On Reading Non-Orthodox Religious or Theological Works

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THE ECCLESIASTICAL DUTY of pious Orthodox Christians is to undertake nothing without the advice of their Hierarchs, as our Synodal and Patristic tradition exhorts us:

Without the Bishop, do nothing; ...no one belonging to the Church may perform anything whatever without the Bishop; ...accomplish nothing without the Bishop; ...whether Presbyter or Deacon, without the advice of the Bishop carry out no task. (St. Ignatios of Antioch, Patrologia Graeca, Vol. V, cols. 704A, 713B, 668B; cf. the Thirty-Ninth Apostolic Canon.)

Hence it is that we exhort our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ—clergy, monastics, and those belonging to the Holy Synod in Resistance—to take care in particular, apart from other considerations, not to read in an indiscriminate manner, not to distribute in sundry ways, and not to permit—particularly within the confines of Churches and monasteries and convents—various books which are not Orthodox, but which, written by extremist Protestant circles in America, have been translated into Greek without ecclesiastical approbation. Unfortunately, in a wholly irresponsible manner, an incredible array of publications and tracts, usually anonymous or pseudonymous, circulates widely and without control among the faithful.

The texts of these books and publications constitute, according to the Holy Fathers, “injurious [wrong] teaching” (“káké didaché”) and “wrong instruction” (“káké didaskalía”), which they compare to a “strange fare” and a “deadly medicine” (poison) that is presented as an admixture “with wine and honey” which the “ignorant delightfully enjoy with injurious pleasure,” thereby dying spiritually (St. Ignatios of Antioch, P.G., Vol. V, cols. 652B, 657B, 680A).

Before reading or distributing and passing them on, it is good, first, to submit these books and tracts, as well as other such publications of unknown and dubious kind and provenance, to the judgment and approbation of the Hierarchs of the Holy Synod; for these works usually contain numerous and indescribable simplisms, delusions, heresies, and wrong teachings, as well as, unfortunately in many instances, deceptions, to the end that they upset and scandalize the con-
The sacred Tradition of our Holy Church, in establishing Her dogmatic teaching for the edification of Her Flock, avoids sedulously the invocation, not only of a) heretical, but of b) spurious and apocryphal, writings and, indeed, even forbids, condemns, and anathematizes both such writings and those employing them (see the Seventh Oecumenical Synod, Sessions IV, V, VI; Spyridon Melias, Praktiká ton Kagíon kai Oikoumenikón Synódon [Acts of the Holy Oecumenical Synods], Vol. II, pp. 779, 817, 818, 850, 851, 859).

The Holy Fathers of the Seventh Oecumenical Synod in Nicaea, upon hearing texts of such provenance (heretical, spurious, and apocryphal texts), exclaimed: “They are not of the Holy Spirit; ...they have defiled our ears; ...they have polluted our hearing” (ibid.).

The Holy Synod in Resistance, affirming that it will return to this most serious issue in a fresh and more detailed communiqué, exhorts her spiritual children, along with St. Ignatios, to “refrain from strange fare.”

From the Chancery of the Holy Synod

prayers, vigils, and placing his thoughts on the Rock, which is Christ” (cf. I Corinthians 10:4).28 When at Sázava a Slavic monastery was founded, Prince Břetislav desired St. Procopius to become its Abbot. At that time, he had already attained such spiritual stature, that miracles of healing were worked through him. But even more remarkably, he acquired an active love for his neighbor and deep humility; thus, he feared to accept the office of abbot. “...He was afraid to have priority over others, and with great gentleness and humble effort he resisted in every possible way, asserting that he had no experience and was unworthy and unable to give his wards the duty of obedience. He called on the Lord God, Who is the only true Judge of all of the heart’s secrets (Psalm 43:21, Septuaginta), as a witness to his innermost self-knowledge. But in the end, he gave in to the great variety of insistent requests and the kind entreaties of noblemen. And so, the dignity of Abbot was given him against his will to a man on whom the Grace of the Holy Spirit quite obviously rested.”29

The Saint also received the gift of prophecy: “By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he shone forth with the prophetic gift, being able to foresee future events. According to the revelation of God’s mercy, two days in advance he foretold the end of his earthy life.”30 St. Procopius summoned his nephew, Vitus, and his own son, Emmeram, and told them: “...At God’s command, I will most certainly leave the de- ceit of this world in three days, entrusting you to God. But I will bring to your attention the fact that...you will be exiles in a foreign land for six years; and this monastery, by the power of the Prince’s hand, will be given to foreigners to hold. ...After the passage of six years, (God) will show mercy on your exile and will restore to you the state of peace. Those who revile you will be given their just reward, and you will be brought back into the harbor of consolation.”31 St. Procopius reposed on the Feastday of the Annunciation of the Mother of God, March 25, in the year 1053. The Vita Minor preserves the details of what happened when the tomb of St. Procopius was opened in 1204: “...When his tomb was opened, a most pleasant fragrance emanated from it, so that all present were brought to wonder.”32

So it is that the present-day Czech Republic has been blessed by the presence of individuals who became genuine persons—truly human—by their unification with God through theosis. St. Gregory of Sinai, in his discourse on the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, speaks about the future age, when the God-Man Jesus Christ will shine as God, surrounded by many Saints: gods and Kings. Among these will also be those Saints who were born and who lived in this land, the contemporary Czech Republic.33

Notes

1. Panayiotis Nellas, Deification in Christ (New York: St. Vladimir’s...