

THE ICON AS SCRIPTURE
and
ICONS OF THE LAST JUDGMENT
A Scriptural and Spiritual Understanding of
Orthodox Christian Iconography
BY ARCHBISHOP LAZAR PUHALO



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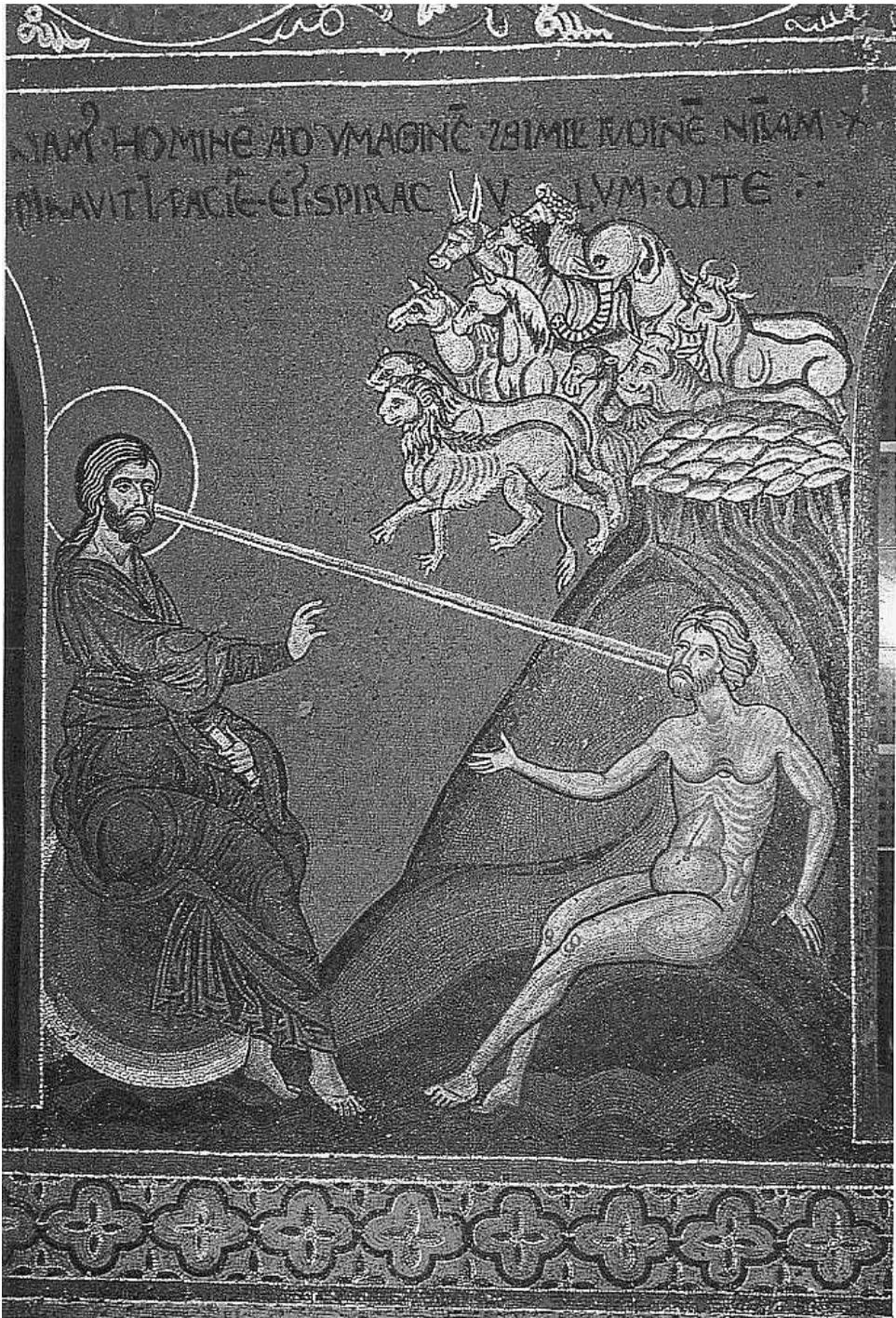
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*Respectfully dedicated to my teacher
Dr George Gabiel*



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I

INTENT: THE PURPOSE OF ICONS

Many things have been written about Orthodox Christian icons. They have been called "windows to heaven," "mystic realities," and many other exotic things. All these words are true, and the explanations given for them are reasonable and sound. Nevertheless, I want to explore with you what I believe to be the most fundamental meaning of the icon. Critics of iconography often condemn it as "pagan," "idolatrous," and worse. They do so from ignorance, yet in North America many Orthodox people fall for these criticisms and end up rejecting the Apostolic Faith. One reason for this is that the explanations of icons all begin at far too esoteric a level and neglect to relate iconography more fully to the Holy Scripture.

"Thou shalt make two cherubim of hammered gold, at the two ends of the mercy seat."

"Moreover, thou shalt form the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely woven linen, blue and purple and scarlet: thou shalt weave them with cherubim of fine craftsmanship" (Ex.25:18; 26:1)

When God caused Moses to build the tabernacle in the wilderness, He commanded that *the walls of the temple be covered with inwoven icons* of cherubim, and that hammered metal icons of the cherubim be placed on either end of the ark of the covenant, overshadowing the "mercy seat" on the ark. Why was

this done? Precisely to reveal to the Hebrews that, in the tabernacle, heaven had truly come down to earth, that God Himself would commune and fellowship with His people in the tabernacle (*Ex.25:22*). The icons of the heavenly beings proclaimed that heaven was, in a manner, revealed by the tabernacle, and that the rule and reign of God was manifested in the holy place.

It is for just this reason that the walls of Orthodox Christian churches are covered with icons of those who have been fully glorified and become partakers of the rule and reign of God (the "kingdom" of heaven). When we enter an Orthodox church and see the icons of the saints and angels on the walls, we receive exactly the same message the priests received when they entered the tabernacle in the wilderness: here, God has manifested Himself. Here, heaven has truly come down to earth, for God, Who is always with us, Who is "everywhere present," has uniquely manifested Himself in His Church. In the church, in the Divine Liturgy, the reign and rule of God are manifested, and He especially communes and fellowships with us in the mutual worship and Mystery of Holy Communion. It is important for us to have this understanding of the icons which God commanded for His tabernacle when He gave the law of His "Old Testament," and which the Holy Spirit has revealed to His "New Testament" Church, if we are to fully understand the Divine Liturgy and the typicon. *Iconography is a form of the Holy Scripture.* It is nothing else but the Bible, and the correct interpretation of the Bible, transferred to paint and mosaic.

When sectarians speak of a "Bible only" religion, and express the idea that one must read and study the Bible personally in order to find salvation, they condemn generations of deeply believing Christians and holy martyrs. In past centuries, the Bible did not even exist as a single book. It was almost impossible for the average person to ever own a copy of the various Scriptures. They had to be hand copied on vellum, and they were expensive beyond the hope of an ordinary person. Moreover, until fairly recently, the literacy rate in most countries was not high enough for the broad masses to even read the Scripture.

The Orthodox Church met this problem very early by adapting iconography, already developed in the first century, to a teaching use. Almost the entire Bible would be painted in a manner which was strictly regulated so that it correctly portrayed the Scripture. After all, no one would be allowed to replace the Holy Scripture with their own Bible, so no one would be permitted to *paint* their own Bible and replace the Scripture with it. Iconographic art was purposely regulated and structured so that it would honestly and accurately present the Holy Scripture and a sound interpretation of it.

In time, a large portion of the Scripture would be set to paint on the walls of churches and in many cases, there would be no bare spots left on a church wall. Every nook and cranny would be filled with sound portrayals of the Scripture. Iconography became another language into which the Scripture was accurately translated, and in which it was accurately interpreted.

In the following illustrations and text, we will see excellent examples of the Bible translated into the language of icons. These paintings are Orthodox icons *because they are scripturally and doctrinally correct* and the Scripture is properly interpreted in them. In the first illustration, we see the interior of the church of High Dechani in Serbia. Here, both the Scripture and the living history of the Church are composed together. We have a chronicle of God's Church in all ages, binding the viewer together with the life of Christ, the witness of the holy martyrs and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church from the creation to the Second Coming. In *plate 2*, we see the Bible and the life of Christ's Church painted iconographically on the exterior walls of the church of - Suchevitsa Monastery in Romania.

It is in this context of the icon as Scripture that we now wish to explore the meaning of iconography.



Plate 1a: Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY



Plate 1b: *Interior view of the church of High Dechani Monastery in Serbia.*



.Plate 1c: *Interior view of the church of High Dechani Monastery in Serbia.*



Plate 2: *Exterior east wall of the monastery church of Sucevița in Romania*

ON THE REVERENCING OF ICONS

(From a sermon on the Sunday of Orthodoxy)

When we enter an Orthodox church, the first thing we do is to reverence and kiss the icons. What does this signify; what does it teach us? We know that we are not reverencing the object itself, the wood and the paint; we understand that our reverence is being shown for the person portrayed in the icon and that the reverence we show to the icon passes over to the prototype, to the one portrayed. Since a saint has become a saint because he or she truly has Christ dwelling in them, and since they are glorified by the fulness of Christ in them, and by their own life in Christ, the reverence we show to any icon, no matter who is portrayed in it, passes to Christ, the source of holiness.

Let us pause for a moment and think: the veneration and reverence we show to an icon passes over to the prototype. Mankind is created in the icon (image) of God. This, then, is the first lesson which we must learn from the veneration of icons. If each human being is created in the icon of God, and the reverence we show toward the icon passes over to the prototype, what should our relationship with our neighbour, with each other human being be? If we reverence an icon, we reverence the prototype; if we hate or disdain an icon, does this not also pass to the prototype of the icon?

Brothers and sisters, each human being is an image of the living God. Are we not taught, by our reverence of icons, that the

way in which we treat any other human being is the manner in which we are treating God? If we have love and reverence for another person, does that love and reverence not pass over to the prototype — to God? And if we have hatred, malice or disdain for another person, does not that also reflect to the prototype — to God? This is just what Jesus Christ told us when He said, *"As you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto Me"* (Mt.25:40).

Therefore, the first lesson we learn from the icon and the veneration of icons is that our disposition toward our fellow humans reflects our true disposition toward God. We are taught by our reverencing of the icon to carefully guard ourselves against hatred, malice and disdain of our neighbour. Every human being, regardless of race, gender or even religion, is created in God's image. That image may have become darkened by sin, by separation from a living relationship with God, but it is there nonetheless. We must learn to love and reverence our fellow human beings, openly and without reservation, for only then can we truly come to love and reverence God. The fact that we are taught this through the reverencing of icons, which are dogmatic, also teaches us that we must have this love and reverence without any compromise of the faith. In this way, our very first approach to the icon opens to us a more clear and certain understanding of the message of Christ's Gospel.

II

THE ORIGIN OF ICONS

The history of iconography really begins with the creation of mankind, because humanity is created, *"in the icon (image), and likeness of God"* (Gn.1:26). But God had not yet become incarnate, and he had no visible, physical form. That man was created in his icon, or image, has deep meaning which transcends ordinary human understanding. It has reference to intellect, free-will and the virtue of self-less love. Moreover, the creation of man is, in itself, a prophecy about the Incarnation — that God would become man in the person of Jesus Christ. We see, then, that the icon, in the sense of true religion, has two levels: what first strikes the eye, and what strikes the soul of the spiritual person.

The concept of man as an icon of God (no matter how faded and soiled that image has become since the fall), is of great moral value. We know that when we reverence and venerate an icon, we do not venerate its physical substance, we do not venerate wood and paint, but we distinctly venerate the prototype, and our reverence passes over to the prototype. Thus, our disposition toward our neighbour, toward our fellow humans, also passes over to the prototype of the icon. If we love our neighbour, we demonstrate a love toward God, if we have reverence for our neighbour, we have a reverence toward God. If we hate our neighbour, we hate God. For, our Saviour said, *"Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done*

it unto me" (Mt.25:40).

There are many "prefigurations" and "types" used in the Old Testament prophecies, such as the altar, the journey through the Red Sea, the occasions upon which Moses made the figure of the Cross and so forth, but these are not icons. The first examples of icons as we know them were made upon the express command of God, for his temple and as a testimony of his covenant. Everyone is familiar with the Ark of the Covenant and the icons of the invisible, bodiless angels which were made for the tabernacle (*Plate 4a below*) (*Ex.25:17-22*) and, with God's blessing, later placed on the walls of Solomon's temple, evidently in 'low relief' form (*2Chron. 3:7*, for example).



Angels had been sent to man in a visible form as messengers from God, and thus, they could be portrayed in an iconographic form. The very reason why they are portrayed with wings is because they did not appear in a material nature (angels are bodiless, immaterial spirits)¹ but in the

form of a vision and revelation which appeared to have a physical presence. The wings indicate the immaterial nature of angels.

1. Contrary to the teaching that angels and human souls have material "subtle bodies." See the troparion and kondakion "For the Heavenly Bodiless Hosts," and numerous references in the prayers of the Church to the "immaterial, bodiless angels." For a further discussion of this, see *The Soul, The Body and Death*, (Synaxis Press, 1996) endnote 9 to chapter 3 (on p.31).

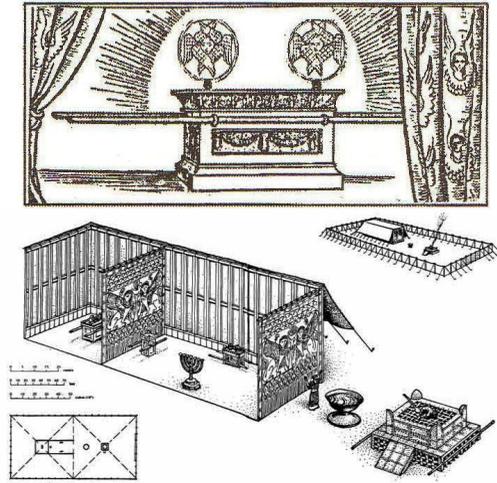


Plate 4b: Icons of angels were worked into every wall of the Tabernacle, on God's command.

God gave very precise instructions and details for the forms of the first man-made icons, including the Holy of Holies, which was an icon of heaven itself, and He sharply distinguished the icons of true worship (Orthodoxia), from pagan images, which are idolatrous. For, while commanding icons to be made for use in the worship and service of His Church, he sharply forbade the making of idolatrous images — that is, images which were used in false worship, in the worship of false gods (*Ex.20:4*).

Icons correctly made and correctly used in true worship, give a greater understanding and awareness of *Spirit and Truth*, and lead the soul upward in true adoration of God. Images falsely made and wrongly used serve to distort truth and lead man away from God. True icons are made in obedience to God through His Holy Church. False images are made in self-will and upon the inspiration of the evil-one.

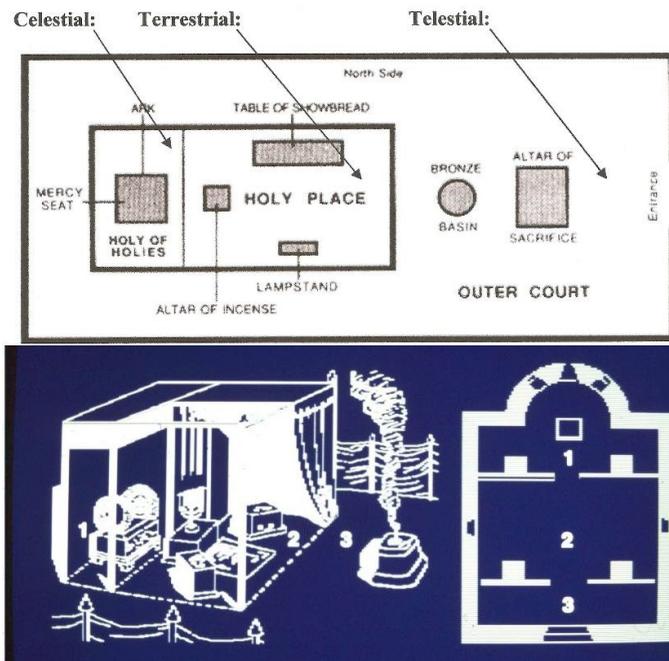


Plate 5: Comparison of the divisions of the Tabernacle and of Orthodox Church buildings. The Holy of Holies was a type of Paradise, as is the altar in Orthodox Churches

Aside from the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament, we do not know what other examples of iconography might have been used in the Old Israel in ancient times. We do, however, have some examples of later Jewish iconographic art.

The following examples are both from murals in the great synagogue at Dura-Europos. In both of these, we see clear types of the iconography of the New Israel, the Orthodox Christian Church.

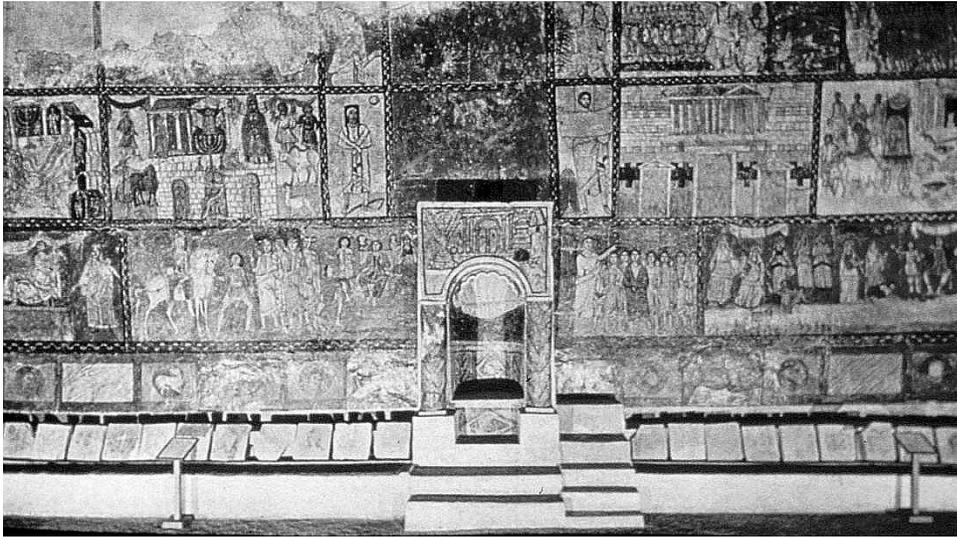
The elements in the development of iconographic art reflected here are clearly understood. Helen Gardner, the noted

art historian, makes a very cogent observation on the principle of iconography, which gives an insight into the difference between the icon and mere religious art. In her standard text, *Art Through the Ages*, she says: "It became apparent that two distinct ways of looking at man and his universe were struggling for supremacy. One, predominantly Hellenic in origin, sought to represent visual appearance of natural forms in space and the actuality of man's experience. The other, basically Semitic in origin, sought the abstract representation of ideas, through symbols and the direct, simple narration of events, which were given form by rhythmic ornamental surface designs..."²



*Plate 6a: Ezekiel's vision (Ez.37:1) of the General Resurrection.
Wall painting in the synagogue at Dura-Europos*

2. Gardner, Helen, *Art Through the Ages*, (Harcourt, Brace, NY) 4th edn., p.18.



*Plate 6b: Scenes from the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament)
on the wall of the great synagogue of Dura-Europos.*

Iconography developed on the basis of the Semitic principles, such as those demonstrated in the Dura-Europos synagogue paintings (examples of which are shown in *Plates 5, 6a and 6b above*) namely, showing things in a perspective which clearly placed God over all, and which related everything to God, elevating everything toward God and using a powerful symbolism in the rhythmic flow of design to bind the icon to the Holy Scripture and, indeed, make it a visual form of the written Scripture.

Into this structure, deeply symbolic tomb art from various cultures was adapted. These principles were not compromised by the enhancement of the forms with a certain grace and beauty in Byzantium. Religious art in the West, after Orthodox times there, began to develop on the principles that were not iconographic, in which everything related to the

physical, carnal man, and the divine was lowered to the perceptible level of fallen human nature.

This can be seen if we compare the Hebrew painting of Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea, two Orthodox Christian icons of Moses (one from the East and one from the then Orthodox West), and a Western post-Orthodox representation.

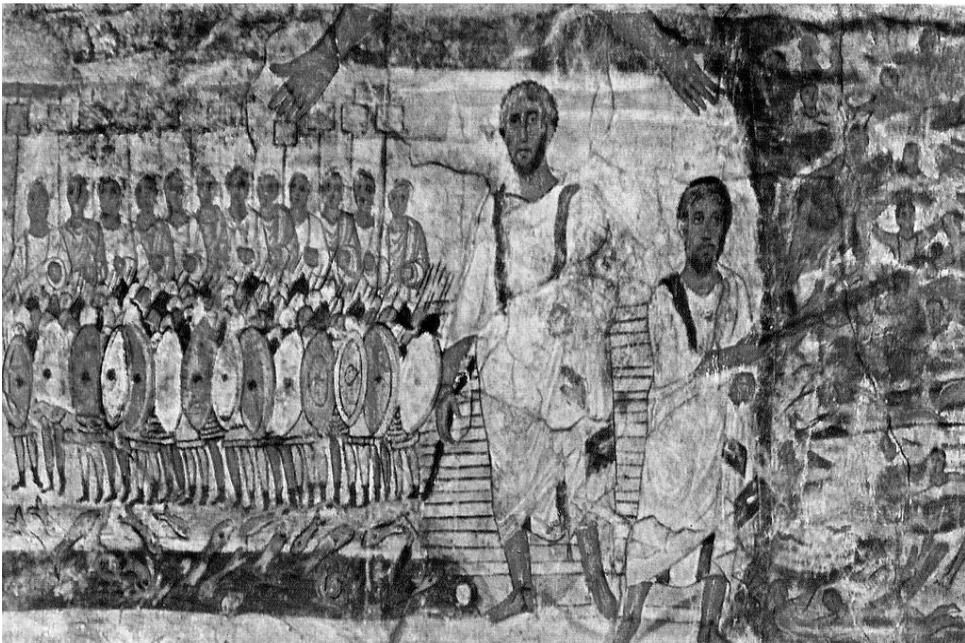


Plate 7: Moses closing the Red Sea with the sign of the Cross. Note the "hands of God" outstretched over him. Wall painting, great synagogue, Dura Europos.

In the first, the Hebrew painting, as Gardner observes, the scene is:

"presented with a minimum of detail. The major interest is in the [spiritual] concept of the event, which needed only to be evoked in order to be a source of

*inspiration. No attempt was made to create natural forms in space..."*³

There is something very striking in this painting of Moses, which passes directly into Orthodox Christian iconography. Notice the hands of God spread out and overshadowing the scene, and especially Moses and Aaron. For, Moses did not act in his own power, but in the Grace and power of God. As Christ said, "*Without Me, you can do nothing*" (*Jn. 15:5*). We shall see this verse of Scripture manifested often in Orthodox icons.

The following illustration is an Orthodox Christian icon of Moses, from the West (*plate 8 below*). It is from a mosaic in the sixth century Orthodox church of St. Vitale in Ravenna, Italy.

Notice the spiritual qualities and disposition of Moses in both the Hebrew and Orthodox

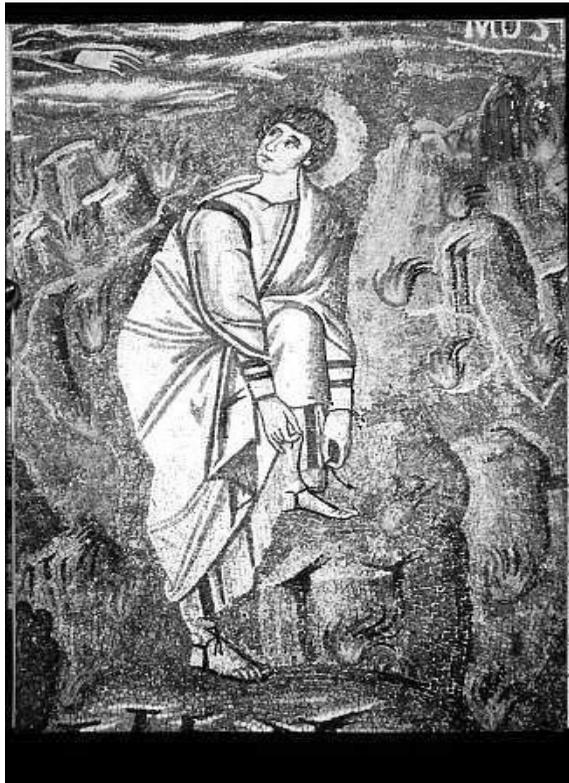


Plate 8: Prophet Moses, St. Vitale, Ravenna, Italy.

3. Gardner, p.18

Christian representations. They are both scriptural, for in the Divine Scripture, God calls Moses, ". . . *very meek, beyond all the men on earth*" (Nu.12:3). The strength of Moses was his meekness, humility and readiness to obey God and submit to his will, and because of this, God called him to His service. Moreover, in both the Hebrew painting and the Orthodox Christian icon, it is clear that Moses has no power of his own and does nothing of himself, for here too, we see the hand of God bestowing grace upon the submissive and obedient servant. Note also the peacefulness and love on the face of the man who was trembling in fear — this is peaceful fear, a love-filled fear. This is what is meant by "Fear of God" — a loving awe, filled with a spirit of peace and hope, assured that God, in all His awesome might, is also a loving Father.



*Plate 9: Prophet Moses on Sinai. Mosaic
in St Catherine's Monastery, Mt Sinai.*

We can see all these qualities more clearly in the following portrayal of Moses in an icon at St Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai (Plate 9). In this icon, study the face and the disposition of Moses. Is this not a scripturally correct portrayal of the man of whom God testifies, "*he is the meekest man on earth?*" Study the tenderness and love on the face of Moses, as he trembles in godly fear before the presence of his Creator and Lord, his loving Father who desires the freedom and salvation of His children.

Now let us take a look at a typical post-Orthodox Western representation of Moses: Michelangelo's famous sculpture; the pagan Moses of western humanism (*Plate 10 below*).



Plate 10: Michelangelo's Moses

This is certainly not the Moses of the Divine Scripture. Indeed, this is just Jupiter or Zeus with a different name. In the Western representation, Moses is shown not as the meek, receptive servant of God, but as if he were himself a god. Here he is a stern, harsh, all-powerful, brooding figure, who teaches in his own name, not in God's name. This is a pagan god, the sort of image that God, in the ten commandments, forbade us to make. Judge for yourselves which of these is an

icon according to the Divine Scripture, and which is just a

pagan image.

In this comparison which we have just made, we have resolved the question, "why did God command images to be made for His tabernacle, and yet a few verses later, forbid the making of graven images?" We have also abolished the sectarian arguments against icons which they base on their wilful, contrived misunderstanding of the "ten commandments." God did indeed command that icons be made for the liturgical decoration of His temple, but images which were unscriptural in nature, which could lead to pagan and false understandings, He strictly forbade.

Orthodox Christian iconography developed directly from the scriptural ideal of religious art and the iconography of the Old Testament tabernacle. This early Christian scriptural art assimilated certain spiritual qualities from existing "tomb art" of various cultures, particularly Egyptian and Roman, brought these qualities into accord with the Holy Scripture and decorated the first churches, the catacombs, with icons which fully maintain the spiritual and scriptural principles of divine revelation. The scriptural basis of the art was carefully guarded and remained completely intact.

We can see the first steps in this adaptation and transformation of "tomb art" into fully scriptural iconography in the following examples from the ancient catacombs.

In the following illustration, we see a group of holy martyrs (*Plate 11*). The central figure in this 1st or 2nd century icon is of particular interest. Notice that the eyes appear enlarged and highlighted by special shading which gives them



Plate 11: Praying martyr, Catacombs of Prissila, 2nd century

a piercing intensity. This is done to indicate that they are looking, not at the carnal, supposed reality around them, but at the reality of the divine and eternal. Their gaze pierces through the limitations of the flesh, and penetrates into eternity; the eyes are fixed on Christ, on eternal life (*Lk.10:23- 24*). In order to demonstrate this, the eyes are slightly exaggerated, enlarged and outlined. This technique is used to show that they, like all the senses, have been transformed and opened by divine grace to perceive that which is beyond the flesh. This is consistent with the Scripture also, for even the disciples who were with Christ and at hand when His resurrection was proclaimed, had need of a special spiritual awakening, that their "*eyes might be opened*" and they might perceive the fulness of the Gospel and the glory of the Lord (*Lk.24:31*). With this technique, judiciously used throughout the scriptural icons of the Orthodox Christian

Church, the icon teaches us that through faith and the moral struggle to grow and develop in that faith, we receive grace that opens up all our senses and understanding (*Eph.1:18*) slowly transforming them from carnal to spiritual so that we may behold, hear and feel the reality of His presence, the truth of His Kingdom and have them ever visible to the eyes of our hearts.



*Plate 12: Life of the Prophet Jonah, surrounding "Good Shepherd."
Catacomb of Sts Peter and Marcellinus, Rome.*

Here is another icon from the ancient catacombs (*Plate 12*), this one centring on Christ, surrounded by scenes from the life of the prophet Jonah. The life of Jonah was important in early iconography because of our Saviour's words, "*No sign shall be given except the sign of the Prophet Jonah*" (*Mt. 12:39-40*). It was clear to the early Christian painters that the events of Jonah's life were prophetic not only of the Resurrection of Christ on

the third day, but also of the preaching of His Gospel and the deliverance from eternal death of those who would harken to it. For this reason, scenes from the life of St Jonah were favourite subjects of the earliest Christian iconographers, and the "Jonah cycle" was often used to designate the place where the divine liturgy would be celebrated in the catacombs. Non-Christians would not know this story and most of the Jews would not recognize the iconography. This icon is interesting also in that it presents an actual *interpretation* of Old Testament scripture — a clear and profound feature of later canonical iconography which clarifies Old Testament prophecy and directly relates it to New Testament scripture.

The first century catacombs are filled with icons of the Saviour, the Virgin and the saints; however, Christian iconography is older than the catacombs. We know that the making of icons began during the earthly life of Christ. Christ himself impressed the image of His own face upon the mandelion⁴ of the King of Edessa. The Apostle Luke painted the first icon of the Virgin from life. Moreover, the historian Eusebius records having viewed many examples of purely secular art which recorded the actual appearance of Christ and various of the Apostles. In the Acts of the Third Ecumenical Council, we see a condemnation of representations of Christ with hair flowing from His head to the sides in the style of *plate 36*, for

4. A mandelion was a cloth used for wrapping a scroll or parchment letter in ancient times. It was a simple white cloth. The mandelion of the King of Edessa was kept as a sacred relic in Constantinople for centuries, until it was destroyed during the invasion of the Latins, being sunk in the Sea of Marmara when a ship went down bearing many of the relics of the great city.

example, and the holy fathers noted that they had "accurate descriptions of Christ, which have come down from those who knew Him personally." In that council, Christ was decribed very much the way we see him depicted in *plate 13* below, with hair bound to the back and a "sparse beard."⁵

We see, therefore, that the use of icons in "True Worship" (*Orthodoxia*), is from the most ancient history of Christ's Church. They were first made on God's command for the very first temple, and continue to this day in His temples, the Orthodox churches, where they have the same sacred character and use as they did then. New Testament icons began with Christ, and were an integral part of the churches and life of the catacombs, the so-called "primitive church."

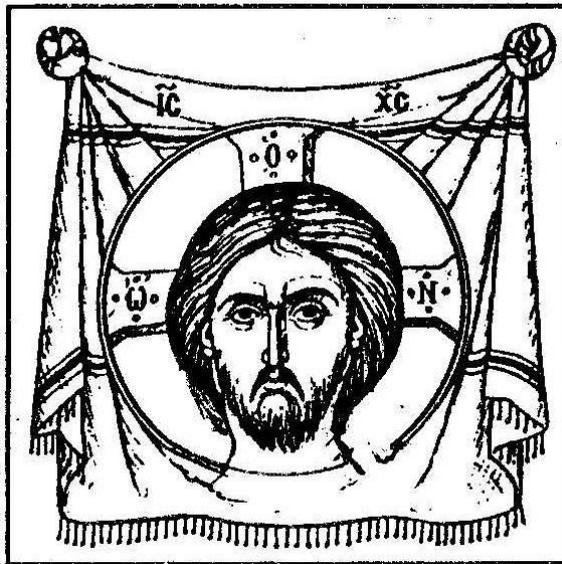


Plate 13: Line drawing of the Mandelion, one of the most ancient icons of Christ.

5. See the acts of the Third Ecumenical Council.

III

FORMS AND SYMBOLISM

In the Old Testament, the Incarnation of Christ and His saving deeds were prefigured in types and symbols. While this is a subject for a separate discussion, we mention this because historically, in the Scripture, those divine truths which have exceeded the grasp of ordinary, fallen human understanding, are revealed in "types," symbolic acts or language, symbols, or symbolism which amplifies certain truths and portrays them in a manner comprehensible to our elementary intellects. However, these symbolic portrayals are not elements of lowering or bringing the divine truths down to the level of existence of the fallen nature. Symbolism or types, both in the Old Testament and in Orthodox ikonography are designed to be stepping stones in building up the spiritual awareness and understanding of the believer, so that he may be lifted upward to greater and higher understandings.

Thus, the symbol traced on the doorposts for the Passover, the cross which Moses traced over the Red Sea to open and close it, the cross shaped branch cast into the bitter waters of Marah, the sign of the cross which he made, on God's command, with his outstretched arms, to defeat Amalek at Refidim (*Ex.17:8-12*), the serpent lifted up in the wilderness (*Nu.21:9; Jn.3:14*), the Ark of the Covenant, and the icons of angels that covered every wall of the Tabernacle at Sinai, the altar and the ritual pertaining to it, the near sacrifice of

Abraham's son, and so on, were events not readily comprehensible, but taken together, they certainly prepared the true believers for the advent of Christ.

The same pertains to symbolism or symbolical elements in ikonography. Let us look at one of the most significant of these symbolical elements: *reverse perspective*.

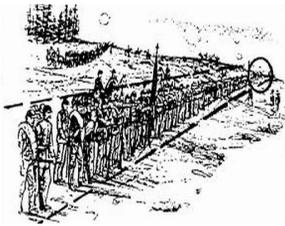


Plate 15: In picture above, the perspective is demonstrated by the broken lines. The vanishing point is shown with the circle at the far end.

Reverse perspective in icons is something which is very much misunderstood, especially by art historians and other superficial viewers, who often attribute it to ignorance of composition. This symbolic technique is most obvious in the evident reversal of the vanishing point lines in icons.

The vanishing point is that point at which lines merge in a background of a picture, to give a sense of distance or depth. This illusion of depth is often accomplished by having a road in a picture grow narrower by drawing the lines closer together toward the top or to one side or corner of the paper or canvas. At a certain point, the lines indicating the road actually come together and the road appears to vanish in the distance. In the example given here, the perspective and vanishing point are established by a row of soldiers who are drawn smaller and smaller toward the back of the picture, until the lines of the drawing converge in the distance.

In the ikon, this convergence of lines moves toward the front of the picture rather than toward the back and, in fact, the vanishing point itself is never reached.

This is so because the vanishing point is behind the viewer, making the viewer an integral part of or participant in the action shown in the ikon. In other words, the viewer is summoned not to be a viewer only, but a partaker of the Gospel, not to be a hearer of the word only, but a doer of the word (Jas.1:23). For, as we shall see, the ikon is nothing else except the Gospel in pictures.

This *reverse perspective* in ikonography is important, for it makes the icon scripturally correct. The Gospel certainly calls upon us to *reverse our perspective*, to look at life and the world, and ourselves, from a perspective which is just the opposite of the way the world views these things. In the world, it is the powerful who triumph, in the Scripture, the meek win the ultimate victory, not by force or might, but

by inheritance. The seeming total defeat of Christ and His Gospel when He died on the Cross is actually the supreme victory of mankind. The world is concerned with material success, and since death is an end of material growth and possessions, it is a complete defeat. The Holy Scripture calls upon us to "*take no thought*" for material things, but to "*seek first the Kingdom of God*" (Mt.6:33), since death is not an end but a beginning, not a loss of our treasures, but an entering into our



Plate 16: The line of perspective is shown with the dotted lines. The position of the viewer is indicated by the circle, the vanishing point is shown by the dot.

inheritance.

Moreover, the Scripture constantly calls on us to repent. Repentance (*metanoia*) really means to *reverse our perspective*, to change the way we look at life, to change our minds and our point of view.

Since the Holy Scripture so vividly calls upon us to reverse our perspective, to change our way of seeing things and the direction of our lives, the icon can only be scripturally correct if it reverses our perspective, and this is done quite intentionally in Orthodox Christian ikonography.

Form and Symbolism in Ikonographic Architecture.

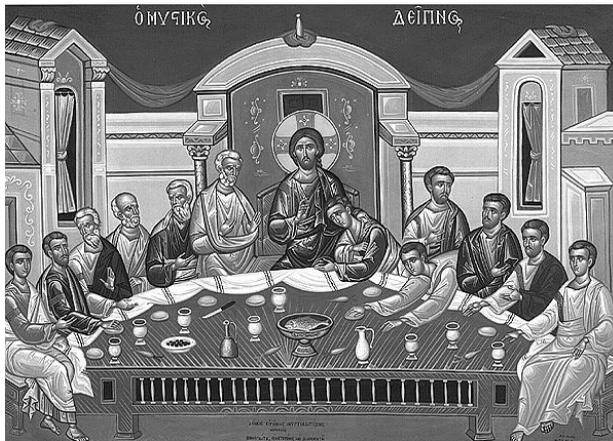
This is a deep and profound subject. It is discussed in more detail in the book **The Evidence of Things Not Seen**,⁶ but we will touch on it briefly here, in the context of Scripture.

Buildings are used in icons in much the same way as reverse perspective. Indeed, they are a part of this reverse perspective, for they bear the reversed vanishing point in their structure. Interiors of buildings in icons, are only semi-structures. They enclose the sacred event or scene from the back and open wide toward the front, this movement being amplified by the reverse perspective. Again, the viewer is drawn into the picture as a participant. The interior of the building spiritually reaches around the viewer, and the walls reach their

6. *Evidence of Things Not Seen*, Synaxis Press, 1997. See especially, *Chapter VI: The Cosmology of Orthodox Church Architecture*.

convergence behind him, just as the vanishing point occurs behind the viewer. The buildings in icons "embrace" the viewer and draw him or her into the spiritual reality — the reality of the Gospel, which the icon is presenting. It is in this same context that we often tell our children that the Orthodox Church is the arms of God, with which He embraces us and hugs us to Himself.

The basic structure of ikonographic building interiors (*see Plate 17, below*) is designed to draw the viewer into the spiritual event as a participant, to transfer his mind from profane to sacred space. The main aspect which must be noted, is the fact that the building embraces, rather than wholly encloses, the scene. The "arms" of the building reach out and embrace the worshipper, drawing him into the Gospel as a living experience of worship. The setting is never covered by a roof which overhangs the entire scene, rather a curtain is draped along the wall to indicate that the event is taking place inside a building. This is because the grace-filled, divine event is taking place within the Holy Church, and it is not limited in time and space, but is truly universal and eternal. The believers both in heaven and on earth are included and united as one body of Christ, and the icon reflects this universality of the Church. A solid ceiling or roof over the scene would indicate a barrier between heaven and earth, and in Christ, in His Gospel, there are no such divisions or barriers.



The building in the icon of the Mystical Supper (*Plate 17, above*), demonstrates the principles of both reverse perspective and the "embrace" of the ikon, as well as the other symbolic aspects mentioned above.

In the icon of the Mystical Supper, the table is an apparent violation of reverse perspective. Another symbolic concept is used here, however, in conjunction with the reverse perspective and the "embrace" evident in the structure of the building itself. The table opens wide to the front, with open space. This is so because the viewer is being invited to come to the table and participate also. Space has been reserved at the table for the worshipper and, thus, the concept of ikonographic perspective is not only preserved, but amplified, as if to say, *"through repentance, you also may come and take your place at the table and participate in Christ's Supper, the wedding feast of the Eternal Bridegroom."*

The immediacy with which the icon draws the viewer into the events of the Scripture is in itself part of the ikonographic preaching of the Gospel. We, in our own time

and century, are called to partake *here and now* in the events of Christ's earthly life, and in the events in the on-going history of His Church. It is evident in the icon that time is not a limiting factor,⁷ so that the Orthodox Christians of every generation participate in, and receive, the action or events or persons portrayed in the ikon. When contemplating an icon of the Nativity of Christ, for example, we ought to be led to understand that on the Feast of the Nativity, every parish church and Orthodox Christian home becomes Bethlehem, and every believing heart becomes the manger, for Christ is received in the heart of the believer, just as the manger received Him as a babe. This all corresponds both with the Scripture and with the dogmatic hymns of the Holy Church. For example, the Apostle says, ". . . *behold, now is the accepted time...*" (2Cor.6:2), and this "now" means any time, in any century and place where the reader comes upon these words; and in the dogmatic hymnology of the Church, we hear such expressions as, "*Today, heaven and earth rejoice ...for God, born of a woman, has appeared in the flesh...*" and "*Today*⁸ *in Bethlehem, I hear from the angels, `Glory to God in the highest'...*" (*Hymns for the Entreaty*,

7. "Space-Time and the Divine Services," in Chapter7 in *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*(Synaxis Press, 1997).

8. Use of this word "Today," which occurs so often in the divine services, is frequently misunderstood and disregarded by careless translators. Many hymns or verses actually begin with this word, sometimes in whole sequences or rows of verses. This was done intentionally to call the heart and mind of the faithful to the immediacy and ever presence of Christ and the events of His life. Careless translators either substitute another word for "Today," or change its place in the verse so that it does not begin the verse or hymn as is intended. This is very unfortunate. For a fuller discussion of this matter, see *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, (Synaxis Press, 1997), p.54-55.

Tone One). In the sacred feasts, the faithful of all times and places mystically participate in the events of our Saviour's earthly sojourn. This is true of holy icons also. Thus, the ceilings and roofs of buildings are omitted in icons to reveal that, in Christ Jesus, there is no division between heaven and earth. This fact and the form of the buildings themselves clearly indicate that each viewer in every time and place is embraced into the holy events of the Gospel and drawn into the Kingdom of God through repentance.

Shadows

These same principles of forms and symbolism pertain to all the symbolic features in icons. One of the most striking such features is the absence of shadows.

There are no shadows in icons. This fact is often overlooked, and yet it is an element of the great spiritual sophistication of the ikon. There are no shadows in icons because they are filled with and permeated by spiritual light. The events take place or the saints stand entirely within the all-pervading light of the "Sun of Righteousness" (*Mal.4:2*), Jesus Christ. Christ, Who "*fillest all things*" (*Eph.1:23*), completely fills the events and persons in the ikon, who dwell within His light. Clearly, in order to be fully scriptural, the icon must have no shadows, for "*Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, in Whom there is no variation, neither shadow cast by His turning*" (*Js.1:17*). In the light of the Holy Trinity, there are no shadows. The ikon,

remember, takes place on the spiritual plane, bringing the spiritual and the physical together, and it breathes with a spirit of immortality and eternity. It deals with immutable realities; it summons us into the deepest, most profound revelations and concepts of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Haloes

Haloes are another sometimes misunderstood element of iconography. They do not have the meaning usually ascribed to them in art. The halo is not an invention of Christian art. It has been used for millennia as a symbolic device in the art of many cultures, usually to amplify or set apart a person depicted in a group of other people, or to signify a special rank or position of a person. In much of pre-Christian art, the light circle or square shown as a backdrop to the head of some person, indicated a special rank, usually of royalty. Kings and the children of kings were often depicted in art with this block of light-coloured space placed behind the head.



The device of the halo of light was beautifully adapted for use in icons, partly to signify that the person depicted has truly become a "member of the royal family," a child of the King and Creator of all. The inner spiritual significance of the halo in Orthodox Christian iconography is much deeper and more profoundly scriptural than this, however, and it is of considerable

theological significance. (*Plate 18 above, icon of St Menas with halo*).

Firstly, there are a number of icons in which the halo does not appear (see *Plate 19* below, for example), for the halo is not an absolute necessity in Orthodox ikonography, because a saint is portrayed in the icon in such a way that the transfigured and spiritual presence is clear from the form and nature of the figure itself, and no label or external sign is necessary to identify the person as a saint of God.



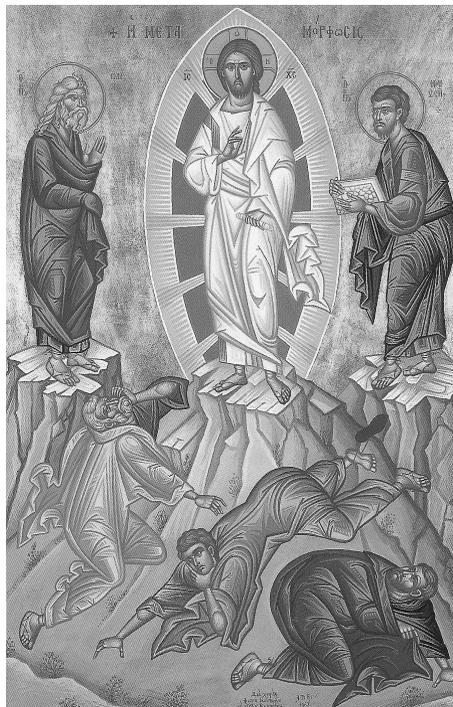
Plate 19: Thomas Sunday icon, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY.

To fully comprehend the scriptural fidelity of this aspect of Orthodox ikonography, it is necessary to understand that the halo is *not* a circle behind the head, but a globe of light which completely encompasses the head. It is rendered transparent, as it were, so that you can see the face of the

saint.

The globe of light, the halo, in the icon is a radiance from within, the radiance of divine grace which is a gift of God, a testimony of the fact that, as Paul put it, "*It is not I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (*Gal.2:20*). This radiance is a gift of divine grace to the purified soul, an expression of the indwelling Holy Spirit, a testimony that the holy person represented has become, indeed, a fit temple for the Spirit, and since he "*lives in the Spirit,*" he "*also walks in the Spirit*" (*Gal.5:25*).

In the same way, the saints should never be depicted in profile, because, as St Makarios the Great explains: "*A soul which has been illumined by Divine glory becomes all light and countenance, and no part of it is behind, but it stands wholly facing forward.*"⁹ This should be the case even for those icons of prophets and apostles on the ikonostas, where they are inclined in the direction of the royal gates, and in icons of the "Communion of the Apostles,"¹⁰ where the figures of the Apostles are oriented toward the figure of Christ in the centre of the icon.



9. Pseudo-Makarios, *50 Sp. Hom.1.2*

IV LANDSCAPES

Finally, we must say something about the landscapes in iconography. This is another aspect in which the icon seeks to convey the fullness of the Gospel message, rather than please carnal, sensual ideals. God has become incarnate and walked upon the earth in a fully human form, and the universe can never again be the same. The Incarnation, life, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ have brought the world to its last days, filled it with hope and impelled it onward toward its final destiny of transfiguration and glory.

These facts are often completely overlooked or misunderstood by some would-be icon painters, who render backgrounds and landscapes in a carnal, naturalistic manner.

The created world fell with man, and now it is again uplifted by the God-man, Jesus Christ. The universe is redeemed together with man, and the process is inevitable, irreversible. As the Church on earth struggles for the salvation of all those who will join themselves to her, she also struggles for, and effectuates, the redemption of the created cosmos.

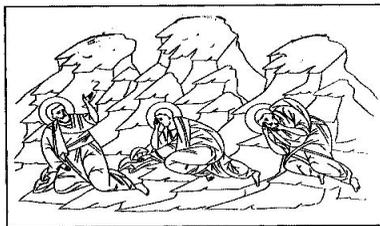


Plate 20: Example of iconographic landscape, from a line drawing of a detail from the Transfiguration icon.

Moreover, when our Saviour declared, "*You are not of this world,*" and "*My kingdom is not of this world,*" (Jn.15:19; 18:36), He separated His Church from the carnal, sensual world around it, and declared it to be a world unto itself — a fore-image of the transfigured cosmos in the age to come. The world of iconography is the world of the Holy Church, a world of regeneration, of newness of life, of transfiguration and incorruptibility. Icons do not seek to debase or lower the created flesh, or to separate it from the spiritual, but rather to clearly unite the two and to transfigure the flesh with the spirit, for the Scripture says, "*Do you not know that your body is a temple of God*" (1Cor. 3:16, 6:19; 2Cor.6 :16); and again, "*The goal is to be holy both in body and in spirit*" (1Cor.7:34), and further, "*May God sanctify you completely and entirely, and your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1Ths.5:23). The same is true of the cosmos. In Western, post-Orthodox art, the world, like the people in it, is either still waiting for the advent of Christ, or it is indifferent to it and unaffected by it. Orthodox Christian iconography, on the other hand, is profoundly aware of it, and faithful to it.

Here, then, is the principle of the iconographic representation of landscapes: "*God took a material body, thereby proving that matter can be redeemed: `The Word made flesh has deified the flesh`,*" says St. John the Damascene. God has shown that matter can be Spirit-bearing, for He bestowed the Holy Spirit upon flesh, "*I shall pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh*" (Joel 2:28), He said. "The Orthodox doctrine of icons is bound up with the Orthodox belief that the whole of God's creation,

material as well as spiritual, is to be redeemed and glorified."¹¹

And here is the Divine Scripture to which the iconographic landscape is profoundly faithful. The Apostle informs us, in Romans, chapter eight, that:

"The whole creation waits expectantly for God's children to be made known. For the creation was made subject to frailty, not by its own fault, but by the Will of Him who so subjected it, but yet with hope. We know that the whole creation has been groaning and toiling together until now. That creation itself will be set free of its bondage to corruption, into the glorious freedom of God's children..." and Paul further says, *"..For in this hope we were saved" (18-24).*

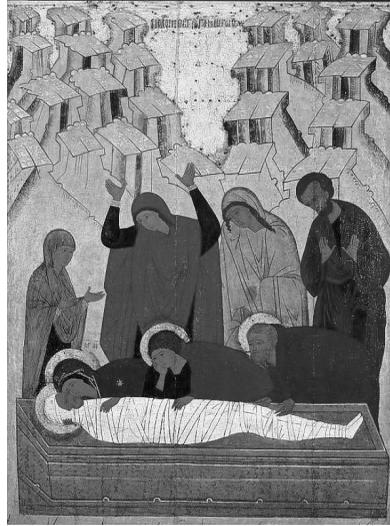
If God has given us this sure hope and knowledge, shall we ignore it? Post-Orthodox Western art does. The icon, however, revels and rejoices in this knowledge and promise, and conveys to the faithful that rejoicing with the sense and awareness of transfiguration and incorruptibility.

Here are some striking examples of this scriptural/spiritual principle in the iconographic form of landscapes:

11. Ware, Timothy, *The Orthodox Church*(Penguin Press, London), p.42

COSMIC GRIEF:

In plate 21, the Lamentation at the Tomb and burial of Christ, we see a perfect example of the unity of man and the created world in the process of redemption. Note the arms of Mary of Magdala cast up in an expression of grief and lament. The mountains behind the scene perfectly mirror the hands of Mary which are raised in a traditional form of lamentation and grief. The



mountains reflect the form of Mary's arms and hands, and thus are also cast up in a cosmic grief that encompasses the whole universe: the creator of all, the Lord of Life, lies as one dead, for the sake of our failings and sins, that He might conquer the power which holds our nature prisoner and set us free from the bondage of the tyranny of death and Satan (Hb.2:15).

COSMIC JOY:

In *Plate 22* below, the proper, canonical icon of the Resurrection, we see, again, the bond between mankind and the created universe. In this icon, Christ is bestowing the promise of everlasting life on those of the faithful who have fallen asleep, from the beginning of time, in the hope of His coming, with faith in the promises of prophecy. We see the joy of Sts Adam and Eve as Christ reaches down to take their hands and lift



them up from darkness to light.¹² As the saints of the Old Testament receive the joy of life and resurrection, they stand arrayed on either side of the Redeemer, rejoicing. Mirroring the redeemed saints, the mountains behind them are cast up in a cosmic rejoicing, for, according to Scripture:

"That creation itself will be set free of its bondage to corruption, into the glorious freedom of God's children" (Rm. 9:24).

The Old Testament prophecy which Paul, in the verse above, proclaims to have been fulfilled, is found in the 97th Psalm (98th Psalm in the KJV). The icon joyously chants this psalm, glorifying its fulfilment:

12. The appearance of Adam and Eve in this icon is of great theological significance. They are a type of the whole fallen nature of mankind, which, indeed, fell through them. Christ, as the "new Adam," came to redeem the fallen nature itself, and restore it to its proper place, uniting it again with the Creator. In the icon, by showing Christ raising Adam and Eve, we are taught the true meaning and nature of redemption. Christ did not come to be "one's own personal Saviour," but to redeem the very nature of mankind and, recapitulating it in Himself (*Eph. 1:10, Orthodox Bible*), unite the perfect human nature with God. (For an important discussion of the subject see Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky's *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas of the Faith*, Chapter 5, "The Dogma of Redemption." (Synaxis Press, 1986), p.91.

"O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things:...The Lord hath made known His Salvation...all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth....rejoice and sing praise...make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King, let the sea be shaken...the world and they that dwell therein. The rivers shall clap their hands together; the mountains shall rejoice together at the presence of the Lord, for He cometh; Yea, He is come to judge the earth" (97th Psalm).



This psalm was written in the spirit of prophecy, and the icon reveals to us that this scripture has been fulfilled in Christ, for in the icon (*Plate 23*), the rivers and the mountains are shown

uplifted in rejoicing, proclaiming the presence of the Lord. Since the icon is a form of the Holy Scripture, we must expect to see in them, the proclamation that this prophecy has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ, as indeed we do.

In the icon above, we see the fulfilment of the prophetic Psalm 97. In the centre of the icon, the Incarnation of Christ is depicted, showing the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, "*A virgin shall conceive and bear a child, and shall call His name Immanuel*" (Is.7:14). The mountains are shown uplifted in a transfigured manner, proclaiming, "*the mountains shall rejoice together at the presence of the Lord*" (Ps.97) The Lord of Hosts and Ancient of Days is received as a babe and the whole of creation recognizes its Creator and rejoices that the day of its redemption is nigh. In this icon, the angels offer praise, the shepherds worship, the magi offer gifts and the earth offers a manger cave and a tomb so that the work of the Saviour might be fulfilled. And we, fallen humanity, offer Him a virgin mother and a hymn of praise.

In the icon, the cosmos reaches upward to receive the Creator and, having received Him twice into its depths, and seen Him ascend again into Heaven, it reaches upward to receive the Holy Spirit, to receive the Righteous Judge and all that He has promised. Being filled with all this hope of transfiguration and the fragrance of incorruptibility, the landscape, the "whole creation" is presented in the icon as an everlasting hymn of hope and glory, vibrant in the timelessness of eternity.

V

THE PERSON AND NATURE OF JESUS CHRIST

One God the Word; God the Messiah

All icons are dogmatic statements, each one is a sermon on the Gospel message, on the "*mystery which was kept hidden from the ages and generations, but now is revealed to the saints*" (Col.1:26; Rm.16:25-26). Thus, the key to understanding iconography is to understand the Gospel. This means that every corruption of iconography is inevitably a corruption of the Gospel message itself. It is precisely for this reason that St. John the Damascene boldly declared: "*Show me the icons that you venerate, so that I may be able to understand your faith.*"¹³

All icons deal with Christ, no matter who is portrayed in the icon. An icon always speaks of the truth of the Incarnation: of the virgin birth (as when the Virgin is shown); of the person and divinity of Christ and His saving acts (as in the icons of the twelve great feast days); His victory over death and His transforming power (as when the saints are shown).

13. *Concise Exposition of the Orthodox Faith.*

The Person and Nature of Jesus Christ

Let us look first of all at the nature and person of Christ, for this is the foundation of our salvation.

Christ is both truly God and truly man. Since He was incarnate and took on human form, we paint His icon with a human form. To represent Christ in the form of only a man however, is only half the truth — indeed, it is not the truth at all. It remains devoid of the Gospel message and opposed to scriptural truth. It is false to represent Christ in a merely human form, for He is very God. This is as fundamental to iconography as it is to the understanding of the New Testament: Jesus Christ must be presented not as a man, but as the God-man. This truth, that He is very God, must always be evident together with the truth that He is perfect man: for though he is *"the Son of man,"* (Mk.8:31; see Dn. 7:13), He is also *"the Christ, the Son of God"* (Jn.11:27) and, *"in Him dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily"* (Col.2:9).

Since Christ was God in the womb of the Virgin, even as He took on the form and nature of man, the truth of His divinity must be clear in portrayals of each stage of His life. This is particularly important when we recall that Christ, as God and man, sanctified each stage of human life, from conception to the full maturity of thirty years. This is an indispensable aspect of our redemption: the redemption of the fallen human nature in all its fulness.

Let us see the depth and profoundness of scriptural understanding and revelation in three icons of Christ as a child.

Since the icon is concerned with a clear revelation of the Gospel, it must reveal to us the person and nature of Jesus Christ. In none of these icons may He be shown as a helpless infant. The Gospel truth that Christ was always God, always in control, is demonstrated not only by the form of the icon, but by the fact that He is shown as a "miniature adult," only with youthful features, and identified in symbolic ways as God the Word.

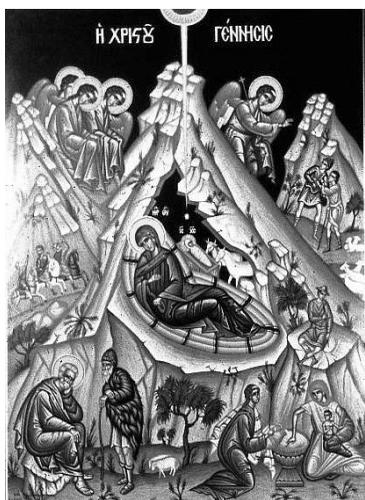


Plate 24: Nativity of Christ. The dominance of the Virgin is explained in the chapter on The Theotokos.

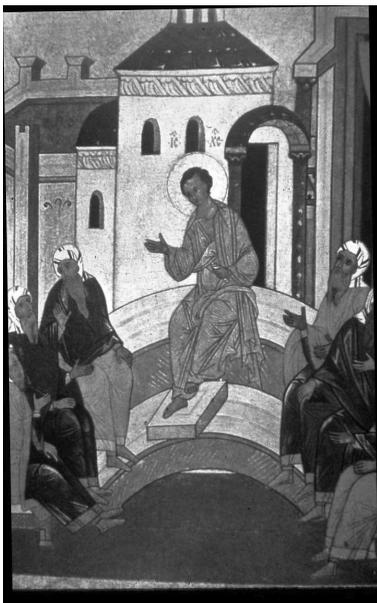
In this icon (*Plate 24*) of the Nativity, Christ is pictured not only wrapped in swaddling cloths (in the same manner as the Torah was wrapped), but wrapped in the manner of burial: for this is the Saviour of mankind, who entered the world as a babe in order to die for it. His birth in the manger cave is a prefiguration of His sabbath in the tomb-cave following His life-bestowing crucifixion. Note the nimbus, (halo), around Christ's head. In it, we see the form of the cross, and in the arms of this cross, is the name which God-The-Word gave to Himself when He spoke to Moses on Sinai — *The Being* or *The Living One* (in Greek and Slavonic: 'o ων), thus, testifying that this infant is truly, God, the God of Moses, the God Who gave the law on Sinai.

Note too, that in the Orthodox icon, Joseph is *never* painted together with Christ and the Virgin. He is painted off

to one side or even in a corner of the icon. This is so because the icon is scriptural, and in Scripture we learn that Joseph did not participate in the Incarnation, he had no hand or role in the matter of the birth of Christ. The Virgin dominates the icon, together with Christ, for the message is clearly the virgin birth, the Incarnation of God. It is scripturally necessary for the figure of Mary to dominate in the icon precisely because the Nativity icon reveals the fulfilment of the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit revealed through the prophet, "*The Lord Himself will give you a sign: a virgin shall conceive and bear a Child*" (Is. 7:14). This icon thus has three primary purposes: to reveal the fulfilment of the prophecy, the giving of the "sign" by which we are to know that the Messiah has come; to teach us that the One born of the Virgin is God incarnate and; to foretell the repose of Christ in the tomb that He might fulfil that for which He came into the world.

The whole icon reflects and proclaims the miraculous nature of the event. This is why the angels overshadow and loom above the landscape, which is cast up in awe and rejoicing. They dwarf the magi and the shepherds. For heaven has reached down to earth that earth might be drawn upward to heaven, and neither the shepherds nor the magi are approaching a merely earthly event: they are approaching heaven itself, the throne of the King of Glory. Christ is truly God, and heaven is with Him. He is both here in the manger cave, but in no wise absent from heaven. To carnal eyes, everything may seem just as it was before, but the world is no longer the same. It is changed, for God has emptied Himself, and poured Himself out

Now, let us look at an icon of Christ as a youth of twelve, teaching in the temple (*plate 26 below*).



He is not shown as a callow youth as he usually is in Western art, but as a font of wisdom and understanding; for, indeed, He is not a mere youth, He is the Word and Wisdom of God. In the icon, He is clearly Christ, God incarnate. The globe of light round his head bears the title of the Creator and Law-giver, come now to reveal and teach the truth of His law to His creation. He has appeared to beseech, one last time, the guardians of His law to understand and reverence that law, to perceive and practice the true meaning of the law. Let us see how beautifully the icon reveals this unity of the Old and New Testaments, this continuity of the Word, Who was revealed in the Old Testament, and now is seen face to face in the New Testament. In the following icons of Christ in the temple and the Lord Emmanuel—the Divine Wisdom (*plates 27 and 30*), we see exactly the same Person in both icons. The Youth Who appeared in the temple was the Lord Emmanuel and the Divine Wisdom, the Son and Word of God. The Orthodox Christian who properly venerates icons is deeply and profoundly aware of this. Western religious art presents only an actor pretending to be Jesus.

Note the similarities in both form and detail between the

New Testament fulfilment above and the Old Testament prophecy depicted below. Clearly, it was "the Lord Emmanuel" (*Is. 7:14, 8:8 and Mt. 1:32*) who appeared in the temple as Christ at age twelve.



Plate 27: The Lord Emmanuel

The Alpha and the Omega

The readings in the Orthodox Vespers services for feast days are designed on the principle that the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New. This is quite true, and Orthodox Christian iconography is faithful to this fact, as we shall see, for Jesus Christ is *The Alpha and the Omega*, the Beginning and the End.

Not only is a nearly complete "life of Christ" to be found in Old Testament prophecy, but The Word (Jesus Christ) is found constantly active with man throughout all the ages, from

the creation until the end.

All the Old Testament theophanies (appearances of God) were appearances of the Son, (Jesus Christ). Dogmatically, this is extremely important. In Western art, there is a complete confusion about the Old Testament theophanies, and idolatrous portrayals of "God the Father" in a human form are frequent, as are the heretical representations of "The Lord of Hosts" and "The Ancient of Days" as God the Father, rather than as Old Testament revelations of The Son and Word, Jesus Christ. Moreover, in this erroneous art, there is no indication of the activity of the Word in the Old Testament, yet He was the active Person of the Trinity at every moment in the history of Israel and the unfolding of the prophecy.

Christ was our active Creator, as we see in this line drawing of an icon of the creation (*Plate 28*) taken from a children's book.

Note the "family resemblance" between Christ, and Adam and Eve in the icon. This may recall that man was created "in the image and likeness of God," but it is more important, iconographically, to understand it as a prophecy of the Incarnation. In the



Plate 28: Line drawing, creation of Adam and Eve.

creation, God made Adam and Eve an image of Himself *spiritually*, but at the same time foreshadowed the coming of God the Word as man for the redemption of His creation. As Adam and Eve were created both body and soul, so God, who is Spirit, would become, for us, also physical, in order both to

redeem us and to fellowship with us "face to face" in His Kingdom.

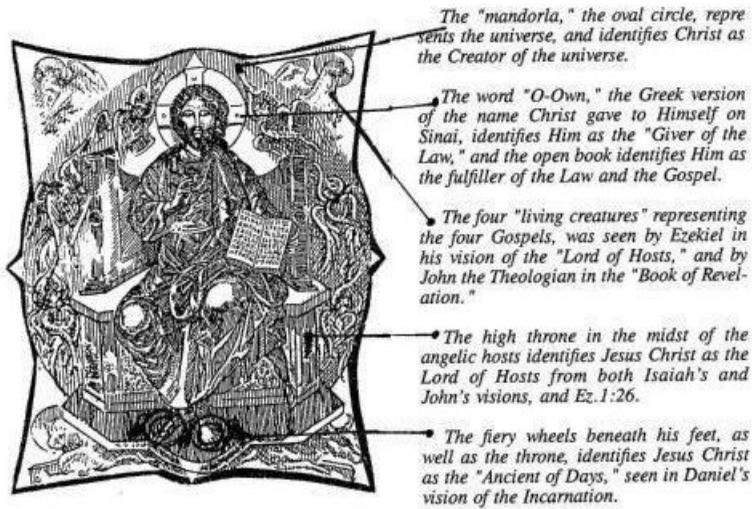
It was God the Word (Christ) Who "walked in the garden" with Adam and Eve, a prophecy about how He would also walk in our midst when He came among us as Jesus Christ. It was the Word, Christ, Who gave the Law on Sinai, and Christ is "Immanuel," Whose virgin birth is the sign that "God is in our midst" (the meaning of the name "Emmanuel").

It is in the icons of Christ Emmanuel and the icons called "de-esis" (*Plate 29, below*) that we see the rich and powerful way that the Orthodox icon binds the Old Testament prophecy to its New Testament fulfilment. Indeed, both icons summarize the entire presence and work of God the Word — Jesus Christ — throughout the history of the created universe, from its beginning to its final transfiguration at the Second Coming. Before we look at examples of these majestic and profoundly scriptural icons, we should examine a line drawing, noting the meaning of the terminology we will have to use. The following sketch will acquaint the reader with the elements of these icons, and their meaning.

The following sketch is of the icon of the "deesis," or "Last Judgment." In it, Christ is shown as the "Lord of Hosts" and the "Ancient of Days," from the visions of Isaiah (ch.6), Ezekiel (ch.1; ch.10), Daniel (ch.7) and John the Theologian (ch.4). Note the elements of this icon as shown by the arrows in the sketch below.

In most such icons, the marks of His suffering: the nail prints in His hands and feet, and the wound on His side, are

also visible. Thus, we see that in this one icon, Christ is identified as the Creator of the universe, the One Who sustained man and creation throughout the ages, as the Lord of Hosts, the One Who would become incarnate for our salvation (the vision of the "Ancient of Days/Son of Man"), the one Who suffered and died for the salvation of His universe, and the One Who will come to judge His universe at the end of the ages.



The "mandorla," the oval circle, represents the universe, and identifies Christ as the Creator of the universe.

The word "O-Own," the Greek version of the name Christ gave to Himself on Sinai, identifies Him as the "Giver of the Law," and the open book identifies Him as the fulfiller of the Law and the Gospel.

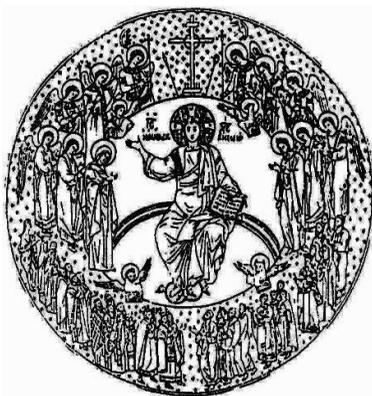
The four "living creatures" representing the four Gospels, was seen by Ezekiel in his vision of the "Lord of Hosts," and by John the Theologian in the "Book of Revelation."

The high throne in the midst of the angelic hosts identifies

Jesus Christ as the Lord of Hosts from both Isaiah's and John's visions, and Ez.1:26.

The fiery wheels beneath his feet, as well as the throne, identifies Jesus Christ as the "Ancient of Days," seen in Daniel's vision of the Incarnation.

The icon of Christ Emmanuel is especially rich and powerful. Look carefully at it and you will see the fulfilment of all the Old Testament revelation and prophecy. Here, Christ is shown surrounded by the whole creation, identifying Him as its *Creator*. He is shown seated upon the rainbow throne, as the *God of Noah*, the One Who baptized the earth and gave it new life and a second chance. His halo bears the words "O Own" ("the Being," "the One Who Is," or "I Am,") identifying Him as the *God of Sinai*, the *Giver of the Law and Deliverer of Israel*.

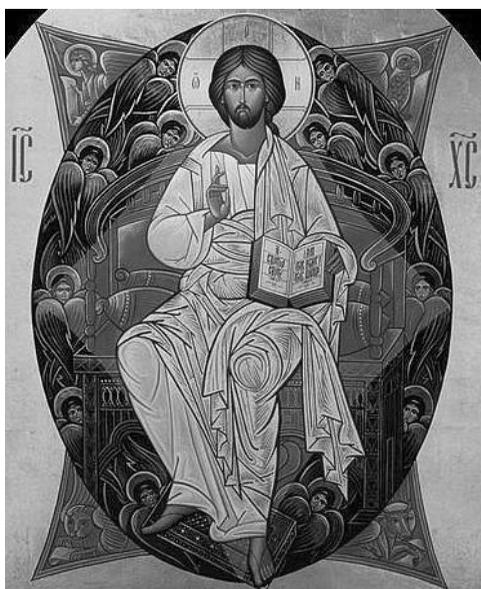


Around Christ is the "tetramorph" (the "four living creatures"), identifying Him as the *Lord of Hosts (Savaoath)*. He is shown here (Plate 30) as the *Lord Emmanuel*, the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of *the Messiah*, in the same form as He appeared in the temple as a youth to reveal that He is the *Giver of the Law*, come now to reveal the meaning of the Law. Beneath His feet are the fiery wheels, identifying Him as the *Ancient of Days*. Above Him are the instruments of His passion, showing Him to be *the Saviour of the Cosmos*, which (because the icon also includes the Deesis) he is now coming to

judge in righteousness. The icon below (*Plate 31*) is a fresco of the Deesis (the Second Coming). You will notice that the elements are identical to those in the line drawing of the icon of Christ Emmanuel (*Plate 30* above).



Plate 31-32: Deesis (Last Judgement detail)



The richness, power and fullness of Divine Scripture in the Orthodox Christian icon is amazing, and this fulness is accomplished on the highest spiritual level, without the overly graphic saccharin affectations of Western religious art. In this icon (*Plate 32*) the visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are all presented, demonstrating the

fulness of revelation about Christ from the Old Testament.

In all the above icons of the Old Testament theophanies,

the Son is shown in a divine-human form. This is so because every appearance of God the Word in the Old Testament was a direct prophecy about His Incarnation in the fulness of time. It is interesting that, in certain other icons of appearances of the Son in the Old Testament, He is depicted in the form of an angel. This is done because that particular appearance is not a prophecy about His Incarnation, but a revelation of something else. The most common example of this is in the icon called "The Hospitality of Abraham" (*Plate 33, below*) In this icon Christ, depicted in the form of an angel, is accompanied by two angels.



Plate 33: Line drawing of the Hospitality of Abraham

They appeared to Sarah and Abraham, and the Lord assured them of the faithfulness of His promise to them. Christ is the "angel" in the centre, usually identified with the tetragrammaton IC XC (Greek for "Jesus Christ"). Some unscriptural and erroneous portrayals identify all three angels as Christ by applying the Christian tetragrammaton to all three. After the appearance to Sarah and Abraham, the Word disappears, and the two angels continue on to Sodom and Gomorrah to deliver Lot and his family and fulfil God's will

regarding those cities.

In this icon, the revelation is not about the Incarnation, but about the Holy Trinity. The Persons of the Trinity did not appear, as Scripture makes clear, but the appearance of the three — the Word with two angels — and the Word addressed as "YHVH" by Abraham, is a type of the Trinity, revealing that when the Word of God speaks, He is speaking as the voice of the Holy Trinity. It is interesting to note that the Old Israel used the tetragrammaton YHVH when referring to God the Word in the Old Testament, while the New Israel — the Orthodox Church — uses the tetragrammaton IC XC to refer to the same Person of the Trinity in His Incarnation in the New Testament. This is another of the ways in which the Orthodox Christian icon maintains the continuity of revelation and Scripture.

It is in the majestic and deeply mystical icons called The Deesis, the Second Coming, that we see the vastness of revelation in the icon, and the manner in which it encompasses the whole of human history, the whole message of redemption.

We can see, then, that the icon is profoundly scriptural and profoundly dogmatic. There is no room in the realm of iconography for trends, for adjusting the icon to personal taste or for re-interpreting the content, form and concept of the icon. It will be noted that various schools of canonical iconography do not vary in any of these aspects. Unfortunately, during the past few centuries, schools of non-canonical iconography developed, not only under strong Latin and Protestant influence, but under the influence of a purely carnal, worldly

mode of thought. To understand the seriousness of the theological and spiritual corruption that comes from these forms of religious art, we must make a few comparisons. We must examine portrayals of Christ which seriously corrupt the Holy Scripture, and show how Orthodox iconography, on the other hand, preserves the Scripture and a correct understanding of it. We will also look at some carnal portrayals which are labelled "Jesus Christ," but which are actually portrayals of a false Christ, helping to distract people from the real Christ and prepare them to receive Antichrist. In the following two representation (*Plates 34 and 35, below*) we see two more Socinian or Arian representations of Christ. The first is a popular pietistic image, the second a more contemporary sensual portrayal.



Plates 34 and 35

If we look at these two plates, and *Plate 36* below, we will see how the degeneration in non-scriptural religious art has led to the popularity of pictures which actually represent Antichrist

posing as Christ. The word “antichrist” does not mean “against Christ,” rather in means “in place of Christ.” In order, to fully understand this, one must have a knowledge of the Orthodox prophecies relating to Antichrist.¹⁵ In these three portrayals, painted and sold as pictures of Jesus, we do not see the God-man Jesus Christ. In the first, we see a representative of theosophical pietism: a solely human thinker with a contemplative, visionary expression on the face. In the second two (*Plates 35 and 36*), which are very popular at this time, we see, not the God-man, Jesus Christ, but a New-Age California cult leader.

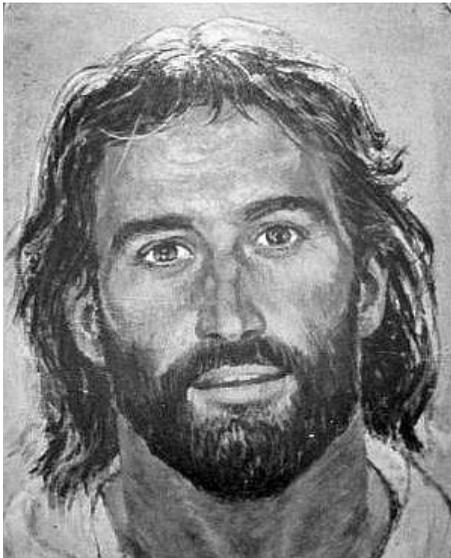


Plate 36

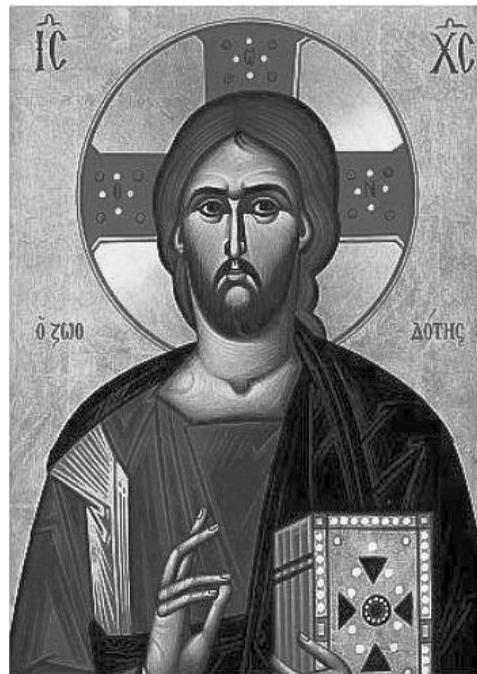
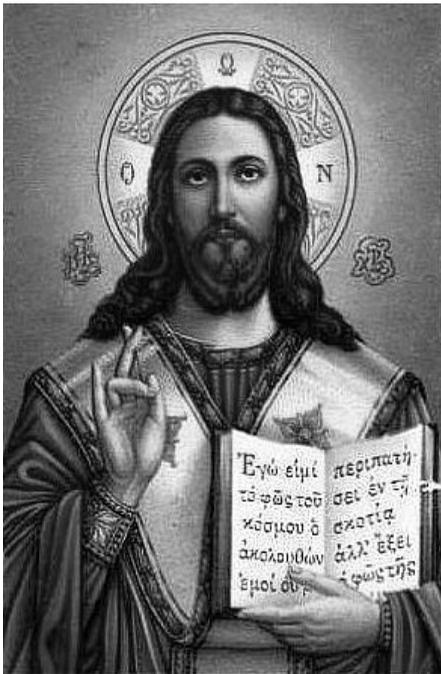
He is sensuous, sexual, beguiling—a combination of Robert Redford and Charles Manson. These portrayals represent everything that Christ is not, and nothing that He is. They are simply pictures of an antichrist—a pretender in place of Jesus Christ. In *Plate 37* below, we see a degenerate form of painting actually misrepresented as an icon.

Popular in Greece, this degenerate portrayal shows a supposed Christ as an effeminate stage actor, with lipstick and rouge adorning the dissolute features. The long, flowing hair was specifically forbidden in the acts of the Third Ecumenical Council. This portrayal is all the

15. See *The Beginning and the End*, (Synaxis Press), 1993

more blasphemous because it is *intentionally* misrepresented as an icon of Christ.

Compare this picture with the correct icon below (*plate 38*, and those elsewhere in this text), and you will see how Jesus Christ is revealed as God the Word, the Ancient of Days and the Son of man, the incarnate God Who is not only a true man but also the very God.



Plates 37 and 38: Effeminate icon of Christ from the “degenerate” period, and a canonical icon of “Christ the giver of light.” These two icons represent two rather different theologies, and two different concepts of the meaning of Scripture.

VI

THE PEACE AND HOPE OF DEATH IN ORTHODOX IKONOGRAPHY

The icon is not a religious painting; it is a theological statement, a declaration of faith. The Orthodox Christian is so deeply aware of this fact that St John the Damascene once wrote: *"Show me the icons that you venerate, that I may be able to understand your faith."*¹⁶ For this reason, there are very definite boundaries and rules regarding both the form and colour in the painting of icons. When we speak of ikonography in contrast with religious painting, *"we are not speaking of a mere conflict between two conceptions of Christian art,"* as Timothy Ware points out.¹⁷ Deeper issues are involved, for *"the character of Christ's human nature, the Christian attitude toward matter [and] the true meaning of Christian redemption"*¹⁸ are all involved.

All questions concerning holy icons are inseparably bound up with the teaching about the Person of Christ, and it will be safe to say that all people who denounce or distort holy icons, or who seek to "humanize" or "westernize" them have a non-Christian view of some aspect of Christ's person. Indeed, Western religious art and westernized paintings bearing the name "icons" inevitably bear some heresy concerning Christ,

16. *Concise Exposition of the Orthodox Faith.*

17. *Ware*, p.42

18. *Ware*, p.41.

the nature of the Godhead and redemption. They also distort the meaning of the saints and teach false spiritualities. As the late Greek ikonographer and philosopher Photios Kontaglou points out:

*The purpose of Orthodox ikonography is not simply to decorate the church for the pleasure of the congregation. To the contrary, its purpose is to offer spiritual nourishment to the faithful. I use `spiritual' in the Christian sense of the word. The ecclesiastical art of the Orthodox Church does not strive to delight our senses, but rather to sanctify our senses by offering the same holy nourishment we partake of during our divine services. "*¹⁹

It is in this context that we now make direct comparisons between heretical representations of Christ and Orthodox icons: it is necessary to examine the manner in which non-ikonographic portrayals distort and destroy the Gospel message, the revelation of Holy Scripture.

It is for this reason that the styles, types, forms and content of icons are set and ordered by the Church, rather than by individual self-will. For just as the Church is the custodian and lawful interpreter of Scripture, she also is the custodian and ordainer of the means of its presentation.

We have already discussed the problems of western style

19. From the collected writings of Photios Kontaglou in Greek. The section from which this quote is taken was supplied to us by a Greek translator, and is found in an essay titled "*The peace and hope of death in Orthodox icons of the crucifixion.*"

representations of Christ. In them, Christ is shown only as a man, a mere prophet, devoid of the divine. In this unscriptural art, Christ is not the "Theanthropos," the "God-man," Who alone can redeem humanity by fully uniting man with God. In a great measure, this fallen art is based on a completely erroneous notion of juridical atonement.

This non-scriptural art may portray scenes from Bible stories, but it portrays them in an heretical manner which is contrary to the very scriptural passages it wishes to recall. Over the passing of time, this humanistic art has degenerated to a point that it no longer presents a man masquerading as Jesus, but it actually presents Antichrist under the pretence of being Christ. Let us look back to *Plates 34 through 38*, at our comparison of some examples of the unscriptural Western portrayals, and we will at once be clear about the spiritual and theological dangers of them.

That these distortions both in Western art and in self-willed "icons" represent heretical doctrines is clear, and sometimes they represent terrible corruptions of the Gospel message. Let us look at a contrast between representations of the crucifixion in Western art and in icons. We will note that the Western religious art depicts Christ as a helpless man, not as the God-man, and we must understand that this art is specifically designed to advance the heretical doctrine of "atonement by juridical satisfaction."²⁰ In the Orthodox icons, we will find

20. In western "justification theology," the mistranslation of Scripture which produced the concept that Christ was our "juridical justification," (rather than the correct concept that He became our "righteousness,") is actually rooted in ancient human sacrifice ideology. The very concept of justification theology is based on the same premises as the sacrifice of a living infant to stop a volcanic

quite another mood, and a diametrically different doctrine.

In *Plate 39* below, we see a painting of the crucifixion by German artist Constantine Gruenwald. Gruenwald's painting, (like a similar one by Holbein) is exceptional in the intensity of its barbarism, despair and hopelessness. Apart from the gruesomeness and despair, let us look at the theology which is represented in these sectarian portrayals and we will clearly see the effects of the pagan doctrine of juridical atonement. In general, this doctrine is based on a strained translation and peculiar interpretation of Paul's words to the Romans (3:25-27). This strange doctrine teaches that Christ suffered and died to redeem man from God's wrath and anger over our sins. It teaches that God the Father needed to have His justice, offended by man's sin, satisfied by the blood of God the Son. In actual fact, the doctrine, based on the errors of the Western neo-platonist philosopher Augustine of Hippo, and developed under the influence of the medieval code of the duel, teaches that *Christ died to save us from God*. This morbid, passion-filled god is not the God of the Gospel. Since, following this doctrine, man depends precisely upon Christ's physical suffering to satisfy a shamelessly sinful god, and provide for his salvation, sectarian religious art strove to make Christ suffer as much as possible.

eruption, a drought or a plague. The principle is that only the sacrifice of a child, better the sacrifice of the son of a ruler, can assuage the wrath of an offended god, and deliver a person, city, tribe or nation from his just vengeance. The idea is preconceived, latent from pagan times, but a supposed scriptural substantiation for it was found in the mistranslation of the "dikaio__" words in the N.T. Whereas the words with this root signify a moral, not a juridical, rightness and righteousness, Latin and sectarian mistranslations interpreted the words as signifying a juridical "justification." See the essay, "Justification theology and human sacrifice" by Archbishop Lazar Puhalo. For a discussion of the meaning of "dikaioima" (righteousness) and related words in Scripture, see Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky's *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas of the Faith*, Chapter 5, "The Dogma of Redemption." (Synaxis Press, 1986), esp. pp202ff.

The more Christ was twisted in hopeless agony on the Cross, the more satisfied this god might be, and the more "saved" one could feel. Gruenwald (as Holbein and others) sought to emphasize both Christ's physical (as opposed to spiritual, moral) suffering, and to emphasize his humanity by showing His body in a state of decay and corruption, clearly in evidence in *plates 39 and 41* (and there are many other examples).

This is an important case in point, for in showing the decay and corruption of the body, they have already proclaimed that this is not, in fact, the real messiah. Why so? Because the prophet says of the Christ, the Holy One of God: "*Thou shalt not suffer Thy holy one to see corruption*" (*Psalms 15:10*). Thus, the real Christ did not see decay or corruption of His body.

How far such art and teachings are from the knowledge of the King of Glory Who enthroned Himself on the Cross, not in order to fulfil God's wrath, but to fulfil His own ineffable cosuffering love for us.

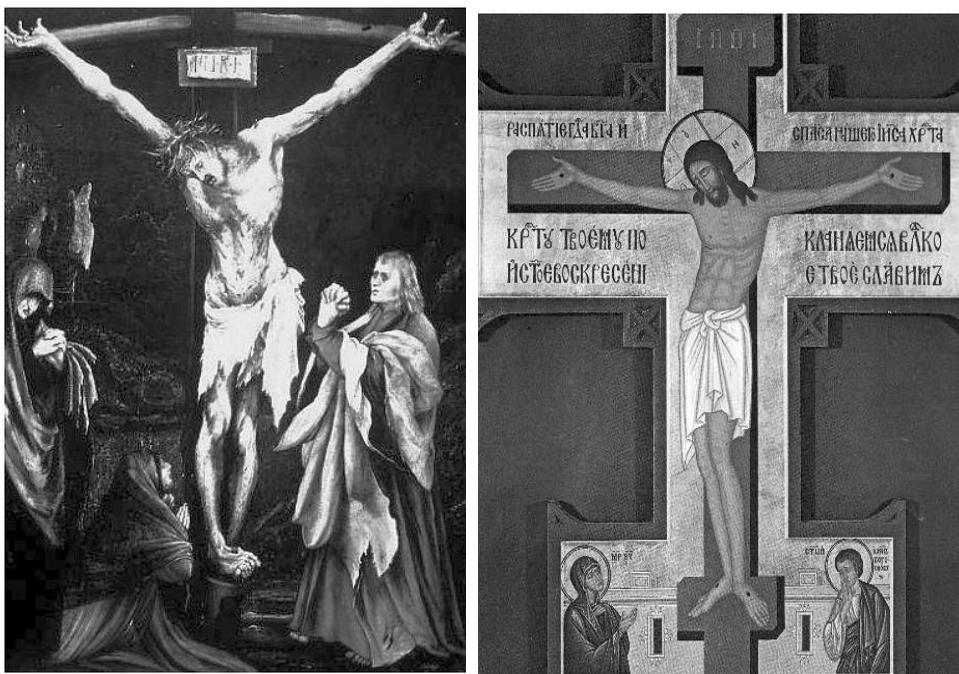
In *plate 40*, the Orthodox Christian icon of the same scene, we see the scriptural Christ, the Messiah Who "shall not see corruption." The whole spirit of the scene in the icon conveys, in the words of Photios Kontoglou, "The peace and hope of death" bestowed by Jesus Christ on the Cross. For, He died, not to redeem us from God (the atonement doctrine of justification theology), but to deliver us from "*bondage to him who held the power of death, namely Satan*" (*Hb.2:15*). In the Orthodox ikon, we see the Word "*through Whom all things were made*" the One of Whom it is said, "*In Him was life*" (*Jn.1:1-4*), the One in Whom "*we live and move and have our being*" (*Acts 17:28*), as-

cended willingly to the Cross to deliver us and redeem us from alienation and bondage *back to the Father*. In the icon of the crucifixion, we behold the King of Glory, the One in Whom "*all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form*" (Col.2:9), *enthroned* on the Cross. We clearly see the marks of His suffering, even His exhaustion, but we see just as clearly that He is truly that Messiah Who "*shall not see corruption.*" This is the scriptural Messiah fulfilling the prophecy and sealing the Gospel with His great act of saving, cosuffering love. There is here no hint of hopelessness or despair, for Christ is God, even on the Cross, and He is still in charge, still fulfilling His will — the eternal will of the Father. Even the grief of John the Theologian and the Virgin does not reflect despair or hopelessness. The peace and hope of death — the anticipation of the resurrection of Christ, and of all the faithful — permeates the Orthodox Christian icon of the crucifixion.

When our Lord Jesus Christ said that His disciples would see Him in the glory of His Kingdom (Mt.16:28), and when He asked the Father to glorify Him with that glory which He had before the world was made (Jn.17:5), and to glorify the Son now, that the Son may also glorify the Father (Jn.17:1), He was speaking precisely of His enthronement upon the Cross. For, the glory of God is not as sinful man beholds glory; rather the glory of God is seen in meekness and humility, in cosuffering love. The glory of God is not to be found in the power of armies, nor in the might of a crushing, vengeful conquest, of an arrogant king sitting upon a throne and lording it over his subjects; it is not seen in rich palaces, treasuries filled with spoil, nor glorious robes and chariots: rather the glory of God is

revealed in His own meek, humble, forgiving, cosuffering love. Nowhere was this more clearly and profoundly revealed than on the Cross. It is for this reason that, in Orthodox Christian icons, the "title" on the Cross is not "King of the Jews," but "King of Glory." It is often forgotten that this title "King of Glory" in the icon of the crucifixion *is really an Orthodox Christian interpretation of the first several verses of the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel*. Every aspect of the Orthodox Christian icon proclaims this scriptural truth and once more reveals the absolute fidelity of the icon to the Holy Scripture.

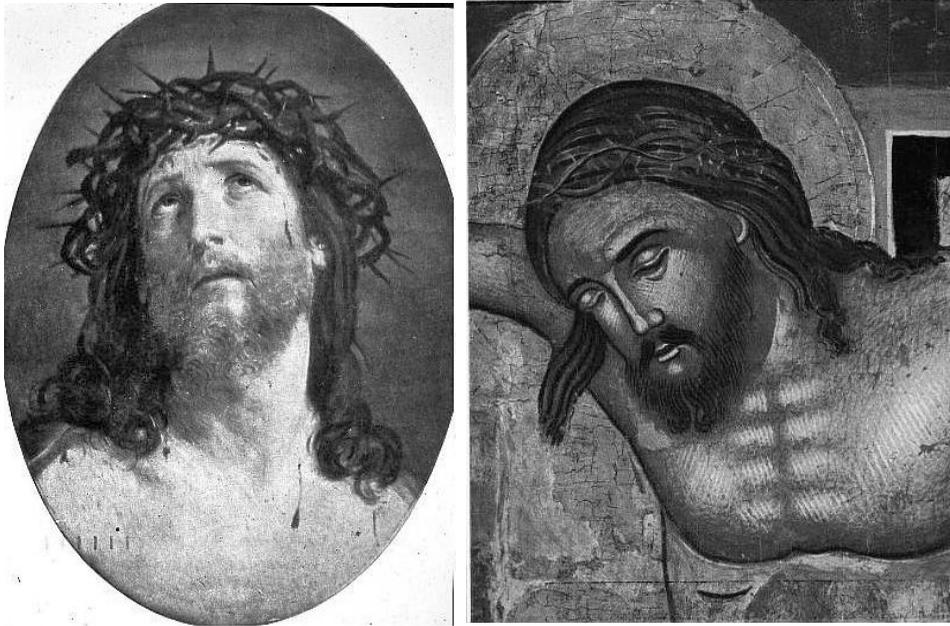
In *Plate 41*, we see a more common heretical portrayal of Christ on the Cross. This one is often labelled, "The God of Justice" (both the icon and the concept are heretical), and also teaches the pagan doctrine of atonement. It shows Christ as



Plates 39 and 40 demonstrate the radical difference between Orthodox Christian theology and juridical theory perspectives. Note that the arms of Christ do not sag down, but rather are outstretched to embrace humanity in His co-suffering love and victory.

only a man, and here, a helpless man. His eyes are rolled back in despair, there is nothing of the divine about Him as He looks off into space to see if there is anyone who could help Him.

Plate 42, an Orthodox icon of the same scene, is called "The Bridegroom of the Church." It is this icon which is used for the service of the first three days of Holy Week, called "The Bridegroom Service." In it is something essential to a correct understanding of the nature of our redemption, for "*Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her*" (*Eph. 5:25-33*). The crown of thorns is often shown still on the head of Christ, *precisely as a type of the wedding crown*; for here, in this solemn majesty, the



Plates 41 and 42: The "God of Justice" vs The Bridegroom of the Church. The crown of thorns on the head of Christ should be seen not simply as a means of torture, but primarily as Christ's wedding crown, with which He redeems His bride, as Paul says, "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her." (Ephesians 5:25)

King of Glory has, upon the Cross, espoused Himself to His beloved bride, the Church, and she has become one flesh with Him, His body. And we are saved, not in egoistic isolation, but precisely by becoming members in deed and in truth of that body, the Church, the redeemed bride of Christ.

Note that here, too, one receives a great sense of peace and composure, a sense of the priest's prayer, *"In the grave bodily, in hades with the soul, in paradise with the thief and on the throne with the Father and the Holy Spirit, wast Thou Who fillest all things, O Christ the ineffable,"* and *"How life-giving, how much more beautiful than paradise, how truly more resplendent than any royal palace, proved Thy grave, the source of our resurrection, O Christ."*²¹

Scripture and sound doctrine are preserved and proclaimed in the Orthodox ikon, abandoned and betrayed in Western religious art.

We can see then how important it is to maintain correct, canonical iconography, lest we also be led away from the Scripture and into sectarian delusions.

21. These prayers are repeated by the priest as he censens round the Holy Table at the end of the proskomedie, and again during the censening of the Cherubikon and the uncovering of the gifts on the Holy Table after the great entrance of the Liturgy.



Plate 38: Icon of "Christ the Giver of Life."

VII

ICONS OF THE THEOTOKOS

There are *no* icons of "the Madonna," "Madonna and Child," nor even of "the Theotokos and Child." *All* icons of the Theotokos are icons of the Incarnation of God, the "first coming of Christ." This is true even of icons of the Theotokos in which Christ is not shown, because of the nature and mission of Mary herself and the message embodied in her person. The Incarnation of God is the pivot of the Christian faith. Without the birth of the Messiah from a virgin, the Old Testament is not fulfilled, the Gospel is not true, the Christ has not come, and the Scripture would be only an interesting, but empty book.

When we look back at the history of Christian liturgical art, at the examples found in the ancient catacombs and in Orthodox churches throughout the ancient world, we find a particular role of icons of the Virgin, usually with Christ in her arms. The reason for this is simple enough. Both the Jews and several of the early gnostic heresies denied the virgin birth of Christ, consequently denying the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. The icons of the Theotokos were one of the earliest responses to these heresies and denials. In these icons, we see clearly the proclamation that the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Redeemer have been fulfilled. Mary herself is that sign *par excellence* which God promised us, to herald our salvation. For the prophet says, "*Behold, God Himself will give*

you a sign: a virgin shall conceive and bear a child, and His name shall be called `God is with us' (Emmanuel)" (Is. 7: 14). It is for this reason that the most frequently used icon of the Virgin, and the oldest one we have from the first century catacombs, is the one called "The Theotokos of the Sign," or "The `Sign' Icon of the Virgin." The ever-virgin Theotokos is, indeed, that very sign by which we shall know that the Christ has come, that "sign" which "God Himself would give."



*Plate 44: Icon of the "Theotokos of the Sign" (1963)
over the entrance to the Church at Holy Trinity Monastery,
Jordanville, NY*

The "Sign" icon shows the Virgin with arms raised, and in the centre of her form is the child Christ, and the Child is clearly identified as God-The-Word. It was painted to teach that central, all important truth upon which the entire truth of

the Gospel and the Christian faith rest: The Incarnation of God, that the Child in Mary's womb was indeed the true God Himself.

The presence and location of this beloved icon in the catacombs, and the location which it now occupies in properly built and decorated Orthodox churches in our own time, clearly demonstrates the unity and uniqueness of the Orthodox Christian Church, as the Church of the first century Christians, and as the everlasting bearer of that life, sacred tradition and Gospel of Christ, the apostles and the first martyrs.

Let us look at one of the most ancient examples of this icon, and then look at a modern example and we will see this unity and, consequently, the absolute faithfulness of the icon to the Scripture.

Here is a very early example of this icon (remember that it was painted in a time of great duress and persecution, with inferior materials, and probably only with the light of a tiny oil lamp). *Plate 45a* below is a wall painting from the arch (*arcosolium*) in the catacomb of Maius (i.e., the *coemeterium Maius*) dated to about A.D. 150. It is located above the sarcophagus of a martyr and is the prototype for both the icons of the Theotokos of the Sign, and the placement of the icon at the top of the apse in all Orthodox Churches.



*Plate 44a and 44b: Icon of “The Theotokos of the Sign,” dated at A.D. 150.
This icon plays a prominent role in the revelation in the Divine Liturgy.*



There is something so familiar about this icon and its location that the Orthodox Christian immediately feels at home. When we look at the arcosolium in this icon, and compare it with the icon in the apse (ἄψις) of an Orthodox church built in our own time, we see why. *Plate 45c* below is one of the two oldest know icons of the Theotokos. This one is dated from 150 AD. It is in the Rome’s catacomb of St. Priscilla, on Via Salaria.

The most ancient of Orthodox Christian sacred paintings in existence are found within the walls of the Rome's Christian catacombs. The catacombs of St. Priscilla, where this icon is found, were used as burial grounds by the Christians from the beginning of the second century to the fourth century. Before that time there was a Roman stone quarry at the same site.



In the icon below (*Plate 46*), we see that same, familiar icon in the apse, over the altar, at the end of that familiar arched ceiling. Did you ever wonder why Orthodox churches are required to have arched ceilings? Did you ever wonder where the tradition came from of having the icon of the Virgin — called in Greek the "Platytera" — in the arch at the top of the apse in our Orthodox churches? Note also, that the Holy Table in the ancient catacombs was the sarcophagus of a martyr. Did you ever wonder why the canons of the Orthodox Church require that a relic of a martyr be placed in every Holy Table at its consecration? You see, any Christian from the catacombs of the first centuries, could suddenly be dropped into the middle of a 20th century Orthodox Church, and he would immediately recognize his surroundings. They are spiritually and liturgically



Plate 46: The “Theotokos of the Sign” (Platytera) icon in the apse of a modern Orthodox Christian Church. Note the arch above the icon and the nich, an compare it with the samples from the 150s, in the catacombs. The icon, like those in the catacombs, is above the table on which the Holy Gifis are consecrated, just as in the catacombs, it was above the tomb of a martyr, which was used as a holy table in the catacombs.

identical, though there is, naturally, more refinement in the painting, now that icons can be painted with proper materials and in full daylight, and the artist can spend the time with them. Such first century Christians would also recognize immediately the doctrine and teachings of the Orthodox Church, the bishops, the presbyters and the deacons, and the Divine Liturgy.

The evangelical nature of the icon is further demonstrated in the location of the two key icons on the iconostas in Orthodox Christian churches.

Notice that, on the north side of the royal gates, we see the icon depicting the Theotokos with Christ, while on the

south side is the icon of Christ alone, usually shown with the Gospel book. We are not looking at pictures of "virgin and child" and "Jesus," for these are theological icons of the First and Second Coming of Christ. Let us look at the significance of this for a moment.



We know that the sanctuary is a type of paradise,²² and the royal gates thus "open into paradise." In the Divine Liturgy, the Gospel is taught, read and preached from the royal gates; all the liturgical revelation about the path and means of salvation is given in, or in front of, the royal gates. Thus, the icon of the First and of the Second Coming of Christ are placed on either side of these gates, because

the *time* of salvation, the "age of redemption," takes place between the First and Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the arrangement of these icons on either side of the royal gates preaches to us the scriptural message that, "*behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation*" (2Cor.6:2), and "*the time has come to wake from your slumber,*

22. We use the word "type" knowing that some readers may not understand the meaning of the word in this context. "Type" is used here in the same way it occurs in the word "proto-type." In our context, "type" is defined as "a foreshadowing; an anticipation." When the word is used in Orthodox theological writings, it almost always has this meaning, but elevated to a spiritual level. One could use the expression "representation of paradise," but that would be completely incorrect. In the Sanctuary of the church, there is a real spiritual presence of paradise.

because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is near at hand. Let us, therefore, put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light" (Rm. 13:11-12). In six days, He created, and on the seventh day He declared a rest and preparation: a rest from work, a preparation for redemption. The seventh "day" was the era of the Old Testament, by which mankind was prepared to receive redemption, but now we live in the eighth day — the day, the acceptable time, of salvation. In six epochs He created, in the seventh epoch He revealed Himself and prepared mankind. In the eighth epoch, He redeems and saves. This is the evangelical revelation preached by the royal gates of the iconostas, flanked by the icons of the First and Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Thus, we see the pure Gospel fidelity of the Orthodox icon, and we understand more clearly that there is no "Madonna and Child," or "Virgin and Child," only the scriptural icon of the "Incarnation of God," the "First Coming of Christ."

The icons of the Theotokos are divine revelation, profound theology, a true and faithful presentation of the divine Scripture.

In the West, the habit developed of referring to the icons depicting the Theotokos with Christ in her arms as "Madonna and Child." However, the central, scriptural point of the portrayal was missed in this and, at the same time, the portrayal itself became, in the west, unscriptural and debased. Mary began to be portrayed as no more than a courtesan woman who had had a baby. She was given a great variety of

wardrobe, and the child was painted as an ordinary baby, with no hint of the essential Gospel message which should be preached. When the western portrayals ceased being iconographic and became humanistic, they no longer had the capacity, or even the intent, of preaching the Gospel, and they lost this essential element, which is so clear and profound in the Orthodox Christian icon.

In the following icon, we again see the message of the divine Incarnation, beginning with the Virgin, who was not an ordinary woman bearing an ordinary child, as the Moslems, Arians and many Protestants believe, but precisely that "*sign*" which would be given, by which we would know that the Christ has come (*Is.7:14*). We see her represented in the fulness of the Gospel, "*Full of grace*" (*Lk.1:28*) as the Scripture proclaims. She is shown here after the "*Holy Spirit overshadowed Her*" (*Lk.1:35*), after she had already become the dwelling place of the Most High God, the Mother of the Incarnate God. She is filled with the Holy Spirit, full of grace, all generations are commanded by the Gospel to "*call her blessed*" (*Lk.1:48*), and God the Creator of Life has dwelt in her womb, and now He rests in her arms. Surely it is a senseless blasphemy to consider her or represent her as only an ordinary housewife or some sort of court minion, as she is represented in Western art.

On the following page, we see one of the most treasured of all Orthodox icons of the Virgin, the icon of the "Theotokos of Tender Mercy."

This particular icon, sometimes referred to as the "Vladimir Icon," was painted in Jerusalem. According to

tradition, the face of the icon was painted by Evangelist Luke. The main things which strike one about Orthodox icons of the Virgin are her meekness, modesty, compassion and majesty: meekness as the totally submissive servant of God; modesty as a truly moral, God-fearing person; compassion as one truly filled with Christian love, and majesty as the one chosen out of all the ages to be the mother of God in the saving Incarnation.

We note again that Christ is by no means shown here as a helpless infant. Here, He is clearly shown to be God. We see again the nimbus, the globe of light round the head, with the cruciform, bearing the inscription of His name as He Himself gave it to Moses on Mt Sinai: "The Existence" (O Own, in Greek). In most icons of the Theotokos in which Christ appears, the Christ-Child is also shown giving His blessing: Blessing the Virgin to hold Him, blessing us to behold Him.

In icons of the Virgin, as in all icons, the inner truth of the Gospel must be taught. Saccharin, emotional or theatrical representations are not permitted. You may make your own comparison of the icons with non-Orthodox, Western representations of the virgin, and see which ones teach the Gospel message, the divine Incarnation; which ones are faithful to the Gospel, proclaiming the fulness of grace which dwelt in her and the pivotal, cosmic event of which she was the principal instrument, that great mystery, wrought in the fulness of time, which shook the universe to its foundations, changed the course of human history, and impelled the cosmos forward toward its final destiny of redemption and glory: the Son and Word of God is begotten in the flesh, and the world beholds Him face to face.



Plate 48: The "Vladimir Icon" of the Theotokos.

VIII

ICONS OF THE SAINTS

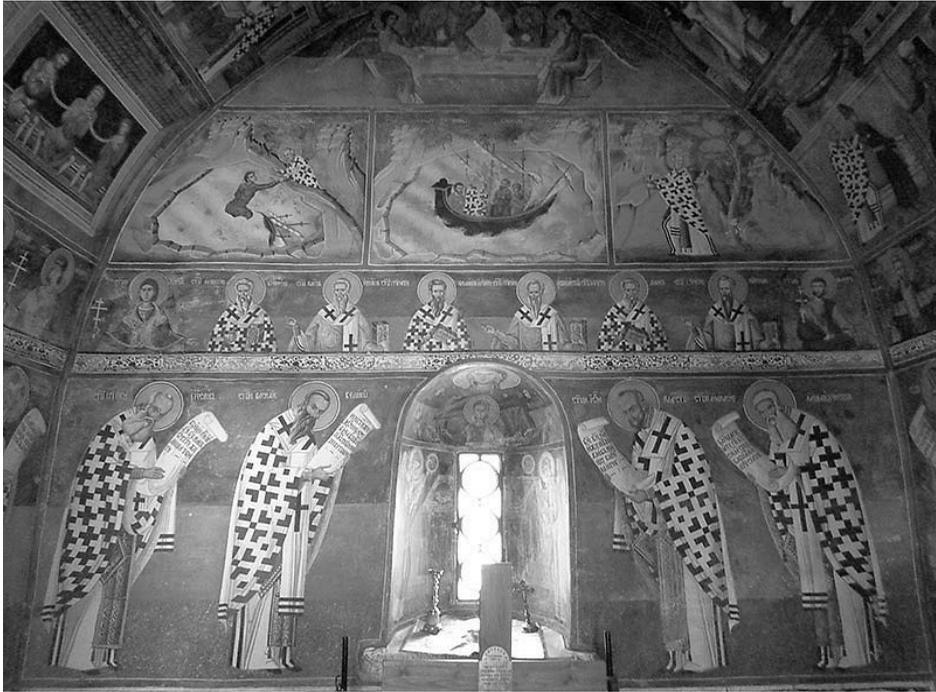


Plate 50: Group of Church Fathers presenting their writings

When you enter an Orthodox Church, you find yourself surrounded by icons of the saints. There are many deep and meaningful explanations for this, but to my mind, the most meaningful of all is this: the icons of the saints on the walls of our churches are our family album.

Among every family, every nation and people, the biographies and portraits of its greatest heroes and most beloved, famous citizens are kept, treasured and well known.

In the case of Orthodox Christians, we are not simply members of the same nation (the "New Israel"), but members in particular of the same family, the household of the Living God. The saints whose icons surround us in the church are our older brothers and sisters, our ancestors in the faith. It matters not at all that they were from different earthly nations, for we are speaking of scriptural concepts, of divine realities. As Apostle Paul says, *"If you are of Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.3:29)*, for, *"those who believe are the children of Abraham" (Gal.3:6-7)*.

Thus, when we see the icons of the saints as our own family album, the spiritual portraits of our most notable and perfected forebears, be they Russian, Aleut, Serb, Greek or Chinese, we come to a full understanding of Paul's words, and of the words of Christ that God is our Father. In this, once more, is proven the faithfulness of the icon to Holy Scripture, for the icons of the saints, seen as our family album, clearly verify to us the words of the Apostle:

"Consequently, you are no longer strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph.2:19-20)

The icons of saints are profoundly doctrinal. Many important dogmatic concepts of Orthodox Christianity receive scriptural illumination in the icons of saints: the dogma of

redemption and the general resurrection; the doctrines of *theosis*, of the nature of the human person and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are among those made clear in the icon. Moreover, clear interpretations of significant, but difficult, passages of Scripture are provided by *canonical* icons of the saints.

Not only are the icons of saints a pictographic extension of the Book of Acts, but they are a clear expression of the ancient Christian understanding of the way the life of Christ and His Gospel impacts on the human nature.

It is not possible for us, in this work, to enter into a deep theological discussion of these dogmatic subjects, but we must touch upon them briefly in order to show how profoundly Orthodox iconography is a form of Divine Scripture, and how faithful it is to that Scripture.

There are three questions which arise at once when we mention icons of saints: **1.** What is the meaning of the word saint; **2.** How does one become a "saint"; **3.** At what point does a picture become an icon, or an icon become merely a picture. Three difficult questions, to which only a simplified answer must be given at present. Please do not take the answers I am about to offer as complete statements of doctrine. They are only superficial definitions which will help us to understand the icon.

What does the word "saint" mean?

The word saint means holy (indeed, the words are interchangeable). In the New Testament, both words, saint and

holy, are translations of the Greek *'agios*, which means "consecrated, set apart."²³ It is obvious that the word *holy* is used in more than one sense in the Divine Scripture. No one would imagine that the Scripture calls God holy in the same sense as it calls the temple holy, nor that God is called holy in the same sense as people and objects are called holy.

Holy refers to God in this sense, that all holiness resides in Him, and objects and people are called holy when they participate in Him or in His service. Thus, holiness as it is used for God is undefinable, and is simply an attribute of God which



Plate 51: Apostle Mark, apse of the church of Resava/Manasija Monastery, Serbia. Ca.1415

the mind somehow apprehends, but cannot comprehend. God possesses it, or rather it is an attribute of His, and objects or people may participate in it by means of their consecration to God.

Everything, therefore, which is consecrated to the service of God is holy. The Holy Scripture calls angels "holy" (*Mk.8: 38*) and it calls the faithful holy (the KJV occasionally uses the word "saint" as well, but it means

23. is only in English that we have two different words for holy. One, "saint," comes to us from the French root of our language, while the other, "holy," comes to us from the Germanic ancestry of English. In Greek (as in Slavonic), there is only one word, *'agios*. Thus, in Greek, Saint Nektarios is *'Agios Nektarios*, while "Holy God" is "*'agios o Theos*."

exactly the same thing). The word "saint" in the New Testament invariably refers to those who are set apart and consecrated to God (e.g., *Acts 9:13, Rm. 1:7, 2Cor. 1:1; 8:4; 13: 13, Rev. 5:8, etc*).

Everyone who truly believes in Christ and truly accepts His Gospel will seek to be united to His Body, the Holy Church. In Baptism, one is consecrated to God and joined to His Body. Thus, everyone who has been baptized into Christ has put on Christ (*Gal.3: 27*), and is holy in the sense of having been consecrated to Him, and become a participant in His Body and Blood in Holy Communion. The Apostle calls them "holy," and the King James Version translates this as "saint."

Very well, then, what is the difference between the congregation of the faithful who are "saints", and those specific individuals who are portrayed in icons and called "saints" in a special manner?

Who are those special "saints" portrayed in icons?

It should be evident then, that the degree of holiness attributed to a person or thing signifies the degree to which that person or thing is consecrated to God and His service — that is, quite simply, the degree to which the person participates in God and in His holiness. We can also easily understand that consecration means purifying. Let us look back to the beginning of our discussion. We said that man was created "in the image of God" but that this "image" had become dimmed

and perverted in man by sin, by the accumulation of the passions and the misuse of the body in which that "image" was to abide. In short, the whole person, body and soul, became dedicated to sin and carnality rather than to holiness (consecration to God), and thus lost its original state of consecration.

Christ became Incarnate in our flesh to reconsecrate it, our whole person, body and soul, to renew in mankind the image and likeness of God. Christ cleared the path and showed the way. By His Life, His death and His resurrection and ascension, He made it possible. He commanded us to "*be perfect [complete] as God is perfect*" (Mt. 5:48); but how is this possible? Man could not possibly possess the same perfection as God. Of course not, but, because of Christ, man can participate in God's perfection.

How, then, does someone become a saint in that special sense? By following that path and that way which Christ has opened through His Holy Church, by struggling to purify, and thus consecrate oneself, completely and without reservation, to God. This means the conquest and weeding out of the passions, and the acquisition of a completely selfless love — for that is what is meant by "God's likeness": absolutely selfless love. Such a person becomes truly humble and thus able to bear participation in God, and the highest gifts of divine grace which come with it. These are the very people of whom Christ said, "*The works that I do, he shall do also, and greater works than these shall he do*" (Jn. 14:12). It is this completeness of purification and consecration to God, this height of participation in His perfection and holiness which makes a person a "saint" in that

special way. And this sainthood is verified by the fulfilment of the Gospel promise: *"the things that I do, he shall do, and greater than these."* These people are participants in Christ in that special way Apostle Paul described, *"It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gal.2:20).

In relation to humanity, the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises is shown forth in the icons of Christ, the Theotokos, the Twelve Great Feast Days and the Mystical Supper, while icons of saints reveal the evidence of the fulfilment of the New Testament promises. For just as the Old Testament promise was fulfilled in Christ, so the New Testament promises of Christ are fulfilled in the faithful, according to the strength of each vessel. And the strongest vessels, the saints, bear in themselves the complete fulfilment of the promises given by Christ in the New Testament. Their icons reveal this fact, for they testify that, in the words of the Scripture, *"Whoever purifies himself from these [passions and ignoble things] will be a vessel sanctified and meet for honourable use, consecrated and profitable unto the Master..."* (2Tm.2:21).

Soteriology of Icons of Saints

"We who, with unveiled faces, behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being transformed into His image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

If salvation consisted only in a person being juridically justified by the death of Christ — saved by Christ having paid

his legal penalty for him, then Western humanistic paintings would suffice.

The ministry of Christ on earth was not, however, a legal excursion. Christ's ministry was one of healing. He did not come to earth as an attorney, a scapegoat or a vicarial sacrifice, but as a physician. He came to redeem the whole fallen human nature from bondage to the evil-one, to heal it and bring it to its intended state as an image and likeness of God, filled with His grace, a reflection of His glory. Thus if the icon is to be faithful to the Gospel, it must demonstrate the illumination and glorification²⁴ of the whole person — the psychophysical being that is man — testified to in the saint.

It is sufficient in western religious art, dominated by Protestant Gnosticism and Latin legalism, to portray as a saint someone who has attained merits by good works and faith. The icon, however, is scriptural: the saint portrayed in the icon attains his position through the process of illumination and, finally, glorification. He is not, however, alone in this, for those "ordinary" saints, the congregation of the faithful, likewise attain their position by the same process.

The loss of this fundamental truth of Christian life, of the true nature of redemption, has deprived Christianity of all power to transform the world as it did in ancient times.

If the words of the Apostle cited above seem enigmatic, symbolic or beyond comprehension, it is only because the

24. Which is why the Orthodox Church *does not "canonize"* saints, In the Orthodox Church, saints are "glorified," *not* canonized. See the discussion about the glorification of saints, below..

authentic apostolic revelation has been buried under the effluences of legalism and Gnosticism and become obscured by philosophical pollutants. Let us look at this verse in the light of apostolic tradition, in the light of the holy and God-bearing fathers and understand that those who have struggled to illumination behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror. If one continues this struggle and ascent, he shall become glorified, that is, transformed into the same glory, from glory unto glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.

This is the purpose of the fasts, prescribed by the Holy Church, of the prayers, the coming together for worship, the very liturgical cycle itself. Indeed every discipline, every action, every manifestation of worship and love which is prescribed is given to us, as St Seraphim of Sarov says, for the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. It is all given so that we may "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," so that those who have received the seed of illumination, in holy baptism, may ascend to glorification. This was testified to by the glory that encompassed St Seraphim as he spoke about the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

If it was sufficient, as the Gnostics taught, to only accept Christ as your Saviour and believe, then the Apostle would not have found it necessary to enjoin us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

The icons of the saints teach us this profound scriptural truth, that salvation is the result of a healing of the broken and fallen human nature, and its gradual restoration to its original goal of illumination and glorification. While Christ redeemed

the whole nature of mankind by recapitulating that nature in Himself, each person must bring about that restoration in himself through moral struggle, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Orthodox icons of the saints, therefore, reveal to us the true nature of redemption, of salvation and the true destiny intended for us by our creator: illumination, glorification, theosis.

When is a portrait an icon?

When, then, does a painting of a saint become an icon? The correct name of the object is "holy icon", and this means that it is a consecrated object, one devoted to and consecrated to the service of God and His Gospel. A painting is a holy icon when, consecrated by obedience to the Holy Church and the sacred form of the illustration, it reveals the fulfilment of the Gospel in the person being portrayed, not by means of some cartoon label, but in the very essence and nature of the portrayal itself, rather in the essence and nature of the saint. Since the "person" consists of both body and soul together, and not of a mere part of the person (neither the soul alone, nor the body alone), the spiritual condition of a glorified person can be seen not only in the intangible, but in the physical body, which is promised an equal glory with the soul.²⁵ For, as Divine

25. In this context, it is important to recall the sequence of colour build up used when painting an icon. This sequence, beginning with the base colour, and building upon it toward the transfiguration and glorification revealed in the finished icon, is theological and deeply spiritual. It teaches us that the person is sanctified and glorified gradually, from the inside,

Scripture clearly says: *"There are bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial, and the glory of the celestial is one, while the glory of the terrestrial is another...So also is the resurrection: it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption...If there is a sensuous body, there is also a spiritual body..." (1Cor.15:39-44)*. Thus the holy icon shows us, not an ordinary person still waiting for the advent of Christ, but a person who has already received Christ, followed Him, and been transfigured by Him. It shows us a person who is already participating in the perfection and immortality of Christ our God, by means of divine grace. This means that the saint is no ordinary person, nor even an ordinary member of the community of the faithful. When we look at the icon of a saint, we must see Christ, for the saint "no longer lives, but Christ lives in Him..." The saint's personality has not been swallowed up or dissolved, but regenerated, transfigured and fulfilled by grace. Thus, for a painting to be an icon, it must proclaim that, in this person, called "saint," the highest promises of the Gospel have been fulfilled, and this person is able to testify from living experience to the truth of the entire Gospel, and to the resurrection of Christ. Here, in the icon, we see that absolute faithfulness to the Scripture which declares: *"We who...behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed into the same image, from glory unto glory, by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Cor.3:18)*.

The saint has become a participant in the fulness of grace,

beginning with the "heart." This sanctification gradually grows and fills the whole being, moving through the soul and mind of man, to encompass his body, and unite his whole person —body and soul —with God.

a participant in the immortality of God. In the saints we see explained and fulfilled that mysterious and troubling statement "*Is it not written in your law, `I have said ye are gods`" (Jn.10:34).*

This is called "The Doctrine of Theosis." Since it is a clear teaching of Holy Scripture, which tells us: "*The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given unto them; that they may be one even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one*" (Jn.17:22-23), it must also be seen in the icon.

For a painting of a saint to be an icon, it must very clearly communicate the doctrine of theosis, it must proclaim that: in this person, uniquely called a saint, and glorified by the conscience of the Holy Church, the highest promises of the Gospel of Christ have been fulfilled. This person is able to testify from living experience to the truth of the entire Gospel and to the resurrection of Christ and the transforming power of divine grace.²⁶

The icon of the saint proclaims the saving Incarnation of Christ and His redeeming cosuffering with man, for it reveals what these acts have made possible for man; it proclaims the reconciliation with God made possible by the God-man, for it clearly shows that man can now participate in God's perfection

26. In this context, it is important to note that the icons of saints, whenever possible, are recognisable portraits of the original person. Thus, for example, icons of St Nicholas are always recognizable because the icon presents an accurate representation of the historical person. This is true of the icons of all the more well known saints, although seldom for the ancient martyrs, who were martyred in the tens of thousands, and whose actual appearances were seldom known. It is important to remember this if one is to understand the fulness of the message of transfiguration and theosis. It is not an idealized or romanticised person who is being transformed by grace, nor is it only the inner person, the soul, thus rendering the material body superfluous, or subject to idealization. In the icon, the actual human being is shown, recognisable by all, and thus we receive the message that such consecration, such holiness, such transfiguration and theosis is the calling of **all** mankind, of all the congregation of the faithful, and not a select few only.

and immortality. The icon of the saint proclaims the resurrection and ascension, for it shows that by grace man can become divine, because Jesus Christ Himself united God and man, and invited the faithful to have the Holy Trinity dwelling in them spiritually.

Let us look at some examples of saints in proper icons and those in post-Orthodox Western paintings, and we shall see how the icon proclaims that profound Gospel truth that the very nature of mankind has been redeemed by Jesus Christ. The icon reveals to us that man can attain a part in this redemption through moral/spiritual struggle to assimilate the inner qualities of life revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The Western painting reveals a pietistic doctrine of salvation by a philosophical acceptance of Christ as a saviour who has paid off our criminal debt to a juridical justice of a far too human god, indeed, a god who is only an idol of fallen humanity. The Western humanistic conception also depicts the saint with a halo that has become a "merit ring" around the head. This theology is also based in juridical legalism. Rather than the transformation of the inner person, reflected in the whole person of the saint (the Orthodox concept), the Western depiction shows a person who, because of good works and some external worth, has built up not only sufficient merits for salvation, but excess merits, so that he or she has become a saint (because of the number of "supererogatory merits.").



Plate 52: Orthodox Icon of Saint Christopher.

In the icon, the saint has become fully a participant in that redeemed and transfigured human nature manifested in Christ. The form of his body is recognizably human, but though it is really a human body, it is not



Plate 53: Western style religious picture.

bound by the "flesh." The carnal aspects, those elements of sensual beauty, have vanished and been replaced by a spiritual beauty which must be seen with spiritual eyes to be fully recognized. In the picture, on the other hand, we see an ordinary person, still bound in the world of the fallen nature, with only a ring around the head to indicate that he has obtained enough merits for good works to be considered a saint. A certain strained pietistic expression attempts, vainly, to indicate holiness, a purely subjective, emotional concept of holiness.

The icon shows us a life transfigured, the actual *person* (body and soul) transformed. The spiritual transfiguration of the person involves the actual person, that is, soul and body together as one complete being, though this transfiguration will be most completely realized only in the resurrection. There is a special genius in the icon to testify to the Orthodox Christian

dogma that neither the soul alone nor the body alone constitutes the *person*. Only the one form of the soul and body together is the *person*, and thus the spiritual transformation and transfiguration encompass the body and the soul as one. Both together have been delivered from the power and bondage of Satan. The principle upon which this aspect of the icon of the saint is based is summarized in the words of St Methodios: "*With respect to his nature, man is 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.*"²⁷

Aspects of Form and Features in Icons of Saints

You will notice that saints are never shown in profile in icons. The principle upon which this is based was defined by the pseudo-Makarios.

*"A soul which has been illumined by divine glory becomes all light and countenance, and no part of it is behind, but it stands wholly facing forward."*²⁸

The iconographic use, not only of such conventions as the absence of profiles, but of exaggerated features must also be understood. We mentioned it briefly in connection with the icons from the catacombs, seen earlier in this text. We often notice in icons that they seem to distort or exaggerate certain

27. "On the Resurrection," *Against Origen*, 1:5.

28. *50 Spiritual Homilies*, 1.2

parts of the anatomy. Eyes, ears, nose and hands are often oversized or accentuated, and no particular attention is given to physical accuracy in anatomy.

None of the theme figures in icons are ordinary people. They have all been transformed by divine grace, all have become filled with the Holy Spirit, all have become partakers of the Immortality of God. Thus, to render them as natural people would be a lie. It may be the highest view to which the carnal, unspiritual mind of the fallen man can ascend, but it is not reality. It is not fact. Reality abides only in Christ, and reality can only be seen in the spiritual eye. That is why the truth and beauty of correct iconography becomes clearer, more beautiful and more beloved to the person who fasts and prays, and struggles to purify the heart and grow spiritually. On the other hand, to those who are non-spiritual and carnal-minded, the correct icon is often considered ugly and threatening. The reason for this is that the icon touches the conscience, and touching the conscience usually results in either gratitude and a desire for correction, or in disdain and malice.

In the icon, the spiritual ears have been enlarged to the hearing of the Gospel and the Divine Mysteries. The eyes are enlarged by grace to the seeing of Divine Mysteries, to the vision of the glory of God and the holy beauty of the Saviour. The nose is enlarged to the receiving of the fragrance of immortality, the scent of the heavenly incense of incorruptibility. And the mouth? It is usually diminished in size. For the saint, as Apostle Paul observes, has heard words which cannot be uttered (*2Cor.12:4*). The saint speaks little and

learns much. When the saint preaches the Gospel it is in deeds more than in words. His or her life is a living sermon of the Gospel and a demonstration of its truth. For the saint, having seen and heard things which the human tongue cannot even express, preaches not so much with *"excellency of speech ... but in demonstration of the Spirit"* (1Cor.2:4).

Thus, the exaggeration of the features is but another aspect of the revelation of transfiguration and regeneration. For, the senses which, in the fallen man, have become dedicated to the passions, are, in the saint, reconsecrated to God and thus, serve not for carnality, but for salvation. All seeming distortions of the anatomy bear just such a spiritual meaning.

There is one final aspect of the icon which I feel is most important. The eyes of the body, our Saviour said, are the windows of the inner man: *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are without defect, your whole body will be filled with radiance, but if your eyes are wicked, your whole body will be full of darkness..."* (Mt.6:22-23).



Plate 54: Fresco of Prophet Elia (Elijah) in Moracha Monastery, Montenegro. Ca.1250

A spiritual icon painter is able to paint truly iconographic eyes: eyes which reflect the mystery of co-suffering love, eyes which proclaim the inner radiance of meekness, humility and a



Plate 55: St John the Baptist, mural in the Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY. Ca 1963

godly love of mankind. Such is the great icon of Prophet Elijah in the church of Moracha Monastery in Montenegro. This icon belongs to the hesychastic period of Serbian icon painting. Study the eyes of this icon, and recall that St Elijah is depicted here having taken refuge in the cave of Sapsas. He has been betrayed by the people to whom he was sent, despised, reviled, driven out, and they are pursuing him to kill him. Moreover,

the leaders of the nation have betrayed God, given themselves over to idolatry and wickedness. Notice the expression in the eyes. There is not a hint of contempt, of condemnation, of hatred or of judgment. There is only the serene look of one who loves his people despite all their sins and all the evil they have done or wish to do to him. His countenance is not angry, rather he is grieved over the loss of their souls. Like Moses, he would "*place himself in the breach*" (*Ps.106:23*) if he could, and like Paul after him, he would make himself anathema [cut off] from Christ for the sake of his people (*Rm.9:3*).

Thus, there is no sign of bitterness or anger in the eyes of Prophet Elijah, nor is he full of judgment and condemnation: he is filled with cosuffering love for his erring people, and desires, not their punishment, but that they should "*turn from their sinfulness and live.*" It is this mystery of cosuffering love that makes an icon the truest icon, the truest presentation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that demonstrates the restoration in human nature of the "image and likeness of God" Who "*so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that all who believe in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life*" (*Jn.3:16*).

We see something similar in that second Elijah, John the Baptist (*Mt.11:14; 17:11-12*). In the icon of St John the Baptist which follows, note the eyes of this "second Elijah." Recall that John the Baptist is preaching repentance, and that he has been rejected and despised by the leaders of the nation. As a prophet, he certainly knew what his destiny was, as a martyr. Nevertheless, one does not see any sign of harshness, bitterness,

anger or self-righteousness in his countenance. Rather, one sees a tender love, a deep, loving sorrow for the very people who despise him and will eventually put him to death. This is a godly love, a cosuffering of the heart for the people and their own self-willed destruction. How far removed this is from the arrogant, self-righteous and hypocritically indignant preaching of Protestantism, and the cruel juridical legalism of Latin and "evangelical" sectarianism. This is a true icon because it captures the spirit of cosuffering love, which is the essence of the mystery of redemption and theosis.

Concerning The Glorification of Saints Who Are Represented in Icons

At issue in the question of whether saints are canonized or glorified is the very message of redemption itself, the doctrine of theosis and the Orthodox Christian concept of purification, illumination and glorification. Fr John Romanides, the most important dogmatic theologian of our times, has discussed the concepts of purification, illumination and glorification in many of his works. We are going to examine only one aspect of this here, in the context of the icon as Scripture.

Let us briefly examine the meaning of the glorification of saints in the Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Christian Church does not "canonize" saints. Unfortunately, through spiritual and theological carelessness, both the term and the concept of Latin canonizations began to be used in the Russian Church. This occurred during the three-hundred year "Latin captivity of Russian theology" and, unfortunately, spread to some other countries. There is no "process" in the Tradition of the Orthodox Church by which the Church "makes" someone a saint.

Canonization is a legalistic process by which a committee of one kind or another is delegated to see if it can find enough good (or politically useful) points about a given person so that they can be declared a saint. It is based upon a legalistic assessment of humanistic good deeds (or political

expediency).

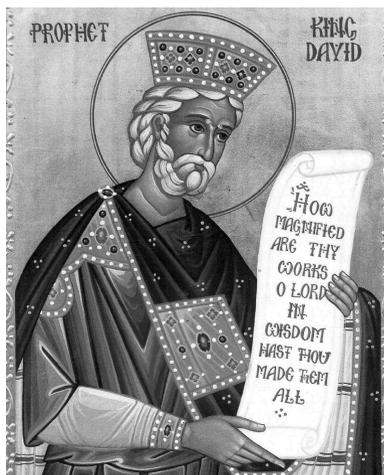
The Orthodox Christian Church glorifies those whom God has already glorified Himself. The glorification of saints in the Orthodox Church is a fulfilment of that holy love and sacred unity to which we are called by Christ in His own words and through His Apostle. The Apostle explains to us that we are all members of one Body of Christ (the Church), and if one member of the body suffers, the entire body suffers with it, but if one member is honoured, the entire body rejoices with it. Thus if God honours a certain member of the Holy Church, visibly revealing this honour and bringing the conscience of the whole Church to an awareness of this honour, either by working miracles for those who ask that person for intercessions, or by the direct action of the Holy Spirit upon the Church conscience, then the whole Church honours that person.

The saint is glorified in the Church on earth because he or she has already attained to glorification and been glorified by God. A holy person is either a saint already in his or her own lifetime, or they never become a saint. When a saint has reposed, he or she is received into the heavenly Church with the honour and glory befitting the moral grandeur of his or her earthly life.

Thus, the glorification of saints in the Orthodox Church is a glorying of the whole body of the Church in the highest attainment of the Holy Spirit by one of the members of that body. As when the eye beholds beauty and the image of that beauty is perceived by the mind of the entire body, and the

sensation of that beauty affects every member of that body in proportion to the sensitivity of that member, so also the glory of the saint is not his alone, but it is perceived by the conscience of the whole body and each member of the body glories in it according to the spiritual sensitivity of that member. The spiritual attainments of the saint uplift the entire Church, and each and all Her members, and draws them closer to God. Moreover, the revelation by God of the glory of the saint affirms and instills the revelation of theosis, and the fact that salvation really consists in illumination and glorification through repentance and moral struggle.

It is, therefore, important for Orthodox Christians to free themselves from Latin terminology and the heretical concepts that come with them. The Orthodox Church *does not* canonize saints, rather she glories in those whom God has glorified and revealed to His people. The Orthodox Church *glorifies* those saints who have already been attained to glorification in the Holy Spirit.



IX

ICONS OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

A HISTORICAL SURVEY

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

Canonical icons of the Last Judgment always centre on the "river of fire." This is both scriptural, in accord with the iconographic manuals, the holy fathers and the tradition of the Orthodox Church. This was the inspiration for a monograph by Greek theologian Dr Alexandre Kalomiros, titled *The River of Fire*. Of necessity, this chapter is somewhat more complex than the previous sections of this present book, but it was added to this edition at the request of several theologians and teachers of religion. Moreover, this chapter presents a profound correlation between correct iconography and a correct understanding of Scripture — which is the primary theme of this book.

In this chapter, we will examine the original Orthodox Christian iconographic representations of the "Last

Judgment," and the concept of the "judgment of the person," in opposition to the clearly Gnostic concept of a judgment and punishment of the soul without its body. In the course of a five year research on the subject of these icons, it became clear that the original and traditional icons of this subject were purely Scriptural and three major facts emerged.

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

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

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



In a very late development, there appeared in some icons of the Last Judgment, a superimposition of a serpent with

dark circles along its trunk, forming a type of barricades, and these were interpreted by some as being the mythological psychostasion or "aerial toll-houses" —although no explanation has ever been given as to why such a motif should suddenly replace the Scriptural and Traditional "River of Fire." More disturbing to both Dr Kalomiros and others, were the attempts to superimpose and re-interpret icons of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, removing this from its actual meaning of our struggle in this present life, and asserting that the *Ladder* represented psychostasia or "toll-houses" faced by the soul after its departure from the body. Such corruptions can be made only by those who hold a purely Platonistic, Scholastic dualism and a heretical concept of redemption, and who have absolutely no Orthodox concept of the process of purification, illumination and glorification — all of which take place during our earthly life.

With this background in mind, the original chapter on the historical icons of the last judgement appears below.

1

In a previous paper, we discussed the question of the sources and development of psychostasia (soul-stations) in Christian art, and asserted that the representation of the weighing of the soul with a balance (a motif borrowed from pagan art) is the only representation of a psychostasion which has been popular and wide-spread in any Christian art, and it

has been most popular in post-Orthodox Western art. The appearance of a representation of toll gates or toll houses psychostasion in art is very late and extremely limited, and derives from Manean and/or Bogomil sources, although ultimately from the Egyptian Book of the Dead and the archons of the astral planes of the Chaldeans. In almost every case, it consists of a simple superimposition of an altered central detail from the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent over the correct central detail of an Orthodox portrayal of the Last Judgment (with the necessary misinterpretation of the Ladder). However, the paintings which some profess to represent these toll gate psychostasion are so abstract, indefinite and illogical that there is considerable question as to whether they were originally intended to be interpreted as toll gates or toll houses at all.

We wish to assert that the development of



Plate 57: The Last Judgment. 6th century mosaic in St Apollinaire, Ravenna, Italy

representatio
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psychostasia
of any sort in
Christian art
i s a
phenomenon
w h i c h
developed
outside the
Orthodox
Church, and
that Orthodox

iconography (except where elements were directly borrowed from the West) remained faithful, in their general schemata, to ancient Church prototypes. On the other hand, the gradual development of the psy chostasia in the iconography of Western art can be fairly well traced, and it closely parallels theological developments contiguous to it. The corruption of Orthodox icon-ography with these themes also parallels the introduction of Western corruptions of Orthodox theology, particularly during the "three hundred year Latin captivity of Russian theology," as Fr Georges Florovsky terms it.

The earliest iconographic representations of the Last Judgment were carefully Scriptural, and contented themselves with demonstrating that a judgment had taken place, by simply showing the enthroned Christ, with sheep already separated from the kid goats²⁹ (Plate 57), the same scene, only with people instead of sheep and goats (Plate 58) (*shown here*) or the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Plate 59).



Plate58: 4TH century Roman terra cotta medallion of the Last Judgment. Compare this with the schemata of Kosmas Indikopentes below.

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

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

clear revelation of the meaning of the word "judgment." As we have discussed elsewhere, the act of judgment consists of a simple act of God's will, of His good and merciful justice, according to which He merely places each soul in the state proper to itself. In a similar vein, the panel of the tomb of Bishop Agilbert (+680) in St Paul's Church at the Jouarre Monastery (Seine-et-Marne), portrays this simple, ancient Christian understanding. On the first panel, Christ is portrayed in majesty surrounded by the four evangelists (the "Tetramorph" of the vision of the Lord of Hosts). On the large



Plate 59: From a 6th century miniature of the judgment, from the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

adjoining panel, we see the resurrection on the last day. The faithful have their arms raised in hope and praise toward the returning Lord. In Christ's hand is a scroll (which Hubert, no doubt correctly, interprets as being "*The Book of Life*").³⁰ This is no scene of extended, legalistically defined horrors but it is, rather, in keeping with the eschatology of the first centuries of

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

Christ's Church. The reposed who were united to the Church were in Its care like the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus,³¹ or like the wise and foolish virgins,³² and were in an expectant rest³³ until the day of the Second Coming and general resurrection when, the soul being reunited with the body, they would awaken in paradise (the "Heavenly Jerusalem").³⁴

There was no place for an individual, act by act, deed by deed accounting or weighing of the soul, good and bad deeds or books of accounts. The wicked awakened to their own particular judgment. The act of judgment was represented (correctly) as a simple act of the omniscient will of God (Who does not need a set of audio-visual aids in order to make up His mind).

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

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

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

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



Plate 60: *River of Fire*. Earliest known rendering of the Last Judgment in iconographic format. Kosmas Indikopleutes, ca. A.D. 530

This theme is evident in the earliest extant examples of the basic format of the Last Judgment icons of the Orthodox Church, the σχήματα of Kosmas Indikopleutes (ca.500-550).³⁵ Here we see some basic elements of format, or σχήματα: the absence of landscaping, the upper hemispherical arch atop the rectangular field, which is divided into parts. Christ is shown as a majestic, but not harsh or brutal, ruler. He is bestowing a blessing and holding either the "Book of Life" or the Gospel,³⁶ surrounded by a mandorla of

glory. This representation is strikingly similar to the above mentioned relief on the tomb of Bishop Agilbert, which would have been executed no more than a hundred years later.

Subsequent Orthodox iconographic portrayals of the Last Judgment developed from this, and the earliest existing icon of the full theme of the Last Judgment follows this format.

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

36. The lozenged background behind Christ (*plate 60*) is interesting, because this motif was often used in portrayals of the *mandylion*, the "ikon-not-made-by-man". The face of Christ here is like the usual early portrayals of the *mandylion*.

In this representation, also after Kosmas Indikopleutes (this one, *Plate 60*, is a 9th century copy of the original) Christ is portrayed at the top of the throne, with His hands outstretched, showing the nail prints. Above Him is Kosmas' hemispherical vault. Beneath the throne, two angels are bowing down. At their feet are the wall of Paradise (compare the Agilbert tomb mentioned above), the "Heavenly Jerusalem," within which are depicted the faithful of all ages and stations.³⁷

At the bottom is Gehenna, depicted as a cavern enshrouded with flames, containing sinners.

Above Gehenna (connecting the two scenes) flows a stream of fire, labelled η' $\pi\eta\gamma\acute{\eta}$ $\tau\acute{o}\upsilon$ $\pi\nu\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$.³⁸ These elements still consti



Plate 61: River of fire motif in Kosmas' Last Judgment icon.

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

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

tute the basic details of the Orthodox iconography of the Last Judgment. Eventually, the hemispherical arch disappears in many cases, in order, perhaps, to accommodate the shape of walls, but see *Plate 70* for a twelfth century icon which clearly retains the format of Kosmas' originals. In later centuries, the scenes became more complex, often more tedious, and sometimes, after the beginning of the Middle Ages, Western and other non-Orthodox elements began to appear in various places.

The increasing complexity of these scenes was not Scriptural and was not a spiritually healthy development, and it was not in keeping with the basic hesychastic spirituality of the Orthodox Faith. Much of the complexity was derived from a symbiosis with Western art, such as clearly took place in Yugoslavia from at least the 12th century on, when Latin theology was vying with Orthodoxy for influence.

The basic elements did remain intact, however, as we can see



Plate 62: 14th century Serbian miniature in the "John Alexander Prayer Book."

from the 14th century miniature in the Ioan Alexander prayer book. We must notice here the simplicity of the scene .

This is a matter-of-fact portrayal, devoid of legalistic court scenes, and the demons most certainly are not participating in the judgment. Indeed, how can they, when they themselves are among

those being judged. Here, an angel of God shepherds the self-condemned into Gehenna.³⁹ Notice that the form of an angel with a set of scales has been introduced from the West, but here, as elsewhere in Orthodox icons, he and the scales are totally incongruous to the rest of the ikon, and this figure is only decorative, playing no actual role in the action.

The judgment is taking place in the fiery river, for the exposure to the radiance of God's love and righteousness is in itself the judgment⁴⁰ — the thing which exposes the sins and deeds of all and sweeps away the wicked while exalting the faithful, or, as words of St Basil the Great says, in his *Homily on the Psalms* (33:4; 48:2) that by "the Judge's countenance" is meant the divine illumination which sheds light in our guilty hearts and points to our own sins as our only accusers, which (because of the divine illumination) will rise up before us in our memories. Similarly, St Cyril of Jerusalem says, "The terrible countenance of the Judge" will bring the truth forth in you (*Cat. Lec.* 15:25).⁴¹

We need to pause here to discuss in more detail why the canonical and genuinely Orthodox icons of the judgment always centre on the River of Fire. A little later, we are going to

39. see St Gregory the Theologian, *Oration 16:5*, for example. Notice here too that at the Last Judgment, our accusers will be, not the demons of the psychostasia myths, but our own past thoughts and deeds — our conscience (cf fn. 43 and 49 below). In many Western representations, it is the demons and not God's angels who are shown ushering the self-condemned souls into the fiery stream. This is an element of that peculiar triumph of the demons which took place in Western art and, to a certain degree, in Western theology.

40. See *Gehenna*, Synaxis Press, 2012.

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

discuss the perversion of the icons with the insertion of a serpent and/or the mythological “aerial toll houses.” hat has been said above already establishes the “River of Fire” as the Traditional (and here we intend Sacred Tradition and the teaching of the holy fathers) element in the icons of the judgement. However, let us add a few more doctrinal statement from some of the holy fathers, and a few more examples of the Traditional and canonical icons of this scene.

Saint Basil the Great says:

I believe that the fire prepared in punishment of the devil and his angels is divided by the voice of the Lord. Thus, since there are two capacities in fire, one of burning and the other of illuminating, the fierce and scourging property of the fire may await those who deserve to burn, while its illuminating and radiant warmth may be reserved for the enjoyment of those who are rejoicing. (Homily on the Psalms, 28:6)

St Ephraim the Syrian says of the judgment and Gehenna;

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

To this, St Abba Isaak the Syrian adds:

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. (Homily 84)

Thus Gehenna ("hell") is clearly understood, when we follow the words of the holy fathers, not at all as a "place," but rather a state of being separated from Christ our God. Moreover, this condition of separation results, not from God's desire or need to punish us, but rather from our own free choices which God simply respects for all eternity. The "icons" depicting a serpent or any other replacements for the River of Fire are contrary to the

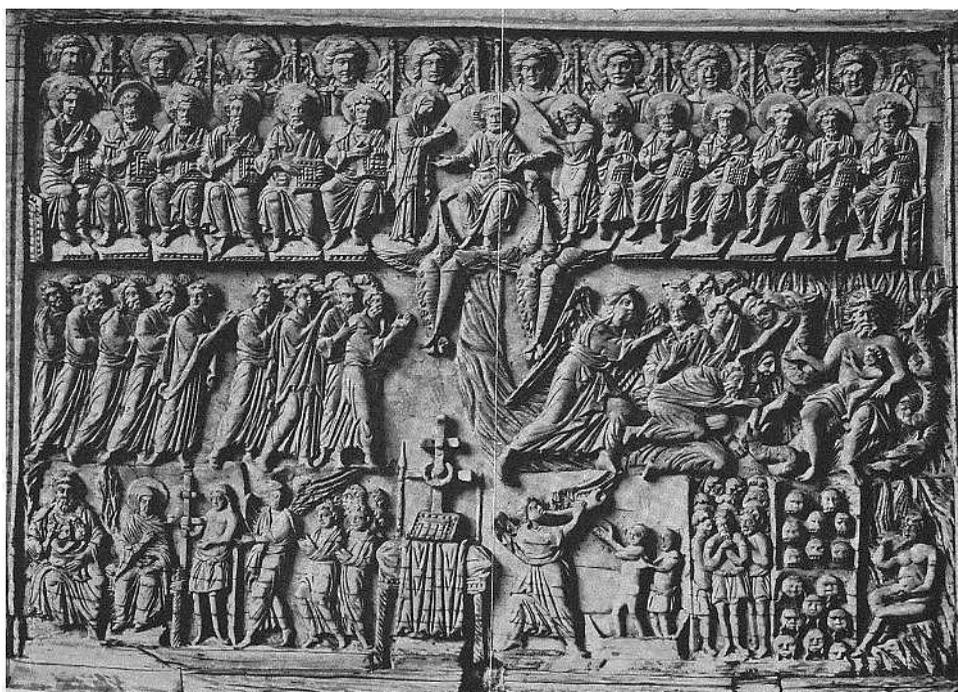


Plate 63: 11th century Byzantine ivory panel. Here again we see the traditional Orthodox Christian schemata of the Judgment icon. Notice the "Deesis" theme with the Theotokos and John the Baptist. The river of fire detail shows God's angels (not any sort of demons) escorting the "goats" away from the "sheep." away from Christ's throne.

Tradition and doctrine of the Orthodox Church and of the holy fathers.



Plate 64 a, b: A.D. 1488 Fresco of the Last Judgment on the exterior wall of the Voronet Monastery Church in Romania Full fresco and close detail of the River of Fire.

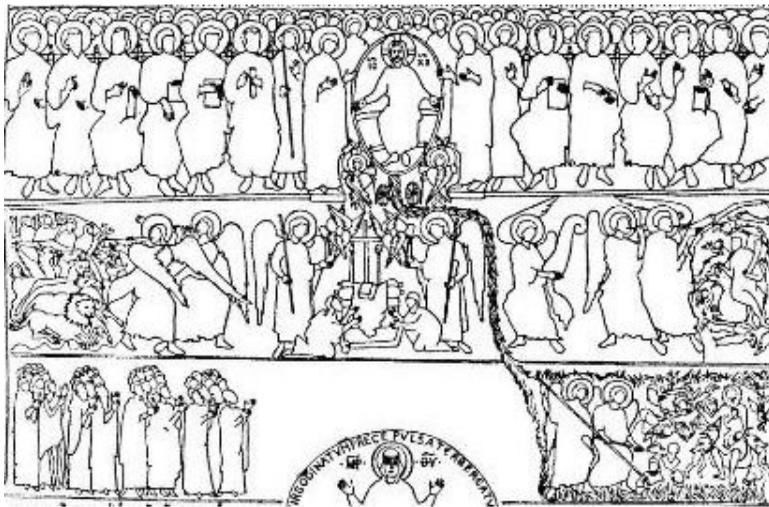
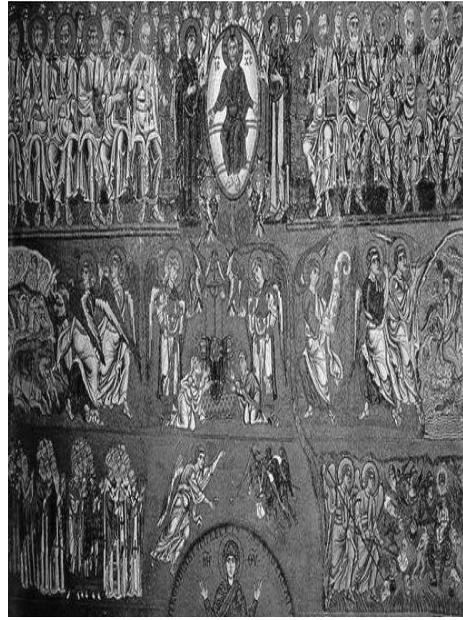
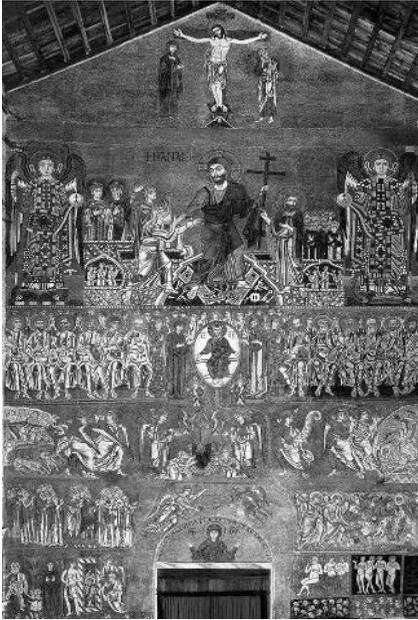


Plate 65, 66, 67: 12th century mosaic of the Last Judgement, Torcello. This is a copy of one from the Cathedral of the Divine Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) in Constantinople. Note the central theme of the River of Fire, the only Traditional and canonical representation of the Judgement.

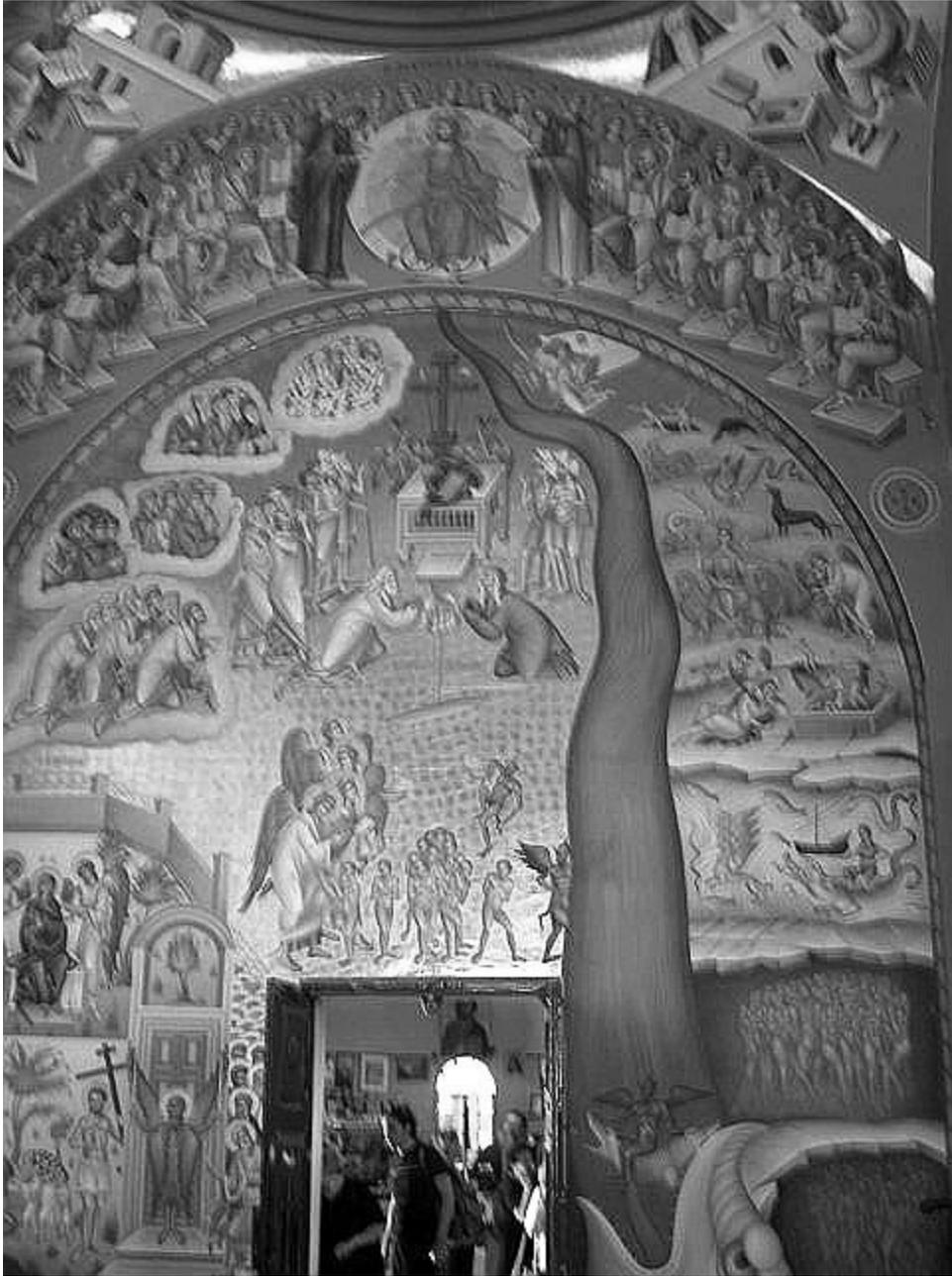


Plate 68: Recently completed Church in Nazareth. Note that it is God's angels that separate the "goats" from the "sheep," and that the demon is among those being driven away not the one driving others away.

The more complex forms of this icon did not begin to appear, evidently, until the 11th century when, in the words of the noted expert on Byzantine art, Kurt Weitzman, it "*apparently was invented,*"⁴² perhaps in Constantinople. This same amplified scene was portrayed in the famous 12th century mosaic at Torcello, near Venice, and in a portable icon of the same century, which is found on Mt Sinai (see *plates 63 and 64* on the following pages).

The details of this form of the Last Judgment icon are explained in the iconographic manuals which appeared after this period, and the contents of these icons were almost certainly considered before they were painted or executed. The fact is that we cannot be absolutely certain when these details were first used, but we have the explanation of the details in the iconographic manual compiled from earlier texts by Dionysios of Fournia (1670-1746),⁴³ for example. Compare his instructions with the schemata drawing of the Torcello mosaic, found at *Plate 66* below.

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

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

This is the traditional Orthodox manner of portraying the Last Judgment, although a legalistic, hyper-dramatic form of portraying the "torments of Gehenna" tended to appear in many, especially later, renditions.⁴⁴

One thing which is notable in the examples of the icons given so far, is that the format, the σχήματα, of these icons remains faithful to the earliest known portrayals (and probably originated with Kosmas Indikopleutes), even when the icon is elongated sideways, that is, when the horizontal plane runs in a rectangle, with the scene running from side to side, rather than vertically, as in the 11th century Byzantine ivory (seen above, *Plate 63*).

Notice also, that even in the contorted arrangement of Theodosy Denisovich's fresco of the Judgment (ca. 1508) in the Annunciation Cathedral in Moscow, the basic schemata of Kosmas remains intact (the scene is stretched sideways to accommodate a doorway and the shape of the wall). In this ikon, the River of Fire flows on a long, meandering course, decorated with curious pretzel shaped puffs of smoke or billows of flame. Coincidentally the layout is similar to the Last Judgment from the paraecclasion of the Khora Church in Constantinople (ca.1320).⁴⁵ There is, incidentally, an extremely

44. Nevertheless, compare the almost peaceful, composed faces of the damned in, for example, the Torcello Mosaic (plate 60) and the "Sinful Kings" in the 13th century fresco of Mileshevo Monastery, Serbia (who are perfectly aware that they are in the condition which they themselves chose), with the sadistic, almost pathological portrayals of the damned in Western art, such as, for example, the tympanum of Autun (which is not even one of the worst examples).

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

interesting aspect of all these portrayals of the Last Judgment and Second Coming, an aspect which was discussed at some length in Chapter V above, in the text concerning the *Deesis* icons (see *plates 29-32* above). That is the revelation contained in them about the Old Testament theophanies. Notice that in almost all these representations, Christ is shown seated upon a rainbow, as the One Who had judged the world in the days of Noah — He is the First and the Last Judge. Moreover, at His feet, one sees the fiery wheels from Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days (*Dn.ch.7*), showing that Jesus Christ the Son is Himself the Ancient of Days. He is also often accompanied by the *Tetramorph* of Ezekiel's vision of The Lord of Hosts (see, eg. *plates 29-32* above) (*Ez.1:5-10*) and/or by the attending Seraphims of Isaiah's vision of the Lord of Hosts (*Is.6:1-5*), showing clearly that Jesus Christ the Son is the Lord of Hosts (see *Jn.12:41*).⁴⁶

Thus, we see that the more ancient icons representing the Last Judgment portrayed the simple theological facts of the Last Judgment as they really are, as an act of the conscience of each individual person, according to the will of God, as a simple, straightforward act of the good and righteous justice of God. A little later, we find more definitive icons, which are set forth in the iconographic manuals and are the traditional Orthodox representations. They still bore considerable simplicity, and were devoid of heavy legalism and excessive

46. see, for example, the Torcello Mosaic (*plate 63*), and the fresco of the same scene by Theodosy Denisovich in the Annunciation Cathedral in Moscow, in which the fiery wheels are especially prominent. Thus, Christ is shown to be both the First and the Last Judge, and He Who was to come, is come and shall come.

delight in gruesome terror. The central detail, a very ancient iconographic feature, which is according to Scripture (*Daniel 7:9-10*), is the stream of fire which pours forth from the feet of Christ and winds like a river into Gehenna, where it totally fills and inundates the state or condition called "hell."⁴⁷ The fire represents the love of God, and we are taught here that it is the radiance of God's love which both warms and radiates and gives joy to the faithful, and burns and torments the wicked.⁴⁸ Those souls which in this life preferred "darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil," will, in the next life, after the resurrection, find no such darkness, but will not be able to hide from that light which they hated in this life. There, bathed in the everlasting light of God's love, which they rejected but cannot now escape, their conscience, which is like a never dying worm, will torment them, and the passions they loved and

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

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

heaped upon themselves in this life will be as serpents round about them. This is the meaning of our Saviour's parable, *"When you go with your accuser (adversary) to the magistrate, make diligent to be reconciled and be delivered from him in the way lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer cast you into prison"* (Lk. 12:58). As St Dorotheos⁴⁹ and others explain, the "adversary (accuser)" is a person's conscience with which he must be reconciled while in this life ("in the way"), since he can do nothing once he leaves this life. If a person does not repent and so become "reconciled," then he will prove to be his own accuser (adversary) before the judge (the conscience being an integral part of us and not a slanderer but a true witness). "In the way" is this life, and being "brought before the magistrate" is death. Here the magistrate (the judge) simply hands one's soul over to His angel (the "officer") who takes it to the state appropriate to itself — in this case, some sort of darkness, the "prison." Again, there is no room for any kind of "toll gates" or aerial judgments, haggling over individual sins, weighings, etc, but only the omniscient and good decree (called metaphorically, "judgment") of the all-good and righteous Judge. In other words, the "damned" will abide forever in the state they chose for themselves while in this life. The judgment is accomplished simply, straightforwardly, and the stream of fire from before the feet of Christ will sweep away the wicked, as St John Chrysostom says, *"Let us then not permit ourselves, by making this brief time a time of carelessness and remissness, to fall*

49. *Instruction Three. Para.42.*

into everlasting punishment, but let us watch and be sober, let us do all things, and make it all our business to attain to that felicity, and to keep far from that river of fire, which rushes...before the dread judgment seat. For he who has once been cast in must remain forever; there is no one to deliver him..."⁵⁰ Similarly, St Theodore of Studion says, *"..and when the stream of fire will issue forth from Thy seat of Judgment, then save me from these flames which cannot be cooled."*⁵¹ For the wicked, there is the "lake of fire" and for the faithful, a "glassy sea blended with fire" (Rev.15:2).

From the medieval era onward, and especially in the 12th century, we begin to find some disturbing developments in the iconography of the Last Judgments in Western art. They begin to become more overpowering, often crude and hideous. There seems to have grown up a sort of morbid and macabre fascination with the torments of hell, and these became ever more anthropomorphized, more varied and usually more disgusting, and in them there is a *final, eternal triumph of Satan*. Note that in Western religious art, Satan and his minions are *rewarded* on judgment day, by being granted eternal power to fulfil their lusts against man. They are shown fulfilling their greatest desire, to torture and torment human beings eternally, with every conceivable instrument of torture. A close study of this art, and some corrupted Orthodox paintings, shows something more drastic. In a whole series of Western "dooms," we must conclude (from careful study of the themes) that Satan

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

51. *Ode Six*.

is not even being *granted* this eternal power, but that *it is naturally his*.⁵² How intentional this is, we cannot say, but to a certain degree at least, the Manichean (and other Gnostic—especially Mandeian) doctrine of dualism is clearly present. This same Manicheism (more directly, Mithraicism and Mandeianism) is fundamental to the "toll house" theology. Indeed, it might be interesting to study the relationship between the later development of the ghastly and morbid portrayals of the now complex and legalistic torments of hell with the advent of the black plague.

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

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

the Inquisitions⁵³ and which would later inspire the murderous aberrations in the mind of John Calvin.

Notably, the device of the "weighing of the souls," which was borrowed originally in the West from illustrations of the Egyptian Book of the Dead and pyramid art, began to appear in some Orthodox representations of the Last Judgment. Formerly, as in the Last Judgment in the Great Church and at Torcello, these figures were almost decorative and had a highly incongruous, if any, function. In the 13th and 14th centuries, this began to change, and the psychostasia began to appear as such in some Orthodox icons. The earliest and heaviest such Western intrusions appear, as one might suspect, in Yugoslavia, where there was a natural symbiosis of the intermixed Latin and Orthodox populations. The art at the Dechani Monastery may be studied in order to see this effect: the appearance of the psychostasion of the weighing of the souls appears in an active manner in a 14th century fresco here, in which is also shown, in purely Latin fashion, Christ brandishing a sword. In order to discover the origins and developments of the psychostasia in Orthodox iconography, we have examined its origins in Western art, since that is where its source is to be found. Now, however, we must look at one very strange and radical innovation in Ukrainian iconography, which was borrowed into Russian usage: the inexplicable and irrational replacement of the river of fire which flows from the judgment seat into

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

Gehenna, with a serpent. Although there is no way this form could be logically or reasonably interpreted as representing the myth of the aerial tollhouses, this Manichean or Bogomil - interpretation⁵⁴ has been given to it in some cases. *Plate 66* on the following page demonstrates one version of this radical and illogical innovation.

This deformity of the traditional icon of the Last Judgment first appeared, as nearly as we can discover, in the Ukraine in the late 16th century.⁵⁵ There are two interpretations of it, one which is technically correct, although the painting itself is contrary to the Tradition and iconographic manuals of the Orthodox Church, another which is quite fantastic and wholly illogical. The first is made by the famous expert in Byzantine and Russian art, Dr David Talbot Rice, who explains the serpent (logically) as reaching up from Gehenna to receive and swallow down the wicked. While this idea changes the theology from that of a traditional ikon, it is at least, as we said, technically correct and logical. The serpent, like the fiery stream in a real Orthodox ikon, does run from the feet of Christ to Gehenna. Let us notice, however, that in deforming one theological and traditional aspect of this ikon, another quite major change has occurred: Christ is no longer identified as the Lord of Hosts and the Ancient of Days. Neither the fiery

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

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

wheels and stream of fire, nor the Tetramorph are here.⁵⁶ Missing also is the rainbow throne which is prescribed by the fourth chapter of Revelations. This radical deformity of the ikon, therefore, has created a great perversion of the Orthodox Faith.⁵⁷ Interesting also is the location of Sts Adam and Eve in this ikon. Traditionally, they are shown prostrating themselves at the etimasia.⁵⁸ Here, they have been moved up to the throne of Christ, as a part of the Deesis, replacing the fiery wheels.

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

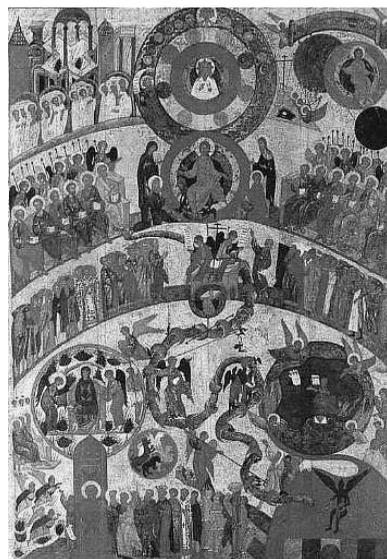


Plate 69?

56. The *Tetramorph* is not shown so often as the Seraphim of Isaiah's vision of the Lord of Hosts (Is.6:2). Inasmuch as the Holy Fifth/Sixth Council resolved that the Holy Evangelists not be historiated as beasts or animals, this seems to be the only case in which it is done. It may be that the *Tetramorph* is permitted in icons of the Second Coming and Last Judgment because of the unity of the vision of Ezekiel and that of John the Divine concerning the Last Judgment and the foundation of the law. The *Tetramorph* is used only in this *prophetic* representation, but cannot be used in other instances.

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

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

which the soul of a reposed person is said to pass after his death.⁵⁹ This interpretation, aside from introducing a new and novel doctrine into the Church, is completely illogical. If the figure of the serpent represented the pathway to heaven (a sort of pneumatic tube purgatory) through which the souls of the reposed had to pass, then why does it originate in the depths of Gehenna? It would rather have to be shown originating at a corpse, a coffin, at least at a graveyard. Or are we being taught

here that all souls are cast into hell (to be purged?) and then led through the aerial toll houses (represented here by the sets of solid circles located on the pneumatic tube serpent)?

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

"I beheld till the



Plate 70: *Portable icon of the Judgment, 1100s, Constantinople (now on Mt Sinai). Note that the River of Fire motif and the schemata of Kosmas Indikopleutes are maintained.*

⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of this subject, see *The Tale of Basil the New: Study of a Gnostic Document*, (Synaxis Press, 1996).

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

To see how closely the Traditional Orthodox icon of this scene matches the Holy Scripture, and how free it is of the Gnostic influences seen in Plate 69 above, let us take a schematic look at the great Torcello mosaic seen before in *Plate 65-67*.

This schemata is more complex than the most ancient (and less speculative) portrayals, but it does follow Scriptural imagery and types, and does not show the demons being rewarded by God by being allowed to judge humans or torment them in hell. The traditional icon is laid out in three tiers, sometimes with the Resurrection scene placed above it, reminding us that the victory of Christ is the source of our own redemption and resurrection in hope. The general schemata and theology are identical to that of the earliest extant examples of Last Judgment icons, those of Kosmas Indikopleutes. Added are the *etimasia* and, often, representations of "Abraham's bosom." Here is the Torcello mosaic below Plate 71:



schemata of the (the icon is shown

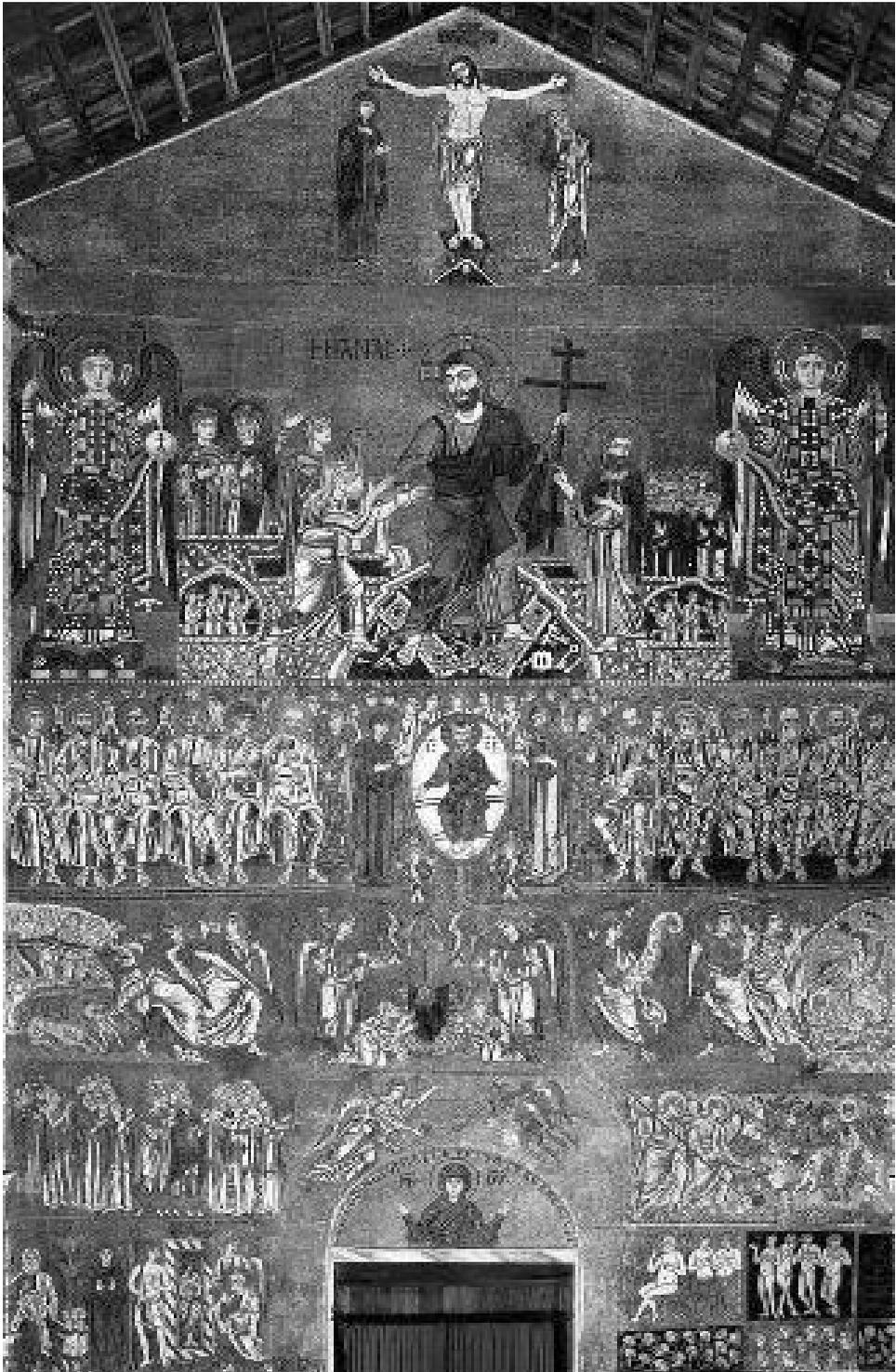
THE RESURRECTION: Is shown first, reminding us of the victory of Christ, and the source of our own Resurrection.

FIRST TIER: Christ is seated upon a high throne, attended by the hosts of which He is Lord, the Apostles and Saints (standing in ranks). The rainbow throne identifies Christ as the Old Testament God and Judge, the God of Noah and the God of John's Revelation; the seraphs at His feet identify Jesus Christ as the Lord of Hosts of Isaiah's vision, and the fiery wheels and stream of fire, as the Ancient of Days. When prophets are shown with open scrolls, the scrolls read: "I beheld until the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit" (Daniel); "For, behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven...and the wicked shall be stubble" (Malachi).

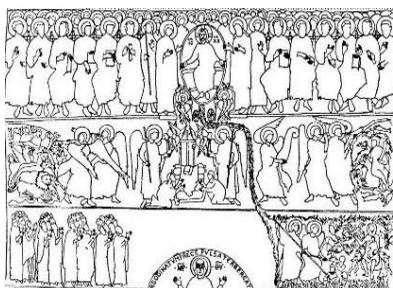
SECOND TIER: The general resurrection and etimasia. On one side, the dead who have been consumed by beasts, buried in the earth, etc, are shown coming forth restored. On the other, the bodies of those resting in the seas are seen arising.

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

GEHENNA: After the judgment, the self-condemned are shown in Gehenna.



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



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

What then is the source of those radical innovations which set aside the traditional, scriptural portrayal of the Last Judgment? They come directly from Gnostic and pagan teachings, sometimes reinforced by fantastic dreams, particularly those reported by a person whose own life story leads us to strongly suspect that he was in a very severe state of spiritual delusion (*plani*; *prelest*) and almost certainly a member of the Bogomil sect, one Gregory of Thrace.⁶⁰ This is not the only source of it. Not only did many of these themes develop in the Dark Ages in Western Europe (in part also under Gnostic influences), but there is a whole collection of fantastic,

60. *ibid*, fn. 59 above.

apocryphal literature which seeks to insinuate the Gnostic and pagan psychostasia myths into Orthodox teachings.⁶¹ Moreover, one is struck by the similarity of the format of this psychostasia serpent and its little demons with the metaphorical imagery and format of the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent. The Ladder of Divine Ascent, which portrays the words of Apostle Paul about our struggle for salvation during this life, *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"* (Eph.6:12), as explained in the

book of the same title by St John of the Ladder. It teaches us about the struggle and ascent of the Orthodox believer *during his life on earth*. As St John of Raithu says of the instruction in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, *"As a ladder set up, they will lead aspirants to the gates of Heaven unharmed and blameless, so that they may pass unhindered the spirits of wickedness, the world-rulers of darkness, and the princes of the air."* Read this book and

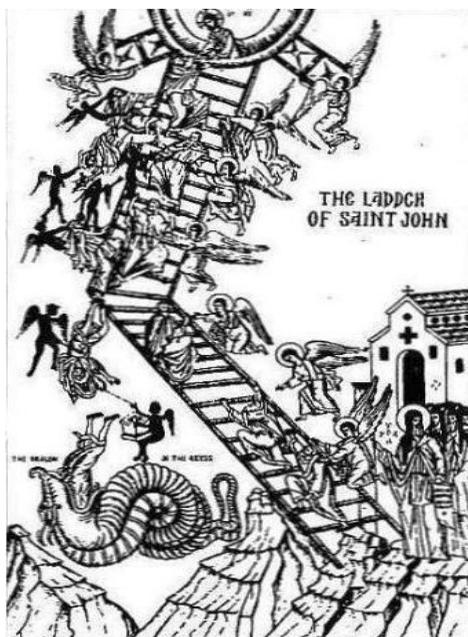


Plate 72.

observe that *all this is to take place during a person's lifetime, not*

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

afterward;⁶² this is the theme of the icon of the Ladder also. It does not seem without significance to our question here that, in the West, in very many texts, one finds The Ladder of Divine Ascent referred to as "The Ladder of Divine *Judgment*."⁶³

This radical iconographic innovation consists, then, in the wilful removal of many or even all traditional elements of the Last Judgment icons, and the Orthodox and Scriptural identification of Christ as the Lord of Hosts and the Ancient of Days. In its place, there is presented the medieval Latin interpretation of the Ladder of Divine Ascent and a purely Gnostic and anti-patristic interpretation of Apostle Paul's words to the Ephesians (6:12). The theological justification for this radical deformity and doctrinal innovation is a series of fantastic literature and highly questionable dreams, and interpretations of various reported dreams and over extensions of some wrongly translated and misinterpreted patristic metaphors.

From the discussion above we see how heretical or erroneous theology becomes manifested in iconography. This is logical since heretical theology depends on

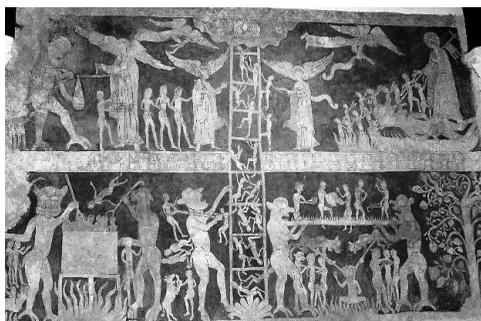


Plate 73: Western "Doom" illustration, Chaldon, Surrey, UK. The erroneous interpretation of the Ladder of Divine Ascent was borrowed from the Latin identification of the Ladder as "the ladder of divine judgment.."

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

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

erroneous interpretations of Divine Scripture and icons are a form of Scripture. All heretical or erroneous icons are a form of incorrect or false interpretations of Scripture.

Inasmuch as we are discussing "the icon as Scripture," let us examine briefly the interplay between false iconography and false interpretation of Scripture and the development of erroneous theology.

The perversion of the icons of the Last Judgment and the understanding of the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent were more likely a result of the acceptance of the Gnostic "aerial toll-house" myth, which may have been used by some early Church writers as an allegory, but was later erroneously accepted by some as if it constituted a "doctrine of the Orthodox Church." Since the idea of the toll-houses (Gr. *telonia*; Slav. *mitarstvo*) was so completely opposed to Orthodox theology and to the Holy Scripture, the perversions in iconography which resulted from it were, as we have seen, irrational and actually meaningless. The perversions were, in the East, generally the result of an untenable and antipatristic misinterpretation of Apostle Paul's words at Ephesians 6:12: *"For our conflict is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (ἐπουρανίους)."*

We are startled to read in a peculiar work of no less a writer than Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov the completely untenable and unpatristic interpretation of this verse in which he relates it to an imaginary after death struggle to pass through

the Mandaean/Manichean "aerial toll-houses." Brianchaninov asserts that *"there can be no doubt whatever [emphasis in the original] that the holy apostle Paul is speaking of them [the after-death aerial toll houses] when he declares that Christians must do battle with the spirits of wickedness under the heavens (Eph. 6:12)"* (Vol.3 Works, p. 138, in Russian).

This is a startling statement, considering that St John Chrysostom gives us *precisely the opposite understanding* in his *Homily 21 on Ephesians* where, citing this very same verse, he says, *"But what stupidity is this, not to think the present a season of war..."* Moreover, he says the same in his *Homily 2 on 2 Timothy* (§ 6) and in many other places. Nor does St Gregory of Nyssa understand the verse at all in the way Bishop Ignaty interprets it so adamantly (see his *Against Eunomius*, Bk.2, 15:5-6.) St Leo the Great, in his *Sermon 39 on Lent*, also shows that there can indeed be considerable doubt about the interpretation of Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov and the Bogomil milieu from which it arose. It is especially interesting that St Athanasios the Great, in his *Life of Saint Antony* also gives us an interpretation of this verse which is precisely the opposite of the interpretation offered by Blessed Bishop Ignaty. In his biography of St Antony, St Athanasios cites Ephesians 6:12 three times, and in each, he makes it clear that *there can be no doubt whatever* that the Apostle is here referring to our struggle *during our earthly life*. The saint says, on these three occasions:

"Thus living, let us keep guard carefully, and as it is written, 'keep our hearts with all watchfulness' (Prov.4:23). For we have terrible and crafty foes — the evil spirits — and against them

we wrestle, as the Apostle said, `not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph.6:12)...The demons therefore, if they see all Christians, and monks especially, labouring cheerfully and advancing, first make an attempt to attack by temptation and place hindrances to hamper our way, to wit, evil thoughts. But we need not fear their suggestions, for by prayer, fasting and faith in the Lord their attack immediately fails...If here also they find the soul strengthened by faith and hopeful of mind, then they bring their leader to their aid...When the prince of the demons appears in this wise...not even then ought we, the faithful to fear his appearance or give heed to his words. For he is a liar and speaks never a word of truth...And he was bound by the Lord as a sparrow that we should mock him. And with him are placed the demons his fellows, like serpents and scorpions to be trodden underfoot by us Christians...Let us then not heed his words, for he is a liar: and let us not fear his visions, seeing that they themselves are deceptive...they are rather the preludes and likeness of the fire prepared for the demons who attempt to terrify men with those flames in which they themselves will be burned. Doubtless they appear; but in a moment disappear again hurting none of the faithful, but bringing with them the likeness of that fire which is about to receive [them] themselves. Wherefore it is unfitting that we should fear them on account of these things; for through the Grace of Christ, all their practices are in vain" (Para.21-24, emphasis mine).

Take note that all this occurs while we are "thus living," and it is completely clear from the text that all this is to

take place in this life. There can, then, be no doubt whatever that the holy Apostle Paul was speaking, not about some sort of imaginary after-death toll houses (which are not so much as even hinted at in Holy Scripture), but about the struggle of Orthodox people in this life. For, note also in paragraphs 28 and 40-43 of the biography of St Antony, that the demons are actually powerless. St Athanasios again cites this verse (*Eph. 6:12*), at paragraph 51, where he clearly says that this wrestling "not against flesh and blood" etc, occurs in this life. St Antony himself, on his death-bed admonishes his monks, "*And do you be watchful and destroy not your long discipline, but as though now making a beginning, zealously preserve your determination. For you know the treachery of the demons, how fierce they are, but how little power they have. Wherefore, fear them not, but rather ever breathe Christ, and trust Him.*" (para.91).

These are the only times Ephesians 6:12 are cited in the *Life of Saint Antony*. Where then is this, "there can be no doubt whatever" which was spoken with such dogmatic emphasis? For again, St Athanasios the Great, in his *Festal Letter Number One*, tells us that the feasts and fasts call us to the war of this life, and says, ".*..now these things [the old law] were typical, and done as a shadow. But let us pass on to the meaning and henceforth leaving the figure at a distance, come to the truth, and look upon the priestly trumpets of our Saviour, which cry out and call us, at one time to war, as the blessed Paul says, `We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities, with powers, with the rulers of this dark world, with wicked spirits in the heavens`"* (*Eph.6:12*).

To this, St Ambrose of Milan concurs also, saying of Paul, "*Worthy indeed was he to be gazed upon by angels, when he was striving to attain the prize of Christ, when he was striving to live on earth the life of angels, and overcome the wickedness of the spirits in the heavens, for he wrestled with spiritual wickedness (Eph.6:12). Rightly did the world gaze upon him, that it might imitate him...*" (Letter 63, §71). And not only once does he teach us that this wrestling and struggling with the aerial powers takes place in this life, but in paragraph 6 of his sermon against Auxentius, he says the same thing, not of Paul only, but of us all; and this much he says again clearly in paragraph 106, Book Two of his *On Belief in the Resurrection*.

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

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

Bear in mind that there are absolutely no references to any kind of "aerial toll-houses," by any name, either in Divine Scripture or in any of the funeral or memorial services

for the reposed. The theme also absolutely does not occur in any Traditional icons of the judgment, for they are, as with all true and canonical icons, faithful to the Scripture. This is necessarily so precisely because the icon is a form of the Holy Scripture itself, and every corruption in our iconography inevitably reflects a corruption in the understanding of Scripture and a rupture of our theology.

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JESUS CHRIST, THE TREE OF LIFE.

X

THE RIVER OF FIRE

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

Dr Alexandre Kalomiros

*I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to My chosen people,
the people whom I formed for Myself
that they might declare My praise.
(Isaiah 44).*

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

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

The reason is the cooling of love. Love for God no

more burns in human hearts, and in consequence, love between us is dead, too.

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

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

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

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

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

illness and death, but rather a cruel judge and a vengeful inquisitor.

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

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

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

2.

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

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

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

What is evil? Is it not the estrangement from God Who is Life?¹ Is it not death? What does Western theology teach about death? All Roman Catholics and most Protestants consider death as a punishment from God. God considered all men guilty of Adam's sin and punished them by death, that is by cutting them away from Himself; depriving them of His life-giving energy, and so killing them spiritually at first and later bodily, by some sort of spiritual starvation. Augustine interprets the passage in Genesis as, "If you eat of the fruit of this tree, you will die the death."²

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

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

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

What is the Western dogma of salvation? Did not God

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

What is salvation for Western theology? Is it not salvation from the wrath of God?³

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

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

Even if there exists a means of escaping the eternal wrath of this omnipotent but wicked Being (the death of His Son in our stead), it would be much better if this Being did not exist. This was the most logical conclusion of the mind and of the heart of the Western peoples, because even eternal Paradise would be abhorrent with such a cruel God. Thus was atheism born, and this is why the West was its birthplace. Atheism was unknown in Eastern Christianity until Western theology was introduced there, too. Atheism is the consequence of Western theology.⁴ Atheism is the denial, the negation of an evil God. Men became atheists in order to be saved from God, hiding their head and closing their eyes like an ostrich. Atheism, my brothers, is the negation of the Roman Catholic and Protestant God. Atheism is not our real enemy. The real enemy is that falsified and distorted "Christianity."

3.

Westerners speak frequently of the "Good God."⁵ Western Europe and America, however, were never convinced that such a Good God existed. On the contrary, they were calling God good in the way Greeks called the curse and malediction of smallpox, *evlogia* (εὐλογία), that is, a blessing, a benediction, in order to exorcise it and charm it away. For the same reason, the Black Sea was called the *Euξενος Ποντος* — the hospitable sea — although it was, in fact, a dreadful and treacherous sea. Deep inside the Western soul, God was felt to be the wicked Judge, Who never forgot even the smallest offense done to Him in our transgressions of His laws.

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

Western Christians thought about God's justice in the same way also; God, the infinite Being, was infinitely insulted by Adam's disobedience. He decided that the guilt of Adam's disobedience descended equally to all His children, and that all were to be sentenced to death for Adam's sin, which they did

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

4.

This paganistic conception of God's justice which demands infinite sacrifices in order to be appeased clearly makes God our real enemy and the cause of all our misfortunes. Moreover, it is a justice which is not at all just since it punishes and demands satisfaction from persons which were not at all responsible for the sin of their forefathers.⁶ In other words, what Westerners call justice ought rather to be called resentment and vengeance of the worst kind. Even Christ's love and sacrifice loses its significance and logic in this schizoid notion of a God who kills God in order to satisfy the so-called justice of God.

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

Perhaps the beginning of the mistaken interpretation of the word *justice* in the Holy Scriptures was its translation by the Greek word δικαιοσύνη.⁷ Not that it is a mistaken translation, but because this word, being a word of the pagan, humanistic, Greek civilization, was charged with human notions which could easily lead to misunderstandings.

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

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

The word δικαιοσύνη, "justice," is a translation of the Hebraic word *tsedakà*.⁸ This word means "the divine energy which accomplishes man's salvation." It is parallel and almost synonymous to the other Hebraic word, *hesèd* which means "mercy," "compassion," "love," and to the word, *emèth* which means "fidelity," "truth." This, as you see, gives a completely other dimension to what we usually conceive as justice.⁹ This is how the Church understood God's justice. This is what the Fathers of the Church taught of it. "How can you call God just," writes Saint Isaac the Syrian, "when you read the passage on the wage given to the workers? `Friend, I do thee no wrong; I will give unto this last even as unto thee who worked for me from the first hour. Is thine eye evil, because I am good?'" "How can a man call God just," continues Saint Isaac, "when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son, who wasted his wealth in riotous living, and yet only for the contrition which

he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck, and gave him authority over all his wealth? None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him lest we doubt it, and thus He bare witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God's justice, for whilst we were sinners, Christ died for us!"¹⁰

So we see that God is not just, with the human meaning of this word, but we see that His justice means His goodness and love, which are given in an unjust manner, that is, God always gives without taking anything in return, and He gives to persons like us who are not worthy of receiving. That is why Saint Isaac teaches us: "Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him just and upright, His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. 'He is good,' He says, 'to the evil and impious.'"¹¹

God is good, loving, and kind toward those who disregard, disobey, and ignore Him.¹² He never returns evil for evil, He never takes vengeance.¹³ His punishments are loving means of correction, as long as anything can be corrected and healed in this life.¹⁴ They never extend to eternity. He created everything good.¹⁵ The wild beasts recognize as their master the Christian who through humility has gained the likeness of God. They draw near to him, not with fear, but with joy, in grateful and loving submission; they wag their heads and lick his hands and serve him with gratitude. The irrational beasts know that their Master and God is not evil and wicked and vengeful, but

rather full of love. (See also St. Isaac of Syria, *Σωζόμενα Ἀσκητικά* [Athens, 1871], pp. 95-96.) He protected and saved us when we fell. The eternally evil has nothing to do with God. It comes rather from the will of His free, logical creatures, and this will He respects.¹⁶

Death was not inflicted upon us by God.¹⁷ We fell into it by our revolt. God is Life and Life is God. We revolted against God, we closed our gates to His life-giving grace.¹⁸ "For as much as he departed from life," wrote Saint Basil, "by so much did he draw nearer to death. For God is Life, deprivation of life is death."¹⁹ "God did not create death," continues Saint Basil, "but we brought it upon ourselves." "Not at all, however, did He hinder the dissolution ... so that He would not make the infirmity immortal in us."²⁰ As Saint Irenaeus puts it: "Separation from God is death, separation from light is darkness ... and it is not the light which brings upon them the punishment of blindness."²¹

"Death," says Saint Maximus the Confessor, "is principally the separation from God, from which followed necessarily the death of the body. Life is principally He who said, 'I am the Life.'"²²

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

were born from a mortal."²³

And Saint Gregory Palamas makes this point: "[God] did not say to Adam: return to whence thou wast taken; but He said to him: Earth thou art and unto the earth thou shalt return ... He did not say: 'in whatsoever day ye shall eat of it, die!' but, 'in whatsoever day ye shall eat of it, ye shall surely die.' Nor did He afterwards say: 'return now unto the earth,' but He said, 'thou shalt return,' in this manner forewarning, justly permitting and not obstructing what shall come to pass."²⁴ We see that death did not come at the behest of God but as a consequence of Adam's severing his relations with the source of Life, by his disobedience; and God in His kindness did only warn him of it.

"The tree of knowledge itself," says Theophilus of Antioch, "was good, and its fruit was good. For it was not the tree, as some think, that had death in it, but the disobedience which had death in it; for there was nothing else in the fruit but knowledge alone, and knowledge is good when one uses it properly."²⁵ The Fathers teach us that the prohibition to taste the tree of knowledge was not absolute but temporary. Adam was a spiritual infant. Not all foods are good for infants. Some foods may even kill them although adults would find them wholesome. The tree of knowledge was planted by God for man. It was good and nourishing. But it was solid food, while Adam was able to digest only milk.

5.

So in the language of the Holy Scriptures, "just" means good and loving. We speak of the just men of the Old Testament. That does not mean that they were good judges but that they were kind and God-loving people. When we say that God is just, we do not mean that He is a good judge Who knows how to punish men equitably according to the gravity of their crimes, but on the contrary, we mean that He is kind and loving, forgiving all transgressions and disobediences, and that He wants to save us by all means, and never requites evil for evil.²⁶ In the first volume of the *Philokalia* there is a magnificent text of Saint Anthony which I must read to you here:

God is good, dispassionate, and immutable. Now someone who thinks it reasonable and true to affirm that God does not change, may well ask how, in that case, it is possible to speak of God as rejoicing over those who are good and showing mercy to those who honour Him, and as turning away from the wicked and being angry with sinners. To this it must be answered that God neither rejoices nor grows angry, for to rejoice and to be offended are passions; nor is He won over by the gifts of those who honour Him, for that would mean He is swayed by pleasure. It is not right that the Divinity feel pleasure or displeasure from human conditions. He is good, and He only bestows blessings and never does harm, remaining always the same. We men, on the other hand, if we remain good through resembling God, are united to Him, but if we become evil through not resembling God, we are separated from Him. By living in

holiness we cleave to God; but by becoming wicked we make Him our enemy. It is not that He grows angry with us in an arbitrary way, but it is our own sins that prevent God from shining within us and expose us to demons who torture us. And if through prayer and acts of compassion we gain release from our sins, this does not mean that we have won God over and made him to change, but that through our actions and our turning to the Divinity, we have cured our wickedness and so once more have enjoyment of God's goodness. Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind.²⁷
[Chap. 150]

6.

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

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

The pagan mentality was in the foundation of all heresies. It was very strong in the East, because the East was the crossroad of all philosophical and religious currents. But as we read in the New Testament, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." So when heresies flourished, Orthodoxy flourished also, and although it was persecuted by the might of this world, it always survived victorious. In the West, on the contrary, the pagan Greek mentality entered in unobtrusively, without taking the aspect of heresy. It entered in through the multitude of Latin texts dictated by Augustine, bishop of Hippo. Saint John Cassian who was living then in the West understood the poison that was in Augustine's teachings, and fought against it. But the fact that Augustine's books were written in Latin and the fact that they were extremely lengthy did not permit their study by the other Fathers of the Church, and so they were never condemned as Origen's works were condemned in the East. This fact permitted them to exercise a strong influence later in Western thought and theology. In the West, little by little knowledge of the Greek language vanished, and Augustine's texts were the only books available dating from ancient times in a language understood there. So the West received as Christian a teaching which was in many of its aspects pagan. Caesaro-papist developments in Rome did not permit any healthy reaction to this state of affairs, and so the West was drowned in the humanistic, pagan thought which prevails to this day.²⁸

So we have the East on the one side which, speaking and writing Greek, remained essentially the New Israel with

Israelitic thought and sacred tradition, and the West on the other side which having forgotten the Greek language and having been cut off from the Eastern state, inherited pagan Greek thought and its mentality, and formed with it an adulterated Christian teaching.

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

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

7.

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

Israel believes in God.

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

Israel (and when we speak of Israel we mean the true Israel, the spiritual sons of Abraham, those who have the faith given by God to His chosen people, not those who have abandoned this faith. The real sons of Abraham are the Church of Christ, and not those carnal descendants, the Jewish race), Israel knows that God and creation are two radically different kinds of existence. God is self-existent, personal, eternal, immortal, Life and the Source of life, Existence and the Source of existence; God is the only real Existence: Ὁ ὢν the Existing, the Only Existing; this is the meaning of the article Ὁ.²⁹

Creation, on the contrary, has no self-existence. It is totally dependent on the will of God. It exists only so long as God wants it to exist. It is not eternal. It had no existence. It was null, it was completely nothing. It was created out of nothingness.³⁰ By itself it has no force of existence; it is kept in existence by God's Energy. If this loving Energy of God ever stops, creation and all created beings, intellectual or non-intellectual, rational or irrational will vanish into non-existence. We know that God's love for His creation is eternal. We know from Him that He will never let us fall into non-existence, from which He brought us into being. This is our hope and God is true in His promises. We, created beings, angels, and men, will live in eternity, not because we have in us the power of eternity, but because this is the will of God Who loves us. By ourselves we are nothing. We have not the least energy of life and of existence in our nature; that which we have comes entirely from God; nothing is ours. We are dirt of the earth, and when we forgot it, God in His mercy permitted that we return to

what we are, in order that we remain humble and have exact knowledge of our nothingness.³¹ "God," says Saint John Damascene elsewhere, "can do all that He wills, even though He does not will all things that He can do — for He can destroy creation, but He does not will to do so." (Ibid. I, 14)³²

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

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

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

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

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

This is the faith of Israel.

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

Paganism considers creation as being something self-existent and immortal, something that always existed and will always exist. In paganism the gods are part of creation. They did not create it from nothingness, they only formed the existing matter. Matter can take different forms. Forms come into existence and vanish, but matter itself is eternal. Angels, demons, and the souls of men are the real gods. Eternal by their

nature, as is matter itself, they are, however, higher than matter. They might take different material forms in a sequence of material existences but they remain essentially spiritual.

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

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

So we see that in paganism the devil succeeded in creating a universal belief that men were gods and so did not need God. This is why pride was so high in Greece and why humility was inconceivable. In his work *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes the following words: "Not to resent offenses is the mark of a base and slavish man." The man who is convinced by the devil to believe in the error that his soul is eternal by nature, can never be humble and can never really believe in God, because he does not need God, being God himself, as his error makes him believe.

This is why, from the very first, the Fathers of the Church, understanding the danger of this stupid error, warned the Christians of the fact that, as Saint Irenaeus puts it: "The

teaching that the human soul is naturally immortal is from the devil" (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, III, 20. 1). We find the same warning in Saint Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho* 6. 1-2), in Theophilus of Antioch (*To Autolycus* 2. 97), in Tatian (*To the Greeks* 13), etc.

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

Paganism is ignorance of the true God, an erroneous belief that His creation is divine, really a god. This god, however, who is Nature, is impersonal, a blind force, above all personal gods, and is called Necessity ('Ανάγκη). In reality, this Necessity is the projection of human reason, as a mathematical necessity governing the world. It is a projection of rationalism upon nature. This rationalistic Necessity is the true, supreme blind god of the pagans. The pagan gods are parts of the world, and they are immortal because of the immortality of nature which is their essence. In this pagan mentality, man is also god like the others, because for the pagans the real man is only his soul,³³ and they believe that man's soul is immortal in itself, since it is part of the essence of the universe, which is considered immortal in itself and self-existent. So man also is god and a measure of all things.

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

8.

It is this pagan way of thought that was mixed with the Christian teaching by the various heresies. This is what happened in the West, too. They began to distinguish not between God and His creation, but between spirit and matter.³⁴ They began to think of the soul of man as of something eternal in itself, and began to consider the condition of man after death not as a sleep in the hands of God, but as the real life of man,³⁵ to which the resurrection of the dead had nothing to add and even the need of the resurrection was doubtful. The feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, which is the culmination of all feasts in Orthodoxy, began to fall into second place, because its need was as incomprehensible to the Western Christians as it was to the Athenians who heard the sermon of the Apostle Paul.

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

It is in this context of Necessity, which even gods obey, that we must understand the Western juridical conception of God's justice. It was necessary for God to punish man's disobedience. It was impossible for Him to pardon; a superior Necessity

demanded vengeance. Even if God was in reality good and loving, He was not able to act lovingly. He was obliged to act contrary to His love; the only thing He could do, in order to save humanity, was to punish His Son in the place of men, and by this means was Necessity satisfied.

9.

This is the triumph of Hellenistic thought in Christianity. As a Hellenist, Origen had arrived at the same conclusions. God was a judge by necessity. He was obliged to punish, to avenge, to send people to hell. Hell was God's creation. It was a punishment demanded by justice. This demand of justice was a necessity. God was obliged to submit to it. He was not permitted to forgive. There was a superior force, a Necessity which did not permit Him to love unconditionally.

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

The pagan Greek mentality could not comprehend that the cause of hell was not God but His logical creatures. If God was not really free, since He was governed by Necessity, how could

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

Origen, and all rationalists who are like him, was not able to understand that the acceptance or the rejection of God's grace depends entirely on the rational creatures; that God, like the sun, never stops shining on good or wicked alike; that rational creatures are, however, entirely free to accept or reject this grace and love; and that God in His genuine love does not force His creatures to accept Him, but respects absolutely their free decision.³⁶ He does not withdraw His grace and love, but the *attitude* of the logical creatures toward this unceasing grace and love is the difference between paradise and hell. Those who love God are happy with Him, those who hate Him are extremely miserable by being obliged to live in His presence, and there is no place where one can escape the loving omnipresence of God.

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

we are, it is our eternal face – bright or dark, loving or hating.

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

11.

Saint John of the Ladder says somewhere in his work that "before our fall the demons say to us that God is a friend of

man; but after our fall, they say that He is inexorable." This is the cunning lie of the devil: to convince us that any harm in our life has as its cause God's disposition; that it is God Who will forgive us or Who will punish us. Wishing to throw us into sin and then to make us lose any hope of freeing ourselves from it, they seek to present God as sometimes forgiving all sins, and sometimes as inexorable. Most Christians, even Orthodox Christians, have fallen into this pit. They consider God responsible for our being pardoned or our being punished. This, my brothers, is a terrible falsehood which makes most men lose eternal life, principally because in considering God's love, they convince themselves that God, in His love, will pardon them. God is always loving, He is always pardoning, He is always a friend of man. However, that which never pardons, that which never is a friend of man, is sin, and we never think of it as we ought to. Sin destroys our soul independently of the love of God, because sin is precisely the road which leads away from God, because sin erects a wall which separates us from God, because sin destroys our spiritual eyes and makes us unable to see God's light. The demons want to make us always think of our salvation or our eternal spiritual death in juridical terms. They want us to think that either salvation or eternal death is a question of God's decision. No, my brothers, we must awaken in order not to be lost. Our salvation or our eternal death is not a question of God's decision, but it is a question of *our* decision, it is a question of the decision of our free will which God respects absolutely. Let us not fool ourselves with confidence in God's love. The danger does not come from God; it comes from

our own self.

12.

Many will say: "Does not Holy Scripture itself often speak about the anger of God? Is it not God Himself Who says that He will punish us or that He will pardon us? Is it not written that 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him' (Hb.11:6)?³⁷ Does He not say that vengeance is His and that He will requite the wickedness done to us? Is it not written that it is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God?"³⁸

In his discourse entitled *That God is not the Cause of Evil*, Saint Basil the Great writes the following: "But one may say, if God is not responsible for evil things, why is it said in the book of Esaias, 'I am He that prepared light and Who formed darkness, Who makes peace and Who creates evils' (45:7)." And again, "There came down evils from the Lord upon the gates of Jerusalem" (Mich.1:12). And, "Shall there be evil in the city which the Lord hath not wrought?" (Amos 3:6). And in the great Ode of Moses, "Behold, I am and there is no god beside Me. I will slay, and I will make to live; I will smite, and I will heal" (Deut.32:39). But none of these citations, to him who understands the deeper meaning of the Holy Scriptures, casts any blame on God, as if He were the cause of evils and their creator, for He Who said, "I am the One Who makes light and darkness," shows Himself as the Creator of the universe, not that He is the creator of any evil "He creates evils," that means, "He fashions them again and brings them to a

betterment, so that they leave their evilness, to take on the nature of good."³⁹

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

Saint Basil in the same discourse⁴⁰ gives the explanation of these expressions of the Holy Scriptures: "It is because fear," says he, "edifies simpler people," and this is true not only for simple people but for all of us. After our fall, we need fear in order to do any profitable thing and any good to ourselves or to others. In order to understand the Holy Scriptures, say the Fathers, we must have in mind their purpose which is to save us, and to bring us little by little to an understanding of our Creator God and of our wretched condition.

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

The Holy Scriptures speak our language, the language which we understand in our fallen state. As Saint Gregory the Theologian says, "For according to our own comprehension, we have given names from our own attributes to those of God"⁴¹ And Saint John Damascene explains further that what in the Holy Scriptures "is said of God as if He had a body, is

said symbolically ... [it contains] some hidden meaning, which through things corresponding to our nature, teaches us things which exceed our nature."⁴²

13.

However, there are punishments imposed upon us by God, or rather evils done to us by the devil and permitted by God. But these punishments are what we call pedagogical punishments. They have as their aim our correction *in this life*, or at least the correction of others who would take a lesson from our example and correct themselves by fear. There are also punishments which do not have the purpose of correcting anybody but simply put an end to evil by putting an end to those who are propagating it, so that the earth may be saved from perpetual corruption and total destruction; such was the case in the flood during Noe's time, and in Sodom's destruction.⁴³

All these punishments operate and have their purpose in *this* corrupted state of things; they do not extend beyond this corrupted life. Their purpose is to correct what can be corrected, and to change things toward a better condition, while things can still change in this changing world. After the Common Resurrection no change whatever can take place. Eternity and incorruptibility are the state of unchangeable things; no alterations whatever happen then, only developments in the state chosen by free personalities; eternal and infinite developments but no changing, no alteration of direction, no

going back. The changing world we see around us is changing because it is corruptible. The eternal New Heavens and New Earth which God will bring about in His Second Coming are incorruptible, that means, not changing. So in this New World there can be no correction whatever; therefore, pedagogical punishments are no longer necessary. Any punishment from God in this New World of Resurrection would be clearly and without a doubt a revengeful act, inappropriate and motivated by hate, without any good intention or purpose.

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

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

So we see that God punishes as long as there is hope for correction. After the Common Resurrection there is no question of any punishment from God. Hell is not a punishment from God but a self condemnation. As Saint Basil the Great says, "The evils in hell do not have God as their cause, but ourselves."⁴⁴

14.

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

God is Truth and Light. God's judgment is nothing else than our coming into contact with truth and light. In the day of the Great Judgment all men will appear naked before this penetrating light of truth. The "books" will be opened. What are these "books"? They are our hearts. Our hearts will be opened by the penetrating light of God, and what is in these hearts will be revealed. If in those hearts there is love for God, those hearts will rejoice in seeing God's light. If, on the contrary, there is hatred for God in those hearts, these men will suffer by receiving on their opened hearts this penetrating light of truth which they detested all their life.

So that which will differentiate between one man and another will not be a decision of God, a reward or a punishment from Him, but that which was in each one's heart; what was there during all our life will be revealed in the Day of Judgment. If there is a reward and a punishment in this revelation – and there really is – it does not come from God but from the love or hate which reigns in our heart. Love has bliss in it, hatred has

despair, bitterness, grief, affliction, wickedness, agitation, confusion, darkness, and all the other interior conditions which compose hell (1Cor.4:6).

The Light of Truth, God's Energy, God's grace which will fall on men unhindered by corrupt conditions in the Day of Judgment, will be the same to all men. There will be no distinction whatever. All the difference lies in those who receive, not in Him Who gives. The sun shines on healthy and diseased eyes alike, without any distinction. Healthy eyes enjoy light and because of it see clearly the beauty which surrounds them. Diseased eyes feel pain, they hurt, suffer, and want to hide from this same light which brings such great happiness to those who have healthy eyes.

But alas, there is no longer any possibility of escaping God's light. During this life there was. In the New Creation of the Resurrection, God will be everywhere and in everything. His light and love will embrace all. There will be no place hidden from God, as was the case during our corrupt life in the kingdom of the prince of this world.⁴⁵ The devil's kingdom will be despoiled by the Common Resurrection and God will take possession again of His creation.⁴⁶ Love will enrobe everything with its sacred Fire which will flow like a river from the throne of God and will irrigate paradise. But this same river of Love – for those who have hate in their hearts – will suffocate and burn.

"For our God is a consuming fire" (Hb.12:29). The very fire which purifies gold, also consumes wood. Precious metals shine in it like the sun, rubbish burns with black smoke. All are in the

same fire of Love. Some shine and others become black and dark. In the same furnace steel shines like the sun, whereas clay turns dark and is hardened like stone.

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

15.

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

Saint Symeon the New Theologian says that it is not what man does which counts in eternal life but what he is, whether he is like Jesus Christ our Lord, or whether he is different and unlike Him. He says, "In the future life the Christian is not examined if he has renounced the whole world for Christ's love, or if he has distributed his riches to the poor or if he fasted or

kept vigil or prayed, or if he wept and lamented for his sins, or if he has done any other good in this life, but he is examined attentively if he has any similitude with Christ, as a son does with his father."

16.

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

17.

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

In the icon of the Last Judgment we see Our Lord Jesus Christ seated on a throne. On His right we see His friends, the blessed men and women who lived by His love. On His left we see His enemies, all those who passed their life hating Him, even if they appeared to be pious and reverent. And there, in the midst of the two, springing from Christ's throne, we see a river of fire coming toward us. What is this river of fire? Is it an instrument of torture? Is it an energy of vengeance coming out from God in order to vanquish His enemies?

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

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

the Ladder says, "Love is the source of fire" (Step 30, 18).

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

"Do you want to know how to understand if a man has faith or unbelief? If you feel warmth coming out of him – from his eyes, from his words, from his manners – be certain that he has faith in his heart. If again you feel cold coming out of his whole being, that means that he has not faith, whatever he may say. He may kneel down, he may bend his head humbly, he may utter all sorts of moral teachings with a humble voice, but all these will breathe forth a chilling breath which falls upon you to numb you with cold."⁴⁷

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

"Do not deceive yourself," says Saint Symeon the New

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

God is a loving fire, and He is a loving fire for all: good or bad. There is, however, a great difference in the way people receive this loving fire of God. Saint Basil says that "the sword of fire was placed at the gate of paradise to guard the approach to the tree of life; it was a terrible and burning toward infidels, but kindly accessible toward the faithful, bringing to them the light of day."⁴⁸ The same loving fire brings the day to those who respond to love with love, and burns those who respond to love with hatred.

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

hates us, it is likened to pouring lighted coals and hot embers on his head.

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

God is love. If we really believe this truth, we know that God never hates, never punishes, never takes vengeance. As Abba Ammonas says, "Love never hates anyone, never reprovcs anyone, never condemns anyone, never grieves anyone, never abhors anyone, neither faithful nor infidel nor stranger nor sinner nor fornicator, nor anyone impure, but instead it is precisely sinners, and weak and negligent souls that it loves more, and feels pain for them and grieves and laments, and it feels sympathy for the wicked and sinners, more than for the good, imitating Christ Who called sinners, and ate and drank with them. For this reason, showing what real love is, He taught saying, 'Become good and merciful like your Father in Heaven,' and as He rains on bad and good and makes the sun to rise on just and unjust alike, so also is the one who has real love, and has compassion, and prays for all."⁴⁹

18.

Now if anyone is perplexed and does not understand how it

is possible for God's love to render anyone pitifully wretched and miserable and even burning as it were in flames, let him consider the elder brother of the prodigal son. Was he not in his father's estate? Did not everything in it belong to him? Did he not have his father's love? Did his father not come himself to entreat and beseech him to come and take part in the joyous banquet? What rendered him miserable and burned him with inner bitterness and hate? Who refused him anything? Why was he not joyous at his brother's return? Why did he not have love either toward his father or toward his brother? Was it not because of his wicked, inner disposition? Did he not remain in hell because of that? And what was this hell? Was it any separate place? Were there any instruments of torture? Did he not continue to live in his father's house? What separated him from all the joyous people in the house if not his own hate and his own bitterness? Did his father, or even his brother, stop loving him? Was it not precisely this very love which hardened his heart more and more? Was it not the joy that made him sad? Was not hatred burning in his heart, hatred for his father and his brother, hatred for the love of his father toward his brother and for the love of his brother toward his father? This is hell: the negation of love; the return of hate for love; bitterness at seeing innocent joy; to be surrounded by love and to have hate in one's heart. This is the eternal condition of all the damned. They are all dearly loved. They are all invited to the joyous banquet. They are all living in God's Kingdom, in the New Earth and the New Heavens. No one expels them. Even if they wanted to go away they could not flee from God's New

Creation, nor hide from God's tenderly loving omnipresence. Their only alternative would be, perhaps, to go away from their brothers and search for a bitter isolation from them, but they could never depart from God and His love. And what is more terrible is that in this eternal life, in this New Creation, God is everything to His creatures. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, "In the present life the things we have relations with are numerous, for instance: time, air, locality, food and drink, clothing, sunlight, lamplight, and other necessities of life, none of which, many though they be, are God; that blessed state which we hope for is in need of none of these things, but the Divine Being will become all, and in the stead of all to us, distributing Himself proportionately to every need of that existence. It is plain, too, from the Holy Scriptures that God becomes to those who deserve it, locality and home and clothing and food and drink and light and riches and kingdom, and everything that can be thought of and named that goes to make our life happy" (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*).⁵⁰

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

Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the everlasting inner fire of hatred,⁵¹ saith the Lord, because I was thirsty for your love and you did not give it to Me, I was hungry for your blessedness and you did not offer it to Me, I was imprisoned in My human

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

Amen.

ENDNOTES:

1. "This is evil: estrangement from God." St. Basil the Great, *That God is Not the Cause of Evils*, "Ἑλληνες Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας [Greek Fathers of the Church] 7, 112 (hereafter cited as ΕΠΕ). "As many . . . as stand apart in their will from God, He brings upon them separation from Himself; and separation from God is death." St. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5. 27.2. "Men, rejecting eternal things and through the counsel of the devil turning toward the things of corruption, became the cause to themselves of the corruption in death." St. Athanasius the Great *On the Incarnation* 5 (Migne, PG 25. 104-105). "For as much as he departed from life, just so much did he draw nearer to death. For life is God; deprivation of life is death. So Adam was the author of death to himself through his departure from God." St. Basil the Great (PG 31. 345).

2. [Ed. Note:] Augustine, in his interpretation, understands the passage as: "If you eat of the fruit of this tree, **I will kill you.**"

3. "The redemptive sacrifice . . . was accomplished in order to reestablish the formerly harmonious relation between heaven and earth which sin had overturned, to atone for the flouted moral law, to satisfy the affronted justice of God." Encyclical Letter for Pascha 1980 of Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios, *Episkepsis* (in Greek), no. 229, 15 April 1980.

4. "Truly foolish, therefore, and lacking all understanding and mind is he who says there is no God. Alongside him no less in this madness is he who says that God is the cause of evils. I consider their sins to be of equal gravity because each one similarly denies the good; the former denies that He exists at all, while the latter defines Him as not being good; for if He is the cause of evils, He is clearly not good; so from both sides there is a denial of God." St. Basil the Great, *ΕΠΙΕ*, op. cit., 7, 90.

5. In France *le bon dieu* is almost always used when speaking of God.

6. "But someone will say, verily Adam fell, and by disregarding the divine commandment he was condemned to corruption and death, but how were the many made sinful on his account? What do his transgressions have to do with us? How is it that we who were not even born were condemned along with him, and yet God says, 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children and the sons shall not be put to death for the fathers; everyone shall die in his own sin'? (Deut. 24:18). Surely, then, that soul that sins shall die; but we became sinners through the disobedience of Adam in this way: For Adam was created for incorruption and life, and his life in the Paradise of delight was holy, his whole mind was continually caught up in divine visions, and his body was tranquil and serene, since every shameful pleasure was calmed, for there was no disturbance of

intemperate emotions in him. However, since he fell under sin and sank into corruption, thence pleasures and pollutions penetrated into the nature of the flesh, and so there was planted in our members a savage law. Nature became diseased with sin through the disobedience of the one, i.e., Adam; thus the many also became sinners, not as transgressing together with Adam — for they did not exist at all — but as being from his nature which had fallen under the law of sin . . . because of disobedience, human nature in Adam became infirm with corruption, and so the passions were introduced into it.... " St. Cyril of Alexandria *Interpretation of the Epistle to the Romans* (PG 74. 788-789). "And furthermore, if they who were born from Adam became sinners on account of his sinning, in all justice, they are not liable, for they did not become sinners of themselves; therefore the term "sinners" is used instead of "mortals" because death is the penalty of sin. Since in the first-fashioned man nature became mortal, all they who share in the nature of the forefather consequently share mortality also." Euthymios Zigabenos, *Interpretation of the Epistle to the Romans*, 5:19.

7. [Ed. Note:] It should be noted that in the Slavonic, this word is not rendered as "justice," but as righteousness. In fact, the words beginning with "dikaios" cannot be translated into modern English as "just" or "justice" or "justification." The word means precisely "righteous," "to make [morally] right," "to righteousize." Ironically, in terms of the word "justification," the word could better be expressed in translation by thinking of the computer terminology "to justify margins," that is, to balance them and set them right. In antique English, the word might have been translated "justice," but it is erroneous in modern English.. The Greek word which could be

translated as "justice" or "according to juridical justice" is "endikos." For a complete discussion of this question see THE MORAL IDEA OF THE MAIN DOGMAS OF THE FAITH, Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky, Synaxis Press, 1984, esp. pp. 102-105.

8. [Ed. Note:] The Hebrew word which indicates juridical justice is "mishpat." Tessedak or tsesdaq (tsedaka) refers to the process of righteousness or making right. In the same way, "dikaio" words have no juridical connotation, and were not used in the context of juridical justice even in Greek legal documents. It refers to the process or becoming righteous, being morally right, etc.

9. It means something totally different from what we customarily mean by the term "justice." This ignorance has caused us to consider as touchstones of Orthodoxy some very strange theories, most particularly the juridical conception of salvation which is based upon a justice that resembles the Necessity ('Ανάγκη) of the ancients, and oppresses not only man but God also, and gives a gloomy aspect to Christianity. See the relevant study of S. Lyonnet "La Soteriologie Paulienne," *Introduction à la Bible II*, (Belgium: Desclées & Bower), p. 840.

10. "If a man readily and joyfully accepts a loss for the sake of God, he is inwardly pure. And if he does not look down upon any man because of his defects, in very truth he is free. If a man is not pleased with someone who honours him, nor displeased with someone who dishonours him, he is dead to the world and to this life. The watchfulness of discernment is superior to every discipline of men accomplished in any way to any degree.

"Do not hate the sinner. For we are all laden with guilt.

If for the sake of God you are moved to oppose him, weep over him. Why do you hate him? Hate his sins and pray for him, that you may imitate Christ Who was not wroth with sinners, but interceded for them. Do you not see how He wept over Jerusalem? We are mocked by the devil in many instances, so why should we hate the man who is mocked by him who mocks us also? Why, O man, do you hate the sinner? Could it be because he is not so righteous as you? But where is your righteousness when you have no love? Why do you not shed tears over him? But you persecute him. In ignorance some are moved with anger, presuming themselves to be discerners of the works of sinners.

"Be a herald of God's goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy though you are; for although your debt to Him is so great, yet He is not seen exacting payment from you, and from the small works you do, He bestows great rewards upon you. Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him just and upright (cf. Ps. 24:8, 144:17), His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. 'He is good,' He says, 'to the evil and to the impious' (cf. Luke 6:35). How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers? 'Friend, I do thee no wrong: I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is thine eye evil because I am good?' (Matt. 20:12-15). How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth? (Luke 15:11 ff.). None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him, lest we doubt it; and thus He bare witness concerning Him. Where, when is God's justice, for whilst we are sinners Christ died for us! (cf. Rm.5:8). But if

here He is merciful, we may believe that He will not change [i.e., as regards the state after death, which St. Isaac mentions again a little below].

"Far be it that we should ever think such an iniquity that God could become unmerciful! For the property of Divinity does not change as do mortals. God does not acquire something which He does not have, nor lose what He has, nor supplement what He does have, as do created beings. But what God has from the beginning, He will have and has until the [unending] end, as the blest Cyril wrote in his commentary on Genesis. Fear God, he says, out of love for Him, and not for the austere name that He has been given. Love Him as you ought to love Him; not for what He will give you in the future, but for what we have received, and for this world alone which He has created for us. Who is the man that can repay Him? Where is His repayment to be found in our works? Who persuaded Him in the beginning to bring us into being? Who intercedes for us before Him, when we shall possess no [faculty of] memory, as though we never existed? Who will awake this our body [Syriac: our corruption] for that life? Again, whence descends the notion of knowledge into dust? O the wondrous mercy of God! O the astonishment at the bounty of our God and Creator! O might for which all is possible! O the immeasurable goodness that brings our nature again, sinners though we be, to His regeneration and rest! Who is sufficient to glorify Him? He raises up the transgressor and blasphemer, he renews dust unendowed with reason, making it rational and comprehending and the scattered and insensible dust and the scattered senses He makes a rational nature worthy of thought. The sinner is unable to comprehend the grace of His resurrection. Where is gehenna, that can afflict us? Where is perdition, that terrifies us in many ways and quenches the joy of His love? And what is

gehenna as compared with the grace of His resurrection, when He will raise us from Hades and cause our corruptible nature to be clad in incorruption, and raise up in glory him that has fallen into Hades?

"Come, men of discernment, and be filled with wonder! Whose mind is sufficiently wise and marvellous to wonder worthily at the bounty of our Creator? His recompense of sinners is, that instead of a just recompense, He rewards them with resurrection, and instead of those bodies with which they trampled upon His law, He enrobes them with perfect glory and incorruption. [St. Isaac speaks here of those who have repented, as is evident from other similar passages in his book.] That grace whereby we are resurrected after we have sinned is greater than the grace which brought us into being when we were not. Glory be to Thine immeasurable grace, O Lord! Behold, Lord, the waves of Thy grace close my mouth with silence, and there is not a thought left in me before the face of Thy thanksgiving. What mouths can confess Thy praise, O good King, Thou Who lovest our life? Glory be to Thee for the two worlds which Thou hast created for our growth and delight, leading us by all things which Thou didst fashion to the knowledge of Thy glory, from now and unto the ages. Amen." St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 60.

11. Ibid.

12. "'For God so loved the world as to give His Only-begotten Son unto death for it.' Not that He could not have redeemed us by another means, but He wished to manifest to us His boundless love, and to draw us near Him through the death of His Only-begotten Son. Indeed, if He had anything more precious than His Son, He would have given it for our sakes, in

order that through it our race would be found nigh to Him. Out of His abundant love, He was not pleased to do violence to our freedom, although it was possible for Him to do so; but He let it be in order that we would draw nigh to Him with the love and volition of our own will." St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 81.

13. "In times of despondency, never fail to bear in mind the Lord's commandment to Peter, to forgive a person who sins seventy times seven. For He who gave this command to another will Himself do far more." St. John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 26 (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1978), p. 147.

14. "A man who is just and wise is like God because he never chastises a man in revenge for wickedness, but only in order to correct him, or that others be afraid." St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 73. "God granted this great benefit to man: that he not abide in sin unto eternity." Theophilus of Antioch *To Autolytus* 2.26.

15. "And God saw all the things that He had made, and behold, they were very good." Genesis 1, 31. "[God] created everything which has good qualities, but the profligacy of the demons has made use of the productions of nature for evil purposes, and the appearance of evil which these wear is from them and not from the perfect God." Tatian *Address to the Greeks* 17. "The construction of the world is good, but the life men live in it is bad." Ibid. 19. "For nothing from the first was made evil by God, but all things good, yea, very good." Theophilus of Antioch *To Autolytus* 2. 17. "Pour l'hebreu, le sensible n'est pas mauvais, ni fautif. Le mal ne vient pas de la matière. Le monde est très bon." ["For the Hebrew, perceptible things are not evil, nor are they deceptive (lit., erroneous). Evil does not come from

matter. The world is `very good.'"] C. Tresmontant, *Essai sur la Pensée Hebraïque* (Paris, 1953). "There is nothing that exists which does not partake of the beautiful and the good.: St. Dionysius the Areopagite *On the Divine Names* (PG 3. 704). "For even if the reasons why some things come about escapes us, let that dogma be certain in our souls, that nothing evil is done by the good." St. Basil the Great, *EΠΠΕ*, 7, 112. "For it is not the part of a god to incite to things against nature. . . . But God, being perfectly good, is eternally doing good." Athenagoras, *Embassy*, 26.

16. "The devil is evil in such wise, that he is evil in disposition, but not that his nature is opposed to good." St. Basil the Great, *EΠΠΕ*, 7, 112. "Since God is good, whatever He does, He does for man's sake. But whatever man does, he does for his own sake, both what is good and what is evil." *Philokalia*, vol. 1, chap. 121, St. Anthony the Great.

17. "For God made not death, neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living; for He created all things that they might have their being, and the generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of Hades upon the earth." Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-14. "For God created man to be immortal and made him to be an image of His own eternity. Nevertheless, through envy of the devil came death into the world." Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24.

18. "And so he who was made in the likeness of God, since the more powerful spirit [the Holy Spirit] is separated from him, becomes mortal." Tatian *Address to the Greeks* 7.

19. "For as much as he departed from life, just so much did he draw nearer to death. For God is life; deprivation of life is death. So Adam was the author of death to himself through his departure from God, in accordance with the scripture which says: `For behold, they that remove themselves from Thee shall perish.'" Psalm 72:27.

20. "Thus God did not create death, but we brought it upon ourselves out of an evil disposition. Nevertheless, He did not hinder the dissolution on account of the aforementioned causes, so that He would not make the infirmity immortal in us." (St. Basil the Great, *PG* 31. 345).

21. "But as many as depart from God by their own choice, He inflicts that separation from Himself which they have chosen of their own accord. But separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness It is not, however, that the light has inflicted upon them the penalty of darkness." St. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5. 27:2. "But others shun the light and separate themselves from God" *Ibid.*, 5. 28:1.

22. *Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 27 (Greek edition), St. Maximus the Confessor.

23. "We became the inheritors of the curse in Adam. Certainly we were not punished as though we had disobeyed that command along with him, but because he became mortal, he transmitted the sin to his seed; we were born mortals from a mortal." St. Anastasius the Sinaite, 19. Vide *Ι.Ν. Καρμίρη, Σύνοψις Δογματικής Διδασκαλίας τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, p. 38.

24. "Man's transgression against the Creator's righteousness brought the soul's death sentence into effect; for when our forefathers forsook God and chose to do their own will, He abandoned them, not subjecting them to constraint. And for the reasons we have stated above, God lovingly forewarned them of this sentence. But he forbore and delayed in executing the sentence of death upon the body; and while He pronounced it, He relegated its fruition to the future in the abyss of His wisdom and the superabundance of His love for man. He did not say to Adam: 'return to whence thou wast taken,' but 'earth thou art, and unto earth thou shalt return' (Gen. 3:19). Those who hear this with understanding can also comprehend from these words that God 'did not make death' (Wisdom 1:13), either the soul's or the body's. For when He first gave the command, He did not say: 'in whatsoever day ye shall eat of it, die!' but 'In whatsoever day ye shall eat of it, ye shall surely die' (Gen. 2:17). Nor did He afterwards say: 'return now unto earth,' but 'Thou shalt return' (Gen. 3:19), in this manner forewarning, justly permitting and not obstructing what should come to pass." St. Gregory Palamas *Physical Theological Moral and Practical Chapters* 51 (PG 1157-1160).

25. "The tree of knowledge itself was good, and its fruit was good. For it was not the tree that had death in it, as some think, but the disobedience which had death in it; for there was nothing else in the fruit but knowledge alone; but knowledge is good when one uses it properly." Theophilus of Antioch *To Autolycus* 2. 25. "The tree did not engender death, for God did not create death; but death was the consequence of disobedience." St. John Damascene *Homily on Holy Saturday* 10 (PG 96. 612a).

26. " ` And what is a merciful heart?' It is the heart's burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he continually offers up tearful prayer, even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns in his heart without measure in the likeness of God." St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homily* 81.

27. "It is not God who is hostile, but we; for God is never hostile." St. John Chrysostom (*PG* 61, 478).

28. Vide. John Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin* (in Greek) (Athens, 1957).

29. "Therefore, we believe in one God: one principle, without beginning, uncreated, unbegotten, indestructible and immortal, eternal, unlimited, uncircumscribed, unbounded, infinite in power, simple, uncompounded, incorporeal, unchanging, unaffected, unchangeable, inalterate, invisible, source of goodness and justice, light intellectual and inaccessible; power which no measure can give any idea of but which is measured only by His own will, for He can do all things whatsoever He pleases; Maker of all things both visible and invisible, holding together all things and conserving them, Provider for all, governing and dominating and ruling over all in unending and immortal reign; without contradiction, filling all things,

contained by nothing, but Himself containing all things, being their Conserver and first Possessor; pervading all substances without being defiled, removed far beyond all things and every substance as being supersubstantial and surpassing all, supereminently divine and good and replete; appointing all the principalities and orders, set above every principality and order, above essence and life and speech and concept; light itself and goodness and being insofar as having neither being, nor anything else that is derived from any other; the very source of being for all things that are, of life to the living, of speech to the articulate, and the cause of all good things for all; knowing all things before they begin to be; one substance, one godhead, one virtue, one will, one operation, one principality, one power, one domination, one kingdom; known in three perfect Persons and adored with one adoration, believed in and worshipped by every rational creature, united without confusion and distinct without separation, which is beyond understanding. We believe in Father and Son and Holy Spirit in Whom we have been baptized. For it is thus that the Lord enjoined the apostles: 'Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'" St. John Damascene *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.8.

30. "He created without matter." St. John Chrysostom (*PG* 59. 308).

31. St. John Damascene, *op.cit.* 1. 14.

32. St. John Damascene, *op. cit.* 1. 8.

33. "The soul without the body can do nothing, whether good or evil. The visions which some see concerning those things that are yonder are shown to them by God as a dispensation for

their profit. Just as the lyre remains useless and silent if there is no one to play, so the soul and body, when they are separated, can do nothing." St. Athanasius the Great.

34. "For each of these, after its kind, is a body, be it angel, or soul, or devil. Subtle though they are, still in substance, character, and image according to the subtlety of their respective natures they are subtle bodies." St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies*, 4, 9.

35. "Let us go and behold in the tombs that man is bare bones, food for worms and a stench." *Great Euchologion* (Venice, 1862), p. 415. "For just as the light when it sets in the evening is not lost, so man also is given over to the grave as if setting; yet he is preserved for the dawn of the resurrection." St. John Chrysostom.

36. "He who berates the Creator for not making us sinless by nature, does naught but esteem the irrational nature above the rational." St. Basil the Great, *EEIE* , 7, 110.

37. Also, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." Hebrews 10:35.

38. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto

the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 10:26-31.

39. St. Basil the Great, op. cit. 7, 94-96. In this particular passage, St. Basil carefully makes a distinction between the Greek verbs κτίζω and δημιουργέω, both of which are generally translated into English as "create." However, κτίζω has a long history, beginning with the Sanskrit *kshi*, which, as in early Greek, meant "to people a country," "to build houses and cities," "to colonize." Later, in Greek, the word came to mean "to establish," "to build up and develop," and finally, "to produce," "create," "bring about." Having in mind these other connotations of the verb κτίζω, St. Basil discerned the proper implication of the word in this context and hence made a point of emphasizing this distinction.

40. Ibid, 7.98.

41. St. Gregory the Theologian *Fifth Theological Oration* 22 (PG 36. 157).

42. St. John Damascene, op. cit. 1.11.

43. "Famines and droughts and floods are common plagues of cities and nations which check the excess of evil. Therefore, just as the physician is a benefactor even if he should cause pain or suffering to the body (for he strives with the disease, and not with the sufferer), so in the same manner God is good Who administers salvation to everyone through the means of particular chastisements. But you, not only do you not speak evilly of the physician who cuts some members, cauterizes

others, and excises others again completely from the body, but you even give him money and address him as saviour because he confines the disease to a small area before the infirmity can claim the whole body. However, when you see a city crushing its inhabitants in an earthquake, or a ship going down at sea with all hands, you do not shrink from wagging a blasphemous tongue against the true Physician and Saviour." St. Basil the Great, *op. cit.* 7, 94. "And you may accept the phrase 'I kill and I will make to live' (Deut. 32:39) literally, if you wish, since fear edifies the more simple. 'I will smite and I will heal' (Deut. 32:39). It is profitable to also understand this phrase literally; for the smiting engenders fear, while the healing incites to love. It is permitted you, nonetheless, to attain to a loftier understanding of the utterance. I will slay through sin and make to live through righteousness. 'But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day' (II Cor. 4:16). Therefore, He does not slay one, and give life to another, but through the means which He slays, He gives life to a man, and He heals a man with that which He smites him, according to the proverb which says, 'For thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from death' (Prov. 23:14). So the flesh is chastised for the soul to be healed, and sin is put to death for righteousness to live When you hear 'There shall be no evil in a city which the Lord hath not wrought' (cf. Amos 3:6), understand by the noun 'evil' that the word intimates the tribulation brought upon sinners for the correction of offenses. For Scripture says, 'For I afflicted thee and straitened thee, to do good to thee' (cf. Deut. 8:3); so too is evil terminated before it spills out unhindered, as a strong dike or wall holds back a river.

"For these reasons, diseases of cities and nations, droughts, barrenness of the earth, and the more difficult

conditions in the life of each, cut off the increase of wickedness. Thus, such evils come from God so as to uproot the true evils, for the tribulations of the body and all painful things from without have been devised for the restraining of sin. God, therefore, *excises* evil; never is evil from God ... The razing of cities, earthquakes and floods, the destruction of armies, shipwrecks and all catastrophes with many casualties which occur from earth or sea or air or fire or whatever cause, happen for the sobering of the survivors, because God chastises public evil with general scourges.

"The principal evil, therefore, which is sin, and which is especially worthy of the appellation of evil, depends upon our disposition; it depends upon us either to abstain from evil or to be in misery.

"Of the other evils, some are shown to be struggles for the proving of courage ... while some are for the healing of sins ... and some are for an example to make other men sober." St. Basil the Great, *op.cit.* 7, 98-102.

44. *Ibid.* 7, 92.

45. "The devil became the 'Prince of matter.'" Athenagoras, *Embassy*, 24, 25. "They [the demons] afterwards subdued the human race to themselves ... and ... sowed all wickedness. Whence also the poets and mythologists, not knowing that it was the angels and those demons who had been begotten by them that did these things to men, and women, and cities, and nations which they related, ascribed them to God Himself." St. Justin Martyr *Second Apology* 5.

46. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." I John 3:8.

47. Fotis Kontoglou, Church Calendars, (in Greek) [*Orthodoxos Typos*] 131 (Athens), 1 January 1971.

48. St. Basil the Great *Homily* 13. 2, *Exhortation to Holy Baptism* (PG 31. 428 and 95, 1272).

49. Library of Greek Fathers (in Greek), vol. 40, pp. 60-61.

50. "I am father, I am brother, I am bridegroom, I am dwelling place, I am food, I am raiment, I am root, I am foundation, all whatsoever thou willest, I am.' Be thou in need of nothing, I will be even a servant, for I came to minister, not to be ministered unto; I am friend, and member, and head, and brother, and sister, and mother; I am all; only cling thou closely to me. I was poor for thee, and a wanderer for thee, on the Cross for thee, in the tomb for thee, above I intercede for thee to the Father; on earth I am come for thy sake an ambassador from my Father. Thou art all things to me, brother, and joint heir, and friend, and member.' What wouldest thou more?" St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 76 on the Gospel of Matthew*(PG 58. 700).

51. "The end of the world' signifies not the annihilation of the world, but its transformation. Everything will be transformed suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye And the Lord will appear in glory on the clouds. Trumpets will sound, and loud, with power! They will sound in the soul and conscience! All will become clear to the human conscience. The Prophet Daniel, speaking of the Last Judgment, relates how the Ancient of Days, the Judge, sits on His throne, and before Him is a fiery stream (Dan. 7:9-10). Fire is a purifying element; it burns sins. Woe to a man if sin has become a part of his nature: then the fire will burn the man himself.

"This fire will be kindled within a man: seeing the Cross, some will rejoice, but others will fall into confusion, terror, and despair. Thus will men be divided instantly. The very state of a man's soul casts him to one side or the other, to right or to left.

"The more consciously and persistently a man strives toward God in his life, the greater will be his joy when he hears: 'Come unto Me, ye blessed.' And conversely: the same words will call the fire of horror and torture on those who did not desire Him, who fled and fought or blasphemed Him during their lifetime!

"The Last Judgment knows of no witnesses or written protocols! Everything is inscribed in the souls of men and these records, these 'books', are opened at the Judgment. Everything becomes clear to all and to oneself.

"And some will go to joy, while others — to horror.

"When 'the books are opened,' it will become clear that the roots of all vices lie in the human soul. Here is a drunkard or a lecher: when the body has died, some may think that sin is dead, too. No! There was an inclination to sin in the soul, and that sin was sweet to the soul, and if the soul has not repented of the sin and has not freed itself from it, it will come to the Last Judgment also with the same desire for sin. It will never satisfy that desire and in that soul there will be the suffering of hatred. It will accuse everyone and everything in its tortured condition, it will hate everyone and everything. 'There will be gnashing of teeth' of powerless malice and the unquenchable fire of hatred.

"A 'fiery gehenna' — such is the inner fire. 'Here there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.' Such is the state of hell." Archbishop John Maximovitch, "The Last Judgment," (*Orthodox Word* (November-December, 1966): 177-78.

