

## THIS WORLD AND THAT WHICH IS *NOT* OF THIS WORLD

by

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In Christ's Church, the "world" means two things in Holy Scripture:

(1) It signifies all mankind in the following and similar passages of Scripture: *God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.* [St. John 3:16, 17] *Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world!* [St. John 1: 29]

(2) By the term *world* is meant those people who lead a sinful life opposed to the will of God, who live for time and not for eternity. Thus we must understand the word *world* in the following and similar passages: *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. if you were men of the world, the world would love you as its own. Just because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, that is why the world hates you.* [St. John 15: 18, 19] *Do not love the world or things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the glamour of wealth, is not of the Father but of the world. And the world is passing away, and the desire for it. But he who does the will of God lives eternally.* [I St. John 2: 15-17] *You adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* [St. James 4: 4]

[Nos. (1) and (2) above are taken from the wonderful 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian saint, St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov)'s classic for monks but applicable for the laity alike, *THE ARENA, Chapter 41, THE MEANING OF THE TERM 'WORLD,'* p. 166.]

We will concentrate on No. 2 and the differences between it and doing the Lord's will, thus living eternally, being as He would say "not of *this* world". This world is the snare of the Devil, the Evil One, who lays traps for us. He is the prince of darkness. The majority of people are of this world; that is to say, they don't recognise Christ as their Saviour. They are living for the moment, for pleasure and self-aggrandisement. Very few are following in the Lord's Way. Our goal is to be within that few. Jesus gives us the opportunity to join His Way. Christ allows the Devil to tempt and harass us as tests of our spiritual mettle. It's up to us!

If we are of Christ, we are not of *this* world in a spiritual sense. We reject the world of the prince of darkness. We live in it but prepare for the eternity promised by the Lord. We live for Christ and struggle to follow in His footsteps. We strive and long for eternity. This life is merely temporary. The Lord wants to save us all, but He will not make it easy for us. We must suffer as He did and be ready to make the ultimate sacrifice if it comes to that!

Now some of you may think that all this struggle and strife stuff is just for monks – couldn't be further from the truth. All of us are called to asceticism, laity and clergy alike. The form of it simply differs. In any case, Christ calls us to sacrifice and our own personal spiritual crucifixion for Him. We are to tilt at the biggest windmill all our lives: the world, otherwise known as the passions. What are these:

... love of riches, desire for possessions, bodily pleasure from which comes sexual passion, love of honour which gives rise to envy, lust for power, arrogance and pride of position, the craving to adorn oneself with luxurious clothes and vain ornaments, the itch for human glory which is a source of rancour and resentment, and physical fear.

Saint Isaac the Syrian, quoted in *THE ARENA*<sup>2</sup>

As true Orthodox Christians, we must battle the forces of this world continually as we climb the spiritual ladder and thread our way along the narrow trail that leads to the eternity promised by Him. Yes, every now and then we may slip off and take a fall, but we get right up, repent and forge on. There are no timeouts.

Our Christian purpose is to serve God, not mammon, not this world.

Notice how different these spiritual requirements are from the 'prosperity' baby food television evangelists feed their viewers. Have you ever heard one of these people mention or stress the sacrifices required of Christians? Probably not, that might dry up the monies being milked from their deluded viewers.

Suffering is not in the vocabulary of these television hotshots, or, indeed of the majority of those in the contemporary clergy in the western world. The church (small "c") advertises its wares as if in a marketplace and competes for memberships (read that financial supporters). The marketers provide promises of comfort if you'll just come to *their* service. They split the services into "traditional," "contemporary," perhaps "youth"- some of these may have guitars, keyboards; others may feature lots of running around, praise gestures, banging on tambourines. The black protestant churches showcase loud "amens," clapping hands and feet, muttering as if speaking in tongues and large choirs rocking with rhythm. Some of their preachers hop, skip and jump around the 'stage'.

In short, they are giving the people "what they want," rather than the spiritual food they need. They are providing support for what the overwhelming majority is doing anyway, following Satan's 'world'. They customise their services and buildings to please the spiritually-lukewarm masses and/or passionate but spiritually-deluded. If you comment on these folk and point out their spiritual errors compared to the true Ancient Orthodox Church of Christ, they charge you

with insensitivity, allege that no one has a monopoly on the spiritual truth, that we should love our brothers and sisters (which we should) etc. etc.

Let us assume that they simply are not aware that there is a monopoly on God's truth. There *is* only one route to salvation and it is through Jesus Christ. It is *not* through a watered-down Jesus, deconstructed to just be a prophet, or your friend, or a mystical historical figure who probably didn't do any of those miracles anyway.

In the last times of this world, which may be near, these lovers of the world

...will crown all by welcoming antichrist and giving him divine honour. How terrible is the love of the world! It enters a person gradually and imperceptibly; but once it gets in, it becomes his cruel and absolute lord. Gradually men developed a disposition and acquired a state of soul capable of deicide; gradually they will develop a disposition and acquire a temper and character capable of welcoming antichrist.

St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov)<sup>3</sup>

We don't want to be friends of this world:

While serving in the world it is impossible to serve God. In fact, double service does not exist. Even though to the distorted sight of the slaves of the world it seems as if such service is real, actually there is no such thing. What appears to be is something different – *hypocrisy, pretence, sham, deception of oneself and others* (emphasis supplied). A friend of the world invariably becomes, though he may not notice it himself, the most bitter enemy of God and of his own salvation. Love of the world steals into the soul like a thief, profiting by the darkness of the night – negligence and inattention to oneself. Love of the world is capable of committing the greatest inequities, the greatest crimes.<sup>4</sup>

Brethren,

As Orthodox Catholics, we obey the secular law, but its moral principles should comply with Christian beliefs and practises, not the other way around. We don't structure the Church to fit in with society. Society is of this world, of the Prince of Darkness.

Take a look around us. Consider the "American idol" phenomenon and the rest of the crazy reality shows. The central goals of the contestants are to become famous, be on TV, get a record contract, be rich, buy fancy or bizarre clothes, high-powered cars to pick up the "chicks". In brief, it's all about perceived pleasure in this world and centered on "me"!

Very little is ever said about sharing one's God-given talent with the world.

There are exceptions, of course, where a winning 'Idol' professes his Christian roots and shares his talent and resources with the poor. A shining example is singer Clay Aiken, who travels to Africa regularly for an international organisation and has developed his own charity, the Babel-Aiken Foundation, to combat autism and other children's disabilities. He is to be greatly admired. Many of this world accordingly are very critical of him, denigrating his country background, accent and mannerisms. They seem to resent that he is a fine, decent man. One wonders how the same people view their fathers?

The homosexual sinners chime in and trot out their favorite query "When is he going to come out of the closet and admit he is gay?" You see to these 'folk in denial,' anyone who is single at 30 years of age and has a strange accent is obviously "gay". Of course, some of these to be pitied (but still loved as our neighbours) individuals also blasphemously infer or expressly state that our Lord is homosexual! You see when you are a sinner, you like to have company.

As long as one lives in this world, there is hope for spiritual renewal. Pray for these misguided people that they change their ways and attitude and accept the true Christ.

Having fame and riches is not in itself evil. Many successful actors and singers have merged lives in show business with spiritual lives and good works. They have found a balance to their lives but lean toward their spiritual sides. Some actors screen their roles so their portrayals do not badly influence young people. Unfortunately, this is an exception, particularly today in 'Hollywood'; but we should remember that people are good. After all, our Lord created them. If they do bad things, the Evil One is actively involved. They can change. We should spiritually help them and pray that they accept Christ into their lives before it is too late. There is no overtime in this respect. What is the proper standard of spiritual living in this world?

The right use of earthly life consists in preparing oneself for eternal life. Brethren, let us accomplish our brief earthly pilgrimage, making it our one business to please God, borrowing from the world only what is essential.<sup>5</sup>

If our lives are spiritually out of balance, let's act now!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> THE ARENA, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>3</sup> *id.*, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> *id.*, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> *id.*, p. 177.