

THE GREEK-ORTHODOX IDEAL OF «PAIDEIA»*

by

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Your Excellency,
Your Graces,
Reverend Fathers,
Most Honorable Consul General of Greece,
Most Reverend Deans,
Reverend Fathers and dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Students:

Before I proceed to the treatment of my topic I feel the need to express my warmest thanks to His Eminence, Archbishop Iakovos of N. & S. America, His Excellency, Metropolitan Silas of New Jersey, His Grace, Bishop Methodios of Boston, President of Hellenic College and Holy Cross School of Theology, as well as to the esteemed and beloved Professors of the School for their unanimous decision to honor me with the conferral of an Honorary Doctor's Degree. Moreover, I wish to express my warmest thanks to His Grace, Bishop Methodios, His Excellency, Metropolitan Silas and the Reverend Dean, Father Alkiviadis Calivas, for their laudatory comments, with which they presented me to this distinguished audience, which I also wish to thank for honoring me with its presence. Furthermore, along with my wife - also a theologian - I wish to express our heartfelt thanks for the hospitality that we receive in this splendid environment.

I promise that I will try to prove worthy of the honor bestowed upon me by contributing to the best of my abilities, in the future as I also did in the past, to the promotion of the Holy Cross School of

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Theology, which, along with Hellenic College, constitute two precious jewels of the Greek-Orthodox Archdiocese of N. & S. America and are truly shining beacons of the Greek Orthodox ideal of *Paideia*; to this ideal are dedicated both tonight's celebration that honors the memory of the Three Hierarchs and the Greek Letters Day, as well as my speech to which I will now proceed. Needless to say time constraints will force me, at many points, to a «telegraphic» presentation of my thoughts.

«*Paideia*» in its narrow sense is the various forms of legislated education, teaching and learning, but in its wider context it is the broad spectrum of the various factors which primarily create or secondarily affect the formation of the human personality in general. In order for this formation to be truly educational and not a disfiguration, *paideia* must not be limited to the use and development only of certain educational processes that help to improve the formation of the biological or other capabilities of the human being and the development even to the highest degree of its intellect, as are the cases of high caliber scientists. True education, which is the qualitative and final cause of the educational process, etymologically means the humanization of the human being, that is, the human being that was created in the image of God takes the form which is befitting to it. In other words, the human being becomes truly human. This can be achieved through the realization not of the degenerate individualistic humanistic ideal, but with the realization of that genuine humanistic educational ideal, which connects the human being with God, Who is the source of all values. This theocentric ideal, which morphologically or species-wise inspired the «ever god-fearing» ancient Greeks (Acts 17,22), as well as the early humanism that evolved under the influence of Christian Byzantium, during the period before its decline and degeneration to an anthropocentric system, this theocentric system, then, acquired its most perfect form, as far as its matter or content is concerned, within the genuinely Greco-Christian or Greek Orthodox tradition. This tradition, when it is not adulterated by conscious or unconscious heretical deviations, which ignore the divine-human character of Orthodoxy, creates a sacramental and uplifting atmosphere, within which the human existence, under the mystical renewing influence of the Divine Grace and under the radiance and the reflection of the transforming light of Tabor, is led to the partaking and communion of the mystical life of Christ, to the deification by grace, to the union and «recapitulation» in Christ of the heavenly and

earthly, in accordance with the Apostle Paul (Eph. 1, 10) and St. Irenaeus.

Within the framework of this «recapitulation», the «partaking» and communion of the mystical life of Christ eliminates any morbid religious mysticism, takes away the blinders of partiality, stirs the deepest ontological depths of man, inspires the innermost nucleus of personality, causes the rekindling and ignition of all the innate and innermost aspirations of human existence and unites them not in a mechanical addition, but in an unbreakable organic totality. Within this totality, the partial value-related goals (cognitive or scientific, aesthetic or artistic, social, ethical, state, legal, biological, even economic) are all realized, not one thriving at the expense of the other, but all together existing harmoniously under the unifying and coordinating energy of God in a hierarchical order, which corresponds to the hierarchical scale of the proper priorities. These priorities must correspond to the god-given hierarchical order of educational and cultural qualities, which realize, embody and make perceptible various values.

According to the above, the Greek Orthodox ideal of Paideia must be founded on the Greek Orthodox value order or Philosophy of values. Orthodox thought can use, in my opinion, without any fear, Axiology, as long as it does not perceive the values in accordance with the outdated view of the Neo-Kantians, who perceive the Holy or Divine as a simple resultant of the values of the True, the Good and the Beautiful, and consequently in the final analysis, blend Theology with Axiology or rather dissolve the first within the second. Rather Orthodox thought accepts that the values have their ultimate ontological foundation in the transcendent God, Who as the highest ontological and axiological reality, is the source of all beings, values and goods. Max Scheler, Johannes Hessen and other representatives of today's Philosophy of Values, stressing this truth, repeat in a different form the saying: «Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming from You, the Father of lights». According to St. Gregory of Nyssa, God is the creator of the innate axiological inclinations of man, since, as he states, «God created man to partake of the divine nature».

The values about which Axiology speaks cannot be defined, but can only be lived and become an object of description. Value is whatever causes the interest and personal attraction towards an object, because of the pleasure and satisfaction it generates within us. Value, then, is a meaning of relationship, a meaning that expresses the relationship between the subject (the human being) and an (material or

spiritual) object, from which relationship a pleasant feeling or desire is created within the soul. When, for example, we are in front of a painting, we feel a spiritual delight and a desire might be born in us to buy it, if we can, because we experience the artistic value of that painting. The value then is an expression of approval and satisfaction about something that makes it pleasant, desirable and appealing. It is anything, which from a certain point (material, bodily, cognitive, aesthetic, social, ethical, religious, etc.), satisfies us, because it responds to certain of the innate needs, predispositions, inclinations and tendencies of the human being. When we ascribe value and importance to an object, it means that we prefer its existence and presence rather than its absence and non-existence. When we ascribe greater value to an object, it means that we prefer its existence and presence rather than the existence and presence of other objects of lesser value. When, finally, we ascribe the highest and absolute value to an object, it means that we prefer to sacrifice our life rather than live without it (e.g. without our faith or freedom). The value is the cause that makes an object to be considered as a «good». The «goods» (material or spiritual) are goods, because they possess value.

The values are not related to the logic and cognition of the human being, but primarily to the feelings and the will. The values are not conceived by reason, but by feeling. The order of values, as Pascal would say, is not an «ordre de la raison» (order of the reason), but «ordre du coeur», an order of the heart. Reason is as blind — as far as values are concerned — as the ear is to colors and the eye to musical tones. The values are understood and appreciated when they shine and radiate within us. We see them when they light up their light within us. We comprehend them when we first become thrilled and possessed by them.

The values that set the feelings afire and are the motives of the human will, act upon it not as forces of oppression, but as indicators of goals. The regulatory suggestion, made by the values, as to the direction of our course, does not exclude, but presupposes freedom. The course of a ship does not necessarily depend on the stars or the compass, which simply assist the captain to find and voluntarily select the ship's course. The values do not define the personality, but the free personality defines itself, when it accepts the imperative demands which are projected by the values. The actualization of values means the self-actualization and self-formulation of the human being, since they have a correspondence and correspond to man's innate axiological

predispositions, tendencies and inclinations. Freedom, then, is neither an end in itself, nor the unique element in the supreme and ultimate goal of the human existence. Freedom exists for the benefit of values. The values are both the creative as well as the final cause of freedom. The supreme and ultimate goal of human action, then, is both the values and the freedom, like the two foci of an «ellipse», to use geometric terminology. The values are its content, while the freedom is its context or its form. Freedom and values are interdependent meanings. One cannot exist without the other.

In order to achieve both the good use of freedom and the «participation» of the host of values in their correct hierarchy and classification, their hierarchical scale must become apparent and acceptable as a way of life, something that is not so easy in reality. The various values are seen not as if they are reflected in a clear mirror on the wall, which always shows everything as it is, but rather as if they are reflected on the surface of a lake or the sea, which, when calm and clear, more or less, faithfully reflects the landscape of the shore, but when turbulent and not clean, sometimes elongates the objects of the shore, sometimes makes them shorter, while at other times deforms or hides them completely. This explains why in the case of an axiological myopia or of a spiritual color-blindness the higher values are totally hidden or undergo a deformation and appear as tyrannical and hideous, while the lower or worthless values appear as attractive and appealing.

By selecting freely the higher in each case instead of the lower value, the cultivation of the ethical *ideal* is achieved. This is manifested as a submission of the «worse» or «lesser» to the «better» or «superior», and as a continuous fighting effort to avoid the deification and absolutization of the lower values and their elevation above the higher spiritual values. This *ideal* reminds us that «every science, separated from justice and the other virtues, appears to be cunning, and not wisdom». A truly genuine ideal of paideia, without limits, without submission of the lower values to the higher spiritual values, without self-control, cannot exist. Fortunately, the need for self-control and self-restraint, at least in the Sciences, is becoming more and more apparent, in view of the dangers threatening the human race, and caused today by the advanced scientific and technological applications. The biological or psychological changes caused by radiation, or by the upsetting of the ecological balance and the pollution of the estuaries and the biosphere, leading to the loss or emergence of new chromosomes or parts

thereof; the specializations of Biology and genetic engineering technology; the technical capability to intervene in the growth of the genotype, phenotype and the gametes; the creation of «the test tube children»; the biotechnology and the medical technology; the industry of psycho-drugs; neurochemistry's invasion of the political psychiatric hospitals; the extremist suggestions about genetic reconstruction of the human race through creation of people whose body would be connected with a computer — all this and much more convince us that the planned scientific and technological engineering of the biological and psychological functions must be selfcontrolled, so that psychosomatic health and interpersonal relations proceed in a way consistent with man's dignity and freedom. This demand for self-control led to the creation of a special branch of science that is, the «technology assessment», which specifically aims at studying the impact of the great technological initiatives and programs, before they are implemented, in relation to the expected consequences upon man and his environment.

True paideia, especially when it also utilizes the dynamism of the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, can create true internal transformations; it can tear apart the thick net and network of bad instinctive tendencies, inherited predispositions, habits, passions and acquired habits; it can annihilate the corrosive action of the forces of darkness and evil and — more importantly — above and beyond the existing realities, it can create within the soul many new potentialities and thus contribute, with the help of Divine Providence, to the defeat, according to Chrysostom, of «the consequence of laws». Thus above the world of biological, psychological and social teleology and necessity there emerges and springs forth with a sudden change and a heterogeneous leap, a true internal revolution, the world of spiritual freedom, which can break heavy chains and shatter longstanding tyrannical shackles, keep in constant vigilance for a responsible self-direction with a heroic resistance against the enchantment of individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism, and be armed with sensitive antennas and spiritual radars, in order to track down either the enemy factors, which plot against the god-given hierarchic scale of educational values and goods of civilization, or the allied forces, which assist in the affirmation and realization of all the values and the utilization of their order, in such a way as to succeed, in accordance with the church hymn, «to submit the worse to the better, and to have the flesh serve the spirit».

This is the Greco-Christian educational ideal, which some, nevertheless, would like to uproot using as an alibi, the fact that those, who abolished political freedom in Greece, had as their slogan «Greece of Christian Greeks». But we should not forget that we must never reject the genuine, because the fake, in order to circulate, imitates the form of the already existing genuine. The Greco-Christian ideal of education is that which always connects the Greeks with the Mother Church, which «as a hen gathers her brood under her wings» (Mat. 23, 37). During the centuries of slavery under the Turkish yoke, the Church undertook the guardianship of the Greeks, impeded the process to barbarism, limited islamization, averted assimilation to the conqueror, established hundreds of schools, supported a multitude of teachers and scholars who introduced even the sciences in the enslaved Hellas, founded libraries and spiritual centers, put in operation printing shops, fostered communal organization, embodied the idea of cooperatives, showed the way of preservation and maintenance of the Greek language and the treasures of the ancestral wisdom and patristic thought, contributed to the reaffirmation of national self-awareness and encouraged the epic of 1821.

This same tradition is also carried on with its ethnarchic role by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of N. & S. America, under the enlightened leadership of his Eminence, Archbishop Iakovos. The same tradition is also promoted by the Diocese of Boston under his Grace, Bishop Methodios, who tirelessly works with a sound progressive spirit, that is matched by his dedication to the Greek Orthodox tradition. The same tradition is also carried on by the Holy Cross School of Theology and Hellenic College, which, as I have stated, together with the Diocese of Boston, constitute truly bright centers of Greek Orthodox radiance, which in their turn cast their light upon all the other educational and spiritual institutions of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of N. & S. America, since they also are served by priests, who are graduates of the Holy Cross School of Theology and have experienced the influence of the entire spiritual atmosphere of the Diocese of Boston¹.

Dear Students²,

You have the great privilege to be called to continue this Greek Orthodox tradition after the integration of your personality in these

1. Translation: Dr Aristotle Michopoulos.

2. Original in English.

excellent educational institutions. This integration will be possible only through the personal experience of the ideals of Greek Orthodox education and culture.

We have spoken about values. Values are not related to reason and intellect, but mainly to the emotions and to the volition. Values are not conceived by the intellect but by the emotions. We repeat that the logic is blind especially to the higher spiritual values in the same way that the ear is blind to light and the eye deaf to sound. Values become understandable when they are first kindled and radiate within us. We see them when they light up or catch fire in us. We perceive them when we are first carried away and fascinated by them.

Consequently we can not be enraptured by the higher spiritual values if we do not see them incarnated in living personal examples. Among these personal examples we must see predominantly the Three Hierarchs, who rightly are considered as the protectors of the Greek Orthodox education and of the Greek letters. They have been models of integrated personalities and innovating sappers and pioneers of true education.

Their educational ideal is not cloudy and one-sided, but whole, entire, integrated, clear like crystal, full of interior unity and dynamism. They incorporated this ideal in themselves, they were raised with the wings of prayer and liturgy in the spheres of the spiritual contemplation, they were illuminated from the rays of the transforming light of Tabor, harmonizing with their world and life all the values.

In the system of these values were included also the immortal spiritual treasures of the ancient Greek wisdom. About the evaluation of the position of the Three Hierarchs on this ancient wisdom we must avoid the extremes of the method of Procrustes. The unprejudiced study of the great Fathers of the Church causes us to realize that on the one hand, from the morphological point of view, they recommend the use of this profane wisdom and speak favourably of the ancient writers, while on the other hand, from the material or essential point of view their position on Greek antiquity is neither hostile and negative, nor completely positive or syncretistic, but critical, selective and consequently on many points friendly. The Three Hierarchs, as also all the great Fathers or Writers of the Church (e.g. St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John of Damascus, St. Photios the Great, St. Eustathios of Thessaloniki) received from ancient Greek culture important elements; they filled them up with a new content and placed

them in new spiritual connections and have made them organs serving their work in Christ. The correspondence of the saints Basil and Gregory with the pagan orator Livanios shows that these two Fathers from Cappadocia had sent so many young men to Libanios for studies that he said that his school was filled with Cappadocians. Thus, the phrase became famous and proverbial: «Look! one more Cappadocian is coming» («Ἴδού καὶ ἕτερος ἦκει Καππαδόκης»). The study of the ancient writers, according to the teaching of St. Basil, leads by comparison to the confirmation of the superiority of the Christian truths.

The Three Hierarchs, while they studied the ancient Greek wisdom, did not limit themselves to a theory barren of practical interests. They were par excellence integrated and realists. They considered the material-technical values as gifts and blessings of God. They blessed the material-technical goods and with their burning preaching and flaming sermons, which were filled with strong feelings, they required the honest and fair acquisition of the goods and their use according to God's will. Therefore they condemned social injustice and the selfish exploitation of man by man. They praised the work and the several vocations and honest professions and occupations. They praised the achievements of their contemporary technology. They recognized the biological values and spoke about the rule of the athletic ideal. They were supporters of psychosomatic medicine. They praised the beauty of pure love and of the Christian family. They enjoyed the beauty of nature and they presented it in wonderful descriptions. They proclaimed that this beauty as much as the aesthetic values of the arts raise us to the «πανυπερτέλειον κάλλος», to the super-perfect beauty of God, Who is the source of all beauty. They praised music, architecture, naturalistic and impressionistic painting. Without compromises they demanded the purification of the social and political structures. They made also clear allusions about the progress which will be attained by international collaboration. In an innovating and pioneering way they organized extensive welfare work and they expressed their love for Christ by caring for His brothers who suffer.

According to the beautiful and expressive formulations of saint Gregory, the Three Hierarchs lived reinforcing and making stronger the ill, raising the fallen, resurrecting the dead, bringing back the misled, searching for the lost and protecting the strong. Thus through their pastoral activity they present the Greek Orthodox ideal of education, not intellectually, but in their personal experience and so they

verify the words of a wise man of the Middle Ages, who has said: «A teacher of the art of life is worth more than a thousand teachers of grammar and of literature».

Note: The ideas presented in the text above are treated in detail in the following works of the writer, where there is a reference to the pertinent Greek and foreign bibliography:

- 1) *Χριστιανισμός και Ἀνθρωπισμός*, Athens 1951.
- 2) *Ἡ λειτουργικὴ μόρφωσις καὶ ἀγωγή*. Συμβολὴ εἰς τὴν θεωρίαν τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἀγωγῆς, Athens 1958.
- 3) *Ἡ καλλιέργεια τῆς βουλήσεως διὰ τοῦ Ὁρθοδόξου μορφωτικοῦ ἔργου*, Athens 1960.
- 4) *Ἡ Φιλοσοφία τῶν Ἀξιῶν*, «Ἐκκλησία», Athens 1961, 184-186 and 202-204.
- 5) *Ὡλοκληρωμένοι Προσωπικότητες*, Athens 1961.
- 6) *Ἐγχειρίδιον Φιλοσοφίας*, τεῦχος Α' Εἰσαγωγικά - Γνωσιολογία - Γενικὴ Ἀξιολογία, Thessaloniki 1967.
- 7) *Χριστιανικὴ Παιδεία: Μεγάλῃ Παιδαγωγικῇ Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεῖα*, 5 (1968) 616-618.
- 8) *Μαθήματα Κατηχητικῆς ἢ Χριστιανικῆς Παιδαγωγικῆς*, Athens 1978.
- 9) *Σχεδιάσμα Ὁρθοδόξου Παιδαγωγικῆς*, Athens, 1984.
- 10) *Ἐκκλησία καὶ Παιδεία: Πρακτικὰ Ε' Πανελληνίου Θεολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου*. Athens 1984, 109-133.
- 11) *Τὸ Ἰδεῶδες τῆς Παιδείας*, Athens 1985.
- 12) *Ἀθῆναι, πόλις συνεχοῦς θεολογικῆς καὶ πολιτιστικῆς συμβολῆς*, Athens, 1986.
- 13) *Ὁ διάλογος περὶ Παιδείας*, Athens 1987.