

Alexei OSIPOV

POSTHUMOUS LIFE

Deliberations of a contemporary theologian

Moscow
Danilov monastery Publishers
Danilovsky blagovestnik
2007

Forth edition, with amendments and additions.
Professor Osipov A.I. POSTHUMOUS LIFE. Deliberations of a contemporary theologian. M., 2007. – 120 p.

*Blessed by His Holiness Patriarch
of Moscow and All Russia Aleksei II*

Aleksei Osipov. POSTHUMOUS LIFE.

The booklet is devoted to the problems of a man's existence beyond the death boundaries. How should we understand the Eternity? What is that – after-death sufferings? Can God give a life to him, who, as He knows, will go to the eternal torments? Do our passions remain in action after the death? Are there any real means to help the departed? What is the influence of the pray on the after-death state of a soul?

Nobody can remain indifferent to theses deep questions, this mystery of the human life in its two measurements – time and Eternity. The booklet written by Aleksei Ilyich Osipov, merited professor of the Moscow Spiritual academy, is composed on the basis of his public lectures and answers to the questions of the listeners; it will help the readers to reconsider in the major part what was known by them before, to approach *that* world through the prism of the patristic teaching.

c. A.I.Osipov

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PREFACE TO THE FORTH EDITION

Posthumous life of a soul – is always a certain mystery, which allures to itself. “What is there and how is there” – is a question that is passed over from generation to generation, giving birth to a lot of answers. Many of them are borrowed from doubtful sources from outside Church; from teachings of non-Christian religions, occult inventions, stories of “visitors” to another world, “revelations” in dreams, fantasies of psychically sick persons and etc. That is why there is every need to open this theme at least in part, giving way to the teaching of Saint Fathers and authoritative hermits of the orthodox Church to the maximum possible extent.

However, Christianity does not have an aim to make this mystery such a reality that would answer all the questions of our infinitely curious souls. For a person, living *here* – this is impossible to do and in the most part it is not useful.

Impossible because - *that* world is absolutely different, and it is impossible to express it by our language. It is very illustrative in this sense the experience of the apostle Paul, who after *being there*, shared with his brethren the only recollection, - he told them that “**he heard inexpressive things, things that man is not permitted to tell**” (2 Corinthians, 12, 4) *.

Is not useful (or not permitted) as the knowledge of the future may completely paralyze a man’s freedom in the most important part of his life – spiritual and moral. It is easy to imagine how our behavior would change if we learned, quite surely that we would die definitely in a certain number of days at a given hour. Knowledge of the future will impose iron chains upon a man’s behavior, who has not got rid of passions and weaknesses. Due to the same reason *that world* and the time of death were opened far from all the saints. And on the contrary, not having direct knowledge about *that* world, a man turns to be quite free in his spiritual and moral life *here*, free in his choice of one of the two basic views on the problem of utmost importance: a **belief** in God and eternal life of a personality or a **belief** in its eternal death. It is not accidentally that Christ told the apostle Thomas: “**You have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed**” (John, 20, 29). In fact – belief is that very true indication of the

spiritual demands of a man, their orientation and purity. I.V. Kirievsky expressed this idea precisely and clearly: “A man is what his belief is”.

Beyond the grave the status of a man – is a direct fruit of his ambitions and actions in *this* world. But the fruit is not according to a law of retribution, but as per a law of conscience. This is beautifully maintained by St. Anthony the Great in his admonitions: “...we, when we happen to be kind, we commune with God – as in a likeness with Him, when we become evil, we depart from God – as in an unlikeness with Him...our sins do not let God begin to shine in us, they unite us with demons who torture us...”¹ Being a Christian we may only discourse, enjoying our theological deliberations, actually not believing Him and excluding Him from the whole of our life. As it was noted: “They philosophize about life, but they do not live through a life”.

Spiritual formation and perfection of a personality take place in front of temptations, influence of passions, heavy doubts more often than not. These thorns are required for a man in his earthy life, for they open to him him-self, humiliate him, make him capable of cognizing the Christ Saviour, and by way of this acquisition of a king’s dignity of a son of God. It is not accidentally that the Fathers used to speak, if there had been no demons, there would have not been any saints. **“The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it”**. (Matthew, 11, 12).

I express cordial gratitude to Alla Alexseevna Dobrosozkikh, without whose energetic initiative and thorough editorial decoding of my lectures this book would hardly be written.

Do not have a propensity for earth.

¹ Admonitions of St. Anthony the Great. Dobrotolubie (Philokalia). V.1.Par.150.

*Everything is short-lived –
and happiness in the next world only is
eternal, unchangeable, true.
And this happiness depends on the way
how we live through our this very life.*

St.Theofan the Recluse.

ABOUT THOSE WHO LIVE IN ANOTHER LIFE

Hasn't anyone watched chains of people strolling to the grave-yards on the Easter to pay homage to the dearest tombs? And though this custom of going to the grave –yards on a Bright day of the Resurrection Of Christ was taken root during the Soviet power (the Orthodox have a special day of the Easter remembrance of the departed – Radonitsa), it is worth noting that it is just on the bright days of the Christian feast of victory over death that even non-Church-goers seek to remember their departed relatives. They want to believe that their dearest ones have not passed away for ever, that they are alive but somehow live differently and it is possible to be with them, at least in spirit.

This inner ineradicable sense of immortality of the human personality is stronger than any skepticism. And it is really so: all of them – our beloved and dearest, - are alive, but they live through a different life, not that one that we are living through right now, but a life to which we will come to in due time, when everyone comes to sooner or later. That is why any questioning about *that life* which is life eternal and which we celebrate marking the Easter, - the Resurrection of Christ, is especially close to us, it does not touch upon our mind only but our heart, maybe in the larger extent.

Our heart perceives very closely the word with a deep meaning - *departed* that sounds in a Church. While hearing it you feel a certain tranquility, which they might have achieved, having thrown a flesh from themselves with its numerous concerns, fuss, a fire of unquenchable passions. You have freed yourself, our beloved and dearest departed. How different is the word from those ones which we hear outside the Church walls! And of course, we would like to know – how are

they there and what is there? There are few people who do not display any concern about it.

And what happens with a man when he dies away? What occurs with a soul when it comes out from its body? We stick to certain Orthodox traditions. It is a custom to remember those passed away on the 3-d, 9-th, 40-th days. But we have very approximate ideas what is happening with a soul during this period of time. We have heard that every person goes through many torments. But what is this? Is it really that very thing, what popular brochures write about on the subject or something different?

And even a more serious question: Who is being saved? And what does it mean: “being saved? If Christians only are saved, or else – only the Orthodox? And out of the Orthodox only those who have lived through a righteous life? And a torturing question put by the life itself, whether they will be saved or perished forever – all those who due to some reasons could not accept Christianity (for example, there was no worshipping about Christ or it was worshipped falsely, or they were not brought up in this way and etc.) ? If all unfaithful or all adherent of a different faith, of the non Orthodox perish, in that case a minor fraction of a percentage of the humankind will be saved, and will all the rest perish? Didn’t God know about it? And another question that springs up when we touch upon the issue of a posthumous state of a soul. What is Gehenna and everlasting torments? Are they really everlasting in the sense of endless? How could it be matched: from the one side – God’s awareness and love and from the other – existence of eternal torments?

Here we see what kind of serious questions arise out of a simple, at first glance, fact of remembrance of the departed. The theme of life of a soul after death is secret, concealed. Very little is revealed to a man about his posthumous residence. We’ll touch upon here only some fragments of the matter, which are of interest for many and are highlighted in the Holy Tradition of the Church.

EAT, DRINK, BE MARRY, MY SOUL?

Many remember the Gospel parable about a man whose land produced a good crop. Even before that he probably was well off, but this time due to a special abundance of the yield he started reasoning what he would do with such wealth. And he made a decision point blank to tear down his barns and build new ones and after that to live a prosperous life. Eat, drink, be marry, my soul, you have plenty of everything.²

It is expressed very eloquently. Really, what different things has not a man dreamed of during the whole history! It's about how to achieve such huge scientific and technological progress, when there comes an opportunity to do nothing and only to eat, drink and be merry. Happiness, probably will be achieved. But what will be the end of these everlasting dreams of the rich man?

But something happens with him about which he had not thought (neither had we) and did not want to think. God spoke out His judgment about him: “**You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you**” (Luke: 12, 19). It is not simply said: you will die (and this would be terrible), but – “**will be demanded**” (in the Church Slavonic language it sounds even stronger: *истяжуют* your soul). The point is not only in this short period of time (to-night), which separated thoughts and dreams of the rich man from the moment when his soul was withdrawn from him. For everyone this moment can be measured by a different period of time: hours, days, months, years. But in any case they are just an instant. Everyone of us knows perfectly that his previous part of life has passed like a dream – no matter how old he is now – 20, 50, 70... Time is somewhat remarkable, a unique thing, it seems that it exists and at the same time it does not. Not without reason the ancient Greek sage men used to say: the past does not exist as it has passed away, the present – there is none, because it is elusive, there is no future, because it has not come yet. And what is there that will come for us beyond the instant of the earth life?

² “And I'll say to myself: you have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry”. (Luke, 12, 19)

Alas, sentence passed on the Gospel rich man: your soul will be withdrawn from you – it is pronounced upon everyone who sees the essence of their life in eating, drinking and being merry.

But what is it – death? This question inevitably comes to everyone, moreover when his age reminds him about it. But the point is not the age but the wisdom, which characterizes a person irrespective of the years that he has lived. Do you remember what Lermontov said when he was only 20 years old: “ I don’t wait anything from life and I don’t feel sorry about anything from the past”.

Because of the impossibility to find an answer to the question about the essence of life in front of unavoidable death it is quite often that tragedies take place. There are many occasions when people finish their lives by committing suicides – due to the seeming senselessness in their lives. What is worth noting, suicides occur in all ages starting from the youngest, among the self-murderers there are children of the ages – 10, 11, 12, and sometimes younger. This striking phenomenon is witnessed presently both in Russia and abroad. For example, 1.5 percent of all deaths are suicides.

UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH BY ANCIENT PEOPLE

So what is death? All people thought about it. All religions speak about it. Actually they speak differently.

If we turn to pre-Christian history, we see numerous versions of descriptions of the after-death period. It is worth noting however that all of them speak, in real fact, about a certain form of the continued life.

What did our distant ancestors think about death? This is quite a voluminous question, and we’ll just speak about it in short.

Conceptions of the Egyptian religion are especially interesting. In the Egyptian “**Book of the dead**” (Its title is literally translated as “**Coming from the day**”)***, which was written about 2000 years B.C. , we find different reflections about how a soul will appeal to gods, to spirits, - to appeal - in order not to be subjected to some heavy blows, sufferings, flagellations, not to find oneself in a

situation which is even worse than death itself. For here lies a terrible sentence that the god Gor announces to the breakers of the gods' will: "Terrible swords will chastise your bodies, your souls will be exterminated, your shadows will be trampled, and your heads will be chopped. You will not rise! You will walk on your heads! You will not stand up as you've got into your pits! You will not run away! You will not get off! Against you is the fire of a snake, that one that burns down millions!...They, gods with knives will cut you off, will put an end to you! No one will ever see you, those who live on Earth!" But according to the same book the soul may save itself and become like a small god.³ Moreover, a striking concern about preservation of a body (mummification) and separate pieces of poetic texts in pyramids give cause to some researches for a supposition about the presence of belief among the ancient Egyptians in the future resurrection.⁴

Something of this kind we see in the Tibetan "**Book of the dead**", though it has a much more later origin, it was written about the VIII century. In it we find different motives, specific for Hindu consciousness. Death is viewed here as a step in the evolution or on the contrary, in the degradation of a soul, it is expressed in certain forms of reincarnation. Though according to Tibetan conceptions some people may achieve the condition of so-called moksha (liberation, release), when the process of release will stop, however very few people will reach the final end. The teaching about the reincarnation is contained in almost all religious and philosophical Hindu systems of thought.

A lot of exotic things may be found in Buddhist tales. According to one of them Buddha reincarnated 215 times and whom hasn't he only been (except female), before at last he became an illuminated.

True, the initial form of Buddhism is different, it orients a person at achieving so-called nirvana. But what it is really – different schools say about it differently. But that is not so important, the main thing is that something is happening *there*.

³ The Egyptian book of the dead":<http://rumagic.com>.

⁴ See, for one, Zubov A.B. Victory over the last enemy. Bogoslovsky Vestnik. №1. second issue. Sergiev Possad, 1993.

By the way, a few words about the idea of reincarnation. It offers a specific salvation from death as well, but deeply deceptive for the human's psychology, postponing as a rule for to-morrow everything that is difficult and is what you don't want to do to-day. So, the spiritual and moral perfection is the heroic deed of the struggle with yourself. And as known:

A battle with yourself

Is the most difficult battle.

Victory out of victories

Is the victory over yourself. (F. Logau).⁵

The idea of reincarnation subconsciously orientates a man at *a battle with himself* in an indefinite future, especially if here a man is doing pretty well. Besides the same chain of incarnations, actually does not have an end – that is an endless number of deaths and births. But such lucky men as Buddha, who reincarnated “only” 215 times, are only a handful. The destiny of the majority, I repeat – is an endless chain of continued reincarnations.

The idea of reincarnations almost without changes was adopted by the theosophy as well.

However this idea has no serious background.

First. If reincarnation had been the law of our existence, every man would have kept his previous conditions in his memory. Otherwise the basic argument would become senseless, the one that dominates in the theory about the need of multiply incarnations of personality giving it a chance to undertake efforts with the aim of complete purification from sins. The English philosopher Locke was quite right in noting, that if there is no memory about the previous reincarnation, there is no identity of a personality, so, consequently there is no reincarnation, but there is a simple birth of a new **myself**.

Secondly. There are no facts confirming it. Rare cases of so-called “recollections” of your own reincarnations have a different origin, they are natural consequences of:

⁵ Friedrich von Logau (+1655), German poet.

- either of a foreign hypnosis (suggestion), including of a telepathic type⁶, or involuntary autosuggestion, and that is the subject of easily yielded people of so-called medium constitution (children and women, most of all);
- or certain psychological illnesses, when a sick person can “remember himself” whoever he could be;
- or direct demonic influences, time and again manifested in the possessed state evident for everybody;
- or manifestation of a genetic memory, which under certain conditions can produce in consciousness some impressions and emotional experience of ancestors, perceived by a man like their own.

We come across interesting ideas both in ancient Greek mythology and religion. The ancient Greeks (by the way like many other people, having no direct Divine Revelation) imagined a posthumous state of a person either as a certain illusory quality or something immeasurably worse, than any earthly life. So in *Odyssey*, by Homer, for example, there are quite eloquent characteristics of the person's state in the kingdom of Hades. Here is how Achilles, who is equal to God, complains to Odysseus:

“ Oh, Odysseus, don't hope to give me comfort in death,
 Rather I would prefer to work in the field as a day-labourer, alive,
 To earn my daily bread by serving as a poor ploughman,
 Than to reign over the soulless here, being dead”⁷.

Even more remarkable is the posthumous state of Heracles - this giant hero of ancient Greek mythology. He himself is staying at Olympus, at the feast of gods and at the same time his trembling shadow with a strained bow is in Hades. Simultaneously he is in two poles. This unusual idea of Homer became one of the sources of the original eschatological concept for father Pavel Florensky.

What do these surprising fantasies speak about? On the one hand ancient Greeks felt the reality of that very world and undestroyability of the human soul,

⁶ See: Archbishop Luke. Spirit, soul and body.

⁷ Homer. *Odysseus*. Trans.by Zukovsky. Prosveshenie publish. S. 325.XI, 487-491.

they believed, that it existed, that very posthumous condition. On the other hand, not knowing what it was like, they were full of fear before this inevitable unknown after-death state and made all possible conjectures; they created, as we see, bright myths in their attempts of attaching some meaning to this mystery. And we must do them credit – some of these myths are not only interesting but they deeply express the idea of posthumous reward. Suffice it to remember the ancient intuitions about Blessed Islands and Elysium fields for the righteous and later myths, expressing hopelessness of the destiny of those condemned: torments of Tantalus, Sisyphean stone (toil), Danaides' barrels and etc.

A similar picture can be seen in other pre-Christian religions. Intuitive feeling of immortality and direct facts confirming it (appearance of the dead, their accurate prophecy, warnings and etc.), are dissolved in the thick fog of ignorance about that world. And this is all along through the pre-Christian history of the mankind.

If we turn to the Scripture of the Old Testament, here again we'll find something similar. Prior to the books of the prophets we find assertions in it that the soul goes into sleep after death, and probably it dies away. That is the whole of the man is turned into ashes after death, not only his body. And prophets only, especially the great ones, started speaking definitely that after death the soul does not escape, does not die and even does not fall asleep, but it experiences suffering or joy depending on the nature of the moral life of the human being; prophets even speak about universal resurrection⁸. And this is the limit, what was revealed to pre-Christian mankind⁹.

AND WHAT IS COMMON FOR ALL?

⁸ See: A.I.Osipov. Old Testament religion. // A way of reason in search of the truth. Sretensky mon.publish. M., 2004.

⁹ In the book "The teaching of the Old Testament about the immortality and the posthumous life" Prof. Yungerov P.A. (1856-1921) in the very broad historic and cultural aspect examines the ideas about the posthumous life, contained in the law statute, historic, teaching, prophetic and non-canonc books of the Old testament, and gives a comparative analysis of the old testament notions about the posthumous life and views of ancient Egyptian and Persians.

All peoples and all religions speak about a certain, although an illusory, but still a life of a man after death. The idea of complete destruction of the human being after the death of a body is quite rare.

The insurmountable psychological difficulty to believe that after his death a man vanishes into nonexistence is common to peoples' quests in all times and nations. A man is not an animal! There exists a life after death! And this is not just a conjecture, not a naïve belief and vague intuition, but, above all, the whole mankind emotional experience of the number of facts, convincingly testifying that the life of the person continues beyond the threshold of the earthy existence. We find information, and often striking information, about it everywhere, wherever any literary sources are found. This very idea runs through all of them: a personality continues to live after the death. The personality is not annihilated!

Quite remarkable in this respect is a story by K.Ikskul, published under the title "Unbelievable for many, but true event". The story makes a great impression with its sincerity and leaves no doubts in the reality of what was happening. The most interesting in it is the fact of continuity of consciousness in transition from life *here* to life *there*. Ikskul, describing the moment of his clinical death, writes, that at first he experienced heaviness, some pressure, and then suddenly he felt a certain lightness and freedom. Then after seeing his body, he started guessing that the body was dead. But he didn't lose his self-consciousness, not for any moment. *"In our comprehension the word "death" is inseparably connected with the understanding of some extermination, termination of life. How could I think that I was dead, that I didn't lose my consciousness, not for any moment, when I felt myself the same alive person, hearing all, seeing, realizing, capable of moving, thinking, speaking?"*¹⁰

Then he tells us about his astonishment, when having found himself in the middle of the room and having seen a group of medical workers, he glanced over their shoulders – in the direction where they were looking at: *"There on the bed it was I who was lying...I called the doctor, but the atmosphere, in which I found*

¹⁰ K.Ikskul. Unbelievable for many, but true event. 'Troitsky listok', № 58, 1910.

myself turned to be quite unfit for myself; it neither perceived nor reproduced sounds of my voice, and I became aware of my complete dissociation with everything around, felt my strange loneliness and fear and was panic stricken. I made all efforts and tried announce myself, but these efforts drove me into the utmost despair. “Don’t they see me?” – I thought with despair time and again. I was approaching the people grouping over my bed, but nobody out of them either turned around, or paid any attention to me, I was examining myself with bewilderment, not understanding how they couldn’t see me, as I was just the same as before. But I made an attempt to grasp hold of myself but my hand could only cut an air another time.”¹¹

And evidences similar to this one are many. Sometimes posthumous feelings of a man happen to be connected with moments disastrous for himself, when in front of his eyes a disgraceful spectacle of sharing out his property is revealed. Nobody spoke about the dead person, he was not needed to anyone already (as a thing which was only good for throwing it out to the rubbish as it was fit for nothing), all the attention was paid at the money and his belongings. And you can imagine the horror of the “loving” relatives when they saw him coming back to life? Do you understand how he felt when he had to communicate with them!

An interesting story from his own life was told me by my neighbour Sergei Alekseevich Zuravlev (1913-1997), a teacher, who lived in Sergiev Possad. I knew him to be a decent man, mentally quite normal and that is why I have no doubts in the credibility of his story. When he was 20 and fell dangerously ill with typhus, he was running a temperature above 40 C, he was taken to hospital. And suddenly at a certain moment he felt a big lightness and saw himself in the middle of the hospital room, where he was lying. It was the First of May (Soviet holiday) and he remembered about his friends and instantly happened to be beside them. They were enjoying the holiday, drinking vodka in the open air, talking, laughing, but his attempts to associate with them turned to be absolutely unsuccessful. Nobody noticed him and nobody heard him. Then he remembered

¹¹ Same.

about the girl he knew and happened to be near her in the same way. He saw her sitting by a familiar young man, listened to their cordial conversation, but they didn't pay attention at him either. But all of a sudden he came to his senses – I am ill, - he thought; and he saw himself in the hospital room, two medical nurses were standing near his bed with a stretcher and the doctor announced: “He is dead and he must be taken to the mortuary (morgue). At that very moment Zuravlev felt an awful cold and heard a scream coming from the women: “He is alive!” After his coming back to life, Sergei's temperature completely left him. A day after he was released from the hospital. But the more exciting was after that. Sergei came back to his routine work and made a hint to his friends, saying he knew, how they had celebrated the First of May and what they were talking about. They were extremely surprised and insisted of giving them an honest answer, who had provided him with these facts. (Probably their debates were not intended for a broad public). And the girl who was exposed by Sergei by telling her all the details of her conversation with another young man and her behavior with him, became very much bewildered. Naturally a question arises: if there is no soul, could it be that a dead body lying in a hospital room would learn everything about what was happening far beyond the walls of the hospital?

And here is one more incident, which a brother of Hegumenos Nikon (Vorobiev)¹² – Vladimir Nikolaevich, experienced. When he was seven, during a game in lapta (a ball game) he was accidentally struck on his head so heavily, that he fell down as a dead. He told everyone that he saw himself very high above this place, he saw the boys that stood around his body perplexed, he watched one of them rushing to his home and his mother running out of their house screaming and crying. She took hold of him and fiercely started plucking at him. And *there* he saw such a beautiful sun and it was so good there, so joyfully, and when he regained he started crying as hard as he could, but not because of the pain but because it was very despondently and unpleasant on earth, it was semidarkness like in some underground, though the day was quite sunny. This was the event

¹² See; the same author “Repentance is left for us”.Sretensky mon. publish. M., 2005.

which was often spoken about by all the brothers of Vladimir Nikolaevich: Hegumenos Nikon, Alexander, Mikhail, Vasily.

These facts are incalculable. They testify with utmost reliability to the presence of a soul in a man and to the continued life after death of the body. And it is important to make it a note – it is the soul that is the source of thoughts, feelings, emotional experience, not the body. Mind, heart (as a feeling organ), will - are in the soul, not in the body. This was always stated by the religion.

Henri Bergson, a famous French philosopher of the end 19-th – beginning 20-th century – said that, a man's brain is just a telephone station that transmits only, but it is not the source of information. Information comes to the brain from somewhere and it could be apprehended and passed to by it differently. It could work well and it could malfunction and fail completely. But it is a transmitting mechanism and it is not the generator of a man's consciousness. To-day a vast range of facts completely confirm that Bergson's idea.

Presently we see a great number of published books written by the authors saying about the unceasing life after the body's death. For instance, a book by Dr. Moudy – “Life after life” caused a real sensation in the United states: 2 millions copies were sold literally during the first a year or two. Books are seldom distributed at such a speed. Many perceived it as a revelation. And though such facts are always sufficient they were not known, people did not pay attention at them, considering them as a description of hallucination or manifestation of a mental abnormality of a person. Here a doctor, a specialist, surrounded by the same specialists, speaks about facts and only facts. What is more he is the person who is not interested in the “propaganda of a religion”.

I may cite here some more books on the subject:

- Vasiliev A. Suggestion at a distance. M., 1962.
- Vasiliev A. Mysterious phenomenon of a man's psychology. M., 1964.
- James V. Diversity of religious experience. M., 1910.
- Diachenko G. From the sphere of mysterious. M., 1896. Reprint: M., 1992.
- Diachenko G. Spiritual world. M., 1990.

- Kalinovsky P. Transition. M., 1991.
- Kuraev A. Where the soul goes. “Troizkoe slovo”, 2001.
- Lodyzensky M.V. Invisible light. Pgr., 1915.
- Lodyzensky M.B. Dark force. Pgr., 1915.
- Luka (Voino-Yasenezky), archbishop. Spirit, soul and body. Brussels, 1978.
- Moritz Roolings. Beyond the threshold of death. SPb.1994.
- Seraphim (Rouse), Hieromonk. Soul after death. M.,1991.

But in order to understand correctly everything that is connected with the phenomenon of *that world*, an Orthodox should read and study the works by St. Ignatious Brianchaninov (+1867) – and in the first place his “A word about perceptual and spiritual vision of spirits”, “A word about death” and “Addition to the word about death” (V.III). In our religiously vague time they give a firm patristic background for correct understanding and evaluation of all the phenomena of spiritual life.

“I AM IN HELL!..”

We find something principally new and important in the book by Moritz Roulings “Beyond the threshold of death” as compared with the information given by Moudy. Moritz is a well-known doctor-cardiologist, professor at the Tennessee University (USA), who used to return people back to life, who were in a state of a clinical death. The book is abundant in great number of facts. It is worth noting that M.Roulings was a kind of man who was quite indifferent to religion, but after one event in 1977 (the book starts with this story) he started viewing the problem of man, soul, death, eternal life and God differently. The facts that the physician describes, makes us ponder over the issue seriously.

Roulings tells us how he began the reanimation of a patient who was in a state of a clinical death. He tried to make his heart work by means of massage, ordinary for this case. It was the common thing in his practice. But he encountered such a phenomenon, which had never occurred in his life before. His patient, upon recovering for a few moments started fiercely screaming: “I am in hell!” “Don’t

stop!” The doctor asked what frightened him. “Don’t you understand? I am in hell! When you stop making me massage I turn to be in hell! Don’t let me return there!”¹³ So it was repeated several times.

Dr. Roulings writes that as he was a man physically strong, he sometimes worked so hard that there were instances when he broke his patients’ ribs. That is why when they came to their senses they usually begged: “*Stop torturing my breast! You hurt me!* In that case the doctor heard something very unusual. “*Don’t stop!*” And he describes further: “*Only at the moment when I looked at his face I was seized with alarm. The expression on his face was much worse than at the moment of his death. His face was distorted by an awful grimace, meaning a horror, pupils of the eyes were widened, he was trembling and he was bathed in sweat, - in other words all this defies description*”¹⁴. Then Dr. Roulings writes when that person finally regained consciousness he told him about his terrifying sufferings during his death. The sick person was prepared to endure anything but not to return back there. There was hell! Later on when the cardiologist started investigating similar cases, asking his colleagues about it, it turned out that there were a lot of such facts in their practice. Since that time he has started writing down stories of the reanimated patients. Not every one revealed. But these stories which were quite open, were more than sufficient to make sure in the continued life of a personality after death. But what life?

In his book Dr. Roulings informs us, unlike Moudy, that half of “resurrected” people say that it is very good *there* and they don’t like to return from there and they came back unwillingly, without a joy, but the other part of reanimated, on the contrary, tells that they saw there fire lakes, horrible monsters and experienced painful feelings and sufferings. And, Roulings writes: “*The number of cases of the acquaintance with the hell is increasing rapidly*”¹⁵. He generalizes the reports of the reanimated in the following words:” *They assert that death – a thought of which frightens an ordinary man – is not a termination of life or drowsiness, but*

¹³ Moritz Roulings. “Beyond the threshold of death”. Ch.1 “To the hell and back”. P.13. SPb., 1994.

¹⁴ Same.

¹⁵ Same. Ch. ”Descent into the hell. P91.

a transition from one form of life to another – sometimes pleasant and joyful, and sometimes gloomy and terrifying”¹⁶.

Especially interesting are the facts concerning the saved suicides. All of them (no one knows any exceptions) experienced there the hardest tortures. Moreover these tortures were connected with both psychological, spiritual experiences and (especially) with visual. These were the hardest sufferings. Monsters appeared in front of the poor, the very sight of those made their souls shudder and there was no place to hide from them, there was no chance to close their eyes, to close their ears. There was no way out of this horrible state! When one girl was returned to senses she kept asking about: “*Mammy, help me. Made them depart from me ... them, demons in the hell! It was so awful!*”¹⁷

Roulings cites another very serious fact: the majority of his patients, who narrated about their spiritual tortures survived by them in the clinical death, resolutely changed their moral life. Some of them kept silent, but it was possible to understand by their subsequent life, that they had experienced something very horrible.

GOD-GIVEN MAN’S FLESH

Nowdays due to a great number of facts accumulated in the medicine science (not fantasies, akin to popular folklore, but sufficiently reliable facts), it is possible to state with the utmost credibility: the existence of a soul is the undisputable **scientific** truth. Despite a rude materialistic notion, forcefully imposed into the minds of the whole generations stating that a man is only a body, only an animal with a computer in his mind, in reality, he is a self-conscious and undestroyable personality; the carrier of this personality is above all a certain immortal substance – a soul, having two forms of existence. First, known to us – in a body: a soul with a body (as different from the spirit) is a man’s flesh. The other mysterious form of the soul existence – is after death. Christianity reopens slightly a curtain of the mystery of its being beyond the earth boundaries.

¹⁶ Same. Introduction. P.10.

¹⁷ Same. Ch.7. “Descent into the hell’. Suicide. P.92.

For more comprehensive understanding of this mystery it is necessary to tell about the body as of a home for the soul. The patristic teaching says quite definitely that a man before the Fall, before his present state, possessed a **spiritual** body but a material as well or if you like **material and a spiritual body**. How could it be understood? Don't spiritual and material exclude each other? According to the Christian religion – no. On the contrary, only that very material body acquires normal image of its existence, when it becomes a spiritual one. We may see that remarkable phenomenon in Christ Resurrected.

Do you remember how Christ passed through the closed doors, suddenly appeared before his disciples, broke bread with them... and suddenly disappeared. At the same time he told his pupils: **“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have”**. (Luke, 24: 39). And it was He who said that, Who suddenly appeared in the room **‘with doors locked for fear of the Jews** (John, 20; 19). Nobody opened Him the doors. And what did the apostle Thomas feel, he, who didn't believe in Resurrection, when he suddenly he saw Christ coming into the room with closed doors and he heard from Him: **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe’**. Thomas' answer was unique: **“My Lord and my God”** (John, 20; 27-28), that is, this is You – Yourself! In Rome they show a finger of the apostle Thomas who touched imperishable rib of Christ. To be frank, I do not believe it very much, sorry. But the point is not whether Thomas touched Christ's rib and with that very finger - what is important is that Thomas touched the reality, going out of the boundaries of our habitual human experience, and made sure of it despite the protest of his so-called common sense. And how was it possible not to protest: could it be possible that real flesh, blood and bones could go through the same real material objects freely, without hindrance?!

We may build different hypotheses to explain this phenomenon. However all of them will be in the final count like telling fortunes by coffee grounds, for **“ now we see but a poor reflection”**, (1 Corinthians, 13; 14) as if guessing. But it you

want here is one of such guessing. At the present time thanks to a deeper scientific understanding of space and time it is possible to make guesses that a body remaining material, but having become spiritual, stays outside our three-dimensional space, in other “spaces”, being “inside” ours. In these spaces a body does not need any material means for its existence. Through these “spaces a spiritual body may go inside any point of our earthy space-time freely, acquiring usual qualities for it. But I repeat, this is not more than guessing, a poor reflection. And what I know for sure that we all, will sooner than we think, turn to be *there* and **‘then we shall see face to face’** (1 Corinthians, 13; 12). That is why don’t hurry and wait a little.

Concerning the fact that the body could be spiritual the apostle Paul writes directly: “ **So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable...It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body...For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality**” (1 Corinthians, 15; 42, 44, 53). The apostle writes about the future condition of a body, however it was as such before the Fall.

In the same way Saint Fathers teach that after the universal resurrection, people will have the same spiritual body, which the first man had (even more perfect), which possessed unusual, remarkable for our present condition qualities: it knew neither illnesses, nor pain, nor sufferings, nor death. It did not need clothes, protection from some outer influence; it did not feel hunger, thirst, fleshly desires and as we see on resurrected Saviour it did not depend on our time and space. And in the same way how it is impossible to make harm to the air, having struck it with a stick, in the same way our human body and soul were and will be invulnerable, dispassionate, non-affected by any sufferings. Saint Ephraim of Syria (IV), wrote, for example: “*Winds in the Paradise float to and fro in front of the righteous men; one blows them the food, the other one pours water...Winds feed spiritually those who live in the spirit... For spiritual creatures food is spiritual*”¹⁸.

¹⁸ St. Ephraim of Syria. Creations. V.5. P.287. “Otchi Dom”, 1995.

*“Paradisiacal fragrance satiate without a bread; a breath of life serves beverage...Bodies containing blood and moisture, achieve there a purity similar to the soul itself...There bodies elevate to the level of souls, a soul rises to the degree of a spirit...”*¹⁹ and stays in a condition of a constant joy.

Saint Athanasius the Great (IV) characterized spiritual and corporal qualities of the first man: *“ For before the crime committed by Adam there was neither grief, nor fear, nor weariness, nor hunger, nor death”*²⁰. Saint Anthony the Great, speaking about those changes, which occur here on the ground with the body of a saint man, wrote: *”Thus a body sticks to any good and bending to the Power of the Holy Spirit changes so drastically, that finally becomes to a certain measure privy to those qualities of the spiritual body, which it is due to obtain after the resurrection of the righteous”*²¹. The same is said by St. Cyril of Jerusalem: *“ This body will rise...it will not remain the same, it will become eternal. It will have no need either in the similar food to sustain life or in a stairway for rising, because it will become spiritual, something remarkable, such as it is impossible to express, as it must be, and we are incapable in doing that...”*²²

Was a body created by God, in need of food and anything else (Genesis, 1, 29), as we know, that resurrected Christ **ate their food “in their presence?** (Luke, 24, 43) St. John Chrysostom answers this question: *‘So, upon His resurrection Christ took food and water not because of the necessity, - then his body was not in need of that, but to fulfill the matter of resurrection’*²³.

The same thing is said by St. Macarius of Egypt:

QUESTION: *Will the bodies of Adam and others upon their resurrection appear naked before God or will they have clothes on them and whether their food will be of different kind? How then a body could be covered with clothes and how will it be fed (all people living in this century, men and women, must cover their private parts and take perishable food (comp. John, 6, 27)? Will all this be needed to*

¹⁹ Same. P.289.

²⁰ St. Athanasius the Great. Creations. M., 1994. T.4. P.466.

²¹ St. Anthony the Great. Admonition about the life in Christ. Par.20. Dobrotolubie (Philokalia). V.1.

²² St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Words on catechumenism. 18, par 18. P.228. Soikin publish. SPb.

²³ St. John Chrysostom. Creations. Interpretation on evangelist Matthew, 26, 26-28. SPb., 1911. V.7. P.822.

those resurrected after their delivery from the earth's life and who will be returned to the previous composition or not?

ANSWER. *'The issue seems to me irrelevant and thoughtless, because we all know that all created splendor (comp. James 1, 11) and composition will be abolished (or fade away) upon delivery (or the end of the world), and the earth will not produce fruit for the body's nourishment, but the sky will come with all its beauty. (comp. 24, 35). Where from will people get their food and make clothes, if according to God, all the visible will pass away? Isn't it clear that there is something else besides the visible and what will be given?...God already now clothing the soul with glory and filling it with His fire, will give cloths to a body at that long-awaited time and He will transform our lowly bodies and they will be like His glorious body (Philippians, 3, 21), having given, the comfort with food at last and heavenly clothes and imperishable angel-like deeds'*²⁴.

Here are the remarkable qualities that were inherent to and will be inherent to a man's flesh- body and soul – in the life of the future age.

CONSEQUENCES OF PROGENITORS' SIN

The Fall of the first men, who imagined themselves Gods, resulted in the fact that changes of ontological nature took place in Man's nature. Saint Fathers call them as a *firstborn damage* (St. Basil the Great), *inherited corruption* (St. Macarius of Egypt), even a sin in a Western theology, then in our theological thought – *original sin*. The man's flesh – a body and a soul became according to the fathers, - *plump*, vested in "**garments of skin**" (Genesis, 3, 21). What kind of changes – that is clearly described by St. Maximus the Confessor (VII c.): "*God having taken upon Himself the condemnation for my voluntary sin, I mean – having taken passionability, perishability and mortality of [human] nature*"...²⁵. These three qualities became inalienable in human's nature, all people are born with them. It should be noted however that these changes are of constitutional

²⁴ St. Macarius of Egypt. Spiritual words and epistles. "Indrik" publish. M., 2002. Word 18, 6 (1). P.588-589.

²⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor. Creations. Book 2. Questions and answers to Thalassios. Question 42. "Martis" publish., 1993. P.111.

character, but not of spiritual-moral one, though they turn to be an unsteady soil, on which a person can easily slide down to a sin.

What is meant by *passion*? If a spiritual body could not suffer, after becoming “plump” the flesh is subjected to different sufferings both a body and a soul. (A Slavic word *passion* means, in particular, *suffering* – “the passions of Christ”). It is well explained by St. John of Damascus (VIII cen.):

“Natural and irreproachable passions are not within our power, they have come into our life as a consequence of condemnation, which took place due a crime (of the first people), as, for example, hunger, thirst, tiredness, labour, tear, decomposition, death evasion, fear, death throes, from which comes perspiration, drops of blood...and etc. what is inherent to all people”²⁶... But this original passions (non-sinful, ‘non-reproachful’, according to St. Maximus the Confessor) should be distinguished from the passion that is sinful, which appears in a man as a result of the sins committed by himself and following his sinful heredity. St. Grigory of Nissa explains the beginnings of sinful passions in such a way: “ A slave of pleasures makes the required necessities by way of passions: instead of meals he seeks the pleasures of a belly, he prefers adorning to clothes, luxurious apartments to comfort of rooms, instead of giving birth to children he turns his eyes to illegal and forbidden pleasures. That is why money-grabbing, delicacy, pride, vanity, libertinism have come into life through wide-open gates”²⁷.

What is perishability? Look at a child and an old man. Here is the process of perishability, what it makes with a man!

And at last the body of a man became mortal.

Here are the three main illnesses, which appeared as a result of the Fall of our progenitors and they are transferred to all people without exception. All of them are unluckily tied with the “original sin”. For in the given case a “sin” means, as we see, not personal guilt of each of Adam’s descendants for his sin, but the single for all corruption, sickness of the human nature.

²⁶ St. John of Damascus. The exact exposition of the Orthodox belief. Ch. XX. SPb., 1994, p. 185.

²⁷ St. Grigory of Nissa . Creations. Ch. VII, M., 1865, p. 522.

Besides the original and personal sins there is a tribal sin. Parents and ancestors endow their descendants with not only bodily and psychical illnesses but with spiritual ones (for example, strongly pronounced envy, anger, avidity and etc.). All the people are born with them, but they become apparent in each man differently. And though a man does not bear the responsibility for these inherited illnesses, but he is morally responsible for his attitude to them – whether he struggles with them or on the contrary, he develops them. This inherited sinful nature is called a tribal or ancestral sin. Christ only had an absolute immaculate nature, he didn't only committed a sin Himself, but he was withdrawn from the stream of a tribal sin due to his birth from the Holy Spirit and the Holy Virgin Mary. St. Fathers speak about this. For example St. Gregory Palamas: Christ “*was the only one who was neither born in lawlessnesses, nor carried in a sinful belly*”²⁸.

Thus, three different phenomena are called the same word “sin”. But a sin in a direct sense is only a sin that is personal. The original and tribal sins are called a sin in a figurative sense, as they are an inherited illness, and not a personal deed, for which a man bears responsibility. Misunderstanding of this terminological difference leads to serious creed delusions, one of which concerns a human nature, perceived by God-the-Word and from here the main Christian religious teaching – the essence of the Christ Sacrifice.

When the original sin is interpreted as a guilt of all peoples (Teaching of a Catholic church), and a false conclusion is made, that God-the-Word has perceived not our “sinful” nature but a first-man made, immortal, imperishable nature of the First Adam. This was the teaching of Monophysites, Monotheletes, Aftartodokets. According to a teaching of Helian Galicarnassky, an heresiarch of Aftardokets, “*upon incarnation, Christ has assumed a soul and a body in the shape which Adam had before the Fall. If Christ got tired, craved for food, cried and etc., He did it only because He wanted it but not due to necessity*”²⁹. At first glance this is an error purely speculative, in reality, however it results in fatal consequences for Christianity – actual denial of the essence of Christ cross passions.

²⁸ Gregory Palamas. Conversations. Moscow, 1993. Conversation 16. V.1. P.155.

²⁹ Christianity. Encyclopaedia in 3 volumes. V.1. M., 1993. p.150.

Above all, how could Christ suffer and die if He possessed impassionate and immortal nature? Assertion of Aftartodokets and the one made by pope Honorius, convicted by the Church Council, that during His earthy life Christ made His body by some specific action either hungry, or thirsty, crying suffering, at last mortal, looks like a fantastic game. St. John of Damascus armed himself against that with all his might. “So, - he wrote, - *it is impious to say as reckless Julian and Gaian assert, that the body of God was imperishable before resurrection. For if it had been imperishable, it would not have had the same essence with us and in the same way quite illusory happened, what the Gospel says, - hunger, thirst, nails, perforation of a rib, death. If that had happened only illusory, the administration of this mystery would have been a lie and a fraud, and He would have made Himself man only shadowy, not in reality, and we are saved illusory not truly; but – no! And those who say that, they will not participate in salvation!*”³⁰

In fact if the Son of God had healed the human nature way back in incarnation, having taken it as impassionate, imperishable, immortal, so Cross becomes unnecessary. By this the major thing in Christianity is abolished – the Cross victim of Christ and a direct battle against cross is consolidated.

That is why St. Athanasius the Great indignant that some people ascribe the first-man qualities to the human nature taken by the Son of God wrote: “*let them be silent those who assert, that Christ’s flesh is inaccessible to death, but immortal in essence!*”³¹. The same thing was asserted by a great number of Church Fathers. For example, Gregory the Theologian (IV c.): “*He (Christ) got tired and got hungry, he was thirsty and was in a state of struggle and cried – according to a law of a body’s nature*”³². St. Ephraim of Syria: “*He was the son of that Adam, over whom a death reigned, according to the apostle*”³³. Grigory Palamas: “*The Word of God assumed such a flesh, what we have, though absolutely pure, though mortal and unhealthy*”³⁴. The expression of a liturgical understanding of this issue

³⁰ St. John of Damascus. The exact exposition of the Orthodox belief. M., 1992. P.268.

³¹ St. Athanasius the Great. Creations. V.3. M., 1994. P.298.

³² St. Gregory the Theologian. Creations. V.1. St.Trinity Sergiev. Lavra, 1994. p. 679.

³³ St. Ephraim of Syria. Interpretation on the Forth Gospel. S. Possad, 1896. P. 293.

³⁴ St. Gregory Palamas. Conversations. P.1. M., 1993.P.165.

is, for one, a prayer behind the ambo at the liturgy of the Preconsecrated Offerings on Great Monday in Jerusalem. There are such words in it: “ *The Tzar of ages...Christ, our God... You, having taken our poor nature, is not privy to passions due to Your God’s nature, if not having been vested in passionate and deathly nature by Your own will*”³⁵. There are a lot of these texts in our Church service³⁶.

Saint fathers say that the Son of God united with the human nature in everything except *sin*, though with the *first man corruption*, but without a tribal sin and that is why is absolutely pure spiritually. And it is by incarnation but by His Cross sufferings God has healed the first damage of the human nature, having resurrected it. That is clearly stated in the epistle to Hebrews: “ **In bringing many sons to glory, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect (teleiisai) through suffering**” (Hebrews, 2, 10). That is why St. Maximus the Confessor wrote: “*The immutability of the fulfillment in Christ has returned impassionability, imperishability and immortality to this nature through the Resurrection*”³⁷.

Mortality, perishability and liability to sufferings – are the qualities of the fallen human’s nature are that incrustation on a healthy body (*garments of skin*, - Genesis, 3, 21), which Christ operated by His death of a martyr in Humanity perceived by Him. Having resurrected it, He became a new Adam, having opened the gates of the Kingdom of God for all capable for spiritual birth. Christianity teaches about the future general resurrection, when owing to passions and resurrection of Christ the nature of a man will raise healed, glorified, spiritually perfect. However to get a new flesh everyman must take off his garments of skin – a death of a body. Even the Mother of God went through the gates of death to acquire a new, spiritual body.

³⁵ A. Dmitrievsky. “Divine service of the Holy and Easter weeks in St. Jerusalem. IX-Xc.” Kazan, 1894. P. 51-53.

³⁶ For example, Oktoikh (Book of Eight Tones). Tone 1, Sunday canon, song 1, tropar: “**You have stretched Your arms on the Cross, calling up my perishable body from the earth, which You have taken from the Vergin**”. Tone 2, another canon, song 5, tropar: “**You have been passionate and mortal due to the human nature...**” Tone 3, Sunday canon, song 1, tropar: “**You’ve taken the passionate flesh... animated...**”; song 4, tropar: “**By the mortal body, Life, you’ve communed death...**” and others.

³⁷ St. Maximus the Confessor. Creations. Book 2. Questions and answers to Thelassious. “Martis” publish., 1993. Answer № 42.

It is worth noting that Catholicism and Protestantism contain a lot of delusions of the principled nature on these and other issues, both of creed type and spiritual life (understanding of the first-man corruption, Christ sacrifice, conditions of salvation, sins and virtues, sacraments, posthumous status of a soul, prayers, prayers for those who passed away, spiritual life...)

WHERE A SOUL RESIDES AFTER DEATH OF THE BODY

What does the Orthodox Holy Tradition say?

A man's contact with another world is more often starts before death and the soul often comes into the complete amazement before a completely different reality, which opens before it. Numerous facts testify to it. I'll cite two reliable facts.

My own uncle studied in the town of Tula. Having received a telegram telling him about his mother's death, who lived in the village, he urgently started for home. It was late at night when he arrived at the town of Plavsk, which was situated at 15 kilometres away from his own village. No means of transport functioned at that hour, he felt fear to walk. But he walked. Having come out of the town, he was amazed seeing clearly his own mother walking in front of him. He rushed to catch her but all in vain. As soon as he started to walk quicker, she in the same way quickened her steps. And that continued all the way along till he reached the village, when the vision suddenly disappeared. This is how his mother's soul encouraged him in a difficult moment of his life.

My another uncle, dieing in complete conscience before our eyes, all our relatives, suddenly stated: "*Here are the two who have come, and now you will not be able to help me*". These cases very remarkable and not explainable by any natural reasons are uncountable number. I am sure almost everyone either heard and got in touch with something similar.

An established church tradition asserts that during the first two-three days after death (though our time cannot be correlated with the category which we call Eternity), a man, or rather his soul stays in the conditions of the "earth gravity".

Having turned out to be *there*, in eternity, it will not deny itself the immediate attempt of usual association with relatives and dearest people.

In Apostolic Decisions (IV c.) we find direct indications to the third, ninth, fortieth and a yearly days as of special days for remembrance of the departed. (Later on in the Church they started to commit ecumenical service for the dead, when the Church prays for all the departed, including those who did not get a Church burial due to different reasons).

We find an interesting explanation of these days of remembrance in the writings of St. Macarios of Alexandria (IV c.) He asked an angle: “*When the Church Fathers are entrusted with making an Offering to God for the departed on the third, ninth and fortieth day, so is the benefit made to the soul of the departed?*” The angel answered: “*God did not connive at anything at the Church that is illdisposed or unfavourable; but He arranged heavenly and earthy sacraments in the Church and ordered to commit them*

*When on **the third day** an offering takes place at the Church, the soul of the departed gets from an angle, guarding him, a relief in his sorrow, which he feels because of the departure from the body; he gets it because, the praying and offering was made in the Church of God for it, and from that a favourable hope is born. During two days the soul is allowed to walk on the earth where it wanted together with angles staying by its side. That is why a soul, loving the body, wonders around the house, where it departed with the body, sometimes around the coffin, into which the body had been put, and in this way it spends two days, as a bird, searching for a nest for itself. A virtuous soul walks along those places, in which it used to commit truthful things. On the third day when He was resurrected from the dead, He orders every Christian soul to resurrect to the heaven in the memory of His resurrection for the adoration to God. Thus the Church has a good tradition to make an offering on the third day and pray for the soul.*

*After the adoration to God He orders the soul to be shown different and pleasant abodes of the saints and the beauty of paradise. All that the soul views **for six days, being** astonished and glorifying the Creator for everything –God.*

*Contemplating all that it changes and forgets sorrow, which it had, being in a body. But if it was guilty in sins when seeing saint enjoyments it starts to grieve about and reproach itself, saying: Alas, how much I used to fuss in that world! Carried away by finding satisfaction in lust, I spent the major part of my life in unconcern and I did not serve God as it should be in order to have the same Grace and Glory. Alas, poor me! Upon viewing during the six days all the joy of the saints it is again raised by the angels to admonition before God. So the Church is doing very well by committing offering and praying on the **ninth** day for the passed away.*

*After the second admonition the Lord of all orders to take the soul to the hell and to show it the places of torture there, different departments of the hell and different tortures of impious, and being there the souls of the sinful weep constantly and grind their teeth. The soul rushes for thirty days, trembling at the thought of a possibility to be condemned and embraced by them. **On the fortieth day** the soul is again raised for the admonition before God; and then the Judge determines the place which is appropriate for it depending on its deeds.*

MESSAGES FROM THERE

We often hear a question: could ghosts of the departed appear before us? And here does not lie a mere curiosity. Quite a few facts are known when the departed appeared to their nearest people in their dreams, in a drowse and even in reality and conveyed some important news to them. For example, three months before his death Philaret (Drozdov) Moscow metropolitan, saw his departed father in his dream who said: “Remember the date of 19-th”. Really, the Metropolitan died on the 19-th of November. There are a lot of these facts. Also there are quite a few reliable reports about how the recently died people appeared before their relatives and very close friends. Numerous facts of this kind are given in the book “Spirit, soul and a body”, written by archbishop Luke (Voino-Yasenezky), in the books “Variety of religious experience” by V.James, in “Dark force” by M.Lodyzensky,

“Mysterious phenomenon of a human state of mind ” by A. Vasiliev, “About life after death” by K.G. Young and etc.

But the yearning to see the departed, to find out about his whereabouts, is very hazardous. The attitude towards these phenomena should be extremely responsible as the Christian creed asserts. Saint Fathers warn strictly that we should not only search for contacts with *that* world, but with all possible means we must **avoid them** and **not trust** the information, obtained in the dream or in reality, moreover at some sort of spiritual sessions, where, allegedly, they summon the souls of the dead. Sometimes a message from *there* in fact comes true. The danger of such realizations lies in the fact that a man is set up to trust dreams, visions, and etc. – and then demons would show him such disgusting things that he would run his head into the noose. Horrible thing. If it is needed, God will find means to prompt a man what he really must do. By the way, the statistics states, that those involved in spiritism, as a rule, are mentally deranged, many end their lives by a suicide.

Venerable John Cassian of Rome describes what happened with one monk, who being a strict ascetic, began to trust dreams and perished. Here is that message: “ *The devil, wishing to lure him, often showed him true dreams (dreams coming true) in order to win him over for accepting temptation into which he wanted to involve him later. So, one night he showed him Christian people with apostles and martyrs, covered with every sort of the infamy, exhausted with grief and weeping, - on the one side, and on the other – Judaic people with Moses, patriarchs and prophets – in the splendor of a radiant light and living in the joy and fun. In addition the temptator advised him that he should take the circumcision (that is Judaism), if he wanted to participate in beatitude and gladness of the Judaist people. And he, being tempted, fulfilled the order. From all said above it is clear, that everybody whom we have spoken about, would not have been mocked at in the most miserable and grievous way, if they had had the gift of reasonableness*”³⁸.

³⁸ Venerable Cassian of Rome. Writings. M., 1982. About reasonableness. Ch. 8. P. 193-194.

The venerable John Climacus (of the Ladder) wrote: *“He, who believes dreams, he is like a man, he runs after his shadow and tries to grasp it”*³⁹. *‘If we start to subjugate ourselves to demons in dreams, they will outrage over us during our wakefulness. He who believes dreams, he is not clever at all; and he who does not have any trust for them, he has love of wisdom’*⁴⁰.

Now in the West (and we do not to try and lag behind them) we witness everybody’s fad for mysticism, to be precise, we’d better use the Latin word - occultism. Every one is eager to learn what is there. According to public opinion polls it was found out that 42 percent of Americans had a contact, as they think, with the “departed”, and two thirds had the experience of extrasensory perceptions. That is the real national disaster. People do not even suspect that such an information may originate from spirits of lies, from devil, and they do not understand how dangerous it is to enter a contact with such “Spirits”. It is not the departed that speak with them but the demons in the image of the dead. That is why the Orthodox saints, knowing perfectly the nature of such phenomenon, they didn’t only search this kind of meetings, but in order to avoid a fatal mistake, they completely rejected to perceive any visions or attach importance to dreams. Venerable Gregory Sinait (XIV) warned: *“Never take to your heart whatever you see sensual or spiritual, outwards or inwards, irrespective whether it is the image of Christ or Angel, or any saint...That one who takes, is easily tempted...God is not indignant at him who carefully heeds himself, if he, for fear of temptation, will not take what comes from Him...but He will praise him as a wise man”*⁴¹.

Multiple facts, connected with the phenomena of *that* world, with different mysterious phenomena (prognostication, telepathy, poltergeist, vision of the dead in real life and in unusual dream and etc.), occultism, spiritism and etc., may be found, for one, in interesting books by archpriest Gregory Diachenko: “From the sphere of mysterious”, M., 1896 and “Spiritual life” – amendment to the book “From the sphere of mysterious”, M., 1900.

³⁹ Lestvitzza (The ladder). Word 3, par.26.

⁴⁰ Same. Par.28.

⁴¹ Venerable Gregory Sinait. Admonition for those keeping silence. Dombotolubie. (Philokalia). V.5.M., 1990. P.224

For those who are interested in patristic understanding of these issues, I'd recommend chapter 46 "About dreams" of the fifth volume of Ignatius' (Brianchaninov) writings and the third volume of the same author "Ascetic experience", which contains "A word about sensual and spiritual vision of ghosts", "A word about death", "Amendment to a word about death" and "About the essence of created spirits and a human soul'. Here you may find a lot of interesting facts about appearance of both angels and demons, you will find a patristic teaching about spirits, about how to discern spirits, about their influence on a man, and what is the most important – about the correct attitude of a man towards different mystical phenomena, about ways of resisting "uninvited guests", and serious warnings based on experience of saint Fathers, to categorically avoid contacts – visual, acoustic, mental, perceptual – with that world.

This is how all saint people behaved! And we being sinful should be more careful the more so.

“TAKE EARTHY THINGS HERE AS MOST WEAK REFLECTION OF CELESTIAL

What happens with the soul after three days? – Outside Christianity we do not find actually anything sound and trustworthy, except fantasies. Orthodoxy reopens that world to a man from an extremely important side for **this life**. We speak about sufferings of souls after death (trying experience)⁴².

Mitropolitan Macarios of Moscow (19 cen.), speaking about the status of a soul after death, wrote: *“However I should make it a point, that, generally speaking, while describing the objects of the spiritual world – for us, invested with flesh, there would come up inevitable features, more or less sensual, anthropomorphous, so, in part, they are inevitably admitted in the similar teaching about trying experience, which the soul undergoes after its departure from the body. That is why we should remember well the admonition, which Angel made to*

⁴²“Suffering after death or trying experience in the theologian language – is torments (exposure of sins) of souls after their departure from bodies before God's judgement over them, committed in the air space by evil spirits. The souls of the saints are not subjected to them. Macarios of Egypt speaks about them in detail”. (Brokgaus and Ephron encyclopaedia.)

the venerable Macarios of Alexandria, as soon as he started speaking about after death suffering: “**Take earthy things here as most weak reflection of celestial**”. We must think of trying experience not in the rough, sensory sense, but in the spiritual sense as far as it is possible for us, and not to be attached to minor particulars, which different writers and different tales within the Church itself are presented differently alongside the single basic idea about the after death sufferings”⁴³. These words, pronounced by Angel, should not be forgotten when we get in touch with messages about that world and stories about trying experience.

We recall the last days before death of bishop Sergei of Smolensk and Dorogoburgsk (Smirnov, +1957) – the elderly, nice, pleasant person, though he could hardly be called a spiritual hermit. His decease was very demonstrative – he, time and again, gazed around himself and kept repeating: “*Everything is not what it is to be, all is not like it should be*”. His surprise could be understood. Though we are sure, that *there everything* should not be in the way it is here, we inadvertently continue to imagine *that* life according to the image and likeness of this life. Both hell and paradise – as per Dante or Milton, and we perceive after death sufferings turning our mind to those pictures which we gaze upon with curiosity in different brochures. Whether we want it or not we cannot depart from our primitive earthy conceptions. Well, how else it could be?

One of the approaches to understanding realities of *that* world we can find in the present day science, which depicts, for one, the world of atom for a broad public with the help of earthy analogies. So, physicists, studying elementary atomic particles assert, that in macrocosm – our world – there are no notions, capable to express adequately the realities of microcosm. That is why in order to present them to the public, physics are forced to find and invent words, names, images, taken from our habitual experience. True the picture that is taking shape, is sometimes fantastic, but nevertheless it is clear in its idea.

⁴³ Metropolitan Macarios of Moscow. Orthodox-dogmatic theology. SPb.; 1895, v.2, p.538.

Let us see how the inventor of the first atomic bomb Oppenheimer describes the conduct of an electron: *“If we ask whether the position of an electron is constant, we must answer “no”; if we ask whether the location of an electron changes in the course of time, we must answer “no”; if we ask, whether an electron is immovable, we must answer “no”, if we ask whether an electron keeps on moving, we must say: “no”*⁴⁴.

Or if take the notion of “ waveparticles”. If we think harder , it sounds absurd enough, as a wave cannot be a particle, and a particle cannot be a wave. With the help of this paradoxical notion, which does not fit within the frames of our so called common sense, scientists try to express the dual character of the nature of the substance at the level of elementary particles of an atom (which, depending on the very particular situation, become apparent either as a particle, or as a wave).

Science knows a lot of these paradoxes. What are they useful for us for? They show, if the potential of a man is so limited in cognizing and expressing the realities of *this* world in a “human language”, so it is obvious, these possibilities are even more limited in understanding of *that* world. That is why all its descriptions bear conditional, symbolic nature. The Bible is full of so-called anthropomorphisms, when God is depicted like a man. And, unfortunately, we are very often inclined to take images and analogies in descriptions of that world for the reality itself, and as a result, absolutely distorted conceptions are being created not only about paradise, hell, trying experience and etc., but about the spiritual life, about salvation, about God Himself. These distortions can easily mislead a Christian, to lure him into the paganism. And a Christian – pagan – what can be the worst?

St. John Cassian of Rome wrote on the subject: *“If these and similar passages of the Scripture are understood literally, in the rough perceptual sense, it will turn out that God sleeps and wakes up, sits and walks, turns his face or back to someone, approaches and distances, - and the flesh parts have – head, eyes, hands, feet and etc. - All this cannot give us the notion without the utmost*

⁴⁴ F. Kapra. Dao of physics. SPb. 1994. P.130.

sacrilege about Him, Who as the Scripture states, is invisible, indescribable, omnipresent, in the same way we cannot ascribe to Him without blasphemy His indignation in anger and rage"⁴⁵. All the descriptions of this kind are such that we seem to start understanding something, but... And this "but" is the main thing that should be born in mind in our attempt to realize what is the trying experience and the status of a soul after death. Realities there are quite different there, everything is not in the same way as we have here.

So when angel told venerable Macarius about *celestial and earthy* things, so above all he meant after death sufferings. And it is clear why he warned him: with all the simplicity of their earthy notions, in reality they have quite different, deeper spiritual, *celestial* sense. And there is no such similar sense in either of the religious teachings, including those of the non-Orthodox nature.

So, Catholicism, for one, deeply distorted the picture of the posthumous state of man by advancing its dogma on purgatory and the teaching of the so-called limbo. Purgatory is the place of sufferings intended for reimbursement of shortage of so-called man's merits to satisfy God's justice. Limbo is the location between paradise and purgatory, where souls of unbaptized babies are placed, they neither suffer, nor take delight. (This is how we may fall into such theological absurdity when we ignore patristic teaching).

The church tradition says, that after the body's death the soul goes through the paradise abodes first, then in the most cases it goes through so-called trying experience. Both are so-called examination for a soul. And as any examinations, they, naturally can be passed differently.

"When our soul is separated from our body, - says St. Cyril, archbishop of Alexandria, (V c.), - on the one hand we'll confront the heavenly hosts and virtues, on the other – the powers of darkness, evil-doers, heavenly chiefs of trying experience, torturers and exposers of our deeds... Having seen them, the soul will express its indignation, shudder and in disarray will search for the safeguard from angels of the Lord, but being received by saint angels, having passed through the

⁴⁵ Dobrotolubie (Philokalia). V.2. St.Trinity Sergiev Lavra. 1993. P.60

air space under their protection and having risen to a height, it will confront different trying experience (as if some frontier post or custom house, at which duties are exacted), which will bar it the way to the Kingdom, will block and hold its striving for it”⁴⁶.

POSTHUMOUS TEST OF GOOD

According to the Church tradition, after the three days stay in the coffin the soul of the dead gazes the paradise abodes, then on the 40-th day it is shown tortures of the hell. How could we understand these earthy images, “earthly things”?

The soul being the inhabitant of *that* world by nature, having freed itself from the plump body, becomes capable of seeing *that* world in the proper way. *There* everything is open to a soul. And if, as the apostle Paul writes, under earthy conditions **we see but a poor reflection, guessing, and then we shall see face to face** (1 Corinthians 13, 12) – that is how it is in reality. This vision and cognition, as differed from the earthy cognition, having basically the external objective character, acquire the implicated nature after the death of the body. The complicity in the given case means the unity of the person who is coming to know with the knowable. The soul enters into the direct contact, contact with the world of ghosts as it is the same sort of ghost. But with what kind of spirits is the soul united? With those with whom it is similar in its spiritual status. We may believe that each virtue has its own spirit, its angel – in the same way as each passion has its spirit, its demon. But we’ll speak about it later.

How could we understand everything happening with the world within the period from the 3-d through to the 9-th days? Somehow people think that the soul is tested at the trying experience. However, there is no doubt, that the soul is being exposed not only in the temptation by evil, passions, but when it turns out to be in front of good. The difference is only in the fact, that the first thing is linked with the vision of demons, their threats and that is why with sufferings, and the second,

⁴⁶ Word on soul outcome. Psalter with the following amendments. Quoted from “Table book of a priest”. M., 1983. V.4. P.457.

on the contrary, enraptures the soul by showing the beauty of angels and saints virtues, of their love. But in this case also the soul “takes exams”. What do they comprise? They expose what good qualities the soul have acquired during its earthy life, what elevated and pure things it strived at, what ideals it served.

So, after three days these so-called tests of the person of good, start. The soul passes in front of all virtues (according to the apostle, this is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, and etc. – Galatians, 5, 22). For example, it turns out to be in front of mercy. Will it perceive it as that spiritual treasure, to which it has been striving at, though it could not perform it completely under the conditions of earthy life, or on the contrary, the acquired brutality will push the soul away from that virtue, as from something alien and unacceptable? Will it unite with the spirit of mercy or reject it? So during the six earthy days the test of the soul for its response to good, love, chastity occurs... As a result of this “exam” it will see all its real good, not sham, not through rose-coloured spectacles, it will see the genuine face of its virtues and good deeds.

This will have a tremendous influence for its further self-determination. One thing is obvious, that the soul, striving for the truth, justice, love in its earthy life and having seen here their entire heavenly beauty, of course, will seek towards them with all its might and become single with them to the measure of its spiritual purity. And that is why it will not be subjected to trying experience, as is witnessed by Lord Himself (**I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, he has crossed over from death to life** – John 5, 24), and the example of saint people, who have directly crossed to heavenly abodes. From here it becomes clear, why the souls of the departed come to know paradise first, but not the hell; why must the soul, having shown the aspiration for God and capable to receive the Kingdom of God, experience the contact with the evil, with the disgusting outrage, with demons?

The most wonderful example is the reasonable criminal. He was the first, who entered the paradise without crossing the trying experience, though, according to

all earthy notions of justice he had to be subjected to them to the utmost measure. This fact testifies to the great significance of Christ's sacrifice, freeing everyone, who has sincerely humbled and repented from the power of demon's tortures both in the earthy and posthumous life. That is why we may believe firmly, that Christians, living according to the Gospel conscience, inherit eternal life on the ninth day, having avoided all the sufferings after their death.

TEST OF EVIL

The trying experience is not God's punishment for sins, but the last remedy for the dangerously sick, who didn't only give themselves into the power of passions, but justified themselves, didn't repent and "reached" a high opinion about himself, his advantages, his merits before God and people. For such a soul the sufferings after death represent perfect means of cognition of his very bottom position, for without this awareness, it is impossible to convert to God, to accept Him; salvation is impossible.

So for a soul, which has not withstood the test of good, alas, the other 30-days trials are provided. The trying experience starts. The torments are described much more often in the civil literature than the contemplation of the beauty of the Kingdom of saints. The reason behind it, evidently, lies in the fact that the majority of people are immeasurably more enslaved by the passions, than engaged in good doing. That is why this test takes much more time. But as a result the soul is shown all the power of evil of each of its passion.

We all know what it means the fire of passion – a man is suddenly subjected to terrifying anger, greed, lust...! And then down with reason, conscience, good, your own wellbeing. All this is happening *there*, but to much greater extent. The action of that very passion (or passions), which prevailed in the essence of the whole man's life, is exposed in the soul in its fullness. And he, who didn't fight it, served it, for whom it was the essence of his life, he will not withstand demons' temptations, he will rush to grasp them as if on a bait. So this is how the frustration occurs during these trials, and falling of the soul into the bosom of

senseless and unquenchable fire, being inflamed by this passion. If under the earthy conditions it could get its food and comfort from time to time, then *there* it is to undergo real torments of Tantalus⁴⁷.

They usually speak about twenty kinds of torments and they start the list with a seemingly innocent sin: with idle talk, - with that one, which we don't pay any attention to. The apostle James says quite the opposite: **“tongue...is a restless evil, full of deadly poison”** (James, 3, 8). And it is not only saint fathers, but even pagan wise men call idleness and its natural and usual manifestation – idle talk, as a mother of all vices. The venerable John Carpathsky, for one, wrote: *“Nothing distorts so much a good mood, as a rule, as laughter, jokes and idle talk”*.

Twenty kinds of trying experience cover all the categories of passions, each of which comprises a vast varieties of sins, that is any trial includes the whole net of related sins. For example, robbery. It is of different kinds: both direct, when someone puts his hand into the pocket of the other, and bookkeeping distortions, misapplication of budgetary funds in your own interests, bribes with the aim of profit and etc. the same thing relative other trials. So the soul goes through twenty passions, twenty exams of sins.

In the Life of Basil the New the venerable Theodora tells about them in the following order: 1) idle talk and ribaldry, 2) lie, 3) censure and slander, 4) gluttony and drinking, 5) laziness, 6) stealing, 7) covetousness and avarice, 8) extortion (bribery, flattery), 9) untruth and vanity, 10) envy, 11) pride, 12) anger, 13) unforgivingness, 14) plunder (beating, striking, fights...), 15) witchcraft (magic, occultism, spiritism, fortune-telling...), 16) lechery, 17) adultery, 18) sodomy, 19) idolatry and heresy, 20) unmercifulness, hard-heartedness⁴⁸.

All of these tests are described in very picturesque, earthy truthful expressions. Reading this story, we can easily recall wise words of an angel: *“Take earthy things here as the weakest reflection of the heavenly ones”*. Theodora saw monsters there, and fire lakes, and horrible faces, heard awful cries, watched

⁴⁷ According to an ancient Greek myth the guilty tzar Tantalus was condemned by gods to stand up to the chin in a pool of water in Hades and beneath the fruit-laden boughs only to have the water or fruit recede at each attempt to drink or eat.

⁴⁸ The Table book of a priest. M., 1978. V.2, P.437-443.

tortures, to which sinful souls are subjected. But all these – “*earthy things*” as the angel warned, are *the weak reflection*, weak similarity of those quite spiritual (and in this sense *celestial*) conditions, which the soul survives, unable to reject passions.

On the basis of the venerable Theodora writings the entire iconographic cycles have been created. Possibly, you have seen the booklets with pictures, depicting various sufferings during tortures. What you could only see there! What kind of sufferings demons might impose on sinful people! The artists have strong fantasy, very vivid, and that is why these pictures impress so greatly. But *there* everything is not like this.

Why isn't it shown in the proper way? The reason behind it is the same – there is no chance to give knowledge to a man, living in his flesh, the nature of those sufferings, which are in store for each person, violating conscience and truth, violating the commandments. As, for one, how to explain to a man, what evil could stick to a man as a result of idle-talking? And here you see a picture: a man is hung by his tongue – you can imagine, how he is suffering.

Of course, this is very primitive, but, as John Chrysostom said (+407), “*it is said in this way in order to drag the object closer to the understanding of more rough people*”⁴⁹.

This is why the pictures of these tortures were designed.

- Have you got it, man?
- I've got everything.
- What did you understand? – Not what kind of sufferings are there, but the most important thing : there are tortures there, in fact, though they are of quite a different nature.

WITH GOD'S SPIRIT OR WITH DEMONS - TORTURERS

⁴⁹ St. John Chrysostom. Conversation on Ps. VI.2. Creations. V.5. Book 1. SPb.1899. P.49.

The Church tradition speaks about evil spirits, who torture the soul for its sins. How should we understand this?

An interesting idea was outspoken on this score by St. Theofan the Recluse (Govorov) in his interpretation of the 80-th verse of psalm 118 (119)**: “May my heart be blameless towards your decrees, that I may not be put to shame”. Here is how he explains the last words: *“The second moment of not putting to shame is the time of death and passing through the trials. No matter, how wild the idea of passing through the after death sufferings can appear to clever men, but they cannot avoid this crossing. What are these torturers search for in those people passing through? Whether those have the commodities belonging to them? What are their goods? Passions. It so happens, those who have pure heart and are free from passions, they cannot possess anything evil to be clung to; on the contrary, the opposite to them goodness will hit the torturers as if with arrows of lightning.*

A commentary was given by one of the scientists on this score: after death sufferings are represented as something awful, but it is quite possible that demons represent something very tempting instead very awful. They represent something seducing and tempting- one by one on all kinds of passions to each of the passing by soul. When within the period of the earthy life all passions have been withdrawn from the soul, and the opposite to them virtues have been planted instead, the soul, having no sympathy for the former, will turn around from them with disgust. And when the heart is not purified, then to which passion the soul feels particular sympathy, it will throw itself on it. Demons take it as if they are friends, then they know, where to send it to. It means, it is very doubtfull, that the soul does not feel shame at the trying experience until it has sympathies for objects of some passions. The shame here lies in the fact that the soul will throw itself into the hell”.

A very interesting idea. According to it, this trying experience – is the test of the spiritual condition of a soul in front of the passionate devils temptations. It turns out that the soul throws itself into the hell and this occurs due to the reason of

those passions, into possessions of which the soul had given itself voluntary during the earthy life.

The idea of St. Theofan, in essence, proceeds from the admonition of venerable Anthony the Great. I'll cite his remarkable words: *“God is good and passionless and unchangeable. If someone while recognizing as good and truthful the fact that God does not change, is puzzled at the same time, how He (being as such) is glad for the good ones and turns away from the evil ones, is angry at the sinful, and when they repent He becomes merciful towards them; it should be explained that God neither rejoices, nor gets angry: because joy and anger are passions. It is ridiculous to think that God will feel good and bad because of the human deeds.*

God is good and He creates only good, he does not make any harm to anyone, He stays the same all the time; but we when we are kind, we enter the communion with God, in His likeness, and when we become evil we depart from Him according to unlikeness with Him. Living virtuously, we are sons of God, when we become evil we become rejected from Him, and this does not mean, that He has anger on us because our sins do not let God begin to shine in us, they link us with demons, tortures. If afterwards we win the absolution of our sins by prayers and deeds of mercy, that does not mean, that we had pleased God and had changed Him, but through these actions and our conversion to God, by having healed the evil existing in us, we again make ourselves capable of enjoying God's grace; so, to say that God turns away from the evil ones is the same thing as to say: the sun hides itself from those who are blind”⁵⁰.

So, it means when we conduct a correct life (that is pious), when we live according to the commandments and repent when we violate them, our spirit unites with God's spirit, and we feel good. When we act against conscience, break commandments, our spirit becomes similar to demons-tortures, and accordingly to the degree of our **voluntary** submission to a sin on earth, the soul *there* **naturally** is allured by them and subordinates to their cruel power. In one of his letters

⁵⁰ St. Anthony the Great. Admonition. Dobrotolubie (Philokalia). V.1. Par.150. St. Troit. Serg Lavra. 1992.

hegumenos Nikon Vorobiev wrote: *“Demons are proud and capture arrogant men, it means, that we must humble. Demons are angry, it means, we should acquire gentleness in order not to let them seize us, as being akin in soul. Demons are rancorous, unmerciful, it means we are to forgive shortly and to keep peace with everybody, who offended us and to be merciful to everyone. And so in everything.*

We must suppress demons features in ourselves, and to plant angel’s substance, indicated in the saint Gospel.

If after death our soul contains more demons’ qualities, demons will master us. If while still being here we are aware of our demons features, and we ask God to forgive us for them and we ourselves forgive, God will forgive us, will demolish everything evil in us and will not give us into the hands of demons”⁵¹. The idea is clear: God does not punish us for our sins, and it is not demons who torture us for them due to their arbitrariness, but by our passions we give ourselves into the hands of tortures. And then their reckless ‘work’ begins. By tempting the soul by different sins and thinking that they will ruin it, they, in reality, open to the soul its spiritual illnesses by these temptations, passions, which it didn’t see in earthy life due to its carelessness. By doing so, demons, wishing to make harm to the soul, do it a lot of good. Because the salvation is possible only in case when the soul sees its sins and passions and understands the extreme need in God –Savour. It is mainly in this, that the fallen soul makes itself clear, when it crosses trying experience, that becomes a token of its healing, following prayers of relatives, prayers of the Church. So, the trying experience is becoming a kind of required remedy for an enslaved soul which reveals its spiritual illnesses - such is the wise and amoureuse Divine Providence. Saint Isaac of Syria, a great hermit of VII century, wrote in this connection: *‘God does nothing for the sake of retribution but He gazes at the benefit which must occur thanks to His actions. One of these objects is gehenna.*

⁵¹ Hegumenos Nikon (Vorobiev). Letters to spiritual children. St. Trinity.Sergiev. Lavra. 1998. P.29-30.

As for myself, I think that He meant to show a wonderful outcome and influence of a great and unexplainable mercy...relative to this hardest torture, set by Him, in order that, thanks to that the richness of His love, his power and His wisdom, as well as a crushing blow of waves of His grace, will become more evident. The merciful Lord has created these reasonable creatures not with the aim to subject them to endless sorrow – those about whom before their creation He knew what would come out of them after their coming into being, but whom He, despite, created”⁵². So the after death suffering is the last means of Providence, given by God’s mercy (but neither by anger nor punishment), thanks to it a man, having come to know himself, what he is in fact, not in his imaginative ideas, – becomes capable for unfallen perception of the Kingdom of Heaven.

LIKENESS UNITES WITH LIKENESS.

POWER OF REPENTANCE

At each stage of the sufferings after death a person cognizes the degree of power of the corresponding passion over the soul. And he who didn’t fight with his passion (passions), who submitted to it, lived with it, who gave all his efforts to it – he falls, he collapses at these sufferings. But here, is what is interesting. This fall (or, on the contrary, painless crossing the sufferings) is determined not by the will of the person, but by that spiritual condition, which a man has acquired during his earthy life. The personality here is incapable to make a choice – it is determined by natural action of the spirit, prevailing over it. Hegumenos Arseniya, one of the remarkable female hermits at the turn of the 20-th century (+1905), wrote; “*When a man is living through an earthy life, he cannot cognize, how far his spirit is in slavery, depending on another spirit, he cannot cognize it, because he has a will, which he uses whenever he wants in his own way. But when after death his will is taken away from him, then his soul will see, whose power it is submitted to. God’s Spirit carries the righteous into the eternal abodes, teaching them, enlightening them, deifying them. The souls which had contact with devil, would fall into his*

⁵² St.Isaac of Syria. About Divine mysteries and spiritual life.M., 1998. Conversation 39, par.5,6.

possession”⁵³. St. Ignatius wrote earlier the same thing: “*The infernal prisons represent a strange and terrible demolishing of life while preserving life. **There there is a complete cessation of all kind of activities; there – only suffering***”⁵⁴.

What does it mean “*a will is taken away*”? If we take as an illustration the examples of many people (and a reasonable person will find himself among them, first of all), we could see that a sinful passion is capable of enslaving a person, depriving him of his will. It occurs, alas, very easily. When we do not fight small temptations, when we do not oppose them, by doing, it we weaken our will and, finally, destroy it. This can often be seen in the life surrounding us. Look at alcoholics, at drug addict. Possibly many of them, having seen what they have been driven at, they would like to return to a normal life – but they can’t. For the law is such; the more and more often a man satisfies any passion, the more become depleted his spiritual powers, and in the final count, he becomes a weak-willed slave. However to the full extent this absence of will is revealed in after death sufferings, when the soul is being tested, is tempted by the spirits of passions, which have enslaved a person. And, as there are no external circumstances, the body itself included, which could detain somehow the action of passions, they declare themselves in the soul in their full might – a 1000 times more, as hegumenos Nikon wrote, then under earthy conditions, so the will of the soul is completely paralyzed, *is taken away*.

If we address to the description of sufferings, we’ll find everywhere spirits of evil appearing in different images. Blessed Theodora even describes the appearance of some of them, though it is clear that it is the weak similarity of their genuine essence. The most serious lies in the fact that as Anthony the Great writes, in what measure the soul resigns itself to a sinful passion, in the same measure it unites with demons-tortures. And this, both on earth and *there*, happens *naturally*, for likeness always unites with likeness. But in earthy life this occurs as if invisibly (though a man sometimes clearly feels it), and *there* quite tangibly. Look, how under the conditions of earthy life people of the same spirit

⁵³ The way of non-dreamy activity... M., 1999. Letter №45, P.323.

⁵⁴ St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov). Creations. SPb., 1905. V.3. P.125.

unite. Quite often you can only wander, – such a friendship, – where is it from? Then at a closer knowledge of them, it turns out, that they have the single spirit! They are **unanimous**.

The same thing happens with the soul after death. When it crosses the sufferings, it is being tempted by a passion of each suffering, its spirits, demons-torturers, and according to its state, it either rejects them, or unites with them, surviving the corresponding sufferings.

There is another reason for these sufferings. That world is the world of a genuine light, in which our deeds, thoughts, feelings will be revealed in front of all the people and angels. And imagine such a picture: in front of all our friends, acquaintances, relatives, all our evil, mean, baseness will suddenly come to light. What a dreadful thing and shame – isn't it a hell? That is why the Church calls upon everyone for the quickest repentance with such a force and persistence. Repentance in Greece – metanoia – **change** of mind, way of thinking, that is rejection of any dirtiness in yourself, it is hatred for a sin. It is a great means of purification of a soul, a perfect means of salvation from the future disgrace, fear, from demons-tortures and unquenchable flame of passions. As prophet Isaiah wrote: **“Come now, let us reason together”, says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool”**. (Isaiah, 1, 18).

And here is how remarkably St. Isaac of Syria speaks about it: *“As God knew with His merciful knowledge, that if an absolute righteousness had been required from people, then only one out of every ten thousand could have been found being able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He gave them medicine, suitable for everyone – repentance, so that for every day and for every moment they might have an accessible means of redressing by force of this medicine power and to wash themselves through contrition of heart at all moments and from all defilement, which can occur, and to renew themselves every day through repentance”*⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ About Divine mysteries and spiritual life. M., 1998. Conversation 40.

How does the genuine repentance act? Not to say anything about striking Gospel stories about a tax-gatherer, a whore, a criminal; let's recall Raskolnikov, for one, from "Crime and punishment" by Dostoevsky. Look: he is ready to go to any convict prison, even to go with a joy – if only to redeem the committed evil, to purify from blood, to wash himself. And we all know, how he transformed himself, having repented in his sins. Dostoevsky excellently showed both a crime and internal punishment, and the great purifying force of repentance. A great many people have gone through the similar transformation. Here is what is repentance. It is in fact a genuine salvation of a soul, which literally speaking transforms a man. The sincere, humble repentance, testifying to our determination to fight our sin to the end is always accepted by God. And this lachrymal drop or as Barsanophius the Great said, this "*small copper coin...*", it seems quite insignificant, becomes a token of the fact that God is united with the soul and eradicates that evil, which lives in it. That is why if a man has a tiny bit of such a struggle, that is the compulsion, that is within one's powers to live according to the Gospel, if he has a repentance, God Himself will make up for what is absent and *there* will free us from the hands of demons-destructors. True is the word of Christ: **"You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"** (Matthew 25, 23).

Here is what a tremendous significance has repentance in our life. We, Christians should be utterly thankful to God, for He has opened to us the posthumous mystery of sufferings, and has given us a great medicine – repentance – to avoid all their nets. God wants, that here, and moreover after death, we will not suffer. That is why the Church calls upon: a man, until it is late, collect yourself, repent.

**“PASSIONS ARE A THOUSAND TIMES STRONGER
THAN ON EARTH...”**

But might a devil be as not that awful as it is painted? Unfortunately, on the contrary – it is more awful, then we paint him and imagine him. The experience of

hermits, having come into contact with demons, says they are inexpressibly villainous, horrible, sickening. Hegumenos Nikon Vorobiev wrote, for one, that “*you may go mad only at one glance at them*”⁵⁶. They are painted in accordance with these descriptions. But their outer image transfers their spiritual condition only partially; human passions give us some presentation about it here, on earth, as they are the essence of demons.

What is passion? We know about a sin; for example, a man has lied, has envied – as we call it, he stumbled, this happens with everyone. And if falsity, envy do not rule over a man, they seem to be a simple blunder, accident, they are the sin. But this is temporally. A habit to lie will definitely drive a man to a state, when he cannot help but telling lies, passion is what pulls strongly and then forcefully towards itself, what is more sometimes so invincibly, that a man cannot cope with himself. He understands perfectly, that, that is bad, and that is harmful, not only for a soul (though he forgets about the soul more often than not), but for the body as well, and for the family, and for the work, despite he turns out to be feeble to manage himself. In front of a conscience in front of his own benefit – he cannot cope. They say about this state: passion. Passion may turn into a vice. And this is awful. Look what people do in their craziness: in the slavery of passion and vice; they kill, cripple, betray each other...

The Slavic word “passion” means, above all, suffering (for example, the Passion of Christ); also – a strong desire of something forbidden, sinful, as it always brings suffering. That is why Christianity warns with all the might about the danger of being enslaved by any passion, - big or small. Passions in their nature are like a cancer tumor, which growing bigger, tortures a man more and more, and then kills him. They are narcotic, the more the person uses it, the more he destroys himself! How it is important to understand this trickery of passions in order to oppose them.

⁵⁶ Hegumenos Nikon (Vorobiev). Letters to spiritual children. St. Trinity t.Sergiev. Lavra. 1998. p.29.

Saint Fathers say, that the source of passions is the soul , but not the body. The roots of passions in our free will⁵⁷. The Lord Himself said: **“The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean”**. (Matthew, 15, 18-20). Even the most rough corporal passions have roots in the soul. That is why they do not disappear upon the death of the body. And a man goes out from this world with them.

How do these non-eliminated passions manifest themselves in that world? I'll cite the words of hegumenos Nikon Vorobiev, pronounced to a heavily drinking man: *“Passions a thousand times stronger than on earth will burn you like a fire without giving you a single possibility to quench them”*⁵⁸. It is not difficult to understand why – *stronger* – and a *thousand times*. Here on earth, passions do not have complete freedom to manifest themselves. People , circumstances, health condition hinder...Yes, a man has fallen asleep and all the passions have calmed down. Or, for one, a person got so angry with someone that he is ready to tear him to pieces. But the time has passed, and malice has abated. And soon they became friends. In earthy life we can fight passions – covered by flesh, they act, as a rule, not to the full extent. And *there*, having freed themselves from the body, they reveal the entire cruelty of their nature. Nothing hampers their activity, neither dream, nor fatigue, nor amusement. Plus to that a passionate soul is easily fascinated by evil spirits, stirring up and multiply intensifying the effect of the passion. In a word, an uninterrupted suffering is under way, because the man himself has not a single *opportunity to quench them!*

And when a man has the whole bunch of passions? What will come out of him in Eternity? If only a single idea has deeply got implanted in us, then without any doubt, we would treat our life differently. That is why, when we act against the voice of conscience light-mindedly and more over deliberately, when we give

⁵⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote, for one: *‘It is not the body that is the reason of passions, but free will, producing passions’*. (Creations. Part.7. M., 1865. P.521)

⁵⁸ Hegumenos Nikon (Vorobiev) Letters to spiritual children. St.Trinity Sergiev.Lavra. 1998. P.81.

ourselves up to a sin, we sow evil seeds into our soul. It turns out that *there* they will bring the most bitter fruit and cruel suffering.

Christianity, being a religion of love, calls upon man: strive to live according to conscience and truth, don't sin, you are immortal personality and you are to get ready to enter the eternal life adequately. And great happiness of the Christians is in the fact that they know about it, and they may *get* prepared. On the contrary, what horrible things will confront a proud man after death, not believing in any kind of truth, good and eternity.

Twenty sufferings will finally wind up the process of the most important condition of salvation – cognition of the real spiritual condition by a personality. The fact is that the our main misfortune in the earthy life consists in the fact, that we actually do not see either our passions or our powerlessness to eradicate them. They are closed before our look by our self-admiration, vanity, uninterrupted self-justification. We hide our sins not only from people, but from ourselves. And we see anything that is the most rough, outrageous. It is no mere chance that the Church, during the Great Lent, calls upon the believers to ask from God with low bows: “ *Give me the chance to see my sins*”. Unfortunately for the majority of people only *there* the whole abyss of dirt, concealed in the soul, is open. But *there*, by God's mercy it is open not immediately, but gradually in front of the face of Good, then at separate sufferings, before the temptations of evil.

That is why we may consider the 40-th day as the step, on which all the passions are open to a soul in their full extent, its powerlessness to change anything is shown, and as a result of this self-cognition in complete accordance with its spiritual state of the soul, its natural unification occurs either with the God Spirit or with spirits of torturing passions. This moment is called by the Church a private God's judgment, at which the place of its “location” is determined.

The private judgment, as we see, is not like an ordinary court, we used to imagine in our life. It is not God who makes His judgment of the man's soul, but we repeat, the soul itself, having found herself on the one part in front of the Divine holy place and truth, on the other – in front of the effect of passions present

in it, it either rises to God or, on the contrary, being self-condemned by its conscience, dragged by its sinful spiritual state, acquired in the earthy life – falls into the abyss.

However the determination on the 40-th day, according to the Church teaching is not the last one and not final. There will be prayers of relatives, friends (Luke, 16, 9), prayers of Church, there will be the Last Judgment. At this Judgment a great number of people of all times and nations of all beliefs and unbelief, undoubtedly will cognize in the full depth all their spiritual poverty, will see incomprehensible Christ love and will bow before Him in the greatest reverence for ever – will be saved!

WE ARE FREE TO MAKE GOOD AND EVIL

How important is the earthy life for a man! It is a kind of a test for him for faithfulness. What does it mean?

In the act of creation God gave His image to a man, which presupposes such a freedom in a man, over which God has no power., which He cannot touch. (If not so, He would have been guilty for all human sins and sufferings). That is why God, being absolute humility and love, expects **free** reciprocal love, but not a slavery obedience – that one, which, contrary to God, is so often required in our world. (What is meant, is not discipline, without which not a single society, including the Church, cannot exist, but a **slave-like** obedience). So, God does not threatens anyone by punishment, moreover by hell, but by its commandments He warns a man, that having committed a sin, he violates the laws of his nature, inflicts wounds upon himself. God calls upon the righteous life, in line with our essence, in order we would not make harm either by deeds (for example by drinking, lust, drugs...) or thoughts and feelings (self-conceit, envy, hypocrisy, hatred...), or by a word (a lie, insult, flattery...).

When I was a child a certain event occurred in my life, it helped me a lot to understand the essence of commandments. Once in winter, while leaving the house my amorous mammy warned me very strictly, that I, in no way, should think of

touching the iron door handle by my tongue. Of course, that was enough that as soon as my mother had turned away, I immediately clung to that ill-starred handle. And, of course, there came an awful screaming. But, on the other hand, I know what it means, - commandments. It appears, that they are not the order from God as if from a fierce boss, for disobedience of which He would impose punishment, down to eternal suffering, but a warning given to a man about the danger of committing wrong deeds, injuring both the body and the soul, that is why entailing all possible suffering. We don't enrage God with our sins, but we cripple ourselves. God, being love, shows us by His commandments on the one hand, the danger of causing ourself sufferings and death (spiritual) by a sin, on the other – the righteous way of life, leading to good in earthy and eternal life. That is why this salvation is free choice of God, through love for the justice, holiness and the truth, but not the obedience to Him due to the fear of punishment or expectation from Him the heavenly enjoyment. A Christian is not a slave and not a hired one by the housekeeper, but a disinterested son of the Father and the heir of the Kingdom.

Why did God humble down to the cross, and didn't appear as the powerful, wisest invincible Tzar to the world? Why did Christ come to the people neither as an emperor, nor as a patriarch, nor a hierarch, nor a theologian, nor a philosopher, nor a pharisee, but a poor, homeless, from the earthy point of view – the very last man, who hadn't a single advantage over anyone? The reason behind that is the same: power, might, external luster, glory, undoubtedly would carry away the whole world, it would bow before Him as a slave and “accept Him in the hope to get as more justice as possible, *“bread and circuses”*, that means benefits of this moment, transitory. Christ has come in such a way, that nothing except the truth, would attract a man to Him, nothing external would be a substitute for it, would be in the way of eternal life. It is no by mere chance that he pronounced such significant words: **“My kingdom is not of this world”** (John, 18, 36). **“For this reason I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me”** (John, 18, 37). The external

effects are idols, which the mankind uses as a replacement for God during the whole of its history.

Unfortunately the Church life in the entire world have chosen the way of external so-called “church” splendor, to be exact the secular luster, for quite a long time ago. It occurs to my memory the outspokenness of an American-Protestant, who stated openly with pride, not with a shame in the least: “ *Everything in our Church must entertain in order to attract people*”. And the spiritual law says the opposite: the more is on the outside, the less is on the inside. And there is no doubt, that the antichrist time period will see such a glitter of a religious cult, which had never existed before in the history and everyone would rush to watch a *spectacle* (in Slavic *shameful event*).

And in the history of our Church this shameful phenomenon has many *Church* advocates. As far back as at the beginning of 16 century the venerable Nil Sorsky came out against the Church luxury, riches and landed properties, especially in monasteries, as means demolishing Church and unnatural to it. He tried to defend the non-possessors, but his voice was not accepted – the process of secularizing the Christian way of thinking even at that time turned to be irreversible.⁵⁹ And this process developing further, undoubtedly resulted in the schism of the XVII century, Peter the First and the Holy Synod administration, revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and their tragic consequences, through to Perestroika (restructuring). And it might result in something even worse if we don’t regain our senses. For the Church is really a **leaven (yeast)** (Matthew, 13, 33) of the society and its spiritual condition directly stipulates the inside and outside wellbeing of the people: “ **A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough**”. (Galatians, 5, 9). What a pity they don’t see it and don’t understand it.

So, the Lord by His life and by His Cross showed that He cannot exert any, even tiny pressure on human freedom, that is why the salvation is open only to

⁵⁹ Three and a half centuries later, in the 19-th century St. Philaret of Moscow said with a grief :”*How sad it is to see, that monasteries want pilgrims, that means they search for entertainment and temptation themselves. True they are in shortage of means, but more often they are in shortage of non-grabbing, simpleness, hope on God and taste for silence*”. And he also: “*if a certain war is to be declared against some clothes, in my opinion, that is not to be done against hats of the priests’ wives, but to gorgeous cassocks of hierarchs and clergymen. At least, this, first of all, was forgotten. Your saints, God, let them cloth themselves in truth*”.

such a person, who voluntarily chooses it. Due to this reason this earthy life is so precious. Being in his body only, a man is capable of committing good or evil, to sin or lead a correct life – on **earth** his freedom and choice are accomplished. After death, alas, there is no such thing, *there* a soul is powerless to change itself – it only reaps the fruit of its earthy life and naturally plunges into the environment of the eternity, akin to its spiritual state, – to be precise, – not finally, not endlessly. This state might be changed by the Church prayers.

CHURCH

The apostle Paul wrote remarkable words, opening us a great truth: **“you are the body of the Christ and each of you is a part of it”** (1 Corinthians, 12, 27). All of us, believers, make up, as is evident, His single live organism, but not a bag of peas, within which the peas push each other and heat each other painfully. We are cells (live, half-live, half-dead) in the Christ Body. All of us are the single body. And being in a single body a change in the condition of any organ and even any cell, would tell on the whole organism, on each other cell. All is interconnected and interdependent in a live organism. The same apostle Paul writes: **“The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” and the head cannot say to the feet, “ I don’t need you! “** (1 Corinthians, 12, 21).

It so happened that a student came up to me one day and said, that he would not be able to be present at the lecture: he had a tooth pain.

- Well, I say, what of it? Your tooth is aching, not you. What do you have to do with it?
- The student smiled sourly: “ Aleksei Ilyich, you can’t help kidding..!

In a live organism all the cells feel, all sympathize with each other as their own- joy and suffering.

Here is, where the question is: why and how one man can help the other spiritually, and, moreover, to the dead? Because, maybe, we all make up the single organism; and one can help the other in the same order as any live cell and organ can aid each other in the same organism. If one eye is blind, the other makes the

double work. One leg is damaged – the other takes its load upon itself. This is natural law of mutual support and, if you like, mutual salvation. In what way does one cell help the other? – By giving up a part of itself, sacrificing its own efforts, its health, itself proper. The most healthful undertakes the functions of the ill and by doing it renders them a real help. Look how animals often help each other. That is the same God's law of love, laid down in the very nature of the created world, though it was distorted and weakened by a man's sin. This law of reciprocal aid preserves life not only in the wild-life world, but, above all in mankind's world.

Who can help another person? Naturally, a strong man can help a weak one, a rich man - a poor, a courageous - a weak-willed, not on the contrary. While in a walking hike, for one, if someone sprains his ankle, the other take up his load upon **themselves**. And who takes most of all? Of course, the strongest. Such is the law of our life, explaining and opening us the mystery of our prayers for those alive and the dead.

Another question: how and by what do our prayers help another man? Might it be, that we beg God and He becomes more merciful and more amorous? Of course, not.. He is an absolute that is a perfect love and that is why he cannot love more or less. The mystery of help to our dead is in the fact that these prayers are means of purification, above all of **ourselves**, means of **our** spiritual communion the with God. Due to this fact only, they become an effective force, helping the weak-willed soul of the dead to free itself from the passions enslaving it. It is very important to remember that we can help each other spiritually **only according** to the measure of our personal spiritual level, which is stipulated by the labour of keeping Christ's commandments, by force of a fight with our passions, by the sincerity of repentance. So the effect of our prayer for the other people is **directly conditional** on the degree of **our** spiritual purity, communing us with God. For in God only we may spiritually unite with our dead, and according to our purity God releases his soul from the flame of passions. By our effective and thorough prayer **here** we awake and pour efforts in the weak-willed dead to be active **there**. Our

prayer aid to the dead consists in the above said and not in the fact that our prayers, exploits, good deeds somehow propitiate God, satisfy to His justice, are a redemption for the sins of the departed, – as Catholicism teaches us.

The great significance of the Church consists in the fact, that being the Body, God-and-Man Organism of Christ, not an ordinary human society, it includes in itself each person, accepting baptism with faith, and makes him its part, its cell, due to this fact the baptized unites with all other Church members by live currents of the Holy Spirit Grace. This man's coming into the Church makes him capable, to the measure of his spiritual growth, both to perceive the spiritual acts of the other members of the Church upon himself, and in his turn, to affect on them. These interactions are expressed first of all in a prayer. However we should bear in mind that a Christian stays in the Church and the Church in him to the extent of his being able to keep Christian commandments and to what measure he has communed to the Holy Spirit (as Seraphim of Sarov put it "*to acquire the Holy Spirit*"). The degree of a Christian residing in the Church stipulates the power of his prayers – in that case our prayer will not be an empty pronouncing words and names, but effective force.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT WAY TO PRAY FOR THE DEPARTED

If was impossible *there* to change the spiritual condition of the soul, then why was it a must for a Church to pray for the departed from the beginning? The Church constantly remembers them and calls upon every believer to pray, teaching them how to do it correctly. Especially important is the prayer help to a soul during the first 40 days after a man's passing away, that of course, does not mean at all that at the subsequent time a prayer is not needed or it is not useful. What kind of prayer should it be?

Answering this question, it must be mentioned about two absolutely different understandings of a prayer. One – is a sincere, heart, repentance prayer, committed both individually and combined with prescribed Divine Service. The other thing is the pronouncing the words of a prayer without praying.

To a great regret, the second as a rule, prevails in our real life. This occurs due to ignorance, to laziness, to self-justification. They often call a prayer not the appeal to God – with attention, reverence and contrition of heart – but a presence at the Church service, which is performed by a priest, reading and singing of the words of a prayer – *without praying*, as a result the liturgy forms themselves remain empty, inactive words for a person. It is very important to remember that we deceive ourselves when we are satisfied with a wording, an enveloping shell only, not forcing ourselves for a prayer proper. Everybody knows that we might as well be present in the Church, *without praying*, listen to a choir, dream a bit, commit a sin in our mind and with this full bow of second thoughts we return home. We recall, for instance, how Ivan the Terrible asked the blessed Basil one day, whether there were many people in the Church. The blessed Basil answered: “two”, despite the Church was full of people *present* there. It turned out that only two persons kept praying, all the rest were only present. This attitude towards a prayer was condemned by the Lord: **“These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain, their teachings are but rules taught by men”**. (Matthew, 15, 8).

So, when a man dies, his relatives very often limit their activity to external side of remembrance: they order panikhidas, sorokoust (forty-days), they hand in intercession lists for the repose, they put candles, send money to monasteries, to churches and etc. And if there is a lot of money – to all monasteries and churches, to all priests and female staff present in the church! And if I myself don't stir a finger to refrain from anger, malignant gossip, censure, gluttony and etc., if I don't force myself for a confession and communion, for a reading of the Holy Scripture and Saint Fathers' writings, for an aid for those who are in need, to sick people, no good would come out of this. We would like to fish out of a pond without an effort – no pains, no gains, - without a slightest exploit of our battle against an Old Testament man we hope to repair the old style of living of another person. And this we call the remembrance of the departed, prayer for him! Somewhere somebody instead of myself must pray for the dead. But do they pray or just

remember? St. Theofan answers this question very openly and with regret: *“If no one (out of relatives) takes breath from the bottom of one’s heart, the moleben will be chattered, but there will be no praying for the sick. The same thing with proskomide, with liturgy... It does not occur to those serving the moleben to grieve before God about those who are remembered at the moleben... And aren’t you able to grieve about everyone?”*⁶⁰ That is a typical paganism to make anything external without a slightest attention to your own soul., without a prayer. And what does the Scripture say: **“Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them (although the law required them to be made)”** (Hebrews, 10, 8). **“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”**. (Psalm 50 (51), 16,17). That means God accepts our sacrifices, gifts, remembrances when our soul and heart are broken and contrite and humbled, otherwise He is **not** pleased: **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former”**. (Matthew, 23, 23). Do you see with what threat God warns: **“Woe to you, hypocrites”** if you limit your activities with **“a tenth”**, that means with external deeds only, the rest you neglect, that means you are not engaged in purification of your soul. All the external is good in case only when you don’t forget about what is important. What is it – **that**, by what we can help the departed? God answers: judgment - reasonable, sober-minded, as per the Gospel, attitude to, above all, to your spiritual life; grace – generosity towards to sinful, mercy for those who are in need, forgiveness for those who offend; belief – personal righteous life, personal repentance, personal prayer.

An outstanding question of greatest significance: how to help the departed, how to pray for him? By the way, protestants rejected prayers for the dead. The

⁶⁰ St.Theofan. Collection of letters. Issue 3.No460.M., 1898. P.102.

Orthodox Church from the outset asserts the need of such a prayer, states that the state of the soul, happened to be grasped by demons bonds of passions after death, **can be changed**. Whom does the Church call upon to pray for? For the Saint? No, for sinful, whom as it turns out, our prayers can help to get rid of a passionate demon-torture. How? God has directly answered to it to His pupils who were unable to oust a demon:” **But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting**”. (Matthew, 17, 21). By saying this, He opened a great truth to us, a sacred mystery: freeing a man from the slavery of passions and demons requires not only a prayer but fasting , by which it is meant – the abstention from your insatiable passionate lust (carnality) of the soul and body at least lowering them down to a minimum. St. Isaac of Syria wrote: “*Any prayer, in which a body didn’t labour and a heart didn’t grieve, is regarded as the same prematurely born foetus (child) of the belly, because such a prayer has no soul in it*”⁶¹. But such a fasting occurs utterly seldom – there are few people who practice this. (See next chapter on this subject).

That is why the gift of ousting demons was given by God to very rear ascetics, but not to any priest. The ordination does not give either a gift of performing miracles or moreover any power over demons. Even the apostles in their attempt to cast out a demon by pronouncing a prayer **only**, failed, as we see it from the Gospel.

The same thing, if not the worst, happens with the present-day exorcists or “otchityvatel” (clergymen, who allege, that by reading out special prayers they clear off a person from demons), who took up the courage upon themselves to be engaged in such a terrible thing, **portraying miracle-makers out of themselves**, not having won their passions and not having obtained a gift of the Holy Spirit from God to cast out demons! Isn’t a very simple truth clear, that only he who has achieved a state of impassivity,- it means who has cast out demons from himself, - is capable to enter an open fight with the spirits of darkness without making any harm for a possessed by demons and for himself? Venerable John

⁶¹ St. Isaac of Syria. Words of Podvizhnichestvo (Ascetism). M., 1858. Word 11, p.75.

Cassian of Rome (V c.) exposes angrily these unreasonable exorcists: “ *And he, who wishes to rule over unclean spirits or miraculously give health to the sick or to show a certain amazing sign before people’s eyes, though he calls upon the name of Christ, but in fact he happens to be alien to Christ, because being arrogant with pride he does not follow the Teacher in His humility... That is why our Fathers never called those monks kind and free from the infection of vanity, who wanted to have a reputation of exorcists*”⁶². Also he said ;”*No one must be glorified for the gifts and wonders of God...For quite often people corrupted in their brains and who are opponents of belief, cast out demons and commit great wonders by using the name of God*”⁶³.

In the “Acts” of the apostles it is said, by way of providence, about those exorcists , who at those times and now impudently reckoned on ousting demons by force of words of prayers and the name of Jesus (as in magic): “ **The evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know and Paul I know about, but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear**”. (Acts, 19, 15-17). This is the most serious warning to all present-day priests, engaged in the attempts to cast out demons by reading prayers , as contrary to the teaching of Saint Fathers and a thousand-years long tradition of the Russian Church⁶⁴ and a sad example of how you may distort a prayer, using its wording and external forms only, ignoring the important conditions of its accomplishment.

But lets return to the prayer for the dead.

Here is a striking example which is being described in the ancient life record of St. Gregory Dialogos, a pope of Rome (who lived in VI c., before the schism [break away] of the Western church). He prayed for none other but for the emperor Trajan (+117), one of the most cruel, through his ignorance, persecutor

⁶² Venerable John Cassian of Rome. Writings. M., 1892. P.445.

⁶³ Same. P. 444.

⁶⁴ See in more detail: A.Osipov. Way of reason in search of the truth. Ch. 5 Par.4 Exorcism. M., Publish., 2004.

of Christians, and at the same time the best ruler in the Roman Empire minding his justice and concern for the poor. St. Gregory, touched by one of his deeds (Trajan defended a poor widow, who was in desperate situation), started vigorously with a certain exploit praying for him. As a result it was revealed to him that his prayer was accepted. How could it be understood? For Trajan was not only baptized but he was a persecutor of Christians. But what do we hear: *“Let no one be surprised, when we say that he (Trajan) was baptized, for without being baptized nobody will see God, but the third kind of baptism is **the christening by tears**”*⁶⁵. By whose tears? – Of St. Gregory. Here is what power of prayer could be, which is linked **with fasting!** *“Though it is a rare case, -explains hieromonk Seraphim Rose, - it gives hope to those whose relatives died not believing”*⁶⁶. By the way, St. Mark of Ephesus (XV c.), a fighter with Catholics for the Orthodoxy, referred to the example with Trajan, as to the fact which arises no doubts: *“Some of the saints, who prayed not only for the faithful but for the impious, were heard and by force of their prayers delivered the latter from eternal suffering, so, for one, the first martyr Feokla – Falconin and divine Gregory Dialogos, as is said, - tzar Trojan”*⁶⁷.

BE A CHRISTIAN AT LEAST FOR FORTY DAYS

Especially this kind of sacrificial prayer, united with the efforts of the heart, linked with a rejection of a certain pleasure is needed for the dead during the first 40 days. That is why, if someone really wants to help your son, daughter, mother, husband, wife, sister, brother – whom he loves sincerely, there is a remedy, it is within our hands, - man, give a part of your soul, a fraction of your usual, spiritual passive life. Take upon you a small exploit. Live these 40 days in feasible abstention of the body, temperance in feelings, continence of thoughts, compel yourself to pray, to read the Word of God. Try to make peace with your enemies. Make good to those who hate you – as per God’s commandments. Fight

⁶⁵ Quoted from: Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose). Soul after death. M., 1993. P. 173.

⁶⁶ Same.

⁶⁷ Quoted from: Archimandrite Amvrosy (Pogodin). St. Mark of Ephesus and Unia of Florence. M., 1995, P.61.

your passions, try not to censure anyone, not to envy anyone, not to respond by evil to evil, confess and administer the Sacrament more often. Purify your soul at least a little, control yourself at least for a short period of time – for the sake of your dearest person. Tell yourself : “ At least these forty days I’ll try to be a Christian, I’ll try to live keeping the Gospel commandments”. As is known, a friend in need is a friend indeed, love is revealed by self-sacrifice, by a deed, not at a festively laid out table, and not by intercession lists. The more you will work at your own soul – at least these 40 days – the more effective for the departed will be your love for him. Then your pray to God and your charity, your intercession lists and all other things will bring real help to the dead. Here is what help is needed to the relative, close, beloved person.

A special need of a personal pray is understandable due to other reasons. As a rule because of a long list of remembrance of the departed, priest is practically unable to pray with all his heart for the departed and everything is limited by *pronouncing* (aloud or to himself) the names of the dead, by taking out the communion particles from prosphoras... But., firstly, a prayer cannot be replaced by anything, and if a person does not pray himself, demons-tortures are not afraid of such remembrance.

Secondly, “**this kind can come out only by prayer and fasting**” (Mark, 9; 29). However it is not difficult to understand how seldom such a person can be found (a priest, a monk, a lay man), who would really reject his comfort, pleasure, enjoyment and even the daily routine of his life in order to commit a prayer for the sake of your departed, intensified by an exploit. But this is one of the conditions under which the Church remembrance comes into force. A Church service is not a magic action, which irrespective of a praying participation of a priest and a believer will bring a salvational fruit “*ex opera operato*”, as Catholicism teaches about it temptingly, and unfortunately we – the Orthodox are not at all against to believe it. The Saint Fathers unanimously assert, that God **cannot save us** against the will of the man himself, without his spiritual participation, that is why where there is no our personal prayer, our compulsion to live according to the Gospel

commandments, He cannot help us – He cannot hear that prayer, when there is none. The belief that the main thing when a man is being remembered is the extraction of communion particles and pronouncing the name during the divine service - is one of the most widely spread and destructive delusions – destructive because it leaves us and our departed without God, without fruit. St. John Chrysostom wrote: “*Neither Baptism, nor remission of sins, nor knowledge, nor taking the communion, nor sacred meal, nor communion in the species of Bread, nor communion in the species of Wine, nor anything else could bring us any benefit if we don’t start leading an honest life, strict and alien of any sin*”⁶⁸.

As an example of the correct Orthodox attitude (as different from the pagan one) to a prayer for another person I’ll cite such an example. A daughter of one of the Moscow priest has broken her leg. He, despite being a man quite abstemious, took a decision: “ *I’ll not drink a gulp of wine until my daughter’s broken leg becomes healed*”. He combined his prayer with his exploit, restricted his flesh demands, tore away from himself a part of a pleasant life for the sake of the person whom he loved. It was a real manifestation of love, it was a real sacrifice, which purifying him, brought him and his daughter a beneficial fruit, not only bodily, but what is incomparably more – spiritual.

I would like to emphasize once again, that only by forcing ourselves to keep commandments in life, to a prayer, we as venerable Anthony the Great wrote, *enter the communion with God* and to the measure of this spiritual unification we become capable to render a spiritual assistance to another person. The cleaner our soul is, the more the condition of the soul of our dead could change, which together with us and **through us unites with God there to the extent we commune with Him here.** For in a prayer a spiritual communing of human souls occurs. But a simple communing, but a communing in God. That is why you should not believe stupid fairy tales that we mustn’t pray for someone, it is dangerous. Praying is always useful. It attracts God’s mercy to the man praying

⁶⁸ SPb. 1897. V.3. Book 1. P. 252-53. Par.6.

and, undoubtedly, brings benefit to the departed. The great benefit is to find a co-prayer, hermit, at least at these most responsible 40 days.

GEHENNA

What is the gehenna? What kind of suffering is there? What is its essence and designation? This question worries a lot of people. And above all it is connected with the teaching of Revelation about eternal torments of sinners. The complexity of understanding of this issue is not only in the fact that *that* is closed from us by impenetrable curtain, but also that eternity – is not time (Revelation 10, 6: “**there will be no more delay**” (time), and human conscience, plunged into a stream of time cannot imagine it. The apostle Paul, for one, was caught up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians, 12, 2-4). Where was he? – In Eternity. Then he returned back to our time. *There* there is no time, *there* there is Eternity. But it not an endlessness of the time, but something quite different. We know only that we can cross from being in time over to Eternity, and from Eternity to return to our time. That is probably all.⁶⁹

What did the apostle Paul say, when he returned from Eternity? He expressed the idea very illustrative. He heard “**the inexpressive things, things that man is not permitted to tell**” (2 Corinthians, 12, 2-4) – that means he heard words which cannot be retold to another man. *There* the language is quite different, *here* it is absolutely incomprehensible, as if someone will start speaking among us, for one, ancient Ethiopian. *There everything is not like here.*

That is why to dwell on what is *there*, what is eternity is senseless. God in His Gospel opens a man not mysteries of the future world, but offers him a way and means to enter that age, where a person will see everything “**face to face**” (1

⁶⁹ The notion of eternity does not mean either endlessness in time or, more over, some stoppage in life. Those stumbled on the trying experience can, according to the Church teaching, thanks to prayers for them, go out of the eternity of torments and enter the eternity of God’s glory. This possibility lasts till the Last Judgement. As was noted by Vladimir Lossky, “*if movement, change, transition from one state to another are the essence of the category of time, we must not oppose to them one notion after another: immobility, invariability, permanentness of some static eternity: that would have been the eternity of the speculative world of Plato, but not the eternity of God Life. If God lives in eternity, this live eternity must overcome the opposition of the moving time and unmovable eternity*”. (Lossky V.N. An essay of mystical theology of the Eastern Church. Dogmatic theology. M., 1991. P.233). See also: priest P.Florensky. The pillar and foundation of the truth, letter “Gehenna”; metropol.Macarios (Okciuk) Eschatology of St.Gregory of Nyssa. M., 1999.

Corinthians, 13,12). And **the dogmatic truths are open so far as it is needed for our correct spiritual life, and that only drives us to knowledge of mysteries of that world.** Greatly mistaken is he, who thinks that we understand or are able to understand the mysteries of the Trinity of the single God, of the Incarnation, Christ's Cross, and others. All Christian truths revealed by God are needed for a man as firm guidelines on the way of salvation in his spiritual life. It is very important to understand that the Good news of Christ is of educational character, targeted exclusively at transformation of a man, at his deification, but not at filling his mind with fresh information about that world. Realities of that world always remain a mystery for an earthy man.

This feature of Revelation embraces to the full extent all the religious doctrines, including the heralding about paradise and hell. The Word of God about endless torments was the utmost tension of His voice of love, wanting to save a man from horror of after death gehenna sufferings. That is quite understandable – love cannot help doing all possible in order to warn and get rid of a beloved person from torments. That is why the Church repeats the words of the Gospel through the writings of Saint Fathers: yes, for the righteous there will be Kingdom of eternal joy, and the impenitent will go to eternal torments. And that is. Even such a sore question is asked: how to combine Christian teaching about God-Love with the teaching that Love gives life to those, about whom Love knows that they will voluntarily choose evil and will be subjected to endless torments? Though it is absolutely clear, that Love cannot commit anything like that, there is something unclear. St. Isaac of Syria said about it in very strong words: *“If a man says that He makes peace with them (sinners) here to show His long suffering in order to torment them ruthlessly there – such man thinks inexpressively blasphemously about God... Such man tells a lie about Him”*⁷⁰. *“The merciful Lord of Heaven has created the reasonable creatures not with the aim to subject them to an endless sorrow ruthlessly – those creatures about whom He knew before their*

⁷⁰ Isaac of Syria. About Divine mysteries and a spiritual life. M., 1998. Conversation 39. Par. 2

creation what would come out of them after the creation and despite He created them”⁷¹.

In Revelation we find direct assertions both about the eternity of torments, and simultaneously the teaching about their finiteness and salvation of all men. The following parts of the Holy Scripture speak about the above mentioned:

“That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows” (Luke, 12, 47-48).

And **“...his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss, he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.** (1 Corinthians, 3, 13-15)

“When he has done this (put everything under Christ) , then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all”. (1 Corinthians, 15, 28).

“And Christ died for all...” (2 Corinthians, 5, 15)

“ And for this we labour and strive that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe”. (1 Timothy, 4, 10).

“ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men”. (Titus, 2, 11).

The same things were indicated in most of Saint Fathers writings, (see below) – and they are not in the vein of Origen’s apocatastasis, saying about the repeated restoration of all the objective reality, which was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

On the theological-speculative plane this issue has no its unambiguous solution. And no wonder. Any reasonable man understands if a human mind

⁷¹ Isaac of Syria. Same.

confronts insurmountable boundaries in cognizing our visible world, the more so it would take place in cognizing the realities of *that* world. The future life is really a great mystery.

That is why the most reasonable attitude to this outstanding question is the sincere humbleness before this mystery. We do not understand eternity, we do not know either paradise, or hell, it is not opened for us what is a new sky or a new earth, we cannot imagine the universal resurrection and a life in a new body and etc., that is why let's give up a dream to solve an equation with many unknown quantities, bow with our belief before love and wisdom of God, let's believe that God has neither untruth, nor revenge, nor reward, but He has only one boundless love and, consequently, for **each person the eternity will directly correspond to his spiritual state, his free self-determination.** Venerable John of Damascus wrote about it in quite definite terms: *“In the next age as well God will give benefits to everyone – because He is the source of good, pouring grace on everyone, but each communes for the good, as far as he has prepared himself to apprehend”*⁷².

St. Isaac of Syria wrote even more eloquently: *“He (God) does nothing with the aim of vengeance, but He watches the benefit that must result from His actions. One of these is gehennal”*⁷³ *“If the Kingdom and gehenna had not been provided in the mind of our graceful God from the very start of good and evil, then God's intentions about them would not have been eternal; but righteousness and sin had been known to God before they manifested themselves. Thus, the Kingdom and gehenna are the consequence of mercy which in their essence were designed by God because of His eternal grace; but they are not the consequence of reward, even if He gave them the name of reward”*⁷⁴. For *“where there is love there is no retribution, while where the retribution is present there is no love”*⁷⁵. A striking answer to the most complicated question of eschatology!

⁷² Venerable John of Damascus. Creations. M., 1997. P.66.

⁷³ St. Isaac of Syria. About Devine mysteries and spiritual life. M., 1998. Conversation 39, par. 5.

⁷⁴ Same. Par.22.

⁷⁵ Same. Par.17.

So that is why fiery hell exists: not for the retribution, not for the infinite punishment, but as the last Divine Providence resort of God's love, Who *gazes at the good, which should take place thanks to His actions*. Fiery hell was designed by God not for infinite torments of a man, but for his **salvation!** *The Kingdom of God and Fiery hell – are the consequence of mercy, not reward! The merciful Lord has created reasonable creatures not with the aim to ruthlessly put them to the endless grief!* St. Gregory of Nyssa⁷⁶, a brother of St. Basil the Great thought in the same way. The same was highlighted with a great force by St. John Chrysostom in his Easter Word.

True, a stupid person (sorry for this word) may derive a conclusion from the similar assertions, considering it possible to deliver people from infernal flame of passions:

- Oh, posthumous torments are not infinite – let's live here to our heart's content!

But listen, how strongly St. Isaac of Syria warns from that light-mindedness: *“Take care in our souls, my beloved, and comprehend that despite fiery hell is due to be limited, the taste of being in it is horrible enough, and it is beyond our understanding to cognate the degree of being tortured in it”*⁷⁷.

Frightful is the gehenna experience of **outside darkness**, “good” outside God, though it might be limited “in time”, despite it could end with entering the Kingdom. The Apostle writes: **“...his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss, he himself will be**

⁷⁶ He wrote, for example: “...after the complete elimination of evil from all the creatures, a God-like beauty will shine again, in the image of which we were created at the beginning”. (St. Gregory of Nyssa. Creations. Part 7.M., 1865. P.530). Here is how hegumenos Illarion (Alfeev) comments this idea: “The VI Ecumenical Council included the name of St. Gregory of Nyssa in the rank of “saint and blessed fathers”, and the VII Ecumenical Council even called him “father of fathers”. As far as the Council of Constantinople in 543 and The V Ecumenical Council, where Origenism was condemned, it is quite indicative, that though the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa about the universal salvation was well known to Fathers of the both Councils, it was not identified with Origenism. The fathers of the Councils were aware that there exists an heretic understanding of the universal salvation (Origenist apocatastasis, being in connection with the idea of preexistence of souls), but its Orthodox understanding exists also, based on 1 Corinthians, 15; 24-28”.

⁷⁷ Isaac of Syria. About Divine mysteries and spiritual life. M., 1998. Conversation 41.

saved, but only as one escaping through the flames”. (1 Corinthians, 3, 13-15). This is a remarkable image, showing that the state of salvation could be different. For one person it is with glory and honor for the exploit of righteous life, the other person, though he will be saved, but as if crossing **through the flames**, as everything that had been done by him turned out to be spiritually fruitless, poor, senseless - **straw**, burnt down at the first test by **fire** for eternity (1 Corinthians 3, 12). Look, what is happening with a man, who has his lifework burnt down.

Who would agree to get a tremendous wealth on condition of going through cruel torments of sadists? I think no one, who is sober-minded! When at the World conference the Russian representatives showed video cassettes with recordings of torments and monstrous executions of our war prisoners in Chechnia, many delegates could not withstand that, closed their eyes, stopped up their ears, ran out of the hall. It was impossible to see – and what about testing it yourself? Really not for any benefits! The same is with fiery hell, though it might *subject to limitation*. If only it could be possible to show what suffering is in store for a man, when passions are disclosed and start acting in their full force, so, probably, *no one would like to live with full enjoyment – and then- let it be, whatever it might be*. No, God save us from even a mini contact with fiery hell!

Now we can comprehend why there are such strong expressions in the Holy Scripture as **“they will go away to eternal punishment”** (Matthew, 25, 46), **‘will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’**(Matthew, 8, 12), here is why so persistently the Church warns us about eternal sufferings of sinners. Yes, love cannot help making everything possible, in order to save a beloved one from sufferings! That is why *‘take care in our souls, beloved ones’!*

WHAT IS IN STORE FOR US AT THE LAST JUDGMENT?

The very expression “The Last Judgment” is absent in the Holy Scripture. However the Church uses it as appropriate to the notion of the event.

What does this Judgment mean? Let's not think that during the whole human history God was only love, and now, sorry, - only justice⁷⁸. Nothing of the kind! St. John Chrysostom said very strongly about Divine justice towards man: "*If you demand justice, according to a law of the truth, we should have perished at once as early as at the very beginning*".

It is unreasonable to imagine God at the Last Judgment as a certain Greek goddess of justice – Themis, blindfolded. This last act in the history of mankind, opening the beginning of its eternal life is called the Last Judgment, because here "**at the last trumpet**" (1 Corinthians 15, 52) each person will make his final decision – whether to be with God or to depart from Him forever and to remain "outside" the Kingdom. Christ will remain the unfailing Divine love at the Last Judgment and will not violate freedom of a man's will.

Here we are to remember about the principally important change, which will occur with a man at the end of the world existence. According to the Church teaching, after the universal Resurrection a man will get a body again, the plenitude of his spiritual-corporal nature will be restored. This returns a will to self-determination to a man, and, consequently and the **last possibility** of conversion to God, a spiritual renovation and the complete healing – as different from the after death condition of the soul, which was completely determined by the way of life on earth. From here is the *frightfulness* of the Last Judgment – a man does not always determines his eternal fate.

It is difficult, of course to imagine, that a personality, having experienced the fiery hell torments, where it was powerless to get rid of sufferings without any assistance., now after resurrection, having obtained a long cherished freedom, would choose the former slavery. But this is the mystery of the future age. Though, reasoning in the earthy-like manner, we may understand somehow an awful choice of hell made by the demon-like people. It's like an alcoholic will not

⁷⁸ The very teaching about love and truth in God as about two different qualities is purely scholastic and distorting the image of God. Because from such a teaching a conclusion may be drawn, that when God acts according to love, consequently not according to the truth; when He acts according to the truth – that means not by love. In reality, God has only **righteous love**, that means the **right one**, (as different from ours), always bringing benefit to a man, and only benefit.

agree voluntarily to live among non-drinking people, a libertine – together with a chaste, a drug addict with healthy people...A creature with the opposite to God features cannot stay in an atmosphere of Divine love, purity, sanctity. The Kingdom of the Holy Spirit will be a hell in the hell's degree for a creature with a hellish spirit. Due to this reason St. John Chrysostom says:” *He (God) has prepared fiery hell because He is good*”⁷⁹. The idea here is that it is impossible for an evil creature to be with God, the Lord as He is graceful, gives him the opportunity to be outside Himself in “**the outside darkness**” (Matthew, 8, 12). That means that God, keeping the freedom of reasonable creature untouched, displays His mercy relative to it even by granting it the choice of being in the place where it may and wants to be even in the very eternity.

In this way it is possible to understand what will happen at the Last Judgment. Not a violence over a man, not a revenge for his earthy disgusting things. No! I repeat, God will remain love at the Last Judgment as well. And at the Last Judgment eternal fate of each personality will be determined by this Love in complete accordance with spiritual features and freedom of self-determination of the personality proper. It is not by chance that St. Isaac of Syria said: “*It is inappropriate for a man to have such an idea, that sinners will be deprived of God's love in fiery hell...But love acts in two ways by its force: it tortures sinners...and gives joy to those who stuck to their duty*”⁸⁰.

Possibly there will be people whose bitterness will make them unable to withstand humility of God's love. And God will not violate their freedom. That is why the doors of the hell may be locked only **from inside** by its inhabitants themselves, but not sealed by Archangel Michael by seven seals in order to bar the way from there outside, not to let anyone to go out if he wished to. For the hell, according to the idea of venerable Macarios of Egypt, “*lies in the depth of the human heart*”.

The idea that the reason behind sinners' residence in the hell and a devil himself, above all, is their free assertion “I don't want God”, - was outspoken by a

⁷⁹ St. John Chrysostom. Creations. V. XI. Book 2. SPb, 1905. P.905.

⁸⁰ St. Issac of Syria. Words of Podvizhnichestvo. M., 1858. Word 18. P112.

number of saint Fathers: Clement of Alexandria (+217), St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great (+379), venerable Maximos the Confessor, venerable John of Damascus, St. Isaac of Syria, St. Nicholas Cabasilas (XIV c.) and others.

“God always grants benefits to the demon as well, but the latter does not want to accept them”, - venerable John of Damascus writes. – “ In the future age God will give benefits to all – because He is the source of good, pouring grace on all, each communes for the good, as far as he has prepared himself to accept it”⁸¹.

In the same way St. Nicholas Cabasilas deliberates: *“And here where the difference lies between righteous and evil ones, who were staying in the same bonds and were subjected to the same slavery, the first were surviving their enthrallment and slavery with displeasure and kept praying that the place of their enslavement and their bonds be demolished and wished that the head of the tyrant be crashed by captives; the others thought of the present as of nothing strange, but they found comfort being in enslavement. And in blessed days they were people like them, who did not accept the Sun shining in them and they tried as far as possible to extinguish It, doing everything, what , according to them, could destroy Its beams. That is why the former got rid of the slavery in hell, when Tzar appeared, the latter remained in bonds”⁸².*

One more thing should be mentioned with complete confidence: The Last Judgment will reveal before each man, irrespective of his earthy persuasions , in its full might and plausibleness the entire moral grandeur of the Jesus Christ Cross exploit, His great kenosis for the sake of our salvation – His inexpressible love. As Archimandrite Ephraim (Moraitis), staretz from Athos, wrote: *“Christ will show us sufferings of His flesh during His Second Advent as a proof of His love for us”⁸³.* And it is difficult to suppose that such great Love would not touch us, or to say better, would not amaze the hearts of resurrected people. Look, what a great impression the film “The passion of the Christ” by Mel Gibson made on us, despite some separately taken drawbacks. And here the entire reality of the

⁸¹ Venerable John of Damascus. Creations. M., 1997. p.66.

⁸² St. Nicholas Cabasilas. Seven words about life in Christ. M., 1874. P.13.

⁸³ Archimandrite Ephraim Svyatogoretz. Father’s advice. Saratov, 2006. P.44.

Cross, all the might of love of the Resurrected will open in front of everyone. No doubt this, in great measure, will determine the positive choice of the great number of people. This choice will surely be the result of the experience of the earthy life, filled with dreamy illusions of its eternity and a sad experience of torments, having shown the real “sweetness” of passions – fruits of a life without God. That is why St. Isaac of Syria wrote: “ *Kingdom and Fiery hell are the consequences of the mercy, which in their essence were designed by God thanks to His eternal grace, not His reward*”.

So, at the Last Judgment the process of the formation and self-determination of a person will be wound up completely. A certain summing up will take place of not only an earthy, but after death spiritual way of a man, that is of his entire being in the state of the Fall. Here before the Divine love each resurrected person will pronounce his final “yes” or “no” to God. That is why this Judgment is fearful, and not because God, having forgotten His love will judge the human acts “according to utmost justice”. St. Theofan wrote: “ *God is unlikely to exact from anybody for anything with the aim of condemning at the Last Judgment, but He is likely to justify. And He will justify everyone even if there had been a slightest opportunity*”⁸⁴. And God grant, that such a judgment would wind up salvationally for everyone.

CHRIST IS SAVOUR OF ALL MEN

St. Isaac of Syria wrote with utmost confidence: “*A sinner is unable to imagine the grace of his resurrection. Where is the fiery hell, that could bring us grief? Where is the suffering, multiformly terrifying us and winning over the joy of His love? And what is fiery hell as compared with the grace of His resurrection, when It would withdraw us from hell, would make so that perishability will turn into unperishability, and he who had fallen into the hell, would be restored in glory? There is a reward for sinners, and instead of reward for the righteous. He will reward them with resurrection; and instead of*

⁸⁴ St. Theofan. Collection of letters. Issue 3. №392. M., 1898. P.38.

perishing of bodies, who violated His law, He will cover them with perfect glory of unperishability. This grace to resurrect us after we have committed sins, is greater the grace – to drive us to the existence, when we did not exist”⁸⁵.

These words of the Venerable from his famous “Words of Podvizhnichestvo”, which have not been subjected to any doubt or criticism whenever and by anyone from Saint Fathers of the Orthodox Church, the Russian ones as well, of course, amaze us. What else could be more expressive: “not a righteous, but *a sinner is unable to imagine the **grace** of his resurrection*. Moreover, Christ will restore **the fallen in hell in the glory**, instead of a reward for the righteous...will **cover them** with **perfect glory of unperishability**. The universal resurrection, St. Isaac of Syria is sure to demolish fiery hell: “*where is the fiery hell that could make us sad, us, sinners?* - he exclaims.

St. Isaac of Syria, of course, is lucky that he does not live in our time. His life would have been hard and the same would be with St. Iustin the Sufferer, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Ephraim of Syria, Amphilohius of Iconia, John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor and many others for their persuasion about the possibility of salvation of non-Christians – they would not have got out of heretics.

The issue about the salvation of non-Orthodox, belonging to a different belief, non-believers, is outstanding – it worries a lot of people, especially those who have just come to the Church. Its essence is simple:

- How come? Are only Orthodox saved, and out of Orthodox – only righteous, that means only a thousand or a million fraction of one percent of the mankind? And the rest – will they go to the eternal suffering? Didn't God know it, when he created a man? And you say that He is love. What love is it – nothing can be worse!

You listen to these reproaches and feel pain. But we are guilty, when we give grounds to such ideas and conclusions by our ambiguity or worse, by our formal approach to some “sore questions”, by doing this we avert people from Christ.

⁸⁵ St. Isaac of Syria. Words of Podvizhnichestvo. Word 90. P. 615. M., 1858

By how actually we are to answer this ambiguous question, which is considered differently by Saint fathers themselves? One part of them assert point blank, that salvation is possible for members of the Orthodox Church only, and for everyone staying outside it – salvation is not possible. Right? Right. The other part of Saint Fathers insist that Christ – **Saviour of all men**. Right? Yes. So what is the correct answer?

I'll try to make it clear by way of an example. They say that during the World War II there were several instances when an airplane was shot down, a pilot fell on the ground without a parachute and...remained not only alive, but even unharmed. How? That happened in winter, a pilot fell down, went downhill, where there was a great thickness of snow, which saved him. But could a conclusion be made that we should to jump without a parachute? No. Salvation is possible with parachute only, but it *happens* that they save themselves without it. Though this is the analogy, but it reopens the reason behind the diverse answers of Fathers to the raised question.

Orthodoxy shows the right way of life (laws of spiritual life), indicates precisely its aim (deification of a man in Christ), gives unique means of help (sacraments). The other beliefs show different ways, means and aims, which do not only differ to a great extent from the Orthodox ones very often, but absolutely disorient people.

What other ways are offered to us? Figuratively speaking, the following is proposed: in order to get to Petersburg from Moscow, they offer to go through Kiev or through Vladivostok or to fly and even more so by the airplane of the beginning of the 20-th century, through New-York, or to cross the Pacific Ocean in a single boat – with ambiguous coordinates of the point of destination. Could we reach Petersburg choosing these ways and by these means of transport? Theoretically we could, but it is very easy to loose way and what is more, it is difficult, it is dangerous, and it takes a lot of time, and etc.

However the erroneousness, from the Orthodox point of view, of such or other belief gives no ground to make a statement about unavoidable destruction of its

adherents, because the final fate of a man is concealed from an earthy glance. As the Russian proverb says correctly: “The alien soul is darkness” (meaning “you cannot tell what goes on in other people’s hearts and minds”, or “another man’s mind is a closed book”), it always remains a mystery for us. Look , how angrily God condemned many the most righteous (or Orthodox), according to human yardstick, many lawyers, theologians, hierarchs, priests who saw themselves better than other people, proud by their righteousness, by their orthodoxy, despising so-called sinners. And on the contrary, He accepted, justified and brought undisguised sinners into the paradise abodes, who became conscious of their sinfulness and who sincerely repented. The first man who entered the paradise was a mere villain , a criminal, whose unfortunate eternal lot was evident for everyone – he entered only due to the fact that already being suspended on the cross, during the last moments of his life he cognized with all his heart the entire abomination of his acts and he repented! And if not for evangelist Luke’s message, would it ever occur to anyone that this scoundrel would be saved? That is why **“do not judge, or you too will be judged”**. (Matthew , 7,1), and don’t undertake a risk to cross a storming ocean of this life on a board or by swimming, recklessly dwelling on, whether it really matters how to believe and according to whatever commandments of what religion to live – but search for a reliable ship for salvation. And having found it, we shouldn’t be proud with this God’s mercy to us and should not condemn the others, but feel sorry for them with all our heart, giving them in the hands of God’s love, remembering the words of the Apostle: **“God will judge those outside”** (1Corinthians 5, 13). The Orthodox belief resolutely excludes both the indifference to the truth and hostility for the people of other beliefs. We don’t know who will be saved first. The Church only by its collegiate reason may say who has perished, and who is saint, we should think about our own salvation, but not to condemn the others.

There is no salvation outside the Church, of course. What does that mean – outside the Church? Could we identify unconditionally the canonical, or visible boundaries of the Church and the Church as the Body of Christ? What Orthodox

Church, for one, Russian or Constantinople (The Great Church) remained the only Church within which the salvation is possible, when starting from February 23 through to May 16 the 1996 Eucharistic communion was ceased between them (because of the jurisdiction problem in Estonia)?

When Saint Fathers say that the salvation is possible within the Orthodox Church only, they **don't** assert that the entrance to the church is possible **only** through the sacrament of Baptism and that all those who didn't take it during their earthy life – that is the overwhelming majority of the mankind, will perish. You know that now there is more than six billion people on the globe, the Orthodox number about 170 million (and how many out of them are really Orthodox?), all the rest are non-Orthodox or the overwhelming majority are not Christians. May we assume that God, knowing that these and the former and subsequent billions of people would perish, gave life to them in order to subject them to endless torments? I cannot help repeating wonderful (in their power of love and thought) words of St. Isaac of Syria: *“It was not for the reason that merciful Lord has created the reasonable creatures in order to expose them ruthlessly to an endless grief – those, about whom He knew before their creation whom they would be transformed into after their creation and whom, despite, He created”*⁸⁶.

And here is what other saints speak on the subject.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons: *“Christ has come for the sake of not only those who had believed in His, but **for all the people in general**, who... wanted to see Christ and to hear his voice. That is why He will raise the latter first of all upon His Second Advent...will resurrect and place in His Kingdom”*⁸⁷.

*“ We are taught that, - writes St. Iustin the philosopher and martyr, -that Christ is the begotten of God, and we declared above , that He is Word, to be communed with all the humankind. Those, who **lived in accordance with the Word, are Christians, though they are considered to be godless: between the Greek are Socrates and Heraclitus and the like, and from the barbarians –***

⁸⁶ St. Isaac of Syria. About Divine mysteries and spiritual life. M.,1998. Conversation 39. Par.6

⁸⁷ St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Creations. Book 4. SPb.: 1990. P. 381.

Abraham, Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, Elijah and many others”⁸⁸. In another place he says:”As **those, who did universal, natural and eternal good, are pleasant to God, they, like righteous who lived before, - Noah, Enosh, Jacob and others, will be saved upon the resurrection through our Christ, together with those, who recognized Christ as a Son of God**”⁸⁹.

And how should we evaluate, in this connection, the Bible story about sending the prophet Jonah to the pagan country of Nineveh with the aim of proclaiming repentance (Jonah, 1, 2). “**The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth**”. (Jonah, 3, 5). And God accepted the repentance of the pagans: “**But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?**” (Jonah, 4, 11) Who baptized the Nineveh pagans, and how far Orthodox was their belief, that God accepted their repentance and showed mercy on them not only here, but, no doubt, in eternity?

St. Gregory the Theologian says: “*How many of us happen to be not from us, because life makes them alien to the common body; in the same way many, who didn’t belong to us happen to be ours, as by their good disposition they anticipate belief, and while possessing the substance proper, they haven’t got the name*” of a Christian so far.⁹⁰.

Venerable Nectarios of Optina thought even, that “*an ordinary Hindu, believing in the Lord and fulfilling, in the way he can, His will, - will be saved. But he who, knowing about Christianity, is going the Hindu way, - will not*”⁹¹.

One of the most well-known Russian saints ascetics-confessors of the 20-th century bishop Athanasius (Saharov +1962) wrote: “*For me the most cherished of all is Orthodoxy. I cannot compare it with any other confession, with any other religion. But I don’t dare to say that all the non-Orthodox have perished*

⁸⁸ St. Iustin the philos. Comp. Apologia 1. Par.46. M.,1892 (reprint 1995)

⁸⁹ St. Iustin the philos. Talk with Triphon the jew. Par.45.

⁹⁰ St. Gregory the Theologian. Creations. V.1. Word 18. SPb. 1912. P. 264.

⁹¹ Quoted from: Mitrop. Veniamin (Fedchenkov). God’s people. (my spiritual meetings). M., 1997, p147.

*hopelessly. God has a lot of mercy, and a lot is subjected to be delivered by Him*⁹².

What do the words of the apostle Peter mean: **“God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right”**(Acts, 10, 34-35) or of the apostle Paul, that Christ **“is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe”** (1 Timothy, 4, 10)? Or **“Glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favouritism”**. (Romans, 2, 9-16). There is no doubt that both apostles speak about the salvation of not only Christians, but of all men, making good in any nation. For there is no favouritism in God.

The principled answer to the question “who will be saved”, is given by God Himself: **“Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come”**. Saint Fathers understand these words unequivocally. Who speaks a word against the Holy Spirit – this is pride, inordinate praise of yourself, callousness against the justice, truth, conscience. **“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter”**. (Isaiah, 5, 20).-proclaims the prophet Isaiah. In general saint fathers say: *‘There is no sin that cannot be forgiven – except for the sin, which has not been confessed’*⁹³. But until the state of arrogance governs in the man, he is incapable for repentance, consequently for salvation. All the other sins, even denial of Christ (“a word against the Son of Man”), if they are committed because of ignorance, because of humankind weakness, due to a false bringing up and education and etc., but they are not connected with cognized opposition to the justice and truth – they will be forgiven – as a possibility of repentance, spiritual change, correction remain.

⁹² Collection of letters of the venerable Athanasius (Sakharov) .M., 2001. P. 272.

⁹³ St. Isaac of Syria. Words of Podvizhnichestvo. Word 2. P.12. M., 1858.

To sum up, these words of Christ contain the idea, that the possibility of salvation, that is to become members of the Body of Christ – the Church – is preserved for **everybody**, including those who **didn't** receive the sacrament of baptism in their earthy life, but who did not say a word against the Holy Spirit. This possibility is stipulated by the fact that the gift of grace of the sacrament is sent by God, but not a clergyman, administering sacraments only. God imparts this gift to the worthy – **the poor in spirit** (Matthew, 5, 3). As He gave the grace of Baptism to the Old Testament righteous man, to the reasonable criminal and many others.

What is the way might they choose to enter the Church?

WHY DID CHRIST DESCEND INTO THE HELL?

Both the Word of God and the Saint Fathers answer this question quite definitely.

The apostle Peter writes: “ He (Christ) **went and preached to the spirits in prison**” (1 Peter, 3, 19). This preach was not only for the righteous (naturally non-baptised), but to those who **disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently**” and perished in floods **in the days of Noah** (1 Peter, 3, 19-20) and **the dead** (1 Peter, 4, 6) and was addressed to all departed from the start of the human being and to its very end..

According to the Church teaching, the fiery hell, as a closed prison, figuratively speaking, ceased to exist, “*fetters of hell*” were broken. In the sequence of Martins on Friday on the Holy Week we hear the following words: “*Your, Lord, You have torn into pieces our life deeds on the Cross and having become dead, You have tied up our torture there, You, deliver all from death fetters by Your Resurrection...*” On the Holy Saturday: *The hell reigns, but not eternally, over the mankind*”...The same thought is heard in many divine service texts of Oktoikh, Lenten and Pentekostarion Triodion and etc.

As we sing on the Easter, Christ “*put an end to death*”, “*demolished death by His death*”, *destroyed deadly hospice by His death to-day*”. And how resolutely it

is said about Christ's victory over the hell, eternal torments and death in the famous Easter Word: *“ Let no one be afraid of death; for the death of Saviour has freed us. He destroyed it , having been enveloped by it; He emptied the hell, having descended down into the hell; He distressed him, who had touched His flesh...”*⁹⁴ *“Where is your sting, death, where is your victory, hell? Christ has risen and the hell has been won. Christ has risen and demons have fallen. Christ has risen and angels are joyful. Christ has risen and life is living. Christ has risen and there is **no one** dead in the coffin!”*. The context of the whole speech is transparently clear: the words *“there is **no one** dead in the coffin”* speak here, naturally, not about the resurrection of the body only, after which endless torments would follow for sinners, but about spiritual resurrection, opening to a man the doors of eternal life in God: ***He emptied the hell by descending down to it.***

St. Epiphanius of Cyprus speaks out the same idea almost word for word: *“Our Life – (Christ) He, Who has suffered for us in order to deliver us from passions and Who has died in flesh, in order to become dead in death, in order to crush a sting of the death, has descended into the hell to crush adamant locks. Having done that, He has lead out the captive souls and **made the hell empty**”*⁹⁵. St. Amphilokhious Iconikisky thinks in the same way: *“ When He appeared in hell, He destroyed its tombs and emptied its depositories...all became emptied...everybody ran after Him...light started shining and darkness was dispersed. For it was possible to see every prisoner, having known freedom, and each captive, rejoicing in the resurrection”*.⁹⁶ St. Athanasius the Great says in the Easter message: *“He is that One, Who lead the people out in the exodus in ancient Egypt, and in the end – all of us , or better to say **the whole mankind – He delivered from death and took out from hell**”*.⁹⁷

St. John Chrysostom, speaking about the prisons of hell, discloses this idea in the following way: *“ They were really dark, until the Sun of justice has descended*

⁹⁴ St. John Chrysostom. Creations. V.1. SPb., 1916. P.38-39.

⁹⁵ St. Epiphanius of Cyprus. Creations. P.1. M., 1863. P.140.

⁹⁶ See: hegumenos Ilarion (Alpheev). Christ - the winner of the hell. SPb., 2001, P.84

⁹⁷ St. Athanasius the Great. Creations. V.3. M., 1994. P. 464.

there, lightened them up and **made the heaven out of the hell**. For where there is Christ, there is heaven.”⁹⁸. This idea of the first high priest of Constantinople about the possibility of the salvation of all the inhabitants of the hell, which he kept repeating, became a pretext of accusing St. John in Origenism by his opponent archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria at the ‘Council under the Oak’ (403). However in the teaching of the saint there are neither Origen ideas about circular rotation of the universal, nor about pre-existence of souls, but the great truth is confirmed – the full and final victory over the evil by Christ, who made the **heaven out of the hell**.

St. Ephraim of Syria does not raise any doubts that: “*In God’s voice[while descending on the Holy Saturday], the hell got the message to be prepared for His subsequent voice[in His Second advent], which will completely demolish it*”⁹⁹.

Even St. Ignatius (Brianchanov), who resolutely excluded the possibility of salvation of non-Christians, wrote: “*Devoided of the glory of Chistianity, they are not devoided the other glory, obtained in their creation –they are the image of God*”¹⁰⁰. It is clear that the saint could speak about any glory of the inhabitants of the hell.

Venerable Maximus the Confessor, explaining the words of the apostle Peter (1 Peter 3, 18-21; 4, 6) about the descending of Christ into the hell, wrote: “...*The Scripture names people the “dead”, who died before the coming of Christ, for example, those who lived during the Flood, during the building of the Tower of Babel, in Sodom, Egypt and also the others, who were stricken by various punishments and terrible misfortunes of divine judgments during different times and by different means. These people were subjected to punishment not so much for not knowing God, but for the insults inflicted upon each other. According to St. Peter, they were worshiped the Great Sermon of salvation – when they had been condemned as per a man’s flesh, that is they perceived, through the life in*

⁹⁸ St. John Chrysostom. Creations. V.2, Book 1. SPb. 1899. P.440. Despite in his works we may find assertions about the eternal punishment of sinners.

⁹⁹ St. Ephraim of Syria. Creations. Part 8. Serggeev Posad, 1914. P.312.

¹⁰⁰ St. Ignatius (Brianchanov). Creations. V.1. SPb. 1905. C.127.

flesh, the punishment for the crimes against each other, - in order to give them the chance to live in God by Spirit, being in the hell, they apprehended the Sermon of coming to know God, believing in Saviour, having **descended into the hell to save the dead**¹⁰¹. It is absolutely clear that the **dead** of all the subsequent times, also being in hell and having apprehended the sermon of coming to know God, will **also** get the opportunity to live in God by Spirit.

St. Innokenty (Borisov) in his “Word on Saturday of the Holy Week”, referring to the same part in the epistle of the apostle Peter, makes a conclusion, that the aim of the Christ coming into the hell was the delivering from it not only the Old Testament righteous (both from Jews, and from other nations), but “**the most stubborn souls**”. Here is how he says:

“What was the subject of the Sermon in hell? The apostle does not say about it directly. But what else could be the subject of Saviour’s sermon, except salvation? The end of the matter shows its essence. And the end of the sermon in the hell for the most stubborn souls, and the contemporaries of Noah, were as such, must be, according to the clear-cut explanation of the apostle, that they, “having accepted the judgment during the Floods – by a man’s flesh “, would live- after the Christ sermon- in spirit” (1 Peter, 4, 6). Those , who were became alive by spirit, could not be left among the habitation of the death, and the Winner of death, having descended into hell Alone, had to withdraw many with Himself. If anyone became doubtful about it concerning the complete belief in hell, complaining that He in this case “ruined the dead, who had reigned from the start of the age”, cannot become doubtful in the testimony of the Church, which is sure to glorify the fact that by the descending of the Divine Fiance into the hell - **all the hell’s kingdoms were exhausted**¹⁰².

How should we understand all these words of the saints – as a poetry, beautiful lyrics, spread in reality on a small circle of selected people, or this is the **reality** of a new life, brought by the Saviour to the mankind? It is utterly clear

¹⁰¹ St. Maximus the Confessor. Creations. Book II. Questions and answers to Phaladius.”Martis”, 1994. P.44. Ques.7.

¹⁰² Innocent, archbishop of the Chersonese and Tavrishesky. Word on the Great Saturday. Com. V.4 P.266. SPb. M., 1870.

that these words testify quite definitely to the fact that not only those who lived righteously, but even **dead, who disobeyed God**, were freed and will be freed from hell by Christ's victory. All of them having crossed the fiery taste of passions, have accepted and will accept the Saviour, will get the gift of the Baptism grace and, consequently having become members of the Christ Church, will **be saved**. This complete victory over the hell and death was shown clearly dogmatically on an ancient Russian icon of Resurrection where the hell is destroyed by Christ, having descended into it.

But Christ's descending into the hell is a timeless act. From this historic moment now on Christ became accessible to **all** descending **there**. That is why before those, who due to same subjective reasons could not believe in the coming Christ in their earthy life and take the sacrament of Baptism *here*, as we see, the possibility is open by force of the Church prayers to enter it *there* as was offered **by way of the Old Testament mankind**, and as St. Grigory the Theologian cautiously spoke out, by way of a fire baptism. He wrote: "*May be they will be baptized there by fire – by this last baptism, the most difficult and prolonged, which eats up the matter as hay and consumes the lightweightness of each sin*"¹⁰³. And he explains: '*Some do not have even the possibility of accepting the gift [of Baptism], or maybe due to small age, or due to some coincidence of circumstances, irrespective of them, because of which people are not lucky to accept the gift... the latter, not having accepted the baptism will be neither glorified, nor punished by the Judge, because despite they are not sealed by the fair Judge, however, they are not bad... For not everyone unworthy glory is worthy of punishment*'¹⁰⁴.

This understanding of Christ's descending into the fiery hell differs principally from the teaching of the Catholic Church, which sees *the accusation of sinners for their disbelief and anger* in the Saviour's sermon in the hell (Thomas Aquinas).

¹⁰³ St. Gregory the Theologian. Creations in two volumes. V.1.St. Trinity. Sergiev. Lavra. 1994. p. 543.

¹⁰⁴ Same. P.557-558.

At the same time it is opportune to make a note that some fathers, for example, St. Macarios of Egypt unambiguously wrote: *“those who conceived a sin in their hearts and having given birth to infants of lawlessness cannot avoid the awful and all-devouring fire on a Doom’s day, but both their souls and bodies will be condemned together”*¹⁰⁵.

Some other saint fathers say simultaneously about the complete destruction of hell and about eternal torments of sinners. Evidently it was caused by consideration of spiritual benefit for the specific listeners. So, St. Ephraim of Syria, asserting that Lord would **completely destroy** the hell, at the same time wrote quite the opposite: He *“will raise the righteous to the heaven, but He will plunge the dishonest down to the gehenna”*.¹⁰⁶ St. John Chrysostom, saying that the descent of Christ made the **heaven out of the hell**, in another part dwelled on: *“The sinners are to be clothed in immortality, but not to the glory, but to have a constant fellow of the torments there”*.¹⁰⁷

As we see saint Fathers do not have the straightforward teaching about the eternal lot of the mankind.

What can this obvious difference in Fathers’ writings, or sometimes in the writings of the same Father, be explained by? The general reason behind was clearly explained by N. Berdyaev (+1948), when he said that the problem of hell is *“the utmost mystery that does not yield to rationalization”*.¹⁰⁸

And Christianity has no aim to open this mystery, as it is impossible to do by a man and it is not useful.

Impossible because the world of eternity is absolutely different, it cannot be expressed by our language. This was shown by the apostle Paul. Being taken to the third heaven, he only said that **“ he heard inexpressive things, things that man is not permitted to tell”** (2 Corinthians 12, 4).

Is not useful – as the knowledge of the future may completely paralyse a man’s freedom in the most significant part of his life – spiritually-moral. It is easy

¹⁰⁵ Venerable Macarios of Egypt. Spiritual words and epistles. “Indrik Publ.” M., 2002. Word 18, 6 (1). P.590/

¹⁰⁶ St. Ephraim of Syria. Psalterion. M., 1874. Ps. № 134, p.194.

¹⁰⁷ St. John Chrysostom. Creations. Admonition to the fallen Theodor. SPb. V.1, book 1, p.13.

¹⁰⁸ N.Berdyaev. About the destination of a man. The experience of paradoxical ethics. Paris., 1931. P.241.

to imagine how our behavior could change , if we learned for sure, that we would die on a certain day in such and such hour. The knowledge of the future imposes iron bonds on a man's behavior, who has not freed himself from passions. God does not reveal this mystery to people in order to let them be free in their spiritual and moral life – free, above all in the solution of the main issue: belief in God and eternal life of a person or belief in its eternal death. For it is the belief in both is the most true indication of the nature of the spiritual demands of a man, their orientation and purity. That is why Christ said to the apostle Thomas: **“because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”**. (John, 20, 29).

We may conjecture other reasons, which caused the difference in opinions of the Fathers concerning the mystery of the future age.

.... On the one hand they spoke about the eternity of sufferings:

1. Believing it only, not posing any questions.
2. As they refused to answer this most complicated question and that is why they cited very famous words from the Gospel.
3. Because of love, in order to keep people away from a sinful life and the subsequent torments in the fiery hell (not necessarily eternal).
4. As they identified the canonic boundaries of the Earth Church with the Church as a Body of Christ and hence, in particular, they considered Baptism *here* an unconditional requirement of salvation.

On the other hand the Fathers wrote about the possibility of salvation of non-Christians and even of all people, as:

1. They haven't seen another answer to a question: why God-Love gives life to those who will choose the way of evil and will eternally stay in endless sufferings?
2. Having cognized the Divine love, they could not imagine endless torments of those created by God.
3. The fact, that the Old Testament righteous men, a reasonable criminal, many martyrs and others, not having accepted the sacrament of Baptism *here*, -

nevertheless were saved, according to the teaching of the Church, testifies , that the boundaries of the Church are wider than its earthy canonic limits and that, consequently, the receiving of the gift of the Baptism grace and entrance into the **Body of Christ** (Colossians, 1, 24) is possible *there*;

4. these Fathers didn't see any contradiction in this notion to the teaching of Christ.

So, the teaching about the complete and final destruction of death and hell by the fact of Resurrection of Christ, contained in the writings of saint Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Theologian, Athanasius the Great , John Chrysostom, Ephraim of Syria, Epiphanius of Cyprus, Amphilokhios Iconisky, Isaac of Syria, Maximos the Cofessor and other saint Fathers, as well as outspokennesses in numerous texts relating to divine worship (especially the Easter and Sunday) is not a private assertion of one or two saint fathers, but the teaching in the same way Orthodox of the Church, as the teaching of other Fathers, stating quite the opposite. That is why we cannot but agree in the given case with Berdyaev, that the problem of hell is *“the utmost mystery which does not yield to rationalization”*.

It is worth noting also that at the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553) , which condemned Origenism, no one of the fathers raised a voice to proclaim St. Gregory of Nyssa, the most well known exponent of the universal salvation, to be an heretic. Moreover, at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680) St. Gregory of Nyssa together with Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, whose ideas on this subject (and partially doublethink) were well known to the Fathers of the Council, were not only subjected to censure, but were especially singled out as being chosen saints. At the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) St. Gregory of Nyssa - a generally wellknown mouthpiece of the idea of universal salvation was called “A Father of Fathers”. Especially notable for our time is the fact is that those Fathers, who considered the opinion of St. Gregory about the universal salvation erroneous, nevertheless, they never proclaim him an heretic or any one who was with him.

What should be emphasized here is the remarkable universal unity and consensus of the Saint Fathers of the both directions in the fact that eternal life of each man will be **better**, depending on his spiritual condition, because God is love.

ABOUT A MORTAL SIN AND WHO IS RIGHTEOUS

Do you remember when Christ raised the four-days Lazarus and it became clear to everyone, that Jesus Christ was that same Messiah, promised by God, what judgment was made by the supreme Jewish court - Sanhedrin? Kill Lazarus too! Here is the historic example of satanist bitterness against the Truth, a word against the Holy Spirit. However a man comes to this position not simply, not of a sudden.

We may think, what villains are the Jewish Pharisees, scholars, clergymen, hierarchs and chief priests, who crucified Christ – we, Christians, wouldn't do such a thing. But think, how did *those* become like that? This is the most serious issue, and the answer to it is very important for each believer, in order not to turn to be among them inadvertently.

The patristic teaching opens us the spiritual law about the “mechanism”, by means of which a man comes to committing a mortal sin. The man commits this sin not all of sudden. He is marching to it gradually, as if unnoticeably, committing it **arbitrary**, without forcible compulsion by a passion, so-called **minor** sins. It is through them that a man shows himself, what he chooses, what he is driving at. Multiple **repetition of minor sins** gradually suppresses the conscience, corrupts the soul, weakens it and as you remember unites it with demons-torturers, who kindle passions even more. So, that if a man does not regain his senses in time, does not start fighting with such **minor things** as : “sinful thoughts, feelings, wishes, - misfortune is inevitable. He is gradually enslaved more and more, is weakened spiritually, becomes capable of committing sins more grave, even mortal and may go as far as becoming reckless – the direct opposition to the obvious truth, undisputable truth, a word against the Holy Spirit.

The roots of this impious blasphemy – are in dreamy development in yourself the feeling of your own righteousness, or, as Saint Fathers say, opinions about yourself, high opinion of yourself, which results in *petrified non-feeling* of God’s sanctity and your own spiritual impiousness. Let’s recall a parable about a tax collector and a pharisee – how the pharisee boasted before God, how much good and righteous things he did. The similar condition when a person seems to live righteously externally, keeps the Church rules, *is present* at Divine service (or administers them), but does not see his sinfulness, his spiritual dirt, is very close to satanism. Such a person even with his obvious sins, is “never guilty”. The other person is guilty, the others – all in the world, but not he. This dazzled condition was well described by St. Theofan (Govorov): “*He himself is the horrible rotter, but he keeps repeating, I am not like the other people*”. “I am good!” – here is where that evil root lies, from which an awful sin of blasphemy comes out. For such a ‘righteous’ Christ-Saviour – is the direct pangs pricks, that is why he hates Him. He crucified Christ two thousand years ago and continues to crucify in his soul during the whole history. What does this “righteous” expect from God? Naturally – earthy and celestial awards, as there is nothing to save him from. That is why he is waiting for the awarder – anti-Christ. So, the so-called Christian, externally lawful, can turn to be an impious creature.

This pride of false piousness venerable Macarius the Great compares with a copper wall, erected between a man and God. The opinion about his own righteousness is, in the final count, the source of all human misfortunes. Mark zealot was right in saying that “*all the evil and sorrowful things fall upon us due to our self-elevation*”.

What is the sober state of the soul? Whom did Christ display His benevolence for, whom did He justify, whom did He make an example? –Evident sinners! But what? Those who **really saw** that they were sinners and they repented from the bottom of their heart. This cognition of your sinfulness, realizing your powerlessness to win passions, tearing your soul into pieces, and from here the sincere humility and repentance - are the only reliable remedy against acquisition

of that satanist pride, which has led *Orthodox*, according to the yardsticks of the Old Law, the Jewish hierarchy, to the reckless uprising against God. Isn't it a lesson and an edification of all of us, who do not doubt in our righteousness?

Why did Christ descend into the hell on that Holy Saturday, which we recall each year before Resurrection of Christ? – The Church answers: in order to deliver from there all the Old Testament righteous. Who are they, these righteous? Sometimes an answer is heard, which leads more into the delusion than explains. They say: the righteous are those, who believed in the coming of the Messiah-Saviour and expected Him. Sorry, but if that is only external belief of *mind*, as St. Theofan put it, and in this case it does not differ in anything from the Protestant one, and can give nothing to a man. It is not about that kind of righteousness the Church tells you.

The righteous is that man, who, living as per the conscience and keeping the commandments, makes sure in the ruinousness of his spiritual condition, incapability to eradicate by his own efforts the passions which torture the soul, and that is why he is in the need of God's help. The Righteous is, above all, the man, who sees his spiritual illnesses and in humbleness and repentance appeal to God - to his last hope. As in usual life the perishing person (who is in danger) cries: "Save me!", the same is in the spiritual life – only he who cognized himself as incurably ill and powerless calls upon from the bottom of his heart: "God, be mercy!" So the righteous is that man, who is eager to appeal to Saviour to get rid of his own spiritual ailments (envy, anger, strive for power, self-elevation, avarice...), but not of the external misfortunes and sorrows. Such is the Christian in spirit, irrespective at what time he lived, lives or will live. That is why St. Iustin the Philosopher, like the other early Christian apologists, calls the Old Testament righteous of **all** the nations "*Christians before Christ*"¹⁰⁹.

Here is what kind of expectation and what belief in Saviour is the testimony of the true unfallen righteousness, opening the gates of the Kingdom of God to a man. He who has cognized the poverty of his spirit and the power of saving

¹⁰⁹ Composition of St. Iustin the Philosopher and Martyr. Apology 1, 46. M., 1892, p.77.

Christ's love will not depart from Him in the ages to come, will not repeat Adam's sin. It is this state of soul that is the true righteousness – the most significant truth of the Orthodox understanding of the spiritual life. There is no need to speak here about the elevated steps of sanctity – this is a separate and a big subject. The main thing is that the righteous (of both the Old Testament and the New Testament) are only those people, who have arrived at this cognition, to such a feeling of need in God-Saviour, but not those who simply believed (or believe) in His coming as in some historic event and are waiting for the earthy and celestial benefits from Him (by the way, not knowing what it is). Those who crucified Christ also believed in the coming of Messiah, but they believed as in some earthy event, which would bring them *shalom*, that is all the goods of the earth – by that they deeply distorted the image of Messiah and the very essence of their religion. **“Even the demons believe and shudder”** (James, 2, 19), but remain demons, and this can happen with a man too.

From here it becomes clear, why those who repented: a criminal, a tax collector, a whore - are the righteous in Christianity.

That is why let's not judge about the eternal lot of any single person: Orthodox, non-Orthodox, non-Christian and etc. – because we do not know either their spiritual state, or all objective circumstances of his life. We must know and judge about the truth and falsity, that means about the salvation or downfall of this or that belief, the way of moral and spiritual life offered by it, but we cannot and have no right to say about a single man (or a nation) that he has perished. Only the Church can proclaim such a judgment. And each Christian is destined to pray for the **neighbour** (Luke, 10, 29-37), live or departed, irrespective of his convictions. Thus the Spiritual council of St. Trinity Sergiev Lavra, expressing their censure in respect of the Catholic expansion on the territory of the modern Russia, and at the same time concluded: *“We cannot undertake upon us the right to judge, whether Roman-Catholics be saved or not, or in what measure the grace is present in the*

*Catholic Church. The judgment of this kind and knowledge belongs to God alone*¹¹⁰.

The Christian belief gives the possibility for a man to get ready for the posthumous life: his fight against a sin, compulsion for the keeping up the Gospel commandments, repentance to clear oneself the way to God and to escape the after death sufferings. As was written by abba Isaiah hermit: *‘What a joy will be for a soul of that person, who, having started working for the sake of God, successfully will end up his deed? Upon his leaving this world, this matter will do for him such a thing that the Angels will share the joy with him, having seen that he had freed from the power of darkness. Because when the soul leaves the body, it is accompanied by Angels; then all powers of darkness come out in the opposite direction, wishing to grasp it, searching for anything of theirs. Then not the Angels fight with them, but the deeds, which had been made by the soul, bar it, as if by a wall and protect it from them, in order they wouldn’t touch it. When the deeds win the victory, then the Angels, marching in front of it, sing, until it appears before God in joy. At that hour it forgets about any deed of this world and about its labour*¹¹¹.

God grant, that everyone will be honoured with such a joy!

QUESTIONS ABOUT ETERNITY

People used to ask a lot of various questions at the lectures. Some of them, relating to the subject of posthumous life, seem to be interesting.

-Can’t we speak about the fact, that when having departed from God, a man is placed in a certain darkness; can’t he feel good in such a space?

- The state of the man, who rejected God, that is the state of the passions’ tyranny. And what is it – passions – we all know. How do you think a man can feel, who is in a possession of ferocious anger – do you think he feels good? And how envy

¹¹⁰ Address of the Spiritual Council of St.Trinity Sergiev Lavra relative the Catholic expansion.// Vologodskaiy Diocese newspaper “Blagovestnik”. №1-3, 2002, p.4.

¹¹¹ Venerable Abba Isaia hermit. Words. About Joy, coming to soul...Par.1. p.73-74. M., 1888

tortures him! Do you remember Dante: “*My blood was so much boiling with envy, that if the other had felt good, you’d see, how I would have turned green?*”¹¹². Such is the so-called goodness of staying with passions. And what is more, *there* there is not a single opportunity either to calm down or to satisfy them. So, the fiery hell is, as the Saviour says, a real fire, which cannot be extinguishable, that is in this sense a worm indefatigable. At the same time the atmosphere of the hell itself – that is the habitation of demons – as completely corresponding to the spiritual state of a man, as natural for him, is in this sense the best from the possible for him sphere of habitation.

-You’ve mentioned that pitch-darkness – is the condition outside God. I’ve marked a quotation of someone from the saint fathers’ writings in the book by Georgy Florovsky, saying that the human soul is relatively immortal - as this life is given to it by God. If there is a pitch-darkness – this is the state outside God, consequently there is no God there. How then a soul may exist without the Life-Giver? How should it be understood?

- You’ve asked a question to which a simple answer can hardly be given.. One of the reasons behind it is the fact, if even, God, save me, I had been there, I would not have been able to describe that reality of being there in a human language. The reason behind it – the absence of notions with the help of which we’ll be able to do it. Here is the limit of our intellect. We may, of course, reason about it. For, example:

It is clear that no one and nothing can exist without God. And consequently, God’s grace, keeping the existence of everything created –it can be called as “being in objective reality”, as different from the grace of deification – of course, is present in pitch-darkness. Saint Isaac of Syria directly asserts, that it is not reasonable to think, that God’s love leaves a sinner in hell, though it will be the source of his tortures. Here are his words: *‘Those being tortured in the fiery hell are hit by the whip of God’s love! And how bitter and cruel is this torture of love!*

¹¹² Dante. Divine comedy. Purgatory, song 14, P.82-84.

Because those who feel, that they have committed a sin against love, they endure sufferings much greater than any fear of torments, the grief, inflicted upon the heart for a sin against love is more acrimonious than any other punishment”¹¹³.

So God is everywhere but He is present in every place differently.

-How can I enjoy being in the Kingdom of God, if I know that my relatives are in hell?

- I've had to repeat it many times that it is difficult and sometimes it is dangerous to judge about the state of a man *there*, not knowing either the future beatitudes, or moreover the nature of eternal torments. Venerable Kallistos Kataphigyot was right in warning that *“intellect should have the measure of cognition in order not to perish”*. *There* everything is not like in our life. Having found ourselves in the world of eternity we come to know everything how it should be, **face to face**, and **“now we see but a poor reflection”, guessing**. (1 Corinthians, 13, 12). As an example, of this kind of guessing, I'll tell you the following. There is no doubt that only a spiritual unity is the firm foundation of the unity of personalities. Spirit, not blood, unite, not alienate people. Look how relatives hate each other sometimes. And on the contrary, absolutely alien in blood people unite in love, form families and become an entity. Spirit will unite some people in eternal life, and the others will alienate. And this separation will be natural, not compulsory, because it will not bring sufferings. We must believe firmly and clearly that there will be no sufferings in the Kingdom of God.

-May we think that a person who dies on the Easter goes straight to paradise?

-There is no Church answer to this question. And though someone will perceive this question with a smile, there is a firm belief circulated in the folks that those whom God gives the chance to die on the Easter, he would be honoured to enter the Kingdom of God. Perhaps, this is how it is. But this will happen not because he died on the Easter, but because it was on the Easter that he died, that means he

¹¹³ St. Isaac of Syria. Words of Podvizhnichestvo. Word 18. M., 1993. P.76.

turned to be worthy of it. Sometimes they say that he is not a believer, but he died on the Easter, won't he be saved? And what does the Gospel answer? The first man who came into the paradise was a criminal, who had repented during the last minutes of his life. That is why let's not discuss and argue about the fate of those who died on the Easter, but let's better sigh from the bottom of our heart and say: "God, give peace to the soul..."

-What is the fate of a soldier who experienced hatred for the enemy at the moment of his death?

-Naturally I cannot say anything about the fate of any man – only God knows that. But I'd like to remind you that we quite often use the notions "hatred", "love" and others, very vaguely figuring their sense, for in each separate case they may have different force and difference directions. There is difference between a hatred to your sin and a hatred to your neighbour, who, no doubt, is the worst in the world! And love, of course, differs greatly: from the most criminal to the most elevated. We are spiritually blind, we can never judge in the correct way about the spiritual and emotional state of another man.

But there is something about which we do know and can judge: "**Greater love has no-one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends**" (John, 15, 13). In the same way, soldiers are those people, who are the first to come out to meet death, sacrificing themselves, giving up their souls for their friends – for those defenseless, who are behind their backs. (That is why the war service has been honourable during all the times). It is not by chance that we find a lot of warriors among the holy faces. That is the first thing that should be remembered.

Second. We must not confuse two absolutely different notions: righteous anger and hatred. There is an righteous anger and there is a rage. Do you remember, how Christ has overturned the tables, scattered the coins of the money and withdrawn all the traders by a whip out of cords from the temple. (How burning it is for our times!) And He explained the reason behind His actions: "**How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!**" (John, 2, 16). Here is the example of a righteous anger, sinless. Why sinless? – Because Christ has done this not because of the

hatred for the traders but due to the sacred anger to the sin of defiling the sanctity of temple of the human souls and a temple of prayer. It was not evil that He wished to the Church traders, but He stopped the development and justification of a sin in their hearts, in practical experience and in the teaching of their religion proper.

And vice versa, he who acts, guided by the evil towards a man, he naturally, commits a hard sin, kills his soul, - no matter who he is, a warrior or a clergyman, a politician or a theologian. At war, of course, a just anger is often mixed up with embitteredness, that is why the Church puts a penance on warriors quite often. At the same time it is necessary to understand that he is not a soldier, who doesn't come out to meet death for the sake of **his friends**, his motherland. A warrior, defending them, **must** kill the enemies, otherwise he is not a warrior but a traitor. And such a murder is **a virtue**, because for a morally and mentally normal man a righteous murder – is the hardest moral exploit. From here it becomes understandable the appearance of advocates of non-resistance to the envy by violence, pacifists, justifying themselves, in part, by a false interpretation of the Gospel. Their “humanism” motives are transparent: let the other undertake this superhuman exploit, but we'll prosper on their blood and sufferings, and what is more will condemn them wrathfully for their killings.

I think that is why, Christians should pray harder (not simply to remember) for our dear perished warriors, and not to try and have a look into where a door is closed for us. We know nothing trustworthy about who and what experienced at the moment of his death. But there is God both seeing, and judging and giving mercy.

- Can we believe the Apocalypse of Peter, in which torments of sinners are described in the fiery hell?

No, you must not as any other Apocryphal, non-canon literature, as well as leaflets and heretic booklets of the following type: “Given by God Makaria”, “Spiritual conversations and admonitions of staretz Anthony”, heiron Monk (?) Triphon

“Miracles of the last times”, video cassettes “Meeting with eternity” and others so-called “spiritual” publications.

-What is the essence of the remembrance of the dead by alms and meal?

-The essence is in the fact that by giving the alms and arranging the remembrance meals (which is one of the type of the same alms) we render our love to the other for the sake of the dead. So, the pray, according to Christ” words, is especially effective when it is connected with “**fast**”, that is with self-restriction, with self compulsion, with good-doing, deprivation of something for the sake of love for another man, with suppression of your **Old Testament man**.

The remembrance meal, when it bears the Christian- like character, is also a certain self –sacrifice for the sake of the dead, because we labour for his sake, and tear away something from our property. That is why combined with the prayer it becomes one of the means of assistance to the departed.

-Will you explain, please: fiery hell and purgatory, is it the same thing?

-Fiery hell and purgatory – are absolutely different things. Purgatory – is purely theologian invention of Catholic theologians and one of the delusions of the Catholic Church. The point is that according to a Catholic teaching to purify oneself from a sin, a man must not only repent, but to bring so-called **satisfaction** to God’s justice, which is achieved by alms, bows, reading special prayers and etc. But by demanding this **satisfaction**, Catholic theologians placed themselves in a difficult situation. For, if a man has repented, but he had no time to commit some deeds of satisfaction, so an insoluble collision springs up: he could be sent neither to paradise (as he has not brought satisfaction), nor to hell (because he repented). And huge “ heads of genius of theologians invented the so-called purgatory, where the repented sinner, allegedly brings satisfaction to God’s truth for his sins by his torments, after that he may be moved to the paradise. Here is what is purgatory in the Catholic understanding.

There is not a single hint in Orthodoxy on such nonsense, sorry. While crossing these torments and in the hell a man is punished by his passions not by God, and does not bring any satisfaction to any God's truth. There quite a different process occurs – a spiritual one in the soul itself. It can be characterized shortly in the following way. On the one hand, the more and more a person cognizes in his soul the ruinness of his passions, the corruption of his nature and the need in the Saviour. On the other hand, this process leads to deepening of the cognition of God's love and increasing of the reciprocal love for Him. All this results in gradual lessening of passions pressure and, correspondingly demontorturers, and at last, may result in acquisition of freedom, departing from them and return to God. The Orthodoxy does not say anything about any satisfaction, that is to God's truth or any purgatory ideas.

-What is the lot of infants killed during abortion?

-A question is posed in a very strange way.. I am surprised, that people ask about a lot of innocent infants, who did not know either good, or evil, but not about the fate of a mother, committing a mortal sin. Haven't the infants committed sins? Haven't they acted iniquitously? Haven't they killed a man? Why the sinful infants are in question? The sources of these pagan fear are known. It comes from false teachers, infected with a middle-ages Catholic teaching about so-called limb. Limb is a place in the other world between the paradise and the purgatory, where, according to the medieval conceptions (the idea of a limb appeared at the end of XIII century), the souls of non-baptized infants are placed. But even Catholicism does not insist presently on their complete destruction. The Roman Pope Pius X wrote in 1905:"*The infants who died before being baptized, penetrate into the limb, where they do not enjoy the presence of God, but at the same time they do not suffer*". A new Pope Benedict XVI decided to exclude the medieval teaching about the limb at all as being false, from the religious doctrine of Catholicism. The document, published by the World theologian commission and approved by this Pope, states, that the traditional concept of a limb reflects the idea of salvation too

limitedness. Now, according to a new theory, the souls of the dead infants , which people had no time to baptize, go to paradise.

But some our “teachers” surpassed the medieval delusions of Catholics. With their eyes burning they terrify ignorant people: “*Non-baptized infants will perish*”! So, according to their opinion, mothers, who consciously committed infanticide, may (if they repent) be saved, but innocent infants, who did not have either will, or conscience, are doomed to ruin. No bigger caricature of the Orthodoxy cannot be imagined.

Didn't all the infants, who died before the Coming of Christ perish? And are infants of our ancestors before the Baptism of Russia – in gehenna? Are the children of non-Christen nations – in the hell? No, all of them are saved by the Sacrifice of Christ! God Himself said about the **non-baptized** infants: “**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these**”. (Matthew, 19, 14). Who baptized infants killed by Herod in Bethlehem, the old testament righteous, a reasonable criminal, God Mother herself, many martyrs and by what order: by submersion, pouring over or sprinkling? Isn't it clear that baptism as all the sacraments are the Church sacred religious rites, committed by a man, and the gift of grace is given by God, when He sees the soul capable to receive this gift? A sacrament is **not a permit**, without which it is impossible to enter the eternal life, but the **effective means** to a man on the way to salvation. That is why all the departed infants will be saved, as “**the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these**”.

To confirm the idea about the blessed posthumous life of non-baptized children I'll cite some authoritative outspokenness of the Fathers.

A well-known early Christian Church writer Tertullian (+220) writes:

“ Bearing in mind the peculiarities and even the age of each personality, it is useful to slow down with baptism, especially of small children (parvulos)...Let them come when they become a little more grown up. Let them come, when they learn, when they are taught, where to go. Let them become Christians when they

are able to cognize Christ (Christum nosse potuerint). Why must an innocent one be in a hurry for remission of sins?”¹¹⁴

Saint Gregory the Theologian wrote: infants “*who haven’t been baptized will be neither glorified nor punished by the just Judge, because despite they haven’t been sealed, however they are not bad*”¹¹⁵. What does it mean, *not glorified*? They will not come into the Kingdom of God? – Nothing of the kind. The words of saint Gregory can be easily understood by way of an example of an army at action. What warriors are given the glory, who receives the award? Those who displayed courage, heroism. The remaining, who didn’t commit such exploits, naturally won’t receive such awards and glory. But aren’t they punished? St. Gregory continues his thought in such a way: “*Not every ... person unworthy of honour is worthy of punishment*”¹¹⁶. Here is the meaning of the above said. There is not a single conjecture about that those who haven’t been baptized will be deprived the Kingdom of God.

The contemporary of St. Gregory the Theologian - venerable Ephraim of Syria spoke out his persuasion, that the dead infants will be higher than the saints. He does not even mention whether they have been baptized or not.

*“We praise you, our God, from the mouths of babies and children, who are as pure angels in Eden are feed in the Kingdom. As was said by the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel, 34, 14) they are tended in a rich pasture among trees, and Anchan- gel Gabriel – is the shepherd of this flock . There position is higher and more beautiful than of celibacy and the saints; they are the children of God, foster children of the Holy Spirit. They are accomplice of the those from the heaven, inhabitants of the pure land, far from the earth of damnations. On the day when they hear the voice of God’s Son, they will rejoice and their bones will enjoy, freedom will bow its head, which has not managed to stir the spirit yet. **Short***

¹¹⁴ About Baptism, 18.

¹¹⁵ St. Gregory the Theologian. Creations in two volumes. V.1. St.Trinity. Sergiev. Lavra, 1994. P.558.

¹¹⁶ Same. P558.

were their days on the earth, but their life in Eden is observed, and their parents would rather approach closer their habitation”¹¹⁷.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, the brother of St. Basil the Great, in a special work under the title “ About babies, prematurely caught by death” directly states, that babies, as they had not committed any evil, are hampered by nothing to be communed with God’s Light. He says the following: *“The baby who has not been tempted in the evil, as no illness hampers his spiritual eyes in communing with the Light, is staying in the natural condition, **having no need in purification to restore his health**, because he had not received an illness in the soul”¹¹⁸.*

How remarkably **St. Theofan the Recluse** wrote about the non-baptized children:

Children are all angels of God. Non-baptized, as everybody being outside the belief, should be granted to God’s mercy. They are not stepsons or stepdaughter of God. Because He knows what and how should be arranged for their sake. There are plenty of God’s ways!”¹¹⁹

The hieromonk Arseny of Athos, well known for his ascetic life (XIX), when asked about the lot of non-baptized babies answered:

*“As far as babies are concerned, about whom you have been asked to find out from us, we may say, that those who have been baptized, will rejoice and will be blissfully happy in the heavens for ever, though they died unexpectedly. In the same way we should not reject those babies, who were born dead or they had no time to be baptized: they are not guilty, that they did not get sacred Baptism, and God of the Heaven has many abodes, including those where these babies will **rest** for their belief and piety of their faithful parents, **thought** they didn’t receive **the Holy Baptism** due to non-experienced destinies of God. That is not contrary to the religious doctrine, and saint Fathers testify to it in the Sinaxaris about it, on*

¹¹⁷ St. Ephraim of Syria. Graveside songs, 44 (Beatitude of died in infancy). Creations. V.4. “Otchi Dom” publish. 1995, p. 460-461.

¹¹⁸ Creations of St. Gregory of Nyssa. M., 1862. Part 4, p. 345.

¹¹⁹ Creations of St. Theofan the Recluse. Collection of letters. Issue I and II. Letter 139. Publish by St-Uspensky Pskovo- Pechersky mon. and publish.”Palomnik”, 1994, p. 155

Shrovetide Saturday. Parents may pray for them with their belief for God's mercy"¹²⁰.

The priest A. Burgov wrote: *"A great contradiction to the teaching of the Holy Scripture is the assertion of the Protestant strict theologians, that the original sin itself is – vere sit peccatum (is actual sin), resulting in censure to eternal death of all the non- raised (by baptism), as well as babies*"¹²¹.

The great historian of the ancient Church B.Bolotov said directly: *"The number of Christians during the times of Athanasius the Great was insignificant, as many received baptism in the grown up age, and some postponed it to the aged years. Children were getting ready to become Christians, young people were still in the state of being Catechumen, and only the people at the mature age were baptized, they became perfect Christians, who were present at the Liturgy of the Faithful*"¹²².

"In the IV century Christian Church was composed of people, baptized at a mature age, that is why they were determined in their intentions and their motives in the transition into the Christianity"¹²³.

That is why the reference of some people to St. Augustine, who pointed out that the non-baptized babies would perish, is beneath criticism: not a single one out of the saint Fathers, at least Eastern, ever spoke out this thought. And only the late Catholic theology, having armed with "Augustinism", "canonized" this delusion. Despite the teaching of saint Church Fathers, it has been adopted, unfortunately by our modern "teachers".

Lets us not be concerned about the lot of babies, they are all in God' possession, but we must seriously ponder over our attitude to a child-birth, marriage, our "Christian" life , dear parents.

- May I pray and how to pray for my relative, a Baptist?

¹²⁰ Letters by hieromonk Arseny of Athos, departed in God, to different persons. Publish. Of Athos Russian Panteleimon mon. M., 1899. Reprint: Galaktika. 1994, p.164 (Letter №42, issue 3).

¹²¹ Priest Alesei Burgov. Orthodox-dogmatic teaching about the Original sin. Kiev. 1904. P. 186.

¹²² Bolotov V.V. Lectures on history of the ancient Church. V.3. M., 1994. P.24.

¹²³ Same. P.96.

- A famous Russian liturgist saint bishop-the confessor Athanasius (Sakharov) wrote the following relating the prayers for non-Christians. *“Relative the remembrance of your departed relatives. Above all, I believe, **children are always obliged to pray for their parents, no matter what they were, even if they were brutes, defamers, persecutors of the faith.** I am sure that saint martyr Varvarra is praying for her father, who had killed her. Your parents were Christians. If, according to God’s word, “in any nation he, who is afraid of God and who prays, is pleasant for Him”, and moreover are those who believed in the Single God, glorified in the Trinity, and professing Christ, who has come in flesh..*

If the pray of venerable Macarios of Egypt about the pagans brought them a certain delight, the more so the pray of the Orthodox children will bring the delight to non-orthodox parents. By request of venerable Tsarina Theodora the fathers of the Church prayed intensively for her husband, ardent iconoclast and persecutor of he Orthodoxy Theofile – and got the revelation, that by their pray and by the faith of Theodora, he was granted the forgiveness.

***You may and you must pray for non-Orthodox in such a way.** But of course, the pray for the non-Orthodox should be of different nature. So, For example, at the very beginning of the canon for the burring, they exhale the praying that God would grant eternal benefits of the departed faithful. This we can say about the Orthodox only. That is why **as far back as under the Holy Synod a special order of the panikhida about the departed non-Orthodox was adopted.** They started to print it in 1917 but it was not finished. In 1934 or 1935 metropolitan Sergei distributed the order of panikhida for non-Orthodox, compiled by him, among the diocesans”.*

Moreover St. Athanasius thought that when submitting the remembrance list for the panikhida, the names of the non-Othodox might be placed among the Orthodox, and if these names are foreign, in order not to confuse people, you may change them by the consonant Orthodox (*for example, instead of Antzia – Andrea should be put*”). God, he wrote, - *knowing whom you pray for, will render mercy by way of your prayer, to that very person whom you meant*”. However, as

far as the remembrance on the Proskomide, he reasoned in this way; “*before I also remembered non-Orthodox on the Proskomide, but now I arrived at the conclusion, that its better not to do it*”¹²⁴. But there is a more significant fact. Almost at each divine service and even at the liturgy they pray for the *power and for the military*. But aren't everybody in the power and military Orthodox, baptized? Remember, at least, after the revolution times of cruel persecutions of the Soviet *power* on the Church!

And for whom did the Lord pray on the cross when committing His blood sacrifice; “**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing**”. (Luke, 23, 34). Isn't it a commandment for the Christians?

So you *may and you must* pray for everybody both at home and in Church. As far as the proskomide remembrance – as the priest will tell you.

-It is known that suicide is the hardest sin. But how about a man, who has committed it, but he was a perfect righteous in his life?

- What does that mean – “*was a perfect righteous*”? If he had been the righteous, kept the commandments of God, of course, he would not have made such a thing. The point is that he was a false righteous.

Who is a false righteous? This is, for one, the Orthodox, who goes to the Church, accepts the sacraments, makes charity deeds, observes fasts, kills no one, does not steal, does not commit an adultery, that is - performs all the *external side* of the Church life and sees this his “righteousness”, boasts with it in his feelings and thoughts, and sometimes before the people, but he does not notice his inner passions: pride, vanity, envy, unlikeness for the neighbours, anger, hypocrisy and etc. This is an awful condition, as in it a worm of an elevated opinion about himself is being brought up, from it, if you don't notice it in time, a serpent of pride grows up. In this inner condition were and are the “perfect righteous” condemned by God, - Jewish and Christians: lawyers, scribes, hierarchs. These

¹²⁴ Collection of letters of St. Athanasius (Sakharov). M., 2001. P.273.

false righteous rejected Christ, crucified Him. Such false righteous may result in the most sad consequences: delusion, heresy, suicide.

The true righteous always sees his sinfulness, sees his full non-righteousness. In one of the letters saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) cites the following vivid example of the genuine righteous: *“To-day I’ve read the pronouncement of Sisoy the Great, which I especially like, it was always dear to my heart. Some young monk told him: “ I incessantly keep remembering God”. Venerable Sisoy answered him: “This is not great; the great thing will be when you consider yourself worse than any small creature”. A high thing, - continues the saint, - to keep remembering God incessantly! But this height is very dangerous, when the ladder to it is not placed on a firm stone of humility”*¹²⁵.

Saint fathers used to say that the height of the righteousness is evaluated by the depth of humility. And the true *“humility does not see itself humble”*.

-What is the state of the soul of a man, who died the death of a martyr, but over whom the funeral service was not performed?

-What is funeral service? This is the service when certain Church prayers for the departed are performed by clergymen and his relatives. The funeral service as well as other funeral services and prayers are the means of aid to the soul of the dead, but not a church procedure without which the soul will perish. Where do these superstitions arrive from? How many people perished during the calamities, internecine wars, military actions, how many died in deserts, forests, mountains, saint hermits, over whom no one performed church service! And they may be higher us, at least many warriors, who gave their lives for **their friends**. Shouldn't we pay so much attention to the funeral service? This service, I repeat – is a pray, but not a magic key to the Kingdom of God. Clergymen are not shamans, who, as soon as they read a prayer – the dead is saved, if they didn't read it – he goes to the hell. You mustn't think of a funeral service as of an

¹²⁵ Creations of St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov). SPb. 1905. V. IV, p. 497.

unconditional requirement for the salvation of the departed. But, of course, if there is an opportunity, you must perform this funeral service. By all means.

-My uncle was a remarkable man: he was a doctor, who helped many and many. A long, hard illness - during 10 years, - preceded his death. He died after hard sufferings. Could these good deeds and sufferings be credited to his belief? He baptized during his illness and he didn't live a Church life.

- A man is credited not with labour, not sufferings, not illnesses, but with the degree of his awareness of his spiritual poverty, and from here the power of *appealing* to Saviour. I happened to quote saint Isaac of Syria, who pronounced the following remarkable words: *“The rewards occur due to not virtues or labour for the sake of it, but to the humility, which is born from them. But if it is lost, the former will be in vain”*¹²⁶. You see everything – both the virtues and labour, of course, illnesses – all loses its significance, if a man does not acquire humility.

The example of that is the two criminals, crucified together with Christ. Both suffered equally and these sufferings were horrible. Cross sufferings are awful unbearable torments. And look what different ways into the eternity were in store for one and another. You remember, the right one was told: **“Today you will be with me in paradise”** (Luke, 23, 43). And the left one perished. So the point is not in the sufferings, but to what measure the person cognizes his sinfulness, humbles and repents.

We may hope, that God let your uncle humble through the sufferings, let him understand that all good deeds are nothing taken separately. Then this state, undoubtedly, became the earnest of his salvation.

-Why did the perfect angel – the son of the dawn (Denniza), departed from the Creator?

-The Holy scripture speaks about the fall of the son of the dawn as about the fact only. There is no any detailed explanation of the “mechanism” of the origin of the

¹²⁶ St.Isaac of Syris. Words Podvizhnicheskije. M., 1858. Word 34. P.217.

evil intention in his conscience, if it could be expressed like that. It is asserted only that the reason behind his fall was pride. Seeing his perfection, the son of the dawn-demon **said in his heart: I will ascend to heaven, I will raise my throne above the stars of God, I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain, I will ascend above the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High** (Isaiah, 14, 11-15).

In this question we confront, in fact, the mystery of freedom. The freedom of a man implies, that reasonable creature may commit this or that act of a will, proceeding only from himself, without any pressure from anything created by God. You can't put a question "why?" to the freely committed act. As there is a "why", it means consequently, that this act was committed due to a certain reason, but not freely. The son of the dawn performed this act of departing from God, acting from himself only, from his self "I", not due to anything else. Here is the essence of the sin.

You'd better bear in mind, that God's revelation is given to a man only due to the single reason – to show him the way and means of salvation, but not to disclose the mysteries of the Heaven to our curious intellect. The aim of the revelation is purely spiritual-moral, that is why it opens to us only these truth facts, which the person must know *here*, for the worthy entering *that* world, where we'll see everything **face to face** (1 Corinthians, 13, 12).

That is why we **see but a poor reflection** now, guessing (1 Corinthians, 13, 12). It is better not to guess about what has happened with the son of the dawn and why he turned from the angel of a day-break into the devil. One thing is clear, that pride is mortal, and this is important for a man to know. And in order to cognize the spiritual way of the son of the dawn we must cover the way ourselves, God save us from that.

-What is the origin of the evil? Why was it admitted by God?

- According to saint Fathers, evil does not exist by itself, has no separate nature, it is an illness on a healthy body. And as there is no illness without an ill person, so

in the same way there is no evil without God's created beautiful (**it was very good** – Genesis, 1; 31) nature of a man and angels. Saint Fathers say, that evil is substanceless, it is not created by God, is not something existing by itself, it is simply erroneous, unnatural act of a free will of reasonable creatures. Saint Diadokh wrote this: “ *The evil does nor exist except as at the moment of its being committed*”. That is why we may say, that there is no evil, but there are evil people. The highest value of the human personality is in the fact that it is God like. God likeness is impossible without freedom. And as a man is not a programmed biorobot, but a clever and a free creature, he may dispose of his freedom against God and his good.

Here is how hegumenos Nikon Vorobiev ponders over the issue in one of his letters.

The evil was not created by God. The evil has no substance. It is the distortion of the world (and relative to a man and angels – moral) order of a man's free will and angels. If there had been no freedom, there would have been no opportunity to pervert the moral order, the wisest and perfect. Angels and men, as if automatic machines would have subjugated to the laws of physical and moral world, and there would not have been any evil. But without freedom of will there would not have been an image and likeness of God in men and angels. The perfect creature is unthinkable without a freedom of will (By the way, all the atheist teachings are forced to deny the freedom of will...)

The clever creatures, having cognized themselves, as independent personalities, “I”, as new independent sources of light (ivanovsky worm)... did not know evil in there experience and could not assess the good to the full, which they used. The intention to become like Gods, knowing good and evil, has resulted in the fall of both angels and men. From here the history of mankind starts...

A proud man cannot save himself. With the pride present in him, he may again depart from God in the paradise by his final fall, like demons. That is why during the whole of his earthy life God gave the person to understand, that without God he is nothing he is a slave of his foibles and a slave of a demon. That

*is why before the death of a man God does not allow to pull the weeds, in order not to do harm to the wheat (Matthew, 13, 29-30). This means that a man without shortcomings, with only positive qualities, is sure to become proud. If we find the possibility to be proud with our minor virtues, what would happen if the entire glory of deified soul opens here? Even the apostle Paul needed this negative aid: **there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me** (2 Corinthians 12, 7). To say nothing about us.*

Quite obvious is becoming God's providence about a man's salvation and the effort of the devil to ruin even those, who direct all their efforts to search the only thing – the Kingdom of God... The man is in constant fight with the evil, with a devil, with its temptations, falling and raising. In this fight he cognizes his weakness, enemy's slyness, God's help and God's love for himself. He cognizes the cost of the good and evil and he chooses the good with his full consciousness, becomes steadfast in the preference of good and its source – God and rejects devil..."

God as we see wants that we should not be slaves, but free sons, gods. The Holy scripture says: “ **You are gods, you are all sons of the Most High**” (Psalms, 81/82, 6). To achieve this grandeur, the man must cross the way of temptations and fight with the evil in himself in order to show his determination, his choice. Saint fathers say: “*He, who is not tempted, he is not skillful*”. And more: “*If there had been no demons, there would have been no saints*”. Through the cognition of the evil a man makes sure by way of experience, that he is the creation, but not an original substance, that the good and the truth is God, but not himself and that God is always ready to deliver him from any evil. All this opens to a man the possibility of non-fallen state in eternity.

*Translated from Russian by
Nadezda Soukhanova*

Translator's remarks:

1. Quotations from the BIBLE are given from *The Holy Bible New International Version. 1981. The Gideons International in the British Isles, LUTTERWORTH, ENGLAND.*
2. Numeration of psalms in the Russian version and English is different: 50(51), 81(82) and etc.
3. Quotations, names and titles of the writings are given in the back translation: from Russian into English.