

THE PICTURE OF THE MODERN WORLD

Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos



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In all ages, men have been trying to understand the state of the world in which they live in order to be able to confront the problems that arise. If one does not study the state of the world, he will not be able to find solutions out of the impasse.

Today we observe that many people try to identify the picture of the modern world. Among them are philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, politicians, journalists, etc. However, we should also look at the views of the theologians, and, above all, of the Fathers of the Church which are timeless.

It is known that the Fathers of the Church believe that the human nature is in a fallen state, which means that it is ruled by sensual pleasure and pain, which constitute the original sin. Therefore, I think we should view the state of the modern world through the link between pleasure and pain and through their transcendence.

After a few introductory remarks, I will attempt to focus on a great saint of our Church who is able to help us with what we face in our times effectively, because he is noted for his great insight and mental capacity, as well as his broad experience in divine matters. He is St. Maximos the Confessor, who may well be

considered a most modern Father, for he combines many talents, such as: a deep knowledge of human matters, of the philosophical trends of his time, experience of God, an outstanding writing style, and, generally, one could say, that he combines theological, philosophical, social, existential, and psychological knowledge.

I. Facing the Third Millennium

I believe we now stand on a distinctive turning point in history. Everyone talks about the Third Millennium which mankind is about to enter, and a lot of hopes have been raised. However, we will only be able to comprehend the present and assess the future, if we examine what has happened in the past carefully.

With the fear that I might fall into the temptation of generalizing what is only a detail, I would like to underline that there are some characteristic features of the past two millennia, in terms of the Church, at least.

The First Millennium is characterized, on the one hand, by the persecutions and the heresies which abounded in the domain of the Church and, of course, influenced society, and, on the other hand, by the Church's martyrdom and the delineation of faith, achieved by the Ecumenical Councils, where great fathers were at the forefront. Thus, in the First Millennium, there was a pronounced development of the spirit of martyrdom, martyrs who gave a good confession of

faith appeared within the Church, and Orthodox teaching about Christ, the Triune God and the Church in general was also articulated. The Ecumenical Councils defined Orthodox Christology, Pneumatology, Trinitology, anthropology and Ecclessiology. This was also the period when Orthodox monasticism emerged as a reaction against the secularization of church life. It is known, of course, that monastic life is the experience of the prophetic, apostolic, martyr like life, lived within the Orthodox Church.

The Second Millennium is characterized by the theological development of orthodox hesychasm, which certainly existed before. So, after confronting the persecutions and the heretics and delineating *(the)* revealed Orthodox Faith, the Church battled with secularism which took the form of departure from the orthodox theological criteria of theology, of a loss of the true prerequisites of Orthodox Theology. It is evident that this secularism is related to man's turn towards the horizontal dimension of life and to a neglect of the vertical dimension towards God, as well as to scholasticism and moralism which developed in the West. The fact is that, during the Second Millennium, the Church, through its great Fathers, defined more precisely the methodology of Orthodox doctrine and of true spiritual life, which is hesychasm, in the full Orthodox meaning of the term. It is true that if we do not assign proper importance to Orthodox hesychasm, it is doubtful whether we will be able to

comprehend the teaching of the Fathers on Christology, on theology, on Divine Oeconomy, on salvation.

In the First Millennium, after the Apostles, an important role was played by the Apostolic Fathers, the Cappadocian Fathers, St. Maximus the confessor, St. John of Damascus, and St. Photios the Great. In the Second Millennium, an important role was played by St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, and all the hesychastic Fathers through to St. Nicodemos the Athonite and other subsequent neptic Fathers.

We may pinpoint some major hesychastic milestones during the Second Millennium which determined the atmosphere of the tradition. One such milestone is St. Symeon the New Theologian who lived at the beginning of the Second Millennium. Another is the hesychastic movement, expressed primarily by St. Gregory Palamas, and also includes previous hesychast Fathers, like St. Gregory of Sinai, and others that followed, which emerged around the middle of the millennium. A third is the movement of the Fathers of the Philokalia, the so-called Kollyvades, led by St. Nicodemos the Athonite, which extends to our days¹. If one recalls that the Second Millennium started with the explosive presence of St. Symeon the New Theologian and ends with the search for the life according to the Philokalia, which is very relevant today, one may realize that hesycasm, or the so-called neptic life, is what constitutes the

distinctive feature of the Second Millennium, as the latter approaches its end.

Faced now with the Third Millennium, we may point out that two major trends prevail. The first one is the force of power, based on both the intelligent and the passible part of the soul. It is characterized by secular life, a preoccupation with worldly matters, a dismissal of the last things, and the excitement of sensual pleasure and pain. The second one is that of martyr-hesychast, found in persons who either have a great thirst for God or else are disappointed by an even life and search for something inner, existential and ontological.

Even if this search of hesychasm and the Philokalia can be observed in our days, it has to be stressed that the atmosphere of our age points in a different direction. That is, in the domain of the Church, the dominant trend is, by and large, that shaped by Stephanos of Nicomedia, with whom St. Symeon the New Theologian disagreed. In theology, even though we observe a radical shift today, the prevailing atmosphere is the one shaped by Barlaam the scholastic, who opposed the hesychasm of St. Gregory Palamas. In monasticism, the dominant trend has been formed by the "anti-Kollyvades", who opposed the spirit of the Philokalia of St. Nicodemos the Athonite and other like-minded Fathers. In social and church relationships, the spirit of George Gemistos Plethon and

Bessarion of Nicaea prevails, rather than that of St. Mark of Ephesus and Gennadios Scholarios.

The seeking of pleasure and hedonism dominate our times, at all levels of life, and this is why there is profound pain and affliction. In my view, what can be observed today is the rule of sensual pleasure and pain. Therefore, the essential contribution of the Church is to help people transcend this nexus of the dualism of sensual pleasure and pain within the boundaries of their personal life. So-called social problems will be solved through the cure of this basic anthropological problem.

In the analysis that follows there is an attempt to study the issue of contemporary hedonism in relation to the view held in the Orthodox Tradition about the dualism of pleasure and pain.

I believe that this issue has important consequences for modern life. It is actually an existential issue with serious repercussions on the personal and social level. It is what determines the whole way of life of modern man.

II. Hedonism

If we undertake a careful examination of modern societies we will observe that a pervasive hedonism prevails. Modern man cultivates it intensely, he experiences it in his personal life and, of course, all modern mass media are engaged in serving and praising

it. TV stations, magazines, books, radio stations, cinema, theater, songs, literature, etc. all audio-visual means satisfy man's insatiable hunger and thirst for the enjoyment of sensual pleasure.

The philosophical system of hedonism, that existed in antiquity, is well known. According to this school of thought, pleasure is good, while sorrow and pain are bad. The founder of this school was Aristippus of Cyrene (435-355 BC). Because of his origin, the School itself was named Cyrenaic.

According to Aristippus, both the past and the future escape man's grip and, therefore, the only thing under his control is pleasure enjoyed in the present. This is actually a gnoseological empiricism, for it teaches that man's intellect cannot attain the experience of spiritual values and, therefore, such spiritual values cannot regulate human life. According to Aristippus, "pleasure is, by itself, preferable and good," regardless of the objects and the sources generating it. Man must enjoy pleasure, without, however, being ruled by it. He said: "I possess, I am not possessed". Pleasure precedes moral rules and the latter should step aside when they obstruct it.

Hedonism was developed as a system and experienced by Epicurianism. Epicurus's ethics start with pleasure which is "the beginning and end of living happily... it is the first and natural good ... for every pleasure is good ... like every pain is bad". Of course,

Epicurus did not assign priority to material and sensual pleasures because he put spiritual pleasures first. He argued that the equation of pleasure with sensual enjoyment is wrong. Although material pleasures give enjoyment, they reconnected with pain. Much more valuable are the pleasures of the soul. Overall, Epicurus's theory of knowledge is empirical and materialistic².

Both Aristippus and Epicurus placed hedonism within their whole gnoseological system which was certainly materialistic. It is a philosophical theory based on gnoseological principles. This is also observed in later philosophers for whom hedonism constituted part of their philosophical system.

The difference with the modern reality of the experience of hedonism is that, first, pleasure today is separated from spiritual pleasures and remains solely within the sphere of bodily senses, and, second, it is not an outcome of a gnoseological theory, of a philosophical system, but rather a fruit of sensual indulgence, with no reflections and visions. It is a derivative state. While for the philosophers of hedonism pleasure is considered an existential issue, for modern man it is just an indulgence, it is not part of existential problems. Of course, on a deeper level, even the modern enjoyment of pleasure constitutes an existential search, but man does not feel it in this way and does not start to experience pleasure from this principle

An extreme and non-philosophical hedonism and seeking of pleasure dominates modern societies. Here we use the term not in its original philosophical sense but with its common contemporary meaning. A pursuit of gratification exists. This is why pain, asceticism and deprivation are avoided in modern societies and there is a pursuit of indulgence by any means, and a predominance of individual rights. I believe the difference between Orthodox and anti-Orthodox life lies at this point. The Orthodox Church speaks about the Cross and the Crucifixion, all the time, and this is something incomprehensible for human mentality.

Next, we will present St. Maximus the Confessor's teaching on pleasure and pain. It will be shown that in their entire theological work the holy Fathers continue the thinking of the ancient philosophers, as St. Maximus does here, answering their questions in the light of and with the experience of the Revelation.

III. Pleasure and pain according to St. Maximus the Confessor

In his Centuries of Theology St. Maximus the Confessor refers to the nexus of the dualism of pleasure and pain, which, by any standard, is an important subject. This means that we cannot discuss Orthodox Theology if we fail to face this crucial point, because the transcendence of pleasure and pain is, precisely, a prerequisite for correct Orthodox Theology. As St. Maximus the Confessor says,

the transcendence of pleasure and pain proves that man has cleansed his heart from the passions.

As we pointed out above, the whole of modern life is governed by pleasure and pain, since, in our age, enjoyment and the gratification of the senses dominate, while at the same time deep grief, an inner pain prevails. In reality, modern man tries to escape pain through the satisfaction of sensual pleasure. All contemporary problems, such as AIDS and drugs, are to be found in this connection. This is why I believe it is extremely important to see this link between pleasure and pain, as elaborated by St. Maximus the Confessor.

a) The origin of pleasure and pain

The world was created by God in Trinity The most perfect creature is man, for he is the apex of creation, the microcosm in the macrocosm. Analyzing the issue of the creation of man and its relation to the birth and the origin of pleasure and pain, St. Maximus says that God the Word who created man's nature, made it without pleasure and pain. "He did not make the senses susceptible to either pleasure or pain."³ He insists on this point by saying: "Pleasure and pain were not created simultaneously with the flesh."⁴

While there was no pleasure and pain in man before the fall,

there was a noetic faculty towards pleasure, through which man could enjoy God ineffably.⁵ But he misused this natural faculty. Man oriented the "the natural longing of the nous for God" to sensible things and thus "by the initial movement towards sensible things, the first man transferred this longing to his senses, and through them began to experience this pleasure in a way contrary to nature".⁶ The words "according to nature" and "contrary to nature" show the complete ontological change that took place in man and depict his fallen state clearly.

Of course, man did not invent this mode of operation of the faculties of the soul on his own, but with the advice of the devil. The devil was motivated by jealousy against man, for whom God had shown special care and attention. It is interesting that the devil envied not only man but God Himself: "Since the devil is jealous of both us and God, he persuaded man by guile that God was jealous of him, and so made him break the commandment".⁷

After the unnatural movement of the noetic capacity of the soul to sensible things and the birth of pleasure, God, being interested in man's salvation "implanted pain, as a kind of chastising force".⁸ Pain, which God, in His love for man, tied to sensual pleasure is the whole complex of the mortal and passible body, that is the law of death, which has, ever since then, been very closely connected to human nature. In this way, the "manic longing of the nous" which

incites the unnatural inclination of the soul to sensible things, is restrained.⁹

This whole analysis by St. Maximus the Confessor in no way reminds us of Platonic teaching about the movement of the immortal soul from the unborn realm of the ideas, and its confinement to a mortal body which is the prison of the soul. This is simply because St. Maximus the Confessor, being an integral member of the entire Orthodox tradition, makes no distinction between a naturally immortal soul and a naturally mortal body, he does not believe in an immortal and unborn realm of ideas, and, obviously, does not adopt a dualistic view of man, according to which salvation consists in his liberation from the prison of the soul, which is the body. In St. Maximus' teaching there is a clear reference to the unnatural movement of the faculties of the soul and to the "manic longing of the nous", which draws the body into situations and acts which are against nature.

It is clear, then, that ancestral sin consists of the "initial movement of the soul" toward sensible things and in the "law of death" granted by God's love for man. Therefore, pleasure and pain constitute so-called original sin. Pleasure is the soul's initial movement toward sensible things, while pain is the whole law of death which took roots in man's existence and constitutes the law of the mortal flesh.

St. Maximus makes some marvelous observations. He states that the transgression (of the commandment) devised pleasure "in order to corrupt the will", i.e. man's freedom, and also imposed pain (death) "to cause the dissolution of man's nature". This means that pleasure causes sin, which is a voluntary death of the soul, while pain, through the separation of soul and body, causes the disintegration of the flesh. This was, actually, the work and objective of the devil, but God allowed the link between pleasure and pain. That is, He allowed the death to come into man's existence on grounds of love and philanthropy, for pain is the refutation of pleasure. Thus, "God has providentially given man pain he has not chosen, together with death that follows from it, in order to chasten him for the pleasure he has chosen." ¹⁰

On several occasions, St. Maximus refers to "voluntary pleasure" and "irrational pleasure", as well as to "involuntary" and "sensible" pain. ¹¹ Pain balances the results of pleasure, that is, it subtracts pain (*pleasure? ed.*), but does not completely revoke it.¹²

Therefore, pleasure precedes pain, since all pain is caused by pleasure, and this is why it is called natural pain. For Adam and Eve, pleasure was without cause, that is, it was not preceded by pain, while pain, which is a natural consequence of pleasure, is an obligation, a debt, paid by all men who have the same human nature.¹³ This is what happened to Adam and Eve. For their

descendants, things are a little different; the experience of pain leads them to the enjoyment of pleasure.

After the Fall and the entry of the law of sin and death into his existence, man is in a tragic state, because, even though pain reverses pleasure and annuls its active movement, man cannot reverse and eliminate the law of death which is found within his being, and this law brings a new experience of pleasure. "Philosophy towards virtue", namely man's whole ascetic struggle brings dispassion in his will but in his nature, because asceticism cannot defeat death, which is found as a powerful law within man's being.¹⁴ Herein lies the tragedy of man, who may cure pleasure and obtain inner balance through voluntary pain (asceticism) and involuntary events (external grief, death) but is unable to liberate himself from pain, which is determined by the law of death.¹⁵

b) The purpose of Christ's incarnation

So far we have described how the link between pleasure and pain was established after the Fall. Pleasure was a result of the irrational movement of the faculty of the soul, with its natural consequence the coming of pain, along with the entire law of death. This combination of pleasure and pain became a law of human nature. Obviously, while living a life contrary to nature, man could not be delivered from this state which had become natural. Christ's incarnation contributed to man's liberation from this connection

between pleasure and pain. St. Maximus the Confessor also makes some marvelous observations on this point too. It was absolutely impossible for human nature which had fallen to voluntary pleasure and involuntary pain to return to the former state "had the creator not become man". The mystery of incarnation lies in the fact that Christ was born human, but the beginning and cause of His birth was not sensual pleasure, for He was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, outside the human way of generation, and He embraced pain and death by His own free choice.¹⁶ For man, pain came as a result of sin, it was involuntary. While for Christ, who was born without sensual pleasure, pain was received by choice.

All humans born after the transgression, are born with sensual pleasure, which precedes their birth, because man is an offspring of his parents pleasure and, of course, no one is free, by nature, from impassioned generation provoked by pleasure. Thus man had the origin of his birth "in the corruption that comes from pleasure" and would finish his life "in the corruption that comes through death".¹⁷ Therefore, he was a complete slave to pleasure and pain "and he could not find the way to freedom".¹⁸ Humans are tortured by unjust pleasure and just pain and, of course, by their outcome which is death.¹⁹

For man to return to his previous state and to be deified, an unjust pain and death without cause had to be invented. Death had to

be without cause, not to be caused by pleasure, and unjust, not following an impassioned life. In this way, most unjust death would cure unjust pleasure which had caused just death and just pain. In this way mankind would enjoy freedom again, delivered from pleasure and pain. Christ became perfect man, having a noetic soul and a passible body, like ours, but without sin. He was born as a man by an immaculate conception and, thus, did not have any sensual pleasure whatsoever, but voluntarily accepted pain and death and suffered unjustly, out of love for man, in order to revoke the principle of human generation from unjust pleasure, which dominates human nature, and in order to eliminate nature's just termination by death.²⁰ Thus, Christ's immaculate conception as man and His voluntary assumption of the passibility of human nature, as well as His unjust death, liberated mankind from sensual pleasure, pain and death.

Christ's birth as man took place in a way contrary to that of humans. After the Fall, human nature has its principle of generation in "pleasure-provoked conception by sperm" from the father. A direct consequence of this sensual birth is the end, namely "painful death through corruption." But Christ could not possibly be ruled over by death, because He was not born in this pleasure-provoked way.²¹ With His incarnation, Christ offered a different principle of generation to man, the pleasure of the life to come, by means of pain. Adam, with his transgression, introduced a different way of generation, a generation originating in sensual pleasure and ending in

pain, grief and death. Thus, everyone who descends from Adam according to the flesh, justly and painfully suffers the end from death. Christ offered a different way of generation, because, through His seedless generation (birth) and His voluntary and unjust death, He eliminated the principle of generation according to Adam (sensual pleasure) and the end which Adam came to (pain-death). In this way "he liberated all those reborn spiritually in him".²²

The way by which Christ became incarnate and cured human nature reveals indisputably that He is wise, just and powerful. He is wise because He became a true man according to nature without being subjected to any change. He is just, because He voluntarily assumed passible human flesh, out of great condescension and love for man. This is also why He did not make man's salvation tortuous. He is also powerful, because He created eternal life and unchangeable dispassion in nature, through suffering and death, and in this way He did not show Himself to be at all incapable of achieving the cure of human nature.²³

c) Personal adoption of salvation

Christ's work and the purpose of His incarnation has to be experienced by man personally. Christ's victory over death and pain has to become each human being's own personal good. This means that a person who is associated with Christ must be freed from the tragic link between pleasure and pain, and especially get rid of the

rule of death, which is deeply rooted in human nature. We must look how St. Maximus analyzes the functioning of pleasure and pain in man after the Fall, and how his freedom and cure are preserved, in more detail. This is an important point, because it shows the state of contemporary humanity as well as its way of liberation from the oppression of death.

St. Maximus makes the analysis that the domination of pleasure and pain exists in the passibility of nature. Since our generation (birth) takes place in a fallen way, sensual pleasure and pain are rooted in our existence. The power of sin lies in the passibility of nature, through pleasure and the dominion of death, of pain. That is to say, sin is caused by sensual pleasure and results in pain and, of course, death. But the experience of pain turns man to sensual indulgence as a comforting medicine. Thus, the renewed enjoyment of pleasure increases pain.²⁴

I think it is worth quoting here the full text by St. Maximus, because it is an outstanding passage: "For the dominion of pleasure and pain clearly applies to what is passible in human nature. And we seek how to alleviate through pleasure the penalty of pain, thus in the nature of things increasing the penalty. For in our desire to escape pain we seek refuge in pleasure, and so try to bring relief to our nature, hard pressed as it is by the torment of pain. But through trying in this way to blunt pain with pleasure, we increase our sum of

debts, for we cannot enjoy pleasure that does not lead to pain and suffering.’²⁵

In this passage by St. Maximus the Confessor, the tragedy of human nature, as experienced in modern times, is manifested in its entirety. We may emphasize three characteristic points:

First: The experience of sensual pleasure always brings a corresponding pain. That which happened to Adam, whereby initial pleasure brought pain and the experience of death, happens with every sin on a personal level. In committing a sin, man feels pleasure and then experiences terrible pain, not only due to remorse but also due to the whole spectre of death and the darkness of Hell. Many of David's Psalms analyze this state in detail: "For my soul is full of troubles and my life draws near to the grave" (88:3).

Second: The experience of pain and death leads man to seek comfort and consolation. Unaware of how to eliminate the disease-breeding cause of pain, which is pleasure, he ends up in sensual pleasure again, in indulgence to comfort his embittered nature. Thus, the experience of pain drives him to various pleasures in life, from sexual gratification to drugs, because he wrongly believes that in this way he will get rid of the spectre of death.

Third: The new experience of pleasure necessarily brings new pain, because pain is always the outcome of pleasure. So, a vicious

circle occurs and man cannot be delivered in any way from the terrible combination of pleasure and pain.

Liberation from this tragedy takes place in Jesus Christ. As we said before, Christ, by way of His birth and His death, gave a new mode of spiritual generation to man. With His incarnation He gave mankind supra-natural Grace, namely deification (theosis), while with His passion He gave dispassion, with His sufferings He gave comfort and with His death granted eternal life to human nature.²⁶

This can be seen in the saints. Whoever is united with Christ and is born spiritually is freed from sensual pleasure, which originates in the law of sin. However, Christ allows the saints to accept death, not because death is an outcome of sin for them, but to condemn sin. The saints who are united with Christ do not have the sensual pleasure of generation, which comes from Adam, but do have the pain which comes from Adam. They have it as a way of refuting sin. Since its mother is not sensual pleasure, the death of a saint becomes a father of eternal life. As Adam's hedonistic life became a mother of death and corruption, similarly Christ's death for Adam becomes the parent of eternal life, because it is free of Adam's pleasure.²⁷

The saints, however, who attain deliverance from the torment of the chain of pleasure-pain, achieve it because they are united with Christ. Union with Christ is reached through a combination of sacramental (mystical) and ascetic life. St. Maximus insists on living

an ascetic life, because Holy Communion and the partaking of Divine Grace through the sacraments is not without prerequisites. We will now see what St. Maximus says about this special way in which the saints experience the ascetic method and life, and how, united to Christ, they transcend pleasure and pain.

First he stresses that affording voluntary pain and bearing involuntary pain removes sensual pleasure and suppresses its impetus.²⁸ Voluntary pains are all spiritual exercises, such as fasting, vigils, deprivation, and all voluntary ascetic effort in general, voluntarily bearing the painful cross of the struggle to transform the passions. Involuntary sufferings are all events that take place unwillingly and unexpectedly, such as illness, death, temptations and hardships. Man takes on voluntary temptations of his own free will, and endures involuntary ones with faith and endurance in God.

Of course, as already mentioned, St. Maximus teaches that sensual pleasure and pain are not revoked completely by human ascetic effort, because the Righteous in the Old Testament also made such an effort. Nevertheless, they were unable to free themselves from the chain of pleasure and pain, and, above all, were unable to free themselves ontologically from the dominion of death. This liberation of human nature was achieved in Jesus Christ and is experienced in the partaking of Divine Grace in the mysteries of the Church. However, each person must struggle in Jesus Christ to

transcend pleasure and pain.

St. Maximus the Confessor makes a detailed elaboration of these issues and presents the way this revocation of pleasure and pain is achieved in personal life.

First, he divides pleasure and pain (grief) into two categories, a pleasure of the soul and a pleasure of the body, as well as a pain (grief) of the soul and of the body. Pleasure of the senses creates pain in the soul and pleasure of the soul creates pain to the senses. The experience of virtue brings pleasure and pain. That is, virtue is accompanied by pain of the flesh, because, by living according to God, man lacks the soft and friendly sense. It is also accompanied by the pleasure of the soul, because it enjoys the pure concepts, freed from every sensible thing. For this reason, anyone who desires the life of Christ, which is held in heaven and will be given as an inheritance through the rising of the dead, feels joy and delight in his soul, while feeling sorrow in the flesh, i.e., he feels the pain and grief caused by temptations.²⁹

Although he feels pain in the flesh because of voluntary or involuntary temptations, a person who lives in Christ is unceasingly happy, for he knows that in this way he is liberated from the law of sin and death. Redeeming pain is necessary for the cure of man, but this pain should be sound, not irrational.³⁰

We have already stressed in this presentation that modern human life is dominated by sensual pleasure and pain, because there is a vicious circle that has been planted in human nature due to Adam's fall, but also cultivated by every man. Only Christ, being perfect God and perfect man, transcended pleasure by his seedless generation by the Holy Spirit and from the Virgin Mary, while also defeating death and pain, by assuming the painful Cross. It is precisely for this reason that Christ is the perfect man and the model for all the faithful. Christ is both the archetype of our creation and our healer, the one who liberates us from the tragedy of sensual pleasure and pain. Asceticism according to Christ is to be seen in this perspective, which is clearly distinct from any other asceticism of the eastern kind, because it is not ruled by human effort, but by God's energy and man's synergy.

IV. The great contribution and value of Orthodox hesychasm

In the analysis above we established that sensual pleasure causes tremendous problems in the being of man, for all the tragic seeds of pain and death are hidden in the state of pleasure. When someone carries the cross of asceticism in Jesus Christ, he is freed from the tyranny of sensual pleasure. Therefore, the presence of pain in our life is beneficial, when we confront it with faith, patience, and in God. This implies that an intensive effort and a continuous struggle

against our fallen human nature is required. We carry the seeds of tragedy within our existence. Man's fundamental problem is not social evil, but the corruption of human nature. So, we continuously struggle to transform mortal nature into a person according to Christ.

This transformation is achieved through Orthodox hesychasm, which aims at the transcendence of pleasure and pain. It is not an old-fashioned and ungrounded method, but rather a most applicable and modern act. Orthodox hesychasm is closely connected to the cure of man. Today, men seek therapy because they are possessed by the tragedy of sensual pleasure and pain. It is on this point that I see the greatest value of Orthodox spirituality, which differs clearly from any other spirituality of either the Western or the Eastern type.

The fact that the modern world is characterized by the experience of tragedy, related to the enjoyment of sensual pleasure and the experiencing of pain, and that today's man seeks redemption and cure and finds it in Orthodox hesychasm, is something clearly demonstrated (*by*) so many people who turn to Orthodox Theology in its authentic expression, both in Greece and in the West. The works of the neptic Fathers of the Church; the reading of (*the*) Philokalia, which, in its final form, was completed by St. Nicodemos the Athonite along with St. Makarios Notaras, Bishop of Corinth; the spread of the works of St. Symeon the new Theologian, of St.

Gregory Palamas and many other saints; the study of the works of the 4th century Fathers, through the neptic-hesychastic teaching of the Church; all demonstrate this search by contemporary man. Therefore, we should not just look at the negative conditions, such as the tragedy of sensual pleasure and pain, but also look at the search for a cure and what Orthodox Theology has to offer.

There is still a huge traditional layer of Orthodox life in our people. Unfortunately, however, this layer is sometimes exploited by irresponsible and self-seeking individuals.

In observing contemporary church life, one feels that there are many Christians who, even if they do not have any sound theological arguments, react against the scholasticism that has entered the sphere of Orthodox life. Likewise, they react to the Vaticanization which is visible in church administration, to the moralism exhibited in the area of spiritual life, to the ecumenistic view of matters of church life. They are unable to combine these with the true Orthodox church life, as lived by their ancestors, which they also read about it in the works of the Church Fathers. Many of these people belong to the Old Calendarists. It is essential that we offer Orthodox life in its authentic expression, so that we attribute a correct ontology to their reactions and prevent them from derailing to minor details. This is also necessary in relation to the great movement observed in the West towards Orthodox Theology and Orthodox church life.

I believe that this is the work of the great Fathers of the Church throughout the centuries, for they gave a theological interpretation of all ecclesiastical currents. If there had been no St. Symeon the New Theologian in the 11th century, perhaps the views of Stephanos, Metropolitan of Nicomedia, would have prevailed. These were purely cerebral and, I would dare claim, scholastic views. But St. Symeon showed in his works that the basis and purpose of Orthodox church life is man's deification (theosis), which is achieved by the energy of the Holy Spirit and the vision of the Uncreated Light.

In the 14th century, if it were not for the beneficial presence of St. Gregory Palamas, hesychasm might have been considered a heretical deviation from genuine church life according to the Gospel. But St. Gregory Palamas presented authoritatively and clearly the whole theology of hesychasm; what man is; how his union with God is achieved; what deification is, and the relationship between noetic prayer and man's ontology and salvation.

Further on, if the towering figure of St. Nicodemos the Athonite had not dominated the 18th century, the sizeable movement of Athonite monks that reacted to the reforms and the secularism of Orthodox life, and expressed its reaction by refusing to have memorial services on Sunday, would have been considered a heresy. St. Nicodemos, however, demonstrated clearly, in all his writings, that the movement of the so-called Kollyvades was the genuine spirit

of the Philokalia, which constitutes the very essence of Orthodox church life.

I believe that if in the beginning of this century, when the calendar problem emerged, there had been a great Father of our Church, such as St. Symeon the new Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Nicodemos the Athonite, then he would have proved that the popular reaction to the introduction of the new calendar was, in reality, a reaction to the introduction of alien views from the West, a reaction to the secularization of Orthodox Theology. Unfortunately, however, the issue was not viewed in this perspective and they made the mistake of limiting people's attention to the change in the calendar. The same mistake could have been made at the time of St. Gregory Palamas, if the debate had been confined only to the method of prayer without considering its theology. And this also holds true if, in the age of St. Nicodemos the Athonite, the whole issue had been restricted to the Sunday memorial services and the full meaning of the reaction to the spirit of secularism in Church had been overlooked.

All the above have been said in light of the fact that a deep layer of Orthodox life and conduct exists in Greece today. We have to cultivate and assign theological meaning and significance to this layer, because only in this way will the Orthodox roots of life remain alive in our people. And we must do the same for all the numerous

converts to Orthodoxy in the Western world. Today, people in the West love Orthodoxy and are enthusiastic about it, because they read the writings of the neptic Fathers and seek this inner peace and communion with God. They look for this theology which can tell them how to get rid of sensual pleasure and pain.

Conclusion:

The present state of the world is expressed vividly and in detail by St. Paul the Apostle, as preserved in his second Epistle to Timothy. There are two trends and two states of people:

Those living outside God belong to the first one. St. Paul writes: "Know this also, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanders, without self-control, brutal, despisers of those that are good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying its power: From such people turn away. For of this sort are those who creep into houses, and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away with by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they will progress no further: for their folly shall be manifest to all, as theirs also was"

(II Tim . 3: 1-9).

In the second category are those who are united with Christ, the disciples of Christ who search for the truth and live in Christ, as expressed by the Apostle himself: "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra - what persecutions I endured: but the Lord delivered me out of them all . Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim . 3, 10-12). People of the first category are "evil men and seducers, ... deceiving, and being deceived," while people of the second category are those who are whole and complete, in the words of the Apostle: "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim . 3: 13-17). I would like to believe that a strong current of people who live in the spirit of unspoiled church tradition also exists today . As well as others who are disappointed by the tragedy of hedonism and pain, and seek a way out of this tragic Hell . Rather than remaining idle when faced with negative situations and lamenting over the tragedy of the modern world, we should take a look at these positive aspects and feed those who are hungry and thirsty for God's righteousness. In this way we will contribute to the revitalisation of Orthodox church life .

Endnotes :

- 1 George Mantzarides, "Person and Institutions", Pournara, Thessaloniki, 1997, p.147
- 2 "Religion and Ethics Encyclopedia", vol.6, p.7 and Greg . Kostaras, "Philosophical propaedia", 218 and 263 .
- 3 "The Philokalia", London, 1981, Trans . Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, Vol II . Fourth Century, 33, p243
- 4 ibid., 34, p.244 .
- 5 ibid., 33, p.243 .
- 6 ibid., 33, p.243 .
- 7 ibid., 48, p.246 .
- 8 ibid., 33, p.243 .
- 9 ibid., 33, p.243 .
- 10 ibid., 34, p.244 .
- 11 ibid., 34, 35, p.244.
- 12 ibid., 35, p.244.
- 13 ibid., 37, p.244 .
- 14 ibid., 36, p.244 .
- 15 ibid., 36, p.244.
- 16 ibid., 38, p.244 .
- 17 ibid., 39, pp.244-245.
- 18 ibid., 39, p.244.
- 19 ibid., 39, p.244.
- 20 ibid., 39, p.245.
- 21 ibid., 46, p.247
- 22 ibid., 44, p.246 .

- 23 *ibid.*, 40, 41, 42, p.245.
- 24 *ibid.*, 42, p.245 .
- 25 *ibid.*, 42, p.246 .
- 26 *ibid.*, 43, p.246 .
- 27 *ibid.*, 45, p.247
- 28 *ibid.*, 36, p.244 .
- 29 *ibid.*, 7, p.236 .
- 30 *ibid.*, 8, 9, 10, p.236-237.[Publishing List]

