Chapter 4

IN MY BELOVED VATOPEDI

Monologue

I stayed for twelve years jn the Italian cities. I met many wise men, many rulers, many eminent nobles. But no one shook me as much as the monk Savonarola, the witness of the Renaissance. Yes, he was a Latin monk, but I am sure that under other circumstances he could have been one of the most brilliant stars of Orthodox monasticism. He belonged to a Christian Church which had been deceived and had long since lost the flame of Orthodox piety. But I could not helped but be impressed by his ascetism, his directness, his courage and his integrity to the end.

Every year that I passed in Italy further confirmed to me , that there was no wisdom superior to that given by a living relationship with Christ. Within that relationship could be found the answers to all the great and the small "whys" of life. Little by little I realised the futility of worldly knowledge, and the more I where a life leads to, if it is cut off from faith and piety. Without fully understanding it, I concluded that if what I found is true, I must truly act upon it and live a life consistent with that truth. For was almost half my lifetime - if one can make such calculations - my soul had been seeking the ultimate. I measured the human forces that surrounded me in sin; without God, man is a slave to his passions and temptations. If God, who cares for the salvation of all men, had not quickly shown me His mercy and had not granted me His grace by illuminating my mind, I would have long before been lost to the disrespectful people I met in Italy. A voice in me was crying:

"All or nothing"

More and more I saw in my dreams the robe of the hanged monk. I still hesitated. Was God sending me the temptation of vanity? In 1505, I came to a conclusion and I left Italy. The first stop was my beloved Arta. It was such a powerful emotional experience! It took me a year before I could tear myself away from my ancestors, but in 1506 I reached my decision. I

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ΣΤΟ ΑΓΑΠΗΜΕΝΟ ΒΑΤΟΠΑΙΔΙ¶
Μονόλογος¶
Δώδεκα χρόνια έμεινα στις Ιταλικές πόλεις. Γνώρισα πολλούς σοφούς, πολλούς ηγεμόνες, πολλούς επιφανείς ευγενείς. Κανένας όμως δεν με συγκλόνισε όσο ο μοναχός Σαβοναρόλα, ο μάρτυρας της Αναγέννησης. Ναι, ήταν ένας Λατίνος μοναχός, είμαι βέβαιος όμως, πως θα μπορούσε, υπό άλλες συνθήκες, να ανήκει στους πιο λαμπρούς αστέρες του Ορθόδοξου μοναχισμού. Ανήκε σε μια Χριστιανική Εκκλησία, που είχε πλανηθεί και είχε χάσει από καιρό τη φλόγα της Ορθόδοξης ευσέβειας. Δεν μπορούσα όμως να μην εντυπωσιαστώ από την ασκητικότητά του, την ευθύτητα, το θάρρος και την ακεραιότητά του μέχρι το τέλος. ¶
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Όσο πέρναγαν τα χρόνια στην Ιταλία, τόσο βεβαιωνόμουν πως άλλη σοφία ανώτερη από εκείνη που δίνει η ζωντανοί σχέση με τον Χριστό δεν υπάρχει. Μέσα σ΄ αυτήν περικλείονται όλες οι απαντήσεις στα μεγάλα και τα μικρά «γιατί» της ζωής. Λίγο-λίγο συνειδητοποιούσα την ματαιότητα της γνώσης του κόσμου τούτου, πολύ δε περισσότερο που έβλεπα σε ποιο κατάντημα η ζωή οδηγεί, αν αποκοπεί από την πίστη και την ευσέβεια. Χωρίς να το καταλάβω καλά-καλά, κατέληξα πως, αν αυτό που διαπίστωσα είναι αλήθεια, θα πρέπει να το κάνω πράξη με μια συνεπή ζωή. Ήμουν σχεδόν στα μισά του βίου μου –αν μπορεί κανείς να κάνει τέτοιους υπολογισμούς- και η ψυχή μου ζητούσε το απόλυτο. Τις ανθρώπινες δυνάμεις τις μέτρησα στην αμαρτία που με περιέβαλε. Κατάλαβα: Χωρίς Θεό, ο άνθρωπος είναι έρμαιο των παθών και των πειρασμών. Εάν ο Θεός που φροντίζει για την σωτηρία όλ ...

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followed my heart and arrived at Mount Athos, From the beginning, Vatopedi had been designated my destination. It was not that it had the richest library, or the greatest number of monks. I had all these things. For me, what counted was the presence of the former Ecumenical Patriarch Niphon, who was a beloved friend of my family, A Holy man!

He welcomed me, but also warned me of the difficulty of monastic life. I reassured him and convinced him. And so, I became a monk and was given the name "Maximus". My life changed. I, the eminent scholar, embarked upon a life at the extreme, I, the student of codes, began to zealously practice virtues. The wanderer and lord, I began to deal with the dissolution of the same will. The learner in the discussions and symposia, I found myself practicing the quietness of God. The man accustomed to the comforts of life embraced abstinence, And when my elder monk asked me to start tours, collecting money for the Monastery needs, I accepted the humiliation with joy, free from the bitter glory of men. I always preached our Orthodox faith openly and without hesitation to the lords, whether they were enlightened or not by the Grace of the Holy Spirit. In short, wherever the Fathers of the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi, sent me, I was enlightened by the Grace of the Holy Spirit and preached the pure Orthodox faith, and those who paid according to their ability set me on the road to return to Mount Athos.

And just then, temptation whispered that I was ... someone, I was witness to the martyrdom of a young child, a new martyr, who did not hesitate to sacrifice himself in a terrible manner for his faith. Once again, the form of Savonarola presented itself to me and I was led to humiliation and self-immolation.

So, time flowed between the inner life and the missions assigned to me by the Fathers. I believed that that was I would live out the rest of my days, Here, forever here, in blessed Vatopedi. I was not looking for anything else. But... the Lord's will was different,

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Κι εκεί που ο πειρασμός μου ψιθύριζε πως είμαι...κάποιος, αξιώθηκα να δω το μαρτύριο ενός νέου παιδιού, ενός νεομάρτυρα, που για την πίστη δεν δίστασε να θυσιαστεί με τρόπο φριχτό. Η μορφή τού Σαβοναρόλα βρέθηκε πάλι μπροστά μου και οδηγήθηκα σε ταπείνωση και αυτομεμψία. ¶

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Έτσι, κυλούσε ο χρόνος, ανάμεσα στην εσωτερική ζωή και στις αποστολές που οι Πατέρες μού ανέθεταν. Πίστευα πως έτσι θα τελειώσει και ο βίος μου. Εδώ, για πάντα εδώ, στο ευλογημένο Βατοπαίδι. Δεν γύρευα κάτι άλλο. Όμως... άλλες ήταν οι βουλές του Κυρίου. ¶

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