

The Three New Hierarchs as New Prophets of Grace*

*“They have Moses and the Prophets;
let them hear them...!”*

(St. Luke 16:29)

† *Bishop Klemes of Gardikion*

BY THE GRACE OF GOD we celebrate today, on the first Sunday of November according to the Church Calendar, the Holy Protectors of the Holy Synod in Resistance in its struggle against the challenge, from the West, of the heresy of Ecumenism.

The Three New Hierarchs, Sts. Photios the Great, Gregory Palamas, and Mark Evgenikos [of Ephesus], have been shown forth in the Church as new **Prophets of Grace**, protecting the new Israel from disbelief, vanity, and every sort of adulteration of the Truth, having established it in faithfulness, steadfastness in what has been delivered unto it, patience, and beneficence, unto eternal salvation in the bosom of Abraham.

In ancient times, the Holy Patriarch Abraham, that faithful servant of God, had great riches, but he was not without charity. His daily fare was not to set a banquet table for himself, but to serve, care for, and give comfort and munificent hospitality to any who came to him. For this reason he received a visitation from the Trihypostatic God in the form of Three Angels. Thereupon, he also received the promise of the blessing of all of mankind by way of his son Isaac.



The Patriarch Isaac is a prefigurement of our Lord Jesus Christ, “Who was for us men and our salvation...made incarnate, crucified..., and resurrected.” And, indeed, the son of this very Patriarch, Jacob, foresaw the joining of earth with Heaven through the Divine Incarnation, and wrestled with God, having been shown strong.

Henceforth, the Trinity of the Forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, declared the just election of the Living God regarding the salvation of the world, and no one who failed to believe as they did, or failed to hope in their promises, was considered a pious Israelite.

The God of our Fathers continued to intervene in history in a revelatory way. He chose the Lawgiver Moses, his brother Aaron, and the righteous Jesus (Joshua) of Navi, that they might guide His Chosen People from the enslavement of Egypt to the Land of Promise. The People were given to know of the Divine commandments, judgments, and decrees through these Righteous Ones, and were called to observe them, so as to persist in faithfulness and with divine blessings, that they might welcome the coming Messiah.

By means of His Divine Prophets, the Triune God ceased not to denounce disbelief, sin, and indeed apostasy from His Law and every form of Syncretism, that is, the admixture of Truth and falsehood and of Light and darkness.

When the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, at last came into the world, He revealed to us clearly the Unoriginate Father, His Only-Begotten Son, Himself, and the All-Holy Spirit, “which proceedeth from the Father” (St. John 15:26), and having demanded faithfulness, He gave us divine Commandments, above all Love of God and our Neighbor, since “God is love” (St. John 4:8).

He affirmed that He was the One in whom Abraham rejoiced, for the father of faith saw His Day and was glad (St. John 8:57). Only he who fulfills the works of Faith and Love (St. John 8:39) is reckoned a true spiritual child of Abraham. Such a one, like the poor Lazarus, shall find rest in his “bosom” in the eternal Kingdom. As well, the Lord

affirmed that he who truly believes in Moses, who wrote of Christ, only such a one would also believe in Him: “But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (St. John 5:46-47).

After such things, we understand why the majority of the Jews did not believe in Christ, but holding firm to the letter of the Law and, sensing richness as only theirs, rejected God, Who impoverished Himself on our behalf, and crucified the King of Glory. By this stand of theirs, however, they continue to travail far from the bosom of Abraham, faithless to Moses and the Prophets, vainly beseeching “drops of Grace....”

It is obvious that our stand before Christ and every “icon” of Him, that is, before every “least one” of His Brothers, and our stand with regard to His Body, His Church, and before each “Member” of Him, will decide the eternal future of all of us!

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Our Lord chose his Disciples as the continuators of His work in the Church. From the twelve, three were preëminent among them: Peter, John, and James. However, none of them was a “Super-Apostle.” No single one held a special place over and above the rest of the Apostles, with administrative privilege or authority. When the mother of two of the preëminent Disciples, John and James, the sons of Zebedee, requested of the Lord seats of honor for her sons, we know what the God-Man answered her: “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: ...whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (St. Matthew 20:25-28).

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On this Biblical basis all of the successors to the Apostles walk in the Holy Spirit, guiding those who believe in salvation through Christ and protecting them from eternal perdition.

This was the course followed by the Three Holy Hierarchs, Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostomos, who set aflame the known world with the rays of their divine dogmas and inundated creation with the streams of their knowledge of God. These great Fathers of the Church, by their God-loving example and compassion, guided the Flock to faith in theory and practice, preserving them from every foreign teaching and poisonous heresy of perdition, upholding the Truth and Righteousness with all of their strength.

Their God-bestowed and Spirit-enlightened sacred legacy has been served worthily and with equal honor by the three new Hierarchs of the Holy Orthodox Church, Sts. Photios the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, and Mark Evgenikos, Metropolitan of Ephesus. Divine Providence has shown them forth as **Pillars of Truth** in times of grave peril and great trial. Western Christianity and its See, the Patriarchate of Rome, first in honor in the administrative system of the Church, has so apostatized from the teaching given by God, for historical and theological reasons, that to check its threat requires the strongest of protectors.

Thus, St Photios the Great, in the second half of the ninth century, confronted the Western distortion of the supposed Primacy of authority and service of the Bishop of Rome throughout the Church and the addition of the *Filioque* Clause to the Symbol of the Faith [the Creed], affirming the supposed procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son [as well as the Father]. These ecclesiological and dogmatic deviations were confronted by St. Photios with prophetic perspicacity and profundity once and for all.

The God-Seer St. Gregory Palamas confronted, in the middle of the fourteenth century, the Western distortion concerning the method and path to the knowledge of God. Against philosophical Scholasticism, he

placed the unique revealed method and path of Divine knowledge: purification by prayer, spiritual struggle, humility, love, and the mystical union of God and man. The communion and union of man with God does not come about philosophically and cognitively, but by His Divine Energies, when the whole man becomes receptive to them, something that is accessible to all.

Finally, the heroic champion, St. Mark Evgenikos, confronted, in the middle of the fifteenth century, the Western perverseness of a sovereign imposition of the worldly power and wealth of the Latins on the poor and beleaguered East, the Church of Christ in the guise of Lazarus the pauper, clad, from a secular viewpoint, in the rags of weakness. The West, through the overweening Pope, sought the spiritual enslavement of the Orthodox by way of their Uniatization, for the purpose of aiding them in averting physical enslavement to the Ottomans. However, the honor and soul of the Truth was saved by a spiritual giant, a new Prophet of Grace, St. Mark Evgenikos. He did not sign the false union of Ferrara-Florence, and in fact changed the course of history: the thousand-year Orthodox empire was lost, but the Faith, the experience, and the Tradition of Holy Orthodoxy, which continued to guide people safely to the warmth of Abraham's bosom, were preserved intact.

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The division of Orthodox into Unionists and Anti-Unionists is still in effect in our days. As far back as the beginning of the twentieth century, the ecumenism instigated in the West began grievously rocking the Ark of the Church. The Orthodox became divided, and the tragic consequences of tendency towards union, not only with the poly-heretical Latins and with the many sects of Protestants who derive from them, but also with all of the ancient and contemporary heretics, and even with adherents of non-Christian religions (!), are more than palpable in our tragic era: relativism, mingling, confusion, hobnobbing, syncretism, and globalization.

The calendar change of 1924 was only the firstfruits of these travails. We have entered an apocalyptic period in which faith, virtue, love, and patience are put to the test. Yet, the verdict of Heaven can be heard among the floundering Orthodox, who are today asking themselves what should be done in these times of crisis, in which even the elect are in danger of being led astray: **“You have**

(as it were, Moses and the Prophets) the Holy Three New Hierarchs! Listen to them! Imitate them!”

All who hear and imitate them creatively, within our living Tradition in the Holy Spirit, decisively reject, both now and at all times, every enticing distortion, whatever its provenance may be. Indeed, they endeavor to live, and to prefer as their way of salvation, **the unity of faith** and the **communion of the Holy Spirit** in truth and love.

With these considerations in view, and motivated by them, our Holy Synod regards the Holy Three New Hierarchs, these Prophets of Grace, as protectors and guides. It promotes their timely and perennial message, not in a **triumphalist manner**, like some pitiless “rich man” towards supposed paupers and outcasts, but in a **spirit of confession and guidance**, so that through steadfastness in the



Faith and compassion and love in our attitudes we might resemble the Holy Hierarchs in an uncompromising adherence to the Truth in humility. If the struggle for the Faith is to prosper and be blessed, it must be conducted in conformity with the Patristic ethos of love, compassionate philanthropy, and humility, as may be inferred from the Hesychastic and Eucharistic experience of the Church and her sanctified members.

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In the gloomy impasse that encompasses us in all areas, in the darkness of the ecclesiastical horizon of our days, the Holy Three New Hierarchs light our way in the Faith to abidance in what has been handed down to us and to patience. They provide us with an example of love and humility. Only if our Orthodoxy is inspired by this stance will it be truly life-giving and joyous, and our witness effective.

Sunday, November 2/15, 2009
Holy Three New Hierarchs

(*) On the Feast of the Three New Hierarchs, a Divine Liturgy was concelebrated at the Holy Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina in Phyle (Athens), Greece, the Seat of the Holy Synod in Resistance, presided over by His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Synod, during the course of which His Grace, Bishop Klemes (Clement) of Gardikion [Secretary of the Holy Synod], delivered a sermon on the basic themes presented in this article.