

Introduction

by Fr. Emmanuel Hatzidakis

Dear Reader,

May the Lord be with you.

What you hold in your hands are precious words, written by a contemporary Father of the Church, St. Theophan the Recluse. The fact that the author is a Saint and a Father of the Church has the following important implication: what he expresses in this booklet is not just his opinion, but it is the distillation of the teachings of all those who preceded him in the faith. He wrote it under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit that inspired the writers of the New Testament and all the Fathers of the Church. We should therefore approach his words with the same reverence we show when we read the holy Scripture: prayerfully, and with our hearts open to receive the message of salvation and act upon it.

In his letter St. Theophan the Recluse addresses the great and most serious problem of heresy, that is, the alteration and forgery of the correct and safe way to salvation. We follow the loving and wise counsels of this shepherd of souls, addressed to an Orthodox Christian whose faith has been seriously shaken, having fallen victim to a heretical preacher. Although this letter was written over 100 years ago, it remains fresh and pertinent even in our own times. Some of the things mentioned in this letter may sound harsh to contemporary ears, especially to non-Orthodox Christians, but even to the Orthodox. Living in a modern, multicultural, free, highly progressive, and “politically correct” society, some readers may find the language and/or tone used by the Saint as austere, fanatic,

or simply out of place and time. We surely do not know how the Saint would have approached the same subject if he were directly addressing a non-Orthodox person. The evangelical preacher mentioned in the letter was someone who consciously regarded the Orthodox as misguided Christians and who took great pains to make them follow his teachings, which explains the general tone of the letter. Although this letter was written to guide Orthodox Christians, we believe that it contains many useful points on the subject matter of “What is the True Faith” to be reflected upon by non-Orthodox as well. After all, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever* (Heb. 13:8). So we should ask for divine illumination to understand what is being said, because without the grace of the Holy Spirit and humility on our part, we will not derive spiritual benefit.

Our Lord also said some harsh things (*This is an hard saying* (John 6:60)) and as a result those who had no love and humility *went back, and walked no more with him* (v. 66). The Apostle Paul also said: *Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?* (Gal 4:16), and the Apostle Peter wrote about the letters of the Apostle Paul: *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness* (2 Pet. 3:16-17). So we must definitely pray for humility and divine illumination to discern the truth, going beyond what first strikes us as “harsh.”

May we all *fight the good fight of faith* (1 Tim. 6:12), and may *the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you* (1 Pet. 5:10).