

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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August 7, 2016

Postfeast of the Transfiguration

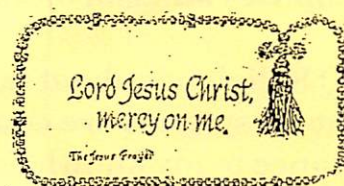
The Dormition Fast

Martyr Dometius of Persia (363) St. Pimen the Much-Ailing of the Kiev Caves (1110)
St. Metrophan of Voronezh (1703) St. Anthony of Optina (1865)

This Week:

Tuesday, August 9 6:30pm Inquirer's Class

Wednesday, August 10, 6:30pm Paraklysis Service



Many Years! Newly Illumined ~ Elizabeth Howell, Luke Hobbs, & Andrew Sokoll !

Looking Ahead: Annual Parish Meeting, Sunday, September 18

The Law and the Prophets

"The standing, therefore, of Moses and Elias before Him, and their talking with one another, was a sort of representation, excellently displaying our Lord Jesus Christ, as having the Law and the Prophets for His body guard, as being the Lord of the Law and the Prophets, and as foreshown in them by those things which in mutual agreement they before proclaimed. For the words of the Prophets are not at variance with the teachings of the Law. And this I imagine was what Moses the most priestly and Elias the most distinguished of the Prophets were talking of with one another."

St. Cyril of Alexandria

"My blessed children, the holy Fathers teach that a man's heart is entangled with the prickly roots of various passions which are lodged very deep within it. When a person, through enlightenment of God, attempts to uproot (in essence, to transfigure) a passion, he grips and removes the rootlets with forceps. However, as he attempts to uproot each passion, he simultaneously lacerates the heart. When the heart is cut open, it bleeds and hurts. If a person decides not to bear the pain, he gives up at that point, he abandons the struggle, and thus remains passionate and sinful. If, however, he patiently endures the pain, he removes the root of the passion and is set free." **Elder Ephraim**

"St. Anthony the Great affirms: 'If a person places the blame on himself, he finds rest. The moment he casts it on someone else, he will feel troubled internally.' Try it when an opportunity arises. If during a temptation you blame the other person, internally you will feel troubled, distressed --- a mess! On the other hand, as soon as you think, 'The other person is not at fault, I am to blame. Why am I speaking about another person? I have made so many mistakes and sins ... hence, I shouldn't speak at all,' you will feel as if you are landing on solid ground and are no longer falling. ... You no longer have anything to fear."

Morals – *Synthetic or Organic*

The idea that moral judgments based in religion are ruled out-of-court a priori is ridiculous, if commonly accepted. Why should moral considerations derived from religious traditions be out of order?

1.) Separation of Church and State: We are a secular state, and so we can't adopt laws derivative from a religious system. Well, **in fact, separation of Church and State is about the Government not establishing a Church or Sect as a National Church.**

However, morals are either synthetic (made up) or organic (based on tradition). There is no reason why synthetic moral judgments are any more or less sound than organic moral judgments. Further, if adopting laws based on organic moral judgments imposes religion on the populace, then using synthetic judgments imposes atheism on the populace, which offends free exercise.

2.) **Religion is about faith, and not everyone shares the same faith. Well, secular moral systems are equally about faith—there is no “scientific” proof of any moral stance to my knowledge** (I acknowledge that someone who adopts a utilitarian frame work may consider science, but they have already critically or acritically adopted utilitarianism). Seculars don't agree on morals any more than religious people do, there are secular social conservatives and secular liberals.

3.) Adopting morals based on one religion discriminates against other religions: Well, that depends if they disagree. But by the same token, adopting morals based on a secular ideology discriminates against everyone who doesn't share your secular ideology, correct? Why is secular discrimination okay, but religious discrimination not okay.

The real reason it is terrible to prefer synthetic moral judgments to morals based on organic religious traditions is that the latter have emerged over a long process of social change and evolution. It is not as if there weren't rivals to traditional Christian morality over the spans of century, but it is true the competitors died out. If we believe that human societies are subject to some form of evolutionary process, why would you cull the systems that have demonstrated the capacity to survive over centuries and diverse cultural and historical environments?

What would be a better genetic design, an ant, or some genetic design an engineer made up, as far as producing a biological organism that could survive and flourish on planet Earth. Clearly, the origins of the ant, whether we ascribe it to God or nature, is probably going to prove superior to something a human comes up with, in part because of the law of unintended consequences.

KD, internet commentator

MLK's Letter from Birmingham Jail was made to the public and it was a religious argument: "A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law."

The Theological Meaning of the Transfiguration of Christ

By His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

The theology of the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ always moved me, together with the theology of the Feast of the Resurrection and Pentecost. Even by reading the hymns of the Feast of the Transfiguration, it feels like those who wrote them had the experience of the uncreated light of divinity, which emanates from the Body of Christ.

The Holy Fathers of the Church, especially however Saint Gregory Palamas, that hagiorite saint, not only saw the uncreated light of divinity, but he also developed this great event theologically and then identified the difference between contemplative theology and hesychastic theology. Contemplative theology is associated with metaphysics, while hesychastic theology is associated with the purification of the heart and illumination of the nous. Herein lies the difference between Western and Orthodox theology, and, of course, the difference between the contemplatives - metaphysicians and the Orthodox hesychast Fathers.

The vision of the uncreated light, according to the teaching of the Church, is participating in the Kingdom of God, and certainly we know that there is the kingdom of God which is the entire creation, and the Kingdom of God which is the uncreated grace and energy of God, which is enhypostatic, since "the agent of energy is the hypostasis which uses the energy" (St. John of Damascus). The sharing in the Kingdom of God is at varying degrees according to our participation and communion with the Grace of God, which we taste of not as a so-called mystic but as the actual Body of Christ.

When man partakes of the uncreated glory of God, then he is glorified, according to the confession of the Apostle Paul: "If one member is glorified, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:16), because the glorification of a member of the Church has consequences for all the people. For example, the Prophet Moses was glorified, he entered the divine cloud, and then guided the people with the laws, advice and his entire inversion.

With these conditions we understand that in the Orthodox Church we cannot speak of a militant and triumphant Church, in the sense that those living biologically are in the militant Church and those who are asleep and have entered divine glorification are participating in the triumph of Christ. This is because every saint who reaches the vision of the glory of God, and is thus glorified, definitely from now participates in the triumph of Christ. Although found to be in biological life, they participate in the triumphant Church. If one reads the writings of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, they will see this truth formulated in a theological and empirical way.

It should also be said that in the Orthodox Church we attach great significance to the methodology which leads to glorification and in the sharing in the triumph of Christ over death. This is because a wrong methodology, such as metaphysics which is associated with fantasy, and moralism which is associated with human-external devices, do not result in the vision of the uncreated light and the salvation of man. And this is important, because sharing in the Kingdom of God, the uncreated light of the future age, cannot be accomplished if the person from now has not prepared themselves for this purpose and has not tasted the rays of this glory. So, through the purification of the heart, in noetic prayer, which is an indication of the illumination of the nous, man can participate in the glory of God.

At this point we find the value of Orthodox monasticism, which maintains unadulterated the Orthodox methodology that leads to theosis, which is the purpose of man. Outside of this Orthodox methodology prevails the secularization of the faith and the Christian life.

In all of his works Saint Gregory Palamas speaks of this Orthodox method. In one of his texts he writes that it takes the true faith, because the distortion of the faith does not lead to the fulfillment of man's existence. "We believe as it was taught by those who were illumined by Christ." He speaks of illumined Fathers, and of obedience to them for the preservation of the faith. But this is not enough, but a personal experience of the uncreated light is necessary: "We proceed towards the brilliance of that light." This is not a luxury of the spiritual life, but the authentic purpose of our existence. For this purpose is required the purification of our intellect of all earthly filthiness, with contempt for everything that is delightful and beautiful which is not permanent. "We must purify the eyes of the intellect from earthly filthiness, scorning the delightful and beautiful things which are not permanent." The delightful that is not permanent is the desire that causes suffering and which "surrounds the soul like an unsightly tunic of sin". For this reason Saint Gregory Palamas clearly argues that we get rid of the fire of hell by the "effulgence and awareness of the intangible and pre-eternal light of the Lord's Transfiguration."

The theology of the Transfiguration is integrally connected with the method we must use to experience this great light, and the Orthodox faith is connected with Orthodox hesychasm, because when one is disconnected from the other, then we arrive either at metaphysics or external ethics, which do not save man.

Many times I think that we contemporary Christians chant the beautiful hymns of the Transfiguration of Christ as well as the Apolytikion of the Feast, supplicating to God: "Let Your everlasting Light also shine upon us sinners", or we pray the prayer of the First Hour: "May the light of Your Countenance shine on us, that in Your light we may see the

unapproachable light", but our entire ecclesiastical life orbits outside the path by which we could see the uncreated light. It exists, that is, as a crisis of identity for the future of the Church, when it is not coordinated with the experience of the purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God.

Contemporary science dazzles humans, because it speaks of the "mapping of the genetic code", of "decoding the genetic code", so that many diseases can be healed and for an extension of biological life to occur, yet we overlook the fact that the greatest disease is death, which is only destroyed by sharing in the glory of Christ. We must remember that the actual genetic code, the spiritual wonder of man, is the likeness of God, theosis, which is the original purpose of the creation of man, and as much as this purpose is not fulfilled, so will man remain empty. It is characteristic that the day the discovery was communicated for the decoding of the genetic code (June 27, 2000), a newspaper (AFP) wrote: "The identity (of life) has been found, and its meaning is sought." When man does not find the meaning of life, then his life is a tragedy.

Human science, when it is not understood in the light of God, becomes a disaster for man. A concrete example is what happened on August 6th in the year 1945 in Hiroshima. While the Church celebrated the Transfiguration of Christ and hymned the light of the divinity of Christ who spreads peace and joy and offers to man to overcome death, in Hiroshima another light shone, the light of contemporary man, the atomic bomb, which created catastrophe, pain, sorrow, death. Two lights, the created and the uncreated, two different worlds with opposite results.

The Transfiguration of Christ in conjunction with the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, as well as with the great Feast of Pentecost, in which the Disciples became members of the Body of Christ, show the purpose and meaning of the existence of man. Unfortunately we remain far from the Transfiguration of Christ, and we live in the distortion of our image. We distance ourselves from the path of theosis and fritter on the path to dehumanization. We chant the hymns of the Transfiguration of Christ and within our soul we live the tragedy of the downward spiral.

"Christ our God,... Let Thine everlasting Light also shine upon us sinners, through the prayers of the Theotokos...."

Source: *Ekklesiastiki Paremnasis*, "Το θεολογικό νόημα της Μεταμορφώσεως του Χριστού", July 2001. Translated by John Sanidopoulos.

More Fred on Evolution - Fred Reed, March 7, 2005

The Lair of the Beast

I have been on several lists on the internet that deal with matters such as evolution, have written on the subject, and have discussed evolution with various of its adherents. These men (almost all of them are) have frequently been very bright indeed, often Ivy League professors, some of them with names you would recognize. They are not amateurs of evolution or high-school principals in Kansas eager to prove their modernity. I asked them the questions in the foregoing (about whether we really know what the primeval seas consisted of, etc.) I knew the answers; I wanted to see how serious proponents of evolutionary biology would respond to awkward questions.

It was like giving a bobcat a prostate exam. I got everything but answers. They told me I was a crank, implied over and over that I was a Creationist, said that I was an enemy of science (someone who asks for evidence is an enemy of science). They said that I was trying to pull down modern biology (if you ask questions about an aspect of biology, you want to pull down biology). They told me I didn't know anything (that's why I was asking questions), and that I was a mere journalist (the validity of a question depends on its source rather than its content).

But they didn't answer the questions. They ducked and dodged and evaded. After thirty years in journalism, I know ducking and dodging when I see it. It was like cross-examining hostile witnesses. I tried to force the issue, pointing out that the available answers were "Yes," "No," "I don't know," or "The question is not legitimate," followed by any desired discussion. Still no straight answer. They would neither tell me of what the early oceans consisted, nor admit that they didn't know.

This is the behavior not of scientists, but of advocates, of True Believers. I used to think that science was about asking questions, not about defending things you didn't really know. Religion, I thought, was the other way around. I guess I was wrong.

Practical Questions

A few things that worry those who are not doctrinaire evolutionists. (Incidentally, it is worth noting that by no means all involved in the life sciences are doctrinaire. A friend of mine, a (Jewish, atheist) biochemist, says "It doesn't make sense." He may be wrong, but a Creationist he isn't.)

To work, a theory presumably must (a) be internally consistent and (b) map onto reality. You have to have both. Classical mechanics for example is (so far as I know) internally consistent, but is not at all points congruent with reality. Evolution has a great deal of elaborate, Protean, and often fuzzy theory. How closely does it correspond to what we actually see? Do the sweeping principles fit the grubby details?

For example, how did a giraffe get a long neck? One reads as a matter of vague philosophical principle that a proto-giraffe by chance happened to be taller than its herdmates, could eat more altitudinous leaves than its confreres, was therefore better fed, consequently rutted with abandon, and produced more child giraffes of height. This felicitous adaptation therefore spread and we ended up...well, up—with taller giraffes. It sounds reasonable. In evolution that is enough.

But what are the practical details? Do we have an unambiguous record of giraffes with longer and longer necks? (Maybe we do. I'm just asking.)

THE PRISONER'S ANGEL

Elena Andreyevna Voronova is a rare example of a righteous woman who neither married, nor was a nun, nor a fool-for-Christ. Her life might well have remained hidden were it not for the spiritually sensitive soul of one of Russia's most talented authors, Sergei Nilus. The following, taken from Nilus' book, "On the Banks of God's River," is a brief illustration of what strength of spirit can be contained in a "fragile" vessel.

The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.

[1 Cor 7:34]

† † †

From childhood Elena Andreyevna Voronova suffered from weak lungs. Upon finishing her higher education, she went south to Crimea so that she can benefit from the warm climate of that region. Despite her fragile health, Elena had an energetic temperament. Her heart was filled with love and the desire to serve her fellow man. Under the rays of the warm Crimean sun, her health improved and she set about founding a model school which elicited the admiration and approval of the country's ober-prokurator, K. P. Pobedonostsev, whose friendship with Elena lasted the rest of his life. [Ed., "ober-prokurator," also Chief Procurator, was the title of the lay supervisor of the Apostolic Governing Synod, who effectively was the lay head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a member of the Tsar's cabinet.]

Returning to the northern capital, Elena soon became involved in a benevolent society which ministered to prisoners. Here it was that she blossomed forth with all of her Christian soul's meek and warm qualities. There were numerous criminals, already sentenced to death, who were granted reprieve by the Tsar due to the intercessions of this compassionate woman; she often pleaded on behalf of all prisoners whose repentance she felt was firm and genuine. Elena would bring her "case" before Metropolitan Anthony (Votkovsky) who in turn served as mediator between her and "her" prisoners, and the Tsar.

One of Elena's most beloved duties in her work among the prisoners was to read aloud to them either from the Holy Scripture or from some other soul-profitting book. Even among hardened criminals she would discover hearts which were not deaf to the call of the Christian faith and the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, there are very

few recorded accounts concerning those prisoners who were converted to a new life under the influence of Elena Andreyevna Voronova. But among those which do exist, one case deserves special notice.

It was Elena Andreyevna's custom to visit the prison hospital, bringing with her some books and small crosses to be given to those prisoners who did not have them and who wouldn't refuse them. She was well-known there by both the guards and the prisoners, with whom she had established a friendly and trusting rapport. This was not easily done with prisoners but, as she herself testified, God helped her in this by the prayers of the Optina elders to whom she went for spiritual guidance.

One day, when she came to the prison hospital, she noticed a prisoner whom she hadn't seen before. He was lying on his hospital bed; his face had a very dark although intelligent expression. On his feet were shackles—evidently he was a particularly dangerous criminal. When Elena sat down to read, he gave her a look of hatred and then turned his face towards the wall. His whole demeanor, his sick body, and especially his

fetters, made a very strong impression on Elena's compassionate heart. Later, she related that she could not remember what it was she had discussed that day, or what she had read, only that God helped and everything went well.

After the discussion, she noticed that the new prisoner had, in the course of her reading, turned his face once again towards her; it seemed that his expression was less harsh. She began to hand out the crosses to

those prisoners who requested them—every prisoner asked for one. Approaching the new prisoner, she timidly offered him a cross. The thought crossed her mind: what if he should turn away or utter some blasphemy? But with her heart she prayed for him; he neither turned away nor said a word as she put a cross around his neck.

Some time passed and Elena again visited the prison hospital. She noticed that the fettered prisoner was no longer there. When she inquired about him she was told that he was placed in solitary confinement; his case had been tried and for political crimes and the murder of five persons he had been sentenced to death. The other prisoners said that in leaving he had asked them to tell her that he was still wearing the cross she had given him; he had also requested that she come to see him if at all possible before the execution.



Elena was very moved by this news and decided with God's help to somehow arrange a meeting with him. Permission was granted and here she found out that his name was Hilarion and that only after a long search he had at last been caught in his sister's apartment. Just before the police arrested him, he had fired a shot which went straight into his pregnant sister's abdomen, killing her unborn child; this was his fifth murder. Clearly he was a vicious criminal and fully deserving of the death penalty. Nonetheless, Elena's heart went out to him, hoping to see, even in such a darkened soul, at least a glimmer of God's image.

As she entered the cell, the door was locked and bolted behind her. Left alone face to face with such a criminal, her heart momentarily gave way and she all but regretted having come. Hilarion was lying on the bed and when she entered he began to get up and pull his legs with the clanking fetters over the side of the bed. It was a painful sight.

—Thank-you for coming! I was afraid you wouldn't. Did they tell you I hadn't taken off your cross?

—Yes, they told me.

—Then I'm grateful to them too. You probably already know that I'm sentenced to death; my days are numbered. Tell me, you were explaining things so well there in the hospital, could you explain for me the meaning of a dream which I had here? I saw that I was in a dark place—such as a swamp or somewhere much worse—and I was covered all over with the most disgusting filth. Only my legs were left white. What does this mean? I don't understand it but somehow I feel this dream is significant; it left such a strong impression. Can you explain it to me?

At this moment Elena felt that the explanation of this dream was a key to something very important for Hilarion's soul; the turning of this hardened sinful soul from darkness to light might well depend on its correct interpretation—not according to human reasoning, but inspired from above. In her heart Elena Andreyevna fervently begged God for wisdom.

—I think, Hilarion that this dream was given you from above, to show you that no matter how sinful you are before God and man, you too can hope in God's mercy—on the condition, however, that you continue towards Him along the path of repentance which you have already begun; after all, you did not remove the cross you were given; on your legs, even during your illness, were iron fetters which caused you great pain, and so your legs, cleansed by this suffering, were shown to you to be white. Is it not from above that you have been assigned the death penalty and all its accompanying torments as a final cleansing, just as the cross for the repentant thief, so that together with him you might be in paradise? Only say as he did—first: I am justly condemned, for *I have received the due reward of my deeds*, and then: *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!* (Lk 23:41-42).

When she finished speaking, Elena Andreyevna glanced at Hilarion. His head was bowed and two tear drops were quietly running down his cheeks. He was silent for moment and then he said:

—You are right; I must suffer to atone [*Ed., make amends*] for all the evil I have done. Thank you; you have done something very great for me; you have opened up for me a new world. What is left to me of this life I must lay upon the cross of my final sufferings, before my death. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom.

The reader can well imagine what went on in Elena Andreyevna's soul on hearing these words and sensing Hilarion's genuine repentance. She knew she could ask Metropolitan Anthony that his sentence be lightened, and yet..., knowing something greater than the prolongation of an earthly life was at hand she kept silent. Hilarion continued:

—I shall not ask you, as would be usual in my case, to have me pardoned. Just call for me the prison priest; I must cleanse my soul by repentance and receive, if only I am worthy, the Holy Mysteries—God grant that this be so! Of you, Lord, I have this last request...

After a tearful embrace they parted for the last time.

Never in very good health, Elena Andreyevna became ill and was forced to give up her prison visits. She developed angina pectoris [*Ed., a syndrome characterized by an extreme pain below the sternum*], and this, combined with her ailing lungs, caused her much suffering. For several months before her death she lay in bed. Then on Monday of Passion Week, 1916, she became radiant and said to her friend:

—Sonia, I shall die on Good Friday. The Lord Himself came and told me!

And so she died, having seen God, on the day of the great suffering of the Lord, and offering her own sufferings for the countless prisoners whose repentance—and freedom—was bought by the compassionate tears and heartfelt prayers of her God-loving soul.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (Mt 5:8)



With fear and reverence you should stand in church, for our Christ is invisibly present with the holy angels. He fills the attentive and reverent with grace and blessings; whereas He censures the inattentive as unworthy. Try to receive Communion as often as possible—you have my permission to do so freely—for Holy Communion is an excellent aid for those who struggle against sin.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"