

THE APOSTLE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JULY & AUGUST 2017

SAINT MARK ORTHODOX CHURCH

OF IRVINE

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Pastor's Column

The God of the Bible

Metropolitan Saba (Esber), Archdiocese of Bosra-Hauran

There are certain erroneous or distorted beliefs that are widespread among the faithful. In this brief note, I am concerned with the one that starts out from the basis of the Bible to erroneously state that the face of God in the Old Testament is not the same as in the New Testament. Some believe that God in the Old Testament is only a god of war, cruelty, violence and racism, while in the New Testament, He is only a god of love, forgiveness, mercy and kindness.

This erroneous belief is the result either out of ignorance of the Old Testament, its interpretation and its structure or under the influence of misconceptions similar to the approach of those critics of the Bible who attack it for reasons too numerous to refute here. In each case, the approach to the bible is wrong because it is not a theological approach to a religious book. Many also arrive at erroneous conclusions because they do not understand the essence of inspiration in Christianity or because they take a merely historical approach to the Bible.

In Christianity, divine inspiration has taken place over the course of a long pedagogical relationship of about eighteen and a half centuries. God inspired humankind with what He wanted to say through the historical events that they experienced, speaking to them in their language and according to their understanding, gradually bringing them toward

Him. The Bible is not a book of history, even though it uses history to speak theology.

By way of example and not exclusively, I will cite some verses of the Old Testament where God's face appears merciful, loving and forgiving:

"And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...'" (Exodus 34:6-7, see also Numbers 14:18, Deuteronomy 4:31, Psalm 86:5 and 108:4, Joel 2:13).

God says, "I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love... I will not execute the fierceness of My anger... For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror" (Hosea 11:4 and 9).

"... But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them" (Nehemiah 9:17).

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Psalm 145:8-9).

And some verses of the New Testament show another face:

"Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Revelation 19:13-15).

"Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matthew 22:13).

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

Christ says, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels..." (Matthew 25:41).

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (Matthew 23:13).

These verses, and many others besides in both testaments, show us that relying on an individual verse in isolation from its context leads to misunderstanding, very often completely contrary to its intended meaning. Scriptural inspiration was first of all inspiration in action and not in writing. God intervened in the lives of people and then a group first of all. He set their life straight. He educated them. He disciplined them. He changed their way of thinking, revealing Himself to them to the degree that they could bear His light until inspiration reached its apex with total divine disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14).

God incarnate spent around thirty-three years on our earth teaching, preaching, guiding, saving and fulfilling the dispensation of salvation completely. He did not leave us a single sheet of paper written by His hand. Rather, He sent the Holy Spirit to His apostles and His Church. He inspired some of them to preserve in writing what He taught them by word and deed.

The writers of the Bible in both its testaments read their experience with God and came to understand it by the Holy Spirit not at the time of its happening, but afterwards, then they learned God's intent and transmitted it to the faithful people.

How many times did Christ rebuke His disciples with harsh words because they did not understand what He meant?

God is the same in both testaments. His true image becomes clear in his accompanying sinful humankind until they reach the point of abandoning sin. Some find fault with the existence of sinful people-- and what human is without sin?!-- who played an important role in the history of salvation but they forget that God accompanies sinners in order to save them from their sin and has mercy on them with longsuffering until they repent and

change. Dwelling on the sins that appear in the stories of people in the Bible is not important. The important thing is focusing on the grace that changes and transforms these sinners.

God has undertaken-- and continues to undertake-- the task of saving humankind. The Bible came into existence for their salvation because they languished under sin and were enslaved to the devil.

It is also necessary to pay active attention to reading the texts, especially the Old Testament, in a manner consonant with its genre. That is, not reading narratives, poetry, stories, proverbs and wisdom literature all in the same way. Rather, give each genre its due. Poetry is not direct speech like explicit commandments are.

It is likewise very necessary to know that in the Old Testament especially, history was the theater that God used to discipline humankind and to show them gradually through its events His pure divine image until it was completed in their eyes. The Bible very often uses historical events to give a religious-- that is, theological-- lesson.

Here is an example. The Book of Judges speaks of people playing an important role in trying times. It magnifies some of them, such as Samson, and attributes superhuman characteristics to them. All of this is with the intent of making it clear that God's hand, when it intervenes, reigns over all other powers. As for the theology intended by the recounting of events and wars that the judges waged, whether they really waged them as it appears or as it was preserved in the popular memory, it is the following:

When the people sins toward God, they break the covenant and God abandons them, handing them over to their enemies. The people become aware of their error and cry out to God, repenting and confessing, so God sends them a judge to save them from the oppression that has befallen them.

God is a father and a pedagogue. He is a lover and a judge. He is just and forgiving. He is kind and disciplines. He is powerful and tender. Does education not requires firmness and intensity, suppleness and tenderness? To the degree that a

person is course and crude and cruel, he benefits from firmness, just as he benefits from sternness. Love is God's essence. His power is the power of love.

As for the superficial teaching that is popular among us, which focuses only on mercy, love and forgiveness, it is incomplete because it does away with the teaching and rebuking face of God who accompanies humankind until they reach the desired ideal.

Education's reliance in the past on fear, violence and punishment and its excessive use of this style does not mean that the correct manner of education today should ignore other aspects, such as judgment, justice and good or evil deeds casting man and all creation into heaven or hell.

May he who realizes his sins, is pained by them and sincerely walks in the way of repentance understand the meaning of the Bible and the essence of God's word and may he have constant nourishment.

The **Dormiton Fast** begins on August 1 and ends on August 14. During the Fast we will sing the service of the **Paraklesis** (or Supplication) to the Theotokos on Wednesdays (see calendar for dates). These services will begin at 7:00 p.m.

During this season the Church prescribes the following fast: we abstain from all meat, dairy products (including eggs), fish, wine and olive oil (in some traditions olive oil is allowed). Shellfish may be eaten throughout the fast. Wine and olive oil are permitted on Saturdays and Sundays only. On the Feast of the Transfiguration on August 6, fish, wine and oil are permitted. Make every effort to fast according to the best of your ability and to come to the Sacrament of Holy Confession during this holy season!

July/August Calendar	
July 5 – July 9,	Western Diocese Parish Life Conference, Los Angeles CA
July 23 – 30	Archdiocese Convention, Miami Florida

Tuesday August 1, Procession of Holy Cross

August 1 to 14, Dormition Fast

Sunday August 6, 10:00 a.m.. Liturgy, Feast of Transfiguration (Orthros 9:00 a.m..)

Tuesday, August 15, 10:00a.m. Liturgy: Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos (Orthros 9:00 a.m.)

Tuesday August 29, 10:00a.m. Liturgy: Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos (Orthros 9:00 a.m.)

September 2017 Advanced Calendar

September 1, Church New Year

September 3, St. Mark Hoedown

September 8, Feast of the Birth of the Theotokos

September 14, Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross

September 17, Ladies Guild Friendship Tea

Metropolitan Joseph Schedule for July

July 5 to 9

Paris Life Conference, Diocese of the West hosted by St. Michael Church, Van Nuys

July 23 to 30 Archdiocese Convention, Miami, FL

WEEKLY SERVICES

Saturday Vespers 4:00 p.m.

Sunday Orthros 8:45 a.m. Confessions heard from 9:00 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.

Sunday Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday Vespers, 6:30 p.m.

Selected Saints of the Month

July 4th

SAINT MARTHA

Martha was the mother of St. Simeon of the Wonderful Mountain (May 24). Dedicated with all her soul to the Faith, she did not think of marriage. When her parents betrothed her to a young man, Martha thought of leaving the home of her parents and withdrawing from the world. Then St. John the Baptist appeared to Martha and counseled her to fulfill the will of her parents by entering into marriage, which she did. From this marital union, the wondrous St. Simeon, ascetic of the Wonderful Mountain, was born. St. Martha had the regular habit of rising at midnight for prayer. With great compassion she helped the poor, visited the orphaned, and served the sick. A year before her death she saw a multitude of angels with candles in their hands, and learned from them the time of her death. Upon learning this, Martha dedicated herself to prayer and good works with even great zeal. She died peacefully in the year 551 A.D., and was buried near the pillar of her son, Simeon the Stylite. After her death, she appeared many times to instruct people and to heal the sick. Her most significant appearance on record was to the abbot of Simeon's monastery. Following the burial of St. Martha, the abbot placed a votive candle on her grave, with the understanding that it should never be extinguished. But after a certain time, people became lazy, and the lamp went out. Then the abbot became ill, and the saint appeared to him and said: "Why do you not burn a votive candle on my grave? Know that I am not in need of the light from your candles, since I have been found worthy before God, the Eternal Heavenly Light--but you need it. When you burn a light on my grave, you entreat me to pray to the Lord for you." It is obvious from this that the goal of our veneration of the saints is to entreat them, as those worthier than we are, to pray to God for us and for our salvation.

July 25th

SAINT OLYMPIAS [OLYMPIADA], THE DEACONESS
Olympias was born in Constantinople of very distinguished parents. Her father, Anysius Secundus, was a senator, and her mother was the daughter of the famous nobleman Eulavius, who is mentioned in the life of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. When Olympias reached maturity, she was betrothed to a nobleman who died before the marriage took place. The emperor and her other

relatives pressured Olympias to marry another, but in vain. She in no way desired this, and devoted herself to a God-pleasing life, giving great offerings to the churches and alms to the needy from her inherited estate. She served as a deaconess in the Church during the time of Patriarch Nectarius and, after his death, during the time of St. John Chrysostom. When Chrysostom was exiled, he counseled Olympias to remain in the church and to serve as before, regardless of who the patriarch after him would be. Immediately after the banishment of this great saint, someone started a fire in the Great Church [The Church of the Divine Wisdom, Hagia Sophia], and the fire consumed many prominent buildings in the capital. The enemies of St. John Chrysostom accused this holy woman of maliciously starting the fire. Olympias was banished from Constantinople to Nicomedia, where she died in the year 410 A.D. She had requested in her last testament that her body be placed in a box and cast into the sea, and that she was to be buried wherever the waves brought it ashore. The coffin was cast ashore in the city of Vrochthoi, where there was a church dedicated to the Apostle Thomas. Throughout the centuries, her relics have had the power of great healing miracles. The exiled Chrysostom wrote beautiful letters to the exiled Olympias, which even today serve as a great comfort to all those who suffer for the sake of God's justice. Among other things, Chrysostom wrote to Olympias: "Now I am very happy, not only because you have been delivered from infirmity, but even more because you are nobly enduring all difficulties, referring to them as trivialities, which is characteristic of a soul full of strength and abounding in the rich fruits of courage. For not only are you courageously enduring misfortune, but you do not even notice it when it comes and, without exertion, without labor and disturbance, do not even inform others, but rejoice and triumph over it. This serves as proof of the greatest wisdom" (Letter VI).

August 6th

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD, GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

In the third year of His preaching, the Lord Jesus often spoke to His disciples of His approaching passion, and also of His glory following His suffering on the Cross. So that His impending

passion would not totally weaken His disciples, and so that no one would fall away from Him, He, the All-wise, wanted to show them a portion of His divine glory before His passion. For that reason, He took Peter, James and John with Him and went by night to Mt. Tabor, and was there transfigured before them: *And His face shone as the sun and His garments became white as snow*(Matthew 17:2). Moses and Elias [Elijah], the great Old Testament prophets, also appeared beside Him. Seeing this, His disciples were stunned. Peter said: *Lord, it is good for us to be here: if You will, let us make here three tabernacles; one for You, one for Moses and one for Elias* (Matthew 17:4). While Peter still spoke, Moses and Elias departed, and a bright cloud overshadowed the Lord and His disciples, and there came a voice from the cloud saying: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear Him* (Matthew 17:5). Hearing the voice, the disciples fell face down on the ground as though dead, and remained that way, prostrate in fear, until the Lord came to them and said: *Arise, and be not afraid* (Matthew 17:7). Why did the Lord take only three disciples onto Tabor, and not all? Because Judas was not worthy to behold the divine glory of the Teacher, Whom he will betray; and the Lord did not want to leave him alone at the foot of the mountain, so that the betrayer would not, because of this, justify his betrayal. Why was our Lord transfigured on a mountain and not in a valley? So as to teach us two virtues: love of labor and godly-thoughts--for climbing to the heights requires labor, and the heights themselves represent the elevation of our thoughts to the things of God. Why was our Lord transfigured at night? Because the night is more suitable than the day for prayer and godly-thoughts; and the night, by its darkness, conceals all the beauty of the earth, and reveals the beauty of the starry heavens. Why did Moses and Elias appear? In order to destroy the Jewish fallacy that Christ was one of the prophets--Elias or Jeremiah or some other. That is why He appeared as a King, above the prophets, and that is why Moses and Elias appeared as His servants. Until then, our Lord had manifested His divine power many times to the disciples; but on Mt. Tabor He manifested His Divine Nature. This vision of His Divinity, and the hearing of the heavenly witness to His being the Son of God, must have served the disciples in the days of the Lord's

passion--in the strengthening of a steadfast faith in Him and in His final victory.

August 18th

THE HOLY MARTYRS FLORUS AND LAURUS

Florus and Laurus were brothers in the flesh, and in spirit and in vocation. Both were zealous Christians, and were stonemasons by occupation. They lived in Illyria. A pagan prince hired them for the building of a temple to the idols. It happened that, during their work, a piece of stone flew and struck the eye of the pagan priest Merentius's son, who was observing the work of the builders with curiosity. Seeing his son blind and bloody, the pagan priest began to shout at Florus and Laurus and wanted to beat them. Then the holy brothers said to him that if he would believe in the God in whom they believed, his son would be healed. The pagan priest promised. Florus and Laurus prayed with tears to the one, living Lord God, and traced the sign of the Cross over the child's injured eye. The child was immediately healed, and his eye became whole, just as it had been. Then Merentius and his son were baptized. Shortly after that, both suffered for Christ, being tortured by fire. When they completed the temple, Florus and Laurus placed a cross on it, summoned all Christians and consecrated it in the name of the Lord Jesus, with an all-night vigil of hymn-singing. Hearing of this, the Illyrian deputy burned many of those Christians, and had Florus and Laurus themselves thrown into a well. He then filled it with dirt to suffocate them. Their relics were later revealed and translated to Constantinople. These two wonderful brothers suffered, and were martyred for Christ and glorified by Him, in the second century.

Parish & Organizations News

Baptized into Christ

On Saturday June 3, Lucy Yousef Billeh the daughter of Yousef and Rita Billeh, at St. Mark Church. Godfather is Firas Billeh and godmother is Nicolette Kalache

Married

On June 3rd, Thuka Farah Owais & Amar Jamal Owais at St Mark Church. The best man is Michael Owais and maid of honor Gina Aragon.

On Sunday June 4th, Matthew Welch & Justin Bahbah at St. Mark Church. The best man is Daniel Welch and the maid of honor is Nora Bahbah.

Departed this life

On June 4, Joseph Waian the uncle of Eileen Ellis. His funeral was sung on June 14, at the Cemetery of Rose Hills Memorial Park City and State, Whittier, CA. Memory Eternal!

Antiochian Women of St. Mark

On June 18th, the Antiochian Women served a fish luncheon to all the fathers and grandfathers for Father's day.

Our final meeting for this year was on Thursday June 22 at Pita Jungle on Bison Road, Newport Beach.

Denise Nassif
President

Men's Club

No report submitted.

Teen SOYO

Members of our SOYO are busy preparing for the upcoming Bible Bowl at the Diocesan Parish Life Conference. Many are registered for Summer Camp and a few of them have been accepted to be coaches and assistants at the Special Olympics Sports Camp held at the Antiochian Village. They just finished selling out a large number of the CD recordings of our Youth made at the last Sacred Music Institute. After Summer Camp, local activities will resume.

BUY SCRIP! Our Ladies Guild buys scrip from many and various stores and restaurants (see list included in this bulletin) at a 3 to 10% discount. When you buy the scrip, which is accepted just like cash at the issuing store, the parish benefits. You pay no more for these goods and services and are making a donation to our parish. You can purchase this scrip from Saeda Turk at the coffee hour.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

July

Seham Aldada 7/6

Daniel Atallah 7/21

Gabriel Atallah 7/24

Ghassan Awayjan 7/9

Mayssa Azzam 7/7

Phillip Bahbah 7/2
 Samir Billeh 7/21
 Rita Billeh 7/26
 Leo Chade 7/14
 George Chami 7/28
 Annabelle Dabit 7/1
 Tony Debbas 7/28
 Mathew Ellis 7/15
 Sandella Goson 7/27
 Norman Haffty 7/28
 Esperance Hadshiti 7/15
 Wafa Hanna 7/29
 Julia Jirjis 7/6
 Reem Karkar 7/11
 Wael Kashou 7/1
 Steven Khamis 7/18
 Elias Khamis 7/8
 Donna Laffoon 7/6
 Nicholas Mamey 7/18
 Anne Mansour 7/1
 Robert Mokbel 7/18
 Don Nassif 7/15
 Irene Novac 7/2
 Tony Rodriguez 7/12
 Tymour Saba 7/3
 Rocky Sayegh 7/31
 Sophia Skaff 7/27
 Penny Skaff 7/8
 Seth Skaff 7/8
 Robert Smathers 7/9
 Rami Tarazi 7/8
 Devon Grace Tax 7/29
 Dave Tax Jr. 7/27
 Tiffany Tomeo 7/27
 Stephanie Turk 7/11
 Brittany Turk 7/8
 Christopher Wakileh 7/13
 Morella Youssef 7/12
 Nour Youssef 7/21
AUGUST
 Nassrin Artoul 8/14
 Salwa Bahbah 8/28
 Randy Bahbah 8/13
 Serene Batarseh 8/17
 Jelly Betar 8/24
 Lucy Billeh Jr. 8/22
 Alex Beyrooty 8/2
 Nicholas Beyrooty 8/2
 Chris Beyrooty 8/11
 Dana Chade 8/5

Rania Chami 8/29
 Marwan Dabit 8/13
 Rula Dabit 8/1
 Victoria Donovan 8/9
 Mark Ellis 8/5
 Eileen Ellis 8/25
 Samira Fasheh 8/24
 Majed Fasheh 8/18
 Richard Gallade 8/11
 Charles George 8/5
 Jimmy Goson Jr. 8/6
 Joseph Haffty 8/12
 Sandi Hanna 8/15
 Salma Hanna 8/21
 Kh. Nina Irish 8/1
 Natalie Kassir 8/21
 Tracy Khamis 8/28
 Michael Khamis 8/31
 James Kishek 8/21
 Vijay Kumar 8/19
 Joseph Laffoon 8/5
 Johnny Liqueste 8/30
 Mary Rose Mamey 8/29
 Rachel Ranney 8/30
 Yasmeen Rizkalla 8/22
 Christopher Scholl 8/1
 Roger Tierney 8/22
 Christina Tomeo 8/31
 George Toubbeh 8/23
 William Turk 8/14
 James Whitacre 8/28
 Luke Whitacre 8/2
 Robert Whitehead 8/4
 Hany Youssef 8/5
 Maryan Youssef 8/22

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

JULY

Samir & Afifa Artoul 7/8
 Gabriel & Samira Attalla 7/11
 Issa & Julie Bahbah 7/23
 Randy & May Dabbah 7/30
 Marwan & Rula Dabit 7/12
 Omar & Fatin Fakhouri 7/5
 Majed & Bunia Fasheh 7/11
 Mead & Wafa Hanna 7/9
 Isa & Barbara Khamis 7/9
 Elias & Hilda Khamis 7/18

Dimitri & Kandy Kort 7/30

Steve & Barbara Scholl 7/18

AUGUST

Edward & Dana Chade 8/15

Sami & Wisam Farraj 8/31

Abe & Diana Khamis 8/28

Nabil & Anne Mansour 8/15

Elias & Jean Nasrawi 8/29

Sammy & Lana Nino 8/12

Kendall & Ronda Schorr 8/19

Shouki & Majida Souri 8/4

The Apostle is a monthly newsletter of St. Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church. Parish Organizations are to submit articles by the 15th of the month to the Church office (949-851-8933)

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