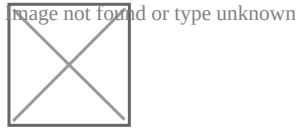


Faith is a matter of the heart (Nikolaos of Mesogaias and Lavreotikis)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Some years ago a young student came up to me. Very hesitantly, but with the intensity of demanding an answer, he told me he was an atheist and, though he would very much like to believe, he couldn't. He'd tried for years and stuck to his search, but had gotten nowhere.

He'd chatted with professors and educated people but his thirst for something serious hadn't been satisfied. He'd heard of me and decided he'd share his existential need with me. He asked me for scientific proof of God.

'Do you know about integrals and different kinds of equations?', I asked him.

'Unfortunately not. I'm studying Philosophy'

'Pity', I said, 'because I know just such a proof', obviously joking.

He looked embarrassed and went quiet for a while.

'Look', I said, 'I'm sorry I made a bit of a joke. But God's not an equation or any kind of mathematical proof. If it were like that, then all the educated people would believe. You have to know that God's approached in a different way. Have you ever been to the Holy Mountain? Have you ever met an ascetic?'



‘No, Father, but I’m thinking of going, I’ve heard so much about it. Tell me and I’ll go tomorrow. Do you know any educated person I could go and see?’.

‘Which would you prefer, an educated person who’ll befuddle your brain, or a saint who’ll wake you up?’.

‘I’d rather have the educated person. I’m afraid of saints’.

‘Faith’s a matter of the heart. Give a saint a try. What’s your name?’, I asked.

‘Gavrīil’, he answered.

I sent him to an ascetic. I described how to get there and gave him the necessary directions. We even made a sketch.

‘Go’, I told him, ‘and ask the same thing: I’m an atheist, tell him, and I want to believe. I want proof of the existence of God’.

“I’m afraid. I’m ashamed’, he answered.

‘Why are you afraid of the saint and ashamed before him, but you’re not with me?’, I asked. ‘Just go and ask him the same thing’.

A few days later, he went and found the ascetic talking to a young man in the yard in front of his house. On the opposite side, there were four others waiting, sitting on some upturned logs. Gavriil shyly found his place among them. After no more than ten minutes, the elder finished his conversation with the young man.

‘How are doing over there?’, he asked. ‘Have you had a sweet? A glass of water?’.

‘Thank you, Elder’, they answered with conventional politeness

‘Come here’, he said, addressing Gavriil, picking him out from the others. ‘I’ll bring some water; you bring the box of sweets. Come over here and I’ll tell you a secret. All right, some people are atheists, but to be an atheist and to have the name of an angel? That’s the first time I’ve heard of that’.

The young man nearly had a heart attack from this sudden revelation. How did the elder know his name? Who’d told him about his problem? What on earth did the elder really mean?

As soon as he’d recovered himself he whispered: ‘Father can I speak to you for a little?’.

‘Look, it’s getting dark. Take a sweet, have a glass of water and go to the nearest monastery to stay overnight’.

‘Father, I really want to speak. Can we not?’.

‘But what’s to say, son? Why did you come?’.

Gavriil related: ‘At that question, I felt I could breathe easily. My heart was filled with faith, my inner world was warmed, my doubts were dispelled without any logical argument, without any discussion, without any specific answer. All the ‘ifs’ the ‘whys’ the ‘maybes’ that I had within me simply collapsed and all that was left was what do from now on and how to do it’.

What the thinking of educated people hadn’t been able to give him had been provided by a gentle hint from a saint, a man whose formal education ended after the fourth class of Primary School. Saints are very discreet. They perform an operation on you without anesthesia and you don’t feel a thing. They perform a transplant without even opening you up. They take you up to inaccessible heights without the ladders of secular reason. They plant faith in you without tiring your brain.

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