

THE CELEBRANT: PRIEST OR PASTOR

*An Investigation of the Mystical Prayers
of the Divine Services of the
Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church*

Introduction

For almost two millennia, priests have addressed our Lord in two different ways during the Divine Services. Some prayers are recited aloud, for all the congregation to hear. Others are prayed silently, and are between the priest and God. These prayers are variously referred to as the "silent prayers," "secret prayers," or, (most aptly) "mystical prayers." There are some today, both from among the priestly rank, as well as from the laity, who teach that all the prayers of the priest should be said aloud. They claim that it is ridiculous to keep these beautiful prayers from the ears of laymen. This is akin to hiding our candle under a bushel (Matt. 5:15). Furthermore, we have all been made a Royal Priesthood, (I Pet. 2:9) and we all have a right to hear these prayers. The following is a critique of the claims of the modernists, and a defense of the traditional liturgical practice of the Orthodox Church.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite was a convert and disciple of the Holy Apostle Paul. (Acts 17:34) The following somewhat lengthy quotation from his work *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* admittedly only seems to touch the present question in one brief phrase. However, this passage states many principles which will become important during the examination of this controversy. The blessed philosopher of Christ writes:

Our hierarchy consists of an inspired, divine, and divinely worked understanding, activity, and perfection...

But see to it that you do not betray the holy of holies. Let your respect for the things of the hidden God be shown in

knowledge *unshared and undefiled* by the uninitiated. Let your sharing of the sacred befit the sacred things: Let it be by way of sacred enlightenment for sacred men only...Jesus enlightens our blessed superiors, Jesus who is transcendent mind, utterly divine mind, who is the source and the being underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God, who is the ultimate in divine power. He assimilates them, as much as they are able, to his own light. As for us, with that yearning for beauty which raises us upward (and which is raised up) to him, he pulls together all our many differences. He makes our life, disposition, and activity something one and divine, and he bestows on us the power appropriate to a sacred priesthood.

Approaching therefore the holy activity of the sacred office we come closer to those beings who are superior to us. We imitate as much as we can their abiding, unwavering, and sacred constancy, and we thereby come to look up to the blessed and ultimately divine ray of Jesus himself. Then, having sacredly beheld whatever can be seen, enlightened by the knowledge of what we have seen, we shall then be able to be consecrated and consecrators of this mysterious understanding. Formed of light, initiates in God's work, we shall be perfected and bring about perfection. (I:1, emphasis added)

St. Dionysius had previously written of the celestial hierarchy, that is the angelic world. He now turns to the hierarchy of the Church and demonstrates that it is both a reflection, and a continuation, of the heavenly hierarchy. The following principles can be gleaned from the above text: First, not all people can bear all truth. His teacher, St. Paul, also refers to this principle, writing: "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it..." (I Cor. 3:2; see also Heb. 5:11-14) Indeed, St. Paul's disciple moves on in the aforementioned work to write, "the share of the divine is apportioned to each in accordance with merit." (I:2)

Second, our faith is an hierarchical faith. There are some individuals who are set over us. They have authority over us, and will be held accountable (by God, not by us) as to how they use this authority. Likewise, we may be set in a position of responsibility over others, and then we learn what a heavy yoke this responsibility is to bear. Our beloved author also writes, "We see our human hierarchy...as our nature allows... [it lifts] us upward hierarchically until we are brought as far as we can be into the unity of divinization." (I:2)

Third, we advance in holiness through the ministrations of those set over us. Likewise, we are responsible for the salvation of those over whom we find ourselves set. Again, the holy philosopher writes, "Subordinates...are to pursue their superiors and they also promote the advance of those below them...because of this inspired, hierarchical harmony each one is able to have as great as possible a share in him who is truly beautiful, wise, and good." (I:2)

Fourth, in order to impart holiness, one has to be holy. Light cannot come from darkness, and darkness can only be dispersed by light.

Fifth, this entire hierarchy is based in and on our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who impart sanctification, impart only what they have received through Him. When we are obedient to our superiors, we are obedient to Christ. Jesus is, according to St. Dionysius, "the source and the perfection of every hierarchy." (I:2)

The importance of these principles will become evident as we move through this investigation. Now let us turn to the Holy Scriptures.

The Old Testament

Moses, representing the entire nation of Israel, twice spent 40 days with God on the mountain. (Ex. 31, 34) Furthermore:

...it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face... (Ex. 33:9-11)

Why does Moses receive these particular blessings? Why, if all men are created equal, do not all the Israelites share in these events? Were they any less Jewish than Moses? less chosen? less human? Is it fair that Moses is chosen as their leader without even their consent? Is it fair that later God will ordain seventy righteous elders and give them the spirit which was with Moses, "and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone"? (Num. 11:17) All without the consent of the people! What gives these seventy the right to speak for the nation? What gives the tribe of Levi special prerogatives to intercession with God?

First let us just note that those who would demand their rightful share of leadership usually overlook the fact that even God, Who grants it, has called it a burden. Would we not think it ridiculous if we saw two

men walking side by side, one carrying several heavy packages, and the other complaining that he has a right to carry some of those packages!

Yet several priests have heard the complaint, "Why do you deny me my right to hear the secret prayers?!" It is quite surprising to hear anyone claim any part of Divine Grace as a right. But this concept, that if we are all priests (I Pet. 2:9), we all have a right to equal access to God, has an ancient, even if not so venerable, history. Indeed as far back as the sojourn in the wilderness we see Miriam and Aaron foreshadowing the modernist Orthodox. They asked, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?" (Num.. 12:2) God heard their prayer and they received more than their rightful due: they received forgiveness (along with a measure of chastisement) for demanding that which they thought was their rightful due!

They certainly fared better than did those other predecessors of our modernist friends, Korah and his 250 followers who complained, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (Num.. 16:3) Yes, and we are all holy, the Lord is in everyone of us! Therefore why should we not complain that the mystical prayers are kept from us?! Why should we not complain that the priests take too much upon themselves? Moses answers such ingratitude,

Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? (Num. 16:8, 9)

But Moses was not the only one to answer these ingrates. The earth opened up and swallowed Korah, his 250 followers, their wives, children, and tents, and then a fire appeared and consumed them all. (Num.. 16:31ff) So God Himself has shown how He feels about people who demand priestly rights.

The answer for us, then, is to accept our station. God has made us a Royal Priesthood (I Pet. 2:9), He adopts us as His own children giving us an exceedingly great inheritance, (Rom. 8:16, 17) He deifies us, changing us from glory to glory, until we become one with the image of the glory of the Lord (I Cor. 3:18), and yet does this seem a small thing to us, that we would demand more? Do we read of the end of Korah, and not tremble when we demand our "right" to hear the mystical prayers?!

First and foremost we must remember God is not a democrat. He is not a democrat religiously, for only the priests went into the Holy Place to accomplish "the service of God," and into the Holy of Holies "went

the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people." (Heb. 9:6, 7) St. Symeon, the bishop of Thessalonica, writes, "the bishop...is the source of the priesthood and all Christianity."^{1a} Nor is He a democrat politically. No divine empire, whether Israelite, Roman, Russian, Ethiopian, etc, was a democracy. Indeed the term "Divine Democracy" is self-contradictory, unless one believes in the deity of the voting majority. St. Symeon points to the fact that the lesser is blessed by the greater (Rom. 7:7), reminding us that "...by divine decree and commanded from heaven...he that transmits sanctification as a cleric is superior to those sanctified, even if they are kings."¹ He then complains:

I do not understand how this order has been changed altogether in some places, so that often the clergy appear in a lower rank than the laity, and without being of lower rank are given orders here and in many other respects because of the disdain of some laymen towards divine matters.²

So let us be cautious, then, before we attempt to take priestly prerogatives upon ourselves. Let us consider what it is we would do. Let us ask ourselves what earthly despot would treat kindly one who demanded to be allowed full access to his royal personage.

The New Testament

But how can I be fed by the Liturgy if I do not hear all the prayers? How can I be expected to say "Amen" to a prayer I have not heard myself? ...a prayer in which I have not been able to participate? ...a prayer which I have not been able to scrutinize for myself?

"And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." (Luke 6:12) Are we fed by Christ? Do we know what He prayed about? Did we participate in this prayer? How can we respond to Him, when we do not know every last word He ever uttered in prayer? How can we say "Amen" to His ministry, when we have this big blank spot in front of us? The Holy Orthodox Church is the Body of Christ; the priest, celebrating the Liturgy, is one with Christ, and can be said to be Christ for us. We trust in our Lord, even though we are not privy to every last word He uttered. Likewise we trust in His Church, and His Servants, even though we may not fully comprehend all the truth which is embodied there. What we are given for the moment, and what may be revealed to us at a later date, and what we may never understand, all are given to us or veiled from us either for our benefit or because of our limitations.

St. Symeon points out that during the entrance at Vespers, the "priest prays in silence with bowed head...because the God-Man offered himself to the heavenly Father, and descending into Hades redeemed us from the tyranny of Hades."³ He then warns us that this, and all other significations of the Entrance, it "is necessary for us to study...always...[to] keep them in mind, for through the descent of God from heaven we received our salvation."⁴ Some things are beyond words. One can never fully express the relationship between the Father and the Son, or for that matter, the descent into Hades. Thus silence sometimes speaks more clearly than words.

Oh, but that is different? You have used Christ as an example. Christ is God, the priest in the Liturgy is a man, my equal. Surely no man is entitled to more than any other man (those earlier references to Moses, were, after all, referring to the Old Testament).

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart..." (Matt. 17:1) What! Did Christ not deign to bring the others up? Were they not all Apostles? Did they not have equal access to Christ? Why then are three favored?

Well that had to do with the level of their spirituality. In sacramental actions we all stand equal before God. But did not the multiplication of the bread and fish foreshadow the Eucharist? And yet, "Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way." (Matt. 15:32) Did not the people have the right to hear these deliberations? After all, it concerned them. Where is the fairness in that? Twelve are called apart, given secret instructions, and fed the group. Do you think anyone in that group was so ungrateful as to ask why he was not consulted before being fed?

Ah, but that was before Pentecost, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Is there no end to this blasphemy? When dissension arose in the early Church, "...the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." (Acts 15:6) Some parts of ecclesiastical life are restricted to those who are called by God to specific ministries. This is Orthodoxy. To claim a right to any portion of divine service on the basis of one's royal priesthood is Protestant. We could go on indefinitely. The point is, ours is an hierarchical faith, not a democracy. When we demand participation in every last action of the Divine Liturgy, we are demanding that the Priest be a Pastor, the Church be a theater, the Liturgy be a play, the Eucharist be an Agape Feast, and that we, ourselves, become the captains of our own fate, rejecting the Loving Providence of God. May it never be!

Three Patristic Texts Against Silent Prayers

To adduce proof that the early Church did not have silent prayers, Kucharek lists three texts: St. Justin Martyr (2nd cent) (*1 Apology* 67), St. Dionysius of Alexandria (3rd cent) (citation in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, VII:9), and Emperor St. Justinian (6th cent) (*Novella* 137:6), calling this evidence obvious and unequivocal.⁵

First let us, for sake of argument, accept two assumptions. Let us say that silent prayers were not utilized in the early Church, and let us also say that there are some Church Fathers who speak against the practice. Would this make a difference?

Many Protestants who want to get back to the pure Church seek to learn what were the earliest practices of the Church. Their belief is that the later the practice, the more corrupt it became. It is taught that the Church became especially corrupt after the conversion to Christianity of Emperor St. Constantine. He supposedly turned the Church into something it was never meant to be. To get back to pure Christianity we have to shed what was supposedly added in his time: mitres, elaborate vestments, etc. This, however, is a purely Protestant principle. (Though, sadly, some Orthodox theologians have succumbed to this belief — most notably Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*.) While the Truth of the Church never changes, the manner in which it is expressed can develop. Development does not mean an organic change, but refers to a process akin to a bud opening into a flower. Even if silent prayers were not a part of early worship (and this is by no means certain), that does not in and of itself mean that they ought not to be utilized.

Further, even if a Church Father could be quoted as speaking out against the traditional practice, this also does not, in and of itself, mean the practice is wrong. Fathers, by themselves, are not infallible. Many erred in some matters. St. Gregory Nyssa, one of the most brilliant theologians of our Church, taught that in the end, all, even Satan himself would be saved. This teaching was later condemned by the Church. St. Gregory is no less a saint, no less a Father. He erred in that matter. The rest of the Church corrected his teaching. The Church as a whole is infallible. Her Ecumenical Councils are infallible. Her Scriptures are infallible. Her Canons are infallible guides. Her individual members, however, are not infallible. Thus, even if a Father is found to speak out against silent prayers (and we will soon see that Emperor St. Justinian certainly did), this does not mean that one automatically must accept what he taught.

Now to turn to the three Church Fathers and examine them one by one:

St. Justin Martyr states that prior to the distribution of the bread and wine, the president (priest) says certain prayers, to which the people joined in with the concluding "Amen." This testimony is extremely ambiguous. The assumption is that for the people to say "Amen" at the conclusion of the prayer, the rest of the prayer must have been audible. Even if this were the case, it only says that the particular prayer being discussed was said aloud. It does not preclude other prayers from having been recited silently. However, as all Orthodox Christians know, just because the rubrics of a service calls for a congregational "Amen," or an audible priestly "Amen" for that matter, does not mean that the entire prayer has to be recited aloud.

St. Dionysius of Alexandria refers to one who, at a baptism, had heard the giving of thanks. Again, the presupposition is that the man heard these prayers therefore, they were obviously said aloud. The picture is not so clear, however, when we look at the entire episode in context. The man is an elderly man who had long been a member of the community, from before St. Dionysius' time, and even before that of his predecessor. This man heard certain prayers at a baptism and was initially upset because they were different from the prayers he had heard at his baptism. He had been baptized by an heretical priest who recited heretical prayers. This greatly agitated the elder. If these prayers were recited loud enough for all to hear, why did it take so long for him to hear the prayer? Could it be that in almost two episcopal reigns in the second see of Christendom, there had been no baptisms? Unlikely. Could it be that he never paid attention in church? Unlikely, his very reaction shows the fervor of his faith. Could it be that he had been finally admitted to the ranks of the lesser clergy? If so he would now have the opportunity to hear a generally inaudible prayer which he had not heard since the last time he had been so close to the celebrant, namely at his own baptism? It may seem a little forced, but there do not seem to be any better explanations. At the very least, it shows the inconclusiveness of the text cited.

Emperor St. Justinian is said to have legislated against the "new" practice of silently reading certain prayers, writing, "...we order all bishops and priests...to offer the divine oblation, not silently, but in a voice audible to the faithful." However, there seems to be a problem with the original 18th century out-of-context translation, or rather mistranslation, of *Novella 137* by LeBrun and Robbe. Those who follow this translation come to the conclusion that St. Justinian was attempting to suppress the novel practice of reciting the prayers silently. Bishop Alexander has shown, however, "that the impression is reversed when we take the trouble to read the particular *Novella* in its original text, and entirely."⁶ What

we see is that he is attempting to establish a new practice of reciting them aloud. It is his opinion that this was the original practice of the early Church, but this is not proven by him. He is reacting against the unfaithful Clerics who, since they did not have to be said aloud, did not recite, or even know, the prayers.⁷ Whatever the immediate effects of Justinian's decree, which are totally unknown, by A.D. 800 the recitation of the major part of the Anaphora was universally recited secretly.⁸

Canons, Rubrics, and Early Church Fathers

The Holy Canons of our Church show, with Ecumenical force, that the principle of silent prayers is unquestionable. Canon XIX of the Council of Laodicea (4th century), accepted by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (7th century), states the principle plainly that there must be both secret and audible prayers. It states, "...then shall the prayers of (sc. for) the faithful be said thrice — once, the first time, silently, but the second and third time *viva voce*..."⁹ Though this is describing a Liturgy somewhat different from the one we celebrate today, it does show conclusively an acceptance of the principle of silent prayers.

Furthermore, the Typicon specifically states that certain prayers are to be said "in a low voice" or "silently."¹⁰

One indication for an early practice of silently praying the Anaphora, though admittedly far from conclusive, is found in St. Basil's allusion to the fact that the mind of many monks wandered during the Eucharistic prayer.¹¹ This might have been because nothing was being said audibly. It is hypothesized that the solution was to insert litanies.

In the early sixth century Chaldean Liturgy, except for three "canons," the rest of the Anaphora was offered in silence.¹² John Moschus (d. 619) tells us that three youths were struck dead by lightning for reciting the secret prayers as a pastime: he then complains that they knew these prayers because some priests would say them aloud!¹³

Louis Bouyer points out that despite the rather dogmatic insistence on the part of some that the prayers were or were not definitely said aloud, is unsubstantiated, for either side.

...we do not have any clear statement on the question in the patristic period. The arguments which people seem to think furnish proof for the fact of the recitation aloud of the Eucharist in antiquity, are generally merely inferences drawn from the importance attached by the Fathers to the people's final "Amen." But at least for twelve centuries in the West, and for still more in certain regions at least of the East, the people gave this "Amen" in response to a few words uttered

aloud by the priest in concluding, and they never seemed to have been concerned about hearing or even knowing exactly what he might have said previously and inaudibly for their sake.¹⁴

He then goes on to tell us that what we actually know for a fact is that in Rome, from the eighth century, and in certain Eastern Liturgies from the sixth century, "either express rubrics or formal commentaries certify that the priest recited the greater part of the canon or anaphora in 'a low voice.'" ¹⁵

Here, it should be noted that he does not mention the aforementioned Canon of Laodicea, which shows that the practice of reciting at least some prayers silently, goes back to at least the 4th century. But, essentially he is correct. In the first two centuries there is virtually no evidence one way or the other. From the 3rd to the 6th century, we have evidence that the principle underlying the usage of silent prayers is accepted; there are some cases which may indicate that silent prayers were common, and sometimes the practice itself is stated. From the 6th century on there is ample evidence, as we shall see soon.

The Solemn Oath

Another point to consider is the modern day origin of the practice of not praying the silent prayers silently. Contrast 30 years ago when it would have been unthinkable to boisterously vociferate the mystical prayers, to the situation in a certain church in the OCA Diocese of the West. Under a previous priest the secret prayers were broadcast over a PA system, and one could barely hear the choir singing what could have been termed the "secret hymns." Further, liturgical books have changed the order of placement of several of the secret prayers, placing them at the end of the litanies, *assuming* that they will be read aloud!

Liturgical change has occurred. Who brought about this change? Who initiated it? It was obviously initiated on the priestly level. These are the same priests who at their ordination signed a document, promising never to institute liturgical change. This oath was sealed with a kiss of the Gospel Book, and the precious feet of our Crucified Lord! Can a liturgical practice originating in violation of this solemn oath be of any good? Can it be of God?

This could be compared to the calendar question. No one teaches that the Church as a whole could not adopt any calendar She chooses (though theologically and astronomically the Julian is by far superior to the Gregorian). Traditionalists, however, strongly oppose the manner in which the new calendar was forced on many Churches. It was originally

instituted unilaterally by Ecumenical Patriarch Meletius Metaxakis, a 33rd degree mason. He was acting more like a Pope or dictator than a chief hierarch of Christ's Church. He had no right to take this power upon himself. We see today the fruits of his wickedness. The Orthodox world is divided, many holding fast to Tradition, but many falling under the lure of modernism in the guise of a new calendar.

Similarly, the abolition of the silent recitation of the mystical prayers by renegade priests can have no good end. St. Nicholas Cabasilas, writing of certain liturgical innovations among the Latins warns that:

To follow the innovations of these men would indeed inevitably mean the total destruction of all Christianity. It is therefore clear that for those who hold such doctrines the very foundations of their virtue are in question, and there is indeed great danger for those who fabricate innovations of this kind, alien to the tradition of the Fathers and undermining the security which this tradition guarantees.¹⁶

Practical Considerations

Another very important reason that some of the prayers are silent is that the priest himself is standing before God, beseeching His aid. Some priests have stated that when they have tried to recite the mystical prayers in a voice for all to hear, they found themselves distracted and less prepared for the dread action which they are about to perform.

St. Symeon of Thessalonica tells us of the importance of a priest's private prayers. During Vespers, after the exclamation, "Let us bow our heads..." the priest:

bows his head, confessing himself to be a humble servant, and prays for the priest — because even he does not have confidence in himself, since he also is in need of mercy. For this reason he prays in piety and silence, in fear and trembling, while he speaks and intercedes with God, saying: "O Lord God, who bows the heavens..." Then, as if having confidence that he will receive what is requested, he raises his head and glorifies God aloud: "Blessed be the power of Thy kingdom..."¹⁷

St. Dionysius the Areopagite, in telling us why the celebrant partakes of Holy Communion before laymen, lays down a principle which can be used to show why the celebrant must, from time to time, stop and pray to God, facing God alone, unencumbered by his ministrations for the

people. The disciple of St. Paul writes, "For it is right to partake before imparting; reception of the mysteries always comes before their mystical distribution. This is the universal order and the harmonious arrangement appropriate to the divine realities."¹⁸ Though this refers to the Eucharist, the principle is clear. Before imparting holiness, one has to acquire holiness. Before praying for and with the congregation, one must be a man of prayer, and be in a prayerful state.

The holy philosopher Dionysius also records a certain "mystical reading of the sacred volumes." This was prayer for the righteous departed which began at the Great Entrance and concluded at the kiss of peace. In context, these can be seen to have been secret prayers, since they are recited by the deacons in the altar while other prayer is being offered.¹⁹ Though this is describing a Liturgy different from that of today, once again the principle is clear. Reading certain prayers silently allows one to perform certain actions without interrupting the flow of the Service.

Furthermore, when one gathers all the silent prayers said during the course of Vigil and Liturgy, one has over 30 pages. We are in an age where people are calling for "communicant-friendly" Churches. (See Nov. 1990 Word, [Magazine of the Antiochian Archdiocese] Letters to the Editor) Would it even be practical to add to the length of the service in this day and age? Rare is the parish which has a full cycle of services. Some in modernist jurisdictions do not even have a complete Liturgy. Would it not be more profitable, if we were to increase the length of services, to bring back into our services those things that truly and unquestionably belong there (e.g. Little Litanies, The Litany of Catechumens, Canons, Old Testament Readings, etc.)? The very people who call for cutting these things out of our services are the same who call for having the mystical prayers read aloud. This can only be described as hypocrisy!

So from a practical consideration we have seen that at times the priest needs to be "alone" with God, free from distractions; the priest, in order to pray for his people, needs to be in a state of prayer; sometimes silent reading allows certain prayers to be said without breaking the flow of the service. Furthermore, there are just too many mystical prayers to recite aloud in this day and age when people expect shorter services — we ought to instead insist that the services be done completely and properly.

A Theological Consideration

One of the most important reasons for the silent prayers is the mystical nature of theology. Cataphaticism (Theology of Silence) and Apophaticism (Theology of Words) are both part of Orthodox Theology.

Since they are both a part of our belief, they are both a part of our prayer. Not every truth about God can be comprehended by the mind, and therefore, not every portion of the Liturgy should be grasped by our ears.

In our Liturgy, that which is most precious, most holy, is veiled. The altar is covered by an iconostas, which has for its purpose, ironically, the uniting of the two areas of the Church. The iconostas is the opposite of a barrier. Far from cutting us off from what is behind it, it mystically brings us into the very presence of the altar.

The Holy Gifts are covered during the entrance. Again, this is part of the hierarchical nature as well as a mystical aspect of our worship. That which we are to consume, and which is to become part of our very selves, is hidden from our eyes.

A monastic is clothed in view of only the bishop and his fellow monastics, and a woman wears a head covering for similar reasons. Both monastics and wives have voluntarily taken a life of obedience. For this reason their precious body (in the case of a monastic) and their precious head (in the case of a married woman) are covered. The covering is, ironically, a glorious and precious sign of their humility. The humble are crowned, their bodies and heads are viewed as being precious so that they ought to be veiled.

Likewise, some prayers are covered from our ears because of their preciousness to God. While the choir sings during the anaphora, "the bishop first saith secretly the Prayer of invocation, then three times the prayer of the Third Hour... These are indeed the most solemn moments of the spiritual worship in the services of the Eastern Orthodox Church."²⁰ Thus, the anaphora certainly qualifies as a time to be covered in the mystical silence of unknowing, so that our sensual conduits of information do not obstruct the noetic apprehension of the incorporeal truths expressed by the Divine Sacrifice.

Later Church Fathers and Modern Theologians

St. Germanos of Constantinople points out that the very nature of the prayer of the people is different from that of the priest. Thus, if not directly mentioning mystical prayers, at least he shows that they are compatible with the Faith he received from his predecessors. The holy patriarch writes, "The chancel barriers indicate the place of prayer: the outside is for the people, and the inside, the Holy of Holies, is accessible only to the priests."²¹ He gets more specific when, commenting on the Great Entrance, he writes:

The priest goes with confidence to the throne of the Grace of God and, with a true heart and in certainty of faith, speaks to God. He converses no longer through a cloud, as once did Moses in the Tabernacle, but with uncovered face seeing the glory of the Lord. He is learned in the divine knowledge of the Holy Trinity and faith, and 'one to one' he addresses God, announcing in mystery the mysteries hidden before the ages and from the generations, but which are now revealed to us through the manifestation of the Son of God... God truly spoke invisibly to Moses and Moses to God: so now the priest, standing between the two Cherubim in the sanctuary and bowing on account of the dreadful and uncontemplatable glory and brightness of the Godhead, and contemplating the heavenly Liturgy, is initiated even into the splendor of the life-giving Trinity... And the priest contemplates and proclaims the thrice-holy glorification of the seraphic powers and of the four-fold creatures. With the overshadowing Cherubim and the Seraphim who cry aloud, he exclaims: "Singing the triumphant hymn..."²²

Speaking of the prostrations and accompanying prayers the priest makes during the anaphora, St. Germanos writes, "The priest's celebration of the divine mystery while bowing down manifests that he converses invisibly with the only God: for he sees the divine illumination, he is made radiant by the brightness of the glory of the face of God..."²³

St. Nicholas Cabasilas, in the beginning of his commentary on the Liturgy of the Catechumens writes:

At the beginning the priest exhorts the people to prayer, for he is appointed to this office and is for this reason placed in front of the people. He is also there as their representative and mediator, so that his prayer may be very efficacious... At the same time those for whom he is making supplication contribute all they can, by their good behavior, prayers, gentleness, and justice, and anything else which they know to be pleasing to God.²⁴

We see here the principle that not everyone can share equally with the priest, participation in the Divine Services. More directly, referring to the secret prayers during the antiphons, he writes, "While the deacon presides at the petitions and the holy people pray, the priest himself within the sanctuary prays in silence for those present and for the holy house..."²⁵ When he finishes "his silent prayer, the priest recites this explanatory verse in an audible voice, that all may hear, since it is a con-

clusion and a doxology; he wishes in this way to bring all the faithful to share in his hymn of praise, that God may be worshiped by the whole Church. And the congregation do indeed unite themselves to his prayer, for when he has recited this doxology all the faithful say, 'Amen,' and by this acclamation take to themselves as their own the prayers of the priest."²⁶

This further emphasizes the inconclusiveness of those earlier arguments that state that since the people say "Amen," the entire prayer of the priest must have been audible. Again, during the second antiphon, "The priest in his turn recites a prayer for all the faithful who are praying with him, asking that each may receive from God that which he privately requests...[and again] the end of the prayer...he says it aloud."²⁷ After the Gospel, St. Nicholas comments, "the priest once more prays privately for himself and those present: that he may conduct himself without reproach at the altar...and that the faithful who pray with him may be made worthy to partake in the holy mysteries..."²⁸ After the Great Entrance the priest "thoroughly prepares himself, purifying himself by prayer and getting ready for the sacrifice."²⁹ This prayer is private, yet it is one of the three things mentioned which also "prepares all those present, and puts them in dispositions of Grace..."³⁰ St. Nicholas shows himself to be a true Dionysian theologian when, commenting on the end of the Liturgy he writes:

...after the sacrifice is completed with its concluding doxology and the holy rites have been duly celebrated, one should note how the priest brings to an end, as it were, his communing with God, and gradually descends from these heights to converse with mankind. He does this as befits a priest, for it is in prayer, and both the manner and the place of his prayer symbolize his descent. First of all within the sanctuary he addresses himself to God and prays secretly on his own behalf. Then he leaves the sanctuary and standing in the midst of the congregation he says aloud, so that everyone can hear, the prayer of common supplication for the Church and for all the faithful.³¹

St. Symeon of Thessalonica tells us of several silent prayers on the part of the clergy recited while the choir is singing something else.³² He tells us that the silent censuring before Vespers and Matins signifies "the divine glory and the Grace given to the priest by an angel, and that the house of the Lord is full of glory."³³

Likewise, to those who would say it is their right to hear the silent prayers because the Liturgy is the work of the people, and we are just as much a part of the service as are the priests, St. Symeon answers:

This divine and most holy service of services is...separate and from Jesus alone, and the task of the clergy... It is something special, the work of God alone, performed by his priests and not by anybody else.³⁴

Further, there was no need to say them aloud at the services held in Thessalonica, for "the priestly prayers to God mention the things which the singers are chanting."³⁵ In other words, even if the words are different, the substance is the same.

Likewise today, Priest, Deacon, Choir, and even the Congregation each have their own function in Worship — the same goal, different functions. A Symphony Orchestra would lose its beauty if all were to play melody, or if all were to play the first part. Second and third violins, second and third trumpets are required, just as are first violins and trumpets. Even a tuba or a bass drum adds to the beauty of the whole. In fact, by accepting their place, the tubas, bass drums, cymbals, etc. achieve a greater beauty than that which they could ever achieve, either alone or attempting to dominate the performance. Finally, of course, there can only be one conductor. Only by each faithfully fulfilling his own part, can the harmonization of melodies produce the sought-after common goal of a splendid rendition of a classical composition. Or as St. Dionysius puts it, "...because of this inspired, hierarchical harmony each one is able to have as great as possible a share in Him Who is Truly Beautiful, Wise, and Good."³⁶

We will close our brief look at St. Symeon with one final description of the importance of silent prayers as connected to the hierarchical nature of our Holy Church. He writes:

After the intercessions come the petitions and bowing of the head, when all bow their heads and stand in silence, signifying the enormous reverence due to God from us, and manifestation of our servanthood and subjection. When the priest has besought God, the only holy Lord dwelling in the heights of his glory and surveying all, to whom we have subjected both our bodies and souls — when he has besought divine blessing, forgiveness of our voluntary and involuntary sins, worldly and other-worldly benefits, he raises his head as strengthened by God. The priest, rising with the people, thanks God and chants: "For it is yours to have mercy and save..." and performs the Dismissal.³⁷

Fr. John of Kronstadt, who is misused to support all sorts of dreadful innovations, is referred to by some as an advocate of reciting the prayers aloud. What this man of God actually says is, "The priest or the

bishop recites many prayers to himself; it would be much more interesting and profitable for the minds and hearts of Christians to be aware of the full text of the Liturgy."³⁸ He does not actually say they should be said aloud, merely that it would be good for the laity to know what is being prayed. Certainly anyone is able to read for themselves these prayers at any time. No one would deny anyone of this! Indeed, Fr. John himself would utter these prayers in a voice barely audible even to those near him in the altar.³⁹

A modern day traditionalist bishop in the State Church of Greece suggests that the silence of the mystical prayer of the Little Entrance, which mentions angelic participation in the Divine Liturgy, emphasizes the fact that creation is both visible and invisible, that angels worship along side of men.⁴⁰ This hierarch also intimates, (though it must be confessed that he does not state outright) that one reason for the silent prayers during the anaphora is to demonstrate that "this mystery cannot be explained by human language. It is understood by those blessed to believe in Christ."⁴¹

Textual Considerations

In our last section we will merely look at some of the secret prayers. For the most part, the texts themselves show why they must be secret. For instance, during Matins, "While the last three Psalms are read, the Priest, standing before the Royal Gates secretly — i.e. inaudibly, to himself, — recites the morning prayers, as the advocate of the people before the Lord."⁴² As he reads the prayers secretly, it is "with an uncovered head in token of penitence and humility of sorrowing Adam..."⁴³ St. Symeon expounds on the prayers recited silently by the Priest during the reading of the Six Psalms. He tells us that "the priest offers to God the Matins Prayers, as a mediator with God through what is said, completing what is sung, for everything is completed by the priesthood."⁴⁴ The second prayer shows the intercessory character of the prayers. The priest prays, "Remember by name, O Lord, all those that are with us and pray with us, and save them by Thy power." Further, in the fifth prayer he says, "Remember, O Lord, those who watch and those who sing to Thy Glory... be Thou their helper and succor. Accept their supplications..." We can see that the priest is praying for us! He does so silently so as not to set his good works before men, thereby losing his reward! How audacious, that we as a Church, in the person of the Bishop, ordain him to intercede for us. Then we demand to know exactly how he does this? What child, relying on his mother's gentleness to assuage his father's wrath, would demand that he be in the room when his mother seeks to mollify the father?

We see during the Little Entrance the prayers are intensely personal. The celebrant prays: "...make there to be with our entrance an entrance of holy angels serving with us..." Shortly after this, during the singing of the troparia, his prayer, in part, reads, "...Who hast vouchsafed us, Thy humble and unworthy servants, even at this hour, to stand before the glory of Thy Holy Altar, and to offer Thee due worship and glorification..." At the singing of the Alleluia, the priest is praying that God, "...open the eyes of our mind to the comprehension of the preaching of Thy Gospel." During the First Prayer of the Faithful the celebrant prays, "...make us to be worthy to offer unto Thee supplications and prayers and bloodless sacrifices for all Thy people." During the Second Prayer of the Faithful, the priest prays that God may "grant us to stand guiltless and uncondemned before Thy Holy Altar. Grant also, O God, to those that pray with us progress in life and faith and spiritual understanding." During the Cherubic Hymn he begs God to "...look down upon me a sinner and Thine unprofitable servant, and purify my soul and heart from an evil conscience, and, by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, enable me, who am clothed with the Grace of the Priesthood, to stand before this Thy Holy Table..." We could continue, but the point is clear. These are very personal moments. The celebrant is standing naked before God, asking to be clothed with Divine worthiness in order to better serve God and His Flock. To demand to be a part of this is sheer presumption.

During the anaphora, the priest is the one vouchsafed with the privilege of being the instrument through which the Bread and Wine are changed into the Body and Blood of our Resurrected Lord. He is the one who celebrates this awesome and terrible act. He is the one who has been prepared through the previous mystical prayers, as well as his own very extensive private prayers, which are canonically required before he serves. He is the one whom God has ordained for this function. Not us! Even if we dismissed the catechumens, still there would probably be Orthodox Christians who have not prepared themselves to receive the precious Body and Blood, let alone take part in its sacerdotal consecration — assuming that a layman could even take part in such a thing. This is why the prayer of the anaphora is not for us. We participate in that which is for us. For this reason the priest exclaims, "Take, eat..." and "Drink ye all of this..." This is our part, to humbly, fearfully, reverently, and joyously receive the Gifts given us by God through His faithful priest. Let us not number ourselves among Korah and the 250 who perished, trying to obtain too great a share in the Divine Mysteries for which they were unprepared to handle. Let us be grateful children, to whom has been given a wondrous inheritance, an inheritance beyond all speech. Let us not grumble, for if we do we render ourselves unfit for the reception of the Divine Mysteries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that there is no clear evidence that the prayers were indeed audible in the early Church, but that there is evidence that there may have been silent prayers from a very early time. We have seen that the principle of silent prayers is found in the Holy Canons of Mother Church, Canons which have been sanctioned by an Ecumenical Council. The actual prayers to be said silently are prescribed very precisely in the Typicon. To alter this is to engage in Liturgical reform, and priests are supposed to take a solemn oath against this.

We have seen that it would be impractical to read all the silent prayers aloud due to the time it would take. It has been suggested that if we want longer services, and this is something we should indeed desire, we should add that which truly belongs in the services, things which due to laziness have been taken out. Furthermore, the priest needs these times alone with God to better carry out his ministry at the altar. And indeed, reading certain prayers silently helps the flow of the Divine Services.

We have seen that any Church Father who speaks about the Silent Prayers, speaks about them either approvingly or, at the very least taking the practice for granted (the sole exception being Emperor St. Justinian, who admits to be attempting to bring a new practice in to the Church).

We have seen that the prayers themselves are written to be uttered by the priests silently, and that laymen participate in everything which pertains to them.

by Cyril Quatrone

ENDNOTES

1a) St. Symeon of Thessalonica, *Treatise on Prayer: An Explanation of the Services Conducted in the Orthodox Church*, H.L.N. Simmons, trans. Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1984, chapter 40.

1) Ibid.

2) Ibid.

3) Ibid., 41.

4) Ibid.

5) Kucharek, Casimir, *The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: Its Origin and Evolution*, Allendale, NJ: Alleluia Press, 1971, 560 n31, n32, n33.

- 6) Bouyer, Louis, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*, Charles Underhill Quinn, trans., Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, 368,369.
- 7) Ibid., 368-370.
- 8) Ibid., 370.
- 9) St. Agapius and St. Nicodemus, compilers, *The Rudder*, d. Cummings, trans. Chicago: The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1983, 560.
- 10) Kovalchuk, Feodor, S., ed., *Abridged Typicon*, S. Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1985, 106.
- 11) Bouyer, 376.
- 12) Kucharek, 560,561.
- 13) Ibid., 561.
- 14) Bouyer, 367.
- 15) Ibid.
- 16) St. Nicholas (Cabasilas), *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, J.M. Hussey and P.A. McNulty, trans., London, SPCK, 1983, sec 29, p.75.
- 17) St. Symeon, chapter 46.
- 18) St. Dionysius, *The Complete Works, Classics of Western Spirituality*, Colm Luibheid, trans., New York: Paulist Press, 1987, chapter 3, III:14.
- 19) Ibid., II.
- 20) Bishop Theophilus, *A Short History of the Christian Church and the Ritual of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, San Francisco: Douglass Brothers, 1934, 46.
- 21) St. Germanos of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, Paul Mayendorff, trans., Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984, 9.
- 22) Ibid., 41, p 91.
- 23) Ibid., 41, p 99.
- 24) St. Nicholas, 12, p 45.
- 25) Ibid., 15, p 50.
- 26) Ibid., 15, p 50,51.
- 27) Ibid., 15, p 51.
- 28) Ibid., 23, p 63.
- 29) Ibid., 25, p 66.
- 30) Ibid., 25, p 66,67.
- 31) Ibid., 53, p 119.
- 32) e.g. St. Symeon, Chapters 17, 47, 55. The list could easily be multiplied.
- 33) Ibid., 55.
- 34) Ibid., 9.
- 35) Ibid.
- 36) St. Dionysius, 1:2.
- 37) St. Symeon, 30.
- 38) Bishop Alexander (Semenoff-Tian-Chansky), *Father John of Kronstadt: A Life*, Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, 50.
- 39) Ibid., 47.

- 40) Bishop Augoustinos of Florina, *On the Divine Liturgy: Orthodox Homilies*, Asterios Gerostergios, trans., Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1986, I:182-185.
- 41) *Ibid.*, II:95.
- 42) Sokolof, Archpriest D., *A Manual of the Orthodox Church's Divine Services*, Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1975, 49.
- 43) Bishop Theophilus, 41.
- 44) St. Symeon, 17.

Appendix 1

Due to the fact that so many opponents of the traditional practice of silently reading the secret prayers point to the text by Emperor St. Justinian, the author of the present article, at the insistence of his parish priest, Fr. Daniel Meschter, sought the original text of the legislation. Thanks to the help of Jonathan Nauman, who tracked down the Greek and Latin texts, and the holy fathers of St. Gregory Palamas Monastery, who so graciously agreed to translate the text, we are able to print in its entirety the text in question. As has been stated in the article, there is no dispute that St. Justinian does indeed believe the silent prayers should be read aloud. What is clear from the very first sentence of the text, however, is that he is attempting to legislate a new practice. He is not, as so many others have claimed, attempting to suppress a new practice of reading them silently. The Greek text and the Latin text differ only in three unimportant word choices. The Greek text reads:

In addition to this, we order all Bishops and Presbyters to perform the divine Proskomedia and the prayer at Holy Baptism not silently but in a voice that can be heard by the most faithful people, so as to incite the souls of the hearers to greater compunction and to glorify the Lord God. For thus does the divine Apostle teach, saying in the First Epistle to the Corinthians: *When thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say, Amen, at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified* (I Cor. 14:16-17). And again, in the Epistle to the Romans, he says: *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* (Rom. 10:10). For this reason it is fitting that the prayer at the Proskomedia and the other prayers be uttered aloud by the most venerable Bishops and Presbyters to our Lord and God Jesus Christ together with the Father and the Holy Spirit; the most venerable Priests should know that if they omit any of these prayers,

they will have to give account at the fearful judgment of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, and if we find out about these things, we will not acquiesce in them, nor will we leave them unpunished. We also order the governors of the provinces, should they see any of our legislation disregarded, to urge the Metropolitans and the other Bishops to form the aforementioned synods and to fulfill everything concerning synods that we have commanded through the present law: but if they see them delaying, they should then inform us, so that there may proceed from us the appropriate correction of those who put off forming the synods; let the governors themselves and their subordinates know that if they do not observe these orders, they will be subject to the ultimate punishments. We confirm through the present law all that has been legislated by us in different regulations concerning Bishops, Presbyters and other clergy, and also those who are in charge of hostels, alms-houses, orphanages and the other sacred houses.

Epilogue. Let Your Gloriousness hasten to bring to the knowledge of all what we have decreed and declared through this divine law by edicts posted in the customary places of the Imperial City and to make them clear to the governors of the provinces.

One final note. It seems as if the Emperor is legislating only about the Proskomedion, and not the Eucharistic Canon, unless the "other prayers" can be shown to refer to the Canon. In other words, and this would take further investigation, it may not even say as much as we have conceded it says.

Appendix 2

When the author of this article asked Fr. Akakios of St. Gregory Palamas Monastery to translate the text of Emperor St. Justinian, he explained the nature of his views and the article to Fr. Akakios. When Fr. Akakios gave the document to Fr. Gregory to have it translated, he did not relate the purpose for which it was intended. When Fr. Gregory returned the translation to the writer of this article, he was suitably concerned that it might be used to attack Tradition. He sent, therefore, along with the translation, a letter which states in a clear, concise, and beautiful manner the nature of Tradition as it touches the topic at hand. We reproduce it here for the benefit of all God-fearing Christians.

Dear Mr. Quatrone:

May the Lord bless you!

With the blessing of Archbishop Chrysostomos and on behalf of Father Akakios, I have asked one of the Fathers here at the monastery to translate the passages that you submitted to us. Enclosed is a translation

of both the Greek and Latin texts; there are minimal differences between them.

Aside from the specific context in which Saint Justinian was writing and the specific issues which he was addressing when he composed these lines, within the Church today there is a seriously mistaken notion which has become quite popular, namely, that ancient texts, such as the ones in question here, can be advanced as justification for a "return" to liturgical practices no longer current in Orthodoxy. If this is what motivates your interest in these words of Saint Justinian, please allow me to alert you to the underlying error of such an approach.

The Orthodox Church is the Body of Christ, a uniquely Divine and human organism. She is animated by the Holy Spirit, and He, being perfect God, perfectly enlivens Her as She organically develops throughout the unfolding of history. This means that the present practices of the Church are the direct result of a Divinely inspired maturation. Accordingly, when we look back at Her life span, it seems that the Church has often "outgrown" certain liturgical practices (while, of course, maintaining Her integrity and self-identity). In such instances, we may interpret the words of Saint Paul in an ecclesiological manner: *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things* (I Corinthians 13:11). This is not to say that the early Church was in any way inferior to the Church in our own day and age. No, not at all; rather, just as the Incarnate Christ Himself always was, is, and ever shall be both perfect God and perfect Man — whether as a Babe lying in the manger, or a Youth teaching in the Temple, or the adult God Incarnate returning on clouds of glory —, so does the Church — His very Body — *grow unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph. 4:13).

Therefore, liturgiological arguments based on the supposition that what is ancient is automatically preferential or "more Orthodox" than what is current are fundamentally flawed. A case in point is the reception of the Holy Gifts. In the early Church, the Pure Body of Christ was placed directly into the hands of the Faithful at the time of Communion. As we know, this practice was superseded by that which remains current: the use of a spoon to commune the faithful. Why the change? The Holy Fathers, in their Divine wisdom, recognized many new Christians who had a callow appreciation of the Eucharist. Many would take the Body of Christ and, rather than consuming It immediately, would save It for later superstitious or even blasphemous uses. It thus became Providentially prudent to administer the Holy Gifts in such a way as to compel the Faithful to approach Communion with the proper piety and solicitude; hence, the introduction of the spoon.

Like several other ancient liturgical practices which were once common to all Orthodoxy — the uplifting of hands during prayer, the exchanging of the kiss of peace, etc. —, the reception of the Body of Christ into one's hands is now reserved by the Church solely for those who hold the Priesthood of Grace — i.e., Hierarchs, Presbyters, and Deacons. The same applies to the hearing of the mystical prayers within the Divine Liturgy. If there was a time when the mystical prayers were to be heard by all of the Faithful, such is no longer the case. The Holy Church, following the inscrutable intuitions of Her Spirit, has decided that it is more spiritually profitable for Her children *not* to hear these prayers. Therefore, any attempt to re-introduce into contemporary Orthodoxy ancient liturgical practices which have naturally fallen into disuse through the mellowing of the Church constitutes an innovation and thus a violation of Tradition itself.

Now, perhaps you agree with all I have said, and your motivation for exploring these passages from Saint Justinian is precisely to defend Orthodoxy from those who would innovatively contend that the mystical prayers of the Liturgy should be read aloud. If this is the case, then I applaud you for your efforts to defend Holy Tradition, and I apologize for "preaching to the choir." Please let my prolixly stated apology for liturgical traditionalism serve as grist for your research.

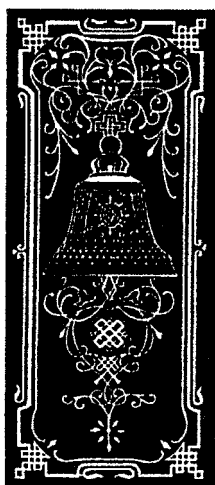
Wishing you the best in your studies of the Holy Faith, I remain,
Least among monks,

Hieromonk Gregory

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