

AN ORTHODOX CONFESSION WHICH LEADS THE INWARD MAN TO HUMILITY

(From the Way of the Pilgrim)

Turning my eyes carefully upon myself and watching the course of my inward state, I have verified by experience that I do not love God, that I have no religious belief, and that I am filled with pride and sensuality. All this I actually find in myself as a result of detailed examination of my feelings and conduct, thus:

1. I do not love God. For if I loved God I should be continually thinking about Him with heartfelt joy. Every thought of God would give me gladness and delight. On the contrary, I much more often and much more eagerly think about earthly things, and thinking about God is labor and dryness. If I loved God, then talking with Him in prayer would be my nourishment and delight and would draw me to unbroken communion with Him. But, on the contrary, I not only find no delight in prayer, but even find it an effort. I struggle with reluctance, I am enfeebled by sloth, and am ready to occupy myself eagerly with any unimportant trifle, if only it shortens prayer and keeps me from it. My time slips away unnoticed in futile occupations, but when I am occupied with God, when I put myself into His presence every hour seems like a year. If one person loves another, he thinks of him throughout the day without ceasing, he pictures him to himself, he cares for him, and in all circumstances his beloved friend is never out of his thoughts. But I, throughout the day, scarcely set aside even a single hour in which to sink deep down into meditation upon God, to inflame my heart with love of Him, while I eagerly give up twenty-three hours as fervent offerings to the idols of my passions. I am forward in talk about frivolous matters and things which degrade the spirit; that gives me pleasure. But in the consideration of God I am dry, bored and lazy. Even if I am unwillingly drawn by others into spiritual conversation, I try to shift the subject quickly to one which pleases my desires. I am tirelessly curious about novelties, about civic affairs and political events; I eagerly seek the satisfaction of my love of knowledge in science and art, and in ways of getting things I want to possess. But the study of the Law of God, the knowledge of God and of religion, make little impression on me, and satisfy no hunger of my soul. I regard these things not only as a non-essential occupation for a Christian, but in a casual way as a sort of side-issue with which I should perhaps occupy my spare time, at odd moments. To put it shortly, if love for God is recognized by the keeping of His commandments (If ye love Me, keep My commandments, says our Lord Jesus Christ), and I not only do not keep them, but even make little attempt to do so, then in absolute truth the conclusion follows that I do not love God. That is what Basil the Great says: 'The proof that a man does not love God and His Christ lies in the fact that he does not keep His commandments'.

2. I do not love my neighbor either. For not only am I unable to make up my mind to lay down my life for his sake (according to the Gospel), but I do not even sacrifice my happiness, well-being and peace for the good of my neighbor. If I did love him as myself, as the Gospel bids, his misfortunes would distress me also, his happiness would bring delight to me too. But, on the contrary, I listen to curious, unhappy stories about my neighbor and I am not distressed; I remain quite undisturbed or what is still worse, I find a sort of pleasure in them. Bad conduct on the part of my brother I do not cover up with love, but proclaim abroad with ensure. His well-being, honor and happiness do not delight me as my own, and, as if they were something quite alien to me, give me no feeling of gladness. What is more, they subtly arouse in me feelings of envy or contempt.

3. I have no religious belief. Neither in immortality nor in the Gospel. If I were firmly persuaded and believed without doubt that beyond the grave lies eternal life and recompense for the deeds of this life, I should be continually thinking of this. The very idea of immortality would terrify me and I should lead this life as a foreigner who gets ready to enter his native land. On the contrary, I do not even think about eternity, and I regard the end of this earthly life as the limit of my existence. The secret thought nestles within me: Who knows what happens at death? If I say I believe in immortality, then I am speaking about my mind only, and my heart is far removed from a firm conviction about it. That is openly witnessed to by my conduct and my constant care to satisfy the life of the senses. Were the Holy Gospel taken into my heart in faith, as the Word of God, I should be continually occupied with it, I should study it, find delight in it and with deep devotion fix my attention upon it. Wisdom, mercy, love, are hidden in it; it would lead me to happiness, I should find gladness in the study of the Law of God day and night. In it I should find nourishment like my daily bread and my heart would be drawn to the keeping of its laws. Nothing on earth would be strong enough to turn me away from it. On the contrary, if now and again I read or hear the Word of God, yet even so it is only from necessity or from a general love of knowledge, and approaching it without any very close attention, I find it dull and uninteresting. I usually come to the end of the reading without any profit, only too ready to change over to secular reading in which I take more pleasure and find new and interesting subjects.

4. I am full of pride and sensual self-love. All my actions confirm this. Seeing something good in myself, I want to bring it into view, or to pride myself upon it before other people or inwardly to admire myself for it. Although I display an outward humility, yet I ascribe it all to my own strength and regard myself as superior to others, or at least no worse than they. If I notice a fault in myself, I try to excuse it, I cover it up by saying, 'I am made like that' or 'I am not to blame'. I get angry with those who do not treat me with respect and consider them unable to appreciate the value of people. I brag about my gifts: my failures in any undertaking I regard as a personal insult. I murmur, and I find pleasure in the unhappiness of my enemies. If I strive after anything good it is for the purpose of winning praise, or spiritual self-indulgence, or earthly consolation. In a word, I continually make an idol of myself and render it uninterrupted service, seeking in all things the pleasures of the senses, and nourishment for my sensual passions and lusts.

Going over all this I see myself as proud, adulterous, unbelieving, without love to God and hating my neighbor. What state could be more sinful? The condition of the spirits of darkness is better than mine. They, although they do not love God, hate men, and live upon pride, yet at least believe and tremble. But I? Can there be a doom more terrible than that which faces me, and what sentence of punishment will be more severe than that upon the careless and foolish life. that I recognize in myself?