

## WEEKLY MEDITATION

*For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb (Kontakion of the Dormition).*

In his recent book, *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (2008), Simon Critchley notes that many people who call themselves Christian live as if they have absolutely no clue about what the Christian faith teaches concerning death. Since we are celebrating the feast of the Dormition, which is a sort of extended meditation on the meaning of death in light of the Resurrection, the sting in Critchley's words can encourage us to really hear what is said in our worship and to strive to live as if we really believed our words. He writes:

"Death is the last great taboo.... The fact of death unpicks many of the truisms by which we live. A detailed survey... from 2003 claimed that fully 92 per cent of Americans believe in God, 85 per cent believe in heaven and 82 per cent believe in miracles. But the deeper truth is that such religious belief, complete with a heavenly afterlife, brings believers little solace in relation to death. The only priesthood in which people really believe is the medical profession and the purpose of their sacramental drugs and technology is to support longevity, the sole unquestioned good of contemporary Western life."

"If proof were needed that many religious believers actually do not practice what they preach, then it can be found in the ignorance of religious teachings on death, particularly Christian teaching...."

"Christianity is about nothing other than getting ready to die. It is a rigorous training for death, a kind of death in life that places little value on longevity. Christianity, in the hands of a Paul, an Augustine or a Luther, is a way of becoming reconciled to the brevity of human life and giving up the desire for wealth, worldly goods and temporal power. ***Nothing is more inimical to most people who call themselves Christians than true Christianity. This is because they are actually leading quietly desperate atheist lives bounded by a desire for longevity and a terror of annihilation...*** (*italics mine*)" (Critchley, p 247-248).

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