

# MYSTAGOGY

*The Weblog Of John Sanidopoulos*



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## MYSTAGOGY



J.SANIDOPOULOS

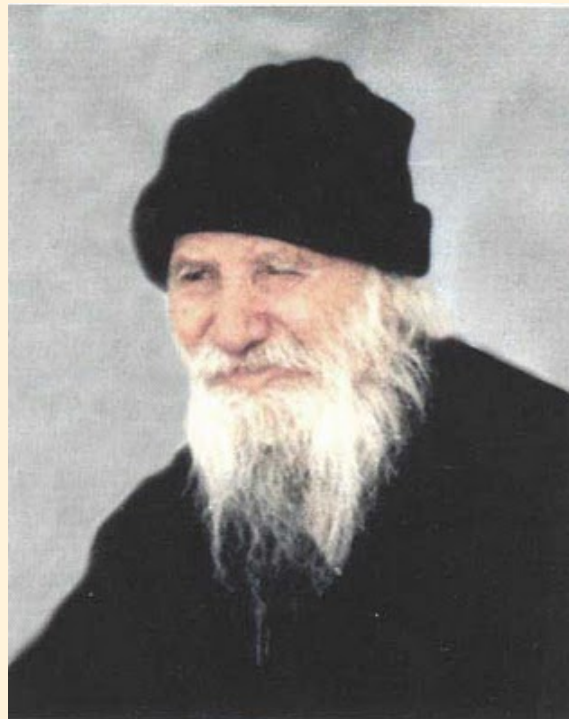
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Christian perspective, among other things.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2010

## Elder Porphyrios On Problematic Spiritual Fathers



### 1. Take care which spiritual fathers you go to

A brother told me: Once, when my job was in a rural area, my wife had gone to a very strict spiritual father. When she had confessed a weakness of hers that she would have repeated, he berated her, he intimidated her and ever since that experience, it took her a very long time to decide to go to confession again.

"Do you see", the elderly Father said to him, "what excessive austerity can do? That's why I tell you, take care which spiritual fathers you go to for confession - both you and your wife as well as your children - and above all, be honest in whatever you say,

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because that way, God will forgive everything and you will move up, spiritually."

[Hieromonk Elder Porphyrios, *COLLECTED COUNSELS*, Published by the Sacred Nunnery Retreat The Transfiguration of the Saviour, 2002, page 337].

## 2. Some spiritual fathers commit a crime

Look, my child! Our God, in His desire to educate His children who believe, trust, love Him and worship Him, resorts to various ways, methods and plans. Among the plans of our God is also the imposition of rules, which of course always aspire to the salvation of our souls. The same applies in your case. We cannot change or delete God's plans. What is more, we cannot impose any on Him. But we can however ask of Him and beseech Him, and He, being the philanthropist that He is, can hearken to our prayers and shorten Time - or even dispense with it. Either way, it is up to Him. We ask for something, and He is the one who will approve.

Even so, these rules do not have the character of revenge or punishment, but of education - and they have nothing to do with the rules imposed by certain spiritual fathers during Confession, who, either out of excessive zeal or out of ignorance, exhaust the limits of punishment without realizing that in that way, they are committing a crime instead of doing any good. I always scold them and counsel them: No severe punishments, just sound advice. Because severe punishments will only supply the "other one" (the devil) with a large clientele; that is exactly what he lies in wait for, and always waits with open arms to receive them! He in fact even promises them impossible things....

That is why the choice of spiritual father demands extreme attention. Just as you would seek the best possible doctor, you should do the same for a spiritual father. They are both doctors - one is for the body, the other for the soul!

[Hieromonk Elder Porphyrios, *COLLECTED COUNSELS*, Published by the Sacred Nunnery Retreat The Transfiguration of the Saviour, 2002, page 337].

## 3. Pay attention to what you say to spiritual fathers

"Be careful what you say to the spiritual fathers that you have chosen for Confession. Because they don't know everything. They must be very wise, discerning and experienced. They must have God's spirit within them, in order to be able to solve your various problems."

It should be clarified here, that he was not referring to the simple, everyday sins that we all commit, but to the more profound meanings, like the prayer of the heart, the offensives of the wicked one, etc...

[Hieromonk Elder Porphyrios, *COLLECTED COUNSELS*, Published by the Sacred Nunnery Retreat The Transfiguration of the Saviour, 2002, page 342].

## 4. Some spiritual fathers can confuse you

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"When you are a long way from the city", he said to a brother, "and you can't come here regularly, you should seek out a very good spiritual father there, to confess your sins. But whatever else preoccupies you with regard to the prayer of the heart or your thoughts, do not mention it to them, because some of them do not know everything and they can confuse you. You should come here and discuss the other issues with me."

[Hieromonk Elder Porphyrios, *COLLECTED COUNSELS*, Published by the Sacred Nunnery Retreat The Transfiguration of the Saviour, 2002, page 341].

## 5. Spiritual guides who are animated by a Papist spirit

I was discussing a related subject with him: It was about a certain "strict" spiritual father, who had refused to approve the wish of his spiritual child to visit the Elder Porphyrios and talk to him about a serious personal problem of his. This incident had made a painful impression on me and I told him about it. The Elder shook his head sadly and whispered: "What can I say? You see, he is also a spiritual father". The Elder was always very careful and lenient in his judgments of others - especially when it pertained to priests who made mistakes. In lieu of a characterization, he preferred to speak to me parabolically:

"You know, when a Papist missionary receives instructions for a mission, he gets onto a plane in Rome and when he arrives at the airport of an African country, that's where he opens a sealed envelope and reads what his mission involves - which he is obliged to execute, even if he disagrees with it. With us Orthodox it is not like that."

I understood - more or less - what he was trying to tell me. Besides, it wasn't the first time I had observed that there also exist in the Orthodox sphere several spiritual guides (fortunately few), who are essentially driven by a Papist mentality; who demand that their instructions be obeyed, in total disregard of the inner resistances of their spiritual children. They tend to cultivate a totalitarian mentality; because they themselves fear freedom they impose discipline, ignoring the fact that Orthodox obedience is the fruit of freedom. It wasn't long before that bossy compulsion brought on the inevitable results: That same spiritual child of the "strict" spiritual father eventually declared to his friends (who had exhorted him to go to the Elder Porphyrios) that he no longer desired to visit him. In one of my visits to the Elder, I said to him: "I think that the reason he doesn't come to you is not so much because he doesn't want to, but because he is showing obedience to his spiritual father."


The Elder surprised me, when he replied: "He is showing obedience, because the advice of his spiritual father satisfied his ego." It was the first time that I had ever heard the Elder speak so openly about a spiritual faux-pas. I knew he wasn't doing it because he felt personally offended. The Elder himself never invited people to visit him. (I knew of one exception only, and even that was on account of the fervent pleas by the friends of a

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certain prejudiced person who was suffering. It was essentially a response to their direct request for a meeting). The Elder did not seek to acquire followers; he simply helped out whoever sought his help at his cell. It is possible he spoke thus openly to me, because he wanted to reveal yet another example of deceitfulness by the devil, among the Christians. And it made me think: "So, the motive behind that person's obedience was the gratification of his ego."

[Hieromonk Elder Porphyrios, *COLLECTED COUNSELS*, Published by the Sacred Nunnery Retreat The Transfiguration of the Saviour, 2002, pages 387-389].

[Source](#)

Posted by J.Sanidopoulos at [8:16 AM](#) 

Labels: [Holy Mysteries \(Sacraments\)](#) , [Spirituality](#)

Reactions: [funny \(\)](#) [interesting \(\)](#) [cool \(\)](#)

2 comments:



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Is there a place on line where I can buy this book? I can't find any mention of it anywhere.

[November 19, 2010 10:43 AM](#)



**[J.Sanidopoulos said...](#)**

This was translated from a book in Greek that can only be purchased in Greece. I'm sure Greek bookstores online may be able to help you find it if you're interested in the original.

[November 19, 2010 10:46 AM](#)

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*"I teach them all the good I can, and recommend them to others from whom I think they will get some moral benefit. And the treasures that the wise men of old have left us in their writings I open and explore with my friends. If we come on any good thing, we extract it, and we set much store on being useful to one another." - Socrates*

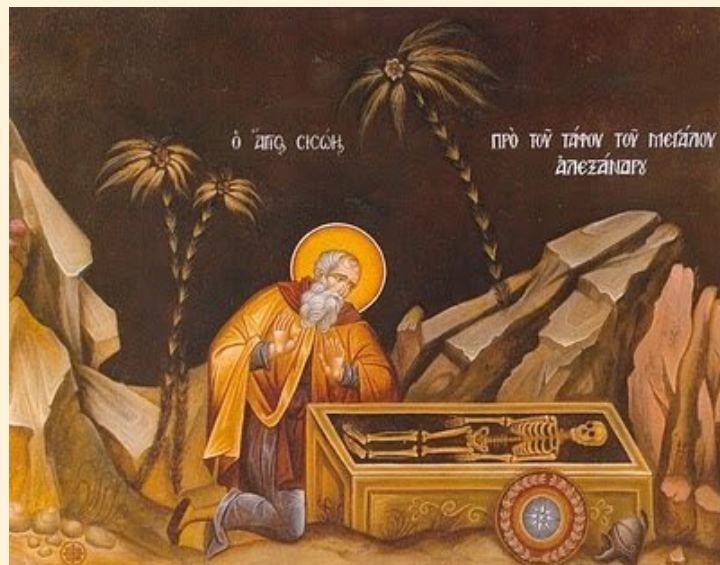
*"In imitation of the method of the bee, I shall make my composition from those things which are conformable with the truth and from our enemies themselves gather the fruit of salvation. But I shall reject all that is worthless and falsely labeled as knowledge." - St. John the Damascene*



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All Saints Celebrated In December



Sisoies, the great ascetic, before the tomb of Alexander, King of the Greeks, who was once covered in glory. Astonished, he mourns for the vicissitudes of time and the transience of glory, and tearfully declaims thus: "The mere sight of you, tomb, dismays me and causes my heart to shed tears, as I contemplate the debt we, all men, owe. How can I possibly stand it? Oh, death! Who can evade you?"

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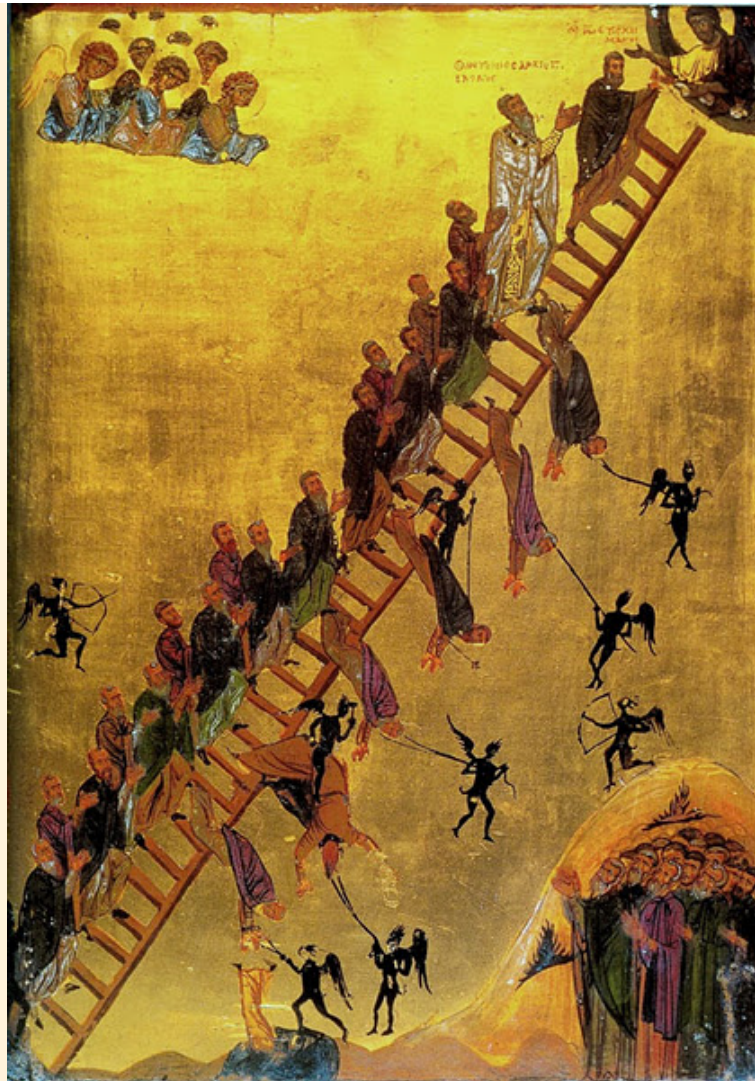
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"Ascend, ascend, brethren, ascend with eagerness and resolve in your hearts, listening to him who says: 'Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of our God, Who maketh our feet like those of the deer, and setteth us on high places, that we may be victorious with His song.'" - St. John Climacos



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"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." - Galatians 6:14



"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." - Matthew



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