

WE OPENED THE WINDOWS TO THE WEST
(But Forgot to Put Up the Screens)
by
Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

There have been few periods in Church History more tragic than the time after the Fall of Constantinople. In the Balkans and in the Mediterranean area, our people were laid low by slavery and subjugation to the Moslems. In Russia, in Transylvania and especially in the Ukraine, our people were subjected to constant harassment and attack from the Swedes, the Germans, and the Poles. The Roman Catholics and Protestants were quick to take advantage of this situation and, as we see in the lives of Saint Niphon, Patriarch of Constantinople, Saint Dimitri of Rostov, and Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris, they did everything they could to infiltrate, influence, and pervert the Orthodox Faith. Our people knew that these heterodox were wrong and that they had to be refuted. But alas, the Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians were exceedingly glib, and the level of theological learning among our people was not what it had once been. The patristic texts were not so readily obtainable, and since, in any case, the Fathers had never written any "Systematic Theology" and a knowledge of them involved both a great deal of expense and time (and, I might add, if this is true now, how much more was it true then), our people very often resorted to the unfortunate, but easy, expedient of using Protestant arguments against the Roman Catholics, and Roman Catholic arguments against the Protestants (as we see in the Calvinistic *Confession* of Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris and in the latinizing *Catechism* of Metropolitan Peter Moghila of Kiev, to mention only two of the many that followed). The only trouble with this tactic (besides being wrong!) is that in neither case is one defending the *Orthodox Catholic* Faith. And there is another aspect to this dangerous strategy. It is not a good idea to be reading (much less using) heretical material. Saint Isaac of Syria, in fact, is very explicit on this point:

Beware of the doctrines of heretics, for they, more than anything else, can arm the spirit of blasphemy against you.

(Homily Four)

Alas, if one is involved with heretical material too long, he begins to be infected with it, the result being a "theologian" whose outlook is not totally (or sometimes, not even remotely) Patristic, but rather Latin or Protestant, or some bizarre mixture of both. This unfortunate period in Church History is known as the "Western" or "Latin Captivity."

Hence, one finds doctrines like Anselm's satisfaction theory, that is, "the perfect satisfaction to the justice of God" or "the suffering willed by God a just payment for sin," which — although they appear *nowhere* in the Holy Scriptures or the Holy Fathers — are phrases found again and again in the various latter-day catechisms printed in Russia and Greece, even though the doctrine itself was first invented and promulgated by a Roman Catholic theologian of the Scholastic school.

We are not at all scandalized by the fact that many illustrious churchmen, including even our God-bearing Father Saint Nectarius of Pentapolis, have these non-patristic and non-Biblical

phrases appearing in their catechisms. In fact, this whole situation reminds us of an incident from the life of the great wonderworker Saint Gerasimus of Jordan. The Saint had gone to visit Saint Euthymius the Great, who was at that time living in the wilderness of Rubah. They had discussed many and various spiritual matters, when, in the course of the conversation, Saint Euthymius, "the theological mind of the desert," pointed out to Saint Gerasimus that his belief concerning our Saviour was heretical. Saint Euthymius corrected Saint Gerasimus upon this point and set him straight on the matter of Christology. The fact of the matter is that, out of his simplicity and guilelessness, Saint Gerasimus, like Peter, Mark, Julian, and Silvan the anchorites, had been deceived and led astray by the Monophysite bishop Theodosius, and had unwittingly accepted his teaching.

When Saint Gerasimus returned to his cell, he was overwhelmed by many thoughts so that he became confused and troubled. For you see, he was a great wonderworker. And although the Saint, in his humility, understood that it was God and not he that had wrought all these miracles through him, he began to doubt Saint Euthymius' words. For he reasoned to himself, "If I were in heresy, would not the heresy be an impediment for the grace of God to work signs and wonders?" And it was revealed to him that God had seen that he had accepted the heretical doctrine out of simplicity, and not out of evil intent. And God, of course, had also foreseen the Saint's repentance. Indeed, in his fourth homily on the *Book of Job*, Saint John Chrysostom tells us, "For if one should sin out of guilelessness, God corrects those things that are done out of guilelessness and simplicity."

Furthermore, in the writings of SS. Barsanuphius and John, we read that a group of monks had come to Saint Barsanuphius to ask him concerning the apparently Origenistic teaching of *Apokatástasis* (the universal restoration and ultimate salvation of all creation, including the demons) which appears in the writings of Saint Gregory of Nyssa. Saint Barsanuphius first censures the monks for their untimely curiosity in matters that do not directly concern their spiritual discipline, and he tells them:

We have ignored the Apostle Paul who writes, "Let all wrath and anger and blasphemy be put away from you, as well as all evil" (and to this I would add gluttony, fornication, greed and all the other passions) for which things we must needs weep day and night. . . . Ye have not brought to mind the Prophet who "forgot to eat his bread" and ye waste your time, and are careless, and have ye already reached that level where ye are able to discuss such matters?

But then the Saint continues by saying that he will answer these thoughts which the monks were having about Saint Gregory of Nyssa:

Yet, I did not wish to leave you with such thoughts and I remembered him that said, "Bear ye one another's burdens." Hearken, therefore, to this which God revealed to me three days before ye wrote your question.

All the Fathers who pleased God were holy and righteous and true servants of God (may they ever pray in my behalf!). But do not think that because they were saints they were able truly to comprehend all the deep things of God. For the Apostle says, "we know in part and we prophesy in part" and again, "to one is

given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit. . . ." and all these are not given to one man, but to some in this manner and to some in that manner; "but all these worketh that one and selfsame Spirit." For the Apostle, knowing that the things of God are incomprehensible, cried, saying: "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor?" Wherefore, attempting to be teachers, or rather, being constrained in this by other men, they advanced greatly, even beyond their teachers, and receiving revelation concerning new doctrines, these did they set forth. But at the same time, they yet retained their instructors' traditions, which, in fact, were erroneous. And though they advanced later and became spiritual instructors, they did not pray unto God as regards their teachers' doctrines, to learn whether or not those things spoken by them were indeed spoken by the Holy Spirit. But esteeming their teachers to be wise and erudite, they did not examine their sayings. Wherefore, their own teachings were mingled with those of their teachers; hence, sometimes they spake from the teachings that they had learned from them, and at other times they spake from the wisdom of their own minds. This was how it came to be that these words were written in their name. For they received some things from others, and having themselves advanced and become greater, through the Holy Spirit they spake whatever they learned from Him. But they quoted also from the teachings of their instructors without examining their words; neither did they consider whether they should be informed by prayer and supplication to God as to whether or not these teachings were true; and thus, the teachings were mingled one with another. Yet, because these words were spoken by the Saints, they were also written in their names.

If, therefore, you should hear one of them saying that he speaks that which he heard from the Holy Spirit, that is a revelation (*pleroforía*), and we are obliged to believe it. But, should you find him saying concerning these teachings that they are not by revelation but from the doctrines of his former teachers, then we must attentively listen to them with knowledge, discernment, and wisdom, for the Saint did not pray unto God concerning these doctrines, to learn whether they be true or no.

Behold, ye have heard all my foolishness. Be quiet henceforth, and meditate on the things of God, and cease your idle talk. Be attentive as regards your passions, concerning which ye will have to give answer at the Day of Judgment. Concerning these matters ye did not ask. How is it that ye know nothing, nor have learned anything concerning these things? Weep, therefore, and lament. Follow in the footsteps of your fathers, of Pimen and the rest, and run that ye might gain the prize, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom be glory unto the ages. Amen.

(SS. Barsanuphius and John, *The 604th Answer*)

Incidentally, Saint Nectarius, who was in all things scrupulously honest, tells us in his *Sacred Catechism of the Orthodox Church* where he got that passage about "appeasing and satisfying the righteousness of God" [*sic*] (he took it word for word from the *Greek* translation

[1834 ed., p. 106] of the *German* translation of the *Russian* original of the *Catechism* of Metropolitan Platon of Moscow, who was right in the middle of the period of the "Latin Captivity.") These books were what he was taught from in school.

In actuality, our beloved father Saint Nectarius is not so much known for his teaching as he is for his unbelievable meekness (as one can see from all the slanders that he patiently endured during his life) and for his great gifts of wonderworking and healing. And this is nothing to marvel at, for the holy Apostle Paul writes:

And God hath placed some in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

(I Cor. 12:28-29)

The fortunate thing is that there always were men who recognized the heterodox influences creeping into these latter-day catechisms and dogmatics and apologetics' handbooks, and they were not slow in speaking out against them (so no one can ever say that there was a "break" or a "gap" in Holy Tradition). There was our own Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky. Also, the saintly Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov was one who constantly spoke out against the Latin and Protestant influences that were creeping into the Church. There were also countless numbers of Orthodox clergy and people who staunchly defended their Orthodox Faith. There were, in addition, the holy services of the Church, the writings of the Holy Fathers, the decisions of the Holy Ecumenical and Local Councils — all of which have remained inviolate and unchanged throughout the centuries.

As our beloved Metropolitan, Saint Philaret, the New Confessor, of New York, used to say, "Peter the First [known in the West as "Peter the Great"] opened the windows to the West, but he forgot to put up the screens." The West had a lot of useful, "first degree knowledge" things, as Saint Isaac of Syria would say. It also had a lot of not so useful things, like modern weapons, nuclear "devices", missiles, and chemical warfare, and, in its "theology", rationalism and scholasticism.

So, because we forgot to put up the screens, a lot of "gnats" got in and are still biting us. Some of the "gnats" are small and inconsequential, but some are whoppers and dangerous.

However, there *are* appropriate insecticides.