

23 Μαρτίου 2017

## Secularism in Church, Theology, and Pastoral Care (Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos))

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



**In the thoughts that follow I would like to look at a crucial subject. It is the great issue of secularism in church, theology, and pastoral care.**



*St Paul*

Secularism is the loss of the true life of the Church, the alienation of Church members from the genuine Church spirit. Secularism is the rejection of the

ecclesiastic ethos and the permeation of our life by the so-called “worldly spirit.”

It should be stressed that secularization of the Church members is a grave danger. The Church has several “enemies”; the worst and most dangerous one is secularization, which eats up the marrow of the Church. The Church itself, of course, is under no real danger, since it is the blessed Body of Christ, but the threat exists for the members of the Church.

To be accurate, we would say that secularism, which consists of the adulteration of the way of life and of true faith, is related to the passions and, naturally, has been lurking in the Church since the beginning of its existence. In Paradise, Adam attempted to interpret God’s commandments rationally. Even after Pentecost there were cases of some Christians adopting an anthropocentric way of thinking and living. Gnostics and others are the obvious proofs of this.

But for the most part, secularism started after the cessation of the persecutions. During the persecutions, Christians believed and lived in truth. When Christianity became the official state religion, an adulteration of the Christian faith and way of living began. Anachoreticism, and later monasticism, developed as a reaction to this secularization. As the Holy Scripture illustrates, especially in the Epistles of the holy Apostles, all Christians lived monastically in the ancient Church. Secularism developed as a consequence of people being attracted to Christianity out of expediency, and the development of monasticism came as a response to that. Monasticism is not something alien to the Church but rather life according to the Gospel, which some Christians wanted to live in perfection and thus elected this way of living. It can be argued that even the most eccentric monk constitutes a healthy reaction to the secular spirit that plagues Christians of our age.

Before proceeding to see how we experience secularism in Church, theology, and pastoral care, I would like to examine more closely the secular spirit and the meaning of the world (*cosmos*) in the Biblical-Patristic tradition, since the word *cosmos* constitutes the main concept of the term *secularism*.

### **The Double Meaning of the Word *Cosmos***

The word *cosmos* (world) has two meanings in the Bible and in the works of the holy Fathers. The first is that *cosmos* is the creation of God, the entire creation; the second meaning is that of the passions and everything that characterizes the spirit of the flesh that lacks the Holy Spirit.

To begin with, *cosmos* is the creation. It is called such because it is an ornament, a jewel (*cosmema* in Greek). In the Orthodox tradition, we say that the world is a

positive work of God. It is not a copy of some other real world, the world of ideas; nor is it a downfall from the true world or a creation of a lesser God. The phrase in the Creed—"I believe in one God, Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of everything visible and invisible"—was articulated to counter a teaching of certain ancient heretics that claimed that the world is a creature of a lesser God.

So the world is a creation of God, an ornament, a jewel. God created the world with His uncreated energy, for God is creator by energy and not by substance. It is characteristic that at the end of creation, the Bible notes " . . . and God saw that it was good".

God not only created the world, He also maintains it with His uncreated providential energies. Christ's words which demonstrate God's love for the world are significant: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son in order that whoever believes in Him is not lost but lives eternally" (John 3:16). God's love for the world was expressed mainly through Christ's incarnation and man's salvation. After all, man is the microcosm within the macrocosm and is the summation of all creation.

The word *world* in the sense of God's creation can be found in several Biblical passages. Saint John, talking about Christ and the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, says: "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not" (John 1:10). It is also said in several passages that while the world is God's creature, it can become a deceit by the evil one, since the evil one deceived Adam in Paradise through the world, through the creation. That is why the Lord sums it up: "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Matt. 16:26).

The second meaning of the word *world* is sin, passions of the flesh, the spirit of the flesh, the spirit that is deprived of the Holy Spirit's life and energy. We encounter the word *world* in this sense several times in the Bible.

Saint John frequently uses the word *world* to denote God's creation, the entire creation. In other cases, he uses it to denote the passions of the flesh, everything that keeps man away from God, or man's life outside of God. A typical passage is the following: "For all that is in the world . . . but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). John does not ask us not to love the creation, God's creation, but rather the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the arrogance of life, which constitute in reality what is called the world.

In Saint Paul's Epistles, there is a characteristic passage showing that the world is,

on the one hand, the desire of the eyes and the arrogance of life, all the external things that become the evil one's deceit and deceive us; on the other hand, the world is the passions of the soul, that is, the contrary-to-nature motion of the soul's forces. Saint Paul says, "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). The Apostle is not taking pride in his origins, in his Roman citizenship, in the fact that he saw Christ in His glory, but only in the Cross of Christ through which he put the world to death. And this happened in a double way: First, the world was crucified for him, then he was crucified for the world. In the first instance, the devil could no longer deceive him with external stimulation. In the second one, he completely eliminated the world of passions and desires existing inside himself.

It is in these two meanings that we encounter the word *world* in patristic texts. Saint Gregory Palamas teaches that the world as a creature of God is neither to be held in contempt nor to be hated. In this meaning, the world has to be used by man for his maintenance. There is a danger, however, when someone views the world as a creature of God also to view it as the devil's deception; for the devil truly knows how to utilize the world to deceive man.

In the Holy Scripture, it is said that the devil is king of the world. Interpreting this term, Saint Gregory Palamas points out that God, who created the world, is the real king of the world. The devil is called such because he dominates the world of injustice and sin. Indeed, " . . . the abuse of beings, our passionate ruling over the world, the world of injustice, the wicked desire and arrogance . . . ," these constitute the world whose king is the devil. Here it is clear that *world* means sin and passions.

In discussing man's departure from the world, St. Basil the Great says that it is not an escape from the world or the soul's exit from the body, as argued by the ancient philosophers; but rather it is the absence of attachment by the soul to the body. Naturally, when the Fathers refer to the body, they do not mean the body as such but rather the carnal spirit, the passions of the flesh and the adoration of the body.

It is in this context that the Fathers discuss the world. Theoleptos of Philadelphia says, "I call 'world' the love of material objects and of the flesh." He who is liberated from these " . . . becomes akin to Christ and acquires His love." More generally, to quote Saint Isaac the Syrian, "when we want to name all passions, we call them world."

It is this sense of the word *world* that is used in the term *secularism* and that we

will employ hereafter. Secularism is man's distortion by the spirit of the flesh and the passions. When our life is permeated by passions, by the world of injustice, and when we pursue such a life within the Church and try to be theologians in such a manner, this is secularism. Secularism is life's estrangement from God, our not pursuing communion and unity with Him, our attachment to earthly matters, and our viewing of all things and issues in our life away from God's will. One could claim that secularism is a synonym for anthropocentrism.

In what follows, we will analyze the term *secularism* in the above framework, obviously extending its dimensions.

## **Secularism in the Church Life**

It should be emphasized that when we talk about secularism in the Church, in theology, and in pastoral care, we do not imply that the Church, theology, and pastoral care become secular and are destroyed. That would imply that the true life and man's true way of therapy are lost. Instead, it is the members of the Church that become secular and, therefore, view the Church, theology, and pastoral care differently. However, throughout the centuries, there are Church members who preserve the truth regarding the Church, theology, and Orthodox pastoral care.

### *Secularism in Church*

In the past we have had the opportunity to analyze the meaning of the term *Church*. The main point is that the Church is Christ's body. It is not a human organization but the God-man [theanthropic] body of Christ. We have also said that the Church is deification, which means that its purpose is to guide its members to divinization, the principal objective of man's creation.

An important excerpt illustrating the objective of the shepherds of the Church can be found in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Christians of Ephesus. Says the Apostle: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephes. 4:11-13). According to Saint Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, in the phrase "the knowledge of the Son of God," Saint Paul does not mean "the knowledge of God which is achieved through the viewing of created things and the divine Scriptures; the impure can also possess such knowledge; instead he refers to the supernatural knowledge of the Son of God, arrived at through divine illumination and glorification, and granted solely to the perfect ones, those purified

from the passions of the flesh and of the soul. It is this knowledge that he wishes all Christians to arrive at.” Also, the phrase “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” conveys the concept of deification.

The true Church’s existence is demonstrated by its success in curing man. We know from the teaching of the holy Fathers that the Church is the spiritual health center, the spiritual hospital that cures man. When we refer to illness and cure, we mean that the *nous*\* is ill and is cured. The *nous*’ cure is not independent of purification, illumination, and deification. The Church’s goal is to cure this gnostic center so that man can acquire the knowledge of God that constitutes his salvation. Therefore, the existence of the true Church can be seen in the degree of success, in the results of the therapy. If it cures man, if it makes a correct diagnosis of the disease, and if it knows the way and method of therapy, then it is the true, not the secular, Church.

There are some tokens revealing that this particular Church preserves the knowledge and the success of therapy. Man’s right social relationships comprise one such token. Indeed the disturbance of interpersonal relationships is a product, a result of the illness of *nous*. The *nous*’ therapy, which consists of its purification and its illumination, has sociological consequences, too. That is why what is relevant to the *nous*’ therapy ought to be studied by today’s so-called “science” of sociology. We Orthodox view the transformation of society through such a perspective; that is why we are realists. It is utopian to want to transform society by trying to find a suitable social system. What is relevant is not a system but a way of life. This is not to imply that we do not applaud every effort for the improvement of certain bad conditions in the post-Fall and sick societies that for the most part do not accept God’s word. But the most effective and realistic way is through the therapy of the *nous*.

Another example revealing a church’s degree of success in curing is the presence and existence of holy relics. The holy relics are a proof of man’s cure. When the *nous* is purified and illumined and when man attains deification, then he is entirely divinized, because God’s Grace is transported from the soul to the body. The relics of the saints, which are everlasting, fragrant, and miraculous, are proof that the method and way of therapy are preserved, that the Church leads man to deification. That is why it has been pointedly argued that the aim of the Church is to create relics, in the sense that it seeks to guide man to deification. A church that does not produce relics demonstrates that it does not lead man to deification and, hence, it does not possess the true method for man’s therapy.

Therefore, the existence of the true Church is revealed in its degree of success. In

medicine it is said that a correct medical theory is distinguished from an incorrect one by its degree of success. Similarly, a doctor is good depending on his healing rate. Likewise for the Church. An organized Church is one that cures man; its existence is demonstrated by its success in the therapy of the darkened *nous*.

Secularism in the Church is directly related to the loss of the Church's true objective. A church not inspired by what has been said above, that is a Church that does not cure man but is concerned with other matters, is a secularized church. It is in this sense that we refer to secularism in the Church. Now we will turn to some cases illustrating the secularized Church.

We can say that the Church becomes secular when it is considered to be a *religious organization*. There is an enormous difference between the Church and religion. Religion speaks about an impersonal God who inhabits the heavens and manages the world from up there. Man, through various rituals, has to appease God and establish communication with Him. But the Church is the Body of Christ who assumed human nature, and in this way there exists a communion between man and God in the Person of Christ. Of course, it cannot be precluded that some Christians within the Church are experiencing God from a religious perspective. This, however, occurs in the lower stages of spiritual life; it constitutes spiritual immaturity, and there is definitely a willingness and tendency for man to go on maturing spiritually so that he arrives at communion and unity with God. A secularized Church, however, simply satisfies the so-called religious feelings of man and nothing more. It is noted for its beautiful ceremonies, and it neglects the entire neptic and therapeutic wealth owned by the Church.

Further, the Church is secularized when it is viewed as an *ideological field* and ideological system, unrelated to life. Ideological systems are inspired by abstract ideas and are imbued with idealism, which has the characteristics of all anthropocentric systems that are based on philosophy and are against materialism. Ideas do not have much of a relation to life, to man's transformation. Idealism is created by man's rationality and is presented in the form of arguments and ideas.

The Church does not function as an ideological field. It does not simply have some ideas, be it the best and most perfect ones, that it uses to counter other ideas. The Church has the life, indeed the true life, which is a fruit of man's communion with God. Saint Gregory Palamas says: "Every saying is countered by another saying." Every argument is confronted by a counterargument. This can be seen clearly in many of the philosophical ideas that have been developed. But who can confront true life, and in particular, life that defeats death? The Church does not have ideas. It has life, which is the transcendence of death.

It is wrong, it is secularistic, to contrast the Church to old or modern ideologies and to modern ideological sociopolitical systems. The Church does not simply copy the methods and manners of other social and philosophical systems. Instead, it possesses a life that is not identical to the purpose of idealistic systems. Of course, when the Church cures man, this has important sociological consequences, but this is a product, a result, and never the cause or the principle.

The secularized Church is occupied with human thought and abstract ideas. The real and true Church, however, is like true medicine, and in particular surgery. A surgeon can never engage in philosophy and culture, can never meditate while performing a surgical operation. In front of him he has a patient he wants to cure, to bring back to full health. Likewise the Church, having in front of her a patient, can never meditate or philosophize. The Church itself experiences the mystery of Christ's Cross and assists man in experiencing the same in his personal life. The experience of the Cross mystery is the deepest repentance through which the *nous* is transformed. From the contrary-to-nature motion it acquires movement according to nature and above nature.

Furthermore, the Church becomes secular when it is downgraded to a *social organization*, like so many other organizations in society. It is often claimed that the Church is the nation's supreme institution. But the Church cannot be considered as an institution of the nation, even the supreme institution. It may be the substance of the nation, since the nation's tradition is inextricably tied to the Church tradition, and nation members are simultaneously Church members. The Church, however, can never become an institution. When a revolution ends up in a bureaucracy, it loses its value, and this brings about its downfall. The same is true of the Church. Being the spiritual hospital that cures man, the Church cannot be considered an institution in support of society, appropriate for citizen taming.

Unfortunately, today some view the Church as a necessary organization, useful for society, its role valued according to its social usefulness. For many the Church is



viewed as Prometheus, with police in the role of Epimetheus; that is, the Church is good enough as society's assistant in order to avoid police intervention. When the Church fails, the police step in. Certainly one cannot dismiss Church benefaction in such matters. A cured Christian causes no troubles to the police. But we should not see the Church presence only in this field because then we refer to a secularized Church.

There are others, unfortunately, who do not look at the prophetic and sanctifying role of the Church, which consists of the sanctification of man and of the whole world. Rather, they accept the Church as a mere decorative element. They need it to decorate various ceremonies and to brighten them with its presence; or they may believe that the Church's presence is required to demonstrate a wide social consensus. But as it has been pointedly observed, not even the atheists reject such a church. However, such a secularized church causes despair to the atheists as well. They may need it for the time being, because it serves them well, but they will face a grave disappointment when they, too, need the true presence of the Church.

Today there is a general tendency to view a secular Church as more useful for modern social needs. There is also a growing tendency to adjust sermons and Church teaching to these social needs, the needs of a society functioning in anthropocentric ways, because we fear society's rejection. Protestants and, generally, the Western "churches" have succumbed to this temptation, and that is why they have spread much despair to those seeking therapy, to those seeking the true Church for a cure.

Overall, a Church that crucifies instead of being crucified, that experiences worldly glory instead of the glory of the Cross, a Church that falls to, instead of overcoming, Christ's three temptations in the desert, is a secularized church. Such a Church is destined to accommodate a fallen society and to encourage it to remain in its fallen state; it spreads disappointment and despair to those who seek something deeper and more substantive. *Secularism in Theology*

Since theology is the voice and faith of the Church, it follows that what has been said about the Church so far applies to theology too. We will discuss this particular subject further in order to see the way that Orthodox theology is secularized in greater detail.

Theology is the logos of God (theo-logia in Greek). It is assumed that someone who talks about God must know God. In the Orthodox Church we say that the knowledge of God is not intellectual but spiritual, that is, it is connected to man's communion with God. In Saint Gregory Palamas's teaching, the vision of the

uncreated Light is closely connected to man's deification, to man's communion with God and the knowledge of God. That is why theology is identical to the vision of God and the theologian is identical to the God-seer. Someone who talks about God, even reflectively, can be called a theologian, and this is why the Fathers attribute the term *theologian* to the philosophers as well. However, from an Orthodox standpoint a theologian is someone who witnessed the glory of God or, at least, accepts the experience of those who reached deification.

In this sense, theologians are the God-seers, those who achieved deification and received the Revelation of God. Saint Paul is one such theologian. He went up to the third heaven, and on several occasions he describes and reveals his apocalyptic experiences. This occurs to such an extent that Saint John Chrysostom, talking about Saint Paul and about the fact that in his Epistles there are greater mysteries than in the Gospels, argues that "Christ declared more important and unspoken things through St. Paul than through Himself."

Saint Paul, as he himself says in the third person, was captured "up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2). I would like to remind us of Saint Maximos the Confessor's interpretation, according to which the three heavens are in reality the three stages of spiritual life. The first heaven is the end of practical philosophy, which is the purification of the heart, the expulsion of all thoughts from the heart. The second heaven is natural *theoria*, that is, the knowledge of the inner essences of beings, when man through God's Grace becomes worthy of knowing the inner essences of beings: ceaseless inner prayer. The third heaven is *theoria*, theology, through which, and by divine Grace and the capture of the *nous*, one reaches, as is possible, the knowledge of God's mysteries and knows all the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. This is "the ignorance superior to knowledge," according to a characteristic saying by Saint Isaac the Syrian. This ignorance, relative to human knowledge, is the true knowledge of God. Therefore, theology is the third heaven, which is a fruit, an outcome of the purification of the heart and the illumination of the *nous*.

All these are related to another teaching by Saint Maximos the Confessor. According to this teaching, all that is seen needs to be crucified and all the thoughts need to be buried, and then the logos rises within ourselves and man ascends to *theoria* and becomes a true theologian. This means that Orthodox theology is closely tied to Orthodox asceticism; it cannot be conceived of outside Orthodox ascesis.

On discussing true theology, I think it is worth reminding ourselves of the Holy Niketas Stathatos's discourse on the interpretation of Paradise. An integral member

of the Orthodox Tradition, Hosios Niketas thoroughly analyzes how the Paradise created by God in Eden is “ . . . the great field of practical philosophy.” The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is natural *theoria*, while the tree of life is mystical theology. When man’s *nous* is purified, he can approach the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and from there acquire the gift of theology. This is the path followed by all the holy Fathers, and this is why they proved to be unerring theologians in the Church and real Shepherds of the people of God. On the contrary, the heretics tried and still try to make theology in other ways, with impure heart and reflection, not through practical philosophy, natural *theoria*, and mystical theology. For this reason, they failed and were expelled from the Church of Christ.

When theology is not a part of this framework, as presented by all the holy Fathers, then it is not Orthodox but secular. This secular theology is encountered in the West, where they analyze and interpret Holy Scripture through their own human and impure intellect, outside of the correct prerequisites presented by the holy Fathers.

A typical example of secular theology, functioning outside the traditional patristic framework, is so-called *scholastic theology*, which was developed in the West between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries. It was termed *scholastic* from the various schools cultivating it. Its main feature was that it relied heavily on philosophy, particularly that of Aristotle, and it attempted to rationally explain everything related to God.

Scholastic theology tried to rationally comprehend God’s Revelation and to harmonize theology and philosophy. It is characteristic that Anselm of Canterbury has said: “I believe in order to comprehend.” The scholastics started by a priori accepting God and then trying to prove His existence by rational arguments and logical categories. In the Orthodox Church, as expressed by the holy Fathers, we state that faith is God’s Revelation to man. We accept faith from hearsay not to comprehend it later, but to purify the heart, achieve faith through *theoria*, and experience Revelation. Scholastic theology, on the other hand, accepted something a priori and then struggled to comprehend it by means of rational arguments.

Scholastic theology attained its peak with Thomas Aquinas, who is considered a saint by the Latin church. He claimed that Christian truths are divided into natural and supernatural. Natural truths, such as the truth of God’s existence, can be proved philosophically; supernatural truths, such as the trinity of God, the incarnation of the Logos, and the resurrection of bodies, cannot be proved philosophically but can be shown not to be irrational. Scholasticism tightly

connected theology with philosophy and in particular, metaphysics; as a result, faith was adulterated, and scholastic theology itself was completely discredited when the model of metaphysics prevailing in the West collapsed. Scholasticism should not be acquitted of the tragedy of the West regarding faith today. The holy Fathers teach that there is no distinction between natural and metaphysical— only between created and uncreated. The holy Fathers never accepted Aristotle's metaphysics, but this is beyond our present topic.

Scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages considered scholastic theology to be a development surpassing Patristic theology. Frankish teaching on the superiority of scholastic over Patristic theology originates from this point. Thus, scholastics, who deal with reason, consider themselves superior to the holy Fathers of the Church and also consider human knowledge, a product of reason, higher than Revelation and experience.

It is from this perspective that we should view the conflict between Saint Gregory Palamas and Barlaam. Barlaam was essentially a scholastic theologian who attempted to bring this theology to the Orthodox East. His scholastic theology in reality constituted a secular theology. Barlaam believed that we cannot exactly know what the Holy Spirit is, thus ending in agnosticism; that ancient Greek philosophers were above the Prophets and the Apostles, since reason is higher than the Apostles' *theoria*; that the Light of the Transfiguration is something that is done and undone; that the hesychastic way of life, that is, the purification of the heart and ceaseless noetic prayer are not necessary, and so forth. Saint Gregory Palamas foresaw this danger to Orthodoxy, and with the power and energy of the Holy Spirit, in addition to the experience he personally had obtained as bearer and conveyer of the tradition of the holy Fathers, he confronted this grave danger and preserved unadulterated the Orthodox Faith and Tradition.

Unfortunately, Barlaamism, which is an expression of scholastic theology in the West and definitely constitutes secular theology, has infiltrated the Orthodox East in other ways. We observe that scholasticism, Barlaamism, permeates manifestations of modern church and theological life. In recent years, there has been an effort to cleanse our theology from its Babylonian captivity to Western scholasticism; there is a great effort to break Orthodox theology's encirclement by the prison of scholastic theology. But we must simultaneously move on to experiencing Orthodox theology. Orthodox theology is not intellectual knowledge, but rather an experience, life, and is closely connected to so-called hesychasm.

Secular theology, which is a function of scholasticism, manifests itself in several ways today. One is the way we base the entire mode of theology on reason and

thought. We think about Orthodox faith, we rationalize about the truths of faith, or we simply form a history of theology. We have almost reached the point of viewing theology as a philosophy about God, ignoring the whole therapeutic method of our Church.

Another way of experiencing Barlaamism and scholasticism is the fact that we have limited theology to aesthetics. We have made it aesthetics. We might write several books and undertake long analyses on Orthodox art, study the schools of iconography, and accept the great value of Byzantine art, while simultaneously treating with contempt and overlooking asceticism, the hesychastic method, that is the foundation of every Orthodox art. Purification, illumination, and deification are the basis of all the Orthodox Church's arts, acts and mysteries.

Another way we manifest secular theology is that we seek the rebirth of the Church's liturgical life without simultaneously discovering and living the ascetic life of the Church. We discuss the continual communion of the Sacraments without simultaneously relating this effort to the stages of spiritual perfection, which are purification, illumination, and deification. We make a great effort so that people can logically comprehend the Divine Liturgy, without making a parallel effort to experience the spirit of Orthodox worship. We seek to abolish the iconostasis so that laymen can peer into the altar, without asking the reason why the Church instituted the iconostasis and the secret reading of prayers. These are not independent of the secularization of ecclesiastical theology. Saint Maximos the Confessor's teaching and historical research are very revealing on this point. The catechumens cannot pray with the same prayers as the baptized and vice versa. If we study the teaching of Saint Simeon the New Theologian on who the catechumens really are, we will be able to understand why the Church has instituted the iconostasis and the secret reading of prayers.

Overall, when our theology is not tied to the so-called hesychastic life, when it is not ascetic, then it is secular, it is scholastic theology, it is Barlaamist theology—even if we seem to be fighting Western theology and struggle to be Orthodox.

### *Secularism in Pastoral Care*

Pastoral care is not unrelated to and independent of the Church and theology. Pastoral care is the work of the Church that aims at admitting man to her Body, at making him Her true member; it is the Church's method of guiding man to deification, which is the Church's deeper objective. Further, pastoral care is not unrelated to theology, for the true theologians are true shepherds, and those who

shepherd in an Orthodox way do so theologically. Therefore, what we have said so far about the Church and theology applies to pastoral care as well. The true Shepherds of the Church are the deified, those who partake, to various degrees, in the deifying energy of God or those who accept the deified and follow their teaching. Therefore, we either are deified or accept those who are and exercise pastoral care with their aid.

Moses reached deification by Grace; he saw God in His glory and then undertook the heavy task of the pastoral guidance of the people. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, before seeing God, Moses was unable to separate two Hebrews fighting with each other; after the vision of God, Moses was able to guide a difficult and uncompromising people. It is indicative that Moses passed the experience of deification on to the people through his guidance and the laws.

The same can be observed in all church life. Saint Gregory the Theologian views pastoral care as the most difficult science, and he definitely ties it to man's deification. For this reason, he desired that the shepherds be previously cured in order to be able to guide their spiritual children to therapy and deification.

The Sacred Canons of the Church present the pastoral method. If we view the Canons as legal schemes and structures, we fail to recognize their true place within the Church. As we have said elsewhere, the Sacred Canons are medicine to cure man. A careful examination of the Canons will lead us to the conclusion that they presuppose man's illness, which is the darkening of the *nous*, and they aim at man's health, which is the illumination of the *nous* and deification. According to Saint Basil the Great, there are five stages for those who repent, namely: those who stay outside the Church, crying and asking to be forgiven by the Christians; those who attend and listen to the Divine Word but leave the Church at the time the catechumens do; those who stay at the narthex of the Church and attend the Divine Liturgy on their knees; those who stay within the main Church, remain there and pray with the rest of the faithful without, however, partaking in the holy Communion; and finally, those who partake in the Body and Blood of Christ. These stages illustrate that every sin, which constitutes the darkening of the *nous*, is a repetition of Adam's sin and a degradation from true life. Then man is no longer a living member of Christ's Church. They also show that repentance is the struggle for man to become a member of the Church.

As stated before, the existence of the iconostasis should be viewed within this perspective. In older times, there were no iconostases—only some veils, and everyone had a visual communion with the goings-on because the entire holy Temple was a place for believers, for true Church members. There was a

substantial separation between the narthex and the main Temple. When someone sinned, he could not attend the Temple or pray with the believers. Thus, a class of repenters existed who were essentially in the catechumen state. Later, however, as a consequence of secularism in faith, those in repentance were allowed in the Temple, but iconostases were erected.

Of course, we should not pay too much attention to external manifestations such as the iconostasis. I would like to stress that the Church's pastoral care does not consist of external activities, of psychological rest and relaxation, but rather of an effort to purify the heart and illumine the *nous*.

Unfortunately, today we can talk about secularism in pastoral care also. There is an attempt to use modern psychology, among other methods, in the pastoral guidance of people. There are some who employ the results of psychology to help people. It is not such a bad thing for someone to know psychological methods. However, someone who knows himself and by God's Grace monitors the way his inner passions act, who studies the Holy Scriptures and the holy Fathers, and who is guided by a deified Spiritual Father can obtain real knowledge about other people, for in essence the problems of all men are the same. Employing modern psychology to guide people is a secularized view of pastoral care, and it is harmful for the following reasons.

It is harmful when, at the same time, our Church's entire ascetic and hesychastic method is ignored. We ignore the hesychastic tradition as expressed in ascetic writings, such as the Ladder of Saint John the Sinaite. It is a pity for us to ignore a healthy tradition possessed by our Church that aims not at psychoanalysis but at psychosynthesis when our psyche, through fragmentation caused by the passions, experiences schizophrenia.

It is also harmful when we maintain an anthropocentric position and believe that man's health can be brought about by the method of listening and talking. Man's soul, created by God in order to attain deification, does not find rest with moralistic advice and humane external support. As we have said, the illness lies deeper, in the *nous*. It does not consist of certain suppressed and traumatic experiences of the past, but in the darkening and mortification of the *nous*. Therapy and illumination of the *nous* cannot be achieved by anthropocentric methods, advice, and psychoanalysis.

Furthermore, the employment of modern psychology creates problems to the extent that it is already considered a failure in the West. Many people have discovered that psychology cannot cure man effectively. This can be seen in two

cases. The first is the development in the West of so-called “anti-psychiatry,” which reacts to psychiatry because it realizes that psychiatry follows a wrong course, having set different assumptions about the illness. Anti-psychiatry claims that classical psychiatry is a form of social violence perpetrated on man. The second case is psychiatrists’ increasing awareness of the failure of psychiatry and psychology to cure and their subsequent abandonment of psychiatry and turning to neurology, for it is believed that many problems originate in man’s neurological system centered in the brain. It is argued that several psychological abnormalities, such as illusions, hallucinations, and so on, have their origin in the illness of brain centers. (Unfortunately, all new scientific discoveries come to Greece with a delay of thirty or fifty years.)

In conclusion, we can say that secularism is the Church’s gravest danger. It is what adulterates her true spirit, her true atmosphere. Of course, we must repeat that it adulterates not the Church, for the Church is the real and blessed Body of Christ, but the members of the church. Therefore, we should more properly refer to the secularization of the members of the Church.

The Church is the jewel of the world, the charity of mankind. When, however, this jewel of the world is permeated by the so-called secular spirit, when Christians, the members of the church, instead of belonging to this jewel, instead of becoming the light of the world, are inspired by the world in the sense of the passions and become the world, then they experience secularism. This secularism does not lead to deification. It is an anthropocentric view of our life. The Church should enter the world to transform it rather than the world entering the Church to secularize it.

A secularized Church is completely weak and unable to transform the world, and secularized Christians have failed at all levels.

*This article was originally published by the Monastery of St. John, [www.monasteryofstjohn.org](http://www.monasteryofstjohn.org), in The Divine Ascent Vol. 2. This and other publications can be found on their bookstore website, [www.stjohnsbookstore.com](http://www.stjohnsbookstore.com). This article was posted here with permission.*