

THE TRUE CHURCH IN THE LAST TIMES

Vladimir Moss

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INTRODUCTION

This book consists of a collection of articles and dialogues written in the last twelve years or so on various themes relating to Orthodox Christianity. Most of them reflect controversies that have divided Orthodox Christians in this period, such as: ecumenism, sergianism, the icon of the Holy Trinity, the relationship between faith, science and art, eldership in the Church, the sacrament of the Eucharist, frequency of Communion, the Sacrifice of Christ, feminism, cloning, marriage and sexuality, abortion and the soul, the seal of the Antichrist, the soul after death, the Last Judgement and the problem of evil. 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.

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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. Orthodoxy is the giving of right glory to God through the right faith and right worship. In common parlance, "Orthodoxy" means simply "the right faith".

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. "There is none good but One, that is, God" ([Matthew](#) 19.17). 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 (64.6).

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." (Hebrews 10.26).

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)).¹ 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".² 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

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

² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 6, PG. 44, 1273.

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 that 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).

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. And if, as St. Nektary of Optina said, there were people outside Noah's Ark who were saved, then there are people outside the Church who can be saved. 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".³ 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).

Moreover, if we, arrogantly presuming to be more "merciful" than the 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, and, being rational sheep made in the image of the Good Shepherd, 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" (Acts 14.17).

St. John Chrysostom says 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).⁴ Creation and conscience alone

³ St. Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church*.

⁴ St. Chrysostom, *First Homily on Hannah*, 3.

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. So the question, "Why are the ignorant punished?", the answer, according to St. Theophylact of Ochrid, is: "Because when he might have known he did not wish to do so, but was the cause of his own ignorance through sloth."⁵

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?

⁵ St. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel according to St. Luke* 12.47-48.

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” (Psalms 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 resource against wickedness.”⁶

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. But it does not go to the other extreme and ceases trying to persuade them. 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

⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter XVII to Eustathia, Ambrosia and Basilissa*.

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 and Einstein? 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 we have many "infallible proofs" of the Resurrection (Acts 1.3). And as St. Paul says: "I did not receive it [the Gospel] 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 Old Testament Theophanies were in fact appearances of God the Son, not 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.

In any case, 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).

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. Moreover, they believe in the false prophet Mohammed, who contradicts Christ's teaching in many respects. 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, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim" (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 them (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 of the Talmud, which approves of all manner of crimes against Gentiles, including murder and extortion. And the constant tradition of the Church has been that the Antichrist will be a Jew ruling from Jerusalem in a reclaimed State of Israel...

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 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, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Serbian Patriarchate, etc., do take part in the ecumenical movement. 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 it 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.

Orthodox. Welcome to the true Faith of Christ, brother! 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).

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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 16th and 17th 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 exactly 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."⁷ 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".⁸

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?

⁷ St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

⁸ St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

2. The Sins of the Papacy.

There are good grounds for adopting a sceptical and even cynical attitude to this. 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.

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" (Psalm 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...’”⁹

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 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

⁹ Lourié, “Ekklesiologia otstupaiuschej armii (The Ecclesiology of a Retreating Army)”, *Vertograd-Inform*, № 3, January, 1999, p. 24 (English edition).

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."¹⁰

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 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

¹⁰ Gundiaev, interview conducted by Alexis Venediktov, March 22, 2001.

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 him¹¹, 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.¹² In England, for example, Orthodoxy has doubled in size during the last decade.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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

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 14th-15th 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

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.

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!¹³

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 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.”¹⁴

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

¹³ Liudmilla Perepiolkina, *Ecumenism – A Path to Perdition*, St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 214.

¹⁴ Perepiolkina, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

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.

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.”¹⁵

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 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.”¹⁶

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

¹⁵ Metropolitan Anthony, “The Church’s Teaching about the Holy Spirit”, *Orthodox Life*, vol. 27, № 4, July-August, 1977, pp. 38-39.

¹⁶ St. Augustine, *Homily 21 on the New Testament*, 19, 20.

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."¹⁷ 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."¹⁸

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.

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,

¹⁷ Blessed Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel of Luke*, 12.47-48.

¹⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily* 93 on Luke.

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).

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Holy Monk-Martyr Nectan of Hartland.*

3. TEN REASONS WHY THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE IS NOT ORTHODOX

I. 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.”¹⁹

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 accomodation 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, as we have seen, one of the first aims of the ecumenical movement was and is to *prevent* proselytism among the member-Churches.

II. 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

¹⁹ 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).

interests demanded that Meletius Metaxakis be elected Patriarch. Such was also the will of Eleutherius 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."²⁰

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 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.

²⁰ Bishop Photius, "The 70th Anniversary of the Pan-Orthodox Congress in Constantinople", *Orthodox Life*, № 1, 1994, p. 41-42.

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!²¹ 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...

III. The EP's uncanonical annexation of vast territories belonging to the Russian and Serbian Churches.

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 28th 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 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.²²

2. Finland. In February, 1921 Patriarch Tikhon granted the Finnish Church autonomy within the Russian Church. On June 9, 1922, Meletius uncanonically received this autonomous Finnish Church 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.

²¹ “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 (G); Bishop Photius, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²² *A History of the Russian Church Abroad*, Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, 1972, p. 51.

“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 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.”²³

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.”²⁴ However, the Finns did not return to the Russians, and the Finnish Church remains to this day within the

²³ See Monk Gorazd, “Quo Vadis, Konstantinopol'skaia Patriarkhia? (Where are you going, Constantinopolitan Patriarchate?)”, *Pravoslavnaia Rus' (Orthodox Rus')*, № 2 (1455), January 15/28, 1992, p. 9 (in Russian).

²⁴ M.E. Gubonin, *Akty Sviateishago Patriarkha Tikhona*, Moscow, 1994, p. 304 (in Russian).

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 the year before, 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.²⁵

Lyudmilla Koeller writes: "The Polish authorities restricted the Orthodox Church, which numbered more than 3 million believers (mainly Ukrainians and Byelorussians).²⁶ 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'." ²⁷

²⁵ M.B. Danilushkin (ed.), *Istoria Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi (A History of the Russian Orthodox Church)*, vol. I, St. Petersburg, 1997, p. 197 (in Russian).

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ 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

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 uncanonical²⁸, 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 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'.

Latvia)", *Tserkovnaia Zhizn'* (Church Life), №№ 3-4, May-June-July-August, 1992, pp. 56-57 (in Russian).

²⁸ Gubonin, *op.cit.*, pp. 320-321.

“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.”²⁹

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.”³⁰

IV. The EP's communion with the Russian renovationist heretics and uncanonical deposition of ROCOR Bishops.

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 schismatics. As the synod of the “Living Church” wrote to Meletius in 1925: “The Holy Synod [of the renovationists] recall with

²⁹ 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-ispovednik Dosifej mitropolit Zagrebskij (New Hieroconfessor Dositheus, Metropolitan of Zagreb)”, *Pravoslavnaia Rus' (Orthodox Rus')*, № 7 (1628), April 1/14, 1999, p. 3 (in Russian).

³⁰ Archbishop John, “The Decline of the Patriarchate of Constantinople”, *The Orthodox Word*, vol. 8, no. 4 (45), July-August, 1972, p. 175.

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.”³¹ 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...”³²

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.

³¹ Cited in Bishop Photius, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³² See Monk Gorazd, *op. cit.*

“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 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.”³³

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 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!”³⁴

V. The EP’s false “Pan-Orthodox” Council of 1923 and 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.”³⁵

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

³³ 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 (in Russian).

³⁴ Sokurova, O.B. *Nekolyebimij Kamen’ Tserkvi* (The Unshakeable Rock of the Church), St. Petersburg: “Nauka”, 1998, p. 32 (in Russian).

³⁵ Goutzidis, op.cit., p. 76.

the heterodox “it is not necessary to have common ground or dogmatic union, for the union of Christian love is sufficient”.³⁶

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 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...³⁷

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.³⁸ 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.”³⁹

In his “Memorandum to the Holy Synod of the Hierarchy of Greece” (June 14, 1929), Metropolitan Irenaeus of Kassandreia wrote that the council was not “Pan-Orthodox” but “anti-Orthodox”: “It openly and impiously trampled

³⁶ Cited in Bishop Photius, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

³⁷ Goutzidis, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-78.

³⁸ However, an Anglican hierarch, Charles Gore of Oxford, was allowed to attend one of the sessions and was treated with great honour.

³⁹ “Oecumenical Patriarch Meletios (Metaxakis)”, *Orthodox Tradition*, vol. XVII, 2 & 3, 2000, p. 9.

on the 34th 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."⁴⁰

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..."⁴¹

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 anathematized 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.

⁴⁰ Monk Paul, *Neomerologitismos-Oikoumenismos (Newcalendarism-Ecumenism)*, Athens, 1982, pp. 72-73.

⁴¹ 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 (G).

VI. 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 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'. "⁴²

⁴² Soldatov, "Pravoslavie i Ekumenizm (Orthodoxy and Ecumenism)", *Mirianin (The Layman)*, July-August, 1992, p. 8 (in Russian).

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.

VII. 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 Church of Greece by Metaxakis himself.⁴³ 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 33rd 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

⁴³ *Pravoslavie ili Smert'*, № 1, 1997, p. 6 (in Russian).

millions are Protestants, Catholics and Buddhists. The aim of every religion is to make man better.”⁴⁴

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.”⁴⁵

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 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,

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ “The Russian Orthodox Church in the System of Contemporary Christianity”, in A. Preobrazhensky (ed.), *The Russian Orthodox Church*, Moscow: Progress, 1988, p. 387.

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 33rd 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".⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ulrich Duckrow, *Conflict over the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva: The World Council of Churches, 1981, pp. 31, 310.

VIII. 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 11th 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."⁴⁷

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 action."⁴⁸ From this time, several monasteries and sketes on Mount Athos ceased to commemorate the Patriarch.

⁴⁷ Full text in *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. I, № 1, Spring, 1966, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁸ *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. I, № 1, Spring, 1966, p. 50.

On December 15, 1965, Metropolitan Philaret, First-Hierarchy of the ROCA, 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."⁴⁹

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 assemblies: '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

⁴⁹ Full text in Ivan Ostroumoff, *The History of the Council of Florence*, pp. 193-199.

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, 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."⁵⁰

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."⁵¹ This heretical confession was condemned by Metropolitan Philaret and his Synod.

Also in 1975, at the WCC's General Assembly in Nairobi, the Orthodox delegates, having signed an agreement to recognize the sacraments of the non-Orthodox delegates, had 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".⁵²

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.⁵³

⁵⁰ Vitaly, "Ekumenizm (Ecumenism)", *Pravoslavniy Vestnik (The Orthodox Herald)*, June, 1969, pp. 14-30; *Moskva (Moscow)*, 1991, № 9, p. 149 (in Russian).

⁵¹ Athenagoras (Kokkinakis), *The Thyateira Confession*, London, 1975, p. 61.

⁵² "Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, October 27 / November 9, 1997, p. 2.

⁵³ *Newsletter of the Foreign Relations Department of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia*, January-March, 1981, p. 2.

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 WCC agreed that the baptism, eucharist and ordinations of *all* denominations were valid and acceptable.⁵⁴

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 θεωρίᾳ)."

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*".⁵⁵

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*".⁵⁶

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."

⁵⁴ See Archbishop Vitaly, "The 1983 Sobor of Bishops", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, August 20 / September 2, 1984, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Perepiolkina, *Ecumenism – A Path to Perdition*, St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 251.

⁵⁶ Perepiolkina, *op.cit.*, p. 252.

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 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.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, in 1992 the patriarchate of Antioch entered into full, official 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

⁵⁷ Metropolitan Calliopius of Pentapolis, *Prodosia tis Orthodoxias (Betrayal of Orthodoxy)*, Piraeus, 1991 (in Greek); *O Pharos tis Orthodoxias (The Lighthouse of Orthodoxy)*, October, 1991, № 66, p. 120 (in Greek); 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 (in French).

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."⁵⁸

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.

IX. 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, anathematized 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

⁵⁸ Patriarch Bartholomew, Address at Emory University at the Presidential Medal award ceremony, October 31, 1997.

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**.”⁵⁹

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...”⁶⁰

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.

<http://news-nftu.blogspot.com/2009/09/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew.html>

“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.

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ "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 Russian).

“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?”⁶¹

X. 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.

⁶¹ 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 16th-18th 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. (Using more technically theological language, the Creed says they are Unity (or Singleness), Holiness, Catholicity and Apostolicity.) 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 (“hom^oousios” as opposed to “hom^oiousios”). 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 20th-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 more; 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"...

*

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 be 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".⁶² 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*.

⁶² Archbishop Nikifor of Slavensk and Cherson, "Encyclical Epistle against Baptism by Pouring", 1754; reprinted in *Sviataia Rus'*, N 2, 1993, pp. 55-57 (in Russian).

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 "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".⁶³

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

⁶³ "A Baptismal Mystagogy", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 31, no. 2, March-April, 1981, p. 31.

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 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 Athanasije (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.”⁶⁴

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 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

⁶⁴ Metropolitan Athanasije, “Liturgy and Spirituality”, http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/en_main/catehism/theologia_zoi/themata.asp?cat=leit&NF=1&contents=contents.asp&main=texts&file=3.htm.

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..."⁶⁵

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

⁶⁵ 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 union between the two factions 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 Trimythus 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.

*

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-hierarch 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 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 unias 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."⁶⁶ 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."⁶⁷

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,

⁶⁶ Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen Unwin, 1959, p. 512.

⁶⁷ Polanyi, "The Two Cultures", *Encounter*, 1959, № 13, p. 61.

such as has been inconceivable till now, before whom science trembles and surrenders in a shameful way."⁶⁸

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?

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.*"⁶⁹

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

⁶⁸ Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, London: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 257.

⁶⁹ Rose, "The Orthodox Patristic Understanding of Genesis", ch. 5, *The Orthodox Word*, № 171, 1993.

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 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.

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 unfailingly 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 reasons, 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.”⁷⁰ 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.”⁷¹

St. Basil the Great said: “At all events let us prefer the simplicity of faith to the demonstrations of reason.”⁷² 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 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.⁷³

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.

⁷⁰ Bishop Ignatius, *Sochinenia (Works)*, volume 4, letter № 45 (in Russian).

⁷¹ Bishop Ignatius, *Sochinenia (Works)*, volume 4, letter № 61 (in Russian).

⁷² St. Basil, Homily 1 on the *Hexaemeron*.

⁷³ 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.”

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”.⁷⁴ 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”.⁷⁵ “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.”⁷⁶ “God forbid,” he wrote, “that we should give out a dream of our own 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.”⁷⁷

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.”⁷⁸

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

⁷⁴ Bacon, *New Atlantis*; see Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷⁵ Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, Book I, 1, 3.

⁷⁶ Bacon, *The Interpretation of Nature*, proemium.

⁷⁷ Bacon, *The Great Instauration*, “The Plan of the Work”.

⁷⁸ Roberts, *The Triumph of the West*, London: Phoenix Press, 1985, p. 160.

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 ecceities – 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."⁷⁹

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 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."⁸⁰

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

⁷⁹ 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.

⁸⁰ Lewis, quoted in Fr. Seraphim Johnson, "A Sane Family in an Insane World".

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.”⁸¹

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.

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. This was seen already by John Donne, who said: “the new philosophy [science] calls all in doubt”.⁸² 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.

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

⁸¹ 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.

⁸² Donne, *The First Anniversarie* (1611), quoted in Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, London: Macmillan, 1990, p. 130.

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 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 11th century, to the nominalist thinker Roscelin. Nominalism, which had triumphed over its philosophical rival, universalism, by the 14th 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.⁸³

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...

⁸³ Trostnikov, "The Role and Place of the Baptism of Rus in the European Spiritual Process of the Second Millenium of Christian History", *Orthodox Life*, volume 39, № 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.”⁸⁴

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.”⁸⁵

“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.’”⁸⁶

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.”⁸⁷

In fact, neither Holy Scripture⁸⁸, nor the Holy Fathers⁸⁹, nor even the Roman church as a whole denied the idea of a spherical earth. “The truth is,”

⁸⁴ Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, London: Abacus, 1999, p. 179.

⁸⁵ Richards, in Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004, pp. 162-163.

⁸⁶ Strobel, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁸⁷ Richards, in Strobel, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Isaiah* 40:22: “It is He Who sits above the *circle* of the earth”.

⁸⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa calls the earth “spherical” in his *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, chapter 4.

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 education, cathedral school or university, without being perfectly clear about the Earth's sphericity and even its approximate circumference."⁹⁰

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 16th 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

⁹⁰ Lindberg, in Strobel, op. cit., p. 164. Cf. Peter De Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, pp. 221-231.

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.

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 one only 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!

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.”⁹¹

⁹¹ Wilkinson, *God, Time and Stephen Hawking*, London: Monarch Books, 2001, p. 104.

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..."⁹²

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.

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."⁹³

⁹² Wilkinson, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

⁹³ 20/20, ABC Television Broadcast, March, 1998; quoted in Wilkinson, op. cit., p. 26.

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)." ⁹⁴

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".

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

⁹⁴ Everett, in Coveney, P. & Highfield, R., *The Arrow of Time*, London: Flamingo, 1991, p. 133.

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.

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 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 reasons for an action* is not the same as describing *the causes 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 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 Nectarius 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, coming out of his cell, 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."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ *Zhitia prepodobnykh Startsev Optinoj Pustyni (The Lives of the Holy Elders of Optina Desert)*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1992 (in Russian). According to another version, the

Thus in answer to the question how Orthodox could be reconciled with "education", i.e. 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. However, he did not linger on this evidence. More important, in his view, was the effect that scientific hypotheses like Darwinism had on morality. For, as St. Nectarius' fellow-elder at Optina, St. Barsanuphius (+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..."⁹⁶

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 atheist⁹⁷); (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.

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.'"⁹⁸

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).

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

⁹⁷ St. Basil the Great, *Homily on Avarice*.

⁹⁸ St. Nectarios, *Sketch concerning Man*, Athens, 1885.

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!⁹⁹ 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".¹⁰⁰ In any case, it must be firmly understood: it is impossible to be a Christian and a Darwinist.

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.

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.'¹⁰¹

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

⁹⁹ Thus Pope John Paul II believes in Darwinism, making an exception only for the soul of man, which he believes was created directly by God.

¹⁰⁰ 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).

¹⁰¹ Field, *The Evolution Hoax Exposed*, Hawthorne, Ca.: The Christian Book Club of America, 1971, p. 12.

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."¹⁰²

Since this is the case, there is no need to concede to the scientific world-view more than it claims for itself (in the mouths of its more honest and intelligent spokesmen). 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. 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 writes, "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."¹⁰³

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,

¹⁰² St. Basil the Great, *Homily 5 on the Hexaemeron*.

¹⁰³ Khomiakov, *Sochinenia* (Works), Moscow, 1914, vol. 1, pp. 256-257 (in Russian).

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...

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 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!¹⁰⁴

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

¹⁰⁴ 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?...*

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!¹⁰⁵

Thus scientists will never be able to explain their own thought processes by purely scientific means - by building a model of the brain on a computer. 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."¹⁰⁶

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

¹⁰⁵ Searle, J., *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

¹⁰⁶ Polanyi, M., *Personal Knowledge*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958, p. 262.

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.¹⁰⁷

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.

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

¹⁰⁷ Penrose, R., *The Emperor's New Mind*, London: Vintage, 1989.

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.¹⁰⁸

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.

¹⁰⁸ Frank, *Dusha Cheloveka (The Soul of Man)*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1917.

It is not only free will and rationality that empirical psychology cannot comprehend. Consider, for example, the important phenomenon of falling in love. 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."¹⁰⁹

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."¹¹⁰

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

¹⁰⁹ Frank, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

¹¹⁰ Heron, J., "The Phenomenology of the Social Encounter: The Gaze", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1970-71, XXXI, pp. 243-264.

and most important, although not the only condition of creativity in any sphere of human activity".¹¹¹ 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 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".¹¹² 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."¹¹³

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

¹¹¹ Basin, E.Y., "Tvorchestvo i Empatia" ("Creativity and Empathy"), *Voprosy Filosofii* (Questions of Philosophy), 1987, № 2, p. 55 (in Russian).

¹¹² Frank, *op. cit.*

¹¹³ Frank, S.L., *Reality and Man*, London: Faber & Faber, 1965, p. 61.

what we may call the religious "I-we" mode.¹¹⁴ 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 Steven 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 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...*

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

¹¹⁴ John Macmurray, *Interpreting the Universe*, London: Faber, 1933; *Reason and Emotion*, London: Faber, 1935; *Persons in Relation*, London: Faber, 1965.

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. 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.

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 that 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..."¹¹⁵

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.

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!"¹¹⁶ 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

¹¹⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Homily 9 on the Hexaemeron*.

¹¹⁶ Kohn, "Joyfully back to Church?", *New Statesman and Society*, May 1, 1992, p. 32.

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 biassed 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 biassed, 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 frauds.¹¹⁷ 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."¹¹⁸ For any such answers must be in principle *unverifiable* insofar as no

¹¹⁷ 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)

¹¹⁸ Medawar, in John Tailor, *When the Clock struck Zero*, London: Picador, 1993, p. 5.

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."¹¹⁹

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 carbon-14 analysis of its age conducted with the aim of refuting its authenticity turned out to be based on false presuppositions.¹²⁰

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).

¹¹⁹ Rose, in Hieromonk Damascene (Christensen), *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 2003, pp. 542-543.

¹²⁰ *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (*Orthodox Rus'*), № 7, 1993, p. 16 (in Russian); *Orthodoxie*, № 60, September, 1994, pp. 33-34 (in French).

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...

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; of 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 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?¹²¹

¹²¹ C.S. Lewis, "'Bulverism' or the Foundation of 20th Century Thought", in *God in the Dock*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, pp. 271-275, 276. Alvin Plantinga has recently produced a

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?"¹²²

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."¹²³ Again, Nicetas Stethatos writes, God made man "king of creation", enabling him "to possess within himself the inward essences, the natures and the knowledge of all beings".¹²⁴

similar argument to refute Darwinism. See Jim Holt, "Divine Evolution", *Prospect*, May, 2002, p. 13.

¹²² Elder Barsanuphius of Optina, *Kelejnnye Zapiski (Cell Notes)*, Moscow, 1991, p. 16 (in Russian).

¹²³ St. Ambrose of Milan, *On Paradise*, 11.

¹²⁴ 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.

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 reality and meaning and the ability to partake in some measure in the Providence of God.

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, 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 and life and meaning in the Light and Life and Logos of the universe, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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 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 any 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.*"¹²⁵

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 mind of man, 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",

¹²⁵ St. Innocent, "O Grekhe" (On Sin), in *Zhitia i Tvorenia Russkikh Svyatykh* (Lives and Works of the Russian Saints), Moscow, 2001, pp. 724-725 (in Russian).

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..."¹²⁶

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¹²⁶ St. Basil, *Homily 8 on the Hexaemeron*.

10. ABORTION, PERSONHOOD AND THE ORIGIN OF THE SOUL

The origin of the soul has never been a subject of major controversy in Orthodoxy as it has been in Catholicism. Thus the argument between creationists and traducianists, which was the subject of several papal bulls, has not received a final resolution in Orthodox dogmatics. The creationist view is that each individual soul is separately created by God; while the traducianist view, in the words of Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, is that it "is created from the souls of a man's parents and only in this general sense constitutes a new creation of God".¹²⁷ But "how the soul of each individual man originates is not fully revealed in the word of God; it is 'a mystery known to God alone' (St. Cyril of Alexandria)¹²⁸, and the Church does not give us a strictly defined teaching on this subject. She decisively rejected only Origen's view, which had been inherited from the philosophy of Plato, concerning the pre-existence of souls, according to which souls come to earth from a higher world. This teaching of Origen and the Origenists was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council."¹²⁹

However, the dramatic changes that modern science has created in man's image of himself have elicited attempts to define the Church's teaching on the soul more precisely. Darwinism, in particular, has elicited some development in the thinking of Orthodox theologians. Thus when the Russian Bishop Theophan the Recluse (+1894) was suspected of coming close to Darwinism because he said that the soul of man is like the soul of the animal, he replied: "We have in us the body, then the soul, whose origin is in natural generation, and finally the spirit, which is breathed in by God. It is said that man is a rational animal. To be an animal means not only to have flesh, but also the whole animal life. Only man possesses in himself the *vous*, that is, the spirit. So man is a spiritualized animal."¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1984, p. 129.

¹²⁸ The full quotation from St. Cyril is as follows: "This mystery of the incarnate Word has some similarity with human birth. For mothers of ordinary men, in obedience to the natural laws of generation, carry in the womb the flesh which gradually takes shape, and develops through the secret operations of God until it reaches perfection and attains the form of a human being; and God endows this living creature with spirit, in a manner known only to Himself. As the prophet says, 'He forms a man's spirit within him' (*Zachariah* 12.1)." (*Epistle One to the Monks of Egypt*)

¹²⁹ Pomazansky, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.

¹³⁰ Thomas Spidlik, *La Doctrine Spirituelle de Théophane le Reclus (The Spiritual Doctrine of Theophan the Recluse)*, Rome: Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 1965, p. 6 (in French). Compare St. Ambrose of Optina: You ask how you can bring into agreement the books: the *Orthodox Confession* and *Theology* of Macarius in relation to the origin of souls. Read yourself question 28 in the first book and *7 in the second volume of the second and you will see that the well-known priest did not at all say, as you aver, that the souls come from their parents by the natural order alone. Peter Moghila says that after the complete formation of the members of the body from human see the soul is given by God; while in Macarius' *Theology* it says that

Other Greek theologians, reacted still more strongly against Darwinism, pointing out that Darwinism is incompatible with the Church's teaching on the purposiveness of creation and the immortality of the soul (first and fifth anathemas of the *Order of the Week of Orthodoxy*). Thus in the works of St. Nectarios of Aegina (+1920), we find twenty arguments for the immortality and rationality of the soul, and a very robust rejection of Darwinism: "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 that 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 mindless cattle, and is become like unto them' (Psalms 48.21 (LXX))."¹³¹

In the twentieth century it is especially the debate over abortion that has elicited further thinking on this subject. The abortionists try to justify the murder of human foetuses by arguing that the foetus is not fully a person at the moment of conception or for some time thereafter. In response to this, Orthodox apologists have shown, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, that life and "personhood" begin at conception. Thus Presbyteria Valerie Brockman writes: "Human life, personhood, development begin at conception and continue until death. There are no magic humanizing events, such as quickening or passage through the birth canal. There are no trimester milestones, no criteria for independence."¹³²

Now a compromise between the pro- and anti-abortion positions is sometimes sought in the gradualist argument that there is no definite time when the foetus has personhood and when it does not, but personhood develops gradually, so that in early stages of pregnancy the foetus is less personal and in later stages more personal. This viewpoint is sometimes expressed by saying that foetuses are "potential persons". Thus "according to this viewpoint," writes Gareth D. Jones, "there is no point in development, no matter how early on, when the embryo or foetus does not display some

after the formation of the bodily members from human seed the soul is created without intermediary by God. The difference is only in the manner of expression. In the first it is said unclearly, in the second more clearly; while in the book on final causes it is explained why the ancient fathers spoke in a hidden way on this subject because at that time there was a dominant tendency towards materialism. However, this a subject or question into the subtle examination of which many have not entered, and yet have been saved" (Letter 226, *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn'*, 478, November, 1989, pp. pp. 207-208 (in Russian)).

¹³¹ St. Nectarios, *Sketch Concerning Man*, Athens, 1885, pp. 216-217.

¹³² Brockman, "Abortion: The Continuing Holocaust", *The True Vine*, vol. 10, summer, 1991, p. 51.

elements of personhood – no matter how rudimentary. The potential is there, and it is because of this that both the embryo and the foetus have a claim to life and respect. This claim, however, becomes stronger as foetal development proceeds, so that by some time during the third trimester the claim is so strong that the consequences of killing a foetus are the same as those of killing an actual person – whether child or adult.”¹³³

However, all gradualist arguments run up against the powerful moral argument concerning the *injustice* of abortion, which is the same regardless when the abortion takes place. Thus in his Second Canon, St. Basil the Great states that a woman who deliberately aborts her child is a murderess, “for here there is involved the question of providing justice for the infant”. For insofar as the foetus would have developed into a full-grown man in normal circumstances, he must be considered to have been deprived of life whether the abortion took place early or late in pregnancy.

To this the gradualist may reply: “Even though the deprivation is the same in the two cases, the ‘patient’ is not the same. For in the case of early abortion, the foetus is, say, a ‘half-person’, whereas in the other it is, say, a ‘quarter-person’. So the injustice is not the same, just as it is not the same injustice to deprive a dog of life as it is to deprive a man.”

In order to counter this argument, we have to demonstrate that *personhood cannot be quantified or divided*. In other words, we have to show that the whole concept of a young foetus being a lower form of life than an older foetus is invalid. *There is no such thing*, therefore, as a ‘half-person’ or ‘quarter-person’.

*

One approach to this problem is to identify personhood with the image of God in man, as is done by the Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky.

Now the image of God has been identified with various faculties of man’s spiritual nature, such as mind, reason and free will. However, St. Gregory of Nyssa asserts that “the image is not in part of our nature, nor is the grace in any one of the things found in that nature”.¹³⁴ This idea has been taken up in our time by Lossky and others, who assert that the image of God is not to be identified exclusively with any single faculty or ability. Still less, *a fortiori*, can it be identified with properties or faculties that can be physically observed and measured by doctors or scientists.

¹³³ Jones, “The Human Embryo: Between Oblivion and Meaningful Life,” *Science and Christian Belief*, vol. 6, April, 1994, p. 15.

¹³⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 16. Cf. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus: “Church doctrine believes that man was created according to the image of God, but does not define precisely in what part of his essence the image of God exists... There is no need at all to define or affirm in what part of us that which is in the divine image is effectuated” (*Against Heresies*, 70, 2; P.G. 42:341).

Thus Lossky writes: "The image cannot be objectified, 'naturalized' we might say, by being attributed to some part or other of the human being. To be in the image of God, the Fathers affirm, in the last analysis is to be a personal being, that is to say, a free, responsible being. Why, one might ask, did God make man free and responsible? Precisely because He wanted to call him to a supreme vocation: deification; that is to say, to become by grace, in a movement as boundless as God, that which God is by nature. And this call demands a free response; God wishes that this movement be a movement of love...

"A personal being is capable of loving someone more than his own nature, more than his own life. The person, that is to say, the image of God in man, is then man's freedom with regard to his nature, 'the fact of being freed from necessity and not being subject to the dominion of nature, but able to determine oneself freely' (St. Gregory of Nyssa). Man acts most often under natural impulses. He is conditioned by his temperament, his character, his heredity, cosmic or psycho-social conditioning; and his dignity consists in being able to liberate himself from his nature, not by consuming it or abandoning it to itself."¹³⁵

But, the gradualist may object: "It is precisely the foetus that *least* shows this ability to liberate oneself from one's nature; it is completely dominated by natural impulses."

However, in Jeremiah we read: "The word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth from the womb I sanctified thee. I appointed thee to be a prophet to the nations' (1.4-5). On which Brockman comments: "Jeremiah is treated by God as a personal being and was sanctified before birth. Surely this indicates that the sanctity of human life and personhood extend back to the time in the womb."¹³⁶

Again, in Luke we read the words of St. Elizabeth, the mother of St. John the Baptist, when the Virgin Mary visited her: "As soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (1.44). St. John, even as a foetus, felt joy, an emotion very close to love, at the presence of the incarnate God. The fact that we cannot imagine the mental and spiritual processes of a foetus, still less of fetuses in relation to each other, should not prevent us, as Christians, from accepting the evidence of Holy Scripture. Let us not forget, moreover, that Christ Himself was a Divine Person from before

¹³⁵ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary, 1989, pp. 71-72. Cf. Vasily Zenkovsky, "Printsipy Pravoslavnoj Antropologii" ("The Principles of Orthodox Anthropology"), *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizhenia* (*Messenger of the Russian Christian Movement*), 1988, II-III (in Russian).

¹³⁶ Brockman, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

eternity, and did not cease to be that Person when He Himself became a foetus in the Virgin's womb. Thus the encounter between the Lord and St. John the Baptist in Elizabeth's house was a fully personal meeting between two "whole persons", in spite of the fact that neither had yet been born...

We may compare a foetus to a comatose or sleeping person, to whom we do not refuse the status of personhood just because he is not exhibiting the signs of sentient and/or conscious life at that moment. Thus a person who is asleep or in a coma is still a person, and to kill a person in such a state is still considered murder. Even in those cases when permission is given to kill a person who is in an irreversible coma by turning off his life-support machine, the usual justification given is not that the patient is no longer a person and can therefore be disposed of as being sub-human, but that he cannot now "enjoy" his personhood.

Of course, an adult who becomes comatose is different from a foetus in that he has already shown signs of a fully personal life over a long period. However, from the materialist point of view, leaving aside the differences in levels of brain and autonomic nervous system activity between a foetus and a comatose adult, it is difficult to see how a fundamental, *qualitative* distinction between the two can be made. Both would appear – again, from a materialist point of view – to be lacking certain fundamental features of personhood, such as consciousness and the ability to communicate with other persons.

And if the materialist says that the foetus is only a "potential person", whereas the comatose adult is an "actual person" who has temporarily lost, or is failing to display, some elements of his nature, then we may justifiably challenge him to give an operational definition of this distinction. How can something be "actual" when it is not being actualized? Cannot we say that a foetus, too, is an "actual person" who is temporarily failing to display certain elements of his nature?

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Another approach to the problem is from the direction of the soul/body distinction. Now most pro-abortionists explicitly or implicitly deny the existence of the soul except in the Aristotlean-Aquinean-evolutionist sense of an "emergent function" of the body. This allows them to look on the unborn as on people whose "souls" have not fully emerged, and so can be treated as if they were just bodies, matter which has not reached its full degree of development or evolution. The Orthodox, however, while not going to the opposite, Platonist-Originist extreme of identifying the person exclusively with the soul, nevertheless assert that man is, in St. Maximus' words, a "composite" being made up of two separate and distinct natures *from the beginning*.

Thus St. Basil the Great writes: "I recognize two men, one of which is invisible and one which is hidden within the same – the inner, invisible man. We have therefore an inner man, and we are of dual make-up. Indeed, it is true to say that we exist inwardly. The self is the inner man. The outer parts are not the self, but belongings of it. For the self not the hand, but rather the rational faculty of the soul, while the hand is a part of man. Thus while the body is an instrument of man, an instrument of the soul, man, strictly speaking, is chiefly the soul."¹³⁷

Again, St. John of Damascus writes: "Every man is a combination of soul and body... The soul is a living substance, simple and without body, invisible to the bodily eyes by virtue of its peculiar nature, immortal, rational, spiritual, without form, making use of an organized body, and being the source of its powers of life and growth and sensation and generation... The soul is independent, with a will and energy of its own."¹³⁸

Since the soul is distinct from the body, the Orthodox have no difficulty conceiving of it as existent, active and conscious even while the body is an undeveloped foetus or showing few signs of life; for, as Solomon says, "I sleep, but my heart waketh" (Song of Solomon 5.2). Moreover, since the soul is not a function of the body, but the cause of its activity, the death or comatose state of the body is no reason for believing that the soul, too, is comatose or dead. For "the dust shall return to the earth as it was, but the spirit to God Who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12.7).

As for the question *when* the soul is joined to the body, this is answered by St. Maximus the Confessor in the context of a discussion of Origenism as follows: "Neither [soul nor body] exists in separation from the other before their joining together which is destined to create one form. They are, in effect, simultaneously created and joined together, as is the realization of the form created by their joining together."¹³⁹ "For if," he writes in another place, "the body and the soul are parts of man, and if the parts necessarily refer to something (for it is the whole which has the full significance), and if the things which are said to 'refer' are everywhere perfectly simultaneous, in conformity with their genesis – for the parts by their reunion make up the whole form, and the only thing that separates them is the thought which seeks to discern the essence of each being, – then it is impossible that the soul and the body, insofar as they are parts of man, should exist chronologically

¹³⁷ St. Basil, *On the Origin of Man*, VII, 9-16; Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, № 160, 1970, p. 182 (in French).

¹³⁸ St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II, 12.

¹³⁹ St. Maximus, *Letter 15*, P.G. 91:552D6-13; translated from the French in M.-H. Congourdeau, "L'animation de l'embryon humain chez Maxime le Confesseur" (« The animation of the human embryo in Maximus the Confessor »), *Nouvelle Revue de Théologie* (*New Review of Theology*), 1989, pp. 693-709 (in French).

one before the other or one after the other, for then the logos (of man), in relation to which each of them exists, would be destroyed.”¹⁴⁰

Another argument put forward by St. Maximus is that if nothing prevented the soul and body from changing partners, one would be forced to admit the possibility of metempsychosis, or reincarnation. However, the fact of their creation simultaneously and for each other, thereby forming a single logos, rules out the possibility; for created beings cannot violate their logoi – that is, their essential nature in the creative plan of God. Even the separation of the soul from the body at death, and the dissolution of the body into its constituent elements, does not destroy this logical unity; for the soul is always the soul “of such-and-such a man”, and the body is always the body “of such-and-such a man”.¹⁴¹

St. John of Damascus sums up the matter: “Body and soul were formed at the same time, not first the one and then the other, as Origen so senselessly supposes.”¹⁴²

The above conclusion is not affected by the view one may take on the traducianist versus creationist controversy. Whether the soul of an individual man comes from the souls of his parents (the traducianist view), or is created by God independently of his parents (the creationist view), it remains true that it comes into existence as a new, independent soul at the same time as his body, that is, at conception. And since the new soul is already in existence at the time of conception, abortion is the killing of a complete human being made up of both soul and body, and therefore must be called murder.

¹⁴⁰ St. Maximus, *Ambigua*, II, 7, P.G. 91:1100C6-D2; quoted by Congourdeau, *op. cit.*, p. 697.

¹⁴¹ St. Maximus, *Ambigua*, II, 7, P.G. 91:1101A10-C7.

¹⁴² St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II, 12.

11. ORTHODOXY, FEMINISM AND THE NEW SCIENCE OF MAN

"There is nothing new under the sun," said the wise Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1.9). And truly, there is nothing new either in the sexual so-called revolution of the 1960s, or in the horrific scientific experiments on the human reproductive system of the 1990s (whether performed by humans or "aliens"). The former was foreshadowed by the depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the latter - by the giants born from the unnatural unions of the sons of God (perhaps fallen angels) with the daughters of men.¹⁴³ Orthodox Christians will not have been seduced by either, knowing that their end is the same - wholesale destruction from the face of the Lord.

However, there is something at least relatively new, and potentially much more seductive, in the new theory of man that has been built up on the basis of these sexual and scientific "revolutions". This new humanism is much more radical than the humanism of the early modern period, although it shares the same basic presuppositions. The basic tenet of humanism in all its periods is that man is autonomous and can control his own destiny without recourse to God, Who either does not interfere in human affairs (Deism) or does not in fact exist (atheism).

From the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries humanism asserted that man could control his own destiny, and ultimately human nature itself, by controlling his *environment*. The *genetic* inheritance of man was assumed to be relatively immutable; but that did not matter, because education and environmental manipulation were thought to be capable of producing all the changes necessary to make man as an individual, and society as a whole, "without spot or wrinkle". The most characteristic result of this old-style humanism in the theoretical field was the American B.F. Skinner's behaviourist psychology, which reduced most of human life to operant conditioning; and in the practical sphere - the Soviet Gulag and Homo Sovieticus.

¹⁴³ "Now the giants were upon the earth in those days; and after that when the sons of God were wont to go in to the daughters of men, they bore children to them, those were the giants of old, the men of renown" (Gen. 6.2-5). The Fathers of the Church interpreted this passage in two ways. According to Lopukhin, the majority of the Jewish and Christian interpreters of antiquity, including Justin the Philosopher, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Ambrose and others understood the term "sons of God" to mean "angels" - that is, the fallen angels or demons. But an equally impressive array of Fathers, including John Chrysostom, Ephraim the Syrian, Blessed Theodoret, Cyril of Jerusalem, Blessed Jerome and Blessed Augustine understood the term to denote the men of the line of Seth, while the "daughters of men" referred to the women of the line of Cain; so that the event described involved an unlawful mixing between the pious and the impious human generations (*Tolkovaia Biblia*, St. Petersburg, 1904-1907 / Stockholm, 1987, volume 1, pp. 44-45).

For a good discussion of this passage, see Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978,

This first, what we might call masculine phase of humanism ended in 1953 with the death of Stalin and the discovery of DNA by Watson and Crick. This discovery meant that now not only the *environment*, but also the *genes* of man could be in principle manipulated and controlled. However, neither science nor the moral climate of the humanist world was yet prepared to see the path to *total control* which, according to the humanist model of man, this discovery opened up. For if man is the interaction of his genes and his environment, with no "intervening variables" such as human freewill or Divine grace, then the possibility of manipulating *both* genes *and* environment is equivalent to the possibility of a control of man and society far more *totalitarian* in principle even than the Soviet experiment that was just beginning to run out of steam.

The event which began to change the moral climate in the desired direction was the discovery of the female contraceptive pill and the subsequent revolution in the role of women in society, which is why we might call this the *feminine* phase of humanism. If the driving force of the earlier, masculine phase had been *the will to power*, then the driving force of this later, more radical, feminine phase has been *the lust for pleasure*. For the discovery of the pill opened up a new prospect - that of maximising sexual pleasure while minimising any unpleasant consequences in the shape of pregnancies.

But democracy demanded that the fruits of this revolution should not be enjoyed only by heterosexuals, and so homosexuals, too, won that recognition of their activities as natural and moral which all monotheist, and even many pagan societies have always refused them.

The feminization of western civilization continued apace with the rise of feminism, and the appearance of women priests. Perhaps this was the fulfilment of the vision of St. John of Kronstadt, which though considered by some to be inauthentic, is nevertheless full of profoundly prophetic images: "O Lord, how awful! Just then there jumped onto the altar some sort of abominable, vile, disgusting black woman, all in red with a star on her forehead. She spun round on the altar, then cried out in a terrible voice like a night owl through the whole cathedral: 'Freedom!' and stood up. And the people, as if out of their minds, began to run round the altar, rejoicing and clapping and shouting and whistling."¹⁴⁴

With the last vestiges of tradition in Christian thought and worship swept aside, the stage was set for a really new, really radical stage in the revolution: *the abolition of sexuality*. The Soviets, to the applause of western liberals, had tried, and to a large extent succeeded, in abolishing religion, the nation, the law and the family. But sexuality remained as one of the last bastions of

¹⁴⁴ "Son' Otsa Ioann Kronshtadtskago" ("The Vision of John of Kronstadt"), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (*Orthodox Rus'*), № 20, October 15/28, 1952; translated in V. Moss, *The Imperishable Word*, Old Woking: Gresham Press, 1980.

normal human life, and therefore a potential nest of counter-revolution, as was recognized by Zamyatin in his novel *We* and by Orwell in 1984.

And so it has been left to the capitalism of the 1990s to carry through this, one of the last steps of the revolution. Its executors, appropriately enough, have been the scientists, the high priests of humanism. What they appear to be saying is that: (i) sexuality, and sexual orientation, is largely in the genes; therefore (ii) sexuality, and sexual orientation, can be predicted and, if necessary, changed before birth through genetic therapy; (iii) men can become women, and women can become men; (iv) hybrid species can be created, and (v) *sexuality is unnecessary from a reproductive point of view, because human beings can be cloned from a single adult cell.*

Of course, the latter statement has not yet been experimentally proved (and, as I shall argue, it could never in fact be proved). Nor is there any lack of voices warning against the dangers of such an experiment. But in spite of all these warnings there seems to be an implicit acceptance, not only that the cloning of human beings is possible, but that it must come sometime.

If (and it is a very big "if", as we shall see) the cloning of human beings were possible, then man would potentially be master of his destiny in a quite new sense. Although the original building blocks of human nature, the cell and its components, would still come to him ready-made (creation ex nihilo remains the only feat which man still feels compelled to concede to God alone), he would then be able to manipulate the building blocks in such a way as to make human beings to order, having whatever physical or psychological characteristics he chose. Frankenstein already seems crude compared to what scientists can theoretically do comparatively soon.

It has often been observed that science, far from being the domain of the purely disinterested observation of nature, is often closely connected with moral or religious impulses - more often than not, immoral and irreligious ones. Thus the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century was closely linked to a falling away of faith in Divine Revelation and a corresponding increase of faith in man's ability to discover the truth by means of his own intellect, unaided by the Divine Logos. The Darwinian revolution of the nineteenth century was likewise closely linked to the desire to prove the autonomy of man and his ineluctable progress to ever great moral and spiritual heights - again, by his own (or rather, Blind Chance's) efforts alone. Now the genetic revolution of the late twentieth century has raised man's autonomy to godlike status; for having reduced all life to "the selfish gene" it has claimed mastery of the gene itself - all for the sake of the lowest and most selfish of aims. In this way has the native heresy of the British Isles, Pelagianism, which denies original sin and over-emphasizes the power of man's unaided freewill, come to find its most developed and dangerous

expression in the worship of science in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and from there - throughout the world.

Each stage of the scientific-humanist revolution has seemed to justify one part of man's fallen nature as being in fact unfallen. The Newtonian physics of the seventeenth century established the credentials of science as such, and therefore of the power of *the mind*, which since Thomas Aquinas had been declared to be unfallen. The Darwinian biology of the nineteenth century justified man's *aggression* at the individual level and *cut-throat competition* at the level of corporations and nations; for did not the law of the survival of the fittest demonstrate that only the aggressive and merciless survive, and that the meek not only do not inherit the earth but are exterminated from it? Finally, the Watsonian genetics of the twentieth century has justified even the basest of man's *desires* by demonstrating to him that he can't help it, there's nothing to be ashamed of, because it's all in our genes anyway. And if for some hedonistic reason (it couldn't be a *moral* reason, for how can one moralize about Mother Nature?) he doesn't like the inherited pattern of his own desiring, he can modify it by a mixture of surgery and gene and hormone therapy.

The immediate reaction of Orthodox Christians to this is, of course, one of horror that human beings should seek to play God and seriously contemplate such experiments in the re-creation of human nature as make Hitler's eugenics look like child's play by comparison. An intellectual response might proceed from two cardinal tenets of Orthodox anthropology: (1) the immortality and relative immateriality of the soul; and (2) the immorality of any attempt to change the nature of sexuality insofar as the latter symbolizes immutable and eternal relationships in the Divine order of things.

Let us briefly consider each of these. (1) Whereas the body was made from the earth, the soul was made from God's inbreathing and therefore does not perish with the body. As Solomon says: "The dust returneth to the earth, as it was, and the soul returneth to God Who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12.7). The soul thus freed from the body is fully conscious. This is shown by the Prophet Samuel's speaking to King Saul from beyond the grave (I Kings 28.11-19). For "even after he had died he prophesied and revealed to the king his death" (Sirach 46.20).

This being so, the cloning of a human being, assuming it were possible, would be a cloning only of his physical nature, his body, and not of his soul. Souls cannot be cloned, for they are not material. Even if the clone spoke and acted just like a human being, it or he would be at best a different human being, with a different soul, just as twins born from the same fertilized egg are nevertheless two different human beings with two different souls. At worst it might not be a human being at all, but a demon inhabiting a human body that had no human soul. And if this seems fantastic, we may recall the opinion of

the well-known Lutheran researcher into the occult, Dr. Kurt Koch, who in the 1970s claimed that so-called "resurrections from the dead" in Indonesia were in fact cases of demons entering into corpses and "resurrecting" them.

For true resurrection from the dead, and therefore also true cloning, can be accomplished only by God, because while men have a certain power over flesh alone, God is the Lord both of spirits and of flesh, and only He can either send a spirit into a newly-formed body or reunite it with a dead one.

This point is well illustrated in one of the homilies of St. Ephraim the Syrian on the last days, in which the one thing which the Antichrist is shown to be incapable of doing is raising the dead: "And when 'the son of perdition' has drawn to his purpose the whole world, Enoch and Elias shall be sent that they may confute the evil one by a question filled with mildness. Coming to him, these holy men, that they may expose 'the son of perdition' before the multitudes round about him, will say: 'If you are God, show us what we now ask of you. In what place do the men of old, Enoch and Elias, lie hidden?' Then the evil one will at once answer the holy men: 'If I wish to seek for them in heaven, in the depths of the sea, every abode lies open to me. There is no other God but me; and I can do all things in heaven and on earth.' They shall answer the son of perdition: 'If you are God, call the dead, and they will rise up. For it is written in the books of the Prophets, and also by the Apostles, that Christ, when He shall appear, will raise the dead from their tombs. If you do not show us this, we shall conclude that He Who was crucified is greater than you; for He raised the dead, and was Himself raised to heaven in great glory.' In that moment the most abominable evil one, angered against the saints, seizing the sword, will sever the heads of the just men."¹⁴⁵

We may rest assured, therefore, that no man, not even the Antichrist, will ever be able to create a new human being possessed of both soul and body from one cell of another human being - although he may well be able to create what *seems* to be a true clone; for in those days "by great signs and wonders he will lead astray, if it were possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24.24).

(2) It is striking that so many of the "advances" in the modern science of man have been made in connection with experiments on sexuality. We have seen one reason for this - the sudden general slackening of morals in the western world in the 1960s, which gave science the task of pandering to the newly liberated desires of the people. But there is another and profounder reason connected with the fact that, from an early age, sexuality is felt to be at the deepest, most intimate core of the child's personality.

Thus the greatest, most wounding insult you can give to a young boy is to say that he is a "sissy" or like a girl. A boy would rather be dead than be seen

¹⁴⁵ St. Ephraim, III, col 188; sermon 2; translated by M.F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, London: Longmans, 1963, vol. 4, p. 357.

wearing pink or having a close friendship with a girl. And similarly with girls. And although psychologists and educators have had some success in bringing dating down to an unnaturally early age, they have failed completely to make boys play with dolls or make girls like typically boyish pursuits. For boys will be boys, and girls - girls.

Why should this be? After all, is it not the case that in Christ there is "neither male nor female" (Gal. 3.28), which would seem to imply that sexual differentiation is not a fundamental, eternal category? And did the Lord not say that there would be no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven, but that the saved would be like the sexless angels?

On the other hand, is it conceivable that Christ should ever be anything other than male in His humanity? Or the Mother of God female? And is not the very idea of a change of sex repugnant to us, which implies that there is something deeper to sexuality than meets the eye, something more than merely a set of biological differences.

Let us then consider the question: what is the significance of sexual differentiation?

Genetics tells us that the essential difference between men and women consists in the possession by men of one X and one Y chromosome, whereas women possess two X chromosomes. This might at first suggest that men have something "extra" which women do not have. However, neither biology nor theology has ever pinpointed what that something "extra" might be. Nor is it at all clear that the interaction of one X and one Y chromosome makes for a *superior* creature to the product of the interaction of two X chromosomes. In any case, genetics, like all the sciences, studies nature *after* the Fall, and cannot tell us anything directly about nature before the Fall, still less what the deeper purpose of sexual differences might be in Divine Providence.

Nevertheless, it can provide some intriguing pointers; and the biological evidence suggests that sexual differences are deep in some respects and superficial in others. Thus chromosomal masculinity or femininity appears to be present at birth and relatively immutable. On the other hand, many sexual differences, including the external genitalia, can be changed and even reversed from one gender to the other by hormone therapy and surgery - but without changing the patient's feeling of who, sexually speaking, he or she really is.¹⁴⁶

Could this contrast between "deep" and "superficial" sexual differences reflect a contrast between sexual differences before the Fall and sexual differences after the Fall?

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Dorothy Kimura, "Sex Differences in the Brain", *Scientific American*, vol. 267, September, 1992, pp. 80-87.

Before the Fall there was Adam and Eve, male and female; and this difference was "deep" in the sense that it existed from the beginning and will continue to exist, presumably, into eternity. But after the Fall further, more "superficial" differences were added to enable mankind to reproduce in a fallen world. In the same way, the eye was refashioned after the Fall, according to St. John Chrysostom, to enable it to weep.

This means that sexuality was there from the beginning, and that the essence of the relationship between the sexes is an essential part of human nature, but that human reproductive anatomy and physiology as we them know today - including the painfulness of childbirth itself - were superimposed upon the unfallen image. This idea of the "superimposition" of sexual differences upon the original image was developed by, among others, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Maximus the Confessor. It may also be that some of the particularities of women that Holy Scripture refers to - their domination by men (Gen. 3.16) and their being "the weaker vessel" in terms of emotional control (1 Peter 3.7) - belong to these more superficial characteristics that were added only after the Fall and can therefore be overcome in Christ.

This brings us to the complaints of the feminists. First, there is the complaint that women are not treated as equal to men. Now Holy Scripture and Tradition agrees with the feminists that women are essentially equal to men, being made, like them, in the image of God, and to that extent should be treated equally. However, if "equal treatment" means "*same* treatment", then Orthodoxy disagrees. For men and women have always been different, both before and after the Fall, and these differences entail that women should have a different place in society from men.

The "deep", antelapsarian differences between men and women cannot be changed, and the attempt to change them is disastrous, both for men and for women. The "superficial", postlapsarian differences between men and women can be changed, not in the sense that sex-change operations are permissible (the Church forbids self-mutilation), but in the sense that the fallen character of relationships between men and women can be overcome in Christ. Marriage in Christ is one of the ways in which sexuality is stripped of its superficiality, going from the Fall to Paradise: the other is monasticism, in which a man becomes a eunuch, spiritually speaking, for the Kingdom of heaven's sake (Matt. 19.12).

Let us try and define this "deeper", antelapsarian nature of sexuality.

St. Paul gives us the clue: "I want you to understand," he writes, "that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God... A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man. For man was

not made from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head" (I Cor. 11.3.7-10).

In other words, the relationship between man and woman in some respect reflects and symbolizes the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, on the one hand, and God the Son and mankind, on the other. Each of these is a *hierarchical* relationship, which is compared to that between the head and the body. Thus while God the Father is equal to God the Son in essence, which is why He says: "The Father and I are one" (John 10.30), the Son nevertheless obeys the Father, the Origin of the Godhead, in all things, which is why He says: "My Father is greater than all" (John 10.29). In the same way, man and woman are equal in essence, but the woman must "be subject to her husband in all things" (Eph. 5.24). By contrast, the relationship between God the Son and mankind would at first sight appear to be different from these insofar as the Divinity is *not* equal in essence to humanity. However, the Incarnation of the Son and the Descent of the Holy Spirit has effected an "interchange of qualities", whereby God the Son has assumed humanity, and humanity has become "a partaker of the Divine nature" (II Peter 1.4) - as the Fathers put it, "God became man so that men should become gods". Therefore the originally unequal relationship between God and man has been in a certain sense levelled by its transformation into the new relationship between Christ and the Church, which can now be described, similarly, in terms of the relationship between head and body.

Now we can see that the very "primitive", very human relationship between head and body, or between male and female, has within itself the capacity to mirror and illumine for us, not only the supremely important, and more-than-merely-human, relationship between Christ and the Church, but also - albeit faintly, "as through a glass darkly" - the more-than-Divine, intra-Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son. Thus the male-female relationship, and even the basic structure of the human body, is an icon, a material likeness, of the most spiritual and ineffable mysteries of the universe. For just as the head (the man) is lifted above the body (the woman) and rules her, but is completely devoted to caring for her, so does Christ love the Church, His Body, and give His life for her - all in obedience to *His* Head, the Father, Who "so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3.16). That is why the relationship between man and woman is not accidental or superficial, still less fallen, but holy - and the entrance into the Holy of Holies. And that is why, according to the holy canons, the sacrament of marriage can only be celebrated on a Sunday, the eighth day, which symbolizes eternity; for even if there will be no marrying or giving in marriage in eternity, marriage will forever symbolize that eternal relationship of love between Christ and the Church which underpins the whole of reality, both temporal and eternal.

From this perspective we can see that the psychological differences between man and woman correspond precisely to the differences in spiritual function between Christ and the Church, and that these differences were implanted in human nature from the beginning precisely in order to mirror the spiritual relationships. The man is more intellectual, because he, like Christ, must lead and take the initiative; the woman is more emotional, because she, like the Church, must respond to him in love. The man is more aggressive, because he, like Christ, must wage war on the devil; the woman is more sensitive and intuitive, because she, like the Church, must be sensitive to the will of her husband.

Of course, these natural, unfallen differences have been corrupted by the Fall: men tend to be crude and boastful, women - weak-willed and easily led by all kinds of influences. If the man must still lead the woman in the Fall, this is not because he is less fallen than her, or less in need of being led by *his* Head, but because obedience to the hierarchical principle at all levels is the only way out of the Fall. For only if the woman obeys the man, and the man obeys Christ, as Christ obeyed the Father, can grace work to heal the fallen nature of mankind. This is not to say that the woman must obey the man in any circumstances; for if he disobeys Christ, and demands that she follow him in his disobedience, she must disobey him out of obedience to Christ. In this case the hierarchical principle has been violated at one level (the level of the man), but remains intact at another (the level of the woman).

It should be obvious - but needs saying, in view of the blasphemous things that are being said by today's modernist theologians - that the fact that the relationship between man and woman mirrors the relationships between Christ and the Church in no way implies that God is subject to sexual passion, or that He is masculine (or feminine) in essence. We are not projecting human sexuality onto God. The point is rather the reverse: that sexuality was created by God in order that man should understand, even in the depths of his physical being, the fundamental pattern and dynamic that holds the universe together in God. This pattern is unity-in-hierarchy, and the dynamic is the attraction of complementaries on one level of hierarchy into unity on a higher level. The initiative in the attraction of complementaries comes from the male pole. The male seeks out the female, and the female responds to the male. Having united they become "a new creature" on a higher plane of existence, that of Christ, Who in relation to the newly formed dyad is Himself the male partner and the initiator of the whole process on the lower plane, so that the human monads become a dyad only in the third, Divine Monad. That is why Christ, on becoming man, had to become *male*. For, as the fairy-tales of all lands testify, it is the man who saves, the woman who is saved; it is the man whose masculine strength and courage destroys the destroyer, it is the woman whose extraordinary beauty and grace inspires him to such feats. So when God came to save mankind from the power of the devil, he necessarily came as a man to save His woman...

Of course, when we speak of "necessity" here, we are not speaking of physical necessity; nor are we placing any limitations on God, for Whom all things are possible. We are simply responding to the clues God has given us in the universe to show why it had to be so; we are recognising that there is a *spiritual* necessity in what actually took place. We are recognising that a drama reflects the mind of a dramatist, and that the Divine Actor of the Drama of our salvation would never allow Himself to give a performance in life which did not exactly match the conception of the Divine Dramatist, which did not perfectly embody the canons of Divine Beauty.

Now there is another sacrament that, like marriage, almost precisely mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church - that of priesthood. The priest (and especially the bishop) is the head of his flock as Christ is the Head of the Church, and the priest must lay down his life for his flock as Christ laid down His life for the Church. There is even a sense in which the priest may be said to be the husband of his flock, which may be the reason why there is a canon (unfortunately, very often violated today) forbidding bishops to move from one diocese to another.

Just as Christ had to be born a male, so the icon of Christ, the bishop, and his representative, the priest, must be a male. For "since the beginning of time," as St. Epiphanius of Cyprus says, "a woman has never served God as a priest".¹⁴⁷ If the priest is a woman, the iconic relationship between Christ the Saviour and Great High Priest and the priesthood is destroyed.

As Bishop Kallistos (Ware) writes: "The priest is an icon of Christ; and since the incarnate Christ became not only man but a male - since, furthermore, in the order of nature the roles of male and female are not interchangeable - it is necessary that a priest should be male. Those Western Christians who do not in fact regard the priest as an icon of Christ are of course free to ordain women as ministers; they are not, however, creating women priests but dispensing with priesthood altogether...

"It is one of the chief glories of human nature that men and women, although equal, are not interchangeable. Together they exercise a common ministry which neither could exercise alone; for within that shared ministry each has a particular role. There exists between them a certain order or hierarchy, with man as the 'head' and woman as the partner or 'helper' (Gen. 2.18); yet this differentiation does not imply any fundamental inequality between them. Within the Trinity, God the Father is the source and 'head' of Christ (I Cor. 11.3), and yet the three Persons are essentially equal; and the same is true of the relationship of man and woman. The Greek Fathers,

¹⁴⁷ St. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, LXXIX, i, 7; cited in Archimandrite (now Bishop) Kallistos Ware, "Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ", in Peter Moore (ed.), *Man, Woman, Priesthood*, London: SPCK, 1976.

although often negative in their opinion of the female sex, were on the whole absolutely clear about the basic human equality of man and woman. Both alike are created in God's image; the subordination of woman to man and her exploitation reflect not the order of nature created by God, but the contra-natural conditions resulting from original sin. Equal yet different according to the order of nature, man and woman complete each other through their free co-operation; and this complementarity is to be respected on every level - when at home in the circle of the family, when out at work, and not least in the life of the Church, which blesses and transforms the natural order but does not obliterate it...

"Men and women are not interchangeable, like counters, or identical machines. The difference between them... extends far more deeply than the physical act of procreation. The sexuality of human beings is not an accident, but affects them in their very identity and in their deepest mystery. Unlike the differentiation between Jew and Greek or between slave and free - which reflects man's fallen state and are due to social convention, not to nature - the differentiation between male and female is an aspect of humanity's natural state before the Fall. The life of grace in the Church is not bound by social convention or the conditions produced by the Fall; but it does conform to the order of nature, in the sense of the unfallen nature as created by God. Thus the distinction between male and female is not abolished in the Church."¹⁴⁸

The perverseness of female "priesthood" is somewhat similar to the perverseness of homosexual "marriage". In both cases, the "innate preaching" of Christ's Incarnation that is implanted in our sexual nature, instead of being reinforced and deepened by the sacraments of the Church, is contradicted and in effect destroyed by a blasphemous parody of them.

That is why such things are felt to be unnatural by men and condemned as abominations by God. And if scientific humanism seeks to redefine what is natural, let us recall that such humanism, according to Fr. Seraphim Rose, is *subhumanism*. It is "a rebellion against the true nature of man and the world, a flight from God the center of man's existence, clothed in the language of the opposite of all these."¹⁴⁹

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¹⁴⁸ Ware, *op. cit.*, pp. 83, 84-85, 80.

¹⁴⁹ Fr. Seraphim, quoted by Monk Damascene, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

12. 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.”¹⁵⁰ 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!

¹⁵⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 47 on John*, 2.

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!”¹⁵¹

Rationalist. But “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God” (I Cor. 15.50).

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.”¹⁵²... 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’.”¹⁵³... 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.

¹⁵¹ St. John of Damascus, *First Apology against those who Attack the Divine Images*, 16.

¹⁵² St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 23.20.

¹⁵³ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 13.

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!

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..."¹⁵⁴ 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.

¹⁵⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 46 on John*, 3.

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 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."¹⁵⁵ 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.

¹⁵⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 37.

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.

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”.¹⁵⁶ It is absolutely essential to realize that we cannot understand 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.

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.

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.

¹⁵⁶ Blessed Theophylact, *On Matthew*, 26.26.

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"¹⁵⁷, 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 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.*"¹⁵⁸

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)

¹⁵⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on I Corinthians*.

¹⁵⁸ St. John Maximovich, "The Church as the Body of Christ", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 31, № 5, September-October, 1981, pp. 16-17.

13. 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."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007, p. 198.

The question is: why did it take so long for the cult of the Mother of God to develop? Bercot offers a typically modernist, psychologising 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 apostasised 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 attaché 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 Mary¹⁶⁰, 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

¹⁶⁰ St. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 19, 1.

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 Mary derives wholly from the glory of her being chosen to be the Mother of God.¹⁶¹ 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”.¹⁶² 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

¹⁶¹ St. John of Damascus, *First Homily on the Dormition*, 12.

¹⁶² St. Photius the Great, *Homily on the Nativity of the Virgin*.

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.

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 Palamas¹⁶³, 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 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?"

¹⁶³ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 18, on the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers*.

(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.*"¹⁶⁴

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 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.

¹⁶⁴ 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).

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 thy 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?¹⁶⁵ 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).

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

¹⁶⁵ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 14, on the Annunciation*, 15.

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 a witness from the Early, Pre-Nicene Church, that of St. Gregory the Wonderworker: "Thy praise, O most holy Virgin, surpasses all laudation, be 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."¹⁶⁶

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¹⁶⁶ St. Gregory the Wonderworker, *Homily 3, On the Annunciation*.

14. AN ORTHODOX APPROACH TO ART

To those who, like the present writer, have derived such 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? How, and to what extent, can a Christian take part in the cultural life of his age?

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.

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."¹⁶⁷

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 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."¹⁶⁸

Artists themselves, even secular ones, have often sensed this truth. Thus when the poet W.B. Yeats wrote:

*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.

The Russian religious 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 with it, 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 'objectivization'. With this proviso, however, the difference between the two kinds of poetry holds good.

¹⁶⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 5.

¹⁶⁸ T. Colliander, *The Way of the Ascetics*, London: Harvill, 1961, p. 73.

“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...”¹⁶⁹

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 embryo. But man as an 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.

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”. The romantic answer is: “to express myself”. It is highly unlikely that he will 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 least self-centred, the least influenced by fallen emotions and purposes, and the most open to the workings of grace; which is why the works of classical artists such as Bach and Handel are recommended by spiritual 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 either his own fallen self or even 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) – and is not the romantic artist concerned above all to “express his own heart”? Some romantic artists, such as 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.

¹⁶⁹ Frank, *Reality and Man*, London: Faber & Faber, 1965, pp. 219-220.

For if the artist is honestly expressing his own nature, since that nature is fallen, he will undoubtedly be expressing its fallenness. 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."¹⁷⁰ 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 corrupt in man from his youth, being "deceitful above all things". As Bishop Ignatius 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..."¹⁷¹

Nevertheless, the exact expression of one's 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. And truth is always to be honoured.

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."¹⁷² 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.

¹⁷⁰ 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 (in Russian).

¹⁷¹ 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 (in Russian).

¹⁷² Metropolitan Anastasy, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

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.*

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, for now it has “shape” and “a local habitation and a name”. Thus by giving an objective, sensual 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 is like David's 50th Psalm, being not merely the expression of emotion, and 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 a certain 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 against the truth about the higher powers that rule his nature and his destiny. In other words, artistic truth, consistently pursued, leads to religious truth.

And so "in the soul of the artist," says St. Barsanuphius 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".¹⁷³

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 "so potent art", in the far subtler, deeper and more lawful art of the Creator:

¹⁷³ Victor Afanasyev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, p. 500.

*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.*

Is there any parallel to artistic self-expression in sacred literature, in the life of the Church? Yes – the Psalms of David are a clear example. St. Nectarius of Optina says 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.”¹⁷⁴

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 sympathize with him in his fall. And perhaps even applaud his prayer... But, 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... Could it be that St. Augustine’s tragedy is that the generations of Western Christians that followed him mistook some of the symptoms of his illness to be stages of spiritual ascension?”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ *Zhitia Prepodobnykh Startsev Optinoj Pustyni (The Lives of the Holy Elders of Optina Desert)*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1992 (in Russian).

¹⁷⁵ Sveshnikov, “Blessed Augustine’s View of Self”, *Orthodox Life*, May-June, 2010, p. 47.

The Case of Gogol

Let us look at some further examples of artistic self-expression in Church life.

In his later years, under the influence of such men as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, the poet Alexander Pushkin came closer to the Orthodox Faith. And both his poetry and his ideal of art became deeper as a result. Ivan Andreyev writes: "The essence of the 'theory' of Pushkin and Zhukovsky (it was not formally clothed into a system, but 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."¹⁷⁶

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 Macarius of Optina¹⁷⁷ 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, rightly or wrongly. 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."¹⁷⁸

Some churchmen did not share the ascetic approach to his art of Gogol and his spiritual fathers. 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

¹⁷⁶ Andreyev, "Religioznoe litso Gogolia" (The Religious Face of Gogol), *Pravoslavniy Put'* (The Orthodox Way), 1952, p. 164 (in Russian).

¹⁷⁷ Fr. Matthew "unhesitatingly directed Gogol to Elder Macarius of Optina, stating that this was what his heart was searching for. Elder Macarius 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 Macarius, 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).

¹⁷⁸ 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.

Feodore 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 Konstantinovskiy, who rejected everything that 'did not openly bear the 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'.¹⁷⁹

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

¹⁷⁹ 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).

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 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.'...

"From the last thought, as from a small seed, during the years of Gogol's unswerving spiritual growth, there grew the decision to burn his last finish work and fall silent.

"The burning before his death of the second part of *Dead Souls* was Gogol's greatest exploit, which he wanted to hide not only from men, but also from himself.

"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."¹⁸⁰

Shortly before he died, Gogol wrote in a letter to Optina: "For Christ's sake, pray for me. Ask your respected Abbot and all the brothers, and ask all who pray more diligently there, to pray for me. My path is hard. 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..."¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Andreev, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-182. St. Barsanuphius of Optina expressed a similar view. "Gogol," he said, "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 Nosdrevs 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 Macarius [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*..." (Victor Afanasyev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, pp. 483-484).

¹⁸¹ Kavelin, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

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 answering 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 the contents of their own souls, 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 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."¹⁸²

Even the chess genius Emmanuel Lasker felt this beauty akin to divinity that the greatest artists felt. 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..."¹⁸³

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".¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Metropolitan Anastasy, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁸³ Einstein, in Daniel Johnson, *White King and Red Queen*, London: Atlantic Books, 2007, p. 52.

¹⁸⁴ Ekonomtsev, "Pravoslavie, Vizantia, Rossia" (Orthodoxy, Byzantium, Russia); quoted in Liubomudrov, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

Ekonomtsev is here reiterating the false “dogma” of the Romantic era – the moral and spiritual 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 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...”¹⁸⁵

The word “creation” was understood by the Romantics almost literally, as the activity of God creating *ex nihilo*. This meant, however, that Romantic art 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

¹⁸⁵ Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence*, New York: Perennial, 2001, pp. 473-474.

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 – 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.”¹⁸⁶

As Adam Zamoyski notes, this rebelliousness common to the revolution and romantic art brought them closer together. This was especially obvious 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

¹⁸⁶ Berlin, “The Essence of European Romanticism”, in *The Power of Ideas*, London: Chatto & Windus, 2000, pp. 202-203.

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."¹⁸⁷

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, let us take the operas of Wagner, or Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring. Very fine music, the products of real genius - of that there can be no doubt. But extremely dangerous spiritually. 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.¹⁸⁸

The identification of art and demonism can be still closer. Thus the decadent artists of the Symbolist movement 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."¹⁸⁹

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 dynamic and sinister "Demon Downcast" (1902).¹⁹⁰

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

¹⁸⁷ Zamoyski, *Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots and Revolutionaries, 1776-1871*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p. 255.

¹⁸⁸ "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..." (in Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, London: Phoenix, 2007, p. 330).

¹⁸⁹ Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914*, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 223.

¹⁹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Symbolism.

of religion. *Le Divin Poem* (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.¹⁹¹ 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."¹⁹²

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..."¹⁹³

These strivings for mangodhood - 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 people at a subconscious level, because it introduces the demons. We are seeing terrifying examples of this in the West today.

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...

¹⁹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Symbolism.

¹⁹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Scriabin.

¹⁹³ Thomas Schipperges, *Prokofiev*, London: Haus Publishing, 2003, p. 8.

Sometimes even the most "spiritual" and classical of music can be corrupting. For example, Mozart's Requiem. Everyone agrees that this is beautiful, profound music. But the emotion it conveys is that of a soul in despair, a soul facing death and hell - 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 the emotion is deep, and the expression of it perfect, as we would expect from such a master. But 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. Barsanuphius 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."¹⁹⁴

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 that is good as art but evil in every other way because its content is evil, and its inspiration - from the devil.

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).¹⁹⁵ 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'."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Afanasyev, op. cit., p. 453.

¹⁹⁵ Metropolitan Anastasy, op. cit., p. 106.

¹⁹⁶ Metropolitan Anastasy, op. cit., p. 104.

These examples demonstrate that art can truly be infused with grace; it expresses not simply the contents of a fallen soul, but a soul striving for God and placing everything “under God’s gaze”. For, as St. Nectarius of Optina said: “One can practise art like anything else, but everything must be done as under God's gaze.”¹⁹⁷

Now this would seem to contradict the word of St. Barsanuphius 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.”¹⁹⁸ 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.”¹⁹⁹

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.

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.*

¹⁹⁷ *Zhitia Prepodobnykh Startsev Optinoj Pustyni*, op. cit.

¹⁹⁸ Afanasyev, op. cit., p. 651.

¹⁹⁹ Afanasyev, op. cit.

It is not certain whether Shakespeare is writing here from a personal experience of the true, undying love he describes, or his imagination of it. In any case, his sympathy for this ideal is clearly unfeigned, and gives to the whole sonnet a note of clarity, profundity and truth.

Or consider Fyodor Tiutchev's "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 – religious truths – are conveyed more powerfully with the aid of the poet's talent.

A famous example of secular artistic inspiration bordering on the sacred and Divine is Dostoyevsky's "Pushkin Speech", which took place fifty years after the "July Days" and represented the Divine opposite of that demonic manifestation. 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."²⁰⁰

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.²⁰¹ 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.

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

²⁰⁰ Metropolitan Anastasy, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10. Thus to the end of his life the Slavophile writer Ivan Aksakov remained under the influence of the Speech. As Dostoevsky 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 Dostoevsky'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" (in I. Volgin, *Poslednij God Dostoevskogo (Dostoevsky's Last Year)*, Moscow: Sovetskij Pisatel', 1986, p. 267 (in Russian)).

²⁰¹ Metropolitan Anastasy, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

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 which 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.”²⁰²

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 there, 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. 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”. As Wordsworth said in “The Prelude”:

*Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music.*

For “rest for the soul,” says St. Barsanuphius of Optina, “equals blessedness, which equals music, the harmony of all the powers of the soul.” “The instrument 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).”²⁰³

Since the Renaissance, and especially since the Romantic movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, art has been abstracted from its original 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.

²⁰² Metropolitan Anastasy, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

²⁰³ Afanasyev, *op. cit.*, pp. 716, 712.

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.”²⁰⁴

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.”

Again, St. Barsanuphius 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...”²⁰⁵

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. Barsanuphius of Optina, “is often spoken of in the Psalms: ‘The Lord is my strength and my song...’ (Psalms 117.14); I will sing and I will chant unto the Lord’ (Psalms 26.7); ‘I will chant to my God as long as I have my being’ (Psalms 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.”²⁰⁶ “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.”²⁰⁷

However, on the path to this consistent dwelling in the music of the soul, there will be days when even the music and words of the Orthodox Church fail to move us. For, as Shakespeare put it in The Merchant of Venice:

²⁰⁴ Lebedev, *Velikorossia* (Great Russia), St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 414 (in Russian).

²⁰⁵ Afanasyev, op. cit., pp. 440-441.

²⁰⁶ Afanasyev, op. cit., p. 712.

²⁰⁷ Afanasyev, op. cit., p. 110.

*Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.*

And so we have to work ascetically on ourselves in order to feel the grace of the words or music in our souls deeply and constantly.

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.

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(This is an adapted and greatly expanded version of "Letter to a Nun on Music", published in *Orthodox America*, November-December, 1996)

15. 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 proskynesis with ‘worship’ and latreia with ‘serve’. (Cf. St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 9-11).²⁰⁸

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.²⁰⁹

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

²⁰⁸ Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, Colorado, *The Orthodox New Testament*, vol. 2, 1999, p. 557.

²⁰⁹ 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... λατρεύσεις: ‘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).

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" (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 Bezalel 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 8th and 9th centuries, and the Protestants of the 16th 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.”²¹⁰

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 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.

²¹⁰ St. John of Damascus, *First Discourse on the Divine Images*, 24.

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 equaled English history since then. And as the Venerable Bede witnesses, icons were definitely used 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 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.”²¹¹

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

²¹¹ 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.

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. 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."²¹²

June 20 / July 3, 2004; revised May 13/26, 2010.

²¹² St. Methodius of Patara, *Second Sermon on the Resurrection*.

16. 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 Arimathaea 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. 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...

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, Monothelitism, 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.*

17. 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' υποστάσιν) and name (κατ' ὄνομα).²¹³

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".²¹⁴

(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

²¹³ St. Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus*, P.G. 99:405B; in V. Lossky, *The Vision of God*, Leighton Buzzard: Faith Press, 1963, p. 112.

²¹⁴ Lossky, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

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."

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."²¹⁵

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. But St. Ambrose says that he saw the Holy Trinity in the form of three young men or angels. 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."²¹⁶

²¹⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 32 on Genesis*, 4.

²¹⁶ St. Philaret, *Zapiski rukovodstvuuschia k osnovatel'nomu razumeniu Knigi Bytia* (Notes leading to a Basic Understanding of the Book of Genesis), Moscow, 1867, p. 122 (in Russian).

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 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 founts 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".²¹⁷

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 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.

²¹⁷ St. Nicodemus, (*The Rudder*, Chicago: Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1957, pp. 420-421).

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 Kalomirov, 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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18. 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"²¹⁸, 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.²¹⁹ 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 troubadors, 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."²²⁰ 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).

²¹⁸ See, for example, St. Photius the Great's *Homily on the Nativity of the Virgin*.

²¹⁹ Blessed Augustine, *On Marriage as a Good*, 6.

²²⁰ *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.

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?

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.²²¹ 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.²²² 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

²²¹ St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 15, Foreword.

²²² 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).

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 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?! And 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'."223

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

²²³ Hieromartyr Gregory (Lebedev) *Tolkovnaie Evangelia ot Marka (Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark)*, Moscow, 1991, p. 106 (in Russian).

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".²²⁴

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".²²⁵

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."²²⁶

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

²²⁴ Blessed Augustine, *On Marriage as a Good*, 6.

²²⁵ Blessed Theodoret, *Commentary on Deuteronomy* 21.13.

²²⁶ "An Address of the Right Reverend Tikhon", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 37, № 4, July-August, 1987, pp. 3-4.

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..."²²⁷

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).

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".²²⁸ 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

²²⁷ 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 (in French).

²²⁸ Blessed Augustine, *On Genesis according to the Letter*, XI, xxxxi.

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".²²⁹

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".²³⁰

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:

*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.*²³¹

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.

²²⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *First Discourse on Marriage*

²³⁰ St. Ignatius, *To Polycarp*, 5.

²³¹ St. Gregory the Theologian, *In Praise of Virginity*, 11.263-75, translated in *Orthodox Life*, November-December, 1981.

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 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."²³²

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.

²³² St. Tikhon, *Journey to Heaven*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1991. p. 117

With such love, a person sees the body only as an image. His admiration carries him through to the Artist himself - to true beauty."²³³

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."²³⁴

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).

²³³ Clement of Alexandria, *The One Who Knows God*, Tyler, Texas: Scroll Publishing, 1990, pp. 90-91.

²³⁴ St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 15:60.

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."²³⁵ 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.²³⁶

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 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

²³⁵ Khomiakov, in *Orthodox Life*, November-December, 1983, p. 22.

²³⁶ 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).

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..."²³⁷

Virginity 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 virginity 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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²³⁷ *Pis'ma Arkhiepiskopa Feofana Poltavskago i Pereyaslavskago (The Letters of Archbishop Theophan of Poltava and Pereyaslav)*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1976, pp. 35-37 (in Russian).

19. DEATH AND THE TOLL-HOUSES

It is decreed that men should die once, and after that the judgement.
Hebrews 9.27.

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...”²³⁸

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*.²³⁹ St. Barsanuphius of Optina called this *Essay* “indispensable” in its genre”.²⁴⁰ In recent years this teaching has been challenged by OCA Archbishop Lazarus (Puhalo).²⁴¹ Although refuted both by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose²⁴² and by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad²⁴³, 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.

²³⁸ St. Macarius, *Homilies*, XLIII, 4, 9.

²³⁹ 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).

²⁴⁰ Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, p. 736.

²⁴¹ Puhalo, “The Soul, The Body and Death”, *Orthodoxy Canada*, vols. 6-7 (1979-80).

²⁴² Rose, *The Soul after Death*, Platina, 1980, 2004.

²⁴³ “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.

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."²⁴⁴

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."²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ St. Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., pp. 75-76.

²⁴⁵ *The Letters of Ammonas*, Oxford: SLG Press, 1979, p. 3.

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 ‘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’ (Psalms 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 3rd) 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)." ²⁴⁶

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.'" ²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ 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.

²⁴⁷ 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).

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 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."²⁴⁸

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.

²⁴⁸ 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.

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."²⁴⁹

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 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.

²⁴⁹ Puhalo, *Orthodoxy Canada*, vol. 6, no. 12, 1979, p. 23.

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.’”²⁵⁰

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.”²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ *The Orthodox Word*, May-June, 1980, pp. 139-140.

²⁵¹ St. Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Anthony*.

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 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...”²⁵²

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.

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 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,

²⁵² St. Mark of Ephesus, “First Homily on Purgatorial Fire”, *The Orthodox Word*, March-April, 1978.

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."²⁵³ 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".²⁵⁴

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 night for us.'"²⁵⁵

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 thing 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 fruitful [of thought] and that their minds were familiar with the Scriptures, but he was not acquainted with their intellectual

²⁵³ Puhalo, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 33.

²⁵⁴ Puhalo, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁵⁵ Palladius, *The Paradise of the Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 200.

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.”²⁵⁶

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...”²⁵⁷

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

²⁵⁶ *The Paradise of the Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 292-293.

²⁵⁷ 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 (in French).

awakened.”²⁵⁸ 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 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?”²⁵⁹

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...”²⁶⁰

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)

²⁵⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Lazarus and the Rich Man*.

²⁵⁹ St. John Cassian, *First Conference of Abba Moses*.

²⁶⁰ St. Dorotheus, *Kataniktikoi Logoi*, in Archimandrite Vasilios Bakogiannis, *After Death*, Katerini, 2001, p. 123.

20. 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 Bishop Ignatius 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.*"²⁶¹ 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 Bishop Ignatius, 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.

²⁶¹ Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1991, chapter 12, p. 43, emphasis mine

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, 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."²⁶²

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)."²⁶³

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."²⁶⁴

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."

²⁶² St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; Willits, CA: Eastern Orthodox Books, 1973, p. 67, Step 4:6.

²⁶³ St. Symeon, *Practical and Theological Texts*, 32, 34, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 3.

²⁶⁴ *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1976, pp. 68, 147-148.

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.

Bishop Ignatius 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).²⁶⁵

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 Ignatius 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

²⁶⁵ Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 45, emphasis his.

they stumble upon an idée fixe, which is considered to be an unshakeable axiom."²⁶⁶

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."²⁶⁷

Bishop Ignatius' 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 Bishop Ignatius' writings²⁶⁸ explains that Bishop Ignatius' 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.

²⁶⁶ Kontzevich, *Optina Pustyn' i ee Vremia (Optina Desert and its Time)*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1970, pp. 12-13, emphasis his (in Russian).

²⁶⁷ Bishop Barnabas Belyaev, *Pravoslavie (Orthodoxy)*, Kolomna: New Golutvin Convent, 1995, p. 149, emphasis mine (in Russian)

²⁶⁸ Hieromonk Nikon, *Pis'ma k Dukhovnym Chadam (Letters to Spiritual Children)*, Kuibyshev, 1990 (in Russian).

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 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."²⁶⁹

Perhaps the most characteristic mark of the last times is the spiritual isolation of the individual believer. As David says: "I am alone until I pass by... Flight hath failed me, and there is none that watcheth out for my soul" (Psalms 140.12, 141.6).²⁷⁰ 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.

²⁶⁹ Abba Poemen, *The Alphabetical Series*, Pi, Poemen, 189, London: Mowbrays, 1975.

²⁷⁰ In the Septuagint, the phrase "watcheth out" could also be translated "superviseth" or "acts as a bishop" (ἐπισκοπεῖ).

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'.²⁷¹

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!"²⁷² 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..."²⁷³

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 (Psalms 118:8-9).

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.

(*Orthodox America*, vol. XVI, № 141), July, 1996; revised June 22 / July 5, 2004)

²⁷¹ 8th Canon of the Third Ecumenical Council.

²⁷² Bishop Damascene, in E.L., *Episkopy-ispovedniki (Bishop-Confessors)*, San Francisco, 1971, p. 92 (in Russian).

²⁷³ Metropolitan Joseph, in I.M. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, Platina, CA: St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1982, p. 128.

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 17th-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.”²⁷⁴

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

²⁷⁴ *The Daily Mail* (London), September 8, 1997, p. 13.

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 "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."²⁷⁵ 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 economic Statecraft".²⁷⁶ 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."²⁷⁷

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

²⁷⁵ *Time*, September 15, 1997, p. 38.

²⁷⁶ Lewis, "Myth became Fact", *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology*, Fount Paperbacks, 1979, p. 64.

²⁷⁷ *The Daily Mail*, September 10, 1997, p. 2.

true worship of God in Christ. In heterodox democracies it could be directed to enthrone – the Antichrist...

For, on the one hand, as Metropolitan Macarius 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."²⁷⁸ 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 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 Thess. 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)

²⁷⁸ Metropolitan Macarius, "Love: the Foundation of Existence in our World", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 47, № 3, May-June, 1997, p. 3.

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."²⁷⁹

"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

²⁷⁹ Bishop Gregory (Grabbe), "Partnership – the Pope and an Atheist", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 42, № 3, May-June, 1992, p. 16.

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...”²⁸⁰

“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 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.”²⁸¹

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 anathematizing 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

²⁸⁰ *Obnovlentsy i Moskovskaia Patriarkhia: preemstvo ili evoliutsia?*, op. cit., p. 15 ®.

²⁸¹ See also Leslie Childe in *The Daily Telegraph*, October 28, 1986, p. 7.

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.

"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. Ignatius 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 to read a comparison of the spirituality 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.*

21. 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."²⁸²

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

²⁸² St. John of Damascus, *Dialogue against the Manichaeans*, 37.

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.

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!

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..."²⁸³

St. Barsanuphius 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 instills 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

²⁸³ St. Chrysostom, *Homily IX on Corinthians*, 1-3. Translated in Maurice Wiles & Mark Santer (eds.) *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

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 in crushing these vermin here on earth, so as to purify one's soul entirely, and before death to say with our Savior, '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."²⁸⁴

"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."²⁸⁵

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"²⁸⁶, 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

²⁸⁴ Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, pp. 283, 309.

²⁸⁵ Afanasiev, *op. cit.*, pp. 735-736.

²⁸⁶ St. John of Damascus, *P.G.* 96, 1084B. Cf. Psalms 6.4.

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: because they cannot feel compassion for those whom the divine justice has rejected..."²⁸⁷

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 Theophanes 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

²⁸⁷ St. Gregory, translated by Nora Burke, *Parables of the Gospel*, Dublin: Scepter Publishers, pp. 155-56.

know this at the present time. We must restrict ourselves to this revelation in the limits of our earthly life."²⁸⁸

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 Theophanes says, has been hidden from us), but 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 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. 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).

²⁸⁸ Archbishop Theophanes, *Pis'ma Arkhiepiskopa Feofana Poltavskogo (The Letters of Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava and Pereyaslavl)*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1976, p. 31 (in Russian).

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)."²⁸⁹ 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 of God, does the impenitent heart speak. This impenitence, then, is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."²⁹⁰

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."²⁹¹

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."²⁹² 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

²⁸⁹ Metropolitan Anthony, "The Church's Teaching about the Holy Spirit", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 27, № 3, May-June, 1977, p. 23.

²⁹⁰ 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.

²⁹¹ St. Theophylactus, *Explanation of the Gospel according to St. Luke* 12.47-48.

²⁹² St. Cyril, *Homily 93 on Luke*. Translated by Payne Smith, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 376.

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."²⁹³

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 do not recognise their Creator naturally."²⁹⁴ 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."²⁹⁵ 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."²⁹⁶

Many have abandoned the darkness of 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" (Psalms 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.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ Bishop Nicholas, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, vol. II, p. 149.

²⁹⁴ St. Jerome, *Treatise on Psalm 95*.

²⁹⁵ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 3 on Romans*, 2.

²⁹⁶ St. Chrysostom, *First Homily on Hannah*, 3.

²⁹⁷ *The Lives of the Women Martyrs*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1991, pp. 528-542.

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."²⁹⁸

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 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!'"²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 8 on John*.

²⁹⁹ I.M. Kontzevich, *Optina Pustyn' i ee Vremia (Optina Desert and its Time)*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1970, pp. 372-73 (in Russian).

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."³⁰⁰ 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."³⁰¹

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 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."³⁰²

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

³⁰⁰ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on Matthew*, 1.

³⁰¹ St. Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII, 8.

³⁰² Prosper, *The Call of the Nations*, II, 33.

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 thing 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..."³⁰³

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.*"³⁰⁴

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

³⁰³ Paul Garrett, *St. Innocent, Apostle to America*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, pp. 80-81.

³⁰⁴ Garrett, op.cit., p. 85, footnote.

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."³⁰⁵

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 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

³⁰⁵ Quoted by David Ritchie, "The 'Near-Death Experience'", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 45, № 4, July-August, 1995, pp. 22-23.

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..."³⁰⁶

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

³⁰⁶ St. Symeon, *The Sin of Adam and our Redemption*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 1979, pp. 57-8.

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).

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."³⁰⁷

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 Theophanes 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.*"³⁰⁸ 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,

³⁰⁷ *Menaion*, September 14, Great Vespers of the Exaltation of the Cross, "Lord, I have cried", "Glory... Both now..."

³⁰⁸ Archbishop Theophanes, "On the Redemption"; quoted in Fr. Anthony Chernov, *Archevêque Theophane de Poltava (Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava)*, Lavardac: Monastère de St. Michel, 1988, p. 146 (in French).

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".³⁰⁹

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 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" (Psalms 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."³¹⁰

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 Theophanes 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..."³¹¹

³⁰⁹ St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

³¹⁰ St. Basil, *On Psalm 28.6*; translated in Jurgens, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 21.

³¹¹ Archbishop Theophanes, *Pis'ma*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

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).

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” (Psalm 118.137)...

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22. GOD AND TSUNAMIS

Introduction

"There were some present at that very time who told Him of the Galilaeans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered then, 'Do you think that these Galilaeans were worse sinners than all the other Galilaeans, 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).

This Gospel tells us three things. First, those who suffer in disasters such as the recent South Asian tsunami 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 their faith against such attacks have been feeble in the extreme. Or rather, they have joined the atheists in attacking it. Thus the 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, some 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 recently published debate with the atheist A.C. Grayling.³¹² 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.

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 of theology – 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?

³¹² "Is God to Blame?: Keith Ward vs. A.C. Grayling", *Prospect*, February, 2004, pp. 17-19.

The Purpose of Suffering and Death

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. Macarius 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.”³¹³

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

³¹³ St. Macarius of Optina, in “Spiritual Teachings of the Optina Elders, Part IX”, *Orthodox Life*, vol. 53, № 5, September-October, 2004, pp. 25, 26.

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. There is no such thing as chance, says St. Ignatius Brianchaninov. 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 the South Asian tsunami, if it was not caused by men, was 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.

Who is Innocent?

The arrogance of the “Christian theologians” is most clearly revealed in their attitude to the victims of the tsunami: all of them, they agree, are “innocent”. This “truth” is 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 can they acquit the pagans and Muslims who died? And on what basis can they acquit the Christian victims, most of whom were sunning themselves on the day after Western Christmas far from a Christian church? It was left to some Muslims who know the region better than the Christian theologians, and who also appear to believe more in the justice of God than they, to point out that immoral practices such as child kidnapping and paedophilia are 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 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 the deliverance of a good but vulnerable soul from mortal sin in the future ("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 of a just life (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 disaster 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).”³¹⁴

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 – 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 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.

³¹⁴ Metropolitan Anastasy, “Conversations with my own Heart”, translated in *Living Orthodoxy*, 101, vol. XVII, № 5, September-October, 1996, pp. 19-21.

“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.
St. Maximus the Confessor.*

23. 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.

Introduction

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 Lourie. Scion of a famous Jewish family (the *Russian Jewish Encyclopaedia* calls them “aristocrats among the Jews”³¹⁵), and a direct descendant of the foremost Kabbalist in Europe in the sixteenth century, Issak Lourie 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 Lourie”³¹⁶).

Lourie's Punk Orthodoxy

In order that we may better understand the essence of this horrific hybrid, here is an extensive quotation from an article on it 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 [Lourie'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

³¹⁵ Quoted in A.I. Solzhenitsyn, *Dvesti Let Vmeste (Two Hundred Years Together)*, 1795-1995, Moscow, 2001, volume I, pp. 216-217 (in Russian).

³¹⁶

www.romanitas.ru/eng/OPEN%20LETTER%20TO%20FR.%20GREGORY%20LOURIE.htm.

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 Lourie, 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: 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 antimonies: 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 world-view 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 Lourie.

"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 Lourie'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 Lourie'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 Lourie [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 Lourie'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*..."

Lourie and True Orthodoxy

So much for Lourie'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 Lourie 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 Lourie in the year 2000. In September, 2005 he went for three weeks to Russia...

One of the reasons for Lourie'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 Lourie's strategic plan for the Orthodox Church in the twenty-first century:-

1. Lourie's Eschatology

It is best to begin at the end, with Lourie's idea of how things are likely to develop, because this to a large extent determines his outlook on other subjects.

Lourie 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 Lourie'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 Lourie. 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 Lourie *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 Lourie 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.)... Lourie 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..."³¹⁷

One might think that Lourie 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! Lourie 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

³¹⁷ Lourie, "Russkoe okaianstvo i pravoslavnoe pokaianstvo" (Russian pestilentialism and Orthodox penitentialism), portal-credo.ru, 3 October, 2005 (in Russian).

obtaining his defrocking - whether canonically or not, as Lourie 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. Lourie 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"!

2. Lourie and Politics

This brings us to Lourie's highly controversial relations with politics and politicians.

Lourie 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!) "Its only chance is to get hitched up to a tug-boat." (That "tug-boat" is the State – and Lourie 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 Lourie 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 Lourie 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, Lourie 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 Lourie 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 Lourie'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. Lourie 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. Lourie 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.

3. Lourie and the MP

So what is Lourie'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 Lourie 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 Lourie. 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 organisation. 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. Lourie *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...

Lourie'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*...

4. Lourie and the Church of the Elite

Elitism runs like a silver thread through all of Lourie'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 Lourie's "Church of the Elite" with

two other forms of quasi-élitist religious organisation: the Masonic lodge and the monastery.

Lourie 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 Lourie 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 Lourie 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.

Lourie 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, Manichaean 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. Lourie 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!).

5. Lourie and Globalism

So far, Lourie'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 Lourie'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...

Lourie'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).

Lourie 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 Lourie'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. Lourie will accept HOCNA as his representative on the American continent and Africa, while HOCNA will accept Lourie 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 – Lourie's name-worshipping and other heresies, including punk orthodoxy. And Lourie will have to accept – or turn a blind eye to – HOCNA's veneration of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky and his "Dogma of Redemption", which Lourie rejects. But these differences are not insuperable; for, for all their claims to strict, patristic Orthodoxy, Metropoulos and Lourie 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 Lourie. And thirdly: never lose the hope that God will save His Church. And without the help of man if necessary; for “this is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying: not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord...” (Zechariah 4.6).

*September 23 / October 6, 2005.
Conception of St. John the Baptist.*

24. 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)."³¹⁸

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

³¹⁸ Novoselov, *Pisma k Druziam (Letters to Friends)*, Moscow, 1994, p. 125 (in Russian).

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)."³¹⁹

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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 God, and so is good.³²⁰ 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"

³¹⁹ Tikhomirov, *Religioznie-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii (The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History)*, Moscow, 1997, p. 570 (in Russian).

³²⁰ St. Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151, 224; *E.P.E.* 9, 492.

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 probably 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.”³²¹

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 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

³²¹ Tikhomirov, op.cit., p. 539.

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.
Apodosis of Pentecost.*

25. "THE RIVER OF FIRE" REVISITED

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.

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, and that only 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.³²²

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 heads: 1. Is God Just? and 2. Does God Punish?

³²² 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...)

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 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 very little, 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 δικαιοσύνη, '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).

Knowledge of the Hebrew 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" - the Hebrew tsedaka and the Greek δικαιοσύνη. 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 Kalomiro's attempt to demote the supposedly pagan word δικαιοσύνη in favour of the Hebrew tsedaka. 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 text 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 probably 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 *Notes 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 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”, however closely these values are related. 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 then 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. And if David calls Him just and upright, His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. “He is good,” He says, “to the evil and impious”.’” (p. 6)

Now if we take St. Isaac’s words literally and unintelligently, we will be forced to say that he is in contradiction with a vast number of texts from the Holy Scriptures and Fathers 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 several of the Fathers have been at one time or another not 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. Even the righteousness of the righteous 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 rejected 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.

Both the doctrine of original sin and the doctrine of redemption can be seen to be expressions of the most perfect justice – but only if we broaden our ideas of justice to the most cosmic level and see each as only one part of the overall scheme. The two doctrines 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 let us go along with Kalomiros to this extent: let us 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 of the original curse, nor the salvation of the subsequent redemption. However, the "injustice" of our salvation perfectly balances, matches, and blots out the "injustice" of our original 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 [δικαιωματος] [the free gift] came upon all men unto justification [δικαιωσιν] 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 true faith, of rightly believing in the Sacrifice – 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.”³²³

³²³ *Menaion*, September 14, Great Vespers of the Exaltation of the Cross, “Lord, I have cried”, “Glory... Both now...”

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 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."³²⁴

So man is the ultimate cause of his own misery: but that by no means implies that God does not actively punish him.

³²⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Dialogue against the Manichaeans*, 37.

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..."³²⁵

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.³²⁶

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 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 and willingly accept the punishment of those acts! The God-seer Moses and the Apostle Paul were 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 Last Judgement, however,

³²⁵ St. Photius, Letter 3, to Eusebia, nun and monastic superior, on the death of her sister; translated by Despina Stratoudaki White.

³²⁶ St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

will be quite unlike these saints, and 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."³²⁷

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

³²⁷ Archbishop Theophan, *On Redemption*.

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" (Psalms 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*."³²⁸

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

³²⁸ St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

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” (Psalms 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 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.”³²⁹

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, thereby destroying his own sin, 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 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. As we have seen, God condemned man to death in Eden *both* because that was the just punishment of his sin *and* because through death, paradoxically, the spread of sin would be cut short, man would be led to repentance and Christ would descend into hades to save mankind. Again, Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross was *both* a supreme 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”.³³⁰ 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.

³²⁹ St. Basil, *On Psalms* 28.6.

³³⁰ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book I, ch. 11.

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 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.*”³³¹

³³¹ 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.

“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...

For, as the Holy Church sings: “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, O Judge most righteous.”³³²

September 21 / October 4, 2007; revised February 18 / March 3, 2008.

³³² Kontakion for Meatfare Sunday.

26. 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, 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.”³³³

To reprove with meekness, and without passionate condemnation or hypocrisy, is a very difficult art. But a vital one. 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.

We may refrain from reproving 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

³³³ *The Explanation of Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew*, House Springs, Missouri: Chrysostom Press, 1992, p. 63.

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.³³⁴ 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.

Now 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:

³³⁴ “Prosopolatreia: I Nosos Tou Ierou Imon Agonos”, *I Foni tis Orthodoxias*, July-August, 2007, pp. 16-17 (in Greek).

“Don’t 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.

Now two different meanings of the words “salvation” and “hell” in English need to be distinguished. 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.

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.

This point is proved by two canons. The first is the 46th of the Holy Apostles: “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?’” The second is the 1st 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."³³⁵

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 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."

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It will be useful to test these conclusions by reference to an article by Archimandrite (Metropolitan) Philaret of blessed memory entitled "Will the Heterodox be Saved?"³³⁶ There is nothing in this article that contradicts the two propositions asserted above. However, the metropolitan introduces some valuable nuances into the argument, as follows:

1. 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,

³³⁵ Quoted by David Ritchie, "The 'Near-Death Experience'", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 45, no. 4, July-August, 1995, pp. 22-23.

³³⁶ Metropolitan Philaret, "Will the Heterodox be Saved?", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 34, no. 6, November-December, 1984, pp. 33-36.

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.

“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”, reproved 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 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.”³³⁷

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 Bishop 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.

2. 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

³³⁷ Bishop Theophan, *Tolkovanie Poslanij Sv. Apostola Pavla*, Moscow, 1911, 2002, pp. 145-146.

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 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 the word "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, and so be delivered from the eternal fire, 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 such a thing as 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)."³³⁸ Another 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.³³⁹

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. 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."³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Metropolitan Anthony, "The Church's Teaching about the Holy Spirit", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 27, no. 3, May-June, 1977, p. 23.

³³⁹ St. Ambrose, *On Repentance*, II, 24. Cf. St. Augustine, *Homily 21 on the New Testament*, 28.

³⁴⁰ St. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel according to St. Luke* 12.47-48.

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."³⁴¹ 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."³⁴²

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 recognise their Creator naturally."³⁴³ 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."³⁴⁴ 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."³⁴⁵

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;

³⁴¹ St. Cyril, *Homily 93 on Luke*. Translated by Payne Smith, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 376.

³⁴² Bishop Nicholas, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, vol. II, p. 149.

³⁴³ St. Jerome, *Treatise on Psalm 95*.

³⁴⁴ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 3 on Romans*, 2.

³⁴⁵ St. Chrysostom, *First Homily on Hannah*, 3.

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.³⁴⁶

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."³⁴⁷ 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."³⁴⁸ 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."³⁴⁹

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, 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.

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 wilful and artificial, being created by man himself through his stubborn refusal to learn the truth.

November 1/14, 2007.

³⁴⁶ *The Lives of the Women Martyrs*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1991, pp. 528-542.

³⁴⁷ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 8 on John*.

³⁴⁸ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on Matthew*, 1.

³⁴⁹ St. Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII, 8.

27. 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 poor³⁵⁰ – 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?

In order to answer this question, we need to examine the concept of *the sacrifice for sin* which clearly lies at the root of the feast's significance. 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.

³⁵⁰ 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, House Springs, Mo: Chrysostom Press, 2003, p. 20.

The Old Testament Sacrifices

In the Old Testament we find blood-sacrifices for sin carried out by the people of God 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 to 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 the offering of sacrifices on a vast scale, with very detailed instructions on how, when and where to offer them. Protopriest-Professor 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.”³⁵¹

³⁵¹ Butkevich, “O Smyse i Znachenii Krovavyykh Zhertvoprinoshenij v Dokhristianskom Mire i o Tak Nasyvaemykh ‘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;

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" (Psalm 49. 14-15)? And again: "If 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 real sacrifice unto 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 seven-fold, because he has not spared. And Nathan said to David: *Thou art the man that hath done this...*" (II Kings 12.1-7).

reprinted in G.L. Shtrak, *Krov' v Verovaniakh i Suyeveriakh Chelovechestva* (Blood in the Beliefs and Superstitions of Mankind), Moscow, 1995, pp. 232-233 (in Russian).

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.³⁵² The Law and the Prophets are full of admonitions to the Jews not to 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” (Psalm 95.5) – they counted as worse sins than all their previous spiritual fornication: they counted as *apostasy* from the Lord God of Israel.

But by allowing the Jews to sacrifice, not their own children, but animals, and not on the altars of the demons, but in the temple at Jerusalem, God gradually weaned them from this vice. Thus 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

³⁵² Butkevich, op.cit., p. 243.

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..."³⁵³

Nevertheless, at the root of this horrific sin of child-sacrifice lay a true thought, albeit one perverted by diabolic 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 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)."³⁵⁴

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

³⁵³ St. John Chrysostom, in Butkevich, op. cit., pp. 249, 250.

³⁵⁴ Butkevich, op. cit., pp. 242-243.

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.³⁵⁵ 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..."³⁵⁶

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.

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 the very first animal sacrifice explicitly commanded by the Lord (although the Patriarchs also practised animal sacrifice, as we have seen, there is no record of their being explicitly commanded to do so in the Holy Scriptures) cannot be said to have been 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.

³⁵⁵ 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.)

³⁵⁶ Butkevich, op. cit., pp. 243-244.

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 practice of dedicating 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...

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 fulfils 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...*"³⁵⁷

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'."³⁵⁸ So Christ was the First-Born in a special and unique sense, 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*".

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..."

³⁵⁷ Bl. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Holy Gospel according to Luke*, 2.21-24, House Springs, Mo: Chrysostom Press, 1997, pp. 33-34.

³⁵⁸ St. Demetrius, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

St. Ephraim the Syrian offers a profound interpretation of this act: "Symeon the priest³⁵⁹, 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..."³⁶⁰

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..."³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ 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.

³⁶⁰ St. Ephraim, "Homily on the Lord", 48; in *The Pre-Nicene Fathers*, Eerdmans, volume XIII, p. 327.

³⁶¹ St. Ephraim, *op. cit.*, 51, p. 328.

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 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".³⁶² So at the Presentation 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 on Golgotha was not only anticipated but also *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".³⁶³ In other words, the Ministry of the New Testament consists in the Death of Christ on the Cross, and its aim is the resurrection of many to true spiritual life through right belief in His Death and Resurrection.

And so, 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, 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. He *must* be slaughtered, because while some sacrifices can be ransomed, there is no *real* forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9.22). Or, to put it more precisely: in the eyes of absolute Justice, the radical extirpation of sin, including the original sin of Adam, is

³⁶² Cf. Mattins, Canticle Three, Irmos: "Do Thou confirm the Church, which Thou hast purchased with Thy precious Blood..."

³⁶³ Bl. Theophylact, op.cit., pp. 35, 36.

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 a perfect 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). He could not be ransomed, 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).

At His Meeting with the Old Testament priesthood in the Temple, Christ as the High Priest of the New Testament 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 already-completed 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."³⁶⁴

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..."³⁶⁵

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 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 Thou wouldest not, but a Body hast Thou prepared for Me..." (Hebrews 10.4-5).

³⁶⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon One on the Resurrection of Christ*, Jaeger, vol. 9, p. 287. In William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1979, volume 2, p. 59.

³⁶⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 27 on I Corinthians*, 5.

An Objection Answered

The above understanding of the Sacrifice for sin is rejected by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) in his well-known book, *The Dogma of Redemption*.³⁶⁶ He rejects the concept of Christ's redemption as a sacrifice made to the Justice of God, calling this the "juridical theory" of redemption and "scholastic". In reply to this objection, and in order to consolidate the traditional teaching, we cite here an article by Archbishop Theophan of Poltava:-

"[Metropolitan Anthony] gives a metaphorical, purely moral meaning to the Sacrifice on Golgotha, interpreting it in the sense of his own world-view, which he calls the world-view of moral monism.³⁶⁷ But he decisively rejects the usual understanding of the Sacrifice on Golgotha, as a sacrifice in the proper meaning of the word, offered out of love for us by our Saviour to the justice of God, for the sin of the whole human race. He recognizes it to be the invention of the juridical mind of the Catholic and Protestant theologians. It goes without saying that with this understanding of the redemptive feat of the Saviour the author had to establish a point of view with regard to the Old Testament sacrifices, the teaching on which has up to now been a major foundation for the teaching on the Saviour's Sacrifice on Golgotha. And that is what we see in fact. The author rejects the generally accepted view of the sacrifices as the killing of an innocent being in exchange for a sinful person or people that is subject to execution. 'In the eyes of the people of the Old Testament', in the words of the author, 'a sacrifice meant only a contribution, just as Christians now offer [candles, kutiya and eggs] in church... But nowhere [in the Old Testament] will one encounter the idea that the animal being sacrificed was thought of as taking upon itself the punishment due to man.'³⁶⁸

"Our author points to St. Gregory the Theologian as being one of the Fathers of the Church who was a decisive opponent of the teaching on sacrifice, in the general sense of the word. In the given case he has in mind the following, truly remarkable (but not to the advantage of the author) words of the great Theologian on the Sacrifice on Golgotha:

"'We were detained in bondage by the evil one, sold under sin, and receiving pleasure in exchange for wickedness. Now, since a ransom belongs only to him who holds in bondage, I ask to whom this was offered, and for what cause? If to the evil one, fie upon the outrage! If the robber receives ransom, not only from God, but a ransom which consists of God Himself, and has such an illustrious payment for his tyranny, a payment for whose sake it would have been right for him to have left us alone altogether. But if to the

³⁶⁶ Translated into English by Monastery Press, Montreal, 1979.

³⁶⁷ *The Dogma of Redemption*, p. 52.

³⁶⁸ *The Dogma of Redemption*, pp. 42-43.

Father, I ask first, how? For it was not by Him that we were being oppressed; and next, on what principle did the Blood of His Only-begotten Son delight the Father, Who would not receive even Isaac, when he was being offered up by his father, but changed his sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of his human victim?³⁶⁹³⁷⁰

However, St. Gregory, unlike Metropolitan Anthony, does not reject the juridical model, but rather embraced its essence. If the metropolitan had started quoting the saint a little earlier, then he would have read that the blood shed for us is “the precious and famous Blood of our God and High-priest and Sacrifice”. And if he had continued the quotation just one sentence more, he would have read that “the Father accepts the sacrifice, but neither asked for it, nor felt any need of it, but on account of the oeconomy”.

“Evidently,” writes Archbishop Theophan, “the author understood that this quotation in its fullness witnesses against his assertion and therefore in the 1926 edition of *The Dogma of Redemption* he does not give a reference to St. Gregory the Theologian”³⁷¹

The archbishop continues: “From the cited words of St. Gregory it is evident that he by no means rejects the teaching that the death of Christ the Saviour on Golgotha was a sacrifice; he only rejects the theory created in order to explain it that this sacrifice was to be seen as offered by Christ the Saviour as a ransom for the sinful race of men to the devil³⁷². As is well known, such a theory did exist and was developed by Origen and in part by St. Gregory of Nyssa. St. Gregory the Theologian with complete justification recognizes this theory to be without foundation, as did St. John of Damascus later (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book III, ch. 27). He thought it just and well-founded to consider the sacrifice as offered to God the Father, but not in the sense that the Father ‘demanded or needed’ it, but according to the economy of salvation, that is, because, in the plan of Divine Providence, it was necessary for the salvation of the human race.³⁷³ Besides, although it is said that the Father receives the Sacrifice, while the Son offers it, the thought behind it is that the Son offers it as High Priest, that is, according to His human nature, while the Father receives it indivisibly with the Son and the Holy Spirit, as the Triune God, according to the oneness and indivisibility of the Divine Essence.”³⁷⁴

³⁶⁹ St. Gregory, *Homily 45 on Pascha*, 22, quoted by Protopresbyter George Grabbe in his foreword to *The Dogma of Redemption*, pp. vi-vii.

³⁷⁰ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*.

³⁷¹ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*.

³⁷² My italics – V.M.

³⁷³ Metropolitan Anthony wrote opposite this: “True, but this contradicts [Metropolitan] Philaret” (HOCNA bishops resolution, p. 13). But does it? No proof is offered that Metropolitan Philaret would have rejected Archbishop Theophan’s formulation.

³⁷⁴ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*.

Still further proof of St. Gregory's real views is provided by his writing that "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".³⁷⁵ 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."³⁷⁶

Returning now to the question of the Old Testament sacrifices, Metropolitan Anthony rejects their prefigurative significance. However, as Archbishop Theophan writes, "in the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, these sacrifices were, on the one hand, concessions to Israel's childishness, and were designed to draw him away from pagan sacrifices; but on the other hand, in these victims the Old Testament law prefigured the future Sacrifice on Golgotha³⁷⁷. In particular, the Old Testament paschal Lamb had this mystically prefigurative significance³⁷⁸.

"'Everything that took place in the time of the worship of God in the Old Testament,' says John Chrysostom, 'in the final analysis refers to the Saviour, whether it is prophecy or the priesthood, or the royal dignity, or the temple, or the altar of sacrifice, or the veil of the temple, or the ark, or the place of purification, or the manna, or the rod, or anything else – everything relates to Him.

"'God from ancient times allowed the sons of Israel to carry out a sacrificial service to Him not because He took pleasure in sacrifices, but because he wanted to draw the Jews away from pagan vanities.... Making a concession to the will of the Jews, He, as One wise and great, by this very permission to offer sacrifices prepared an image of future things, so that the victim, though in itself useless, should nevertheless be useful as such an image. Pay attention, because this is a deep thought. The sacrifices were not pleasing to God, as having been carried out not in accordance with His will, but only in accordance with His condescension. He gave to the sacrifices an image corresponding to the future oeconomy of Christ, so that if in themselves they were not worthy to be accepted, they at least became welcome by virtue of the image they expressed. By all these sacrifices He expresses the image of Christ and foreshadows future events...'379"³⁸⁰

³⁷⁵ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. V, p. 42. Cf. *Homily 20* (P.G. 35.1068d).

³⁷⁶ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Sermon 30*, 20.

³⁷⁷ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. I, pp. 179-180, Moscow, 1889 and vol. I, St. Petersburg edition, p. 669.

³⁷⁸ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. IV, pp. 132-142, Moscow, 1889 and vol. I, St. Petersburg edition, p. 675-680.

³⁷⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, pp. 898-900.

³⁸⁰ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*.

After quoting from St. Athanasius the Great and St. Cyril of Alexandria to similar effect, Archbishop Theophan continues: “But if the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church look at the Old Testament sacrifices in this way, then still more significance must they give to the redemptive death of Christ the Saviour for the human race on Golgotha. And this is indeed what we see. They all recognize the death of Christ the Saviour on Golgotha to be a sacrifice offered by Him as a propitiation for the human race - and that, moreover, in the most literal, not at all metaphorical meaning of this word. And from this point of view the death of Christ the Saviour on Golgotha is for them ‘the great mystery’ of the redemption of the human race from sin, the curse and death and ‘the great mystery’ of the reconciliation of sinful humanity with God.

“St. Gregory the Theologian, in expounding his view on the Old Testament sacrifices as being prefigurations of the great New Testament Sacrifice, notes: ‘But in order that you should understand the depth of the wisdom and the wealth of the unsearchable judgements of God, God did not leave even the [Old Testament] sacrifices completely unsanctified, unperfected and limited only to the shedding of blood, but to the sacrifices under the law is united the great and in relation to the Primary Essence, so to speak, untempered Sacrifice – the purification not of a small part of the universe, and not for a short time, but of the whole world for eternity’.

“By this great Sacrifice he understands the Saviour Jesus Christ Himself, Who shed His blood for the salvation of the human race on Golgotha, which is why he often calls Him ‘God, High Priest and Victim’. ‘He gave Himself for us for redemption, for a purifying sacrifice for the universe’.³⁸¹

“‘For us He became man and took on the form of a servant, he was led to death for our iniquities’.³⁸²

“‘He is God, High Priest and Victim’.³⁸³

“‘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 raised onto the Cross, but to the Cross was nailed the sin of all mankind’.³⁸⁴

“He redeems the world by His own blood’.³⁸⁵

³⁸¹ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 30, Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, p. 82 or vol. I (St. Petersburg), p. 442.

³⁸² St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 19, Works*, Russian edition, vol. II, p. 129 or vol. I (St. Petersburg), p. 296.

³⁸³ 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.

³⁸⁴ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Verses on himself*, vol. IV, p. 245 or vol. II (St. Petersburg), p. 22.

“St. Athanasius of Alexandria says about the Sacrifice of the Saviour on Golgotha: ‘He, being the true Son of the Father, later became man for us so as to give Himself for us as a sacrifice to the Father and redeem us through His sacrifice and offering (Ephesians 5.2). He was the same Who in ancient times led the people out of Egypt, and later redeemed all of us, or rather, the whole human race, from death, and raised us from hell. He is the same Who from the age was offered as a sacrifice, as a Lamb, and in the Lamb was represented prefiguratively. And finally He offered Himself as a sacrifice for us. “For even Christ our Pascha is sacrificed for us” (I Corinthians 5.7).’³⁸⁶

“By His death was accomplished the salvation of all, and the whole of creation was redeemed. He is the common Life of all, and He gave His body to death as a sheep for a redemptive sacrifice for the salvation of all, though the Jews do not believe this.’³⁸⁷

“St. Gregory of Nyssa reasons in a similar way.

“Jesus, as Zachariah says, is the Great High Priest (Zachariah 3.1), Who offered His Lamb, that is, His flesh, in sacrifice for the sins of the world, and for the sake of the children who partake of flesh and blood Himself partook of blood (Hebrews 11.14). This Jesus became High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, not in respect of what He was before, being the Word and God and in the form of God and equal to God, but in respect of that fact that He spent Himself in the form of a servant and offered an offering and sacrifice for us’.³⁸⁸

“He is our Pascha (I Corinthians 5.6) and High Priest (Hebrews 12.11). For in truth Christ the Pascha was consumed for us; but the priest who offers to God the Sacrifice is none other than the Same Christ. For in Himself, as the [Apostle] says, “He hath given Himself for us as an offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5.2).’³⁸⁹

“By means of priestly acts He in an ineffable manner unseen by men offers an offering and sacrifice for us, being at the same time the Priest and the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world’.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁵ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 29, Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, p. 61 or vol. I (St. Petersburg), p. 427.

³⁸⁶ St. Athanasius the Great, *Tenth Paschal Epistle*, 10; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, p. 464.

³⁸⁷ St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation of God the Word*, 37; *Works*, Russian edition (St. Sergius Lavra, 1902), vol. I, p. 238.

³⁸⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, book VI, 2; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VI, pp. 43-44.

³⁸⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To Olympius the Monk on Perfection*; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VII, p. 237.

³⁹⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Word on Holy Pascha*; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 38.

"We find much material on the given question in the same spirit in the works of St. John Chrysostom.

"'The oeconomy that was to be accomplished in the New Testament,' says this Holy Father in his interpretation on the Gospel of John, 'was foreshadowed beforehand in prefigurative images; while Christ by His Coming accomplished it. What then does the type say? "Take ye a lamb for an house, and kill it, and do as He commanded and ordained' (Exodus 12). But Christ did not do that; He did not command this, but Himself became as a Lamb, offering Himself to the Father as a sacrifice and offering'.³⁹¹

"'When John the Forerunner saw Christ, he said to his disciples: "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1.35). By this he showed them all the gift which He came to give, and the manner of purification. For "the Lamb" declares both these things. And John did not say, "Who shall take", or "Who hath taken", but "Who taketh away the sins of the world", because Christ always does this. In fact, he took them away not only then when He suffered, but from that time even to the present He takes away sins, not as if He were always being crucified (for He at one time offered sacrifice for sins), but since by that one sacrifice He is continually purging them.'³⁹²

"'This blood was ever typified of old in the altars and sacrifices determined by the law. It is the price of the world, by it Christ redeemed the Church, by it He adorned the whole of her.'³⁹³ 'This blood in types cleansed sins. But if it had such power in the types, if death so shuddered at the shadow, tell me how would it not have dreaded the very reality?'³⁹⁴

"'David after the words: "Sacrifice and offering hast Thou not desired", added: "but a body hast Thou perfected for me" (Psalm 39.9), understanding by this the body of the Master, a sacrifice for the whole universe, which cleansed our souls, absolved our sins, destroyed death, opened the heavens, showed us many great hopes and ordered all the rest'.³⁹⁵

"St. John Chrysostom's reasoning on the mystery of the Sacrifice on Golgotha is particularly remarkable in his discourse, *On the Cross and the Thief*, which he delivered, as is evident from the discourse itself, on Great Friday in Holy Week. 'Today our Lord Jesus Christ is on the Cross, and we celebrate, so that you should know that the Cross is a feast and a spiritual triumph. Formerly the Cross was the name of a punishment, but now it has become an honourable work; before it was a symbol of condemnation, but now it has become the sign of salvation... It has enlightened those sitting in

³⁹¹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 13, 3; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 95.

³⁹² St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 18, 2; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 119-120.

³⁹³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 46, 4; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 306.

³⁹⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 46, 3; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 305.

³⁹⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Against the Jews*; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. I, p. 722.

darkness, it has reconciled us, who were in enmity with God... Thanks to the Cross we do not tremble before the tyrant, because we are near the King. That is why we celebrate in commemorating the Cross.... In fact, one and the same was both victim and priest: the victim was the flesh, and the priest was the spirit. One and the same offers and was offered in the flesh. Listen to how Paul explained both the one and the other. "For every high priest," he says, "chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins... Hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer" (Hebrews 5.1, 8.3). So He Himself offers Himself. And in another place he says that "Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation" (Hebrews 9.28)....³⁹⁶

"St. Cyril of Alexandria reasons as follows with regard to the words of John the Forerunner on the Saviour: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world" (John 1.29). It was necessary to reveal Who was the One Who came to us and why He descends from heaven to us. And so "Behold", he says, "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world", to Whom the Prophet Isaiah pointed in the words: "As a sheep for the slaughter is he led and as a lamb before the shearers is he silent" (Isaiah 53.7) and Who was prefigured in the law of Moses. But then He saved only in part, without extending His mercy on all, for it was a figure and a shadow. But now He Who once was depicted by means of enigmas, the True Lamb, the Spotless Victim, is led to the slaughter for all, so as to expel the sin of the world and cast down the destroyer of the universe, so that by His death for all He might abolish death and lift the curse that was on us, so that, finally, the punishment that was expressed in the words: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3.19) might cease and the second Adam might appear – not from the earth, but from the heaven (I Corinthians 15.47) – and become for human nature the beginning of a great good, the destruction of the corruption wrought [by sin], the author of eternal life, the founder of the transformation [of man] according to God, the beginning of piety and righteousness, the way to the Heavenly Kingdom. One Lamb died for all, saving for God and the Father a whole host of men, One for all so that all might be subjected to God, One for all so as to acquire all, "that those who live might live no longer for themselves but from Him Who for their sake died and was raised" (II Corinthians 5.15). Insofar as we were in many sins and therefore subject to death and corruption, the Father gave the son to deliver us (I Timothy 2.6), One for all, since all are in Him and He is above all. One died for all so that all should live in Him."³⁹⁷ St. Cyril's general view of the death of Christ the Saviour on Golgotha is such that on Golgotha 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

³⁹⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. II, pp. 437-438. Cf. vol. II, pp. 446-449.

³⁹⁷ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Interpretation of the Gospel of John; Works of the Holy Fathers*, Sergiev Posad, 1901, vol. 64, pp. 175-176 (in Russian).

and guilt of sin'.³⁹⁸ 'He offered Himself as a holy sacrifice to God and the Father, having bought by His own blood the salvation of all'.³⁹⁹ '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'.⁴⁰⁰ '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 oeconomy towards us of Him Who because of us, for our sakes and in our place was subject to death'.⁴⁰¹

"St. Basil the Great in his epistle to Bishop Optimus writes: 'The Lord had to taste death for each, and having become a propitiatory sacrifice for the world, justify all by His blood'.⁴⁰² He develops his thought on the death on the Cross of Christ the Saviour in more detail as a redeeming sacrifice for the sins of the human race in his interpretation of Psalm 48, at the words: "There be some that trust in their strength, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches. A brother cannot redeem; shall a man redeem? He shall not give to God a ransom [ἐξιλασµα] for himself, nor the price of the redemption of his own soul" (Psalm 48.7-9): 'This sentence is directed by the prophet to two types of persons: to the earthborn and to the rich.... You, he says, who trust in your own strength.... And you, he says, who trust in the uncertainty of riches, listen.... You have need of ransoms that you may be transferred to the freedom of which you were deprived when conquered by the power of the devil, who, taking you under his control, does not free you from his tyranny until, persuaded by some worthwhile ransom, he wishes to exchange you. And the ransom must not be of the same kind as the things which are held in his control, but must differ greatly, if he would willingly free the captives from slavery. Therefore a brother is not able to ransom you. For no man can persuade the devil to remove from his power him who has once been subject to him, not he, at any rate, who is incapable of giving God a propitiatory offering even for his own sins.... But one thing was found worth as much as all men together. This was given for the price of ransom for our souls, the holy and highly honoured blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He poured out for all of us; therefore we were bought at a great price (I Corinthians 6.20).... No one is sufficient to redeem himself, unless He comes who turns away "the captivity of the people" (Exodus 13.8), not with ransoms nor with gifts, as it is written in Isaiah (52.3), but with His own blood... He Who "shall not give to God His own ransom", but that of the whole world. He does not need a ransom, but He Himself is the propitiation. "For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, set apart from sinners, and become higher than the heavens. He does not need to offer

³⁹⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part I.

³⁹⁹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Interpretation of the Gospel of John; Works of the Holy Fathers*, Sergiev Posad, 1901, vol. 66, pp. 175-176 (in Russian)..

⁴⁰⁰ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part II.

⁴⁰¹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part II.

⁴⁰² St. Basil the Great, *Letter to Bishop Optimus; Works*, Russian edition, Sergiev Posad, 1892, vol. VII, p. 224.

sacrifices daily (as the other priests did), first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 7.26-27).⁴⁰³

"The Scriptures do not reject all sacrifices in general," writes St. Basil the Great in his interpretation on the book of the Prophet Isaiah, 'but the Jewish sacrifices. For he says: "What to Me is the multitude of your sacrifices?" (Isaiah 1.11). He does not approve of the many, but demands the one sacrifice. Every person offers himself as a sacrifice to God, presenting himself as "a living sacrifice, pleasing to God", through "rational service" he has offered to God the sacrifice of praise (Romans 12.1). But insofar as the many sacrifices under the law have been rejected as useless, the one sacrifice offered in the last times is accepted. For the Lamb of God took upon Himself the sin of the world, "gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5.2)... There are no longer the "continual" sacrifices (Exodus 29.42), there are no sacrifices on the day of atonement, no ashes of the heifer cleansing "the defiled persons" (Hebrews 9.13). For there is one sacrifice of Christ and the mortification of the saints in Christ; one sprinkling - "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3.5); one propitiation for sin - the Blood poured out for the salvation of the world.'⁴⁰⁴

"Finally, St. John of Damascus says the following about the mystery of the sacrifice on Golgotha: "Every action and performance of miracles by Christ are most great and divine and marvelous: but the most marvelous of all is His precious Cross. For no other thing has subdued death, expiated the sin of the first parent [προπατορος αμαρτια], despoiled Hades, bestowed the resurrection, granted the power to us of condemning the present and even death itself, prepared the return to our former blessedness, opened the gates of Paradise, given our nature a seat at the right hand of God, and made us children and heirs of God, save the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ'.⁴⁰⁵ Therefore, according to the words of the holy father, 'we must bow down to the very Wood on which Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, since it is sanctified through contact with the body and blood'.⁴⁰⁶

"This is what the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church teach about the mystery of the sacrifice of the Saviour on Golgotha for the sins of the human race. But that is not all. This teaching was even formally confirmed by a whole local council of the Church of Constantinople in 1156. This council was convened because of different understandings of the well-known words in the liturgical prayer, where it is said of Christ the Saviour: 'Thou art He that offereth and is offered, that accepteth and is distributed'.⁴⁰⁷ The initial reasons

⁴⁰³ St. Basil the Great, *Homily 19 on Psalm 48*, 3, 4; *Works*, Russian edition, Sergiev Posad, 1892, vol. I, pp. 194-195.

⁴⁰⁴ St. Basil the Great, *Works*, Russian edition, Sergiev Posad, 1892, vol. I, pp. 241-242.

⁴⁰⁵ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book IV, ch. 11.

⁴⁰⁶ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book IV, ch. 11.

⁴⁰⁷ Prayer recited secretly by the priest during the Cherubic hymn.

for this difference, according to the account of a contemporary historian, Kinnamas, was the following circumstance. A certain Deacon Basil during Divine service in the Church of St. John the Theologian declared while giving a sermon on the daily Gospel reading that 'the one Son of God Himself became a sacrifice and accepted the sacrifice together with the Father'. Two deacons of the Great Church who were present at this found in the words of Basil an incorrect thought, as if two hypostases were thereby admitted in Jesus Christ, of which one was offered in sacrifice and the other accepted the sacrifice. Together with the others who thought like them they spread the idea that the Saviour's sacrifice for us was offered only to God the Father. In order to obtain a more exact explanation and definition of the Orthodox teaching, the conciliar sessions took place, at the will of the Emperor Manuel Comnenus, on January 26 and May 12, 1156. The first conciliar session took place in the hall attached to the Great Church as a result of the inquiry of the just-appointed Metropolitan Constantine of Russia, who was hastening to leave: was it truly necessary to understand the words of the prayer as he understood them, that the sacrifice was offered and is offered to the whole of the Holy Trinity? The council, under the presidency of the Patriarch of Constantinople Constantine Kliarenos, confirmed the teaching expressed of old by the Fathers and Teachers of the Church, whose works were read at the council, that both at the beginning, during the Master's sufferings, the life-creating flesh and blood of Christ was offered, not to the Father only, but also to the whole of the Holy Trinity, and now, during the daily performed rites of the Eucharist, the bloodless sacrifice is offered to the Trihypostatic Trinity", and laid an anathema on the defenders of the error, whoever they might be, if they still adhered to their heresy and did not repent. "408

"From this historical note it is evident that the council of 1156 considered it indisputable that the death of Christ the Saviour on Golgotha is a propitiatory sacrifice for the human race. It was occupied only with the question to which this sacrifice was offered and decided it in the sense that the sacrifice was offered by Christ the Saviour to the All-Holy Trinity. Moreover, Christ the Saviour Himself was at the same time both the sacrifice and High Priest offering the sacrifice in accordance with His human nature, and God receiving the sacrifice, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. According to the resolution of the council, the eucharistic sacrifice is the same sacrifice, by its link with the sacrifice on Golgotha. Those who thought otherwise were subjected by the council to anathema..."409

*January 25 / February 7, 2008.
St. Gregory the Theologian.*

⁴⁰⁸ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*.

⁴⁰⁹ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*.

28. 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” Fathers⁴¹⁰ – 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.”⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ 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).

⁴¹¹ Constantine Cavarnos, *St. Macarios of Corinth*, Belmont, Mass. : Institute for Byzantine and Modern Studies, 1972, p. 21.

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, 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*).

However, in view of the fact that there are those who continue to deny that *any* special fast before Communion is necessary, it will be worth examining the early evidence for that. In the early fifth century, the *Typicon* of the Monastery of St. Savvas of Jerusalem states: “When one wishes to commune of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, one must keep the entire week, from Monday, in fasting, prayer and complete sobriety in every way, and then, with fear and great compunction receive the All-Holy Mysteries.” (chapter 32, “Concerning Communion of Christ’s Mysteries”).

Stavros Markou comments on the evidence from the Jerusalem *Typicon*: “This required fast was later made easier, according to *economia*, and was reduced to a fast of three days. In some cases, it can be reduced to one day. Most clergy (those in sacred orders) and monastics only fast for one day, or even half a day, before receiving Holy Communion. However, those among the laymen must fast for one week, or for three days, or (if one’s spiritual father permits) at least one day. This is the historical practice of the Orthodox Church.”⁴¹²

There is other early evidence for the fast before Communion. Thus St. John Chrysostom (+407) recommends 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.”⁴¹³

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.

⁴¹² Markou, internet communication.

⁴¹³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 27 on I Corinthians*, 7.

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 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.

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).

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.

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..."⁴¹⁴

"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 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

⁴¹⁴ Archimandrite Lazarus (Moore), *St. Seraphim of Sarov: A Spiritual Biography*, Blanco, Texas: New Sarov Press, 1994, pp. 67, 68.

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. I have never seen proof of this statement (Acts 2.42 is often quoted, but it is not proof), but I do 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.

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. 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 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."⁴¹⁵

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

⁴¹⁵ St. Theophan, *The Path to Salvation – A Manual of Spiritual Transformation*, part III, chapter 5, section 9, pp. 269-272.

quite faint. And his spiritual father blessed him to prepare for Communion."⁴¹⁶

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 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.

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.

This 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 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.

⁴¹⁶ Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 2000, pp. 565-566.

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.”⁴¹⁷

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.⁴¹⁸

4. Not to receive the Holy Mysteries at a Liturgy (unless one has a canonical impediment) is an Insult to Christ. In defence of this statement, 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

⁴¹⁷ St. Symeon, *Dialogue*, chapter 78, P.G. 155, col. 252CD.

⁴¹⁸ In the interpretations found in St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite’s *Pedalion* on Apostolic Canons 8 and 9, the 13th 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).

only at certain set times such as Pascha, says 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, says the Saint, then one is not worthy of going to the Liturgy at all.

Now the rule of truth in the Orthodox Church is not the opinion of one Father, however distinguished, but the *consensus* of *all* the Fathers. And the present writer has not found a similar statement in any other Holy Father except St. Nicodemus, who quotes it in *On Frequent Communion*. In any case, St. John's highly rhetorical language must be understood in context – his desire to impress an important and valid point (that receiving Communion should not be only at “set times”) on a particular kind of audience that he knew much better than we. It would be unwise to take such language out of context and create a general rule out of it applicable to all times and places. And the Orthodox Church has never created such a general rule.

However, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite claims that there is such a rule – the Ninth Apostolic Canon, which, in his interpretation, says that all those who do not receive Communion at every Liturgy are excommunicated “as creating a disorder in the church”. 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.”⁴¹⁹

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

⁴¹⁹ *Manna from Athos*, Bern, Oxford, New York: Peter Lang, 2006, p. 100.

Church concerning the spiritual 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 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."⁴²⁰

St. Nicodemus anticipates the possibility that someone, on reading Chrysostom's word 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

⁴²⁰ Bishop Nicodemus, *Pravila Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (The Canons of the Orthodox Church), St. Petersburg, 1911, Moscow, 2001, volume 1, pp. 68-69 (in Russian).

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 to communicate, unless you have an impediment. You may violate neither the one nor the other...”⁴²¹

Much as we respect St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, his “very strict” position here appears to us to be untenable. On the one hand, he approves of St. Chrysostom’s seeming implication that those who do not receive Communion when they have no canonical impediment are not worthy to go to the Liturgy, and believes that the Apostolic Canon excommunicates such people – although this is probably a false interpretation of St. Chrysostom’s words.⁴²² 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.

⁴²¹ St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, *On Frequent Communion*; in *Manna from Athos*, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

⁴²² Bishop Photius of Marathon (personal communication, March 6/19,. 2008)) writes that “the Holy Father uses the rhetorical device of hyperbole (exaggeration) in order to stop the bad habit of some people taking communion only at the great feasts even if they are not worthy, but [who] stay simply in the church during the liturgies on other days of the year without taking communion because it is not a feastday. *This* is an insult to Christ because the Body and Blood of Chrsit is the same at every liturgy.”

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 Manichaeian heretics who see sexual relations in marriage as sinful. But it does not correspond to the Apostolic teaching. Thus 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 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.

*January 27 / February 9, 2008.
St. John Chrysostom.*

29. 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."⁴²³

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.*"⁴²⁴

⁴²³ Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2005, pp. 291, 293.

⁴²⁴ *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983, p. 55.

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.*"⁴²⁵ However, there is reason for believing 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.*"⁴²⁶

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..."⁴²⁷

Again, in the *Life of St. Gregory, Bishop of Agrigentum* (+6th 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."⁴²⁸

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

⁴²⁵ *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers*, p. 60.

⁴²⁶ *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers*, p. 59.

⁴²⁷ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2001, volume III: November, p. 592.

⁴²⁸ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2001, volume III: November, p. 537.

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."⁴²⁹

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 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."⁴³⁰

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!"⁴³¹

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."⁴³²

⁴²⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 87 on John*, 4.

⁴³⁰ Bl. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel of John*.

⁴³¹ St. Innocent, "What is Necessary for a Saving Confession?", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 38, no. 4, July-August, 1988, pp. 20-22.

⁴³² St. Bede, *Sermon on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul*, P.L. 94, col. 219, sermon 16.

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?”⁴³³

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...⁴³⁴

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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.

⁴³³ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Discourse* 33, 3.

⁴³⁴ Kratkoe zhitie Otsa-Ispovednika Katakombnoj Tserkvi Ieromonakha Fyodora (Rafanovicha), <http://www.catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=page&pid=679> (in Russian).

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, 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..."⁴³⁵

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.

⁴³⁵ 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 (in Russian).

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 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."⁴³⁶

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."⁴³⁷ The confessors of his days often included unordained monks, such as St. Barsanuphius the Great.⁴³⁸

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, but an enemy, a trickster, one [who] fools himself and [is] a wolf amidst the people of God".⁴³⁹

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.⁴⁴⁰ 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.

⁴³⁶ St. Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance*, book 1; in Gabriel, op. cit., p. 28.

⁴³⁷ St. Basil, *Ascetical Works*; in Gabriel, op. cit., p. 26.

⁴³⁸ Gabriel, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴³⁹ 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.

⁴⁴⁰ Golitzin, op. cit.

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."⁴⁴¹ 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."⁴⁴² 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."⁴⁴³

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 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

⁴⁴¹ St. Anastasius, *Odigos (The Guide)*, Answer 104, Mount Athos, 1970, p. 171 (in Greek).

⁴⁴² St. Anastasius, *Odigos*, Answer 105, p. 171.

⁴⁴³ St. Anastasius, *Odigos*, Answer 106, p. 171.

saved..."⁴⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁴⁵ 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 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

⁴⁴⁴ St. Anastasius, *Odigos*, Answer 6, pp. 16, 17.

⁴⁴⁵ 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).

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 charism 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..."⁴⁴⁶

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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

⁴⁴⁶ St. Symeon; in Golitzin, op. cit., pp. 197-200.

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?

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.”⁴⁴⁷ Again, as St. Anastasius of Sinai says: “Men have often sinned before others, and then, confessing *in secret* to God, they received forgiveness...”⁴⁴⁸ 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.”⁴⁴⁹

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

⁴⁴⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Fourth Homily on the Rich Man and Lazarus*, in Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁴⁴⁸ St. Anastasius, *Odigos*, in Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁴⁴⁹ St. Barnabas, *Osnovy Iskusstva Sviatosti* (The Foundations of the Art of Holiness), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2001, p. 275 (in Russian).

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 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.”⁴⁵⁰

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.

⁴⁵⁰ St. Symeon, *Moral Homily* 6, in Gabriel, op.cit., p. 32.

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.

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..."⁴⁵¹

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

⁴⁵¹ St. Innocent, *op.cit.*

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."⁴⁵²

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 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.

⁴⁵² St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 83 on Matthew*, 6.

30. HOW THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE FELL FROM GRACE

Introduction

In 1922 the first pro-Soviet schism in the Russian Orthodox Church took place – the so-called renovationists or “Living Church”. However, the people in their great majority rejected the renovationists, and the Patriarchal Church remained unvanquished until the death of Patriarch Tikhon in April, 1925. Two years after that, however, in 1927, the second, “neo-renovationist” schism took place – and this time the official church fell together with the majority of the people...

After the death of Patriarch Tikhon, and the arrest and imprisonment of the patriarchal locum tenens, Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa, in December, 1925, True Orthodoxy in Russia was without a first-hierarchy living in freedom and able to administer the Church. By the middle of 1926, Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) of Nizhni-Novgorod had established himself as the leading Russian hierarchy, although he was neither patriarch nor patriarchal locum tenens, but only a deputy of Metropolitan Peter. As such, he did not have the authority to undertake any important steps in Church matters without the express authorization of Metropolitan Peter.

Lev Regelson has argued⁴⁵³ that Metropolitan Peter’s action in appointing deputies was not canonical, and created misunderstandings that were to be ruthlessly exploited later by Metropolitan Sergius. A chief hierarchy does not have the right to transfer the fullness of his power to another hierarchy as if it were a personal inheritance: only a Council representing the whole Local Church can elect a leader to replace him. Patriarch Tikhon’s appointment of three locum tenentes was an exceptional measure, but one which was nevertheless entrusted to him by – and therefore could claim the authority of – the Council of 1917-18. However, the Council made no provision for what might happen in the event of the death or removal of these three. In such an event, therefore, patriarchal authority ceased, temporarily, in the Church; and there was no canonical alternative, until the convocation of another Council, but for each bishop to govern his diocese independently while maintaining links with neighbouring dioceses, in accordance with the Patriarch’s ukaz no. 362 of November 7/20, 1920.

In defence of Metropolitan Peter it may be said that it is unlikely that he intended to transfer the fullness of his power to Metropolitan Sergius, but only the day-to-day running of the administrative machine. In fact he explicitly said this later, in his letter to Sergius dated January 2, 1930.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵³ Regelson, *Tragedia Russkoj Tserkvi, 1917-1945* (The Tragedy of the Russian Church, 1917-1945), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977.

⁴⁵⁴ M.E. Gubonin, *Akty Sviateishego Patriarkha Tikhona*, Moscow, 1994, p. 677.

Moreover, in his declaration of December 6, 1925, he had given instructions on what should be done in the event of his arrest, saying that “the raising of my name, as patriarchal locum tenens, remains obligatory during Divine services.”⁴⁵⁵ This was something that Patriarch Tikhon had not insisted upon when he transferred the fullness of his power to Metropolitan Agathangelus in 1922. It suggests that Metropolitan Peter did not exclude the possibility that his deputy might attempt to seize power from him just as the renovationists had seized power from the patriarch and his locum tenens in 1922, and was taking precautions against just such a possibility.

The critical distinction here is that whereas the patriarchal locum tenens has, de jure, all the power of a canonically elected Patriarch and need relinquish his power only to a canonically convoked Council of the whole local Church, the deputy of the locum tenens has no such fullness of power and must relinquish such rights as he has at any time that the Council or the locum tenens requires it. Nevertheless, the important question remains: why did Metropolitan Peter not invoke ukaz no. 362 and announce the decentralization of the Church’s administration at the time of his arrest? Probably for two important reasons:

- (1) The restoration of the patriarchate was one of the main achievements of the Moscow Council of 1917-18, and had proved enormously popular. Its dissolution might well have dealt a major psychological blow to the masses, who were not always educated enough to understand that the Church could continue to exist either in a centralized (though not papist) form, as it had in the East from 312 to 1917, or in a decentralized form, as in the catacomb period before Constantine the Great and during the iconoclast persecution of the eighth and ninth centuries.
- (2) The renovationists – still the major threat to the Church in Metropolitan Peter’s eyes – did not have a patriarch, and their organization was closer to the synodical, state-dependent structure of the pre-revolutionary Church. The presence or absence of a patriarch or his substitute was therefore a major sign of the difference between the true Church and the false for the uneducated believer.

There is another important factor which should be mentioned here by way of introduction. Under the rules imposed upon the Church administration by Peter the Great in the eighteenth century, the Ruling Synod was permitted to move bishops from one see to another, and even to retire, ban or defrock them, in a purely administrative manner. This was contrary to the Holy Canons, which envisage the defrocking of a bishop only as a result of a full canonical trial, to which the accused bishop is invited to attend three times. Peter’s rules made the administration of the Church similar to that of a government department – which is precisely what the Church was according to his Reglament. It enabled the State to exert pressure on the Church to move and

⁴⁵⁵ Gubonin, op.cit., p. 422.

remove bishops in the speediest and most efficient manner, without the checks and balances – and delays – that following the Holy Canons would have involved. This was bad enough in itself, even when the State was kindly disposed towards the Church. It was catastrophic when the State became the enemy of the Church after 1917... Now Patriarch Tikhon, while not rescinding Peter's rules, had opposed the pressure of the State, on the one hand, and had preserved the spirit of *sobornost'*, or conciliarity, on the other, consulting his fellow bishops and the people as far as possible. But the danger remained that if the leadership of the Church were assumed by a less holy man, then the combination of the uncanonical, Petrine rules, on the one hand, and an increase of pressure from the State, on the other, would lead to disaster...

The fall of the Moscow Patriarchate took place as a result of a decisive movement by Metropolitan Sergius and a small group of likeminded hierarchs towards a reconciliation between the Orthodox Church and the God-hating Soviet power and their close collaboration in support of the revolution. It was not authorized by Metropolitan Peter, who remained in prison until his martyric death in 1937. And it was in any case contrary both to the dogmatic teaching of the Orthodox Church, and to the anathema of Patriarch Tikhon of January 19 / February 1, 1918 - which was supported by the Local Council of the Russian Church then in session in Moscow - against any such collaboration. It was imposed upon the Church without any conciliar consultation, and the dissidents – who included most of the senior bishops – were ruthlessly disposed of – forcibly retired, banned or defrocked – without the possibility of a trial by their fellow-bishops or appeal against the verdict. The decisions of Sergius and Synod were still more ruthlessly followed up by Soviet power, which cast all those who opposed “our Sergius” into prison or exile, where the great majority of them perished.

The Rise of Metropolitan Sergius

Of course, the Soviets would have preferred to act through the canonical leader of the Church, Metropolitan Peter, rather than a deputy. For that would have given their take-over of the Church greater “canonicity”. However, in December, 1926, when the Soviet official Tuchkov proposed to Metropolitan Peter, who was in prison in Suzdal, that he renounce his locum tenancy, Peter refused, and then sent a message to everyone through a fellow prisoner that he would “never under any circumstances leave his post and would remain faithful to the Orthodox Church to death itself”.⁴⁵⁶

This was a blow to the Soviets: while continuing to try and persuade Metropolitan Peter – through the well-known methods of torture – to change his mind, they would have to try and find another man to act as the Judas of the Russian Church. Fortunately for them, however, on January 1, 1927, while he was in Perm on his way to exile on the island of Khe in Siberia,

⁴⁵⁶ Regelson, *op.cit.*, p. 408.

Metropolitan Peter confirmed Sergius as his deputy. This suited the Soviets perfectly, because Sergius was well-known even from the pre-revolutionary period for his “leftist” views, and had even been a leader of the pro-Soviet renovationist schism in 1922.

Though he came to regret this decision, Metropolitan Peter was not able to revoke it officially from his remote exile. And the Soviets wasted no time in imprisoning Sergius, so as to remind him, if he needed reminding, who the real powers in the land were... After three months in prison, Sergius emerged in April a devoted servant of the revolution...

While Sergius was in prison, Archbishop Seraphim of Uglich had been managing affairs as *his* deputy. At the beginning of March he was summoned from Uglich to Moscow and interrogated for three days by the GPU. Evidently, they were thinking that if Seraphim might also be useful to them, they might not need Sergius...

But they were mistaken. Seraphim was offered a Synod, and indicated who should be its members. Seraphim rejected this list, and put forward his own list of names, which included Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan, probably the most authoritative hierarch in Russia and one of Patriarch Tikhon’s three locum tenentes (the others were Metropolitan Agathangel of Yaroslavl and Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa).

“But he’s in prison,” they said.

“Then free him,” said the archbishop.

The GPU then presented him with conditions for the legalization of the Church by Soviet power. This would have involved surrendering the Church into the power of the atheists. Arfed Gustavson writes: “He refused outrightly without entering into discussions, pointing out that he was not entitled to decide such questions without the advice of his imprisoned superiors. When he was asked whom he would appoint as his executive deputy he is said to have answered that he would turn over the Church to the Lord Himself. The examining magistrate was said to have looked at him full of wonder and to have replied:

“‘All the others have appointed deputies...’

“To this Seraphim countered: ‘But I lay the Church in the hands of God, our Lord. I am doing this, so that the whole world may know what freedom Orthodox Christianity is enjoying in our free State.’”⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁷ Gustavson, *The Catacomb Church*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1960.

Another account of this dialogue was given by Archbishop Seraphim's senior subdeacon, Michael Nikolaevich Yaroslavsky: "For 100 days Vladyka Seraphim happened to rule the whole of the Russian Orthodox Church. This was in 1926. Metropolitan Sergius was in prison, everybody was in prison..."

"And so, as he had been put in charge, Vladyka told me that at that time the authorities offered him, as the Primate of the Church, a Synod of bishops. He did not agree and immediately received three years in Solovki camp. He did not betray the Church, but... declared the autocephaly of each diocese, since each Church Primate was another candidate for prison..."⁴⁵⁸

This was a decisive moment, for the central hierarchy of the Church was effectively declaring the Church's decentralization. And not before time. For with the imprisonment of the last of the three possible *locum tenentes* there was really no canonical basis for establishing a central administration for the Church before the convocation of a Local Council. But this was prevented by the communists. As we have seen, the system of deputies of the deputy of the *locum tenens* had no basis in Canon Law or precedent in the history of the Church. And if it was really the case that the Church could not exist without a first hierarchy and central administration, then the awful possibility existed that with the fall of the first hierarchy the whole Church would fall, too...

The communists also wanted a centralized administration; so Tuchkov now turned to Metropolitan Agathangelus with the proposal that he lead the Church. He refused. Then he turned to Metropolitan Cyril with the same proposal. He, too, refused. The conversation between Tuchkov and Metropolitan Cyril is reported to have gone something like this:-

"If we have to remove some hierarchy, will you help us in this?"

⁴⁵⁸ Tape recorded conversation with Protopriest Michael Ardov in 1983, *Church News*, vol. 13, № 11 (112), p. 6. According to the same source, Vladyka Seraphim mentioned Metropolitan Cyril. "But he is behind bars," Tuchkov said. "He is behind *your* bars, and you must release him," said Seraphim.

"According to a letter written by Archbishop Seraphim a few days after his Lubyanks interview, Tuchkov said to him 'at parting': 'We don't harbour evil thoughts; we are releasing you and assign to you Uglich as your place of residence; you can officiate wherever you want, but under no circumstances can you govern. You should neither appoint, nor transfer, nor dismiss, nor reward.' 'But what about enquiries from the dioceses, current affairs,' asked Archbishop Seraphim. 'You cannot stop life, it will claim its own.' 'Well, you can make purely formal replies. After all, you have declared autonomy. So what do you want? You have left no deputies. So you should act accordingly: you must not send around any papers on the new government system. You can write to the dioceses that "since I have refused to govern, you should manage on your own in your localities." But it comes into your head to write something, send it to me with a trusted man, I'll look through it and give you my opinion... As for now, goodbye. We'll buy you a ticket and see you to the railway station. Go back to Uglich and sit there quietly.'" (in Fr. Alexander Mazyrin, "Legalizing the Moscow Patriarchate in 1927: The Secret Aims of the Authorities", *Social Science: A Quarterly Journal of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, no. 1, 2009, p. 3. The article was first published in Russian in *Otechestvennaia Istoria*, no. 4, 2008).

"Yes, if the hierarch appears to be guilty of some ecclesiastical transgression... In the contrary case, I shall tell him directly, 'The authorities are demanding this of me, but I have nothing against you.'"

"No!" replied Tuchkov. "You must try to find an appropriate reason and remove him as if on your own initiative."

To this the hierarch replied: "Eugene Nikolayevich! You are not the cannon, and I am not the shot, with which you want to blow up our Church from within!"⁴⁵⁹

Metropolitan Sergius forms a Synod

On April 2, 1927 Metropolitan Sergius emerged from prison, ready to be the shot that would blow up the Orthodox Church from within... He was released from prison on condition that he did not leave Moscow – although before his arrest he had not had the right to live in Moscow. However, the investigation of his case was not discontinued, showing that the authorities still wanted to keep him on a leash... Five days later, Archbishop Seraphim handed over to him the government of the Russian Church. And another six days later, on April 13, Metropolitan Sergius announced to Bishop Alexis (Gotovtsev), who was temporary administrator of the Moscow diocese, that he had assumed the post of deputy of the patriarchal locum tenens.⁴⁶⁰

On May 16 Sergius asked the NKVD for permission to hold a preliminary meeting with six or seven hierarchs with a view to inviting them to become members of a Synod and then to petition the government for registration of the Synod. The NKVD immediately agreed, acknowledging receipt of one rouble for the certificate. "Thus a one-rouble certificate inaugurated the history of the legalized Moscow Patriarchate."⁴⁶¹

On May 18 the meeting took place, and the hierarchs agreed to convert their meeting into a temporary Patriarchal Holy Synod. The members of this Synod, according to Archbishop Seraphim's subdeacon, were precisely those hierarchs that had been suggested to Archbishop Seraphim, but whom he had rejected... As the Catholic writer Deinber points out, "when the names of the bishops invited to join the Synod were made known, then there could be no further doubts concerning the capitulation of Metropolitan Sergius before Soviet power. The following joined the Synod: Archbishop Sylvester

⁴⁵⁹ Regelson, op. cit., p. 413.

⁴⁶⁰ Mazurin, op. cit., p. 5. In later years, after Sergius' betrayal of the Church, Archbishop Seraphim is reported to have reasserted his rights as patriarchal locum tenens. See Michael Khlebnikov, "O tserkovnoj situatsii v Kostrome v 20-30-e gody" (On the Church Situation in Kostroma in the 20s and 30s), *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn'* (Orthodox Life), 49, № 5 (569), May, 1997, p. 19.

⁴⁶¹ Mazurin, op. cit., p. 6.

(Bratanovsky) – a former renovationist; Archbishop Alexis Simansky – a former renovationist, appointed to the Petrograd see by the Living Church after the execution of Metropolitan Benjamin [Kazansky]; Archbishop Philip [Gumilevsky] – a former beglopopovets, i.e. one who had left the Orthodox Church for the sect of the beglopopovtsi; Metropolitan Seraphim [Alexandrov] of Tver, a man whose connections with the OGPU were known to all Russia and whom no-one trusted..."⁴⁶²

On May 20, the OGPU officially recognized this Synod, which suggested that Metropolitan Sergius had agreed to the terms of the legalization of the Church by Soviet power which Patriarch Tikhon and Metropolitan Peter had rejected. One of Sergius' closest supporters, Bishop Metrophanes of Aksaisk, had once declared that "the legalization of the church administration is a sign of heterodoxy"... In any case, on May 25 Metropolitan Sergius and his "Patriarchal Holy Synod" now wrote to the bishops enclosing the OGPU document and telling them that their diocesan councils should now seek registration from the local organs of Soviet power. Some hierarchs hastened to have their diocesan administrations legalized. But as it turned out, the OGPU was in no hurry to register diocesan councils before their membership had been established to the OGPU's satisfaction...

"In 1929, when the results were already obvious, [the Catacomb] Bishop Damascene (Tsedrik) wrote this in his 'Letter to the Legalized Ones': 'Fathers and brothers! While it is still not too late, do think and look into the essence of the 'legalization' that was graciously granted to you, lest you should later bitterly repent of the mistake that all of you with Metropolitan Sergius at your head are now committing! What you are accepting under the name of 'legalization' is, in essence, an act of bondage that guarantees you no rights whatsoever, while imposing upon you some grievous obligations. It would be naïve to expect anything other than that. The Communist Soviet Power is frank and consistent. It openly declared itself hostile to religion and set the destruction of the Church as its goal. It never stops stating openly and clearly its theomachistic tasks through its top governmental representatives and all of its junior agents. This is why it is very naïve and criminal to believe that the so-called legalization by the Soviets is even partially seeking the good of the Church.'"⁴⁶³

In June, 1927 Sergius wrote to Metropolitan Eulogius of Paris directing him to sign a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet power. He agreed... On July 14, in ukaz № 93, Sergius demanded that all clergy abroad should sign a formal pledge to cease criticizing the Soviet government. It also stated that any clergyman abroad who refused to sign such would no longer be considered to be a part of the Moscow Patriarchate. This ukaz, which completely contradicted his previous ukaz of September 12, 1926, which blessed the

⁴⁶² Regelson, op. cit., p. 415; Gubonin, op. cit., p. 407.

⁴⁶³ Mazyrin, op. cit., p. 10.

hierarchs abroad to form their own independent administration, even included the actual text of the pledge that was to be signed: "I, the undersigned, promise that because of my actual dependence upon the Moscow Patriarchate, I will not permit myself neither in my social activities nor especially in my Church work, any expression that could in the least way be considered as being disloyal with regard to the Soviet government."⁴⁶⁴

The clergy abroad were given until October 15 to sign this pledge. The ROCOR Council of Bishops, in their encyclical dated August 26, 1927, refused this demand and declared: "The free portion of the Church of Russia must terminate relations with the ecclesiastical administration in Moscow [i.e., with Metropolitan Sergius and his synod], in view of the fact that normal relations with it are impossible and because of its enslavement by the atheist regime, which is depriving it of freedom to act according to its own will and of freedom to govern the Church in accordance with the canons."⁴⁶⁵

However, Metropolitan Eulogius of Paris, agreed to sign, "but on condition that the term 'loyalty' means for us the apoliticisation of the émigré Church, that is, we are obliged not to make the ambon a political arena, if this will relieve the difficult situation of our native Mother Church; but we cannot be 'loyal' to Soviet power: we are not citizens of the USSR, and the USSR does not recognise us as such, and therefore the political demand is from the canonical point of view non-obligatory for us..."⁴⁶⁶

The impossible demands that Sergius' appeal for loyalty to the Soviet Union placed on hierarchs living outside the Soviet Union was pointed out by the future hieromartyr, Archbishop John of Latvia, to Metropolitan Eleutherius of Lithuania: "As far as I know you, your co-pastors and flock, the question of loyalty to the USSR and the openly antitheist authorities in power there can be resolved sincerely by you only in a negative sense. But if you and your flock were not such as I know you to be, the confession of loyalty to the USSR and the authorities in power there would still be impossible for you from a juridical point of view. And you and your co-pastors and flock are obliged under oath to be faithful citizens of the Lithuanian Republic. Simultaneous fidelity both to Lithuania and the USSR is juridically unthinkable. But even if it were not a question of loyalty in the sense of fidelity to the USSR where the 'appeal' [of Metropolitan Sergius] was born, but in the sense of benevolence towards the USSR, then all the same you, as a

⁴⁶⁴ Quoted in Protopriest Alexander Lebedeff, "Is the Moscow Patriarchate the 'Mother Church' of the ROCOR", Orthodox@ListServ, Indiana.Edu, 24 December, 1997.

⁴⁶⁵ Monk Benjamin, "Letopis' Tserkovnykh Sobytij Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi nachinaia s 1917 goda" (A Chronicle of Church Events of the Orthodox Church beginning from 1917), <http://www.zlatoust.ws/letopis.htm>, p. 171.

⁴⁶⁶ Protopriest Vladislav Tsyppin, *Istoria Russkoj Tserkvi 1925-1938* (A History of the Russian Church, 1925-1938) Moscow: Monastery of the Meeting of the Lord, 1999, p. 383. Monk Benjamin (*op. cit.*, p. 172) writes that on September 13, Metropolitan Eulogius wrote to Sergius asking that he be given autonomy. On September 24 Sergius replied with a refusal.

faithful son of Lithuania, cannot in the future and in all cases promise benevolence towards the USSR..."⁴⁶⁷

On July 5, 1928, the Hierarchical Synod of ROCOR decreed: "The present ukaz [of Sergius] introduces nothing new into the position of the Church Abroad. It repeats the same notorious ukaz of his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon in 1922, which was decisively rejected by the whole Church Abroad in its time."⁴⁶⁸ In response to this refusal, Metropolitan Sergius expelled the hierarchs of the Russian Church Abroad from membership of the Moscow Patriarchate. So the first schism between the Russian Church inside and outside Russia took place as a result of the purely political demands of Sergius' Moscow Patriarchate.

The Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius

On July 16/29, Metropolitan Sergius issued the infamous Declaration that has been the basis of the existence of the Sovietized Moscow Patriarchate ever since, and which was to cause the greatest and most destructive schism in the history of the Orthodox Church since the fall of the Papacy in the eleventh century.

Several points should be noted about this document. First Sergius pretended that Patriarch Tikhon had always been aiming to have the Church legalized by the State, but had been frustrated by the émigré hierarchs and by his own death. There is a limited truth in this – but it was not the émigré hierarchs that frustrated the patriarch, nor did he want the kind of legalization Sergius wanted... Then he went on: "At my proposal and with permission from the State, a blessed Patriarchal Synod has been formed by those whose signatures are affixed to this document at its conclusion. Missing are the Metropolitan of Novgorod, Arsenius, who has not arrived yet, and Archbishop Sebastian of Kostroma, who is ill. Our application that this Synod be permitted to take up the administration of the Orthodox All-Russian Church has been granted. Now our Orthodox Church has not only a canonically legal central administration but a central administration that is legal also according to the law of the State of the Soviet Union. We hope that this legalization will be gradually extended to the lower administrative units, to the dioceses and the districts. It is hardly necessary to explain the significance and the consequences of this change for our Orthodox Church, her clergy and her ecclesiastical activity. Let us therefore thank the Lord, Who has thus favoured our Church. Let us also give thanks before the whole people to the Soviet Government for its understanding of the religious needs

⁴⁶⁷ "Pis'mo Sviashchennomuchenika Ioanna, arkhiepiskopa Rizhskago (1934 g.), arkhiepiskopu Litovskomu i Vilenskemu Elevferiu" (A Letter of Hieromartyr John, Archbishop of Riga (1934) to Archbishop Eleutherius of Lithuania and Vilnius), *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn'*, 676, August, 2008, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁶⁸ Tsypin, *op.cit.*, p. 384.

of the Orthodox population. At the same time let us assure the Government that we will not misuse the confidence it has shown us.

“In undertaking now, with the blessings of the Lord, the work of this Synod, we clearly realize the greatness of our task and that of all the representatives of the Church. We must show not only with words but with deeds, that not only people indifferent to the Orthodox Faith or traitors to the Orthodox Church can be loyal citizens of the Soviet Union and loyal subjects of the Soviet power, but also the most zealous supporters of the Orthodox Church, to whom the Church with all her dogmas and traditions, with all her laws and prescriptions, is as dear as Truth and Life.

“We want to be Orthodox, and at the same time to see the Soviet Union as our civil Fatherland, whose triumphs and successes are also our triumphs and successes, whose failures are our failures. Every attack, boycott, public catastrophe or an ordinary case of assassination, as the recent one in Warsaw, will be regarded as an attack against ourselves...”

Protopriest Lev Lebedev comments on this: “This murder in Warsaw was the murder by B. Koverdaya of the Bolshevik Voikoff (also known as Weiner), who was one of the principal organizers of the murder of the Imperial Family, which fact was well known then, in 1927. So Sergius let the Bolsheviks clearly understand that he and his entourage were at one with them in all their evil deeds up to and including regicide.”⁴⁶⁹

Metropolitan Sergius continued: “Even if we remain Orthodox, we shall yet do our duties as citizens of the Soviet Union ‘not only for wrath but also for conscience’s sake’ (Romans 13.5), and we hope that with the help of God and through working together and giving support to one another we shall be able to fulfil this task.

“We can be hindered only by that which hindered the construction of Church life on the bases of loyalty in the first years of Soviet power. This is an inadequate consciousness of the whole seriousness of what has happened in our country. The establishment of Soviet power has seemed to many like some kind of misunderstanding, something coincidental and therefore not long lasting. People have forgotten that there are no coincidences for the Christian and that in what has happened with us, as in all places and at all times, the same right hand of God is acting, that hand which inexorably leads every nation to the end predetermined for it. To such people who do not want to understand ‘the signs of the times’, it may also seem that it is wrong to break with the former regime and even with the monarchy, without breaking with Orthodoxy... Only ivory-tower dreamers can think that such an enormous society as our Orthodox Church, with the whole of its organisation, can have a peaceful existence in the State while hiding itself from the

⁴⁶⁹ Lebedev, “Dialogue between the ROCA and the MP: How and Why?”, Great Lent, 1998.

authorities. Now, when our Patriarchate, fulfilling the will of the reposed Patriarch, has decisively and without turning back stepped on the path of loyalty, the people who think like this have to either break themselves and, leaving their political sympathies at home, offer to the Church only their faith and work with us only in the name of faith, or (if they cannot immediately break themselves) at least not hinder us, and temporarily leave the scene. We are sure that they will again, and very soon, return to work with us, being convinced that only the relationship to the authorities has changed, while faith and Orthodox Christian life remain unshaken...⁴⁷⁰

An article in *Izvestia* immediately noted the essence of the declaration – a return to renovationism: “The far-sighted part of the clergy set out on this path already in 1922”.⁴⁷¹ So “sergianism”, as Sergius’ position came to be known, was “neo-renovationism”, and therefore subject to the same condemnation as the earlier renovationism of “the Living Church” received – *anathema*. As recently as November, 2008 the True Orthodox Church of Russia⁴⁷² has defined sergianism as “a neo-renovationist schism”.

The radical error that lay at the root of this declaration lay in the last sentence quoted, in the idea that, in an antichristian state whose aim was the extirpation of all religion, it was possible to preserve loyalty to the State while “faith and Orthodox Christian life remained unshaken”. This attitude 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 impossible to draw. For the Bolsheviks, there was no such dividing line; for them, *everything* was ideological, 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 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, 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 (Darwinism, 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 Soviet interpretation of the word: “Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one has become guilty of all of it” (*James* 2.10), such a person was an *enemy*

⁴⁷⁰ Regelson, *op. cit.*, pp. 431-32.

⁴⁷¹ *Izvestia*, in Protopriest Benjamin Zhukov, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov’ na Rodine i za Rubezhom* (The Russian Orthodox Church in the Homeland and Abroad), Paris, 2005, p. 40.

⁴⁷² At its Council in Odessa under the presidency of Archbishop Tikhon of Omsk and Siberia.

of the people. Metropolitan Sergius' identification of his and his Church's joys and sorrows with the joys and sorrows of Soviet communism placed the souls of the millions who followed him in the most serious jeopardy.⁴⁷³

The publication of Sergius' Declaration was greeted with a storm of criticism. Its opponents saw in it a more subtle version of renovationism. Even its supporters and neutral commentators from the West recognized that it marked a radical change in the relationship of the Church to the State.

Thus Professor William Fletcher comments: "This was a profound and important change in the position of the Russian Orthodox Church, one which evoked a storm of protest."⁴⁷⁴ According to the Soviet scholar Titov, "after the Patriarchal church changed its relationship to the Soviet State, undertaking a position of loyalty, in the eyes of the believers any substantial difference whatsoever between the Orthodox Church and the renovationists disappeared."⁴⁷⁵ According to Archimandrite (later Metropolitan) John (Snychev), quoting from a renovationist source, in some dioceses in the Urals up to 90% of parishes sent back Sergius' declaration as a sign of protest."⁴⁷⁶ Again, Donald Rayfield writes: "In 1927... Metropolitan Sergi formally surrendered the Orthodox Church to the Bolshevik party and state."⁴⁷⁷

On September 14/27, the bishops imprisoned on Solovki issued a statement, denouncing Sergius' Declaration: "The subjection of the Church to the State's decrees is expressed [in Sergius' declaration] in such a categorical and sweeping form that it could easily be understood in the sense of a complete entanglement of Church and State... The Church cannot declare all the triumphs and successes of the State to be Her own triumphs and successes. Every government can occasionally make unwarranted, unjust and cruel decisions which become obligatory to the Church by way of coercion, but which the Church cannot rejoice in or approve of. One of the tasks of the present government is the elimination of all religion. The government's successes in this direction cannot be recognized by the Church as Her own successes... The epistle renders to the government 'thanks before the whole people to the Soviet government for its understanding of the religious needs of the Orthodox population'. An expression of gratitude of such a kind on the lips of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church cannot be sincere and therefore does not correspond to the dignity of the Church... The epistle of

⁴⁷³ St. John Cassian writes: "You should know that in the world to come also you will be judged in the lot of those with whom in this life you have been affected by sharing in their gains or losses, their joys or their sorrows..." (cited by S. Brakus, [ROCElaity] FW: Communists and Spies in cassocks, January 8, 2007).

⁴⁷⁴ Cited in Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917-1971*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 57.

⁴⁷⁵ Cited in Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴⁷⁶ Regelson, *op. cit.*, p. 434.

⁴⁷⁷ Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen*, London: Viking, 2004, p. 123.

the patriarchate sweepingly accepts the official version and lays all the blame for the grievous clashes between the Church and the State on the Church...

"In 1926 Metropolitan Sergius said that he saw himself only as a temporary deputy of the patriarchal *locum tenens* and in this capacity as not empowered to address pastoral messages to the entire Russian Church. If then he thought himself empowered only to issue circular letters, why has he changed his mind now? The pastoral message of Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod leads the Church into a pact with the State. It was considered as such by its authors as well as by the government. Sergius' action resembles the political activities of the 'Living Church' and differs from them not in nature but only in form and scope..."⁴⁷⁸

The Solovki bishops affirmed the civic loyalty of the Orthodox Church to the Soviet State. But, as M.B. Danilushkin points out, "the tone of these affirmations was fundamentally different than in the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius. Recognizing necessity – mainly the inevitability of civil submission to the authorities – they decisively protested against the unceremonious interference of the authorities into the inner affairs of the Church, the ban on missionary activity and the religious education of children, firmly expressing their position that in this sphere there could be no compromise on the part of the Church. Although the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius recognized the religious persecutions in the USSR, it called, not the state, but the believers, to peace. In this consists the fundamental difference between the two documents..."⁴⁷⁹

According to different sources, 17 or 20 or 26 bishops signed this epistle. However, the majority of the bishops on Solovki did not consider Sergius' declaration a reason for breaking communion with him. Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan wrote to an unknown person that the Solovki bishops wanted to wait for the repentance of Sergius "until the convening of a canonical Council... in the assurance that the Council could not fail to demand that of him".⁴⁸⁰

The Struggle in Petrograd

Although the church revolution engineered by Metropolitan Sergius and supported by the Soviets was conceived and first brought to fruition in the centre, in Moscow, it could not hope to succeed on a large scale if it did not also triumph in the other capital of Russian life, Petrograd – or Leningrad, as the communists now called it. The revolutionaries must have had good hopes

⁴⁷⁸ Regelson, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

⁴⁷⁹ Danilushkin, *Istoria Russkoj Tserkvi ot Vosstanovlenia Patriarshestva do nashikh dnei* (A History of the Russian Church from the Reestablishment of the Patriarchate to our Days), vol. I, St. Petersburg, 1997, p. 291.

⁴⁸⁰ Nicholas Balashov, "Esche raz o 'deklaratsii' i o 'solidarnosti' solovchan" (Again on the 'declaration' and on 'the solidarity of the Solovkans'), *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizhenia* (Herald of the Russian Christian Movement), 157, III-1989, pp. 197-198.

of succeeding also in Petrograd. After all, it had been the birthplace of the political revolution in 1917, and had also been pivotal in the renovationists' church revolution in 1922-23. But by the Providence of God it was precisely in revolutionary Petrograd that the fight-back began. Let us go back a little in time to see how this came to pass.⁴⁸¹

By the end of 1925 the Episcopal council of vicar-bishops that had ruled the Petrograd diocese since the martyric death of Metropolitan Benjamin in 1922 ceased its existence – three bishops were arrested: Benedict (Plotnikov), Innocent (Tikhonov) and Seraphim (Protopopov). There remained only Bishop Gregory (Lebedev). Also in the city were Bishop Sergius (Druzhinin) and Bishop Demetrius (Lyubimov). These three were all thoroughly Orthodox bishops, who would lead the Catacomb Church after 1927 and suffer martyric deaths. However, in the spring of 1926 there returned from exile two Petrograd vicar-bishops, Nicholas (Yarushevich) and Alexis (Simansky). These two bishops, together with Metropolitan Sergius, would form the core of the apostate Moscow Patriarchate in the 1940s. Alexis had already betrayed the faith once, by removing the anathema placed by Metropolitan Benjamin on the renovationist Vvedensky. Now he, Nicholas and a group of clergy led by Protopriest Nicholas Chukov, who became Metropolitan Gregory of Leningrad after the war, represented the neo-renovationist tendency in the city who wanted to improve relations with the Soviets and get the Church legalized by them.

As Fr. Michael Cheltsov writes: "Two groups became clearly delineated: Alexis and Nicholas, and Gregory and Demetrius. Sergius, in view of his closeness to [Protopriest Basil] Veriuzhsky [rector of the zealot Cathedral of the Resurrection "on the Blood"] and to me, also joined the group of Gregory..."⁴⁸²

In August, 1926 Bishop Alexis was transferred to the see of Novgorod, and Archbishop Joseph (Petrovykh) of Petrograd was appointed Metropolitan of Petrograd. This appointment was greeted with great joy by the faithful. However, the Soviets refused Joseph permission to go to Petrograd - he served there only once, on September 12, the feast of St. Alexander Nevsky, and never returned to the city. In the meantime, he appointed the little-known Bishop Gabriel (Voyevodin) as his deputy.

Meanwhile, Bishop Alexis received permission from the Soviets to stay in Petrograd and began to serve in the churches of his friends in the city. This

⁴⁸¹ In this section I am particularly indebted to the work of Lydia Sikorskaya, *Svyaschennomucheniki Sergij, episkop Narvskij, Vasilij, episkop Kargopolskij, Ilarion, episkop Porechskij. Tainoye sluzhenie Iosifyan* (Holy Hieromartyrs Sergius, Bishop of Narva, Basil, Bishop of Kargopol, Hilarion, Bishop of Porech), Moscow: Bratonezh, 2009, pages 78 et seq.

⁴⁸² Cheltsov, "V chem. Prichina tserkovnoj razrukhi v 1920-1930 gg." (The Reason for the Church Collapse in 1920-1930), *Minuvshee*, Moscow and St. Petersburg, 1994, issue 17, p. 447.

was opposed by Bishops Gregory and Demetrius, who obtained from Metropolitan Joseph that bishops from other sees (i.e. Alexis) should not be allowed to serve in the city without the permission of Bishop Gabriel. But Bishop Alexis paid no attention to the metropolitan and continued to serve – to the distress of the faithful.

At the beginning of the Great Fast, 1927 Bishops Gregory and Gabriel were arrested and cast into prison. Since Metropolitan Joseph was still in exile in Ustiuzhna, Bishop Nicholas began to administer the diocese as being the senior bishop by ordination, and in April received official permission to do this from Metropolitan Sergius in Moscow. On his return to Petrograd, Bishop Nicholas began to act authoritatively and brusquely towards his fellow hierarchs, and in August he obtained the forcible retirement of Bishop Sergius from his see.

The previous month Metropolitan Sergius' Declaration had been published, and Bishop Nicholas tried to get it distributed and read out in church. However, there was widespread resistance to this. When Fr. Nicholas Chukov read it out, there was a great commotion in the church. And when one of the deans, the future Hieromartyr Fr. Sergius Tikhomirov, received it, he immediately sent it back to Nicholas and resigned his deanery. "Whether the epistle was read out somewhere or not," writes Fr. Michael Cheltsov, "the mood among the Peterites against Metropolitan Sergius and to a significant extent against our Nicholas was sharply negative. Their Orthodoxy, especially of the former, was subjected to powerful doubt, and trust in them was undermined. Our clergy, if they read the epistle, were all against it."⁴⁸³

However, it was not the Declaration so much as the actions undertaken by Metropolitan Sergius against Metropolitan Joseph that stirred the Petrograd flock into action.

On September 12 (or 17) Metropolitan Joseph was transferred to the see of Odessa by decree of Sergius' Synod. On September 28, Metropolitan Joseph wrote to Sergius that he refused to accept it, saying that he saw in it an evil intrigue by a clique which did not want him to be in Petrograd. Then he wrote to the GPU agent Tuchkov asking that he be allowed to administer the Petrograd diocese. Finally he wrote to Sergius again rebuking him and his Synod for "a woefully servile obedience to a principle alien to the Church". He said that he regarded his transfer as "anti-canonical, ill-advised and pleasing to an evil intrigue in which I will have no part". He clearly saw in it the hand of the OGPU, to which Metropolitan Sergius was simply giving in.

On October 21, Sergius directed all the clergy in Russia to commemorate the Soviet authorities, and not the bishops who were in exile. This measure greatly increased the anxiety of the faithful. The commemoration of the Soviet

⁴⁸³ Cheltsov, *op.cit.*, p. 457.

authorities was seen by many as the boundary beyond which the Church would fall away from Orthodoxy. And the refusal to commemorate the exiled hierarchs implied that the hierarchs themselves were not Orthodox and constituted a break with the tradition of commemorating exiled hierarchs that extended back to the time of the Roman catacombs. Sergius was in effect cutting the faithful off from their canonical hierarchs.

One of the leaders of the opposition, the future hieromartyr and possibly bishop, Mark Novoselov, saw in these events the third step in the revolution's destruction of the Church. The first step was the revolution's depriving the Church of Her civil protector, the Orthodox Christian Emperor in 1917, "thereby doubling the significance of the pastors". The second step was its depriving the Church of the possibility of convening Councils, by which it "increased their [the pastors'] significance tenfold, since it made every bishop the real guardian of Orthodoxy in his province". The third step took place in 1927, when "under the form of the gift of legalization the Church was deprived of Her head," which increased the significance of the true pastors still more.

Sergius' act of October 21 "depersonalized" the Liturgy, according to Mark, by "1) casting into the shade the person of Metropolitan Peter through (a) ceasing to commemorate him as 'our Lord' and (b) placing the name of Metropolitan Sergius next to it, that is, two names in one patriarchal place, which is both contrary to the spirit of the canons and deprives the name of the head of the Russian Church – and the personal name of Metropolitan Peter – of its very symbolical meaning; 2) introducing the commemoration of the impersonal name of the authorities, ... and 3) casting into oblivion the names and persons who shone out in their confessing exploit."⁴⁸⁴

Hieromartyr Mark pointed out that, while transfers of bishops took place frequently in tsarist Russia, those were in the context of a single Church family, when Russia was as it were "one diocese". But the transfers in Soviet times were far more dangerous. For when the people were deprived of their confessing bishop, whom they knew and loved, there was no guarantee that his replacement – if there was one – would be Orthodox.

On October 25, Bishop Nicholas (Yarushevich) proclaimed in the cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Petrograd the decision of the Provisional Synod to transfer Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovykh) from Petrograd to Odessa (the secular authorities had already forbidden Metropolitan Joseph to return to the city). In the same decision Bishops Demetrius and Seraphim were forbidden to leave the diocese "without the knowledge and blessing" of Bishop Nicholas (Yarushevich). This caused major disturbances in Petrograd.

⁴⁸⁴ Novoselov, "Oblichenie netserkovnosti sergianskikh printsipov 'poslushania' i 'edinstva Tserkvi'" (A Rebuke of the non-ecclesiastical nature of the sergianist principles of 'obedience' and 'the unity of the Church'), www.romanitas.ru.

However, Metropolitan Sergius paid no attention to the disturbances in Petrograd. Taking upon himself the administration of the diocese, he sent in his place Bishop Alexis (Simansky). So already, only three months after the declaration, the new revolutionary cadres were being put in place...

Then, on October 31, Archimandrite Sergius (Zenkevich) was consecrated Bishop of Detskoe Selo, although the canonical bishop, Gregory (Lebedev), was still alive but languishing in a GPU prison. From that moment many parishioners stopped going to churches where Metropolitan Sergius' name was commemorated, and Bishop Nicholas was not invited to serve.⁴⁸⁵

On October 30 Metropolitan Joseph wrote to Sergius: "You made me metropolitan of Leningrad without the slightest striving for it on my part. It was not without disturbance and distress that I accepted this dangerous obedience, which others, perhaps wisely (otherwise it would have been criminal) decisively declined... Vladyko! Your firmness is yet able to correct everything and urgently put an end to every disturbance and indeterminateness. It is true, I am not free and cannot now serve my flock, but after all everybody understands this 'secret'... Now anyone who is to any degree firm and needed is unfree (and will hardly be free in the future)... You say: this is what the authorities want; they are giving back their freedom to exiled hierarchs on the condition that they change their former place of serving and residence. But what sense or benefit can we derive from the leap-frogging and shuffling of hierarchs that this has elicited, when according to the spirit of the Church canons they are in an indissoluble union with their flock as with a bride? Would it not be better to say: let it be, this false human mercy, which is simply a mockery of our human dignity, which strives for a cheap effect, a spectre of clemency. Let it be as it was before; it will be better like that. Somehow we'll get to the time when they finally understand that the eternal, universal Truth cannot be conquered by exiles and vain torments... One compromise might be permissible in the given case... Let them (the hierarchs) settle in other places as temporarily governing them, but let them unflinching retain their former title... I cannot be reconciled in my conscience with any other scheme, I am absolutely unable to recognize as correct my disgustingly tsarist-rasputinite transfer to the Odessa diocese, which took place without any fault on my part or any agreement of mine, and even without my knowledge. And I demand that my case be immediately transferred from the competence of your Synod, in whose competence I am not the only one to doubt, for discussion by a larger Council of bishops, to which alone I consider myself bound to display my unquestioning obedience."

⁴⁸⁵ V.V.Antonov, "Otvét na Deklaratsiu" (Reply to the Declaration), *Russkij Pastyr'* (Russian Pastor), № 24, 1996, p. 73.

The Birth of the Catacomb Church

On November 24 an important meeting took place in the flat of Protopriest Theodore Andreyev, at which it was decided to write several letters to Sergius. A few days later one such letter, composed by Fr. Theodore and Mark (Novoselov), was read out in the flat of Bishop Demetrius. On December 12 a meeting took place in Moscow between Metropolitan Sergius and his leading opponents from Petrograd which deserves to be described in detail because it marked the decisive make-or-break point between Sergius' Moscow Patriarchate and what became known as the True Orthodox or Catacomb Church.

Bishop Demetrius, Protopriest Basil Veryuzhsky, I.M. Andreyevsky and Professor Sergius Semyonovich Abramovich-Baranovsky were received in Moscow by Metropolitan Sergius. Bishop Demetrius handed him an appeal by six Petrograd bishops; Fr. Basil gave him one written in the name of the clergy, which had been written by Protopriest Theodore Andreyev; and Andreyevsky gave him one written in the name of the church intelligentsia and written by Professor Abramovich-Baranovsky. The letters called on Sergius to abandon his present church policy, stop transferring bishops arbitrarily and return to the position adopted by Patriarch Tikhon.⁴⁸⁶

Sergius read everything slowly and attentively, but occasionally broke off to make a comment.

"Here you are protesting, while many other groups recognize me and express their approval," he said. "I cannot take account of everyone and please everyone and each group. Each of you judges from your bell-tower, but I act for the good of the Russian Church."

"We also, Vladyko," we objected, "want to work for the good of the whole Church. And then: we are not just one of many small groups, but express the church-social opinion of the Leningrad diocese composed of eight bishops – the better part of the clergy. I express the opinion of hundreds of my friends and acquaintances and, I hope, thousands of likeminded scientific workers of the Leningrad diocese, while S.A. represents broad popular circles.

"You are hindered in accepting my appeal by a counter-revolutionary political ideology," said Metropolitan Sergius, "which was condemned by his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon," and he got out one of the papers signed by his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon.

"No, Vladyko, it is not our political convictions, but our religious conscience that does not allow us to accept that which your conscience allows

⁴⁸⁶ In this section I am indebted especially to Lydia Sikorskaya, *Soyaschennomuchenik Dmitriy Arkhiiepiskop Gdovskij* (Holy Hieromartyr Demetrius, Archbishop of Gdov), Moscow, 2008.

you to accept. We are in complete agreement with his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon (in the indicated paper). We also condemn counter-revolutionary speeches. We stand on the point of view of the condemnation of your declaration made by Solovki. Do you know this epistle from Solovki?"

"This appeal was signed by one man (Bishop Basil Zelentsov), but others approve of me. Do you know that I was accepted and approved by Metropolitan Peter himself?"

"Forgive us, Vladyko, that is not quite right. It was not the metropolitan himself. But did you hear this through Bishop Basil?"

"Yes, but how do you know?"

"We know this from the words of Bishop Basil. Metropolitan Peter said that he 'understands [ponimaet]', but does not 'accept [prinimaet] you. But has Metropolitan Peter not written anything to you?"

"You must know that I have no communications with him!" said Metropolitan Sergius.

"They why, Vladyko, do you say that Metropolitan Peter himself recognized you?"

"Well, what's special in commemorating the authorities?" said Metropolitan Sergius. "Since we recognized them, we also pray for them. Did we not pray for the tsar, for Nero and the rest?"

"But is it possible to pray for the Antichrist?" we asked.

"No, that is impossible."

"But can you vouch that this is not the power of the Antichrist?"

"I can vouch for it. The Antichrist must come for three and a half years, but in this case ten years have already passed."

"But after all, is this not the spirit of the Antichrist, who does not confess that Christ has come in the flesh?"

"This spirit has always been with us from the time of Christ to our days. What antichrist is this, I do not recognize him!"

"Forgive us, Vladyko, you 'do not recognize him'. Only an elder can say that. But since there is the possibility that this is the antichrist, we do not pray

[for him]. Besides, from the religious point of view our rulers are not an authority."

"How not an authority?"

"A hierarchy is called an authority when not only someone is subject to me, but I myself am subject to someone higher than myself, etc., and all this goes up to God as the source of every authority!"

"Well, that's a subtle philosophy!"

"The pure in heart simply feel this. But if one reasons, then one must reason subtly, since the question is new, profound, complex and subject to conciliar discussion, and not such a simplified understanding as you give it."

"But prayer for those in exile and prison is excluded because they have made a political demonstration out of this."

"And when, Vladyko, will the tenth beatitude be repealed? After all, it, too, can be seen as a demonstration."

"It will not be repealed, it is part of the liturgy!"

"Prayer for the exiles is also part of the liturgy!"

"My name must be raised in order to distinguish the Orthodox from 'Borisovschina', who commemorate Metropolitan Peter but do not recognize me."

"But do you know, Vladyko, that your name is now pronounced in the renovationist churches?"

"That's only a trick!"

"Then 'Borisovschina' is also a trick!"

"Well, what about the Synod, what don't you like about it?"

"We do not recognize it, we don't trust it, but we trust you for the time being. You are the deputy of the Patriarchal locum tenens, but the Synod is some kind of personal secretariat attached to you, is it?"

"No, it is a co-ruling organ."

"So without the Synod you yourself can do nothing?"

"[after a long period not wanting to reply] Well, yes, without conferring with it."

"We ask you to report nothing about our matter to the Synod. We do not trust it and do not recognize it. We have come personally to you."

"Why don't you like Metropolitan Seraphim?"

"Can it be that you don't know, Vladyko?"

"That's all slander and gossip."

"We haven't come to quarrel with you, but to declare to you from the many who have sent us that we cannot, our religious conscience does not allow us to recognize, the course that you have embarked on. Stop, for the sake of Christ, stop!"

"This position of yours is called confessing. You have a halo..."

"But what must a Christian be?"

"There are confessors and martyrs. But there are also diplomats and guides. But every sacrifice is accepted! Remember Cyprian of Carthage."

"Are you saving the Church?"

"Yes, I am saving the Church."

"The Church does not need salvation, but you yourself are being saved through her."

"Well, of course, from the religious point of view it is senseless to say: 'I am saving the Church'. But I'm talking about the external position of the Church."

"And Metropolitan Joseph?"

"You know him only from one side. No, he categorically cannot be returned."

According to another account, Bishop Demetrius - who was then 70 years old - fell to his knees before Sergius and exclaimed:

"Vladyka! Listen to us, in the name of Christ!"

Metropolitan Sergius immediately raised him up from his knees, seated him in an armchair, and said in a firm and somewhat irritated voice:

"What is there to listen to? Everything you have written has been written by others earlier, and to all this I have already replied many times clearly and definitely. What remains unclear to you?"

"Vladyka!" began Bishop Demetrius in a trembling voice with copious tears. "At the time of my consecration you told me that I should be faithful to the Orthodox Church and, in case of necessity, should also be prepared to lay down my own life for Christ. And now such a time of confession has come and I wish to suffer for Christ. But you, by your Declaration, instead of a path to Golgotha propose that we stand on the path of collaboration with a God-fighting regime that persecutes and blasphemes Christ. You propose that we rejoice with its joys and sorrow with its sorrows... Our rulers strive to annihilate religion and the Church and rejoice at the successes of their anti-religious propaganda. This joy of theirs is the source of our sorrow. You propose that we thank the Soviet government for its attention to the needs of the Orthodox population. But how is this attention expressed? In the murder of hundreds of bishops, thousands of priests, and millions of faithful. In the defilement of holy things, the mockery of relics, in the destruction of an immense number of churches and the annihilation of all monasteries. Surely it would be better if they did not give us such 'attention'!"

"Our government," Metropolitan Sergius suddenly interrupted the bishop, "has persecuted the clergy only for political crimes."

"That is a slander!" Bishop Demetrius cried out heatedly.

"We wish to obtain a reconciliation of the Orthodox Church with the governing regime," Metropolitan Sergius continued with irritation, "while you are striving to underline the counter-revolutionary character of the Church. Consequently, you are counter-revolutionaries, whereas we are entirely loyal to the Soviet regime!"

"That is not true!" exclaimed Bishop Demetrius heatedly. "That is another slander against the confessors and martyrs, those who have been shot and those who are languishing in concentration camps and in banishment... What counter-revolutionary act did the executed Metropolitan Benjamin perform? What is 'counter-revolutionary' in the position of Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa?"

"And the Karlovtsy Council [of the Russian Church in exile], in your opinion, also did not have a political character?" Metropolitan Sergius interrupted him again.

"There was no Karlovtsy Council in Russia," Bishop Demetrius replied quietly, "and many martyrs in the concentration camps knew nothing of this Council."

"I personally," continued the bishop, "am a completely apolitical man, and if I myself had to accuse myself to the GPU, I couldn't imagine anything of which I am guilty before the Soviet regime. I only sorrow and grieve, seeing the persecution against religion and the Church. We pastors are forbidden to speak of this, and we are silent. But to the question whether there is any persecution against religion and the Church in the USSR, I could not reply otherwise than affirmatively. When they proposed to you, Vladyka, that you write your Declaration, why did you not reply like Metropolitan Peter, that you can keep silence, but cannot say what is untrue?"

"And where is the untruth?" exclaimed Metropolitan Sergius.

"In the fact," replied Bishop Demetrius, "that persecution against religion, the 'opium of the people' according to Marxist dogma, not only exists among us, but in its cruelty, cynicism and blasphemy has passed all limits!"

On December 15 Tuchkov, having received a secret report from Petrograd on this meeting with Sergius, wrote the following in his own handwriting: "To Comrade Polyansky. 1. Tell Leningrad that Sergius had a delegation with such-and-such suggestions. 2. Suggest that the most active laymen be arrested under some other pretences. 3. Tell them that we will influence Sergius that he ban certain of the oppositional bishops from serving, and let Yarushevich then ban some of the priests."⁴⁸⁷

Having failed to convince Metropolitan Sergius, on December 26 Bishops Demetrius of Gdov and Sergius of Narva separated from Sergius: "for the sake of the peace of our conscience we reject the person and the works of our former leader, who has unlawfully and beyond measure exceeded his rights".

Sergius soon began issuing bans against the True Orthodox bishops. But the True Orthodox paid no attention to them. On December 30 Archbishop Demetrius wrote to Fr. Alexander Sidorov, a priest in Moscow, who had been threatened with defrocking: "May the Lord help you to remain in peace and unanimity in the firm confession of the purity and truth of the Orthodox faith, helping each other with love in everything. Do not be disturbed by any bans that the apostates from the faith of Christ are preparing for you. Any ban or defrocking of you by Metropolitan Sergius, his synod or bishops for your stand in the Truth has not reality for you. As long as there remains just one firmly Orthodox bishop, have communion with him. If the Lord permits it, and you remain without a bishop, then may the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit,

⁴⁸⁷ Monk Benjamin, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

be with you all, inspiring you to solve all the questions which you may encounter on your path in the spirit of True Orthodoxy.”

Again, on January 4/17, 1928 he wrote “to Father Superiors” that he was breaking communion in prayer with Metropolitan Sergius “until a complete Local Council of the Russian Church, at which will be represented the entire active episcopate - i.e. the present exile-confessors - shall justify by its conciliar authority our way of acting, or until such time as Metropolitan Sergius will come to himself and repent of his sins not only against the canonical order of the Church, but also dogmatically against her person (blaspheming against the sanctity of the exploit of the confessors by casting doubt on the purity of their Christian convictions, as if they were mixed up in politics), against her conciliarity (by his and his Synod's acts of coercion), against her apostolicity (by subjecting the Church to worldly rules and by his inner break - while preserving a false unity - with Metropolitan Peter, who did not give Metropolitan Sergius authorization for his latest acts, beginning with the epistle (Declaration) of July 16/29, 1927). 'Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions' (II Thessalonians 2.7).”⁴⁸⁸

On Christmas Day, 1927/28, Metropolitan Joseph officially supported the actions of Bishops Demetrius and Sergius. In a letter to a Soviet archimandrite, he rejected the charge of being a schismatic, accused Sergius of being a schismatic, and went on: “The defenders of Sergius say that the canons allow one to separate oneself from a bishop only for heresy which has been condemned by a Council. Against this one may reply that the deeds of Metropolitan Sergius may be sufficiently placed in this category as well, if one has in mind such an open violation by him of the freedom and dignity of the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. But beyond this, the canons themselves could not foresee many things, and can one dispute that it is even worse and more harmful than any heresy when one plunges a knife into the Church's very heart - Her freedom and dignity?... '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' (8th Canon of the Third Ecumenical Council)... Perhaps I do not dispute that 'there are more of you at present than of us'. And let it be said that 'the great mass is not for me', as you say. But I will never consider myself a schismatic, even if I were to remain absolutely alone, as one of the holy confessors once was. The matter is not at all one of quantity, do not forget that for a minute: 'The Son of God when He cometh shall He find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18.8). And 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...”⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁸ <http://catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=page&pid=777>.

⁴⁸⁹ I.M. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 1982, p. 100.

The Rebellion Spreads

Meanwhile, antisergianist groups were forming in different parts of the country. Thus between October 3 and 6, 1927 an antisergianist diocesan assembly took place in Ufa, and on November 8 Archbishop Andrew of Ufa issued an encyclical from Kzyl-Orda in which he said that “even if the lying Sergius repents, as he repented three times before of renovationism, under no circumstances must he be received into communion”. This encyclical quickly circulated throughout Eastern Russia and Siberia.

In November, Bishop Victor of Glazov broke with Sergius. He had especially noted the phrase in the declaration that “only ivory-tower dreamers can think that such an enormous society as our Orthodox Church, with the whole of its organisation, can have a peaceful existence in the State while hiding itself from the authorities.” To Sergius himself Bishop Victor wrote: “The enemy has lured and seduced you a second time with the idea of an organization of the Church. But if this organization is bought for the price of the Church of Christ Herself no longer remaining the house of Grace-giving salvation for men, and he who received the organization ceases to be what he was – for it is written, ‘Let his habitation be made desolate, and his bishopric let another take’ (Acts 1.20) – then it were better for us never to have any kind of organization. What is the benefit if we, having become by God’s Grace temples of the Holy Spirit, become ourselves suddenly worthless, while at the same time receiving an organization for ourselves? No. Let the whole visible material world perish; let there be more important in our eyes the certain perdition of the soul to which he who presents such pretexts for sin will be subjected.” And he concluded that Sergius’ pact with the atheists was “not less than any heresy or schism, but is rather incomparably greater, for it plunges a man immediately into the abyss of destruction, according to the unlying word: ‘Whosoever shall deny Me before men...’ (Matthew 10.33).”⁴⁹⁰

At the same time antisergianism began to develop in the Ukraine with the publication of the “Kievan appeal” by Schema-Archbishop Anthony (Abashidze), Bishop Damascene of Glukhov and Fr. Anatolius Zhurakovsky. They wrote concerning Sergius’ declaration: “Insofar as the deputy of the patriarchal locum tenens makes declarations in the person of the whole Church and undertakes responsible decisions without the agreement of the locum tenens and an array of bishops, he is clearly going beyond the bounds of his prerogatives...”⁴⁹¹ In December the Kievans were joined by two brother bishops – Archbishops Averky and Pachomius (Kedrov).⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Cited in Andreyev, op. cit., pp. 141-43.

⁴⁹¹ Regelson, op. cit., p. 435.

⁴⁹² Archbishop Ambrose (von Sievers), “Katakombnaia Tserkov’: ‘Kochuiuschij’ Sobor 1928 g.” (The Catacomb Church: The ‘Nomadic’ Council of 1928), *Russkoe Pravoslavie* (Russian Orthodoxy), № 3 (7), 1997, p. 3.

The Kievans were supported by the famous writer Sergius Alexandrovich Nilus, who wrote to L.A. Orlov in February, 1928: "As long as there is a church of God that is not of 'the Church of the evildoers', go to it whenever you can; but if not, pray at home... They will say: 'But where will you receive communion? With whom? I reply: 'The Lord will show you, or an Angel will give you communion, for in 'the Church of the evildoers' there is not and cannot be the Body and Blood of the Lord. Here in Chernigov, out of all the churches only the church of the Trinity has remained faithful to Orthodoxy; but if it, too, will commemorate the [sergianist] Exarch Michael, and, consequently, will have communion in prayer with him, acting with the blessing of Sergius and his Synod, then we shall break communion with it."

On February 6, 1928 the hierarchs of the Yaroslavl diocese, led by Metropolitan Agathangel, signed an act of separation from Metropolitan Sergius. Metropolitan Joseph also signed the document. Two days later he announced to his Petrograd vicars, pastors and flock that he was taking upon himself the leadership of the Petrograd diocese. This persuaded the authorities to arrest him on February 29, and send him again to the Nikolo-Modensky monastery. On March 11 Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod placed Metropolitan Joseph under ban.

In the birth of the Catacomb Church in 1927-28 we can see the rebirth of the spirit of the 1917-18 Council. In the previous decade, the original fierce tone of reproach and rejection of the God-hating authorities, epitomized above all by the anathematization of Soviet power, had gradually softened under the twin pressures of the Bolsheviks from without and the renovationists from within. Although the apocalyptic spirit of the Council remained alive in the masses, and prevented the Church leaders from actually commemorating the antichristian power, compromises continued to be made – compromises that were never repaid by compromises on the part of the Bolsheviks. However, these acts did not cross the line separating compromise from apostasy. That line was passed by Metropolitan Sergius when he recognized *the God-cursed power to be God-established*, and ordered it to be commemorated while banning the commemoration of the confessing bishops. At this point the spirit of the Council flared up again in all its original strength. For, as a "Letter from Russia" put it many years later: "It's no use our manoeuvring; there's nothing for us to preserve except the things that are God's. For the things that are Caesar's (if one should really consider it to be Caesar and not Pharaoh) are always associated with the quenching of the Spirit."⁴⁹³ Again, as Protopresbyter Michael Polsky wrote: "The Orthodoxy that submits to the Soviets and has become a weapon of the worldwide antichristian deception is not Orthodoxy, but the deceptive heresy of antichristianity clothed in the torn raiment of historical Orthodoxy..."⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹³ *Russkaia Mysl'* (Orthodox Thought), № 3143, March 17, 1977.

⁴⁹⁴ Polsky, *O Tserkvi v SSSR (On the Church in the USSR)*, New York – Montreal, 1993, p. 13.

Already by 1928 Metropolitan Sergius' church was a Sovietized institution. We see this in the official church calendar for 1928, which included among the feasts of the church: the memory of the Leader of the Proletariat Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (on the 32nd Sunday after Pentecost), the Overthrow of the Autocracy (in the Third Week of the Great Fast), the memory of the Paris Commune (the same week), the Day of the Internationale and the Day of the Proletarian Revolution.⁴⁹⁵

By the end of the 1920s there were vigorous groups of True Orthodox Christians in every part of the country, with especially strong centres in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev, Voronezh, the North Caucasus, Kazan, Ufa, Orenburg and the Urals... It remained now to unite these scattered groups under a common leadership, or, at any rate, under a common confession, through the convening of a Council of the Catacomb Church... Now we can infer from a remark of Hieromartyr Maximus of Serpukhov, the first secretly consecrated bishop of the Catacomb Church, that there was *some* Catacomb Council in 1928 that anathematized the Sergianists.⁴⁹⁶ Another source has described a so-called "Nomadic Council" attended at different times by over 70 bishops in 1928 which likewise anathematized the Sergianists. But hard evidence for the existence of this council has proved hard to obtain,⁴⁹⁷ and there are reasons for suspecting the authenticity of the council protocols.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie (Orthodox Review)*, St. Petersburg, №10 (23), 1999, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁶ His words, as reported by Protopresbyter Michael Polsky (*Novie Mucheniki Rossijskie*, Jordanville, 1949-57, vol. II, p. 30), were: "The secret, desert, Catacomb Church has anathematized the 'Sergianists' and all those with them."

⁴⁹⁷ Our information about this Council is based exclusively on Archbishop Ambrose (von Sievers), "Katakombnaia Tserkov': Kochuiushchij Sobor 1928 g." ("The Catacomb Church: The 'Nomadic' Council of 1928"), *Russkoe Pravoslavie* (Russian Orthodoxy), № 3 (7), 1997 ®, whose main source is claimed to be the archives of the president of the Council, Bishop Mark (Novoselov), as researched by the Andrewite Bishop Evagrius. Some historians, such as Pavel Protsenko ("Skvoz' mif ob 'Istinnoj Tserkvi'", *Russkij Pastyr'*, 35, III-1999, pp. 84-97), dismiss the authenticity of the Council completely. Others, such as Osipova ("V otvet na statiu 'Mif ob 'Istinnoj Tserkvi''" (In Reply to the Article, "The Myth of 'the True Church'"), *Russkoe Pravoslavie* (Russian Orthodoxy), № 3 (7), 1997, pp. 18-19) and Danilushkin (*op. cit.*, p. 534) appear to accept the existence of this Council. But it is difficult to find anything other than oblique supporting evidence for it, and von Sievers has refused to allow the present writer to see the archives. A Smirnov (perhaps von Sievers himself) writes that the "non-commemorating" branch of the Catacomb Church, whose leading priest was Fr. Sergius Mechev, had bishops who "united in a constantly active Preconciliar Convention" and who were linked with each other by special people called 'svyazniki'" ("Ugasshie nepominaiushchie v bege vremeni" (The Extinguished Non-Commemorators in the Passing of Time), *Simvol* (Symbol), № 40, 1998, p. 174).

⁴⁹⁸ "We cannot believe that in the Act of that Council, which was allegedly undersigned by 70 hierarchs of the Greco-Russian Church, the Savior's name was written as **Isus**, the way Old Rite Believers wrote it, and the way Ambrosius himself does. Furthermore, the hierarchs could not have unanimously excommunicated the Council of 166-1667 as 'an assembly of rogues'. The Council could not have agreed to recognize all Onomatodox believers as 'true believers', thus easily ending the stalemate unresolved by the Council of 1917-1918. The

A "Little Council" of Catacomb bishops took place in Archangelsk in 1935 and proclaimed: "We declare Metropolitan Sergius, who has violated the purity of the Orthodox faith, who has distorted the dogma of Salvation and of the Church, and who has caused a schism and blasphemed against the Church of Christ and Her confessors, and in scattering the Church has also blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, to be deprived of communion in prayer with us and with all the Orthodox bishops of the Russian Church. We commit him to ecclesiastical trial and ban him from serving. The bishops who think like Metropolitan Sergius are accepted by us into canonical and prayerful communion in accordance with the rite of reception from renovationism."⁴⁹⁹

How many bishops supported Sergius? Out of the approximately 150 Russian bishops in 1927, 80 declared themselves definitely against the declaration, 17 separated from Sergius but did not make their position clear, and 9 at first separated but later changed their mind.⁵⁰⁰

On August 6, 1929 Sergius' synod declared: "The sacraments performed in separation from Church unity... by the followers of the former Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovykh) of Leningrad, the former Bishop Demetrius (Lyubimov) of Gdov, the former Bishop Alexis (Buj) of Urazov, as also of those who are under ban, are also invalid, and those who are converted from these schisms, if they have been baptized in schism, are to be received through Holy Chrismation."⁵⁰¹

procedure of assignment by hierarchs of casting vote powers to their proxies, which violated the provisions of the 1917-1918 Local Council, could not have been adopted without any deliberation or objections at all. The seventy attending hierarchs could not have been unaware of the fact that only the First Hierarch, Metropolitan Peter, had the power to convene a Local Council..." (*Vertograd* (English edition), December, 1998, p. 31).

⁴⁹⁹ M.V. Shkarovsky, *Sud'by iosifylyanskikh pastyrej. Iosifylyanskoye dvizhenie RPTs v sud'bakh ego uchastnikov. Arkhivniye dokumenty* (The Destinies of the Josephite Pastors. The Josephite Movement of the ROC in the Destinies of its Participants. Archive Documents), St. Petersburg, 2006, p. 542. "Novie dannia k zhizneopisaniiu sviashchennomuchenika Fyodora, arkhiepiskopa Volokolamskogo, osnovannia na protokolakh doprosov 1937 g." (New Data towards a Biography of Hieromartyr Theodore, Archbishop of Volokolamsk), *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn'* (Orthodox Life), 48, № 8 (584), August, 1998, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁰⁰ *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), № 14 (1587), July 15/28, 1997, p. 7. These figures probably do not take into account all the secret bishops consecrated by the Ufa Autocephaly. In 1930 Sergius claimed he had 70% of the Orthodox bishops (not including the renovationists and Gregorians), which implies that about 30% of the Russian episcopate joined the Catacomb Church (Pospielovsky, "Mitropolit Sergij i raskoly sprava" (Metropolitan Sergius and the schisms from the right)), *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizhenia* (Herald of the Russian Christian Movement), № 158, I-1990, p. 70). According to the Catholic Bishop Michel D'Erbigny, once the Vatican's representative in Russia, three quarters of the episcopate separated from him; but this is probably an exaggeration (D'Erbigny and Alexandre Deubner, *Evêques Russes en Exil – Douze ans d'Épreuves 1918-1930* (Russian Bishops in Exile – Twelve Years of Trials, 1918-1930), *Orientalia Christiana*, vol. XXI, № 67)

⁵⁰¹ The area occupied by the "Bujevtsy" in Tambov, Voronezh and Lipetsk provinces had been the focus of a major peasant rebellion against Soviet power in 1921. It continued to be a major stronghold of True Orthodoxy for many decades to come. See A.I. Demianov, *Istinno*

However, as even the sergianist Bishop Manuel (Lemeshevsky) had to admit: "It is the best pastors who have fallen away and cut themselves off..."⁵⁰²

In 1929, the Bolsheviks began to imprison the True Orthodox on the basis of membership of a "counter-revolutionary church monarchist organization, the True Orthodox Church". The numbers of True Orthodox Christians arrested between 1929 and 1933 exceeded by seven times the numbers of clergy repressed from 1924 to 1928.⁵⁰³ In 1929 5000 clergy were repressed, three times more than in 1928; in 1930 – 13,000; in 1931-32 – 19,000.⁵⁰⁴

Vladimir Rusak writes: "The majority of clergy and laymen, preserving the purity of ecclesiological consciousness, did not recognize the Declaration... On this soil fresh arrests were made. All those who did not recognize the Declaration were arrested and exiled to distant regions or confined in prisons and camps. [In 1929] about 15 hierarchs who did not share the position of Metropolitan Sergius were arrested. Metropolitan Cyril, the main 'opponent' of Metropolitan Sergius, was exiled to Turukhansk in June-July. The arrest procedure looked something like this: an agent of the GPU appeared before a bishop and put him a direct question: what is your attitude to the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius? If the bishop replied that he did not recognize it, the agent drew the conclusion: that means that you are a counter-revolutionary. The bishop was arrested."⁵⁰⁵

It is hardly a coincidence that this took place against the background of the collectivization of agriculture and a general attack on religion⁵⁰⁶ spearheaded by Yaroslavsky's League of Militant Godless (who numbered 17 million by 1933). Vladimir Rusak writes: "1928, the beginning of collectivisation. Stalin

Pravoslavnoe Khristianstvo, 1977, Voronezh University Press; "New Information on the True Orthodox Christians", *Radio Liberty Research*, March 15, 1978, pp. 1-4; Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978. ch. 4; "Registered and unregistered churches in Voronezh region", *Keston News Service*, 3 March, 1988, p. 8.

⁵⁰² Michael Shkarovsky, "Iosiflianskoe Dvizhenie i Oppozitsia v SSSR (1927-1943)" (The Josephite Movement and Opposition in the USSR (1927-1943)), *Minuvshee* (The Past), № 15, 1994, p. 450.

⁵⁰³ I.I. Osipova, "Istoria Istinnno Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi po Materialam Sledstvennago Dela" (The History of the True Orthodox Church according to Materials from the Interrogation Process), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), № 14 (1587), July 15/28, 1997, p. 2. According to *Slovar' Ateista* (The Dictionary of the Atheist) (Moscow, 1964), "613 priests and monks" entered the True Orthodox Church.

⁵⁰⁴ I.I. Osipova, *O Premiloserdij... Budi s nami neotstupno...Vospominania veruiuschikh Istinnno-Pravoslavnoj (Katakombnoj) Tserkvi. Konets 1920-kh – nachalo 1970-kh godov. (O Most Merciful One... Remain with us without fail. Reminiscences of believers of the True-Orthodox (Catacomb) Church. End of the 1920s – beginning of the 1970s)*, Moscow, 2008.

⁵⁰⁵ Rusak, *Svidetel'stvo Obvoinenia*, Jordanville, 1987, p. 175; Gubonin, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

⁵⁰⁶ Although the Protestants had welcomed the revolution and thus escaped the earlier persecutions, they were now subjected to the same torments as the Orthodox (Pospelovsky, "Podvig very", *op. cit.*, pp. 233-34).

could no longer 'leave the Church in the countryside'. In one interview he gave at that time he directly complained against 'the reactionary clergy' who were poisoning the souls of the masses. 'The only thing I can complain about is that the clergy was not liquidated root and branch,' he said. At the 15th Congress of the party he demanded that all weariness in the anti-religious struggle be overcome."⁵⁰⁷

Also in 1928, economic cooperatives and all philanthropic organizations were banned.⁵⁰⁸ But this was only the beginning: the real killer was collectivization, which, together with the artificial famine that followed, claimed as many as 14 million lives. Collectivization can be seen as an attempt to destroy religion in its stronghold, the countryside, by destroying the economic base of village life and forcing all the villagers into communes completely dependent on the State. The peasants, led by their priests, put up a fierce opposition to it, and many were brought to trial and sentenced to the camps.

Husband writes: "On 8 April 1929, the VtsIK and Sovnarkom declaration 'On Religious Associations' largely superseded the 1918 separation of church and state and redefined freedom of conscience. Though reiterating central aspects of the 1918 separation decree, the new law introduced important limitations. Religious associations of twenty or more adults were allowed, but only if registered and approved in advance by government authorities. They retained their previous right to the free use of buildings for worship but still could not exist as a judicial person. Most important, the new regulations rescinded the previously guaranteed [!] right to conduct religious propaganda, and it reaffirmed the ban on religious instructions in state educational institutions. In effect, proselytising and instruction outside the home were illegal except in officially sanctioned classes, and religious rights of assembly and property were now more circumscribed."⁵⁰⁹

"Henceforth," writes Nicholas Werth, "any activity 'going beyond the limits of the simple satisfaction of religious aspirations' fell under the law. Notably, section 10 of the much-feared Article 58 of the penal code stipulated that 'any use of the religious prejudices of the masses... for destabilizing the state' was punishable 'by anything from a minimum three-year sentence up to and including the death penalty'. On 26 August 1929 the government instituted the new five-day work week – five days of work, and one day of rest – which made it impossible to observe Sunday as a day of rest. This measure deliberately introduced 'to facilitate the struggle to eliminate religion'.

⁵⁰⁷ Rusak, *op. cit.*, part I, p. 176.

⁵⁰⁸ M.I. Odintsev, "Put' dlinoiu v sem' deiatiletij; ot konfrontatsii k sotrudnichestvu" (A Path Seven Decades Long: from Confrontation to Cooperation), in *Na puti k svobode sovesti* (n the Path to Freedom of Conscience), *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁵⁰⁹ W. Husband, "Godless Communists", Northern University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 66.

"These decrees were no more than a prelude to a second, much larger phase of the antireligious campaign. In October 1929 the seizure of all church bells was ordered because 'the sound of bells disturbs the right to peace of the vast majority of atheists in the towns and the countryside'. Anyone closely associated with the church was treated like a kulak and forced to pay special taxes. The taxes paid by religious leaders increased tenfold from 1928 to 1930, and the leaders were stripped of their civil rights, which meant that they lost their ration cards and their right to medical care. Many were arrested, exiled, or deported. According to the incomplete records, more than 13,000 priests were 'dekulakised' in 1930. In many villages and towns, collectivisation began symbolically with the closure of the church, and dekulakization began with the removal of the local religious leaders. Significantly, nearly 14 percent of riots and peasant uprisings in 1930 were sparked by the closure of a church or the removal of its bells. The antireligious campaign reached its height in the winter of 1929-30; by 1 March 1930, 6,715 churches had been closed or destroyed. In the aftermath of Stalin's famous article 'Dizzy with Success' on 2 March 1930, a resolution from the Central Committee cynically condemned 'inadmissible deviations in the struggle against religious prejudices, particularly the administrative closure of churches without the consent of the local inhabitants'. This formal condemnation had no effect on the fate of the people deported on religious grounds.

"Over the next few years these great offensives against the church were replaced by daily administrative harassment of priests and religious organizations. Freely interpreting the sixty-eight articles of the government decree of 8 April 1929, and going considerably beyond their mandate when it came to the closure of churches, local authorities continued their guerrilla war with a series of justifications: 'unsanitary condition or extreme age' of the buildings in question, 'unpaid insurance', and non-payment of taxes or other of the innumerable contributions imposed on the members of religious communities. Stripped of their civil rights and their right to teach, and without the possibility of taking up other paid employment – a status that left them arbitrarily classified as 'parasitic elements living on unearned wages' – a number of priests had no option but to become peripatetic and to lead a secret life on the edges of society."⁵¹⁰

Religious life did not cease but rather intensified in the underground. Wandering bishops and priests served the faithful in secret locations around the country. Particular areas buzzed with underground activity. Thus Professor Ivan Andreyevsky testified that during the war he personally knew some 200 places of worship of the Catacomb Church in the Leningrad area alone. Popovsky writes that the Catacomb Church "arose in our midst at the

⁵¹⁰ Werth, "A State against its People", in Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Packowski, Karel Bartošek, Jean-Louis Margolin, *The Black Book of Communism*, London: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 172-173.

end of the 20s. First one, then another priest disappeared from his parish, settled in a secret place and began the dangerous life of exiles. In decrepit little houses on the outskirts of towns chapels appeared. There they served the Liturgy, heard confessions, gave communion, baptized, married and even ordained new priests. Believers from distant towns and regions poured there in secret, passing on to each other the agreed knock on the door.”⁵¹¹

Even patriarchal sources have spoken about the falsity of Sergius’ declaration, the true confession of those who opposed him, and the invalidity of the measures he took to punish them. Thus: “Amidst the opponents of Metropolitan Sergius were a multitude of remarkable martyrs and confessors, bishops, monks, priests... The ‘canonical’ bans of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) and his Synod were taken seriously by no one, neither at that time [the 1930s] nor later by dint of the uncanonicity of the situation of Metropolitan Sergius himself...”⁵¹² And again: “The particular tragedy of the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius consists in its principled rejection of the podvig of martyrdom and confession, without which witnessing to the truth is inconceivable. In this way Metropolitan Sergius took as his foundation not hope on the Providence of God, but a purely human approach to the resolution of church problems... The courage of the ‘catacombniks’ and their firmness of faith cannot be doubted, and it is our duty to preserve the memory of those whose names we shall probably learn only in eternity...”⁵¹³

Metropolitan Sergius Consolidates His Power

This persecution began to arouse criticism in the West – specifically, from Pope Pius XI and the Archbishop of Canterbury. On February 14, 1930 the Politburo decided “to entrust to Comrades Yaroslavsky, Stalin and Molotov the decision of the question of an interview” to counter-act these criticisms. The result was two interviews, the first to Soviet correspondents on February 15 and published on February 16 in *Izvestia* and *Pravda* in the name of Sergius and those members of his Synod who were still in freedom, and a second to foreign correspondents three days later.

In the first interview, which is now thought to have been composed entirely by the Bolsheviks with the active participation of Stalin, but whose authenticity was never denied by Sergius⁵¹⁴, it was asserted that “in the Soviet Union there was not and is not now any religious persecution”, that “churches are closed not on the orders of the authorities, but at the wish of the

⁵¹¹ Grabbe, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁵¹² Gubonin, *op. cit.*, pp. 809, 810.

⁵¹³ Danilushkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 297, 520.

⁵¹⁴ Igor Kurlyandsky, “Nash Otvet Rimskomu Pape: kak tt. Stalin, Yaroslavsky i Molotov v 1930 godu pisali ‘interview’ Mitropolita Sergia i ego Sinoda” (Our Reply to the Pope of Rome: How Comrades Stalin, Yaroslavsky and Molotov wrote the ‘interview’ of Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod in 193), *Politicheskij Zhurnal* (The Political Journal), 183-184, 21, April, 2008; <http://www.politjournal.ru/index.php?action=Articles&dirid=50&tek=8111&issue=218>

population, and in many cases even at the request of the believers", that "the priests themselves are to blame, because they do not use the opportunities presented to them by the freedom to preach" and that "the Church herself does not want to have any theological-educational institutions".⁵¹⁵

This interview, writes Fr. Stefan Krasovitsky, "was especially absurd and scandalous in the eyes of the simple people in that the universally venerated chapel of the Iveron Icon of the Mother of God had just been destroyed. As N. Talberg writes, 'the Russian people, fearing not even the chekists, demonstrated their attitude to him (Metropolitan Sergius)... When Metropolitan Sergius went to serve in one of the large churches of Moscow, the crowd whistled at him in the streets, which had never happened before in spite of the most desperate agitation of the atheists. Bishop Pitirim, one of those who had signed the declaration in the press, was also whistled at and met in the same way. *Paris-Midi* for March 5 (№ 1392) informed its readers of the insults Metropolitan Sergius had been subjected to by his flock in Moscow. *Vozrozhdenie* for March 6 (№ 178) printed the report of the Berlin *Lokale Anzeiger* to the effect that when Metropolitan Sergius 'came out of the altar to serve the Liturgy, the crowd began to whistle and showered him with brickbats: "traitor", "Judas", "coward", etc. The noise was so great that Metropolitan Sergius was not able to serve and went into the crowd to pacify them. But the aroused parishioners tried to tear his vestments from him, spat at him and wanted to take off his patriarchal cross. Metropolitan Sergius had to leave the church. He tried to serve the Liturgy in another church, but the believers boycotted his service.' The Roman newspaper *Today* (№ 64), reporting the same incident, added that 'not one person' appeared at the service arranged by Metropolitan Sergius for the other church."⁵¹⁶

Commenting on the interview, Archbishop Andrew of Ufa wrote: "Such is the opinion of the false-head of the false-patriarchal church of Metropolitan Sergius... But who is going to recognize this head after all this? For whom does this lying head remain a head, in spite of his betrayal of Christ?... All the followers of the lying Metropolitan Sergius... have fallen away from the Church of Christ. The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is somewhere else, not near Metropolitan Sergius and not near 'his Synod'."⁵¹⁷

In May, 1932, Stalin declared an anti-religious five-year plan: by 1936 the last church was to be closed, and by 1937 the name of God would no longer

⁵¹⁵ Grabbe, *op. cit.*, p. 78; Monk Benjamin, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 10-11.

⁵¹⁶ Krasovitsky, *Sergianskij raskol v perspective preodolenia* (The Sergianist Schism in the Perspective of Its Overcoming), Moscow, samizdat, p. 25.

⁵¹⁷ Zelenogorsky, M. *Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Arkhiepiskopa Andrea (Kniazia Ukhtomskogo)* (The Life and Activity of Archbishop Andrew (Prince Ukhtomsky), Moscow, 1991, p. 216. According to Archbishop Bartholomew (Remov), who never joined the Catacomb Church, the whole activity of Metropolitan Sergius was carried out in accordance with the instructions of the Bolsheviks (*Za Khrista Postradavshie* (Suffered for Christ), Moscow: St. Tikhon's Theological Institute, 1997, p. 220).

be pronounced in the Soviet Union. By the beginning of 1933 half the churches in the land had been closed or destroyed.⁵¹⁸ But the census of 1937 established that two-thirds of the peasantry and one-third of the city-dwellers still maintained their faith in God. This impressive figure owed nothing to Sergius' pact with the State, which divided the faithful and gave the atheists a powerful weapon against them.

In 1933 Metropolitan Sergius stated officially that he "as the deputy of Metropolitan Peter, had not only the temporary authority of the First Hierarch but the Patriarchal Power as well". He also declared that Metropolitan Peter, the lawful First Hierarch, did not have the right "to interfere in the administration of the Church or even correct the mistakes of his deputy."⁵¹⁹ As a result of this shocking statement, Bishop Athanasius (Sakharov) of Kovrov broke communion with Sergius, as he stated in a letter to him on his return from exile in December, 1933.

In April, 1934 Sergius' Synod gave him the title of Metropolitan of Kolomna – Metropolitan Peter's see – thereby making him in effect an "adulterer bishop". In 1935 Metropolitan Peter returned to Moscow and met Metropolitan Sergius. The latter asked him to recognize the new construction of Church life and to agree to the convening of a Council. On his side, Metropolitan Peter demanded that Sergius return Church power to him. Sergius refused, and Peter returned to the camps. In August, 1936, the NKVD spread the rumour that Metropolitan Peter had died. The Sergianist Synod promptly – and completely uncanonically – passed a resolution transferring the rights and duties of the patriarchal locum tenency to Metropolitan Sergius. In fact, Metropolitan Peter was not martyred until October, 1937. So at this point Sergius not only de facto, but also de jure usurped the position of the canonical leader of the Russian Church.

Metropolitans Peter and Cyril

In view of this further departure of Metropolitan Sergius from the holy canons, it may be asked what was the reaction of the leading hierarchs of the Catacomb Church – Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa, the patriarchal locum tenens and de jure leader of the Church, Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd, her de facto leader, and Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan, the first locum tenens appointed by Patriarch Tikhon and the favoured candidate of the Russian episcopate for the role of patriarch.

Metropolitan Peter's attitude was particularly important to ascertain in view of the fact that both the True Orthodox and the sergianists formally acknowledged him as the Church's first hierarch. Earlier, Bishop Damascene

⁵¹⁸ Radzinsky, however, claims that by the end of 1930 "80 per cent of village churches were closed" (*Stalin*, New York: Doubleday, 1996, p. 249).

⁵¹⁹ *Zhurnal Moskovskoj Patriarkhii* (Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate), 1933, № 1, p. 3.

of Glukhov had claimed to have made contact with him through his cell-attendant, who reported that Metropolitan Peter expressed disapproval of Sergius' policies. Thus on January 22, 1928 he wrote to a certain N. "For a first-hierarchy such an appeal [as Sergius' declaration] is *inadmissible*. Moreover, I don't understand why a Synod was formed from (as I can see from the signatures under the appeal) unreliable people. Thus, for example, Bishop Philip is a heretic... In this appeal a shadow is cast upon me and the patriarch, as if we had political relations with abroad, whereas the only relations were ecclesiastical. I do not belong to the irreconcilables, I allowed everything that could be allowed, and it was suggested to me in a more polite manner that I sign the appeal. I refused, for which I was exiled. I trusted Metropolitan Sergius, and I see that I was mistaken."

On September 17, 1929, the priest Gregory Seletsky wrote to Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd on behalf of Archbishop Demetrius (Lyubimov): "I am fulfilling the request of his Eminence Archbishop Demetrius and set out before you in written form that information which the exiled Bishop Damascene has communicated to me. He succeeded in making contact with Metropolitan Peter, and in sending him, via a trusted person, full information about everything that has been taking place in the Russian Church. Through this emissary Metropolitan Peter said the following to him: '1. You Bishops must yourselves remove Metropolitan Sergius. '2. I do not bless you to commemorate Metropolitan Sergius during Divine services...'"⁵²⁰

In December, 1929 Metropolitan Peter wrote to Sergius: "Your Eminence, forgive me magnanimously if by the present letter I disturb the peace of your Eminence's soul. People inform me about the difficult circumstances that have formed for the Church in connection with the exceeding of the limits of the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to you. I am very sorry that you have not taken the trouble to initiate me into your plans for the administration of the Church. You know that I have not renounced the locum tenancy, and consequently, I have retained for myself the Higher Church Administration and the general leadership of Church life. At the same time I make bold to declare that your remit as deputy was only for the management of everyday affairs; you are only to preserve the status quo. I am profoundly convinced that without prior contact with me you will not make any responsible decision. I have not accorded you any constituent right as long as I retain the locum tenancy and as long as Metropolitan Cyril is alive and as long as Metropolitan Agathangelus was alive. Therefore I did not consider it necessary in my decree concerning the appointment of candidates for the deputyship to mention the limitation of their duties; I had no doubt that the deputy would not alter the established rights, but would only deputize, or represent, so to speak, the central organ through which the locum tenens

⁵²⁰ V.V. Antonov, "Lozh' i Pravda" (Lies and Truth), *Russkij Pastyr'* (Russian Pastor), II, 1994, pp. 79-80.

could communicate with his flock. But the system of administration you have introduced not only excludes this: it also excludes the very need for the existence of the locum tenens. Such major steps cannot, of course, be approved by the consciousness of the Church. I did not admit any qualifications limiting the duties of the deputy, both from a feeling of deep reverence and trust for the appointed candidates, and first of all for you, having in mind at this point your wisdom. It is burdensome for me to number all the details of negative evaluations of your administration: the resounding protests and cries from believers, from hierarchs and laypeople. The picture of ecclesiastical division that has been painted is shocking. My duty and conscience do not allow me to remain indifferent to such a sorrowful phenomenon; they urge me to address your Eminence with a most insistent demand that you correct the mistake you have made, which has placed the Church in a humiliating position, and which has caused quarrels and divisions in her and a blackening of the reputation of her leaders. In the same way I ask you to suspend the other measures that have increased your prerogatives. Such a decision of yours will, I hope, create a good atmosphere in the Church and will calm the troubled souls of her children, while with regard to you it will preserve that disposition towards you which you deservedly enjoyed both as a Church figure and as a man. Place all your hope on the Lord, and His help will always be with you. On my part, I as the first-hierarch of the Church, call on all clergy and church activists to display, in everything that touches on the civil legislation and administration, complete loyalty. They are obliged to submit unfailingly to the governmental decrees as long as they do not violate the holy faith and in general are not contrary to Christian conscience; and they must not engage in any anti-governmental activity, and they are allowed to express neither approval nor disapproval of their actions in the churches or in private conversations, and in general they must not interfere in matters having nothing to do with the Church..."⁵²¹

On February 13/26, 1930, after receiving news from Deacon K. about the true state of affairs in the Church, Metropolitan Peter wrote to Sergius: "Of all the distressing news I have had to receive, the most distressing was the news that many believers remain outside the walls of the churches in which your name is commemorated. I am filled with spiritual pain both about the disputes that have arisen with regard to your administration and about other sad phenomena. Perhaps this information is biased, perhaps I am not sufficiently acquainted with the character and aims of the people writing to me. But the news of disturbances in the Church come to me from various quarters and mainly from clerics and laymen who have made a great impression on me. In my opinion, in view of the exceptional circumstances of Church life, when normal rules of administration have been subject to all

⁵²¹ Gubonin, op. cit., pp. 681-682, 691-692. Protopresbyter Michael Polsky (*Novie Mucheniki Rossijskie* (The New Martyrs of Russia), op. cit., p. 133) reported that Metropolitan Peter had written to Sergius: "If you yourself do not have the strength to protect the Church, you should step down and hand over your office to a stronger person."

kinds of distortion, it is necessary to put Church life on that path on which it stood during your first period as deputy. So be so good as to return to that course of action that was respected by everybody. I repeat that I am very sad that you have not written to me or confided your plans to me. Since letters come from other people, yours would undoubtedly have reached me..."

On August 17, 1930, after again refusing to renounce the locum tenancy, Metropolitan Peter was imprisoned in the Tobolsk and Yekaterinburg prisons in solitary confinement with no right to receive parcels or visitors.

On March 11, 1931, after describing the sufferings of his life in Khe (which included the enmity of three renovationist priests), he posed the following question in a letter to J.B. Polyansky: "Will not a change in locum tenens bring with it a change also in his deputy? Of course, it is possible that my successor, if he were to find himself incapable of carrying out his responsibilities directly, would leave the same person as his deputy - that is his right. But it is certain, in my opinion, that the carrying out of his duties by this deputy would have to come to an end at the same time as the departure of the person for whom he is deputizing, just as, according to the declaration of Metropolitan Sergius, with his departure the synod created by him would cease to exist. All this and other questions require thorough and authoritative discussion and canonical underpinning... Be so kind as to bow to Metropolitan Sergius on my behalf, since I am unable to do this myself, and send him my fervent plea that he, together with Metropolitan Seraphim and Archbishop Philip, to whom I also bow, work together for my liberation. I beseech them to defend, an old man who can hardly walk. I was always filled with a feeling of deep veneration and gratitude to Metropolitan Sergius, and the thought of some kind of worsening of our relations would give me indescribable sorrow."

We have no direct evidence for Metropolitan Peter's views after 1931. Indirectly, however, we can infer that his attitude towards Metropolitan Sergius hardened. For, as Professor Ivan Andreyev witnesses, "approval of the position of Metropolitan Joseph [whose views on Sergius were known to be uncompromisingly severe] was received from the exiled Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa and from Metropolitan Cyril".⁵²² Moreover, "from the fact that in the last years secret relations were established between Metropolitan Peter and Metropolitan Joseph, we may conjecture that Metropolitan Peter gave his blessing, in the event of his death, to Metropolitan Joseph's heading the Russian Church in his capacity as *Extraordinary Locum Tenens*. This right

⁵²² Andreyev, "Vospominania o Katakombnoj Tserkvi v SSSR" (Reminiscences of the Catacomb Church in the USSR), in Archimandrite Panteleimon, *Luch Sveta v Zashchitu Pravoslavnoj Very, v oblichenie ateizma i v oproverzhenie doktrin neveria* (A Ray of Light in Defence of the Orthodox Faith, to the Rebuking of Atheism and the Rebuttal of the Doctrines of Unbelief), Jordanville, 1970, part 2, p. 123.

was accorded to Metropolitan Joseph, as is known only to a few, by a Decision of the Local Council of 1917-18 dated January 25, 1918.”⁵²³

Metropolitan Cyril, like Metropolitan Peter, at first took a relatively “lenient” attitude towards the sergianists. Thus in 1934 he wrote: “If we reproach them for not resisting, and, therefore, of belonging to heresy, we risk depriving them of the psychological opportunity to reunite with us and losing them forever for Orthodoxy.” This relative leniency has been exploited by those who wish to make out that the MP is a true Church even now, nearly eighty years after Sergius’ declaration. However, there are several reasons for thinking that Cyril was less “moderate” than he has been made out.

First, as his correspondent, another Catacomb hierarch said, he was being “excessively cautious” because of his insufficient knowledge of the Church situation from his position in exile. Secondly, he was in the unique position of being the only legal *locum tenens* that was able to correspond and reason with Sergius. He therefore naturally steered the dialogue to the theme of the canonical rights of the *locum tenentes* and their deputies, convicting Sergius of usurpation of the power of the First Hierarch. Concentrating on the *canonical-administrative* aspect of the matter, without entering into the *dogmatic* aspect of Sergius’ subordination to the atheists, was bound to lead to a less serious estimate of his sin. Nevertheless, in 1934 he wrote that while the Sergianist priests administered valid sacraments, Christians who partook of them knowing of Sergius’ usurpation of power and the illegality of his Synod would receive them to their condemnation.

Several points made by Metropolitan Cyril in his correspondence with Metropolitan Sergius are of vital importance in evaluating the status of the Moscow Patriarchate. The first is the priority of “the conciliar hierarchical conscience of the Church”. As he wrote in 1929: “Church discipline is able to retain its validity only as long as it is a true reflection of the hierarchical conscience of the Conciliar [Sobornoj] Church; discipline can never take the place of this conscience”. Sergius violated the hierarchical, conciliar conscience of the Church by his disregard of the views of bishops equal to him in rank.

The second is that a hierarch is justified in breaking communion with a fellow hierarch, not only for heresy, but also in order not to partake in his brother’s sin. Thus while Metropolitan Cyril did not consider Sergius to have sinned in matters of faith, he was forced to break communion with him because “I have no other means of rebuking my sinning brother”. If clergy

⁵²³ *Uchenie o Tserkvi Sviatykh Novomuchenikov i Ispovednikov Rossijskikh* (The Teaching on the Church of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia), attachment to *Russkoe Pravoslavie* (Russian Orthodoxy), № 3 (7), 1997, p. 7; Regelson, *op.cit.*, p. 590.

have mutually opposing opinions within the Church, then their concelebration is for both “to judgement and condemnation”.⁵²⁴

Again, in November, 1929, Metropolitan Cyril refused to condemn Metropolitan Joseph and his supporters, who had broken communion with Sergius; and he did not agree with the bishops in exile in Tashkent – Arsenius (Stadnitsky), Nicodemus (Krotkov), Nicander (Fenomenov) and others – who condemned Joseph, considering their hopes of convening a canonical Council to be “naivety or cunning”.⁵²⁵

Thirdly, while Metropolitan Cyril did not deny the sacraments of the sergianists, he did so only in respect of those clergy who had been *correctly ordained*, i.e. by non-sergianist hierarchs.

A fourth point made by the metropolitan was that even when such a break in communion occurs between two parties, both sides remain in the Church so long as dogmatic unanimity is preserved. But this immediately raised the question: had Sergius only sinned “administratively”, by transgressing against the canons, as Metropolitan Cyril claimed (until 1934, at any rate), or had he sinned also “dogmatically”, by transgressing against the dogma of the One Church, as Archbishop Demetrius of Gdov, among others, claimed?⁵²⁶

In about the middle of the 1930s Metropolitan Cyril issued an epistle in which he called on the Catacomb hierarchs to confirm his candidacy as the lawful patriarchal *locum tenens* in the case of the death of Metropolitan Peter. We know the reaction of one hierarch, Archbishop Theodore of Volokolamsk, to this epistle. He was not enthusiastic, because he considered that in times of persecution a centralized administration was not obligatory for the Church.⁵²⁷ In any case, at some time in the 1930s, as we have seen, both Metropolitan Peter and Metropolitan Cyril came to accept that Metropolitan *Joseph* should lead the Russian Church in the event of Metropolitan Peter’s death.

Metropolitan Cyril’s position hardened towards the end of his life. Thus in March, 1937 he wrote: “With regard to your perplexities concerning Sergianism, I can say that the very same questions in almost the same form

⁵²⁴ “Ekkleziologia sv. Kirilla (Smirnova), mitropolita Kazanskogo” (The Ecclesiology of St. Cyril (Smirnov), Metropolitan of Kazan), *Vestnik Germanskoj Eparkhii Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi za Granitsej* (Herald of the German Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad), № 1, 1991, pp. 12-14.

⁵²⁵ V.V. Antonov, “Vazhnoe Pis'mo Mitropolita Kirilla” (An Important Letter of Metropolitan Cyril), *Russkij Pastyr'* (Russian Pastor), II, 1994, p. 76. Arsenius appears to have changed his position before his death in 1936.

⁵²⁶ Andreyev, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

⁵²⁷ “Novie dannia k zhizneopisaniju sviashchennomuchenika Fyodora, arkhiepiskopa Volokolamskogo, osnovannia na protokolakh doprosov 1937 g.” (New Data towards a Biography of Hieromartyr Theodore, Archbishop of Volokolamsk, Based on the Protocols of Interrogations in 1937), *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn'* (Orthodox Life), 48, # 8 (584), August, 1998, pp. 4-5.

were addressed to me from Kazan ten years ago, and then I replied affirmatively to them, because I considered everything that Metropolitan Sergius had done as a mistake which he himself was conscious of and wished to correct. Moreover, among our ordinary flock there were many people who had not investigated what had happened, and it was impossible to demand from them a decisive and active condemnation of the events. Since then much water has flowed under the bridge. The expectations that Metropolitan Sergius would correct himself have not been justified, *but there has been enough time for the formerly ignorant members of the Church, enough incentive and enough opportunity to investigate what has happened*; and very many have both investigated and understood that Metropolitan Sergius is departing from that Orthodox Church which the Holy Patriarch Tikhon entrusted to us to guard, and consequently there can be no part or lot with him for the Orthodox. The recent events have finally made clear the renovationist nature of Sergianism. We cannot know whether those believers who remain in Sergianism will be saved, because the work of eternal Salvation is a work of the mercy and grace of God. But for those who see and feel the unrighteousness of Sergianism (those are your questions) it would be unforgiveable craftiness to close one's eyes to this unrighteousness and seek there for the satisfaction of one's spiritual needs when one's conscience doubts in the possibility of receiving such satisfaction. Everything which is not of faith is sin..."⁵²⁸

This is an important document, for it shows that by 1937 Metropolitan Cyril considered that enough time had passed for the ordinary believer to come to a correct conclusion concerning the true, "renovationist" – that is, *heretical* – nature of Sergianism. So from 1937, in Metropolitan Cyril's opinion, "the excuse of ignorance" was no longer valid. What had been involuntary ignorance in the early days of the schism was now (except in exceptional circumstances caused by, for example, extreme youth or mental deficiency) *witting* ignorance – that is, *indifference to the truth or refusal to face the truth*.

The Ust-Kut Council of 1937

On November 20, 1937, Metropolitans Joseph and Cyril were shot together in Chimkent. Following on the shooting of Metropolitan Peter on October 10, this meant that all of the holy patriarch's *locum tenentes*, both "ordinary" and "extraordinary", were now dead... The martyrdom of the last *de jure* and *de facto* leaders of the Catacomb Church meant that the True Russian Church's descent into the catacombs, which had begun in the early 20s, was completed. From now on, with the external administrative machinery of the Church destroyed, it was up to each bishop – sometimes each believer – individually to preserve the fire of faith, being linked with his fellow Christians only through the inner, mystical bonds of the life in Christ. Thus was the premonition of Hieromartyr Bishop Damascene fulfilled: "Perhaps the time

⁵²⁸ Letter of Metropolitan Cyril to Hieromonk Leonid, February 23 / March 8, 1937, *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), № 16, August 15/28, 1997, p. 7. Italics mine (V.M.).

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 for himself as it was with the forefathers!"⁵²⁹

This judgement was supported by ROCOR at its Second All-Emigration Council in 1938: "Since the epoch we have lived through was without doubt an epoch of apostasy, it goes without saying that for the true Church of Christ a period of life in the wilderness, of which the twelfth chapter of the Revelation of St. John speaks, is not, as some may believe, an episode connected exclusively with the last period in the history of mankind. History show us that the Orthodox Church has withdrawn into the wilderness repeatedly, from whence the will of God called her back to the stage of history, where she once again assumed her role under more favourable circumstances. At the end of history the Church of God will go into the wilderness for the last time to receive Him, Who comes to judge the quick and the dead. Thus the twelfth chapter of Revelation must be understood not only in an eschatological sense, but in a historical and educational sense as well: it shows up the general and typical forms of Church life. If the Church of God is destined to live in the wilderness through the Providence of the Almighty Creator, the judgement of history, and the legislation of the proletarian state, it follows clearly that she must forego all attempts to reach a legalization, for every attempt to arrive at a legalization during the epoch of apostasy inescapably turns the Church into the great Babylonian whore of blasphemous atheism. The near future will confirm our opinion and prove that the time has come in which the welfare of the Church demands giving up all legalizations, even those of the parishes. We must follow the example of the Church prior to the Council of Nicaea, when the Christian communities were united not on the basis of the administrative institutions of the State, but through the Holy Spirit alone."⁵³⁰

Perhaps the most striking and literal example of the Church's fleeing into the wilderness is provided by Bishop Amphilochius of Yenisei and Krasnoyarsk, who in 1930 departed into the Siberian forests and founded a catacomb skete there in complete isolation from the world.

However, the catacomb situation of the Church did not mean that it could no longer make decisions and judgements. Thus in this period the following anathema attached to the Order for the Triumph of Orthodoxy in Josephite parishes was composed: "To those who maintain the mindless renovationist heresy of sergianism; to those who teach that the earthly existence of the Church of God can be established by denying the truth of Christ; and to those who affirm that serving the God-fighting authorities and fulfilling their godless commands, which trample on the sacred canons, the patristic

⁵²⁹ E.L., *Episkopy-Ispovedniki* (Bishop-Confessors), San Francisco, 1971 p. 92.

⁵³⁰ Cited by Gustavson, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

traditions and the Divine dogmas, and destroy the whole of Christianity, saves the Church of Christ; and to those who revere the Antichrist and his servants and forerunners, and all his minions, as a lawful power established by God; and to all those... who blaspheme against the new confessors and martyrs (Sergius of Nizhni-Novgorod, Nicholas of Kiev and Alexis of Khutyn), and to... the renovationists and the other heretics – **anathema**.”⁵³¹

Again, Divine Providence convened a Council of the Catacomb Church in July, 1937, in the depths of Siberia:- “In the last days of July, 1937, in the Siberian town of Ust-Kut, on the River Lena (at its juncture with the River Kut), in the re-grouping section of the house of arrest, there met by chance: two Metropolitans, four Bishops, two Priests and six laymen of the secret Catacomb Church, who were on a stage of their journey from Vitim to Irkutsk, being sent from Irkutsk to the north.

“It was difficult to anticipate a similarly full and representative gathering of same-minded members of the Church in the near future. Therefore those who had gathered decided immediately to open a ‘Sacred Council’, in order to make canonical regulations concerning vital questions of the Catacomb Church. The time of the Council was, as it seemed, limited to four hours, after which the participants in the Council were sent in different directions.

“The president was Metropolitan John (in one version: “Bishop John”), and the Council chose the layman A.Z. to be secretary. The resolutions of the Council were not signed: A.Z. gave an oath to memorize the decisions of the Council and to pass on to whom it was necessary whatever he remembered exactly, but not to speak at all about what he confused or could not remember exactly. A.Z. in his time succeeded in passing on the memorised decisions of the Church. His words were written down and became Canons of the Church. Among these Canons were some that are especially necessary for the Church:

“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!**

“4. All branches of the Church which are on the common trunk – the trunk is our pre-revolutionary Church – are living branches of the Church of Christ.

⁵³¹ S. Verin, "Svidetel'stvo russkikh katakomb" (A Witness of the Russian Catacombs), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), № 14 (1563), July 1/14, 1996, pp. 11-12.

We give our blessing to common prayer and the serving of the Divine Liturgy to all priests of these branches. The Sacred Council forbids all those who do not consider themselves to be branches, but independent from the tree of the Church, to serve the Divine Liturgy. The Sacred Council does not consider it necessary to have administrative unity of the branches of the Church, but unity of mind concerning the Church is binding on all.”⁵³²

Thus Sergius was to be condemned, not only because he was a usurper of Church authority and violated the canons, but also because he expressed an heretical attitude towards the antichristian authorities. As Bishop Mark (Novoselov) said during interrogation: “I am an enemy of Soviet power – and what is more, by dint of my religious convictions, since Soviet power is an atheist power and even anti-theist. I believe that as a true Christian I cannot strengthen this power by any means... [There is] a petition which the Church has commanded to be used everyday in certain well-known conditions... The purpose of this formula is to request the overthrow of the infidel power by God... But this formula does not amount to a summons to believers to take active measures, but only calls them to pray for the overthrow of the power that has fallen away from God.”⁵³³

Again, in another catacomb document dating from the 1960s we read: “Authority is given by God in order to preserve and fulfill the law... But how should one look on the Soviet authority, following the Apostolic teaching on authorities [Romans 13]? In accordance with the Apostolic teaching which we have set forth, one must acknowledge that the Soviet authority is not an authority. It is an anti-authority. It is not an authority because it is not established by God, but insolently created by an aggregation of the evil actions of men, and it is consolidated and supported by these actions. If the evil actions weaken, the Soviet authority, representing a condensation of evil, likewise weakens... This authority consolidates itself in order to destroy all religions, simply to eradicate faith in God. Its essence is warfare with God, because its root is from Satan. The Soviet authority is not authority, because by its nature it cannot fulfil the law, for the essence of its life is evil.

“It may be said that the Soviet authority, in condemning various crimes of men, can still be considered an authority. We do not say that a ruling authority is totally lacking. We only affirm that it is an anti-authority. One must know that the affirmation of real power is bound up with certain actions of men, to whom the instinct of preservation is natural. And they must take

⁵³² Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), personal communication; B. Zakharov, *Russkaia Mysl'* (Russian Thought), September 7, 1949; "Vazhnoe postanovlenie katakombnoj tserkvi" (An Important Decree of the Catacomb Church), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), № 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), “Katakombnaia Tserkov': Ust'-Kutskij Sobor 1937g.” (The Catacomb Church: the Ust-Kut Council of 1937), *Russkoe Pravoslavie* (Russian Orthodoxy), № 4 (8), 1997, pp. 20-24.

⁵³³ Novoselov, quoted in Osipov, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

into consideration the laws of morality which have been inherent in mankind from ages past. But in essence this authority systematically commits murder physically and spiritually. In reality a hostile power acts, which is called Soviet authority. The enemy strives by cunning to compel humanity to acknowledge this power as an authority. But the Apostolic teaching on authority is inapplicable to it, just as evil is inapplicable to God and the good, because evil is outside God; but the enemies with hypocrisy can take refuge in the well-known saying that everything is from God. This Soviet anti-authority is precisely the collective Antichrist, warfare against God..."⁵³⁴

The Ust-Kut Council may be seen as confirming the sixth canon of the "Nomadic Council" of 1928, which defined the essence of Sergianism as its recognition of Soviet power as a true, God-established power. It also harks back to the seventh canon of that Council, which declared: "The anathema of January 19, 1918 laid by Patriarch Tikhon and the Holy Council on the former Christians who became blasphemers, is confirmed. Since Soviet power is a blaspheming and Christ-persecuting power, the action of the anathema very much applies to the God-fighting power, and one must pray not for it, but for the deliverance of people from the bitter torment of the godless authorities and for the suffering land of Russia. We establish the reading of a special prayer for the persecuted and much-suffering Church after the service."⁵³⁵

The Cost of Sergianism

If Metropolitan Sergius thought that his betrayal of the True Orthodox Christians would "save the Church", the next few years would prove him terribly wrong. From 1935 the Bolsheviki began to repress all the clergy, sergianist as well as True Orthodox. According to Russian government figures, in 1937 alone 136,900 clergy were arrested, of whom 106,800 were killed; while between 1917 and 1980, 200,000 clergy were executed and 500,000 others were imprisoned or sent to the camps. The rate of killing slowed down considerably in the following years. In 1939 900 clergy were killed, in 1940 – 1100, in 1941 – 1900, in 1943 – 500. In the period 1917 to 1940 205 Russian hierarchs "disappeared without trace"; 59 disappeared in 1937 alone.⁵³⁶ By 1939 there were only four bishops even of the sergianist church at

⁵³⁴ Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, pp. 541-42.

⁵³⁵ Bishop Ambrose (von Sievers), "Katakombnaia Tserkov': Kochuiushchij Sobor", pp. 7-8.

⁵³⁶ A document of the Commission attached to the President of the Russian Federation on the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repressions, January 5, 1996; *Service Orthodoxe de Presse* (Orthodox Press Service), № 204, January, 1996, p. 15 (F). According to another source, from October, 1917 to June, 1941 inclusive, 134,000 clergy were killed, of whom the majority (80,000) were killed between 1928 and 1940 (Cyril Mikhailovich Alexandrov, in V. Lyulechnik, "Tserkov' i KGB" (The Church and the KGB), in <http://elmager.livejournal.com/217784.html>). According to a third source (*Kharbinskoye Vremia*, February, 1937, № 28), in the nineteen years of Soviet terror to that date there were killed: 128 bishops; 26,777 clergy; 7,500 professors; about 9,000 doctors; 94,800 officers; 1,000,000 soldiers; 200,000 policemen; 45,000 teachers; 2,200,000 workers and peasants. Besides that, 16 million Russians died from hunger and three million died in forced labour in

liberty, and only a tiny handful of churches open, in the whole of the country. By 1938, according to T. Martynov, most of the 180,000 priests from before the revolution had been killed.⁵³⁷

The situation was no better with regard to churches. There were no churches at all in Belorussia (Kolarz), "less than a dozen" in Ukraine (Bociurkiw), and a total of 150-200 in the whole of Russia.⁵³⁸ In all, the numbers of functioning Orthodox churches declined from 54,692 in 1914 to 39,000 at the beginning of 1929 to 15, 835 on April 1, 1936.⁵³⁹

And yet the census of 1937 established that one-third of city-dwellers and two-thirds of country-dwellers still confessed that they believed in God. Stalin's plan that the Name of God should not be named in the country by the year 1937 had failed...

But what of the future? What hopes did the Christians of the Catacomb Church nurture with regard to a deliverance from their terrible sufferings? If some, like Bishop Maximus of Serpukhov, were pessimistic about the future, thinking that the very last days of the world had been reached⁵⁴⁰, others prophesied the resurrection of Holy Russia before the end, such as Bishop Victor of Glazov. Eldress Agatha of Belorussia, who was starved to death by the authorities in 1939 at the age of 119, told her spiritual children concerning the Soviet Church: "This is not a true church. It has signed a contract to serve the Antichrist. Do not go to it. Do not receive any Mysteries from its servants. Do not participate in prayer with them." And then she said: "There will come a time when churches will be opened in Russia, and the true Orthodox Faith will triumph. Then people will become baptized, as at one time they were baptized under St. Vladimir. When the churches are opened for the first time, do not go to them because these will not be true churches; but when they are opened the second time, then go - these will be the true churches. I will not live to see this time, but many of you will live to this time. The atheist Soviet authority will vanish, and all its servants will perish..."⁵⁴¹

However, the immediate outlook at the end of the thirties was bleak indeed. E.L., writing about Hieromartyr Bishop Damascene, comments: "He warmed the hearts of many, but the masses remained... passive and inert, moving in any direction in accordance with an external push, and not their

the camps. (Protopriest John Stukach, "Vysokomerie kak prepona k uiedineniu" (Haughtiness as an obstacle to union), <http://catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=page&pid=1357>.

⁵³⁷ "'Nasha Strana' - konechno zhe ne Vasha" (Our Country - of course not yours), http://catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=print_page&pid=771, p. 3.

⁵³⁸ Nathanael Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003, p. 13.

⁵³⁹ Werth, *op. cit.*, pp. 172, 173.

⁵⁴⁰ Polsky, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 32.

⁵⁴¹ Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, *op. cit.*, pp. 422-23.

inner convictions... The long isolation of Bishop Damascene from Soviet life, his remoteness from the gradual process of sovietization led him to an unrealistic assessment of the real relations of forces in the reality that surrounded him. Although he remained unshaken himself, he did not see... the desolation of the human soul in the masses. This soul had been diverted onto another path – a slippery, opportunistic path which led people where the leaders of Soviet power – bold men who stopped at nothing in their attacks on all moral and material values – wanted them to go... Between the hierarchs and priests who had languished in the concentration camps and prisons, and the mass of the believers, however firmly they tried to stand in the faith, there grew an abyss of mutual incomprehension. The confessors strove to raise the believers onto a higher plane and bring their spiritual level closer to their own. The mass of believers, weighed down by the cares of life and family, blinded by propaganda, involuntarily went in the opposite direction, downwards. Visions of a future golden age of satiety, of complete liberty from all external and internal restrictions, of the submission of the forces of nature to man, deceitful perspectives in which fantasy passed for science... were used by the Bolsheviks to draw the overwhelming majority of the people into their nets. Only a few individuals were able to preserve a loftiness of spirit. This situation was exploited very well by Metropolitan Sergius..."⁵⁴²

Sergius has had many apologists. Some have claimed that he "saved the Church" for a future generation, when the whirlwind of the persecution had passed. This claim cannot be justified, as we have seen. It was rather the Catacomb Church, which, as Alexeyev writes, "in a sense saved the official Church from complete destruction because the Soviet authorities were afraid to force the entire Russian Church underground through ruthless suppression and so to lose control over it."⁵⁴³ As St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco wrote: "The Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius brought no benefit to the Church. The persecutions not only did not cease, but also sharply increased. To the number of other accusations brought by the Soviet regime against clergy and laymen, one more was added – non-recognition of the Declaration. At the same time, a wave of church closures rolled over all Russia... Concentration camps and places of forced labor held thousands of clergymen, a significant part of whom never saw freedom again, being executed there or dying from excessive labors and deprivations."⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² E.L., *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

⁵⁴³ W. Alexeyev, "The Russian Orthodox Church 1927-1945: Repression and Revival", *Religion in Communist Lands*, vol. 7, № 1, Spring, 1979, p. 30.

⁵⁴⁴ St. John Maximovich, *The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. A Short History*, Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1997, pp. 28-29. Even a recent biography of Sergius by an MP author accepts this fact: "If Metropolitan Sergius, in agreeing in his name to publish the Declaration of 1927 composed by the authorities, hoping to buy some relief for the Church and the clergy, then *his hopes not only were not fulfilled, but the persecutions after 1927 became still fiercer, reaching truly hurricane-force in 1937-38.*" (Sergius Fomin, *Strazh Doma Gospodnia* (Guardian of the House of the Lord), Moscow, 2003, p. 262)

Others have tried to justify Sergius by claiming that there are two paths to salvation, one through open confession or the descent into the catacombs, and the other through compromise. Sergius, according to this view, was no less a martyr than the Catacomb martyrs, only he suffered the martyrdom of losing his good name.⁵⁴⁵ However, this view comes close to the "Rasputinite" heresy that there can be salvation through sin – in this case, the most brazen lying, the sacrifice of the freedom and dignity of the Church and Orthodoxy, and the betrayal to torments and death of one's fellow Christians! Thus Hieromartyr Sergius Mechev was betrayed by "Bishop" Manuel Lemeshevsky.⁵⁴⁶ And more generally, Metropolitan Sergius' charge that all the catacomb bishops were "counter-revolutionaries" was sufficient to send them to their deaths.⁵⁴⁷

Sergianists are constantly trying to prove that the declaration of Metropolitan Sergius, though disastrous for the Church, was nevertheless motivated by the purest of feelings. Apart from the inherent improbability that an action motivated by the purest of feelings – and therefore inspired by the Grace of God – would bring disaster, both physical and spiritual, to thousands, if not millions of people, we have seen that Sergius was an opportunist from the beginning, from well before the revolution.

Further proof of this is provided in the *Memoirs* of Princess Natalya Vladimirovna Urusova: "The personality of Metropolitan Sergius was of the basest, crawling before the authorities. Many people asked each other: 'Does Metropolitan Sergius really take part in the persecutions and the destruction of churches?' Some did not admit that he took an active part in this, but, unfortunately, they were wrong. He completely sold himself to satan. I can cite a case personally known to me which confirms the fact of his participation in these works.

"In the church of St. Nicholas the Big Cross there chanted in the choir a young girl, very humble and nice. The whole of her family was religious, and consequently did not recognize the sergianist church. We got to know each other, and I and Andryusha would often go to their dacha near Moscow. Verochka worked in the main post office in Moscow, she was welcoming and good-looking. Once there came to her department on service matters a GPU boss. He was attracted to her and began to talk with her. To her horror and that of her family, he asked for their address. Unexpectedly he came to the dacha, thoroughly frightening everyone, of course. After all, it was impossible ever to know the intentions of these terrible people. Having said hello, he brought out a box of pastries, which no simple mortal could get at that time,

⁵⁴⁵ E.S. Polishchuk, "Patriarkh Sergei i ego deklaratsia: kapitulatsia ili kompromiss?" (Patriarch Sergius and his Declaration: Capitulation or Compromise?), *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizhenia* (Herald of the Russian Christian Movement), № 161, 1991-I, pp. 233-250.

⁵⁴⁶ See Alla D. "Svidetel'stvo" (Witness), in *Nadezhda* (Hope), vol. 16, Basel-Moscow, 1993, 228-230.

⁵⁴⁷ I.M. Andreyev, *Is the Grace of God Present in the Soviet Church?*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

and gave it to Verochka, asking her to accept him as a guest. He began to come often and to court her. Probably everyone was quietly and secretly crossing themselves, praying to be delivered from this guest. But there was nothing to be done. He looked about 30, with quite an interesting appearance. Almost immediately they set off on a walk without Verochka's father and mother, while Andryusha and I hurried to leave. Verochka said that she could have liked him, but the single thought that he was not only the boss of a GPU department, but, as he himself said, in charge of Church affairs, repulsed and horrified her. He proposed to her. She refused. 'How can I be your wife, when you are not only not a believer, but a persecutor of the Church, and I can never under any circumstances agree with that.' During their conversations he tried by every means to draw her away from faith in God, but she was unbending, the more so in that she was one of the beloved spiritual children of the murdered Fr. Alexander. He did not give up, but threatened to shoot her and himself. Moreover, he once even got out his revolver and pointed it at her. He continued to visit her. The family's situation was terrible. They couldn't think of sleeping or eating. They spoke only about one thing: how it would all end, with his taking revenge or his leaving them in peace? Verochka rushed around like a trapped bird trying to extricate herself from the claws of a hawk. Once when she was working (at the post office) she was summoned and given a note to go immediately to the GPU at the Lubyanka... It turned out to be his office. He ordered her to take up the telephone receiver. Then he took up another and summoned Metropolitan Sergius. "Listen to the conversation," he told her. The conversation was about the destruction of one of the churches in Moscow. Sergius not only did not register any protest, but took part in this terrible affair and gave his agreement. "Did you hear?" said the boss. "That's the kind of clergy you bow down to." She replied that this conversation could not shake her faith in God, and that even before she had not recognized Metropolitan Sergius, while now she was convinced that she had not been mistaken about him... "548

Sergius made the basic mistake of forgetting that it is God, not man, Who saves the Church. This mistake almost amounts to a loss of faith in the Providence and Omnipotence of God Himself. The faith that saves is the faith that "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19.26). It is the faith that cries: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will call upon the name of the Lord our God" (Psalms 19.7). This was and is the faith of the Catacomb Church, which, being founded on "the Rock, which is Christ" (I Corinthians 10.7), has prevailed against the gates of hell.

But Sergius' "faith" was of a different, more "supple" kind, the kind of which the Prophet spoke: "Because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with hell we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our

⁵⁴⁸ N.V. Urusova, *Materinskij Plach Sviatoj Rusi (The Maternal Lament of Holy Rus')*, Moscow: "Russkij Palomnik", 2006, pp. 285-287.

refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter'; therefore thus says the Lord God,... hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter. Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with hell will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through you will be beaten down by it..." (Isaiah 28.15, 17-19)

Through Sergius, the Moscow Patriarchate made an agreement with hell. We know already that it will not stand in God's eyes. We await its final exposure and annulment...

*January 30 / February 12, 2010.
Feast of the Holy Three Hierarchs.*

31. ORTHODOXY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND MARXISM

A man kicks another man who is lying on the ground and is not threatening anyone. Is that right or wrong? No civilized person would deny that it is wrong. The question is: why is it wrong? Is it wrong because God has commanded us to love our neighbour, not abuse him? This is the answer that an Orthodox Christian (and most religious people) would give. Is it wrong because unprovoked violence is a crime according to the laws of the State? Again, an Orthodox Christian (and most law-abiding people) would answer: yes. Is it wrong because every human being has the right to be treated with dignity and respect? Here an Orthodox Christian would probably hesitate to answer... Not because he denies that human beings should be treated with dignity and respect, but because the way the question is posed presupposes a philosophy of human rights which is not Orthodox...

The Origins of the Philosophy

The modern philosophy of human rights is a theory of universal morality binding on all men and all human institutions and states that is not dependent on the existence of God or any personal lawgiver.

The roots of this philosophy lie in the medieval western idea of *natural law*. This idea was born out of the need to place limits on two institutions that in different ways were thought to be *above the law*: the Holy Roman Empire, and the Roman papacy. According to Roman law, the emperor was above the law, or freed from human laws (*legibus solutus*), insofar as "what pleases the prince has the power of law". For if he broke his own laws, who was to judge him, and who was to prevent him passing other laws to make his previous transgression of the law lawful? The pope was similarly considered to be above the law – that is, freed from the provisions of canon law. This was a consequence of his "absolute power" (*potestas absoluta*), for if he sinned against canon law, or became a heretic, who was to judge him if not the supreme expert on the subject, the pope himself? And who could judge him if he refused to judge himself?

However, although a monarch might be freed from the laws of the State, and the pope might be freed from the canon law of the Church, they were both theoretically subject to another kind of law. This higher law was called by medieval theorists *natural law*. Natural law is defined by the historian of medieval scholastic philosophy Fr. Frederick Copleston as "the totality of the universal dictates of right reason concerning that good of nature which is to be pursued and that evil of man's nature which is to be shunned."⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁹ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, vol. 2, part II, p. 129.

But this definition begs the question: how do we know what is “right reason”? And what is “the good of nature”? The answer given by the medieval theologians, according to J.S. McClelland, was roughly as follows: “For a maxim of morality or a maxim of good government to be part of natural law, it has to be consistent with scripture, with the writings of the Fathers of the Church, with papal pronouncement, with what the philosophers say, and it must also be consistent with the common practices of mankind, both Christian and non-Christian.”⁵⁵⁰

But this, too, begs several questions. What are we to do if “papal pronouncement” contradicts “the writings of the Fathers of the Church” (as it often does)? And is not “what the philosophers say” likely to be still more at variance with the Holy Fathers? And is not “the common practices of mankind, both Christian and non-Christian” an extremely vague and debatable concept?

It is indeed; which is why, even in its more modern and secularized version, the philosophy of natural law, or human rights, has remained extremely vague and debatable ever since. But this does not prevent it from being, both then and now, a very powerful weapon in the hands of those who, for one reason or another, wish to overturn the prevailing hierarchy or system of morality. We see this even in Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of the scholastics, and a loyal son of the Roman Catholic Church. He defined the relationship of natural law to man-made laws as follows: “Every law framed by man bears the character of a law exactly to that extent to which it is derived from the law of nature. But if on any point it is in conflict with the law of nature, it at once ceases to be a law; it is a mere perversion of the law.”⁵⁵¹

The first important application of the principle of natural law came during the Magna Carta crisis in England. Pope Innocent III had placed the whole of England under ban because King John disagreed with him over who should be archbishop of Canterbury. He excommunicated John, deposed him from the throne and suggested to King Philip Augustus of France that he invade and conquer England! John appealed to papal mediation to save him from Philip. He received it, but at a price – full restitution of church funds and lands, perpetual infeudation of England and Ireland to the papacy, and the payment of an annual rent of a thousand marks. Only when all the money had been paid was the ban lifted.

⁵⁵⁰ McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought*, Routledge: London and New York, 1996, p. 123.

⁵⁵¹ Aquinas, in Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen Unwin, 1946, p. 648.

And then, as Peter De Rosa puts it acidly: “by kind permission of Pope Innocent III, Christ was able to enter England again”.⁵⁵²

This enraged King Philip, however; for he was now ordered to abandon his preparations for war, in that he was not allowed to invade what was now, not English, but *papal* soil. Moreover, the abject surrender of John to the Pope, and the oath of fealty he made to him, aroused the fears of the English barons, whose demands led to the famous Magna Carta of 1215 that limited the powers of the king and is commonly regarded as the beginning of modern western democracy. Thus the despotism of the Pope elicited the beginnings of parliamentary democracy....

Now Magna Carta was a limitation of royal, not papal power. Nevertheless, it affected the papacy, too: first because England was supposed to be a papal fief, but more importantly because it set a dangerous, revolutionary precedent which might be used against the Pope himself. And so Pope Innocent III “from the plenitude of his unlimited power” condemned the charter as “contrary to moral law”, “null and void of all validity for ever”, absolved the king from having to observe it and excommunicated “anyone who should continue to maintain such treasonable and iniquitous pretensions”. But Archbishop Stephen Langton of Canterbury refused to publish this sentence. And the reason he gave was very significant: “*Natural law is binding on popes and princes and bishops alike: there is no escape from it. It is beyond the reach of the pope himself.*”⁵⁵³

And so the doctrine of natural law opened the way for the people to judge and depose both popes and kings... However, throughout the medieval period and into the beginning of the modern period, natural law remained tied to Christianity and Christian norms of behaviour. And since Christianity in general does not favour rebellion against the powers that be, the full revolutionary potential of the concept was not yet realized.

If any one man can be said to be its originator of the modern, non-Christian and religionless philosophy of human rights, that man is probably the seventeenth-century Dutch jurist, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). Grotius was writing under the influence of the wars of religion between Catholics and Protestants, and also the trade wars between European nations such as England, Holland and France. He wanted to find a way of regulating wars in accordance with principles that would be universally accepted. Like most men of his time, he was a Christian, and even wrote a popular work, *On the Truth of the Christian Religion*. However, in his most influential work, *On the Law of War and Peace*, he let slip a phrase that would point the way to a theory of international law and human rights that was independent of Christian

⁵⁵² De Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, p. 71.

⁵⁵³ De Rosa, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

morality or theology: "Even the will of an omnipotent Being," he wrote, "cannot change or abrogate" natural law, which "would maintain its objective validity *even if we should assume the impossible, that there is no God* or that He does not care for human affairs" (Prolegomena XI).

According to Grotius, therefore, natural law is *the most* objective truth, more objective, if that were possible, even than the existence of God or God's care for the world. That being the case, *theoretically* if natural law says that something is right, whereas God says it is wrong, we should stick to natural law. Of course, if natural law derives ultimately from God, there will never be any such conflict. But Grotius appears here to envisage the possibility of a world with natural law but without God. This idea is among the most destructive in the whole history of ideas...

Natural Rights and Social Contract Theory

However, the concept of natural law needed to be fleshed out. The first question was: If natural law exists, who is the lawgiver? Or, if there is no lawgiver, what is its basis in reality? And the second question was: assuming that a real basis for natural - as opposed to Divine, or ecclesiastical, or state - law exists, what does it prescribe? In particular, since all law implies rights and obligations, what are the rights and obligations legislated by natural law, and to whom are they given?

Considerable "progress" in answering these questions was made in the Early Modern period. During the Renaissance interest began to be focused on the nature of man, and in particular on man's *freedom and dignity* - a promising basis, in the view of the Renaissance man, for a theory of natural law. Thus Leonardo da Vinci wrote: "The chief gift of nature is... freedom." Again, Pico della Mirandola wrote in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*: "O sublime generosity of God the Father! O highest and most wonderful felicity of Man! To him it was granted to be what he wills. The Father endowed him with all kinds of seeds and with the germs of every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow and bear fruit in him."

So man is supposedly granted "to be what he wills"... But is he? Is he not in fact constrained in all kinds of ways in what he can do? If by man's freedom we mean *freewill*, then yes, man has freewill. God's creation of man in His image means, according to the Fathers, that he is born with freedom and rationality in the image of God's Freedom and Reason. But that is by no means equivalent to the ability to "grow the germs of every way of life" in himself. Can a stupid man "grow the germs" of genius within himself?

However, the idea that man is "born free" now became a commonplace of political thought, and the basis for very far-reaching conclusions about life and morality. If man is born free, then he is not by nature subject to any

external power, whether it be God, the Church, the State or the Family. And since he is this by nature, he has the *right to remain* such.

But this, as the philosopher Thomas Hobbes pointed out, is a recipe for anarchy, for “war of all against all”; for if each man is free to exercise his will to have food, property, sexual pleasure, etc., without restraint, he will end up fighting every other man for these goods. For “if everyone has that same equal and unlimited liberty to do as he pleases in pursuit of the literally selfish end of self-preservation, then without law every man is a menace to every other man. Far from being an original endowment for which men should be grateful, the unlimited liberty of the Right of Nature is a millstone round men’s necks, of which they would be wise to unburden themselves at the first opportunity.”⁵⁵⁴

Therefore in order for men to live a tolerable life, they must form a social contract for the formation of a State: that is, each must agree to give up his natural right to freedom (in the sense of freedom to do whatever they like) by creating a State that has certain rights over them. Each citizen gives up his right in this way on the understanding that every other citizen in the contract likewise gives up his right. The State thus formed through a social contract between its citizens will be a Leviathan, “a monster composed of men”, headed by a sovereign, personal or collective, whose power is created by a social contract between its citizens, but who, after the “signing” of the contract, is answerable to no man or law.

But why should the sovereign’s power be unlimited in this way? “Since the sovereign,” explains Roger Scruton, “would be the creation of the contract, he could not also be party to it: he stands *above* the social contract, and can therefore disregard its terms, provided he enforces them against all others. That is why, Hobbes thought, it was so difficult to specify the obligations of the sovereign, and comparatively easy to specify the obligations of the citizen.”⁵⁵⁵

In fact, properly speaking, according to Hobbes, the State can do no wrong. For the very concepts of right and wrong, justice and injustice, acquire meaning only if there is a higher authority to adjudicate who is right and why. But there is no higher authority than the State in Hobbes’ conception. “Therefore before the names of Just and Unjust can have place, there must be some coercive Power, to compel men equally to the performance of their Covenants..., to make good that Propriety, which by mutual contract men acquire, in recompense of the universal Right they abandon, and such power there is none before the erection of the Commonwealth.”⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ McClelland, *op. cit.*, 1996, p. 199.

⁵⁵⁵ Scruton, *Modern Philosophy*, London: Arrow Books, 1997, p. 415.

⁵⁵⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1, XV.

But this was not at all what the originators of the notion of natural law had in mind! They saw natural law as *limiting* the power of the State (and the Pope). And yet here Hobbes is using it to *buttress* the power of the State!

Hobbes wrote an apologia for absolutism because he lived in a time of absolutism – Cromwell’s and King James II’s. But the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 overthrew James II and brought to power the Protestant constitutional monarchy of William III. Its *de jure* justification was worked out by John Locke, who set out to prove that James had broken some kind of agreement with the people, and so had been rightly overthrown, whereas William was abiding by its terms and so should be obeyed. What was needed was to retain the social contract theory, but rework it so as to bring the monarch within the contract (impossible according to Hobbes), make parliament the real sovereign, and bring God back into the picture, if only for decency’s sake.

Like Hobbes, Locke began by positing an original State of Nature in which all men were equal and free. But, unlike Hobbes, he considered that this original state was not one of total anarchy and vicious egoism, - but of some social cohesion, with men “living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth”. “Though this (State of Nature) be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence.”⁵⁵⁷ For, in addition to the State of Nature, Locke also posited a “Law of Nature” inspired by “the infinitely wise Maker” and identifiable with “reason”, which instructed men not to infringe on the freedom of other men. Thus “the state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one; and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.”⁵⁵⁸ In the State of Nature every man owns the land that he tills and the product of that labour: “Though the earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property”.⁵⁵⁹

The critical words here are “property” and “possessions”. For Locke’s second aim, after the justification of the “Glorious Revolution”, was to make sure that the constitutional monarchy was in the hands of the men of property, the aristocratic landowning class. And so those who signed the original social

⁵⁵⁷ Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*. Locke’s criticism of Hobbes was later echoed by the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, who asked: had not the author of *Leviathan* “forgot to mention Kindness, Friendship, Sociableness, Love of Company and Converse, Natural affection, or anything of this kind?” (quoted in Roy Porter, *Enlightenment*, London: Penguin Books, p. 160).

⁵⁵⁸ Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, chapter 2, section 6.

⁵⁵⁹ Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, chapter 13, section 149.

contract, in his view, were not all the men of the kingdom, but those who had substantial property and therefore the right to vote for members of parliament in elections. For “the great and chief end of men uniting into commonwealths is the preservation of their property.”

Thus man is born, according to Locke, with three basic Natural Rights, as he called them: *life* – everyone is entitled to live; *liberty* – everyone is entitled to do anything they want provided it doesn’t conflict with the first right; and *estate* – everyone is entitled to own all that they create or gain through gift or trade so long as it doesn’t conflict with the first two rights. Men form a social contract for the formation of a State which limits their own rights in the sense that they can lose life, liberty and/or estate if they transgress the State’s laws. But in exchange the State is obliged to protect these three rights of the citizens so long as they do not break the State’s laws. However, if the State does not fulfil its side of the contract, the citizens can overthrow the State, in the person of the constitutional monarch and form a new contract with a new monarch.⁵⁶⁰

This was more like it - now the property-owning aristocrats had a theory of the State that suited them perfectly! The State was created to protect their interests, and could be overthrown by them if it violated their interests – all in the name of natural law! The problem was: who was to say when the State had violated the natural rights of the citizens sufficiently to justify violent revolution?

This vital question has never received a satisfactory answer in western political theory. Locke’s answer was: when “estates, liberties, lives are in danger, and perhaps religion too”. Only “*perhaps* religion”? In the Orthodox East, danger to religion is the *only* possible justification for rebellion against the powers that be. But for Locke the justification was, in the end, secular: for “the end of government is the good of mankind, and which is best for mankind, that the people should always exposed to the boundless will of tyranny or that the rulers should be sometimes liable to be opposed? Upon the forfeiture of their rulers, [power] reverts to the society and the people have a right to act as supreme and place it in a new form or new hands, as they think good.”⁵⁶¹

In other words, if the people feel that their Natural Rights have been violated by king or parliament, then they have the right to declare the contract broken and take power back from their representatives. For “the Community may be said in this respect to be always the Supreme Power”.⁵⁶² Thus if the

⁵⁶⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_and_legal_rights.

⁵⁶¹ Locke, *An Essay concerning the true, original, extent, and end of Civil Government* (1690).

⁵⁶² Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, chapter 13, section 149.

prince seeks to “enslave, or destroy them”, the people are entitled to “appeal to heaven”.

But “since Heaven does not make explicit pronouncements,” writes Russell, “this means, in effect, that a decision can only be reached by fighting, since it is assumed that Heaven will give the victory to the better cause. Some such view is essential to any doctrine that divides governmental power.”⁵⁶³

Essentially, this was the Chinese pagan theory of “the mandate of Heaven” dressed up in vaguely Christian clothes...

However, the experience of the English revolution and Locke’s own conservative instincts led him to countenance revolution only in extreme cases. Otherwise the right to rebel would “lay a perpetual foundation for disorder”. “Great mistakes in the ruling part... will be born by the People without muting or murmur”, and recourse would be had to force only after “a long trains of Abuses, Prevarications, and Artifices”. For “people are not so easily got out of their old forms as some are apt to suggest”.⁵⁶⁴ “‘Overturning the constitution and frame of any just government’ is ‘the greatest crime a man is capable of’, but ‘either ruler or subject’ who forcibly invades ‘the rights of either prince or people’ is guilty of it. ‘Whosoever uses force without right, as everyone does in society who does it without law, puts himself into a state of war with those against whom he so uses it... every one has a right to defend himself and to resist the aggressor.’”⁵⁶⁵

The influence of Locke’s theory is very clear in the United States’ Declaration of Independence of 1776: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” In fact, the American revolution of 1776 was not “self-evidently” in accordance with Locke’s theory – especially for the Blacks, who knew that their “self-evident” equality with the Whites was not recognized by either side... But Locke would have understood: the only self-evident thing about his theory was its usefulness in justifying the deposition of kings...

A Critique of Social Contract Theory

“In all its forms,” writes Roger Scruton, “the social contract enshrines a fundamental liberal principle, namely, that, deep down, our obligations are self-created and self-imposed. I cannot be bound by the law, or legitimately constrained by the sovereign, if I never chose to be under the obligation to obey. Legitimacy is conferred by the citizen, and not by the sovereign, still

⁵⁶³ Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 662-663.

⁵⁶⁴ Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, treatise 2, chapter 14, section 168.

⁵⁶⁵ J.R. Western, *Monarchy and Revolution*, London: Blandford Press, 1972, p. 25.

less by the sovereign's usurping ancestors. If we cannot discover a contract to be bound by the law, then the law is not binding."⁵⁶⁶

Andrezey Walicki writes: "The argument that society was founded on reason and self-interest could of course be used to sanction rebellion against any forms of social relations that could not prove their rationality or utility."⁵⁶⁷

A basic objection to social contract theory put forward by Hegel is that this original premise, that "our obligations are self-created and self-imposed", is false. We do not choose the family we are born in, or the state to which we belong, and yet both family and state impose undeniable obligations on us. Of course, we can rebel against such obligations; the son can choose to say that he owes nothing to his father. And yet he would not even exist without his father; and without his father's nurture and education he would not even be capable of making choices.

Thus we are "hereditary bondsmen", to use Byron's phrase. In this sense we live in a cycle of freedom and necessity: the free choices of our ancestors limit our own freedom, while our choices limit those of our children. The idea of a social contract entered into in a single generation is therefore not only a historical myth (as many social contract theorists concede); it is also a dangerous myth. It is a myth that distorts the very nature of society, which cannot be conceived as existing except over several generations.

But if society exists over several generations, all generations should be taken into account in drawing up the contract. Why should only one generation's interests be respected? For, as Scruton continues, interpreting the thought of Edmund Burke, "the social contract prejudices the interests of those who are not alive to take part in it: the dead and the unborn. Yet they too have a claim, maybe an indefinite claim, on the resources and institutions over which the living so selfishly contend. To imagine society as a contract among its living members, is to offer no rights to those who go before and after. But when we neglect those absent souls, we neglect everything that endows law with its authority, and which guarantees our own survival. We should therefore see the social order as a partnership, in which the dead and the unborn are included with the living."⁵⁶⁸

"Every people," writes L.A. Tikhomirov, "is, first of all, a certain historical whole, a long row of consecutive generations, living over hundreds or thousands of years in a common life handed down by inheritance. In this form a people, a nation, is a certain socially organic phenomenon with more or less clearly expressed laws of inner development..."

⁵⁶⁶ Scruton, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

⁵⁶⁷ Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1988, p. 39.

⁵⁶⁸ Scruton, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

“But political intriguers and the democratic tendency does not look at a people in this form, as a historical, socially organic phenomenon, but simply in the form of a sum of *the individual inhabitants of the country*. This is the second point of view, which looks on a nation as a simple association of people united into a state because they wanted that, living according to laws which they like, and arbitrarily changing the laws of their life together when it occurs to them.”⁵⁶⁹

Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow wrote as follows on the social contract, which was already beginning to influence political thinking in Russia in his time, and would be one of the influences leading to the Russian revolution: “It is obligatory, say the wise men of this world, to submit to social authorities on the basis of a social contract, by which people were united into society, by a general agreement founding government and submission to it for the general good. If they think that it is impossible to found society otherwise than on a social contract, - then why is it that the societies of the bees and ants are not founded on it? And is it not right that those who break open honeycombs and destroy ant-hills should be entrusted with finding in them... a charter of bees and ants? And until such a thing is done, nothing prevents us from thinking that bees and ants create their societies, not by contract, but by nature, by an idea of community implanted in their nature, which the Creator of the world willed to be realised even at the lowest level of His creatures. What if an example of the creation of a human society by nature were found? What, then, is the use of the fantasy of a social contract? No one can argue against the fact that the original form of society is the society of the family. Thus does not the child obey the mother, and the mother have power over the child, not because they have contracted between themselves that she should feed him at the breast, and that he should shout as little as possible when he is swaddled? What if the mother should suggest too harsh conditions to the child? Will not the inventors of the social contract tell him to go to another mother and make a contract with her about his upbringing? The application of the social contract in this case is as fitting as it is fitting in other cases for every person, from the child to the old man, from the first to the last. Every human contract can have force only when it is entered into with consciousness and good will. Are there many people in society who have heard of the social contract? And of those few who have heard of it, are there many who have a clear conception of it? Ask, I will not say the simple citizen, but the wise man of contracts: when and how did he enter into the social contract? When he was an adult? But who defined this time? And was he outside society before he became an adult? By means of birth? This is excellent. I like this thought, and I congratulate every Russian that he was able - I don't know whether it was from his parents or from Russia herself, - to agree that he be born in powerful Russia... The only thing that we must worry about is that neither he who was

⁵⁶⁹ Tikhomirov, “Demokratia liberal'naia i sotsial'naia” (“Liberal and Social Democracy”), in *Kritika Demokratia (A Critique of Democracy)*, Moscow: “Moskva”, 1997, p. 122 (in Russian).

born nor his parents thought about this contract in their time, and so does not referring to it mean fabricating it? And consequently is not better, as well as simpler, both in submission and in other relationships towards society, to study the rights and obligations of a real birth instead of an invented contract – that pipe-dream of social life, which, being recounted at the wrong time, has produced and continues to produce material woes for human society. ‘Transgressors have told me fables, but they are not like Thy law, O Lord’ (Psalm 118.85).”⁵⁷⁰

Since social contract theory originated in the seventeenth century, the century of the Wars of Religion, one of its aims was to prevent such conflicts by relegating religion to the private sphere, having no part in the contract. This meant increasing toleration of previously forbidden religions, but also the increasing restriction of the influence of religion as a whole. Thus in the seventeenth-century Locke argued that religion was a private matter, and that people should be allowed as far as possible to mind their own business; but he drew the line at Catholics and atheists. In the time of Mills in the nineteenth century, Catholics and atheists, too, had won the right to express their views. Today, in the twenty-first century, any expression of Christian views that offends any other religious or anti-religious group may be deemed to be a violation of their “human rights” and so earn a prison sentence...

Modern versions of social contract theory, such as John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, aim, as Roger Scruton notes, to remove “from the legal order all reference to the sources of division and conflict between human groups, so as to create a society in which no question can arise that does not have a solution acceptable to everyone. If religion, culture, sex, race, and even ‘conceptions of the good’ have all been relegated to the private sphere, and set outside the scope of jurisdiction, then the resulting public law will be an effective instrument for the government of a multicultural society, forbidding citizens to make exceptions in favour of their preferred group, sex, culture, faith, or lifestyle.... This simply reinforces the status of the theory as the theology of a post-religious society.”⁵⁷¹

Thus social contract theory, while not explicitly anti-religious, actually leads, in its modern variants, to the purest secularism: the original social contract must be postulated to be between irreligious people and to lead to a state that is strictly irreligious, relegating religion entirely to the private sphere where it can have no influence on public policy. In exchange for this banishment to the “catacombs” of society, the religious citizen is generously accorded the “right” to worship God. But such a state will be accepted only by a society for which religion has ceased to be the primary focus of life, and has become merely one “interest” or “need” among many others. Such a

⁵⁷⁰ Metropolitan Philaret, *Sochinenia (Works)*, Moscow, 1877, vol. 3, pp. 448, 449; reprinted in *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn’ (Orthodox Life)*, 49, № 9 (573), September, 1997, pp. 3-4 (in Russian).

⁵⁷¹ Scruton, *The West and the Rest*, London: ISI Books, 2002, pp. 10-11.

society was England after the English revolution. And such a society has the whole of the West, following England, become in the decades and centuries that have passed since “the Glorious Revolution”...

Declarations of Human Rights

The influence of Locke’s theory of natural or human rights, and of the social contract, was confined to Anglo-Saxon countries until the fateful year 1789. Then, in the more radical form of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen”, it became the theoretical underpinning of the French Revolution. Let us remind ourselves of the first clauses of the Declaration:

“I. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can only be founded on public utility.

II. The purpose of every political association is the preservation of the natural and unprescriptible rights of men. These rights are liberty, property, and safety from, and resistance to, oppression.

III. The principle of all sovereignty lies in the nation. No body of men, and no individual, can exercise authority which does not emanate directly therefrom.

IV. Liberty consists in the ability to do anything which does not harm others.

V. The Law can only forbid actions which are injurious to society...”

There was no mention of women’s rights in the original Declaration. But in *The Rights of Women and the Citizen* (1791) Olympe de Gouges wrote: “1. Woman is born free, and remains equal to Man in rights... 4. The exercise of Woman’s natural rights has no limit other than the tyranny of Man’s opposing them... 17. Property is shared or divided equally by both sexes.” Again, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Mary Wollstonecraft denied that there were any specifically feminine qualities: “I here throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty.” And there were other additions. Thus Article XXI of the revised Declaration of 1793 stated: “Public assistance is a sacred obligation [*dette*]. Society owes subsistence to unfortunate citizens, whether in finding work for them, or in assuring the means of survival of those incapable of working.”⁵⁷²

Pope Pius VI condemned the Declaration, “this absolute liberty which not only assures people of the right not to be disturbed about their religious opinions but also gives them this licence to think, write and even have printed with impunity all that the most unruly imagination can suggest about religion. It is a monstrous right...” For God, said the Pope, also had rights: “What is more contrary to the rights of the Creator God Who limited human freedom

⁵⁷² Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*, London: Pimlico, 1997, pp. 713-714.

by prohibiting evil, than ‘this liberty of thought and action which the National Assembly accords to man in society as an inalienable right of nature?’”⁵⁷³

There are two essential innovations in this revolutionary philosophy. First, the source of authority in human society is proclaimed to be neither God, nor any existing political authority, but “the nation”. Hence nations are to be seen as free agents with rights.⁵⁷⁴ But what constitutes the nation? The essence of the nation, and the source of its rights, is what Rousseau called “the General Will” – a very vague term which any body, composed according to almost any criterion, can claim to represent. At the same time, this “nation” or “General Will” ascribes to itself the most complete power, so that “no body of men, and no individual, can exercise authority which does not emanate directly therefrom.” This immediately destroys the authority, not only of the king, but also of the Church – and indeed, of every other person and body.

The second innovation is the concept of “rights” that are “unprescriptible” – that is, prescribed neither by God nor by man. Man, according to the Declaration, has the unprescriptible “right” to do anything he likes – providing he doesn’t harm others (article 4). However, this latter qualification is not elaborated on, and was in practice ignored completely in the French revolutionary tradition. Thus man is in principle free to do anything whatsoever. The only limitation on his freedom is other men’s freedom: their right not to be limited or restricted by him.

However, positive freedom, freedom “to”, and negative freedom, “freedom not to”, are very different things, with very different consequences. The English liberal tradition, from Locke to J.S. Mill to John Rawls, defined freedom in a negative way, as freedom *from* certain restraints on, and violence to, the individual. Thus “liberty,” writes Locke, “is to be free from restraint and violence from others”.⁵⁷⁵ But the French revolutionary tradition, by grafting Rousseau’s concept of the “General Will” onto Locke’s concept of Natural Rights, emphasized positive freedom – the absolute freedom of the man who embodies the General Will to do absolutely anything he likes.⁵⁷⁶

Recent history has shown that the idea of “positive” freedom, whether of a man (e.g. Napoleon, Lenin, Stalin, Mao) or a Party (e.g. the Bolshevik Party) or a race (e.g. the Germans under Hitler) is perhaps the most destructive idea of all time... In spite of that, and in spite of the terrible destruction and blood-letting caused by the idea of positive freedom in the period 1917 to 1945, in 1948 the United Nations published the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declared: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity

⁵⁷³ Jean Comby, *How to Read Church History*, London: SCM Press, 1989, volume 2, p. 113.

⁵⁷⁴ This was not such a new notion. Thus Hugh Grotius wrote in *Concerning the Law of Prize* (1604): “Freedom of trade is based a primitive right of nations”.

⁵⁷⁵ Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, 57.

⁵⁷⁶ Sir Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.

and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” The Declaration stated that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. While this sounds anodyne enough, even a superficial reading of history since 1789 should have convinced those who drew up the Declaration to be more specific and careful about the meaning of the words “freedom” and “rights” here. They should have known that very similar statements had served as the foundation of the French revolution, and almost every other bloody revolution right up to the Russian revolution, which at that very moment was still destroying millions of souls in the name of “the spirit of brotherhood”...

An Analysis of the Philosophy

Leaving aside historical exposition, let us now analyze the philosophy of human rights in its modern form point by point. The philosophy can be summarized in the following propositions:

1. What is natural is what is right.
2. What is natural and right is what we desire.
3. All human beings are equal.
4. All human beings have the same human nature and more or less the same desires.
5. Therefore every human has the right to have whatever he desires provided the satisfaction of his desire does not interfere with the desires of other human beings.

There are major problems with each of these propositions.

1. First, let us ask the question: Why should what is natural be what is right? Why should any natural fact or desire create a right or obligation for us? If I want food, why do I have the right to have food? If I am walking in a desert place and there is no food around and I have forgotten to bring food with me, then I go hungry. But no right of mine has been violated – only my will.

Linguistic philosophers in the twentieth century argued that it is impossible to get from a statement of fact to a statement of value, from “is” statements to “ought” statements. So from the fact that I am hungry it is impossible to deduce that I ought to have food in the sense that I have the *right* to have food. We only get from facts to values, from *natural* laws to *moral* laws, by exploiting an apparent ambiguity in the term “law”.

“Law” in its original meaning implies a personal lawgiver who *lays down the law*, that is, *prescribes* what should and should not be done: “Thou shalt not kill”, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”, etc. Outside the context of a rational

lawgiver giving laws to rational receivers of the law, the concept of law is strictly speaking inapplicable. However, in a metaphorical sense we can speak of observed regularities in nature as *laws* of nature, the underlying idea being that these regularities did not come into being by chance, but were *commanded* by God: “He spake, and they came to be; He commanded, and they were created” (Psalm 148.5). But of course the elements of nature are not rational beings; they follow the laws of nature, not from choice, but out of necessity; so their obedience to the laws of nature creates no moral right or obligation. At the same time, the fact that God both creates natural laws for all creation and prescribes moral laws for rational men shows that there *is* a link between fact and value. That link is God Himself; for He alone is Truth *and* Goodness, the Giver of *both* the natural *and* the moral law. However, human rights theorists, following Grotius, construct their philosophy without assuming the existence of God; and their “self-evident” laws are not prescribed by God or anybody else, but are “unprescriptible”, as the 1789 Declaration puts it. Therefore they fail to find – because they do not want to see – the only possible link between the world of facts and the world of values: the commandment of the Creator. In view of this, their attempt to base human rights on natural law collapses...

2. Secondly, why should we assume that all our desires are natural? It is the teaching of the Orthodox Church that all our desires are in fact fallen, warped, distorted from their original, natural form. Of course, the idea of the fall forms no part of the philosophy of human rights – it undermines it completely. But even leaving aside the idea of the fall, human rights theorists have to deal with the fact that, in the opinion of most human beings, certain desires are natural and others unnatural. They deal with this problem in a remarkable way: *by simply denying the fact that there are unnatural desires.*

Let us take the key test-case of homosexuality. It is completely obvious that homosexuality is unnatural; it frustrates the biological purpose of sexual intercourse, which is the procreation of children. St. Paul says that male homosexuals “have given up natural intercourse to be consumed with passion for each other”, and that female homosexuals “have turned from natural intercourse to unnatural practices” (Romans 1.26-27). Until about 1960 the vast majority of people in the western world considered that homosexuality was both unnatural and wrong. The proportion of people who believe this in the West has fallen in more recent decades; but it remains the position of the three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism; and with the rapid increase of Islam in recent decades it is very likely that anti-homosexuality is still the majority opinion. In spite of this, human rights theorists insist that homosexuals have the “right” to practise their perversions. This clearly shows that the human rights agenda is based neither on nature nor natural law nor even on the “democratic” consensus of mankind...

Even when human rights theorists agree that something is wrong – for example, paedophilia – they rarely use the argument that it is unnatural. After

all, if some people *want* to do it, then it must be natural in some sense... Thus paedophilia is wrong, not because it is unnatural, but because the child is assumed *not* to want it, and therefore it is a violation of *his* human rights. And yet if it could be proved that the child did want it, or that it caused him no objective harm, presumably paedophilia would be acceptable, as it was in Classical Greece... By the same criterion, it is possible that a whole range of other perversions – incest, bestiality, necrophilia – may one day become acceptable because some people, at any rate, want them, and so these practices must have some basis in human nature. The usual way this is “proved” is by pretending to find some area in the brain that accounts for the perverse behaviour and therefore makes it “natural” – in the case of homosexuality, the current candidate is the hypothalamus, which is supposed to be smaller in homosexuals than in heterosexuals...

In the absence of a teaching on the fall, there is no theoretical way of distinguishing natural wants from unnatural ones. Thus the only restriction on my egoism becomes the possibility that it may clash with your egoism – a restriction that we shall discuss later. And so if the first axiom of modern ontology is Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am”, the first axiom of modern morality is “I want, therefore I can”...

3 and 4. As we have seen, the essential equality of all men was an essential part of the philosophy from at least the time of the American revolution. For egalitarianism was the essential tool for the realization of the real aim of the human rights philosophy: to destroy all social, political or ecclesiastical hierarchies. The equality of man was one of those truths that the American Founding Fathers declared to be “self-evident”.

However, it is by no means self-evident that all men are equal; they differ in intelligence, strength, beauty, courage, taste, sporting and musical ability, sense of humour, moral worth and in countless other ways. The only thing that makes them in any real sense equal is the fact they are all made in the image of God and have the capacity, through the exercise of their free-will and the grace of God, to become in His likeness. And yet even in the Kingdom of heaven one star differs from another in brightness...

The new science of genetics shows that it is not strictly true that all men have the same human nature; for if a man’s human nature – or, at any rate, his psycho-physical, if not his spiritual nature – is defined by his DNA, then every man’s DNA is unique. Eve had the same nature as Adam (except her gender). But as their descendants multiplied, so did their differences...

Of course, men differ only within the bounds of the species or “kind” determined by God – and this, too, can be seen in the DNA. However, the species “man” is not an absolute: it is an abstraction derived from studying many particular men. In fact, as Archbishop Theophan of Poltava writes,

"Only in relation to the absolute Divine [nature] is the concept of nature used by the Fathers of the Church in an absolute sense, insofar as the Divine nature is absolutely one both in concept and in reality. But in relation to the units of created nature, and in particular to people, the concept of one nature is understood in the sense of complete unity only abstractly, insofar as every concept of genus or species is one, but in application to reality it indicates only the oneness of the nature of all the units of the given genus."⁵⁷⁷

Having different natures, or only relatively similar natures, men also differ in their desires. Some of these differences are trivial: one prefers tea, another – coffee; one man prefers Mozart, another – Bach. But others are less trivial: one man longs for chastity, another – for the satisfaction of his lust at every opportunity. Often the same man will desire quite opposite things, as when St. Augustine prayed: "Lord, give me chastity – but not yet." This shows that we may even speak of each man, or at any rate each Christian, having two different human natures – the old Adam and the new Adam.

And then there are the differences between men which, as has been generally recognized in generation after generation, make a material difference to their rights and obligations: the differences between a man and a child, between a man and a woman, between a knowledgeable man and an ignoramus, between an employer and an employee, etc. In their levelling, egalitarian passion, human rights activists have tended to regard these differences as accidental or inessential, and have created special categories of "children's rights", "women's rights", "students' rights", "workers' rights", etc., in order to iron out the differences. It must be admitted that this activity has often had beneficial effects in abolishing discrimination and cruelty that is based more on prejudice than on reason. However, the fact of unjust discrimination in some, even many cases does not alter the fact that many of the physical, sexual, maturational, psychological and social differences between men are important, and require corresponding differences in rights and obligations if the good of each man, and of society as a whole, is to be achieved. Moreover, the argument based on commonality of nature has been

⁵⁷⁷ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Unity of Nature*, p. 11. In what sense, it may then be asked, did Christ take on human nature? Did He take on human nature understood as an abstract unity, or as the human species comprising all individual human hypostases? Neither the one nor the other, according to St. John of Damascus. For, as Professor Georgios Mantzaridis explains the Holy Father's thought: "'nature' can be understood firstly to denote an abstraction, in which case it has no intrinsic reality; secondly, to denote a species, in which case it comprises all the individual hypostases of that species; and thirdly, it can be viewed as a particular, in which case it is linked with the nature of the species but does not comprise all its individual hypostases. The Logos of God made flesh did not take on human nature in the first two senses, because in the first case there would be no incarnation but only delusion, and in the second case there would be incarnation in all human individual hypostases. Therefore, what the Logos of God took on in His incarnation was the 'first-fruits of our substance', individual nature, which did not previously exist as individual in itself, but came into existence in His hypostasis" (*The Deification of Man*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984, pp. 29-30).

taken to absurd extremes in recent times, when it has been seriously maintained that if an animal has, say, 95% of the DNA of a human being he should have 95% of his human rights!

Christianity teaches *love*, not egalitarianism. St. Paul, for example, teaches that masters and slaves should love each other. He does not teach that slaves should rebel against their masters, or that they have the “right” to freedom. At the same time, if all men practised the commandment of love, there would be no need for revolution; for every kind of cruel and irrational discrimination would disappear of itself. But society would still be structured and hierarchical, because that is the way God created men to live together.

5. The only serious check that human rights theorists admit on the absolute freedom and right of human beings to do whatever they want is the so-called harm principle, which was enshrined in article 4 of the original 1789 Declaration of Human Rights. The most influential development of this principle comes in John Stuart Mill’s famous essay, *On Liberty*, where, fully in keeping with the Anglo-Saxon “freedom from” tradition, he sees it not so much as restriction *on* liberty, as an affirmation *of* liberty, an affirmation of the individual’s right to be free from the control, not only of the state, but of any “tyrannical majority” in matters that were his private business: “The object of this essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means to be used be physical force in the form of legal penalties or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him must be calculated to produce evil to someone else. The only part of the conduct of anyone or which it is amenable to society is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.”⁵⁷⁸ Mill asserted that this “Liberty Principle” or “Harm Principle” applied only to people in “the maturity of their faculties”, not to children or to “those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage.”⁵⁷⁹ For “Liberty, as a

⁵⁷⁸ Mill, *On Liberty*, London: Penguin Classics, 1974, pp. 68-69.

⁵⁷⁹ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 69.

principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved through free and equal discussion".⁵⁸⁰

James Fitzjames Stephen, in his *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (1873) pointed to an important flaw in Mill's argument. Liberty was like fire, he said; it could be used for good and ill; to assume otherwise was naïve and dangerous. With regard to freedom of speech, it was by no means certain that full freedom from interference by others would lead to greater searching for truth; it could just as easily lead to idleness and lack of interest in social affairs... Moreover, he was disturbed, writes Gertrude Himmelfarth, that the adoption of Mill's doctrine might "leave society impotent in those situations where there was a genuine need for social action. Implicit too was the possibility that the withdrawal of social sanctions against any particular belief or act would be interpreted as a sanctioning of that belief or act, a licence to do that which society could not prohibit."⁵⁸¹

Stephen's line of argument has been developed in our time by Lord Devlin in his essay entitled *The Enforcement of Morals* (1968). "The occasion for Devlin's essay," writes Himmelfarth, "was the Report of the Wolfenden Commission recommending the legalization of homosexuality between consenting adults. Against the Commission's claim that private morality and immorality were 'not the law's business', Devlin argued that 'the suppression of vice is as much the law's business as the suppression of subversive activities; it is not more possible to define a sphere of private morality than it is to define private subversive activity'."⁵⁸²

As we know, the Wolfenden Commission's recommendation with regard to homosexuality was accepted by the English parliament, which demonstrates the power – the highly destructive power – that the application of Mill's Principle has acquired in our times, a power that Mill himself would probably have deplored. Indeed, a completely consistent application of the Principle would probably lead to the sweeping away of prohibitions against such activities as euthanasia, incest and prostitution on the grounds that these are within the sphere of private morality or immorality and so of no concern to the State. But then, asks Devlin, "if prostitution is... not the law's business, what concern has the law with the ponce or the brothel-keeper...? The Report recommends that the laws which make these activities criminal offences should be maintained... and brings them... under the heading of exploitation.... But in general a ponce exploits a prostitute no more than an impresario exploits an actress."⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 69.

⁵⁸¹ Himmelfarth, in Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 40.

⁵⁸² Himmelfarth, in Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 41.

⁵⁸³ Devlin, in Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 141.

Mill justifies the prohibition of certain acts, such as public decency, on the grounds that they “are a violation of good manners, ... coming thus within the category of offences against others”. And yet, as Jonathan Wolff points out, it is difficult to see how such a prohibition can be justified on the basis of the Harm Principle alone. For “what harm does ‘public indecency’ do? After all, Mill insists that mere offence is no harm...”⁵⁸⁴

It all depends on what we mean by “harm”. And that depends on our fundamental belief-system. So it all comes down to the fundamental question: what is the ultimate good of man?... But this question can only be answered by answering the further questions: “Who made us?” “What did He make us for?” “Can the goal of human life as created by God be attained by striving to fulfil all our fallen human desires?” These are religious questions that are resolutely pushed aside by human rights theorists. They start, by contrast, from the premise that the goal of human life is not prescribed by God, but by ourselves, and consists solely in the satisfaction of fallen desire...

This anti-religious bias of the philosophy of human rights arose from its original need to create a rational basis for resolving *conflict* within and between societies. Although its originators considered themselves to be Christians, Christian teaching was eliminated from the beginning as the basis of conflict resolution, since the Pope was considered the final judge in matters of Christian teaching – and the Pope was the cause of most of the conflicts in the first place. The basis therefore had to be *above* Christianity – while incorporating Christian values, since the warring parties were still (at that time) Christians. It had to be a “self-evident”, common-sense consensus on which all the parties could agree. And if a philosophical rationale for this consensus was required, it was to be found in the common human needs and desires that all the parties shared.

However, this whole approach was implicitly *anti-Christian* for two important reasons. First, by placing something other than the Word of God at the base of the theoretical structure, it was implicitly asserting that a human philosophy can supplement, complement, or, still worse, *improve on* the Word of God – which implies a lack of faith in the Word of God. And secondly, it implies that the purpose of life is to satisfy the fallen needs and desires of human nature, which is an essentially *pagan* approach to life.

This latter point was quite consciously recognized by J.S. Mill, who defended his Harm or Liberty Principle on the basis, among other things, that it fostered that ideal of the vigorous, independent man, unafraid of being different, even eccentric, which he found in Classical Greece. Indeed, he openly rejected the ascetic, Calvinist ideal in favour of the pagan Greek:

⁵⁸⁴ For the difficulties created for Mills’ theory by public indecency, see several articles in *Philosophy Now*, issue 76, November-December, 2009.

“There is a different type of human excellence from the Calvinistic: a conception of humanity as having its nature bestowed on it for other purposes than merely to be abnegated. ‘Pagan self-assertion’ is one of the elements of human worth, as well as ‘Christian self-denial’. There is a Greek ideal of self-development, which the Platonic and Christian ideal of self-government blends with, but does not supersede. It may be better to be a John Knox than an Alcibiades, but it is better to be a Pericles than either; nor would a Pericles, if we had one in these days, be without anything good which belonged to John Knox.”⁵⁸⁵

This from a conservative liberal who was certainly against any revolutionary excess. But in the hands of consciously anti-Christian revolutionaries, the philosophy of human rights became the instrument, not of “pagan self-assertion” of the cultured, Periclean type, but of pagan destruction of the most uncultured, barbarian type. The long series of bloody revolutions set off by, and claiming their justification from, the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man is the proof of that...

Human Rights and Cultural Marxism

Melanie Phillips has perceptively described the onslaught of the philosophy of human rights on traditional Christian culture in Britain as “cultural Marxism”, the continuation of the Marxist revolution by other means since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989:-

“As communism slowly crumbled, those on the far Left who remained hostile towards western civilization found another way to realise their goal of bringing it down.

“This was what might be called ‘cultural Marxism’. It was based on the understanding that what holds a society together are the pillars of its culture: the structures and institutions of education, family, law, media and religion. Transform the principles and you can thus destroy the society they have shaped.

“The key insight was developed in particular by an Italian Marxist philosopher called Antonio Gramsci. His thinking was taken up by Sixties radicals – who are, of course, the generation that holds power in the West today.

“Gramsci understood that the working class would never rise up to seize the levers of ‘production, distribution and exchange’ as communism had prophesied. Economics was not the path to revolution.

⁵⁸⁵ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 127.

"He believed instead that society could be overthrown if the values underpinning it could be formed into their antithesis: if its core principles were replaced by those of groups who were considered to be outsiders or who actively transgressed the moral codes of that society.

"So he advocated a 'long march through the institutions' to capture the citadels of the culture and turn them into a collective fifth column, undermining from within and turning all the core values of society upside-down.

"This strategy has been carried out to the letter.

"The nuclear family has been widely shattered. Illegitimacy was transformed from a stigma into a 'right'. The tragic disadvantage of fatherlessness was redefined as a neutrally viewed 'lifestyle choice'.

"Education was wrecked, with its core tenet of transmitting a culture to successive generations replaced by the idea that what children already knew was of superior value to anything the adult world might foist upon them.

"The outcome of this 'child-centred' approach has been widespread illiteracy and ignorance and an eroded capacity for independent thought.

"Law and order were similarly undermined, with criminals deemed to be beyond punishment since they were 'victims' of society and with illegal drug-taking tacitly encouraged by a campaign to denigrate anti-drugs laws.

"The 'rights' agenda – commonly known as 'political correctness' – turned morality inside out by excusing any misdeeds by self-designated 'victim' groups on the grounds that such 'victims' could never be held responsible for what they did.

"Feminism, anti-racism and gay rights thus turned men, while people and Christians into the enemies of decency who were forced to jump through hoops to prove their virtue.

"This Through the Looking Glass mindset rests on the belief that the world is divided into the powerful (who are responsible for all bad things) and the oppressed (who are responsible for none of them).

"This is a Marxist doctrine. But the extent to which such Marxist thinking has been taken up unwittingly even by the Establishment was illustrated by the astounding observation made in 2005 by the then senior law lord, Lord Bingham, that human rights law was all about protecting 'oppressed' minorities from the majority...

"When the Berlin Wall fell, we told ourselves that this was the end of ideology. We could not have been more wrong.

"The Iron Curtain came down only to be replaced by a rainbow-hued knuckle duster, as our cultural commissars pulverise all forbidden attitudes in order to reshape western society into a post-democratic, post-Christian, post-moral universe. Lenin would have smiled..."⁵⁸⁶

Conclusion

"If God does not exist," says one of Dostoyevsky's characters, "then everything is permissible." For God and His commandments are the only foundation of morality. Every other foundation devised by the wit of man has proved to be porous, unstable, liable at any moment to dissolve into the abyss of anarchical egotism, on the one hand, or tyrannical despotism, on the other.

Human rights is a philosophy that leads to anarchical egotism – and then to its apparent opposite, tyrannical despotism. But, as Nicholas Berdiaev pointed out: "Neither 'human rights' nor 'the will of the people', nor both together can be the foundation of human society. For the one contradicts the other: 'the rights of the human personality', understood as the final foundations of society, deny the primacy of social unity; 'the will of the people', as an absolute social basis, denies the principle of personality. There can be, and in fact is, only some kind of eclectic, unprincipled compromise between the two principles, which witnesses to the fact that neither is the primary principle of society. If one genuinely believes in the one or the other, then one has to choose between the unlimited despotism of social unity, which annihilates the personality – and boundless anarchy, which annihilates social order and together with it every personal human existence."⁵⁸⁷

In spite of the manifest failures of these extremes, modern man continues to search for some such foundation for his life. For although He does not believe in God, – at any rate, the traditional image of God that most Europeans and Americans believed in until the beginning of the twentieth century, – he does believe in morality. Or rather, he believes in morality for others, not himself. What he really wants is to be free to pursue the life he wants to lead, – the life which brings him the maximum of pleasure and the minimum of pain, – without being interfered with by anybody else, whether that somebody else be God, the State, or some other individual or group of individuals. However, he knows that in a society without laws, in which *everybody* is free to pursue the life he wants the life he wants to lead without

⁵⁸⁶ Phillips, "We were fools to think the fall of the Berlin Wall had killed off the far Left. They're back – and attacking us from within", *The Daily Mail* (London), November 9, 2009, p. 14.

⁵⁸⁷ Berdiaev, N. "Religioznie osnovy obshchestvennosti" ("The Religious Foundations of Society"), *Put' (The Way)*, № 1, September, 1925, p. 13 (in Russian).

any kind of restriction, he will not achieve his personal goal. For if everybody were completely free in this way, there would be anarchy, and life would be “nasty, brutish and short” – for everybody. So a compromise must be found.

The compromise is a kind of religionless morality. Let some powerful body – preferably the post-revolutionary State, certainly not God or the Church, because God is unpredictably and unpleasantly demanding – impose certain limits on everybody. But let those limits be as restricted and unrestrictive as possible. And let there be a set of rules accepted by all States – preferably enforced by some World Government – that puts limits on the limits that States can place on their citizens. These rules we can then call “human rights”, and they can be our morality. Thus “human rights” include civil and political rights, such as the right to life and liberty, freedom of expression, and equality before the law; judicial rights, like the right to a free trial, and freedom from torture and the death penalty; sexual rights, like the rights to have sex with any consenting adult, reproduce a child by any means, and to destroy that child in the womb; and economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to participate in culture, to have food and water and healthcare, the right to work, and the right to education. This morality will be permissive in the sense that it will permit very many things previous, more religious ages considered unlawful. But it will not permit everything; it will not permit others to interfere with my life of pleasure so long as I don’t interfere with theirs...

There will be another important advantage to this system: for those who believe in, and champion, “human rights”, it will be a source of great pride and self-satisfaction. They will be able to preach it to others, even impose it on others, with the sweet knowledge that they are doing good and serving mankind – no, rather, saving mankind.⁵⁸⁸ After all, the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action declares: “All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and related. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis”. This provides the justification for the invasion of individual countries by “the international community” in order to correct human rights abuses. So the belief in, and justification and implementation of, “human rights” will turn out to be a new kind of universal religion, with a new kind of god, a new kind of sanctity and a new kind of paradise – a kingdom of god on earth that is so much more conducive to the needs of modern man than the old kind that was too far away in “heaven” and boringly devoid of the real pleasures of life!

The revolution sparked off by the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789 is continuing today, not as bloodily as before, but more extreme than ever in the absurdity and multiplicity of its claims. Thus the numbers of “human rights” have increased exponentially. The fact that many of these rights

⁵⁸⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna_Declaration_and_Programme_of_Action. This statement was endorsed at the 2005 World Summit in New York (paragraph 121).

contradict each other (for example, the right to life contradicts the right to abortion), and that there is no way that more than a fraction of these rights can be fulfilled for more than a fraction of the world's population for the foreseeable future only increases the zeal and ambition of the "human righters". Now every minority group that has not fulfilled its desires to the utmost claims victim status, the violation of its "human rights" and blames the oppressor state and society. If Mills feared above all the "tyranny of the majority" opinion, and therefore championed the rights of every eccentric to express his views (provided they were "decent"), today, taking advantage of our ultra-liberal laws, and the "cultural Marxism" that has taken the place of traditional Marxism, it is the tyranny of millions of minorities that has taken over society, almost outlawing the beliefs of "the silent majority".

If the majority remains silent, then there is only one possible outcome: one of these minorities – probably the most ruthlessly organized and dogmatically extreme - will take complete and tyrannical control over all...

*January 21 / February 3, 2010.
St. Maximus the Confessor.*

32. ORTHODOXY AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION

It is generally assumed by Orthodox Christians that Orthodoxy is a liberal religion in the sense that it favours freedom of religion in general. It is pointed out with some pride that Orthodoxy has never had an institution to compare with the Catholic Inquisition, and that Orthodoxy has been the persecuted, rather than the persecutor, throughout her history. Orthodox persecutors such as Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great have been rare exceptions to the rule – and condemned ones at that.

I believe that this is basically true. However, it is always dangerous to identify Orthodoxy with any popular dogma of the modern age. Even when Orthodoxy appears to coincide with popular sentiment, there are almost always subtle but important differences to be noted and qualifications to be made. And the motivation for the position in question is almost invariably different. It may therefore be useful to examine the Orthodox position on freedom of religion in the context of a brief historical survey.

The Origin of the Idea

The modern world prides itself on its religious toleration as if this were a mark of its superiority over all previous civilizations, which, supposedly, were constantly persecuting dissidents. However, no society has ever practised complete toleration of all opinions. Rather, societies differ amongst themselves in those opinions which they tolerate, and those they do not tolerate, and in the manner and severity with which they persecute dissidents. Thus if earlier societies persecuted what they considered to be religious heresies, our contemporary society persecutes such attitudes as racism, “homophobia” and holocaust-denial. Just as there is no society which does not punish crime in general, and does not send murderers to prison, so there is no society which does not have a certain consensus of ideas that it acts in various ways to preserve and enforce, using the stick as well as the carrot.

In fact, if we were to define the main difference between ancient and modern societies, it would not be that ancient societies were intolerant while modern societies are tolerant, but that ancient societies in general practised tolerance without elevating it into a supreme value, whereas modern societies, in accordance with its cult of freedom in all its forms, has elevated religious tolerance into an absolute value, a human “right”, in and for itself.

The main motive of religious toleration in the ancient world was simply political expediency – a multi-ethnic and multi-faith population is more easily controlled if all its faiths are respected and legalized. Another motive was superstition. After all, calculated the ruler (who was almost always religious), the god of this people is more likely to help me if I do not persecute his people...

Consider, for example, Imperial Rome before Constantine. Contrary to what is generally thought, periods of persecution were intermittent and generally short-lived, and directed exclusively at Christians. (The Soviet persecution of the twentieth century was, by contrast, far more intense and persistent, and directed at all religions.)

As Perez Zagorin writes, Rome “was tolerant in practice in permitting the existence of many diverse religious cults, provided their votaries also complied with the worship of the divine emperor as part of the state religion. Unlike Christianity and Judaism, Roman religion had no sacred scriptures and did not depend on any creed, dogmas, or ethical principles. It consisted very largely of participation in cult acts connected with the worship of various deities and spirits that protected the Roman state and were associated with public, family, and domestic life. At nearly all stages of their history the Romans were willing to accept foreign cults and practices; this *de facto* religious pluralism is entirely attributable to the polytheistic character of Roman religion and had nothing to do with principles of values sanctioning religious toleration, a concept unknown to Roman society or law and never debated by Roman philosophers or political writers.”⁵⁸⁹

Christianity introduced a new depth and a new complexity to the question of religious toleration. On the one hand, the Christians, like the Jews, rejected the idea of a multiplicity of gods, and insisted that there was only one name by which men could be saved – that of the One True God, Jesus Christ. This position did not logically imply that Christians wanted to persecute people of other faiths. But the “exclusivism” of Christianity, then as now, was perceived by the pagan-ecumenist majority, whether sincerely or insincerely, as a threat to themselves. On the other hand, the Christians set no value on the forcible conversion of people to the Faith: man, being in the image of God, was free, and could come to God only by his own free will.

The Christian attitude was expressed by Tertullian. “His *Barring of Heretics* (ca. 200) contained an exposition of Catholic principles and included a Rule of Faith that he called it heresy to question. Heretics, in his opinion, could not be called Christians. Although he insisted on the truth of Christianity, Tertullian was nevertheless opposed to compulsion in religion and stated in other works that ‘to do away with freedom of religion [*libertas religionis*]’ was wrong. While Christians, he said, worship the one God and pagans worship demons, both ‘human and natural law’ ordain that ‘each person may worship whatever he wishes’.”⁵⁹⁰ However, Tertullian was writing at a time when the Church, as a persecuted minority, clearly benefited from religious toleration. What if the Church herself were to gain political power?

⁵⁸⁹ Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 4.

⁵⁹⁰ Zagorin, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

The Idea in Early Byzantium

The Old Testament Kings David and Solomon, Hezekiah and Josiah were *required* by God to defend the faith of the people *as their first duty*. The prophets constantly reminded them that they would be judged by God in accordance with their fulfilment or non-fulfilment of this duty. This same duty was taken very seriously by the greatest of the New Testament Emperors of New Rome, Constantine I, Theodosius I and Justinian I.

The first Christian emperor, St. Constantine the Great, is often unjustly blamed by Protestants for introducing religious intolerance into the State. However, the truth is that he delivered the Church from the Diocletian persecution, and then introduced certain laws which facilitated Christian worship. He exiled the heretic Arius, but is not known to have killed anyone for his faith. For, as he declared: "It is one thing to undertake the contest for immortality voluntarily, another to compel others to do it likewise through fear of punishment."⁵⁹¹ His imperial successors in the fourth century did persecute those whom they considered heretics – but one was a pagan, Julian the Apostate, and those before Julian were heretics themselves, and so not representative of Christian right practice.

Non-violence to the persons of heretics combined with mercilessness to the heresies themselves was especially emphasised by St. John Chrysostom (+407), who wrote: "Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force... It is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice."⁵⁹²

Again, Hieromonk Patapios writes: "St. John showed not the slightest indulgence towards false teachings; indeed, much of his life as a preacher was devoted to combatting such heretics as the Eunomians, the Judaizers, and the Manichaeans. However, he was resolutely opposed to the use of violence by the authorities to subdue heretics. And it is this reservation of his that must be carefully understood, if one is to grasp what may seem to be a contradictory view of heretics. He knew from pastoral experience that heretics were far more likely to be turned aside from their errors by prayer: 'And if you pray for the Heathens, you ought of course to pray for Heretics also, for we are to pray for all men, and not to persecute. And this is good also for another reason, as we are partakers of the same nature, and God commands and accepts benevolence towards one another' (*Homilies on the First Epistle to St. Timothy*, 7). Near the end of this homily on the dangers of anathematizing

⁵⁹¹ Quoted in Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, London: Penguin Books, 1988, p. 637.

⁵⁹² St. John Chrysostom, quoted by Fr. Antonious Henein, orthodox-tradition@egroups.com, 8 August, 2000.

others, he says that 'we must anathematize heretical doctrines and refute impious teachings, from whomsoever we have received them, but show mercy to the men who advocate them and pray for their salvation.' In other words, we must love the heretic, but hate the heresy."⁵⁹³

However, it may be wondered whether St. John's words should be interpreted as an absolute ban on any kind of coercion in any circumstances. For there were other prominent and holy Christians contemporary with him who did approve of some measure of coercion in some circumstances. In particular, there was the question of the rights of the Christian emperor. If the Church as an institution or individual Christians could only persuade, not coerce, was it not the task of the emperor to coerce, or at any rate limit the activity of those who refused to be persuaded? It is significant that no prominent churchman denounced the undoubtedly coercive laws passed against pagans and heretics by the Emperor Theodosius I (379-395)...

Theodosius, writes Perez Zagorin, "was an implacable enemy of heresy, against which he issued no fewer than eighteen edicts. He proscribed various heresies by name, ordered the confiscation of churches and private houses where heretics met for worship, and deprived them of the right to make wills or receive inheritances. In the case of certain heretical sects [the Manichaeans] he commanded that their members be hunted down and executed. In his attempt to enforce uniformity of belief he also instituted legislation against paganism, including a comprehensive enactment in 395 forbidding anyone of whatever rank of dignity to sacrifice to or worship 'senseless images' constructed 'by human hands', on pain of heavy fines and other penalties."⁵⁹⁴ He was likewise the first emperor to impose penalties on Christians who profaned their baptism by reverting to paganism.

"... All subjects were expected to be worshippers in this [the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic] Church; and in addition to the spiritual and political authority its bishops wielded, it had the power of the state at its disposal to enforce its faith against heretics. The practical toleration and religious pluralism that had formerly been the Roman custom no longer existed. The change that took place is epitomised in an appeal made in 384 by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus – a Roman senator, orator, and prefect of Rome, and a defender of paganism – to the emperors Theodosius I and Valentinian II to restore the altar of the goddess victory to the Senate House (it had been removed by imperial decree after standing there for over 350 years, since the reign of the emperor Augustus at the beginning of the first century). Speaking in the name of the proscribed ancient religion of Rome, Symmachus declared

⁵⁹³ Patapios, "On Caution regarding Anathematization", *Orthodox Tradition*, vol. XVII, № 1, January, 2000, p. 22.

⁵⁹⁴ Moreover, in 392 the Emperors Theodosius, Arcadius and Honorius decreed that pagans should "forfeit that house or landholding in which it is proved that [they] served a pagan superstition" (XVI, 10, 2). (V.M.)

that 'each nation has its own gods and peculiar rites. The Great Mystery cannot be approached by one avenue alone... Leave us the symbol on which our oaths of allegiance have been sworn for so many generations. Leave us the system which has given prosperity to the State.' His plea was of no avail, however, for the cross of Christ had conquered the Roman Empire, and the altar of Victory remained banished and abandoned."⁵⁹⁵

Zeal against heretics was, of course, not the preserve of the Christian emperors. In 388 some Christians burned down the synagogue in Callinicum on the Euphrates. Theodosius ordered its rebuilding at the Christians' expense. However, St. Ambrose, the famous Bishop of Milan, wrote to him: "When a report was made by the military Count of the East that a synagogue had been burnt down, and that this was done at the instigation of the bishop, you gave command that the others should be punished, and the synagogue be rebuilt by the bishop himself... The bishop's account ought to have been waited for, for priests are the calmers of disturbances, and anxious for peace, except when even they are moved by some offence against God, or insult to the Church. Let us suppose that the bishop burned down the synagogue... It will evidently be necessary for him to take back his act or become a martyr. Both the one and the other are foreign to your rule: if he turns out to be a hero, then fear lest he end his life in martyrdom; but if he turns out to be unworthy, then fear lest you become the cause of his fall, for the seducer bears the greater responsibility. And what if others are cowardly and agree to construct the synagogue? Then... you can write on the front of the building: 'This temple of impiety was built on contributions taken from Christians'. You are motivated by considerations of public order. But what is the order from on high? Religion was always bound to have the main significance in the State, which is why the severity of the laws must be modified here. Remember Julian, who wanted to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem: the builders were then burned by the fire of God. Do you not take fright at what happened then?... And how many temples did the Jews not burn down under Julian at Gaza, Askalon, Beirut and other places? You did not take revenge for the churches, but now you take revenge for the synagogue!"⁵⁹⁶

"What is more important," he asked, "the parade of discipline or the cause of religion? The maintenance of civil law is secondary to religious interest."⁵⁹⁷

Ambrose refused to celebrate the Divine Liturgy until the imperial decree had been revoked. Theodosius backed down... So here we find one of the greatest saints of the Church urging one of the most severe of the Christian emperors (who is also counted as a saint) to adopt still greater severity against non-Christians than was his wont!

⁵⁹⁵ Zagorin, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 24.

⁵⁹⁶ St. Ambrose, *Letter 40*, quoted in Sergius Fomin and Tamara Fomina, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. I, p. 69 (in Russian).

⁵⁹⁷ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, London: Phoenix, 1987, 1995, p. 164.

The “Ambrosean” position may be tentatively formulated as follows. On the one hand, in relation to those outside her the Church can herself adopt no coercive measures; she can do no more than reason, plead and threaten with *God’s* justice at the Last Judgement. Her only means of “coercion”, if it can be called that, is the excommunication of unrepentant Christians from her fold. On the other hand, the Church blesses the Christian State to use other, more physical means of coercion against those over whom she has no more influence. The purpose of this is not to *convert*; for only persuasion can convert, and as St. Basil the Great says, “by violence you can frighten me, but not persuade me”. But there are other legitimate and Christian purposes for coercion: justice against evildoers, the restriction of their influence, and the protection of the young and weak in mind... At the same time, even St. Ambrose never advocated the *execution* of heretics or Jews.

This aversion against the execution of heretics is found in other saints. Thus when St. Martin of Tours (+397) signed the decision of a Synod of Bishops condemning the Spanish heretic Priscillian and handing him over to the Western Emperor Maximus for execution, he felt the reproaches of his conscience, and never again attended a Synod of Bishops.⁵⁹⁸ So can we say that the execution of heretics is *absolutely* forbidden by Orthodox Christianity?

Not quite... In the *Lives of the Saints* we find a few instances of the saints blessing the execution of heretics. We even find cases in which saints who are not secular rulers have executed heretics or magicians themselves. Thus in *The Acts of the Apostles* we read how the Apostle Peter in effect executed Ananias and Sapphira. Again, the Apostles Peter and Paul by their prayers brought about the death of Simon Magus. Again, St. Basil the Great prayed for, and obtained, the death of Julian the Apostate (by the sword of St. Mercurius the Great Martyr). And the holy hierarchs Patrick of Ireland and Leo of Catania in effect executed particularly stubborn perverters of the people.

At this point it will be useful to consider the position of St. Augustine of Hippo, who was baptized by St. Ambrose, and who took the “Ambrosean position” a step further. Perez Zagorin writes: “Augustine carried on a long theological combat with three formidable heresies, Manichaeism, Pelagianism, and Donatism. Among his writings against the last of these and its followers, the Donatists, he left an invaluable record of his reflections on the justification of coercion against heretics to enforce religious truth. At the time he became bishop of Hippo, Donatism, which took its name from one of its first leaders, Donatus, bishop of Carthage, had already existed in North Africa for more than eighty years and had undergone considerable persecution. Originating in the early fourth century in an ecclesiastical controversy over a bishop who had [allegedly] compromised with paganism during the persecution by the emperor Diocletian and was therefore

⁵⁹⁸ Sulpicius Severus, *Life of St. Martin of Tours*.

considered a betrayer of the faith, the Donatists formed a schismatic and rival church with its own clergy. Rigorists who believed in a church composed exclusively of the holy, they maintained that an unworthy priest could not perform a valid sacrament. By insisting on the rebaptism of converts, the Donatist church declared its rejection of the sacramental character of Catholic baptism. To some extent Donatism represented an expression of social protest against the profane world as a domain ruled by Satan. Its more extreme advocates, a fanatical fringe of zealots and ascetics known as Circumcellions, sought a martyr's death by any means, including suicide; they gathered as bands of marauding peasants who attacked estates and committed other acts of violence. As a self-described church of martyrs, the Donatists condemned the alliance between Catholicism and the Roman authorities as a renunciation of Christ in favour of Caesar, and their bishop Donatus was reported to have said, 'What has the Emperor to do with the Church?' In the course of its history Donatism became a considerable movement, although it remained largely confined to North Africa.

"In his numerous writings against this heresy, one of Augustine's constant aims was to persuade its followers by means of reason and arguments to abandon their errors and return to the Catholic Church. He did his best to refute its doctrines in a number of treatises and at first opposed any use of coercion against these heretics. A lost work of 397 repudiated coercion, and in an undated letter to a Donatist churchman he wrote: "I do not intend that anyone should be forced into the Catholic communion against his will. On the contrary, it is my aim that the truth may be revealed to all who are in error and that... with the help of God, it may be made manifest so as to induce all to follow and embrace it of their own accord.' To several Donatists he wrote in around 398 that those who maintain a false and perverted opinion but without 'obstinate ill will' – and especially those 'who have not originated their error by bold presumption' but received it from their parents or others, and who see truth with a readiness to be corrected when they have found it – are not to be included among heretics. The heretic himself, however, 'swollen with hateful pride and with the assertion of evil contradiction, is to be avoided like a mad man'.

"Nevertheless, Augustine eventually reversed his position and decided to endorse coercion. Looking back at this development some years later, he said that at first he had believed that no one should be forced into the unity of Christ, and that the Church should rely only on speaking, reasoning, and persuasion 'for fear of making pretended Catholics out of those whom we knew as open heretics'. But then proven facts caused him to give up this opinion when he saw Donatists in his own city 'converted to Catholic unity by the fear of imperial laws' and those in other cities recalled by the same means. Reclaimed Donatists, he contended, were now grateful that 'fear of the laws promulgated by temporal rulers who serve the Lord in fear has been so beneficial' to them.

“We first learn of Augustine’s change of mind in the treatise he wrote (ca. 400) as a reply to a letter by the Donatist bishop Parmenian, a leading spokesman of the movement. In this work he justified the intervention of the imperial government against the Donatists by making Saint Paul’s theology of the state, as the apostle outlined it in the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Romans (Romans 13.1-7). There Paul instructed Christians to be obedient to the higher powers as the minister ordained by God and armed with the sword for the repression of evildoers. In the light of this apostolic teaching, Augustine insisted that the emperors and the political authorities had the God-given right and duty to crush the sacrilege and schism of the Donatists, since they were as obligated to repress a false and evil religion as to prevent the crime of pagan idolatry. He further pointed out that the Donatists were guilty of many cruelties and had themselves appealed to the emperors in the past against the dissidents in their own church. Denying that those of them condemned to death were martyrs, he described them instead as killers of souls and, because of their violence, often killers of bodies.

“One of the arguments he put forward in defense of force in this work was his interpretation of Jesus’ parable of the tares in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 13.24-30). This famous text was destined to be cited often during subsequent centuries in discussions of toleration and persecution, and to occupy a prominent place in the tolerationist controversies of the era of the Protestant Reformation. The parable first likens the kingdom of heaven to a good seed and then relates how a man sowed good seed in the ground, whereupon his enemy came in the night and planted tares, or weeds, there as well. When the wheat appeared, so did the tares. The man’s servants asked their master if they should pull up the tares, but he forbade them lest they also uproot the wheat. He ordered that both should be left to grow until the harvest, and then the reapers would remove and burn the tares and gather the wheat into the barn. The parable’s point would seem to be that good people and sinners alike should be allowed to await the Last Judgement to receive their due, when God would reward the good with the kingdom of heaven and punish the bad with the flames of hell. Augustine, however, drew from it a very different lesson: if the bad seed is known, it should be uprooted. According to his explanation, the only reason the master left the tares to grow until the harvest was the fear that uprooting them sooner would harm the grain. When this fear does not exist because it is evident which is the good seed, and when someone’s crime is notorious and so execrable that it is indefensible, then it is right to use severe discipline against it, for the more perversity is corrected, the more carefully charity is safeguarded. With the help of this interpretation, which reversed the parable’s meaning, Augustine was able not only to justify the Roman government’s repression of the Donatists but to provide a wider reason for religious persecution by the civil authorities.

“Augustine elaborated his position in favour of coercion in religion in a number of letters. In a lengthy epistle to the Donatist Vincent, he argued for the utility of coercion in inducing fear that can bring those who are subject to it to the right way of thinking. Maintaining that people could be changed for the better through the influence of fear, he concluded that ‘when the saving doctrine is added to useful fear’, then ‘the light of truth’ can drive out ‘the darkness of error’. To reinforce this view, he quoted the parable of the feast in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 14. 21-23), another of the texts that was to figure prominently in future tolerationist controversy. In this parable, a man prepared a great feast to which he invited many guests who failed to appear. After summoning from the city the poor, blind, and lame to come and eat, he found that room still remained, so he ordered his servants to ‘go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in [compelle intrare in the Latin Vulgate], that My house may be filled’. ‘Do you think,’ Augustine asked in a comment on this passage, ‘that no one should be forced to do right, when you read that the master of the house said to his servants, “Whomever you find, compel them to come in”’. He referred also to the example of the conversion of the apostle Paul, who ‘was forced by the great violence of Christ’s compulsion to acknowledge and hold the truth’ (Acts 9.3-18). The main point, he claimed, was not whether anyone was forced to do something, but whether the purpose of doing so was right or wrong. While no one could be made good against his will, the fear of punishment could persuade a person to repudiate a false doctrine and embrace the truth he had previously denied, as had happened to many Donatists who had thankfully become Catholics and now detested their diabolical separation.

“In dealing with heresy, Augustine thus laid great stress on what might be called the pedagogy of fear to effect a change of heart. He did not see coercion and free will as opposites in religious choice but claimed that fear plays a part in spontaneous acts of the will and may serve a good end. In one of his most important statements on the subject, contained in a letter of 417 to Boniface, the Roman governor of Africa, he propounded a distinction between two kinds of persecution. ‘[T]here is an unjust persecution,’ he said, ‘which the wicked inflict on the Church of Christ, and ... a just persecution which the Church of Christ inflicts on the wicked.’ The Church persecutes from love, the Donatists from hatred; the Church in order to correct error, the Donatists to hurl men into error. While the Church strives to save the Donatists from perdition, the latter in their fury kill Catholics to feed their passion for cruelty. Augustine was convinced that the coercion of heretics was therefore a great mercy because it rescued them from lying demons so that they could be healed in the Catholic fold. He rejected the objection of those who said that the apostles had never called upon the kings of the earth to enforce religion, since in the apostles’ time there had been no Christian emperor to whom they could appeal. It was necessary and right, however, for kings to forbid and restrain with religious severity actions contrary to God’s commandments, and

to serve God by sanctioning laws that commanded goodness and prohibited its opposite.

“While admitting that it was better to lead people to the worship of God by teaching than to force them through fear of suffering, Augustine nevertheless averred that the latter way could not be neglected. Experience proved, he claimed, that for many heretics it had been a blessing to be driven out by fear of bodily pain to undergo instruction in the truth and then follow up with actions what they had learned in words. Schismatics, he noted, protested that men have freedom to believe or not to believe, and that Christ never used force on anyone. To this objection he countered with his previous argument that Christ had first compelled Paul to cease his persecution of the Christian Church by striking him blind at his conversion and only then taught him. ‘It is a wonderful thing,’ he said, ‘how he [Paul] who came to the gospel under the compulsion of bodily suffering labored more in the gospel than all the others who were called by words alone.’ Once again he drew on the injunction compelle intrare in the Gospel of Luke to affirm that the Catholic Church was in accord with God when it compelled heretics and schismatics to come in. In other letters he denied that the ‘evil will’ should be left to its freedom, and cited not only this same parable and the example of Christ’s compulsion of Paul, but also God’s restraint of the Israelites from doing evil and compelling them to enter the land of promise (Exodus 15.22-27), as proof of the Church’s justice in using coercion.

“Although after his change of mind Augustine consistently approved the policy of subjecting heretics to coercion, he never desired that they should be killed. In writing to Donatists, he often stated that he and his brethren loved them and acted for their good, and that if they hated the Catholic Church, it was because ‘we do not allow you to go astray and be lost’. Donatists had been subject to previous imperial legislation against heresy, but between 405 and 410 the emperor Honorius decreed a number of heavy penalties against them that put them outside the protection of the law for their seditious actions; he ordered their heresy to be put down in ‘blood and proscription’. Augustine frequently interceded with the Roman authorities to spare their lives. In 408 he wrote to the proconsul of Africa urging Christian clemency and praying that though heretics [should] be made to feel the effect of the laws against them, they should not be put to death, despite deserving the extreme punishment, in the hope that they might be converted. To another high official he pleaded in behalf of some Donatists tried for murder and other violent acts that they should be deprived of their freedom but not executed that they might have the chance to repent.

“Although repression weakened Donatism, it failed to eliminate this deeply rooted heresy, which survived until the later seventh century when the Islamic conquest of North Africa destroyed every form of Christianity in this region. In the course of his career, Augustine, who was not only an

outstanding thinker but a man of keen and sensitive conscience, wrestled strenuously with the problem of heresy and the achievement of Catholic unity by the use of coercion... 'Pride', he once wrote, 'is the mother of all heretics,' and fear could break down this pride and thus act as an auxiliary in the process of conversion. Whether the heretic was really sincere in professing a change of mind under the threat of bodily pain was a question that could best be left to God. Augustine certainly did not recommend the death penalty for heretics but strove tirelessly to save their souls from eternal perdition. He supported their repression by the Roman imperial government in the hope of restoring them to the Catholic Church, and because, as he said in a letter to some Donatists, 'nothing can cause more complete death to the soul than freedom to disseminate error'.⁵⁹⁹

St. Augustine's scriptural justification for his teaching here has seemed to many to be forced and artificial. However, it is more difficult to refute his general contention that *some* form of physical coercion practised against inveterate sinners and heretics – but not extending to execution, for that would be "uprooting the tares" – is justified. Just as God sends all kinds of physical calamities on men in order to humble their pride and make them examine themselves and become more responsive to the true teaching, so for the same reasons (and also to protect the young and the weak in mind) earthly rulers should punish those who publicly blaspheme God or distort His teaching in a particularly serious manner. Certainly, such punishments were accepted by almost all Christian societies, including the Byzantine and Russian empires, until very recent times. Only in our post-Christian times has it seemed logical and right to imprison a man for slandering another man, but to allow the vilest slanderers of Almighty God to go scot-free...

Underlying the argument that heresy should not be punished, - physically, at any rate, - there seems to be the false idea that the sins of man can be divided into "mental" and "physical", and that only physical sins (murder, theft) need to be punished physically. However, as Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov writes: "Man is a bodily being. Moral 'persuasion' is inseparable from moral 'coercion', and in certain cases also from physical 'violence'. If one says: 'Act through moral persuasion, but do not dare to resort to physical violence', this is either absurdity or hypocrisy. Every conviction sooner or later unfailingly finds its expression in forms of physical action for the simple reason that man is not [only] spirit and lives in a physical form. All our acts represent a union of spiritual and physical acts. If a man does something, it is unfailingly accompanied by physical actions. This relates both to good and to evil. One can oppose evil sometimes by moral persuasions, but at other times it is impossible to resist it otherwise than physically, and then 'resistance' and 'violence' are morally obligatory."⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁹ Zagorin, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-32, 33.

⁶⁰⁰ Tikhomirov, "O Smysle Vojny" ("On the Meaning of War"), in *Khristianstvo i Politika* (*Christianity and Politics*), Moscow: GUP "Oblizdat", 1999, pp. 206-207 (in Russian).

Roman Catholic Intolerance

The balanced and Orthodox view, therefore, is that persuasion is always to be preferred to compulsion, but that physical punishments *excluding* execution are appropriate for particularly dangerous and stubborn heretics, both in order to humble them and make them more amenable to correction, and in order to protect those who might be corrupted by their words. However, this attitude began to be undermined in the West from the time of Charlemagne, who attempted to “convert” multitudes of Saxons in the “wild east” of his domains at the edge of the sword. After the fall of the West from Orthodoxy in 1054, the acceptance of conversion by force became widespread. Or rather, the view now was that if someone would not be converted voluntarily, he might as well be killed, since he was clearly worthless and destined for hell fire anyway...

This view was most notoriously expressed in the crusades. Thus in the first crusade of 1098-99, the Muslim and Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem were slaughtered *en masse*. Again, Bernard of Clairvaux said about the Wendish (Baltic) crusade of 1147: “We expressly forbid that for any reason whatsoever they should make a truce with those peoples, whether for money or for tribute, until such time as, with God’s help, either their religion or their nation be destroyed.”⁶⁰¹ Both the religion and the nation were duly destroyed... For, as Bernard stressed “the knight of Christ need fear no sin in killing the foe, he is a minister of God for the punishment of the wicked. In the death of a pagan a Christian is glorified, because Christ is glorified.”⁶⁰²

Even the Orthodox Russians were considered to be in need of this militaristic kind of conversion. Thus in 1150 Bishop Matthew of Crakow asked Bernard to “exterminate the godless rites and customs of the Ruthenians [Russians]”.⁶⁰³ But even the Pope was repulsed by the crusaders’ sacking of Constantinople in 1204, an event that finally sealed the schism between East and West. And yet in 1209, the same Pope, Innocent III, gave an expedition against the Cathar heretics the status of a crusade. At Muret in 1213 the Catholic crusaders from northern France overcame the Cathars of southern France and a terrible inquisition and bloodletting followed. Indeed, according to Barbara Ehrenreich, “the crusades against the European heretics represented the ultimate fusion of church and military... In return for an offer of indulgences, northern French knights ‘flayed Provence [home of the Cathars], hanging, beheading, and burning ‘with unspeakable joy.’ When the city of Béziers was taken and the papal legate was asked how to distinguish

⁶⁰¹ Bernard, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, in Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, London: HarperCollins, 1997, pp. 487-488.

⁶⁰² Aristides Papadakis, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994, p. 65.

⁶⁰³ Wil van den Bercken, *Holy Russia and Christian Europe*, London: SCM Press, 1999, p. 125.

between the Cathars and the regular Catholics, he gave the famous reply: 'Kill them all; God will know which are His...'”⁶⁰⁴

This slaughter was legalised at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, in which it was declared a bounden duty to kill heretics: “If a temporal Lord neglects to fulfil the demand of the Church that he shall purge his land of this contamination of heresy, he shall be excommunicated by the metropolitan and other bishops of the province. If he fails to make amends within a year, it shall be reported to the Supreme Pontiff, who shall pronounce his vassals absolved from fealty to him and offer his land to Catholics. The latter shall exterminate the heretics, possess the land without dispute and preserve it in the true faith... Catholics who assume the cross and devote themselves to the extermination of heretics shall enjoy the same indulgence and privilege as those who go to the Holy Land...”⁶⁰⁵

The theological justification for the extermination of heretics was given some years later by Thomas Aquinas: “There is the sin, whereby they deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be shut off from the world by death. For it is a much more serious matter to corrupt faith through which comes the soul’s life, than to forge money, through which temporal life is supported. Hence if forgers of money or other malefactors are straightway justly put to death by secular princes, with much more justice can heretics, immediately upon conviction, be not only excommunicated but also put to death.”⁶⁰⁶

We can agree with Aquinas that heresy is a more serious sin than forging money. But, as we have seen, if we follow the natural (non-Augustinian) interpretation of the parable of the tares, the Lord expressly forbids the execution of heretics for a very specific reason – “lest you uproot the wheat together with the tares”.

Such a warning and prohibition was especially applicable to the Roman Catholic West after the foundation of the Inquisition in 1231, when the inquisitors themselves were heretics and many of their victims were probably innocent of the charges against them. For in the Inquisition only one verdict was possible: guilty. As the *Libro Negro* of the inquisitors said, “if, notwithstanding all the means employed, the unfortunate wretch still denies his guilt, he is to be considered as a victim of the devil: and, as such, deserves no compassion...: he is a son of perdition. Let him perish among the damned...”⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁴ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites*, London: Virago Press, 1998, p. 172.

⁶⁰⁵ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, third edition, 1999, p. 147.

⁶⁰⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ii. Q. xi; in Bettenson & Maunder, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.

⁶⁰⁷ Peter de Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, p. 164.

The Revival of Tolerance

In the early sixteenth century, in the wake of the resurrection of the old pagan ideas of the dignity of man, the pagan idea of religious toleration also revived. We say "pagan", because the justification adduced for religious toleration was not Orthodox Christian, but what we would now call ecumenist: a belief that religious differences are not worth fighting and dying over. This humanist attitude would not survive the appearance of Protestantism in the 1520s and the religious wars that followed; but it revived again in the more sceptical eighteenth century.

We find it well expressed in Sir Thomas More's fantasy-manifesto, *Utopia: the Best State of the Commonwealth* (1516). On the island of Utopia, or Land of Nowhere, King Utopus has introduced a social system characterized by common ownership of property and religious toleration, with no official church or religion.

"King Utopus, even at the first beginning hearing that the inhabitants of the land were before his coming thither at continual dissension and strife among themselves for their religions, perceiving also that this common dissension (whiles every several sect took several parts in fighting for his country) was the only occasion of his conquest over them all, as soon as he had gotten the victory, first of all made a decree that it should be lawful for every man to favour and follow what religion he would, and that he might do the best he could to bring other to his opinion, so that he did it peaceably, gently, quietly, and soberly, without hasty and contentious rebuking and inveighing against others. If he could not by fair and gentle speech induce them unto his opinion, yet he should use no kind of violence, and refrain from displeasing and seditious words. To him that would vehemently and fervently in this cause strive and contend was decreed banishment or bondage.

"This law did King Utopus make, not only for the maintenance of peace, which he saw through continual contention and mortal hatred utterly extinguished, but also because he thought this decree should make for the furtherance of religion... Furthermore, though there be one religion which alone is true, and all other vain and superstitious, yet did he well foresee (so that the matter were handled with reason and sober modesty) that the truth of its own power would at the last issue out and come to light. But if contention and debate in that behalf should continually be used, as the worst men be most obstinate and stubborn and in their evil opinion most constant, he perceived that then the best and holiest religion would be trodden underfoot and destroyed by most vain superstitions, even as good corn is by thorns and weeds overgrown and choked."⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁸ More, *Utopia*, book II, pp. 119-120.

More seems to be hovering here between two contrary propositions: that free debate will ultimately lead to the triumph of truth ("the truth of its own power would at the last issue out and come to light"), and that this freedom will be used by the worst men for the triumph of heresy ("then the best and holiest religion would be trodden underfoot"). More himself came to favour the second proposition over the first, and for nearly two hundred years thereafter, it would be the second proposition that would be believed by the majority of men.⁶⁰⁹ As late as 1646 Thomas Edwards wrote: "Religious toleration is the greatest of all evils; it will bring in first scepticism in doctrine and looseness of life, then atheism".⁶¹⁰

The beginning of a politics of toleration can be seen in Germany in 1555, when the bitter struggle between Catholicism and Lutheranism was brought to an end temporarily by the Peace of Augsburg, which enshrined the cuius regio eius religio formula: the religion of a country, whether Catholic or Lutheran, was determined by the faith of its ruler. This Peace may not have been much comfort to a Catholic living in a Lutheran state, or to a Lutheran living in a Catholic state, but it least recognized a plurality of religions in Germany as a whole. But the peace did not prove lasting: in 1618 there began the still bitterer Thirty Years War. This came to an end with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which modified the Augsburgian framework to allow Calvinism as a third religious alternative for rulers, acknowledging that "subjects whose religion differs from that of their prince are to have equal rights with his other subjects" (V. 35).

We see a similar pattern of limited tolerance followed by renewed persecution in France. In 1598 the Catholic King Henry IV promulgated the Edict of Nantes, which put an end to the bloody war between the French Catholics and Calvinist Huguenots, keeping Catholicism as the official religion of France while giving religious freedom to the Protestants. But in the early seventeenth century the Protestants rebelled several times, which led to a revoking of their privileges and the complete revocation of the Edict by Louis XIV in 1685. This elicited the emigration of many thousands of Huguenots to other countries. But Louis' revival of Catholic militarism was finally quenched in the early eighteenth century after the failure of his wars against Protestant Holland and England.

Of course, some relaxation of religious persecution was only to be expected, when in Germany, for example, as a result of the Thirty Years War, between a third and a half of the population lay dead. No society can continue to take such losses without disappearing altogether. Believers on both sides of the conflict were exhausted. They longed for a rest from

⁶⁰⁹ In *Dialogue concerning Heresies* (1529), More advocated the execution of the new breed of heretics, the Protestants. He himself was executed by Henry VIII for his faithfulness to the Pope.

⁶¹⁰ Edwards, in Roy Porter, *Enlightenment*, London: Penguin, 2000, p. 105.

religious passions and the opportunity to rebuild their shattered economies in peace. It was as a result of this cooling of religious passions, and rekindling of commercial ones, that the idea of religious toleration was born. Or rather, *reborn*. For, as we have seen, even the fiercest of ancient despotisms of the past had gone through phases of religious toleration – for example, the Roman empire in the late third century, or the Mongols in the thirteenth.

The first country to introduce religious toleration in a systematic and enduring manner was Holland. Shortly after the Union of Utrecht (1579), when the seven northern provinces resolved to fight for their independence against Spain, the Dutch declared that not only all Protestant sects, but also Jews and even – most surprisingly, given the current war against Catholic Spain – Roman Catholics were given freedom to practise their beliefs. All strictly religious faiths were given liberty alongside the newest and most important faith, Capitalism. As the English Catholic poet Andrew Marvell put it in his poem, “The Character of Holland” (1653):

*Hence Amsterdam, Turk-Christian-Pagan-Jew,
Staple of Sects and Mint of Schism grew;
That Bank of Conscience, where not one so strange
Opinion but finds Credit, and Exchange
In vain for Catholicks ourselves we bear;
The universal church is onely there.*

Holland has maintained its reputation of being in the vanguard of liberty, toleration and permissiveness to the present day. It was not by chance that when the foremost expression of the modern ecumenical movement, the “universal church” of the World Council of Churches, was founded in 1948, its centre was designated in Amsterdam...

Other countries did not immediately follow the lead given by Holland and Germany. Thus in England religious passions continued to exclude toleration until after the triumph of Cromwell. For, as Winstanley wrote in *The Law of Freedom* (1651), Cromwell “became the main stickler for liberty of conscience without any limitation. This toleration became his masterpiece in politics; for it procured him a party that stuck close in all cases of necessity.”

Cromwell’s supporter, the poet John Milton, produced a whole tract, *Areopagitica* (1646) in favour of freedom of speech and the abolition of censorship. “Let her [Truth] and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?”

Besides, “how”, he asked ironically, “shall the licensers themselves be confided in, unless we can confer upon them, or they assume to themselves above all others in the Land, the grace of infallibility and uncorruptedness?”

Not was Calvinism an inherently tolerant creed. Calvin asked “why good magistrates shouldn’t draw the sword given them by heaven to repress the apostates who openly mock God and profane and violate his sanctuary”.⁶¹¹ And “the Calvinist dogma of predestination,” as Porter points out, “had bred ‘enthusiasm’, that awesome, irresistible and unfalsifiable conviction of personal infallibility.”⁶¹²

So the English revolutionaries were not the most tolerant of men... But the tide was turning. Shortly after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, King Charles II tried to persuade the English parliament to introduce religious toleration on the Dutch model, but failed. But in Samuel Butler’s *Hudibras* (1668) we can see people’s revulsion from the methods of the wars of religion:

*Such as do build their faith upon
The holy text of pike and gun
Decide all controversies by
Infallible artillery...
As if religion were intended
For nothing else but to be mended.*

And he described the rise of another, no less pernicious tendency – the enthronement of the love of money above every value:

*What makes all doctrines plain and clear?
About two hundred poundes a year.
And that which was true before
Proved false again? Two hundred more...*

English Liberalism

It was not until the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, when the Dutch King William was invited to accept the throne of England, that religious toleration began to become universally accepted by polite society in England. However, it was in need of a philosophical justification. This was provided by the English philosophers Hobbes and Locke, especially the latter.

Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651), published during Cromwell’s Protectorate, at first sight seems a recipe for intolerance – indeed, the most complete tyranny of the State over the religious beliefs of its citizens. For religious truth, according to Hobbes, was nothing other than that which the sovereign ruler declared it to be: “An opinion publicly appointed to be taught cannot be heresy; nor the Sovereign Princes that authorise them heretics.”⁶¹³

⁶¹¹ Zagorin, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁶¹² Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁶¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*; in Christopher Hill, “Thomas Hobbes and the Revolution in Political Thought”, *Puritanism and Revolution*, London: Penguin books, 1958, p. 277.

Being in favour of the absolute power of the sovereign, Hobbes was fiercely opposed to the other major power in traditional societies, religion, which he relegated to an instrument of government; so that the power of censorship passed, in his theory, entirely from the Church to the State.

However, Hobbes was not opposed to dissent so long as it did not lead to anarchy, "for such truth as opposeth no man's profit nor pleasure, is to all men welcome."⁶¹⁴ In fact, he did not believe in objective Truth, but only in "appetites and aversions, hopes and fears", and in the power of human reason to regulate them towards the desired end of public and private tranquillity. He was not anti-religious so much as a-religious.

Hobbesean indifference to religion was a step towards its toleration, but it did not go very far. It was Locke, according to Roy Porter, who became the real "high priest of toleration". "In an essay of 1667, which spelt out the key principles expressed in his later *Letters on Toleration*, Locke denied the prince's right to enforce religious orthodoxy, reasoning that the 'trust, power and authority' of the civil magistrate were vested in him solely to secure 'the good preservation and peace of men in that society'. Hence princely powers extended solely to externals, not to faith, which was a matter of conscience. Any state intervention in faith was 'meddling'.

"To elucidate the limits of those civil powers, Locke divided religious opinions and actions into three. First, there were speculative views and modes of divine worship. These had 'an absolute and universal right to toleration', since they did not affect society, being either private or God's business alone. Second, there were those – beliefs about marriage and divorce, for instance – which impinged upon others and hence were of public concern. These 'have a title also to toleration, but only so far as they do not tend to the disturbance of the State'. The magistrate might thus prohibit publication of such convictions if they would disturb the public good, but no one ought to be forced to forswear his opinion, for coercion bred hypocrisy. Third, there were actions good or bad in themselves. Respecting these, Locke held that civil rulers should have 'nothing to do with the good of men's soul or their concernments in another life' – it was for God to reward virtue and punish vice, and the magistrate's job simply to keep the peace. Applying such principles to contemporary realities, Locke advocated toleration, but with limits: Papists should not be tolerated, because their beliefs were 'absolutely destructive of all governments except the Pope's'; nor should atheists, since any oaths they took would be in bad faith."⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*; in Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

⁶¹⁵ According to the principles of this father of liberalism, therefore, communist parties should be banned, as well as the expression of communist opinions, first, because communists are atheists, and therefore cannot be trusted to keep their oaths, and secondly because they work towards the destruction of all non-communist governments. (V.M.)

“As a radical Whig in political exile in the Dutch republic, Locke wrote the first *Letter on Toleration*, which was published, initially in Latin, in 1689. Echoing the 1667 arguments, this denied that Christianity could be furthered by force. Christ was the Prince of Peace, his gospel was love, his means persuasion; persecution could not save souls. Civil and ecclesiastical government had contrary ends; the magistrate’s business lay in securing life, liberty and possessions, whereas faith was about the salvation of souls. A church should be a voluntary society, like a ‘club for claret’; it should be shorn of all sacerdotal pretensions. While Locke’s views were contested – Bishop Stillingfleet, for example, deemed them a ‘Trojan Horse’ – they nevertheless won favour in an age inclined, or resigned, to freedom of thought and expression in general.”⁶¹⁶

“Since you are pleased to enquire,” wrote Locke, “what are my thoughts about the mutual toleration of Christians in their different professions of religion, I must needs answer you freely, that I esteem that toleration to be the chief characteristical mark of the true church.”⁶¹⁷

As Smith interprets his thought: “Religion is a man’s private concern, his belief is part of himself, and he is the sole judge of the means to his own salvation. Persecution only creates hypocrites, while free opinion is the best guarantee of truth. Most ceremonies are indifferent; Christianity is simple; it is only theologians who have encrusted it with dogma. Sacerdotalism, ritual, orthodoxy, do not constitute Christianity if they are divorced from charity. Our attempts to express the truth of religion must always be imperfect and relative, and cannot amount to certainty... Church and State can be united if the Church is made broad enough and simple enough, and the State accepts the Christian basis. Thus religion and morality might be reunited, sectarianism would disappear with sacerdotalism; the Church would become the nation organised for goodness...”⁶¹⁸

Such lukewarmness would hardly have satisfied a truly religious nation; but from 1688 England’s religious zeal rapidly cooled, and to this day “toleration” represents for English Christianity the cardinal virtue, perhaps the only essential virtue, and certainly more important than true faith...

Nevertheless, it was ironic, in view of Locke’s anti-Catholicism, that the first ruler who legislated for tolerance was the Catholic King James II, who bestowed freedom of religion on Catholics, Anglicans and Non-Conformists in his *Declaration of Indulgence* (1688), declaring: “We cannot but heartily wish, as it will easily be believed, that all the people of our dominions were

⁶¹⁶ Porter, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-197.

⁶¹⁷ Locke, *A Letter concerning Toleration* (1689).

⁶¹⁸ A.L. Smith, “English Political Philosophy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, in *The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. VI; *The Eighteenth Century*, 1909, p. 813.

members of the Catholic Church; yet we humbly thank Almighty God, it is and has of long time been our constant sense and opinion (which upon divers occasions we have declared) that conscience ought not to be constrained nor people forced in matters of mere religion: it has ever been directly contrary to our inclination, as we think it is to the interest of government, which it destroys by spoiling trade, depopulating countries, and discouraging strangers, and finally, that it never obtained the end for which it was employed..."⁶¹⁹

The generosity shown by James to non-Catholics was not reciprocated by his Protestant successors, who, through the *Toleration Act* (1689) and *Declaration of Indulgence* (1690), re-imposed restrictions on the Catholics while removing them from the Protestants. To this day the heir to the British throne is still not allowed to marry a Catholic...

The justification given for this was purely secular: "Some ease to scrupulous consciences in the exercise of religion" was to be granted, since this "united their Majesties' Protestant subjects in interest and affection..."

In other words, tolerance was necessary in order to avoid the possibility of civil war between the Anglicans and the Non-Conformist Protestants.

For, as Porter goes on, "the so-called Toleration Act of 1689 had an eye first and foremost to practical politics, and did not grant toleration. Officially an 'Act for Exempting their Majesties' Protestant Subjects, Dissenting from the Church of England, from the Penalties of Certain Laws', it stated that Trinitarian Protestant Nonconformists who swore the oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance and accepted thirty-six of the Thirty-nine Articles [the official confession of the Anglican Church] could obtain licences as ministers or teachers. Catholics and non-Christians did not enjoy the rights of public worship under the Act - and non-Trinitarians were left subject to the old penal laws. Unitarians, indeed, were further singled out by the Blasphemy Act of 1697, which made it an offence to 'deny any one of the persons in the holy Trinity to be God'. There was no official Toleration Act for them until 1813, and in Scotland the death penalty could still be imposed - as it was in 1697 - for denying the Trinity.

"Scope for prosecution remained. Ecclesiastical courts still had the power of imprisoning for atheism, blasphemy and heresy (maximum term: six months). Occasional indictments continued under the common law, and Parliament could order books to be burned. Even so, patriots justly proclaimed that England was, alongside the United Provinces, the first nation to have embraced religious toleration - a fact that became a matter of national pride. 'My island was now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects; and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I

⁶¹⁹ Bettenson & Maunder, *op.cit.*, p. 342.

looked,’ remarked Defoe’s castaway hero, Robinson Crusoe; ‘we had but three subjects, and they were of different religions. My man Friday was a pagan and a cannibal, and the Spaniard was a Papist: however, I allowed liberty of conscience throughout my dominions’.

“Two developments made toleration a *fait accompli*: the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695⁶²⁰, and the fact that England had already been sliced up into sects. It was, quipped Voltaire, a nation of many faiths but only one sauce, a recipe for confessional tranquillity if culinary tedium: ‘If there were only one religion in England, there would be danger of despotism, if there were only two they would cut each other’s throats; but there are thirty, and they live in peace’ [*Letters concerning the English Nation*].”⁶²¹

The more religious justifications of tolerance offered by More or Milton were no longer in fashion. In the modern age that was beginning, religious tolerance was advocated, not because it ensured the eventual triumph of the truth, but because it prevented war. And war, of course, “spoiled trade”...

“To enlightened minds,” writes Porter, “the past was a nightmare of barbarism and bigotry: fanaticism had precipitated bloody civil war and the axing of Charles Stuart, that man of blood, in 1649. Enlightened opinion repudiated old militancy for modern civility. But how could people adjust to each other? Sectarianism, that sword of the saints which had divided brother from brother, must cease; rudeness had to yield to refinement. Voltaire saw this happening before his very eyes in England’s ‘free and peaceful assemblies’: ‘Take a view of the *Royal Exchange* in London, a place more venerable than many courts of justice, where the representatives of all nations meet for the benefit of mankind. There the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian transact together as tho’ they all profess’d the same religion, and give the name of Infidel to none but bankrupts. There the Presbyterian confides in the Anabaptist, and the Churchman depends on the Quaker’s word. And all are satisfied’. [*Letters concerning the English Nation*]. This passage squares with the enlightened belief that commerce would unite those whom creeds rent asunder. Moreover, by depicting men content, and content to be content – differing, but agreeing to differ – the *philosophe* pointed towards a rethinking of the *summum bonum*, a shift from God-fearingness to a selfhood more psychologically oriented. The Enlightenment thus translated the ultimate question ‘How can I be saved?’ into the pragmatic ‘How can I be happy?’”⁶²²

⁶²⁰ This put an end to pre-publication censorship. From now on, as Porter remarks, “though laws against blasphemy, obscenity and seditious libel remained on the statute book, and offensive publications could still be presented before the courts, the situation was light years away from that obtaining in France, Spain or almost anywhere else in *ancien régime* Europe.” (*op. cit.*, p. 31).

⁶²¹ Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁶²² Porter, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

The American Idea

During the eighteenth century, under the influence of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the idea of religious toleration underwent a subtle but important change in Europe. This was the change from toleration as “a utilitarian expedient to avoid destructive strife” to toleration as “an intrinsic value”.⁶²³ It became a dogma of the Enlightenment and Masonry that a ruler could not impose his religion on his subjects.⁶²⁴ In fact, certain rulers, such as Frederick the Great, adopted an attitude of complete religious indifference. However, the *complete* separation of Church and State, religion and politics, was still unheard-of in Europe. This idea was first put into practice in *the United States*, a land founded mainly by Calvinist refugees fleeing from the State’s persecution of their religion. It marks the furthest application of the principle of negative liberty, freedom *from*. For what the Calvinist refugees valued above all was the freedom to practice their religion free from any interference from the State.

K.N. Leontiev writes: “The people who left Old England and laid the foundations of the States of America were all extremely religious people who did not want to make any concessions with regard to their burning personal faith and had not submitted to the State Church of Episcopal Anglicanism, not out of progressive indifference, but out of godliness.

“The Catholics, Puritans, Quakers, all were agreed about one thing – that there should be mutual tolerance, not out of coldness, but out of necessity. And so the State created by them for the reconciliation of all these burning religious extremes found its centre of gravity outside religion. Tolerance was imposed by circumstances, there was no inner indifferentism.”⁶²⁵

⁶²³ Isaiah Berlin, “Nationalism”, in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, London: Pimlico, 1998, p. 581.

⁶²⁴ According to Enlightenment philosophers, “physical matter in identical circumstances would always behave in the same way: all stones dropped from a great height fall to the ground. What applied to the physical world applied to the human world too. All human beings in human circumstances other than their own would act in very different ways. How human beings conducted themselves was not accidental, but the accident of birth into particular societies at particular moments in those societies’ development determined what kinds of people they would eventually turn out to be. The implications of this view were clear: if you were born in Persia, instead of France, you would have been a Muslim, not a Catholic; if you had been born poor and brought up in bad company you would probably end up a thief; if you had been born a Protestant in northern Europe, rather than a Catholic in southern Europe, then you would be tolerant and love liberty, whereas southerners tended to be intolerant and to put up with autocratic government. If what human beings were like was the necessary effect of the circumstances they were born to, then nobody had a right to be too censorious about anybody else. A certain toleration of other ways of doing things, and a certain moderation in the criticism of social and political habits, customs and institutions, seemed the natural corollary of the materialistic view of mankind” (McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 297).

⁶²⁵ Leontiev, “Vizantizm i Slavianstvo” (“Byzantinism and Slavism”), in *Vostok, Rossia i Slavianstvo (The East, Russia and Slavism)*, Moscow, 1996, p. 124 (in Russian). As a matter of

"After the Revolution," however, writes Karen Armstrong, "when the newly independent states drew up their constitutions, God was mentioned in them only in the most perfunctory manner. In 1786, Thomas Jefferson disestablished the Anglican church in Virginia; his bill declared that coercion in matters of faith was 'sinfull and tyrannical', that truth would prevail if people were allowed their own opinions, and that there should be a 'wall of separation' between religion and politics. The bill was supported by the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians of Virginia, who resented the privileged position of the Church of England in the state. Later the other states followed Virginia's lead, and disestablished their own churches, Massachusetts being the last one to do so, in 1833. In 1787, when the federal Constitution was drafted at the Philadelphia Convention, God was not mentioned at all, and in the Bill of Rights (1789), the First Amendment of the Constitution formally separated religion from the state: 'Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof'. Henceforth faith would be a private and voluntary affair in the United States. This was a revolutionary step and has been hailed as one of the great achievements of the Age of Reason. The thinking behind it was indeed inspired by the tolerant philosophy of the Enlightenment, but the Founding Fathers were also moved by more pragmatic considerations. They knew that the federal Constitution was essential to preserve the unity of the states, but they also realized that if the federal government established any single one of the Protestant denominations and made it the official faith of the United States, the Constitution would not be approved. Congregationalist Massachusetts, for example, would never ratify a Constitution that established the Anglican Church. This was also the reason why Article VI, Section 3, of the Constitution abolished religious tests for office in the federal government. There *was* idealism in the Founders' decision to disestablish religion and to secularize politics, but the new nation could not base its identity on any one sectarian option and retain the loyalty of all its subjects. The needs of the modern state demanded that it be tolerant and, therefore, secular."⁶²⁶

The religious toleration of the United States has undoubtedly been a precious boon for the immigrants from many countries and of many faiths who have fled there to escape persecution. But it is based on a false assumption from an Orthodox Christian point of view. That assumption was well expressed by a law report in 1917: "If... the attitude of the law both civil and criminal towards all religions depends fundamentally on the safety of the State and not on the doctrines or metaphysics of those who profess them, it is not necessary to consider whether or why any given body was relieved by the

fact, the Puritans of Massachusetts and Long Island were far from tolerant in the beginning. The impetus to toleration came mainly from the Quakers of Pennsylvania.

⁶²⁶ Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: a History of Fundamentalism*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2001, p. 85.

law at one time or frowned on at another, or to analyse creeds and tenets, Christian and other.”⁶²⁷

However, as we have seen, the idea that the safety of the State is completely independent of the religion confessed by its citizens is false. For, as Solomon says: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14.34). The history of the people of Israel, and of several New Testament nations, demonstrates that their prosperity depended crucially on their fulfilling of the commandments of God. The idea that the religion of a State has no bearing on its prosperity could occur only to a person who has not studied history (or any human science) or believes in a Deist conception of God as a Being Who created the world but does not interfere in its history thereafter. In fact, the religion, and hence the morality, of a nation’s rulers is a vitally important factor determining its destiny.

Therefore, according to Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, the state has the duty to put some limits on religious freedom for the sake of preserving that religious consciousness which forms its own spirit. “The idea [of religious tolerance] appears good, but it is fair only when the subject and limits are precisely and correctly determined. The idea of protecting the unity of the ruling confession in the state (thereby preserving the popular spirit – a source of strength for the state and an important aid to governance) should come before the idea of religious tolerance and should impose limits on the latter.”⁶²⁸

Also false is the idea that anyone worshipping “according to the dictates of his own conscience” is for that reason alone worthy of protection. “Conscience” very often refers, not to the real voice of God speaking in the soul of man, but to any voice, however demonic, that a man *thinks* is the voice of God. It is therefore inherently dangerous to consider a religion worthy of protection, not because it is objectively true, but because the believers are sincere in their beliefs, whether these are in fact true or false, profitable to society or profoundly harmful to it. False religion is always harmful, both for its adherents, and for those right-believers who are tempted away from the right path by them. We would never accept the argument that a poison can be sold freely so long as its traders sincerely believe it to be harmless or because the traders “are accountable to God alone” for the harm they cause. And the spiritual poison of heresy is far more harmful than material poison, in that it leads, not simply to the temporal dissolution of the body, but to the eternal damnation of the soul.

⁶²⁷ Bowman v. Secular Society, Ltd. (1917) A.C. 406. Quoted in Huntingdon Cairns (ed.), *The Limits of Art*, Washington D.C.: Pantheon Books, 1948, p. 1353.

⁶²⁸ Quoted in George Frazee, “Skeptical Reformer, Staunch Tserkovnik: Metropolitan Philaret and the Great Reforms”, in Vladimir Tsurikov (ed.), *Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow 1782-1867*, Jordanville: Variable Press, 2003, pp. 169-170.

Of course, it is another question *how* a false religion is to be combated. Crude persecution is counter-productive. Persuasion and education that respects the freewill of the heretic is undoubtedly the best means of combating false belief. Then he is able to come freely, with the help of God's grace and by the free exercise of his reasoning power, to a knowledge of the truth.

However, what about those who are too young to reason for themselves or for some other reason unable to exercise their reasoning powers? If allowed to live in a truly Christian atmosphere, these weak ones may become stronger in faith and have less need of the protection of the State. But while they are still weak, the influence of heretics, if unchecked, could lead them astray. It is a generally accepted principle that the young and the weak are entitled to the protection of the State against those who would exploit their weakness to their destruction. So in cases where the heretic stubbornly continues to lead others astray, physical forms of oppression may be justified. The spiritually strong may refuse to offer physical resistance to religious evil, choosing instead the path of voluntary martyrdom. But the spiritually weak cannot choose this path, and must be protected from the evil, if necessary by physical means. Indeed, one could argue that the government that does not protect the weak in this way is itself persecuting them, laying them open to the most evil and destructive influences. For, as Sir Thomas More's King Utopus understood, "the worst men be most obstinate and stubborn and in their evil opinion most constant", so that without some restraint on them "the best and holiest religion would be trodden underfoot by most vain superstitions, even as good corn is by thorns and weeds overgrown and choked."⁶²⁹

The Russian Idea

The Russian State accepted the Byzantine laws on heresy without substantial alteration. "The laws concerning heretics in Russia and Byzantium were as follows. In Byzantium the state laws envisaged the death penalty for apostates and Manichaeans. That is how they related to a series of public and more dangerous crimes (it was not the beliefs themselves that were punished, but the spreading of them), but other heresies were sometimes subsumed under these two large categories. Russia fully accepted the Byzantine laws (changing several of them in form), and already from the Ustav of St. Vladimir until the Ulozhenie of Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich, native laws envisaged such penalties as death for 'blasphemy' (burning, ch. 1, article 2 of the Ulozhenie), 'for seducing from the Orthodox Faith into Islam [Judaism]' (burning, ch. 22, article 24), 'wizardry' (burning), sacrilege (death penalty), etc."⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ More, *Utopia*, book II, pp. 119-120.

⁶³⁰ "Iosif Volotsky", <http://webforum.land.ru/mes.php?id=4176471&fs=0&board=287&1st=&arhv> (09/08/02) (in Russian).

In practice, however, the Russian State – again, following Byzantium – very rarely executed heretics. One of the very few exceptions was the execution of a few leaders of the Judaizing heresy at the beginning of the sixteenth century by Great Prince Basil III. Some have speculated that such harshness betrayed the influence of the contemporary Spanish Inquisition, which was also directed primarily at Judaizing heretics. Be that as it may, it should be remembered that the Judaizing heresy represented a most serious threat to both the Church *and the State* of Moscow. The executions elicited protests from the Trans-Volga elders, but were supported by St. Joseph of Volotsk.

St. Joseph's argument was set out in his work, *The Enlightener*. Essentially, he argued that heretics should be executed only if they aggressively try and bring others into their heresy. He pointed out that the holy apostles and fathers did not seek the punishment of heretics when they kept themselves to themselves, but only when they sought to corrupt others to their false teachings:

“In *The Acts of the Apostles* there is a description of how, when the holy Apostles Peter and John came to Samaria, Simon Magus offered him silver and said: ‘Give me the ability that upon whomever I lay my hand he receives the Holy Spirit’ – and the holy apostles did not condemn him to death at that time. But when he came to complete dishonour, and began to corrupt the pious, and seduce the believers, then they condemned him to death.

“St. John the Theologian acted in exactly the same way. As long as Kinop lived in his own house and did not seduce any of the faithful, he was not condemned. But when he arrived in the city intending to corrupt the believers, he was condemned to death. The holy Apostle Philip also acted in exactly the same way: he did not go to the chief priest, and did not condemn him; but when he saw that the chief priest had come only in order to corrupt the pious, then he condemned him to death.

“The Apostle Paul acted in a similar way: he did not begin to search out Elymas the sorcerer, to condemn or destroy him. But when he saw that he was seducing the Proconsul from the faith, he condemned him so that he became blind and could not see the sun.

“When St. John Chrysostom saw that the Arians were living in Constantinople and caused no harm to any of the Orthodox, he himself also did no evil to them. But when he saw that they were occupied in seduction and were composing a series of songs and hymns so as to shake faith in the Unity of Essence, he asked the Emperor to drive him out of the city.

“In exactly the same way when St. Porphyrius, Bishop of Gaza, saw that the Manichaean heretics were living in Gaza and were not seducing any of the

Orthodox, he did not condemn them. But when he saw that they had come there to seduce the Christians, he condemned them at first to dumbness, and then to death.

“In the same way St. Leo, Bishop of Catania, did not at first condemn Liodorus the heretic to death. But when he saw that he had come to the church and was sowing confusion in order to seduce those who were faithful to piety, he went out of the church and arranged that Liodorus should be burned with fire, and then he returned to the church and served the Divine service.

“In the same way when St. Theodore, Bishop of Edessa, found many heretics in Edessa who did not want to cause any particular harm to the Orthodox, he did not do them any evil. But when he saw that they had gathered to do such an evil, to seduce the Orthodox and steal church property, he even set off for Babylon and asked the Emperor to destroy the heretics.

“And there are many further cases in the Divine Writings, when heretics holding to certain heresies and not doing any harm to the Orthodox are not judged by our Holy and God-bearing Fathers. But when they see that the faithless heretics are intending to seduce the Orthodox, then they condemn them. That is how we, too, should act...”⁶³¹

The arguments for and against religious toleration became especially fierce towards the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century in Russia. Although the Orthodox Church retained a privileged position in Russia, as she had done in Byzantium, the restrictions on other confessions were light, and did not constitute religious persecution in any meaningful sense (in spite of much, especially Jewish, propaganda to the contrary). Moreover, many argued that if these restrictions were removed completely while keeping the Orthodox Church in the dependence on the State imposed on her by Peter the Great, the Orthodox Church would be in fact *less* free than other confessions. Nevertheless, liberals and atheists attacked the restrictions on non-Orthodox confessions in the name of freedom of conscience and the word.

According to the famous St. Ambrose of Optina (+1891), this propaganda was entirely western in origin and was very harmful, especially to the educated people. “Was any benefit gained by religious tolerance in Russia in relation to foreign nations: the French and others, not to speak of the Jew, who, as a people rejected by God, is despised by all, and nowhere has any significance? Religious tolerance of the indicated nations could have no influence on the simple people, because the way of life of our simple people is completely different from the condition and situation of these nations: but in the circle of Russian educated people this religious tolerance had a great

⁶³¹ St. Joseph, “Slovo ob Osuzhdenii Eretikov” (Sermon on the Condemnation of Heretics) ®.

influence on morality and on their domestic way of life. Now many educated people bear only the name of Orthodox, but in actual fact completely adhere to the morals and customs of those of foreign lands and foreign beliefs. Without any torment of conscience they violate the regulations of the Orthodox Church concerning fasts and gather together at balls and dances on the eves of great Feasts of the Lord, when Orthodox Christians should be in church in prayerful vigil. This would be excusable if such gatherings took place on the eves of ordinary days, but not on the eves of Feasts, and especially great Feasts. Are not such acts and deeds clearly inspired by our enemy, the destroyer of souls, contrary to the commandment of the Lord which says: carry out your ordinary affairs for six days, but the seventh (festal) day must be devoted to God in pious service? How have Orthodox Christians come to such acts hated by God? It is for no other reason than indiscriminate communion with believers of other faiths..."⁶³²

The liberals were especially aroused by the excommunication of the novelist Lev Tolstoy in 1901, although this was a purely internal affair of the Church, and amounted to no more than the public recognition – which Tolstoy himself did not dispute – that he no longer believed in Orthodoxy and so could no longer be counted as a member of the Orthodox Church.

Much needed clarification was introduced into these debates by Archbishop Ambrose of Kharkov, who made an important distinction between freedom of *conscience* and all the other freedoms we have been discussing.

"What, it seems, could be better," he asked, "than to present to people the possibility of going freely along the path to the knowledge of the truth, without restraining or limiting them by other people's influence? What could be better than the independent development in them of various mental powers and gifts? But in fact it turns out that for the majority a teacher and leader on the path to the truth is required, because they themselves do not find this path and often even do not see it and do not recognize it, although it is clearly indicated to them. Would it not be better to give people the opportunity to exercise their freedom in independent activity in accordance with the laws of Divine and human righteousness, without any interference of guides? Then one could only rejoice at the appearance in them of the special perfections of human nature that are particular to each person. But in fact it turns out that people sometimes so forget and trample on these laws that one has to put them in prison. If people are such in relation to the knowledge of the truth and in free activity in accordance with the laws of righteousness, then can they be different when they are alone with their conscience, which is the expression of the common condition of a man? Obviously not."

⁶³² St. Ambrose, in Sergius and Tamara Fomin, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem (Russia before the Second Coming)*, Moscow: Rodnik, 1994, vol. 2, p. 90 (in Russian).

Archbishop Ambrose pointed out that the consciences of men are in very various conditions. Some have “crude, sensual” consciences, which remain unfeeling even when they have committed great crimes. Others “speak lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (I Timothy 4.2). Others have “literalist” consciences, who will forgive great crimes, but not infringements of ritual rules. Still others have “fanatical” consciences, which in their zeal to spread their faith will not shrink from imposing their views on others by force. Others have “servile” consciences, which may be overwhelmed by the consciousness of their sins, but can find no way out of their condition. Still others have “fearful” consciences; they are overwhelmed and overcome by fear after committing merely trivial offences.

And then there is the conscience of the saint, who, when he sins, immediately repents thoroughly and deeply, and recovers his habitual peace of mind and joy of heart. Only this conscience is truly *free*, being able to retain its equilibrium and clarity even under conditions of the fiercest persecution. This freedom consists “not in external rights and advantages, social and political, but in the unshakeable feeling of inner peace, in the inner liberation of the spirit from all hindrances to the observance of the law that arise in the damaged nature of man.”

It follows that there is an important distinction between freedom of conscience, which depends on the moral condition of a man, and freedom of the press, of the word, of religion, etc. The latter, external freedoms may or may not advance the inner freedom that is freedom of conscience. They are justified if they do promote inner freedom in the given situation, and not justified if they do not. It is the task of the ruler to discern when they are justified and when they are not.

“And so,” concludes Archbishop Ambrose, “we must seek for freedom of conscience, not in the sphere of earthly rights, but in the sphere of spiritual perfections. We must expect it, not from state laws, but from our own moral labours and exploits, and ask for it, not from earthly kings and rulers, but from the Lord God. As regards the broadening of rational freedom in public life, we must discuss freedom of thought, freedom of the word, freedom of convictions, freedom of confession, but not freedom of conscience. All these varieties of freedom can only be paths to freedom of conscience, but it itself stands higher than them. ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (II Corinthians 3.17).”⁶³³

So freedom of conscience is the ultimate, absolute value, while all the other varieties of freedom are only valuable relatively speaking, depending on their contribution to the absolute value, and can be evil if they do not contribute to it. Russian society was soon to see the point of this distinction when Tsar

⁶³³ Archbishop Ambrose, “O Svobode Sovesti” (On Freedom of Conscience), in *Polnoe Sobranie Propovedej*, volume 2, Kharkov, 1902 (in Russian).

Nicholas II issued his ukaz of April 17, 1905, the Sunday of Pascha, "On the Strengthening of the Principles of Religious Toleration", which removed most of the restrictions on the non-Orthodox confessions. The result was not universal peace and joy, but a horrific explosion of anti-Orthodox and anti-monarchist feeling...

St. John of Kronstadt was one of those highly critical of the decree, seeing it as one product of the revolutionary unrest: "Look what is happening in this kingdom at the present time: everywhere students and workers are on strike; everywhere there is the noise of parties who have as their goal the overthrowing of the true monarchical order established by God, everywhere the dissemination of insolent, senseless proclamations, disrespect for the authority of the ruling powers established by God, for 'there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God': children and young people imagine that they are the master and commanders of their own fates; marriage has lost all meaning for many and divorces at will have multiplied to endlessness; many children are left to the whims of fate by unfaithful spouses; some kind of senselessness and arbitrariness rule... Finally, an unpunished conversion from Orthodoxy into any faith whatever is allowed [by the Decree of April 17, 1905]; even though the same Lord we confess designated death in the Old Testament for those denying the law of Moses.

"If matters continue like this in Russia and the atheists and the anarchist-crazies are not subjected to the righteous retribution of the law, and if Russia is not cleansed of its many tares, then it will become desolate like the ancient kingdoms and cities wiped out by God's righteous judgement from the face of the earth for their godlessness and their wickedness: Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Greece-Macedonia.

"Hold fast, then, Russia, to your faith, and your Church, and to the Orthodox Tsar if you do not wish to be shaken by people of unbelief and lawlessness and if you do not wish to be deprived of your Kingdom and the Orthodox Tsar. But if you fall away from your faith, as many intelligenty have fallen away, then you will no longer be Russia or Holy Rus', but a rabble of all kinds of other faiths that wish to destroy one another."

The situation was not improved, but made worse, by the publication of the Manifesto of October 17, which granted "real personal inviolability, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association" to all. Now there was no bar on the most blasphemous and hate-filled revolutionary propaganda. The result: the revolution of 1905, which almost overturned the Russian State. Even after the revolution had been crushed, the freedoms remained in place; with the result that unrestrained slander against the Tsar and the Church continued until the unprecedented tragedy of 1917. So unfettered freedom led to the most repressive and God-hating tyranny in history...

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion:-

1. Since man is by nature free and rational, he cannot be brought to a knowledge of the truth through the essentially irrational means of physical coercion, although physical punishments such as imprisonment may help him indirectly by humbling his pride. For the Christian, the aim of the Christian life is freedom of conscience in the sense of complete inner freedom to do God's will. External freedoms are valued only to the extent that they contribute to, and do not hinder, the attainment of inner, spiritual freedom.
2. Although free in essence, man, because of youth or weakness of will or mind, can be physically coerced into renunciation of his faith by evil tyrants, or seduced by evil teachers into heresy or unbelief. It is the duty of the Christian, as an individual and in society, to do everything in his power to protect his weaker brethren from such a disaster. The justification of censorship and those restrictions on freedom - and restrictions of some kind are to be found in all societies - is that while man is free according to his original nature, some men are less free than others by virtue of their youth or lack of education. And their freedom is further weakened by being brought into bondage by evil ideas and passions. Once a man has been infected by false ideas, the only cure is reasoned argument, education; we cannot convert him by force. But we can reasonably limit his freedom to infect others, especially the intellectually weak and children, and to lead them into false religion and immorality.
3. In the Christian State, some restriction of freedom of speech, press and assembly in order to restrict the influence of evil teachers is in accordance with reason and has always been blessed by the Church. For we should remember that the present disastrous state of the world has been brought about in large measure by the cult of freedom carried to irrational extremes. The most illiberal and anti-religious State in history, the Soviet Union, was brought into being largely through the infiltration of liberal ideas from the West into Russia and their acceptance in the educated layers of society and eventually by the Russian State. We should always remember that external freedoms can be used for evil as well as for good.
4. In the non-Christian State, the influence of evil teachers will inevitably be dominant. And so restrictions will be placed not, for example, on atheism or blasphemy or homosexuality, but on racism or sexism or "religious exclusivism". In such circumstances, while trying to guard themselves from the evil influence exerted by these teachers, Christians

will be in favour of such freedoms as will enable them to worship and practise their faith without persecution. Contemporary Orthodox Christians have special reason to value religious toleration, in that we form a very small minority in almost every contemporary state, and would almost certainly be subjected to persecution if some such principle were not in force.

5. Religious toleration should never be confused with *ecumenism* – that is, the idea that all religions are in principle equal. In fact, it is the combination of the idea of religious toleration with ecumenism in modern societies that constitutes probably the greatest contemporary threat to religious freedom. For if all religions are considered equal, it becomes a crime to say that any one of them is superior or truer than the others. Thus religious indifference ultimately leads to a resumption of religious persecution... It follows that religious toleration must be exercised together with religious *discrimination* – that is, discrimination in favour of the one true religion. And if that is not possible in any contemporary society, insofar as none of them is ruled by Orthodox Christian rulers, we must nevertheless work for the establishment of those laws and habits which make it easier for men to come to a knowledge of the truth and true morality and escape from the snares of falsehood. For in the final analysis, it is not religious freedom that is the ultimate value, but religious *truth*, since, as the Lord says, “ye shall know the *truth*, and the *truth* shall make you free” (John 8.32).

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33. ON NOT ROCKING THE BOAT

“The protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves.”

Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs, 17 (1848).

“Hide the truth,” goes the popular Greek saying, “and you hide Christ.” “Publish – and be damned!” might be the nearest modern equivalent, in which “damnation” comes from the court of public opinion, not God. The difference is important. Publishing the truth often comes at a price. We have to choose the price: damnation by men – or by God...

But is it always necessary to publish the truth? True: the Apostle Paul says: “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5.11). But are we not also supposed to hide our neighbour’s sins, leaving the judgement to God? After all, the Lord Himself says: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7.1). Not so, says St. John Chrysostom, commenting on the Apostle’s words. “Paul did not say ‘judge’, he said ‘reprove’, that is, correct. And the words, ‘Judge not that ye be not judged’ He spoke with reference to very small errors...”⁶³⁴

So we should hide our neighbour’s sins when they are small, but reprove and expose when they are large and provide a bad example to others – “a little leaven leavens the whole lump”. Indeed, to hide them, and not to reprove them, is a serious sin, according to the same Apostle. “It is reported continuously 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 you. For I verily, as 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... For... do not ye judge them that are within [the Church]?... Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (I Corinthians 5.1-5, 12-13).

If even the major sins of laypeople should be judged in public by the Church, what about the canonical sins of hierarchs? It seems obvious that they, too, should be judged – and in public. After all, that is what the canon law of the Holy Church prescribes. And if the major sins of laypeople, which are usually done in private and affect only a small group of people, should be judged in public, then a fortiori the canonical sins of hierarchs, which are usually done in public and affect many more people, directly and indirectly,

⁶³⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 18 on Ephesians*.

should be judged in public. It follows, of course, that public protests against public canonical transgressions - we are assuming that, as is usually the case nowadays, private exhortations achieve nothing and the hierarchs themselves do not correct themselves - are not only permissible but *obligatory*.

However, this conclusion is disputed by many - especially among the clergy. The practice among clergy of almost all Orthodox jurisdictions today is to cover up each other's sins, as if the clergy were (as in medieval Catholicism) a kind of closed corporation that exists only to serve the interests of its members, and not the salvation of all the rational sheep of Christ. When protests against the sins of the clergy arise from the lower ranks of the Church, these are usually sternly rejected as being "ill-conceived" (even when their truth is not disputed), "ill-timed" (there never seems to be a right time to protest), or "not the business of laypeople". If the protests gather pace, and the transgression can no longer be hidden from public view, then the protesters are accused of "rocking the boat", of shaming the Church before the world outside, even of preventing other people from joining the Church...

Let us look at these arguments a little more closely.

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But let us first concede this to those who wish to suppress the whistle-blowers: it would be better for all if the scandals of the Church could be healed by the bishops without the intervention or protests of the laity. That is, after all, the function, or one of the functions, of the hierarchy; we elect a man to the hierarchy precisely because we believe him to have the knowledge and the courage to heal the wounds of the Church through the grace that is given him in the sacrament of ordination. The problem is: by the Providence of God there has not been a time since the Apostolic age when the hierarchy has been able to rule the Church in accordance with the holy dogmas and canons without the help of the lower clergy and the laity...

If we look at the history of the Orthodox Church, we are struck by the *constant* struggle for the faith and canonical order - and the involvement of all ranks of the Church in that struggle. "Peace on earth", in the sense of freedom from internal dissension and quarrels, was never the destiny of the Church on earth. In the period of the Ecumenical Councils, not only were bishops and patriarchates constantly warring against each other: the laity, too, often rose up publicly against their hierarchs when they betrayed the faith.

Sometimes order was restored only through the intervention of the kings - as the holy Emperors Marcian and Pulcheria intervened at the Fourth Ecumenical Council. St. Isidore of Pelusium approved of this intervention, writing: "Formerly, when those who had lived an evangelical and apostolic life were crowned with the priesthood, the priesthood was fearful by right for

the royal power; but now the royal power is fearful to the priesthood. However, it is better to say, not 'priesthood', but those who have the appearance of doing the priestly work, while by their actions they insult the priesthood. That is why it seems to me that the royal power is acting justly." It was acting justly, in Isidore's view, because "although there is a very great difference between the priesthood and the kingdom (the former is the soul, the latter – the body), nevertheless they strive for one and the same goal, that is, the salvation of citizens".⁶³⁵

Nor were these struggles only against manifest heretics, such as Arius or Nestorius. St. Theodore the Studite is noted as much for his struggles against the holy Patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus as against the iconoclast heretics. And the major struggles of the mid-ninth century were as much between Patriarchs Photius and Ignatius, both holy men, as between them and the heretical Pope Nicholas...

In this period, Christians of all ranks appear to have been much less inhibited about criticizing their hierarchs than they are today. The argument so often employed today to suppress dissent – "This is the hierarchs' business, not yours" – was rejected by in the Early Church. Thus we read in *The Institutions of the Apostles*, "these sheep are not irrational but rational creatures – and we say this lest at any time a lay person should say, 'I am a sheep and not a shepherd, and I have no concern for myself: let the shepherd look to that, for he alone will be required to give account for me.' For even as the sheep that will not follow its good shepherd is exposed to the wolves, that is, to its destruction, to also the sheep that follows a bad shepherd is likewise exposed to unavoidable death, since the shepherd will devour him. Therefore, take care to flee from the ravening shepherd."

The best hierarchs of the time bemoaned the anarchy of conflicting opinions in which the most vainglorious and ill-informed were often the most eagerly heard. But they did not take this as an excuse to suppress dissent, but rather bewailed a general lack of zeal for curing the ills of the Church in a thorough-going manner. Thus St. Basil the Great wrote: "[In the Church] one must get to the bottom of the problems, so as to eradicate the sickness from its very root."⁶³⁶ And St. John Chrysostom said: "A want of zeal in small matters is the cause of all our calamities; and because slight errors escape fitting correction, greater ones creep in."⁶³⁷ These holy hierarchs also bewailed the bad impression that the internal quarrels of the Church made on those outside. However, this did not inhibit them from convening synods to depose heretics and evil-doers in the full glare of public scrutiny. Evidently they believed that glasnost was the price that had to be paid for true perestroika...

⁶³⁵ St. Isidore, *Tvorenia (Works)*, Moscow, 1860, vol. 3, pp. 400, 410 (in Russian).

⁶³⁶ St. Basil the Great, *Letter 156*.

⁶³⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 1 on Galatians*.

From about the tenth century, the internal quarrels of the Churches appear to have died down, at any rate in the East. But this is a deceptive impression: in these periods of comparative peace, leading Christians took it upon themselves to sound the alarm still more urgently, as if this peace was the peace of impending spiritual death. Consider, for example, the *Letter on Confession* by St. Simeon the New Theologian (+1022):

“It is permissible for an unordained monk to confess us. You will find this to be the case everywhere. This is because of the vesture and likeness [*proschema*] given by God as the monk’s inheritance and by which monks are named. So is it written in the God-inspired writings of the Fathers, and you will find this to be the case should you chance to examine them. To be sure, prior to the monks only the bishops had that authority to bind and loose which they received in succession to the Apostles. But, when time had passed and the bishops had become useless, this dread authority passed on to priests of blameless life and worthy of divine grace. Then also, when the latter had become polluted, both priests and bishops becoming like the rest of the people with many – just as today – tripped up by spirits of deceit and by vain and empty titles and all perishing together, it was transferred, as we said above, to God’s elect people. I mean to the monks. It was not that it had been taken away from the priests and bishops, but rather that they had made themselves strangers to 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 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 do 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, and it is a cause of great concern..."⁶³⁸

St. Symeon's chastisement of the Byzantine Church at the apparent height of its glory is astonishingly harsh. The Orthodoxy of the hierarchs of his time, he says, is purely formal: they are neither "zealots for the sake of what is good" nor do they "do battle with anyone because of evil". While pretending to "keep peace here in Church", they are in fact waging war against God.

The hierarchs he is describing are what the Lord calls "hirelings". The hireling is not a wolf in sheep's clothing, that is, a heretic, but neither is he a true shepherd, for he "is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not" (John 10.12). Nevertheless, he may well belong to the external organization of the True Church and receive the honour of a true shepherd. But he flees when the wolf comes and allows the sheep to be scattered, because he "careth not for the sheep" (John 10.13).

Commenting on this passage, St. Gregory the Great writes in his *Homilies on the Gospel*: "He flees, not by giving ground, but by withholding his help. He flees, because he sees injustice and says nothing. He flees, because he takes refuge in silence..."

And "by silence," as another great Gregory, the Theologian, says, "God is betrayed..."

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Turning now to the present day, it would be a very bold (and foolish) man who would claim that the True Orthodox Church today is not in an even worse condition than the Church in tenth-century Byzantium. Formally speaking, our bishops are Orthodox: none of them confesses the heresies of ecumenism or newcalendarism or sergianism. They condemn (although sometimes not very loudly) the obviously heretical and apostate patriarchs of "World Orthodoxy". But "someone is not Orthodox just because he does not slip some new dogma into the Church of God", as St. Symeon says. If he does not confess a certain heresy, but allows it to infect the flock, then he is a hireling, and not a true shepherd. And this *is* happening in our Church – notably with regard to the soteriological and other heresies of Fr. John Romanides and his many followers and admirers in World Orthodoxy. Moreover, many other injustices and scandals are not being corrected, and the absolutely necessary sacramental unity that should exist between the True Orthodox Churches of different nationalities is being sabotaged...

⁶³⁸ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Letter on Confession*, 11, 13; translated in Alexander Golitzin (ed.), *St. Symeon the New Theologian. On the Mystical Life. The Ethical Discourses*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997, pp. 196, 198-199.

The result is that many laypeople, especially (but not only) in the diasporas, are receiving tragically little pastoral care and instruction. Meanwhile, other people from other jurisdictions who are seeking the truth are being repelled by the uncorrected scandals they see in the Church. They look for the good works that will prove our faith – and do not see them.

The Apostle Paul calls on Timothy to “reprove, admonish and exhort” “in season and out of season” (II Timothy 4.2). But for today’s hierarchs every season seems to be out of season when it comes to rebuking and disciplining those who are destroying the Church. In such a situation, one would expect a multitude of whistle-blowers to come forward from the lower ranks in order to call the hierarchs to carry out their duty. But the strange and alarming thing is that as the Church becomes weaker and weaker, so the protests become fewer and fewer and fainter and fainter.

Nor - except in a very few cases - does the recent and terrifying example of the fall of the Russian Church Abroad appear to have inspired our leaders with a godly fear that the same could happen to them.

Let us linger a little longer on the example of the Russian Church Abroad. The present writer remembers how, as early as the mid-1970s, hierarchs such as Archbishops Averky and Nikodim and laymen such as Professor Ivan Andreyevsky were deeply worried by the lack of a truly confessing stand in the Church against the heretics of World Orthodoxy. But all three men died in 1976, and the torch of protest was handed on to lesser men who commanded less respect – and were in any case told to shut up. Only the holy Metropolitan Philaret paid heed to their protests and sympathized with them – and to some extent succeeded in stopping the rot through the anathema against ecumenism in 1983. But when he died in 1985, and then Bishops Gregory Grabbe and Anthony of Los Angeles died in the mid-1990s, the way was open for the remaining hierarchs to “reinterpret” the 1983 anathema, join the Cyprianite schismatics, and then, in 2000, to vote for joining World Orthodoxy. From 2001 protests were punished by excommunications. And so it was a “purified” Church that finally joined the apostates in 2007...

In the True Orthodox Church of Greece today, the disease is different, but the situation is no less serious. Only very few seem to recognize this fact. Everything is covered by an eerie silence, as under snow in winter...

But this is not the silence of the prudent man who realizes that there is a time to speak and a time to keep silence. This is the silence of the hireling who is fleeing from the calls of his conscience and his pastoral duty... And the exhaustion of laypeople who have come to believe that nothing can be changed in the Church, that it is not their business, and that they must simply accept the status quo without protest, say “axios!” (worthy) to him who is “anaxios” (unworthy), hibernate, and quietly lose all hope...

But there is always hope, because, as St. Ambrose of Optina once said when he was in conflict with the Russian Holy Synod, “there is a Vladyko above all Vladykos”, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is “the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls” (I Peter 2.25). And He is the Helmsman who will always guide the ship of the Church to the safe harbour of the Kingdom of heaven.

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Finally, let us look more closely at the metaphor of “not rocking the boat” and develop it a little.

The Church, as we know, is compared to a boat whose Captain is Christ and whose chief rowers are the hierarchs. When a storm arises from outside the boat, the hierarchs wake up the supposedly sleeping Christ (He gives the impression of sleeping only in order to give them the opportunity to act), and He calms the winds and the waves. That is the right order, the canonical order.

But what if the rowers themselves are asleep? Then the passengers have to act in order to wake up the rowers. And how can they do this without rocking the boat?

“But rocking the boat will let in water from outside,” goes the objection. Hardly. After all, the boat is already in a storm, and is already letting in water from all sides. A little rocking from within will hardly make the situation significantly worse. In any case, if the rowers are not woken, the whole boat will inevitably capsize sooner or later.

“But how can that be, when the boat is unsinkable?” continues the objection. However, *no* boat, in the sense of a Local Church, is unsinkable. In 1905 St. John of Kronstadt gave the Russians a list of distinguished Local Churches, such as the Carthaginian, which had been wiped off the face of the earth, and warned them that the same could happen to the Russian Church. If St. John could say this of a Church that was the largest in history, and was even at that time nourishing hundreds of thousands of future new martyrs in her bosom, then *no* Local Church, however ancient and venerable, is unsinkable. It is only the rightly confessing Church that is unsinkable; while the Church cannot be destroyed *everywhere*, she *can* be destroyed *anywhere* – that is, there is no Local Church in any part of the world which can be sure that she will not fall away from the truth. The Lord promised that the Church built on the Rock of the true faith would prevail over the gates of hell, and we must always preserve a lively faith in this truth. Holding it, we know that even if our Local Church falls, there will be another somewhere else that remains in the truth, and that “help and deliverance will come from another quarter”, as Mordecai said to Esther (Esther 4.14).

It is an attribute of fallen human nature to seek the illusion of security, infallibility or indestructibility, in something concrete, material and locatable. Thus the Jews sought to anchor their feeling of eternal superiority in the fact that they were “the sons of Abraham” – in a genetic, not a spiritual sense. And the Roman Catholics sought a guarantee of their Church’s infallibility in its location – Roma eterna et invicta. But the Church, as St. Maximus the Confessor taught, does not consist in genes or spatial location or anything material, but in *the right confession of the faith*. And that faith can disappear like the wind if God withdraws it from a soul – “the Spirit blows where It wishes” (John 3.8)...

But there is an important corollary to this truth: since the faith can be lost by any Church in any place, whatever its nationality or reputation, it has to be fought for with every ounce of reason, strength and passion. Our respect for the clergy and the grace of the priesthood should allow them time to correct their mistakes themselves. But when we see that the clergy do not deserve respect, and that the grace they have received is being trampled on to the potential damnation of the whole Local Church, it is time for the lower ranks to act. For there is no salvation in following a “canonical” hierarch when he is not following the canons. Such “canonicity” is a lie and hypocrisy...

Let us conclude with some quotations from the Holy Fathers:

“Anarchy is altogether an evil, the occasion of many calamities, and the source of disorder and confusion... However, the disobedience of those who are ruled is no less an evil... But perhaps someone will say, there is also a third evil, when the ruler is bad. I myself, too, know it, and it is no small evil, but a far worse evil even than anarchy. For it is better to be led by no one than to be led by one who is evil. For the former indeed are often saved, and often in peril, but the latter will be altogether in peril, being led into the pit of perdition.

“How, then, does Paul say, ‘Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves’? Having said above, ‘whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation,’ he then said, ‘Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves.’ ‘What then,’ you say, ‘when he is wicked, should we not obey?’ Wicked? In what sense? If in regard to faith, flee and avoid him, not only if he is a man, but even if he is an angel come down from heaven; but if in regard to life, do not be over-curious...”⁶³⁹

“‘But so-and-so,’ you say, ‘is a decent man, is a Priest, lives in great self-control, and does this and that.’ Do not talk to me about this decent person, this self-controlled, pious man who is a Priest; but if you like, suppose that this man is Peter, or Paul, or even an Angel come down from heaven. For not even in such a case do I regard the dignity of their persons... For our

⁶³⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 34 on Hebrews*, 1.

reckoning is not with our fellow-servants, but with our Master, and to Him we shall give an account for all that we have done in our life.”⁶⁴⁰

“When there is no one to support the cause of true religion, we ought alone and all unaided to do our duty...”⁶⁴¹

*December 6/19, 2010.
St. Nicholas the Wonderworker.*

⁶⁴⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *First Baptismal Catechesis*, 5.

⁶⁴¹ St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 30.

34. PREDESTINATION, ST. AUGUSTINE AND FR. PANTELEIMON

There is, as everyone knows, an heretical, Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Less well known is the fact that there is also an Orthodox doctrine. It is contained in two verses from St. Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* and in the patristic commentaries on it. Almost the same as the Orthodox doctrine is the teaching of St. Augustine, who, however, made some unguarded comments (what writer does not make unguarded comments occasionally?) that have been interpreted as supporting Calvinism and have caused his name to be vituperated almost ad infinitum by today's "new soteriologists". Finally, there is the teaching of Fr. Panteleimon of Boston, followed by that of Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston, who appear not to know the Orthodox doctrine of predestination, who revile St. Augustine even more than other "new soteriologists", and who have a teaching that in effect denies true predestination, substituting the vain and feeble surmises of human justice for a God-fearing prostration before the abyss of God's judgements.

Let us look at each of these doctrines in turn.

1. Calvinism. The first, Calvinism, can be disposed of quickly because all Orthodox agree that it is false. Calvin believed that all human beings are assigned by God in a completely arbitrary manner to two categories: the saved and the damned, and that there is nothing that any man can do to take himself out of one category and into the other. "Predestination" for him meant "predetermination" and fatalism; and it involved the denial of the place of freewill in our salvation.

2. The Orthodox Teaching. St. Paul writes: *We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, Who are the called according to His purpose. Those whom He foreknew (προέγνω) He also predestined (προώρισεν) to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8.28-29).*

Commenting on this passage, St. Theophan the Recluse writes: "God knows everything - both the past, and the present, and the future, - the beginning and the end of every man, and in accordance with this knowledge He makes His decisions: in knowing beforehand, He foresees; in deciding how things must be beforehand, He predestines. He sees beforehand all the free actions of men and, in accordance with them, He predestines concerning them. So here the Lord foresaw who will truly believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him through an exact fulfilment of His commandments and, having been sanctified by grace, will become a saint. Therefore He also predestined that these should be saints, 'in conformity with the image of His Son', that is, that in the sacrament of Baptism, with the help of the gifts of grace, they should be clothed in the image of Jesus Christ and become like Him, which

they will attain in full measure in the future life: so that the Incarnate Son of God should be 'the first-born' – the first to re-establish in Himself a pure human nature, and the first among His followers – His brethren. That is God's predestination concerning those who are being saved. How does He bring it to fulfilment?

"Moreover, those whom He predestined, He also called; and those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified (v. 30). This predestination of men to salvation God accomplishes and brings to fulfilment by drawing them to Christ (John 6.44), by disposing their spirit to realize the necessity of salvation in Christ; then by justification – by liberating them from sins and regenerating the spirit of those who believed in Him by the grace of the Holy Spirit; and, finally, he finishes by glorifying them also in the body in the life to come.

*"If such is the love of God for those who are marked for salvation, then no obstacles, external or internal, should frighten Christians on their path."*⁶⁴²

Bishop Elias Miniatos summed up the matter well: "God desires, and if man desires also, then he or she is already predestined."⁶⁴³

We can draw two preliminary conclusions from this commentary:

1. Predestination is by no means incompatible with man's free will. In fact, predestination is the working of God's Providence *together with, in harmony with* man's free will. Man shows a will to be saved, and God predestines him to be saved, that is, runs to meet that good will by arranging all things in such a way that he will in fact be saved. For example, he leads him to meet the True Church, gives him the desire to be baptized, sends him good teachers, sends him temptations that he can overcome and which thereby, through his overcoming them, bring him closer to God, but removes temptations that he would not be able to overcome, which would lead him to falling away from God...

Many stumble at the Orthodox doctrine of predestination because they assume that God's foreknowledge of the events of a person's life "predestines" in the sense of "predetermines" them – wholly, and without room for the exercise of freewill. But this, as we have seen, is not the meaning of "predestination". In any case, as St. Justin the Martyr writes: "The cause of future events is not foreknowledge, but foreknowledge is the *result* of future events. The future does not flow from foreknowledge, but foreknowledge from the future. It is not Christ Who is the cause of the betrayal of Judas. But the betrayal is the cause of the Lord's foreknowledge."⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴² St. Theophan, *Tolkovanie Poslanij Sv. Apostola Pavla*, Moscow, 2002, p. 369.

⁶⁴³ Miniatos, "On Predestination", *Orthodox Life*, November-December, 1990. p. 28.

⁶⁴⁴ St. Justin, in Miniatos, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

Again, Diodore writes: "This text does not take away our free will. It uses the word *foreknew* before *predestined*. Now it is clear that *foreknowledge* does not by itself impose any particular kind of behaviour. What is said here would be clearer if we started from the end and worked backwards. Whom did God glorify? Those whom He justified. Whom did He predestine? Those whom He foreknew, who were called according to His plan, i.e., who demonstrated that they were worthy to be called by His plan and made conformable to Christ."⁶⁴⁵

2. Predestination is only for those who show a will to be saved, not for those who show no such good will. That is, as St. Paul says, it is for *them that love God, Who are the called according to His purpose* – by which is meant, according to the Holy Fathers, those who are both called *and respond* to the call. Again, Origen says: "In Scripture, words like *foreknew* and *predestined* do not apply equally to both good and evil. For the careful student of the Bible will realize that these words are used only of the good..."⁶⁴⁶ Again, St. Theodoret of says: "This [predestination] is not true of everyone but only of believers. Nor do things simply work together – they work together for good. If someone asks for something which will not contribute to his good, he will not get it, because it is not good for him to get it."⁶⁴⁷

3. St. Augustine's Teaching. Without entering into a detailed discussion of St. Augustine's teaching, a few relevant points will be made here.

First, it is often claimed that St. Augustine rejected the place of man's free-will in his salvation. This is simply not true. It is true that, meditating on St. Paul's words in Romans 9.14-21, where the apostle places great emphasis on God's election rather than on man's making himself worthy of election (for example: "It depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (v.10)), Augustine does say some things that have been interpreted in a Calvinist sense. But he vehemently rejected the charge that he denied free will. "Thus, when it was objected to him that 'it is by his own fault that anyone deserts the faith, when he yields and consents to the temptation which is the cause of his desertion of the faith' (as against the teaching that God *determines* a man to desert the faith), Augustine found it necessary to make no reply except: 'Who denies it?' (*On the Gift of Perseverance*, ch. 46)."⁶⁴⁸ Again, he writes: "It is our part to believe and to will and His part to give to those who believe and will the ability to do good works through the Holy Spirit".⁶⁴⁹ A perfect statement of the Orthodox doctrine of synergy!

⁶⁴⁵ Diodore, in Gerald Bray (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. VI. *Romans*, Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1998, p. 235.

⁶⁴⁶ Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, in Bray, *op.cit.*, p. 234.

⁶⁴⁷ St. Theodoret, *Interpretation of the Epistle to the Romans*, in Bray (ed.), p. 234.

⁶⁴⁸ Fr. Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1983, p. 18.

⁶⁴⁹ St. Augustine, *Commentary on Romans* 9.15, in Bray (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 255.

However, Augustine is more culpable in his teaching that some are “predestined to eternal death”. For, as we have seen, there is no such thing in the Orthodox teaching, but only predestination to salvation. Moreover, there are some grounds for believing that he did not accept the apostle’s words that “God wills that all men should be saved” in their literal sense.⁶⁵⁰ But here, too, we must be careful not to ascribe to him a Calvinist kind of fatalism. In the passage where Augustine speaks of “predestination to eternal death”, he immediately adds: “not only because of the sins which they add of their own willingness, but also because of original sin”.⁶⁵¹ In other words, “predestination to eternal death” is not the result of some kind of completely inscrutable and arbitrary choice on the part of God, but of the sins of man. This does not remove the error of Augustine’s phrase, but it does make us think that he did not mean “predestination” in the Calvinist sense here, but rather something closer to “condemnation”.

4. The Teaching of Fr. Panteleimon. This is preceded by a ritual condemnation of St. Augustine of the kind that we have become so accustomed to in the writings of the “new soteriologists” such as Romanides and Kalomiros. Only in the mouth of Fr. Panteleimon it is more extreme than anything I have read elsewhere: “Both Origen and Augustine were so enamored by pagan philosophy, that they fell into great errors and heresies. I maintain that what Origen was in the East, Augustine was in the West – the originator of all heresies that followed in their time. There is no heresy in the East which does not have its seeds in Origen, and no heresy in the West that does not have its seeds in Augustine.

“Because of this novel teaching of predestination, Augustine not only did not have any problem with consigning most of mankind to eternal damnation. But there could be no other way about it. He had no qualms about this. In his pagan legalistic mind, this is what God’s justice demanded, and consequently God was bound. He would not, or to put it more plainly, *could* not overrule His own Divine justice and predestination.” (p. 5).

It is not our intention to provide a detailed defence of St. Augustine here – that is being done by other better qualified writers.⁶⁵² However, we cannot pass this shameless onslaught in silence. First, to suppose that Augustine “had no problem with consigning most of mankind to eternal damnation” is to imply that he was a completely heartless monster – for which there is absolutely no evidence. C.S. Lewis once said of a similar attack on Augustine: “They speak as if he *wanted* unbaptized babies to go to hell...” On the

⁶⁵⁰ Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶⁵¹ St. Augustine, *The Soul and Its Origin*, in William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1979. p. 139.

⁶⁵² Notably Romaric d’Amico, a True Orthodox Christian from Paris who is writing a thesis on St. Augustine defending him against the misrepresentations of the new soteriologists.

contrary, it is quite clear that Augustine *grieved* over the massa damnata, and would have liked to what the conclusion he drew from Holy Scripture – the conclusion that cannot be avoided by anyone who studies the Scriptures objectively – the conclusion, namely, that “many are called but few are chosen”, and that there are many more who travel the broad way to perdition than enter the strait gate that leads to salvation...

Again, while we might agree that Augustine’s thought is legalistic at times, we cannot in any way agree that it was pagan. His bowing down before the abyss of God’s judgements, and His God-fearing refusal to question them, far from showing that He believed that God was bound by some pagan goddess of chance or necessity, shows his profoundly Orthodox refusal to twist the evidence in favour of a more palatable theodicy. There is nothing pagan in the assertion that “God’s justice requires expiation for sin”, any more than it is pagan to say that “God’s love required that He die as a sacrifice for the sin”. In both statements we are simply making assertions about the nature of God as He reveals Himself in His actions towards us. We are saying that God always acts in accordance with justice as well as love in order to abolish sin and reconcile men to Himself.

Irrational nature is bound by necessity, the laws of nature that God has decreed. Rational beings are free, in that they can act in accordance with their nature or against it. But the absolute freedom that belongs to God alone is far above the freedom of rational creatures. As St. Maximus the Confessor explained, God does not have freewill in the sense that He makes choices between good and evil – which always presupposes the possibility of committing evil. Rather He is like the Child in Isaiah Who, “before he knows either to prefer evil or choose the good, [or] before He shall know good or evil, refuses the evil, to choose the good” (7.15-16). That is, good is so intrinsic to His nature that He chooses it without any possibility of choosing the opposite. Thus God is just, not because He makes a choice between acting justly and acting unjustly (which is the case with all those who have not reached perfection and deification), still less because He is compelled to by some external force or principle, but because justice flows from his nature like light from the sun or water from a source. That is why God does not simply act justly: as St. John of the Ladder says, He *is justice* - no less than He is love.⁶⁵³

Having clarified this point, let us pass on to Fr. Panteleimon’s main thesis, which is that *it is unjust that men who have never had the opportunity to become Orthodox in this life should not have a second chance after death*. This is related to his further thesis that *Christ’s Descent into Hell is repeated continuously in order to give this chance to those who have died before having Orthodoxy taught to them*. Which is related (although the connection is not immediately obvious) to his further thesis that *the idea propagated by St. Augustine and several Orthodox Popes that in His Descent into Hell Christ did not save all those who listened to Him is false*.

⁶⁵³ St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

Let us begin with this third thesis. We know concerning Christ's Descent into Hell that "He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, who were at one time disobedient when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared" (I Peter 3.19-20). But do we know whether all these accepted His preaching and were saved?

Fr. Panteleimon cites the story of a monk to whom the philosopher Plato appeared, saying that He had believed in Christ's preaching when He descended into Hell, and so was saved. Fair enough; so we know that Plato was saved, and we may hope that other worthies among the ancients, such as Socrates, were also saved. But does that entitle us to say that *all* were saved?

St. Cyril of Alexandria makes it clear that not all were saved: "while Christ was able to preach to all those who were alive at the time of His appearing and those who believed in Him were blessed, so too He was able to liberate those in Hades who believed and acknowledged Him, by His descent there. However, the souls of those who practiced idolatry and outrageous ungodliness, as well as those who were blinded by fleshly lusts, *did not have the power to see him, and they were not delivered.*"⁶⁵⁴

The Old Testament provides us with several examples of men of evil life who serve for the New Testament Church as exemplars of vice, and even, in some cases, as forerunners of the Antichrist. We think of Cain and Lamech; of Esau of whom it is written that God "hated" him; of Ham and Canaan; of Nimrod; of the Pharaoh that pursued Moses; of Core, Dathan and Abiram; of the Amalekites and the Philistines and the Assyrians, such as Sennacherib; of Jeroboam and Ahab and Jezabel; of Haman; and of Herod the Great. Although we cannot be sure that all these were damned, it seems extremely unlikely that they were all saved...

And what about Judas, whom Christ called "the son of perdition" and a "devil", who would have done better never to have been born? He died before Christ, and presumably witnessed His preaching in Hell. And yet the tradition of the Church is that he remains in Hell and is destined for the eternal fire of gehenna...

But Fr. Panteleimon says: "If Hades were not annihilated by our Saviour in His descent but only a 'bite' (morsus in Latin), in the words of Saint Gregory the Great, was taken out, then what is there to be so jubilant about and celebrate?" (p. 6).

⁶⁵⁴ St. Cyril, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol. 11, InterVarsity Press, 2000, p. 107-108.

Are we to assume, then, that since Fr. Panteleimon *is* celebrating, he believes that everyone is saved by the “continuous” descent of Christ into Hades? Surely not, for this is the heretical Origenist theory of the salvation of all!

Fr. Panteleimon goes on to criticize Fr. Panagiotes Carras for writing: “The *effect* of the unique Descent into Hades is eternal, not the process. Christ is not continuously descending and teaching in Hades.” And yet Fr. Panagiotes is surely correct. The Descent into Hades took place at one time, and one time only, just as the Crucifixion of Christ took place at one time, and one time only...

Against this, however, Fr. Panteleimon cites the fact in the feasts of the Church we are transported out of space and time, so that we chant: “Today the Virgin giveth birth...”, “Today there is born of the Virgin...” Today there hangeth upon a tree...” (p. 8).

But the fact that we, through the mystery of the liturgy and “Church time”, are enabled to take part in these past events *now* by no means entails that these events are *repeated* every time we participate in them. The *celebrations* are repeated, but the event itself remains unique and unrepeatable.

We can understand this most clearly with regard to the Crucifixion. This took place at one single point in space-time, and the fixedness of the event is emphasized in the Creed, where we declare that He “was crucified *under Pontius Pilate*” – that is, under *this* procurator of Judaea, and not an earlier or later one. True, in a mystical sense the Lamb of God was sacrificed before the beginning of time, and His Sacrifice avails throughout time to reconcile sinners with God, being continually offered at the Divine Liturgy. But this continual offering is of *one and the same Sacrifice*; for, unlike the sacrifices of the Old Testament, the Sacrifice of Christ on the altar of the Cross was “once for all (ἐφ’ ἁπλῶς)” (Hebrews 10.10). “After He had offered *one* Sacrifice for sins *for ever*, He sat down on the right hand of God... For by *one* offering He hath perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10.12, 14).

The fruit of the Cross is the Descent into Hades and its destruction. But just as Christ’s Blood was shed “for many” (Matthew 26.28), not for all, - because not all believe in Him, - so the Descent into Hades was for the liberation of many, not of all, because not all believed in His preaching. Similarly, we read that when Christ appeared to His disciples after the resurrection, they worshipped Him, “but some doubted” (Matthew 28.17)... So at every stage of the economy of our salvation there is division, choice, “election”. Some through their ready faith are predestined (we are not ashamed of that word in its Pauline, non-Calvinist meaning!) to salvation, while others reject that opportunity.

But what of the patristic sayings that speak of Christ conquering death in *all*? Here we must make a distinction between *salvation* and *liberation from physical death*. As regards salvation, as we have said, there is always division, separation, election. But as regards deliverance from death, this is a universal gift to all mankind. For at the General Resurrection, as a direct result of Christ's conquest of death in His own Body, all without exception will be raised from the dead and restored to their bodies. That is why death is no longer death in the proper sense, but falling asleep. And so: "Sleepers, awake!" This is a truly universal call and gift...⁶⁵⁵

"Finally," writes Fr. Panteleimon, "we come to the issue of pagans who never heard of or were given an opportunity in this life to accept or deny our Saviour, as evidently those pagans that lived before the appearance in the flesh of the Redeemer, and those millions upon millions that came after Christ until our times..."

"It is a given for us Orthodox Christians that when our Saviour descended into Hades, He redeemed as many as accepted Him as the Christ, both from among the righteous of the Old Testament, and the pagans. For the Roman Catholics, following Augustine and his teaching concerning predestination, no pagan was saved – all were predestined to be damned." (p. 12)

Actually, Augustine's teaching on predestination has nothing directly to do with the issue whether any pagans were saved at the Descent into Hades. Nor does Fr. Panteleimon produce any direct quotation from St. Augustine to prove that he believed that all pagans, both before and after Christ, are damned forever. This lack of direct quotations from St. Augustine is something we find in all the "new soteriologists", and especially in their father, Romanides; for their purpose is not to establish exactly what the great African Father really said and meant, but rather to create a "straw man", a scapegoat – or, more precisely, a diversion, behind which to introduce their own innovatory teachings.

Fr. Panteleimon continues: "If the pagans before Christ were given this opportunity [to have the Gospel preached to them at the Descent into Hades], why should it be denied to the pagans that come after? Why this discrimination between the pagans before Christ and those after Christ? Both lived and died without ever having been given an opportunity to accept or deny the Saviour. Is this the God of love and mercy that we know and worship, to give one group this opportunity and yet deny it all that come after because He so wills it according to His 'predestination'?" (pp. 12-13). Having already cited some examples of pagans and heretics being saved from Hades through the prayers of the Church, Fr. Panteleimon evidently thinks that the answers to these questions are self-evident, even if, just a little later, he admits

⁶⁵⁵ See Fr. Georges Florovsky, "Redemption", in *Creation and Redemption*, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1976, pp. 143-149.

that he and Metropolitan Ephraim consider the idea of a “second chance” for pagans to be no more than “a possibility”.

However, Fr. Panteleimon’s questions are strictly unanswerable, because they are posed from the standpoint of human justice, which is completely powerless to plumb the depths of Divine Justice. Fr. Panteleimon has invented the idea of “continual” Descents into Hades, because that is what his very human and very personal sense of justice requires. But then, knowing that there is no evidence whatever for such an idea, he tries to protect himself by saying that he put it forward only as “a possibility”.

A much more reliable approach is to begin from what we know about Divine Justice, Divine Omniscience and Divine Omnipotence.

God knows the hearts of men even before they are born, when they are still in their mother’s womb. He does not need to see their actions in order to know who they are. So if He takes a man away from this world before he has encountered the Orthodox Gospel, we cannot accuse him of injustice – perish the thought!

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?” (Wisdom of Solomon 12.12).

And yet this, implicitly, appears to be what Fr. Panteleimon and Metropolitan Ephraim are doing. Those who have never heard the Orthodox Gospel, they are implying, do not deserve to go to Hades. Or at any rate they deserve “a second chance” – as if God has “made a mistake” and confined to Hades someone who should be in Paradise, and to “correct the mistake”, the man should be given another chance!

But suppose that God in His omniscience knows that if the man heard the Orthodox Gospel he would reject it? Or that, having accepted it, he would fall away later? Perhaps God in His mercy does not send him an Orthodox preacher in order that he should not become guilty of rejecting it, or falling away from it?

Of course, these are merely human speculations to explain God’s judgements. But as such they are no less valid than Fr. Panteleimon’s about a

“second chance”... Better than either course is humbly to accept God’s judgements as just even if we do not understand why or how they can be just.

Fr. Panteleimon says that those who have never heard the Orthodox Gospel are, or should be, judged by whether they have kept the natural law, not whether they have kept the Christian law which they never heard. This seems reasonable enough – according to human justice. But the question then arises: why did the man not hear the Orthodox Gospel? It is no use saying: because he lived in a pagan country where there were no Christian preachers. Such an obstacle is easily overcome by God...

*

Let us begin again, from the certainty of Holy Scripture...

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 their freewill, this is entirely their fault. 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."⁶⁵⁶

No one is completely deprived of the knowledge of God. Thus St. Jerome writes: "Ours and every other race of men knows God naturally. There are no peoples who do not recognise their Creator naturally."⁶⁵⁷ 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."⁶⁵⁸ Again, Chrysostom 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."⁶⁵⁹

Now before the Coming of Christ God “suffered all nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14.16). However, since His Coming He permits this no longer, but insists that men, using the witness of creation and conscience, and helped by the Providence (Predestination) of God, should come to the full truth in the new and still greater witness that He has provided, the Church.

⁶⁵⁶ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 8 on John*.

⁶⁵⁷ St. Jerome, *Treatise on Psalm 95*.

⁶⁵⁸ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 3 on Romans*, 2.

⁶⁵⁹ St. Chrysostom, *First Homily on Hannah*, 3.

For if a man follows the teachers 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 provides all the knowledge any man could need - "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.*"⁶⁶⁰ 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."⁶⁶¹

This point was developed in an illuminating manner by Cassian's French contemporary (and disciple of St. Augustine), 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 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."⁶⁶²

Another striking example of how God can bring anyone to the truth, however apparently hopeless his situation, is provided by the story 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

⁶⁶⁰ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on Matthew*, 1.

⁶⁶¹ St. Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII, 8.

⁶⁶² Prosper, *The Call of the Nations*, II, 33.

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 thing 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..."⁶⁶³

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*."⁶⁶⁴

These cases lead us to draw the following conclusions: (1) Divine Providence 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 forever, 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. Therefore (3) there is no need to posit any "second chance", still less a "continual Descent into Hades". And so (4) if we, who know the truth, say that people who died in ignorance of the Gospel did not

⁶⁶³ Paul Garrett, *St. Innocent, Apostle to America*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, pp. 80-81.

⁶⁶⁴ Garrett, *op. cit.*, p. 85, footnote.

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).

March 23 / April 5, 2011.

35. ON FAITH AND THE ROOTS OF UNBELIEF

Faith is a gift of God. As the Apostle Paul says, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing – it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2.9). And again: "To another - faith by the same Spirit" (I Corinthians 12.9).

When the Apostle Peter made his famous declaration of faith in the Divinity of Christ, the Lord made it clear that this was a gift from God: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father Who is in the heavens" (Matthew 16.17). For, as He said to the Jews: "No man can come unto Me unless the Father Who hath sent Me draw him... Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me" (John 6.44, 45). Indeed, as St. John Cassian writes, "so much did the apostles realize that everything which pertains to salvation was bestowed on them by the Lord that they asked for faith itself to be given them by the Lord when they said: 'Increase our faith,' for they did not presume that its fullness would come from free will but believed that it would be conferred on them by a gift of God. The Author of human salvation teaches us how even our faith is unstable and weak and by no means sufficient unto itself, unless it has been strengthened by the Lord's help, when He says to Peter: 'Simon, Simon, behold Satan has sought to sift you like wheat, but I have asked My Father that your faith might not fail.'"⁶⁶⁵

The Naturalness of Faith

Although faith is a gift of God, it is nevertheless true that faith is natural to man. This is the result of man being made in the image of God, so that there is, as it were, an interface between God and man. Thus St. Augustine says that in the heart of man is a hole in the shape of God Himself. And St. Jerome says: "Ours and every other race of man knows God naturally. There are no people who do not recognize their Creator naturally."⁶⁶⁶ Again, St. Gregory of Nyssa says: "The soul preserves within itself the image of the divine grace. For our reason surmises that divinity itself, whatever it may be in its inmost nature, is manifested in... universal supervision and the critical discernment between good and evil."

What is meant by "universal supervision" and "the critical discernment between good and evil"?

The mind of man in its natural, inbuilt searching for its Archetype, the Word and Wisdom of God, looks in two directions: inward and outward. Looking inward, it finds *conscience*, that faculty in himself which discerns the Law of God and "critically discerns between good and evil". Looking

⁶⁶⁵ St. John Cassian, *Conferences*.

⁶⁶⁶ St. Jerome, *Treatise on Psalm 95*.

outwards, it finds *creation*, that witness to the omnipotence of God and His “universal supervision” of all things. In the one case the mind of man compels him to recognize that one God created all things, and in the other – that he is a sinner, a transgressor of a moral law that emanates from the same Creator God. This dual vision gives him a firm conviction, not only of the existence of God, but also of His power and goodness.

St. John Chrysostom says: “One way of coming to a 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 you how you have a self-taught knowledge of what is good and of 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; they teach men in silence...”⁶⁶⁷

That creation is a guide to faith is witnessed by David: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaimeth the work of His hands” (Psalms 18.1). For, as the Apostle Paul says, “His invisible properties are clearly seen by the things that are made from the creation of the world, both His everlasting power and His Divinity” (Romans 1.20). Therefore those who do not believe the witness of creation “are without excuse” (1.20). As St. John Chrysostom says, “From the beginning God placed the knowledge of Himself in men, but the pagans awarded this knowledge to sticks and stones, doing wrong the truth to such an extent as they were able. For really, the truth remained unharmed, its own glory being immutable. And how, O Paul, is it plain that God put this knowledge in them? ‘Because,’ he says, ‘what can be known of Him is manifested in them’ (Romans 1.19). But this is assertion, not proof. Only reason it out for me, and show me that the knowledge of God was evident to them, and that they wilfully turned aside from it. Whence, then, was it plain? Did He send them a voice from above? Of course not! But He did something that was better able to draw them to Him than a voice: He put creation in front of them so that the wise and the simple, the Scythian and the barbarian, having learned by vision the beauty of what they saw, might mount up to God.”⁶⁶⁸

The second guide to faith, conscience, is called by St. Paul the natural law, which he contrasts with the written, Mosaic law. “For when the Gentiles who do not have the [written] law do by nature the things of the law they are a law unto themselves, showing the work of the law written in their hearts. And their conscience also beareth witness, while their thoughts accuse of even excuse each other” (Romans 2.15, 16).

⁶⁶⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Hannah*, 3; translated in W.A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, volume 1, Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1979.

⁶⁶⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 3 on Romans*, 2; translated in Jurgens, *op.cit.*

St. Dorotheus of Gaza takes up this theme: "When God created man, He breathed into him something divine, as it were a hot and bright spark added to reason, which lit up the mind and showed him the difference between right and wrong. This is called the conscience, which is the law of his nature. This is compared to the well which Jacob dug, as the Fathers say, and which the Philistines filled up (Genesis 26.15). That is, to this law of conscience adhered the patriarchs and all the holy men of old before the written law, and they were pleasing to God. But when this law was buried and trodden underfoot by men through the onset of sin, we needed a written law, we needed the holy prophets, we needed the instruction of our Master, Jesus Christ, to reveal it and raise it up and bring to life through the observance of the commandments that buried spark. It is in our power either to bury it again, or, if we obey it, to allow it to shine and illuminate us. When our conscience says to us, 'Do this!' and we despise it, and it speaks again and we do not do it but continue to despise it, at last we bury it and it is no longer able to speak clearly to us from the depths where we have laid it. But like a lamp shining on a damaged mirror, it reflects things dimly and darkly, just as you cannot see the reflection of your face in muddy water. We are found unable to perceive what our conscience says to us so that we think we have hardly any conscience. No one is without a conscience since it is something divinely implanted in us, as we have already said, and it can never be destroyed. It always patiently reminds us of our duties, but sometimes we do not perceive that we are despising it and treading it underfoot."⁶⁶⁹

Many have abandoned the darkness of 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 both the voice of creation 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.⁶⁷⁰

Although the conscience cannot be destroyed, since it is part of the image of God in man, in idolaters and unbelievers like St. Barbara's father it is "defiled" (Titus 1.15); they "have their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4.2). Men with seared consciences cannot believe. That is why St. Paul often links faith and a good conscience (cf. I Timothy 1.5, 1.19).

⁶⁶⁹ St. Dorotheus, *Discourses and Sayings*; translated by E.P. Wheeler, Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1977, pp. 104-105.

⁶⁷⁰ *The Lives of the Women Martyrs*, Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 1991, pp. 528-542.

Atheism, like idolatry, is the product of evil works and a seared conscience. St. John Maximovich says: "The Prophet David, long before the Incarnation of Christ, clearly showed the reason why men strive to convince themselves that there is no God: 'They are corrupt and abominable in iniquities' (Psalms 52.2). Moral corruption forces men to tremble before the future judgement; the conscience accuses them of sins. But men wish to soothe themselves, to stifle the conscience. They convince themselves that 'there is no God'."⁶⁷¹

Men with seared consciences have for centuries tried to demonstrate that faith is a chance product of special circumstances and therefore not natural at all. However, it is interesting to note that recently scientists have come to the conclusion that faith in God is natural. Ruth Gledhill writes: "Human beings are predisposed to believe in God and afterlife, according to a study by academics at the University of Oxford.

"The findings of a three-year, £1.9 million research project suggest that there is an inbuilt bias in the mind towards seeing the world in religious or spiritual terms. This means that public life will always have a strong religious dimension, and that religion will always have an impact on public life, the project leaders say.

"'It means you cannot separate religion and public life,' said Roger Trigg, a philosophy professor and co-director of the project. Professor Trigg, from the Ian Ramsey Centre in the Theology Faculty at Oxford, said: 'The mind is open to supernatural agency. There are lots of explanations. It is certainly linked to basic cognitive architecture, in other words, the way we think.'"⁶⁷²

Of course, cognitive scientists do not see this evidence for the innateness or naturalness of faith as evidence that the object of faith exists. On the contrary, they see it as proof that belief in God is a product of subjective bias – a similar bias to that which Freud saw when he linked belief in God the Father to the existence of a subjective need for a father-figure. And yet there is an inconsistency in the scientists' thought here. For when, for example, they find cells in the visual cortex specifically designed to detect certain colours, or shapes, or movement, they interpret this as a functional adaptation to the colours, shapes and movements that objectively exist in the environment. When, however, research reveals a propensity to believe in God in the "basic cognitive architecture" of man, they interpret this, not as adapted to the objective existence of God, but as "bias", a kind of harmful mutation...⁶⁷³

⁶⁷¹ St. John Maximovich, in *St. Herman Calendar 1980*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman Press.

⁶⁷² Gledhill, "Are we programmed to believe in God? Not quite, but He really is in the mind, say scientists", *The Times*, Friday, May 13, 2011, p. 21.

⁶⁷³ Here is another example of science appearing to confirm faith. Boston University psychologist George Stavros, Ph.D., wanted to find out whether repeating the Jesus Prayer for ten minutes each day over the 30 days would affect these people's relationship with God, their relationships with others, their faith maturity, and their "self-cohesion" (levels of depression, anxiety, hostility, and interpersonal sensitivity). In short, Stavros was

Faith is natural because there is a light “that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1.9). This light can be identified in a general sense with *the love of the truth* – truth in all spheres, dogmatic, scientific, moral, aesthetic. Faith is kindled in us when the Light of Christ the Truth unites with the light of the love of the truth that is implanted in our minds by God at our creation, which is made in the image of His Truth. We who have faith “have the Mind of Christ” (I Corinthians 2.6), because our minds, given wings by our love of the truth, have been united with the Mind of Christ, “in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2.4). As for those, writes St. John Chrysostom, “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.”⁶⁷⁴ And so they “receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved” (II Thessalonians 2.10).

This mystery of the voluntary rejection of the light by those who do not love the truth 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 excommunicate: “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 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

asking whether the Jesus Prayer can play a special role in a person's “journey to the heart.” The answer—at least on all the scales that showed any significant effect compared to the control group—turned out to be a resounding yes (<http://orthodoxwayoflife.blogspot.com/2011/05/science-studies-jesus-prayer.html>).

⁶⁷⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 8 on John*; in Jurgens, *op. cit.*

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!'"⁶⁷⁵

“This is the condemnation,” says the Lord, “that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3.19-21).

The Preconditions of Faith

Let us look a little more closely at the preconditions of faith, why it is given to some and not to others. Clearly, as we know, faith is not given to everyone; and those who do receive it do so to different degrees, with different degrees of purity and constancy. The parable of the Sower teaches that some to whom faith is given have it snatched away by demons, while others lose their faith in the time of persecution, while still others lose it through preoccupation with the cares and riches of this life (Matthew 13.18-23). That not all can receive and retain the faith is indicated by Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria, who writes: “The Father draws those who have the capacity, in accordance with their free will, while those who have made themselves incapable He does not draw to the faith. Just as a magnet does not attract everything that draws near to it, but only iron, so God draws near to all, but attracts only those who are capable and display a certain kinship with Him.”⁶⁷⁶

We have seen already that conscience is a natural, inborn guide to faith, and that those who follow their conscience in departing from evil and doing good thereby attract the gift of grace to themselves. A clear example of this is the first Gentile convert, the centurion Cornelius, “a devout man who feared God with all his house, who gave many alms to the people, and always prayed to God” (Acts 10.2). The Angel who appeared to Cornelius and led him to the Apostle Peter pointed out that his good works had attracted the favour of God: “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God” (10.4).

⁶⁷⁵ I.M. Kontzevich, *Optina Pustyn' i ee Vremia*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1970, pp. 372-73 (in Russian).

⁶⁷⁶ Blessed Theophylact, quoted by Archbishop Averky in his commentary on John 6.

On the other hand, the “good” thief was saved through a sudden infusion of faith although he had lived an evil life until literally his very last hours. Tradition records that he had done a good deed to Christ when the Holy Family fled to Egypt. But still: his election seems paradoxical if good works were really a precondition of the gift of faith...

The truth is that good deeds are valuable only if they are the expression of a good *heart*. Faith “worketh through love”, according to St. Paul (Galatians 5.6), and love is found in the *heart*. The good heart is that “good soil” in which the seed of faith takes root and grows. Not all deeds that are considered good come from a good heart – that is, are the works of true love. Thus “though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing” (I Corinthians 13.3).

It is a good heart that attracts the grace of faith, even if, as in the case of the good thief, circumstances sometimes hinder the goodness of the heart from being manifest in good works. That is why, when the Lord upbraided the Apostles for not believing in Him after His resurrection, He reproached them for their “unbelief and *hardness of heart*” (Mark 16.14), linking faithlessness with heartlessness. Again, He said to Luke and Cleophas: “O fools and *slow of heart*, to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24.25). And yet, on recovering their faith, these same disciples said: “Did not our *heart* burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24.32).

St. Gregory Palamas confirms that faith is located in the heart rather than in the head: “I hold that our holy faith is... a vision of our heart which passes beyond all sensation and all understanding, for it transcends all the intellectual faculties of our soul. Faith is a firm assurance of the things for which we hope (Hebrews 11.1), an intellection of the heart.”⁶⁷⁷

A good heart naturally produces good works. So those who produce truly good works out of a good heart will eventually receive the gift of faith. For “it is not possible,” says 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.”⁶⁷⁸ 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.”⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁷ St Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, II, 3. 40; in J. Meyendorff, *A Study of St. Gregory Palamas*, London: The Faith Press, 1964, p. 155.

⁶⁷⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on Matthew*, 1.

⁶⁷⁹ St. Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII, 8.

Conversely, evil works darken the heart, making it difficult to receive faith, while lack of faith disposes the heart to evil works. Thus the Apostle says that the love of money has led some to “err from the faith” (I Timothy 6.10). Again, there are evil men who, “just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so they oppose the truth: men of corrupt mind, reprobate concerning the faith” (II Timothy 3.8). They “creep into houses, and lead captive silly women, laden with sins, who are led away with divers lusts, ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (II Timothy 3.6-7).

It is not only the cruder and more obvious kinds of sin that harden the heart against faith. In St. John’s Gospel we find a fascinating analysis of why His opponents, the Pharisees, could not believe in Him. The Pharisees were respectable people, zealots for the law, but they did not believe in Christ because they secretly envied Him, because He did not share their revolutionary ideals, and because He rebuked their hidden sins.

A still deeper cause of their unbelief was their pride in their collective infallibility, their sheep-like refusal to step beyond the party line: “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in Him?” (John 7.48). The Apostle Thomas, on the other hand, showed a commendable individualism when he refused to believe in the testimony of his fellow apostles until he had himself seen the evidence for their faith. For initially faith is always a personal matter: we do not believe simply because others believe, but because, the truth having been revealed to us personally, we can say with conviction: “I believe...” Later, when we have become convinced that our fellow men have received the same faith as we have, we can believe on their authority. And this is still more commendable; for as the Lord said of those who believe in the physical resurrection, not on the basis of their own experience, but on the authority of the Apostle Thomas: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20.29).

The example of the Apostle Thomas shows that while faith is, as St. Gregory Palamas says, a vision of the heart that goes beyond all intellection, it does not preclude the workings of logic and the senses, but rather includes them within its own super-logical and super-sensory vision. Thus the Lord “showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being *seen* of them forty days” (Acts 1.3). And in Thomas’ case physical sight was supplemented by a still more primitive and direct form of physical proof – *touch*. At first, it may seem as if this kind of faith is surprisingly akin to the research of a private detective or scientist in its use of physical evidence and logic. And indeed, the analogies are obvious. When a forensic scientist, for example, looks down a microscope and sees a certain DNA sequence in a blood sample, and from there infers that a certain person is guilty of a certain crime, he is going from what is visible to the naked eye (what he sees in the microscope) to what is not visible to the naked eye (DNA) to a certain historical event (the crime). Similarly, Thomas went from what was visible to

his naked eye and accessible to his touch (the hands and the side of Christ) to a certain historical event (His Crucifixion) to a conclusion concerning what was not visible to his naked eye (Christ's Resurrection and Divinity). And yet there is a vital difference. Whereas the scientist never goes beyond what is *in principle* visible and material, Thomas, in inferring that Christ was "my Lord and my God" took "the leap of faith" into that which is *in principle* invisible and immaterial.

The secular scientist - out of the hardness of his heart and pride in the collective infallibility of the unbelieving scientific establishment - is incapable of taking the leap of faith that his evidence appears to demand: he refuses to infer the existence of God (or souls or angels) from his data. But the believer, without in any way abandoning logic or the evidence of the senses, but rather pursuing them to their true end, comes to believe in God, in the soul and in angels. For "we walk by faith, not by sight" (II Corinthians 5.7) - not by ignoring the evidence of our senses but by transcending them through the supra-ocular vision of faith. For "faith is the substance of things hoped for, *the proof of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11.1).

If pride, and sheep-like obedience to the collective party-line, is the chief obstacle to faith in the intellectuals and leaders of the people, among the people themselves it is more likely to be fear of falling out with the leaders. Thus the parents of the man born blind, whom Christ healed, refused to recognize the miracles "because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (John 9.22). Of all these unbelievers, both rulers and ruled, the Lord said: "How can ye believe, who receive honour from each other, and seek not the honour that cometh from God alone?" (John 5.44).

This leads us to the conclusion that the real precondition of faith is *love of the truth above all else*. Good works out of a good heart predispose a man to receive faith, but even an immoral man can receive faith if the love of the truth is greater in him than the deception of his passions. That is why the publicans and the prostitutes believed in Christ before the Pharisees. And that is why the Samaritan woman, on being rebuked for her immorality by Christ, did not say: "How dare you!" or "How do you know?", but "Sir, I perceive that Thou are a prophet" (John 4.19) and then: "Come and see a Man Who told me everything that ever I did: is this not the Christ?" (John 4.29).

If the Light of Christ enlightens everyone, then there is no one who cannot come to the True Faith, without which he cannot be saved. If a man follows the teachers 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 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."⁶⁸⁰ 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."⁶⁸¹

Faith, Ignorance and the Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

Against this the modern ecumenists argue: "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. Their lack of true faith is therefore not their fault, and the All-loving and All-just God will certainly not condemn them for it. 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, God attaches little value to sincerity *per se*: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 12.15), 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). 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."⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on Matthew*, 1.

⁶⁸¹ St. Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII, 8.

⁶⁸² Archbishop Theophan, *Pis'ma Arkhiepiskopa Feofana Poltavskogo*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1976, p. 31 (in Russian).

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 in order to re-establish those basic principles of the Faith, ignorance of which will undoubtedly place us in danger of damnation.

The first principle is that God is omnipotent and able to bring anyone to the Church however unpromising the circumstances in which they live. The ways in which He brings people to the faith are very varied. Thus Prosper of Aquitaine writes: "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 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."⁶⁸³

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

⁶⁸³ Prosper, *The Call of the Nations*, II, 33.

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 thing 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..."⁶⁸⁴

Very apt was the comment of one 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*."⁶⁸⁵

In spite of this and many other examples, it remains true that ignorance - real, involuntary ignorance - constitutes 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 such a thing as *wilful*, voluntary ignorance. It was wilful ignorance of which the Lord accused the Pharisees when He said: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9.41). And St. Paul was speaking of this kind of ignorance when he said that men 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.

⁶⁸⁴ Paul Garrett, *St. Innocent, Apostle to America*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, pp. 80-81.

⁶⁸⁵ Garrett, *op.cit.*, p. 85, footnote.

Pagans and evolutionists "have no excuse", according to the Apostle, because they deny the evidence of the existence of God that is accessible to everyone from creation. Again, St. Peter says of those who deny the Flood: "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..." (II Peter 3.5-7).

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 "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)."⁶⁸⁶ It is not that God does not want to forgive all sins, even the most heinous: it is simply that he who blocks the way to the truth about himself and God is thereby barring the way to the Holy Spirit, 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 of God, does the impenitent heart speak. This impenitence, then, is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."⁶⁸⁷

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 out of fear of falling out with them. Thus we read: "That servant who knew his master's will, and prepared not himself,

⁶⁸⁶ Metropolitan Anthony, "The Church's Teaching about the Holy Spirit", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 27, no. 3, May-June, 1977, p. 23.

⁶⁸⁷ 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.

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."⁶⁸⁸

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."⁶⁸⁹ 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."⁶⁹⁰

Conclusion

Faith is a gift of God to all those who love the truth from a good heart. Although it is a gift, it is natural for man to have faith insofar as he is made in the image of God - his love of the truth is made in the image of the Truth Himself. The reception of faith is aided by the mute teachers of creation and conscience, and completed by the vocal teacher that is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. There are no circumstances that can prevent a man from coming to the true faith if he loves the truth and follows the teachers that are given to all men: creation and conscience. Only hardness and blindness of heart, leading to wilful, voluntary ignorance, can blind a man to the light that enlightens every man that comes into the world. So it is left to us only to cry: "Lord, I believe! Help Thou mine unbelief!" (Mark 9.24).

May 2/15, 2011.
Sunday of the Paralytic.

⁶⁸⁸ St. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel according to St. Luke* 12.47-48.

⁶⁸⁹ St. Cyril, *Homily 93 on Luke*. Translated by Payne Smith, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 376.

⁶⁹⁰ Bishop Nicholas, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, vol. II, p. 149.