

GEHENNA

THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
DOCTRINE ABOUT JUDGMENT AND
HELL, FROM THE TRADITION AND
HOLY FATHERS
AND
A HISTORICAL SURVEY AT ICONS OF
THE LAST JUDGMENT.
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PROLOGUE

by Saint Anthony the Great

God is good, without passions and unchangeable. One who understands that it is sound and true to affirm that God does not change might very well ask: how, then, is it possible to speak of God as rejoicing over those who are good, becoming merciful to those who know Him and, on the other hand, shunning the wicked and being angry with sinners. We must reply to this, that God neither rejoices nor grows angry, because to rejoice and to be angered are passions. Nor is God won over by gifts from those who know Him, for that would mean that He is moved by pleasure. It is not possible for the Godhead to have the sensation of pleasure or displeasure from the condition of humans, God is good, and He bestows only blessings, and never causes harm, but remains always the same. If we humans, however, remain good by means of resembling Him, we are united to Him, but if we become evil by losing our resemblance to God, we are separated from Him. By living in a holy manner, we unite ourselves to God; by becoming evil, however, we become at enmity with Him. It is not that He arbitrarily becomes

angry with us, but that our sins prevent God from shining within us, and expose us to the demons who make us suffer. If through prayer and acts of compassionate love, we gain freedom from our sins, this does not mean that we have won God over and made Him change, but rather that by means of our actions and turning to God, we have been healed of our wickedness, and returned to the enjoyment of God's goodness. To say that God turns away from the sinful is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind (*St Anthony the Great, Cap. 150*).

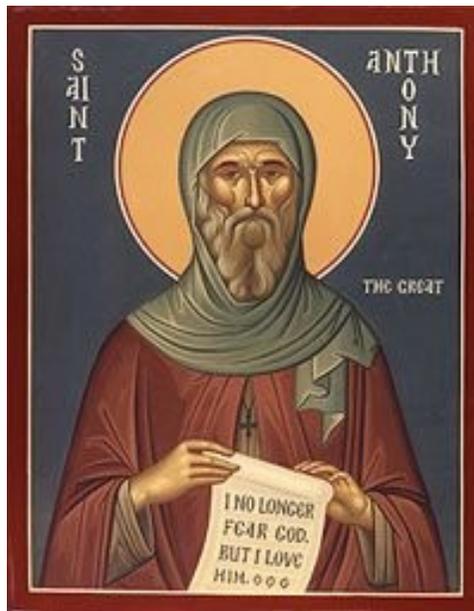


Plate 1: SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT

I INTENT Roots of the Problem

The intent of this volume is to examine the actual Orthodox Christian doctrine about the nature of hell, and touch upon the nature of that heavenly kingdom which is spoken of as the reward of the faithful. The intention is to free Orthodox people from those ideas of hell which make God Himself immoral, which attribute to Him the serious sins of savage cruelty, vengefulness and malice. The responsibility for our tragedy and the recompense for our free choice to follow Christ, ignore Him or renounce Him, lies with us, not with God. God never punishes us either in this life or the one to come. The suffering which awaits the wicked is their own creation, not God's, their own responsibility, not God's. God is not a half-evil, half-good monstrosity such as many would present Him to be. Moreover, the Orthodox faith does not depend on ignorance for its survival as does the "generic Christianity" into which lethargy has led so many of our people.

The doctrine of hell is one of the most difficult concepts in Christianity. It is made more difficult by two factors. The first of these problems is that there is

no such concept in Hebrew scripture, the Christian "Old Testament."¹⁴ The second problem is the fact that in many instances, the Orthodox Christian understanding of hell has been submerged by an idolatrous and pagan "folk religion" image of it.

SHEOL AND HADES

Among the problems that cloud any discussions of hell and heaven is the confusion between hell and hades, and heaven and paradise. Hell (Gehenna) and hades are not synonyms. They are not the same thing. Paradise and the Heavenly Kingdom are also not the same thing or "place." In the course of this text, we will discuss the differences.

Neither the "heavenly kingdom," or any post-life return to paradise, nor any concept of a literal place of retribution and eternal torment in hell, are found in Hebrew scripture or tradition. To the degree that concepts were introduced among the post-exile Pharisees, they were almost certainly borrowed from forms of Zarathustrianism and late Chaldean systems during the Babylonian exile. There are many references in Christian scripture, the New Testament, to Gehenna – usually translated as "hell" sometimes, erroneously, as "hades." The Sadducees, who were more defensive of the pre-Exile tradition, rejected such graphic notions of physical locations of hell or, for that matter, of the heavenly kingdom. Possibly, they would have been

more comfortable with the Orthodox Christian concept, which avoids the idolatry of considering heaven and hell to be different “places,” but rather identify both with the presence of God. In the Hebrew Scripture, we find mention of “Sheol” many times. The word comes from the pre-Chaldean Babylonian word *shublu* or *shilu*. The word indicates a cave or subterranean chamber, and often represents the grave. Certainly it could be used to describe the cave at Mamre in which Sarah and Abraham are buried.

In Hebrew Scripture and tradition Sheol is the final destination of both the wicked and the righteous, without distinction. The translation of Sheol as “hell” is *always* erroneous. It never, ever indicates anything like the later concept, particularly the Western and folk religion notions of “hell.” Jacob, believing his son Joseph to be dead, anticipates encountering him in Sheol upon his own demise (Gn.37:36), and everywhere in the Hebrew Scripture (the “Old Testament”) the word indicates only this eternal abode of the shades or souls of the departed. There is no torture, no torment, no retribution. There is no distinction between the pious and the unbeliever, the moral and the wicked. It is clearly a place ruled by God — it would have seemed to the Hebrews an idolatry to think otherwise. Rewards to the righteous are promised in this life. We find only vague hints of a personal resurrection (though a “resurrection” of Israel itself is foretold), and hints that are even more vague of some

afterlife rewards.

When the Jewish translators of the Hebrew Scripture and writings rendered them in Greek, they choose the word "hades" as the best rendition of Sheol. Hades has no relation to the later concept of hell or Gehenna. Hades, like Sheol, involved no torment, no punishment, no retribution. All were there equally, both the good and the bad. There was no difference between them. It is unfortunate that in Romania a decision was taken to render the concept of Gehenna as "hades." This can only confuse Orthodox Christian theology. In Orthodox Christian thought hades is only a temporary condition of souls awaiting the resurrection. The Old Testament faithful were in "hades" (Sheol) until Christ appeared to them on Holy Saturday. There was no "descent into hell" but a "descent" into hades (Sheol). The "brazen gates" of hades is a metaphor for death. If Scripture tells us that the gates of hades cannot prevail against the Church (Mt.16:18),² then what is being said is that "the power of death" cannot prevail.



GEHENNA

Consider Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who refused to worship the idol in Babylon (Daniel 3). They were thrown by King Nebuchadnezzar into the "fiery furnace" which was heated "seven times more". The signifi

cance of "seven" is a number symbolic of the "furnace" of Heaven, the place where God dwells. The three Jews were unharmed by the fire where one "like the Son of God" was among them. However, the same flames of fire killed the king's "most mighty" soldiers. This is an analogy to how the presence of God is light and warmth to those who love Him, and pain and destruction to those who oppose him, yet it is the same "fire." (Peter Chopelas)³

The term "Gehenna" is a metaphorical use of the name of a valley just outside the walls of Jerusalem. In Hebrew, the valley is called *ben-hinnom*, the "valley of the sons of Hinnom." The valley has an ignoble history. In it, human sacrifices had been offered to Moloch and other idols, and these were generally the sacrifice of infants and children who were often burned to death in fires or hot coals kindled before the idols (Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35). In times of war and invasions, when there were masses of dead corpses to dispose of, the bodies were burned in this valley and the first heavy rains would wash the remains into the dead sea, the "lake of fire." In later times, rubbish was burned in the valley, and the unclean, that is, those with communicable illnesses such as leprosy, were forbidden to cross the valley and enter the city of Jerusalem. Thus, not only was the Valley of Gehenna associated with fires that received idolatrous human sacrifices and

burned the bodies of the dead (Jeremiah 19:8), but it was also a gulf or chasm that separated the “unclean” from those who were permitted to enter the holy city.

Here, another problem arises. Gehenna, and the “lake of fire,”⁴ so prominent in common descriptions of hell are actual geographical sites in Judea, and references to them in Scripture with relation to any after death or eternal experience are clearly metaphorical, not literal. The neo-Christian teaching about Gehenna or hell as a place created by God for the physical torture of humans administered by demons, as well as the popular folk religion images, are among the causes of the rejection of Christianity – one of the powerful dynamics in turning people away from God, and the rejection of Christ. It is, therefore, urgent that we present the original Christian understanding of “Gehenna” (hell), concepts that would be comprehensible to “Old Testament” Hebrews as well as being compatible with the context in which Christ spoke.

The neo-Christian and folk culture versions of hell clearly present God as being savage, vindictive, unjust even evil in His dealings with humanity. This corrupted vision of the nature of hell, Gehenna, has become an ideology in vast areas of Christianity, including among many in the Orthodox Church. According to this ideology, God has created a torture chamber beneath the surface of the earth, more terrible and filled with more horror than even the most depraved human minds could conceive. He created this

torture chamber knowing full well that the vast majority of all people who ever lived would be consigned to it for eternity — including innocent children and people who had no way of ever knowing the Gospel.

The fact that such a teaching, so far from frightening people into repentance, has driven many from Christianity, is nothing new. John Adams, the second American president, expressed precisely this sentiment in his correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, the third American president.

Even before the tragedy of cultural infiltration began infecting Orthodox Christian doctrine, many corruptions antithetical to Patristic Orthodoxy had clouded the radiant truths of the faith. The plague of scholasticism which swept into Russia during the “300 year Latin captivity of Russian theology⁵” was responsible for much of it. The infiltration of Greece by Augustinianism added much to the catastrophe, but one cannot simply blame “Western influence” for the corruption. The Zarathustrian (Zoroastrian) concepts of *Drûgâskan* took root in Eastern Christian thought (as well as among some Jews) directly from Chaldea and Persia. In more recent times, semi-convert priests have brought many sectarian ideas into the Church with themselves. However, the basis of the problem has really been the fact that “popular religion,” that blend of peasant superstitions, Hellenistic mythologies and ideas developed during the Babylonian captivity, has been mixed into the Christian revelation. Added to

this, the Platonistic and Gnostic concept of the relationship between body and soul has infiltrated Christian teaching in general, and Orthodox Christian "popular belief" so deeply that even many teachers do not know that it is an error.

It is astonishing how many Orthodox Christians are unaware of the immense difference between the Western scholastic doctrine of *atonement* and redemption by *satisfaction of God's justice*, and the Orthodox Christian revelation of redemption by *ransom and theosis*. Indeed, if one began to poll Orthodox teachers and even priests, it would likely be astonishing how many of them would not have heard of the "ransom doctrine" of redemption, but believe that the Latin-Calvinist doctrine of atonement is valid and even Orthodox.

Just as astounding is the fact that so many Orthodox people and clergy are unaware of the teaching of the holy fathers on the nature of heaven and hell, and of the relationship between soul and body, and the nature of eschatological judgment.

We will approach the matter of *ransom and theosis* vs. *vicarial sacrifice atonement and satisfaction* and the nature of eschatological judgment later but, for now, we wish to clarify the Orthodox Christian understanding of the nature of heaven and hell, and the matter of "judgment."



Plate 4: *Valley of the sons of Hinnom – Gebenna*



Plate 3: *Early 20th century photo of Valley of Gehenna*

II

ROOTS OF IDOLATRY

Literalism, Fantasy and Fundamentalism⁶

The idea that paradise and hell are two different places is an idolatrous concept.⁷ Rather they signify two different conditions [ways or states of being], which originate from the same uncreated source, and are perceived by man as two, differing experiences. More precisely, they are the same experience, except that they are perceived differently by man, depending on his internal state. This experience is the sight of Christ in the uncreated light of His divinity, of His "glory". (V. Rev. George Metallinos)⁸

ROOTS OF THE CORRUPTION

Since Western Christian thought was tied directly to the pagan philosophers Plato and Aristotle, their concepts of God and of spiritual matters in general were also bound by these philosophical sources. While the pagan Greeks were outstanding at philosophy,

Rome had a special genius for law and legalism. Drawing from these sources, Western religious development became expressed in the Gnosticism of Plato, the rationalism of Aristotle and the dialectic of the law courts. The Holy Scripture, the understanding of God Himself and every aspect of the spiritual life, became philosophised on these bases. The Latins added their love for legal forms to this philosophy, and so developed the legalistic, rationalistic philosophy which almost completely replaced living theology in Western Europe. While similar tensions developed in the East, patristic theology was able to resist it. Aside from some monastic hyperbole, the more pagan concepts of heaven and hell did not have much impact outside folk religion until the fall of the Byzantine Empire and the later Latinization of Russian theology.

Along with other elements of this scholastic philosophy, Latins and later, Protestants, developed their concept of hell (as well as of heaven) from the presuppositions of civil law, Aristotelian rationalism, and to some degree, the elements of Orphic Gnosticism found in Plato, with its radical dichotomy between body and soul, and *noetos kosmos*. There were also aspects of superstition and the terrors of the pagan world involved – what we have referred to as “folk religion.” They applied the metaphors and similitudes of Greek sagas to these concepts, although many of the ideas themselves might have been found in the Vedic writings of India, Zoroastrianism or the idolatry of

Babylon and Egypt. None of these sources were strangers to the Hellenistic world or to Rome. The most likely source of the idea of a literal place called hell, with its horrors and torture chambers, is Zarathustra (Zoroaster). The depictions of hell that appear in Western art and in corrupted paintings in the Orthodox Christian world are found nowhere in Hebrew Scripture or tradition, nor in early Christian iconography or tradition. Rather, they match the descriptions presented by Zarathustra and in some Hindi and Buddhist art.

THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

The corruption of Christianity into a system of morality and ideology, reconstructing the Church as essentially a juridical organisation intended to judge the world and send some to heaven and some to hell, is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Teaching and condemning are not the same thing. The Church is not a court of law, but a spiritual hospital; the clergy are not intended to be prosecuting attorneys but spiritual doctors. The purpose of the Church on earth is to prepare people for their ultimate encounter with the love and uncreated glory of Christ. This very encounter in and of itself constitutes the "final judgment."

“...The uncreated glory that belongs to Christ by nature from His Father is Paradise to those

whose egocentric and selfish love has been cured and transformed into unselfish love. The same glory, however, is eternal, uncreated fire and perdition for those who elected to remain unhealed in their selfishness.”⁹

This is clear not only in the Scripture and the fathers but in canonical Orthodox icons of the Judgment as well (which we will examine further on in this book). In proper icons, the same golden light of glory pouring forth from Christ that envelopes His friends becomes red as it flows downward so that this same divine love can embrace the “outcasts” who look upon it as a burning force. This is the glory and love of Christ that cleanses the sins of all but glorifies some and damns others. All shall be led by the Holy Spirit “unto all truth,” i.e., they shall all see Christ with His friends in glory, but not all will be glorified. “Those whom He hath justified, the same hath He glorified,” as St. Paul says. The parable of Lazarus the poor man in the bosom of Abraham and the rich man in a place of suffering is clear. The rich man sees but cannot partake (Lk. 16: 19-31). A little further along, we will discover that it is *what he sees* that constitutes the fire that burns him. In the words of Fr John Romanides:

“The Church sends no one to Paradise or to Perdition; rather, she prepares the faithful for the vision of Christ in glory that all men will

receive. God loves the damned the same as the saints. He desires the cure of all, but not all accept the therapy that He offers. This means that forgiveness of sins [alone] is not sufficient preparation for one to see Christ in glory and to be glorified.¹⁰“

It is one of the tragedies for the Orthodox Christian worldview that the effects of social concepts have caused so many of our people, even among the less educated clergy, to accept a kind of “generic Christian” understanding of religious and spiritual matters. The dark, confused understanding of the nature of God common to both Latin and Protestant theology, has been accepted as dogma by more and more Orthodox teachers and faithful. It is this very view of God, however, which bears direct responsibility for the rise of modern atheism. While sectarians of every stripe seek to find a scapegoat in modern science, they themselves, with their perverted teachings about God, about the nature of redemption and the nature of hell, not to mention the dreary saccharine idea of a heaven of eternal, mindless “bliss,” where everyone gets a set of wings, a harp and a floating ring around the head,¹¹ have made atheism inevitable. Culturally, many modern societies have dealt with the concepts of heaven and hell by transferring them into the realm of cartoon and humour. Evangelical Protestants have attempted to deaden the horror of the implications of

their doctrines of Atonement and Hell with tawdry rock concert and egoistic entertainment that cannot possibly pass for worship. It is a form of escapism from the nightmare they have created for themselves.

The tragedy for Orthodoxy is that, while it possesses the bright, clear revelation of the Holy Spirit, given to us through the holy fathers and New Testament prophets, our people have practically abandoned this spring of pure water to drink from the polluted sloughs of medieval superstitions and Latin/Protestant scholasticism.¹² While it is true that scholasticism is the main culprit for the latter illness, the attachment to medieval and Gnostic superstitions must be laid more directly at the feet of Orthodox teachers who will not study the holy fathers, but take their ideas from various catechisms and antiquated text books, from philosophers such as Augustine of Hippo, and from supposed lives of saints by unknown authors, of more than dubious content. So often, the teachings of the fathers will be overridden by a supposed "dream" of an unknown "pious older woman," in an unknown location, at an unknown time of some vague tale about "a certain monk...." When we encounter a consensus of the holy fathers and the actual doctrine of the Orthodox Christian Church, we are sometimes taken by surprise, usually delighted. We have, however, come to realise that we can no longer use fear with which to manipulate people into an artificial "faith." Faith based on fear can never be sincere. Rather, we need to

cultivate a living, vital faith based in the co-suffering love of God which is alien to those who cultivate fear. Even the matter of our individual responsibility for the direction of our lives is twisted in such a manner that God becomes the guilty one for our suffering both in this life and the next. God becomes, for these scholastic teachers, a dreadful oppressor, unworthy of our love but demanding our fear; a tyrant who must be feared even while we offer Hindu-like incantations about love in the hopes of appeasing his ferocity, much like ancient pagans casting a maiden down a volcano in order to appease an angry fire god, or the sacrifice of young men in order to placate a rain god. Such people will blame God for hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural disasters because, they assert, our sins have angered Him. Such a god cannot actually be adored, cannot be loved, and the worship offered to him cannot be pure or sincere. Psychologically, such worship might well be related to the excess adulation in which many abused children, especially sexually abused girls, express toward their abusive father. Such worship is tainted by the concept that we are somehow appeasing his passions with our rituals and slogans of worship and such oft repeated mantras as "praise the Lord," etc. Moreover, often enough, such worship is self-serving, not sincere, having become little more than a "hell avoidance" technique.

To paraphrase Dr Alexandre Kalomiros, let us emphasize one extremely important point here. We

must free ourselves from the neo-pagan Western ideas of hell. "Hell" [Gehenna] is not an instrument of punishment created by God. That fire which is spoken of at the Last Judgment represents the love of God, and we are taught by the holy fathers that it is the radiance of God's love which both warms and radiates and gives joy to the faithful, and burns and torments the wicked. Those persons who in this life preferred "darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil," will, in the next life, after the resurrection, find no such darkness, and will not be able to hide from that light which they hated in this life. There, bathed in the everlasting light of God's love, which they rejected but cannot now escape, their conscience, which is like a never-dying worm, will torment them, and the passions they loved and heaped upon themselves in this life will be as serpents round about them. In other words, they will abide forever in the state they chose for themselves while still in this life. As Kalomiros observes:

This is a theme which... "needs to be preached with great insistence [for] not only the West but we Orthodox have departed [from it] in great numbers, causing men to fall to atheism because they are revolted against a falsified angry God full of vengeance toward His creatures.... We must urgently understand that God is responsible only for everlasting life and bliss, and that hell (Gehenna) is nothing else but the

rejection of this everlasting life and bliss, the everlasting revolt against the everlasting love of God. We must urgently remember and preach that it is not a creation of God but a creation [i.e., product] of our revolted liberty, that God did not create any punishing instrument that is called hell, that God never takes vengeance on His revolted creatures, that His justice has nothing to do with the legalistic 'justice' of human society which punishes the wicked in order to defend itself....That our everlasting spiritual death is not inflicted on us by God, but is a spiritual suicide, everlasting because our decision to be friends or enemies of God is a completely free and everlasting decision of the free spiritual beings created by God, a decision which is respected by God eternally and absolutely."¹³

And, indeed, our Saviour Himself says: "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn.12:46-48).

III

Gehenna

The place, the fire and the worm

Gehenna is a metaphor, and cannot be assumed to be a description of a concrete eschatological reality. To suggest that Gehenna (hell) and Paradise (heaven) are two different places is an idolatry.

In some systems of thought, souls that depart the body in a state of sin or wickedness are taken by demons directly to Gehenna (hell). The Orthodox Church, on the other hand, teaches us that Gehenna (hell) does not even exist at this time, and will not exist until the second coming of Christ. Moreover the holy fathers have, from the very beginning, from the time of St Irenaeus of Lyons and St. Justin the Philosopher and before, taught that the soul cannot possibly experience Gehenna (hell) without the body, for the soul alone is not the complete person. Moreover, the popular descriptions of hell, if they are more than allegory or metaphor, are also idolatrous and in some cases more likely to have been inspired by demons than by any doctrines of authentic Christianity. In many such depictions the demons are shown being rewarded by

God for their wickedness. They are blessed to spend all eternity doing what they enjoy most — tormenting humans. Many Orthodox young people derisively refer to these pictures as “Halloween icons.” Indeed, they are based on the same premise that the much condemned Protestant “hell houses” are.

Many Orthodox Christians will be surprised, mostly delighted (although some will be angry), at learning the actual Orthodox Christian understanding of hell and the nature of hell, but each will receive it according to the “fulness of their own hearts.” Most will be so used to the pagan mythologies that dominate in peasant or “popular” religion that they will never even have heard the clear theological and doctrinal statements of the holy fathers on this subject. The paterikons have been of little help in this matter either. All “ascetic literature” overstates almost all matters because they are aimed at monastics in the throes of great moral struggles. Moreover, whether one wishes to acknowledge it or not, monasticism has always been a safety valve for the Gnostic impulses which are constant in “spirituality.” Monasticism provides such a safety valve so that those deeply inclined to such Gnostic ideas as “the body is the enemy of the soul,” etc. can struggle for their salvation without corrupting the theology of the Church, which teaches otherwise. Since it is helpful for hermits and desert monks to contemplate hell in the most graphic and terrifying of images, one finds such images in some of the ascetic

literature (which is often influenced by Manichean concepts). Some of the fantastic images and descriptions of Gehenna (hell) arise from the imagination of somewhat disoriented individuals. Extreme asceticism, particularly long periods of sleeplessness and hunger, produce hallucinations which are often taken as "revelations," and many of the graphic images of the physical torments of hell arise from these. Sometimes, as in the case of Saint Anthony the Great, his struggle taking "beatings from demons" etc. are misinterpreted as being physical rather than spiritual, although his own writings about the demons tells us otherwise.

THE "LOCATION" OF GEHENNA (HELL); IS ANYONE THERE YET?

Such an erroneous source of notions about heaven and hell (Gehenna) is found in the unfortunate homily of Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov, titled *A Word About Death*. In his clear and patristic critique of Ignaty Brianchaninov's mischievous work, *A Word About Death*, V. Rev. Paul Matveesky, an official reviewer for the Holy Synod, observes:

The location of hades [*sic-he is referring to hell, not hades*] is a related type question. St John Chrysostom said to his listeners, "Let us not seek where it is located, but the means of avoiding it" (*Homily 31 on Romans*). But the

author [Bishop Ignaty] seeks and finds it in the interior of the earth. "Hades¹⁴ is situated," he says, "in the interior of the earth" (p.36), and he justifies this by quotations from many places in both testaments — quotations which, one must affirm, are very questionable. "And so," concludes the compiler, "the teaching that hades [sic—Bishop Ignaty means Gehenna] is located inside the earth is a teaching of the Orthodox Church" (p.40). But where is this a "teaching of the Church? In what symbolic book, in what catechism is such a teaching set forth?"¹⁵

A far more dependable source is the great Pillar of Orthodoxy, Saint Mark of Ephesus. Despite such delusions and mythologies as the "aerial toll house" myth and the Gnostic novel called *The Tale of Elder Basil the New*, demons cannot "drag a soul down to hell." How could they when hell does not even exist at present? Hear the words of our holy and God-bearing father, St Mark of Ephesus as he testifies to the clear and unequivocal teaching of Orthodox Christianity. In his refutations of the Latins, Saint Mark says:

But if, as was said, no one has entered either the Kingdom or Gehenna, how is it that we hear concerning the rich man and Lazarus that the former was in fire and torment and spoke

with Abraham? The Lord said everything about Lazarus in the manner of a parable, even as He spoke of the ten virgins and in the rest of the parables. The parable of Lazarus has not come to pass in actuality, because the sinners in Gehenna shall not see the righteous who are with Abraham in the Kingdom, nor will any of them know his neighbour, being in that darkness.

Nay, but then what need is there of the judgment, or even of the resurrection of the bodies of these [souls], and of the Judge's coming [again] to earth and of that fearsome, universal theatre, if each man has received his due before that day?....

Do you see that before [the time of] that judgment seat and before [the time when] we shall all appear gathered together, for while we are bereft of our bodies, no one shall receive according to that which he has done through his body?¹⁶

WHAT IS THE "FIRE" OF GEHENNA AND WHAT IS IT THAT "BURNS" THE WICKED?

Let us hear the answer to this from the holy and God-bearing fathers, rather than from the heterodox, folk religion and the speculations of others. Since

Heaven and Gehenna are the same “place,” and since God did not create a raging torture chamber in which to wreak vengeance on those who were less than perfect or had never heard of Christ Jesus, what does this Gehenna, the river of fire and the lake of fire consist in?

Our holy father Basil the Great says:



I believe that the fire prepared in punishment of the devil and his angels is divided by the voice of the Lord. Thus, since there are two capacities in fire, one of burning and the other of illuminating, the fierce and scourging property of the fire may await those who deserve to burn, while its illuminating and radiant warmth may be reserved for the enjoyment of those who are rejoicing.¹⁷

St Ephraim the Syrian says of the judgment and Gehenna (hell)¹⁸:

...the Gehenna [hell] of the wicked consists in what they see, and it is their very separation that burns them, and their mind acts as the flame.

Our holy and God-bearing father Abba Isaak of Nineveh says also:

I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love. Nay, what is so bitter and vehement as the torment of love? I mean those who have become conscious that they have sinned against love suffer greater torment thereby than by any fearsome punishment which can be conceived. For the sorrow caused in the heart by sin against love is more piercing than any torment. It would be improper for a man to think that sinners in Gehenna are deprived of the love of God. Love is the offspring of knowledge of the truth which, as is commonly confessed, is given to all. The power of love works in two ways: it torments sinners, even as happens here when a friend suffers from a friend; but it becomes a source of joy for those who have observed its duties. According to my understanding this is the torment of Gehenna: bitter regret. But love inebriates the souls of the sons of heaven by its delectability.¹⁹

Thus Gehenna ("hell") is clearly understood, when we follow the words of the holy fathers, not at all as a "place," but rather a state of being separated from Christ our God. Moreover, this condition of separation results, not from God's desire or need to punish us, but rather from our own free choices which God simply respects for all eternity. We choose to be separated

from the source of love and light, and so we are; but we must then spend all eternity having our choice respected, because God loves us and respect is a mark of love. The horrible darkness and alienation that is experienced by those who are separated from God was chosen for themselves. This is hell: everlasting exposure to the presence of the love and glory that was rejected, separation from the beloved, everlasting separation from love, from light and from life itself: it is a living death, where we find out the true nature of that worldly happiness we sought for in our earthly life, and discover that it was really bondage to the passions that we were seeking, and now we have it, for all eternity, devouring us like a worm that never ceases to gnaw and never manages to devour. How was this "prepared for Satan and his angels" (Mt.25:41)? The full and everlasting presence of Christ in His love and glory was always the intention of God. That it could be hell as well as heaven came to pass when Satan rebelled and began to consider God to be his enemy. Hell was prepared for Satan and his angels precisely by Satan; not that he could create anything except his own disposition.

Gehenna (hell) is the condition of the mind tormented by the conscience, even as cruel memories and regrets torment us already in this life. The torment of Gehenna is much greater because one must exist forever beholding the love of Christ and the glory that He shares with his saints, while being forever cut off

from it. Will the condition of those who lived with a good conscience but to whom Christ had never been revealed be the fulness of Gehenna, or will the fact that they had never known and rejected that love and light ameliorate their condition? We have not been informed about this and have no right to speculate about it. This matter is resolved only in the love and economy of God.

**IS ANYONE IN HELL (OR HEAVEN) AS A
SOUL ALONE
AND BEFORE THE RESURRECTION?**

Earlier, we cited words of Saint Mark of Ephesus who says:

But if, as was said, no one has entered either the Kingdom or Gehenna, how is it that we hear concerning the rich man and Lazarus that the former was in fire and torment and spoke with Abraham? The Lord said everything about Lazarus in the manner of a parable, even as He spoke of the ten virgins and in the rest of the parables. The parable of Lazarus has not come to pass in actuality, because the sinners in Gehenna shall not see the righteous who are with Abraham in the Kingdom, nor will any of them know his neighbour, being in that darkness.

*Accepting this opinion our Church thus is minded and preaches, and She is most ready and well prepared to defend it.*²⁰ Firstly, the Lord in the Gospel according to Matthew describes beforehand the judgment to come, saying, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit..." – it is evident that they have not yet inherited – "the kingdom prepared for you;" "prepared" He says, not "already given." But to sinners He says, "Depart ye cursed" – evidently they have not yet departed – into everlasting fire "prepared" not for you but "for the devil and his angels." Here again He says "prepared," since [that fire] has not yet received the condemned demons. And how could this be, when the demons even till now and until that very day roam about everywhere in the air and work their deeds in those who obey them? This very thing they cry out to the Lord in another place, as it is recorded in the same Gospel, "Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?" So it is clear that they do not endure torment yet, since the time has not yet come. If, therefore, the wicked demons, the first to work evil, for whom hell has especially been prepared and stored up, if they have not yet paid the debt of their fitting condemnation and freely wander about wherever they wish, what reasoning could persuade us that souls which

amidst sins have departed from hence are straightaway given over to fire and to those torments which are prepared for others [i.e., the demons]?

Nay, but then what need is there of the judgment, or even of the resurrection of the bodies of these [souls], and of the Judge's coming [again] to earth and of that fearsome, universal theatre, if each man has received his due before that day? And how is it that the Lord in the parable of the virgins says that the virgin souls who went forth to meet the Bridegroom "slumbered and slept while the Bridegroom tarried," which means that they died, but that they did not enter the bridal chamber until the Bridegroom came from Heaven, awakening all the virgins as it were from sleep, and the one group he led within along with Himself, while the others He shut out, which thing clearly shall come to pass only on that day? For He says, "Then shall the Kingdom of the heavens be likened to ten virgins." And how is it that having travelled into a far country and delivered unto His servants His goods, He summons all together upon His return and requires of each one his work, if even before the Master's return each of the servants has laid bare his work and received his recompense?

But also the divine Apostle in his second

epistle to the Corinthians says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done [lit. through] his body, according to that which he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2Cor. 5:10).

Do you see that before [the time of] that judgment seat and before [the time when] we shall all appear gathered together, for while we are bereft of our bodies, no one shall receive according to that which he has done through his body? But also in his second epistle to Timothy he says that on the one hand the time of his departure is "at hand," but the crown of righteousness is "laid up," and therefore is not "at hand," that "which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2Tm.4:6-8)....

This we must think concerning all the faithful and righteous who lived until the Master's coming. For just as those who have gone before have not been made perfect without the apostles, so neither are the apostles without the martyrs, nor the martyrs without those who after them have entered and shall enter into the good vineyard of the Church. This is indeed taught most lucidly by the parable where at different times there were

different callings for workmen into the vineyard, but the recompense was given to all at the same time, and those who came first received nothing more. The great Evangelist, John the Theologian says the same in Revelations: "And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held, and they cried with a loud voice saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants and also their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled" (Rev.6:9-11).

From all these things, therefore, it is evident that neither are the saints in perfect enjoyment of those good things and of the blessedness to come, nor have sinners already received condemnation and been sent away to torment. And, indeed, since they are incomplete and, as it were, cut in half, being bereft of their bodies²¹ which they wait to receive incorruptible after the resurrection, how could they attain to those perfect rewards? Hence the Apostle says, "Christ the first fruits, afterwards

those who are Christ's at His coming, then cometh the end" (1Cor.15:23, 24), then, he says they shall appear, then they shall be perfected. And the Lord says, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the heavens" (cf Mt.13:43).²²

All this is sufficient to inform us that the Orthodox Church clearly rejects any notion that anyone can be present in Gehenna or in Paradise before the general resurrection and the reunion of the soul with its body. The Orthodox Church denies any teaching that demons can seize the souls even of the wicked and "drag them into hell."

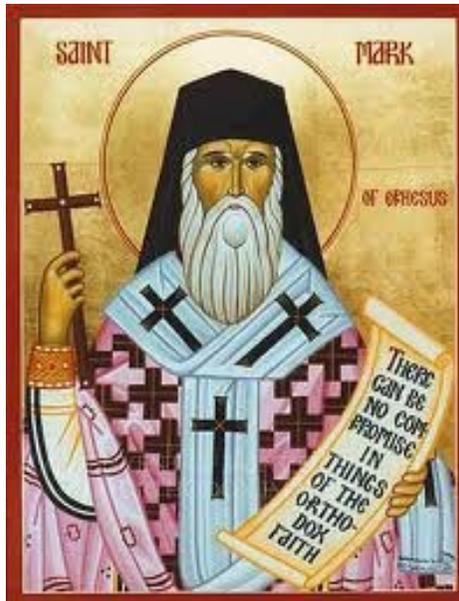


Plate 6: SAINT MARK OF EPHEBUS

IV HEAVEN Material or Noetic

Here, too, we are accustomed to falling into error because of the problem of visualizing that which it is not possible to visualize. What we mean by visualization is that we interpret on the basis of our visual experiences, and we do some with linguistically and visually based assumptions. When we do this with things that cannot be seen and which words cannot adequately describe, we always risk creating an idolatry.

These words of Abba Isaak the Syrian are extraordinarily important when he says: "*Speech is the language of this world, but silence is the mystery of the age to come,*²³" by which he also precludes the visualization of "things yonder."

We are further protected against idolatry by Abba Isaak when he says of Apostle Paul:

Indeed, he wrote that he saw divine visions and said that he heard words, but was unable to describe what were those words or the figures of those divine visions. For when the mind in the spirit of revelation sees these things in their own place, it does not receive permission to

utter them in a place that is not their own.

Even if it should wish, it could not speak of them, because it did not see them with the bodily senses.

Whatever the mind receives through the senses of the body, this it can express in the physical realm.

However, whatever the mind perceptibly beholds, hears or apprehends within itself in the realm of the spirit, it has no power to express. For this very reason the blessed Paul by one word closed the door in the face of all theoria and the exclusion thereof he anchored in silence, where even if the mind were able to disclose that which belongs to the realm of the spirit, it would not receive permission to do so. For he said that *all divine visions which the tongue has power to disclose in the physical realm are phantasies of the soul's thoughts, not the working of grace.*²⁴

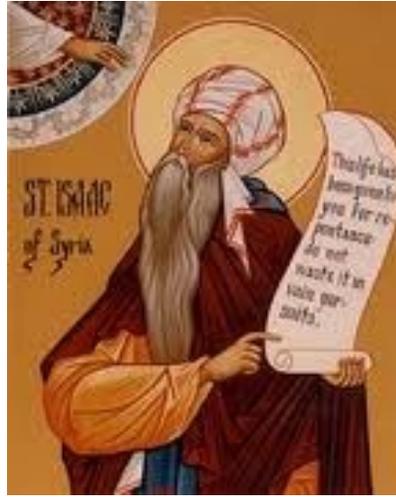


Plate 7: Original of this icon is in the St Isaac Skete, Boscobel, WI

In the Bogomil Gnostic myth of Elder Basil the New, for example, we see one delusion (plani; prelest) following another as the so obviously Gnostic author of the novel presents visualizations of practically everything "beyond the grave."²⁵ Nevertheless, the holy fathers have given a sound and direct response to such mythologies and delusions. Here again, V. Rev. Paul Matveesky correctly rebukes the questionable *A Word About Death*:

After the compiler of *A Word About Death* had introduced [his teaching of] the materiality of the soul and spirits, it is not surprising that he proposed [a teaching of] the sensuality of paradise: for, material souls, when separated from the bodies, require for themselves a material dwelling place.²⁶ Having said that in the book of Genesis, paradise is represented in the form of a most beautiful garden, the compiler remarks, "such it is in actual fact; but matter and nature are subtle, they correspond to the nature of its inhabiting spirits, and are thus inaccessible for our senses, which have become coarse and dull from the fall (p.22) This surmise is justified by extracts from lives of saints (26, 24 March; 2 October, and a manuscript of [the life of] St Evfrosiniya of Suzdal). From the vision of Saint Andrew (2 October), the author concludes that "paradise

is the heavenly abode nearest to the earth, or the first heaven, above which are found other heavens...in these celestial abodes, the souls of the righteous now abide, according to *their merits*²⁷“ (p.34). Since the Church has not expressed Its mind about what paradise is and where it is located, then all such conclusions and conjectures are left up to the will of those who wish to accept them.²⁸

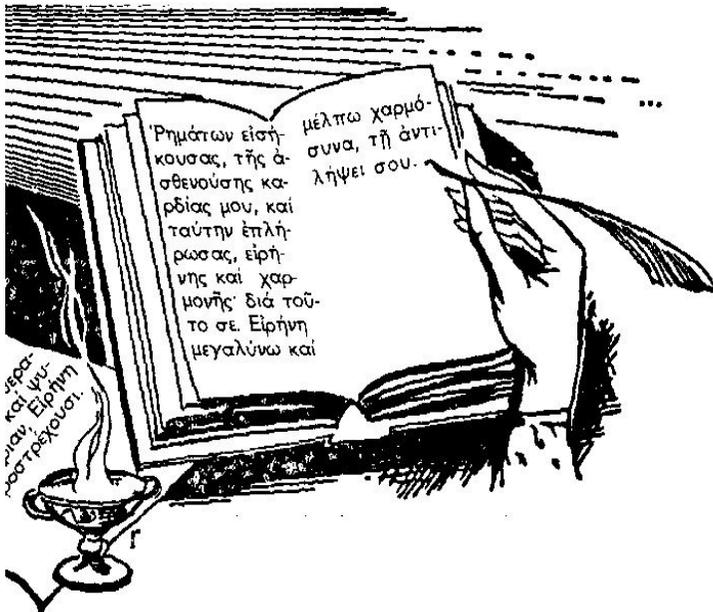
These images do not, however, accord with the clear and direct teachings of the great theological fathers of the Church on this subject, and it is to their words that we now turn for a correct Orthodox Christian understanding.

Here are the words of Saint Mark of Ephesus, who is refuting the materialistic heresy of the Latins:

We reply that Heaven *is not a physical place* where the angels dwell like as we, but it is a noetic place surpassing sense perception, if indeed this should be called a place at all; but more properly, it must be called the “place of God.” For John the Damascene says in his thirteenth Theological Chapter en-titled “On The Place of God”: “The place of God is said to be that which [or, he who] has a greater share in His energy and grace. For this reason the heaven is His throne, for in it are the

angels who do His will;" and again, "A noetic place is where the noetic and bodiless natures both function noetically and exist, both are present and active." We say, then, that such a place, supercelestial and supramundane, noetic and bodiless...we are accustomed to call it Heaven.²⁹

This, then, is sufficient to inform us that all teachings that heaven or paradise are material places, rather than noetic, are erroneous and to be rejected.



V THE NATURE OF JUDGMENT

The degree to which conceptions about the “Last Judgment” have been corrupted and rendered Gnostic and pagan can be discovered in the gradual perversion of the icons purporting to depict the judgment. Following this discussion of the actual nature of both the so-called “partial judgment” and the final judgment, we will examine the path of this deformity and perversion of the icons.

V.Rev N. Malinkovsky gives us a sound, Orthodox Christians understanding of the “partial judgment” (there is no “partial judgment”³⁰ in Orthodox thought):

Apostle Paul says, ‘It is appointed to man once to die, and after that comes judgment’ (Hb.9: 27). In these words, the judgment is presented as taking place immediately following the death of a person.

How does the partial judgment take place? Scripture does not speak of this. One can only clarify this to oneself by examining the idea of judgment as it applies to God. Judgment (in its

earthly sense) has two sides: the examination of the rightness or guilt of the one being judged and the bringing down of a sentence upon him. When however, judgment is being made by the all-knowing God, to Whom the moral condition and worthiness of the man are always known, the first side of the judgment must be understood exclusively in the sense of the soul being brought to the acknowledgment of its own moral condition. This condition of the personal awareness [or, acknowledgment] of a person is revealed by means of the conscience. The conscience also judges the actions of a person in the present life. After death, upon the divestment of the body, before the countenance of the all-seeing God, the voice of the conscience will, no doubt, stand up even more clearly and incorruptibly [or, with greater integrity], judging the entire path followed in life. No self-deceit, earthly excuses or self-justifications will have a place. By means of the conscience, at the partial judgment, the soul can be brought, by God, to an acknowledgment of its moral condition. In exactly the same way, the pronouncement of a sentence by the Almighty One cannot be understood in the sense of the announcement to the soul of a judicial decision. God's will is at once an action of His will, and thus the decision of the all-powerful Judge is at once a beatification of

the soul or the rejection of it from the kingdom of eternal life. Undoubtedly, the soul itself, being judged by the conscience, will clearly acknowledge the justice of the judgment of God Who has decreed its fate."³¹

Thus, what is the "process" of this judgment? We will observe from all that has been said above that when the soul goes forth from the body, it is faced with the reality of the Gospel, with the existence of God and His love and glory. The soul, beholding the countenance of the Saviour (i.e., His radiance) will no longer be able to subdue its conscience which, like an open book will judge it and sentence it. Exactly what is revealed to the soul through the conscience after it departs the body? We do not know this. Will the souls that have rejected God's grace and failed to struggle for the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, see some spiritual vision of demons, and understand that it has chosen to place itself in their milieu, having followed their leading and path during their life times; while the souls of those who have been robed in divine grace and the Holy Spirit in this life see some spiritual revelation of God's angels, and understand that they, being robed in a "wedding garment" are destined to abide with them and partake of the eternal wedding feast? We do not know this and cannot make rationalistic speculations upon it.

Such an event is here and there hinted at in some places, and if angels and demons had some place in the partial judgment, this would seem to be all that it could consist in.³²

THE NATURE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

Accepting the lead of the holy and God-bearing fathers, we will conclude, therefore, that the partial judgment consists in nothing else but the assignment of the soul to the state proper to itself, by the mercy and goodness of Christ our God, and that this action takes place in and by the conscience of the soul itself, its conscience being its accuser and judge. The Last Judgment consists in the resurrection of the body and its reunion with the soul, at which the person awakens in his own 'state,' and then beholds in full the radiance of the countenance of Christ. Beholding the radiance of the glory and love of God, no one will be able to hide from it, and the conscience of each person, like an open book, will judge them. The faithful, recounting thus the deeds and sins from which they were delivered by repentance and faith, according to the love and mercy of God, will understand at once and for the first time, how great a salvation they have availed themselves of and how great is the love of God that He accepted and blotted out such sins and revolts.

The wicked will understand then how great a salvation they rejected, how great a love and mercy

they scorned in life and, for them, this radiant love and glory of God, from which they can no longer hide, becomes as a river of fire, pouring forth from the glory, or throne, of Christ, and it sweeps them away, their conscience receiving it as coals of fire. The righteous receive one and the same "fire" as complete spiritual illumination and understanding, and are filled with unspeakable joy and exaltation by it, for this fire shall be to them the rays of the Sun of Righteousness which shall heal them of all that they lack, and they shall go forth and grow in perfection and knowledge unto all eternity, for:

"Behold the day cometh that shall burn like an oven, and the...wicked shall be as stubble, and the day cometh that shall burn them up, sayeth the Lord of Hosts...but unto you that reverence³³ My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His rays, and you shall go forth and grow up..."(Mal.4:1-2).

We cited the words of Saint Mark of Ephesus earlier, let us revisit one or two paragraphs of his words:

Firstly, the Lord in the Gospel according to Matthew describes beforehand the judgment to come, saying, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit..." – it is evident that they have not yet inherited – "the kingdom prepared for you;" "prepared" He says, not "already given." But to sinners He says, "Depart ye cursed" – evi-

dently they have not yet departed – into everlasting fire “prepared” not for you but “for the devil and his angels.” Here again He says “prepared,” since [that fire] has not yet received the condemned demons.

And again, the saint says:

As for now...the righteous abide in all gladness and rejoicing, already awaiting and only not holding in their grasp the Kingdom promised to them and those ineffable good things. But sinners, on the contrary, are in all straitness and inconsolable sorrow, like criminals awaiting the decision of the judge, and they foresee those torments. (ibid).

THE JUDGMENT OF THE PERSON

"Take care, therefore, how you hearken, for to him who has, more will be given, but from him who does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken away." (Lk.8: 18).

We have learned from the fathers of the Church that the soul is not judged alone, but rather the whole person is judged as a single being. For the very reason that the soul alone is not the person, one does not receive the fulness of his reward until the time of the general resurrection and so the soul, as the intelligent

faculty of man, must repose in some condition until that day.

We are told, therefore, of two judgments, a "partial judgment" and a final or "last judgment." These terms may be somewhat confusing at first glance, for we may wonder, "why are there two judgments," and why is one evidently a "temporary judgment" and the other "final," as if God could not decide the first time. Of course, we are thinking here in fallen human terms, and rationalistic speculation on the subject has created many and gross fables. The matter is neither so legalistic nor complicated. When the soul departs the body it cannot, as the holy fathers have said, receive the fulness of the person's reward, because it is not the whole person but only a part of the person, as the fathers of the Church say repeatedly.

St Mark of Ephesus, for example, says of the departed:

Indeed, since they are incomplete and, as it were, cut in half, being bereft of their bodies...how could they attain those rewards?³⁴

And the other fathers concur in this:

And this is the course and ground of justice, that since the actions of body and soul are common to both (for what the soul has conceived, the body has carried out)...for it would

seem almost inconsistent that...the mind [*lit:νοῦς = soul, mind, intellect*] guilty of a fault shared by another should be subjected to penalty, and the flesh, the author of the evil, should enjoy rest: and that that alone should suffer which had not sinned alone, or should attain to glory not having fought alone, with the help of grace. (St Ambrose of Milan)³⁵

For, it is just that in the very same condition in which they (the body and the soul) toiled or were afflicted, being proved in every way by suffering, they should receive the reward of their suffering. (St Irenae of Lyons)³⁶

But in what instance can the flesh possibly sin by itself, if it have not the soul going before it and inciting it? For as in the case of a yoke of oxen, if one or other is loosed from the yoke, neither of them can plough alone; so neither can soul or body alone effect anything, if they be unyoked from their communion. (Saint Justin the Philosopher)³⁷

This state is lost in death, but, through hope it receives again (in the resurrection) the state of being a person. (St Titus of Bostra)³⁸

When the living body is dissolved by death and

we should look upon its dust or its bones, or wish to say something about the soul, we say that these things are 'of' a man, but we do not say that they are the man. (St Titus of Bostra)³⁹

For, what is man but the rational animal composed of body and soul? Is the soul by itself man? No; but (only) the soul of a man. Would the body be called man? No, but it is called (only) the body of a man. If, then, neither of these is by itself man, but that which is made up of the two together is called man, and God has called man to life and resurrection, He has called not a part, but the whole, which is the soul and the body. (St Justin the Philosopher)⁴⁰

Thus, while God knows already the destiny of the person even before he departs this life, the soul cannot receive that destiny until it is once more united with the body as the "whole person," as St Titus of Bostra says, in words quoted by St John Damascene:

The soul cannot enjoy anything or possess or do anything, or suffer anything, except it be together with the body, being the same as it was at the beginning...⁴¹

As we have already seen, the soul is the intelligent

faculty in man. It does not die or become comatose when it departs the body, and so it must repose in a condition in which it already knows its destiny. It remains a part of the Church if the person was united to the Church in this life, and so it continues to live a life in communion with the whole Church. The partial judgment, therefore, consists in the fact that at death, God assigns the soul to the state appropriate to itself. That is all. There is no complex system of juridical procedure, with prosecuting attorneys (demons), defence counsels (angels, saints with excess merits, etc), mitigators or extenuators, or redeemers who offer ransoms or bribes in order to deliver the soul from the decisions of an imaginary "petit tribunal." For, our Saviour has once and for all time made ransom for us from all things, and we do not set His death at nought, seeking other redeemers or payment of new ransoms.

If we must inquire further as to what is meant by the expression "partial judgment," then we must, once more, set aside allegories and stories, even those contrived to teach greater compunction. We simply refer the reader to the words of Malinkovsky with which we opened this chapter. This term, "partial judgment," has legalistic overtones and is an overly anthropomorphic connotation which has led more esoterically inclined philosophers into many and absurd errors. Reading the works of St Dionysios the Areopagite,⁴² we find a Scriptural and Orthodox answer. For, what we mean by the judgment at the departure of the soul is this:

that God's all-knowledge (omniscience) alone knows the state of a person's soul and alone knows the proper state for it to abide in until that Day of the Lord – until it, reunited with the body, shall be self-judged in the light of God's love and glory. Since God is love, He is good, and since good, He wills good for every created being. Thus, divine justice is understood according to the laws of love and goodness, not according to the legal systems of fallen humanity, not according to the pagan ideals of vengeance, or the medieval satisfaction theory of the feudal duel, since:

As a grain of sand cannot counterbalance a great quantity of gold, so God's use of just judgment cannot counterbalance the likeness of His mercifulness. As a handful of sand thrown into a great sea, so are the sins of all flesh with respect to the likeness of the providence and mercy of God. And just as a strongly flowing spring is not obstructed by a handful of dust, so the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of His creatures. (St Isaak of Nineveh)⁴³

With God, what is proper and good is just. As St Dionysios the Areopagite says:

The divine justice in this respect is really true justice because it distributes to all, the things

proper to themselves, according to the fitness of each existing thing, and preserves the nature of each in its own order and fitness...the nature of each in its own order and capacity."⁴⁴

"But," someone will say, "surely there is some sense of condemnation at this 'partial judgment,' since the saved thereafter repose in light and the lost repose in some sort of darkness. What then is the nature of this first condemnation and of this 'darkness'?"

St Basil the Great makes an answer to just such a question, saying:

In like manner they which have grieved the Holy Spirit by the wickedness of their ways, or have not worked for Him Who was given [to them], shall be deprived of what they have received, their grace being transferred to others; or, according to one of the evangelists, they shall even be wholly cut asunder, the cutting asunder meaning complete separation from the spirit....This cutting asunder, as I have observed, is the separation forever of the soul from the spirit. For now, although the spirit does not suffer admixture with the unworthy, He nevertheless does seem in a manner to be present with them that have once been sealed, awaiting the salvation which comes from their conversion; but then He will

be wholly cut off from the soul that has defiled His grace. For this reason in "hades there is none that makes confession, nor in death any that remembers God"⁴⁵ because the succour of the Spirit is no longer present. How then is it possible to conceive that the judgment is accomplished without the Holy Spirit, wherein the Word points out that He is Himself the prize of the righteous, when instead of the earnest, is given that which is perfect, and the first condemnation of sinners, when they are deprived of that which they seem to have? (Lk.8: 18).⁴⁶

Thus, what else is the first condemnation (the "partial judgment") of sinners, except that at death they are cut off from the Holy Spirit and that, "From him who does not have, even that which he seems to have will be taken away" (Lk.8: 18). So therefore, if you wish to form some idea of the partial judgment it is this, that the sinner is deprived of the Holy Spirit forever, and if you desire to have some notion of the nature of that "hades," that darkness into which the sinful soul goes to its rest, consider that without the Holy Spirit there is no spiritual light, and the sinful soul, as being cut off from the Spirit, abides thus in complete spiritual darkness, as St Basil the Great says again:

But there can be no beholding without the Spirit! For just as at night, if you withdraw the light from the house, the eyes fall blind and their faculties become inactive and worth objects cannot be discerned"⁴⁷

Is there more than this to the partial judgment and to that state of darkness or "hades" in which the sinful soul awaits the resurrection? It would seem not. The suffering of a soul in such a state, knowing the meaning of it, is not hard to imagine. And what is this "partial judgment" and state of "light" in which the soul of the righteous is placed? Is it not this, that "To him who has, more will be given?" That is, to him who has struggled in the Spirit, who has in this life acquired the Holy Spirit, the abundance which he already has shall become a superabundance, and he shall repose in the spiritual light of the Holy Spirit, which from the beginning filled paradise?⁴⁸ As our holy and God-bearing father Anastasios of Sinai says:



Plate 9: *St Anastasios of Sinai*

As for the souls which have acquired the Holy Spirit and have become as it were one body and one organism with Him, it seems to me that through His illumination they rejoice even after death, and they noetically glorify God the Word and intercede for others, as we learn from the Scrip-

tures.⁴⁹

What more than this could we say in figurative terms, in the form of a parable? That as pertains to us, the partial judgment is this: during our lifetime, we are repeatedly exhorted to prepare, to “robe ourselves” for the Master’s eternal wedding feast. If, at the moment of death, God’s messengers come for our soul and, seeing it properly attired (in the Holy Spirit), they proclaim to it God’s invitation to that marriage feast, then is the soul rejoiced beyond measure and it shall repose in hope filled expectation, radiant with the light of the indwelling Holy Spirit, magnified within it, “dreaming” of what the Master is about to bestow upon the person in the resurrection.⁵⁰ If, however, the soul is taken forth by God’s angels, but receives no such invitation from these terrible powers, then it shall repose in darkness, since even that which it seemed to have – the invitation to the eternal feast and the company of the Holy Spirit – shall be taken from it. Thus, the souls of the righteous repose at the very door of the wedding hall (already within paradise), joyously anticipating the hour of the feast, while others repose in the chill darkness outside, on the porch, dreading the hour of that feast. And this is something like what St Mark of Ephesus indicates also, saying:

How is it that the Lord in the parable of the virgins says that the virgin souls who went

forth to meet the Bridegroom 'slumbered and slept while the bridegroom tarried,' which means that they died, but that they did not enter the bridal chamber until the bridegroom came...awakening all the virgins as it were from sleep, and the ones He led within, along with Himself, while the others He shut out, which thing clearly shall come to pass only on that day.⁵¹

Some of the virgins waited in a "place of light," which is signified by the fact that they had oil for their lamps – meaning that they had acquired the Holy Spirit during their lifetime. Or, as some would say, the oil signifies their virtues and good deeds, which means the same thing, since "virtues and good deeds" are not ends, but means of struggle by which one acquires the Holy Spirit.⁵² While the others dwelt in darkness, which is what is meant by the saying that they had no oil for their lamps, meaning that they were not robed in the Holy Spirit, or if one will say that it signifies that they had no virtues or good deeds, this means the same thing, since it means that they had not struggled during their lifetime to acquire the Holy Spirit.⁵³ For good deeds are nothing at all in themselves, but have value only as part of our struggle to acquire the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴

What about the idea that demons lead away the souls of the wicked to some sort of torture chamber at death? The demons receive no such favours or rewards from God. They cannot, do not lead the soul away anywhere. This notion is simply the application of a pagan idea to a mistranslation or misunderstanding of some allegories in one or another saying of some texts, or else the result of some demonic vision. St John Chrysostom, in his second homily on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, says:

...a soul which departs from the body does not fall under the tyranny of the devil ...For if while the soul dwells in the body the devil cannot bring violence upon it, it is obvious that when it departs he likewise cannot.... 'And it came to pass,' He says 'that the beggar died and was carried away by the angels'. Not only the souls of the righteous but also the souls of those who have lived in wickedness are carried away thither.... 'Thou fool, this night shall they require thy soul of thee.' See how there He says 'carried away by angels,' here, 'they shall require'? The one they (the angels) led forth as in bonds, the other they escorted as a champion.⁵⁵

Here, you see, the Saint makes it clear that the demons do not take the souls of the wicked, and they

have no power or tyranny over any departed soul, as he says again:

*Nor is it possible for a soul, once torn away from its body to wander here anymore. For 'the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God' (Ws.-3:1)And the souls too of sinners are straight way led away hence....*⁵⁶

This fact, that the demons do not take any souls and have absolutely no power or tyranny over any departed souls is the actual subject of these two discourses, the very point he has set out to make. Some allegorical expressions used occasionally to teach compunction notwithstanding, God and Satan are not partners who divide up mankind between themselves according to marks or brands. Such an idea is sheer, unmitigated Manicheism, perhaps a remnant of Bogomil influence. This fact is clear also from the parable of the wheat and the darnel (tares). For, our Saviour is speaking to His servants when He says, "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest, I will say to the reapers, first, gather the darnel (tares), and bind them in bundles with a view toward burning them: but gather the wheat into my granary." (Mt.13: 24-30)

Here, you see, the reapers of both the one and the other are the same. He does not say, "I will send the evil ones who sowed the darnel to gather it, but My

servants to gather the wheat.” He commands one and the same reapers to gather both.

In this same thirteenth chapter of Matthew, the Lord gave another parable, and in explaining it, He says directly, “...the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just....”⁵⁷

In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, according to St John Chrysostom, it is the angels of God who led the souls of both away. It seems, however, that when God’s angels are described as terrible, awful or stern powers, etc, some believe thereby that demons are spoken of. St Andrew of Crete, for example, describes the angels of God who come for the soul thus:

Radiant angels, bearers of (royal) sceptres, awful to behold, come from above... whose figure is the likeness of light, breathing fire, robed in fire, these hasten to surround him who is lying and abruptly extract the deposit (the soul)....⁵⁸

Again, we are asked, “What, then, is the nature of the judgment, and who is it that testifies against us?”

According to St Cyril of Jerusalem:

Let us dread, then, brethren, lest God condemn us; Who needs not examination or proofs to condemn....Out of thine own consc-

ience shalt thou be judged, the 'thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men' (Rm. 2:15-16). The terrible countenance of the Judge will force thee to speak the truth; or rather, even though thou speakest not, it will convict thee....How then does the shepherd make the separations (of the sheep from the kid- goats)? Does he examine out of a book which is a sheep and which a kid- goat? Or does he distinguish from their evident marks? Does not the wool show the sheep, and the hairy and rough skin the goat? By thy vesture shalt thou be known as a sheep.⁵⁹

Thus, we are judged by our own consciences, and we are separated to the "left" or to the "right," not by weighings or tortures, but by whether or not we are robed in grace, in the Holy Spirit, which we must acquire in this life, or else we will in no wise enter into the heavenly kingdom.

St Aphraat likewise testifies:

Remember that the Apostle also said, 'We shall judge angels' (1Cor.6:3). And Ezekiel said concerning righteous men (Ez.23:21-22), they shall judge Samaria and Jerusalem [Aholah and Aholibah]. Since then, the righteous are to judge the wicked, He has made it clear con-

cerning them that they shall not come unto judgment.⁶⁰

Our Saviour Himself declared:

I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, he that listens to my words and believes on Him that sent Me, possesses eternal life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed already from death unto life. (Jn.5:24).

Our Saviour did not say, "he who has attained special holiness" or "he who has more good points than bad," or "he who has exceptional virtues," but "he who listens and believes shall not come unto judgment, but has passed already from death unto life."

St Basil the Great, in his homilies on Psalms, says that the judge's countenance is the divine illumination which sheds light into our guilty hearts.⁶¹ At the "judgment" our accusers will be our own sins, which will rise up before us in our memories.⁶²

Similarly, St Gregory the Theologian writes that the true meaning of judgment is that which presses upon a person's conscience. At the judgment, our accusers (he says) will be our own thoughts and deeds: we will be arraigned by our own consciences and led away self-convicted and self-condemned.⁶³ St Ambrose of Milan understands that the judgment takes place in the sinner's own conscience and as a result of God's

knowledge of the heart (*Epistle 2:9f*; 73:3), "by His knowledge of the hearts and not by the interrogation of deeds..."⁶⁴ The early Christian philosopher Augustine of Hippo, in one of his rare agreements with Orthodox understandings, also asserts that the "books which will be opened" means the conscience of each individual, whose sins will come flooding in on his recollection.⁶⁵ St Abba Dorotheos and others explain in just such a context the Saviour's parable, "When you go with your accuser (or, adversary) to the magistrate, make diligent to be reconciled and be delivered from him in the way lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer cast you into prison" (Lk.12:58).

According to Abba Dorotheos and other fathers, "the adversary" (or, accuser) is a person's conscience with which he must be reconciled in this life,⁶⁶ since we can do nothing to effect this once we leave this life. If a person does not repent in this life, and so become "reconciled," then he will prove to be his own accuser before the judge (the conscience being an integral part of us and not a slanderer but a true witness). "In the way" is this life, and being "brought before the magistrate" is death. Here, the magistrate (the conscience) simply hands over one's soul to His angel (the "officer") who places it in the state appropriate to itself – in this case, some sort of darkness, the "prison." Again, there is no room for any kind of purgatories, haggling and bartering over individual sins, weighings, ponder-

ings, etc, but only the omniscient and good decree (called only metaphorically a "judgment") of the all-good, all-loving and all-merciful Judge.

St Gregory of Nyssa expresses these same thoughts, too, saying:

...the 'gulf' (in the Lazarus parable), which is not made by the parting of the earth, but by those decisions in this life which result in a separation into opposite characters. The man who has once chosen pleasure in this life, and has not cured his inconsiderateness by repentance, places the land of the good beyond his own reach; for he has dug against himself the yawning impassable abyss...that nothing can break through. This is the reason, I think, that the name 'Abraham's bosom' is given to that good situation of the soul in which the Scripture makes the athlete of endurance repose. For it is related of this patriarch first....that he exchanged the enjoyment of the present for the hope of the future; he was stripped of all the surroundings in which his life at first had passed, and resided among foreigners, and thus purchased by present annoyance future blessedness. As then figuratively we call a particular circular of the ocean a 'bosom', so does the Scripture seem to me to express the idea of those measureless blessings above by

the word 'bosom', meaning a place into which all virtuous voyagers of this life are, when they have put in from hence, brought to anchor in the waveless harbour of that bay of blessings. Meanwhile the denial of these blessings which they witness becomes in others a flame which burns the soul and causes the craving for the refreshment of one drop out of that ocean of blessings wherein the saints are affluent; which nevertheless they do not get....Surely the 'hell' [hades] we have just been speaking of cannot reasonably be thought a place so named; rather we are told by Scripture about a certain unseen and immaterial condition [or, situation] in which the soul resides.⁶⁷

Many more patristic explanations can be cited in this regard, and these are from the clear theological statements of the fathers, not from allegorical expositions intended to strengthen monks in their struggle, to frighten illiterate sinners into contrition, or the recitation of "dreams," often made up by an elder as a moral fable for the spiritual instruction of people too spiritually imperceptive to grasp the real, theological explanation of the matter. Very Reverend Michael Pomozansky, late professor of dogmatic theology at Holy Trinity Seminary encourages such an understanding of the "aerial toll-house" allegory. He says:

"Let us take the earthly side of the symbolism into

the spiritual understanding. Theodora [in the "Tale of Basil the New," a popular religious fable] is the soul of man; the angels – its virtues; the demons – its sins. Both are in the soul of a man and perhaps after death are found, as it were, on the pans of a balance."⁶⁸

According to Fr Michael Pomozansky, therefore, the "toll houses" or "balance" in the allegories can only be understood as *our conscience*: our sins as our only accusers and our virtues (that is, acquired grace) as our defence before our conscience, the judge (see Rm.2:15-16). Such a concept is certainly in complete agreement with the fathers of the Church.

In the "partial judgment" therefore, the soul is assigned to the state appropriate to itself, already knowing its destiny. And in the "final judgment," the soul, being reunited with the body as the whole person, rises not to another "judgment," but to its reward, as the fathers teach us. St Aphraat says:

The righteous who kept the commandments shall go and shall not come nigh unto judgment in the day that they shall rise; as David says, 'And bring not Thy servant unto judgment' (Ps.142:2); nor will their Lord terrify them in that day.

Remember that the Apostle also said, 'We shall judge angels (1Cor.6:3)...Since, then, the righteous are to judge the wicked, He has made it clear concerning them that they shall not

come unto judgment.⁶⁹

According to St Cyril of Jerusalem:

For it is said that 'The ungodly shall not rise up in judgment' (Ps.1:5). This shows that they shall rise, not in judgment, but in condemnation; for God does not need a long scrutiny, but close on the resurrection of the ungodly follows their punishment.⁷⁰

St Ephraim the Syrian says of the judgment and Gehenna:



Plate 10: Abba Ephraim

The vision of the eye is also permitted there (at the resurrection and judgment) to come and go, giving pain or joy to either side – the good regard their own lot as all the better when they see the wicked, and they rejoice all the more in it [their own lot], while the

wicked see themselves the more condemned, and their pain increased...the Gehenna of the wicked consists in what they see, and it is their very separation that burns them, and their

mind acts as the flame. The hidden judge which is seated in the discerning mind [i.e., the conscience] has spoken, and has become for them the righteous judge, who beats them without mercy with torments of contrition...it is this which separates them out, sending each one to the appropriate place; perhaps it is this which grasps the good with its just right hand, sending them to that right hand of mercy; and it again which takes the wicked in its upright left hand, casting them into the place called 'the left'...it is this [the conscience] which silently accuses and quietly pronounces sentence upon them... this inner intelligence has been made the judge and the law, for it is the embodiment of the shadow of the law, and it is the shadow of the Lord of the Law.⁷¹

Our holy and God-bearing father Isaak of Nineveh affirms this, saying:

I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love. Nay, what is so bitter and vehement as the torment of love? I mean those who have become conscious that they have sinned against love suffer greater torment thereby than by any fearsome punishment which can be conceived. For the sorrow caused in the heart by

sin against love is more piercing than any torment. It would be improper for a man to think that sinners in Gehenna are deprived of the love of God. Love is the offspring of knowledge of the truth which, as is commonly confessed, is given to all. The power of love works in two ways: it torments sinners, even as happens here when a friend suffers from a friend; but it becomes a source of joy for those who have observed its duties. According to my understanding this is the torment of Gehenna: bitter regret. But love inebriates the souls of the sons of heaven by its delectability.⁷²

We will conclude, therefore, that the partial judgment consists in nothing else but the assignment of the soul to the state proper to itself, by the mercy and goodness of Christ our God, and that the participants in this are God, the soul itself, its conscience being its accuser and judge, and perhaps the angels (somehow) who fulfil God's will. The Last Judgment consists in the resurrection of the body and its reunion with the soul, at which the person awakens in his own "state," and then beholds in full the radiance of the countenance of Christ. Beholding the radiance of the glory and love of God, no one will be able to hide from it, and the conscience of each person, like an open book, will judge them. The faithful, recounting thus the deeds and sins from which they were delivered by repentance and

faith, according to the love and mercy of God, will understand at once and for the first time, how great a salvation they have availed themselves of and how great is the love of God that He accepted them and blotted out such sins and crimes.

The wicked will understand then how great a salvation they rejected, how great a love and mercy they scorned in life, and for them, this radiant love and glory of God, from which they can no longer hide, becomes as a river of fire, pouring forth from the glory, or throne, of Christ, and it sweeps them away, their conscience receiving it as coals of fire. The righteous receive one and the same "fire" as complete spiritual illumination and understanding, and are filled with unspeakable joy and exaltation by it, for this fire shall be to them the rays of the Sun of Righteousness which shall heal them of all that they lack, and they shall go forth and grow in perfection and knowledge unto all eternity, for:

"Behold the day cometh that shall burn like an oven, and the...wicked shall be as stubble, and the day comes that shall burn them up, says the Lord of Hosts...but unto you that fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His rays, and you shall go forth and grow up...." (Mal.4:1-2).

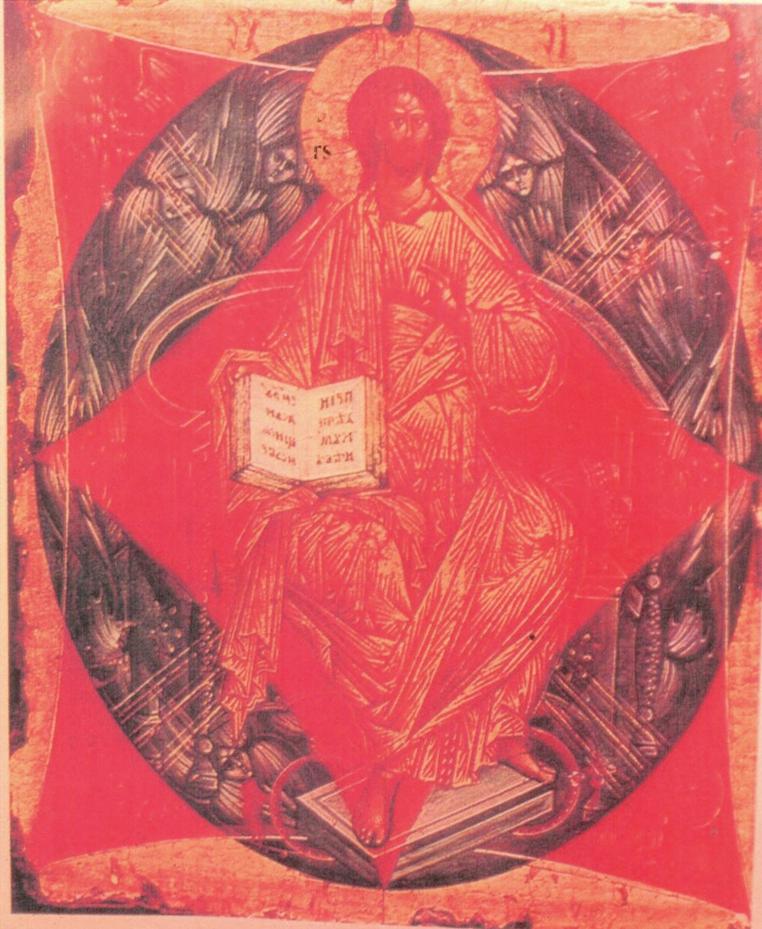


Plate 11: DEESIS: Christ of the Last Judgment. This icon reveals Christ as the "theophanies" of the Old Testament. Note the fiery wheels beneath His feet as the "Ancient of Days" from Daniel's prophecy. It is from this scene that the River of Fire streams forth.

VI

ICONS OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

A HISTORICAL SURVEY

This chapter was originally printed as a separate essay. It was also the inspiration for a monograph by Greek theologian Dr Alexandre Kalomiros, titled *The River of Fire*. Of necessity, this chapter is somewhat more complex than the previous sections of this present book, but it was added to this edition at the request of several theologians and teachers of religion. Moreover, this chapter presents a profound correlation between correct iconography and a correct understanding of Scripture — which is the primary theme of this book.

In this chapter, we will examine the original Orthodox Christian iconographic representations of the “Last Judgment,” and the concept of the “judgment of the person,” in opposition to the clearly Gnostic concept of a judgment and punishment of the soul without its body. In the course of five years of research on the subject of these icons, it became clear that the original and traditional icons of this subject were purely Scriptural and three major facts emerged.

1. The most ancient icons of the Last Judgment ("eschatological icons"), had only two elements: (1) the separation of the sheep from the goats and, (2) the river of fire flowing from the feet of Christ.

2. Even in the icons of the *Deesis* (the intercession of the Theotokos and John the Baptist), the fiery wheels of Daniel's vision of the river of fire are present at the feet of Christ, and no complex, unscriptural aspects, such as "psychostasion" appear.

3. In traditional, canonical icons of the Last Judgment (including the *Deesis*) there is no hint of any psychostasia (soul stations, toll houses, etc.), psychopomps (the "soul guides" of pagan Greek and Egyptian mythology), or scenes of the "weighing of the soul" (a motif borrowed into Western art from Manichean, but ultimately, pagan Egyptian, sources). This latter theme was later instigated into icons at about the same time the heretical portrayals of "God-The-Father" began to appear.

In a very late development, there appeared in some icons of the Last Judgment, a superimposition of a serpent with dark circles along its trunk, forming a type of barricades, and these were interpreted by some as being the mythological "aerial toll-houses" of Bogomil (Gnostic) mythology—although no explanation has ever been given as to why such a motif should suddenly replace the Scriptural and Traditional "River of Fire." More disturbing to both Dr Kalomiros and others, were the attempts to superimpose and re-

interpret icons of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, removing this from its actual meaning of our struggle in this present life, and asserting that the *Ladder* represented psychostasia or "toll-houses" faced by the soul after its departure from the body. Such corruptions can be made only by those who hold a purely Platonistic, Scholastic dualism and a heretical concept of redemption, and who have absolutely no Orthodox concept of the process of purification, illumination and glorification — all of which take place during our earthly life.

With this background in mind, we present this study of the historical icons of the last judgement.

1

In a previous paper, we discussed the question of the sources and development of psychostasia (soul-stations) in Christian art, and asserted that the representation of the weighing of the soul with a balance (a motif borrowed from pagan art) is the only representation of a psycho- stasion which has been popular and wide spread in any Christian art, and it has been most popular in post-Orthodox Western art. The appearance of a representation of toll gates or toll houses in art is very late and extremely limited, and derives from Manichean and/or Bogomil sources. In almost every case, it consists of a simple superimposition of an altered central detail from the icon of the Ladder of

Divine Ascent over the correct central detail of an Orthodox portrayal of the Last Judgment (with the necessary misinterpretation of the Ladder). However, the paintings which profess to represent these toll gates are so abstract, indefinite and illogical that there is considerable question as to whether they were originally intended to be interpreted as toll gates or toll houses at all.

We wish to assert that the development of representations of psychostasia of any sort in Christian art is a phenomenon which developed outside the Orthodox Church, and that Orthodox iconography (except where elements were directly borrowed from the West) remained faithful, in their general schemata, to ancient Church prototypes. On the other hand, the gradual development of the psychostasia in the iconography of Western art can be fairly well traced, and it closely parallels theological developments contiguous to it. The corruption of Orthodox iconography with these themes also parallels the introduction of Western corruptions of Orthodox theology, particularly during the "three hundred year Latin captivity of Russian theology," as Fr Georges Florovsky terms it.



Plate 12: 6th century mosaic
St Apollinaire, Ravenna

The earliest iconographic representations of the Last Judgment were carefully Scriptural, and contented themselves with demonstrating that a judgment

had taken place, by simply showing the enthroned Christ, with sheep already separated from the kid goats⁷³ (plate 12), the same scene in this 4th century terra cotta, only with people instead of sheep and goats (plate 13) or the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (plate 14 below).



Plate 13: 4th century
terracotta



Plate 14: 6th Century
miniature

There is a considerable superiority in this type of representation, not only in its simple, majestic dignity and its conformity with the texts of Scripture, but

also in its simple, clear revelation of the meaning of the word "judgment." As we have discussed elsewhere, the act of judgment consists of a simple act of God's will, of His good and merciful justice, according to which He merely places each soul in the state proper to itself. In a similar vein, the panel of the tomb of Bishop Agilbert (+680) in St Paul's Church at the Jouarre Monastery (Seine-et-Marne), portrays this simple,

ancient Christian understanding. On the first panel, Christ is portrayed in majesty surrounded by the four evangelists (the "Tetramorph" of the vision of the Lord of Hosts). On the large adjoining panel, we see the resurrection on the last day. The faithful have their arms raised in hope and praise toward the returning Lord. In Christ's hand is a scroll (which Hubert, no doubt correctly, interprets as being "*The Book of Life*").⁷⁴ This is no scene of extended, legalistically defined horrors but it is, rather, in keeping with the eschatology of the first centuries of Christ's Church. The reposed who were united to the Church were in Its care, and they went to sleep like the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus,⁷⁵ or like the wise and foolish virgins,⁷⁶ and were in an expectant rest⁷⁷ until the day of the Second Coming and general resurrection when, the soul being reunited with the body, they would awaken in paradise (the "Heavenly Jerusalem").⁷⁸ There was no place for an individual, act by act, deed by deed accounting or weighing of the soul, good and bad deeds or books of accounts. The wicked awakened to their own particular judgment. The act of judgment was represented (correctly) as a simple act of the omniscient will of God (Who does not need a set of audio-visual aids in order to make up His mind).



Plate 15: *Earliest form of icon of the Last Judgment*

This theme is evident in the earliest extant examples of the basic format of the Last Judgment icons of the Orthodox Church, the *σχήματα* of Kosmas Indikopleutes (ca. 500-550).⁷⁹ Here we see some basic elements of format, or *σχήματα*: the absence of landscaping, the upper hemispherical arch atop the rectangular field, which is divided into parts. Christ is shown as a majestic, but not harsh or brutal, ruler. He is bestowing a blessing and holding either

the "Book of Life" or the Gospel,⁸⁰ surrounded by a mandorla of glory. This representation is strikingly similar to the above mentioned relief on the tomb of Bishop Agilbert, which would have been executed no more than a hundred years later.

Subsequent Orthodox iconographic portrayals of the Last Judgment developed from this, and the earliest existing icon of the full theme of the Last Judgment follows this format. In this representation, also after Kosmas Indikopleutes (this one, *plate 15*, is a 9th century copy of the original) Christ is portrayed at the top of the throne, with His hands outstretched, show-

ing the nail prints. Above Him is Kosmas' hemispherical vault. Beneath the throne, two angels are bowing down. At their feet are the wall of Paradise (compare the Agilbert tomb mentioned above), the "Heavenly Jerusalem," within which are depicted the faithful of all ages and stations.⁸¹

At the bottom is Gehenna, depicted as a cavern enshrouded with flames, containing sinners. Above Gehenna (connecting the two scenes) flows a stream of fire, labelled η' $\pi\eta\gamma\acute{\eta}$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\pi\nu\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$.⁸² These elements still constitute the basic details of the Orthodox iconography of the Last Judgment. Eventually, the hemispherical arch disappears in many cases, in order, perhaps, to accommodate the shape of walls, but see *plate 19* for an eleventh century icon which clearly retains the format of Kosmas' originals. In later centuries, the scenes became more complex, often more tedious, and sometimes, after the



Plate 16: *River of Fire Schema*

beginning of the Middle Ages, Western and other non-Orthodox elements began to appear in various places. The increasing complexity of these scenes was not Scriptural and was not a spiritually healthy development, and it was not in keeping with the basic hesychastic spirituality of the Orthodox Faith. Much of the complexity was derived from a symbiosis with Western art, such as clearly took place in the Balkans from at least the 12th century on, when Latin theology was vying with Orthodoxy for influence.

The basic elements did remain intact, however, as we can see from the 14th century miniature in the Ioan Alexander prayer book (*plate 17 below*). We must notice here the simplicity of the scene .



Plate 17: 14th century
Serbian Miniature

This is a matter-of-fact portrayal, devoid of legalistic court scenes, and the demons most certainly are not participating in the judgment. Indeed, how can they, when they themselves are among those being judged. Here, an angel of God shepherds the

self condemned into Gehenna.⁸³ Notice that the form of an angel with a set of scales has been introduced from the West, but here, as elsewhere in Orthodox icons, he and the scales are totally incongruous to the rest of the icon, and this figure is only decorative, playing no actual role in the action.

The judgment is taking place in the fiery river, for the exposure to the radiance of God's love and righteousness is in itself the judgment — the thing which exposes the sins and deeds of all and sweeps away the wicked while exalting the faithful, or, as words of St Basil the Great says, in his *Homily on the Psalms* (33:4; 48:2) that by "the Judge's countenance" is meant the divine illumination which sheds light in our guilty hearts and points to our own sins as our only accusers, which (because of the divine illumination) will rise⁸⁴ up before us in our memories. Similarly, St Cyril of Jerusalem says, "The terrible countenance of the Judge" will bring the truth forth in you (*Cat. Lec.* 15:25).

The more complex forms of this icon did not begin to appear, evidently, until the 11th century when, in the words of the noted expert on Byzantine art, Kurt Weitzman, it "*apparently was invented,*"⁸⁵ perhaps in Constantinople. This same amplified scene was portrayed in the famous 12th century mosaic at Torcello, near Venice, and in a portable icon of the same century, which is found on Mt Sinai (see *plates 18 and 19* on the following pages).

The details of this form of the Last Judgment icon

are explained in the iconographic manuals which appeared after this period, and the contents of these icons were almost certainly considered before they were painted or executed. The fact is that we cannot be absolutely certain when these details were first used, but we have the explanation of the details in the iconographic manual compiled from earlier texts by Dionysios of Fournà (1670-1746),⁸⁶ for example. Compare his instructions with the schematic drawing of the Torcello mosaic, found on page 88 below.

This is the traditional Orthodox manner of portraying the Last Judgment, although a legalistic, hyperdramatic form of portraying the “torments of Gehenna” tended to appear in many, especially later, renditions.⁸⁷

One thing which is notable in the examples of the Icons given so far, is that the format, the σχήματα, of these Icons remains faithful to the earliest known portrayals (and probably originated with Kosmas Indikopleutes), even when the icon is elongated sideways, that is, when the horizontal plane runs in a rectangle, with the scene running from side to side, rather than vertically, as in the 11th century Byzantine ivory (seen below, *plate 20*).

Notice also, that even in the contorted arrangement of Theodosy Denisovich’s fresco of the Judgment (ca. 1508) in the Annunciation Cathedral in Moscow, the basic schema of Kosmas remains intact (the scene is stretched sideways to accommodate a doorway and the

shape of the wall). In this icon, the River of Fire flows on a long, meandering course, decorated with curious pretzel shaped puffs of smoke or billows of flame. Coincidentally the layout is similar to the Last Judgment mosaic found in the paraecclasion of the magnificent Khora (country)

Church in Constantinople (ca.1320).⁸⁸ There is, incidentally, an extremely interesting aspect of all these portrayals in the Last Judgment icons and the similar icons called *Deesis*. This aspect was discussed at some length in *The Icon As Scripture*, chapter V, in the text concerning the *Deesis* icons. That is the revelation contained in them about the Old Testament theophanies. Notice that in almost all these representations, Christ is shown seated upon a rainbow, as the One Who had judged the world in the days of Noah — He is the First and the Last Judge. Moreover, at His feet, one sees the fiery wheels from Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days (*Dn.ch.7*), showing that Jesus Christ the Son is Himself the Ancient of Days. He is also often accompanied by the *Tetramorph* of Ezekiel's vision of The Lord of Hosts (see, eg. *plate 11* above) (*Ez.1:5-10*) and/or by the attending Seraphims of Isaiah's vision of the Lord of Hosts (*Is.6:1-5*), showing clearly that Jesus Christ the Son is the Lord of Hosts (see *Jn.12:41*).⁸⁹

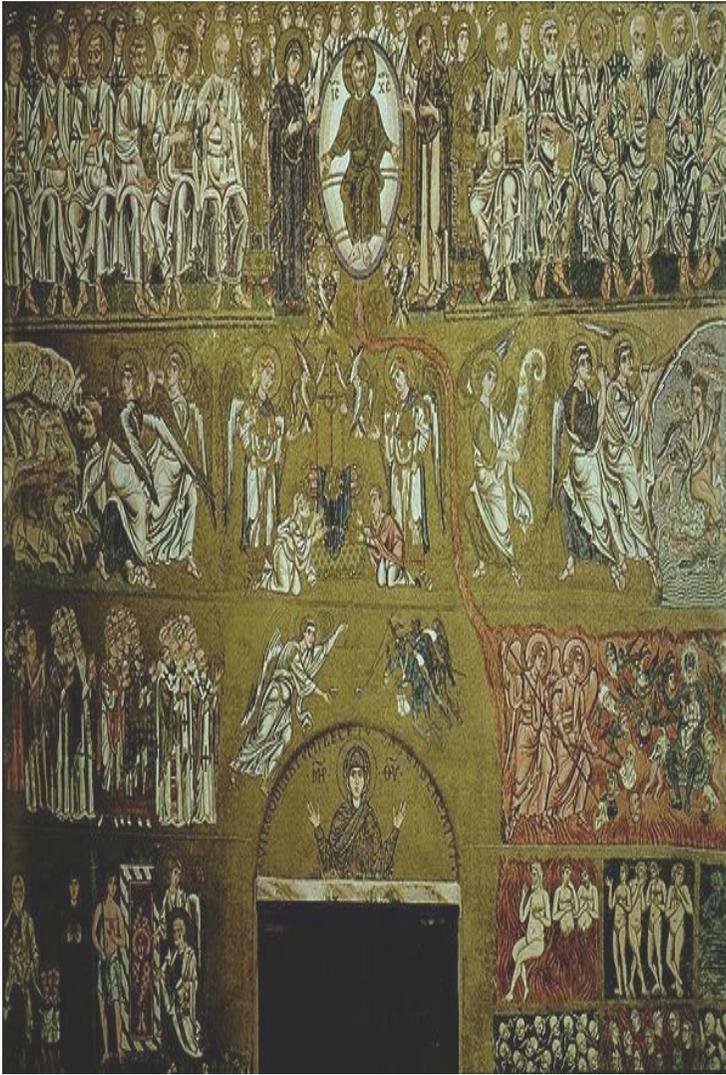


Plate 18: 12th century, *Great Mosaic at Torcello*. A direct copy of a mosaic in the *Divine Wisdom (Aghia Sofia)* in Constantinople



Plate 19: *Last Judgment, with river of fire schema of Kosmas. 11th cent. Constantinople, now located on Mt. Sinai*



Plate 20: *11th century Byzantine Ivory Panel. The River of Fire detail and schemata basically follow the ancient schemata of Kosmas Indikopleutes, the Traditional presentation of the Last Judgment in Orthodox iconography.*



Plate 21: *Voronets Monastery, Romania. River of Fire Motif from prophecy of Daniel. The traditional schema of Kosmas is maintained, despite excess accretions.*

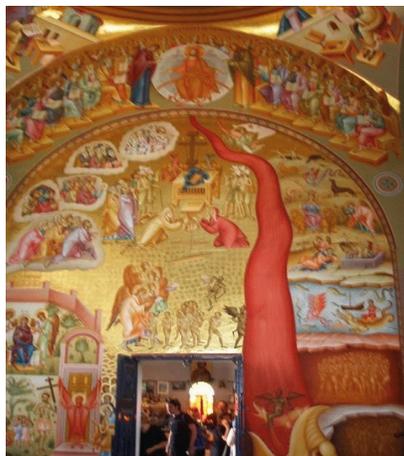


Plate 22: *River of Fire. Last Judgment fresco, Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, Galilee. Canonical Schema is preserved.*

Thus, we see that the more ancient icons representing the Last Judgment portrayed the simple theological facts of the Last Judgment as they really are, as an act of the conscience of each individual person, according to the will of God, as a simple, straightforward act of the good and righteous justice of God. A little later, we find more definitive icons, which are set forth in the iconographic manuals and are the traditional Orthodox representations. They still bore considerable simplicity, and were devoid of heavy legalism and excessive delight in gruesome terror. The central detail, a very ancient iconographic feature, which is according to Scripture (*Daniel 7:9-10*), is the stream of fire which pours forth from the feet of Christ and winds like a river into Gehenna, where it totally fills and inundates the state or condition called "hell."⁹⁰ The fire represents the love of God, and we are taught here that it is the radiance of God's love which both warms and radiates and gives joy to the faithful, and burns and torments the wicked.⁹¹ Those souls which in this life preferred "darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil," will, in the next life after the resurrection, find no such darkness, but will not be able to hide from that light which they hated in this life. There, bathed in the everlasting light of God's love, which they rejected but cannot now escape, their conscience, which is like a never dying worm, will torment them, and the passions they loved and heaped upon themselves in this life will be as serpents round about them. This is the

meaning of our Saviour's parable, "*When you go with your accuser (adversary) to the magistrate, make diligent to be reconciled and be delivered from him in the way lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer cast you into prison*" (Lk. 12:58). As St Dorotheos⁹² and others explain, the "adversary" (accuser) is a person's conscience with which he must be reconciled while in this life ("in the way"), since he can do nothing once he leaves this life. If a person does not repent and so become "reconciled," then he will prove to be his own accuser (adversary) before the judge (the conscience being an integral part of us and not a slanderer but a true witness). "In the way" is this life, and being "brought before the magistrate" is death. Here the magistrate (the judge) simply hands one's soul over to His angel (the "officer") who takes it to the state appropriate to itself — in this case, some sort of darkness, the "prison." Again, there is no room for any kind of "toll gates" or aerial judgments, haggling over individual sins, weighings, etc, but only the omniscient and good decree (called metaphorically, "judgment") of the all-good and righteous Judge. In other words, the "damned" will abide forever in the state they chose for themselves while in this life. The judgment is accomplished simply, straightforwardly, and the stream of fire from before the feet of Christ will sweep away the wicked, as St John Chrysostom says, "*Let us then not permit ourselves, by making this brief time a time of carelessness and remissness, to fall into everlasting punish-*

ment, but let us watch and be sober, let us do all things, and make it all our business to attain to that felicity, and to keep far from that river of fire, which rushes...before the dread judgment seat. For he who has once been cast in must remain forever; there is no one to deliver him..."⁹³

Similarly, St Theodore of Studion says, "...and when the stream of fire will issue forth from Thy seat of Judgment, then save me from these flames which cannot be cooled."⁹⁴ For the wicked, there is the "lake of fire" and for the faithful, a "*glassy sea blended with fire*" (Rev. 15:2).

From the medieval era onward, and especially in the 12th century, we begin to find some disturbing developments in the iconography of the Last Judgment in Western art. They begin to become more overpowering, often crude and hideous. There seems to have grown up a sort of morbid and macabre fascination with the torments of hell, and these became ever more anthro-pomorphized, more varied and usually more disgusting, and in them there is a *final, eternal triumph of Satan*. Note that in Western religious art, Satan and his minions are *rewarded* on judgment day by being granted eternal power to fulfil their lusts against man. They are shown fulfilling their greatest desire, to torture and torment human beings eternally, with every conceivable instrument of torture. A close study of this art, and some corrupted Orthodox paintings, shows something more drastic. In a whole series of Western "dooms," we must conclude (from careful study of the themes) that Satan is not even



Plate 23: *Corrupted rendition from 17th century Nogovorod. This icon presents an erroneous concept and disregards Orthodox Traditional icons of the Last Judgment.*

being *granted* this eternal power, but that *it is naturally his*.⁹⁵ How intentional this is we cannot say, but to a certain degree at least, the Manichean (and other Gnostic—especially Mandeian) doctrine of dualism is clearly present. This same Manicheism (more directly, Mithraicism and Mandeianism) is fundamental to the “toll house” theology. Indeed, it might be interesting to study the relationship between the later development of the ghastly and morbid portrayals of the now complex and legalistic torments of hell with the advent of the black plague.

Interestingly enough, parallels may be found in the development of Western theology, spirituality and social life with the developments of the sadistic morbidity in this aspect of the Last Judgment iconography. There were no such developments in the Orthodox world and so one must surmise (and we shall later try to demonstrate this) that these elements, where they do occur in Eastern religious art, were borrowed from the West. The 13th century Last Judgment in the Church of the Saviour at Nereditsa, near the Hanseatic city of Novgorod is an example of a rendition which seems calculated to overpower one with a morbid fear of God, in place of a love-filled and Christian fear, and with horror in place of hope. One might suspect that it was influenced by those same developments in Western theological thinking which spawned the Inquisitions⁹⁶ and which would later inspire the murderous aberrations in the mind of John Calvin.

Notably, the device of the "weighing of the souls," which was borrowed originally in the West from illustrations of the Egyptian Book of the Dead and pyramid art, began to appear in some Orthodox representations of the Last Judgment. Formerly, as in the Last Judgment in the Great Church and at Torcello, these figures were almost decorative and had a highly incongruous, if any, function. In the 13th and 14th centuries this began to change and the psychostasia began to appear as such in some Orthodox icons.

The earliest and heaviest such Western intrusions appear, as one might suspect, in the Balkans, where there was a natural symbiosis of the intermixed Latin and Orthodox populations. The art at the Dechani Monastery may be studied in order to see this effect: the appearance of the psychostasion of the weighing of the souls appears in an active manner in a 14th century fresco here, in which is also shown, in purely Latin fashion, Christ brandishing a sword. In order to discover the origins and developments of the psychostasia in Orthodox iconography, we have examined their origins in Western art, however, the actual source is to be found in Egypt, in the wall paintings in Pharaonic temples. Psychostasia and dangerous passages of the soul through weighing or toll stations were deeply ingrained in the Egyptian culture and psyche, and passed into Christianity there. It took a few centuries before, largely through Gnostic sects, before these heresies perverted Orthodox theology and

iconography.

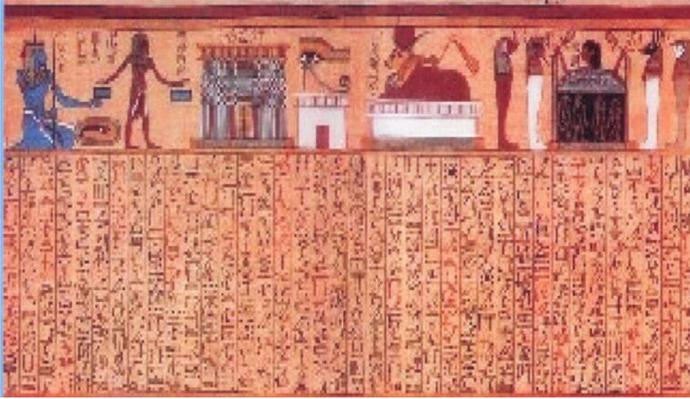


Plate 24: *Psychostasion: Toll House 17, Egyptian Book of the dead.*



Plate 25: *Anubis weighing a heart/soul (Book of the Dead of Ani)*

Now, however, we must look at one very strange and radical innovation in Ukrainian Uniate iconography which was borrowed into Russian usage: the inexplicable and irrational replacement of the river of fire which flows from the judgment seat into Gehenna, with a serpent. Although there is no way this form could be logically or reasonably interpreted as representing the myth of the aerial tollhouses, this Manichean or Bogomil interpretation⁹⁷ has been given to it in some cases. *Plate 23 above* demonstrates one version of this radical and illogical innovation.

This deformity of the traditional icon of the Last Judgment first appeared, as nearly as we can discover, in the Ukraine in the late 16th century.⁹⁸ There are two interpretations of it, one which is technically correct, another which is quite fantastic and wholly illogical. The first is made by the famous expert in Byzantine and Russian art, Dr David Talbot Rice, who explains the serpent (logically) as reaching up from Gehenna to receive and swallow down the wicked. This idea dramatically changes the theology of the Orthodox Church and that of a traditional icon. The serpent, like the fiery stream in a real Orthodox icon, does run from the feet of Christ to Gehenna. Let us notice, however, that in deforming one theological and traditional aspect of this icon, another quite major change has occurred: Christ is no longer identified as the Lord of Hosts and the Ancient of Days. Neither the fiery wheels and stream of fire, nor the Tetramorph are here. The

Tetramorph is not shown so often as the Seraphim of Isaiah's vision of the Lord of Hosts (Is.6:2). Inasmuch as the Fifth/Sixth Ecumenical Council resolved that the Holy Evangelists not be historiated as beasts or animals, this seems to be the only case in which it is done. It may be that the *Tetramorph* is permitted in icons of the Second Coming and Last Judgment because of the unity of the vision of Ezekiel and that of John the Divine concerning the Last Judgment and the foundation of the law. The *Tetramorph* is used only in this *prophetic* representation, but cannot be used in other instances. Missing also is the rainbow throne which is prescribed by the fourth chapter of Revelations. This radical deformity of the icon, therefore, has created a great perversion of the Orthodox Faith.⁹⁹ Interesting also is the location of Sts Adam and Eve in this icon. Traditionally, they are shown prostrating themselves at the etimasia.¹⁰⁰ Here, they have been moved up to the throne of Christ, as a part of the Deesis, replacing the fiery wheels. This a further corruption of the icon and demonstrates that the icon painter was not familiar with Orthodox Christian theology and doctrine.

Now let us look at the other interpretation, which is quite startling in the further deformities it makes in the theology of the Last Judgment icon and the teachings of the Church. In this interpretation, we are told that this icon portrays the soul stations (toll-houses) through which the soul of a reposed person is said to

pass after his death.¹⁰¹ This interpretation, aside from introducing a new and novel doctrine into the Church, is completely illogical. If the figure of the serpent represented the pathway to heaven (a sort of pneumatic tube purgatory) through which the souls of the reposed had to pass, then why does it originate in the depths of Gehenna? It would rather have to be shown originating at a corpse, a coffin, at least at a graveyard. Or are we being taught here that all souls are cast into hell (to be purged?) and then led through the aerial toll houses (represented here by the sets of solid circles located on the pneumatic tube serpent)?

The traditional Orthodox portrayal of this scene is perfectly Scriptural (as usual), and portrays an actual, Biblical vision of it. The holy great prophet Daniel describes it thus:

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, Whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him... the judgment was set and the books were opened" (Dan.7:9-10; cf Rev. Ch 4-Ch 10).



Plate 26: *Detail of the DEESIS icon. Note the completeness of the revelation. The mandorla of the cosmos surrounds its creator. He is seated on the rainbow as the God of Noah, in the angelic throne as the Lord of Hosts. The words in His halo identify Him as the "I AM" of Moses, and the fiery wheels of the Ancient of Days are beneath his feet. The marks of His saving passion are on His hands and feet.*

To see how closely the Traditional Orthodox icon of this scene matches the Holy Scripture, and how free it is of Gnostic influences seen in *plate 26* above, let us take a schematic look at the great Torcello mosaic seen before. The drawing is found on page 88 below.

This set of schemata is more complex than the most ancient (and less speculative) portrayals, but it

does follow Scriptural imagery and types, and does not show the demons being rewarded by God by being allowed to judge humans or torment them in hell. The traditional icon is laid out in three tiers, sometimes with the Resurrection scene placed above it, reminding us that the victory of Christ is the source of our own redemption and resurrection in hope. The general schema and theology are identical to that of the earliest extant examples of Last Judgment icons, those of Kosmas Indikopleutes. Added are the *etimasia* and, often, representations of "Abraham's bosom." On the following page is the set of schemata of the Torcello mosaic, which was a direct copy of one in the Church of the Divine Wisdom (Aghia Sofia) in Constantinople. A schematic drawing of this icon is found on the following page.s:

THE RESURRECTION: Is shown first, reminding us of the victory of Christ, and the source of our own Resurrection.

FIRST TIER: Christ is seated upon a high throne, attended by the hosts of which He is Lord, the Apostles and Saints (standing in ranks). The

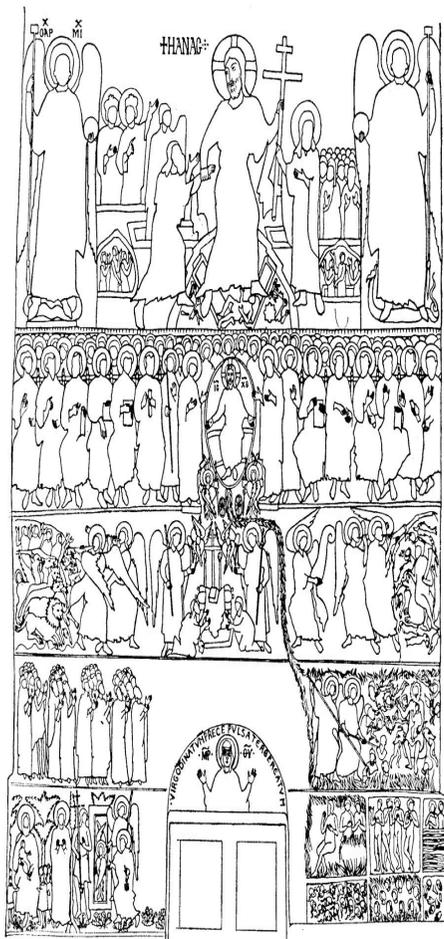


Plate 27: *Aghia Sofia and Torcello*

rainbow throne identifies Christ as the Old Testament God and Judge, the God of Noah and the God of John's Revelation; the seraphs at His feet identify Jesus Christ as the Lord of Hosts of Isaiah's vision, and the fiery wheels and stream of fire, as the Ancient of Days. When prophets are shown with open scrolls, the scrolls read: "*I beheld until the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit... his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.*" (Daniel 7:9); "*For, behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven...and the wicked shall be stubble*" (Malachi 4:1-2).

SECOND TIER: The general resurrection and etimasia. On one side, the dead who have been consumed by beasts, buried in the earth, etc, are shown coming forth restored. On the other, the bodies of those resting in the seas are seen arising.

THIRD TIER: The souls of those who have fallen asleep in the Lord are shown in hope and expectation. The souls of the unrighteous are not

shown at all.

Gehenna: After the judgment, the self-condemned are shown in Gehenna. Note that it is God's angels, and not demons which thrust them into Gehenna. Notice also, that on the one side, the righteous behold the stream of fire in hope, expectation and joy, whilst the unrighteous receive it as stubble receives a fire. This third tier and Gehenna are a very dramatic and important revelation, which is discussed at length elsewhere in this paper.

The last two segments of the icon show, on His right, Abraham's bosom and the gate of paradise, and on the left, the chambers of Gehenna, indicating the degrees of the self-inflicted tortures of the consciences of the wicked. Note that those in Gehenna are no longer human, for they have lost the "likeness and image of God."

What then is the source of those radical innovations which set aside the traditional, scriptural portrayal of the Last Judgment? They come directly from Gnostic and pagan teachings, sometimes reinforced by fantastic dreams, particularly those reported by a person whose own life story leads us to strongly suspect that he was in a very severe state of spiritual delusion (*plani*; *prelest*) and almost certainly a member of the Bogomil sect, one Gregory of Thrace.¹⁰² This is not the only source of it. Not only did many of these themes develop in the Dark Ages in Western Europe (in part also under Gnostic influences), but there is a whole collection of fantastic, apocryphal literature which seeks to insinuate the Gnostic and pagan psychostasia myths into Orthodox teachings.¹⁰³ Moreover, one is struck by the similarity of the format of this psychostasia serpent and its little demons with the metaphorical imagery and format of the icon of the

Ladder of Divine Ascent. The Ladder of Divine Ascent, which portrays the words of Apostle Paul about our struggle for salvation during this life, "*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*" (Eph. 6: 12), is explained in the book of the same title by St John of the Ladder. It teaches us about the struggle and ascent of the Orthodox believer during his life on earth. As St John of Raithu says of the instruction in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, "*As a ladder set up, they will lead aspirants to the gates of Heaven unharmed and blameless, so that they may pass unhindered the spirits of wickedness, the world-rulers of darkness, and the princes of the air.*" Read this book and observe that *all this is to take place during a person's lifetime, not afterward*,¹⁰⁴ and this is the theme of the icon of the Ladder also. It does not seem without significance to our question here that, in the West, in very many texts, one finds The Ladder of Divine Ascent referred to as "The Ladder of Divine Judgment"¹⁰⁵ (see plates 29 and 30 below).

This radical iconographic innovation consists, then, in the wilful removal of many or even all traditional elements of the Last Judgment icons, and the Orthodox and Scriptural identification of Christ as the Lord of Hosts and the Ancient of Days. In its place, there is presented the medieval Latin interpretation of the Ladder of Divine Ascent and a purely Gnostic and anti-

patristic interpretation of Apostle Paul's words to the Ephesians (6:12). The theological justification for this radical deformity and doctrinal innovation is a series of fantastic literature and highly questionable dreams, and interpretations of various reported dreams and over extensions of some wrongly translated and misinterpreted patristic metaphors.

From the discussion above we see how or erroneous theology becomes manifested in iconography. This is logical since heretical theology depends on erroneous interpretations of Divine Scripture and icons are a form of Scripture. Thus all erroneous icons are a result of in-correct interpretations of Scripture.

Inasmuch as icons reveal doctrine and must be faith-ful to Scripture, let us examine briefly the interplay between false iconography and false interpretation of Scripture and the development of erroneous theology.

The perversion of the icons of the Last Judgment and the understanding of the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent were more likely a result of the acceptance of the Gnostic "aerial toll-house" myth as if it constituted a "doctrine of the Orthodox Church." Since the idea of the toll-houses (Gr. *telonia*; Slav. *mitarstvo*) was so completely opposed to Orthodox theology and to the Holy Scripture, the perversions in iconography which resulted from it were, as we have seen, irrational and actually meaningless. The perversions were, in the East, generally the result of an

untenable and antipatristic misinterpretation of Apostle Paul's words at Ephesians 6:12: "*For our conflict is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (ἐπουρανίους).*"

We are startled to read in a peculiar work of no less a writer than Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov the completely untenable and unpatristic interpretation of this verse in which he relates it to an imaginary after death struggle to pass through the Mandeian/Manichean "aerial toll-houses." Brianchaninov asserts that "*there can be no doubt whatever* [emphasis in the original] *that the holy apostle Paul is speaking of them* [the after-death aerial toll houses] *when he declares that Christians must do battle with the spirits of wickedness under the heavens (Eph. 6:12)*" (Vol.3 *Works*, p. 138, in Russian).

This is a startling statement, considering that St John Chrysostom gives us *precisely the opposite understanding* in his *Homily 21 on Ephesians* where, citing this very same verse, he says, "*But what stupidity is this, not to think the present a season of war....*" Moreover, he says the same in his *Homily 2 on 2 Timothy* (§ 6) and in many other places. Nor does St Gregory of Nyssa understand the verse at all in the way Bishop Ignaty interprets it so adamantly (see his *Against Eunomius*,

Bk.2, 15:5-6.) St Leo the Great, in his *Sermon 39 on Lent*, also shows that there can indeed be considerable doubt about the interpretation of Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov and the Bogomil milieu from which it arose. It is especially interesting that St Athanasios the Great, in his *Life of Saint Anthony* also gives us an interpretation of this verse which is precisely the opposite of the interpretation offered by Blessed Bishop Ignaty. In his biography of St Anthony, St Athanasios cites Ephesians 6:12 three times, and in each, he makes it clear that *there can be no doubt whatever* that the Apostle is here referring to our struggle *during our earthly life*. The saint says, on these three occasions:

Thus living, let us keep guard carefully, and as it is written, "keep our hearts with all watchfulness" (Pr. 4:23). For we have terrible and crafty foes — the evil spirits — and against them we wrestle, as the Apostle said, 'not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph. 6: 12)... The demons therefore, if they see all Christians, and monks especially, labouring cheerfully and advancing, first make an attempt to attack by temptation and place hin-

drances to hamper our way, to wit, evil thoughts. But we need not fear their suggestions, for by prayer, fasting and faith in the Lord their attack immediately fails...If here also they find the soul strengthened by faith and hopeful of mind, then they bring their leader to their aid...When the prince of the demons appears in this wise....not even then ought we, the faithful to fear his appearance or give heed to his words. For he is a liar and speaks never a word of truth....And he was bound by the Lord as a sparrow that we should mock him. And with him are placed the demons his fellows, like serpents and scorpions to be trodden underfoot by us Christians....Let us then not heed his words, for he is a liar: and let us not fear his visions, seeing that they themselves are deceptive...they are rather the preludes and likeness of the fire prepared for the demons who attempt to terrify men with those flames in which they themselves will be burned. Doubtless they appear; but in a moment disappear again hurting none of the faithful, but bringing with them the likeness of that fire which is about to receive [them] themselves. Wherefore it is unfitting that we should fear them on account of these things; for through the Grace of Christ, all their practices are in

vain” (Para.21-24, emphasis mine).

Take note that all this occurs while we are “*thus living,*” and it is completely clear from the text that all this is to take place in this life. There can, then, be no doubt whatever that the holy Apostle Paul was speaking, not about some sort of imaginary after-death toll houses (which are not so much as even hinted at in Holy Scripture), but about the struggle of Orthodox people in this life. For, note also in paragraphs 28 and 40-43 of the biography of St Anthony, that the demons are actually powerless. St Athanasios again cites this verse (*Eph. 6:12*), at paragraph 51, where he clearly says that this wrestling “not against flesh and blood” etc, occurs in this life. St Anthony himself, on his deathbed admonishes his monks:

And do you be watchful and destroy not your long discipline, but as though now making a beginning, zealously preserve your determination. For you know the treachery of the demons, how fierce they are, but how little power they have. Wherefore, fear them not, but rather ever breathe Christ, and trust Him. (para.91).

These are the only times Ephesians 6:12 is cited in

the *Life of Saint Anthony*. Where then is this, "there can be no doubt whatever" which was spoken with such dogmatic emphasis? For again, St Athanasios the Great, in his *Festal Letter Number One*, tells us that the feasts and fasts call us to the war of this life, and says:

...now these things [the old law] were typical, and done as a shadow. But let us pass on to the meaning and henceforth leaving the figure at a distance, come to the truth, and look upon the priestly trumpets of our Saviour, which cry out and call us, at one time to war, as the blessed Paul says, 'We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities, with powers, with the rulers of this dark world, with wicked spirits in the heavens'" (Eph.6:12).

To this, St Ambrose of Milan concurs also, saying of Paul:

Worthy indeed was he to be gazed upon by angels, when he was striving to attain the prize of Christ, when he was striving to live on earth the life of angels, and overcome the wickedness of the spirits in the heavens, for he wrestled with spiritual

wickedness (Eph.6:12). Rightly did the world gaze upon him, that it might imitate him... (Letter 63, §71).

And not only once does he teach us that this wrestling and struggling with the aerial powers takes place in this life, but in paragraph 6 of his sermon against Auxentius, he says the same thing, not of Paul only, but of us all; and this much he says again clearly in paragraph 106, Book Two of his *On Belief in the Resurrection*.

St John Cassian, too, sweeps away this attempt to erroneously use Ephesians 6:12 as a testimony in favour of the toll-house myth, for his understanding of the verse is in full accord with the host of the God-bearing fathers, rather than with that of the toll-house theologians. See for example, St John Cassian's *Institutes Book 5, Ch. 18; Conferences, Seven, Ch.21; Ch.32; Ch.33; Eight, Ch.2; Ch.14; Thirteen, Ch.14*.

Likewise, St Gregory the Theologian says of Ephesians 6:12 that this wrestling and struggle takes place in this life, involving both body and soul, "*that [we] may inherit the glory above by means of a struggle and wrestling with things below, being tried as gold in the fire by things here, and gain the object of our hopes...*" (*On His Flight From Pontus*, §17; see also §84).

Bear in mind that there are absolutely no references to any kind of "aerial toll-houses," by any name, either in Divine Scripture or in any of the funeral or memorial services for the reposed. The theme also absolutely does not occur in any Traditional icons of the judgment, for they are, as with all true and canonical icons, faithful to the Scripture. This is necessarily so precisely because the icon is a form of the Holy Scripture itself, and every corruption in our iconography inevitably reflects a corruption in the understanding of Scripture and a corruption of our theology.

ENDNOTES:

1. In English translations of the Hebrew Scripture, the word "Sheol" is variously translated as "hell" and/or "hades." This is erroneous. Sheol never indicates the concepts of "hell" or "hades." Rather it means the "grave." In some eras of Hebrew thought, it appears to have also referred to the concept of a dark, underground habitat of the "shades" or "spirits" of the departed (not the soul as we think of it). This was a shadowy, place in which the righteous and the wicked equally endured a lugubrious existence, with neither reward nor punishment.
2. Although some translations read "gates of hell," the correct reading is "gates of hades (Ἅδου).
3. *Heaven and Hell in the Afterlife According to the Bible* (2009, unpublished).
4. The reference to the Dead Sea as a "lake of fire" is historical. There was considerable seismic activity throughout the Rift Valley (which extends from the Jordan Valley into Ethiopia). The lakes of fire are still active in the southern portion of the Rift. Historically, when there was an invasion of Judea, and so many people were killed that the bodies could not be buried, they were taken down into the valley of Gehenna (Hinnom) and burned. The first major rainstorm cause the valley to "flash flood," and the remains were mostly washed down into the Dead Sea, the "lake of fire."

5. The expression was coined by the late Fr. Georges Florovsky to describe the 17- 19th centuries, during which time, Russia was inundated by Western scholasticism and sound Orthodox theology was not being taught in the academies and seminaries.

6. Literalism, that is, understanding metaphor in a literal sense, always creates arises from and drift into fantasy and creates an idolatry.

7. God is everywhere present and fills all things. There cannot be a place in the Transfigured Cosmos of the future in which the love and the light of the uncreated glory is not present. Nor can there be a place where Satan reigns rather than God.

8. See APPENDIX 1 below.

9. Romanides, John S., *Dogmatiki kai Symvoliki Theologia tis Orthodoxou Katholokis Ekklesias*, p. 13-14, vol 1, 4th Edition (1999)

10. Romanides, John S., *Dogmatiki kai Symvoliki Theologia tis Orthodoxou Katholokis Ekklesias*, p. 13-14, vol 1, 4th Edition (1999).

11. Because Protestantism is essentially Gnostic, you will see in art and in cartoons, the departed, whether believers or not, whether moral or immoral, depicted as angels in full bodily form, with wings, western style "merit" halos, robes and harps. This is something radically different from icons of saints who have become glorified in this life already. They are not depicted as "angels," as if the resurrection was not going to take place, rather they are shown as complete, transfigured persons and their bodies are shown transfigured. They appear as they will in that age to come and reveal to us the promise of the transfiguration of the whole person, body and soul together. On the other hand, depicting the departed, regardless of condition, as angels follows the Gnostic notion that the soul, being "liberated from the body," has its own complete, identifiable form has taken deep root in all Protestant countries. In the "popular" religion of these countries, *everyone* who departs this life has such a complete body, and *becomes an angel*. Naturally, the idea of the general resurrection has grown dim in the face of such ideas, because it has been rendered not only unnecessary, but even undesirable. Moreover, such a concept disregards all moral struggle and even an active faith in Jesus Christ.

12. This is not to advocate a blanket condemnation of Scholasticism. The processes developed by the scholastics facilitated the development and growth of modern science. It formed the basis of purely secular thinking and systems,

leading to modern science and political theory, though also, ultimately to loss of faith among many.

13. Letter reviewing my article on ikons of the Last Judgment

14. Throughout his work, Brianchaninov confuses hades with hell. They are not the same thing. Hades is a temporary condition. Hell is an eternal condition. The Hebrew Scripture, in its Greek translation, uses the Greek word "hades" to translate the Hebrew word "Sheol." In the New Testament, careless translators sometime use "hell" and "hades" both as a translation of Gehenna. This is not correct.

15. This present review appeared in the journal "**Strannik**", 1863,(V.3, Nr.9, Sec.3, pp.26-36).

16. Ten Arguments Against Purgatory

17. *Homily on Psalms, 28:6.*

18. Not to be confused with "hades," which signifies something quite different.

19. *Homily 84*

20. Emphasis not in original, added by the author.

21. This is extremely important. The heretical teaching that the soul alone constitutes the Person is so pervasive, and knowledge of the holy fathers so scant that even the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia synodically endorsed the heresy. Nevertheless, this heresy is refuted by a host of the holy fathers.

22. *Ten Arguments Against Purgatory.*

23. *Epistle 3*

24. *Epistle to Symeon of Caesaria*

25. The author is billed as "Gregory of Thrace." The tale of Basil the New was written at a time when Thrace was occupied by Paulician and Bogomil Gnostics. If there were any Orthodox Christians in the province at that time, they were few indeed. This author presents us with such a collection of outrageous spiritual delusion that one must question his sanity.

26. Brianchaninov, being unfamiliar with the Holy Fathers, surmises that the soul alone is the complete person and can be in Heaven without the physical body, and even before the Judgment, since for him, it is demons and not Christ who pass the judgment.
27. This was written during an era when much of the Russian Church taught the Latin doctrine of "merits," including the "saving merits of Christ."
28. This present review appeared in the journal "**Strannik**", 1863,(V.3, Nr.9, Sec.3, pp.26-36).
29. The complete text may be found in the appendices of *The Soul, The Body and Death* (Synaxis Press, 2009).
30. The term "partial judgment" has no meaning in Orthodox theology. "Partial judgment" means that only a part of the person is present: the soul, and as we see, the soul without the body is not a complete person.
31. More precisely, the conscience announces our fate. God respects our decision to be separated from Him.
32. *Outline of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, (p.460),
33. "*iyare*" in Hebrew, which can only mean reverence, the type of fear which is reverence. Fear as terror is *aratz*, while general fear, such as a phobia, is *pakhad* in Hebrew. The use of "*iyare*" in this verse already moves toward the New Testament and the idea that the beginning of salvation is to "believe on the name of the Lord," more properly, to "have a reverential belief on the name of the Lord."
34. *Ten Orations Against Purgatory*, Nr.2, P.O. 15:111-114.
35. *On Belief in the Resurrection*, para.88.
36. *Against Heresies*, Book Five, para.32.
37. *On the Resurrection*, Ch.8.
38. *Homily One Against the Manicheans*, para.1, P.G. 96:489B.
39. *ibid.*
40. *On the Resurrection*, Ch.8.
41. *Homily One Against the Manicheans*, P.G.96:489B.

42. *The Divine Names*, 7:7.
43. *Homily 58*; see also *Homily 60*, and St Ephraim the Syrian, *Homily on the End*, lines 30-31.
44. *The Divine Names*, 7:7.
45. Cf. Psalm 88:5-12, eg.
46. *On The Holy Spirit*, para.40; see Lk.14:18-19.
47. *ibid*, para.38.
48. St John Damascene, *Concise Exposition*, Book 2, Ch.11; cp Saint Kallistos, *Texts On Prayer*, para.4 (*Philokalia*).
49. Answer 89.
50. St Aphraat the Persian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, para. 18-20; St Gregory the Theologian, *Panegyric For Caesarios*.
51. *Ten Orations Against Purgatory*, Nr.2, P.O.15:111-114.
52. "Good deeds" are not understood as "merits", as material benefits, but only as part of the struggle to purify the heart and soul and acquire the Holy Spirit (or the manifestation of the results of such a struggle). See especially St Mark the Ascetic, *On Those Who Think to Justify Themselves With Works*, etc.
53. St John Chrysostom, in his *Homily on Matthew 25* says that the oil that was missing from the lamps of the foolish virgins was the "oil of humanity."
54. *Ten Orations Against Purgatory*, Nr.2, P.O.15:111-114.
55. *Homily 2 on Lazarus and the Rich Man*. St Makary of Moscow seems to have had an erroneous translation of this work.
56. *Homily 28, on Matthew*, 28:3. Both Sts Isaak the Syrian and St John Cassian insist that the demons cannot even see the soul. See St Isaak, *Homily 67* and St John, *First Conference of Abba Sereneus*, para 15, 16. Both references are included in Appendix 1 of this work.
57. Mt.13:41; 49. See St Ambrose of Milan, *The Good of Death*, para.45. St Ambrose understands that the judgment takes place in the sinner's own conscience, as a result of God's knowledge of the heart (*Ep.2:9f*; etc). He further

asserts that the judges ranged on the bench and the open books symbolize our own consciousness of guilt (whence our English expression, "his mind is an open book"). The thrones of the Divine Judge and the Apostles are metaphorical, and the sentence pronounced simply means the confirmation unto eternity of the spiritual-moral state of each individual. See, e.g., *Epistle. 73:3*; *Explications on Psalms*, 1:51f; *Exp. on Luke's Gospel*, 2:60; 2:82; 10:49, etc.

58. *Homily on Human Life and Those Fallen Asleep*.

59. *Catechetical Lecture* 18:14-15.

60. *Select Demonstrations*, 22:15-16.

61. *Homily On Psalms*, 33:4.

62. *Homily On Psalms*, 48:2.

63. *Oration* 16:8.

64. see St Ambrose of Milan, *The Good of Death*, para.45.

65. *The City of God* 20:14; see *Sermon 242*, 4.

66. *Instruction 3*, para.42. Strangely some people have interpreted the "adversary" or "accuser" here as being Satan or his demons. One wonders how they could imagine that Christ is advising us to "be reconciled with Satan and his demons in the way."

67. *On The Soul and the Resurrection*, para.54.

68. Letter on the toll-house question. Complete text in Appendix 2, *The Soul, the Body and Death* (Synaxis Press, 1985).

69. loc.cit., fn.23 above.

70. *Catechetical Lecture* 15:25.

71. *Letter to Publios*, para.21-23. cp. St John Chrysostom, *Homily 76 on Matthew*, "But He brings it [the sign of the Son of Man] that their sin may be self-condemned...the mourning shall be that they may bring forth their sentence from within and condemn themselves."

72. Ibid

73. Mt.25:32-33. The actual text reads "kids", not "goats" as in the KJV, etc. St John Chrysostom explains the verse: "He indicates the disposition of each, calling the one 'kids,' the other 'sheep,' that He might indicate the unfruitfulness of the one, for no fruit will come from kids; and the great profit from the other, for indeed from sheep great is the profit, as well from the milk as from the wool, and from the young (offsprings), all of which things the kid (ἔπιος) is destitute." (*Homilies on Matthew*, 79:4).

74. Hubert, J., "Les cryptes de Jouarre" (4e congrès de l'art du haut moyen-ages) (Melun; Seine-et-Marne, 1952).

75. cf Aries, Phillipe, *Western Attitudes Toward Death* (John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974) pp.29-33.

76. see St Mark of Ephesus, *Ten Arguments Against Purgatory*, 1, in which he especially discusses the wise and foolish virgins in just this context.

77. see, for example, St Aphraat the Persian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, para. 18-20, and St Athenagoras of Athens, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, ch.16, both quoted in *The Soul, The Body and Death* (Synaxis Press, 1996), Appendix 1.

78. see especially, St Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymn Eight on Paradise*, esp. ode 11, (loc cit fn.36)

79. see Ainalov, D.V., *The Hellenic Origins of Byzantine Art* (Rutgers; New Brunswick, N.J., 1961) esp. pp. 31-45.

80. The lozenged background behind Christ (*plate 15*) is interesting, because this motif was often used in portrayals of the *mandylion*, the "icon-not-made-by-man". The face of Christ here is like the usual early portrayals of the *mandylion*

81. Hubert, J., *ibid*. Also discussed in Aries, P. loc cit.

82. Literally, "the wellspring of fire", showing that Christ is the source, that is, the love of Christ God is the source of the stream of fire. see Sacra Parallela, Par. gr. 923, for 67v, *Codices e Vaticanis selecti*, x (Milan, 1908); Winsteadt, E.O., *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleutes* (Cambridge, 1909).

83. see St Gregory the Theologian, *Oration 16:5*, for example. Notice here too that at the Last Judgment, our accusers will be, not the demons of the psychostasia myths, but our own past thoughts and deeds — our conscience (cf fn. 43 and 49 below). In many Western representations, it is the demons and not God's angels

who are shown ushering the self-condemned souls into the fiery stream. This is an element of that peculiar triumph of the demons which took place in Western art and, to a certain degree, in Western theology.

84. cf St Ambrose of Milan, *Letter 2:9 ff, 73:3; Exp. On Psalms* 1:55 ff and *Exp on Luke's Gospel*, 2:60; 2:82; 10:49

85. Weitzman, K., *The Icon* (George Braziller; N.Y., 1978) p.84.

86. Available in English as *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna*, tr. by Paul Hetherington (The Sagittarius Press; London, 1974). Note that in the official Church instructions for painting icons of the Last Judgment, no mention is made of the scales or balances, the "weighing of the souls" or of any form of psychostasia. Both Dr Gabriel Millet and Dr Paul Jessen point out that, after researching the matter, they could find no mention whatever in any of the iconographic manuals on the Holy Mountain or Greece of the angel and scales or psychostasia. Dr Jensen also examined the fake "*Vision of St Ephraim the Syrian*" which was often cited by earlier art historians as a possible source of the "weighing of the souls" device. He concluded that there was nothing in it which could possibly be thus construed, and he concluded that there was no concept of psychostasia in Orthodox teaching or art, but that the "weighing of the souls" image was of Western origin (see Jessen, P., *Die Darstellung Des Weltgerichts Bis Aus Michel Angelo*, Berlin, 1883. p.17ff). The spurious work called "*The Vision of St Ephraim*" is of an unknown origin. It was once popular in Western Europe, where it was likely composed, probably in early medieval times. The work was long ago discredited. It does not seem ever to have been translated into Greek, and we do not know if it found its way into any of the Slavic tongues.

87. Nevertheless, compare the almost peaceful, composed faces of the damned in, for example, the Torcello Mosaic (plate 18/28) and the "Sinful Kings" in the 13th century fresco of Milieshevo Monastery, Serbia (who are perfectly aware that they are in the condition which they themselves chose), with the sadistic, almost pathological portrayals of the damned in Western art, such as, for example, the tympanum of Autun (which is not even one of the worst examples)

88. The basic schemata is maintained even in the grotesque and bizarre "Last Judgment" by George Margazios, painted in 1647 in the church in Skradin, Serbia. This painting, for various evident reasons, might not be considered an icon by an informed observer, because of its overbearing Latin influence.

89. see, for example, the Torcello Mosaic (*plate 18*), and the fresco of the same scene by Theodosy Denisovich in the Annunciation Cathedral in Moscow, in which the fiery wheels are especially prominent. Thus, Christ is shown to be both the First and the Last Judge, and He Who was to come, is come and shall come.

90. The word "hell" and "Gehenna," or "hades" could all as well be understood as another word for "separation." All the "torments of hell" which are so grossly literalised in folk tales and peasant understandings result solely from the fact of separation from God and His vivifying love, and not at all from physical, created forms of torture, which would be extremely unworthy of God.

91. This is a theme which, as Dr Alexander Kalomiros stresses, *"needs to be preached with great insistence, and from which, not only the West but we Orthodox have departed in great numbers, causing men to fall to atheism, because they are revolted against a falsified angry God full of vengeance against His creatures. What you write on pages five and six is very important, that the stream of fire, which burns in the state called 'hell' represents the love of God which both warms and gives joy to the faithful, and burns and torments the wicked, because they are not able to hide from that light which is everywhere and which they hate, although it is full of love and kindness. We must urgently understand that God is responsible only for everlasting life and bliss, and that hell is nothing else but the rejection of this everlasting life and bliss, the everlasting revolt against the everlasting love of God. We must urgently remember and preach that it is not a creation of God but a creation of our revolted liberty, that God did not create any punishing instrument which is called hell, that God never takes vengeance of His revolted creatures, that His justice has nothing to do with the legalistic 'justice' of human society, which punishes the wicked in order to defend itself...That our everlasting spiritual death is not inflicted on us by God, but is a spiritual suicide, everlasting because our decision to be friends or enemies of God is a completely free and everlasting decision of the free spiritual beings created by God, a decision which is respected by God eternally and absolutely."* (from Dr Kalomiros' review of this article).

92. Instruction Three. Para.42.

93. Homilies on St John's Gospel, 12:3.

94. Ode Six.

95. A monstrous idea which is absolutely essential to the "aerial toll-house" ideology.

96. It is interesting that the masters of the Inquisition considered themselves, not torturers, but purgers, and they based their deeds upon the ideas of the doctrine of purgatory itself. Thus, as in their iconography and theology, the demons are the purgers of purgatory, the inquisitors placed themselves in the role of demons, and the Pope in the role of the prince of the demons, the master of the purge.

97. For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *The Tale of Basil the New: Study of a Gnostic Document*, (Synaxis Press, 1996).

98. We have not been able to find an earlier example of this grotesque and radical innovation.

99. It is significant that these radical theological novelties appeared in the same era that the portrayals of God the Father began to be accepted broadly, together with the heretical teaching that the Old Testament theophanies were appearances of God the Father.

100. Etimasia (ἐτοιμασία) "preparation of the throne." From Ps.9:8, "*He has prepared His throne, and He Himself will judge the world in righteousness; He will judge the peoples in uprightness.*" (cf Dn.7:13-14; Mt.25:31; Mk.14:62; Lk.22:69; Hb.8:1; 10:12; Rv.4:2-8, etc). The etimasia shows the throne prepared for Christ from all ages, and the prophecy of His Second Coming. Usually, the Gospel Book is shown on the etimasia, indicating that Christ is invisibly present and reigning in His Church on earth. Sts Adam and Eve are usually shown worshipping before the etimasia.

101. For a detailed discussion of this subject, see *The Tale of Basil the New: Study of a Gnostic Document*, (Synaxis Press, 1996).

102. *ibid.*, fn. 59 above

103. For example, the Egyptian apocryphal work, *The Tale of Joseph the Carpenter*, and a Nestorian work, based on the Ishtar (Easter) myth, which was very popular in Russia, *The Passion of the Mother of God* (also called *The Descent of the Virgin Mary Into Hell*, etc)

104. We cannot help but notice that advocates of the Gnostic "aerial toll-house" myth are not adverse and have no shame at re-writing the holy fathers or making absurd and unsubstantiated re-interpretations of their works.

105. In much the same way as the icon of *The Bridegroom* came to be called "*The God of Justice*" in heretical art and theology.



APPENDIX 1

Paradise and Hell According to Orthodox Tradition

Protopresbyter George Metallinos

On the Last Sunday of Lent "we commemorate the Second and Incorruptible Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". The expression in the Synaxarion, "we commemorate" confirms that our Church, as the Body of Christ, re-enacts in its worship the Second Coming of Christ as an "event" and not just something that is historically expected. The reason is that, through the Holy Eucharist, we are transported to the celestial kingdom, to meta-history. It is in this orthodox perspective, that the subject of paradise and hell is approached.

In the Gospels (Matthew, ch.5), mention is made of "kingdom" and "eternal fire". In this excerpt, which is cited during the Liturgy of this Sunday, the "kingdom" is the divine destination of mankind. The "fire" is "prepared" for the devil and his angels (demons), not because God desires it, but because they are without repentance [i.e., unwilling to turn, to re-think, and participate in redemption]. The "kingdom" is "prepared" for those who remain faithful to the will of God. The uncreated glory is Paradise (the "Kingdom"). "Eternal fire" is hell (v.46). At the beginning of history, God invites man into paradise, into a communion with

His uncreated Grace. At the end of history, man has to face both paradise and hell. We shall see further down what this means. We do however stress that it is one of the central subjects of our faith — it is Orthodox Christianity's "philosopher's stone."

Mention of paradise and hell in the New Testament is frequent. In Luke 23, 43, Christ says to the robber on the cross: "Today you will be with me in paradise". However, the robber also refers to paradise, when he says: "Remember me, Lord...in your kingdom". According to Theofylaktos of Bulgaria (PG 123, 1106), "for the robber was in paradise, in other words, the kingdom". The Apostle Paul (2Cor.12:3-4) confesses that, while still in this lifetime, he was "swept up to paradise and heard unspoken words, which are impossible for man to repeat." In Revelations, we read: "To the victor, I shall give him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God" (2:7). And Arethas of Caesarea interprets: "paradise is understood to be the blessed and eternal life" (PG 106, 529). Paradise, eternal life, kingdom of God, are all related.

References on hell: Matthew 25:46 ("to everlasting torment"), 25:41 ("everlasting fire"), 25:30 ("the outermost darkness"), 5:22 ("the place of fire"). 1John4:18 ("...for fear contains torment"). These are ways that express what we mean by "hell".

Paradise and *hell* are not two different places. Such an idea is an idolatrous concept. Rather they signify two different conditions [ways or states of being], which originate from the same uncreated source, and are perceived by man as two, differing experiences. More precisely, they are the same experience, except that they are perceived differently by man, depending on his internal state.

This experience is the sight of Christ in the uncreated light of His divinity, of His "glory".

From the moment of His Second Coming, through to all eternity, all people will be seeing Christ in His uncreated light. That is when "those who worked good deeds in their lifetime will go towards the resurrection of life, while those who worked evil in their lifetime will go towards the resurrection of judgment" (Jn.5:29). In the presence of Christ, mankind will be separated (like "sheep" and "kidgoats", to His right and His left). In other words, they will be discerning in two separate groups: those who will be beholding Christ as paradise (the "exceeding good, the radiant") and those who will be looking upon Christ as hell ("the all-consuming fire" of Hebrews 12:29).

3

Paradise and hell are the same reality. This is what is depicted in the portrayal of the Second Coming. From Christ, a river of fire flows forth. It is radiant like a golden light at the upper end of it, where the

saints are. At its lower end, the same river is fiery, and it is in that part of the river that the demons and the unrepentant ("the never repentant" according to a hymn) are depicted. This is why in Luke 2:34 we read that Christ stands "as the fall and the resurrection of many". Christ becomes the resurrection into eternal life for those who accepted Him and who followed the means given for the healing the heart. To those who rejected Him, however, He becomes their separation and their hell.

Among the patristic testimonies, Saint John of Sinai (of the Ladder) says that the uncreated light of Christ is "an all-consuming fire and an illuminating light". Saint Gregory Palamas (E.P.E. II, 498) observes: "Thus, it is said, He will baptize you by the Holy Spirit and by fire: in other words, by illumination and judgment, depending on each person's predisposition, which will in itself bring upon him that which he deserves." Elsewhere, (*Essays*, P. Christou Publications, vol.2, page 145): The light of Christ, "albeit one and accessible to all, is not partaken of uniformly, but differently".

Consequently, paradise and hell are not a reward or a punishment (condemnation), but the way that we individually experience the sight of Christ, depending on the condition of our heart. God doesn't punish in essence, although, for educative purposes, the Scripture does mention punishment. The more spiritual that one becomes, the better he can comprehend the language of

the Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Man's condition (clean-unclean, repentant-unrepentant) is the factor that determines the acceptance of the Light as "paradise" or "hell".

4

The anthropological issue in Orthodoxy is [to provide] that man will eternally look upon Christ as paradise and not as hell; that man will partake of His heavenly and eternal "kingdom". This is where we see the difference between Christianity as Orthodoxy and the various other religions. The other religions promise a certain "blissful" state, even after death. Orthodoxy however is not a quest for bliss, but a cure from the illness of religion, as the late father John Romanides so patristically teaches. Orthodoxy is an open hospital within history (a "spiritual infirmary" according to Saint John the Chrysostom), which offers the healing (catharsis) of the heart, in order to finally attain *theosis* — the only desired destination of man. This is the course that has been so comprehensively described by Father John Romanides and the Rev. Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Hierotheos (Vlachos); it is the healing of mankind, as experienced by all of our Saints.

This is the meaning of life in the body of Christ (the Church). This is the Church's reason for existence. This is what Christ's whole redemptive work aspired to. Saint Gregory Palamas (*4th Homily on the Second Coming*) says that the pre-eternal will of God for man

is "to find a place in the majesty of the divine kingdom" — to reach theosis. That is the purpose of creation. And he continues: "But even His divine and secret *kenosis*, His Theanthropic conduct, His redemptive passions, and every single mystery (in other words, all of Christ's work on earth) were all providentially and omnisciently pre-determined for this very end [purpose]."

The important reality, however, is that not all people respond to this invitation of Christ, and that is why not everyone partakes in the same way of His uncreated glory. This is taught by Christ, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke, ch.16). Man refuses Christ's offer, he becomes God's enemy and rejects the redemption offered by Christ (which is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, because it is within the Holy Spirit that we accept the calling of Christ). This is the "never repentant" person referred to in the hymn. God "never bears enmity", the blessed Chrysostom observes; it is we who become His enemies; we are the ones who reject Him. The unrepentant man becomes demonized, because he has chosen to. God does not desire this. Saint Gregory Palamas says: "...for this was not My pre-existing will; I did not create you for this purpose; I did not prepare the pyre for you. This undying pyre was pre-fired for the demons who bear the unchanging trait of evil, to whom your own unrepentant opinion attracted you." "The co-habitation with mischievous angels is voluntary" (*4th Homily on*

the Second Coming.) In other words, it is something that is freely chosen by man.

Both the rich man and Lazarus were looking upon the same reality, i.e., God in His uncreated light. The rich man reached the Truth, the sight of Christ, but could not partake of it, as Lazarus did. The poor Lazarus received "consolation", whereas the rich man received "anguish". Christ's words for those still in this world, that they "have Moses and the prophets," signifies that we are all without excuse. For, we have the Saints, who have experienced theosis and who call upon us to accede to their way of life so that we too might reach theosis as they have done. We therefore conclude that those who have chosen evil ways (like the rich man) are without an excuse.

5

Our orientation toward our fellow man is indicative of our inner state, and that is why this will be the criterion of Judgment Day during Christ's Second Coming (Matthew, ch.25). This does not imply that faith, or man's faithfulness to Christ is disregarded; faith is naturally a prerequisite, because our stance toward each other will show whether or not we have God within us. The first Sundays of the Triodion preceding Lent revolve around relationships with our fellow man. On the first of these Sundays, the outwardly pious Pharisee justifies himself and denigrates the Tax-collector. On the second Sunday, the older

brother (a repetition of the seemingly pious Pharisee) is sorrowed by the salvation of his brother. Likewise seemingly pious, he too had false piety, which did not produce love. On the third Sunday, this conditions reaches Christ's seat of judgment, and is evidenced as the criterion for our eternal life.

6

The experience of paradise or hell is beyond words or the senses. It is an uncreated reality, and not a created one. The Latins invented the myth that paradise and hell are both created realities. It is a myth that the damned will not be able to look upon God; just as the "absence of God" is equally a myth. The Latins had also perceived the fires of hell as something created. Orthodox Tradition has remained faithful to the Scriptural claim that the damned shall see God (like the rich man of the parable), but will perceive Him only as "an all-consuming fire". The Latin scholastics accepted hell as punishment and the deprivation of a tangible vision of the divine essence. Biblically and patristically however, "hell" is understood as man's failure to cooperate (*synergy*) with Divine Grace, in order to reach the illuminating vision of God (which is paradise) and unselfish love (following 1Cor.13:8): "love.... does not demand any reciprocation"). Consequently, there is no such thing as "God's absence," only His presence. That is why His Second Coming is dire ("O, what an

hour it will be then", we chant in the Praises of Matins). It is an irrefutable reality, toward which Orthodoxy is permanently oriented ("I anticipate the resurrection of the dead...")

The damned — those who are hardened at heart, like the Pharisees (Mark 3:5: "in the callousness of their hearts") — eternally perceive the pyre of hell as their salvation! It is because their condition is not susceptible to any other form of salvation. They too are "finalized" — they reach the end of their road — but only the righteous [sincerely pious] reach the end as redeemed persons. The others finish in a state of condemnation. "Salvation" to them is hell, since in their lifetime, they pursued only pleasure. The rich man of the parable had "enjoyed all of his riches". The poor Lazarus uncomplainingly endured "every suffering". Apostle Paul expresses this (1Cor.3:13- 15): "Each person's work, whatever it is, will be tested by fire. If their work survives the test, then whatever they built, will be rewarded accordingly. If one's work is burnt by the fire, then he will suffer losses; he shall be saved, thus, as though by fire." The righteous and the unrepentant shall both pass through the uncreated "fire" of divine presence, however, the one shall pass through unscathed, while the other shall be burnt. He too is "saved", but only in the way that one passes through a fire. Efthimios Zigavinos (12th century) observes in this respect: "God as fire that illuminates and brightens the pure, and burns and obscures the unclean." And

Theodoritos Kyrrou regarding this "saving" writes: "One is also saved by fire, being tested by it, just as when one passes through fire. If he has an appropriate protective cover, he will not be burnt, otherwise, he may be 'saved', but he will be charred!"

Consequently, the fire of hell has nothing in common with the Latin "purgatory", nor is it created, nor is it punishment, or an intermediate stage. A viewpoint such as this is virtually a transferal of one's accountability to God. But the accountability is entirely our own, whether we choose to accept or reject the salvation, the healing, that is offered by God. "Spiritual death" is the viewing of the uncreated light, of divine glory, as a pyre, as fire. Saint John Chrysostom in his *9th homily on First Corinthians*, notes: "Hell is never-ending ...sinners shall be brought into a never-ending suffering. As for the 'being burnt altogether,' it means this: that he does not withstand the strength of the fire." And he continues: "And he (Paul) says, it means this: that he shall not be burnt, like his works, into nothingness, but he shall continue to exist, but within that fire. He therefore considers this as his 'salvation.' For it is customary for us to say 'saved in the fire,' when referring to materials that are not totally burnt away."

Scholastic perceptions and interpretations which, through Dante's work (*Inferno*) have permeated our world, have consequences that amount to idolatrous concepts. An example is the separation of paradise and

hell as two different places. This has happened because they did not distinguish between the created and the uncreated. Equally erroneous is the denial of hell's eternity, with the idea of the "restoration" of all, or the concepts surrounding the idea of *Bon Dieu*. God is indeed "benevolent" (Mt.8:17), since He offers salvation to everyone: ("He desires that all be saved....." 1Tm 2:4). However, the words of our Lord as heard during the funeral service are formidable: "I cannot do anything on my own; as I hear, thus I judge, and my judgment is fair" (Jn.5:30). Equally manufactured is the concept of theodicy, which applies in this case. Everything [all responsibility] is ultimately attributed to God alone, without taking into consideration man's cooperation (synergy) as a factor of redemption. Salvation is possible only within the framework of cooperation between man and divine grace. According to the blessed Chrysostom, "the utmost, almost everything, is God's; He did however leave something little to us." That "little something" is our acceptance of God's invitation. The robber on the cross was saved, "by using the key request of 'remember me'..."! Also idolatrous is the perception of a God becoming outraged against a sinner, whereas we mentioned earlier that God "never shows enmity". This is a juridical perception of God, which also leads to the prospect of "penances" in confessions as forms of punishment, and not [epitimia] as medications, as means of healing.

The mystery of *paradise-hell* is also experienced in

the life of the Church in the world. During the holy mysteries/sacraments, there is a participation of the faithful in divine grace, so that grace may be activated in our lives, by our course towards Christ. Especially during the Holy Eucharist, the uncreated (Holy Communion) becomes either paradise or hell within us, depending on our condition. Primarily, our participation in Holy Communion is a participation in either paradise or hell, in our own time and place. That is why we beseech God, prior to receiving Holy Communion, to render the Precious Gifts "not as judgment or condemnation" within us, "for the healing of soul and body," not as "condemnation." This is why participation in Holy Communion is linked to the overall spiritual course of life of the faithful. When we approach Holy Communion uncleansed and unrepentant, we are condemned (burnt). Holy Communion inside us becomes the "inferno" and "spiritual death" (see 1Cor.11:30, etc.). Not because it is transformed into those things of course, but because our own uncleanness cannot accept Holy Communion as "paradise." Given that Holy Communion is called "the medicine of immortality" (Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, 2nd century), the same thing exactly occurs as with any medication. If our organism does not have the prerequisites to absorb the medication, then the medication will produce side-effects and can kill instead of heal. It is not the medication that is responsible, but the condition of our organism. It must be stressed, that

if we do not accept Christianity as a therapeutic process, and its holy mysteries/sacraments as spiritual medication, then we are led to a "religionisation" of Christianity; in other words, we "idolatrize" it. And unfortunately, this is a frequent occurrence when we perceive Christianity as a "religion."

Besides, this lifetime is evaluated in the light of the twin criterion of paradise-hell. "Seek first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness," Christ teaches us (Mt.6:33). Saint Basil the Great says in *To The Youth* (ch.3) "Everything we do is in preparation of another life." Our life must be a continuous preparation for our participation in *paradise* – our communion with the Uncreated (Jn.17:3). Everything begins from this lifetime. That is why Apostle Paul says: "Behold, now is the opportune time. Behold, now is the day of redemption." (2Cor.6:2) Every moment of our lives is of redemptive importance. Either we gain eternity, the eternal community with God, or we lose it. This is why oriental religions and cults that preach reincarnations are injuring mankind: they are virtually transferring the problem to other, (nonexistent of course) lifetimes. The thing is, however, that only one life is available to each of us, whether we are saved or condemned. This is why Basil the Great continues: "We must proclaim that those things therefore that lead us towards that life should be cherished and pursued with all our strength; and those that do not lead us to that destination, we should disregard, as something of no

value.” Such are the criteria of the Christian life. A Christian continuously chooses whatever favours his salvation. We gain paradise or lose it and end up in hell, already during our lifetime. That is why John the Evangelist says: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn.3:17-18).

Consequently, the work of the Church is not to “send” people to paradise or to hell, but to prepare them for the final judgment. The work of the clergy is therapeutic and not moralistic or character-shaping, in the temporal sense of the word. The purpose of the therapy offered by the Church is not to create “useful” citizens and essentially “usable” ones, but citizens of the celestial (uncreated) kingdom. Such citizens are the Confessors and the Martyrs and the true faithful, the saints.

However, this is also the way that our mission is directed: What are we inviting people to? To the Church as a [spiritual] hospital/therapy Centre, or just an ideology that is labelled “Christian”? More often than not, we strive to secure a place in “paradise”, instead of striving to be healed. That is why we focus on the rites and not on therapy. This of course does not signify a devaluing of worship. But, without ascesis (spiritual exercise, ascetic lifestyle, acts of therapy),

worship cannot sanctify us. The grace that pours forth from it remains inert inside us. Orthodoxy doesn't make any promises to send mankind to any sort of paradise or hell; but it does have the power — as evidenced by the incorruptible and miracle-working relics of our saints (incorruptibility=theosis)— to prepare man, so that he may forever look upon the Uncreated Grace and the Kingdom of Christ as Paradise, and not as Hell.

APPENDIX 2

“Word About Death”

AND ORTHODOX ESCHATOLOGY

Protopresbyter Paul Matveevsky¹

The essay *Word About Death* is a theological dissertation presented by the author [Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov] with the intention of offering edification. He presents concepts about the incomprehensibility of death, the fate of the body and soul after death, paradise, hades, hell. He speaks about the separating of the soul from the body, the death of the righteous and of sinners, the death of souls, eternal death, the torments of Gehenna, “tollhouses,” mortal sin², preparation for death, the remembrance of death.

Regardless of the fact that this dissertation was composed on the basis of various ascetic traditions, there is much in it which must be regarded negatively from a theological point of view.

Of the opinions which the author rushed, in vain, to elevate to a degree of acceptability, we will discuss: 1. the teaching about the corporeality of the soul and of spirits; 2. [his teaching] about the sensuality of paradise; 3. his notion that Gehenna [hell; hades] is located in the interior of the earth, and; 4. the idea about the distribution of evil spirits and tollhouses in the air.

Before we express our observations on the above cited opinions [of Bishop Ignaty], we cannot but point out that as yet, not a single presentation of our [Orthodox] eschatology or aspect of our [Orthodox] theology which has examined these matters concerning the world and man, has ever attempted such a detailed definition of these questions as [Brianchaninov] has attempted. The theology [of the Orthodox Church] has not undertaken an exposition of these questions in such speculation as they were presented by the author of *Word About Death*. [Our theology] has never subjected such and similar questions to the realm of human curiosity, which desires to stretch itself beyond the borders of human limitations. Our theology has always provided only those aspects of understandings about the soul, paradise, Gehenna, hades and evil spirits which are beyond dispute in Scripture and the teachings of the whole Church.

1

The Opinion that Human Souls and Spirits are Corporeal

The author of *Word About Death* attempts to base his opinion about the corporeality of the soul and of [both evil and angelic] spirits on the words of [pseudo] St Makarios the

Egyptian.³

Bishop Ignaty claims that, "God's saint teaches that angels and souls, although they are very subtle according to their nature, are in all their subtlety, nevertheless, corporeal bodies. They are thin, ethereal bodies, since, on the other hand, our earthly bodies are very material and gross. The coarse human body serves as a garment for the subtle body — the soul. Over the eyes, ears, arms, legs belonging to the soul, similar bodily members are put on" (p.11).

"The corporeality of the soul" [Brianchaninov asserts] "is proved by the experience of a certain hermit⁴ who saw his soul coming out of the body — it had the entire appearance of a body, a full similitude with it" (p.12); the author remarks that even in our time there were two similar occurrences with people, who are not dead (p.13,fn.). "Angels are similar to the soul: they have members — heads, eyes, mouths, breasts, arms, legs, hair — a full likeness of a visible person in his body" (p.13). Good angels have a meek and beautiful appearance, but evil spirits are ugly.⁵ The author considers as a good proof of the corporeality of spirits the narrations about the Saints who had either themselves beaten evil spirits or were beaten by them: "How could this have been carried out if the fallen angels were totally bodiless?"⁶ (p.17, fn.). Curious, too, is the philosophical consideration which Brianchaninov asserts is completely in favour of that opinion. We will extract from it. Having mentioned that the Western scholar Allarus (who wrote the foreword to the words of St John Cassian) refutes the ideas of St Cassian about the corporeality of spirits, the author [Brianchaninov] says:

"Unfortunately, even amongst us, certain people participate in the dark and indefinite opinion of the Jesuit

and of Western philosophers at the expense of the incorporeality of created spirits. The Holy Scripture and the fathers constantly call them bodiless and immaterial; but they call them that only relatively: relative to gross human bodies and to the coarse material world, and not at all relative to God — the one Spirit. God alone is fully spirit. Angels, both the holy and also the fallen, are subjected to time and space. An understanding about the subjection to space is inseparable from an understanding about the subjection to form. If one refutes the concept of the subjugation of angels to space, one must either refute their existence altogether or acknowledge them as being boundless, i.e., attribute to them God's omnipresence. Only two indefinite quantities — nothingness and the infinite — are not subjected to form; on the contrary, every definite quality, no matter how small or how large it might be, inevitably has a form, according to its own definiteness. Having agreed that angels are limited, one necessarily must accept that, in relationship to space, they have form, while in relationship to the subtlety of their nature, they have a certain degree of this subtlety, i.e., they are inevitably bodies, no matter how subtle these bodies might be. The form of a limited being is inevitably delineated, so to speak, by its very borders, extremities; thus a delineated being has its appearance. The infinite, as not having any ending in any direction, is not subjected to any form; for this reason it cannot have any appearance.”⁷ (pp.16-17).

“This is sufficient; the reader can draw a conclusion for himself regarding the bases of the opinion about corporeality.” We, on our part, will offer against this theory the briefest observations, drawing them from the Holy Scripture, the teaching of the Church, and philosophical induc-

tion.

On the one hand, the author has already acknowledged that the Holy Scripture and the holy fathers constantly call spirits bodiless, and on the other hand, he can in no way prove that they called spirits bodiless only relatively. From the fact that Holy Scripture (we speak of the Church fathers later) no where says that this affirmation of the bodilessness of spirits ought to be understood relatively, we must acknowledge that to insert a concept of “relativeness” into the completely clear and direct words of the Holy Scripture is arbitrary, and justified by nothing. Bringing such arbitrariness into the interpretation of the Holy Scripture, we could evade any proper proof taken from the Bible and directed against us, and affirm any kind of idea by [using] propositions [taken from] God’s word, according to our own interpretation. But is this an impartial service to truth? Let us remember the examples of ancient heretics: they all strove, with the aid of an original system of interpretations, to support their errors with Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, their opinions were refuted by the Church as not being in accord with the true sense of God’s word. Let us look at how the Holy Scripture speaks about the compound parts of man and about bodiless spirits. It acknowledges in man: (1) πνεῦμα = ψυχὸν (2) σῶμα = σαρξ = χροῦς; the clearest places are those where πνεῦμα, in the sense of an incorporeal [bodiless] and spiritual being is distinguished from σαρξ — of the body and, in general, of the material composition of man (Mt.26:41; Rm.8:10; Gal.5:17; 1Cor.5:3-5; 7:34; 2Cor.7:1; Jm.1:26; etc); but in others, ψυχὸν is obviously used in the sense of πνεῦμα (Mt.10:28; 16:26; 3Ki.19:4; Jb.27:8; Acts 2:27; Lk.9:56; 21:19; Rm.2:29; and certain others). That ψυχὸν is the same as πνεῦμα in the understand-

ing of the ancient writers is evident (Ps.118; 175; Acts 2:41; 3:23). According to the concept of the ruling part in man — the soul — the Holy Scripture sometimes simply calls man πνεῦμα (with the preposition σώματος: Ws.16:14; Lk.24:26; Acts 7:59; 1Cor.2:11), and extremely rarely by the word σώμα=σαρξ (Eph.5:28, 29). If in two places the Holy Scripture distinguishes in man πνεῦμα, ψυχὴ and σώμα (1Ths.5:23), and ψυχὴ and πνεῦμα (Hb.4:12): then, since both ψυχὴ (1Ki.19:5; Lk.12:19; Acts 2:43; 15:26; Mt.2:20; 20:28; Jn.10:15; Rm.11:3; etc) and πνεῦμα (Mt.27:50; Lk.8: 55, 23, 46; etc) are used identically in the significance of a foundation which has animated the body of man, it is impossible to conceive that these cited places introduce an idea of trichotomy in the composition of man (although some did adhere to this thought).

What conclusions will we draw from this philological-exegetical consideration? That the Holy Scripture, in attributing existence, conscience, life to one part of man (i.e., the soul, which is "part of man, but not the complete man")⁸, and calling this part πνεῦμα, clearly gives us to understand the spiritual nature of this part, not in the sense of a "subtle materialism," but in a direct and actual sense. The Lord Himself explains the word πνεῦμα in this manner at His appearance to the disciples narrated in chapter twenty-four of Luke's Gospel. Having said, "for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (vs.39), He revealed that, on the one hand, His subtle body, glorified after the Resurrection, *has both flesh and blood*, i.e., materiality, and on the other hand, He freed the understanding of πνεῦμα from any concept this subtle materiality. Since the word πνεῦμα is used in the New Testament to describe angels also (Hb.1:14; Acts 23:8), and only this word, for

neither σῶμα nor σαρξ are attributed to them; then it follows that they, as πνεύματα, are not only spiritual, immaterial, personally conscious, but they also differ from man in that they are not united with a physical body (even a "subtle" one), and differ from God in that they are limited in will and mind (Mt.24:36; 1Pt.1:2; Mk.13:32). Only God is perfect spirit, unlimited in will, mind or place.

Thus, according to the mind of the Holy Scripture, (1) man *is* body and soul, and he is a being half corporeal and half spiritual (in the real sense of the word); (2) an angel (and also an evil spirit) is a spiritual being (in the same sense), but created and limited.

On the basis of the Holy Scripture, the majority of the holy fathers, as also the Liturgical texts, taught the complete immateriality of souls and of spirits; but while the teaching of the Church on this subject had not yet been defined exactly, certain of the ancient fathers and teachers allowed themselves to think somewhat otherwise. In pre-Christian times both philosophy and folklore sometimes conceived the soul as being material. Thus Aristotle considered it to be a phase or variety of matter, a more subtle form of it, [an idea] which inevitably followed from the empirical view of this philosopher. In the system of Homer, the soul, upon separation from the body, appears in the form of a shade, of a subtle image (εἶδωλον), before Hermes who leads it into the subterranean. Under the influence of these former concepts, or more correctly, in order to separate themselves more sharply from the heretics of their day [we have in mind Gnostics], some writers and fathers, that is, Justin, Irenae, Caesarius, entertained, although in indefinite expressions, a certain materiality of angels and the soul.⁹ The most eminent fathers and teachers of the Church,

however — true pillars of the faith — Sts Ignatios the God-bearer, Athanasios the Great, Gregory the Theologian, St John Chrysostom, etc, were decisively of the understanding that angels and souls are immaterial — and this was at that very time when St Makarios flourished in the Egyptian desert, from whom the author of *Word About Death* quotes so much. The question must be asked: How could St Makarios the Great have assimilated to himself imagery and thoughts so discordant with the understandings of the greatest fathers of Christianity?¹⁰

Finally, the Church, finding this opinion that the soul and angels and evil spirits have some form of “corporeality” unfounded, pronounced at the fourth session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, the second at Nicea, on the immateriality of angels and souls. This ecumenical decree must be acknowledged, without doubt, as completely obligatory for us.

2

After the compiler of *Word About Death* had introduced [his teaching of] the materiality of the soul and spirits, it is not surprising that he proposed [a teaching of] the sensuality of paradise: for, material souls, when separated from the bodies, require for themselves a material dwelling place. Having said that in the book of Genesis, paradise is represented in the form of a most beautiful garden, the compiler remarks, “such it is in actual fact; but matter and nature are subtle, they correspond to the nature of its inhabiting spirits, and are thus inaccessible for our senses, which have become coarse and dull from the fall” (p.22) This surmise is supposedly justified by extracts from

lives of saints (26, 24 March; 2 October, and a manuscript of [the life of] St Evfrosiniya of Suzdal). From the vision of Saint Andrew (2 October), the author concludes that "paradise is the heavenly abode nearest to the earth, or the first heaven, above which are found others heavens...in these celestial abodes, the souls of the righteous now abide, according to *their merits*" (p.34). Since the Church has not expressed Its mind about what paradise is and where it is located, then all such conclusions and conjectures are left up to the will of those who wish to accept them.

3

The location of hades is a related type question. St John Chrysostom said to his listeners, "Let us not seek where it is located, but the means of avoiding it" (*Hom.31 on Romans*). But the author [Bishop Ignaty] seeks and finds it in the interior of the earth. "Hades is situated," he says, "in the interior of the earth" (p.36), and he justifies this by quotations from many places in both testaments — quotations which, one must affirm, are very questionable. "And so," concludes the compiler, "the teaching that hades [sic—he means gehenna] is located inside the earth is a teaching of the Orthodox Church" (p.40). But where is this a "teaching of the Church? In what symbolic book, in what catechism is such a teaching set forth?

4

The author also represents to us the dwelling place of fallen spirits. "God's word and the spirit cooperating with

the word reveal to us, by means of their chosen vessels, that the space between heaven and earth, all the azure abyss which we see, the air, the universe, serves as a dwelling place for fallen angels who have been cast down from the heaven" (p.104). "Fallen angels are scattered in crowds in all the transparent abyss we see above ourselves." (ibid). But the location of evil spirits in aerial space serves the author only as a point of departure to the description of "toll-houses" (pp.110-143), on the basis of the well known tale of Theodora, found in the life of Basil the New. The Orthodox Church, however, has not made any pronouncement about either the tollhouses, or about the abode of evil spirits, and therefore we not say anything definitive or authoritative about it. We must assert that in a theological work it would be better to avoid such and similar speculations of plain and simple curiosity, which have no moral significance and speak only to the imagination.

This is what we wish to note concerning *A Word About Death*. We would have willingly by-passed much in it if the very peculiarity of the opinions of the author [Bishop Ignaty] had not imposed upon us the duty of exposing these views..."

ENDNOTES:

1. (V. Rev. Paul Matveesky was an official reviewer for the Holy Synod. This present review appeared in the journal "**Strannik**", 1863, V.3, Nr.9, Sec.3, pp.26-36).
2. [Ed Note:]The concept of a separate "mortal" and "venial" sin is not found in Orthodox theology, but rather in Roman Catholic teaching. Brianchaninov was much affected by Latin Scholasticism.

3. [Ed. Note:] Although it is known that St. Makarios of Egypt wrote absolutely nothing. Works attributed to him were primarily Gnostic or Massalian forgeries. This is why the Spiritual Homilies are labeled "*Pseudo Makarios*." Massalian passages were edited out of the original text and, as we receive them today, they have been cleared of this element.
4. [Ed. Note: In the unsober and unstable atmosphere of 19th century Russia, many mythologies were created, and taken to be authoritative, even when they contradicted the Holy Fathers, based on nothing more than "a certain ascetic" whose name and location no one knows, or the "dream of a certain pious older woman" in some usually undisclosed location. Such fantasies were often given more credence than the Ecumenical Council and the Scripture.
5. [Ed. Note]: We note that in a book published by the late Seraphim Rose of Platina, it is asserted that "male demons have horns, while female demons do not." Such is the delusion that can befall the over zealous.
6. [Ed. Note:] In fact, the Saints, such as Anthony the Great, as he himself makes clear, are speaking of spiritual wounds, spiritual "beatings" and spiritual warfare, not anything physical.
7. [Ed. Note:] Of course, if angels and souls are intelligent energy, the whole rationalistic philosophical argument about "form" is rendered null and meaningless.
8. [Ed. Note:] See, eg. Papademetriou, George, *On The Nature of Man According to the Holy Fathers* (Synaxis Press, Dewdney) 2004.
9. Although in these cases, they were concerned with pointing out that only God is Pure Spirit.

APPENDIX 3

Heaven and Hell in the Afterlife According to the Bible

Peter Chopelas

The idea that God is an angry figure who sends those He condemns to a place called Hell, where they spend eternity in torment separated from His presence, is missing from the Bible and unknown in the early church. While Heaven and Hell are decidedly real, they are experiential conditions rather than physical places, and both exist in the presence of God. In fact, nothing exists outside the presence of God.

This is not the way traditional Western Christianity, Roman Catholic or Protestant, has envisioned the afterlife. In Western thought Hell is a location, a place where God punishes the wicked, where they are cut off from God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet this concept occurs nowhere in the Bible, and does not exist in the original languages of the Bible.

While there is no question that according to the scriptures there is torment and "gnashing of teeth" for the wicked, and glorification for the righteous, and that this judgment comes from God, these destinies are not separate destinations. The Bible indicates that everyone comes before God in the next life, and it is because of being in God's presence that they either suffer eternally, or experience eternal joy. In other words,

both the joy of heaven, and the torment of judgment, is caused by being eternally in the presence of the Almighty, the perfect and unchanging God.

This is not a new interpretation or a secret truth. It has been there all along, held by the Church from the beginning, revealed in the languages of the Scriptures, which were spoken by the Christians of the early church era. This understanding was held by nearly all Christians everywhere for the first 1000 years of the Church's existence, and, except where influence by western theologies, continued to be held by Christians beyond Western Europe and America even up to this day (including the roughly 350 million Orthodox Christians worldwide).

When you examine in context the source words which are translated as "hell" in English language Bibles the original understanding becomes clear. You will find that "hell" is translated from four different Greek and Hebrew words. These words are not interchangeable in the original language, yet, incredibly, in English-language bibles these words are translated differently in different places to fit the translators' theology (rather than allow the words of scripture to determine their theology). Not only did English translators dump these four very different words into one meaning, they were not even consistent with it and chose to translate these same words with different meanings in different places. It is no wonder that English readers of the Bible are confused.

If one examines what the early Church Fathers wrote about "hell" and the afterlife, it will be seen that they too understood that there is no place called hell, and that both paradise and torment came from being in God's presence in the afterlife.

When you examine what the Roman Catholic Church teaches and what most Protestants believe about the afterlife, and compare that with the scriptures and early Church beliefs, you find large disparities. You will also find their innovative doctrines were not drawn from the Bible or historic Church doctrine, but rather from the mythology of the Middle Ages, juridical concepts, and enlightenment rationalizations, all alien to early Christian thought.

The Afterlife according to the Hebrew Scriptures

Sheol is one word sometimes translated as "Hell" in the Old Testament. In Hebrew, this word is a proper noun, that is a name or title, so properly it should not have been translated but simply transliterated, as is done with other names. The literal meaning of this Hebrew word is simply "subterranean retreat". Sheol was not understood as a physical place since it exists in the spirit world, but it is a spiritual "place" associated with dead people. It was understood that when a person dies, their body is buried, and their soul goes to reside in Sheol. That is the fate for all people who die, both the righteous and the wicked.

According to Hebrew scholars, anything more detailed is conjecture and speculation.

Sheol was translated as "hell" in a number of places where it was indicating a place for the wicked, which is consistent with western thought. But it was also translated as "grave" and as "pit" in a number of other places where it was clearly not a place of the wicked. Yet there are other Hebrew words for grave and pit, so why did it not occur to the translators that if the author wanted to mean pit or grave they would have used them? It can be seen that where Sheol fit the translators' idea of hell as a place of torment, they interpreted it one way, as hell, and simply used the word another way if it did not, confusing those who are trying to understand the Scriptures in translation.

In historic Jewish understanding, it is the perception of the individual in Sheol that makes the difference. This same "place" called Sheol is experienced by the righteous as "gen eiden", the Garden of Eden or Paradise, i.e. "heaven". Moreover, Sheol is experienced by the wicked as the "fires of gehennom", i.e. punishment or "hell".

What is it that causes this same place to be experienced differently by the righteous and the wicked? According to the Jews (and by inheritance, the Christians as well) it is the very presence of God. Since God fills all things and dwells everywhere in the spirit world, there is nowhere apart from Him. Moreover, evil sinners, the enemies of God, experience His

presence, His Shekhinah glory, as punishment. Yet the righteous bask in that same glory, and experience it as the love and joy of God, as Paradise.

Consider Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who refused to worship the idol in Babylon (Daniel 3). They were thrown by King Nebuchadnezzar into the "fiery furnace" which was heated "seven times more". The significance of "seven" is a number symbolic of the "furnace" of Heaven, the place where God dwells. The three Jews were unharmed by the fire where one "like the Son of God" was among them. However, the same flames of fire killed the king's "most mighty" soldiers. This is an analogy to how the presence of God is light and warmth to those who love Him, and pain and destruction to those who oppose him, yet it is the same "fire."

It's also useful to consider the ancient Greco-Roman pagan understanding of the heavens and Hades. Though it was not fundamental to Hebrew theology, the Greek view was still sometimes referenced or borrowed, because these ideas were familiar and prevalent in the culture.

The ancient pagan Greek view, later adopted by the Romans, was that heaven was a physical place up in the sky. The word for heaven is used interchangeably with the location of the objects of the sky, as in "heavenly bodies", and for the dwelling place of the gods. That is why the Greek word for heaven and sky is the same; there was no distinction made between

them in the earliest writings, but eventually they were also understood to be more as a metaphor for the spiritual heaven.

For the ancient pagan Greeks, Hades was a place, but was sometimes also personified in folk mythology. The physical place was where all humans go when they die, a site located at the center of the earth. The Greek word literally means “unseen place”. Like Sheol, it was the final abode of all humans, but unlike Sheol, it was taken to be a geographic site, the literal “underworld” in folk mythology. It was also taken as a metaphor for the place of final rest. Hades was also sometimes taken as the name of the ruler of this place, the pagan god Hades, also known as Pluton by the Romans (after which the plant Pluto was named, the ruler of the dark).

In Greco-Roman mythology Heaven was reserved only for the gods, and after death mere mortals could only hope to find a safe place in Hades to spend eternity. The early Greco-Roman Hades was a very literal and even primitive concept, compared to the Jews’ more spiritual Sheol. If a person was dead, they were in Hades, and there was no other option; only a very rare few heroes challenged the gods of the heavens and were immortalized in the stars.

The pre-Christian Greek language had thus developed in this kind of world view, both heaven and Hades as a physical and literal existence up in the sky, or down under the ground. Although these later

became more metaphorical in more developed pagan writings, from this is where the universal concept of “up” for heaven or Paradise, and “down” for the place of the dead came. It is used metaphorically by both the Jews and pagans to describe mankind’s relationship with God, and so became a universal cultural concept. This is why there are so many Biblical references to God being “up” in heaven, and Sheol being “down” in the “under parts of the earth”. However, neither the Jews nor the early Christians took these ideas literally as the ancient Greeks and Romans may have, but understood “up” and “down” as spiritual rather than physical realities.

For the Jews and early Christians, even Sheol was not separated from God. Translating directly from the Greek of the Septuagint Palms 139:7 and 8 “Where can I go away from your spirit? And away from your presence, where can I flee? If I go up into heaven, you are there. If I go down into Hades, there is your presence.”

When Jewish scholars translated their scriptures into Greek in the third century BC, they used the Greek word Hades interchangeably for the Hebrew Sheol in the Septuagint. Strictly speaking, the pagan understanding was very different, but Jewish scholars adapted “Hades” for their use. It is one of many examples of changed, allegorical, or metaphorical non-Hebrew words used in the Bible borrowed from Greek pagan mythology. In the New Testament, Hades is

used in a number of places as the Greek equivalent to Sheol as well.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, Sheol is [*erroneously*] translated 31 times as Hell in the King James Bible, and similarly in the Revised Standard and NRSV. In a number of other places it is translated as "grave" or "pit" and once even as "dust". It appears the translators did not have a very consistent understanding as to what Sheol means, translating the same word differently in different places. The idea of "Hell" as a physical place of torment, apart from the presence of God, had already taken root, and the translation fit the preconception rather than the original meaning of the word.

Gehenna is another word translated as "hell". It was known to the Jews as a physical place, a valley outside to the south of Jerusalem. It literally means in Hebrew "valley of the sons of Henna". Here child sacrifices were once made to the pagan god Molech. Gehenna is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 28:3 and 33:6, and Jeremiah 7:31, 19:2-6, and appears in many traditional extra-Biblical Jewish writings. After this area came under Jewish control a memorial fire was kept burning there. Later it became a dumping place for refuse, dead animals, and eventually prisoners' bodies, or the bodies of the poor that were not claimed by any family. Trash fires were kept continually burning there for sanitary reasons. It was like many landfills: a smoky, foul-smelling place with carrion-

eating birds circling overhead, and with maggot infested carcasses.

By the time of Jesus this place became a well known metaphor for the fate of those condemned and judged by God. Expressions like “the fiery pit” or the “fires of Gehenna” and “where the worm turns” were equivalent to the unrighteous’ experience of God’s presence. Gehenna was the place where evil and sinful people ended up. In Jewish mystical writings it was believed that this place is where the final destruction of the wicked would occur at Messiah’s arrival. Because this is when the resurrection would occur, all the evil lawbreakers would be resurrected and standing in Gehenna when God reclaims the earth. In the final battle, God’s enemies, the evil ones, would be burned up, “As wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God” as it says in Psalm 68. Jesus affirmed and clarified this teaching and Christians now believe this will occur on Messiah’s return.

This experience of Gehenna was used as an analogy to express what happens to those who oppose the God of the Jews. Yet even it was not a place God “sends” people. The fire itself was understood to be how the wicked experienced the Shechinah glory of God, as a burning judgment fire.

Therefore, usage of this word is interchangeable with “judgment”, and quite different than Sheol. To be forgiven of your offenses was to be rescued from “the fiery pit”, or rescued from judgment. You would still

go to Sheol until the resurrection, but in glory rather than in torment.

Notice however that in English, the translators rendered Gehenna as the "valley the sons of Henna" in some places in the scriptures and in other places as "hell," rather than just making a direct transcription of the words wherever it appears. This confuses the reader, who could get a more consistent understanding of the meaning of the word if it was rendered accurately as "Gehenna" every time, or more properly as "the Valley of the Sons of Henna".

There are numerous references to God's presence being like fire in the Hebrew Scriptures. And before the invention of the electric light, any reference to "light" meant "fire" in one form or another. For example, "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire" (Numbers); God "...appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush," (Exodus); "The fire of the Lord burns among them" (Numbers); "the Lord descends upon it in fire" (Exodus); "You have refined us as silver in a fire" (Psalms); and "Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire" (Psalms). These are a few of the many Old Testament references to God being perceived as fire; it was how the Jews understood humans experience God's Shechinah glory.

No human could bear to look at the blazing holy presence of God: not Moses, who hid his face, not Abraham, not Adam or Eve after they fell from Grace. No human could look at the face of God and live to

tell about it.

God is described as fire in the following verses; Gen 19:24, Ex 3:2, 9:23, 13:21-22, 19:18, Num 11:1-3, 4:24, Ne 9:12, Ps 66:10, 104:4, Is 66:15, among others places. Another interesting word study to examine is the Hebrew words used in English renditions of the Old Testament when describing how God "punishes" people. Ten different Hebrew words are translated as "punish" in this context, yet none carries our English meaning of punishment. The most common word *paqad* rendered 31 times as punish, simply means "to visit" or "to remember." The word *anash* (used 5 times) simply means "to urge" or "compel", *chasak* (occurs 3 times) means to restrain, *avown* (used 12 times) means sin. This also implies the cost for being evil or causing offence. One interesting word translated as punish, *yakar* means to chastise, but also means "to add value" as in chastising a child makes him more valuable. There are a few others words rendered as punish, but they occur only once each. As can be seen, none of these words clearly indicates that God does the punishing. Apparently for the translators, every time God visits or remembers His people, He is "punishing" them, but that is not how Jews understand this word. Nor would Jews automatically assume that a visit from God was a bad thing, either.

This kind of translation seems attributable to a presupposition of what these words mean, and

intrinsically changes the meanings of these words from the original intent. The translators' own incorrect ideas have clouded their objectivity, an all-too-frequent occurrence with virtually all western language Bibles.

The Afterlife according to the New Testament

Jesus and the Apostles were all Jews of course, as were nearly all the members of the first Christian Church. The first Christians saw themselves as inheritors of the covenant of Abraham, and the early Church "New Testament," so they naturally understood the afterlife in the terms of the Old Testament. The Gospels and all of the epistles affirm this understanding as well, when read in the original Greek.

During the New Testament and Patristic times some of the Church Fathers clearly held that everyone went to the same place, to Hades. Within Hades they held there was a separating of the unjust, who were experiencing a foretaste of the sufferings of judgment, from the just who were in "Abraham's bosom" or Paradise — experiencing a foretaste of heaven (Saint Hippolytus, 2nd century; Tertullian, 2nd century; Saint Andrew of Crete, 7th century). "Abraham's bosom" is understood to be within, but separated or "walled off", from Hades. The departed righteous and the unrighteous experience that which is appropriate to each. The word "paradise" comes from an ancient

Persian word that means a walled garden or courtyard, implying a separation from the area around the garden. In Xenophon's economics, Socrates said that the king of Persia took particular care, wherever he was, to have gardens or enclosures full of every beautiful and good thing the earth could produce. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture) this word is used to refer to the Garden of Eden (Gn.2:8). Abraham's Bosom implies being in an intimate embrace, being in the hollow formed by the doubling of a robe between the arms of the wearer of the robe, and being covered and protected by the embrace.

In the Gospel story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, they both are able to see Abraham. The Rich Man and Lazarus can see and talk to one another though they are far off from each other and both see Abraham. "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." (Luke 16:23). The grammar implies both the rich man and Lazarus are in Hades. The bosom of Abraham represents God's bosom. All of them are in God's presence, but one is in torment, the other is in a state of comfort. The immediate application of the story concerns the state of the departed prior to the resurrection of Christ. This is why it is said "...neither will they [the Jewish People that have Moses and the prophets] be persuaded though one rises from the dead".

Lazarus, who did not have personal pleasure or

possessions, spent his life pursuing God, and then in the afterlife basks in God's glory when in His Presence. The Rich Man, on the other hand, pursued his own selfish desires during his life, and in doing so ended up in pain when in God's Presence, because of the sin in his heart. Abraham says to the Rich man in Luke 16:25 "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted, and you are tormented". See how he contrasts "but now" (in death), one is comforted, the other in torment. In the Greek, it does not say that God is punishing him, he is simply "in torment" while there. They were separated by a large gulf, which is primarily spiritual, not physical. The Rich Man does not have a physical tongue to cool with physical water from Lazarus' physical finger. It is a gulf that exists in the heart, a spiritual gulf that causes us to experience God's loving presence as Paradise or torment. A gulf that was not placed there by God, but rather created by the choices, actions and state of the sinner.

In *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Edited by Spiros Zodhiates Th.D and Dr. George Hadjiantoniou Ph.D., the authors describe Hades as:

The region of departed spirits of the lost...It corresponds to Sheol in the OT...in the story of the rich man and Lazarus...[it has] been taken to put our Lord's confirmation on the Jewish idea

of two compartments in Hades, distinct from and yet near one another...Hades is associated with death. It expresses the general concept of the invisible world or abode into which the spirits of men are ushered immediately after death...In none of the passages in which the word itself occurs have we any disclosures or even hints of purgatorial fires, purifying processes, or extended operations of grace. The state of human beings in Hades is immediate and irreversible after death... Our Lord conclusively teaches in the story of the rich man and Lazarus that there is no possibility of repentance after death....Unfortunately, both the Old Old Testament. and NT words have been translate in the KJV as "hell" (Ps.16:10) or the "grave" (Gn.37:35) or the "pit" (Nm.16:30, 33). Hades never denotes the physical grave nor is it the permanent region of the lost. It is the intermediate state between death and the ultimate hell, Gehenna"

The same inconsistency in translation of the Old Testament can also be seen in the New Testament. Hades is translated as hell ten times in the New Testament, but it is also translated as "grave" in 1Cor

15:55.

In Revelation Chapter 20, it states that Death and Hades gave up their dead, and Death and Hades are placed in the lake of fire when God reclaims the world. If the ones in Hades were judged and will be in torment for eternity "far from the Lord" as so many think, why would these same ones be released from Hades when God returns? It is because all who have died reside in "Death and Hades" until that moment, when Death and Hades can no longer exist because God, the author of Life, is present. The "lake of fire and brimstone" into which Death and Hades is placed, in the Greek would be grammatically correct to translate as the "lake of fire and divinity", or even "the lake of divine fire". When Death and Hades is placed in the fiery presence of God, in the "lake of divine fire", it is destroyed. It is in the very presence of God, where death can not exist when God is present.

It is interesting to examine the Greek word for "divine", it is from the Greek "theion", which could also mean "divine being", but also means "sulfur", or in Old English "brimstone" [lit. 'burning stone']. As strange as that sounds to us, it is because of the ancient understanding of the cosmic order of the nature of all things. All people in all cultures from the Near East to the West understood that there were four 'elements', these were: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Their nature was that Earth and Water tended to go down toward Hades, and Air and Fire tended to go up toward

heaven. This could plainly be seen when the heavenly fire, lighting, would hit a living tree and burn the "life" out of it. Anyone could see that the heat from the tree would go back to heaven in the fire, and the ash that remained would go down into the ground. But there was this mysterious yellowish earth substance that behaved very differently, when placed in a fire it burn so brightly that your eyes could not bear to look at it. As it burned, it would release the heavenly substance that was trapped inside and it would rise back to heaven. Clearly, this "burning stone" was a divine substance, and as such, it was simply called "divinity". It was burned within a new temple to "purify" it before consecration, presumably when this burning stone released it's divinity, it causes all evil things to flee from the temple, and thus was the temple readied for worship.

Yet the word *theion* is translated as "brimstone" or "sulfur" in Luke 17:29, Rev. 9:17, 14:10, 20:10, 21:8, which is where "fire and brimstone" is said to come out of heaven, but it is equally interchangeable with the words "divine fire." Since this did not fit the translators' preconceived ideas, it is rendered always as brimstone in this context.

Elsewhere in Revelation it states that the "heat comes out of heaven" and burns the enemies of God, yet does not harm the ones with God's seal on their foreheads. So the same heat, the heat that is the very life and light that comes from God, burns the sinners,

and does not harm the ones that love God.

Again, in many places God's presence and appearance is described as fire in the New Testament as well as in the Old. Examine for example, Mt.31:10-12, 25:41, Mk.9:49, Lk.12:49, Acts 7:30, 1Cor3:15, Hb.1:7, 12:29, Rev.3:18 and in numerous other places.

Typical is the verse where John the Baptist says "I baptize you with water, but the One that comes after me will baptize you with fire." The author of Hebrews writes that God is a consuming fire. Jesus Himself states the he brings "fire" to the earth. That is, "divine fire".

Everywhere in the New Testament when humans come face to face with the Transfigured Jesus they cannot look at Him: Peter, James and John on Mt. Tabor, Paul on the road to Damascus — humans hid their face and fell down in fear and trembling when confronted with the revelation of Jesus as Almighty God. Old Testament figures did the same, but now, in the New Testament, it is revealed that this "holy fire" is present when Jesus reveals his nature. This is because Jesus is the incarnate God of the Old Testament.

A couple of these descriptions of the fire of God's presence are worth examining closely. Paul writes in 1Cor.3:13, "Every man's work shall be made manifest...because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." In Mark 9:49 Jesus says "For everyone will be salted with fire" (interestingly, in Greek this sentence has the

grammatical structure of an obvious statement of fact, similar to “for [everyone knows that] everyone will be salted with fire”). Peter repeats this idea in 2Peter 3:7 “but now, by the same Word [that is Jesus], heaven and earth are saved and kept for fire on the day of judgment, and the destruction of impious men.”

So clearly everyone experiences this fire caused by the presence of God. The Bible tells us there is no place apart from God, that he is everywhere and fills all things, so how can He create a place apart from Him? Moreover, why would He create a place just to punish the ones He says He loves unconditionally? That is not the nature of a loving God.

Since God is everywhere and fills all things, in the spirit world there is nowhere to escape from God even if you wanted to (Ps 139:7-8).

Translating 2Thes.1:7-8 from the Greek literally, St. Paul tells the persecuted Thessalonians that they will “get relief at the revelation of the Lord Jesus coming out from heaven with His powerful angels in flames of fire”. (notice He comes with “flames of fire”). Yet this same presence of Jesus causes the ones persecuting them to “...be punished with everlasting destruction *because of* [Gr. “apo”] the presence of the Lord, and *because of* his mighty glory” (2Thes.1:9). Further on Paul writes in 2Thes.2:8 that “the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy by the breath [or, “spirit”] of his mouth and make ineffective by the astonishing appearance of his presence.” So the mere

presence of Jesus makes the "lawless one" ineffective, yet gives relief and comfort to the Thessalonians.

Unfortunately many English translations insert a word that is not there in the Greek in verse 1:9, adding the idea that the wicked will be "separated" or "cut off" from the Lord's presence. This is a totally different meaning, and if Paul had wanted to say this he would have used the word *schizo*, which is where we get the word for "scissors" and "schizophrenia" [lit. divided-mind]. The Greek word *apo* that Paul uses here is a preposition that indicates cause or direction: "because of," "out of," "caused by," "from," etc. The word *apo* appears 442 times in the New Testament, and it is never used to indicate separation, location or position. For example "Apostles" in Greek "apostolon" literally means "those sent out from the fleet." The word "Apocalypse" literally means "out from cover," i.e. to reveal, hence the Book of Revelation. Also interesting is the word "apostate" which in Greek literally means "out from standing". If you were once in a condition to stand in God's presence, then "fell" away, you would not be able to stand any longer; you would be "out from standing," cowering and trying to hide from His presence.

The history of the English word "hell" is also revealing. The Old English word from which hell is derived is "helan", which means to hide or cover, and is a verb. The noun form means "hidden place," not unlike the literal meaning of Hades "unseen place". So

at one time the English church understood that to be judged a sinner meant one would cower and want to hide in fear when in God's presence. Unfortunately, because of the political expedience of controlling an often rebellious population, corrupt rules in the West, in collusion with corrupt clergy, and adopting ideas from non-Biblical yet popular fantasy novels such as Dante's *Inferno*, corrupted the use of this word during the middle ages. Eventually turning a verb into a noun by popular usage, even if theologically insupportable from the Bible.

It is tragic that modern translators would insert the word "far from" or "cut off from" into 2Thes.1:9, apparently because they had a preconception about what Paul was trying to say so they altered the text to fit. They added this little "clarifying" word that is not in the Greek text at all, changing the meaning and inserting their own ideas. If your preconceived idea is that Hell is a "place" that an angry God sends people away from his presence, in order to punish and hurt them, you would expect and look for ways that Scripture would support your idea.

Clearly, when you read the Bible in the original languages you learn that there is no place apart from God, and there is no place that God "puts" you to punish you. What scripture reveals is that all eventually will be in the fiery presence of the Lord, and this presence will be either "eternal torment" or "comfort and glory". Judgment and paradise both come from

being in God's presence.

Another word translated incorrectly as Hell appears in 2 Peter 2:4. Saint Peter is warning about the swift destruction of false prophets and false teachers. In the Greek grammar he uses an obvious statement of fact by stating "For if God did not spare the sinning angels, but rather places them down in Tartarus, reserved for [a future] judgment.....the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of trials, and to reserve the unjust until the day of judgment." (2:9).

The word Tartarus is also a proper noun, that is a name of a place, and accordingly should not be changed into a different word, and certainly not the same word that used for Hades and Gehenna.

Tartarus originally came from Greek mythology and popular folk tales. It is the name of a prison in Hades that Zeus, after triumphing over the Titans, placed them, bound in chains to hold them for future punishment for crimes against humans. It was metaphorically seen as the place where justice was meted out in the spirit world, and this metaphor often found it's way into Jewish apocryphal writings about the end times. Saint Peter borrows this term and uses it in exactly the same way as it was used in popular contemporary writings by both Greeks and Jews; it is a place where "sinning angels" are bound and imprisoned, awaiting a future punishment. They are bound by God to prevent them from doing further harm, and they are judged for crimes against humanity.

This image is seen in the ancient icon of the Resurrection, metaphorically depicted are “dark” angels, or demons, being bound in chains under the feet of the resurrected Christ, who broke the bonds of death and rendered powerless the “sinning angles”. Remember from 2 Thessalonians, where Saint Paul writes that the power of the presence of Christ made the “lawless One” powerless, and gave comfort to the Christians, which is exactly the same idea that Saint Peter is writing about in 2 Peter 2:4 through 9.

Again the translators made an improper interpretation of this passage because of preconceived ideas about the afterlife, changing the meaning and only adding to the confusion for English speaking Christians.

Also totally absent from the scriptures is any hint that demons are tormenting sinners in “hell.” This concept comes from Dante’s Inferno and other pagan concepts, not from the Bible. Because any “sinning angels” in the presence of God are also in torment, and their power is made ineffective.

The Afterlife According to the Church Fathers

After the Gospels and Epistles were composed, in the centuries before Christians decided exactly which books would be in the New Testament, many gifted believers wrote books of commentary, sermons, apologetics, and stories of martyrdom. These eloquent

early Christian writers confirm the Biblical view of the afterlife and add some clarifying details.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. John Chrysostom (4th century) and St. John of Damascus (6th century) and many others made extensive use of the allegory of iron or a sword placed within the "energies" of a fire. This is reminiscent of Hebrews 4:12, and therefore a common allegory used in the early Church. On the joining of the divine and the human in Christ, God is like the furnace that a craftsman uses to temper a sword. When a properly prepared sword is placed within the fire, the fire makes it stronger and the sword takes on the properties of the fire, it gives off heat and light. The sword then has two natures, one that cuts and one that burns, joined together and inseparable, yet distinctly different. This is the two natures of Christ, and by extension all of humanity when we become "Christ-like". However, to carry this allegory further, this same fire will melt and destroy a sword that was not properly prepared.

St. Isaac the Syrian in the sixth century writes "Paradise is the love of God" and he also writes "...those who are punished in Gehenna, are scourged by the scourge of love". So the "fire" is the love of God, and we experience His love as either divine love, or as painful "scourge".

St. Basil the Great (fourth century) points out that the Three Children thrown into the fiery furnace were unharmed by the fire, yet the same fire burned

and killed the servants at the entrance to the furnace.

According to St Gregory the Theologian, God Himself is Paradise and punishment for man, since each man tastes God's "energies" (His perceptible presence) according to the condition of his soul. St. Gregory further advises the next life will be "light for those whose mind is purified... in proportion to their degree of purity" and darkness "to those who have blinded their ruling organ [meaning the "eyes of the heart"]...in proportion to their blindness..."

St. Gregory of Nyssa says, "Hades...is not intended to signify a place... it is some invisible and incorporeal condition of life, in which the soul lives." (On the Soul and the Resurrection, SVS p.73).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes about the Second Coming of Christ, "the sign of the Cross [at His returning] will be terror to His foes, but joy to His friends who have believed in Him".

Lactantius (AD 260-330) wrote that on His return "there comes before Him an unquenchable fire".

St. John Chrysostom (AD 344-407) wrote [in homily LXXVI] "let us clothe ourselves with spiritual fire, let us gird ourselves with its flame. No man who bears flame fears those who meet him; be it wild beast, be it man, be it snares innumerable, so long as he is armed with fire, all things stand out of his way, all things retire. The flame is intolerable, the fire can not be endured, it consumes all. With this fire let us clothe ourselves, offering up glory to our Lord Jesus Christ,

with whom the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and ever and world without end. Amen.”

A prayer of St. Simeon the Translator goes: “...Thou who art a fire consuming the unworthy, consume me not, O my Creator, but rather pass through all my body parts, into all my joints, my reins, my heart. Burn Thou the thorns of all my transgressions, Cleanse my soul and hallow Thou my thoughts [etc.] ...that from me, every evil deed and every passion may flee as from fire...”

The Holy Orthodox Church, in keeping with Scripture and the most ancient Christian doctrine, teaches that all people come into the presence of God in the afterlife. Some will bask in joy because of that infinite love, glory, light, power, and truth that is Almighty God. Others will cower in fear and be in torment due to that same presence. All the same, there will be some kind of separation or “great gulf”.

“Life” in the Orthodox Church as defined by the Fathers, is experiencing the perfect, pure and infinite love of God in ultimate harmony and intimacy for eternity, and “death” is experiencing God’s energies in torment, darkness and disharmony for eternity. It is only through Christ that we come to that place of perfect harmony, in this life, in this world. The goal of the Christian is not to get to “heaven” in the after life, but rather to come to a state of constant communion with the Holy Spirit, beginning in this life. We may

bask in the presence of God's glory here and now, and in the afterlife for eternity.

Accordingly, from ancient times icons have shown the Saints dwelling in a place filled with the golden, uncreated divine light of God. With the icon we symbolically peer through this "window" into the spirit realm infused with God's energies. In the icon of the Heavenly Kingdom, we see Christ enthroned in the center as God Almighty, surround with the host of angels, His mother the Theotokos, and all the saints. However, at His feet you see others, also in His presence, who are being burned and tormented due to just being there, and have no escape. The larger more elaborate icons of the Resurrection show the Old Testament saints with halos looking on with joy, and others without halos on the other side of the gulf, looking on in fear and confusion, as Christ frees the captives of Death. He rescues all of humanity (represented by Adam and Eve being pulled from the tomb) and all of creation with them, from the beginning of time to the end of time.

It is not God's intention that his love will torment us, but that will be the inevitable result of pursuing our own selfish desires instead of seeking God. When we are in harmony with God, we will bask in that presence. Yet, if we desire our own will and are in disharmony with God, we suffer in His presence. Satan is evil not just because he harms others, but because he is an angel of light who stands in the presence of God

yet chooses to pursue his own selfish desires, which causes him to tremble in fear. Satan and his fallen angels, the demons, were thrown to the earth and he became the 'god of this world'. It can be speculated that Satan and his demons are on the earth because it is the only place they can escape God's presence, if only temporarily. This is why they will suffer for eternity after God reclaims the world at the end of this age, filling it with his presence. Then there will be nowhere to escape God, for both demons and evildoers.

So "hell" is not a "place" but rather a condition we allow ourselves to be in, not because of God's "justice" but because of our own selfish and sinful disobedience. In other words, we put ourselves in "hell" when we do anything other than seeking God's will. It is not that God wants to harm us; He loves us unconditionally, but torment is the result of coming into His pure presence when we are in an impure condition.

It is like spending your whole life in a cave or basement in darkness, never seeing the sun, then suddenly being thrust into bright sunshine. Your skin will burn, your eyes will burn, you will want to bury yourself under the rocks to try and escape this terrible thing pouring down on you, but there is no escape, just as described in Revelation. However, if you expose yourself to the sun regularly and often, eventually you will want nothing but to bask in the warmth and light of the sunshine. The same sunshine that torments one person brings warmth and pleasure to another. Similarly, if

you get too close to the sun, you will be burned, not because the sun wants to burn you, because it is the sun's nature.

Roman Catholic and Protestant Understanding

It is clear from the Scriptures and the Church Fathers there is no room in the afterlife for Purgatory, limbo, or any place apart from God, nor for Calvin's idea of predestination and "divine justice".

Neither in scripture, nor in the writings of the Saints do we see any such innovation as Purgatory or even of Hell as a place of torment apart from God.

Purgatory, according to the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" article 1030-1031, is defined as the place of "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified...after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven." The more purging that is necessary, the longer one must spend in purgatory. Further, in article 1032, "The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead..." presumably to hasten how quickly one may complete this purging.

Built into this uniquely Roman Catholic doctrine is the assumption that in the afterlife we would experience time passing the same way we do in the physical world. This is a mistake because there are enough hints in Scripture that time as we know it does

not exist in the spirit world. For example: "... one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day". (2 Peter 3:8). Also the idea that the return of Christ is immanent, in addition to the prevalent use of the word 'eternal' throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the Revelation of St. John many scholars believe that St. John is not describing sequential events (which would be nonsensical, since the narrative jumps around so much) but the Saint is rather seeing all the events occurring simultaneously. It is like he is in a room with all this activity happening at once, and he says "then I turned and I saw...". He is describing the sequence in which he sees the visions, but that is not necessarily in the order that the events occurred.

Even modern science tells us that time and space are connected. Without physical space [i.e. creation], there is no time. Without a physical body you can not experience time. Without time, you can not change. This would also preclude the ancient heresy of Origin that speculated that in eternity eventually everyone will be saved. This "restoration" of all, know by theologians as Apokatastasis [meaning "out from your previous standing"], also called Universal Salvation in modern times, presumes that those in "hell" will eventually change their minds and come to salvation in the next life. This is not only unbiblical, it presumes the ability to change when in the presence of an unchanging Almighty God. The same Greek word for

"eternal life" is also used for "eternal torment". You can not argue that the word really means "age" (a fixed period of time) when there is no time, and since it means "eternal life" would also only be for a fixed period of time.

So it is very speculative to assume that time passes outside of creation the same way it does here. No sound doctrine can be built based on this assumption.

The Orthodox believe, from Scripture and the writings of the saints, that because God is perfect he does not change. However, imperfect humanity continues to change. So when someone in an imperfect "forever changing" condition comes into God's pure unchanging presence, it is experienced as darkness and torment. Presumably, at the time of death we lose the ability to change, since our condition will be "consolidated" by being "caught" in the pure, unchanging presence of God, which will also occur to the living at the Apocalypse. The idea of changing in Purgatory is incompatible with the timeless, changeless nature of the afterlife.

Furthermore, nowhere in the original language of the Bible does the Calvinistic idea occur of a place of "hellfire" torment, created especially by God so He can punish those he judges for eternity. Why would a God who loves us unconditionally torment us for eternity, because of an equally unbiblical notion of Divine Justice? In fact nowhere in the Bible does it explicitly

state that it is God that punishes the sinners. If you put your hand in the fireplace, is it the fire's intention to punish you? Or is the torment you experience caused by your own foolish action? It is merely the nature of the fire to burn your unprotected skin.

In Conclusion

There is no "place" of torment, or even a "place" apart from God, because there is no "place" at all; you are outside of time and space. The "place" is actually a condition of either punishment ("hell") or paradise ("heaven") depending on how you experience the presence of God and His Uncreated Energies.

Consider a person who hates God, and anything to do with religion, and has done nothing but pursued his own self-centered desires all his life. It would be far more terrifying, and painful, to spend eternity in the fiery embrace of God's almighty and divine love with no escape, than to be far from Him.

Experiencing God's presence and His in-filling transforming Energies in glory or in torment, as Paradise or as Punishment, is the heaven and hell of the Bible. Not something God did to us, but rather something we did to ourselves. God unconditionally pours out His love on all, whether we want it or not, whether we are ready for it or not, when we enter the afterlife. This is why the Gospel or "good news" of Jesus Christ should be shared with all people, of all

nations, in all tongues. For there is nothing to fear from God's perfect love, since love casts out all fear.

However, it is not totally wrong to understand the after life as "type" of Heaven and Hell. Because from each individual's perspective, it will not be perceived as the same "place", but rather as either torment and darkness you can not escape, or as the paradise you have always longed for. For those judged, they will experience God's presence as eternal darkness and torment. Though it is very important to keep in mind what is the cause of either of these conditions, or one could reach very wrong conclusions about the nature of God, as they have in western theologies. To misrepresent the nature of a loving God would cause one to conclude that it was God's intention to punish his creation. Indeed, one blasphemes the reputation of the God of the Bible when you make him into an angry vengeful god that punishes His creation. The cause of the torment is the poor choices that we make, not God. If one thinks of these two different "places" as conditions that we choose to be in, rather than "compartments" God puts us in, it would be more accurate.

And it will certainly be "paradise" to finally experience His Divine Love up close and in person for those who seek it. It is all in the perception. Such is the nature of a loving God. For God is God.

APPENDIX 4

THE RIVER OF FIRE

A reply to the questions:
Is God really good?
Did God create hell?

Dr Alexandre Kalomjiros

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

There is no doubt that we are living in the age of apostasy predicted for the last days. In practice, most people are atheists, although many of them theoretically still believe. Indifference and the spirit of this world prevail everywhere. What is the reason for this state?

The reason is the cooling of love. Love for God no more burns in human hearts, and in consequence, love between us is dead, too.

What is the cause of this waning of men's love for God? The answer, certainly, is *sin*. Sin is the dark cloud which does not permit God's light to reach our eyes.

But sin always did exist. So how did we arrive at the point of not simply ignoring God, but of actually hating Him? Man's attitude toward God today is not really ignorance, or really indifference. If you examine men carefully you will notice that their ignorance or indifference is tainted by a deep hate. But nobody hates

anything that does not exist.

I have the suspicion that men today believe in God more than at any other time in human history. Men know the gospel, the teaching of the Church, and God's creation better than at any other time. They have a profound consciousness of His existence. Their atheism is not a real disbelief. It is rather an aversion toward somebody we know very well but whom we hate with all our heart, exactly as the demons do.

We hate God, that is why we ignore Him, overlooking Him as if we did not see Him, and pretending to be atheists. In reality we consider Him our enemy par excellence. Our negation is our vengeance, our atheism is our revenge.

But why do men hate God? They hate Him not only because their deeds are dark while God is light, but also because they consider Him as a menace, as an imminent and eternal danger, as an adversary in court, as an opponent at law, as a public prosecutor and an eternal persecutor. To them, God is no more the almighty physician who came to save them from illness and death, but rather a cruel judge and a vengeful inquisitor.

You see, the devil managed to make men believe that God does not really love us, that He really only loves Himself, and that He accepts us only if we behave as He wants us to behave; that He hates us if we do not behave as He ordered us to behave, and is offended by our insubordination to such a degree that we must pay

for it by eternal tortures, created by Him for that purpose.

Who can love a torturer? Even those who try hard to save themselves from the wrath of God cannot really love Him. They love only themselves, trying to escape God's vengeance and to achieve eternal bliss by managing to please this fearsome and extremely dangerous Creator.

Do you perceive the devil's slander of our all-loving, all-kind, and absolutely good God? That is why in Greek the devil was given the name διάβολος, "the slanderer."

2.

But what was the instrument of the devil's slandering of God? What means did he use in order to convince humanity, in order to pervert human thought?

He used "theology." He first introduced a slight alteration in theology which, once it was accepted, he managed to increase more and more to the degree that Christianity became completely unrecognizable. This is what we call "Western theology."

Did you ever try to pinpoint what is the principal characteristic of Western theology? Well, its principal characteristic is that it considers God as the real cause of all evil.

What is evil? Is it not the estrangement from God

Who is Life? Is it not death? What does Western theology teach about death? All Roman Catholics and most Protestants consider death as a punishment from God. God considered all men guilty of Adam's sin and punished them by death, that is by cutting them away from Himself; depriving them of His life-giving energy, and so killing them spiritually at first and later bodily, by some sort of spiritual starvation. Augustine interprets the passage in Genesis as, "If you eat of the fruit of this tree, you will die the death."

Some Protestants consider death not as a punishment but as something natural. But is not God the creator of all natural things? So in both cases, God — for them — is the real cause of death.

And this is true not only for the death of the body. It is equally true for the death of the soul. Do not Western theologians consider hell, the eternal spiritual death of man, as a punishment from God? And do they not consider the devil as a minister of God for the eternal punishment of men in hell?

The "God" of the West is an offended and angry God, full of wrath for the disobedience of men, Who desires in His destructive passion to torment all humanity unto eternity for their sins, unless He receives an infinite satisfaction for His offended pride.

What is the Western dogma of salvation? Did not God kill God in order to satisfy His pride, which the Westerners euphemistically call justice? And is it not by this infinite satisfaction that He deigns to accept the

salvation of some of us?

What is salvation for Western theology? Is it not salvation from the wrath of God?

Do you see, then, that Western theology teaches that our real danger and our real enemy is our Creator and God? Salvation, for Westerners, is to be saved from the hands of God!

How can one love such a God? How can we have faith in someone we detest? Faith in its deeper essence is a product of love, therefore, it would be our desire that one who threatens us not even exist, especially when this threat is eternal.

Even if there exists a means of escaping the eternal wrath of this omnipotent but wicked Being (the death of His Son in our stead), it would be much better if this Being did not exist. This was the most logical conclusion of the mind and of the heart of the Western peoples, because even eternal Paradise would be abhorrent with such a cruel God. Thus was atheism born, and this is why the West was its birthplace. Atheism was unknown in Eastern Christianity until Western theology was introduced there, too. Atheism is the consequence of Western theology. Atheism is the denial, the negation of an evil God. Men became atheists in order to be saved from God, hiding their head and closing their eyes like an ostrich. Atheism, my brothers, is the negation of the Roman Catholic and Protestant God. Atheism is not our real enemy. The real enemy is that falsified and distorted

"Christianity."

3.

Westerners speak frequently of the "Good God." Western Europe and America, however, were never convinced that such a Good God existed. On the contrary, they were calling God good in the way Greeks called the curse and malediction of smallpox, *evlogia* (εὐλογία), that is, a blessing, a benediction, in order to exorcise it and charm it away. For the same reason, the Black Sea was called the *Ευξεινος Ποντος* — the hospitable sea — although it was, in fact, a dreadful and treacherous sea. Deep inside the Western soul, God was felt to be the wicked Judge, Who never forgot even the smallest offense done to Him in our transgressions of His laws.

This juridical conception of God, this completely distorted interpretation of God's justice, was nothing else than the projection of human passions on theology. It was a return to the pagan process of humanizing god and deifying man. Men are vexed and angered when not taken seriously and consider it a humiliation which only vengeance can remove, whether it is by crime or by duel. This was the worldly, passionate conception of justice prevailing in the minds of a so-called "Christian" society.

Western Christians thought about God's justice in the same way also; God, the infinite Being, was

infinitely insulted by Adam's disobedience. He decided that the guilt of Adam's disobedience descended equally to all His children, and that all were to be sentenced to death for Adam's sin, which they did not commit. God's justice for Westerners operated like a vendetta. Not only the man who insulted you, but also all his family must die. And what was tragic for men, to the point of hopelessness, was that no man, nor even all humanity, could appease God's insulted dignity, even if all men in history were to be sacrificed. God's dignity could be saved only if He could punish someone of the same dignity as He. So in order to save both God's dignity and mankind, there was no other solution than the incarnation of His Son, so that a man of godly dignity could be sacrificed to save God's honour.

4.

This paganistic conception of God's justice which demands infinite sacrifices in order to be appeased clearly makes God our real enemy and the cause of all our misfortunes. Moreover, it is a justice which is not at all just since it punishes and demands satisfaction from persons which were not at all responsible for the sin of their forefathers. In other words, what Westerners call justice ought rather to be called resentment and vengeance of the worst kind. Even Christ's love and sacrifice loses its significance and logic

in this schizoid notion of a God who kills God in order to satisfy the so-called justice of God.

Does this conception of justice have anything to do with the justice that God revealed to us? Does the phrase "justice of God" have this meaning in the Old and New Testaments?

Perhaps the beginning of the mistaken interpretation of the word *justice* in the Holy Scriptures was its translation by the Greek word δικαιοσύνη. Not that it is a mistaken translation, but because this word, being a word of the pagan, humanistic, Greek civilization, was charged with human notions which could easily lead to misunderstandings.

First of all, the word δικαιοσύνη (*dikaosine*) brings to mind an equal distribution. This is why it is represented by a balance. The good are rewarded and the bad are punished by human society in a fair way. This is human justice, the one which takes place in court.

Is this the meaning of God's justice, however?

The word δικαιοσύνη, "justice," is a translation of the Hebraic word *tsedakà*. This word means "the divine energy which accomplishes man's salvation." It is parallel and almost synonymous to the other Hebraic word, *hesèd* which means "mercy," "compassion," "love," and to the word, *emèth* which means "fidelity," "truth." This, as you see, gives a completely other dimension to what we usually conceive as justice. This is how the Church understood God's justice. This is

what the Fathers of the Church taught of it. "How can you call God just," writes Saint Isaac the Syrian, "when you read the passage on the wage given to the workers? `Friend, I do thee no wrong; I will give unto this last even as unto thee who worked for me from the first hour. Is thine eye evil, because I am good?'" "How can a man call God just," continues Saint Isaac, "when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son, who wasted his wealth in riotous living, and yet only for the contrition which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck, and gave him authority over all his wealth? None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him lest we doubt it, and thus He bare witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God's justice, for whilst we were sinners, Christ died for us!"

So we see that God is not just, with the human meaning of this word, but we see that His justice means His goodness and love, which are given in an unjust manner, that is, God always gives without taking anything in return, and He gives to persons like us who are not worthy of receiving. That is why Saint Isaac teaches us: "Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him just and upright, His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. `He is good,' He says, `to the evil and impious.'"

God is good, loving, and kind toward those who disregard, disobey, and ignore Him. He never returns evil for evil, He never takes vengeance. His punish-

ments are loving means of correction, as long as anything can be corrected and healed in this life. They never extend to eternity. He created everything good. The wild beasts recognize as their master the Christian who through humility has gained the likeness of God. They draw near to him, not with fear, but with joy, in grateful and loving submission; they wag their heads and lick his hands and serve him with gratitude. The irrational beasts know that their Master and God is not evil and wicked and vengeful, but rather full of love. (See also St. Isaac of Syria, *Σωζόμενα Ἀσκητικά* [Athens, 1871], pp. 95-96.) He protected and saved us when we fell. The eternally evil has nothing to do with God. It comes rather from the will of His free, logical creatures, and this will He respects.

Death was not inflicted upon us by God. We fell into it by our revolt. God is Life and Life is God. We revolted against God, we closed our gates to His life-giving grace. "For as much as he departed from life," wrote Saint Basil, "by so much did he draw nearer to death. For God is Life, deprivation of life is death." "God did not create death," continues Saint Basil, "but we brought it upon ourselves." "Not at all, however, did He hinder the dissolution ... so that He would not make the infirmity immortal in us." As Saint Irenaeus puts it: "Separation from God is death, separation from light is darkness ... and it is not the light which brings upon them the punishment of blindness."

"Death," says Saint Maximus the Confessor, "is

principally the separation from God, from which followed necessarily the death of the body. Life is principally He who said, 'I am the Life.'"

And why did death come upon the whole of humanity? Why did those who did not sin with Adam die as did Adam? Here is the reply of Saint Anastasius the Sinaite: "We became the inheritors of the curse in Adam. We were not punished as if we had disobeyed that divine commandment along with Adam; but because Adam became mortal, he transmitted sin to his posterity. We became mortal since we were born from a mortal."

And Saint Gregory Palamas makes this point: "[God] did not say to Adam: return to whence thou wast taken; but He said to him: Earth thou art and unto the earth thou shalt return He did not say: 'in whatsoever day ye shall eat of it, die!' but, 'in whatsoever day ye shall eat of it, ye shall surely die.' Nor did He afterwards say: 'return now unto the earth,' but He said, 'thou shalt return,' in this manner forewarning, justly permitting and not obstructing what shall come to pass." We see that death did not come at the behest of God but as a consequence of Adam's severing his relations with the source of Life, by his disobedience; and God in His kindness did only warn him of it.

"The tree of knowledge itself," says Theophilus of Antioch, "was good, and its fruit was good. For it was not the tree, as some think, that had death in it, but the

disobedience which had death in it; for there was nothing else in the fruit but knowledge alone, and knowledge is good when one uses it properly." The Fathers teach us that the prohibition to taste the tree of knowledge was not absolute but temporary. Adam was a spiritual infant. Not all foods are good for infants. Some foods may even kill them although adults would find them wholesome. The tree of knowledge was planted by God for man. It was good and nourishing. But it was solid food, while Adam was able to digest only milk.

5.

So in the language of the Holy Scriptures, "just" means good and loving. We speak of the just men of the Old Testament. That does not mean that they were good judges but that they were kind and God-loving people. When we say that God is just, we do not mean that He is a good judge Who knows how to punish men equitably according to the gravity of their crimes, but on the contrary, we mean that He is kind and loving, forgiving all transgressions and disobediences, and that He wants to save us by all means, and never requites evil for evil. In the first volume of the *Philokalia* there is a magnificent text of Saint Anthony which I must read to you here:

God is good, dispassionate, and immutable. Now

someone who thinks it reasonable and true to affirm that God does not change, may well ask how, in that case, it is possible to speak of God as rejoicing over those who are good and showing mercy to those who honour Him, and as turning away from the wicked and being angry with sinners. To this it must be answered that God neither rejoices nor grows angry, for to rejoice and to be offended are passions; nor is He won over by the gifts of those who honour Him, for that would mean He is swayed by pleasure. It is not right that the Divinity feel pleasure or displeasure from human conditions. He is good, and He only bestows blessings and never does harm, remaining always the same. We men, on the other hand, if we remain good through resembling God, are united to Him, but if we become evil through not resembling God, we are separated from Him. By living in holiness we cleave to God; but by becoming wicked we make Him our enemy. It is not that He grows angry with us in an arbitrary way, but it is our own sins that prevent God from shining within us and expose us to demons who torture us. And if through prayer and acts of compassion we gain release from our sins, this does not mean that we have won God over and made him to change, but that through our actions and our turning to the Divinity, we have cured our wickedness and so once more have enjoyment

of God's goodness. Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind. [Chap. 150]

6.

You see now, I hope, how God was slandered by Western theology. Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas and all their pupils contributed to this "theological" calumny. And they are the foundations of Western theology, whether Papist or Protestant. Certainly these theologians do not say expressly and clearly that God is a wicked and passionate being. They rather consider God as being chained by a superior force, by a gloomy and implacable Necessity like the one which governed the pagan gods. This Necessity obliges Him to return evil for evil and does not permit Him to pardon and to forget the evil done against His will, unless an infinite satisfaction is offered to Him.

We open here the great question of pagan, Greek influence on Christianity.

The pagan mentality was in the foundation of all heresies. It was very strong in the East, because the East was the crossroad of all philosophical and religious currents. But as we read in the New Testament, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." So when heresies flourished, Orthodoxy flourished also, and although it was persecuted by the mighty of this world, it always survived victorious. In the West, on the

contrary, the pagan Greek mentality entered in unobtrusively, without taking the aspect of heresy. It entered in through the multitude of Latin texts dictated by Augustine, bishop of Hippo. Saint John Cassian who was living then in the West understood the poison that was in Augustine's teachings, and fought against it. But the fact that Augustine's books were written in Latin and the fact that they were extremely lengthy did not permit their study by the other Fathers of the Church, and so they were never condemned as Origen's works were condemned in the East. This fact permitted them to exercise a strong influence later in Western thought and theology. In the West, little by little knowledge of the Greek language vanished, and Augustine's texts were the only books available dating from ancient times in a language understood there. So the West received as Christian a teaching which was in many of its aspects pagan. Caesaro-papist developments in Rome did not permit any healthy reaction to this state of affairs, and so the West was drowned in the humanistic, pagan thought which prevails to this day.

So we have the East on the one side which, speaking and writing Greek, remained essentially the New Israel with Israelitic thought and sacred tradition, and the West on the other side which having forgotten the Greek language and having been cut off from the Eastern state, inherited pagan Greek thought and its mentality, and formed with it an adulterated Christian teaching.

In reality, the opposition between Orthodoxy and Western Christianity is nothing else but the perpetuation of the opposition between Israel and Hellas.

We must never forget that the Fathers of the Church considered themselves to be the true spiritual children of Abraham, that the Church considered itself to be the New Israel, and that the Orthodox peoples, whether Greek, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian, etc., were conscious of being like Nathaniel, true Israelites, the People of God. And while this was the real consciousness of Eastern Christianity, the West became more and more a child of pagan, humanistic Greece and Rome.

7.

What were the principal characteristics of this difference of thought between Israel and paganism? I call your attention to this very important matter.

Israel believes in God.

Paganism believes in creation. That is to say, in paganism creation is deified. For the pagans, God and creation are one and the same thing. God is impersonal, personified in a multitude of gods.

Israel (and when we speak of Israel we mean the true Israel, the spiritual sons of Abraham, those who have the faith given by God to His chosen people, not those who have abandoned this faith. The real sons of

Abraham are the Church of Christ, and not those carnal descendants, the Jewish race), Israel knows that God and creation are two radically different kinds of existence. God is self-existent, personal, eternal, immortal, Life and the Source of life, Existence and the Source of existence; God is the only real Existence: O "Ωv the Existing, the Only Existing; this is the meaning of the article O.

Creation, on the contrary, has no self-existence. It is totally dependent on the will of God. It exists only so long as God wants it to exist. It is not eternal. It had no existence. It was null, it was completely nothing. It was created out of nothingness. By itself it has no force of existence; it is kept in existence by God's Energy. If this loving Energy of God ever stops, creation and all created beings, intellectual or non-intellectual, rational or irrational will vanish into non-existence. We know that God's love for His creation is eternal. We know from Him that He will never let us fall into non-existence, from which He brought us into being. This is our hope and God is true in His promises. We, created beings, angels, and men, will live in eternity, not because we have in us the power of eternity, but because this is the will of God Who loves us. By ourselves we are nothing. We have not the least energy of life and of existence in our nature; that which we have comes entirely from God; nothing is ours. We are dirt of the earth, and when we forgot it, God in His mercy permitted that we return to what we are, in

order that we remain humble and have exact knowledge of our nothingness. "God," says Saint John Damascene elsewhere, "can do all that He wills, even though He does not will all things that He can do — for He can destroy creation, but He does not will to do so." (Ibid. I, 14)

In the *Great Euchologion* (Venice, 1862), a fundamental liturgical book of the Church, we read:

"O God, the great and most high, Thou Who alone hast immortality" [7th prayer of Vespers, p. 15];

"Thou Who alone art life-giving by nature...O only immortal" [Ode 5, Funeral Canon for Laymen, p. 410];

"Thou art the only immortal: [p. 410];

"The only One Who is immortal because of His godly nature" [Ode 1, Funeral Canon for Laymen, p. 471].

This is the faith of Israel.

What is the teaching of paganism? Paganism is the consequence of the loss of contact with God. The multitude of the sins of humanity made men incapable of receiving the divine light and of having any union with the Living God. The consequence was to consider as something divine the creation which they saw before them every day.

Paganism considers creation as being something self-existent and immortal, something that always existed and will always exist. In paganism the gods are part of creation. They did not create it from nothingness, they only formed the existing matter. Matter can take

different forms. Forms come into existence and vanish, but matter itself is eternal. Angels, demons, and the souls of men are the real gods. Eternal by their nature, as is matter itself, they are, however, higher than matter. They might take different material forms in a sequence of material existences but they remain essentially spiritual.

So in paganism we see two fundamental characteristics: (1) An attributing of the characteristics of godhood to the whole of creation, that is: eternity, immortality, self-existence. (2) A distinction between the spiritual and the material and an antagonism between the two as between something higher and something lower.

Paganism and humanism are one and the same thing. In paganism, man is god because he is eternal by nature. This is why paganism is always haughty. It is narcissism. It is self-adoration. In Greece, the gods had human characteristics. Greek religion was the pagan adoration of man. The soul of man was considered his real being, and was immortal by nature.

So we see that in paganism the devil succeeded in creating a universal belief that men were gods and so did not need God. This is why pride was so high in Greece and why humility was inconceivable. In his work *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes the following words: "Not to resent offenses is the mark of a base and slavish man." The man who is convinced by the devil to believe in the error that his soul is eternal

by nature, can never be humble and can never really believe in God, because he does not need God, being God himself, as his error makes him believe.

This is why, from the very first, the Fathers of the Church, understanding the danger of this stupid error, warned the Christians of the fact that, as Saint Irenaeus puts it: "The teaching that the human soul is naturally immortal is from the devil" (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, III, 20. 1). We find the same warning in Saint Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho* 6. 1-2), in Theophilus of Antioch (*To Autolytus* 2. 97), in Tatian (*To the Greeks* 13), etc.

Saint Justin explains the fundamental atheism which exists in the belief of the natural eternity and immortality of the human soul. He writes: "There are some others who, having supposed that the soul is immortal and immaterial, believe though they have committed evil they will not suffer punishment (for that which is immaterial is also insensible), and that the soul, in consequence of its immortality needs nothing from God" (*Dialogue with Trypho* 1).

Paganism is ignorance of the true God, an erroneous belief that His creation is divine, really a god. This god, however, who is Nature, is impersonal, a blind force, above all personal gods, and is called Necessity ('Ανάγκη). In reality, this Necessity is the projection of human reason, as a mathematical necessity governing the world. It is a projection of rationalism upon nature. This rationalistic Necessity is the true,

supreme blind god of the pagans. The pagan gods are parts of the world, and they are immortal because of the immortality of nature which is their essence. In this pagan mentality, man is also god like the others, because for the pagans the real man is only his soul, and they believe that man's soul is immortal in itself, since it is part of the essence of the universe, which is considered immortal in itself and self-existent. So man also is god and a measure of all things.

But the gods are not free. They are governed by Necessity which is impersonal.

8.

It is this pagan way of thought that was mixed with the Christian teaching by the various heresies. This is what happened in the West, too. They began to distinguish not between God and His creation, but between spirit and matter. They began to think of the soul of man as of something eternal in itself, and began to consider the condition of man after death not as a sleep in the hands of God, but as the real life of man, to which the resurrection of the dead had nothing to add and even the need of the resurrection was doubtful. The feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, which is the culmination of all feasts in Orthodoxy, began to fall into second place, because its need was as incomprehensible to the Western Christians as it was to the Athenians who heard the sermon of the Apostle

Paul.

But what is more important for our subject, they began to feel that God was subject to Necessity, to this rationalistic Necessity which was nothing else but human logic. They declared Him incapable of coming into contact with inferior beings like men, because their rationalistic, philosophical conceptions did not permit it, and it was this belief which was the foundation of the hesychast disputes; it had already begun with Augustine who taught that it was not God Who spoke to Moses but an angel instead.

It is in this context of Necessity, which even gods obey, that we must understand the Western juridical conception of God's justice. It was necessary for God to punish man's disobedience. It was impossible for Him to pardon; a superior Necessity demanded vengeance. Even if God was in reality good and loving, He was not able to act lovingly. He was obliged to act contrary to His love; the only thing He could do, in order to save humanity, was to punish His Son in the place of men, and by this means was Necessity satisfied.

9.

This is the triumph of Hellenistic thought in Christianity. As a Hellenist, Origen had arrived at the same conclusions. God was a judge by necessity. He was obliged to punish, to avenge, to send people to

hell. Hell was God's creation. It was a punishment demanded by justice. This demand of justice was a necessity. God was obliged to submit to it. He was not permitted to forgive. There was a superior force, a Necessity which did not permit Him to love unconditionally.

However, Origen was also a Christian and he knew that God was full of love. How is it possible to acknowledge a loving God Who keeps people in torment eternally? If God is the cause of hell, by necessity then there must be an end to it, otherwise we cannot concede that god is good and loving. This juridical conception of God as an instrument of a superior, impersonal force or deity named Necessity, leads logically to *apokatastasis*, "the restoration of all things and the destruction of hell," otherwise we must admit that God is cruel.

The pagan Greek mentality could not comprehend that the cause of hell was not God but His logical creatures. If God was not really free, since He was governed by Necessity, how could His creatures be free? God could not give something which He did not possess Himself. Moreover, the pagan Greek mentality could not conceive of disinterested love. Freedom, however, is the highest gift that God could give to a creature, because freedom makes the logical creatures like God. This was an inconceivable gift for pagan Greeks. They could not imagine a creature which could say "no" to an almighty God. If God was

almighty, creatures could not say "no" to Him. So if God gave men His grace, men could not reject it. Otherwise God would not be almighty. If we admit that God is almighty, then His grace must be irresistible. Men cannot escape from it. That means that those men who are deprived of God's grace are deprived because God did not give His grace to them. So the loss of God's grace, which is eternal, spiritual death, in other words, hell, is in reality an act totally dependent on God. It is God Who is punishing these people by depriving them of His grace, by not permitting it to shine upon them. So God is the cause of the eternal, spiritual death of those who are damned. Damnation is an act of God, an act of God's justice, an act of necessity or cruelty. As a result, Origen thought that if we are to remain Christians, if we are to continue to believe that God is really good, we must believe that hell is not eternal, but will have an end, in spite of all that is written in the Holy Scriptures and of what the Church believes. This is the fatal, perfectly logical conclusion. If God is the cause of hell, hell must have an end, or else God is an evil God.

10.

Origen, and all rationalists who are like him, was not able to understand that the acceptance or the rejection of God's grace depends entirely on the rational creatures; that God, like the sun, never stops

shining on good or wicked alike; that rational creatures are, however, entirely free to accept or reject this grace and love; and that God in His genuine love does not force His creatures to accept Him, but respects absolutely their free decision. He does not withdraw His grace and love, but the *attitude* of the logical creatures toward this unceasing grace and love is the difference between paradise and hell. Those who love God are happy with Him, those who hate Him are extremely miserable by being obliged to live in His presence, and there is no place where one can escape the loving omnipresence of God.

Paradise or hell depends on how we will accept God's love. Will we return love for love, or will we respond to His love with hate? This is the critical difference. And this difference depends entirely on us, on our freedom, on our innermost free choice, on a perfectly free attitude which is not influenced by external conditions or internal factors of our material and psychological nature, because it is not an external act but an interior attitude coming from the bottom of our heart, conditioning not our sins, but the way we think about our sins, as it is clearly seen in the case of the publican and the pharisee and in the case of the two robbers crucified with Christ. This freedom, this choice, this inner attitude toward our Creator is the innermost core of our eternal personality, it is the most profound of our characteristics, it is what makes us that which we are, it is our eternal face – bright or

dark, loving or hating.

No, my brothers, unhappily for us, paradise or hell does not depend on God. If it depended on God, we would have nothing to fear. We have nothing to fear from Love. But it does not depend on God. It depends entirely upon us, and this is the whole tragedy. God wants us to be in His image, eternally free. He respects us absolutely. This is love. Without respect, we cannot speak of love. We are men because we are free. If we were not free, we would be clever animals, not men. God will never take back this gift of freedom which renders us what we are. This means that we will always be what we want to be, friends or enemies of God, and there is no changing in this our deepest self. In this life, there are profound or superficial changes in our life, in our character, in our beliefs, but all these changes are only the expression in time of our deepest eternal self. This deep eternal self is eternal, with all the meaning of the word. This is why paradise and hell are also eternal. There is no changing in what we really are. Our temporal characteristics and our history in life depend on many superficial things which vanish with death, but our real personality is not superficial and does not depend on changing and vanishing things. It is our real self. It remains with us when we sleep in the grave, and will be our real face in the resurrection. It is eternal.

11.

Saint John of the Ladder says somewhere in his work that "before our fall the demons say to us that God is a friend of man; but after our fall, they say that He is inexorable." This is the cunning lie of the devil: to convince us that any harm in our life has as its cause God's disposition; that it is God Who will forgive us or Who will punish us. Wishing to throw us into sin and then to make us lose any hope of freeing ourselves from it, they seek to present God as sometimes forgiving all sins, and sometimes as inexorable. Most Christians, even Orthodox Christians, have fallen into this pit. They consider God responsible for our being pardoned or our being punished. This, my brothers, is a terrible falsehood which makes most men lose eternal life, principally because in considering God's love, they convince themselves that God, in His love, will pardon them. God is always loving, He is always pardoning, He is always a friend of man. However, that which never pardons, that which never is a friend of man, is sin, and we never think of it as we ought to. Sin destroys our soul independently of the love of God, because sin is precisely the road which leads away from God, because sin erects a wall which separates us from God, because sin destroys our spiritual eyes and makes us unable to see God's light. The demons want to make us always think of our salvation or our eternal spiritual death in juridical terms. They want us to think that either salvation or eternal death is a question of God's decision. No, my brothers, we must awaken in order

not to be lost. Our salvation or our eternal death is not a question of God's decision, but it is a question of *our* decision, it is a question of the decision of our free will which God respects absolutely. Let us not fool ourselves with confidence in God's love. The danger does not come from God; it comes from our own self.

12.

Many will say: "Does not Holy Scripture itself often speak about the anger of God? Is it not God Himself Who says that He will punish us or that He will pardon us? Is it not written that 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him' (Hb.11:6)? Does He not say that vengeance is His and that He will requite the wickedness done to us? Is it not written that it is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God?"

In his discourse entitled *That God is not the Cause of Evil*, Saint Basil the Great writes the following: "But one may say, if God is not responsible for evil things, why is it said in the book of Esaias, 'I am He that prepared light and Who formed darkness, Who makes peace and Who creates evils' (45:7)." And again, "There came down evils from the Lord upon the gates of Jerusalem" (Mich.1:12). And, "Shall there be evil in the city which the Lord hath not wrought?" (Amos 3:6). And in the great Ode of Moses, "Behold, I am and there is no god beside Me. I will slay, and I will make to live; I will smite, and I will heal" (Deut.32:39). But

none of these citations, to him who understands the deeper meaning of the Holy Scriptures, casts any blame on God, as if He were the cause of evils and their creator, for He Who said, "I am the One Who makes light and darkness," shows Himself as the Creator of the universe, not that He is the creator of any evil "He creates evils," that means, "He fashions them again and brings them to a betterment, so that they leave their evilness, to take on the nature of good."

As Saint Isaac the Syrian writes, "Very often many things are said by the Holy Scriptures and in it many names are used not in a literal sense... those who have a mind understand this" (*Homily 83*, p. 317).

Saint Basil in the same discourse gives the explanation of these expressions of the Holy Scriptures: "It is because fear," says he, "edifies simpler people," and this is true not only for simple people but for all of us. After our fall, we need fear in order to do any profitable thing and any good to ourselves or to others. In order to understand the Holy Scriptures, say the Fathers, we must have in mind their purpose which is to save us, and to bring us little by little to an understanding of our Creator God and of our wretched condition.

But the same Holy Scriptures in other places explain to us more accurately who is the real cause of our evils. In Jeremy 2:17,19, we read: "Hath not thy forsaking Me brought these things upon thee? saith the Lord thy God Thine apostasy shall chastise thee and thy

wickedness shall reprove thee; know then, and see that thy forsaking Me hath been bitter to thee, saith the Lord thy God."

The Holy Scriptures speak our language, the language which we understand in our fallen state. As Saint Gregory the Theologian says, "For according to our own comprehension, we have given names from our own attributes to those of God" And Saint John Damascene explains further that what in the Holy Scriptures "is said of God as if He had a body, is said symbolically ... [it contains] some hidden meaning, which through things corresponding to our nature, teaches us things which exceed our nature."

13.

However, there are punishments imposed upon us by God, or rather evils done to us by the devil and permitted by God. But these punishments are what we call pedagogical punishments. They have as their aim our correction *in this life*, or at least the correction of others who would take a lesson from our example and correct themselves by fear. There are also punishments which do not have the purpose of correcting anybody but simply put an end to evil by putting an end to those who are propagating it, so that the earth may be saved from perpetual corruption and total destruction; such was the case in the flood during Noe's time, and in Sodom's destruction.

All these punishments operate and have their purpose in *this* corrupted state of things; they do not extend beyond this corrupted life. Their purpose is to correct what can be corrected, and to change things toward a better condition, while things can still change in this changing world. After the Common Resurrection no change whatever can take place. Eternity and incorruptibility are the state of unchangeable things; no alterations whatever happen then, only developments in the state chosen by free personalities; eternal and infinite developments but no changing, no alteration of direction, no going back. The changing world we see around us is changing because it is corruptible. The eternal New Heavens and New Earth which God will bring about in His Second Coming are incorruptible, that means, not changing. So in this New World there can be no correction whatever; therefore, pedagogical punishments are no longer necessary. Any punishment from God in this New World of Resurrection would be clearly and without a doubt a revengeful act, inappropriate and motivated by hate, without any good intention or purpose.

If we consider hell as a punishment from God, we must admit that it is a senseless punishment, unless we admit that God is an infinitely wicked being.

As Saint Isaac the Syrian says: "He who applies pedagogical punishments in order to give health, is punishing with love, but he who is looking for

vengeance, is devoid of love. God punishes with love, not defending Himself – far be it – but He wants to heal His image, and He does not keep His wrath for long. This way of love is the way of uprightness, and it does not change with passion to a defense. A man who is just and wise is like God because he never chastises a man in revenge for wickedness, but only in order to correct him or that others be afraid" (*Homily 73*).

So we see that God punishes as long as there is hope for correction. After the Common Resurrection there is no question of any punishment from God. Hell is not a punishment from God but a self condemnation. As Saint Basil the Great says, "The evils in hell do not have God as their cause, but ourselves."

14.

One could insist, however, that the Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers always speak of God as the Great Judge who will reward those who were obedient to Him and will punish those who were disobedient, in the day of the Great Judgment (2Tm.4:6-8). How are we to understand this judgment if we are to understand the divine words not in a human but in a divine manner? What is God's judgment?

God is Truth and Light. God's judgment is nothing else than our coming into contact with truth and light. In the day of the Great Judgment all men will appear naked before this penetrating light of truth. The

"books" will be opened. What are these "books"? They are our hearts. Our hearts will be opened by the penetrating light of God, and what is in these hearts will be revealed. If in those hearts there is love for God, those hearts will rejoice in seeing God's light. If, on the contrary, there is hatred for God in those hearts, these men will suffer by receiving on their opened hearts this penetrating light of truth which they detested all their life.

So that which will differentiate between one man and another will not be a decision of God, a reward or a punishment from Him, but that which was in each one's heart; what was there during all our life will be revealed in the Day of Judgment. If there is a reward and a punishment in this revelation – and there really is – it does not come from God but from the love or hate which reigns in our heart. Love has bliss in it, hatred has despair, bitterness, grief, affliction, wickedness, agitation, confusion, darkness, and all the other interior conditions which compose hell (1Cor.4:6).

The Light of Truth, God's Energy, God's grace which will fall on men unhindered by corrupt conditions in the Day of Judgment, will be the same to all men. There will be no distinction whatever. All the difference lies in those who receive, not in Him Who gives. The sun shines on healthy and diseased eyes alike, without any distinction. Healthy eyes enjoy light and because of it see clearly the beauty which

surrounds them. Diseased eyes feel pain, they hurt, suffer, and want to hide from this same light which brings such great happiness to those who have healthy eyes.

But alas, there is no longer any possibility of escaping God's light. During this life there was. In the New Creation of the Resurrection, God will be everywhere and in everything. His light and love will embrace all. There will be no place hidden from God, as was the case during our corrupt life in the kingdom of the prince of this world. The devil's kingdom will be despoiled by the Common Resurrection and God will take possession again of His creation. Love will enrobe everything with its sacred Fire which will flow like a river from the throne of God and will irrigate paradise. But this same river of Love – for those who have hate in their hearts – will suffocate and burn.

"For our God is a consuming fire" (Hb.12:29). The very fire which purifies gold, also consumes wood. Precious metals shine in it like the sun, rubbish burns with black smoke. All are in the same fire of Love. Some shine and others become black and dark. In the same furnace steel shines like the sun, whereas clay turns dark and is hardened like stone.

The difference is in man, not in God. The difference is conditioned by the free choice of man, which God respects absolutely. God's judgment is the revelation of the reality which is in man.

15.

Thus Saint Macarius writes, "And as the kingdom of darkness, and sin, are hidden in the soul until the Day of Resurrection, when the bodies also of sinners shall be covered with the darkness that is now hidden in the soul, so also the Kingdom of Light, and the Heavenly Image, Jesus Christ, now mystically enlighten the soul, and reign in the soul of the saints, but are hidden from the eyes of men ... until the Day of Resurrection; but then the body also shall be covered and glorified with the Light of the Lord, which is now in the man's soul [from this earthly life], that the body also may reign with the soul which from now receives the Kingdom of Christ and rests and is enlightened with eternal light" (*Homily 2*).

Saint Symeon the New Theologian says that it is not what man does which counts in eternal life but what he is, whether he is like Jesus Christ our Lord, or whether he is different and unlike Him. He says, "In the future life the Christian is not examined if he has renounced the whole world for Christ's love, or if he has distributed his riches to the poor or if he fasted or kept vigil or prayed, or if he wept and lamented for his sins, or if he has done any other good in this life, but he is examined attentively if he has any similitude with Christ, as a son does with his father."

16.

Saint Peter the Damascene writes: "We all receive God's blessings equally. But some of us, receiving God's fire, that is, His word, become soft like beeswax, while the others like clay become hard as stone. And if we do not want Him, He does not force any of us, but like the sun He sends His rays and illuminates the whole world, and he who wants to see Him, sees Him, whereas the one who does not want to see Him, is not forced by Him. And no one is responsible for this privation of light except the one who does not want to have it. God created the sun and the eye. Man is free to receive the sun's light or not. The same is true here. God sends the light of knowledge like rays to all, but He also gave us faith like an eye. The one who wants to receive knowledge through faith, keeps it by his works, and so God gives him more willingness, knowledge, and power" (*Philokalia*, vol. 3, p. 8).

17.

I think that by now we have reached the point of understanding correctly what eternal hell and eternal paradise really are, and who is in reality responsible for the difference.

In the icon of the Last Judgment we see Our Lord Jesus Christ seated on a throne. On His right we see His friends, the blessed men and women who lived by His love. On His left we see His enemies, all those who passed their life hating Him, even if they appeared to

be pious and reverent. And there, in the midst of the two, springing from Christ's throne, we see a river of fire coming toward us. What is this river of fire? Is it an instrument of torture? Is it an energy of vengeance coming out from God in order to vanquish His enemies?

No, nothing of the sort. This river of fire is the river which "came out from Eden to water the paradise" of old (Gn.2:10). It is the river of the grace of God which irrigated God's saints from the beginning. In a word, it is the out-pouring of God's love for His creatures. Love is fire. Anyone who loves knows this. God is Love, so God is Fire. And fire consumes all those who are not fire themselves, and renders bright and shining all those who are fire themselves (Hb.12:29).

God many times appeared as fire: To Abraham, to Moses in the burning bush, to the people of Israel showing them the way in the desert as a column of fire by night and as a shining cloud by day when He covered the tabernacle with His glory (Ex.40:28,32), and when He rained fire on the summit of Mount Sinai. God was revealed as fire on the mountain of Transfiguration, and He said that He came "to put fire upon the earth" (Lk.12:49), that is to say, love, because as Saint John of the Ladder says, "Love is the source of fire" (Step 30, 18).

The Greek writer, Fotis Kontoglou said somewhere that "Faith is fire, and gives warmth to the heart. The Holy Spirit came down upon the heads of the apostles

in the form of tongues of fire. The two disciples, when the Lord was revealed to them, said 'Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us in the way?' Christ compares faith to a 'burning candle.' Saint John the Forerunner said in his sermons that Christ will baptize men 'in the Holy Spirit and fire.' And truly, the Lord said, 'I am come to send fire on the earth and what will I if it be already kindled?' Well, the most tangible characteristic of faith is warmth; this is why they speak about 'warm faith,' or 'faith provoking warmth.' And even as the distinctive mark of faith is warmth, the sure mark of unbelief is coldness.

"Do you want to know how to understand if a man has faith or unbelief? If you feel warmth coming out of him – from his eyes, from his words, from his manners – be certain that he has faith in his heart. If again you feel cold coming out of his whole being, that means that he has not faith, whatever he may say. He may kneel down, he may bend his head humbly, he may utter all sorts of moral teachings with a humble voice, but all these will breathe forth a chilling breath which falls upon you to numb you with cold."

Saint Isaac the Syrian says that "Paradise is the love of God, in which the bliss of all the beatitudes is contained," and that "the tree of life is the love of God" (*Homily 72*).

"Do not deceive yourself," says Saint Symeon the New Theologian, "God is fire and when He came into the world, and became man, He sent fire on the earth,

as He Himself says; this fire turns about searching to find material – that is a disposition and an intention that is good – to fall into and to kindle; and for those in whom this fire will ignite, it becomes a great flame, which reaches Heaven this flame at first purifies us from the pollution of passions and then it becomes in us food and drink and light and joy, and renders us light ourselves because we participate in His light" (*Discourse 78*).

God is a loving fire, and He is a loving fire for all: good or bad. There is, however, a great difference in the way people receive this loving fire of God. Saint Basil says that "the sword of fire was placed at the gate of paradise to guard the approach to the tree of life; it was a terrible and burning toward infidels, but kindly accessible toward the faithful, bringing to them the light of day." The same loving fire brings the day to those who respond to love with love, and burns those who respond to love with hatred.

Paradise and hell are one and the same River of God, a loving fire which embraces and covers all with the same beneficial will, without any difference or discrimination. The same vivifying water is life eternal for the faithful and death eternal for the infidels; for the first it is their element of life, for the second it is the instrument of their eternal suffocation; paradise for the one is hell for the other. Do not consider this strange. The son who loves his father will feel happy in his father's arms, but if he does not love him, his

father's loving embrace will be a torment to him. This also is why when we love the man who hates us, it is likened to pouring lighted coals and hot embers on his head.

"I say," writes Saint Isaac the Syrian, "that those who are suffering in hell, are suffering in being scourged by love It is totally false to think that the sinners in hell are deprived of God's love. Love is a child of the knowledge of truth, and is unquestionably given commonly to all. But love's power acts in two ways: it torments sinners, while at the same time it delights those who have lived in accord with it" (*Homily 84*).

God is love. If we really believe this truth, we know that God never hates, never punishes, never takes vengeance. As Abba Ammonas says, "Love never hates anyone, never reprovcs anyone, never condemns anyone, never grieves anyone, never abhors anyone, neither faithful nor infidel nor stranger nor sinner nor fornicator, nor anyone impure, but instead it is precisely sinners, and weak and negligent souls that it loves more, and feels pain for them and grieves and laments, and it feels sympathy for the wicked and sinners, more than for the good, imitating Christ Who called sinners, and ate and drank with them. For this reason, showing what real love is, He taught saying, 'Become good and merciful like your Father in Heaven,' and as He rains on bad and good and makes the sun to rise on just and unjust alike, so also is the

one who has real love, and has compassion, and prays for all."

18.

Now if anyone is perplexed and does not understand how it is possible for God's love to render anyone pitifully wretched and miserable and even burning as it were in flames, let him consider the elder brother of the prodigal son. Was he not in his father's estate? Did not everything in it belong to him? Did he not have his father's love? Did his father not come himself to entreat and beseech him to come and take part in the joyous banquet? What rendered him miserable and burned him with inner bitterness and hate? Who refused him anything? Why was he not joyous at his brother's return? Why did he not have love either toward his father or toward his brother? Was it not because of his wicked, inner disposition? Did he not remain in hell because of that? And what was this hell? Was it any separate place? Were there any instruments of torture? Did he not continue to live in his father's house? What separated him from all the joyous people in the house if not his own hate and his own bitterness? Did his father, or even his brother, stop loving him? Was it not precisely this very love which hardened his heart more and more? Was it not the joy that made him sad? Was not hatred burning in his heart, hatred for his father and his brother, hatred for

the love of his father toward his brother and for the love of his brother toward his father? This is hell: the negation of love; the return of hate for love; bitterness at seeing innocent joy; to be surrounded by love and to have hate in one's heart. This is the eternal condition of all the damned. They are all dearly loved. They are all invited to the joyous banquet. They are all living in God's Kingdom, in the New Earth and the New Heavens. No one expels them. Even if they wanted to go away they could not flee from God's New Creation, nor hide from God's tenderly loving omnipresence. Their only alternative would be, perhaps, to go away from their brothers and search for a bitter isolation from them, but they could never depart from God and His love. And what is more terrible is that in this eternal life, in this New Creation, God is everything to His creatures. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, "In the present life the things we have relations with are numerous, for instance: time, air, locality, food and drink, clothing, sunlight, lamplight, and other necessities of life, none of which, many though they be, are God; that blessed state which we hope for is in need of none of these things, but the Divine Being will become all, and in the stead of all to us, distributing Himself proportionately to every need of that existence. It is plain, too, from the Holy Scriptures that God becomes to those who deserve it, locality and home and clothing and food and drink and light and riches and kingdom, and everything that can be

thought of and named that goes to make our life happy" (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*).

In the new eternal life, God will be everything to His creatures, not only to the good but also to the wicked, not only to those who love Him, but likewise to those who hate Him. But how will those who hate Him endure to have everything from the hands of Him Whom they detest? Oh, what an eternal torment is this, what an eternal fire, what a gnashing of teeth!

Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the everlasting inner fire of hatred, saith the Lord, because I was thirsty for your love and you did not give it to Me, I was hungry for your blessedness and you did not offer it to Me, I was imprisoned in My human nature and you did not come to visit Me in My church; you are free to go where your wicked desire wishes, away from Me, in the torturing hatred of your hearts which is foreign to My loving heart which knows no hatred for anyone. Depart freely from love to the everlasting torture of hate, unknown and foreign to Me and to those who are with Me, but prepared by freedom for the devil, from the days I created My free, rational creatures. But wherever you go in the darkness of your hating hearts, My love will follow you like a river of fire, because no matter what your heart has chosen, you are and you will eternally continue to be, My children.

Amen.

