



■ New Year Encyclical for 2004

“I Am Crucified with Christ” Concerning the Authentic Ethos of the Church

Beloved children in the Lord:

I sincerely pray that, during the new period of the Year of Salvation 2004, we may more greatly grow in the authentic mind and ethos of the Church, that is, that we may come to a deeper awareness of our identity as Christians and show forth more consistency between our Orthodoxy and our *Orthopraxia*, with the encouragement and guidance, to be sure, of all the Saints, and especially of the All-Immaculate Ever-Virgin Mary.

I. Doctrine and Life

This year, too, I wish, for the umpteenth time, to address the issue of the ethos of the Orthodox Church, because, to my sorrow, I have discovered that its significance for our salvation is either not deeply embedded in our conscience or is downplayed and overshadowed by other priorities, with the cooperation of the evil spirits.

However, we ought never to forget that it is not only heretical and “depraved” doctrines that are evil and pernicious, but also a passion-filled and “depraved” way of life, as the Saints of our Faith assiduously assure us.

“And so it is,” says St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, “that depraved doctrines and a depraved way of life are a like evil; and, conversely, a depraved way of life and depraved doctrines are a like evil,” because “the one engenders the other, and whoever has the one ends up with the other.”¹

In discussing this reciprocal relationship between doctrine and life, I consider it necessary now to emphasize strongly the transition from life and ethos to doctrine and truth; from a life which is “unclean and perverted” to “evil and perverted doctrines.”²

On this point, Holy Tradition is very clear and categorical: “A corrupt life often becomes the basis of impious doctrine.”³

As the Holy Apostle Paul pointedly writes: those who have rejected and stifled a “good conscience,” that is, a virtuous way of life, “have suffered ship-

wreck concerning the faith,”⁴ and erred with regard to correct teaching of the word of truth.

II. “Action” and “Vision”

At this point, however, a very basic clarification is required, because it might be supposed that I am simply repeating familiar platitudes. The Holy Fathers teach us that in order for someone to fall into error, in order to arrive at mistaken ideas about God and Divine truths and, in consequence, to jeopardize his salvation, it is not necessary for him to live a life of total corruption, depravity, and indifference.

The unclean spirits do not need much to lead a man astray. A lack of constant struggle for purification of the heart suffices for them; indulging in passionate fantasies suffices for them; an unenlightened mind attached to created things suffices for them; laziness in guarding the five senses suffices for them; idleness or the adulteration of what is good suffices for them.

“Knowledge” and “vision” of God and, consequently, our deliverance from the activity of the Evil One come as a result of “action” in Christ, that is, a strenuous Christian life, diligent observance of the commandments, an evangelical, Cross-centered way of life, and unceasing repentance.

“We must first purify ourselves,” says St. Gregory the Theologian, “and then converse with Him Who is pure”; “Ascend through your way of life; acquire purity through purification”; “action is a step towards the vision of God.”⁵

If a Christian does not traverse this path of purification in humility, love, and chastity, then not only will he be susceptible to demonic influences, not only will he be mocked by Satan, but anything he says about God or Orthodoxy runs the risk of being demonic!

St. Maximos the Confessor declares that “knowledge divorced from action is quite clearly the theology of demons.”⁶

III. The Cross and Glory

Asure criterion, therefore, by which we find ourselves within the realm of the Orthodox ecclesiastical ethos is that we suffer with Christ and for His sake; “We suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together with Him”;⁷ that we mortify ourselves daily and die to the old man, “that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” and “that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”⁸

The Holy Fathers teach us from experience that “where one finds the love of God, there also does he find ascent with Him upon the Cross, suffering with Him and glorification together with Him, death with Him and life with Him; therefore, he who ascends the Cross is raised above the earth; he has died to the world; thus,

he ought to bethink himself of the things on high, where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father.”⁹

He who is pious and is voluntarily and knowingly crucified together with Christ does not succumb to the temptations wrought by a worldly mentality, which urge him to come down from the Cross. Rather, he sacrifices himself at every moment by the Grace of our Savior and for His sake.

The Christian—never failing to recall the words “I am crucified with Christ”¹⁰—is neither annoyed by, nor complains of, trials; but he endures, prays, and gives thanks to God. He does not seek to justify himself, but is humbled, chides himself, and repents. He prefers, not self-love, but self-sacrifice. He cultivates, not love of pleasure, but asceticism.

The cross of temptations becomes a noetic ladder, which lifts him out of affliction into joy, from death to life, from mortification in Christ to resurrection in Christ.

This “treasure” of “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”¹¹ is the “sanctifying power of the Spirit,”¹² which we have “in earthen vessels”;¹³ it is “the sure and unceasing illumination of the hypostatic Light”¹⁴ in our hearts.

Let this be our unceasing way of life: a life centered on the Cross and Resurrection. Let this be our fervent and unceasing offering for the renewal of the world and its restoration from the corruption of the Fall to the incorruption of the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

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Notes

1. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, “Notes” on Romans 1:28. Cf. his “Notes” on Ephesians 4:19 and I St. Timothy 6:10.

2. See note 1.

3. Theodoretos of Kyros, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXXII, col. 796C (on I St. Timothy 1:19).

4. I St. Timothy 1:19.

5. St. Gregory the Theologian, Homily 20, “On the Nature of Christian Doctrine,”

§§4, 12, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXV, cols. 1069A, 1080B.

6. St. Maximos the Confessor, Epistle 20, “To the Monk Marinos,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCI, col. 602C.

7. Cf. Romans 8:17.

8. Cf. II Corinthians 4:10, 11.

9. St. John the Recluse, *Βίβλος Βαρσανουφίου* [*The Book of Barsanouphios*], §567 (Volos: 1960), p. 266b; cf. §351, p. 189ab.

10. Galatians 2:20.

11. Cf. II Corinthians 4:6-7.

12. St. Makarios of Egypt, Homily 18, §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXIV, col. 636A.

13. See note 11.

14. St. Makarios of Egypt, as paraphrased by [St.] Symeon Metaphrastes, §138, *Φιλοκαλία*, Vol. III, p. 229.