

## RESISTANCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO REPENTANCE

Like His Grace, Bishop Auxentios, our keynote speaker today, I would like to thank the Church council and members of the Holy Archangel Michael Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as the council and parishioners the Sts. Raphael, Nicholas, and Irene Greek Orthodox Church, two much-valued parishes of the American Exarchate of the Holy Synod in Resistance, for inviting me and one of our monastery Deacons, Father Photios, to be present for the visit of His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos and His Grace, Bishop Auxentios to Toronto for services in both Churches and for today's seminar. I would also like to thank the organizers of the seminar for their invitation to speak briefly and to introduce the plenary session that will follow my remarks.

In our plenary session, the Archbishop, Bishop Auxentios, and Hegumen Father Sofronije, the second Priest here at the parish of the Holy Archangel Michael, will focus on the issues raised by His Grace, Bishop Auxentios, and our discussion of those issues will include questions from anyone in the audience, to which one or all of the participants will respond. I would like to introduce the session by placing Bishop Auxentios' excellent comments about anti-ecumenism and resistance movements in the Orthodox Church, which he discussed with me some days ago in summary form, in the context of a trait that Archbishop Chrysostomos calls, in one his books, *Themes in Orthodox Patristic Psychology*, "a subject interwoven with all other spiritual themes" and, quoting St. John of Karpathos, a means by which sinful humans can achieve a "life of virtue."

That trait is repentance. It seems to me that to understand and to undertake resistance in the name of Orthodoxy, one needs, in addition to humility and an obedient love for Holy Tradition and the teachings of the Church, a repentant spirit. Why do I say this? Because unless we resist innovation, ecumenism, the religious syncretism that gave birth to ecumenism, and various other betrayals of the Faith without being nurtured and transformed by a spirit of repentance, we will, in opposing and condemning what is wrong, fall to compounding the ills that we resist by our own sins of judgmentalism and exclusivism. Unless one is acutely aware of his own sins and sincerely and fully committed to the Orthodox Faith as that which has helped him to recognize, treat, and attempt to overcome his deficits and

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shortcomings through repentance, he will ultimately undertake resistance in a spirit of opposition and as an ideology that he claims as his own exclusively.

By way of example, many Orthodox—and no doubt well-meaning individuals—have taken great umbrage with our Bishops and with the Holy Synod in Resistance for not condemning those who are smitten with all of the anti-Orthodox and dangerous teachings, theologies, and ecclesiologies foreign to Holy Tradition that His Grace, Bishop Auxentios enumerated in his comments. If these are wrong beliefs and, in the language of the Church, heresies or deviations from what has been passed down from Christ through the Apostles, supported by the Fathers of the Church, and deemed healthy and true by the conscience of the Church, how is it sufficient, these Orthodox ask, simply to wall oneself off from such errors without condemning them and counting all of those who believe in them among the heretics, outside the Church, and dangerous to the Faith?

The most compelling and definitive answer to this question His Grace made clear in his presentation: that only an Oecumenical Synod and the Church as a whole can declare local Churches to be in heresy and devoid of Grace, and that until such a Synod is held, we can only, in imitating the Cappadocian Fathers, for example, wall ourselves off from error and form communities of resisters to preserve the Faith until, by God's Grace, a unifying Synod is held. Furthermore, we must ask about the spiritual state of anyone who would wish to see those in error condemned and cut off from the Grace of God and the hope of salvation. Looking at the perfection for which we were created, seeing the Church as a means by which we can cleanse ourselves of our own filth by loving our brothers and sisters beyond whatever stain may burden them, and thus desiring to save others by restoring ourselves, how could we ever desire to condemn our fellow man? After all, we read of God Himself, in the Old Testament, that he "wisheth not the death of a sinner."

It is the spirit of repentance and of condemning ourselves, and not others, that leads us to the Patristic idea of resistance. When we see and repent of our own sins, we come to pity our brothers and sisters with deep and abiding love, and this as a consequence of a mystery that rises out of a fixed spiritual law: that we *must* love our fellow man. One who is in a state of repentance is drawn to true resistance by a natural disposition. While he is zealous—because of what the Faith has done to renew him through repentance—to defend and love the Church with his whole heart, this zeal is spiritual and *not* ideological. He does not defend the Church with passion, expressing his own ideas and beliefs and opinions (whether right or wrong), but weighs his defense of the Church against his constant love for his fellow man, and especially for those in error (just as Christ loved sinners with a special tenderness). If he is ever aflame with zeal and with fervor in defending the precepts and teaching of the Faith, it is because of his firm conviction that only in Orthodoxy and only in the Archetype of Christ, Perfect Man and Perfect God, can sinners be restored. He zealously defends the Faith out of his love for others, wanting for others that which the Faith has done for him.

The repentant man or woman is much like a person who, having found, among a myriad of quacks, a physician who can heal human illness, is undergoing therapy for the cure of

his own illness. Out of love for those afflicted with his same disease, he speaks out forcefully against the false physicians who lead his fellow sufferers deeper into illness by their ineffective cures. Once again, such a repentant man or woman never acts out of some ideological commitment or out of a passionate hatred for others. Nor does such a person covet a true therapy as his own, denying it to those who are “less worthy” or somehow seen as an enemy. A true Christian acts always, as I said, in the spirit of repentance, aware of his sins and rejoicing that he has found an effective cure for himself and for others. He opposes false spiritual physicians only because they bring harm on others with their quackery. Cutting himself off from such quacks, and calling others to do so as well, he tries in every way to turn all men and women to the True Physician.

Not only does such a repentant Christian call the victims of spiritual deception to the Truth, but he also calls those practicing spiritual quackery to repentance, since love has no limits. It is for this reason that the Church not only calls heretics to repentance, but asks us to try again and again to bring them out of error. Even then, if they do not repent, they are not judged for their wrong beliefs as much as for their intransigence and, as a consequence thereof, the likelihood of their leading yet more spiritually ill victims into the nets of false teaching and false hope. Is it not then apparent to all—to anyone—that the repentant Christian acts out of love, sympathy for his fellow sinner, and profound concern for others? He fosters no hate, no fanaticism, no desire to see others condemned, and no animosity for those in error. If he cuts himself off from heretics by walling himself off, he does so to avoid being infected by their spiritual bacterium or virus and calls others away from them for the same reason: to protect them from infection. There is no selfishness, triumphalism, no spirit of condemnation, and no ego in the resistance of a repentant Christian to wrong belief and betrayals of the Faith.

Let me lastly, now, speak to the issue of practical repentance, that is, the way in which we live a repentant life, and how this relates to resistance. I will give you some very stark and practical images. His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos, who converted me to Orthodoxy, has always been strict about the observance of Orthodoxy. His opposition to ecumenism, whenever I have heard him speak, is not to religious toleration. As he has often said to us: “Believing that we have the Truth and are the True Church is not a prerogative; it is an inestimable gift and a treasure that should humble us and make us feel unworthy.” In other words, we have no right to condemn those in other religions. Even the strictest Church Fathers, in condemning a heresy, warned against the mistreatment or reviling of heretics, who are often just misled and victims of the heresy possessing them. Moreover, we also become heretics when we do not practice our Faith. We distort it, and our defense of it as the True Faith comes back to condemn us, since if we truly believed in it, we would practice it at all costs!

A good example of this is the growth of an Orthodoxy without Orthopraxy; that is, an adherence to right belief without right practice. Many converts to Orthodoxy—and I am not criticizing converts, since I am one—think that they can accept the Faith and be Orthodox, or simply repent for past beliefs and be Orthodox. I heard a popular Orthodox speaker, a convert with a Protestant evangelical background, say that the Orthodox Church is “evan-

gical.” This is not true. We are not an “evangelical” religion in the Protestant sense of that word. We evangelize, as Archbishop Chrysostomos always emphasizes to us, by becoming living Gospels, by restoring the whole man in each man and woman through the experience of the Gospel. Our evangelization is “sacred” work: *Leitourgía* (from the Greek word for “work” or “function”). We evangelize and do the work of God through the Mysteries of the Church and we function as living Gospels by practicing our Faith. Participation in God through the Mysteries and through the observance of Orthodoxy in fasting, prayer, and following the dictates of the Church are our evangelization.

If we wish to live a life of resistance, we must practice the very Faith in which repentance is brought to fruition. If we follow the Old Calendar, have Churches without pews, demand proper dress and uncut hair and beards among our clergy, keep the fasts, and live moral lives according to what is set out in Scripture, we are living the life of repentance. We are working and functioning correctly. There are those who scoff at such things, but in so doing they scoff at St. Paul, who calls us not to Protestant evangelization, but to the life of a “Peculiar People,” Christians not *irrelevant* to the world, but *exceedingly* relevant to it by virtue of their living in it but separate from it: practicing that which transforms and divinizes the world, making it holy. Our repentant way of life reflects our resistance to those things which are eroding away our Christian peculiarity: ecumenism, which tells us that we are what everyone else is; modernism, which sets aside our ancient customs for worldly living; and subtle heresy, which makes a religion of saying what is right, but separates it from doing what is right by repentant action.

When we follow the Church Calendar, which the Orthodox have followed for almost two thousand years, we will be separate from the world. If we worship while standing, we will imitate all who went before us, sacrificing comfort for the ascetic experience of our Faith. If our Priests dress as they should, they will be less likely to engage in improper behaviors or become worldly, as Archbishop Chrysostomos, drawing on the Fathers and his own spiritual Father, Metropolitan Cyprian, constantly teaches us: Can you imagine a properly dressed Priest entering a bar or an inappropriate place? If we fast and live moral lives, we will place ourselves outside of a society that is killing itself by eating junk food and for which morality is almost secondary today, as though Christians were allowed to live like prostitutes, whoremongers, thieves, liars, and the like. In practicing our Faith, we live in resistance to error. And in so doing, we prove to people that life is not about money, sex, ego, witless entertainment, materialism, and all of the things that this unhappy generation seeks. We demonstrate that in resisting the world, we are preparing ourselves for eternity. By *this* witness, we evangelize the world. By *this* witness, we bring together right belief and right practice. Once again, by walling ourselves off from the wrong actions and practices of others, we cure ourselves and commend our therapy, in a spirit of love, to others. Forgoing condemnation, we teach by our example.

I do not argue, and would not argue, of course, that the Old Calendar, proper Churches, standing in worship, women humbly covering their heads, Priests always and everywhere dressed in their cassocks and allowing their hair and beards to grow, fasting, or

morality will guarantee a Christian life. These alone do nothing. But without them, one lacks all of those traditional things that can fully protect us against worldly corruption. Without them, we show no practical resistance to the spirit of ecumenism, innovation, and deviation from Holy Tradition. If the essence of Christianity is not *just* perfect doctrine (or, as the evangelical Protestant world now teaches—at times from within Orthodoxy—religious platitudes or traditional practices separated from traditional belief), it is not *just* religious practice. It is a perfect combination of right belief and right practice as they are joined to the spirit of repentance—that spirit which makes living Gospels of all of us.

If there are sinful, weak, spiritually defective, and imperfect people among us, and I am sure that there are, they are distinguished from the rest of the world, not by their sharing of these deficits, but by a resistance to them that draws on Orthodox belief and an Orthodox way of life deeply rooted, as I have said again and again in my talk, in love for all others. Likewise, the hatred, divisiveness, and judgmentalism of those traditionalists who embrace smug “rightness” drawn from personal opinion that divides the world into enemies and the elect, goats and sheep (a right that belongs to God alone!), or those whom one likes and those whom one hates—they are distinguished from Patristic resisters by their lack of love and repentance.

Resistance that draws on repentance and that is fed by repentance will always be moderate and will always focus on love, seeking not to separate us from our errant brothers and sisters, both within and outside Orthodoxy, but to reconcile them by our good example to the Truth that we unworthily preserve. If our walling-off protects us, our love compels us to go out through the doors of repentance, when at all possible, as living Gospels written in the secret (mystical) language of that same repentance.

Thank you for your patience and attention. I ask your forgiveness.