

# The Orthodox World-View

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Before beginning my talk, a word or two on why it is important to have an Orthodox world-view, and why it is more difficult to build one today than in past centuries.

In past centuries—for example, in 19th century Russia—the Orthodox world-view was an important part of Orthodox life and was supported by the life around it. There was no need even to speak of it as a separate thing—you lived Orthodoxy in harmony with the Orthodox society around you, and you had an Orthodox world-view provided by the Church and society. In many countries the government itself confessed Orthodoxy; it was the center of public functions and the king or ruler himself was historically the first Orthodox layman with a responsibility to give a Christian example to all his subjects. Every city had Orthodox churches, and many of them had services every day, morning and evening. There were monasteries in all the great cities, in many cities, outside the cities, and in the countryside, in deserts and wildernesses. In Russia there were more than 1000 officially organized monasteries, in addition to other more unofficial groups. Monasticism was an accepted part of life. Most families, in fact, had somewhere in them a sister or brother, uncle, grandfather, cousin or someone who was a monk or a nun, in addition to all the other examples of Orthodox life: people who wandered from monastery to monastery, and fools for Christ. The whole way of life was permeated with Orthodox kinds of people, of which, of course, monasticism is the center. Orthodox customs were a part of daily life. Most books that were commonly read were Orthodox. Daily life itself was difficult for most people: they had to work hard to survive, life expectancy was not great, death was a frequent reality—all of which reinforced the Church's teaching on the reality and nearness of the other world. Living an Orthodox life in such circumstances was really the same thing as having an Orthodox world-view, and there was little need to talk of such a thing.

Today, on the other hand, all this has changed. Our Orthodoxy is a little island in the midst of a world which operates on totally different principles—and every day these principles are changing for the worse, making us more and more alienated from it. Many people are tempted to divide their lives into two sharply distinct categories: the daily life we lead at work, with worldly friends, in our worldly business, and Orthodoxy, which we live on Sundays and at other times in the week when we have time for it. But the world-view of such a person, if you look at it closely, is often a strange combination of Christian values and worldly values, which really do not mix. The purpose of this talk is to see how people living today can begin to make their world-view more of one piece, to make it a whole Orthodox world-view.

Orthodoxy is life. If we don't live Orthodoxy, we simply are not Orthodox, no matter what formal beliefs we might hold.

Life in our contemporary world has become very artificial, very uncertain, very confusing. Orthodoxy, it is true, has a life of its own, but it is also not very far from the life of the world around it, and so the life of the Orthodox Christian, even when he is being truly Orthodox, cannot help but reflect it in some way. A kind of uncertainty and confusion have also entered into Orthodox life in our times. In this talk we will try to look at contemporary life, and then at Orthodox life, to see how better we might fulfill our Christian obligation to lead other-worldly lives even in these quite terrible times, and to have an Orthodox Christian view of the whole of life today that will enable us to survive these times with our faith intact.

## **Life Today Has Become Abnormal**

Anyone who looks at our contemporary life from the perspective of the normal life lived by people in earlier times—say, Russia, or America, or any country of Western Europe in the 19th century—cannot help but be struck by the fact of how abnormal life has become today. The whole concept of authority and obedience, of decency and politeness, of public and private behavior—all have changed drastically, have been turned upside down except in a few isolated pockets of people—usually Christians of some kind—who try to preserve the so-called "old-fashioned" way of life.

Our abnormal life today can be characterized as spoiled, pampered. From infancy today's child is treated, as a general rule, like a little god or goddess in the family: his whims are catered to, his desires fulfilled.; he is surrounded by toys, amusements, comforts; he is not trained and brought up according to strict principles of Christian behavior, but left to develop whichever way his desires incline. It is usually enough for him to say, "I want it!" or "I won't do it!" for his obliging parents to bow down before him and let him have his way. Perhaps this does not happen all the time in every family, but it happens often enough to be the rule of contemporary childrearing, and even the best-intentioned parents do not entirely escape its influence. Even if the parents try to raise the child strictly, the neighbors are trying to do something else. They have to take that into consideration when disciplining the child.

When such a child becomes an adult, he naturally surrounds himself with the same things he was used to in his childhood: comforts, amusements, and grown-up toys. Life becomes a constant search for "fun" which, by the way, is a word totally unheard of in any other vocabulary; in 19th century Russia they wouldn't have understood what this word meant, or any serious civilization. Life is a constant search for "fun" which is so empty of any serious meaning that a visitor from any 19th-century country, looking at our popular television programs, amusement parks, advertisements, movies, music—at almost any aspect of our popular culture—would think he had stumbled across a land of imbeciles who have lost all contact with normal reality. We don't often take that into consideration, because we are living in this society and we take it for granted.

Some recent observers of our contemporary life have called the young people of today the "me generation" and our times the "age of narcissism," characterized by a worship of and fascination with oneself that prevents a normal human life from developing. Others have spoken of the "plastic" universe or fantasy world in which so many people live today, unable to face or come to terms with the reality of the world around them or the problems within themselves.

When the "me generation" turns to religion—which has been happening very frequently in the past several decades—it is usually to a "plastic" or fantasy form of religion: a religion of "self-development" (where the self remains the object of worship), of brainwashing and mind-control, of deified gurus and swamis, of a pursuit of UFO's and "extra-terrestrial" beings, of abnormal spiritual states and feelings. We will not go into all these manifestations there, which are probably familiar enough to most of you, except to discuss a little later how these touch on the Orthodox Christian spiritual life of our days.

It is important for us to realize, as we try ourselves to lead a Christian life today, that the world which has been formed by our pampered times. makes demands on the soul, whether in religion or in secular life, which are what one has to call totalitarian. This is easy enough to see in the mindbending cults that have received so much publicity in recent years, and which demand total allegiance to a self-made "holy man"; but it is just as evident in secular life, where one is confronted not just by an individual temptation here or there, but by a constant state of temptation that attacks one, whether in the background music heard

everywhere in markets and businesses, in the public signs and billboards of city streets, in the rock music which is brought even to forest campgrounds and trails, and in the home itself, where television often becomes the secret ruler of the household, dictating modern values, opinions, and tastes. If you have young children, you know how true this is; when they have seen something on television how difficult it is to fight against this new opinion which has been given as an authority by the television.

The message of this universal temptation that attacks men today—quite openly in its secular forms, but usually more hidden in its religious forms—is: Live for the present, enjoy yourself, relax, be comfortable. Behind this message is another, more sinister undertone which is openly expressed only in the officially atheist countries which are one step ahead of the free world in this respect. In fact, we should realize that what is happening in the world today is very similar whether it occurs behind the Iron Curtain or in the free world. There are different varieties of it, but there is a very similar attack to get our soul. In the communist countries which have an official doctrine of atheism, they tell quite openly that you are to: Forget about God and any other life but the present; remove from your life the fear of God and reverence for holy things; regard those who still believe in God in the "old-fashioned" way as enemies who must be exterminated. One might take, as a symbol of our carefree, fun-loving, self-worshipping times, our American "Disneyland"; if so, we should not neglect to see behind it the more sinister symbol that shows where the "me generation" is really heading: the Soviet Gulag, the chain of concentration camps that already governs the life of nearly half the world's population.

## **Two False Approaches to Spiritual Life**

But what, one might ask, does all this have to do with us, who are trying to lead, as best we can, a sober Orthodox Christian life? It has a lot to do with it. We have to realize that the life around us, abnormal though it is, is the place where we begin our own Christian life. Whatever we make of our life, whatever truly Christian content we give it, is still has something of the stamp of the "me generation" on it, and we have to be humble enough to see this. This is where we begin.

There are two false approaches to the life around us that many often make today, thinking that somehow this is what Orthodox Christians should be doing. One approach—the most common one—is simply to go along with the times: adapt yourself to rock music, modern fashions and tastes, and the whole rhythm of our jazzed-up modern life. Often the more old-fashioned parents will have little contact with this life and will live their own life more or less separately, but they will smile to see their children follow after its latest craze and think that this is something harmless.

This path is total disaster for the Christian life; it is the death of the soul. Some can still lead an outwardly respectable life without struggling against the spirit of the times, but inwardly they are dead or dying; and—the saddest thing of all—their children will pay the price in various psychic and spiritual disorders and sicknesses which become more and more common. One of the leading members of the suicide cult that ended so spectacularly in Jonestown four years ago was the young daughter of a Greek Orthodox priest; satanic rock groups like Kiss—"Kids in Satan's Service"—are made up of ex-Russian Orthodox young people; the largest part of the membership of the temple of satan in San Francisco, according to a recent sociological survey—is made up of Orthodox boys. These are only a few striking cases; most Orthodox young people don't go so far astray—they just blend in with the anti-Christian world around them and cease to be examples of any kind of Christianity for those around them.

This is wrong. The Christian must be different from the world, above all from today's weird, abnormal world, and this must be one of the basic things he knows as part of his Christian upbringing. Otherwise there is no point in calling ourselves Christian—much less Orthodox Christians.

The false approach at the opposite extreme is one that one might call false spirituality. As translations of Orthodox books on the spiritual life become more widely available, and the Orthodox vocabulary of spiritual struggle is placed more and more in the air, one finds an increasing number of people talking about hesychasm, the Jesus Prayer, the ascetic life, exalted states of prayer, and the most exalted Holy Fathers like St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, and St. Gregory the Sinaite. It is all very well to be aware of this truly exalted side of Orthodox spiritual life and to have reverence for the great saints who have actually lived it; but unless we have a very realistic and a very humble awareness of how far away all of us today are from the life of hesychasm and how little prepared we are even to approach it, our interest in it will be only one more expression of our self-centered, plastic universe. "The me-generation goes hesychast!"—that is what some are trying to do today; but in actuality they are only adding a new game called "hesychasm" to the attractions of Disneyland.

There are books on this subject now that are very popular. In fact, Roman Catholics are going in very big for this kind of thing under Orthodox influence and themselves influencing other Orthodox people. For example, there is a Jesuit priest, Fr. George Maloney, who writes all kinds of books on this subject and translates St. Macarius the Great and St. Symeon the New Theologian and tries to get people in everyday life to be hesychasts. They have all kinds of retreats, usually "charismatic"; people are inspired by the Holy Spirit, supposedly, and undertake all types of these disciplines which we get from the Holy Fathers, and which are far beyond the level at which we are today. It is a very unserious thing. There is also a lady, Catherine de Hueck Doherty (in fact, she was born in Russia and became a Roman Catholic), who writes books about Poustinia, the desert life, and Molchanie, the silent life, and all these things which she tries to put into life like you would have some fashion for a new candy. This, of course, is very unserious and is a very tragic sign of our times. These kind of exalted things are being used by people who have no idea of what they are about. For some people it is only a habit or a pastime; for others who take it seriously, it can be a great tragedy. They think they are leading some kind of exalted life and really they have not come to terms with their own problems inside of them.

Let me re-emphasize that both of these extremes are to be avoided—both worldliness and super-spirituality—but this does not mean that we should not have a realistic awareness of the legitimate demands which the world makes upon us, or that we should cease respecting and taking sound instruction from the great hesychast Fathers and using the Jesus prayer ourselves, according to our circumstances and capacity. It just has to be on our level, down to earth. The point is—and it is a point that is absolutely necessary for our survival as Orthodox Christians today—we must realize our situation as Orthodox Christians today; we must realize deeply what times we live in, how little we actually know and feel our Orthodoxy, how far we are not just from the saints of ancient times, but even from the ordinary Orthodox Christians of a hundred years or even a generation ago, and how much we must humble ourselves just to strive as Orthodox Christians today.

## **What We Can Do**

More specifically, what can we do to gain this awareness, this realization, and how can we make it fruitful in our lives? I will try to answer this question in two parts: first, concerning our awareness of the world around us, which as never before in the history of Christianity has become our conscious enemy; and

second, concerning our awareness of Orthodoxy, which, I am afraid, most of us know much less than we should, much less than we have to know if we wish to keep it.

First, since whether we wish it or not we are in the world (and its effects are felt strongly even in a remote place like our monastery here), we must face it and its temptations squarely and realistically, but without giving in to it; in particular, we must prepare our young people for the temptations facing them, and as it were inoculate them against these temptations. We must be aware that the world around us seldom helps and almost always hinders the upbringing of the child in the true Orthodox spirit. We must be ready every day to answer the influence of the world by the principles of a sound Christian upbringing.

This means that what a child learns at school must constantly be checked and corrected at home. We cannot assume that something he is going to learn at school is simply something that is profitable or secular and has nothing to do with his Orthodox upbringing. He may be taught useful skills and facts (although many schools in America today are failing miserably even at this; many school teachers tell us that all they can do is keep the children in good order in class without even teaching them anything), but even if he gets this much, he is also taught many wrong attitudes and philosophies. A child's basic attitude towards and appreciation of literature, music, history, art, philosophy, even science, and of course life and religion—must come first of all not from school, for the school will give you all this mixed up with modern philosophy; it must come first from the home and Church, or else he is bound to be miseducated in today's world, where public education is at best agnostic, and at worst openly atheistic or anti-religious. Of course, in the Soviet Union all this is forced upon the child, with no religion whatsoever and an active program of making the child an atheist.

Parents must know exactly what is being taught their children in education courses, which are almost universal today in American schools, and correct it at home, not only by a frank attitude to this subject (especially between fathers and sons—a very rare thing in American society), but also by a clear setting forth of the moral aspect of it which is totally absent in public education.

Parents must know just what kind of music their children are listening to, what is in the movies they see (listening and seeing together with them when necessary), what kind of language they are exposed to and what kind of language they use, and give the Christian attitude to all this.

Television—in households where there is not enough courage to throw it out the window—must be strictly controlled and supervised to avoid the poisonous effects of this machine which has become the leading educator of anti-Christian attitudes and ideas in the home itself, especially to the young. I speak about the raising of children because this is where the world first strikes its blows at Orthodox Christians and forms them in its image; once wrong attitudes have been formed in a child, the task of giving him a Christian education becomes doubly difficult.

But it is not only children, it is all of us, who are facing the world which is trying to form us in anti-Christianity, by means of schools, television, movies, popular music, and all the other influences that pound in upon us, most of all in the big cities. We have to be aware that what is being pounded in upon us is all of one piece; it has a certain rhythm, a certain message to give us, this message of self-worship, of relaxing, of letting go, of enjoying yourself, of giving up any thought of the other world, in various forms, whether in music, or in movies, television, or what is being taught in schools, the way subjects are emphasized, the way the background is given, and everything else; there is one particular thing which is being given to us. It is actually an education in atheism. We have to fight back by knowing just what the world is trying to do to us, and by formulating and communicating our Orthodox Christian response to it.

Frankly, from observing the way Orthodox families in today's world live and pass on their Orthodoxy, it would seem that this battle is more often lost than won. The percentage of Orthodox Christians who retain their Orthodox identity intact and are not changed into the image of today's world, is small indeed.

Still, it is not necessary to view the world around us as all bad. In fact, for our survival as Orthodox Christians we have to be smart enough to use whatever is positive in the world for our own benefit. Here I will go into a few points where we can use something in the world which seems to have nothing to do directly with Orthodoxy in order to formulate our Orthodox world-view.

The child who has been exposed from his earliest years to good classical music, and has seen his soul being developed by it, will not be nearly as tempted by the crude rhythm and message of rock and other contemporary forms of pseudo-music as someone who has grown up without a musical education. Such a musical education, as several of the Optina elders have said, refines the soul and prepares it for the reception of spiritual impressions.

The child who has been educated in good literature, drama, and poetry and has felt their effect in his own soul—that is, has really enjoyed them—, will not easily become an addict of the contemporary movies and television programs and cheap novels that devastate the soul and take it away from the Christian path.

The child who has learned to see beauty in classical painting and sculpture will not easily be drawn into the perversity of contemporary art or be attracted by the garish products of modern advertising and pornography.

The child who knows something of the history of the world, especially in Christian times, and how other people have lived and thought, what mistakes and pitfalls people have fallen into by departing from God and His commandments, and what glorious and influential lives they have lived when they were faithful to Him—will be discerning about the life and philosophy of our own times and will not be inclined to follow the first new philosophy or way of life he encounters. One of the basic problems facing the education of children today is that in the schools they are no longer given a sense of history. It is a dangerous and fatal thing to deprive a child of a sense of history. It means that he has no ability to take examples from the people who lived in the past. And actually, history constantly repeats itself. Once you see that, it becomes interesting how people have answered problems, how there have been people who have gone against God and what results came from that, and how people changed their lives and became exceptions and gave an example which is lived down to our own times. This sense of history is a very important thing which should be communicated to children.

In general, the person who is well acquainted with the best products of secular culture—which in the West almost always has definite religious and Christian overtones—has a much better chance of leading a normal, fruitful Orthodox life than someone who knows only the popular culture of today. One who is converted to Orthodoxy straight from "rock" culture, and in general anyone who thinks he can combine Orthodoxy with that kind of culture—has much suffering to go through and a difficult road in life before he can become a truly serious Orthodox Christian who is capable of handing on his faith to others. Without this suffering, without this awareness, Orthodox parents will raise their children to be devoured by the contemporary world. The world's best culture, properly received, refines and develops the soul; today's popular culture cripples and deforms the soul and hinders it from having a full and normal response to the message of Orthodoxy.

Therefore, in our battle against the spirit of this world, we can use the best things the world has to offer in order to go beyond them; everything good in the world, if we are only wise enough to see it, points to God, and to Orthodoxy, and we have to make use of it.

### **The Orthodox World-View**

With such an attitude—a view of both the good things and the bad things in the world—it is possible for us to have and to fire an Orthodox world-view, that is, an Orthodox view on the whole of life, not just on narrow church subjects. There exists a false opinion, which unfortunately is all too widespread today, that it is enough to have an Orthodoxy that is limited to the church building and formal "Orthodox" activities, such as praying at certain times or making the sign of the Cross; in everything else, so this opinion goes, one can be like anyone else, participating in the life and culture of our times without any problem, as long as we don't commit sin.

Anyone who has come to realize how deep Orthodoxy is, and how full is the commitment which is required of the serious Orthodox Christian, and likewise what totalitarian demands the contemporary world makes on us, will easily see how wrong this opinion is. One is Orthodox all the time every day, in every situation of life, or one is not really Orthodox at all. Our Orthodoxy is revealed not just in our strictly religious views, but in everything we do and say. Most of us are very unaware of the Christian, religious responsibility we have for the seemingly secular part of our lives. The person with a truly Orthodox world-view lives every part of his life as Orthodox.

Let us, therefore, ask here: How can we nourish and support this Orthodox world-view in our daily life? The first and most obvious way is to be in constant contact with the sources of Christian nourishment, with everything that the Church gives us for our enlightenment and salvation: the Church services and Holy Mysteries, Holy Scripture, the Lives of Saints, the writings of the Holy Fathers. One must, of course, read books that are on one's own level of understanding, and apply the Church's teaching to one's own circumstances in life; then they can be fruitful in guiding us and changing us in a Christian way. But often these basic Christian sources do not have their full effect on us, or don't really affect us at all, because we don't have the right Christian attitude towards them and towards the Christian life they are supposed to inspire. Let me now say a word here about what our attitude should be if we are to obtain real benefit from them and if they are going to be for us the beginning of a truly Orthodox world-view.

First of all, Christian spiritual food, by its very nature, is something living and nourishing; if our attitude towards it is merely academic and bookish, we will fail to get the benefit it is meant to give. Therefore, if we read Orthodox books or are interested in Orthodoxy only to gain information—or show off our knowledge to others, we are missing the point; if we learn of the commandments of God and the law of His Church merely to be "correct" and to judge the "incorrectness" of others, we are missing the point. These things must not merely affect our ideas, but must directly touch our lives and change them. In any time of great crisis in human affairs—such as the critical times right in front of us in the free world—those who place their trust in outward knowledge, in laws and canons and correctness, will be unable to stand. The strong ones then will be those whose Orthodox education has given them a feel for what is truly Christian, those whose Orthodoxy is in the heart and is capable of touching other hearts. Nothing is more tragic than to see someone who is raised in Orthodoxy, has a certain idea of the catechism, has read some Lives of Saints, has a general idea of what Orthodoxy stands for, understands some of the services, and then is unaware of what is going on around him. And he gives his children this life in two categories: one is the way most people live and the other way is how Orthodox live on Sundays and when they are reading some Orthodox text. When a child is raised like that he is most likely not going

to take the Orthodox one; it is going to be a very small part of his life, because the contemporary life is too attractive, too many people are going for it, it is too much a part of reality today, unless he has been really taught how to approach it, how to guard himself against the bad effects of it and how to take advantage of the good things which are in the world.

Therefore, our attitude, beginning right now, must be down-to-earth and nominal. That is, it must be applied to the real circumstances of our life, not a product of fantasy and escapism and refusal to face the often unpleasant facts of the world around us. An Orthodoxy that is too exalted and too much in the clouds belongs in a hothouse and is incapable of helping us in our daily life, let alone saying anything for the salvation of those around us. Our world is quite cruel and wounds souls with its harshness; we need to respond first of all with down-to-earth Christian love and understanding, leaving accounts of hesychasm and advanced forms of prayer to those capable of receiving them.

So also, our attitude must be not self-centered but reaching out to those who are seeking for God and for a godly life. Nowadays, wherever there is a good-sized Orthodox community, the temptation is to make it into a society for self-congratulation and for taking delight in our Orthodox virtues and achievements: the beauty of our church buildings and furnishings, the splendor of our services, even the purity of our doctrine. But the true Christian life, even since the time of the Apostles, has always been inseparable from communicating it to others. An Orthodoxy that is alive by this very fact shines forth to others—and there is no need to open a "department of missions" to do this; the fire of true Christianity communicates itself without this. If our Orthodoxy is only something we keep for ourselves, and boast about it, then we are the dead burying the dead—which is precisely the state of many of our Orthodox parishes today, even those that have a large number of young people, if they are not going deeply into their Faith. It is not enough to say that the young people are going to church. We need to ask what they are getting in church, what they are taking away from church, and, if they are not making Orthodoxy a part of their whole life, then it really is not sufficient to say that they are going to church.

Likewise, our attitude must be loving and forgiving. There is a kind of hardness that has crept into Orthodox life today: "That man is a heretic; don't go near him;" "that one is Orthodox, supposedly, but you can't really be sure;" "that one there is obviously a spy." No one will deny that the Church is surrounded by enemies today, or that there are some who stoop to taking advantage of our trust and confidence. But this is the way it has been since the time of the Apostles, and the Christian life has always been something of a risk in this practical way. But even if we are sometimes taken advantage of and do have to show some caution in this regard, still we cannot give up our basic attitude of love and trust without which we lose one of the very foundations of our Christian life. The world, which has no Christ, has to be mistrustful and cold, but Christians, on the contrary, have to be loving and open, or else we will lose the salt of Christ within us and become just like the world, good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden underfoot.

A little humility in looking at ourselves would help us to be more generous and forgiving of the faults of others. We love to judge others for the strangeness of their behavior; we call them "cuckoos" or "crazy converts." It is true that we should beware of really unbalanced people who can do us great harm in the Church. But what serious Orthodox Christian today is not a little "crazy"? We don't fit in with the ways of this world; if we do, in today's world, we aren't serious Christians. The true Christian today cannot be at home in the world; he cannot help but feel himself and be regarded by others as a little "crazy." Just to keep alive the ideal of other-worldly Christianity today, or to get baptized as an adult, or to pray seriously, is enough to put you into a crazy house in the Soviet Union and in many other countries, and these countries are leading the way for the rest of the world to follow.

Therefore, let us not be afraid of being considered a little "crazy" by the world, and let us continue to practice the Christian love and forgiveness which the world can never understand, but which in its heart it needs and even craves.

Finally, our Christian attitude must be what, for want of a better word, I would call innocent. Today the world places a high value on sophistication, on being worldly-wise, on being a "professional." Orthodoxy places no value on these qualities; they kill the Christian soul. And yet these qualities constantly creep into the Church and into our lives. How often one hears enthusiastic converts especially, express their desire of going to the great Orthodox centers, the cathedrals and monasteries where sometimes thousands of the faithful come together and everywhere the talk is of church matters, and one can feel how important Orthodoxy is, after all. That Orthodoxy is a small drop in the bucket when you look at the whole society, but in these great cathedrals and monasteries there are so many people that it seems as though it is really an important thing. And how often one sees these same people in a pitiful state after they have indulged their desire, returning from the "great Orthodox centers" sour and dissatisfied, filled with worldly church gossip and criticism, anxious above all to be "correct" and "proper" and worldly-wise about church politics. In a word, they have lost their innocence, their unworldliness, being led astray by their fascination with the worldly side of the Church's life.

In various forms, this is a temptation to us all, and we must fight it by not allowing ourselves to overvalue the externals of the Church, but always returning to the "one thing needful": Christ and the salvation of our souls from this wicked generation. We needn't be ignorant of what goes on in the world and in the Church—in fact, for our own selves we have to know—but our knowledge must be practical and simple and single-minded, not sophisticated and worldly.

## **Conclusion**

It is obvious to any Orthodox Christian who is aware of what is going on around him today, that the world is coming to its end. The signs of the times are so obvious that one might say that the world is crashing to its end.

What are some of these signs?

—The abnormality of the world. Never have such weird and unnatural manifestations and behavior been accepted as a matter of course as in our days. Just look at the world around you: what is in the newspapers, what kind of movies are being shown, what is on television, what it is that people think is interesting and amusing, what they laugh at; it is absolutely weird. And there are people who deliberately promote this, of course, for their own financial benefit, and because that is the fashion, because there is a perverse craving for this kind of thing.

—The wars and rumors of wars, each more cold and merciless than the preceding, and all overshadowed by the treat of the unthinkable universal nuclear war, which could be set off by the touch of a button.

—The widespread natural disasters: earthquakes, and now volcanoes— the newest one forming not far from here near Yosemite Park in central California—which are already changing the world's weather patterns.

—The increasing centralization of information on and power over the individual, represented in particular by the enormous new computer in Luxembourg, which has the capacity to keep a file of information on every man living; its code number is 666 and it is nicknamed "the beast" by those who work on it. To facilitate the working of such computers, the American government plans to begin in 1984 the issuance of Social Security checks to persons with a number (apparently including the code number 666) stamped on their right hand or forehead—precisely the condition which will prevail, according to the Apocalypse (ch. 13) during the reign of antichrist. Of course, it doesn't mean that the first person to get himself stamped 666 is the antichrist, or the servant of antichrist, but once you are used to this, who will be able to resist? They will train you first and then they will make you bow down to him.

—Again, the multiplication of false Christs and false Antichrists. The latest candidate just this summer spent probably millions of dollars advertising his impending appearance on world television, promising to give at that time a "telepathic message" to all the world's inhabitants. Quite apart from any occult powers that might be involved in such events, we already know well enough the opportunities for presenting subliminal messages by radio and especially by television, as well as the fact that this can be done by anyone with the technology for breaking into normal radio and television signals, no matter how many laws there might be against it.

—The truly weird response to the new movie everyone in America is talking about and seeing: "E.T.", which has caused literally millions of seemingly normal people to express their affection and love for the hero, a "Saviour" from outer space who is quite obviously a demon—an obvious preparation for the worship of the coming Antichrist. (And incidentally, the movie editor of the official Greek Archdiocese newspaper in America, an Orthodox priest, has heartily recommended this movie to Orthodox people saying that it is a wonderful movie which can teach us about love, and everyone should go see it. There is quite a contrast between people who are trying to be aware of what is going on, and those who are simply led into the mood of the times.)

I could go on with details like this, but my purpose is not to frighten you, but to make you aware of what is happening around us. It is truly later than we think; the Apocalypse is now. And how tragic it is to see Christians, and above all Orthodox young people, with this incalculable tragedy hanging over their heads, who think they can continue what is called a "normal life" in these terrible times, participating fully in the whims of this silly, self-worshipping generation, totally unaware that the fool's paradise we are living in is about to crash, completely unprepared for the desperate times that lie just ahead of us. There is no longer even a question of being a "good" or a "poor" Orthodox Christian; the question now is: will our Faith survive at all? With many, it will not survive; the coming Antichrist will be too attractive, too much in the spirit of the worldly things we now crave, for most men even to know that they have lost their Christianity by bowing down to him.

Still the call of Christ comes to us; let us begin to heed it. The clearest expression of this call today is coming from the enslaved atheist world, where there is real suffering for Christ and a seriousness of life which we are rapidly losing or have already lost. One Orthodox priest in Romania, Fr. George Calciu, is now near death in a communist prison for daring to challenge young seminarians and students to put off their blind allegiance to the spirit of the times and come forward to labor for Christ. After speaking of the emptiness of atheism, he tells today's young people: "I call you to a much higher flight, to total abandonment, to an act of courage which defies reason. I call you to God. To the One that transcends the world so that you might know an infinite heaven of spiritual joy, the heaven which you presently grope for in your personal hell, and which you seek even while in a state of non-deliberate revolt....Jesus has

always loved you, but now you have the choice to respond to His invitation. In responding, you are ordained to go and bear fruit that will remain. To be a prophet of Christ in the world in which you live. To love your neighbor as yourself and to make all men your friend. To proclaim by every action this unique and limitless love which has raised man from the level of a serf to that of a friend of God. To the prophets of this liberating love which delivers you from all constraint, returning to you your integrity as you offer yourself to God."

Fr. George, speaking to young people who had little inspiration to serve Christ's Church because they had accepted the worldly opinion (common also among us in the free world) that the Church is only a set of buildings or a worldly organization, calls them and us to a deeper awareness of Christ's Church and of how our "formal membership" in it is not enough to save us.

"The Church of Christ is alive and free. In her we move and have our being, through Christ Who is her Head. In Him we have full freedom. In the Church we learn of truth and the truth will set us free (John 8:32). You are in Christ's Church whenever you uplift someone bent down in sorrow, or when you give alms to the poor, and visit the sick. You are in Christ's Church when you cry out: "Lord, help me." You are in Christ's Church when you are good and patient, when you refuse to get angry at your brother, even if he has wounded your feelings. You are in Christ's Church when you pray: 'Lord, forgive him.' When you work honestly at your job, returning home weary in the evenings but with a smile upon your lips; when you repay evil with love—you are in Christ's Church. Do you not see, therefore, young friend, how close the Church of Christ is? You are Peter and God is building His Church upon you. You are the rock of His Church against which nothing can prevail....Let us build churches with our faith, churches which no human power can pull down, a church whose foundation is Christ....Feel for your brother alongside you. Never ask: 'Who is he?' Rather say: 'He is no stranger; he is my brother. He is the Church of Christ just as I am.'"

With such a call in our hearts, let us begin really to belong to the Church of Christ, the Orthodox Church. Outward membership is not enough; something must move within us that makes us different from the world around us, even if that world calls itself "Christian" and even "Orthodox." Let us keep and nourish those qualities of the true Orthodox world-view which I mentioned earlier: a living, normal attitude, loving and forgiving, not self-centered, preserving our innocence and unworldliness even with a full and humble awareness of our own sinfulness and the power of the worldly temptations around us. If we truly live this Orthodox world-view, our Faith will survive the shocks ahead of us and be a source of inspiration and salvation for those who will still be seeking Christ even amidst the shipwreck of humanity which has already begun today.

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