

## JULY 27 BLOG POST OF METROPOLITAN MOSES

I want to begin this week's talk with some preliminary remarks. As I prepared my talk for this week, I realized that it is actually two talks at least. So, I ask your patience. I ask you to follow through this process with me. Also, because the issues we are tackling are so complicated, it is impossible to even address everything in several lengthy talks. So, I also ask for persistence and discipline as we learn together. We need to have mental stamina, especially in our times.

One of the great temptations of our age is for modern man to completely immerse his mind and heart in material things. We need to move about in the material world, but we are called to be in the world, yet, not of the world.

There is an image from the book of Judges in the Old Testament that is quite useful for us. The Israelites had gone a whoring from God by setting up altars unto Baal and the Lord allowed the Midianites to oppress the children of Israel. At that time, God chose Gideon to bring them back to piety. When assembling an army to overthrow the Midianites, God wanted the battle to be arranged according to His will, as it is written:

*And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people with thee are many, so that I may not deliver Midian into their hand, lest at any time Israel boast against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. And now, speak in the ears of the people, saying, Who is afraid and fearful? Let him return and depart from mount Gilead: and there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people is yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will purge them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, even he shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, even he shall not go with thee. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Whosoever lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set apart; and likewise whosoever boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, with their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: and all the rest of the people bowed upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and give Midian into thine hand: and all the other people shall go every man unto his place. (Judges 7:2-7)*

So, the majority of men bowed on both of their knees and put their faces in the water, completely obscuring their vision. On the other hand, the chosen three hundred men came to the water bowed on one knee, put their hand in the water, and lapped from their hand while remaining upright.



The image of the men who drank from an upright position is an image of spiritual vigilance.

Yet, there is another form of vigilance that is harmonious with spiritual vigilance, and that is intellectual vigilance. Classical education in a Christian context helps to make a man intellectually vigilant and to lift his mind towards metaphysical truth. *It is a completely different form of education from what government schools use today.*

Today, for the most part, people have not only rejected theology, but they have rejected the very idea of reality as such. How can I make this claim? There are so many reasons for this claim that it would require many pages to delineate them all. For now, let me say this; the doctrine of relativism has been promoted in our schools since the 1960's, and it has infected our culture. Relativism is the doctrine that knowledge, truth and morality exist in relation to culture, society or historical context. In other words, there is no absolute truth. What springs from this is that most people think with their emotions and not with their rational faculty. How many times have you heard, "To me, such and such is the case..." or "This is how I feel..." The implicit goal of this is to condition all "good" citizens to say to each other, "Your [reality] is as good as my [reality]."

Like a cancer, relativism has ravaged every corner of society - universities, seminaries, primary and secondary school, television programming. The list goes on. In many places, one is considered a bigot simply for believing in objective truth. Go to a college campus and tell passers by that mankind is made up of only two sexes, male and female, and you will quickly discover the consequences of speaking about objective truth today. *Indeed, the very notion that human nature exists has been under attack for some time.*

We have a multitude of problems that we are forced to confront from many different directions. We have temptations from without and temptations from within. Heresies and schisms are here and there. We have intellectual problems galore - in the schools, in the universities, in the air itself. But, we must not lose hope. With David, we must cry out: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life. Of whom then shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 26) And also with David, we need to recall: "Wondrous is God in his saints, the God of Israel." (Psalm 66) We must trust in God with all our heart. We must *remember* to look to the saints, to their example

and guidance left behind both in accounts of their lives and their writings handed down to us.

For this reason, it is greatly providential that we have Saint John of Damascus as the patron of our educational initiative. In his works, we find a cornucopia of patristic thought. Educated in both natural and spiritual wisdom, he was a model to his fellow monks at St. Savvas Monastery and one of the great hymnographers of the Church. He composed the Funeral Hymns and compiled the *Octoechos*, the *Menologion*, and the Paschal Canon. He wrote numerous theological works, including his *Apologetic Treatises against those Decrying the Holy Images* and *The Fount of Knowledge*. In the Holy Gospels, our Lord commands us to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with our mind. (Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27)<sup>i</sup> Indeed, this is the great commandment in the law. We need to seek to do this in our lives. Saint John gives a pattern by which to frame our efforts.

There is a long and varied history to our present intellectual problems. Before I consider just a few of those problems, I would like to take the time to make special mention of Saint John's work *The Fount of Knowledge*. Written in the eighth century AD, *The Fount of Knowledge* is a compendium of both natural and spiritual wisdom. It is divided into three parts: 1) Philosophical Chapters, 2) On Heresy, and 3) The Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith. It is of note that in English we only usually see the third part of this great work. Yet, this is a pity, as the Exact Exposition forms a cohesive whole with the other two parts.

You will assuredly note my use of the term 'philosophical'. You might find it odd to see that I use this term. After all, Saint Paul says in his letter to the Colossians, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." (Col. 2:8) We need to understand the term 'philosophy' in an *Orthodox* manner. Thankfully, Saint John's work provides us with a means to do this. In the Philosophical Chapters, he does just that. However, before I cite from his work, I would like to address the reason that I have been choosing to include these long passages. I am doing so because we *need to read* more. These passages are included as a sampling of the sorts of things that we should be reading. If you are interested in reading more from this book, you can find it at .... For now, let's return to our passage. St. John writes:

*Philosophy is knowledge of things which are in so far as they are, that is, a knowledge of the nature of things which have being. And again, philosophy is knowledge of both divine and human things, that is to say, of things both visible and invisible. Philosophy, again, is a study of death, whether this be voluntary or natural. For life is of two kinds, there being the natural life by which we live and the voluntary one by which we cling lovingly to this present life. Death, also, is of two kinds: the one being natural, which is the separation of soul from body, whereas the other is the voluntary one by which we disdain this present life and*

*aspire to that which is to come. Still again, philosophy is the making of one's self like God. Now, we become like God in wisdom, which is to say, in the true knowledge of good; and in justice, which is a fairness in judgment without respect to persons; and in holiness, which is to say, in goodness, which is superior to justice, being that by which we do good to them that wrong us. Philosophy is the art of arts and the science of sciences. This is because philosophy is the principle of every art, since through it every art and science has been invented. Now, according to some, art is what errs in some people and science what errs in no one, whereas philosophy alone does not err. According to others, art is that which is done with the hands, whereas science is any art that is practiced by the reason, such as grammar, rhetoric, and the like. Philosophy, again, is a love of wisdom. But, true wisdom is God. Therefore, the love of God, this is the true philosophy. (9-10)*

We need to notice the different senses of his use of "philosophy". First, he says "philosophy is a knowledge of things which are insofar as they are, that is, a knowledge of the nature of things which have being." Here, we have to see this in the context of intellectual history. The study of being as being was also known as metaphysics. When we say "metaphysical realism", we mean that there is objective reality. We believe that reality can be known. You may think, "What does this have to do with theology?" Saint John clearly thought these issues were important, as evidenced by the fact that he discusses them for over one hundred pages in the Philosophical Chapters. If Saint John thought it was important, we ought to think it is important as well. There is a problem when we think that we know better than the Church Fathers.

Let's return to our contemporary problems for a moment. These trends are the bad fruit of the bad philosophy of nominalism, which gained notoriety in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Put in the simplest terms, nominalism is the doctrine that general ideas are mere names without any connection to reality. In short, it is a rejection of the metaphysical realism espoused by Saint John and the other Fathers of the Church. It is a rejection of reality.

Taken in its most literal sense, philosophy means "the love of wisdom". This is why Saint John finds philosophy's fulfilment in the love of God. If we want to have a philosophic use of language, we have to presuppose that there is an objective truth and an objective reality. Again, this is where metaphysics comes in and this is why Saint John discusses it at such lengths. Metaphysics is concerned with the first principles of things, the higher intellectual and, at least in a sense, spiritual truths concerning being, knowing, substance, cause and identity.

In general, modern universities have rejected *any* traditional view of metaphysics. Consequently, they do not offer courses or keep faculty qualified to teach it. Our society is completely dominated by materialistic philosophies. These modern materialistic philosophies which underlie our present education system bring a man down to his knees and plant his face in material things so that he cannot look up.

Classical Christian education helps to keep man upright in his perception of reality, in his pursuit of truth and in his wonder at how God made man in His image by giving us reason and freewill. The ultimate goal of classical Christian education is to foster a love and understanding toward higher things and towards a love of both natural and spiritual wisdom.

On this topic, there is more to discuss. I will stop there for now.

You probably have lots of questions, such as:

“Your Eminence, isn’t this all too advanced to discuss when discussing primary and secondary education?”

“If it is not too advanced, how does it tie in with the curriculum offered by the initiative?”

There is so much to address! Our administrator Fr. John will begin to answer the first question in a talk distributed through our blog this coming week. The second part of this talk will be available next week.

May God grant you and your families wisdom!

God bless you! Amen.

In Christ,

+Moses, of Toronto

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Writings: The Fount of Knowledge- The Philosophical Chapters, on Heresies, the Orthodox Faith (The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 37)

By Saint John of Damascus

Translated by Frederic H. Chase Jr.

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<sup>i</sup> Heart – *kardia*, soul – *psyche*, mind – *dianoia* (discursive reasoning; see the *Philokalia*, Vol. 1, glossary. See also *The Sculptor and the Stone*, Abp. Chrysostomos of Etna of Blessed Memory, CTOS Press)