

THE NEW SOTERIOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

In the course of the last century or more, a new teaching on salvation or redemption has been stealthily – and sometimes, not so stealthily – introduced into the Orthodox Church. It has appeared in both the Greek and the Russian Churches with slightly different emphases, but with the same aim and essentially the same result, that is, a new approach to some of the central dogmas of Christianity that differs in important respects from the teaching of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. As often happens with heretical movements, this new approach claims to be in itself a reaction against heresy – viz., the scholastic, Roman Catholic teaching on redemption. It claims to be “cleansing” the Orthodox Church from a centuries-old infiltration with Roman Catholic teachings and to be restoring to the Orthodox consciousness certain forgotten ideas, such as deification and uncreated grace, which the “Babylonian captivity” of Orthodox theology by Roman Catholic ideas has obscured. In this booklet I propose to examine this “new soteriology” in three major aspects: original sin, Christ’s sacrifice for sin on the Cross, and heaven and hell.

With regard to original sin, the “new soteriologists” introduce an emphasis that, while not contrary to Orthodoxy in itself, in their hands prepares the way for real heresy. This emphasis consists in treating original sin as an inherited *illness* rather than *sin*, and mocking the idea of inherited guilt as somehow Roman Catholic and scholastic, deriving from false teachings of St. Augustine. As a result, the sinfulness of original sin is de-emphasized to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to understand *from what*, in the new soteriologists’ opinion, we are saved through Christ. And then the answer comes: not from any inherited sin, but from *death*. More precisely, according to the Greek new soteriologist, Fr. John Romanides, we are saved from *the fear of death*, which is the real cause of sin in fallen man. In some more extreme formulations, the concept of *inherited* sin is abolished altogether, it being considered unjust and unworthy of God that He should punish later generations for the sin of their first parents, Adam and Eve. Thus according to Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev, our fallen nature is not inherited from our first parents, but is given to each of us individually because God knows beforehand that we will sin as Adam and Eve did.

Having taken the guilt out of original sin, the new soteriologists go on to take the sacrifice out of the Cross. Christ did not offer a sacrifice for sin in the scholastic sense of a propitiatory, vicarious appeasement of the wrath of God in satisfaction of His vengefulness. The idea of God the Father demanding a blood sacrifice from the Son is unworthy of Him. Christ sacrificed Himself for us, not in the sense that He actually took our sins upon Himself, but in the sense that He made an offering of love and solidarity for the human race. The Cross was simply the supreme manifestation of Christ’s compassionate love

for man; it is this love alone, without any supposed satisfaction of Divine justice, which saves us.

Having taken the guilt out of original sin, and justice and propitiation out of the Cross, the new soteriologists go on to take the fear out of the Last Judgement. Heaven and hell are not God's recompense for virtue and vice. They are different psychological or "noetic" reactions – joyful in the case of the saved, sorrowful in the case of the damned – to the experience of God's grace, "the river of fire", at His Second Coming. Since God does not punish except with a therapeutic aim, He does not send sinners to the eternal fire: their punishment is self-inflicted, consisting in their own reaction to God's love poured out through the whole universe on the Last Day. In more extreme formulations, the new soteriologists deny the eternity of the torments of hell, regarding this as incompatible with the love of God.

Of course, not all of the new soteriologists agree with all parts of the theological programme I have summarized above. Metropolitan Anthony, for example, while agreeing with the points on original sin and the Cross, rejected any neo-Origenist teaching on heaven and hell. However, all the soteriologists have certain traits in common, in particular an emphasis on Divine love at the expense of Divine justice, that are characteristic of the contemporary ecumenical movement.¹ So it is not surprising to find that the great majority of the new soteriologists are, or were, active participants in ecumenism. Even those who were not, like Alexander Kalomiros, show the strong influence of western heretical Christianity in other ways - for example, in a predilection for Darwinism or Marxism or Protestant Pietism.

In the following chapters I examine the new soteriologists' teaching in more detail, so as to demonstrate that: (1) original sin, although not incorrectly called an illness or disease, is a real inherited defilement that makes intimate communion with God impossible; (2) only the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, offered as a true propitiatory atonement in place of the atonement that we are unable to offer because of our sinfulness, destroys sin and death and makes communion with God possible again; and (3) God is not only love, but also justice, and those who reject His love will experience His justice in full retributive mode at the Last Judgement. Then, in a concluding chapter, I take a more general look at the place of the new soteriology in the modern world view. The booklet is offered in the hope that it will help warn Orthodox Christians to take a more critical attitude to this dangerous new theological trend which, while purporting to steer Orthodox Christians away from western heresy, actually draws them nearer to it...

¹ And of earlier ages. Thus in the third century, Lactantius, the tutor of St. Constantine the Great, wrote: "I have often observed, Donatus, that many persons hold this opinion, which some philosophers also have maintained, that God is not subject to anger; since the divine nature is either altogether beneficent, and that it is inconsistent with His surpassing and excellent power to do injury to any one..." (*On the Anger of God*).

I want to acknowledge the great help I have received in writing this little book from Fr. Steven Allen and Patrick Pummill. However, any errors in it are my responsibility, and mine alone.

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

*June 1/14, 2009; revised April 5/18, 2011.
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I. ORIGINAL SIN

The Orthodox Teaching

First, a word about the term “original sin”. The new soteriologists do not like this term because, as Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev points out, it is “of Western provenance”.² They think this term savours of heresy, and prefer the supposedly more Orthodox “ancestral” or “forefather’s”. I have no objection to these latter terms, but will stick to the traditional term “original”, first because I see nothing wrong with a word being of western provenance (especially for one writing in a western language), and secondly because I think it is an exceptionally accurate designation of the subject of our discussion. For this subject is Adam’s sin, understood both as *the original* sin in the sense of *the first* one, and as *the origin* of the sinfulness of the rest of mankind in the sense of *the cause*, albeit only in part, of our own sinful state. More precisely, original sin may be described as: (1) the sin committed by Adam in Paradise, (2) the consequences of that sin for the rest of mankind, that is, the sinful defilement inherited from Adam by each of his descendants. “Original sin” is usually referred to in the latter sense, and it is this meaning that we shall attach to the phrase from now on. As St. Augustine puts it: “The deliberate sin of the first man is the cause of original sin”.³

The doctrine of original sin is a mystery. As Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov writes: “What is this mystery – the birth of a man in sin? How is it that one who has not yet lived has already died? That one who has not yet walked has already fallen? That one who has done nothing has already sinned? How are our forefather’s children, still in their wombs, separated from him by thousands of years, participants in his sin? My mind reverently gazes upon the judgements of God; it does not comprehend them.”⁴

Although mysterious, the birth of man in sin is a fact that cannot be denied. The heresy of Pelagius, the fourth-century British monk, consisted essentially in the denial of this fact. St. Leo the Great wrote of Pelagius and his followers: “Those heretics say that grace comes as a result of our natural efforts. In that way it would appear that [man's nature] was not afflicted by any wound of original sin.”⁵ Again, St. Symeon the Theologian wrote: “That saying that calls no one sinless except God, even though he has lived only one day on earth [Job 14.14], does not refer to those who sin personally. For how can a one-day

² Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002, p. 235, note 63. The original Latin phrase is: peccatum originale, from the title of St. Augustine’s essay, *De Peccato Originale*. However, St. Basil the Great uses the phrase prototypon amartima (*Homily VIII*, “On the Famine and Drought,” PG 31: 324C), which could be translated “original sin”.

³ St. Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, II, xxvi, 43.

⁴ Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov), “My Lamentation”, *The Orthodox Word*, № 222, January-February, 2002, p. 11.

⁵ St. Leo the Great, Letter 1, in *St. Leo the Great. Letters*, translated by Edmund Hunt, 1957.

child sin? But in this is expressed that mystery of our Faith, that human nature is sinful from its very conception. God did not create man sinful, but pure and holy. But since the first-created Adam lost this garment of sanctity, not from any other sin than pride alone, and became corruptible and mortal, all people also who came from the seed of Adam are participants of the ancestral sin from their very conception and birth. He who has been born in this way, even though he has not yet performed any sin, is already sinful through this ancestral sin.”⁶

Even St. John the Baptist, “the greatest born of women”, was, according to St. John Chrysostom, in need of being baptized by Christ. “For I bear the yoke of ancestral sin and am poisoned by the serpent’s venom. I need to be washed of the defilement of the ancient transgression.”⁷

This condition gets worse with the passing of time. As Nicholas Cabasilas writes: “Because our nature was extended and our race increased as it proceeded from the first body, so wickedness too, like any other natural characteristic, was transmitted to the bodies which proceeded from that body. The body, then, not merely shares in the experiences of the soul but also imparts its own experiences to the soul. The soul is subject to joy or vexation, is restrained or unrestrained, depending on the disposition of the body. It therefore followed that each man’s soul inherited the wickedness of the first Adam. It spread from his soul to his body, and from his body to the bodies which derived from his, and from those bodies to the souls. This, then, is the old man whom we have received as a seed of evil from our ancestors as we came into existence. We have not seen even one day pure from sin, nor have we ever breathed apart from wickedness, but, as the psalmist says, ‘we have gone astray from the womb, we err from our birth’ (Psalm 58.4). We did not even stand still in this unhappy lot of the sin of our ancestors, nor were we content with the evils which we had inherited. So greatly have we added to this wickedness and increased the abundance of evil that the primal sin has been covered over by that which came later and the imitators have shown themselves to be worse by far than the examples...”⁸

Again, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov writes: “In our human nature good is mixed with evil. The evil that was introduced into man was so mixed up and merged with man’s native good that the native good can never act separately, without the evil also acting together with it. Man has been poisoned by tasting of sin, that is, the experiential knowledge of evil. The poison has penetrated into all the members of the body, into all the powers and properties of the soul: both the body and the heart and the mind have

⁶ St. Symeon, *Homily 37*, 3.

⁷ St. John Chrysostom, “Homily on the Day of Holy Illumination”, in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, January 6.

⁸ Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, II, 7; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974, p. 77.

been afflicted by a sinful infirmity. Fallen men, flattering and deceiving themselves to their destruction, call and recognize their reasoning to be healthy. The reason was healthy before the fall; after the fall, in all men without exception, it has become falsely so called, and for salvation must be rejected. 'The light of mine eyes is no longer with me', says Scripture about the reasoning of fallen nature (Psalm 37.11). Flattering and deceiving themselves to their destruction, fallen men call and recognize their heart to be good; it was good before the fall; after the fall its good has been mixed with evil, and for salvation it must be rejected as defiled. God the Knower of hearts has called all men evil (Luke 11.13). From the infection of sin everything in man has fallen into disarray, everything works incorrectly, everything works under the influence of lies and self-deception. That is how his will works, that is how all the feelings of his heart work, that is how all his thoughts work. In vain and falsely does blinded humanity call them good, elegant, elevated! Profound is our fall, and very few are the men who are conscious of themselves as fallen, in need of the Saviour; the majority look upon their fallen condition as a condition of complete triumph, and apply all their efforts to strengthen and develop their fallen condition.

"It has become impossible for man to separate the evil that has been introduced from the native good by his own efforts: man is conceived in iniquities and is born in sin (Psalm 50.5). From his very birth man has not one deed, not one word, not one thought, not one feeling, even for the shortest minute, in which good would not be mixed with a greater or lesser admixture of evil. This is witnessed by Holy Scripture, which says about fallen men that among them 'a righteous man there is no more; for truths have diminished from the sons of men. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one' (Romans 3.10,12). Indicating his fallen nature, the holy Apostle Paul says: 'In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing' (Romans 7.18). Here by 'flesh' the apostle means not the human body as such, but the carnal condition of the whole man: his mind, heart and body. And in the Old Testament the whole man is called 'flesh': 'My Spirit shall not abide in man for ever,' said God, 'for he is flesh' (Genesis 6.3). In this fleshly condition, as if in its own body, lives sin and eternal death. The apostle calls the fleshly condition 'the body of death' (Romans 7.14), 'the body of sin' (Romans 6.6). This condition is called flesh, body, body of death and body of sin because in it thought and heart, which should strive towards the spiritual and the holy, are aimed and nailed to the material and sinful, they live in matter and sin."⁹

That which for the saints is a mystery to be revered, for rationalists becomes a "problem" to be removed. The "problem" is the connection that the doctrine of original sin posits between Adam and Eve's transgression in

⁹ Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, "Slovo o razlichnykh sostoianiakh estestva chelovecheskogo" ("A Word on the Various Conditions of Human Nature"), *Tvorenia (Works)*, Moscow, 2001, vol. II, pp. 343-344 (in Russian).

Paradise and the sinfulness of all their descendants. In other words, how is it that *the original* sin of Adam and Eve can become *the origin* of the sinfulness of their descendants? Does not the guilt of the sin of Adam and Eve rest on them alone, and not on their descendants, who were not even in existence at the time? How can we be held responsible for our ancestors' sin? Certainly we can be affected by the consequences of their sin; but surely this is not the same as being directly infected by their sin itself?

The Greek Neo-Soteriologists

The basic approach to this problem of the new soteriologists of Greek race has been to claim that it is not sin that is transmitted by Adam, but something else – a disease, which we may call corruption or mortality.

An example of this kind of thinking comes from Fr. Anthony Hughes, an Antiochian priest and former Orthodox chaplain at Harvard University: “The Eastern Church, unlike its Western counterpart, never speaks of guilt being passed from Adam and Eve to their progeny, as did Augustine. Instead, it is posited that each person bears the guilt of his or her own sin. The question becomes, ‘What then is the inheritance of humanity from Adam and Eve if it is not guilt?’ The Orthodox Fathers answer as one: *death*. (I Corinthians 15:21) ‘Man is born with the parasitic power of death within him,’ writes Fr. Romanides (2002, p. 161). Our nature, teaches Cyril of Alexandria, became ‘diseased...through the sin of one’ (Migne, 1857-1866a). It is not guilt that is passed on, for the Orthodox fathers; it is a condition, a disease.”¹⁰

The main source for the new soteriologists' theory of original sin is the thesis of John Romanides entitled *The Ancestral Sin*, which he defended at the University of Athens in 1957. This thesis, not surprisingly, elicited intense debate, being rejected by two of the examiners, Trembelas and Bratsiotis, and was not accepted quickly or unanimously. However, it has now become a “classic” statement of the new theory of original sin.

Romanides objects to “the peculiar teachings of the Franco-Latin tradition concerning original sin as guilt inherited from Adam, or the need of satisfying divine Justice through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross”.¹¹ He has a particular contempt for Blessed Augustine of Hippo, whom he accuses of being the “original sinner” in respect of the Franco-Latin doctrine of original sin. His works mention the name of Augustine on almost every page. And yet he very rarely quotes Augustine, and his readers are not given the information necessary in order to judge whether the accusations against him are valid. Nor does he explain why, if Augustine was such a heretic in this respect, he was called “holy” in the Fifth Ecumenical Council, and was so

¹⁰ www.stmaryorthodoxchurch.org/orthodoxy/articles/2004-hughes-sin.php.

¹¹ Romanides, *An Outline of Orthodox Patristic Dogmatics*, Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004, p. 125.

admired by many Orthodox Fathers in both East and West who lived before the eleventh-century schism of the West from Holy Orthodoxy.

Actually, Romanides is not as extreme – at any rate, in this early work of his – as many of his contemporary followers. Thus he writes: “Death is not from God; nor is it caused by personal sins of a newborn child but by an inherited sinful condition and the devil.”¹² This is true; but what is this “inherited sinful condition” if not original sin in the traditional sense? We may call this condition a “disease” – several Holy Fathers call it that.¹³ But it should be understood that whereas an ordinary physical disease is morally neutral, so to speak, this disease is far from being such: it is a *sinful* condition, which therefore requires, not simply *treatment*, but also *expiation*. If this point is accepted, then we remain within the bounds of Orthodoxy.

The problem is that many of Romanides’ followers use the language of disease to exclude the language of sin altogether, as if the two categories were mutually exclusive – although St. Leo, as we have seen, uses them together, speaking about “the *wound* of original *sin*”. They seek, as it were, to take the sin – and therefore the sting – out of original sin. Romanides himself does not go that far: instead, he tends to see death, and the fear of death, as the “original” sin which causes all others. Thus he writes: “Because of the sins that spring forth from the fear of death ‘the whole world lieth in wickedness’. Through falsehood and fear, Satan, in various degrees, motivates sin.”¹⁴

And yet can it be true that all sin is motivated by Satan through the fear of death? Is lust the product of the fear of death? Or pride?

Again he writes: “All human unrest is rooted in inherited psychological and bodily infirmities, that is, in the soul’s separation from grace and in the body’s corruptibility, from which springs all selfishness. Any perceived threat automatically triggers fear and uneasiness. Fear does not allow a man to be perfected in love.”¹⁵

There is no doubt that the fear of death, which is natural to man in his mortal, corrupted state, provides an incentive to sin. Nevertheless, this fear is *not* sin in itself, which is proved by the fact that Christ, having assumed a corruptible but sinless body, allowed Himself to feel the fear of death in the Garden of Gethsemane. (It is significant that another “new soteriologist”, Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), denied, contrary to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, that Christ experienced the fear of death.) The fear of death is

¹² Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, Ridgewood, N.J.: Zephyr Publishing, 2002, p. 93.

¹³ As does the Church in her liturgy: “Adam fell prey to bodily corruption, which he transmitted to all our kind like some pollution from disease” (*Festal Menaion*, Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14, Mattins, Canon, Canticle Seven, troparion).

¹⁴ Romanides, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁵ Romanides, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

an innocent passion in itself, otherwise Christ, Who is completely sinless, would not have allowed Himself to feel it. Personal sin begins only when out of fear of death we turn away from God's commandments. Christ feared death in the Garden, but He did not allow this fear to turn Him away from the feat of dying for the salvation of the world, but trampled on His fear, showing Himself perfect in love. Indeed, the fear of death and hell is not only not sinful *per se* but is an ascetic practice strongly recommended by the Holy Fathers.

The traditional teaching is that Christ came to save man from sin, the curse and death. Thus Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow writes: "Q. In what sense is Jesus Christ said to have been crucified for us? A. In the sense that by His death on the Cross He delivered us from sin, the curse and death."¹⁶ And then he goes on to cite separately those Scriptural passages which speak of Christ's delivering us from sin (Ephesians 1.7), from the curse (Galatians 3.13) and from death (Hebrews 2.14-15). Romanides does not deny this, but places all the emphasis on death rather than sin; he tends to blur the concepts of sin, the curse and death; and for him it is death, rather than sin, that is transmitted from Adam to his descendants. In fact, for him death is not only the wages, that is, the *effect*, of sin in the sense of the first sin committed by Adam and Eve alone, but also the *cause* of the general sinfulness of mankind in all succeeding generations. Death for him is the origin, as it were, of original sin in the human race - if it is not to be identified with original sin itself. "The fountain of man's personal sins," he writes, "is the power of death that is in the hands of the devil and in man's own willing submission to him."¹⁷

Now there is an important element of truth in this thesis, which is valuable and should not be denied. But it is also an exaggeration, which ignores and obscures certain vital facts. We shall come to these facts after citing his most extensive exposition of his thesis in full:-

"When we take into account the fact that man was created to become perfect in freedom and love as God is perfect, that is, to love God and his neighbour in the same unselfish way that God loves the world, it becomes apparent that the death of the soul, that is, the loss of divine grace, and the corruption of the body have rendered such a life of perfection impossible. In the first place, the deprivation of divine grace impairs the mental powers of the newborn infant; thus, the mind of man has a tendency toward evil from the beginning. This tendency grows strong when the ruling force of corruption becomes perceptible in the body. Through the power of death and the devil, sin that reigns in man gives rise to fear and anxiety and to the general instinct of self-preservation or survival. Thus, Satan manipulates man's fear and his desire for self-satisfaction, raising up sin in him, in other

¹⁶ Metropolitan Philaret, *Extended Christian Catechism of the Orthodox Catholic Eastern Church*, 1823.

¹⁷ Romanides, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

words, transgression against the divine will regarding unselfish love, and provoking man to stray from his original destiny. Since weakness is caused in the flesh by death, Satan moves man to countless passion and leads him to devious thoughts, actions, and selfish relations with God as well as with his fellow man. Sin reigns both in death, and in the mortal body because 'the sting of death is sin'.

"Because of death, man must first attend to the necessities of life in order to stay alive. In this struggle, self-interests are unavoidable. Thus, man is unable to live in accordance with his original destiny of unselfish love. This state of subjection under the reign of death is the root of man's weaknesses in which he becomes entangled in sin at the urging of the demons and by his own consent. Resting in the hands of the devil, the power of the fear of death is the root from which self-aggrandizement, egotism, hatred, envy, and other similar passions spring up."¹⁸ And so, "because of the sins that spring forth from the fear of death 'the whole world lieth in wickedness'".¹⁹

In another work, Romanides writes: "Because [a man] lives constantly under the fear of death, [he] continuously seeks bodily and psychological security, and thus becomes individualistically inclined and utilitarian in attitude. Sin... is rooted in the disease of death."²⁰ And he goes on to cite Hebrews 2.14-15: "Since, then, the children [of God] have shared in blood and flesh, and He Himself has likewise participated in those, so that through death He might destroy the one having the power of death, i.e. the devil, and that he might release them, as many as were in the bonds of servitude throughout their life(time)."

But this is an exaggeration: the fear of death is not the root of *all* evil. Apart from the fact, noted above, that the fear of death as such is not a sin in itself, but only an incitement to, or excuse for, sin, we should note that many pagan vices have nothing to do with the fear of death. When the warrior risks his life in order to rape and plunder, is his motivation the fear of death? No, it is lust and greed – which are evidently stronger than the fear of death that threatens rapists and plunderers. As for the more subtle but still more serious sins, such as pride, these are much more primordial than the fear of death. The devil did not rebel against God out of fear of death, but simply out of pride.

The root of all evil is the desire to live in defiance of God and His law, which is pride. That was the motivation of Eve when she took of the forbidden fruit. She feared neither God nor the death that God prophesied would take place if she disobeyed Him. If we look for a cause of her pride in her own nature or in her environment, we look in vain. For sin, as Dostoyevsky powerfully demonstrated in *Notes from Underground*, is

¹⁸ Romanides, op. cit., pp. 162-163.

¹⁹ Romanides, op. cit., p. 77.

²⁰ Romanides, "The Ecclesiology of St. Ignatius of Antioch".

ultimately irrational. If it were not irrational, but the determined effect of a definite cause, it would not be sin. Thus if all the blame could be placed on the devil, it would not be her sin, but the devil's. And if the blame could be placed on her nature alone, again it would not be her sin, but simply an inevitable product of her nature, like the behaviour of animals. But her nature was not fallen and not purely animalian. The mystery and the tragedy of sin – both before the fall and after the fall – lies in the fact that, whatever incitements to sin exist in our nature or in our environment, they do not explain the sin, and therefore do not excuse it. The much-maligned St. Augustine was surely right in attributing the cause of the fall to pride, and in not seeking any cause of that pride in anything beyond itself.

Romanides continues: “In addition to the fact that man ‘subjects himself to anything in order to avoid dying’, he constantly fears that his life is without meaning. Thus, he strives to demonstrate to himself and to others that it has worth. He loves flatterers and hates his detractors. He seeks his own and envies the success of others. He loves those who love him and hates those who hate him. He seeks security and happiness in wealth, glory, bodily pleasures, and he may even imagine that his destiny is a self-seeking eudaemonistic and passionless enjoyment of the presence of God regardless of whether or not he has true, active, unselfish love for others. Fear and anxiety render man an individualist. And when he identifies himself with a communal or social ideology it, too, is out of individualistic, self-seeking motives because he perceives his self-satisfaction and eudaemonia as his destiny. Indeed, it is possible for him to be moved by ideological principles of vague love for mankind despite the fact that mortal hatred for his neighbour nests in his heart. These are the works of the ‘flesh’ under the sway of death and Satan.”²¹

In support of his thesis Romanides quotes from St. John Chrysostom's commentary on the phrase “sold under sin” (Romans 7.14): “Because with death, he is saying, there entered in a horde of passions. For when the body became mortal, it was necessary for it also to receive concupiscence, anger, pain, and all the other passion which required much wisdom to prevent them from inundating us and drowning our reason in the depth of sin. For in themselves they were not sin, but in their uncontrolled excess this is what they work.”²²

But St. Chrysostom does not so much support Romanides' thesis here as limit and correct it. He limits it by referring only to what we may call *physical* passions, such as concupiscence, anger and pain: there is no reference to pride. He corrects it by indicating that these passions are not in themselves sinful. They may incite sin by attempting to inundate our reason. But it is our reason that sins or refrains from sin by giving in to, or resisting, passion.

²¹ Romanides, op. cit., pp. 163-164.

²² St. John Chrysostom, quoted in Romanides, op. cit., p. 167, note 45.

God allowed the introduction of the physical passions into our nature in order to counteract the effects of death (here we leave aside the question whether these passions existed in a different, unfallen form in Paradise). Thus concupiscence was introduced in order that man should want to reproduce himself; pain in order that he should learn what is dangerous for his existence; and anger in order that he should fight against such dangers. Since these passions are useful and good for our continued existence in the conditions of the fall and death, the saint does not call them sinful as such, even though they can lead to sin. Nor are they the direct product of death, but rather a form of *resistance* to death. So St. Chrysostom does not support Romanides' thesis that death is the direct cause of sin.

More in favour of Romanides' thesis are the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria: "Because he [Adam] fell under sin and slipped into corruptibility, pleasures and filthiness assaulted the nature of the flesh, and in our members was unveiled a savage law. Our nature, then, became diseased by sin through the disobedience of one, that is, of Adam. Thus all were made sinners, not by being transgressors with Adam, something which they never were, but by being of his nature and falling under the law of sin... Human nature fell ill in Adam and subject to corruptibility through disobedience, and, therefore, the passions entered in."²³

However, even here it is not said that death and corruptibility are the cause of our nature's sickness, but the other way round: our nature's sickness is the cause of death and corruptibility, and the cause of that sickness is sin ("our nature... became diseased *by sin*"), which is, of course, a perfectly Orthodox thought. So the only difference between St. Cyril and St. Chrysostom is that while St. Cyril prefers to speak about our nature falling under *the law of sin*, St. Chrysostom prefers to speak about the introduction of *passions* (concupiscence, anger, pain) which, if not checked by our reason, lead to sinful acts, but which are not sinful in themselves. This difference, as Romanides himself admits, is only a matter of terminology.²⁴

So in order to avoid confusion, we need to distinguish between: (i) *personal sin*, which attaches to the individual person, and for which he, and he alone, is personally responsible, and (ii) *the law of sin*, a sinful disorder of human nature as a whole. When St. Paul says: "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Romans 7.14), he is saying that our human nature is subject to the law of sin, not in the sense that we cannot avoid committing personal sins, but in the sense that we all have *incitements* or *proclivities* to sin implanted in our nature as a result of the fall. We can fight against the law of sin, preventing it from being translated into personal sin, in an imperfect way through the law of our mind, which resists sin, and in a more radical way through the law of grace, which

²³ St. Cyril, *Commentary on Romans*, P.G. 74: 788-789; quoted in Romanides, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

²⁴ Romanides, *op. cit.*, p. 167, note 45.

not only resists sin but destroys it altogether. For since grace has come, Holy Baptism “washes man clean from the ancient shame of Adam’s sinfulness”.²⁵

Returning now to Romanides’ thesis that death is the cause of sin²⁶, his seemingly most powerful argument rests on a controversial translation of Romans 5.12: “As through one man sin came into the world, and through sin death, and so death came upon all men, because of which [i.e. because of death] all have sinned.” We shall have more to say about the translation of this verse later. Suffice it to say here that according to Romanides’ translation the second half of the verse is *in direct contradiction* to the first. For while the first half says that death came into the world through sin, the second half says that sin came into the world through death! Now it seems very unlikely that St. Paul would have meant to contradict himself in one and the same sentence. Much more plausible, therefore, is the following translation: “Death came upon all men because (i.e. insofar as) all have sinned”. This makes for one self-consistent thought rather than two self-contradictory ones. Moreover, it is consistent with the later verse: “sin... working death in me” (Romans 7.13), where sin is seen as the cause of death and not vice-versa.

Romanides tries to encapsulate the argument that death is the cause of sin by asserting that “death is a kind of parasite in which sin dwells”.²⁷ This is an elegant phrase, but it is not immediately clear what it means. He comes closest to a clarification a little later: “Because of the action of the devil through the death of the soul, that is, the loss of divine grace, and the infirmity of the flesh, men are born with a powerful inclination toward sin. And all, whether in knowledge or in ignorance, violate the will of God. All are born under captivity to the devil, death, and sin. Moreover, as a result, they fail to attain to their original destiny, that is, to moral perfection, immortality, and theosis, and are bereft of the glory of God.”²⁸

As it stands, this is perfectly acceptable – distinctly more so than his earlier statements. For his earlier statements stressed the fear of death, *physical* death, as the cause of sin, which is patently not true for many sins; whereas here he places the emphasis on the much broader and deeper category, “the death of the soul, the loss of divine grace”.

Nevertheless, this passage still begs the question: what is the cause of the death of the soul that causes the powerful inclination to sin, the law of sin in our members? Is it not sin, insofar as death is “the wages of sin”? And whose

²⁵ *Festal Menaion*, Feast of the Holy Theophany, Mattins, Canon, Canticle Five, Second Canon, troparion.

²⁶ Romanides accuses Western theologians of teaching that death and decay are the punishment of sin, even among newborn babies, whereas in the East it is death that is the cause of sin. “Most importantly, in the Augustinian context, corruption and death became a punishment from God for sin rather than only a cause of sins.”

²⁷ Romanides, op. cit., p. 164.

²⁸ Romanides, op. cit., p. 165.

sin could this be, if not Adam's, insofar as we are already born in the condition of spiritual death before we have committed any personal sin?

There is much that is true in Romanides' account, but it shifts the emphasis too far away from sin to death, as if death were the cause of sin rather than the other way round. So, as Patrick Pummill puts it, "instead of the wages of sin being death, it is turned upside down and the wages of death becomes sin. No doubt, death fuels the fire of sin, but the inner fallenness/corruption we inherit from Adam is the root of human sin".²⁹

St. Augustine expressed essentially the same thought, against a very similar error, as follows: "People speak in this way, who wish to wrest men from the apostle's words into their own thought. For where the apostle says, 'By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so passed upon all men', they wish the meaning to be not that sin passed over, but death... [But] all die in the sin, they do not sin in the death."³⁰

As the second Canon of the Council of Orange (529) said: "If anyone asserts that Adam's transgression injured him alone and not his descendants, or declares that certainly death of the body only, which is the punishment of sin, but not sin also, which is the death of the soul, passed through one man into the whole human race, he will do an injustice to God, contradicting the Apostle who says: 'Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed into all men, in whom all have sinned' (Romans 5.12)".

The Russian Neo-Soteriologists

Another, quite different attack on the traditional doctrine of original sin was mounted just after the revolution by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev, first-hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, in his *Dogma of Redemption* and *Catechism*. Both works were explicitly directed against the *Catechism* of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, whose teaching on original sin and redemption he regarded as scholastic in origin.

Metropolitan Anthony formulated his objection to Metropolitan Philaret's teaching on original sin as follows: "'As from a polluted spring,' we read in our textbook, 'there flows corrupted water,' etc. But, if you will, a spring and water are one thing, whereas living, morally responsible human beings are something else. It is not by our own will that we are descendants of Adam, so why should we bear the guilt for his disobedience? Indeed, we must struggle greatly in order to appropriate Christ's redemption: can it be that the condemnation of each man because of Adam befell men despite each one's own guilt? After all, the Apostle says here 'that the gift was poured out more

²⁹ Pummill, personal communication.

³⁰ St. Augustine, *Contra duas Epistolas Pelagianorum*, IV, 4.7.

richly than the condemnation' (cf. Romans 5.15), but with the juridical interpretation the result is rather the opposite".³¹

Here we may agree with Metropolitan Anthony that Adam, and Adam alone, was *personally* responsible for his transgression. However, while we do not inherit *personal* responsibility for Adam's sin, we do inherit Adam himself! For, as St. Basil the Great writes, what we inherit from Adam "is not the personal sin of Adam, but the original human being himself", who "exists in us by necessity".³² For, as St. Gregory Palamas writes, the original sin was not only personal to Adam, but "our original disobedience to God" and "our ancestral sin Paradise".³³ It follows, as St. Athanasius the Great writes, that "when Adam transgressed, his sin reached unto all men..."³⁴ And this, as St. Cyril of Alexandria writes, "not because they sinned along with Adam, for they did not then exist, but because they had the same nature as Adam, which fell under the law of sin".³⁵

Metropolitan Anthony was opposed by, among others, the second hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad and former rector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, Archbishop Theophan of Poltava. Much of the argument between the two men revolved around the correct translation and interpretation of the words: "By one man sin entered into the world, and so death entered all men by sin, *because* - or, according to another translation: *for in him* - all have sinned" (Romans 5.12).

Archbishop Theophan wrote that Metropolitan Anthony "in his *Catechism* gives a new interpretation of the cited words of the Apostle Paul, and, in accordance with this interpretation, puts forward a new teaching on original sin, which essentially almost completely overthrows the Orthodox teaching on original sin."³⁶ In the opinion of Metropolitan Anthony, these words from the Apostle Paul are translated incorrectly in the Slavonic translation: "Let us consider the original Greek text: the words 'in that' translate the Greek εφ' ω, which means: 'because', 'since' (Latin tamen, quod)... Therefore, the correct translation of these words of the Apostle Paul is: 'and so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned' (and not just Adam alone)".³⁷

³¹ *The Dogma of Redemption*, p. 47.

³² St. Basil, quoted in Demetrios Tzami, *I Protologia tou M. Vasileiou*, Thessaloniki, 1970, p. 135 (in Greek).

³³ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 31*, col. 388C.

³⁴ St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses against the Arians*, I, 12.

³⁵ As Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich writes: "All men from the first to the last are made from the same piece of clay, therefore they all, from the first to the last, form one body and one life. Each is responsible for all, and each is influencing all. If one link of this body sins, the whole body must suffer. If Adam sinned, you and I must suffer for it... ("The Religious Spirit of the Slavs", *Sabrana Dela* (Collected Works)), vol. 3, p. 124.

³⁶ Archbishop Theophan, *The Patristic Teaching on Original Sin*, in *Russkoe Pravoslavie*, № 3 (20), 2000, p. 20 (in Russian).

³⁷ *The Dogma of Redemption*, Montreal: Monastery Press, 1972, p. 47.

Now we may agree with Metropolitan Anthony that the strictly correct translation of Romans 5.12 is: “death passed upon all men, *because* all have sinned” rather than: “death passed upon all men, for *in him* [i.e. in Adam] all have sinned”. Nevertheless, not only all the Orthodox Latin Fathers and translations read “in him”, but also the Greek translators of the Bible into Slavonic, SS. Cyril and Methodius. Moreover, Bishop Theophan the Recluse considered that the translation “in him”, though freer and less literally accurate, in fact conveyed the *underlying* meaning *more* accurately. These facts should at least make us pause before we condemn unreservedly the freer translation. It may be that the spirit of the law is preserved more faithfully by not keeping exactly to the letter...

If we follow the correct translation, according to Metropolitan Anthony, “Adam was not so much the cause of our sinfulness as he was the first to sin, and even if we were not his sons, we still would sin just the same. Thus one should think that we are all sinners, even though our will be well directed, not because we are descendants of Adam, but because the All-knowing God gives us life in the human condition (and not as angels, for example), and He foresaw that the will of each of us would be like that of Adam and Eve. This will is not evil by nature, but disobedient and prideful, and consequently it needs a school to correct it, and this is what our earthly life in the body is, for it constantly humbles our stubbornness. In this matter this school attains success in almost all its pupils who are permitted to complete their whole course, that is, live a long life; but some of God’s chosen ones attain this wisdom at an early age, namely those whom Providence leads to the Heavenly Teacher or to His ‘co-workers’”.³⁸ As he put it in another place: “God knew that each of us would sin in the same way as Adam, and for that reason we are his descendants... Knowing beforehand that every man would display Adam’s self-will, the Lord allows us to inherit Adam’s weak, ill, mortal nature endowed with sinful tendencies, in the struggle with which, and still more in submitting to which, we become conscious of our nothingness and humble ourselves.”³⁹

However, while this appears to dispel one paradox and apparent injustice – that we should be guilty for a sin we did not commit – it creates other, no less difficult ones. For is it not unjust that we should be given a nature inclined to sin and doomed to death before we have done anything worthy of death? Metropolitan Anthony’s explanation is that God, foreseeing that we would sin like Adam, gave us a corrupt and mortal nature in anticipation of that. But this implies that whereas in the case of Adam death is clearly the wages of sin and the just punishment for the crime he committed, in our case the punishment *precedes* the crime, and therefore cannot be perceived as the wages of sin. Is this not no less unjust? Nor is it convincing to argue, as does the metropolitan, that we are encumbered with a sinful and mortal nature,

³⁸ *The Dogma of Redemption*, pp. 47-48.

³⁹ *Attempt at a Christian Catechism*, Third Article, Victoria, Australia, 1990, p. 45.

not as a punishment for sin, but in order to humble us, that is, in order to prevent worse sin in the future. For first: if we needed to be humbled, we clearly were already in sin – the sin of pride. And secondly: how can sin be reduced by endowing us with a nature inclined to sin?! Why not provide us with a sinless nature to begin with?

But God *did* provide us with a sinless nature to begin with, and it is we, not God, who have caused its corruption. Metropolitan Anthony, however, is forced by the logic of his argument, which denies that our sinfulness was caused by Adam's original sin, to attribute to God Himself the corruption of our nature. As he writes: "Let us now ask: Who was responsible for fashioning human nature so that a good desire and repentance are, nevertheless, powerless to renew a man in actuality and so that he falls helplessly under the burden of his passions if he does not have grace assisting him? God the Creator, of course."⁴⁰ This is perilously close to the assertion that God is the author of evil – or, at any rate, of the evil of human nature since Adam, which is clearly contrary to the Orthodox teaching that God created everything good in the beginning, and that there is nothing that He has created that is not good. God did not create death: death is the consequence of the sin of man, which in turn is the consequence of the envy of the devil. So the idea that God created sinful natures, natures subject to death, is contrary to Orthodox teaching. The only possible reason why human beings should come into the world already tainted by corruption is that their corrupt nature is the product of sin. And if not of their own personal sin, then the sin of an ancestor. That is, the forefather's or the ancestral or the original sin...

Thus St. Cyril of Alexandria writes: "[All men] have been condemned to death by the transgression of Adam. For the whole of human nature has suffered this in him, who was the beginning of the human race."⁴¹ Again, St. Symeon the Theologian writes: "When our Master descended from on high He by His own death destroyed the death that awaited us. *The condemnation that was the consequence of our forefather's transgression* he completely annihilated."⁴² Again, St. Gregory Palamas writes: "Before Christ we all shared the same ancestral curse and condemnation poured out on all of us from our single Forefather, as if it had sprung from the root of the human race and was the common lot of our nature. Each person's individual action attracted either reproof or praise from God, but no one could do anything about the shared curse and condemnation, or the evil inheritance that had been passed down to him and through him would pass to his descendants."⁴³

⁴⁰ *The Dogma of Redemption*, p. 40. Cf. similar statements in his *Catechism*, p. 54, "On the Fourth Article".

⁴¹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On Romans 5.15*, P.G. 74:785C; quoted in Nikolaos Vassiliadis, *The Mystery of Death*, Athens: "Sotir", 1993, p. 85.

⁴² St. Symeon, *The Discourses*, V: On Penitence, 9.

⁴³ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 5: On the Meeting of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ*, in Christopher Veniamin, *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002, vol. I, p. 52.

At this stage it will be useful to revert to the distinction discussed earlier between *personal sin* and *the law of sin*, between sin as the *act* of a human person, and sin as the *state* or *condition* or *law* of human nature. This distinction is in fact made by St. Paul in the passage in question, as Archbishop Theophan points out: “The holy apostle clearly distinguishes in his teaching on original sin between two points: παραπτώμα or transgression, and αμαρτία or sin. By the first he understood the personal transgression by our forefathers of the will of God that they should not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, by the second – the law of sinful disorder that entered human nature as the consequence of this transgression. [“I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at work with the law of my mind and making me captive to *the law of sin* which dwells in my members” (Romans 7.22-23).] When he is talking about the inheritance of the original sin, he has in mind not παραπτώμα or transgression, for which only they are responsible, but αμαρτία, that is, the law of sinful disorder which afflicted human nature as a consequence of the fall into sin of our forefathers. And ἥμαρτον - ‘sinned’ in 5.12 must therefore be understood not in the active voice, in the sense: ‘committed sin’, but in the middle-passive voice, in the sense: αμαρτωλοὶ in 5.19, that is, ‘became sinners’ or ‘turned out to be sinners’, since human nature fell in Adam.”⁴⁴

We find essentially the same distinction in St. Maximus the Confessor: “There then arose sin, the first and worthy of reproach, that is, the falling away of the will from good to evil. Through the first there arose the second – the change in nature from incorruption to corruption, which cannot elicit reproach. For two sins arise in [our] forefather as a consequence of the transgression of the Divine commandment: one worthy of reproach, and the second having as its cause the first and unable to elicit reproach”.⁴⁵ Thus the original sin of Adam, in the sense of his personal transgression, *the* original sin which no other person shares or is guilty of, has engendered sinful, corrupt, diseased, mortal human nature, the law of sin, which we all share because we have all inherited it, but of which we are not guilty since we cannot be held personally responsible for it. And if this seems to introduce two original sins, this seems to correspond to the teaching of the Holy Fathers.

We have inherited the “second” original sin, the law of sin, in the most basic way: through the sexual propagation of the species. For “in sins,” says David, - that is, in a nature corrupted by original sin, - “did my mother conceive me” (Psalms 50.5).⁴⁶ It follows that even newborn babies, even unborn embryos, are sinners in this sense. For “even from the womb, sinners are estranged” (Psalms 57.3). And as Job says: “Who shall be pure from

⁴⁴ Archbishop Theophan, *The Patristic Teaching on Original Sin*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 42.

⁴⁶ David here, as St. John Chrysostom points out, “does not condemn marriage, as some have thoughtlessly supposed” (*On Psalm 50*, M.P.G. 55:583).

uncleanness? Not even one, even if his life should be but one day upon the earth" (Job 14.4). 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 keeps us company till life's term".⁴⁷ Again, St. Anastasius of Sinai writes: "In Adam we became co-inheritors of the curse, not as if we disobeyed that divine commandment with him but because he became mortal and transmitted sin through his seed. We became mortals from a mortal..."⁴⁸ Again, St. Gennadius Scholarius, Patriarch of Constantinople, writes: "Everyone in the following of Adam has died, because they have all inherited their nature from him. But some have died because they themselves have sinned, while others have died only because of Adam's condemnation - for example, children".⁴⁹

Christ was born from a virgin who had been cleansed beforehand from all sin by the Holy Spirit precisely in order to break the cycle of sin begetting sin. For, as St. Gregory Palamas writes: "If the conception of God had been from seed, He would not have been a new man, nor the Author of new life which will never grow old. If He were from the old stock and had inherited its sin, He would not have been able to bear within Himself the fullness of the incorruptible Godhead or to make His Flesh an inexhaustible Source of sanctification, able to wash away even the defilement of our First Parents by its abundant power, and sufficient to sanctify all who came after them."⁵⁰

The fact that original sin taints even children is the reason for the practice of infant baptism. And this practice in turn confirms the traditional doctrine of original sin. Thus the Council of Carthage in 252 under St. Cyprian decreed "not to forbid the baptism of an infant who, scarcely born, has sinned in nothing apart from that which proceeds from the flesh of Adam. He has received the contagion of the ancient death through his very birth, and he comes, therefore, the more easily to the reception of the remission of sins in that it is not his own but the sins of another that are remitted".

Still more relevant here is Canon 110 of the Council of Carthage in 419: "He who denies the need for young children and those just born from their mother's womb to be baptized, or who says that although they are baptized for the remission of sins they inherit nothing from the forefathers' sin that would necessitate the bath of regeneration [from which it would follow that the form of baptism for the remission of sins would be used on them not in a

⁴⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 6, PG. 44, 1273.

⁴⁸ St. Anastasius, quoted in Romanides, *op. cit.*, p. 34, note 64.

⁴⁹ St. Gennadius, in K. Staab (ed.) *Pauline Commentary from the Greek Church: Collected and Edited Catena*, Munster in Westfalen, 1933, 15:362.

⁵⁰ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 14, 5*; in Veniamin, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

true, but in a false sense], let him be anathema. For the word of the apostle: 'By one man sin came into the world and death entered all men by sin, for in him all have sinned' (Romans 5.12), must be understood in no other way than it has always been understood by the Catholic Church, which has been poured out and spread everywhere. For in accordance with this rule of faith children, too, who are themselves not yet able to commit any sin, are truly baptized for the remission of sins, that through regeneration they may be cleansed of everything that they have acquired from the old birth."⁵¹

"It follows," writes Archbishop Theophan, "that it is Metropolitan Philaret who has correctly expounded the teaching of the Orthodox Church on original sin, and not Metropolitan Anthony. The attempt of the latter to give a new interpretation to the text of Romans 5.12 violates the ban laid in its time by the Council of Carthage, a ban on similar attempts with the laying of an anathema on the violators of the ban. But since the canons of the Council of Carthage were confirmed by the [Sixth] Ecumenical Council in Trullo, then for the violation of the indicated decree Metropolitan Anthony's *Catechism* falls under the anathema not only of the local Council of Carthage, but also of the [Sixth] Ecumenical Council in Trullo".⁵²

There is another argument against Metropolitan Anthony's position. St. Paul writes: "Until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not reckoned where there is no law. But death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression... Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died" (Romans 5.13,14, 7.8-9). For "sin is lawlessness" (I John 3.4), transgression of the law, so there can be no sin where there is no law. In other words, death reigned from Adam to Moses in spite of the fact that the men of that time did *not* sin as Adam did, and that personal sin was *not* imputed to them.

This interpretation is confirmed by St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who writes: "Paul's meaning is that, although Moses was a righteous and admirable man, the death sentence promulgated upon Adam reached him as well, and also those who came after, even though neither he nor they copied the sin of Adam in disobediently eating of the tree".⁵³ Again, Blessed Augustine writes: "He says not that there was no sin but only that it was not counted. Once the law was given, sin was not taken away, but it began to be counted".⁵⁴

⁵¹ This Canon was confirmed by the Sixth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils, and is therefore part of the dogmatic teaching of the Holy Orthodox Church. Compare Canons 114, 115 and 116 of the same Council, and Canon 2 of the Second Council of Orange (529).

⁵² Archbishop Theophan, *The Patristic Teaching on Original Sin*, p. 23.

⁵³ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 15.31.

⁵⁴ Blessed Augustine, *On Romans*, 27-28.

Thus before Moses the personal sins of men were not imputed to them, and they were not counted as having committed them. *And yet they died*. But death is “the wages of sin” (Romans 6.23). So of what sin was their death the wages? There can only be one answer: *Adam’s*.

Thus Metropolitan Anthony’s teaching on original sin, which links our sinful state, not with Adam’s past sin, but with our future ones, encounters several powerful objections. First, the idea that the punishment should precede the crime and that we should receive corruption and death *before* we have sinned is contrary both to natural justice and to the doctrine of the goodness of the original creation. Secondly, although, in the case of children who die young, the punishment precedes a *non-existent* crime in that they have *not* sinned personally, Church tradition still commands the baptism of children precisely “for the remission of sins” – which, since they are innocent of personal sin, can only mean the sin of Adam. But thirdly, and most importantly, the Apostle Paul specifically excludes the idea that our death is the wages of our personal sins, as opposed to the original sin of Adam.

St. Paul goes on to give a still more powerful reason for this interpretation: *the exact correspondence between Adam and Christ, between Adam who made all his descendants by carnal birth sinners and Christ Who makes all His descendants by spiritual birth righteous*: “As through one man’s transgression [judgement came] on all men to condemnation, so through one man’s act of righteousness [acquittal came] to all men for justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in to increase the transgression; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5.18-21).

St. John Chrysostom writes: “Adam is a type of Christ in that just as those who descended from him inherited death, even though they had not eaten of the fruit of the tree, so also those who are descended from Christ inherit His righteousness, even though they did not produce it themselves... What Paul is saying here seems to be something like this. If sin, and the sin of a single man moreover, had such a big effect, how it is that grace, and that the grace of God – not of the Father only but also of the Son – would not have an even greater effect? That one man should be punished on account of another does not seem reasonable, but that one man should be saved on account of another is both more suitable and more reasonable. So if it is true that the former happened, much more should the latter have happened as well.”⁵⁵ Again, St. Ephraim the Syrian writes: “Just as Adam sowed sinful impurity into pure bodies and the yeast of evil was laid into the whole of our mass [nature], so our Lord sowed righteousness into the body of sin and His yeast was mixed

⁵⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 10 on Romans*.

into the whole of our mass [nature]".⁵⁶ Again, St. Ambrose of Milan writes: "In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of paradise, in Adam I died. How shall God call me back, except He find me in Adam? For just as in Adam I am guilty of sin and owe a debt to death, so in Christ I am justified."⁵⁷ Again, St. Gregory Palamas writes: "Just as through one man, Adam, liability to death passed down by heredity to those born afterwards, so the grace of eternal and heavenly life passed down from the one divine and human Word to all those born again of Him".⁵⁸

Thus just as Adam sinned, and so brought sin and death on all his descendants, even though they had not committed the original sin, so Christ brought remission of sins and eternal life to all His descendants (the children of the Church), even though they have not rejected sin as He has. If the original curse and punishment was "unjust", the freedom from the curse and redemption is also "unjust". But the one "injustice" wipes out the other "injustice" and creates the Righteousness of God. It is therefore vain to seek, as does Metropolitan Anthony, a rational justification of our inheritance of original sin. It is unjust – from a human point of view. And the fact that we later sin of our own free will does not make the original inheritance just. However, this "injustice" is wiped out by the equal injustice of Christ's blotting out *all* our sins – both original sin, and our personal sins – by his unjust death on the Cross. As Archbishop Seraphim of Lubny writes: "If we bear in mind that by the sufferings of One all are saved, we shall see no injustice in the fact that by the fault of one others are punished."⁵⁹

It is not only the parallel between the old Adam and the new Adam that is relevant here, but also that between the old Eve and the new Eve, the Virgin Mary. The metropolitan says: "Knowing beforehand that every man would display Adam's self-will, the Lord allows us to inherit Adam's weak, ill, mortal nature endowed with sinful tendencies..." However, there is one human being of whom we know that she would *not* have displayed Adam's self will, and who is glorified above all human beings precisely because she *rejected* Eve's temptation, *reversing* her disobedience: the Mother of God. *And yet the Mother of God was born in original sin.* This is the teaching of the Orthodox Church, which rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine that the Virgin was conceived immaculately in order to preserve her from original sin. Rather, the Orthodox Church follows the teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian, who says: "The Son of God was conceived of the Virgin, who had been purified beforehand [obviously, from sin] in soul and body by the Holy Spirit."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ St. Ephraim, in Archbishop Theophan, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the death of his brother Satyrus.*

⁵⁸ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 16, 17*; in Veniamin, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁵⁹ *The Holy Hierarch Seraphim Sobolev*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press, 1992, p. 72.

⁶⁰ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Homily 44, On Pascha.*

St. John Maximovich writes: "The teaching that the Mother of God was preserved from original sin, as likewise the teaching that She was preserved by God's grace from personal sins, *makes God unmerciful and unjust*; because if God could preserve Mary from sin and purify Her before Her birth, then why does He not purify other men before their birth, but rather leaves them in sin? It follows likewise that God saves men apart from their will, predetermining certain ones before their birth to salvation.

"This teaching, which seemingly has the aim of exalting the Mother of God, in reality completely *denies all her virtues*. After all, if Mary, even in the womb of Her mother, when She could not even desire anything either good or evil, was preserved by God's grace from every impurity, and then by that grace was preserved from sin even after Her birth, then in what does Her merit consist? If She could have been placed in the state of being unable to sin, and did not sin, then for what did God glorify Her? If She, without any effort, and without having any kind of impulses to sin, remained pure, then why is She crowned more than everyone else? There is no victory without an adversary..."⁶¹

Logically, Metropolitan Anthony's theory leads to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin. For if God gave us our sinful nature because He knew that we would sin as Adam sinned, He would have refrained from this in the case of the Virgin, knowing that she would *not* sin as Eve sinned. So the fact that she *did* inherit a sinful nature shows that this was not in prevision of her sin, but because of the original sin of Adam...

Metropolitan Anthony's theory clearly shows the dangers of trying to squeeze the doctrine of original sin within the bounds of what seems rational or reasonable to ordinary human beings. He balks at the seeming injustice of original sin, but forgets that the salvation of all through the Sacrifice of Christ is equally unjust from a human point of view, and that the injustice of our inheritance of Adam's sin is blotted out by the injustice of our salvation through Christ's Sacrifice. As Bishop Hilarion warns: "Objectively speaking, it would be unjust to punish the entire human race for Adam's sin. Many theologians in recent centuries, labouring under the concept of 'religion solely within the bounds of reason', have rejected the doctrine [of original sin] as being incompatible with deductive logic. No Christian dogma, however, has ever been fully comprehended by reason. Religion within the bounds of reason is not religion but naked rationalism, for faith transcends reason and logic. The doctrine of original sin is disclosed in the light of divine revelation and acquires full meaning when seen against the dogma of humanity's atonement through the New Adam, Christ."⁶²

⁶¹ St. John Maximovich, *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mary the Birthgiver of God*, Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996, p. 59.

⁶² Alfeyev, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

The Effects of Baptism

Another way to approach the question of original sin is to ask: what does Holy Baptism remove or destroy? The traditional answer is: *all sin*, whether personal or original. However, it is obvious that mortality and corruption are not removed by Baptism: we all die, we are all corrupted, we all can feel within ourselves the workings of the old, fallen Adam. So if original sin, according to the new soteriologists, is mortality and corruption, then original sin (or whatever term they prefer) is not removed by Baptism, according to them. But this is contrary to the teaching of the Holy Church...

It follows that there must be a difference between original sin, which is removed at Baptism, and mortality and corruption and fallen nature in general, which are not. The cause is removed, but its consequences are allowed to remain.

"An analogy," writes Jonathan Grossmeister, "is when an infection damages an organ (like pneumonia can scar the lungs). After the infection is cured, nevertheless the scars remain, which permanently weaken the organ, rendering it more susceptible to future infections. In the same way, after baptism "cures" original sin, nevertheless our nature remains scarred and susceptible to sin, which is why we must continue to struggle..."⁶³

The reason why the Lord allows the consequences of original sin to remain is explained by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite: "An internal cause of thoughts, however remote, is the passionate and corrupted condition of human nature which was brought about by the ancestral sin. This condition remains in our nature also after baptism, not as ancestral sin *as such* (for this is removed

⁶³ Grossmeister, personal communication. "However," he goes on, "the medical analogy is not quite adequate. From what I understood of St Nicodemus, baptism does have a permanent effect. So even if you commit many serious sins after baptism, the innermost part of your soul remains clean. It is impossible ever to "catch" original sin again. Instead, all sins committed after baptism are like stains on the surface of the heart, which must be washed away by repentance, but which only cover the surface, never penetrating to the inside. Regarding the saints of the Old Testament, the opposite situation obtained: they struggled to wash away all the surface stains, but until Christ came and redeemed humanity, their innermost heart remained infected.

"At the same time, baptism, like the other sacraments, grants special grace to fight off future 'infections', future sins. So baptism can also to a certain degree 'heal' the scars of original sin. My understanding here is that to the extent you are spiritually prepared for baptism and the mysteries, to that extent you receive grace to fight off sin. In this sense, the strength of your faith and repentance when you approach the baptismal font matters, and why preparation in the catechumenate matters. This is in addition to the 'automatic' result of baptism, which is the forgiveness of sins. I believe this occurs no matter what the degree of preparedness, though correct me if I'm wrong.

"Finally, regarding the saints of the Old Testament, the opposite situation obtained: they struggled to wash away all the surface stains, but until Christ came and redeemed humanity, their innermost heart remained infected."

through baptism, according to Canon 120 of Carthage), but as a consequence of the ancestral sin, for the exertion and test of our free will, and in exchange for greater crowns and rewards, according to the theologians. For after the fall the intellect lost its innocent memory and thought which it had fixed formerly only on the good; but now when it wishes to remember and think upon the good, it is immediately dispersed and also thinks upon the bad. For this reason the divine Gregory of Sinai said: 'The source and ground of our thoughts is the fragmented state of our memory. The memory was originally simple and one-pointed, but as a result of the fall its natural powers have been perverted: it has lost its recollectedness in God and has become compound instead of simple, diversified instead of one-pointed.'"⁶⁴

Again, he writes: "Although baptism removes the ancestral sin and every other voluntary sin, it does not, however, remove the ignorance of the intellect, and lust, and the implanted inclination of the heart toward sin, and the other effects which that ancestral sin brought about in human nature; for these things remain as a consequence even after baptism in order to test our free will and for us to struggle and conquer, and for the baptized to receive their crowns."⁶⁵

As St. Diadochus of Photiki writes: "Although baptism removes from us the stain resulting from sin, it does not thereby heal the duality of our will immediately, neither does it prevent the demons from attacking us or speaking deceitful words to us. In this way we are led to take up the weapons of righteousness, and to preserve through the power of God what we could not keep safe through the efforts of our soul alone."⁶⁶

In the Old Testament, before the gift of Baptism was bestowed on us through the Cross of Christ, it was possible to struggle against fallen nature, but it was not possible to be saved, because it was not possible without baptism to conquer original sin. The greatest of the Old Testament saints, such as Enoch and Elijah, were even granted to be in "suspended animation", by being removed temporarily from this life of corruption. But they, too, will eventually die...⁶⁷ Even St. John the Baptist, "the greatest born of women", died. Even the Mother of God, the greatest of all rational creatures, died...

⁶⁴ St. Nicodemus, *Exomologetarion, Instructions to the Spiritual Father*, chapter 6, section 4.

⁶⁵ St. Nicodemus, *Homily on Repentance*, part 3, section 2, subsection F.

⁶⁶ St. Diadochus, *On Spiritual Knowledge* 78.

⁶⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 21.13: "Since, after the fall of the first formed, a human being [Enoch] was found to ascend the very heights of virtue and to revoke the sin of our first parents through his own acceptable way of life, see the exceeding love of the good God. When he found someone capable of revoking Adam's sin, he showed through his very actions that it was not out of a desire to inflict death on our race for transgression of the command that he had condemned the person who had given the command: he took him away during his lifetime to another place... He took him away during his lifetime, he did not grant him immortality, in case this should diminish fear of sinning; instead, he let it remain strong in the human race." And yet Enoch, too, will die at the end of the world....

Death was finally conquered by Christ. Being alone without sin of any kind, whether personal or original, He alone did not have to die. But He destroyed “the sting of death”, which is sin, by offering the perfect sacrifice for sin in His voluntary death, and thereby destroyed its effect, death itself.

Let us now turn to the Orthodox teaching on the Cross of Christ, which the new soteriologists, also succeed in distorting...

II. THE CROSS

Adam's fall was in three closely inter-related stages: sin, the curse and death. Similarly, his salvation through the new Adam, Christ, was in three stages forming a single redemptive act that the Church services call "the great justification"⁶⁸: the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection. Through His Incarnation Christ destroyed the curse on human nature: from the pure soil of the Virgin there arose a renewed and sanctified humanity that was free from all sin and again in intimate communion with God, sharing in His Holy Spirit. Through His Crucifixion Christ destroyed the sin of all men, offering in His own Body the perfect Sacrifice to the Holy Trinity that outweighed the sins of all men on the scales of Divine Justice. And through His Resurrection Christ destroyed death, releasing those in hades from the bondage of death and restoring His own blameless Soul to His incorrupt Body on the third day.

The "new soteriologists" have particular problems with the second stage of our redemption. They wish to remove from it all reference to sacrifice and to the satisfaction of Divine Justice and righteousness. These elements, they claim, are scholastic, Roman Catholic additions to, and distortions of, the pure and Orthodox dogma of redemption. Typical is the statement of Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Naupactos: "The aim of Christ's Incarnation was not to propitiate divine righteousness, as Western theologians suppose, but to heal human beings".⁶⁹ They claim that the language of wrath and vengeance is unworthy of God. Nor does God require a blood-sacrifice for sin. Christ wrought our salvation, not through the satisfaction of Divine Justice by a propitiatory sacrifice, but simply through the power of compassionate love.

A Question of Language

Since the language of sacrifice and justice, wrath and propitiation, is so deeply embedded in the Holy Scriptures, the new soteriologists do not attempt to deny its existence. Instead, they try to relegate it to a role in redemption that is subsidiary to that of love. This is the approach adopted by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev, who writes: "The act of redemption – the exploit of compassionate love which pours Christ's holy will into the souls of believers – could not, as an act of love, violate the other laws of life, that is, justice. And yet it has not infrequently been considered from this secondary, non-essential, and incidental viewpoint, a viewpoint which the sons of Roman legal culture, as well as the Jews, considered extremely important. Such a view of the secondary aspect of the event in no way obscures its real meaning as an act of compassionate love".⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Menaion, May 21, Service to Saints Constantine and Helena, Mattins, Canon, ikos.

⁶⁹ Vlachos, *The Science of Spiritual Medicine*, p. 24.

⁷⁰ Metropolitan Anthony, *The Dogma of Redemption*, Montreal: Monastery Press, 1972, p. 41.

We shall return to this argument later. But first let us consider another, more sophisticated, essentially philosophical argument. According to this argument, the language of the Bible is anthropomorphic and metaphorical, adapted to fallen human needs and ways of thinking. Therefore the “true” dogma of redemption is to be found only by stripping away this metaphorical covering. This stripping away reveals that God does not get angry or vengeful; He needs neither sacrifice nor propitiation; His nature is all-forgiving love and compassion, which was poured out on the cross in such abundance as to forgive all men all their sins without the need for any “juridical” satisfaction of Divine Justice.

Now we may readily admit that the juridical language of justice, sacrifice and propitiation as applied to the mystery of redemption is metaphorical. But this is only to be expected, and is in no way a fault of that language. For *all* language is *necessarily* metaphorical. As C.S. Lewis writes: “It is a serious mistake to think that metaphor is an optional thing which poets and orators may put into their work as a decoration and plain speakers can do without. The truth is that if we are going to talk at all about things which are not perceived by the senses, we are forced to use language metaphorically. Books on psychology or economics or politics are as continuously metaphorical as books of poetry or devotion. There is no other way of talking, as every philologist is aware... All speech about supersensibles is, and must be, metaphorical in the highest degree.”⁷¹

Even if we admit that the juridical metaphor is limited in its capturing of the mystery, it by no means follows that we will come closer to capturing that mystery by rejecting the metaphor. The Holy Scriptures did not reject the metaphor, nor did the Holy Fathers. Nor did they apologize for using it. What they did do was supplement the juridical metaphor with others.⁷² Thus the juridical metaphor was supplemented by, for example, the metaphor of the strong man (God) despoiling the goods of the brigand (the devil) (Matthew 12.29), which St. Irenaeus develops⁷³, and by the metaphor of the devil as a fish being caught on the hook of Christ’s Divinity and the worm of His Humanity, which is developed by St. Gregory of Nyssa among others.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Lewis, *Miracles*, London; Fount, 1998, p. 71.

⁷² Archbishop Basil (Krivoshein) of Brussels writes that the juridical metaphor is “one-sided” and “incomplete”, but nevertheless “expresses a doctrine contained in the Revelation” (“Christ’s Redemptive Work on the Cross and in the Resurrection”, *Sobornost*, summer, 1973, series 6, no. 7, pp. 447-448).

⁷³ But while employing this metaphor St. Irenaeus still also uses the language of justice: “The Word bound [Satan] securely as one banished from Himself, and He seized his spoils, in other words, the people who were held by him, whom he used *unjustly* for his own purposes. And verily he who *unjustly* led men captive is *justly* made a captive” (*Refutation*, 5, XXI, 3).

⁷⁴ Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 24; St. Maximus the Confessor, *Questions to Thalassius*, 64; Paul M. Blowers, “The Passion of Jesus Christ in Maximus the Confessor”, *Studia Patristica*, 2001, vol. 37, pp. 370-371.

Each metaphor illumines a part of the truth; one metaphor complements another, correcting its possibly misleading emphases.⁷⁵ And yet the juridical metaphor remains the central metaphor, the standard way given to us by God of understanding the mystery. As such, it must be accepted by us *with reverence*, as the *best way* of understanding the mystery, as God's *Divine Revelation* concerning this mystery.

For, as Fr. Georges Florovsky writes: "Revelation is the voice of God speaking to man. And man hears this voice, listens to it, accepts the Word of God and understands it. It is precisely for this purpose that God speaks; that man should hear him. By Revelation in the proper sense, we understand precisely this word of God as it is heard. Holy Scripture is the written record of the Revelation which has been heard. And however one may interpret the inspired character of Scripture, it must be acknowledged that Scripture preserves for us and presents to us the voice of God in the language of man... God speaks to man in the language of man. This constitutes the authentic anthropomorphism of Revelation. This anthropomorphism however is not merely an accommodation. Human language in no way reduces the absolute character of Revelation nor limits the power of God's Word. The Word of God can be expressed precisely and adequately in the language of man. For man is created in the image of God. It is precisely for this reason that man is capable of perceiving God, of receiving God's Word and of preserving it. The Word of God is not diminished while it resounds in human language. On the contrary, the human word is transformed and, as it were, transfigured because of the fact that it pleased God to speak in human language. Man is able to hear God, to grasp, receive and preserve the word of God..."

"When divine truth is expressed in human language, the words themselves are transformed. And the fact that the truths of the faith are veiled in logical images and concepts testifies to the transformation of word and thought – words become sanctified through this usage. The words of dogmatic definitions are not 'simple words', they are not 'accidental' words which one can be replaced by other words. They are eternal truths incapable of being replaced."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ For, as Vladimir Lossky writes: "The immensity of this work of Christ, a work incomprehensible to the angels, as St. Paul tells us, cannot be enclosed in a single explanation nor in a single metaphor. The very idea of redemption assumes a plainly legal aspect: it is the atonement of the slave, the debt paid for those who remained in prison because they could not discharge it. Legal also is the theme of the mediator who reunited man to God through the cross. But these two Pauline images, stressed again by the Fathers, must not be allowed to harden, for this would be to build an indefensible relationship of rights between God and humanity. Rather must we relocate them among the almost infinite number of other images, each like a facet of an event ineffable in itself" (Lossky, "Christological Dogma", in *Orthodox Theology*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989, p. 111).

⁷⁶ Florovsky, "Revelation, Philosophy and Theology", in *Creation and Redemption*, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976, p. 21, 22, 33.

Let us now contrast this Orthodox teaching with the teaching of one of the “new soteriologists” who happened to be a pupil of Florovsky, Fr. John Romanides: “God’s revelation to mankind is the experience of theosis. In fact, since revelation is the experience of theosis, an experience that transcends all expressions and concepts, the identification of Holy Scripture with revelation is, in terms of dogmatic theology, pure heresy.”⁷⁷

Heresy?! It is quite extraordinary for an Orthodox theologian to lambast the idea that Holy Scripture is revelation as heresy! And yet he goes on: “Today Protestants and Roman Catholics are under the impression that *God* gave Holy Scripture to the Church. This idea has so greatly influenced modern Orthodox thought that the Orthodox even agree with Protestants and Roman Catholics on this point...

“But now the Orthodox Church has to face a certain paradox. When you read the Old Testament, the New Testament, and even writings from Tradition, you will run across opinions that science proved to be false at least 150 years ago, especially on account of the breakthroughs in research made in the exact sciences. Naturally, this creates a serious problem for someone who does not fully grasp what the Fathers mean when they speak about divine inspiration. This problem mainly applies to the study of the Bible.”⁷⁸

So the Bible is not from God, according to Romanides, because it is contradicted, not so much by the experience of theosis, as by certain supposed findings of science...

Of course, Romanides does not deny the authority of Holy Scripture directly, but in denying that it is revelation on a par with the saints’ direct experience of the glory of God, or deification, which “transcends all expressions and concepts”, he provides himself with a tool whereby he can degrade certain scriptural expressions and concepts. For he introduces the idea that there is a “higher” theology, that of deification, which is without expressions and concepts, and a “lower”, Biblical theology with expressions and concepts. And he who has the higher theology can do without, or even correct, the lower theology.

He buttresses this idea with the teaching that there is no likeness, no analogy at all “between teachings in the Bible and the truth about God. Why not? Because there is absolutely no similarity between God and creation. This is the reason why Biblical concepts about God are concepts that can be set aside *and are set aside* during the experience of theosis. Before theosis, these concepts are clearly helpful, necessary, correct, and right, but only as guideposts towards God.

⁷⁷ Romanides, *Patristic Theology*, The Dalles, Oregon: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008, p. 109.

⁷⁸ Romanides, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

“The Bible is a guide to God, but the description of God in the Bible does not bear any similarity to God. Holy Scripture talks about God; it talks about the Truth, but it is not the Truth. It is a guide to the Truth and the Way Who is Christ. The words in the Bible are simply symbols that contain certain concepts. These concepts lead us to Christ, but they are no more than thoroughly human concepts.

“So you cannot hope to theologize correctly simply because you have read the Bible and base your theology on the Bible. If you do this, you cannot avoid becoming a heretic, because Holy Scripture can be correctly interpreted only when the experiences of illumination or theosis accompanies the study or reading of the Bible. Without illumination or theosis, Holy Scripture cannot be interpreted correctly.”⁷⁹

Let us separate the wheat from the chaff in these words. It is certainly true that Holy Scripture cannot be correctly interpreted without the help of the Holy Spirit. That help comes to us both directly and through the writings of the Holy Fathers, the texts of the Divine Services, the holy icons and in general the whole Holy Tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church. However, it is not true that “you cannot avoid becoming a heretic” if you have not had the experience of illumination (by which Romanides means the conscious experience of the Holy Spirit praying in one’s heart) or theosis. If that were the case, then the vast majority of Orthodox Christians would in fact be heretics. Orthodoxy or heresy is not determined by the presence or absence of a specific spiritual experience: it is determined by the sincere public acceptance or rejection of the Orthodox Faith as expressed in its official doctrinal pronouncements – as the Apostle Paul says: “With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10.10). Of course, every dogma has an infinite depth; and that depth is plumbed only to the degree that one has made progress in the spiritual life; and those saints who have acquired prayer of the heart and seen the Divine Light undoubtedly plumb the depths of the dogmas to a far greater degree than us sinful mortals. Nevertheless, the criterion of Orthodoxy remains the “holding fast the pattern of sound words” (II Timothy 1.13).

It is also not true to say that since there is no similarity between God and creation, the words of the Bible are “simply symbols” containing “no more than thoroughly human concepts”. First, although there is no similarity between the *essence* of God and creation, there is a certain likeness between the *energies* of God and His rational creatures, men and angels. That is why man is said to be made in the image and likeness of God. And that is why it makes sense to talk of God’s “love”, “anger”, etc. These words do not describe God’s essence, but they do describe – approximately, but nevertheless truly – a certain likeness between human experience and God’s actions towards us.

⁷⁹ Romanides, op.cit., p. 129.

And when these words are found in Holy Scripture in reference to God we know that they are *the best* approximation to the truth and therefore cannot be replaced. Yes, they are human artefacts which are more or less inadequate in describing the mysteries of God. But this applies to *all* the words and images used, not only the juridical words and images: words such as “love” and “compassion” are equally inadequate. God neither loves nor hates as human beings do; both the love and the wrath of God are not to be understood in a human way. For, as St. John of Damascus says: “God, being good, is the cause of all good, subject neither to envy nor to any passion”.⁸⁰ And, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, by virtue of our limitations and imperfection as human beings we introduce “something human even into such lofty moral definitions of the Divine essence as righteousness and love”.⁸¹ “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 55.8). And yet, provided we guard ourselves by this apophatic warning, our thoughts *can* ascend closer to the thoughts of God by accepting with gratitude and faith those words and images that God Himself has given us for our understanding, remembering that they are now not merely human words, but the Word of God, and that “the words of the Lord are pure words, silver that is fired, tried in the earth, brought to sevenfold purity” (Psalms 11.6). Moreover, we ourselves, by studying the Word of God in this way, become purer, loftier, more spiritual, more understanding.

Such understanding cannot be accomplished by replacing the vivid words of Holy Scripture with the dry categories of secular philosophy – or even of Romanidean theology. The Word of God is above all human attempts to explain it. And any attempt to “improve on” or “clarify”, still less “set aside”, the Word of God as expressed in Holy Scripture can only lead to distortions and heresies. If Holy Scripture uses this language, then we cannot expect to find any better words to explain the mystery. Instead of rejecting or belittling the terms given us by the Holy Spirit in Holy Scripture, we must accept them with reverence and probe as deeply as possible into their meaning, while purging them of all fallen connotations. Thus when considering the curse that God placed on mankind at the fall, we must exclude from our minds all images of bloodthirsty men cursing their enemies out of frenzied hatred and a desire for vengeance. At the same time, the concept of the curse must not become so abstract that the sense of awe and fear and *horror* that it elicits is lost. The curse was not imposed on mankind by God out of hatred of mankind, but out of a pure and dispassionate love of justice – and this justice, far from being a “cold”, “abstract” idea, is a living and powerful energy of God Himself. Similarly, God did not demand the Sacrifice of the Son out of a lust for blood, out of the fallen passion of vengefulness, but in order to restore justice and peace between Himself and His creatures, than which there can be nothing more desirable and necessary...

⁸⁰ St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book I, chapter 1.

⁸¹ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Sermon* 28.

The Sacrifice for Sin

Let us now look more closely at the Scriptural understanding of sacrifice, and of Christ's Sacrifice on Golgotha. In the Holy Scriptures, a sacrifice, as Archbishop Theophan of Poltava writes, is "the killing of an innocent being in exchange for a sinful person or people that is subject to execution".⁸² The very first God-pleasing act recorded in the Bible after the fall was the sacrifice of a lamb by Abel: "by faith," it is said, "Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Hebrews 11.4). Abel's sacrifice was pleasing to God, whereas Cain's was not (Genesis 4.4), in spite of the fact that Abel's involved the death of an innocent victim, whereas Cain's did not. Abel's sacrifice was excellent in God's eyes because it was offered through faith in the Lamb of God, the One Who would offer His own Body in Sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ. And all the sacrifices that pleased God in the Old Testament, from the sacrifices of Noah⁸³ and Abraham and Job to the sacrifices prescribed by the Law of Moses, were offered out of the same faith. This was especially true of the Passover lamb, and of the lambs offered by the rich to ransom their first-born sons (Exodus 13.13-15; 34.20; Leviticus 12.6).

Finally, the Object of this faith, 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). Since the Law was only "a shadow of the good things to come" (Hebrews 10.1), and "our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Galatians 3.24), the purpose of the Old Testament sacrifices was, by drawing a parallel between the Old Testament sacrifices (the types) and that of the New Testament (the anti-type), to instruct and prepare the people for the mystical meaning of the latter, the Sacrifice to end all sacrifices. For "if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the Blood of Christ, Who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9.13-14).

The new soteriologists do not accept this. Thus Fr. James Bernstein writes: "For the Jews, offering a sacrifice to God was an act of self-denial, an aspect of purification. Orthodoxy taught me a new view of sacrifice: The sacredness of the blood and its efficacy consists not in what the offering of the blood does to

⁸² Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*, p. 9.

⁸³ On the sacrifice of Noah, St. Ephraim the Syrian writes: "'In revelation, Lord! it has been proclaimed, that that lowly blood which Noah sprinkled, wholly restrained Your wrath for all generations; how much mightier then shall be the blood of Your Only Begotten, that the sprinkling of it should restrain our flood! For lo! it was but as mysteries of Him that those lowly sacrifices gained virtue, which Noah offered, and stayed by them Your wrath. Be propitiated by the gift upon my altar, and stay from me the deadly flood. So shall both Your signs bring deliverance, to me Your cross and to Noah Your bow! Your cross shall cleave the sea of waters; Your bow shall stay the flood of rain." (*Nisibene Hymns*).

God (to influence or change God), but in what it does to the offerer (to influence and change him). When the offerer places his hands on the head of the animal to be offered, he indicates that the offering is being given in his name and for his benefit. It does not imply a magical transference of sins from the offerer to the animal being sacrificed. Discarding sin from one's heart and life should be so easy? So when Orthodox read a verse like 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures' (I Corinthians 15:3), it is understood to mean that Christ died for us - to heal us, to change us, to make us more godlike - not that He died instead of us. The ultimate purpose of His death is to change us, not to avert the wrath of God."⁸⁴

This is half-true and half-false. It is true that the ultimate purpose of all the sacrifices, both of the Old and of the New Testaments, is not to change God, Who is immutable, but to change us - "to heal us, to change us, to make us more godlike". But it is false to say that there is no transference of sins, and no dying of one being instead of another.

When Abraham, following the command of God, offered his son Isaac in sacrifice, God stopped his hand and gave him a ram "in the place of his son" (Genesis 22.13), which was a prefiguring of the Sacrifice of Christ in our place. Again, the concept at the root of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, is clearly the transference of sin. As John Fisher says: "Upon this solemn occasion, the high priest was required to offer a bullock and a goat, the one for himself and the other for the people. Having sprinkled the blood of these upon the mercy-seat, he was then to bring forth another goat, called the 'scape-goat'; and, having confessed over him the sins of the people, and put them upon his head, to send him away bearing this burden into the wilderness. No Israelite, viewing the connection, as pointed out in the succeeding chapter [For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for the soul; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul' (Leviticus 17.11)], between the blood of the animal and atonement for sin, could view this transaction in any other light than as an atonement for his own sins, by the transfer of them to one goat, and the substitution of the other's death for the punishment due to them. By the sprinkling of the blood upon the mercy-seat he would likewise understand, that the Divine mercy was thus vindicated from the imputation of injustice in pardoning the offender. With the type and the antitype, therefore, both before us, and the nature of their mutual connection clearly pointed out to us by the inspired Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews, we are bound to conclude with him, that 'Christ' also 'was once offered to bear the sins of many' (Hebrews 8.5; cf. 9.23)."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Bernstein, *Surprised by Christ*, Conciliar Press, 2008, pp. 252-253.

⁸⁵ Fisher, *A Theological Essay read in the Divinity School, Oxford, June 25, 1835*, Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1877, pp. 17-18.

The new soteriologists claim that the language of wrath and curse and ransom, propitiation and sacrifice is scholastic or goes back to St. Augustine. But this is not true. All these words are found both in the Holy Scriptures and in the early Fathers, Greek as well as Latin.

The word “wrath” is used so often that no demonstration is needed. As for “curse”, in the Old Testament everyone who fails to fulfil every commandment of the Mosaic Law, and everyone who is hanged on a tree (i.e. crucified), is accursed. And in the New Testament St. Paul says that both these curses were voluntarily taken on Himself by Christ: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Galatians 3.13). So the language is impeccably Scriptural.

Nor are the Holy Fathers averse from using the same language. Thus in the troparion for Holy and Great Friday we chant: “Thou hast redeemed us from the curse of the Law by Thy precious Blood”. And St. Cyril of Alexandria writes: “In His own Person, He bore the sentence righteously pronounced against sinners by the Law. For He became a curse for us, according to the Scripture: For cursed is everyone, it is said, that hangeth on a tree. And accursed are we all, for we are not able to fulfil the Law of God: For in many things we all stumble; and very prone to sin is the nature of man. And since, too, the Law of God says: Cursed is he that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of this Law, to do them, the curse, then, belongeth unto us, and not to others. For those against whom the transgression of the Law may be charged, and who are very prone to err from its commandments, surely deserve chastisement. Therefore, He That knew no sin was accursed for our sakes, that He might deliver us from the old curse. For all-sufficient was the God Who is above all, so dying for all; and by the death of His own Body, purchasing the redemption of all mankind.

“The Cross, then, that Christ bore, was not for His own deserts, but was the cross that awaited us, and was our due, through our condemnation by the Law. For as He was numbered among the dead, not for Himself, but for our sakes, that we might find in Him, the Author of everlasting life, subduing of Himself the power of death; so also, He took upon Himself the Cross that was our due, passing on Himself the condemnation of the Law, that the mouth of all lawlessness might henceforth be stopped, according to the saying of the Psalmist; the Sinless having suffered condemnation for the sin of all.”⁸⁶

Let us now turn to the words “ransom”, “propitiation” and “sacrifice”. All the Holy Fathers used this language, both those who came before both the scholastics and St. Augustine, and those who lived at the time of scholasticism, and those who specifically warred against scholasticism.

⁸⁶ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, 22.19.

Thus one of the earliest Fathers of the Church, St. Cyprian of Carthage, writes: "If Jesus Christ our Lord and God, is Himself the Chief Priest of God the Father, and has first offered Himself as a sacrifice to the Father, and has commanded this to be done in commemoration of Himself, certainly that priest truly discharges the office of Christ who imitates that which Christ did; and he then offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father".⁸⁷

Again, Blessed Theophylact, who lived at the same time as the scholastic Anselm of Canterbury, writes: "Since the Lord offered Himself up for us in sacrifice to the Father, having propitiated Him by His death as High Priest and then, after the destruction of sin and cessation of enmity, sent unto us the Spirit, He says: 'I will beseech the Father and will give you a Comforter, that is, I will propitiate the Father for you and reconcile Him with you, who were at enmity with Him because of sin, and He, having been propitiated by My death for you and been reconciled with you, will send you the Spirit.'"⁸⁸

Still more striking is the language of one of the greatest opponents of scholasticism, St. Gregory Palamas: "Man was led into his captivity when he experienced God's wrath, this wrath being the good God's just abandonment of man. God had to be reconciled with the human race, for otherwise mankind could not be set free from the servitude. 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.... God overturned the devil through suffering and His Flesh which He offered as a sacrifice to God the Father, as a pure and altogether holy victim – how great is His gift! – and reconciled God to the human race..."⁸⁹

Another new soteriologist who rejects the language of "ransom", "propitiation" and "sacrifice" is Metropolitan Anthony. According to him, the Old Testament sacrifices were meant "only as 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."⁹⁰

Archbishop Theophan writes: "Our author [Metropolitan Anthony] 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

⁸⁷ St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 62*, 14.

⁸⁸ Blessed Theophylact, *Explanation of the Gospel of John*, 14.16.

⁸⁹ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 16*, 21, 24, 31; in Christopher Veniamin (ed.), *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, South Canaan, PA: Saint Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002, pp. 193, 195, 201.

⁹⁰ Metropolitan Anthony, *The Dogma of Redemption*, pp. 42-43.

(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 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?”⁹¹⁹²

However, St. Gregory, unlike Metropolitan Anthony, did 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.”⁹³

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 devil* (my italics – VM). 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

⁹¹ St. Gregory, *Homily 45 on Pascha*, 22, quoted by Protopresbyter George Grabbe in his foreword to *The Dogma of Redemption*, pp. vi-vii.

⁹² Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*, pp. 9-11.

⁹³ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*, p. 11.

Providence, it was necessary for the salvation of the human race.⁹⁴ 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."⁹⁵

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"⁹⁶ 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."⁹⁷

Returning now to the question of the Old Testament sacrifices, we may agree with the new soteriologists that their purpose was *not only* to prefigure the Sacrifice of Christ as Golgotha. They were also designed to bring home to the Israelite the *cost* of sin, and to wean him away from pagan sacrifices.

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 Golgotha⁹⁸. In particular, the Old Testament paschal Lamb had this mystically prefigurative significance⁹⁹.

"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

⁹⁴ 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.

⁹⁵ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*.

⁹⁶ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Works*, Russian edition, Moscow, 1889, vol. V, p. 42. Cf. *Homily 20* (PG 35.1068d).

⁹⁷ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Sermon 30*, 20.

⁹⁸ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. I, pp. 179-180.

⁹⁹ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. IV, pp. 132-142.

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...¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹

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 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’.¹⁰²

“‘For us He became man and took on the form of a servant, he was led to death for our iniquities’.¹⁰³

“‘He is God, High Priest and Victim’.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, pp. 898-900.

¹⁰¹ Archbishop Theophan, *On the Redemption*, pp. 25-27.

¹⁰² St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 30*, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, p. 82.

¹⁰³ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 19*, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. II, p. 129.

¹⁰⁴ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 3*, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. I, pp. 58-59.

“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’.¹⁰⁵

“He redeems the world by His own blood’.¹⁰⁶

“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).’¹⁰⁷

“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.’¹⁰⁸

“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’.¹⁰⁹

“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).’¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Verses on himself*, vol. IV, p. 245.

¹⁰⁶ St. Gregory the Theologian, *Word 29, Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, p. 61.

¹⁰⁷ St. Athanasius the Great, *Tenth Paschal Epistle*, 10; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. III, p. 464.

¹⁰⁸ St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation of God the Word*, 37; *Works*, Russian edition (St. Sergius Lavra, 1902), vol. I, p. 238.

¹⁰⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, book VI, 2; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VI, pp. 43-44.

¹¹⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To Olympius the Monk on Perfection*; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VII, p. 237.

“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’.¹¹¹

“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’.¹¹²

“‘When John the Forerunner saw Christ, he said to his disciples: “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1.35). By this he showed them the whole gift that 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.’¹¹³

“‘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.’¹¹⁴ ‘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?’¹¹⁵

“‘David after the words: “Sacrifice and offering hast Thou not desired”, added: “but a body hast Thou perfected for me” (Psalms 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’.¹¹⁶

“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

¹¹¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Word on Holy Pascha; Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 38.

¹¹² St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 13, 3; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 95.

¹¹³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 18, 2; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 119-120.

¹¹⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 46, 4; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 306.

¹¹⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 46, 3; *Works*, Russian edition, vol. VIII, p. 305.

¹¹⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Against the Jews; Works*, Russian edition, vol. I, p. 722.

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 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)...'¹¹⁷

"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.

¹¹⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Works*, Russian edition, vol. II, pp. 437-438. Cf. vol. II, pp. 446-449.

One died for all so that all should live in Him.¹¹⁸ 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 and guilt of sin'.¹¹⁹ 'He offered Himself as a holy sacrifice to God and the Father, having bought by His own blood the salvation of all'.¹²⁰ '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'.¹²¹ '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'.¹²²

"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'.¹²³ 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)....

¹¹⁸ 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).

¹¹⁹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part I.

¹²⁰ 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).

¹²¹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part II.

¹²² St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On worship and service in spirit and in truth*, part II.

¹²³ St. Basil the Great, *Letter to Bishop Optimus; Works*, Russian edition, Sergiev Posad, 1892, vol. VII, p. 224.

“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 sacrifices daily (as the other priests did), first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 7.26-27).¹²⁴

““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.”¹²⁵

“Finally, St. John of Damascus says the following about the mystery of the sacrifice on Golgotha: “Every action and performance of miracles by Christ is 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... [Therefore] 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.”¹²⁶

¹²⁴ St. Basil the Great, *Homily 19 on Psalm 48*, 3, 4; *Works*, Russian edition, Sergiev Posad, 1892, vol. I, pp. 194-195.

¹²⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Works*, Russian edition, Sergiev Posad, 1892, vol. I, pp. 241-242.

¹²⁶ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book IV, ch. 11.

Love and Justice

We noted above that the new soteriologists try to relegate justice to a role subsidiary to love in the mystery of our redemption. They exhibit a kind of impatience when mention is made of the need for the satisfaction of God's justice. It is not simply the scholastic overtones of the word "satisfaction" that annoy them: they are unhappy also with the emphasis on *justice*. It is as if they are saying: "Why all this talk about justice? Is not love enough? Are we not saved through God's love for mankind, demonstrated to a supreme degree on Golgotha? All we need is love..."

As the echo of the Beatles' pop song suggests, this is a very modernist, ecumenist-Protestant attitude. In our ecumenist age love has become the catch-phrase and the cure-all. All we need is love...

But it is not true that all we need is love. We also need truth and justice. These three principles are one in God, but at the same time they are three. God is love, but He is also truth and justice, and His love is incompatible with all untruth and injustice. For, as St. John of the Ladder writes: "God is called love, *and also justice*."¹²⁷

What is justice? In its most primitive meaning, justice signifies order, equity and balance. In its loftier, religious meaning, it signifies the right functioning of all things in accordance with their God-given nature.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite writes: "God is named Justice because He satisfies the needs of all things, dispensing due proportion, beauty and order, and defines the bounds of all orders and places each thing under its appropriate laws and orders according to that rule which is most truly just, and because he is the Cause of the independent activity of each. For the Divine Justice orders and assigns limits to all things and keeps all things distinct from and unmixed with one another and gives to all beings that which belongs to each according to the dignity of each. And, to speak truly, all who censure the Divine Justice unknowingly confess themselves to be manifestly unjust. For they say that immortality should be in mortal creatures and perfection in the imperfect and self-motivation in the alter-motivated and sameness in the changeable and perfect power in the weak, and that the temporal should be eternal, things which naturally move immutable, temporal pleasures eternal, and to sum up, they assign the properties of one thing to another. They should know, however, that the Divine justice is essentially true Justice in that it gives to all things that which befits the particular dignity of each and preserves the nature of each in its own proper order and power."¹²⁸

¹²⁷ St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

¹²⁸ St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, VIII.

Injustice in rational creatures is what we call *sin*. It is a transgression of God's law, a deviation from His righteousness, an offence against His love. The attitude of God to sin and injustice is called in the Holy Scriptures *the wrath of God*. This term does not denote a sinful passion of anger, for God is completely pure and passionless, but the utterly inexorable determination of God to destroy that which is evil and unjust, that is, which is opposed to love. As Archbishop Theophan puts it: "The wrath of God 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."

The wrath of God is expressed in *vengeance*, which in God is not a sinful passion, but the expression of perfect justice: "The Lord is the God of vengeance; the God of vengeance hath spoken openly" (Psalm 93.1). The saints, too, being in all things like God, desire vengeance against sin, but in a pure, passionless manner. Thus in the Apocalypse the Apostle John sees "under the altar the souls of those who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord, holy and true, does Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6.9-10). That the motivation of these saints is pure is confirmed by the Venerable Bede, who writes: "The souls of the righteous cry these things, not from hatred of enemies, but from love of justice."¹²⁹

Injustice in man is blotted out by repentance and the works of repentance, of which the most characteristic is sacrifice. Even before the Coming of Christ a partial blotting out of injustice through repentance was possible. Thus we know that God frequently forgave the sins of people in the Old Testament who sincerely repented before Him, such as David. However, since man was mired in sin, - not only his personal sins but also "the law of sin" that had penetrated his very nature, - he was unable to justify himself; his personal repentance was insufficient and his personal sacrifices tainted. "A brother cannot redeem; shall a man redeem?" (Psalm 48.7).

That is why even the best men of the Old Testament were barred from entry into heaven and went to hades after their death. Thus the Patriarch Jacob said of his son Joseph: "I will go down to my son mourning to hades" (Genesis 37.35). For "[sinful] flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of heaven" (I Corinthians 15.50).

¹²⁹ St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10. In his commentary on the Apocalypse, Archbishop Averky (Taushev) of Syracuse and Jordanville says the same: "The prayer of the righteous is explained, of course, not by their desire for personal revenge, but by the speeding up of the triumph of God's justice on earth and of that rewarding of each according to his works which must be accomplished by the Terrible Judgement" (with Fr. Seraphim Rose, *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1998, pp. 129-130).

If the injustice of man was to be blotted out, and peace restored between God and man, a Mediator had to be found Who would take upon himself the sins of all men and blot them out through a supreme Sacrifice that would be completely untainted by sin. Such a Sacrifice was offered by the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. It was offered by Himself as man to Himself and the Father and the Holy Spirit as God.¹³⁰

Now the new soteriologists implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – deny that any Sacrifice in the full sense – that is, in the sense of vicarious, propitiatory atonement – took place, but only an outpouring of love and compassion so strong that it blots out the sins of all men who open their hearts to receive it. Thus Metropolitan Anthony writes: “It appears to me that we have, according to our power, cleared the way to a more perfect understanding of the mystery of redemption, of its essential, its objective side. The salvation which Christ brought to humanity consists not only of the conscious assimilation of Christ’s principle truths and of His love, but also of the fact that by means of His compassionate love Christ demolishes the partition which sin sets up between men, restores the original oneness of nature, so that the man who has subjected himself to this action of Christ finds new dispositions, new feelings and longings, not only in his thoughts, but also in his very character, these being created not by himself, but coming from Christ who has united Himself to him. It then remains for the free will either to call all these to life or wickedly to reject them. The influence of the compassionate love a mother, a friend, a spiritual shepherd, consists (though to a much lesser degree) in this same penetration into the very nature (φύσις), the very soul of a man.... The direct entrance of Christ’s nature, of His good volitions into our nature is called grace, which is invisibly poured into us in the various inner states and outer incidents of our life, and especially in the Holy Mysteries... The subjective feeling of compassionate love becomes an objective power which restores the oneness of human nature that had been destroyed by sin, and which is transmitted from one human soul to others”.¹³¹

The problem with this interpretation is: if it is “the subjective feeling of compassionate love... which restores the oneness of human nature that had been destroyed by sin”, why was it necessary for Christ to die?¹³² Did He not manifest His compassionate love long before the Cross in innumerable ways? Was He not the same God of love in the Old Testament? But then why did He not carry out His redemptive work long before? Why did He have to wait five thousand years before forgiving all the sins of men and destroying the chains of hades?

¹³⁰ This teaching was officially dogmatized at the Councils of Constantinople in 1156 and 1157, and included in *The Synodicon of Orthodoxy*. See *The True Vine*, issues 27 and 28, Spring, 2000, pp. 53-55

¹³¹ *The Dogma of Redemption*, pp. 37-38.

¹³² Metropolitan Anthony implicitly accepts the justice of this objection when he shifts the centre of Christ’s redemptive act from His death on the Cross to His suffering in Gethsemane, writing: “In this did our redemption consist”...

The answer to all these questions is: because only in this way, the way of the Cross, could *justice* be accomplished. As St. Gregory Palamas explains: "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.*"¹³³

"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 the very heart, the very essence of our salvation...

¹³³ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 16*, 1, 2, 21; in Veniamin, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-180, 194. Italics mine (V.M.).

There is no conflict between love and justice. To say that God should be loving but not just is like saying that the sun should give light but not heat: it is simply not in His nature. It is not in His nature, and it is not in the nature of any created being, for the simple reason that justice *is* the order of created beings, it is the state of being as it was originally created. When people say that God is loving but not just, or that His justice demonstrates a lack of love, they do not know what they are saying. For His love is aimed precisely towards the restoration of justice, the restoration of “the nature of each in its own proper order and power”, in which alone lies its blessedness.

But justice can be restored, and injustice blotted out, only through suffering. “For it was necessary,” writes Nicholas Cabasilas, “that sin should be abolished by some penalty and that we by suffering a proportionate punishment should be freed from the offences we have committed against God.”¹³⁴ And if the restoration of justice involves suffering, this is not the fault of God, but of His creatures, who freely go against their nature as God created it and thereby create injustice.

For, as St. John of Damascus 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.”¹³⁵

Nor is justice a kind of cold, abstract principle imposed upon Him from without, as it were. As Vladimir Lossky writes: “We should not depict God either as a constitutional monarch subject to a justice that goes beyond Him, or as a tyrant whose whim would create a law without order or objectivity. Justice is not an abstract reality superior to God but an expression of His nature. Just as He freely creates yet manifests Himself in the order and beauty of creation, so He manifests Himself in His justice: Christ Who is Himself

¹³⁴ Cabasilas, *The Life of Christ I*, P.G. 150:516B; quoted in Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987, p. 62.

¹³⁵ St. John of Damascus, *Dialogue against the Manichaeans*, 37. Cf. St. Anthony the Great: We should not become angry with those who sin, even if what they do is criminal and deserves punishment. On the contrary, for the sake of justice we ought to correct and, if need be, punish them ourselves or get others to do so. But we should not become angry or excited; for anger acts only in accordance with passion, and not in accordance with good judgment and justice. Moreover, we should not approve those who show more mercy than is proper. The wicked must be punished for the sake of what is good and just, but not as a result of the personal passion of anger.”

justice, affirms in His fullness God's justice... *God's justice is that man should no longer be separated from God.* It is the restoration of humanity in Christ, the true Adam."¹³⁶

Love and justice are the positive and negative poles respectively of God's Providence in relation to the created universe. Love is the natural, that is, just relationship between God and man. Sin has destroyed love and created injustice. Divine Providence therefore acts to destroy injustice and restore love. We would not need to speak of justice if sin had not destroyed it. But with the entrance of sin, justice is the first necessity – love demands it.

However, since love never demands of others what it cannot give itself, the justice of God is transmuted into *mercy*. Mercy is that form of justice in which the punishment of sin is not removed altogether, but removed from the shoulders of the offender and placed on the shoulders of another, who thereby becomes *a propitiatory sacrifice*. And so, as Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov says, Christ “offered Himself as a redemptive Sacrifice to the Justice of God for sinful mankind – and the Holy Scriptures witness with all justice concerning Him: *Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world (John 1.29)*”.¹³⁷ Thus the Cross is both love and justice, both mercy and sacrifice, the perfect manifestation of love, and the perfect satisfaction of justice. It is “the mercy of peace”, in the words of the Divine Liturgy, the mercy that restores peace between God and man.

This intertwining of the themes of love and justice in the Cross of Christ is developed with incomparable grace by Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow: “Draw closer and examine the threatening face of God's justice, and you will exactly discern in it the meek gaze of God's love. Man by his sin has fenced off from himself the everlasting source of God's love: and this love is armed with righteousness and judgement – for what? – to destroy this stronghold of division. But since the insignificant essence of the sinner would be irreparably crushed under the blows of purifying Justice, the inaccessible Lover of souls sends His consubstantial Love, that is, His Only-begotten Son, so that He Who ‘upholds all things by the word of His power’ (Hebrews 1.3), might also bear the heaviness of our sins, and the heaviness of the justice advancing towards us, in the flesh of ours that He took upon Himself: and, having Alone extinguished the arrows of wrath, sharpened against the whole of humanity, might reveal in his wounds on the Cross the unblocked springs of mercy and love which was to the whole land that had once been cursed - blessings, life and beatitude. Thus did God love the world.

¹³⁶ Lossky, “Christological Dogma”, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115. My italics (V.M.).

¹³⁷ Brianchaninov, “Slovo o spasenii i o khristianskom sovershenstve” (Sermon on salvation and Christian perfection), *Polnoe Sobranie Tvorenij* (Complete Collection of Works), volume II, Moscow, 2001, p. 308 (in Russian).

“But if the Heavenly Father out of love for the world gives up His Only-begotten Son; then equally the Son out of love for man gives Himself up; and as love crucifies, so is love crucified.¹³⁸ For although ‘the Son can do nothing of Himself’, neither can he do anything in spite of Himself. He ‘does not seek His own will’ (John 5.19 and 31), but for that reason is the eternal heir and possessor of the will of His Father. ‘He abides in His love’, but in it He Himself receives into His love all that is loved by the Father, as he says: ‘As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you’ (John 15.9). And in this way the love of the Heavenly Father is extended to the world through the Son: the love of the Only-begotten Son of God at the same time ascends to the Heavenly Father and descends to the world. Here let him who has eyes see the most profound foundation and primordial inner constitution of the Cross, out of the love of the Son of God for His All-holy Father and love for sinful humanity, the two loves intersecting with, and holding on to, each other, apparently dividing up what was one, but in fact uniting the divided into one. Love for God is zealous for God – love for man is merciful to man. Love for God demands that the law of God’s righteousness should be observed – love for man does not abandon the transgressor of the law to perish in his unrighteousness. Love for God strives to strike the enemy of God – love for man makes the Divinity man, so as by means of love for God mankind might be deified, and while love for God ‘lifts the Son of man from the earth’ (John 12.32 and 34), love for man opens the embraces of the Son of God for the earthborn, these opposing strivings of love intersect, dissolve into each other, balance each other and make of themselves that wonderful heart of the Cross, on which forgiving ‘mercy’ and judging ‘truth meet together’, God’s ‘righteousness’ and man’s ‘peace kiss each other’, through which heavenly ‘truth is sprung up out of the earth, and righteousness’ no longer with a threatening eye ‘hath looked down from heaven. Yea, for the Lord will give goodness, and our land shall yield her fruit’ (Psalm 84.11-13).”¹³⁹

St. Philaret’s successor in the see of Moscow, St. Macarius “Nevsky” (+1926), put the relationship between love and justice very succinctly: “The justice of God demands the punishment of the sinner, but the love of God demands clemency. According to the justice of God, the sinner, as having nothing by which he could satisfy this eternal justice, must be subject to eternal torments. But love demands mercy. The Wisdom of God found a

¹³⁸ In the mystery of the Cross, says Metropolitan Philaret, is expressed “the crucifying love of the Father, the crucified love of the Son, the love of the Holy Spirit triumphant in the power of the Cross. For God so loved the world”. Metropolitan Anthony’s comment on these words is dismissive: “this is a most unpersuasive sophism, a mere juggling of words. What sort of love is it that crucifies? Who needs it?” (*The Dogma of Redemption*, p. 6). And yet it is precisely the crucifying love of the Father of which the Lord says: “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life...” (John 3.16).

¹³⁹ Metropolitan Philaret, “Sermon on Holy Friday (1816)”, *The Works of Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna*, Moscow, 1994, pp. 107-108 (in Russian); translated in *Orthodox Life*, March-April, 1992, pp. 2-10.

means to satisfy both justice and love. This means is the Redemptive Sacrifice of the Son of God. Christ paid by His blood for the debts of all sinners. They are forgiven, but after baptism people have again offended both the justice and the love of God. Consequently, they have again become heirs of hell. Then love wishes again to have mercy, and does not subject the sinner to eternal punishment, but punishes him temporarily, calling on him to repent through this punishment. If the sinner repents, the Lord forgives him, having established for this the Sacrament of Repentance, while Christ receives him into communion with Himself through the Sacrament of Communion."¹⁴⁰

Christ's redemptive work can be described as *perfect love in pursuit of perfect justice*. The beginning of all God's works is without question *love*: God created the world out of love. But with the appearance of sin, or injustice, God directed His love towards the abolition of injustice and the justification of man. This He achieved through *a propitiatory sacrifice*. As the Apostle of love - who is also the son of thunder - writes: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3.16). And again: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the *expiation* [or propitiation or atonement] (*ἰλασμον*) of our sins" (I John 4.10). "Let our lives, then," chants the Holy Church, "be worthy of the loving Father Who has offered sacrifice, and of the glorious Victim Who is the Saviour of our souls".¹⁴¹

So the Cross is perfect justice - but justice of a supremely paradoxical kind. 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, uttering the words expressive of sinners' horror at their abandonment by God: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" 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 self-sacrificial love 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 faith, gratitude and repentance.

The Church has expressed this paradox 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

¹⁴⁰ Tatyana Groyan, *Tsariu Nebesnomu i Zemnomu Vernij. Mitropolit Makarij Altajskij (Parvoitsky - "Nevsky"), 1835-1926*, Moscow, 1996, p. 305 (in Russian).

¹⁴¹ *Triodion*, Sunday of the Prodigal son, Vespers, "Lord, I have cried", verse.

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."¹⁴²

¹⁴² *Menaion*, September 14, Great Vespers, "Lord, I have cried", "Glory... Both now..."

III. HEAVEN AND HELL

The Holy Fathers teach that our salvation takes place in two stages: (1) our redemption through the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, and (2) our deification through participation in the Life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Phase 2 could not take place before phase 1 was completed; for the vessel of human nature had first to be cleansed through the Sacrifice of Christ before the new wine of the Holy Spirit could be poured into it. For before the Cross “the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7.39).

In the following petition from the Divine Liturgy we see the two phases clearly distinguished: “That our God, the Lover of mankind, Who hath accepted them upon His holy and most heavenly and noetic altar, as an odor of spiritual fragrance [phase 1, the Sacrifice], will send down upon us His divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit [phase 2, deification], let us pray”.

The new soteriologists, by contrast, place all the emphasis on deification. Moreover, just as their concept of deification overshadows that of redemption through the Cross, so does it overshadow that of the Last Judgement and the final reward of saints and sinners in the life to come. Let us examine their teaching...

The Critics of Justice: (1) Fr. John Romanides

Perhaps none of the new soteriologists places a greater emphasis on deification than Fr. John Romanides, who claims that deification was possible even before the Cross. Thus he writes that “the Old Testament Job reached theosis even though he was a heathen and not a Jew”.¹⁴³ Again he writes, speaking of the Eucharist, which is the mystery of Christ’s Sacrifice in the Church: “There is one Christ and He dwells in His entirety within every believer who has communed of the Immaculate Mysteries... This same mystery was also at work before Christ assumed flesh...”¹⁴⁴ The logical conclusion of this is that salvation is possible without Christ, without His Sacrifice on the Cross, and without even His Incarnation...

The downgrading of the Cross by Romanides is accompanied by a downgrading of *justice*, not only in the work of redemption, but also in the Last Judgement. Thus he writes: “Should we identify religion with the final victory of universal justice? Are we obligated to have religion because there must be a God of justice Who will ultimately judge all mankind so that the unjust will be punished in Hell and the just (in other words, good boys and girls) will be rewarded in Heaven? If our answer is yes, then we must have

¹⁴³ Romanides, *Patristic Theology*, Dalles, Origen: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008, p. 168.

¹⁴⁴ Romanides, op. cit., p. 161.

religion so that justice will ultimately prevail and the human longing for happiness will be fulfilled. Is it conceivable for good boys and girls to be unhappy after their death in the life to come? It is inconceivable. And if they were wronged in this life, is it possible for these good boys and girls who suffered unjustly to receive no justice in the next life? It is impossible. And in Heaven shouldn't they lead a pleasant life, a life of happiness? Of course, they should. But for all this to happen, life after death has to exist as well as a good and righteous God Who will settle the score with good and just judgement. Isn't that how things stand? He has to exist, at least according to the worldview of Western theology in the Middle Ages.

"But then modern psychology comes along and discredits all of this. Modern psychology tells us that these views are products of the mind, because human beings have an inner sense of justice, which calls for naughty boys and girls to be punished and good boys and girls to be rewarded. And since compensation fails to take place in this life, the human imagination projects this idea into another life where it must take place. This is why someone who feels vulnerable becomes religious and believes in his religion's doctrines. It also applies to someone who is devoted to justice and has profound and earnest feelings about what is right. They both believe, because the doctrinal teaching that they have accepted satisfies their psychological need for justice to be done. Their reasons are not based on philosophy or metaphysics but on purely psychological considerations..."¹⁴⁵

What a slander against the holy apostles, prophets and martyrs, who all longed for the final triumph of truth and justice! The Lord came "to proclaim good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to declare the acceptable year of the Lord, *the day of recompense*" (Isaiah 61.1-2). 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 a longing for the day of recompense when justice will be done by "the God of justice" (Malachi 2.17).

But "modern psychology", says Romanides, has proved that the longing for that day is just a projection of the human imagination, merely the expression of a (fallen) psychological need! What then of those martyrs under the heavenly altar who cry out with a loud voice: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6.10). Is their cry based "on purely psychological considerations"? Is their faith and hope founded on a medieval worldview? Are they not deified saints in the Kingdom of heaven and so not in need of any "purely psychological" gratification? If even the saints in heaven cry out for justice and vengeance against evil, this shows that the love of justice is an essential part of holiness and in no way a subject for pseudo-psychological reductionism.

¹⁴⁵ Romanides, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

The Critics of Justice: (2) Christos Yannaras

Another way to downgrade justice is to deny that God is a judge. Thus another new calendarist new soteriologist, Christos Yannaras, writes: "God is not the 'judge' of men in the sense of a magistrate who passes sentence and imposes a punishment, testifying to the transgression. He is judge because of what He is: the possibility of life and true existence. When man voluntarily cuts himself off from the possibility of existence, he is automatically 'judged'. It is not God's sentence but His existence that judges him. God is nothing but an ontological fact of love and an outpouring of love: a fullness of good, an ecstasy of loving goodness.... Man is judged according to the measure of the life and existence from which he excludes himself. Sin is a self-inflicted condemnation and punishment which man freely chooses when he refuses to be a personal hypostasis of communion with God and prefers to 'alter' and disorder his existence, fragmenting his nature into individual entities-when he prefers corruption and death. For the Church sin is not a legal but an existential fact. It is not simply a transgression, but an active refusal on man's part to be what he truly is: the image and 'glory', or manifestation of God."¹⁴⁶

There is an element of truth in this. It is true that "sin is a self-inflicted condemnation and punishment which man freely chooses". And it is true that a heretic, for example, who refuses to listen to a first and a second exhortation, is "self-condemned", as St. Paul says (Titus 3.11). This self-condemnation, as Bishop Theophan the Recluse explains, is the condemnation of his *conscience*: "In his conscience he is condemned for his disagreement with the truth, but he still does not listen to its voice, being ashamed to humiliate himself by making a concession. Thus he brings the clearly recognized truth as a sacrifice to his self-love, and sins in going against his conscience."¹⁴⁷

However, the fact that sinners are condemned by their own conscience, "the eye of God in the soul of man", in no way implies that they will not be condemned again. Many are judged by an untimely death that takes them away to stand before the judgement-seat of Christ without being given time for repentance. Thus we chant: "Give rest, O Christ, to all the faithful destroyed by the wrath of God: struck down by deadly thunderbolts from heaven, swallowed by a cleft in the earth, or drowned in the sea."¹⁴⁸ And then "all the nations" will be judged again - this time in the sight of the whole universe - at the Last and Most Terrible Judgement, when God will indeed be a Judge Who passes sentence, as the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25) clearly demonstrates. For there is a difference between *the guilt and self-condemnation of the criminal* and *the sentence of the Judge*.

¹⁴⁶ Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, pp.36, 46.

¹⁴⁷ Bishop Theophan, *Tolkovanie Poslanij sv. Apostola Pavla* (Interpretation of the Epistles of the Holy Apostle Paul), Moscow, 2002, p. 647 (in Russian).

¹⁴⁸ *Triodion*, Saturday of the Dead, Mattins, Canon, Canticle Nine, Troparion, p. 237.

The Critics of Justice: (3) Fr. Luke Dingman

Let us turn to another new soteriologist, Fr. Luke Dingman: “When we think of the Last Judgment the fathers say we are not to think of harsh justice, a strict angry judge, we should think rather of being in the presence of Supreme Love. In the presence of God that is of Supreme Love, that is our judgment. For God does not cause judgment at anytime, he doesn't do something vengeful to evil doers, nor does He prepare a place of punishment. God is Love and by His very nature He cannot do what is evil, hateful or destructive to anyone. Judgment and Hell are spiritual conditions of sin and darkness. Judgment results when someone is separated from God who is the source of life and light. Judgment results when we shut off ourselves from God's redeeming Love. Yes there is a Judgment, there will be a judgment day temporary and eternal, but we judge ourselves. What about the fearful descriptions of hell, fire and brimstone that are in the Bible. These are warnings and pictorial representations, but they are not to be interpreted literally as geographic or physical places created by God for the punishment of human beings. Rather they are admonitions with a serious message: Life outside of God results in evil, falsehood, hatred, guilt, alienation and pain. Life apart from God leads to an agony of darkness, in which people torment themselves and each other. It is a spiritual hell created not by God, but by the wilful refusal to turn to God who is Love, in order to be forgiven and cleansed and renewed and set free. Yes there is a judgment, but it is we who judge ourselves, by the thoughts we think, by the values we hold, the decisions we make, the things we do and do not do. The people we are today and in the afterlife.”¹⁴⁹

Here we find the familiar refrain of the new soteriologists: “God does not judge us, we judge ourselves”. But Dingman goes further than Romanides or Yannaras (at least as I have cited them above) in denying that hell is anything more than a spiritual condition, “created not by God, but by the wilful refusal to turn to God who is Love”. Moreover, the descriptions of fire and brimstone are merely “warnings and pictorial representations” of a non-physical state: in essence they are merely metaphors of a non-physical reality.

However, the Lord Himself tells us that the everlasting fire *is* created by Him - “for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25.41) and those men who follow the devil in their works. As for the description of hell as a purely spiritual state, this fails to take into account the fact that it is the souls *and bodies* of men who are cast into the fire of gehenna (we shall have more to say on this below). Again, however “pictorial” the description of the torments of hell, they are not purely allegorical, just as the bodies cast into those torments will not be allegorical...

¹⁴⁹ Dingman, a sermon delivered in 2009 (Sunday of The Last Judgment), at St. Lawrence Orthodox Church, transcribed from the official Church recording by Patrick Pummill.

The Critics of Justice: (4) Alexander Kalomiros

Another attempt to deny the justice of God and God's status as Judge is made by the Old Calendarist – but new soteriologist – Alexander Kalomiros in his famous article, "The River of Fire". 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? 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: 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.

Man is the ultimate cause of his own misery: but that by no means implies that God does not punish him. In fact, as St. John of Damascus 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."¹⁵⁰

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..."¹⁵¹

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.¹⁵²

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 follows Romanides in confusing two very different things: the crime of the criminal, and the sentence of the judge. If the judge sentences the criminal to prison for his crime, it is obvious that the primary cause of the criminal's being in prison is his own criminal actions: it is the criminal himself who is ultimately responsible for his miserable condition – this is clearly the point that St. Basil is making. Nevertheless, it is equally obvious that the judge, too, has a hand in the matter. It is he who decides both whether the criminal is guilty or innocent, and the gentleness or severity of the sentence. In other words, there are two actors and two actions involved here, not one.

Kalomiros also confuses the free acts of the criminal and his involuntary 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" there, 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

¹⁵⁰ St. John of Damascus, *Dialogue against the Manichaeans*, 37.

¹⁵¹ St. Photius, Letter 3, to Eusebia, nun and monastic superior, on the death of her sister; translated by Despina Stratoudaki White.

¹⁵² St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

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. Those condemned at the Last Judgement, however, 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 characteristically modernist, rationalist manner he reduces them to *psychological states* only: 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 psychological: 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. 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."¹⁵³

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 the Church. But on the last Day, when the sinner is found naked of grace, the King will say to His servants: "Bind him hand and

¹⁵³ Archbishop Theophan, *On Redemption*.

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”, we may 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 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 or therapeutic 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: “To them there is no requital, because they have not feared God; He hath stretched forth His hand in retribution” (Psalms 54.22). And again: “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; cf. Psalms 98.8; Isaiah 34.8; Jeremiah 50.15, 51.6; II Thessalonians 1.8). 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 none 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*.”¹⁵⁴ So the desire that justice should be done is by no means 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” (Romans 12.19), He is not saying that justice should not be desired, but that it

¹⁵⁴ St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

should be sought, not through the exercise of the fallen human passions, but through *God*, Who acts with the most perfect and passionless impartiality.

Even St. Basil the Great, upon whom Kalomiros relies so heavily, does not deny the idea of retributive justice in God – and precisely in the context of the river of fire. As he writes, commenting on the verse: “The voice of the Lord divideth the flame of fire” (Psalm 28.6): “The fire prepared in punishment for the devil and his angels is divided by the voice of the Lord. Thus, since there are two capacities in fire, one of burning 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.”¹⁵⁵

So the river of fire *is* punitive – for “those who deserve to burn”. And it is punitive in a retributive sense, as expressing the pure love of justice that is part of the nature of God. Of course, God longs to have mercy even on the most inveterate sinner. But if that sinner does not wish to believe and repent, He wills that the sinner should be punished – even though the punishment can have no rehabilitative effect...

The Critics of Justice: (5) Fr. George Metallinos

An ardent admirer of Romanides is Fr. George Metallinos, who adopts a somewhat different approach to the same goal of downgrading the traditional Orthodox teaching on the last things. After various scriptural and liturgical references, Metallinos presents his major thesis as follows: “Paradise and hell are not two different places. (This version is an idolatrous concept.) They signify two different situations (ways), which originate from the same uncreated source, and are perceived by man as two, different experiences. Or, more precisely, they are the same experience, except that they are perceived differently by man, depending on man’s internal state. This experience is the sight of Christ inside the uncreated light of His divinity, of His ‘glory’. From the moment of His Second Coming, through to all eternity, all people will be seeing Christ in His uncreated light. That is when ‘those who worked evil in their lifetime will go towards the resurrection of their life, while those who have worked evil in their lifetime will go towards the resurrection of judgement’ (John 5.29). In the presence of Christ, mankind will be separated (‘sheep’ and ‘goats’, to His right and His left). In other words, they will be discerned in two separate groups: those who will be looking upon Christ as paradise (the ‘exceeding good, the radiant’) and those who will be looking upon Christ as hell (‘the all-consuming fire’, Hebrews 12.29).

“Paradise and hell are the same reality...”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ St. Basil, *On Psalm 28.6*.

¹⁵⁶ Metallinos, “Paradise and Hell in the Orthodox tradition”. *Orthodox Tradition*, vol. XXVII, 3, 2010, pp. 12-19.

If Metallinos wrote these words in order to *shock*, he succeeded. The common-sense reaction to these words is: "How can it be true that Paradise and hell are the *same* experience, the *same* reality?! Surely no two experiences or realities could be more different!"

Of course, there is a purpose to this "shock-therapy". Metallinos is trying to shock us out of our traditional understanding of heaven and hell, which he considers to be rooted in a western, "scholastic" mind-set. And he thinks he has the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers on his side. But perhaps his ideas have more in common with modern western thinkers, especially the existentialists, and less with the Holy Fathers, than he thinks...

Let us begin with the statement that paradise and hell are not two different *places*, but two different *experiences*. Now if he had said that Paradise and hell are *not only* places, *but also* experiences, or spiritual conditions, we would not have objected. But Metallinos seems to give a purely subjective, psychological or "noetic" interpretation of heaven and hell that is completely abstracted from anything spatio-temporal or material. This is clearly false. God planted Paradise, or Eden, "toward the east" in a definite part of planet earth which tradition associates with what is now the neighbourhood of the city of Tabriz in North-Western Iran, and "placed there the man that He had formed" (Genesis 2.8). Paradise had (and has) earth, and plants, and rivers, and birds and trees. After the fall of man, the entrance to Paradise was blocked by the sword of the Seraphim, and then Paradise itself was removed from the earth, in order that it should not be corrupted. But it has only changed *place*; it has not ceased to be what it was in the beginning. The Apostle Paul was taken up to Paradise, which is also called the Third Heaven (II Corinthians 12.1-4) – and he admits the possibility that he was there *in body* as well as soul, which implies that Paradise is *physical*, as well as a spiritual reality. Again, St. Irenaeus writes that "Enoch of old, having pleased God, was translated in the body, foreshowing the translation of the righteous... The Elders... say that those who have been translated are taken to Paradise, and remain there until the consummation of all things, being the first to enter into incorruption."¹⁵⁷ If Enoch, who has not died, is in Paradise *in the body*, then Paradise is a *physical place* even now, after its translation from the earth. Of course, the Fathers also understand Paradise in other ways: as the mind in which God dwells noetically, and as a type of future, eschatological realities.¹⁵⁸ But these spiritual interpretations should not be seen as contradicting the physical reality. Even in St. John's vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem, after "the first heaven and the first earth have passed away" (Revelation 21.1), there is still a place "in the middle of its street" for the tree of life, for its leaves and for the river of Paradise (Revelation 22.2).

¹⁵⁷ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 5:1; cf. V, 36:1.

¹⁵⁸ St. Symeon the New Theologian writes: "Paradise He planted afterwards as a sign of the age to come" (*First Ethical Discourse*).

Similarly, Hell has always been understood to be a place. And just as Heaven and Paradise have always been understood to be “up”, above us, so Hell has always been understood to be below us, in the bowels of the earth. Thus St. Paul’s words have a definite spatial connotation: “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth, and those *under the earth*” (Philippians 2.9).

A sophisticated rationalist will mockingly reply: “Do you mean to say that if you go far enough up from earth in a spaceship you will someday reach Heaven, or if you dig a hole far enough into the earth you will eventually reach Hell?!” No, we do not mean that. Clearly, when Christ descended into Hell and then ascended into Heaven, he entered a region that is in some sense beyond our normal space-time continuum. Of course, modern physics has revealed that space-time is very far from what it seems to be to our normal, unsophisticated sense-perception. We experience it in four dimensions, but modern string-theory physicists believe it has eleven! So the question arises: could Paradise and Hell be in one of the seven dimensions that we do not normally experience? Or even in a twelfth dimension not yet discovered by scientists? Even if we give negative answers to these questions, and conclude that Heaven and Hell exist in some completely different kind of reality, we must nevertheless accept the fact that Heaven and Hell must in some way *interact* with our familiar four dimensions of space and time. For when Christ ascended into Heaven, he definitely went *up* in relation to the observing Apostles, and not down, or to the right or left. And again, when He descended into Hell, he definitely went *down*, and not in any other direction.

As C.S. Lewis writes, referring to the “New Nature” of Christ’s resurrection Body, “the New Nature is, in the most troublesome way [for sophisticated rationalists], interlocked at some points with the Old. Because of its novelty we have to think of it, for the most part, metaphorically; but because of the partial interlocking, some facts about it [the local appearances, the eating, the touching, the claim to be corporeal] come through into our present experience in all their literal facthood – just as some facts about an organism are inorganic facts, and some facts about a solid body are facts of linear geometry.”¹⁵⁹

Again, Fr. Seraphim Rose writes that, in reacting to an over-materialist understanding of heaven and hell, “many Christians... have gone to the opposite extreme and declare that heaven is ‘nowhere’. Among Roman Catholics and Protestants there are sophisticated analogies which proclaim that heaven is ‘a state, not a place’, that ‘up’ is only a metaphor, the Ascension of Christ... was not really an ‘ascension’, but only a change of state. The result of such apologies is that heaven and hell become very vague and indefinite conceptions, and the sense of their reality begins to disappear – with

¹⁵⁹ Lewis, *Miracles*, London: Fount, 1974, p. 162.

disastrous results for Christian life, because these are the very realities toward which our whole earthly life is directed.

“All such apologies, according to the teaching of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, are based on the false idea of the modern philosopher Descartes that everything that is not material is ‘pure spirit’ and is not limited by time and space. This is not the teaching of the Orthodox Church. Bishop Ignatius writes: ‘The fantasy of Descartes concerning the independence of spirits in space and time is a decisive absurdity. Everything that is limited is necessarily dependent on space’ (vol. III, p. 312). ‘The numerous quotations from the Divine service books and the works of the Fathers of the Orthodox Church decided with complete satisfaction the question as to where paradise and hell are located... With what clarity the teaching of the Orthodox Eastern Church indicates that *the location of paradise is in the heavens and the location of hell is in the bowels of the earth*’ (vol. III, pp. 308-9; the emphasis is his). Here we shall only indicate just how this teaching is to be interpreted.

“It is certainly true, as Bishop Ignatius’ numerous citations indicate, that all Orthodox sources – the Holy Scripture, Divine services, Lives of Saints, writings of Holy Fathers – speak of paradise and heaven as ‘up’ and hell as ‘down’, under the earth. And it is also true that since angels and souls are limited in space..., they must always be in one definite *place* – whether heaven, hell, or earth...

“Heaven, therefore, is certainly a place, and it is certainly *up* from any point on the earth, and hell is certainly *down*, in the bowels of the earth; but these places and their inhabitants cannot be seen by men until their spiritual eyes are opened... Further, these places are not within the ‘coordinates’ of our space-time system: airliner does not pass ‘invisibly’ through paradise, nor an earth satellite through the third heaven, nor can the souls waiting in hell for the Last Judgement be reached by drilling for them in the earth. They are not *there*, but in a different *kind* of space that begins right here but extends, as it were, in a different direction...”¹⁶⁰

Returning to Metallinos, we can agree that heaven is “noetic”; but we cannot deny that they are also in some real sense places, because we humans, in both our souls and our bodies, are located in space and time; we are circumscribed. Even the angels are circumscribed; they cannot be in two places at once. Only God and His Grace are completely uncircumscribed, not bounded by space and time. So when our souls are sent by God to Heaven and Hell, they are sent to places, because they cannot be in a non-place, so to speak. True, the space and time of the other world are different in some ways from the space and time we know. That is, the images of heaven and hell that we form in our earth-bound imagination are more or less inadequate to the

¹⁶⁰ Rose, *The Soul after Death*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1980, pp. 129-131.

reality. And yet both the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the experiences of many who have been to the other world and come back, agree that they are places, even if they are much more than only places...

Let us turn to Metallinos' statement that Heaven and Hell "are the same experience, except that they are perceived differently by man". As it stands, this statement makes no logical, let alone theological sense. An experience is an event in one man's subjective consciousness. If it is an experience in Heaven or of Heaven, then it must be joyful; if it is in Hell or of Hell, then it must be painful. But a joyful experience cannot be the same as a painful experience: they must be *different* experiences. The experience of Uncreated Grace as described by the saints could be called an experience of Heaven on earth. In any case, it cannot be described as an experience of Hell...¹⁶¹

As for one and the same experience being "perceived differently", this is possible, but only later, in recollection. But this is not what Metallinos is saying. He is saying that at the Second Coming of Christ, the righteous will look upon the Uncreated Light – the Divine Fire that will sweep through the whole universe – and rejoice, being enlightened but not burned, while the sinners will look upon It and grieve, being burned but not enlightened. This is *true*, as the patristic references cited by Metallinos prove. But the truth of this statement by no means proves that Heaven and Hell are *one experience*. Rather, it demonstrates that the righteous and the sinners have *two, completely different experiences in relation to one and the same event* – the Appearance of Christ in all His Majesty at the Second Coming.

All spiritual experiences, insofar as they involve an interaction between the uncreated God and created man, have a *dual* nature. It is a characteristic of Romanides and his followers, such as Kalomiros and Metallinos, that they tend to emphasize the uncreated, Divine aspect of these experiences at the expense of their created, human aspect. This "eschatological monophytism" has the effect, as Fr. Seraphim Rose noted, of making our ideas about heaven and hell vague and indefinite, with disastrous consequences for the spiritual life.

The Critics of Justice: (6) Bishop Kallistos Ware

Another ardent proponent of the new soteriology in relation to the last things, is Bishop Kallistos (Ware). He claims that while some passages of Holy Scripture clearly teach that many will burn in the flames of gehenna for ever

¹⁶¹ For example, St. Gregory of Sinai writes: "The energy of grace is the power of spiritual fire that fills the heart with joy and gladness, stabilizes, warms and purifies the soul, temporarily stills our provocative thoughts, and for a time suspends the body's impulsions. The signs and fruits that testify to its authenticity are tears, contrition, humility, self-control, silence, patience, self-effacement and similar qualities, all of which constitute undeniable evidence of its presence."

and ever, there are others which promise the salvation of all. "It is important, therefore, to allow for the complexity of the Scriptural evidence. It does not all point in the same direction, but there are two contrasting strands. Some passages present us with a *challenge*. God invites but does not compel. I possess freedom of choice: am I going to say 'yes' or 'no' to the divine invitation? The future is uncertain. To which destination am I personally bound? Might I perhaps be shut out from the wedding feast? But there are other passages which insist with equal emphasis upon *divine sovereignty*. God cannot be ultimately defeated. 'All shall be well', and in the end God will indeed be 'all in all'. Challenge and sovereignty: such are the two strands in the New Testament, and neither strand should be disregarded."¹⁶²

And yet Ware clearly believes in the second strand, and not the first. The first group of quotations he calls "challenging", although these passages do not issue a challenge but state a fact: many will be damned for ever. As for the second, much smaller group, this he misinterprets.

Let us take I Corinthians 15:28: "When all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will be subject to Him Who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." St. John Chrysostom understands this passage as follows: "What is: 'that God may be all in all'? That all things may be dependent on Him, that nobody may suppose two beginningless authorities, nor another kingdom separated off; that is, that nothing may exist independent of Him."¹⁶³ There is nothing here about universal salvation... Again, Blessed Theodoret writes: "In the future life, when corruption has come to an end and immortality been given, there will be no place for the passions, and after the final expulsion of the passions not one form of sin will have any effect. Then God will dwell in everyone in a fuller, more perfect way."¹⁶⁴ So the Divine sovereignty is expressed, not in the salvation of all men, but in the complete sanctification and deification of all those who are saved.

Ware's other "salvation of all" quotation is Romans 11:32: "God has imprisoned all in disobedience, that He may be merciful to all". But St. John Chrysostom writes: "'God has imprisoned all in disobedience'. That is, He brought them to the proof. He showed them forth as disobedient; but not in order that they might remain in disobedience, but that He might save the one [the Jews] through its rivalry with the other [the Gentiles] – the former through the latter, and the latter through the former."¹⁶⁵ Again, the Apostle is not speaking here about universal salvation, but about how God in His wonderful Providence uses the rivalry between the Jews and the Gentiles in order to save as many as possible from both.

¹⁶² Ware, "Dare we hope for the salvation of all?" in *The Inner Kingdom*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000, p. 197.

¹⁶³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 39*, P.G. 61:372.

¹⁶⁴ Bishop Theophan, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

¹⁶⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 19*, P.G. 60:652.

Ware now turns from Scripture to Church history, and discusses the heretic Origen, whose teaching on the apocatastasis, or restoration of all things and all men, was anathematized at the Fifth Ecumenical Council as follows: “If anyone maintains the mythical pre-existence of souls, and the monstrous apocatastasis that follows from this, let him be anathema.” This should be enough for anyone who believes in the authority of the Seven Ecumenical Councils: the doctrine of apocatastasis is heretical and under anathema. But Ware tries to get round this by pointing out that the anathema “does not only speak about apocatastasis but links together two aspects of Origen’s theology: first, his speculations about the beginning, that is to say, about the pre-existence of souls and the precosmic fall; second, his teaching about the end, about universal salvation and the ultimate reconciliation of all things. Origen’s eschatology is seen as following directly from his protology, and both are rejected together... Suppose, however, that we separate his eschatology from his protology; suppose that we abandon all speculations about the realm of eternal logikoi [rational intellects existing prior to the conception of the eternal world]; suppose that we simply adhere to the standard Christian view whereby there is no pre-existence of the soul, but each new person comes into being as an integral unity of soul and body, at... the moment of the conception of the embryo within the mother’s womb. In this way we could advance a doctrine of universal salvation – affirming this, not as a logical certainty (indeed, Origen never did that), but as a heartfelt aspiration, a visionary hope – which would avoid the circularity of Origen’s view and so would escape the condemnation of the anti-Origen anathemas.”¹⁶⁶

However, Ware’s and Origen’s “visionary hope” is dashed by the sober and penetrating vision of the faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. First, the Fifth Ecumenical Council calls Origen’s doctrine of apocatastasis “monstrous” – which it would hardly do if it were true in itself, independently of the teaching of the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls. This being the case, the “visionary hope” of universal salvation may be “heartfelt” (although “the heart is deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17.9)), but it is undoubtedly *false*, and therefore harmful. Hope that is not based on true faith, but on a false vision of reality, is a form of spiritual deception, and must be rejected. It is possible to “hope against hope”, that is, hope for something that looks impossible according to a secular, scientific point of view but is possible for Almighty God; but to hope against – that is, in direct contradiction to – the doctrines of the faith, can never be justified.

Nothing daunted, Ware continues to expound the Origenist teaching: “The strongest point in Origen’s case for universalism is his analysis of punishment. We may summarize his view by distinguishing three primary reasons that have been advanced to justify the infliction of punishment.

¹⁶⁶ Ware, op. cit., pp. 199-200, 200-201.

“First, there is the *retributive* argument. Those who have done evil, it is claimed, themselves deserve to suffer in proportion to the evil that they have done. Only so will the demands of justice be fulfilled: ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ (Exodus 21.24). But in the Sermon on the Mount Christ explicitly rejects this principle (Matthew 5.38). If we humans are forbidden by Christ to exact retribution in this way from our fellow humans, how much more should we refrain from attributing vindictive and retributive behaviour to God. It is blasphemous to assert that the Holy Trinity is vengeful. In any case, it seems contrary to justice that God should inflict infinite punishment for what is only a finite amount of wrongdoing.”¹⁶⁷

In accusing others of blasphemy here, Ware undoubtedly falls into blasphemy himself. As we have seen, God *is* the God of vengeance. In the Sermon on the Mount He forbids men to take vengeance because in men the laudable desire for justice is mixed with the sinful passion of hatred. But God is able to do what men cannot do, with perfect freedom from sinful passion. That is why “vengeance is *Mine*, saith the Lord; *I will repay*” – an Old Testament text (Deuteronomy 32.35) that is twice quoted by New Testament authors (Romans 12.19; Hebrews 10.30). In saying that the Orthodox who believe in eternal torments “attribute vindictive and retributive behaviour to God”, Ware slanders the Orthodox by confusing the sinful passion of “vindictiveness” with the laudable longing for “retribution”, the natural and God-implanted desire that everybody should get their just deserts in the end.

As for Ware’s argument that finite sins do not merit infinite punishment, we are tempted to ask: “Shall mortal man be more just than God?” (Job 4.17). How can Ware dare to contest the judgement of God? In any case, 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?"

¹⁶⁷ Ware, op. cit., p. 203.

"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..¹⁶⁸

Ware continues: "The second line of [Origen's] argument insists upon the need for a *deterrent*. It is only the prospect of hell-fire, it is said, that holds us back from evil-doing. But why then, it may be asked, do we need an unending, everlasting punishment to act as an effective deterrent? Would it not be sufficient to threaten prospective malefactors with a period of painful separation from God that is exceedingly prolonged, yet not infinite? In any case, it is only too obvious, especially in our day, that the threat of hell-fire is almost totally ineffective as a deterrent. If in our preaching of the Christian faith, we hope to have any significant influence on others, then what we need is not a negative but a positive strategy: let us abandon ugly threats, and attempt rather to evoke people's sense of wonder and their capacity for love."¹⁶⁹

Again, Ware's lack of agreement with the Holy Fathers is evident. St. John Chrysostom says: "I have to proclaim hell so that we may not fall into it." But Ware, giving in to the prevailing Zeitgeist, prefers to talk about love – although love without justice is mere sentimentality. The truth is that he does not want to preach hell because he does not believe in it; it is no deterrent for him, so he cannot try and make it a deterrent for others. But the true pastor is called to preach "in season and out of season", whether people want to hear his message or not. And if he has real faith, and the fire of the Holy Spirit, then his word about the fire of gehenna *will* be believed.

Ware goes on: "There remains the *reformativ*e understanding of punishment, which Origen considered to be the only view that is morally acceptable. Punishment, if it is to possess moral value, has to be not merely retaliatory or dissuasive but remedial. When parents inflict punishment on

¹⁶⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily IX on Corinthians*, 1-3. Translated in Maurice Wiles & Mark Santer (eds.) *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

¹⁶⁹ Ware, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-204.

their children, or the state on criminals, their aim should always be to heal those whom they punish and to change them for the better. And such, according to Origen, is precisely the purpose of the punishments inflicted upon us by God; He acts always 'as our physician'. A doctor may sometimes be obliged to employ extreme measures which cause agony to his patients. (This was particularly so before the use of anaesthetics.) He may cauterize a wound or amputate a limb. But this is always done with a positive end in view, so as to bring about the patients' eventual recovery and restoration to health. So it is with God, the physician of our souls. He may inflict suffering upon us, both in this life and after our death; but always He does this out of tender love and with a positive purpose, so as to cleanse us from our sins, to purge and heal us. In Origen's words, 'The fury of God's vengeance avails to the purging of our souls'.

"Now, if we adopt this reformatory and therapeutic view of punishment – and this is the only reason for inflicting punishment that can worthily be attributed to God – then surely such punishments should not be unending. If the aim of punishment is to heal, then once the healing has been accomplished there is no need for the punishment to continue. If, however, the punishment is supposed to be everlasting, it is difficult to see how it can have any remedial or educative purpose. In a never-ending hell there is no escape and therefore no healing, and so the infliction of punishment in such a hell is pointless and immoral. This third understanding of punishment, therefore, is incompatible with the notion of perpetual torment in hell; it requires us, rather, to think in terms of some kind of purgatory after death. But in that case this purgatory should be envisaged as a house of healing, not a torture chamber; as a hospital, not a prison. Here, in his grand vision of God as the cosmic physician, Origen is at his most convincing..."¹⁷⁰

However, there is a fundamental flaw in Ware's neo-Origenist argument: although punishment can be *mixed* with therapy, *the two cannot be identified*. Justice may be *mitigated* by mercy; it may even be completely *cancelled* or *outweighed* by mercy (this is what we call *clemency*). But it is *not the same* as mercy. For justice by its very nature demands punishment; it expresses the profoundly scriptural principle that *sin must be paid for* in one way or another, by one person or another, and that *what we sow we must reap*. Mercy, on the other hand, is precisely the removal of punishment.

But Ware quite clearly does not believe in Divine justice at all. As he writes: "His justice is nothing other than His love. When He punishes, His purpose is not to requite but to heal."¹⁷¹ And yet if this were so, it would not make sense for a sinner to say: "I have sinned; I deserve to be punished"; for the concept of *just desert* or *requital* would be altogether removed. The true attitude is to recognize the claims of justice while pleading for mercy. This is the attitude of

¹⁷⁰ Ware, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205.

¹⁷¹ Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

the Prodigal Son: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no longer worthy to be called Thy son. Make me as one of Thy hired servants." (Luke 15.18-19). The son recognized the claims of justice, which required that he be demoted from the status of sonship. And the Father had mercy on him, restoring him to sonship, *precisely because* the son recognized that he was not worthy of it, because he recognized the claims of justice. It follows that repentance is possible only *in and through* the recognition of justice. But to abolish justice by identifying it with love is to abolish repentance and therefore the possibility of salvation...

The philosopher Immanuel Kant, though also a heretic, was much closer to the truth than Origen in this respect. He wrote: "Judicial punishment can never be used merely as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society, but instead it must in all cases be imposed on him only on the ground that he has committed a crime."¹⁷² In other words, if the guilty are not punished, justice is not done; crime is punished because that is *just*, not because it is therapeutic or useful. This is not an argument against mercy or clemency (or therapy). It is an argument that mercy or clemency *make no sense* if the prior claims of justice are not recognized...

To identify the concepts of "justice" and "love" is radically to distort the meaning of two of the most important words in the vocabulary of theology. Earlier we quoted St. John of the Ladder: "He is called *justice* as well as love."¹⁷³ Now this statement would have no weight if "justice" and "love" were identical in God. It has weight because it tells us that there are in God two moral principles or energies that cannot be identified with each other, and of which the one cannot be reduced to the other.¹⁷⁴ God is always and in all things supremely just and righteous. He is also supremely merciful and loving. But His mercy does not contradict His justice. It only seems to - to those who do not understand the mystery of the Cross. But on the Cross "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 84.10): that is to say, on the Cross Christ *took on Himself* the whole burden of the just punishment of sinners, thereby making it possible for Him to have mercy on all and restore peace between God and man while satisfying the claims of justice. As a result, all those justly imprisoned in hades

¹⁷² Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*.

¹⁷³ St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24.23.

¹⁷⁴ The distinction between the two principles is particularly clear in this text from St. Ephraim the Syrian: "Weigh our repentance, that it may outbalance our crimes! But not in even balance, ascends either weight; for our crimes are heavy and manifold, and our repentance is light. He had commanded that we should be sold for our debt: His mercy became our advocate; principle and increase, we repaid with the farthing, which our repentance proffered. Ten thousand talents for that little payment, our debt He forgave us. He was bound to exact it, that He might appease His justice: He was constrained again to forgive, that He might make His grace to rejoice. Our tears for the twinkling of an eye we gave Him; He satisfied His justice, in exacting and taking a little; He made His grace to rejoice, when for a little He forgave much." (*The Nisibene Hymns*).

since the time of the fall were released and restored again to Paradise. This was the triumph of love – but *in and through* the triumph of justice...

The element of truth in Ware's argument is that in His Providence towards us God very often does mix punishment with therapy, justice with healing. In this way He gives men the opportunity and the time to repent, administering chastisements that bring sinners to see the error of their ways. Indeed, it is the true sons of God who receive the most "therapeutical punishment": "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Hebrews 12.5-6).

But the therapy succeeds only if the sinner comes to see that he is being *justly punished* for his sins. Moreover, the opportunity to repent through suffering is not offered forever; "for why should you continue to be struck, since you continue in lawlessness?" (Isaiah 1.5). The time for repentance is strictly limited to this earthly life; "for in death there is none that is mindful of Thee, and in hades who will confess Thee?" (Psalms 6.4). After death, we cannot be saved by our own repentance, but only by the prayers of the Church, which God does not allow to be offered for all men (Ezekiel 14.14; I John 5.16)... In any case, at the very end "there will be time (as we know it) no longer" (Revelation 10.6), and so there will also no longer be change. For time is the medium of change and therefore of repentance...

The deeply disturbing fact is that God in His omniscience knows that many people *would not repent* even if given ages of ages in which to do so. So when He brings the life of a sinner to an end, this indicates that He knows that he will not repent... In the fact that some men will not repent lies the mystery of human freedom, the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God. Ware acknowledges the mystery of human freedom, and admits that the argument from freedom is a strong one - stronger, in his opinion, than that of Divine justice, which he dismisses completely. And yet he prefers the witness of Origen and one or two of the Holy Fathers to the overwhelming consensus of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church to the effect that some men – many men – will use their freedom to say "no" to God forever...

The mystery of human freedom is demonstrated most vividly in the two thieves who died on either side of the Cross. The good thief was saved, not only because he believed in Christ, but because, unlike the bad thief, he *recognized the justice of his punishment*: "We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds" (Luke 23.41). That is why the Cross of Christ is described as "the balance-beam of justice"¹⁷⁵, with the balance beam exalting the good, penitent thief to Paradise but plunging the bad thief into hades.

¹⁷⁵ Troparion of the Third Hour.

While admitting the strength of the argument from human freedom, Ware nevertheless thinks that the opposing argument from divine love implies – if not strictly logically, at any rate by a kind of logic of hope – that all sinners will be saved eventually. “If divine love is constantly knocking on the door of their heart, and if that door is locked on the inside, may not the time come when at long last they respond to love’s invitation and open the door?”¹⁷⁶ It may take aeons and aeons, but that time will come eventually, according to Ware; and then God will be bound to forgive the sinner who repents.

But the question is: are there souls who will *never* repent?

Lazarus and the Rich Man

This question was addressed by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev as follows: “We are accustomed to imagine the lot of sinners in the life to come from the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Those condemned to the fire of hell will vainly lament their sins, and unsuccessfully appeal to God and the saints for mercy: repentance is not accepted from the dead, it is already too late to correct oneself! Why is that so? Why is the soul that has condemned its falls and changed its mental attitude still rejected by the Divine justice? This remains not understood.

“Hence the very natural attempts to fantasize about some new, universal reconciliation-apocatastasis. But this teaching has been condemned by the Church and the Origenists have been recognized as heretics. And, moreover, completely consistently: all attempts to interpret the eternity of the torments as a very long duration, but not unending, contradict the word of God and the Tradition of the Church. It is sufficient to point to the words of God in Isaiah: ‘Their worm will not die and their flame will not go out’ (66.24). These words cannot be reinterpreted to mean a long duration of the eternal torments, for it is directly indicated that they will have no end (cf. Revelation 14.11; 20.10).

“However, if neither even the Holy Bible nor the clearly expressed teaching of the Church had revealed to men the teaching on the eternity of torments, our reason still could not avoid this sad conclusion concerning the lot beyond the grave of conscious opponents of God or impenitent sinners. In fact, it would remain only to admit that the Lord will forcibly make them righteous and draw them to His joy. But, after all, where there is force, there there can be no moral values, there the very difference between good and evil disappears, and with it the whole meaning of the Redemption and Economy.

“Is it wrong to suppose that consciously and finally evil people do not exist, that evil is the fruit of misunderstanding and imperfection, as the pantheists, the evolutionists and even some theists teach? But such an idea is also incompatible with the teaching on free will, and still more with the teaching

¹⁷⁶ Ware, op. cit., p. 208.

of Holy Scripture and the Church on the demons, which not one reader of the Gospel, however sincere, could reinterpret, whether he himself believes in God or not. Finally, we have the direct words of Christ that His enemies hated Him, not because they did not understand Him, but precisely because they understood and hated the very truth and goodness in Him. 'If you were blind, they would have no sin; but since you say that you see, sin remains on you' (John 9.41). 'If I had not come and told them, they would not have had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not worked among them the works that no other has worked, they would not have had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father' (15.22-24).

"And so the teaching on the eternity of the torments flows not only from the clear meaning of the word of God and Church Tradition, but it is impossible to avoid it even if we adopt a purely rational resolution of the question.

"However, this is not quite what the reader will object to us in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: there it is not a question of an impenitent and embittered evildoer, but of a soul bitterly lamenting its sins, and, moreover, filled with compassion for other sinners who still live on earth. Why can the mercy of the Lord not be found for such a soul? The objection, in our humble opinion, would be completely well-founded and difficult to deal with if the final lot of the dead were described in this parable. But let us recall that the Lord said this to the Jews before His Descent into hades: was that Descent not saving for the rich man who repented of his sinful life? Yes, of course, for the Apostle witnesses that it was not only the righteous, but also the sinners who were saved by the Conqueror of hades: 'Christ, in order to bring us to God, suffered once for our sins, the Righteous for the unrighteous. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit, by Whom He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah' (I Peter 3.18-20).

"From these words of the Apostle we can draw the clear conclusion that the words of Abraham in the parable on the great abyss established between the righteous and the sinners, which neither the former nor the latter were able to cross, retained its significance before the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, who crossed this abyss on the day of His saving death and resurrection. He called from there not only the righteous, but also many who were 'formerly disobedient', but had not become finally hardened in their resistance to the Truth.

"And so the condition of the sinful souls condemned to the ages will by no means be the same as that which the rich man of the parable experienced, when he obediently prayed for the enlightenment of his brothers living on earth. But where are we to find in the Divine revelation indications as to how the souls that have perished beyond the grave will feel? 'There will be

weeping and gnashing of teeth' – that is how the Lord defines the lot of the rejected in His parables. These words are applied by Him to the evil guest expelled from the wedding supper, who wanted to darken the general joy by his non-reception of a wedding garment, and to the lazy servant who did not increase the talent given to him and maliciously explained himself to his lord on his return. By these words the Lord drives away from Himself those who will knock to Him from outside and say: 'Open to us – we have eaten and drunk in Thy presence and Thou hast taught us in our streets' (Matthew 24.51; 25.30; Luke 13.28). Finally, this expression defines the final condition of sinners (Matthew 8.12; 13.42, 50; 24.51)...

“And so 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' signifies not simply suffering, but malice and suffering from powerless fury, fury at the impossibility of pouring it out on the Kingdom of God that they hate. That is what the torments beyond the grave will consist of. These are not at all torments of conscience: if they were present, repentance would follow, and with repentance – forgiveness. It is impossible to imagine the all-good God not paying attention to the age-old repentance of sinner and not lightening their lot.

“But is it possible to imagine such a hardening in malice that would not see reason at the opening of the judgements of God, at the destruction of the kingdom of the devil? Why ask about this possibility when it has already taken place in reality? Our future standing before the Person of the Lord should be likened to how people here received the Lord when He appeared and lived among them: the good joyously recognized Him... like those healed from demon-possession, and the thief on the Cross, and Nicodemus, the Jewish prince, while the more the evil recognized Him they more they hated Him, and when they saw Lazarus resurrected by Him, then 'from that day they sought to kill Him' (John 11. 53). This was expressed by the Lord in the words of His farewell conversation... But the Apostle John constructed the whole of his Gospel, his epistles and the Apocalypse precisely on the uncovering of that sad law of the struggle between God and the world, which consists in the irreconcilable enmity of the latter against Christ and His Kingdom – an enmity that does not grow weaker, but, on the contrary, grows stronger in proportion as the destinies of God are revealed. 'Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God Who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.' That is how the sinners will act in the fire of gehenna, and its eternity will depend solely on their impenitence... “¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Metropolitan Anthony, “O zagrobnoj zhizni i vechnykh mucheniakh” (On the Life beyond the Grave and the Eternal Torments), in *Zhizneopisanie i Tvorenia Blazhennejshego Antonia, Mitropolitan Kievskogo i Galitskogo* (Life and Works of his Beatitude Anthony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galich), New York, 1969, vol. 16, pp. 10-15; www.catacomb.org.ua (in Russian).

Conclusion

Being made in the image of the God of justice, the love of justice is natural to man. As faith teaches, so 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.

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 vice¹⁷⁸, 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 the human race 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...¹⁷⁹

St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes: "Attend, I pray, to the very principle of justice, and come to your own case. You have different sorts of servants: and some are good and some bad; you honour therefore the good, and smitest the bad. And if you are a judge, to the good you award praise, and to the transgressors, punishment. Is then justice observed by you a mortal man; and with God, the ever changeless King of all, is there no retributive justice? Nay, to deny it is impious. For consider what I say. Many murderers have died in their beds unpunished; where then is the righteousness of God? Yea, often a murderer guilty of fifty murders is beheaded once; where then shall he suffer punishment for the forty and nine? Unless there is a judgment and a retribution after this world, you charge God with unrighteousness. Marvel not, however, because of the delay of the judgment; no combatant is crowned

¹⁷⁸ This is a point made in the third century by Lactantius, the tutor of St. Constantine the Great, in his work, *On the Anger of God*.

¹⁷⁹ As Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich writes: "God's mercilessness begins when our mercifulness ends. God will rule the world by justice as long as we rule it by our mercilessness. He will rule the world by mercifulness when we forgive each other, but not before..." ("For Cross and Freedom", in *Sabrana Dela* (Collected Works), volume 3, Khimelstir, 1986, pp. 462-463).

or disgraced, till the contest is over; and no president of the games ever crowns men while yet striving, but he waits till all the combatants are finished, that then deciding between them he may dispense the prizes and the chaplets. Even thus God also, so long as the strife in this world lasts, succours the just but partially, but afterwards He renders to them their rewards fully."¹⁸⁰

In conclusion, let us hear another powerful witness to the truth of this teaching, that of Archbishop Averky of Jordanville: "In our time we have become witnesses of a completely new teaching, so far unheard-of in our Church, to the effect that the Second Coming of Christ and the Terrible Judgement must be understood somehow in an 'allegorical' way, and not literally, and that the Terrible Judgement will in essence be not at all terrible. In propagandizing this 'teaching', they affirm with great aplomb and authority that everything we expounded above 'has been thought up by dark fanatical monks', and that contemporary 'enlightened Christians' cannot and must not believe in it all. (But how, we may ask, can we not believe in that which has been clearly and definitively said in the Sacred Scriptures, or by the great Fathers of the Church or the glorious, Spirit-bearing ascetics who have been glorified by the Holy Church?) For Christ Himself, they say, said that He came 'not to judge the world, but to save it (and then references are made to John 12.47, Matthew 18.11 and Luke 9.56).

"Already a long time ago we were warned that the cunning of Satan and his servants, especially in the last times, will be manifest also in the fact that, in order to destroy people, they will also begin skilfully to use even the texts of the Sacred Scriptures, interpreting them in a distorted manner. (After all, on such distorted interpretations are based all the numerous contemporary sects.) And it is like that in the given case: Christ truly came to earth the first time in order to save the world, but the second time He will come no longer to save, but to judge the world. Moreover, the measure of this Judgement, as He Himself said, will be the word uttered by Him: 'The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day' (John 12.48), that is: he who does not observe the teaching brought by Christ the Saviour to the earth will be subjected to condemnation at the Terrible Judgement.

"To whom could this not be clear? Only to a mind that is ill-intentioned!

"But how can one distort that which is said so clearly in the Sacred Scriptures?

"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.' (Revelation 1.7; cf. Acts 1.11).

¹⁸⁰ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 18.4.

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his works” (Revelation 22.12), says the Lord himself.

“What could be clearer or more comprehensible than these words?

“And so there will undoubtedly be the Terrible Judgement, and there will be the reward of each according to his works, and there will be hell and the everlasting torments for the impenitent sinners.

“This will be demanded by the Highest Divine Justice, which is so clearly felt and whose inexorable necessity is recognized by every human heart that is uncorrupted, not poisoned by lying pseudo-wisdom...”¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Archbishop Averky, “Budet li Strashnij Sud?” (Will there be a Terrible Judgement), <http://www.catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=page&pid=830> (in Russian).

CONCLUSION: SALVATION AND DEIFICATION

While undermining the traditional Christian concepts of sin, redemption and the Last Judgement, the neo-soteriologists at the same time try to replace them with other concepts. The most popular of these, especially among the Greek neo-soteriologists, is that of *deification* or theosis. In conclusion, therefore, let us briefly examine the relationship between salvation as traditionally understood and deification.

“God became man, so that men should become gods.” This patristic dictum going back to the fourth century was rediscovered with enthusiasm by theologians of the twentieth century at the same time that they rediscovered the teaching of the Holy Fathers – especially Saints Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas – on the Divine Light and uncreated Grace. As a result, a “revolution” has been created in the teaching of the faith, with references to the Divine Light, uncreated Grace and deification peppering even the sermons of ordinary parish priests.

In itself there is nothing to be regretted in this “revolution”. For many, including the present writer, it came as a revelation to learn that the aim of the Christian life is not only to escape hell, not only to become good, but to become *god*, to acquire the Holy Spirit in such fullness that our humble human nature becomes completely transfigured by the Divine Energies and is transformed “from glory into glory”. We cannot attain the goal of the Christian life if we do not realize how lofty it is: “without a vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29.18). Losing sight of this goal carries with it the great danger of reducing Christianity to a kind of Victorian bourgeois morality that is satisfied with a level of attainment far short of holiness or deification. We must always bear in mind that God requires us to be holy as He is holy, and that unless our righteousness greatly exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5.20)...

The tragedy is that, in the new soteriologists, the loftiness of this vision is combined with a pride that is in its own way no less pharisaical. They become intoxicated by the goal rather than humbled by their distance from it. They forget that while the goal of the Christian is indeed to become a god, it was the premature desire to attain precisely the same goal in a manner contrary to God’s will that led to Adam and Eve being expelled from Paradise...

This is most clear in the writings of perhaps the most typical of the new soteriologists, Fr. John Romanides. He talks constantly about deification and the main means to it, noetic prayer. About the other commandments and dogmas he says comparatively little – of redemption through the Cross, for example, there is no discussion at all in his *Patristic Theology* and very little in his *Outline of Orthodox Patristic Dogmatics*.

But Orthodox dogmatics has a definite order of exposition, and each step must be fully and correctly understood before going on to the next step. Thus a profound understanding of original sin requires a prior understanding of the original creation; the necessity of the Redeemer, and of His Sacrifice on the Cross, is incomprehensible if the true predicament of fallen mankind is not appreciated; the acquisition of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, and especially her sacramental life, is inconceivable without the Economy of the Son that made it possible; and finally, deification and the resurrection of the dead presupposes the prior presence of the Spirit of life in those who are being saved in the Church. To concentrate almost exclusively on the later steps at the expense of the earlier is like attempting to place the roof on a house before the foundation has been dug and the walls have been completed: it threatens the collapse of the whole structure.¹⁸²

Yet this is precisely what we see in Romanides. As a clear example let us return to his words: “the Old Testament Job reached theosis even though he was a heathen and not a Jew”.¹⁸³ We pointed out earlier that if this were true, it makes Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross superfluous; for we can reach no other conclusion if a man can attain the highest goal of existence while living in original sin and before the conquest of sin and death by Christ. Of course, Job is a saint of the Church and lives in the glory of the Divine Light. But his salvation and deification, like that of all the Old Testament saints, took place only *after*, and in strict dependence on, the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

Romanides’ error involves him directly in two heresies: Pelagianism and Ecumenism. His thinking is Pelagianist because it implies that a man can conquer sin and death, and attain deification, without Christ and without the Holy Spirit Who was given only after the Resurrection of Christ. And it is Ecumenist because it implies that there is salvation outside the Church – indeed, that the Church is unnecessary as the Ark of Salvation.

¹⁸² Take, for example the words of Chris Jensen in his otherwise excellent essay, “Shine as the Sun: C.S. Lewis and the Doctrine of Deification” (*Road to Emmaus*, vol. VIII, no. 2 (29), p. 48): “The concept of deification has challenged those who are accustomed to thinking of salvation as a once-for-all decision or as divine pardon in which God overturns out guilty verdict and lets us off the hook. As Vladimir Lossky has observed, a treatise of St. Anselm of Canterbury called *Cur Deus Homo* (completed in Italy in 1098 AD), deeply colored popular Western notions of salvation by presenting the idea of redemption in isolation from the rest of Christ’s life and work. By so doing, the main focus of salvation became the cross and passion, where Christ is said to have effected a change in the Father’s attitude toward fallen men. Oddly, this forensic model suggests that an angry God needs to be cured rather than sinful or mortal human beings. Salvation as deification, in contrast accents human healing and transformation, looking at the Cross but additionally to the Resurrection, the Ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit”. However, the concept of deification in no way “challenges” the traditional Orthodox (which is not to say Anselmian) concept of salvation through the Cross. Christ did indeed offer a once-for-all Sacrifice for sin which was accepted by the Holy Trinity. It is on the basis of this Sacrifice, and the real change in the relationship between God and man that it secured, that the deification of Christians is possible. Without the Cross there could have been no Pentecost...

¹⁸³ Romanides, *Patristic Theology*, Dalles, Origen: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008, p. 168.

The irony is that although Romanides is possessed by an especially fierce anti-western pathos, Pelagianism and Ecumenism are two quintessentially *western* heresies. That this is not an accident is proved by the fact that several other leading new soteriologists display the same combination of fierce anti-westernism with susceptibility to western modes of thinking. Thus Alexander Kalomiros, who railed so much against westernism that he doubted whether a person brought up in Catholicism or Protestantism could ever become truly Orthodox, nevertheless believed in the western heresy of Darwinism. It is a case of "Physician, heal thyself!" The new soteriologists protest too much against precisely that heretical West from which their own errors emanate. While fiercely condemning flawed but Orthodox thinkers of the West, like Augustine, they themselves separate themselves from Orthodoxy...

It is not for nothing that the Church in her prayers cries out: "O Lord, save us!", not: "O Lord, deify us!" While we long for both salvation and deification, and while the two undoubtedly go together in the end, as sinners for whom salvation is by no means yet assured we cry out humbly for deliverance from sin before we ask for the still greater gift of glorification. It is the new soteriologists' reversal of this relationship, and their concentration on the more "exciting" and exalted teaching on deification at the expense of the more basic and better-known teaching on salvation, that reveals that inner pride which is the cause of their heretical assault on the Justice of God.

They could learn from the story of a famous anchorite who came to see Abba Poemen in the Egyptian desert. "Abba Poemen received him with joy. They greeted one another and sat down. The visitor began to speak of the Scriptures, of spiritual and of heavenly things. But Abba Poemen turned his face away and answered nothing. Seeing that he did not speak to him, the other went away deeply grieved and said to the brother who had brought him, 'I have made this long journey in vain. For I have come to see the old man, and he does not wish to speak to me.' Then the brother went inside to Abba Poemen and said to him, 'Abba, this great man who has so great a reputation in his own country has come here because of you. Why did you not speak to him?' The old man said, 'He is great and speaks of heavenly things and I am lowly and speak of earthly things. If he had spoken to me of the passions of the soul, I should have replied, but he speaks to me of spiritual things and I know nothing about that.' Then the brother came out and said to the visitor, 'The old man does not readily speak of the Scriptures, but if anyone consults him about the passions of the soul, he replies.' Filled with compunction, the visitor returned to the old man and said to him, 'What should I do, Abba, for the passions of the soul master me.' The old man turned towards him and replied joyfully, 'This time, you come as you should. Now open your mouth concerning this and I will fill it with good things...'"¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Benedicta Ward (ed.), *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, London: Mowbray, 1975, pp. 140-141.