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### 1. On **Faith... Faith... Faith...** and Yes-ness...<sup>1</sup>

G.G.: The only thing I know that I have permanently – and I do not speak out of conceit or imagination – is what I have day and night, wherever I may be... It is First, Faith; Second, Faith; Third, Faith... That's it! There's nothing else I can say to you. It animates and guides my life. Since I have faith, if someone were to come and say to me, "Will you go with me to Lebanon"? I would answer, "Yes". "How can you say 'yes' just like that"? they may ask. "Yes! I say 'yes, because I believe that if it is not for my own good, God will arrange things so that the very same persons who invited me will tell me 'no' – for instance, there may be some delays with formalities which will prevent our departure and so on. I have seen that occur in my life, regularly, these last fifty years – not just one or two years, as I am now ninety-one years old! (I wish you all to reach that age!) I read in the Gospel again and again something extraordinary. Jesus comes and says to the Apostles, "Leave your fishing nets now, and follow me". If they had answered, "Who are you? Why should we lose the day's work? Why should we lose our profit? What will you do with us?" If they had answered thus, what would they be? They would have remained in darkness. They said "yes" to a Stranger Who came and told them, "Come! Leave everything and come!" Why? Because they had Faith in God and were expecting the One, Him Who would tell them "Come"! And this is how it began. Whereas if they had said "No" what would have happened? Now, something else too. If you have faith you will walk on water as Peter did. But if you get frightened ... you will go under! Nothing else! It has been like that all my life. I was called to the most strange and remote places in India. One night a message arrived, "Come to a sick person". I set out on an oxcart driven by a shepherd boy. As we were going up the mountain, through the forest, I saw in the dark two shining spots right above us. They were the eyes of a tiger! What do you say at that moment? "Lord of mercy upon me" and "Thy Will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven". If I close my eyes, I see these words written inside me. For He has told us, "Why are you anxious? Why do you take thought? Since even the hairs of your head have all been counted"! So, why are you anxious? Because Faith is lacking! Yet, if we have faith ...

### 2. on **Faith and Freedom**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Andreas, Patission, Athens, 15-2-88

G.G.: The Psalmist says, "I believed, therefore I spoke". First you believe and then you speak. The experience is granted by God to him who has Faith. Nothing can be done without Faith – not even the most trivial thing. Let's say, we take a taxi and *believe* that the driver will not go mad and throw the car down a cliff. Yet, so many people go mad every day. Have you ever thought of it? We believe that we shall reach our destination. On the other hand, we come into this life and while we know that this was not by chance, out of the blue, since everything is part of God's Plan, we do not dare tell him, "*Lord, take me a do with me anything You want in any way You want*"...

G.: Essentially this is freedom, isn't it?

G.G.: This is freedom, *great freedom!*

G.: And yet, some say that in this way Man is not free because he is guided by God, Who plans and arranges everything for him. Therefore, he lacks all freedom.

G.G.: But, it is then that man's soul is free! His heart is free. His mind is free. His body may not be free. Because if your soul, your mind and your heart do not subdue the body, what will become of you? Freedom of the body is what is sought by materialist. They want to be free to spend the evening at the theater, the cinema or somewhere else. Or again, to sit in front of the T.V. until 3 o'clock in the morning and ruin their eyes. They consider as freedom everything that is wrong. But what is freedom? It is to understand the words of Christ: "*My peace I give you, not as the world giveth*". The world will exalt you up to the skies the one day and precipitate you down to the abyss the next. Today, you will greatly enjoy the party to which you went. Tomorrow, you will hear the wicked comments that were made the moment you left, and you will be sad.

3. on the **Famous People** she had known<sup>2</sup>

S.: Gerondissa, in your life you have met some famous persons. Who were they?

G.G.: I met Martin Luther King. I went to his church – he was a Pastor of the Protestant Church, a Methodist. I have known and admired him, for he was one of the most exceptional persons I have met in my life. I also made the acquaintance of his mother, his wife and his children. As if his assassination weren't enough, a gunshot killed his mother also one day, while she was playing the church organ and singing "Halleluiah".

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<sup>2</sup> St. Andreas, Patission, Athens, 15-3-88

It was awful! He himself had dedicated his life to the Black People's Liberation in the U.S.A. The first time I traveled to the U.S.A. was in the autumn of 1949. I had with me a blind coloured man from Haiti whom I guided around. To take the bus, we had to stand in the queue and, irrespective of turn, had to wait until all White people got on first. Whenever we went to a restaurant, we were told: "No Blacks are allowed here"! and other such things Martin Luther King gave his life for that. He walked in the steps of Gandhi, who put up no resistance with arms and the like – only love.

Fr. G.: Where did you meet Mother Theresa?

G.G.: In New Delhi. The Director of the Social Welfare Service of India was a good friend of mine, with whom I had worked in many of their Institutions. He knew Mother Theresa very well. One day I was with him in a town where Mother Theresa and her assistants were also attending to the Lepers and the sick, under a tree. He sent for her and we met in his office. After the introductions, we greeted each other as compatriots, because my forefathers and hers were from neighboring regions (note: Mother Gavrilia's ancestors were from Monastir). We exchanged a few words and then she asked me: "Where did you meet this excellent Social Worker"? "I have gone to every part of India with him", I said. "So you work with the Locals"? she went on. "Yes. With the ... Locals". "In which Order"? "I do not belong to any Order. I am as you see me: Alone".

Fr. G.: ... the independent Gerondissa Gavrilia!

G.G.: I explained that I was a laywoman (I was not a nun at the time) and had come to India. ... She said: "Do you know what this man is? He is everything that Christ said without being committed to Him." That was quite true. At a later date this gentleman came to Greece and visited many libraries, drawing a parallel between their philosophy and our texts. He died shortly after. His name was Ramachandrra. A remarkable man.

#### 4. on Fasting<sup>3</sup>

G.: Mother, what could you tell us on fasting?

G.G.: Fasting is one of our greatest weapons against the Evil One. I will repeat what Father Lazarus told me once. In 1962, I went to the U.S.A. I stayed there a long time and

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<sup>3</sup> G. Meneopoulou, Athens, 1970-80

traveled to many states. The letters of Father Lazarus (Moore) were a great help. He was my Spiritual Guide and I am most grateful to him for the valuable letters he wrote to at times, wherever I went. He used to say, "Go anywhere you like, do whatever you like, as long as you observe Fasting".

G.: Why that, Mother?

G.G.: Because not a single arrow of the Evil One can reach you when you fast. Never.

G.: You mean Wednesdays and Fridays?

G.G.: Not only that; all Fast days and periods.

G. What were you eating then?

G.G.: It was the Fast of the first two weeks in August and there they keep a good table with all sorts of delicacies. But for me, a tomato juice and some stewed fruit were more than enough – every day of the Fast. I was then witnessing God's 'any Miracles. When they asked me for a Confession on Orthodox Faith or for my experiences with the Lord, I listened afterwards to what I had said on tapes, I marveled as if the words had not been my own. I am deeply grateful to Father Lazarus for this advice of his.

G.: Mother, as you have just said, by fasting we are safe from the arrows of the Evil One. Does this happen because the soul is left free for spiritual nourishment?

G.G.: To begin with, fasting makes you forget your body – the "What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink"? So, when you pay no attention to the body, you turn your attention to the spirit. And the spirit is blessed by God. It receives and accepts the Grace of God. Then you can lead a life according to Christ, as we all wish our life to be, as we all wish to live our life. Fasting helps in that. St. Basil the Great said that the basis of spiritual progress is the practice of temperance in everything. Our ancestors, too, had that famous saying, "A fat belly cannot breed a fine mind".

G.: This rule is for monastics. What about people living in the world?

G.G.: No, the rule is not only for monks and nuns. I was living in the world before, with my professional activities, my Physiotherapy practice, etc.

G.: Yes, but what if someone is married and has a family? As far as fasting is concerned, some solution may be found. What about continence though? What is the right measure?

G.G.: Temperance in food, fun, and marital relations can be practiced. Provided both spouses agree that their way of living will not be totally “according to the world”, but that they will also share a life according to God. I know many couples who have raised a family and led a proper life. A young man or woman, who loves God, should ask first, “Is the future wife or husband a true Christian”?

G.: What if he or she is not?

G.G.: In that case, there is no reason to start a family. Even so, I know of some instances, in which the pious wife after long years of prayer, saw her husband go to church and receive Holy Communion – for the first time in thirty or forty years perhaps. Imagine how long. ...

G.: What great patience!

G.G.: A prayer is always answered, when it is about a spiritual change and progress.

##### 5. **Father Kyrillos Tambaxis** of Katounakia, Athos

G.G.: Do you know what I have here? A *Kanon* from the Holy Mountain: How many Komboskinia Prayers (with the Prayer-rope)... It is by Father Kyrillos Tambaxis of Katounakia who went to the Holy Mountain at the age of fourteen and slept there at eighty-seven. We corresponded during the last years of his life at Katounakia. He did not correspond with anyone, but his book came to my hands “by chance”: My brother had found it in a grocery store at Karyes, on Mount Athos, and sent it to me in the Himalayas! I wrote to Father Kyrillos and he replied: “I do not write to anyone, but since it was from God, I sit and write to you”.

##### 6. on **Fear**

G.G.: Fear must not enter in our heart. But then, when you love God, you have no fear. Because, after all, what can you be afraid of? This is the question I put to those who come filled with fear. Don’t be afraid. What are you afraid of? Death? Say that you are dead and have done with it! I mean, when you are past the fear of death, there is nothing else. Again, you may fear that something will happen to your eyes – and at

once you feel a pain in the eyes. It happened to me. I had trouble with my eyes. Well? If it is God's Will, and if you believe that you will lose your eyesight, so you will. Wait, though. Wait with faith – only with faith and patience, nothing else. For, quite often, the Hour of God takes long.

G.: That's the problem. We are in a hurry.

G.G.: We are in a hurry because life is short and because we believe we should have everything here. If we believed that going over there, to Eternity, is almost like going from here to the U.S.A., then we would not be in such a hurry. For we would know that we could do the rest ... over there.

## 7. on the **Fear of Death**

E.<sup>4</sup> Tell us, Gerondissa, are you afraid of death?

G.G.: That's what I don't fear – not a bit.

E.: Are you waiting for death?

G.G.: Every year till Ascension Day. Because I love the Funeral Service to include the Hymn "Christ is Risen". It seems to me that when the time of my departure comes, it will be something very simple, because Death does not exist. It will be like closing the door and opening another. I remember a fine painting showing two rose gardens separated by a wall. A twig, from one of the rose bushes had worked its way through a crack in the wall and a beautiful rose had bloomed on the other side. That's how it is with our life. We leave this world and go to blossom in the Next.

Chr.<sup>5</sup> Gerondissa, I would like to tell you of a fear that troubles my daughter. With what she reads about wars and the end of the world, she wonders if she will have the time to grow up and become a mother in her turn.

G.G.: She will have the time to become not only a mother but also a great-grandmother. What she has to do is live her life according to the Lord's Commandments. Nothing else. We know the Commandments God gave us. And, in any case, if it is God's Will that we shall be struck by lightning, it will happen. It will happen, whether we are afraid of it or not. So? He who is not to perish will not perish. And he who is to perish

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<sup>4</sup> St. Menas Monastery, Aegina, 21-5-89

<sup>5</sup> Leros, 1-1-92

will perish. No matter what precautions he may take. I remember, in London, during the war. The parents of two little children had built an air-raid shelter in their garden. The children were all excited and kept asking their parents to spend the night in the shelter. But they refused and when the children asked, "Then why did you have it built"? They answered, "God will guide us". One day the father had to go on a business trip, and the children jumped on the opportunity. So, they went to sleep in the air-raid shelter. That night, as every night, the bombing caused havoc. When they woke up in the morning, they gathered their bedding and prepared to return home. They stepped out of the shelter and what did they see? The house was no more! The only night they spent in the shelter was the night the house took a direct hit. When the father returned from his trip, he went to where his house was and seeing what had happened he started crying for his family. "Don't worry", the neighbors told him. "Your family is safe. They had a narrow escape and they are now in a house nearby". That is how God guides us if we are to be saved.

#### 8. on the **Fellow-Traveller**<sup>6</sup>

G.G.: The greatest gift of God, on this journey of our through Life, is the Fellow-Traveller. Do you know how many times in my life I travelled far and wide to find the person who would tell me, "Yes, my child, you are right". A meeting with an enlightened Spiritual Guide is of the utmost importance. You go to your Confessor and feel glad when he tells you, "Yes, my child, you are on the right way". He is indispensable. A good Confessor at the end of your Confession – or of your discussion, if he is in favor of dialogue, will tell you, "My child, pray God to give you His answer". Because every man is a unique being for God. We have a spark of Christ in our soul. As we sing in that wonderful hymn: "Christ is the True Light that illumines and sanctifies every man coming into the world" **Every man!** Do not forget that. I was often asked, "Why do you consider the Indians as your own? Or the Muslims, or the Jews"? Simply because I see Christ Himself in them. Perhaps they are not yet consciously aware of Him, but I have seen many of them acting as if guided by the Spirit of God.

K.: This is a vast issue. All those people who have been listening for years to the Gospel, to the Word of Christ, but cannot accept Him, because they have their own Scriptures.

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<sup>6</sup> K. Panoutsipoulou, Athens, 1985

G.G.: It is not they who cannot accept Christ. It is the persons presenting Christ to them, who do not live according to His Word. They give them words only. They don't give them their own living example, the "Word Incarnate". Yet, Christ has said, "I am the Life". So, they hear these things, they read about them, and they even put them into practice. But they do not want to become Christians. Because, as Gandhi said to the great missionary Stanley Jones, "You Christians are the worst example of Christianity". Well?

K.: You mean that only very few truly put into practice the Word of Christ.

G.G.: Yes, Because it is very difficult to do so.

K.: Is it that difficult? Why?

G.G.: Because if they follow to the letter what the Gospel says, nothing will be left standing on Earth! There will be such an earthquake! And then you'll see what happens. Isn't that what the first Hermits who retreated to the desert tried to do, when they left by the thousands? A few years after the Gospel was put into practice, the desert was filled with a multitude of hermits. Because they feared that by living in the world they would commit sin. Yet, now, we have become accustomed to it. And we do all the things contrary to the principles of Christianity.

K.: Yes. Still, how is it possible that a religion such as Christianity – which teaches Love and is so much alive – cannot be put into practice?

G.G.: It cannot. Exactly because it demands from us, who have a sinful nature, to shun everything with the Other. Here you are. Take your coat and give it away. Withdraw your money from the bank and give it away. Can you do it? You cannot. So? This is why many Indians have said, time and again, that since this religion cannot be practiced, why should we accept it?

K.: Then, is this religion only for the very few?

G.G.: It is for the very few. This is why Christ told us, "You are the salt of the Earth". And this is why He said in His last Prayer, "Those whom Thou hast given me, Holy Father, I have kept. They belong to Thee". But let us leave material things aside and turn to the spiritual matters we read in the Gospel. Christ says, If you do not sacrifice yourself, you are not Mine. Well? Who is he who places the other before himself?

Always? In everything? He may be in a position to help his neighbor, not materially but spiritually, and yet he may tell him, "Oh, I am so tired today. I will not be able to see you" at a time when the other may be desperate for a helping hand. Or he may say, "I got tired." What is the meaning of "I got tired"? I got tired doing the Work which the Lord told me to do? Yet, "My Father has never yet ceased His Work, and I am working too". Tiredness is not permitted to a Christian! Are you tired? Then it means that you have not spoken of God with all your heart. For God is Rest.

#### 9. On the **First Call** she received

GG: When we hear the Call of God, it means that God's Hour has come. I remember, before I left the world, that whenever I happened to hear a sermon, it was: "...go and sell that hour hast... and come and follow Me". After some time, in another church, again, the same passage from the gospel: "...go and sell that thou hast ... and come and follow Me". I asked myself, how is it possible that wherever I go, the sermon is the same? At that time I was traveling a lot and when I could not find an Orthodox church, I went to any other church, but again I happened to hear a sermon on this particular subject. It was something like a sign. Another thing happened also. The last year before receiving the Call – when I still had no idea that I was to take this path – I received a calendar from the U.S.A. On the cover, Christ was shown telling the young man: "*Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me*". Near Christ were various persons. My first impression was that they were the poor, but then I noticed that they were lepers, crippled, blind ... That was in January, 1954, In March the Message for India came. I had completed my studies in Physiotherapy and had already practiced it for seven years, before I left for India in 1954 (note: at the age of 56). This is why I say that I am of the eleventh hour. But the Lord said that even those of the last hour are to work!

#### 10. on the **Five Languages**<sup>7</sup>

G.: Mother, which are the five languages you spoke in India and Africa?

G.G.: Well, I will tell their story. Once, when I was in India, I came across a missionary who said to me, "You may be a good woman but you are not a good Christian". I asked, "Why"? "Because you have been here for quite some time and you go about speaking

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<sup>7</sup> G. Meneopoulou, Athens, 1970-80

only English. What local languages have you learned"? I answered, "I don't have time to learn any, because I move from place to place and before I can manage to learn a dialect, I am called somewhere else. I just learn to say 'good morning' and 'good evening'. Nothing else". "Well, you are not a good Christian! Nor can you be a missionary'. You know, of course, that Catholics and Protestants always learn the local dialect so that they can preach. Then I prayed, "Lord! Give me an answer to this". I asked with all my heart! And then I said, "Ah, I forgot to tell you. I use five languages". "Indeed? Which five"? "The first is smile, the second, tears, the third, touch, the fourth, prayer, the fifth, love. With these five languages I travel the whole world"! And then the man, perplexed, said to me, "Just a moment. Say that again so I can write it down". And he took out a piece of paper and wrote down the five languages. That's how it is. With these five languages you can travel around the world and the whole world is yours. You love everyone alike – irrespective of religion or nationality, irrespective of anything. God's people are everywhere. And you can never know if the person you meet today will not be tomorrow's saint. <sup>8</sup>

11. on I **Foresaw** the Lord – "I have set the Lord always before me"<sup>9</sup>

G.G.: If we were to use a little our imagination and place our Lord Jesus Christ by our side, permanently, do you know what an overwhelming feeling of awe we would have?

Nun: ... I foresaw the Lord... "I have set the Lord always before me".

G.G.: Then, every time, before opening our mouth, we would think: What will He say? How will He judge that? How will He look at us? How will He speak to us? It is the only way. When young people ask me: "What must we do to control our tongue and our thought"? I tell them: "If He were here, by your side, would you dare do this or that? No. You wouldn't! And now you dare, because He is Invisible".

12. on **Freedom**<sup>10</sup>

G. When man is completely free, then he is in a state of Grace. This is the presence of the Divine Element in man. Without freedom, he cannot receive Divine Grace. And without

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<sup>8</sup> Another version of this story has come down to us in which the five languages are remembered as 1. The language of helping, 2. When there is no help that can be given, the language of just a touch, 3. The language of smiles, and 4. The language of tears, and 5. When there is nothing else, the language of just loving the person

<sup>9</sup> St. Menas Monastery, Aegina, 21-5-89, (Psalm 15:8)

<sup>10</sup> G. Meneopoulou, Athens, 1970-80

Grace there can be no decisive emancipation from necessity, servitude and destiny.  
(Berdiaev)

B.: Mother, how is freedom acquired?

G.G.: When speaking of freedom, most people believe that it is related to outward factors. True freedom, however, is an inner attitude and does not depend on environment, the State, the Law, or other people. It depends solely on the relation we have with our self.

B.: But how do we gain freedom?

G.G.: When you feel that you are not free but a slave, it means that you are a slave to a passion. Some people say, "I am free. I take account of no one. I earn all by myself and I spend by myself". In essence, however, dear friend, you are in great bondage. For you are not free from yourself. You have desires; you have needs; and above all you make discriminations. Now if, with God's help, you want to free yourself from all such things, you should take the Gospel and make it a Precept of Life. Then, little by little, you will begin to subdue your passions. For example: You feel that you are attached to money? Even if you earn it all on your own, see that you don't forget to put aside for others the ten percent mentioned in the Old Testament. Above all, give impersonally. Do not expect "thanks" for what you give, for then it would be better not to give at all. There is only one Freedom, as there is only one Truth. There cannot be one freedom for that person and another one for the other. For the, we shall end up with compromises and lies. So, let us say that with much effort you get rid of your love for money. It might take you as long as twenty years and, even then, you may find out some day that you are still not free from it. Then you will try to get rid of the discriminations you make between yourself and the other. This too is part of egoism. Unless you reach the point where you will feel that you and the other are ONE – any other: the Black man of Africa, the Indian, the Chinese, the Moslem, the Jew, the Christian – unless you become conscious that we are all children of God, unless you feel like that, Truly – *with a capital T* – then you are still a slave!

G.: Mother, when we say "I am free", it means that I am free from my desires?

G.G.: Not only from your desires. That is another chapter.

G.: Isn't egoism, money, vanity part of our desires?

G.G.: Vanity is the wish to show off to other people. To stop being mindful of their opinion comes later, after you have subdued yourself. You cannot feel free and take no notice of what other people say or do in relation to you unless first you set yourself free from yourself. To gain freedom from yourself you must subject and reject whatever you have done through Pride, in other words through *the capital Sin of Mankind*.

B.: I think that freedom can be felt only with the Grace of God.

G.: This is what the author says.

G.G.: Yet, you cannot receive the Grace of God if you have not cleared yourself of all these things.

B.: You could, however, do all that and still not feel free.

G.G.: No! This happens only if you have not done what you should. If you have, then you cannot possibly not feel freedom! One more thing, though: *Without Faith no one can be free*.

G.: Mother, it says here that if we do not have freedom, it is impossible to receive the Grace of God, because the recipient for this purpose is non-existent. What does this mean?

G.G.: On this point I disagree with the author. What receives the Grace of God is our heart, our soul. Therefore, I cannot understand when he says that the recipient does not exist. Unless, of course, the translation is wrong. This is why I have brought here the text – for the conversation it would lead to. Once again, I tell you that freedom can come only with the Grace of God: when we have put an end to our pride and when we love one another. Christ gave us this as a new Commandment, because only thus shall we find perfect freedom. For God is Love. The True Freedom...

### 13. on **Friendship**<sup>11</sup>

G.: Mother, how can we tell if someone is a true friend?

G.G.: A person should be tried much before being called a friend. You should find out if he has the sense of sacrifice – not towards you but generally towards all people. If he hasn't, if you see that he is egocentric, preoccupied only with whatever concerns his

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<sup>11</sup> G. Meneopoulou, Athens, 1970-80

own self, then you will know that he cannot become a friend. You have certainly noticed that sometimes you may say something like, "I had such a headache yesterday, I couldn't read a single line the whole day". Then the reply you get is, "Wait till I tell you what I went through... Then he starts talking about the things that touch him. This is why he cannot listen to you or anyone else.