

7. In Step With Sts. Patrick and Gregory of Tours

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23.07.2009 22:55 - Обновлено 12.06.2010 06:16

7. FINDING THE REAL CAUSES



There is a very interesting book from the same period of Abba Dorotheos (the sixth century) by St. Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, which is all about the life at the court of that time and religious people. There are very many interesting lives of Saints in it, as well as the lives of the kings. The kings of that time were particularly unedifying spectacles. They were constantly poisoning each other. The women were even worse.... There was one Brunehild and her sister Fredegund. They were trying to get their sons and grandsons on the throne, and what they didn't do to get them there! They were dragging people by horse's tails and killing them off, and lying and cheating and fantastic things—very uninspiring. But this bishop, St. Gregory, was there and was writing a history of this people, writing in such a way that it actually comes out very inspiring. Behind everything there is a meaning. St. Gregory is constantly on the lookout for comets, earthquakes, and such things. When a king does something wrong, there is an earthquake nearby, or if he goes and kills a person or a whole village unjustly, then there is a famine: and St. Gregory always sees that God is looking out. There is always something spiritual whenever something happens—a comet is seen, the king dies, etc. There is always a connection between what happens in the world and the moral state of the people. Even when the moral state is very bad, all the constant earthquakes and famines and everything else remind us that it is the wrong way to behave, and inspire people to behave correctly. [Next...](#)

No wadays, the historians say that this is a horribly outmoded way of looking at things, that it is very "quaint" and "naive" and unsophisticated, and that of course nobody can think like that now. They think it's very cute, in fact, to look at this after all these centuries and to see how people used to think. "But of course," they say, "we serious historians are looking for the real causes." By real causes they mean what a person ate and what it caused his feet to do and so forth. The Christian point of view, however, is that these are not the real causes, but the secondary causes. The real cause is the soul and God: whatever God is doing and whatever the soul is doing. These two things actualize the whole of history, and all the external events—what treaty was signed, or the economic reasons for the discontent of the masses, and so forth—are totally secondary. In fact, if you look at modern history, at the whole revolutionary movement, it is obvious that it is not the economics that is the governing factor, but various ideas which get into people's souls about actually building paradise on earth. Once that idea gets there, then fantastic things are done, because this is a spiritual thing. Even though it is from the devil, it is on a spiritual level, and that is where actual history is made; all the external things mean nothing.

Thus St. Gregory is actually looking at history in the correct way, because he sees that there is a first cause, which is what God does in history and how the soul reacts to it, and that the

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secondary cause is ordinary events. Therefore, whenever he sees some great event like a comet or an eclipse, he tries to give it meaning. At one point, in telling of a strange sign that was seen in the sky over Gaul, he says in all simplicity, "I have no idea what all this meant."** Of course, from the scientific point of view we know that we can predict these things, that they are caused by the shadow of the moon and so forth; but from St. Gregory's point of view, why does God choose to frighten us like this? What is the moral meaning of it? He was constantly looking above, not below. *In Step With Sts. Patrick and Gregory of Tours A Homily by Fr. Seraphim Rose of Platina*