearly, if there is no truth, then all things are lawful (which merely means, nothing is unlawful). By this reasoning one should seize all possible pleasure regardless of cost [or consequence], or else put oneself beyond the reach of problems through self-extinction!

Dennis Engleman on Truth in Ultimate Things: An Orthodox Christian Perspective on the End Times pages 106-107.

## SERMON TRANSLATION

HOMILY ON THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD  
OF OUR FATHER AMONG THE SAINTS  
ARCHBISHOP JOHN, WONDERWORKER OF SHANGHAI AND SAN FRANCISCO

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the time of the creation of the world God said: *Let Us make man in Our Image, after Our Likeness*. The Image of God manifested itself in man's mental capabilities, in his rule over nature, in his power and in his creative abilities. The Likeness of God was embodied in man's moral virtues, in his spiritual aspiration, in his capability to achieve holiness.

The Image and Likeness of God were fully manifested in our forefathers before the fall. Sin breached both the first and the second — though it did not deprive man of them totally. Man remained a rational being and retained other qualities as well which reflected the Image of God. Yet to develop these traits, great effort needed to be expended in order to achieve only a small fraction of that which the forefathers received in entirety. To a certain degree there remained in man a longing to achieve the Likeness of God — though at times he falls to a point beyond recognition.

In order to return man his original closeness to God, the Son of God came down to earth and was incarnate. He accepted onto Himself all of human nature — became like man in everything, save sin. The Son of God came to recreate the beauty which we possessed being created in the Image of God. Yet if man, originally being created from non-being in the Image and Likeness of God, could not participate in his own creation, then for the recreation of his original image, man's cooperation becomes mandatory. Now man must labor in order to, by the grace and help of God, achieve moral perfection. By His teachings, the Lord defined the path to perfection. By His actual example He demonstrated it. This path is the path of striving for moral purity, of self denial, of readiness to discard from oneself all that is sinful. Yet sin has penetrated deeply into the very nature of man, becoming integrated with it. Every human being is born with seed of sin in him. Thus in order to free oneself of sin, it is

as if one has to war against oneself. This battle is quite painful, yet necessary if one is to draw nearer to God. Christ has told us: *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*. This cross that we must bear is precisely our battle against our weaknesses, our shortcomings, our propensity to sin. As one begins to win this battle, gradually freeing oneself from impurity, one begins to draw nearer to God in Whose Image he was created. Man does not have the strength to do this alone. He can achieve it only with the help of Divine Grace which is granted by God through the Church which was instituted by the incarnate Son of God. And this is precisely why He became incarnate: to raise up His fallen Image.

On Tabor, Christ revealed to his disciples the beauty and glory of His Divinity in order that the Apostles, and through them the entire universe, would know Whose Likeness man *is* and to what he *draws near* as he spiritually ascends. The more one cleanses oneself from sin and draws nearer to God, the more God's glory is reflected in him. This is why saints are called *Prepodobniye*, i.e. "those possessing the Likeness of God to the greatest degree." Like a mirror, the glory of God is reflected in their souls, filling them with effulgence.

When this earthly struggle is completed, the degree to which one has attained God's Likeness becomes permanently established. At the coming of the Kingdom eternal, all men shall arise, be reunited with their bodies and then *shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*.

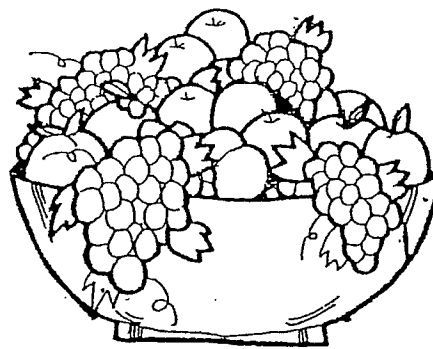
May the Lord Who was Transfigured today on Mount Tabor for our sake, vouchsafe us to be found worthy of this. AMEN.

*Taken from the book Sermons of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, published by Russkiy Pastyr in 1994. Translated from Russian by priest Gregory Naumenko of the Protection of the Mother of God Russian Orthodox Church in Rochester, N.Y.*

# *The Blessing of Fruit*

by

ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN



It is an ancient custom in Orthodox churches to bless fruits and vegetables on the feast of Transfiguration. This prompts us to ask ourselves: what is the meaning of this ancient rite, and of blessing, sanctification in general, since the blessing of fruit on Transfiguration is only one of many such rites? If we open the liturgical service book where all these rites are collected, the so-called "Book of Needs," we find special services such as blessings for a new home, a field, a garden, a well. It is as if the Church addresses itself to the entire world, as if God's right hand of blessing were being extended over all through these rites of blessing and sanctification. Why have people from time immemorial felt the need for blessings?

We must say immediately that proponents of anti-religious propaganda unquestioningly regard all these rites as superstition which, in their view, is the whole content of religion. They argue that superstition is a product of fear: a person is afraid of being poisoned, afraid of a bad harvest, afraid that his house will burn down, afraid of other people. Religion purveys deliverance from fear: sprinkle the fruit or the garden or the home with holy water and God will protect both them and you. "So you see, it's all crude ignorance, superstition and...deception." However, in presenting the issue this way, atheist propaganda does not mention any of the prayers or rites involved with these supposed superstitions. They make it sound as if priests, the clergy, are a cadre of swindlers who exploit fear and ignorance by using incomprehensible magical incantations. But if one actually listens to these prayers and looks closely at these rites, if only once in a lifetime one experiences the joy of that radiant and sunlit Transfiguration noonday blessing, then it becomes clear that the deception is not coming from the Church, but from ill-willed atheist propaganda. It is precisely this propaganda, and not the Church's prayer, which is permeated with fear, mistrust, and a need to denounce anything more elevated, more pure, more profound than its own simplistic, mundane, and materialistic approach to the world and to life. For what we see and hear and experience above all in these rites and prayers is joy and thanksgiving. But if fear were present, there could be no joy and no thanksgiving; and conversely, if joy is present, there can be no fear. Fear produces misery and mistrust, but there is none of this in transfiguration's light. But what is the source of this joy and thanksgiving?

One of Osip Mandelstam's poems, devoted to the eucharistic liturgy, the main service of Christian worship, includes this wonderful verse: "Take into your hands the whole world, as if it were a simple apple..." Perhaps here, because it is so simple and childlike, we see better than anywhere else the source of joy and thanksgiving that permeate Christian faith. In an apple, and in everything within the world, faith sees, recognizes, and accepts God's gift, filled with love, beauty and wisdom. Faith hears the apple and the world speaking of that boundless love that created the world and life and gave them to us

as our life. The world itself is the fruit of God's love for humanity, and only through the world can human beings recognize God and love him in return... And only in truly loving his own life, can a person thereby accept the life of the world as God's gift. Our fall, our sin, is that we take everything for granted—and therefore everything, including ourselves, becomes routine, depressing, empty. The apple becomes just an apple. Bread is just bread. A human being is just a human being. We know their weight, their appearance, their activities, we know everything about them, but we no longer know them, because we do not see the light that shines through them. The eternal task of faith and of the Church is to overcome this sinful, monotonous habituation; to enable us to see once again what we have forgotten how to see; to feel what we no longer feel; to experience what we are no longer capable of experiencing. Thus, the priest blesses bread and wine, lifting them up to heaven, but faith sees the bread of life, it sees sacrifice and gift, it sees communion with life eternal.

So, on Transfiguration we bring to church apples, pears, grapes, vegetables, and suddenly the church itself is transformed anew into that mystical garden, into that blessed paradise where man's life and his encounter with God began. And just as that first man rejoiced and gave thanks to God as he opened his eyes for the first time and saw this world where everything, by God's own word, was "very good," so in this rite of blessing we see the world as if for the first time, as the reflection of God's wisdom and love, and we rejoice and give thanks. And through this joy and thanksgiving our life is purified, renewed and reborn. No, we do not negate the material world, as atheist propaganda falsely claims, nor do we repudiate it; on the contrary, we sanctify and bless it, for in it we joyfully and with thanksgiving see and feel the gift of God. "Heaven and earth are full of your glory," we sing in church. The significance of blessing is that through it, this glory breaks into our drowsy consciousness, opens our ears, opens our eyes, and life itself becomes praise, joy and thanksgiving.

But what about evil, people ask me. What about suffering, what about death? To this we answer: if we are filled to the brim with this light, if we genuinely accept this blessing and sanctification and bring them within, then we ourselves become the place where the victory over evil begins. And death will be swallowed up in victory, for we live in a world where Christ lived and continues forever to be present. And if in everything and everyone in the world we see him, love him, give ourselves to him; if in all, we see the light of his presence, his love, and his victory—then nothing can separate us from him.

## Modern Loneliness and Staying Put

Fr. Stephen Freeman, *Glory to God for All Things* Blog (his first article in 2007)

In monastic tradition, a monk makes four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience and stability. Most people are familiar with the first three but not with the fourth. In classical monastic practice it meant that a monk stayed put: he did not move from monastery to monastery. It was not a new idea. Before this vow was formalized in various Rules, there was already the saying from the Desert: "Stay in your cell and your cell will teach you everything."

Staying put or stability doesn't sound all that difficult – certainly easier than poverty, chastity and obedience. But it may indeed be the hardest thing of all. The "noonday devil" which tended to afflict monks from the beginning, was especially known as the temptation at some point to leave your cell and just go visiting, where gossip and many far worse temptations could make themselves manifest. Staying put was the hardest battle of all. In its most extreme form in the East we see the Stylites, the monks who lived on the tops of pillars.

In our modern world stability is an extremely rare commodity. The average American moves once every five years. When I first came to Oak Ridge (Tennessee), I was constantly told by the old-timers, "People in Oak Ridge are from everywhere!" In 1943 when this city was founded as part of the Manhattan Project, that statement was truly unusual. Americans rarely relocated. But I had to break the sad news to my new co-citizens, "Everywhere you go, people are from everywhere!"

There was a time in my hometown in South Carolina that a trip to the store or Mall would bring a dozen casual meetings with friends and acquaintances. Now they are all strangers when I visit – or rather I am the stranger. I do not live there anymore.

All of this would just be sociologically interesting if it had no effect on our lives. But it has a profound effect.

In 1950 (to pick a date), the most common pattern in our country was for a local boy to meet and marry a local girl and to settle down and raise their children in the community in which they themselves were born, with relatives and friends forming a network of relationships that surrounded and nurtured (or harassed) them. Divorce rates and crime rates were relatively low in most places. Stable communities tend to have stable families. The network of relationships promotes this. We have lived in these relatively stable forms for most of human history. Even the great nomadic tribes traveled as *tribes*.

In 2013 (to pick another date), the more common pattern is for a boy to meet a girl in college or later – he is from Virginia (say) and she is from Ohio (say). They marry, move to Oregon and begin their careers, or they met there and married. Family is the stuff you negotiate as in "whose parents do we visit at Thanksgiving this year, etc.?" The network of friends is often his friends from work and her friends from work, and frequently not much more.

In 1980, living in Columbia, S.C., I attended a conference in which the lecturer asked an auditorium of about 400 to raise their hands if they knew 5 people on their city block. A few hands went up. I wound up in the last group. I knew no one in the Apartment Complex where we lived. Most of us did not know a single neighbor. And that is not an unusual modern pattern.

This brings us to the loneliness of modern man. The internet has probably made us more connected, in a *virtual* sense, than we have been in a generation. But, of course, there is an extreme level of volunteerism in this virtual community. If I don't want to post today there is nothing you can do about it. We are not a *natural* community.

I cannot touch you or hear you laugh. I share a photo so you know something of what I look like. But how do I sound? How much of my native Appalachian dialect still clings to my tongue (not much, but some).

And we only know what we choose to share. It makes for a very thin village indeed.

As modern man has lost his stability (I blame our economic structures largely for this phenomenon – moving expenses are tax-deductible, for example) so we have lost the fruit of stability. Crime, divorce, the simple consensus that makes a culture a culture disappears. The 1950's three channel television and white-bread families were probably the last cultural manifestation of an earlier consensus that will not return. It cannot return without stability.

I have lived in this small city since 1989, the longest I have ever lived anywhere. I have come to know many people in this town of 25,000 and I know my parish of 100+ souls quite well. Stability for me means I have a child buried here, and I will be buried here as well. It is a *goal* I have – a very long term one. For all of us, some form of stability is necessary, even if it is one we must largely create ourselves.

I would point to the Orthodox Church as an example of stability. I can read from centuries of writings and recognize and understand what is said. St. Athanasius is as interesting to me on a daily basis as, say, Fr. John Behr. The “latest thing” in Orthodoxy just isn't very late. There is a stability that comes within that part of life – a stability I cannot create but to which I can submit. I am Orthodox and I can daily seek to imbibe more fully what that means. *It can create me* (which is probably much to be preferred).

I cannot leave the modern world (or post-modern if you prefer). I was born in 1953 and there's is nothing to be done about it. But there are commitments that I can make – that any of us can make. I am married. I do not take a vow of poverty, but everything I own is owned by my wife as well (no private property). If you have children, you will learn a certain form of poverty no matter what. For the married, *faithfulness* is the form of chastity. I do not take a vow of obedience (nor did my wife for that matter), but we have a life of mutual submission – my will is not my own. We are not here because I alone wanted to be here. We are here because we wanted to be here (ultimately, I suppose there is obedience – to my Bishop, and to my God – but on a daily basis His Eminence does not interfere. God can also be strangely silent).

But stability is more fleeting. I think that only by becoming part of a larger community, even larger than the present and reaching into the past, do we begin to find stability. Many Christians today live, at best, as part of a *movement*. It is an interesting word – incompatible with stability. Nothing in my life compares with the stability of 2,000 years of living Tradition. Stability means to live my life in the neighborhood of the Kingdom of God where the saints know my name and encourage or harass me if necessary.

*God give us the grace to come to the place of stability in you. Put me some place where I can stay put.*

---

Modern Christians attend Church, celebrate the Eucharist, are justified and are working on being sanctified. They think about various aspects of God. They are liberal or conservative, tough on sin or soft, Biblically-centered, or culturally sensitive. They are many things but never one thing. Thus when engaging them I have to ask, “Which of your gods are you now describing?” Fr. Stephen Freeman

## Elder Paisios – On Raising Children without Pride

When I was a young boy I could outrun the other children in the neighborhood. They didn't want me to race them and would send me away. They called me "the refugee boy". I would then go to my mother in tears. "Why are you crying?" she would ask. "The other children won't let me run," I would say. "You want to run? Here's our yard, run. Why do you want to run there, so others can see you and say bravo? This attitude has pride in it."

Another time I wanted to play with the ball and the children wouldn't let me. Again I went crying to my mother. "What happened, why are you crying again?" she asked. "They won't let me play with the ball," I said. "We have a big yard, you have a ball, play here. Why do you want the other children to see you and admire you? This attitude has pride in it." Then it occurred to me, "My mother is right." Gradually over time I didn't want to run or play ball in front of others, because I realized that this attitude had pride in it and I thought to myself "These really are useless things; mother is right."

After that I got over the problem, and when I saw the other children running and kicking the ball with pride, I would smile and think to myself, "What are they doing?" and I was just a small child in the third grade. From then on I lived a normal and natural life. So now if people ask me, "Would you prefer to climb Mount Athos barefoot in August over the briar leaves, or to go to a ceremony and be dressed with a cloak, and so on?", I will say I prefer to go barefoot up Mount Athos. Now, this I say not out of humility, but because this is what pleases me and gives me peace.

People who have pride were not helped at home in their childhood. The worldly frame of mind is tormenting for man. And if this isn't noticed and parents don't help their children from a young age, pride then becomes an abiding condition. It's one thing to praise and encourage a child so he doesn't get disappointed, and quite another to fill up his mind with egoism. For example, a child recited a poem but did it poorly and was disappointed. Then the mother can encourage him by saying, "But you did well enough." But if the child says the poem well and the mother begins in front of others to say, "Bravo, yours was the best recitation of all the children; my child is the best," this is wrong and harmful to the child. This is how parents often cultivate pride in their children.

Or, to give you another example, a child misbehaves in school and is punished by the teacher. Then the child goes home and tells his parents, "The teacher punished me unfairly." When the father or mother supports the child and says in front of it, "I'll show that teacher; my child is the best...", then the child considers good what he did in school and is eventually tormented by useless things. The important thing is to teach the child a few basic things at home. If one grasps the deeper meaning of life from a young age, then everything goes well. Otherwise, one learns to be pleased with earthly things, with the praises of other men - which do not really please or comfort man - and he remains an earthly human being.

## Elder Paisios – On Obedience

"Obedience," he would emphasize, "is the quickest easiest way. It's the key to paradise. In *obedience, the will is cut off as well as selfishness and the passions and when the grace of God comes, life becomes paradise.*"

If someone is ill," taught the elder, "and is obedient to his doctor, he'll get better. If someone isn't very bright, but he's obedient, he'll become wise (Literally, a *philosopher*, that is, through God's Grace he becomes wise in God)." But if he's smart as a whip but disobedient, he'll be destroyed."

The worst thing, the Elder thought, is for someone to ignore the advice of the elders to do what his own thoughts tell him to do. "If someone listens to his own thoughts, he'll get hurt - he's lost, he's asking to be destroyed."

When someone would ask him for counsel, not for the sake of obedience and spiritual benefit, but to extract a blessing to do his own will, the elder would end the fruitless discussion and say, "Make a prostration to your thoughts, and do what you want." For his part, he would be relieved of responsibility.

"Elders," he emphasized, will be accountable to God according to the degree of obedience their disciples show them."

Those in monastic obedience," he advised, "should obey their elder. If he's strict and unfair with them, they'll receive great grace. They shouldn't criticize him. If they find it hard to be obedient, they should tell him their thoughts and then do whatever he says. Those in obedience should be full of willingness and self-renunciation - the elder should just put on the brakes.

"An elder shouldn't go chopping away - he should prune tactfully. He should have passed through obedience himself first, and he shouldn't conduct experiments on his disciples. Elders who demand blind obedience ought to have excellent vision."

## On Marriage

"Sacred Scripture says: *'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the Church' [Eph. 5:23]*. God has determined that man should be head of the household. For the woman to be head instead of the man is disdain for God. God first made Adam and then Eve. And Adam, in seeing his wife, Eve, said: *'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' [Gen. 2:23]*." Elder Paisios

"The Scripture says that the woman should fear her husband, that is, respect him, and that the husband should love his wife. It is through love that one can have respect. It is through respect that one can have love. What I love, I also respect; and what I respect, I also love. In other words, love and respect are not two different things; they are one and the same." Elder Paisios

=====

## Statement of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church

Because of abortions, the population of Serbia every year is reduced by the equal population of an average city in Serbia. This attests to a deep moral degradation, a great crisis of family life and lack of true faith in God among many people, though many of our people declare themselves as faithful Orthodox Christians at least in the elementary sense of that word. The Assembly has, therefore, supported the initiative of doctors who adhere to the teachings of our Church that the state should ban abortions, accept in cases of extreme medical reasons. The Assembly appeals to the consciousness of parents, teachers, state officials and all those who can make an impact on the status in society to do everything they can that among us, despite material poverty, the celebration of life as God's greatest gift becomes the alternative to the unconscious cult of death which has spread in the contemporary western civilization.

At the same time, the Assembly recommends to all dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church and all their respective local church units and organizations to establish funds for the support of families with a great number of children, to preventatively, pastorally and therapeutically, prevent displays of immorality, the use of narcotics, pornography and all other pathogenic phenomena which violate human existence, the soul and the future of the Serbian people and all Christian people, exposed to the fatal influence of secularism, consumer mentality, hedonism, individualism, pseudo-religiousness without concept of personal God, false Christianity without Christ as God-Man (Theanthropos) and without Church as the divine-human community, as well as various ideologies of nonsensical thinking and hope. The Assembly, for its part, calls all to life and works through faith, hope and love, for God is Love.