



IS COMMON SENSE WISDOM?

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It is often said that the modern world lacks common sense. If this is so, it must be because many people are no longer learning from life, because the source of common sense is experience of life. Indeed, this may be true, for people more and more live not in the real world, but in a virtual world, a world of artifice and so lack of experience and so of immaturity. Without experience of life there is no common sense, only ideology, or theory, or naivety, or else just plain stupidity.

Even more seriously, as our knowledge of facts has in recent times hugely increased (partly through the internet), there seems to be less wisdom. Wisdom is being replaced by mere factual knowledge and the latter guarantees no understanding, no ability to interpret facts.

For there is no correlation between knowledge of facts, with its mere technological progress, and wisdom, with its spiritual, and so moral and cultural, progress. So what is the source of wisdom?

The answer can be found in two words in Church Slavonic. Firstly, there is the word 'tselomudrie'. Although this means 'chastity', it literally means 'wisdom from wholeness'.

Therefore, in order to understand what chastity means we must go beyond the superficiality of Puritanism which understands chastity only in the outward sense. Thus, in the Orthodox wedding service we pray that the couple to be wed may preserve their chastity. Chastity is not necessarily about virginity.

For from the Gospel (as from life) we know that there are foolish virgins, just as there are wise married couples. In other words, what chastity actually means is integrity, keeping our wholeness with Christ, despite distractions, such as money or, for that matter, unrestrained (= unchaste) sexual activity.

This is what we express in Church services by the words 'let us entrust our whole life to Christ our God'. Chastity means wholeness, the integrity of our devotion to Christ.

Secondly, there is the Slavonic word 'smirennomudrie', which means wisdom from humility. This is the wisdom that angelic, pure and innocent children (still uncorrupted and non-sexualized) can have. They too are 'chaste', that is, they have wholeness and integrity, that is, they have humility.

However, such wisdom from humility can also come from accepting life's sufferings positively. For example, old soldiers, who have seen suffering and suffered, are often very humble.

We can see this also with academics. Some are humble and have wisdom, others are pompous and only have knowledge. The pompous are mocked openly or behind their backs; their level of wisdom is less than that of many children and they just seem childish and silly. Little wonder that in English the word 'pompous' goes with 'ass'. They suffer from what the apostle Paul calls a 'puffed up mind'. In fact such people, suffering from intellectual pride, become 'humility-proof'.

Thus we see children who are wise, but old people who are not wise. In today's world, the sources of wisdom, outward integrity (chastity), inward integrity, humility and suffering are all derided. Perhaps that is why there is less wisdom today. For wisdom does not come from experience of life, like common sense. Wisdom comes from inner purity. As we say: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. And Who is God? He is Supreme Wisdom, obtained only through inner purity.

Courtesy of Orthodox England.

The [photo](#) shows an old Novgorod icon of Holy Wisdom and Her Three Daughters.

