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Saints, Martyrs, and the Communist Prisons

Abstract

To be a saint is not an abstract, moral concept. It does not mean that one was good in the eyes of the secular world. It does not mean that one was politically correct. To be a saint is concretely to participate in the uncreated and deifying energy of God. Those who are deified are saints. They have become holy. Moreover, Christians know that martyrs are those who have died for their belief in Christ, and thus become saints. A martyr's death washes away all sins and renders one a saint, just as the thief on the cross became a saint by confessing Christ. This presentation explores ways in which the secular world purposefully distorts such Traditional Christian understandings, so as socially and politically to undermine Orthodox Christianity. For example, in the United States and Western Europe, politically correct speech has reconceptualized the



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concept of a “saint” in terms of the secular good. “Sanctity” is no longer appreciated in terms of submission to God, but rather as living a life compatible with secular moral judgments regarding human rights and social justice. Such a recasting of Christian discourse fails to regard a ‘saint’ as “one who has been deified and become holy” and, instead, attributes ‘sanctity’ to one who is good in a secular sense of goodness. Such a distortion of Christian language encourages Orthodox Christians to treat as “saints” and “martyrs” many who have rejected Christ and His Church. It admonishes Christians not to glorify as saints those who clearly died a martyr’s death for Christ, perhaps because such individuals made what the Church recognizes as misguided choices, but who nevertheless died for confessing the faith. Among the saints, for example, one must remember the millions of Orthodox Christian priests, monks and laity that the Soviet Union brutally tortured and killed, precisely because they were Orthodox Christians. How should the Church understand their deaths? Orthodox Christians who suffered and died under international socialism confessing the faith died a martyr’s death. Through martyrdom for Christ, they have become saints. They are to be glorified.

Keywords

Saint, Martyr, Communism, International Socialism

1 Introduction

St. Symeon the New Theologian reminds Christians that saints are “those who have acquired the whole Christ within them wholly by work and experience and perception and knowledge

and vision of God.”¹ To be a saint is not an abstract, moral concept. It does not mean that one was good in the eyes of the secular world. It does not mean that one was politically correct. To be a saint is concretely to participate in the uncreated and deifying energy of God. Those who are deified are saints. They have become holy. St. Isaac the Syrian further admonishes Christians to remember that martyrs are “those who have accepted death for their belief in Christ”,² and thus become saints. A martyr’s death washes away all sins and renders one a saint, just as the thief on the cross, who, by his own admission justly deserved crucifixion, became a saint by confessing Christ. But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise’ (Luke 23:39-43).

Among the saints, one must remember the millions of Orthodox Christian priests, monks and laity that the Soviet Union brutally tortured and killed, precisely because they were Orthodox Christians. Orthodox Christians who suffered and died under international socialism confessing the faith died a martyr’s death. Even if some such individuals made what the Church recognizes as misguided choices, through martyrdom for Christ, they have become saints. They are to be glorified. This paper

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- 1 Quoted from Hierotheos Vlachos. *The Mind of the Orthodox Church*, Esther Williams (trans.), Levadia, Greece, Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1998, p. 136. Hierotheos Vlachos continues: “From this witness it seems clear that saintliness is participation in the uncreated deifying energy of God, and the person deified is a saint. Saints are those who have experience and knowledge and perception and vision of God. They are not simply the good people.”
 - 2 Saint Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, revised second edition, Holy Transfiguration Monastery (trans.), (Boston, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2011), p. 135.

critically explores ways in which the secular world purposefully distorts such Traditional Christian understandings, so as socially and politically to undermine Orthodox Christianity.

2 Worshipping Idols: The Distortion of Christian Language to Support a Secular Ideology

For man made them, and he that borrowed his own spirit fashioned them; but no man can make a god like unto himself. For, since he is mortal, he worked a dead thing with wicked hands; for he himself is better than the things, which he worshipped, since he indeed lived once, but they never.³

In his “Exhortation to Martyrdom”, St. Cyprian (AD 200-258) denounces idolatry and encourages Christians towards martyrdom for Christ. He reminds the faithful that idols are but dead creations that distract and disorient us from our struggle towards salvation. God alone is to be worshipped. False gods, however, come in many forms: physical and intellectual. For example, Christians are routinely exhorted to worship the idols of human dignity and social justice,⁴ to embrace the ideological commitment that man defines morality for himself. Because for secular culture God is dead, that culture lacks any ultimate foundation or final point of focus. As a result, secular culture

3 St. Cyprian, *Treatise XI. Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus* in “Ante-Nicene Fathers,” vol. 5, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, Publishers, 2004, pp. 496-507, p. 498.

4 See Thomas S. Huddle, *The limits of social justice as an aspect of medical professionalism* in “The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy” 38.4(2013): 369-387; J. Paul Kelleher, *Real and alleged problems for Daniel’s account of health justice* in “The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy” 38.4(2013): 388-399; Christian Spiess, *Recognition and social justice: a Roman Catholic view of Christian bioethics of long-term care and community service* in “Christian Bioethics” 13.3(2007): 287-301.

lacks any definitive moral content. In such circumstances, as Protagoras (490-420 BC) so aptly put the point: "Man is the measure of all things"; without God, humans create their own criteria for truth, with the consequence that morality becomes plural.⁵ Consequently, secular morality emphasizes alternative life-styles choices, as well as the diversity of religions and spiritual points of view, as each equally potentially good. Orthodox Christianity, in contrast, recognizes only the one True God and His one Holy Apostolic Church. As is sung during Divine Liturgy: "We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity: for He hath saved us."⁶ Rather than following the false gods of man, True morality requires obedience to the God Who commands. As a consequence, Orthodox Christianity finds itself decidedly at odds with the secular world. In its refusal to embrace religious ecumenism and moral diversity, Orthodox Christianity stands out as politically incorrect. Consequently, a central goal of secular morality is to undermine Orthodox Christianity, its moral understandings and knowledge of God.

In the United States and Western Europe, for example, politically correct speech distorts Christian language to support a secular moral narrative. The concept of a "saint", for instance, has been fully reconceptualized in terms of the secular good. "Holiness" is no longer appreciated in terms of submission to God, but as a life compatible with secular atheistic judgments regarding the right, the good and the virtuous. The term 'saint' is no longer taken to refer to "one who is holy", but as "...an

5 Eduard Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, New York: Dover, 1980, p. 81: "Man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are, of those that are not that they are not."

6 Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom* in "Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church," Englewood Hills, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, 1971, p. 123.

extremely good or long-suffering person.”⁷ “Sanctity” is no longer appreciated in terms of submission in all things to God in love and repentance, but rather as living a life compatible with secular moral judgments regarding human rights and social justice. Politically correct language regards anyone who is good in the eyes of the world, or who struggles for secular understandings of social justice, to be a “saint”. Yet, one must recognize the circumstance that much of the “good” of which secular morality approves is evil (e.g., homosexual acts;⁸ abortion; acceptance of false religions⁹). The moral order is thereby inverted: evil is embraced as if it were good.

Secular morality, for example, judges abortion to be central to the basic human rights of women. Indeed, abortion is often described in very religious terms. George Tiller, a professional abortionist, who performed late term abortions even after 24 weeks of pregnancy, was described by his colleagues as a “highly spiritual person”, and referred to his abortion clinic as a “ministry”.¹⁰ Others who worked in his abortion clinic described their work in a religious fashion:

“I felt I was doing the Lord’s work,” said the staff member charged with readying the stillborn babies to be seen by their parents. In almost identical terms, the woman who prepared the babies’ bodies for cremation said, “God put me here to do

7 “saint, adj. and n.” OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press.<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/169847?rskey=94S4r4&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 28, 2014).

8 See, e.g., Ronald E. Long, *Reclaiming the heritage of Saints Serge and Bacchus: towards a quixotic gay-affirmative, pro-animal, vegetarian Christianity* in “Theology & Sexuality” 17.1 (2011): 101-131; Loretta Kopelman, *If HIV/AIDS is punishment, who is bad?* in “The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy” 27.2 (2002): 231-243.

9 See, e.g., Karen Pechilis, *Interpreting devotion: the poetry and legacy of a female bhakti saint of India*, New York, Routledge, 2012.

10 Carole Joffe, *Working with Dr. Tiller: Staff recollections of Women’s Health Care Services of Wichita* in “Sexual & Reproductive Health” 43.3 (2011): 199-204, p. 203.

this work." And the clinic chaplain, referring to the comfort she tried to give to grieving parents, recounted, "This was holy work we were doing here."¹¹

Abortion apologists have described the procedure as being attended to by angels:

During her abortion procedure, the patient turned to Claudia, a fifty-year-old Latina licensed vocational nurse who sat beside her (...) Claudia perched forward on her stool to get closer to the patient and suddenly the patient grasped the crucifix that dangled from Claudia's necklace. (...) The patient was very focused on the crucifix and seemed to stop paying attention to what was going on in the room. (...) At the end, Claudia recalled, "I said to her, 'Mi hija, it's over.' And she said, 'It is?'" And then the patient took Claudia's hand, kissed it, and said, "You're an Angel".¹²

Note the intentional and perverse distortion of Christianity. The abortion nurse is described as wearing a crucifix, rhetorically signifying goodness and sanctity. The woman, who has had her child aborted, even kisses the nurse's hand, just as one might kiss the hand of a holy man. Abortion is so central to Western secular culture that girls as young as 14 years of age are held to have a basic human right to access abortion.¹³ Whereas St. John

11 Carole Joffe, *Working with Dr. Tiller: Staff recollections of Women's Health Care Services of Wichita* in: "Sexual & Reproductive Health" 43.3 (2011): 199-204, p. 203.

12 Lori Freedman, *Forgiveness in the abortion clinic* in "Atrium: The Report of the Northwestern Medical Humanities and Bioethics Program 12.Winter (2014): 6-8, p. 6.

13 Mark J. Cherry, *Ignoring the data and endangering children: why the mature minor standard for medical decision making must be abandoned* in "The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy" 38.3 (2013): pp. 315-331; Laurence Steinberg, *Does recent research on adolescent brain development inform the mature minor doctrine?* in "The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy" 38.3 (2013): pp. 256-267; Mark J. Cherry, *Sex, abortion and infanticide: the gulf between the secular and the divine*

Chrysostom reminds us that all things done by the angels are of Christ: "So that the things also done through Angels are of Him",¹⁴ here, secular morality has turned that very Christian teaching on its head to support a great evil. The murder of a child in the womb has been recast as a "sacred choice".¹⁵

Consider also the AIDS quilt, an international secular project designed to celebrate the lives of those who have died from HIV/AIDS. As James Hitchcock documents, panels of the AIDS quilt revisit Christian truths through a secular lens: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."¹⁶ Even public efforts to judge such figures as Mother Theresa a saint are misguided. We do not know her relationship with Christ; we do know, however, that she was sundered from Orthodox Christianity. Taking care of the poor is good; but, in itself, care for the poor does not render one a saint. Those who reject Christ and His Church may also act in ways that are believed to benefit the poor. The siren song of international socialism, for example, always includes its false claims to take care of the poor, masking its staunch and aggressive atheism. As Karl Marx notes:

Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is

in "Christian Bioethics" 17.1 (2011): pp. 25-46; Mark J. Cherry. *Parental authority and pediatric bioethical decision making* in "The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy 35.5 (2010): pp. 553-572.

14 St. John Chrysostom, *Homily III on Colossians* in "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," vol. 13, P. Schaff (ed.), Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, 2004, 270-275, p. 271.

15 Daniel C. Maguire, *Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2001.

16 James Hitchcock, *The new martyrs: Witnesses to the conversion of a culture* in "Touchstone" January/February (2014), p. 3.

but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat.¹⁷

Historically, such deformation of Christian language undermined Orthodox Christianity and ripped out the Christian roots of the Western world. Today, advocates continue to recast Western culture in terms of a very secular understanding of the right, the good, and the virtuous. Such distortions encourage us to treat as "saints" and "martyrs" many who have rejected Christ and His Church. It substitutes an atheistic morality for traditionally Christian moral truths.

3 Secular Morality is a Babel

Secular modernity has become a moral Babel. As Gianni Vattimo argues: "The West, indeed, is a synonym for consumerism, hedonism, a Babel-like pluralism of cultures, loss of center, and obliviousness to any reference to 'natural' law".¹⁸ In its denial of God, the secular West has lost any in principle standpoint from which to provide a unique canonical perspective on morality. Indeed, without God, everything is approached as if all were without ultimate meaning. Given such circumstances, the very project of morality is radically transformed. To illustrate, consider Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who was well aware of the implications of his diagnosis that "God is dead":

The most important of more recent events – that "God is dead," that the belief in the Christian God has become unworthy of belief – already begins to cast its first

17 Karl Marx. *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in R.C. Tucker (ed.), "The Marx-Engels Reader," 2nd edition, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, p. 492

18 Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, Luca D'Isanto (trans.), New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 70.

shadows over Europe. ...not to speak of many who already knew *what* had really taken place, and what must all collapse now that this belief had been undermined, – because so much was built upon it, so much rested on it, and had become one with it: for example, our entire European morality.¹⁹

As Vattimo situates Nietzsche's analysis: "the death of God signifies the final dissolution of supreme values and metaphysical belief in an objective and eternal order of Being. That is nihilism in a nutshell".²⁰ Without God to secure a canonical standpoint, the very significance of epistemic claims regarding morality change. Without God, moral claims cannot be grounded in knowledge of reality itself. Instead, all such claims are always situated within the taken-for-granted background assumptions of particular social and cultural frameworks.

Nietzsche's atheistic announcement captures the existential emptiness of the moral engagements of a secular culture committed to the non-existence of God: a culture ungrounded in being, trapped in immanence, and unable to secure its claims to moral truth.

But what I have in view will now be understood, namely, that it is always a *metaphysical belief* on which our belief in science rests, – and that even we knowing ones of to-day, the godless and anti-metaphysical, still take *our* fire from the conflagration kindled by a belief a millennium old, the Christian belief, which was also the belief of Plato, that God is truth, that the truth is divine. But what if this itself always becomes more untrustworthy, what if nothing any longer proves itself divine,

19 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom (La Gaya Scienza)* in: "The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche," volume 10, Oscar Levy (ed.), Thomas Common (trans.), London, T.N. Foulis, 1910, p. 275.

20 Gianni Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*, William McCuaig (trans.), New York, Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 58.

except it be error, blindness, and falsehood; – what if God himself turns out to be our most persistent lie?²¹

Vattimo affirms that those who, like Nietzsche, are committed to living without God, must also be content to exist without such ultimate foundations. "In sum, for Nietzsche 'God is dead' means nothing else than the fact that there is no ultimate foundation".²² There is no privileged position from which to obtain knowledge of reality as it is in itself. Or, as Richard Rorty (1931-2007) puts the point, the secular culture seeks to "treat *everything* – our language, our conscience, our community – as a product of time and chance."²³ Without God, the unity and force of reality, including moral reality, cannot, even in principle, be secured.

Here Vattimo builds on G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), who appreciated that without God moral norms are always situated within particular cultural and historical circumstances. Secular morality is, and can be, no more than what humans make of it. Unlike God's commands, secular moral content is fully conditioned by particular societies and cultures. Any specific ideal of human flourishing or human good is revealed as only one particular set of moral intuitions among others, and unable, as Vattimo puts it, "without violence, to obtain as the true essence of man, of all men".²⁴ Hegel recognized that without God's uniquely objective understanding of reality, moral norms can never be more than particular socially conditioned human creations. Cut off from God, all secular moralities – all claims regarding the right, the good and the virtuous – are no

21 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom (La Gaya Scienza)* in "The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche," volume 10, Oscar Levy (ed.), Thomas Common (trans.), London, T.N. Foulis, 1910, p. 280.

22 Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, Luca D'Isanto (trans.), New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 3.

23 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 22.

24 Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, David Webb (trans.), Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. 4.

more than particular socio-historically conditioned narratives sustaining idiosyncratic clusters of moral intuitions and ethical inclinations. Secular reason cannot even definitively indicate why one account of the moral life is better *ceteris paribus*, more reasonable or more rationally to be preferred, over another. As a result, secular morality does not and cannot identify a single unified account of the right, the good, and the virtuous. As Hegel puts it, philosophy simply cannot know how the world must be.²⁵ Consequently, as H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. concludes, all secular moralistic assertions “have become at best covert political slogans masquerading as moral truths”.²⁶ The cluster of intuitions guiding contemporary secular ethics are only those judgments and proclivities that the current prevailing secular culture assumes to be morally reasonable and rational.

4 God Himself Defines the Standards

The Holy Spirit shows and predicts by Solomon, saying:

“And although in the sight of men they suffered torments, yet their hope is full of immortality. And having been troubled in a few things, they shall be in many happily ordered, because God has tried them, and

25 “As the *thought* of the world, it appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its complete state. This lesson of the concept is necessarily also apparent from history, namely that it is only when actuality has reached maturity that the ideal appears opposite the real and reconstructs this real world, which it has grasped in its substance, in the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Allen Wood (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 23.

26 H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *Core competencies for health care ethics consultants: In search of professional status in a post-modern world in “HEC Forum”* 23.3 (2011): 129-146, p. 140.

has found them worthy of Himself. As gold in the furnace, He hath tried them; and as whole burnt-offerings of sacrifice, He hath received them, and in its season there will be respect of them. They will shine and run about as sparks in a place set with reeds. They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the peoples; and their Lord shall reign for Ever."²⁷

The mark of being cut off from God, and His perfect knowledge of reality, is that one is also cut off from being-in-itself. Without God, we encounter numerous moral points of view, worldviews, and moral narratives, incommensurable claims to social justice, personal virtues and human goods, each of which is socially and culturally conditioned. Secular morality has no access to a unique, canonical standard on the basis of which to choose amongst the various possibilities. Unlike secular philosophy, which attempts to assimilate morality to claims regarding the demands of human rationality and the conceits of currently popular moral intuitions, Orthodox Christianity knows that morality flows from God's command. Consequently, as St. John Chrysostom recognizes, there will exist significant tension between ordinary moral secular intuitions and God's commands.

I should not call Phinehas a murderer, though he took two lives with one blow [Num 25:7-8], nor Elijah, in spite of the hundred soldiers and their captains [2 Kings 1: 10, 12] and the great river of blood he made flow from the slaughter of those who sacrificed to devils [1 Kings 18:40]. If we were to allow that description, a man could strip all action of the intention of the agents, examine it out of context, and, if he liked, condemn Abraham for murdering his son [Gen 22:10], and accuse

27 St. Cyprian, *Treatise XI. Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus* in "Ante-Nicene Fathers," vol. 5, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, Publishers, 2004, pp. 496-507, p. 505.

his grandson and his descendant of evil-doing and fraud, since it was by this means that the one gained the privileges of the first-born [Gen 27], and the other transferred the wealth of the Egyptians to the host of the Israelites [Ex 11:2]. But this will not do, it will not do! Perish the presumption! We not only acquit them of blame, we revere them for these very things, since God praised them on their account.²⁸

Here, consider also the command of God to Joshua son of Nun regarding the conquest of Jericho: “Then the Lord said to Joshua, See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. (...) They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it – men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys” (Joshua 6: 1-21). At times, divine commands will appear to be idiosyncratic or in error to the secular observer. But, God alone is the Master of life and death.

Traditional Christians recognize that morality must be appreciated in terms of an encounter with and an authentic experience of God, which will routinely conflict with the moral dictates of secular morality. Indeed, Orthodox Christianity does not recognize the authority of any independent intellectual enterprise (such as claims to human rights or social justice), as in authority critically to recast the moral norms given by God. As Engelhardt, notes, “As a consequence, should the moral requirements of the religious life offend ‘ordinary,’ that is secular, moral intuitions, sentiments, and settled judgments, then so much the worse for ordinary morality.”²⁹ In this light,

28 St. John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, Graham Neville (trans.), Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984, p. 51.

29 H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Euthyphro dilemma reconsidered: A variation on a theme from Brody on Halakhic method* in M. J. Cherry and A. S. Iltis (eds.) “Pluralistic Casuistry: Balancing Moral Arguments, Economic Realities, and Political Theory,” Springer, Dordrecht, 2007, 109-130, p. 117.

one can understand the reflections of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I on the noetic empirical character of Orthodox theology:

The Orthodox Church does not live in a place of theoretical and conceptual conversations, but rather in a place of an essential and empirical lifestyle and reality as confirmed by grace in the heart (Heb. 13.9). This grace cannot be put in doubt either by logic or science or other type of argument. Our conception of Holy Tradition moves upon the same track. (...) Holy Tradition for the Orthodox Christian is not just some collection of teachings, texts outside the Holy Scriptures and based on their moral tradition within the Church. It is this, but not only this. First and foremost, it is a living and essential imparting of life and grace, namely, it is an essential and tangible reality.³⁰

Instead of a rationalistic discourse directed towards human dignity or social justice, Traditional Christianity engages in a dialectic of suspicion against secular morality and in favor of a rightly oriented religious life, aimed through rightly oriented prayer, fasting, and alms-giving towards God Himself. Orthodox Christianity is very much out of step with the trends of the dominant secular culture.

5 Conclusion: Orthodox Christian Martyrs are Saints

Let us only who, by the Lord's permission, have given the first baptism to believers, also prepare each one for the second; urging and teaching that this is a baptism greater in grace, more lofty in power, more precious in honour - a baptism wherein angels baptize - a baptism in which God and His Christ exult - a baptism after which no one sins any

30 Bartholomew, Joyful light, speech delivered on October 21, 1997 at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., pp. 1-2.

more - a baptism which completes the increase of our faith - a baptism which, as we withdraw from the world, immediately associates us with God. In the baptism of water is received the remission of sins, in the baptism of blood the crown of virtues. This thing is to be embraced and desired, and to be asked for in all the entreaties of our petitions, that we who are God's servants should be also His friends.³¹

As a result, the lives and deaths of the saints carry with them a vivid understanding of the importance of locating all aspects of life and death within the pursuit of salvation. Remember the Gospel of Saint Matthew: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt 5: 11-12). As St. John Chrysostom similarly affirms, God will reward those who suffer for His sake: will the Infinite Goodness, that is, God, the Unspeakable Love to man, the kindness so vast: will He overlook and leave uncrowned His own servants, Peter and Paul, and James, and John, those who every day for His sake suffered hunger, were bound, were scourged, were drowned in the sea, were given up to wild beasts, were dying, were suffering so great things as we cannot so much as reckon up? (...) shall God alone, after those so great toils and labors, repay them with no good thing great or small? Shall those just and pious men, who have walked in every virtue, lie in the same state with adulterers, and parricides, and manslayers, and violators of tombs? (...) Didst thou mark the exceeding

31 St. Cyprian, *Treatise XI. Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus* in "Ante-Nicene Fathers," vol. 5, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), Peabody, MA, Hendrickson, Publishers, 2004, pp. 496-507, p. 497.

greatness of the absurdity, and in what this argument issues?³²

Or, as Tertullian made the point:

'These are they who come out of that great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' For the flesh is the clothing of the soul. The uncleanness, indeed, is washed away by baptism, but the stains are changed into dazzling whiteness by martyrdom.³³

The Orthodox Church does not create saints; rather, the Church recognizes as saints those who have been glorified by God. Consider, for example, Saint Nicholas Velimirovich's (1880-1956) account of the Martyr Nicodemus, who embraced his martyrdom:

Our Holy Father, the Martyr Nicodemus. Born in Elbasan, he was married and had children. Duped by the Turks, he embraced Islam and forced his children to do likewise, with the exception of one son who fled to the Holy Mountain and became a monk. Nicodemus went to Athos to take his son back, but that place made such an impression on him that he repented, returned to the Christian faith and became a monk himself. He bewailed his apostasy for three years, then decided to return to Albania, to expiate his sin there where he had committed it. He therefore returned, informed the Turks that he was a Christian and was beheaded on July

32 St. John Chrysostom, *Homily XIII* in "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," vol. 10, "Chrysostom: Homilies on The Gospel of Saint Matthew," P. Schaff (ed.), Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, 2004, 80-86, p. 85.

33 Tertullian, *Scorpiace. Antidote for the scorpion's sting* in S. Thelwall (trans.), A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), "Ante-Nicene Fathers: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian," Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, 2004, 633-648, p. 646.

11th, 1722. His wonder working relics are preserved today whole and uncorrupt.³⁴

God provides the final unconditioned point of epistemological reference, a transcendent foundation for knowledge of reality, right action and human good in being in itself.

The call of martyrdom, of faithfulness to God unto death, is alien to secular ears. The dominant secular culture is atheistic, hostile to Christianity, and has set itself in opposition to Christ and Christian martyrs, for their deaths underscore and bear witness to the transcendent Truth of God.³⁵ The secular distortion of Christian language plays a key role in this ongoing project to undermine Orthodox Christianity. Such misuse orients one towards immanent goods, such as the social justice promised by international socialism, and away from the transcendent reality of God. In so doing, secular morality also admonishes Christians not to glorify as saints those who clearly died a martyr's death for Christ, since such individuals did not endorse the proper secular accounts of moral pluralism, religious ecumenism, and social justice.

Why is it so difficult openly to glorify as saints those millions of Orthodox Christian priests, monks and laity that the Soviet Union brutally tortured and killed, precisely because they were Orthodox Christians? Timothy Snyder's recent study, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, helps to provide a partial answer: "In Stalinism mass murder could never be anything more than a successful defense of socialism, or an element in a story of progress towards socialism; it was never

34 St. Nicholas Velimirovich, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Mother Maria (trans.), Birmingham, England, Lazarica Press, 1985, vol. 3, p. 49.

35 Mark J. Cherry, *Ascendency of the Fundamentalist Secular State* in "European Journal of Science and Theology" 10.2(2014): 79-88.

the political victory itself."³⁶ In other words, the mass killings were necessary to achieve an endstate of equality and social justice, political ends that continue to resonate with the politically correct, progressive, goals of today.³⁷

How should the Church today understand the deaths of such Orthodox Christians? Orthodox Christians who suffered and died under international socialism confessing the faith died a martyr's death. Truly martyric suffering followed by a martyr's death not only covers all sins, but renders one a saint. The Orthodox Church must glorify those who through martyrdom have become saints. Through martyrdom for Christ, they have become saints. To be a saint is concretely to participate in the uncreated and deifying energy of God. Those who are deified are saints.³⁸ They have become holy. They are to be glorified.

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