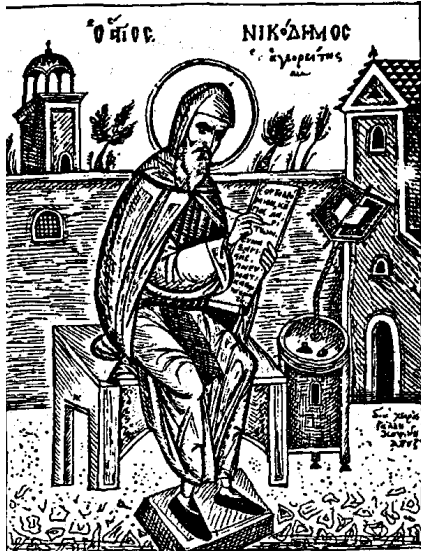


Orthodox America

Unseen Warfare - St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain



In 1729 the word "Methodist" was first used; 90 years before, American Baptists had gathered for the first time. This was t still 100 years before the world would hear t the name of Joseph Smith, and many disillusioned Protestants in both Europe and America were beginning to seek a revival of faith, As opposed to the comparatively recent birth of these new sects, the long line of Holy Fathers and teachers of the Orthodox Church had at that time already spanned 17 centuries, and it was in this year of 1729 that Almighty God raised up yet another who was to be numbered among the ranks of bright luminaries of the Church. Born on the

island of Naxos, Greece, and educated at Smyrna, this Father and Saint went to the Holy Mountain of Athos at the age of 27, where he became a monk and received the name of Nicedemos.

St. Nicedemos undertook the struggle of writing about divine things. As one biographer said, "it is impossible to keep account of his fatigue and sweat in the labors which enabled him to beautify his' soul and capture in his books the fragrance of the Holy Spirit."

His most famous labor was helping St. Makarios of Corinth to select, edit, and prepare for publication the Philokalia, a collection of writings of Holy Fathers On what St. Nikodemos Called the "mystical school of inward prayer. The. word Philokalia means "love of good", a fitting title for Writings that speak of how to live in Jesus Christ. The Philokalia appeared at the very time the French Revolution had begun to flood the world with hatred for anything godly.

Large parts of the Philokalia have been translated into English; however, it must be said that these writings are not for the beginner, nor even for the average Orthodox Christian. There is even a danger in their being read "out of season" and without proper guidance. More appropriate, and wonderfully useful, is the Saint's superb work, Unseen Warfare. This book, originally published in Italy in 1589, was translated and many times enlarged by the Saint. The present English translation* is from the edition of the great 19th

century Russian Holy Father, Theophan the Recluse.

The whole purpose of Unseen Warfare is to give the Orthodox Christian teaching concerning perfection in virtue and the "unseen warfare" necessary to accomplish this: "I will tell you plainly: the greatest and most perfect thing a man may desire to attain is to come near to God and dwell in union with Him.

"There are many who say that the perfection of Christian life consists in fasts, vigils, genuflexions, sleeping on bare earth and other similar austerities of the body. Others say that it consists in saying many prayers at home and in attending long services in church. And there are others who think that our perfection consists entirely in mental prayer, solitude, seclusion and silence. But the majority limit perfection to a strict observance of all the rules and practices laid down by the statutes, falling into no excess or deficiency, but preserving a golden moderation. Yet all these virtues do not by themselves constitute the Christian perfection we are seeking, but are only a means and a method for acquiring it.

"You must learn that perfection consists in nothing but coming near to God and union with Him, as was said in the beginning. With this is connected a heartfelt realization of the goodness and greatness of God, together with the consciousness of our own nothingness and our proneness to every evil This is the law of love, inscribed by the finger of God Himself in the hearts of His true servants ! This is the renunciation of ourselves that God demands of us! This is the blessed yoke of Jesus Christ and His burden that is light! This is the submission to God's will, which our Redeemer and Teacher demands from us both by His word and by His example !

"Do you now see what all this means, brother? I presume that you are longing to reach the height of such perfection. Blessed be your zeal! But prepare yourself also for labor, sweat and struggle from your first steps on the path. You must sacrifice everything to God and do only His will. Yet you will meet in yourself as many wills as you have powers and wants. Therefore, to reach your desired aim, it is first of all necessary to stifle your own wills and finally to extinguish and kill them altogether. And in order to succeed in this, you must constantly oppose all evil in yourself and urge yourself towards good. In other words, you must ceaselessly fight against yourself and against everything that panders to your own wills, that incites and supports them. So prepare yourself for this struggle and this warfare and know that the crown--attainment of your desired aim--is given to none except to the valiant among warriors and wrestlers.

"But if this is the hardest of all wars... victory in it is the most glorious of all If you really desire to be victorious in this unseen warfare and be

rewarded with a crown, you must plant in your heart the following four dispositions and spiritual activities, as it were arming yourself with invisible weapons, the most trustworthy and unconquerable of all, namely:

- a) never rely on yourself in anything;
- b) bear always in your heart a perfect and all-daring trust in God alone;
- c) strive without ceasing; and
- d) remain constantly in prayer.

"You must know that progress on the path of spiritual life differs greatly from an ordinary journey on earth. If a traveler stops on his ordinary journey, he loses nothing of the way already covered; but if a traveler on the path of virtue stops in his spiritual progress, he loses much of the virtues previously acquired In an ordinary journey, the further the traveler proceeds, the more tired he becomes; but on the way of spiritual life the longer a man travels, reaching forth unto those things which are before, the greater the strength and power he acquires for his further progress."

During the night in which he died, July 14, 1809, St. Nicodemus received Holy Communion and, sinking into holy tranquility, prayed constantly. The monks approached and asked: "Teacher, are you resting?" The Saint replied: "I have placed Christ within me, how is it possible for me not to be at rest?"

In the Foreword to his translation, St. Nicodemus wrote:

"This book teaches that the warriors who take part in this unseen war are all who are Christians; and their commander is our Lord Jesus Christ, surrounded and accompanied by His marshals and generals, that is, by all the hierarchies of angels and saints. The arena, the field of battle, the site where the fight actually takes place is our own heart and all our inner man. The time of battle is our Whole life.,

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but...against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Eph. 6:12)

"So this spiritual warfare of ours must be constant and never ceasing, and should be conducted with alertness and courage in the soul; they can easily be attained, if you seek these gifts from God. So advance into battle without hesitation. Should you be visited by the troubling thought of the hatred and undying malice, which the enemies harbour against you, and of the innumerable hosts of the demons, think on the other hand of the infinitely greater power of God and of His love for you, as well as of the

incomparable greater hosts of heavenly angels and the prayers of saints. They all fight secretly for us and with us against our enemies, as it is written, *The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation* (Ex. 17:16). How many weak women and small children were incited to fight by the thought of this powerful and ever ready help! And they got the upper hand and gained victory over all the wisdom of the world, all the wiles of the devil and all the malice of hell."

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