

On Magic and Occultism

Ch. 19. from The Truth of Our Faith:: A Discourse from Holy Scripture on the Teachings of True Christianity, By Elder Cleopa of Romania

Inquirer: I know that many people, in pain caused by the death of their beloved relatives, take recourse to spiritualism, fortune-telling, occultism, or even aim at conversing with their dead relatives. Why doesn't the Church allow this?

Elder Cleopa: In both Holy Scripture and throughout the writings of the Holy Fathers there are a host of testimonies clearly showing that God punishes those that become involved with occultism and necromancy (seeking to speak with the dead). Our Saviour teaches us that "blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn. 20:29). The Apostle Paul shows us who believe in Christ that we must seek after the power of faith and not the perception of our material eyes, saying "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). The prowling demons, however, instruct certain men not to be satisfied with the teaching of the Saviour and of His Apostle - to walk with trust in the faith of Christ - but rather to seek by every means to view with their sensible eyes that which is accessible only to the eyes of faith. The man who resorts to black magic and necromancy is an enemy of God, disobedient to His commandments, not content with the salvatory lessons God teaches him through the Scriptures, but rather, prompted by the demons in this illegitimate work, he seeks to investigate things rationally. And so, believing in these fantasies, he withdraws from God and the teaching of our Church.

Those who concern themselves with this and call upon the spirits of the dead, bring in as support the example of Saul who sought from the sorceress the invocation of the soul of Samuel (1 Sam. 28). Those who have fallen into this delusion of Saul should know from his punishment that they are culpable before God. For, because of this very transgression, Saul lost his kingdom and his life and was punished by God to be killed with his own sword. The punishment of Saul for his unlawful conversing with the dead is related in Holy Scripture thus: "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; and inquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse" (1 Chr. 10:13-14).

In the Old Testament the Lord commands the following: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:31). And elsewhere: "A man or also woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them" (Lev. 20:27). The invocation of the spirits of the dead is hateful before God Who has never given it sanction among His people: ". . . there shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD" (Deut. 18:9-14). God considers this abomination one of man's greatest revolts against His Will.

We have no need to communicate with the dead since God has revealed to us everything He knows to be necessary and beneficial for our salvation. For example, conversing with the dead is not able to prove to us that the souls of the dead live as they once lived in this present life. This reality of the next life is not news to us since we know it from Divine Revelation and it is a matter of faith, without there being the need for research and examination with our bodily senses. Divine Revelation offers us every assurance of truth. If someone wants to inspect and feel this with their

visible senses it means placing in doubt the truths which were revealed by God. Furthermore, in these spiritual discourses there is no assurance that the spirit of the dead that was called for will appear and speak, for the evil spirits, the demons, mimic the righteous spirits, as Saint Paul teaches us: "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (1 Cor. 11:14). And the Evangelist John tells us the following: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God" (1 Jn. 4:1-3).

In addition to all of this, the Holy Fathers tells us that in the case of Saul and the witch, it was not the spirit of Samuel that appeared, but a demonic spirit that had supplanted the spirit of Samuel. Saint Gregory of Nyssa says that the spirit was so dreadful and hideous, that the sorceress was frightened by it. Likewise, we see in the case of Adam whom God had called to the height of theosis, that he was deluded by the Devil and, falling from the grace of God, hid himself with Eve. There are many examples in Scripture from which we know that by the delusion of the devil death is inherited instead of life, the lie instead of the truth, and evil instead of good.

Due to the danger of deception from visions and dreams, some of the Holy Fathers didn't accept any kind of dream before performing a very careful examination. Saint John of the Ladder [Abbot of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (6th c.) & author of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*] says "Whoever does not believe in visions and dreams is a spiritual philosopher," and also that when the demons of vainglory and pride tempt the weaker brothers with visions and dreams, they make them into "prophets."

Inq.: The fortune-tellers and enchanters say that Holy Scripture relates cases of the appearances of dead men and angels. They also say that since Scripture attests to our inability to communicate directly with the dead, it follows that conjuring of spirits is not foreign to Christianity, and, above all, is not something anti-Christian.

EC: It is true, indeed, that Holy Scripture relates to us the appearance of Moses and Elias during the transfiguration of the Saviour (Mat. 17:3), and also that after the crucifixion of Christ many dead were raised from the tombs (Mat. 27:52-53). Scripture also attests to the appearance of angels, such as at the news of the birth of Saint John the Baptist, and birth of the Saviour Christ (Lk. 1:11-20), at the Resurrection of the Lord (Lk. 2:9-15), and also to their intervention in the service of certain of the righteous and the saints of the Old and New Testaments (Mat. 28:2-7). They communicated with men either face to face or through dreams (Mat. 1:20, 2:13). However, these appearances did not happen by the will and invocation of men, but by the command of God. These appearances certify the immortality of their souls and their power to be revealed to men in exceptional ways, however, it does not support the prerogative of man to seek out contact with the dead.

Inq.: In the Old Testament necromancy was practiced, as is clear in the case of Saul and the sorceress and elsewhere. In the Christian Church, likewise, that which we call the supplication of saints and angels is practiced. At its base, this is nothing else but an invocation of righteous souls or a communication with the dead, with the aim of helping the living with their particular needs. On account of this, it is claimed that occultism or fortune-telling represents a scriptural teaching that in practice is recognized by the Church.

EC: The truth regarding Saul and the sorceress was clarified earlier. Concerning the entreaty of saints and angels, in no way is it the same as necromancy. In calling upon the saints and angels, we do not have the intention or pretension of speaking sensibly with them, of seeing them, hearing their voice, or of having them appear before us perceptibly in order to reveal to us mysteries which God has determined should remain hidden from man. We speak to the saints and angels in our prayer, by means of our mental (*νοερός*) eyes and our faith, without the need to see or hear them sensibly.

The conjurers have the aim and the need to call upon the spirits of the dead (I believe, however, that in fact they are spirits of demons which appear in the form of the spirits of the dead) in order that they may reveal to them certain secrets that relate to the future of the dead or other curiosities forbidden by the law of God. Listen to what Holy Scripture has to say: “And when they shall say unto you, seek unto the necromancers and unto the soothsayers, who chirp and who mutter, Shall not a people seek unto their God? On behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead? To the law and the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, for them there is no daybreak” (Is. 8:19-20).

When the unmerciful rich man called upon Abraham to send Lazarus to the house of his father and to make known the situation in which he was found in order to bring his brothers to repentance, Abraham answered him that for the living the revelation of the Law (Moses and the Prophets) was sufficient. Indeed, in the Divine Revelation that was given to us with Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition we lack nothing in the way of knowing about our salvation, nor do we have need to seek from the dead - or better, the demons - something favourable to our salvation.

When God sends us a prophet and it is not revealed to us immediately, this means that he does not want to make other disclosures, knowing that they won't be profitable for us. When someone who prophesies is not from God, without a doubt he is from the Devil, as were the false-prophets referred to in Scripture. They announced false visions, vanities, and preposterous prophecies relative to the condition of their heart. When they actually do tell us the truth, we should not believe it, since they don't say it with the aim of benefiting anyone, but rather, from deceptiveness they seek to lead us into delusion. Look at the girl with the unclean spirit of divination in the city of Philippi of Macedonia. Everything that the evil spirit said through her mouth was true, and yet the Apostle Paul admonished it to keep silent, casting out the demonic spirit. (Acts 16:16-18)

As was suggested earlier, with the supplication of the saints and angels we are not curious as to what we will see or what we will hear from them (materially speaking), as are the magicians and fortune-tellers with their invocation of spirits. We seek from God, through the saints, that which He deigns to give us for our salvation, while the psychics and shamans seek, from the demons that appear in the semblance of dead men, that which they themselves want, and even this out of base curiosity.

If, however, by the command of God, one of the saints or angels wanted to appear to us in a material way, there is no transgression in this, for we didn't desire this or seek after this. Yet, even in such cases, it is necessary for us to be very careful, humble, prudent and full of the fear of God, for knowing that Satan also assumes the guise of an angel, it may well be a fantasy of the Devil (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Of course, even when the vision is from God it is better for us not to receive it. For if we do this with humility God will not be sorrowful because He knows that we are taking heed not to accept within us the wolf instead of the shepherd. We don't, indeed, have need of seeing the saints and angels, but only to pray with faith and internal vision. Saint Neilos the Ascetic says “Blessed is that intellect which arrives at the point of worshipping God without giving shape to His form within itself.”

Inq.: The occultists and necromancers allege that, according to the teaching of Scripture, being born again or returning to life is accepted by the Scriptures, as in the case recorded of the return of Elias in the person of Saint John the Baptist. The angel said about John: “And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias” (Lk. 1:17). And the Saviour says similar words about John: “And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, who was to come,” (Mat. 11:14) in other words, he concerning whom it was revealed by the prophets must come (Mal. 4:4). Another time the disciples asked the Lord, “‘Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?’ And Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you that Elias is come already, and

they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist” (Jn. 17:10-13). Consequently, John the Baptist is Elias who is to come again into the world. Therefore, Jesus Christ taught that there is a re-awakening or retrieval of life. Isn't this the case?

EC: Truly, the Prophet Malachi did prophesy the appearance of Elias, however, this was not fulfilled prior to the birth of the Messiah. Rather, Elias will appear just before the coming of the great and illustrious day of the Lord and thereby signify the beginning of the end of the world (Mal. 3:23).

We should understand the angel's words, that John will come “in the spirit and power of Elias,” to mean that he will have the force of Elias in his mission to the world and in his preaching of repentance, with his zeal, deeds, toils and raiment. (2 Kg. 1:8)

The words of the Saviour would seem, indeed, to support the return of Elias in the person of John (Mat. 11:14,17:10-13), and that it would happen then and not at the end of the world. Nevertheless, based on the spirit of the teaching of the Saviour it is not possible for John to be identified with Elias, but only to resemble him. Lucid and unmistakable proof of this is the fact that to the question of the Jews of Jerusalem, addressed to John through the priests and Levites, as to whether he was or was not Elias, he answered them categorically “ I am not” (Jn. 1:21). It is impossible that John would contradict the Saviour and deny his identification with Elias. Furthermore, if Elias was to come in the person of John the Baptist, how was it that he appeared together with Moses on Mount Tabor during the Transfiguration of the Lord? (Mt. 17:3)

The regeneration which the Saviour speaks of to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:3-7) is not a bodily restoration but a spiritual rebirth from above through water and the spirit, that is, through Holy Baptism. The text itself rules out any possibility of a bodily rebirth, as Nicodemus had mistakenly understood, when it stresses that it is not speaking of a second bodily or natural birth.

And yet, neither can the prudent mind accept the possibility of identifying John with that prophet who is to come, Elias. Likewise, disagreeable is that which the spiritualists teach, namely that his return happens for the purpose of moral purification and perfection, since Elias has no need of purification and moral perfecting. According to the Christian teaching there does exist a return of the soul to the body, but only once, and that at the end of the world when all will be raised and the material body will be transfigured in order to participate in eternal life.

Inq.: In relation to this, I found a passage in Holy Scripture difficult to understand. It is the passage which tells the story of the man born blind who washed and was healed in the pool of Siloam. The Apostles asked the Lord, saying, “Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (Jn. 9:2) It seems to follow from this that apparently the blind man was in a position to pay off those personal sins committed before his birth. This is what certain occultists and those who believe in reincarnation maintain.

EC: As we said earlier, at the end of the world there will be one re-establishment of soul and body before the final judgement. This forgiveness of personal sins or of the sins of the parents of the blind man is something else entirely. The case of the man born blind is not concerned with who sinned and punished the blind man, as the Apostles mistakenly supposed. Rather, the Saviour brushed aside this opinion of theirs, saying that the man was not blind on account of his sins, but so that the “works of God should be made manifest in him,” (Jn. 9:3) or, so that His therapeutic power may be made manifest. In the teachings of Christ, nowhere does there exist, even in this life, punishment as the fruit of a just reward. The loosing and forgiveness of sins occur in this life as well. However, the definitive loosing from the shackles of sin happens after the Future Judgement,

when it will be not for purification but as recompense. Redemption came from the Lord alone for the sake of all mankind and no one, by any means whatsoever, is able to forgive his own sins.

As for the other teachings of the spiritualists, like those presented earlier they are all anti-Christian and their mask has been removed under the scrutiny of the teaching of our Orthodox Church. Our Church teaches us that:

1) Souls have been created directly by God.

2) According to the teaching of our Church, under no circumstances can one speak of the pre-existence of souls.

3) Bodies are creations of God and not of the angels.

4) The place of punishment is Hades, in which the conditions are immutable - something certified by the words of Divine Revelation.

5) The demons cannot be saved.

7) There exists only one resurrection and return of the soul to the resurrected body, which will happen at the end of the world for the final judgement.

No one among the race of men can compel a soul to leave paradise and go to hell, or vice versa, as the deluded spiritualists believe. How can such a thing happen when we know very well that the souls of the just are in the hands of God? Likewise, we also know that between the living and the dead "a great gulf is fixed" and no one from there is able to come to us here (Lk. 16:26). Do you think it possible for one among men to take a soul from the hand of God, against His Will and to request it to engage in a conversation? Can someone cross that impassable chasm referred to in the Gospel and through its invocation bring a soul from the other world to earth? And if we assume that we are benefited by such a medium how can we accept it knowing that it is hateful and an abhorrence to God? (Dt. 18:9-13)

Someone might say that, indeed, the souls of the just are in the hands of God, however, the spiritualists in their meetings don't call upon souls of the righteous, but of the wicked, who are not in the hands of God, but in Hades.

Are the souls of the branded and accursed found beyond the supervision of God? Listen to what the Lord says in the Revelation of Saint John with reference to this: "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." (Rev. 1:17-18)

Consequently, just as the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, so too, those of the wicked in the kingdom of Hades are also under the infinite and indescribable authority of God. They are not to be found at the disposal of certain spiritualists who would like to call upon them to serve them in their lawless work. If, through the medium, spirits appear which they have called, let them know that these are not the spirits of relatives or friends. On the contrary, they are the unclean spirits of darkness which, until the last judgement, God has left free to harass men, and who reside in - according to the witness of Holy Scripture - the uppermost stratum of the atmosphere, or "high places." (Eph. 6:12) Against these powers and principalities battle the Christians with the weapons God has given them. (Eph. 6:11, 13-17)

Inq.: Could you give us a brief summary of the teaching of those who occupy themselves with the

occult, who are called variously: spiritualists, fortune-tellers, sorcerers, necromancers etc.?

EC: The teaching of the spiritualists takes many forms, according to the testimonies of the vanguard of occultism. Here it is in general terms:

- 1) They deny the dogma of the Holy Trinity, replacing it with one supreme god and other solar-gods considered his sons or with other planets that they compare with the Holy Spirit, and all of it is organized hierarchically.
- 2) Some speculate that God is not the creator of the cosmos, only its organizer.
- 3) They say that Jesus is a higher spirit and our sun's god who guides man but doesn't save him. They believe that the true revelation comes from the spirits that appear to man by means of the medium.
- 4) They believe that man is made of flesh and encircled with the spirit; that the soul of man has a casing or husk, can leave the visible world and after death communicate with those of the living that are worthy and believing.
- 5) They say that salvation is accomplished with the evolution toward the good and with reincarnation. They accept an infinite god having under his authority other, lesser, gods which govern particular planets and areas of heaven, assisted by the angels. Spirits of planets, animals and sentient beings inhabit the universe. The body of man is destroyed, but the shell and spirit is immortal. Human beings that are good have within them the good spirit, while the evil pass over into another body until they also, themselves, become good and so on.

Source: <http://www.christian-orthodox.com/magic-divination.html>