

**ESSAYS ON TRUE ORTHODOX**  
**CHRISTIANITY**

*Volume 1*  
*(Before 2010)*

Vladimir Moss

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This book consists of a collection of articles and dialogues written in the first decade of this century on various themes relating to Orthodox Christianity. Most of them reflect various controversies that have divided Orthodox Christians in this period. It is hoped that they will show that the Orthodox world-view based on the teaching of the Holy Fathers is consistent and able in principle to answer all the perplexities posed by modern life.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us! Amen.

*January 1/14, 2015.*

*St. Basil the Great.*

*East House, Beech Hill, Mayford, Woking, Surrey. GU22 0SB. United Kingdom.*

## 1. A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN AND A GENUINE SEEKER ON THE ORTHODOX FAITH

**Seeker.** What is Orthodoxy?

**Orthodox.** "Orthodoxy" means "right glory", giving the right glory to God. For there is also a wrong glorification of God, a glorification in which He takes no pleasure. "Unto the sinner God hath said: Why declarest thou My statutes and takes up My covenant in they mouth?" (Psalm 49.17 (LXX)). Thus Orthodoxy is the giving of right glory to God through the right faith and right worship.

**Seeker.** Why is right faith necessary?

**Orthodox.** We cannot glorify that which we do not know, and right faith is the true knowledge of God. Those who do not have the right faith cannot glorify God rightly. To them the true believers say, not with arrogance but in humble recognition of the treasure they have received: "Ye know not what ye worship: we know what we worship" (John 4.22).

**Seeker.** What is the Orthodox Church?

**Orthodox.** The Orthodox Church is the Church which has Orthodoxy – "the faith once given to the saints" (Jude 9) and the "worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4.23) – that is, the worship of God the Father in the Son, Who is the Truth, and in the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of truth. She is the Body of Christ, the Dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, the Ark of salvation, the True Vine. By another definition She is the Church that is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic – One in Her unity in faith and worship, Holy in Her sacraments and the multitude of holy men and women she has produced, Catholic in Her wholeness in each of Her constituent parts, Apostolic in Her origin and unbroken succession from the Apostles and in Her fidelity to the Apostolic teaching. St. Germanus of Constantinople defines the Church as "a divine house where the mystical living Sacrifice is celebrated,... and its precious stones are the divine dogmas taught by the Lord to His disciples."

**Seeker.** What bigotry! What, then, are the other Churches – the Roman Catholic and the Protestant, for example?

**Orthodox.** They are branches that have been cut off from the True Vine in the course of the centuries. The Western Church was Orthodox for the first thousand years of Christian history. But in 1054, after a long period of decline, Rome broke away from the Orthodox East and introduced a whole series of heretical teachings: the infallibility and universal jurisdiction of the Pope, the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father *and* the Son (the Filioque), indulgences, purgatory, created grace, etc. The Protestants broke away from Rome in the sixteenth century, but did not return to Orthodoxy and the True Church. Instead, they introduced still more heresies, rejecting Tradition, the Sacraments, praying for the dead, the veneration of Saints, etc.

**Seeker.** But are there not good people among the other Churches?

**Orthodox.** "Someone came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And He said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but One, that is, God. But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19.16-17).

Man in his present fallen state is not, and cannot be, good. "There is none that doeth good, no not one" (Psalm 13.4). Even the Apostles were called evil by the Lord (Luke 11.13). Man can become good only through union with the only Good One, God. And

this union is possible only through keeping the commandments, of which the first is the command to repent and be baptized. Unless a man has repented and been baptized through the One Baptism of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, thereby receiving God's goodness within himself, he cannot be said to be good in any real sense. For the "goodness" of the fallen, unbaptized man is not good in God's eyes, but "filthy rags", in the words of the Prophet Isaiah.

**Seeker.** So the Orthodox are good, and all the rest are bad? A pretty self-righteous religion, I should say, just the kind of pharisaical faith the Lord condemned!

**Orthodox.** No, we do not say that all the Orthodox are good, because it is a sad fact that many, very many Orthodox Christians do not use the goodness, the grace that is given to them in Holy Baptism, to do truly good works. And their condemnation will be greater than those who have never received Baptism. "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (II Peter 2.21). "For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgement, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the Blood of the Covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know Him Who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again: 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10.26-31).

**Seeker.** What a bleak picture you paint! The unbaptized cannot do good, and those who sin after baptism are destined for even worse condemnation!

**Orthodox.** Not quite. Although we cannot be baptized again for the remission of sins, we can receive remission of sins in other ways: through prayer and tears, through fasting and almsgiving, above all through the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion. God does not reject those who repent with all their heart. As David says: "A heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise" (Psalms 50.17).

**Seeker.** But is not such repentance possible for all men? Did not David repent in the Psalm you have cited, and receive forgiveness from God?

**Orthodox.** Yes, but salvation does not consist only in the forgiveness of sins, but also in acquiring holiness, that holiness "without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12.14), that holiness which is given only in the sacraments of the Church and which can be lost unless we conduct an unremitting ascetic struggle against sin. Moreover, *original sin* can only be remitted in the baptismal font.

**Seeker.** So not even David was saved?

**Orthodox.** Not even David was saved before the Coming of Christ. Even the Patriarch Jacob anticipated going to Hades (Sheol) after his death together with his righteous son Joseph: "I shall go mourning down to my son in Hades" (Genesis 37.35). For "all these [Old Testament righteous], though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us [the New Testament Christians], that apart from us [outside the New Testament Church] they should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11.39-40).

**Seeker.** What is original sin?

**Orthodox.** A certain contagion that we receive by inheritance through our parents from Adam, who committed *the* original sin.

**Seeker.** How can we be responsible for Adam's sin?

**Orthodox.** We are not *responsible* for it, but we are *defiled* by it.

**Seeker.** Even children?

**Orthodox.** Even children. For "even from the womb, sinners are estranged" (Psalm 57.3). And as Job says: "Who shall be pure from uncleanness? Not even one, even if his life should be but one day upon the earth" (Job 14.4 (LXX)).<sup>1</sup> Again, St. Gregory of Nyssa writes: "Evil was mixed with our nature from the beginning... through those who by their disobedience introduced the disease. Just as in the natural propagation of the species each animal engenders its like, so man is born from man, a being subject to passions from a being subject to passions, a sinner from a sinner. Thus sin takes its rise in us as we are born; it grows with us and keep us company till life's term".<sup>2</sup> That is why the Church has from the beginning practiced infant baptism "for the remission of sins".

**Seeker.** It still seems unfair to me that anyone, let alone tiny children, should suffer for someone else's sin.

**Orthodox.** God's justice is not our justice. And remember: if it is unfair that we should suffer because of Adam's sin, it is no less unfair that we should be redeemed because of Christ's virtue. The two "injustices" are symmetrical and cancel each other out: "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5.19).

**Seeker.** So it is impossible to be good outside the Church, because sin and the roots of sin are extirpated only in the Church?

**Orthodox.** More than that: only in the Church can sin be *known*. For only to the Church has the will of God been made known in its fullness. And if we do not know what the will of God is, we cannot repent properly of our transgression of His will. The Church is the only hospital in which we receive both the correct diagnosis of the disease and complete healing from it.

**Seeker.** Alright. But how, then, are miracles done outside the Church, and even in non-Christian religions?

**Orthodox.** Miracles - if they are truly from God, and not from the evil one - are a proof, not (or not necessarily) of the goodness of the human miracle-worker, but of the mercy of God.

**Seeker.** So if a Catholic or an Anglican or a Hindu works a miracle, that is nothing, whereas if an Orthodox does it, it's great!

**Orthodox.** I didn't say that. What I said was that the working of a miracle, if it is of God, tells us first of all that God is merciful. Whether it also proves the goodness of the human miracle-worker (or of the recipient of the miracle) is quite another question, which requires careful examination.

I do not deny that true miracles can take place outside the Church. After all, God "maketh His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5.45). And when St. John forbade a man who was casting out demons in Christ's name "because he followeth not us", Christ did not approve of his action. "Forbid him not," he said; "for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name that can lightly speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is on our side" (Mark 9.38-40).

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<sup>1</sup> The Massoretic text says: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one."

<sup>2</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 6, PG. 44, 1273.

On the other hand, the Lord also said: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name cast out demons? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you, Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity!" (Matthew 7.22-23). So it is possible to work a miracle in Christ's name, and yet be an evil man. And God may work the miracle through the evil man, not in order to testify to the man's (non-existent) goodness, but purely out of compassion for the miracle's recipient. After all, Judas worked miracles – but St. John the Baptist, the greatest born of woman, worked no miracles...

Nor must we forget that Christian-looking miracles and prophecies can be done through the evil one. Thus a girl spoke the truth about the Apostle Paul, exhorting people to follow him – but she spoke through a pythonic spirit which Paul exorcised (Acts 16.16-18). I believe that the vast majority of miracles worked in pagan religions such as Hinduism are from the evil one; for "all the gods of the heathen are demons" (Psalms 95.5).

**Seeker.** If even miracle-workers can be of the evil one, who can be saved?

**Orthodox.** One must always distinguish between the possession of spiritual gifts and salvation. "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you;" said the Lord, "but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10.20). "If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (I Corinthians 13.2).

**Seeker.** Ah now that's where I agree with you! Love is the essential mark of the Christian. And I have to say that's just what I find distinctly lacking in your exposition. Such pride to think that you Orthodox, and you alone, belong to the True Church! And such hatred to think that everyone except you is going to be damned!

**Orthodox.** But I didn't say that!

**Seeker.** You did!

**Orthodox.** I said that the Church of Christ, by which I mean exclusively the Orthodox Church, is the only Ark of salvation. But I did not say that all those in the Ark will be saved, for they may cast themselves out of it by their evil deeds. And I did not say that those who are swimming towards the Ark but who were cut off from entering it before their death, cannot be saved. Who knows whether the Sovereign God, Who knows the hearts of all men, may not choose to stretch out His hand to those who, through ignorance or adverse circumstances, were not able to enter the Ark before the darkness of death descended upon them, but who in their hearts and minds were striving for the truth? "Charity hopeth all things" (I Corinthians 13.7).

**Seeker.** [ironically] How charitable of you! But this is more a pious hope than an article of faith for you, isn't it?

**Orthodox.** Of course. From the point of dogmatic faith, we can and must assert that, as St. Cyprian of Carthage said, "there is no salvation outside the Church".<sup>3</sup> For the Lord Himself says, with great emphasis: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3.5). And again: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, unless you eat of the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, you have no life in you" (John 6.53). And the Apostle Peter says: "If the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?" (I Peter 4.18).

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<sup>3</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church*.

Moreover, if we, arrogantly presuming to be more “merciful” than the All-Merciful Lord Himself, take it upon ourselves to “absolve” those living in false religions or heresies, we sin not only against dogmatic faith, but also against love. For then we make ourselves guilty of leading them further into error by giving them the false hope that they can stay in their falsehood without danger to their immortal souls. We take away from them the fear of God and the spur to search out the truth, which alone can save them.

**Seeker.** And yet you spoke earlier about “ignorance and adverse circumstances”. Surely God takes that into account!

**Orthodox.** Of course He does. But “taking into account” is not the same as “absolving of all guilt”. Remember the parable of the negligent servants: “That servant who knew His master’s will, but did not make ready or act according to His will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating” (Luke 12.47-48). In other words, ignorance of the Lord’s will and of His truth can mitigate His sentence, but it cannot remove it altogether.

**Seeker.** Why? Did not the same Lord say: “If ye were blind, ye would have no sin” (John 9.41)?

**Orthodox.** Because we are never *totally* blind. Being made in the image of God, we always have some access to that “Light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1.9). Thus the Apostle Paul says plainly that pagans who do not believe in the One Creator of the universe are “without excuse”; “for what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and divinity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (Romans 1.19-20). God “did not leave Himself without witness” even among the pagans, “for He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14.17). Moreover, as the Wisdom of Solomon declares, any man with a conscience knows instinctively that the sacrifice of children is evil. That is why some of the greatest Christians, such as St. Barbara, rejected paganism even without the help of a Christian preacher.

The Holy Fathers say that every man has creation outside him and conscience within to lead him away from falsehood and towards the Church, which is the third great witness to the truth, “the pillar and ground of the truth”, as St. Paul calls it (I Timothy 3.15). Creation and conscience alone cannot reveal the whole truth to him; but if he follows that partial revelation which creation and conscience provide, God will help him to find the fullness of truth in the Church. Nor is there any situation in life, however remote from, and opposed to, the Church, from which the Lord, Who wishes that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, cannot rescue the genuine seeker.

**Seeker.** But what if the pagan or the heretic has never met the truth in the Church, or has met only very sinful or ignorant representatives of the Church? Can he not then be said to be blind and ignorant, and therefore not sinning?

**Orthodox.** Everything depends on the nature and degree of the ignorance. There is voluntary ignorance and involuntary ignorance. If there were not such a thing as involuntary ignorance, the Lord would not have said on the Cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23.34). And His prayer was answered, for on the Day of Pentecost, Peter called on the Jews to repent, saying, “I know that you acted in ignorance” (Acts 3.17), after which thousands repented and were

baptized. Again, the Apostle Paul “received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief” (I Timothy 1.13). But note that all these people responded to the truth when it was presented to them. This showed that their ignorance had been involuntary, and therefore excusable. On the other hand, there is a hardness of heart that refuses to respond to the signs God gives of His truth, the signs from without and the promptings from within. This is *voluntary* ignorance. People who are hardened in this way do not know the truth because they do not *want* to know it. This stubborn refusal to accept the truth is what the Lord calls “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 12.32), which will not be forgiven in this world or the next.

**Seeker.** Why can it not be forgiven?

**Orthodox.** Because forgiveness is given only to the penitent, and penitence is a recognition of the truth about oneself. However, if a man refuses to face the truth, and actively fights against it in his soul, he cannot repent, and so cannot be forgiven. In fighting against truth, he is fighting against the Holy Spirit of truth, Who leads into all truth (John 16.13). It is possible for a man to be sincerely mistaken about Christ for a while, and this can be forgiven him, as it was forgiven to the Apostle Paul. But if such ignorance is compounded by a rejection of the promptings to truth placed in the soul by the Spirit of truth, there is no hope. So the pagan who stubbornly remains in His paganism in spite of the evidence of creation and conscience, and the heretic who stubbornly remains in his heresy in spite of the teaching of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, are both blaspheming against the Spirit of truth, and cannot be saved.

**Seeker.** So is there really no hope for the heretic?

**Orthodox.** While there is life there is hope. And there are many examples of people who have remained in heresy all their lives but have been converted to the truth just before their death. There is no hope only for those who do not love the truth. Such people the Lord will not lead to His truth, because they do not desire it. Rather, He will allow them to be deceived by the Antichrist “because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sendeth upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thessalonians 2.10-12).

**Seeker.** Alright. But I am still not convinced that only your Church is the True Church. In fact, I am not happy with the concept of “the One True Church” in general. It smacks of bigotry and intolerance to me.

**Orthodox.** You know, tolerance is not a Christian virtue. Love is.

**Seeker.** You amaze me! Is not tolerance a form of love? And is not all hatred forbidden for the Christian?

**Orthodox.** No. The Lord our God is a zealous God, and He expects zeal from us – zeal for the good, and hatred for the evil. “Ye that love the Lord, see to it that ye hate evil” (Psalm 96.11). What He hates most of all is lukewarmness: “I know your works: ye are neither cold nor hot. Would that ye were cold or hot! So, because ye are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth... So be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3.15-16, 19). St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote: “The Lawgiver of our life has enjoined upon us one single hatred. I mean that of the serpent, for no other purpose has He bidden us exercise this faculty of hatred, but as a weapon against wickedness.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter XVII to Eustathia, Ambrosia and Basilissa*.

**Seeker.** But that still means we are not allowed to hate human beings. Are we not meant to hate the sin and love the sinner? This is the kind of teaching that leads to burning heretics at the stake!

**Orthodox.** No. Neither St. Gregory nor any other saint of the Orthodox Church that I know of advocated persecuting people for their religious convictions. Christian love abhors using violence as a means of persuading people for the simple reason that such “persuasion” may change the movement of a person’s body or tongue, but never of his heart. But it does not go to the other extreme and ceases trying to persuade them by reasoned argument. Nor, if they persist in their false teachings, does it hold back from protecting others from their influence! If we love the sinner and hate his sin, then we must do everything in our power both to deliver him from that sin and protect others from being contaminated by it.

**Seeker.** I think this is the kind of bigotry that comes from believing that one is in “the One True Church”. It is the source of religious persecution, the Inquisition, etc.

**Orthodox.** The cause of religious persecution is not the claim to possess the truth, which all rational people who have thought out their beliefs claim, but human passions.

**Seeker.** What about Ivan the Terrible? What about most of the Orthodox emperors? Did they not discriminate against heresy?

**Orthodox.** Ivan was excommunicated by the Church, and was rather a persecutor of the Orthodox than an instrument of their persecuting others. As for the emperors’ discriminating against heresy, I am all in favour of that. It is irrational to place truth and falsehood on an equal footing. St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves, one of the greatest saints who ever lived, said that by honouring others’ faiths we dishonour our own. Do our schools give equal honour to the theories of Ptolemy and Newton? Of course not!

**Seeker.** But that’s different! There we’re talking about scientific facts!

**Orthodox.** I don’t see any difference in principle. Our principle is: speak the truth at all times, reject falsehood at all times. If scientists do that in their sphere, where there is no certainty and “facts” are constantly being disputed by later investigators, why should we not do it in the incomparably higher and more important sphere of religious faith, whose incontrovertible facts have been communicated to us by the Truth Himself? For as St. Paul says about the Gospel: “I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ” ([Galatians 1.12](#)).

**Seeker.** And if everyone claims to have received a revelation from God?

**Orthodox.** Then we must patiently investigate who is telling the truth and who has been deceived by “the father of lies”. Just as scientists have methods for comparing different hypotheses and determining which (if any) is the correct one, so do we Orthodox Christians have methods of determining what is truth and what is falsehood in the religious sphere. And just as scientists will never accept that there can be more than one true explanation of an empirical phenomenon, so we will never accept that there can be more than one religious truth.

**Seeker.** Cannot different religious faiths each reveal part of the truth?

**Orthodox.** No. The Truth is One, and has been revealed to us by the Truth Himself: “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism” ([Ephesians 4.4](#)).

**Seeker.** So there is no truth at all in any of the non-Christian religions?

**Orthodox.** I didn’t say that. Satan likes to appear as an angel of light ([II Corinthians 11.14](#)); he “mixes truth with unrighteousness” ([Romans 1.18](#)). Thus with the bait of

such fair-seeming ideals as “love”, “peace” and “freedom”, which correctly interpreted are indeed goods from God, he lures them into an abyss of falsehood. There is only one religion which contains “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”. All the others, being parasitical on the One Truth, contain partial truths, but make even these partial truths false by association with falsehood, just as even a small dose of poison in a wholesome loaf makes the whole loaf poisonous.

**Seeker.** So there are partial truths in other religions, but no salvation?

**Orthodox.** Right. For as St. Peter said of Christ: “There is salvation in none other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4.12).

**Seeker.** What about the Muslims and the Jews? Do they not believe in the same God as we – the God of Abraham, their common ancestor?

**Orthodox.** The Lord said to the Jews: “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (John 8.39). And St. Paul said: “Know ye therefore that they which are of the faith” – that is, the faith in Christ – “are the children of Abraham” (Galatians 3.7). The God of Abraham is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ; Abraham himself looked forward to the Coming of Christ in the flesh – “Abraham saw My day and was glad” (John 8.56).

**Seeker.** Alright. But do not the Jews and Muslims also believe in the God of the Old Testament, Jehovah, Who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?

**Orthodox.** We believe that the great majority of the appearances of God in the Old Testament were appearances of the Son, not of God the Father. Contrary to the belief of the Jehovah’s witnesses, the “Jehovah” of the Old Testament is Christ Himself. Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration to show that it is He Who appeared to them in the cloud and the fire and the still, small voice; it is He Who is the God of the Law and the Prophets.

**Seeker.** But do not the Muslims believe in Christ after their fashion?

**Orthodox.** They believe that He is a prophet who is coming again to judge the world. But they do not believe in His Divinity, nor in His Cross and Resurrection – the central dogmas of our Faith. Remember that since God is a Trinity of Persons, it is impossible rightly to believe in One of the Persons and not in the Others. For “whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father” (I John 2.23).

Moreover, the Muslims believe in the false prophet Mohammed, who contradicts Christ’s teaching in many respects. For example, the Muslims say that a man can have four wives, but Christ – only one. If they truly believed in Christ, they would not follow Mohammed’s teaching instead of Christ’s.

**Seeker.** But the Jews are the chosen people, are they not?

**Orthodox.** They *were* the chosen people, but then God rejected them for their unbelief and scattered them across the face of the earth, choosing the believing Gentiles in their place.

**Seeker.** But the religion of the Old Testament was the true religion, was it not? And insofar as they practise that religion, they are true believers, are they not?

**Orthodox.** The religion of the Old Testament was a true foreshadowing of, and preparation for, the full revelation of the Truth in Jesus Christ. But once the fullness of the Truth has appeared, it is impious to remain with the shadow; indeed, to mistake the shadow of the Truth for the Truth Himself is a grievous delusion. In any case, the Jews do not practise the Old Testament religion.

**Seeker.** What are you talking about?! Of course they do!

**Orthodox.** Since the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., it has been impossible for the Jews to practise the main commandment of their religion, which was to worship God with sacrifices in the Temple three times a year – at Pascha, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. Thus has the prophecy of the Prophet Hosea been fulfilled: “The children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince or sacrifice” (Hosea 3.4).

**Seeker.** What is their present religion then?

**Orthodox.** Not the religion of the Old Testament, but the religion of the Pharisees, which Christ rejected as being merely “the traditions of men”. Its relationship to the Old Testament is tenuous. Its real holy book is not the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, but the Talmud, a collection of the teachings of the Pharisees.

**Seeker.** And what does that teach?

**Orthodox.** The most extreme hatred of Christ and Christians. Not only does the Talmud deny the Divinity and Resurrection of Christ: it reviles Him as a sorcerer and a bastard, the son of a Roman soldier called Panthera and an unclean woman. Moreover, it teaches a double standard of morality: one for fellow Jews, quite another for the goyim, the Gentiles, who are not even accorded the dignity of fully human beings.

**Seeker.** But is this not anti-semitism?

**Orthodox.** Anti-semitism as a racist attitude of hatred for all Jews as such is of course contrary to the Christian Gospel. Nor can Christians approve of those cruelties that have been perpetrated against the Jews (not the discrimination against their teaching, but the physical violence against their persons) down the centuries. But this in no way implies that Christians must participate in the campaign of whitewashing the Jews that has been continuing for nearly a century in both religious and non-religious circles. As the Gospels clearly indicate, the Jews killed Christ and brought His Blood upon themselves and upon their children. Nor has their hatred of Christ and Christians lessened down the centuries: anti-semitism is in large measure the reaction of Christians and Gentiles to the anti-Gentilism and anti-Christianity of the Talmud, which approves of all manner of crimes against Gentiles.

**Seeker.** But must we not love the Jews, even if they are our enemies?

**Orthodox.** Indeed, we must love our enemies and pray for them, as Christ commanded. In particular, we must pray that they will be converted and return to Christ, as St. Paul prophesied would happen in the last times. “For if the casting away of them [the Jews] be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” (Romans 11.15).

**Seeker.** What you say makes sense, but I have one fundamental objection to everything you say.

**Orthodox.** What is that?

**Seeker.** You claim that this is Orthodoxy, but I know that it is not.

**Orthodox.** What do you mean?

**Seeker.** Your hierarchs participate in the ecumenical movement, which is based on principles completely contrary to the Orthodoxy you preach.

**Orthodox.** Actually, my hierarchs do not participate in the ecumenical movement. However, your mistake is understandable, because those large organizations and patriarchates which are associated in the public eye with Orthodoxy, such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate, do take part in the ecumenical

movement and even pray with the leaders of other non-Christian religions. But we have no communion with them, because they have betrayed Orthodoxy.

**Seeker.** How can the leaders of Orthodoxy be said to have betrayed Orthodoxy?! It's like saying that the Pope has betrayed Catholicism!

**Orthodox.** But he did! It was the Popes who in the second half of the eleventh century betrayed Orthodox Catholicism and the Orthodox Catholic Church, making it - or rather, that part of it which submitted to them - into something quite different: the *Roman* (pseudo-) Catholic Church. In the same way, in the twentieth century, it is the leaders of the official Orthodox Churches who have betrayed Orthodoxy, making it into something quite different: "World Orthodoxy" or "Ecumenist Orthodoxy".

You must remember that just as "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly" (Romans 2.28), but only he who belongs to "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6.16), that is, the Church of Christ, so he is not an Orthodox Christian who is one outwardly, but only he who confesses his Orthodoxy in word and deed. Fortunately, there are still Orthodox Christians who are so in truth, and not merely in appearance, and who have separated from the prevailing apostasy. And these, however few they are or will become, remain that Church against which "the gates of hell will not prevail" (Matthew 16.18), and of whom the Lord of the Church said: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12.32).

**Seeker.** Well, I am relieved to hear that. For I was convinced by your words, but was beginning to think that nobody practised that truth which I have come to believe in. And now I ask you: when you have instructed me in the true faith, receive me into the Church through Holy Baptism.

**Orthodox.** If you believe what I have said, then you already have the true faith, dear brother! If you believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that the Orthodox Church contains the fullness of the truth revealed by Him without any admixture of error, then there is nothing to prevent you from being baptized. And do not fear: however small the Church on earth becomes, the Church in heaven is growing all the time, until the very end of the world. For "you have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable Angels in festal gathering, and to the Assembly of the Firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to a Judge Who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the sprinkled Blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel..." (Hebrews 12.22-24).

*May 21 / June 3, 2004; revised December 3/16, 2013.*

## 2. CATHOLIC AND ORTHODOX ECUMENISM

### **Introduction. The Papal Initiative**

On Forgiveness Sunday, 2000, according to the Orthodox Church calendar, the Pope of Rome issued an appeal for pardon for the sins of Catholics over the ages. "As the successor of Peter," he writes in his Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Incarnationis Mysterium, "I ask that in this year of mercy the Church, strong in the holiness which she receives from her Lord, should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters.... Christians are invited to acknowledge, before God and before those offended by their actions, the faults which they have committed... Let them do so without seeking anything in return... All of us, though not personally responsible and without encroaching on the judgement of God, who alone knows every heart, bear the burden of the errors and faults of those who have gone before us." Among the specific acts repented of by the Pope are the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. He also admitted that the Catholics had been unjust to ethnic and religious minorities, especially the Jews, women and natives of the Third World.

How are we Orthodox Christians to react to this declaration? Is it simply a political manoeuvre on the part of the world's chief heretic, or is something deeper and more sincere contained in it? Can we refuse forgiveness to him who asks us for it? *Must* we forgive? These are some of the questions elicited by this declaration by the Pope.

### **1. Our Sins and the Sins of our Fathers**

First of all, it is necessary to say that if we are talking about personal sins committed against us personally, then we must not only forgive him who asks us for forgiveness, whoever he might be and whatever faith he might confess, but we must forgive him before he asks for forgiveness: the Christian must immediately and "from the heart" forgive every one who has offended him. For "if you will not forgive men their sins," said the Lord, "then your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6.15).

But can we forgive personal sins *not* committed against ourselves personally, but against our ancestors? Can, for example, an Orthodox Englishman forgive the Pope blessing the Norman invasion of England in 1066, which resulted in the destruction of 20% of her population and the complete annihilation of English Orthodox culture? Can an Orthodox Greek forgive the destruction of Constantinople during the fourth crusade in 1204? Can an Orthodox Russian forgive the persecution of the Orthodox by the Catholics in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries or the support given by the Pope to the revolution of 1917? Can an Orthodox Serb forgive the deaths of 750,000 Serbs at the hands of Catholic persecutors in Croatia in 1941?

This is a more complicated question, which demands a more detailed reply. On the one hand, insofar as it was our ancestors who perished first of all, it is up to them to forgive, not to us. And if amidst those who suffered there were some who died without forgiving their enemies, we can only pray for the forgiveness both of them and of their persecutors.

On the other hand, there is a definite sense in which we, being bound to our ancestors by bonds not only of blood but also of spiritual kinship, suffer together with them even to the present day. If the sins of the fathers affect their children, then the same applies to their sufferings and offences: "The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jeremiah 31.29). In this sense, actions directed at the redemption of the guilt on the part of the heirs of the persecutors can significantly lighten the bitterness felt by the descendants of those who suffered.

But, leaving psychological considerations to one side, can we demand repentance for sins committed against our ancestors? The answer to this question depends on the answer to the following: what is the motive eliciting this demand for repentance? If it is a desire to humiliate an opponent or in some way take revenge on him, then the answer will be negative, for "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12.19).

But if we are moved by love for justice, then the answer must be positive, for the love of justice is natural for man, created as he is in the image of the righteous God. Indeed, according to St. John of the Ladder, "God is called love, *and also justice*."<sup>5</sup> Thus the desire for justice, if it is not mixed with any sinful passion, is good and worthy of honour. This is evident from the words which may at first sight appear a bloodthirsty cry from the souls under the altar depicted in the Apocalypse: How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you not judge and be avenged for our blood on those living on the earth?" (Revelation 6.10). For "they cry out these words," according to the English Orthodox Father, the Venerable Bede, "not out of hatred for enemies, but out of love of justice".<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, if the heirs of the persecutors come to recognize the sins of their fathers, then they thereby come closer to the truth and to their own salvation. And this is precisely the aspect that should interest Orthodox Christians first of all in the Pope's declaration. Are we witnessing the return, albeit partial and not completely conscious, of the western papist church to the faith of our fathers?

## 2. The Sins of the Papacy

A sceptical, even cynical attitude to this is understandable. The Pope remains a potential threat to the salvation of millions of Orthodox Christians, having recently added to his many doctrinal sins the heresy of ecumenism. He promised his church a jubilee gift for the year 2000: reunion with the Orthodox, a gift which for the Orthodox would signify spiritual death and which, however painful it is to say it, the overwhelming majority of them have already accepted.

Moreover, the Pope's repentance excludes that which is most important for the Orthodox: repentance not so much for the personal sins of the Roman Catholics as for the heresies of Roman Catholicism.

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<sup>5</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

<sup>6</sup> St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

The Greek Old Calendarist Archimandrite Gregory of Dormition Skete, Colorado, U.S.A. has expounded those thoughts that in his opinion would constitute a more correct repentance on the part of the Pope:

“I, Pope John-Paul, would like to ask the forgiveness of the whole world for spreading my evil and destructive doctrine, which is called Roman Catholicism.

“Among the heresies I would like to renounce is the heresy of the Filioque, which destroys the theological understanding of the Trinity. I would also like to renounce the following heresies:

“our diabolical teaching on purgatory, which is similar to the teaching of Origen;

“the teaching on the immaculate conception which we have thought up;

“our use of statues, like the pagans and idol-worshippers;

“the ban on our clergy entering into marriage;

“our introduction of the papist calendar;

“our distortion of all the sacraments which we accepted when we were Orthodox – for example, our heretical practice of baptism by sprinkling, which is like the practice of the Protestants, and our use of unleavened bread, which is like the Jews;

“our teaching that I the Pope am infallible, a teaching that forms the foundation of all the above-mentioned sins, which thereby witness to the fact that I am not infallible.

“I would also like to repent of the fact that I have drawn the Orthodox patriarchs of our century into the new heresy of ecumenism.

“From all the above examples it is evident that I have fallen away from True Christianity, and therefore both my actions and those of my predecessors are like the actions of the pagans, like whom I in the name of ‘Christianity’ killed, burned and destroyed everything that I could and everyone that I could for the sake of spreading my false teachings.

“The list of such evil works includes the Inquisition, when innocent people were burned at the pillar of shame, which witnesses to my unchristian attitude to people; and the crusades, which ravaged the capital of Orthodox Byzantium, Constantinople; the invasion and conquest of America, as a result of which with my blessing the two main indigenous civilizations there were annihilated; the murder by dismemberment of the holy Martyr Peter the Aleut, an Orthodox Christian who suffered in San Francisco at the hands of my Jesuit monks because he did not want to convert to my disgusting faith; and in our century, my predecessor Pius XII’s blessing of forcible conversion in Croatia, during which 800,000 Orthodox were killed because they did not want to convert and be subject to my papal authority.

“From all the above it follows that I am in a wretched condition, and I intend to ask forgiveness. I intend to renounce this heretical teaching and accept Orthodox baptism...”

Approximately some such list of sins would be demanded from the Pope if his request for forgiveness were to correspond to the Orthodox world-view. But insofar as the present declaration of the Pope is far from this, it is difficult to quarrel with those who see in this act a purely political trap, yet another move in the ecumenical game, a new tactic in the papacy’s age-old attempts to draw the Orthodox into a false union with itself.

Some may object: but have not Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople already forgiven each other by means of the lifting of the anathemas in 1965? If the Pope and the Patriarch no longer have anything against each other, why should we renew the quarrel between them? Can an act of mutual lifting of anathemas really be “invalid”, when anathematising someone is so obviously an act of hatred?

No: an anathematisation of that which is truly false is an act of *love*, not hatred. How can it be otherwise when the Apostle Paul himself anathematises (I Corinthians 16.22, Galatians 1.8,9), and when the Church herself in her Seven Ecumenical Councils and on the Sunday of Orthodoxy anathematises all heretics?

It is necessary at this point to return to the distinction between personal sins and sins against the faith. We have the right and the duty to forgive personal sins committed against us, even if the offender does not ask for forgiveness. And *if* the original hurling of the anathemas in 1054 was caused by purely personal sins and passions, then the meeting of the hierarchs some 900 years later, could, if not remove that original sin, at any rate help to remove any residual bitterness passed down the generations. And it seems that this is how the hierarchs understood the act. Thus the epistle sent by the Pope to the Patriarch expressed his regret that the Church of Constantinople had been *offended* by the papal legates in 1054: “We deeply regret this, and all excommunications and anathemas that the legates placed upon Patriarch Michael Cerularius and upon the Holy Church of Constantinople we declare to be null and void”.

But if the “offence” is not (primarily, at any rate) a personal one, but a sin against the faith, then it can be healed only by repentance specifically for that *dogmatic* sin on the part of the sinner. But of such repentance there was not a trace in the meeting in 1965: dogmatic differences, the original and true cause of the schism, came into the discussion not at all. And yet sins against the faith remain unforgiven until the sinner has completely renounced them. For a sin against the faith is primarily a sin, not against man, but against God, since it is in essence blasphemy, an affirmation that God is a liar in His witness about Himself. In relation to such sins the words of David are especially applicable: “Against *Thee only* have I sinned” (Psalms 50.4). And if the heretic sins against God alone, then only God can forgive him. Or the Church of God, to which God has given the power to bind and to loose, that is, to discern whether a sinner has truly repented of his sin. That is why we, as individuals, cannot forgive a heretic his

heresy, but only the Church - through baptism and anathematisation of his heresies if he was not a member of the Church in the first place, or confession if he is already baptised.

As regards anathemas against heresies, these can never be removed. For since God and His truth does not change, the sentence against that which contradicts this truth is also immutable. People can change; they can change from confessing heresy to confessing the truth; and so they can change from being under anathema to being freed from anathema. But the heresy itself remains under anathema unto the ages of ages.

### 3. False Forgiveness and Ecumenism

It is significant that the papists began for the first time to ask for forgiveness from their "separated brethren" (the Orthodox), from the Jews and from others only when they accepted the heresy of ecumenism during the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. This permits us to suppose that there is a close link between ecumenism and the false understanding of forgiveness.

It is often said that the essence of ecumenism consists not in some particular heretical teaching, but in a false understanding of heresy in general. One reviewer of a book on the Anglican Reformation in *Church Times* remarked that the real heresy consists in the idea that there exists such a thing as heresy! In other words, heresy does not exist! But if heresy does not exist, then neither does truth. For heresy is simply the denial of a particular truth about God.

The strange thing is that the same ecumenists who are so indifferent to religious truth and falsehood, even denying that the latter exists, can be extremely zealous for what they consider to be the truth in other, non-theological matters. Only when the matter concerns Divine truth do they suddenly become amazingly "tolerant", thereby confirming the truth of the apostolic words: "they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (II Thessalonians 2.10).

This is particularly obvious in the case of Patriarch Athenagoras - the man who supposedly "lifted the anathemas" against the papacy in 1965. Fr. Basil Lourié writes : "Athenagoras ... did not consider [the Latins] to be heretics. But his denial of their hereticalness was not a manifestation of his special love for them: Athenagoras did not recognize the existence of heresy in general! Having heard of a certain man who saw heresies everywhere, Athenagoras said: 'I don't see them anywhere! I see only truths, partial, reduced, sometimes out of place...'"<sup>7</sup>

And so we can define the essence of ecumenism as indifference to religious truth, or, in its extreme manifestations, the absence of faith in the existence of objective truth generally. In the words of Metropolitan Philaret of New York in his *Sorrowful Epistle to Patriarch Athenagoras*, ecumenism "places a sign of equality between error and

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<sup>7</sup> Lourié, "Ekklesiologia otstupaiuschej armii (The Ecclesiology of a Retreating Army)", *Vertograd-*Inform**, № 3, January, 1999, p. 24 (English edition).

truth". This is the same indifference that was manifested by Pontius Pilate, when, standing in front of Truth Incarnate, he wearily asked: "What is truth?" - and would not stay for an answer...

But this is only one side of the question. Ecumenism also displays a striking indifference to justice. Again, the ecumenists, like everyone else, can be zealous in relation to justice in non-theological, especially political, matters - for example, the injustice of Third World debt or racism or sexism or some other form of discrimination. Moreover, they do not fear to accuse God Himself of injustice, as when the Anglican Bishop of Durham (Northern England) declared that if God permitted Auschwitz, he was a devil... But when we are talking about injustices committed in relation to Christians because they are Christians - for example, the persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union, - then they become suddenly silent. Here again we see a similarity with Pilate, who washed his hands after committing the greatest of all injustices, while claiming to carry out the duties of an impartial judge.

The most important value for the ecumenist is peace - not peace with God or with the true people of God, but peace with the world and the rulers of this world. And if truth and justice have to be sacrificed for the sake of this worldly peace, then so be it. Thus Pilate betrayed Truth and Justice for the sake of peace with, and out of fear of, the Jews. And thus do the present-day leaders of the ecumenical movement, for fear of the non-ecumenical confessions (primarily, Judaism and Islam), strive first of all to establish peace amongst themselves so as to be able to present a united front in their pursuit of a general peace with - or rather, capitulation before - their enemies, whom they fear because of their secular power. But "there have they feared where there is no fear" (Psalm 13.6); for it is not fitting to fear the enemies of God, friendship with whom is enmity with God (James 4.4), Whom alone they have to fear as being able "to destroy both soul and body in gehenna" (Matthew 10.28).

Where there is no consciousness of sin, or a distorted understanding of sin, a request for forgiveness is seen to be in essence a request for something else - perhaps the conclusion of a non-aggression pact, or an agreement on cooperation for the attainment of some common goal. "And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves" (Luke 23.12). Why? Because their mutual rivalry was less important than their mutual desire to placate the Jewish religious establishment, to whom Christ was to be thrown like meat to a hungry animal. In the same way the dogmatic differences between the Pope of Rome and the "Orthodox" ecumenists are less important to them than their retention of a place at the table of the world's rulers - who are once again, as in the time of Christ, mainly Jewish.

#### **4. Orthodox Herods and Catholic Pilates**

Let us continue for a time to draw out the parallels between Pilate and Herod, on the one hand, and Catholic and Orthodox ecumenism, on the other.

Were Pilate and Herod equally guilty in the eyes of God? Not at all. Christ spoke with Pilate, but refused to speak to Herod (Luke 23.9). Herod mocked Christ and

arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, thereby mocking His assertion that he was the king of the Jews (Luke 23.11). But Pilate wanted to know more about Christ's claims to a kingdom, and, bringing Him out to the Jews, said, not without some genuine admiration: "Behold your King!" (John 19.14). And again he asked, not without some genuine fear: "Shall I crucify your King?" (John 19.15). Moreover, overcoming for once his fear of the Jews, he refused to remove the inscription on the Cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". We have no evidence that Herod had any gnawings of conscience in handing over Christ, Who was in Herod's jurisdiction and Whom he could have released. But Pilate found no fault in Him and was searching for a way of releasing Him. To the end he retained a definite consciousness of his sin, and God had given him a further impulse to stand firm through his wife's exhortation. And even after he had betrayed Him, his guilty conscience revealed itself in his washing his hands and saying: "I am innocent of the blood of this Righteous Man" (Matthew 27.24).

Just as Herod's sin was greater than Pilate's, so the crime of the Orthodox ecumenists is greater than that of the Catholic ecumenists. This assertion may shock many Orthodox zealots who are accustomed to see in Catholicism and the apostate West the root of all evil. But after some thought it becomes obvious that, in accordance with the principle: "to whom much is given, much is required", greater responsibility is undoubtedly borne by those to whom the treasures of Orthodox Tradition have been entrusted than by those who have never been Orthodox.

The Orthodox ecumenists are like the Pharisees, who, having the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, shut up that Kingdom against men; for they neither go in themselves, nor suffer those that are entering to go in (Matthew 23.13). One of the most shameful documents in the history of Christianity is the resolution accepted by the heads of the Local Orthodox Churches in Constantinople on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, 1992. On that day the Orthodox triumphantly declare about their faith: "This is the Apostolic Faith! This is the Orthodox Faith! This is the Faith that supports the world!", and anathematize all the heresies, including those of the Catholics and Protestants. And yet in their 1992 council these so-called Orthodox leaders officially renounced proselytism among the heretical Christians of the West! It was as if they said to the westerners "Yes, ours is the Apostolic Faith, and yes, we have just anathematized your heresies. But these are only words. The world does not need our faith. And the world need not fear our anathematisms. Remain where you are. Remain in your heresy. We will not try and convert you."

Nine years later, the Moscow Patriarchate's Metropolitan Cyril (Gundiaev) of Smolensk put it as follows: "In practice we forbid our priests to seek to convert people. Of course it happens that people arrive and say: 'You know, I would like, simply out of my own convictions, to become Orthodox.' 'Well, please do.' But there is no strategy to convert people."<sup>8</sup>

And this at a time when the Christians of the West are undergoing the deepest crisis in their history, when thousands of Western Christians, and especially Catholics, are

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<sup>8</sup> Gundiaev, interview conducted by Alexis Venediktov, March 22, 2001.

turning their eyes to the Orthodox in the hope that they will extract them from the terrible dead-end in which they find themselves. Thus traditional Catholics brought up in accordance with the decrees of their “infallible” first bishop, that their Church is the one saving Church, and that their faith is the one saving faith, were profoundly shaken, in some cases even to the extent of mental disorder, to learn, during the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, that not only the Catholics, but also the Orthodox and even Protestants, Jews and Muslims belong to the People of God and can be saved, and that that which they considered to be heresy was no longer heresy, and that which they consider to be mortal sin was no longer mortal sin...

Is there a way out of this situation? One possibility is to declare, with the Swiss Cardinal Lefèbvre, that the Pope of Rome has fallen into heresy, that he is an anti-pope, and that the true Catholic Church is another place, among the Catholics who do not recognize the present Pope. But if the Pope is infallible, how can he fall into heresy? Of course, there were Popes who fell into heresy even before the rise of the papist heresy itself – Pope Honorius, for example, who was condemned by the Sixth Ecumenical Council. But the papists have always tried to explain away such examples because the idea of a heretical Pope actually undermines their faith at its very base. For if the Pope falls away from the truth, he is no longer Peter, no longer the rock on which the Church is built. And then the Catholics will have to look for their Catholic faith outside the (pseudo-) Catholic Church, which is an absurdity for them. For according to their papist faith, there can be no true faith, and no true Church, without the Pope. If the Pope falls, then the Universal Church falls with him<sup>9</sup>, and the gates of hell, contrary to the promise of the Saviour, have prevailed against her (Matthew 16.18).

Another possibility is to declare that the Roman see is temporarily vacant. But again: can the Church exist without Peter according to papist doctrine? If the Church is founded on the rock, and that rock is Peter and his successors, the Popes of Rome, how can the Church continue to exist without the rock?

A third possibility is to declare, together with the True Orthodox Christians, that the Roman Catholic Church is not only in heresy, but has been in heresy ever since she fell away from her true Mother, the Orthodox Church, to which her children must return if they want to receive the grace and truth that is in Christ. And, glory to God, many in the West, both Catholics and Protestant, are doing just that – to the extent that the Orthodox ecumenists are allowing them.<sup>10</sup> In England, for example, Orthodoxy has doubled in size during the last decade.

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<sup>9</sup> It was for this reason that the Orthodox Pope Gregory I (known as “the Dialogist” in the East, and “the Great” in the West) refused the title of “universal” or “ecumenical”. See his *Epistle 33*.

<sup>10</sup> And sometimes they have not only not allowed them, but have expelled them. Thus in 1975 a group of Sardinian parishes, who had been received into the Moscow Patriarchate from Roman Catholicism, were ordered by their archpastor, Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (who was himself ordered to do this by Metropolitan Juvenaly of Tula), to leave his Church. The reason, as the present writer was able to ascertain from Anthony himself, was: the Pope had laid it down as a condition of the success of his negotiations with the MP on the Ukrainian uniate question that these parishes return to him. After various adventures, these parishes were later admitted into communion with the Greek Old Calendar Church.

But this growth in converts to Orthodoxy from the Western confessions has taken place not thanks to, but *in spite of*, the preaching of the official Orthodox Churches. For how often have potential converts to Orthodoxy been dissuaded from joining by the Orthodox hierarchs themselves! Even when already Orthodox, these neophytes from the West have often been made to feel like second-class citizens who cannot really know the mystery of Orthodoxy because of their “western mentality”.

Thus one English Orthodox Christian, on arriving at a Greek church one Sunday morning, was politely but firmly directed to an Anglican church, in spite of his protests that he was Orthodox. The explanation: “Orthodoxy is for Greeks and Russians: for the English there is Anglicanism...” In this way do the heresies of ecumenism and phyletism grow into each other, combining to shut the door on those searching for, and even those who have already found, the truth!

Something similar to the present crisis in the Roman Catholic church took place in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, when for many years there were two popes, and once even three! In reaction to this crisis there arose the conciliar movement, which strove to return to the Orthodox teaching on authority in the Church, declaring that the highest authority in the earthly Church was not the Pope, but the Ecumenical Councils. Here was a wonderful opportunity for the Orthodox to support this beginning of a return to Orthodoxy, if not in the papacy itself, at least in a large portion of its (former) followers), and direct it to its consummation in the bosom of the Orthodox Church.

But this opportunity was missed largely for the same reason as it is being missed today: because the Orthodox leaders of the time, having lost the salt of True Orthodoxy themselves, were seeking a union with Roman Catholicism for political motives. Thus in 1438-1439, when the most representative council of the Western Church was convening in Basle in Switzerland, so as to resolve the problems of the Western Church on the basis of conciliarity, the Orthodox leaders preferred to meet the Pope in Florence and conclude a false union with him, betraying the purity of the Orthodox Faith for a mess of pottage. The victory of the Pope signified not only the fall of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (fortunately, only temporarily), and of Constantinople itself a few years later, but also the crushing of the hopes of the conciliarists in Basle...

Of course, it could be argued that the conciliarists were not really ready for Orthodoxy, not really seeking it, which is why the Lord did not allow them to be united to it. That may be true. But it does not remove the responsibility of those Orthodox hierarchs then and now who put obstacles in the way of potential converts to the faith through their own lukewarmness about that faith.

Thus the Orthodox uniates of the fifteenth century, like the Orthodox ecumenists of the twentieth century, betrayed not only their Orthodox flock but also the potential flock to be gathered from those outside Orthodoxy. Through their refusal to carry out missionary work among the heterodox, in accordance with the Lord’s command to go out and make converts of all the nations (Matthew 28.19), they have in effect denied

themselves the right to call themselves Orthodox. For as St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves (+1054) said, he who honours the faith of another dishonours his own...

Since the "Orthodox" ecumenists refuse to carry out missionary work in view of their ecumenist convictions, why should they object if the True Orthodox take this burden upon themselves? But this is where the ecumenists show their true face. For while serving with and flatter the heretics, whose faith is far from Orthodoxy, they actively persecute the True Orthodox whose faith they supposedly share. They secretly kill their priests, send the secular powers to take away their churches and in the West deny their very existence. Like Herod, they claim that they, too, worship Christ in the true faith, but will not accompany the true seekers, the Magi, to Bethlehem, but will rather kill the innocents who bear witness to the existence of the True Body of Christ.

Thus in the 1970s, as reported in *Church Times*, an Australian journalist once asked Metropolitan Nicodemus of Leningrad about the existence of the Russian Catacomb Church. "Have they got a bank account?" asked the metropolitan (now exposed as KGB Agent "Sviatoslav" and a secret Catholic bishop!). The journalist had difficulty in replying. Nicodemus triumphantly concluded: "If it doesn't have a bank account, then it doesn't exist!"

Actually, from the point of view of the Orthodox Herods, this was a completely adequate answer. For to them the significance of a Church is defined, not by the strength of its Orthodox faith, but by its worldly strength – and worldly strength in the contemporary world is measured by the size of one's bank account. From their point of view, a Church without a bank account is truly of no significance and can be swept off the face of the earth without the slightest torments of conscience.

On the other hand, if an unbeliever has a large bank account, then he is worthy of every honour and even of Orthodox baptism – as was granted, for example, to the mayor of Moscow Luzhkov. And what business is it of anyone's that the mayor happens to be an unbeliever? For the sergianist concept of "economy", this is a trivial problem. Did not Metropolitan Pitirim of Volokolamsk say, towards the end of the 1980s, that true ecumenism is the gathering together into one Church or religion "of all people of good will", including even atheists?

In comparison with the cunning and spite of this "Orthodox Herodianism", the "Pilatism" of the Catholics and Protestants looks almost innocent. At least they believe in their own faith, false though it is, with sufficient sincerity and conviction to want to convert others to it – and not in exchange for money, but at the *cost* of money. Thus the Vatican organization "Aid to the Church in Need" offered a yearly subsidy of \$1000 to every priest in the Moscow Patriarchate!<sup>11</sup>

Of course, such bribery cannot in any way be approved. But it is hardly worse than the sheer mercenariness of, for example, Archbishop Lev of Novgorod, who openly admits Protestants and Catholics to communion in his cathedral, his obvious

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<sup>11</sup> Liudmilla Pereiolkina, *Ecumenism – A Path to Perdition*, St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 214.

motivation being, according to Liudmilla Perepiolkina, “the material benefit gained as a result of attracting foreign tourists, along with their dollars, pounds and marks, into the Patriarchate’s churches.”<sup>12</sup>

The truth is that many educated Roman Catholics look with sincere respect at their “separated brethren”, the Orthodox, and long for reunion with them, hoping that an injection of eastern blood may reanimate, as it were, the ailing body of their own church. For they know that the Orthodox Church is no less traditional than their own (in fact, much more so), and that it occupies precisely those lands in Greece and the Middle East that are the birthplace of Christianity. They would really prefer to be on the side of the Orthodox, forming a “united front” of Traditional Christianity against the ravages of modern secularism and atheism.

Indeed, in the subconsciousness of the Catholics a question arises concerning the Orthodox Church: could this really be our real Mother? In the same way, Pilate secretly respected Christ, was half-persuaded by his wife not to harm “that Righteous Man”, Who, he suspected, might truly be the Son of God. And he condemned Him only because the respect he felt for Him was outweighed by his fear of the Jews.

It goes without saying that the above paragraph in no way represents a justification of Roman Catholicism, nor a denial that it remains a most dangerous heresy. Indeed, the corruption and heresy of Roman Catholicism grows deeper every year, especially now that it has absorbed all manner of Protestant ideas into itself. However, “the Spirit blows where It wills” (John 3.8), and God can make sons of Abraham even out of the stoniest of hearts (Matthew 3.9). Who could have foreseen, during the savage persecutions under Diocletian at the beginning of the fourth century, that the Roman Empire would very soon be converted to Christ and remain, in its Byzantine and Russian incarnations, the main support of Christianity right until the revolution of 1917? And if, as the famous novelist F. M. Dostoyevsky said, the heretical Roman papacy is the regeneration of the pagan Roman empire in a new form, who can be certain that the grace of God cannot again transfigure that organism, so that it suddenly, after centuries of cruel despotism and proud blindness, loses faith in itself, begins to investigate its past and beseech, albeit hesitantly and imperfectly at first, the forgiveness of its sins?

### **Conclusion. The Unforgivable Sin**

The Lord said on the Cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23.34). And many were forgiven and joined the Church after Pentecost, because “you did it through ignorance” (Acts 3.17). An important principle follows from this. To the extent that we remain in ignorance, to that degree we can hope for forgiveness from God, if we repent. Conversely, to the extent that we know that we are sinning, but still continue in that sin, to that degree we remain unforgiven, for forgiveness is given only to those who seek it through repentance.

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<sup>12</sup> Perepiolkina, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

Even the greatest sins can be forgiven if the sinner is truly, involuntarily ignorant. Thus the Apostle Paul wrote: "I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief" (I Timothy 1.13; Acts 17.30). For our Great High Priest is truly the One Who "can have compassion on the ignorant, and on those who are led astray" (Hebrews 5.2).

However, there is such a phenomenon as voluntary, conscious ignorance. Thus the Apostle Paul says of those who do not believe in the One God, the Creator of heaven and earth, that they are "without excuse" (Romans 1.20), for they reject that which is evident to all through contemplation of creation. Similarly, the Apostle Peter says: "This they are willingly ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old" (II Peter 3.5). Moreover, if someone says that he knows, when in fact he is ignorant, this is counted to him as conscious ignorance. For Christ said to the Pharisees: "If ye were blind, ye would have no sin; but now that ye say, We see, your sin abides" (John 9.41).

Voluntary ignorance is very close to conscious resistance to the truth, which, according to the word of God, will receive the greater condemnation. Thus those who will accept the Antichrist will accept him because "they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. For this reason God will send them the working of deception, that they should believe in a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2.10-12).

And if it seems improbable that God should send someone the working of deception, let us recall that God allowed a lying spirit to enter into the lips of the prophets of King Ahab, because they prophesied to him only that which he wanted to hear (III Kings 22.19-24).

Voluntary, conscious resistance to the truth is "the sin unto death" (I John 5.16) or *the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*, which, according to the Lord's word, "will never be forgiven" (Matthew 12.31). Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) writes: "The Seventh Ecumenical Council in its fifth canon explains what a sin unto death is. Here, in the Saviour's well-known words about this sin, it is not blasphemy in the usual sense of the word that is meant, but a conscious opposition to the truth, to which one's soul bears witness, as the Lord said: 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin' (John 15.22). Here is an example of an unforgivable sin. The Lord first spoke about an unforgiven blasphemy in Mark 3.29, here the Evangelist explains: 'Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit' (Mark 3.30). As you see, there was no direct blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but there was an opposition to evident truth."<sup>13</sup>

It is not that God does not want to forgive all, even the most terrible sins; he wishes that all should come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved (I Timothy 2.4). The point is that if a man stubbornly refuses to respond to the promptings of the Spirit of

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<sup>13</sup> Metropolitan Anthony, "The Church's Teaching about the Holy Spirit", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 27, № 4, July-August, 1977, pp. 38-39.

truth, Who “guides into all truth” (John 16.3) about God and man, he cannot come to repentance, which is based on a knowledge of the truth. And so he cannot receive forgiveness from the Truth. As Blessed Augustine said: “the first gift is that which concerns the forgiveness of sins... Against this free gift, against this grace of God speaks the impenitent heart. And so this impenitence is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup>

Voluntary ignorance can be of various degrees. There is the voluntary ignorance which refuses to believe even when the truth is staring at one in the face. This is the most serious form of ignorance, which was practiced by the Pharisees and heresiarchs. But the voluntarily ignorant can also be he who does not take the steps that are necessary to find the truth. This is less serious, but still worthy of punishment and is a characteristic of many of those who followed the Pharisees and heresiarchs.

Thus we read: “That servant who knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12.47-48).

A fitting commentary on this is provided by Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria: “Some ask: ‘Let us grant that the man who knew the will of his master and did not do it merited his punishment. But why was there punishment for the man who did not know the master’s will?’ He too was punished because he was able to learn the will of the master, but did not want to do so. Because of his laziness, he was the cause of his own ignorance, and he deserves punishment for this very reason, that of his own will he did not learn.”<sup>15</sup> And St. Cyril of Alexandria writes: “How can he who knew it not be guilty? The reason is, because he would not know it, although it was in his power to learn.”<sup>16</sup>

And to whom does this distinction between different degrees of ignorance apply? According to St. Cyril, to false teachers and parents, on the one hand, and those who follow them, on the other. In other words, the blind leaders are subjected to a greater punishment than the blind who are led by them, but both the leaders and followers fall into a pit (Matthew 15.4).

In the light of this teaching, the greatest and least forgivable sinners in the present-day ecumenical movement are the Orthodox hierarchs. They know the truth; they know that the Orthodox Church, and only the Orthodox Church, is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3.15) and the only ark of salvation. Those who follow these false hierarchs are also guilty, albeit to a lesser degree, because although, in many cases, they may not know the truth as clearly and fully as their leaders, they can easily take steps to learn the truth, by more attentively studying the Holy Scriptures and Divine Services of the Church.

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<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine, *Homily 21 on the New Testament*, 19, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Blessed Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel of Luke*, 12.47-48.

<sup>16</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily 93 on Luke*.

As for the Western heretics who partake in the ecumenical movement, some may know as much as their Orthodox colleagues and are therefore as guilty as they. But generally speaking, the western heretics must be considered to be less guilty than the Orthodox ecumenists. For while they have the Holy Scriptures, they do not have the God-inspired interpretation of the Scriptures that is to be found in the Holy Fathers and Divine services of the Orthodox Church. Moreover, their striving for union with the Orthodox is natural insofar as they feel themselves spiritually unfulfilled in their own churches and seek to satisfy that hunger in union with Orthodoxy. The tragedy – and it is a great tragedy for all concerned – is that when they seek the truth from the Orthodox, the Orthodox usually push them back to their own spiritual desert, saying that they are already in the truth. They seek bread, but are given a stone...

And so when we seek the causes of the present-day ecumenical catastrophe, let us not accuse the western heretics first of all. Paradoxical as it may seem, the further away a person is from the truth, the more forgivable and his blind wanderings in the sphere of theology. That who “sit on Moses’ seat”, and call themselves Orthodox and successors of the Holy Fathers – they are the ones who bear the greatest responsibility. They build the tombs of the prophets, the holy elders and hierarchs of Orthodoxy, and adorn the monuments of the righteous, the shrines of the new martyrs and confessors, and say that they would not have taken part in the shedding of their blood. And yet by their betrayal of Holy Orthodoxy they witness against themselves that they are the sons of those who killed the martyrs (Matthew 23.29-31).

*March 6/19, 2000; revised June 17/30, 2004.  
Holy Monk-Martyr Nectan of Hartland.*

### **3. TEN REASONS WHY THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE IS NOT ORTHODOX**

#### **1. The EP's Heretical Encyclical of 1920**

In January, 1920, Metropolitan Dorotheus, locum tenens of the patriarchal throne, and his Synod issued what was in effect a charter for Ecumenism. It was addressed "to all the Churches of Christ everywhere", and declared that "the first essential is to revive and strengthen the love between the Churches, not considering each other as strangers and foreigners, but as kith and kin in Christ and united co-heirs of the promise of God in Christ."

It went on: "This love and benevolent disposition towards each other can be expressed and proven especially, in our opinion, through:

"(a) the reception of a single calendar for the simultaneous celebration of the great Christian feasts by all the Churches;

"(b) the exchange of brotherly epistles on the great feasts of the single calendar..;

"(c) close inter-relations between the representatives of the different Churches;

"(d) intercourse between the Theological Schools and the representatives of Theological Science and the exchange of theological and ecclesiastical periodicals and writings published in each Church;

"(e) the sending of young people to study from the schools of one to another Church;

"(f) the convening of Pan-Christian conferences to examine questions of common interest to all the Churches;

"(g) the objective and historical study of dogmatic differences..;

"(h) mutual respect for the habits and customs prevailing in the different Churches;

"(I) the mutual provision of prayer houses and cemeteries for the funeral and burial of members of other confessions dying abroad;

"(j) the regulation of the question of mixed marriages between the different confessions;

"(k) mutual support in the strengthening of religion and philanthropy."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Vasilios Stavrides, *Istoria tou Oikoumenikou Patriarkheiou (1453 - simeron) (History of the Ecumenical Patriarchate from 1453 to the present day)*, Thessalonica, 1987, pp. 248-249 (in Greek).

The unprecedented nature of the encyclical consists in the fact: (1) that it was addressed not to the Orthodox Churches only, but to the Orthodox and heretics together, as if there were no important difference between them but all equally were “co-heirs of God in Christ”; (2) that the proposed rapprochement was seen as coming, not through the acceptance by the heretics of the Truth of Orthodoxy and their sincere repentance and rejection of their errors, but through various external measures and, by inference, the mutual accommodation of the Orthodox and the heretics; and (3) the proposal of a single universal calendar for concelebration of the feasts, in contravention of the canonical law of the Orthodox Church. There is no mention here of the only possible justification of Ecumenism from an Orthodox point of view – the opportunity it provides of conducting missionary work among the heretics. On the contrary, one of the first aims of the ecumenical movement was and is to *prevent* proselytism among the member-Churches.

## **2. The EP’s Uncanonical Election of Meletius Metaxakis**

In 1918 the traditionalist Archbishop Theocletus of Athens was uncanonically defrocked “for having instigated the anathema against [the Cretan Freemason] Eleutherios Venizelos”. Two years later, Theocletus was vindicated. But the damage was done. In his place another Cretan Freemason, Meletius Metaxakis, was enthroned as Archbishop of Athens in November, 1918. However, in November, 1920 he was defrocked “for uncanonical actions” and confined to a monastery on Zakynthos as a simple monk. But by December, 1921 he was Patriarch of Constantinople! How did this transformation of a defrocked monk into Patriarch of Constantinople take place?

Bishop Photius of Triaditsa writes: “Political circles around Venizelos and the Anglican Church had been involved in Meletius’ election as Patriarch. Metropolitan Germanus (Karavangelis) of the Holy Synod of Constantinople wrote of these events, ‘My election in 1921 to the Ecumenical Throne was unquestioned. Of the seventeen votes cast, sixteen were in my favour. Then one of my lay friends offered me 10,000 lira if I would forfeit my election in favour of Meletius Metaxakis. Naturally I refused his offer, displeased and disgusted. At the same time, one night a delegation of three men unexpectedly visited me from the “National Defence League” and began to earnestly entreat me to forfeit my candidacy in favour of Meletius Metaxakis. The delegates said that Meletius could bring in \$100,000 for the Patriarchate and, since he had very friendly relations with Protestant bishops in England and America, could be useful in international causes. Therefore, international interests demanded that Meletius Metaxakis be elected Patriarch. Such was also the will of Eleutherios Venizelos. I thought over this proposal all night. Economic chaos reigned at the Patriarchate. The government in Athens had stopped sending subsidies, and there were no other sources of income. Regular salaries had not been paid for nine months. The charitable organizations of the Patriarchate were in a critical economic state. For these reasons and for the good of the people [or so thought the deceived hierarchy] I accepted the offer...’ Thus, to everyone’s amazement, the next day, November 25, 1921, Meletius Metaxakis became the Patriarch of Constantinople.

“The uncanonical nature of his election became evident when, two days before the election, November 23, 1921, there was a proposal made by the Synod of

Constantinople to postpone the election on canonical grounds. The majority of the members voted to accept this proposal. At the same time, on the very day of the election, the bishops who had voted to postpone the election were replaced by other bishops. This move allowed the election of Meletius as Patriarch. Consequently, the majority of bishops of the Patriarchate of Constantinople who had been circumvented met in Thessalonica. [This Council included seven out of the twelve members of the Constantinopolitan Holy Synod and about 60 patriarchal bishops from the New Regions of Greece under the presidency of Metropolitan Constantine of Cyzicus.] They announced that, 'the election of Meletius Metaxakis was done in open violation of the holy canons,' and proposed to undertake 'a valid and canonical election for Patriarch of Constantinople.' In spite of this, Meletius was confirmed on the Patriarchal Throne."<sup>18</sup>

Two members of the Synod then went to Athens to report to the council of ministers. On December 12, 1921 they declared the election null and void. One of the prominent hierarchs who refused to accept this election was Metropolitan Chrysostom (Kavourides) of Florina, the future leader of the True Orthodox Church, who also tried to warn the then Prime Minister Gounaris about the dangers posed by the election of Meletius. The Sublime Porte also refused to recognize the election, first because Meletius was not an Ottoman citizen and therefore was not eligible for the patriarchate according to the Ottoman charter of 1856, and secondly because Meletius declared that he did not consider any such charters as binding insofar as they had been imposed by the Muslim conquerors.

On December 29, 1921, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, having deposed Metaxakis for a series of canonical transgressions and for creating a schism, declared both Metaxakis and Rodostolos Alexandros to be schismatics and threatened to declare all those who followed them as similarly schismatic.

In spite of this second condemnation, Meletius was enthroned as patriarch on January 22, 1922; and as a result of intense political pressure his deposition was uncanonically lifted on September 24, 1922!<sup>19</sup> Thus there arrived at the peak of power one of the men whom Metropolitan Chrysostom (Kavourides) called "these two Luthers of the Orthodox Church". The other Orthodox Luther, Archbishop Chrysostom (Papadopoulos) of Athens, would come to power very shortly...

### **3. The EP's annexation of Russian and Serbian Territories**

Meletius and his successor, Gregory VII, undertook what can only be described as a wholesale annexation of vast territories belonging to the jurisdiction of the Serbian and Russian Patriarchates. Basing his actions on a false interpretation of the 28<sup>th</sup> canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, which supposedly gives all the "barbarian lands" into the jurisdiction of Constantinople, he and his successor created the following

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<sup>18</sup> Bishop Photius, "The 70th Anniversary of the Pan-Orthodox Congress in Constantinople", *Orthodox Life*, № 1, 1994, p. 41-42.

<sup>19</sup> "To imerologiakon skhism apo istorikis kai kanonikis apopseos exetazomenon (The calendar schism examined from an historical and canonical point of view)", *Agios Agathangelos Esphigmenites (St. Agathangelos of Esphigmenou)*, № 131, May-June, 1992, p. 17; Bishop Photius, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

uncanonical autonomous and autocephalous Churches on the model of the “Greek Archdiocese of North and South America”:-

**1. Western Europe.** On April 5, 1922, Meletius named an exarch for the whole of Western and Central Europe. By the time of Gregory VII’s death in November, 1924, there was an exarchate of Central Europe under Metropolitan Germanus of Berlin, an exarchate of Great Britain and Western Europe under Metropolitan Germanus of Thyateira, and a diocese of Bishop Gregory of Paris. In the late 1920s the Ecumenical Patriarch received into his jurisdiction the Russian Metropolitan Eulogius of Paris, who had created a schism in the Russian Church Abroad, and who sheltered a number of influential heretics, such as Nicholas Berdyaev and Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, in the theological institute of St. Sergius in Paris.<sup>20</sup>

**2. Finland.** In February, 1921 Patriarch Tikhon granted the Finnish Church autonomy within the Russian Church. On June 9, 1922, Meletius uncanonically received the Finns into his jurisdiction. The excuse given here was that Patriarch Tikhon was no longer free, “therefore he could do as he pleased” (Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky). This undermined the efforts of the Orthodox to maintain their position vis-à-vis the Lutherans. Thus under pressure from the Lutheran government, and in spite of the protests of Patriarch Tikhon, Patriarch Gregory allowed the Finnish Church to adopt the western paschalion. Then began the persecution of the confessors of the Old Calendar in the monastery of Valaam.

“Even more iniquitous and cruel,” continues Metropolitan Anthony, “was the relationship of the late Patriarch Gregory and his synod towards the diocese and the person of the Archbishop of Finland. The Ecumenical Patriarch consecrated a vicar bishop for Finland, the priest Aava, who was not only not tonsured, but not even a rasophore. Moreover, this was done not only without the agreement of the Archbishop of Finland, but in spite of his protest. By these actions the late Patriarch of Constantinople violated a fundamental canon of the Church – the sixth canon of the First Ecumenical Council [and many others], which states, ‘If anyone is consecrated bishop without the consent of his metropolitan, the Great Council declares him not to be a bishop.’ According to the twenty-eighth canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the patriarch cannot even place a bishop in his diocese without the approval of the local metropolitan. Based on precisely this same canon, the predecessors of Gregory vainly attempted to realize his pretensions and legalize their claims to control. This uncanonical ‘bishop’ Aava, once consecrated as bishop, placed a monastic klobuk on his own head, and thus costumed, he appeared in the foreign diocese of Finland. There he instigated the Lutheran government to persecute the canonical Archbishop of Finland, Seraphim, who was respected by the people. The Finnish government previously had requested the Ecumenical Patriarch to confirm the most illegal of laws, namely that the secular government of Finland would have the right to retire the Archbishop. The government in fact followed through with the retirement, falsely claiming that Archbishop Seraphim had not learned enough Finnish in the allotted time. Heaven and earth were horrified at this illegal, tyrannical act of a non-Orthodox government. Even more horrifying was that an Orthodox patriarch had consented to

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<sup>20</sup> *A History of the Russian Church Abroad*, Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, 1972, p. 51.

such chicanery. To the scandal of the Orthodox and the evil delight of the heterodox, the highly dubious Bishop Germanus (the former Fr. Aava) strolled the streets of Finland in secular clothes, clean-shaven and hair cut short, while the most worthy of bishops, Seraphim, crudely betrayed by his false brother, languished in exile for the remainder of his life in a tiny hut of a monastery on a stormy isle on Lake Ladoga.”<sup>21</sup>

On November 14/27, 1923, Patriarch Tikhon and the Russian Holy Synod, after listening to a report by Archbishop Seraphim decreed that “since his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon has entered upon the administration of the Russian Orthodox Church, the reason for which the Patriarch of Constantinople considered it necessary temporarily to submit the Finnish Church to his jurisdiction has now fallen away, and the Finnish eparchy must return under the rule of the All-Russian Patriarch.”<sup>22</sup> However, the Finns did not return to the Russians, and the Finnish Church remains to this day within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the most modernist of all the Orthodox Churches.

**3. Estonia.** In February, 1921 Patriarch Tikhon granted a broad measure of autonomy to the parts of the former Pskov and Revel dioceses that entered into the boundaries of the newly formed Estonian state. On August 28, 1922, Meletius uncanonically received this Estonian diocese of the Russian Church into his jurisdiction, under Metropolitan Alexander. The recent renewal of this unlawful decision by the present Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, nearly led to a schism between the Ecumenical and Russian patriarchates.

**4. Latvia.** In June, 1921 Patriarch Tikhon granted the Latvian Church a large measure of autonomy under its Latvian archpastor, Archbishop John of Riga, who was burned to death by the communists in 1934. In March, 1936, the Ecumenical Patriarch accepted the Church of Latvia within his own jurisdiction.

**5. Poland.** In 1921 Patriarch Tikhon appointed Archbishop Seraphim (Chichagov) to the see of Warsaw, but the Poles, whose armies had defeated the Red Army in 1920, did not grant him entry into the country. So the patriarch was forced to bow to the Poles’ suggestion that Archbishop George (Yaroshevsky) of Minsk be made metropolitan of Warsaw. However, he refused Archbishop George’s request for autocephaly on the grounds that very few members of the Polish Church were Poles and the Polish dioceses were historically indivisible parts of the Russian Church.<sup>23</sup>

Lyudmilla Koeller writes: “The Polish authorities restricted the Orthodox Church, which numbered more than 3 million believers (mainly Ukrainians and

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<sup>21</sup> See Monk Gorazd, "Quo Vadis, Konstantinopol'skaia Patriarkhia? (Where are you going, Constantinopolitan Patriarchate?)", *Pravoslavnaiia Rus'* (*Orthodox Rus'*), № 2 (1455), January 15/28, 1992, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> M.E. Gubonin, *Akty Sviateishago Patriarkha Tikhona*, Moscow, 1994, p. 304.

<sup>23</sup> M.B. Danilushkin (ed.), *Istoria Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (*A History of the Russian Orthodox Church*), vol. I, St. Petersburg, 1997, p. 197.

Byelorussians).<sup>24</sup> In 1922 a council was convoked in Pochayev which was to have declared autocephaly, but as the result of a protest by Bishop Eleutherius [Bogoyavlensky, of Vilnius] and Bishop Vladimir (Tikhonitsky), this decision was not made. But at the next council of bishops, which gathered in Warsaw in June, 1922, the majority voted for autocephaly, with only Bishops Eleutherius and Vladimir voting against. A council convoked in September of the same year 'deprived Bishops Eleutherius and Vladimir of their sees. In December, 1922, Bishop Eleutherius was arrested and imprisoned in a strict regime prison in the monastery of the Camaldul Fathers near Krakow, from where he was transferred to Kovno in spring, 1923'."<sup>25</sup>

Two other Russian bishops, Panteleimon (Rozhnovsky) and Sergius (Korolev), were also deprived of their sees. The three dissident bishops were expelled from Poland.

In November, 1923, Metropolitan George was killed by an opponent of his church politics, and was succeeded by Metropolitan Dionysius "with the agreement of the Polish government and the confirmation and blessing of his Holiness Meletius IV [Metaxakis]". Patriarch Tikhon rejected this act as uncanonical<sup>26</sup>, but was unable to do anything about it. In November, 1924, Patriarch Gregory VII uncanonically transferred the Polish Church from the jurisdiction of the Russian Church to his own.

**5. Hungary and Czechoslovakia.** According to the old Hungarian law of 1868, and confirmed by the government of the new Czechoslovak republic in 1918 and 1920, all Orthodox Christians living in the territory of the former Hungarian kingdom came within the jurisdiction of the Serbian Patriarchate, and were served directly by Bishops Gorazd of Moravia and Dositheus of Carpatho-Russia.

However, on September 3, 1921, the Orthodox parish in Prague elected Archimandrite Sabbatius to be their bishop, and then informed Bishop Dositheus, their canonical bishop about this. When the Serbian Synod refused to consecrate Sabbatius for Prague, he, without the knowledge of his community, set off for Constantinople, where on March 4, 1923, he was consecrated "archbishop" of the newly created Czechoslovakian branch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which included Carpatho-Russia. Then, on April 15, 1924, the Ecumenical Patriarch established a metropolia of Hungary and All Central Europe with its see in Budapest - although there was already a Serbian bishop there.

"The scandal caused by this confusion," writes Z.G. Ashkenazy, "is easy to imagine. Bishop Sabbatius insisted on his rights in Carpatho-Russia, enthusiastically recruiting sympathizers from the Carpatho-Russian clergy and ordaining candidates

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<sup>24</sup> For example, on October 22, 1919 the Poles ordered 497 Orthodox churches and chapels, which had supposedly been seized from the Catholics in the past, to be returned to the Catholic Church. See Danilushkin, *op. cit.*, p. 586.

<sup>25</sup> Koeller, "Kommentarii k pis'mu Arkhiepiskopa Rizhskago i Latvijskago Ioanna Arkhiepiskopu Vilyenskomu i Litovskomu Elevferiu ot 2 noiabria 1927 g. (Commentary on the letter of Archbishop John of Riga and Latvia to Archbishop Eleutherius of Vilnius and Latvia)", *Tserkovnaia Zhizn'* (Church Life), №№ 3-4, May-June-July-August, 1992, pp. 56-57.

<sup>26</sup> Gubonin, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-321.

indiscriminately. His followers requested that the authorities take administrative measures against priests not agreeing to submit to him. Bishop Dositheus placed a rebellious monk under ban – Bishop Sabbatius elevated him to igumen; Bishop Dositheus gathered the clergy in Husta and organized an Ecclesiastical Consistory – Bishop Sabbatius enticed priests to Bushtin and formed an Episcopal Council. Chaos reigned in church affairs. Malice and hatred spread among the clergy, who organized into ‘Sabbatiites’ and ‘Dositheites’.

“A wonderful spiritual flowering which gave birth to so many martyrs for Orthodoxy degenerated into a shameful struggle for power, for a more lucrative parish and extra income. The Uniate press was gleeful, while bitterness settled in the Orthodox people against their clergy, who were not able to maintain that high standard of Orthodoxy which had been initiated by inspired simple folk.”<sup>27</sup>

In 1938 the great wonderworker Archbishop John Maximovich reported to the All-Diaspora Council of the Russian Church Abroad: “Increasing without limit their desires to submit to themselves parts of Russia, the Patriarchs of Constantinople have even begun to declare the uncanonicity of the annexation of Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate, and to declare that the previously existing southern Russian Metropolia of Kiev should be subject to the Throne of Constantinople. Such a point of view is not only clearly expressed in the Tomos of November 13, 1924, in connection with the separation of the Polish Church, but is also quite thoroughly promoted by the Patriarchs. Thus, the Vicar of Metropolitan Eulogius in Paris, who was consecrated with the permission of the Ecumenical Patriarch, has assumed the title of Chersonese; that is to say, Chersonese, which is now in the territory of Russia, is subject to the Ecumenical Patriarch. The next logical step for the Ecumenical Patriarchate would be to declare the whole of Russia as being under the jurisdiction of Constantinople...

“In sum, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in theory embracing almost the whole universe, and in fact extending its authority only over several dioceses, and in other places having only a superficial supervision and receiving certain revenues for this; persecuted by the government at home and not supported by any governmental authority abroad; having lost its significance as a pillar of truth and having itself become a source of division, and at the same time being possessed by an exorbitant love of power – represents a pitiful spectacle which recalls the worst periods in the history of the See of Constantinople.”<sup>28</sup>

#### **4. The EP’s communion with the Russian renovationist heretics**

In 1922 the so-called “Living Church” came to power in Russia, deposed Patriarch Tikhon, and instituted a programme of modernistic reforms that was very close to those Meletius was to introduce. He promptly entered into communion with the

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<sup>27</sup> Monk Gorazd, *op. cit.*. At the beginning of the Second World War, Metropolitan Dositheus was imprisoned and tortured in Zagreb, and died on January 13, 1945 without returning to consciousness. See “Novij sviashchenno-ispovyednik Dosifej mitropolit Zagrebskij (New Hieroconfessor Dositheus, Metropolitan of Zagreb)”, *Pravoslavnaia Rus’ (Orthodox Rus’)*, № 7 (1628), April 1/14, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Archbishop John, “The Decline of the Patriarchate of Constantinople”, *The Orthodox Word*, vol. 8, no. 4 (45), July-August, 1972, p. 175.

schismatics. As the synod of the "Living Church" wrote to Meletius in 1925: "The Holy Synod [of the renovationists] recall with sincere best wishes the moral support which Your Beatitude showed us while you were yet Patriarch of Constantinople by entering into communion with us as the only rightfully ruling organ of the Russian Orthodox Church."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, his successors Gregory VII and Constantine VI remained in communion with the "Living Church".

Patriarch Gregory first called for Patriarch Tikhon's resignation, and then demanded "that the Russian Metropolitan Anthony and Archbishop Anastasius, who were residing Constantinople at the time, cease their activities against the Soviet regime and stop commemorating Patriarch Tikhon. Receiving no compliance from them, Patriarch Gregory organized an investigation and suspended the two bishops from serving. He asked Patriarch Demetrius [of Serbia] to close down the Russian Council of Bishops in Sremsky-Karlovtsy, but Demetrius refused..."<sup>30</sup>

Gregory then decided to send a special mission to Russia to investigate the church situation there.

Patriarch Tikhon wrote to Gregory: "Attached to the letter of your Holiness' representative in Russia, Archimandrite Basil Dimopoulo, of June 6, 1924, no. 226, I received the protocols of four sessions of the Holy Constantinopolitan Synod of January 1, April 17, April 30 and May 6 of this year, from which it is evident that your Holiness, wishing to provide help from the Mother Great Church of Christ of Constantinople, and 'having exactly studied the course of Russian Church life and the differences and divisions that have taken place - in order to bring peace and end the present anomalies', .. 'having taken into consideration the exceptional circumstances and examples from the past', have decided 'to send us a special Commission, which is authorized to study and act on the spot on the basis and within the bounds of definite orders which are in agreement with the spirit and tradition of the Church'.

"In your Holiness' instructions to the members of the Mission one of the main points is your desire that I, as the All-Russian Patriarch, 'for the sake of the unification of those who have cut themselves off and for the sake of the flock, should sacrifice myself and immediately resign from the administration of the Church, as befits a true and love-filled pastor who cares for the salvation of many, and that at the same time the Patriarchate should be abolished, albeit temporarily, because it came into being in completely abnormal circumstances at the beginning of the civil war and because it is considered a major obstacle to the reestablishment of peace and unity'. Definite instructions are also given to the Commission regarding which tendencies [factions] they should rely on in their work.

"On reading the indicated protocols, we were in no small measure disturbed and surprised that the Representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the head of the Constantinopolitan Church, should without prior contact with us, as the lawful representative and head of the whole of the Russian Orthodox Church, interfere in the

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in Bishop Photius, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> See Monk Gorazd, *op. cit.*

inner life and affairs of the Autocephalous Russian Church. The Holy Councils... have always recognized the primacy in honour, but not in power, of the Bishop of Constantinople over the other Autocephalous Churches. Let us also remember the canon that 'without being invited, bishops must not pass beyond the boundaries of their own jurisdiction for the sake of ordination or any other ecclesiastical affair.' For that reason any attempt by any Commission without consulting me, the only lawful and Orthodox First-Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, and without my knowledge, is unlawful and will not be accepted by the Russian Orthodox peoples, and will bring, not pacification, but still more disturbance and schism into the life of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has suffered much even without this. This will be to the advantage only of our schismatics – the renovationists, whose leaders now stand at the head of the so-called (self-called) Holy Synod, like the former archbishop of Nizhegorod Eudocimus and others, who have been defrocked by me and have been declared outside the communion of the Orthodox Church for causing disturbance, schism and unlawful seizure of ecclesiastical power.

"I, together with the whole mass of Russian Orthodox believers, and with all my flock, very much doubt that your Holiness has, as you declare, 'studied exactly the course of Russian church life'. I doubt it because You have not once turned to me for documentary explanations of who is the true and real cause of disturbance and schism.

"The whole Russian Orthodox people long ago pronounced its righteous word concerning both the impious meeting which dared to call itself a Council in 1923, and the unhappy leaders of the renovationist schism... The people is not with the schismatics, but with their lawful Orthodox Patriarch. Allow me also to be sceptical about the measure your Holiness suggests for pacifying the Church – that is, my resignation from the administration of the Church and the abolition, albeit temporary, of the Patriarchate in Rus'. This would not pacify the Church, but cause a new disturbance and bring new sorrows to our faithful Archpastors and pastors who have suffered much even without this. It is not love of honour or power which has forced me to take up the cross of the patriarchy again, but the consciousness of my duty, submission to the will of God and the voice of the episcopate which is faithful to Orthodoxy and the Church. The latter, on receiving permission to assemble, in July last year, synodically condemned the renovationists as schismatics and asked me again to become head and rudder of the Russian Church until it pleases the Lord God to give peace to the Church by the voice of an All-Russian Local Council." <sup>31</sup>

Relations between Constantinople and the Russian Church continued to be very frosty. Constantine's successor, Basil III, broke communion with the Living Church in 1929 – but then entered into communion with the Sovietized Moscow Patriarchate of Metropolitan Sergius! When Metropolitan Peter came to power in Russia in April, 1925, he was presented a letter from Patriarch Basil III which called on the "Old Churchmen" to unite with the renovationists. His comment was: "We still have to

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Archbishop Nikon (Rklitsky), *Zhizneopisanie Blazhennejshago Antonia, Mitropolita Kievskago i Galitskago (Life of his Beatitude Anthony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galich)*, Eastern American and Canadian diocese, 1960, vol. VI, pp. 161-163.

check whether this Patriarch is Orthodox..." Metropolitan Sergius was also sceptical; he reacted to Constantinople's recognition of the renovationists as follows: "Let them recognize them; the renovationists have not become Orthodox from this, only the Patriarchs have become renovationists!"<sup>32</sup>

## 5. The EP's acceptance of the uncanonical papist calendar in 1924

At the beginning of 1923, a Commission was set up on the initiative of the Greek government to see whether the Autocephalous Church of Greece could accept the new calendar – the first step towards union with the West in prayer. The Commission reported that "although the Church of Greece, like the other Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, is inherently independent, they are nevertheless firmly united and bound to each other through the principle of the spiritual unity of the Church, composing one and one only Church, the Orthodox Church. Consequently none of them can separate itself from the others and accept the new calendar without becoming schismatic in relation to them."

On February 3, Meletius Metaxakis wrote to the Church of Greece, arguing for the change of calendar at his forthcoming Pan-Orthodox Council "so as to further the cause, in this part of the Pan-Christian unity, of the celebration of the Nativity and Resurrection of Christ on the same day by all those who are called by the name of the Lord."<sup>33</sup>

Shortly afterwards, on February 25, Archimandrite Chrysostom Papadopoulos, was elected Archbishop of Athens by three out of a specially chosen Synod of only five hierarchs – another ecclesiastical *coup d'état*. During his enthronement speech, Chrysostom said that for collaboration with the heterodox "it is not necessary to have common ground or dogmatic union, for the union of Christian love is sufficient".<sup>34</sup>

As one of the members of the commission which had rejected the new calendar, Chrysostom might have been expected to resist Meletius' call. But it seems that the two men had more in common than the fact that they had both been expelled from the Church of Jerusalem in their youth; for on March 6 Chrysostom and his Synod accepted Meletius' proposal and agreed to send a representative to the forthcoming Council. Then, on April 16, he proposed to the Hierarchy that 13 days should be added to the calendar, "for reasons not only of convenience, but also of ecclesiastical, scientifically ratified accuracy".

Five out of the thirty-two hierarchs – the metropolitans of Syros, Patras, Demetrias, Khalkis and Thera – voted against this proposal. Two days later, however, at the second meeting of the Hierarchy, it was announced that Chrysostom's proposal had been "unanimously" approved, but "with absolutely no change to the Paschalion and Calendar of the Orthodox Church". Moreover, it was decided that the Greek Church

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<sup>32</sup> Sokurova, O.B. *Nekolyebimij Kamen' Tserkvi (The Unshakeable Rock of the Church)*, St. Petersburg: "Nauka", 1998, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Goutzidis, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Bishop Photius, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

would approve of any decision regarding the celebration of Pascha made by the forthcoming Pan-Orthodox Council, provided it was in accordance with the Canons...<sup>35</sup>

It was therefore with the knowledge that the Greek Church would support his proposed reforms that Meletius convened a "Pan-Orthodox Council" in Constantinople from May 10 to June 8, 1923, whose renovationist resolutions concerned the "correction" of the Julian calendar, a fixed date for Pascha, the second marriage of clergy, and various relaxations with regard to the clothing of clergy, the keeping of monastic vows, impediments to marriage, the transfer of Saints' feasts from the middle of the week, and fasting.

However, hardly more than ten people, and no official representatives of the Patriarchates, turned up for the "Pan-Orthodox Council", so discredited was its convener.<sup>36</sup> And even Archbishop Chrysostom (Papadopoulos) had to admit: "Unfortunately, the Eastern Patriarchs who refused to take part in the Congress *rejected all of its resolutions in toto from the very outset*. If the Congress had restricted itself only to the issue of the calendar, perhaps it would not have encountered the kind of reaction that it did."<sup>37</sup>

In his "Memorandum to the Holy Synod of the Hierarchy of Greece" (June 14, 1929), Metropolitan Irenaeus of Kassandra wrote that the council was not "Pan-Orthodox" but "anti-Orthodox": "It openly and impiously trampled on the 34<sup>th</sup> Apostolic Canon, which ordains: 'It behoves the Bishops of every nation to know among them who is the first or chief, and to recognize him as their head, and to refrain from doing anything superfluous without his advice and approval... But let not even such a one do anything without the advice and consent and approval of all. For thus will there be concord, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'. He replaced the Julian calendar with the Gregorian in spite of all the prohibitions relating to it; he decided to supersede the Paschalion which had been eternally ordained for the Orthodox Church by the decision of the First Ecumenical Council, turning to the creation of an astronomically more perfect one in the observatories of Bucharest, Belgrade and Athens; he allowed clerics' hair to be cut and their venerable dress to be replaced by that of the Anglican Pastors; he introduced the anticanonical marriage and second marriage of priests; he entrusted the shortening of the days of the fast and the manner of their observance to the judgement of the local Churches, thereby destroying the order and unity that prevailed in the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches of the East. Acting in this way, he opened wide the gates to every innovation, abolishing the distinctive characteristic of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which is its preservation, perfectly and without innovation, of everything that was handed down by the Lord, the Apostles, the Fathers, and the Local and Ecumenical Councils."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Goutzidis, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-78.

<sup>36</sup> However, an Anglican hierarch, Charles Gore of Oxford, was allowed to attend one of the sessions and was treated with great honour.

<sup>37</sup> "Oecumenical Patriarch Meletios (Metaxakis)", *Orthodox Tradition*, vol. XVII, 2 & 3, 2000, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Monk Paul, *Neomerologitismos-Oikoumenismos (Newcalendarism-Ecumenism)*, Athens, 1982, pp. 72-73.

What made the council's decisions still less acceptable was the reason it gave for its innovations, viz., that changing the Paschalion "would make a great moral impression on the whole civilized world by bringing the two Christian worlds of the East and West closer through the unforced initiative of this Orthodox Church..."<sup>39</sup>

The council was rejected by the Alexandrian, Antiochian and Jerusalem Churches, and by the Russian Church Abroad and the Serbian Church. Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) called the calendar innovation "this senseless and pointless concession to Masonry and Papism".

That the adoption of the new calendar was an abomination in the sight of God was clearly indicated by the great miracle of the sign of the cross in the sky over the Old Calendarist monastery of St. John the Theologian in Athens in September, 1925. In fact the new calendar had been anathematised by the Eastern Patriarchs in three Councils, in 1583, 1587 and 1593, and synodically condemned again in 1722, 1827, 1848, 1895 and 1904. By adopting it, the EP, as the Commission of the Greek Church had rightly declared, became schismatic in relation to the Churches keeping the Church calendar.

## **6. The EP's participation in the World Council of Churches**

The Ecumenical Patriarchate was a founder-member of the WCC. It had participated in several ecumenical conferences with the Protestants since its official espousing of Ecumenism in 1920 and up to the founding congress of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948. A.V. Soldatov has chronicled the progressive weakening in the Orthodox position during these years: "At the conference [of Faith and Order] in Geneva in 1920 the spirit of extreme Protestant liberalism gained the upper hand. It came to the point that when the Orthodox Metropolitan Stephen of Sophia noted in his report: 'The Church is only there where the hierarchy has apostolic succession, and without such a hierarchy there are only religious communities', the majority of the delegates of the conference left the hall as a sign of protest. At the next conference on Faith and Order [in Lausanne] in 1927, victory again went to the extreme left Protestants. The Orthodox delegation, experiencing psychological pressure at this conference, was forced to issue the following declaration: 'in accordance with the views of the Orthodox Church, no compromises in relation to the teaching of the faith and religious convictions can be permitted. No Orthodox can hope that a reunion based on disputed formulae can be strong and positive... The Orthodox Church considers that any union must be based exclusively on the teaching of the faith and confession of the ancient undivided Church, on the seven Ecumenical Councils and other decisions of the first eight centuries.' But the numerous speeches of the Orthodox explaining the teaching of the Church on the unity of the Church seemed only to still further increase the incomprehension or unwillingness to comprehend them on the part of the Protestant leaders of Ecumenism. This tendency was consistently pursued by the Protestants at the conferences in 1937 in Oxford and Edinburgh. Summing up this 'dialogue' at the beginning of the century, Fr. Metrophanes Znosko-Borovsky remarks: 'The Orthodox delegates at Edinburgh were forced with sorrow to accept the

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<sup>39</sup> Dionysius Batistes, *Praktika-Apophaseis tou en Kon/polei Panorthodoxou Synedriou 1923 (The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Congress of 1923 in Constantinople)*, 1982, p. 57.

existence of basic, irreconcilable differences in viewpoint on many subjects of faith between the Orthodox East and the Protestant West.'

"After the Second World War, the World Council of Churches was created. It is necessary to point out that the movements 'Faith and Order' and 'the Christian Council of Life and Work' were viewed by their organizers as preparatory stages in the seeking of possible modes of integration of 'the Christian world'. The World Council of Churches differed from them in principle. It set out on the path of 'practical Ecumenism' for the first time in world history, declaring that it was the embryo of a new type of universal church. The first, so to speak founding conference of the WCC in Amsterdam chose as its motto the words: 'Human disorder and God's house-building'. At it, as Archbishop Vitaly remarks, 'every effort was made to destroy the teaching on the One, True, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church'. "<sup>40</sup>

Among the rules of the WCC which bind every member is the following: "A church must recognize the essential interdependence of the churches, particularly those of the same confession, and must practise constructive ecumenical relations with other churches within its country or region. This will normally mean that the church is a member of the national council of churches or similar body and of the regional ecumenical organisation."

Article I of the WCC Constitution reads: "The World Council of Churches is a *fellowship of churches* which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures (sic) and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." And the Constitution also declares that the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to "visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe".

Further, according to Section II of the WCC Rules, entitled *Responsibilities of Membership*, "Membership in the World Council of Churches signifies faithfulness to the Basis of the Council, fellowship in the Council, participation in the life and work of the Council and commitment to the ecumenical movement as integral to the mission of the church."

In accepting these terms the Orthodox churches that entered the WCC clearly accepted a Protestant ecclesiology.

## **7. The Apostasy of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras**

In 1949 there flew into Constantinople - on US President Truman's plane - the second Meletius Metaxakis, the former Archbishop of North and South America Athenagoras, who in 1919 had been appointed secretary of the Holy Synod of the

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<sup>40</sup> Soldatov, "Pravoslavie i Ekumenizm (Orthodoxy and Ecumenism)", *Mirianin (The Layman)*, July-August, 1992, p. 8.

Church of Greece by Metaxakis himself.<sup>41</sup> By an extraordinary coincidence Athenagoras was a former spiritual son of Metropolitan Chrysostom of Florina, leader of the Greek Old Calendarists, so that the leaders of the opposing sides in the Church struggle in the early 1950s were, like David and Absalom, a holy father and his apostate son.

Patriarch Maximus was forced into retirement on grounds of mental illness and the 33<sup>rd</sup> degree Mason Athenagoras took his place. In his enthronement speech he went far beyond the bounds of the impious masonic encyclical of 1920 and proclaimed the dogma of 'Pan-religion', declaring: "We are in error and sin if we think that the Orthodox Faith came down from heaven and that the other dogmas [i.e. religions] are unworthy. Three hundred million men have chosen Mohammedanism as the way to God and further hundreds of millions are Protestants, Catholics and Buddhists. The aim of every religion is to make man better."<sup>42</sup>

In 1960 the Orthodox Churches in the WCC met on Rhodes to establish a catalogue of topics to be discussed at a future Pan-Orthodox Council. "In the course of the debate on the catalogue," write Gordienko and Novikov, "the Moscow Patriarchate's delegation suggested the removal of some of the subjects (The Development of Internal and External Missionary Work, The Methods of Fighting Atheism and False Doctrines Like Theosophy, Spiritism, Freemasonry, etc.) and the addition of some others (Cooperation between the Local Orthodox Churches in the Realisation of the Christian Ideas of Peace, Fraternity and Love among Peoples, Orthodoxy and Racial Discrimination, Orthodoxy and the Tasks of Christians in Regions of Rapid Social Change)... Besides working out the topics for the future Pre-Council, the First Conference passed the decision 'On the Study of Ways for Achieving Closer Contacts and Unity of Churches in a Pan-Orthodox Perspective', envisaging the search for contacts with Ancient Eastern (non-Chalcedonian) Churches (Monophysites), the Old Catholic, Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant Churches, as well as the World Council of Churches."<sup>43</sup>

In other words, the Orthodox henceforth were to abandon the struggle against Atheism, Freemasonry and other false religions, and were to engage in dialogue towards union with all the Christian heretics – while at the same time persecuting the True Orthodox and using ecumenical forums to further the ends of Soviet foreign policy in its struggle with the Capitalist West!

It is not recorded that the EP objected to this programme...

Athenagoras' apostate course received a boost from the WCC's General Assembly in New Delhi in 1961, which marked the decisive dogmatic break between "World Orthodoxy" and True Orthodoxy. If, until then, it could be argued, albeit unconvincingly, that the new calendarists had not apostasised, and that only a few of

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<sup>41</sup> *Pravoslavie ili Smert'*, № 1, 1997, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> The newspapers *Khronos* (20 March, 1949) and *Orthodoxos Typos* (December, 1968), cited in Hieromonk Theodoretus (Mavros), *Palaion kai Neon (The Old and the New)*, p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> "The Russian Orthodox Church in the System of Contemporary Christianity", in A. Preobrazhensky (ed.), *The Russian Orthodox Church*, Moscow: Progress, 1988, p. 387.

their leaders were ecumenist heretics, this could no longer be maintained after the summary statement signed by all the delegates at New Delhi, which declared, among other things: “we consider that the work of creating the One, Universal Church must unfailingly be accompanied by the destruction and disappearance of certain outmoded, traditional forms of worship”.

This was an outright challenge delivered to the Holy Tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church! And, having delivered it, the Orthodox delegates seemed to lose all restraint. After the New Delhi congress, convened, appropriately enough, in the centre of the Hindu world, the ecumenical movement climbed into a higher gear, and even, within a decade or two, into the realm of “Super-ecumenism” – relations with non-Christian religions.

Already before the Delhi Assembly, in April, 1961, the Greek Archbishop James of North and South America (a Freemason of the 33<sup>rd</sup> degree) had said: “We have tried to rend the seamless robe of the Lord – and then we cast ‘arguments’ and ‘pseudo-documents’ to prove – that ours is the Christ, and ours is the Church... Living together and praying together without any walls of partition raised, either by racial or religious prejudices, is the only way that can lead surely to unity.” What could these “pseudo-documents” and “religious prejudices” have been if not the sacred Canons which forbid the Orthodox from praying together with heretics?

Then, in April, 1963, he said: “It would be utterly foolish for the true believer to pretend or to insist that the whole truth has been revealed only to them, and they alone possess it. Such a claim would be both unbiblical and untheological... Christ did not specify the date nor the place that the Church would suddenly take full possession of the truth.”

This statement, which more or less denied that the Church is, as the Apostle Paul said, “the pillar and ground of the Truth” (I Timothy 3.15), caused uproar in Greece and on Mount Athos. However, Athenagoras supported James, calling his position “Orthodox”. From this time on, the two Masons went steadily ahead making ever more flagrantly anti-Orthodox statements. There was some opposition from more conservative elements in the autocephalous Churches; but the opposition was never large or determined enough to stop them...

At a meeting of the Faith and Order movement in Montreal in 1963, a memorandum on “Councils of Churches in the Purpose of God” declared: “The Council [WCC] has provided a new sense of the fullness of the Church in its unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. These marks of the Church can no longer be simply applied to our divided churches, therefore.”

Although this memorandum was not accepted in the end (Fr. George Florovsky objected to it in the plenary session), it showed how the WCC was encroaching on the Orthodox Church’s understanding of herself as the One Church. Indeed, it could be argued that the Orthodox participants had already abandoned this dogma. For as early as the Toronto, 1950 statement of the WCC’s Central Committee, it had been agreed that an underlying assumption of the WCC was that the member-churches

“believe that the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own body”.<sup>44</sup>

## 8. The EP's Inter-Christian Ecumenism

At the Second Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes, in September, 1963, it was unanimously agreed that the Orthodox should enter into dialogue with the Catholics, provided it was “on equal terms”. In practice, this meant that the Catholics should abandon their eastern-rite missions in Orthodox territories. The Catholics have never shown much signs of wishing to oblige in this, but they did help to make a dialogue easier by redefining the Orthodox, in Vatican II's decree on Ecumenism, as “separated brethren”.

On January 5 and 6, 1964, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras met in Jerusalem and prayed together. This was a clear transgression of the canons concerning relations with heretics (Apostolic canon 45). Archbishop Chrysostom of Athens was reported as saying that “while the Pope is going to the Holy Land to kneel before the Saviour's sepulchre, you (Athenagoras) are going to kneel before the Pope and bury Orthodoxy.”

Further intense activity led, on December 7, 1965, to the “lifting of the anathemas” of 1054 between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. The announcement was made simultaneously in Rome and Constantinople. It included the following words: “Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I with his synod, in common agreement, declare that: a. They regret the offensive words, the reproaches without foundation, and the reprehensible gestures which, on both sides, have marked or accompanied the sad events of this period [viz. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century]. B. They likewise regret and remove both from memory and from the midst of the Church the sentences of excommunication which followed these events, the memory of which has influenced actions up to our day and has hindered closer relations in charity; and they commit these excommunications to oblivion.”<sup>45</sup>

It should be pointed out, first, that in saying that the schism of 1054 was based on “reproaches without foundation”, the Patriarch was in effect saying that the Papacy was not, or never had been, heretical – although the Papacy had renounced none of its heresies, and Pope Paul VI had reasserted papal infallibility as recently as Vatican II. Secondly, while relations with excommunicated individuals or Churches can be restored if those individuals or Churches repent, anathemas against heresies cannot be removed insofar as a heresy remains a heresy forever.

In the journal *Ekklesia* Archbishop Chrysostom of Athens denied that the Patriarch had the authority to act independently of the other Orthodox Churches. And he said: “I am convinced that no other Orthodox Church will copy the Ecumenical Patriarch's

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<sup>44</sup> Ulrich Duckrow, *Conflict over the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva: The World Council of Churches, 1981, pp. 31, 310.

<sup>45</sup> Full text in *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. I, № 1, Spring, 1966, pp. 49-50.

action."<sup>46</sup> From this time, several monasteries and sketes on Mount Athos ceased to commemorate the Patriarch.

On December 15, 1965, Metropolitan Philaret of New York wrote to the Patriarch protesting against his action: "Your gesture puts a sign of equality between error and truth. For centuries all the Orthodox Churches believed with good reasons that it has violated no doctrine of the Holy Ecumenical Councils; whereas the Church of Rome has introduced a number of innovations in its dogmatic teaching. The more such innovations were introduced, the deeper was to become the separation between the East and the West. The doctrinal deviations of Rome in the eleventh century did not yet contain the errors that were added later. Therefore the cancellation of the mutual excommunication of 1054 could have been of meaning at that time, but now it is only evidence of indifference in regard to the most important errors, namely new doctrines foreign to the ancient Church, of which some, having been exposed by St. Mark of Ephesus, were the reason why the Church rejected the Union of Florence... No union of the Roman Church with us is possible until it renounces its new doctrines, and no communion in prayer can be restored with it without a decision of all the Churches, which, however, can hardly be possible before the liberation of the Church of Russia which at present has to live in the catacombs... A true dialogue implies an exchange of views with a possibility of persuading the participants to attain an agreement. As one can perceive from the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, Pope Paul VI understands the dialogue as a plan for our union with Rome with the help of some formula which would, however, leave unaltered its doctrines, and particularly its dogmatic doctrine about the position of the Pope in the Church. However, any compromise with error is foreign to the history of the Orthodox Church and to the essence of the Church. It could not bring a harmony in the confessions of the Faith, but only an illusory outward unity similar to the conciliation of dissident Protestant communities in the ecumenical movement."<sup>47</sup>

In 1968 the Fourth General Assembly of the WCC took place in Uppsala. It considerably furthered the ecumenical movement, with the Orthodox, as the new general secretary Carson Blake joyfully pointed out, taking full part in all the sections and committees and not, as often in the past, issuing separate statements disagreeing with the majority Protestant view. Archbishop Vitaly (Ustinov) of Canada said to the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia: "At the opening of the Assembly an ecumenical prayer was read in the name of all those assembles: 'O God our Father, You can create everything anew. We entrust ourselves to You, help us to live for others, for Your love extends over all people, and to search for the Truth, which we have not known...' How could the Orthodox listen to these last words? It would have been interesting to look at that moment at the faces of the Orthodox hierarchs who had declared for all to hear that they, too, did not know the Truth. Every batyushka of ours in the remotest little village knows the Truth by experience, as he stands before the throne of God and prays to God in spirit and in truth. Even *The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, which is completely subject to the censorship of the communist party, in citing the words of the prayer in its account of this conference,

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<sup>46</sup> *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. I, № 1, Spring, 1966, p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> Full text in Ivan Ostroumoff, *The History of the Council of Florence*, pp. 193-199.

did not dare to translate the English 'truth' by the word 'istina', but translated it as 'pravda' ['righteousness']. Of course, everyone very well understood that in the given case the text of the prayer was speaking without the slightest ambiguity about the Truth. Perhaps the Orthodox hierarchs have resorted, in the conference, to the old Jesuit practice of *reservatio mentalis*, but in that case if all these delegates do not repent of the sin of communion in prayer with heretics, then we must consider them to be on the completely false path of apostasy from the Truth of Orthodoxy... Ecumenism is the heresy of heresies because until now each heresy in the history of the Church has striven to take the place of the true Church, but the ecumenical movement, in uniting all the heresies, invites all of them together to consider themselves the one true Church."<sup>48</sup>

In 1975, Archbishop Athenagoras of Thyateira and Great Britain published, with the blessing of Patriarch Demetrius, his *Thyateira Confession*, which declared that the Church is a house without walls which anyone can enter freely and receive "eucharistic hospitality". And he wrote: "Orthodox Christians believe that the following Churches have valid and true Priesthood or Orders. The Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, the Ethiopian, the Copto-Armenian and the Anglican. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Romania and the Church of Cyprus half a century ago declared officially that the Anglican Church has valid Orders by dispensation and that means that Anglican Bishops, Priests and Deacons can perform valid sacraments as can those of the Roman Catholic Church."<sup>49</sup>

This heretical confession was condemned by Metropolitan Philaret and his Synod of the Russian Church Outside Russia.

Also in 1975, at the WCC's General Assembly in Nairobi, the Orthodox delegates, having agreed to recognize the sacraments of the non-Orthodox delegates, declared that "the Orthodox do not expect the other Christians to be converted to Orthodoxy in its historic and cultural reality of the past and the present and to become members of the Orthodox Church" - which gave the lie to their excuse that they were participating in the ecumenical movement "to witness to the non-Orthodox".<sup>50</sup>

Again, in 1980, the Ecumenical Press Service declared that the WCC was working on plans to unify all Christian denominations into a single new religion.<sup>51</sup>

Then, in 1982, an inter-denominational eucharistic service was composed at a conference in Lima, Peru, in which the Protestant and Orthodox representatives to the

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<sup>48</sup> Vitaly, "Ekumenizm (Ecumenism)", *Pravoslavnij Vestnik (The Orthodox Herald)*, June, 1969, pp. 14-30; *Moskva (Moscow)*, 1991, № 9, p. 149.

<sup>49</sup> Athenagoras (Kokkinakis), *The Thyateira Confession*, London, 1975, p. 61.

<sup>50</sup> "Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, October 27 / November 9, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Newsletter of the Foreign Relations Department of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia*, January-March, 1981, p. 2.

WCC agreed that the baptism, eucharist and ordinations of *all* denominations were valid and acceptable.<sup>52</sup>

In 1990, a Declaration was agreed at Chambésy in Switzerland between a Joint Commission of theologians of the Orthodox (including the EP) and the Monophysites (called “Oriental Orthodox” in the documents), in which the Orthodox and Monophysites were called two “families of churches” (a phrase unknown to Orthodox ecclesiology).

Paragraph Four of the Declaration said: “The two families accept that the two natures [of Christ] with their own energies and wills are united hypostatically and naturally without confusion, without change, without division and without separation and that they are distinguished only in thought (εν θεωρία).”

This is already completely unacceptable from an Orthodox point of view, and represents a heretical, Monophysite formulation. The two natures and wills of Christ are not distinguishable “only in thought”, but also in reality. Paragraph Seven also speaks of the two natures being distinguishable “only in thought”, which implies, as Ludmilla Perepiolkina points out “an *absence of this distinction in reality*”.<sup>53</sup>

Paragraph Five states: “The two families accept that the One Who wills and acts is always the single Hypostasis of the incarnate Logos”. However, as Perepiolkina again correctly points out, according to the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor, “the concept of energy (activity) of nature is attributable only to nature as a whole, and not to the hypostasis. This teaching was affirmed at the Sixth Ecumenical Council. In the Chambésy Declaration, as it is evident from Paragraph Five, natural wills and energies in Jesus Christ are attributed to His Hypostasis. In other words, this Paragraph is a *purely Monothelite formula*”.<sup>54</sup>

Paragraph Eight states: “The two families accept the first three Ecumenical Councils which form our common heritage. With regard to the four later Councils of the Orthodox Church, the Orthodox affirm that, for them, points one through seven are also the teaching of these four later Councils, whereas the oriental Orthodox consider this affirmation of the Orthodox like their own interpretation. In this sense the oriental Orthodox respond positively to this affirmation.”

An unclear statement, about which one thing, however, is clear: the Monophysites do *not* commit themselves to accepting the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils in the way the Orthodox do, but only “positively respond to their affirmation”, which means nothing in dogmatic terms.

Paragraph Nine states: “In the light of our joint declaration on Christology and the joint affirmations mentioned above, we now clearly realize and understand that our

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<sup>52</sup> See Archbishop Vitaly, “The 1983 Sobor of Bishops”, *Orthodox Christian Witness*, August 20 / September 2, 1984, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Perepiolkina, *Ecumenism – A Path to Perdition*, St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 251.

<sup>54</sup> Perepiolkina, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

two families have always loyally guarded the same and authentic Christological Orthodox Faith, and have maintained uninterrupted the apostolic tradition although they may have used the Christological terms in a different manner. It is that common faith and that continual loyalty to the apostolic tradition which must be the basis of our unity and communion."

This is in flat contradiction to 1500 years of Orthodox Tradition, during which all the Holy Fathers unambiguously affirmed that the Monophysites had *not* "loyally guarded the same and authentic Christological Orthodox Faith", and were in fact heretics. But the modern ecumenists claim that all the six hundred and thirty holy Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, as well as all the Fathers of all the succeeding Council that condemned Monophysitism, were wrong, and the whole controversy was simply based on some linguistic misunderstandings!

Paragraph Ten of the Declaration states: "The two families accept that all the anathemas and the condemnations of the past which kept us divided must be lifted by the Churches so that the last obstacle to full unity and communion of our two families can be removed by the grace and power of God. The two families accept that the lifting of the anathemas and the condemnations will be based on the fact that the Councils and the father previously anathematised or condemned were not heretics."

So according to these "theologians", the anathemas against all the Monophysite councils and fathers, including the notorious heresiarchs Dioscurus, Timothy and Severus, lifted! This is a clear and explicit rejection of the Faith of the Seven Ecumenical Councils! Of course, the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches (with the exception of Jerusalem) have already *implicitly* rejected the Councils and the Fathers by their communion in prayer and the sacraments with all sorts of heretics, and even pagans, the WCC General Assembly in Canberra in 1991 being perhaps the most extreme example. Nevertheless, it is a further and important stage to say *explicitly* that the Ecumenical Councils were *wrong*, that the Monophysites should not have been condemned, that they were Orthodox all these centuries although the Holy Fathers and all the saints of the Orthodox Church considered them to be heretics. This is not simply a failure to come up to the standards of the Ecumenical Councils: *it is a renunciation of the standards themselves.*

In essence, the Local Orthodox Churches, led by the EP, here placed themselves under the anathemas against Monophysitism from the Fourth Ecumenical Council onwards, and must be considered to be "semi-Monophysites".

The ROCOR and the Greek Old Calendarists quickly condemned the Chambésy agreement.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, in 1992 the patriarchate of Antioch entered into full, official

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<sup>55</sup> Metropolitan Calliopius of Pentapolis, *Prodosia tis Orthodoxias (Betrayal of Orthodoxy)*, Piraeus, 1991; *O Pharos tis Orthodoxias (The Lighthouse of Orthodoxy)*, October, 1991, № 66, p. 120; Monk Isaac, "Commentary on the latest recommendations of the Joint Commission for theological dialogue between the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 42, № 3, May-June, 1991; "Dossier sur les Accords de Chambésy entre Monophysites et Orthodoxes (Dossier on the Agreements of Chambésy between the Monophysites and the Orthodox)", *La Lumière du Thabor (The Light of Tabor)*, № 31, 1991.

communion with the Monophysites. There is every indication that the Moscow Patriarchate wants to go along the same path. The MP's relations with the Armenian Monophysites are especially close.

Chambésy was followed by the Seventh General Assembly of the WCC in Canberra in 1991, in which the Orthodox delegates blasphemed against the Faith still more blatantly. Thus aboriginal pagans invited the participants to pass through a "cleansing cloud of smoke" uniting Aboriginal spirituality to Christian spirituality!

In March, 1992, the heads of the Local Orthodox Churches met in Constantinople and official renounced proselytism among Western Christians. Of course, this renunciation had been implicit in the Ecumenical Patriarchate's statements since the encyclical of 1920. But it still came as a shock to see the "Church" renounced the hope of conversion and therefore salvation for hundreds of millions of westerners.

Union with the Monophysites proceeded in parallel with moves for union with the Catholics. In 1994 the Local Orthodox churches signed the Balamand agreement with the Catholics, in which the Orthodox and the Catholics were declared to be sister-Churches in the full sense, "two lungs" of the same organism (with the Monophysites as a "third lung"?). The Balamand Agreement, which was signed on the Orthodox side by Moscow, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Romania, Cyprus, Poland and Finland, declared: "Catholics and Orthodox... are once again discovering each other as sister churches" and "recognizing each other as sister churches". "On each side it is acknowledged that what Christ has entrusted to His Church – the profession of the apostolic faith, participation in the same sacraments, the apostolic succession of bishops, and, above all, the one priesthood celebrating the one Sacrifice of Christ – cannot be considered to be the exclusive property of one of our Churches." The baptism of penitent papists into the Orthodox Church was prohibited: "All rebaptism (sic) is prohibited." The Orthodox Church "recognizes the Catholic Church in her entirety as a sister Church, and indirectly recognizes also the Oriental Catholic Churches" (the Uniates). "Special attention should be given on both sides to the preparation and education of future priests with regard to the new ecclesiology, (that they may) be informed of the apostolic succession of the other Church and the authenticity of its sacramental life, (so that) the use of history in a polemical manner (may be avoided)".

This was an official acceptance of the "branch theory" of the Church. There were protests in Greece and Mount Athos, but Patriarch Bartholomew forced the protestors to back down. This was the same Patriarch, the most senior in Orthodoxy, who said a few years later: "Orthodox Christian and modernist, Protestant and modernist, Jew and modernist, Catholic and modernist: however we worship, as long as we abide in our faith and unite it to our works in the world, we bring the living and always timely message of Divine wisdom into the modern world."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Patriarch Bartholomew, Address at Emory University at the Presidential Medal award ceremony, October 31, 1997.

Since the election of the fervently pro-Catholic (and pro-Soviet) Cyril (Gundyaev) as Patriarch of Moscow in 2009, Patriarch Bartholomew has received a powerful ally in his bid to unite the Orthodox Church with Rome. Preparations are now under way for a Council of the Local Orthodox Churches that will rubber-stamp the two patriarchs' uniate policy.

## 9. The EP's Inter-Faith Ecumenism, or "Super Ecumenism"

In the early 1980s inter-Christian ecumenism began to be supplemented by inter-faith ecumenism, or "super ecumenism". In 1983, the Vancouver General Assembly of the WCC was attended by representatives of every existing religion and began with a pagan rite performed by local Indians. The participation of Orthodox hierarchs in religious services with representatives of all the world's religions required a rebuke – and a rebuke was forthcoming.

First, the Greek Old Calendarist Metropolitan Gabriel of the Cyclades attempted to address the Vancouver Assembly. But he was not allowed to speak by the ecumenists, who thereby demonstrated that they are "tolerant" and "loving" to every kind of blasphemy, but not to the expression of True Christianity. Then the Synod of the ROCA, also meeting in Canada, anathematised ecumenism, declaring: "To those who attack the Church of Christ by teaching that Christ's Church is divided into so-called 'branches' which differ in doctrine and way of life, or that the Church does not exist visibly, but will be formed in the future when all 'branches' or sects or denominations, and even religions will be united in one body; and who do not distinguish the priesthood and mysteries of the Church from those of the heretics, but say that the baptism and eucharist of heretics is effectual for salvation; therefore to those who knowingly have communion with these aforementioned heretics or advocate, disseminate, or defend their new heresy of Ecumenism under the pretext of brotherly love or the supposed unification of separated Christians, **Anathema.**"<sup>57</sup>

The implication of this anathema was clear: since the EP was a fully participating member of the WCC, it was under anathema and deprived of the grace of sacraments. As I.M. has written: "There is no heresy without heretics and their practical activity. The WCC in its declarations says: The Church confesses, the Church teaches, the Church does this, the Church does that. In this way the WCC witnesses that it does not recognize itself to be simply a council of churches, but the one church. And all those who are members of the WCC are members of this one false church, this synagogue of satan. And by this participation in the WCC all the local Orthodox churches fall under the anathema of the ROCA of 1983 and fall away from the True Church..."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See "A Contemporary Patristic Document", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, November 14/27, 1983, p. 3; "Encyclical Letter of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 33, № 6, November-December, 1983, p. 13; Bishop Hilarion of Manhattan, "Answers to Questions Posed by the Faithful of the Orthodox Parish in Somerville, South Carolina", *Sunday of the Myrrhbearers*, 1992.

<sup>58</sup> "Iskazhenie dogmata 'O edinstve Tserkvi' v ispovedaniakh very Sinodom i Soborom Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi Zagranitesj (The Distortion of the dogma 'on the Unity of the Church' in the confessions of faith by the Synod and Council of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad)".

In spite of this, the EP has continued to have close relations with non-Christian religions, particularly the Jews and the Muslims. In 1989 Patriarch Parthenius of Alexandria declared that Mohammed was an “Apostle of God” – words that many thousands of New Martyrs under the Turkish yoke had refused to utter even on pain of death. This apostasy from the Christian faith drew no rebuke from the EP.

Most recently, Patriarch Bartholomew congratulated Muslims on the end of the Ramadan fast. Fr. Steven Allen writes: “If anyone asks you why the Genuine Orthodox Christians do not commemorate the present Ecumenical Patriarch, you could, among numerous other items, refer them to the story at the link below. I pray that it will cause them to think.

“Patriarch Bartholomew is here publicly teaching that the god of Islam is the true God. This is an inescapable conclusion from his asking ‘God Almighty’ to reward the Hagarenes for keeping Ramadan. This by itself makes him a heretic.

“The Mohammedans do not worship the Holy Trinity, and therefore their god is a false god. There is no generic ‘God Almighty’ whom all men - or all ‘monotheists’ - worship, of whom the Holy Trinity is merely a representation or an optional ‘conceptualization’. The Holy Trinity is, simply and absolutely, the only God.

“If the Patriarch truly loved the Hagarenes and wanted the true God Almighty to bless them, he would call upon them to convert to the Faith in the Holy Trinity. If one objects that then he would die for the Faith, for the Moslems would slay him...well, that's good, isn't it? Isn't that what we believe in?”<sup>59</sup>

## 10. The EP's Persecution of Confessing Orthodox Christians

In spite of the EP's supposedly universal “love” that embraces all heretics and even non-Christian religions, it clearly hates one group of people – the truly confessing Orthodox Christians. Thus in 1992 it expelled the confessing monks of the skete of the Holy Prophet Elijah (Russian Church Abroad) from Mount Athos. Again, it has initiated an unprecedented campaign of slander and harassment against the 104 monks of the Athonite monastery of Esphigmenou. The monastery has been subjected to a military siege; its property has been seized; a false monastery called “Esphigmenou” has been created in order to take the place of the genuine monastery of that name; and most recently it has succeeded in having jail sentences served by the Greek courts on the monastery's Abbot Methodius and twelve of his monks. So the EP today combines the broadest welcome to almost all contemporary heresies while persecuting those who hold to the True Orthodox faith. To him and to those with him the Church proclaims: **Anathema!**

*July 28 / August 10, 2004; revised September 16/29, 2009.*

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<sup>59</sup> Fr. Steven Allen, “NFTU: True Orthodox and Ecumenism News: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Blesses the End of Ramadan”, September 29, 2009.



#### 4. A LETTER TO AN ANGLICAN FRIEND ON HERESY

Dear C.,

I think it's a little unfortunate that this conversation centres on the calendar question, because we can't profitably discuss this question until we have agreed on certain basic principles. But let me say this much before turning to the more basic issues. The calendar question is not about astronomical accuracy: it is about unity of worship. Unity of worship between the Heavenly and the Earthly Church, and between all parts of the Earthly Church, has always been of great importance to the Orthodox. That is why it occupied the heads of the Churches in the second century (Rome and the East), at the First Ecumenical Council (where the basic rules of our calendar were established), the Synod of Whitby in 664 (unity between the Celts and Saxons), many Synods in East and West in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries (England waited 169 years before adopting the Gregorian calendar, and even then there were riots in the streets), and in modern times. If unity of worship is unimportant to you, then the calendar question will be unimportant to you. But it is important to us, and has been important to most of the Christian world for most of Christian history.

But let's get down to basic principles. You haven't answered my question about how you interpret the Scriptural passages I cited. So let me take the first: "If he refuses to hear even the Church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector" (Matthew 18.17). This passage indicates the great importance of the Divinely founded institution of the Church - that institution which St. Paul called "the pillar and ground of the Truth" (I Timothy 3.15). The Lord says that we must obey the Church; St. Paul - that we cannot be in the truth without being in the Church. Now we cannot obey the Church unless we know where it is. So what are the marks of the Church? True faith and true worship. When quarrels arose over what was the true faith and worship of the Church, the bishops got together in Councils to thrash the matter out. When the Councils had reached a decision, all the bishops were required to sign a confession of faith expressing that decision. Those who refused, insofar as they were refusing to obey the Church, were treated, in accordance with the Lord's words, "as heathen and tax collectors". Of course, there were some "robber councils" - that is, councils at which heresy, rather than Orthodoxy, triumphed. But over the years and centuries seven particularly important Councils were accepted in both East and West (excluding the Monophysite and Nestorian "Churches") as having particular authority. These define both the dogmatic faith and the canonical discipline of the Orthodox Church to this day.

Unfortunately, however, in the West since the rise of the Papacy, and especially since the Reformation, the Ecumenical Councils have been increasingly ignored, even despised. The result is that the West has not only lost unity of faith and worship within itself: it has also lost it with the Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils - that is, the Church of the first millenium of Christian history. Now anyone can proclaim just about any kind of teaching, however far removed from Christianity, label it "Christian" and pass muster as a "Christian" and a member of the "Church" (you can be a member of the Methodist "Church" in England, for example, without even believing in God!).

Until the early twentieth century the Orthodox Church retained both its internal unity and its unity with the Early Apostolic Church through its faithfulness to the teachings of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, “the seven pillars of wisdom”. However, under the twin hammer blows of Communism and Ecumenism (“Ecucommunism”, as I have called it), the major part of the Orthodox Church has also fallen away. This should not surprise us: the Lord called His Church a “little flock” and put the rhetorical question: “When I come again, shall I find faith on the earth?” (Luke 12.40, 18.8). (Answer: not much.) But He also said that “the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church” (Matthew 16.18). So even in the last, most terrible times, when the vast majority of mankind will fall into the abyss, there will still be the opportunity for the lover of truth to find the One True Church, Christ’s “little flock”; and even in our terrible times there have been literally *millions* of martyrs for the truth, and great wonderworkers whom God has glorified with great signs and miracles on the earth. However, to those who “did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved,... God will send a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie” (II Thessalonians 2.11-12). They will include the “believers” of the last, “Laodicean” period of Church history, of whom the Lord says: “Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3.16).

Now the modern, lukewarm “believer” trots out a number of standard arguments against the view I have just propounded. I shall call them the “persecution” argument, the “linguistic” argument, the “doctrine doesn’t matter anyway” argument and the “God is merciful” argument.

**1. The Persecution Argument.** This may be stated as follows: If we become obsessed with doctrinal niceties, we’ll only end up killing each other without anyone coming any closer to the “truth”. This is the way to the Inquisition, to Auschwitz, etc.

Needless to say, arguments about fundamental truth do not always end in blood; and the fact that they do occasionally should not put us off from “the one thing necessary” – the search for the truth. In any case, as I have already indicated, the Orthodox Church believes that peaceful persuasion, not physical persecution, is the right method for bringing people to a knowledge of the truth. That has been the method employed by all Orthodox missionaries and preachers in all ages. The teaching that heretics should be killed was first officially proclaimed, not by any Orthodox saint or council, but by Thomas Aquinas and the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, whence it entered the bloodstream of the Early Protestants and Anglicans. The Inquisition was a Catholic institution, and I know of no similar institution established by any Church authority in any Orthodox land.

Some physical persecution has been undertaken by secular authorities, it is true. For example, St. Constantine the Great exiled Arius and his followers after the First Ecumenical Council, and his example was followed by some other Orthodox emperors and kings. However, before condemning such an act, it would be worth asking *why* it was done.

Two possible answers suggest themselves. First, that, having failed with peaceful persuasion, the Emperor may have thought that a little physical and psychological suffering would humble the heretics and therefore dispose them to receive the truth, which always requires humility. This is an unlikely explanation in this case, but it should not be forgotten that “spare the rod and spoil the child” is a Biblical precept, and that God Himself often imposes physical sufferings on His people in order to bring them to their senses – there are many examples in the Bible from the Babylonian captivity to the plagues of the Book of Revelation.

More likely, the Emperor recognised that the Arians were beyond persuading, and that he exiled the heretics in order to protect those who were still Orthodox, but weak or immature in their thinking, from the corrupting influence of their teaching. Don’t forget that in the understanding of the Early Church, and of the Orthodox Church to this day, heresy is a disease which kills the soul, cuts it off from God; it is far worse in its effects than the worst of physical afflictions. That is why the apostles were so severe in relation to it. “If anyone preaches any other gospel to you that what you have received, let him be anathema” (Galatians 1.8). “A heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3.10). “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God... If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him” (II John 9-10).

**2. The Linguistic Argument.** How often have I heard the argument, even from very intelligent people: “These disputes were just about words; we mustn’t quarrel just about words; the truth cannot be wrapped up in linguistic definitions.” Of course, the truth cannot be “wrapped up” in words. But words can point to a truth – or a falsehood. “You obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered,” says St. Paul (Romans 6.17). Obviously he was talking about some teaching expressed in words. Again, “hold fast the form of sound words you have heard from me,” he says (II Timothy 1.13). What is he talking about if not about some verbally expressed teaching of the faith? Again: “With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and *with the mouth* confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10.10). So our words matter: with them we confess the truth or heresy, unto salvation or damnation. By what other way, besides “the form of sound words” and “confession with the mouth”, do we distinguish truth from falsehood?

If words are vitally important to scientists and writers and lawyers, why should they be any the less important to theologians? To say that Christ is “of one substance” with the Father is to express a radically different idea from saying that Christ is “of a similar substance” to the Father, yet this enormous difference in ideas is expressed by the difference of only one letter (iota) in Greek (“homoousios” as opposed to “homoiousios”). As the Lord Himself said, “not one iota shall pass away...” In the fourth century, both learned people and simple people, both Orthodox and heretics, understood both the difference in these words and the enormous importance of the difference. Not now! Why? The answer to this question brings me to:

**3. The “Doctrine Doesn’t Matter Anyway” Argument.** For nearly nineteen centuries, Christians and heretics argued about truth and heresy, but they had this in common: they agreed that there *was* a difference, and that the difference was vitally

important. What distinguishes 20<sup>th</sup>-century heretics from almost all previous ones is that they don't even believe in the existence of heresy – or, if they do, they don't believe it's important. I once read a review in *Church Times* of a book on the wars between Anglicans and Catholics in sixteenth-century England. The reviewer said that both sides were equally right, and the “martyrs” on both sides were martyrs, even though they died for completely contradictory “truths”, because the only real heresy is the idea that there is such a thing as heresy. This is essentially the doctrine of ecumenism, which would unite every conceivable truth and heresy in a pan-cosmic religious stew in which everyone can believe as they like “because all paths lead to God”. But this is simply the abandonment of reason and objectivity in favour of complete subjectivism. And the Orthodox Church has officially defined it as “the heresy of heresies” because it combines all heresies in itself while denying the very existence of objective truth.

For if heresy doesn't exist, then truth doesn't exist either. And if the difference between truth and heresy is unimportant, then Christianity and religion in general are unimportant. Because if Christianity is anything at all, it is TRUTH. “Father, sanctify them by Thy truth”, said the Lord. But if anything goes, if anything is accepted as the truth, then where is the possibility of sanctification?

Or of salvation? Until our inglorious twentieth century, all those who called themselves Christians, heretics as well as true believers, accepted that in Christ alone is salvation, and that the way to salvation is through true, correct faith in Him – faith that is then expressed and confirmed by good works. Faith without works is dead, and works without true faith, as the Venerable Bede says, is also dead. It does not lead to salvation. Heretics are not saved themselves, and lead others to perdition.

Let us hear some apostolic testimonies on this subject. “Their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the faith, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some” (II Timothy 2.17-18). “As Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith” (II Timothy 3.8). “Rebuke them sharply, that they be sound in the faith” (Titus 1.13). “Heresies... and the like: of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practise such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Galatians 5.20-21). “There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord Who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (II Peter 2.1).

Do we need any more testimonies to the undeniable fact that heretics destroy themselves and those who listen to them, and that, as St. Paul said, “their mouths must be stopped” – by persuasion if they will listen, by expulsion from the Church if they will not. For they are blind leaders of the blind, as the Lord said – and both leaders and followers fall into a pit. They are dry branches who will be cut off from the True Vine and thrown into the fire, as the Lord again said.

But all this is too terrifying for some tender (St. Paul calls them “itching”) ears, and they want to change the Gospel to make it “nicer”. So we come to the following very nice “argument”:

**4. The “God Is Merciful” Argument.** God will not condemn heretics, goes the argument, for the simple reason that He is merciful. He is too compassionate to send His creature to hell. The very idea is so uncivilized!

“Civilized” or not, it happens to be what we read in the Word of God – and what we read in the word of God inscribed on our hearts, our conscience, if only we read it honestly. Yes, God is merciful – to the merciful. But He is also just, and rewards every man according to his works. Yes, He gives the Truth – Himself – to those who love the truth. But the corollary is also true: those who do not love the truth He gives over to the father of lies, Satan. Sometimes this happens even in this life. Thus about one sinner St. Paul said: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (I Corinthians 5.4-5). And St. Peter wasn’t exactly merciful to Ananias and Sapphira... As David says in the Psalms: “With the holy man wilt Thou be holy, and with the innocent man wilt Thou be innocent. And with the elect man wilt Thou be elect, and with the perverse wilt Thou be perverse...” (Psalms 17.25-26 (LXX)).

Any careful reader of the Gospel will agree that it is both the most comforting, and the most terrifying book ever written. “Many are called, but few are chosen.” “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” “Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” “It is more difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven than...” “Depart from Me, I never knew you...” “You, Capernaum,... will be brought down to hell.” “Better were it for that man if he had never been born...”

Yes, God is merciful, because He gives us every opportunity to be saved, and warns us in every way against the path that leads to damnation. But we are unutterably foolish, because we want to rewrite the rules, as if we were the Judge and not the man standing in the dock. “Wait a minute, you can’t really mean that all who... will be damned!” “Okay, let Hitler and Stalin rot in hell, but we’re such *nice* people, I’m such a nice person...!”

What a shock death will be for the vast majority of mankind! And all because we do not want to believe what Christ has written with such clarity in His Gospel. We want dispensations for our lusts and passions, for our criminal indifference to the truth. We want to rewrite the Gospel, make it the Gospel according to Luther, or John-Paul II, or George Carey, which absolves all manner of heretics, all manner of evil perversions, all manner of betrayals of the One Saviour of mankind. But St. Paul consigns all those who preach a different Gospel to the terrible sentence of anathema. And what does the Apostle of love and mercy say in the very last chapter of God’s Word? “I testify to anyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book;

and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book...." (Revelation 22.18).

With love,  
Vladimir.

*September 3/16, 1999.  
St. Edward the Martyr, King of England.*

## 5. ON MYSTERY AND MYSTIFICATION

"None of the mysteries," writes Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, "of the most secret wisdom of God ought to appear alien or altogether transcendent to us, but in all humility we must apply our spirit to the contemplation of divine things." And so, in the Divine services of the Orthodox Church, we are constantly being drawn to contemplate the mysteries of our salvation - especially the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ, but also those of the Holy Trinity, the creation of the world out of nothing, the Cross and the Resurrection, the Church, the Second Coming and the Terrible Judgement, man made in the image of God, eternal life and eternal damnation. By contemplating these mysteries, our faith is strengthened and deepened, we draw closer to God and His saints and further away from the abyss of unbelief and heresy.

However, there is a trend in contemporary heretical thought that seeks to use the concept of "mystery" to overturn faith in the mysteries and replace it by a false religious mysticism and a pseudo-intellectual *mystification*. This current of thought does not openly deny any of the mysteries of the faith - with the exception of the mystery of the Church, upon whose denial the whole of Protestantism is based. Rather, it loves to talk about "the eternal Christ" of St. John's Gospel (their favourite because it is so "mystical"), about "parousia" and "eternal life", about "transfiguration" and "deification" and "resurrection" - but in senses that are so alien to the Orthodox understanding that we have to use these terms in quotation marks. Characteristic of this current of thought is its blurring of the boundaries between psychology and religion, between experiences of the soul and dogmas of the faith. Characteristic, too, is its syncretism, its willingness, indeed determination, to identify Christian concepts with pagan (especially Buddhist) ones, and the Christian world-view with the scientific world-view - even those elements of the scientific world-view, such as evolutionism, which are most contrary to traditional, Orthodox Christianity.

When one asks the "mystifiers", as I shall call them, whether they believe, for example, that Jesus Christ is God, the Creator of the universe, one rarely gets a straight answer. Thus they may admit that Christ is "divine" - but not that He is "God", that "God is uniquely expressed in Christ" - but not that He created the universe. And then if one shows some dissatisfaction by this lack of clarity, one is told that one must not try to "analyze the mystery", that "words cannot express the mystery", with more than a hint that one is not "deep" or "mystical" or "apophatic" enough. And if one counters that the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, who invented the term "apophatic" and knew a great deal more about mysticism than any of us, were nevertheless quite prepared to make the clear and categorical statements of faith which the mystifiers are not prepared to make, one is gently chided for being too "dogmatic" and "rationalist". The unspoken assumption behind the mystifiers' "argument" is that they, as educated people of the twentieth century, do not need the Apostles or Fathers to guide them any longer; like the gnostics of all ages, *they know better*, they have a special insight into religious truth which does not need words and definitions, because "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must keep silent"...

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The leaders in this heretical trend are the Anglicans. Beginning from the 1960s and the infamous book *Honest to God*, the Anglican Church has undergone a most astonishing doctrinal degeneration. All the basic truths of the faith have been denied, with astounding arrogance, from the highest pulpits in the land, and with minimal resistance from the so-called believers. The only issue which has produced any real rebellion has been the ordination of women as priests - and this drew from the archbishop of Canterbury the amazing reaction that those who believed in an exclusively male priesthood (that is, 99.9% of all Christians, Orthodox and heretical, before our present "enlightened" age) were "heretics"! In 1995, after an Anglican priest was (very belatedly) defrocked for saying that God "has no objective existence", 65 priests wrote an open letter to *The Times* protesting the decision on the grounds that it was a "violation of human rights"! It is in this "Church" of rampant liberalism, if not outright atheism, that the mystifiers have flourished and prospered.

But the roots of Anglican mystification go much deeper; we see it already in that issue which was at the heart of the Anglican Reformation - the Eucharist. The early Anglican Reformers, being true Protestants, denied that the sacrament of the Eucharist is the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and truly His Body and Blood - and they were prepared to be burned at the stake for this denial. However, since King Henry VIII remained a Catholic at heart, the first Anglican archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer, was forced to conceal his Protestant tendencies and devise a form of words which could be interpreted in either a Catholic or Protestant sense. Thus was invented the first mystification of modern times - the doctrine of the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. The Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church could take it to mean that Christ is "truly present" in His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. The Low Church wing could take it to mean that Christ is *not* present literally and physically, but only spiritually and symbolically. And the broad mass of believers in the middle could take refuge from the necessity of choosing between the two, mutually incompatible doctrines by saying simply that it was an inexplicable mystery.

*Of course*, the Eucharist is a great mystery. *Of course*, one cannot say how this, or any of the other great mysteries of the faith takes place, nor subject them to scientific analysis. But that is no reason for deliberate doctrinal ambiguity and obfuscation, for *making a mystification out of the mystery*. The Apostles and the Fathers of the Church were so conscious of the mystery of the Eucharist that it was the one doctrine of the Church which was not proclaimed from the rooftops, and which was hidden even from catechumens until after they had actually partaken of it. But this is no way preventing them, when necessity (in the form of the appearance of heresy) presented itself, of proclaiming the mystery clearly and unambiguously - and of making the acceptance of the definitions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils the touchstone of true belief in, and passport to participation of, the mysteries.

That is why the Orthodox Church chants: "The preaching of the Apostles and the doctrines of the Fathers confirmed the one Faith of the Church. And wearing the garment of truth woven from the theology on high, she rightly divideth and glorifieth the great mystery of piety." And again: "The choir of the holy Fathers, which hath gathered from the ends of the earth, hath taught the single essence of the Father, Son

and Holy Spirit, and hath carefully committed to the Church the mystery of theology." The Church "rightly divides" the great mystery of piety from the mystery of iniquity by uttering God-inspired definitions of the faith which are immediately recognized by those who truly believe as expressing their own faith. But those who are outside the Church, to whom the mystery of theology has not been committed, instinctively feel that this definition does *not* express what they believe; and so, if they are honest, they openly reject it, and if they are dishonest, they resort to mystification.

Mystification like the following, which is to be found in the theological novel *Mystical Paths* by the Anglican writer Susan Howatch: "He paused again, and in that silence I heard the sentence resonate as the footsteps of mysticism and Gnosticism echoed and re-echoed in the classic Christian corridor. Then I saw Truth as a multi-sided diamond with the themes of heresy and orthodoxy all glittering facets of a single reality, and beyond the facets I glimpsed that mysterious Christ of St. John's Gospel, not the Jesus of history but the Christ of Eternity who is turn pointed beyond himself to the Truth no human mind could wholly grasp..." As if Truth were on a par with heresy, or Gnosticism could co-exist with "classic" Christianity, or "the Christ of Eternity" were not *at the same time* "the Jesus of history"!

This passage comes in the middle of a "healing" session conducted by an Anglican priest, which actually describes a psychic seance. And this leads us to another important fact concerning the mystifiers: that in rejecting the mystery of theology as defined by the Seven Ecumenical Councils, they lay themselves open to a false and demonic mysticism. Hence the speaking in tongues and emotional outpourings and "healings", the inter-faith services and homosexual marriages and calling up of dead spirits by women "priests". For just as Orthodox faith and obedience to all the teachings of the Orthodox Church is the only entrance to true mysticism, so heresy and mystification is the immediate passport to false mysticism, to spiritual deception and, ultimately, to possession by demonic spirits. And such possession can spread from individuals and groups of individuals to whole churches and nations, as we see in the Russian revolution (which was preceded by the spread, not only of Marxism, but also of Theosophy) and in the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s (which was preceded by the widespread practice of occultism).

But the true mystics, such as St. John and St. Paul, were the sworn enemies of all kinds of heresy, mystification and pseudo-mysticism. Thus St. John says: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed, for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John, 10-11). And St. Paul says: "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith" (II Corinthians 13.5), and: "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (I Corinthians 14.33), and: "The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (I Timothy 4.1).

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The Greek word for "mystery" means literally that which is shut or closed or hidden. Thus St. Paul was speaking of a mystery when he said that he was "caught up

into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (II Corinthians 12.4). These words are hidden from us because we are not worthy, we are not in a spiritual condition to receive them.

But this is not to say that mysteries *cannot*, in any circumstances, be understood. On the contrary, that which is hidden from some in some circumstances can be opened and revealed to others. Such was the mystery of the Divinity of Christ, which was revealed to the Apostle Peter, as the Lord Himself declared: "Blessed art Thou, Peter, Bar Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it [the mystery] unto thee, but My Father Which is in heaven" (Matthew 16.18). As Blessed Theophylact, archbishop of Bulgaria, comments: "He calls Peter blessed for having received knowledge by divine grace. And by commending Peter, He thereby shows the opinion of other men to be false. For He calls Him 'Bar Jona', that is, 'son of Jona', as if saying, 'Just as you are the son of Jona, so am I the Son of My Father in heaven, and of one essence with Him.' He calls this knowledge 'revelation', *speaking of hidden and unknown things that were disclosed by the Father.*"

In this sense, all true believers in the Divinity of Christ are "mystics"; for to them has been made known "the mystery of His will", they have been given "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Ephesians 1.9,17). And indeed, "all men" are called "to see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might by known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3.9-10). Thus the mystery is made known by the Father to the Church, which in turn makes it known both to men and to the ranks of the angels.

From this it should be clear that the mysteries of God are neither radically unknowable, nor is it impossible to express them in words - although the understanding of the words, and the communication of the mystery, is impossible without *grace*, the sending of the Holy Spirit from the Father. Without grace the mystery will remain hidden; for faith is a gift of grace (Ephesians 2.8).

But words, too, are important; for they show us whether a man has truly received the mystery or not. Just as Christ is called the Word of God because He reveals to us the mystery of the Father, so the words of our confession of faith reveal the presence of the mystery of Christ in us. For "I believed, and therefore I spoke" (Psalms 115.1). And "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10.10).

And that is why the words and definitions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils must be accepted by all true Christians. For they are not foolish attempts to express the inexpressible, as the mystifiers would have it, but living words from the Word, "the garment of truth woven from the theology on high." Therefore St. Paul says: "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 1.13).

It follows that those who refuse to give a clear and unambiguous confession of faith, but rather resort to mystification on the basis of a supposed reverence for "the mystery", are in fact strangers to the mystery of Christ and partakers of "the mystery of iniquity" (II Thessalonians 2.7). They will not express the right confession because they do not have it - although they are not slow to express their judgement of those who do have it. To them, therefore, we can with justice say, in the words of Wittgenstein: "Whereof you cannot speak - because you do not believe it - thereof you should keep silent"...

## 6. BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

The very beginning and foundation of the Christian life is the mystery of Holy Baptism. The Christian enters the Church through Baptism, and without Baptism it is impossible to be saved. As the Lord Himself said: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3.6). Again: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16.16). And again: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28.19-20).

If Christ Himself has laid it down as a condition of our salvation that we follow His teachings, and especially the teaching on Baptism, how foolish are we if we ignore His words! And if Christ Himself, Who alone was sinless and did not need Baptism, consented to be baptised at the hands of St. John the Forerunner, saying: "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3.15), of what condemnation shall we not be found worthy if we ignore His example and introduce a righteousness of our own making?! And yet in the Christian world today we are witnessing a radical corruption of both the doctrine and the practice of Holy Baptism.

This corruption comes from different historical sources: the rejection of full triune immersion - from Catholicism, the rejection of water baptism in favour of a so-called "baptism of the Spirit" - from Protestantism, the rejection of the very necessity and efficacy of baptism - from Ecumenism. Let us consider each of these in turn.

**1. How is Baptism performed?** The Greek word βαπτίζειν means "to immerse repeatedly".<sup>60</sup> Therefore a baptism which is performed with only one immersion (as is done by the Baptists) or with no immersions but only sprinkling or pouring (as is done by the Catholics, the Anglicans and many Protestant sects) is not Baptism in the proper meaning of the word. The 50th Canon of the Holy Apostles declares: "If any bishop or priest does not form three immersions, but a single immersion, that given into the death of the Lord, let him be deposed. For the Lord did not say, 'Baptize ye into My death', but, 'Go ye and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'."

Threefold immersion represents both the Triune Divinity and the three-day Death, Burial and Resurrection of the Lord. To be immersed only once signifies to die in the Lord's Death, but not to rise in His Resurrection. It is as if the rebirth which is to be accomplished by Holy Baptism were *aborted*, or - a *stillbirth*.

According to the 84th Canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, a person who does not know or cannot demonstrate that he was correctly baptized must without hesitation be baptized. Hence the practice, in the True Church, of baptizing Catholics and Protestants when they turn to the True Faith. Although this is sometimes called

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<sup>60</sup> Archbishop Nikifor of Slavensk and Cherson, "Encyclical Epistle against Baptism by Pouring", 1754; reprinted in *Sviataia Rus'*, N 2, 1993, pp. 55-57.

"rebaptism", this is a misnomer, because, as we have seen, "baptism" that is not by three immersions is not in fact baptism at all.

**2. In what does Baptism consist?** If the Catholics cut short the rite of Holy Baptism and therefore abort it, the Protestants of the contemporary "born again" variety eliminate it entirely. The Lord said that Holy Baptism is "by water and the Spirit". But the "born again Christians" first divide the indivisible concept of the One Baptism into two, by distinguishing between a "water baptism" and a "baptism of the Holy Spirit", and then reject "water baptism" altogether - or allow it as an optional extra to "the real thing", the so-called "baptism of the Holy Spirit".

What is this "baptism of the Holy Spirit"? Although clear theological descriptions or definitions are hard to come by, it seems to be a *conversion experience*, apparently quite sudden and independent of any rite. On receiving this conversion experience the believer suddenly considers himself saved and in need of nothing else.

Now a true conversion experience is, of course, of great significance for the salvation of the believer. If baptism is a birth, then the genuine conversion experience is the moment of conception. It is, as Fr. Gregory Williams puts it, "the spark of divine life [which] has been present in you [the baptized] from the moment of your conception, the Holy Spirit calling you to life eternal".<sup>61</sup>

But a conception that is not allowed to reach its fullness in birth, which is considered to be *both* conception *and* birth, is no conception at all, but a *phantom pregnancy*. And the Protestant doctrine that denies the necessity of full birth "by water and the Spirit" - that is, through the full rite of triune immersion carried out by a duly ordained priest - may be considered to be a (fully reliable) *contraceptive device* which prevents the conception of real Christians in the womb of their mother, the Church. It is of such "phantom Christians", who have either never been truly reborn in the Spirit or have never given birth to Christ in truly spiritual works that that great father of the Gentile Churches, the Apostle Paul, says: "I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (Galatians 4.19).

St. Paul himself had the archetype of all true conversion experiences in his famous encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus. But what does the Lord tell him to do? To go to Ananias. And what does Ananias do at the Lord's command? *Baptize him* (Acts 9.18).

Other examples could be multiplied. Thus when the eunuch receives his "conversion experience" through the Apostle Philip, he says: "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptised?" And he was baptized - by immersion; for "they both went down into the water" (Acts 8.36-38). Again, although Apollos was "fervent in the Spirit, and spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord" (Acts 18.26), he had only had the baptism of John, and so had to be baptized "by water and the Spirit". Again, when the centurion Cornelius and his household had been converted, the Apostle Peter said: "Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received

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<sup>61</sup> "A Baptismal Mystagogy", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 31, no. 2, March-April, 1981, p. 31.

the Holy Spirit as we have?" (Acts 10.47). Now at first sight this might seem to prove the Protestants' point in that Cornelius received the Holy Spirit *before* baptism. But it in fact proves just the opposite; it proves that the gift of the Holy Spirit which is given in faith (and, in this case, the speaking of tongues), far from making the still greater gift of Baptism *unnecessary*, rather makes it *mandatory*.

**3. What does Baptism do?** Baptism is the participation of the individual Christian in the Death and Resurrection of Christ (Romans 6.3-11). The baptized person receives the forgiveness of all his sins, both personal and generic; he is reborn to a new and holy life; he has put off the old Adam and put on the new Adam, Christ; he is a new creature. This rebirth is absolutely necessary for salvation because "flesh and blood", i.e. the "old nature which is corrupt through deceitful lusts" (Ephesians 4.22), "cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven" (I Corinthians 15.50).

The gift of faith alone without Baptism cannot, as the Protestants claim, lead us into the Kingdom of heaven; for the man with faith alone can see the goal of the Kingdom and can strive for it, but is prevented from entering because he has not received the redeemed and regenerated human nature which is given through the sacraments, and especially the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist. Faith without works is dead, and the first work of faith is the reception of the sacraments in accordance with Christ's command. Baptism washes the believer clean, clothing him in a robe of light; Chrismation gives him a new spirit, sealing him with the gift of the Holy Spirit; and the Eucharist gives him the Body and Blood of Christ, of which the Lord said: "Verily, verily I say unto you, unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you" (John 6.53).

In the *Life* of St. Martin of Tours by Sulpicius Severus we read of a certain catechumen who died without baptism while the saint was away. On his return, the saint, fearful concerning the lot of his spiritual son, resurrected him so as to baptize him. In reply to those who questioned him about his experiences after death, the catechumen said that he had been taken to a dark and gloomy dungeon - he had not been granted to enter Paradise because of his unbaptized state.

Now the ecumenists like to talk about rebirth, enlightenment, resurrection - all those images and symbols that we associate with Baptism. But they give them a meaning which is quite contrary to Orthodox Christianity. For there is no question, for the ecumenists, of crucifying the old man with all his lusts and fallen desires, and putting on the new man who is "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4.24). Rather, the goal of life for them is to give the fullest possible freedom and expression to the old man in his fallen nature, oriented as it is entirely to this-worldly pleasures and pursuits. Holiness as an ideal is completely foreign to them; they recognize no saints, and no ascetic struggle, unless it be the purely secular "sanctity" and struggles of such figures as Che Guevara or Martin Luther King.

Again, the World Council of Churches recognizes the baptisms of all its constituent churches. But what can this mean if, on the one hand, baptism for its "born-again" members, as we have seen, does not even involve water or a rite of any kind, and, on

the other hand, it is proclaimed that all religions lead to God? For if Jews and Muslims and Buddhists, who do not have baptism and do not even believe in Christ, are equally on the way to God with the Christians, the only conclusion must be that neither Baptism nor Christ Himself are necessary for salvation. The Apostle proclaims "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism" (Ephesians 4.5). But the new ecumenist gospel is: many lords, any kind of faith, and no baptism...

St. Paul teaches that before Baptism "we all lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2.3). But in the Spirit-filled water of Baptism we received mercy instead of wrath, light out of darkness, life after death. For those, however, who attempt to separate the water from the Spirit in a purely "spiritual" baptism, the living water of the Spirit, too, has run dry (John 7.38-39). For, as the Lord said to the prophet, "they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2.13). And those who attempt to deny the need for real rebirth, for a new Spirit of holiness that cannot abide with the spirit of this world, have fallen victim to a quite different, unholy and lying spirit, like those false prophets of whom the Prophet Michaeas said: "Lo, the Lord has allowed a lying spirit to enter the mouths of all these your prophets..." (III Kings 22.23)

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The Protestant doctrine of the "Baptism of the Spirit" recalls an ancient heresy called *Messalianism*.

This heresy, as Metropolitan Atanasije (Jevtic) of Herzegovina has written, preached a spirituality that was "*non-ecclesial and non-liturgical*". In its pure form, it "denied the Church and the Church's liturgical life: the sacraments (baptism, eucharist, priesthood), common worship, and all that in the name of a non-ecclesial and non-liturgical 'spirituality'. To this the Orthodox ecclesial *liturgical-hesychastic* true spirituality responded vehemently with unanimous condemnation, such that this type of heretical 'spirituality' fell under the same sharp condemnation, just as in the 4th century, so also in the 14th century, and that condemnation remains in effect today."<sup>62</sup>

One of the saints who wrote particularly against Messalianism was St. Mark the Ascetic in the fifth century; and it will be worth examining St. Mark's teaching on Baptism and the Spirit in more detail. St. Mark, writes Hieromonk Makarios of Simonopetra monastery, "wrote particularly to refute the Messalians, who disparaged the value of the sacraments and maintained that, once the 'Baptism of the Spirit' had been received, then the supposedly 'perfect' man would not be required to participate in the Church's life and could content himself with constant prayer. In reply, Saint Mark insisted that the whole of the spiritual life is nothing other than the development of the grace received in Holy Baptism. 'Christ, perfect God, has given to the baptised

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<sup>62</sup>Metropolitan Atanasije, "Liturgy and Spirituality", [http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/en\\_main/catechism/theologia\\_zoi/themata.asp?cat=leit&NF=1&contents=contents.asp&main=texts&file=3.htm](http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/en_main/catechism/theologia_zoi/themata.asp?cat=leit&NF=1&contents=contents.asp&main=texts&file=3.htm).

the gift of perfect grace in the Spirit; it can be given no sort of increase on our part, but is developed and manifested in us in the measure to which we put the commandments into practice. Adam's transgression placed our whole human nature in a state 'against nature', giving it over to the death of soul and body. Renewed by conformity to Christ the Second Adam in the washing of Holy Baptism, and placed in the Paradise of the Church as in a new Eden, man is hereafter free to work according to the commandments and the holy virtues, with the aim of discovering Christ in 'the most interior, hidden and pure place of his heart'. The grace of the Holy Spirit is therefore freely given to us from the time of our Baptism, but it remains there in bud unless we bring it to radiant flowering through the practice of the Commandments, being gradually led by it to a conscious sense of the fruits of the Holy Spirit 'in a taste of full certitude'.

"This gift of grace that Baptism gives us does not place us in a passive situation, but, on the contrary, represents for Saint Mark the beginning of a ceaseless battle against the passionate predispositions that dwell within us and against the thoughts suggested by the demons. This spiritual combat is that of repentance (metanoia), which must not only precede Baptism but be pursued throughout the whole of our life. All Christians must do violence to themselves till death in embracing the path of repentance, in order to show Christ that they have definitively turned from the inclination to evil inherited from our first father. 'All the commandments are contained in one single commandment,' he says, 'that of repentance'. And he adds: "The Lord conceals Himself within His commandments, and we find Him in the measure to which we seek Him'.

"Militating thus for Christ according to the spiritual Law of our renewed freedom, we must constantly keep very close to Him by remembrance of God, with pain of heart, and offer Him, as our first-fruits, all our thoughts as soon as they take root in our mind; thus repelling, through the grace of prayer, the assaults of the 'three giants' of evil: ignorance, negligence and forgetfulness. 'At the moment at which you remember God, pray with all your might, so that God will remind you when you forget Him', the holy ascetic recommends. It is by knocking, through prayer, at the door of this secret sanctuary of our heart, with perseverance and without distraction, that Christ the High Priest will finally open to us, received our offering and consume it by the fire of the Holy Spirit, making the grace of our Baptism shine forth in resplendence for all eternity..."<sup>63</sup>

*February 5/18, 1997; revised March 5/18, 2011.*

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<sup>63</sup> Hieromonk Makarios, *The Synaxarion*, Holy Convent of the Annunciation, Ormylia, 2003, volume 4: March, April, pp. 50-52.

## 7. A REVIEW OF "THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ECUMENISM"

*The Struggle against Ecumenism* by the Holy Orthodox Church in North America (Boston, Mass., 1998) has two aims, the first explicitly stated and the second implicit. The first is to provide a history of the True Orthodox Church of Greece, the so-called "Old Calendarists", in its struggle against the heresy of Ecumenism from 1924 to 1994. The second is to provide an apologia on behalf of the "Auxentiite" branch of the Greek Old Calendarist Church, and in particular of its North American affiliate centred in Boston and calling itself the Holy Orthodox Church in North America. In its first, major aim this book must be judged to have succeeded; it is probably the best book on its subject to have appeared in English, and quite possibly in any language. With regard to its second aim, however, the present reviewer remains unconvinced that the book has proved its case.

The heresy of Ecumenism was first officially proclaimed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in its Encyclical, "To the Churches of Christ wheresoever they may be", dated 1920. In addition to recognizing the Catholics and Protestants as "fellow-heirs" of Christ with the Orthodox, this Encyclical made a number of proposals of a renovationist character, including the introduction of the new, papal or Gregorian calendar, all with the aim of bringing union between the Orthodox and the western heretics closer. That is why the introduction of the new calendar is regarded as the first concrete step (apart from the 1920 Encyclical itself) in the introduction of the heresy of Ecumenism.

In 1924, the new calendar was introduced into the State Church of Greece, and later in the same year into the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Romania. This provoked the emergence of the Old Calendarist movement in Greece, Romania and some other places where the Ecumenical Patriarchate had jurisdiction (e.g. the Russian monastery of Valaam, which was on the territory of the Finnish Church, which had been granted autonomy by Constantinople). From 1924 to 1935 the movement had a predominantly lay character, consisting of several hundred thousand Greek laymen and women with only a few priests (mainly hieromonks from Mount Athos) and no bishops. In 1935, however, three bishops from the new calendar State Church of Greece (two of them consecrated before 1924) returned to the Old Calendar and consecrated four new bishops. They then proclaimed that the State Church had fallen into schism and was deprived of the grace of sacraments.

The years 1935 to 1937 probably represented the peak of the Greek Old Calendarist Church, with a united and rapidly expanding membership that posed a serious threat to the official church. In 1937, however, after persecution from the State Church had reduced the number of Old Calendarist bishops to four, a tragic schism took place between two factions that came to be called the "Florinites" (after their leader, Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Florina) and the "Matthewites" (after Bishop Matthew of Bresthena) respectively. The "Florinites" declared that the new calendarists were only "potentially" and not "actually" schismatics, and still retained the grace of sacraments. The "Matthewites" considered that this was a betrayal of the 1935 confession and broke communion with the "Florinites".

By the late 1940s the Florinites had only one bishop (Metropolitan Chrysostomos) but the majority of the clergy and laity, while the Matthewites had two bishops (Matthew and Germanos, the latter of whom was in prison). Attempts at reunion foundered, not only on the question of grace, but also on Metropolitan Chrysostomos' refusal to consecrate any more bishops (even after Bishop Germanos had rejoined him). So in 1948, fearing that the Old Calendarist Church would again find itself without bishops, Bishop Matthew was persuaded (not immediately, but only after several years of pressure from his supporters) to consecrate some bishops on his own, the first of whom was Bishop Spyridon of Trimythus.

At this point the authors of *The Struggle against Ecumenism* make their first error of fact. On page 64 they write: "The saintly Spyridon of Trimithus spent the last years of his life in seclusion, refusing to celebrate as a hierarch because he had repented of being consecrated in this completely uncanonical way [that is, by one bishop alone]." This is not true. In 1981 Bishop Spyridon's closest disciple, Abbot Chrysostomos of Galactotrophousa monastery, near Larnaca, Cyprus, told the present reviewer a very different story - which is supported by the letters to him of Bishop Spyridon himself. He said that shortly after starting to serve as the only Old Calendarist bishop in Cyprus in 1949, Bishop Spyridon was exiled from the island to Greece by the British acting at the behest of the new calendarists. After some years, the Matthewite Synod decided to replace Spyridon as bishop in Cyprus. They invited Monk Epiphanius to Greece and ordained him to the priesthood. Then, in 1957 an election took place in Cyprus at which Fr. Epiphanius was elected to the episcopate, which was followed by his consecration in Greece. All this took place, however, without the blessing of the still-living Bishop of Cyprus, Spyridon, who refused to recognize Bishop Epiphanius. And he told his disciples on Cyprus, including Abbot Chrysostomos (who had been his candidate for the episcopate), not to serve with Bishop Epiphanius. Meanwhile, he entered into seclusion in Greece and did not serve with the Matthewites as a protest. After some time Abbot Chrysostomos entered into communion with Bishop Epiphanius, for which he was punished by his spiritual father, Bishop Spyridon. So he again broke communion with Epiphanius. The Matthewites responded by defrocking Abbot Chrysostomos (although he was simply following the command of his spiritual father), but did not touch Bishop Spyridon until his death in 1963. A few years ago, shortly before his death, Abbot Chrysostomos' defrocking was rescinded by the Matthewite Synod. When his remains were exhumed they were discovered to be partially incorrupt..

In spite of this error the schism between the Florinites and the Matthewites is in general treated with admirable fairness by the authors of *The Struggle against Ecumenism*. This is important, not only because the schism still exists (and has now been transposed onto Russian, American and West European soil), but also because existing accounts in English are heavily biased in favour of the Florinites. But the Boston authors, while in general inclining towards the Florinites (as does the present writer), not only note that "Bishop Matthew's integrity, personal virtue, and asceticism were admitted by all" (his relics are very fragrant, and he was a wonderworker both before and after his death in 1950), but also give reasons for supposing that a union between Chrysostomos and Matthew could have been effected

if it had not been for the zeal without knowledge of certain of Matthew's supporters. They also do not conceal the fact that in 1950 Metropolitan Chrysostomos repented of his confession of 1937 and returned to his confession of 1935, declaring that the new calendarists were deprived of sacraments. In fact, this remained the official confession of faith of all factions of the Greek Old Calendarist Church until the appearance of the "Synod of Resisters" led by Metropolitan Cyprian of Fili and Oropos in 1984...

The Boston authors continue their history of the Old Calendarist movement by relating how the Florinites, after the death of Metropolitan Chrysostomos in 1955, eventually received a renewal of their hierarchy through the Russian Church Abroad in the 1960s, and how the Matthewites also achieved recognition by the Russian Church Abroad in 1971. Again, the treatment of this phase in the history is objective and fair. Especially valuable is the translation of all the relevant documents in full and with a helpful commentary.

The rest of the book is mainly devoted to a defence of the Florinite Archbishop Auxentius of Athens, who was defrocked by a Synod composed of the majority of the Florinite bishops in 1985. The Boston authors do not hide the fact that Auxentius made many mistakes; but their account of these mistakes, and especially of his trial in 1985, is sketchy and biased. They write: "Some of His Beatitude's mistakes were notable, while others were debatable... His errors were often mistakes made in good faith, often on the advice of clergy who wittingly or unwittingly misled him." (pp. 125, 129). However, it is one thing for the Boston authors to try and see extenuating factors alleviating the guilt of their archpastor - charity (and the canonicity of their own ecclesiastical position) demanded that. But it is another to slander those other Orthodox bishops who tried to introduce canonical order into the Church in the only canonical way open to them - by a hierarchical trial conducted according to the holy canons. Whatever the personal virtues of Auxentius, in the opinion of the present reviewer the Boston authors have not succeeded in demonstrating that his defrocking in 1985 was not canonical and just.

The second half of the book consists of a number of useful appendices on various topics related to Ecumenism.

In conclusion, this book can be recommended both as a history of the Greek Old Calendarist Church and as a good introduction to the ecclesiological issues surrounding the great heresy of our time, Ecumenism. However, for those seeking to find a clear answer to the question: which of the many Greek Old Calendarist jurisdictions is the most canonical and true?, this book will provide a mixture of light and darkness. Such seekers will have to conduct further research, and investigate other points of view.

## **8. FR. SERAPHIM ROSE: A MODERN ST. AUGUSTINE**

*A Review of Monk Damascene's book, "Not of this World"*

This is an instructive and moving book, big both in its length (over 1000 pages) and in its significance. The subject is the life of the American-born member of the Russian Church Abroad, Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, who died in 1982 at the age of 48 after an amazingly productive life as a missionary and church writer. A man of Fr. Seraphim's stature would be worthy of a biography whatever age he lived in or country he came from. But his life is of particular significance for our particular age and our particular culture.

First, he represents one of the few, very few westerners who, having brought up in our spiritual Babylon, have not only converted to the True Faith of Orthodoxy, but have brought forth much spiritual fruit. This should lead us westerners to study his life with particular attention; for, as Fr. Damascene points out, Fr. Seraphim vaulted many of the hurdles that present such difficulties to the Orthodox western convert, and his life and writings offer many valuable "tips" for the convert. Coming from a typically Protestant background, he seemed set for a brilliant academic career as a Chinese expert. But his agonized striving for the truth led him to reject the vanities of academe, and after a brief descent into the hell of nihilism and the self-indulgent life-style of the San Francisco hippy culture, his soul was resurrected in the light of Orthodox Christianity.

Secondly, Fr. Seraphim's brilliant and cultured mind, illumined by true faith and honed on the writings of the Holy Fathers, produced book-length studies of various theological topics that have deservedly acquired "classic" status. Fr. Damascene quotes at length from his works on the soul after death, the western saints, eastern religions, Blessed Augustine, evolution and other topics, in which Fr. Seraphim's contribution is second to none. However, on one topic - the "jurisdictional issue" and the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate in particular - Fr. Seraphim's opinions do not reflect the consensus of the Holy Fathers of our time, and Fr. Damascene's uncritical acceptance of Fr. Seraphim's position here shows a certain bias.

Thirdly, Fr. Seraphim did not only speak and write about the faith: he also put it into practice: as a monk and co-founder of the Brotherhood of St. Herman of Alaska in Platina, California, as a missionary, and as a priest and spiritual father. Much of the value of this book resides in the accounts given by his spiritual children and his co-struggler, Fr. Herman, that witness to his quiet wisdom and warm charity. And this reviewer, for one, has no difficulty in believing the accounts at the end of this book of his appearances to, and intercession for, his spiritual children after his death.

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So in turning now to the opinions of Fr. Seraphim which are likely to prove less enduring and solidly based, we are in no way disputing his reputation as one of the truly righteous men of his century. Like Blessed Augustine, whom he so ably defended, he made errors while remaining Orthodox. And so of him we say, as St. Photius said of St. Augustine: "We embrace the man, while rejecting his errors."

The one major question on which, in the reviewer's opinion, Fr. Seraphim was wrong was the jurisdictional issue, or, if we accept that "there are no such things as jurisdictions, only the Church", the question: Where is the True Church? While accepting that inter-faith and inter-Christian ecumenism were heresies, as also the policy of submitting to atheist political power that is called sergianism, Fr. Seraphim did not accept that the Orthodox Churches which practiced these heresies officially were heretical and deprived of the grace of true sacraments. Again, there is a remarkable similarity here to St. Augustine, who rejected the Donatists as schismatics while accepting their sacraments.

Fr. Seraphim had not always been a "liberal" on this question, as early issues of his monastery's publication, *The Orthodox Word*, demonstrate. However, from the mid-1970s another influence began to bear on his views on the subject: the "zealot" rejection of the sacraments of the ecumenist Orthodox on the part of the "Hartford" monastery, a pseudonym for the Greek-American Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration in Boston. Finding the Boston monastery and its "super-correct" followers lacking in charity and the true warmth of Orthodox piety, and quite rightly rejecting their views on other subjects such as the soul after death, Fr. Seraphim over-reacted, in the present reviewer's opinion, by adopting the "liberal" position rejected by Boston.

Another factor that influenced his conversion to the liberal position on this matter was the so-called "rebaptism" controversy. Boston, with the blessing of Metropolitan Philaret, first-hierarchy of the Russian Church Abroad, had baptized several converts to Orthodoxy who had been received into the Russian Church Abroad without baptism. Fr. Seraphim considered this practice over-zealous and harmful (he himself had been received from Protestantism by chrismation only).

Now since the "rebaptism" controversy started, as Fr. Damascene says, in England in 1976, and since the present reviewer was the first to be "rebaptised" there, it may not be out of place for him to correct Fr. Damascene on certain points of fact in this connection.

First, the English converts were not "rebaptised" since they had never received baptism in any Orthodox jurisdiction (Anglican sprinkling is not baptism in any sense). Secondly, in asking for baptism, they had not acted at the instigation of the Boston monastery, but at the promptings of their own conscience; nor, contrary to what Fr. Damascene writes, was Archbishop Nicodemus of Great Britain, who granted the converts' request, in any way influenced by Boston. Thirdly, neither Archbishop Nicodemus nor the converts insisted that everyone else in a similar situation to theirs should be baptized, or that they had been outside the Church before their baptism (for they had previously been received into the ROCOR by confession). Now it may be that Fr. Seraphim felt that he and others who had been received into the ROCOR by "economy", i.e. without baptism, would now be forced to accept "rebaptism", which would explain Fr. Damascene's vehemence against the "rebaptism" in England. However, we can only reaffirm that neither Archbishop Nicodemus nor the priest who baptized us nor we ourselves had any such ideas.

What *is* true is that we asserted that when we moved from the Moscow Patriarchate to the ROCOR, we moved from a heretical “church” into a true one, and that the chrismation we received in the MP was graceless. This opinion Fr. Seraphim contested on several grounds: (1) Hieromartyr Cyril of Kazan had accepted the sacraments of the MP in 1934; (2) the ROCOR had not made any declaration on the subject, and (3) there were still supposedly great confessors in the MP – for example, Fr. Demetrius Dudko.

Let us look briefly at each of these arguments.

1. Metropolitan Cyril expressed his opinion with great caution and admitted that he might be being over-cautious. Moreover, he asserted – this is an important point always passed over by the “liberal” tendency – that those who partook of the sacraments of the MP knowing of its evil partook *to their condemnation*. In any case, Metropolitan Cyril’s opinion was expressed in 1934, when the schism of the MP was incomplete, since both sides still commemorated Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa. It is extremely unlikely that Metropolitan Cyril would have continued to maintain what he admitted might be an over-cautious position after the death of Metropolitan Peter and the completion of the schism in October, 1937. Moreover, already in March, 1937 he wrote a letter in which, while not expressly saying that the MP was graceless, he noted that it was “renovationist in essence” and that enough time had passed for people to evaluate its nature and leave it. And by his death in November, 1937, according to Catacomb sources, he had come to full agreement with the “zealot” position of Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd on this point before they were shot together in Chimkent. Can there be any doubt what his opinion would be now, when the MP has added, among many other crimes, the “heresy of heresies”, ecumenism, to its original sin of sergianism?

2. It is true that the *whole* ROCOR Synod made no declaration on this subject. But individual leaders did – and they were not speaking only for themselves. For example, in his encyclical of 1928 Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev declared *in the name of his whole Synod* that the leaders of the MP were schismatics and apostates. This declaration was quoted by Metropolitan Philaret in his 1969 encyclical on the American Metropolia, and in 1977 the same Metropolitan Philaret told the present writer in the presence of witnesses that he should remain faithful to the anathema of the Catacomb Church against the MP. Other members of the ROCOR Synod who adopted this zealot position were Archbishop Averky of Jordanville, Archbishop Nicodemus of Great Britain, Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles, Archbishop Andrew of Rockland, Protopresbyter Michael Polsky and Professor Andreyev, the last three of whom had all been members of the Catacomb Church. Even Fr. Seraphim himself once compared the sergianists and ecumenists to the iconoclasts, who were graceless heretics.

The position of the Catacomb confessors on this question is critical, since they knew the MP at first-hand and were in the best position, canonically speaking, to judge it. Among the martyr-hierarchs about whose zealot views there can be no doubt we can mention Bishop Maximus of Serpukhov (who said that the Catacomb Church had

formally anathematized the MP), Archbishop Demetrius of Gdov, Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd, Archbishop Andrew of Ufa, Archbishop Theodore of Volokolamsk and the four bishops who attended the Ust-Kut Council of 1937. Again, Fr. Ishmael Rozhdestvensky, whose life was translated by Fr. Seraphim, forbade his spiritual children even to *look* at churches of the MP.

3. Fr. Seraphim defended Fr. Demetrius out of a sense of deep compassion. Now compassion, when purified, is a great virtue. But it should not be allowed to hinder sober and dispassionate judgement, and there is no doubt that Fr. Seraphim allowed his heart (“the heart is deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17.9)) to cloud his judgement in this matter.

Let us consider the facts. Fr. Demetrius was a priest of the Soviet church who refused the invitation of the Catacomb Church to join it. He was an ecumenist – he revered the Pope and asked his blessing on his work, and those who published the English edition of *Our Hope* told the present reviewer that they had had to edit out large amounts of ecumenist material from the work. And he was a sergianist – under pressure from the authorities, he once told a 15-year-old spiritual son of his to return to the Komsomol. In 1980 he publicly recanted of his anti-Soviet activities on Soviet television. When the ROCOR first accepted parishes on Russian soil in 1990, he stubbornly refused to join it, although there was now far less danger in doing so. And towards the end of his life (he died in June, 2004) he became an ardent advocate of the canonization of – Stalin!

When speaking about Fr. Demetrius, Fr. Seraphim’s usual discernment seems to have deserted him. Thus he wrote that Fr. Demetrius’ “fiery, urgent preaching hasn’t been heard in Russia and probably the whole Orthodox world since the days of St. John of Kronstadt” (p. 859) – an amazing exaggeration which placed Fr. Demetrius above Patriarch Tikhon and other great preachers among the true martyrs and confessors of Russia. Again, he often said that he was in the same Church as Fr. Demetrius, quoting his words: “The unity of the Church at the present time consists in division” (p. 863), as if to assert that the obvious division between the MP and the ROCOR either did not exist or was of little significance.

When Fr. Demetrius “repented” before Soviet power in 1980, thereby fulfilling the prediction of Metropolitan Philaret, who stated quite bluntly that he would fall because he was not in the True Church, there was much talk about the danger of “gloating”. But nobody gloated. Fr. Demetrius’ fall was clearly a matter of profound sorrow, not triumphalism. But neither Fr. Demetrius nor anyone else was served by denying that it was a fall – which is what many liberals tried to assert. The present reviewer heard from a spiritual son of Fr. Demetrius, now a priest of the True Church inside Russia, that he was never the same after his public recantation. And, as was noted above, in his later years he actually became an ardent supporter of the worst aspect of the MP, its worship of Stalin. For the fact is that his house was built on sand, the sand of Soviet communism, and this alone is the reason why he fell (Matthew 7.27).

However much compassion he felt for Fr. Demetrius, Fr. Seraphim was wrong to hold him up as a role model and “confessor”. First, because he did not belong to the

True Church and did not confess the True Faith (which is not to say, of course, that he did not sometimes write good things). And secondly, because to glorify a priest of the Soviet church, however courageous, is to undervalue the podvig of the true confessors of the Catacomb Church. If it is possible to be a “martyr” and “confessor” while belonging to a false church and confessing heresy, why should anyone take the trouble and undergo the danger of joining the True Church? But many thousands, even millions, did just that, preferring death to doing what Fr. Demetrius did; and we must recognize that their position was not only canonically “correct”, but *the only Christian way*.

To take just one example: in the 1970s, at precisely the time that Fr. Demetrius was preaching his fiery sermons, the Catacomb hierarch Gennadius (Sekach) was living near Novy Afon in the Caucasus. The Soviet hierarch Ilia of Sukhumi (a KGB agent since 1962 and now “patriarch” of the official Georgian church), hearing of his whereabouts through spies, offered Gennadius a comfortable place in the Soviet church organization. Gennadius refused, saying that if he accepted the offer he “would lose everything”. Ilia then denounced him to the KGB, who put him in prison in Georgia and tortured him till the blood flowed...

Gennadius was a true confessor – and Fr. Seraphim devoted a chapter to him in his book *Russia’s Catacomb Saints*. But then why did he devote another chapter to Dudko, who did everything Gennadius refused to do? How could they both be confessors?!

The present reviewer’s position may perhaps be criticized as being “over-logical” and “super-correct”, demonstrating typically convert pride and lack of compassion. Certainly, he can recognize many of the traits Fr. Seraphim identifies as being typical of the convert mentality in himself. But God forbid that we should ever devalue the podvig of the true confessors by glorifying false ones – that is *not* the path of true humility and compassion. For let us make no mistake: if we glorify pseudo-confessors, we both injure them (by confirming them in their heresy or schism), and may end up falling away from the truth ourselves. Which is precisely what happened, tragically, to some of Fr. Seraphim’s fellow strugglers after his repose...

Fr. Seraphim himself, in spite of his errors, remained in the True Church until his death, and deserves to be remembered among the true confessors. Indeed, the present reviewer believes that if he had lived to witness the ROCOR’s Anathema against Ecumenism in 1983, and the extraordinary pagan festivals of the ecumenists in Vancouver in 1983, Assisi in 1986 and Canberra in 1991, not to mention the unions of the Orthodox ecumenists with the Monophysites at Chambésy in 1990 and with the Roman Catholics at Balamand in 1994, he would have returned to his earlier, more zealous position and the common mind of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church on this question. For there is only One Church, just as there is only one true confession of the Faith; and all those who deny that fact, such as the present-day Moscow and Ecumenical Patriarchates, have no part in that Faith and that Church, according to the sacred canons and dogmas.

To recognize this in a humble and obedient spirit is not to be “super-correct” or pharisaical, but correct and Orthodox; for “Orthodoxy” means “correct belief”.

Moreover, it is to be truly compassionate; for “the greatest act of charity,” as St. Photius the Great says, “is to tell the truth”. It follows that if we arrogantly mock the need for such correctness while glorying in our “Orthodoxy of the heart” – which none of the Holy Fathers did – we run the risk of condemnation. For, as the Lord Himself said: “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven...” (Matthew 5.19).

*Revised June 19 / July 2, 2004.  
St. John Maximovich.*

## 9. QUO VADIS, SCIENCE?

*I am Thy slave and the son of Thy handmaid, a man who is weak and short-lived, with little understanding of judgement and laws; for even if one is perfect among the sons of men, yet without the wisdom that comes from Thee he will be regarded as nothing... For a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labour; but who has traced out what is in the heavens, and who has learned Thy counsel, unless Thou give him wisdom, and send Thy Holy Spirit from on high?*  
Wisdom of Solomon 9.5-6, 15-17.

*Only Christianity is a reliable and useful philosophy. Only thus and for this reason can I be a philosopher.*  
St. Justin the Philosopher.

*For a man to know God, and to know himself and his proper rank - a knowledge now possessed even by Christians who are thought to be quite unlearned - is a knowledge superior to natural science and astronomy and to all philosophy... Moreover, for our intellect to know its own infirmity, and to seek healing for it, is incomparably greater than to know and search out the magnitude of the stars, the principles of nature, the generation of terrestrial things and the circuits of the celestial bodies... For the intellect that recognizes its own infirmity has discovered where to enter in order to find salvation and how to approach the light of knowledge and receive the true wisdom that does not pass away with this present world.*  
St. Gregory Palamas.

### **Introduction**

What is the truth about science? Is it, as its worshippers claim, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Or are there other truths that both stand independent of science and contradict it, both in its general assumptions and in some of its most cherished and universally accepted hypotheses? To what extent can we trust scientists? What is the relationship between science and faith, and can we expect any change in that relationship in the future?

Such questions cannot be avoided by any Orthodox Christian who has a conscious attitude towards his faith. For science is now more powerful than ever; it transforms the external conditions of man's existence at an ever-accelerating rate, and generates an ever-growing army of servants with ever-increasing demands for money and resources. So unquestioned is the dogma that the well-being of mankind depends on scientific progress more than anything else that science may be said to rule governments and their budgets rather than being ruled by them. One of the two greatest powers of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union, fell in the 1980s largely because it bankrupted itself in the arms race, which was a struggle for scientific and technological superiority. The one that survived, the United States, retains its military, political and cultural power largely because it is able to attract more top-grade scientists from all over the world, and do more scientific research in every field, than any other state - at the price of the largest federal deficit in history.

But these material and external effects of science pale into insignificance beside its *spiritual, internal* effects: the corrosive effect of the scientific world-view on all traditional religions, and its self-exaltation above all other faiths as their ultimate arbiter and judge.

Bertrand Russell once wrote: "Almost everything that distinguishes the modern world from earlier centuries is attributable to science, which achieved its most spectacular triumphs in the seventeenth century."<sup>64</sup> Michael Polanyi confirms this judgement: "Just as the three centuries following on the calling of the Apostles sufficed to establish Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire, so the three centuries after the founding of the Royal Society sufficed for science to establish itself as the supreme intellectual authority of the post-Christian age. 'It is contrary to religion!' - the objection ruled supreme in the seventeenth century. 'It is *unscientific!*' is its equivalent in the twentieth."<sup>65</sup>

At first, from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries, the scientific world-view coexisted in an increasingly uncomfortable and schizoid manner with various forms of the Christian world-view. But it has ended, in the twentieth century, by more or less completely banishing Christianity from the minds of "educated" men, whether or not they still call themselves "Christian". Science has indeed become the god of our age, worshipped both by scientists and by non-scientists, both in the democratic West and in the non-democratic East. Indeed, one of the most powerful arguments for the superiority of democracy and the market economy over other forms of politico-economic organization is that it promotes science, which in turn promotes peace, prosperity and democracy: authoritarian forms of government are rejected because they undermine the free flow of ideas and criticism that fosters the scientific enterprise. There is no getting away from the influence of science: even the power of prayer to produce healings is now subject to controlled scientific experiments.

The cult of science was described in dark, almost apocalyptic colours by Dostoyevsky: "Half-science," says one of his characters, "is that most terrible scourge of mankind, worse than pestilence, famine, or war, and quite unknown till our present century. Half-science is a despot such as has never been known before, a despot that has its own priests and slaves, a despot before whom everybody prostrates himself with love and superstitious dread, such as has been inconceivable till now, before whom science trembles and surrenders in a shameful way."<sup>66</sup>

Dostoyevsky was careful to distinguish between science and "half-science", or what we would now call "scientism". This implies that he saw science as a legitimate pursuit, but one in danger of subjection to its parasite or counterfeit, "half-science".

How can this be?

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<sup>64</sup> Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen Unwin, 1959, p. 512.

<sup>65</sup> Polanyi, "The Two Cultures", *Encounter*, 1959, № 13, p. 61.

<sup>66</sup> Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, London: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 257.

## 1. The Foundations of Science

Science obviously contains some measure or kind of truth, otherwise it would not have such formidable predictive power or generate such wonderful technologies. It has therefore been a natural and laudable quest on the part of educated Christians to try and find some way of resolving the apparent contradictions between science and Christianity. Indeed, this is a necessity of our faith. For if the universe is one and created by one God, we must believe that the truths of the faith and the final conclusions of true science (if such there can ever be) are compatible. To believe otherwise leads to a kind of epistemological Manichaeism postulating two kinds of mutually impenetrable universes which cannot be comprehended from a single viewpoint, or, alternatively, to a kind of solipsistic Buddhism according to which one of the two realms is considered to be illusory.

Thus Fr. Seraphim Rose writes: "Even though revealed knowledge is higher than natural knowledge, still we know that there can be no conflict between *true* revelation and *true* natural knowledge. But there *can* be conflict between revelation and *human philosophy*, which is often in error. There is thus no conflict between the knowledge of creation contained in Genesis, as interpreted for us by the Holy Fathers, and the *true* knowledge of creatures which modern science has acquired by observation; but there most certainly is an irreconcilable conflict between the knowledge contained in Genesis and the *vain philosophical speculation of modern scientists, unenlightened by faith, about the state of the world in the Six Days of Creation.*"<sup>67</sup>

That human philosophy (philosophy as the world knows it) and natural philosophy (science) are often in error and in conflict with the revealed truth of the Scriptures is not surprising if we consider the different origins of the two kinds of knowledge.

The knowledge that science gives can be compared to the light of the sun that we know, which was created on the fourth day of creation; whereas the knowledge contained in the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church can be compared to that original light which flooded the universe on the very first day at the Lord's word: "Let there be light!" The light of the sun lights up only one planet among the millions of planets in the universe; it is itself only one out of millions of stars in millions of galaxies. Moreover, the knowledge it gives us only illumines a part of the planet's surface; for much of the time it is covered with clouds or completely obscured by night. As for what is under or beyond the earth, that remains completely unilluminated by it. However, the light created at the beginning of creation, though we can only guess at its nature, was certainly such as to reveal the whole of material reality without casting any shadows or leaving any nook or cranny unilluminated.

Science became useful only with the fall of man; it is a method of reasoning carried out by fallen men with fallen faculties and with strictly limited and earthly aims. As we shall see in more detail later, it cannot give real knowledge of the unfallen world, neither the world of unfallen spirits nor the world that will be after the restoration at

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<sup>67</sup> Rose, "The Orthodox Patristic Understanding of Genesis", ch. 5, *The Orthodox Word*, N 171, 1993.

the Second Coming of Christ. It is of limited use for limited men – that is, men who use only their fallen faculties; and when the true light of knowledge comes, as we see it come in the lives of the saints, the truly enlightened ones, it ceases to have any use at all. Thus the holy Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, who had a thorough training in physics, mathematics and engineering, writes: “You ask what is my opinion of the human sciences? After the fall men began to need clothing and numerous other things that accompany our earthly wanderings; in a word, they began to need material development, the striving for which has become the distinguishing feature of our age. The sciences are the fruit of our fall, the production of our damaged fallen reason. Scholarship is the acquisition and retention of impressions and knowledge that have been stored up by men during the time of the life of the fallen world. Scholarship is a lamp by which ‘the gloom of darkness is guarded to the ages’. The Redeemer returned to men that lamp which was given to them at creation by the Creator, of which they were deprived because of their sinfulness. This lamp is the Holy Spirit, He is the Spirit of Truth, who teaches every truth, searches out the deep things of God, opens and explains mysteries, and also bestows material knowledge when that is necessary for the spiritual benefit of man. Scholarship is not properly speaking wisdom, but an opinion about wisdom. The knowledge of the Truth that was revealed to men by the Lord, access to which is only by faith, which is inaccessible for the fallen mind of man, is replaced in scholarship by guesses and presuppositions. The wisdom of this world, in which many pagans and atheists occupy honoured positions, is directly contrary according to its very origins with spiritual, Divine wisdom: it is impossible to be a follower of the one and the other at the same time; one must unflinchingly be renounced. The fallen man is ‘falsehood’, and from his reasonings ‘science falsely so-called’ is composed, that form and collection of false concepts and knowledge that has only the appearance of reason, but is in essence vacillation, madness, the raving of the mind infected with the deadly plague of sin and the fall. This infirmity of the mind is revealed in special fullness in the philosophical sciences.”<sup>68</sup> And again he writes: “The holy faith at which the materialists laughed and laugh, is so subtle and exalted that it can be attained and taught only by spiritual reason. The reason of the world is opposed to it and rejects it. But when for some material necessity it finds it necessary and tolerates it, then it understands it falsely and interprets it wrongly; because the blindness ascribed by it to faith is its own characteristic.”<sup>69</sup>

St. Basil the Great said: “At all events let us prefer the simplicity of faith to the demonstrations of reason.”<sup>70</sup> These words should be our guide whenever science – or, as happens more often, philosophy clothed in “half-scientific” arguments – appears to contradict faith. That science could ever really refute faith is the opinion only of those who do not know what faith is, who have not tasted of that knowledge which comes, not from the fallen faculties of fallen men applied to the most limited and circumscribed of objects, but from God Himself.

The scientific world-view proclaims that the only reliable way of attaining non-mathematical truth is by inferences from the evidence of the senses. This principle, the

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<sup>68</sup> Bishop Ignatius, *Sochinenia (Works)*, volume 4, letter N 45.

<sup>69</sup> Bishop Ignatius, *Sochinenia (Works)*, volume 4, letter N 61.

<sup>70</sup> St. Basil, Homily 1 on the *Hexaemeron*.

principle of empiricism, was first proclaimed by Francis Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning* (1605). It rejects the witness of non-empirical sources – for example, God or intuition or so-called “innate ideas”. The reverse process – that is, inferences about God and other non-empirical realities from the evidence of the senses – was admitted by the early empiricists, but rejected by most later ones.<sup>71</sup>

Thus in time empiricism became not only a methodological or epistemological, but also an ontological principle, the principle, namely, that reality not only is best discovered by empirical means, but also *is*, solely and exclusively, that which can be investigated by empirical means, and that non-empirical reality simply *does not exist*.

By contrast, the Christian Faith makes no radical cleavage between empirical and non-empirical truth, accepting evidence of the senses with regard to the existence and activity of God and the witness of God Himself with regard to the nature of empirically perceived events.

In accordance with this difference in the kinds of truth they seek, there is a difference in spirit between science (in its more “advanced”, materialist form) and faith. The spirit of true religion is the spirit of the humble receiving of the truth by revelation from God; it does not preclude active seeking for truth, but recognizes that it will never succeed in this search if God on His part does not reveal it. For Wisdom “goes about seeking those worthy of her, and She graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought” (Wisdom 6.16). Science, on the other hand, is supremely self-reliant...

Moreover, there is a Faustian spirit in science, a striving for *power* over nature, rather than simply knowledge of it, which is incompatible with the true religious spirit. Thus Bacon thought that the “pure knowledge of nature and universality” would lead to power - “knowledge is power”, in his famous phrase - and to “the effecting of all things possible”.<sup>72</sup> This is even more true of modern scientists, who place no limits to the powers of science.

Bacon compared science to the knowledge Adam had before the fall - “the pure knowledge of nature and universality, a knowledge by the light whereof man did give names unto other creatures in Paradise, as they were brought to him”.<sup>73</sup> “This light should in its very rising touch and illuminate all the border-regions that confine upon the circle of our present knowledge; and so, spreading further and further should presently disclose and bring into sight all that is most hidden and secret in the world.”<sup>74</sup> “God forbid,” he wrote, “that we should give out a dream of our own

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<sup>71</sup> The transition from the early to the later empiricism is marked by David Hume’s *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1747), in which he writes: “While we argue from the course of nature and infer a particular intelligent cause which first bestowed and still preserves order in the universe, we embrace a principle which is still uncertain and useless. It is uncertain because the subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience. It is useless because... we can never on that basis establish any principles of conduct and behaviour.”

<sup>72</sup> Bacon, *New Atlantis*; see Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>73</sup> Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, Book I, 1, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Bacon, *The Interpretation of Nature*, proemium.

imagination for a pattern of the world: rather may He graciously grant to us to write an *apocalypse* or true vision of the footsteps of the Creator imprinted on His creatures."<sup>75</sup>

As J.M. Roberts writes, Bacon "seems to have been a visionary, glimpsing not so much what science would discover as what it would become: a faith. 'The true and lawful end of the sciences', he wrote, 'is that human life be enriched by new discoveries and powers.' Through them could be achieved 'a restitution and reinvigorating (in great part) of man to the sovereignty and power... which he had in his first creation.' This was ambitious indeed – nothing less than the redemption of mankind through organised research; he was here, too, a prophetic figure, precursor of later scientific societies and institutes."<sup>76</sup>

This striving for power by wresting the secrets of nature indicates a kinship between science and magic, if not in their methods, at any rate in their *aims*. And while Erasmus' humorous critique of scientists in the early fifteenth century could not be applied to their early twenty-first century successors without qualification, he unerringly pointed to a common *spirit* between science of all ages and magic: "Near these march the scientists, revered for their beards and the fur on their gowns, who teach that they alone are wise while the rest of mortal men flit about as shadows. How pleasantly they dote, indeed, while they construct their numberless worlds, and measure the sun, moon, stars, and spheres as with thumb and line. They assign causes for lightning, winds, eclipses, and other inexplicable things, never hesitating a whit, as if they were privy to the secrets of nature, artificer of things, or as if they visited us fresh from the council of the gods. Yet all the while nature is laughing grandly at them and their conjectures. For to prove that they have good intelligence of nothing, this is a sufficient argument: they can never explain why they disagree with each other on every subject. Thus knowing nothing in general, they profess to know all things in particular; though they are ignorant even of themselves, and on occasion do not see the ditch or the stone lying across their path, because many of them are blear-eyed or absent-minded; yet they proclaim that they perceive ideas, universals, forms without matter, primary substances, quiddities, and ecceties – things so tenuous, I fear, that Lynceus himself could not see them. When they especially disdain the vulgar crowd is when they bring out their triangles, quadrangles, circles, and mathematical pictures of the sort, lay one upon the other, intertwine them into a maze, then deploy – and all to involve the uninitiated in darkness. Their fraternity does not lack those who predict future events by consulting the stars, and promise wonders even more magical; and these lucky scientists find people to believe them."<sup>77</sup>

C.S. Lewis writes: "There is something which unites magic and applied science while separating both from the wisdom of earlier ages. For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the

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<sup>75</sup> Bacon, *The Great Instauration*, "The Plan of the Work".

<sup>76</sup> Roberts, *The Triumph of the West*, London: Phoenix Press, 1985, p. 160.

<sup>77</sup> Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, in Charles H. George, *500 Years of Revolution: European Radicals from Hus to Lenin*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Co., 1998, p. 38.

problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique; and both, in the practice of this technique, are ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious – such as digging up and mutilating the dead.”<sup>78</sup>

Fr. Seraphim Rose writes: “Modern science was born [in the Renaissance] out of the experiments of the Platonic alchemists, the astrologers and magicians. The underlying spirit of the new scientific world view was the spirit of Faustianism, the spirit of magic, which is retained as a definite undertone of contemporary science. The discovery, in fact, of atomic energy would have delighted the Renaissance alchemists very much: they were looking for just such power. The aim of modern science is power over nature. Descartes, who formulated the mechanistic scientific world view, said that man was to become the master and possessor of nature. It should be noted that this is a religious faith that takes the place of Christian faith.”<sup>79</sup>

Faith, on the other hand, does not seek power over nature, but obedience to God. It relies on no other ultimate authority than the Word of God Himself as communicated either directly to an individual or, collectively, to the Church, “the pillar and ground of the Truth” (I Timothy 3.15), which preserves and nurtures the individual revelations.

## 2. The Fallibility Principle

Science is *in principle fallible*, not only because scientists are fallen human beings, but also because the only way in which they progress in their work is by showing that the work of earlier scientists is fallible. It is not simply that they *add* to the work of earlier scientists, discovering facts that were concealed from their predecessors: they actively try and *disprove* the currently reigning hypotheses. No hypothesis can ever be proved beyond any possible doubt, and science advances by the systematic application of doubt to what are thought to be weak points in its hypothetical structure, so as to clear the way, as it were, for a sounder theoretical structure. This was seen already by John Donne, who said: “the new philosophy [science] calls all in doubt”.<sup>80</sup> And in the twentieth century it was confirmed by Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn and others: *verifiability equals disprovability*.

Now this is a paradox if ever there was one: that truth is truth only if it can, in principle, be proved to be not true! And yet this is the very corner-stone of the scientific method and the scientific world-view! Of course, scientists try and soften the force of this paradox. Even if we cannot be certain about the truth of any scientific hypothesis, they say, we can be sure that our present hypotheses are closer to the truth than those of our predecessors. And the proof of that is that science *works*: our science is truer than Aristotle’s because we can fly to the moon and explode atomic bombs, whereas he couldn’t.

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<sup>78</sup> Lewis, quoted in Fr. Seraphim Johnson, “A Sane Family in an Insane World”.

<sup>79</sup> Rose, in Monk Damascene Christensen, *Not of this World: The Life and Teachings of Fr. Seraphim Rose*, Forestville, CA: Fr. Seraphim Rose Foundation, 1993, p. 594.

<sup>80</sup> Donne, *The First Anniversarie* (1611), quoted in Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, London: Macmillan, 1990, p. 130.

And yet the paradox is not so easily disposed of, nor the destructive effects of the scientific world-view so easily forgiven. And by “destructive” here I do not mean the obviously destructive effects of atomic bombs, or of the pollution of the atmosphere caused by space flights, carbon gas emissions, etc. Science can defend itself against the charge of *this* kind of destructiveness by arguing, with greater or lesser plausibility, that it is not responsible for the use that is made of its discoveries. Knowledge is good in itself, or at least not evil: it is the *use made of knowledge* by irresponsible men that is evil. However, much more serious and fundamental than this is the charge that the principle of systematic and universal doubt that lies at the foundation of the modern scientific world-view is simply *false*, that there *are* certain very important truths we can be *completely certain* of, which we cannot and must not doubt, and that the enthroning of the scientific world-view in the heart of man actually makes it *impossible* for man to acquire these truths.

Faith is the opposite of doubt; it is defined by the apostle as “the *certainty* of things not seen” (Hebrews 11.1). Doubt has no place *within* the true religion, but only when one is still outside it, in the process of seeking it, when different religious systems are being approached as *possible* truths, that is, as *hypotheses*. Having cleaved to the true religion by *faith*, the religious believer advances, not by subjecting his faith to doubt, but by *deepening that faith*, by ever deeper immersion in the undoubted truths of the one true religion.

When the differences between science and faith are viewed from this perspective, the perspective of Orthodox Christianity, there are seen to be important differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. For from this perspective, Catholicism is more “religious”, and Protestantism – more “scientific”. For Protestantism arose as a protest against, and a doubting of, the revealed truths of the Catholic religion. From an Orthodox point of view, some of these doubts were justified, and some not. But that is not the essential point here. The essential point is that Protestantism arose out of doubt rather than faith, out of negation rather than assertion, and, like Descartes in philosophy, *placed doubt at the head of the corner of its new theology*.

How? First, by doubting that there is any organization that is “the pillar and ground of the truth”, any collective vessel of God’s revelation. So where is God’s revelation to be sought? In the visions and words of individual men, the Prophets and Apostles, the Saints and Fathers? Yes; but – and here the corrosive power of doubt enters again – not all that the Church has passed down about these men can be trusted, according to the Protestants. In particular, the inspiration of the post-apostolic Saints and Fathers is to be doubted, as is much of what we are told of the lives even of the Prophets and Apostles. In fact, we can only rely on the Bible – Sola Scriptura. After all, the Bible is *objective*; everybody can have access to it, can touch it and read it; can analyse and interpret it. In other words, it corresponds to what we would call *scientific evidence*.

But can we be sure even of the Bible? After all, the text comes to us from the Church, that supposedly untrustworthy organization. Can we be sure that Moses wrote Genesis, or Isaiah Isaiah, or John John, or Paul Hebrews? To answer these questions we have to analyze the text, subject it to scientific verification. Then we will find the *real* text, the text we can really trust, because it is the text of the *real* author. But suppose

we cannot find this real text? Or the real author? And suppose we come to the conclusion that the “real” text of a certain book was written by tens of authors, none of whom was the “inspired” author, spread over hundreds of years? Can we then be sure that it is the Word of God? But if we cannot be sure that the Bible is not the Word of God, how can we be sure of anything?

Thus Protestantism, which begins with the doubting of authority, ends with the loss of truth itself. Or rather, it ends with a scientific truth that accepts religious truth only to the extent that it is “confirmed by the findings of science”. It ends by being a branch of the scientific endeavour of systematic doubt, and not a species of religious faith at all.

If we go back to the original error of Protestantism, we will find that it consists in what we may call a *false reductionist* attitude to Divine Revelation. Revelation is given to us in the Church, “the pillar and ground of the truth”, and consists of two indivisible and mutually interdependent parts – Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition. Scripture and Tradition support each other, and are in turn supported by the Church, which herself rests on the rock of truth witnessed to in Scripture and Tradition. Any attempt to *reduce* Divine Revelation to one of these elements, any attempt to make one element essential and the other inessential, is doomed to end with the loss of Revelation altogether. The Truth is one irreducible whole.

Where does the false reductionist attitude come from? Vladimir Trostnikov has shown that it goes back as far as the 11<sup>th</sup> century, to the nominalist thinker Roscelin. Nominalism, which had triumphed over its philosophical rival, universalism, by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, “gives priority to the particular over the general, the lower over the higher”. As such, it is in essence the forerunner of reductionism, which insists that the simple precedes the complex, and that the complex can always be reduced, both logically and ontologically, to the simple.<sup>81</sup>

Thus the Catholic heresy of nominalism gave birth to the Protestant heresy of reductionism, which reduced the complex spiritual process of the absorption of God’s revelation in the life of the Church to the unaided rationalist dissection of a single element in that life, the book of the Holy Scriptures. As Trostnikov explains, the assumption – against all the evidence – that reductionism is true has led to a series of concepts which taken together represent a summation of the contemporary world-view: that matter consists of elementary particles which themselves do not consist of anything; that the planets and all the larger objects of the universe arose through the gradual condensation of simple gas; that all living creatures arose out of inorganic matter; that the later forms of social organization and politics arose out of earlier, simpler and less efficient ones; that human consciousness arose from lower phenomena, drives and archetypes; that political rulers must be guided, not from above, but from below, by their own subjects...

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<sup>81</sup> Trostnikov, “The Role and Place of the Baptism of Rus in the European Spiritual Process of the Second Millennium of Christian History”, *Orthodox Life*, volume 39, N 3, May-June, 1989, p. 29.

We see, then, why science, like capitalism, flourished in the Protestant countries. Protestantism, according to Landes, “gave a big boost to literacy, spawned dissent and heresies, and promoted the skepticism and refusal of authority that is at the heart of the scientific endeavor. The Catholic countries, instead of meeting the challenge, responded by closure and censure.”<sup>82</sup>

However, it is misleading to make too great a contrast between science-loving, democratic religion and science-hating authoritarian religion. Much confusion has been generated in this respect by Galileo’s trial, in which, so it is said, a Pope who falsely believed that the earth was flat and that the sun circled the earth persecuted Galileo, who believed on empirical evidence that the earth circled the sun. Other scientists persecuted by the Catholics, it is said, were Copernicus and Bruno. But the truth, as Jay Wesley Richards explains, was different. “First of all, some claim Copernicus was persecuted, but history shows he wasn’t; in fact, he died of natural causes the same year his ideas were published. As for Galileo, his case can’t be reduced to a simple conflict between scientific truth and religious superstition. He insisted the church immediately endorse his views rather than allow them to gradually gain acceptance, he mocked the Pope, and so forth. Yes, he was censured, but the church kept giving him his pension for the rest of his life.”<sup>83</sup>

“Indeed,” writes Lee Strobel, “historian William R. Shea said, ‘Galileo’s condemnation was the result of the complex interplay of untoward political circumstances, political ambitions, and wounded prides.’ Historical researcher Philip J. Sampson noted that Galileo himself was convinced that the ‘major cause’ of his troubles was that he had made ‘fun of his Holiness’ – that is, Pope Urban VIII – in a 1632 treatise. As for his punishment, Alfred North Whitehead put it this way: ‘Galileo suffered an honorable detention and a mild reproof, before dying peacefully in his bed.’”<sup>84</sup>

Richards continues. “[Bruno] was executed in Rome in 1600. Certainly this is a stain on [Roman Catholic] church history. But again, this was a complicated case. His Copernican views were incidental. He defended pantheism and was actually executed for his heretical views on the Trinity, the Incarnation, and other doctrines that had nothing to do with Copernicanism.”<sup>85</sup>

In fact, neither Holy Scripture<sup>86</sup>, nor the Holy Fathers<sup>87</sup>, nor even the Roman church as a whole denied the idea of a spherical earth. “The truth is,” writes David Lindberg, “that it’s almost impossible to find an educated person after Aristotle who doubts that the Earth is a sphere. In the Middle Ages, you couldn’t emerge from any kind of

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<sup>82</sup> Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, London: Abacus, 1999, p. 179.

<sup>83</sup> Richards, in Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004, pp. 162-163.

<sup>84</sup> Strobel, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>85</sup> Richards, in Strobel, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *Isaiah* 40.22: “It is He Who sits above the *circle* of the earth”.

<sup>87</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa calls the earth “spherical” in his *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, chapter 4.

education, cathedral school or university, without being perfectly clear about the Earth's sphericity and even its approximate circumference."<sup>88</sup>

### 3. The Fallibility of Science: (1) The New Physics

Let us now turn to some of the ways in which the scientific enterprise has run aground in modern times, beginning with the new physics.

Since the time of Galileo a certain degree of counter-intuitiveness has come to be seen as an essential ingredient of "real" science; for science progresses by challenging accepted assumptions. And yet there is a very large difference between the counter-intuitiveness (to some in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) of an earth circling the sun and the plain nonsensicality of, for example, a universe in which time can go backwards! But this is one of things that some modern physicists are saying: since physics expresses all its laws in time-reversible equations, there is no reason in principle why time should not go backwards - and so no reason in principle (according to some of the more melodramatic writers) why one should not be able to go back in time and kill one's own father!

To these writers we are tempted to say: *you can't be serious!* But many of them are being perfectly serious - and the idea of time-travel has now entered, through Hollywood, into the consciousness of a whole younger generation. So we have to take this phenomenon, if not these ideas, seriously.

Humility is required here, as in all spheres of knowledge. If our knowledge of physics and mathematics is as limited as the present writer's, then we are not in a position to argue with the scientists on their own ground. So should we retire from the fray hurt and simply bow down before the scientists' superior knowledge?

Many Christians have been prepared to do just that. But, bearing in mind Dostoyevsky's warning about "half-science", we should be more careful. After all, if these scientists are right, we shall have to change, not only our ideas about the physical universe, but also our ideas about just about everything else, including God, freewill, morality and the human person. And since we have "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1.3) of our traditional beliefs in these spheres, we have good reason to pause.

For it would be false humility, even irrational, to abandon well-established beliefs out of respect for a tiny group of men, whose work extremely few understand (it is said that only about six people in the world fully understand "string theory", for example, with its eleven dimensions of reality), and who are themselves far from agreed about how their results should be interpreted. If Einstein could not believe that God plays with dice, why should we? We know *that* these scientists are wrong in some of their wilder judgements - they *must* be wrong; the problem is discerning *why*, or rather *how* they are wrong.

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<sup>88</sup> Lindberg, in Strobel, op. cit., p. 164. Cf. Peter De Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, pp. 221-231.

But we are being too alarmist, we are told. These problems are simply temporary inconsistencies in the scientific picture of the world that will eventually be removed as science progresses and new theories are constructed. Thus the problems relating to the nature of time, we are told, will eventually be overcome in the unified field theory, the so-called TOE or "Theory of Everything".

This touching faith in the new physics is reminiscent of those biologists who say: although nobody has actually *seen* the evolution of a new species, "it is only a matter of time"; eventually (perhaps in a few million years) we *shall* see it. Thus time is the great healer of the wounds of modern science. And yet that is simply to place a non-religious *faith* and *hope* (in the eventual omniscience of science) in place of solid hypotheses based on firm evidence.

The problem is that physics, far from gradually removing all anomalies and contradictions in our understanding of the world, seems to be throwing up still more intractable ones. Thus quantum physics undermines not only the category of time, but also the category of substance; in fact, it undermines the very notion of objective reality. For the quantum wave function that is the fundamental unit of the modern physicist's universe is not a thing or an event, but a spectrum of *possible* things or events. Moreover, it exists as such only while it is not being observed. When the wave function is observed (by a physical screen or living being), it *collapses* into one and only one of the possibilities that define it. Thus the price of the birth of reality in this way is the destruction of the fundamental unity of reality!

One of the foundations of quantum physics is the indeterminacy principle, which proclaims that the behaviour of any individual sub-atomic particle cannot be predicted, and that the only laws governing physics at this level are "statistical". Many have seen in this astonishing fact no contradiction with the naturalistic, deterministic view of the universe. But C.S. Lewis begs to differ: "I submit that it matters to the scientist's view of the miraculous. The notion that natural laws may be merely statistical results from the modern belief that the individual unit of matters obeys no laws. Statistics was introduced to explain why, despite the lawlessness of the individual unit, the behaviour of gross bodies was regular. The explanation was that, by a principle well known to actuaries, the law of averages levelled out the individual eccentricities of the innumerable units contained in even the smallest gross body. But with this conception of the lawless units the whole impregnability of nineteenth-century Naturalism has, as it seems to me, been abandoned. What is the use of saying that all events are subject to laws if you also say that every event which befalls the individual unit of matter is not subject to laws. Indeed, if we define nature as the system of events in space-time governed by interlocking laws, then the new physics has really admitted that something other than nature exists. For if nature means the interlocking system then the behaviour of the individual unit is outside nature. We have admitted what may be called the sub-natural. After that admission what confidence is left us that there may not be a supernatural as well? It may be true that the lawlessness of the little events fed into nature from the sub-natural is always ironed out by the law of averages. It does not follow that great events could not be fed

into her by the super-natural: not that they also would allow themselves to be ironed out..."<sup>89</sup>

This brings us to the famous Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe. According to the most famous of contemporary scientists, Stephen Hawking, the universe owes its origin to a chance quantum fluctuation. Thus David Wilkinson, a physicist and Methodist minister, in a book on Stephen Hawking writes that the universe arose by "a chance quantum fluctuation from a state of absolute nothing... Quantum theory deals with events which do not have deterministic causes. By applying quantum theory to the universe, Hawking is saying that the event that triggered the Big Bang did not have a cause. In this way, science is able not only to encompass the laws of evolution but also the initial conditions."<sup>90</sup>

The idea that the whole, vast, infinitely varied universe should come from a chance quantum fluctuation is unbelievable (and certainly undemonstrable). But still more unbelievable is the idea that the quantum fluctuation itself should come out of absolute nothing. Nothing comes from nothing. To say that the quantum fluctuation is not deterministically caused does not resolve the problem. Existing things can owe their existence only to "He Who Is" (Exodus 3.14) essentially and from before all time, Who is "the Beginning of every beginning" (I Chronicles 29.12).

However, scientists – even Christian scientists – still believe that one can explain the emergence of something out of nothing without resort to God. Thus Wilkinson writes: "Many people find difficulty in imagining where the matter of the universe comes from to begin with. Surely, they say, there must be an amount of matter or a 'primeval atom' with which to go bang? As Einstein's famous equation  $E=mc^2$  implies that energy (E) is equivalent to mass (m) multiplied by the square of the speed of light (c), the question can be translated to where does the energy come from?"

"Now energy has the property that it can be either positive or negative. Two objects attracted by the force of gravity need energy to pull them apart, and therefore in that state we say that they have negative gravitational energy.

"It turns out that the energy in matter in the universe is the same amount as the negative energy in the gravitational field of the universe. Thus the total energy of the universe is zero. In this way you can have something from nothing in terms of the matter in the universe. No problem here for the Big Bang..."<sup>91</sup>

But this is simply attempting to solve the problem by sleight of hand. Positive energy is something, and negative energy is something. They are not *numbers* that cancel each other out as in the equation:  $1-1=0$ . They are *things*, and the existence of things needs to be explained. And something cannot come out of nothing except through the creative energy of God.

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<sup>89</sup> Lewis, "Religion without Dogma?" *Faith, Christianity and the Church*, London: HarperCollins, 2002, pp. 166-167.

<sup>90</sup> Wilkinson, *God, Time and Stephen Hawking*, London: Monarch Books, 2001, p. 104.

<sup>91</sup> Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

Actually, some of the most famous physicists of our time, while not endorsing the idea that God created the heavens and the earth, nevertheless admit that the concept of God is not entirely irrelevant. Thus Stephen Hawking writes: "It is difficult to discuss the beginning of the Universe without mentioning the concept of God. My work on the origin of the Universe is on the borderline between science and religion, but I try to stay on the scientific side of the border. It is quite possible that God acts in ways that cannot be described by scientific laws. But in that case one would just have to go by personal belief."<sup>92</sup>

Another fact that has compelled scientists to accept the relevance of the concept of God is *the anthropic principle*. This is based on the discovery that there are about 10 constant physical and chemical values – for example, the distance of the earth from the sun – which, if altered even to the slightest degree, would immediately make life on earth impossible. The combination of these 10 values in one place at one time would seem to be an enormous – in fact, unbelievable – coincidence.

The most natural explanation is that it is in fact *no* coincidence, but that these 10 values have been precisely calibrated by a Creator *in order that* there should be life – specifically, human life – on earth. However, we must never underestimate the ability of scientists to refuse to accept the obvious conclusion if that conclusion involves the existence of a Being higher than themselves. Thus when we point out the extraordinary non-coincidence of the 10 constant physical and chemical values that make life on earth possible, the scientists resort to the innumerable parallel universes argument. It probably *is* a coincidence, they say, if we suppose that our universe is just one out of billions of other universes, in one of which the values of these 10 constants as we find them in ours is bound to occur by chance. For according to Everett, "the universe itself is described by a wave-function which contains the ingredients of any outcome. His interpretation carries with it a bizarre implication – that innumerable 'parallel' universes, each as real as our own, all exist independently. Your wildest dreams may be fulfilled within these other worlds. With every measurement made by an observer, who is by definition within a universe, the entire universe buds off an uncountable multitude of new universes (the 'many worlds'), each of which represents a different possible outcome of the observation (for example, a living or a dead cat)."<sup>93</sup>

And yet there is no reason whatsoever for believing that there are billions of other universes. This unbelievable hypothesis is created by scientists' refusal to believe in the Creator God. They need to reject the God hypothesis, and so they have invented the innumerable parallel universes hypothesis!

The main philosophical argument against the idea of the Creator is that it sets up an infinite chain of causes. For if we say that God created the universe, then they reply: "And who caused God? (and who caused the Creator of God?, etc., etc.)" If we say: "But God has no cause", then they reply: "Why not? Everything has a cause".

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<sup>92</sup> 20/20, ABC Television Broadcast, March, 1998; quoted in Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>93</sup> Everett, in Covey, P. & Highfield, R., *The Arrow of Time*, London: Flamingo, 1991, p. 133.

However, those who reply in this way are making what the linguistic philosophers call a “category mistake”. Empirical causality, as Kant pointed out in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, is one of the basic categories (the others are substance and time) by which we order the flux of sensory experience. The category of empirical causality can be applied to any segment of space-time. But it cannot be applied to space-time *as a whole*, because, while the effect here will be spatiotemporal, the cause will be *outside* space-time. And a fortiori it cannot be applied to a supposed Creator of the Creator of space-time.

But are we not contradicting ourselves here? Did we not agree that God, Who is immaterial and outside space-time, is the Cause of the spatiotemporal universe? There is no contradiction here if we carefully distinguish between three types of causality: *empirical, human* and *Divine*.

Let us begin with *empirical* causality, which is the weakest, most insubstantial form of causality. For, strange as it may seem, we never actually *see* an empirical causal bond. What we see is events of class A being regularly followed by events of class B. We then *infer* that there is something *forcing* this sequence of events, or *making it happen*; and this we call *causality*. But, as David Hume pointed out, we never actually *see* this force, this bond uniting A and B: we only see regular sequences of events. We say that A *causes* B, but all we actually ever see is events of classes A and B in regular, predictable succession to one another, not the force that joins A to B.

To say that A *causes* B is to take a jump of faith, which is at the same time a jump of reason. For it posits *an invisible something* that connects A with B. For, as C.S. Lewis writes, “the assumption that things which have been conjoined in the past will always be conjoined the future is the guiding principle not of rational but of animal behaviour. Reason comes in precisely when you make the inference ‘Since always conjoined, therefore probably connected’ and go on to attempt the discovery of the connection. When you have discovered what smoke is you may then be able to replace the mere expectation of fire by a genuine inference”<sup>94</sup>

In fact, our only direct experience of causality is when we cause *our own actions*. Thus when I decide to open the door, I have a direct experience of myself making my hand go towards the door-knob and turn it. This experience of causality is quite different from watching events of class A “causing” events of class B in empirical nature. I do not see the exercise of my will being constantly followed by the opening of doors. I *know* by direct, irrefutable, non-sensory (what the philosophers call *phenomenological*) experience that the cause of that door opening was *I*. This is the second type of causality, *human* causality; and our knowledge of it, unlike our knowledge of any empirical causality, is both direct and *certain*.

Moreover, - and this, as we shall see, is a very significant point for the so-called science of psychology - I know that my decision to open the door was *uncaused* in the scientific, empirical sense. Even if a man were standing behind me with a gun and

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<sup>94</sup> Lewis, *Miracles*, London: Collins, 2012, p. 30.

ordering me to open the door, this would not take away from the uncaused nature of my action. It might explain *why* I decided to open the door at that moment; but, as the philosophers have demonstrated, to give *the reason for an action* is not the same as describing *the cause of an event*; to confuse reasons with causes is another “category mistake”. Only if the man with a gun *took away my power of decision* – that is, hypnotized me to open the door, or took hold of my hand and placed it on the door-knob and then turned my hand, would it be true to say that my action was caused. Or rather, then it would no longer be *my* action, for *my* action can only be the free result of *my* will: it would be the action of another person, *he* would be the cause (the uncaused cause) of the action.

Both human and empirical causality are caused by God, Who brings all things into being out of nothing. Thus it is the Divine Causality which causes events of type A to be followed always (or almost always – the exception is what we perceive to be miracles) by events of type B: He is the Cause of all empirical causation. But Divine Causality is closer to human causality, in Whose image it was made, insofar as It, too, is (a) empirically uncaused, and (b) personal, whereas every empirical cause is (a) empirically caused (because God has caused it to be so), and (b) impersonal.

We experience Divine Causality in moments of grace. It has this effect on human causality that it does not violate the latter’s free and uncaused nature; It informs it without compelling it. Thus when a saint speaks under the influence of God’s grace, he retains complete control over his own words while submitting to the influence of God’s Word. This is incomprehensible within the scientific world-view. But since the scientists cannot see even the empirical causes they postulate, why should this concern us?...

The Orthodox teaching on causality was explained by St. Nikolai Velimirovich as follows: “Every day and everywhere people talk of causes. They say: ‘This is caused by that, and that is caused by this.’ That is to say: the next preceding thing, or event, or fact, or accident is the cause of the next succeeding one.

“This is indeed a superficial and shortsighted notion of causality. We don't wonder about this superficiality of some ignorant persons, especially of the busy people of great cities who have little time for deep and calm thinking. But we are astonished to find the same superficiality with the learned and philosophically minded, as the materialists, naturalists and even deists. And because we call their theory of causes naive and fatalistic, they call us mystics. We consider that all those persons be they ignorant or learned, who believe in natural and physical causes as definite, are fatalists. Both naturalism and materialism are teaching a blind fatalism without a smallest door of escape or a smallest window for sunshine. We orthodox Christians must resist this blind fatalism, as all Christians should do, and defend our intelligent doctrine of personal causality of and in the world.

“This doctrine means that all causes are personal. Not only the first cause of the world is personal (as the deists think), but personal are all the causes of all things, of all facts, of all happenings and changes in all the world. When we say personal, we mean intelligent, conscious and intentional. Yea, we mean that some sort of personal

beings are causing all, or better to say, are the causes of all. That is what personal means. I know that at this my first statement some non-orthodox would remark: "That doctrine you are probably drawing from your copious orthodox tradition, for which we do not care, and not from the Holy Scripture, which we take as the only infallible source of all truths." To this I answer: no, not at all; this doctrine is so evident in the Holy Scripture, from the first page to the last, that I have no need this time to quote our tradition at all.

"On the first pages of the sacred Bible a personal God is specified as the First cause, or better to say the First Causer of the world visible and invisible. That God the Creator is personal, this is a professed and upheld dogma not only by all Christian denominations, but by some other religions too. We Christians, however, are privileged to know the inner being of God, i.e., God as Trinity in persons and Oneness in essence. We have learned to know this mystery through the momentous revelation in the New Testament. The dogma of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost means that God is trebly personally, yea supremely personal.

"But not God alone is personal. Personal are also the angels, personal is Satan with his perverse hosts of demons, and finally personal are men. If you carefully read the Bible, without the prejudices of so-called "natural laws" and the supposed "accidental causes", you will find three causal factors, and all the three personal. They are: God, Satan and Man. They are, of course, not equal in personal attributes, and there is no parity among them. Satan has lost all his positive attributes of an angel of light, and has become the chief enemy of God and Man, but still he has remained a personal being, bent though to do evil. Man, since the original of sin, has darkened his glory and deformed God's image in himself; yet, he has remained a personal being, conscious, intelligent and purposefully active, wavering between God and Satan, with his free choice to be saved by the first or destroyed by the second.

"God is activity itself. Not only does He interfere now and then with His wonders and miracles in the life of men and nations, but He is constantly and unceasingly active in supporting and vivifying His creation. "Being near to everyone of us", (Acts 17:27) and "knowing even the thoughts of man", (Ps. 94, 11) He eagerly acts and reacts in human affairs: giveth or withholds children, giveth or withholds good harvest, approves or threatens, grants peace to the faithful and excites war against the devil worshippers. He commands all the elements of nature, fire and water, hail and storms, either to aid the oppressed righteous or to punish the godless. He calls the locust, caterpillars and worms "my great army", (Joel 2.25) which He orders to devour the food of the sinners. He is "able to destroy both soul and body in hell". (Mt. 10.28) He knows "the number of our hairs", and not a sparrow shall fall on the ground" without His will and His knowledge. All this is testified by many instances in the Bible. And this is not all. There is no page in the Scripture which does not refer to God, yea a personal God, His will and His diverse activities. The whole Bible affirms that God is not only the First Causer of the world but also that He is all the time the personal All keeper - Pantokrator - of the world, as we confirm in the first article of our Creed.

"Another causal factor is Satan, God's adversary, with his hosts of fallen spirits. He is the personal causer of all evil. Ever since his fall as Lucifer from the glory of "an

anointed cherub" (Jez. 28) (Isa. 14) to the dark pit Hell,' he is unceasingly trying to infiltrate evil and corruption into every part of God's creation, specially into man. Envious of God and man, he is the hater of both. Christ called him "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8.44) and also "a liar and the father of it". He is a mighty ruler of evil and darkness, but still subordinate, unwillingly though, to the all powerful God. Only with God's permission he is able to harm men and to cause illness, confusion, pain, discord, death and destruction. But the more a person or a people sin against God, the greater power Satan gets over that person or that people. At the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ the whole world was lying in evil because of Satan's terrible grasp over the bedeviled mankind. The world then was teeming with evil spirits as never before. Therefore, Satan dared to offer Christ all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them as his own. A robber and liar!

"The third causal factor in this world, according to the Bible, is man. With all his littleness and weaknesses man is the greatest prize for which Satan is relentlessly and desperately fighting, and for which God from the beginning was ready to die. Staggering between God and Satan, man is supported by God and beguiled by Satan, vacillating hither and thither, groping for light, life and happiness in his short span of existence on this planet. Yet, with all his seeming insignificance in this mammoth universe, man is able to change it by his conduct. Confucius said: "The clouds give the rain or give it not according to men's conduct". Much more valid is this observation in Christianity with its belief in a personal God, the Giver of rain.

"By his faith and virtues, specially by his obedience to God, man regains the dominion over all the created nature as God in creating him entrusted to him. But by his apostasy and corruption he dethrones himself and comes under the dominion of physical nature and becomes its slave. Instead of commanding he is obeying the mute nature, and fighting it for his mere existence, as you see it still now happening in our own generation. And instead of having God as his only Master, he got two masters over himself, Satan and nature, both tyrannizing him... By his faith and virtue, man could have removed the mountains, tame the wild beasts, defeat the aggressor, shut the heaven, stop calamities, heal the sick, raise the dead. And by his sins and vices, specially by his apostasy from God, his only loving and powerful Friend, he could have caused the destruction of cities and civilizations, the earthquakes, floods, pestilence, eclipse of the sun, famine and all the innumerable evils, pleasing Satan and saddening God. Thus, following God man becomes god, and following the devil, he becomes devil. But be he with God or with God's adversary, man has been from the beginning and is now the focus point of this planet and one of the three most important causes of events and changes in the world. And thus, whatever happens on this world's stage, it happens either by God's benevolent will, or by Satan's evil will, or by man through his free choice between good and evil, right and wrong.

"Now, when we mention only these three causal factors: God, Satan, and Man, you should not think of mere three persons, but of terrific forces behind each of them. Behind God - a numberless host of angels of light, so much so that each man and nation have their own angel guardian; behind Satan a horrible locust of evil spirits, so much so that a whole legion of them are used to torment one single man, that one of

Gadara; behind Man, since Christ's emptying the Hades and His Resurrection, there are by now billions of human souls who from the other world, from the Church Triumphant, by their intercession and love, are helping us, many millions of Christ's faithful, still fighting against the Satanic forces for Christ and our own salvation. For our chief fight in this world is not against natural and physical adversities which is comparably a small fight befitting more animals than men-but as the visionary Paul says:"Against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world", (Eph. 6.12) i.e., the satanic forces of evil. And we Christians have been, and always shall be, victorious over these satanic forces through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Why through Him? Because love is greater power than all other powers, visible and invisible. And Christ came to the earth and went down below to the very hellish nest of the satanic hosts to crush them in order to liberate and save men for sheer love of men. Therefore, He could at the end of His victorious mission say: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth". (Mt. 28, 18) When He says all power, He means it literally, all power, in the first place the power over Satan and his satanic forces, then the power over sinners, sin and death. First of all over Satan, the causer of sin and death. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil". (I John ,3, 8) Therefore, we rejoice in our belief that our Lord Jesus Christ is the irresistible Lord. We are acknowledging this belief in every liturgy by stamping the sacred bread for the Holy Communion with the words IC-XC-NI-KA.

“Read and reread the Gospel as much as you like, you will find in Christ's words not a slightest suggestion of natural and physical causes of anything and any happening. Clear as the shining sun is Christ's revelation and teaching, that there are only three causal factors in this world: God, Man and Satan. His chief obedience was to His heavenly Father; His chief loving work was the healing of men's bodies and soul, and His chief dispute with the Pharisees was about His power of driving the evil spirits out of men and the forgiving of sins. As to the nature and so-called natural order and laws, He showed an unheard of absolute dominion and power. He vigorously impressed His followers that they"were not of the world", but, said He, "I have chosen you out of the world". (John 15, 19) Now, since the Christians are not of this world, they certainly cannot accept the theory of the men of this world about the impersonal, unintelligent and accidental causes of the process of things and events. Also in our liturgical book you find the same three personal causal factors as in the Gospel. The same in the Life of Saints too. The same in the conviction and consciousness of the masses of our Orthodox people.

“Therefore, whoever speaks of impersonal causes of things, happenings and changes in this world, is limiting God's power, ignoring the powers of darkness, and despising the role and significance of man. The Scripture does not know, and does not mention any impersonal and blindly accidental cause of anything in the world. The Bible teaches us quite clearly, that the causes of all things, facts, happenings and changes, come from higher personal beings and personal intelligences. And we stick to this teaching of the Holy Book. Therefore we make no concessions to the secular, or scientific theories about impersonal, unintelligent, unintentional or accidental causality in the world. When I say we, I do not think only of the great Fathers of the Church, nor of the Doctors of Divinity, nor of the learned teachers of religion, but also of the masses of our Orthodox people all over the world. Our

Orthodox people would not say: a wolf caused the death of somebody's sheep; nor a falling stone caused the injury of a boy; nor a tornado was the cause of the destruction of somebody's house; nor good weather was the cause of an abundant crop. Our people look through the screen of the physical world into a spiritual sphere and there seek the true causes of those happenings. They always seek a personal cause, or causes. And though this is in per accord with the Bible's teaching, some outsiders call us mystics, and our Faith mysticism or superstition. In fact, our mysticism is nothing else as a deeper insight into the spiritual realities, or intelligences, which are personally causing whatever there is or happens, using the natural things and elements only as their instruments, tools, channels, symbols, or signals.

“All this leads us to the following conclusions: First of all, Christianity is a religion not so much of principles, rules and precepts, but primarily and above all of personal attachments, in the first place an affectionate attachment to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him to other members of His Church, the living and the dead.

“Secondly, our Orthodox doctrine of personal causality on the whole range of nature and world's history is beyond any doubts the biblical doctrine. It was wholly adopted and explained by the Fathers of the Church, and it is kept lucidly in the consciousness of the Orthodox people.

“The benefits we are drawing from such personalism in the doctrine of causality are manifold. By it we are stirring our mind to pierce through the visible events into the realm of invisible intelligences causing and dominating all the drama of the world. It sharpens more than anything else our thinking power, our own intelligence. By it we are constantly aware of the presence of our Friend, Christ the Saviour, to whom we are praying, and also of our archenemy, Satan, whom we have to fight and avoid. It helps us enormously toward educating and forming the strong personal, or individual, characters. It inspires us with spirit of optimistic heroism in suffering, self-sacrificing, and in enduring martyrdom for Christ's sake beyond description, as testified by our Church history.

“All these and other benefits do not possess the follower of the doctrine of impersonal causality; not even the greatest of all benefits-the knowledge of the truth.”

#### **4. The Fallibility of Science: (2) The New Biology**

Let us take as another example of the radical fallibility of science Darwin's theory of evolution. One of the few encouraging developments in the modern world is the gradual undermining, from many directions, of the hitherto unchallenged pseudo-dogma of Darwinism. However, long before modern scientists began to doubt it (and it is still only a minority that doubts), it was considered false by the saints both on empirical grounds and, much more importantly, because it conflicted with the dogmas of the Christian faith and morality.

It is sometimes supposed that the saints disdained to speak of science as being a lower form of knowledge irrelevant to questions of faith. But this is not so. That they

were not afraid to discuss science on its own terms, the terms of empirical evidence, is indicated by the following conversation between Elder Nectary of Optina (+1928) and one of his spiritual children, who sorrowfully remarked to her friend in his reception room:

"I don't know, perhaps education is altogether unnecessary and only brings harm. How can it be reconciled with Orthodoxy?"

The elder rejoined: "Once a man came to me who simply couldn't believe that there had been a flood. Then I told him that on very high mountains in the sand are found shells and other remains from the ocean floor, and how geology testifies to the flood, and he came to believe. You see how necessary learning is at times." And again the elder said: "God not only permits, but demands of man that he grow in knowledge. However, it is necessary to live and learn so that not only does knowledge not ruin morality, but that morality does not ruin knowledge."<sup>95</sup>

Thus in answer to the question how Orthodox could be reconciled with modern science, the elder pointed, on the one hand, to the geological evidence for the flood of Noah - the fossil evidence on which Darwinism rests can much more easily be explained by the flood than by Darwinism itself. Still more important, in his view, were the moral consequences of Darwinism. For, as St. Barsanuphy (+1912) said: "The English philosopher Darwin created an entire system according to which life is a struggle for existence, a struggle of the strong against the weak, where those that are conquered are doomed to destruction and the conquerors are triumphant. This is already the beginning of a bestial philosophy..."<sup>96</sup>

More important still is the incompatibility of Darwinism with certain cardinal dogmas of the Christian faith. Thus the consistent Darwinist must believe: (i) that God did not create the heavens and the earth, or that if He did, He did it through *death*, the destructive forces of mutation and natural selection (but "God did not create death" (Wisdom 1.13)); (ii) that the species came into being through *chance* (St. Basil says that anyone who believes in chance is an atheist<sup>97</sup>); (iii) that death was not the result of sin, as Scripture says (Romans 5.19), but existed even before sin was possible; (iv) that man, being only matter, does not have free will, and therefore cannot be judged; and (v) that man does not have an immortal soul, but is wholly the product of chance forces operating on matter.

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<sup>95</sup> *Zhitia prepodobnykh Startsev Optinoj Pustyni (The Lives of the Holy Elders of Optina Desert)*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1992. According to another version, the elder said: "God not only allows, He demands that a man grow in knowledge. There is no stopping place in God's creation, everything moves, and even the angels do not remain in one rank, but ascend from step to step, receiving new revelations. And even if a man has studied for a hundred years, he must still go on to ever new knowledge... You must work - years pass unnoticed while you work." And as he spoke these words, "his face became unusually bright, so that it was difficult to look at it." (*Zhitia*, op. cit., p. 337).

<sup>96</sup> Victor Afanasyev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, p. 488.

<sup>97</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Homily on Avarice*.

St. Nectarios of Aegina wrote: "The followers of pithecogeny [the derivation of man from the apes] are ignorant of man and of his lofty destiny, because they have denied him his soul and Divine revelation. They have rejected the Spirit, and the Spirit has abandoned them. They withdrew from God, and God withdrew from them; for, thinking they were wise, they became fools... If they had acted with knowledge, they would not have lowered themselves so much, nor would they have taken pride in tracing the origin of the human race to the most shameless of animals. Rightly did the Prophet say of them: 'Man being in honour, did not understand; he is compared to the dumb beasts, and is become like unto them.'"<sup>98</sup>

It is not only the origins of man and animals that remain completely unexplained by Darwinist theory. Dr. D. T. Gish writes: "Darwin called the origin of flowering plants 'an abominable mystery'. In 1984, to evolutionists, the origin of flowering plants is still an abominable mystery!"

It is amazing how many so many Christians fail to see the incompatibility of Darwinism with Christian dogma and morality. Or perhaps they see it, but suppress this perception because of the choice it will then place before them: to accept the modern world-view and reject Christianity, or vice-versa. They prefer the muddled and impossible compromise of "theistic evolution", choosing to believe that God somehow works through death and chance, that He could not or would not make His creation perfect from the beginning, but had to go through billions of years of bloody experiments before He "hit upon" the world as it is now!<sup>99</sup> Or perhaps they are seduced by the perspective of infinite progress through unending evolution that Darwinism offers. As one Masonic writer puts it: "First a mollusc, then a fish then a bird, then a mammal, then a man, then a Master, then a God".<sup>100</sup>

It is important to remind ourselves at this point that science is hypothetical in essence; it proclaims no certainties; what is declared to be a self-evident law of nature in one generation is denounced as false in the next. Moreover, several of the major hypotheses of science appear to contradict each other, at least in the opinion of significant sections of the scientific community - for example, the time-reversible laws of quantum physics and the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Darwinism also contradicts this latter law, since evolution involves the build-up of complexity and information rather than its inexorable loss, as the Second Law says.

Still more radically, Darwinism is *not even a scientific theory*, insofar as it cannot be falsified. "Our theory of evolution," write Paul Ehrlich and L.C. Birch, "has become ...

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<sup>98</sup> St. Nectarios, *Sketch concerning Man*, Athens, 1885.

<sup>99</sup> Thus Pope John Paul II believed in Darwinism, making an exception only for the soul of man, which he believes was created directly by God. Most recently, Pope Francis declared to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, "God is not a divine being or a magician, but the Creator who brought everything to life. Evolution in nature is not inconsistent with the notion of creation, because evolution requires the creation of beings that evolve."

<sup>100</sup> J.D. Buck, *The Genius of Freemasonry*, p. 43; quoted in Vicomte Léon de Poncins, *Freemasonry and the Vatican*, London and Chumleigh: Britons Publishing Company. Buck goes on: "The theologians who have made such a caricature or fetish of Jesus were ignorant of this normal, progressive, higher evolution of man" (p. 29).

one which cannot be refuted by any possible observations. It is thus 'outside of empirical science'... No one can think of ways in which to test it ... [Evolutionary ideas] have become part of an evolutionary dogma accepted by most of us as part of our training."<sup>101</sup>

In fact, Darwinism is essentially a fairy-tale dressed up in scientific language. As A. N. Field writes: 'With oaks to be seen sprouting from acorns, grubs turning into butterflies, and chickens pecking their way out of eggs, it is not surprising that human fancy from an early date toyed with the notion of one kind of living thing being transformed into some other kind. This idea has been the stock-in-trade of folk-lore and fairy tales in all ages and all lands. It was the achievement of Charles Darwin to make it the foundation of modern biological science."<sup>102</sup>

However, as Field goes on to say, a major difficulty is encountered by the Darwinists at the very outset of their argument: "There is... not a shred of evidence of any living thing ever evolving into some different kind of living thing capable of breeding but infertile with its parent stock. All that breeding experiments have produced is mere varieties fertile with their parent stock, or else sterile hybrids, incapable of breeding, such as the mule produced by a cross between horse and donkey."

Darwin admitted as much in a private letter to Dr. Bentham on May 22, 1863: "In fact belief in Natural Selection must at present be grounded entirely on general considerations... When we descend to details, we can prove that no one species has changed (i.e. we cannot prove that a single species has changed); nor can we prove that the supposed changes are beneficial, which is the groundwork of the theory." Nearly 150 years later, this statement is still true. Moreover, developments in genetics and molecular biology have placed further vast obstacles in the way of the possibility of natural selection.

It seems that the "ignorant" St. Basil was right after all: "Nothing is truer than that each plant produces its seed or contains some seminal virtue; this is what is meant by 'after its kind'. So that the shoot of a reed does not produce an olive tree, but from a reed grows another reed, and from one sort of seed a plant of the same sort always germinates. Thus all that has sprung from the earth in its first bringing forth is kept the same to our time, thanks to the constant reproduction of kind."<sup>103</sup>

Since this is the case, there is no need to concede to the scientific world-view more than it can honestly claim for itself. Otherwise we fall into the trap which so many non-scientific Christians have fallen into of immediately accepting the latest scientific fashion and adapting one's faith to it, only to find that science has moved on and left their "modernised faith" as an out-of-date relic.

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<sup>101</sup> Ehrlich and Birch, "Evolutionary History and Population Biology," *Nature*, Vol. 214, 1967, p. 352.

<sup>102</sup> Field, *The Evolution Hoax Exposed*, Hawthorne, Ca.: The Christian Book Club of America, 1971, p. 12.

<sup>103</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Homily 5 on the Hexaemeron*.

This has been the fate of the "Christian Marxists" and "theist evolutionists", who in trying slavishly to adapt Christianity to the latest and least credible fashion in science show themselves to be neither Christians nor scientists.

What we must always remember is that, whatever its many and undoubted achievements, science is a fallible enterprise conducted by sinful men. Therefore scientists individually and collectively are not immune from deception, and we Christians should not be cowed by their supposedly superior knowledge from subjecting their conclusions to criticism.

As A.S. Khomiakov wrote, "we should accept, preserve and develop [science] in all the intellectual space that it requires; but at the same time subject it constantly to our own criticism, enlightened by those lofty principles that were passed down to us of old by the Orthodoxy of our ancestors. Only in this way can we raise science itself, giving it the wholeness and fullness that it does not yet have."<sup>104</sup>

This is especially the case with regard to the new biology, because in this field, at any rate, there is a growing minority of fully qualified scientists who reject the Darwinist myth. They point to a vast number of facts that contradict Darwinism: not only the familiar one of the missing links in human evolution, but such facts as the impossibility of generating even a single-cell organism out of a primitive biochemical soup, the impossibility of assembling the elements of a cell into working order one by one (they all have to be present simultaneously and in exactly the right relationship to each other), the impossibility of understanding the evolution of sexually differentiated species from asexual ones (since the vastly complicated differences between the male and the female of the new species have to emerge, in perfect working order, in a single generation), the circularity and radical unreliability of the Darwinist methods of dating rocks and fossils, the fact of the universal flood as witnessed in the folk lore of all peoples, etc., etc. "Creationism" is not, as many suppose, the imposition of Protestant fundamentalism into the realm of pure science, but simply honest science.

And if elements of heretical Protestantism have crept into some creationist work, these are easily separated from the science, like wheat from the chaff. There is no reason why the great bulk of creationist work – as well as all conventional science that does not rest on Darwinist assumptions (i.e. the vast majority of science) - could not be absorbed into a new project of "Orthodox creationism", which will be honest both to God and to science, being interested in truth alone...

## **5. The Fallibility of Science: (3) The New Psychology**

The modern scientific project of encompassing the whole universe from the primal matter of the Big Bang to all the planets and galaxies and all the species of plants and animals in a single explanatory framework, that is, in a single causal nexus, would surely be judged to have failed if it stopped short at *man*. After all, while earlier generations of men wished to demonstrate that man is a "fifth essence" separate from the four natural essences of fire, earth, water and air, and *not* included in the causal

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<sup>104</sup> Khomiakov, *Sochinenia* (Works), Moscow, 1914, vol. 1, pp. 256-257.

nexus of the material universe, modern scientists think just the opposite. They have an enormous respect for matter as the origin of all things, and the fount of the evolutionary ascent of man; and they wish to be included in that evolutionary ascent at all costs – even at the cost of denying the existence of their own souls!<sup>105</sup>

The hub of the scientific project in its application to man is what is sometimes called the Artificial Intelligence or "AI" hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, mental states are to be identified with brain states, which in turn can be described exclusively in terms of computer states. The crucial test of this hypothesis would be to build a robot whose behaviour would simulate the behaviour of a man in every way. If the behaviour of the robot were indistinguishable from what we recognize as the behaviour of a man, then we would be forced to admit that the robot *is* a man. And then we would be forced to the further conclusion that man is the product of evolution: the last link in the chain would be complete.

However, the philosopher John Searle has argued that however accurately a machine could mimic the behaviour of an intelligent human being, it cannot be said *to understand what it is doing*. And he proves his contention by describing an imaginary "Chinese room" experiment. Suppose a person is locked in a room and is given a large amount of Chinese writing. Suppose, further, that he understands not a word of Chinese, but is given a set of instructions in a language he does understand which teaches him to correlate one set of Chinese symbols with another. If the rules correlating input and output are sufficiently complex and sophisticated, and if the man becomes sufficiently skilled in manipulating them, then it is possible to envisage a situation in which, for any question given him in Chinese, the man will be able to give an appropriate answer also in Chinese in such a way that no-one would guess from his answers that he knows not a word of Chinese!<sup>106</sup>

Thus scientists will never be able to explain their own thought processes by purely scientific means. For such functions as "understanding meaning" and "intending" cannot be simulated on a machine, no matter how sophisticated. As Michael Polanyi writes: "These personal powers include the capacity for understanding a meaning, for believing a factual statement, for interpreting a mechanism in relation to its purpose, and on a higher level, for reflecting on problems and exercising originality in solving them. They include, indeed, every manner of reaching convictions by an act of personal judgement. The neurologist exercises these powers to the highest degree in constructing the neurological model of a man - to whom he denies in this very act any similar powers."<sup>107</sup>

This conclusion reached by philosophical thought is confirmed by the findings of mathematicians. Thus the Oxford professor Roger Penrose, relying on the work of

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<sup>105</sup> The transition between the old and the new concept of man may perhaps be seen best in *Hamlet*, where the superiority of man to the natural world is indeed extolled, and man himself is called a "quintessence", but a quintessence – "of dust": *What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason" how infinite in faculty! In form, in moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?...*

<sup>106</sup> Searle, J., *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>107</sup> Polanyi, M., *Personal Knowledge*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958, p. 262.

other mathematicians such as Gödel and Turing, has given some excellent reasons for not believing that minds are algorithmic, i.e. mechanistic entities. For example, there are certain necessary mathematical truths which are seen to be true but cannot be logically deduced from the axioms of the system to which they belong; that is, although we know that they are true, we cannot prove them to be true. This suggests that the seeing of mathematical truths is a spontaneous, uncaused, yet completely rational act. Penrose believes that mathematical truths are like Platonic ideas, which exist independently both of the mind and of the physical world. Whether or not he is right in this, he has clearly demonstrated that mathematical thinking cannot be described or explained in deterministic terms. And if mathematical thinking, the most rigorous and logical of all kinds of thought, is free and not determined, the same must be true of scientific thought in general.<sup>108</sup>

It follows that if psychologists try to deny that thinking is free, they cut the ground from under their own feet and deprive their own thought of any credibility. For let us suppose that the thinking of psychologists is in fact determined by certain natural laws. The question then arises: if that is so, what reason do we have for believing that their reasoning is rational and true? For if a man speaks under some kind of compulsion, we conclude either that he does not understand what he is saying, or that he is lying, or that he is telling the truth "by accident", as it were. In any case, we attach no significance to his words; for free and rational men believe only the words of free and rational men.

Now just as rational thought presupposes freedom, so does responsible action. The whole of morality and law is based on the premise that the actions of men can be free, although they are not always so. If a man is judged to have committed a criminal offence freely, then he is blamed and punished accordingly. If, on the other hand, he is judged to have been "not in his sound mind", he is not blamed and is sent to a psychiatric hospital rather than a prison. If we could not make such distinctions between various degrees of freedom, civilized society would soon collapse.

Now, as we have seen, free will is a completely different kind of causality from empirical causality. Unlike empirical causality, it is not inferred, but directly perceived by the cause himself. As such, we can be certain about our human causality, whereas empirical causality can never be more than a subject of conjecture or hypothesis.

Free will is only faintly discerned at the subconscious level of human life, where we feel that we are being pushed and pulled in a dark sea of desires and aversions, of attractions and repulsions, over which we have little control. In this context we can see that it was no accident that psychology should have begun its section of the scientific enterprise at the beginning of the twentieth century with the psychoanalytical study of the subconscious and of those pathological states in which free will and rationality appear to be suspended. For, with his freewill and rationality removed, man can be more easily treated as if he were just a biological organism, subject to the same empirical laws as other biological organisms.

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<sup>108</sup> Penrose, R., *The Emperor's New Mind*, London: Vintage, 1989.

However, even psychoanalysis was forced to introduce the concept of the ego – that is, the person, the seat of free will and rationality. For insofar as a man feels himself to be the victim of subconscious forces that he cannot yet conceptualize or control, he also feels himself to be distinct from them, and therefore potentially able to resist them. Moreover, at the higher level of consciousness, this feeling of passive "victimization" is translated into active attention to objects and resistance to (some) desires; Prometheus bound becomes Prometheus unbound, at least in relation to some elements of his mental life.

The phenomenon of attention is of particular interest here because it is at the same time the sine qua non of all perception and thought and the first real manifestation of freedom of the will, the will being bound at the lower, subconscious level. As the Russian religious philosopher S.L. Frank points out, some element of will is present in all perception and thought insofar as it is not imposed by either the environment or the subconscious. Even if our attention is involuntarily drawn to an object, the perception of it as occupying a definite place in the objective world requires an effort of will directing our cognitive faculties upon it. Thus my attention may be involuntarily drawn by a bright light or a pretty face - at this moment I am under the control of subconsciously registered images, sensations and desires. But immediately I try to perceive where and what it is that has attracted my attention, I am displaying freedom of will.<sup>109</sup>

However, it is above in all in the experience of resisting one or other of our desires that we become conscious that our will is free. This freedom is only relative insofar as the resistance to one desire is conditioned by submission to another, stronger one. But introspection reveals that in any struggle between two desires at the conscious level there is always a third element, the ego, that chooses between them, however under pressure by one of the desires the ego may feel itself to be. It is in the hesitation before choice that we become conscious of our freedom. And it is in the consciousness that we could have chosen differently that we become conscious of our responsibility.

Empirical psychology cannot provide us with knowledge of the workings of our free will insofar as it is dominated by the dogma of scientism, which excludes specifically human, as opposed to empirical causality. In the most extreme manifestation of psychological scientism, behaviourism, even the word "action" is removed from the scientific vocabulary and replaced by the word "behaviour", which has fewer connotations of free will and choice. According to the behaviourists, our "behaviour" is exclusively determined by biological drives and learned conditional reflexes. Fortunately, behaviourism is now generally admitted to have been a mistake; but we must not underestimate the continued influence of scientistic modes of thought in psychology. If the mechanistic model of the behaviourists is simply replaced by the computer models of the cognitive scientists, then we are no nearer the truth now than we were in the 1950s.

It is not only free will and rationality that empirical psychology cannot comprehend. Consider, for example, the important phenomenon of falling in love.

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<sup>109</sup> Frank, *Dusha Cheloveka (The Soul of Man)*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1917.

Frank writes: "What can so-called empirical psychology observe in it? First of all it will fall on the external, physical symptoms of this phenomenon - it will point out the changes in blood circulation, feeding and sleep in the person under observation. But remembering that it is, first of all, psychology, it will pass over to the observation of 'mental phenomena', it will record changes in self-image, sharp alterations in mental exaltation and depression, the stormy emotions of a pleasant and repulsive nature through which the life of a lover usually passes, the dominance in his consciousness of images relating to the beloved person, etc. Insofar as psychology thinks that in these observations it has expressed, albeit incompletely, the very essence of being in love - then this is a mockery of the lover, a denial of the mental phenomenon under the guise of a description of it. For for the lover himself all these are just symptoms or consequences of his feeling, not the feeling itself. Its essence consists, roughly, in a living consciousness of the exceptional value of the beloved person, in an aesthetic delight in him, in the experience of his central significance for the life of the beloved - in a word, in a series of phenomena characterizing the inner meaning of life. To elucidate these phenomena means to understand them compassionately from within, to recreate them sympathetically in oneself. The beloved will find an echo of himself in artistic descriptions of love in novels, he will find understanding in a friend, as a living person who has himself experienced something similar and is able to enter the soul of his friend; but the judgements of the psychologist will seem to him to be simply misunderstandings of his condition - and he will be right."<sup>110</sup>

A description of love in terms of drives, stimuli and learning will invariably miss out the most important element, the element that makes love love - the perception of another person *as a person*. Nor is it simply the *one-way* perception of another as a person that is important: it is the *mutual* perception that the other is perceiving oneself in the same way. This is the fact of *inter-personal communion*, which enables two people to relate to each other not as subjects and objects but as inter-penetrating subjects whose knowledge of each other, though from different points of view, is identical, and though taking place in space and time seems to transcend space and time. Heron has described this fact as follows: "My awareness of myself is in part constituted by my awareness of his awareness of me, and my awareness of him is in part constituted by my awareness of his awareness of me."<sup>111</sup>

I am not here talking simply about empathy, which is another basic psychological phenomenon that transcends empirical science. Empathy lies at the root of art, and has been described by one Russian scientist as "a necessary and most important, although not the only condition of creativity in any sphere of human activity".<sup>112</sup> But empathy is a one-way relationship, like art itself: here we are talking rather about mutual and simultaneous empathy which creates a new content as well as form of consciousness. Thus two people in relation to each other as people are like two mirrors placed opposite each other. That which is reflected in mirror A is mirror B, and that which is reflected in mirror B is mirror A. The "knowledge" that each has is therefore

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<sup>110</sup> Frank, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>111</sup> Heron, J., "The Phenomenology of the Social Encounter: The Gaze", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1970-71, XXXI, pp. 243-264.

<sup>112</sup> Basin, E.Y., "Tvorchestvo i Empatia" ("Creativity and Empathy"), *Voprosy Filosofii (Questions of Philosophy)*, 1987, N 2, p. 55.

objective and subjective at the same time; in fact, the objectivity and subjectivity of the vision or visions are logically and chronologically inseparable. But this amounts to a radically different kind of knowledge from that of scientific, empirical knowledge, which Frank calls "object consciousness".<sup>113</sup> For whereas object consciousness entails a radical separation between a spaceless and timeless subject and a spatial (if material) or temporal (if mental) object, person consciousness entails an equally radical identity-in-diversity of subject and object which we may simply call *communion*.

Frank describes communion as follows: "When we speak to a person, or even when our eyes meet in silence, that person ceases to be an 'object' for us and is no longer a 'he' but a 'thou'. That means he no longer fits into the frame-work of 'the world of objects': he ceases to be a passive something upon which our cognitive gaze is directed for the purposes of perception without in any way affecting it. Such one-sided relation is replaced by a two-sided one, by an interchange of spiritual activities. We attend to him and he to us, and this attitude is different from - though it may co-exist with - the purely ideal direction of attention which we call objective knowledge: it is real spiritual interaction. Communion is both our link with that which is external to us, and a part of our inner life, and indeed a most essential part of it. From an abstract logical point of view this is a paradoxical case of something external not merely coexisting with the 'inward' but of actually merging into it. Communion is at one and the same time both something 'external' to us and something 'inward' - in other words it cannot in the strict sense be called either external or internal.

"This can still more clearly be seen from the fact that all communion between 'I' and 'thou' leads to the formation of a new reality designated by the word 'we' - or rather, coincides with it."<sup>114</sup>

The fact is that human beings can relate to themselves and each other not only in the scientific, "I-it" mode, but also in the artistic "I-thou" mode, and in what we may call the religious "I-we" mode.<sup>115</sup>

It follows that if psychologists are to truly understand their subject, and not dehumanize man by pretending that he exists only on the "I-it" mode of our limited scientific understanding, then they must be prepared to ascend to the "I-thou" and "I-we" modes, and understand him in these, more intimate and at the same time more comprehensive and universal modes. For how can we understand the humanity of another man if we do not exert our own humanity to its fullest extent?

In the Spielberg film *Artificial Intelligence* a boy who is in fact a robot is rejected by his human "parents" because the son whom they lost is brought to life and begins to be jealous of the "brother" robot who had been constructed to replace him. The robot makes it his life's mission to find his "mother" again and prove to himself that she loves him just as much as her "real", human son. In the course of the film, humanity

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<sup>113</sup> Frank, *op. cit.*

<sup>114</sup> Frank, S.L., *Reality and Man*, London: Faber & Faber, 1965, p. 61.

<sup>115</sup> John Macmurray, *Interpreting the Universe*, London: Faber, 1933; *Reason and Emotion*, London: Faber, 1935; *Persons in Relation*, London: Faber, 1965.

destroys itself, and only the robots are left “alive”. With the help of some fellow-robots, and some DNA preserved from a wisp of his mother’s hair, the robots are able to bring the mother to life again for a single day. And so the boy-robot is at last able to enjoy the supreme pleasure of hearing her say that she loves him...

The “message” of the film (for this writer, if not for Spielberg) is by no means that robots will one day be just as human as real human beings. It is rather that scientific advances in artificial intelligence, and in the knowledge of man’s genetic and physiological make-up, will never penetrate to the heart of man’s mystery, which is the capacity to love, freely and not in order to fulfil a biological desire, but simply because an object worthy of love exists. For, as Hamlet says:

*You would play upon me;  
You would seem to know my stops;  
You would pluck out the heart of my mystery;  
You would sound me from my lowest  
note to the top of my compass.  
And there is much music, excellent voice,  
in this little organ.  
Yet cannot you make it speak...*

## 6. Science and the Word of God

The study of science gives us many reasons for believing in God. After all, “since the creation of the world”, says St. Paul, “His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead”; which is why those who do not believe in the Creator God “are without excuse” (Romans 1.20). This leads many to believe that science and the Word of God *must* be compatible.

If they mean by “science” *real* science, science unaffected and unpolluted by scientism and “half-science”, then they are right. But modern science has long ago been hijacked, as it were, by a project that actually has nothing to do with real science: the project, namely, to prove that empirical reality, the reality studied by the scientists, is the only reality, and that scientific truth is the only truth. This project, which is called Naturalism, makes, as C.S. Lewis, writes, “the sweeping negative assertion, ‘There is nothing except this’ – an assertion, surely, as remote from practice, experience, and any conceivable verification as has ever been made since men began to use their reason speculatively”.<sup>116</sup>

It is therefore naïve to expect that science as it is presently practised in most universities and laboratories will be found to be compatible with the Word of God. In the end, in spite of all attempts to reconcile the one with the other, glaring contradictions will remain, because it is not only in theological science that the truth is unattainable without the help of God. In *every* sphere the full truth can be found only with the help of the Truth Himself, that is, God, and will remain hidden unless the Truth Himself is invoked.

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<sup>116</sup> Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 34.

Thus one fact clearly proclaimed by the Word of God is that the sun and all the heavenly bodies were created *after* the earth. This fact is in no way compatible with any modern hypothesis put forward by godless science about the origin of the solar system. And it would be dishonest of us to try to “reinterpret” that fact to make it “fit” with modern physics in the way that the theistic evolutionists try to make Genesis’s seven days of creation somehow “fit” with the million-year epochs of Darwinist time.

Instead of trying to reinterpret or allegorise the Word of God to make it fit with godless science, we should heed the words of St. Basil the Great: “I know the laws of allegory, though less by myself than from the works of others. There are those truly who do not admit the common sense of the Scriptures, for whom water is not water, but some other nature, who see in a plant, in a fish, what their fancy wishes, who change the nature of reptiles and of wild beasts to suit their allegories, like the interpreters of dreams who explain visions in sleep to make them serve their own ends. For me grass is grass; plant, fish, wild beast, domestic animal, I take all in a literal sense. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. Those who have written about the nature of the universe have discussed at length the shape of the earth. If it be spherical or cylindrical, if it resemble a disc and is equally rounded in all parts, or if it has the form of a winnowing basket and is hollow in the middle; all those conjectures have been suggested by cosmographers, each one upsetting that of his predecessor. It will not lead me to give less importance to the creation of the universe than the servant of God Moses is silent as to shapes; he has not said that the earth is a hundred and eighty thousand furlongs in circumference; he has not measured into what extent of air its shadow projects itself while the sun revolves around it, nor state how its shadow, casting itself upon the moon, produces eclipses. He has passed over in silence, as useless, all that is unimportant for us. Shall I then prefer foolish wisdom to the oracles of the Holy Spirit? Shall I not rather exalt Him Who, not wishing to fill our minds with these vanities, has regulated all the economy of Scripture in view of the edification and the making perfect of our souls? It is this that those seem to me not to have understood, who, giving themselves up to the distorted meaning of allegory, have undertaken to give a majesty of their own invention to Scripture. It is to believe themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and to bring forth their own ideas under a pretext of exegesis. Let us hear Scripture as it has been written...”<sup>117</sup>

One may object that the book of Genesis was not written as a scientific textbook, so it is useless to cite anything from it as if it contradicted any scientific hypothesis. Now it is, of course, true that Genesis is not a scientific textbook – as St. Basil himself points out. But at the same time, as the same saint pointed out, it is not allegory, and it does describe *facts*. And if these facts, whether expressed in scientific language or not, contradict the hypotheses of modern science, such as the fact that the earth was created before the sun, or that man was created separately from the other species, or that there was once a universal flood which destroyed the old world and laid down the fossils that we see now, then there is no way of getting round this for the honest, truly believing Christian. We either believe the Word of God, or we believe modern godless science.

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<sup>117</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Homily 9 on the Hexaemeron*.

The problem with trying to reconcile the Word of God with modern godless science is that in our joy at finding certain points of concord, or apparent concord, between the two, we may subconsciously accept certain ideas of science which are definitely heretical. Thus the anthropic principle in physics can be interpreted to imply that God created the universe in precisely such a way that man should be able to study and understand it, which is clearly what Christians believe. However, it may also be interpreted in a quite different way more in accordance with Hindu ideas about the divinity of man; for according to Marek Kohn, the principle "seems to be on the verge of substituting man for God, by hinting that consciousness, unbound by time's arrow, causes creation"<sup>118</sup> In fact, the eastern idea that every man is by nature a god gains credence from both from the Darwinist idea that we are evolving into gods, and from the physicists' idea that our consciousness causes creation.

These parallels between ideas in modern science and eastern religions suggest that the strange path that science is treading may be connected with the general penetration of western civilisation by these religions. For centuries, Christians have believed that there are clear and important differences between the Creator and creation, matter and spirit, time and eternity, freedom and determinism, man and animal, soul and body, life and death. But in the twentieth century, the age of relativity and relativism, all these terms have melted into each other; under the combined onslaught of modern science and eastern religion, the distinctions which are so basic to our understanding of ourselves and the world we live in have tended to disappear in a pantheist, panpsychic or panmaterialist soup.

However, the recognition that all these alarming intellectual and spiritual trends are related makes the task of resisting them only a little easier. For even if we reject eastern religion as false and satanic, and suspect that the god of this world has also had a hand in blinding some scientists, we cannot say the same about science in general. We have to explain both how science has gone wrong and why it still manages to get so many things right...

One obvious way in which science has gone wrong is by drastically narrowing a priori the range of data it examines, eliminating from its field of observation the vast sphere of phenomena that we call religious. Concealment of data which conflicts with one's hypothesis is usually considered dishonest science. And yet in relation to religion it has been practised on a massive scale by most of the scientific community for centuries. Even when scientists do deign to study religion, their methods and conclusions are often blatantly biased and unscientific. This was obvious with regard to the "achievements" of Soviet "scientists" as they tried to explain, for example, the incorruption of the relics of the Russian saints: but western scientists have been hardly less biased, if usually more sophisticated than their Soviet counterparts.

Of course, some "miracles" are contrived, just as some religious beliefs are superstitious; and science can do a genuine service to the truth by exposing these

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<sup>118</sup> Kohn, "Joyfully back to Church?", *New Statesman and Society*, May 1, 1992, p. 32.

frauds.<sup>119</sup> But the existence of some frauds does not undermine religion in general, any more than the existence of quack doctors undermines genuine medicine. Moreover, science itself has not been immune from quackery of its own in its eagerness to explain away the phenomena of religion. Particularly useful to it in this respect has been the concept of psychosomatic illness and psychology in general. But psychology is the least developed of the sciences; and, as we have seen, there are strong reasons for disputing whether it can ever be a genuinely empirical science.

We must also remember that, as Sir Peter Medawar writes, "it is logically outside the competence of science to answer questions to do with first and last things."<sup>120</sup> For any such answers must be in principle *unverifiable* insofar as no man observed the beginning of the universe and no man can see its end. As the Lord said to Job: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding" (Job 38.4). Science, however, - or rather, false science - denies any such limits to its competence; and so, by the just judgement of God, it proceeds further and further away from the knowledge of the greater mysteries of the universe - of God, of the soul, of the origins and destiny of creation, - while puffing itself up by its knowledge of the lesser mystery of how to build a rocket to the moon.

To understand the first and last things we have to resort to another method, that of *faith*; for, as St. Paul says, "we walk by faith, not by sight" (II Corinthians 5.7). In this sphere we cannot walk by sight, because, as Fr. Seraphim Rose writes, "the state of Adam and the first-created world has been placed forever beyond the knowledge of science by the barrier of Adam's transgression, which changed the very nature of Adam and creation, and indeed the very nature of knowledge itself. Modern science knows only what it observes and what can be reasonably inferred from observation... The true knowledge of Adam and the first-created world - as much as is useful for us to know - is accessible only in God's revelation and in the Divine vision of the saints."<sup>121</sup>

Walking by faith does not mean ignoring the evidence of our senses or the methods of logical reasoning. Thus the central truth of our Faith, the Resurrection of Christ, was verified by the Apostle Thomas in a simple scientific experiment involving the sense of touch. And the main physical evidence of the Resurrection, the Turin Shroud, has been subjected to analysis by scientists from practically every discipline from botany to astrophysics - and remains inexplicable by any other hypothesis (a recent

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<sup>119</sup> Thus Professor I.M. Andreyev writes: "Only with a superficial knowledge do there arise *false* contradictions between faith and knowledge, between religion and science. With a deeper knowledge these false contradictions disappear without a trace... A broad, scientific and philosophical education not only does not hinder faith in God, but makes it easier, because the whole arsenal of scientific-philosophical thought is natural apologetic material for religious faith. Moreover, honest knowledge often has a methodical opportunity to uncover corruptions of faith and exposing superstitions, whether religious or scientific-philosophical." ("Christian Truth and Scientific Knowledge", *The Orthodox Word*, March-April, 1977)

<sup>120</sup> Medawar, in John Tailor, *When the Clock struck Zero*, London: Picador, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> Rose, in Hieromonk Damascene (Christensen), *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 2003, pp. 542-543.

carbon-14 analysis of its age conducted with the aim of refuting its authenticity turned out to be based on false presuppositions.<sup>122</sup>

And yet millions of people confronted by these "many infallible proofs" do not believe; they cannot make the, for us, eminently *logical* deduction that the man who fulfils so many prophecies in His own life *must* be "my Lord and my God" (John 20.28). They cannot do this because, while science and logic confirm the Resurrection of Christ, the Person they point to is an unseen reality Who cannot be contained within the confines of the senses and logic and therefore represents a challenge to their carnal nature. Thus their seeing and reasoning are not mixed with faith, which is, in St. Paul's words, "the reality (Greek hypostasis: literally "substance") of things hoped for, *the proof of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11.1).

When a man, following the evidence of his senses and the reasoning of his logical mind, penetrates, through faith, beyond the veil of the senses to the Logos Himself, He receives further revelations about things not seen in accordance with his spiritual level. He learns about the creation of the world in the beginning, and its judgement at the end, about angels and demons, the souls of men and the logoi of all created beings. Nature becomes for him, in the words of St. Anthony the Great, "a book in which we read the thoughts of God".

Only those "thoughts" are not mathematical formulae describing the structure of matter or space-time. Rather, they express the *essential nature* and *purpose* for which each thing was created, its place in the universe *as a whole* and *in eternity*. This alone is the true knowledge of things...

## 7. Two Approaches to Nature

The scientific approach to nature may be described as analytic and reductionist; the Christian approach as *analogical* and *symbolic*. The essence of the one approach is mathematical and quantitative; the other - spiritual and qualitative. The two approaches are compatible; there is no reason why we cannot go up the great ladder of Being at one moment - qualitatively, "from glory to glory", and go down it at another - quantitatively, until we reach that smallest quantum or "thing" which is in fact "no thing". However, these two approaches are not on a par with each other; for while the analogical approach ascends from one level of reality to a higher one which is closer to Absolute Reality, the analytical approach sheds, as it were, dimensions or planes of reality, as it descends lower. Thus by reducing psychology and the social sciences to neurophysiology, analytical science loses the reality of freewill and consciousness; by reducing biology to chemistry, it loses the élan vital, the essence of life; and by reducing chemistry to quanta, it loses, time, substance and causality.

Indeed, the analytical approach reduces itself to absurdity by claiming that there is nothing else than these "no-things" - the ultimate statement of nihilism. This is what happens when qualities are redefined as quantities, when the analytical approach is adopted on its own without any reference to the truths and dimensions of reality

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<sup>122</sup> *Pravoslavnaia Rus' (Orthodox Russia)*, N 7, 1993, p. 16; *Orthodoxie*, N 60, September, 1994, pp. 33-34.

revealed by the analogical approach. That is how we come to have theories which deny the arrow of time while trying to describe its supposed beginning (the Big Bang) and end (the Big Crunch); and theories about the origin of life which are based on destruction (mutation) and death (natural selection); and theories about the neurological nature of mind which, if they were true, would deprive us of any reason for believing in the truth of any theories whatsoever - for why should I believe that the chance product of one set of neuronal firings is "truer" than any other?<sup>123</sup>

Reductionism leads to nihilism and absurdity: the opposite process reveals an ever-increasing fullness of reality leading to God Himself. As Elder Barsanuphius writes: "In nature, in this visible world, various forces function, and the lowest of them yield to the higher: the physical yields to the chemical, the chemical to the organic, and finally, all of them together to the highest of all, the spiritual. Without the intervention of the higher forces, the lower forces would function in a homogeneous, immutable order. But the higher forces alter, and sometimes even suspend the actions of the lower. In such a natural subordination of the lower forces to the higher, not one of the laws of nature is changed. Thus, for example, a physician changes the progression of a disease, a man changes the face of the earth by digging of canals, and so on. Cannot God cause the same thing to a boundlessly greater extent?"<sup>124</sup>

Orthodox Christianity is not against science that stays humbly within its limits, which recognises that the universe is not an isolated system, but one that is open to the God Who created it, Who preserves it and all its parts in existence, and Who sustains every one of its laws by His Providence until the day when He will come to judge it, when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Peter 3.10).

Orthodoxy declares that there is nothing more real than God, that all things "live and move and have their being in Him" (Acts 17.28), and that things lose reality when they begin to move away from Him and cease to reflect His light. Some things reflect God more fully and therefore partake in more dimensions of His reality. Christ is His perfect, consubstantial Image and Name; for He "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, upholding the universe by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1.3). Men are also images of God, though not consubstantial ones; and their ability to use the word in science, art and religion in order to describe and understand the universe is a true reflection of the power of the Word of God.

Indeed, Adam's "naming" of the animals in Paradise may be seen as the beginning of true, analogical science; for through it, in St. Ambrose's words, "God granted [us] the power of being able to discern by the application of sober logic the species of each and every object, in order that [we] may be induced to form a judgement on all of them."<sup>125</sup> Again, Nicetas Stethatos writes, God made man "king of creation", enabling

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<sup>123</sup> C.S. Lewis, "'Bulverism' or the Foundation of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Thought", in *God in the Dock*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, pp. 271-275, 276. Alvin Plantinga has recently produced a similar argument to refute Darwinism. See Jim Holt, "Divine Evolution", *Prospect*, May, 2002, p. 13.

<sup>124</sup> Elder Barsanuphy of Optina, *Kelejnnye Zapiski (Cell Notes)*, Moscow, 1991, p. 16.

<sup>125</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On Paradise*, 11.

him "to possess within himself the inward essences, the natures and the knowledge of all beings".<sup>126</sup>

Lower levels of being do not have the power of the word and can therefore symbolise higher levels less fully and deeply. And yet in Christ and the Church, "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1.22), even the lowliest wave-function acquires significance and the ability to partake in the Providence of God.

The ability of lower levels of being to participate in higher levels through symbolism is at the base of the sacred art of iconography, whereby we enter into communion with the inhabitants of heaven through icons made of wood and paint. The "theology of the image" (Ouspensky) adumbrated here unites three planes of being through the concept of the image. At the highest level, Christ the Son of God is "the brightness of the glory and express image of the Person" of the Father (Hebrews 1.3), and the Holy Spirit is the image of the Son.<sup>127</sup> At the intermediate level, the saint who purifies himself of sin similarly becomes an image of Christ. Thus in the service to St. Basil the Great we read: "The Son has appeared as an image of the Father and the Spirit as an image of the Son, and thou, O Basil, are a glass without stain and a dwelling place of the entire Trinity."<sup>128</sup> At a still lower level, the icon becomes an image of the saint. And all this is accomplished through the Light that streams from God "the Father of lights" (James 1.17) down throughout the created universe, down to the smallest particle of created matter...

The proof of the primordial unity of the universe, and the guarantee of its eternal unity, is the Incarnation of Christ. For when the Word became flesh, He that is absolutely immaterial and unquantifiable took on matter and was as it were "quantised". Thus in His one and indivisible Person was united the Godhead, human mind, soul, body, atoms and quanta. We might call this the First Law of Analogical Thermodynamics. It is the Law of the conservation of matter, life and meaning in the Light, Life and Logos, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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However, the unity of the universe has been threatened by man, who, misusing the freedom and rationality given him in the image of God's absolute Freedom and Rationality, has turned away from God to the lower levels of reality. Thus instead of contemplating all things in symbolic and symbiotic relation to the Word and Wisdom

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<sup>126</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *Century 3*, 10; P.G. 120, 957D-980A; quoted in P. Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987, p. 85.

<sup>127</sup> St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>128</sup> *Menaion*, January 1, Mattins, canon, Ode 7, troparion.

of the universe, he has considered them only in relation to himself, the observer and user; instead of offering nature up to God in eucharistic thanksgiving, he has dragged it down to the level of his own self-centred desires. As a result, both he and nature have disintegrated, and not only abstractly, in the systems of scientists and philosophers, but concretely, in history; for there has been a progressive seepage or dissipation of reality and meaning from the universe separating man from God, then man from woman, the soul from the body, and all the elements of nature from their original moorings.

In scientific terms, this seepage or disintegration or expanding chaos is expressed in the second law of thermodynamics, the best verified law in the whole of science. We might call it the Second Law of Analogical Thermodynamics. In theological language it is known as original sin or, in St. Paul's words, "the bondage of corruption", under which the whole of creation has been groaning to the present day (Romans 8.21-22).

We fell through partaking of the tree of knowledge prematurely, before partaking of the tree of life. We began to analyse and reduce and kill and consume before we had acquired real, stable life in Christ. God did not say that knowledge was evil, nor that Adam and Eve would not acquire a certain kind of knowledge by partaking of the forbidden tree; but since this knowledge was not a knowledge of life grounded in life it became a knowledge of death that brought in death.

The thesis of the First Law, and the antithesis of the Second Law, require a Third Law which restores or recreates the order that was in the beginning. This Third Law began to operate at the Incarnation of Christ, when human nature was *recreated* in the image and likeness of God, but with a new energy that took it onto a higher plane, the plane of *deification*. This Third Law is in fact not a law in the sense of a constraint upon nature, but rather "the law of liberty" (James 2.12), "the glorious liberty of the sons of God" (Romans 8.22), the law of grace...

## Conclusion

The original fall of man took place as the result of a desire for forbidden knowledge – forbidden because useless for the man who has the knowledge of God and leading in the end to alienation from God. Why? Because this sin, as St. Innocent of Kherson (+1857) writes, "blinds and spoils even the greatest abilities, and perverts and destroys even the widest knowledge". For "its ineradicable property is to predispose man to mental craziness. But shall we then dispute that the sinner has knowledge? No, we grant this to him, even that he has a certain special kind of knowledge, bearing in mind the experience and example of our unfortunate forbears. [For] they, after the fall, truly had their eyes opened, as the tempter promised them. But what did they see? *That they were naked.*"<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> St. Innocent, "O Grekhe" (On Sin), in *Zhitia i Tvorenia Russkikh Soyatykh* (Lives and Works of the Russian Saints), Moscow, 2001, pp. 724-725.

Science has repeated the original fall of man, coming to the bitter and senseless and deadly conclusion that all life has evolved through a struggle to the death, being constructed out of ghostly spectra of possibilities that disappear on encountering the first dawn of knowledge. The universe, according to science, is indeed, in Macbeth's words, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". Science can only come to life again, covering its shameful nakedness, by coming into contact with the true Light, Christ, "in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2.3).

Science and faith *can* come to a single, mutually consistent understanding of the universe. But only if science takes the absolute truths revealed by faith, and not the forever-provisional hypotheses of the fallen human mind, as its starting point. Scientific method that does not attempt to compete with faith, but is grounded in faith and constantly united with, and informed by it, will lead to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Let us hope and pray that science, grounded in this way in absolute truth, in certainty and not in mere hypothesis, will undergo its own resurrection...

But in the meantime let us not be deceived by "antitheses of science falsely so called" (I Timothy 6.20). Let us "continue in the faith grounded and settled", taking care lest any man rob us "through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the traditions of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 1.23, 2.8). For the words of St. Basil the Great about the "half-scientists" of his day are no less relevant in our own: "Have not those who give themselves up to vain science the eyes of owls? The sight of the owl, piercing during the night time, is dazzled by the splendour of the sun. Thus the intelligence of these men, so keen to contemplate vanities, is blind in the presence of the true Light..."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> St. Basil, *Homily 8 on the Hexaemeron*.

## 10. AN ORTHODOX APPROACH TO ART

To those who, like the present writer, have derived great pleasure and benefit from the great classics of world art and literature, such as Bach and Beethoven, Rembrandt, Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky, it would seem obvious that art, and the artistic faculty, are implanted in man by God to bring him closer to Himself. At the same time, it is no less evident that the great mass of contemporary "culture" not only does not bring anyone closer to God, but is in fact an instrument – a very powerful instrument – of the devil. How are to understand these antipodes of the artistic spirit? Under what conditions does art ascend to God, and – descend to the devil? To what extent can a Christian take part in the cultural life of his age?

### **1. Man the Artist**

God reveals Himself first of all as the Creator – in the words of the Symbol of faith, the "Maker" or "Poet" (Ποιητής) of all things visible and invisible. In a sense, therefore, man, as being in the image of God, is also a poet, a creator – not as an incidental or minor aspect of his being, not as a mere "talent", but essentially, by virtue of the image of God that is in him. And he makes things both visible and invisible. The visible things are the works of his own hands, and his own visible actions. The invisible things are his inner thoughts and feelings. His aim is to bring all that is his, visible and invisible, into one harmonious whole which will be a beautiful likeness of his Creator. It is, with the help of God, to make himself into what the Russians call a prepodobnij, a being "very like" his Creator – in other words, a saint. Thus man is a work of art created by God in order to mirror Himself – but with this difference from "ordinary" art, that the Artist has given to His creature a share in that artistic work, enabling him to correct the faults that the fall has introduced into it, to shape himself into a truly beautiful likeness of God.

Image and likeness are not identical, according to the Holy Fathers. The image of God, according to Christian thought, is man's rationality and freewill, which is made in the image of God's absolute Reason and Freedom. The likeness of God is the virtuous life, which makes us like God in His perfect Goodness. We all have the image of God – that is, we are all free and rational; but sin has destroyed the likeness of God in us. The aim of the Christian life, therefore, is to restore the original likeness. This process of restoring the likeness is compared to a painter's restoration of an old portrait whose original features have become overlaid by dirt. As St. Gregory of Nyssa writes: "Just as painters transfer human forms to their pictures by means of certain colours, laying on their copy the proper and corresponding tints, so that the beauty of the original may be accurately transferred to the likeness, so... also our Maker also, painting the portrait to resemble His own beauty, by the addition of virtues, as it were with colours shows in us His own sovereignty."<sup>131</sup>

That is why prayer, the Christian's main path to Godlikeness, is called "the science of sciences and art of arts". For, as Colliander writes, "the artist works in clay or colours, in words or tones; according to his ability he gives them pregnancy and

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<sup>131</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 5.

beauty. The working material of the praying person is living humanity. By his prayer he shapes it, gives it pregnancy and beauty: first himself and thereby many others."<sup>132</sup>

Artists themselves have often sensed this truth. Thus when W.B. Yeats wrote, in Sailing to Byzantium:

*Gather my soul  
Into the artifice of eternity,*

the word "artifice" was highly appropriate, insofar as the poet was hoping that his soul would be worked upon by God in such a way as to make a truly artistic offering, fit for entrance into eternity, somewhat like a Byzantine icon...

The Russian philosopher S. L. Frank writes: "Man is in one respect a creature in exactly the same sense as the rest of the world: as a purely natural being, he is part of the cosmos, a part of organic nature; in man's inner life this fact finds expression in the domain of involuntary mental processes, strivings and appetites, and in the blind interplay of elemental forces. But as a personality, as a spiritual being and 'an image of God' man differs from all other creatures. While all other creatures are expressions and embodiments of God's particular creative ideas, man is a creature in and through which God seeks to express His own nature as spirit, personality and holiness. An analogy with human artistic creativeness will make the point clearer.

"In poetry (and to some extent, by analogy, in other arts) we distinguish between epic and lyric works, between the artist's intention to embody some idea referring to the objective content of being, and his intention to express his own self, to tell of his own inner world, and as it were to make his confession. The difference, of course, is merely relative. The poet's creative personality involuntarily makes itself felt in the style of an 'objective' epic; on the other hand, a lyric outpouring is not simply a revelation of the poet's inner life as it actually is, but an artistic transfiguration of it, and therefore inevitably contains an element of 'objectivisation'. With this proviso, however, the difference between the two kinds of poetry holds good.

"Using this analogy we may say that man is, as it were, God's 'lyric' creation in which He wants 'to express' Himself, while the rest of creation, though involuntarily bearing the impress of its Creator, is the expression of God's special 'objective' ideas, of His creative will to produce entities other than Himself. The fundamental point of difference is the presence or absence of the personal principle with all that it involves, i.e. self-consciousness, autonomy, and the power of controlling and directing one's actions in accordance with the supreme principle of the Good or Holiness..."<sup>133</sup>

Man as a work of art is like an unfinished symphony. All the essential elements or content are there, implanted by God at conception; but the development and elucidation of that content into a perfect form remains incomplete - and God calls on us to complete it. Without that development and completion man is a still-born

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<sup>132</sup> T. Colliander, *The Way of the Ascetics*, London: Harvill, 1961, p. 73.

<sup>133</sup> Frank, *Reality and Man*, London: Faber & Faber, 1965, pp. 219-220.

embryo. But man the artist works on this unfinished material and brings it to perfection, to a true likeness of God, "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4.13). Thus man as artist works on himself as work of art in order to reveal the harmony latent in God's original design.

## 2. The Motives of the Artist

Why do artists create? There are broadly three answers to this question: the classical, the romantic and the pornographic. The classical answer is: "to create a thing of beauty" - and, if the artist is religious, he will add: "to the glory of God" (with which words Haydn ended all his works). The romantic answer is: "to express myself". He is not likely add: "to the glory of God", because it is not at all obvious, - whether he is religious or not, - how expressing *himself* will contribute to the glory of *God*. The pornographic "artist" works for commercial gain, and nothing else. His aim is neither to create a work of beauty, nor to express himself, but to elicit certain reactions in his clientèle - reactions for which they are prepared to pay him.

The classical artist is the less self-centred, less influenced by fallen emotions and purposes, and more open to the workings of grace; which is why the works of classical artists such as Bach and Handel were recommended by the Optina fathers for people living in the world. It is a different matter with what we may loosely call "the romantic artist". The question arises: is the romantic artist condemned to express only his own fallen self or the demonic forces that express themselves in his fallen nature? Regrettably, the answer must be: yes, to the extent that he subscribes to the romantic ideology of self-expression. After all, "a fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart" (Proverbs 18:2) - the romantic artist is concerned above all to "express his own heart". Some romantic artists, such as the late Beethoven or Bruckner, were able to "classicise" their work, making it capable of glorifying God and not the artist himself; but they were exceptions. For if the artist is honestly expressing his own nature, since that nature is fallen, he will undoubtedly be expressing its fallenness. At worst he will be making an idol of himself - and, as the Prophet David says, "all the idols of the pagans are demons" (Psalm 95.5). As Metropolitan Anastasy (Gribanovsky) of New York writes: "If you want to look deeper into the soul of this or that writer, read his works more attentively. In them, as in a mirror, is clearly reflected his own spiritual character. He almost always creates his heroes according to his own image and likeness, often putting into their mouths the confession of his heart."<sup>134</sup> But since even the best impulses of the fallen man are more or less corrupted, such corruption cannot fail to be perceived by the sensitive listener, viewer or reader.

That is why romantic art is so much better at expressing evil in all its forms than good. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh" - and the heart is "deceitful above all things".

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<sup>134</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy (Gribanovsky), *Besedy s sobstvennym serdtsem* (Discussions with my own heart), in *Troitskij Pravoslavnij Russkij Kalendar' na 1998 g.* (Trinity Russian Orthodox Calendar for 1998), Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1998, p. 77.

As St. Ignaty Brianchaninov wrote, speaking of the romantic artists of his day: "People who are endowed with talent by nature do not understand why they have been given this gift, and there is nobody who can explain this to them. Evil in nature, and especially in man, is so masked that the morbid enjoyment of it entices the young man, and with the whole warmth of his heart he gives himself to lies hidden by a mask of truth... Most talents have striven to represent human passions extravagantly. Evil in every possible variation is represented by singers, by painters, by music. Human talent in all its power and unfortunate beauty has developed in the representation of evil; in the representation of good it is generally weak, pale, strained..."<sup>135</sup>

That is why the most convincing character in John Milton's great poem, *Paradise Lost*, is *Satan*. "The reason," writes C.S. Lewis, "is easy to find. Of the major characters whom Milton attempted he is incomparably the easiest to draw. Set a hundred poets to tell the same story and in ninety of the resulting poems Satan will be the best character. In all but a few writers the 'good' characters are the least successful, and every one who has ever tried to make even the humblest story ought to know why. To make a character worse than oneself it is only necessary to release imaginatively from control some of the bad passions which, in real life, are always straining at the leash; the Satan, the Iago, the Becky Sharp, within each of us, is always there and only too ready, the moment the leash is slipped, to come out and have in our books that holiday we try to deny them in our lives. But if you try to draw a character better than yourself, all you can do is to take the best moments you have had and to imagine them prolonged and more consistently embodied in action. But the real high virtues which we do not possess at all, we cannot depict except in a purely external fashion. We do not really know what it feels like to be a man much better than ourselves. His whole inner landscape is one we have never seen, and when we guess it we blunder. It is their 'good' characters that novelists make, unawares, the most shocking self-revelations. Heaven understands Hell and Hell does not understand Heaven, and all of us, in our measure, share the Satanic, or at least the Napoleonic, blindness. To project ourselves into a wicked character, we have only to stop doing something and something that we are already tired of doing; to project ourselves into a good one we have to do what we cannot and become what we are not."<sup>136</sup>

Nevertheless, the exact expression of one's corrupted inner life has a moral value in itself, because it is telling *the truth* about oneself. Moreover, the process of expressing an emotion in art changes it, "objectivising" and in a sense transfiguring it. As A.N. Wilson said of Leo Tolstoy, "it was only through the artifice of literature that he was able to comprehend or impose a shape on the inchoate business of existence... The intolerable chaos and agony of life, as well as its unmanageable pleasures and its fascinatingly irreversible history, can be mastered. Through the medium of prose fiction, it was possible to transform experience itself."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Brianchaninov, "Khristianskij Pastyr' i Khristianin Khudozhnik" (The Christian Pastor and the Christian Artist), Moscow, 1993, № 9, p. 169; quoted in A.M. Liubomudrov, "Sviatitel' Ignatij (Brianchaninov) i Problema Tvorchestva" (The Holy Hierarch Ignatius Brianchaninov and the Problem of Creativity), in Kotel'nikov, V.A. (ed). *Khristianstvo i Russkaia Literatura (Christianity and Russian Literature)*, St. Petersburg, 1996, p. 27.

<sup>136</sup> Lewis, *Preface to 'Paradise Lost'*, New Delhi: Atlantic, 2012, p. 96.

<sup>137</sup> Wilson, *Tolstoy*, London: Atlantic Books, 2012, pp. 88, 94.

But telling the truth about oneself is inevitably a painful process. As Tolstoy himself wrote: "Poetry is the fire burning in a person's soul. This fire burns, warms and brings light... There are some people who feel the heat, others who feel the warmth, others who just see the light, and others who do not even see the light... But the true poet cannot help burning painfully, and burning others. That's what it's all about..."<sup>138</sup>

Truth is always to be honoured, even if it is, as it were, "lower-level truth". In this sense all good art is moral. As Metropolitan Anastasy writes, "the word has its ethics: the latter demands that it be pure, honourable and chaste. Where this rule is not observed, where language is the plaything of passions or chance moods, where it is bought or sold or people simply lightmindedly take their pleasure in it, there begins the adultery of the word, that is, the betrayal of its direct and lofty purpose."<sup>139</sup> But where the rule is observed, it follows that the verbal expression even of one's fallen emotions has value if it is done precisely and honestly, without any attempt to embellish or glorify them.

For example: if I feel angry, and then write a poem about my anger, the process of trying to analyze and express my anger in words actually changes the nature of that anger, masters or controls it in a certain sense. As Shakespeare put it in Sonnet 77:

*Look what thy memory cannot contain  
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find  
Those children nurs'd, deliver'd from thy brain,  
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.*

In this sense the process of artistic creation is a little like the confession of sins. Only in confession we do not simply express or control our sins; confession is not just psychotherapy. We also *sorrow* over them and *judge* them in the sight of God, so that He may *destroy* them and therefore *change* the content of our souls.

Thus one can create good, if not great art from base materials. By objectifying that baseness and conveying it exactly to his audience, the artist to a certain degree "takes the sting" out of the baseness. It is in this context that we can see how the imaginative faculty, which in the ascetic life is invariably associated with deception, can be used in the service of truth. Shakespeare described this process in A Midsummer Night's Dream as follows:

*The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.*

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<sup>138</sup> Tolstoy, *Diary*, entry for October 28, 1870.

<sup>139</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, op. cit., p. 30.

Before the imagination has produced its work, the content of the artist's mind is "unknown". But as his work comes into being, so does the content of his mind become known to him; now it has "shape", "a local habitation and a name". Thus by giving an objective, sensory correlate to his emotions, the artist is enabled to know them and judge them... This is the paradox of good art, that in creating images that do not exist in nature it puts up "a mirror to nature", in Hamlet's words. But such good, truthful art can become great only if the fallen content of the art is not only accurately expressed but also correct *judged*, so that a revulsion from it and a striving for something higher is also conveyed to the listener. If that is achieved, then the material is no longer base and the work becomes like David's 50<sup>th</sup> Psalm - not merely the expression of emotion, not even psychotherapy, but *confession and repentance*.

An example of art that is striving towards confession and repentance, but does not quite reach this goal, is Shakespeare's Sonnet 144:

*Two loves I have, of comfort and despair,  
Which like two angels do suggest me still;  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.  
To win me soon to hell, my female evil  
Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.  
And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend,  
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;  
But being both from me, both to each friend,  
I guess one angel in another's hell.  
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,  
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.*

The artist is here struggling to evaluate his feelings for two people. He recognizes the fallenness of his emotions, and theirs, which is why he describes them in terms of angels and demons, purity and pride. And yet he fails to evaluate precisely what is going on, and so the sonnet suffers from obscurity. It is obscure to him, and therefore also to us. Fallen passion has not yet been mastered sufficiently to produce great art.

The true artist seeks the truth about himself. He is like Sophocles' Oedipus:

*Born as I am, I shall be none other than  
I am, and I shall know me who I am.*

However, in seeking the truth about himself, the true artist will inevitably, again like Oedipus, come up, not only with truths about himself that are deeply disturbing, but also with the higher powers that rule his nature and destiny.

In other words, artistic truth, consistently pursued, leads to religious truth. "In the soul of the artist," says St. Barsanuphy of Optina, "there is always a streak of

monasticism, and the more lofty the artist, the more brightly that fire of religious mysticism burns in him".<sup>140</sup>

We see this progression in several of the greatest artists. Thus Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*, is also his most religious, in which he seeks to "drown" his "rough magic" but "so potent art", in the far subtler, deeper and more lawful art of the Creator:

*But this rough magic  
I here abjure; and, when I have required  
Some heavenly music (which even now I do),  
To work mine end upon their senses, that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,  
I'll drown the book.*

And the very last words he wrote before his voluntary retirement were words on the ultimate impotence of "pure" art, and the need for God's mercy:

*Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.*

Another example of successful self-expression is St. Augustine's *Confessions*. And yet the very rarity of successful "confessions" of this kind demonstrates the difficulties and dangers of the genre. So deeply is man attracted even to the sin that his mind condemns, that the confession of another's sin in public, however honestly dissected and condemned, may give a certain "glamour" to the sin for some of his listeners. Thus when St. Augustine described his sexual falls, and then his famous prayer: "Lord, make me chaste - but not just yet", we may be tempted to sympathize with him in his fall - and perhaps even applaud his prayer... For, as Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov writes, "a pastor who gives his most intimate to this flock, who opens his heart and offers to them his confession is playing a dangerous game with a double-edged sword: he will either be trampled into the dirt at the doorstep of his cathedral, or he will be admired and hallowed..."<sup>141</sup>

### 3. The Case of Gogol

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<sup>140</sup> Victor Afanasyev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, p. 500.

<sup>141</sup> Sveshnikov, "Blessed Augustine's View of Self", *Orthodox Life*, May-June, 2010, p. 47.

St. Nektary of Optina said that, in addition to ordinary art, "there is also greater art - the word of life and death (the Psalms of David, for example). But the way to this art lies in the personal struggle of the artist. This is the path of sacrifice, and only one out of many thousands reach the goal."<sup>142</sup>

One of those few was the poet Alexander Pushkin. In his later years, under the influence of such men as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow and Tsar Nicholas I, he came closer to Orthodoxy, with the result that both his poetry and his ideal of art became deeper. Ivan Andreyev writes: "The essence of the 'theory' of Pushkin and Zhukovsky (it was not formally clothed into a system, but practically and unerringly carried forward in life and creativity) consisted in the following. The poet had to be completely free in the process of his creativity. No social or moral or even religious 'orders' could be presented to him. But the poet as a person had spiritually to grow without ceasing, that is, become perfect in a religio-moral sense, remembering the ideal of Christian morality: 'Be ye perfect, even as your Heavenly Father is perfect'. And if he were to grow himself, his creativity would grow with him."<sup>143</sup>

A still more instructive example is that of the novelist Nikolai Gogol. During the last part of his life, under the influence of the Rzhev Protopriest Fr. Matthew Konstantinovsky, then Elder Makary of Optina<sup>144</sup> and towards the end also of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, he gradually turned away from writing altogether and even burned his best work.

Many blame Fr. Matthew for this. He is reported to have said: "Artistic talent is a gift of God.... True, I advised [Gogol] to write something about good people, that is, to depict people of positive types, not negative ones."<sup>145</sup>

Some churchmen did not share the ascetic approach to art of Gogol and his mentors. Thus Archimandrite Feodor (Bukharev), as Robert Bird writes, "in his famous 'Letters to Gogol' elaborated a markedly different approach to the religious significance of artistic creativity. Archimandrite Feodor regretted the way that Gogol, who had once 'unconsciously' followed Christ in his 'powerful and free creative work', had fallen under the influence of the 'slavish fearfulness and mercilessness' of Father Matvei Konstantinovsky, who rejected everything that 'did not openly bear the

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<sup>142</sup> *Zhitia Prepodobnykh Startsev Optinoj Pustyni* (The Lives of the Holy Elders of Optina Desert), Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1992.

<sup>143</sup> Andreyev, "Religioznoe litso Gogolia" (The Religious Face of Gogol), *Pravoslavnij Put'* (The Orthodox Way), 1952, p. 164.

<sup>144</sup> Fr. Matthew "unhesitatingly directed Gogol to Elder Makary of Optina, stating that this was what his heart was searching for. Elder Makary made a profound impression on Gogol, who under the Elder's influence drastically changed his liberal thinking and was converted to age-old, traditional Orthodoxy. When he wrote his famous *Correspondence with Friends*, Gogol so stirred up liberal society against himself that the leading literary salons totally disgraced and dismissed him. Elder Makary, however, continued to have a close relationship with the great writer, and even wrote a whole critique of his last work (found later among his books)." (Fr. Leonid Kavelin, *Elder Macarius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1995, pp. 285-286).

<sup>145</sup> V. Veresaev, *Gogol' v zhizni* (Gogol in life), Moscow, 1990, p. 553; quoted in Robert Bird, "Metropolitan Philaret and the Secular Culture of His Age", in Vladimir Tsurikov (ed.), *Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow 1782-1867*, The Variable Press, USA, 2003, p. 30.

imprint of Christ'. Writing of his own appreciation of the irreligious Belinsky, Archimandrite Feodor wrote: 'He gave to these texts his own thought, and I understood them in the proper way, and in accordance with this I understood his entire discourse. And therefore it turned out that, by following the system of his thoughts, which distorted Christ's truth, I in my own mind developed a living system of Christ's truth itself.' Summing up this hermeneutic model, Archimandrite Feodor noted that he 'no longer stopped at the mere letter of the texts which are studied in theological scholarship,' but rather sought to engage their theological spirit in dialogue with non-religious authors. From this general premise Bukharev concluded that any genuine literary or intellectual work can inspire a Christian: 'another tendency of thought and discourse, without explicitly recognizing Christ as its leading principle, nonetheless can be under His invisible leadership and be led by Him to be of direct use to faith and love for Christ's truth.' Significantly, Archimandrite Feodor's work was not approved for publication by Metropolitan Philaret. Philaret alleged that Bukharev saw the mere 'flickering of the light'.<sup>146</sup>

Gogol came to believe that his work would be harmful because of the imperfection of its creator; as he put it, "One should not write about a holy shrine without first having consecrated one's soul"; and in 1845 he burned the second half of his masterpiece, *Dead Souls*. But he could not keep away from writing, which was his life, and in 1851 he began again the second part of *Dead Souls*, which was highly praised by those friends to whom he read it...

However, on the night of 11th to 12th February, 1852, he burned the manuscript of the second part of *Dead Souls* for the second time. Then he made the sign of the cross, lay down on the sofa and wept... The next day he wrote to Count A.N. Tolstoy: "Imagine, how powerful the evil spirit is! I wanted to burn some papers which had already long ago been marked out for that, but I burned the chapters of *Dead Souls* which I wanted to leave to my friends as a keepsake after my death."

"What were the true motives," asks Andreev, "for the burning of the completed work which Gogol had carefully kept, accurately putting together the written notebooks and lovingly rebinding them with ribbon? Why did Gogol burn this work, with which he was himself satisfied, and which received an objective and very high evaluation from very competent people who had great artistic taste? Let us try to answer this complex and difficult question.

"In his fourth letter with regard to *Dead Souls*, which was dated '1846' and published in his *Correspondence*, Gogol gives an explanation why he for the first time (in 1845) burned the chapters of the second part of his poem that he had written.

"The second volume of *Dead Souls* was burned because it was necessary. 'That will not come alive again which does not die', says the Apostle. It is necessary first of all

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<sup>146</sup> Bird, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32. "Sushkov speaks of Philaret's strict rejection of 'non-classical comedies, immoral operas, non-historical novels, bloodthirsty dramas [...] There is no need to mention stories, vaudevilles, erotic, mythological and other poems without inner content, without thought, without feeling'" (Bird, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35).

to die in order to rise again. It was not easy to burn the work of five years, which had been produced with some painful tension, in which every line was obtained only with a shudder, in which there was much that constituted my best thoughts and occupied my soul. But all this was burned, and moreover at that moment when, seeing death before me, I very much wanted to leave at any rate something after me which would remind people of me. *I thank God that He gave me strength to do this.* Immediately the flame bore away the last pages of my book, its content was suddenly resurrected in a purified and radiant form, like a phoenix from the ashes, and I suddenly saw in what a mess was everything that I had previously considered to be in good order. The appearance of the second volume in that form in which it was would have been harmful rather than useful.'... 'I was not born in order to create an epoch in the sphere of literature. My work is simpler and closer: my work is that about which every person must think first of all, and not only I. My work is my soul and the firm work of life.'...

"Such was the motivation for the first burning of *Dead Souls* in 1845.

"But this motivation also lay at the root of the second burning of the already completed work – but now much deeper, depending on the spiritual growth of Gogol.

"In his *Confession of an Author* written after *Correspondence*, Gogol for the first time seriously began to speak about the possibility of rejecting his writer's path in the name of a higher exploit. With striking sincerity he writes (how much it would have cost him!): 'It was probably harder for me than for anybody else to reject writing, for this constituted the single object of all my thoughts, I had abandoned everything else, all the best enticements of life, and, like a monk, had broken my ties with everything that is dear to man on earth, in order to think of nothing except my work. It was not easy for me to renounce writing: some of the best minutes in my life were those when I finally put on paper that which had been flying around for a long time in my thoughts; when I am certain to this day that almost the highest of all pleasures is the pleasure of creation. But, I repeat again, as an honourable man, I would have to lay down my pen even then, if I felt the impulse to do so.

"I don't know whether I have had enough honour to do it, if I were not deprived of the ability to write: because – I say this sincerely – life would then have lost for me all value, and not to write for me would have meant precisely the same as not to live. But there are no deprivations that are not followed by the sending of a substitute to us, as a witness to the fact that the Creator does not leave man even for the smallest moment.'...

"Three weeks before his death Gogol wrote to his friend Zhukovsky: 'Pray for me, that my work may be truly virtuous and that I may be counted worthy, albeit to some degree, to sing a hymn to the heavenly Beauty'. The heavenly Beauty cannot be compared with earthly beauty and is inexpressible in earthly words. That is why 'silence is the mystery of the age to come'.

“Before his death Gogol understood this to the end: he burned what he had written and fell silent, and then died.”<sup>147</sup>

St. Barsanuphy of Optina described Gogol’s motivation as follows: “Gogol wanted to depict Russian life in all of its multifaceted fullness. With this goal he began his poem, *Dead Souls*, and wrote the first part. We know in what light Russian life was reflected: the Plyushkins, the Sobakevitches, the Nodrevs and the Chichikovs; the whole book constitutes a stifling and dark cellar of commonness and baseness of interests. Gogol himself was frightened at what he had written, but consoled himself that this was only scum, only foam, which he had taken from the waves of the sea of life. He hoped that in the second volume he would succeed in portraying a Russian Orthodox man in all his beauty and all his purity.

“How was he to do this? Gogol did not know. It was at about this time that his acquaintance with Elder Makary [of Optina] took place. Gogol left Optina with a renewed soul, but he did not abandon the thought of writing the second volume of *Dead Souls*, and he worked on it.

“Later, feeling that it was beyond his power to embody in images that Christian ideal which lived in his soul in all its fullness, he became disappointed with his work. And this is the reason for his burning of the second volume of *Dead Souls*...”<sup>148</sup>

Shortly before he died, Gogol wrote: “My work is of such a kind that without the obvious help of God every minute and every hour, my pen cannot move. My power is not only minimal but it does not even exist without refreshment from Above...”<sup>149</sup>

#### **4. The Inspiration of the Artist: (1) The Demonic**

So is an artist unable to depict any but dead souls, until his own soul has come to life under the influence of grace? And does the artist, if he is fully consistent in the pursuit of his calling, inevitably end up in a monastery? Before inquiring into these questions, it is necessary to inquire more deeply into the inspiration of the artist.

It has been the conviction of artists since earliest times that in creating their works they are not merely expressing themselves, but are under the influence of some super-human “muse”. “People often try,” writes Metropolitan Anastasy, “to approximate genius to holiness as ‘two phenomena’ which, in the words of one thinker, ‘go beyond the bounds of the canonical norms of culture’. The kinship between them is based on the fact that the genius is usually given wings by inspiration that Plato called ‘divine’: this is the true breathing of the Divinity in man, which distributes its gifts to each, where and to the degree that it wants. The ancient pagan philosophers, poets and artists, beginning with Socrates and Phidias, vividly felt within themselves the presence of this or that higher power overshadowing them during the time of their

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<sup>147</sup> Andreev, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-182.

<sup>148</sup> Victor Afanasyev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, pp. 483-484.

<sup>149</sup> Kavelin, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

creativity. Not in vain did the latter fall face down before one of his best compositions in reverent emotion. The same feeling was given also to other highly gifted people in recent times."<sup>150</sup>

Even the chess genius Emmanuel Lasker felt this beauty akin to divinity. As another genius, Albert Einstein, put it in his foreword to Hannak's biography of Lasker: "What he really yearned for was some scientific understanding and that beauty peculiar to the process of logical creation, a beauty from whose magic spell no one can escape who has ever felt even its slightest influence..."<sup>151</sup>

At the same time it must not be forgotten that the "divinity" involved may be evil as well as good. Therefore the following words of the Moscow Patriarchal theologian Igumen Ioann (Ekonomtsev) must be taken with a great deal of caution: "Creativity in essence... is our likeness... to God". He calls on us to reject our superstitious fear of the possibly demonic nature of creativity, for "true creation is always from God, even if the author himself does not recognize this and even if we are times find it seductive and dishonourable... The condition of creative ecstasy is a condition of deification, and in this state it is no longer man who creates, but the God-man".<sup>152</sup>

Ekonomtsev is here reiterating the false "dogma" of the Romantic era – the moral superiority of the artist. Imagination for the Romantics was much more than the ability to fantasise, as Jacques Barzun writes: "Out of the known or knowable, Imagination connects the remote, interprets the familiar, or discovers hidden realities. Being a means of discovery, it must be called 'Imagination of the real'. Scientific hypotheses perform that same office; they are products of imagination.

"This view of the matter explains why to the Romanticists the arts no longer figured as a refined pleasure of the senses, an ornament of civilized existence, but as one form of the deepest possible reflection on life. Shelley, defending his art, declares poets to be the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world'. The arts convey truths; they are imagination crystallized; and as they transport the soul they reshape the perceptions and possibly the life of the beholder. To perform this feat requires genius, because it is not a mechanical act. To be sure, all art makes use of conventions, but to obey traditional rules and follow set patterns will not achieve that fusion of idea and form which is properly creation. It was Romanticist discussion that made the word *creation* regularly apply to works of art...

"Those Romanticist words, recharged with meaning, helped to establish the religion of art. That faith served those who could and those could not partake of the revived creeds. To call the passion for art a religion is not a figure of speech or a way of praise. Since the beginning of the 19C, art has been defined again and again by its devotees as 'the highest spiritual expression of man'. The dictum leaves no room for anything higher and this highest level is that which, for other human beings, is

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<sup>150</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>151</sup> Einstein, in Daniel Johnson, *White King and Red Queen*, London: Atlantic Books, 2007, p. 52.

<sup>152</sup> Ekonomtsev, "Pravoslavie, Vizantia, Rossia" (Orthodoxy, Byzantium, Russia); quoted in Liubomudrov, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

occupied by religion. To 19C worshippers the arts form a treasury of revelations, a body of scriptures, the makers of this spiritual testament are prophets and seers. And to this day the fortunate among them are treated as demigods..."<sup>153</sup>

The word "creation" was understood by the Romantics almost literally, as creation *ex nihilo*. Thus art for the Romantics was not only a path to truth: it *created* truth. Thus, as Sir Isaiah Berlin writes, "whatever the differences between the leading romantic thinkers – the early Schiller and the later Fichte, Schelling and Jacobi, Tieck and the Schlegels when they were young, Chateaubriand and Byron, Coleridge and Carlyle, Kierkegaard, Stirner, Nietzsche, Baudelaire – there runs through their writings a common notion, held with varying degrees of consciousness and depth, that truth is not an objective structure, independent of those who seek it, the hidden treasure waiting to be found, but is itself in all its guises created by the seeker. It is not to be brought into being necessarily by the finite individual: according to some it is created by a greater power, a universal spirit, personal or impersonal, in which the individual is an element, or of which he is an aspect, an emanation, an imperfect reflection. But the common assumption of the romantics runs counter to the *philosophia perennis* in that the answers to the great questions are not to be discovered so much as to be invented. They are not something found, they are something literally made. In its extreme Idealistic form it is a vision of the entire world. In its more familiar conduct – aesthetics, religious, social, moral, political – a realm seen not as a natural or supernatural order capable of being investigated, described and explained by the appropriate method – rational examination or some more mysterious procedure – but as something that man creates, as he creates works of art; not by imitating, or even obtaining illumination from, pre-existent models or truths, or by applying pre-existent truths that are objective, universal, eternal, unalterable; but by an act of creation, the introduction into the world of something literally novel – the unique expression of an individual and therefore unique creative activity, natural or supernatural, human or in part divine, owing nothing to anything outside it (in some versions because nothing can be conceived as being outside it), self-subsistent, self-justified, self-fulfilling. Hence that new emphasis on the subjective and ideal rather than the objective and the real, on the process of creation rather than its effects, on motives rather than consequences; and, as a necessary corollary of this, on the quality of the vision, the state of mind or soul of the acting agent – purity of heart, innocence of intention, sincerity of purpose rather than getting the answer right, that is, accurate correspondence to the 'given'. Hence the emphasis on activity, movement that cannot be reduced to static segments, the flow that cannot be arrested, frozen, analysed without being thereby fatally distorted; hence the constant protest against the reduction of 'life' to dead fragments, of organism to 'mere' mechanical or uniform units; and the corresponding tendency towards similes and metaphors drawn from 'dynamic' sciences – biology, physiology, introspective psychology – and the worship of music, which, of all the arts, appears to have the least relation to universally observable, uniform natural order. Hence, too, celebration of all forms of defiance directed against the 'given' – the impersonal, the 'brute fact' in morals or in politics –

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<sup>153</sup> Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence*, New York: Perennial, 2001, pp. 473-474.

or against the static and the accepted, and the value placed on minorities and martyrs as such, no matter what the ideal for which they suffer."<sup>154</sup>

As Adam Zamoyski notes, this rebelliousness common to the revolution and romanticism brought them closer together, as during the "July Days" revolution in France in 1830. "'People and poets are marching together,' wrote the French critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve in 1830. 'Art is henceforth on a popular footing, in the arena with the masses.' There was something in this. Never before or since had poetry been so widely and so urgently read, so taken to heart and so closely studied for hidden meaning. And it was not only in search of aesthetic or emotional uplift that people did so, for the poet had assumed a new role over the past two decades. Art was no longer an amenity but a great truth that had to be revealed to mankind, and the artist was one who had been called to interpret this truth, a kind of seer. In Russia, Pushkin solemnly declared the poet's status as a prophet uttering the burning words of truth. The American Ralph Waldo Emerson saw poets as 'liberating gods' because they had achieved freedom themselves, and could therefore free others. The pianist and composer Franz Liszt wanted to recapture the 'political, philosophical and religious power' that he believed music had in ancient times. William Blake claimed that Jesus and his disciples were all artists, and that he himself was following Jesus through his art. 'God was, perhaps only the first poet of the universe,' Théophile Gautier reflected. By the 1820s artists regularly referred to their craft as a religion, and Victor Hugo represented himself alternately as Zoroaster, Moses and Christ, somewhere between prophet and God."<sup>155</sup>

The close affinity of romantic art with the revolution permits us to speculate whether some of the more famous and powerful works of romantic art were actually inspired by the devil. For example, the operas of Wagner, or Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring are very fine music, the products of real genius - of that there can be no doubt. But they are extremely dangerous from a spiritual point of view. Speaking very schematically, we could say that Wagner's Ring cycle is Nazism in music (which is why Hitler loved it so), just as The Rite of Spring is Bolshevism in music.<sup>156</sup>

The decadent Symbolists in Russia wanted to capture the Divinity in artistic symbols. For them, symbolism took the place of religion; it was a new kind of religion. "In the Symbolist aesthetic," as J.W. Burrow writes, "the intense focusing on the thing taken as a symbol, the perception of its numinous aura, gave access to another, as it were, parallel, invisible world of light and ecstasy."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Berlin, "The Essence of European Romanticism", in *The Power of Ideas*, London: Chatto & Windus, 2000, pp. 202-203.

<sup>155</sup> Zamoyski, *Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots and Revolutionaries, 1776-1871*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p. 255.

<sup>156</sup> "I can't listen to music too often," said Lenin after hearing Beethoven's Appassionata Sonata. "It makes me want to say kind stupid things and pat the heads of people. But now you have to beat them on the head, beat them without mercy..." (Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, London: Phoenix, 2007, p. 330).

<sup>157</sup> Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914*, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 223.

This “parallel, invisible world of light and ecstasy” was demonic. Thus the Symbolist painter Michael Vrubel achieved fame with a large mosaic-like canvas called “Seated Demon” (1890), and went mad while working on the sinister “Demon Downcast” (1902).<sup>158</sup>

Symbolist ideas are most vividly expressed in the music and thought of the composer Alexander Scriabin, who in his *First Symphony* praised art as a kind of religion. *Le Divin Poème* (1902-1904) sought to express the evolution of the human spirit from pantheism to unity with the universe. *Poème de l'extase* (1908) was accompanied by the elaborately selected colour projections on a screen. In Scriabin's synthetic performances music, poetry, dancing, colours, and scents were used so as to bring about *supreme, final ecstasy*. Similar ideas on the stage fusion of all arts were elaborated by the poet Andrej Bely and the painter Vassily Kandinsky.<sup>159</sup> In 1909, after a spell in Paris with the impresario Diaghilev, Scriabin returned to Russia permanently, where he continued to compose, working on increasingly grandiose projects. For some time before his death he had planned a multi-media work to be performed in the Himalayas, that would bring about Armageddon, "a grandiose religious synthesis of all arts which would herald the birth of a new world."<sup>160</sup>

Another of Diaghilev's composer-protégés, Sergei Prokofiev, was also influenced by Symbolism - and Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science. Among the propositions of his theory of creative action were: “1. I am the expression of Life, i.e. of divine activity. 2. I am the expression of spirit, which gives me power to resist what is unlike spirit... 9. I am the expression of perfection, and this leads me to the perfect use of my time...”<sup>161</sup>

A Russian artist of the 1960s wrote: “The soul of the artist is under a ‘double blow’ - Divine love and satanic ordeal. Everything that is fruitful, that is life as a creative act, is all from God. Every ordeal, all those so-called intellectual and conceptual moments, are all from Satan.”<sup>162</sup>

These strivings for mangledhood - but in defiance of the God-Man - among Russia's creative intelligentsia were associated by them with a revolutionary future that rejected the past more or less totally. Hence the brief fashion for the European movement of Futurism with its radical rejection of the past and all past and present ideas of what is beautiful and tasteful. In reality, however, these strivings were as unoriginal as the revolution itself proved to be, and were rather a sign that Russia's future would consist, not in producing a radically new civilization, but in a catastrophic regression to her pre-Christian, pagan past.

Much of modern pop music is satanic in origin. Fortunately, however, it is also bad art, so it has less influence on those who love good art - which is one very good reason for educating people in good art. However, bad art of this kind can still influence

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<sup>158</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_Symbolism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Symbolism).

<sup>159</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_Symbolism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Symbolism).

<sup>160</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Scriabin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Scriabin).

<sup>161</sup> Thomas Schipperges, *Prokofiev*, London: Haus Publishing, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>162</sup> Igor Voroshilov, letter to Boris (now Hieromonk Tikhon) Kazushin.

people at a subconscious level, because it introduces the demons. We are seeing terrifying examples of this in the West today. Thus the children of an American missionary in Africa were once playing pop music with the window open. Soon the local witch doctor visited the missionary and asked him: "I did not know that you had renounced your God, Christ." "But I haven't." "But the music you are playing is the music we use to call up our gods..." The missionary immediately went and destroyed the records his children were playing.

Again, the famous German tenor Jonas Kaufman says that while he can usually return to his usual self very quickly after performing an operatic role, after performing the lead role in Verdi's Otello, in which the hero murders his innocent wife before killing himself, he feels different and disturbed for some time afterwards. And this has nothing to do with the quality of the art - Otello represents perhaps the highest peak of tragic opera. On the contrary, the greatness of the art may increase its harmfulness...

There are some profound paradoxes here.

Thus on the one hand, Mozart's Marriage of Figaro, though a thoroughly secular work, contains, in its last act, perhaps the most perfect expression of the penitent soul seeking forgiveness in the whole of music. On the other hand, while his Requiem is consciously Christian, and beautiful, profound music, the emotion it conveys is that of a soul in despair - and Mozart died while composing it. We know that Mozart did not live a good life, and that his last opera, The Magic Flute, which was composed just before his Requiem, was actually a Masonic opera. So he had good reason to fear death and what awaited him after death. So while the emotion is deep, and the expression of it perfect, as we would expect from such a master, we are nevertheless entitled to wonder whether this music is good for the soul. For is it good for our souls to experience feelings of despair, even if they are artistically controlled and mastered?

Sometimes even "Orthodox" music may fall short insofar as it elicits fallen emotions in the listener. Thus St. Barsanuphy of Optina said of one setting of the Paschal Canon of St. John of Damascus, "that kind of melody can evoke only tears of despair, rather than a joyful state. No, sing it the ancient way."<sup>163</sup> St. John of Kronstadt is well-known for rejecting the theatre. If we have such difficulty being ourselves, we should not encourage people trying to be someone else. And he advised testing the effect of every work of art on one's spiritual life...<sup>164</sup>

As we have seen, art is good as art (if not in any other way) if it is the exact, truthful expression of the emotional contents of the artist's mind, whether the content itself is good or bad, profound or superficial. It is great if the expression, or form, is accurate, and the content is good rather than bad, profound rather than superficial. But there is also art that is bad as art in that it fails to express its content clearly. And there is art

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<sup>163</sup> Afanasyev, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

<sup>164</sup> C.S. Lewis says something similar: "The test of music or religion or even visions if one has them is always the same - do they make one more obedient, more God-centred, and neighbor-centred and *less self-centred*" (*Yours Jack. The Inspirational Letters of C.S. Lewis*, London: Harper, 2008, p. 287).

that is good as art but evil in every other way because its content is evil, and its inspiration – from the devil.

## 5. The Inspiration of the Artist: (2) The Divine

The Holy Scriptures tell us that David was able to drive away the evil spirit from Saul by playing his harp (I Kings (I Samuel) 16.23). Again, when King Joaram of Israel, King Joasaphat of Judah and the king of Edom were undertaking a common expedition against the Moabites, they asked the Prophet Elisha to reveal to them the will of God concerning the outcome of the war. “Bring me a minstrel,” said the prophet. “And it came to pass that when the minstrel played, the hand of the Lord came upon him” (IV Kings (II Kings) 3.15).<sup>165</sup>

Again, “one of the greatest contemplative minds of Christianity, St. Gregory the Theologian, was at the same time a religious poet. His verses are mainly filled with a lyrical mood. ‘Exhausted by illness,’ he writes, ‘I found in poetry joy, like an old swan talking to himself in the sounds of his wings.’ At the same time he wanted through his poetic compositions to give ‘young people’ and all those who most of all love ‘the art of words as it were a pleasant remedy, something attractive and useful in persuasion’.”<sup>166</sup>

These examples demonstrate that art can truly be infused with grace – which is not to say, however, that it *is* grace. It can express not simply the contents of a fallen soul, but a soul striving for God and placing everything “under God’s gaze”. For, as St. Nektary of Optina said: “One can practise art like anything else, but everything must be done as under God's gaze.”<sup>167</sup>

Now this would seem to contradict the word of St. Barsanuphy of Optina: “Some say that science and art, especially music, regenerate a man, granting him lofty aesthetic delight, but this is not true. Under the influence of art, music, singing, etc., a man does indeed experience delight, but it is powerless to regenerate him.”<sup>168</sup> Again, replying to the composer Paschalov who said that music tore him away from everything earthly and he experienced great sweetness listening to the great classical composers, the elder said: “Nevertheless, this aesthetic sweetness cannot take the place of religion.”<sup>169</sup>

But there is no real contradiction here. Art *in and of itself*, as simply the expression in words or colours or sounds of a mental content that produces aesthetic delight, cannot regenerate the soul, and cannot take the place of religion. But if that art is the expression of *confession and praise*, of *prayer and thanksgiving*, then it is no longer merely art, but religious art, and partakes of the regenerative grace of God.

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<sup>165</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>166</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>167</sup> *Zhitia Prepodobnykh Startsev Optinoj Pustyni*, op. cit.

<sup>168</sup> Afanasyev, op. cit., p. 651.

<sup>169</sup> Afanasyev, op. cit.

Even in the writings of secular poets we find inspired works whose inspiration is godly. Consider, for example, Shakespeare's famous Sonnet 116:

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error, and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

Whether Shakespeare is writing here from a personal experience of the true, undying love he describes, or his imagination of it, his sympathy for it is clearly unfeigned, and gives to the whole sonnet a note of clarity, profundity and truth.

Or consider Fyodor Tiutchev's poem, "Our Age", in which he describes the unbelief of the intelligentsia from the point of view of a true believer:

*Not flesh, but spirit is today corrupt,  
And man just pines away despairingly.  
He strives for light, while sitting in the dark,  
And having found it, moans rebelliously.  
From lack of faith dried up, in fire tossed,  
The unendurable he suffers now.  
He knows right well his soul is lost, and thirsts  
For faith – but ask for it he knows not how.  
Ne'er will he say, with prayers and tears combined,  
However deep before the closed door his grief:  
"O let me in, my God, O hear my cry!  
Lord, I believe! Help Thou mine unbelief!"*

Here profound truths are powerfully conveyed with the aid of the poet's talent.

A famous example of secular words bordering on the sacred and Divine is Dostoyevsky's "Pushkin Speech" on June 8, 1880. Metropolitan Anastasy writes: "However accustomed people are to crawling in the dust, they will be grateful to every one who tears them away from the world below and bears them up on his powerful wings to the heavens. A man is ready to give up everything for a moment of pure spiritual joy and bless the name of him who is able to strike on the best strings of his heart. It is here that one must locate the secret of the amazing success attained by the famous speech of Dostoyevsky at the Pushkin festival in Moscow. The genius

writer himself later described the impression produced by him upon his listeners in a letter to his wife: 'I read,' he writes, 'loudly, with fire. Everything that I wrote about Tatiana was received with enthusiasm. But when I gave forth at the end about the universal union of men, the hall was as it were in hysterics. When I had finished, I will not tell you about the roars and sobs of joy: people who did not know each other wept, sobbed, embraced each other and swore to be better, not to hate each other from then on, but to love each other. The order of the session was interrupted: grandes dames, students, state secretaries – they all embraced and kissed me.' How is one to call this mood in the auditorium, which included in itself the best flower of the whole of educated society, if not a condition of spiritual ecstasy, to which, as it seemed, our cold intelligentsia was least of all capable? By what power did the great writer and knower of hearts accomplish this miracle, forcing all his listeners without distinction of age or social position to feel themselves brothers and pour together in one sacred and great upsurge? He attained it, of course, not by the formal beauty of his speech, which Dostoyevsky usually did not achieve, but by the greatness of the proclaimed idea of universal brotherhood, instilled by the fire of great inspiration. This truly prophetic word regenerated the hearts of people, forcing them to recognize the true meaning of life; the truth made them if only for one second not only free, but also happy in their freedom."<sup>170</sup>

Thus to the end of his life the Slavophile writer Ivan Aksakov remained under the influence of the Speech. As Dostoyevsky wrote: "Aksakov (Ivan) ran onto the stage and declared to the public that my speech was not simply a speech but an historical event! The clouds had been covering the horizon, but here was Dostoyevsky's word, which, like the appearing sun, dispersed all the clouds and lit up everything. From now on there would be brotherhood, and there would be no misunderstandings."<sup>171</sup>

Here we see the transition from aesthetic to religious emotion. The difference between the two is similar to the difference between a concert-hall and a church. Religious emotion unites one man with everyone else in the church in a way that never happens in the concert-hall. In the concert-hall, you may be deeply moved, and your neighbour may be moved, too, so that you both communicate in a certain sense with the soul of the composer. But the communication with the composer is one-way; you do not communicate with other listeners; and, of course, God may or may not be in the emotion communicated. Orthodox art, however, - and we may call Dostoyevsky's "Pushkin Speech" a special kind of Orthodox art - is much more than one-way communication; it is *living communion*, making the hearts of the listeners one both with each other and with the Divine Composer.

The word "culture" comes from "cult", reminding us that the original context of cultural productions was religious worship.<sup>172</sup> And it is in religious worship that art, music, architecture and poetry all find their true home and most potent expression. And most of all, of course, in the worship of the true religion, Orthodox Christianity.

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<sup>170</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>171</sup> Aksakov, in I. Volgin, *Poslednij God Dostoevskogo (Dostoyevsky's Last Year)*, Moscow: Sovetskij Pisatel', 1986, p. 267.

<sup>172</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

Thus “when the holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir is likened to ‘a merchant seeking the good pearl’, this comparison in relation to him acquires an especially deep meaning. Like a wise inventor, he searched for a long time for the true and pure and valuable pearl, trying out various religions until he found it in Eastern Orthodoxy. He determined the value of this pearl by the sign of its beauty. In the latter was revealed for him and for his ambassadors the superiority of the Orthodox Faith, and this, of course, was not only the perception of external aesthetics, in which Byzantium was so rich, giving in its art a synthesis of the best artistic achievements of East and West, but above all of the spiritual beauty which shone from under the external forms of the majestic ecclesiastical art of Byzantium. Both in the church singing, and in the iconography, and in the architecture of the Orthodox Church there is a special rhythm that serves to reflect the eternal heavenly harmony. The Church masters not only had to sharpen their work, but also their very spirit, in order rise to the heights, to hear there the heavenly music and bring it down to earth. Impressed upon all of our ecclesiastical splendour, to this day it serves as an immediate revelation of the truth of Orthodoxy. Its language is much more understandable for everyone than the language of abstract theological concepts, and through it first of all the Orthodox Church realizes her mission in the world.”<sup>173</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Music of the Soul**

Only God is a true Creator, in that only He can create out of nothing. Man is a creator only derivatively, in that he creates out of something already in existence, rearranging and reforming elements that have already been created by God. And yet in that rearranging and reforming of his nature, a nature distorted and disturbed by sin, lies the whole meaning of his existence. For to the extent that he succeeds in reforming his created nature in accordance with the Divine Archetype, man allows the Uncreated Light of God Himself to shine through his nature.

In this way man the artist becomes man the supreme work of art, man the likeness of God.

The purpose of art in its original, true context and designation is to help man in the work of harmonising the warring elements of his soul, to find “the music of the soul”. For “rest for the soul,” says St. Barsanuphy of Optina, “equals blessedness, which equals music, the harmony of all the powers of the soul.” “The instrument [of the soul] is there, the piano is open and ready, a row of white keys is before us, but there is no piano player. Who is the Player? God. We must labor ascetically, and the Lord will act according to His promise: ‘We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him’ (John 14.23). He will come unto us and play our instrument (Batiushka tapped me lightly on the chest).”<sup>174</sup>

Since the Renaissance, and especially since the Romantic movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, art has been abstracted from its original

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<sup>173</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>174</sup> Afanasyev, *op. cit.*, pp. 716, 712.

function and context in religion. This has allowed a new, often demonic content to enter into it. Nevertheless, insofar as secular art strives towards *harmony* (which, unfortunately, cannot be said of much modern art), it can help the soul that is sunk in disharmony to a limited extent.

Thus Archpriest Lev Lebedev compares the phenomena of culture to “a ladder, on the steps of which it is possible to go down and up... For those who live in the Church and are nourished by its very rich spiritual food, being drawn by the secular works of art is a movement down the ladder. But for those who are torn away from faith and the Church, who often know almost nothing about the Church, but are accustomed to look on writers, poets, artists and composers as their teachers, the works of secular art which directly or indirectly speak in a good spirit about God and the Divine can become steps *upward* to faith and the Church.”<sup>175</sup>

At a certain point, when the soul is already beginning to hear the sounds of the Divine Harmony consistently, it will lose its need and taste for the harmonies of secular art.

Thus St. Brendan the Navigator was once seen putting cotton into his ears at a concert of the Irish bards. When asked why he did this, he said: “If you had heard the music of the angels, you would not delight in this music.”<sup>176</sup>

Again, St. Barsanuphy said of himself: “When I was in the world, I loved opera. Good, serious music gave me pleasure and I always had a subscription – a seat in the orchestra. Later on, when I learned of different, spiritual consolations, the opera ceased to interest me. When a valve of the heart closes the receptivity of worldly enjoyments, another valve opens for the reception of spiritual joys...”<sup>177</sup>

For the man for whom this other valve has opened, only the art of the Orthodox Church, and the music of prayer, will be delightful. “This music [of prayer],” says St. Barsanuphy of Optina, “is often spoken of in the Psalms: ‘The Lord is my strength and my song...’ (Ps. 117.14); I will sing and I will chant unto the Lord’ (Ps. 26.7); ‘I will chant to my God as long as I have my being’ (Ps. 103.35). This singing is inexpressible. In order to receive it people go to monasteries, and they do receive it: one after five years, another after ten, a third after fifteen, and a fourth after forty. May God grant you, too, to receive it; at least you’re on the road to it.”<sup>178</sup>

However, on the path to this consistent dwelling in the music of the soul, there will be days when, because of our fallenness, even the music and words of the Orthodox Church fail to move us. For while a work of art may be inspired by God, it will not be received unless God is in the soul of the receiver. As Shakespeare put it in The Merchant of Venice:

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<sup>175</sup> Lebedev, *Velikorossia* (Great Russia), St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 414.

<sup>176</sup> *Life of St. Brendan the Navigator*, commemorated on May 16.

<sup>177</sup> Afanasyev, *op. cit.*, pp. 440-441.

<sup>178</sup> Afanasyev, *op. cit.*, p. 712. Cf. “The Six Psalms is a spiritual symphony, the life of the soul, which embraces the whole soul and grants it the most sublime delight. People don’t understand this. Their hearts are stony. But music helps them feel all the beauty of the Six Psalms.” (p. 110).

*Such harmony is in immortal souls,  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.*

The Lord said to the Pharisees: "Why do ye not understand my speech? Because ye cannot hear My word... He that is of God heareth God's words" ([John](#) 8.43, 47). God's artistic word works on the soul only if the soul itself has been made receptive to it, refashioned in accordance with His likeness, the likeness of Him Who is the Maker-"Poet" of heaven and earth. We have to have the word in us if we are to hear the Word coming from outside us; we have to have harmony in our souls if we are to hear the Harmony of the heavens.

(This is an adapted and greatly expanded version of "Letter to a Nun on Music", published in *Orthodox America*, November-December, 1996, last revised on November 9/22, 2021)

## 11. A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN AND A RATIONALIST ON THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

**Orthodox.** My friend, I would like to ask you a question: what do you understand by the words: "We are saved by the Blood of Christ"?

**Rationalist.** That we are saved by the Sacrifice of Christ Crucified, whereby He washed away our sins in His Blood shed on the Cross.

**Orthodox.** I agree. And how precisely are our sins washed away?

**Rationalist.** By true faith, and by partaking of the Holy Mysteries of the Church with faith and love, and especially the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

**Orthodox.** Excellent! So you agree that in the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ we partake of the very same Body that was nailed to the Cross and the very same Blood that was shed from the side of the Saviour?

**Rationalist.** Er, yes...

**Orthodox.** I see that you hesitate, my friend. Is there something wrong in what I have said.

**Rationalist.** Not exactly... However, you must be careful not to understand the Mystery in a cannibalistic sense.

**Orthodox.** Cannibalistic? What do you mean, my friend? What is cannibalistic here?

**Rationalist.** Well, I mean that we must not understand the Body of Christ in the Eucharist to be a hunk of meat. That would be close to cannibalism – to paganism.

**Orthodox.** You know, the early Christians were accused of being cannibals by their enemies. However, cannibals eat *dead* meat. In the Mystery we do not partake of dead meat, but of *living* flesh, the Flesh of the God-Man. It is alive not only through Its union with His human Soul, but also through Its union with the Divine Spirit. And that makes It not only alive, but *Life-giving*.

**Rationalist.** Still, you mustn't understand this in too literal a way. Did not the Lord say: "The flesh is of little use; it is the spirit that gives life" (John 6.63)?

**Orthodox.** Yes indeed, but you must understand this passage as the Holy Fathers understand it. St. John Chrysostom says that in these words the Lord was not referring to His own Flesh (God forbid!), but to a carnal understanding of His words. And "this is what carnal understanding means – looking on things in a simple manner without representing anything more. We should not judge in this manner about the visible, but we must look into all its mysteries with internal eyes."<sup>179</sup> If you think about the Flesh of Christ carnally, you are thinking about It as if it were *just* flesh, separate from the Divine Spirit. But we must have spiritual eyes to look beyond – to the invisible reality.

**Rationalist.** But this is just what I mean! You are reducing a spiritual Mystery to something carnal, material. But we are not saved by matter!

**Orthodox.** St. John of Damascus did not agree with you. "I do not worship matter," he said, "but I worship the Creator of matter Who became matter for my sake and Who, through matter, accomplished my salvation!"<sup>180</sup>

**Rationalist.** But "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God" (I Cor. 15.50).

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<sup>179</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 47 on John*, 2.

<sup>180</sup> St. John of Damascus, *First Apology against those who Attack the Divine Images*, 16.

**Orthodox.** *Fallen* flesh and blood is what the Apostle means. But if our fallen flesh and blood is purified and transfigured by the incorrupt Body and Blood of Christ, then our bodies will be raised in glory at the Second Coming and we will be able to enter the Kingdom – *in our bodies*. Indeed, the Lord makes precisely this link between eating His Flesh and the resurrection of the body: “He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6.54).

**Rationalist.** Nevertheless, the Lord’s Body in the Sacrament is different from ours...

**Orthodox.** In purity – yes, in essence – no. For, as St. John of the Ladder says, “The blood of God and the blood of His servants are quite different – but I am thinking here of the dignity and not of the actual physical substance.”<sup>181</sup>... But let me understand precisely what you mean. Are you saying that when we speak of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we are speaking not literally, but metaphorically or symbolically?

**Rationalist.** No, of course not! I believe that the Consecrated Gifts are the True Body and Blood of Christ!

**Orthodox.** I am glad to hear that. For you know, of course, that the metaphorical or symbolical understanding of the Mystery is a Protestant doctrine that has been condemned by the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Thus St. John of Damascus writes that “the Lord has said, ‘This is My Body’, not ‘this is a figure of My Body’; and ‘My Blood’, not ‘a figure of My Blood’.”<sup>182</sup>... So are you saying that the bread and wine are in some sense transfigured or “spiritualized” at the consecration through their union with the Divine Spirit of Christ, “penetrated” by the Spirit, as it were, so that we can then call them the Body and Blood of Christ, although they do not cease to be bread and wine?...

**Rationalist.** Er, let me think about that...

**Orthodox.** Well, while you’re thinking let me remind you that the Eastern Patriarchs in their Encyclical of 1848 also condemned this teaching, which is essentially that of the Lutherans. It is also very close to the Anglican idea of the “Real Presence” of Christ in the Eucharist – although it is notoriously difficult to say precisely what the Anglicans believe. And you will remember that the Anglicans and Catholics killed each other during the Anglican Reformation precisely because the Catholics had a realistic understanding of the sacrament, whereas the Anglicans, being Protestants, did not. A recent Anglican biography of the first Anglican archbishop, Cranmer, has demonstrated that he was a Zwinglian in his eucharistic theology.

**Rationalist.** You know, I think that you are misrepresenting the Anglican position. Fr. X of the Moscow Theological Academy has told me that the Orthodox teaching coincides with that of the Anglicans, but not with that of the Catholics.

**Orthodox.** Really, you do surprise me! I knew that your Moscow theologians were close to the Anglicans, the spiritual fathers of the ecumenical movement and masters of doctrinal double-think, but I did not know that they had actually embraced their doctrines! As for the Catholics – what do you find wrong with their eucharistic theology?

**Rationalist.** Don’t you know? The Orthodox reject the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation!

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<sup>181</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 23.20.

<sup>182</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 13.

**Orthodox.** I do not believe that the Orthodox reject transubstantiation. We dislike the word “transubstantiation” because of its connotations of Aristotlean philosophy and medieval scholasticism, but very few people today – even Catholics – use the word in the technically Aristotlean sense. Most people mean by “transubstantiation” simply the doctrine that the substances of bread and wine are changed into the substances of Body and Blood in the Eucharist, which is Orthodox. The Eastern Patriarchs in their Encyclical write that “the bread is changed, *transubstantiated*, converted, transformed, into the actual Body of the Lord.” They use four words here, including “transubstantiated”, to show that they are equivalent in meaning. In any case, is not the Russian word “presuschestvlenie” a translation of “transubstantiation”? It is important not to quarrel over words if the doctrine the words express is the same.

**Rationalist.** Nevertheless, the doctrine of transubstantiation is Catholic and heretical.

**Orthodox.** If that is so, why has the Orthodox Church never condemned it as heretical? The Orthodox Church has on many occasions condemned the Catholic heresies of the *Filioque*, papal infallibility, created grace, etc., but never the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist.

**Rationalist.** It’s still heretical. And I have to say that I find your thinking very western, scholastic, primitive and materialist!

**Orthodox.** Perhaps you’ll find these words of the Lord also “primitive and materialist”: “Unless you eat of My Flesh and drink of My Blood, you have no life in you” ([John 6.53](#)). And these words of St. John Chrysostom written in his commentary on the Lord’s words: “He hath given to those who desire Him not only to see Him, but even to touch, and eat Him, and fix their teeth in His Flesh, and to embrace Him, and satisfy their love...”<sup>183</sup> Was St. John Chrysostom, the composer of our Liturgy, a western Catholic in his thinking?

**Rationalist.** Don’t be absurd!

**Orthodox.** Well then... Let’s leave the Catholics and Protestants and get back to the Orthodox position. And let me put my understanding of the Orthodox doctrine as concisely as possible: at the moment of consecration the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ in such a way that there is no longer the substances of bread and wine, but only of Body and Blood.

**Rationalist.** I accept that so long as you do not mean that there is a physico-chemical change in the constitution of the bread and wine?

**Orthodox.** But can there not be a physico-chemical change?! Are not bread and wine physical substances?

**Rationalist.** Yes.

**Orthodox.** And are not human flesh and blood physico-chemical substances?

**Rationalist.** Yes...

**Orthodox.** And is not a change from one physico-chemical substance into another physico-chemical substance a physico-chemical change?

**Rationalist.** Here you are demonstrating your western, legalistic, primitive mentality! All Aristotlean syllogisms and empty logic! The Orthodox mind is quite different: it is mystical. You forget that we are talking about a Mystery!

**Orthodox.** Forgive me for offending you. I quite accept that we are talking about a Mystery. But there is a difference between mystery and mystification. If we are going to speak at all, we must speak clearly, with as precise a definition of terms as human

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<sup>183</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 46 on John*, 3.

speech will allow. The Fathers were not opposed to logic or clarity. Illogicality is no virtue!

**Rationalist.** Alright... But the fact remains that the change is not a physico-chemical one, but a supernatural one. It says so in the Liturgy itself!

**Orthodox.** I agree that the change is supernatural in two senses. First, the instantaneous change of one physical substance into another is obviously not something that we find in the ordinary course of nature. Of course, bread and wine are naturally changed into flesh and blood through the process of eating and digestion. But in this case the change is effected, not by eating, but by the word of prayer – and it's instantaneous. For, as St. Gregory of Nyssa points out, "it is not a matter of the bread becoming the Body of the Word through the natural process of eating: rather it is transmuted *immediately* into the Body of the Word."<sup>184</sup> Secondly, the change is effected by a supernatural Agent – God. So what we have is the change of one physico-chemical substance into another through a non-physical, supernatural Agent, the Spirit of God.

**Rationalist.** But if I were to accept your western logic, I should have to believe that the Body of Christ is composed of proteins and enzymes and such things, and that the Blood of Christ contains haemoglobin!

**Orthodox.** Well, and what is impious about that?

**Rationalist.** It is the height of impiety! My faith is not based on scientific molecular analysis!

**Orthodox.** Nor is mine.

**Rationalist.** But you have just admitted that the Body and Blood of Christ contain proteins and enzymes and haemoglobin!

**Orthodox.** Well, does not human flesh and blood contain such elements?

**Rationalist.** Yes, but these words are scientific terms that were unknown to the Fathers. You don't seriously think that in order to understand the Mystery, you have to have a degree in biology?!

**Orthodox.** Not at all.

**Rationalist.** So you accept that the Blood of Christ does not contain haemoglobin...

**Orthodox.** No I don't. Your argument is a non-sequitur. I believe *by faith alone* – not by molecular analysis, nor by any evidence of the senses – that the consecrated Gifts are human Flesh and Blood united to the Divine Spirit. Biologists tell me – and no one, as far as I know, disputes this – that human blood contains haemoglobin. So it seems eminently reasonable to believe that the Blood of Christ also contains haemoglobin. Of course, this fact was discovered, not by faith, but by scientific research, so it does not have the certainty – or the importance – attaching to revelations of faith. But *if* we suppose that human blood contains haemoglobin, and if we accept that Christ's Blood is human, then it follows that Christ's Blood also contains haemoglobin. Or do you think that Christ is not fully human and does not have fully human flesh and blood like ours?

**Rationalist.** There you go with your syllogisms and empty logic again! Always trying to catch me out! I never said that Christ's Blood was not human!

**Orthodox.** Nevertheless, you seem to have great trouble accepting the consequences of that statement.

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<sup>184</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 37.

**Rationalist.** They are consequences for you, but not for me. Thus you, but not I, are committed to the consequence that a molecular analysis of the Blood of Christ would reveal haemoglobin.

**Orthodox.** Not so... I think it was Vladimir Lossky who said that hypothetical situations are not a fitting subject of theological discourse, which deals only in absolute realities. However, let us follow your thought experiment through for a moment. I do not know, of course, what would happen if anyone – God forbid! – were so blasphemous as to perform such a molecular analysis. Nevertheless, *if* God allowed him to do it, and to analyze the results, I expect that they would indicate that the consecrated Gifts are bread and wine, not flesh and blood, and so contain no haemoglobin.

**Rationalist.** Now you're the one who's being illogical! One moment you say that Christ's Blood contains haemoglobin, and the next you say that a physico-chemical analysis would reveal no haemoglobin!

**Orthodox.** Precisely, because the reality revealed by faith is *not* the appearance revealed to the fallen senses, of which science is simply the organized extension. Faith, as St. Paul says, "is the certainty of things unseen" (Heb. 11.1); science is an uncertain apprehension of things seen. In the case of the Mystery we see and taste one thing; but the reality is something quite different. God veils the reality from our senses; and no amount of scientific observation can discern the reality if God chooses to hide it.

**Rationalist.** Why should he do that?

**Orthodox.** He does this in order that we should not be repelled by the sight and taste of human flesh and so refrain from partaking of the Saving Mystery. As Blessed Theophylact says, "Since we are weak and could not endure raw meat, much less human flesh, it appears as bread to us although it is in fact flesh".<sup>185</sup> It is absolutely essential to realize that we cannot trust our senses here – even if aided by a microscope. In fact, when it comes to the Mystery, all sense-perception, of any kind, must be discarded; it can be seen by faith alone. For, as St. Paul says, we walk by faith, not by sight.

**Rationalist.** Of course, I agree with that.

**Orthodox.** So what's your problem?

**Rationalist.** I don't have a problem. *You* have a problem, a very serious one.

**Orthodox.** What's that?

**Rationalist.** A diseased imagination, what the Greeks call "plani" and the Russians – "prelest". Instead of simply receiving the sacrament in faith, you are imagining that it is composed of all sorts of things – molecules, proteins, haemoglobin, etc. This is western rationalism!

**Orthodox.** No, I can sincerely assure you that I don't use my imagination in any way when approaching the Mystery. And forgive me, but I think it is you who are infected with rationalism, insofar as you have such difficulty in accepting what the Church plainly teaches.

**Rationalist.** My advice to you is: when you approach the Mystery, just believe the words of the priest that this is the True Body and Blood of Christ, and don't feel or think or imagine anything else.

**Orthodox.** Thank you for your advice. I shall try to follow it in the future, as I have followed it in the past.

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<sup>185</sup> Blessed Theophylact, *On Matthew*, 26.26.

**Rationalist.** You are not being honest. You *do* use your imagination, the intellectual imagination of the scientist; you think of haemoglobin, proteins, molecules, etc.

**Orthodox.** There's no point arguing about this. How can I convince you? You know, I think the difference between us is not that I use imagination and you don't, but that I rely on faith alone and entirely reject the evidence of my senses while you waver between what the Church teaches and what your senses tell you. I believe, contrary to the evidence of my senses, that the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist is *exactly the same* Body and Blood as that which He received from the Virgin, in which He walked on this earth, and in which He was crucified on the Cross. You, on the other hand, whether you admit it or not, think that it is in some sense the same Body and Blood but in another not the same, because it looks and tastes different.

**Rationalist.** You'll have difficulty proving that!

**Orthodox.** Will I? Well, just let me try by putting a few questions to you.

**Rationalist.** Go ahead.

**Orthodox.** Now I am going to talk about blood with haemoglobin in it, not because I think that blood having haemoglobin is such an important fact, but simply because it enables me to identify whether you are referring to the same kind of blood as I. Agreed?

**Rationalist.** Okay.

**Orthodox.** Right then. First question: Did the Holy Virgin have human blood with haemoglobin in it?

**Rationalist.** Very likely.

**Orthodox.** Second question: Was the Blood which the Lord Jesus Christ receive from the Virgin blood with haemoglobin in it?

**Rationalist.** If the Virgin had that blood, then the Lord had the same blood.

**Orthodox.** Good. Now the third question: Did the Lord on the Cross shed human Blood with haemoglobin in it?

**Rationalist.** I think I see what you're leading to...

**Orthodox.** Please answer the question: yes or no?

**Rationalist.** Yes, of course.

**Orthodox.** Fourth question: Bearing in mind that, as St. John Chrysostom says, "that which is in the chalice is *the same* as that which flowed from Christ's side"<sup>186</sup>, is that which is in the chalice human blood with haemoglobin in it?

**Rationalist.** You have convinced me! I did see them as different, but now I agree with you!

**Orthodox.** Not just with me, brother: with the Church, which *is* the Body of Christ insofar as it is composed of members who have partaken of the Body of Christ. For, as a recently canonized saint of the Church, St. John Maximovich, wrote: "Bread and wine are made into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy... How is the Body and Blood of Christ at the same time both the Church and the Holy Mystery? Are the faithful both members of the Body of Christ, the Church, and also communicants of the Body of Christ in the Holy Mystery? In neither instance is this name 'Body of Christ' used metaphorically, but rather *in the most basic sense of the word*. We believe that the Holy Mysteries which keep the form of bread and wine are the very Body and the very Blood of Christ... Christ, invisible to the bodily eye, manifests Himself on earth clearly through His Church, just as the unseen human spirit

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<sup>186</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on I Corinthians*.

manifests itself through the body. The Church is the Body of Christ both because its parts are united to Christ through His Divine Mysteries and because through her Christ works in the world. *We partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, in the Holy Mysteries, so that we ourselves may be members of Christ's Body, the Church.*"<sup>187</sup>

**Rationalist.** Yes, I agree with the Body about the Body, I agree with the Church!

**Orthodox.** Glory to God! "What is so good or so joyous as for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 132.1).

*Pentecost, 1998; revised Pentecost, 2004.*

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<sup>187</sup> St. John Maximovich, "The Church as the Body of Christ", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 31, № 5, September-October, 1981, pp. 16-17.

## 12. A REPLY TO DAVID BERCOT ON THE MOTHER OF GOD

*David Bercot is a continuing Anglican who has produced a number of cassettes on spiritual themes. In several of these, he criticizes the position of the Orthodox Church from the point of view of what he considers the classical Anglican via media – that is, a position midway between Protestantism, on the one hand, and Orthodoxy and Catholicism, on the other. Bercot claims that he was very sympathetic to Orthodoxy, but was put off by the attitude of the Orthodox to the Mother of God, which he considers to be clearly contrary to the teaching of the Pre-Nicene Church. The following is a reply to Bercot in defense of the Orthodox teaching.*

I come now to Bercot's third tape, on Mary, the Mother of God. I find this the most interesting of Bercot's tapes so far, not because it is correct – I think it contains the same mixture of true and demonstrably false statements as in the earlier tapes – but because it points to a certain mystery of Divine Providence which has been little inquired into. This is the mystery of why the veneration of the Mother of God, though present in the Early Church, acquired, relatively suddenly, such a great impetus and development in the fifth century.

For I accept that there is little written evidence for the veneration of Mary in the Early Church. I do not accept that there is *absolutely no* evidence, as Bercot claims, even in the writings of the early Fathers. For example, St. Gregory the Wonderworker, a pupil of Origen and the apostle of Cappadocia, composed hymns in praise of the Holy Virgin which are just as "extravagant" as those of later Byzantine Fathers. Moreover, Bercot completely ignores the evidence from unwritten Tradition – the iconography of the early Church (in the Roman catacombs, for example), and liturgical tradition – which does, in a quiet way, point to the great honour in which Mary was held by the early Christians. And I firmly reject Bercot's rejection of the oral traditions concerning Mary's earthly life and assumption to heaven, which, while committed to writing only in the fifth century, witness to a strong oral tradition in the Church of Jerusalem since the first century. This points to a characteristically Protestant flaw in all of Bercot's reasoning: his reliance only on written evidence – the Holy Scriptures, or the writings of the Pre-Nicene Fathers, while completely ignoring all the evidence from art and oral tradition.

Having said that, I accept that the veneration of Mary takes a huge leap – not in dogmatic development, but in sheer volume and extravagance of expression – in the fifth century. For, as Andrew Louth writes, "while there are a few precious fragments of evidence of early devotion in the East, it was only after the Synod of Ephesus in 431 affirmed her title as *Theotokos*, 'Mother of God', that it developed apace, while in the West it is not until the ninth century that there is much sign of devotion to the Virgin."<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007, p. 198. In fact, an Egyptian papyrus dating to 250 has been found containing a prayer to the Mother of God and calling her *Theotokos* (*Aleteia*, August 17, 2019, <https://aleteia.org/2019/08/15/this-papyrus-contains-the-oldest-marian-prayer-known-to-date>)

The question is: why did it take so long for the cult of the Mother of God to develop? Bercot offers a typically modernist, psychologizing explanation: the post-Nicene Christians felt a need for a more feminine, less wrathful God, so they elevated Mary to divine status on the analogy of the Great Earth Mother. I find this explanation absurd. Does he mean to say that in the middle of the fifth century *the whole Church*, from the Celts of Britain to the Copts of Egypt, suddenly and without external pressure, abandoned its belief in the Trinitarian God and went back to paganism?! Let us remember that, to my knowledge, *nobody* throughout the whole Christian world objected to the veneration of Mary except a few western heretics who denied the virginity of Mary and were refuted in Blessed Jerome's two books against Jovinian already in the fourth century. It follows that if Bercot is right, the Saviour's promise that the Church would prevail against the gates of hell even to the end of the world is wrong, and the whole Church fell away from the truth in the fifth century, only to be recreated by a few continuing Anglicans 1500 years later!

I offer another explanation. It is only a hypothesis, and I may well be wrong. But I think it fits the fact much better than Bercot's explanation, while removing the necessity of concluding that the whole Church apostasized in the fifth century – a conclusion that Bercot does not draw explicitly, but which must be drawn if his argument is correct.

The explanation consists in noting that the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431, which established, as we have seen, that Mary was the "Mother of God", decreed that henceforth hymns to Christ and the Saints should always conclude with a hymn to the Mother of God, a rule that is followed to this day in the liturgical practice of the Orthodox Church. The Council's decree naturally stimulated a great deal of hymnography and iconography glorifying the Mother of God. This does not mean that the cult of Mary became more important than that of Christ, as Bercot quite wrongly asserts – a cursory examination of the liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church demonstrates that all services begin with prayers to one or other of the Persons of the Holy Trinity (Vespers and Mattins, for example, begin with a prayer to the Holy Spirit), and that prayers to God are far more frequent than prayers to the Mother of God and the Saints, especially in the central service of the Divine Liturgy. But it is certainly true that the veneration of the Mother of God became more prominent, in the sense of more public, after the Third Ecumenical Council.

However, the decrees of the Third Council provide only a partial explanation of the facts. We still need to explain why the pre-Nicene Fathers said so little about the Mother of God, and in language that was so restrained by comparison with what came later. I think that the explanation is to be found in a principle that we find exemplified throughout the history of Divine Revelation: the principle, namely, that while the whole truth has been committed to God's people from the time of the apostles, certain aspects of that truth are concealed from the outside world at certain times because a premature revelation of them would be harmful to the acceptance of the Christian Gospel as a whole.

Let us take as an example the most cardinal doctrine of the Church, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is implicit even in the first chapter of

Genesis, where we read of the Father creating the material and noetic worlds through His Son, the Word of God, and with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, Who broods like a bird over the waters of the abyss. And in the creation of man the multi-Personed nature of God is clearly hinted at in the words: “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image...” (Genesis 1.27). And yet the mystery is only gradually revealed in the course of the Old Testament, and becomes fully explicit only on the Day of Pentecost in the New.

Let us take another example: the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ. In the Synoptic Gospels this mystery is only partially revealed, more emphasis being attached to the full Humanity of Christ. In the Gospel of John, however, the veil is lifted with the words: “In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh” (John 1.1, 14), and it is clearly explicit in the Epistles and in Revelation. So why did the Synoptic Evangelists not declare the mystery openly? Because they did not know it, as the Arians and modern heretics such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses would have us believe? Of course not! The mystery is there, in Matthew, Mark and Luke, for all those with ears to hear and eyes to see. So why is it not made explicit in them as it is in John?

As always, the Holy Fathers provide us with the answer. They explain that John wrote his Gospel later, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., not in order to correct the earlier Gospels, which were flawless in themselves, but in order to “fill in the gaps” which they had left unfilled under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The first three Evangelists faithfully reflect the general sequence of Christ’s teaching in not immediately and explicitly proclaiming His Divinity, for which the people (and even the apostles themselves) were not yet ready. Another reason was that, as St. Paul says, “none of the princes of this world knew [this], for had they known [it], they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Corinthians 2.8). This is confirmed by St. Ignatius the God-bearer, a disciple of St. John, who says that certain facts were concealed from the devil, such as the virginity of Mary<sup>189</sup>, because, had he known them, he would not have stirred up the Jews to kill Christ and so bring about the salvation of the world. Moreover, we see from Acts that the earliest sermons of St. Peter and St. Stephen also did not emphasize the Divinity of Christ, but rather concentrated on His being the Messiah. One step at a time: for the Jews, it was necessary to demonstrate that Christ was the Messiah before going on (in private, perhaps) to the deeper mystery of His Divinity. St. Matthew, who wrote in Hebrew for the Jews, undoubtedly followed this method under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And the same applies to Saints Mark and Luke, who, though not writing exclusively for the Jews, had to take the Jewish religious education of many of their readers into account. After the fall of Jerusalem, however, when the power of the Jews had been broken, and when Christian heretics such as Cerinthus arose, openly denying the Divinity of Christ, a more explicit affirmation of the mystery became necessary. And that was what St. John – who fled from a bath-house in which he was washing in order not to remain under the same roof as Cerinthus – provided in his writings.

Now let us turn to the mystery of Mary, the Mother of God. As St. John of Damascus points out, the mystery of Mary is the mystery of the Incarnation, and the glory of

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<sup>189</sup> St. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 19, 1.

Mary derives wholly from the glory of her being chosen to be the Mother of God.<sup>190</sup> All the titles and honour we ascribe to her do not add to, but express that original glory; they are a direct consequence of her being, in the words of St. Photius the Great, “the minister of the mystery”.<sup>191</sup> For only a being of surpassing holiness could have given her flesh to the All-Holy Word of God, becoming the new Eve, as Saints Justin and Irenaeus point out, to Christ’s new Adam.

But just as the glory of Christ Himself was temporarily concealed for the sake of the more effective long-term propagation of the Gospel, so the glory of Mary was concealed – from the world, but not from the Church – until the time when it was safe to reveal it, that is, when idolatry had been destroyed and the dogmas of the Divinity of Christ and of the Mother of God had been defined in theologically precise terms. Until that time, however, such a revelation would have been dangerous, for in a world in which paganism was still strong, and female goddesses, as Bercot points out, were common, many would have seen Christ and His Mother as two gods – the Christian equivalent of Jupiter and Juno. And indeed, as Bercot again rightly points out on the basis of the writings of St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, in the fourth century there existed a heresy which consisted in the worship of the Mother of God and the offering of sacrifices to her. That is why the apostles and their successors preached to the truths of the faith to the pagan world in a definite order, with each successive stage beginning only when the previous stage was firmly established in the minds of their hearers. First came the teaching about God, then about the Incarnation of the Word and the Redemption through Christ; then about the Church and the sacraments; and then about the Mother of God.

The Church displayed a similar reticence with regard to another of her cardinal doctrines – that of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. When the Lord first expounded this mystery, many even of His disciples left Him ([John](#) 6.66). It is not surprising, therefore, that the Church should have refrained from preaching this doctrine from the roof-tops, and kept it even from the catechumens, or learners, until after they had actually partaken of the sacrament. And as with the Divinity of Christ, so with the sacraments, the Church’s teaching is only sketchily outlined in the Synoptic Evangelists, but more fully expounded later, in the Gospel of John. And it is only in the Gospel of John that we find certain events in which the Mother of God played a prominent part: the marriage in Cana, for example, or Christ’s entrusting the care of His Mother to John himself at the Cross.

In all these cases, the Church’s early reticence was not the product of some kind of esotericism in the Gnostic sense, but a prudent desire to give her children the meat of the Word only after they have been strengthened on the milk, the rudiments of the Gospel. For to entrust people with the holy mysteries before they are ready for them is like giving pearls to “swine” – they will trample on them by interpreting them in their own swinish, carnal way. Thus the doctrine of the Mother of God, while always known to the Church, was not preached openly until the world had become solidly Christian.

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<sup>190</sup> St. John of Damascus, *First Homily on the Dormition*, 12.

<sup>191</sup> St. Photius the Great, *Homily on the Nativity of the Virgin*.

An illustration of the wisdom of this principle is found in the life of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, the disciple of St. Paul and first bishop of Athens. When he first met the Mother of God, as he confesses in a letter, he was so struck by her extraordinary, other-worldly beauty, that he was tempted to think that she was in fact a goddess. It was not until the apostles took him aside and explained that she was not herself Divine by nature, but the created Mother of the pre-eternal Creator, that he abandoned his error. If such a holy man as Dionysius was tempted to make such an error, we can imagine what would have been the consequences if the apostles had openly preached the Mother of God to the pagan world! And we see in modern Roman Catholic Mariolatry what happens to the understanding of Mary even among Christians when those Christians have lost the salt of the grace of God.

If the Catholics have become like the pagan Greeks in their Mariolatry, the Protestants have embraced the opposite, Jewish error in refusing to see anything special in the Holy Virgin, even denying her holiness and virginity. To be fair to Bercot, he never descends to such blasphemy, and is willing to accept both her virginity and her exceptional blessedness. He does not even object to the term Theotokos, or Mother of God, although, revealingly, he never uses it himself.

But Bercot displays a definite Protestant bias and superficiality in his interpretation of those passages in the Gospel in which Christ speaks to or about His Mother. In all these passages (Matthew 12.46-50; Luke 2.48-49, 8.19-21; John 2.4, 19.26-27), Bercot sees Christ as “putting down” His Mother, as if He needed to suppress an incipient rebellion on her part, an attempt to impose her will upon Him. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although the Orthodox do not believe in the absolute sinlessness of the Mother of God, at any rate before Pentecost, and admit that she may have had moments of doubt, hesitation or imperfect comprehension, there can be no question of any conflict between her and her Son. Christ was not so much rebuking His Mother in these passages, as teaching a general truth which the carnally and racially-minded Jews very much needed to absorb: the truth, namely, that closeness to God depends, not on racial affiliation, but on spiritual kinship. Moreover, when He said, “My Mother and My brethren are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 8.21), He was not excluding His physical Mother from the category of those close to Him. On the contrary, it was precisely because she, more than anyone, knew the word of God and kept it, thereby acquiring spiritual kinship with God, that Mary was counted worthy to give birth to God in the flesh.

That is also why Christ entrusted the Holy Virgin to St. John at the foot of the Cross. This was actually a very surprising thing for the Lord to do, for the Virgin did have a family – the sons of Joseph referred to above – and the normal custom in the East would have been for them to take her into their care. But here again, as often in the Gospel, the Lord indicates that spiritual kinship, kinship in the Church, is higher and deeper than kinship after the flesh or in law.

Bercot makes another error of interpretation when he says that Mary was not one of the first witnesses of the Resurrection. The oral tradition of the Church, confirmed

in the writings of St. Gregory Palamas<sup>192</sup>, affirms that Mary was in fact the very first person to see the Risen Christ, being none other than the person whom the Evangelists call “Mary, the mother of James and Joses” (Matthew 27.56) and “the other Mary” (Matthew 27.81, 28.1). For the sons of Joseph, the Betrothed of Mary, were James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, Simon, the second bishop of Jerusalem, Jude, one of the twelve apostles, and Joses; which meant that Mary was, in law if not by blood, their mother, “the mother of James and Joses”.

St. Matthew conceals her identity in this way for the same reason that the inner greatness of the Mother of God is concealed throughout the first centuries of the Christian preaching: because it was dangerous to reveal her great glory and pre-eminent closeness to Christ before the doctrine of Christ Himself, perfect God and perfect Man, had been firmly established in the world through the Ecumenical Councils. Moreover, if it had been said that the first witness of Christ’s Resurrection had been His Mother, the Jews would have seized on this to pour scorn on the fact, saying: “What trust can we place in the visions of an hysterical woman, crazed with grief over the death of her only son?”

Bercot is again wrong in asserting that the Lord was rebuking Mary at the marriage of Cana, when He said: “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” (John 2.4). If Mary was really sinning by asking the Lord to intercede for the married couple, why did He then fulfil her request and change the water into wine? According to St. Gaudentius of Brescia, the Lord was not rebuking the Virgin, but drawing her mind forward to the mystery of the Cross: “This answer of His does not seem to me to accord with Mary’s suggestion, if we take it literally in its first apparent sense, and do not suppose our Lord to have spoken in a mystery, meaning thereby that the wine of the Holy Spirit could not be given to the Gentiles before His Passion and Resurrection, as the Evangelist attests: ‘As yet the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified’ (John 7.39). With reason, then, at the beginning of His miracles, did He thus answer His Mother, as though He said: ‘Why this thy hasty suggestion, O Woman? Since the hour of My Passion and Resurrection is not yet come, when, - all powers whether of teaching or of divine operations being then completed - I have determined to die for the life of believers. After My Passion and Resurrection, when I shall return to My Father, there shall be given to them the wine of the Holy Spirit.’ Whereupon she too, that most blessed one, knowing the profound mystery of this answer, understood that the suggestion she had just made was not slighted or spurned, but, in accordance with that spiritual reason, was for a time delayed. Otherwise, she would never have said to the waiters, *Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.*”<sup>193</sup>

Bercot displays a similar obtuseness when discussing the fact that Mary was not present at the Last Supper. Since the Passover meal was a family occasion, he says, Mary’s absence shows that the Lord was “putting her in her place” and placing his

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<sup>192</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 18, on the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers*.

<sup>193</sup> St. Gaudentius, *Sermon 9*; P.L. 20, p. 900; in Thomas Livius, *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries*, London: Burns & Oates, 1893, p. 173. And in another place the same saint says that Christ, “after the hour of His Passion, so far consummated the reality of the mystery which had gone before that the water of the Incarnation became the wine of the Divinity.” (*Sermon 19*; P.L. 20, p. 990; Livius, *op. cit.*, p. 174).

bonds with the apostles above all carnal bonds. Well, it is true, as we have seen, that the Lord often emphasizes the superiority of spiritual bonds to carnal ones. But Mary was most closely related to Him, as has already been said, *both* spiritually *and* by blood.

In any case, the Last Supper did not require the presence of Mary for a quite different reason. At this Supper the Lord introduced the fundamental sacrament of the New Testament Church, the Eucharist, and Himself performed the sacrament as the eternal High Priest of the New Testament, being a priest not after the order of Levi, but of Melchizedek. He as the Priest offered Himself as the Victim to Himself and the Father and the Holy Spirit as the Receivers of the Sacrifice. And He wished the apostles to be present because they also were to be priests according to this new and higher order, and would themselves offer the same Sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood, saying: "Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee..." But Mary, being a woman, was not and could not be a priest.

Not that Mary's ministry was any less important than the apostles'. On the contrary: without the ministry of the Virgin at the Incarnation neither Christ's ministry at the Cross and Resurrection, nor that of the apostles after Pentecost, would have been possible. For if the apostles, through the priestly gift bestowed on them, multiplied the Church to the ends of the earth, the Virgin, having given birth to the High Priest Himself, and having been made the Mother of His closest disciple at the Cross, may be said to have given birth to the Church as a whole, to be the Mother of the Body of which He is the Head to all generations. Indeed, in a deeper sense the Virgin is not only the Mother of the Church but the Church herself; for if Christ is the New Adam and the Head of the Church, and Mary is the New Eve and "flesh of His flesh", then through the mystery of marriage the Virgin (i.e. the New Eve or the Church) *is* the Body and Bride of Christ...

It is in the context of this mystical relationship between Christ and the Holy Virgin that we must understand the extraordinary epithets that the Church bestows on her, such as mediatrix and Queen of Heaven.

At this point, however, it is important to distinguish the Orthodox position from that of the Roman Catholics and from that of certain Orthodox who have been infected by the Romanist point of view. Contrary to the Romanist teaching, the Holy Virgin was conceived in original sin, and therefore was as much in need of salvation as any other mortal. Moreover, as St. John Chrysostom says, it is possible that she committed some actual sins, although these could only have been minor ones resulting from her less than perfect knowledge of the ministry of her Son before she received complete enlightenment at Pentecost. The salvation of the world was effected by Christ alone, the only Mediator between God and man, for He alone is *both* God *and* man. At the same time, Christ could not have become man without the cooperation of a human being who was both humble enough to receive the Word of God into her flesh without being destroyed by Him, and believing enough to consent to the mystery without doubting: "Be it unto me according to they word" (Luke 1.38). For, as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow says, "In the days of the creation of the world, when God was uttering His living and mighty 'Let there be', the word of the Creator brought

creatures into the world. But on that day, unparalleled in the life of the world, when divine Miriam uttered her brief and obedient: 'Be it unto me', I hardly dare to say what happened then – the word of the creature brought the Creator into the world." In this sense, the Virgin, too, can be called a mediatrix insofar as she mediated our salvation. To say, as Bercot does, that Christ could have effected the salvation of the world in some other way if the Virgin had refused is to indulge in idle hypothesizing which illumines nothing. For the fact is that the Virgin did not refuse and God did not choose another person or another method.

Now, having entered into such an extraordinarily intimate union with God, and with such enormous consequences for the whole of created being, who can doubt that the Virgin has become deified, "a partaker of the Divine nature", as St. Peter puts it (II Peter 1.4), "on the border between the created and uncreated natures", as St. Gregory Palamas puts it?<sup>194</sup> And, this being so, who can doubt that all her petitions are granted by God, that her "mediation" before God, in the sense of intercession for mankind, is always heard? It is not that what she demands she always gets, as the Romanists blasphemously say; for that would imply that the creature can dictate to the Creator, the pot to the Potter. No: the Virgin is always heard by God because, being in complete harmony with His will, she never asks for anything that is contrary to His will. Like the perfect wife, she both knows the will of her Husband and wills it herself, so that she neither compels Him nor is herself compelled by Him "Whose service is perfect freedom". For "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Corinthians 3.17).

Where there is such perfect spiritual union and freedom, the distinctions between Master and servant, even Creator and creature, become, if not less real than before, at any rate less prominent. The Protestants are very jealous to preserve God's rights and sovereignty; but they forget that God Himself "emptied Himself" of His Divine rights, and became a servant to His own creatures, so that they should acquire His rights and privileges. As the Fathers say: "God became man, so that men should become gods." And the word "gods" means what it says – the saints truly become gods by grace: "I said: ye are gods, and all of your sons of the Most High" (Psalms 81.6; John 10.34). For if the Holy Scripture calls Christians now, before they have become completely freed from sin, "brothers" and "friends" and "sons of God", of what great "weight of glory" will they not be accounted worthy when they are completely freed from sin, in the life of the age to come? And if this is true of all the saints, how can it be denied of the Virgin Mother of God, she who even at the beginning of her ministry was already "full of grace", and who by offering herself as "the minister of the mystery" made it possible for all men to become gods? And if, as St. Paul says, the saints shall judge angels (I Corinthians 6.3), how can it be hyperbole to say that she, the mother of all the saints in the spiritual sense, is "more honourable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim"? Indeed, if Christ, the New Adam, is the King of Heaven, how can she, the New Eve, be denied her rightful side at His side as the Queen of Heaven? For it is of her that the Prophet David spoke: "At Thy right hand stood the queen, arrayed in a vesture of inwoven gold, adorned in varied colours" (Psalms 45.8).

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<sup>194</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 14, on the Annunciation*, 15.

The mystery of Mary is the mystery of the deification of man. The path she traversed from humility on earth to glory in the heavens is the path that all Christians hope to traverse. And while it was God's will that she should remain in the background until the ministry of her Son should be completed and firmly established in the world through the teaching of the Fathers, so it is God's will now that her glory should be revealed and all generations call her blessed (Luke 1.48); that all men should see the hope that is set before them and strive for it with redoubled zeal. And to that end God has bestowed on her the grace of miracles and the fulfillment of all the godly petitions that men address to her, as is witnessed by thousands upon thousands of Christians in all countries and generations. Only the blindest bigot could deny all these witnesses, or ascribe them all to the workings of Satan. Or rather, only one who is blind to the true depth of the mystery of which she was the minister, would seek to detract from the glory of the Virgin...

Let me end, then, with two witnesses to her veneration from the Early, Pre-Nicene Church. Secondly, a hymn found in an Egyptian papyrus dating to about 250 AD and still used in the Orthodox Church today: "Under thy tender mercy we run, O Virgin Birth-Giver of God. Despise not our prayers in our troubles, but deliver us from danger, O only pure, O only blessed one!"<sup>195</sup> Protopresbyter James Thornton comments on this discovery: "This papyrus is 75 years before Emperor Constantine. 131 years before the Church officially declared the New Testament closed and listed what books were in it. Christians were already calling Mary 'Theotokos' and asking her intercessions-- frequently and widespread enough that it was \*written down\* and we have a fragment. Addressing the saints in prayer is not a 'later innovation'. It is a vital part of early Christian worship and practice."<sup>196</sup>

And secondly, the witness of St. Gregory the Wonderworker, a third-century, that is, pre-Constantinian holy father: "Thy praise, O most holy Virgin, surpasses all laudation, by reason of the God Who took flesh and was born of three. To thee every creature, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, offers the meet offering of honour. For thou has indeed been shown forth to be the true cherubic throne, thou shinest as the very brightness of light in the high places of the kingdoms of intelligence, where the Father, Who is without beginning, and Whose power thou hadst overshadowing thee, is glorified; where also the Son is worshipped, Whom thou didst bear according to the flesh; and where the Holy Spirit is praised, Who effected in thy womb the generation of the Mighty King. Though thee, O thou who art full of grace, is the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity known in the world. Together with thyself deem us also worthy to be made partakers of thy perfect grace in Jesus Christ, our Lord, with Whom and with the Holy Spirit, be glory to the Father, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen."<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> "Папирус с молитвой ко Пресвятой Богородице 250 г.н.э.", September 22, 2014, <http://blagomissia.livejournal.com/42349.html>.

<sup>196</sup> Thornton, Facebook communication, January 21, 2017.

<sup>197</sup> St. Gregory the Wonderworker, *Homily 3, On the Annunciation*.

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### 13. A REPLY TO DAVID BERCOT ON THE HOLY ICONS

*David Bercot is a continuing Anglican who has produced a number of cassettes on spiritual themes. In several of these, he criticizes the position of the Orthodox Church from the point of view of what he considers to be the classical Anglican via media – that is, a position halfway between Protestantism, on the one hand, and Orthodoxy and Catholicism, on the other. Bercot claims that he was very sympathetic to Orthodoxy, and was even preparing to join the Orthodox Church, but was put off by the attitude of the Orthodox to the Mother of God and the holy icons, which he considers to be clearly contrary to the teaching of the Pre-Nicene Church. The following is a reply to Bercot in defence of the Orthodox teaching on icons.*

My reaction to Bercot's fourth tape, on icons, is similar to my reaction to his lecture on the Mother of God. He fails to understand that in the first three centuries of the Church's life, paganism was still the dominant religion, so that certain doctrines which were part of the apostolic tradition, but which the pagans would almost inevitably misinterpret if presented to them before they had acquired a firm faith in Christ, had to be "played down" or "kept under wraps" in the public teaching of the Church until paganism was finally defeated in the fourth century. One such doctrine was the Orthodox veneration of the Mother of God; another was the Orthodox veneration of icons, which pagans clearly were likely to confuse with their own worship of idols.

Let me begin with Bercot's argument that since the distinction between proskynesis (veneration, obeisance, bowing) and latreia (worship) is not found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, and since the prohibition of idol-worship in the Second Commandment uses the word proskynesis rather than latreia, the distinction cannot be used to justify the veneration, as opposed to the worship, of icons.

It is true that the *verbal* distinction between proskynesis and latreia is not clearly made in either the Old or the New Testaments. But this in no way proves that the *real* distinction between the honour and veneration shown to holy people and objects, on the one hand, and the absolute worship given to God alone, on the other, does not exist and is not implicit in the sacred text. Thus in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, while the words latreia and proskynesis are used, as always, indiscriminately to refer to the worship of God and the veneration of holy people, the angel is careful to admonish John not to treat him, the angel, as he would God, Whom alone he is commanded to worship (22.9).

Holy Apostles Convent writes: "The proskynesis given by a Christian to an icon is ontologically the same reverence he ought to give his fellow Christians, who are images of Christ; but it is ontologically different from the latreia which is due to God alone. It was St. John of Damascus who developed the word latreia to indicate the absolute worship of which only God is worthy. He describes the relative veneration given to the Theotokos, saints, or sacred objects (the Cross, relics, icons, books) by the word proskynesis. At the writing of the Septuagint such distinctions were not strictly observed. Latreia was seldom used and proskynesis was used to describe everything from worship of God to paying respect to a friend. Although modern usage of these terms (worship and veneration, etc.) are often interchanged as synonyms, it has been

critical to maintain their exact Orthodox use, consistent with the explanation of St. John of Damascus, since the iconoclast controversy. Although St. John the Theologian freely uses both 'worship' (latreia) and 'make obeisance' (proskynesis) with relation to God, he never speaks of offering 'worship' (latreia) for anyone or anything outside of the Deity (cf. Rev. 7.15, 22.3). Note that the KJV translates the Greek word prokynesis with 'worship' and latreia with 'serve'. (Cf. St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 9-11)."<sup>198</sup>

It quite often takes time for real theological distinctions to acquire precise verbal equivalents. Thus the early Fathers made little distinction between ousia (essence) and hypostasis (person); but from the later fourth century such a distinction became essential to the development of precision in Trinitarian and Christological theology. In the same way, the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council made use of the clear distinction made by St. John of Damascus between proskynesis and latreia in order to expose the falsehood of the iconoclast heresy. Unfortunately, this distinction was not made clear in the translation into Latin of the Acts of the Seventh Council, which led to Charlemagne rejecting the Council.<sup>199</sup>

As Bercot rightly says, we must not become prisoners of words, but penetrate to the realities behind the words. And the fact is that, whatever imprecisions of terminology may have existed at that time, the Old Testament Jews most certainly *did* make a practical distinction between veneration and worship. They venerated and bowed down to certain physical objects and people, while worshipping God alone. And they neither venerated nor worshipped the idols of the pagans.

The Jews' veneration of certain holy objects was central to their spiritual life, and was never at any time confused with idolatry. Was not the ark considered to be holy and the dwelling-place of God? And did not God confirm the veneration in which it was held by striking dead Uzzah, who had handled it without sufficient reverence? Again, did not Abraham and David bow down to men and angels? And did not God command Solomon to build a temple with images in it, so that "he overlaid the cherubim with gold and carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms"

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<sup>198</sup> Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, Colorado, *The Orthodox New Testament*, vol. 2, 1999, p. 557.

<sup>199</sup> Andrew Louth writes: "The Frankish court received a Latin version of the decrees of Nicaea II in which a central point was misrepresented: instead of an assertion that icons are not venerated with the worship owed to God, the Latin version seems to have asserted exactly the opposite, that icons are indeed venerated with the worship due to God alone. There is certainly scope for misunderstanding here, especially when dealing with a translated text, for the distinction that the iconodules had painstakingly drawn between a form of veneration expressing honour and a form of veneration expressing worship has no natural lexical equivalent. Proskynesis, which in Greek at this time probably carried a primary connotation of bowing down, prostration – a physical act – and latreia, the word used for worship exclusively due to God – a matter of intention – are derived from roots, which in their verbal forms are used as a hendiadys in the Greek version of the second commandment in the Septuagint (προσκυνήσεις... λατρέυσης: 'you shall not bow down... you shall not worship': Exod. 20.5). Latin equivalents add further confusion, not least because the Latin calque of proskynesis, adoratio, was the word that came to be used for latreia. But whatever the potential confusion, the distinction explicitly made by the Nicene synod simply collapsed into identity by the faulty translation that made its way to the Frankish court" (*Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007, pp. 86-87).

(I Kings 6.28-29)? And yet, if Bercot is right, and we cannot make any distinction between worship and veneration, this must be counted as impious idol-worship!

God not only blessed sacred art – that is, art whose products were deemed to be sacred – in the Old Testament. He clearly attached great importance to it by sending down grace upon the artist. Thus of Belzalel He said: “I have filled him with the Spirit of God with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting and in carving wood, for work in every craft” (Exodus 31.2-4). According to tradition, Christ Himself sent an image of Himself to King Abgar of Edessa, who treated it with great reverence. In the early Church, grace was given to specially commissioned artists, such as the Evangelist Luke, who painted several icons that have survived to the present day. According to British tradition, St. Joseph of Arimathea brought an icon of the Mother of God to Glastonbury, where it remained until it was destroyed by Protestant iconoclasts in the 1520s. We know from Eusebius’ *History of the Church* that the woman with an issue of blood whom Christ healed built a statue of Him which worked miracles for many years and was never condemned as idolatry by the Church. Archaeological excavations have unearthed Christian iconography from very early times. And of course the Roman catacombs are full of icons.

This evidence shows that in the early Church the tradition of iconography was present in embryo. What prevented the embryo from growing quickly into the fully mature adult of later Byzantine iconography was not any theological objection to sacred art as such, but, as we have said, the still living tradition of pagan idolatry. If we read the Wisdom of Solomon, chapters 12 to 15, we see that pagan idolatry involved: (i) the worship of inanimate objects as gods; (ii) the rejection of the true and living God; and (iii) various kinds of immorality (child sacrifice, temple prostitution) associated with the cult of the false gods. On all three counts, the veneration of icons must be sharply distinguished from pagan idolatry: (i) icons are neither gods, nor worshipped. (ii) they lead us closer to, rather than away from, the true God; and (iii) they have no connection with immoral practices, but rather stimulate purity and chastity. And yet there is no doubt that if the iconoclasts of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Protestants of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, failed to understand the distinction between icon-veneration and idol-worship, there must have been a similar temptation for pagan converts to the Faith in the early centuries.

“Just because the pagans used [images] in a foul way,” writes St. John of Damascus, “that is no reason to object to our pious practices. Sorcerers and magicians use incantations and the Church prays over catechumens, the former conjure up demons while the Church calls upon God to exorcise the demons. Pagans make images of demons which they address as gods, but we make images of God incarnate, and of His servants and friends, and with them we drive away the demonic hosts.”<sup>200</sup>

On one point, however, the Orthodox Christians and the pagans are, paradoxically, closer to each other than either are to the iconoclasts and Protestants. For both agree, contrary to the latter, that *matter can become spirit-bearing*. An image can become a

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<sup>200</sup> St. John of Damascus, *First Discourse on the Divine Images*, 24.

channel of the Holy Spirit, as in Christian iconography, or a channel of the evil spirit, as in witchcraft. The spittle of Christ, the shadow of Peter and the handkerchief of Paul all worked miracles because the Holy Spirit was in them; and all the sacraments involve material objects – water, oil, bread and wine. Similarly, the objects used by Satanists and witches also work “miracles” through the evil spirit that is in them; and their “sacraments”, too, always have a material element.

The Protestants, on the other hand, while not rejecting sacraments altogether, diminish their significance and the material element in them. Thus whereas the Lord clearly decrees that baptism is “through water and the spirit”, “born again Christians” usually dispense with the “water” part altogether, thinking they can receive the Spirit without it.

Since we are made of soul and body, the Word took on a soul and a body in order to save the whole of us – soul and body. Therefore the flesh and matter are no barrier to worship in the Spirit: rather, flesh and matter must become spiritualized, filled with the Spirit, in order to commune with the immaterial. And to this end the Flesh of the incarnate of God is given to us in the Eucharist.

It follows that it is not the materiality of icons as such that is critical, but the use to which they are put. The pagans, as St. John of Damascus said, use material images for evil uses, to commune with evil spirits. The Orthodox, however, use them for good uses, to commune with the One True God.

Bercot is guilty of serious distortion in his discussion of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. He says, for example, that almost all the Christians in the eighth century were Christians in name only. What an astonishingly sweeping and unjust judgement! Since he is an Anglican, let me point out that the seventh and eighth centuries were the golden age of the English Church, an age of the most abundant sanctity which has not been equalled in English history since then. And as the Venerable Bede witnesses, icons were definitely used in her worship. Thus when St. Augustine and his fellow missionaries set foot for the first time on English soil, they were preceded by an icon of Christ; and St. Benedict Biscop (seventh century) imported icons from Rome to Northumbria.

Again, Bercot claims that the Church at that time was completely dominated by the emperors – a false cliché which is proved by the simple fact that vast numbers of Christians, bishops, priests, monks and laypeople, were driven into exile or tortured precisely because they refused to accept the emperor’s iconoclasm. Let him read the bold language St. Theodore the Studite used to the emperor of his time – a boldness not, sadly, employed by the Anglicans against that other iconoclast “emperor” and founder of the Anglican church, Henry VIII.

Again, he claims that the icon-venerators were just as cruel to their opponents as the iconoclasts to them. In fact, an unprejudiced reading of the history of the time makes it clear that the persecutions were directed exclusively against the icon-venerators, and were every bit as cruel as those of the pagan Roman emperors. This shows that an evil spirit possessed the iconoclasts, just as an evil spirit possessed the

Protestant Anglicans who destroyed the monasteries and images and relics of the saints in sixteenth-century England.

The veneration of icons was the common practice of the whole Church in both East and West for the first millennium of Christian history at least. Consider, for example, the thoroughly Orthodox reasoning of the English Abbot Aelfric, who lived in about 1000: "Truly Christians should bow down to the holy cross in the Saviour's name, because we do not possess the cross on which He suffered. However, its likeness is holy, and we always bow down to it when we pray, to the mighty Lord Who suffered for men. And that cross is a memorial of His great Passion, holy through Him, even though it grew in a forest. We always honour it, to honour Christ, Who freed us by it with His love. We always thank Him for that in this life."<sup>201</sup>]

Iconoclasm is a recurrent temptation in the history of the Church. Since the devil hates God, he hates all those who are filled with the grace of God, and all those holy things which are channels of His grace. That is why he inspired the Muslims and the iconoclasts, the Bogomils and the Albigensians, the Protestants and the Masons and the Soviets, to destroy icons and crosses and relics and churches. And that is why the Church anathematizes the iconoclasts and iconoclasm as a most dangerous heresy. For let us not think that we do God service while destroying those things in which God dwells and through which He helps us to come close to Him. If we think that God *cannot* dwell in material things, or work miracles through holy icons and relics, then by implication we are denying the reality of the Incarnation, in which God not only worked *through* matter, but *became* flesh. That is why the main argument in defence of icons is based on the reality of the Incarnation. If the immaterial Word was made flesh, and seen and touched, why cannot we make images of His human body, and touch and kiss them? And if the burning of the national flag is considered treason by those who love their country, why should not the destroying or dishonouring of the holy icons be considered blasphemy by those who love their Lord?

As St. Basil the Great says, "the honour accorded to the image passes to its prototype", so that the icon is a kind of door (St. Stephen the Younger) opening up into the world of the Spirit. This is not a pagan principle, as Bercot claims; and if the pagans have something analogous, it only goes to show that in this, as in many other ways, false religion simply apes the true. To put it in a more philosophical way, we may say that this is the principle of the *symbolical* or *analogical* nature of reality, whereby lower-order realities reflect and participate in higher-order realities, as the light of the moon reflects and participates in the light of the sun. The Catholic West began to lose this symbolical understanding of reality when Charlemagne rejected the veneration of icons at the council of Frankfurt in 794; and the Protestant West lost it entirely when it replaced symbolic truth with scientific truth, the appreciation of qualities with the analysis of quantities. In this respect, the Protestant-scientific revolution represents not so much the triumph of reason over superstition as the beginning of a descent into something even lower than paganism, as Dostoyevsky pointed out - the descent into *atheism*, the complete loss of faith in spiritual reality.

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<sup>201</sup> Abbot Aelfric, *Catholic Homilies*, II, 18, On the Finding of the Cross; quoted by Fr. Andrew Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the English Tradition*, English Orthodox Trust, 1995, pp. 180-181.

Correspondingly, the return to icon-veneration in the West would represent the beginning of a return to true faith, the faith that ascends in and through material things to the immaterial God.

I end with a quotation from a holy Father of the Pre-Nicene Church, Hieromartyr Methodius, Bishop of Patara: “Even though the images of the emperor are not all made from gold or silver or precious metals, they are always honoured by everyone. Men are not honouring the materials from which they are made; they do not choose to honour one image more than another because it is made from a more valuable substance; they honour the image whether it is made of cement or bronze. If you should mock any of them, you will not be judged differently for mocking plaster or gold, but for showing contempt to your king and lord. We make golden images of God’s angels, principalities and powers, to give glory and honour to Him.”<sup>202</sup>

*June 20 / July 3, 2004; revised May 13/26, 2010.*

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<sup>202</sup> St. Methodius of Patara, *Second Sermon on the Resurrection*.

## 14. A SERMON IN PRAISE OF THE BRITISH SAINTS

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Congratulations, dear brothers and sisters, on our new feast of all Saints of the British Isles! Our numbers are relatively few, and yet our church today is full as at no other time. For, as we sang in the kontakion of the feast: *Today the choir of the Saints who pleased God in our land standeth before us in church and invisibly prayeth to God for us.* As we heard in the litany that we chanted yesterday, there are many hundreds of such saints whom we know by name. And many hundreds more whose names are known to God alone.

Let me say a few words about how this feast came into being.

Holy Orthodoxy came to our land at the time of the holy apostles: St. Peter, according to Greek tradition, was in England when he received the command from an angel to go to Rome to suffer for the faith; St. Simon the Zealot preached in England before being martyred in the Caucasus; and Righteous Joseph of Arimathea with twelve companions founded the first church dedicated to the Mother of God at Glastonbury.

In the Roman period, the Church developed relatively slowly in Britain. However, by the early fourth century there was a large basilica in London, and we already had our first martyrs – St. Alban, protomartyr of Britain, SS. Julius and Aaron of Caerleon in Wales, and St. Augulus, bishop of Augusta (probably London). Moreover, it was from Roman Britain that Christian statehood took its origin, when St. Constantine was proclaimed emperor by the Roman legions in York in 306, exactly 1700 years ago.

When the Roman legions left Britain in 410, the Church entered a very difficult period, with invasions of barbarians from the north, the east and the north-west. Many British Christians fled to the west, where “the last of the Romans”, Ambrosius Aurelianus, and his successor, the famous King Arthur, fought a stubborn rearguard action against the pagan Saxons.

It was in the West that we see the flourishing of the Celtic Church, which in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries produced so many of our most famous monastic and missionary saints: Patrick and David, Nectan, Samson and Columba.

Meanwhile, however, not wishing that the Angles and Saxons of Eastern Britain should perish, the Lord enlightened the heart of St. Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, to send a missionary expedition to “the land of the Angels”. He wished to lead this expedition himself, but was forced in the end to send St. Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury. By Christmas, 597, he and his band of forty monks, preceded by an icon of the Lord, had converted many thousands, including King Ethelbert of Kent, to the Orthodox Faith.

With the help of foreign missionaries from Ireland, France, Italy, Greece and North Africa, the Anglo-Saxons were soon producing great saints of their own: Cuthbert,

Bede, Chad, Cedd, Guthlac, Aldhelm, Egwin, Wilfrid, Eanswythe, Mildred, Etheldreda and many others. And in the eighth century, a great wave of English missionaries led by St. Boniface, Archbishop of Mainz, undertook the conversion of their kinsfolk in Holland and Germany. The invasion of the Vikings in the ninth century produced a great number of martyrs and the near-extinction of Anglo-Saxon Christian civilization. But under King Alfred the Great and his successors, the Church recovered all the ground she had lost to the pagans. By the time of King Edgar the Peaceable (+975) and St. Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury (+988), the English Orthodox kingdom embraced Saxons, Celts and Danes in a multi-ethnic state that was a model of what a Christian kingdom can and should be.

However, the murder of St. Edward the Martyr in 979 signalled the beginning of the end of English Orthodoxy: a second wave of Viking invasions led to the conquest of the kingdom by the Danish King Canute in 1016. Although he and much of his Scandinavian empire embraced English Christianity, and although King Edward the Confessor restored the native English dynasty in 1042, corruption from within and the pressure of the now-heretical Roman papacy from without was undermining the foundations of English piety. On October 14, 1066 – the most tragic day in English history – the last English Orthodox king, Harold II Godwinson, was killed at Hastings by Duke William “the Bastard” of Normandy, who had been blessed to conquer “schismatic” England by Pope Alexander II. During the next four years English Orthodoxy was destroyed by fire and sword: all the bishops were removed and replaced by French papists, the cathedrals were destroyed to make way for Norman ones, the relics of the English saints were abused, and perhaps 20% of the population was killed. The cream of the aristocracy fled to Constantinople and Kiev, where the daughter of King Harold married Great Prince Vladimir Monomakh of Kiev.

And so the thousand-year history of English Orthodoxy came to an end. The next thousand years were to see the rise of England to world power and the most extensive empire the world has ever seen. But “what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but lose his own soul?” England had lost her soul, her Orthodox faith. And now, at the beginning of the third millennium of Christian history, she is morally and spiritually as low as she has ever been.

An illustration of how far we are from the traditions of our ancestors can be found in today’s newspapers, where it is reported that the Synod of the Anglican Church has decided to “demote” St. George from his status as patron saint of England because his existence is supposedly doubtful. Some want to make St. Alban our patron saint instead. But while St. Alban is a most worthy candidate, the Anglicans appear to have forgotten that already in 758 Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury and his Synod appointed three patrons of the English Church and land: Saints Gregory the Great, Augustine of Canterbury and Boniface of Mainz, three holy missionary bishops...

Nevertheless, in the twentieth century there was the beginning of a return of Orthodoxy to the English land. In 1922 the diocese of Thyateira and Great Britain was founded under the Ecumenical Patriarchate. And a few years later Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) handed the archpastoral staff to the Russian Bishop Nicholas of London (+1932).

After the Second World War Archbishop John (Maximovich) of Western Europe appointed Bishop Nikodem to look after the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia, and himself restored St. Alban and St. Patrick to the calendar of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Renowned missionary that he was, Archbishop John (who was canonized in 1994) knew that the renewal of the veneration of the Western Saints was a vital first step to the renewal of Orthodoxy in the western lands. And in September, 2000, following a petition of our English Orthodox parish, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church in Suzdal blessed the creation of a new Feast of the Saints of the British Isles on the Third Sunday after Pentecost, together with the service to the saints that we used today.

Why is the restoration of the veneration of the British Saints so important for us?

The first reason is that the British saints, having been appointed by God to intercede for their native land, are an indispensable source of strength and grace. What builder would set about building a house while ignoring the fact that its foundations have already been laid, solid and true, in the only place fitting for construction? And if the Church as a whole is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2.20), the Church in the British Isles has already been built upon the foundation of her apostles and other saints. Of course, the saints intercede for us even when we do not ask for their prayers. But by honouring them and asking for their prayers in a conscious, reverend and ardent manner, as we have today, we attract the waters of salvation to our parched land and further our personal salvation and regeneration.

Secondly, our faithfulness to the British saints is a criterion of the correctness of our struggle in Orthodoxy. The British saints warred against paganism, Arianism, Pelagianism, Monothelism, Roman Catholicism and other heresies; and the Russian missionary bishops who have worked in Britain in our time have warred against the contemporary heresies of Protestantism, Ecumenism and Sergianism. By venerating them, we affirm their faith and protect ourselves against falling into the heresies they condemned.

Thirdly, by venerating the saints of our native land we give expression to an ecclesiastical patriotism which is not only not nationalistic in a pejorative sense, but actually reinforces the unity of the Church of Christ throughout the world and in all nations. For the true object of worship of all the saints is the same: God, Who “is wondrous in His saints” of all nations, sanctifying them all with the same Holy Spirit. And so by venerating the saints of our native land we come closer to understanding and loving the saints of other lands; in venerating them we come closer to the God Who unites all in one Body and one worship, in the one “Church of the saints” (Psalms 149.1) and in the one “hymn of all His saints” (Psalms 148.14), so that we are now “no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2.19).

Therefore let us be unstinting in our praise of the British saints, and untiring in our efforts to imitate their faith and love of God, their single-minded devotion to “the one

thing necessary", "the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6.33). Then we will have good hope of joining them in the choir of all the inhabitants of heaven, in that unity-in-diversity which God the Holy Spirit created when He descended in tongues of fire on the apostles at Pentecost. Then the prayer of the Great High Priest will be one step closer to fulfilment: "That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (John 17.21).

*Third Sunday After Pentecost, 2006.  
Feast of All Saints of the British Isles.*

## **15. WHAT DID THE MARTYRS DIE FOR?**

The Apostle Paul writes: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things..." (Philippians 4.8). In the terrible twentieth century, there was nothing more true, more pure and more lovely than the feats of the holy new martyrs and confessors of Russia. Their faith, their virtue, their love of God and man warms hearts grown cold from the icy breath of the prince of this world and protects them from the power of satan. Truly, with their heart they believed unto righteousness, and with their mouth they confessed unto salvation (Romans 10.10). And so they are with the Lord, Who said: "Whosoever shall confess in Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father Who is in heaven" (Matthew 10.32).

When we look down the roll-call of Christian martyrdom, we are struck by the great variety of reasons for which the martyrs suffered. Some were killed for what were clearly reasons of faith - because they confessed the One God against the pagans, or Christ against the Jews, or one or another dogma of the faith against the heretics. But others suffered to defend their chastity (e.g. the Martyr Thomais), or because they rebuked injustice (e.g. St. John the Forerunner), or because they refused to return evil for evil (e.g. Saints Boris and Gleb), or simply because they were *there*, unwitting obstacles to the impious designs of evil men (e.g. the 14,000 innocents of Bethlehem, St. Edward the Martyr). The Holy Church accepts all of them as martyrs because, even if they were not killed specifically for their confession of the faith, nevertheless they died for Christ, being true Christians who suffered an unjust death at the hands of the evil one. They witnessed for Christ in the sense that they imitated Him in life and death, and thereby witnessed to the power of His Resurrection.

The holy new martyrs of Russia present a similar apparent variety in the reasons for their martyrdom. This has led to some to wonder whether they are all really martyrs for Christ. In particular, some have cast doubt on the sanctity of at least some of the Russian new martyrs and confessors on the grounds that they suffered for "political" reasons, for their pronouncements against the crimes of Soviet power or in favour of monarchism.

### **Martyrs or Political Criminals?**

Now we are familiar with this argument in relation to the Tsar-Martyr Nicholas, an argument that was well refuted by Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles: "We will speak to the point, in a way that befits an honest, believing Christian. The Tsar-Martyr, and his family as well, suffered for Christian piety. He was opposed to the amorality and godlessness of the communists, both on principle and by virtue of his position - on principle, because he was a deeply believing Orthodox Christian; by virtue of his position, because he was a staunch Orthodox Monarch. *For this he was killed.* To ask him anything concerning the faith was unnecessary, because he gave witness before the tormentors to his steadfastness in Christian principles by his entire previous life and works, and especially by his profoundly Christian endurance of the moral torments of his imprisonment. He was a staunch defender and protector of the

Christian faith, preventing the God-haters from beginning a vicious persecution against believers in Christ and against the whole Orthodox Church. *For this reason he was removed and slain...*

"It is also known from witnesses still alive that prior to the Revolution it was proposed that the Tsar repeal the strictures against anti-Christian secret societies, and it was threatened that if he refused he would lose his throne and his life. The sovereign firmly refused this proposal. Therefore, they deprived him of his throne and killed him. Thus, he suffered *precisely* for the faith."<sup>203</sup>

However, it is not only the Tsar's canonization that has been labelled as a "political" act, an attempt to rehabilitate a "political criminal" or political programme. Since so many of the non-royal martyrs were also condemned as "political criminals", it is necessary to defend them, too, from this charge.

Thus A. Zhuravsky writes in his book on the martyrs of the Kazan diocese in 1918: "To the present day many of our contemporaries have preserved the conviction that the majority of those clergy who suffered in 1918 suffered torments not so much for the faith as for their 'political' pronouncements, which were expressed in Church sermons against the violence of atheism, of the Bolshevik terror, of the trampling on the norms of Christian morality and even against Soviet power. Therefore there exists the opinion that it is not worth canonizing this or that group of martyrs only because they suffered for 'political crimes', or, on the contrary, suffered as it were by chance, only because they happened to be servants of the cult. In the latter case, it is said, the very fact of 'witnessing' for the truth of Christ is absent."<sup>204</sup>

Zhuravsky goes on to give an effective refutation of these charges: "As regards those who 'suffered by chance', let us point out only that everything happens in accordance with the Providence of God and the 'witness' is priesthood itself, clerical rank, belonging to Orthodoxy, for which these righteous ones were doomed to torments by the Godless. Let us also remember that since the times of the persecutions against the first Christians the Eastern Church has maintained the position that the single fact of martyrdom communicates holiness. Moreover, if we turn to the Lives of the Saints, we shall find tens of short descriptions of 'facts' of martyrdom, when both the names of the saints and the circumstances of *their* martyric deaths remained unknown. For the first Christians it was clear - if the Christian died in the faith and from the pagans, then he died for the faith and for Christ, and consequently, was worthy of veneration, as having already acquired for himself the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. For that reason the Orthodox Church chants in the troparion to the martyrs: 'In your sufferings you acquired unfading crowns...'

"As regards politics, things are not quite so unambiguous. If we turn to the history of the persecutions against the first Christians, we discover to our amazement the wonderful similarity of the position (and reasons for persecution) of the Christians in

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<sup>203</sup> Archbishop Anthony, "The Glorification of the New Martyrs of Russia is Our Sacred Moral Duty", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 29, N 3, May-June, 1979, pp. 24, 25.

<sup>204</sup> Zhuravsky, *Zhizneopisaniya Novykh Muchenikov Kazanskikh God 1918*, Moscow, 1996, pp. 4-5.

the conditions of the Roman empire and of the Soviet state. According to Roman legislation, the Christians were persecuted, not for their convictions (for Roman law did not punish convictions, but actions), but for their refusal to bow down to the cult of the emperors. And the Christians were judged as hostes Caesari and hostes rei publicae, that is, as political prisoners, opponents of the authority of Caesar, and as 'enemies of the people'! In the trials of the Christians three main accusations were brought forward: that they were opponents of the state religion (sacrilegium - godless ones), as non-venerators of the cult of Caesar (crimen laesae majestatis) and as secret plotters (they formed secret societies). But that is exactly what we see in the 20th century! The Orthodox Christians and the clergy were also judged, not for their religious convictions (after all, freedom of confession was guaranteed by the Constitution), but for 'political' anti-Soviet activity, for refusing to bow down to the idol of the Bolsheviks' dreams. And so is it the case that the first Christians, who refused to bow down to the statue of Caesar and rebuked the pagan abomination of idol-worship, differ so much from those pastors of 1918, who rebuked another idol (but also pagan), and other disorders (but of the same kind and nature), witnessing their zeal for their faith with every sermon? As Prudentius, the Christian poet and hymnographer, justly remarked: '*Despising the temple* (the pagan temple - A.Zh.) *means rejecting the emperors.*' But we can make almost the same remark with regard to the 20th century: Despising (that is, rejecting) state atheism (Godlessness, materialism) means rejecting the revolution (from the point of view of the authorities such a person was a 'counter-revolutionary'). Already from the end of the 1920s Christians began to be accused of, amongst other things, secret plots aimed at the overthrow of the existing system. Let us note that the latter had much in common with the Roman empire. In the Roman empire there was no pagan church: '*That which, among the Christians, related to the sphere of Church activity, in Rome related to the sphere of activity of the state. The priests, pontifexes and flamens were state functionaries; therefore by dint of historical necessity that challenge which the Christian Church hurled at the pagan faith and to which the pagan church had to reply was accepted by the state.*'<sup>205</sup>

"But, you know, the Soviet state did not have its own 'institution of the Church'. The role of that institution was played by the communist ideology, whose 'ideological clergy' (commissars, party secretaries, popularisers of 'Marxist-Leninist' philosophy, etc.) were also employed by the state. The Soviet state, like the Roman empire (its much more likeable forerunner), took the challenge of the Church of Christ to the bearers of Godless (antichristian) ideology as a challenge to itself, a challenge to Bolshevism, a challenge to the initiators of the mindless plan to erect a new tower of Babylon of the future. And insofar as the state authorities had religious functions, it descended with all its strength upon its 'rival' and rebuker - the Orthodox Church. All this completely explains why we cannot reject the fact of martyrdom solely because at its base their lies the authorities' declaration of the passion-bearer's 'political guilt'. Every case must be examined individually."<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Bolotov, V.V. *Lektsii po Istorii Drevnej Tserkvi*, Saint Petersburg, 1907, reprinted in Moscow, 1994, volume 2, pp. 14-15.

<sup>206</sup> Zhuravsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-7.

## Orthodoxy in the Soviet Union

Zhuravsky's point is well taken. And yet, in order to understand what precisely it was that the Russian New Martyrs died for, and the great difficulties they had in defining their relationship to the State, it is necessary to consider the *differences* between the situation of the confessing Christians in Old Rome and in the Soviet Union. For since Christ had been born in the Roman Empire and had explicitly commanded the giving to Caesar of what was Caesar's, and the Apostle Paul had had no hesitation in using his Roman citizenship to defend himself against the Jews, the Roman Empire was natural and lawful for Roman Christians in a way that the Soviet state, for many powerful reasons, could never be for Russian Christians.

Thus Tertullian once said to the Roman pagans: "Caesar is more truly ours (than yours) because he was put into power by our God".<sup>207</sup> Emperor-worship was not part of the original constitution of the Roman Empire; such famous emperors as Tiberius, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius explicitly rejected it; and in the case of those who tried to enforce it, such as Nero and Domitian, it was in essence an *import* from the eastern pagan theocracies, an heretical *aberration* from the fundamental Roman conception, which was that the emperor is subject both to his own laws, of which he is the main custodian, and to the laws of God, being emperor "by the will of God" and not "as a god". "In fact," as Professor Sordi writes, "the imperial cult had never been imposed formally, or even encouraged, by any of the emperors to whom the Christian apologists from Aristides to Quadratus, from Melito to Athenagoras, were addressing their works."<sup>208</sup>

Thus the early Christians could quite clearly and sincerely distinguish the honour in which they held the institution of the empire and the emperor himself from the disgust they felt for the cult of emperor-worship during the few reigns in which it was imposed; which is why they refused to offer incense to the emperor's statue, while continuing to pay taxes and carry out military service.

Soviet power, however, was established by the overthrow of the Christian Roman Empire and in direct opposition to everything which that Empire stood for. Unlike the pagan Romans, the Bolsheviks did not acknowledge that their power had been established "by the will of God"; nor did they consider themselves subject to any laws, human or Divine. Of course, no society can exist without laws, and the Bolsheviks did create a code of laws; but since the essence of their state was "the mystery of lawlessness" (II Thessalonians 2.7), they had no compunction in breaking their own laws whenever it suited them - which, in the case of relations with the Church and Christians, meant most of the time.

This placed the Christians before a most acute dilemma. Their first instinct - an instinct which found expression above all in the decrees of the Local Council of the Russian Church - was to refuse any kind of recognition for the Soviet state. Thus on November 11, 1917 the Council addressed a letter to the faithful, parts of which hinted

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<sup>207</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 33.1.

<sup>208</sup> Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 176.

at a complete rejection of the Bolshevik regime: "To our grief, as yet no government has arisen which is sufficiently one with the people to deserve the blessing of the Orthodox Church." Again, on January 19, 1918 Patriarch Tikhon issued his famous anathema against the Bolsheviks and their co-workers, adjuring all Christians "*not to commune with such outcasts of the human race in any matter whatsoever*". A few days later, the Council endorsed the Patriarch's anathema in even stronger language.

This first instinct of the Russian Church in the face of Soviet power has never been extinguished among Russian Christians. It continued to manifest itself both at home and abroad (for example, in the First All-Emigration Council of the Russian Church Abroad in 1921), both in the early and the later decades of Soviet power (for example, among the "passportless" Christians of the Catacomb Church). However, it was very soon tempered by the realisation that publicly and on a large scale such outright rejection of Soviet power could be sustained only by *war* - and after the defeat of the White Armies in the Civil War there were no armies left to carry on the fight against the Bolsheviks.

Therefore from the early 1920s a new attitude towards Soviet power began to evolve among the Tikhonite Christians: loyalty towards it as a political institution ("for all power is from God"), and acceptance of such of its laws as could be interpreted in favour of the Church (for example, the law on the separation of Church and State), combined with rejection of its atheistic world-view (large parts of which the renovationists, by contrast, accepted).

In essence, this new attitude involved accepting, contrary to the decrees of the Local Council of 1917-18, that the Soviet State was not Antichrist, but Caesar - no worse in principle than the Caesars of Ancient Rome. Therefore some things were due to it - "to Caesar the things that are Caesar's". This presupposed that it was possible, in the Soviet Union as in Ancient Rome, to draw a clear line between politics and religion.

But in practice, even more than in theory, this line proved very hard to draw. For to the Bolsheviks there was no such dividing line; to them, *everything* had to be in accordance with their ideology, there could be no room for disagreement, no private spheres into which the state and its ideology did not pry. Unlike most of the Roman emperors, who allowed the Christians to order their own lives in their own way so long as they showed loyalty to the state (which, as we have seen, the Christians were very eager to do), the Bolsheviks insisted in imposing their own ways upon the Christians in every sphere: in family life (civil marriage only, divorce on demand, children spying on parents), in education (compulsory Marxism), in economics (dekulakization, collectivization), in military service (the oath of allegiance to Lenin), in science (Lysenkoism), in art (socialist realism), and in religion (the requisitioning of valuables, registration, commemoration of the authorities at the Liturgy, reporting of confessions by the priests). Resistance to any one of these demands was counted as "anti-Soviet behaviour", i.e. *political* disloyalty. Therefore it was no use protesting one's political loyalty to the regime if one refused to accept just one of these demands. According to the Soviets, such a person was an *enemy of the people*.

In view of this, it is not surprising that many Christians came to the conclusion that, as the English saying goes, "hung for a penny, hung for a pound" - it was less morally debilitating to reject the whole regime that made such impossible demands, since the penalty would be the same whether one asserted one's loyalty to it or not. And if this meant living as an outlaw, so be it. Such a rejection of, or flight from the state had precedents in Russian history; and from as early as 1918 we find priests, such as Hieromartyr Timothy Strelkov of Mikhailovka (+1930) and bishops, such as Hieroconfessor Amphilochius of Yeniseisk (+1946), adopting this course.<sup>209</sup>

Nevertheless, this path required enormous courage, strength and self-sacrifice, not only for oneself but also (which was more difficult) for one's family or flock. It is therefore not surprising that, already during the Civil War, the Church began to soften her anti-Soviet rhetoric and try once more to draw the line between politics and religion. This is what Patriarch Tikhon tried to do in the later years of his patriarchate - with, it must be said, only mixed results.

Thus his decision to allow some, but not all of the Church's valuables to be requisitioned by the Bolsheviks in 1922 not only did not bring help to the starving of the Volga, as was the intention, but led to many clashes between believers and the authorities and many deaths of believers. For, as the holy Elder Nectary of Optina said: "You see now, the patriarch gave the order to give up all valuables from the churches. But they belonged to the Church!"<sup>210</sup>

The decision to negotiate and compromise with the Bolsheviks - in transgression of the decrees of the 1917-18 Council - only brought confusion and division to the Church. Thus on the right wing of the Church there were those, like Archbishop Theodore of Volokolamsk, who thought that the patriarch had already gone too far; while on the left wing there were those, like Archbishop Hilarion of Verey, who wanted to go further. The basic problem was that the compromises were always one-sided; the Bolsheviks always took and never gave; their aim was not peaceful co-existence, but the complete conquest of the Church.

However, the Patriarchal Church remained Orthodox under Patriarch Tikhon and his successor, Metropolitan Peter, for two major reasons: first, because the leaders of the Church did not sacrifice the lives of their fellow Christians for the sake of their own security or the security of the Church organization; and secondly, because, while the Soviet regime was recognised to be, in effect, Caesar rather than Pharaoh, no further concessions were made with regard to the communist *ideology*.

### **The Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius**

But everything changed in 1927 with the notorious declaration of the deputy head of the Russian Church, Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhni-Novgorod. By declaring that

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<sup>209</sup> See Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), *Tserkov' Katakombnaya na Zemlye Rossijskoj*, 1980 (typescript).

<sup>210</sup> Matushka Evgenia Grigorievna Rymarenko, "Remembrances of Optina Staretz Hieroschemamonk Nektary", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 36, N 3, May-June, 1986, p. 39.

the Soviet regime's joys were the Church's joys, and its sorrows the Church's sorrows, Sergius in effect declared an *identity of aims* between the Church and the State. And this was not just a lie, but *a lie against the faith*, a concession to the communist *ideology*. In fact, it implied that communism as such was good, and its victory to be welcomed.

Moreover, Sergius followed this up by committing *the sin of Judas*; he placed all those who disagreed with him under ban and in effect handed them over to the GPU as "counter-revolutionaries". Far from "saving the Church", as he claimed, he condemned its finest members to torture and death. And then his successors in the present-day Moscow Patriarchate (MP) followed this up with *the sin of Pilate* - the criminal indifference to the truth manifest in their participation - under pressure from the communists as Pilate had been from the Jews - in the "heresy of heresies", ecumenism.

In order to protect the flock of Christ from Sergius' apostasy, the leaders of the True Church had to draw once more the line between politics and religion. One approach was to distinguish between *physical* opposition to the regime and *spiritual* opposition to it. Thus Archbishop Barlaam of Perm wrote that physical opposition was not permitted, but spiritual opposition was obligatory.<sup>211</sup> This criterion allowed Christians quite sincerely to reject the charge of "counter-revolution" - if "counter-revolution" were understood to mean *physical* rebellion. The problem was, as we have seen, that the Bolsheviks understood "counter-revolution" in a much wider sense...

Another, still more basic problem was that it still left the question whether Soviet power was from God or not unresolved. If Soviet power was from God, it should be counted as Caesar and should be given what was Caesar's. But bitter experience had shown that this "Caesar" wanted to seat himself in the temple as if he were God (II Thessalonians 2.4). So was he not in fact Antichrist, whose power is not from God, but from Satan (Revelation 13.2), whose power *allowed*, but by no means *established* by God for the punishment of sinners? If so, then there was no alternative but to flee into the catacombs, rejecting totally the government of Satan on earth.

In the early years after Metropolitan Sergius' declaration, many Catacomb Christians, while *in practice* not surrendering what was God's to the Soviets, *in theory* could not make up their minds whether the Soviet regime was Caesar or Antichrist.

Thus Hieromartyr Joseph (Gavrilov), superior of Raithu Desert (+1930), confessed at his interrogation: "I have never, and do not now, belong to any political parties. I consider Soviet power to be given from God, but a power that is from God must fulfil the will of God, and Soviet power does not fulfil the will of God. Therefore it is not from God, but from Satan. It closes churches, mocks the holy icons, teaches children atheism, etc. That is, it fulfills the will of Satan... It is better to die with faith than without faith. I am a real believer, faith has saved me in battles, and I hope that in the future faith will save me from death. I firmly believe in the Resurrection of Christ and

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<sup>211</sup> Cited in William Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917-1970*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 64.

His Second Coming. I have not gone against the taxes, since it says in Scripture: 'To Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'<sup>212</sup>

From this confession, impressive though it is, it is not clear whether Hieromartyr Joseph recognised the Soviet regime as Caesar, and therefore from God, or as Antichrist, and therefore from Satan. In the end the Bolsheviks resolved his dilemma for him. They shot him, and therefore showed that they were - Antichrist.

In the Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR), meanwhile, a consensus had emerged that the Soviet regime was not Caesar, but Antichrist. This was the position of, for example, Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, Metropolitan Innocent of Peking and Archbishop Averky of Jordanville. As Archbishop Theophan put it in the same critical year of 1927: "The Bolshevik authorities are in essence antichristian, and there is no way in which they can be recognised as being established by God."<sup>213</sup>

The same conclusion was reached by the Catacomb Church inside Russia. Thus the Catacomb Council of Ust-Kut, Siberia, in July, 1937, decreed:

"1. The Sacred Council forbids the faithful to receive communion from the clergy legalized by the anti-Christian State.

"2. It has been revealed to the Sacred Council by the Spirit that the anathema-curse hurled by his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon is valid, and all priests and Church-servers who have dared to consider it as an ecclesiastical mistake or political tactic are placed under its power and bound by it.

"3. To all those who discredit and separate themselves from the Sacred Council of 1917-18 - **Anathema!**"<sup>214</sup>

Thus we come to the conclusion that the confessing Christians of the Soviet Union suffered and died precisely for Christ and against the Antichrist. This was not a political struggle because the Antichrist is not a purely political figure. In his kingdom there is no sustainable boundary between religion and politics; everything is *both* religion *and* politics; for he claims to be both *lord* (of the bodies) and *god* (of the souls) of his subjects. This being so, it is impossible to resist the Antichrist in one sphere while cooperating with him in another - the totalitarian man-god must be rejected *totally*. It is the glory of the holy new Martyrs and Confessors of Russia that, having exhausted all attempts to achieve some kind of honourable modus vivendi with the

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<sup>212</sup> *Novye Prepodobnomuchenki Raifskiye*, Moscow, 1997, p. 17.

<sup>213</sup> *Pis'ma Arkhiepiskopa Feofana Poltavskago i Pereyaslavskago*, Jordanville, 1976. Cf. Archbishop Averky, "Mir nevidimij - sily byezplotniya", *Slova i rechi*, Jordanville, 1975, vol. 2, pp. 593-95; Metropolitan Innocent, "O Sovyetskoj Vlasti", in Archbishop Nikon (Rklitsky), *Zhizneopisaniye Blazhenneishago Antoniya, Mitropolitan Kievskago i Galitskago, izdaniye Severo-Amerikanskoj i Kanadskoj eparkhii*, 1960, volume 6, pp. 168-172.

<sup>214</sup> Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), personal communication; B. Zakharov, *Russkaya Mysl'*, September 7, 1949; "Vazhnoye postanovleniye katakombnoj tserkvi", *Pravoslavnyaya Rus'*, N 18, 1949. According to one version, there is a fifth canon: "To all those who support the renovationist and sergianist heresy - **Anathema**". See Bishop Ambrose (von Sievers), "Katakombnaya Tserkov': Ust'-Kutskij Sobor 1937g.", *Russkoye Pravoslaviye*, N 4 (8), 1997, pp. 20-24.

Antichrist (more often than not, for the sake of others rather than themselves), when they were finally presented with the stark choice between the man-god and the God-Man, they boldly and unswervingly chose the latter, proclaiming: "*Thou art my Lord and my God*" (John 20.28).

### **Martyrdom and the Moscow Patriarchate**

In November, 1981 the Russian Church Abroad, meeting in New York, canonised the holy new martyrs and confessors of Russia. This act proved to be very popular not only in the Russian Church Abroad and the Catacomb Church, but also among ordinary believers in the Moscow Patriarchate – that church organisation founded by Metropolitan Sergius and Stalin which had become the “official church” of the Soviet Union since 1943. Over the next twenty years, under pressure from these believers in its own ranks, the MP began to follow the Russian Church Abroad’s example, glorifying first some of the major martyrs who died before 1927, such as Great Princess Elizabeth and Patriarch Tikhon, and then, in its “Jubilee Council” of the year 2000 – the Royal Martyrs and several of the martyrs who died after 1927.

How was it possible for the MP to glorify Tsar Nicholas, which, following communist ideology, it had condemned as a “blood-sucker” for so many years?

The decision to glorify Tsar Nicholas was a compromise, reflecting the very different attitudes towards them in the patriarchate. The Royal Martyrs were called “passion-bearers” rather than “martyrs”, and it was made clear that they were being glorified, not for the way in which they lived their lives, but for the meekness with which they faced their deaths. This allowed the anti-monarchists to feel that Nicholas was still the “bloody Nicholas” of Soviet mythology, and that it was “Citizen Romanov” rather than “Tsar Nicholas” who had been glorified - the ordinary layman stripped of his anointing rather than the Anointed of God fulfilling the fearsomely difficult and responsible role of “him who restrains” the coming of the Antichrist. Of course, even if the Tsar had committed the terrible sins he was accused of (nobody denies that he made certain political mistakes), this would in no way affect his status if he was truly, as all the Orthodox believe, martyred for the sake of the truth. After all, many of the martyrs lived sinful lives, and some even temporarily fell away from the truth. But their sins were wiped out in the blood of their martyrdom. However, this elementary dogma was ignored by the MP, which wished, even while glorifying the Tsar, in a subtle way to humiliate him at the same time.

How was it possible for the MP to glorify the martyrs after 1927, when these rejected Metropolitan Sergius and were condemned by him as graceless schismatics - for example, Hieromartyr Victor of Glazov (+1934), whose relics are incorrupt and wonderworking, but who said that Metropolitan Sergius’ betrayal was “worse than heresy”? After all, as late as 1992 “Patriarch” Alexis II was declaring that the Catacomb Church was uncanonical.<sup>215</sup> How could an “uncanonical” and “graceless” Church produce martyrs?

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<sup>215</sup> *Nedelya*, N 2, 1/1992.

The short answer is that, as in the case of the Royal Martyrs, the people already venerated them, and it was impossible to deny their manifest holiness any longer... However, since to glorify only the true martyrs would be to admit that they themselves were schismatics, the MP hierarchs proceeded also to glorify a series of *false martyrs* – hierarchs and priests who remained in communion with Metropolitan Sergius and shared in his sin of Judas. Thus was fulfilled the prediction of Fr. Oleg Oreshkin: "I think that some of those glorified will be from the sergianists so as to deceive the believers. 'Look,' they will say, 'he is a saint, a martyr, in the Heavenly Kingdom, and he recognized the declaration of Metropolitan Sergius, so you must be reconciled with it and its fruits.' This will be done not in order to glorify martyrdom for Christ's sake, but in order to confirm the sergianist politics."<sup>216</sup>

This position had been anticipated by "Patriarch" Alexis II in 1993, when he declared: wrote: "I believe that our martyrs and righteous ones, regardless of whether they followed Metropolitan Sergius or did not agree with his position, pray together for us."<sup>217</sup> It became official at the Council of 2000.

As Sergius Kanaev writes: "In the report of the President of the Synodal Commission for the canonisation of the saints, Metropolitan Juvenaly (Poiarkov), the criterion of holiness adopted... for Orthodox Christians who had suffered during the savage persecutions was clearly and unambiguously declared to be submission 'to the lawful leadership of the Church', which was Metropolitan Sergius and his hierarchy. With such an approach, the holiness of the 'sergianist martyrs' was incontestable. The others were glorified or not glorified depending on the degree to which they 'were in separation from the lawful leadership of the Church'. Concerning those who were not in agreement with the politics of Metropolitan Sergius, the following was said in the report: 'In the actions of the "right" oppositionists, who are often called the "non-commemorators", one cannot find evil-intentioned, exclusively personal motives. Their actions were conditioned by their understanding of what was care for the good of the Church'. In my [Kanaev's] view, this is nothing other than blasphemy against the New Martyrs and a straight apology for sergianism. With such an approach the consciously sergianist Metropolitan Seraphim (Chichagov), for example, becomes a 'saint', while his ideological opponent Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd, who was canonized by our Church, is not glorified. For us another fact is also important, that Metropolitan Seraphim was appointed by Sergius (Stragorodsky) in the place of Metropolitan Joseph, who had been 'banned' by him."<sup>218</sup>

The canonisation of both the true and the false martyrs downgraded the exploit of the true martyrs without denying it completely. It was as if the MP were saying: "Yes, these were good men, and we give permission for them to be venerated and prayed to as saints. But it would have been better if they had followed the lawful hierarchy!"

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<sup>216</sup> "Ierei o. Oleg otvechayet na voprosy redaktsii", *Pravoslavnaya Rus'*, N 23 (1452), December 1/14, 1991, p. 7.

<sup>217</sup> Fr. Peter Perekrestov, "Why Now?" *Orthodox Life*, November-December, 1994, p. 44.

<sup>218</sup> Kanaev, "Obrascheniye k pervoierarkhu RPTsZ", in *Otkliki na deiania Arkhierejskogo Sobor RPTsZ 2000 goda i na prochie posleduischie za nim sobytia*, part 2, Paris, 2001, pp. 3-4.

Some, seeing the glorification of the Catacomb martyrs by the successors of those who had persecuted them, remembered the words of the Lord: "Ye build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets'. Therefore ye bear witness against yourselves that ye are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up the measure of your fathers!" (Matthew 23.29-32).

As the Kaliningrad parish of the ROCOR wrote on November 1/14, 2000: "What throng of new martyrs was canonized by the Moscow Patriarchate if, in that multitude, there are 'saints' who fought against the Church, and who later suffered at the hands of their masters - but not for Christ, having become, rather, victims who were offered up upon the altar of the revolution, just as were thousands of other bolsheviks and liberal dreamers? A throng of new martyrs in which victims and executioners, holy martyrs and 'Christians' (at whose orders these new martyrs were shot and sent to prisons and labour-camps), find themselves side by side?"

The 20<sup>th</sup> canon of the Local Council of Gangra declares: "If anyone shall, from a presumptuous disposition, condemn and abhor the assembly [in honour of] the martyrs, or the services performed there, and the commemoration of them, let them be **anathema**..." And again, Canon 34 of the Council of Laodicea decrees: "No Christian shall forsake the martyrs of Christ, and turn to false martyrs, that is, to those of the heretics, or those who formerly were heretics; for they are aliens from God. Let those, therefore, who go after them, be **anathema**."

This act of canonising both the true and the false martyrs has further absurd consequences. First, it means that, if any one was still tempted to consider that the official acts of the MP had any validity at all, he can now be assured that even the MP itself does not believe in them. For consider: Archbishop Victor, Metropolitan Cyril and the whole host of Catacomb confessors were defrocked, excommunicated and cast out of the community of the "faithful" by official acts of Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod. But if these "defrocked" and "excommunicated" people are now saints in the Heavenly Kingdom, this only goes to show, *as the MP now implicitly admits*, that the actions of Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod were completely uncanonical and invalid!

Secondly, it also shows that *the MP does not know what martyrdom is*, and looks upon it in an essentially ecumenist spirit which deprives it of all meaning. Some years ago, a writer for the *Anglican Church Times* was reviewing a book on the "martyrs" of the Anglican Reformation. In the spirit of that ecumenism that has been at the root of Anglicanism for centuries, this reviewer claimed that both the Catholics who died for their faith at the hands of the Anglicans and the Anglicans who died for their faith at the hands of the Catholics died for the truth as they saw it and so were martyrs! For it was not important, wrote the reviewer, who was *right* in this conflict: the only thing that matters is that they were *sincere* in their beliefs. And he went on to deny that heresy in general even exists: the only real heresy, he said, is the belief that there is such a thing as heresy!

The act of the MP presupposes a very similar philosophy. It presupposes that you can be a martyr whether you oppose the Antichrist or submit to him, whether you confess the truth or lie through your teeth, whether you imitate the love of Christ or the avarice of Judas. This is the perfect philosophy for our lukewarm times! But if the Lord Himself spews such lukewarmness out of His mouth, then so should we. And if the anathema on those who venerate false martyrs does not frighten us, let us at least pay heed to the words of St. Paul: "If a man strive for mastery, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully" (II Timothy 2.5)...

*June 3/16, 2006; revised January 25 / February 7, 2021.  
Feast of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia.*

## 16. THE ICON OF THE HOLY TRINITY

In recent years, the icon of the Holy Trinity in which the Father is portrayed as an old man with white hair, the Son as a young man, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, has been characterized as "deception" and "cacodoxy" by some Orthodox writers, especially the Greek-American George Gabriel.

The arguments Gabriel brings forward are essentially three:-

1. It is impossible to see or portray the Divine nature. Only the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, can be portrayed on icons, for He took on visible, tangible flesh in His Incarnation. Therefore the portrayal of the Father, Who has not become incarnate, is forbidden and speedily leads to the heresy of the circumscribability of the Divinity.
2. The icon of the Holy Trinity in question is supposed to portray the Prophet Daniel's vision of "The Ancient of Days", the old man with white hair being a depiction of the figure called "The Ancient of Days" (Daniel 7). However, the Ancient of Days, according to the Tradition and hymnology of the Church, is Christ, not the Father. Therefore the icon is based on a false interpretation of the prophetic text.
3. The icon of the Holy Trinity in question is a western invention, and has been forbidden by the Councils of Moscow in 1666 and Constantinople in 1780. These councils are authentic witnesses of Holy Tradition. Therefore their decisions should be respected and the icon condemned.

In this article I propose to show that these arguments are false and should be rejected. In doing so I shall rely largely on the excellent work, *The Holy Trinity in Orthodox Iconography*, produced (in Greek) by Holy Nativity skete, Katounakia, Mount Athos. The present article is essentially a synopsis of the main arguments of this work together with a few observations of my own.

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Let us take each of Gabriel's arguments in turn.

1. Both Gabriel and his Orthodox opponents are agreed, in accordance with the unanimous Tradition of the Orthodox Church, that the Divine Nature cannot be portrayed in icons. Gabriel then proceeds to assume, without any good reason, that the portrayal of "the Ancient of Days" in the icon of the Holy Trinity is an attempt to portray the Divine Nature. This is false.

The icon is a portrayal, not of the Divine Nature of the Father, but of His Divine *Person*. Moreover, it depicts Him, not realistically, but symbolically, not as He really is, in His Divine Nature, which is forever unattainable and undepictable, but only as He appeared to the prophet in a symbolic form or image for the sake of our

understanding. The Son really became a man, so the depiction of the Son as a man in icons is a realistic depiction. The Father never became a man, so the depiction of Him as a man in icons is a symbolic, not a realistic depiction. In exactly the same way, the Holy Spirit never became a dove, so the depiction of Him as a dove in icons is not a realistic, but a symbolic depiction of Him, being a depiction of Him as He appeared in a symbolic form or image to St. John the Forerunner in the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan.

Two critical distinctions are implicit here: (a) between nature and person, and (b) between the Divine Nature (or Essence) and Energies.

(a) Icons, as St. Theodore the Studite teaches are representations, not of natures, but of *persons* existing in natures. Act 6 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council states: "An icon is not like the original with respect to essence, but with respect to hypostasis". St. Theodore put it as follows: The image is always dissimilar to the prototype with regard to essence (κατ' ουσίαν), but it is similar to it with regard to hypostasis (καθ' ὑπόστασιν) and name (κατ' ὄνομα).<sup>219</sup>

Thus an icon of Christ is an image of a Divine Person in His human nature, which is visible to the bodily eye; and the icons of the angels are images of the persons of the angels in their angelic nature, which is invisible to the bodily eye. Nevertheless, God has condescended to allow the prophets and the saints to see the angels in bodily form, and it is these visions that we depict in the icons of the angels. For, as Vladimir Lossky writes, "it is not nature which sees nature, but person who sees person".<sup>220</sup>

(b) The distinction between the Divine Nature (or Essence) and Energies was clearly worked out by St. Gregory Palamas. Both the Nature and the Energies of God are common to all Three Persons. Only the Divine Nature is forever inaccessible to man (like the centre of the sun), while the Energies are God coming out of Himself, as it were, and making Himself communicable to men (like the rays of the sun).

The visions of God by the Old Testament Prophets are visions of the Divine Energies of God, not of His Essence. Thus St. Gregory Palamas, commenting on the Patriarch Jacob's words: "I have seen God face to face [or person to person], and my soul has been saved", writes: "Let [the cacodox] hear that Jacob saw the face of God, and not only was his life not taken away, but as he himself says, it was saved, in spite of the fact that God says: 'None shall see My face and live'. Are there then two Gods, one having His face accessible to the vision of the saints, and the other having His face beyond all vision? Perish the impiety! The face of God which is seen is the Energy and Grace of God condescending to appear to those who are worthy; while the face of God that is never seen, which is beyond all appearance and vision let us call the Nature of God."

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<sup>219</sup> St. Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus*, P.G. 99:405B; in V. Lossky, *The Vision of God*, Leighton Buzzard: Faith Press, 1963, p. 112.

<sup>220</sup> Lossky, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

Abraham's vision at the oak of Mamre was likewise a vision of God, not in His Essence, but in His Energies. Thus St. John Chrysostom writes: "How is it that elsewhere Scripture says, 'No one will see God and live' (Exodus 33.20)? How, then, would we interpret the words of Scripture, 'He appeared'? How did He appear to the just man? Surely he didn't see His true being? No - God forbid. What, then? He was seen in the way He alone knows and in the manner possible for Abram to see. In His inventiveness, you see, our wise and loving Lord, showing considerateness for our human nature, reveals Himself to those who worthily prepare themselves in advance. He explains this through the sacred author in the words, 'I gave many visions and took shape in the works of the inspired authors' (Hosea 12.2). Isaiah in his time saw him seated, something that is inapplicable to God, since He doesn't sit down - how could He, after all, with His unique nature being incorporeal and indefectible? Daniel too saw Him, as the Ancient of Days. Zechariah had a different vision of Him, and Ezekiel in turn a different one. This is the reason, therefore, that He said, 'I gave many visions', that is, I appeared in a way suited to each one."<sup>221</sup>

Again, St. John of Damascus, the great defender of the icons, writes: "Abraham did not see the Nature of God, for no one has seen God at any time, but an icon of God, and falling down he venerated it."

As the True Orthodox Fathers of Katounakia aptly put it: "There is no icon representing the Nature or Essence of God, but there is an icon of the 'icon' of God." (p. 30).

As for whether we can call it an icon of the Holy Trinity, Saints Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus and John Chrysostom say that Abraham saw Christ and two angels. On the other hand, St. Ambrose says that he saw the Holy Trinity in the form of three young men or angels. And St. Philaret of Moscow writes: "It is the custom of the Church to represent the mystery of the Holy Trinity in the form of three Angels appearing to Abraham, which shows that pious antiquity saw a symbol of the Holy Trinity in the *number* of these Angels...; for symbolic icons are more ancient than historical ones in the Church."<sup>222</sup>

2. The term "Ancient of Days", like "God", is applicable to all Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. Therefore there is no contradiction between allowing that Christ can be called "the Ancient of Days", as in the hymnology for the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, and believing that "the Ancient of Days" in the vision of Daniel is God the Father. Hieromartyr Hippolytus of Rome (*P.G.* 10, 37), St. Athanasius the Great (*V.E.P.* 35, 121), St. John Chrysostom (*P.G.* 57, 133; *E.P.E.* 8, 640-2), St. Gregory Palamas (*Homilies* 14, *E.P.E.* 9, 390), St. Cyril of Alexandria (*P.G.* 70, 1461), St. Symeon of Thessalonica (*Interpretation of the Sacred Symbol*, p. 412), and St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite (*The Rudder*, Zakynthos, 1864, p. 320; Chicago, 1957, p. 420) all agree in identifying "the Ancient of Days" in the vision of Daniel with God the Father. They interpret the vision as portraying the Ascension of Christ ("the Son of Man") to God the Father ("the

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<sup>221</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 32 on Genesis*, 4.

<sup>222</sup> St. Philaret, *Zapiski rukovodstvuiuschia k osnovatel'nomu razumeniu Knigi Bytia* (Notes leading to a Basic Understanding of the Book of Genesis), Moscow, 1867, p. 122.

Ancient of Days"), from Whom He receives the Kingdom and the Glory, together with the power to judge the living and the dead. Thus St. Cyril of Alexandria writes: "Behold, again Emmanuel is manifestly and clearly seen ascending to God the Father in heaven... The Son of Man has appeared in the flesh and reached the Ancient of Days, that is, He has ascended to the throne of His eternal Father and has been given honor and worship..." (Letter 55, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 77, Washington: CUA Press, 1987, pp. 28, 29). There are some Holy Fathers who speak in favour of the Ancient of Days being Christ in this vision (see *The Lives of the Holy Prophets*, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, 1998, pp. 407-408). Nevertheless, Gabriel's interpretation of this vision as a prophecy of the Incarnation, "the Son of Man" being the human nature of Christ and "the Ancient of Days" His Divine Nature, is difficult to support in that the two figures in the vision clearly represent Persons, not Natures, and the attempt to represent the two natures of Christ in separation, as if they each had an independent enhypostatic existence, smacks of Nestorianism. That is why we prefer the interpretation that the Ancient of Days in this vision is the Father.

The fact that in Revelation 1 Christ is portrayed with white hair does not undermine this interpretation. Christ as an old man symbolically signifies His antiquity, the fact that He has existed from the beginning. Christ as a young man is a realistic image of His Incarnation as a man and a symbolic image of His agelessness as God. These images together teach us that Christ God passes unchanging through all ages from the beginning to the end. Revelation also portrays Christ as a lamb, which signifies that He was slain for the sins of the world. The Father and the Spirit also have different symbolical representations. The Father is represented visually as a man (in Isaiah, Daniel, Stephen's vision in Acts and in Revelation) and aurally as a voice from heaven (at the Baptism of Christ and in John 12.28). Similarly the Spirit is represented as a bird (in Genesis 1 and at the Baptism of Christ) and as a wind and tongues of fire (at Pentecost).

3. Most of these scriptural icons of God passed into the artistic iconographical tradition of the Church from the beginning; only the iconographic representation of Christ as a lamb has been forbidden. Thus the appearance of the Trinity to Abraham is represented in the Via Latina catacombs in Rome (4th century), and the Father as an old man - in the Roman church of St. Maria Maggiore in Rome (c. 432). This constant tradition of the Church was confirmed by the Seventh Ecumenical Council and the Synodicon of Orthodoxy.

Thus the Seventh Ecumenical Council declares: "Eternal be the memory of those who know and accept and believe the visions of the prophets as the Divinity Himself shaped and impressed them, whatever the chorus of the prophets saw and narrated, and who hold to the written and unwritten tradition of the Apostles which was passed on to the Fathers, and on account of this make icons of the Holy things and honour them." And again: "Anathema to those who do not accept the visions of the prophets and who reject the iconographies which have been seen by them (O wonder!) even before the Incarnation of the Word, but either speak empty words about having seen the unattainable and unseen Essence, or on the one hand pay heed to those who have seen these appearances of icons, types and forms of the truth, while on the other hand

they cannot bear to have icons made of the Word become man and His sufferings on our behalf."

St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, in his prolegomena to the Seventh Ecumenical Council, sums up the Council's decrees on this subject as follows: "The present Council, in the letter which it sent to the Church of Alexandria, on the one hand blesses those who know and accept, and therefore make icons of and honour, the visions and theophanies of the Prophets, as God Himself shaped and impressed them on their minds. And on the other hand it anathematizes those who do not accept the iconographies of such visions before the incarnation of God the Word (p. 905 of the second volume of the Conciliar Records). It follows that the Beginningless Father must be represented in icons as He appeared to the Prophet Daniel, as the Ancient of Days. Even though it be admitted as a fact that Pope Gregory in his letter to Leo the Isaurian (p. 712 of the second volume of the Conciliar Records) says that we do not blazon the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet it must be noted that he said this not simply, but in the sense that we do not paint Him in accordance with the divine nature; since it is impossible, he says, to blazon or paint God's nature. That is what the present Council is doing, and the entire Catholic Church; and not that we do not paint Him as He appeared to the Prophet. For if we did not paint Him at all or portray Him in any manner at all to the eye, why should we be painting the Father as well as the Holy Spirit in the shape of Angels, or young men, just as they appeared to Abraham? Besides, even if it be supposed that Gregory does say this, yet the opinion of a single Ecumenical Council attended and represented by a large number of individual men is to be preferred to the opinion of a single individual man. Then again, if it be considered that even the Holy Spirit ought to be painted in the shape of a dove, just as it actually appeared, we say that, in view of the fact that a certain Persian by the name of Xanaeus used to assert, among other things, that it is a matter of infantile knowledge (i.e., that it is a piece of infantile mentality or an act of childishness) for the Holy Spirit to be painted in a picture just as It appeared in the semblance of a dove, whereas, on the other hand, the holy and Ecumenical Seventh Council (Act 5, p. 819 of the second volume of the Conciliar Records) anathematized him along with other iconoclasts, it may be concluded as a logical inference that according to the Seventh Ecumenical Council It ought to be painted or depicted in icons and other pictures in the shape of a dove, as it appeared... As for the fact that the Holy Spirit is to be painted in the shape of a dove, that is proven even by this, to wit, the fact that the Fathers of this Council admitted the doves hung over baptismal fountains and sacrificial altars to be all right to serve as a type of the Holy Spirit (Act 5, p. 830). As for the assertion made in the *Sacred Trumpet* (the Encomium of the Three Hierarchs) to the effect that the Father ought not to be depicted in paintings, according to Acts 4, 5, and 6 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, we have read these particular Acts searchingly, but have found nothing of the kind, except only the statement that the nature of the Holy Trinity cannot be exhibited pictorially because It is shapeless and invisible".<sup>223</sup>

As regards the councils of 1666 and 1780, even if they were without reproach in every other respect, they cannot be accepted as expressing the Tradition of the Church

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<sup>223</sup> St. Nicodemus, (*The Rudder*, Chicago: Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1957, pp. 420-421).

if they contradict the decrees of the Seventh Ecumenical Council as well as the constant practice of the Church since Roman times.

However, there are other strong reasons for not accepting these councils. The Moscow council of 1666 was convened by the Tsar in order to defrock the righteous Patriarch Nikon; but only 16 years later, in 1682, this decision of the Moscow council was annulled by the Eastern Patriarchs. In any case, the prime force at the council, "Metropolitan" Paisios Ligarides, had already been defrocked by the Patriarch of Jerusalem for his crypto-papism. Thus far from expressing the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church against westernizing influences, the "Pan-Orthodox" council of Moscow actually represented a victory for westernism! Which is probably why Russia was flooded with the supposedly illegal icons of the Holy Trinity precisely after this council!

As for the Constantinopolitan council of 1780, it was convened by the same Patriarch, Sophronios II, who four years earlier had unjustly condemned Athanasios of Paros for following the laws of the Church in refusing to carry out memorials for the dead on Sunday instead of Saturday.

Another important historical point is the fact that the famous "Reigning" icon of the Mother of God, which went before the Russian armies fighting against Napoleon in 1812, and was miraculously discovered and renewed in Moscow at the precise moment that Tsar Nicolas II abdicated, on March 2, 1917, clearly portrays the Father as an old man at the top of the icon. Is it possible that God should have worked miracles through an icon that is heretical and blasphemous? Nor is this the only icon portraying the Father that has worked miracles. Another wonderworking icon of the Holy Trinity has been found in recent times in the possession of True Orthodox Christians in the region of Thessaloniki. This timing and location is significant, because perhaps the first opponent of the icon in the recent controversy, Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, was once in the True Orthodox Church in Thessaloniki, but left it and died while speaking against the holy icon.

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In conclusion, let us consider an icon which everyone accepts to be canonical and in accordance with Orthodox Tradition - the icon of the Transfiguration of Christ. Who or what is represented in this icon?

Clearly, the icon represents the Divine Person of Christ, Who exists inseparably in His Divine and human natures.

Now the particular significance of this icon of Christ is that we see in it not only the visible part of His human nature - His body, but also the Divine Energies that flow from His Divine Essence - the Divine Light.

And yet, as St. Gregory Palamas writes, "the Light of the Transfiguration of the Lord has no beginning and no end; it remains uncircumscribed (in time and space) and imperceptible to the senses, although it was contemplated... But the disciples of

the Lord passed here from the flesh into the spirit by a transmutation of their senses." And again he writes: "The Divine Light is not material, there was nothing perceptible about the Light which illuminated the apostles on Mount Tabor."

Now if we follow Gabriel's argument through to its logical conclusion, iconographers who depict the Divine Light of the Transfiguration are falling into the heresy of circumscribing the uncircumscribable. For unlike the body of Christ, the Divine Light that flowed from His body is uncircumscribable and imperceptible to the senses. But this conclusion is obviously absurd and against Tradition.

The correct conclusion which needs to be drawn is that iconographers are permitted to depict, not only realities that are accessible to our bodily senses, such as the bodies of Christ and the saints, but also those invisible realities, both created and uncreated, circumscribable and uncircumscribable, that God makes visible to holy men by a mystical transmutation of their senses. These invisible realities which God has made visible include angels and the souls of men, and the Divine Light of God Himself. This is the Tradition of the Holy Church of Christ.

Also depictable are those symbolic manifestations of spiritual realities which were revealed in visions to the Prophets and Apostles by a cataphatic outpouring of the Energies of God, such as Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days, or the Holy Scriptures taken as a whole. For, as St. Nicodemos writes: "There is a third kind of picture (or icon), which is called a figurative or symbolic picture. Thus, for example, the mysteries of the grace of the Gospel and of the truth of the Gospel were originals, while the pictures thereof are the symbols consisting of the old Law and the Prophets."

It remains forever true that the Divine Essence is absolutely unknowable and undepictable. But our zeal to guard this truth should not blind us to the reality of what holy men have seen and which the Holy Church therefore allows to be depicted in icons. For as the Lord says through the Prophet Hosea: "I will speak to the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and in the hands of the prophets I was likened" (12.11).

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## 17. ON CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Marriage as described in Holy Scripture represents a paradoxical, seemingly impossible union of opposites. On the one hand, it is seen as a great mystery, an image of, and participation in, the highest, purest, most self-sacrificial love - that of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5.32). On the other hand, it is little more than a safety-valve for unclean desire - "it is better to marry than to burn" (I Corinthians 7.9). On the one hand, it is the scene of the Lord's first and one of His most radiant miracles, whereby He "manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2.11). But on the other hand, it is that which those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes must avoid at all costs; "for these are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins" (Revelation 14.4).

The failure to reconcile these apparent opposites has produced some strange perversions of theory and practice, especially in the West. Thus whereas in the East sexual pleasure in marriage is generally regarded as "lawful"<sup>224</sup>, Blessed Augustine states that "intercourse... for the sake of satisfying lust... is a venial sin" even in marriage, though "it is pardoned" insofar if it leads to the sacred end of procreation.<sup>225</sup> This uneasy compromise in a great Orthodox thinker was followed, after the falling away of the West, by some definitely heretical innovations: the false dogma of the "immaculate conception" of the Virgin, the adulterous "chastity" of the medieval troubadours, the sensual "mysticism" of Teresa of Avila, the ban on marriage by the Shakers, the sexual hypocrisy of the Victorians, and our own century's general debauchery.

Now as Orthodox Christians we know that "*all* Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine..." (II Timothy 3.16). Therefore when difficulties in interpretation and apparent contradictions between texts are found, we are not at liberty to pick and choose those texts that we like and reject that those that we do not like. Rather we must humbly admit that the reason for our perplexity lies in ourselves, in the passionateness which prevents us from understanding the mysteries of God - and continue to "search the Scriptures". For "none of the mysteries," writes Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, "of the most secret wisdom of God ought to appear alien or altogether transcendent to us, but in all humility we must apply our spirit to the contemplation of divine things."<sup>226</sup> We must turn to the Giver of wisdom for enlightenment, in accordance with the apostle's words: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1.5).

**1. Marriage in Paradise.** Therefore, having invoked God's help, let us turn again to the Holy Scriptures. And let us pose the question: what was the original purpose of marriage as instituted by God in Paradise?

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<sup>224</sup> See, for example, St. Photius the Great's *Homily on the Nativity of the Virgin*.

<sup>225</sup> Blessed Augustine, *On Marriage as a Good*, 6.

<sup>226</sup> *Sermons and Addresses of the Metropolitan Philaret*, Moscow, 1844, part II, p. 87; quoted in Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London: James Clarke, 1957, p. 8.

Two answers are suggested in Genesis: (a) the procreation of children, and (b) the inability of man alone, without woman, to fulfil the task appointed to him by God.

(a) "And God blessed them, saying, Increase and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it..." (1.28). Coming immediately after the first mention of the differentiation of the sexes (1.27), this clearly implies that the purpose of this differentiation is the procreation of children. But the question then arises: why, then, is there no mention of children or procreation in Paradise, the first reported birth, that of Cain, taking place only after the expulsion from Eden (4.1)?

Some of the Holy Fathers suggest that the reason is that God's command to increase and multiply was given in prevision of the Fall, and that if there had been no Fall there would have been no sexual relations, and the multiplication of the species would have taken place in a different way. Thus St. John of the Ladder writes that if Adam had not been overcome by gluttony, he would not have known what a wife was - that is, he would have lived with her as with a sister.<sup>227</sup> And certainly, since all that we know of sexuality and procreation comes from life after the Fall, and has been corrupted by the Fall, there can be no doubt that marriage *as we know it* was not part of the life of the first couple in Paradise.

At the same time, the institution of "one-flesh" marriage is based on the nature of man and woman as they were originally created, on the fact that Eve was created from the flesh of Adam. Thus God placed Adam in a deep sleep (the Greek word in the Septuagint is: "ecstasy"), and created Eve (the literal translation from the Greek is: "built") out of his rib - an operation, incidentally, that makes very good surgical sense.<sup>228</sup> Adam's first words on seeing the newly-created Eve clearly base marriage on this original "one-flesh" creation, defining it unambiguously as a physical union: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of her man. *Therefore* shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" (2.23).

The Lord Himself quoted these words in the context of His discussion of divorce (Matthew 19.4-5), so their authority is great. Divorce is wrong, because marriage was constituted from the beginning, in Paradise, as an unbreakable bond creating a single new unit. A unit, moreover, not only of spirit, but also of flesh.

The holy new Russian confessor Bishop Gregory (Lebedev) has commented on these words in an illuminating way: "And they two shall be one flesh, so that they are

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<sup>227</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 15, Foreword.

<sup>228</sup> Thus Dr. J.E. Shelley writes: "The account in Genesis 2.18-25 is as factual as words can make it. It reads like the account which a surgeon writes for the records of the operating theatre! God performs a surgical operation under general anaesthesia, a rib re-section in this case. Note the detail: 'He closed up the flesh instead thereof'. In just such a manner would a surgeon describe his closing up of an incision. Remarkably enough, provided that the surgeon is careful to leave the periosteum (the membrane which envelops the bones) of the removed rib, the rib will reform in a non-septic case, and the operation performed upon Adam was truly aseptic. So far as I remember, the rib is the only bone in the body of man which will do this. God gave it this property, which is why He chose it. With the vast reservoir of living cells contained in the rib, 'He built up Eve'." (*How God Created Man*, a Bible Christian Unity Fellowship Study, p. 6).

no longer two, but one flesh', that is, the people have ceased to exist separately even in the physical sense. They have become one physical body, 'one flesh'. That is what the fulfilment of the will of God has done... It has not only completed and broadened their souls in a mutual intermingling, it has changed their physical nature and out of two physical existences it has made one whole existence. That is the mystery of marriage. Having explained it, the Lord concludes with a mild reproach to the Pharisees: 'Well, what do you want? What are you asking about? How after this can a man leave his wife? That would be unnatural! In marriage we have a mutual completion of life! But you want Me to approve the destruction of this completion?! In marriage we have a creative act, an act of God, Who creates one life... How can you want Me to destroy life created by God? This is unnatural... Don't think of encroaching on marriage! What God has joined together, let man not put asunder'.<sup>229</sup>

It follows that it is not enough to define the purpose of marriage as procreation alone. Marriage is not procreation, but *creation*, the creation of one new life out of two; and this new life has value in itself, quite apart from the fact that it is the means towards the procreation of further life. Otherwise the union of childless couples would be without value.

That the marriage of childless couples can be blessed by God is clearly seen, for example, in the lives of Saints Joachim and Anna. Although society condemned them for their childlessness, they were righteous in the eyes of God. And eventually they were rewarded by the birth of the Mother of God, who appeared, not as the justification of their marriage, but as the natural fruit of its manifest righteousness.

(b) "It is not good for man to be alone, let Us make for him a help suitable to him" (2.18 - the Septuagint text literally translated is: "according to him", just as man was made "according to the image of God"). In *Tobit* this passage is paraphrased as: "Thou madest Adam, and gavest him Eve his wife for an helper and support" (8.6). What kind of support is meant here?

St. Augustine, followed by most of the Western Fathers, replies: "for the sake of the procreation of sons, just as a support to the seed in the earth is that a thicket should grow on either side".<sup>230</sup>

However, St. Basil the Great takes a more spiritual view in his treatise, *On Virginity*; the support which is meant here, he says, is the general support that a woman gives to her husband in passing through life.

And Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus writes: "He bade her satisfy the man's desire, not a passion for pleasure, but by showing him the rational need of her society".<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Hieromartyr Gregory (Lebedev) *Tolkovanie Evangelia ot Marka (Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark.)* Moscow, 1991, p. 106.

<sup>230</sup> Blessed Augustine, *On Marriage as a Good*, 6.

<sup>231</sup> Blessed Theodoret, *Commentary on Deuteronomy* 21.13.

Again, the holy new Martyr-Patriarch Tikhon writes: "Without a helpmate the very bliss of paradise was not perfect for Adam: endowed with the gift of thought, speech, and love, the first man seeks with his thought another thinking being; his speech sounds lonely and the dead echo alone answers him; his heart, full of love, seeks another heart that would be close and equal to him; all his being longs for another being analogous to him, but there is none; the creatures of the visible world around him are below him and are not fit to be his mates; and as to the beings of the invisible spiritual world they are above. Then the bountiful God, anxious for the happiness of man, satisfies his wants and creates a mate for him - a wife. But if a mate was necessary for man in paradise, in the region of bliss, the mate became much more necessary for him after the fall, in the vale of tears and sorrow. The wise man of antiquity spoke justly: 'two are better than one, for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up' (Sirach 4.9-10). But few people are capable of enduring the strain of moral loneliness, it can be accomplished only by effort, and truly 'all men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given' (Matthew 19.11), and as for the rest - 'it is not good for a man to be alone', without a mate."<sup>232</sup>

**2. Marriage in the Fall.** Like everything else that was created good by God in the beginning, marriage has been corrupted by the Fall. Unbelief ("ye shall not surely die" (3.15)), pride ("ye shall be as gods" (3.6)) and sensuality ("the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes to look upon, and beautiful to contemplate" (3.7)) invaded the nature, first of the woman, and then of the man. The Fall did not completely destroy the joyful, paradisiac image of marriage; but, as Vladimir Lossky points out, "this paradisiac 'eros' would have been as different from our fallen and devouring sexuality as the sacerdotal royalty of man over created being is from their actual devouring of each other. For... the Fall has changed the very meaning of the words. Sexuality, this 'multiplication' which God ordains and blesses, appears in our universe as irremediably bound to separation and death. The human condition has experienced a catastrophic mutation right down to its biological reality. But human love would not be pregnant with such a paradisiac nostalgia if there did not remain in it the sad memory of an original condition in which the other and the world was experienced *from within*, when death did not exist..."<sup>233</sup>

Both Adam and Eve failed to fulfil the law of marriage as God had ordained it. Thus Eve failed in her task of spiritually supporting Adam by offering him the forbidden fruit. But Adam, too, failed in his responsibility towards her. Instead of enlightening her about the devil's deception, and leading her back to obedience to God, he weakly followed her example. And instead of taking the blame for the whole affair upon himself, as befitted the head of the family, he bitterly put the blame on his wife - and indirectly on God Who had created her for him (3.13).

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<sup>232</sup> "An Address of the Right Reverend Tikhon", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 37, № 4, July-August, 1987, pp. 3-4.

<sup>233</sup> Lossky, "Theologie Dogmatique (1)" *Messenger de l'Exarchat du Patriarchat Russe en Europe Occidentale* ((Dogmatic Theology (1), *Messenger of the Exarchate of the Patriarchate of Russia in Western Europe*), № 48, October-December, 1964, pp. 224-225.

Thus they both felt guilty, and their shame took on a specifically physical form: "And the eyes of both were opened, and they perceived that they were naked" (3.8).

Blessed Augustine sees in this consciousness of nakedness the first stirrings of lust. For "the rational soul blushed at the bestial movements in the members of the flesh and inspired it with shame, not only because it felt this there where it had never sensed anything similar, but also because that shameful movement came from the transgression of the commandment".<sup>234</sup> Thus the passionless delight *in* the other became the passionate desire *for* the other; "flesh *of* my flesh" was now "flesh *for* my flesh".

Against this new, devouring force in human nature, protection was needed; and a first protection was provided by God in the "coats of skin" - modesty is the first step towards chastity. There is another, more spiritual interpretation of the "coats of skin", according to which they signify the fallen passions in which man was now clothed.

However, modesty alone cannot control this passion in fallen man. A stronger restraint is required - and marriage provides that restraint. "For marriage," says St. John Chrysostom, "was not instituted for debauchery and fornication, but to prevent the one and the other: 'on account of fornications,' says St. Paul, 'let each man have his wife, and each woman her husband' (I Corinthians 7.2). There are two reasons for which marriage was instituted: to regulate our lust and to give us children: but the first is the principal one. The day on which lust was introduced was the day on which marriage was introduced to regulate it by leading the man to be content with one woman.

"As for the procreation of children, marriage does not absolutely enjoin it. That responds rather to this word of God in Genesis: 'Increase and multiply and fill the earth' (1.28). The proof of this is the large number of marriages which cannot have children.

"That is why the first reason for marriage is to regulate lust, and especially now that the human race has filled the whole earth".<sup>235</sup>

An important consequence of this view is that sexual pleasure in marriage, far from being an evil or inessential by-product of marriage, is to be welcomed - and this not for hedonistic, but for moral reasons. For if the man does not obtain sexual pleasure in marriage, he is likely to seek it elsewhere, thus destroying the one-flesh relationship and endangering both his and his wife's salvation. Hence the forthright exhortation of St. Ignatius the God-bearer: "Speak to my sisters that they love the Lord, and be satisfied with their husbands in flesh and in spirit".<sup>236</sup>

The doctrine of the majority of the Eastern Fathers on this point may be summed up in words from a poem by St. Gregory the Theologian:

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<sup>234</sup> Blessed Augustine, *On Genesis according to the Letter*, XI, xxxii.

<sup>235</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *First Discourse on Marriage*

<sup>236</sup> St. Ignatius, *To Polycarp*, 5.

*For man and wife the union of wedlock is a bolted door securing chastity and restraining desire,*

*And it is a seal of natural affection,  
They possess the loving colt which cheers the heart by gamboling,  
And a single drink from their private fountain untasted by strangers,  
Which neither flows outwards, nor gathers its waters from without.  
Wholly united in the flesh, concordant in spirit, by love  
They sharpen in one another a like spur to piety.<sup>237</sup>*

But marriage in the Fall restrains more than lust alone. The pride and pleasure-seeking that led to the Fall are also corrected, and God achieves this through their opposites - pain and humiliation. Thus "to the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy pains and thy groanings; in pain thou shalt bring forth children, and thy turning shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3.17). Having turned to the devil in disobedience to God, the woman must learn obedience to God in turning to her husband. And having spoken to him to his ruin, she must now listen to him to her gain.

St. Paul develops the theme: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (I Timothy 2.11-15). Wives are to be "discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2.5). Nor is this obedience only for their own sake: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conduct of the wives; while they behold your chaste conduct coupled with fear" (I Peter 3.1-2).

"And to Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and eaten of the tree concerning which I charged thee of it only not to eat - of that thou hast eaten, cursed is the ground in thy labours, in pain thou shalt eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread until thou shalt return" (Genesis 3.18-20). Thus for his weakness of will and lack of true love for his wife, the man is condemned to work to support her and his family for the rest of his life, groaning not only under the physical burden but also in anxiety of spirit. For "if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the Faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Timothy 5.8). But in thus having to care for her, he will learn more truly to love her, subduing his anger and bitterness: "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them" (Colossians 3.19). "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as

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<sup>237</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *In Praise of Virginity*, 11.263-75, translated in *Orthodox Life*, November-December, 1981.

unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (I Peter 3.7).

Whereas obedience in marriage is one-way, exhortation must be mutual. Thus St. Tikhon of Zadonsk writes: "The husband and wife must lay virtue, and not passion, as the foundation of their love, that is, when the husband sees any fault in his wife, he must nudge her meekly, and the wife must submit to her husband in this. Likewise when a wife sees some fault in her husband, she must exhort him, and he is obliged to hear her."<sup>238</sup>

**3. Marriage in Christ.** Marriage in the Fall restrains sin and lust, but it cannot extirpate them entirely. But Christ, writes Clement of Alexandria "condemns more than just imagining having sex with a woman. For to fantasize is already to commit an act of lust. Rather, Jesus goes further. He condemns any man who looks on the beauty of a woman with carnal and sinful admiration. It is a different matter, however, to look on beauty with chaste love. Chaste love does not admire the beauty of the flesh. It admires the beauty of the spirit. With such love, a person sees the body only as an image. His admiration carries him through to the Artist himself - to true beauty."<sup>239</sup>

However, a completely chaste love of beauty is unattainable to fallen man. The spirit is willing - for "I loved Her, and sought Her out from my youth; I desired to make Her my spouse, and I was a lover of Her beauty" (Wisdom 8.2; Proverbs 4.6). But the flesh is weak - for "the corruptible body presses down on the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weighs down the mind that muses upon many things" (Wisdom 9.15). That is why God became man and united His Spirit to our flesh, so as to purify our flesh and make it in all things conformed to His Spirit. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8.3-4).

Through the grace communicated to our flesh in the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ, the disordered passions of our fallen nature are first crucified and then resurrected to new life. Sexuality is not destroyed completely; for it was there, as we have seen, in the beginning, before the Fall. Rather, it is resurrected in a new form. Thus St. John of the Ladder writes: "Someone told me of an extraordinarily high degree of purity. He said: 'A certain man, on seeing a beautiful woman, thereupon glorified the Creator; and from that one look, he was moved to the love of God and a fountain of tears. And it was wonderful to see how what would have been a cause of destruction for one was for another the supernatural cause of a crown.' If such a person always feels and behaves in the same way on similar occasions, then he has risen immortal before the general resurrection."<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> St. Tikhon, *Journey to Heaven*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1991. p. 117

<sup>239</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The One Who Knows God*, Tyler, Texas: Scroll Publishing, 1990, pp. 90-91.

<sup>240</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 15:60.

For fallen man, marriage is a virtual necessity; and even in Christ it is the best path to chastity for most. However, Christ by His Coming and Example has opened up another path to the same end - that of virginity or monasticism. For He is the New Adam, just as His Mother is the New Eve - and both, of course, are Virgins.

Monasticism is the more direct, more arduous way to the summit; and to reach it by this path brings a special reward. True monastics attain in this life to the condition of the life to come, in which "they neither marry nor are given in marriage... for they are equal to the angels" (Luke 20.35, 36). Marriage is the less direct route, with many stops on the way and with the consequent danger of becoming distracted by the scenery along the way (I Corinthians 7.31-33). That is why St. Paul says: "I would that all men were even as myself [i.e. virgins]... But every man hath his proper charisma, one after this manner, and another after that" (I Corinthians 7.7).

Marriage in Christ recreates the image of Adam and Eve in Paradise, when there was no pride or lust or jealousy. Thus, as Alexis Khomiakov says, "for the husband, his companion is not just one of *many* women, but *the* woman; and her mate is not one of *many* men, but *the* man. For both of them the rest of the race has no sex."<sup>241</sup> Monasticism, on the other hand, recreates the image of Adam not only before the Fall, but also before the creation of Eve, when he had eyes for God alone. In this sense, as St. Ambrose of Milan points out, monasticism, the state of being a "monad", alone with God, is even more primordially natural than marriage.<sup>242</sup>

However, there is no contradiction between the perfection of the monastic monad and the perfection of the marital dyad, just as there is no contradiction between the commandment to love God with all one's heart and the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself. Just as the first commandment is greater than the second, so is the virginal state greater than the marital. But they are both holy, both pure.

Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava sums up the question well: "It is necessary, first of all, to establish a correct understanding of marriage in principle, and then to examine the question from a practical point of view. There are two extreme viewpoints with regard to this question which are in principle incorrect: both that which considers marriage to be an evil and that which completely abolishes the difference in inner merit between marriage and virginity. The first extreme is seen in many mystical sects, the second is a generally accepted opinion in the Protestant West, from where it has succeeded in penetrating Orthodox literature also. According to the latter viewpoint, both the married and the virginal ways of life are simply defined as individual characteristics of a man, and nothing special or exalted is seen in the virginal way by comparison with the married state. In his time Blessed Jerome thoroughly refuted this viewpoint in his work: 'Two Books against Jovinian'. While the positive teaching of the Church was beautifully expressed by St. Seraphim in the words: 'Marriage is a good, but virginity is a better than good good!' True Christian marriage is the union

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<sup>241</sup> Khomiakov, in *Orthodox Life*, November-December, 1983, p. 22.

<sup>242</sup> St. Ambrose, *On Paradise* 4.25. St. Ephraim the Syrian expresses the tradition that Adam was androgynous before the creation of Eve when he writes: "Adam was both one and two; one in that he was man [adam], two in that he was created male and female" (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.12; quoted in Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 302).

of the souls of those being married that is sanctified by the grace of God. It gives them happiness and serves as the foundation of the Christian family, that 'house church'. That is what it is in principle; but unfortunately it is not like that in our time for the most part. The general decline in Christian life has wounded marriage, too. Generally speaking, people in recent times have forgotten that the grace of God is communicated in the sacrament of marriage. One must always remember this grace, stir it up and live in its spirit. Then the love of the man for the woman and of the woman for the man will be pure, deep and a source of happiness for them. For this love, too, is a blessed gift of God. Only people do not know how to make use of this gift in a fitting manner! And it is for this simple reason that they forget the grace of God! 'The first thing in the spiritual life,' says St. Macarius the Great, 'is love for God, and the second - love for one's neighbour. When we apply ourselves to the first and great task, then the second, being lesser, follows after the first with very little labour. But without the first the second cannot be pure. For can he who does not love God with all his soul and all his heart apply himself correctly and without flattery to love for his brothers?' That which has been said about love generally applies also to married love. Of all the kinds of earthly love it is the strongest and for that reason it is represented in Holy Scripture as an image of the ideal love of the human soul for God: 'The Song of Songs,' says Blessed Jerome, 'is a nuptial song of spiritual wedlock,' that is, of the union of the human soul with God. However, with the blessedness of the virgins nothing can be compared, neither in heaven nor on earth..."<sup>243</sup>

Virginitly is not only higher than marriage, but the only viewpoint from which marriage can be correctly evaluated, and the apparently contradictory scriptural texts on marriage understood. For whereas a perfect marriage is the end of most men's dreams, "paradise on earth", the ideal of virginitly points to a still higher end - not paradise on earth, but the Kingdom of heaven, an end which can be attained only by rejecting all thought of earthly delights, however lawful, an end in which marriage will exist neither as an arena in which to struggle with the fallen passions, nor as a passionless contemplation of each other's beauty, like Adam and Eve in Paradise. Rather, both the virgins and those who have been married will be "like the angels, who always behold the face of the Father in heaven" (Matthew 18.11). For when the Supreme Object of desire is present, lesser objects are necessarily eclipsed, not because they are lacking in true beauty, but simply because they are lesser. Which is why the holy Apostle Simon the Zealot, the bridegroom at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, abandoned not only the water of a fallen marriage, but even the wine of a marriage transformed and sanctified by Christ, for love of the Divine Bridegroom Himself...

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<sup>243</sup> *Pis'ma Arkhiepiskopa Feofana Poltavskago i Pereyaslavskago (The Letters of Archbishop Theophan of Poltava and Pereyaslav)*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1976, pp. 35-37.

## 18. DEATH AND THE TOLL-HOUSES

*It is decreed that men should die once, and after that the judgement.*  
Hebrews 9.27.

*No matter how absurd the idea of the toll-houses may seem to our 'wise men,' they will not escape passing through them.*

St. Theophan the Recluse, The One-Hundred Eighteenth Psalm.

The Orthodox tradition on the judgement of the soul after death, and the passage of the soul through the "toll-houses", was summarized by St. Macarius the Great as follows: "When the soul of man departs out of the body, a great mystery is there accomplished. If it is under the guilt of sins, there come bands of demons, and angels of the left hand, and powers of darkness that take over that soul, and hold it fast on their side. No one ought to be surprised at this. If, while alive and in this world, the man was subject and compliant to them, and made himself their bondsman, how much more, when he departs out of this world, is he kept down and held fast by them. That this is the case, you ought to understand from what happens on the good side. God's holy servants even now have angels continually beside them, and holy spirits encompassing and protecting them; and when they depart out of the body, the hands of angels take over their souls to their own side, into the pure world, and so they bring them to the Lord...

"Like tax-collectors sitting in the narrow ways, and laying hold upon the passers-by, so do the demons spy upon souls and lay hold of them; and when they pass out of the body, if they were not perfectly cleansed, they do not suffer them to mount up to the mansions of heaven and to meet their Lord, and they are driven down by the demons of the air. But if whilst they are yet in the flesh, they shall with much labour and effort obtain from the Lord the grace from on high, assuredly these, together with those who through virtuous living are at rest, shall go to the Lord..."<sup>244</sup>

The first major exposition of this tradition in modern times was Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov's *Essay on Death* in the third volume of his *Collected Works*.<sup>245</sup> St. Barsanuphy of Optina called this *Essay* "indispensable" in its genre".<sup>246</sup> In recent years this teaching has been challenged by OCA Archbishop Lazar (Puhalo).<sup>247</sup> Although refuted both by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose<sup>248</sup> and by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad<sup>249</sup>, Puhalo's thesis continues to be received doctrine in HOCNA and elsewhere, and elicits passionate support on Orthodox list-forums. It may be useful, therefore, to review some of the major arguments.

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<sup>244</sup> St. Macarius, *Homilies*, XLIII, 4, 9.

<sup>245</sup> Later, he added a "Reply" to the objections of a certain priest called Matveevsky. See *Polnoe Zhizneopisanie Svititelia Ignatia Kavkazkogo*, Moscow, 2002, pp. 450-488 (in Russian).

<sup>246</sup> Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, p. 736.

<sup>247</sup> Puhalo, "The Soul, The Body and Death", *Orthodoxy Canada*, vols. 6-7 (1979-80).

<sup>248</sup> Rose, *The Soul after Death*, Platina, 1980, 2004.

<sup>249</sup> "Extract from the Minutes of the Session of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 31, no. 1, January-February, 1981, pp. 23-27.

## 1. Is the Toll-House Teaching Gnostic?

The idea that the toll-house teaching is Gnostic is refuted by the support given it by many Holy Fathers. A very large body of evidence in favour of the toll-houses from scriptural, patristic, hagiographical and liturgical sources was amassed by Rose in the book alluded to above. According to Puhalo, however, many of these sources are either apocryphal (e.g. St. Cyril of Alexandria's *Homily on the Departure of the Soul from the Body*) or influenced by Egyptian Gnostic ideas (e.g. the *Homilies* of St. Macarius the Great, quoted above) or the products of western heretical concepts concerning Divine justice, purgatory, etc. (e.g. the stories in St. Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* or the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People*).

Since the present writer is not competent to discuss questions of textual authenticity, the rest of this article will be based on authorities and writings whose authenticity has never been questioned - in Orthodox circles, at any rate.

St. Athanasius the Great writes in his *Life of Saint Anthony* that one night the saint received "a call from on high, saying, 'Anthony! Rise, go out and look!' He went out therefore - he knew which calls to heed - and, looking up, saw a towering figure, unsightly and frightening, standing and reaching to the clouds; further, certain beings ascending as though on wings. The former was stretching out his hands; some of the latter were stopped by him, while others flew over him and, having come through, rose without further trouble. At such as these the monster gnashed with his teeth, but exulted over those who fell. Forthwith a voice addressed itself to Anthony, 'Understand the vision!' His understanding opened up, and he realized that it was the passing of souls and that the monster standing there was the enemy, the envier of the faithful. Those answerable to him he lays hold of and keeps them from passing through, but those whom he failed to win over he cannot master as they pass out of his range. Here again, having seen this and taking it as a reminder, he struggled the more to advance from day to day in the things that lay before him."<sup>250</sup>

Anthony's disciple, Abba Ammonas, spoke of the power of the Holy Spirit enabling us to pass all "the powers of the air" (Ephesians 2.2) after death: "For this is the power which He gives to me here; it is this, again, which guides men into that rest, until he shall have passed all the 'powers of the air'. For there are forces at work in the air which hinder men, preventing them from coming to God."<sup>251</sup>

The theologian Nikolaos P. Vasileiades writes: "After his death poor man Lazarus 'was received up by the angels' (Luke 16.22). Angels, however, accompany not only the souls of the just, but also those of evil men, as the divine Chrysostom comments, basing his words on what God said to the foolish rich man: 'Fool, this night will they require thy soul from thee' (Luke 12.20). So while good angels accompanied the soul of Lazarus, the soul of the foolish rich man 'was required by certain terrible powers who had probably been sent for this reason. And the one (the rich man) they led away

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<sup>250</sup> St. Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., pp. 75-76.

<sup>251</sup> *The Letters of Ammonas*, Oxford: SLG Press, 1979, p. 3.

‘as a prisoner’ from the present life, but Lazarus ‘they escorted as one who had been crowned’. St. Justin the philosopher and martyr, interpreting the word of the psalm, ‘Rescue my soul from the sword, and this only-begotten one of mine from the hand of the dog; save me from the mouth of the lion’ (Psalm 21.21-22), comments: By this we are taught how we also should seek the same from God when we approach our departure from this life. For God alone can turn away every ‘evil angel’ so that he may not seize our soul.

“Basil the Great relates that the holy martyr Gordius (whose memory is celebrated on January 3<sup>rd</sup>) went to martyrdom not as if he was about to meet the public, but as if he was about to hand himself over into the hands of angels who immediately, since they received him as ‘newly slaughtered’, would convey him to ‘the blessed life’ like the poor man Lazarus. In another place, the holy Father, with reasons (at that time men used to be baptized at a great age), said: Let no one deceive himself with lying and empty words (Ephesians 5.6); for the catastrophe will come suddenly upon him (I Thessalonians 5.3); it will come like a tempest. There will come ‘a sullen angel’ who will lead away your soul which will have been bound by its sins; and your soul will then turn within itself and groan silently, for the further reason, moreover, that the organ of lamentation (the body) will have been cut off from it. O how you will wail for yourself at that hour of death! How you will groan!

“The Lord’s words: ‘The ruler of the world cometh, and has nothing in Me’ (John 14.3) are interpreted by St. Basil as follows: Satan comes, who has power over men who live far from God. But in Me he will find nothing of his own that might give him power or any right over Me. And the luminary of Caesarea adds: The sinless Lord said that the devil would not find anything in Him which would give him power over Him; for man, however, it is sufficient if he can be so bold as to say at the hour of his death that the ruler of this world comes and will in me only a few and small sins. The same Father says in another place that the evil spirits watch the departure of the soul more vigilantly and attentively than ever enemies have watched a besieged city or thieves a treasury. St. Chrysostom calls ‘customs-officers’ those ‘threatening angels and abusive powers’ of terrible appearance, meeting whom the soul is seized with trembling; and in another place he says that these ‘persecutors are called customs-officials and tax-collectors by the Divine Scripture’.

“In that temporary state [between the death of the body and the Last Judgement] the just live under different conditions from the sinners. According to St. Gregory the Theologian, every ‘beautiful and God-loving’ soul has scarcely been parted from the body when it experiences a ‘wonderful’ inner happiness because of all the good things that await it in endless eternity. For this reason ‘it rejoices’ and goes forward redeemed, forgiven and purified ‘to its Master’ since it has left the present life which was like an unbearable prison. On the other hand, the souls of the sinners are drawn ‘to the left by avenging angels by force in a bound state until they are near gehenna’. From there, as they face ‘the terrible sight of the fire’ of punishment, they tremble in expectation ‘of the coming judgement’ and are already punished ‘in effect’ (St. Hippolytus). For the whole time that they are separated from their bodies they are not separated from the passions which had dominion over them on earth, but they bear

with them their tendency to sin. For that reason their suffering is the more painful (St. Gregory of Nyssa)."<sup>252</sup>

Visions of the passage through the toll-houses are common also in the *Lives* of the Celtic saints. Thus we read about St. Columba of Iona that "one day he suddenly looked up towards heaven and said: 'Happy woman, happy and virtuous, whose soul the angels of God now take to paradise!' One of the brothers was a devout man called Genereus, the Englishman, who was the baker. He was at work in the bakery where he heard St. Columba say this. A year later, on the same day, the saint again spoke to Genereus the Englishman, saying: 'I see a marvelous thing. The woman of whom I spoke in your presence a year ago today – look! – she is meeting in the air the soul of a devout layman, her husband, and is fighting for him together with the holy angels against the power of the enemy. With their help and because the man himself was always righteous, his soul is rescued from the devils' assaults and is brought to the place of eternal refreshment.'"<sup>253</sup>

Coming to our own age, we have mentioned the witness of the holy Bishops Ignatius Brianchaninov and Elder Barsanuphius of Optina. Still closer to our time is St. John Maximovich (+1966), who writes: "Many appearances of the dead have given us to know in part what happens with the soul when it leaves the body. When it no longer sees with its bodily eyes, its spiritual vision is opened. This frequently occurs even before actual death; while seeing and even conversing with those around them, the dying see that which others do not. Leaving the body, the soul finds itself among other spirits, good and evil. Usually it strives towards those which are more akin to it, but if while still in the body it was under the influence of certain spirits, it remains dependent upon them when it leaves the body, no matter how unpleasant they might prove to be at the encounter.

"For two days the soul enjoys relative freedom and can visit its favourite places on earth, but on the third day it makes its way towards other realms. At this time it passes through a horde of wicked spirits, who obstruct its path and accuse the soul of various sins by which they themselves had deceived it. According to revelations, there are twenty such barriers, so-called 'toll-houses'. At each stop the soul is tested as to a particular sin. Passing through one, the soul comes upon the next, and only after successfully passing through them all can the soul continue its way, and not be thrown

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<sup>252</sup> Vasileiades, *The Mystery of Death*, Athens: Sotir, 1980, pp. 368, 371-372, 189 in the Greek edition, 382-382, 386 and 404-405 in the English edition. St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on the Rich Man and Lazarus*, 2, P.G. 48:984; St. Justin the Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 105, 3-5; St. Basil the Great, *Homily on Gordius the Martyr*, 8, P.G. 321:505C; *Exhortation to Holy Baptism*, 8, P.G. 31:444D-444A; *On Psalm 7.2*, P.G. 29:232C-233A; St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 53 on Matthew*, 5, P.G. 58:532; *On Patience*, P.G. 60:727; St. Gregory the Theologian, *Homily 7, to Caesarius*, 21, P.G. 35:781; St. Hippolytus, *To the Greeks*, 1; St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, P.G. 46:88.

<sup>253</sup> Adomnan, *Life of St. Columba*, III, 10. When St. Brendan the Navigator was dying, his sister said to him: "Father, what dost thou fear?" "I fear," said he, "my lonely passing: I fear the darkness of the way: I fear the untravelled road, the presence of the King, the sentence of the Judge" (Rev. Francis Browne, *Saints and Shrine of Lough Corrib*, pp. 4-5). And when St. Ciaran of Clonmacnoise came to die, and said, "Dreadful is the way upwards" his disciples said: "But surely not for you?" "Och," said St. Ciaran, "indeed my conscience is clear of offence, but yet, even David and Paul dreaded this road" (D.D.C. Pochin Mould, *Ireland of the Saints*, London: Batsford, 1953, p. 79).

straightway into hell. These demons and their trials are so horrendous that the Mother of God herself, when informed by Archangel Gabriel of her imminent repose, entreated her Son to deliver her from those demons and, in fulfillment of her prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared from Heaven to take the soul of His Most Pure Mother and carry it up to Heaven. The third day is terrifying for the soul, and it is especially in need of prayer.

“Once having safely passed through the toll-houses and having bowed down before God, the soul spends the next thirty-seven days visiting the heavenly habitations and the chasms of hades, not knowing where it will find itself, and only on the fortieth day is it assigned its place of waiting until the resurrection of the dead. Some souls find themselves with a foretaste of eternal joy and blessedness, while others – in fear of eternal torments, which will begin in earnest after the Dread Judgement. Until that time, changes in the state of the soul are still possible, especially through offering for their sake the Bloodless Sacrifice (commemoration at the Divine Liturgy), and likewise through other prayers.”<sup>254</sup>

Descriptions of the passage of souls through the toll-houses are to be found in the Orthodox literature of many ages and nations. Such universality is in itself a witness against the idea that the toll-house tradition is Gnostic.

## **2. To Whom Belongs the Judgement?**

Puhalo also argues that the toll-house tradition is heretical on the grounds that it implies that the judgement of souls after death is not God’s but the demons’. Moreover, it is very close, he claims, to the papist doctrine of purgatory. For “the difference between the purgatory myth and that of the aerial toll-houses is that the one gives God satisfaction by means of physical torment, while the other gives Him His needed satisfaction by means of mental torture.”<sup>255</sup>

To discuss the role of justice and its satisfaction would take us too far from the toll-house. Therefore suffice it to say that while all judgement of souls is in the hands of God, He often uses created beings as the instruments of His justice, just as a judge might use lawyers for the prosecution and defence, or a king might use an executioner. Thus we think of the avenging Angel who slew all the first-born of Egypt, and of the Archangel Michael’s destruction of the 185,000 warriors of Sennacherib. And it is not only good angels who carry out His will in this way: the other plagues of Egypt were “a mission performed by evil angels” (Psalm 77.53).

We are not tempted to think, in these cases, that God has lost control: He is simply executing His will through created instruments. Similarly, we should not think that God is not carrying out His own judgement when he allows the soul to be tested at the toll-houses. Here God is revealing His judgement on a soul through the agency, on the one hand, of demons, who, like counsel for the prosecution, bring up all the

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<sup>254</sup> St. John Maximovich, “I Believe in the Resurrection of the Dead”, in *Man of God: Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco*, Redding, Ca.: Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1991, pp. 143-144.

<sup>255</sup> Puhalo, *Orthodoxy Canada*, vol. 6, no. 12, 1979, p. 23.

evil things that the soul has thought or done, and, on the other hand, of the good angels, who, like counsel for the defence, bring up its good deeds. Moreover, insofar as it is the good angels who encourage men to good deeds, and the demons who incite them to evil, this procedure actually reveals to the soul the hidden springs of many of his actions on earth.

Thus there is no contradiction, contrary to Puhalo's assertion, between the demons' testing souls at the toll-houses and the final judgement of sinners being delivered by God Himself, Who "cuts them off from the Holy Spirit". Of course, God has no need for a detailed examination of our thoughts and deeds; it is *we* who, in accordance with His justice, are required to come to a full consciousness of them. For the Lord Himself said: "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account of in the day of judgement" (Matthew 12.36). Sinners who fail the searching test of their conscience at the toll-houses are indeed cut off from the Holy Spirit, and their souls are "cast into prison" (Matthew 5.25), the prison of hades, of spiritual darkness and excommunication from God, until the final judgement of soul and body together on the last day. Thus while angels accuse and excuse, it is God alone who delivers the final verdict; He alone decides the soul's destiny.

Moreover, in His mercy God often "tips the balance" in favour of the sinner when the demons appear to have won the case. Thus in the *Life of St. Niphon*, Bishop of Constantia in Cyprus, we read: "With his clairvoyant eyes the Saint saw also the souls of men after their departure from the body. Once, standing at prayer in the church of St. Anastasia, he raised his eyes to heaven and saw the heavens opened and many angels, of whom some were descending to earth, and others were ascending bearing to heaven many human souls. And he saw two angels ascending, carrying someone's soul. And when they came near the toll-house of fornication, the demonic tax-collectors came out and said with anger: 'This is our soul; how do you dare to carry him past us?' The angels replied: 'What kind of sign do you have on this soul, that you consider it yours?' The demons said: 'It defiled itself before death with sin, not only natural ones but even unnatural ones; besides that, it judged its neighbour and died without repentance. What do you say to that?' 'We will not believe,' said the angels, 'either you or your father the devil, until we ask the guardian angel of this soul.' And when they asked him, he said: 'It is true that this soul sinned much, but when it got sick it began to weep and confess its sin before God; and if God has forgiven it, He knows why: He has the authority. Glory be to His righteous judgement!' Then the angels, having put the demons to shame, entered the heavenly gates with that soul. Then the blessed one saw the angels carrying yet another soul, and the demons ran out to them and cried out: 'Why are you carrying souls without knowing them? For example, you are carrying this one, who is a lover of money, a bearer of malice, and an outlaw.' The angels replied: 'We well know that it did all these things, but it wept and lamented, confessed its sins, and gave alms; for this God has forgiven it.' But the demons began to say: 'If even this soul is worthy of God's mercy, then take and carry away the sinners from the whole world. Why should we be labouring?' To this the angels replied: 'All sinners who confess their sins with humility and tears receive

forgiveness by God's mercy; but he who dies without repentance is judged by God."<sup>256</sup>

This shows, on the one hand, that the demons are essentially powerless, and on the other, that such authority as they possess over souls is ceded to them by the souls themselves when they willingly follow their enticements. For the Lord said: "He who sins is the servant of sin" (John 8.34), and therefore of him who is the origin and instigator of sin, the devil. If the demons have power even in this life over those who willingly follow their suggestions, what reason have we for believing that these souls do not continue in bondage after their departure from the body? However, if we resist sin and the devil in this life, they will have no power over us in the next. For, as St. Anthony says: "If the demons had no power even over the swine, much less have they any over men formed in the image of God. So then we ought to fear God only, and despise the demons, and be in no fear of them."<sup>257</sup>

### 3. The Toll-Houses and Purgatory

But if the judgement of souls after death is not in any real sense a judgement by the devil, as opposed to God, much less is it a purging of souls in the papist sense. At most, the fear experienced on passing through the toll-houses can to some extent purify the soul. That this is admitted by the Orthodox Church is shown by the following reply of St. Mark of Ephesus to the Roman cardinals on purgatory: "At the beginning of your report you speak thus: 'If those who truly repent have departed this life in love (towards God) before they were able to give satisfaction by means of worthy fruits for their transgressions or offences, their souls are cleansed after death by means of purgatorial sufferings; but for the easing (or 'deliverance') of them from these sufferings they are aided by the help which is shown them on the part of the faithful who are alive, as for example: prayers, Liturgies, almsgiving, and other works of piety.'

"To this we answer the following: of the fact that those reposed in faith are without doubt helped by the Liturgies and prayers and almsgiving performed for them, and that this custom has been in force since antiquity, there is the testimony of many and various utterances of the Teachers, both Latin and Greek, spoken and written at various times and in various places. But that souls are delivered thanks to a certain purgatorial suffering and temporal fire which possesses such (a purgatorial) power and has the character of a help - this we do not find either in the Scriptures or in the prayers and hymns for the dead, or in the words of the Teachers. But we have received that even the souls which are held in hell and are already given over to eternal torments, whether in actual fact and experience or in hopeless expectation of such, can be aided and given a certain small help, although not in the sense of completely loosing them from torment or giving hope for a final deliverance. And this is shown from the words of the great Macarius the Egyptian ascetic who, finding a skull in the desert, was instructed by it concerning this by the action of Divine power. And Basil the Great, in the prayers read at Pentecost writes literally the following: 'Who also, on

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<sup>256</sup> *The Orthodox Word*, May-June, 1980, pp. 139-140.

<sup>257</sup> St. Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Anthony*.

this all-perfect and saving feast, art graciously pleased to accept propitiatory prayers for those who are imprisoned in hell, granting us a great hope of improvement for those who are imprisoned from the defilements which have imprisoned them, and that Thou wilt send down Thy consolation' (Third Kneeling Prayer at Vespers).

"But if souls have departed this life in faith and love, while nevertheless carrying away with themselves certain faults, whether small ones over which they have not repented at all, or great ones for which – even though they have repented over them – they did not undertake to show fruits of repentance: such souls, we believe, must be cleansed from this kind of sins, but not by means of some purgatorial fire or a definite punishment in some place (for this, as we have said, has not at all been handed down to us). But some must be cleansed in the very departure from the body, thanks only to fear, as St. Gregory the Dialogist literally shows; while others must be cleansed after the departure from the body, either while remaining in the same earthly place, before they come to worship God and are honoured with the lot of the blessed, or – if their sins were more serious and bind them for a longer duration – they are kept in hell, but not in order to remain forever in fire and torment, but as it were in prison and confinement under guard.

"All such ones, we affirm, are helped by the prayers and Liturgies performed for them, with the cooperation of the Divine goodness and love for mankind. This Divine cooperation immediately disdains and remits some sins, those committed out of human weakness, as Dionysius the Great (the Areopagite) says in *Reflections on the Mystery of those Reposed in the Faith* (in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, VII, 7); while other sins, after a certain time, by righteous judgements it either likewise releases and forgives – and that completely – or lightens the responsibility for them until that final Judgement. And therefore we see no necessity whatever for any other punishment or for a cleansing fire; for some are cleansed by fear, while others are devoured by the gnawings of conscience with more torment than any fire, and still others are cleansed by the very terror before the Divine glory and the uncertainty as to what the future will be. And that this is much more tormenting and punishing than anything else, experience itself shows..."<sup>258</sup>

Thus while St. Mark rejected the idea of a purging by fire as the cardinals understood it, he definitely accepted the notion of a purging by fear and the gnawings of conscience. Now the experience of the soul after death which Orthodox writers describe by means of the toll-house metaphor is certainly an experience which includes fear and the gnawings of conscience. We may therefore conclude that there is nothing heretical in the notion of the toll-houses – provided we remember that it is a metaphor and not a literal description of events.

### 3. Soul-Sleep?

A third set of objections raised by Puhalo is based on the teaching that the soul when separated from the body cannot, by its nature, have such experiences as are attributed to it by the Orthodox teaching. For "the notion that the soul can exit the

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<sup>258</sup> St. Mark of Ephesus, "First Homily on Purgatorial Fire", *The Orthodox Word*, March-April, 1978.

body, move about, have experiences, receive visions, revelations, wander from place to place, make progress or be examined and judged without the body, is essentially Origenistic, and is derived from the philosophies of the pagan religions of Greece and elsewhere... Old Testament anthropology, like that of the New Testament, never conceived of an immortal soul inhabiting a moral body from which it might be liberated, but always conceived a simple, non-dualistic anthropology of a single, psychophysical organism. And active, intellectual life or functioning of the soul alone could never be conceived in either Old or New Testament thought. For the soul to function, its restoration with the body as the 'whole person' would be absolutely necessary."<sup>259</sup> At the same time, Puhalo accepts that the soul has "some consciousness of future destiny, some hope", and is "neither dead nor devoid of spiritual sensations".<sup>260</sup>

The question arises: why should not the experiences that the Orthodox teaching attributes to the soul after death be accounted as "spiritual sensations"? We have seen, for example, that according to St. Basil the indolent soul after death "groans silently" because "the organ of lamentation (the body) will have been cut off from it". So while it cannot lament in the way it did before, the soul still laments – in a disincarnate, bodiless way. Similarly, it sees without eyes and hears without ears. These "spiritual" experiences are certainly different from their analogues in the sensual world, but they are none the less real and vivid for all that.

The difference between the spiritual and sensual senses is well illustrated by the following: "they used to tell a story of a certain great old man, and say that when he was traveling along a road two angels cleaved to him and journeyed with him, one on his right hand and the other on his left. And as they were going along they found lying on the road a dead body which stank, and the old man closed his nostrils because of the evil smell, and the angels did the same. Now after they had gone on a little farther, the old man said unto them, 'Do ye also smell as we do?' And they said unto him, 'No, but because of thee we closed our nostrils. For it is not for us to smell the rottenness of this world, but we do smell the souls which stink of sin, because the breath of such is nigh for us.'"<sup>261</sup>

It is not only angels who have these spiritual senses: to the degree that a man is purified he may also see, hear and smell spiritually even while in the body: "It came to pass that when the old man [St. Pachomius the Great] had said these things to the brethren, the door-keeper came to him and said: 'Certain travelers, who are men of importance, have come hither, and they wish to meet thee.' And he said: 'Call them hither.' And when they had seen all the brotherhood, and had gone round all the cells of the brethren they wanted to hold converse with him by themselves. Now when they had taken their seats in a secluded chamber, there came unto the old man a strong smell of uncleanness though he thought that it must arise from them because he was speaking with them face to face; and he was not able to learn the cause of the same by the supplication which [he made] to God, for he perceived that that their speech was

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<sup>259</sup> Puhalo, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 33.

<sup>260</sup> Puhalo, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>261</sup> Palladius, *The Paradise of the Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 200.

fruitful [of thought] and that their minds were familiar with the Scriptures, but he was not acquainted with their intellectual uncleanness. Then, after he had spoken unto them many things out of the Divine Books, and the season of the ninth hour had drawn nigh meanwhile, they rose up that they might come to their own place, and Rabba entreated them to partake of some food there but they did not accept [his petition, saying] that they were in duty bound to arrive home before sunset; so they prayed, and they saluted us, and then they departed.

“And Abba, in order to learn the cause of the uncleanness of these men, went into his cell, and prayed to God; and he knew straightway that it was the doctrine of wickedness which arose from their souls and pursued these men, and having overtaken them, he said unto them, ‘Do ye call that which is written in the works of Origen heresy?’ And when they had heard the question they denied and said that they did not. Then the holy man said unto them, ‘Behold, I take you to witness before God, that every man who readeth and accepteth the work of Origen, shall certainly arrive in the fire of Sheol, and his inheritance shall be everlasting darkness. That which I know from God I have made you to be witnesses of, and I am therefore not condemned by God on this account, and ye yourselves know about it. Behold, I have made you hear the truth. And if ye believe me, and if ye wish to gratify God, take all the writings of Origen and cast them into the fire; and never seek to read them again.’ And when Abba Pachomius had said these things he left them.”<sup>262</sup>

Spiritual beings not only *smell* the spiritual condition of souls: they also *see* them – and their appearance depends on their spiritual state. Thus St. John the Baptist once appeared to St. Diadochus of Photike, and said that “neither the angels nor the soul can be seen” by the bodily senses insofar as they are “beings which do not have a shape”. However, he went on, “one must know that they have a visible aspect, a beauty and a spiritual limitation, so that the splendour of their thoughts is their form and their beauty. That is why, when the soul has beautiful thoughts, it is all illumined and visible in all its parts, but if bad ones, then it has no luster and nothing to be admired...”<sup>263</sup>

When the soul is separated from the body, it loses the use of its bodily senses, but by no means the use of its spiritual senses. On the contrary, they revive. For, as St. John Maximovich says, “When it [the soul] no longer sees with its bodily eyes, its spiritual vision is opened.” Again, St. John Chrysostom writes: “Do not say to me, ‘He who has died does not hear, does not speak, does not see, does not feel, since neither does a man who sleeps.’ If it is necessary to say something wondrous, the soul of a sleeping man somehow sleeps, but not so with him who has died, for [his soul] has awakened.”<sup>264</sup> Again, St. John Cassian writes: “The souls of the dead not only do not lose consciousness, they do not even lose their dispositions – that is, hope and fear, joy and grief, and something of that which they expect for themselves at the Universal Judgement they begin already to foretaste... They become yet more alive and more

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<sup>262</sup> *The Paradise of the Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 292-293.

<sup>263</sup> St. Diadochus, in *Orthodoxie: Bulletin des Vrais Chrétiens des pays francophones (Orthodox Bulletin of the True Orthodox Christians of the French-speaking Countries)*, no. 13, January, 1981, p. 5.

<sup>264</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Lazarus and the Rich Man*.

zealously cling to the glorification of God. And truly, if we were to reason on the basis of the testimony of the Sacred Scripture concerning the nature of the soul, in the measure of our understanding, would it not be, I will not say extreme stupidity, but at least folly, to suspect even in the least that the most precious part of man (that is, the soul), in which, according to the blessed Apostle, the image and likeness of God is contained, after putting off this fleshly coarseness in which it finds itself in this present life, should become unconscious – that part which, containing in itself the power of reason, makes sensitive by its presence even the dumb and unconscious matter of the flesh?”<sup>265</sup>

Not only is the soul the opposite of unconscious and unfeeling when it departs from the body: its sinful passions reveal themselves in all their hidden strength. “For the soul,” writes St. Dorotheus of Gaza, “wars against this body with the passions and is comforted, eats, drinks, sleeps, talks to and meets up with friends. But when it leaves the body it is left alone with the passions. It is tormented by them, at odds with them, incensed at being troubled by them and savaged by them... Do you want an example of what I am saying to you? Let one of you come and let me lock him up in a dark cell, and for no more than three days let him not eat nor drink, nor sleep, not meet anyone, not singing hymns or praying, not even desiring God, and you will see what the passions make of him. And that while he is still in this life. How much more so when the soul has left the body and is delivered to the passions and will remain all along with them...”<sup>266</sup>

It follows that the ancient heresy of “soul-sleep”, which is here revived in a modern form by Puhalo in his polemic against the toll-houses, is false: the soul in its disincarnate form can indeed spiritually perceive angels and demons and feel “hope and fear, joy and grief” in their presence.

## Conclusion

The doctrine of the toll-houses, of the particular judgement of souls after death, is indeed a fearful doctrine. But it is a true and salutary and Orthodox one. Let us therefore gather this saving fear into our souls, in accordance with the word: “Remember thine end, and thou shalt never sin” (Sirach 7.36).

*February 8/21, 1981; revised July 9/22, 2004 and November 14/27, 2007.*

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<sup>265</sup> St. John Cassian, *First Conference of Abba Moses*.

<sup>266</sup> St. Dorotheus, *Kataniktikoi Logoi*, in Archimandrite Vasilios Bakogiannis, *After Death*, Katerini, 2001, p. 123.

## **19. THE PHENOMENON OF FALSE ELDERSHIP**

*A Rejoinder to the "Response" to Fr. Alexey Young's Article "Cults Within and "Without"  
(Orthodox America, March-April, 1996)*

The phenomenon of false eldership is well-known in monastic circles. However, in our times it has become rampant even in parishes in the world – especially in the Moscow Patriarchate, but also in True Orthodox Church. Fr. Alexey Young has justly criticised the practice whereby lay parishioners are given monastic-style obediences by parish priests who arrogate to themselves authority over them that is appropriate only to a true, Spirit bearing elder. And he is surely right to say that you should be wary "if you are a layman in a parish situation [and] are expected to get permission ('a blessing') from the priest before you change jobs, buy a new car, etc. Under normal circumstances these are not the proper purview of a parish priest, however wise and pious he may otherwise be. One may -- and should -- ask for prayers and advice about these and other non-controversial aspects of practical life, but asking for permission is quite a different thing." Since such demands for monastic-style obedience are often encountered by laymen, Fr. Alexey, as a pastor of laymen, has every right to express an opinion on the subject, basing himself, of course, on the Tradition of the Orthodox Church as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Holy Fathers.

One of the Fathers who spoke most urgently about the dangers of false elders was St. Ignaty Brianchaninov, who wrote: "What has been said of solitude and seclusion must also be said of obedience to elders in the form in which it was practiced in ancient monasticism -- *such obedience is not given in our time.*"<sup>267</sup> Fr. Alexey does not mention Bishop Ignatius, but he follows in the same tradition when he asserts: "... in this country, at least, there are NO true elders today whose voice can be the voice of heaven for a disciple or spiritual child" (emphasis his).

The *Response* disputes this opinion, pointing out that the Optina elders flourished during the time of St. Ignaty, and that "in this century, many Holy Elders in Russia, Romania Bulgaria, Greece, Mt Athos, Mt. Sinai and elsewhere have led countless souls to salvation."

However, disputes about the number of elders in Russia or America in the 19th or 20th century are beside the point. The point is that the grace of true eldership has +grown exceedingly scarce (how could it be otherwise in the era of the Antichrist?), and that great care must therefore be exercised before entering into a relationship of strict obedience to a supposed elder, insofar as obedience to a false elder, according to the Holy Fathers, can lead to the loss of one's soul.

Let us consider some examples. In the sixth century, when monasticism was at its height and truly Spirit-bearing elders could be found in many places, Saint John of the Ladder still found it necessary to warn: "When motives of humility and real longing for salvation decide us to bend our neck and entrust ourselves to another in the Lord,

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<sup>267</sup> Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1991, chapter 12, p. 43, emphasis mine.

before entering upon this life, if there is any vice and pride in us, we ought first to question and examine, and even, so to speak, test our helmsman, so as not to mistake the sailor for the pilot, a sick man for a doctor, a passionate for a dispassionate man, the sea for a harbor, and so bring about the speedy shipwreck of our soul."<sup>268</sup>

Again, in the eleventh century Saint Symeon the New Theologian wrote: "If you wish to renounce the world and learn the life of the Gospel, do not surrender (entrust) yourself to an inexperienced or passionate master, lest instead of the life of the Gospel you learn a diabolic life. For the teaching of good teachers is good, while the teaching of bad teachers is bad. Bad seeds invariably produce bad fruits...

"Every blind man who undertakes to guide others is a deceiver or quack, and those who follow him are cast into the pit of destruction, according to the word of the Lord, If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a hole (Matthew 15:14)."<sup>269</sup>

In the eighteenth century, the situation had become so serious that, in spite of having an ardent desire to find a true elder to whom he could bow his neck in complete obedience, Saint Paisius Velichkovsky was unable to find such a man, although he scoured all the lands between Russia and Mount Athos. Eventually he and a like-minded brother from the Holy Mountain entered into mutual obedience to each other, "having instead of a father and instructor the teaching of our Holy Fathers."<sup>270</sup>

The author of the *Response* writes: "We must also understand what true Eldership is. True Elders do not, of course, ask us to do what is immoral or wrong. Nor do they claim to speak with the authority of Heaven or to possess infallibility. We Orthodox are not Papists."

So far so good. But then he continues: "To the extent that we entrust our souls to our Elders, make them images of Christ, and let God work through them, their human errors become inconsequential. In short, our obedience within monasticism, covered as we are by the Grace of the sacred tonsure, produces eldership. Eldership is not personal. Wherever there is sincere monastic obedience, there is Eldership."

The obedience of disciples produces elders, makes them images of Christ?! Perhaps this is just careless language, but the prima facie sense of the words implies that the grace of eldership comes, not from above, but from below, not from God but from the subjective and quite possibly misplaced faith of the disciple. Perhaps what is meant is that God bestows the grace of eldership on a man in response to the eager faith of his disciple. But this is still unacceptable from an Orthodox point of view. A disciple can no more make an elder than a layman can ordain a priest.

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<sup>268</sup> St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; Willits, CA: Eastern Orthodox Books, 1973, p. 67, Step 4:6.

<sup>269</sup> St. Symeon, *Practical and Theological Texts*, 32, 34, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 3.

<sup>270</sup> *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1976, pp. 68, 147-148.

St. Ignaty puts the point in typically trenchant fashion: "Perhaps you retort: A novice's faith can take the place of an incompetent elder. It is untrue. Faith in the truth saves. Faith in a lie and in a diabolic delusion is ruinous, according to the teaching of the Apostle. They refused to love the truth that would save them, he says of those who are voluntarily perishing. Therefore, God will send them (will permit them to suffer) a strong delusion, so that they will believe a lie, that all may be condemned who do not believe the truth but delight in falsehood (II Thessalonians 2:10-12)."<sup>271</sup>

How, then, are we to distinguish between true and false elders? I. M. Kontzevich provides the answer in his book on the Optina elders: "Those who have given themselves over to the direction of a true elder experience a special feeling of joy and freedom in the Lord. He who writes these lines has personally experienced this in himself. The elder is the immediate channel of the will of God. Communion with God is always accompanied by a 'feeling of spiritual freedom, joy, and indescribable peace in the soul. Contrary to this, the false elder pushes God into the background, putting his own will in the place of God, which is accompanied by a feeling of enslavement, depression and, almost always, despondency. Besides, the complete submission of the disciples before the false elder exterminates his personality, buries his will, perverts the feeling of righteousness and truth, and, in this way, weans his conscience from responsibility for his actions.

"Concerning false eldership his Reverence Ignaty Brianchaninov says this: 'It is a terrible business, out of self-opinion and on one's own authority, to take upon oneself duties which can be carried out only by the order of the Holy Spirit and by the action of the Spirit. It is a terrible thing to pretend to be a vessel of the Holy Spirit when all the while relations with Satan have not been broken and the vessel is still being defiled by the action of Satan! It is disastrous both from oneself and one's neighbor; it is criminal, blasphemous.'

"False eldership produces hypnosis of thought. And since at the root of it there lies a false idea, this idea produces spiritual blindness. When the false idea covers up reality, then no arguments will be accepted any longer, since they stumble upon an idée fixe, which is considered to be an unshakeable axiom."<sup>272</sup>

True eldership, according to Kontzevich, is nothing other than the gift of prophecy, the second of the gifts of the Spirit listed by the Apostle Paul (I Corinthians 12:28). This is confirmed by Hieroconfessor Barnabas (Belyaev), Bishop of Pechersk, himself a clairvoyant elder, who wrote: "Elders in Russian ecclesiastical consciousness are ascetics who have passed through a long probation and have come to know the spiritual warfare from experience, who by many exploits have acquired the gift of discernment, and who, finally, are capable by prayer of attaining to the will of God for man. That is, to a greater or lesser extent they have received the gift of clairvoyance and are therefore capable of giving spiritual direction to those who turn to them."<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 45, emphasis his.

<sup>272</sup> Kontzevich, *Optina Pustyn' i ee Vremia (Optina Desert and its Time)*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1970, pp. 12-13, emphasis his.

<sup>273</sup> Bishop Barnabas Belyaev, *Pravoslavie (Orthodoxy)*, Kolomna: New Golutvin Convent, 1995, p. 149, emphasis mine.

St. Ignaty's warnings against false eldership should not be taken as a renunciation of all forms of monastic obedience. If they were, his works would hardly have been given as required reading for monastics by the Optina elders and Bishop Theophan the Recluse. Hieromonk Nikon of Optina, in his commentary on St. Ignaty's writings<sup>274</sup> explains that his warnings apply only to the strictest kind of elder-disciple relationship: less strict forms of obedience still retain all their spiritual usefulness, even necessity; for no Christian can be saved without obedience and the cutting off of his will in some way. But in our apocalyptic age, when the love of many has grown cold and there is a general spiritual impoverishment, it is as dangerous to demand the strictest forms of obedience as it would be to demand the strictest forms of fasting or prayer or other kinds of ascetic endeavour. We must discern the signs of the times, and adapt our strategies for survival accordingly.

When we see, on the one hand, how difficult it is to be a Christian in the maze of modern life, and, on the other, with what swiftness and apparent ease the monks and pious laymen of past ages attained salvation through strict obedience to a God-bearing elder, it is tempting to find such an elder even when he does not exist. But when we surrender our will to a false elder, we become slaves of a man, a man who is suffering a very grave spiritual sickness; whereas Apostle Paul says, "You were bought with a price; do not become the slaves of men" (I Corinthians 7:23). And having become slaves of men, we lose that most quintessential attribute of man made in the image of God - independent judgment, and the ability to turn to God directly for enlightenment and help.

Many converts are tempted to submit to a false elder for another reason - that he led them to Orthodoxy and may well be the only Orthodox leader in the vicinity. Then a mixture of gratitude and the fear of becoming completely isolated may lead the convert to conclude that Divine Providence must have led him to submit his whole life to this man for the salvation of his soul. The false elder, who is often a cunning psychologist, can exploit this situation to gain complete control over his disciples, adding, in the case of disobedience, the threat of fearsome sanctions, including very strict penances, curses and even anathematization and expulsion (supposedly) from the Orthodox Church! - a tragic situation which may lead to the convert's abandoning the Orthodox Church altogether, and which the present writer has personally observed in True Orthodox communities in England, Russia, Bulgaria and Greece.

Many who have fallen into the trap of false eldership and begin to see their real situation, are deterred from breaking free by false feelings of guilt, as if there were no circumstances in which a disciple can disobey an elder. But, even apart from heresy, there are certain conditions in which it is right to disobey and leave one's elder, as we read in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers:

A brother questioned Abba Poemen, saying, "I am losing my soul through living near my abba; should I go on living with him?" The old man knew that he was finding this harmful and he was surprised that he even asked if he should stay there. So he

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<sup>274</sup> Hieromonk Nikon, *Pis'ma k Dukhovnym Chadam (Letters to Spiritual Children)*, Kuibyshev, 1990.

said to him, "Stay if you want to." The brother left him and stayed there. He came back again and said, "I am losing my soul." But the old man did not tell him to leave. He came a third time and said, "I really cannot stay there any longer." Then Abba Poemen said, "Now you are saving yourself; go away and do not stay with him any longer. And he added, "When someone sees that he is in danger of losing his soul, he does not need to ask advice."<sup>275</sup>

Perhaps the most characteristic mark of the last times is the spiritual isolation of believers. As David says: "I am alone until I pass by... Flight hath failed me, and there is none that watcheth out for my soul" (Psalm 140.12, 141.6).<sup>276</sup> Of course, no true Christian is ever really alone: he always has with him God and the Mother of God and all the saints and angels of the Heavenly Church. But in the last times the support of the Heavenly Church may be the only real support that the conscientious believer has, as the Earthly Church grows weak and small, and even such leaders as are left become ensnared in uncanonical situations or suspect in some other way.

This has been the experience of many thousands of believers of the Russian Catacomb Church, and it is therefore from that Church that we hear the most urgent admonitions to preserve our spiritual freedom, "lest imperceptibly and little by little we lose the freedom which our Lord Jesus Christ, the Liberator of all men, has 'given us as a free gift by His Own Blood'.<sup>277</sup>

Thus Hieromartyr Bishop Damascene, Bishop of Glukhov, said, "Perhaps the time has come when the Lord does not wish that the Church should stand as an intermediary between Himself and the believers, but that everyone is called to stand directly before the Lord and himself answer as it was with the forefathers!"<sup>278</sup> Again, Hieromartyr Joseph, Metropolitan of Petrograd, emphasized the possibility that the true Christians of the last times will have to leave all the recognized spiritual guides; for "perhaps the last 'rebels' against the betrayers of the Church and the accomplices of Her ruin will be not only bishops and not protopriests, but the simplest mortals, just as at the Cross of Christ His last gasp of suffering was heard by a few simple souls who were close to Him..."<sup>279</sup>

Thus we may be moving into the last period of the Church's history, when the wheel has come round full circle and the Church has returned to the molecular structure of Abraham's Family Church, when true bishops are few and far between, when charismatic spiritual guides have more or less disappeared, and when the individual believer has to seek the answers to his spiritual problems from God and God's word alone, remembering David's words: It is better to trust in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to hope in the Lord than to hope in princes (Psalm 118:8-9).

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<sup>275</sup> Abba Poemen, *The Alphabetical Series*, Pi, Poemen, 189, London: Mowbrays, 1975.

<sup>276</sup> In the Septuagint, the Greek word "επισκοπεει", translated here as "watcheth out" could also be translated as "superviseth" or "acts as a bishop".

<sup>277</sup> 8th Canon of the Third Ecumenical Council.

<sup>278</sup> Bishop Damascene, in E.L., *Episkopy-ispovedniki (Bishop-Confessors)*, San Francisco, 1971, p. 92.

<sup>279</sup> Metropolitan Joseph, in I.M. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, Platina, CA: St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1982, p. 128.

If even the Apostle Peter was rebuked for making damaging concessions to the Jews (Galatians 2:11-12), how can we expect never to be in conflict with our spiritual leaders? And if even the Apostle Paul feared lest after preaching to others he himself should be disqualified (I Corinthians 9:27), how can we deny the possibility that our spiritual guides may also lose grace, necessitating our departure from them? Those who point out these facts are not inciting to rebellion -far from it! They are calling men to a sober understanding of the nature of the times we live in, They are warning that those who, unlike the true apostles and holy fathers and God-bearing elders of all ages, attempt to lord it over our faith (II Corinthians 1:24) must be rejected for the sake of that same faith, out of obedience to the one and only infallible authority, God Himself.

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## 20. THE DIANA MYTH AND THE ANTICHRIST

“Are we united in grief or collectively nuts?” asked a British columnist the day after Princess Diana’s funeral. He posed a false dichotomy. The majority of the British nation (and many millions abroad) is *both* united in grief *and* collectively “nuts” – and it is important to understand how and why.

A priest of the Russian Church Abroad who happened to be visiting England at the time of Diana’s death expressed a seemingly cruel, but in fact sober and saving truth. Although we cannot know God’s final judgement on her, he said, and whatever personal qualities she may have had, the natural reaction of the Orthodox Christian to her death must be that this was the judgement of God upon her and a warning sent from God for all of us. For what else can we say about a person who was not a Christian (she believed in reincarnation and visited fortune-tellers), who lived an openly sinful and extravagant life-style in spite of her royal status, and who was cut down suddenly and without repentance in the middle of her sins?

So why this sudden outpouring of grief on an unparalleled scale, by millions of people who did not even know her? Why was this obviously deeply flawed woman, whose flaws were well known and had been severely criticized, suddenly promoted to the status of an “icon”, the “goddess of good”, “the Cinderella of the twentieth century”?

The journalist Ann Leslie, a fierce critic of Diana in the past, says she has now been humbled in the face of the “awesome power” of the Diana myth. “Myths may not be based on truth – in fact, few are. But we need myths to tell us that we can rise above our pettiness, our banality, our ordinariness, that through some person, or some object, we can connect with the nobler part of ourselves.”

“Myth is not about the head,” she continues, “it is – like Diana – about the heart. It is about longing to feel we belong to something greater, more beautiful than ourselves. Diana, whether she liked it or not, deserved it or not, has become the vehicle for that collective longing.

“This Diana worship, the insistence that this dead, highly privileged if often unhappy millionaires was a saint is, of course, totally irrational. But as the 17<sup>th</sup>-century French theologian Pascal put it: ‘The heart has its reasons, which reason knows nothing of.’”

Leslie goes on: “Those who felt marginalized by illness, by disease, by disablement, by poverty, found that by believing in the Diana myth – rather than her reality which none of us can truly know – they felt less isolated.

“Because of the way she publicised the stigmata of her eating disorder, her self-laceration, her semi-suicide attempts, she had somehow ‘cured’ them of their sense of estrangement.

“Like apparently miraculous statues, marble Pietas, holy pictures, her image seemed to tell them: ‘I have suffered and I will redeem you.’

“In a country with the highest divorce rate in Europe, Diana’s broken marriage made those whose relationships had collapsed in bitterness and pain feel that perhaps they were not such failures after all.

“If even Diana, with her beauty and wealth, couldn’t make her husband love her, then countless of others couldn’t be blamed for failing in exactly the same way.

“And those whose ethnicity and religion made them feel excluded felt – through the power of the Diana myth – included at last.

“As one Moslem said: ‘She fell in love with a Moslem, a man from the Middle East. If someone like Diana could love a Moslem, perhaps ordinary people in Britain won’t look at us as if we were enemies any more.’

“That is the role of myth. A powerful myth tells us more about our needs than the reality upon which it is founded; it not only rises above reality, but transforms it.”<sup>280</sup>

There is much perceptive psychology in these words; but from an Orthodox Christian perspective they are morally and spiritually misleading.

First, the people may have needs which express themselves in the creation of myths, but if the needs are fallen, their expression needs to be suppressed – or rather, *confessed*. This may not accord with the tenets of modern psychology (although Freud, for one, was by no means in favour of the completely free expression of passion), but it agrees completely with Orthodox Christian psychology, which favours self-knowledge but not uncontrolled self-expression. In any case, if a myth is false, there is no way it can heal us; for “we can rise above our pettiness, our banality, our ordinariness” only through *the truth*, which alone, as the Lord said, can make us free (John 8.32).

Secondly, it is misleading to oppose the head and the heart in such a stark and categorical manner, still more to infer (as Leslie appears to do) that where they are in conflict one must follow one’s heart, even if this seems “totally irrational” to the head. The wise Solomon says: “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28.26), and the Prophet Jeremiah says: “The heart is deceitful above all things” (17.9). Both the head *and* the heart are fallen. They can be healed only by a fervent pursuit of truth in all spheres – dogmatic truth, moral truth, psychological truth, scientific truth, artistic truth. And truth can be attained only by the head and the heart working together under the guidance of the Spirit of truth.

Diana said that she wanted to be a “Queen of hearts”; she laid claim to the virtues of love and sincerity combined with royal charisma – and the world has taken her at her word. But love of the poor sits badly with great wealth and luxurious living, and

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<sup>280</sup> *The Daily Mail* (London), September 8, 1997, p. 13.

“sincerity” – with public humiliation of one’s husband and family and betrayal of his marriage bed. For just as “love” can so often be a cover for sentimentality at best, and self-indulgence at worst, so “sincerity” can be a mask for unconscious hypocrisy and cruelty.

Diana may well be an “icon”, in the sense of a likeness and exemplar, of many elements of popular culture, from her love of pop music and psychotherapy to her eating disorders and religious ecumenism. People identify with her in the faults they share with her, while vicariously enjoying the things they do not share with her – her beauty, her glamour, her popularity. But the saints depicted in *Orthodox* icons are “God-like” rather than “man-like”; they depict the unfallen image of God in man rather than the image of the beast to which we have fallen. We venerate them precisely because they are *not* like us in our fallenness, but like God in His holiness.

If Diana is made into an icon in the sense of an object of veneration, then there is a real danger of idolatry. Such an “icon” will not heal our infirmities, because it will in fact confirm us in them, justify them, make them look good. It will tell us that we do not have to change, to repent. Like the gods and goddesses of the pagans, against whom the apostles fought, the veneration of the new goddess Diana – the hunted goddess rather than the hunter goddess, as her brother said at her funeral service (although in fact she was both hunter and hunted) – will become a form of national self-worship and self-justification, the deification of the nation’s fallen passions.

One “constitutional expert” has said of the Diana myth: “Man invented God, and man invented Diana”. It would be truer to say: “Man, having lost faith in the true God, has invented a false goddess.” Diana acquired this ascendancy over the hearts of many millions of people without having any formal political or ecclesiastical power, and without having provided any great service to mankind. By a combination of Hollywood glamour, media hype and an “iconic” likeness to everyman’s image of himself, she invented the world’s longest-running and most popular soap-opera – a show that is destined to continue running long after her death, and whose popularity democratic politicians will have to take into account for many years to come.

And yet the myth of Diana could never have come into being without her being a real princess. For, for all Diana’s personal gifts, and, as one American commentator has written, “for all the opprobrium heaped last week by Diana’s admirers on the chilly Windsors, she would have been invisible without them.”<sup>281</sup> It is not simply that her royal marriage made her well-known. Without the charisma attaching to her marriage “in the purple”, she would have been just another high-born socialite.

This raises interesting questions concerning the enduring appeal of the monarchy in our ultra-democratic society. Even such a convinced democrat as C.S. Lewis could write of the monarchy as “the channel through which all the *vital* elements of citizenship – loyalty, the consecration of secular life, the hierarchical principle, splendour, ceremony, continuity – still trickle down to irrigate the dustbowl of modern

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<sup>281</sup> *Time*, September 15, 1997, p. 38.

economic Statecraft".<sup>282</sup> Even in republican America, whose whole national myth is built on its cult of individual freedom and anti-monarchism, Diana-mania has reached extraordinary proportions, as if she represented the queen the Americans never had and would so like to have had...

Thus to take just one example from many, a 51-year-old professor from Chicago made a 8000-mile round trip just to lay lowers at Diana's grave, saying: "I absolutely had to come. You don't have to ask yourself why. If I didn't, I just wouldn't have been able to forgive myself for the rest of my life."<sup>283</sup>

And yet, how can this be so, when the whole of western education teaches people to believe that monarchy is an outdated institution, when the monarchies that survive have been deprived of all real power, when the royals themselves often behave in an exceedingly unroyal manner, and when Diana herself never ruled in reality, and by her death was an ex-royal, having been divorced from her prince and deprived of her royal title?

Being made in the image of the Heavenly King, men instinctively venerate the image of the Heavenly King in the earthly monarchies, even if some of those images bear very little likeness to the Archetype. Just as those who do not know the true God will nevertheless construct images of false gods, so those who have never known a true king, and have been taught to despise the true kings of the past, are still not protected from falling in love with pseudo-kings and queens. For even in democratic society the urge to love and sacrifice oneself for someone higher than oneself can never be discounted. In Orthodox monarchies such an urge can be directed to sustain Orthodoxy, the true worship of God in Christ. In heterodox democracies it could be directed to enthrone – the Antichrist...

For, on the one hand, as Metropolitan Makary of Moscow writes: "The Tsar lives for his subjects and the subjects for the Tsar... Obviously here the law of love and self-sacrifice for others rules and not the struggle for survival."<sup>284</sup> On the other hand, in the time of the Antichrist, both the struggle for survival – for a world ruler will be need to deliver the world from anarchy – and the law of love and self-sacrifice – manipulated, as the prophecies say, by a magician-false prophet – will propel to the fore a king whose "myth" the whole non-Orthodox world will fall for, and who will then use the power he has attained (perhaps through a quasi-Orthodox ceremony of sacred anointing beamed throughout the world by television) to charm the whole world into worshipping him as king *and as god*.

Of course, the twentieth century has already been distinguished by several evil cults of personality, such as those of Hitler and Stalin. But these, we thought, were exceptional phenomena occasioned by war, revolution, personal powerlessness and national humiliation. But the Diana phenomenon has taken place in a peaceful and

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<sup>282</sup> Lewis, "Myth became Fact", *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology*, Fount Paperbacks, 1979, p. 64.

<sup>283</sup> *The Daily Mail*, September 10, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>284</sup> Metropolitan Macarius, "Love: the Foundation of Existence in our World", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 47, № 3, May-June, 1997, p. 3.

prosperous nation, in which no despot rules or necessity compels. It represents the collective madness of a nation famed for its eccentric individualism and sober sanity. As such, it is an important “sign of the times”, showing how easily the Antichrist could take control even in an anti-monarchical society.

St. Paul said of people in the last times: “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, for this cause God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not in the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thessalonians 2.10-12). In the wake of the Diana phenomenon, it becomes less difficult to believe how these words could come true on a world-wide scale. We know now that the world is materially, psychologically and spiritually one major step closer to that most evil apotheosis, from which may the Lord deliver us in His great mercy...

(August 28/ September 10, 1997; revised June 26 / July 9, 2004)

## **21. LETTER TO A PAPIST**

Thank you for your letter and your review of my books, *The Fall of Orthodox England* and *The Mystery of Christian Power*.

You write: "Please do not take offence at anything I write any more than I would take offence at being called a 'papist' and my faith 'popery'". No, I don't take *personal* offence, although as an Orthodox Christian I cannot rejoice in your attack on the Orthodox Church and defence of heresy. But I believe that you write out of ignorance, and not with malicious intent. And I actually rather like the zeal with which you write, mistaken though it certainly is. You evidently care about dogmatic questions, which is a rarity nowadays, when ecumenism has destroyed the love of truth in so many hearts. With God's help, therefore, I think our continued dialogue may be worthwhile.

However, when I called you and your co-religionists "papists", I was actually employing the most accurate description of your faith that I know, and was by no means intending to insult anyone (in any case, my books were written primarily for an Orthodox readership). My mother-in-law, a Russian aristocrat, was once asked by a Jesuit: "Are we not both Christians?" She replied: "No. I am a Christian. You are a papist." This may sound harsh, but it was the truth. The Orthodox follow Christ - imperfectly, no doubt, and with many sins and lapses, but they at any rate follow no other, put no other teacher or guide in His place. The papists, on the other hand, while pretending to follow Christ, and having warm feelings for Him and His Mother, in actual fact follow the Pope. This is proved by the fact that where the teachings of Christ and the Pope diverge, - and they diverge in many places, - they follow the Pope.

You contrast my blunt approach unfavourably with the approach of Clark Carlton's proselytizing book, *The Truth: What Every Roman Catholic Should Know About the Orthodox Church*. I haven't read Clark's book, but if he has won many converts to Orthodoxy through it, then I congratulate him. But you were not one of them, were you? So while Clark may have flattered you a little more than I have, his approach convinced you no more than mine has.

In any case, since Clark is part of "World Orthodoxy", which recognizes the Pope as a true bishop, what would be the point of joining his Church? You would just be moving from a western variety to an eastern variety of essentially the same faith. That would not be conversion, but an administrative accommodation to suit your slightly changed tastes in dogmatics, liturgics, etc.... But I shall return to the subject of ecumenism later.

You criticize me for relying on Peter de Rosé, a liberal, as a source for my history. I think you would have a strong point if you could prove that what he writes about the history of papism is false. But you haven't done that. And his views on abortion are strictly irrelevant to his historical writing.

You also criticize me for quoting *Lives of the Pillars of Orthodoxy*, since the latter is "not exactly a 'pillar' of historical truth". Why not? Where has the author - who, by

the way, is an Orthodox Christian with very rigorist views – gone wrong in his historical description?

“Nor do I trust any of the libels against the Catholic Church written by the English in the centuries after the Reformation”. What libels? Please be more specific.

Forgive me, but it seems to me that you would not trust any source I use, whether Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant, whether liberal or rigorist, which did not conform with your own views. Perhaps I am wrong about that. But in any case, if you dispute a source, you have to show precisely where and how he is wrong.

So I think you have “an axe to grind” no less than myself. In any case, what’s wrong with axes? I write my books in order to cut down false teachings that seek to undermine the Orthodox Faith. Would my books be any better if I set out to write them from no fixed viewpoint, with no previous knowledge or convictions? You write on the basis of a set of pre-formed convictions. So do I. I don’t criticize you for that – although I don’t agree with your convictions. So please let me keep my axe until you have truly blunted its sharpness...

You quote F.H. Dudden, to the effect that “almost all the leading principles of the later Catholicism are found, at any rate in germ, in Gregory the Great”. Why, then, do the Orthodox recognize Gregory but not Aquinas and the later papist theologians? The reason is clear: because Gregory did not teach any of the later papist heresies, not even the infallibility of the papacy, though he was a Pope. In fact, he was *the fiercest opponent* of the doctrine of the supremacy and infallibility of the papacy, threatening to break communion with Patriarch Eulogius of Alexandria for offering him the title “ecumenical bishop”, and specifically admitting the possibility that the bishop of Rome may fall away from the Church while the Church remains true as before.

“Thus the doctrine of Gregory the Great upon the Church,” writes Abbé Guettée, a French convert from papism to Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century, “destroys, piece by piece, the whole Papal system. We defy the Romanists to find in the writings of this great Pope a single word which gives any idea of that universal monarchy whose center is in the Church of Rome, and whose sovereign is the bishop of that city. This doctrine runs utterly counter to that of St. Gregory. According to him, the unity of the Church results from the reciprocal relations of its chiefs. ‘May your piety,’ he wrote to Anastasius, Archbishop of Corinth, ‘reply to our letters in which we have notified him of our ordination, and *by replying give us the pleasure of know that the Church is united.*’

“He defines the ‘unity of the Catholic Church’ as ‘the totality (compago) of the body of Christ (book II, epistle 47). He does not swerve from this: the individual churches are the members of the church; each church is governed by its pastors; the authority is the same, of divine right, in all the pastors of the Church...” (*The Papacy*, New York: Minos, 1866, p. 235).

By the way, do the Romanists (I also like Guettée’s term, and will use it from now on as an alternative to “papists”) still use St. Gregory’s Liturgy of the Presanctified

Gifts during Lent? We do, which witnesses to the fact that there is nothing in it contrary to Orthodox teaching.

“The developments in the Western Patriarchate has given the Catholic Church a marvelous and much needed doctrinal and organic unity; such unity is a miracle in this post-modern rebellious world.” Forgive me, but I think you must know that this is just plain false. Everybody even slightly acquainted with ecclesiastical developments knows that the Romanist Church is riven by the most various and most fundamental divisions. Did not the last Pope have serious conflicts with the liberal Romanists of North America, and with the Marxist Romanists of Central and South America? Can you honestly, with your hand on your heart, say that all, or even a large majority, of Romanists truly believe that the Pope is infallible when speaking ex cathedra? Do all Romanists agree with the inter-religious ecumenism practiced by recent Popes? With the decrees on birth control? With the decrees on women priests? What about Lefèbvre? What about Kung? Vast numbers rejected Vatican I. Vast numbers were bitterly disappointed and perplexed by Vatican II (some even went out of their minds, since what are you to believe when an infallible source contradicts itself?). The unity of the Romanist Church is a sham. In any deep, spiritual sense it simply does not exist.

You then attack our “English Orthodox Church” as a rigorist sect. Actually, I think you are simply misinformed here. Although our parish is English in its majority, and our services are in English, we actually belong to the Greek (Old Calendar) Orthodox Church, and our bishop is the Metropolitan of Corinth.

“The rigorists’ decision to denounce the Orthodox Church because of Ecumenism is unwarranted and unscriptural. How else can all baptized Christians resolve their differences other than by coming together to talk doctrine.” Of course, if the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical organizations were merely talking-shops, you would be right. But they are not. They are based on doctrinal presuppositions, and come to doctrinal agreements, that have to be examined and evaluated as such. The WCC, for example, is based on the presupposition, written into its founding statutes, that all the member churches recognize each other as parts of the One Church of Christ. No Orthodox can accept that, and I think no traditional Romanist can either.

And yet the Romanists take part in inter-Christian and inter-faith Ecumenism. In fact, the last Pope was an extreme Ecumenist. At Assisi in 1986 he not only chatted with, but prayed with heretics and pagans of all kinds, with the clear implication that they were all praying to the same God.

Allow me to quote some paragraphs from another book of mine: “In 1985 the Vatican issued a twelve-page document containing new directives “for a correct presentation of Jews and Judaism in sermons and in the catechism of the Catholic Church” by the Vatican Pontifical “Commission for Union with Non-Christians”. As reported by the conservative newspaper *Pensant* in 1986, the twelfth paragraph of this document declared: “Heeding the same God, Who has spoken on the foundation of the same word (that the Jews have), we must bear witness according to the same remembrance and with a common hope in Him Who is the Lord of history. Therefore

it is necessary for us to take upon ourselves the obligation to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah, working together for social justice, for the respect of the rights of the human personality, and of the nation, and of international social reconstruction. The law of love for one's neighbour, the common hope of the Kingdom of God, and the great heritage of the prophets motivate us, both Christians and Jews, to do this. Such a conception, taught sufficiently early through the catechism, would educate young Christians for a cooperation and collaboration with the Jews which would exceed the limits of simple dialogue."<sup>285</sup>

"It would indeed, for it would involve Catholics becoming Jews, awaiting the same "Messiah" that the Jews are waiting for – that is, the Antichrist!.. Such was the depth of apostasy to which the Catholics had been led through putting into practice the Second Vatican Council's decree, Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, October 28, 1965): "Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ, neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion." And yet the Jewish religion to this day justifies the killing of Christ, saying that He was a magician and His Mother a prostitute! Until this hatred of Christ is renounced and repented of, the curse that the Jews invoked upon themselves – "His Blood be upon us and upon our children" Matthew 27.25) – still lies upon them.

"But perhaps the most radical of the Pope's initiatives was his day of prayer for peace at Assisi in 1986, when he prayed with the leaders of various faiths, including Orthodox Christians (Metropolitans Methodius of Thyateira and Philaret of Kiev), Anglicans, Hindus, Shintos, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims, Jews, American Indian snake-worshippers and the Dalai Lama, for "peace in our time". "On the joint prayers in Assisi (Italy) we have documentary films. How useful it would be to show them to the zealots of 'Orthodoxy Soviet-style'! Behind the tribune there followed, one after the other, Catholics, Protestants, African idolaters in war-paint, Red Indians in feathers, an invoker of snakes, the Dalai Lama, who confesses himself to be a god, Metropolitan Philaret [Denisenko] of the Moscow Patriarchate, and many, many others, raising up prayers behind the tribune – each in his own style: the Red Indian smoked the pipe of peace, the invoker of snakes brought his cobra. And over all this there ruled, as the chief pagan priest, the Pope of Rome, whom the whole of this multi-coloured crowd in feathers, tattoos, loin-cloths and metropolitan mitres came up to greet in a luxurious, colourful and unending queue – over which there hovered, unseen, the "positive relationship" and blessing of Patriarch Pimen..."<sup>286</sup>

"An Italian Catholic newspaper, *Si Si No No* wrote: "Never has our Lord been so outraged, never have His holy places been so profaned, His Vicar so humiliated, His people so scandalized by His own ministers, as at Assisi. The superstitions of the several false religions practised at Assisi pale by comparison with the betrayal of our Lord by these ministers. In St. Peter's the bonzes adored the Dalai Lama (for them, a

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<sup>285</sup> Bishop Gregory (Grabbe), "Partnership – the Pope and an Atheist", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 42, № 3, May-June, 1992, p. 16.

<sup>286</sup> *Obnovlentsy i Moskovskaia Patriarkhia: preemstvo ili evoliutsia?*, p. 15..

reincarnation of Buddha). In that church a statue of the Buddha was placed atop the Tabernacle on the main altar. In St. Gregory's the Red Indians prepared their pipe of peace on the altar; in Santa Maria Maggiore's, Hindus, sitting around the altar, invoked the whole range of Hindu gods; in Santa Maria degli Angeli's, John-Paul II sat in a semi-circle of wholly identical seats amidst the heads of other religions so that there should be neither first nor last."<sup>287</sup>

In view of the above (and I have not even mentioned developments in the last 20 years), I think the Orthodox Church is fully justified in calling Ecumenism "the heresy of heresies", and anathematising it as such.

You go on: "The Orthodox Church makes no claim to *INFALLIBILITY*; it recognises no living teaching authority competent to decide matters of faith or morals. It has renounced its teaching authority on any of the issues of modernity such as medical ethics. As Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stated in *TIME*, 5 May 1997, 'According to the long-held tradition, the Orthodox Church avoids dictating or making categorical decisions of a social or ethical nature.' It cannot decide, it does not have mechanisms."

I'm really astonished by this! The false statement by the Ecumenical Patriarch (now do you see why we have no communion with him?) may have misled you for a while. But you must surely know that the Orthodox Church not only has mechanisms – Councils of Bishops – to decide matters of faith and morals, but has been using them continuously! Of course, the Pope of Rome did not take part in any of them; but so what? Even in the early Church there were many Councils that took place without the Pope or his legates, and which were nevertheless accepted by the whole Church. Some of the early Councils even condemned the Pope, such as those which condemned Pope Zosimas the Pelagian or Pope Honorius the Monothelite...

True, there have been no Ecumenical Councils since 787. But, as St. Maximus the Confessor and others pointed out, the truth and validity of a Council is not determined by its numbers, or by who convened it, but by the conformity of its decisions to the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church. And that can be determined only by study and consultation, not by pressing some magic infallibility button, which gives you the correct answer without even having to think about it!

The Orthodox Church does believe in her infallibility, but not in the sense that there is some place or person which, if consulted, will automatically and in all circumstances, give the correct answer. She believes in her infallibility in the sense that, in accordance with the Saviour's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, at all times, and even at the end of the world, there will be people confessing the true faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. There may not be many of them – in fact the Lord implied they would be few when He said: "When I come again, shall I find faith upon the earth?" (Luke 18.8) – but there will be some.

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<sup>287</sup> See also Leslie Childe in *The Daily Telegraph*, October 28, 1986, p. 7.

“If Orthodoxy were united with the West then her bishops would once more participate and collaborate in the formation of living doctrine.” Living doctrine is true doctrine. Since the West, since its separation from Orthodoxy, has invented a whole series of false new doctrines, union with her would be her death-knell.

“Instead today’s Orthodoxy looks nostalgically to the past; its theologians are neo-patristic romantics; in many ways Orthodoxy itself is a sepulchre.”

“Neo-patristic romantics”! How can you be at the same time patristic and a romantic?! We read the Fathers – and you, too, claim to read them – for no other reason than they proclaim the truth, a truth that is no less relevant to our times than it was in the past. This is not romanticism: it is spiritual realism.

As for Orthodoxy being a sepulchre, it is a sepulchre of martyrs and great ascetics and wonderworkers. The Russian Church alone has produced literally millions of martyrs in the last century, great wonderworkers such as St. John of San Francisco, great theologians such as St. Theophan of Poltava. In 1999 the True Orthodox Church of Romania canonised St. Glycerie, whom I had the honour to meet before his death in 1985 – a modern saint if ever there was one!

“Neither is the Orthodox Church *CATHOLIC*, it is not racially or numerically so. It is restricted to mainly the Greek and Slavic peoples.” Come to our parish and you will see what Catholicity in the sense of Universality means! We have a Greek bishop, a Singaporean-Chinese priest, a Russian subdeacon, three English readers, and parishioners from Serbia, the Ukraine, Estonia, Japan, South Africa and Mauritius! And there are many parishes like ours. You should know that Orthodoxy is the second-fastest religion in the United Kingdom after Islam. Orthodoxy, in spite of all its woes and the terrible persecutions in its homeland, has spread around the world. Its numbers are smaller than the Romanists, but its inner diversity is no less great!

However, from a theological point of view, Catholicity is much more than universality or diversity. It is the quality of being “*kath’olon*”, “according to the whole”, in all its parts. That is, in every diocese of the Orthodox you will find the fullness of the Church, all her holiness and apostolicity. The Romanists, on the other hand, have lost Catholicity precisely because they are tied to one place – Rome. A Romanist is not a Romanist if he is not in communion with Rome. So a Romanist diocese cannot be Catholic, because it does not contain the fullness of holiness and apostolicity, since its apostolicity resides in Rome. But the Orthodox recognise that “the Spirit blows where He wills”; He may be in Rome one day, and depart from it the next – which is what in fact happened in the eleventh century. He may be in Constantinople one day, and depart from it the next. There is no guarantee that the Holy Spirit will be in any of the ancient centres of Orthodoxy at the end of time. He may be in Japan or Uganda or Timbuktu. But wherever He is, there will be the Catholic – that is, the *Orthodox Catholic* - Church.

“The Orthodox Church obviously claims to be *APOSTOLIC* but it has left the Barque of Peter; it was to Peter the head of the college of apostles to whom the Lord promised his Church would be indefectible.” He said those words to all the Apostles;

and He promised that the Church would be indefectible only if it adhered to the faith which Peter had just professed. I am glad that you do not say that Peter is the rock on which the Church is built – that hoary old chestnut of the Romanists which so clearly contradicts the consensus of the Fathers. The rock (petra) on which the Church is built is *the faith in Christ as the Son of God* which Peter (Petros, not petra) confessed. Or, according to another interpretation given by the Apostle Paul, it is *Christ Himself* (I Corinthians 10.4). In any case, it could not possibly be the extremely fallible Peter, for the Lord, only seconds later, says to Peter: “Get thee behind Me, Satan!” – and I don’t believe that even the most ardent Romanist will agree that the Church is founded on Satan! Did not the Lord say to Peter, during the Last Supper: “When you are converted, strengthen the brethren”? And does not that imply that Peter *fell away from Christ, the Rock*, when he betrayed Him? He recovered, of course, but until he was converted he was not rocklike in any sense...

“I will make no judgement on whether the Orthodox are *HOLY*; God judges us in this respect.” But if we are outside the Church, as you claim, how can we be holy? Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed “infallibly” that there is no salvation for anyone who is not in communion with the Pope of Rome. So there is no salvation for us, and therefore no holiness, according to your “infallible” judge.

“Because Orthodoxy is stagnant it has clearly not developed any new or beautiful devotions or religious orders since the Great Schism.” Why should we develop new religious orders if our existing one fulfils all the spiritual needs of our monastics? What virtue is there in a multiplicity of orders? As for “beautiful devotions”, you are obviously unacquainted with the liturgical treasures of the Orthodox Church. We are *constantly* developing new services for newly appeared saints. The last century, with its multitude of new martyrs and confessors, has been particularly fertile. I myself wrote a service to the Saints of the British Isles which was officially approved by the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church.

And yet all that is irrelevant to *holiness*, which is an inner quality manifested in gifts of the Holy Spirit – gifts by which Orthodox Christians have not ceased to glorify God through the ages – and not least in the ages since the Western Schism.

“Orthodoxy has missed out terribly, and yet Moss slanders St. Francis of Assisi as a ‘madman’.” It was not I, but St. Ignaty Brianchaninov, one of the greatest theologian-saints of Russia, who characterised Francis in this way. And with good reason. Francis displays all the signs of spiritual deception in the Orthodox understanding. If you wish to understand what I mean, I recommend you read a comparison of the spiritualities of Francis and St. Seraphim of Sarov written by the American Orthodox priest Fr. George Macris and published by St. Nectarios Press, Seattle.

You end: “Mankind’s unity was shattered by Adam at the Fall; only the true Church of Christ is able to pick up the broken splinters and join us all back together in the second Adam: Christ the Perfect Man.” A good ending, and one with which I completely agree. And I invite you to visit a small cell of this true Church of Christ in Guildford, where all services are in English and where you will be met with unfeigned joy and hospitality.

*August 3/16, 2005.*  
*St. Anthony the Roman.*

## **19. IS HELL JUST?**

Of all the Christian dogmas, none has elicited more perplexity over the centuries than the doctrine of eternal punishment. Thinkers from Origen to the contemporary ecumenists have tried somehow to get round the unequivocal statements of the Gospel that those who will stand condemned at the Last Judgement will be cast into the eternal fire, from which there will be no deliverance unto the ages of ages. In attempting in this way to deny the eternity of the torments of hell, these thinkers have employed a number of arguments, of which the most commonly encountered are the following: -

### **1. The Argument from God's Compassion**

According to this argument, it is contrary to God's nature to consign anyone to hell for ever. After all, what human father would ever divide his children into sheep and goats? What human bridegroom, even the most insanely jealous, would wish eternal torments on his bride? And even if some such could be found, what has this to do with God? Is He not perfect love, infinite mercy, unbounded compassion?

The commonest answer to this very common perplexity is to say: God is not only perfect love, He is also perfect justice; and while in His love for mankind He wishes that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2.4), the fact remains that very many "resist the truth" (II Timothy 3.8), and so cannot be saved, becoming subject to the full severity of His justice. The satisfaction of justice is an absolute demand of the Divine Nature, not because God is a bloodthirsty tyrant seeking revenge in a human, fallen manner, - God is not subject to any human passion, - but because evil and injustice are utterly alien to His Nature. As St. John of Damascus puts it: "A judge justly punishes one who is guilty of wrongdoing; and if he does not punish him he is himself a wrongdoer. In punishing him the judge is not the cause either of the wrongdoing or of the vengeance taken against the wrongdoer, the cause being the wrongdoer's freely chosen actions. Thus too God, Who saw what was going to happen as if it had already happened, judged it as if it had taken place; and if it was evil, that was the cause of its being punished. It was God Who created man, so of course he created him in goodness; but man did evil of his own free choice, and is himself the cause of the vengeance that overtakes him."<sup>288</sup>

Now such an answer was quite sufficient for generations of Christians brought up in the fear of God, and believing in the goodness of His judgements without presuming to understand them. For them the fact of impenitence, and its link with Divine judgement, was as self-evident as the link between penitence and Divine mercy. And if there were still many things they did not understand, this was only to be expected. After all, how can the pot be expected to understand the potter (Romans 9.20-21)? The judgements of God are a great abyss, and it is not for sinful mortals to plumb their depth.

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<sup>288</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Dialogue against the Manichaeans*, 37.

If we question God's judgements, then we are implicitly placing ourselves in judgement over Him, as if we could be more just than He. What folly could be greater than this? "Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, He put no trust in His servants; and His angels He charged with folly. How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust? (Job 4.17-19). "For who shall say, What hast Thou done? Or who shall withstand His judgement? Or who shall accuse Thee for the nations that perish, whom Thou hast made? Or who shall come to stand against Thee, to be revenged for the unrighteous men? (Wisdom of Solomon 12.12).

It was by meditating on such passages of Holy Scripture that our forefathers guarded themselves from highmindedness. We are not so humble today. In proportion as our pride in ourselves and our capacities has increased, so has our trust in, and reverence for, the judgements of God decreased. Our attitude is: if I cannot understand this, or if it offends my moral sense, then even if God has declared it to be so, it cannot be so; there must be a mistake.

Hell offends not only our sense of justice, but also our self-esteem (the two are closely connected). Whereas the holy Apostles, though innocent of betraying their Master, still had the humility and awareness of their profound weakness to ask: "Lord, is it I?" (Matthew 26.22), we both absolve ourselves of any really serious sin, and, like the Popes of old, give indulgences to the whole of the rest of humanity. Although the holy Apostle Peter says that even the righteous will scarcely be saved (I Peter 4.18), we consider that even unbelievers will be saved. Perhaps a few of the worst sinners, we concede, might be worthy of hell - the Hitlers and Stalins of this world. But is it possible to believe that the nice, caring, enlightened men of late twentieth-century civilisation are worthy of hell? Away with the thought! Besides, we are such caring, loving people would never wish hell on anyone. Which implies, of course, that we are more caring and loving than God Himself!

St. Basil the Great writes: "In one place the Lord declares that 'these shall go into eternal punishment' (Matthew 25.46), and in another place He sends some 'to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matthew 25.41). And elsewhere He speaks of the fire of gehenna, specifying that it is a place 'where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished' (Mark 9.45). And even of old through the Prophet it was foretold of some that 'their worm will not die, nor will their fire be extinguished' (Isaiah 66.24). Although these and the like declarations are to be found in numerous places of Divinely inspired Scripture, it is one of the devices of the devil, that many men, as if forgetting these and other such statements and utterances of the Lord, ascribe an end to punishment, so that they can sin the more boldly. If, however, there were going to be an end of eternal punishment, there would likewise be an end to eternal life. If we cannot conceive of an end to that life, how are we to suppose that there will be an end to eternal punishment? The qualification 'eternal' is ascribed equally to both of them. 'For these are going,' He says, 'into eternal punishment; the just, however, into eternal life'."<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> St. Basil, *Rules Briefly Treated*, 267.

Again, speaking of hell and its eternity, St. John Chrysostom writes: - "Do not say to me, 'How is the balance of justice preserved if the punishment has no end?' When God does something, obey His demand and do not submit what has been said to human reasoning. In any case, is it not in fact just that one who has received countless good things from the beginning, has then done things worthy of punishment, and has not reformed in response either to threats or to kindness, should be punished? If it is justice you are after, we ought all on the score of justice to have perished at the very outset. Indeed even that would have fallen short of the measure of mere justice. For if a man insults someone who never did him any wrong, it is a matter of justice that he be punished. But what if he insults his Benefactor, Who without having received any favour from him in the first place, has done countless things for him - in this case the One Who was the sole source of his existence, Who is God, Who endowed him with a soul, Who gave him countless other gifts and purposed to bring him to heaven? If after so many favours, he not only insults Him but insults Him daily by his conduct, can there be any question of deserving pardon?

"Do you not see how He punished Adam for a single sin? 'Yes', you will say, 'but He had given him paradise and made him the recipient of very great kindness.' And I reply that it is not at all the same thing for a man in the tranquil possession of security to commit a sin and for a man in the midst of affliction to do so. The really terrible thing is that you sin when you are not in paradise but set amidst the countless evils of this present life, and that all this misery has not made you any more sensible. It is like a man who continues his criminal behaviour in prison. Moreover you have the promise of something even greater than paradise. He has not given it to you yet, so as not to make you soft at a time when there is a struggle to be fought, but neither has He been silent about it, lest you be cast down by all your labours.

"Adam committed one sin, and brought on total death. We commit a thousand sins every day. If by committing a single sin he brought such terrible evil on himself and introduced death into the world, what should we, who live continually in sin, expect to suffer - we who in place of paradise have the expectation of heaven? This is a burdensome message; it does upset the man who hears it. I know, because I feel it myself. I am disturbed by it; it makes me quake. The clearer the proofs I find of this message of hell, the more I tremble and melt with fear. But I have to proclaim it so that we may not fall into hell. What you received was not paradise or trees and plants, but heaven and the good things in the heavens. He who had received the lesser gift was punished and no consideration exempted him; we have been given a greater calling and we sin more. Are we not bound to suffer things beyond all remedy?

"Consider how long our race has been subject to death on account of a single sin. More than five thousand years have passed and the death due to a single sin has not yet been ended. In Adam's case we cannot say that he had heard prophets or that he had seen others being punished for their sins so that he might reasonably have been afraid and learnt prudence if only from the example of others. He was the first and at that time the only one; yet he was still punished. But you cannot claim any of these things. You have had numerous examples, but you only grow worse; you have been granted the great gift of the Spirit, but you go on producing not one or two or three but countless sins. Do not think that because the sins are committed in one brief

moment the punishment therefore will also be a matter of a moment. You can see how it is often the case that men who have committed a single theft or a single act of adultery which has been done in a brief moment of time have had to spend all their lives in prison or in the mines, continually battling with hunger and every kind of death. No one lets them off, or says that since the crime was committed in a brief moment the punishment should match the crime in the length of time it takes.

"People do act like that,' you may say, 'but they are men, whereas God is loving towards mankind.' Yes, but even the men who act in this way do not do so out of cruelty but out of love for mankind. So since God is loving to mankind He too will deal with sin in this way. 'As great as is His mercy, so great also is His reproof' (Sirach 16.12). So when you speak of God as loving towards mankind, you are actually supplying me with a further reason for punishment, in the fact that the One against Whom we sin is such as this. That is the point of Paul's words: 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Hebrews 10.31). I ask you to bear with these words of fire. Perhaps, yes, perhaps they may bring you some consolation. What man can punish as God has been known to punish? He caused a flood and the total destruction of the human race; a little later He rained down fire from on high and utterly destroyed them all. What human retribution can compare with that? Do you not recognise that even this case of punishment is virtually endless? Four thousand years have passed and the punishment of the Sodomites is still in full force. As His loving kindness is great, so also is His punishment..."<sup>290</sup>

St. Barsanuphy of Optina said: "We think too abstractly about the torments of hell, as a result of which we forget about them. In the world they have totally forgotten about them. The devil convinces everyone there that neither he himself nor the torments of hell exist. But the Holy Fathers teach that one's betrothal to Gehenna, just as to blessedness, begins while one is still on earth – that is, sinners while still on earth begin to experience the torments of hell, while the righteous experience blessedness, only with this difference – that in the future age both the one and the other will be incomparably more powerful..."

"At the present time, not only among lay people, but even among the young clergy the following conviction is beginning to spread: eternal torment is incompatible with the boundless mercy of God; consequently, the torments are not eternal. Such a misconception proceeds from a lack of understanding of the matter. Eternal torments, and eternal blessedness, are not things which proceed from without, but exist first and foremost within a man himself. 'The Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17.21). With whatever feelings a man instils within himself during his life, he departs into eternal life. A diseased body torments one on earth, and the more severe the disease is, the greater the torment is. So also a soul infected with various diseases begins to be cruelly tormented at its passage into eternal life. An incurable physical ailment ends with death, but how can a sickness of the soul end, when there is no death for the soul? Malice, anger, irritability, lust, and other infirmities of the soul are vermin which will creep after a man even into eternal life. Hence, it follows that the aim of life consists

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<sup>290</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily IX on Corinthians*, 1-3. Translated in Maurice Wiles & Mark Santer (eds.) *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

in crushing these vermin here on earth, so as to purify one's soul entirely, and before death to say with our Saviour, 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me' (John 14.30). A sinful soul, not purified by repentance, cannot be in the company of the saints. Even if it were placed in Paradise, it would itself find it unbearable to remain there, and would try to get out."<sup>291</sup>

"Even the bodies of sinners will experience torment. The fire will be material; there will not only be pangs of conscience, and so forth. No, this will really be perceptible fire. Both the one and the other will be real. Only, just like the body, the fire will be far more subtle, and everything will bear only a certain resemblance to earthly things."<sup>292</sup>

## 2. The Argument from the Saints' Compassion

According to this argument, heaven would not be heaven for the righteous as long as they knew that the sinners were being tortured in hell. Being filled with compassion, their bliss would be spoiled as long as there was even one sinner still suffering torment. So God in His compassion, and so as to give His chosen ones a perfect and unspoiled reward, will forgive all men eventually.

However, the Fathers teach that that feeling of compassion which is so necessary while there is still life and hope will be taken away by God when there is no more use for it. For if, as St. John of Damascus says, "in hades [i.e. after death but before the Last Judgement] there is no confession or repentance"<sup>293</sup>, then much less will there be confession and repentance after the Last Judgement in gehenna. And if there is no repentance how can there be forgiveness?

Thus St. Gregory the Great writes, in his commentary on the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man: "We must ponder these words: 'They who would pass from hence to you cannot' (Luke 16.26). For there is no doubt that those who are in hell long to enjoy the lot of the blessed. But since the latter have been received into eternal happiness, how can it be said that they desire to pass over to those in hell? It must be that, as the damned desire to go to the dwelling of the elect, to escape from that place of suffering, so the just wish to cross over in mercy to that place of torments, to bring them the freedom they desire. But those who wish to cross from heaven to hell can never do so; for although the souls of the just are aflame with mercy, nevertheless they are so united to the divine justice and guided always by rectitude, that they are not moved by any compassion towards the reprobate. They are in complete conformity with that judge to whom they are united, and so they cannot have compassion for those whom they cannot free from hell. They consider them as strangers, remote from themselves, since they have seen them repelled by their Maker who is the object of their love. So neither the wicked can cross over to the felicity of the blessed: because they are shackled by an irrevocable condemnation, nor the just go to the unjust:

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<sup>291</sup> Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, pp. 283, 309.

<sup>292</sup> Afanasiev, *op. cit.*, pp. 735-736.

<sup>293</sup> St. John of Damascus, *P.G.* 96, 1084B. Cf. Psalms 6.4.

because they cannot feel compassion for those whom the divine justice has rejected..."<sup>294</sup>

### 3. The Argument from Ignorance

This argument can be summarised as follows: "Neither are the works of faith necessary for salvation, nor even faith. For most men have never had the Gospel preached to them, and so belong to other faiths simply out of ignorance, because they were born into non-Christian societies or families. The All-loving and All-just God will certainly not judge them for that. Indeed (continues the argument in some of its forms), all that is necessary for salvation is good faith, by which we do not mean the one true faith (for there is no such thing), but *sincerity*, even if that sincerity is manifested in non-Christian beliefs and actions: blessed are the sincere, for they shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven."

However, Divine Revelation attaches little value to sincerity *per se*: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 12.15), says Solomon, and: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death" (Proverbs 14.12). In any case, if true faith in Christ were not absolutely necessary for salvation, and one could be saved without knowing Him, then it would not have been necessary for the Martyrs to confess Him, for the Apostles to preach Him, or for Christ Himself to become incarnate for our sakes.

"Are you saying, then" retort the ecumenists, "that all the Hindus and Buddhists will be damned?!"

We neither assert this nor deny it, preferring to "judge nothing before the time" (I Corinthians 4.5), and to follow St. Paul's rule: "what have I to do to judge them that are without?... Them that are without God judgeth" (I Corinthians 5.12-13). We know with complete certainty about the perdition of only a few men (Judas, Arius, etc.), just as we have complete certainty about the salvation of only a few men (those whom the Church has glorified as saints). As Archbishop Theophan of Poltava wrote, when asked about the salvation of the Jews: "When St. Anthony the Great was thinking about questions of this kind, nothing concerning the essence of these questions was revealed to him, but it was only told him from on high: 'Anthony, pay attention to yourself!', that is, worry about your own salvation, but leave the salvation of others to the Providence of God, for it is not useful for you to know this at the present time. We must restrict ourselves to this revelation in the limits of our earthly life."<sup>295</sup>

Nevertheless, when compassion for unbelievers is taken as a cloak from under which to overthrow the foundations of the Christian Faith, it is necessary to say something more, not as if we could say anything about the salvation or otherwise of specific people (for that, as Archbishop Theophan says, has been hidden from us), but

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<sup>294</sup> St. Gregory, translated by Nora Burke, *Parables of the Gospel*, Dublin: Scepter Publishers, pp. 155-56.

<sup>295</sup> Archbishop Theophan, *Pis'ma Arkhiiepiskopa Feofana Poltavskogo (The Letters of Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava and Pereyaslav)*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1976, p. 31.

in order to re-establish those basic principles of the Faith, ignorance of which will undoubtedly place us in danger of damnation.

Ignorance - real, involuntary ignorance - is certainly grounds for clemency according to God's justice, as it is according to man's. The Lord cried out on the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23.24); and one of those who were forgiven declared: "I obtained mercy because I acted in ignorance" (I Timothy 1.13; cf. Acts 3.17, 17.30). For our Great High Priest is truly One "Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way" (Hebrew 5.2).

However, there is also such a thing as *voluntary* ignorance. Thus St. Paul says of those who do not believe in the one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, that "they are without excuse" (Romans 1.20), for they deny the evidence from creation which is accessible to everyone. Again, St. Peter says: "This they are *willingly* ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men" (II Peter 3.5-7). Again, claiming knowledge when one has none counts as wilful ignorance. For, as Christ said to the Pharisees: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9.41).

Wilful ignorance is very close to conscious resistance to the truth, which receives the greatest condemnation according to the Word of God. Thus those who accept the Antichrist will do so "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2.10-12). And if it seems improbable that God should send anyone a strong delusion, let us remember the lying spirits who, with God's permission, deceived the prophets of King Ahab because they only prophesied what he wanted to hear (I Kings 22.19-24).

Conscious, willing resistance to the truth is the same as that "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" which, in the words of the Lord, "shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matthew 12.31). As Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) explains: "Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, or 'sin unto death', according to the explanation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (VIII, 75), is a conscious, hardened opposition to the truth, 'because the Spirit is truth' (I John 5.6)."<sup>296</sup> It is not that God does not want to forgive all sins, even the most heinous: it is simply that he who bars the way to the Spirit of truth is thereby blocking the way to the truth about himself and God, and therefore to the forgiveness of his sins. As St. Augustine says: "The first gift is that which is concerned with the remission of sins... Against this gratuitous gift, against this grace

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<sup>296</sup> Metropolitan Anthony, "The Church's Teaching about the Holy Spirit", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 27, № 3, May-June, 1977, p. 23.

of God, does the impenitent heart speak. This impenitence, then, is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."<sup>297</sup>

Wilful ignorance can be of various degrees. There is the wilful ignorance that refuses to believe even when the truth is staring you in the face – this is the most serious kind, the kind practised by the Pharisees and the heresiarchs. But a man can also be said to be wilfully ignorant if he does not take the steps that are necessary in order to discover the truth – this is less serious, but still blameworthy, and is characteristic of many of those who followed the Pharisees and the heresiarchs. Thus we read: "That servant who knew his master's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and he to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12.47-48). To which the words of St. Theophylactus of Bulgaria are a fitting commentary: "Here some will object, saying: 'He who knows the will of his Lord, but does not do it, is deservedly punished. But why is the ignorant punished?' Because when he might have known he did not wish to do so, but was the cause of his own ignorance through sloth."<sup>298</sup>

St. Cyril of Alexandria writes: "How can he who did not know it be guilty? The reason is, because he did not want to know it, although it was in his power to learn."<sup>299</sup> To whom does this distinction apply? St. Cyril applies it to false teachers and parents, on the one hand, and those who follow them, on the other. In other words, the blind leaders will receive a greater condemnation than the blind followers - which is not to say, however, that they will not *both* fall into the pit (Matthew 15.14). For, as Bishop Nicholas Velimirovich writes: "Are the people at fault if godless elders and false prophets lead them onto foreign paths? The people are not at fault to as great an extent as their elders and the false prophets, but they are at fault to some extent. For God gave to the people also to know the right path, both through their conscience and through the preaching of the word of God, so that people should not blindly have followed their blind guides, who led them by false paths that alienated them from God and His Laws."<sup>300</sup>

Are Hindus and Buddhists who have lived their whole lives in non-Christian communities wilfully ignorant of the truth? Of course, only God knows the degree of ignorance in any particular case. However, even if the heathen have more excuse than the Christians who deny Christ, they cannot be said to be completely innocent; for no one is completely deprived of the knowledge of the One God. Thus St. Jerome writes: "Ours and every other race of men knows God naturally. There are no peoples who

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<sup>297</sup> St. Augustine, *Homily 21 on the New Testament*, 19, 20. See also St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Discourse XXIII*, 1. There are other interpretations of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which complement and follow from this one. Thus St. Ambrose (*On Repentance*, II, 24), followed by St. Augustine (*Homily 21 on the New Testament*, 28), regards heretics and schismatics as blasphemers against the Holy Spirit insofar as they deny the Spirit and Truth that is in the True Church.

<sup>298</sup> St. Theophylactus, *Explanation of the Gospel according to St. Luke* 12.47-48.

<sup>299</sup> St. Cyril, *Homily 93 on Luke*. Translated by Payne Smith, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 376.

<sup>300</sup> Bishop Nicholas, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, vol. II, p. 149.

do not recognise their Creator naturally."<sup>301</sup> And St. John Chrysostom writes: "From the beginning God placed the knowledge of Himself in men, but the pagans awarded this knowledge to sticks and stones, doing wrong to the truth to the extent that they were able."<sup>302</sup> And the same Father writes: "One way of coming to the knowledge of God is that which is provided by the whole of creation; and another, no less significant, is that which is offered by conscience, the whole of which we have expounded upon at greater length, showing how you have a self-taught knowledge of what is good and what is not so good, and how conscience urges all this upon you from within. Two teachers, then, are given you from the beginning: creation and conscience. Neither of them has a voice to speak out; yet they teach men in silence."<sup>303</sup>

Many have abandoned idolatry by following the voices of creation and conscience alone. Such, for example, was St. Barbara, who even before she had heard of Christ rejected her father's idols and believed in the One Creator of heaven and earth. For she heeded the voice of creation: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaimeth the work of His hands" (Psalm 18.1). And the voice of her conscience, which recoiled from those "most odious works of witchcrafts, and wicked sacrifices; and also those merciless murderers of children and devourers of man's flesh, and the feasts of blood, with their priests out of the midst of their idolatrous crew, and the parents, that killed with their own hands souls destitute of help" (Wisdom of Solomon 12.4-6). But her father, who had the same witnesses to the truth as she, rejected it - to the extent of killing his own daughter.<sup>304</sup>

Thus there is a light that "enlightens every man who comes into the world" (John 1.9). And if there are some who reject that light, abusing that freewill which God will never deprive them of, this is not His fault, but theirs. As St. John Chrysostom says, "If there are some who choose to close the eyes of their mind and do not want to receive the rays of that light, their darkness comes not from the nature of the light, but from their own darkness in voluntarily depriving themselves of that gift."<sup>305</sup>

This mystery of the voluntary rejection of the light was revealed in a vision to a nun, the sister of the famous novelist Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, who rejected the teaching of the Orthodox Church and died under anathema: "When I returned from the burial of my brother Sergius to my home in the monastery, I had some kind of dream or vision which shook me to the depths of my soul. After I had completed my usual cell rule, I began to doze off, or fell into some kind of special condition between sleep and waking, which we monastics call a light sleep. I dropped off, and beheld... It was night. There was the study of Lev Nikolayevich. On the writing desk stood a lamp with a dark lampshade. Behind the desk, and leaning with his elbows on it, sat Lev Nikolayevich, and on his face there was the mark of such serious thought, and such despair, as I had never seen in him before... The room was filled with a thick, impenetrable darkness; the only illumination was of that place on the table and on the face of Lev Nikolayevich on which the light of the lamp was falling. The darkness in

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<sup>301</sup> St. Jerome, *Treatise on Psalm 95*.

<sup>302</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 3 on Romans*, 2.

<sup>303</sup> St. Chrysostom, *First Homily on Hannah*, 3.

<sup>304</sup> *The Lives of the Women Martyrs*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1991, pp. 528-542.

<sup>305</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 8 on John*.

the room was so thick, so impenetrable, that it even seemed as if it were filled, saturated with some materialisation... And suddenly I saw the ceiling of the study open, and from somewhere in the heights there began to pour such a blindingly wonderful light, the like of which cannot be seen on earth; and in this light there appeared the Lord Jesus Christ, in that form in which He is portrayed in Rome, in the picture of the holy Martyr and Archdeacon Laurence: the all-pure hands of the Saviour were spread out in the air above Lev Nikolayevich, as if removing from invisible executioners the instruments of torture. It looks just like that in the picture. And this ineffable light poured and poured onto Lev Nikolayevich. But it was as if he didn't see it... And I wanted to shout to my brother: Levushka, look, look up!... And suddenly, behind Lev Nikolayevich, - I saw it with terror, - from the very thickness of the darkness I began to make out another figure, a terrifying, cruel figure that made me tremble: and this figure, placing both its hands from behind over the eyes of Lev Nikolayevich, shut out that wonderful light from him. And I saw that my Levushka was making despairing efforts to push away those cruel, merciless hands... At this point I came to, and, as I came to, I heard a voice speaking as it were inside me: 'The Light of Christ enlightens everyone!'"<sup>306</sup>

If the Light of Christ enlightens everyone, then there is no one who cannot come to the True Faith, however unpromising his situation. If a man follows the teachers that are given to everyone, creation and conscience, then the Providence of God, with Whom "all things are possible" (Matthew 19.26), will lead him to the teacher that is given at the beginning only to a few - "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the Truth" (I Timothy 3.15). For "it is not possible," writes St. John Chrysostom, "that one who is living rightly and freed from the passions should ever be overlooked. But even if he happens to be in error, God will quickly draw him over to the truth."<sup>307</sup> Again, as Chrysostom's disciple, St. John Cassian, says: "When God sees in us some beginnings of good will, He at once enlightens it, urging it on towards salvation."<sup>308</sup>

This point was developed in an illuminating manner by Cassian's French contemporary, Prosper of Aquitaine: "The very armies that exhaust the world help on the work of Christian grace. How many indeed who in the quiet of peacetime delayed to receive the sacrament of baptism, were compelled by fear of close danger to hasten to the water of regeneration, and were suddenly forced by threatening terror to fulfil a duty which a peaceful exhortation failed to bring home to their slow and tepid souls? Some sons of the Church, made prisoners by the enemy, changed their masters into servants of the Gospel, and by teaching them the faith they became the superiors of their own wartime lords. Again, some foreign pagans, whilst serving in the Roman armies, were able to learn the faith in our country, when in their own lands they could not have known it; they returned to their homes instructed in the Christian religion. Thus nothing can prevent God's grace from accomplishing His will... For all who at any time will be called and will enter into the Kingdom of God, have been marked out

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<sup>306</sup> I.M. Kontzevich, *Optina Pustyn' i ee Vremia (Optina Desert and its Time)*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1970, pp. 372-73.

<sup>307</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on Matthew*, 1.

<sup>308</sup> St. Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII, 8.

in the adoption which preceded all times. And just as none of the infidels is counted among the elect, so none of the God-fearing is excluded from the blessed. For in fact God's prescience, which is infallible, cannot lose any of the members that make up the fullness of the Body of Christ."<sup>309</sup>

However, there are few today who have a living faith in God's ability to bring anyone to the faith, whatever his situation. It may therefore be useful to cite the famous example of God's favour to the Aleuts of Alaska, to whom He sent angels to teach them the Orthodox Faith in the absence of any human instructor. Fr. John Veniaminov (later St. Innocent, metropolitan of Moscow (+1879)) relates how, on his first missionary journey to Akun island, he found all the islanders lined up on the shore waiting for him. It turned out that they had been warned by their former shaman, John Smirennikov, who in turn had been warned by two "white men", who looked like the angels on icons. Smirennikov told his story to Fr. John, who wrote: "Soon after he was baptised by Hieromonk Macarius, first one and later two spirits appeared to him but were visible to no one else... They told him that they were sent by God to edify, teach and guard him. For the next thirty years they appeared to him almost every day, either during daylight hours or early in the evening - but never at night. On these occasions: (1) They taught him in its totality Christian theology and the mysteries of the faith... (2) In time of sickness and famine they brought help to him and - though more rarely - to others at his request. (When agreeing to his requests that they help others, they always responded by saying that they would first have to ask God, and if it was His will, then they would do it.) (3) Occasionally they told him of things occurring in another place or (very rarely) at some time in the future - but then only if God willed such a revelation; in such cases they would persuade him that they did so not by their own power, but by the power of Almighty God.

"Their doctrine is that of the Orthodox Church. I, however, knowing that even demons believe - and tremble with fear [[James 3.19](#)], wondered whether or not this might be the crafty and subtle snare of him who from time immemorial has been Evil. 'How do they teach you to pray, to themselves or to God? And how do they teach you to live with others?' He answered that they taught him to pray not to them but to the Creator of all, and to pray in spirit, with the heart; occasionally they would even pray along with him for long periods of time.

"They taught him to exercise all pure Christian virtues (which he related to me in detail), and recommended, furthermore, that he remain faithful and pure, both within and outside of marriage (this perhaps because the locals are quite given to such impurity). Furthermore, they taught him all the outward virtues..."<sup>310</sup>

Very apt was the comment of one of the first who read this story: "It is comforting to read about such miraculous Divine Providence towards savages, sons of Adam who, *though forgotten by the world, were not forgotten by Providence.*"<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Prosper, *The Call of the Nations*, II, 33.

<sup>310</sup> Paul Garrett, *St. Innocent, Apostle to America*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, pp. 80-81.

<sup>311</sup> Garrett, *op. cit.*, p. 85, footnote.

These cases lead us to draw the following conclusions: (1) The Providence of God is able to save *anyone* in *any* situation, providing he loves the truth. Therefore (2), although we cannot declare with categorical certainty that those who die in unbelief or heresy will be damned, neither can we declare that they will be saved because of their ignorance; for they may be alienated from God "through the ignorance that is in them, *because of the blindness of their heart*" (Ephesians 4.18), and not simply through the ignorance that is caused by external circumstances. And (3) if we, who know the truth, say that such people do not need to become Christians in order to be saved, then we shall be guilty of indifference to the truth; for which we shall certainly merit damnation. For while we cannot presume to know the eternal destinies of individual men, we do know this, that the Word of God is true that declares: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16.16). And again: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3.5). And again: "Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Who is in heaven" (Matthew 10.33).

Moreover, to the unlying Word of God we may add the witness of Holy Tradition, in the form of the experience of Theodora, the spiritual daughter of St. Basil the New, who, after passing through the toll-houses and being returned to her body, was told by the angels: "Those who believe in the Holy Trinity and take as frequently as possible the Holy Communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, our Saviour's body and Blood - such people can rise to heaven directly, with no hindrances, and the holy angels defend them, and the holy saints of God pray for their salvation, since they have lived righteously. No one, however, takes care of wicked and depraved heretics, who do nothing useful during their lives, and live in disbelief and heresy. The angels can say nothing in their defence... [Only those] enlightened by the faith and holy baptism can rise and be tested in the stations of torment [that is, the toll-houses]. The unbelievers do not come here. Their souls belong to hell even before they part from their bodies. When they die, the devils take their souls with no need to test them. Such souls are their proper prey, and they take them down to the abyss."<sup>312</sup>

Some believe that even those condemned to hell after their death, may yet get a "second chance" at the Last Judgement, through the prayers of the saints and the Mother of God. The present writer knows no patristic witness that would clearly confirm or refute such an idea. However, we know from St. Simeon the Theologian that *if a man is making progress towards the truth in this life he will not be deprived of further progress in the life to come*: "It is a great good thing to believe in Christ, because without faith in Christ it is impossible to be saved; but one must also be instructed in the word of truth and understand it. It is a good thing to be instructed in the word of truth, and to understand it is essential; but one must also receive Baptism in the name of the Holy and Life-giving Trinity, for the bringing to life of the soul. It is a good thing to receive Baptism and through it a new spiritual life; but it is necessary that this mystical life, or this mental enlightenment in the spirit, also should be consciously felt. It is a good thing to receive with feeling the mental enlightenment in the spirit; but one must

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<sup>312</sup> Quoted by David Ritchie, "The 'Near-Death Experience'", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 45, № 4, July-August, 1995, pp. 22-23.

manifest also the works of light. It is a good thing to do the works of light; but one must also be clothed in the humility and meekness of Christ for a perfect likeness to Christ. He who attains this and becomes meek and humble of heart, as if these were his natural dispositions, will unfailingly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven and into the joy of the Lord. Moreover, regarding all those who are running on the path of God according to the order I have indicated, if it happens that natural death should cut off their course in the midst of this, they will not be banished from the doors of the Kingdom of God, and these doors will not be closed before them, according to the limitless mercy of God. But regarding those who do not run in such a way, their faith also in Christ the Lord is vain, if they have such..."<sup>313</sup>

#### 4. The Argument from the Supremacy of Love over Justice

Another argument goes as follows. "Let us suppose that most men are not worthy to enter the Kingdom of heaven, if only because they will find nothing akin to their own corrupted nature there. Nevertheless, God is love, and he would never cast the creatures He has created and still continues to love into the unimaginably terrible torments of hell, whose purpose, since they are unending, cannot be the rehabilitation of the sinner, nor deterrence of future evil. We do not deny that the Scriptures speak in many places of the existence of just such a hell, and of a great multitude entering into it. But we cannot but hope and believe (for 'love believeth all things, hopeth all things' (I Corinthians 13.7)) that these images are placed before us simply as a deterrent, and that in the end hell will be an empty place, not only spiritually but also physically. God has shown, by His Death on the Cross, that His love for us is greater than His love for the abstract principle of justice. Is it possible that he would finally deny that, admit that His Sacrifice had been in vain (for the great majority of people, at any rate), and allow cold justice to triumph over love?"

In attempting to answer this objection, we must first arm ourselves with the most basic weapon of the Christian life: *the fear of God*. The fear of God is not an abject trembling before a despotic tyrant. It is a rational, heartfelt awareness that we all, and every part of our lives, are in the hands of a Being Who infinitely transcends everything that we can say about Him, and even the very categories of our discourse. This applies not only to clearly inexplicable and unimaginable acts of His such as the creation of the world out of nothing. It also applies to those definitions of His nature which seem to correspond to something in our experience, such as: "God is love".

If human love can sometimes seem to be incompatible with justice, this is not so with Divine love. For what is the whole economy of God's incarnation, life on earth and death on the Cross if not *perfect love in pursuit of perfect justice* - an extraordinary, humanly speaking paradoxical justice, it is true, but for that very reason characteristically Divine justice? For He, the Just One, Who committed no sin and had done everything to deter us from it, out of love for man died to blot out all the sins and injustices of the whole world. When we could not pay the price, He paid it for us;

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<sup>313</sup> St. Symeon, *The Sin of Adam and our Redemption*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 1979, pp. 57-8.

when we were dead in sin, He died to give us life; "for Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust" (I Peter 3.18).

The Church has expressed the paradoxicality of God's justice with great eloquence: "Come, all ye peoples, and let us venerate the blessed Wood, through which the eternal justice has been brought to pass. For he who by a tree deceived our forefather Adam, is by the Cross himself deceived; and he who by tyranny gained possession of the creature endowed by God with royal dignity, is overthrown in headlong fall. By the Blood of God the poison of the serpent is washed away; and the curse of a just condemnation is loosed by the just punishment inflicted on the Just. For it was fitting that wood should be healed by wood, and that through the Passion of One Who knew not passion should be remitted all the sufferings of him who was condemned because of wood. But glory to Thee, O Christ our King, for Thy dread dispensation towards us, whereby Thou hast saved us all, for Thou art good and lovest mankind."<sup>314</sup>

Here there is no contradiction between love and justice. And if there is no contradiction between them in the Redeeming Passion of Christ on the Cross, then there is likewise no contradiction between them in His Coming again to judge men in accordance with their response to His Passion. But in order to understand this it is necessary, first, to rid ourselves of the idea that God's just wrath against impenitent sinners is comparable to the sinful human passion of vengefulness. Such vengefulness is condemned by the Word of God (Romans 12.17-21), and cannot possibly be attributed to the Divine Nature, which is alien to all fallen human passion. We must at all times hate the sin and not the sinner; we must wish for the destruction of sin and not of sinners. If we wish to identify our will with the Will of God, then our first desire must be for the salvation of all sinners, including our enemies, paying special attention (lest we become hypocrites) to those sinners we know best and for whom we are primarily responsible - ourselves.

"*The wrath of God,*" writes Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, "*is one of the manifestations of the love of God, but of the love of God in its relationship to the moral evil in the heart of rational creatures in general, and of man in particular.*"<sup>315</sup> That is why the martyrs under the heavenly altar, filled as they are with the love of God to the highest degree, are at the same time filled with a holy wrath: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6.10). And yet, as the Venerable Bede writes, "the souls of the righteous cry out these words, not out of hatred for enemies, but out of love for justice".<sup>316</sup>

This love of justice is natural to man, for it is made in the image of God's own love of justice. The love of justice proceeds naturally from the Nature of God, like heat from the sun. Thus to say that God should be loving but not just is like saying that the sun should give light but not heat. It is simply not in the nature of things. What is in

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<sup>314</sup> *Menaion*, September 14, Great Vespers of the Exaltation of the Cross, "Lord, I have cried", "Glory... Both now..."

<sup>315</sup> Archbishop Theophan, "On the Redemption"; quoted in Fr. Anthony Chernov, *Archevêque Theophane de Poltava (Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava)*, Lavardac: Monastère de St. Michel, 1988, p. 146.

<sup>316</sup> St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

accordance with the nature of God is that He should divide the light of His grace from its fiery heat at the Last Judgement, giving the light only to the blessed and the heat only to the damned.

As St. Basil the Great writes, commenting on the verse: "The voice of the Lord divideth the flame of fire" (Psalm 28.6), writes: "The fire prepared in punishment for the devil and his angels is divided by the voice of the Lord. Thus, since there are two capacities in fire, one of burning and the other of illuminating, the fierce and punitive property of the fire may await those who deserve to burn, while its illuminating and radiant part may be reserved for the enjoyment of those who are rejoicing."<sup>317</sup>

The Lord placed justice on a par with mercy and faith (Matthew 23.23), and it was the Ephesian Church's hatred of injustice that redeemed it in His eyes; for "this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (Revelation 2.6). This lesson is particularly important for our century, when the Orthodox Church has been persecuted by the ecumenists with their indifference to the truth, on the one hand, and the sergianists with their indifference to justice, on the other. We have to kindle in ourselves a holy and dispassionate zeal for the truth and hatred of injustice.

Thus, as Archbishop Theophan writes in reply to the question "Can one have a negative feeling in relation to the enemies of the Russian people and the Orthodox Church or must one suppress in oneself this feeling, repeating the words: 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay'?" "To have a negative feeling towards the enemies of God and of the Russian people is natural. And on the contrary not to have a negative feeling is unnatural. Only this feeling must be correct. And it will be correct when it has a principled, not personal character, that is, when we 'hate' the enemies of God and of the Russian people not for their personal offences against us, but for their hostile attitude towards God and the Church and for their inhuman attitude towards Russian people. Therefore it is also necessary to fight with these enemies. Whereas if we do not fight, we will be punished by God for our lukewarmness. He will then take His vengeance not only on them, but also on us..."<sup>318</sup>

The whole burden of the Old Testament Prophets was an impassioned, yet holy lament against the injustice of man against God and against his fellow man. And if anything to the Prophets was proof of the corruption of Israel, it was that, instead of repenting of their own injustice, they accused the Just One of injustice. Thus the holy Prophet Ezekiel laments: "The house of Israel saith, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not My ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God." (Ezekiel 18.29-30). And the holy Prophet Malachi laments: "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied Him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgement?" (Malachi 2.17).

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<sup>317</sup> St. Basil, *On Psalm 28.6*; translated in Jurgens, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 21.

<sup>318</sup> Archbishop Theophan, *Pis'ma*, p. 40.

The God of judgement is within us, manifest in that extraordinarily powerful love of justice that is created in the image of God's love of justice. Faith teaches, and human nature cries out for, a last and most glorious Judgement in which all tears will be wiped away from every innocent face (Revelation 21.4), and every apparently meaningless suffering will find its meaning and reward. Again, faith teaches, and human nature cries out for, a last and most terrible Judgement in which those who laughed over the sufferings of others will weep (Luke 6.25), and those who feasted on human flesh will gnash their teeth in eternal frustration. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Galatians 6.7,8)

Thus the Last, Most Terrible Judgement is a mystery proclaimed by the Word of God and grounded in the deepest reality of things. It both proceeds from the nature of God Himself, and is an innate demand of our human nature created in the image of God. It is the essential foundation for the practice of virtue and the abhorrence of vice, and the ultimate goal to which the whole of created nature strives, willingly or unwillingly, as to its natural fulfilment. Without it all particular judgements would have a partial and unsatisfactory character, and the reproaches of Job against God, and of all unbelievers against faith, would be justified. And if the Last Judgement is different from all preceding ones in that in it love seems to be separated from justice, love being distributed exclusively to the righteous and justice to the sinners, then this is because human nature itself will have divided itself in two, one part having responded to love with love, to justice with justice, while the other, having rejected both the love and the justice of God, will merit to experience His justice alone...

And if, like Ivan in Dostoyevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, we still cannot come to terms with the tears of an innocent child, this is not because our love is too great, but because our faith in God's justice is too small. God's ways are not our ways, His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His justice, we must humbly accept, is not our justice. At some times we cannot understand why the innocent suffer; at others - why the guilty get away with it. At some times we cannot understand why great sinners are forgiven in a moment; at others - why those who seem to us to be less guilty appear destined for the eternal fire. The only right way to respond to this is to recognise humbly that the creature cannot and must not argue with his Creator, and to say with the Psalmist: "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgements" (Psalms 118.137)...

*(January 20 / February 2, 1999; revised July 8/21, 2004 and August 9/22, 2020)*

## 20. GOD AND TSUNAMIS

### **Introduction**

Whenever a great tragedy takes place involving many victims, the fashion among contemporary commentators is to say that this is “senseless”, “unjust”, and the victims must be “innocent”. And yet we do not believe in a meaningless or unjust universe. We believe in a universe that is full of meaning in all its parts, for it was created and is ruled by the Logos, which could be translated as “Meaning”, Who will come again to judge the living and the dead, thereby giving meaning to, and revealing the justice of, every event that has ever taken place down the ages.

So let us listen to the Gospel of the Logos: *“There were some present at that very time who told Him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered them, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13.1-5).

### **1. The Atheist Response**

This Gospel tells us three things. First, those who suffer in disasters are not necessarily worse people than those who escape them. Secondly, however, such disasters do come upon those who do not repent of their sins; they are the instruments of God’s wrath against sinners. And so, thirdly, we who remain among the living must fear lest we perish like they did because of our sins.

The western press, both atheist and Christian, will have none of this. God does not cause disasters like this, says the atheist: rather, the very presence of such disasters is proof that God does not exist. For if He did exist, and was able to stop them but did not, this proves that He is immoral. And if He was not able to stop them, this proves that He is impotent, or at any rate not omnipotent. But since religion says that God is both moral and omnipotent, this proves that God does not exist.

The arguments of Christian leaders to defend the faith against such attacks have been feeble in the extreme. Or rather, they have joined the atheists in attacking it. Thus a recent Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, shocked British listeners by declaring: “Every single random, accidental death is something that should upset a faith bound up with comfort and ready answers. Faced with the paralysing magnitude of a disaster like this, we naturally feel more deeply outraged.” But there are no “random, accidental” deaths, and Orthodox Christian piety most definitely does not feel “outrage” before the judgements of God, but only reverence: “The judgements of God are a great abyss...”

The archbishop’s statement is on a par with the remark made by the Bishop of Durham, Dr. David Jenkins, several years ago that if God allowed Auschwitz, He is the devil! Presuming that the Bishop of Durham is not joking, and that he does believe

in the devil, we must conclude either that he believes that the devil rules the universe and allowed Auschwitz or that he does not believe in the omnipotence of God. The latter opinion appears to be much more likely...

A similar, if less crudely expressed, argument has been made by Professor Keith Ward of Oxford University in his debate with the atheist A.C. Grayling.<sup>319</sup> God, he says, is not as omnipotent as some traditional concepts of the deity presume: although God is the Creator of the universe, the laws of nature produce some unpleasant consequences, such as tsunamis, over which He has no control. And so He is not responsible for them; in fact, He is not connected with them at all.

Grayling replies: "If he is the creator, he is not like the builder of an aeroplane, which everyone hopes will never crash; he is rather like the builder of an aeroplane which is actually designed to crash – this being the necessity of a world with moving tectonic plates, viruses, and all the other vectors of disaster; and for this, therefore, he is responsible".

Not so, responds Ward. "There is a big difference between the statements 'The universe is designed to inflict pain' and 'The universe is designed to produce intelligent life, but a foreseen, regretted yet inevitable consequence is the existence of pain'; also between 'suffering for some good purpose' and 'suffering as an unwelcome consequence of the pursuit of a good purpose'. A personal cause might have to accept the latter pair, but never the former."

To which Grayling retorts: "When believers recite their version of the creed – every version of which bar the Chalcedonian places 'almighty God' at the head – they literally mean a God capable of anything, and therefore capable of preventing innocent suffering if he chose; which, if he exists and is omnipotent in the literal sense, he does not do, and that impugns his morals. Your vaguely drawn alternative deity is not to blame for humanity's sufferings because he is powerless to prevent them, but since this is far from what the body of the faithful believe of him, and furthermore, since diminished potency entails diminished wisdom, benevolence, and the rest of the traditional attributes, it is hard to see why anyone should be impressed by the residue you offer."

It is hard to disagree with Grayling's objection to the professor – but without, of course, accepting his atheist conclusions. Diminishing the omnipotence of God in order to free Him from responsibility for human suffering is a false solution, which only plays into the atheists' hands. God *is* almighty, but at the same time perfectly good and just: that is the belief of the Orthodox Church.

How, then, do we answer the atheists, and those "Christians" who concede far more to the atheists than is compatible with the Christian Faith?

## **2. The Purpose of Suffering and Death**

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<sup>319</sup> "Is God to Blame? Keith Ward vs. A.C. Grayling", *Prospect*, February, 2004, pp. 17-19.

Let us begin by pointing out that God is not only capable of creating a world without suffering – He did so, right at the beginning, in Paradise. Suffering and death came into the world, not by the will of God, but through the envy of the devil, who caused Adam and Eve to fall away from God, and therefore from Life itself. If man had not sinned, there is no reason why this blissful life in Paradise, free of all suffering and death, should not have continued forever, both for Adam and Eve and for their descendants.

But why, somebody may object, should sin result in death? Could not God have devised a better way of correcting the sinner? Could He not simply have explained to Adam and Eve the error of their ways, and then, upon their repentance, allowed them to continue their former blissful life?

But God did call Adam and Eve to repentance – and they did not repent. Moreover, it must be remembered that sin, being the opposite of holiness, drove away that holiness that was integral to man at the beginning, who was made “after the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4.24). And having lost holiness, or the Holy Spirit, man began to disintegrate, like an organism out of which the central, controlling organ has been removed. When the Spirit departed from the soul, it began to fall apart into warring passions. And then the body, too, began to break up, resulting in death.

There could therefore be no question of restoring man to his former beauty and holiness just like that – he was dying, and destined for the grave, the moment he stubbornly refused to repent. Only a thorough *recreation* of man could restore him. And that recreation was effected in Christ, the New Adam.

In any case, for sinners like ourselves, as St. Ambrose of Milan points out, death is a *good*. Suffering helps to *correct* sin by humbling the soul, preparing it to receive the forgiveness and new life that is in Christ. And death cuts off sin together with the sinner. Moreover, death is the necessary precondition of resurrection; for just as a statue that is flawed can be corrected only by melting it down and starting again, so is it with man. Through death he is “melted down”, as it were, making it possible for him to be rebuilt, without the flaws introduced by sin, at the general resurrection from the dead...

“Faith”, writes St. Makary of Optina, “does not consist of merely believing in the existence of God, but also in His all-wise Providence which guides His creatures and arranges everything for the good; the times and the seasons are put in His power (Acts 1.7), and for each of us the limits of our life were determined before our existence, and without His will a bird does not fall nor does a hair of our head perish! (Matthew 10.29; Luke 21.28)... The works of God are wondrous and unfathomable for our darkened minds, but as much as possible, we see from Scripture and our personal experiences that the Lord sends sicknesses, sorrows, deprivation, droughts, wars, and revolutions, either as punishment for our sins, or in anticipation, so that we do not fall into sins, or sometimes to test our faith. And so, we must bow in reverence before His all-wise Providence and give thanks for His ineffable mercy towards us.”

### 3. Does God Play with Dice?

“But this is all nonsense”, say the atheists and our modern theologians. Being Darwinists to a man, they do not believe in Paradise or in Adam and Eve; they believe that death was there from the beginning, as the engine of evolution. God just couldn’t help it, they say: the world He created came into being through death and destruction – mutation and natural selection.

It is a paradox, of course, that life should come into being through death – but science has proved it! God wasn’t capable of getting it right first time: He had gradually to perfect the species through an incredibly costly process of trial and error involving the suffering and deaths of millions and millions of creatures over millions and millions of years. And even now He hasn’t got it right: “foreseen, regretted yet inevitable” disasters keep interfering with the world He supposedly created. God is really in the dock before our contemporary theistic evolutionists. However, they are generously prepared to acquit Him – on the grounds of “diminished responsibility”...

According to this “enlightened” thinking, man is in the privileged position of being able, through science and reason, to correct the mistakes God made in creation. God gets things wrong, sending thousands of innocent creatures to their deaths, but man puts things right – through earth science (how clever we are!) and tsunami appeals (how generous we are!), through the American Fleet and the United Nations and the Kyoto Protocols, etc., etc., etc. Eventually, perhaps, man will even be able to help God out in recreating man himself – through stem cell research and gene therapy, through social engineering, free trade and democracy. No need, then, for a New Adam: the old Adam can put himself right, thank you! In truth, then, the real god of creation is not God – but man!

All this rests on the premise that God is as limited by the laws of nature as we are. At best, the picture that the modern theologians present us with is the Deist-Masonic one of the eighteenth-century philosophers. The Deists’ “god” may have created the universe in the beginning, but he certainly has no control over it now; he is like the child who winds up a toy and then cannot keep up with it as it jumps all over the room. He is allowed to perform a miracle occasionally, but only as a special exception – for those who believe in such things. But there can be no question of God having any real control over nature *as a whole* or *in detail* – after all, that would leave no room for the creativity of man, whose “calling” is to alter the workings of the bouncing toy and return it, like a benevolent father, to the distraught child!

The Orthodox Christian philosophy argues quite differently. He who believes in chance, says St. Basil the Great, is an *atheist* – he does not really believe in God at all.<sup>320</sup> “There is no such thing as blind chance”, says St. Ignatius Brianchaninov. “God rules the world, and everything that takes place in heaven and under heaven does so

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<sup>320</sup> St. Basil, *On Avarice*.

according to the judgement of the All-Wise and All-Powerful God, Who is unattainable in His wisdom and omnipotence, and unattainable in His rule.”<sup>321</sup>

Nothing is impossible for God, because He controls the workings of the universe down to the last detail, down to the tiniest wave-function. When we say that A causes B, what we mean is that God causes A and then causes B. As David Hume pointed out already in the eighteenth century, nobody has actually *seen* a cause: the only thing we ever see is events of class A being followed by events of class B, a regular sequence; we never see a third entity, C, *causing* A to be followed by B. The only true Cause of every single event in the history of the universe – except, as we shall see, the free decisions of men and angels – is God.

The only limitations God allows to be placed on his sovereign will are the workings of the wills of men and angels – and that only for a time, and only within severe limits. Everything that is not willed by men or angels is willed by God. And so a disaster like a tsunami or an earthquake, if it is not caused by men, is caused by God or the devil. Actually, it could have been caused by God *and* the devil, in that God sometimes uses the evil will of demons as an instrument to the fulfilling of His own good and perfect will. And so all things are either actively willed by God, or, if it not actively willed, are *allowed* by Him.

#### 4. Who is Innocent?

The arrogance of the “Christian theologians” was particularly clearly revealed in their attitude to the victims of the tsunami that struck South Asia several years ago: all of them, they agreed, were “innocent”. This “truth” was reeled out by almost every commentator as if it were a dogma. As if they could see and weigh up the thoughts of all of the 150,000 victims, and declare them all: “not guilty!”

But on what basis could they acquit the pagans and Muslims who died? And on what basis could they acquit the Christian victims, most of whom were sunning themselves on the day after Western Christmas far from a Christian church? As for the Muslim victims, it was left to some Muslims who knew the region better than the Christian theologians to point out that immoral practices such as child kidnapping and paedophilia were rife in the region...

“Are you then saying that all the victims were killed as God’s punishment for their sins?” No, we are not. We do not know the victims, and would not have the right to judge them, even if we knew them. Only God can judge, because only He knows the hearts and the reins of every man. We know neither the heart of each man, nor the reason why God sends this or that man this or that form of suffering.

For there are many possible reasons why a man should die or be injured in a disaster such as the South Asian tsunami. It may be the final punishment of a sinner who will not repent. Or the timely chastisement of a sinner who *will* repent. It may be

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<sup>321</sup> Brianchaninov, “Sud’by Bozhii”, *Collected Works*, Moscow, 2001, vol. II, p. 72.

the deliverance of a good but vulnerable soul from mortal sin in the future; for “while living among sinners he was taken up, lest evil should change his understanding or guile deceive his soul” (Wisdom 4.10-11). Or the crown, paradoxically, of a just life, as when St. Athanasius of Mount Athos was killed by a falling bell.

Herod and Ahab and Judas died as a punishment of their sins, of which they did not repent; and their punishment continued after their deaths. But David and Peter and Paul suffered as a chastisement for their sins, repented and were forgiven. The children who mocked the Prophet Elisha died because of their mockery. But Job did not suffer because of his sins, but in order to serve as an example of long-suffering, and even as a type of Christ. And the 14,000 innocents of Bethlehem suffered in order to receive a crown of glory in the heavens...

It is important to realize that when speaking of fallen human beings, - that is, all human beings except Christ the Lord, - we use the term “innocent” only relatively speaking. The sentence of death falls on all the sons of Adam. “For *all* have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.23).

Nor are children and even new-born babies exempt from this rule; for “even from the womb, sinners are estranged” (Psalms 57.3). As Job says: “Who shall be pure from uncleanness? Not even one, even if his life should be but one day upon the earth” (Job 14.4 (LXX)). That is why we baptise children “unto the remission of sins”.

Modern theologians try to “absolve” God of responsibility for the suffering and deaths of millions whom they - the theologians - in their infinite wisdom declare to be “innocent”. And yet God does not deny that He sends death upon these millions - and says that *we* are to blame! Consider His verdict on the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar: “The Lord, the God of their fathers, constantly sent to them by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words, and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against His people, until there was no remedy. Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged: He gave them all into his hand” (II Chronicles 36.15-16).

There is no question about it: the destruction of Jerusalem was willed by God, as a just punishment for sin. And even if the instruments of His wrath, the Chaldeans, were themselves evil, God used the evil as an instrument for His good ends. In the same way, the ten plagues of Egypt - which killed many “innocent” babes - were willed by the good God, but carried out by evil demons: “And He sent forth against them the wrath of His anger, anger and wrath and affliction, a mission performed by evil angels” (Psalms 77.53). (Not that the evil executioners of God’s wrath are justified for that; “for shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it?” (Isaiah 10.15).)

Of course, God’s *primary* or *active* will is that we should do good, and should be rewarded for it. But if we frustrate his primary will, then He allows evil to be

punished: this is His *secondary* will, as it were. For He is just as well as merciful; He is the God of justice as well as the God of love.

Metropolitan Anastasy (Gribanovsky) of New York writes: “The Lord sometimes waits for evil to reveal itself utterly, so that, having exposed its real nature, it might by itself be rejected by the hearts of men; and He subjects the righteous man to a sevenfold trial, so as to reveal his spiritual beauty before the whole world and increase his reward. Thus, for a time, He allows things to remain as they are: ‘He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still’ (Revelation 22.11).

“If, with a righteous man, the least sinful obstacles characteristic of fallen human nature are burned up in the fire of trials, so also does God allow the ungodly one to enjoy prosperity for a time, so that he might receive his ‘reward’ for those crumbs of good which he might at any time do during his life. The just Judge does not wish to remain in debt either to the righteous or to the sinful. The latter, of course, do not realize that He is dealing with them in this instance as a physician does with the hopelessly ill, deciding at the last moment to let them have anything they want, only because they have no hope for a future. With great eloquence and persuasiveness the blessed Augustine reveals this latter idea in his famous work *On the City of God*, which is, as is well known, the first attempt at a philosophy of history, when he speaks of the fall of Rome. The very prosperity of those condemned to destruction is no more than a phantom, like smoke, and therefore it should elicit no sense of envy in anyone, but only a sad pity for their lot, for the divine Word is immutable: ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay’ (Romans 9.13; Deuteronomy 32.35). ‘When I am given the appointed time, I will judge uprightly’ (Psalms 74.3); ‘I will begin, and I will make an end’ (I Kings 3.12).

“‘Fret not thyself because of evil-doers,’ King David the prophet urges us, ‘nor envy them that work iniquity. For like grass quickly shall they be withered, and like green herbs quickly shall they fall away’ (Psalms 36.1-2).

“‘Weep for the sinner who succeeds at everything’, one of the Fathers of the Church teaches us, ‘for the sword of divine justice is hanging over him’.

“When the Lord deems it necessary, He reveals His judgement over ungodliness even here on earth, answering, as it were, the entreaty of mankind: ‘Let me see Thy vengeance taken upon them, for to Thee I have declared my cause’ (Jeremiah 11.2).”<sup>322</sup>

## Conclusion

The Apostle Paul writes: “All things happen for the best for those who love God, and who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8.28). So even the most terrible disasters are for the best – but only for those who love God, and for those who, though they do not love God now, are called to love Him in the future and enjoy His eternal

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<sup>322</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, “Conversations with my own Heart”, translated in *Living Orthodoxy*, 101, vol. XVII, N 5, September-October, 1996, pp. 19-21.

good things. For those who do not love God, however, they express the righteous wrath of God in punishing evil.

The love and justice of Divine Providence is based on the omnipotence of God: if God were not the pantocrator, the almighty, the words of the apostle would make no sense. It is therefore the height of impiety, exhibiting clear disbelief in the truth of the Holy Scriptures, to attempt to limit His omnipotence. For as the Lord said to Abraham: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18.14). For "I form light and create darkness, I make prosperity and create woe. I am the Lord, Who does all these things" (Isaiah 45.7). And if it is the height of impiety – equivalent, as St. Basil says, to atheism – to attempt to limit the omnipotence of God, and make Him helpless before chance or the supposed iron laws of nature, what are we to say of those who impugn His justice, and who take it upon themselves to declare all the victims of His judgements innocent?

God is justified in His words and prevails when He is judged by those evil men who accuse Him of injustice. As He says through the Prophet Ezekiel: "Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not My ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways" (Ezekiel 18.29-30). Again, the Prophet Malachi says: "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied Him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgement?" (Malachi 2.17). But God is not unequal in His ways, and He is always the God of judgement.

"For who will say, 'What hast Thou done? Or who will resist Thy judgement? Who will accuse Thee for the destruction of the nations which Thou didst make? Or who will come before Thee to plead as an advocate for unrighteous men? For neither is there any god besides Thee, Whose care is for all men, to whom Thou shouldest prove that Thou hast not judged unjustly; nor can any king or monarch confront Thee about those whom Thou hast punished.'" (Wisdom 12.12-14).

*January 21 / February 3, 2005; revised February 28 / March 13, 2011 and October 9/22,  
2016.*

## 21. OPEN LETTER TO FR. GREGORY LOURIÉ

Dear Fr. Gregory,

Your recent letters to Metropolitan Valentine, published in *Vertograd* (NN 539, 540), are characteristically clever and cunning. "Mixing truth with unrighteousness" (Romans 1.18), they elicit sympathy by their elements of truth, while pouring the poison of unrighteousness into ears thus rendered sympathetic. My aim in this letter is not to "convert" you from unrighteousness to the fullness of truth (I doubt whether anybody can do that, let alone someone so reviled by you as myself), but to elicit from you an honest and public confession of your true aims, since the aims you publicly set yourself are quite obviously unrealisable and therefore point to some hidden agenda that needs to be elucidated.

You write in your letter of 20 September to the metropolitan: "As you must well remember from your own biography, nobody in True Orthodoxy is frightened by an uncanonical defrocking [you are clearly referring to your own defrocking by Metropolitan Valentine on September 5 of this year for the heresy of name-worshipping, among many other things]. Therefore I in no way relate to you as to a man who has inflicted an irreparable blow upon me. Moreover, I am sure that we will continue to work together.

"We must think together about the future of ROAC. As you said more than once before, the question of this future is the question of the organisation of the higher Church authority. I truly value your services in the matter of the organisation of the True Orthodox Church of Russia. Now for all of us one more action of yours is necessary. This action must by no means consist in the correction of certain private decisions; I am not at all asking you to rescind those decisions that were taken in relation to me. It must consist in something quite different.

"We must all together with you, dear Vladyko, think about how we are to elect the next First Hierarch..."

I have to say: your impudence, and calculated sang-froid is astounding! It all sounds - and this is no doubt the impression you are intending to produce - that you are not in the slightest bit upset by your defrocking, and don't even want it reversed, uncanonical though you consider it to be, because you have no ambition whatsoever with regard to an ecclesiastical career. All you are interested in is having a nice, quiet chat on the future administration of the Church with the man who defrocked you for heresy...

As if he or any of those who supported his decision want to have anything more to do with you!

Who are you trying to imitate? Socrates? Or Oscar Wilde?

Certainly not the Holy Fathers, who, while free of the passion of ambition, were passionately concerned to correct canonical injustice and dogmatic falsehood (see the

life of today's saint, St. John Chrysostom, who supported from exile the "Johnnites" who contested his unjust defrocking). In a previous letter you demonstrated at great length why your defrocking was uncanonical. Why write such a long letter if you want the unjust decision to remain on the statute books? And why are you so unconcerned that the metropolitan, after several years of wavering, has finally come out against your heretical teaching on the Name of God? (Your disciple, Nun Martha (Senina), shows much more zeal than you for the theological issues in her letter published in the same issue of *Vertograd*.) Can we really believe that you care for none of these things?

Allow me to speculate about the real reasons for this studied insouciance...

But first let us dispel the impression you are trying to create that you venerate the metropolitan and "bow down to his holy will". Right from the beginning, even before you joined ROAC, you made clear in a letter to me that you were joining ROAC, not in order to submit to, learn from or be saved by it, but in order to reform it in your own image. Moreover, you had no respect at all for the metropolitan; you called him "adogmatic" and "a typical Soviet pope". Adogmatic and Soviet - perhaps, but useful nonetheless. For, as you confided to me and others, he had promised to make you bishop of St. Petersburg. And I think you would be that now if you had been more careful and restrained yourself from introducing so many heresies into the Church organism so early...

So his defrocking of you is certainly a blow to your plans. Not "irreparable" perhaps - for you hope and believe that the next first-hierarchy will reverse the "mistake" of his predecessor and reinstate you with the added aureole of a confessor for the truth. Hence the arrogant confidence of your words spoken to a man who has done the worst he can do to you and may well now be on his deathbed.

Perhaps, though, you still fear that Valentine can upset your plans by telling his disciples, in a kind of spiritual testament against Lourieism, not to reinstate you under any circumstances. Hence your hint about discussing "how we are to elect the next First Hierarchy..." For not only does the right man have to be elected as first-hierarchy: he must be enthroned as soon as possible. Is that the "one more action" you want him to do before he dies?

More evidence about your true intentions comes in today's *Vertograd* (N 541), in which you begin to cast off the mask of veneration for the metropolitan. First, you openly mock him by asserting that "most of the [ROAC] parishes in far abroad (USA, Bulgaria, England) were lost... because of the incompetence in personnel politics of the metropolitan, who put too much hope on his personal relations with people." (I can say that in relation to the parish in England this statement is false.) Then in the next sentence: "Various disturbances have also arisen among believers on the territory of the CIS, with which the metropolitan has not been able to cope." But the coup de grace comes in the next paragraph, where you assert that in recent days the question has been raised "of the voluntary retirement of Metropolitan Valentine, whose state of health evidently does not allow him to fulfil the duties of first-hierarchy". This question, of course, has been raised by *you* - because *you* want to fulfil the duties of first-hierarchy

- by manipulating the next first-hierarchy from behind the scenes. But wait a minute, Fr. Gregory! The present first-hierarchy is not yet dead, and may live longer than you think! And even if he doesn't, your open intriguing over his still-warm body is, frankly, obscene!

Impious men are often over-confident. But you must realise that even if your preferred candidate were elected as the next metropolitan, the Catacomb bishops would never agree to your restoration to the priesthood. So even if you obtained some support, it would be at the cost of a schism in the Church - a major schism, involving several bishops and the whole of the Catacomb flock.

Of course, this may well be what you are aiming at; for the last five years in the history of the ROAC have been, in essence, a struggle between the "neo-renovationist" wing under your leadership and the "traditional ROCOR-Catacomb" wing under the leadership of the Catacomb hierarchs, with the metropolitan trying to hold the balance by slapping down first one and then the other. You had the edge for some years, and so could afford to live with your opponents (while working to expel the most vocal of them, such as Anton Ter-Grigorian). But the pendulum has now swung the other way; and after your defrocking you must realise that no reconciliation or "cohabitation" between the two wings is possible any longer. And so you are looking for a schism...

And yet can reinstatement (and possible promotion to the episcopate) in a "purged" ROAC be the height of your ambitions? I think not. You are looking for a wider flock and a larger dominion, which is why you have taken such an active interest in various Greek Old Calendarist jurisdictions. Thus recently you announced that you were starting a joint missionary project in Western Europe with one of these jurisdictions - but without the knowledge or blessing either of your hierarchy or of the hierarchs of the Greek jurisdiction in question.

But I think that was just a diversion. Much more serious, in my opinion, is your relationship with HOCNA. It is tempting to speculate that the recent visit of Fr. Panteleimon of Boston, the "elder" of that jurisdiction, to Russia has something to do with your plans...

Your sympathies with HOCNA have been evident for some years. I wrote to you several years ago warning of the moral problems in that jurisdiction. But you paid no attention...

There is a certain logic in a tie-up between a "purged" ROAC and HOCNA. Both jurisdictions are, or will be, ruled by a priest directing the bishops from behind the curtains. Both are linked to the criminal world: the one by his passion for smuggling antiques; the other through his mafia connections. Both have heretical views on sexuality, which views they have not been afraid to put into practice, to the scandal of thousands. Both have sullied their reputation in the Russian Church, and have dreams of restoring it in the Greek Church....

Again, your two groups have a similarly rationalist and reformist approach to theology - you see yourself as cleansing the Russian Church of its anti-canonical

practices deriving from Peter the Great, and returning it to "Byzantinism", while HOCNA wish to purge it of "scholasticism".

HOCNA rejects as heretical Blessed Augustine of Hippo, St. Philaret of Moscow and Fr. Seraphim Rose - and by implication all the Holy Fathers of the Church, who shared the so-called "juridical theory" of redemption which HOCNA condemns. In their zeal for purging the Church of Latinism and scholasticism, the HOCNA theologians threaten to become "Protestants of the Eastern rite", throwing out all traditions (toll-houses is another) that do not accord with their neo-Protestant outlook. You, on the other hand, reject Patriarch Tikhon, St. Barsanuphy of Optina and a number of Russian New Hieromartyrs as "fighters of the Name" because they rejected the name-worshipping heresy of Fr. Anthony Bulatovich, which you accept as Orthodox. In your zeal for purging the Church of Petrine "Sergianism", you have already called the Most Holy Synod of the pre-revolutionary Russian Church "chimerical", and in your letter written in 2000 and published just recently to Metropolitan Valentine you write that "all the [pre-revolutionary] Synodal decrees are equally lawless - even when they are just in essence. In the best case, they have the juridical status of just sentences delivered by a band of robbers - something in the nature of the [Mohammedan] sharia courts in Chechnya"!

If we combine these two positions, we obtain an explosive new brew which makes the renovationists of the 1920s look like amateurs!

And yet I don't think that spreading a new brand of renovationist theology in conjunction with HOCNA is your main aim. Like the HOCNA theologians you may *talk* theology and the canons, etc., but your real aim is quite different. It is *power*. Not power in a crude political sense. But power over the hearts and minds and wills of men - the same power that Satan himself desires.

For power-hungry ecclesiastical politicians like you and Fr. Panteleimon (and you're not the only ones: Gregory of Colorado is another in the news just recently), theology is a means, not an end. Like any cult leader, you first have to attract people by a doctrine, a doctrine of salvation. Then you have to demonstrate that salvation is in your doctrine, and no other, because the others who pretend to be Orthodox, and may even have big reputations in Orthodoxy, are in fact, according to you and Fr. Panteleimon, heretics. Of course, you cannot go too far in that direction. Orthodoxy is based on tradition and authority, so you have to have some authorities: "The Holy Fathers", "Byzantinism", etc. But on the basis, supposedly, of this ancient authority, you then strive to undermine other, more recent, and therefore more "attackable" authorities. This course also has its dangers, but if carried out with skill can reap great rewards for the cult leader. For fallen men have something rebellious and ambitious in them; "the seed of corruption is in me still", as the prayer says. And it tickles their vanity and ambition to think that they are joining a movement that is "reforming the Church", "returning to the Holy Fathers" from the "Babylonian captivity of nineteenth-century Russian theology..."

But having joined this movement, they are enslaved to it. Because it goes without saying that the leader of this movement, if he is truly "reforming the Orthodox

Church", must be a saint and endowed with the most wonderful spiritual gifts. So to leave him, or stop obeying him absolutely, would be spiritual suicide and the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit! And he, of course, would be completely justified in punishing his former disciple for his apostasy by condemning him to the outer darkness of rejection by the cult. For having once joined the campaign "to save the Church", he cannot leave it without finding himself, according to cult logic, outside the Church itself.

Of course, in reply to this you will say: where's the proof? I have no proof, I admit. I am only speculating that you and Fr. Panteleimon will join up, and thereby create perhaps the greatest danger to True Orthodoxy that has yet arisen in modern times. But I *do* have proof about *you*, and I *do* have proof about *HOCNA*. And as surely as  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , a union between your proven heresies will produce a multiple catastrophe for the Holy Church!

And yet, as I said at the beginning of this letter, I am not so stupid as to think that I can "convert" you. The most I can hope to achieve is an honest statement by you of your true ecclesiastical aims, of your grand strategic design. Then at least "he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Revelation 22.11); while he that is righteous, being warned of your filthiness, let him flee to the mountains like a sparrow, where God will receive him in safety...

*Vladimir Moss  
Woking, England.  
September 14/27, 2005.*

## **22. USA BEWARE: PUNK-TRUE-ORTHODOXY IS HERE!**

*They have set their mouth against heaven, and their tongue roveeth in the earth.*  
Psalm 72.9.

*Let not the throne of iniquity have fellowship with Thee, which maketh mischief in the name  
of the law.*  
Psalm 93.20.

An Orthodox bishop once said: the lives of the saints reveal an infinite variety, in the image of God's infinity, but sin is always boring, always the same. Yes indeed: "there's nothing new under the sun", said the wise Solomon, having tasted of almost everything this fallen world has to offer. However, we need to qualify this judgement somewhat. Since sin is always boring, the sinner is always bored *with himself above all*, and so is always seeking new expressions for his everlastingly boring content. Moreover, Satan is always seeking to catch us out by presenting sin in new forms, new and unexpected combinations.

Modern western culture revels in such shocking new combinations. Take the rock singer Marilyn Manson. A conventional Satanist, one might think. After all, one of his records is called "Antichrist Superstar", and he has large placards on stage while performing that read: "KILL GOD!" However, he wears a large cross in a prominent position over his demonic face, and has published an article entitled: "The Cross I bear". Does he respect the Cross even while trampling on it? No, of course not... And yet the modern phase in popular culture, which may be said to have started in the 1970s with the rise of the punk movement in the West, and about ten years later in the East with Gorbachev's perestroika, is definitely religious by comparison with the preceding phase. Some time ago Satan came to the conclusion that the frontal assault on religion – through the persecutions against the faith in the communist countries, and through the preaching of unbridled license and the relativization of religion in the capitalist countries – should now be brought to an end. It was time, while not completely abandoning the old methods, to combine communism with capitalism, Christianity with Antichristianity, licentiousness with asceticism. No longer, since then, do Satan's agents strive to sweep the very name of God from off the face of the earth. Instead the names of God and Christ and the Mother of God appear everywhere – but rarely in a holy context, always in combination with filth and blasphemy. Thus a singer in Los Angeles and London calls herself "Madonna" and propagates the Kabbala, while a cult leader in Kiev with links to the KGB calls herself "Deva Christi", "Virgin of Christ"...

One of the first True Orthodox thinkers to study these phenomena and write about them was Hieromonk Seraphim Rose. Having drunk deeply of the "delights" of hippy-nihilist culture before converting to Orthodoxy, he was in a good position to analyze it and anticipate the ways in which it might invade the culture of True Orthodoxy. His book, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, touched a chord in the hearts of many, not only in America but also in Russia.

One of Rose's Russian admirers is Igumen Gregory Lourié. Scion of a famous Jewish family (the *Russian Jewish Encyclopaedia* calls them "aristocrats among the Jews"<sup>323</sup>), and a direct descendant of the foremost Kabbalist in Europe in the sixteenth century, Issak Lourié Levi (a link of which he is reported to be very proud), he is a product of the Leningrad rock underground as Rose was of San Francisco hippydom. Like Rose, he has set himself the task of interpreting the nihilist culture of his youth for a True Orthodox readership, and, vice-versa, of bringing True Orthodoxy to the down and outs of the Russian cities. Unlike Rose, however, he has not fully broken with that culture... The result is a horrific hybrid, a mixture of True Orthodoxy and nihilist "art" and philosophy - "Punk-True-Orthodoxy" - which has already created havoc in the ranks of the True Orthodox in Russia, and which he is threatening to bring to America through a union with HOCNA (see my "Open Letter to Fr. Gregory Lourié"<sup>324</sup>).

In order that we may better understand the essence of this horrific hybrid, here is an extensive quotation from an article by N.D. Nedashkovskaya, former Director of the Centre of Orthodox Enlightenment in St. Petersburg, entitled "Taking Inspiration from Emptiness, or: "The Theology of the Gutter":-

"First: blasphemy against God as the Creator of a perfect and beautiful world that has not finally lost these qualities even after the fall of Satan and man. As it is written in [Lourié's] "Swiss Time": "You want to be a good person? I do not, whatever this 'goodness' may consist in. But if after all I have to be a man, then I would do better to try and become the kind of man I myself want to be, and not the kind that someone here (even God) would consider to be 'good'. But if I were to set about thinking even harder, then I would not find in the idea of 'man' (*any* man, 'man generally speaking') anything for the sake of which it would be worth living, even on the condition of immortality: the senseless does not acquire sense if it becomes infinitely long... Such a picture of Paradise - in the form of an infinitely long and infinitely happy human existence - begins very much to smack of Mohammedan dreams of blessedness beyond the grave. But the Mohammedans have in mind the usual physiological 'pleasures' raised to an infinite degree, while with the Christians it turns out to be something closer to psychedelics: some special kind of 'kick' which you don't find in everyday life (the same 'psychedelic paradise' that Yanka Dyagilev [a Russian pop star] rejected!). One can't help thinking at this point that the Mohammedans nevertheless have something healthy. "

"I should like immediately to point out either the illiteracy or the deliberate distortion of concepts in Fr. Gregory Lourié, who is advertised as a 'theologian' or 'patrologist'. He substitutes for the positive infinity of being, *well-being*, of the creature in the Kingdom of Heaven the "bad" infinity. The latter will be realised in hell. By the way, in this extract we have a vivid example of the characteristic style of our author:

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<sup>323</sup> Quoted in A.I. Solzhenitsyn, *Dvesti Let Vmeste (Two Hundred Years Together)*, 1795-1995, Moscow, 2001, volume I, pp. 216-217.

<sup>324</sup> [www.romanitas.ru/eng/OPEN%20LETTER%20TO%20FR.%20GREGORY%20LOURIÉ.htm](http://www.romanitas.ru/eng/OPEN%20LETTER%20TO%20FR.%20GREGORY%20LOURIÉ.htm).

mocking and overstrained, the exact opposite of the style of the Holy Fathers, which is full of seriousness and weeping.

"The failure to distinguish between the "heights" and the "depths", the substitution of the one for the other, and demagogic play on the antinomies: the *world* as the sum total of God's creation, created as a mirror in which His all-perfection is reflected for the Noetic Powers and for man; and the *world* in the ascetic sense, as the name of the sum total of the demonic and human passions. In this consist the spirit of the worldview of "**Luciferyanism**" (we retain Fr. Nektary [Yashunsky]'s term). However, for the author we have his own name for himself: "punk-orthodoxy": "I am conscious of, and recognise in myself, something of the rocker and even... of 'punk-orthodoxy', writes Fr. Gregory Lourié.

"Second blasphemy: a blasphemous distortion of the lofty patristic teaching on the final end of the existence of the world and man - deification. As Fr. Nektary writes in the above-mentioned work: "... Once the daystar 'said in his heart, 'I will ascend to heaven: above the stars of God I shall set my throne... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself equal to the Most High' (Isaiah 14.13-14). But Hieromonk [Gregory] truly aspires to become equal to the Most High. He writes: 'Being with God is not the infinity of unlimited human existence, but real eternity, which has not only no end, but also no beginning'. He apparently hopes to excel in deification even the Son of God Himself, or at least he ascribes this to the Holy Fathers, who, insofar as 'in them the real aim of the Incarnation of Christ has been completely accomplished', 'themselves became *primary sources* of the teaching of the Church' ('Swiss dogmatics')..."

Nedashkovskaya continues her article: "Thus we see a direct merging between the theology of *Luciferyanian* "deification" and the "simple" Luciferyanism of the punk-nihilists... That is Fr. Gregory Lourié's Orthodoxy!..."

"But of course the apotheosis of his theology is his insinuation of a 'discovery' of the unfortunate Nietzsche, who died of syphilis. In the course of eighteen and a half centuries there was nothing that was not thrown at the Church: both heresies and schism. But neither they, nor the most savage enemy of Christianity, Talmudic Judaism, ever thought up such a blasphemy against the Life-Giver Christ as was born in the rotting brain of the mad Nietzsche and which is now being taken up as a revelation of Fr. Gregory Lourié's 'purified' (from Christianity) 'direct path'. It is terrible even to repeat this blasphemy, but the Internet is teeming with it: **Christ committed... suicide**: 'The image of the death of Christ, to which our death must be conformed, has long ago been named in the unbelieving world: suicide (F. Nietzsche)' ("Let's try this").

"Here is some correspondence between Fr. Gregory Lourié [and someone else] in the 'suicides' club':

"Someone: They say that if a person believes in God, it's kind of more difficult for him to decide on the step [of suicide]. Tell me, please: do you believe that this is true?"

"Fr. Gregory: It depends how you look at it. You can also believe that deciding on this step would even be easier. On this subject there is a special song by Yanka Dyagileva, 'The flocks are flying'. But if you believe in an Orthodox way, then all problems are removed, while new ones (even worse?) appear (4 January, 2002).

"Someone: I'm almost, I don't want to live... It's true, it's a great thing.

"Fr. Gregory: One 'wants' to live, but one mustn't." (5 January, 2002).

Nedashkovskaya concludes: "How have we got to such a life?

"Such a *horrific* phenomenon as Fr. Gregory Lourié's punk-Orthodoxy is not a chance phenomenon, just as the appearance of another horror, ecumenism, was not a chance phenomenon. *Horrific* not in an abusive sense: we call horrors the fantastic union of that which cannot be united by nature. And if ecumenism is justly called a pan-heresy, then we can call the newly-born chimera, "punk orthodoxy", a hyper-heresy. The essence of ecumenism is the bringing to earth of the commandment on love, bringing it down to the level of an earthly, non-spiritual phenomenon. The pseudo-struggle of "punk orthodoxy" with ecumenism leads to a denial of, and blasphemy against, all manifestations of love - except love for one's own pseudo-divine ego. The stages on the inglorious path of apostasy from God were indicated by Fr. Seraphim Rose in his work, *Subhumanism...*"

So much for Lourié's Punk Orthodoxy, which, as should be clear now, is not only not Christian or Orthodox, but the purest Antichristianity. However, if that were all there is to the man, he would not represent such a threat to the True Orthodox. Surely he cannot enter among us, one may object! But he entered already eight years ago... How could such a bizarre, deluded man make serious inroads into our enclosed, traditionalist, anti-modernist world? By presenting himself as traditionalist and anti-modernist to some, while practising the destruction of tradition in the most cynically modernist spirit in front of others...

We must not underestimate what Lourié can achieve and has already achieved: his horrific hybrid "Punk-True-Orthodoxy" is spreading fast in Russia - and he plans to bring it to America through a secretly planned union with HOCNA... Fr. Panteleimon of Boston was already courting Lourié in the year 2000. In September, 2005 he went for three weeks to Russia...

One of the reasons for Lourié's success is his ability to think *strategically* about Orthodoxy in the contemporary world in clear, coherent lines that seem to make sense of the present "time of troubles" while giving concrete indications as to how the Church is to survive in the 21st century. Such strategic thinking is very rare in True Orthodoxy today, obsessed as we are by *tactical* questions - that is, inter- and intra-jurisdictional issues. These cannot, unfortunately, be avoided; but for the soul, especially the young soul, they are meagre food. As the wise Solomon says, "without a vision the people perish..."

So let us examine some aspects of Lourié's strategic plan for the Orthodox Church in the twenty-first century:-

It is best to begin at the end, with Lourié's idea of how things are likely to develop, because this to a large extent determines his outlook on other subjects.

Lourié is resolutely opposed to the idea that there will be a restoration of the Orthodox monarchy (which he in any case considers to be an "Old Testament" institution!). Thus in July, 2003 the ROAC Synod, at Lourié's prompting, declared: "The old 'Christian world' has gone, never to return, and that which is frenziedly desired by some, the regeneration of the 'Orthodox monarchy' in some country, in which the true faith will reign, must be considered a senseless utopia." Assuming that the signatures under this decree are genuine (which one can by no means assume in the ROAC), then we must conclude that the ROAC has officially rejected the hope of all truly Orthodox Christians in the resurrection of Orthodoxy under an Orthodox Emperor, and in particular the resurrection of Orthodoxy under a Russian Tsar.

How this renunciation of the hopes of the Catacomb Church and the old-style ROCOR can be reconciled with the many prophecies that speak of a restoration of Orthodoxy and the Orthodox monarchy before the end, has never, to my knowledge, been explained by Lourié. The authenticity of some prophecies may be doubted; the sanctity and true inspiration of some of the prophets may perhaps be challenged; but a rejection of *all* the prophecies, and the characterisation even of the *hope* of the resurrection of Orthodoxy as a "frenzied desire" for a "senseless utopia", indicates more than a cautious scepticism. It is as if Lourié *does not want* the resurrection of Orthodoxy, as if he is determined, for motives that are unclear, to *root out* this "superstition" from the minds of believers (who happened to include very many of the saints and martyrs of the twentieth century).

In his most recent article Lourié also attacks the idea that Russia must undergo some kind of collective repentance in order to receive again an Orthodox monarchy. "The worst thing about this 'penitentialism'," he writes, "is that it blocks all thought about the regeneration of Russia as a State without her regeneration as an *Orthodox State*" (my italics -V.M.)... Lourié here forgets that St. John Kronstadt said Russia without an Orthodox tsar is "a stinking corpse"...

"Perhaps," he continues, "such a destiny [having an Orthodox State] still awaits Russia. But for us now, who again find ourselves in about the first century of Christianity, such historical conjectures are of practically no topical interest. Whether we like it or not, we are living in the midst of an unbelieving people. If we do not consider that its unbelief is a reason for wishing it the speediest annihilation, then it would be reasonable on our side not to imitate the eschatological escapism of Old Ritualism..."<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Lourié, "Russkoe okaianstvo i pravoslavnoe pokaianstvo" (Russian pestilentialism and Orthodox penitentialism), portal-credo.ru, 3 October, 2005.

One might think that Lourié simply believes, as do so many Orthodox Christians today, that the Antichrist is just round the corner, so there is no hope of a "Triumph of Orthodoxy" before the Second Coming of Christ; we must simply bunker down in our catacomb-like cells and wait for the end, renouncing missionary work and all long-term plans for the establishment of large-scale Orthodox structures – Churches or States.

Not a bit of it! Lourié talks little about the Antichrist – he is much too anchored in the here and now. And he is the very opposite of a Catacomb Christian in his mentality and aspirations (which is why the Catacomb hierarchs of the ROAC have been trying, and now finally succeeded in obtaining his defrocking - whether canonically or not, as Lourié contends, is another matter). He is a media man, a performer, a "star", just made for the age of the internet. He and his very active disciples in St. Petersburg and elsewhere write articles, publish journals, speak on the radio, create web-sites and web-forums and even organize press conferences to propagandize their views. Lourié seeks publicity because, as he writes, "for the successful mission of the Church in the contemporary world the Church organism must be not only Spirit-bearing, but also dynamic and effective" – as if acquiring the Holy Spirit is not the ultimate and completely sufficient aim of the Orthodox Christian, but has to be supplemented by worldly "dynamism" and "effectiveness"!

This brings us to Lourié's highly controversial relations with politics and politicians.

Lourié believes that, even in this "post-religious" world, as he calls it, the Church should get involved in politics. This is made clear in his writings. "The True Orthodox Church should exert a strong influence on the religious politics of its State." "Her strategic interests coincide with the interests of any patriotic government of its country." (Interesting...) "The process of degeneration is unstoppable, and the Old Calendarist movement is no longer able to save itself..." (HOCNA, take note!)

The Church's "only chance is to get hitched up to a tug-boat." That "tug-boat" is the State – and Lourié is not too finicky about what kind of State: the Soviet State under Stalin and the neo-Soviet State under Putin are equally acceptable. "For me it is evident that in Russia there is required a restoration of those relationships between the MP and the State that were bequeathed to us by the great Stalin."

So Sergianism is just fine, and Stalin is "great" (in other places he speaks of his "respect" for Stalin, and the "genius" of his socialist realist art)! And yet in other works of his Lourié blasts both ecclesiastical Stalinism and the Sergianism of the MP! More than that: he blasts the *pre-revolutionary* Synod for being "Sergianist" before Sergius!

In this amazingly hypocritical tactic Lourié displays a close kinship with the "Living Church" renovationists of the 1920s. Before the revolution, these heretics were among the foremost critics of the Church's too-close dependence on the Orthodox Tsarist State, and were usually anti-monarchists. After the revolution, they

immediately entered into an extremely dependent relationship on the antichristian Soviet State, and justified all the horrors of Lenin and Stalin in the name of Christ.

There can be no doubt that when the time for the next State-sponsored persecution of the Church comes, Lourié will be on the side of the persecutors. After all, if, as he says, Bulgakov and Pasternak "should not have been left alive" by the "great" Stalin, what mercy can we, the True Orthodox Christians expect from him in time of trouble? Already, he has powerful protectors in high places, such as the Kremlin "polittechnologist" and betrayer of the dissidents, Gleb Pavlovsky, who provides him with money and lawyers and makes visits with him to the bedside of Metropolitan Valentine...

Some have speculated that Lourié is a KGB agent. I have no proof of this, and just as we had to wait until 1992 for final proof that the leading hierarchs of the MP were KGB agents, so we shall probably have to wait until the arrival of a True Orthodox tsar before Lourié's true status is elucidated beyond doubt. But his activities would seem to indicate that here is a new type of agent – not the crude Soviet mouth-pieces of the Brezhnev years, but a much more "flexible" force (the word was used of Metropolitan Sergius), more like an "agent of influence", that is probably given much more freedom to choose his own strategy, more rope with which to hang others – and himself.

Lourié is no atheist planted in an already Sovietized institution, but a sincere "believer" – an eccentric and heretical one, but a "believer" nonetheless, whose ambition can be guaranteed to bring about the required results for the government without any (or only very little) instructions or encouragement. Lourié probably feels he is using the government rather than being used by it (again the parallel is with Sergius. The important fact from our point of view is that Satan is manipulating both of them.

So what is Lourié's relationship to the MP? Just as Metropolitan Sergius, as Hieromartyr Damascene pointed out, took a suspiciously long time to leave the renovationists in 1924, so Lourié was remarkably late in leaving the MP in 1997. In the case of many, perhaps most, converts, this could be put down to ignorance of the true state of affairs. Not Lourié. A patrologist and Byzantinist, a former secretary of Metropolitan Ioann (Snychev) of St. Petersburg, he must have been well aware long before he left the MP that it was a thoroughly corrupt and heretical organization. Certainly, the MP's betrayal of the faith at Chambésy and Balamand in the early 1990s would have made him think of leaving (he appears to be a sincere anti-ecumenist), and he was prominent in the criticism of these unias within the MP. But precisely because he could still have influence within the anti-ecumenist movement in the MP, he was not going to leave it simply on anti-ecumenist principle immediately heresy appeared. Lourié *never* acts on principle alone...

This lack of principle is evident in his ambiguous attitude towards the question of when the MP lost grace. There is an interesting parallel here (and not the only one)

with Fr. Panteleimon of Boston. The Bostonites are usually considered very zealous anti-ecumenists, and I would not deny them that title. But why does Fr. Panteleimon consider that the new calendarists lost grace only in 1965, when the official position of the Greek Old Calendarists (and of Archbishop Auxentius, from whom Panteleimon's bishops obtained their orders) is 1935, a full thirty years later, and a full fifteen years after Patriarch Athenagoras made his super-ecumenist declaration: "We are in error and sin if we think that the Orthodox Faith came down from heaven and that the other dogmas [i.e. religions] are unworthy. Three hundred million men have chosen Mohammedanism as the way to God and further hundreds of millions are Protestants, Catholics and Buddhists. The aim of every religion is to make man better"? The probable answer is that since Fr. Panteleimon left the new calendarists in 1965, to assert that the new calendarists lost grace before that would imply that Panteleimon – heaven forbid! – was once a heretic. Far better to say that the new calendarists lost grace precisely when Panteleimon left them! Then he can claim he had never been in heresy or a false church! Similarly, when the Bostonites left the ROCOR in 1986 (so as to save Panteleimon from a court trial and defrocking for immorality), they conveniently stated that the ROCOR had lost grace at *that* time. They could not say that the ROCOR lost grace earlier, for then the Bostonites would have been graceless at least for a time. But they could not say it remained Orthodox *after* they left, because it had always been a cardinal doctrine of Boston that one can leave a Church for no other reason than heresy, and leaving for any other reason constitutes schism...

Lourié's attitude to the question of grace is not so clearly defined, but no less opportunistic. He has carefully not subscribed to the view that the MP lost grace in the 30s or 40s, as the great majority of the New Hieromartyrs of Russia declared, nor even when the MP entered the World Council of Churches in the 1960s. In fact, it is not at all clear *when*, if at any time, he considers the MP to have lost grace.

This makes sense in terms of his overall strategic plan, which is not to replace or convert the MP – he considers such an idea wildly unrealistic, even undesirable – but *to keep it in place as the church for the uncultured masses*. What, then, should the relationship of ROAC be to the MP, in his opinion? A form of "*alternative* Orthodoxy". For, as he said in a press conference in 2001, he regards the MP, the Old Ritualists and the ROAC as the three forms of Orthodoxy in Russia. The ROAC is not a rival, but an *alternative* to the MP.

For whom? For those who are really serious about their Orthodoxy, for the *elite* believers...

Elitism runs like a silver thread through all of Lourié's writings. Now an élite does not live in complete isolation from the "common" crowd: rather it is like the leaven in the lump, working to transform the lump while not being corrupted by it. It is useful to compare Lourié's "Church of the Elite" with two other forms of quasi-élitist religious organisation: the Masonic lodge and the monastery.

Lourié writes: "The True Orthodox Church is distinguished from a Masonic lodge by the fact that it is not an esoteric organization: on no 'level of initiation' do they

communicate something that contradicts what is communicated on lower levels." This reveals that for Lourié the TOC is in fact rather like a lodge, only more "open". And in fact the similarity, not of the TOC as a whole, but of his own sect within the TOC, to Masonry is remarkable. Like the lodges, the sect exists in order to subvert existing ecclesiastical authority, to effect a revolution in the Church. The élite who are privileged to be given access to this lodge are initiated into a series of "secret" doctrines, which it would be as well not to proclaim too quickly or too openly. For example, the doctrine that the Name of God *is* God, a heresy condemned by the Greek and Russian Churches in 1913. (It was for preaching this heresy that Lourié was defrocked by the Synod of the ROAC in September, 2005.) Again, the doctrine of "samobozhie", that all True Christians are gods, having no beginning or end (see the "second blasphemy" in Nedashkovskaya, above). Of course, pseudo-patristic arguments are cited in favour of these doctrines. For without such arguments the doctrines would not be accepted – and it is the purpose of the sect to spread their doctrines in the wider world, just as it was the purpose of the Masonic lodges to spread the revolution.

Lourié combines quasi-masonic élitism with a strong emphasis on monasticism. But not Orthodox monasticism. The first book of his that elicited controversy within the True Orthodox Church, *The Calling of Abraham*, is a call to monasticism of a special, Manichaeian kind, in which the monastic or virgin life is seen as the *only* possible way of life for the New Testament Christian, while marriage is for "Old Testament Christians", who live according to the law, not grace. Lourié himself abandoned his wife against her will in order to become a monk in the world – a way of life that he recommends for his closest followers (rock music is the preferred preparation for this kind of monasticism!).

So far, Lourié's cult is comparatively small – a few hundred people at most, (but with thousands of sympathizers) – confined mainly to Russia. However, cults, like malignant cancers, have an inexorable tendency to grow – and Lourié's influence is growing rapidly. In the present writer's opinion, his defrocking is likely to be only a temporary setback on his road to religious superstardom, and may even be exploited by him to his advantage. For if he succeeds in having that decision reversed under a new first-hierarchy, he may even gain complete control over ROAC – after the diehard catacombniks have fled in horror...

Lourié's appeal lies in his exotic mixing of many elements hitherto considered to be incompatible, and in his ability to appeal to strictly traditionalist "theologians", on the one hand, and punks, drug addicts and suicides, on the other. He is, or tries to be, "all things to all men" – except that, unfortunately, the purity of the Apostolic message is lost along the way. Moreover, he realizes the full import of a fact too often lost sight of by the leaders of True Orthodoxy today: that almost all new members of the Orthodox Church today are *converts*, even if they happen to be Greek or Russian by origin, and have to be taught the fundamentals of Orthodoxy *from the beginning*. In this increasingly small and interconnected world, to retreat into an ethnic reservation, preaching Russian Orthodoxy to Russians only, or Greek Orthodoxy to Greeks only, is no longer an option, for the simple reason that young Russians and Greeks, for

better or worse, already belong to a cosmopolitan culture in which internationalist science, internationalist art and international politics are the staple fare. This means that if the Church is to expand and flourish it must fulfill the command of Christ: "Go and teach *all* nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28.19-20).

Lourié is ready and able to do this – according to his lights. And so already his tentacles extend from St. Petersburg and Moscow to Paris and Berlin to Boston and New York...

If Lourié's planned union with HOCNA takes place (see my "Open Letter"), this will unite two consciously cosmopolitan jurisdictions, one with its roots in Greek Orthodoxy and the other in Russian Orthodoxy, with a potentially global outreach and appeal. Lourié will accept HOCNA as his representative on the American continent and Africa, while HOCNA will accept Lourié as their representative in Russia and probably also in Western Europe (although this and other "geopolitical" questions will obviously have to be negotiated between them). For many, very many people just coming to the light of Orthodoxy, this genuinely global jurisdiction, transcending narrowly phyletistic divisions, yet with a traditionalist, anti-ecumenist ethos and a strong emphasis on the teaching of the Universal Faith, will be undeniably – fatally – attractive.

But are there no theological differences between the two groups?

There are. HOCNA will have to accept – or agree to ignore – Lourié's name-worshipping and other heresies, including punk orthodoxy. And Lourié will have to accept – or turn a blind eye to – HOCNA's veneration of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky and his "Dogma of Redemption", which Lourié rejects. But these differences are not insuperable; for, for all their claims to strict, patristic Orthodoxy, Metropoulos and Lourié are pragmatists in theological matters; they can "drop" a theological crusade as quickly as they take it up if that is "for the benefit of the Church"...

So how are we to combat this "fatal attraction"? Only by returning to the "basic instincts" of the Orthodox world-view. One of these is: never trust a morally corrupted person, however brilliant his talents and convincing his arguments. Secondly: never trust a man or a movement that is not founded upon the rock of the confession of the Russian Catacomb Church – whose representatives in the form of the ROAC Catacomb hierarchs have delivered (however clumsily and even, from a formal point of view, uncanonically) a crushing verdict on the teachings of Fr. Gregory Lourié. And thirdly: never lose the hope that God will save His Church – without the help of man if necessary. For "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord..." (Zechariah 4.6).

*September 23 / October 6, 2005.*

### 23. HAS THE REIGN OF THE ANTICHRIST BEGUN?

For several decades now, beginning in some of the Protestant Churches, and spreading to the Orthodox, there has been speculation that the reign of the Antichrist has begun, and that his servants are already being sealed with his seal and with the number "666". There has been no agreement about what the seal of the beast really is, nor about the meaning of his number. Nor has any Orthodox Church Council given an authoritative interpretation of the thirteenth to twentieth chapters of Revelation and their symbols – the first beast, the second beast, the horns and heads of the beast, his seal and image and number, the whore of Babylon, etc. In spite of this absence of authoritative interpretation and guidance, schisms have already begun to appear on this soil in more than one Orthodox country. This is a tragic phenomenon, and would appear to make a fresh attempt to achieve clarity and consensus on this question urgent.

However, we have to accept from the beginning: God may have deliberately concealed the interpretation of these texts because the time is not ripe, because the Antichrist in his last, personal incarnation, has *not* yet appeared. If so, then any attempt to fix the correct interpretation may be not only premature, but harmful and impious because bound to be mistaken. After all, did not the holy theologian, speaking in the Holy Spirit, say: "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast" (Revelation 13.18)? In other words, a special gift of wisdom, of spiritual understanding, is required in order to understand this mystery. And who, in our corrupt generation can claim to have that gift, which was not given to the Holy Fathers of earlier generations and has not been given to the leaders of the Church in the present generation? It is precisely for this reason that no attempt will be made in this article to provide a definitive answer to the question: who (or what) is the beast, and what is the meaning of his number? Instead, a different, but perhaps more necessary question will be addressed: do we have good reason to believe that we have reached the very last times of the world? More precisely: have all the prophecies relating to the times *preceding* the appearance of the Antichrist already been fulfilled?

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One of the most recent saints of the Orthodox Church, Holy New Martyr James (Arkatov) of the Altai in Siberia (+1991), who had the gift of prophecy, once said in conversation with some Old Ritualists: "You have already been talking for an hour about the coming Antichrist, but allow me to ask you: to what seal or trumpet or cup, or in general to what powers, do you relate this [Soviet] regime under which we are living?" At first the guests were perplexed by the presence of a stranger, and even the master of the house was embarrassed. One of them said: "If you want to say something, say it."

Then James briefly expounded his understanding of the basic prophecies. "First, all the prophecies spoke not only about one time of the reign of the Antichrist, but about three sections of the last times: the first was called 'the beginning of sorrows', according to the prophetic word of the Saviour, or 'apostasy', according to the Apostle Paul, and in the Revelation of the Apostle John it is referred to as the coming out and

reign of the beast from the sea with his head-followers. The second section of the last times is 'the beast was and is not' or the time of the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world, and, finally, the third period, which is in fact the time of the enthronement of the Antichrist. The Saviour calls it 'the end', the beginning of which is the placing of 'the abomination of desolation' or the coming 'out of the beast from the abyss' (St. John the Theologian), who is the eighth in number in the dynasty of the beasts and is of the number of the seven, or the appearance of 'the man of sin' (St. Paul the Apostle). As for the 'whore', is it not clear to you that this image refers to a traitor-church that has betrayed Christ, that which should be 'the bride of Christ', but which has been united with the scarlet beast. In the Apocalypse there are three 'women', and all three signify the Church, it is only by their clothes and their activity that we can distinguish them: on the way into the wilderness she is clothed in the sun, but there she is divided into her who is clothed in scarlet and her who goes out to meet Christ, clothed in pure white, which is the righteousness of the saints."

And so the holy martyr divides the last times into three stages: (1) the Soviet period, which began in 1917 and has not fully come to an end yet; (2) the Triumph of Orthodoxy, which will see the spread of the True Faith throughout the world for a short time; and (3) the reign of the Antichrist.

St. James' schema was not unique to himself: many saints of the Russian Catacomb Church expressed similar thoughts. All agreed that the abdication of the tsar, "he who restrains", according to St. Paul (II Thessalonians 2.7), marked the beginning of the last times, the reign of the Antichrist. However, Soviet power was not the Antichrist in the literal, personal sense, but the *collective* Antichrist. He had his own seals, the red star and the hammer and sickle, if not his own number. He had his own "abomination of desolation", "priests" appointed by himself, whom he put in the churches of God to defile them. And all those who were sealed with his seal in the spiritual sense - that is, accepted communism, or did not resist it spiritually - fell away from Christ. As for the "whore", this was the false church of the Sovietized Moscow Patriarchate, which, by accepting the joys and sorrows of the collective Antichrist as its own joys and sorrows, had clearly accepted his seal and fallen away from Christ and Orthodoxy.

But the Catacomb saints did not believe that the period of Soviet power, or the collective Antichrist, would be followed immediately by "the end", the reign of the personal Antichrist, the false king of the Jews. On the contrary: they believed that after the violent overthrow of Soviet power (in a war with China, according to several elders) True Orthodoxy would be re-established in Russia under a True Orthodox tsar. Moreover, some also believed that this would lead to the spread of Orthodoxy throughout the world, in accordance with the words of the Lord: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; *and then* shall the end come" (Matthew 24.14). For, as St. John Maximovich (+1966) once explained, this prophecy of the Lord has not yet been fulfilled. "The Gospel of the Kingdom" must refer to the *Orthodox* Gospel, and not to Catholic or Protestant heresies; and we cannot say that the Orthodox Gospel has yet been preached to all nations.

In fact, if we include the pre-revolutionary saints who prophesied the fall and resurrection of Russia, we have a “great cloud of witnesses” who clearly imply that today, in the year 2007, we have *not* yet reached “the end”, the reign of the personal Antichrist, and that many great – and greatly joyful – events have to take place before his coming: Monk Abel the Prophet, Elder Seraphim of Sarov, Elder Porphyrius of Glinsk, the Elders of Valaam, Elder Barnabas of Gethsemane Skete, Righteous John of Kronstadt, Elder Aristocles of Moscow, Martyr-Eldress Dunyushka of Siberia, Hieromartyr Andronicus of Perm, Elder Anatolius of Optina, Elder Alexis (Mechev) of Moscow, Elder Nectarius of Optina, Martyr-Eldress Agatha of Belorussia, Elder Theodosius of Minvody and others.

So why do people find it so difficult to believe that there can be any improvement before the end, and insist that the very last days, the reign of the personal Antichrist, are upon us already?

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Many saints believed that they were living just before the end. We may recall two fairly recent examples. In 1848 St. Callinicus of Cernica in Romania decided not to build a church because he believed that the end was so near, and was only persuaded to build it by the appearance to him of Saints Nicholas and George. Again, St. John Maximovich believed that the Antichrist had been born in 1962...

Paradoxically, such a mistake is more characteristic of saints than of sinners because saints feel the growth of evil around them more acutely; their spiritual senses are trained to feel the increase in iniquity and the love of many growing cold, whereas sinners, being immersed in evil, are less sensitive to this. And there is no doubt that evil has grown today to unprecedented proportions. This fact, combined with the weakening of the Church on earth, and its ever-increasing divisions, must lead the deeply thinking Christian to wonder: how long can this continue? “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Revelation 6.10).

These words were spoken by “the souls of them that were slain for the word of God” (Revelation 6.9), and remind us of another fact that is too easily forgotten: that our age has produced not only the greatest evil, *but also the greatest good* – in the form of the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of martyrs that have shone forth, especially in Russia, but also in other lands. Now in earlier ages periods of martyrdom have always been followed by periods of missionary expansion, in accordance with the principle: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Thus the martyrs of the Roman catacombs produced the vast expansion of the Church in the time of St. Constantine the Great, and the martyrs of the iconoclast period produced the conversion of the Slavic lands. Why should not the holy new martyrs and confessors of Russia bring forth a still greater harvest of souls – especially since some of the prophecies say that this is precisely what will happen?

One harvest of souls that is clearly prophesied before the end is that of *the Jews*. St. Paul writes: “Blindness in part is come to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. And so shall all Israel be saved. As it is written: There shall come out of Zion the

deliverer, who will turn away impiety from Israel" (Romans 11.25-26). The fulfilment of this prophecy, the conversion of the Jews, has certainly not taken place yet.

Some argue that this is impossible because it is precisely the Jews who destroyed the Russian empire and who are controlling the present descent of the world into the depths of depravity and antichristianity. But does not the example of St. Paul himself persuade us that the Lord is capable of making the greatest sinners into the greatest saints? And would not the conversion of the Jews be the greatest demonstration of God's long-suffering mercy?

Again, others argue that the Jews will be converted only during the reign of the Antichrist. However, St. Paul says that the sign for the conversion of the Jews will not be the reign of the Antichrist but the "coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles" - that is, the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world. This spiritual resurrection of the Jews will not be total, and a large part of them will again apostasize and follow the Antichrist; but the fact of the resurrection cannot be denied and must modify our attitude towards this race, which, though cursed by God, has nevertheless not been totally abandoned by Him, and has been preserved in existence when many other nations have perished.

And who will convert the Jews if not the Russians, who have suffered so much from them, but whose history and culture has become the history and culture of a large part of the Jewish race itself (one sixth of all Israelis are Russian Jews)?

If this seems fantastic in view of the present collapse of Russian civilization, let us remember the interpretation of a passage from the book of the Apocalypse given by the holy new Hieromartyr Bishop Mark (Novoselov): "[St. John] with complete clarity speaks about the conversion of the God-fighting people to the Church of Christ, when she, few in numbers and powerless from an external point of view, but powerful with an inner strength and faithfulness to her Lord (Revelation 3.8) will draw to herself the 'remnant' of the God-fighting tribe. 'Behold, says the Lord to the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and make obeisance before they feet, and to know that I have loved thee.'

"Gazing with the eye of faith at what the Lord has done, and applying the ear of our heart and mind to the events of our days, comparing that which is seen and heard with the declarations of the Word of God, I cannot but feel that a great, wonderful and joyous mystery of God's economy is coming towards us: the Judaizing haters and persecutors of the Church of God, who are striving to subdue and annihilate her, by the wise permission of Providence will draw her to purification and strengthening, so as 'to present her [to Christ] as a glorious Church, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she should be holy and blameless' (Ephesians 6.27).

"And in His time, known only to the One Lord of time, this, according to the son of thunder's strict expression 'synagogue of Satan' will bow before the pure Bride of Christ, conquered by her holiness and blamelessness and, perhaps, frightened by the image of the Antichrist. And if the rejection of the Apostle Paul's fellow-countrymen

was, in his words, 'the reconciliation of the world, what will be their acceptance if not life from the dead?' (Romans 11.15)."<sup>326</sup>

The famous monarchist writer Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov agrees with this interpretation: "Is this conversion of the Jews that salvation of 'all Israel' which the Apostle Paul foretold? In the Apocalypse it is said that the saved will come 'of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie'. But not the whole of the 'synagogue' will come, but only 'of the synagogue', that is, a part of it. But even here, where the Apostle Paul says that 'the whole of Israel will be saved', he means only a part: 'for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel... They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed' (Romans 9.6,8).

"The opinion is widespread among us that the conversion of the Jews will take place at the very appearance of the Saviour, when they shall cry out: 'Blessed is He That cometh in the name of the Lord'. But this is not evident from the Apocalypse. But if the Philadelphian conversion will bring 'all Israel' that is to be saved to Christ, then this will, of course, be a great event, fully explaining the rejoicing of the Heavens. Israel is a chosen people with whom it will not be possible to find a comparison when he begins to do the work of God. The Jews will, of course, multiply the forces of Christianity for the resistance against the Antichrist. 'If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world,' says the Apostle Paul, 'what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?' (Romans 11.15)."<sup>327</sup>

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And so our answer to the question: "Has the Reign of the Antichrist Begun?" is: "Not yet: many prophecies concerning the resurrection of Orthodoxy before the end have not yet been fulfilled, and even if it is difficult, in the present, extraordinarily corrupt state of the world, to see how this could possibly happen, it is necessary to believe the Word of God and the prophecies of the saints more than our own ears and eyes; for 'with God all things are possible'".

But the objection will arise: what about the bar-codes, the passports, the bio-chips - all the technology which seems, for the first time in history, to show in a concrete manner how the prophecy concerning the seal of the Antichrist could be fulfilled? We are not denying that the Antichrist, when he comes, may well use this technology, or its more sophisticated successor, to seal his servants. But *the appearance of the technology is not the same as the fulfilment of the prophecy*. Here we must be wise, as the son of thunder warns. We must not take a shadow, or foreshadowing of the truth, for the truth itself.

Let us consider first: is the number "666" evil in itself? The answer, according to St. Gregory Palamas, is: no; this number, like all the other numbers, has been created by

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<sup>326</sup> Novoselov, *Pisma k Druziam (Letters to Friends)*, Moscow, 1994, p. 125.

<sup>327</sup> Tikhomirov, *Religioznie-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii (The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History)*, Moscow, 1997, p. 570.

God, and so is good. <sup>328</sup> What is evil is not the number itself, but the end to which it is used.

How will it be used? We know from the Holy Fathers that the seal will be used as a sign that the person sealed willingly and consciously accepts and believes in the Antichrist. Thus St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher prophesied: "On the seal will be written the following: 'I am yours.' 'Yes, you are mine.' 'I go willingly, not by force.' 'And I accept you in accordance with your will, and not by force.' These are four utterances, or inscriptions, which will be written in the middle of this accursed seal..."

Now has anyone discovered that these four inscriptions are to be found on any modern technological device? As far as the present writer knows, the answer to that question is: no. In any case, such inscriptions make no sense before the appearance of the Antichrist himself. For what does "I am yours" mean if we do not know who "you" is? It follows that before the actual appearance of the Antichrist, and the people's willing and conscious acceptance of him as the true King of the Jews and God, the prophecy cannot be fulfilled... At the same time, the appearance of the technology is undoubtedly *a sign of the times* (Matthew 16.3), a sign that we are approaching the end, and that we must prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of the Antichrist.

The world has been close to the end many times before – for example, in the time of Julian the Apostate, who tried to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. But each time the Lord has delivered the world from the Antichrist. As L.A. Tikhomirov writes: "In history there have been times when the pressure of evil has been so strong that it seemed that there was no further reason for the world to exist, and if the anti-God mood had become finally entrenched then the end of the world would have come. The multitude of small 'potential' antichrists, of whom the Apostle John already spoke, would immediately have promoted from their midst someone capable of growing into the real Antichrist. Such epochs, of which ours is one, in their character truly constitute the last times. But are they chronologically the last? We cannot know that, because if the free will of men, amazed by the disgusting sight of the abomination of desolation in the holy place, strives again towards God, the Antichrist, already ready to enter the world, will again be cast into the abyss until conditions more favourable for him arise, while the Lord will again lengthen the term of life of the world so that new members should be prepared for the Kingdom of God."<sup>329</sup>

One day, however, the Antichrist will indeed come, and we will have to be prepared. And even if his coming is not "at the doors", we must still be prepared, because we can receive the seal of one of his forerunners. So the appearance of signs of the times, and signs of the end, is God's mercy to us, a wake-up call, a call to vigilance which must not be ignored.

Let us recall the context of St. Paul's words on the Antichrist in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. Many Thessalonians were so convinced that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand that they had even stopped working. St. Paul considered this

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<sup>328</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151, 224; *E.P.E.* 9, 492.

<sup>329</sup> Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, p. 539.

harmful, and asked them “not to be quickly shaken from your mind, nor to be disturbed, neither through a spirit, nor through a word, nor through a letter supposedly from us, that the Day of the Lord has come. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless there is first the apostasy and the man of sin, the son of destruction, is revealed...” (2.2-3).

These words are a warning also for us. Although we are, of course, much closer to the reign of the Antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ than the Thessalonians in the first century, nevertheless we also must not “be shaken from our minds” and believe that these events are already upon us when they are not. Technology alone can never separate us from Christ. We can be separated from Christ only by *willingly and consciously* accepting a lie – a heresy like ecumenism, or an evil leader like the Antichrist. The importance of the seal consists in its being an outward and visible sign of this inward and invisible apostasy. The seal will be destructive for those who receive it, because it will be a sign of their acceptance of the heresy of the Antichrist. But the seal has no power on its own – that is, before the appearance of the heresy and before anyone has consciously accepted it.

There is a danger that in our eschatological speculations we may, like the Jews, become fixated on the letter (or number) of the law while completely ignoring its spirit, its inner content, and so fall away from the true faith. That this is a real danger is shown by the fact that recently some zealot monks, in their zeal to avoid what they consider to be the seal of the Antichrist, have broken communion with a truly confessing bishop who does not accept their eschatology and joined a heretical bishop who does. In other words, in order to avoid a future heresy that has not yet appeared and has not yet been identified and condemned by the Church, they have embraced a past heresy (Apollinarianism) that was identified and condemned centuries ago! In the same way, many Orthodox Christians today claim to see the Antichrist in many phenomena – in new passports and globalization, in American foreign policy and the European Union – but completely fail to see that their ecumenist hierarchs are heretics who are leading them into the abyss of the Church’s condemnation. Truly they are “blind guides who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23.24)!

May the Lord grant us that most valuable of gifts, the gift of *discernment*, so that we may discern the signs of the times, not selectively and not in the wrong order, but in conformity with the witness of Holy Scripture and Tradition *as a whole*. For, as St. John Chrysostom says, it is those who do not have this depth of Scriptural knowledge who will bow down to the Antichrist...

*May 20 / June 2, 2007.*

## **24. TO JUDGE OR NOT TO JUDGE**

*If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*  
I Peter 4.18.

“Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7.1) – we all know this very important commandment of the Lord. We know what it means: to express condemnation of a person with hatred or derision. And we know, if we are honest with ourselves, that we very often sin against it... However, the word “judge” has many meanings in the English language; and there is a tendency to use the commandment not to judge in this sense as an excuse for inaction against evil, as a stick with which to suppress dissident opinions, and even, sometimes, as an argument in favour of ecumenism. Let us look at these different meanings.

First, it is important not to confuse judging in the sense of passionate condemnation with *rebuking* or *reproving*. Blessed Theophylact writes: “He forbids condemning others, but not reproving others. A reproof is for another’s benefit, but condemnation expresses only derision and scorn. You may also understand that the Lord is speaking of one who, despite his own great sins, condemns others who have lesser sins of which God will be the judge.”<sup>330</sup>

As St. Moses the Ethiopian says: “Do not rail against anyone, but rather say, ‘God knows each one.’ Do not agree with him who slanders, do not rejoice at his slander and do not hate him who slanders his neighbour. This is what it means not to judge. Do not have hostile feelings towards anyone and do not let dislike dominate your heart; do not hate him who hates his neighbour.”

To reprove with meekness, and without passionate condemnation or hypocrisy, is a very difficult art. But a vital one. St. Basil the Great writes: “Reprimand and rebuke should be accepted as healing remedies for vice and as conducive to good health. From this it is clear that those who pretend to be tolerant because they wish to flatter . . . those who thus fail to correct sinners . . . actually cause them to suffer supreme loss and plot the destruction of that life which is their true life.”

The clergy especially have to rebuke. As the Apostle Paul says to Timothy: “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (I Timothy 5.20), “in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (II Timothy 2.25). But ordinary Christians, too, must sometimes employ rebukes. Parents must reprove their children, spiritual fathers have to reprove their children, brothers in the Church must reprove each other when they see each other going wrong. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Galatians 6.1). If we did not exhort and reprove each other as the Gospel commands (I Thessalonians 4.18; Hebrews 12.5; Ephesians 5.11), our communities would very soon lose grace. Well-directed reproof is the wine that the Good Samaritan poured into the wounds of the man attacked by robbers, the salt that keeps the body of the Church from corrupting.

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<sup>330</sup> *The Explanation of Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew*, House Springs, Missouri: Chrysostom Press, 1992, p. 63.

We may refrain from reproofing others for good or bad reasons. Good reasons include: fear of hypocrisy out of a consciousness of one's own great sinfulness; fear of mistakes out of insufficient knowledge of the person; and fear of one's own fallen nature, which is constantly ready to add the sinful element of derision or scorn to the sinless element of reproof. But there are bad reasons, too: fear of losing the other person's favour – in other words, man-pleasing or social cowardice; and simple indifference to the other person's salvation – in other words, lack of love. Man-pleasing is a particularly widespread and dangerous vice in our times, as has been recently pointed out by his Grace, Bishop Photius of Marathon.<sup>331</sup> Indifference to the salvation of others is perhaps *the* most characteristic vice of our time, in accordance with the word of the Lord: "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall grow cold" (Matthew 24.12).

Secondly, we must not confuse judging in the sense of condemnation with *discernment* of the truth about a person or situation. The Apostle Paul uses the word "judge" in the sense of "discern" when he says: "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" (I Corinthians 2.15). Discernment, the gift of seeing the difference between good and evil in men and situations, is another vital gift, without which salvation is impossible.

Now discernment is acquired, above all, by examination of *oneself* and one's own sins rather than those of others. And preoccupation with the sins of others may lead to pharisaism, blindness to one's own sins and therefore to the opposite of true discernment. Nevertheless, fear of pharisaism should never be used as an excuse to refuse to see the evil that is in front of one's eyes and that necessitates *action* from us.

Thirdly, "judging" as sinful condemnation must be distinguished from "judging" as "executing justice" or "following the judgement of a properly qualified judge", whether ecclesiastical or secular. This confusion is often made by ecumenists, who accuse the Orthodox of "judging" when we are simply following the judgements of the Lord and His Holy Church. We are supposedly not allowed to "judge" heretics and apostates when it is not a question of personal, sinful condemnation, but of loyalty and obedience to the decrees of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

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Particular attention should be made to the "refusal to judge" argument in the context of ecumenism... Ecumenism can be described as the refusal to accept the judgement of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church on the heretics of all ages. We see how the contemporary ecumenists of World Orthodoxy have trampled on the judgements of the Church on the heretics of the period of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, such as the Nestorians and Monophysites, as well as on the heretics of the second millennium of Church history, the Roman Catholics and Protestants. If a True Orthodox Christian says that, for example, the Anglicans are heretics and outside the Church, or that the Anglicans will go to hell after death if they do not repent, he as often as not receives the reply: "Don't

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<sup>331</sup> Bishop Photios, "Prosopolatreia: I Nosos Tou Ierou Imon Agonos", *I Foni tis Orthodoxias*, July-August, 2007, pp. 16-17 (in Greek).

judge". The more extreme ecumenists say that everyone, even the heretics, will be saved; while the more moderate ones, and even some "moderate traditionalists" such as the Cyprianites, are simply agnostic, saying that we do not know who will be saved, it is up to God alone to judge.

So the question arises: What do we know for certain? Can we make judgements about the salvation or damnation of those outside the Church? And if so in what sense of the word "judge"?

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to deal with the objection that we should not even be discussing this question, because, as the Fathers say, we must concentrate on our own sins rather than the sins of others.

In the context of *personal asceticism*, this is perfectly true. In that context, to wonder whether our neighbour will be saved or not is at best a distraction, at worst a serious temptation. However, the context of this discussion is not personal, but *dogmatic*. As is well-known, the ecumenists often assert that it would be unjust of God and contrary to His merciful loving-kindness to condemn those outside the Church. And from this they deduce the idea that there is salvation outside the Church and even, in more contemporary forms of the heresy, that everybody will be saved. This false idea must be refuted for the sake of the defence of Orthodoxy. And so it is legitimate to discuss the question of the salvation of those outside the Church in this context.

Two different meanings of the words "salvation" and "hell" in English need to be distinguished here. Sometimes we mean by "salvation" the deliverance of the soul from hell - that is, hades - immediately after death, at the "particular judgement" of the individual soul. At other times, however, we mean "final" salvation, that is, salvation from gehenna - at the Last Judgement of all souls. Now it is obvious that a person who is delivered to hades after his death is in very great danger of being cast into gehenna at the Last Judgement. Nevertheless, there is a difference between being in hades and being in gehenna. Thus we know from Holy Tradition and the Lives of the Saints that some people in hades have been saved through the prayers of the Church; but we also know that nobody who is cast into gehenna will ever escape from it. Cases of deliverance from hades are doubtless rare; and in themselves they are not enough to create a dogma of the faith. Nevertheless, they indicate the *possibility*, if nothing more, that a person who is in hades will not be cast into gehenna at the Last Judgement and the General Resurrection.

In this sense we can agree with the "moderate traditionalists" - and indeed, with all the Holy Fathers of the Church - that we do not know who will be saved. We know neither whether we who are in the Church will be saved, nor even whether those who die outside the Church will be saved at the Last Judgement. For it is possible even for one who is in hades to be saved from it and therefore also from the eternal fire.

Therefore: **1. We cannot say with certainty that all those who die outside the True Faith and the True Church will be condemned to the eternal fire of gehenna at the Last Judgement.** We shall call this, not a dogma of faith, for faith apprehends only certainties (Hebrews 11.1), but a *postulate of hope* and an object of love - that love which "hopeth all things" (I Corinthians 13.7)

However, this is not the end of the story. Some things about salvation we do know for certain, including the following: 2. *We can say with certainty that all those who die outside the True Faith and the True Church will be sent to hades after death.*

The proof of this second statement is found in the completely categorical words of the Lord Himself: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3.5). And again: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Unless ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6.53). Here the Lord is emphasizing that the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Divine Eucharist are an *absolutely necessary* condition of entrance into the Kingdom of God. It is *impossible* for a man who has not been baptized to enter Paradise, because he remains in original sin, burdened with all his personal sins and without the purification and enlightenment that comes from baptism alone. He has not been born again in the womb of the Church; he has not been buried with Christ, and so cannot be resurrected with Christ.

Another *absolutely necessary* condition of entrance into the Kingdom of God is the true faith: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16.16). So *both* true faith *and* true baptism are necessary. But neither of these are possessed by heretics, pagans and unbelievers. For heretics by definition do not have the true faith. And the Holy Church teaches us that they do not have grace-filled sacraments either. As the 46<sup>th</sup> of the Holy Apostles declares: "We order that a bishop or presbyter that recognized the baptism or sacrifice of heretics be defrocked. For 'what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?'" Again, the second is the 1<sup>st</sup> of the Council of Carthage (of St. Cyprian): "We declare that no one can possibly be baptized outside the Catholic (i.e. the Orthodox) Church, there being but one baptism, and this existing only in the Catholic Church."

To these scriptural and canonical witnesses we may add the witness of Holy Tradition, in the form of the experience of Blessed Theodora, who, after passing through the toll-houses and being returned to her body, was told by the angels: "Those who believe in the Holy Trinity and take as frequently as possible the Holy Communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, our Saviour's Body and Blood - such people can rise to heaven directly, with no hindrances, and the holy angels defend them, and the holy saints of God pray for their salvation, since they have lived righteously. No one, however, takes care of wicked and depraved heretics, who do nothing useful during their lives, and live in disbelief and heresy. The angels can say nothing in their defence... [Only those] enlightened by the faith and holy baptism can rise and be tested in the stations of torment [that is, the toll-houses]. The unbelievers do not come here. Their souls belong to hell even before they part from their bodies. When they die, the devils take their souls with no need to test them. Such souls are their proper prey, and they take them down to the abyss."<sup>332</sup>

Someone may argue: "Even if an unbaptized person cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven, that does not mean that he is in hell." To this we reply: "There are only two places

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<sup>332</sup> Quoted by David Ritchie, "The 'Near-Death Experience'", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 45, no. 4, July-August, 1995, pp. 22-23.

a soul can go to after death: heaven or hell (hades). So if he is not in heaven, he must be in hell. There is no third possibility, since the Orthodox do not believe like the Latins in purgatory or any such place.”

Authoritative here is the answer given by St. Mark of Ephesus at the council of Florence in 1439. He rejected purgatory, or any purifying pains after death, except for the fear that the soul feels when he has not yet been judged by the Lord and does not know what his sentence will be.

Also important is the reply given by the Eastern Patriarchs to the English Non-Jurors in 1721: “As for the purgatorial fire, invented by the Papists to command the purse of the ignorant, we will by no means hear of it. For, it is a fiction and a doting fable, invented for lucre and to deceive the simple; and in a word, has no existence but in the imagination. There is no appearance nor mention of it in the Sacred Scriptures or Holy Fathers, whatsoever the authors or abettors of it may clamor to the contrary. But we say, that the benefactions and holy sacrifices, the alms and prayers of the Church and her priests for the dead, are the things that greatly profit them; and not the purgatorial fire, which does not by any means anywhere exist. For, these relieve the pains which the souls endure in Hades, as is plain from the Centurion, whose son our Lord healed at the Centurion’s petition, and from the Paralytic, whom He recovered by a double cure for the faith of those that brought him to Him, and might be proved from a thousand other instances as clear as the sun.”<sup>333</sup>

But what about unbaptized babies? Surely it would be unjust for God to condemn them to hades? This question has been answered by Hieromonk Enoch: “In the *Lenten Triodion* (both in the Greek and Slavonic, the Greek being originally compiled by monk Nikephorus Xanthopolous), as well as in St. Gregory Nazianzen’s *Oration 40 on Baptism*, an answer is provided. The readings provided in the Triodion [for Meatfare Saturday and Sunday], as well as the homily of St. Gregory, state that those unbaptized infants go neither to the delights of Paradise, nor to the fires of Gehenna. They are subject to no punishment, it seems, and only suffer the mere loss of what is given to those who enjoy Baptismal union with Christ. Obviously, Our Lord has no reason to punish them, but, while we do commemorate the Holy Innocents, it must be remembered that they died prior to the Resurrection and Ascension; indeed, prior to Pentecost.

“As the Synod of Constantinople said in the 1770s, there are many abodes in Hades, some for the irrevocably damned; some for those Orthodox Christians who die without fruits of repentance and must be cleansed by the prayers of the Church and the Divine Compassion; and, seemingly, some in the intermediate period for the unbaptized children. Ultimately, only God knows; and He is Just and Loving...

“It says in the Triodion reading: ‘We should also know that when baptized infants die, they enjoy the Paradise of delight, whereas those not illumined by Baptism and those born of pagans go neither to Paradise nor to Gehenna. When the soul departs from the

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<sup>333</sup> *The Answers of the Orthodox of the East to the Proposals sent from Britain for and Union and Agreement with the Oriental Church: Answers to Proposals 9, 10, 11 and 12*; quoted by Hieromonk Enoch.

body, it has no concern for the things of this world, but only for the things of the Heavenly realm.’

“And St. Gregory states: ‘Others are not in a position to receive it, perhaps on account of infancy, or some perfectly involuntary circumstance through which they are prevented from receiving it, even if they wish. As then in the former case we found much difference, so too in this. They who altogether despise it are worse than they who neglect it through greed or carelessness. These are worse than they who have lost the Gift through ignorance or tyranny, for tyranny is nothing but an involuntary error. And I think that the first will have to suffer punishment, as for all their sins, so for their contempt of baptism; and that the second will also have to suffer, but less, because it was not so much through wickedness as through folly that they wrought their failure; and that the third will be neither glorified nor punished by the righteous Judge, as unsealed and yet not wicked, but persons who have suffered rather than done wrong. For not every one who is not bad enough to be punished is good enough to be honoured; just as not every one who is not good enough to be honoured is bad enough to be punished.’ (Homily 40:23)”

In another accounts of visions granted to righteous ascetics, unbaptized babies are not placed in torment, but are *blind* – that is, they cannot see the Uncreated Light, but will do so on the Last Day...

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It will be useful to test these conclusions by reference to an article by St. Philaret of New York written when he was an archimandrite in China.<sup>334</sup> Although some have argued that this article contradicts the two propositions asserted above, this is not the case, as a careful examination of it will prove.

The metropolitan writes: “What should one say of those outside the Church, who do not belong to her? Another apostle provides us with an idea: ‘For what have I to do to judge them that are without? Do ye not judge them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But then that are without God judgeth’ (I Corinthians 5.12-13). God ‘will have mercy on whom He will have mercy’ (Romans 9.18). It is necessary to mention only one thing: that to ‘lead a perfectly righteous life,’ as the questioner expressed it, means to live according to the commandments of the Beatitudes – which is beyond the power of one, outside the Orthodox Church, without the help of grace which is concealed within it.”

It is not quite clear what the metropolitan is saying precisely here. One possible interpretation is: rather than say that the heterodox will not be saved, which is beyond our knowledge, for “those who are outside [the Church] God will judge”, it is better to say essentially the same thing in a more positive, less “judgemental” way: that the grace which enables us to fulfill the commandments of God is given to people only in the Orthodox Church.

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<sup>334</sup> Metropolitan Philaret, “Will the Heterodox be Saved?”, *Orthodox Life*, vol. 34, no. 6, November-December, 1984, pp. 33-36.

Whether or not this is a correct interpretation of the metropolitan's words, it will be useful to examine more closely what the passage from I Corinthians 5 that he quotes really means by looking at it in its wider context.

"It is reported continuously," writes the apostle, "that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you..." (5. 1-2).

We can draw two immediate conclusions: (1) this was not a matter of faith, but of morality, and (2) the Corinthians were "looking through their fingers", as the Russian expression goes, at the fornication of their brother; they neither rebuked him nor excommunicated him, as the canons required. The apostle, far from praising them for their "refusal to judge", reprovved them for being "puffed up" – that is, proud. This again shows that the "refusal to judge" may proceed, not from humility, but from its opposite...

"For I verily," continues the apostle, "although absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." (5. 3-7).

We can now draw a third conclusion: the context of this passage is not the rightness or wrongness of "judging" sinners in the sense of *censuring* or *criticizing* them, but rather the rightness or wrongness of "judging" them in the sense of *bringing them to trial*.

In the case of a sinner within the Church, the apostle declares that it is necessary to excommunicate him and deliver him to bodily punishment at the hands of Satan for the sake of his salvation through Christ in the Day of Judgement. The setting is a parish or diocesan assembly at which the apostle is not present but at which he presides in spirit. The Corinthians are rebuked once again for pride, "glorying", because they complacently considered that they could not be infected by the bad example of their sinning brother. But the leaven of sin infects the whole lump, the whole church community, if it is not cast out by the judgement of the community – that is, through the judgement of a properly convened ecclesiastical court. Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us in order to cast out sin from our souls and bodies, and do we then with such vainglorious complacency allow sin to come back into our lives?!

The importance of this passage is shown, as Archbishop Averky points out, by its being placed in the liturgy of Holy and Great Saturday. It teaches that we who are about to receive the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ for the remission of our sins must take special care to cleanse ourselves of all sin, not only personally, but in the community as a whole. It also shows the danger that comes if we do not judge the sinners within our own ranks – the word "judge" being used here in the triple sense of "discern" their sin, "reprove" their sin, and "pass judgement" formally on their sin.

However, continues the apostle, it is quite a different matter with people who sin against us from outside the Church. "For what have I to do with judging those who are outside? Do ye not judge those that are inside?" (5.12-13). Or, as St. Theophan the Recluse puts it: "We ourselves judge our own sinners here, and through that, by disposing them to repentance, deliver them from the judgement of God. But the pagans do not have a mediating corrective court: what awaits them without mediation is the judgement of God."<sup>335</sup>

Nor, says the apostle, should we take such sinners to a civil court. For "does any of you dare, if he has something against another person, to go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints [the Christians]? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" (6.1-2).

Or, as St. Theophan puts it: "Having spoken about the inner Church court in spiritual matters, the apostle wishes that everyday matters also should be examined by the Christians themselves without taking them to pagan courts... If court justice is necessary, then they must seek it before righteous people – the holy Christians... The Christians are holy, and by their example of faith and love they will be the accusers of the impious world at the Judgement of Christ, so are they really unworthy now to examine their own affairs that are of little importance?" (p. 146)

We may conclude that this passage is not relevant to the question whether it is right or wrong to say that heretics go to hell. For the context is not sins against the faith, but moral sins, and the "judging" in question is not passionate condemnation, but the taking of a sinner to trial in an ecclesiastical or civil court. Moreover, the only kind of "judging" that the apostle is explicitly condemning is the taking of pagans to trial in a civil court.

The metropolitan continues: "In attempting to answer this question [can the heterodox be saved?], it is necessary, first of all, to recall that in His Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ Himself mentions but one state of the human soul which unfailingly leads to perdition – i.e. blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12.1-32). The same text makes it clear that even blasphemy against the Son of Man – i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God Himself may be forgiven men, as it may be uttered in error or in ignorance and, subsequently may be covered by conversion and repentance (an example of such a converted and repentant blasphemer is the Apostle Paul. (See Acts 26.11 and I Timothy 1.13.) If, however, a man opposes the Truth which he clearly apprehends by his reason and conscience, he becomes blind and commits spiritual suicide, for he thereby likens himself to the devil, who believes in God and dreads Him, yet hates, blasphemes and opposes Him.

"Thus, man's refusal to accept the Divine Truth and his opposition thereto makes him a son of damnation. Accordingly, in sending His disciples to preach, the Lord told them: 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned' (Mark 16.16), for the latter heard the Lord's Truth and was called upon to accept

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<sup>335</sup> Bishop Theophan, *Tolkovanie Poslanij Sv. Apostola Pavla*, Moscow, 1911, 2002, pp. 145-146.

it, yet refused, thereby inheriting the damnation of those who ‘believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness’ (II Thessalonians 2.12).

“The Holy Orthodox Church is the repository of the divinely revealed Truth in all its fullness and fidelity to apostolic Tradition. Hence, he who leaves the Church, who intentionally and consciously falls away from it, joins the ranks of its opponents and becomes a renegade as regards apostolic Tradition. The Church dreadfully anathematized such renegades, in accordance with the words of the Saviour Himself (Matthew 18.17) and of the Apostle Paul (Galatians 1.8-9), threatening them with eternal damnation and calling them to return to the Orthodox fold. It is self-evident, however, that sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members of other non-Orthodox confessions, cannot be considered renegades or heretics – i.e. those who *knowingly* pervert the truth... They have been born and raised and are living according to the creed which they have inherited, just as do the majority of you who are Orthodox; in their lives there has not been a moment of *personal and conscious renunciation of Orthodoxy*. The Lord ‘Who will have all men to be saved’ (I Timothy 2.4), and ‘Who enlightens every man born into the world’ (John 1.43), undoubtedly is leading them also towards salvation in His own way.”

Confusion may be caused by the holy metropolitan’s unusual and somewhat paradoxical definition of the word “heretic”, which is much narrower than the usual definition. The usual definition is very simple: a heretic is a person who believes a heretical teaching, that is, a teaching contrary to the Orthodox Faith – regardless of whether he was brought up in the truth or not, or has consciously renounced Orthodoxy or not. “Sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members of other non-Orthodox confessions” *are* heretics, according to this definition. They are not as guilty as those who have known the truth but have personally and consciously renounced it, who are not only heretics but also *apostates* (renegades). But they are nevertheless in error, heterodox rather than Orthodox, and therefore cannot receive the sanctification that comes from the knowledge of the truth (John 17.18).

However, this difference in the definition of “heretic” does not affect the validity of the metropolitan’s main point, which may be formulated as follows:

**3. We may be certain that at the Last Judgement the lot of those who have known the truth but have consciously rejected it will be worse than those who have remained in error out of ignorance.**

This third major conclusion of ours in no way contradicts the first two. All heretics in the usual sense of the word will go to hell (hades) after death because they do not know the truth and have not received the baptism by water and the Spirit that alone, according to the Lord’s infallible word, delivers a soul from hades and brings it into the Kingdom of Heaven. However, those who have been brought up in error and have never been confronted with the truth, and therefore never rejected the truth personally and consciously, are much more likely to attract the mercy of God at the Last Judgement than those who, having known the truth and been baptized in it, have consciously rejected it.

Some may interpret the metropolitan’s words to mean that “sincere Christians who are

Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members of other non-Orthodox confessions" can be saved in the sense that they can go to Paradise immediately after death. But the metropolitan does not say that (and if he had said that, we would be forced to come to the conclusion that he, the author of the renowned 1983 anathema against ecumenism, was an ecumenist!). Rather, he is speaking about salvation at *the Last Judgement*, a different matter, about which we can say much less with certainty...

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Finally, it may be useful to say a few more words about the word "ignorance" in this context. Ignorance - real, involuntary ignorance - is certainly grounds for clemency according to God's justice, as it is according to man's. The Lord cried out on the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23.24); and one of those who were forgiven declared: "I obtained mercy because I acted in ignorance" (I Timothy 1.13; cf. Acts 3.17, 17.30). For our Great High Priest is truly One "Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way" (Hebrews 5.2).

However, there is also wilful, voluntary ignorance. Thus St. Paul says of those who do not believe in the one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, that "they are without excuse" (Romans 1.20), for they deny the evidence from creation which is accessible to everyone. Again, St. Peter says: "This they are *willingly* ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgement and perdition of ungodly men" (II Peter 3.5-7). Again, claiming knowledge when one has none counts as wilful ignorance. For, as Christ said to the Pharisees: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9.41).

Wilful ignorance is very close to conscious resistance to the truth, which receives the greatest condemnation according to the Word of God. Thus those who accept the Antichrist will do so "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (II Thessalonians 2.10). Wilful ignorance is therefore the same as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which we have already discussed. Metropolitan Philaret's definition of this sin is essentially the same as that of Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), who in turn follows the definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council: "Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, or 'sin unto death', according to the explanation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (VIII, 75), is a conscious, hardened opposition to the truth, 'because the Spirit is truth' (I John 5.6)."<sup>336</sup> A similar, but somewhat broader definition is given by St. Ambrose of Milan: all heretics and schismatics are blasphemers against the Holy Spirit insofar as they deny the Spirit and Truth that is in the True Church.<sup>337</sup>

Wilful ignorance can be of various degrees. There is the wilful ignorance that refuses

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<sup>336</sup> Metropolitan Anthony, "The Church's Teaching about the Holy Spirit", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 27, no. 3, May-June, 1977, p. 23.

<sup>337</sup> St. Ambrose, *On Repentance*, II, 24. Cf. St. Augustine, *Homily 21 on the New Testament*, 28.

to believe even when the truth is staring you in the face – this is the most serious kind, the kind practised by the Pharisees and the heresiarchs. But a man can also be said to be wilfully ignorant if he does not take the steps that are necessary in order to discover the truth – this is less serious, but still blameworthy, and is characteristic of many of those who followed the Pharisees and the heresiarchs. Thus we read: "That servant who knew his master's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and he to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12.47-48).

To which the words of St. Theophylact of Bulgaria are a fitting commentary: "Here some will object, saying: 'He who knows the will of his Lord, but does not do it, is deservedly punished. But why is the ignorant punished?' Because when he might have known he did not wish to do so, but was the cause of his own ignorance through sloth."<sup>338</sup>

Or, as St. Cyril of Alexandria puts it: "How can he who did not know it be guilty? The reason is, because he did not want to know it, although it was in his power to learn."<sup>339</sup> To whom does this distinction apply? St. Cyril applies it to false teachers and parents, on the one hand, and those who follow them, on the other. In other words, the blind leaders will receive a greater condemnation than the blind followers - which is not to say, however, that they will not *both* fall into the pit (Matthew 15.14). For, as Bishop Nicholas Velimirovich writes: "Are the people at fault if godless elders and false prophets lead them onto foreign paths? The people are not at fault to as great an extent as their elders and the false prophets, but they are at fault to some extent. For God gave to the people also to know the right path, both through their conscience and through the preaching of the word of God, so that people should not blindly have followed their blind guides, who led them by false paths that alienated them from God and His Laws."<sup>340</sup>

The ecumenists often bring up the example of the Hindus and Buddhists and others who have lived their whole lives in non-Christian communities. Can they be said to be wilfully ignorant of the truth? Of course, only God knows the degree of ignorance in any particular case. However, even if the heathen have more excuse than the Christians who deny Christ, they cannot be said to be completely innocent; for no one is completely deprived of the knowledge of the One God.

Thus St. Jerome writes: "Ours and every other race of men knows God naturally. There are no peoples who do not recognize their Creator naturally."<sup>341</sup> And St. John Chrysostom writes: "From the beginning God placed the knowledge of Himself in men, but the pagans awarded this knowledge to sticks and stones, doing wrong to the truth to the extent that they were able."<sup>342</sup> And the same Father writes: "One way of coming to the knowledge of God is that which is provided by the whole of creation; and another, no less significant, is that which is offered by conscience, the whole of which we have expounded upon at

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<sup>338</sup> St. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel according to St. Luke* 12.47-48.

<sup>339</sup> St. Cyril, *Homily 93 on Luke*. Translated by Payne Smith, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 376.

<sup>340</sup> Bishop Nicholas, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, vol. II, p. 149.

<sup>341</sup> St. Jerome, *Treatise on Psalm 95*.

<sup>342</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 3 on Romans*, 2.

greater length, showing how you have a self-taught knowledge of what is good and what is not so good, and how conscience urges all this upon you from within. Two teachers, then, are given you from the beginning: creation and conscience. Neither of them has a voice to speak out; yet they teach men in silence."<sup>343</sup>

Many have abandoned the darkness of idolatry by following creation and conscience alone. Thus St. Barbara heeded the voice of creation, rejected her father's idols and believed in the One Creator of heaven and earth even before she had heard of Christ. And she heeded the voice of her conscience, which recoiled from those "most odious works of witchcrafts, and wicked sacrifices; and also those merciless murderers of children and devourers of man's flesh, and the feasts of blood, with their priests out of the midst of their idolatrous crew, and the parents, that killed with their own hands souls destitute of help" (Wisdom of Solomon 12.4-6). But her father, who had the same witnesses to the truth as she, rejected it – and killed her.<sup>344</sup>

Thus there is a light that "enlightens every man who comes into the world" (John 1.9). And if there are some who reject that light, abusing that freewill which God will never deprive them of, this is not His fault, but theirs. As St. John Chrysostom says, "If there are some who choose to close the eyes of their mind and do not want to receive the rays of that light, their darkness comes not from the nature of the light, but from their own darkness in voluntarily depriving themselves of that gift."<sup>345</sup>

If the Light of Christ enlightens everyone, then there is no one who cannot come to the True Faith, however unpromising his situation. If a man follows the teachers that are given to everyone, creation and conscience, then the Providence of God, with Whom "all things are possible" (Matthew 19.26), will lead him to the teacher that is given at the beginning only to a few - "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the Truth" (I Timothy 3.15). For "it is not possible," writes St. John Chrysostom, "that one who is living rightly and freed from the passions should ever be overlooked. But even if he happens to be in error, God will quickly draw him over to the truth."<sup>346</sup> Again, St. John Cassian says: "When God sees in us some beginnings of good will, He at once enlightens it, urging it on towards salvation."<sup>347</sup>

This leads us to draw the following further conclusions:

**4. The Providence of God is able to bring anyone in any situation to the True Faith and the True Church, providing he loves the truth.**

Therefore **5. Although we cannot declare with certainty that those who die in unbelief or heresy will be damned forever, because their ignorance of the truth may be involuntary, neither can we declare that they will be saved because of their ignorance; for they may be voluntarily alienated from God "through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Ephesians 4.18), and not simply through the involuntary**

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<sup>343</sup> St. Chrysostom, *First Homily on Hannah*, 3.

<sup>344</sup> *The Lives of the Women Martyrs*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1991, pp. 528-542.

<sup>345</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 8 on John*.

<sup>346</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on Matthew*, 1.

<sup>347</sup> St. Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII, 8.

*ignorance that is caused by external circumstances.*

For the Orthodox do not believe in the Roman Catholic concept of “invincible ignorance”. No ignorance that is truly ignorance is invincible – that is, cannot be conquered by the Almighty Providence of God. The only ignorance that God cannot and will not conquer – because to do so would be to violate the free will of man – is the ignorance that is willful and artificial, being created by man himself through his stubborn refusal to learn the truth.

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## 25. "THE RIVER OF FIRE" REVISITED

### **Introduction**

Alexander Kalomiros' 1980 article, "The River of Fire", has acquired for many English-speaking Orthodox the status of a classic of Orthodox soteriology. However, many also dispute this status, and regard it as a dangerously Protestantizing work. The purpose of this article is to examine whether "The River of Fire" truly reflects the patristic consensus or not.

Kalomiros' main thesis is that our salvation depends primarily on ourselves, on our acceptance or rejection of God's love for mankind. God's grace shines on the just and on the unjust alike, and is never turned away from sinners, even in the depths of hell. But we experience that grace in different ways depending on our inner disposition: as paradise if we return love with love, and as hellfire if we return love with hatred. God does not punish except pedagogically – at any rate, within the bounds of our earthly life. Even at the Last Judgement God does not punish the unjust – to do so would be pointless and cruel, since it could have no pedagogical purpose. Rather, the "river of fire", God's grace, proceeding, as we see on icons of the Last Day, from under God's judgement seat, enlightens and warms those who love God while burning and consuming those who hate Him. God plays no active part in this: it is we who freely choose heaven or hell for ourselves.<sup>348</sup>

In support of his thesis, Kalomiros quotes from the Holy Fathers, in particular St. Isaac the Syrian's *Homilies* and St. Basil the Great's *Against Those Who Say that God is the Author of Evils*.

From St. Isaac he derives the teaching that since God is all-merciful towards us, forgiving us even when we sin again and again, we cannot speak of His being *just* towards us – mercy on this scale excludes justice. From St. Basil he derives the teaching that since all the apparent "evils" that God sends upon us – illnesses, calamities, sufferings of all kinds – are in fact designed to deliver us from the only real evil, which is sin, He cannot be said to punish us in any real sense.

In sum, therefore, Kalomiros' thesis amounts to the assertion that God is love, but not justice, and that He corrects, but does not punish.

So I propose to examine his thesis under two headings: **1. Is God Just?** and **2. Does God Punish?**

### **1. Is God Just?**

The answer to this question is so obviously: yes, that readers may be inclined to think that I am being unjust to Kalomiros in asserting that he believes otherwise. Of

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<sup>348</sup> I shall be quoting from the text to be found at [http://www.stjamesthejust.com/features/\(050\)%20Kalomiros,%20THE%RIVER%2...](http://www.stjamesthejust.com/features/(050)%20Kalomiros,%20THE%RIVER%2...)

course he believes that God is just! He simply defines the word “justice” in a different way...

Yes, that is precisely what he does. He redefines “justice” in such a way as to abolish it in the sense that it is usually understood. Let us examine how he accomplishes this...

“What Westerners call justice,” writes Kalomiros, “ought rather to be called resentment and vengeance of the worst kind”. This is especially evident, he says, in the western (Catholic) dogmas of original sin and redemption. Thus according to the western dogma of original sin, justice “is not at all just since it punishes and demands satisfaction from persons who were not at all responsible for the sin of their forefathers”. Again, the western dogma of redemption contains “the schizoid notion of a God who kills God in order to satisfy the so-called justice of God” (p. 5). The origin of western atheism, according to Kalomiros, lies in a (healthy) reaction against this false dogmatizing, whose origins go back to Augustine in the fourth century.

I will not here attempt to examine whether Catholic theologians’ concept of justice is really “resentment and vengeance of the worst kind”, nor whether western atheism really originates in a reaction against it. I will only point out how strange it is that the Holy Fathers said so little about this, and that we had to wait until the appearance of Alexander Kalomiros (and his immediate forerunners, such as John Romanides) before it was revealed that a false conception of justice was the core heresy of the West. The Holy Fathers who spoke most, and most authoritatively, about the western heresies - SS. Photius the Great, Gregory Palamas and Mark of Ephesus - spoke much about such heresies as the Filioque, papal absolutism and created grace, but nothing, to my knowledge, about a false conception of justice in the dogmas of original sin and redemption. This is not to say that there were no distortions in western thinking on these subjects - heresy in one area of theology tends to introduce subtly distorted thinking in several other areas. But evidently the Holy Fathers did not consider these distortions serious enough to make them major stumbling-blocks to union with the West. Nor did they agree with Kalomiros in considering Augustine of Hippo to be the fount of the western heresies. On the contrary, the Fifth Ecumenical Council proclaimed him “holy”, and St. Photius the Great “embraced” him, while not accepting his errors on free will, the baptism of heretics, etc.

But Kalomiros goes still further back than St. Augustine in his search for the origins of this conception. The Greek word for “justice”, δικαιοσυνη, is, he argues, pagan in origin and is “charged with human notions which could easily lead to misunderstandings. First of all, the word δικαιοσυνη brings to mind an equal distribution. This is why it is represented by a balance. The good are rewarded and the bad are punished by human society in a fair way. This is human justice, the one which takes place in court. Is this the meaning of God’s justice, however? The word δικαιοσυνη, ‘justice’, is a translation of the Hebraic word tsedaka. This word means ‘the Divine energy that accomplishes man’s salvation’. It is parallel and almost synonymous to the other Hebraic word, hesed which means ‘mercy’, ‘compassion’, ‘love’, and to the word emeth which means ‘fidelity’, ‘truth’. This, as you see, gives a completely other dimension to what we usually conceive as justice.” (p. 6).

It may well give an extra dimension to the understanding of “justice”, but it does not change its essential, root meaning, which remains that of equity and balance. We see this very clearly in the Kontakion of the Ninth Hour: “In the midst of two thieves, Thy Cross was found to be *a balance of justice*”. Justice means nothing if it does not mean a balancing of good against evil, so that evil is destroyed through its being outweighed by the good. Thus the supremely good work that Christ did on the Cross is balanced against all the evil committed by all men from the beginning to the end of time – and the good outweighs the evil. In that consists our salvation and redemption, the *propitiation* for our sins, as St. John the Theologian puts it, or our *justification*, as St. Paul puts it.

In any case, there is surely no contradiction in meaning between the two words for “justice” - Kalomiros’ conjectural Hebrew word tzedaka and the Greek δικαιοσυνη. Justice as “the Divine energy that accomplishes the salvation of man” is perfectly compatible with justice as the restoration of a state of balance, that is, righteousness or blamelessness in man's relationship with his fellow man and with God. Sin upset the balance in this relationship, creating injustice. Justice is restored through the destruction of sin: on the part of God, by His perfect Sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of all men, and on the part of man by true faith in that Sacrifice...

Paradoxically, there is something western and rationalist and Kalomiros’ attempt to demote the supposedly pagan word δικαιοσυνη in favour of the Hebrew tzedaka. God the Holy Spirit decreed that the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament should be written in Greek, the language having the greatest philosophical precision and sophistication in the ancient world. The Greek text cannot therefore be said to be in any way a translation of, or derivation from, a supposedly “purer”, more “godly” Hebrew original: it *is* the original. Hebrew is the original language of the Old Testament. And yet we do not have the original Hebrew text. We have the Massoretic text, which dates from many centuries after Christ and has probably been corrupted by the rabbis. The text that probably corresponds most closely to the original, but now lost Hebrew is the early Greek translation by the Seventy, which remains to this day the official text of the Old Testament in the Orthodox Church.

Western scholars since Luther have loved trying to unearth the “real” meaning of the Greek Scriptures by going to the Hebrew. Comparisons with the Hebrew are not necessarily illegitimate, and can be genuinely illuminating in the hands of truly Orthodox scholars such as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (see his wonderful *Commentary on Genesis*). But as often as not such comparisons are illegitimate attempts to prove a false theological theory by “getting round” the plain meaning of the Greek text.

In Kalomiros’ case, he is clearly trying to prove that “justice” does not mean what it quite plainly means in the writings of the apostles, but rather “mercy”, “love” and “truth”, on the grounds that the Hebrew word for “justice” is etymologically related to the words for “mercy”, “love” and “truth”. Now nobody doubts that God’s justice is related in a profound way to His mercy, love and truth. It could not be otherwise, since He is the fount of all good, and of all true values. Nevertheless, it is obvious that “justice” is not *equivalent* to “mercy”, “love” and “truth”. And it is equally obvious,

contrary to Kalomiros, that the root meaning of justice has to do with “equity”, “balance” and “compensation”. The question for the theologian is: how is God’s justice to be reconciled with His mercy, love and truth? By simply redefining “justice” in terms of “mercy”, “love” and “truth”, Kalomiros has not answered this question, merely *bypassed* it through a verbal sleight of hand.

At this point Kalomiros brings in St. Isaac: “How can you call God just, when you read the passage on the wage given to the workers? ‘Friends, I do thee no wrong; I will give unto this last even as unto thee who worked for me from the first hour. Is thine eye evil, because I am good?’ How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son, who wasted his wealth in riotous living, and yet only for the contrition which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck, and gave him authority over all his wealth? None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him lest we doubt it, and thus He bare witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God’s justice, for whilst we were sinners, Christ died for us!”

Kalomiros comments on this: “So we see that God is not just, with the human meaning of this word, but we see that His justice means His goodness and love, which are given in an unjust manner, that is, God always gives without taking anything in return, and He gives to persons like us who are not worthy of receiving. That is why Saint Isaac teaches us: ‘Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you.’” (p. 6)

Now if we take St. Isaac’s words out of context, we will be forced to say that he is in contradiction with a vast number of scriptural and patristic texts that clearly proclaim the justice of God, and that on this point, at any rate, he is not in accord with the consensus of the Fathers. This is a possible conclusion, since not all of the Fathers have always been in accord with the patristic consensus. However, I do not think that we are forced to draw such a conclusion if only we try and put his remarks in the context of the whole of Orthodox soteriology. The main point St. Isaac is making is that God gives us abundantly more than we deserve if we consider only *our* works. So if we consider only *our* works, we must conclude that God is unjust. As the saint puts it: “His justice is not manifest in the things concerning *you*”. No amount of good works by us can merit the Kingdom of heaven. According to the Prophet Isaiah, even the righteousness of the saints is “dust and ashes” in God’s eyes. However, if we broaden our perspective to include not only our works, the things concerning us alone, but also *the Work of Christ*, we must come to a quite different conclusion. For the Work of Christ, His Sacrifice on the Cross, abundantly makes up for the inadequacy of our works. So the saint’s words are perfectly acceptable within the narrow context of our sinful works. But there is no reason to believe that he denied that justice is nevertheless done through the Work of Christ on the Cross.

However, it is precisely this that Kalomiros denies. He rejects the idea that justice is done by Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross; that the inadequacy of our own works is made up for by the Supreme Work of Christ. Similarly, he rejects the idea that the human race was justly condemned to hell through the original sin of Adam and Eve. Both these events offend *his* sense of justice. But instead of confessing that his own sense of justice is probably narrow and limited, he on the one hand unjustly

caricatures the traditional theological understanding of Divine justice as "bloodthirsty", "vengeful", etc., and on the other hand decides to abolish the notion of justice altogether by redefining it in such a way as to remove from it the idea of balance and equity.

The doctrines of original sin and redemption must be seen *together*, the latter being the *reversal* of the former, with the apparent "injustice" of the one cancelling out the apparent "injustice" of the other. So we may go along with Kalomiros to this extent; we may concede that the doctrine of original sin, whereby the sin of Adam and Eve is passed on to their descendants, is unjust from a narrowly human point of view. And let us further concede that Christ's salvation of mankind on the Cross when mankind took no part in His Sacrifice is similarly "unjust". We neither deserve the punishment for Adam's sin, nor the salvation that is in Christ. However, the "injustice" of our salvation perfectly balances, matches, and blots out the "injustice" of our condemnation. And thereby justice is achieved in the most perfect way. This balance, or parallelism, between our fall in the first Adam and our resurrection in the second, is the central theme of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. And cognates of the Greek - according to Kalomiros, *pagan* Greek - word for "justice", δικαιοσύνη, occur throughout. Thus: "as through one offence condemnation came upon all men, so through one righteous act [δικαιώματος] [the free gift] came upon all men unto justification [δικαιώσιν] of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous [δίκαιοι]" (Romans 5.18-19).

There are further paradoxes here. Sin, that is, injustice, is completely blotted out - but by the unjust death and Sacrifice of the Only Sinless and Just One. Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8.3) and died the death of a sinner, though He was sinless. The innocent Head died that the guilty Body should live. He, the Just One, Who committed no sin, took upon Himself the sins of the whole world. When we could not pay the price, He paid it for us; when we were dead in sin, He died to give us life. "For Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust" (I Peter 3.18). And the greatness of this Sacrifice was so great in the eyes of Divine justice that it blotted out the sins of the whole world - of all men, that is, who respond to this free gift with gratitude and repentance. For only one work is required on our side - the "work" of faith, of rightly believing in the Sacrifice of Christ - precisely the work that Kalomiros would have us deny, or at any rate reinterpret in such a way as to deny its true nature. For as the Lord Himself says: "This is the work of God - that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent" (John 6.29), that is, on Him "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood... that He might be just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3.25, 26). If we accept God's Work of justice with true faith and gratitude, then this faith of ours, like that of Abraham, "is accounted to us for righteousness" (Romans 4.3) - that is, for our justification, our loosing from all injustice, or sin.

The Church has expressed this paradox of Divine Justice with great eloquence: "Come, all ye peoples, and let us venerate the blessed Wood, through which *the eternal justice* has been brought to pass. For he who by a tree deceived our forefather Adam,

is by the Cross himself deceived; and he who by tyranny gained possession of the creature endowed by God with royal dignity, is overthrown in headlong fall. By the Blood of God the poison of the serpent is washed away; and the curse of a *just* condemnation is loosed by the *unjust* punishment inflicted on the *Just*. For it was fitting that wood should be healed by wood, and that through the Passion of One Who knew not passion should be remitted all the sufferings of him who was condemned because of wood. But glory to Thee, O Christ our King, for Thy dread dispensation towards us, whereby Thou hast saved us all, for Thou art good and lovest mankind."<sup>349</sup>

## 2. Does God Punish?

Kalomiros writes: "God never takes vengeance. His punishments are loving means of correction, as long as anything can be corrected and healed in this life. They never extend to eternity..." (p. 6)

But how can this be true?! What about the sentence of death passed on all mankind, which is called a "curse" in so many church texts? Is that not a punishment?

What about the terrible deaths of various sinners, such as Ahab and Jezabel, Ananias and Sapphira, Heliodorus and Herod and Simon Magus? How can they be said to have been "loving means of correction", since they manifestly did not correct the sinners involved, who were incorrigible? And what about the torments of gehenna? Do they not extend to eternity? Will not the Lord Himself say to the condemned at the Last Judgement: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into *everlasting* fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25.41)?

Kalomiros writes: "Death was not inflicted upon us by God. We fell into it by our revolt." (p. 6). And he quotes St. Basil: "God did not create death, but we brought it upon ourselves".

Certainly God did not create death. And certainly we brought it upon ourselves by our wilful transgression of His commandment. But does this mean that God was completely inactive in His pronouncement of the sentence on Adam and Eve, in their expulsion from Eden, in His placing the cherubim with the sword of fire to prevent their return? Of course not! God did not will our first parents to fall. Nor did He, being Life Itself, create death. However, He *allowed* our first parents to fall, and He permitted death to enter into their life. Why? Partly in order to correct them, to humble them and lead them to repentance. Partly in order to cut off sin and allow the dissolution of the body for the sake of its future resurrection. And partly because *crime requires punishment*, because God is the just Judge Who cannot allow sin to go unpunished.

This is confirmed by St. John of Damascus, who writes: "A judge justly punishes one who is guilty of wrongdoing; and if he does not punish him he is himself a wrongdoer. In punishing him the judge is not the cause either of the wrongdoing or of the vengeance taken against the wrongdoer, the cause being the wrongdoer's freely

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<sup>349</sup> *Menaion*, September 14, Great Vespers of the Exaltation of the Cross, "Lord, I have cried", "Glory... Both now..."

chosen actions. Thus too God, Who saw what was going to happen as if it had already happened, judged it as if it had taken place; and if it was evil, that was the cause of its being punished. It was God Who created man, so of course he created him in goodness; but man did evil of his own free choice, and is himself the cause of the vengeance that overtakes him."<sup>350</sup>

So man is the ultimate cause of his own misery: but that by no means implies that God does not punish him.

Again, St. Photius the Great writes: "Let us comprehend the depths of the Master's clemency. He gave death as a punishment, but through His own death He transformed it as a gate to immortality. It was a resolution of anger and displeasure, but it announces the consummate goodness of the Judge..."<sup>351</sup>

Thus the truth is more complex than Kalomiros would have it. Death is *both* a punishment *and*, through Christ's own Death, a deliverance from death. It is *both* judgement *and* mercy. Nor could it be otherwise; for God is *both* love *and* justice. As St. John of the Ladder says, "He is called *justice* as well as love".<sup>352</sup>

Turning now to the question of eternal torments, we note that Kalomiros does not deny their existence, but denies that they are inflicted by God because "God never punishes" (p. 19). Rather, they are self-inflicted. "After the Common Resurrection there is no question of any punishment from God. Hell is not a punishment from God but a self-condemnation. As Saint Basil the Great says, "The evils in hell do not have God as their cause, but ourselves."" (p. 16).

Kalomiros here deliberately confuses two very different things: the crime of the criminal, and the sentence of the judge. If the judge sentences the criminal to prison for his crime, it is obvious that the primary cause of the criminal's being in prison is his own criminal actions: it is the criminal himself who is ultimately responsible for his miserable condition – this is clearly the point that St. Basil is making. Nevertheless, it is equally obvious that the judge, too, has a hand in the matter. It is he who decides both whether the criminal is guilty or innocent, and the gentleness or severity of the sentence. In other words, there are two actors and two actions involved here, not one.

Kalomiros also deliberately confuses the free acts of the criminal and his coerced, unfree submission to his sentence. Thus, corrupting the words of Christ in Matthew 25.41, he writes: "Depart freely from love to the everlasting torture of hate" (p. 20). But the sinners do not *freely* depart into the everlasting fire! On the contrary, they "gnash their teeth" in the fire, witnessing, as the Fathers explain, to their fierce anger and *rejection* of the justice of their punishment. We may agree that they have been brought to this plight by their own sinful acts, freely committed. But they do not freely accept their punishment for those acts! The God-seer Moses and the Apostle Paul were

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<sup>350</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Dialogue against the Manichaeans*, 37.

<sup>351</sup> St. Photius, Letter 3, to Eusebia, nun and monastic superior, on the death of her sister; translated by Despina Stratoudaki White.

<sup>352</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

willing to be cast away from God for the sake of the salvation of their brethren, the Jews – here we see the free acceptance of torture and punishment, but out of love. The condemned at the Judgement, however, will not be like these saints, but will be cast *against* their will into the eternal fire.

Again, Kalomiros distorts the nature of heaven and hell. In a thoroughly modernist, rationalist manner he reduces them to *psychological states*: a state of supreme joy and love enlightened by the fire of God's grace, on the one hand, and a state of the most abject misery and hatred, burned but not enlightened by the fire of God's grace, on the other. "This is hell: the negation of love; the return of hate for love; bitterness at seeing innocent joy; to be surrounded by love and to have hate in one's heart. This is the eternal condition of all the damned. They are all dearly loved. They are all invited to the joyous banquet. They are all living in God's Kingdom, in the New Earth and the New Heavens. No one expels them. Even if they wanted to go away they could not flee from God's New Creation, nor hide from God's tenderly loving omnipresence..." (p. 20).

Like all heretics, Kalomiros mixes truth with falsehood. So let us first freely admit what is true in his account. It is true that a large part of the torment of hell will be the hatred and bitterness that continues to seethe in the sinner's heart – together with remorse, shame and the most soul-destroying despair. It is also true that that bitterness will be exacerbated by the thought of the "innocent joy" of the blessed in Paradise. (This was an insight granted also to the atheist Jean-Paul Sartre: "Hell is other people", he said.) It is true, furthermore, that in a certain sense it is precisely God's love that torments the sinners in hell. For, as Archbishop Theophan of Poltava writes: "In essence the wrath of God is one of the manifestations of the love of God, but of the love of God in its relation to the moral evil in the heart of rational creatures in general, and in the heart of man in particular" (*On Redemption*).

However, it is stretching traditional theological understanding far too far to say that those condemned in the eternal fire of gehenna are at the same time "all living in God's Kingdom, in the New Earth and the New Heavens"! There is no place for the damned in God's Kingdom! As was revealed to St. John in the last chapter of Revelation: "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For *outside* are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (22.14-15). In other words, the New Earth and the New Heavens, Paradise and the City of God, will *not* be accessible to the condemned sinners; they will *not* be living there!

Nor is it true that even the damned will be "invited to the joyful banquet" and that "no-one will expel them". In *this* life, yes, even sinners are invited to the joyful banquet of communion with God in His Holy Church. But on the last Day, when the sinner is found to have no wedding garment, the King will say to His servants: "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22.13).

God is not as passive as Kalomiros makes out. He *acts* – and acts to expel the unrepentant sinner from His presence. Thus to the “inner darkness” of the sinner’s hate-filled, graceless soul will be added the “outer darkness” of the *place* that is gehenna, where the river of fire will consume his *body* as well as his soul. This *outer* aspect of the eternal torments appears to have been ignored by Kalomiros in his over-psychological, over-abstract and over-sophisticated understanding of the torments of hell.

And if he were to object: “There is no space or time as we understand it in the life of the age to come”, I would reply: “*As we understand it*, in our present fallen and limited state - yes. And yet we cannot get rid of the categories of space and time altogether. Only God is completely beyond space and time. The idea of a *body* burning in hell is incomprehensible if it is not burning *somewhere*. Nor is the idea of our earth being transfigured into Paradise comprehensible if it not located in *any* kind of space...”

Kalomiros makes all these errors and distortions of Holy Scripture because he refuses to admit that God punishes, not only pedagogically, to correct and rehabilitate the sinner, but also *retributively*, as a pure expression of His justice. Since retributive punishment does not lead to the rehabilitation of the sinner, he considers it pointless and cruel, and therefore unworthy of God. In other words, he sees no value in justice *in itself*, independently of its possible pedagogical effect.

And yet Holy Scripture is full of the idea of retributive justice as being the norm of existence, proceeding from the very nature of God. Thus: “The Lord is the God of vengeance; the God of vengeance hath spoken openly. Be Thou exalted, O Thou that judgest the earth; render the proud their due” (Psalm 93.1-2). And again: “They [the martyrs] cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord, holy and true, doest Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Revelation 6.10). It goes without saying that in neither of these quotations are God or the saints understood as being vengeful in a crudely human and sinful manner, as if they were possessed by a fallen passion of anger. As the Venerable Bede writes: “The souls of the righteous cry these things, not from hatred of enemies, but *from love of justice*.”<sup>353</sup> So the desire that justice should be done is not necessarily sinful; it may be pure, proceeding not from the fallen passion of anger, but from the pure love of justice. Indeed, when the Lord says: “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay”, He is not saying that justice – and clearly it is retributive justice that is meant here – should not be desired, but rather that it should be sought, not through the exercise of the fallen human passions, but through God, Who always acts with the most perfect and passionless impartiality.

Even St. Basil the Great, upon whom Kalomiros relies so heavily, does not deny the idea of retributive justice in God – and precisely in the context of the river of fire. As he writes, commenting on the verse: “The voice of the Lord divideth the flame of fire” (Psalm 28.6): “The fire prepared in punishment for the devil and his angels is divided by the voice of the Lord. Thus, since there are two capacities in fire, one of burning

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<sup>353</sup> St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

and the other of illuminating, the fierce and punitive property of the fire may await those who deserve to burn, while its illuminating and radiant part may be reserved for the enjoyment of those who are rejoicing."<sup>354</sup>

So the river of fire *is* punitive – for “those who deserve to burn”. And it is punitive in a retributive sense, as expressing the pure love of justice that is part of the nature of God. Of course, God longs to have mercy even on the most inveterate sinner. But if that sinner does not wish to believe and repent, He wills that the sinner should be punished – even though the punishment can have no rehabilitative effect...

### 3. Love and Justice

If we seek for a deeper cause of Kalomiros’ heresy, we may find it in the very modernist error of disconnecting, as it were, the values of love, truth and justice. Modern man believes in love, but it is a false, sentimental kind of love because it is not linked to truth and justice. More precisely, modern man thinks that it is possible to sacrifice truth and justice for the sake of love. We are familiar with the sacrifice of truth for the sake of “love” in the modern pan-heresy of ecumenism. Kalomiros’ heresy may be described as an analogue to ecumenism; only the value that he wishes to sacrifice is *justice*.

However, love and justice, mercy and judgement, are inseparably related in God’s economy. God condemned man to death in Eden *both* because that was the just punishment of his sin *and* because through death, the spread of sin would be cut short, man would be led to repentance and Christ would descend into hades to save mankind. For Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross was *both* an act of love for fallen mankind *and* the restoration of justice in God’s relationship with man.

The obverse of God’s love for mankind is His wrath and hatred of the sin that tears mankind away from eternal life in Him. St. John of Damascus writes: “By wrath and anger are understood [God’s] hatred and disgust in relation to sin, since we also hate that which does not accord with our thought and are angry with it”.<sup>355</sup> Now hatred of sin is the same as the love of justice, since justice is the destruction of sin and the restoration of the state of sinlessness. It follows that he who does not love justice for its own sake does not hate sin. And he who does not hate sin does not love God, Who hates sin so much that He gave His Only-Begotten Son to die in order that sin should be destroyed and man restored to his original condition of sinlessness.

In conclusion, let us listen to the words of St. Gregory Palamas, who can in no way be accused of “scholasticism”, but who emphasizes, as if anticipating the debates of our time, the critical importance of *justice*: “The pre-eternal, uncircumscribed and almighty Word and omnipotent Son of God could clearly have saved man from mortality and servitude to the devil without Himself becoming man. He upholds all things by the word of His power and everything is subject to His divine authority. According to Job, He can do everything and nothing is impossible for Him. The

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<sup>354</sup> St. Basil, *On Psalm 28.6*.

<sup>355</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book I, ch. 11.

strength of a created being cannot withstand the power of the Creator, and nothing is more powerful than the Almighty. But the incarnation of the Word of God was the method of deliverance most in keeping with our nature and weakness, and most appropriate for Him Who carried it out, *for this method had justice on its side, and God does not act without justice*. As the Psalmist and Prophet says, 'God is righteous and loveth righteousness' (Psalm 11.7), 'and there is no unrighteousness in Him' (Psalm 92.15). Man was justly abandoned by God in the beginning as he had first abandoned God. He had voluntarily approached the originator of evil, obeyed him when he treacherously advised the opposite of what God had commanded, and was *justly* given over to him. In this way, through the evil one's envy and the good Lord's *just* consent, death came into the world. Because of the devil's overwhelming evil, death became twofold, for he brought about not just physical but also eternal death.

"As we had been *justly* handed over to the devil's service and subjection to death, it was clearly necessary that the human race's return to freedom and life should be accomplished by God *in a just way*. Not only had man been surrendered to the envious devil by divine righteousness, but the devil had rejected righteousness and become wrongly enamoured of authority, arbitrary power and, above all, tyranny. He took up arms against *justice* and used his might against mankind. It pleased God that the devil be overcome first by the *justice* against which he continuously fought, then afterwards by power, through the Resurrection and the future Judgement. *Justice before power is the best order of events*, and that force should come after *justice* is the work of a truly divine and good Lord, not of a tyrant....

"A sacrifice was needed to reconcile the Father on High with us and to sanctify us, since we had been soiled by fellowship with the evil one. There had to be a sacrifice which both cleansed and was clean, and a purified, sinless priest... It was clearly necessary for Christ to descend to Hades, but *all these things were done with justice, without which God does not act.*"<sup>356</sup>

"Justice before power", the Cross before the Resurrection. And "all things done with justice, without which God does not act." Clearly, justice is no secondary aspect of the Divine economy, but its very heart and essence...

As the Holy Church chants: "When Thou comest, O God, upon the earth with glory, the whole world will tremble. The river of fire will bring men before Thy judgement-seat, the books will be opened and the secrets disclosed. Then deliver me from the unquenchable fire, and count me worthy to stand on Thy right hand, Judge most righteous".<sup>357</sup>

*September 21 / October 4, 2007; revised January 28 / February 10, 2014, July 1/14, 2016 and September 15/28, 2017.*

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<sup>356</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 16, 1,2,21*; in Christopher, *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, South Canaan, PA: Saint Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002, pp. 179-180, 194.

<sup>357</sup> *Triodion*, Kontakion of Meatfare Sunday.

## 26. THE SACRIFICE FOR SIN

*In the shadow and the letter of the Law, let us, the faithful, discern a figure: every male child that opens the womb shall be sanctified to God. Therefore do we magnify the firstborn Word and Son of the Father without beginning, the firstborn Child of a Mother who had not known man.*

Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, Mattins, Canticle Nine, Irmos.

*There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.*  
Hebrews 9.22.

### **Introduction**

The feast of the Meeting of the Lord is one of the most mysterious in the Church calendar. Christ is brought into the Temple by His Mother and Joseph in order to be offered to the Lord in accordance with the word of the Lord to Moses: "Sanctify to Me all the firstborn, whosoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is Mine" (Exodus 13.2). Also, the Mother brought an offering for herself, for her purification. The Law said that this offering should be "a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering"; but "if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtle doves, or two young pigeons" (Leviticus 13.6-8). Since Joseph and Mary were poor – or, perhaps, because they had given away most of their money to the poor<sup>358</sup> – she did not offer a lamb, but two turtle doves.

At first sight, it is difficult to see why this event should be celebrated each year as one of the twelve major feasts of the Church. The Lord's Conception from the Virgin at the Annunciation; His Nativity in Bethlehem; the Revelation of the Holy Trinity and the sanctification of the waters at His Baptism; and, of course, His Death and Resurrection: these are all events that are clearly of the greatest significance, without which our salvation would be unthinkable. But in what lies the exceptional significance of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple?

At the root of the feast's significance lies the concept of *the sacrifice for sin*. The importance of this concept cannot be exaggerated: if one had to point to one common denominator of all religions, besides the existence of God, it would surely be: the blood-sacrifice for sin. We find such sacrifices in the true religion and in all the false, pagan ones, in the New Testament and in the Old.

Let us examine their meaning.

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<sup>358</sup> St. Demetrius of Rostov writes: "They shunned wealth as a root of pride, and in everything showed humility. Being lovers of the poor, they had already given to the needy the gold gifted them by the Magi, except for a little they were saving for the Flight to Egypt" ("Homily on the Meeting of the Lord"), *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, February 2, House Springs, Mo: Chrysostom Press, 2003, p. 20.

## 1. The Old Testament Sacrifices

In the Old Testament we find blood-sacrifices for sin carried out even before the Law. Abel and Cain offered sacrifices to the Lord – the one pleasing in His eyes, and the other not. Noah offered sacrifices immediately after being delivered from the Flood – and it was after the Lord had smelled its “smell of sweetness” that He vowed that He would not curse the earth again (Genesis 8.21). The Patriarchs offered sacrifices to the Lord. Abraham even offered His only son Isaac – and it was his readiness to do this that caused God to bless him and his descendants with that extraordinary blessing that contained in itself the promise of the Redeemer.

The Law of Moses institutionalized sacrifices on a vast scale, with very detailed instructions on how, when and where to offer them. Protopriest T.I. Butkevich writes: “The Jews unfailingly carried out two daily blood-sacrifices: in the morning and in the evening (Exodus 29.38; Numbers 28.3, 4), besides sacrifices from individual people. There were cases when a very large quantity of blood sacrifices were offered on one day. Thus on the day of his anointing to the kingdom Solomon offered to the Lord in Gabaon 1000 whole-burnt offerings (III Kings 3.4); on the day of the sanctification of the Jerusalem temple he offered 22,000 bullocks and 120,000 sheep in sacrifice to God (III Kings 8.63; compare Chronicles 7.5). In general, Solomon unfailingly offered a multitude of sacrifices three times a year: at the feast of the unleavened bread, at the feast of weeks, and at the feast of tabernacles, besides the sacrifices required by the decree of the law for every day, and also on the Sabbaths and new moons. However, abundant sacrifices were also offered by other pious kings, for example, David (II Kings 6.13), Joasaph (II Chronicles 17.4), Joash, Ozias and Hezekiah (II Chronicles 29.32, 33). On returning from the Babylonian captivity, the Jews, celebrating the consecration of the half-built temple in Jerusalem, in spite of all their poverty, offered in sacrifice to God one hundred bullocks, two hundred asses, four hundred lambs and twelve goats for the sins of the whole of Israel in accordance with the number of the twelve tribes of Israel (II Ezdra 7.7, 8). Even Herod, according to the witness of Josephus Flavius, on the day of the triumphant consecration of the temple in Jerusalem restored by him offered in sacrifice to God three hundred bullocks, while the number of animals then offered in sacrifice by individual people, says Flavius, cannot be calculated because of the unusually great number of slaughtered animals. There is an indication that sometimes on the feast of Pascha up to 260,000 lambs were slaughtered in Jerusalem.”<sup>359</sup>

In view of this evidence, it is impossible to deny the centrality of blood-sacrifices in the worship of the Old Testament Church. But this immediately raises the question: *why*? After all, did not the Lord say through the Prophet-King David: “Shall I eat of the flesh of bulls? Or the blood of goats, shall I drink it? Sacrifice unto God a sacrifice of praise, and pay unto the Most High thy vows” (Psalms 49. 14-15)? And again: “If

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<sup>359</sup> Butkevich, “O Smysle i Znachenii Krovavykh Zhertvoprinoshenij v Dokhristianskom Mire i o Tak Nazyvaemykh ‘Ritual’nykh Ubijstvakh” (On the Meaning and Significance of Blood Sacrifices in the Pre-Christian World and on the So-called ‘Ritual Murders’”), a report read in the Russian Assembly in St. Petersburg by reason of the Beilis affair on October 13, 1913; reprinted in G.L. Shtrak, *Krov’ v Verovaniakh i Suieveriakh Chelovechestva* (Blood in the Beliefs and Superstitions of Mankind), Moscow, 1995, pp. 232-233.

Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I had given it; *with whole-burnt offerings Thou shalt not be pleased*. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise" (Psalm 50.16-17). In other words, the blood of innocent victims is *not* what God wanted from the Jews and wants from us. What he wants is "the sacrifice of praise" and "a heart that is broken and humbled".

There are three possible ways of resolving the apparent contradiction between God's institution of animal-sacrifices in the Old Testament, and His clear indication that *in themselves* these sacrifices are not pleasing to Him.

The first is that animal sacrifices were introduced by God in order precisely to elicit in the Jews the feeling of compunction, of sorrow for sin, that is the only real sacrifice we can offer to God. If, when one sins, one has to sacrifice the best lamb in one's flock, one soon comes to realize the *cost* of sin - the cost to oneself, but also the cost to others. Nor should this be difficult to understand even for contemporary Americans or Europeans: if we had to sacrifice our favourite pet dog or cat every time we sinned, we would undoubtedly begin to curb our sinful impulses!

Thus animal-sacrifices elicit *compassion* or *pity* - pity for the animal, pity for oneself at being deprived of it, - and compassion elicits *compunction*. It was precisely the method of eliciting King David's *compassion* that the Prophet Nathan used in order to elicit his *compunction*, his sorrow for the double sin of sleeping with Bathsheba and killing her husband Uriah: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. And the rich man had very many flocks and herds. But the poor man had only one little ewe lamb, which he had purchased, and preserved, and reared; and it grew up with himself and his children in common; it ate of his bread and drank of his cup, and slept in his bosom. And a traveller came to the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flocks and of his herds, to dress for the traveller that came to him; and he took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that came to him. And David was greatly moved with anger against the man. And David said to Nathan, As the Lord lives, the man that did this thing shall surely die. And he shall restore the lamb sevenfold, because he has not spared. And Nathan said to David: *Thou art the man that hath done this...*" (II Kings 12.1-7).

Since we have sinned, we "shall surely die" - that was the sentence of God on Adam and Eve. But rarely do we feel the full horror of sin, its full consequences. So God causes another, innocent victim to die in our place in order to elicit our shame, our horror, our pity and our compunction...

A second reason why God may have introduced animal sacrifices was to divert the Jews from the pagan custom of sacrificing, not only animals, but even human beings, to their false gods. David speaks of the sacrifices of children that the Jews made to Baal-phegor during the exodus from Egypt and in Canaan (Psalm 105.28, 35-36). And in Judges 11 we read the tragic story of how Jephtha sacrificed his daughter in fulfilment of a vow made to God - but inspired by the devil, according to St. John Chrysostom.<sup>360</sup> The Law and the Prophets are full of admonitions to the Jews not to

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<sup>360</sup> Butkevich, op. cit., p. 243.

sacrifice their sons and daughters to Baal or Moloch: “Do not give your children to the service of Moloch, and do not dishonour the name of your God. I am the Lord... And the Lord said to Moses: tell the sons of Israel: whoever of the sons of Israel or of the proselytes who live among the Israelites shall give of his children to Moloch, let him be put to death” (Leviticus 18.21, 20.1). The Prophet Micah sums up the sinfulness of all such sacrifices, saying: “How shall I reach the Lord, and lay hold of my God most high? Shall I reach Him by whole-burnt-offerings, by calves of a year old? Will the Lord accept thousands of rams, or ten thousands of fat goats? Should I give my first-born for the sin of my soul? Has it not been told you, O man, what is good? Or what does the Lord require of you except to do justice, and love mercy, and be ready to walk with the Lord your God?” (Micah 6.6-8). And again the Lord says through Ezekiel: “You took of your sons and daughters, whom you bore, and sacrificed them to be destroyed. You went a-whoring as if it were a little thing, and slew your children, and gave them up in expiatory offerings. This is beyond all your fornication...” (Ezekiel 16.20-22). Since these sacrifices were offered to demons – for “all the gods of the pagans are demons” (Psalms 95.5) – they counted as worse sins than all their previous spiritual fornication: they were *apostasy* from the Lord God of Israel.

But by allowing the Jews to sacrifice, not children, but animals, and not on the altars of the demons, but in the temple at Jerusalem, God weaned them from this vice. St. John Chrysostom, commenting on Isaiah 1.2, writes that the Lord instituted animal sacrifices “out of condescension to our weakness. God acted exactly like a doctor, who, seeing that a person sick with a fever is self-willed and impatient, and wants to drink a lot of cold water, and threatens that if they do not give it him he will put a halter around his neck, or cast himself over a precipice, in order to avert the greater evil, allows the lesser, only so as to divert the sick man from a violent death... [However,] having allowed them to offer sacrifices, He allowed them to do this in no other place than Jerusalem. Then, when they had offered sacrifices for some time, He destroyed this city so as... to distract them, albeit against their will, from this matter. If He had said: stop it, they would not easily have agreed to abandon their passion for sacrifices. But now, from the sheer necessity of their being (outside Jerusalem), He drew them away from this passion...”<sup>361</sup>

Nevertheless, at the root of this horrific sin of child-sacrifice lay a true thought, albeit one perverted by diabolical cunning. For, as Butkevich writes, “the belief that only the death of the most innocent human being is a true sacrifice reconciling man with God runs like a red thread through all the pages of the Old Testament Divine Revelation. Only the blood of a perfect righteous man, according to the teaching of the Word of God, could wash away the impurity of Adam’s fall into sin from man. Paganism wrapped this idea in the crude form of offering infants at the breast, who had as yet no personal sins, in sacrifice to God. Paganism found nobody on earth more innocent, pure and sinless than infants at the breast. This crude form was rejected by the boundless compassion of God, but the idea itself, as the sentence of eternal and absolute Justice, was retained. It lies already at the base of the Old Testament law on the consecration to God of all the first-born. This law was given by God even before the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. ‘And the Lord said to Moses: sanctify to Me every

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<sup>361</sup> St. John Chrysostom, in Butkevich, *op. cit.*, pp. 249, 250.

first-born that opens the womb from among the sons of Israel' (Exodus 13.1, 2). And this law was repeated more than once: compare Exodus 22.29, Numbers 3.13 and 8.17. But what does to sanctify somebody to God mean? First of all (according to the explanation of Moses himself), it means to slaughter the one who is sanctified and offer him in sacrifice; and then already in a figurative sense 'to give him to the Lord for all the days of his life to serve the Lord' (I Kings 1.28). God Himself announced through Moses to the Jewish people: 'Every dedicated thing which a man shall dedicate to the Lord of all that he has, whether man or beast, or of the field of his possession, he shall not sell it, nor redeem it: every devoted thing shall be most holy to the Lord. And whatever shall be dedicated of men, shall not be ransomed, but shall surely be put to death.'" (Leviticus 27.28, 29)."<sup>362</sup>

And yet there was an exception to the rule that that which was dedicated to the Lord could not be ransomed. As Butkevich writes: "Immediately after declaring the law on the dedication of the first-born, the Lord commands the Jewish people through Moses not to offer their first-born in sacrifice, but to ransom them. This is what Moses told his people on this score: 'Redeem every first-born of man. And when your son will ask you, saying, What is this?, then you will say to him: with a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh was stubborn and would not let us go, the Lord killed all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of man to the first-born of beast. Therefore do I sacrifice to the Lord everything that opens the womb of the male sex, and every firstborn from my sons I redeem' (Exodus 13.13-15). The Lord repeated His command through Moses a little later: 'Redeem all the first-born of your sons' (Exodus 34.20). At first the Jewish first-born to a significant extent were substituted by the Levites, who were separated exclusively for the service of God (cf. Numbers 3.45). Then they were ransomed with money: five shekels per person.<sup>363</sup> But above all, and exclusively later on, [they were ransomed] by sacrificial animals. Prosperous and rich people had to offer for their son a one-year lamb for a whole-burnt-offering and a young dove or pigeon as a sin offering; while poor people who did not have enough to acquire a lamb had to offer two pigeons or two young doves, one for a whole-burnt-offering and the other for a sin offering (cf. Leviticus 12.6-8). In this way we already see clearly here that the Old Testament Jewish blood sacrifices took the place of the sacrifice of people themselves..."<sup>364</sup>

## 2. The Sacrifice of the First-Born

However, there is more to be said about the sacrifice of the first-born, which will reveal to us both why it occupies such a pivotal place in the whole system of sacrificial worship, and why - the third and most fundamental reason why - God introduced animal-sacrifices in the Old Testament.

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<sup>362</sup> Butkevich, op. cit., pp. 242-243.

<sup>363</sup> St. Demetrius of Rostov notes that "the redemption money, five sacred shekels per child, was the wages of the priests serving in the Temple of the Lord" (op. cit., p. 19). (V.M.)

<sup>364</sup> Butkevich, op. cit., pp. 243-244.

Let us recall the Exodus story that gave rise to it. God called the Jews to make a journey of three days into the wilderness in order to offer sacrifices to Himself (Exodus 4.18). Since Pharaoh refused to allow them to go, he and his people were subjected to the ten plagues of Egypt, the last and most terrible of which was the destruction of all the first-born of Egypt. However, since the Jews, in accordance with God's instructions, sacrificed a lamb and smeared his blood on the lintel and door-posts of their houses, they were spared this destruction, and the Angel of death passed over them. This lamb, the paschal lamb, as we learn from the Scriptures of the New Testament, is a shadow and a type of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Blood of Whose Sacrifice on the Cross redeems us from sin and death, allowing us to pass over from death to life. "For Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (I Corinthians 5.7). And so the *primary* purpose of this first animal sacrifice was not to elicit sorrow for sin among the Jews, nor to distract them from idol-worship, but rather *to save them from slavery and death*. In the Old Testament story, the blood of the lamb saved them from slavery to *Pharaoh* and *physical* death. In its New Testament fulfilment in Christ, the Blood of the Lamb saves all believers from slavery to *Satan* and *spiritual* death.

So fundamental is the Exodus story and its inner meaning to the true worship of God that the Lord not only commanded its celebration and re-enactment at the most important feast of the Jewish year, Pascha, but also instituted the dedication the first-born sons of the Jews to the Lord through the Temple priesthood.

This had two purposes. The first was to remind the Jews of how, through the mercy of God, their first-born had been spared the fate of the first-born of Egypt. The second, and more important, was to hint at the real identity of the Lamb Who had delivered them, and at the context in which He would be revealed to Israel... As the Church sings of St. Symeon, the God-receiver: "O blessed priest, thou didst offer up the sacrifices of the law, the lambs, for ineffable mercy, showing forth beforehand the Blood of the Saviour..."<sup>365</sup>

This is where the Gospel account of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple becomes so important. Christ is offered as the first-born of His Mother and supposed father. But He is not one first-born among many. He is the *only* first-born who literally fulfills the commandment of the Law. For, as Blessed Theophylact writes, "The law said, *Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord*. Only with Christ did this literally occur. He Himself opened the womb of the Virgin at His birth, while all other wombs which have borne a child have been first opened by a man..."<sup>366</sup>

Moreover, Christ alone, of all the first-born of Israel, could not be ransomed, being Himself the Ransom. For while the first-born of Israel escaped death in Egypt through the blood of the paschal lamb, and all the following generations of first-born also escaped immolation by being ransomed through the offering of the animals or the five shekels, the one and only First-Born of God the Father and Mary the Virgin did not,

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<sup>365</sup> *Menaion*, February 3, Mattins, Ode 8, troparion.

<sup>366</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Holy Gospel according to Luke*, 2.21-24, House Springs, Mo: Chrysostom Press, 1997, pp. 33-34.

and could not, escape death. For of Him alone it was said in the Law that He “shall not be ransomed, but shall surely be put to death.” (Leviticus 27.28, 29). For the paschal lamb slaughtered in Egypt, and the lamb offered by the rich in the place of their first-born *are*, typologically speaking, Christ the First-Born. Therefore He *must* be slaughtered, for while some sacrifices can be substituted, there is no *real* forgiveness without the shedding of the Blood of the One real, antitypical Sacrifice (Hebrews 9.22). For in the eyes of absolute Justice, the radical extirpation of sin is possible only through the *supreme* Sacrifice, the shedding of the Blood of the most perfect creature. But since no man born of Adam could offer such a sacrifice, being corrupted by sin, the sinless Creator Himself had to become man and offer Himself in sacrifice, becoming the Lamb slain not only in time, but before time, “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13.8).

Christ could not be ransomed for money or animals, because He was an offering *beyond price*; but precisely for that reason His Blood could *be* a ransom for many, for all those who believe in Him. For “the Son of Man came to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20.28), “as a ransom for all” (I Timothy 2.6), “as a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2.17).

Christ, as we have seen, was the only first-born son in history who opened His mother’s womb. This implied that His Mother was a Virgin... Now the virginity of Mary was known to the small band assembled in the Temple that day. For, as St. Demetrius of Rostov writes, “The Holy Fathers [Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria and Andrew of Crete] relate that the Prophet Zacharias, father of the Forerunner, entered the Temple to participate in the rite of the Purification of the immaculate Virgin. He had the Theotokos stand not in the place assigned to mothers waiting for cleansing, but in that for maidens, where married women were not allowed. Seeing this, the scribes and Pharisees murmured. Zacharias announced to them that Mary remained a virgin after giving birth. As they did not believe him, the saint explained that all creation serves its Master and is in His power, and that God is perfectly capable of enabling a virgin to give birth and remain a virgin. ‘Most truly, she is a virgin,’ he insisted: ‘wherefore, I have permitted her to stand in the place appointed for virgins’.”<sup>367</sup> So Christ was the First-Born both Divinely and humanly speaking. As the liturgical text puts it: “*the firstborn Word and Son of the Father without beginning, the firstborn Child of a Mother who had not known man*”.

### **3. The Old Pours into the New**

Then the Elder Symeon, having been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ, entered the Temple, and, taking the Lord in his arms, uttered the famous words: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel...”

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<sup>367</sup> St. Demetrius, op. cit., p. 21.

St. Ephraim the Syrian offers a profound interpretation of this act: “Symeon the priest, when he took Him up in his arms to present Him before God, understood as he saw [Him] that *He was not presenting Him, but was being himself presented*. For the Son was not presented by the servant to His Father, but the servant was presented by the Son to his Lord. For it is not possible that He, by Whom every offering is presented, should be presented by another. For the offering does not present him that offers it; but by them that offer are offerings presented. So then He Who receives offerings gave Himself to be offered by another, that those who presented Him, while offering Him, might themselves be presented by Him. For as He gave His Body to be eaten, that when eaten It might quicken to life them that ate Him; so He gave Himself to be offered, that by His Cross the hands of them that offered Him might be sanctified. So, then, though the arms of Symeon seemed to be presenting the Son, yet the words of Symeon testified that he was presented by the Son. There can be no dispute about this, because that which was said put an end to dispute: ‘Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace’. He, then, who is allowed to depart in peace to God, is presented as an offering to God...”<sup>368</sup>

At this moment, therefore, the Old Testament meets the New and gives way to the latter. Or, as St. Ephraim puts it, the priesthood and prophecy of the Old Testament *pours itself*, in the person of Symeon, *into* the High Priest and Prophet of the New Testament, in the person of Christ: “Accordingly, the Son came to the servant; not that the Son might be presented by the servant, but that by the Son the servant might present to His Lord Priesthood and Prophecy, to be laid up with Him. For prophecy and priesthood, which were given through Moses, were handed down, both of them, and reached to Symeon. For he was a pure vessel, who sanctified himself that he might be like Moses, capable for both of them... And so Symeon presented our Lord, and in Him offered both these things; so that that which was given to Moses in the wilderness was received from Symeon in the Temple. But seeing that our Lord is the vessel wherein all fullness dwells, when Symeon was offering Him before God, he poured over Him (as a drink-offering) those two (gifts), priesthood from his hands and prophecy from his lips. Priesthood continued on the hands of Symeon, because of his purifications; and prophecy dwelt in operation upon his lips, because of revelations. When then these two powers saw Him Who was Lord of both, they two united together and poured themselves into the vessel that was capable of both, that could contain priesthood and kingdom and prophecy...”<sup>369</sup>

#### 4. The Priesthood of the New Testament

Our probe into the inner meaning of the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord has revealed that at least three major events were concealed within the one:

1. Christ, the Great High Priest of the New Testament and Creator of the Old, the one and only First-Born of both God and man, appeared in the Old Testament

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<sup>368</sup> St. Ephraim, “Homily on the Lord”, 48; in *The Pre-Nicene Fathers*, Eerdmans, volume XIII, p. 327. According to Blessed Theophylact (*op. cit.*, p. 34), Symeon was not a priest. If so, then it is still easier to understand why he was not the real priest at this rite, but Christ.

<sup>369</sup> St. Ephraim, *op. cit.*, 51, p. 328.

Temple before the last worthy representatives of the Old Testament priesthood, Zachariah and Symeon.

2. The gift of the Old Testament priesthood was returned by Symeon to Him Who gave it, the Great High Priest of the New.
3. The Ministry of the New Testament Priesthood was begun by Christ's *Self-dedication* and *Self-sanctification*, in accordance with His words in the High-Priestly prayer: "I sanctify Myself" (John 17.19).

As the kontakion of the Feast puts it: "Thou hast even now *by anticipation* saved us." At the Meeting Christ saved us "by anticipation" - in anticipation, that is, of the completion of the Sacrifice on Golgotha. We can put it more strongly: the Sacrifice was not only anticipated but *begun* here, in the Temple.

Naturally, therefore, Symeon immediately speaks about the Cross: "This Child is set for the fall and resurrection of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against" (Luke 2.34). "The fall and resurrection of many", as Blessed Theophylact says, is "the fall of those who do not believe, and the resurrection of those who believe". And the "sign" is "the Cross, which until this very day is spoken against, that is, it is rejected by those who do not believe".<sup>370</sup>

At His Meeting with the Old Testament priesthood in the Temple, Christ as the High Priest of the New dedicated Himself as an offering to the Lord. This was the beginning of the path to Golgotha, when He could say of His Sacrifice: "It is finished". It was the beginning of the path that led to His offering the Sacrifice to His disciples in His Body and Blood. For, as St. Gregory of Nyssa writes: "He offered Himself for us, Victim and Sacrifice, and Priest as well, and 'Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world'. When did He do this? When He made His own Body food and His own Blood drink for His disciples, for this much is clear to anyone, that a sheep cannot be eaten by a man unless its being eaten is preceded by its being slaughtered. This giving of His own Body to His disciples for eating clearly indicates that the sacrifice of the Lamb has now been completed."<sup>371</sup>

Again, St. John Chrysostom writes: "Why does He say: 'This cup is the New Testament'? Because there was also a cup of the Old Testament: the libations and blood of brute creatures. For after sacrificing, they used to receive the blood in a chalice and bowl and so pour it out. Since that time, instead of the blood of beasts, He brought in His own Blood. Lest any should be troubled on hearing this, He reminds them of the ancient sacrifice..."<sup>372</sup>

So there is the old sacrifice, and there is the New Sacrifice, the Sacrifice of the Cup of the New Testament. The former prefigures the latter, and illumines Its meaning, and the coming of the latter makes the former redundant. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the Law" (Hebrews 7.12). "For it

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<sup>370</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 36.

<sup>371</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon One on the Resurrection of Christ*, in William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1979, volume 2, p. 59.

<sup>372</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 27 on I Corinthians*, 5.

is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering [of animals] Thou wouldest not, but a Body [of the God-Man] hast Thou prepared for Me..." (Hebrews 10.4-5).

At the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple the Old Testament priesthood after the order of Levi meets the New Testament Priest after the order of Melchizedek, and pours itself into Him, making itself redundant. The Lord, although still a Babe in arms, blesses Symeon to depart in peace: the Old Testament rites, which were only a shadow of true salvation, can now depart in peace because the Saviour Himself has come. The Great High-Priest and Victim now sanctifies Himself in anticipation of, and as the first step towards, His own Sacrifice of Himself, the one and only Sacrifice that takes away the sins of the whole world. "He takes away the first [sacrifice] that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once and for all" (Hebrews 10.9-10).

*January 25 / February 7, 2008; revised February 2/15, 2014 and February 3/16, 2016.*

## 27. ON FREQUENCY OF COMMUNION

The old debate on how frequently we should receive Holy Communion, and with what kind of preparation, shows no signs of dying down in our time. Although not a dogmatic question, it has all the potential to cause as much disruption in Church life as many dogmatic questions. In this respect it is similar to the debate on how heretics and schismatics of various kinds are to be received into the True Church. In both cases perplexity is caused by the fact that the Church seems to adopt a different position at different times in her history. And so one side in the debate adopts the position of the Church at one point in her history, and the other side – her position at another time. Both can claim patristic support, and so both can claim that right is on their side. The problem, then, is: how to reconcile the apparently contradictory positions taken by the Church at different times in her history.

With regard to frequency of Communion, there is no argument that Christians received it more frequently in the early centuries of Christianity than in recent centuries. The question, then, is: is this because there has been a falling away from the early, correct practice? Or are there good reasons why the Church has modified the practice of the Early Christians?

The question was first raised in recent times by the so-called “Kollyvades” Fathers<sup>373</sup> – so called after the *kollyva*, or boiled wheat, which is traditionally given out at memorial services in the Greek Church. They taught, among other things, that Communion was being received too infrequently by contemporary Christians, and that it should be received as often as possible consistent with proper preparation for the sacrament. There was much opposition to this teaching, and successive patriarchs tended to adopt a position midway between the two parties.

Thus “in 1775, Ecumenical Patriarch Theodosios sought to reconcile the two factions. He wrote to the monks of Athos saying that the early Christians received Holy Communion every Sunday, while those of the subsequent period received it every forty days, after penance; he advised that whoever felt himself prepared should follow the former, whereas if he did not he should follow the latter. But this did not bring an end to the dispute. Like the contention about memorial services, it continued until the early part of the nineteenth century. In 1819, Patriarch Gregory V wrote to the Athonite monks that Communion should not be received at certain set times, but whenever one felt oneself ready for it, following confession and other necessary preparation.”<sup>374</sup>

St. Gregory here appears implicitly to rule out the extreme positions on both sides: *both* the idea that it is wrong to receive Communion more than two or three times a year (this is the extreme that the Kollyvades Fathers strongly, and rightly, reacted against), *and* the idea that one *must* receive Communion at every single Liturgy,

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<sup>373</sup> Especially St. Macarius of Corinth (1731-1805), St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809), St. Nicephorus of Chios (1750-1821) and St. Arsenius of Paros (1800-1877).

<sup>374</sup> Constantine Cavarnos, *St. Macarios of Corinth*, Belmont, Mass. : Institute for Byzantine and Modern Studies, 1972, p. 21.

whether one feels ready for it or not, and whether one has done the necessary preparation or not (even the Kollyvades Fathers agreed that preparation for Communion by fasting was necessary – see the book by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, *On Frequent Communion*). Thus in his *Sigillion* of 1819 he and his Synod write that “whoever wishes to receive permission from his spiritual father, as one irreproachable, is permitted to receive Communion every week. *However, neither is this a limit, nor is it an Apostolic Canon.*”<sup>375</sup>

The holy elders of Optina had a similar position. In 1912 St. Barsanuphy of Optina wrote: “In the first century the followers of Christ the Savior received Communion every day, but they led a life equal to that of the angels and were ready every minute to stand before the face of God. None of the Christians were safe. It frequently happened that a Christian would receive Communion in the morning and in the evening he would be seized and led out to the coliseum. Being in constant danger, Christians looked after their spiritual peace with a watchful eye and conducted their lives in purity and holiness.

“But the first centuries passed, persecutions from unbelievers ceased, and the constant danger passed. Then, instead of daily Communion they began to commune once a week, then once a month, and now even once a year.

“Here in the Skete we follow the rule of Mount Athos, compiled by holy elders and handed down to us for our edification. All the monks commune six times a year, but with a blessing, sometimes even more often. They’ve gotten so used to this that more frequent Communion attracts general attention....”

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With regard to fasting in preparation for communion, again there seem to be differences of opinion. Some say that no fasting is necessary. Others say the opposite.

St. John Chrysostom (+407) recommended fasting before Communion – and, if possible, also after: “You fast before Communion in order to be worthy of Communion. But as soon as you receive Communion, instead of increasing prudence and temperance, you let it all go, whereas you should be more temperate after Communion. For before you received Communion you fasted in order to be worthy to receive the Bridegroom, while after this you should be more prudent and temperate in order not to seem unworthy of what you have received. What, then? Should we fast after Communion as well? I don’t say this, and I don’t force you. It would be good, but I don’t force you to do this. But I exhort you not to feast to excess.”<sup>376</sup>

St. John Chrysostom’s words are clear evidence that, whatever was the practice in the very earliest period of the Church, by the late fourth century fasting before Communion was the norm.

Most True Orthodox Churches today insist on a three-day fast for laymen. The present writer has seen this practice in the Russian Church Abroad in the 1970s, in the

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<sup>375</sup> <http://www.genuineorthodoxchurch.net/images/patriarchgregory5eng.pdf>

<sup>376</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 27 on I Corinthians*, 7.

Matthewite and Chrysostomite Greek Old Calendarists, and also in Russia, Serbia and Bulgaria. The only major exception appears to be the “Holy Orthodox Church of North America” (HOCNA) and those parishes and monasteries in other jurisdictions influenced by their reasoning, and perhaps also the Cyprianites.

Fr. Seraphim Rose wrote: “Concerning preparation for Holy Communion: the standard preparation is to read the Three Canons and Akathist, as stated in the Jordanville Prayer Book, usually the night before (in monasteries these are often read at Compline for the whole community, after the Creed), and in the morning the Canon before Communion and the Pre-Communion Prayers. If for some reason one can’t read this whole rule, one repents and reproaches oneself and does as much as one can; if need be, the Akathist and/or canons could be read in the afternoon or evening after receiving Communion. As for fasting, the general Russian custom is to fast for three days beforehand, but this is actually a custom which arose with the practice of infrequent communion, and Vladika John once told a woman who wanted to receive Holy Communion but hadn’t fasted the day before: “But it wasn’t a fast day. If you are keeping the Church’s regular fast days, it is sufficient to guard against over-eating, or eating especially tasty foods, for several days before receiving Holy Communion, and especially the day before, but without making a special point of avoiding all non-fast foods, unless you feel the need for it. As for frequency of communion: in your case you should receive as frequently as you can, i.e., just about every time you attend Liturgy. The pre-communion prayers are read aloud in our skete, as in many Russian churches, during the priest’s communion.”<sup>377</sup>

Such near-unanimity about the three-day rule among the True Orthodox Churches is a very strong indication that it was introduced into the Church by the Holy Spirit. True, it does not seem to have been legislated in any Ecumenical or Local Council. But this is understandable: since this is a *pastoral*, rather than a dogmatic matter, the rule should be seen as a guideline rather than a strict law, with allowance of considerable flexibility in view of individual circumstances. The very young, the old and the sick may be granted a relaxation of the rule by their spiritual fathers, while the more ascetical may wish to fast longer or more strictly. But it appears that the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has come to a near-unanimous conclusion in several traditionally Orthodox countries that an average person in normal circumstances should aim to prepare for Communion through a minimum of three days’ fasting.

Moreover, there seem to be some clear pointers to the three-day rule in Holy Scripture. Consider, for example, Exodus 19.10-19, which is appointed to be read by the Holy Church on the Vespers-Liturgy of Holy Thursday. Here God commands the people of Israel to sanctify themselves for three days before they ascend the Mount. “Be ready,” says Moses; “for three days come not near to a woman” (v. 15). Now ascending the Holy Mountain is a figurative expression for entering into communion with God, as we see in Psalms 23, which is appointed to be read during the preparatory prayers for Holy Communion: “Who will ascend the mountain of the Lord, or who will stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...” (vv. 3-4).

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<sup>377</sup> Rose, *Letter 244*, January 28 / February 10, 1977.

A still closer prefiguring of Holy Communion can be seen in the story of the meeting between David and the priest Abimelech, when David asks whether he and his men can eat of the showbread on the altar. Abimelech replies that this bread was no common bread, "but holy loaves: if the young men have abstained from women, then they shall eat them. And David answered the priest, and said to him, Yes, we have abstained from women for three days: when I came forth for the journey all the young men were purified" (I Samuel 20.4-5). The holy loaves are clearly a type of the Eucharist, which require a preparation of three days' abstinence.

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Let us turn now to certain objections raised against the three-day rule.

1. The three-day rule encourages laziness and infrequency of Communion. In answer to this, we readily admit: it may. And in such circumstances the pastor should urge his flock to prepare and receive Communion more often, "lest the spiritual wolf seize" them, as it says in the prayers of preparation for Communion. But pastors and laity differ in their opinion of what constitutes frequent or infrequent Communion: what is frequent for one is infrequent for another. Most will agree that two or three times a year is infrequent. Some would consider once a month also infrequent. But more would probably consider that frequent!

However, the Church has decreed four periods in the year in which fasting is compulsory: the Christmas fast, Great Lent, the Apostles' fast and the Dormition fast. In these periods, even a lazy person does not have to put in any extra fasting if he wants to receive Communion. Of course, a person who does not respect the compulsory fasts will not be ready to receive Communion even in the fasting periods. But then that will not be the "fault" of the three-day rule, but of the believer's general lack of zeal and disobedience to the Church's laws. He will in effect be excommunicating himself. De facto he does not *want* to receive Communion, so de jure he is excommunicate.

In this connection it is illuminating to consider the advice that St. Seraphim of Sarov gave on frequency of Communion. Concerning the nuns of Diveyevo, his spiritual children, he said: "I command them, Father, to partake of Christ's holy and life-giving Sacrament in all the four fasts and on the twelve festivals." But to a layman he said: "Communicate four times. Once is also good. As God deems you worthy..."<sup>378</sup>

"As God deems you worthy..." So God considers some people worthy of more frequent Communion than others - not in an absolute sense, for nobody is absolutely worthy, but relatively speaking, depending on their zeal and compunction. The nuns, who valued It more highly and struggled more to prepare for It through fasting and prayer, were counted worthy of frequent Communion, and the layman - of less frequent Communion. This is the general pattern we find in all the True Orthodox Churches today: those who struggle harder, and have greater zeal - the clergy and

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<sup>378</sup> Archimandrite Lazarus (Moore), *St. Seraphim of Sarov: A Spiritual Biography*, Blanco, Texas: New Sarov Press, 1994, pp. 67, 68.

monastics, particularly – are counted worthy to receive Communion more often than those who struggle less. “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly” (Matthew 13.12).

To this the objection will immediately be raised: “But no-one is worthy to receive Communion, we are all sinners!” True, and yet St. John Chrysostom says: “You fast before Communion in order to be worthy of Communion.” Worthiness here is measured by one’s awareness of one’s *unworthiness*, that is, one’s humility, and some are clearly more “worthy” in this sense than others. If this were not true, it would make no sense to pray: “Count us not unworthy to receive...”, or: “We thank Thee that Thou hast counted us worthy to receive...” The three-day rule of preparation, while making nobody worthy in an absolute sense to receive Divine Communion, nevertheless, like all ascetic practices, sharpens our sense of our weakness and unworthiness, and therefore actually makes us less unworthy to receive, in accordance with the spiritual law that he who humbles himself is exalted. But those who do not prepare in the way the Church teaches run the danger of complacency and routine, of seeing Communion as their right or their duty rather than their *salvation*, even of “not discerning the Body and Blood of the Lord” and so of receiving to their condemnation. For “whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath” (Matthew 13.12).

2. The Early Christians Communed at every Liturgy, and so should we. The present writer has never seen proof of this statement (Acts 2.42 is often quoted, but it is not a proof), but he does accept that Christians in the early centuries communed in general more often than we do now. But what follows from that fact? That we should receive more often in imitation of them? That would be true only if our circumstances were very similar to theirs, and we ourselves similar to the Early Christians.

Until the end of the first millennium, although practice varied, we still find monastic saints practising very frequent Communion, such as St. Theodore the Studite (+821) and St. Symeon the Theologian (+1022). However, St. Symeon, while Communing every day himself, did so *with tears* – and stressed that *if one did not have tears one should not Commune*. This is a “hard saying”, and in practice, the Church balances the need to Commune worthily – that is, with tears – with the need not to fall into the hands of the “spiritual wolf” through infrequent Communion.

Nevertheless, the teaching of St. Symeon, though “a hard saying”, should be studied and pondered by all. He writes: “We should know that there are five classes of people for whom, according to the holy fathers, it is forbidden to approach Holy Communion. The first are the catechumens, as they are not yet baptized. The second are those baptized, but who fell in love with shameful and unrighteous ways, such as apostates from the holy life for which they were baptized: fornicators, murderers, usurers, extortioners, slanderers, proud persons, jealous persons, those who harbour grudges, all those who being in such a state do not feel that they are enemies of God and are in a tragic situation, because they do not repent... The third are those possessed by demons, if they blaspheme and mock this Divine Mystery. The fourth are those who have come to their senses and have repented, but are fulfilling the penance (epitimia) laid on them to stand outside the church for a certain period of

time. The fifth are those who have not yet the ripened fruit of repentance, i.e. those who have not yet come to the final decision to consecrate their entire life to God and to live the rest of their life in Christ in purity and without reproach. These five classes are clearly unworthy of Holy Communion. He is worthy to commune the precious Mysteries who is pure and has no part with sin, of whom we have spoken above. But when anyone of these worthy persons is corrupted by any corruption, as a man, then, of course, he also communes unworthily, if he does not wash away by repentance that which corrupted him. And so he eats and drinks unworthily who, although he is worthy, unworthily approaches the Holy Mysteries. May we, then, be worthy and commune worthily the most pure Mysteries in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be glory for endless ages of ages. Amen."<sup>379</sup>

And again he writes to a spiritual child of his: "You should abstain from the divine and awe-inspiring Gifts, I mean the undefiled Body and Blood of our Master and Lord Jesus Christ (I advise you also to abstain even from his blessed bread, the so-called *kataklaston*), until you have your will in an unchangeable state vis-à-vis the ugly deeds of sin, and until you acquire a disposition which will not be turned away from good and is perfectly possessed of a hatred for sin. But when you perceive that in this way you have entered into this state, then, brother, draw near with faith unwavering..."<sup>380</sup>

As we come closer to our time, we find that the saints, without denying the patristic teaching that frequent Communion is good, stress the importance of adequate preparation, of which the most important component is true contrition over our sins. Thus St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite writes: "Three days' fasting is enough before Communion. Those who are able to fast even for a whole week before, do well."<sup>381</sup>

Again, St. Theophan the Recluse writes: "There is no salvation without Communion, and no progress in life without frequent Communion.

"But the Lord, the Source of life that enlivens those who partake of Him, is also fire to those who eat Him. Those who receive worthily taste of life, but those who partake unworthily taste of death. Although this death does not occur visibly, invisibly it always occurs in the spirit and heart of the man. The unworthy communicant steps away like a charred log from the fire, or the metal remnants of a conflagration. In the body itself either the seed of death is sown, or death happens right away, as it was in the Corinthian church at the Apostle's reprimand. Therefore when receiving Communion you must approach it with fear and trembling, and sufficient preparation.

"This preparation consists in cleansing the conscience of dead deeds. But let a man examine himself, teaches the Apostle, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup (I Corinthians 11.28). Confession made with hatred of sin and the promise to

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<sup>379</sup> St. Symeon, "Concerning Communicants and those who Partake of the Holy Mysteries Unworthily", *Orthodox Life*, July-August, 1975, p. 11.

<sup>380</sup> St. Symeon, *Epistle* 2.

<sup>381</sup> St. Nicodemus, commentary on the 13<sup>th</sup> Canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council; quoted by Bishop Photios of Marathon, personal communication, March, 2008.

flee it in any way possible makes a man's soul a vessel capable of containing the uncontainable God by His grace. Decisiveness and promise are the place where the Lord communes with us in Communion, for it is the only clean place in us – everywhere else in us it is unclean. Therefore no one approaches worthily, but only through the Lord and His grace are we deemed worthy, for the sake of compunctionate confession and promise.

“We could have limited it to this: confess worthily and you will be a worthy communicant. But Confession itself is a sacrament, which requires worthy preparation; and more than that, it requires particular actions, feelings and dispositions that cannot be summoned all at once, but require time and a certain amount of exclusive preoccupation. That is why it has always been conducted according to a known office, with preliminary deeds and exercises that prepare one for it and enable one to better recognize his sins, to awaken contrition over them, and to guard the fortress of promise. All of these things together comprise govenie.”<sup>382</sup>

Again, consider the following from the life of a nearly contemporary saint, Elder Barsanuphius of Optina (+1912): “I remember once how in a talk he discoursed on frequent Communion and how certain people, citing the example of the Christians of the first centuries, demand permission even now to commune, if not daily, then weekly. ‘They don’t understand that those Christians were constantly prepared for death, and were often taken to prison right from the Liturgy. Each expected that, if not today, then tomorrow his turn would come to suffer for faith in Christ. Then they lived more soberly; their life was, one might say, a continuous state of govenie [fasting in preparation for Communion]. It’s not surprising therefore, that they often communed the Holy Mysteries. We don’t live that way, and we should not equate ourselves with them. Therefore in our Monastery it is agreed upon that the brothers commune six times a year – once during each fast and twice during Great Lent and the Nativity Fast. Deviations from this rule are allowed rarely, and each time with the blessing of the Elder and the Superior, so that one time the brothers were surprised: ‘Why is Fr. So-and-so approaching the Chalice?’ And those who knew what was going on explained, ‘He went through a terrible ordeal. He saw demons in perceptible form and became quite faint. And his spiritual father blessed him to prepare for Communion.’”<sup>383</sup>

Now Optina Monastery, as is well-known, was probably the finest monastery in Russia at the time. Fourteen of its elders were glorified by the Russian Church Abroad, and many of its monks became martyrs under the Soviet yoke. Note also that Optina under the holy elders towards the end of the nineteenth century was more strict on this question (i.e. allowed Communion less often) than Diveyevo under St. Seraphim at the beginning of the century. This was almost certainly because conditions had changed: the level of spiritual life in the country as a whole, and among monastics in

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<sup>382</sup> St. Theophan, *The Path to Salvation – A Manual of Spiritual Transformation*, part III, chapter 5, section 9, pp. 269-272.

<sup>383</sup> Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 2000, pp. 565-566.

particular, had fallen; which was reflected in a stricter attitude towards the reception of Communion.

And this is understandable. Modern life is much more complex and more full of temptations, both crude and subtle, than earlier ages. It correspondingly takes a Christian more time and more effort to drag himself away from earthly cares, concentrate on his spiritual state and reach that state of preparedness and compunction which is necessary before receiving Communion. This is especially the case with married laypeople (see more on that below). But monks, too, are affected by the increased worldliness of the age they live in.

Coming still closer to our age, the Serbian Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956) writes in his *Catechism*: “Q. How should we receive Holy Communion? A. At least four times a year, during the four fasts. But it is recommendable to receive it more frequently, depending on a communicant’s preparedness, and specially in sickness.”<sup>384</sup>

So the Church, while never abandoning her basic principles, changes her practices to some degree in accordance with the spiritual condition of her children. In earlier ages, when general conditions were more conducive to the spiritual life, and Christians generally were in a higher state of spiritual preparedness, there was less danger in the practice of very frequent Communion. But in more recent times, spiritual Fathers, moved by the Holy Spirit, have not blessed *very* frequent Communion except in special cases, knowing that it is very difficult for their spiritual children to prepare adequately for It.

Nor, of course, have they *banned* very frequent Communion. But they have recognized that different practices are possible for different people. “What is best,” asked Hieromartyr Nikon of Optina (+1931): “to Commune of the Holy Mysteries of Christ rarely or often? It is difficult to say. Zacchaeus joyfully received a dear Guest, the Lord, into his house, and he did well. But the centurion, out of humility, recognizing his unworthiness, did not decide on receiving him, and he also acted well. Their actions, though contrary to each other, are identical in their motivation. And they were equally worthy in the sight of the Lord. The essence is that one should prepare oneself worthily for the great Mystery.”<sup>385</sup>

This discussion of the practice in the Early Church leads us to a general point on historical comparisons between different Christian epochs. We call our Church “Apostolic” because we have received the teachings of the Holy Apostles without addition or subtraction. However, this refers to *dogmatic* teachings and to general norms of Christian faith and morality. It does *not* mean that we, living in the twenty-first century, are obliged to imitate the lives of the Early Christians in every particular. The attempt to do that is a characteristically Protestant venture, and we all know what is the result of their attempts to “go back to the Early Church” – a renunciation of the

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<sup>384</sup> Velimirovich, *Sabrana Dela* (Collected Works), vol. 12, Khimelstir, 1984, p. 298.

<sup>385</sup> “Zhizneopisanie Ieromonakha Nikona Optina Pustin’” (A Life of Hieromonk Nikon of Optina Desert), *Nadezhda* (Hope), Frankfurt: Posev, 1982, p. 230.

very concept of the Church! Our task is not to “go back to the Early Church”, but to join the Apostolic Church as it exists *now*, having maintained unbroken succession from the Apostles and their successors.

Not only are we quite simply not able to “go back to the Early Church” in a literal sense: it would be very harmful for us to attempt to do so. Thus, for example, standards of sexual morality in the Early Church were very high, and very strictly enforced. A man who committed fornication was completely cut off from any kind of fellowship with other Christians, and deprived of Communion for a very long period, if not for the rest of his life (cf. I Corinthians 5; Hebrews 6.4-6). If, in the Early Church, standards were so high, and discipline so strict that “of the rest no man *dared* to join himself to them” (Acts 5.13), what would happen to our Church if such strictness were enforced today, when the general spiritual level is so much weaker?

3. The Only Point of Going to the Divine Liturgy is to Receive Communion. In defence of this statement, reference is made by some to the statement of St. Symeon of Thessalonica: “The Divine Liturgy is a rite for the purpose of consecrating the All-Holy Body and Blood of Christ, that they may be given in Communion to all the faithful, and it exists in and of itself for the sole purpose of Communion.”<sup>386</sup>

Now this statement raises no problems if it is understood as emphasising the absolute centrality, in the rite of the Divine Liturgy, of the Consecration and Communion. This in no way means that nothing else of value is done during the Liturgy besides Consecration and Communion. The Divine Liturgy accomplishes many things besides sanctifying individual communicants through their receiving Communion. During the Liturgy we listen to the Holy Scriptures; we pray for ourselves and the whole world; we are present at the Awesome Sacrifice, and worship Christ Crucified. All this strengthens us and the Church as a whole.

Therefore attendance at the Liturgy is valuable even if one does not Communicate. Even the catechumens, and those under penance, are encouraged to stay for the first part of the service, so this must be true for the baptised as well. While it is true that the *full* benefit of attending the Liturgy is gained only by those who Commune of the Holy Mysteries, attending only, without Communicating, is highly beneficial.<sup>387</sup>

4. Not to receive the Holy Mysteries at every Liturgy (unless one has a canonical impediment) is Spiritual Death, and Equivalent to Apostasy from Christ. Thus in an article penned in the 1950s the well-known ecumenist Fr. John Romanides wrote: “When a Christian does not commune at all with the Body and Blood of Christ in every Eucharist, he is spiritually dead... The approval that our clergy today gives our sacramental practice is even more unacceptable! If the Christian was excommunicated for having denied Christ after hours of physical torture, those who week after week

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<sup>386</sup> St. Symeon, *Dialogue*, chapter 78, P.G. 155, col. 252CD.

<sup>387</sup> In the interpretations found in St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite’s *Pedalion* on Apostolic Canons 8 and 9, the 13<sup>th</sup> Canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council and the First Canonical Epistle of St. John the Faster, mention is made of different categories of repenting faithful, one of which is the synestotes, that is, those who “stand with” the other faithful until the end of the Liturgy, but do not receive communion for some reason. (Bishop Photius of Marathon, personal communication, March 31, 2007).

excommunicate themselves are all the more condemnable.”<sup>388</sup> This position has become generally accepted in Greek new calendarist Orthodoxy, and has even crept into the Old Calendar Greek Church.

In defence of this position, reference is made by some to St. John Chrysostom’s *Homily 3 on Ephesians*, in which the saint, in the course of reproving those who come to Communion only at certain set times such as Pascha, *appears* to say that to refrain from receiving Communion at the Liturgy is like being invited to a friend for dinner and refusing to eat his food – it is an insult to him. If one is not worthy of receiving Communion, the Saint *appears* to say, then one is not worthy of going to the Liturgy at all. However, Bishop Photius of Marathon offers a different – and, in our view, much more convincing – interpretation. St. John Chrysostom, he writes, was addressing members of his flock who received Communion only on major feastdays, like Pascha, but did not receive It on “ordinary” days. This, he said, was an insult to Christ, because it implied that His Body and Blood is not the same on major feastdays as on “ordinary” days.<sup>389</sup>

Again, in his book *On Frequent Communion*, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite claims that the Ninth Apostolic Canon says that all those who do not receive Communion at every Liturgy are excommunicated “as creating a disorder in the church”, so everybody who does not have a canonical impediment *must* commune. However, this interpretation of the Canon is *not* generally accepted by the Orthodox Church. As Hieromonk Patapios and Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna write: “St. Nikodemos is speaking very strictly here. According to Balsamon [perhaps the best known canonist of the Byzantine empire], some have argued, on the basis of the Ninth Apostolic Canon, that those who do not communicate should be excommunicated. However, as Balsamon point out, *the Canon penalizes only those who create disorder by leaving the Church before the end of the Liturgy* [my italics – VM]. What people are required to do is to stay until the dismissal has been pronounced and they have received antidoron (the blessed bread distributed to those who have, for whatever reason, been unable to communicate). They cannot be compelled to communicate against their will, especially if their conscience is bothering them.”<sup>390</sup>

Commenting on the same Canon, the famous Serbian canonist, Bishop Nicodemus (Milash) of Dalmatia, writes: “In the first period of the Church the communion of Christians was expressed mainly in the common participation of all the faithful in the Lord’s Supper (I Corinthians 10.16, 17) and in everyone remaining unanimously in the church (Acts 2.46, 20.7). Moreover, this communion, expressed in this way, was laid at the base of the composition of the rite of the Liturgy, so that the catechumens, who could stay in the church with the faithful only until certain prayers, immediately the rite of the Eucharist itself began were invited by the deacon to leave the church, so that only the faithful remained in the church and became participants in the Lord’s Supper. This was how the common thought of the Church concerning the spiritual

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<sup>388</sup> Romanides, “The Life in Christ”, first published in French in *Synaxe*, 21, pp. 26-28 and 22, pp. 23-26, and then in English by Romanity Press, Norman, OK, 2008.

<sup>389</sup> Bishop Photius, personal communication, March 20, 2008.

<sup>390</sup> *Manna from Athos*, Bern, Oxford, New York: Peter Lang, 2006, p. 100.

union between the faithful was expressed, as well as the fact that, for the sake of this spiritual union, every faithful could and had the right to take part in church in all the prayers, both in the Eucharist itself and in the common prayer after Holy Communion to thank the Lord for His great gift. That is how it was at the beginning of the Church of Christ, and all the faithful always came to church and not only listened to the reading of Holy Scripture in church, but remained there until the priest, having finished the Divine Liturgy, blessed them to leave the church. However, this zeal began to cool among some, and many, having heard only the reading of the Holy Scriptures, left the church. Because of this, without a doubt, there was introduced into the rite of the Liturgy, as we read in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (VIII, 9), the deacon's exclamation, after reminding the catechumens to leave the church, that not one of those having the right to remain until the end of the service should leave it. In all probability this did not help, and many even after the deacon's exclamation still left the church before the end of the service, thereby spoiling the reverent feeling of the true faithful and producing disorder in the church itself. As a consequence the present strict rule was published, which required the excommunication of everyone who entered the church and did not remain until the end of the service.

"Some canonists understand this canon in such a way that the faithful not only had to remain in church until the end of the Divine Liturgy, but also were all obliged to commune of the Holy Mysteries. It is possible that this interpretation is correct, since the places from Holy Scripture cited above in explanation of this canon can serve to confirm it. However, it cannot be that all the faithful were forced to commune each time they went to church, since it could easily happen that that not everyone was prepared to commune, either through the intimations of his own conscience, or by dint of some other reasons from his personal or public life. In order that such people should be counted worthy of at any rate some participation in the holy things, on the one hand, and in order to avoid the heaviness of the punishment imposed by this canon, on the other, and in order also to oblige those who could not commune nevertheless to stay in church until the end of the Divine Liturgy, there was introduced the distribution of antidoron, which everyone had to receive from the hands of the priest or for his own sanctification."<sup>391</sup>

St. Nicodemus anticipates the possibility that someone, on reading Chrysostom's (supposed) opinion that those who do not receive Communion when they have no canonical impediment are not worthy to go to the Liturgy, may reply: "Since this is how it is, I am not going to the Liturgy at all." Then he writes: "No, my brother, no. You are not permitted to do this, either, because you excommunicate yourself, as the Holy Oecumenical Fifth-Sixth Synod of 692 decrees when it says: 'If anyone, while living in the city, does not go to Church on three consecutive Sundays, if he is a clergyman, let him be deposed, but if he is a layman, let him be barred from communion.' The Holy local Synod of Sardica decrees the same thing in its Eleventh Canon. Therefore, you are subject to the penalty of excommunication, beloved, if you do not do both things, that is, go to Liturgy *and* prepare yourself as much as possible

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<sup>391</sup> Bishop Nicodemus, *Pravila Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (The Canons of the Orthodox Church), St. Petersburg, 1911, Moscow, 2001, volume 1, pp. 68-69.

to communicate, unless you have an impediment. You may violate neither the one nor the other..."<sup>392</sup>

Much as we respect St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, we agree with Hieromonk Patapios and Archbishop Chrysostomos that his "very strict" position here is untenable. On the one hand, he approves of St. Chrysostom's implication that those who do not receive Communion when they have no canonical impediment are not worthy to go to the Liturgy (although, as we have seen, there is another way of understanding Chrysostom's words), and believes that the Apostolic Canon excommunicates such people. On the other hand, he thinks that everybody must come to the Liturgy every Sunday, because those who stay away for three Sundays consecutively are excommunicated according to another Canon. And he says: "You may violate neither the one nor the other." But this is easier said than done! If I follow his instructions to the letter, then if I do not feel ready to partake I am not "worthy" to go to the Liturgy and must stay at home. But if I do that for three Sundays running I am excommunicated. So I am in a double-bind!

In effect, St. Nicodemus' position comes down to making the reception of Communion at every Liturgy *compulsory* for those who do not have a canonical impediment (i.e. are not excommunicated for some serious sin such as adultery).

But let us now turn to the practical consequences that are likely to follow if all the faithful are *compelled* to receive Communion at every Divine Liturgy they attend. One possible consequence is that the three-day rule will be abolished or severely weakened. This already takes place in certain places, such as those monasteries and parishes under the influence of HOCNA's Boston monastery. The present writer has heard that in one such monastery and parish the three-day rule is observed only in relation to sexual relations, but not in relation to food. In support of this, they argue that the Holy Canons forbid fasting on Saturdays. It is true that the Eastern Church rejected the Roman Church's practice of making Saturday a fast day. But that does not mean that it is *compulsory* to eat meat on that day, only that it is not forbidden! Similarly, it is not forbidden to fast on Saturdays in preparation for Communion the next day.

But suppose that the three-day rule is observed together with the rule of compulsory Communion at every Liturgy. In that case, two possible consequences may be foreseen. Either laypeople, in order to preserve some normality of family and marital life, will go less often to the Liturgy, and perhaps leave the Church altogether. And that, of course, would be a tragedy... Or they will drastically curtail marital relations to a very few times in the year and introduce a semi-monastic regime into the family.

Now the latter consequence might seem attractive and desirable to certain Manichaean heretics who see sexual relations in marriage as sinful. But it does not correspond to the Apostolic teaching. For St. Paul says to married couples: "Deprive ye not one another, unless it be with consent for a time in order that ye may have time

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<sup>392</sup> St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, *On Frequent Communion*; in *Manna from Athos*, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

for prayer; and come together again, lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (I Corinthians 7.3).

So married couples are exhorted to strike a balance. On the one hand, they must devote certain periods to prayer and fasting and sexual abstinence. These include the Wednesday and Friday fasts, the four major fasts of the Church year and additional three-day fasts before Communion in non-fasting periods - provided both partners agree to them. But then they must come together again. For married couples are not given the grace of complete abstinence, and to force them to that, even under the pretext of piety, is to go against, not only human nature, but also the will of God. In the worst cases, - and I have seen one such "worst case", - it will lead to the break-up of the family and the falling away of all of the family members from the Church...

To conclude: in this, as in many other Church questions, we have to take account of the real while never losing sight of the ideal. The ideal, no doubt, is frequent liturgies, the attendance of all parish members at all liturgies and the communing of all members of the parish at all those liturgies. But it is doubtful whether that ideal has ever been attained, even in the Early Church. And by striving too inflexibly for the ideal without taking into account the real we may actually make the reality worse. It is better to tread "the Royal Way" between the extremes of excessive zeal and excessive slackness, striving for the heights but humbly recognizing our weaknesses. St. Seraphim said that virtue is not like a pear - it cannot be swallowed all at once. The slow but steady path of doing what we can in obedience to the Church's rules, pushing ourselves forward, but not beyond our personal strength and in full consciousness of our weakness, is the way that will lead us to the heights in the long run...

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November 26 / December 9, 2016.*

## 28. TO BIND AND TO LOOSE

The power to bind and to loose is one of the main charismata of the Christian priesthood. And yet its real meaning is not immediately obvious. For the question arises: can it really be true that the power to bind and to loose is given *unconditionally* to every priest who has been allowed to perform the sacrament of confession, in spite of the fact that every priest, like every man, is fallible and can make mistakes? Suppose a priest refuses to absolve a genuine penitent: is God obliged to keep the man bound, that is unabsolved from his sin, simply because a priest refuses to absolve him? Or, on the other hand, suppose that a priest looses a man from his sins in spite of the fact that he has not repented of them genuinely: is God, too, obliged to loose him?

Let us begin with a textbook of dogmatic theology: "The Mystery of Repentance is a Grace-giving sacred rite in which, after the faithful offer repentance of their sins, the remission of sins is bestowed by the mercy of God through the intermediary of a pastor of the Church, in accordance with the Saviour's promise...

"Priests are only the visible instruments at the performance of the Mystery, which is performed invisibly through them by God Himself.

"St. John Chrysostom, having in mind the Divine institution of the authority of the pastors of the Church to loose and bind, says: 'The priests decree below, God confirms above, and the Master agrees with the opinion of His slaves'. The priest is here the instrument of God's mercy and remits sins not on his own authority, but in the name of the Holy Trinity."<sup>393</sup>

This makes clear that the *power* of the sacrament belongs to God, not the priest. As the priest says in the Greek rite: "My spiritual child, who hast confessed to my humble person, *I, humble and a sinner, have not power on earth to forgive sins, but God alone; but through that divinely spoken word which came to the Apostles after the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, saying, Whosoever sins ye are remitted, they are remitted, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained, we are emboldened to say: Whatsoever thou hast said to my humble person, and whatsoever thou hast failed to say, whether through ignorance or forgetfulness, whatever it may be, may God forgive thee in this world, and in that which is to come... May God Who pardoned David... forgive thee all things, through me a sinner, both in this world and in the world to come, and set thee uncondemned before His Terrible Judgement Seat.*"<sup>394</sup>

At first it would seem that the Russian rite contradicts the Greek in giving power to the priest himself, independently of God: "May our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, through the grace and bounties of His love for mankind, forgive thee, my child N., all thy transgressions. *And I, an unworthy priest, through the power given unto me by Him, do forgive and absolve thee from all thy sins.*"<sup>395</sup> However, there is reason for believing

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<sup>393</sup> Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2005, pp. 291, 293.

<sup>394</sup> *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983, p. 55.

<sup>395</sup> *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers*, p. 60.

that the use of the personal pronoun “I” here was introduced into the Slavonic rite of absolution in the Ukraine in the seventeenth century under Catholic influence, and therefore does not express the Apostolic tradition. Earlier, however, the Russian rite attributes to the priest a much more modest role: “Behold, my child, Christ standeth here invisibly and receiveth thy confession... *I am but a witness*, bearing testimony before Him of all the things which thou hast said to me.”<sup>396</sup>

That God alone forgives sins is also testified in the *Lives of the Saints*. Thus in the *Life of St. Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria* we read that the priests Achilles and Alexander, together with many believing and noble citizens, went to St. Peter when he was in prison for the faith and asked him to receive the heretic, Arius, whom he had excommunicated, back into the Church. Peter replied: “Beloved, you do not know for whom it is that you make this request. You ask forgiveness for a man who rends and shall tear asunder the Church of Christ. You know that I love all my sheep and do not wish that even one of them should perish. Before all else I pray God’s compassion to grant salvation to all and to forgive the sins of every man. But Arius I refuse to accept, for he has been cast out of the Holy Church by God Himself and excommunicated not so much in accordance with my judgement as with God’s...”<sup>397</sup>

Again, in the *Life of St. Gregory, Bishop of Agrigentum* (+6<sup>th</sup> century) we read: “Then Eudocia threw herself at the feet of Saint Gregory, crying, “Have mercy on me, O servant of God, and forgive me, the wretch, who have sinned against you!...” “*It is not given us to forgive sins,*” said Gregory, “*but the most merciful God. However, we are obliged to pray for the remission of men’s sins, so I will beseech His compassion to forgive your offenses.*”<sup>398</sup>

So the role of the priest is to *pray* and to *witness*; but it is God Who *works* and Who *forgives* the sin. Thus St. John Chrysostom points out that the power of the sacrament works even through unworthy priests precisely because the power does not come from men, but from God, while the priest merely “lends his tongue and offers his hand”: “For the sake of you, the right-minded, will He, though the priests be exceedingly vile, work all the things that are His, and will send the Holy Spirit... For the things which are placed in the hands of the priests it is with God alone to give; and however far human wisdom may reach, it will appear inferior to that grace... But why speak I of priests? Neither Angel nor Archangel can do anything with regard to what is given from God; but the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit dispense all, while the priest lends his tongue and offers his hand. For neither would it be just that through the wickedness of another, those who come in faith to the symbols of their salvation should be harmed.”<sup>399</sup>

Again, Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria writes: “The power to forgive sins is a divine power; hence, we must show honor to the priests as to God. Even if they are

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<sup>396</sup> *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers*, p. 59.

<sup>397</sup> St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2001, volume III: November, p. 592.

<sup>398</sup> St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2001, volume III: November, p. 537.

<sup>399</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 87 on John*, 4.

unworthy, they are still ministers of divine gifts, and grace flows through them just as it flowed through Balaam's ass, enabling it to speak. Human frailty does not hinder the working of grace. Therefore, since grace is bestowed through the priests, let us honor them."<sup>400</sup>

So for the sake of God's justice and mercy, the sincere believer will not be deprived of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – including the remission of sins – that are given through the priesthood, even if the priest is evil, because the power is from God. But the reverse is also true: if the penitent does not in fact repent, then he remains bound, whatever the priest says. As St. Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow, writes: "He who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, 'I forgive and absolve,' the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!"<sup>401</sup>

So the power to bind and to loose is *conditional* - conditional on the priest having true knowledge of God's will in relation to the penitent, whether he has been forgiven by God or not forgiven, and conditional on the penitent truly repenting. It is not the priest who forgives or refuses to forgive, but God: his task is to *discern* whether God has forgiven or not, and to act accordingly.

This leads us to the provisional conclusion that the priest's power to bind and to loose is not in fact a *power* in the conventional sense. It is not a power to forgive sins in the active sense, but a power *to discern whether sins have already been forgiven*. Thus according to the English Orthodox Father, the Venerable Bede (+735), the power to bind and to loose consists precisely in the power of *discerning* who is worthy to enter the Kingdom: "The keys of the Kingdom designate the actual knowledge and power of discerning who are worthy to be received into the Kingdom, and who should be excluded from it as unworthy."<sup>402</sup>

Again, St. John of Karpathos interprets the keys given to Peter in terms of *spiritual knowledge*: "Peter was first given the keys, but then he was allowed to fall into sin by denying Christ, and so his pride was humbled by his fall. Do not be surprised, then, if after receiving the keys of *spiritual knowledge* you fall into various evil thoughts."

Again, St. Symeon the New Theologian speaks of *the key of knowledge*: "What shall I say to those who want to enjoy a reputation, and be made priests and prelates and abbots, who want to receive the confidence of others' thoughts, and who say that they are worthy of the task of binding and loosing? When I see that they know nothing of the necessary and divine things, nor teach those things to others nor lead them to the light of knowledge, what else is it but what Christ says to the Pharisees and lawyers: 'Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you do not enter yourselves, and you have hindered those who are entering' (Luke 11.52). But what is the key of knowledge other than the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith?"<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel of John*.

<sup>401</sup> St. Innocent, "What is Necessary for a Saving Confession?", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 38, no. 4, July-August, 1988, pp. 20-22.

<sup>402</sup> St. Bede, *Sermon on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul*, P.L. 94, col. 219, sermon 16.

<sup>403</sup> St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Discourse* 33, 3.

The following incident from the *Life* of the Holy New Hieroconfessor Theodore Rafanovich (+1975) shows the absolute sovereignty of God in this matter. In 1923 Fr. Theodore was arrested and exiled to Chernigov, where he served with New Hieromartyr Archbishop Pachomius of Chernigov (+1937). However, some priests slandered him to Archbishop Pachomius, who banned him from serving. Some time later, when Vladyka was beginning to celebrate the liturgy, he felt *himself* as it were bound, and it was revealed to him that the reason was his unjust punishment of Fr. Theodore. Vladyka stopped the service and ordered Fr. Theodore to be brought to him in the altar. Bowing down to him to the earth, Vladyka asked his forgiveness and blessed him to serve with him...<sup>404</sup>

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Let us now approach the subject from a somewhat different point of view, and ask whether the power of forgiving sins, however, we interpret it, is given to priests alone.

And let us begin with the Holy Scriptures. In the Old Testament Nathan the Prophet, although not a priest, as far as we know, received David's confession and then announced to him God's forgiveness in a manner reminiscent of the sacrament of Confession (II Kings 12.13). In the New Testament, St. James the Brother of the Lord and first Bishop of Jerusalem, urges Christians to confess to each other and thereby receive forgiveness.

No mention is made of the priesthood in that verse; but it will be worth putting these words in context by quoting the whole passage: "Is any sick among you? Let him call the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick one, and the Lord will raise him; and if he has committed any sins, it will be forgiven him. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for each other, that ye may be healed. The petition of a righteous man is very strong. Elijah was a man of like passions as we, and he prayed that it should not rain, and it rained not on the earth for three and a half years. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Brethren, if any of you errs from the truth, and someone converts him, know that he who converted the sinner from the error of his way will save his own soul from death and will hide a multitude of sins." (James 5.14-20).

Clearly, the first part of this passage refers to the sacrament of Holy Unction, which is performed by priests, "the presbyters of the Church", and which, while mainly directed to the healing of the body, also contains an element of the healing of the soul and the forgiveness of sins (especially forgotten ones). "Therefore", continues the Apostle, "confess your sins to one another, and pray for each other". Now Archbishop Averky considers that "one another" refers to the priests present at the sacrament of Holy Unction: "The link with the preceding words through the word 'therefore' gives grounds for supposing that here *confession* before a spiritual father is meant - that is,

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<sup>404</sup> *Kratkoe zhitie Otsa-Ispovednika Katakombnoj Tserkvi Ieromonakha Fyodora (Rafanovicha)*, <http://www.catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=page &pid=679>.

also the sacrament of repentance, which is usually united with the sacrament of Holy Unction. 'The petition of a righteous man is very strong' (5.16) – by the 'righteous' here are understood those people whose prayer is more perfect. Here, of course, it is not only people who possess personal righteousness that are meant, but again the presbyters who have been given a special privilege to pray for people and carry out the sacraments. As an example of how much the prayer of a righteous man can do, the holy Apostle cites the prayer of the holy Prophet Elijah..."<sup>405</sup>

Yes, but the striking fact is that the holy Prophet Elijah was *not* a priest (though he was of the priestly tribe of the Levites). So while the word "righteous" here obviously does not *exclude* priests, neither does it exclude righteous men who are not of the priestly rank. And this leads us to suppose that when St. James urges the faithful, in the preceding verse, to confess "to one another", he was again not excluding righteous men not of the priestly rank. And certainly, the key of knowledge, the power of discerning whether God has forgiven a person, was given to Elijah, as to many righteous men of non-priestly rank.

St. Ambrose of Milan indicates that a sinner needs above all an *intercessor* to plead for him before God, but does not say that that intercessor has to be of the priestly rank: "It is written, 'If a man has sinned against God, who shall entreat for Him?' (I Kings 2.25). The writer implies, not an ordinary man or one of the common sort, but only a man of excellent life and singular merit. It must be such a one as Moses, who both merited and obtained that for which he asked..." (Moses also asked for and obtained forgiveness for his brother Aaron. Moses and Aaron were of the priestly tribe of Levi, but it appears that Moses' role was not that of a priest, which belonged to his brother, but rather that of a king, as we see in icons of Moses and Aaron.) "Such intercessors, then, must be sought for after very grievous sins... Stephen prayed for his persecutors who had not been able even to listen to the name of Christ, when he said of those very men by whom he was being stoned, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge'. And we see the result of this prayer: Paul, who held the garments of those who were stoning Stephen, not long after became an apostle by the grace of God, having previously been a persecutor."<sup>406</sup>

According to the tradition of the Desert Fathers, unordained but holy monks were put in charge of novices and had the boldness to say whether a novice had received forgiveness from God – independently, as it would seem, of the sacrament of confession. St. Basil the Great writes: "Confession of sins is to be made to those who are able to heal... From old times, the penitents confessed to saints."<sup>407</sup> The confessors of his days often included unordained monks, such as St. Barsanuphius the Great.<sup>408</sup>

Nor could the priesthood make up for a lack of holiness. For, as St. Dionysius the Areopagite writes, a priest who is "unillumined" (aphotistos) is "no priest, not at all,

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<sup>405</sup> Averky, *Rukovodstvo k Izucheniu Sviaschennago Pisania Novago Zaveta* (Guide to the Study of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament), volume 2, Jordanville, 1987, p. 150.

<sup>406</sup> St. Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance*, book 1; in Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>407</sup> St. Basil, *Ascetical Works*; in Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>408</sup> Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

but an enemy, a trickster, one [who] fools himself and [is] a wolf amidst the people of God".<sup>409</sup>

Again, Golitzin points out that in the Eastern Church the sacrament of confession by a priest did not enjoy any official status as a sacrament (*leitourgema*) until the time of Symeon of Thessalonica in the fifteenth century.<sup>410</sup> This may be related to the fact that in the Greek Church then, as now, permission is not *immediately* granted to a priest to carry out Confession – that is, to become a *pnevmatikos*, or spiritual father: only after a period of testing is he granted this right. This would appear to indicate that the power to bind and to loose is not automatically granted to all canonically ordained priests, and is not inherent in the gift of the priesthood as such.

In the seventh century, St. Anastasius of Sinai was asked how many ways there were of receiving the forgiveness of sins. He answered this question as follows: "Three. The first is: to stop sinning. The second is: to repent worthily. And there is a third way for sinners to be saved: through temptations and sorrows and patience... For there are times when God casts the sinner who does not repent into temptations and through the temptations he comes to humility, and through humility he is saved without asceticism."<sup>411</sup>

It is striking that the saint says nothing here about the sacrament of Confession. Perhaps because neither the sacrament of Confession nor any other sacrament in which the forgiveness of sins is given (e.g. Holy Communion and Holy Unction) is of any use if there is no true repentance or humility in the soul of the penitent. But in his next answer the saint does speak about confession, if not to a priest, at any rate to another Christian. Thus in response to the question: "Is it good to confess one's sins?" he answers: "It is good and very useful – but not to all, for it will not only not benefit you [to confess to anybody], but will also defile those who listen to you. Therefore find a spiritual man, who is able to heal you and pray for you, and confess to him alone."<sup>412</sup> In his next answer, Anastasius replies to the question how a man can know that God has forgiven him, not by referring to a priest's prayer of absolution, but to a more internal criterion: "From his own conscience, and from the boldness his soul has in prayer to God."<sup>413</sup>

Could it be accidental that the saint does not refer to the sacrament of Confession as one of the ways of receiving the forgiveness of sins, nor to the prayer of absolution as giving reassurance of forgiveness? It appears not, because in an earlier and more extensive answer to the same question, while warning against the danger of confessing to inexperienced and passionate men, "blind guides leading the blind", he writes: "If you find an experienced spiritual man who is able to heal you, confess to him without shame and with faith, as to the Lord... For John the Theologian says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to take away our sins and cleanse us

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<sup>409</sup> St. Dionysius, *Epistle VIII*; quoted in Golitzin, *St. Symeon the New Theologian: On the Mystical Life; The Ethical Discourses*, volume 3, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997.

<sup>410</sup> Golitzin, *op. cit.*

<sup>411</sup> St. Anastasius, *Odigos (The Guide)*, Answer 104, Mount Athos, 1970, p. 171.

<sup>412</sup> St. Anastasius, *Odigos*, Answer 105, p. 171.

<sup>413</sup> St. Anastasius, *Odigos*, Answer 106, p. 171.

from all iniquity (I John 3.6)... Again, the Brother of the Lord according to the flesh says: 'Confess your sins one to another, and pray for each other that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' (James 5.16) Again, the Apostle [Paul] says: 'Bear ye one another's burdens and in this way fulfil the law of Christ' (Galatians 6.6)... For it is God's custom to work the salvation of men not only through angels but also through holy men. Of old it was through the prophets, and in the last times it was through Himself and the Divine Apostles... Therefore if it is a man who listens to the confession, it is God who through him converts and educates and forgives, just as he forgave David through Nathan... For the saints are the ministers of God and co-workers and stewards unto the salvation of those who wish to be saved..."<sup>414</sup> So the saint by no means undervalues the importance of confession before others, but it must be to an experienced man – a saint, in fact. He does not say that confession must be to a priest, just as St. James in the passage quoted does not refer to the necessity of confessing before a priest (although in the previous verse he says that "the elders of the Church" have to be called to carry out the sacrament of Holy Unction).

Why is it necessary to confess before an experienced and holy man? First, because, as St. Anastasius points out, the penitent may involuntarily defile the confessor by putting evil thoughts and desires into his mind. Secondly, because in the case of serious, and even not so serious sins, a penance (*epitimia*) is necessary in order to deepen the penitent's consciousness of his sin and help him to prevent a repetition of the sin in the future.<sup>415</sup> A passionate confessor will not be able to do this. He will give inappropriate penances and advice, either too strict or too lenient; and his whole attitude to the penitent's confession may be such as to discourage the penitent from confessing to him again.

A most important witness to the patristic tradition in this question comes from St. Symeon the New Theologian. In his *Letter on Confession*, he writes: "Let us... see from when, and how, and to whom this power of celebrating the sacraments [*hierourgein*] and of binding and loosing was given from the beginning, and so proceed in due order just as you asked the question so that the solution may be clear, not just for you but for everyone else. When our Lord and God and Savior said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Yours sins are forgiven you', the Hebrews in attendance were all saying: 'This man is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins except God alone?' (Matthew 9.3; Mark 2.7; Luke 5.21). Up to that time remission of sins had not yet been granted, not to prophets, nor to priests, not to any of the patriarchs. The scribes were thus making difficulties because, really, a kind of strange, new teaching and reality was being proclaimed. And, because of this newness and strangeness, the Lord did not find fault with them. Instead, He taught them what they were ignorant of by proving that it was as God and not as man that He granted remission of sins. For He says to

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<sup>414</sup> St. Anastasius, *Odigos*, Answer 6, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>415</sup> As Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev writes: "The sacrament of Confession is not limited to a mere acknowledgement of sins. It also can offer advice on how to avoid particular sins in the future. The sacrament of Confession is not limited to a mere acknowledgement of sins. It also involves recommendations, or sometimes *epitimia* (penalties) on the part of the priest. It is primarily in the sacrament of Confession that the priest acts in his capacity of spiritual father." (*The Mystery of Faith*, London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 2002, p. 145).

them: 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins' (Matthew 9.6), He says to the man with the withered hand, 'Stretch out your hand,' and he stretched it out and it was restored 'whole, healthy like the other' (Matthew 12.13). By means of this visible wonder He provided a guarantee of the greater and invisible one. The same applies to Zacchaeus (Luke 19.1ff), to the harlot (Luke 7.36f), to Matthew at his tax collector's post (Matthew 9.9f), to Peter after he had denied the Lord three times (John 18.17), to the paralytic (John 5.5) to whom, after the Lord had healed him, He said: 'See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may befall you' (John 5.14). By saying this He showed that the man had been taken by illness because of his sins and that, in being freed from the former, he had also received forgiveness of the latter, not because he had been praying for it for a long time, not because of fasting, not due to his lying on the ground, but instead and only because of his conversion and unhesitating faith, his breaking-off with evil and true repentance and many tears, just as the harlot (Luke 7.38 and 44) and Peter who wept bitterly (Matthew 26.75).

"Here is the source of that great gift which is proper uniquely to God and which the Lord alone possessed. Next, just as He was about to ascend into heaven, He bequeathed this great charisma to His disciples in His stead. How did He imbue them with this dignity and authority? Let us find out the what, and the how much, and the when. The chosen eleven disciples were gathered together behind closed doors. He entered and stood in their midst and breathed on them, saying: 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit, whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (John 20.22-23). At that time He enjoined on them nothing about penances, since they were going to be taught [about such things] by the Holy Spirit.

"As we said, therefore, the holy Apostles summoned this authority in succession for those who were to hold their thrones. Not one of the rest of the disciples ever conceived of presuming upon it. The Lord's disciples preserved with all exactitude the rightness of this authority. But, as we said, when time had gone by, the worthy grew mixed and mingled with the unworthy, with one contending in order to have precedence over another and feigning virtue for the sake of preferment. Thus, because those who were holding the Apostles' thrones were shown up as fleshly minded, as lovers of pleasure and seekers of glory, and as inclining towards heresies, the divine grace abandoned them and this authority was taken away from them. Therefore, having abandoned as well everything else which is required of those who celebrate the sacraments, this alone is demanded of them: that they be Orthodox. But I do not myself think that they are even this. Someone is not Orthodox just because he does not slip some new dogma into the Church of God, but because he possesses a life which keeps harmony with true teaching. Such a life and such a man contemporary patriarchs and metropolitans have at different times either looked for and not found, or, if they find him, they prefer [to ordain] the unworthy candidate instead. They ask only this of him, that he put the symbol of the faith [the Creed] down in writing. They find this alone acceptable, that the man be neither a zealot for the sake of what is good, nor that he battle with anyone because of evil. In this way they pretend that they keep peace here in the Church. This is worse than active hostility [to God], and it is a cause of great unrest.

“It is because of this that the priests have also grown worthless and no better than the people. None of them are that salt of which the Lord spoke (Matthew 5.13), able to constrain and reprove and keep the life of another from wasting away. Instead, they are aware of and conceal each other’s faults, and have become themselves inferior to the people, and the people in turn still worse than before. Some of the latter, though, have been revealed as superior to the priests. In the lightless gloom of the clergy these people appear as burning coals. If the former were, according to the Lord’s word (Matthew 5.16), to shine in their lives like the sun, then these coals would seem radiant but would be dark in comparison to the greater light. But, since only the likeness and vesture of the priesthood is left among men, the gift of the Holy Spirit has passed to the monks. It has been revealed through signs that they have entered by their actions into the life of the Apostles. Here too, however, the devil has been busy at his proper work. For when he saw that they had been revealed as, in a way, the new disciples of Christ in the world, and that they had shown forth in their lives and done miracles, he introduced false brethren, his disciples, and when after a little while, these had multiplied (as you can see for yourself!), the monks as well were rendered useless and became altogether as if they were not monks at all.

“Therefore it is neither to those in the habit of monks, nor to those ordained and enrolled in the rank of the priesthood, nor yet to those who have been honoured with the dignity of the episcopate – I mean the patriarchs and metropolitans and bishops – that God has given the grace of forgiving sins merely by virtue of their having been ordained. Perish the thought! For these are allowed only to celebrate the sacraments (and I think myself that even this does not apply to many of them, lest they be burned up entirely by this service who are themselves but straw). Rather, this grace is given alone to those, as many as there are among priests and bishops and monks, who have been numbered with Christ’s disciples on account of their purity of life...”<sup>416</sup>

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Now the authority of St. Symeon in the Orthodox Church is great. He is one of only three saints to whom the title of “theologian” has been given. He knew the mysteries of God, not through reading or instruction, but through direct experience. Nevertheless, these words seem, at first sight, to be at variance with the tradition of the Church as a whole. Can it be that a priest who is correctly ordained, and Orthodox in his confession of faith, but not Orthodox in his way of life, can *lose* the power to bind and to loose, while a man who is not ordained “according to the traditional order”, as St. Symeon puts it, can nevertheless receive that power because of the purity of his life?

We have seen that according to St. Dionysius the Areopagite an “unillumined” priest is “no priest at all”, but a wolf. But how literally are we to take these words? And would it not be harmful to take them literally, since we would appear to be undermining the authority of the priesthood and discouraging people from going to the sacrament of Confession?

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<sup>416</sup> St. Symeon; in Golitzin, op. cit., pp. 197-200.

In guiding an Orthodox course between the Scylla of Catholic clericalism and the Charybdis of Protestant anti-clericalism, it is necessary to establish, first of all, that God wishes all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth – not only the truth about the Orthodox dogmas, but also the truth about themselves, about their sins and passions. It is only in confessing this dual truth – about God and themselves – that Christians can be saved. And God aids them in this in every possible way.

Thus for those who, without the aid of a priest or mediator, have a deep and compunctionate consciousness of their sins, it is sufficient to confess to God alone in their heart. That this is sufficient for *some* people and *some* sins is demonstrated by the text of innumerable prayers. After all, why do we pray the Jesus prayer if this does not, *by itself*, bring us forgiveness of sins and freedom from passion? Why pray our morning and evening prayers *on our own* if the frequent petitions for the forgiveness of sins in these prayers do not in actual fact bring forgiveness? True compunction of heart is sufficient for God, even if nobody but God sees it; for “a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise” (Psalm 50.17).

For “I do not force you into the midst of everyone,” He says, “nor do I make an exhibition of you before many witnesses. Tell your sins to me in private that I may heal your sores and deliver you from your pain.”<sup>417</sup> Again, as St. Anastasius of Sinai says: “Men have often sinned before others, and then, confessing *in secret* to God, they received forgiveness...”<sup>418</sup> Again, New Hieroconfessor Barnabas, Bishop of Pechersk (+1963), writes: “The Lord knows everything, and if we had not sinned in soul and body, we would have no need of a bodily mediator, a witness at the Terrible Judgement of God that the soul cleansed this sin through repentance, we would talk with God Himself. And now confession is nothing other than conversation with the Lord through a mediator – a spiritual father.”<sup>419</sup>

So at the beginning, for those pure in soul and body, no mediator was necessary. But now, for those who have defiled both soul and body to such an extent as to have become insensitive to depth of their fall – that is, for almost all Orthodox Christians after the very first generations – a mediator *is* necessary. It is necessary because, without such a mediator, we would suppress our knowledge of our sins, speak to God only about the more superficial ones and fail to come to true compunction. Even great saints do not always come to a knowledge of their sins without help from others. Thus it required the mediation of Moses to bring forgiveness to Aaron and Miriam, and the intervention of the Prophet Nathan to bring the Prophet-King David to full knowledge of his sin against God and Uriah.

And so in the first millennium of Christian history, we find the practice of “confessing to each other” (James 5.16) – that is, seeking out a spiritual father or mediator, who may or may not be a priest, but who, in the opinion of the penitent, is

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<sup>417</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Fourth Homily on the Rich Man and Lazarus*, in Gabriel, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>418</sup> St. Anastasius, *Odigos*, in Gabriel, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>419</sup> St. Barnabas, *Osnovy Iskusstva Sviatosti* (The Foundations of the Art of Holiness), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2001, p. 275.

able, skilfully and tactfully, to bring the sins of the penitent into the light, where they are immediately destroyed. The emphasis here is not on the position of the confessor in the hierarchy of the Church, but on his personal holiness, his discernment, his skill in posing the right questions and imposing the right *epitimia* and, above all, his love. Through his love, his prayers will ascend to the Throne of God, and for the sake of his love God will soften the hardened heart of the penitent and lead him to a true confession of his sins...

However, by the end of the first millennium, as St. Symeon the New Theologian (+1022) witnesses, this gift of mediating for a fellow sinner in confession was becoming very scarce. Confession was becoming dangerous – and not only for the penitent, but also for the confessor. Thus St. Symeon writes: “Look here, I beg you. Do not by any means assume the debts of others at all while you are indebted yourself in the same way. Do not dare to give remission of sins if you have not acquired in your heart Him Who takes away the sin of the world.”<sup>420</sup>

And yet, in spite of these increased dangers, by the middle of the second millennium, as we have seen, confession to a priest had been raised to the level of a sacrament, and is generally accounted one of the seven sacraments to this day. Why?

Not having found a direct answer to this question in the theological literature, the present writer can only offer a tentative answer to this question...

The history of the Church since the middle of the second millennium has been one of almost continual decline. Until approximately the time of the Russian revolution, this was not a decline in numbers – in fact, the numbers of those who nominally belonged to the Orthodox Church had never been higher. But in terms of holiness, of the fruits of the Spirit, it represented a sharp decline. As the Lord said to the angel of the Church of Sardis: “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art *dead*” (Revelation 3.1). It was only after the revolution (and not only in Russia) that this inner spiritual death of the majority of Orthodox Christians was revealed, when great numbers of them fell away into heresies or schisms or simply atheism.

In these conditions, the Holy Spirit that guides the Church and her leaders laid special emphasis on the sacrament of confession as that vital link that was still able to reunite the fallen Christian to the Church. For the Christian that has fallen into mortal sin cannot be rebaptized: his only chance of salvation is to confess his sins, to undergo that second baptism by tears. But only in very few cases can he do that alone: he needs a helper, a mediator – and that, in the majority of cases, can only be the local priest. Moreover, for the Christian who has just come to a realization of the terrible seriousness of his sins, there is the danger of *despair*, of feeling that he *cannot* be forgiven. And here the formula of absolution which the priest alone has the right to pronounce, absolving all his sins *with certainty* in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (as long as the penitent truly repents), represents a vital assurance.

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<sup>420</sup> St. Symeon, *Moral Homily* 6, in Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

In the Russian Empire a minimum once-a-year confession before a priest was mandatory according to State law. This measure has been frequently criticized as being none of the State's business; but if one reads the lives of Russian saints who confessed large numbers of once-a-year laity, such as St. John of Kronstadt, and notes the regularity with which they had to absolve mortal sins, one can see this measure may well have saved many from eternal damnation. And if the generally low spiritual level of the priesthood still represented a real danger (priests of the quality of St. John or the Optina elders were very rare), nevertheless the danger of despising the priesthood, and not going to confession at all, represented a much greater danger...

There is another reason why, in these conditions of steep spiritual decline, the sacrament of confession should have acquired such importance. When many Christians have committed mortal sins, but have not come to a full realization of their seriousness, it becomes a necessity for the priest to be able to refuse them Divine Communion, lest they partake to their condemnation – and he himself incur the wrath of God for communicating the unworthy. But this is not possible if the priest does not know the Christian, as was often the case in large city churches in Russia, and has not heard his confession.

As St. Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow, said: "It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, 'For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?' Certainly God knows all of our sins; but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution..."<sup>421</sup>

For unless he is clairvoyant, there is no way for the priest to know whether a Christian should be admitted to the Holy Mysteries unless he has heard his confession, or knows that he has confessed his sins to another spiritual father. Thus St. John Chrysostom says: "Let no-one communicate who is not of the disciples. Let no Judas receive, lest he suffer the fate of Judas... I would give up my life rather than impart of the Lord's Blood to the unworthy. And I will shed my own blood rather than give such awful Blood contrary to what is right."<sup>422</sup>

This reminds us that the final seal of the forgiveness of sins is the mystery of Divine Communion, and that as being "the stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Corinthians 4.1), it is exclusively the priests who have the power to bind and to loose believers who desire to approach the Holy Chalice and receive the remission of sins through the Blood of Christ. It is this power – the power to grant or withhold access to the Holy Mysteries, the power of spiritual life and death – that the Lord gave to the Apostles and their successors to the end of time. Thus when St. Peter of Alexandria refused to admit the heretic Arius to Communion, he demonstrated the power of binding. And when the local priest of every Orthodox parish admits believers to the Chalice who have been absolved from their sins in the sacrament of confession, he demonstrates the power of loosing... But if one, looking at the degradation of the priesthood in the

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<sup>421</sup> St. Innocent, *op. cit.*

<sup>422</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 83 on Matthew*, 6.

contemporary Church, laments that this power of the keys is so often abused, he should remember that we have a Great High Priest in the heavens Who is above all earthly bishops and priests, and Whose supremely just sentence overrides all others; for He alone "killeth and maketh alive, bringeth down into hades and raiseth up again" (I Kings 2.6), insofar as He alone "has the keys of hades and death" (Revelation 1.18).

December 11/24, 2008.

*"O God and Lord of all! Who hath power over every breath and soul, the only One able to heal me, hearken unto the prayer of me, the wretched one, and, having put him to death, destroy the serpent nestling within me by the descent of the All-Holy and Life-Creating Spirit. And vouchsafe me, poor and naked of all virtue, to fall with tears at the feet of my spiritual father, and call his holy soul to mercy, to have mercy on me. And grant, O Lord, unto my heart the humility and good thoughts that become a sinner who hath consented to repent unto Thee, and do not abandon unto the end the soul that hath united itself unto Thee and hath confessed Thee, and instead of all the world hath chosen Thee and hath preferred Thee. For Thou knowest, O Lord, that I want to save myself, and that my evil habit is an obstacle. But all things are possible unto Thee, O Master, which are impossible for man. Amen."*

Prayer before Confession of St. Symeon the New Theologian.

## 29. METROPOLITAN EPHRAIM AND ORIGINAL SIN

*Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities.*  
(Lamentations 5.7).

Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston has joined the long list of modernist theologians who deny, or claim to deny, the existence of original sin.<sup>423</sup> This now-fashionable denial was at first confined to one or two liberal Russian theologians such as Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky<sup>424</sup> and some Greek new calendarists such as Fr. John Romanides<sup>425</sup>. When the Russian version appeared, early in the twentieth century, it met with strong opposition from such distinguished theologians as Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, Archbishop Seraphim of Lubny, Fr. Georges Florovsky, Hieromartyr Victor of Glazov and (somewhat later) Fr. Seraphim Rose; and its influence has been correspondingly muted in the Russian Church. However, the resistance to the more recent, Romanidean version has been altogether weaker, and now not only the Greek new calendarist churches, but also many Greek Old Calendarists, such as Alexander Kalomiros and Metropolitan Ephraim himself, have been infected with this false teaching. Let us examine the latest version to be offered by the leader of HOCNA.

Metropolitan Ephraim begins by asserting that the term “original sin” is a purely Augustinian, “and thereafter, exclusively Papal and Protestant concept”. The Augustinian concept of original sin – that we all inherit the guilt of Adam’s sin – is nowhere to be found in the Holy Fathers. The Greek Fathers prefer the term propatorikon amartima, which, he claims, means something different.<sup>426</sup>

Now it would appear to be true that the Latin phrase peccatum originale first appears in the works of St. Augustine, in his treatise entitled *De Peccato Originale*, and in other places, as in: “The deliberate sin of the first man is the cause of original sin”<sup>427</sup>. But its use was not confined to him and to Papal or Protestant heretics. For we find it frequently in Western Orthodox writings, including those of St. Leo the Great, St. Gregory the Great and the Venerable Bede – and the metropolitan would not, I hope, be denying their Orthodoxy...

“Before Augustine,” he continues, “this teaching was unknown to the Church of Christ. In contrast, the Fathers taught that we inherit the seed of sin, a proclivity for sin because of the corruption into which we are born. This weakness (like a tendency for diabetes that we might inherit from our parents) rules like ‘another law’ in our members and ‘wars against the law’ of our minds, bringing us ‘into captivity to the law of sin’ which is in our members, as the blessed Paul writes to the Romans. Nowhere in the Scriptures or in the Fathers does it say that we inherit the guilt of

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<sup>423</sup> “The Shackles of the Latin Captivity” or “Your Sin is Not So Original”, *OrthodoxInfo@yahoo.groups.com*, August 5, 2009.

<sup>424</sup> *The Dogma of Redemption*, Wildwood: Monastery Press, 1972.

<sup>425</sup> *The Ancestral Sin*, Ridgewood, N.J.: Zephyr Publishing, 2002.

<sup>426</sup> We could add that they also use the terms propatoriki amartia, progoniki amartia and prototypon amartima (St. Basil the Great, *Homily 8*).

<sup>427</sup> St. Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, II, xxvi, 43.

Adam's transgression. I am responsible for and guilty of my own sins, not Adam's. Indeed, the Fathers say that we 'inherit sin', by which however, they mean a weakness for sin, or, we are born into a sinful environment which encourages us to sin."

Now on the face of it there does not seem to be a deep disagreement between Metropolitan Ephraim and the traditional teaching. That we are responsible for and guilty of only our own sins, and not Adam's, is something that we can all readily agree with – including, I believe, St. Augustine. The essential point that Augustine and other Fathers insisted on was that *in some sense* we inherit sin from Adam, even if we are not guilty precisely of *his* sin since (of course) we were not in existence at that time. And here Metropolitan Ephraim appears to agree. "We inherit the seed of sin", he writes. Later he appears to qualify this by saying that inheriting sin means having a weakness for sin or being born into a sinful environment. But is not the seed of sin in itself sinful, even if less sinful than the full-grown fruit? And is not a weakness or proclivity for sin already the beginning of sin itself? But then what is this if not the traditional doctrine of original sin, even if the doctrine is expressed in a non-Augustinian terminology?

In order to avoid confusion, it is essential to distinguish between two meanings of the word "sin". We have to distinguish between *personal sin* and *the law of sin*, between sin as the *act* of a human *person*, and sin as the *state or condition or law* of human *nature*. This distinction is in fact made by St. Paul in Romans, as Archbishop Theophan of Poltava points out: "The holy apostle clearly distinguishes in his teaching on original sin between two points: paraptoma or transgression, and amartia or sin. By the first he understood the personal transgression by our forefathers of the will of God that they should not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, by the second – the law of sinful disorder that entered human nature as the consequence of this transgression. ["I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at work with the law of my mind and making me captive to *the law of sin* which dwells in my members" (Romans 7.22-23).] When he is talking about the inheritance of the original sin, he has in mind not paraptoma or transgression, for which only they are responsible, but amartia, that is, the law of sinful disorder which afflicted human nature as a consequence of the fall into sin of our forefathers.<sup>428</sup>

The deniers of the doctrine of original sin *either* claim that our sinful nature is not the direct result of Adam's sin (as Metropolitan Anthony puts it: "Adam was not so much the cause of our sinfulness as the first sinner in time", and God gave us a sinful nature in anticipation that we would sin as Adam did) *or* that there *is* a direct causal link from Adam, but that what we inherit from him is not sin, but disease or death (Romanides and his followers). However, it is clear from the Apostle Paul's teaching in Romans that it is precisely *sin* that we inherit – but sin in the sense of a sinful disorder of human nature (amartia) rather than guilt for a particular transgression (paraptoma). This distinction between two meanings of "sin" is confirmed by St. Maximus the Confessor, who writes: "There then arose *sin*, the first and worthy of reproach, that is, the falling away of the will from good to evil. Through the first there arose the second – the change in nature from incorruption to corruption, which cannot elicit reproach. For two sins arise in [our] forefather as a consequence of the

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<sup>428</sup> Archbishop Theophan, *The Patristic Teaching on Original Sin*, p. 22.

transgression of the Divine commandment: one worthy of reproach, and the second having as its cause the first and unable to elicit reproach."<sup>429</sup>

In order to establish the vital point that nothing less than *sin* - and not only disease or death, as the Romanideans affirm - is transmitted to us from Adam, let us look exclusively at the writings of some of the Eastern Fathers who can by no stretch of the imagination be called Augustinians:-

- (i) St. Athanasius the Great: "When Adam had transgressed, his *sin* reached unto all men."<sup>430</sup>
- (ii) St. Ephraim the Syrian: "Adam sowed sinful impurity into pure bodies and the yeast of evil was laid into the whole of our mass."<sup>431</sup>
- (iii) St. Gregory of Nyssa: "Evil was mixed with our nature from the beginning... through those who by their disobedience introduced the disease. Just as in the natural propagation of the species each animal engenders its like, so man is born from man, a being subject to passions from a being subject to passions, a sinner from a sinner. Thus *sin* takes its rise in us as we are born; it grows with us and keeps us company till life's term."<sup>432</sup>
- (iv) St. Anastasius of Sinai: "In Adam we became co-inheritors of the curse, not as if we disobeyed that divine commandment with him but because he became mortal and transmitted *sin* through his seed. We became mortals from a mortal..."
- (v) St. Symeon the New Theologian: "That saying that calls no one sinless except God, even though he has lived only one day on earth [Job 14.14], does not refer to those who sin personally. For how can a one-day child sin? But in this is expressed that mystery of our Faith, that human nature is sinful from its very conception. God did not create man sinful, but pure and holy. But since the first-created Adam lost this garment of sanctity, not from any other sin than pride alone, and became corruptible and mortal, all people also who came from the seed of Adam are participants of the ancestral sin from their very conception and birth. He who has been born in this way, even though he has not yet performed any sin, is already *sinful* through this ancestral sin."<sup>433</sup>
- (vi) St. Gregory Palamas: "Before Christ we all shared the same ancestral curse and condemnation poured out on all of us from our single Forefather, as if it had sprung from the root of the human race and was the common lot of our nature. Each person's individual action attracted either reproof or praise from God, but no one could do anything about the shared curse and condemnation, or the *evil inheritance* that had been passed down to him and through him would pass to his descendants."<sup>434</sup>
- (vii) Nicholas Cabasilas: "Because our nature was extended and our race increased as it proceeded from the first body, so wickedness too, like any

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<sup>429</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 42.

<sup>430</sup> St. Athanasius the Great, *Four Discourses against the Arians*, I, 51.

<sup>431</sup> St. Ephraim, quoted in Archbishop Theophan, *op. cit.*

<sup>432</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 6, PG. 44, 1273.

<sup>433</sup> St. Symeon, *Homily 37*, 3.

<sup>434</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 5: On the Meeting of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ*.

other natural characteristic, was transmitted to the bodies which proceeded from that body. The body, then, not merely shares in the experiences of the soul but also imparts its own experiences to the soul. The soul is subject to joy or vexation, is restrained or unrestrained, depending on the disposition of the body. It therefore followed that each man's soul inherited the *wickedness* of the first Adam. It spread from his soul to his body, and from his body to the bodies which derived from his, and from those bodies to the souls."<sup>435</sup>

Insofar as Metropolitan Ephraim accepts the patristic teaching that sin in some sense is inherited by us from Adam, then in spite of his abhorrence of the term "original sin" and his very Romanidean tendency to attack St. Augustine (a tendency not shared by the Holy Fathers), his doctrine does not in essence diverge from the traditional doctrine. However, our doubts about his real thoughts are rekindled by his remarks on the Latin doctrine of the immaculate conception. This doctrine, according to the metropolitan, is "a wrong solution to a nonexistent problem" – there was no need for the Latins to suppose that Mary was born immaculately and without sin, because she never inherited Adam's guilt in the first place.

But she *did* inherit original sin – not the guilt of Adam's original transgression, but the sinful disorder of nature caused by that transgression. She inherited it through her birth in the normal way from Joachim and Anna. This fact did not create a "problem" as such. Rather, it meant that before the Virgin could conceive Christ the Holy Spirit had to descend upon her in order to purify her. For although she had fought against original sin in herself to the utmost that was possible for a human being, it still could not be removed except by a special act of God. It needed to be "surgically treated", as St. Gregory Palamas puts it.<sup>436</sup> The Spirit had to descend upon her, as the same Father explains, "to further purify her nature, and give her the strength to receive the Child of salvation".<sup>437</sup> And so St. Ephraim the Syrian writes that at the Annunciation "Christ purified the Virgin and then was born, so as to show that where Christ is, there is manifest purity in all its power. He purified the Virgin, having prepared her by the Holy Spirit, and then the womb, having become pure, conceived Him."<sup>438</sup> Again, St. Gregory the Theologian writes: "The Word of God became a complete man, with the exception of sin, born of a Virgin who was first purified (protokatartheises) by the Spirit in her soul and in her body."<sup>439</sup> As the Virgin herself says in the Mattins of the Annunciation composed by St. Theophanes: "The descent of the Holy Spirit has purified my soul and sanctified my body".<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, II, 7; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974, p. 77.

<sup>436</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 37 on the Dormition*, P.G.151: 460-474; quoted in *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1989, p. 90.

<sup>437</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 14*; quoted in *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1989, p. 105.

<sup>438</sup> St. Ephraim, *Homily 41*; quoted in *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1989, p. 105.

<sup>439</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, P.G. 35: 325B, 633C; quoted in *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1989, p. 90.

<sup>440</sup> *The Festal Menaion*, March 25, Mattins canon, Ode Seven; quoted in *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1989, p. 112.

So the Virgin was not preserved from original sin at her conception, as the Latins teach, but was “conceived in sins” (Psalm 50.5), like every other son and daughter of Adam. What made her great was her unremitting struggle against this inherited sin. This is a point emphasized by St. John Maximovich in his argument against the Latin teaching: “The teaching that the Mother of God was preserved from original sin, as likewise the teaching that She was preserved by God’s grace from personal sins, *makes God unmerciful and unjust*; because if God could preserve Mary from sin and purify Her before Her birth, then why does He not purify other men before their birth, but rather leaves them in sin? It follows likewise that God saves men apart from their will, predetermining certain ones before their birth to salvation.

“This teaching, which seemingly has the aim of exalting the Mother of God, in reality completely *denies all her virtues*. After all, if Mary, even in the womb of Her mother, when She could not even desire anything either good or evil, was preserved by God’s grace from every impurity, and then by that grace was preserved from sin even after Her birth, then in what does Her merit consist? If She could have been placed in the state of being unable to sin, and did not sin, then for what did God glorify Her? If She, without any effort, and without having any kind of impulses to sin, remained pure, then why is She crowned more than everyone else? There is no victory without an adversary.”<sup>441</sup>

It is in fact Metropolitan Ephraim who has a problem to which he has chosen the wrong solution. Following the Romanidean-Kalomiran “revolution in theology”, he has seen a big problem in almost every cranny of Orthodox theology: the great demon of Augustinian-scholastic influence. (This is not to say that there have not been harmful influences from the West on Orthodox theology that persist to the present day, only that these have not penetrated to the heart of Orthodox dogmatics as the anti-Augustinians claim.) His wrong solution to this much-exaggerated problem has been to try and get rid of all supposedly “Augustinian” influences, all references to original sin, the “juridical theory” of redemption, etc. But his real problem is that in fact, - at any rate, to judge from this article, - he *does* believe in original sin, - as he says, “we inherit the seed of sin,” - but cannot, so far, be brought to admit this because he believes - wrongly - that original sin is not a patristic teaching. So the right solution to his “problem” would be to abandon the Romanidean-Kalomiran anti-Augustinian revolution, just as he abandoned the Kalomiran crusade for Darwinism some years ago, and agree that, rightly understood, there *is* such a thing as original sin, that Christ delivered us from it through His Sacrifice on the Cross, and that that is why even newborn babes, who have committed no personal sins, must be baptized “for the remission of sins” - the sinful disorder we inherit from our forefather Adam.

August 8/21, 2009.

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<sup>441</sup> St. John Maximovich, *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mary the Birthgiver of God*, Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996, p. 59.

### 30. METROPOLITAN EPHRAIM, BLOOD-SACRIFICES AND NECESSITY

Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston has returned to one of his favourite themes: the bloodthirsty Anselmian doctrine of redemption and its supposed dependence on a belief in blind necessity. Since I have never met a person who believes in either of these theories, I fail to see the relevance of his obsession. However, a little reflection reveals the real reason for the metropolitan's constant carping on these themes: as a faithful disciple of the Romanidean-Kalomiran "revolution in theology", which is boldly seeking to liberate Orthodox theology from "the shackles of the Latin captivity", he wishes to tar all those Orthodox who do not accept this revolution, and adhere to traditional beliefs and modes of expression with regard to our salvation in Christ, as crypto-scholastics and even pagans.

It won't wash. As other Orthodox commentators have pointed out, the Romanidean-Kalomirans are here setting up a straw man.<sup>442</sup> Whatever the Roman Catholic medieval scholastics believed (and I very much doubt that their beliefs were as crude as the metropolitan makes out), this whole approach is completely irrelevant as regards those Orthodox so-called "scholastics" (and they include some very distinguished names, and many Holy Fathers and saints!) whom the metropolitan and his fellow revolutionaries wish to purge from the Orthodox pantheon.

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Let us begin with Necessity. "The Scholastic 'God'," writes Metropolitan Ephraim, "is... just, and he cannot be unjust, because he is what he is and he cannot be otherwise (for you see, the Super-Goddess Necessity is hanging over his head like a domineering and nagging wife, and he must do her bidding)." The metropolitan seems to think that the notion of justice inevitably entails that of blind necessity, that the word "must" cannot be used of God without implying that God is not free, but is ruled by Necessity.

But this is nonsense. The word "must" when applied to the Divine Economy means neither physical necessity (for how can the immaterial God be bound by anything physical?) nor moral necessity (for God is the author of morality, and the Giver of the law is not bound by the law). God is Absolute Freedom, so He is not bound by any kind of necessity in these senses. At the same time, God does not act arbitrarily, or inconsistently. In other words, He is *true to His nature*. So when we say that God "must" act in accordance with love or justice, we are simply asserting that God is God, that He always acts in accordance with His Divine nature, which is loving and just.

Justice is not a kind of cold, abstract principle imposed upon God from without, as it were. As Vladimir Lossky writes: "We should not depict God either as a constitutional monarch subject to a justice that goes beyond Him, or as a tyrant whose whim would create a law without order or objectivity. Justice is not an abstract reality superior to God but an expression of His nature. Just as He freely creates yet manifests

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<sup>442</sup> See, for example, Ephrem Hugh Bensusan's blog, <http://razilazenje.blogspot.com/2006/12/ancestral-vs-original-sin-false.html>

Himself in the order and beauty of creation, so He manifests Himself in His justice: Christ Who is Himself justice, affirms in His fullness God's justice... *God's justice is that man should no longer be separated from God.* It is the restoration of humanity in Christ, the true Adam."<sup>443</sup>

In this connection Lossky's colleague Fr. Georges Florovsky writes illuminatingly: "[Christ] not only prophesied the coming Passion and death, but plainly stated that He must, that He had to, suffer and be killed. He plainly said that 'must', not simply 'was about to'. 'And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again' [Mark 8.31; also Matthew 16.21; Luke 9.22, 24.26]. 'Must' [dei] not just according to the law of this world, in which good and truth is persecuted and rejected, not just according to the law of hatred and evil. The death of our Lord was in full freedom. No one took His life away. He Himself offers His soul by His own supreme will and authority. 'I have authority' - *exousian echo* [John 10.18]. He suffered and died, 'not because He could not escape suffering, but because He chose to suffer,' as it is stated in the Russian Catechism. Chose, not merely in the sense of voluntary endurance or non-resistance, not merely in the sense that He permitted the rage of sin and unrighteousness to be vented on Himself. He not only permitted but *willed* it. He 'must have died according to the *law of truth and love*. In no way was the Crucifixion a passive suicide or simply murder. It was a Sacrifice and an oblation. He had to die. This was not the necessity of this world. This was the necessity of Divine Love..."<sup>444</sup>

"The necessity of Divine Love" ... And the necessity of Divine Justice... There is no other necessity involved...

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Let us turn now to the idea of blood sacrifice. That Christ offered up Himself as a Sacrifice to the Father (indeed, to the whole of the Holy Trinity) as a propitiation for the sins of men is, with the dogma of the Holy Trinity, the central teaching of the Christian Faith, sealed by the Holy Scriptures, confirmed by the Holy Fathers and proclaimed at the Holy Councils of the Orthodox Church (specifically, the Councils of Constantinople in 1156 and 1157). To cast doubt on it, to infer that its language is in some sense scholastic or heretical, is an extraordinarily serious step; it amounts to nothing less than an attempt to rip the heart out of Christianity.

*Of course*, the language of sacrifice is metaphorical - *all* language describing spiritual realities is of necessity metaphorical. *Of course*, when contemplating this reality, we have to purge our minds of the image of fallen men passionately pursuing vengeance and murder. Most Orthodox have no trouble in doing this without being told. Evidently Metropolitan Ephraim and his fellow revolutionaries do have some trouble in this, and would prefer to use some more abstract, squeaky-clean

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<sup>443</sup> Lossky, "Christological Dogma", in *Orthodox Theology*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989, pp. 114-115. My italics (V.M.).

<sup>444</sup> Florovsky, "Redemption", in *Collected Works*, volume 3, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1976, pp. 99-100.

terminology that doesn't remind them of blood and gore. Alright, let us condescend to their aesthetic sensibilities; let them use some different terminology if they want – *provided they mean the same thing as we*, provided they don't throw the dogmatic baby out with the terminological bathwater...

So Metropolitan Ephraim would like to throw out words such as “satisfaction” and “atonement”. Well, we can accommodate him up to a point. Instead of speaking of the “atonement”, or “the satisfaction of God's Justice”, we can speak of “the *propitiation* of God the Righteous Judge”, or something similar, which means precisely the same thing. After all, he can't object to this: “propitiation” is a Biblical word used by none other than the Apostle of love, St. John the Theologian, himself (“God... sent His Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins” (I John 4.10)). But it is clear that while the metropolitan does not express any objection to the word “propitiation”, he doesn't like any reference to justice – hence his very long quotation from St. Isaac the Syrian which appears, to a superficial view, to be denying that God is just towards us. But of course St. Isaac is not denying God's justice: he is simply emphasizing its *paradoxicality*, and its infinitely greater *depth* when compared with our earthly notions of justice.

We cannot remove the notion of justice altogether from our understanding of the dogma of redemption without denying that dogma altogether. After all, as St. John Climacus writes, God is not only love: He is also *justice*.<sup>445</sup> And St. Gregory Palamas (surely the metropolitan doesn't think he too is infected with scholasticism?!) is *constantly* speaking about God's justice in the work of redemption. Consider how many times the word and its cognates appears in the following passage: “The pre-eternal, uncircumscribed and almighty Word and omnipotent Son of God could clearly have saved man from mortality and servitude to the devil without Himself becoming man. He upholds all things by the word of His power and everything is subject to His divine authority. According to Job, He can do everything and nothing is impossible for Him. The strength of a created being cannot withstand the power of the Creator, and nothing is more powerful than the Almighty. But the incarnation of the Word of God was the method of deliverance most in keeping with our nature and weakness, and most appropriate for Him Who carried it out, *for this method had justice on its side, and God does not act without justice*. As the Psalmist and Prophet says, ‘God is righteous and loveth righteousness’ (Psalm 11.7), ‘and there is no unrighteousness in Him’ (Psalm 92.15). Man was *justly* abandoned by God in the beginning as he had first abandoned God. He had voluntarily approached the originator of evil, obeyed him when he treacherously advised the opposite of what God had commanded, and was *justly* given over to him. In this way, through the evil one's envy and the good Lord's *just* consent, death came into the world. Because of the devil's overwhelming evil, death became twofold, for he brought about not just physical but also eternal death.

“As we had been *justly* handed over to the devil's service and subjection to death, it was clearly necessary that the human race's return to freedom and life should be accomplished by God *in a just way*. Not only had man been surrendered to the envious

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<sup>445</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

devil by divine righteousness, but the devil had rejected righteousness and become wrongly enamoured of authority, arbitrary power and, above all, tyranny. He took up arms against *justice* and used his might against mankind. It pleased God that the devil be overcome first by the *justice* against which he continuously fought, then afterwards by power, through the Resurrection and the future Judgement. *Justice before power is the best order of events*, and that force should come after *justice* is the work of a truly divine and good Lord, not of a tyrant....

“A sacrifice was needed to reconcile the Father on High with us and to sanctify us, since we had been soiled by fellowship with the evil one. There had to be a sacrifice which both cleansed and was clean, and a purified, sinless priest... It was clearly necessary for Christ to descend to Hades, but *all these things were done with justice, without which God does not act.*”<sup>446</sup>

This quotation shows clearly that not only is the language of *justice* inseparable from our understanding of redemption, but also that of *sacrifice*. Now Metropolitan Ephraim does not go quite as far as to reject the whole idea of sacrifice (although he does not develop the idea at all): his objection seems to be against the notion of a *blood* sacrifice. And yet Christ did shed His *Blood* in the Sacrifice on Golgotha – not only His life, in the sense that His soul was separated from His Body, but precisely His *Blood*. Moreover, *we literally and not merely symbolically receive that same Blood* in the Sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy, which is called “bloodless”, not because the Blood of Christ is not literally offered and drunk, but because He is not killed again each time the Liturgy is celebrated.

Since this is a vital point, let us quote from the Holy Fathers. First, St. Irenaeus of Lyons: “If this flesh is not saved, then the Lord has not redeemed us by His Blood, and the bread which we break is not a sharing in His Body. For there is no blood except from veins, and from flesh, and from the rest of the substance of human nature which the Word of God came to be, and redeemed by His Blood, as His Apostles also says: ‘In Him we have redemption through His Blood, and the forgiveness of sins’ (Colossians 1.14).”<sup>447</sup> And then St. Gregory the Theologian: “Do not hesitate to pray for me, to be my ambassador, when by your word you draw down the Word, when with a stroke that draws no blood you sever the Body and Blood of the Lord, using your voice as a sword.”<sup>448</sup>

Since St. Gregory the Theologian is such a great authority for Metropolitan Ephraim (as for us), it is worth pointing out those passages where he quite unashamedly uses “scholastic” words such as “sacrifice”, “ransom”, etc. Thus: “He is God, High Priest and Victim.”<sup>449</sup> “He was Victim, but also High Priest; Priest, but also God; He offered as a gift to God [His own] blood, but [by It] He cleansed the whole world; He was

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<sup>446</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 16*, 1,2,21.

<sup>447</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 2, 3.

<sup>448</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Letter 171*.

<sup>449</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 3, Works*, Russian edition, vol. I, pp. 58-59 or vol. I (St. Petersburg), p. 58; *Word 20*, vol. II, p. 235 or vol. I (St. Petersburg), p. 299; *Verses on himself*, vol. IV, p. 247 or vol. II (St. Petersburg), p. 66.

raised onto the Cross, but to the Cross was nailed the sin of all mankind."<sup>450</sup> "He redeems the world by His own blood."<sup>451</sup> "Christ Himself offers Himself to God [the Father], so that He Himself might snatch us from him who possessed us, and so that the Anointed One should be received instead of the one who had fallen, because the Anointer cannot be caught".<sup>452</sup> And again: "He is called 'Redemption' because He set us free from the bonds of sin and gives Himself in exchange for us as a ransom sufficient to cleanse the world."<sup>453</sup>

Another favourite of Metropolitan Ephraim is St. Cyril of Alexandria. So let us see what he says... On Golgotha, says the holy Father, Emmanuel "offered Himself as a sacrifice to the Father not for Himself, according to the irreproachable teaching, but for us who were under the yoke and guilt of sin".<sup>454</sup> "He offered Himself as a holy sacrifice to God and the Father, having bought by His own blood the salvation of all."<sup>455</sup> "For our sakes he was subjected to death, and we were redeemed from our former sins by reason of the slaughter which He suffered for us."<sup>456</sup> "In Him we have been justified, freed from a great accusation and condemnation, our lawlessness has been taken from us: for such was the aim of the economy towards us of Him Who because of us, for our sakes and in our place was subject to death."<sup>457</sup>

We could go on – with St. John Chrysostom and many other Holy Fathers. But the point, I think, is made. The idea that Christ offered Himself in sacrifice – precisely a *blood* sacrifice – to God the Father is proclaimed frequently by the Holy Fathers without any apologies. It goes without saying that this idea does not imply that the Father lusted for His Son's Blood according to pagan ideas of vengeance. He accepted the propitiatory Sacrifice, not out of a fallen human lust for vengeance, but out of love for us, in order that justice be restored between God and man: *perfect love in pursuit of perfect justice*....

Metropolitan Ephraim would like to purge the Gospel of all references to the Divine Justice, and reduce it entirely to the Divine Love. But he can't do it. Love and Justice, though equally attributes of the Divine Nature, do *not* mean the same thing. It is *not* true that "all we need is love": we also need truth and justice. And Love without Justice, like Love without Truth, is just sentimentality.

There is no conflict between justice and love. To say that God should be loving but not just is like saying that the sun should give light but not heat: it is simply not in His nature. It is not in His nature, and it is not in the nature of any created being. For the simple reason that justice *is* the order of created beings, it is the state of being as it was

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<sup>450</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Verses on himself*, vol. IV, p. 245 or vol. II (St. Petersburg), p. 22.

<sup>451</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 29, Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, p. 61 or vol. I (St. Petersburg), p. 427.

<sup>452</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. V, p. 42. Cf. *Homily 20* (PG 35.1068d).

<sup>453</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Sermon 30*, 20.

<sup>454</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part I.

<sup>455</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Interpretation of the Gospel of John; Works of the Holy Fathers*, Sergiev Posad, 1901, vol. 66, pp. 175-176.

<sup>456</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part II.

<sup>457</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part II.

originally created. For, as St. Dionysius the Areopagite writes: "God is named Justice because He satisfies the needs of all things, dispensing due proportion, beauty and order, and defines the bounds of all orders and places each thing under its appropriate laws and orders according to that rule which is most truly just, and because he is the Cause of the independent activity of each. For the Divine Justice orders and assigns limits to all things and keeps all things distinct from and unmixed with one another and gives to all beings that which belongs to each according to the dignity of each. And, to speak truly, all who censure the Divine Justice unknowingly confess themselves to be manifestly unjust. For they say that immortality should be in mortal creatures and perfection in the imperfect and self-motivation in the alter-motivated and sameness in the changeable and perfect power in the weak, and that the temporal should be eternal, things which naturally move immutable, temporal pleasures eternal, and to sum up, they assign the properties of one thing to another. They should know, however, that the Divine justice is essentially true Justice in that it gives to all things that which befits the particular dignity of each and preserves the nature of each in its own proper order and power."<sup>458</sup>

When people say that God is loving but not just, or that His justice demonstrates a lack of love, they do not know what they are saying. For His love is aimed precisely towards the restoration of justice, the restoration of "the nature of each in its own proper order and power", in which alone lies its blessedness. And if the restoration of justice involves suffering, this is not the fault of God, but of His creatures, who freely go against their nature as God created it and thereby create injustice, which can only be abolished through suffering and sacrifice.

Love and justice may be seen as the positive and negative poles respectively of God's Providence in relation to the created universe. Love is the natural, that is, just relationship between God and man. Sin has destroyed love and created injustice. Divine Providence therefore acts to destroy injustice and restore love. We would not need to speak of justice if sin had not destroyed it. But with the entrance of sin, justice is the first necessity - love demands it.

*August 18/31, 2009.*

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<sup>458</sup> St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, VIII.

## 31. METROPOLITAN EPHRAIM ON SALVATION

In the now-famous article of Metropolitan Ephraim, "Sleepers, awake!" reference is made to an article by Archimandrite (later Metropolitan) Philaret of blessed memory entitled "Will the Heterodox be Saved?"<sup>459</sup>

"Essentially, what Saint Philaret (and the Church Fathers) say," writes Metropolitan Ephraim, "is that, in order to judge mankind fairly, our Saviour will give every person who ever lived on earth the opportunity to espouse or reject His teaching. Whether this happens while the person is still living or in Hades - *whenever* it happens - he or she will have the opportunity to make that choice."

I do not find this thought in Metropolitan Philaret's article. What I find is two passages which say something superficially similar. In this article I propose to examine these two passages and discuss the issues they raise.

*In the first passage* the metropolitan writes: "What should one say of those outside the Church, who do not belong to her? Another apostle provides us with an idea: 'For what have I to do to judge them that are without? Do ye not judge them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But then that are without God judgeth' (I Corinthians 5.12-13). God 'will have mercy on whom He will have mercy' (Romans 9.18). It is necessary to mention only one thing: that to 'lead a perfectly righteous life,' as the questioner expressed it, means to live according to the commandments of the Beatitudes - which is beyond the power of one outside the Orthodox Church, without the help of grace which is concealed within it."

It is not quite clear what the metropolitan is saying precisely here. One possible interpretation is: rather than say that the heterodox will not be saved, which is beyond our knowledge, for "those who are outside [the Church] God will judge", it is better to say essentially the same thing in a more positive, less "judgemental" way: that the grace which enables us to fulfil the commandments of God is given to people only in the Orthodox Church.

Whether or not this is a correct interpretation of the metropolitan's words, it will be useful to examine more closely what the passage from I Corinthians 5 that he quotes really means by looking at it in its wider context, and whether it is really relevant to the question whether it is possible for heretics to be saved.

"It is reported continuously," writes the apostle, "that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you..." (5. 1-2).

We can draw two immediate conclusions: (1) this was not a matter of faith, but of morality, and (2) the Corinthians were "looking through their fingers", as the Russian

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<sup>459</sup> Metropolitan Philaret, "Will the Heterodox be Saved?", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 34, no. 6, November-December, 1984, pp. 33-36.

expression goes, at the fornication of their brother; they neither rebuked him nor excommunicated him, as the canons required. The apostle, far from praising them for their “refusal to judge”, reprovved them for being “puffed up” – that is, proud. This again shows that the “refusal to judge” may proceed, not from humility, but from its opposite...

“For I verily,” continues the apostle, “although absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.” (5. 3-7).

We can now draw a third conclusion: (3) the context of this passage is not the rightness or wrongness of “judging” sinners in the sense of *censuring* or *criticizing* them, but rather the rightness or wrongness of “judging” them in the sense of *bringing them to trial*. In the case of a sinner within the Church, the apostle declares that it is necessary to excommunicate him and deliver him to bodily punishment at the hands of Satan for the sake of his salvation through Christ in the Day of Judgement. The setting is a parish or diocesan assembly at which the apostle is not present but at which he presides in spirit. The Corinthians are rebuked once again for pride, “glorying”, because they complacently considered that they could not be infected by the bad example of their sinning brother. But the leaven of sin infects the whole lump, the whole church community, if it is not cast out by the judgement of the community – that is, through the judgement of a properly convened ecclesiastical court. Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us in order to cast out sin from our souls and bodies, and do we then with such vainglorious complacency allow sin to come back into our lives?!

The importance of this passage is shown, as Archbishop Averky points out, by its being placed in the liturgy of Holy and Great Saturday. It teaches that we who are about to receive the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ for the remission of our sins must take special care to cleanse ourselves of all sin, not only personally, but in the community as a whole. It also shows the danger that comes if we do not judge the sinners within our own ranks – the word “judge” being used here in the triple sense of “discern” their sin, “reprove” their sin, and “pass judgement” formally on their sin.

However, continues the apostle, it is quite a different matter with people who sin against us from outside the Church. “For what have I to do with judging those who are outside? Do ye not judge those that are inside?” (5.12-13). Or, as Bishop Theophan the Recluse puts it: “We ourselves judge our own sinners here, and through that, by disposing them to repentance, deliver them from the judgement of God. But the pagans do not have a mediating corrective court: what awaits them without mediation is the judgement of God.”<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Bishop Theophan, *Tolkovanie Poslanij Sv. Apostola Pavla*, Moscow, 1911, 2002, pp. 145-146.

Nor, says the apostle, should we take such sinners to a civil court. For “does any of you dare, if he has something against another person, to go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints [the Christians]? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (6.1-2). Or, as St. Theophan the Recluse puts it: “Having spoken about the inner Church court in spiritual matters, the apostle wishes that everyday matters also should be examined by the Christians themselves without taking them to pagan courts... If court justice is necessary, then they must seek it before righteous people – the holy Christians... The Christians are holy, and by their example of faith and love they will be the accusers of the impious world at the Judgement of Christ, so are they really unworthy now to examine their own affairs that are of little importance?” (p. 146)

We may conclude that this passage is not relevant to the question whether it is right or wrong to say that heretics go to hell. For the context is not sins against the faith, but moral sins, and the “judging” in question is not condemnation to hell, but the taking of a sinner to trial in an ecclesiastical or civil court. Moreover, the only kind of “judging” that the apostle is explicitly condemning is the taking of pagans to trial in a civil court.

*In the second passage* the metropolitan writes: “In attempting to answer this question [can the heterodox be saved?], it is necessary, first of all, to recall that in His Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ Himself mentions but one state of the human soul which unfailingly leads to perdition – i.e. blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12.1-32). The same text makes it clear that even blasphemy against the Son of Man – i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God Himself may be forgiven men, as it may be uttered in error or in ignorance and, subsequently may be covered by conversion and repentance (an example of such a converted and repentant blasphemer is the Apostle Paul. (See Acts 26.11 and I Timothy 1.13.) If, however, a man opposes the Truth which he clearly apprehends by his reason and conscience, he becomes blind and commits spiritual suicide, for he thereby likens himself to the devil, who believes in God and dreads Him, yet hates, blasphemes and opposes Him.

“Thus, man’s refusal to accept the Divine Truth and his opposition thereto makes him a son of damnation. Accordingly, in sending His disciples to preach, the Lord told them: ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned’ (Mark 16.16), for the latter heard the Lord’s Truth and was called upon to accept it, yet refused, thereby inheriting the damnation of those who ‘believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness’ (II Thessalonians 2.12).

“The Holy Orthodox Church is the repository of the divinely revealed Truth in all its fullness and fidelity to apostolic Tradition. Hence, he who leaves the Church, who intentionally and consciously falls away from it, joins the ranks of its opponents and becomes a renegade as regards apostolic Tradition. The Church dreadfully anathematized such renegades, in accordance with the words of the Saviour Himself (Matthew 18.17) and of the Apostle Paul (Galatians 1.8-9), threatening them with eternal damnation and calling them to return to the Orthodox fold. It is self-evident, however, that sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members

of other non-Orthodox confessions, cannot be considered renegades or heretics – i.e. those who *knowingly* pervert the truth... They have been born and raised and are living according to the creed which they have inherited, just as do the majority of you who are Orthodox; in their lives there has not been a moment of *personal and conscious renunciation of Orthodoxy*. The Lord ‘Who will have all men to be saved’ (I Timothy 2.4), and ‘Who enlightens every man born into the world’ (John 1.43), undoubtedly is leading them also towards salvation in His own way.”

Confusion may be caused by the holy metropolitan’s unusual definition of the word “heretic” here, which is much narrower than the usual definition. The usual definition is very simple: a heretic is a person who believes a heretical teaching, that is, a teaching contrary to the Orthodox Faith – regardless of whether he was brought up in the truth or not, or has consciously renounced Orthodoxy or not. “Sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members of other non-Orthodox confessions” *are* heretics, according to the usual definition. They are not as guilty as those who have known the truth but have personally and consciously renounced it, who are not only heretics but also *apostates* (renegades). But they are nevertheless in error, heterodox rather than Orthodox, and therefore cannot receive the sanctification that comes from the knowledge of the truth (John 17.18).

The metropolitan says that “the Lord is leading them also to salvation”, but he does not say that they *are* saved. As the proverb says: “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink”. In the same way, the Spirit of truth tries to bring all men to the truth, but only a minority respond to His call – “Many are called, but few are chosen”.

If a person dies outside the True Church, then we can be sure that he goes to hell (in the sense of hades, not gehenna) immediately after death. This we know from the Lord’s categorical insistence that he who is not baptized cannot enter the Kingdom of God (John 3.5). The only exceptions to this rule are those who confess the faith and are killed for it before having a chance to be baptized – they are counted as having been baptized in their own blood.

However, what we cannot be sure about is whether these words of the Lord admit the possibility of salvation *later*. Metropolitan Ephraim and Fr. Panteleimon have cited cases from the *Lives of the Saints* in which a heretic is cast into hades but is then saved through the prayers of the Church – the case of the iconoclast Emperor Theophilus is the best-known. These rare and exceptional, but nevertheless genuine cases prove: (1) that heretics *are* cast into hades after death, but (2) that not all of them *stay* there forever, but some are saved from hades through the prayers of the Church.

Even people who are not heretics in faith, and want to be baptized in the Orthodox Church, but are prevented from doing so by death, do *not* enter the Kingdom of God immediately after death. This is proved by the story in Sulpicius Severus’ *Life* of St. Martin of Tours of a catechumen who died when St. Martin was on a journey. Having returned from his trip, the distraught St. Martin raised him from the dead by his prayers and immediately baptized him. The catechumen later used to recount how, “when he was out of the body, he had been brought before the tribunal of the Judge

and had heard the dismal sentence of consignment to a place of gloom among the generality of men. Then two angels had represented to the Judge that he was the man for whom Martin was praying. He was therefore ordered to be taken back by those same angels and to be restored to Martin and to his former life..."<sup>461</sup> This case proves: (1) that not only heretics, but also unbaptized catechumens are cast into hades after death, but (2) that not all of them stay there forever, but some are saved through the prayers of the Church.

In accordance with this is the story of the nineteenth-century Russian ascetic Athanasia, who in a vision saw a sea of hands of unbaptized babies. They were in darkness, but she was given to understand that at the Second Coming of Christ they would see the Light. This case proves: (1) that not only heretics, and not only unbaptized catechumens, but also unbaptized babies are cast into hades after death (not into a place of torment, but a place of darkness), but (2) that they will not stay there forever.

So there is hope that some people who die outside the Church will be saved *eventually* - perhaps at the Last Judgement. And this may be what the metropolitan was saying. But this in no way contradicts the truth that at the particular judgement of the soul immediately after death the souls of those dying outside the Church are sent to hades...

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<sup>461</sup> *Life of Martin*, in Thomas Noble and Thomas Head (eds.), *Soldiers of Christ*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1995, p. 11.

## 32. FREUDIANISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Great sea-changes in human thought are often accompanied by changes in the honour accorded to particular human faculties. The Renaissance, for example, exalted *reason*; hence the heretical mind-set that exaggerates the power of reason that we know as *rationalism*. The Romantic era, on the other hand, tended to downgrade reason in favour of the irrational faculties of *will*, *imagination* and *emotion*, which in artistic geniuses were considered capable of attaining higher truths than those attained by philosophers and scientists.<sup>462</sup> Another human faculty that came into prominence during the Romantic era was *memory*, both collective and individual. The nineteenth century marks the heyday of *historiography* and *historicism* and the belief that the truth about a man, a nation or an epoch is to be discovered above all in his or its *history*: "In my beginning is my end".

Freud inherited all three trends: rationalist, romantic-irrationalist and historicist. Thus he considered himself first and foremost a rationalist and a scientist. And if he had been able to read later assessments of his work, he would probably have been upset most by the fact that (in Anglo-Saxon countries, at any rate) he is not considered to have been a scientist at all insofar as his methods were not objectively empirical and quantitative. But even if he personally valued reason above all, he reveals his romantic heritage in his discovery (if it is truly that) of the enormous extent to which our apparently rational thinking is dominated by the *irrational*, by that huge, dark reservoir of repressed feelings, desires and memories which he called the unconscious and which is revealed especially in dreams. His *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), which A.N. Wilson calls "one of the most extraordinary and revolutionary texts ever to come from a human brain", is sometimes seen as heralding the beginning of a truly modern consciousness. It "expounded the theory on which all subsequent psychoanalysis was based, even or especially those psychoanalytical theories which reacted most violently against it: namely, that the human mind consists of what might be described as two layers. With the outer layer, of our conscious mind, we reason and form judgements. In reasonable, well-balanced individuals, the pains and sorrows of childhood have been worked through, put behind them. With the unhealthy, however, neurotic or hysterical individuals, there is beneath the surface of life a swirling cauldron of suppressed memories in which lurk the traumas (the Greek word for wounds) of early experiences. Under hypnosis, or in dreams, we re-enter the world of the subconscious and with the care of a helpful analyst we can sometimes revisit the scenes of our early miseries and locate the origins of our psychological difficulties...

"On the publication of *Die Traumdeutung*, there were many people who, if not actually tempted to burn the book, must have found its contents shocking. 'If *Oedipus the King* is able to move modern man no less deeply than the Greeks who were Sophocles' contemporaries, the solution can only be that the effect of Greek tragedy does not depend on the contrast between fate and human will, but is to be sought in the distinctive nature of the subject-matter exemplifying this contrast. There must be a voice within us that is ready to acknowledge the compelling force of fate in *Oedipus*... His fate moves us only because it could have been our own as well, because at our

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<sup>462</sup> A.N. Wilson, *After the Victorians*, London: Hutchinson, 2005, pp. 3-4.

birth the oracle pronounced the same curse upon us as it did on him. It was perhaps ordained that we should all of us turn our first sexual impulses towards our mother, our first hatred and violent wishes against our father. Our dreams convince us of it. King Oedipus, who killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, is only the fulfillment of our childhood wish. But, more fortunate than he, we have since succeeded, at least insofar as we have not become psychoneurotics, in detaching our sexual impulses from our mothers, and forgetting our jealousy of our fathers.' Dr Freud, further, told his Vienna lecture audiences: 'The dream of having sexual intercourse with the mother is dreamed by many today as it was then, and they recount it with the same indignation and amazement [as Oedipus].'"<sup>463</sup>

Freud called the conscious layer of the mind the "ego", and the unconscious layer – the "id". Later he added a third layer, that of the "super-ego", a kind of internalized social conscience which forces the memories of childhood sexual experiences and conflicts into the "id". The process whereby these memories are forced by the "super-ego" into the "id" is called *repression*. For Freud, the "super-ego", is no less irrational in origin than the "id". The task of psychoanalysis is to strengthen the "ego", the sole outpost of rationality in the soul, against the irrational pressure of *both* the "id" and the "super-ego". This was not to say that the "super-ego" was rejected completely – as Freud argued in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), submission to it, at least most of the time, is the price we pay for our deliverance from primitive savagery and our enjoyment of civilization. But it was recognized as being deprived of any higher or other-worldly origin. It was a faculty owing its origins to childhood conflicts and traumas and no more rational in itself than the "id" which it censored and repressed.

Another way in which Freud showed his romantic heritage was the significance he attached to art. Thus already in his early obituary on Charcot, written in 1893, he clearly saw the relationship between "the poet's eye" and the gift of clinical diagnosis.<sup>464</sup> He acknowledged his debt to the Greek tragedians, Goethe and Shakespeare; in his *Leonardo* he felt the need to forestall the criticism that he had merely written "a psycho-analytic novel"<sup>465</sup>; and he included literary history and literary criticism among the disciplines to be studied in the ideal Faculty of Psychoanalysis. According to Philip Rieff, the fact that "Freud owed most to Sophocles and Shakespeare (cf. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, SE IV, Part I, 264) and least to the scientific psychology of his era shows us how dangerous scientific training can be to the mental life of the scientist when poetry is excluded from what is conceived as significant in his training. William James said this best, in the conclusion to his Gifford Lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: 'Humbug is humbug, even though it bear the scientific name, and the total expression of human experience, as I view it objectively, invincibly urges me beyond the narrow "scientific" bounds' (London, rev. ed., 1902, p. 519)."<sup>466</sup>

Norman Holland writes: "What Freud admires in the writer are his powers as a seer, his ability to grasp intuitively truths the psychologist gets at only by hard work. As

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<sup>463</sup> Wilson, *After the Victorians*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>464</sup> Freud, S., "Charcot", *Standard Edition*, London: Hogarth, vol. III, pp. 11-23.

<sup>465</sup> Freud, S., *Leonardo*, London: Penguin Books, 1957.

<sup>466</sup> Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer*, University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 385, footnote.

early as 1895, he wrote, 'Local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight'. 'Creative writers,' he wrote in *Delusions and Dreams*, 'are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream'. Writers could see, for example, the 'necessary conditions for loving' before psychologists could. Shakespeare had understood the meaning of slips of the tongue long before Freud, and not only that, he had assumed that his audiences would understand, too, The writer, however, knows these things 'through intuition - really from a delicate self-observation', while Freud himself had to 'uncover' them through 'laborious work'.<sup>467</sup>

Freud defined the difference between conscious and unconscious contents in terms of the element of *naming* or verbalization which belongs to the conscious content alone: "What we have permissibly called the conscious presentation of the object can now be split up into the presentation of the word and the presentation of the thing... We now seem to know all at once what the difference is between a conscious and an unconscious presentation. The two are not, as we supposed, different registrations of the same content in different psychical localities, nor yet different functional states of cathexis in the same locality; but the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the representation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone...

"Now, too, we are in a position to state precisely what it is that repression denies to the rejected presentation in the transference neuroses: what it denies to the presentation is *translation into words* which shall remain attached to the object. A presentation which is not put into words, or a psychical act which is not hypercatheted, remains thereafter in the Ucs in a state of repression."<sup>468</sup>

Dreams, according to Freud, are a kind of language for repressed presentations; we are to read them as we read a poem, treating the techniques of "dream work" - displacement, condensation, symbolization, dramatization, etc. - as a critic might treat the devices of poetry, such as metaphor and allegory. According to the literary critic Lionel Trilling, Freud's greatest achievement was his discovery that "poetry is indigenous to the very constitution of the mind", which is "in the greater part of its tendency exactly a poetry-making organ". Thus psychoanalysis is, in effect, "a science of tropes, of metaphor and its variants, synecdoche and metonymy."<sup>469</sup>

Dreams are like the first draft of a poem, the expression of an unconscious content in a semi-conscious form. More work needs to be done on them in order to bring them into the full light of consciousness, work which the patient must carry out with help from the psychotherapist. In this way psychotherapy is a kind of artistic collaboration,

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<sup>467</sup> Holland, N., "Freud and the Poet's Eye", in Mannheim, L. & Mannheim, E., *Hidden Patterns: Studies in Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*, New York: Macmillan, 1966, p. 153.

<sup>468</sup> Freud, S., "The Unconscious", 1915, *Standard Edition*, vol. XIV, pp. 201-202. My italics (V.M.).

<sup>469</sup> Trilling, L., "Freud and Literature", in *The Liberal Imagination*, New York: Doubleday, 1947.

with the therapist encouraging his patient to do as Shakespeare exhorted in his *Sonnet 77*:

*Look what thy memory cannot contain  
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find  
Those children nurs'd, deliver'd from thy brain,  
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.*

The importance of memory in Freudianism brings us to its third major characteristic: historicism. For the psychoanalyst's work in unearthing the unconscious can be compared to that of the historian or archaeologist. Just as the latter discovers and interprets old documents that cast light on the present, so the psychoanalyst unearths significant events and strata in the patient's life, especially his early sexual history, that have been repressed from his conscious memory but continue to colour and distort his present behaviour. In his theory of the collective archetypes, Freud's most famous disciple, Karl Jung, extended the importance of memory in psychoanalysis still further into the past, not only of the individual, but also of the race. And Freud himself, in his later works such as *Moses and Monotheism*, pointed to certain hypothetical events in the history of the tribe, such as the killing of the leader, that supposedly continue to influence all succeeding generations.

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In order to understand the relationship between Freudianism and Orthodox Christianity, we need to distinguish between Freud's purely psychological ideas and his philosophical presuppositions. Most of Freud's most purely psychological ideas, such as the Oedipus Complex, have not been confirmed by empirical research. "Every particular idea [of Freud] is wrong," says psychiatrist Peter D. Kramer: "the universality of the Oedipus complex, penis envy, infantile sexuality..."<sup>470</sup> This is not to say that these Freudian phenomena are *never* found, only that they do not play that vast role in the life of the soul that Freud attributed to them.

An exception to this rule, according to C.S. Lewis, is the Freudian concept of *repression*, which is valid. But repression, says Lewis, must not be confused with *suppression*. "Psychology teaches us that 'repressed' sex is dangerous. But 'repressed' is here a technical term: it does not mean 'suppressed' in the sense of 'denied' or 'resisted'. A repressed desire or thought is one which has been thrust into the subconscious (usually at a very early age) and can now come before the mind only in a disguised and unrecognisable form. Repressed sexuality does not appear to the patient to be sexuality at all. When an adolescent or an adult is engaged in resisting a conscious desire, he is not dealing with a repression nor is he in the least danger of creating a repression. On the contrary, those who are seriously attempting chastity are more conscious, and soon know a great deal more about their own sexuality than anyone else..."<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Kramer, in Jerry Adler, "Freud in our Midst", *Newsweek*, March 27, 2006, p. 37.

<sup>471</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, London: Fount Paperbacks, 1977, pp. 91-92.

Christians would agree with Freud that repression is bad for the soul, just as any refusal to face up to the facts about oneself is bad; whereas suppression, in the sense of self-restraint or self-denial is an essential element of the Christian life. In this respect psychoanalysis has something in common with the Christian practice of the confession of sins. Insofar as psychoanalysis helps one to unearth hidden traumas and shine the light of reason on the irrational depths of the soul, it should not be considered harmful.

The suppressing mechanism, according to the Freudians, is the “super-ego”. But insofar as the super-ego is the internalization of the social conscience of contemporary society, with all its pride and prejudice, it cannot be identified with the Christian *conscience*, which is “the eye of God in the soul of man”. The super-ego is irrational in origin, and therefore is by no means necessarily in accordance with the interests of the “true self”, or “ego”. But the conscience is not irrational: it is the supra-rational revelation of God’s will. It is therefore very closely linked with the true self, with the image and likeness of God in man, and its judgements cannot be ignored or rejected by reason, but must be accepted as having objective validity. Moreover, since the judgements of the conscience are *moral* judgements – that is, they declare this or that feeling of thought to be morally right or wrong, they are incompatible with the Freudian presupposition that the contents of the “id” are *morally neutral*. Nor do they agree with the idea – which belongs less to Freud than to the Freudians and popular interpretations of his ideas<sup>472</sup> – that the suppression (as opposed to the repression) of the “id” is harmful.

Now psychoanalysis, according to Lewis, says nothing very useful about normal feelings, but does help to remove abnormal or perverted feelings. “Thus fear of things that are really dangerous would be an example of the first kind [of feelings]: an irrational fear of cats or spiders would be an example of the second kind. The desire of a man for a woman would be of the first kind: the perverted desire of a man for a man would be of the second... What psychoanalysis undertakes to do is to remove the abnormal feelings, that is, give the man better raw material for his acts of choice; morality is concerned with the acts of choice themselves.”<sup>473</sup>

However, this optimistic view of the potential of psychoanalysis is unwarranted. On the one hand, as we have seen, many of its theoretical constructs have been rejected, and so the occasional successes of therapy may be attributable, not to the truth of the theory itself, but rather to other factors having nothing to do with psychoanalysis as such – for example, the love of the therapist for his patient. On the other hand, and still more fundamentally, there exists no criterion within Freudianism for distinguishing the normal from the abnormal. Homosexuality, for example, may have been judged abnormal by Freud and his contemporaries, as it has always been

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<sup>472</sup> Freud has been unjustly accused of opening the floodgates to all kinds of immorality. He never preached free love or abnormal love in the manner of his contemporaries H.G. Wells and D.H. Lawrence. Jessie Chambers recounts how D.H. Lawrence once told her: “You know, Jessie, I’ve always loved mother.” “I know you have,” I replied. “I don’t mean that,” he answered, “I’ve loved her – like a lover – that’s why I could never love you.” (in A.N. Wilson, *After the Victorians*, London: Hutchinson, 2005, p. 73).

<sup>473</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

judged abnormal by Christians. But there is no good reason, within Freud's theory, for considering it abnormal.

Whereas Christianity possesses a detailed model of the normal man – that is, the saint, believes in a God-given conscience, and affirms that human nature has been corrupted through original sin, Freudianism possesses no such model, and believes in conscience (which, as we have seen, is not the same as the “super-ego”) nor in original sin. It can have no reason for declaring a certain feeling or desire good or evil, normal or abnormal, so long as its presence does not create conflicts with other psychical processes. And this is another reason for concluding that while Freudians may not actively encourage immorality, their attitude to life is essentially *amoral*.

Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) makes this point well: “The criterion of the norm for every person in psychoanalysis is the person himself with all his sins and inadequacies, in a condition of calm after the overcoming of all conflicts arising within his consciousness. In psychoanalysis they try to overcome and remove conflicts by putting the conscience to sleep and reconciling the person with the sin that lives in him. Therefore the very profound critic of psychoanalysis, Arved Runestam, in his book *Psychoanalysis and Christianity* (Augustiana Press, 1958) notes with reason that psychoanalysis in theory and practice is in general a powerful proclaimer of the right to a life directly ruled by instinct. ‘One cannot say,’ he writes, ‘that this signifies the recognition of morality as an evil in itself. But morality is represented rather as an inescapable evil than a positive good’ (p. 37)...”<sup>474</sup>

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Now some Orthodox writers have purported to find in Freud's concept of the “id” a useful analogy, if not more, to the Orthodox doctrine of original sin. For example, Mikhail Dronov writes: “Man's consciousness represents one of his natural energies, but when it is cut off, there remains only the experience accumulated by the personality, which constitutes as it were the content of the personality. This is what is called ‘the unconscious’. The essence of original sin consists in the fact that, even without becoming conscious of it (that it, acting beyond the control of the consciousness), man makes an egoistical sinful choice. He thereby breaks the first-created bond between his personality and his common human nature, destroying its unity and as it were walling off from it his own small individual part.

“If man sins for the most part unconsciously, then repentance – the overcoming of sin – can only be in consciousness!”<sup>475</sup>

Now we have already noted that there is a certain analogy between the psychotherapeutic technique of psychoanalysis and the Christian practice of confession. In both cases, an attempt is made to speak openly about certain acts, feelings and desires which up to now the patient/sinner has been too ashamed to

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<sup>474</sup> Grabbe, “Pravoslavnoe vospitanoe detej v nashi dni”, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site.print.php?act=lib&id=846>.

<sup>475</sup> Dronov, “Otets PsikhAnaliza protiv Svyatykh Otsov”, *Pravoslavnaia Beseda*, N 4, 1998; <http://www.psylib.ukrweb.net/books/dronm01.htm>, p. 4.

discuss/confess, or which he has altogether forgotten or repressed. In both cases, moreover, it is assumed that the act of speaking openly about this material is beneficial for the patient/sinner; the shining of the light of consciousness and reason on the repressed or forgotten material drives away the darkness from it and destroys its harmful influence on the rest of the psyche.

However, it should be immediately obvious that the analogy does not go very far. First, the Christian penitent confesses what he and his confessor consider to be *sins*, while, as we have seen, psychoanalysis does not use the language of sin at all. True, the patient may express guilt feelings; but psychoanalysis speaks only about (neurotic) *diseases* and eschews all “judgemental” language; the analyst will be much more likely to view the expression of guilt feelings as a symptom of an illness that has to be removed - that is, the symptom as well as the illness - than as an objective statement of fact. Of course, certain guilt feelings are inappropriate because they are the product of an internalized social conscience that is merely conventional, that is, which does not correspond to God’s measure of sin. Nevertheless, there is a “hard core” of guilt feelings which the Christian will recognize as being authentic, that is, corresponding to God’s own measure, but which the analyst, since he believes neither in God nor in sin, will continue to regard as inauthentic and diseased. For, as Dronov writes, “the positivist and Freudian understanding of ‘the unconscious’ in man’s psyche substantially differs from the patristic one. The positivists do not notice the moral quality of that content of the personality which he calls ‘the unconscious’.”<sup>476</sup>

Secondly, while the analyst regards the light of consciousness and rational discussion as the means of destroying the darkness of neurosis, the Christian regards the healing power to be the light of *God* Who alone forgives men their sins and grants them healing. The analyst does not heal so much as help the patient to heal himself by becoming conscious of his inner state. But for the Christian, consciousness of his inner state is not enough: he must also *condemn* that which is sinful in that state, *repent* of it, and ask God to *destroy* it. It is precisely *self-condemnation*, and not simply “self-understanding” that alone can relieve the penitent of his guilt, for “he who condemns himself will not be judged” - neither by his own conscience, not by God.

Moreover, confession before God and his spiritual father is only part of what the Christian has to do in order to achieve full healing. The grace of God is drawn into the soul through a whole range of ascetic practices, including fasting, abstinence, prayer and active love for one’s neighbour. These practices, as Bishop Gregory writes, “carried out not only consciously but also subconsciously (that is ‘prayer of the heart’), concentrate grace-filled experiences, thoughts and feelings in the subconscious sphere...”

Psychoanalysis, however, “usually looks at abstinence only from” the point of view of “an imposed or external law or implacable rules of decency”. “For it the aim, without going into a moral evaluation of a man’s passions, is to remove the suffering elicited by the struggle inside him, to pacify him, reconcile him with the passion living in him, pointing out to him a path on which he can peacefully live in society without

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<sup>476</sup> Dronov, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

transgressing its external laws of decency, but at the same time without condemning his passion and without rejecting it.

“The overcoming of passions and sin is recognised as necessary only insofar as the man who gives himself up to them unrestrainedly harms his own health. That is, the passions are not subjected to extirpation. The limitation of their satisfaction is dictated in essence not so much by higher moral principles as by practical considerations.

“Psychoanalysis preaches a life directed by the instincts, the suppression of which in its eyes is an abnormal phenomenon and one that threatens to engender dangerous internal conflicts...”<sup>477</sup>

The Jewish rabbi Joshua Liebman, whose book *Peace of Mind*, published in 1946, topped the *New York Times* bestseller list for 58 weeks, a record, compared analysis and the confessional, and came to the conclusion that analysis was superior in producing peace of mind. “‘The confessional only touches the surface of a man’s life,’ he said, while the spiritual advice of the church throws no light on the causes that lead someone to confession in the first place. Moreover, priestly strictures about confessants showing more ‘willpower’ were ‘ineffective counsels’.

“On the other hand, psychotherapy was, Liebman said, designed to help someone work on his (or her) own problems without ‘borrowing’ the conscience of a priest, and ‘offers change through self-understanding, not self-condemnation’. And this was the unique way to inner peace. The human self, Liebman insisted, was not a gift from God, as traditionally taught, but an achievement.

“The religion of the future, he declared, must poach from the psychotherapist’s armoury. He told his readers that henceforth it should not be ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’ but ‘Thou shalt love thyself properly and then thou wilt be able to love thy neighbour’.”

We see here the beginning of that “psychology of self-worship” and self-obsession that became so dominant in the therapeutic culture of the 1960s and 70s. Liebman is as wrong as it is possible to be. First of all, it is the therapist, not the priest, who only touches the surface of a man’s life. Deep in man, deeper even than his passions, is his God-given conscience, which, as we have seen, is not a socially indoctrinated construct, but the eye of God in the soul of man. When a man transgresses his conscience he feels guilt, and no amount of psychotherapy can relieve him of that guilt but only the confession of his sins before God and a priest (whose conscience he does not “borrow”, although he may well check his conscience against the priest’s).

Orthodoxy agrees with Freudianism in teaching that much of the suffering in the souls of men is caused by a diseased and disordered functioning of the incensive and appetitive passions. However, the two systems differ in their understanding of the causes of this disorder. Freudianism attributes it to childhood traumas, while considering the passions themselves to be “normal” and undiseased. Orthodoxy says

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<sup>477</sup> Grabbe, *op. cit.*

little about childhood traumas, attributing most to the original trauma that took place in the childhood of the human race, in the Garden of Eden. *That* was the original sin, which spread like a disease, changing the some of the passions themselves from innocent to guilty.

Moreover, Orthodoxy considers not only the incensive and appetitive passions to be diseased and infected by original sin, but also the reasoning faculty. In this respect, Orthodoxy differs not only from Freudianism, but also from the whole western rationalist tradition going back as far as Thomas Aquinas, who regarded the rational mind of man as not subject to original sin. It is precisely because our mind, too, is diseased and sinful that we cannot heal ourselves but need the grace of God.

It follows that while a happy childhood in a peaceful environment could conceivably prevent the neuroses that are the main object of the psychoanalyst's study, this could in no way remove the original sin that is the object of the Christian's lamentation and which is inherited from Adam at the very moment of conception. For "in sins did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 50.5), says David, and "even from the womb the sinner is estranged" (Psalm 57.3).

True healing from original sin comes to the Christian only through the transformation and redirection of the passions themselves to their original holy object; and this is possible only through the granting of God's grace in Holy Baptism and a life lived completely in accordance with God's commandments.

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Freudianism came to prominence in the first decade of the twentieth century, as the Victorian world was dying and the great totalitarian dictators Hitler and Stalin were growing up. And its most lasting achievement perhaps lies in the light that it cast on the two men. For while no purely psychological hypothesis can fully explain the extremes of evil that the Russian revolution threw up, it is legitimate to seek a *partial* explanation of the actions of a man like Stalin in his early childhood.

Thus the historian Alan Bullock agrees with Erich Fromm that Stalin, like Hitler, was a narcissist: "'Narcissism' is a concept originally formulated by Freud in relation to early infancy, but one which is now accepted more broadly to describe a personality disorder in which the natural development of relationships to the external world has failed to take place. In such a state only the person himself, *his* needs, feelings and thoughts, everything and everybody pertaining to *him* are experienced as fully real, while everybody and everything else lacks reality or interest.

"Fromm argues that some degree of narcissism can be considered an occupational illness among political leaders in proportion to their conviction of a providential mission and their claim to infallibility of judgement and a monopoly of power. When such claims are raised to the level demanded by a Hitler or a Stalin at the height of their power, any challenge will be perceived as a threat to their private image of themselves as much as to their public image, and they will react by going to any lengths to suppress it.

“So far psychiatrists have paid much less attention to Stalin than to Hitler. Lack of evidence is part of the reason. There has been no parallel in the case of the Soviet Union to the capture of documents and interrogation of witnesses that followed the defeat of Germany. But more important is the striking contrast in temperament and style between the two men: the flamboyant Hitler, displaying a lack of restraint and extravagance of speech which for long made it difficult for many to take him seriously, in contrast to the reserved Stalin, who owed his rise to power to his success, not in exploiting, but in concealing his personality, and was underestimated for the opposite reason – because many failed to recognize his ambition and ruthlessness. Nor surprisingly, it is the first rather than the second who has caught the psychiatrists’ attention. All the more interesting then is the suggestion that underlying the contrast there was a common narcissistic obsession with themselves.

“There is one other insight, which Stalin’s American biographer, Robert Tucker, has adopted from Karen Horney’s work on neurosis. He suggests that his father’s brutal treatment of Stalin, particularly the beatings which he inflicted on the boy, and on the boy’s mother in his presence, produced the basic anxiety, the sense of being isolated in a hostile world, which can lead a child to develop a neurotic personality. Searching for firm ground on which to build an inner security, someone who in his childhood had experienced such anxiety might naturally search for inner security by forming an idealistic image of himself and then adopting this as his true identity. ‘From then on his energies are invested in the increasing effort to prove the ideal self in action and gain others’ affirmation of it.’ In Stalin’s case, this fits his identification with the Caucasian outlaw-hero, whose name he assumed, and later with Lenin, the revolutionary hero, on whom he fashioned his own ‘revolutionary persona’, with the name of Stalin, ‘man of steel’, which echoed Lenin’s own pseudonym...

“The earliest recorded diagnosis of Stalin as paranoid appears to have been made in December 1927, when an international scientific conference met in Moscow. A leading Russian neuropathologist, Professor Vladimir Bekhterev from Leningrad, made a great impression on the foreign delegates and attracted the attention of Stalin, who asked Bekhterev to pay him a visit. After the interview (22 December 1927) Bekhterev told his assistant Mnukhin that Stalin was a typical case of severe paranoia [more precisely: “a paranoiac with a withered arm”] and that a dangerous man was now at the head of the Soviet Union. The fact that Bekhterev was suddenly taken ill and died while still in his hotel has inevitably led to the suspicion that Stalin had him poisoned. Whether this is true or not, when the report of Bekhterev’s diagnosis was repeated in *Liternaturnaia Gazeta* in September 1988, it was accepted as correct by a leading Soviet psychiatrist, Professor E.A. Lichko.”<sup>478</sup>

And yet Donald Rayfield may be right that “psychopaths of Stalin’s order arise so rarely in history that forensic psychiatry has few insights to offer”.<sup>479</sup> In such cases, psychiatry needs to be supplemented with demonology...

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<sup>478</sup> Bullock, *Stalin and Hitler*, London: HarperCollins, 1991, pp. 10-12, 401.

<sup>479</sup> Rayfield, “A Georgian Caliban”, Review of *Stalin, vol. I: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* by Stephen Kotkin, *Literary Review*, November, 2014, p. 25.

Again, historians have found a limited usefulness in Freud's ideas about Eros and Thanatos in their attempts to explain the unprecedented bloodshed of the first half of the twentieth century. Thus Niall Ferguson writes that in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud "suggested that 'beside the instinct preserving the organic substance and binding it into ever larger units, there must exist another in antithesis to this, which would seek to dissolve these units and reinstate their antecedent inorganic state; that is to say, the death instinct as well as Eros.' It was the interaction of the death instinct and the erotic instinct which he now saw as the key to the human psyche:

'The tendency to aggression is an innate, independent, instinctual disposition in man, and ... constitutes the most powerful obstacle to culture... Eros... aims at binding together single human individuals, then families, then tribes, races, nations into one great unity, that of humanity. Why this has to be done we do not know; it is simply the work of Eros. These masses of men must be bound to one another libidinally; necessity alone, the advantages of common work, would not hold them together.

'The natural instinct of aggressiveness in man, the hostility of each against us all of all against each one, opposes this programme of civilization. The instinct of aggression is the derivative and main representative of the death instinct we have found alongside Eros, sharing his rule over the earth. And now, it seems to me, the meaning of the evolution of culture is no longer a riddle to us. It must present to us the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instincts of life and the instincts of destruction.'

"Thought it is now fashionable to sneer at Freud, there is something to be said for this interpretation – at least with respect to the behaviour of men at war. Today's neo-Darwinian genetic determinism may be more scientifically respectable than Freud's mixture of psychoanalysis and amateur anthropology, but the latter seems better able to explain the readiness of millions of men to spend four and a quarter years killing and being killed. (It is certainly hard to see how the deaths of so many men who had not yet married and fathered children could possibly have served the purpose of Dawkins's 'selfish genes'.) In particular, there is a need to take seriously Freud's elision of the desire to kill – 'the destructive instinct' – and the lack of desire not to be killed – the striving of 'every living being... to work its ruin and reduce life to its primal state of inert matter.'

"There is some evidence to support Freud's thesis. In June 1914 – before the war in which he would fight had ever begun – the 'Vorticist' artist Wyndham Lewis wrote:

'Killing somebody must be the greatest pleasure in existence: either like killing yourself without being interfered with by the instinct of self-preservation – or exterminating the instinct of self-preservation itself.'"<sup>480</sup>

But there is a problem in seeing Thanatos as an integral part of human nature. Orthodox anthropology has much to say about the thinking, desiring and aggressive

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<sup>480</sup> Ferguson, *The Pity of War, 1914-1918*, London: Penguin, 1999, pp. 358-359.

faculties of man, and sees them all as positive in their original creation. Even aggression is good if it is turned to its original object – evil and the evil one. Only when, as a result of original sin, it is turned to hatred of man and a suicidal urge to destroy oneself, can we say that it has become evil. However, this originally good, but perverted force should not be seen, as the Freudians see it, as an ineradicable part of human nature as it was first created...

Freudianism on the one hand exposed the hypocrisy of the Victorian bourgeois class that pretended to deny its sexual and aggressive drives. And on the other hand it showed how much the power that the totalitarian dictators exerted over the peoples who followed them owed to the pathological resurgence of those repressed drives, making the age that began in 1914 unparalleled in its barbarism... But as an objective model of human nature it must be rejected...

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When we turn from the psychological theory of psychoanalysis to its philosophical foundations, then its incompatibility with Christianity becomes still more obvious. Thus Freud believed that human psychology is completely reflected in the activity of the brain, so that the sciences of the brain and of psychology should eventually merge.<sup>481</sup> This is simply *materialism*, the denial of the existence of the rational soul and its survival after the death of the body.

As Bishop Gregory writes: "Although psychoanalysis contains within its name the word 'soul', it concentrates its investigations on the functions of the brain. But we, of course, know that with the latter is mysteriously linked our invisible soul, which constitutes a part of our personality. We must suppose that much that the psychiatrists refer to as the workings of the subconscious sphere of the brain in fact belong not only, or not so much, to the brain, as to the soul."<sup>482</sup>

Again, Freud believed that the roots, not only of man's abnormal actions, but even of his higher activities, the things which are most characteristic of his humanity – politics, art and religion – are to be found in childhood traumas and conflicts. Of course, the phenomena of totalitarian politics, pornographic art and sectarian religion do manifest abnormal psychological traits, and as such may be illumined to some extent by psychoanalytic ideas. However, the higher we ascend in our study of these spheres, the more inadequate, crude and distorting of a true understanding will the theory of psychoanalysis appear.

Thus if politics is reduced by psychoanalysis to narcissism, or to the libidinal relations between the leader and his followers<sup>483</sup>, then there can be no higher politics of the kind that we find in the lives of the holy kings and princes of Orthodox Christian history. Again, if the psychoanalysts' study of art consists in "the pursuit of the

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<sup>481</sup> The idea was first put forward in his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) (Claudia Kalb, "The Therapist as Scientist", *Newsweek*, March 27, 2006, p. 42).

<sup>482</sup> Grabbe, *op. cit.*

<sup>483</sup> Freud, *Group Psychology*, pp. 103, 94.

personal, the neurotic and the infantile in the work of artists”<sup>484</sup>, then we may justly wonder whether they understand art at all. And if religion is reduced to hatred and love for a repressed father-figure, then it is not difficult to see why psychoanalysis should be seen as one of the roots of contemporary atheism...

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<sup>484</sup> Anthony Storr, *The Dynamics of Creation*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1972, p. 236.