

On Reading Non-Orthodox Religious or Theological Works

Taken from Άγιος Κυπριανός [*Hágios Kyprianós*],
No. 28 (November-December 1997), pp. 294-295.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL DUTY of pious Orthodox Christians is to undertake nothing without the advice of their Hierarchs, as our Synodal and Patristic tradition exhorts us:

Without the Bishop, do nothing; ...no one belonging to the Church may perform anything whatever without the Bishop; ...accomplish nothing without the Bishop; ...whether Presbyter or Deacon, without the advice of the Bishop carry out no task. (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. V, cols. 704A, 713B, 668B; cf. the Thirty-Ninth Apostolic Canon.)

Hence it is that we exhort our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ—clergy, monastics, and those belonging to the Holy Synod in Resistance—to take care in particular, apart from other considerations, not to read in an indiscriminate manner, not to distribute in sundry ways, and not to permit—particularly within the confines of Churches and monasteries and convents—various books which are not Orthodox, but which, written by extremist Protestant circles in America, have been translated into Greek without ecclesiastical approbation. Unfortunately, in a wholly irresponsible manner, an incredible array of publications and tracts, usually anonymous or pseudonymous, circulates widely and without control among the faithful.

The texts of these books and publications constitute, according to the Holy Fathers, “injurious [wrong] teaching” (“*kaké didaché*”) and “wrong instruction” (“*kaké didaskalía*”), which they compare to a “strange fare” and a “deadly medicine” (poison) that is presented as an admixture “with wine and honey” which the “ignorant delightfully enjoy with injurious pleasure,” thereby dying spiritually (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *P.G.*, Vol. V, cols. 652B, 657B, 680A).

Before reading or distributing and passing them on, it is good, first, to submit these books and tracts, as well as other such publications of unknown and dubious kind and provenance, to the judgment and approbation of the Hierarchs of the Holy Synod; for these works usually contain numerous and indescribable simplisms, delusions, heresies, and wrong teachings, as well as, unfortunately in many instances, deceptions, to the end that they upset and scandalize the con-

sciences of the more simple faithful, who are sometimes led into behavior dissonant with the true Orthodox ethos, thereby upsetting the unity of the Church.

The sacred Tradition of our Holy Church, in establishing Her dogmatic teaching for the edification of Her Flock, avoids sedulously the invocation, not only of a) heretical, but of b) spurious and apocryphal, writings and, indeed, even forbids, condemns, and anathematizes both such writings and those employing them (see the Seventh Oecumenical Synod, Sessions IV, V, VI; Spyridon Melias, *Praktiká ton Kagíon kai Oikoumenikón Synódon* [*Acts of the Holy Oecumenical Synods*], Vol. II, pp. 779, 817, 818, 850, 851, 859).

The Holy Fathers of the Seventh Oecumenical Synod in Nicaea, upon hearing texts of such provenance (heretical, spurious, and apocryphal texts), exclaimed: “They are not of the Holy Spirit; ...they have defiled our ears; ...they have polluted our hearing” (*ibid.*).

The Holy Synod in Resistance, affirming that it will return to this most serious issue in a fresh and more detailed communiqué, exhorts her spiritual children, along with St. Ignatios, to “refrain from strange fare.”

From the Chancery of the Holy Synod