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FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Talks on The Beatitudes

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### “Blessed are the merciful”

The Fifth Beatitude that was spoken in the Sermon on the Mount is *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* (Matt. 5:7) It is possible that no other commandment of Christ is needed more in our epoch than this commandment of mercy, of charity.

We live in the era of ideologies which in their attempt to be all-encompassing exist in continuous strife, and this strife fills the world with fear and hatred. We live in the world from which mercy and charity are exiled, and that is perhaps the most frightening thing about it, the sign of its dehumanization. It is possible to read all the thick tomes interpreting every word, every comma of those who are considered the creators of those ideologies, teach-

ers, and prophets of “the new world.” Everything is described there, rules and laws are prescribed for everything. But all these teachings, ostensibly intended for the good and happiness of humanity, promising it the final solution to all issues, in practice for some reason turn out terribly inhuman. The explanation is simple: in all contemporary teachings about man there is no place for mercy. And perhaps this is why the adherents of these teachings hate Christianity so much, although they have something in common with it. For Christianity also speaks about perfection, and Christianity declared the absolute norm long before these newest “saviors” of mankind. But it contains something that is especially hateful for the alchemists of forcibly organized happiness: the light and the power of mercy. How often it



is told about Christ in the Gospels that He had *compassion* for the people, that He was *merciful* to them!

What is this compassion, this mercy, this charity, and why are they so threatening to the enemies of Christianity, forcing them to uproot the image of Christ from people's memory with all their might? Compassion, for example, is not at all the same as condescension. Condescension almost always comes from a sense of one's own superiority, and most importantly from a light disdain for those who are considered incapable of meeting certain expectations. "This is beyond them," a condescending person says about such people, and that means that he essentially holds them in derision and therefore can afford to be condescending. But Christ—and this is proven literally by every line of the Gospel—was infinitely removed from such condescension. His entire preaching (and He almost always preached to

the simplest, poorest and most uneducated people) presupposes an endlessly exalted calling of each person. "*Be perfect*" (Matt. 5:48)—Christ said it not to some elect, but to everyone, which means also to us, considering each of us capable of such perfection.

Therefore in Christ and Christianity there is not even a shadow of that prideful condescension which we often bestow upon people. He has mercy—that which is the opposite of legalism and moralism. A legalist says, "You broke the law, you are guilty and must be punished!" One who is merciful is able to comfort, "You are guilty but you are my brother, you are human like me, and you are having just as hard a time searching for the right way!" Mercy is the loving understanding, loving trust, and most of all, belief that a human being, despite any guilt, any trespassing, is worthy of love. Mercy maintains the primacy of the personal over the collective. Law only knows a criminal; mercy sees a person even in a criminal. The law condemns; mercy is merciful. The law cannot discern the entire uniqueness of this particular person; mercy, without disputing the law, looks into the face of the guilty, into the depth of his eyes, and knows that man is in essence inexhaustible.

Those ideologies which in their desire to completely govern a human being hate Christianity, hate its mercy. They choke with joy over their own "scientific might," while science only tries to discover the laws, that is, the common, the normative, the impersonal. One's identity, one's living face, one's living soul are obstacles for these ideologies, just as science is encumbered by everything singular, everything that it calls "accidental." Yet mankind consists solely of such singular "accidents."

There isn't not and has never been an abstract "mankind" as described by science, but there has been, now is, and will be singular and inimitable John, Paul, Alexis. And this living, concrete person does not completely fit into any law, but by his singularity and inimitability constantly puts it all in doubt. And this is all hateful for an ideology that is only interested in generalities, and requires complete and unconditional uniformity—everything that excludes mercy.

*Blessed are the merciful* (Matt. 5:7)—those who discern a living face in every human being, those who do not reduce his life to the sphere of the law and are therefore capable of being charitable, of being merciful. This is the foundation of Christian anthropology—the teaching about a human person—and the foundation of Christian morality—the teaching about the life of a Christian and his relationship with his brothers and sisters. With this commandment Christianity inevitably confronts all those builders of "the new world" who, while promising happiness to mankind, are bringing it the hell of impersonality.

### **"Blessed are the pure in heart"**

With the Sixth Beatitude we enter into the inner world of Christianity that the anti-religious propaganda passes by in silence out of fear that people, having discovered it, will regain sight, and all its efforts will be in vain. This Beatitude proclaims, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matt. 5:8). Until now we have seen how each Beatitude reveals a facet of Christ's teaching about a human person. What is revealed here, in these words about the purity of heart? What kind of vision of God are these words speaking about?

The word *purity* is exceptionally meaningful in Christianity, signifying much more than simply an antithesis to moral (especially sexual) licentiousness, and far surpassing the limits of morality per se. Purity is an internal quality that could be best defined as "wholeness." Purity, according to Christian teaching, leads to chastity, that is, "whole-mindedness,"<sup>1</sup> which endows a human being with a continuous awareness of standing before God. It is not so much filth, immorality, and sin that oppose purity and chastity in a person as his internal confusion and fragmentation. A Christian experiences sin as a loss of parity to himself, as blindness preventing the true, that is, whole self-valuation. And the main task, the main calling of a human person in Christianity is to claim anew one's internal wholeness, to rebuild in oneself the former purity, and with it the fullness of vision that disappears in the state of internal fragmentation. A person of our time may see this all as unclear, excessively complicated, and—most importantly—unnecessary, whereas this is the most necessary endeavor, which is for some reason forgotten by the contemporary world.

The terrible evil of ideologies, forced upon a person as the scientific truth about him, is that they completely ignore the inner world, or, to put it in a simpler way, they deny a person his personality. Yet personality is not mere individuality but that depth of each person that the Bible and Christianity call his "heart." Individuality can be understood as the combination of certain qualities of a particular human being: appearance, character, tastes, talents, and abilities, but all of this does not yet constitute personality. Christianity teaches that each human being possesses a deep and indivisible core—that which contains his true

<sup>1</sup> The Russian word for "chastity" is *tselomudrie*, which is derived from *tse-lyi* ("whole") and *mudrost'* ("mind").

self, incomparable with anything else, irreducible to anything else. This self is unique, and the authentic life of each of us is rooted in it. And it is that very self that we are constantly losing in the roaring hustle and bustle of life spent in a whirlwind of passions, interests, etc. And so it turns out that it is not I who possess life, but it is life that possesses me, constantly forcing upon me fleeting moods, desires, reactions. Yet this is precisely why my life is never whole, for I always see a fragment instead of a whole, only what possesses me at this very moment. It is as if I am disintegrating into a multitude of separate disconnected “selves,” and I am slowly dissolving in the stream of the impersonal which is carrying me into death. Materialistic ideology declares there to be a complete dependency of the human being on the external, but that is the crux of its horrible lie, of its truly slavish essence.

Christianity on the other hand begins with calling a person to recover and rebuild in himself the lost wholeness—in other words, that purity of oneself that is so polluted by the sinful bustle of life. The entire Gospel, each word of Christ, is addressed to a person’s identity. Each word of Christ presupposes and affirms it. It is as if Christ says to each one of us, “You exist and thus can hear me. Stop, gaze into yourself, un-

derstand that your life is broken and you do not possess it, and that means that you are a slave. Free yourself from this slavery, for your freedom is inside you, where you can finally meet yourself, acquire yourself.” Materialistic ideology says the exact opposite, “Do not stop, do not retreat into yourself! You are given all that is necessary, the only verifiable truth, and by dissolving in it you will acquire happiness.” These approaches to a human being, Christian and materialistic, are not just divided by an impassable abyss—between them rages a battle to the death. It is either/or: either the dissolution of a man in an impersonal whole, or his free entry into an inspired organism living by love. And the entire history of Christianity (not the external institutional history that the anti-religious propaganda loves to “expose,” but its internal and therefore authentic history)—is here, in a man’s continuous purifying of his heart, in the reconstruction of his inner freedom and wholeness, or, in other terms, in communion with the very experience of holiness which is only afforded by the true possession of life. That is, in essence, what the Sixth Beatitude is calling us to: to return to the whole vision to see that which we do not see in our superficial life—the invisible beauty, power, light, and love in which God manifests himself. ✱

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