

Spiritual Vitamins
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Upbeat
V.3, n. 8, 1970

Some twenty-odd years ago Louis Bromfield wrote about experiments with chicken-farming. Some of these experiments were aimed at curing a frightful habit which chickens frequently developed: in their hunger they would eat each other – they would become cannibals. The “experts” suggested a remedy. They proposed fitting the chickens with special eye-glasses that would make their companions look less appetizing. The chickens in question were enjoying the most scientific care. Their houses were scrubbed and disinfected frequently and provided with fresh new litter.

Mr. Bromfield’s experiments showed that it was not eyeglasses and disinfectant that the chickens needed: it was proper nourishment – the traditional nourishment of chickens. The scientifically disinfected houses with their new litter did not contain the natural organisms to fight disease, and above all, they lacked an absolutely essential vitamin. The chickens were thus starved of their natural nourishment developed unnatural appetites which craved satisfaction.

How much this makes us think of our world today! In education, in politics, in religion there has been a widespread effort to sweep away the “litter” of the past and start over in a fresh new sterile environment of thought. The result is that there are masses of spiritually starved young people in our society today who know nothing of the spiritual treasures in the accumulated experience of the past. They are starved for the experience of mystical fellowship, for the consciousness of belonging to something and to someone for expressing themselves as individuals through a higher ideal, for finding value in life. In their starvation they resort to harmful drugs, to experimenting with sex, to destroying everything that symbolizes to them the source of their frustration.

The field of public education has been sterilized of many values in the interest of facts, and many religious educators are following suit. The special target of their disinfecting program is the institution of Christianity and its 2000 years of accumulated experience. They especially wish to rid it of what is superhuman (because they do not want to acknowledge anyone greater than themselves) or beyond their comprehension (because they want to keep God under the control of their knowledge). They explain away the traditions of the Church by putting on a special kind of mental eyeglasses which enable them to read new meanings into the words of the Bible and of Holy Tradition. They suggest that instead of admitting our dependence upon a God who is immeasurably greater, more perfect and holy than ourselves and seeking strength from Him, we should consult an expert who has made a study of human behavior. Instead of humility, sin repentance, and spiritual renewal, the expert in behavior speaks of environment and motivation.

Our society at large is in need of the spiritual vitamins which traditional Christianity has long supplied to people and which the Orthodox Church still retains. Let us rejoice that

the Orthodox Church has not swept out all of the accumulated spiritual treasures of the past.