

How should we behave towards atheists or heterodox?

**by the Elder Porphyrios Kafsokalyvitis (=the
"hut-burner") - a landmark of sanctity in the
contemporary world.**

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"I was told that your Elder [fr. Justin Popovitch] was a zealous man, a fighter, with a fiery nature. He gave his all for Christ. He was fearless towards everyone and towards the Communists. Some of his spiritual children and admirers strive to emulate him in confrontations there [in Serbia]. They voice their opinions with very caustic words. But I would like to say the following. He was a holy man, and as such, could act that way. But not the others, who albeit zealous, are inclined to confront their opposition and say "Let them cut off my head - I will remain steadfast and will not budge." It is easy to say "let them cut off my head" - it is a good thing - but that is not how Christ's labours should be undertaken. Fr. Justin was something else. He had that Outspokenness; he could say things like that, but I don't think that

you should. I would advise you, fr. Irenaeus [Bulovitch], to follow a somewhat different course. For Christ's work to be achieved, so that even atheists, communists and others may be saved, you should not be confrontational with them. Do not stand up to them and do not provoke them."

Well, you can imagine at my age at the time, and with my youthful euphoria, how those words sounded to me! You see, we had that simple, black-and-white image of the prevailing situation: there are persecutors here - persecutors of the Church - and we are here to defend Her is what we believed. And now, all of a sudden, the Elder was reminding us that Christ also wants the salvation of those persecutors and enemies, as much as He wants ours and the others'.

"Don't say too many things", he continued to advise me. "Don't infuriate them, don't make them your enemies, because that way, they will isolate you and you will not be able to do anything thereafter. Many will come there; they will create various problems for you, and they will say all sorts of things to you. Do not reciprocate, do not try to defend yourself and give explanations about our faith. For as long as they are attacking you, you should remain silent and pray. Pray secretly. **Even if someone spits on the icon of Christ in front of you, you should remain silent.** Do not defend Christ. Christ does not need you to defend Him. What do you think about all this? Does Christ want atheists and communists to be saved also, or not?"

"Of course He does, Elder" I replied.

"Well, that is what Christ wants: for those who also deny Him to become acquainted with Him, so that they too might be saved."

(...)

That atheist **who spat on Christ's image**, may well think to himself on his way home: "Imagine, I said all those things to that priest; I even spat on something so sacred to him, and yet, he never said a word; he never retaliated, even though he could have." And it is not improbable that he might come and find you, and say: "I need you, for my soul". That way, it is quite possible that you might win him for Christ, and that is far more important than displaying heroism and outspokenness. You should work secretly, noiselessly, and not become involved in politics. Preach Christ. Speak only about Him. That is the only way you will be of benefit to others - by saving people; even when you find yourself in the company of Christians who might be talking about different matters and expressing their own opinions, which you may not agree with or have another position, another opinion and may well be a better one. You should not seek to voice your opinion however. You can give your opinion, humbly, without imposing it on the others, but only when asked for it. That is how people are best benefited. They will then say: "Did you notice how well he spoke? And if we hadn't asked him, he would have kept silent."

(...)

"Over there", he said, "you also have heterodox and other religions. You must behave to everyone with subtlety, with love. Do not offend anyone. **You must perceive and address all of them as brethren** - even those who belong to other

religions. We are all children of the same Father.
Do not comment on the beliefs of those who
belong to other religions.

Translation: K.N.

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