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The temptation of rough justice and the law of forgiveness (Archimandrite Theofilos Lemontzis, D. Th.)

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Once people distanced themselves from God, inebriated by the mortal pleasure of Luciferian self-deification, and after Cain, motivated by envy and jealousy, murdered his brother Abel, down this day and age and until the end of the age 'wickedness has accompanied human nature as rust does copper or filth the body', as Saint Anthony the Great teaches. Human nature remains the same. We may have achieved some remarkable technological advances, but, 'the darkness of hell is an integral part of the whole of human existence', since 'the earthly atmosphere emits the stench of blood. We're all fed, on a daily basis, with news about murders or the torture of the defeated in internecine warfare. Dark clouds of hatred hide the Heavenly Light from our eyes. People create their own hell for themselves, by themselves', as the great modern spiritual father, Elder Sophrony Sakharov, puts it.



This gloomy reality is reflected every day in our social relationships, which often hold unpleasant surprises in store for us. Betrayal, injustice, lies and deceit are all actions which can bring our world crashing down. The pain and despair we experience from other people overwhelm us with feelings of anger, hatred and revenge which it's not easy to get rid of. In fact, it often takes us years to get over them. People might have been unfair to you at work, exploited you, or not given you your due. Churlish people may have insulted you, mocked you. How many times have they told lies, fake news, about us. Sometimes they've made us a laughing stock and taunted us. The worst thing of all, as the media tell us, is that many people commit heinous crimes against their fellows, such as murder, rape and other mortal sins. When we experience these truly wretched actions, the first thing that comes into our head, instinctively, is revenge and payback. In fact, public opinion is often in favour of acting outside the law and taking revenge, especially if the crime is particularly egregious.

People are more willing to pay back harm than any good you've done for them, because gratitude's a burden, but revenge is a pleasure, as Tacitus (55-120 A.D.), the Roman historian puts it. Rough justice and revenge are payback for something bad or are pleasure over righting some harm. We come across them in the early stages of all cultures and societies. Even today, we encounter them wherever the level of civil life is low. Revenge is not to be confused with legitimate defence, because it involves a conscious attack, aimed at paying back somebody who has

wronged us. Revenge can be individual or communal (vendetta). In personal revenge, it's one on one, in communal it's family against family or tribe against tribe. Blood revenge has been considered a sacred obligation and was the norm in all primitive societies. Communal revenge is driven by organized families or tribes where there is a communal sense of honour. In this case, any insult against any member is considered a direct challenge to the whole of the group to which the victim belongs.

(to be continued)