

REPENTANCE

Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna



With a Preface by
Father Gregory Telepneff

CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST
ORTHODOX STUDIES

THEMES IN ORTHODOX
PATRISTIC PSYCHOLOGY
Volume III

REPENTANCE

by
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Second Edition



CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST
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PREFACE

I am particularly pleased to write a few introductory remarks about Archbishop Chrysostomos' book on repentance. Naturally, I am happy to see a book on this important subject. Repentance is a spiritual subject little understood in its profound Patristic meaning, as evidenced by the fact that even Orthodox theologians at times bandy about notions of repentance that are wholly foreign to traditional Orthodox thought. But I am also happy to see another volume in the proposed four-volume collection by His Eminence, *Themes in Orthodox Patristic Psychology*. The first two volumes, one on humility, published by the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies and now out of print, and another on obedience, published by the Holy Cross Orthodox Press at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Hellenic College, were provocative, challenging studies. They are essential contributions to contemporary Orthodox theology, in that they represent an entirely new approach to the synthesis of Patristic materials, yet literally exude a traditional Orthodox spirit. They are innovative studies within a staunchly traditional framework. I think it will be some time before many of us adequately appreciate the importance of these volumes as paradigms for our modern research into the Fathers.

Anyone who has read and studied the Greek Fathers with any care will immediately recognize in Archbishop Chrysostomos' treatment of the desert Fathers a thorough familiarity with the Fathers in general. Often his expressions and off-handed remarks are paraphrases of the Fathers themselves. Hardly a thought is found in the first two volumes of this series—and now in the third and next-to-the-last volume—that is not based on some Patristic reference or understanding. It is this feature which both distinguishes His Eminence's writings and which makes them so distinctly Orthodox. It is this feature, too, which attests to his staunch traditionalism. There are few writers—his friend Con-

stantine Cavarnos, whom he often so eloquently praises, comes to mind—who actually know the Fathers well enough to capture their thought with such clarity and who express such dedication and faith to the Patristic witness in their scholarship.

The study of spirituality from a psychological standpoint is not unusual. It is also not a traditional Orthodox pursuit. Most of the commentaries on spirituality by those schooled in theology and psychology aim at superficial explications of spiritual principles in terms of psychological medianisms and theories. More often than not, being insufficiently grounded in Patristics, these works come to cast doubt on the very Faith itself. Superficiality in dealing with theological things always leads to misbelief, if simply because belief is not superficial. Archbishop Chrysostomos, however, does something quite different in blending psychology and the Patristic witness. He looks within the Fathers themselves for a psychology—albeit a practical one—and then applies what he finds to modern psychological theory and to our own lives. In a sense, he quite simply assumes the primacy of the Fathers and submits modern psychology to their critical eye. That he often even supports some modern theories bespeaks, I think, the objectivity of his approach.

In this volume on repentance, there is a far more practical approach in His Eminence's treatment of the desert Fathers, and one notices that he perhaps appropriately has expanded his thoughts beyond the *Evergetinos*, or the writings of (about) the desert Fathers, as such, maintaining that this is the natural consequence of understanding that there is a wholeness to the Patristic witness that goes back to the desert, where the Christian life was put into practical application. I think that this expansion in his scope is *apropos* of the topic, and certainly his wider treatment of the Patristic witness is warranted and appreciated.

I would only warn the reader who is perhaps unfamiliar with the desert Fathers and with the Patristic witness in general that he should not assume that Archbishop Chrysostomos' practical ap-

proach and more expansive theological treatment, in this particular volume, betray what I have said about his footing in the Fathers. Every Patristic citation from a Father other than a desert hermit, if one studies the text with care, is actually a citation which can be found in the desert Fathers also. And in some passages where His Eminence offers advice that would seem to be the product of his knowledge of the science of psychology and his personal experience in that field, a careful and informed reader will find advice from Dostoevsky, St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, and the Fathers of the *Philokalia*—advice updated, perhaps, for our age, but carefully taken from the most reliable Orthodox tradition. This is something that every reader should deeply appreciate in these days when personal opinion, hearsay, and even outright heresy enjoy full expression and authority.

I look forward to the next volume in this series, a volume on love. Though I know that good academic practice requires that I express here some reservations about this series, I must honestly say that my only disappointment with this entire venture is that it has an end. And if this is something that sounds like a flattering personal testimony to the author, I would hasten to point out—as would he, I am sure—that the excellence of this material lies precisely in its adherence to the richness of Patristic wisdom.

Father Gregory Telepneff



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- Volume I: *Humility*
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- Volume II: *Obedience*
(Holy Cross Orthodox Press)
- Volume III: *Repentance*
(Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies)
- Volume IV: *Love*
(Holy Cross Orthodox Press)

“As a Roman Catholic, I deeply appreciate the contributions of this series [*Themes in Orthodox Patristic Psychology*] to a Western understanding of Orthodoxy.”

*Professor Jeffrey B. Russell
University of California,
Santa Barbara*