

A close-up, profile view of an elderly man with a long, flowing white beard and hair. He is wearing a black, cylindrical head covering. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

DR. CHARALAMBOS M. BOUSIAS

ELDER ANTHIMOS OF SAINT ANNE'S

THE WISE AND GOD-BEARING
CONTEMPORARY FATHER OF ATHOS

ELDER ANTHIMOS OF SAINT ANNE'S

**The wise and God-bearing contemporary
Father of Athos**

by Dr Charalambos M. Bousias

Translated by Fr Nicholas Palis
Revised and edited by Fr Joseph Frawley



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An iconographic portrait of
Elder Anthimos of Saint Anne's
Painted by Marios Pelelis.

APOLYTIKION TONE 3

Special Melody: "Thy Confession of the Divine Faith"

With all reverence, let us praise Anthimos, who in our own time dawned over Athos like a star shedding a new light of piety as a brightly shining vessel of grace, bearing the undoubted flower of purity, with great love crying out to him: "As one who rejoices with the angels, ever entreat Christ for us."

KONTAKION PLAGAL TONE 4

Special Melody: "O Victorious Leader"

As a most enlightened and inspired ascetic, a follower of the way of stillness and wakefulness, let us praise the newly planted yet undoubted fragrant Flower of the Holy Mountain, a Rose of the great Skete of Saint Anne, with great love crying out, "Hail, most wise Anthimos"

MEGALYNARION

As one who kept the Lord's commandments, and the guiding Star of love in practice, the very standard of the spirit-bearing Fathers newly shining forth in Athos, let us celebrate Anthimos in song.

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Letter of the Ecumenical Patriarch

To the most venerable erudite Archimandrite Cherubim Apostolou, Elder of the Brotherhood of the Theophileon at Saint Anne, beloved child of our Modesty in the Lord, grace and peace from God.

With joy we received from your Venerableness the piously submitted work of the most erudite Dr Charalambos Bousias entitled *Elder Anthimos of Saint Anne's*.

Therefore, through this Patriarchal Letter, we proceed to thank you fervently for sending this work which depicts the venerable figure of the ever-memorable Spiritual Father Elder Anthimos. Congratulating you from our heart, we very eagerly bestow our paternal and Patriarchal blessing, invoking upon your Venerableness and those brethren practicing asceticism with you God's grace and His infinite mercy.

December 11, 2000

+ *Bartholomew of Constantinople,*
your fervent intercessor before God

Prologue

Our age is an age of apostasy from God's will. It is an age of disobedience, of the kingdom of egotism, of the kingdom of lewdness, of sinful pleasure, of disbelief, of easy profit, of profiteering. However, in this age, as always, God has His own people, people whose speech is "seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). They make the area around them, and all of society in general, savory. Let us not forget the observation of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, "where sin abounded, grace much more abounded" (Rom. 5:20). We feel this grace, which descends like the dew of Hermon from the heavenly peaks to the people, especially in our sin-loving age. In recent times, this grace refreshed holy men, who by word and by works made faith firm and magnified the name which is above every name, that of our Savior Christ. It is worth mentioning some ascetic personalities with the gifts of foreknowledge and clairvoyance: Father Iakovos in Euboea, Father Porphyrios in Attica, and Father Paisios on Athos; the wise missionaries Amphilochios of Patmos and Philotheos of Paros; the good Levite Demetrios Gagastathis in Platano of Trikala; the Spiritual Fathers of the cities, Epiphanius and Agathangelos in Athens, Athanasios in Amarousion and Simon in Penteli. We must also mention the erudite and spirit-moved Joel in Kalamata and Gerasimos of Little Saint Anne's; and finally, the hesychasts and Spiritual Fathers of the Holy Mountain, Joseph the Cave-Dweller, Ephraim of Katounakia, Gabriel of Dionysiou and Anthimos of Saint Anne's.

All these were habitations of the virtues and fragrances of the All-Holy Spirit, from Whom they received

grace to gladden the souls of the living Christian flock. All these personalities, along with many others, both known and unknown, are the gift of our Lord to contemporary society. They are the yeast which leavens the small dough of the pious pleroma.

Elder Anthimos had many gifts, which he diligently hid. He was distinguished by humility, meekness and his vast love, virtues which he obtained with many struggles and harsh asceticism. He was prudent, chaste, discerning, hospitable, a loving Father who emptied himself in order to fill the souls of others, and those of his brothers, in whom he saw our Lord Himself, Who said, "Whatever you have done for one of the least of these my brethren, you have done for me" (Matt. 25:40). When everyone despaired because of the trials and the difficulties they encountered, he had absolute trust in God and remained calm. He held the hand of his visitors and took their pulse. He became as one with them, imparting his meekness and his peace, the gifts of the Holy Spirit with which he had been adorned after many years of asceticism.

Elder Anthimos was particularly characterized by his praying heart. He had the gift of correct guidance, and also much diverse knowledge, which he revealed, not so that others would admire him, but to draw and comfort even his most demanding and difficult listeners. Everyone listened to him with admiration, and the grace of the Lord which dwelt in him unlocked the hearts of those who had cast off the old man, were renewed, and proceeded on the path of the new life "in Christ."

The spiritual depth of Elder Anthimos and the wealth of his wisdom became more obvious with his ascetical experience, and in the way he faced various circumstances.

Prologue

Everyone admired the purity of his face with his sparkling blue eyes, his concentration and vigilance, the calm and correct way he reacted, and his always accurate answers interspersed with sayings of the ancient philosophers, the holy Fathers of our Church, and Scriptural passages. He was an example for abbots, monks and lay people to imitate.

The present work wishes to emphasize that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8), presenting the great ascetical personality of the “wise” and “God-bearing” Elder Anthimos, as he has been called by other contemporary Athonite Fathers, who are themselves wise and God-bearing. For the past year we have visited various persons who were acquainted with the blessed Elder, or who had wondrous experiences of him. With our weak antennae, and with our small powers, we have compiled and documented a few of them. We did not spare any efforts, but ran all over Greece like honeybees in order to harvest the sweetest nectar of the experiences and the miracles of Father Anthimos. We went alone, or as directed by, or in the company of Elder Cherubim Apostolou, the Elder's successor in the Kalyva of the Entrance of the Theotokos of the Skete of Saint Anne. All these show, even deficiently, who the blessed Elder was, he who lived “wisely and righteously and devoutly” (Tit. 2:12), purifying himself and becoming pleasing to God and his fellow man.

Dr Charalambos M. Bousias
January 2000

Introduction to the English edition

Mount Athos, the Holy Mountain, the Garden of the Most Holy Theotokos, has been a source of inspiration for Orthodox Christians for more than a thousand years. It offers a salutary antidote to the turbulent storm of modern existence, revealing the way of holiness to Christians in every land, and in every walk of life.

Throughout the centuries, Orthodox pilgrims from various countries have visited the Holy Mountain to refresh themselves at this spiritual oasis in the midst of the desert of contemporary secularism and ungodliness. Many Orthodox Christians around the world dream of making this pilgrimage and setting foot on the sacred soil of Athos. Perhaps, as they begin to walk up the path from the shore, they may recall the words of Psalm 23/24:3-4, which are chanted during the Third Antiphon at Liturgy for the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord: "Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place? He who is guiltless (athoos) in his hands and pure in his heart..."

Other people who may wish to travel to the Holy Mountain will never have the opportunity to do so. They must be content to read about the Holy Mountain and its inhabitants in soul-profiting books such as this one on the Life of the ever-memorable Elder Anthimos.

Why is Athos considered holy? It is holy because it was given to the Mother of God as her portion. She told St Peter of Athos (June 12) that she had chosen Mount Athos to

be a habitation for those who wish to fight against the devil, and promised to be an invincible ally and helper in their struggle. Furthermore, she promised to provide for their physical and spiritual well-being during their lifetime. After their death, she would entreat her Son and God to grant full pardon for their sins to those who lived and died in repentance, and would also request Him to number them among His saints.

Like all Athonite monks, Fr Anthimos had a deep devotion to the Mother of God. The church of his Kalyva is dedicated to the Feast of her Entrance into the Temple (November 21), the day on which he received the monastic tonsure. Reference is made in the Biography (Chapter 9, "The Elder's Love of the All-Holy Virgin") to several wonderworking icons of the Most Holy Theotokos on Mount Athos. Consolation at Vatopedi (January 21), Directress at Xenophontou (June 20, January 21), Fearful Protection at Koutloumousiou (Bright Tuesday), Hope of the Hopeless at Vatopedi, Quick to Hear at Docheiariou (November 9, Oct.1), Sweet-Kissing at Philotheou (March 27, May 14 and Thomas Sunday), Refuge and Protection, etc.

The Holy Mountain has long been regarded as the defender of the purity and fullness of Orthodox doctrine, and its zealous saints as models of true piety. One of Fr Anthimos's greatest virtues was his strictness, or exactitude, in matters of the Orthodox Faith. This is important, because one cannot be a saint without being Orthodox in faith. In the early Church, heretics who were put to death because of their faith in Christ were not honored as martyrs or saints, because they did not confess the truth in all its fullness. Christ said to the Samaritan woman: "You worship what

you do not know", but the Jews, He said, worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:22-23). We are also called to discern and confess the truth in order to inherit the heavenly Kingdom. That is why Fr Anthimos was so insistent that correct doctrine is essential for those who struggle for salvation.

The story of Abba Piammon in St John Cassian's Conferences (18:5) states that Christ lived in a community with His disciples. In a similar way, monks live in a community under the direction of an Elder, or an Igumen. Cenobitic and eremitic monasticism began around the third century, and saints such as St Basil the Great (January 1) and St Pachomios (May 15) laid down special Rules, or principles of monastic life.

Many women have also embraced this life of spiritual struggle in order to cleanse themselves from passions and vices, and to acquire the virtues. St Anthony the Great (January 17) entrusted his younger sister to a community of "well known and faithful virgins" who had devoted themselves to Christ (St Athanasios, *Life Of Saint Anthony*, Ch. 3). The nun Kassiane, who was the first cousin of Fr Anthimos, also lived the angelic life of monasticism, and was filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. She knew beforehand the day of her death, and sent word to her nephew to make preparations for her funeral.

This biography is not merely a chronicle of the life of the ever-memorable Father Anthimos; it is also a picture of monastic life on the Holy Mountain. In broader terms, *The Life Of Elder Anthimos* is about the life of every Christian, which ought to be directed towards God rather than the things of this world. We must realize that we

cannot simply remain as we are now, for we are all called to become saints. In order to attain this goal, we must engage in spiritual struggle (ascesis), purifying ourselves from every sin which separates us from God, while acquiring every virtue which leads to holiness.

At Baptism we were enlisted as “warriors of Christ”, and our battle is against the world, our own fallen nature, and the demons. The cross we wear is a reminder of the Savior's words, “Take up your cross and follow me.” Those who do not take up their cross are not worthy of Him (Matt. 10:38, 16:24).

God commands everyone to be perfect or holy, which amounts to the same thing (Deut. 18:13, Matt. 5:48, Eph. 4:11-13, Col. 1:28, 4:12, James 1:4). “If thou wouldst be perfect, go and sell everything that thou hast and give it to the poor, and then thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me”. (Matt. 19:21).

Purification from the passions and triumph over vice are necessary in order for us to acquire the virtues and to grow more and more into the divine likeness. We are all created in God's image (i.e. we are endowed with reason, free will, and self-determination). The divine likeness in man, however, may become distorted through sin. This likeness can be cleansed and restored, not solely through our feeble efforts, but with God's help (John 15:5, Matt. 7:7).

Holiness is the true goal of our spiritual striving. If it were not possible to achieve this goal, then it would be unreasonable for God to command, “Be holy” (Lev. 11:44, Lev. 19:1-2, Lev. 20:7-8, 1 Peter 1:16). God wills that we become holy, which is the destiny of all people who are living in this world (1 Thess. 4:3), whether monastics or laity.

Submission to Elders

More than once in this book, novices are said to obey their Elders with unquestioning obedience. Perhaps some explanation is required, lest people who are not well acquainted with the Orthodox ascetical and spiritual tradition form a mistaken impression. One of the most difficult things for contemporary secular people to understand is why monks would voluntarily renounce their own will and promise complete obedience to an Elder or Spiritual Father. Perhaps this seems incomprehensible because many people today do not feel obliged to obey any laws at all, whether civil or religious.

A monk entering a monastery is assigned a Spiritual Father who trains and instructs him in the monastic life. One of the first things the novice learns is to cut off his own will and submit to his Elder in all matters without question, without opposition or rebellion. This is not an unhealthy control or manipulation of an individual by unscrupulous cult leaders, nor does it make the novice blind or brain-washed. The novice voluntarily defers to the Elder's wisdom and experience, while distrusting his own judgment. As St John Climacus explains, "Obedience is an abandonment of discernment in a wealth of discernment" (*Ladder* 4:3).

Why should the novice mistrust his own judgment? Because our minds are defiled and darkened by the body (*Ladder* 14:28). Obedience leads to humility and dispassion (Step 4:55, 4:71, 25:62, 26:72). Obedience helps the monk to

avoid disobedience and conceit (Step 4:55, 56, and Step 25) as well as delusion.

Christ did not seek His own will, but that of His Father (John 5:30, 6:38). Christ's will is not opposed to the Father's will, but is in harmony with it. A novice struggles to reject his own will and understanding, trusting in his Elder's greater knowledge and experience. The Elder's will, insofar as he has purified himself of the passions and has acquired the virtues, is in harmony with God's will. This is why the monastic literature says that the novice is to obey his Elder just as he would obey God. Fr Anthimos became a sure guide for others because his obedience to his own Elder enabled him to acquire knowledge and discernment in his spiritual life.

Father Anthimos

There are twenty monasteries, twelve sketes, and many small hermitages on the Holy Mountain. St Anne's Skete lies almost at the tip of the thirty-five mile long Chalkidike peninsula on which the monasteries of Mount Athos are located.

Fr Anthimos came to read in the libraries of Mount Athos, but did not intend to remain there as a monk. He asked himself why people would choose to live in such a remote place under such difficult conditions. Monastics flee the world in order to remove themselves from worldly ties and influences. The deserts and forests where they build their cells are not just remote and tranquil places which are conducive to prayer. There is also danger from wild animals,

from a harsh climate, as well as from the attacks of demons. There must be something worthwhile here, he reasoned. So there was. There on the Holy Mountain he found the Pearl of great price (Matt. 13:46).

Fr Anthimos was instructed in the "science of sciences" by his Elder Father Gabriel, and he passed this knowledge on to his own disciples. He represents only one link in the unbroken chain of spiritual wisdom passed down from Elder to disciple for more than a thousand years.

The ever-memorable Elder Paisios told Fr Anthimos's disciple and successor Fr Cherubim to take notes of everything that Elder Anthimos said. Similarly, the *Sayings of the desert Fathers* were compiled by disciples of various God-bearing Elders in order to preserve them for future generations of monks.

Their authority came from the example they set in fulfilling the commandments of God. Many times they would not offer their own teaching, but would cite the words of the Fathers and saints of the Church instead. The fifth century writer Sozomen said that monks did not demonstrate virtue through persuasive arguments, but by their own example (*Church History* 1:2). Therefore, when they did give instruction to others, it had the power to heal the spiritual infirmities of those who were disposed to hear it.

Elder Anthimos did not try to force people to obey him. Sometimes he would give in to others, as on the occasion when a certain dentist wished to take his photograph, but Fr Anthimos did not want him to do so. When the picture was printed, everything in the background could be seen quite distinctly, but the Elder did not come out.

Fr Anthimos, „the flower of St Anne's," and "the new boast of St Anne's Skete", was a great model of prayer and

fasting. It should not be surprising that he also worked miracles and was clairvoyant. After all, the Lord said, "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and he will do greater works than these... (John 14:12). Christ Himself links prayer and fasting with spiritual gifts (Mark 9:29). In our evil and sinful times, however, it may be a greater miracle to save one's soul than to raise the dead.

In *The Life of Elder Anthimos* we find confirmation of the teachings of Christ, and the fulfillment of His promises. Living in a monastery and receiving the monastic tonsure are not, by themselves, indications of a saintly life. Today's monks are called to measure themselves against the saints of the past, and to attain a similar degree of holiness. Those of us who live "in the world" are also called to do the very same thing. The Church must not only look back to its heroes of the distant past as examples of holiness, but must continue to produce new saints until the Lord comes again. This is both a goal and a challenge for the present generation of Athonite monks, and for all of us. In spite of the current state of the world, it is still possible to attain such holiness. The life of Fr Anthimos demonstrates that this is so.

*Archpriest Joseph Frawley
St Martin's Chapel, West Point, NY
October 2010*

I.

Biography

Dawn in Zireia

The small village of Kallianoï is located in the heights of the Corinthian land, in the peaks of the cloud-covered Zireia. At a height of seven hundred meters, a little before the lake of Stymphalia, where the mythical Hercules killed the Stymphalian birds, and opposite the village of Psari, the birthplace of New Martyr Nicholas (beheaded at Constantinople on February 14, 1554), Kallianoï has resisted time, which tames everything. Although it is the main village of the surrounding area, today it has few inhabitants, for most of them went to Kiato, Corinth and Athens hoping for better days. Its natural resources are small, and the struggle to survive is difficult for its inhabitants.

In this semi-mountainous and semi-barren village the little Constantine Zappeiropoulos, who later became the famous Spiritual Father Anthimos of St Anne's, first saw the light of the sun.

His first cries were heard on November 5, 1913, which with his premature orphanhood, the harsh conditions of life and his subsequent voluntary asceticism and prayer which ended in contrition, would accompany him in all his later life. These things, however, gave him the unending joy and rejoicing of the Kingdom of Heaven. His parents

ELDER ANTHIMOS

of Saint Anne's

(1913 - 1996)

Although the name of the Athonite Elder Anthimos has not yet been added to the Church's calendar of saints, many of those who knew him have testified to the holiness of his life, and his strictness, or exactitude, in matters of the Orthodox Faith. This wise ascetic of Mount Athos has shone forth in our times "like a star shedding a new light of piety, and as a brightly shining vessel of grace."

People were drawn to this humble monk because of his wise spiritual counsels, and by the holiness of his life. Reading the life of Elder Anthimos, we discover that he was indeed a holy ascetic who strove to purify himself of every sinful inclination, and to acquire every virtue. After years of struggle, he became an unerring guide of souls, a Spiritual Father to those at St Anne's, and in other monasteries on the Holy Mountain. He also had many other spiritual children in Greece, and in other countries.

Elder Anthimos is greatly venerated in Russia. One may see his icon in Moscow's Christ the Saviour Cathedral, and in another parish of that city the Akathist to Elder Anthimos is chanted every week. Portions of his relics are to be found in Moscow, and at Valaam Monastery.

The Greek life of Elder Anthimos has already appeared in several editions. It has also been translated into Russian, and now, by the grace of God, it is available in English. The lives and teachings of righteous men and women can be a salutary antidote to the turbulent storm of modern existence, revealing the way of holiness to people in every land, and in every walk of life. It is hoped that those who read this book will be edified by his God-pleasing life, and encouraged by his words.

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