

## H

### 1. On “getting it on the Head” at once<sup>1</sup>

G.G.: All the time we have, on the one side, a human wish and, on the other, the advice of the Angels who tell us, “No, it must not be so”. For example: You want to sleep some more. “No, you will not – because the whole day you will not be able to see anything, enjoy anything, be grateful for anything”. Or., you may think: Why don’t I have that sweet now? Why bother with keeping Lent? What’s the difference whether I fast or break my fast? “No, you will not eat. In this way you will teach yourself discipline, daily, with small thins, so that you may be ready for the great test which will eventually come for your own perfection”. I remember that in my early youth I was very squeamish. One day, I walked into a pastry shop to buy some biscuits. The shop assistant was a young man who had put plenty of brilliantine on his hair. I said, “Could I have half a pound of these biscuits, please.? As he was preparing my order, a lock of hair fell on his eyes. He brushed it back with his hand and continued with the biscuits. So, I told him, “You may go on with your hair-dressing, young man. Good day’! And I left. Ah, my children, it seemed such a trivial thing, then, but it must have been quite mean, since I was to pay for it much later. How” In India, in the countryside, where I had been invited by some Indian head of the family, cross-legged, barefoot, absent-mindedly playing with his toes, takes a piece of bread and offers it to me! There, now! Well, my sisters, in a flash that young man with the lock of hair came to my mind. Do you understand? It is so. Everything, everything, we shall go through everything! Since then, I have prayed the Lord to give me my lesson immediately – to let me get it on the head at once, at that very moment. And He did so! I was a novice, in the Monastery at Bethany. At that time there was a military camp quite close. Some tourists, who came to visit the Monastery had a camera and wished to take photographs. As I spoke their language, I accompanied them up on the terrace, to see *Pera* (the site from which Jesus mounted a donkey and set out for Jerusalem on Palm Sunday). While the poor tourist was getting his camera ready, a soldier came running up the stairs and frantically shouted at me, “How did you do such a thing, bring this man up on the terrace to take pictures, knowing that it is forbidden”! And he took the camera from the visitor’s hands. I felt anger surge up within me and I said to the soldier, “Is this how you welcome a stranger who just wanted to photograph a Biblical site”? As I was saying

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<sup>1</sup> St. Menas Monastery, Aegina, 21-5-89

that – bang – I felt a pain in my head, right here! I got over my anger at once, and told him, “Excuse me. Please excuse me. I know you are only doing your duty. And I was so rude to you. I should not have spoken to you in this manner”. My headache vanished as suddenly as it had come. Then the soldier turned to the visitor and said, “Come along, please”. He was taken and given a tour of the entire Judea, under military surveillance. They accompanied him to the airport and even returned the camera.

## 2. on “with the **Head** only”<sup>2</sup>

G.G.: Two weeks ago, a gentleman of great learning came with his wife to visit me and told me, “You should come to Italy. We have a very nice circle there and we would be very glad if you could speak to us.” To that I answered, “Thank you very much. If I could travel only with my head, I would be there tomorrow. But, unfortunately, my legs are also needed”! People do not realize that I am now 91 years old.

## 3. on **Hermit** life<sup>3</sup>

K.: What can you tell us about the Hermits who withdraw from the world and live for years in seclusion?

G.G.: What do you think they do? They do what is hardest. They pray and fast. That is to say, they reach the two highest steps of human love leading to God. This is the ultimate test. Blessed is he who is called to this kind of life. I lived like that only one year, up in the Himalayas, all alone.

K.: How was it?

G.G.: Endless hours of prayer and hesychia (stillness, quiet). I lived alone. The offering though does not stop. Even at the top of the world. For something may happen and someone may pass by – a sick person who requires your help, or a wayfarer with whom you share a crust of bread. But, virtually, you are alone – neither a friend nor an acquaintance, no one to talk to, not a word, nothing. You do not speak. You just sit. Sometimes, for five or ten days on end I did not even say “good morning” to anyone. It was only later, when I read about Hesychast Monasticism, that I understood what I had been doing without knowing it. Anyway. Up there, one can think of nothing but the

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

<sup>3</sup> K. Panoutsopoulou, Athens, 1985

Glory of God. From one morning to the next. Day and night. With the sun, with the stars, with the birds, with everything, nothing else. Whom else can you think of?

K.: How did you survive? What were you eating?

G.G.: I subsisted on chapatti – a kind of round roughly baked bread that could be purchased for about one cent from all the small shops. With about five cents you could buy a chapatti and a small bowl of boiled lentils. That was my midday meal. Mornings and nights I had a glass of powdered milk, which was distributed then by the Red Cross. I lost about 14 kgs. In eleven months, but I was quite fit.

K.: Were you reading anything?

G.G.: In those days I had no problem with my eyes and I could read. The only book I had with me was the Bible. No other book.

K.: You studied the Bible for a whole year, in those surroundings eating so frugally and praying.

G.G.: And this was where I received the call to become a nun.

K.: You received the call? How old were you then?

G.G.: That's the strange thing. I believed that God would be satisfied with all this, and that He would send me back among people to help the sick. Yet, the message (*plerophoria*) was that now I could go and become a nun. Which means that monasticism is quite different from the life I was leading during those five years in India.

Monasticism has the grace of making you "impersonable". You hear people saying, "A nun went by, a monk came, a priest told me". When you lose your social identity for the sake of God, then you really belong to Him. You asked how old I was then. I must have been 60.

K.: A mature person, in full maturity.

G.G.: I was 55 when I left for India; and 5 years had gone by.

K.: You had been seeking for 5 years.

G.G.: I never sought anything. I kept going, following the Voice of the Lord. Nothing else.

K.: Which you felt as an inner urge.

G.G.: Quite right. It was as if I had a Guiding Angel. "You will go there. You will leave here". I was receiving successive invitations from various people, and these determined the course of my life.

#### 4. on the Halo of **Holiness**<sup>4</sup>

C.: Did anyone ever gain the halo of holiness?

G.G.: On the Earth? NEVER – in capital letters! No ... Yet, step-by-step, step-by-step... Provided we don't turn back, as Lot's wife did, or do as that man who had his hand on the plough but was looking backwards. Never backwards! Even if we progress by a very small step every day. Above all, don't keep much in your heart. Go to Confession quickly, and don't let such things remain in you. If you don't get rid of them, they will keep coming back, again and again. In this way, you will give wickedness an entity. You will make malice "exist" whereas it should not. Neither your own wickedness nor that of the others should "exist". Don't call to mind the person who wronged you. Leave him at the Feet of Christ and let that be the end of it. That's how it is.

#### 5. on the **Holy Angels**<sup>5</sup>

G.G.: The Angels are always ready to help us. I have seen it happen with my eyes, with the eyes of my mind – even at the most difficult moments. When I was in India, jackals, a whole pack of jackals, with their eyes glowing in the dark, rushed in my direction in the jungle forest and God made me invisible to them, as if I didn't exist. Wasn't that protection of the angels? What do you think? After such adventures nothing frightens me. And something else too. When we have love in our heart, the angels become our best "colleagues". They are the one to come when, at times, we ask ourselves, "Where am I to go now? What shall I find there"? I travelled a lot in my life and happened to move from one place to another, without any material security, but always with the protection of the angels. I used to say, as I still do, "I am going from something good to something better". Always gladly, even if it meant something worse or physically harder. Because I know that it is God's plan. This is what you should do all the time, my

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

<sup>5</sup> G. Meneopoulou, Athens, 1970-1980

child. No matter where you are. No matter who is near you. EVERYTHING that happens is in God's plan, and because of that you will love it.

G.: Mother, I have noticed that you give to everyone what he needs: love, help, comfort and much more. At the same time I have realized that there is something like a protection, like a distance, that prevents anyone or anything from harming you or...

G.G.: Yes, Although I believe that I am not the one protecting myself.

G.: but the angels, as you say!

G.G.: It is the "Encompass us..." Still, the "distance" you have mentioned is true. Do you know why? When we are with God, we have no "problems", neither "psychological" nor any other "personal problems". We solve them with the Holy Bible, with our Spiritual Guide, with the writings of the Fathers, with Christ Himself Who tells us: "Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". When man reaches the point of believing so, of working so, of living so, then this "distance" you mentioned will always exist – in spite of all our love. The fact that I have no "problem" to tell to the other one is what causes this "distance". I listen to the problem of the others and have only love to give them. When this happens, everyone will come to you, because people need to talk of what troubles them. You will be the one who listens – in God, always.

G.: So, are the angels protecting us from everything?

G.G.: Yes. As you say, the angels are protecting us. I have seen it happen many times. It is as if they raise a protective wall around us. We say it every evening in Compline: "Encompass us with your Holy angels, so that guided and guarded by their host, we may attain the unity of Faith." Do you know how important this is? Never to lose Faith? To have it constantly? I have just remembered an instance which you may consider trivial. But it happened to me. When we reached Faran (in the Sinai Desert) everything was very nice. The small cells, all new, had door and window screens. So, the first night I went to sleep feeling very safe. I am in the desert now, I thought, and will have nothing of what I had in India 0 no snakes, no scorpions, no mosquitoes. Great stillness. Then, what happened to me at daybreak? What did I see? The floor was covered with a carpet formed by enormous ants – a whole carpet! But look at the wonder. Around the bed at a distance of about 50 cm., the floor was absolutely free of ants. They had left

something like a margin. I called Sister Catherine to help me. For I may have great faith and courage, but faced with an ant I am unable to do anything. I can neither step on it nor chase it away. So she came with a broom and swept them out. This happened to make me see, once again, the “I am here” of the Guardian Angel. This is how it happens with everything and everyone.

Chr.:<sup>6</sup> Gerondissa, this secret voice tht we “hear” many times, is it our angel?

G.G.: Yes, and we must be aware of it. We must recognize it clearly. Then, little by little, God will grant us the holy power of discernment to put it into practice.

Chr.: Because every time I stop and “listen” to this “voice”, it really makes me both relax and see everything clearly. It happens exactly so. Many times. But I hadn’t noticed it in older days.

G.G.: Be sure of that. Don’t listen to the world talking of temptations and temptations and temptations again. They have reached the point where they have the Tempter instead of Christ! So... You will leave yourself in the Hands of God, saying “yes”, “yes”, “yes”. And if it is sometimes spiritually detrimental to you, God will make it “no”. That’s it.

K.:<sup>7</sup> So, the guardian angel does exist?

G.G.: Yes. He is *within* us.

K.: In everyone?

G.G.: Yes. He dwells in every one of us.

K.: Is it perhaps the voice of our conscience?

G.G.: No, it is not. Because the voice of conscience is the voice of God. This is why, even without having read much about God, we do not feel “all right” when we disobey His Commandments. All of us have this “feeling”, all men, whether the socially developed or the so-called “primitive”. It is impossible for a person to sin and not to be aware of it. Actually, many persons have told me that when they sin, they sense a taste of bitterness in their mouth as if they had swallowed quinine, or feel a sadness which stays with

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<sup>6</sup> Leros, 1-1-92

<sup>7</sup> K. Panoutsopoulou, Athens, 1985

them long afterwards. Therefore, this voice is not their own. It is the voice of God, who dwells in them. Now, the Guardian Angel is someone else. And he has his “friends”. For there are other angels protecting us – not just one. Once, father Elias (Mastroyannopoulos) spoke beautifully on the angels at the Monastery of Tinos. He said how willing to help us the angels are. This is their purpose. All we have to do is call for their help and everything will become much easier than it would have been otherwise.

K.: Do we chase our angels away?

G.G.: When we ignore them.

K.: I gather you have good relations with the angels.

G.G.: We all should.

X.: And how can we become friends with the Angels?

G.G.: This is a personal matter. You will find out by yourselves.

K.: What else would you tell us about the angels?

G.G.: A good book has been published: *The Holy Liturgy – An Interpretation*. It contains a great deal on Angels. Because, as you know, in our Liturgy angels have a ministering part – “the Cherubim and Seraphim, with six wings and many eyes”, they all attend. The whole Sacrificial Service in the Sanctuary is performed with them.

## 6. Holy Communion<sup>8</sup>

It's not for us to decide when we should or should not receive communion. It is not easy to see ourselves clearly, especially on our disordered side. For that there must be the Spiritual Guide. There must be Sacred Confession which will draw out of us whatever should not exist in us.

## 7. on the Holy Mother of God<sup>9</sup>

G.G.: Once, in the U.S.A., I was asked to speak to an audience of Protestants, on a subject of my choice. So, I spoke of the Holy Virgin. I said: “Probably by reason of insufficient study, some passages from the Gospels have been overlooked by certain Christian Denominations. In our Church, we acknowledge the Holy Virgin as our

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<sup>8</sup> Leros, 1-1-1992

<sup>9</sup> G. Meneopoulou, Athens, 1970-80

Mother, and since we, especially we monastics, are Her servants, we attach great importance to the study of Her life. If you read the Gospels attentively, you will see that it was She who said: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord'. You will see that when the Lord chose Her, He sent His Archangel to Her, and that as soon as She heard his words, She said: 'Behold the hand-maid of the Lord'. She did not resist God's Will. So, **First:** since obedience to God's Will is a matter of paramount concern to us, the Mother of God is an archetype for us. **Second;** The Holy Virgin was terribly slandered for have a Son while being a maiden. This is why, if a woman stand accused today, the Holy Virgin stands by her like a Mother, and goes with her through all hardships. **Third:** We Greeks, who became refugees more than once, remember that the Holy Virgin took the Infant Christ and sought refuge in Egypt. **Fourth:** Many women lose their sons, who are killed in wars or otherwise, in the prime of youth. The Mother of God lived through this pain too, in an even greater tragedy. For She saw Her Sinless, He Blameless Son, on the Cross. **Fifth:** When She remained alone and had nowhere to go (because She had no other children), She was entrusted to the care of someone else, the Disciple who took Her to his own house. This also happens to us sometimes, when we grow old. In other words, Her entire life followed a course, as does the life of every human being. Now, my friend, I will tell you something else. Don't you say: 'Brother Robert, pray for me. Sister Lila, pray for me'. So, what's wrong if we say 'Mother of Christ, pray for us'. Then, somebody from the audience stood up and told me, "But She is dead"! And I answered, "oh! I beg your pardon! In our Church we believe in the Resurrection"! All that, my children, with the tape-recorders on!

#### 8. on the **Holy Spirit**<sup>10</sup>

K.: What is the Holy Spirit?

G.G.: Without the Holy Spirit nothing moves. Nothing is done. Nothing exists. Nothing is enlightened. The Holy Spirit is the Breath that God blew into Man. This is how I feel it. We have the Holy Spirit, His Seal, through our Baptism.

#### 9. on **Holy Tuesday**<sup>11</sup>

G.G.: Listening to the Hymn of Kassiani (sung on Holy Tuesday) "O Lord, the woman who had fallen into many sins" ... one cannot help thinking Have we not fallen into many sins? But how else could we have felt the Miracle of His Pardon and His Love? This is why all of us who worship the Lord are aware that without His help, His intervention, we would be wallowing in the mud permanently. O my God! I thank You!

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<sup>10</sup> K. Panoutsopoulou, Athens, 1985

<sup>11</sup> Athens, Holy Tuesday, 1987

I thank You day and night, with my eyes open or closed, with or without words, alive or dead...

#### 10. on **Holy Week**<sup>12</sup>

G.G.: I remember that when my nephew Andrew was seventeen years old he said to me, "Ah! Why don't we have the Holy Week four or five times a year? So that we may get all that into our head and assimilate everything"! Truly, Holy Week makes us meditate for hours and days, even permanently. It is something beyond this world.

#### 11. on the **Hour of God**<sup>13</sup>

G.G.: I have noticed that occasionally, when we say something that comes from us, the other may not accept it. But if we say something that so and so has said. Then, that's it!

G.: This is why when we want to convince somebody, we tell him, "Sister Gavrilia has said it, and ... that's it! We no longer have any problems.

G.G.: I'd like to ask you, though. Do you have results in this way?

G.: Indeed, we have. Fantastic results.

G.G.: Then it means that the Hour of God has come, and this has nothing to do with what I say.

G.: I remember you telling us, "Let it be. Don't talk unless you are asked to".

G.G.: Yes. Don't give what is Holy, when you should not. The Gospel says, "Give when you are asked to give". There are so many who seek the Truth, who go about looking for advice. Those are the ones you should help. Leave the others alone. Either their hour will come, or...

G.: What? Could the hour never come for someone?

G.G.: God summons all. We do know that. There isn't a person who has not been Called. But some are, or pretend to be, deaf. In which case, what can be done?

G.: Are they accountable for that?

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<sup>12</sup> Athens, 14-4-84

<sup>13</sup> G. Meneopoulou, Athens, 1970-80

G.G.: Certainly. Most certainly.