

A

On **Abandoning** oneself in God's Hands

GG: Quite often, patients with a painful arm would come to me for treatment. The moment I started massaging the arm, the patient stiffened and I would say: "Relax. Let your arm loose so I can do my work". But he couldn't and would keep his arm stiff. Then I would tell him again: "In spite of all my good will, my experience and the love I have for my job and people, I will not be able to help you if you don't let your arm free." I have watched how the patient's attitude works and have realized that this is also what happens with us. If we abandon ourselves in God's hands, He will fashion us as He wants us to be. He will give us so many opportunities! He will make us meet people that are His own! We shall progress in life! And finally we shall flourish in Christ, in God. But when we want things to be according to our own petty will and tell Him: "No, I do not want that", then God says to us: "Let yourself free". "No, I will have it my way." Let yourself free." "No. This is what I want." And because He made us free, He tells us: "Well, since this is your wish, go ahead and break your little head! Then, you will come and say, 'Forgive me, Lord. Have mercy on me, my Lord.'" Let us hope that this may be so, to make us turn to God and tell Him: "Lord, have mercy upon me." For even then, even with a broken head, if He opens our eyes, all will be well.

On **Adolescence**

K: What can you tell us of the problems concerning the relations between adolescent boys and girls?

G.G.: I believe that a sincere talk, without severity, could prevent the worse of what may go on in secret, the very worse...

K.: What about present-day adolescents and their rebellious behavior? What could we do?

G.G.: The first thing I say to the mothers of young girls is to meet the young boy and invite him to the house, no matter how odd-looking he may be or how strangely he may behave. In this way they will know whom they have to deal with. This, I think, should be the first step. Above all, the mothers should recall *their own youth* and remember that they had the same feelings and desires – with the only difference that these were then kept secret perhaps, whereas today they are no longer concealed... Isn't it so?

K. : Well, I am glad you've said that... However, in our days, young people are not contented with one relationship. They go on to a second, a third... It is said that ideals are lacking in our times.

G.G.: Yes. Because romance has departed and what remains is the physical part of the so-called "love", which is not love's love. This is not love, not at all... Anyway, such things are related with the social manners of various countries. In our country social morality has changed and tends to resemble that of the Northern European countries. We cannot stop the trend however. Well, what did the Ancient Greeks say? "*Should destiny bear something to you, bear it and bear yourself well. For if you resent it, you will cause grief to yourself and Destiny will still bear on you.*" Whether we like it or not, we'll "swim with the current", according to the popular saying. Yet, even in this "current" we shall find chosen ones. I know a lot of today's young people who are among the chosen of God.

K.: You have just said something very important: that we cannot swim against the tide.

G.G.: We cannot.

K.: Should we, therefore, let the young follow their way? Let them learn from their mistakes?

G.G.: Can we do anything to prevent this? *“You will cause grief to yourself and Destiny will still bear on you!”* By adopting a negative attitude, we shall be distressed, we shall be estranged from the young and, still, we shall not be able to do anything. Anyhow, we shall not let it be. We shall pray day and night to God for His Will to be done in their lives – *not our will, but His Will*. For, naturally, God loves these children more than we do and long before we ever did. You will probably ask me: *“Why does God permit this situation? Why should these youths go through such awful experiences?”* It is necessary for sin to go through something like that. It cannot be otherwise. As the poet says: *“and not having another step/ to fall lower down the ladder of Evil/ for the ascent to which He summons you again, o Soul,/you will feel growing on you the wings/ your great original wings”* (Costis Palamas. The Dodecalogue of the Gypsy).

K.: What would you advise us? Is there anything we could do in the face of all these problems? With drugs, etc.?

G.G.L I will tell you what St. Augustine said: “Love, and do as you want.” For anything you will do out of love for these adolescents will be from God.

K. What if I were to thrash one of them, out of love?

G.G.: God forbid!

K.: Why?

G.G.: What do you mean, why?

K. Because he did something that he shouldn't. I'll catch and give him a good jolt. This may bring him to his senses.

G.G.: You will end up with two evils. In the first place, you will disturb your inner peace, your equanimity. You'll be beside yourself, and your Guardian Angels will no longer be near you. So, you will expose yourself to every evil spirit. The first slap might lead to a second one, a third, a fourth. Then the adolescent will associate you with something unpleasant and may refuse to see you again.

3. on **Adversities**

G.G.: The ancient Greeks used to say: *“Should destiny bear something to you, bear it and bear yourself well. For if you resent it, will cause grief to yourself and destiny will still bear on you”*. In other words, if you meet with set-backs in your life, accept them.

Quietly. Because if you revolt, you will cause grief to yourself, and *adversities will still come your way*.

G. Th.: That is, you will experience them anyhow. Consequently, by feeling resentment you just add to the temptation!

G.G.: Exactly.

E.: a popular saying goes: “He who gets tired in his nook, will cry in strange corners”. May a time we think and say: *“Let me get away from that temptation, or from such and such a place. Let me escape”*.

G.G.: This is a great folly! A very great one. It is like that monk who couldn't find rest anywhere, and when he decided to change cell, he saw next to him someone putting on his shoes. *“Who are you and where are you getting ready to go?”* He asked. *“I am the one*

who is going to bid you welcome in your new cell,” was the answer. Do you understand? ... Let me tell you of an English lady I knew, whose mother was so nasty and horrid that she used to lock her daughter in a dark cellar since the age of four. When the young girl was seventeen, she decided that after all those years of misery she would leave her home. She said to herself: *“I will leave. I will go to a boarding-school, study to become a Social Worker and then find myself a job.”* She obtained her degree, but had a hard time at the boarding-school, because the Principal was even worse than her mother! Embittered by what she had endured, she determined to leave England. *“I’ll go to India and work for the poor. That will put an end to the hardships I went through so far.”* ... This is what she thought, but the Head of the Group she worked for proved far worse! ...

Nun: Good Lord! ... She wanted to get away.

G.Th.: You cannot evade temptation. You will encounter it again.

G.G.: Christ tells us: *“Resist not evil.”* Now then, the lady who headed the group treated our young friend so badly that she was driven to despair. One night, she told her, *“Leave our group. Go away. We don’t want your help or anything else.”* So she left that night. Crying over her misfortunes, she walked through the Indian jungle until she arrived at the house of a Swiss couple. They probably thought that she was mentally deranged and brought her to a Psychiatric clinic, where I happened to be teaching physiotherapy to the staff. When she saw me, she came near and asked, *“Who are you? What Church do you belong to?”* *“I am Orthodox”,* I told her. *“I never heard of them.”* *“Because you never read anything about them.”* *“They are going to commit me to a Mental Hospital. Please help me, if you can. Where are you staying?”* *“At an Indian compound, where we take care of sick people,”* I said. *“I am a Christian. I cannot stay with Indians.”* Well”, I told her, *“nobody can say that he is a Christian and not love his neighbor, no matter who he is.”* In 24 hours she had another crisis and they decided to take her to the Mental Hospital. She came to me in tears and said, *“Send me anywhere you want.”* I gave her a note and sent her to that Indian family, with whom she spent two weeks. They gave her all their love, treated her with kindness, did all they could. Fifteen days later, I went to see her, together with the psychiatrist. *“There is nothing wrong with her. She is quite normal now,”* he said. *“You do see what happened,”* I told him. *“All this rancor, from the time of her mother to the present, has done her great harm and she could not get over it.”* ... Years went by, and again she found herself in a difficult situation. She tried to contact me in India, but by that time I was a novice in Bethany. When her letter reached me, I wrote back: *“Do you truly wish to save your self and your soul? Go to such and such a place in India and ask for an Orthodox Priest-monk, Fr. Lazarus (Fr. Lazarus Moore, of the Russian Church).* She found him, he confessed her and, all of a sudden, she arrived in Bethany. *“I want to become Orthodox and a nun.”* ... Yes! She was christened and became a nun taking the name Th. Later, we went to Father Amphilochios, whom I did not know then. On the feast-day of Zoodochos Pigi (the Holy virgin honoured as “Life-giving Fount”) at the small Chapel of St. Anthony, in the Monastery of the annunciation on the island of Patmos, we took our monastic vows of the *Small Schema* and Father Amphilochios gave us his blessing for missionary work. So, we returned to India – this time as nuns. Now Sr. Th. Lives in another country and has been working for the last twenty years as a social worker in a Home for the Aged. She takes care of them, helps them, and reads the Gospel to them every morning. *For a Church that she had*

never heard of before... That's how it is. This is how life is. When you are watchful, you see what happens!

On Baba **Amte**

G.: Mother, would you tell me some of the occasions when you gave the witness while in India?

G.G.: I cannot recall any personal incidents at this moment, dear G. However, I do remember the remarkable case of some Indian friends, people affected with leprosy. Yes ... he was a very wealthy Indian lawyer, married, with two young children. A friend of Gandhi, he supported the great effort to free India from British Rule and gave his fortune to Gandhi's movement, dedicating himself to the cause. After many years near Gandhi, he thought that no tree can thrive in the shade of a big tree, and that he should go away and find out what he could do by himself. So, he went back to his hometown and after a while he was elected Mayor, I think. Not, Gandhi was of the opinion that all should participate actively in any work and so make the People realize that they really cared – instead of just sitting and, for example, assigning a task to street-sweepers without knowing exactly what the job is or how much it should be paid, and so on ... Putting these principles into practice, our friend went one day to clean the public conveniences. There, he saw an old man lying on the floor, his face and body covered with the terrible ulcers of leprosy. He approached him but could neither touch him nor help him.

G.: He was afraid ...

G.G.: Yes, That was his first reaction. He went home and the moment he started talking with his wife, the face of the old leper came before his eyes. His children returned home and he went to play with them, but again that face came between them. The same happened at his office, when he tried to work... The face of the old man haunted him for two months. So, at last, he realized that unless he did something for those whom this face represented, God would not be pleased with him, as he said ... he came of a great Brahmin family and had attended English Missionary Schools. On day, he went home and said to his wife: "We shall leave everything. We shall close the office, take our two children, and ask the government for a place where we could establish a Leper Colony" ... You know, in India, a wife believes that if her husband takes such a decision, it must be very serious and quite right, and never says "No". so, she said "Yes". They took their two children and went a location which the Government gave them in the jungle. As they told me later, they started with seven lepers, a lame cow and a dog. The hardships they faced were beyond imagination. Wild animals came near them in the dark, and on one occasion, attacked the dog, under the bed on which his wife and children were sleeping. Yet, he was quite determined and very certain that he would succeed. When I joined them, six or seven years later, the shacks in which we slept were still without doors and wild boars were coming in at night. It was quite frightening! As for rats, they were as big as domestic animals – something terrible! After some time, they started writing to all parts of the world and aroused the interest of various people from abroad. (some of his countrymen were opposed to what he did and even blamed him for abandoning his profession.) It seems to me that indeed God had worked in the hearts of these people and had granted them a great gift. Now, their two sons are doctors. They have more than three thousand patients, many leprosy Centres in several places, and the whole family

continues this great work going everywhere, on foot, on bicycles, by car. Today he is known all over the world as “the Albert Schweitzer of India.

Once, Baba Amte had to be taken to a hospital in a city far away. So he cabled, “Send Sister”, and I went. In those days hospitals in India did not allow anyone accompanying a patient to spend the night on the premises. So, the only solution was the Railway Station, where I had seen many times people sleeping on the benches. I was spending the whole day at the hospital and sleeping at night on a bench at the Station. In the morning, I used to wash one of the two white dresses I had in the washroom, hang it up to dry, and give a small tip to the charwoman to keep an eye on it. In this way, with God’s help and without my realizing it, the days went by. On the eve of the day Baba Amte was to leave the hospital, I saw the Station Master and told him: “Will you permit me one more night at the Station?” “When did you arrive?” he asked. “Are the 48 hours you’re entitled to over?” “Ah, didn’t you see me? The angels must of made me invisible. I have already spent 14 nights at the Station!” he burst into laughter and said: “Well, let them be 15! But whom do you have here?” “My brother” I said. “Indeed? And who is your brother?” “Baba Amte,” I answered and showed him the telegram. “since it is for Baba Amte, you can certainly stay.”

Shortly after, we returned to the Leper Colony. One of my tasks then was to wash every morning the garments of twelve healthy people. (*meaning, non-lepers*). I took the washing to the well, and look at the wonder – the most beautiful butterflies I have ever seen, of all colors and sizes, were flying around, to play with the soap bubbles. It made me so happy! When I had finished, the wet washing was very heavy and two lepers came to carry the buckets back. Years went by. Today, I received a letter from one of Baba Amte’s sons and he writes: “You should come again.” They cannot visualize that I have grown old. Now? In the jungle as before? In those times the out-patients of the Leper Colony numbered about 7,000 a year; the in-patients about 600-700. I hear that in-patients have now reached 2,000.

G.: Why so many lepers?

G.G.: Better ask why so many destitute. Because they do not have the means to work.

On **Anchorism** which is **withdrawal** from the world.

G.G.: My child, when you are dead to this World of Vanity and by the Grace of the Holy Spirit you are reborn and brought back to life by Christ, then BEWARE! Do not recall anything from your former life. The Power of Darkness will use fiendish means. First, he will make use of your relatives. This will be the hardest, for you love them. Then he will send friends to remind you of worldly successes and praises, of old friendships. Even if you are far away, he will send travelers acquainted with persons from your past, to stimulate your interest and make you talk of them. When they go back, they will add their own comments, and some will no longer believe in your change. Many people are “little-hearted”. And such people can never understand how one of their fellow-beings has managed to get away! Therefore, beware ... *Prayer, peace, silence*, and, as much as possible, *manual work*. Surely, you will be able, with your hands, both to help others and keep yourself busy. May god bless you, help you and guide you always. Praise the Lord, at all times, for EVERYTHING. *Live and watch His Wisdom, with a permanent “Thank You” in your heart.*

On **Anti-Church** voices:

G.: Mother, let me say something that preoccupies me. You tell us: “This is Christ. Follow Him. Love Him. Accept Him in your life.” However, others have taken from Christ whatever they want, whatever they can, while they do not wish to take anything essential. Some speak of Ritualism or accuse the clergy.

G.G.: Ah! Those thinking like that are wrong. This is only an excuse. They want to find fault in the other one, while actually they themselves are to blame.

G.: You think so?

G.G.: absolutely! Yes! Because we have the Holy Scripture, the gospel which speaks to us. The more you read it, the more you understand, the more you advance, the more His Mysteries are revealed to you and you become a person of god. People who find false reasons against the church and the Clergy, are people who refuse to admit that there are also saintly men among this Clergy and see only those who are not saintly. In the Church of god in the Holy Spirit, Who comes and enlightens us during the divine Liturgy. If we stay on, after the congregation has left, and remain seated in a corner with our eyes closed, we shall “see” God with the eyes of our soul. We shall understand what the Angels are. We shall comprehend the meaning of the prayer: *“Encompass us with your Holy Angels, so that guided and guarded by their Host, we may attain the Unity of faith”* – instead of doubting one another – *“and the comprehension of Your ineffable Glory.”* We cannot see the ineffable Glory of god with these earthly eyes, but we can behold It when the Holy spirit fills our mind and soul, our entire being. Then we can understand what is said in the Holy bible: *“Love the Lord you God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.”* That is: *Totally*. Our entire being loves Him. And then, what happens? Automatically you *“love your neighbor as yourself.”* You cannot distinguish yourself from the others. Quite often they ask me “Why do you associate with Hindus, Moslems, Jews? With persons of other religions?”

G.: Because you have love in your heart. That’s why.

G.G.: Because God is Love. How can you be a Christian unless you love non-Christians too? If you love only Christians, well ... “even the sinners do as much.”

G.: Still, every now and then, articles against the Church are published in the newspapers.

G.G.: Why does that surprise you? Poor reporters, they only see what is bad, they cannot see what is good. They don’t write about all these persons who serve in so many churches, who hear confessions, who organize works of Love. They don’t mention these. They search for a fault, to project it, to generalize it, to say that all Church people are like that. We see it. We saw it in the Parable of the Pharisee last Sunday. He began by saying “I thank thee, o God” – which is very good and which we should all be saying from morning till night. And then, suddenly, he turned and said “that I am not like that one who is so and so.” Yet, all those who judge others, wouldn’t they be wise to begin with themselves? If they could discover what is inside them, they would realize that they are a hundred times worse than those they criticize. For this is what is wrong. People are always ready to criticize other.