

Baptizing the World, Part Two

By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

The principle of Christianizing life, society, and traditions is natural in Christianity and all religions. Since religion encompasses all aspects of life, it is natural for it to imbue them with its spiritual hue on the one hand, and to adopt some of them and make them its own, on the other hand. This does not detract from Christianity; on the contrary, it gains a higher value. When Christianity absorbed practices of older religions, it proved that it could give them new meaning, and showed it could fulfill people's spiritual aspirations, satisfy their hunger for true life, and give meaning to their existence.

By baptizing the good things that came before it, Christianity proved its ability to grant people their aspirations for spirituality, as well as moral and societal values. Directed towards humanity, Christianity has completed the good things and made them a means of salvation.

This leads us to reflect a little on our spiritual and pastoral reality. The rhythm of life in today's societies is no longer limited to the religious aspect because they have become irreligious, or simply satisfied with superficial religion. Materialism has become predominant, par excellence, in all aspects of life. Man has been deprived of one of his most important dimensions, and he no longer finds the spring capable of quenching his thirst. The rush to possess material things is not a sign of a healthy lifestyle, but rather a confirmation of an inner void seeking fulfillment in the ephemeral things of this world.

As pastors and believers, we should reflect on how to baptize and Christianize today's world, addressing it and reaching it in a language that is faithful to the faith. This requires, on the one hand, a deep understanding of humanity in general, and contemporary humanity in particular; and on the other hand, a deep, rooted understanding of the Christian faith, with a pure conscience filled with and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

A quick look at some of the new methods of care in our ecclesiastical reality reveals a frightening superficiality regarding interactions of faith and humanity, in many cases. For example, holding a New Year's Eve party in a church building does not mean that it has become a Christian party. If it is organized like other parties in public places, it will not bring about anything new. It would mark a secularization of

Christianity, a confirmation of the licentious worldliness that characterizes other parties, and an illusion of protection in the minds of believers. Traditions cannot be easily and lightly baptized, replacing one with another, especially if they have similar forms!

The goal of the Church, the body of Christ, is to open man to the love of Christ and His living presence, not to replace worldly activities with similar ones within a purported "Christian" framework!

Baptizing the world means converting it to Christ, not coloring secular things with an external Christian hue. The challenge today before believers is great in this regard. Current pastoral practices, behaviors and conducts need serious scrutiny and examination to uncover hidden errors. This requires that the Church pays much more attention to pastoral care, and that believers help to establish a true Christian climate, not to pressure pastors to secularize pastoral care.

May we, in the spirit of prayer and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, discern what is necessary for our preaching to be upright and our witness to be faithful, so that we may contribute to the salvation of mankind for whom God came.