

The Attitude of the Saints towards the Maladies of their Era (Elder Christodoulos, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Koutloumousi)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



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We feel sad, worried, exposed and afraid not only because of external events, but also because we ourselves have lost the centre of our lives. We've become subject to the temptations which Christ rejected in the desert: gluttony, vainglory and the desire for power. We've chased after easy money. We've sought to climb the social ladder. We've become imprudent investors. We've organized our lives around selfish aims, love of pleasure and popularity. Even if we consider ourselves believers and claim to acknowledge the virtues of the Gospels, we apply them only insofar as it suits our personal interests. Our relationship with God has become contractual. Even the Churches have become places for the pursuit of interests and ambitions, where shepherds and flocks care about material things and pleasures. The peace of the common cup recedes in the face of the turmoil of individual interests and pursuits. We've built 'uncommunication' amongst ourselves. We bear complete personal responsibility for this and, in this way, are contributing to the general malaise.



When a sickness manifests itself with pain and temperature, it's a trial for the patient. But at the same time, the pain and the other symptoms play a beneficial role. Because they're a warning to the patients, they encourage them to take the measures necessary for their cure. Were there no pain, no expression of sickness, every illness would lead to death, and we would continue to live, unsuspecting, in the world of our imagined good health. This is why any crisis in the social sphere reveals a sickness which is already eating away at our innards. And it moves us to find a way of curing it.

Every ill which infests the social milieu is a personal malaise. Virtue is cultivated on a personal level. Wickedness is born within the human person. And from the individual it spreads like the plague, like an epidemic, to the whole of the body politic. So if we want to find remedies for a crisis, we must first examine and deal with the spiritual root of the evil, starting with ourselves. 'Don't look for wickedness outside yourself', is the advice of Saint Basil the Great. And don't think that wickedness is our primeval nature, as good is. Each of us knows we're responsible for our own wickedness.

Phenomena related to social degeneration are not exclusive to our own times. If you read the pastoral texts, the homilies and the letters of the Fathers of the Church, you can see their concern over corrupt practices in their own societies. They speak of unjust laws, the arbitrary actions of those in power, the exploitation

of standards and institutions, social injustice, unbridled passions, and social insensitivity. They also refer to the hypocrisy of the leaders, even those who are Christian.

How did the saints of the Church confront these maladies?

In the first place, by their active and dynamic intervention in the social institutions. Their concern sometimes led to the creation of new institutions, as was the case, for example, in the establishment of hospitals with specialized staff- a concept which owes its existence to the initiative of monks. At the same time, their attitude to social injustice was not passive. With courage and self-negation they were active in seeking the vindication and protection of the weak. Their concern for the alleviation of pain and poverty was no less intense. Caring for the hungry and wounded was for them a function imposed by God, a 'Divine Liturgy'.

At the same time, the Fathers were imbued with the monastic spirit, and so they brought into the outside world the basic message of monasticism: the need to work on the inner person. Turning in on oneself. And they knew that this introversion did not mean seclusion, or isolation from other people. Monastic inversion is internal activity, in the depth of the human heart, where reflection, meditation, desire, inhibition and reverie are in play. Internal work means ploughing the field of the soul, so that, in this way, we can come to know ourselves and encounter God personally. Every saint is an example of this labour in the inner space of the soul.

(to be continued)