

The Tale of the Wayward Priest

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I once met a monk on the Holy Mountain. No one knew how old he was, but he would speak of the crowning of that heretic Charlemagne as if it happened in his middle-aged years. He told a story of a priest from “the world” who visited Mount Athos some 200 years ago—within recent memory for the monk. He said he witnessed this priest levitate with his own eyes. After this priest from the world had spoken the epiclesis in the Divine Liturgy in one of the cave chapels, the Mysteries thereafter appeared as if freshly butchered beef on the discos and pure blood in the cup, glowing nonetheless with uncreated light, but, though as raw as flesh, they attracted no flies and smelt of an unearthly sweetness.

This priest lived as one of the holiest men from the world this monk had ever met. He consumed only the Mysteries for food and drink, taking nothing else, except on Pascha when he would eat a bit of egg that had been colored red and blessed for the Resurrection, and a bit of koliva that was blessed during the annual memorial on the anniversary of the repose of his spiritual father. The priest worked miracles of healing, and, the monk recounted, once healed another monk who had lost his arm in an accident. He grasped the monk’s stump at his

shoulder and pulled a new arm out of his body. Still not satisfied, he pulled a new hand out of the arm and new fingers out of the hand. The monk I met shared many similar stories about this priest from the world.

But then, as he continued his story, the monk’s face became grave in aspect. One day the priest was asked about that Western monk Bruno, founder of the Carthusians in union with Rome. The priest rashly commented that Bruno had lived before the Great Schism, and he seemed to live a life of ascetic devotion to Christ. The monk recounted that at once an angel of the Dark One appeared to all present saying, “Aha! Now we have you, priest!” For although Bruno was born in 1030, and thus before the Schism, he died in 1101, as a heretic in union with Rome. “We have waited all these years for this moment. The grace of your priesthood is now ours, and though we cannot keep it, we consign it to vanish from you forthwith!” And then the unclean spirit fled for fear of being present among the relics of so many saints on the Holy Mountain.

Thus it was told by that ancient monk how easy it is to lose the grace of the priesthood by consorting with heretics from the West! ✿



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