

# The Apostle

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## *A Baptism of Repentance*



**At the feast of the Theophany,** or in Western terminology the Epiphany, we celebrate the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan by John, the Forerunner. However, this is not the baptism with which we were once baptised. Our baptism, of course, took place after the death and resurrection of Christ, the source of our renewal, whereas any baptism before those events was after the manner of John's

baptism.

The Forerunner's baptism was a baptism of repentance. This is made clear in Mark 1:4, Matthew 3:11 and Acts 19:4. In preparing the way for Christ the Forerunner insisted on the necessity for repentance. Christ himself, being God-in-the-flesh had no need of repentance, so why did He submit himself to this unnecessary, for Him, ritual? Jesus' own explanation might seem rather curious; he explains: "it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Righteousness of life for any human is only possible through extreme humility; pride is the very antithesis of righteousness. This insight is the key to understanding Christ's perfect obedience to the Father. St Paul writes this to the Church at Philippi: "Have this mind among yourselves,

which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

Humility came naturally to Christ without impedance or internal conflicts; yet to heal us, He would need to submit Himself to the consequences of our sinful and broken humanity as being the only one who could mend us and eventually recreate us in His own untarnished image. If the fulfilling of righteousness was the goal, then the method was certainly extreme humility, even to bitter death on a cross.

Before, then, we can receive the fullness of Christian baptism in the death and resurrection of Christ, we must commit ourselves to the lifelong process of repentance, that change of mind which refreshes the soul with life-giving humility. In this high calling we not only follow Christ and imitate his passion we also throw ourselves upon His mercy with an honest confession

that in us, the only goodness that we have comes from God.

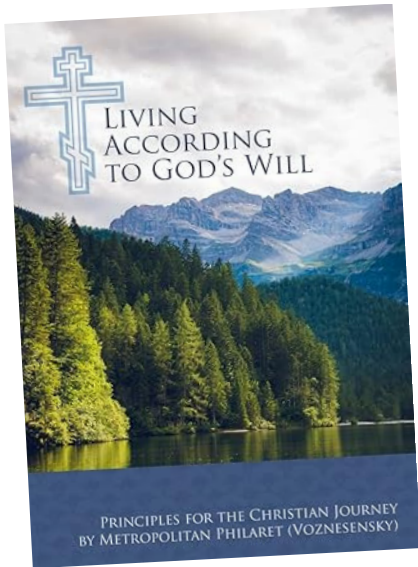
Modern man thinks that he is self-made, or rather that he should become so. This is the voice of the snake in the garden, not the life-giving Word of our Creator. If we would aspire to fullness of life that deadly counsel must be strangled by a humility that always puts God first, others after him and ourselves last. This is not hatred of self, as some suppose, but the Royal Highway, the way of the cross, that leads to the fullness of life.

After this baptism of repentance and humility comes the fullness of actual baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins and then baptism in fire which is of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Not one part of this threefold transformation from conversion through illumination to union with God is optional. Let us then continually apply ourselves by the grace of God to our own salvation. Through humility and repentance, let us light a fire that will ripple outwards to enlighten the whole world, starting from our own little corner where even God loves to dwell.

**- Fr Gregory**

# *Book Review* - **Living according to God's Will**

by Metropolitan Philaret Holy Trinity Publications, 2021



The opening sentence of this helpful book sets us a challenge: "The Lord is constantly calling us to repentance: to reorient the substance of our day-to-day life toward the attainment of the eternal life He has opened up for us.... This book is particularly suitable for use by clergy and other catechists ... as a primary text for instruction of new converts and for use by lifelong Orthodox believers who desire to enter into

the practice of their faith more fully than ever before" [pp. ix-x].

A key question is: "By what means does one distinguish between the morally good and the morally bad? This differentiation is made by means of a special moral law given to man by God. This moral law, this voice of God in man's soul, is felt in the depth of consciousness: it is called conscience" [p. 1].

"Living in this world, a Christian is in a constant, lively intercourse with God and with their neighbors. In addition to this, during the course of their whole life, they care for themselves, for their physical well-being, and for the salvation of their souls. Their moral obligations, therefore, can be divided into three groups: (1) obligations concerning themselves, (2) concerning neighbors and (3) highest of all, concerning God" [p.25].

"The first of all Christian virtues is humility. Without this virtue, no other virtue can be acquired....

Holy Scripture says: ‘God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble’ [1 Peter 5:5] [p. 29].

“Psychologists recognize three basic powers or capabilities in man’s soul: mind, emotion (heart) and will. Through their minds man acquires knowledge of the surrounding world and its life, and also of all the conscious experiences of their personal souls.... Finally, man’s will is that strength of soul through which they enter the world and act in it. Man’s moral character depends very strongly upon the character and direction of their will” [p. 41]... How is one to develop a strong will? The answer is simple—above all through the exercise of the will. To do this, as with a bodily exercise, it is necessary to begin slowly, little by little.... Discipline is necessary for every one of us... The source of good principles is God’s will.... It is revealed to us in the Saviour’s teaching, in His Holy Gospel” [pp.53-54, 56].

“The basic task of Orthodox Christianity is to teach people to live according to God’s will... Perhaps the transforming and

elevating influence of Christianity has been experienced most of all by the primary unit in the structure of social life—the family.... It is a great responsibility for an Orthodox Christian person to choose a friend for life. God’s word says of the Christian marriage, ‘The two shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24), that is, in marriage, two people form one organism, one common life. An Orthodox Christian wife thinks first of all about her husband and then about herself. Likewise, the husband first cares for his wife and then for himself” [pp. 97-98].

Other chapters of this helpful book consider: “The Christian obligation to know God” [pp. 123-126], “The necessity of prayer” [pp. 127-131] and “The Lord’s Prayer” [pp.132-137]. This book review is not a summary of the book, but rather, an invitation to you to pick it up on the bookstall and consider a possible purchase.

**- Father Emmanuel**

# *Theophany or the “appearance of God”*

Every year on January the 6th, Orthodox Christians celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ or the Theophany and represents the baptism in the waters of Jordan River of Our Lord by Saint John the Baptist. On the eve or on the day of Theophany, in all Orthodox churches, with the power of the Holy Spirit, at the prayers of the bishops and priests, the Great Holy Water or “aghiasma mare” – in my native language - is sanctified.

## **Theophany**

At the age of 30, at the full age of a perfect man, Christ came to river Jordan, where Saint John the Baptist taught and baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the Pharisees who question him: “I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know” John 1:26. “I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me: ‘Upon Whom you will see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, this is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God” John 1:33-34. When the

Lord appeared on the banks of river Jordan, Saint John, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, recognizes and presents Him to the people present, saying: “Behold! the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. This testimony was necessary for the Jewish people, as they were waiting for the Messiah prophesied many centuries before. Christ himself asks John to baptize Him, yet only with deep humility Saint John accepts, at Lord’s commandment.



After Christ’s baptism, the heavens opened, the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove

and remained on Christ, and we hear the voice of God the Father testifying about His Only Son: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" Matthew 3:17. Therefore, the baptism received by the Lord signifies the Theophany - the visual manifestation of the Holy Trinity - the moment when He is revealed to John and, through him, to Israel, as the Son of God and as the Messiah.

The Baptism of John and the Baptism of the Church

What happened with the Jewish Passover, happens with the baptism. At the Last Supper we encounter both the Jewish Passover and our Orthodox Passover; Christ Himself ends the first and begins the second. And now at the Jordan River he fulfilled the Jewish baptism, but at the same time He opened the doors for the baptism of the Church. Saint John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, which made people confess and repent their sins. This baptism was not a Holy Mystery and it did not forgive their sins, as the Holy Spirit of God has not been given yet, but was given to us by Christ himself, from above, from God the Father: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father

will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26, coming into the world at Pentecost. The apostles had to first clothe themselves with all the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they could then baptize with water and the Holy Spirit, adding to the Church "about three thousand souls" Acts 2:41.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not need to be baptized by Saint John. He needed no cleansing from sins because He had none. By immersing in the river Jordan, He actually baptised and sanctified the waters and nature of Earth so that we can be baptized also. The Holy Mystery of Baptism was instituted by Christ Himself immediately after His Resurrection from dead, together with the sending of the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen." Matthew 28:19-20. So, help us God!

**With love in Christ, Fr. Daniel**

# *When Knowledge Becomes a Stumbling Block:*

## Preparing Our Young People for Intellectual Challenges to Faith

There is a particular tragedy that plays out with disturbing regularity in our time: a young person grows up in the Church, learns the Faith, can recite the Creed and knows the Bible reasonably well, goes off to university—and within a year or two quietly drifts away. When asked what happened, if they're willing to talk about it at all, they mention questions they encountered that they couldn't answer, challenges from professors or peers that seemed unanswerable, and a growing sense that perhaps their childhood faith was naive after all.

What makes this especially heartbreaking is not that Christianity lacks answers to these challenges—the Church has been addressing them for two millennia, but that these young people often don't know the answers exist. They are, as St. Paul warned, “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14), not because the Faith is weak, but because they never learned its strength.

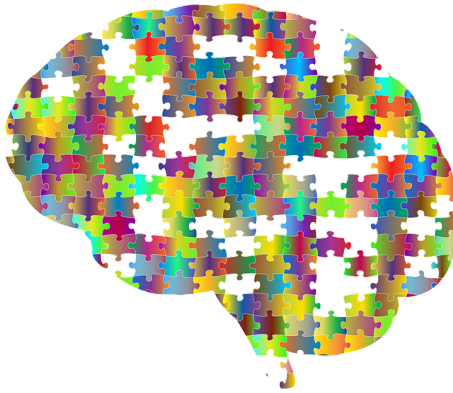
### **The Pattern of Proudful Self-Sufficiency**

Many knowledgeable young Christians fall into an error rooted in pride: the pride of working everything out for themselves. Having successfully navigated Sunday School and youth group, having perhaps even engaged in some basic apologetics, they develop confidence in their own ability to answer any question about the Faith. This intellectual self-sufficiency mirrors the very self-reliance that Christianity warns against in spiritual matters.

When they encounter challenges they cannot immediately answer, sophisticated objections to biblical reliability, philosophical arguments about the problem of evil, historical criticisms of the Church, or scientific claims presented as incompatible with faith—the foundation shakes. They are completely unaware that these very questions, and even harder ones, were posed many ages ago and answered by the Fathers, the great theologians, and the saints who were far wiser than they.



The tragedy deepens when fear prevents them from seeking help. They worry that asking questions might be interpreted as doubting or backsliding. They feel shame that they “should” know the answers already. They suspect, sometimes correctly, that their youth group leaders or even their parish priest might not have sophisticated responses. And so they face these challenges alone, in secret, increasingly isolated from the very community that could guide them through the struggle.



### **The Questions They Face**

The challenges young people encounter at university are rarely original, though they are new to the student and often presented with considerable rhetorical force. From professors, they hear that the Bible was written by men to control people, that religion is merely evolutionary psychology, that

biblical ethics represent primitive morality we've outgrown, or that the problem of evil makes belief in God logically impossible. From peers, the objections are often more emotional: “How can you believe gay people are sinful? That's bigotry.” “You really think people who've never heard of Jesus go to hell?” “Religion causes all the wars in history.”

These questions feel devastating precisely because the student has never encountered them before and doesn't know that the Church addressed them long ago. Someone hearing Bart Ehrman's claims about biblical manuscripts for the first time might lose faith—unless they knew that textual criticism is an established field where Orthodox and other Christian scholars have thoroughly addressed these issues. Someone encountering Freud's claim that religion is wish fulfillment might find it compelling—unless they knew that Christian thinkers wrote sophisticated responses within years of Freud's work, responses that remain intellectually credible today.

### **The Witness of the Fathers**

The situation is not unlike what St. Augustine faced. He grew up with his mother Monica's





simple Christian faith but found it intellectually unsatisfying. He was drawn to Manichaeism, which seemed more sophisticated and better able to answer his questions about evil and the nature of reality. He spent years struggling with objections to Christianity—the problem of evil, questions about free will, difficulties with biblical interpretation.

His breakthrough came when he encountered Christian intellectuals, especially St. Ambrose, who showed him that Christianity could engage his intellect at the highest level. He discovered that many of his “unanswerable” objections were based on misunderstandings of what Christianity actually claimed. He found that the Faith had philosophical depth he had

never imagined. His journey back to Christianity, chronicled in his “Confessions” involved discovering that the Faith was intellectually deeper than he had known, not that he needed to abandon reason.

This pattern repeats throughout Church history. The Cappadocian Fathers engaged Greek philosophy at its highest levels. St. John of Damascus synthesized Christian theology with the best of classical thought. St. Gregory Palamas defended hesychastic theology against scholastic rationalism with rigorous philosophical argument. The Church has never been afraid of questions or intellectual challenge—indeed, some of our greatest theological achievements came in response to such challenges.



## **What Our Young People Need**

If we are to prepare our young people for the intellectual challenges they will face, several things are essential:

Theological Depth before College Youth formation must go beyond moral instruction and emotional experiences to include serious engagement with theology, church history, and the intellectual tradition. Young people should know not just *\*what\** the Church teaches, but *\*why\**—the reasoning, the scriptural basis, the patristic witness. They should be familiar with the great councils and controversies, understanding that every doctrine we hold was hammered out in response to real questions and alternatives.

## **Familiarity with the Christian Intellectual Tradition**

Our young people should know

that Christianity has always had brilliant defenders. They should have encountered the Fathers—not just their spiritual writings, but their theological and philosophical works. They should know of figures like C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, and contemporary Orthodox theologians and apologists who engage modern questions. When they encounter objections at university, they should know instinctively: “The Church has thought about this.”

## **Normalisation of Questions and Struggle**

We must create a culture where asking hard questions is seen as a sign of mature faith, not weak faith. Doubt and struggle are normal parts of spiritual growth—indeed, many saints experienced them. When young people know they can bring their questions to their priest, their parents, or trusted mentors without judgment, they are far less likely to face challenges alone and

in secret.

## **Distinction between Core and Periphery**

Young people need to understand which beliefs are essential to Orthodox Christianity and which are matters of theological opinion or cultural practice. When everything is presented as equally essential, a



challenge to any single belief feels like a threat to the entire Faith. But when they understand what constitutes the heart of the Faith—the reality of the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Trinity, salvation through Christ—they can hold firmly to these while thoughtfully engaging questions about secondary matters.

## **Resources for Ongoing Learning**

Before our young people leave for university, they should be equipped with resources: books by Orthodox theologians and apologists, websites and podcasts that

address common objections, names of Orthodox campus ministries or parishes near their school. They should know that when questions arise—and they will—there are places to turn.

## **Connection to the Worshipping Community**

Most fundamentally, young people need to understand that Orthodox Christianity is not primarily an intellectual system to be defended but a living relationship with Christ in His Body, the Church. Participation in the Divine Liturgy, the sacraments, prayer, and fasting provide a foundation that intellectual challenges cannot shake. When faith is rooted in encounter with the living God rather than merely in arguments, questions become opportunities for deeper understanding rather than threats to the entire edifice.

## **A Call to Action**

For parents: Begin conversations now. Ask your children what questions they have about the Faith. Read together some of the great Orthodox theologians and apologists. Model intellectual humility by acknowledging what you don't know while demonstrating confidence that answers exist. Stay connected with your college-age

children not to monitor them but to provide a safe space for questions.

**For church leadership:** Consider how we can deepen theological education for young people. Can we offer classes on church history, apologetics, or reading the Fathers? Can we connect college students with Orthodox campus ministries or provide mentorship? Can we create a culture where doubt and questions are met with patience and wisdom rather than alarm?

**For young people facing challenges:** Know that you are not the first to face these questions, and you do not face them alone. The Church has been answering these objections for two thousand years. Bring your questions to your priest, to trusted mentors, to the rich treasury of Orthodox theological writing. Continue to participate in the life of the Church—the Liturgy, the sacraments, prayer—even as you work through intellectual struggles. Faith and reason are not enemies; both are gifts from God.

**For all of us:** Remember that genuine Christian faith has never required the abandonment of reason or intellectual curiosity. The same God who revealed Himself

in Christ also created the rational mind capable of seeking truth. When our young people encounter challenges to their faith, it is not a crisis to be feared but an opportunity for that faith to deepen and mature, rooted more firmly in the two-thousand-year treasury of Orthodox Christian wisdom.

Let us equip our young people not merely with answers, but with the knowledge that answers exist, the humility to seek them, and the confidence that the Faith can withstand any honest inquiry. As St. Peter instructs us, let us be “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Our young people deserve no less than to be prepared to do the same.”

**- Reader Daniel**

