

11 July 2019 Recording

In the Name of Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

This talk is the first of a series on the topic of Orthodox education and our newly established educational initiative.

An education for an Orthodox Christian begins with the fear of God, for as Solomon once wrote:

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and there is a good understanding unto all them that do it: and godliness toward God is the beginning of perception; but the ungodly will set at nought wisdom and instruction. (Prov 1:7)

We seek to impart wisdom and knowledge unto our youth according to the methods used to teach such great men as Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint Photios the Great, Saint Mark of Ephesus and Saint Gregory Palamas, to name a few. These are all men who confessed the saving faith and gave us teachings inspired by the Holy Spirit, yet they used methods of logic, reasoning and argumentation taken from classical Greek learning or what is also called in Latin the Trivium.

We seek to strengthen the faith of our children by helping them use their minds to read and understand and weigh arguments and proofs, along with teaching them the limits of the tools of logic, reasoning and rhetoric.

Reasoning is only a means to an end, a tool to facilitate clear and right thinking.

It is only through divine revelation, handed down to us by the Holy Apostles and Holy Fathers, that we can understand what it is to be human according to God's design and intent. Authentic Orthodox Christology is the key to understanding authentic anthropology. A sound Orthodox understanding of education is dependent on a sound understanding of authentic anthropology. Thus, all of our instruction is informed by and guided by the Holy Faith of the Orthodox Christian Church and its history.

In our journey to seek knowledge our ultimate goal is to love God and commune with Him. The Holy Fathers of the Church teach us that this journey is comprised of the steps of Faith, Fear, Repentance and Love.

Saint Isaac the Syrian explains the process thus:

Repentance is the second grace and is begotten in the heart by faith and fear. Fear is the paternal rod which guides

our way until we reach the spiritual paradise of good things. When we have attained thereto, it leaves us and turns back. ... Paradise is the love of God, wherein is the enjoyment of all blessedness...

--Homily 46 Saint Isaac the Syrian

In addition to this, Saint Dorotheos of Gaza explains how each man progresses through the different stages of the fear of God:

23. No one can attain to perfect fear unless he first acquires the initial fear. The wise Sirach says, 'To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom . . . The fear of the Lord is a crown of wisdom' (Ecclesiasticus i. 14, 18). By the beginning is meant the initial fear, on which follows the perfect fear of the saints. The initial fear belongs to the state of our soul. It protects the soul from every fall, for it is said, 'By the fear of the Lord everyone departs from evil' (Prov. xv. 27). But a man who departs from evil from fear of punishment, like a slave in fear of his master, gradually comes to doing good voluntarily --at first like a hireling in the hope of some reward for his good action. If he continues thus constantly to avoid evil from fear, like a slave, and to do good in the hope of reward like a hireling, then, abiding by God's grace in the good and thus correspondingly uniting with God, he finally acquires a taste for the good, comes to a certain sense of what is truly good, and no longer wishes to be parted from it. Then he attains to the dignity of son and loves good for its own sake and

although he fears, he does so because he loves. This is great and perfect fear.

*--Early Fathers From The Philokalia,
Saint Dorotheos Directions on Spiritual
Training, p. 139*

So, once again, we come to faith and while we progress through the stages of fear we strive to live a life of repentance seeking our ultimate goal of love.

Now, you may ask, “That is good to say but how do I implement that and what does all of the above have to do with the education initiative and what does that mean for my life practically?” Let us turn to the words of Saint John the Baptist, for in the Gospel, he enjoins us to “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance.” (Matt 3:8)

True repentance will always have corresponding fruits, that is, good works that are a consequent of a true change of heart. Thus, if we are taking all of this seriously, there will always be things we can change, things we can make better, both in our own lives and for our children. In order to accomplish this we must live a life of self-examination. The Christian life is a life of self-examination and repentance.

When we practice self-examination and seek to make things better we need to be very concrete. We should always be able to come up with a list of things to change in our day-to-day life. If we try to make a list of things we need to change and it is blank, we are not repenting. It is that simple.

I humbly submit to you that the process of self-examination for the sake of repentance in our day includes an examination of how we have perhaps been influenced by the prevailing culture of the antichrist and how it has made inroads into our life choices and daily activities. Part of this self-examination should be an assessment and calibration of to what degree our children have been influenced by the prevailing antichrist culture: what clothes they wear, what media they use and watch, how much time they spend on media and devices, the environment of their school and what they are taught within it, their general habits and conduct.

Specifically, in regards to our initiative, we should re-examine our children's present education. Saint John Chrysostom teaches us the order of importance parents should assign to the education of their children when he said, "With us *everything* else should be secondary compared to our concern with children and their upbringing in the instruction and teaching of the

Lord.” (Cited in Protopresbyter Georges Grabbe “*Orthodox-Christian Education of Children in our Days*”, 3)

Saint John makes it clear that education is first and foremost. Extracurricular activities, vacations, financial success, all of these are secondary.

If our purpose of education is to cultivate sound reasoning and wisdom, then for that education to be Orthodox, it ought to be suffused with, first, godly fear and reverence, then, all the various virtues, natural and spiritual. With respect to natural virtues we have - Justice, Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude. And, with respect to the spiritual virtues, we have Faith, Hope, and Love. -This you will not receive at a government school.

At this point, I think it is necessary to compare and contrast the terms “education” and “training.” Education is not training for a job. Learning practical job skills (e.g., accountancy, plumbing, computer coding) is good and necessary but it is not education as such. Again, when I say that training in these is not education, I do not disparage training in these real-world skills. Practical skills are important and absolutely necessary for your child’s physical survival in this world. Yet, sound reasoning and wisdom, and here I mean spiritual wisdom according to the mind of

the Church, is important and necessary for your child's spiritual survival in this world of false ideas and the confusion that surrounds us.

We have many examples of education and wisdom from the lives of the saints. Look at the life of Saint Basil the Great. In the *Prologue*, Saint Nikolai Velimirovich says Saint Basil "...spent fifteen years in Athens, where he studied philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, and all the other secular sciences of that time." (*Prologue*, January 1) In the same volume, we read that Saint Gregory the Theologian studied in Athens alongside Basil the Great. (*Prologue*, January 25).

Another example is Saint Photios the Great, who was considered the most widely learned and wise man of his age.

Faith is the foundation of everything we do in life; however, the education that we provide our children must not only be catechetical in nature. Look at the examples of the Great Fathers of the Church we cited above and other similar examples. They did all to the Glory of God. Thus when they pursued education, even secular education, they sought after truth wherever they could find it.

The Holy Fathers used the tools of Greek learning to help elucidate the truth of the Gospel against all error. As a result of this, in one case that I remember, Saint Gregory the Theologian had an acquaintance from the Athens Academy who used to revile him for taking the tools of Greek pagan learning and using them against the Greek pagans in argument.

We are in the midst of a culture war. To some, the term culture war may sound cliché, but we all know of friends and relatives who have been swept away by our prevailing culture and are now no longer members of the Church. Just as in an actual war, where soldiers have friends and family who have died next to them, so too do we, have friends and family who have fallen away from the Church, that is, died spiritually.

To continue the analogy of war, if we lived in centuries gone by and dwelt in a city where we were under constant threat of the barbarians coming over the wall and taking away captives, we would make sure our children were well trained in the art of self defense in order to protect themselves and ward off the barbarians.

The training we seek to offer is a tool that will help your children ward off all of the barbarians in the

culture war, lest they be confused and converted and or destroyed by following the false wisdom of this age.

Many have asked me, “Your Eminence, all of this sounds great, but where do I find the time to have my child take even one class?” This demonstrates why self-examination, repentance and change are necessary. We all waste time, we all need to repent regarding how we use our time. We need to make a list of the things we can cut out of our lives that are not necessary so that we can fulfill the words of Saint John Chrysostom and make the education and upbringing of our children the most important part of our life.

With that, I want to give you, the parents, a homework assignment.

Sit down with your spouse and make a list of everything that you do in the day, including how much time you spend on social media, how much time you spend following the multitudinous forms of sports that surround us, how much time you spend reviewing news that you don’t actually need to know or follow, how much time you spend playing Candy Crush Saga, Angry Birds or the like.

Then make a second list of things you can cut out of your day. I am confident that if you do this for

yourselves and your children you will notice that you will have at least an hour more in your daily schedule.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, with fear of God, faith and love let us all pray for this initiative that our merciful Savior guide our steps aright in the ways of repentance and change so that we might provide the tools of learning and sound reasoning to help our children become wise in Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. Amen.