

The New Generation (ELDER PAISIOS OF MOUNT ATHOS)

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The Spirit of Sacrifice Is Missing

Most people today have not tasted the joy of sacrifice and are not fond of toil. An easy going, lazy life and much comfort have taken centre stage. Gone are *philotimo* and sacrifice. People consider it a great achievement when they succeed in something without making an effort, when they are easily accommodated. But when they have to make an effort, they are unhappy. If they were approaching life spiritually, things would be different: the mere opportunity to struggle would give them joy.

Nowadays, both young and old, care only for convenience and comfort. Spiritual people aspire to holiness, but they want to get there the easy way. Those who live in the world want to make more money but work less. Young people want to pass their exams without studying and get their diplomas without ever leaving the coffee shops. And if possible, they would even love to call from there and get their exam scores over the phone! This is how far they will go. Many young students come to my *Kalyvi* and tell me, "Pray for me to pass my exams." They do not study and then say, "God will help me." "You must study and pray too," I advise them. "Why," they answer, "can't God help me?" They expect God to bless their laziness. That's not possible. Now, if someone studies hard but he doesn't get anything out of it, God will help him. There are some young people who have memory and comprehension problems but try hard nevertheless. God will help them become brilliant.

Fortunately, there are exceptions. A young man from Chalkidiki applied to three University Schools and was accepted in all of them with a first or second rank (1). But he felt more comfortable finding a job to relieve his father who was working in the mines. So he deferred his studies and took a job. Such souls are medicine for me. I am willing to die for them, to have them step all over me. Most young people, however, have been affected by the secular spirit and are in bad shape. All they know is how to take care of their needs. They could not care less about others, they only think of themselves. The more you help them, the lazier they become.

You cannot imagine how bland some young people are today. All they do is judge everything and get bored with everything when, in essence, the heart is never bored and does not get old. The monastic life, they find it boring; marriage scares them. You see these robust young men come to the Holy Mountain again and again and say, "Oh, the monk's life is so tough; you must get up at midnight every day, not just one or two days, a week..." So they return to the world. "What will I do in this kind of society," they wonder, "what kind of person will I have to live with if I get married? Oh, it's such a bother," they conclude, and they return to the Holy Mountain. They

stay for a while ... and then they start all over again, "It's so tough..."

Young people of today resemble new engines whose oil is frozen. The oil has to be warmed in order for the engines to restart; there is no other way. Many young men, troubled souls, come to my *Kalyvi* - it's not just one or two - and they ask me, "What should I do, Father? How should I spend my time? I am bored." "Find a job, my son!" "I have money; I do not need to work," he tells me.

"But," I reply, "the Apostle Paul says, *If any one will not work, let him not eat* (2). You must work in order to eat even if you have money. Work helps a man thaw out the oil of his engine. To work is to create. It gives you joy and takes away your stress and boredom. So, my son, this is what you should do; find a job that you like enough to get started. Just give it a try, and you will see the difference!"

But then, there are also young men who will get tired, but they find rest in fatigue, because they find fulfilment. Some will come to my *Kalyvi*, sit around and get tired doing nothing. Others who have a lot of *philotimo* will ask me constantly, "Is there anything we can do for you? Is there anything we can get you?" I never ask for anything. At night I use the flashlight to do my errands, whether it is fetching wood to light the stove or straightening the place up. Many of the visitors create a mess, leaving mud and wet socks everywhere. I give them the fine socks that I receive as gifts and they throw away their soiled ones. I give them paper napkins to wrap them and dispose of them, but they leave them lying around.

Three times in my life I have asked for something. Once I told a young man, "I need two boxes of matches from Karyes" - even though I had four lighters. I did this only to make him happy. He rushed there and returned out of breath to bring the matches, but this fatigue refreshed him because he tasted the joy of sacrifice. And all along, another fellow was getting tired just from sitting around. These young men are looking for joy, but joy will not come if we don't sacrifice ourselves. Sacrifice gives birth to joy. Real joy comes from *philotimo*. Once we cultivate *philotimo*, then we'll have a real festival inside us! Egoism and self-love is what causes us pain. That's where we get stuck.

Two young officers had come to the Holy Mountain and told me that they wanted to become monks. "Why do you want to become monks? How long have you been thinking about it?" I asked. "Just now," they said, "we visited the Holy Mountain and thought of staying here, in case a war breaks out." "Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?" I asked. "Listen to them, 'if a war breaks out!' And how will you manage to leave the army?" "We will find an excuse." What excuse were they going to find? They would probably pretend they are crazy ... or they would come up with something else. "If you set out to become a monk with this mindset, you have failed already," I told them. There are also those who, even though they have been planning for long time to get married and start a family, will come and tell me, "Why should I marry? These are difficult times to raise a family." "Fine," I reply, "did life stop during the time of persecutions? Weren't people working or getting married then? Or, are you perhaps too lazy to get married?" "I want to become a monk," he insists. "But you are bored.

What kind of a hard-working monk are you going to be?" Do you see my point? If a woman wants to become a nun because she is thinking, "What's the point of staying in the world, of getting married, and having kids, headaches and troubles? I will go to a Monastery where I will do what they tell me and have no responsibilities, and if they should reprimand me, I will just bow my head. Why bother having my own household? At the Monastery lodging and food will be provided..." This kind of person will definitely fail right from the start. Do you find this strange? There are a lot of people who think like this. You must know that a hardworking man will prosper no matter what he does. A hardworking family man would also be a good monk, and a hard-working monk would also be a good family man.

There was once someone who had joined a Monastery as a novice and did not want to become a monk. "Why, my son, are you still a novice?" I asked him. "Because the monk's cap reminds me of a helmet," was his answer. Can you believe this? This person did not want to become a monk because he did not want to wear the monk's cap. It reminded him of a helmet! When did he ever wear a helmet? Maybe he did a few times, while he was training in the army. Imagine if he had been to war! Listen to that! It reminded him of a helmet! What a thing to say! Why would such a person ever want to be a monk? When someone starts this way, what kind of monk will he be? Can you tell me? The poor fellow, he finally became a monk in some Monastery, but never put on a thick monastic cap.

Another time two young men came to my *Kalyvi* and their hair was really long. I tried to give them a haircut, but they resisted and, since I was in a hurry, I only offered them a treat. At that time, I had a kitten. One of them tells me, "May I take it?" "Take it," I said. They left in the rain, one of them holding the cat in his lap, and they headed for Iveron Monastery, an hour's walk away. He asked if he could spend the night at the *archontariki* with the cat. "That is not possible," he was told, and he ended up staying outside in the rain all night. If you had asked him to stay guard for an hour, he would have said, "No, I can't." But he was perfectly able to stay out a whole night, holding a kitten in his arms.

Another young man had gone to serve in the army but one day he took off; later he came to my *Kalyvi*. "I want to become a monk," he said. "You should go finish your military service first," was my answer. "But the army is not like my home," he replied. "Thank you for letting me know," I said, "this way I can warn others about it!" Meanwhile his family had been looking for him. A few days later he reappeared, early one morning. It was the Sunday after *Pascha*, the Sunday of Saint Thomas. "I need you," he tells me. "What do you want?" I asked him, "Where did you go to Church?" "Nowhere," he said. "Today, on Sunday of Saint Thomas, the Monasteries keep Vigils and you did not go to Church? And you want to become a monk! Where were you?" "I stayed at the hotel, where it's quiet. I find the Monasteries too noisy," he replied. "And what are you going to do now?" I asked him. "I am thinking of going to the Monastery at Sinai because I want to live a hard life," he replied. I said, "Wait a minute." I went inside and got him some fresh Easter bread, gave it to him and said,

"Here, take this soft Easter bread to help you start your hard life and get out of here!" This is today's youth. They do not know what they want. They will not take any pressure. How can they possibly sacrifice themselves?

I remember, in the army, there were all kinds of urgent needs, and every time this happened, men would say, "Commander, let me go to this mission; this man is married, has children and it will be a pity for these children to be left without a father." There they were, asking the Commander to send them to the front lines! They found joy in the idea of getting killed so that others with children would not have to die and leave their children alone! I can't imagine anyone making this kind of sacrifice today! It would be a rare thing!

Once, we had run out of water. The Commander located on the map an area where we could find water, but the guerillas were there. He told us, "There is water somewhere near, but it is very dangerous. Who will go to fill some canteens with water? It will have to be done in the dark." One man came forward immediately, "I will go, Commander," and then another, and another. Everybody wanted to go. It was going to be a night mission, in the dark and a dangerous one. "You cannot all go," the Commander said. What I am trying to say is that no one thought of himself in that situation. You did not hear, "Commander, my foot is hurting," or "I have a headache," or "I am tired." Everybody wanted to go, even though our life was at risk.

These days there's a lukewarm spirit; there's no manliness, no sacrifice. People's afflicted logic has turned everything upside down. You see, in the past, people would go voluntarily to serve in the army, whereas today, they will try to get a doctor to diagnose them as crazy to get an exemption. They will try everything to avoid the draft. This was unheard of in the old days. In our unit, we had a 23-year-old lieutenant, young but very brave! One day his father, a retired army officer, called him to say that he was planning to use his influence to have him relocated from the front lines to the rear. The lieutenant became really upset, "Shame on you, father, for saying such things! Only drones do nothing." His honesty, candour and bravery exceeded all bounds; he was always first in the front line. His greatcoat was full of bullet holes, but he was still alive. When he was discharged, he took the greatcoat with him as a souvenir.

Indiscriminate Love Spoils Children

I have observed that today many children, especially those who are students, are harmed by their families. While they are basically good children, they are rendered useless. They don't put their mind to work; they have become insensitive. It is the parents who spoil them. Because the parents have gone through difficult years, they do not want their children to be deprived of anything. They don't cultivate *philotimo* in their children so that they can find joy in deprivation. It's not that parents don't mean well. It would be cruel to deprive a child that does not understand the reason for the deprivation. But it is right for the parents to try and help their

children acquire a sort of monastic conscience, to rejoice when they do not have something they want. Now, with their goodness, their indiscriminate goodness and generosity, parents are spoiling their children. They use no discernment and end up stupefying them. These children expect to be served at all times; even a glass of water they will not get for themselves, supposedly because they are studying and cannot afford to waste any time. And they end up spoiled, both boys and girls. Even when they are not doing their homework, they still expect to be served. And of course, it's the mothers who are responsible. "You, go ahead and study, son," they say, "I will go and get you your socks, and wash your feet. Here's your coffee, here's your dessert"! And the children never realize how tired the mother gets from offering so much, because they never have to work for anything. Then they begin using disposable dishes, disposable clothes, eating pizzas and not even knowing how to wrap one up! Thus, they become useless human beings, who find life itself boring and tiresome. When their shoe lace comes untied all they know to say is, "Mother, please tie my shoe lace," and they go on stepping on it, doing nothing! How can these children ever achieve anything in life? They are incapable of getting married or becoming monks. This is why I tell mothers, "Do not let your children study all day, they will become dizzy. Have them take breaks of a quarter or half an hour to do some work around the house, to clear and rest their mind a little."

These bad habits among young people today are carried over to Monasticism. For instance, in one Monastery, there may be seven secretaries on duty - all of them educated - including the oldest. In the old days, there was only one secretary with barely two years of High School education, and he was able to handle the full load of work himself. And now, with seven secretaries and the senior one helping, they are all drowning in work, and are unable to find time to carry out their spiritual duties!

Directives From Dark Powers

Today many young people are being misguided and destroyed by all kinds of ideas and theories. This is why so many of them are upset and confused. They want to go in one direction, but the current of our times takes them elsewhere. There are dark powers out there pushing their propaganda on young people who may not be very intelligent. In schools, for example, some teachers will say to their students, "If you want to develop initiative, do not listen to your parents; do not obey them." Words like these ruin young people. They no longer listen to their parents or teachers. And you can't blame them really, since that's what they think is expected of them. On the one hand there is the state, which often supports this kind of behaviour, while on the other hand we have people, who care nothing about country and family, issuing directives and taking advantage of the young people to achieve their evil ends. As a result, our youth has been so harmed that some of them end up under the direct leadership of the devil himself. Satan worship is widespread. One can hear people in clubs singing all night, "Satan we adore you, we do not want Christ. You give us everything." What a horrific thing! But what is it that the devil will give you and what

will he take from you, miserable children?

You see young men and women, adolescent youths, who have a wild look in their eyes from the many coffees they drink and the many cigarettes they smoke... Their eyes do not sparkle; the glow of God's Grace is nowhere to be seen on their face. An architect was right when he said to a group of young people whom he was escorting to the Holy Mountain, "Our eyes resemble the eyes of spoiled fish." He had accompanied a group of ten young men between the ages of eighteen to twenty five to the Holy Mountain. He himself had made a spiritual turn in his life and felt bad for young people who lived prodigal lives. So, he convinced some of them to come to the Holy Mountain. I met them on my way down from the *Kalyvi*. I said to them, "I am on my way out, but let's sit here for a while." And we did. At the same time some students were returning from the *Athonias* Academy and I invited them to join us. And we all sat together. The architect asked his company, "Have you noticed something here?" The young men were puzzled. "Look at each other's eyes and then look at the eyes of these students. Do you see that their eyes sparkle while ours resemble those of a spoiled fish?" And indeed, when I looked carefully at them, I realized that their eyes did resemble the eyes of spoiled fish: dull, spoiled, while the *Athonias* students' eyes would sparkle. The youths from the Academy made prostrations, attended regular worship services. The eyes are the reflection of the soul. This is why Christ said, *Your eye is the lamp of your body* (3). So many youths come to the Holy Mountain or go to other Monasteries and become monks, and despite the fact that monastic life is, what should I say, no piece of cake, the joy they experience radiates from their face! But for so many who live in the world, life is sheer hell; they have everything they want but their life is full of pain.

Various trends have come to us today from all directions. Hinduism and other occult religions have come from the East, communism from the north, various theories from the West, from the South; from Africa, we get magic and other forms of "cancer". A young man wounded by such beliefs came to my *Kalyvi* once. I understood that it was his mother's prayers that brought him to me. After we had conversed for a while, I told him, "Look, son, you must find a Spiritual Father so that you may go to confession, receive the Holy Chrism and get some help in the beginning. You must be anointed again with the Holy Chrism because you have renounced Christ." The poor child was crying, "Father, please pray for me," he was pleading, "I cannot get rid of all these ideas, they have brainwashed me. I know that my mother's prayers have brought me to you."

Oh! How a mother's prayers can help us! These poor children are ruined, they get trapped and then they panic, they become anxious and turn to drugs, and go from one evil to another. May God help them!

- Geronda, does it help to tell these youths that these are satanic things?
- Of course it helps, but you must find the right way to say it.
- How can these youths get to know Christ?

- How can they possibly come to know Christ, when, before learning anything about Orthodoxy, they go to the gurus of India and stay there for two or three years? Then, after they get dizzy with all the magic tricks, they find out that there is mysticism in Orthodoxy and end up here seeking to see lights and have experiences of a higher nature. And if you ask them, "How long has it been since you received Holy Communion?" They say, "I do not remember if my mother had taken me to receive Holy Communion when I was little." You ask them, "Have you ever been to confession?" "I don't care about confession," they reply. How can you get anywhere with these people, when they know nothing about Orthodoxy?

- How will they be helped, Geronda?

- Well, how can you help them if they see the Church as "the establishment"? You realize that it will be very difficult to find common ground with them. But young people of good disposition will be helped and will, in the end, return to the Church.

Don't Touch the Children!

- Geronda, what will become of so many children who grow up today without discipline?

- For them, there will be mitigating circumstances. It is the parents who never understood the nature of discipline that now allow their children such excessive freedom and turn them into little hooligans. You say one word to them and they will respond with five, and with such impudence! These children may one day turn into criminals. Today many children are totally unraveled by too much freedom and no discipline. "Don't touch the children!" These are the slogans in society. And of course what do children think? "Where else are we going to find a better regime than that?" In other words, they are deliberately turning them into little rebels who do not want to listen to parents, to teachers, or to anyone else. This serves their designs perfectly, for if children are not first taught to be rebellious, how can they end up later destroying everything? And you can see the poor youth looking like they are virtually demonized.

If we, monks, cannot put freedom to good use in the spiritual life, what is one to expect of people who live in the world? If freedom is not put to good use, it is worth nothing. All it brings is disaster. This is why the country is heading in the wrong direction. Can today's people make good use of the freedom given to them? When freedom does not serve the cause of true progress, the result is catastrophe.

Combined with secular progress, this sinful freedom has given rise to spiritual slavery. True spiritual freedom is spiritual obedience to the will of God. But you see, whereas it is obedience that will give us true freedom, the tempter, out of malice, presents it as enslavement, and so our youth today who have been poisoned by the spirit of rebellion, reject obedience. It is understandable that these young people are tired of the various ideologies of the twentieth century, which unfortunately distort God's beautiful creation and fill His creatures with anxiety, putting a gap between them and the true joy that is God.

Have you any idea what we went through when we were discharged from the army? If we were at all like today's youth, we would have gone on a rampage and destroyed everything on our path. It was in 1950, when the Guerilla War was over and many classes of recruits were discharged simultaneously from the Army. Some of us had been to war for four and a half years, others for four, others for three and a half. Well, after all these hardships, we arrive in Larisa and we head for the Transit Centres, only to find them full. So we tried some hotels but they would not accept us. "Soldiers!" they must have thought, "If they lodge here, not a single blanket will be left clean!" We, of course, had the money to pay the rate. It was March and very cold. Fortunately, an officer saved us, may God keep him well. He went and found out the train schedules and their manoeuvres and arranged to have us spend the night in the trains. "They will do manoeuvres throughout the night," he told us, "but don't be afraid, the trains will depart at this or that time in the morning." And indeed, the trains were manoeuvring all night long. Finally we got to Thessaloniki. Some of us were from around there and went to their homes. The rest of us went to Transit Centres but they too were full. Next, we tried the hotels but no luck. I pleaded with them at the hotel, "Please give me a chair to sit on and I will pay double the rate of a room!" "Sorry, we can't do that," they replied. They were afraid that someone might see me and turn them in for not giving a soldier a room. I spent the whole night outside with other soldiers standing up and leaning against a wall. There were soldiers lying down on all the pavements, as if we had a parade. If today's youth were in our place, they would have burned Larisa, Thessaly and the entire province of Macedonia to the ground. Although they face nothing compared to what we had to go through, they still do takeovers, destroy property... And back then, all those poor soldiers, were thinking so differently. They felt hurt and bitter but it never crossed their mind to do anything bad. They had been through so many hardships in the snow. Many had been wounded and crippled in the War - they sacrificed so much! - and now they had to sleep out on the street; that was the "thank you" they got! I can't help comparing today's youth with the young men I knew then... No more than fifty years have gone by, but look how the world has changed.

Today's youth resembles a calf that is tied in a meadow, and constantly kicks and pulls on the rope to remove the stake and run away. Then it breaks loose, runs off and gets all tangled up and finally beasts come and devour it. When a child is young, it helps to apply the brake. You see, for example, a mischievous young boy climbing a

wall, where he may fall and hurt himself badly. "No, no," you shout, and you give him a slap or two. Next time he will be careful, not because he will think of the danger, but because he will be afraid of being slapped. Today no punishments are given out in schools or even in the army. This is why young people are such a menace to their teachers and the nation. In the army, in the old days, the more austere the basic training was, the greater the bravery the soldiers would show in battle.

A young person needs a spiritual guide, someone who will advise him and be eager to listen to his concerns, in order to proceed with spiritual security, without dangers, fears and dead ends. All of us, as we grow older, acquire experience from our own life and from the lives of others. But a young person lacks this experience. An older person should use his experience to help inexperienced youth avoid blunders. When young people refuse to take advice, they end up experimenting with their own lives. But if they take the advice given to them, they will have much to gain.

Young men from a Christian organization visited the *Kalyvi* once, and were boasting with self-confidence, "We don't need anybody; we'll find our own way!" Who knows why they said that? Perhaps they had been pressured too much and were rebelling. When they were about to leave, they asked me to point them the right direction for Iveron Monastery. "Which way should we go?" they asked. "Wait a minute," I told them, "didn't you, boys, say that you needed no one, that you will find your own way? Didn't you just say that? Miss this road and you'll have only a minor inconvenience; at some point, you will run into someone and he will show you the way. But who is going to show you the road to Heaven? How will you get there on your own without a guide?" One of them said, "You know, the Elder may have a point."

The Youth Must Pass the Test of Purity

A few female students came to see me today and told me, "Geronda, pray so that we may pass our exams." I said, "I will pray that you pass your purity exams. This is the most important thing. Everything else falls into place after that." It was the right thing to say, wasn't it? There's no greater sight than that of modesty and purity in the faces of young people today! No greater sight!

Some traumatized young women come to see me. They live unruly lives with young men and they don't realize that these men do not have good intentions and, of course, they end up getting hurt. "What must I do, Father?" they ask. "The tavern owner," I replied, "may have the drunkard as a friend, but he will never accept him as his son-in-law. Stop having relations. If the man really loves you, he will appreciate it; if he leaves you, you will know that he doesn't love you and this way you will not be wasting your time."

The cunning devil takes advantage of young people, who, on top of everything else, have to deal with the rebellion of their flesh, and he tries to destroy them during this difficult period of their life, when the mind is not yet mature, the experience is missing and their spiritual reserves are almost non-existent. This is why, during this critical period, young people must always seek the advice of their elders, so that they

may not slip down the sweet secular slope, which will only fill their soul with anxiety and separate it eternally from God.

I know that a physiologically healthy young person cannot easily attain a spiritual state where *there is neither male nor female* (4). This is why the Spiritual Fathers recommend that young men and women, no matter how spiritual they may be, should not spend time together; at their age, problems will naturally arise and then temptation will step in and take advantage of their youth. It is better for a young man or a young woman to bear this heavy cross and risk being considered a fool by the opposite sex for his or her spiritual prudence and innocence. This heavy cross hides all the power and wisdom of God, making a young man stronger than Sampson (5) and wiser than Solomon (6). Better, then, that he walk down the street praying rather than looking left and right, even if relatives may misunderstand him and think that he snubbed them by not speaking with them. Otherwise, if he walks looking around with curiosity, he may get in trouble or get misunderstood by lay people who always harbour suspicious thoughts. It's a thousand times better to leave Church right away, after Liturgy, like a lone animal, and keep his spiritual good sense and whatever he learned intact, rather than stay around and stare at fancy furs or ties, and become spiritually agitated as the enemy starts scratching at his heart.

It is true, unfortunately, that there is so much filth in this world that no matter what path the soul that desires purity may follow, it will get soiled. The difference is that God will not make the same demands on a Christian who wishes to remain pure today that He made in the past. Purity requires nerves of steel; a young man must try every means to resist temptation, and he will surely have Christ's help. When divine eros is kindled in his heart, the burning is such that every other desire and unseemly picture will be burned out. When this divine fire is burning in us, we experience pleasures so divine that all other pleasures pale in comparison. When we taste heavenly manna, wild carobs will mean nothing to us. This is why we should hold fast to the steering wheel, make the sign of the cross and not be afraid. After every little struggle, heavenly delights follow. If we are brave when temptation comes, God and the *Panaghia* will help miraculously.

The Elder Augustinos had told me the following story (7). When he was a young novice, he lived in a Monastery in his native Russia. Most of the Fathers there were old and so they would use him for various chores such as helping a Monastery employee with fishing, the Monastery's main means of support. One day the daughter of that employee came and asked her father to return home for an emergency and she stayed to help in his place. But the poor girl was seized by temptation, and without thinking, came on the novice with sinful intentions. Antonios, this was his name when he was in the world, was taken aback because everything happened so suddenly. He crossed himself and said, "My Christ, I'd rather drown than sin!" and plunged into the deep river. But the Good Lord, seeing the heroism of this chaste young man, who acted like Saint Martinianos (8) in order to remain chaste, kept him afloat and completely dry! "You see," he explained to me, "I jumped head first into the

river and I still cannot figure out how I found myself standing up with my clothes dry!" At that moment, he had felt an internal peace and inexpressible sweetness that made every sinful thought and carnal desire caused by the indecent gestures of the young woman go away. When she saw Antonios standing up on the water, she was overcome by repentance and started weeping, deeply moved by this great miracle.

Christ does not require big things from us to help us in our struggle. He expects very little, a tiny bit. A young man was telling me that he went to Patmos (9) to worship and fell into temptation's trap. A female tourist jumped on him and hugged him while he was walking. He pushed her away saying, "My Christ I have come for worship not for love" and he went away. That same night in his hotel room, during prayer, he saw Christ immersed in Uncreated Light. Do you see the reward he received for that one push? Others strive for years in the ascetic life and may never be blessed with something like that. And he saw Jesus Christ only because he resisted temptation. And this experience, naturally, made him stronger spiritually. Later on, he saw Saint Marcella, Saint Raphael, and Saint George more than once. One day, he came and told me "Father, say a prayer for me so that I may see Saint George again and be consoled. I cannot find any consolation in this world!" And then you see where other young people end up.

A young man with his elderly uncle came to the *Kalyvi* once and told me, "Pray for a young girl who broke her spine in an accident. Her father fell asleep at the wheel, killing himself and injuring her. Let me show you a picture of her." "It's not necessary", I said. He insisted and they showed me the picture of a girl who was lying down and two men were embracing her. "Who is this young man?" I asked. "A friend" he answered. "Will he marry her?" "No, they are just friends," he replied. "Don't hold it against them, Father," the uncle told me, "that's how young people are today." "I will pray," I thought to myself, "but she does not just need her spine to be straightened out, her mind also needs correction and so does yours, you hopeless man." Where is the respect? His uncle should have told him off. And they were supposedly spiritual people. It is so sad to have spiritual guidance and still be in such a state of spiritual confusion! Even if he intended to marry her, there was no reason for her to be stretched out between the two men, and for the man to be showing me the picture. It never crossed his mind that what he was doing was wrong. I am not bothered by the picture, but it is still not right. What sort of family will these young people have? May God help them come to their senses!

In the old days, young women would sacrifice everything to keep their chastity! I remember, during the war against Italy, they had drafted some villagers and their animals, and they got trapped on a hill by heavy snowfall. The men gathered under the snow, covered spruce trees and made some shelters using spruce branches to protect themselves. The women were forced to seek protection from their fellow villagers, people they knew. Two of them, one young, one elderly, from a faraway village, had to enter one of these shelters. Now, unfortunately, there are those faithless cowards for whom even a war will not make a difference. They have no

feelings whatsoever for their fellow human being, who may die or get injured; if they get the chance, they will do their best to sin, because they are afraid that they may get killed and try to use all the time they have to have fun. When in danger, people should repent.

One of these men, who had sin rather than repentance in his mind, was harassing the young woman so much that she was forced to leave the group. She preferred to freeze to death from the cold rather than lose her chastity. When the elderly woman saw that her young companion had left the shelter, she followed her tracks and found her, thirty minutes away, under a small shed, in a Chapel dedicated to Saint John the Forerunner. You see how Saint John the Baptist cared about this honest woman and led her to his Chapel which she never knew it existed! And guess what else the Saint did! He appeared to a soldier (10) in his sleep and told him to go to his Chapel as soon as possible.

So the soldier got up in the middle of the snow-lit night and headed to the Chapel; he had a rough idea where it was. When he got there, he saw the two women stuck in the snow up to their knees, blue in the face and frozen from the cold. He immediately opened the Chapel and they all entered and felt better. The soldier had nothing else to offer them, besides a scarf for the old lady and a pair of gloves which he told them to share, so that they could warm first one hand and then the other. They then told him about the temptation they had confronted. "Why," the soldier asked the young woman, "did you decide to leave in the middle of the night, with all this snow and head to an unknown place?" And she replied, "I did all that I could do for my part, and I was convinced that Christ would take care of the rest." Feeling their pain and trying to console them, the soldier said spontaneously, "Your troubles are over, tomorrow you will be home." These words made them happy and they felt even warmer. Sure enough, the Battalion of Mountain Transports opened the road and, in the morning, military trucks came, and the poor women were taken home. It is Greek women like them, vested in divine Grace - rather than stripped of clothes and divine Grace alike - who deserve our praise and admiration. Later, that beast - may God forgive me for this word - told the Commander that a certain soldier had broken the Chapel's door and put mules inside! The Commander replied, "I don't believe the man you accuse would do such a thing." In the end, he was sent to prison.

Young People Will Sense True Love

- Geronda, it seems that people who want to destroy society, have seized upon its foundation, its roots, our young people, and have destroyed them.

- There is no way that they will succeed. Evil self-destructs. In Russia, after the revolution, they had destroyed everything and look what is happening now, after three generations! God will not allow it. And He will not judge the sins of today's youth as strictly as He will judge the sins of our generation.

- Geronda, how come some young men and women who lead secular lives give very

good answers to questions of faith?

- These young people had good intentions but were not able to apply the brakes on themselves at the right time and so they were swept along. That is why they give the right answers. What I mean to say is that someone, for example, wants to follow a particular path in life; he wants to go in that direction, but he finds it hard to follow. And when he sees another who succeeds, he has great respect for him. God will not abandon those who want the good, because they lack malice. The time will come when they will find the strength to follow the right path.

- Geronda, how should we approach young people who have gone astray?

- Love is the answer. Where there is true and noble love, young people will sense it; they will be informed right away and feel disarmed. Young men, who come to my *Kalyvi*, come from all walks of life, with all kinds of problems. I welcome them, I give them a treat, we start a conversation and soon enough we become friends. They open their heart to me and accept the love I give them. Among them are some who are so deprived of love! Poor souls, they are thirsty for it! You can tell right away those who have never felt a mother's or father's love. If you care for them, if they sense your love, they forget all their problems, even their drug use, all their ills disappear, they stop getting in trouble and end up coming to the Holy Mountain as pious pilgrims. You see, they somehow come to sense God's love. And I see in them such nobility that it breaks my heart. They refuse financial aid, even though they need it so much, and get a job during the day to make ends meet, and go to school at night. They deserve all the help they can get. Near the New Train Station, in Thessaloniki, some of these young people, men and women, will pull their resources together, and stay under the same roof. You could find as many as fifteen living in one apartment. Many of them come from broken homes. Some of them will steal to make ends meet, but others have *philotimo* and will not do it. For years, I have been telling many people to approach them, to help them. I had asked for a Church to be built nearby so that they can gather there and have a shelter. Now they have built a small Chapel dedicated to the Apostle and Deacon Philip, the protector of railway workers.

What I have come to realize is that; if we don't take advantage of the opportunities offered to us when we are young, the devil will exploit this situation. Don't we have the saying "Strike while the iron is hot"? When ironsmiths wanted to join two pieces of iron together - this was before modern welding - they would put the iron in the fire, pour hot water and borax on it, and then, the moment they removed it, while still spewing sparks, they would join it to another piece. But this would not work, if the iron got cold. It's the same thing with a young person. When opportunities present themselves and he shows no interest, he will concern himself with other people, judging them, criticizing their ways, and thus slowly losing the Grace of God. But if he is full of divine fervour, he will prosper. This is why parents should help their children as much as they can when they are still young. Children are like empty cassette tapes. If we fill them with Christ, they will stay close to Him forever. If we don't, it will be easier for them to go astray when they become older. But if we help them

when they are young, even if they later stray a bit, they will eventually come to their senses. Wood soaked in oil does not rot. Youth soaked in the "oil" of piety and the fear of God will have nothing to fear later.

(1) In the past, in Greece, it was customary for students to take entrance examinations for more than one University School.

(2) II Th 3:10.

(3) Lk 11:34.

(4) Gal. 3:28.

(5) Cf. Jdg 15:14 mf.

(6) Cf. I Kg 3: 9-12 (LXX: III Kg 3: 9-12).

(7) See Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, p. 93.

(8) The biography of Saint Martinianos (we commemorate his name on February 13) mentions that when he was an ascetic, living on a rocky outcropping in the sea, a shipwrecked girl approached the rock on a raft and begged him to save her from the sea. The Saint first pulled her out of the water to safety on his rock and then, after praying, jumped into the sea. By divine Providence, dolphins came, took Saint Martinianos on their backs and carried him to safety on the shore.

(9) Patmos is a Greek island in the Aegean, in the NW Dodecanese. Saint John the Theologian wrote the Apocalypse there, during his exile (95 A.D.).

(10) This soldier was in fact Elder Paisios himself. The incident took place during the Guerilla War when the Elder was doing his military service.

(ELDER PAISIOS OF MOUNT ATHOS SPIRITUAL COUNSELS "*WITH PAIN AND LOVE for Contemporary Man*", Part 3, Chapter 3, p. 258-283, Holy Monastery "Evangelist John the Theologian" SOUROTI, THESSALONIKI, GREECE)