

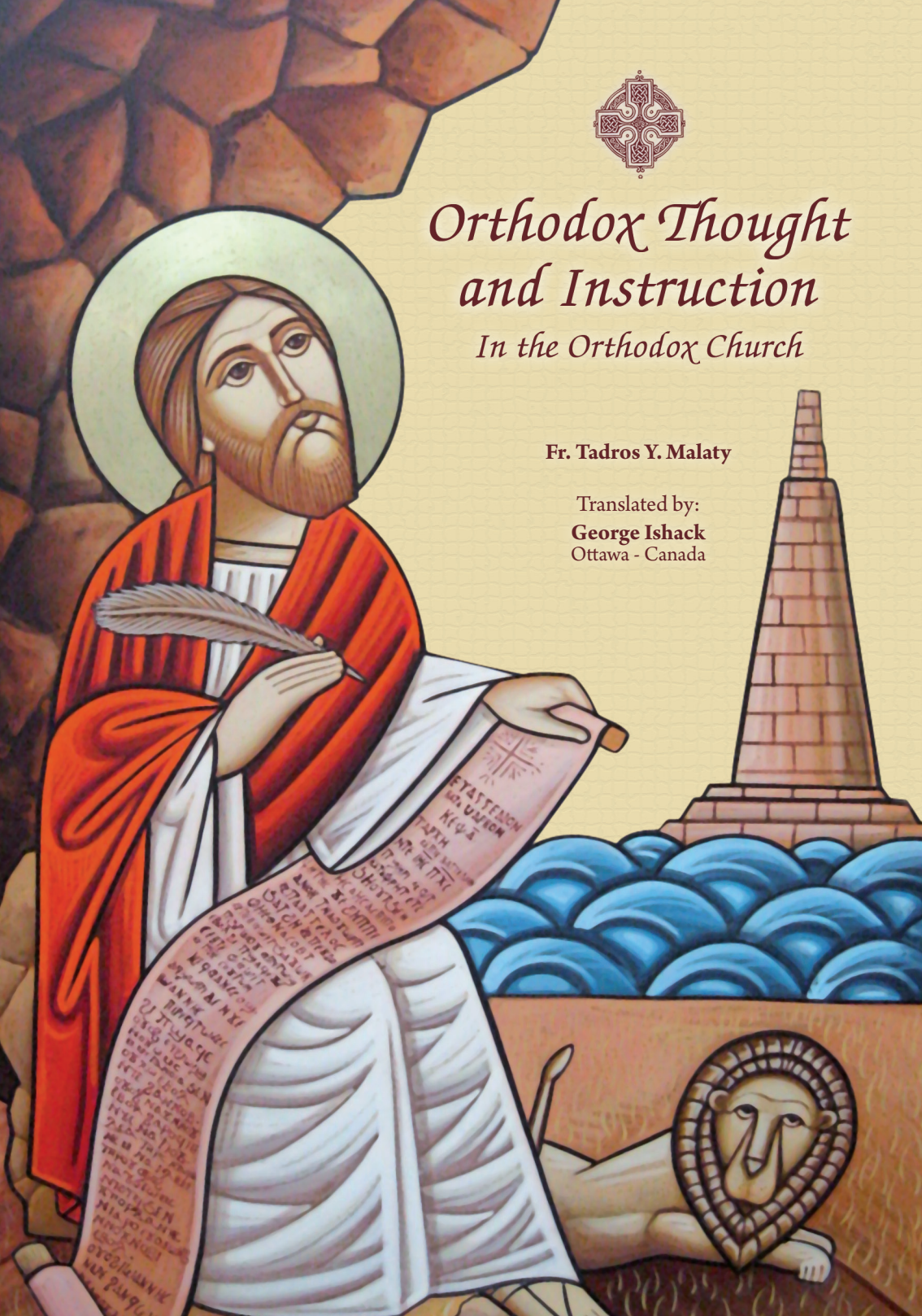


Orthodox Thought and Instruction

In the Orthodox Church

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Translated by:
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Ottawa - Canada



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THE UNIQUE DIVINE TEACHER

The Church's primary task is ensuring the practical encounter of humanity with the Holy Trinity. This task aims for the Church to regain God's lost image in her because of sin; this, in turn, enables the Church to live through Him, on earth, and to embark on a pleasurable trip, during which she delights in heaven's deposit, through the work of the divine grace. This is the purpose of the Word's incarnation, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, and His second coming. He is the **unique Divine Tutor** - the philanthropic Saviour of humanity.

I entreat the Lord to grant us now the understanding of orthodox thought, and its instructive role in the Church's life during its estrangement, in order for her to be propelled to eternal glory:

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ the unique Teacher.
2. Instruction in the School of Alexandria.
3. The view of St. Basil the Great concerning classical instruction and culture.
4. St. Jacob of Serugh's program of instruction.
5. Our instructional needs today.



Our Lord Jesus Christ the unique Teacher

The beloved label for our Lord Jesus Christ assigned by the School of Alexandria was "*Paedagogus*"; this expression denotes a teacher or instructor, who teaches, trains, and realizes His goals towards us. During the second century, St. Clement of Alexandria published his well-known book entitled "*Paedagogus*."

Throughout His teachings, our Christ was characterized by the following:

1. He did not end His role as a Teacher by presenting the truth, revealing divine mysteries, or issuing commandments, instructions, rules, or guidance; rather, through the abundance of His riches and attributes, He grants fellowship with Him to all those who accept Him. We find that as soon as St. Mary accepted that the Word of God be incarnate within her, He started working with and within her; therefore, in the spirit of love, service and humility, she went immediately to the hills of Judaea, to meet with her relative Elizabeth. Rather than offer gifts or advice to her relative, St. Mary offered Elizabeth our Lord Jesus Christ, incarnate in her womb! In turn, the child in Elizabeth's womb was immediately transformed into a joyful preacher, and leapt exultantly! His mother felt him and rejoiced saying: "*But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*" (Luke 1:43)

Whoever accepts our Lord Christ as his Teacher will, in turn, carry his Teacher's Spirit, and will set forth to serve, **offering Christ Himself to all those who encounter Him.** This is precisely what materialized in the Samaritan woman's life whom He met: she left her water jar and went to evangelize in Sychar. (John 4:28)

Thus, the basic tenet of true Christian instruction is for humanity to encounter the Holy Trinity in order to become a true icon of the Divine Teacher.



2. Our Christ's service on earth started **the very first moment of His incarnation**; it constituted an extension to His service which preceded His incarnation, and which was realized through the lives of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), prophets, and the forefathers of the Old Testament. This is as though He wants the flame of love to be kindled immediately within all who meet Him, thus making them desirous, with their Teacher, for everybody who can, to experience the fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

A true believer is the Lord's servant and ambassador, regardless of age or capabilities; whether silently or audibly, he teaches with a smile, inner joy, meekness in the Lord, a fervent heart, prayers, fasting and prostrations. His entire inner being and behaviour become active testimony in the lives of his brethren.

St. Mary served John, the fetus, so that in his turn he set forth to serve while he was still in his mother's womb, and while his name was yet to be recorded in any of the world's birth registers.

3. The primary preoccupation of our divine Teacher's heart is **to transpose us, through His grace, to His heaven**. It therefore befits us to not only talk about heaven, but also, through experiencing its deposit and through God's Holy Spirit, to attract others, so that together, we may enjoy the experience of heaven.

Summing up: through the unique Divine Teacher, we present Orthodox instruction as follows:

a- The focal point of instruction is to reveal the work of the Holy Trinity in us, especially His love, care and salvation.

b- We invite all, even the young children, to witness for the evangelical truth.

c- To our brethren, we offer heaven's sweetness - the sweetness which we savour and in which we live.



**Grant me, O Teacher, that I acquire You,
So that I may serve You,
And offer You to all my brethren, even in my silence!
I do desire for all to acquire You and to become, in
their turn, teachers, capable of witnessing for You!**

† † †



Instruction in the School of Alexandria¹

APPLYING A CHRISTIAN APPROACH IN FACING THE SCHOOLS OF ALEXANDRIA

Upon St. Mark's arrival in Alexandria to evangelize, he realized that Alexandria was home to the largest oriental university, namely, "The School of Alexandria for Philosophy." That school's great library was unrivaled in either orient or occident. So, what did he do?

Long before the dawn of Christianity, Alexandria was famous for its schools, the greatest being "The Museum," which Ptolemy had founded, and which had become the best-known one in the orient. Additionally, there were the schools of Serapeum and Sebastion. Each of those schools had its own huge library² - that of the "Museum" alone boasted between two and five hundred thousand manuscripts and books, during the reign of Ptolemy I. In addition to those schools there were also several Jewish schools, which spread the Jewish culture throughout the land³.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Mark did not resist that university; instead he founded the (Christian) School of Alexandria, at the outset of his evangelical service. That undertaking gives us insights with respect to the apostles' perception of instruction. St. Jerome⁴ testifies that St. Mark had founded the Christian School of Alexandria. Furthermore, that undertaking was at once a means of Christian instruction, and a means of edifying the new religion on a solid basis⁵,

¹ For more information, see the author's "Early Fathers of the School of Alexandria", 1980 (in Arabic).

² C. Bigg: *Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, Oxford 1913, p. 26.

³ According to Phillon, *The number of Jews in Egypt were at least one million.*

⁴ *De Viris Illus.* 36.

⁵ *Coptic Orth. Patriarchate: St. Mark, Cairo 1968, p. 61.*



whether that was for those of Jewish origin or Gentile one. As Alexander Roberts states that the earliest seat of Christian learning has been founded... and Alexandria became the brain of Christendom... while the West was still receptive only, its hands and arms stretched forth - towards the Orient for greater enlightenment¹."

THE ECCLESIASTIC LEADERSHIP'S BROADENING PERSPECTIVE

This school with its deans reveals the extent of the broadening perspective of the Church's leadership in those days. This school is considered a living example for us to follow. It has been said that it is doubtful that one could find a better system for the Christian learning than that which was established in Alexandria^{2 3}."

1. The school was open to all, regardless of religion, culture, social standing, or age. Hence, instruction was at once ecumenical and unified treating, on an equal footing, all society's classes, whether they be masters or slaves³."

We truly need to pause in admiration before our early forefathers who, through their sublime spirituality, managed to found a school in the first century which welcomed both genders, at a time when the entire civilized world discriminated between them^{4 5}. Equally admirable was awarding the same status to master and slave, at a time when slaves were traded as objects! This image alone, represented practical evangelization, preaching live Christian faith, which unified all in Christ Jesus our Lord. This image also lays a significant burden on the shoulders of teachers: they commit to presenting a program suited to each one's thinking level.

¹ *A.N. Frs., vol 2, Introd. note to Clem. of Alex., p. 165.*

² *C. Bigg. p. 71.*

³ *Cf. Rev. Markary El- Souriany: Ancient and contemporary Christian Education in the Coptic Church, Princeton, 1955, p 78.*

⁴ *C. Bigg. p 69.*



2. Such receptiveness led to the impossibility of the school's studies being confined to the Holy Bible and theology; rather, as of the second century, if not earlier, its program had evolved into a **comprehensive encyclopaedic one**. This traditional program, typical of Alexandria, was also applied in that city's Jewish and pagan schools. In this regard, Carl S. Meyer remarks that *this school was a center for philosophical, scientific and catechetical instruction, because of the Alexandrians' belief that all knowledge contributes to the perception of the truth, which peaks in Christian theology*¹. Further expounding on the excellence of the school's programs, W. J. Gauche said that *It seems that... in Alexandria, instruction has attained a level of sublimation strongly resembling, in form and direction, the system followed by our modern universities, more so than earlier universities in other parts of the Greco-Roman world*².

3. The School of Alexandria adopted a graduated approach. Most likely, studies started with secular sciences, thus enabling the teacher to **win over the hearts of non-believers, establishing a common basis for philosophical and scientific thought**, and drawing them towards the only Teacher, Jesus Christ. Religious morals and ethics would follow, not as a goal in Christians' lives, rather, as the godlike model to which they should conform. The final stage is the study of Christian theology, in the form of commentaries, and biblical exegesis.

4. This school was characterized by its **melding of academic learning with a life of pioussness and faith**. Worship was thus practiced alongside studying³. With the aim of embarking on the path of Christian perfection, teachers,

¹ Carl S. Meyer: *The Church from Pentecost to the Present*, Chicago 1970, p. 32.

² W. J. Gauche: *Didymus the Blind, an educator at the fourth century*, Washington 1954, p. 36.

³ J. Lebreton: *History of the Primitive Church*, vol 3, London 1946, p. 732.



together with their students, prayed, fasted, and led an ascetic, chaste, life. The professors led exemplary lives - most were known for their love of celibacy and asceticism¹.

5. The school was also known for **promoting scientific research**. Hence, teachers were not merely lecturers dictating whatever they desired to their students - rather, they awarded more attention to counselling in the areas of research and prospecting, with emphasis on constant discussions. The testimony of St. Gregory of Nazianzus hints at this approach: he stated that his professor, Origen, considered that those enrolling in the school had the right to study philosophy wisely and diligently, and to respect writings of antecedents in the field. Origen, furthermore, was more like a counsellor, helping his students familiarize themselves with the various schools of philosophy and discern, independently, between truths and falsehoods.

6. Another feature of the school was its fostering of **the development of personal relationships between teachers and their students**; this led to the most sublime form of studentship. Such an atmosphere of learning was quite different from a school where teachers simply lecture their students. The school thus became an integral part of church life which, fundamentally, is "a life of discipleship."

7. Through this direction, **the school's teachers were rendered ecumenical**; hence, not only did they win many from various cultures, but because they were unprejudiced, they also attracted the attention of the universal - oriental and occidental - Church. In his narrative about two of the school's deans, St. Clement and Origen, Carl S. Meyer² stated that, they were among the foremost ecumenical men, and the greatest in the Early Church." In subsequent centuries, men

¹ *Coptic. Pat.*, p. 63.

² *Carl S. Meyer*, p. 32.



like St. Athanasius the Apostolic and St. Cyril the Great, carried ecclesiastical responsibilities at the ecumenical level.

TANGIBLE EXAMPLES OF ORTHODOX THOUGHT

1. **Athenagoras** was the first philosopher whose strong perseverance earned him the position of Dean of the Theological School of Alexandria, while retaining his philosopher's robe. He was known to have been the first Christian whose faith was permeated with strong philosophical overtones.

2. **Pantaenus**, the School's dean during the second century, was characterized by his open-mindedness, and his extensive readings of philosophical writings. Nevertheless, his contemporaries neither protested against him, nor did they accuse him of deviating from the Faith. Rather, speaking of his own study of philosophy, Origen said he followed Pantaenus' example who had won many cultivated people through his knowledge of philosophy. That approach, introduced by Pantaenus, was further developed by his student Clement, and later restructured by Origen.

Not only was Pantaenus open-minded, but his heart was also all-embracing; in the eyes of Alexandrians, he was not only a scholar or a teacher - rather, he was "the helper of many." His preoccupation with everyone's salvation led that city's inhabitants to label him "our Pantaenus." On the other hand, he accepted Pope Demetrius' invitation to evangelize in India, leaving the School's leadership temporarily in the hands of Clement. In his instructional domain, rather than confining himself to a certain location or to a specific congregation, Pantaenus' aim was that everyone enjoy the sweetness of the fellowship of God.

Although the prevailing culture in the orient relied predominantly on the Greek language, Pantaenus' desire to educate his congregation led him to introduce the Coptic



alphabet, by using the Greek letters supplemented by seven letters from the ancient Demotic script. It was thus possible to translate the Holy Bible to Coptic under his direction; he was aided in this great task, by his students Clement and Origen. Researchers award the same level of importance to this translation as they do the Greek original¹. In his quest to offer the Egyptian commoners as high a degree of education as possible, St. Pantaeus translated numerous Christian literature works into Coptic, due to the latter's having been considered as the latest stage of development of the ancient Egyptian language. In fact, several writers had started using Coptic instead of Greek.

Pantaeus interpreted all the books of the Holy Bible: from Genesis through Revelation, both orally and in writing. For this reason, his contemporaries labelled him "Interpreter of the Word of God." Unfortunately, all we have today of his writings are a few excerpts mentioned in the writings of his student St. Clement.

3. **St. Clement** was Pantaeus' student, and successor as the School's dean. St. Jerome described him as the most learned of all², and a person whose known writings are filled with knowledge and eloquence, **utilizing both holy and worldly literature**³. Socrates furthermore said that Clement was filled with wisdom⁴.

St. Clement's writings reveal the hand of a skilful author since they blend Christian principles side-by-side with then-contemporary publications; for this reason he merited the title of "**Leader of Christian culture**"⁵. His writings emphasize the fact that his comprehensive culture embodied philosophy, poetry, archaeology, mythology, literature, logic and music.

¹ *Coptic Patriarchate: St Mark, p 67.*

² *Epist. 70:4.*

³ *De Vir. Illus. 38.*

⁴ *Socrates H:E 2: 35.*

⁵ *Quasten, Vol 2, p 6.*



The wide scope of his knowledge also included the early Christian writings such as books of the Holy Bible, post-apostolic writings, as well as heretics' writings. We can thus agree with J. Patrick¹ that, besides being the Church's champion for a liberated ecclesiastical culture, St. Clement was the first to introduce and teach Christianity as a program.

The following points summarize the views of St. Clement of Alexandria with respect to philosophy:

a- He believed that there was no conflict between the Church's constitution and the Holy Scriptures on the one hand, and philosophy on the other; he also believed that no enmity exists between Christianity and philosophy. In a nutshell, he felt that **philosophy is not a product of darkness**, rather, each of its sects was "*illuminated by the dawn of Light*"² from the Logos. He started his book "*Stromata*" (meaning: miscellaneous) by criticizing those who characterized philosophy as "evil," and he promised to clarify - through that book - that philosophy, in a sense, represents the Divine disposition³: It was said of Clement that he was the first Christian writer who married the Faith with philosophy. Subsequently, his student Origen used philosophy occasionally to counter arguments presented by heretics armed with philosophy. Leaders of the School of Alexandria used philosophy in their positive response to those enemies of the Christian Faith who claimed that Christianity prevented people from pursuing philosophical studies.

b- St. Clement sees that Providence never neglected a single nation. He contends that just as God prepared the Hebrews, through the Law, to lead them to Jesus Christ, He used philosophers for the Greeks to attain the same goal. In this regard St. Clement says: "Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for

¹ J. Patrick: *Clement of Alexandria, London 1914, p 13.*

² *Strom. 1: 13.*

³ *Ibid 1: 4.*



righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration. The philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. As the Law led the Hebrews to Christ (Galatians 3:24), in the same way, philosophy was a preparation, paving the way for those who were to be perfected in Christ¹."

The Saint gave many examples demonstrating that the Greeks borrowed much from the Old Testament². He said that Plato adopted the views of Moses and the prophets - albeit in a misleading way. Furthermore, he likened the Greek philosophy unto the Mosaic covenant. However, St. Clement stressed that faith is the foundation of all knowledge³, greater than it, and the judge of it⁴.⁴ He also defended the faith against opposing philosophers⁵.

c- The Saint clarified⁶ that a **true Gnostic or Christian welcomes all kinds of knowledge and, rather than fearing philosophy, benefits from it**. It is true that, whereas philosophy intimidates the masses, just as children fear losing their way if they wore masks, a Christian, through faith, can discern truth, and differentiate between unchangeable facts and vain perspectives. This is analogous to the skilful cashier who separates counterfeit notes from legal tender. Hence, a Gnostic is undaunted by false statements, and would cry with David saying: "For the righteous shall never be shaken (Psalm 112:6), neither through vain claims, nor misguided passions. The righteous' claim to his heritage is unwavering: "He will not be afraid of evil tidings;" (Psalm 112:7) hence, he will neither be perturbed by unfounded allegations, nor affected by prevailing meaningless opinions.

¹ *Stromata 1:5.*

² *Strom 2: 5.*

³ *Ibid 2: 4.*

⁴ *Ibid 2: 4: 5.*

⁵ *Ibid 2: 2: 8.*

⁶ *Ibid 6: 10.*



Clement also notes in his clarifications that, whereas a gnostic **uses philosophy in a good way, in order to ferret out the partially-appearing truth**, heretics use it in an evil way, in order to mislead. He furthermore believes that philosophy is capable of exposing the sophists' errors, and revealing their perversion.

In his book "*Protrepticus*," (or "exhortation to the heathen"), Clement invites humanity to accept our Lord Jesus Christ, saying, "Hear, then, ye who are far off, hear ye who are near: the Logos has not been hidden from any; He is the common Light which shines on all men. No more darkness in the world. Lets us haste to our salvation, to our regeneration¹."

4. **Origen**: In his four-volume "*Patrology*," Quasten states that *the School of Alexandria reached its peak of grandeur under St. Clement's successor, Origen*², *the outstanding teacher and scholar of the early Church,... a man of encyclopaedic learning and an unblemished personality, and considered to be one of the most original thinkers the world has ever seen*³. Some regard Origen as the greatest profound thinker in the Church's history⁴.

Philosophy, to Origen, was analogous to the jewellery which the Jews brought with them out of Egypt: they used it both to decorate their sacraments, and to build the golden calf. Philosophy is not the truth's enemy; rather, it accompanies and supports the truth, minimizing the attacks against it.

In teaching literature and rhetoric to the heathens, young Origen found his opportunity to witness, as far as practicable, to the Christian Faith; he used to point out the center of theologies among the Greek writings. He thus attracted some

¹ *Protrepticus* 9.

² *Origen name means "Son of Horus". Horus was the Egyptian sun god.*

³ *Quasten: Patrology, vol 2, p. 37.*

⁴ *Carl S. Meyer: The Church, p. 32.*



pagans whose quest was to listen to his Christian teachings; among those pagans was Plutarch, later martyred, and his brother Heracles, who became one of Alexandria's patriarchs.

Origen devoted his entire energy not only to studying the Holy Bible and teaching it, but also to offering his life as a role model for an evangelistic life. In this regard, his disciple **St. Gregory the Wonder-worker** says: *"He attracted us through his works, more so than his teachings."* Eusebius also tells us: *"Origen's behaviour was perfectly consistent with his teachings which were compatible with his life. For this reason, the Divine power working within him drove many to his zeal. Through his harsh philosophical life, he managed to subjugate his desires to the maximum extent of his capability; he achieved this by training himself to fast, and sometimes by limiting his periods of sleep. His overwhelming enthusiasm led him to sleep on the floor rather than on a bed."*

In addition to his ascetic life, Origen awarded much importance to prayer, being an integral part of the ascetic life. Prayer supports the soul's liberation, and aids its entrance in a deeper communion with God. Origen also felt that prayer is necessary for obtaining the grace of God which, in turn, helps us understand His word¹.

5. In one of his epistles, **St. Dionysius** encourages believers to read philosophical literature - even writings which had not been validated. He explained this by the fact that God revealed Himself to him through numerous books, and called him saying: *"Study anything that you can lay your hands on, since you are called to examine and prove things. This gift, from the start, is the primary reason for your faith."* The saint accepted the revelation, and never abandoned reading; this knowledge enabled him to challenge the enemy in his lair.

¹ Hom. Jer. 6: 3



The School of Alexandria offered the ecclesiastic perception of instruction, namely:

1. While philosophy and scientific research provide us with knowledge that should not be belittled, they must not be deified.

2. Ecclesiastical instruction, in all its branches, aims for the enjoyment of experiencing the Holy Trinity in all facets of our lives.

3. Faith-based traditions, worship, and practical conduct are inseparable.

4. We must enjoy open-minded, joyous and heavenly evangelical thinking.

5. A believer should be open to love all of humanity, and should yearn for the salvation of all.

6. Through a true ecumenical spirit, our constant spiritual struggle should be aimed at genuine faith-embodied thought.

7. Our growth in knowledge, research and study, should be continuous.

8. Instruction should be through studentship in a paternal or fraternal spirit, combined with instilling in the students a spirit of leadership, witnessing, and evangelization, in sincere and unfeigned humility.



The View of St. Basil the Great Concerning Classical Instruction and Culture

The relationship between faith and classical instruction, such as studying philosophy, research and scientific theories, represents an age-old debate. No wonder that Solomon, to whom God granted wisdom, requires us to be educated since our childhood: *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6) In his conversation with the Jews, Deacon Stephen said: *"And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."* (Acts 7:22) Furthermore, St. Paul tells us: *"Test all things; hold fast what is good."* (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Now let us take a close look at the view of St. Basil the Great concerning contemporary philosophy and science. Is it befitting for believers to send their children to private schools, where philosophy, science, grammar and pagan literature are taught?

ADDRESS TO YOUNG MEN ON "HOW THEY WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE HELLENIC LITERATURE?"

In 364 A.D., St. Basil published a treatise calling on the youth to enrol in those schools to study philosophy and the sciences, explaining how they can benefit from Hellenic culture. This treatise, subsequently translated into English by Dr. F. M. Padelford, was corroborated by St. Basil's life: hence, his piety, education, and evangelic and pastoral work, both during his studies in Athens, and during his service as priest, then archbishop, in Caesarea. It was also substantiated by the Saint's monastic principles, and his preoccupation with establishing schools run by monks, offering the methodology



to which the monks were committed, with respect to dealing with the young men joining those schools.

St. Basil wrote this treatise in response to the stance of emperor Julian the apostate, who had noticed the success of Basil along with his friend Gregory (they all studied in the same university.) Julian realized that the studies which the two friends enjoyed did not hinder their Christian service; rather, their excellence coupled with their piety helped their witnessing for the Divine truth amidst the pagans and perverts. Therefore, one of the most significant edicts which Julian issued following his apostasy was the prohibition of Christians from enrolling in those schools, hoping that by limiting their educational opportunities, they could be accused of illiteracy and ignorance.

Christians' reactions to Julian's position varied. While some felt that it was necessary to rewrite the Holy Bible in classical Greek, in a way that would attract contemporary philosophers and cultured Hellenes, others' perception was that what Julian did was in the Christians' best interest, since they did not need Greek culture, and that there was no relationship between Athens, the centre for Hellenic culture, and Jerusalem, the centre of the Christian Faith. For this reason, when the schools reopened their doors to Christians, some wondered about the position of the Church's leaders. St. Basil's reaction was to encourage the faithful youth to study and to be educated, albeit with a spirit of discernment and wisdom.

Despite the fact that, apparently, the Saint wrote that treatise by way of advice to his nephews, who had enrolled in pagan schools to study philosophy, it nevertheless was instrumental in giving us insights with respect to St. Basil's views concerning classical Greek literature and contemporary science.

In the "Orthodox America" Website, this treatise which was translated by Dr. F. M. Padelford, was referred to, and the



translator commented on St. Basil's treatise saying that it revealed a greater breadth of thought of many of the Church's forefathers, than that of contemporary Church leaders¹.

EARLY BASILIANS AND THE ADDRESS TO YOUNG MEN ON "HOW THEY WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE HELLENIC LITERATURE?"

Basilians attach much historical weight to this treatise. In 1822, the college at Annonay (France) studied its original Greek text; its significance is evident in the early Basilians' choice of Basil as their role model and patron saint².

THE FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED ST. BASIL

1. The saint was raised by his father, the able teacher Basil senior; the latter taught and tempered the youth, between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, in Caesarea. Basil senior devoted much of his time to his son's education, upon recognizing his intelligence, excellence, and desire to learn, holding him in great esteem until his death. The son subsequently travelled to Athens to complete his studies.

2. Along with his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, the young Basil was quite distinguished in Athens; they never felt that studying philosophy and the sciences hampered either their spiritual life or their witnessing for the Gospel of Christ, before their colleagues who were a mix of heretics, degenerates and perverts. Rather, they assumed a positive role and attracted many to the Divine truth; and they were admired not only by their colleagues, but also by their teachers.

¹ *Essays on the Study and Use of Poetry by Plutarch and Basil the Great*, Dr. F. M. Padelford, trans., *Yale Studies in English*, Vol. XV; New York, Holt and Co. 1902. (cf. *Orthodox America In Internet, Learning With Discernment – The Education Theory of St. Basil the Great.*)

² *James Hanrahan: The Life of Saint Basil the Great, 1979, The Basilian Press, Toronto.*



3. We should also remember the strong friendship that existed between St. Basil and St. Athanasius, the then pope of Alexandria. It was mentioned earlier that the School of Alexandria was the first Christian, scientific institution, whose program encompassed those studies alongside ecclesiastical and biblical studies. When asked about the reason for his use of worldly philosophies, Origen said that his teacher, Pantaenus, attracted many philosophers to the Faith, by conversing with them in their own philosophical language.

4. The three great Cappadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, lived in an atmosphere of a high cultural level; this came about either through their strong friendship, or through family ties.

5. Also, we shouldn't forget the role of the famous rhetorician/orator Libanius who cultivated Basil's love for Greek literature; Basil's faith, nevertheless, remained steadfast.

6. Finally, it is worth quoting Gregory, Basil's friend, concerning their life in Athens: *"We experienced two paths: the first, which is dearest to us, is the one which leads us to the Church and her teachers; the second, less favoured one, leads us to the school and its dean."* Basil definitely felt, sometimes, that he wasted too much of his time studying contemporary sciences, given that they compare very poorly with the Christian Faith. This is the reason he said in his later years: *"I have likely wasted all my youth in a vain attempt to learn that wisdom which, in the eyes of God, constitutes folly."* On the other hand, we should point out that he used those very sciences to attract pagan philosophers, and to respond to heretics, such as the Arians, who used philosophy to spread their heresy; it was necessary to respond to them in kind, hence, in their own language and style.



THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE TREATISE

St. Basil revealed the Christian's position with respect to classic Greek literature. Although the latter's comparison with the Holy Bible is not plausible, he does point out that some of that literature is helpful and fit for educational purposes.

St. Basil was not hostile towards any of the philosophical texts - he read the works of Greek poets and writers. Basil regarded whatever he laid his hands on as being analogous to very beautiful shapes, forms and images. He had no preferences whatsoever. He simply used the language and style which prevailed at that time, to the extent that one is convinced that Basil could not, for an instant, express himself outside the thought framework of that age. This fact is to his credit, rather than one of his faults, as some might believe¹.

The points below give a broad outline of the main ideas in the treatise:

1. In his introduction, Basil referred the youth to **his own practical personal experience** in regards to pagan literature; studying it gave him insights in human affairs, enabling him to discern the right path for those starting their life's journey.

❖ My children - I am desirous in offering you good advice. There are many reasons which have driven me to write this, and I am confident that you will find it useful, if you adopt it. As you can see, I have reached a certain age and I have amassed much experience, especially having contributed, more than my colleagues, to the establishment of that school where everything is taught, despite scathing criticism. All this has given me experience in human affairs, and enabled me to point out the right path to those starting life's journey².

Saint Basil the Great

¹ Dr. George A. Ibrahim, *St. Basil the Great, The Orthodox Center for Paternal Studies, Cairo. (in Arabic)*.

² Cf. "How Can they benefit from the Hellenic Culture?" 1.



2. St. Basil appreciates the importance of Hellenic culture. Hence, **classical sciences adorn the mind**, just like foliage gracing fruit-bearing trees: leaves do not harm the fruit, rather, they cover it.

Here, he outlines definitively the relationship between truth and social sciences, such as philosophy, education, poetry, arts, literature and others: while truth resembles the soul's fruit, the sciences are the leaves protecting this fruit, and giving it a beautiful appearance. Divine truth occupies first place, and all the sciences rank second: their role is to serve the truth. On the basis of his first-hand experience, St. Basil asserts that anyone reversing this order strays.

St. Basil emphasizes the breathtaking beauty of the sciences serving the Divine truth; indeed, God's entire creation, including the sciences, is splendid and beautiful (see the Hexaemeron, Homily 1:11; 2:1)¹.

3. When studying pagan references, **it is necessary to discern between useful and harmful material**; we accept the former and reject the latter, which is analogous to listening to an enchanting, attractive, yet profane, song. We should act as a bee flying from one flower to another: its flight is not indiscriminate, rather, it seeks the right fragrance, rejects the poison, and takes only that which is necessary to realize its mission which, ultimately, is the production of honey. Similarly, a wise person will glean that which suits his needs and befits the truth, and will reject the rest.

Although it is not plausible to compare classical references with the Holy Bible, St. Basil points out that some of that material is helpful, and fit for educational purposes.

¹ Dr. George A. Ibrahim, *St. Basil the Great, The Orthodox Center for Paternal Studies, Cairo. (in Arabic)*.



❖ First, let us consider poets' works: they address numerous topics such that we cannot regard them indiscriminately. They quote sometimes from the works and sayings of righteous people, thus inducing us to love them and to do our utmost to follow their example. On the other hand, their imagination sometimes wanders towards evildoers; thereby we should avoid such examples. Accustoming one to hearing depraved language is one way of traversing towards wicked deeds.

It befits us to follow the bees' example, as they discriminate between the flowers they approach. When they fly to a certain species, rather than attempting to transport the whole flower, they only take that which satisfies their needs, leaving the rest without even considering it. By the same token, the wise amongst us will gather that which suits our needs and supports the truth, and dismiss the rest¹.

Saint Basil the Great

4. St. Basil **sees value in studying ancient writings, provided that the best works of poets, historians and rhetoricians are selected**, and the material which deemed harmful to the students' souls is distanced from them. While St. Basil was not worried about the readerships' faith, he was quite mindful of their behaviourisms.

5. Lessons concerning virtue have a pronounced effect on a youth's life. While most prominent philosophers extol virtue, it behoves us to examine their lives, which could be inconsistent with their writings.

Caesarea's Christian youth could find **examples of virtuous lives** in Homer, Hesios, Theognis, Solon, Euripides and Plato, since their writings praised virtue.

¹ Cf. "How Can they benefit from the Hellenic Culture?" 4.



- ❖ Through virtue we reap for ourselves a treasure for the other life. In most cases, poets, surrealist writers and many philosophers extol virtue. We need to apply this kind of study to ourselves. The birth of a type of knowledge specific to virtue, in the youth's souls, is an invaluable gain. It is equally priceless for a person to learn, at that age, that nature steers us towards resisting change, such lessons are deeply effective on those malleable souls.

Now as I have heard from one skilful in interpreting the mind of a poet, all the poetry of Homer is a praise of virtue, and with him all that is not merely accessory tends to this end¹.

- ❖ Almost all who have written upon the subject of wisdom have more or less, in proportion to their several abilities, extolled virtue in their writings².

Saint Basil the Great

6. As the works of those genteel people are praised if they are in accordance with their writings, similarly, **it is befitting to study their works if they are in agreement with the teachings of the Holy Bible.**

- ❖ If, then, there is any affinity between the two literatures, a knowledge of them should be useful to us in our search for truth; if not, the comparison, by emphasizing the contrast, will be of no small service in strengthening our regard for the better one.

Just as it is the chief mission of the tree to bear its fruit in its season, though at the same time it puts forth for ornament the leaves which quiver on its branches. Even so the real fruit of the soul is truth, yet it is not without advantage for it to embrace the pagan wisdom, as also leaves offer shelter to the fruit, and an appearance not untimely³.

Saint Basil the Great

¹ Cf. "How Can they benefit from the Hellenic Culture?" 5.

² Cf. "How Can they benefit from the Hellenic Culture?" 6.

³ Cf. "How Can they benefit from the Hellenic Culture?" 3.



7. As the youth become acquainted with what is useful versus what is harmful, it is appropriate for them to ingrain in their minds **the ultimate goal of a Christian's life, namely, eternal life.** They thus expend all their energies and talents towards acquiring the heavenly crown. Some of those studies lead us to appreciate the fact that life on earth has no value, other than our using it with all our might to prepare ourselves for the other life.

Once this is realized through classical education, full growth and maturity are achieved through **studying the Holy Bible** - this being the avenue whereby we store our knowledge of eternal life. On the other hand, in case of the youth's inability to understand fully the value of the Holy Scriptures' profound thoughts, **they can turn to secular sciences where the truth appears as it were in a mirror.**

❖ We Christians, young men, hold that this human life is not a supremely precious thing, nor do we recognize anything as unconditionally a blessing which benefits us in this life only... but we place our hopes upon the things which are beyond, and in preparation for the life eternal do all things that we do. Accordingly, whatever helps us towards this we say that we must love and follow after with all our might...

The Holy Scriptures lead us, through the mysteries we learned, to that life eternal.

But so long as our immaturity forbids our understanding to their deep thought, we exercise our spiritual perceptions upon profane writings, which are not altogether different, and in which we perceive the truth as if it were in shadows or in mirrors. Thus we imitate those who perform the exercises of military practice, for they acquire skill in gymnastics and in dancing, and then in battle reap the reward of their training... Consequently we must be



conversant with poets, with historians, with orators, indeed with all men who may further our soul's salvation¹.

Saint Basil the Great

8. This goal is achieved by controlling the body, despising wealth and the love of lusts, and subjugating all to virtue. St. Basil offered examples from literature from which we conclude that heathens also desire, and seek after, good.

9. The saint gave some examples from the Holy Bible of some who used classical education; these include Moses who was trained in the wisdom of the Egyptians, and Daniel who studied Chaldean culture and sciences.

10. Some may wonder: Should not the Holy Bible suffice and obviate the need for contemporary cultures? St. Basil's response is that the Holy Bible contains all we need to delight in salvation. But the Holy Bible also calls on us to study, learn and advance on all fronts - just like the river into which pure waters flow uninterrupted, nourishing and feeding it continuously.

Believers can, furthermore, benefit from pagan, classical, literature in training the soul, until they should master the understanding of the Holy Bible's profound meanings.

❖ Now, to be sure, we shall become more intimately acquainted with these precepts in the sacred writings, but it is incumbent upon us, for the present time, to trace, as it were, the silhouette of virtue in the pagan authors. For those who carefully gather the useful from each book are wont, like mighty rivers, to gain accessions on every hand².

Saint Basil the Great

¹ Cf. "How Can they benefit from the Hellenic Culture?" 2.

² Cf. "How Can they benefit from the Hellenic Culture?" 10.



ST. BASIL AND THE CONTEMPORARY CULTURES

St. Basil was raised, along with his brothers and sister, in a family that was at once wealthy, cultured and pious. Their mother St. Emmelia, together with her mother, St. Macrina the elder, trained them to study the Holy Bible. The fruit of this upbringing was that the three boys became bishops, and their sister, the young St. Macrina, fostered a convent or a home for virgins.

The father, an orator, was delighted to find his son Basil enjoying the same talent. Basil was later sponsored by the well-known (pagan) orator, Libanius, who also instilled in him a love for Hellenic literature. At the same time, St. Basil considered the Christian path to be more sublime than any philosophy.

The Saint not only used classical philosophy and sciences in rebuffing Arianism, but he also encouraged their use in defending Christianity, and in supporting the Holy Bible's studies with respect to promoting enjoyment of the powerful nourishment.

THE NEED FOR PIOUS BIBLICAL WISDOM

Despite all the emphasis which St. Basil placed on the importance of the classical contemporary studies, he asserts repeatedly that these cannot compare with the Divine, evangelical, truth.

- ❖ I wasted a long time in follies, and I spent most of my youth in vain activities, and in seeking worldly wisdom which, in God's view, constitutes ignorance. I woke up suddenly, as it were, from a deep sleep, and saw the wondrous light of the evangelical truth. I then realized the vanity of the wisdom of "*...the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*" (1 Corinthians 2:6)



I poured out a flood of tears lamenting my wretched life; and I prayed to find a guide capable of instilling within me the principles of true piousness... My focus was then on correcting my conduct, having corrupted it through my long association with evil doers. I then read the Bible, and saw that there was no chance of attaining perfection other than through selling one's possessions, giving the poor their share, and renouncing all life's selfishness, until the soul is left with nothing that might pollute it with any worldly issue¹.

Saint Basil the Great

¹ *Letters, 223:2.*



St. John Chrysostom's Program of Instruction

St. John Chrysostom is considered to be the most prominent personality in the Church of Antioch, that gives us a vivid image of his pastoral, evangelical, ecclesiastic program of education. In a separate publication, I addressed in greater detail St. John's personality as a teacher, as well as his attributes in teaching, evangelizing, shepherding and preaching¹.

THE TEACHER'S PERSONALITY AND THE PROGRAM

Although many concentrate on the educational program and its contents, St. John Chrysostom, in addition to the importance he awards to the program, considers that the teacher's personality, plus both his manifest and hidden qualities, represent a vital part of the program - since this constitutes the practical gospel read by all. Hence, he exhorts teachers to let their lives be a shining beacon of education for everyone, and an example of overall virtue. (Titus 2:7-8)

- ❖ Consider how Christ accredited His works by His deeds. He thus says: ***"Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart."*** (Matthew 11:29) He taught men to be poor, and exhibited this by His actions, He thus said: ***"The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*** (Matthew 8:20) Again, He charged men to love their enemies; and He taught the same lesson on the Cross, when He prayed for those who were crucifying Him. He said, ***"If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also."*** (Matthew 5:40) Now He not only gave

¹"St. John Chrysostom, His Life, Writings & Thoughts", Fr. Tadros Malaty, 1980 (in Arabic).



His garments, but even His blood. In this manner He bade others to teach. Wherefore Paul also said, "**Brethren, join in following my example.**" (Philippians 3:17) **For nothing is more frigid than a teacher who shows his philosophy only in words: this is to act the part not of a teacher, but of a hypocrite.** Therefore the apostles first taught by their conduct, and then by their words; nay rather they had no need of words, when their deeds spoke so loud. Nor is it wrong to speak of Christ's Passion as action, for in suffering all He performed that great and wonderful act, by which He destroyed death, and effected all else that He did for us¹.

St. John Chrysostom

He accentuated the need to witness for the Gospel of Christ by adopting the following attributes:

a- **Rigour and loyalty coupled with love and gentleness** - he rejoices in the salvation of those who encountered them. Accompanying his extreme tenderness towards sinners, is an adherence to proclaiming God's anger directed at those who have hardened their hearts, persisting in their intransigence². Coincidentally, he emphasizes that the priest standing at the pulpit is the emissary of the Heavenly King³, proclaiming the good tidings. He is the physician who not only severs causing pain, but he also needs to bandage and heal wounds⁴. He is the salt which, in addition to its bitter taste, is capable of rendering food palatable⁵. A priest's preoccupation should not be with administering punishment, rather, with the fervent desire to save souls⁶. St. Chrysostom's consistent and constant principle was: *[My desire is not to*

¹ *Hom. On Acts, Homily 1.*

² *Non esse ad gratiam concionandum, 2 PG 50: 653.*

³ *In Gen, homily 44:1. PG. 54:406.*

⁴ *In 10 millia talent, 2 PG 51:19.*

⁵ *In Matt., homily 15:7.*

⁶ *In Gen., homily 24:8 PG 53:216-17.*



punish sinners, rather, to heal the afflicted¹.]

[A teacher does not need authority alone, rather, he also needs gentleness; on the other hand, he does not need gentleness alone, rather, he also needs authority².]

[I know of no life besides you, and my preoccupation with your souls³.]

[I rejoice in seeing you advancing in spiritualities⁴.]

*[I cannot forget you... rather, your images are forever before my eyes - I derive much comfort from contemplating about them. Whether I am seated or standing up, walking or resting, entering my home or leaving it, you are always on my mind. You occupy my thoughts even in my dreams, dearly beloved, since I derive pleasure from such recollections not only during the light of day, but also after the sun had set. In this regard, I join Solomon in saying, "**I sleep, but my heart is awake.**" (Song of Solngs 5:2) The power of sleep closes my eyes, but the power of love for you opens the eyes of my soul. I usually dream that I am standing on the pulpit talking to you... since I can see you through the eyes of love⁵.]*

"Evangelization keeps me healthy; all fatigue flees from me as soon as I open my mouth, and as soon as I start teaching, all feelings of exhaustion disappear. For this reason, neither sickness, nor the tens of other obstacles, can separate me from your love. Consequently, I wanted to be present, this beautiful feast. Although I have been bedridden until now, God did not want me to die of starvation. As you hunger to listen, so I hunger to evangelize... my congregation is the crown of my glory and, in my view, each person who listens is worth more than the rest of the city⁶.]

¹ In S. Phocam mart, l. PG 50:699.

² In 1 Tim. hom 17.

³ ad pop. Ant. Hom 9:1 PG 49:103.

⁴ In Gen. Hom 32:1; in Matt.17:7 In Gen. Hom. 4:1, 9:2.

⁵ de poenitentia, Hom 1:1 PG 49:277-78.

⁶ Hom. Post terral motum. PG 50:713-14.



[The day in which I was deprived from your company seemed like a year! I drowned in sorrow like a child snatched away from his mother's bosom - he looks at her arms with longing eyes, just like my quest for your company!]¹

[I constantly embraced you in my heart - that is why I do not feel the burden of teaching anymore; the load becomes easy, as long as the audience is benefitting!]

[This is truly the only reward I need to renew my vigour; it gives me wings, elevates me, and urges me to endure hardships for your sake!]²

b- St. John converses with his children **as a physician concerned about their well-being**; he thus says: *[I am a physician offering treatment; I am a teacher and I teach³.]*

[Picture to yourselves that you are suffering from an eye affliction, and that I am your physician; I therefore administer various kinds of ointments and oils... since the desired results are not achieved. Analogously, you knock on my door and reproach my laziness... I respond by discussing with you, once more, alms-giving - since I feel it is incumbent on me to revive your paralyzed hands, and to continue treating them until they are outstretched to give⁴.]

c- **He opens to sinners the gates of hope:** *[Truly, brethren, I am a priest of God, because of God's will for me; I am a sinner like you, beating my breast, asking with you, for forgiveness, and aspiring with you, to His mercies! Inform us, O saintly apostles: After the Lord's resurrection, and after your edification in the Holy Spirit Who descended upon you, did you become completely immune to sin?... Let us listen to their answer, so sinners would not despair..." **If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not***

¹ *In faciem PG 51:371.*

² *Conc Statues, hom 9:1.*

³ *De Laz. PG 48:1029.*

⁴ *Ad Pop Ant. PG 49:118-119.*



in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1: 9-10)]

d- His openness to criticism by those whom he served:
[I will remain faithful to my friend, even when reproachful, since "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid." (Proverbs 12:1)¹]

"Do you not know that those occupying high offices in the Church, serving the holy altar, are not completely blameless? Indeed they are sinners with perishing bodies! Even we, presiding in the high priest's seat and constantly teaching you, are not without sin - but we do not lose faith in God's love for mankind, and we do not display harshness. God has exposed priests to sin's pain, in order for them to have pity on others².]

e- He demands of those served to pray for his soul:
["A bishop's need of such prayers is greater than you... the higher a person's stature, the more drastic are his falls. One virtue suffices to raise a bishop to heaven, and one transgression is capable of casting him in hell³.]

f- He has no biases towards anyone: *[I will not be concerned with either those who laugh or those who sulk, since the only reason for my occupying this position is to be laughed at and rejected! I am prepared to endure everything. If you persist in your way, ignoring my warnings, my disallowing you from entering the church will be as loud as a trumpet - whether you be a prince or an emperor⁴.]*

ADORATION OF THE HOLY BIBLE

He sees the Holy Bible not only as the meadow from

¹ *de mutatione nominum. Hom. 3:1 PG 51:131.*

² *The Pastoral Love, pp. 376-7. (in Arabic)*

³ *The Pastoral Love, pp. 98-9. (in Arabic)*

⁴ *In Act PG 60:74.*



which emanates a sweet aroma refreshing the world, but also as a paradise into which the soul creeps seeking nourishment and satiation! He also likens it unto a precious pearl which the soul conceals deep within it - and a gold mine which the soul permeates through toil and hard labour, to reap heavenly gold, purified with the fire of the spirit!

[You have heard the apostolic voice! It is a heavenly trumpet! It is the spirit's lute! Indeed, reading the Holy Bible is not only a meadow, but also a paradise offering fragrant flowers, and fruit capable of sustaining the soul!...

We resemble people melting gold extracted from the apostolic mines - not by casting it into an earthly fire burning in an oven, rather, by depositing it in the minds of their souls and the fervour of their spirits!... Let us labour diligently in gleaning small parts of it... since pearls are not valued by their size, but by the beauty of their nature¹.]

[When I see you hungering and unsatisfied through spiritual instruction, I cannot allow a single day to pass without feeding you from the treasures of the Holy Scriptures².]

He firmly believed that whoever preached seeking vain glory is a killer of himself as well as his audience's souls: *[Anyone preaching for the sake of praise from his audience kills himself³.]*

[I will kindle a fire - a fire proceeding from the Holy Scriptures that will burn on your tongues with the glow of divine instruction⁴.]

LEADING THEM TOWARDS HEAVEN THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF GOD

[I know that everyone desires to fly towards heaven sooner

¹ *Conc. Statues hom 1: 1. 2.*

² *In Gen. Hom. 32:2 PG 53:294.*

³ *Non esse ad gratiam concionandum, 2 PG 50:656.*

⁴ *In Gen., 4. Sermon 4:3 PG 54:597.*



than later; but it befits you to demonstrate this desire through deeds¹.]

OFFERING EVANGELICAL THOUGHT WHILE OBSERVING CONTEMPORARY LIFE

Instruction should be offered in a form compatible with contemporary culture. Corroborating this view, St. John used many analogies and examples from the Holy Bible in addition to analogies and examples derived from contemporary thought and lifestyles. He considered that a sermon without analogies and examples is like a headless body. When he spoke of the Mosaic covenant, he said: *[It resembles a mother's breasts, which become of no use to a child once he can sit at a more nutritious table².]* Also *[How useful is a candle's light when the sun is shining?³]*

REJECTING APPLAUSE INSIDE THE CHURCH

St. John halted applause more than once, urging his audience to cooperate with him through their deeds and lifestyles, rather than through their hands and tongues. He said: *[We do not expend much effort in evangelizing in order to reap rowdy applause, but to lead those who are saved from sin, down the path of truth⁴.]*

[Do you really believe that we wish to talk vainly to you, simply so that you might praise us, applaud, then leave? Seriously, of course not! Rather, we only speak in response to your spiritual needs. The greatest praise, which would more than satisfy me, is when one of you renounces evil in pursuit of righteousness, and when I see someone turning from a path of negligence to one of consecration. That is the praise to

¹ *In Joan, hom 1:5.*

² *In Mat. PG 57:261.*

³ *In Philip PG 62:269.*

⁴ *Adv. Judaeos, homily 7:6 PG 48:925.*



which I aspire, which gives me comfort, and which imparts to you much benefit and spiritual richness¹.]

[The church is not a theatre, frequented by people for amusement... put differently, what use is this applause to me - or what is the benefit of praising me? My praise is when you convert my words to deeds².]

[It is proper that we not be satisfied with simply praising the sermon; rather, we should earnestly follow the instructions... I ask you only one thing: prove this, through your actions, and obedience, in your day-to-day life. This is my glory; this is your crown; I cherish this more than a king's crown³.]

INSTILLING IN EACH BELIEVER A SPIRIT OF LEADERSHIP

As much as he believed in the priesthood's authority, St. John was also cognizant of the laity's position as "laymen priests;" he took care, though, to distinguish between the "sacrament of priesthood" and the "laymen priesthood." Believers, following their baptism, become laymen priests, capable - in Christ Jesus - of offering sacrifices of prayer, almsgiving, fasting, selflessness,... *In the baptismal font I became a king, a priest and a prophet. **You are a king, crushing on earth all wickedness, and slaughtering your sins. You are a priest offering yourself an oblation unto God:** you offer your body and yourself a sacrifice to God saying, "Having died with Him, we will also live with Him." **You are a prophet** teaching the principles that you will follow, in accordance with what God has revealed to us⁴.]*

[In some circumstances, there is no difference between a priest and those whom he leads. An example is when we

¹ *In Gen. homily 54:2; In Princ. Acl., homily 4:3.*

² *Ad pop. Ant., homily 2:4; 5:2; 7:5.*

³ *In Rom., homily 16:6; In Gen., homily 1:1; 4:1; 7:1 etc.*

⁴ *In 2 Cor., hom 3:7.*



commune of the awesome sacraments: we are all equal in becoming worthy of them. This is unlike the Old Testament, where the priest ate something different from the congregation - that was because the congregation had no right to share the priest's portion with him. Today, however, things are not the same: we have one body and one chalice for all... The priest and congregation also join in prayers; hence, thanksgiving is offered jointly, not by the priest alone. He starts by giving thanks and they respond saying: "Worthy and just."

*Why do you marvel? Everyone fellowships with the Cherubim themselves, and the heavenly powers, in offering holy lauds. **I have spoken thus to ensure that every layperson is alert, and fully aware that we are all one body, and that any differences among us are simply attributed to differences from one member to another. In this way, priests should not carry the entire burden - rather, we share with them caring for the Church, given that she is one body for all. This supports our great peace, and our continued growth in every virtue¹.***

St. John says that it is improper for priests to be filled with pride, and to insist on their opinions; it is better for the Church that priests consult with knowledgeable laity. In this regard, he offers the example of the apostles themselves: *[They most likely involved laypersons with them to participate in formulating their decisions. Hence, when the seven deacons were ordained (Acts 6:2-3) the apostles met first with the congregation; and when Matthias was ordained, (Acts 1:15) all were present - both men and women².]*

¹ *In 2 Cor., hom 18:3.*

² *In 2 Cor., hom 18:3.*



St. John believes that, through friendship, a layperson is more effective than a priest, in the area of individual spiritual service: *[Do not cast all the load upon your teachers - do not lay it in its entirety on your leaders... if you have the will, you are capable of working amongst yourselves more than us, since you have more opportunities of meeting each other, and your knowledge of your individual circumstances and weaknesses is greater than ours. You also have a greater freedom of speech, love and affection - these aspects are important in teaching...]*

I implore you to not ignore this talent - each one of you has a wife, a friend, a servant, a relative... If you feel obliged to attend a funeral or a dinner, or to help a relative in a particular situation, how then would you not do these things aiming to teach him virtue? Please, do not neglect each other in this way - your reward from God will be great...

"You will then lighten our task by participating with us in everything and stretching your hands towards us; you will become our partners, everyone preoccupied with his, as well as others' salvation¹."

He reiterates: *[Each one of you - if he so wills - is a teacher... You are a shining beacon capable of lighting up tens of thousands of others; on the other hand, if that beacon were extinguished, it will neither give light to itself, nor will it illuminate others. Thus, in a life of purity, permitting the light within us to shine will benefit many students and teachers who select role models amongst themselves, each taking from the other. Listeners will never profit from my words as they do from one another's lives...]*

¹ In Hebr. Hom 30:4-7 PG 63:211.



*They listen to me once or twice a month, or less; even if they managed to memorize everything they heard in church, they will forget it quickly. But great indeed will be their benefit if they see someone constantly practising these teachings. **I know of many families who have benefitted considerably from their servants' virtues.***

I am addressing each individual, plus the congregation as a whole. Let each one look after the salvation of his neighbour... since this would be very advantageous not only in lightening the teacher's load, but also in enabling each student to share the pain which, in turn, will render him capable of becoming a teacher¹.]

[We can consider that each believer is the pastor of his household, as well as his friends, servants, wife, and children².]

[I cannot imagine the salvation of someone who fails to look after the salvation of his brother³.]

[Nothing can be as contemptible as a Christian neglecting others' salvation.]

[Do not say, "I am poor," since the widow's two farthings will shame you. Also, Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have,..." (Acts 3:6), and Paul was so poor that he often went hungry.

Do not cite extenuating circumstances as an excuse - their circumstances too, were harsh.

Do not use your ignorance as an excuse - they were illiterate.

You may be sick - but so was Timothy...

Everyone is capable of helping his brother, at least by offering moral support, if it is not within his power to do something...

Do not claim that you are unable to influence others; as long as you are Christian, it is impossible not to be influential... this is the essence of Christianity.

¹ In 2 Thes, hom 5.

² In Rom. PG 60:660-661.

³ De Sacer. 3:10. PG 48:686.



It is inconsistent to assert that you are a Christian while claiming inability to help others; this is analogous to saying that the sun is incapable of providing light¹.]

One of the factors which helped the growth and success of the early Church is its recognition of the congregation's role, especially the younger generations. In this regard, St. Ambrose says:

- ❖ Beautiful, therefore, is the union between the old and the young. The one to give witness, the other to give comfort; the one to give guidance, the other to give delight...

What are we to say of **Elijah and Elisha**? Though Scripture has not in so many words stated that Elisha was a young man, yet we gather from it that he was the younger.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Barnabas took Mark with him, and Paul took with him Silas (Acts 15:39-40), Timothy (Acts 16:3) and Titus (Titus 1:4).

We see also that duties were divided amongst them according to their capabilities. The elders took the lead in giving counsel, the younger in showing activity. Often, too, those who were alike in virtue but unlike in years, were greatly rejoiced at their union, as Peter and John were.

We read in the Gospel that John was a young man, even in his own words, though he was behind none of the elders in merits and wisdom. For in him was a venerable ripeness of character and the prudence of the mind...²

St. Ambrose

¹ *De Sacer.* 3:10. PG 48:686.

² *St. Ambrose: Duties of the clergy*, book 2:20:100, 101.



Our Instructional Needs In the Current Generation

In light of our view concerning the Early Church, with respect to the ecclesiastic program of education, we can revise our current programs on many fronts such as our teaching through sermons, youth meetings, Sunday Schools service, and the like.

REVEALING THE ORTHODOX UNDERSTANDING

1. The onus on each believer is to grant everyone the orthodox evangelical thought. In our prayers we entreat for the entire world, for the universal Church, and for the coming generations which we have not seen yet, in order for the Lord to enlighten every human being to know the evangelical Divine truth.

The Church along with all her members, even the children, are committed to be trained in praying and petitioning thus, so that this message may be realized.

2. Revealing the Church's Orthodox understanding. Our prayers are not limited to a local church; rather, our quest is for the Church to extend from Adam unto the end of ages - carrying her Christ's splendour, and enjoying the fellowship of eternal glories.

3. Emphasizing the Orthodox understandings in our teaching, as well as in our day-to-day life¹:

The world: It is good, since it is the work of our Righteous Creator. We must use it, while not allowing ourselves to be used by it. Through it we glorify God the Creator. It must not enthral us and distance us from our love of God.

Heaven: Heaven is not far from us, because the kingdom of God is within us.

¹ Quoted from the Paternal Writings with some condensation and modification.



Man: Man is a single unit, where the spirit, soul and body serve God, working in perfect harmony. The senses, along with the energies and emotions, resemble one holy choir, sharing lauds with the celestials.

The Holy Bible: The Holy Bible leads all of man's internal workings, to traverse this world's wilderness under the Holy Spirit's guidance. We thus experience daily growth in our enjoyment of the Saviour's image, and in our rapid journey towards the bosom of the Father.

The Divine commandment: This does not constitute an order which we are required to carry out; rather, it is more like jewellery adorning the human soul, as a bride would for her heavenly Groom, since she carries His image through His commandment.

Hardships: These are perfect opportunities for us to accept them with thanks, so that we may be crucified and resurrected with Christ.

Success: We must always seek success in all aspects of our life, relying on the abundance of the grace of God.

Repentance: This is a joyful return to the bosom of God. While confessing our weakness and transgressions, we focus on the Forgiver of sins. Our tears carry remorse for our iniquities, and joy for meeting the Holy Trinity. St. Jacob of Serugh sees that in essence our tears express disgust at the filth soiling our garment steeped in sin, while welcoming the wedding garment which is the righteousness of Christ. Repentance is also rejection of the deeds of the old man and acceptance of those of the new man.

Worship: It should not be extreme in any of its forms. Moderation in worship varies from one believer to another, depending on age, capabilities, nature of work, health condition and other personal factors.



The Church's Holy Sacraments: These represent the believer's preparation for the heavenly wedding through the work of the Holy Spirit. *"For I am jealous for you with Godly jealousy; for I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."* (2 Corinthians 11:2):

a- Baptism, or Sacrament of the New Birth: This is the beginning, not the end, of the road. A newborn needs constant nourishment and steady growth, even after maturing. St. John Chrysostom says: *[Since our sins were buried at baptism, they do not resurface - rather, they disappear, as long as we seek repentance¹.]*

b- Chrismation: This is the Holy Spirit's indwelling us, ensuring our perpetual holiness, as a temple and a dwelling for God!

We acquire the seal of God *"Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."* (2 Corinthians 1:22) Just like soldiers for the heavenly King, we are triumphant, through His Spirit, as we enter the battle; and we march with Him carrying within us the heavenly Leader, Who offers us the truth. *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth."* (John 16:13) **St. Ambrose**, furthermore, says: *[Every believer is anointed a priest and a king; however, he does not become a true priest or a true king, rather, a spiritual king and a spiritual priest, offering to God spiritual sacrifices, and offerings of thanksgiving and lauds.]*

c- Repentance and Confession: This is a return to God, acknowledging His bounties, and confessing our sins. Our confession is continual, as long as we are in the flesh. Both St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom say that confession

¹ In Joan, hom 34: 3.



carries two inseparable parts: confessing His work in us, and confessing our daily sins, hence "Forgive us... as we too forgive those who trespass against us."

d- Eucharist: This is Christianity's lifeblood, whereby the bride springs towards Calvary with her celestial friends. She sees her Groom offering His blood as her dowry. She remembers Christ's life-giving death and resurrection, not only through thoughts and words, but also by communing His sacrificed body and blood - the mystery of her life and constant growth.

When we edify ourselves in Christ Jesus by communing the body and blood He sacrificed for us, we carry the fruit of the Spirit, we experience the resurrected life in Jesus Christ, and we become ready to traverse to the eternal glories in the Father's bosom.

e- Priesthood (Holy Orders): In this service we see the work of the Most High Priest, Who intercedes for us in the heavenly holies, in order for us to acquire the right to enjoy eternity. Christ continues to evangelize, sanctify and shepherd, through this sacrament; it was handed to the apostles and the Church to spread the kingdom of God throughout humanity. The priest is the icon of Christ - the Most High Priest - who delights in the honour of shepherding, which is uniquely the work of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. He is the father of all humanity in Christ Jesus; his only preoccupation is to carry humanity, in its entirety, in his heart, shepherding them into the Father's presence, desiring that all become that spotless bride.

f- Holy Matrimony: Through this sacrament, Christ unifies in Him, the bride and groom; they thus experience a semblance of the heavenly wedding, and a pledge of eternal joy. During the matrimonial rite, our hearts are raised with the priest to say: "O God, You have crowned Your saints with unwilting crowns." - this is also an opportunity for being courteous, or rather for a greater union with the heavenly



Groom, as the fervent heart joyfully awaits the glorious Day of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit asserts that marriage is neither a stark legal contract, nor a purely social event; rather, it is enjoyment of the kingdom's pledge. The Holy Spirit invites the couple not to live together by themselves, rather, to delight together in the Lord, and to savour union with Him.

g- Unction of the Sick: The Church, as a bride, shares the afflicted their pains; therefore, the priests and congregation, along with the sick person's family, pray for him, so that both his body and soul may be healed. *"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."* (James 5:14 &15)

In this sacrament, our Lord Christ Himself bends over the afflicted, to pour over them His Divine love, and to show His closeness to the suffering person.

Through His Spirit, the Church entreats the Groom to raise her children, but according to His will, not hers. It may be that, despite the forgiveness of his sins, it is for the sick person's benefit that his affliction persist, either for chastisement or, simply, because of Divine wisdom, as was the case with St. Paul.

4. The Perception of a Virtuous Life: In their essence, Christian virtues are the adoption of Christ Himself. We thus acquire righteousness, holiness and salvation, working in those who struggle in the spirit, with neither laxness nor indulgence. Each virtue represents a different angle of the others.

Virtues are not purely the fruit of human struggle; rather, they are a Divine gift, which God offers to His children who are watchful through His Spirit.



5. Ecclesiastic tradition: "Tradition" does not mean simply "following the past pattern;" rather, as indicated in the Holy Bible, it is a trust handed down and received: one generation deposits faith, and the other receives it "*.the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*" (Jude 3) In other words, it's the "Gospel" written in our life and engraved in our heart. Tradition is the current of the Church's life with one accord. It carries the past in all its forms as a living present, and projects it unchanged into the morrow.

This is the essence of tradition on which we focus, when studying its elements; these are:

a- Belief in the Holy Trinity and in the redeeming work of God.

b- Deeds and sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

c- Books of both Old and New Testaments.

d- Spiritual and behavioural programs in Christ Jesus.

e- Program of worship: its perception and methodology.

f- The Church's canons, and its organization of worship, prayers, fasts, feasts, prostrations etc. These should be practiced with devoutness, for the congregation's edification, and for the growth of each believer's life in his personal relationship with the Holy Trinity.

g- Canons of the ecumenical councils.

In a nutshell, the essence of tradition is belief on the Holy Trinity and on the Church teaching, as well as keeping our forefathers' experience and their perception of the word of God etc.

6. The Perception of the Christian Behaviour. Humble behaviour, in Christ Jesus, represents the believer's indelible knowledge that without the grace of God, he is incapable of practising a Christian life and, on the other hand, through it, he is capable of everything.

Meekness does not in any way constitute yielding or personal degeneracy; rather, it is obedience in the Lord and



fellowshipping with Him - He Who was obedient unto death, the death of the Righteous.

Proceeding down the path of truth, is the adherence to truth in the spirit of love - since truth without love leads to violence, and love unbounded by truth leads to degeneracy!

As an Orthodox Church, it befits us to give serious consideration with respect to what we offer the world in our evangelization. By way of example, upon attempting to offer the orthodox faith to a Frenchman, it behoves us to present to him worship in an orthodox, divine, patristic, framework, in the unity of spirit, but in a cultural envelope best suited to him.

In this regard, His Grace Abba Gregorios, metropolitan of New Delhi, in India, said at a Church leadership meeting in Melbourne, in June 1976: *"It is incumbent on the Orthodox Church to sow the seeds of orthodoxy in the Australian soil, in order to yield an Australian orthodox tree."*

Since the Church of Alexandria has now opened up to the outside world, and since thousands have emigrated to foreign lands, it is only proper for the Church to study her message - since she should guide and help them in offering orthodox thought to others, with no deviations from the spirit of orthodox tradition and rites.

It befits our Church not to isolate herself with a local group, and not to be biased towards a particular language while neglecting the others... rather, she should handle her responsibility as an ecumenical one.

It is unquestionably a very delicate mission indeed, to offer the living tradition to the universe, with an open heart and, coincidentally, with neither deviation nor laxness! This constitutes one of the most important tasks of the contemporary theologians.

7. Perception of Leadership: A genuine leader does not rely on his authority to give orders that must be obeyed;



rather, he supports everyone, including children, to enjoy their development of practical leadership skills.

A veritable leader supports every person to fathom his talents and capabilities - everyone thus works towards edification of a holy assembly.

One step towards handing down tradition to the new generation in foreign lands, is to offer them, in that country's language and culture, the orthodox thought, culture and life.

8. The Meaning of Consecration: Consecration is not acquired through a position, an attire, or a location; rather, a person's heart, thought, senses, emotions, and time are consecrated to serve the kingdom of God, and to realize the will of God.

St. Basil asserts that a monk does not derive his holiness from his cell or from his monastic garb; rather, through consecration of the inner self.



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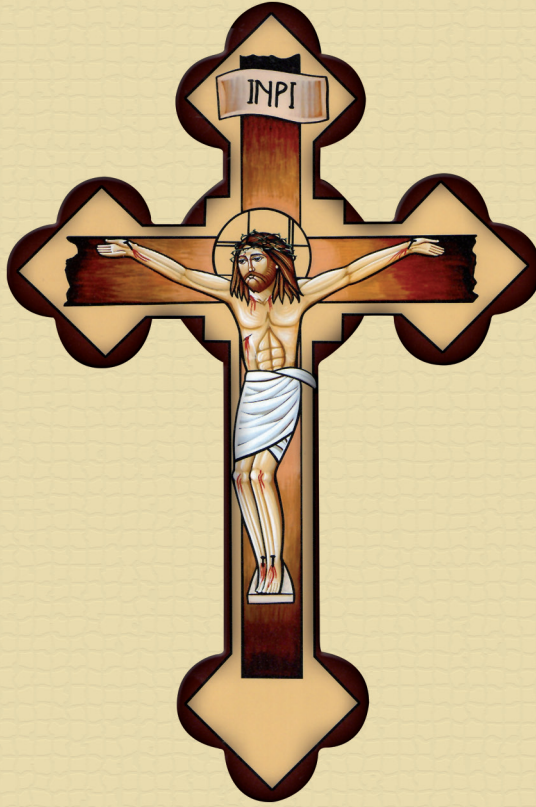
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