

A Message from the Patriarch of the Apostolic Orthodox Church

Out of My Mind . . . Back in Five Minutes

There's that sign again. It's just there to remind us of where this message started, for if we just jump into the middle of things, we're likely to miss or misinterpret something. But that's how it is with the Scriptures. Here in the West, we have little, if any, idea of life and culture at the time of Jesus, other than what we may read in a popular book or view on TV. But, by not having this knowledge, we may lose much or misinterpret what we read. And that's the purpose of this installment on the Scriptures, to fill in some blanks. If it stirs some thought, if it makes you angry, or if it causes you to say, "I've always felt that," then I've accomplished my purpose—to make you stop, think, and move a step closer to the Truth.

Before we look at that compilation of writings we call the *Holy Bible*, we must consider the literary forms at the time of Jesus. In this age of the printed word and plethora of written information, it's difficult for us to conceive of a time when this was not so, a time when a written document was the exception rather than the norm. Indeed, the majority of writing in biblical times was for governmental and commercial (trade, etc.) purposes and we would recognize the form or style of writing immediately. It is very straightforward, deals in terms of black and white, and very detailed in its presentation. As with government and commerce today, there are few "loopholes," little left to the imagination. Spiritual and philosophical writing, on the other hand, was almost a polar opposite. Wisdom was seldom passed from teacher to student in written form, and details were almost non-existent. The greatest of the Mystic Truths were transmitted orally—from mouth to ear. Scripture, as it existed then, was not *the* definitive word, but rather an outline or compilation of what was presented orally, a jog to the memory of the most important points. Usually, writing was not done directly by the author, but was dictated to a scribe, as most could not read and few could write—even the most educated. Further, the style of writing referred to today as an *homage*, a work to honor or pay homage to another, was extremely common. Authors would write in the style of the honoree, even use his name, as if the person himself had actually written the *homage*. Indeed, modern scholars have determined that this is the case with some of the Epistles of St. Paul. But does such a revelation diminish their value? Of course not.

But there is a greater reason why that which was considered the most spiritually significant was transmitted orally, and that is due to the human *charisma*. Here we are not speaking of charisma as meaning a pleasing personality or the ability to hold an audience spellbound, but of the original meaning, as used in a spiritual sense. As usual, the word has its origin in a Greek word, *charis* (χαρις), which, according to James Strong in his *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, is taken to mean "the divine influence upon the heart and its reflection in the life." The ancient Christians took this as an emanation of the

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quality of the soul called *theiotes* (θειοτης), or the divinity resident within human beings. (For those who wish to know a bit more, please refer to the section entitled “**Man**” in the *Precepts of Religion*, available to you in our *Reading Room*.) It is the *physical presence* of the teacher that was, and is, considered to be essential in order that “deep calleth unto deep,” soul speaking to soul, may occur. This is not a subjective, but rather objective phenomena. As an example, I love classical music, opera in particular. Most people, who have never attended may agree with Andy Griffith’s comedy routine in which he calls it “high-class screaming.” But take that person who has only heard opera on the radio or as a recording or seen it on television to a live performance, and watch the difference. The presence of the performers and their love of the work conveys itself at the level of the soul, and if our opera-hater is open to its influence, he may next year be the first in line for a season ticket. So it is with the conveyance of spiritual Truths. The written word may inspire, but the spoken word and the presence of the teacher open the door through which the Light of God floods the consciousness, making “all things new.”

So where does this leave our literalist whom we met in Part 1? In his mind, after reading the foregoing, nothing has changed. His eyes do not see further than the words on the page, his ears do not hear further than the banal words of the fellow-literalist in the pulpit. I will assume that those of that ilk have hence departed these pages in disgust and self-righteousness, and at the worst, some of you that remain are thinking, “let’s see if he can hang himself with his words.” Well, you’ll just have to watch for Part 3 to find out!

May the Light of Lights enfold you.

Mathias Mar Yusef, Patriarch

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