

# **THE SOUL, THE BODY AND DEATH**

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## PREFACE

**T**he consummation of our redemption was actualized for us by our Lord Jesus Christ upon the Cross, and our beatitude or condemnation will be realized after our own death. Our Holy Orthodox Church speaks of Christ's authority on the doctrine of the last things or *eschata*. The Church communicates the message of the Holy Scripture as delivered by the Holy Fathe

In our day, there are numerous false doctrines and spiritually detrimental teachings about death, from atheistic ideologies and philosophies to cults and sects that pervert the authentic message of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as manifested in the Holy Scriptures. The Church, through its pastors and archpastors, guides the people in the correct doctrines of our Holy Faith. The Holy Spirit guides those who dwell in the household of God to discern the true faith and preach it to God's people.

This present work by Archbishop Lazar is a handbook on the Orthodox doctrine of the *eschata* and life after death. This study is very impressive, for it is based on the Sacred Scriptures as interpreted by our Holy Fathers. The text is greatly enriched with patristic quotations and appendices of long texts on the topic from the Orthodox Fathers. This book is extremely important in communicating our Holy Orthodox faith

to contemporary people who seek authentic Christian teachings and a healthy spiritual guidance to attain beatitude.

I highly recommend this book to Orthodox and non-Orthodox readers alike, for spiritual edification and a greater understanding of the hope we have in the everlasting life.

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## PROLOGUE

*"Regarding those things which are passed over in silence in the Divine Scripture, it is manifest that they must not be sought out. The Holy Spirit revealed to us those things which it is to our profit to learn, and again as for those things which are not profitable, He kept them hidden. But since man is an argumentative and inquisitive creature, whatever we have been able to learn from the Holy Fathers, as it were somewhat dimly, this also shall I attempt to make clear to you" (St Anastasios of Sinai).<sup>1</sup>*

**T**he fathers have enjoined us repeatedly that we not be curious concerning the soul after death, its condition or its state. For, "a wicked and perverse generation seeks after signs."<sup>2</sup> To seek such proofs of the objects of faith is to renounce faith, for "Faith is the essence of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."<sup>3</sup> Faith is the tool of salvation, but if we seek proof, then we no longer seek faith, if we strive to know of a certainty what transcends all knowledge, then we crush our own spirit and kill our own faith.

Bearing these injunctions in mind, and determined to conform, with God's help, to the promise of our father amongst the saints, Anastasios of Sinai, that we say only "what we have been able to learn from the Holy Fathers," it has become necessary to write somewhat concerning the soul, the body and death, and concerning the judgment and our prayers for those who have fallen

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asleep. Surely no one would undertake to write on such a subject lightmindedly, or without some fear, and no one would venture to set forth such a subject unless the circumstances of the time made it imperative. It is imperative now, because on every side, Orthodox people are beset by all manner of speculations, every sort of scientific, religious, occult and philosophical teaching about the nature of the soul and death, and the condition of souls after death. It is difficult enough for Orthodox people to keep their bearing in a world dedicated and committed to ungodliness and sin, but when they are seeking for truth and so much falsehood cleverly masquerades as truth, the struggle is rendered even more difficult. Thus, while it is a fearful thing to write on this subject, it seems that under the circumstances, it would be almost a sinful thing not to. For in avoiding the task, we would be leaving the faithful prey to a host of falsehoods while keeping the truth buried in obscurity. There is, at present, a considerable vogue in academic and occult speculation on the nature of the state of the soul after it departs the body. Most of these speculations are inspired by a nearly desperate desire of a post-Christian society to find some sort of proof that life continues after bodily death. As this society is post-Christian, it wants a proof that will exempt it from having to answer for the course and quality of life it chooses, of its own free will, to follow in this present existence.

Death is the enemy of mankind, and a source of the utmost confusion and dread to a humanity deprived of true Christian hope. The idea that death is a final end of

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all human existence is also a source of avarice, self-centredness, the worship and exaltation of the passions and the desire to feed the sensual pleasures to the utmost in this life. This is precisely why the Apostle says that, "Through fear of death, man was all his lifetime held in bondage by him who had the power of death, namely Satan," and, "The sting of death is sin."<sup>4</sup>

Mankind in general has always known that human existence does not cease with physical death, and those philosophies which have advocated the contrary have usually appeared in times of considerable material well-being and carnal self-indulgence. Such philosophers, advocating that death is a final end to all existence, usually have a vested interest in advocating this: it frees their own conscience from the moral constraint of the possibility of having to answer later for the avarice, coarse materialism and selfish passions of this life. Developing a philosophy which denies all chance of judgment of the person is a way of conquering and defeating one's own conscience. It is, therefore, a psychopathic pursuit.

Given then, that we accept the continuance of human existence after the repose of the person, there are a number of questions which arise in our minds: what is the nature of this continued existence, can we know about it from tangible, scientific or experiential evidence, or from faith only; what bearing do our conduct, spiritual directions in this life and faith have upon our state in that continued existence; what happens to the soul during that period when it is separated from the body; what is meant

by judgment and when does it take place; what is the meaning of the prayers offered for those who have fallen asleep?

To add to the confusion created by sectarian and occult writings on the soul and death, certain false teachings have crept into some of our own Orthodox texts, especially during the period of the Westernizers, when all manner of Latin and scholastic material found its way into our theological texts. Often these alien concepts and understandings were applied to Orthodox teachings, or to certain moral fables and moral allegories, and corrupt teachings were created. Such a terrible and corrupt teaching is the tollhouse myth,<sup>5</sup> created by interpreting an ancient allegory according to Latin doctrine, which teaches that at death, a person's soul must pass through terrifying and dangerous aerial, demonic judgments. This particular subject is discussed in Appendix 2 of this work. In many instances, our whole concept of the nature of man, his relationship with God, the nature of the Holy Church, the judgment of the soul, God's mercy and justice, and of salvation (soteriology) itself, have been corrupted by Western influences — primarily by the doctrine and philosophy of the "satisfaction theory of salvation" upon which rest such teachings as purgatory, toll-houses and the mechanical (really, "magical") theory of prayers for the departed. These false teachings present God as a remote, vengeful creature Who demands some degree of personal satisfaction for any, even minor, offences a person might commit against Him. Such teachings as these have hardened the hearts of many and turned many to atheism.

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In this work we will, with God's help, strive to present the Orthodox Christian understanding of these matters. Obviously, there are contrary views; views which either do not accept the authority of the Scripture, Church fathers and Sacred Tradition or which consider that there is some sort of stream of cosmic or gnostic consciousness which has equal or superior authority with them and which can create new theologies about which the former did not know.

Within the Christian world, there are, generally speaking, two conceptions of the relationship between the body and the soul, and the state of the soul after the repose of the body. The first of these is the Orthodox Christian view, and it quite naturally conforms to the Hebraic understanding, as presented in the Old Testament and completed in the New Testament. After all, the Orthodox Church regards Herself as the New Israel, the continuation of the Old Testament Church in its fulfilled and completed state, in the "New Testament." Many of the later Christian religions maintain at least some aspects of these understandings.

The other view, held to one degree or another by theosophists and many of the Western Christian religions, is essentially Gnostic, though it is present also in Origenism (more correctly, Platonism as developed by the early Christian heretic Origen and later neo-Platonist philosophers such as Augustine of Hippo.)

As an example, in the first, the Orthodox understanding, the "person" is considered to be composed of both soul and body in harmony. At death, the body is

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committed to the grave, while the soul continues to live by God's grace, not of itself, and it is assigned to a state of repose proper to itself by an act of the Will of God, existing completely by means of grace and functioning solely within the realm of grace, having a noetic perception of the joy and blessings which await it, or the sorrow and grief which await it. Thus, it awaits the resurrection of its other half, its body, in a state of grace.

The Gnostic (and Origenistic) view holds that the soul is liberated from a physical prison at death,<sup>6</sup> and thus functions even better than before death. It enters into a new freedom, exalts in the discovery that it can see, reason and discover new things even though it no longer has the other unit of its existence, the body, with the bodily senses. This Origenistic view includes a whole range of teachings about purgatories, experiences of exaltation, unspeakable horrors of souls pursued and tormented by demons, wanderings, hauntings, of souls hovering over their bodies, of transmigrations and even of returns to the body shortly after death.

The difference between these two views is, as you see, quite great.

Because of all this, hoping on the mercy of God and trusting the wisdom and grace of our holy and God-bearing fathers, it seems absolutely imperative to present, even if only in general terms, the Orthodox patristic teaching on these matters.

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### ENDNOTES:

1. Answer 89.

2. Mt.16:4; Jn.4:48.

3. Hb.11:1.

4. Hb.2:14-15; 1Cor.15:56.

5. We are referring here to the novel teaching or doctrine of aerial judgments, which contains a clearly anti-Orthodox soteriology. There was, extremely rarely, a certain allegorical use of the expression "customs booths" (Greek:"telonia") to express to simple, illiterate people, the action of the conscience at the time of one`s death.

6. By contrast, the fathers always spoke of the sanctity of the physical body, and referred to our being delivered from the power of the "flesh", meaning the carnal lusts built up in our person, and from the carnal passions and frame of mind which dwell parasitically in the "flesh". When any one of the fathers speaks of the soul being "set free from the body", etc, it is evident that they mean it no longer has the use of the bodily senses through which it sins. By the same token, the body is freed of the ability to sin also, since the soul conceives the sin and the body carries it out. (See, e.g., Fr John Romanides, "The Nature and Destiny of Man" in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol.1 (series).

# ONE

## THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF DEATH

*"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."  
"Yet here too man makes a gain, namely death, and  
the cutting off of sin that evil may not be immortal."<sup>1</sup>*

In general, in the West, the concept of death and the soul after death is coloured by the Hellenic ideas of Western Scholasticism, and is founded on apocryphal and non-Christian sources. This is especially well evidenced by such teachings as Original Sin, which includes the notion of death as a formal punishment, Purgatory, the natural immortality of the soul, and other similar ideas, not least of which is a certain hedonism in the Western moral ideal, which sets as an object, a type of post-life epicureanism.

The contemporary Greek theologian, Fr John Romanides remarks:

"It would be highly illogical to try to interpret Pauline thought with the presupposition [1] that death is normal or, [2] that at most, it is the outcome of a juridical decision of God to punish the whole human race for one sin, [3] that happiness is the ultimate destiny of man, and [4] that the soul is immaterial, naturally immortal and as directly created by God at conception, normal and pure of defects."<sup>2</sup>

Man was created for communion with God. He found his complete fulfilment in a life of communion, praise and giving glory to the Creator, living in a unison of love with God, by love drawing nearer to Him toward sharing

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in His immortality, in His deity.<sup>3</sup> Man was not created for death; death was not a part of his nature, and it is by no means "natural." Man was created to live, through unity with the Creator.<sup>4</sup>

Why, then, does God warn Adam and Eve that if they turn from Him in disobedience and learn the conflict between good and evil, they will "surely die;" for this is just what He means by, "For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die."<sup>5</sup> This was no threat of punishment, for death is by no means a contrived punishment, rather it was a simple statement of reality.<sup>6</sup> Immortality is a property of God alone.<sup>7</sup> Man cannot possess it.<sup>8</sup> He can only share in it by grace.<sup>9</sup> We said that man was created for communion with God, and thus, he was created for life.<sup>10</sup> Evil, which causes death, was not in his nature.<sup>11</sup> By disobedience, man turned away from God and thus from life and the Source of Life,<sup>12</sup> and so death became his destiny,<sup>13</sup> for his nature became corrupted<sup>14</sup> and he was no longer in direct communion with life.

By accepting sin into his nature, man fell, not from the high state of perfection ascribed to him by Augustine,<sup>15</sup> but from a state of harmonious existence in which he was growing and maturing toward perfection in God. The fall resulted in a change in man's nature. It now became disharmonious, full of internal conflict,<sup>16</sup> and dissonance. Death is in itself the arch-manifestation of this disharmony and dissonance.<sup>17</sup> Death is an automatic result of separation from God, and sin is the cause of this separation. Death and sin are interacting and co-supportive, for "death is the wages of sin," while "sin

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is the sting of death."<sup>18</sup> In order for one to be conquered, the other must be overcome. Thus, the "Only Sinless One," Jesus Christ alone was able to conquer death and liberate man from its bondage, making the struggle for "perfection"<sup>19</sup> once more possible. For, sin sets up a complete internal disharmony, and death completely shatters the natural organism, the psychophysical organism that is man. The soul does not depart the body lightly, nor into a new world of purification and experience. Rather, the soul tears itself away from the body unwillingly, with anguish over the apparent destruction of its organism by the unnatural division of its components. It is not the body which holds man in bondage, but death itself and "him who has the power of death."<sup>20</sup>

Death is the "last enemy" of both God and man.<sup>21</sup> It is the direct result of man's separation from God, and man is separated from God by sin. Satan increases and perpetuates this separation, and thus he has the power of death in his hands. To be in the hands of death means to be out of the hands of God.<sup>22</sup> How great this enemy is, the Saviour Himself reveals to us. He wished us to know how great a gulf He was bridging for us, and yet how completely, how absolutely He was willing to suffer for us, and so on the Cross, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"<sup>23</sup> This means that the Human Christ truly tasted death — He placed Himself, as a man, in the hands of death: and to be in the hands of death is to be separated from God. Thus, the human body of Christ tasted death for us. Christ, as God, entered the realm of death and truly conquered it. He returned from

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death, removed His human nature and body from the hands of death and restored it once more to the hands of God.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the dominion of death and, consequently, the effective power of Satan, has been shattered. (All that is left to him is the power of deceit and delusion).<sup>25</sup> There is now one resurrected Body, the Body of Christ – that fully human body which is united fully with God. In it, the power of death is shattered once and for all. One participates in that victory over death by uniting oneself with that one resurrected Body in which the victory is complete and certain: by uniting oneself to the Body of Christ. For this reason, in the Divine Liturgy, we partake of that one Resurrected Body and unite ourselves to it. For this reason, too, the Orthodox Dogma of the Church is, for us, central and vital to our lives and salvation. The Church is the Body of Christ, as the Apostle clearly says.<sup>26</sup> We unite ourselves to that Body of Christ, the Church, in the rebirth of Baptism, which in itself is a living manifestation of the victory over death, and within the Church, we receive the very Body and Blood of the risen and ascended Saviour, and in faith unite ourselves to Him, and participate in the liberation from the fear of death with which Satan has held mankind in bondage all his lifetime.<sup>27</sup> Being truly liberated from that bondage, one can take up where Adam and Eve left off, in the struggle to mature in perfection: only now, it is a very great struggle indeed. Thus, salvation consists in the union of the faithful with the life of God in the Body of Christ (the Holy Church), where the evil-one is being progressively and really destroyed in the life of co-suffering love.<sup>28</sup> This union is effected by baptism (the

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grace of regeneration) and fulfilled in the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, and in the mutual, cooperative struggle of Orthodox Christians against the power and influence of the evil-one. This is precisely why the last words of the "Lord's Prayer" are, "deliver us from the evil-one," and not "deliver us from evil."

### **THE ACT OF DEATH**

The "act of death" is a great mystery, and we do not wish to go too far in trying to explain or define it, but we will make a few observations.<sup>29</sup>

Death is the unnatural dissolution of the psychophysical organism of man. It occurs by means of the corruption of the vital functions of the physical aspect of man – whether a long process of corruption, as when a person dies of old age; an accelerated corruption, as when one dies of disease or illness; or an instantaneous one, as with an accident.

The soul, the "psyche" aspect of man, cannot function on its own, but only by means of the body. Thus, when the body's functions break down and cease, God, in His mercy calls the soul forth and preserves it in existence. The soul is the life-force of the body, and so the body dies at the moment the soul is called forth from it. The body does not die until the soul departs from it. This is why persons whose heart beat has ceased and whose brains no longer emit even the slightest signs of life, have been found, nevertheless, to be still alive – such as the famous incident in the 1970's, in the United States, when doctors,

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having applied the "Harvard Method for Determining Death," opened a man's skull and began to extract his brain, supposing him to be dead: he was still alive, and the doctors hurriedly tried to undo their deed.

The soul does not depart from the body easily. Death is unnatural; it is common to the fallen nature of man, and not to his true nature. Thus, the soul tears itself away from the body with regret, not as from a separate object or container, but as from its own self, from a part of its own being.

### **ENDNOTES:**

1. 1Cor.15:26; St Gregory the Theologian, Oration on Theophany, Ch.12.
2. Fr John Romanides, The Ancestral Sin, Athens, 1971.
3. 1Tm.6:16; 2Tm.1:10; 1Cor.17:50-54; cp St Anastasios of Sinai, "the soul is not by nature, but by Grace immortal" (Ans.89:2).
4. Wis.2:23-24; 1:13f.
5. Gn.2:7.
6. see St Gregory Palamas, Phys. Ch. 5.150, c11157 PG. Augustine of Hippo, in his blasphemous commentary on Genesis, interprets this verse and has God saying, "On the day you eat of it, I will kill you."
7. St Ambrose of Milan, The Christian Faith, 3:19-21, e.g.
8. *ibid*; Jb.10:12.
9. St Ambrose of Milan, *ibid*; St Hilary of Poitiers, The Trinity, 9:4, 38, e.g.
10. Wis.3:23.
11. St John Damascene, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, 12:4-5; St Ambrose of Milan, Belief in the Resurrection; c47 and c120 of 2nd Carthage; St Gregory of Sinai, On Commandments and Dogmas, 4:11 (Philokalia).
12. St Hilary, *ibid*, 9:4-5; 38-39, etc.
13. Dt.30:15, 19-20; Wis.2:24; Rm.5:12, etc.
14. St Gregory of Sinai, *ibid*; 1Cor.15:24.

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15. 1Cor.15:26.

16. Rm.7:10-25.

17. This is why the Orthodox Russians, at funeral services purposely ring the bells in a disharmonious peal.

18. Rm.2:23; 1Cor.15:56; Gn.3:22; St Gregory the Theologian, loc cit; St Ambrose of Milan, Belief in the Resurrection, Ch. 48; St John Chrysostom, Homily on the Statues, 5:13 and 14; Homily 79 on John's Gospel (esp. on Jn.16:33); St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lecture Nr.3, On Baptism.

19. 2Cor.7:1. Because of the New Adam, we can take up where the old Adam left off when he fell.

20. Hb.2:14.

21. 1Cor.15:26.

22. Hb.2:14-15. The early Christians understood this principle very well. During the time of the great persecutions, when anyone identified as a Christian could be killed at random on the street, the Christians would never absent themselves from the Divine Liturgy on account of fear of being killed. To do so, to have become again a slave to the fear of death, would have been considered a confession that one had again become a slave to the evil-one.

23. Mt.27:46; Mk.15:34.

24. Which is why the apostle says that God raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:24, 34; 3:15, 26, etc.).

25. see, for example, The Life of St Antony, by St Athanasios the Great, where this idea is repeated two or three times.

26. Col.1:18; 24.

27. Hb.2:14-17; 1Cor.10:16-17, etc.

28. Eph.6:12; 2:2; 6:13, etc.

29. On the subject of the "act of death", we are not setting forth theological statements or doctrines, but only observations.

## TWO RELATIONSHIP OF THE SOUL AND BODY

*"Man, with respect to his nature, is most truly said to be neither soul without body, nor, on the other hand, body without soul; but is composed of the union of body and soul into one form of the beautiful." (St. Methodios of Olympus).<sup>1</sup>*

**M**an was created both body and soul. The body alone, though it was created first, is not the human being, and though the soul gave life to the body, neither is it alone the human being.<sup>2</sup> Man became a living human being when body and soul were united together.<sup>3</sup> As our holy and God-bearing father Gregory Palamas says:

"When God is said to have made man according to His image, the word man means neither the soul by itself nor the body by itself, but the two together."<sup>4</sup>

From love, God created the body and in love He bestowed upon it the soul as the force of life, that it might dwell in harmony with the body and function by means of the body, bearing not only His likeness and image, but man being himself like a type and image of the life of the Holy Church. For God created not without wisdom, but that His love and salvation might be made manifest.

The soul and the body, then, are not two separate entities; they are together a single psychophysical whole, mutually serving one another and mutually dependent upon one another for life and functions, as our holy father

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Ephraim the Syrian says:

"Behold how both the soul and the body look and attest to one another: even as the body must have the soul so as to live, so must the soul have the body to see and hear."<sup>5</sup>

And St Anastasios of Sinai informs us likewise that:

"Accordingly, when the soul is separated from the entire body, it no longer is able to operate, because it operates through the members of the body..."<sup>6</sup>

The soul is not the prisoner of the body,<sup>7</sup> rather the two were created and composed together in a mutual life, each one harmoniously deriving functions and qualities of existence from the other.<sup>8</sup> If the soul departs the body, the body dies. And the soul, when separated from the body is no longer able to function in any sensual, psycho-physical manner, as our holy and God-bearing father Justin the Martyr says:

"For as in the case of a yoke of oxen, if one or other is loosed from the yoke, neither of them can effect anything, if they be unyoked from their communion...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 the body of a man...then neither of these is by itself man, but that which is made up of the two together is called man ..."<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the soul and body mutually depend upon, fulfil and provide life and functions to one another. It is sheer carelessness and a great error to misrepresent certain passages of Apostle Paul, using them out of context to establish an idea of a direct conflict between body and

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soul, and a need for the soul to be liberated from the body. When, for example, the Apostle says, "O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death,"<sup>10</sup> he is referring not to the physical body, but to the power of sin lodged parasitically in the "flesh."<sup>11</sup> To understand the Orthodox Christian anthropology in this respect, one must refer to the Scripture and understand Apostle Paul's teachings, not according to the idea and conceptions of pagan Greece,<sup>12</sup> which made a sharp distinction between body and soul, but rather to the uniform concepts of the entire Old and New Testament in which "body and soul" denote the whole living person, and not at all independent parts of him. The Manicheans held the contrary view, and St Titus of Bostra, in refuting them, observes:

"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."<sup>13</sup>

And St Photios the Great, refuting Origenism, concurs:

"The name `man', according to the most truthful and natural expression, applies to neither the soul without [its] body, nor to the body without [its] soul, but to that composition of soul and body made into a unique form of beauty. But Origen says that the soul alone is the man, as did Plato."<sup>14</sup>

In both Old Testament Scripture and general Hebrew thought, and in New Testament Scripture and Orthodox Christian thought in general, a living person is consistently regarded as a composite entity of body and

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soul. Death is an unnatural shattering of this psychophysical entity. As our holy father St Titus of Bostra says:

"But though the soul be immortal [by grace], yet it is not the person, and so the Apostle does not consider [death] to differ in any wise from destruction..."<sup>15</sup>

It was clearly understood in Old Testament Scripture that that which survived in death maintained a continuity of identity, and, since Christ had not yet trampled down the bonds of death and appeared in the state of the reposed ("hades"), it was conceived of as existing in a state of wordless, sightless repose. The soul evidently had some consciousness of future destiny, some active hope, and thus it was neither dead nor devoid of some sort of spiritual awareness, by grace.<sup>16</sup>

Old Testament anthropology, like that of the New Testament never conceived of a naturally immortal soul inhabiting a mortal body from which it might be liberated, but always conceived of a simple, non-dualistic anthropology of a single, psychophysical organism. An active, intellectual life or functioning of the soul alone could never be conceived in either Old or New Testament thought. For the soul to function, its restoration with the body as the "whole person" would be absolutely necessary.

The sharp conflict between these two concepts: the Scriptural and the Hellenic, was clearly brought forth in the reaction to Paul's sermon to the Greeks, on the resurrection, found at Acts 17:16-34. Apart from the Stoics and a few others, few of the Greeks would have

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questioned a concept of the soul continuing to exist, and even being rewarded after death, but the idea of a bodily resurrection astounded them. Their astonishment was logical. In general, with some exceptions, they conceived that the soul was a prisoner of the body and escaped, or was liberated from the body by death, and that it gained its highest knowledge and awareness only then. Why, therefore, would anyone want to have the soul reunited with the body in a resurrection<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, there is a parable in the Talmud (the Hebrew commentaries on the "Old Testament") which gives a good example of the Old Testament understanding of the subject. This parable was given to explain the matter to the simple Jewish people. In it we read:

"There was a ruler who had an orchard. When he saw that the choice first-fruits were ripening, he set two watchmen over the orchard gate. The one was crippled in his legs, and the other was blind. The cripple, seeing the ripe and choice first-fruits, submitted to temptation. He said to the blind man: take me on your shoulders, I will guide you, and we will go to the best tree and take of the first-fruits and eat them. This they did. When the ruler came and saw that the choice first-fruits were gone, he questioned the two watchmen. The blind one replied, 'Have I eyes that I could see to take the fruit?' The cripple replied, 'Have I legs that I could go and get the fruit?' The ruler, perceiving the matter, made the cripple to sit on the shoulder of the blind man, and he judged the two as one. Even so shall the Holy-One, blessed be He, do on the last

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day. He will cast the soul back into its body, and He will judge the two as one."<sup>18</sup>

The fathers of the Church have taught the same thing, telling us precisely that the soul cannot receive its reward without the body, as St Ambrose of Milan makes clear, saying:

"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), each should come into judgment... for it would seem almost inconsistent that...the mind 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."?<sup>19</sup>

St Irenae of Lyons is like-minded when he says:

"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 ..."<sup>20</sup>

St Titus of Bostra, rebuking the Manicheans, confirms this thought in words quoted by St John the Damascene:

"For the soul cannot enjoy anything, or possess, or do anything, or suffer, except it be together with the body, being the same as it was created in the beginning, and thus it enjoys that which is proper to it. This state is lost in death through the disobedience of Adam, and again through the obedience of the one Christ, through hope it receives (in the resurrection) again the state of being a

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person."<sup>21</sup>

### ***ENDNOTES:***

1. On The Resurrection (Against Origen), 1:5.

2. see for example, St Titus of Bostra, Homily One, Against the Manicheans, para.1 (quoted by St John the Damascene: P.G. 96:489B).

3. Gn.2:7; cp. Chapter 1 of this work.

4. P.G. 150, 1361c.

5. Hymn Eight On Paradise (complete text in Appendix 1).

6. Answer 89 (complete text in Appendix 1).

7. The teaching that the soul is a "prisoner of the body," and thus a separate entity which can exit the body, have experiences, receive visions, revelations, wander from place to place, be purged or be "examined and judged" without its body, or indeed, function in any sensual manner without its body is, essentially, pagan Hellenism. Such teachings of the relationship of the body and the soul, called dualism, because they give the soul an actual independent functioning apart from the body, were refuted in the patristic works against Origen and against the Manichean and Gnostic heresies. This doctrine of dualism is also one of the roots of a basic misunderstanding of the dogma of redemption involved in many erroneous teachings. When one penetrates to the essence of such mythologies as purgatory, toll-houses, etc, one finds a basic presupposition that God either cannot or will not forgive sins, but that He must rather obtain some form of satisfaction for them, please Himself with some form of punishment for each transgression. This self-pleasing passion may take the form of physical torment (as in the purgatory myth) or mental and physical torture (as in the toll-house myth). The Latin doctrine of "the saving merits of Christ" is such a teaching also. Here, God does not actually forgive anyone of anything, He only agrees to be satisfied by Christ's suffering, and He is bribed by the excessive merits earned by Christ through His sufferings, and appropriated to a sinner for the sinner's having fulfilled some legal obligation. These teachings of dualism are nearly always bound together with a variation of the "satisfaction theory" of redemption.

8. Some misread Eccl.7:1, "...the day of death is better than the day of one's birth." The Hebrew understanding of this verse is expressed in the Talmudic writings thus: "Why rejoice when a ship leaves harbour and sets forth on a perilous journey: rather rejoice when it safely returns." This also points out the belief in the soul's continuance after death. Taken in connection with related

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verses and writings, we get a picture of the Old Israel's concept of the nature of the soul and its repose. It is, of course, identical to that of the New Israel, the Orthodox Church, except that the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ have not only given us a fuller knowledge, but have also changed many things. It is interesting that some people think that the teaching of the Hebrews on this subject should be dramatically different from that of the New Testament Church, as if there were two different Gods, giving two different revelations. The Orthodox Church, after all, is the fulfilled and continued Israel.

9. On The Resurrection, chapter 8.

10. Rm.7:24.

11. see St Gregory Palamas, First Triad, para.2, answer 2; Methodios of Olympos, On The Resurrection, part 1; Fr John Romanides, The Ancestral Sin, Athens, 1971.

12. cp. Romanides, The Nature and Destiny of Man (Greek Orthodox Theological Review, vol.1, series). Apostle Paul was a Jew, and his concepts and word imagery were Hebraic. The West interpreted Paul with Hellenic, especially Platonic, preconceptions. The meaning of his imagery and even of his words themselves must be related back to Hebrew significations, since Paul was "translating" as it were, Hebrew concepts into Greek, and making do with what words were available.

13. Homily One, Against the Manicheans, P.G. 96:489B.

14. On The Resurrection, (against Origen), 1:5.

15. *ibid* fn.12, para.1.

16. e.g., "If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my transformation comes. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee: Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands...If I wait, the grave is my house: I have made my bed in darkness...and where is now my hope...For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though...worms destroy this body, yet, in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another..." (Jb.14: 14; 17:13; 19:25-26. cp. Jn.5:28-29); "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God Who gave it" (Eccl.12:7); "...the soul shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord your God" (1Ki.25:29). "God made man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity" (Wis.2:23-24); etc. See also Chapter 3 of this work.

17. This was one of Origen's quandaries once he had adopted the radical dualism of Hellenism and its disdain for the body. He tried to solve it with his theory of "material substratum" (see Chapter 4 of this work). This is also the quandary of

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the doctrines that souls can be examined and judged at death by demons, aerial toll-houses and the like. Indeed, St Titus of Bostra poses this very question in refuting the radical dualism of the Manicheans (Homily One), and Sts Irenae of Lyons and Ambrose of Milan both refute the idea that the soul can be "judged" or physically suffer without the body, in their works against heresies (cited in Appendix A).

18. Sanh.91a, b.

19. On Belief in The Resurrection, para.88.

20. Book Five, para.32.

21. Homily One, Against The Manicheans, para.1.

### THREE

## THE STATE OF THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

*"But do not investigate the state of the soul after its departure from the body, because it is not for you or for me to know this. For, if we are unable to know the essence of the soul, how should we understand its repose" (St Andrew of Crete).<sup>1</sup>*

**T**his injunction of our holy father Andrew of Crete forewarns us that if we hope to come to any kind of genuine understanding of the soul or condition of the soul after the repose of the person, we will not be able to attain our goal. We will discover that only so much has been revealed to us as is necessary to keep us from error and to instil in us a firm Christian hope and awareness of God's mercy and the nature of the Church. The fathers have always been reticent to speak on this subject. When, on account of distortions, falsehoods and heresies which have arisen, created by speculations, vain curiosities and demonic delusions, they were compelled to speak, they did so in the spirit of the dictum of St John of the Ladder:

"It is dangerous to be inquisitive about the depth of the divine judgment, because the inquisitive sail in the ship of conceit. Yet because of the weakness of many, something should be said."<sup>2</sup>

The scope of the patristic explanations is necessarily limited. Even where some great, spiritual and grace-filled saint has had a deeper insight and surer comprehension of the subject, he has been faced with the limitations of

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sensual human languages and understandings. Those things yonder simply cannot be truthfully expressed in human languages.

### *1*

#### *Two Extremes:*

*The heresy of "soul sleep" and the heresy of "dualism."*

Since many fall into the error of speculation on these matters, two extremes of opinion have arisen. The first error is that common to many sectarians, who teach a heresy called "soul sleep," or "soul slumber." This error is based partly on a misunderstanding of the symbolic or metaphorical use of the word "sleep" in Scripture and in certain of the holy fathers. This teaching holds that at death, the soul is either buried with the body or that it enters a total comatose state and ceases not only its psychophysical function, but even its spiritual function and growth. The other extreme, equally heretical, is Gnostic and neo-platonist. This error teaches that the soul is imprisoned in the body, and that it has a pseudo-physical "subtle body"<sup>3</sup> of its own, so does not need the physical body. According to this heresy, the soul can function better, have bold new experiences and a complete psychophysical functioning once "liberated" from the body. The first heresy is called "soul sleep," the second heresy is called "dualism." We cannot add anything to the words of the holy fathers on this subject, but we can deal with these two extreme opinions, these two heresies which have been created by the vain

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curiosity of human speculation on matters which the holy fathers have forbidden us to speculate about.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, we will, with God's help, address these two heretical concepts, born of theological extremism and human arrogance.

### 2

*The Old Testament awareness of the continued life of the soul;  
that the soul lives by grace, and not as naturally immortal.*

In general, we do not expect to find any particular difference between the spiritual understandings revealed in the Old Testament, and those of the New Testament, for one and the same Holy Spirit inspired the Scripture of both Testaments. Yet, there are differences in some things. For, the Old Testament was but a shadow and type of the New. The New Testament is a fulfilment of the Old, and the shadow, therefore, has been replaced by the reality. Moreover, the advent of Christ and His victory over the world, Satan and death, have not only brought all the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament to fulfilment, but have changed many things. In the Old Testament, death still possessed its power, and the state of the reposed was still one of uncertain expectations – but for the faithful, it was not at all devoid of hope. When the holy prophet King David declares, "His spirit shall go forth and he shall return to his earth,"<sup>5</sup> he shows clearly that the soul does not die and enter the grave with the body. The holy prophet Solomon is more direct, saying

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plainly that the soul, "shall return to God Who gave it,"<sup>6</sup> and he closes his book with the admonition that the person must be prepared for the judgment of the last day.

The Old Testament faithful also had a sound awareness of the resurrection of the body, as the holy prophet Job testifies:

"If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my transformation...and where is my hope now?...I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He will stand at the latter day upon the earth: and...in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself."<sup>7</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the Old Testament faithful understood that the soul continued to exist, in hope, by grace, "in God Who gave it," after death, even as our holy father St Justin Martyr, the Philosopher says:

"Now that the soul lives, no one would deny. But if it lives, it lives not as being life, but as the partaker of life...Now the soul partakes of life since God wills it to live. Thus, then, it will not even partake if God does not will it to live. For to live is not its attribute, as it is God's..."<sup>8</sup>

### 3

*Changes wrought by the coming of Christ;  
the soul continues and perceives after death by grace,  
not by self-contained physical functions or by means of a  
psuedo-physical "subtle body"*<sup>9</sup>

The more negative sounding aspects of the Old Testament understanding of the state of the soul after

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death,<sup>10</sup> then, are not nearly so negative as they seem at first glance. And it must be said that there is, in fact, a difference between the state of the soul after death in Old Testament times, and since the victory of Christ. For if the light had not appeared and been made known to the living — to the "person" — how much less was the light seen by those who had reposed. Doubtless, the souls of the Old Testament faithful reposed in hope, but that hope was not made manifest until the victory of Christ, when the light appeared in the realm of death, and brought the Old Testament faithful into the light of His glory, and made them participants in that victory upon which they had hoped. No longer do the faithful who are departed repose in darkness or in an uncertain hope. For Christ our God has broken down the power of death and overturned its kingdom. The faithful departed of all ages past were baptized in the light of His glory and given to taste of paradise. Truly, "Abraham rejoiced to see His day,"<sup>11</sup> and "those who dwelt in darkness have seen a great light."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the souls of the faithful are liberated from darkness, and abide now in the realm of light, perceiving the grace of God which sustains them and gives them the joy of the certain expectation of paradise to which they are already heirs, and which they will inherit when they are reunited with their bodies.

We have seen already that a person is a psychophysical being, that neither the soul without the body is the person, nor is the body apart from the soul. Yet, the soul is man's "intelligent faculty," the "image of God" in man. And it continues to be alive when the person has fallen asleep,

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because God wills it so. It is alive, and therefore, it perceives. It cannot perceive as the person perceives, for it no longer has use of bodily or carnal senses. Moreover, as we constantly pray for the peaceful repose of the soul, we understand that both its perception and, if it has any sort of functions, then its functioning also, are in a different realm, on a different plane. This realm is the realm of grace. Exactly what it perceives, we cannot know, but it perceives, evidently, according to revelation, by grace, and not according to any carnal sensations. We know that the souls of the departed are aware of our prayers for them, and are comforted and increased by them. It perceives things which cannot be expressed or even guessed at by our fallen human minds. And this is a true miracle, an event which, because God wills it so, takes place contrary to the "laws of nature."

The soul is not the body,<sup>13</sup> and the body is not the soul. When the two are parted, death results, and all psychophysical activity, thought and perception cease. Indeed, this is the very meaning of the expression, encountered in some patristic literature, that the soul is "freed from the body." The body is not disdained or considered to be a "prison of the soul" (for, as St Maximos the Confessor says, "Man's body is deified at the same time as his soul,"<sup>14</sup>) but it means that after death, the person can no longer sin (or repent). At death, we are "freed from sin,"<sup>15</sup> as the Apostle says, for the soul is tempted, or tempts itself, through the sensual faculties, and in partnership with the body, it sins. In the words of St Justin:

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"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 the other is loosed from the yoke, neither of them can plough alone; so neither can soul or body alone effect anything ..."16

Thus when the soul of the reposed departs its body, it is taken by God's angels, in the words of St Isaak, "immediately and suddenly" to the state of its repose, and St Ephraim the Syrian says the same, adding that the souls of the righteous are taken to paradise.<sup>17</sup>

"The souls of the pious remain in a better place, while those of the unjust and wicked are in a worse place, waiting for the time of judgment" (St Justin Martyr, the Philosopher).<sup>18</sup>

The soul does not experience any sort of adventure, such as purgatories or any other contrivances of man's imagination, about which the Scripture knows nothing, for, "Nor indeed is it possible for the soul, once torn from the body, to wander here anymore... whence it is evident that our souls after their departure hence are led away to some place, having no more power of themselves, but awaiting that awesome day," as St John Chrysostom says.<sup>19</sup> And the soul is taken away, "immediately and suddenly" to the state of its repose as St Isaak says,<sup>20</sup> and, in the words of St Gregory the Theologian, "When it [the soul of the faithful] departs hence, [it] at once enjoys a sense and perception of the blessings which await it..."<sup>21</sup>

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### 4

*The meaning of the Scriptural and patristic use of the metaphor "to sleep"; the soul perceives by revelation from God, by grace, not as being the self-contained "person."*

Many Orthodox people have become so used to the sectarian and philosophical understanding of the soul that they picture the souls of the departed becoming angels, with complete physical bodies. Added to these pseudo-physical bodies are wings, a halo and a harp. The distinction between the glorified saints of the Church and the ordinary faithful is no longer understood and no longer revered by most Christians. The fact that the saints are more fully participating in that *theosis* which is promised, and therefore have facility and powers which are beyond the ordinary has been forgotten.

The departed faithful, dwelling in the realm of grace, perceiving whatever God grants them to perceive, by grace, do not receive the fulness of their reward until they are reunited in the resurrection and again become a whole person. Neither do the wicked receive any fulness of their reward. The faithful, having acquired grace in this life already, and receiving "grace for grace,"<sup>22</sup> when they depart this life, repose in peace, their consciences free by grace, their sins having been remitted them by grace. The unrighteous repose in darkness, being tormented by their own consciences, their conscience itself testifying to them of their proper destiny on the day of the resurrection. And this is just what St Aphraat the Persian

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says:

"But blessed shall be the faithful and the righteous in that Resurrection, in which they expect to be awakened and to receive the good promises made to them. But as for the wicked who are not faithful, in the Resurrection, woe to them, because of that which is laid up for them! It would be better for them according to the faith which they possess, were they not to arise. For the servant for whom his lord is preparing stripes and bonds, while he is sleeping desires not to awake, for he knows that when the dawn shall come and he shall awake, his lord will scourge and bind him..."

In other words, the unfaithful and unrighteous are aware that they have been placed on "the left," that the final "death" awaits them on the day of the resurrection. Thus, they are already suffering in anticipation of what awaits them, and their conscience is already tormenting them somehow. The saint continues:

"But the good servant, to whom his lord had promised gifts, looks expectantly for the time when dawn shall come and he shall receive gifts from his lord. And even though he is soundly sleeping, in his dream he sees something like what his lord is about to give him, whatsoever he has promised him, and he rejoices in his dream, and is gladdened. As for the wicked, his sleep is not pleasant to him, for he imagines that, lo, the dawn has come for him, and his heart is broken in his dream. But the righteous sleep, and their slumber is pleasant to them, and they have no perception of all that long night, and like one hour is it accounted in their eyes. Then in the

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watch of the dawn they awake with joy. But as for the wicked, their sleep lies heavy upon them, and they are like a man who is laid low by a great and deep fever, and tosses on his couch hither and thither, and he is terrified the whole night long, which lengthens itself out and he fears the dawn when his lord will condemn him.

"But our faith teaches thus, that when men fall asleep, they sleep this slumber without knowing good from evil. And the righteous receive not their promises nor do the wicked receive their sentence of punishment, until the Judge come and separate those whose place is at His right hand from those whose place is at His left..."<sup>23</sup>

In this, the saint instructs us that the faithful already have a perception of what glory awaits them, though nothing like a full perception, which is why he uses the metaphor of "sleep" and "dream." This perception itself is already a partial fulfilment of that reward, something like what the true ascetic receives a small taste of already in this life. The unrighteous too, the saint teaches us, have, by the testimony of their consciences, some anticipation of their destiny, and this is some portion of their reward. This is exactly what St Mark of Ephesus says, making use of the same metaphors, and directing our thoughts to the same things:

"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,

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and the ones he led along with Himself, while the others He shut out, which things clearly shall come to pass only on that day? Do you see therefore that...while we are bereft of our bodies, no one shall receive according to that which he has done through his body? ...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 to torment. And, indeed, since they are incomplete and, as it were, cut in half, being bereft of their bodies which they wait to receive incorrupt after the resurrection, how would they attain those rewards."<sup>24</sup>

St Gregory the Theologian says the same, too,<sup>25</sup> as does St John Chrysostom.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, both the Old and New Testament, and all the holy prophets and fathers of both the Old and New Israel are of one mind and agree together in this: that the soul and the body are together a single organism; that neither is naturally immortal, but hope on God for the gift of life, resurrection, reunion and immortality; that when the soul departs the body, it immediately enters the state proper to itself, wherein it dwells until the resurrection.

The state of the souls of the faithful is no longer the same, however, as it was in the Old Testament, before the advent of Christ, before God the Word manifested the glory of His divinity in the realm of death, "taking captivity captive"<sup>27</sup> and obliterating its dark sway over the souls of the faithful. The faithful repose now in light, in ineffable peace and joyous expectation.

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Why, then, do the fathers of the Church so consistently use the term "sleep" to refer to the state of the soul after death, and why do we repeatedly pray for the "peaceful repose" of the souls of the departed?

It is important to have some understanding of the sense in which the fathers use the metaphors "sleep" and "dream." The problem facing the fathers was how to express in some terms comprehensible to the human mind a concept so alien to the ordinary laws of nature and human thought, namely, that with death the "person" ceases to be, yet a part of that person is alive by grace, and by grace cognizant of something which is beyond all human comprehension.

From the Orthodox point of view, the Scriptural term "sleep" and also the logical term "dream" are quite satisfactory metaphors because the Orthodox faithful have the conceptual framework within which the meaning of these expressions can be properly apprehended. Let us look at the nature of sleep, even if only in its common, material sense. When one falls asleep, his general physical functions cease, and he is no longer functioning in an externally sensual manner (of course, his vital functions continue because he is still in this life). Although a person's physical, sensual functions have been suspended, the mind has not ceased to function. It does not function in the same way, for it does not now have the use of the sensual faculties. The level at which the mind is now functioning is commonly called "dreaming." To "dream" simply refers to the level or mode in which the mind functions when it does not have

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the full cooperation of the body, when it does not have the use of the sensual faculties.

At death, as we have already observed, one also ceases to function in a psychophysical manner, and indeed the soul does not function relative to anything the carnal mind can conceive. The "intelligent faculty," the soul, the "image of God" in man continues to be alive because God wills it so, and it perceives in a different dimension, on a different plane and level; thus, we see the metaphor of "sleeping" and "dreaming," as the holy confessor Athenagor as of Athens says, "Some call sleep the brother of death... because those who are dead and those who sleep are subject to similar states..."<sup>28</sup>

The primary reason for the use of the term "sleep" to describe the person's state after death is to teach the resurrection, for a person who is sleeping will awaken and rise up, and resume his functions once more.

Further, the terms "sleep" and "repose" were used precisely to counteract certain heretical teachings of Origen, the Gnostics and Platonists, regarding "subtle bodies" and the "liberation of the soul." To understand this further, however, let us look at saint Gregory of Nyssa's words from his commentary on *Song of Songs*:

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### **`I sleep and my heart watcheth' (Song of Songs, 5:2)**

"The notion of sleep is admirably suited to express the experience of ecstasy...<sup>29</sup> From this point of view the spiritual life is seen as an awakening, a watching, that withdraws the soul from the illusory dreams of sensual pleasures. Thus, after the banquet the bride, too, is overcome with sleep. But this is indeed a strange sleep and foreign to nature's custom. In natural sleep the sleeper is not wide awake, and he who is wide awake is not sleeping. Sleeping and waking are contraries, and they succeed and follow one another. But in this case there is a strange and contradictory fusion of opposites in the same state. For 'I sleep,' she says, 'and my heart watches.'

"What meaning ought we to take from these words? Sleep is the image of death. All the body's sensory perception is suspended: in sleep, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch do not perform their functions...

"When all of [the senses] have been lulled into inactivity by a kind of sleep, the heart's functioning becomes pure, the reason looks up to heaven, unshaken and unperturbed by the motion of the senses ... Thus, the soul, enjoying alone the contemplation of being, will not awake for anything that arouses pleasure. After lulling to sleep every bodily motion, it receives in a divine wakefulness with pure and naked intuition. May we make ourselves worthy of this vision, achieving by this sleep the awakening of the soul."<sup>30</sup>

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This is why, without at all contradicting the other Church Fathers, St John Chrysostom can say:

"The man who sleeps shall certainly rise up, and death is nothing else save protracted sleep. Do not say to me, 'He who has died does not hear, does not speak, does not see, does not feel,' since neither does a man who sleeps. If it is necessary to say something wondrous, the soul of a sleeping man somehow sleeps, but not so with him who has died, for [his soul] has awakened."<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, it is interesting to compare the words of the fathers in this respect. At first reading, and when read separately, they often seem not to be in perfect accord with one another. Set side by side, however, and read with an eye toward the spirit of the words, one arrives at quite another conclusion. Look, for instance, at the words of St Gregory the Theologian, already cited, and the similar words of St Aphraat:

"But the good servant, to whom his Lord has promised gifts, looks expectantly for the time when dawn shall come and he shall receive gifts from his Lord. And even though he is soundly sleeping, in his dream, he sees something like what his Lord is about to give him, whatsoever He has promised him, and he rejoices in his dream and exults and is gladdened."<sup>32</sup>

St Gregory the Theologian says precisely the same thing, though in slightly different words:

"..every fair and God-beloved soul, when...it departs hence, at once enjoys a sense and perception of the blessing which awaits it... and feels a wondrous pleasure and exultation."<sup>33</sup>

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If we look carefully at the words of the fathers on this matter, we will find such an accord throughout.

It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss the doctrine of theosis — the teaching that, because of Christ, man can become divine by grace — but in order for us to understand the dramatic difference between the state of departed souls before Christ, and after His victory, we must touch upon it.<sup>34</sup>

Our whole life of prayer, fasting and struggle is carried out for no other reason than that we might acquire the Holy Spirit within us and become, through grace, participants in God. We enter the Heavenly Kingdom not by virtue of good works or our own "goodness," and certainly not by having become "sinless," but in no other way than by having acquired the Holy Spirit and become participants in divine grace already in this life. The soul of the faithful goes forth from the body already possessed of the Holy Spirit and of grace. The faithful are already "gods by grace" when they depart this life.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore inconceivable that they would not enter "at once," "immediately," as the fathers say, into the light of God's love, rejoicing and exalting in the realization of their destiny.

### 5

*"Theosis" and the experience of the soul after death;  
that the experience of the soul is in the realm of grace,  
and not in any physical manner.*

Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter 6, "Things Done

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For the Reposed," the souls of the righteous not only perceive in the realm of grace, but do not cease to increase both in peace and spiritual advancement, being increased by the prayers of the Church on their behalf. Indeed, as several of the holy fathers, remind us, *theosis* is the blessed transfiguration and transformation of the whole human person, within whom the Holy Spirit dwells. This person, so transformed, bears a truly filial relationship to the Father as an icon of Christ. A consideration of this process brings a critical question to mind. What is the final *telos* of *theosis*? At what point, one asks, can one say that the process is complete for a given transfigured human person? Careful contemplation is necessary to arrive at an appropriate answer to this question. It arises, in the first place, from the fact that the basis of mankind's existential experience has been largely limited to the mutability of earthly life, circumscribed – as it is – by limitations of time and space, and the corruptibility of fallen human nature. Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the *synergia* which such inspiration engenders, Divine light penetrates into the closed world which we inhabit; these are little flashes at first, bringing fleeting glimpses of a grandeur beyond human comprehension. Then, as we begin to live the life revealed to us in Christ, taking His proffered hand tremblingly in our own, the glimpses are gradually, perceptibly coalesced, broadening into a continual revelation of glorious understanding, illuminating all things as the rising sun fills a darkened world with golden radiance. Little by little, the shadows retreat and the limitations of the world

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melt away. The being, filled with Divine illumination, radiates it forth into the surrounding world. The transformation proceeds and grows.

Biological death, in the context of such metamorphosis, becomes not an end but a beginning – the *arche* of eternal life. Surely, following the General Resurrection, such a person shall ascend, as did Christ, to the Kingdom. But, is the process then complete? Entering a timeless existence unbound by mundane physical and temporal restriction, does the human hypostasis then remain in a static, immutable condition, frozen – as it were – into a celestial stagnation, improved to the limit possible, with no further progress possible? Such a concept of Heaven appears forbidding, unchallenging, and even seems to threaten eternal monotony. Again, such a conclusion concerning the after-life harkens back to the lingering tendency to contemplate even "eternity" in earthly and temporal terms. Through the infinite mercy of God, we are rescued from such a fate!

The progression which began in earthly life, with the beginnings of *theosis*, proceeds unabated and continues throughout eternity. St. Nicholas Kavalas<sup>36</sup> indicates this clearly in his magnificent portrayal of the Christian life, "The Life in Christ is rooted in time, but is preferred in the future." At the "third birth," that is, the General Resurrection, one can visualize mankind transformed – a joyous multitude, a race renewed, luminous with divine light. The radiance rises toward the descending Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, more radiant than a thousand stars, will now make a new Heaven and a new Earth.

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Intimate union with the Divine Energies leads to the perfecting of human nature. In each transmuted person, the Image of God is now fully ablaze with brilliant splendor. But, in this case, the act of perfecting is not a static reality. Human persons, in mystical union with the Uncreated Energies, have now become partakers of Divinity; that is, the finite and temporal progress increasingly toward the infinite and eternal. A person therefore begins to ascend, rising from glory to a greater glory, and thence yet a greater glory, and so progresses endlessly and forever.<sup>37</sup> As we ascend the ladder of spiritual enlightenment, we embark upon an upward movement that is endless, for the infinitude of God has no bounds and the splendors of God are ineffable. St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his inimitable manner, makes the point aptly, recognizing only one limit to the process of perfection – that, indeed, it has no limit!<sup>38</sup>

Of course the soul apart from the body does not receive the fulness of all this, but it is hardly logical to conceive that all progress ceases at death. It is not a series of purgatories, aerial toll houses or neo-platonic psychophysical activities which the soul experiences after its departure from the body, but a continued existence within the Church, in which a consistent development in the process of *theosis* is certainly possible, in the realm of grace and with the help of the prayers of the faithful.

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### 6

#### *theosis and the intercessions of the saints*

The souls of the faithful perceive and rejoice in this state of "peaceful repose," according to the degree in which they have acquired the Holy Spirit and become participants in grace in this life, as St Anastasios of Sinai says:

"As for the souls which have acquired the Holy Spirit and have become as it were one body and organism with Him [i.e., the saints], it seems to me that through His illumination they rejoice even after death, and noetically glorify God the Word and intercede for others, as we learn from the Scriptures."<sup>39</sup>

Here is a great revelation concerning the mystery of holiness. For, the saints, having "become as it were, one body and organism with Him," having been "deified by grace" and participating in God to the greatest possible degree, have become, in a manner, higher than the angels. In a wondrous way, they know what the Holy Spirit knows, for they are filled with the Holy Spirit. No, let us grow bolder still and say that in some degree, they know what God knows, because by grace, they have become participants in God. Thus, whatever may be said of the "place of the saints," the saints are freed from the human conception of "place." God is everywhere and sees all things, and the saints, as possessing *theosis*, as "participants in God" are, to the greatest degree possible, omniscient and omnipresent, by the miracle of *theosis* and the indwelling Holy Spirit and the awesome mystery

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of divine grace. Thus, St Mark of Ephesus says of the saints that they are:

"..in heaven with the angels before God Himself, and already as if in the paradise from which Adam fell...and often visit us in those temples where they are venerated, and hear those who call on them and pray for them to God, having received from Him this surpassing gift, and through their relics perform miracles, and take delight in the vision of God and the illumination sent from Him more perfectly and purely than before ..."40

More will be said on this subject in the chapter on the judgment and prayers for the reposed. It is sufficient now for us to recall that Christ has conquered the dominion of death already, and that hope

which before was known only as a shadow of the future is now a present reality. Christ has risen, He has filled His Church with the joy and hope of certainty, and the Church is itself a manifestation of divine love. It unites the living and the dead together, and this bond of divine love cannot be severed by any means — certainly not by that death which Christ Himself has already conquered. Thus, the faithful, whether living, and still struggling, or reposed, and enjoying already a noetic awareness of the kingdom to which they are heirs, continue in a life of mutual love and prayer, exemplified by the saints. This is a mark of the victory of Christ, a seal of the "age of grace," a testimony of the grace bearing life of the Holy Church and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

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### **ENDNOTES:**

1. Homily on Human Life and Those Fallen Asleep.

2. The Ladder of Divine Ascent, 26:30.

3. In Orthodox patristic literature we find the expression "subtle body" used once or twice (St John Damascene, for example) to indicate that the soul is created and therefore, like all matter and energy, belongs to the realm of the creaturely. In Gnostic usage, the term denotes a heretical notion that the soul has a pseudo-physical body (too subtle to be seen) and is, therefore, self-contained and independent of the body. This concept is known as Gnostic Dualism and it was refuted by every Church father who wrote against Manicheism and other Gnostic heresies..

4. The errors and heresies that have arisen on this subject are always due to the pride of some writer who wishes to exceed the understanding of the holy fathers. The seriously erroneous treatise on The Soul After Death by Bishop Ignatii Brianchaninov is a prime example. St Theophan the Recluse condemned this work in the very strongest of terms, and, I. Matveevski ("Strannik," 1863, #9) criticising the same work in, pointedly observed "No eschatology or the work of theology that deals with the end of the world and man, has attempted to deal with the subject as thoroughly as the author. [Orthodox] Theology never undertook to solve the questions the author tries to solve, because it regarded as indecent the attempts of human curiosity to go beyond the limits that are given to or knowledge of these subjects. Our theology taught about the soul, Paradise, Hell, and evil spirits only according to the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church." Like St Theophan the Recluse, Matveevski correctly criticized Bishop Ignatii Brianchaninov on the following points 1) a theory that souls and angels are material, 2) about Paradise being sensual, 3) about Hell being inside the Earth 4). The heretical work of the neo-Gnostic philosopher Fr Seraphim Rose, also titled The Soul After Death, resulted from the same lack of cautiousness and the same desire to exceed the boundaries set by the holy fathers.

5. Ps.145:4 (and the hope of the resurrection follows, see vs.5, etc.).

6. Eccl.12:7.

7. Job 14:14; 17:13; 19:25-26.

8. Dialogue With Tryphon, Ch.6.

9. This is not to say that the human soul is pure spirit as God is pure spirit. The soul is created by God, and thus is part of the material world. Certain of the holy fathers, emphasizing the "wholly otherness of God," have made this point, and it is important for us to make it also. St Justin and St Irenaeus of Lyons were among those who, while refuting the "dualism" between soul and body, and the

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idea of a pseudo-physical "subtle body" of the soul, also made it clear that the human soul is a created thing, and thus in the realm of the material universe—and it is in precisely this context that one or two of the holy fathers used the term "subtle bodies" in relation to created spirits (the soul). Nevertheless, they, like the other great fathers, asserted the immateriality of the soul and of angels. This is not a contradiction, but only a matter of aspects. The soul is not a body and is not independent of its human body. Nevertheless, the soul is not a spirit in the same manner that God is a spirit, for God is completely other than what man is. The confusion of those who offer the erroneous teaching that the soul is or has a pseudo-physical "subtle body" of its own, which gives it operation and psychophysical life independently of the body, arises from the fact that they have not considered the aspect of theology being examined by the holy fathers in regard to this question. The immateriality of the soul is a consistent doctrine of the holy father, but they did not fail to mention the distinction between this nature and the nature of God as a pure spirit. Gnostics use the term "subtle body" also, but have a radically different understanding of its meaning, interpreting in the context of classic Gnostic dualism.

10. Eccl.9:5-6, 10, for example.

11. Jn.8:56.

12. Mt.4:16.

13. For a more complete discussion of this subject, see under the heading, "On Subtle Bodies," in appendix 2 of this work.

14. Centuries on Knowledge, 11, 88.

15. Rm.6:7.

16. On The Resurrection, Ch.8.

17. St Isaak the Syrian, Homily 35; St Ephraim the Syrian, Hymn 8, On Paradise. See chapter 5 of this work.

18. Dialogue with Tryphon, Ch.5.

19. Homily 27, on Matthew's Gospel.

20. Homily 35.

21. Panagyric for Caesarios.

22. Jn.1:16.

23. Select Demonstrations, 19.

24. Orations Against Purgatory. See complete text in Appendix 1.

25. Panagyric for Caesarios, 7:21.

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26. Homily 27, on Matthew's Gospel.

27. Eph.4:8.

28. The Resurrection of the Dead, para.16.

29. See Letter Nr.1 and Letters Nr.5 and 6 in Appendix 2.

30. Commentary on Song of Songs, 5:2.

31. Homily on Lazarus and the Rich Man.

32. Select Demonstrations, 19.

33. Panegyric for Caesarios, *ibid*.

34. Concerning the doctrine of Theosis, see, e.g., Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church, Ch.11, esp. p.236 ff ("Partakers of the Divine Nature.")

35. We are not saved by having more "good points" than "bad points," and we certainly do not enter the Heavenly Kingdom by becoming "sinless" (since then, no one, not even the saints, would enter.) We enter the Heavenly Kingdom in no other way than by having struggled in this life to acquire the Holy Spirit and become participants in divine grace. In other words, we enter God's Kingdom by becoming participants in God. Repentance is a struggle, a part of a process of transforming one's mind and heart and soul into a fit temple for the Holy Spirit, of growing in humility and purity toward participating in divine grace. This is why our passions are not simply "removed" from us, and why God allows us to fall and repent without simply removing all temptation from us. It is our struggle against temptations and passions, in order to acquire the Holy Spirit, which saves us. By this, we become participants in Christ's righteousness, which He has fulfilled for us.

36. The Life in Christ, 1:1.

37. St John of the Ladder, The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Epilogue.

38. St Gregory of Nyssa, Life of the Prophet Moses, PG 44.300

39. Answer 89.

40. Orations Against Purgatory (see complete text in Appendix 1).

## FOUR OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCES

### 1

*The idea of out of body experiences is always a demonic delusion*

*"To cause the mind to abide outside the body itself,<sup>1</sup> so as there to chance upon noetic spectacles, is the root and source of the very worst of Hellenic [pagan] errors and of all heresies, an invention of demons, an instruction engendering folly and an offspring of senselessness..."<sup>2</sup>*

**W**ith these words, St Gregory Palamas censures all those who accept or teach about "out of body experiences."

We have read a considerable number of such teachings recently, both in popular, pseudo-scientific, occult and religious sources, and note that both the notion of "out of body experiences" and the conclusions reached from them by various authors, philosophers and theologians, are related either directly or indirectly to pagan mystery cults and to Hinduism, all of which are demonic religions.

In fact, such "out of body experiences" are not merely based in Western and Origenistic heresies, but are integral parts of not only Hinduism, but of Shamanism and other clearly pathological spiritualities, and do not depend at all upon an actual nearness to death in order to occur. So-called out of body experiences are also a symptom of florid schizophrenia and certain other psychotic

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conditions. This is of great importance, and we will speak of it later.

The question of "out of body experiences" has far deeper theological ramifications than might at first be surmised. In the first place, the idea that an "out of body experience" might occur presupposes the radical dualism of Origen's teachings concerning the soul and the body (or that of Manicheanism),<sup>3</sup> and diametrically contradicts the teachings of the fathers on the relationship of the soul to the body, the condition of the soul without the body,<sup>4</sup> and the teachings concerning the nature of prayer. In the second place, the idea that revelations could be given to the soul outside the body, or that the soul would leave the body in order to obtain enlightenment or revelation is simply the heretical spirituality of Barlaam the Calabrian and his milieu, opposed to the whole body of the teachings of the hesychastic fathers.<sup>5</sup>

Before setting forth on an examination of the teachings of the fathers in relation to these matters, let us set forth the three basic points we wish to make:

1. All revelation or true spiritual experience takes place within the body, in the Kingdom of God which is within one. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and one seeks truth, enlightenment and revelation, not outside the body, in the realm of demonic powers and delusion, but within the temple of the Holy Spirit. A person who accepts, seeks or teaches about "out of body experiences," has either been merely misinstructed, or is under heavy Latin-Scholastic-Hellenistic influences, in a state of spiritual delusion, a practitioner of the occult, or

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simply abysmally ignorant of the basic spiritual teachings of the fathers.

2. "Out of body experiences" are never real. They are either demonic hallucinations, phantasies or delusions, medical hallucinations or manifestations of mental illness. When one thinks to project the soul out of the body, what one really does is to project the imagination and emotions outward into the realm of the demonic spirits and powers of the air, who accept them and fill them with all manner of ideas, revelations and apparitions.

3. The experiences of those few, highly developed and Spirit filled fathers – including Paul – which Latins, occultists and spiritually Platonized Orthodox writers have interpreted as "out of body experiences" are precisely the opposite: they are noetic experiences which take place within the very depths of the being – where the Kingdom of God is to be found. Those complex experiences reported by various mystics as "out of body experiences" in which they reveal matters concerning departed souls, or any other such things, are simply demonic delusions (plani; prelest).

### 2

#### *The site of authentic spiritual experiences*

*"Nor shall they say `it is here!' or `it is there!' For behold, the Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk.17:21).*

*"God appears to the mind in the heart" (Saint*

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*Nikiforos the Solitary*).<sup>6</sup>

We have discussed the relationship of the soul and the body in Chapter 2. From what we read there, it should be obvious that the idea that the soul can leave the body, hover around here or there and then later return to the body, is blasphemous as a concept and patently heretical as a teaching. For, it suggests (as in the KueblerRoss phenomena which we will discuss later) that God is sometimes confused and cannot make up His mind whether to take a soul or leave it, that He occasionally calls and sends the soul back and forth with fallen human indecision or accidentally removes a soul before its time and has to send it back;<sup>7</sup> or, as a theological teaching, that the fathers of the Church were in error in their teachings of the relationship of the soul and body, the nature of prayer and delusion (plani; prelest) and the condition of the soul once it does depart the body at death.<sup>8</sup>

The soul departs the body at the moment God determines, and He sends His holy and terrible angelic powers to receive it from the body. The power of God alone can remove the soul from the body and neither the efforts of man nor demons, nor even of the angels by themselves can do this.

Our first point concerns the nature of true spiritual experiences and visions. The fathers have been so clear and explicit in this regard that there is little left to say in applying their words to the present question. Moreover, if we were to present a comprehensive survey of the fathers on the subject, we would end up with countless

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volumes and would quote a majority of the *Philokalia* itself.

Nowhere is the question more thoroughly examined than in the Palamite dialogues and councils of the 1300's. The Palamite councils took place as a result of the visits of the Latin scholastic mystic Barlaam of Calabria to Mt Athos in the 1340's. Here he encountered, for the first time, Orthodox Christian spiritual theology, called *hesychasm*. Barlaam, a disciple of Augustinian scholasticism, began a campaign against the Orthodox teachings with regard to the manner of prayer, the nature of the soul and body, divine vision and the nature of revelation and divine grace. St Gregory Palamas promptly responded to Barlaam's heresies, and the famous "Palamite Controversy" began. We will not discuss this epic theological event here, for it is well covered in a number of books and writings already.<sup>9</sup> Our point is to demonstrate the place of true prayer, revelation and contemplation, as opposed to the realm of demonic delusion obtained by those who advocate "out of body experiences" (and here let us point out that mind [νοῦς] and soul are occasionally being used interchangeably, as the mind is the soul's faculty of spiritual awareness).

Barlaam, along with the Western mystics, taught that the mind [soul] is to be sent outwards, outside the body, where it may behold visions, revelations, etc, and he was greatly scandalized by the Athonite fathers who spent their efforts trying to bring the mind into the depths of the body and keep it there, within the heart. This prompted St Gregory Palamas' words, partially quoted before:

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"However, to cause the mind to abide outside the body itself, so as there to chance upon noetic spectacles, is the root and source of the very worst of Hellenic errors and of all the heresies, an invention of demons, an instruction engendering folly and an offspring of senselessness. For those who speak by the inspirations of demons are outside themselves and do not even comprehend what they say. But we, on the contrary, not only send our mind within the body and the heart, but even back within itself."<sup>10</sup>

St Gregory of Sinai was clear on the same matter, when he said:

"Take heed, therefore, O lover of God, with great care and discretion: if, when you are practising the work [of prayer], you should see...an apparent form of Christ, or an angel or of something else, do not accept it, lest you suffer injury...For everything of this sort taking form outside the body comes to pass in order to delude the soul...And even if you perceive your mind being drawn outwards or upwards by some invisible power, do not trust it, nor allow your mind to be thus drawn away, but straightaway, bring it back to its work [of prayer]."<sup>11</sup>

The point is certainly obvious. The mind [νοῦς], the soul's chief faculty of spiritual awareness, must remain inside the body, the temple of God in order to be delivered from the wiles of the demons and their delusions and phantasies. The revelations which the saints received, they received within, in the Kingdom of God, not without, in the realm of demons. For, the Kingdom of God and the vision, therefore, of that

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Kingdom is within. All these other things, "out of body experiences," psychic phenomena, astral projection, etc, all have as their chief step, the exit of the mind from the body — where they are subject to diverse demonic phantasies. As we have already said, the soul (or, mind, the meaning here is the same) cannot exit the body, but the imagination and emotions can be projected outward, and are easily subject to demonic influences which are then brought into the mind.

### 3

#### *The actual spiritual condition of monastics and would-be elders who teach that out of body experiences are possible and desirable*

What shall we say then of those fabulous and complex revelations brought to us by certain mystics or stories of mystics, concerning things yonder, beyond death? St Isaak of Nineveh ("The Syrian") has already answered for us, saying of those writings and revelations:

"Indeed, he wrote that he [Apostle Paul] 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 which is not their own. And 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. But

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whatever the mind perceptibly beholds, hears or apprehends within itself in the realm of the spirit, it has no power to express when it turns again toward the body. It merely remembers that it saw them, but how it saw them, it knows not how to express with clarity.

*"This convicts the false writings called `revelations' which, being composed by the originators of the corrupt heresies under the influence of demonic phantasies, describe the celestial dwelling in the sky...the pathways to Heaven, the places set apart for judgment, the manifold figures of the hosts of the sky, and their diverse activities.* But all these things are shadows of a mind inebriated by conceit and deranged by the working of demons. 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.

"May your holiness, therefore, keeping these things in mind, beware of the phantasies of profound thoughts. This warfare especially assaults monks who are keen-witted, who inquire into empty opinions, yearn for novelties and are superficial."<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, what treasures of knowledge or pathways would one seek out there, outside the body, when such great fathers of the Church have instructed us:

"Try to enter your inner treasure house and you will

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see the treasure house of heaven. For both the one and the other are the same, and one and the same entrance reveals them both. The ladder leading to the Kingdom is concealed within you, that is, in your soul. Wash yourself from sin and you will see the rungs of the ladder by which you can ascend thither."<sup>13</sup>

For, "a hesychast is he who being `bodiless'<sup>14</sup> strives to retain his soul within the bounds of its bodily home...close the door of your cell to the body, the door of your lips to conversation and the inner door of the soul to evil spirits,"<sup>15</sup> because, "He who always remains in his heart is remote from this world...Truly did the holy father speak when he said that the wiles of the enemy fail as long as we abide in a certain place in the depths of our hearts, and the more so the more firmly we hold there."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, according to the fathers, to become "bodiless" one enters into the depths of the body, of one's being, and there, the saints experience something like what they will experience at death: that is, they are asleep and insensitive to things corporeal and free of all sensation and all sense perception, they are asleep to the flesh, but awake to God. And this is similar to what St Basil the Great tells us also, saying:

"And when discoursing of Himself, He says, `Yet a little while and the world seeth Me no more, but ye see Me;' again, in this passage, using the name `the world' for those who being bound down by this material and carnal life, and beholding the truth by the physical eyes alone, were through their unbelief in the resurrection no more to see the Lord with the eyes of the heart. And He said the

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same of the Spirit. `The Spirit of truth,' He says, `Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him for He dwelleth in you.'"<sup>17</sup>

For, of that Spirit which is to be found not "out there" outside the body, but "dwelling in you," the saint further says that when one beholds the light and energies of God, "the image of the invisible God...the Spirit of knowledge is somehow there inseparably present, in Himself bestowing on them that love the vision of the truth, the faculty of beholding the image, not making the exhibition from without but within, Himself leading on to full knowledge."<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, those who would seek the vision of God, illumination, vision or participation in divine grace (the energies of God) outside the body, have departed the temple of God, entered into a place of worship foreign to the Spirit and kindled incense upon strange altars. For, St Basil the Great says:

"But concerning the Spirit, it is said, `Behold there is a place by Me, and stand upon the rock.' What else could He mean by `place' except divine vision in the Spirit... This is the special and peculiar place of true worship; for it is said, `Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place... but in the place the Lord God shall choose.' Now what is a spiritual burnt offering? `The sacrifice of praise.' And in what place do we offer it? In the Holy Spirit...So it follows that the Spirit is verily the place of the saints and the saint is a proper place for the Spirit, offering himself as he does for the

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indwelling of God, and called God's temple."<sup>19</sup>

The fathers here warn against anything which seems to be an "out of body experience," and they censure and warn against anyone who teaches that revelation or "noetic spectacles" can be experienced in an "out of body" state, or that "out of body experiences" ought to be sought, or believed in, or indeed, that an actual one could really occur. For as we have seen already, the soul cannot remain or wander here once it is separated from the body (Saint John Chrysostom), and the soul without the body cannot speak, nor discern, nor think, nor be roused, nor see (St Anastasios of Sinai), and without the body, the soul "is found lacking in perception and knowledge" (St Ephraim the Syrian) and separated from the body, "the soul cannot enjoy anything, or possess or do anything ..." and it is not even a person, but only part "of" a person (Sts Titus of Bostra and Justin the Philosopher) (see Chapter 2).

We have, therefore, learned already that experiences of the soul out of the body, "out of body experiences" are completely impossible, and everything which claims to be one is a demonic delusion, and those who claim to have had them are suffering from spiritual delusion (*plani; prelest*).

What, then, of those great and wondrous revelations vouchsafed through those few, rare, Spirit-filled fathers, such as St Seraphim of Sarov's famous conversation with Motovilov,<sup>20</sup> St Andrew the Fool's experience of the divine light, which he described metaphorically as "three heavens," Apostle Paul's identical experience, as well as

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his earlier experience on the Damascus road? Here, too, we have not been left to idle speculation which leads to delusion, but our Saviour, in order to protect us from those who would be interpreters of such things, has given us a clear disclosure of the matter. In the Life of Our Holy and God-bearing father, St Symeon the New Theologian, by his disciple Nikitas Stethatos, we have this revelation, which refutes the absurdities engendered by those who claim that "out of body experiences" can ever really occur:

"He himself [St Symeon] also became illumined by that light, and it seemed to him that he was outside his dwelling...and he totally forgot about his own body...He was in ecstasy for a long time, and, as he himself said, could not perceive whether he was in the body or out of the body. Only as the light diminished little by little did he understand that he was in his body and inside his cell, and that his heart was full of joy and that his mouth was crying aloud: `Lord have mercy'." And another time, "Being entirely in ecstasy, he fixed his whole mind upon that light which had appeared. This light gradually grew and made the air to appear more and more radiant, and he perceived that his whole being, body and soul, was removed from things of earth. But as this light continued to grow in brightness and intensity, shining above him like the midday sun, he perceived that he stood bodily in the midst of that light, and he was filled with tears of joy...He beheld how this same light united itself in a strange manner to the flesh and gradually entered into his members...He began to see how this light little by little

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was given to his entire body...As formerly with his dwelling, so now with his body, he became aware of its form, posture, density or appearance; his tears then ceased. Whereupon, there came to him a voice from that light, which said: `In this manner shall the saints which shall live and remain upon the earth at the sounding of the final trumpet be transfigured, and in this state shall they be caught up, as Paul has said'...<sup>21</sup>

..He [St Symeon] then began to think and say within himself, `Shall I once again return to the previous form of my body...' No sooner had he completed this thought when suddenly, he realized that he still bore the form of his body...he perceived that he, together with his body which had remained with him, having somehow become bodiless<sup>22</sup>..."<sup>23</sup>

The experience of St Andrew the Fool of Constantinople, in his own "rapture" was clearly identical. St Andrew (like St Symeon) says that at first he did not know whether he was "in the body or out of the body," but says that, "in appearance I was in the body ..." And he says quite clearly, "But it seemed to me that with this body of mine, I was such as we shall be after the resurrection, or rather, that with this very body I had secretly slipped in among those there."<sup>24</sup>

This description is almost identical to that of St Symeon the New Theologian, whose awareness that he was actually, fully in his body came to him gradually, from the realization that he appeared to be in the body, to the sure understanding that he in fact was and always had been "in the body." St John Chrysostom reaches a similar

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conclusion concerning Apostle Paul's experience. He asks, "What then? Was it the mind that was caught up and the soul, whilst the body remained dead? Or was the body caught up?" And further on he adds, replying to anyone who might doubt Apostle Paul's story: "If anyone should ask, `how is it possible to be caught up without a body?' I ask of him, `how is it possible to be caught up with a body?' for, if you examine by reasonings and do not give place to faith this is even more inexplicable than the first."<sup>25</sup>

If, as St John Chrysostom would have us do, we "give place to faith," and accept that the stories of Sts Enoch and Elijah really are true, then we have two clear examples of saints being caught up in the body (but not a single example of one being caught up "out of the body"), and the explanation is clear.

### 4

#### *Apostle Paul's experience of rapture: the Orthodox Christian explanation by the holy fathers*

Why then, did Apostle Paul say, "Whether in the body or out of the body, I know not"? In the beginning, Sts Symeon and Andrew also did not know this, or rather, they were not aware of the circumstances. But did Apostle Paul really not know? As St John Chrysostom<sup>26</sup> and St Athanasios the Great say, in this case the Apostle was, from humility, being purposely vague. He does not say, "More than fourteen years ago, I was caught up....," but rather, "I knew a man who, more than fourteen years

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ago was caught up..., " showing by such means that while he had much of which he could boast, he did not wish to boast of such things. But did he really not know "whether in the body or out of the body"? Here is what our holy and God-bearing father Athanasios the Great says:

"This is sufficient to confute them [the Arians]; but to demonstrate still further that they are hostile to the truth and enemies of Christ, I should wish to ask a question of them. The Apostle, in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians writes, 'I knew a man in Christ, more than fourteen years ago, whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know; God knows...!' What do you now say? Did the Apostle know what had happened to him in the vision, though he says 'I know not' or did he not know? If [you say] he did not know, look to yourself, lest being familiar with error you err in the trespass of the Phrygians who say that the Prophets and the other ministers of the Word know neither what they do nor concerning what they announce. But if he did know though he said, 'I know not', for he had Christ within him revealing to him all things, [then] is not the heart of God's enemies indeed perverted and 'self--condemned'? ...For if since Christ was within him, Paul knew that of which he says, 'I know not', does not much more Christ Himself know, though he says 'I know not'? The Apostle, then, the Lord revealing it to him, knew what happened to him; for on this account he says, 'I knew a man in Christ'; and knowing the man, he knew also how the man was caught away. Thus Elisha, who beheld Elijah, knew also how he was taken up; but

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though knowing ...he was silent...Did he then not know, because he was silent? He knew indeed, but as if not knowing, he endured them, that they being convinced, might no more doubt about the taking up of Elijah. Therefore much more Paul, himself being the person caught away, knew also how he was caught up...And yet Paul himself says, 'I know not', for these two reasons, as I surmise; one, as he has said himself, lest because of the abundance of the revelations anyone should think of him beyond what he saw; the other, because, our Saviour having said 'I know not', it became him [Paul] to say, 'I know not', lest the servant should appear above his Lord, and the disciple above his Master."<sup>27</sup>

Not only, according to the God-bearing Athanasios, did Apostle Paul know full well how he was caught up, but the holy father links this being caught up to that of Prophet Elijah who, we well know, was indeed caught up body and soul complete.

What sort of experience did Paul have then? The hesychastic fathers are in a position to know more clearly. If we study their works, we discover just how surely the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, in our very depths, and when we then read that someone was "caught up into heaven," might we be so bold as to suggest that these people were caught up *into the depths of the body*, rather than out of the body? For, this is just exactly in what the hesychastic teaching consists. St Gregory Palamas, speaking especially of Apostle Paul, instructs us:

"The great Paul, being about to be found amidst

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invisible and celestial visions in Christ, was 'caught away' [ἄρπαγείς] and transcended the heavens [lit. became supercelestial], but not in the sense that his intellect had to ascend above the heavens in a topical way — although indeed the word 'caught away' [ἄρπαγή] indicates another mystery that is known only by those who have experienced it, and concerning which there is no need to speak...Then in very truth a man sees by the Spirit, not the intellect or the body, and he knows supernaturally that he beholds a light that transcends light. But by what means he sees this, he does not know then, nor can he investigate the nature of that light on account of the Spirit's inscrutableness, by Whom he sees. And this is the same thing that Paul said when he heard ineffable things and saw invisible things. He beheld, he says, 'whether out of the body I know not, or within the body I know not'. That is to say, he did not know whether it was the intellect or the body that was seeing. For he sees, but not by sense perception, and yet [he sees] like sense perception sees perceptible things, clearly and even more clearly than sense perception. And he sees himself, that, by the ineffable sweetness of that which he sees, he is apart from and caught away not only from every material and noetic thing, but even from himself. And by this ecstasy he even forgets his prayer to God."<sup>28</sup> Further, "And the recompense for this, or the earnest of the recompense, Paul called 'rapture' [ἄρπαγή] and 'supercelestial ascent', but Christ called it the 'coming' and 'abiding' of Himself and His Father. That these things are one and the same, though expressed differently, is not

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something concealed from the initiated."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, "The vision, therefore, of this light is a union, even though for the imperfect the union be not long-lasting. And what is union with light, if not vision? But since this comes to pass after the cessation of the noetic operations, how can it be accomplished except through the Spirit? For in the light, light is seen, and that which sees is in similar light. If that which sees has no other means of operating, since it has departed from all other things, it becomes itself wholly light and becomes like that which it sees, or rather, it is united [with it] without confusion, being light and seeing light through light. And so even if it sees itself, it sees light, and though it looks toward what it sees, that also is light, and though it looks at that by which it is able to see, that also is light. This is the union; all these things are one, such that that which sees cannot distinguish either that through which it sees, or that at which it looks, or what it is itself, but only that there is light and that it sees light which is different from all created things. Therefore the great Paul says that during that astonishing rapture he was ignorant of himself, what he was. He saw himself, however; how? Sensibly, rationally or noetically? But being caught away from these things, he left these powers behind. Through the Spirit Who wrought that rapture he saw himself. But what was he, being imperceptible to every natural faculty, or rather, being loosed from every natural faculty? He was assuredly that with which he was united, and through which he recognized himself and because of which he was divorced from all...He was at that time light and

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Spirit, to Whom he was united, from Whom he had the ability to be united, being separate from all things and having become Him by grace."<sup>30</sup>

This makes it perfectly clear, as St Symeon also said of himself, that Paul saw nothing but light, his body and soul having together become a "sort of immaterial luminary," and outside of him there was nothing but light; he was not even able to perceive what he was, except light. This is also the perfect union of God, soul, and body.<sup>31</sup> What then was the nature of Apostle Paul's experience, and was he actually in his body? Of course he was, and the nature of his experience was just what Sts Symeon and Andrew say, "Wherefore, there came upon me a voice from that light, which said: `In this manner shall the saints which shall live and remain upon earth at the sounding of the final trumpet be transfigured, and in this state shall they be caught up, as Paul said',"<sup>32</sup> and, "it seemed to me that with that body of mine, I was such as we shall be after the resurrection, or rather, that with this very body I had secretly slipped in among those there."<sup>33</sup> Let us surmise then that Apostle Paul was also "caught up" in the same manner and state that those who are still alive at the time of the Second Coming will be. And does one deny the resurrection and transfiguration of the body? Or the transfiguration and "catching away" of the body of those who remain?

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### 5

#### *A Further Note: Visualization and Idolatry*

Our descriptive apparatus is dominated by the character of our visual experience. It is for just this reason that linguistically based assumptions lead to errors in our understanding of the Divine and the eternal, the nature of heaven, the nature of hell and the relationship between body and soul in human beings. Linguistically based assumptions are derived from the presumption of visualizability. Language develops on the matrix of vision and is a developed system of imitation of and metaphor for things heard and seen.<sup>34</sup> Idolatry, I surmise, can arise from the impulse to linguistically describe and define the unseen. This results in metaphor or allegory. When the metaphor for the unseen is, as it must be, visualized, some form of idolatry results. In Orthodox Christian theology we are preserved from this idolatry by the concept of the apophatic. In this regard, the words of Abba Isaak the Syrian are extraordinarily important when he says: "Speech is the language of this world, but silence is the language of the world to come," 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

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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.*<sup>135</sup>

This is interesting, because it shows us that the ability to visualize in material terms and to describe in language are interrelated, and that noetic things are subject to neither. For whatever visual and concrete concepts or ideas one has about the nature of heaven, hell, the Divinity, the partial and last judgments, and all things "yonder" are without fail delusion and phantasy. According to St Gregory Palamas, this is also the mystery of Apostle Paul's words that when he had his noetic experience, he did not know whether he was "in the body or out of the body." St Gregory does not allow the concept of "out of body experiences" but says of Paul: "He beheld, he says, 'whether out of the body I know not, or within the body I know not'. That is to say, he did not know whether it was the intellect or the body that was

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seeing. For he sees, but not by sense perception, and yet [he sees] like sense perception sees perceptible things, clearly and even more clearly than sense perception. And he sees himself that, by the ineffable sweetness of that which he sees, he is apart from and caught away not only from every material and noetic thing, but even from himself."<sup>36</sup> This is the point that neo-Gnostic writers do not grasp: "whether in the body or out of the body" does not at all indicate an "out of body experience," but rather precludes all visualizability or language based description of the experience and the vision, and thus guards against idolatry.

### 6

## *The appearance of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration*

"But," someone will say, "what about the appearance of Moses on Mt Tabor? Was this not an "out of body" appearance, since Moses was not caught up as were Enoch and Elijah?" Such a question could only arise from coarse materialism. Besides, why was it that, according to the Scripture,<sup>37</sup> the Archangel contended for the body of Moses? Was Moses' body like that of John the Theologian resurrected and "caught up"? Did Moses appear on Mt Tabor actually with his body? St Ephraim the Syrian says of this:

"Now he summoned Elijah, who had been caught up, and Moses, *who was resurrected*, and the three witnesses from among the preachers, they who were indeed pillars

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(Gal.2:9), for they supported the testimony of the kingdom ... And as they came down from the mountain Jesus charged them saying, 'tell the vision to no man'. Why? Because He knew that they would not be believed, but they would be considered madmen. Men would say, 'How did you recognize Elijah? And lo, Moses is dead and buried and no man knows his grave!' So there would be blasphemy and scandal because of this ... and He said, 'wait until,' meaning that they should wait until the tombs be rent asunder and the righteous come forth, the recent and the ancient, and enter into Jerusalem (Mt.27:52 -53), the city of the great king. And lo, then will they believe that He Who resurrected them also resurrected Moses..."<sup>38</sup>

St John Damascene says also:

"Moses represents the community of the saints of old who have fallen asleep, and Elijah, the community of the living, for He Who is transfigured is the Lord of the living and the dead. Moses entered into the promised land, because Jesus, the Bestower of the inheritance, brought him in, and those things which he beheld in a type, today shine forth more clearly."<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, did the three apostles see Elijah and Moses carnally, or noetically, or not even that, but purely spiritually? They were in the light of God's glory, a part of that vision, and is the light of the glory of the Godhead seen by men physically or noetically, or purely spiritually? Let us see what St Gregory Palamas says of this:

"Do you see how the Unseen One is seen by those who

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are pure of heart, not however, seen sensibly, nor noetically, nor conceptually, but by some ineffable power? ... But I shall tell you openly. The first martyr saw spiritually, even as those who have seen that pure light through revelation ... And if you become full of faith and the Holy Spirit, you will see spiritually things which are invisible to the intellect [ν ο υ ζ ; nous]."<sup>40</sup>

And, as St John Damascene says of the vision on Mt Tabor: "Truly, the abyss of unapproachable light, today the uncircumscribable flood of divine radiance shines forth upon the apostles on Mt Tabor ... now things unseen by human eyes are seen ..."<sup>41</sup>

It is sufficient to declare that Moses and Elijah were seen by the apostles, but how and in what manner is known to God. It is enough to know that they did appear, and some of the fathers have explained why they appeared but few have ventured an explanation of how. We must remember here that we are dealing with an actual revelation of the glory of the Godhead, of Christ "coming in His glory." And so we are already not dealing with any sort of physical/material phenomenon (or would one assert that the light of God's glory is a physical, thus a created light?) So, we are outside time, space and all physical phenomena, and all on Tabor is taking place within the vision of the glory of the Godhead and, as Saint Anastasios of Antioch says:

.."they (the apostles) went up to so lofty a place so as to be vouchsafed a vision which was called the Kingdom of Heaven by Him Who revealed Himself to them, being transfigured with the prophets."<sup>42</sup>

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How, St Gregory Palamas asks, did the apostles even recognize the prophets? By revelation, he replies.<sup>43</sup> And St Anastasios of Antioch concurs, adding, "And certainly the apostles were also prophets."<sup>44</sup>

How was Moses there? More surprising, how was Elijah there, being in a corrupt body which will some day die a martyr's death? If Elijah is still in his carnal, mortal, un-regenerated body (for it will die) how then is he with God in the spiritual world and appearing in that very immaterial light of the glory of the Godhead; how is his sinful carnal body participating in the glory of God? This question alone should make one wary of hasty conclusions concerning Moses. Yet, to a certain degree, we answered both these questions — how was Moses there, and how was Elijah there — already in Chapter 3. About Elijah (and Enoch) we can say little, and only look in wonder. Nevertheless, the saints are participants in God. They are freed from the laws of time and place. They are participants already in God's glory. As participants in God, they are wherever God is. And if, in revealing Himself in that manner in which He does — by the vision of His uncreated, immaterial glory — what is so marvellous if He, at the same time, also in like manner reveals those who are always with Him, participating in Him and His glory? Whether Moses is immaterial soul or resurrected body, he is with God, and Elijah, by the will of God is also with God. God is not bound by laws.

Will one insist that Moses had to have a material form (even a "subtle" one) in order to be seen by the apostles? Well, then, will one also insist that, for the purpose of this

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vision, the glory of God became material, had a created form? Light is not immaterial. It is physical, measurable, refractable. To insist that God could not reveal Moses on Tabor without his having at least a "subtle" form also, it would seem, implies the Latin doctrine of the material, created form of God's glory. If God was unable to reveal Moses on Tabor without his having an external form, how was He able to reveal the light of His glory without its having a material form? In other words, the insistence that Moses had some sort of a material form on Tabor (other than, perhaps, his own resurrected body, as St Ephraim suggests) forces us to re-fight the Palamite controversy all over again, because the essence of the question is quite clearly the same as Barlaam the Calabrian's challenge to St Gregory Palamas. Indeed, St Gregory says that Moses was immaterial on Tabor.

Now, obviously, the Transfiguration was a super-divine manifestation, something beyond the capabilities of all such scholastic reasonings. Time and place do not exist here. The apostles could have been seeing Moses as after the general resurrection itself, for that matter, unless we are to limit God and His glory in time and space – for this was that very same glory in which Christ will appear again at the last day (and look at the Apocalypse of St John the Theologian, for example).

Thus, in examining the fathers, we find a consensus that Moses and Elijah were seen and recognized by the apostles by means of revelation. This fact already bars us from seeking definitions or scientific style explanations as to how Moses (or Elijah) were seen on Mt Tabor. But

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we have certainly seen enough to exclude any notions that Moses was on Mt Tabor in an "out of body appearance" or in the form of a "subtle body" (as the Gnostics might suggest). Let us conclude with these words of St Gregory Palamas:

"But why did he separate the chief apostles from the rest and lead them alone to the mountain? Surely to show them something great and mystical. How, then, would the sight of sensible light be something great and mystical, since those who were chosen perceived such light even before being led off, as did the rest? What need would they have had of the power of the Spirit, and of the addition (to nature) by means of this power, or an alteration in their eyes, so as to be able to see light that is sensible and created? How should the glory and kingdom of the Father and the Spirit be sensible light? And how shall Christ in the future age come in this glory and Kingdom, when there will be no air, no light, nor any need of [physical] place or any such thing, but instead of all this there will be God, as the Apostle says. If God will take the place of all these things, He certainly will take the place of light. Wherefore it is proved that that light was the light of the Godhead. Hence the most theological of the Evangelists, John makes clear in his 'Revelation' that the future and enduring city 'has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof' (Rev.21:23). Has he not, then, clearly shown us here also Jesus Who is now divinely transfigured on Tabor, Who has His own Body as a lamp, and Who instead of light

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has the glory of the Godhead which became manifest to those who ascended the mountain with Him? Now concerning those that dwell in the city, John says that 'They need no lamp, neither the light of the sun, for the Lord God shines upon them, and there shall be no night' (Rev.22:5). What, therefore, is that light, 'with which there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning' (Js.1:17)? What is this immutable and unwaning light? Is it not the light of the Godhead. But how could Moses and Elijah – and especially Moses, who was a soul and not something material – appear and be glorified by means of sensible light? They appeared in glory and spoke of the departure which Jesus should accomplish in Jerusalem. But how did the apostles recognize them when they had never seen them before, unless it was by the power of revelation given by that light."<sup>45</sup>

Such are the revelations which the saints receive, but all those things which take place "outside the body" are demonic delusions, since the experience of God and the things of God take place in the depths of the body, for, "know ye not that your bodies are become temples of the Holy Spirit,"<sup>46</sup> and it is a true rule of all godly prayer that:

"Wisdom moved by the Spirit is, according to theologians, the power of mental, pure, angelic prayer; a sign of this is that during prayer the mind is free from forms, with no image either of itself or of anything else appearing for an instant, since it is drawn away from the senses by the light acting within. For then the mind is removed from everything material and is like lights, being ineffably merged with God into one spirit."<sup>47</sup>

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Where and how does one thus become so close to God? Saint Abba Dorotheos of Gaza replies:

"To the degree that the saints enter into the things within, desiring to come near to God, in proportion to their progress in the things within, they do in fact come closer to God and to their neighbour."<sup>48</sup>

Here, we have touched upon a wondrous source of edification and spiritual instruction. Let the reader not be satisfied with only the few words of the Spirit-bearing fathers cited here. Rather, let everyone be moved to seek more, as a thirsty man in a desert craves water, let us seek spiritual sustenance and edification by reading whatever is to be found of the Orthodox fathers, and prepare ourselves to receive the light of grace like the wisemen of the East to whom God revealed the noetic vision of the light of a star, seen within themselves. For it was, as St John Chrysostom says,<sup>49</sup> a noetic vision, and not a real star, and it was seen within themselves, and not by anyone else. They saw it well enough to follow it, but it was obviously not visible outside themselves. For with the faculties of the physical body, no one beheld it. Sensual vision is never enough to see with in any case. How many saw Christ and His mighty deeds as a "threat" and how many saw and beheld the Son of God, "that Messiah that is to come?" How many of the things of God and eternity are ever seen with the sensual vision? The sensual vision, it seems, only presents some evidence of what reality might actually consist in, and unless we see that evidence in another light, through different "eyes," then we never perceive it at all. The epic of the Magi is

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like the life of the Prophet Moses, and it would seem that it is also a testimony about the spiritual life of all believers. The Magi saw the light of God's kingdom within themselves – with the eyes of the mind, those special "eyes" of the soul. And they saw it because their souls were open to this perception when the grace of God should bring it to them. They saw the evidence of the manifestation of the kingdom of God, which was beginning to grow within them, and with no little difficulty and struggle, they followed with unshakable faith, that evidence until it led them to the King Himself. Yet, when they saw the King, there was nothing in His appearance or surroundings (to those carnal eyes) which would commend belief in or reverence to Him. Still, they not only worshipped Him, but even adored Him. They could not have revered Him, they could not have recognized Him, except for that divine light, that evidence of the Kingdom which was manifested within them, and which the eyes of the soul perceived. When they set out and struggled to reach the King of that kingdom, they were led by the light of God's grace to Him, and they were able to recognize the King on account of that kingdom which was already manifested by the Spirit within them. The perception was noetic – within them. The vision of the "star" was noetic – within them. The recognition of the King was noetic, by means of spiritual eyes opened and enlightened by the grace of God, operating in a soul willing to co-operate with it.

Now, the saints (indeed, all believers) have "seen His star shining ..." and followed it, the light of this grace

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accepted into the soul which is willing to co-operate with it. They have struggled, set out on the desert path, to follow that light. Howbeit, the "world" does not see this light, this "star," and thinks those who are following it are bereft of good sense. And if the world seeks confirmation of that testimony of those who are following this "star," it is only so it can slay the offspring of this faith, so it can "send forth and slay all the children" of that faith.

Let the world seek its spiritual goals "out there," outside the body, in the realm of the "Prince of this World." But let us, Orthodox Christians, hearken diligently to the fathers, with all sobriety and discretion, and in Orthodox fashion, struggle to keep our mind within ourselves, striving to cleanse and make ready the temple of our bodies, that our souls may find the Holy Spirit and the things of God, there in His kingdom in the depths of ourselves, where they are to be found.

### 7

#### *Near death experience phenomena*

At the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned the phenomena of medical hallucinations. Obviously, we must also touch upon this subject, as there are a number of books circulating now regarding "out of body experiences" on deathbeds and sickbeds. The reports allege that certain people who have died have later come back to life and given revealing insights into that world yonder, into the state and condition of the soul after death, or who have reported visions of light and of saints

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and angels. It is in these stories especially that we come upon the idea of a soul being removed from its body erroneously or too early – an idea which, as we said, attributes to God the qualities of fallen human indecision. The soul departs the body at the moment God calls it forth and, in the words of St John Chrysostom, "Our souls after their departure hence are led away to some place, having no more power of themselves ... but awaiting that awesome day."<sup>50</sup> The soul *cannot* depart the body except at God's summons, and the human soul is not stronger than God that it can resist Him when He calls it forth. Nor does God "accidentally" summons the soul and then, discovering His accident, return it.

On those extremely rare occasions when God has raised a person from the dead for some direct, specific reason, there has been no talk at all of some sort of "out of body experience," nor indeed, have such people ever told us anything of what took place (Lazarus, Dorcas, Athanasy of the Kiev Caves, for example).<sup>51</sup>

God calls the soul forth in its appointed time, and the soul tears itself away from its body and heeds the call of the all-powerful and merciful God. As to what happens to the soul then, we have said as much as can be said. The rest is simply a great mystery, for it exceeds the understanding of the human mind. We know very little about the subject, for the Scripture is silent on the matter, the prophets and fathers of the Church are as silent, and those who were actually resurrected were absolutely silent on the matter. This is logical, for they could have known precious little indeed of what did happen to them,

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if one is to give credence to the Scripture and the New Testament prophets and fathers. Moreover, their state of existence in the repose was beyond the human tongue to speak of, and beyond the human mind to comprehend. Indeed, St Isaak of Nineveh says, as we have already seen, that no vision or revelation about things yonder (beyond death) can be expressed in human words, and everything that is, is false. When the fathers spoke of it at all, they were forced, like Moses, to use figurative expressions and metaphors, such as Christ Himself used, calling this state "Abraham's Bosom," as if to say only that these souls were the heirs of the promise given to Abraham for his true children.<sup>52</sup> Nor was St Antony the Great able to obtain an answer to the matter either, for when he pondered it, he was told by God, "Antony, take heed to yourself; for such things are for the judgment of God, and it is not for you to know them."<sup>53</sup> Thus, despite attempts to doctrinalize certain stories and moral fables, which have appeared over the centuries, despite speculations of "science falsely so called,"<sup>54</sup> which purport to give answers to what the Divine Scripture and the fathers mutually refused to attempt answers, the matter remains a mystery in the wisdom of God.

As to the *medical* "out of body experiences" and teachings (such as those asserted by Dr Kuebler-Ross, et al),<sup>55</sup> in general, there are two answers: one given to us by members of the teaching staff in the faculty of medicine at two Canadian universities, and confirmed by inquiries made of practising physicians and surgeons, and another which is completely self-evident, at least to the Orthodox

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Christian.

In the first place, we are given this general explanation of certain of the "death hallucinations" which occur most frequently. When a body approaches clinical death, the heart can slow down or even stop for some periods of time (in a catatonic state, one can appear "dead" for considerable lengths of time). The brain is deprived of oxygen and a sense of entering a dark vortex is felt. As the brain spirals into this vortex, the body chills. Then suddenly, there will be a heart beat again, blood rushes to the brain, bearing oxygen. The perfectly natural sensation of the brain is one of a sudden blinding light, breaking through the vortex into light. The body suddenly feels the warmth of the blood flow, and experiences a feeling of lightness, warmth and well-being. A deep sense of love is also common, and a person in both the initial state and the latter, experiences distorted images of people and events, both past and present. Because of the euphoric condition, things which are actually vaguely seen or remembered are seen in a highly exalted or idealized manner, and this is often attributed to an "out of body experience," just as things seen under the influence of hallucinogens are interpreted as extra-carnal experiences.

8

*Where do "near death" and  
"out of body experiences" actually take place?*

Clinically, it can be demonstrated by sound scientific method that these so called "near death" experiences, and

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similar hallucinations take place in the hippocampus and amygdala regions of the brain, and not "outside the body." Moreover, these experiences can be easily induced in the laboratory with well placed electrodes. One does not have to experience a severe medical trauma to have these hallucinations, rather they can be induced by any number of non-spiritual means. They can also be induced with such drugs as L.S.D. Within the range of medical "near death experiences," the ones we are concerned with here, the cause and mechanism is known. Under medical stress, when there is an oxygen deprivation to the brain, the atmosphere for such hallucinations is ideal. Minor seizures in the hippocampus and/or amygdala regions of the brain induce not only the now popular form of "near death experiences," but a range of other hallucinations such as "out of body experiences" in other circumstances, which are interpreted by New Age practitioners as "spiritual." Research at Laurentian University Medical Centre in Canada is particularly cogent in this regard, but these facts have been demonstrated in a number of other research centres as well.

We have ourselves seen people under the influence of such drugs, sitting before us talking, but insisting that they were floating overhead, near the ceiling, looking down on the scene, and describing the whole room as if from above it looking down onto it. Dr Richard Blacher of Tufts University School of Medicine notes, too, that:

"First, it is clear these experiences occur only when there is a gradual cardiac arrest. Such experiences do not occur with Stokes-Adams attacks, during which the pa-

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tients describe no mental sensations with the sudden stopping of the heart. These episodes were also commonly experienced during induction of anaesthesia with open-drop ether. Numerous such accounts of noises, lights, and a sensation of being outside the body and watching the situation are available when such patients are asked about their experience; rarely does anyone volunteer this information ... This kind of dramatic experience is never described by patients who have had heart surgery, although not uncommonly these patients have the fantasy that when their heart stopped they are dead ..."<sup>56</sup>

This is, in fact, the proper perspective to receive all such stories of people who have observed themselves from "outside the body," floating along over the body as it was moved from one place to the other, and the like. These explanations are quite reasonable and obviously true. One doctor observed, in closing, that these conditions are interpreted in two different ways: the one by those physicians who are practising medicine, and the other way by those who are making big money selling books of occult speculations.

### 9

#### *The demonic aspect of "near death experiences"*

There is, however, another aspect, another dimension of such phenomena which must be explained: for, Satan would certainly never pass up such an excellent opportunity to delude humanity and deprive it of its

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salvation.

When the evil-one finds a person near death and in a passive condition, susceptible to spiritual delusion (the more so considering the natural phenomena discussed earlier) he knows that the person is not actually dead, and so, given the opportunity by circumstances, he assaults the person's mind with ideas and demonically contrived visions and false experiences — just as the demons have appeared to the saints as angels and even as Christ Himself, trying to destroy them through pride — in order to sow false teachings and beliefs. About this, our holy father St Gregory of Sinai has warned:

"And some evil spirits ... sway the soul's contemplative faculty by producing certain violent winds and phantasies, and they transform themselves into flying creatures, and sometimes into angels and delude the soul. They form in our memory, images of things known to us, and they produce a form of, and change, every kind of spiritual vision ... for there is nothing spiritual of which they do not stealthily produce an exact image by means of phantasies ... and assailing one with delusion in place of truth, phantasy in place of divine vision, they establish themselves in him."<sup>57</sup>

Those who "return" from these demonically contrived experiences, played out upon either medically induced hallucinations, or hallucinations induced by the workings of deluded minds, have stories to tell which instil in mankind either a belief that at death everyone will enter into the same glory, both the good and the evil, the believer and the atheist, the chaste and the lecherous, the

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pious and the blasphemer (the Kuebler-Ross syndrome), or with tales of horror well calculated to cast the soul into despair and unbelief (such as purgatories of various kinds). All these supposed "out of body experiences" universally deny and contradict Orthodox Christian teachings on the subject, and none of them in any way confirm or agree with what divine revelation has given us on the matter. And this is just what our holy and God-bearing father John Chrysostom warns, saying:

**"Let us not, therefore, seek to hear from dead men what the Scriptures teach us much more clearly every day. For if God knew that resurrected dead men could be of profit to the living then He – Who brings to pass all things for our benefit – would not have neglected or let pass (the opportunity to give us) such gain. But besides this, if dead men were to be raised up continuously to proclaim to us all things that are yonder, then in time this also would be set at naught, and moreover, the devil could introduce wicked doctrines with much ease. For he could often show forth apparitions, or further, he could contrive that certain men should seem to die ... and then he could show them as being risen from the dead, and by means of these men he could persuade the minds of the deluded of whatsoever he wished. If indeed, now, when there is no one who has risen from the dead, *dreams very often appear in the likeness of the departed and have corrupted and led many astray, then if such a thing actually happened and it became established in the minds of men that many of the departed have returned***

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*again, how much more so could the despicable demon weave ten thousand wiles and introduce great delusion into this life. For this very reason God closed the doors and has not permitted that any man who has departed this life could return and express those things yonder, lest the devil, taking this opportunity, should introduce all his own doctrines. For when there were prophets, the devil raised up false prophets; when apostles, then false apostles; and when Christ appeared, then false christs; and when sound doctrines were brought in, he introduced corrupt ones, everywhere sowing tares. And so if this thing also were to happen (i.e., what was mentioned above), he would attempt to feign the same through his own instruments, not truly raising up dead men, but by a certain deception he would deceive the eyes of the beholders, or else, as I just said, he would contrive that certain should seem to die, and thus he would turn all things upside down and confuse them. But God, foreseeing all this ... does not permit that any man should ever come from thence and speak to the living about the things yonder, and hereby He teaches us to hold the Divine Scripture to be more worthy of credence than anything else."*<sup>58</sup>

### 9

#### *A Wicked and Adulterous Generation Seeks After Signs (Mt.16:4).*

The passionate desire for these "near death experiences" to be authentic is born of a lack of faith in

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God and the promises of Jesus Christ. There is a desire to have some sign, even if it is theosophical or occult, to reassure one that Christ was telling us the truth, or, indeed that Christ actually had authority to tell us anything. Seeking after signs, and continuing to insist on the veracity of these "signs" even when they directly contradict the holy fathers and when they have been proved false by sound and dependable medical research, is not only testimony to a total lack of real faith in God, but it is foolish. Ultimately, such insistence on clearly disproved "signs" can only help to undermine the faith of others, particularly a younger generation that is better educated and less susceptible to obsolete theosophical notions. It is sinful and heretical to advocate that "out of body experiences" of any form can take place, and the theosophical/New Age advocates of these "near death" experiences are doing a dreadful disservice to the faithful, and are actually plowing the field of Satan so that his demons can sow much delusion and spiritual confusion. If someone is trying to convince you to believe in these "near death experiences," you should probably not listen to or believe anything else that they try to teach you either.

### *The Real Danger of These New Age Teachings*

The great danger in the New Age theosophists and those who write in Orthodox journals supporting their theosophical and occult ideas as if they constituted Christian teaching of any variety is clear, and we need to

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explore this for a moment. They feel a need for these "mystical experiences" because their faith is so weak and tenuous that it must be propped up by "phenomena." Unable to take our Lord at His word, they need "signs," even if they are illusory and self-induced. Those who made the heretical teachings of one or another neo-Gnostic guru in America a sort of sacred canon are in even greater difficulty. They have a desperate need to protect their idea that he is a "saint and prophet" because they have developed an unhealthy personality cult around him which amounts to a spiritual dependency, and in some cases even their faith in God depends upon their cultish relationship with their guru, whether he is living or dead. This kind of guru cultism is also worthy to be refuted.

## *10*

### *Conclusion*

In short, all these types of experiences are simply demonic delusions aimed at knocking people off the path of salvation and making them think that living faith in Christ, truth and moral struggle are not at all necessary, as the end of every one is basically the same beautiful reward regardless of the quality of their lives and their relationship with Christ and His Holy Church, or else to instil some overwhelming horror in people's souls, some false idea of special powers held by the demons, some false and distressing doctrines and teachings.

All this, together with false miracles, common

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incidents lightmindedly interpreted as miracles, demonic apparitions, supposedly of the Holy Virgin, and other such manifestations, helps to prepare the path of Antichrist, whose trademark will be such revelations, false, theatrical miracles and apparitions of all manner. People will believe all this, for they are even now being prepared for it, and will follow after Antichrist because of them.

As to what precisely, in material terminology, happens to the soul after death, we offer only this observation: this matter is a great mystery which cannot be comprehended by the human mind, and God has not chosen to reveal the matter to us. There are a few things which we do know from the Scripture, prophets and fathers, and these certainly preclude tales of "out of body experiences" or occult stories about messages or communications being sent back by souls from beyond the grave, or of people returning to the body after a brief bout of death, and giving revealing insights into what lies beyond the grave. These things are simply not possible and are diametrically contrary to Orthodox Christian teachings. Much of what we have been told through the Holy Church about these matters is spoken of in figurative terms which serve more to form an attitude than to elucidate the incomprehensible and ineffable mystery. Since God Himself has not chosen to reveal these details to us, it is self-evident that all speculation on the matter, whether on the nature of "hades," which is a state or condition, not a place, or "hell" or "Abraham's Bosom," or on the paths by which the soul is taken at death (and

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we use "paths" only metaphorically), or the time it takes to go there, or whether, indeed, time even exists after the repose of the body, or whether the demons could even see the soul (not according to the holy fathers, who clearly teach that they cannot<sup>59</sup>), lead inevitably to distortions, false teachings and concepts, and even to clear, soul destroying heresies. From such speculations and from the doctrinalization of moral fables ("pious frauds") and tales, came such heresies as purgatory (in all its forms), limbo, apokatastasis, and a host of others.<sup>60</sup>

### **ENDNOTES:**

1. The mind [vous; soul] cannot, of course, actually "abide outside the body itself." In that case, the body would die immediately and the soul be carried away to the place of its repose. The thought and imagination can, however, be sent outward, and this is what the Latin Scholastics were practising. Thinking to project their vous outside the body to obtain mystic experiences, they projected their imaginations into the realm of demonic influences and, there, created the theologies of the Western Christian religions.

2. St Gregory Palamas, Response to Barlaam, para.4.

3. e.g., his Contra Celsus, 5:14; 8:49; 5:18; 7:32; 5:23; On Psalms, 1:5; The Prin. 3:6, 6 and; cp C. Celsus 3:14f; 4:56f (where he introduces the Stoic principles of energy maintained identity). Origen taught the equal opposite heresy of the Helkesaites (whose heresy he personally refuted). Where the Helkesaites taught the doctrine of Θνητοψυχισται (belief in the "death of the soul"), Origen countered with a teaching of a completely independent existence of the soul, according to which, after death, the soul could have new experiences and make new discoveries. It exalted in the discovery that it could perceive and learn even better "freed from the prison of the body" than before. Thus, the soul itself was the actual person and could be judged, rewarded, function completely, acquire experiences and be purged, with no need of or reference to the body. Origen (as also Tertullian and Lactanius, etc) adopted a completely Hellenic view of the soul and its existence and Origen especially considered it to be the complete person in itself. He was, then, hardpressed to justify any belief in an actual resurrection of the body, and he attempted to resolve this problem by spiritualizing the resurrection and advancing his variation on the "subtle body" theory, with his own theory of "material substratum". Ultimately, like the Latin Scholastics, he (as also Tertullian and Lactanius) ended up playing one Hellenic philosophical formula against another (especially Epicureanism and Stoicism against one another to defend their own form of Platonism). Origen's confused dualism became a necessity for the defence of the doctrines of purgatory,

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whether the material purgatory of the Latin dogma or the psychological purgatory of the occult toll-house theologians.

4. see Chapter 2 of this work, and Appendix 2, "Questions and answers."

5. While Barlaam was not the originator of his ideas, he drew them together from the deeply Platonic traditions of Latin Scholasticism, where an Origenistic dualism was current. I would like to suggest, too, that an examination of Western religious art reveals a deep current of Gnostic and Manichean ideas and even magic in Western eschatology. These, to a certain degree, spilled over into some circles of Russian thought, where they found an already existing remnant of Bogomil influence, and some writers, Brianchaninov's grotesque eschatology for example, reveal a certain strain of this influence. The fathers of the Great Moscow Synod of 1667 seemed to have sensed these influences encroaching from Western influences in ikon painting.

6. On Sobriety, in "From the Life of Antony the Great" (in the Philokalia).

7. Evidently, this question came up during the time of St Gregory of Rome. At that time, following the best available medical science, which did not correctly define comas, catatonic states, heart seizures and the like, and which still considered that cessation of a detectable heartbeat constituted actual death, and interpreted ordinary recoveries (resuscitations) as returns from death, Gregory gave what for him seemed a logical, medically sound answer. He was asked if, on these occasions, God returned the soul to the body, having removed it accidentally. He replied that God did not remove the soul accidentally, but did it as a "warning". Of course, the people were not actually dead. Such instances are not rare, and they constitute rather ordinary medical phenomena, not a "return from death". Nevertheless, the Saint was not entirely wrong, since we naturally ought to take all such incidents as reminders of our mortality and impending demise and be corrected by such experiences.

8. e.g., St John Chrysostom, "...and it cannot be that a soul, when it is gone out from the body could wander here..." (Homily on Matthew, 28:3). The soul cannot be outside the body except at death. Theologically, the "out of body" ideas presuppose, as we said earlier, that Origen's radical dualism was correct.

9. e.g., Papademetriou, G., Introduction to St Gregory Palamas, Philosophical Library, N.Y., 1973 (the best work we know of on the subject) and Meyendorff, J., A Study of Gregory Palamas, the Faith Press, London, 1964 (a very good historical work.)

10. Response to Barlaam, para.4.

11. "On Delusion," para.10 of On Stillness and the Two Ways of Prayer (in the Philokalia).

12. Epistle to Symeon of Caesaria.

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13. St Isaak of Nineveh, quoted in St Nikiphoros the Solitary's collection On Sobriety (in the Philokalia).

14. bodiless: that is, "outside the corporeal manner of thought" (see, e.g., Saint Gregory Palamas, *Contra Barlaam*, para.4.)

15. St John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Ch.27:6, 17-18.

16. St Diadochos, quoted in St Nikiphoros the Solitary's collection On Sobriety (in the Philokalia)

17. On the Holy Spirit, para.53.

18. *ibid*, para.40

19. *ibid*, para.62

20. A Wonderful Revelation to the World, St Seraphim's Conversation With Motovilov, Holy Trinity Monastery Press, 1972.

21. 1Ths.4:17.

22. see fn. 14 above

23. The Life of St Symeon The New Theologian, by his disciple Nikitas Stethatos. Emphases in all quotes are mine.

24. Life, p34.

25. Homily 24, On 2 Corinthians

26. *loc. cit.*

27. Discourse Three, Against the Arians, para.47

28. The Triads, 1.3:5; 21

29. *ibid*, 2.1:44

30. *ibid*, 2.3:36-37.

31. St Gregory Palamas, Sixth Ethical Homily, 1.130-175.

32. *ibid*, fn. 23.

33. *ibid*, fn. 24.

34. It is more complex than that since warning cries, food communications and sexual attractions are all part of the use of language and of its origins. In *Cratylus* Plato calls words "an imitation of that which it imitates," and Aristotle refers to words as "imitations" (Rhet.3:1) but they had something of the concept that words conveyed *essence* and not simply *names*. There is another form of language which we must discuss later: the language of silence and of inner prayer — the language of paradise and of the world to come; the language of Rm.4:26 and

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1Cor.14:15..

35. *Epistle to Symeon of Caesaria*

36. *The Triads*, 1.3:5; 21

37. Jude 9.

38. *Commentary on the Diatessarion*, 14:5,8,9,10

39. *On The Transfiguration*, P.G. 96:572

40. *The Triads*, 1.3:30

41. *ibid*, fn. 36.

42. *Homily on the Transfiguration*, P.G. 89:1369

43. *First Homily on The Transfiguration*, 50.

44. *ibid*, fn. 39.

45. *First Homily on the Transfiguration*, P.G. 89:1369.

46. 1Cor.6:19.

47. St Gregory of Sinai, *Most Edifying Chapters*, para.116.see also, para.131 and 132 (in the *Philokalia*).

48. *Discourses and Sayings*, para.6.

49. *Homily on Matthew*, 6:3.

50. *ibid*, 28:3.

51. Life of St Athanasy, *The Kiev Caves Paterikon*, Synaxis Press, Dewdney, B.C., Canada, 1980.

52. see St John Chrysostom, *Homily 24 On John's Gospel*.

53. *The Life of St Antony the Great*, by St Athanasios.

54. 1Tm.6:20.

55. see, e.g., her *Death: The Final Stage of Growth*, Prentice-Hall, 1975.

56. "To Sleep, Perchance to Dream," *Journal Of The American Medical Association*, Vol.242, Nr.21, p.2291. It would seem likely that many mystics who reported such "out of body experiences," being ignorant of the patristic teachings and warnings on the matter, misinterpreted ordinary medical phenomena.

57. *Most Edifying Chapters*, para.123 (in the *Philokalia*).

58. Homily 4, *On Lazarus and the Rich Man*.

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59. St John Chrysostom, Homily 2 on Lazarus and the Rich Man and Homily 28, on Matthew, 28:3. Both Sts Isaak of Nineveh (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.

60. We do not accept, for purposes of doctrine or teaching, reports of dreams, visions or stories told for the sake of moral edification. To do so inevitably leads to many absurdities and contradictions. These things are recorded to form moral attitudes and dispositions, not to teach realities or doctrines. Our actual teachings and understandings must be drawn from the clear theological statements of the fathers, but above all from Scripture and the explanations of the Scripture given us by the fathers. It is not desirable or particularly pious to blindly accept all reports of dreams, etc; rather, it is an indication of sheer superstitiousness. We must bear in mind that ignorance is not piety and superstition is not sanctity.

## FIVE

### 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).*

**W**e 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 "particular 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 called 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 we 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

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in half, being bereft of their bodies...how could they attain those rewards?"<sup>1</sup>

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 [voûς; soul] 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)<sup>2</sup>

"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 Irenaeus of Lyons)<sup>3</sup>

"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)<sup>4</sup>

"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)<sup>5</sup>

"When the living body is dissolved by death and we should look upon its dust or its bones, or wish to say

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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)<sup>6</sup>

"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)<sup>7</sup>

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..."<sup>8</sup>

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 particular 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

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(demons), defense 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 "particular judgment," then we must, once more, set aside allegories and stories, even those contrived to teach greater compunction. This term, "particular 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, 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, re-united 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

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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)<sup>9</sup>

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."<sup>10</sup>

"But," someone will say, "surely there is some sense of condemnation at this `particular 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 be 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

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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' 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)."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, what else is the first condemnation (the "particular 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 particular 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

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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 ....<sup>12</sup>

Is there more than this to the particular 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 "particular 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?<sup>13</sup> As our holy and God-bearing father Anastasios of Sinai says:

"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 Scriptures."<sup>14</sup>

What more than this could we say in figurative terms, in the form of a parable? That as pertains to us, the particular 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

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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.<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup>

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

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thing, since "virtues and good deeds" are not ends, but means of struggle by which one acquires the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> 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. For good deeds are nothing at all in themselves, but have value only as part of our struggle to acquire the Holy Spirit.

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

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shall require'? The one they (the angels) led forth as in bonds, the other they escorted as a champion."<sup>18</sup>

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..."<sup>19</sup>*

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 cohorts 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

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gather the wheat." He commands one and the same reapers to gather both. Indeed, in explaining this parable to His apostles, He says precisely:

"The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire."

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...."<sup>20</sup>

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)...."<sup>21</sup>

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 conscience shalt thou be judged, the

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`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 speak 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."<sup>22</sup>

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 concerning them that they shall not come unto judgment."<sup>23</sup>

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).

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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.<sup>24</sup> At the "judgment" our accusers will be our own sins, which will rise up before us in our memories.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup> 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 (Epst.2:9f; 73:3), "by His knowledge of the hearts and not by the interrogation of deeds..."<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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

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cast you into prison" (Lk.12:58).

St Dorotheos and other fathers explain that "the adversary (or, accuser)" is a person's conscience with which he must be reconciled in this life,<sup>29</sup> 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 (Christ) 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, ponderings, 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

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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."<sup>30</sup>

We have an excellent summary of all that has been said above about the "process" of the "particular judgment," in the words of the Russian theologian N. Malinkovsky:

"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 particular judgment take place? Scripture does not speak of this. One can only clarify this

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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 particular 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."<sup>31</sup>

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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 particular judgment, this would seem to be all that it could consist in.

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

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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, with his usual lofty spiritual thought and theological alertness, 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 Vasili Novy," 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."<sup>32</sup>

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 "particular 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

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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.'"<sup>33</sup>

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."<sup>34</sup>

St Ephraim the Syrian says of the judgment and gehenna:

"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

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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."<sup>35</sup>

Our holy and God-bearing father 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.

"Someone asked, `when shall a man know that he has received this remission of his sins?' He answered, `When in his soul he shall be conscious that he has completely hated them with his whole heart, and when he shall govern himself in his external actions in a manner

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opposed to his former way of life. Such a man, as having already hated his sin, is confident that he has received remission of his sins by reason of the (good) witness of his conscience which he has acquired, after the saying of the Apostle, 'A conscience un-condemned is a witness of itself'..." [cp. Rm.2:15]<sup>36</sup>

And our holy father Basil the Great likewise 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."<sup>37</sup>

Let us emphasize one extremely important point here. We must free ourselves from the heathenish 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 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, 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

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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 the renowned Greek theologian Dr Alexandre 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."<sup>38</sup> 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

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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).

We will conclude, therefore, that the particular 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

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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).

### **ENDNOTES:**

1. Ten Orations Against Purgatory, Nr.2, P.O. 15:111-114.
2. On Belief in the Resurrection, para.88.
3. Against Heresies, Book Five, para.32.
4. On the Resurrection, Ch.8.
5. Homily One Against the Manicheans, para.1, P.G. 96:489B.
6. ibid.
7. On the Resurrection, Ch.8.
8. Homily One Against the Manicheans, P.G.96:489B.
9. Homily 58; see also Homily 60, and St Ephraim the Syrian, Homily on the End, lines 30-31.
10. The Divine Names, 7:7.
11. On The Holy Spirit, para.40; see Lk.14:18-19.
12. ibid, para.38.
13. St John Damascene, Concise Exposition, Book 2, Ch.11; cp Saint Kallistos, Texts On Prayer, para.4 (Philokalia).
14. Answer 89.
15. St Aphraat the Persian, On the Resurrection of the Dead, para. 18-20; St Gregory the Theologian, Panegyric For Caesarios.

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16. Ten Orations Against Purgatory, Nr.2, P.O.15:111-114.

17. "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.

18. Homily 2 on Lazarus and the Rich Man. St Makary of Moscow seems to have had an erroneous translation of this work.

19. 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.

20. Mt.13:41; 49. See St Ambrose of Milan, The Good 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., Ep.73:3; Explications on Psalms, 1:51f; Exp. on Luke's Gospel, 2:60; 2:82; 10:49, etc.

21. Homily on Human Life and Those Fallen Asleep.

22. Catechetical Lecture 18:14-15.

23. Select Demonstrations, 22:15-16.

24. Homily On Psalms, 33:4.

25. Homily On Psalms, 48:2.

26. Oration 16:8.

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

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

29. 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."

30. On The Soul and the Resurrection, para.54.

31. Outline of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, p.460 (in Russian).

32. Letter on the toll-house question. Complete text in Appendix 2.

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**33.** loc.cit., fn.23 above.

**34.** Catechetical Lecture 15:25.

**35.** 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."

**36.** Homily 84.

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

**38.** Letter reviewing our article on Ikons of the Last Judgment (Appendix 3).

## SIX

### THE NATURE OF HEAVEN AND HELL

The tragic incursion of Western Scholasticism into the Orthodox world came at a time when the Gnosticism of the Bogomil sect was still active in the East. This coincidence brought so many corruptions that are antithetical to Patristic Orthodoxy that they clouded the radiant truths of the faith. The plague of scholasticism which swept into Russia during the "300 year Latin captivity of Russian theology" was responsible for much of it. The infiltration of Greece by Augustinianism, particularly through the hyper-moralistic ZOE Brotherhood, later added much to the catastrophe. In more recent times, semi-converts who are priests have brought many sectarian ideas into the Church with themselves and the neo-Gnostic Seraphim Rose Cult has greatly exacerbated the problem. However, the basis of the problem has really been the tenacity of "popular religion," that blend of peasant superstitions and Hellenistic mythologies with the Christian revelation.

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*.

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, the relationship between soul and body and the nature of eschatological judgment.

## *The Nature of Heaven and Hell*

We have discussed the matter of *Ransom and Theosis* vs. *Atonement and Satisfaction* elsewhere. For the present, we wish to clarify the Orthodox Christian understanding of the nature of heaven and hell, and the matter of "judgment." The late Dr Alexandre Kalomiros' outstanding treatise, *The River of Fire*<sup>1</sup> is also valuable reading to those who wish to have an Orthodox understanding, rather than a corrupt sectarian one.

### 1

#### **Saint Antony the Great on God's Judgment**

"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

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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 Antony the Great, *Cap. 150*).

### 2

## **The Nature of the Problem of Understanding**

It is one of our tragedies in the Orthodox Christian world that the lack of patristic education has 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 the Latin Church and Protestantism 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 so-called "Darwinism," they themselves, with their perverted teachings about God, about the nature of redemption and the nature of hell, not to mention the

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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, have made atheism inevitable.

The tragedy for Orthodoxy is that, while it possess 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. While it is true that Ecumenism 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 antique text books, from heterodox philosophers such as Augustine of Hippo, and from supposed lives of saints by unknown authors and of more than dubious content.<sup>2</sup> When such teachers hear the clear, pure words of the holy fathers and the actual doctrine of the Orthodox Christian Church, they are often enraged by it and denounce it. They are much more attached to their translated school books than to the holy fathers and the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and cannot accept the truth. For so long they have followed the hopeless, deadend path of a "faith" manipulated by fear, which borders on the pagan, so that the living, vital faith based in the co-suffering love of God is alien to them. 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

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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. Such a god cannot actually be adored, and the worship offered to him cannot be pure, but rather 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.

Let us briefly 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 intent of this chapter is to free Orthodox people from those pagan ideas of hell which make God Himself immoral, attributing to Him the serious sins of vengefulness and malice. We wish to remind our readers that 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 Ecumenism has led so many of our people.

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### 3

#### **What Notions do we Need to Free Orthodox People From?**

Let us emphasize one extremely important point here. We must free ourselves from the heathenish 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 the renowned Greek theologian Dr Alexandre 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*

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*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."*<sup>3</sup>

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).*

### **4**

## **The Nature of Judgment**

We have already discussed this subject at length in an earlier chapter, and offered the clear words of the holy fathers about it. Let us summarize the matter here again

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for the sake of our present discussion.

Accepting the lead of the holy and God-bearing fathers, we will conclude that the particular 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 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

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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 comes 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 reverence<sup>4</sup> 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).*

### 5

## **The Nature of Hell (Gehenna)**

Many Orthodox Christians will surprised, mostly delighted (although some will be angry) at learning the actual Orthodox Christian understanding of hell and the nature of hell. They will be so used to the pagan mythologies that dominate in peasant or "popular" religion that they will never have even 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. The *Paterikons* and all of the "ascetic literature" overstate almost all matters because they are aimed at monastics in the throes of great moral struggles. Moreover, whether anyone 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

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without corrupting the theology of the Church, which actually 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 much of the monastic literature. However, these images do not at all 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.

St Ephraim the Syrian says of the judgment and gehenna (hell<sup>5</sup>):

...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. The hidden judge which is seated in the discerning mind [i.e., the conscience<sup>6</sup>] 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 [the conscience] 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.<sup>7</sup>

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Our holy and God-bearing father 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.

Someone asked, "when shall a man know that he has received this remission of his sins?" He answered, "When in his soul he shall be conscious that he has completely hated them with his whole heart, and when he shall govern himself in his external actions in a manner opposed to his former way of life. Such a man, as having already hated his sin, is confident that he has received remission of his

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sins by reason of the (good) witness of his conscience which he has acquired, after the saying of the Apostle, "A conscience uncondemned is a witness of itself..." [cp. Rm.2:15]<sup>8</sup>

And our holy father Basil the Great likewise 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.<sup>9</sup>

Thus "hell" is, as we shall see more clearly when we follow the words of the holy fathers below, not at all 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 separation from the beloved, everlasting separation from love, from light and from life itself: it is

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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 actually devour.

### 6

## **The Nature of Heaven**

Here, too, we are accustomed to falling into error because of the problem of visualizing that which is not visualizable. In the Bogomil Gnostic myth of Elder Basil the New, for example, we see on delusion and plani (prelest) following another as the author of the novel presents visualizations of practically everything "beyond the grave." Nevertheless, the holy fathers have given a sound and direct response to such mythologies and delusions.

St Mark of Ephesus, speaking with the voice of the Holy Church, says:

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 entitled "On The Place of God": "The place of God is said to be that which [or, he who] has a

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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 nature both functions noetically and exists, both is present and active." We say, then, that such a place, supercelestial and supermundane, noetic and bodiless, contains both the angels and the saints, and we are accustomed to call it Heaven.

### 7

**Neither "Heaven" Nor "Hell" Exist At Present;  
and No One is in Either "Heaven" Or "Hell" Yet.**

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." Why? Because 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 Roman Catholic delusions, Saint Mark of Ephesus 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

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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. 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

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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

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[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). And in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those who trouble you, and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, taking vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with the everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all those who believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (2Ths.1:6-10). And again in the epistle to the Hebrews where he speaks concerning the saints who have gone before us, "And all these, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hb.11:39-40). This we must think concerning all

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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 soul 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 bodies which they wait to receive incorruptible after the

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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). (*Ten Arguments Against Purgatory*).

And again, the holy father 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).

Having thus established from these holy fathers what is the true and divinely revealed nature of heaven, of hell and of the judgment, let us go yet a little further in examining the state of the souls after death.

### ENDNOTES:

1. Available from St Nectarios Press, 10300 Ashworth Av. N., Seattle, Wa. 98163.

2. Unfortunately, some people interpret the lives of the saints as being almost equal to the Scripture. In fact, Lives of Saints are inspirational reading, they are not part of the Sacred Tradition and we often have no idea what their source is. There are several different versions of many of the "Lives." St. Symeon Metaphrastes made a new compilation and re-wrote a whole collection of the

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Lives of the Saints because, as he pointed out, many accretions, superstitions and fables had crept into existing versions. There are sound biographies of almost all the holy fathers, such as St. Antony the Great, St. Basil and others, but the Lives of the Saints absolutely cannot be used to establish doctrine and certainly not to override the teachings of the great holy fathers.

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

4. "iyare" in Hebrew, which can only mean reverence, the type of fear which is reverence. Fear as terror is **aratz**, as 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."

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

6. See, eg. St Cyril of Jerusalem, **Catechetical Lecture** 18:14-15

7. 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 morning shall be that they may bring forth their sentence from within and condemn themselves."

8. Homily 84.

9. Homily on Psalms, 28:6.

## SEVEN THINGS DONE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP

*"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."  
(Paul)<sup>1</sup>*

Death, the Apostle says, cannot separate us from the love of our Saviour. And another time he says, "To live is Christ and to die is gain...for I am torn between the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil.1: 21-23). How, then, if the soul which has fallen asleep is with Christ, could it not be also with His Body, the Church? For, if the Apostle says that none of these things, not even death, can separate us from Christ, he says as well that they cannot separate us from the Church. It is manifest, therefore, that those who do not commemorate and offer prayers on behalf of the reposed do not recognize Christ's victory over death, that death is set at nought, that the mutual love of those who live in and by Christ is in no wise severed or broken by this defeated and shattered enemy, for, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rm.14:8).

These things, then, are abundantly clear: that we are bound by bonds of undefeatable love that is of Christ and

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the Holy Spirit, and that we pray for one another, not as though at death we passed into annihilation and non-existence, but as knowing that those who have fallen asleep are among the living and are still "members in particular of the body of Christ" (1Cor.12:27). And the very fact that we pray for the reposed is an active confession of our faith in the victory of Christ and our sure hope in the resurrection.

Although the reasons for our prayers and commemorations of those who have fallen asleep are so simple and have been set forth so clearly from the earliest times, through vain curiosity and speculation, a great cloud of misunderstanding and confusion has arisen around this subject. The speculations of men have come to be considered as some kind of holy tradition. And although these traditions of men contradict the pure, simple doctrine of the fathers, because of the prejudice of habit, they have come to be defended as dogmas. It must be said that, for the most part, these customs (they ought not to be called traditions at all) have come to us from the Latin West, whether through Jesuit preachers and translators who corrupted much of our spiritual literature, through Uniatism, or through the sheer carelessness of our own apologists who, during the dark days of the Westernizers, brought so many of the corrupt Latin and sectarian teachings into Eastern languages.<sup>2</sup>

If we compare these two – the precise, theological teachings of the fathers, and the Scholastic corruptions in our school book theology – we are struck by the immensity of the difference. While the Western

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corruptions are complex, labyrinthine, morbid and tediously legalistic, exalting the power of demons and rendering God cold, remote and almost indifferent, the patristic theological teachings are pure, joyous and simple, completely characteristic of the Scripture and firmly based in the love of God. And this is of the greatest significance: that the Scholastic teachings are based on the fear of demons and a certain remoteness of God, while the patristic theological teachings are clearly rooted in the sure knowledge of the closeness, love and mercy of God, and that contempt for the wretched demons which we are repeatedly taught by the fathers.

Before setting forth the patristic theological teachings on the prayers and commemoration of those fallen asleep, let us present an outline of the points we wish to make:

[1] The prayers and commemorations for the reposed are acts of love and confessions of faith, not bribes to God, means of satisfying His "need for vengeance" nor appeasements to demons.

[2] While the reposed benefit greatly from our prayers and commemorations, this benefit is in the form of a spiritual increase, an increase in their joy and in the mutual exchange of co-suffering love. It is not true that our prayers are offered as appeasements to Satan, to teach God how to be merciful, to *obtain* repose for the soul, to bribe the soul's way through some demonic turnpike, to "pay off the demons" or any other such thing.

[3] The prayers for the reposed do not change the condition, the "inheritance" of the reposed, or obtain for them anything which God will not give them even

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without our poor prayers. For, when we ask anything on behalf of the reposed, we ask only what God has already promised. Our prayers are not bailiffs which force God to pay His promises, or instructors which shame Him into mercy. They are expressions of our *faith* in God's promises and expressions of our mutual love.

[4] The prayers and commemorations for the reposed, while they fulfil the calling of love, serve primarily to instruct the living. For, in the prayers, we often mention not only the hope of the faithful, but also the destiny of the unrighteous at the same time we are being reminded of our own mortality and the day of our own death.

It does not seem edifying to even discuss the Scholastic ideas about the prayers and commemorations for the reposed. Which teachings fit this category is self-evident, and if they are not, then after we present the exact theological teachings of the fathers, they should be. They are identified, in addition to the exaltation of the power of demons and the remoteness they attribute to God, by the fact that they turn the prayers into magical incantations which, as containing the correct formulae, obtain certain predicted results in themselves (thus the oft repeated injunction that we must be careful "not to omit a single word," from the prayers.) This is the Latin mechanical theory of prayers and grace, reflected also in the heretical notion that the epiklesis is a "formula." Observe, for example, the mechanical theory of the prayers for the reposed on the third, ninth and fortieth days, and ask what happens in those seasons when these prayers are not even permitted, or on days when they are prohibited and must

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be served instead a day or two, or even a week later.

But let us pass over from these things and, seeing what the prayers and commemorations for the reposed do mean, we shall also understand what they do not mean. We mentioned that we were going to turn to the "precise patristic theological statements" on the subject. We specify this because, as with many subjects, the fathers spoke often in various contexts. Thus, we find certain emphasis being given and certain allegorical expressions being used when, for example, one of the fathers is admonishing careless listeners to compunction. Again, we sometimes find terms or expressions used rhetorically in sermons or instructions to monks, etc, and often parables are used (and this is especially true of the Paterikon collections, which contain much that is parable and allegory, not at all intended as doctrine). On the other hand, there are occasions when the fathers are called upon to give more exact theological expression, as when they are making response to questions put to them by some heretic or false teacher. Such for example, was the case when the heretic Aerios made inquiry of our holy father Epiphanius of Cyprus concerning prayers offered for those fallen asleep. The response of the Saint was a well considered reply, drawn from the conscience of the Church. Such, too, are those precise expositions of the meaning of liturgical practices, as we shall see.

We naturally give the greatest consideration to those particular words of the fathers in which they are especially formulating a complete and precise statement of doctrine or defence of a teaching. When we find what

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at first glance seems somehow contradictory to this, we examine, first of all, the context of the words which seem to be a contradiction. Usually, when we do this, the seeming contradiction vanishes.

Saint John Chrysostom tells us, for example, of the incident when Jerusalem was saved by calling to remembrance David, and God's promise to him. The Saint adds:

"If the remembrance of a just man had so great power, when deeds are done for one, how great power will it not have. Not in vain did the Apostles command that remembrance should be made of the dead in the terrible Mysteries. They know that great gain results ...."

To whom does this gain come? The people of Jerusalem gained by their remembrance of David, for David had his promise already, and the people, by commemorating this just man, obtained for themselves a share in his promise. And to the one commemorated also, for our holy father continues:

"They know that great gain results to them, great benefit...and this we do only for those who have departed in faith..."<sup>3</sup>

According to the Scholastic satisfaction theory, this "benefit" consists in a remote, vengeful God being convinced into mercy and forgiveness by the entreaties of fallen humans who, evidently, have greater love and compassion than God. These prayers are magical, because by repeating the formulae correctly, we compel the "powers" to react in a certain prescribed way.

What are the benefits of these prayers and

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commemorations then? Our holy, apostolic father Dionysios the Areopagite, in a most complete theological exposition "*Concerning Things Performed Over Those Fallen Asleep*,"<sup>4</sup> replies:

"..now the prayer beseeches the supremely Divine Goodness to remit to the person fallen asleep all the failings committed by reason of human infirmity, and to transfer him in the light [or, light-filled] land of the living (Ps.56:13; 116:9) into the bosom of Abraham (Lk.16:22) and Isaak and Jacob; in a place where grief and sorrow and sighing are no more. It is, I think, evident then, that these, the rewards of the pious are most blessed...

"But you may, perhaps, say that these things are indeed correctly affirmed by us, but want to know for what reason the hierarch beseeches the supremely Divine Goodness for the remission of the sins committed by the person fallen asleep, and [that he may receive] his most glorious inheritance....For, if everyone shall receive, by the divine justice, equivalent to what he has done in the present life, whether it be good or otherwise, and the person fallen asleep has finished his own activities in this present life, from what prayer offered by the hierarch will he be transferred to another inheritance than that due to and equivalent for his life here?

"Now, well do I know, following the Scriptures, that each one will have the inheritance equivalent; for the Lord says, he has closed respecting him, `and each one shall receive the things done in his body according to that [which] he has done, whether it be good or bad' (2Cor.5:10). Yes, the sure Traditions of the Scripture

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teach us that the prayers even of the just avail only for those who are worthy of pious prayers, during this present life, by no means after death. What, in truth did Saul gain from Samuel? (1Sm. 16:1). And what did the intercessions of the prophet profit the people of the Hebrews? (Jer.7:16)....

"Now with reference to the prayer mentioned, which the hierarch prays over the person fallen asleep...the holy hierarch...has learned then, from the God transmitted Scriptures, that to those who have passed their life piously, the most bright and divine life is given in return (1Jn.5:16), according to their due...the divine love overlooking, through its goodness, the stains which have come to them through human infirmity, since no-one, as the Scripture says, is free of blemish (Jb.14:4).

"Now, the hierarch knew that these things have been promised by the infallible Scriptures; and he asks that these things may come to pass, and that the righteous returns be given to those who lived piously...and while knowing that the promises will be unailing, he makes known clearly to those present that the things asked by him according to the holy law, will be entirely realized for those who have been perfected in a holy life. For the hierarch... would never seek things which were not pleasing to the Almighty God, and divinely promised to be given by him" (Ap.Con.8:43).<sup>5</sup> (Entire text appears in Appendix 1).

Compare these words of a great and profound Orthodox theologian who was taught by the mouths of the apostles themselves, with the complex and disturbing

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legalism and "satisfaction ideology" of the scholastics who turn these prayers into bribes or magical means of forcing God to be merciful.

God does not have the remotest need of our prayers. He does not have to be "satisfied" or receive vengeance for each little sin, whether known or unknown, etc. Repentance does not consist in a legalistic enumeration of each sin. It is simply not true that God forgives only those sins which we actually enumerate either mentally or with our tongue. Repentance is a state or condition, a disposition of heart, not the fulfilling of a legal agreement with God. As the Scripture says, "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness."<sup>6</sup> And if to Abraham who was a child of the law, how much more to us who are children of faith shall it be accounted to us for righteousness if we have believed God, for we hope not on our "own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Rm.3:21-22; 8:4; 10:3-6 f). For if we struggle, as the Church teaches us, to purify ourselves and acquire the Holy Spirit, we will receive no less than did our father Abraham. It will be accounted to us for righteousness, for the sake of Christ, in Whom all righteousness has been fulfilled. After all, we are saved by actual faith, and for our works we are rewarded; a greater reward for the one who has fulfilled the greater works, a lesser one with lesser works – but no less a salvation.

St Epiphanius of Cyprus also gives us a very clear and definite theological statement on this subject. Here, he is

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specifically refuting a certain heresy which denied prayers and commemorations for the reposed. Here, he is drawing forth from the whole Tradition and Conscience of the Church against an aggressive heretic. Aerios was questioning prayers for the reposed:

"Then he [the heretic Aerios] asks, `for what reason do you commemorate the names of the dead after their death? If a living person prays or gives out alms, what profit will this be to a dead person? But if the prayer of those here could really profit those yonder, let no man be pious, let no man do good! Rather let him gain some friends by any means whatever, and persuading them with money or having them simply as friends at the time of his death, they shall pray for him, lest he suffer anything yonder, or any grave sin he has committed be required of him'."

Now this question is not without merit and the speaker makes a perfectly valid point, for this is exactly the absurdity the Latins fell into at an early date. St Epiphanius responds directly to this question, and we may do well to look at some other responses to such questions. St Epiphanius answers:

"As regards the saying [commemoration] of the names of the dead, what could be more useful, more proper and wonderful? *For this causes those present to believe that the departed live and are not in a state of non-existence*, but rather that they exist and live with the Master; and it causes that the holy kerygma be proclaimed, that there is [lit. there being] hope for those brethren who are prayed for, who are, as it were, in a distant land. And indeed the

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prayer made in their behalf brings profit — though in truth it does not do away with the whole entirety of their offences — because in this world, we often do wrong involuntarily and voluntarily, and this act [of praying about the sins of the reposed] clearly points out that which is more perfect. For, we make memory of both just and sinners...."<sup>7</sup>

St John Chrysostom, as we saw above, assures us of benefits from our prayers for those fallen asleep. What reason does he give for these prayers?

"And this is the reason for the prayers, psalms and glorifications of God [at burial services]: so that you not weep and lament, but rather give thanks to God Who has taken him."<sup>8</sup>

As we saw above, according to our apostolic father Saint Dionysios the Areopagite, the prayers and commemoration of the reposed serve primarily to educate the faithful regarding the promises given to those who struggle for salvation, and the opposite end of those who are faithless. He declares that the things we ask on behalf of the reposed are only proclamations of what they are going to receive anyway, because God has already promised them, and so far from Him requiring our prayers in order that the reposed be shown mercy, He readily, without our prompting, overlooks those sins and stains the faithful died with. He does not keep some kind of "scorecard," but knows the heart and the volition and the disposition of the soul, and this he "accounts to us for righteousness" on account of Christ.

Saint John of Kronstadt also captures the immensity

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and beauty of the true meaning of our commemorations of the reposed when, separating himself from the corrupted text book theology, he turns to his own deep patristic consciousness and proclaims:

"What a close connection there is between the Church in heaven and the Church on earth! What love the Church has! Behold how She unceasingly remembers, calls upon in prayer and glorifies the Church in heaven for the great deeds accomplished on earth for God's sake; She unceasingly prays for the Church on earth and intercedes for the departed, in the hope of their resurrection, of their life eternal and of their union with God and the saints. Her love is immense, great, divine! Let us enter into the spirit of this love of our Mother, the Orthodox Church, and let us be penetrated with the spirit of this love. Let us look upon all our brethren as our own members, upon ourselves and them as members of one body of the Church, and let us love them actively, as ourselves; then we ourselves shall be living members of the Church in heaven and she will be our active and speedy helper and intercessor.

"How do we maintain [this] connection with the spiritual world, with the heavenly Church? By calling upon them in prayer, by keeping the festivals instituted in their [those fallen asleep] honour; and by the Church services. For the Church is one, under one Head – Christ. How do we maintain [this] connection with the departed? By means of prayers for them, especially when united with the offering of the bloodless sacrifice. How do we maintain union with living Christians....Again, by means

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of prayer for them all in God's temple and also at home."<sup>9</sup>

Here is the true meaning of all our prayers and commemorations of the faithful fallen asleep, that we be mindful of them and of God's promise to the faithful, that we learn and assimilate a deep, unshakable understanding of the uniqueness and unity of the Holy Church, and of Her hope and joy, so that we too might grow in love and be given the courage to struggle to attain those promises for ourselves. We commemorate the reposed so that we remain consciously united with them, confessing our faith in the resurrection and life eternal. Our prayers for the reposed are manifestations of Christian love, hope and faith, and they are revelations of the mystery of the union of heaven and earth in the body of the Holy Church. The immense difference between this pure, patristic understanding and the Scholastic concept is dramatically demonstrated if we compare these words of St John of Kronstadt, in which he obviously expresses his own deep spiritual conscience, with his words in another place, in which he expresses the text book teaching on the subject of prayers for the reposed.<sup>10</sup>

Compare the above quoted words of St John of Kronstadt with the explanation of the daily liturgies offered for the reposed, given by the most venerable and authoritative commentator on the liturgical practices of the Church, St Symeon of Thessaloniki:

"...and especially [is] the Bloodless Sacrifice offered daily, for there is nothing more profitable for him who has fallen asleep, nor is there anything so much a cause of joy, illumination and union with God, for then, the very

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Blood of the Lord is shed in behalf of us the worthless ones, and the Divine Body is sacrificed ....What indeed is more beneficial than for Christ to be sacrificed in our behalf?

"The particle [taken out of the prosphora] at the dread sacrifice and the commemoration made then of him that has departed unites him to God and invisibly grants him to partake and to participate in Him. For this reason not only the brethren who have in repentance departed in Christ are greatly benefited, comforted and saved, but also the sacred and divine souls of the saints greatly rejoice in this... and through this most sacred sacrifice they more purely and lucidly are united to Christ and commune and more truly partake of His gifts."<sup>11</sup>

Do we not see that not only sinful believers such as we, benefit from these prayers, but also the saints? And we all benefit in the same manner, for these prayers are great mysteries of divine love. Great indeed is the power of Godly love, and great is the mystery of divine love in the Holy Church. For, such love ascends to heaven and penetrates even the darkness of hades. To those in hades, it gives some small remission of the darkness – for love, which is the essence of all goodness, is the essence of spiritual light, before which darkness must retreat – and it gives, by God's grace, some kind of merciful and ineffable comfort and relief. But to those reposing in paradise, the prayers of the Holy Church rise up like warm waves of love which encompass the soul like a mother's tender embrace, like the gentle kiss a mother plants on the forehead of a sleeping child in the middle of

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the night. As God's grace is borne on the wings of His love, so our love is borne on the wings of God's grace, and by grace the souls of the departed perceive our love, and by His grace they benefit from our prayers and alms offered in love on their behalf. For, all things which the soul perceives, it perceives not of itself, but by the action of divine grace, just as it remains immortal not of itself, but by grace.

The benefits which the reposed derive from these daily liturgies and commemorations are not in the form of forcing God to mercy or buying off demons, but in the form of spiritual increase. The Church, as a loving mother, desires that all Her children have the best, or at least better. The reposed member of the Church is still a member: the organism of which he was and is a cell has not ceased to function in the fullest, and that functioning (which is certainly soteriological and pertains to the spiritual development of all Her members) involves the whole created universe, which is being redeemed along with man. It certainly involves the reposed in some way. The grave does not form a barrier to the love and life of the Holy Church (and that life is a liturgical life); the co-suffering love of the body of the faithful extends to all alike, and penetrates the grave and "hades." The saints, though glorified already and interceding for us, derive benefit from our commemoration of them, and we pray for them and for all for the sake of their increase, so that, by God's hand, love is made manifest, and they pass from light to light, from joy to joy, from glory to glory, every good and every perfect thing being made more perfect,

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more radiant by the divine action of godly love, in the which all are bound together and ascend as one body toward the perfection of our high calling in Christ. And what is so marvellous that we ask for the "pardon and remissions of the sins" of our reposed brothers and sisters? Not as though God would not grant it anyway, and not as though they would not be saved even without our prayers, but as demonstrating our oneness and unity of love. And what is so marvellous that the fathers on occasion phrased their charge to us to pray for the departed as if our prayers were the effectual means of the remission of their sins? For God honours love and things done from love, and the gifts of love even from us poor sinners He in no wise rejects or turns away, but in His own perfect love, He causes that our gifts of prayers and alms be received by the souls of the reposed and that they benefit from them. For He does not allow that godly love be offered in vain but as the Author of love, He causes His work to be fulfilled. And in this sense we say that the reposed benefit from our prayers and receive, as it were, pardon and remission of the consequences of sins on account of our prayers. Is this any different from what the sponsor does for a child at baptism? Only in the first instance, the child must accept, in due time, this intent, those vows made in its behalf and complete and fulfil what has been begun on its behalf, but the reposed believer has already accepted this intent before his death, by his very faith in the Holy Church which only helps complete and perfect what he has already begun. Would God deny grace and salvation to the child if there were no sponsor

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to proclaim the promises and vows? Of course not, and neither would He hinder the soul of the faithful even if no one so much as breathed a prayer in their behalf. Nor would the demons have the slightest tyranny over the soul just because it had no one to utter some magical incantations to force them to release it. But what is it, then, to have their "sins pardoned and remitted" by the prayers of the faithful? Is it not that their own conscience is relieved of its burden by the light of our love generated in the serving of the Holy Mysteries for the person? For, they know already that they are "saved" and destined for the Kingdom, but perhaps their conscience is still troubled by the burden of its own self-knowledge. The conscience is, after all, our only accuser. Nonetheless, this much is clear, that God allows the manifestation of our love and prayers to be received by the souls of the reposed, in order to increase their joy and give them the comfort of the feeling of oneness and companionship common to the Body of Christ, the Holy Church leading us in the struggle of love "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no more...tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind....But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from Whom the whole body fitly joined together and united by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph.4:13-16.)

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We have seen now, both from the preceding chapters and from the extracts from the works of the fathers given in Appendix One of this work, that, for believers, death is not an object of fear or terror. No one who has lived a life of active faith need tremble in terror at death. For, "death is a fairhaven" (St John Chrysostom), and "no one should be made sad by death; since in living there is a labour and peril, in dying, peace and the certainty of resurrection" (St Cyprian of Carthage), moreover, "I believe the words of the wise that every fair and God-beloved soul, when it departs hence, at once enjoys a sense and perception of the blessings which await it...and feels a wondrous pleasure and exultation, and goes rejoicing to meet its Lord" (St Gregory the Theologian), and "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Paul). Our holy and God bearing father Gregory the Theologian "trusts the word of the wise" that the soul departs the body and at once enjoys the noetic awareness of its future blessings, that the souls of the faithful go forth from the body "rejoicing to meet its Lord," feeling "a wondrous exultation." While the Scholastics and neo-Gnostics would have us face death in morbid terror, for they believe, contrary to the great theologian, that the soul goes forth and at once perceives dark and terrifying spectacles, seeing that Christ has failed in His effort to conquer the demons. These Scholastics and Gnostics would cast us into doubt and despair, teaching us that the Theologian was in error, that in fact the soul goes forth

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not "rejoicing to meet its Lord," but shaking in hideous terror to meet demons, not feeling "a wondrous pleasure and exultation" but feeling a hopeless abandonment, doubting in their salvation, uncertain if God has been able to save them, crushed in hopeless dread to face a legalistic series of demonic tribunals, where demons have the power to obliterate God's promises and snatch away hapless souls from the arms of the Holy Church, if they have forgotten or not been able to fulfil some legal contract, some legislated "works of repentance." How pitiful and despicable does such a doctrine appear beside the words of our apostolic father Dionysios the Areopagite:

"..the divine love overlooking, through its goodness, the stains which have come to them through human infirmity, since no one, as the Scripture says, is free of blemish."<sup>12</sup>

Compare, too, these gruesome, complex and legalistic doctrines about demonic torture chambers, aerial traffic-courts and wandering souls needing to be prayed to rest, with the pure, simple and profoundly Christian explanations of the apostles and fathers of the memorial services and prayers offered for the reposed on the third, ninth and fortieth days, and the yearly anniversary of their demise. The holy apostles have commanded us to, "Let the third day of the departed be celebrated with psalms and lessons and prayers, on account of Him Who arose within the space of three days; and let the ninth day be celebrated in remembrance of the living, and of the departed; and the fortieth day according to the ancient

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pattern: for so did the people lament Moses, and the anniversary day in memory of him. And let alms be given to the poor out of his goods for a memorial of him."<sup>13</sup>

Turning again to that foremost authority on Orthodox liturgical practices, St Symeon of Thessaloniki, we learn:

"[The Kolyva is offered] because man is also a seed and like a fruit from the earth; and like a seed sown in the earth he will be raised up again by God's might....The tritina [third day service] is celebrated for the reason that [the reposed one] received his being through the Trinity and having passed to a state of good being and being changed he shall [at the resurrection] appear in his original state or one superior. The ennata [ninth day] is celebrated that his spirit dwell together with the holy spirits, the angels, being immaterial and naturally similar to them – for these spirits are nine in number and by them [the orders] they triply proclaim and praise the God in Trinity – and so that he may be united with the holy spirits of the saints. The tessaracosta [fortieth day] is celebrated because of the Saviour's ascension – which came to pass after so many days after His Resurrection – in the sense that he [the reposed] as it were, having also risen and having ascended, as it were, being caught away in the clouds, shall meet the Judge and thus being united with Him, he should ever be with the Lord (1Ths.4:17). Now the third, sixth and ninth months also celebrated as proclaiming the Trinity, the God of all, and His glory in behalf of the deceased, for by the Trinity a man is fashioned, and when loosed from the body he returns to Him, and by the Trinity he hopes to receive resurrection. But the end of the year is celebrated because it is the

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consummation, and our God, the Trinity, is the Life of all and the Cause of being, and shall be the restoration of all and the renewal of human nature."<sup>14</sup>

St Gregory the Theologian explains his own offering of a memorial to Caesarios: "Such is my offering; if it be slight and inferior to his worth, God loves that which is according to our power. Part of our gift is complete, the remainder we will pay by offering (those of us who still survive) every year our honours and memorials."<sup>15</sup>

Thus, we have presented the specific, pure, simple, joyous doctrine of the holy apostles and fathers concerning things done for those who have fallen asleep. We need not even go into detail and offer comparison with the horror-filled Scholastic, Gnostic doctrines of aerial purgatories, toll-houses and demonic tribunals. Let everyone compare these dreadful doctrines as they will with the radiant doctrines of the apostles and fathers, and weigh each for oneself. The choice between the two is not, it seems, difficult to make.

Finally, beloved in Christ, let us recall those words of the Apostle cited earlier, that:

"Because of Him the whole body is joined and firmly held together by the joints and ligaments with which it is supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, grows to full maturity, building itself up in love," "...holding the Head [Jesus Christ], from Whom all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God."<sup>16</sup>

And if we are all thus knit together, it is by the power of divine love, and our prayers and commemorations of

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those fallen asleep are but the confession and manifestation of the penetration of the faithful by this divine love, a grace-filled response of love to love. This is not of ourselves, but it is the grace of God working in those who accept it, "both to will and to do of His own good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

### **ENDNOTES:**

1. Rm.8:38-39.

2. Many of these problems arose during the famous "three hundred year Latin captivity of Russian theology," which is discussed somewhat by Fr Georges Florovsky in his work Ways of Russian Theology.

3. Homily 3 on Phillipians, para.24.

4. Complete text in Appendix One.

5. The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, Ch.7 (complete text of chapter appears in Appendix 1.)

6. Rm.4:3, 9; Gal.3:6; Jas.2:23.

7. Against Heresies, Vol.1, Bk.2, Ch.74.

8. P.G.96:33A.

9. My Life In Christ, Holy Trinity Monastery Press, Jordanville, N.Y., 1967 edn. p.177, 176.

10. *ibid.* p.282.

11. On Things Done for the Departed.

12. The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, Ch.7 (text in Appendix 1).

13. The Instructions of the Holy Twelve Apostles, Bk.8, Ch.42.

14. On Things Done for the Departed

15. Panegyric for Caesarios.

16. Eph.4:13-16 (this is a more exact translation); Col.2:19.

**EIGHT**  
**A DISCUSSION OF THE Gnostic**  
**"MACARIAN HOMILY."**

**A refutation of the false "Macarian Homily"**  
**and an exposition of the heresies in this**  
**destructive forgery.**

**1**

**The Fictitious "Macarian Document" Concerning**  
**The Memorial Services for the Reposed.**

**T**he following is a critique of a tale which has been attributed to St Macarios of Alexandria. It purports to give an explanation of the Christian tradition of offering memorial services for the departed on the third, ninth and fortieth days after their repose.

Ordinarily, one might consider this fable to be a mere "pious fraud," a pretty little tale with some ethical value, despite its obvious pagan overtones and, therefore, harmless. That is not the case with this fable, however, because it is not "harmless." Not only are the clearly Gnostic and pagan elements of it almost always taken at face value by simple readers and even educated clergy, thus introducing pagan ideas and quite clearly heretical ideas into the minds of the faithful, but the tale keeps people, even seminarians, from reading the *actual* patristic and apostolic explanations of the third, ninth and fortieth day commemorations for the departed.

The Macarian document contains serious heresies, long ago refuted by the holy fathers of the Orthodox Church. Among these are the following:

## *The Fake "Macarian Homily"*

1. The Makarian document teaches the Gnostic/Platonistic doctrine of a radical dualism or dichotomy between soul and body. This is a teaching that has been condemned and written against by more than 15 of the holy and God-bearing fathers.
2. The Makarian document teaches that souls can wander after death. This is a teaching condemned and written against by St. John Chrysostom, St Andrew of Crete, St Gregory of Nyssa and others.
3. The Makarian document teaches the heretical notion that hell already exists and that souls can in any way experience hell without their bodies. This heresy is roundly condemned by every holy father who ever wrote against Gnosticism. The condemnation of this grotesque heresy is beautifully summarized by St Mark of Ephesus in his *Ten Arguments Against Purgatory*. (See the Point of Faith booklet *On the Nature of Heaven and Hell According to the Holy Fathers* for a more complete discussion).
4. The Makarian document teaches that the soul can have psycho-physical experiences once separated from the body. This is a heresy condemned by all the holy fathers from St Justin the Philosopher on, and firmly understood in the Orthodox Church up until the Bogomil heresy infiltrated Orthodox countries, and Latin Scholasticism began to dominate books published for Orthodox

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countries.

5. It is sufficient that the Makarian document presents a teaching radically different from that of the Orthodox Church, as expounded so clearly by St. Symeon of Thessaloniki, but also the Makarian teaching is just plain silly. How can a soul be led (as if it has a complete physical body, which it most certainly does not) up to heaven to venerate God Himself, and then be led to hell? By what Holy Scripture, according to the words of which Divine Service, by what words of the holy and God-bearing fathers, or by what twist of distorted reason can one begin to justify such a blasphemy?

Moreover, because of this fictitious document, practically no-one ever reads the actual Orthodox Christian teaching on the subjects it deals with. To the contrary, cluttered, foggy, pagan and Gnostic mythology is being foisted off on Christians, in place of the clear, simple, scriptural truth of the Orthodox reasons for the third, ninth and fortieth day memorial services.

We have arranged this examination of the Macarian document in two columns. On the one side is the Macarian document itself and in the opposite column are relevant teachings of the holy and God-bearing fathers. In this way, a direct comparison may be made. At the end, we will discuss more at length the heretical aspects of the Macarian document. Essentially, the heresies are: (1) the idea that a soul can wander about after it has departed the body; (2) the idea of a radical dualism between soul and

## *The Fake "Macarian Homily"*

body; (3) the idea that souls are already in hell, suffering in the "fire." Another aspect of the fable almost too ridiculous to be considered a heresy is the idea that a person or the soul of a person could stand before the very throne of God, reverence Him in His Heavenly Kingdom, and afterward be led into hell.

Let us look at a side by side comparison of the heretical Makarian document with the Orthodox Christian teachings.

### **THE MACARIAN FABLE**

According to the fable, St Macarios of Egypt was walking along the road, chatting with some angels which were strolling along with him. No one knew the reason for the memorial services offered by the Church for those who had departed, so he decided to ask the angels about it. One of the angels who was strolling with him replied:

When, on the third day, the body is brought into the church, the soul of the dead

### **THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN TEACHING**

## *The Soul, The Body and Death*

person receives from his Guardian Angel some relief from the grief which he feels at parting from his body. He receives this relief because of the oblation and praise which are offered in his behalf in God's temple, from which a blessed hope arises in him. For, over the time of two days, the soul has to wander at random over the world, with the angels accompanying it. Since the soul loves its body, it sometimes hovers about in the house in which it was parted from the body; sometimes around the coffin in which its body has been placed. Thus it passes those days like a bird which seeks a nesting place for itself. The good soul, however, wanders through those places where it used to perform good deeds of righteousness.

### **Condemnation of All Teachings That the Soul Can Wander After Death:**

"Nor, indeed, is it possible for a soul, once separated from its body, to wander here anymore. For, `the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God.'... And the souls, also of sinners, are straightaway led away hence... And it cannot be that a soul, when it has gone out of the body can wander here" (St John Chrysostom, *Homily 28 on Matthew*.)

### **The Actual Orthodox Teaching About the Meaning of the Third, Ninth and Fortieth Day Services:**

## *The Fake "Macarian Homily"*

On the third day, every soul is brought to heaven, that it may do reverence to the God of all. Wherefore, the Church has the blessed custom of offering oblation and prayers on the third day for that soul.

After the soul has done reverence to God, He commands that it be shown the varied and fair mansions of the saints and the beauty of paradise. All these things the soul sees during six days, marvelling and giving glory to God, the Creator of all. When the soul has seen all these things, it is changed and forgets all the sorrows which it felt in the body....

Having thus viewed the joys of the righteous for the space of six days, the angels lead the soul again to do reverence to God. Therefore, the Church does well to celebrate and offer

The holy apostles have commanded us to, "Let the third day of the departed be celebrated with psalms and lessons and prayers, on account of Him Who arose within the space of three days; and let the ninth day be celebrated in remembrance of the living, and of the departed; and the fortieth day according to the ancient pattern: for so did the people lament Moses, and the anniversary day in memory of him. And let alms be given to the poor out of his goods for a memorial of him." *The Constitutions of the Holy Twelve Apostles, Bk.8, Ch.42.*

Turning again to that foremost authority on Orthodox liturgical practices, St Symeon of Thessaloniki, we learn:

"[The Kolyva is offered] because man is also a seed

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oblation for the soul on the ninth day.

After this second reverencing of God, the Master of all orders that the soul be conducted to Hell, to be shown the places of torment, the different departments of Hell, the various torments of the impious, which causes the souls that are there to groan continually and gnash their teeth. Through these various places of torments, the soul is conducted for thirty days, trembling, lest it be also imprisoned therein.

On the fortieth day, the soul is again taken to do reverence to God; and only then does the Judge determine the fitting place for its imprisonment according to its deeds.

Thus, the Church acts properly in making mention of the baptized

and like a fruit from the earth; and like a seed sown in the earth he will be raised up again by God's might....The tritina [third day service] is celebrated for the reason that [the reposed one] received his being through the Trinity and having passed to a state of good being and being changed he shall [at the resurrection] appear in his original state or one superior. The ennata [ninth day] is celebrated because his spirit [soul] abides together with the holy spirits, the angels, *being immaterial* and naturally similar to them – for these spirits are [of] nine [orders] in number and by them [the orders] they triply proclaim and praise the God in Trinity – and so that he may be united with the holy spirits of the saints. The tessaracosta

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dead on the fortieth day.

[Since we are dealing in popular mythologies, one must wonder where the passage through the twenty-one aerial toll-houses fits into this schedule. The angels chatting with St Macarios evidently did not know about them, since the “passage through the toll-houses” supposedly occupies this entire forty day period.]

[fortieth ] is celebrated because of the Saviour's ascension – which came to pass so many days after His Resurrection. (*On Things Done for the Departed.*)

### **Condemnation of the Heresy That There Are Souls Already in Hell and Suffering:**

Nothing could more clearly expose the heresy and falseness of this fictitious "Macarian Homily" than the words of our Holy and God-bearing father, Mark of Ephesus, in his *Ten Arguments against Purgatory*:

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

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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.***

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

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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.”

I should be clear to the reader that under no circumstances can one trust the teaching or theology of any person or organisation that offers this fake ""Makarian Homily" as an explanation for the memorial services for the reposed in the Orthodox Church.

## 2

### **The Origin of The "Macarian Homily"**

*The following is a reply to a letter which was received by the editor of **The Canadian Orthodox Missionary**. The reply to this letter included the preceding critique of the "Macarian Homily."*

As you have seen for yourself, the false Macarian "homily" does indeed differ radically from the actual

## *The Soul, The Body and Death*

Orthodox teachings, which few people seem interested to learn. As to where it originated one can only surmise. However, one would probably be accurate to make this scenario: Someone, somewhere, challenged the Orthodox practice of serving memorials for the departed. People did not know how to answer, because they had always taken the practice for granted, and never sought to understand why it was done. To "remedy" this, someone simply created an answer. This is certainly not unusual; this has happened many times in the past, and the fictitious explanation has frequently been given the name of a famous person as its supposed author. In the case of the memorial services, the answer was taken from pagan folklore. It was not at all unusual for someone to invent an "answer" like this and attribute it to someone with more authority, and this was a notable and regular practice of the early Gnostic sects. That is why there were so many false "Gnostic Gospels" and fake "apostolic epistles" around before the Ecumenical Councils sorted them out and determined which ones were false. The story about the wandering soul probably actually did come from Egypt, because the tale comes directly from Egyptian paganism, from the rites of embalming high ranking personages of the old Egyptian kingdom. The embalming process took from forty to seventy days (it took longer in the most ancient era, and closer to forty days in later times, longer for the wealthy and noble, a shorter time for ordinary people). In early Egypt, the period of mourning, which was taken quite seriously, could last for a year or more. Sometime in later Egypt,

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the official mourning time had been set at forty days. The stages of this mourning process were marked off with special significance for each, relating to the steps of the embalming ritual. In fact, we read in the Bible that Joseph, who was given a high rank in Egypt, and thus had access to the embalming rite of the nobility, had his father embalmed.

*"And Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father, and the physicians embalmed Israel [Jakob]. And **forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those who are embalmed**" [in Egypt] (Gn. 50:2-3).*

We can read about this practice in the history of Herodotos, the "father of history." He records the same information about the embalming process during his visit to Egypt (c.440 B.C.).

In Egyptian mythology, the soul itself could not rest until the body had been properly prepared for burial, thus, the pagans believed that the soul wandered for this time. It is a fact that the embalmed body was often kept in its family home for some time after the rites. There was a belief that the soul haunted the house for some period during this time, and needed to be able to find its body. During that period, according to Egyptian paganism, the soul was judged and weighed before the forty two nome gods (a source, by the way, of the equally pagan "aerial toll-house" myth, which reduces the nome gods to exactly half: twenty one in number, but the "sins" decided at each follows the pagan Egyptian pattern very closely).

The periods of celebrating memorials for the reposed

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is not at all of Christian or even Jewish origin. Every society and culture, from quite primitive times, has had "stepping away from grief" rituals, in which the near ones of the departed could little by little moderate and step away from their grief and "get on with life." Usually, there is a given period after which a widow or widower can remarry without any feelings of guilt or without violating the propriety of a given society. The period is usually one year.

It is a fact that official or taboo periods for celebrating, commemorating or fearing the reposed are also not of Christian origin, rather certain periods already used in pre-Christian practice were chosen and "baptised" into Christian practice. For example, in voodoo practice, the ninth day is especially significant, as it has been in pagan practice from very ancient times. If a person has been murdered, their body is often buried with a whip or weapon in each hand so that, on the ninth day, the dead person can revenge itself on the murderer. A solemn, often dark celebration may be kept on that day by voodoo practitioners. We note in the Scripture that the forty days kept for Joseph were not kept because of any Jewish practice or ordinance of God, but because "it was the custom of the Egyptians." The purely symbolic meanings given to these practices by the apostles and early fathers was intended to give a Christian understanding and transformation to pagan practices, long established. These were incorporated into the clearly prescribed order of serving memorial Liturgies for the departed.

There is an interesting story which was told in Greece

### *The Fake "Macarian Homily"*

for some time, to explain the third, ninth and fortieth day commemorations. At one time, it was popular to believe that the services had to do with the rate at which vital organs decayed. This story actually occurred in a Greek catechism, as the late Dr Alexandre Kalomiros told me. I do not remember the exact details, but it seems that the ideas was that the brain decayed in three days, the vitals in nine days and the heart in forty days. This, too, relates to the embalming rites of ancient Egypt, since great care was taken to preserve the internal organs in *canopic* jars before decay could set in, and the heart was of special importance in this process.

It is sorrowful that, in an era of relatively well educated clergy, some priests are still foisting off a Gnostic or pagan Egyptian myth about the memorial services, rather than referring to well attested Orthodox Christian writings on the subject. What is more astounding is that they do not recognize the non-Christian quality of the story, or realize that it not only contradicts Orthodox Christian liturgical tradition, but St John Chrysostom has said quite strongly that when a soul departs its body, *it is impossible for it to wander here any longer.*

I wonder, also, why so many people do not seem to notice that nowhere in the funeral service, nor in the memorial services, is there a single mention of this fantastic wandering of the soul, or of the mythological "aerial toll houses."

## *The Soul, The Body and Death*

### **The Memorial Services of the Third, Ninth and Fortieth Days:**

**A patristic explanation of these services.**

### ***The Actual Orthodox Teaching About the Meaning of the Third, Ninth and Fortieth Day Services:***

Let us look once more at the actual Orthodox Christian teaching about the memorial services for the departed. This is the clear Patristic teaching so despised by those who are addicted to the heretical "Makarian Homily."

The holy apostles have commanded us to, "Let the third day of the departed be celebrated with psalms and lessons and prayers, on account of Him Who arose within the space of three days; and let the ninth day be celebrated in remembrance of the living, and of the departed; and the fortieth day according to the ancient pattern: for so did the people lament Moses, and the anniversary day in memory of him. And let alms be given to the poor out of his goods for a memorial of him." ***The Constitutions of the Holy Twelve Apostles, Bk.8, Ch.42.***

Turning again to that foremost authority on Orthodox liturgical practices, St Symeon of Thessaloniki, we learn:

"[The Kolyva is offered] because man is also a seed and like a fruit from the earth; and like a seed sown in the earth he will be raised up again by God's might....The tritia [third day service] is celebrated for the reason that [the reposed one] received his being through the Trinity and having passed to a state of good being and being changed he shall [at the resurrection] appear in his original state or one superior. The ennata [ninth day] is cele-

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brated because his spirit [soul] abides together with the holy spirits, the angels, *being immaterial* and naturally similar to them — for these spirits are [of] nine [orders] in number and by them [the orders] they triply proclaim and praise the God in Trinity, and so that he may be united with the holy spirits of the saints. The tesseract [fortieth] is celebrated because of the Saviour's ascension — which came to pass so many days after His Resurrection. (*On Things Done for the Departed.*)



*Earliest known Orthodox rendition of the Last Judgment. This icon, attributed to Kosmas Indicopluetes, ca. AD530, shows the Traditional "River of Fire" theme which forms the only Canonical representation of the Last Judgment*

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Selections from Patristic Writings on The Soul, The Body, and Death**

**I**n this appendix, we are presenting a collection of theological statements of the Fathers of the Church on the state of the soul after death. It will be noted here that we are not presenting interpretations of other people's dreams, either real or reported, nor are we presenting stories that someone heard from someone else. There are a number of problems with the reported dreams of various saints and other people. Dreams are not and cannot be sources of theology — this is logical and completely comprehensible. The things which are seen by various saints in dreams relate to given situations and affairs. They are understood by the saints in this manner. It is also true that not all the dreams recorded in the lives of the monastic fathers actually took place. Often, they were only parables told by an elder or abbot to help correct a wayward novice. There is, for example, a reported dream according to which, after a person reposes, God extracts (through the action of cooperating demons) satisfaction for every unrepented sin, even those sins which he did not remember, or did not even know were sins. This is absurd, and if taken literally, would constitute a slander against God. However, it could be useful in calling to his senses a monk who had fallen into a habit of confessing lightmindedly and of being negligent in considering his sins. If, however, someone tried to interpret this dream (or parable, as the case may

be) as a theological revelation, then it would be seen that not only is it contrary to the theological statements of the fathers, but it also contradicts the dogma of redemption and the doctrine of repentance.

We will also note that in the clear theological statements of the fathers, we encounter no descriptions of the existence beyond death, nor details of the soul's "journey" to its rest. There is no real mention of any judgments, demonic gauntlets, soul stations, pathways, or places of repose. Indeed, such is forbidden by some of the fathers. Whatever is spoken about the state of the soul after it departs the body must, naturally, correspond with the various dogmas and doctrines of the faith and with the clear theological statements of the fathers.

Moreover, it is important to realize just how much the demons can do to delude us and create pseudo-spiritual states and visions, and Saint Gregory of Sinai has warned us about this, saying:

"And some evil spirits which are light and subtle, since they are found in the air, sway the soul's contemplative faculty by producing certain violent winds and phantasies, and they transform themselves into flying creatures and sometimes into angels and delude the soul. They form in our memory images of things known to us, and they produce a form of (and pervert) every kind of spiritual vision within those who are still labouring in asceticism and have not reached purity and spiritual discernment. For there is nothing spiritual of which they do not stealthily produce an exact image by means of phantasies. According to the state and degree of the progress of each man they fashion their weapons, and

## *The Soul, The Body and Death*

assailing him with delusion in the place of truth, phantasy in the place of divine vision [theoria], they establish themselves in him."<sup>1</sup>

This same saint, writing about true prayer and the true spiritual state, informs us that when the saints receive revelations, they receive them in ineffable simplicity, without material or sensible images:

"Wisdom moved by the Spirit is, according to theologians, the power of mental, pure, angelic prayer; a sign of this is that during prayer the mind is free from forms, with no image either of itself or of anything else appearing even for an instant, since it is drawn away from the senses by the light acting within. For then the mind is removed from everything material and is like light, being ineffably merged with God into one spirit."<sup>2</sup>

It may be that on occasions someone has tried to convey some form of psychological image of such revelations in the words and images of the fallen nature, with their complex, sensual multiplicity, but only as incomplete parables. To suppose, however, that this complex realm is yonder, beyond one's repose, is sheer madness, as one would understand from reading St Dionysios the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchies*, and the works of the hesychastic fathers. Therefore, as one reads various accounts, stories, or supposed descriptions of the events which supposedly occur to the soul after its departure from the body, let him keep in

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1. Most Edifying Chapters, Nr 123.

2. *ibid*, Nr. 116.

## *APPENDIX 1: Patristic Selections*

mind these profound words and warnings of our holy and God-bearing father, Isaak of Nineveh ("the Syrian"):

"Indeed, he [Paul] wrote that he saw divine visions and said that he heard words, but he was unable to describe what were those words of the figures of those divine visions. For when the mind in the Spirit of revelation sees [noetically] these things in their own place, it does not receive permission to utter them in a place which is not their own. And 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. But whatever the mind perceptibly beholds, hears or apprehends within itself in the realm of the spirit, it has no power to express when it turns again to the physical.

"This convicts the false writings called revelations, which, being composed by the originators of corrupt heresies under the influence of demonic phantasies, describe the celestial dwelling in the sky...the pathways to heaven, the places set apart for judgment, the manifold figures of the hosts of the sky, and their diverse activities. But all these things are shadows of a mind inebriated by conceit and deranged by the workings of demons. For this very reason the blessed Paul by one word closed the door in the face of all such theoria and the exclusion thereof he anchored in silence....For he said that all divine visions which the tongue had power to disclose in the physical realm are phantasies of the soul's thought, not the

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workings of grace."<sup>3</sup>

When we hear reports of people returning from the dead and relating events and details of what supposedly occurred there, or about that existence there, we understand that these things are not true and cannot be taken seriously. For our holy and God-bearing father, John Chrysostom, has already declared:

"God...has not permitted any man who has departed this life and returned, to express those things yonder....God does not permit that any man should ever come from thence and speak to the living about the things yonder."<sup>4</sup>

Even in the service for the reposed, we are warned against such things:

"None of those hence has returned to life so as to tell us how they fare, our erstwhile brethren and kinsfolk who have gone there before [us] to the Lord."<sup>5</sup>

And our holy father Justin Martyr the Philosopher has wisely instructed us:

"If it were possible for them to show you thence what has befallen them after the termination of this life, you would know from what fearful ills they desired to deliver you. But now since it is not possible in this present life that you either learn from them...it follows that one thing remains for you to do, that...you read the prophecies of

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3. Letter to Simeon of Caesaria, editor's emphasis.

4. Homily 4, On Lazarus and the Rich Man.

5. Service for the Burial of a Priest.

## *APPENDIX 1: Patristic Selections*

the sacred writers, not requiring from them faultless diction (for the matters of our religion lie in works not in words), and learn from them what will give you life everlasting."<sup>6</sup>

Thus not only have we not included here any such stories, as if they constituted patristic sources, but we make a point of asserting that they do not.

Indeed, it is of no great profit for us to enter into discussions of the soul after death at all, for we can never really arrive at any conclusions comprehensible to our earth-bound, passion-darkened minds. That we do it at all is only in response to certain questions which have recently arisen, and we take up the questions only in the spirit of our God-bearing father Anastasios of Sinai, who, in answering similar questions, said:

"Regarding those things which are passed over in silence in the Divine Scriptures, it is manifest that they must not be sought out. The Holy Spirit revealed unto us those things which it is to our profit to learn, and again as for those things which are not profitable, He kept them hidden. But since man is an argumentative and inquisitive creature, whatever we have been able to learn from the holy fathers, as it were somewhat dimly, this also shall I attempt to make clear to you."<sup>7</sup>

In this appendix, we have presented only a small selection of the direct, simple, clear words of the fathers,

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6. Hortatory Address, Ch. 35).

7. Answer 89

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which we have made use of in our research for this book. Perhaps, with God's help, we can eventually present a more complete collection.

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**1**

**SAINT DIONYSIOS THE AREOPAGITE(+96)**

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY, CHAPTER  
7.

**A. Concerning Things Performed Over Those Fallen  
Asleep.**

These things having been defined, I think it is necessary also to describe the things religiously performed by us over those who have fallen asleep. For neither is this also the same between the holy and the unholy; but, as the form of life of each is different, so also, when approaching death, those who have led a religious life, by looking steadfastly to the unfailing promises of the Godhead (inasmuch as they have observed their proof, in the resurrection proclaimed by it), come to the goal of death, with firm and unfailing hope, in godly rejoicing, knowing that at the end of holy contests their condition will be altogether in a perfect and endless life and safety, through their future entire resurrection. For the holy souls, which may possibly fall during this present life to a change for the worse, in the regeneration, will have the most Godlike transition to an unchangeable condition. Now, the pure bodies which are enrolled together as yoke-fellows and companions of the holy souls throughout; the divine life, will jointly receive their own resurrection; for, having been united with the holy souls to which they were united in this present life, by having become members of Christ, they will receive

### *The Soul, The Body and Death*

in return the Godlike and imperishable immortality, and blessed repose. In this respect then the sleep of the holy is in comfort and unshaken hopes, as it attains the goal of the divine contests.

Now, amongst the profane, some illogically think to go to a non-existence; others that the bodily blending with their proper souls will be severed oncand for all, as unsuitable to them in a divine life and blessed lots, not considering nor being sufficiently instructed in divine science, that our most Godlike life in Christ has already begun. But others assign to souls union with other bodies, committing, as I think, this injustice to them, that, after (bodies) have laboured together with the godly souls, and have reached the goal of their most divine course, they relentlessly deprive them of their righteous rewards. And others, (I do not know how they have strayed to conceptions of such earthly tendency) say that the most holy and blessed repose promised to the devout is similar to our life in this world, and unlawfully reject, for those who are equal to the angels, nourishments appropriate to another kind of life. None of the most religious men, however, will ever fall into such errors as these; but, knowing that their whole selves will receive the Christlike inheritance, when they have come to the goal of this present life, they see more clearly their road to incorruption already become nearer, and extol the gifts of the Godhead, and are filled with a divine satisfaction, no longer fearing the fall to a worse condition, but knowing well that they will hold firmly and everlastingly the good things already acquired. Those, however, who are full of

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blemishes, and unholy stains, even though they have attained to some initiation, yet, of their own accord, have, to their own destruction, rejected this from their mind, and have rashly followed their destructive lusts, to them when they have come to an end of their life here, the divine regulation of the Scriptures will no longer appear as before a subject of scorn, but, when they have looked with different eyes upon the pleasures of their passions destroyed, and when they have pronounced blessed the holy life from which they thoughtlessly fell away, they are, piteously and against their will, separated from this present life, conducted to no holy hope, by reason of their shameful life.

Now, whilst none of these attain the repose of the holy men, he himself, when coming to the end of his own struggles, is filled with a holy consolation, and with much satisfaction enters the path of the holy regeneration. The familiar friends, however, of him who has fallen asleep, as befits their divine familiarity and fellowship, pronounce him blessed, whoever he is, as having reached the desired end crowned with victory, and they send up odes of thanksgiving to the Author of victory, praying also that they may reach the same inheritance. Then they take him and bring him to the hierarch, as to a bequest of holy crowns; and he right gladly receives him, and performs the things fixed by reverend men, to be performed over those who have piously fallen asleep.

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### **B. Mysterion Over Those Who Have Religiously Fallen Asleep.**

The holy hierarch collects the reverend choir, and if the person who has fallen asleep were of the sacerdotal rank, he lays him down before the divine Altar, and begins with the prayer and thanksgiving to God; but if he belonged to the rank of the chaste monks, or the holy people, he lays him down near the hallowed sanctuary, before the sacerdotal entrance. Then the hierarch finishes the prayer of thanksgiving to God; and next, the celebrants, after reading the unfailing promises concerning our holy resurrection, contained in the Holy Scripture, reverently chant the odes of the same teaching and power, from the revelations of the Psalter. Then the first celebrant dismisses the catechumens, and calls aloud the names of the holy people, who have already fallen asleep; amongst whom he deems the man, who has just terminated his life, worthy of mention in the same rank, and urges all to seek the blessed consummation in Christ; then the holy hierarch advances, and offers a most holy prayer over him, and after the prayer both the hierarch himself salutes the defunct, and after him, all who are present. When all have saluted, the hierarch pours the oil upon the fallen asleep, and when he has offered the holy prayer for all, he places the body in a worthy chamber, with other holy bodies of the same rank.

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### **C. Contemplation.**

Now, if the profane should see or hear that these things are done by us, they will, I suppose, split with laughter, and commiserate us on our folly. But there is no need to wonder at this. For, as the Scriptures say, "If they will not believe, neither shall they understand."

Now, the chants and readings of the supremely divine promises are explanatory of the most blessed inheritances, to which those, who have attained a divine perfection, shall be eternally appointed, and descriptive of him who has religiously fallen asleep, and stimulative of those, who are still living, to the same perfection.

Observe, however, that not all the ranks under purification are customarily dismissed, but only the catechumens are expelled from the holy places, for this class is entirely uninitiated in every holy rite, and is not permitted to view any of the religious celebrations, great or small, inasmuch as it has not participated in the faculty of contemplating the holy mysteries, through the birth from God, which is a source and gift of light. The rest, however, of the ranks under purification have already been under instruction in sacred tradition; but, as they have foolishly returned to an evil course it is incumbent to complete their proper elevation in advance, and they are reasonably dismissed from the supremely divine contemplations and communions, as in holy symbols; for they will be injured, by partaking of them unholily, and will come to a greater contempt of the Holy Mysteries

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and themselves.

Naturally, however, they are present at the things now done, being clearly taught by seeing both the fearlessness of death amongst us, and the last honour of the saints extolled from the unfailing Scriptures, and that the sufferings threatened to the unholy like themselves will be endless; for it will perhaps be profitable for them to have seen him, who has religiously finished his course, reverently proclaimed by the public proclamation of the celebrant, as being certainly companion of the saints forever. And, perchance, even they will come to the like aspiration, and will be taught from the science of the Liturgy, that the consummation in Christ is blessed indeed.

Then the holy hierarch, advancing, offers a holy prayer over the man fallen asleep. After the prayer, both the hierarch himself salutes him, and next all who are present. Now the prayer beseeches the supremely divine goodness to remit to the man fallen asleep all the failings committed by reason of human infirmity, and to transfer him into light and the land of the living, into the bosom of Abraham, and Isaak, and Jacob: in a place where grief and sorrow and sighing are no more. It is evident, then, as I think, that these, the rewards of the pious, are most blessed. For what can be equal to an immortality entirely without grief and luminous with light. Especially if all the promises which pass man's understanding, and which are signified to us by signs adapted to our capacity, fall short, in their description, of the actual truth. For we must remember that the Logion is true, that "Eye hath not seen,

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nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." "Bosoms" of the blessed Patriarchs, and of all the other pious men, are, in my judgment, the most divine and blessed inheritances, which await all godly men, in that consummation which grows not old, and is full of blessedness.

But thou mayst, perhaps, say that these things are correctly affirmed by us, indeed, but want to know for what reason the hierarch beseeches the supremely divine goodness, for the remission of the faults committed by the man fallen asleep, and his most glorious inheritance, amongst godly men of the same rank. For, if every one shall receive, by the divine justice, equivalents for what he has done in the present life, whether it be good or different, and the man fallen asleep has finished his own activities in this present life, from what prayer offered by the hierarch will he be transferred to another inheritance, than that due to and equivalent for his life here? Now, well do I know, following the Scriptures, that each one will have the inheritance equivalent; for the Lord says, he has closed respecting him, and each one shall receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or whether it be bad. Yea, the sure traditions of the Scriptures teach us that the prayers, even of the just, avail only for those who are worthy of pious prayers during this present life, by no means after death. What forsooth did Saul gain from Samuel? And what did the intercession of the Prophet profit the people of the Hebrews? For, as if any one, when the sun is shedding its

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own splendour upon unblemished eyes, seeks to enjoy the solar splendour by obliterating his own powers of vision; so does he cling to impossible and extravagant expectations, who beseeches the intercessions of holy men, and, by driving away the holy efforts natural to the same, plays truant from the most luminous and beneficent commandments, through heedlessness of the divine gifts.

Nevertheless, according to the Scriptures, I affirm that the intercessions of the pious are, in every respect, profitable in this present life, after the following fashion. If any one, longing for holy gifts, and having a religious disposition for their reception, as recognizing his own insufficiency, approaches some pious man, and should prevail upon him to become his fellow-helper, and fellow-suppliant, he will be benefitted in every respect, thereby, with a benefit superior to all; for he will attain the most divine gifts he prays for, since the supremely divine goodness assists him, as well as his pious judgment of himself, and his reverence for devout men, and his praiseworthy craving for the religious requests requested, and his brotherly and Godlike disposition. For this has been firmly fixed by the supremely divine decrees, that the divine gifts are given, in an order most befitting God, to those who are meet to receive them, through those who are meet to distribute them.

If any one, then, should despise this sacred regulation, and betaking himself to a wretched self-conceit, should deem himself sufficient for the supremely divine converse, and look down upon pious men, and if he should further make requests, unworthy of God, and not

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holy, and if he should have his aspiration for things divine not sustained, and correlative to himself, he will fail in his ignorant request, through his own fault. Now, with reference to the prayer mentioned, which the hierarch prays over the man fallen asleep, we think it necessary to mention the tradition which has come to us from our inspired leaders. The holy hierarch, as the Scriptures say, is interpreter of the supremely divine awards; for he is messenger of the Lord God omnipotent. He has learned then, from the God-transmitted Scriptures, that to those who have passed their life piously, the most bright and divine life is given in return, according to their due, by the most just balances, the divine love towards man overlooking, through its goodness, the stains which have come to them through human infirmity, since no one, as the Scriptures say, is pure from blemish.

Now, the hierarch knew these things to have been promised by the infallible Scriptures; and he asks, that these things may come to pass, and that the righteous returns be given to those who have lived piously, whilst being moulded beneficently to the divine imitation, he beseeches gifts for others, as favours to himself; and, whilst knowing that the promises will be unailing, he makes known clearly to those present, that the things asked by him, according to a holy law, will be entirely realized for those who have been perfected in a divine life. For the hierarch, the expounder of the supremely divine justice, would never seek things, which were not most pleasing to the Almighty God, and divinely promised to be given by Him. Wherefore, he does not

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offer these prayers over the unholy fallen asleep, not only because in this he would deviate from his office of expounder, and would presumptuously arrogate, on his own authority, a function of the hierarchy, without being moved by the Supreme Legislator, but because he would both fail to obtain his abominable prayer, and he, not unnaturally, would hear from the just Scripture, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss." Therefore, the holy hierarch beseeches things divinely promised, and dear to God, and which will, in every respect, be given, demonstrating both his own likeness to the good loving God, and declaring explicitly the gifts which will be received by the devout. Thus, the hierarchs have discriminating powers, as interpreters of the divine awards, not as though the all-wise God, to put it mildly, were slavishly following their irrational impulses, but, as though they, as expounders of God, were separating, by the motion of the Holy Spirit, those who have already been judged by God, according to due. For "receive," he says, "the Holy Spirit, whose faults ye may have remitted, they are remitted; whose ye may have retained, they are retained." And to him who was illuminated with the divine revelations of the most Holy Father, the Scriptures say, "Whatsoever thou shalt have bound upon the earth, shall be bound in the heavens; and whatsoever thou shalt have loosed on earth, shall be loosed in the heavens," inasmuch as he, and every hierarch like him, according to the revelations of the Father's awards through him, receives those dear to God, and rejects those without God, as announcing and interpreting the divine Will.

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Further, as the Scriptures affirm, he uttered that sacred and divine confession, not as self-moved, nor as though flesh and blood had revealed it, but moved by God Who revealed to him the spiritual meaning of divine things. The inspired hierarchs then must so exercise their separations and all their hierarchical powers as the Godhead, the Supreme Initiator, may move them; and the others must so cling to the hierarchs as moved by God, in what they may do hierarchically, "For he who despiseth you," He says, "despiseth Me."

Let us now proceed to that which follows the prayer mentioned. When the hierarch has finished it, he first salutes the fallen asleep, and next, all who are present; for dear and honoured by all Godlike men is he who has been perfected in a divine life. After the salutation, the hierarch pours oil upon the man fallen asleep. And remember, that during the sacred birth from God, before the most holy baptism, a first participation of a holy symbol is given to the man initiated – the oil of Chrism – after the entire removal of the former clothing; and now, at the conclusion of all, the oil is poured upon the man fallen asleep. Then indeed the anointing with the oil summoned the initiated to the holy contests; and now the oil poured upon him shews the fallen asleep to have struggled, and to have been made perfect, throughout those same contests.

When the hierarch has finished these things, he places the body in an honourable chamber, with other holy bodies of the same rank. For if, in soul and body, the man fallen asleep passed a life dear to God, there will be

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honoured, with the devout soul, the body also, which contended with it through the devout struggles. Hence the divine justice gives to it, together with its own body, the rewarding inheritances, as companion and participator in the devout, or the contrary, life. Wherefore, the divine institution of sacred rites bequeaths the supremely divine participations to them both – to the soul, indeed, in pure contemplation and in science of the things being done, and to the body, by sanctifying the whole man, as in a figure with the holy chrism, and the most holy symbols of the supremely Holy Communion, sanctifying the whole man, and announcing, by purification of the whole man, that his resurrection will be most complete.

### 2

The sleep of the holy [i.e., the faithful] is in comfort and unshaken hopes, as it attains the goal of the divine contests. (2Tm.4:6-8) (The Divine Names).

### 3

The divine justice in this respect is really a 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 capacity. (Divine Names, Ch.8, para.7).

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**SAINT JUSTIN MARTYR  
"THE PHILOSOPHER" (+165)**

**1**

Now, that the soul lives, no one would deny. But if it lives, it lives not as being life, but as the partaker of life; but that which partakes of anything is different from that of which it partakes. Now the soul partakes of life, since God wills it to live. Thus, then, it will not even partake if God does not will it to live. For to live is not its attribute, as it is God's; but as a man does not live always and the soul is not forever conjoined with the body, whenever this harmony must be broken up, the soul leaves the body and the person exists no longer. (DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHON, Ch.6).

**2**

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.... For where He promises to save man, there He gives the promise to the flesh. For what is man but the rational animal composed of body and soul? Is the soul by itself man? No; but the soul of man. Would the body be called man? No, but it is called the body of man. If, then, neither of these is by

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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. (ON THE RESURRECTION, Ch.8)

3

The souls of the pious remain in a better place, while those of the unjust and wicked are in a worse, waiting for the time of judgment.(DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHON, Ch.5).

4

...since it is likely enough that they themselves are now lamenting in hades, and repenting with a too late repentance; and if it were possible for them to show you thence what has befallen them after the termination of this life, you would know what fearful ills they desired to deliver you from. But now since it is not possible in this present life that you either learn from them...it follows that one thing remains for you to do, that...you read the prophecies of the sacred writers, not requiring from them faultless diction (for the matters of our religion lie in works not in words), and learn from them what will give you life everlasting. (HORTATORY ADDRESS, Ch.35).

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### **SAINT ATHENAGORAS OF ATHENS (A.D. 177)**

Death and sleep are analogous: "And let no one think it strange that we call by the name of life a continuance of being which is interrupted by death and corruption; but let him consider rather that this word has not one meaning only, nor is there only one measure of continuance, because the nature also of the things that continue is not one. For if each of the things that continue has its continuance according to its peculiar nature, neither in the case of those who are wholly incorruptible and immortal shall we find the continuance like ours, because the natures of superior beings do not take the level of such as are inferior; nor in men is it proper to look for a continuance invariable and unchangeable; inasmuch as the former are from the first created immortal, and continue to exist without end by the simple will of their Maker, and men, in respect of the soul, have from their first origin an unchangeable continuance, but in respect of the body obtain immortality by means of change. This is what is meant by the doctrine of the resurrection; and, looking to this, we both await the dissolution of the body, as the sequel to a life of want and corruption, and after this we hope for a continuance with immortality, not putting either our death on a level with the death of the irrational animals, or the continuance of man with the continuance of immortal [beings], lest we should unawares in this way put human nature and life on a level with things with which it is not proper to compare them. It ought not, therefore, to excite dissatisfaction, if

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some inequality appears to exist in regard to the duration of men; nor, because the separation of the soul from the members of the body and the dissolution of its parts interrupts the continuity of life, must we therefore despair of the resurrection. For although the relaxation of the senses and of the physical powers, which naturally takes place in sleep, seems to interrupt the sensational life when men sleep at equal intervals of time, and, as it were, come back to life again, yet we do not refuse to call it life; and for this reason, I suppose, some call sleep the brother of death, not as deriving their origin from the same ancestors and fathers, but because those who are dead and those who sleep are subject to similar states, as regards at least the stillness and the absence of all sense of the present or the past, or rather existence itself and their own life. If, therefore, we do not refuse to call by the name of life the life of men full of such inequality from birth to dissolution, and interrupted by all those things which we have before mentioned, neither ought we to despair of the life succeeding to dissolution, such as involves the resurrection, although for a time it is interrupted by the separation of the soul from the body." (ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, Ch. 16, editor's emphasis).

### **SAINT IRENAE OF LYONS (+203)**

#### **1**

Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the

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man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and union of the soul receiving the spirit...and the admixture of that fleshly nature...For that flesh which has been moulded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and a part of a man. Neither is the soul itself...the man; but it is the soul of a man, and part of a man. (AGAINST HERESIES, Book 4, Ch.6:1).

### 2

...How must these men not be put to confusion, who allege that "the lower parts" refers to this world of ours, but that the inner man, leaving the body here, ascends into the super-celestial place? For as the Lord "went away in the midst of the shadow of death" (Ps.23:4), where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up [into heaven], it is manifest that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event; then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is, bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come thus into the presence of God. "For no disciple is above his Master, but everyone that is perfect shall be as his Master" (Lk.6:40). (AGAINST HERESIES, Book 5, 31:2).

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### 3

For it is just that in the very condition [or, form] 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. (ibid, 22:1).

### 4

## **Against the Aerial Toll House Teaching**

"...Using the above-named invocations [magical words] the person... may become incapable of being seized upon by principalities and powers, [so] that their inner man may ascend on high..[as their] body [in death] is left among the created things of this world. ...[Gnostics teach that] when the [evil angelic] companions of the Demiurge [their creator] hear [their incantations], they are greatly agitated [and overcome]." ...Salvation belongs to the soul alone. (Irenae of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, Bk.1, Chap.21, Par.5.)

## **SAINT TITUS OF BOSTRA (+378)**

### 1

But though the soul be immortal [by grace], yet it is not the person, and so the Apostle does not consider [death] to differ in any wise from destruction. For the soul cannot enjoy anything, or possess, or do anything, or suffer, except it be together with the body, being the same as it was created in the beginning, and thus it enjoys that

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which is proper to it. This state is lost in death through the disobedience of Adam, and again through the obedience of the one Christ, through hope it receives [in the resurrection] again the state of being a person. (AGAINST THE MANICHEANS, Homily 1, P.G.96:489B).

### 2

A man is properly said to be a man whilst he remains within the confines of his proper form ....Therefore when the living body is dissolved by death and we should look upon its dust or its bones, or should we wish to say something about the soul [of the deceased], we say that these things are of a human, but we do not say that they are the man. (ibid, Para.16, quoted by St John Damascene).

## **SAINT PHOTIOS THE GREAT (+891)**

### 1

The name "man," according to the most truthful and natural expression, [applies to] neither the soul without [its] body, nor to the body without [its] soul, but to that composition of soul and body made into a unique form of beauty. But Origen says that the soul alone is the man, as did Plato. (BIBLIOTHEKE, Nr. 234).

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2

Death is nothing else but protracted sleep. (THE AMPHILOKHIA, Ques.167).

### **SAINT METHODIOS OF OLYMPOS (+311)**

Man, with respect to his nature, is most truly said to be neither soul without body, nor, on the other hand, body without soul; but being composed out of the union of soul and body into one form of the beautiful.(Against Origen, ON THE RESURRECTION, 1:5).

### **SAINT CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE (200-258)**

1

No one should be made sad by death, since in living is labour and peril, in dying peace and the certainty of resurrection. (TREATISE 58).

2

In the place of the departed there is no confession neither can confession be made there. (LETTER 51).

### **SAINT APHRAAT THE PERSIAN (A.D. 337)**

...A sinner while he is living is dead unto God; and a

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righteous man, though dead, is alive unto God. For such, death is a sleep, as David said, I lay down and slept and awoke (Ps.3:4). Again Isaiah said, "They that sleep in the dust shall awake" (Is.26 :19). And our Lord said concerning the daughter of the chief of the synagogue, "The damsel is not dead, but sleeping a slumber" (Mt.9 :26). And concerning Lazarus, He said to His disciples: "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go to waken him" (Jn.9:11). And the Apostle said: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1Cor.15:51). And again he said: "Concerning them that sleep, be ye not grieved" (1Ths.4:13).

But it is right for us to be afraid of the second death (Rv.2:11; 20:14; 21:18), that which is full of weeping and gnashing of teeth, and of groaning and miseries, that which is situated in outer darkness. But blessed shall be the faithful and the righteous in that Resurrection, in which they expect to be awakened and to receive the good promises made them. But as for the wicked who are not faithful, in the Resurrection woe to them, because of that which is laid up for them! It would be better for them according to the faith which they possess, were they not to arise. For the servant, for whom his Lord is preparing stripes and bonds, while he is sleeping desires not to awake, for he knows that when the dawn shall come and he shall awake, his Lord will scourge and bind him. But the good servant, to whom his Lord has promised gifts, looks expectantly for the time when dawn shall come and he shall receive gifts from his Lord. And even though he is soundly sleeping, in his dream he sees something like

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what his Lord is about to give him, whatsoever He has promised him, and he rejoices in his dream, and exults, and is gladdened. As for the wicked, his sleep is not pleasant to him, for he imagines that lo! the dawn has come for him, and his heart is broken in his dream. But the righteous sleep, and their slumber is pleasant to them, in the day-time and the night-time, and they have no perception of all that long night, and like one hour is it accounted in their eyes. Then in the watch of the dawn they awake with joy. But as for the wicked, their sleep lies heavy upon them, and they are like a man who is laid low by a great and deep fever, and tosses on his couch hither and thither, and he is terrified the whole night long, which lengthens itself out for him, and he fears the dawn when his Lord will condemn him.

But our faith thus teaches, that when men fall asleep, they sleep this slumber without knowing good from evil. And the righteous receive not their promise, nor do the wicked receive their sentence of punishment, until the Judge come and separate those whose place is at His right hand from those whose place is at His left. (SELECT DEMONSTRATIONS, Ch.8, Para.18-20)

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**SAINT EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN (+373)**

**1**

**HYMN ON PARADISE**

**1.** There came to my ears a word which gladdened me,  
// A word which one reads in Scripture in the tale of the thief, // And it consoled me amidst my many transgressions. // He Who had mercy on the thief shall also permit me to enter // That Garden, the name of which I heard and was filled with joy. // My spirit broke its bonds and I went swiftly to contemplate her. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

**2.** I beheld there a dwelling and an arbour of light, // And a voice exclaimed: "Blessed is the thief // Who by the gift of grace received the keys of Paradise!" // I thought, at first, that the thief was here, but then I again reflected: // The soul would not be able to perceive Paradise // Without her companion, her instrument, her lyre. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

**3.** In that place of joy an anxiety overcame me, // For it is not profitable to delve into mysteries. // With respect to the thief a question came to me: // If the soul were able to see and to hear // Bereft of the body, then why would she be enclosed therein? // And if she could live without the body, why should she die with the body? // Deem me

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worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

4. That the soul is unable to see without the body // The body itself gives the proof; for when it is blind // With it the soul is also blind, and she with it feels her way. // Behold how both the soul and the body look and attest to one another: // Even as the body must have the soul so as to live, // So must the soul have the body to see and hear. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

5. If the body is deprived of speech, with it the soul is also dumb: // And furthermore she grows delirious when the body reels with sickness. // Even though the soul exists of herself and by herself, // Yet without her companion, she lacks her full existence. // She is, then, in truth like unto an embryo within the maternal womb: // Possessing life, she is bereft of word and thought. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

6. If, therefore, whilst abiding in the body, the soul is like unto an embryo, // And she can know neither herself nor her companion, // How much more feeble shall she be when she has taken leave of the body! // For then she no longer has either by herself [alone] or in herself // Any sense perceptions that she might utilize as implements, // Because it is by the senses of her companion that she manifests // herself and becomes visible. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an // inheritance!

7. That blessed dwelling knows no deficiency, // For

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that land of plenitude is in every wise perfect. // The soul, therefore, cannot enter therein alone, // Since she is found lacking in both: // Both in perception and knowledge. But on the day of the Resurrection. // The body with all its senses shall in its perfection enter into Paradise. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

**8.** When the Creator's hand fashioned the body [of man], // He made it such that it might hymn its Fashioner; // But like a silent harp it was bereft of a voice, // Until at last He breathed into it a soul, // Which brought forth through the body a hymn of praise. // Thereupon the strings received a sound, // And through the body the soul gained speech replete with wisdom. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

**9.** Once Adam's creation was altogether accomplished, // The Lord took him and placed him in Paradise. // By herself and for herself [alone] the soul could not enter therein, // But body and soul entered together, all pure, // Wholly perfect, into that wholly perfect realm. // Wherefore also together they departed from thence all defiled, // And it is evident that together at the Resurrection they shall return. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance.

**10.** Adam was a heedless guardian of Paradise, // Because the despoiler, the crafty one, drew nigh to steal, // And paying no heed to the fruit for which every other would strive to obtain, // He stole the very husbandman of the Garden. // But Adam's Lord left [Heaven] to seek him

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out, // And He descended to Hades and there He found him; // He seized him from thence and gave him leave once more to enter into Paradise. // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

**11.** In the longed-for abodes which lie within the enclosure of Paradise // The souls of the faithful and the righteous dwell, // And there they await their friends, their bodies, // So that when the door of the Garden shall open, // Both bodies and souls should cry out: Hosanna, // Blessed is He that led Adam [from Hades] and brought him into [Paradise] in the company of many! // Deem me worthy, that in Thy Kingdom we should have an inheritance!

## 2

### **THE FORTY-SEVENTH NISIBEAN HYMN**

**1.** Within both wood and flint // Fire lies concealed, // Which our intellect by its craft // Can bring to life and make to sparkle. // Now if our will can // Awaken created things, // How much more the Will // That created all! // It commanded and the soul // Shone forth within the body; // And thus the soul, which has departed and quit [the body], // Will again shine radiantly within it. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**2.** Avenge, my Lord, that calumny // Which affirms that the soul // Dwells in a house like a sojourner, // And that she rents the house, // Giving payment at her departure // [By] demolishing and destroying it. // May

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she enter again // And take up her dwelling there anew! //  
May she offer praises in her dwelling // And chant hymns  
in her lodging! // And may her voice again be heard // To  
come forth from the deserted tabernacle! // May both  
body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**3.** The portion of life // Will again stir in its members.  
// The motions of her thoughts // Will again stir within its  
senses. // The treasures of her fragrance // Will again  
exhale in its veins. // And the body will repay her // What  
it had borrowed, // So that through it she will regain her  
riches // And through it she will proclaim her glory, //  
When [men] will there render account // For their course  
of life and their labours. // May both body and soul, my  
Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**4.** The soul by the body's mouth // Offered up her  
prayer to the All-hearing One. // By its hands she lent  
alms // To Him that bestows all. // With its eyes she read  
Scripture // And with its ears she heard teaching. // By its  
feet she entered the door // And ministered in the house  
[of God]. // See by experience that the soul // Only exists  
completely in the body! // Blessed be He that made the  
soul so needy // That she will magnify her consort. // May  
both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy  
Paradise!

**5.** The will of the Creator of the body // Will gather  
together its dust, // Will renew it and make it // Into a  
temple of glory. // He will bring it into His bridal  
chamber // And will console its yokefellow. // And that  
which lay mournful in Hades (Sheol) // He will cause to  
rejoice. // And that of which the fools despaired, //

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Thereupon will mercy mightily prevail. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**6.** The body's fettered feet // Will leap in Paradise. // Its paralysed hands // Will pluck the fruit, even all good things. // Its blinded eyes // Will behold Him that enlightens all. // Its silenced mouth // Will again be opened. // Its sealed ears // Will hear the trumpet. // And its corrupted flesh // Will glisten with glory. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**7.** And if, although wrath, // Lust and greed, // And the rest of such hateful things // Arise from the body, // Even unbelievers affirm // That the body is a temple, // Because they can overcome // The vices by an effort of will, // And [they say] that the Spirit is not ashamed // To dwell in the body's uncleanness, // And that He is not afflicted // Like Jeremy in the pit, // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**8.** Then this very thing slays the unbelievers, // Since they are caught by their own words; // For they have condemned themselves, // Affirming that the Holy Spirit // Dwells in their bodies, // Which are execrable and gluttonous. // And while they think they have overcome, // They are overcome. // For if, when the body is foul, // It is a suitable abode for the Spirit, // How much more so through its purification // Will it be worthy of love in its resurrection! // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**9.** If a demon dwells in the body, // And although it be a detestable foreigner, // Although it be an accursed wanderer, // It loves to dwell therein, // And though

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fasting extirpates the demon, // It does not wish to depart from the avaricious man, // Then how much more will the soul // Love her abode! // For if the body and soul are in agreement, // They drive away the stranger // And call upon the Holy Spirit, // That He should dwell in them. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**10.** And if an unclean spirit // Even dwells in a libation // And perches upon a dead object, // And is enclosed therein, // And unites itself with a carved // Block of wood, bereft of intelligence, // Then how greatly will the Holy Spirit // Ardently cherish // The body which by reason of the hope [of salvation] // Was sacrificed without sacrificing! // Even its slaughter is a manifestation, // A witness of its resurrection. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**11.** "God is not a God // Of the dead," said our Lord. // Dead are those who bury // Their dead without hope, // Those who assembled and disputed with Him // Who bestows life upon the sons of men. // By the device which they contrived // They were themselves defeated. // For He cited to them the Scriptures // And brought to life the dead for them. // By word and by deed // He confirmed the resurrection. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**12.** He called Lazarus, who straightaway // Came forth and reproved them. // For if to his Lord he was dead, // He would not have been able to answer Him. // In his deadness he was alive // To that voice which raised him up. // The dead man lives, // While they were envious and

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were dead. // Our Lord wept // Over the living who were dead, // For they mourned over the resurrection // Which gladdened Lazarus. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**13.** The dead man, in whom // Hidden life is buried, // Lives unto God // Even before he shall be raised up. // And likewise the sinner // Is dead even before he dies. // The dead man [Lazarus] // Has convicted the unbelievers, // That they themselves are dead, // Being buried in their lifetimes, // [Outwardly] puffed up by their raiment, // [Inwardly] mouldering with their passions. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

**14.** May I not be seen, my Lord, // Together with these men in Gehenna! // And may they not deride me, // That I was in no wise better than they! // For at least I shall not be accused // That I did not exercise my tongue for the truth. // May I not, my Lord, // Be seen with them! // May they know that because of this // Thou didst have mercy on me in the resurrection: // Even because I spoke concerning the resurrection // As much as I was able. // May both body and soul, my Lord, // Chant hymns in Thy Paradise!

### 3

### **FROM THE FORTY-EIGHTH NISIBEAN HYMN**

Let not words bewilder thee // Which are bereft of hope! // For one is He at Whose command // Life will slay thee, // And at Whose beckoning // Death will raise thee to life. // In the treasury of His will // All things are

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found. // Death is for the righteous // A sleep in their tombs; // But life for sinners: // It [will] slay them in Gehenna. // Avenge, my Lord, [all] calumny // Against the body by Thy resurrection!

### 4

## **EPISTLE TO PUBLIOS**

[SUMMARY: 1. Description of the mirror of the Gospel; how it is affected when things are held up to it. 2. At a deeper level it also reflects the Kingdom and 3. Gehenna. 4. The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. 5. Invitation to look at the mirror and its picture of the day of Judgment; it depicts both those about to be judged. 6-8. Christ the Judge, Whose attributes are listed in hymnic terms. 8-9. Christ separates out the sheep from the goats; He Himself sits impassive and it is the deeds of each man which speak out for or against their "masters;" the traditional language of the Judgment scene is in fact just metaphorical. 10. Further exhortation to look into the mirror with a discerning mind. 11. St Ephraim describes his own experience, with his spiritual awakening. 12-13. His understanding of the Parable of the Virgins and its meaning. 14-15. His trepidation at the discovery of the real meaning of virginity and 16. his resolve to take heed of the warning. 17-20. Invitation to meditate on the fate of past generations and to descend in the mind to the depths of the grave and there ponder the end of departed kings and princes. 21. The contrast with Paradise, the vision of which merely aggravates the torments of those

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in hell. 22-23. St Ephraim expounds on the true meaning of Gehenna, putting aside the metaphorical imagery. 24. The effect of this view of hell on him, and his resolve to repent. 25. [Summary].

### **TEXT**

1. You do well not to let drop from your hands the polished mirror of the holy Gospel of your Lord, for it provides the likeness of everyone who looks into it, and it shows the resemblance of all who peer into it. And, while it preserves its own nature and undergoes no change, having no spots and being quite free from any dirt, yet when coloured objects are placed in front of it, it changes its aspect, though it itself undergoes no change: when white objects are put in front of it, it turns white; when black ones, it takes on their hue; when red, it becomes red like them; with beautiful objects, it reflects their beauty; with ugly, it becomes unsightly like them. It depicts in itself every limb of the body: it rebukes the defects of the ugly, so that they may remedy themselves, and remove the blackness from their faces. To the beautiful it declares that they should be careful of their beauty, that it does not become spotted with dirt, but rather, they should add to their natural created beauty with adornments of their own choosing. Though dumb, the mirror speaks: in its silence it cries out; although you might think it was a dead object, it makes its proclamation. Though still, it dances about; though it has no body, its womb is spacious, and in those hidden

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chambers within it every limb is depicted. All kinds of shapes are featured in a fraction of a moment, they are created within it with a speed that is imperceptible.

2. For this mirror is a figure of the holy preaching of the outward Gospel. Within itself is depicted the beauty of the beautiful who look into it, and again in it the defects of the ugly who despise it are rebuked. And just as this natural mirror is but a figure of the Gospel, so too the Gospel is but a figure of the beauty that is above which does not fade and at which all the sins of the created world are rebuked. For in it reward is given to all who have kept their beauty from being defiled with mud. For to everyone who peers into this mirror his sins are visible, and everyone who considers it, sees there the lot which is reserved for him, whether good or bad. There the kingdom of heaven is depicted, visible to those who have a clear eye; there the lofty ranks of the good to be seen on high, there the raised ranks of the intermediate can be distinguished, and there the low ranks of the wicked are marked out. There the fair places prepared for those who are worthy of them, can be recognized, there the paradise is visible, joyous with its flowers.

3. In that mirror Gehenna too is visible, all fiery, ready for those who deserve to live there. In paradise are the glorious things promised to the good, waiting for the time when they shall receive their owners, with confident looks upon them; while in Gehenna the things promised to the wicked are groaning at the time when they shall see their owners, with their whole body bowed down. There the outer darkness is clearly to be seen, and proceeding

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from it can be heard the sound of wailing and weeping, of moans and gnashing of teeth. There, from their bonds, men cry out in their torture, which is all the greater according to their wickedness, so that they are justly afflicted.

4. There is Dives who changed his raiment every day, as he delighted in his luxuries. Now he wails from the tortures of Sheol. There Dives' doleful voice is to be heard, crying out to Abraham, the father of the just, saying, "Send your son Lazarus to wet my tongue, for I am in affliction, because my sins are burning me, and my wicked deeds are roasting me as if they were coals of oak." The just reply leaves the mouth of the upright one, sent on its way to the wicked like a swift messenger, flying fast-winged above the fearful chasm which is set as a boundary between the good and the wicked; and the letter of justice, written down at the bidding of that just mouth, is carried direct by it, sent to that deaf ear of the man who never opened the gate of his ear for any holy message to enter. In that letter, which it bore like a swift messenger, were inscribed these melodious words of just judgment: "My son, remember that you received your good things and your luxuries during your lifetime, while Lazarus formerly received his pain and affliction, and now he is unable to come and help you in your torments, because you did not come to his help when he was tormented in sickness. For this reason you are asking him to help you, just as he used to ask you to help him — but you refused; and he is unable to come because of the great impassable chasm that separates us, so that no one

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from you can come to us, and none from us can come to you."

**5.** Look carefully, and gaze with the eye of your mind on that mirror which I have just now been telling you about. Look at the twelve thrones in it, placed ready for judgment; look at the tribes standing there in terror, at the many nations standing trembling; look at their shaking bodies, at their knees knocking together; look at their hearts beating fast, at their minds which curdle in fear; look at their faces bowed down, look at the shame fastened on them like darkness; look at their souls, all troubled, at their spirits flickering; look at their tears welling over and soaking the dust under their feet; look at the colour of their faces, turned to green: one takes on the colour, and passes it on to his neighbour. Look at their faces which used to be happy, but are now changed to become like sooty cauldrons. Listen to their innumerable groans, to their wailing moan, listen to their bitter lamentation, and the sound of their inward parts knocking together. Look at their secret deeds, which have now come out into the open: what was performed in the dark is now as clear as the sun; things they did in secret now cry out with a loud voice. Look how everyone stands with his actions in front of him, justly accusing him before his judge. Look at their evil thoughts, which have now taken on bodily form, and stand there in front of their masters accusing them. Look at the disparaging whispers which now cry out at the top of their voice, and the hidden traps which are now made manifest before them....

**6.** Look at the judge of righteousness, ready seated;

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look at the Word of his Father, at the wisdom of his nature, at the arm of his glory, at the right hand of his mercy, at the ray of his light, at the manifestation of his rest, at him who is equal in essence with his begetter, at him whose nature is commensurate with that from which he sprang, at him who is near to him, yet far from him, at him who is mingled with him, yet distinct from him, who is with him and is not distant, at his right hand and not far off, who shares his throne, and not as an alien; the gate of salvation, the way of truth, the propitiatory lamb, the purificatory sacrifice, the priest who removes guilt, the purifying sprinkling, the creator of works, the fashioner and establisher, the moulder of creatures, who gives feeling to dust, clothing earth with perception, giving movement to all flesh, making distinct the places of every species, transforming innumerable faces, renewing the minds of all generations; he sows all kinds of wisdom in all things. The stretcher out of the heavens, the adorer of the luminaries, who gives names to them all, who established the earth on foundations that cannot be felt, the architect of the mountains, the builder of the hills, the ordainer of vegetation, who causes trees to germinate, who ...?... wood, who causes fruit to come, who provides different tastes, who gives colours to the flowers and different shapes to all the plants; who measured the heavens with the span of his fingers — with that hand which cannot be measured; Who measured out in the palm of his hand the dust of the earth — in that right hand of his that is beyond measurement; who weighed the mountains in scales — with that knowledge which cannot

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be comprehended; who weighed the hills in the balance — with that unfailing understanding which considers there the gathered waters of the sea that surround created things, and the deeps of the ocean that cannot be explored by us, as less than a mere drop.

7. God of God, second essential light, treasury of all riches that have been or shall be, created; Judge of the tribes, the measure of justice, the scales that know no deceit, the straight rod, the balance that does not deceive, unfailing wisdom, mind that never passes away, he who brings change in creation, the renewer of nature, who gives life to mortality, who dispels the cloud of darkness, who brings to nought the power of iniquity, who weakens the hand of Sheol, who breaks off the sting of wickedness, who brings out the captives into the light, who raises up those prostrate in perdition, the dispeller of darkness, the establisher of rest, who opens the mouths that are closed, who gives breath to the soul as of the old.

8. Look then on that divine child, whose names exceed what creation can count, whose titles surpass what the world can reckon; king of kings, the Christ assured by the prophets, who is spoken of in the prophets, the sender of the Spirit, who sanctifies through the Spirit every soul, whose aid is manifest. Consider this only-begotten one, with so many names, who carries out the will of him who sent him, whose will conforms with the will of his begetter. Look at him on that day, sitting at the right hand of his begetter, setting the sheep to his right at that hour, and the goats to his left at that moment, calling to his blessed ones, "Come, inherit the kingdom" — that was

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prepared for them from of old in his knowledge, and was made ready for them from the beginning of creation. He thanks them for having fed him when he was hungry – in the person of the poor; for having given him to drink when he was thirsty – in the person of the ill-treated; for having clothed him when he was naked – in the person of the destitute; for having visited him when he was in prison – in the person of prisoners; for having taken him in when he was a stranger – in the person of foreigners; for having visited him when he was ill – in the person of the sick. And when they did not acknowledge before him their good works, those excellent works, which were depicted on their limbs themselves cried out in their behalf and gave their testimony; and like excellent fruit on delightful trees they festooned them and hung like clusters, in order to testify the truth concerning those who had performed these deeds.

9. For just as the actions of the wicked accuse the wicked before the righteous judge, making them bend double and hold down their heads in shame and silence, in the same way the excellent deeds of the good make their defence before him who is Good. For the deeds of all mankind are at once silent and eloquent – silent by their nature, but eloquent when one looks at them. For there are no questions asked there, since the judge has full knowledge, nor are there any replies, for he hears by what he sees. He hears by what he sees, and he sees by what he hears, since by means of what is not expressed there is hearing and sight, speed (or lightness) and touch, perception and the sense of smell, taste and discernment,

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knowledge and judgment; and by the same unexpressed means there is handed out reward for (or consisting of) good deeds (or things) and punishment for (or consisting of) evil to those on both sides, on the right and on the left. Not that there really is a right or left there, but these are just terms we use for those who are honoured, and for those who are of low estate; and we speak of a [judge's] throne, and we call the place of the good "the right," and we name the place of the wicked "the left;" we call the good "sheep," because of their humility, and we call the wicked "goats" because of their obstinacy; we call his justice "scales" and his reward towards us "the measure of truth."

**10.** Take hold, therefore, of that smooth mirror of the divine Gospel in your two hands and gaze with the pure eye that can make you see that divine mirror – for not everyone is able to see in it his soul (or himself), only the person who has a heart that can distinguish, a mind that can feel, an eye that is desirous of beholding what can help it. Look into it, then, and see all the reflections of creation, the delineation of mankind – of both the good and the wicked. Out of it peer the beautiful images of the works of the good, and the disfigured images of the actions of the wicked – for they are all conceived within it, ready to be born in the proper time, so as to sing the praises of those who performed the (good) works, and to ridicule those who carried out the (evil) actions. See, just as the mirror mocks the ugly here (on earth), so it will there too, showing up in itself their ugly action. And just as it can make the distinction and praise the good here, so

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it will delineate in its midst their good deeds.

**11.** Sometimes we too used to stand in error, and our ...?... were sunk in pride of mind as if in mud, without our realising our error, in that our soul was unable to perceive itself, and though we gazed every day (in the mirror), we were like blind men groping in the dark, because our inner mind did not possess the faculty of distinguishing. It was then, as if it were out of a deep sleep, that the flowing mercies of the Most High were sprinkled like pure water on our sleepfulness, and we were awoken out of our sleep, and we boldly grasped the mirror in order to see ourselves (or our soul) in it, and at that moment we were rebuked for our faults, and we were discovered to be destitute of every good habit, but instead made into a lodging place for all kinds of destructive thoughts, and a home and resting place for every lust.

**12.** For I saw there beautiful people, and I was desirous of their beauty, and the places of the good where they were standing, and I was eager for their position. I saw their bridal chamber opposite, which no one who has not a lamp may enter; I saw their joy, and I myself sat down in mourning, not possessing works worthy of that bridal chamber. I saw them clothed with the robe of light, and I was grieved that [I] had prepared no virtuous raiment. I saw their crowns adorned with victory, and I was pained that I had no victorious deeds with which to be crowned. I saw there the virgins knocking, and no one opening for them, and I groaned that I was empty of the works of the blessed oil.

**13.** I saw there great crowds, crying out at the gate, and

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no one answering them, and I was disturbed that I had not that way of life which authorised the opening of the gate of the kingdom. I heard a clamour of many voices saying "Lord, Lord, open for us," and a voice from thence fell on my ears, which swore by itself that "I do not recognize you as being worthy of salvation." I saw there those who were clamouring "we have eaten and drunken in your presence," but he answered and told them "it was not me you were wanting, but simply because you ate bread and had your fill."

**14.** Then I, who like them, had always taken shelter in his name, and had benefited from the honours given to it, having always spread his name, like a covering, over my secret faults — then I was seized with fear, and trembling shook me, and a great trepidation counselled me to turn back and see if there might meet me any of the provisions required for that narrow road which leads to the land of salvation [or, life]. For I did not see anyone there who was in a position to succour his neighbour by wetting his tongue in that burning fire; for that deep chasm, which makes a division between the good and the wicked, did not allow them to succour one another.

**15.** I saw there pure virgins whose virginity had been rejected because it had not been adorned with the good oil of excellent works; they begged their fellow virgins to give them aid, but they got no pity; (they asked) to be given a chance to go and buy (good) works for themselves, but they were refused it, because the end (and) their departure from the world was imminent. And I approached the gate of the kingdom of heaven, and I

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also saw there those who did not have the title of virginity, but who were crowned with victorious deeds, their conduct having filled the place of virginity. For just as those who had been betrothed to him in body alone had been rejected, being bare of the clothing of good deeds, so those whose bodies had been betrothed in chaste marriage, while their spirit was bound in the love of their Lord, were chosen, being clothed in love of Him as with a robe, with the desire for Him permeating all their limbs.

**16.** When I saw these there I said in my mind, "let no man any longer trust in the chaste reputation alone of virginity when it is deprived of the works which constitute the oil of the lamps." And while I was chastened by the fearful sight of the torture of others, I heard another voice from the mirror's mouth, which called out, "be careful, sluggish one, of your poor soul, for it is something very fearful to fall into the hands of the living God." Have you not heard the children crying out to you that "if a man gain the entire world, but lose his soul, what profit has he?" Or again, "what can a man give in exchange for his soul"? Do you not see what happened to the man whose land brought in vast crops, and because he said to his soul, "my soul, eat, drink and take your rest and pleasure, for you have vast crops stored up for you for many years," have you not heard that, while the word was still sweet in his mouth, a bitter message was poured out into his inmost ear, crying out to him as he was all faint, and saying, "this night they will require your beloved soul. Who will have all this that you have prepared"?

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**17.** Hold in awe this imprint of yours, and consider where are all those children of Adam who have swarmed in the world like locusts from the very first day. Wake yourself from this slumber which makes you lax, and which is spread like the shadow of death over all your limbs. Stand up and come, take yourself back to those former generations that you have heard about: where is Adam, and where are your ancestors who luxuriated in the midst of the garden of Eden like well-fed sheep, and who spoke fearlessly with God as though they were his fellows – [men] whose arm held subject the entire creation under its authority: their hand controlled sea and dry land, the fearful dragons they trampled under foot, while the fierce wild animals of today bent their heads in subjection to them. Their mind was fixed on heaven, and they explored the bottom of the depths as if it was dry land.

**18.** Where are those ten generations from Adam to Noah? Were they not washed away in the flood of water? Where are the generations of the men of Sodom? Were they not also washed away in the flood of fire? Where are the generations from that time up till today, where are they? – people who at that time lived for a thousand years more or less, have they not faded out and come to an end? And if their names had not been recorded in ink on the skins of lambs and so preserved the memory of their names for us, we would not even have known that they existed.

**19.** Come, I will take you out to the dark graveyards, and descend with me in your mind to lowest Sheol, and

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I will show you there kings lying prostrate on their faces, with their crowns buried in the ground with them. Come, look at the nobles, who luxuriated in silks, how worms have become their bed and vermin their covering. Come and look at the generals who once commanded myriads of forces, how they are now become useless vessels of dust, and something that has no perception. Take a good look at the dust of the ground, and gaze upon it, for it resembles you. How long will you deceive yourself, thinking that you are better than the grass of the roof, grass which a single day's heat withers up; and the breath of fever can dry up a healthy body in a single day too.

Where are the kings with their garments, their crowns and their purple; where are their powers and their wars, their armies and assemblies, their wealth and their treasure? Look at their spears lying broken, at their bows unstrung, at their swords rusted, at their weapons decayed: generations which have removed and passed on, the tread of their lives shrivelled up like the home of worms at their death, and like a warp ready to be cut off the loom, they suffer the destruction of uprooting.

**20.** See how their songs have been changed into mourning, their music into the sound of weeping, their mirth overthrown and turned into mourning, their pleasant tunes changed to songs of lament. A garment of spider's web has been woven for them there, and they have a despicable bed of worms beneath them, and a covering of vermin is spread over them like some garment. Upturned tables lie before them, the brilliant position of their former luxurious state is overthrown, and

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their post of office is upturned and rendered quite useless. Their honour lies prostrate in the dust, and their luxury is hidden in ashes there. Bridegrooms snatched away, and brides, left deserted, have been cast down from their very bridal chamber, with crowns fading on their heads and sprinkled with the dust on the earth beside them; a gloomy garment is spread over them, one which Sheol has woven for them on a dingy web. You would hear the sound of wailing from every mouth, for no one is able to comfort his companion there.

**21.** The sight their eyes see gives them pain, stretching to the boundary of the chasm and passing quickly over it and flying to the garden of Eden, hovering over God's Paradise, it beholds the blessed resting place, and is envious of the tables of the kingdom; it hears the sound of pure songs mixed with sacred melodies and mingled with the praises of God, which make a wreath for their height with their full extent, and open up the gates of the kingdom. The songs hover in front of their Lord in joy, just sending their sound from one mouth to another. The vision of the eye is also permitted there 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 [i.e., their own lot], while the wicked see themselves the more condemned, and their pain increased.

**22.** And maybe it is that 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 who is seated in the discerning mind has

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spoken, and has become for them there the righteous judge, who beats them without mercy with the torments of contrition. Perhaps it is this which separates them out, sending each one to the appropriate place; perhaps it is this which grasps the good with its right hand stretched out [or, 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;" maybe it is this which silently accuses them, and quietly pronounces sentence upon them.

23. My opinion is that 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 that Lord of the law. And for this reason such authority has been given to it so that it may be separated up in every generation and yet remain one, and be marked in every body yet remain undivided, and depicted in every heart yet remain not split up, flying unwearied over all, and rebuking all without shame, teaching all, yet using no force, giving counsel, but employing no compulsion, reminding them of the judgment to come by means of warnings, bringing to their mind the kingdom of heaven so that they may desire it, explaining the rewards of the good so that they may yearn for them, showing to them the power of judgment, that they may restrain themselves, telling them of the gentleness of the Only-begotten, that they may take courage, running with them after every good thing and strengthening them, hovering over them and rebuking them as they stoop to what is hateful. For its mercy resembles that of its Lord, in that it does not depart

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from them when they are soiled in filth, and is not ashamed of them when they lie wallowing in the mud. Those who listen to it, it will remind, those who disobey it, it will overtake. Here [on earth] it is mingled with them in every way, while there it stands up in front of them on this day (of judgment).

**24.** When I saw all this in that clear mirror of the holy Gospel of my Lord, my soul grew feeble, and my spirit was quenched, and my stature bent down to the dust. My heart was filled with bitter groans, in the hope that somehow my stains might be washed white in my tears. I remembered the good Lord and gentle God, who wipes out the bond of the debtors' debt through tears, who accepts weeping in place of burnt sacrifices. And when I reached this point I took refuge in repentance, and sheltered under the wings of repentance, and I took cover in the shade of humility, saying "what else do I need henceforth to offer him who has no need of burnt sacrifices except a meek spirit, for this constitutes the perfect sacrifice that can make propitiation for shortcomings; and a broken heart in place of burnt offerings is something that God will not reject. Instead of a libation of wine [I will offer] tears that propitiate."

**25.** This, then, is what I saw in that eloquent and living mirror, in which the images of all the actions of mankind vibrate — from Adam up to the end of the world, and from the resurrection until the day of the just judgment. And what I heard from the blessed voice which was audible from inside the mirror I have recorded in this letter, my beloved brother. [Footnotes not included in this edition]

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(See also Chapter Six of the text).

### **SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN (+397)**

#### 1

Christ...judges by his knowledge of hearts and not by interrogation of the deeds, to reward virtue and condemn impiety. (HOMILY ON LUKE'S GOSPEL, 10:49).

#### 2

And this is the course and ground of justice, that since the action of body and soul is common to both (for what the soul has conceived the body has carried out)...it would seem almost inconsistent that...the mind 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 would suffer which had not sinned alone, or should alone attain to glory, not having fought alone with the help of grace....The reason...is complete and just, but I do not require a reason from Christ. If I am convinced by reason, I reject faith. (ON BELIEF IN THE RESURRECTION, Bk.2, 88-89).

#### 3

Christ, then, is the first-fruits of them that rest. But is this [only] of His own who are at rest, who, as it were, freed from death, are holden by a kind of sweet slumber,

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or of all those who are dead? "As in Christ all die, so too in Christ shall all be made alive" (1Cor.15:22) (ibid, 91).

### 4

So as a pilgrim he [David] hastened to that common homeland of the saints, asking that because of the wickedness of his sojourn here his sins be forgiven him before he departed this life. The one who does not obtain pardon for his sins here will not be there; that man will not be there who cannot come to eternal life, because eternal life is the remission of sins. Therefore, David says, "forgive me that I might be refreshed before I go and am no more." (ON THE GOOD OF DEATH, para.6).

### 5

For the soul is indeed mocked by the eyes' sight and the ears' hearing, and therefore it must leave and abandon them. (ibid, para.10).

### 6

Therefore, while the fulness of time is awaited, souls await the reward due them. Punishment awaits some, glory others and yet the former are not meanwhile free from suffering, nor the latter without reward. For the former "are disturbed" seeing that for those observing the law of God a reward of glory is set aside, their dwelling

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places are kept by the angels, but for them future punishments, shame and confusion for their negligence and obstinacy, so that while looking on the glory of the Most High, they are ashamed to come into his sight, whose commands they violated. Their confusion is just like the sin of Adam, for just as he fell by his neglect of the heavenly commandments, and hid himself out of shame for his fall, not daring to submit to the splendour of the divine presence because of the shame of his sinful conscience, so also the souls of sinners will be unable to bear the splendour of His shining light, because by their own testimony they recall that they have sinned. (ibid, para.47)

## 7

The foolish, however, dread death as if it were the sum total of evils, but the wise desire it as the repose after toil and the end to evils.

The foolish fear death for two reasons. The first is because they call it annihilation....The second reason is because they dread punishments, terrified to be sure, by the fables of the poets, the barkings of Cerberus, the gloomy whirlpool of the river Cocytus, the even gloomier Charon, the array of Furies [demons], or the steep cliffs of Tartarus, then...in which the savage Hydra has its abode....These are full of fables. (ibid, para.32-33).

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### 8

Therefore, recently we lamented the death of this prince, and now we are celebrating the fortieth day, with prince Honorius assisting....Because as holy Joseph performed the burial rites for his father Jacob during forty days, so this son offers due ceremonies for his father Theodosius. And because some are accustomed to observe the third and the thirtieth day, others the seventh and the fortieth, let us consider what the text teaches. Thus when Jacob died, "Joseph commanded," it says, "the servant undertakers to bury him, and the undertakers buried Israel, and forty days were completed for him; for thus the days of the funeral rites are reckoned and Egypt mourned for his seventy days." Accordingly, that solemnity which the text prescribes is to be followed. But also in Deuteronomy it is written that the children of Israel mourned for Moses thirty days, and the days of mourning were finished. Each observance, then, has authority because the necessary duty of filial piety is accomplished. (ORATION ON THE FORTIETH DAY OF THE DEATH OF THEODOSIOS).

### **SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (344-407)**

#### 1

Let us not, therefore, seek to hear from dead men what the Scriptures teach us much more clearly every day. For if God knew that resurrected dead men could be of profit

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to the living, then He – Who brings to pass all things for our benefit – would not have neglected or let pass [the opportunity to give us] such gain. But besides this, if dead men were to be raised up continuously to proclaim to us all things that are yonder, then in time this also would be set at naught, and moreover, the devil could introduce wicked doctrines with much ease. For he could often show forth apparitions or further, he could contrive that certain men should seem to die and be buried and then he could show them as being risen from the dead, and by means of these men he could persuade the minds of the deluded of whatsoever he wished. If indeed now, when there is no one who has arisen from the dead, dreams very often appear in the likenesses of the departed and have corrupted and led many astray, then if such a thing actually happened and it became established in the minds of men that many of the departed have returned again, how much more so could the despicable demon weave ten thousand wiles and introduce great delusion into this life. For this very reason God closed the doors and has not permitted any man who has departed this life and returned to express those things yonder, lest the devil, taking this opportunity, should introduce all his own doctrines [or, things]. For when there were prophets, the devil raised up false prophets; when apostles, then false apostles; and when Christ appeared, then false christs; and when sound doctrines were brought in, he introduced corrupt ones, everywhere sowing tares. And so if this thing also were to happen [i.e., the above described], he would attempt to feign the same through his own

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instruments, not truly raising up dead men, but by certain sorceries and deceptions he would deceive the eyes of the beholders, or else, as I just said, he could contrive that certain should seem to die, and thus he would turn all things upside down and confuse them. But God, forseeing all this, closed off this plot to him and, sparing us, permitted not that any man should ever come from thence and speak to the living about the things yonder, and hereby He teaches us to hold the Divine Scripture to be more worthy of credence than anything else. (HOMILY 4 ON LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN).

### 2

Let us not be persuaded by the demon at all, but though he say something true, let us flee and turn away from him. For sound and saving doctrines are not to be accurately learned from demons, but from Divine Scripture. Now so as to know that a soul which departs from the body does not fall under the tyranny of the devil, listen to what Paul says, "He who is dead is freed from sin," that is, he no longer sins. 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. (HOMILY 2 ON LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN, PG.48:984).

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### 3

Nor indeed is it possible for a soul, once torn away from its body, to wander here any more. For, "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God" (Ws.3:1); and if [those souls] of the righteous, then those children's souls also: for neither are they wicked: and the souls too of sinners are straightway led away hence... And it cannot be that a soul, when it is gone forth from the body, should wander here. (HOMILY 28 ON MATTHEW, 28:3)

### 4

We ought not to lament and wail for those who have fallen asleep: Let no man therefore, beat himself any more, nor wail, neither disparage Christ's achievement. For indeed, He overcame death. Why then do you wail for nought? The thing [death] is become a sleep. Why lament and weep?...Do you not hear the Psalm that says: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee?" (Ps.116:7). God calls it "bountiful dealing," and do you make lamentation?...Why, if there must be mourning, it is the devil who ought to mourn....This lamentation becomes his wickedness, not you....Yea, for death is a fair haven. Consider, at any rate, with how many evils our present life is filled; reflect how often you yourself have cursed our present life....For, He says, "In sorrow thou wilt bring forth children;" and, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread;" and, "In the world ye shall have tribulation."

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But of our state there, no such word at all is spoken, but all the contrary; that "grief and sorrow and sighing have fled away" (Is.35:10) Why then disgrace the departed? Why dispose the rest to fear and tremble at death? Why cause many to accuse God, as though He had done very dreadful things?...You are, therefore, fighting and warring with yourself on account of his having entered into harbour.... How shall we persuade the heathen when we fear death and shudder at it more than he? (*HOMILY 31 ON MATTHEW*, 31:2-4)

### 5

For where tears are — or rather, where miracles are, there tears ought not to be; not where such a mystery is celebrating. Hear, I beseech you:...in the case of our reposed likewise, a great mystery is celebrating. If, as we sit together, the emperor were to send and invite one of us to the palace, would it be right, I ask, to weep and mourn? Angels are present, commissioned from heaven and having come from there, sent from the King Himself to call the fellow servant, and do you weep? Do you not know what a mystery it is that is taking place, how awesome, how dread, and worthy indeed of hymns and praises? Would you learn, that you may know that this is no time for tears? For it is a very great mystery of the wisdom of God. As leaving her dwelling the soul goes forth, speeding on her way to her own Lord, and do you mourn? Why then, you should do this on the birth of a child: for this in fact is also a birth, and a better than that.

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For here she goes forth to a very different light, is loosed as from a prison [i.e., the prison of the passions], comes off as from a contest....For as the sun arises clear and bright, so the soul, leaving the body with a pure conscience, shines joyously...when the soul having left the body is departing in company with angels. Think what the soul must be then! In what amazement, what wonder, what delight! Why do you mourn? (HOMILY 21 ON ACTS, 21:5).

### 6

For tell me what hope is there when our sins accompany us thither, where there is no putting off sins? As long as they were here, perchance there was great expectation that they would change, that they could become better; but when they are gone...nought can be gained from repentance. (HOMILY 3 ON PHILIPPIANS, para.24).

### 7

We must set our hopes for salvation in our own achievements, not enumerating fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers, nor kinsmen, friends, relatives and neighbours. "A brother cannot redeem; shall a man redeem?" (P.G. 48:1007).

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### 8

If you have Paul as your father, and you have martyrs as your own brothers, but you do not imitate their virtue, you shall have no profit from this relationship, but it shall rather harm and condemn you. (P.G. 48:1036).

### 9

Neither kinship, nor friendship, nor affection, nor any other thing in existence can be of profit to the man who is betrayed by his own way of life...nor can the virtue of other men be of any help to us then [when we have departed this life]. (P.G. 48:1005).

### 10

But when you are gone away thither, neither of these things will you have it in your power to do at need. And with good reason. For you who have had so long a period fixed [given to] you, and have done good neither for yourself or anyone else, how when you are under the Judge's Hand shall you be able to obtain this grace? Putting all these things together then, let us cling fast to our own salvation, and not lose the opportunity of this present life. For it is possible, it is, even at our last breath to please God. It is possible to gain approval by your last will. (HOMILY 18 ON ROMANS).

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### 11

But if you have not been minded to do this, at all events do some noble act upon your death- bed. For this is not what a strong love for Christ would do, yet still it is an act of love. For if you will not have the high place with the lambs, still even to be after them at all is no light thing, and so not to be placed with the goats nor on the left hand. (ibid).

### 12

And this is the reason for the prayers, psalms and glorification of God [at the burial service]: so that you not weep and lament, but rather give thanks unto God Who has taken him [the departed]. (P.G. 96:33A).

### 13

If the remembrance of a just man had so great power, when deeds are done for one, how great power will it not have? Not in vain did the Apostles order that remembrance should be made of the dead in the terrible Mysteries. They know that great gain results to them, great benefit....And this we do for those who have departed in faith, while [even] the catechumens are not thought worthy of even this consolation. (**HOMILY 3 ON PHILIPPIANS**, para.24).

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### **SAINT PAULINUS OF NOLA (+431)**

David himself, when his two sons whose virtues were so different were lost to him, exemplified this mysterious truth. He wept for his beloved son when this son was ill, but not when this son was dead, since he knew that the child had passed to the happiness of eternal peace. But he wept for the dead Absalom, whom he had made his enemy, because as prophet he was aware of God's justice. He had no hope that this impious son would obtain rest, and he knew that the blessing of the resurrection was not owed to one who had killed his brother. But, as I say, he wept for the first child when it was sick, and put off his royal garment for black clothing, and supported his prayers to God with fasting and goat hair and ashes. But when death brought his son's sickness to an end, he made the end of the child's life the end of his grief, once the material cause of his worry vanished. So the son was freed from his body and the father from his grief. David simultaneously laid aside his sadness and his garments, took food, put on again his royal apparel, and anointed his head which was foul with dust. When his servants, astonished at this unusual manifestation of parental love, asked the reason for David's grief before his deprivation and his joy after it, he replied: "I shall go to him rather, but he shall not return to me."

I think that the king and prophet has given us sufficient instruction on the anxiety which we are to assume after our loved ones have gone. We are to concern ourselves with the journey [of life] by which we ourselves follow,

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rather than with the journey of them who have already gone before us and arrived. It is a loving act to show sadness when our dear ones are torn from us, but it is a holy act to be joyful through hope and trust in the promises of God, and to say to one's troubled soul "Why art thou sad, O my soul, and why dost thou trouble me? Shall he that sleepeth rise no more?"

Thankful joy is more acceptable to God than long and querulous grief. We learn by David's example not to shed superfluous tears. Tears bestowed on the dead are especially vain – they do nothing for the one whom God has taken, and they oppress the one left behind. So David wept while his son lived, but was joyful when the son was dead; for whilst the child breathed the father could by prayers and tears still obtain a respite from death, but once the child had been summoned by God it was David's duty to be thankful, as indeed he was – for the will of God is undoubtedly superior to our wishes.

So let us perform the duties of love without breaching our faith, and prefer the joys of faith without damage to our love. Granted our love may weep for a time, but our faith must ever rejoice. We should long for those who have been sent before us, but we should not lose hope of gaining them back. For "ours is the God of the living and not of the dead," and Paul says that the dead are asleep in Christ. You are to understand from the work "sleep" that death is not permanent. For one who sleeps is later roused and arises. So in our love for our dear-ones, let us show the longing of intimate friendship, but let us console ourselves by that confidence in the resurrection which is

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afforded by our faith.

Accordingly, my dearest brother, you must follow the authority of these heavenly words and examples, not only in the shedding of loving tears, but also in restraining them. For it is written: "All things have their season." The time for weeping is surely past, and now it is the time for joy, for the Lord is at hand.

Divine Scripture, which allows us to prolong our tears as though to disperse our grief, enjoins also a limit to them at a fixed time. It says that "the bitterness of grief is to be borne for a single day." What riches God's goodness affords! With what loving care for us He makes this stipulation! He does not begrudge our ready love, but He is aware of our weakness and restrains any immoderation: so He commands us to prolong our tears over the dead, but restricts our bitter weeping to a single day. He allows us to weep the tears which dissolve our grief and relieve our souls, but He cuts short the sorrow which oppresses our minds with uncontrolled and unreasonable torture, and which our frailty cannot longer endure. But God in His love explains this more fully with words of His own. For in the same passage He added: "and comfort thyself at the proper time in thy sadness, for of sadness hasteneth death, and it shall overwhelm thy power. For only the sorrow that is according to God achieveth salvation." On the other hand, as Paul says, "the sorrow of the flesh," which is of man and so springs from weakness, "worketh death." Though the two authors are different, Scripture speaks in harmony through both holy men with the spirit and word of God. For real death lies in one's strength

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being overshadowed. Now if "Christ is the power of God" and our life, you see the truth of the statement that death hastens on through the grief by which our power is overwhelmed, and the whole man is, as Paul says, "swallowed up with overgreat sorrow" as if by some whirlpool of hell.

But thanks be to God, because this grief of yours and this fear of mine are balanced by my awareness of your strength and wisdom, the light from which is too abundant in you to be buried in the darkness of grief. Rather, your strength conceals your sadness and swallows up death itself and the onset of baneful grief. It is not in mere words that I attribute this power to you; this is no guess I make about it. Your actions witness this in you, and it is experience of them which compels me to speak.

I intend to pass now to the proclamation of your deeds, to the mention of your religious acts springing from your holy tears. You discharged what was due to both parts of your wife; you shed tears for her body and lavished alms for her soul. As a son of light really aware of truth, you shed tears where you knew there was death, but performed good works where you believe there is life. So upon the empty you bestow empty things, but on the living, living things.

For we do not guess at the afterlife from human opinions, the fictitious dreams of poets, or the images of philosophers, but we draw our faith in actuality from the very fount of truth. And who could have greater knowledge of things divine than God Himself, who is

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aware of His own works and laws? We shall not tell lying doctrines of souls passing into other bodies so that men become beasts, or of souls surviving utterly without bodies, or of souls dying in the body. Let those who do not possess the prophets of truth delude themselves with the lies of poets. Let those who have no hope console themselves in despair, saying: "Our time is as the passing of a shadow, and there is no going back of our end; for it is fast sealed, and no man returneth." For blinded by the darkness of their wickedness and unbelief, they cannot say "I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the light of the living." But we have no need of such desperate remedies, for we have Truth Itself. This Truth, which is God and the word of God, has promised by Its teaching, and proved by Its rising again, the resurrection of the flesh unto eternal life. For the Son of God Himself, through whom all things exist and without whom there is nothing, has testified: "I am the resurrection; he that believeth in Me, although he be dead shall live; and every one that liveth and believeth in Me shall not die forever." So that He should not maintain this solely by words, He ratified it by example. He showed to His disciples His own person, in whom all men are taken up, raised from the dead, and He instilled in them belief in His risen flesh when He said to Thomas: "Put in thy finger hither and see My hands; and bring hither thy hand and put it in My side; and be not faithless but believing, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see Me to have."

Since we have these testimonies, these proofs and this light of faith, under what circumstances will we be able

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to throw doubt on the resurrection, which we have heard from God's word, which we have seen with the eyes and felt with the hands of the apostles? Moreover, we are so closely bound and united to God through Christ that we possess the Holy Spirit whom God gave to us as an earnest on this earth, and we have the flesh of Christ as our pledge in God. For over the boundless space which separates things mortal and divine He has established His mediation like a bridge to connect the two, so that by this path the earthly may be joined with the heavenly, once the celestial incorruption has permeated our corrupt nature, once immortality, in the words of Scripture, has swallowed up our mortality, and our life, victorious in Christ and from Christ, has conquered and absorbed death.

We cannot doubt the truth of this blessing, though we can doubt if our merit deserves to obtain it. But let us carry out Christ's commands that we may obtain Christ's promises. His truth is with us; let not our faith fail Him. He is the Life, the Way, the Gate for all men. To no one does He close His kingdom, and He allows us to make entry by force.

Advance to your goal, that "you may apprehend wherein you are apprehended." Struggle along the narrow path, that you may attain the glorious possession of your eternal heritage. In your wife you have now a great pledge in Christ, one who will make efforts to win support for you. In heaven she is obtaining for you as much grace as the wealth which you accumulate for her on earth; for, as I have said, you do not honour her with

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vain grief, but rather you heap up for her the gifts of life in which she now takes pleasure. Already she enjoys the fruit of your work for her, where- as her gift to you is still newly sown.

She now obtains honour through your deserving deeds. Now she feasts on your bread and is enriched by your wealth. She is dressed "in gilded clothing, surrounded by variety," and bathed in precious light. She needs no refreshment from the tip of another's finger, for she is sprinkled with the water from her own fingers, that is, from the works of your right hand. You did not enrich her when she married you with a marriage portion as large as the wealth you pour on her now in her rest.(Letter 13)

### **SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA (+444)**

#### **1**

The blessed prophet Isaiah has somewhere introduced those who by faith in Christ have been won unto life, as calling out eagerly, so to speak, unto one another, and saying: "Come, let us go up unto the mountain of the Lord, and unto the house of the God of Jacob, and they shall teach us His way, and we will walk in it." Now by the mountain here we affirm to be meant not any earthly mountain; for to imagine this would be foolish: but rather the church which Christ has rescued for Himself. For it is high and conspicuous to people everywhere, and, so to say, exalted, because there is nothing in it which brings men down to earth. For those who dwell within it care

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nothing for the things of earth, but rather desire those things that are above: and, as the Psalmist says, "They are exalted far above the earth;" as being altogether brave and courageous, and practising uninterrupted endeavours after all things whatsoever which please God.

And such we believe you to be; and your earnest desire after instruction is a plain proof thereof. For ye have come of course to seek the fulfilment of the promise given unto you: but neither have we forgotten what we promised, but pay our debt, adding on to what has been already said that which is still wanting to the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

"For it came to pass," He says, "that Lazarus died, and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom: and the rich man also died, and was buried." Observe carefully the Saviour's words. For of the poor man, He says, that he was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom: but of the rich man there is nothing of the sort, but only that he died and was buried. For those who have hope towards God find in their departure from the world a deliverance from anguish and pain. And something like this Solomon also has taught us, saying, "In the sight of men they seemed to die, and their departure was considered an injury and their going from among us a breaking to pieces: but they are at peace, and their hope is full of immortality." For there is given unto them a measure of consolation commensurate with their labours: or even perhaps one which surpasses and exceeds their toils: for Christ has somewhere said, that "good measure, pressed down, and heaped up and running over shall they give into your

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bosom." For like as ships that sail upon the sea stand the shock of savage waves and struggle with the violence of might winds, but afterwards arriving at tranquil havens fit for their rest, cease there from tossing; so in like manner I think that the souls of men, when they emerge from the turbulence of earthly things, enter the mansions that are above, as into a haven of salvation.

"Lazarus then," He says, "was carried by the holy angels unto Abraham's bosom: but the rich man died and was buried." For to that rich man who had shewn himself harsh and unmerciful the separation from the body was death. For he was going from pleasure to torment: from glory to shame: from light to darkness. Such were the things that the rich man must suffer, who had been voluptuous, and close-handed, and unready for mercy. And to torment him the more now that he dwells in Hades, he beheld, it says, Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham: and made supplication that he might be sent to drop a little water upon his tongue: for he was tormented, it says, as in a fierce flame. And what reply does the patriarch Abraham make? "Son, thou receivedst thy good things in thy life; and Lazarus his evil things." Thou wast enamoured, He says, of these temporal things; thou wast clad in fine linen and purple; thou wast boastful and haughty; all thy time was spent in luxury; thou offeredst up thy wealth to thy appetite and to flatterers; but thou never once calledst to mind the sick and sorrowful: thou hadst no compassion on Lazarus when thou sawest him thrown down at thy portals. Thou beheldest the man suffering incurable misery, and a prey to intolerable

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griefs: for two maladies at once possessed him, each worse than the other, the cruel pain of his ulcers, and the want of the necessaries of life. The very beasts soothed Lazarus, because he was in pain; "the dogs licked his sores," but thou wast more hard-hearted than the beasts. "Thou hast received therefore, He says, thy good things in thy life, and Lazarus his evil: and now here he is comforted, and thou art tormented;" and, as the sacred Scripture saith, "they shall have judgment without mercy who have wrought no mercy" (Js.2:13). Thou wouldst have been a partner with Lazarus, and a portion of his consolation would have been given thee by God, if thou hadst admitted him to be a partner of thy wealth. But this thou didst not do, and therefore thou alone art tormented: for such is the fitting punishment of the unmerciful, and of those whose mind feels no sympathy for the sick.

Let us therefore make for ourselves friends of the unrighteous mammon: let us listen to Moses and the prophets calling us unto mutual love and brotherly affection: let us not wait for any of those now in Hades to return hither to tell us the torments there: the sacred Scripture is necessarily true: we have heard, that "Christ shall sit upon the throne of His glory to judge the world in righteousness, and that He shall set the sheep indeed on His right hand, but the goats on His left. And to those on His right hand He shall say, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundations of the world; for I was hungry, and ye gave Me to eat: and thirsty also, and ye gave Me to drink: I was naked, and ye clothed Me: in prison, and ye came

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unto Me." But upon those upon the left hand He shall lay a heavy condemnation, saying, "Go to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And the charge against them is, that they have done the very opposite of that for which the saints were praised. "For I was hungry, and ye gave Me not to eat; and thirsty, and ye gave Me not to drink: for inasmuch as ye did it not, He says, to one of these little ones, ye did it not to Me." (Mt.15: 31f).

But to this perhaps some one will object, that there are many kinds of well living; for virtue is diversified, so to speak, and manifold: why therefore, having omitted those other kinds, does He make mention only of love to the poor? To this we reply, that the act is better than any other kind of well doing: for it works in our souls a certain divine likeness which moulds us, so to speak, after God's image. For Christ also has said, "Be ye merciful, as your Father also in heaven is merciful." He who is quick to shew mercy, and compassionate and kind, is ranked with the true worshippers; for it is written, that "a pure and unpolluted sacrifice to God the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their poverty, and that a man keep himself unspotted from the world." And the wise Paul also has somewhere written, "But alms and communication forget not: for with such sacrifices God is content." For He loveth not the incense of the legal worship, but requireth rather the pleasantness of the sweet spiritual savour. But the sweet spiritual savour unto God is to shew pity unto men, and to maintain love towards them. This also Paul adviseth us, saying, "Owe no man anything, but that ye love one another": and the

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daughter of love is pity for poverty.

Come therefore, ye rich, cease from transitory pleasure: be earnest after the hope that is set before you: clothe yourselves with mercy and kindness: hold out the hand to them that are in need: comfort those who are in necessity: count as your own the sorrows of those who are in extreme distress. (*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Sermon 102).

### 2

For they who have once enjoyed the honour of adoption shall abide in the presence of God, at no time thrust forth from the court of the first-born, but rather passing a long and lasting season therein....For the boast of the Church will never cease nor ever fail, for the souls of the righteous depart from things of earth and are safely moored at the city that is above, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church of the first-born, which is our Mother, according to the voice of Paul. (COMMENTARY ON JOHN'S GOSPEL, 8:35).

### 3

We must not be slothful, therefore, toward the communion of love to the brethren, but rather advance unto good resoluteness, and put as far as possible from us the cowardice and fear that dispose us to inhospitality and, confirmed in hope through faith in the power of God to multiply little things too, let us open our depths to the

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needy, according to the appointment of the Law, for He says, "Thou shalt open thy depths wide unto the needy brother" (Dt.15:11). For when will you be found merciful if you remain hard in this life? When will you fulfil the commandment if you allow the time of being able to do it to slip by in idleness? Remember the Psalmist saying "For in death there is none that remembereth Thee: in the grave who shall confess Thee?" (Ps.6:5). For what fruit is there yet from [or, of] the dead, or how shall one of them that has gone down into the grave [or, the pit] remember God by fulfilling His commandments? For "God closed upon him" (Jb.3:23) as it is written. Therefore did the most wise Paul too instruct us, writing to certain ones, "While we have opportunity, let us do good." (Gal. 6:10). (HOMILY ON JOHN'S GOSPEL, on "Why Christ Gave Such Abundance of Fragments").

### 4

For those who have hope toward God find in their departure from the world a deliverance from anguish and pain. And something like this Solomon also has taught us saying, "In the sight of man they seemed to die, and their departure was considered an injury and their going from among us a breaking to pieces: but they are at peace and their hope is full of immortality" (Ws.3: 2). For there is given unto them a measure of consolation commensurate with their labours: or even perhaps one which surpasses and exceeds their toils: for Christ has somewhere said that, "good measure pressed down and heaped up and

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running over shall they give unto your bo- som" (Lk.6:38). For like as ships that sail upon the sea stand the shock of savage waves, and struggles with the violence of mighty winds, but afterwards arriving at tranquil havens fit for their rest, cease there from tossing; so in like manner I think that the souls of men, when they emerge from the turbulence of earthly things, enter the mansions that are above, and into a haven of salvation. (COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, Sermon 112).

### 5

...let us listen to Moses and the prophets calling us unto mutual love and brotherly affection: let us not wait for any of those now in hades to return hither to tell us the torments there: the sacred Scripture is necessarily true. (ibid).

### 6

For henceforth, by the death of Christ, death for us has been transformed, in a manner, into sleep, with the like power and operation. For we are alive unto God, and shall live forevermore, according to the Scripture. Therefore, also, the blessed Paul, in a variety of places, called those asleep who have died in Christ. For in the times of old the dread presence of death held human nature in terror....We were transformed into His Image, and undergo, as it were, a different kind of death that

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does not dissolve us in eternal corruption, but casts upon us a slumber which is laden with fair hope, after the likeness of Him, Who has made this new path for us, that is, Christ. (COMMENTARY ON JOHN'S GOSPEL, Bk.12, Ch.19, para.41).

### **SAINT BASIL THE GREAT (+379)**

For when the whole has sinned it is like old fables and unworthy of a righteous judge for only half to suffer chastisements ...the soul, the whole of which possesses the sinful affection and works the wickedness in co-operation with the body. (ON THE HOLY SPIRIT, para.40).

### **SAINT GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN (+390)**

I believe the words of the wise, that every fair and God-beloved soul, when...it departs hence, at once enjoys a sense and perception of the blessings which await it, inasmuch as that which darkened it has been...laid aside [the flesh], and [the soul] feels a wondrous pleasure and exultation, and goes rejoicing to meet its Lord...and it enters on the enjoyment of the bliss laid up for it, of which it has even now some conception. Then a little later, it receives its kindred flesh, which once shared in its pursuits of things above...and in some way known to God Who knit them together and dissolved them, enters with it upon the inheritance of the glory there.

But now, laying aside lamentations, I will look at

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myself and examine my feelings, that I may not unconsciously have in myself anything to be lamented of. O you sons of men, for the words apply to you, how long will you be hard-hearted and gross in your mind? Why do you love vanity and seek after falsehood, supposing life here to be a great thing and these few days many. (PANAGYRIC FOR CAESARIOS).

### SAINT ANDREW OF CRETE (+720)

#### 1

Come behold what is coming to pass, and seeing, be silent; do not disturb this our mystery. A terrible thing, brethren is that which we see, but more awesome is that which is coming to pass. Radiant angels, bearers of [royal] sceptres, awful to behold, come from above; choirs of hosts clad in white, whose figure is the likeness of light, breathing fire, robed in fire, these hasten and surround him who is lying and abruptly exact the deposit [the soul], and we, do we not show reverence? (P.G. 97:1284 D-1285 B).

#### 2

If God is light, which indeed He is, and there is no darkness in Him whatsoever, and "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), and to Him we are taken, and the souls of all of us "are in His hand" according to the Scripture (Wis.3:1), then the

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unreasonable proposition [that our souls go to] darkness and the dark places of hades is false....But do not investigate the state of the soul after its departure from the body, because it is not for thee or for me to inquire into these things. Another is He Who knows this. For if we are unable to know the essence of the soul, how shall we understand its [state of] repose? (ibid, 1289 BC).

### **SAINT SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN (+1022)**

#### 1

But if you say that only after death this vision is to be enjoyed, then you place your purification also after death, and thus it will befall you never to behold God because after your departure [repose] you can have no activity whereby you might gain purification. (FIFTH ETHICAL HOMILY, Line 125).

#### 2

Blessed are they who have even now kindled the light in their hearts and have preserved it from being extinguished, for in their departure from life they being radiant shall meet with the Bridegroom and shall enter with Him into the bridalchamber bearing their lamps. Blessed are they who have not been of the opinion that men do not receive from here, already, the assurance of their salvation, but only after their departure, because

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these people have struggled now to receive this assurance. (TENTH ETHICAL HOMILY, Lines 805-813).

### 3

For if the Lord is the Light of the world and He said to His apostles that He would be together with us until the consummation (Mt.28:20), how is it that being [already] with us, He shall come? In no wise. For we are not children of darkness and children of the night, such that the Light could come upon us, but we are children of light and children of the day of the Lord. Wherefore both while living we are in the Lord and dying we are in Him and with Him we shall live, as Paul says (cf.Rm.14:8; Ths.5:10). (TENTH ETHICAL HOMILY, Lines 681-687).

### **SAINT ANASTASIOS OF SINAI (+ ca. 700)**

Regarding those things which are passed over in silence in the Divine Scriptures, it is manifest that they must not be sought out. The Holy Spirit revealed unto us those things which it is to our profit to learn, and again as for those things which are not profitable, He kept them hidden. But since man is an argumentative and inquisitive creature, whatever we have been able to learn from the Holy Fathers, as it were somewhat dimly, this also shall I attempt to make clear to you.

Let it be known unto all, then, that it is for this cause

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that man is said to be [fashioned] according to the image and likeness of God, because many of those [attributes] which exist by nature in the Divine Nature and are known obscurely in a certain image and figure, are found also by grace – not by nature – in our soul. That is to say, we confess and believe that God's Nature is by nature incomprehensible, nameless, invisible, immortal, beyond touch and incorruptible. For this cause also the soul, insomuch as it is according to the image of God – is not by nature, but by grace – incomprehensible for us men according to its essence, and also invisible, inexplicable, beyond touch, incorruptible and immortal; and it is also creative by grace. For man gives birth to man by the grace of God, and he creates...since he is made according to the image of God. Wherefore, even as no man from ages past has been able to say what and of what kind is the nature of God, likewise neither can any of us say or understand what is the essence of man's soul, or what is the essence of the soul which is made according to the image of God. For even as God reveals to us His own powers and operations by means of the material creation which is visible to us – I mean heaven and the stars, the sun and moon – though He Himself is invisible, so also our invisible soul which is according to His image reveals its own operations by means of its visible body, which is like a sort of world. It has the brain which is above the so-called roof of the mouth [i.e., little heaven or heavenly vault] after the likeness of God Who is above Heaven, and it possesses the ruling mind which guides and governs the body like a sort of small world. Wherefore,

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should the brain ever receive some grievous wound or a man be smitten on the head, straightway the mind suffers and the man is no longer able to discern or remember as before.

And again, the soul operates the rational faculty...the faculty of desire...the faculty of joy and mirth...the faculty of breathing...; that of reproduction...; that of ardour...; that of perception through the eyes; that of speech through the tongue, since when it is severed, a man is no longer able to speak. Accordingly, when the soul is separated from the entire body, it is no longer able to operate, because it operates through the members of the body. The soul can neither speak, nor remember, nor discern, nor desire, nor think, nor be roused, nor see, but it exists in a certain reflective state within itself, remaining immortal [by grace], until it again receives its own incorrupt body; and henceforth, the functions which it accomplishes therein shall be incorrupt ....As to the fact that the soul is bereft of the reasoning faculty when it is separated from the body, listen to what the Psalmist says concerning those that have died: "In that day all his thoughts shall perish" (Ps.145:4). And again he says, "They shall remember no one." And, "For in death there is none that is mindful of Thee, O God" (Ps.6:4).

But concerning the saints, he says: But as for the souls which have acquired the Holy Spirit and have become as it were one body and organism with Him, it seems to me that through His illumination they rejoice even after death, and noetically glorify God the Word and intercede for others, as we learn from the Scriptures. Further, it is

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fitting that we should know that all the visions that occur in churches or at the shrines of the saints are accomplished by angels at God's command. Since how is it possible, the resurrection of the body not having taken place and the bones and bodies of the saint being yet scattered about, that they should be seen as men already intact, and oftentimes seen as armed men on horseback? But if you are minded to contradict, tell me how Peter, or Paul, or another apostle or martyr can oftentimes appear in many places at the same time? For not even an angel can be found in the same instant in different places or lands; this is a property of the uncircumscribable God alone. (ANSWER 89)

### **SAINT ISAAK OF NINEVEH (THE SYRIAN) (7th CENT.)**

#### 1

Silence is the mystery of the age to come, but words are the instruments of this world. (EPISTLE 3)

#### 2

The Saviour calls the "many mansions" of His Father the noetic degrees of those who dwell in that land, I mean the distinctions and differences of the spiritual gifts they noetically enjoy ....Just as each man enjoys the physical sun according to the clarity and receptive power of his sight...so in the age to come all the righteous shall dwell in one place indivisibly, but each of them is illumined by

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the one noetic Sun according to his own measure.  
(HOMILY 56)

#### 3

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.

If, therefore, mercy belongs to the portion of righteousness, then just judgment belongs to the portion of wickedness. As grass and fire cannot exist in one place, so just judgment and mercy cannot abide in one soul. (HOMILY 58)

#### 4

Now by this as in an image the Spirit depicts the design that God has had everlastingly. But the man who chooses to consider God an avenger, presuming that he bears witness to His justice, the same accuses Him of being bereft of goodness. Far be it that in that Fountain of Love and Ocean brimming with goodness, vengeance could ever be found!...For He wills that we should rejoice not as it were in what is His, but as it were in the recompense of our own deeds. For although all things are His, yet He

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is not pleased that we should consider them His, but that we should delight in what is as it were ours. (HOMILY 123:2)

### 5

He suddenly translates us from hence by death and keeps us for no small time in insensibility and motionlessness....And then at a time when He wills and has decreed in His adorable wisdom, He shall raise us up in another form, which He Himself knows, and shall bring us into another state.

### 6

The true Sabbath, the Sabbath that is not a similitude, is the tomb, which reveals and manifests perfect repose from the tribulations of the passions and the husbandry which opposes rest. All humanity shall keep there the sabbath, both in soul and body. (HOMILY 74) (See also Chapters Four and Six of the text).

## **SAINT MARK OF EPHEBUS (+1444)**

We affirm that neither the righteous have as yet received the fulness of their lot and that blessed condition for which they have prepared themselves here through works, nor have sinners, after death, been led away into the eternal punishment in which they shall be tormented eternally. Rather, both the one and the other must

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necessarily take place after the judgment of that last day and the resurrection of all. Now, however, both the one and the other are in places proper to them: the first in absolute repose and free, are in heaven with the angels before God Himself, and already as if in the paradise from which Adam fell (into which the good thief entered before others) and often visit us in those temples where they are venerated, and hear those who call on them and pray for them to God, having received from Him this surpassing gift, and through their relics perform miracles, and take delight in the vision of God and the illumination sent from Him more perfectly and purely than before, when they were alive.

Secondly, you asked, what do we mean by saying that the saints are with God in Heaven together with the angels? 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 entitled "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 nature both functions noetically and exists, both is present and active." We say, then, that such a place, supercelestial and supermundane, noetic and bodiless, contains both the angels and the saints, and we are accustomed to call it Heaven. And we have believed

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that in it more than elsewhere and especially God is and appears and is active, since we possess the Master's words, "Our Father Who art in Heaven," For just as the noetic natures are something akin to Divinity and are comprehended by the mind alone, while every nature in the realm of the senses is completely alien to Divinity, according to Gregory the Theologian, so the place and world of the noetic and unmaterial natures is akin to God and was created by Him first, according to the same Theologian, but this earthly place and world is in every wise alien to Him. (*ORATIONS AND REPLIES TO THE CARDINALS ON THE ORATIONS, P. O. 15: 109- 154*).

### 2

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. 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

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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 not enter the bridal

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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 it is 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, [that is] 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). And in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those who trouble you, and to you who are troubled rest with us,

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when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, taking vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with the everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all those who believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (2Ths.1:6-10). And again in the epistle to the Hebrews where he speaks concerning the saints who have gone before us, "And all these, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hb.11:39-40). 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 soul 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

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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 thing 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 bodies 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). (*Ten Arguments Against Purgatory*).

### 3

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).

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**A SHORT SELECTION FROM  
THE SERVICES FOR THE REPOSED.**

**SERVICE FOR THE BURIAL OF REPOSED  
PRESBYTERS:**

"Why do you mourn for me so strongly, O people, Why do you make so vain a clamour?" proclaims the one who has been called forth. Death is a rest for all people. Therefore, let us hearken to the voice of Job when he says: "Death is rest unto man." Grant rest, therefore, with Thy saints, unto him whom Thou hast taken. (*Verse on the Beatitudes, Blessed are the Persecuted*).

2

But whither now go the souls? How fare they now together there? This mystery have I desired to learn, but there is none who can relate it. Do they remember their own people, as we do them? Or have they, then, forgotten those who mourn for them and make the song: Alleluia.

None of those hence has returned to this life so as to tell us how they fare, our erstwhile brethren and kinsfolk who have gone there before [us] to the Lord. Wherefore always and many times we say, Shall we indeed see each other there? Is it really possible to see our brethren there? Is it really possible that there we shall say together the psalm: Alleluia? (*Kontakia after the Sixth Ode of the Canon*).

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**A SHORT COLLECTION FROM ANCIENT  
HYMNS  
RELATING TO THE SOUL.**

1

The dead shall not praise Thee, O Lord, nor do those in hades have freedom of speech to offer up confession. (*Prostration prayer at Pentecost*).

2

To those, O Lord, whom in faith Thou hast taken from things temporal, grant remission, O Good-One, in Thy second coming; for Thou art the greatly merciful God. (*For Soul-Saturday before Meatfare*).

Concerning the meaning of the prayers and divine services offered for those who have fallen asleep, see Saint Dennis the Areopagite, quotation number one, Saint Ambrose of Milan, quotation number eight, item thirteen in Appendix 2 and Chapter Six of the text.

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**THE POWER OF SATAN AND HIS DEMONS  
ACCORDING TO THE FATHERS OF THE  
CHURCH**

1

SAINT ATHANASIOS THE GREAT

"Whence it is quite fitting that the Lord suffered this death. For thus being lifted up He cleared the air of the malignity both of the devil and of demons of all kinds." (THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD OF GOD, para.25).

2

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

"...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." (HOMILY TWO ON LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN, P.G. 48:984).

3

SAINT ISAAK THE SYRIAN

"The demons, though they are extremely polluted, are not concealed from one another in their orders; howbeit

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they do not see the two orders [human souls and angels] that are above them." (*HOMILY 67*)

### 4

#### SAINT DIADOCHOS OF PHOTIKI

The Grace of God, on the other hand, dwells in the very depths of the soul...and it is not perceptible to the demons." (*ON SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE*).

### 5

#### SAINT JOHN CASSIAN

"But the demons cannot possibly come near to those thoughts which have not yet come forth from the inmost recesses of the soul. And the thoughts too, which they suggest, whether they are actually or in a kind of way embraced, are discovered by them not from the nature of the soul itself, i.e., that inner inclination which lies concealed so to speak in the very marrow, but from the motions and signs given by the outward man." (*FIRST CONFERENCE OF ABBA SERENEUS, para.15*).

### 6

#### SAINT ANTONY THE GREAT

"We ought not to fear the demons or even Satan

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himself, for he is a liar and speaks not a word of truth...and with him are placed the demons his fellows, like serpents and scorpions to be trodden underfoot by us Christians...and let us not fear his visions seeing that they themselves are deceptive....Doubtless they appear; but in a moment disappear again, hurting none of the faithful....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.

`From the beginning the devil is a manslayer and a father of vice' (Jn.8:44); while we, though this is so, are alive, and spend our lives all the more opposing him; it is plain that they [the demons] are powerless. For place is no hindrance to their plots, nor do they look on us as friends that they should spare us; nor are they lovers of good that they should amend. But on the contrary they are evil, and nothing is so much sought after by them as wounding those who love virtue and fear God. But since they have no power to affect anything, they do nought but threaten ....If they had power, they would permit none of us Christians to live....But since they can do nothing, they inflict the greater wounds on themselves; for they can fulfil none of their threats. Next this ought to be considered that we may be in no fear of them....But the demons as they have no power are like actors on the stage...from which they ought rather to be despised as showing their weakness." (LIFE).

"But if the demons had power not even against the swine, much less have they any over men formed in the image of God. So then we ought to fear God only, and despise the demons, and be in no fear of them."

SAINT JOHN THE SOLITARY

"The devil cannot touch the nature of the soul, nor can he draw nigh it at all to harm it..."

"The devil does not touch or see the soul, but the members of the body only...and by harming one of the members he disturbs the thoughts which are active within them. For indeed, if he could draw nigh the soul so as to harm it, then he would also be able to harm it after it departed from the body, but this he would have to do while being unable to see it and having no power over it, because his power extends only as far as the body."  
*(SIXTH DIALOGUE WITH THOMASIOS).*

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**APPENDIX TWO  
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
ON THE TEXT**

[This appendix consists of a selection of letters to Bishop Lazar, the author of this book, with questions on the material contained in this book, and his replies to them. These letters are offered as a supplement to the text].

1

Question:

In your articles on the soul after death, you say that after death, one cannot function, see, hear or speak. Are you not teaching that the saints cannot intercede for us and pray for us since not being able to see and hear, they can't receive our prayers and are not able to speak to God and pray for us? Why do we ask for their prayers if they cannot speak?

Reply:

"They beseech in silence Him Who hearkens unto silence" (St Ephraim the Syrian, Nisibian Hymns, 43:10).

"Silence is the mystery of the age to come, but words are the instruments of this world" (St Isaak the Syrian, Epistle 2).

"In things spiritual, the soul is not compelled to divide herself among the windows of the senses, and she no longer strives to open the eyes to see anything, nor the ears to receive a word...and her perception becomes

beyond all these things...being wholly and completely collected in the mind...(St Symeon the New Theologian, Third Ethical Homily, 166-171).

Can it be that the saints need neither carnal tongues nor eyes in order to intercede for us, because their minds are ever upon the Kingdom and the welfare of the Commonwealth? And that they are already, in this life, communicating and communing with God in a way which passes not only all human understanding, but also all the limits of nature (so called)? Can it be that they are "living miracles," in whom the laws of nature have been overcome, even reversed? Can it be that the saints, insofar as they dwell in that Kingdom of God which is within themselves, are already living outside the laws of nature?

What laws of nature are there for souls departed the body? Communications between God and man is already outside the laws of nature. When the soul departs the body, carnal sense is left behind and decays, and then the soul can depend only upon that spiritual sense which it has developed, or rather, striven for, in this life already. True, the soul cannot see, hear, experience or have adventures. But that is not to say that it cannot perceive and communicate in the realm of Grace. Who is to say, in fact, that that 'eternal praise of God' in the Kingdom is to be sensually audible?

Is not the whole aim of hesychasm noetic prayer, and the spoken "Jesus Prayer" but a tool in this? There is a place deep within the heart of a person into which Satan cannot see, neither penetrate (for, he cannot enter into the

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Kingdom of God). And there, the troubled soul can find a peace which passes all understanding; there the wounds from the arrows of the evil-one can find balm and healing, and the arrows cannot penetrate there to wound one again. Here, one does not pray with words or even with actions, but one weeps and the teardrops themselves are prayer and confession and rejoicing and hope fulfilled. Here, there is already a communication between God and the soul which is outside the realm of the laws of nature. Here, every thought is known and every movement of the heart is incense rising up to the Creator. Here, one finds the Holy Spirit and understands something of the potential of the soul which longs to cooperate with God's Grace, and perceives that only its sins form a barricade to that complete cooperation which it so earnestly desires. Here, one cannot remain, no matter how one longs to — longs even to die if, by that, he could remain in this deep place in the heart, being "this day in paradise with Me." And this is only a shadow of what is yet to come for those who persevere to the end.

But leave it one must. No one is without sin, and the passions and sinfulness of each person drags them as if a prisoner being led into captivity, back out of those precious depths. And one sins again, and cannot re-enter that beloved naveland in the heart until he repents and struggles to exhaustion back along the path. One sins, but one does not forget. And the bare memory of that gate to paradise which is within the heart is sufficient to induce one to endure all things and rejoice even in martyrdom just in order to visit it once again — if only the passions do

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not dominate one's life, if only one did not himself erect a barrier of sins, of self, of ego, of pride, along the path. And this is only a hint of what the saints experience in their souls after repose and before the resurrection. What will come after the resurrection! Even to have a concept of it would cause the heart to fail because the fallen nature would no longer be able to endure.

How do the saints intercede for us after their repose? Ask as well how the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father; ask as well by what process of thought God designed the universe. But this much is clear: the saints intercede for us constantly precisely because they are no longer capable of seeing, hearing, experiencing, speaking or doing any of the other things by means of which we sin and deprive ourselves of the experience of that Kingdom of God which is within us already. Why else did the fathers teach us to pray in such a manner that all those senses are nullified and forgotten, if only for a little while? Because the "star" which leads to the King is noetic and the bodily senses cannot see it. Because the bodily senses and their fruit (because of the fall) now are used by us, and by the evil-one, to keep us out of that Kingdom.

The saints intercede for us, and even without ceasing. There is no mystery as to how the saints intercede for us after their repose, and yet this is a very great mystery. To speculate further could only lead to confusion but to accept it simply as a matter of fact is very comforting and joyous.

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### Question:

In a recent reply to a letter to the editor, you stated, "It is no mystery as to how the saints intercede for us constantly after their repose, and yet this is an extremely great mystery." Can you elaborate on that? Can you say more about the ability of saints after their repose?

### Reply:

The abilities of the saints even before their repose is a mystery to fallen human reason, but they are no mystery to faith. Fallen reason demands a fallen "scientific" explanation for the unexplainable, while faith is assured of the truth of God's promises by the cooperation of Divine Grace itself and given proofs by a Divine science. I will offer the following explanation of the abilities of the saints after their repose, and I do not think that I can really say more than this.

St Anastasios of Sinai says of the saints, "As for the souls which have acquired the Holy Spirit and have become as it were one body and organism with Him, it seems to me that through His illumination they rejoice even after death, and noetically glorify God the Word and intercede for others, as we learn from the Scripture" (*ANSWER 89*).

Here is a great revelation concerning the mystery of

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holiness. For, the saints, having "become as it were, one body and organism with Him," having been "deified by Grace," and participating in God have become, in a manner, higher than the angels. In a wondrous way, they know what the Holy Spirit knows, for they are filled with the Holy Spirit. No, let us grow bolder still and say that in some degree, they know what God knows because by Grace, they have become participants in God. Thus whatever may be said of the "place of the saints," the saints are freed from the human conception of "place". God is everywhere and sees all things, and the saints, as possessing *theosis*, as "participants in God," are, to the greatest degree possible, omniscient and omnipresent, by the miracle of *theosis*, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the awesome mystery of Divine Grace. Thus, St Mark of Ephesus says of the saints that they are:

"...in heaven with the angels before God Himself, and already as if in the paradise from which Adam fell...and often visit us in those temples where they are venerated, and hear those who call on them and pray for them to God, having received from Him this surpassing gift, and through their relics perform miracles, and take delight in the vision of God and the illumination sent from Him more perfectly and purely than before..." (*TEN ARGUMENTS AGAINST PURGATORY FIRE*).

We had previously quoted St Anastasios of Sinai's statement that when the saints are seen *as if bodily*, it is actually an angel which appears in their form, as the saint no longer has his or her body, and the relics of that body are scattered abroad in many churches and places. This

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the saint says in part to refute the gnostic/platonic teaching about "subtle bodies," for which Origen was also condemned. In this, the saint says nothing at all contrary to what we have said above, for we know very well that an angel did indeed appear in the form of Saint Theodosy of the Caves to the dying monk St Damian the Healer, as we read in the Kiev-Caves Paterikon, St Athanasios made his statement not as limiting the power and presence of the saints, as someone maliciously charged, but as a reasonable explanation which has been proved by facts repeatedly (we have many records of angels appearing in the form of saints). On the other hand, saints are sometimes seen in visions as if bodily, but never actually bodily. This is the whole point of St Athanasy of Sinai's words.

3

### Question:

In *The Canadian Orthodox Missionary*, Volume 5, Number 12, you say about dreams and revelations in lives of saints, relating to the soul after death, "Unfortunately...so many of these stories are so mutually contradictory that an exact idea cannot be formed..." I do not agree. I would say *fortunately*, not unfortunately. Don't you remember how diverse and contradictory were the appearances of God's glory on Sinai to the Hebrews? It was so diverse (as St Gregory of Nyssa points out) that they could not anthropomorphize it and make an idol of it. Do you not think it is the same in this case? That (as

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you yourself mention) these dreams and stories in the lives of the saints are given to form a psychological disposition and not an anthropomorphic image from which heresies can be formed, and that is why these things are *purposely* "mutually contradictory," and cannot be taken as actual revelations of realities, but as parables to lead one to compunction... (Fr Mamas, Monk)

### REPLY:

Thank you for the observation. I had not thought of it that way. One has to observe how free the Old Testament Scripture – which is dominated by Grace-filled prophets – is of apocryphal visions and dreams such as the wild "Theodora toll house" tale. No doubt, in the time when the Hebrews were still in the faith and struggling to keep God's law, someone like "Gregory," the creator of the toll house fable, would have justly been taken out and stoned. Perhaps this is the reason for the discretion and sobriety shown in the Old Testament scripture. It is also demonstrated by Apostle Paul. This observation is especially appropriate to Gregory of Thrace, the inventor of the Theodora tale (which is found in the dubious fable, the "Tale of Basil the New"), because he was in the habit of having "out of body experiences" and "dream visions" on a regular basis, and taking them seriously. If one examines his narrations of his dreams, and compares them with what the fathers say on such subjects, one is constrained to conclude that this Gregory was in a most severe state of spiritual delusion.

## APPENDIX THREE

### A Note About Bishop Ignatii Brianchaninov's Booklets Homily About Death and the Supplement to Homily About Death.

There is some confusion about the matters discussed in this work because of an unfortunate booklet which appeared in Russia in 1863, and which is still current, having been made popular by the late neo-Gnostic philosopher, Fr Seraphim Rose.

In 1863, St Petersburg publisher V. Askkochevki printed Bishop Ignatii Branchaninov's booklet *Homily About Death*. The booklet caused immediate shock and consternation among Russian Orthodox theologians, and strong rebuttals of the booklet were forthcoming. St Theophan the Recluse, the most authoritative and respected theological writer of his day, wrote the strongest condemnation of Brianchaninov's work. Indeed, St Theophan gives the purpose of his refutation of Brianchaninov's *Homily About Death* in these words: "unmasking the falsity of the position contained in these booklets" (i.e., *Homily About Death* and the *Supplement* to it), "obliterating the unpleasant impression which they create" and "dispersing the darkness which they bring about." The statements are made in the "Foreward" of St Theophan's work *Souls and Angels are not Bodies, but Spirits (Against the Booklets "Homily About Death" and the Supplement to that Homily*.

The first problem with Rt Rev. Ignatii Brianchaninov's Homily is his attempt to explore matters which the holy fathers had not only refused to explore, but even

forbidden the exploration of them. In essence, Bishop Ignatii was seeking to create both a new theology and novel doctrines where none had existed. Right Reverend Ioann Matveevski, writing in Issue Nr. 9 (1863) of the journal "Strannik," specifically discusses the following serious error in Brianchaninov's work:

1. His erroneous theory that souls and angels have subtle physical bodies.
2. His false teaching that Heaven is sensual and carnal.
3. His false doctrine that hell is a physical place inside the earth.

As Fr Matveevski correctly points out: "No study of eschatology, nor any field of [Orthodox] theology dealing with the end of the world and with man, has dealt with the subject so completely as the author [Bp Ignatii Brianchaninov]. The science of theology has never undertaken to solve the questions this author attempts to solve, because it has regarded the attempts of human curiosity to exceed the limits of [revealed] knowledge to be indecent."

We will not enter into a more detailed discussion of this matter here as Synaxis Press will be publishing the entire text of St Theophan the Recluse's rebuttal of Bishop Ignatii Brianchaninov's *Homily About Death*, with Very Reverend Matveevski's critique included. I simply want to establish that I am well aware of Bishop Ignatii's work, which appears to have formed a rough

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basis for the late neo-Gnostic philosopher, Father Seraphim Rose's heretical book, *The Soul After Death*. I am equally aware of the sound and definitive refutations of Bishop Ignatii's work by St Theophan the Recluse.