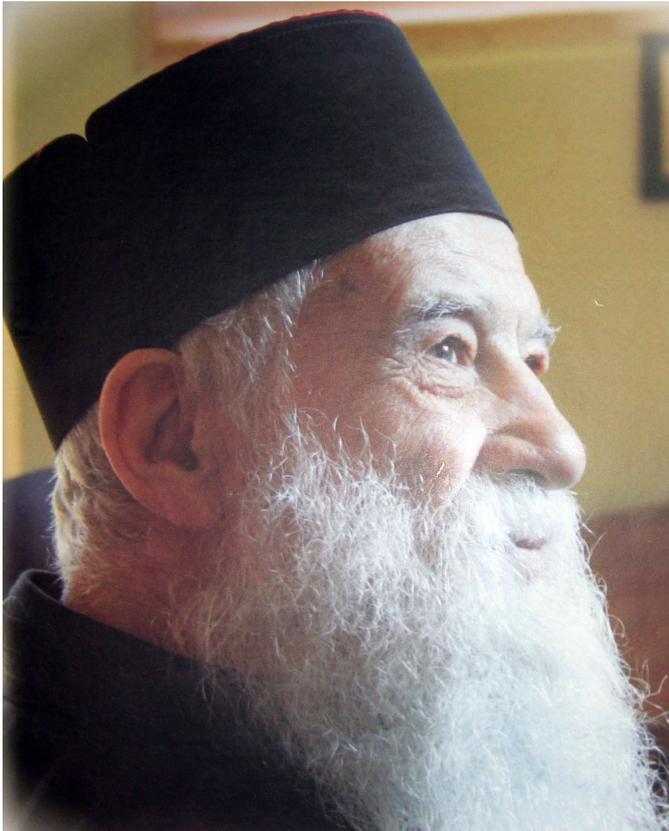


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{From the fact that in real life certain people, at a certain stage of spiritual development, and presumably after a certain number of ascending steps taken on the Ladder of askesis and/or suffering, can embody the 'all are guilty for all ethics' *profitably* for themselves and others, it does not seem to follow that anyone, at any time, can immediately do so.

The Idiot,

perhaps, suggests this

practical

, 'non-Euclidean' caveat, better than is usually acknowledged...}

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From The Great Paterikon

A certain brother was in a community and carried on his shoulders all the duties of the brethren. Even for lust he condemned himself: I have done this! Some of the brethren, not knowing his work, began to murmur against him, saying: How many evil things has he done, and he neither works! And Abba, knowing his deed, said to the brethren: I want one mat from this one, made with a contrite conscience, rather than your many, made with pride. Do you want to receive notice from God? And he brought three mats of those, and a mat of the brother. And lighting fire, he threw them into it, and they burned all, but the brother's mat. And seeing this, the brethren were frightened, and put to that one metania, and had him afterwards as a parent.

(minimally revised automatic translation of the [Romanian version](#))

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Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa

Lenten Words (Great Lent, 1978)

Sermons to young people

Given under the Ceausescu Regime, at the Chapel of the Romanian Orthodox Church Seminary (Radu-Voda Monastery), Bucharest, Romania. Translation by Keston College, Kent, England. A brief introduction followed by the complete translations can be found in the Orthodox Word # [102](#) - [103](#) (1982)

FIFTH MEDITATION

Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisadec. Hebrews 5:6

Perhaps you have been asking yourself, my young friend, why I have even been addressing you, and by what authority? What right do I have to give this message which is disturbing you and obliging you to face up to disturbing questions? Why have I come to confirm you in your

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own misunderstood terror and to open up to you certain perspectives which are both new and unexpected? Why do I also break down your fragile balance of defenses?

Probably by uncovering for you the purity and innocence which you did not recognize, I have made you even more vulnerable in this wicked world. I have made you more open to suffering, and it is natural that you should ask what is the purpose of suffering. Is it a finality, a blind happening, a fate traced by the stars, a blinding ocean in which you swim without hope of reaching any shore?

I speak to you in the name and authority of Christ and His Church, in the name of the priesthood to which Christ called me, because nothing in this world is an interplay of unconscious, arbitrary happenings. All things stem from a cause and hold fast towards an end which stands outside this world. The cause is God, the end is God. He is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega.

But what is this world? What certainty does it offer us, what happiness awaits us at the unknown corners of life, like comfort in misfortune? I will not begin with death, nor life, nor with the beginning nor the end; but with the given: that which happens to us every day.

Have you asked yourself, young person, what is your purpose in the world and whether everything is reduced simply to that? If we were born to be slaves of matter —and this is only a philosophical proposition — then the end of your life is slavery. If your freedom is reduced to need and logic — which in the last analysis is the same thing — then your freedom is slavery. If all our knowledge is reduced to a sterile and never-realized understanding of the laws of matter, our knowledge is slavery. If your love is reduced to the struggle for existence, and our sacrifice is for the perpetuating of the species, then these things too are but slavery. And finally, if all our convictions spring from an imposed, official doctrine, then they too are slavery. And in all this series, young friend, where is the place for your soul?

You sense that there exists, away from all the materialism with which you have been intoxicated, and far from the atheism which has been imposed upon you like a violent ideology, something vaster, more authentic and yet closer to you personally than all that which suffocates you in this materialist bath. Your spirit within you propels you towards that “something”, as towards a world only envisioned and suspected.

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This world, like the blue sky glistening in the sun, sees its own image through the grid of prohibitions which this society raises up to you.

Know, friend, that neither an atheist ideology, nor the materialist order, no matter how authoritatively it might be imposed upon you, is in any state to raise up an absolutely impregnable wall against you and the spiritual world. The soul cannot be made prisoner. This is a law which the materialists refuse to recognize at their own peril. On the spiritual level there is no captivity without hope.

Your teachers speak to you of atheism and secretly go to church. Behold a crack through which the golden light of the spiritual dimension reaches you. Your ideological leaders thunder and lighten against religion, uttering the most foul curses, yet at the moment of disaster they make the sign of the cross, asking for God's help — as, for example, during the earthquake of March 4, 1977. Behold another crack through which the soul escapes the suffocating locker with the official ideology builds up by and by. In atheist meetings those obliged to speak condemn those who believe or who were caught in the criminal act of going to church. Yet away from the lying words, far from their false-toned platform proclamations, you discern their fear of being discovered as also having a religious belief. The lie in which they so lamentably swim breaks down once more the wall of your incarceration, and you say as the sweet light breaks through: "Whence this unnatural light? It is a light foreign to this world."

I spoke to you about these things in my previous four sermons, I will continue to speak further about them —for I am a priest of Christ. God has discovered us through the sacramental love of His works, and Jesus has commanded me to make it known to you so that you will not say further: "I did not know it."

I speak to you that you might know that you can fly, and that only spiritual flight is truly exalted. The flight of materialism is flight with broken wings. The Church of Christ has come out of the catacombs. She shines blindingly on the soil of this country which is highly esteemed in our hearts.

The Enea Church was destroyed — but who among us, Romanian and Christian, can forget it? A beer hall, a symbol of a concept which considers the Church a plague, will be put in its place. A beer hall — so once more the people will be happy! Woe to the architect who builds there, binding his name forever with the destruction of something that was a demonstration of the Romanian genius of construction and faith. Woe to the officials who believe that they can win

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glory and power by destroying a church and building a beer hall. Woe to the concept that considers an Agapia Inn more valuable than the Agapia Monastery. Woe to those who consider that the Romanian Patriarchate is a piece of history which can be placed in a museum, and who have not understood that it has a real life which is always present. It is not a historical relic but a living soul.

Woe to those who bow to force, allowing destruction which will never be accepted by history.

I have said all these things to you because I am a priest. And because we are priests and we listen to the command of God which says that a burning light cannot be hid under a bushel but must shine before all (Matt. 5:15). I have said these things, young friends, that you might judge if it is right before God to listen to men rather than God (Acts 4:19). For He Who gave Himself upon the Cross for the salvation of the world, commanded us not to hide the divine truth. I have said all these things to you that you might understand that through faith we shatter walls and break down the bonds of prejudice and abuse, even if we shall have tribulation in this world (John 16:33).

There is a continual battle between good and evil, between right and wrong, between freedom and captivity of ideas, between purity and corruption. All these battles take place on the one single field of combat — the heart of man. I, the priest of Christ, address this heart; for as Pascal has said: “The heart has its own way of thinking, which reason ignores.”

What, then does the priesthood mean? It means to be an enduring witness to human suffering and to take it upon your own shoulders. To be the one who warms the leper at the breast and who gives to the miserable life through the breath from his own mouth. To be a strong comfort to every unfortunate one, even when you yourself are overwhelmed with weakness. To be a ray of shining light to unhappy hearts when your own eyes long ago ceased to see any light. To carry mountains of suffering on your shoulders, while your own being screams out with the weight of its own suffering.

Your flesh rebels and says: “This is absurd, impossible. Where is such a man, where is the priest you describe so that I may put my own suffering upon him?” Yet nevertheless he exists! From time to time there awakens within us the priest of Christ who, like the Good Samaritan, will kneel down by the side of the man fallen among thieves and, putting him upon his own donkey, will bring him to the Church of Jesus for healing. From time to time the priest of Christ in us forgets ourselves and comforts you, the man of suffering.

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Who else could be moved by your suffering? Who else would bear your burden, say words of comfort to you? From whom else would you hear the words of Christ to you today: “Come to me, all who are burdened and heavy ladened.”

I have seen you, my young friend, bullied by your elders, mocked and insulted for the simple crime of being young. I spoke to you then as one in weakness and pain, as a sensitive and defenseless being. Then I saw you, to my horror and joy, bow and kiss my hand, humbling yourself in your unexpected gesture which flowed from the depth of your wounds. For you did not kiss my hand, but that of a priest of Christ who brought you comfort.

Because you have overcome death, to which atheist doctrine had condemned you, because you have been exalted above the ruins of fallen materialism through your youth and faith, I speak to you the words which Jesus spoke through the Apostle to the Gentiles. They sound absurd to the prisoner of matter and materialism, to those who substitute beer halls for churches and indecency for suffering. But to you they will resound full of spiritual meaning and truth.

The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? (I Cor. 1:18–20).

Where are all these men, my friends? There are none of them left. But you have remained here alive and whole in the Church of Christ, a holy people, won by God, a foundation stone on which the Orthodox spirit of the Romanian people is built. You are its single salvation and preservation through this age.

[At the time of this writing, in 1983] Father George is a prisoner for his Faith in Romania — see the December, 1982 issue of The Word, page 20.

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