

“THE WAY OF A PILGRIM” AND BISHOP IGNATIUS (BRIANCHANINOV’S) TEACHING ON PRAYER

Basing himself on the legacy of St Ignatius of the Caucasus, Alexey Ilyich Osipov, the well-known Professor of the Moscow Theological Academy, reflects on the issues of spiritual practices in Eastern and Western Christian traditions, as well as the place of the book *The Way of a Pilgrim* in Christian spiritual life.

Hieromonk Adrian (Pashin): Alexey Ilyich, your booklet on the Jesus Prayer was published recently. What prompted you to tackle this exclusively (as it might seem) monastic subject?

Alexey Ilyich Osipov: The thing is that I was invited to give a lecture in Italy, at the famous Bose monastery, where they hold conferences on various topics every year. Representatives of different Churches are invited – not only from the Catholic Church, but from the Orthodox and even the Protestant Churches as well. That was in September 2004. The topic of the conference was prayer and, I think, even the Jesus Prayer, but I don’t remember for sure. How did the theme for my talk come up? The Chancellor of one of the Pontifical Institutes in Rome visited our Academy about twenty years ago. During his talk in the conference hall he said, in particular, that Catholic monastics are currently very interested in Hindu meditation practices and *The Way of a Pilgrim*, where a quite peculiar teaching on the Jesus Prayer is expounded. That is why I decided to write a talk on the subject of “The Teaching on the Jesus Prayer according to Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov) and *The Way of a Pilgrim*”. I thought that the subject would be of interest both to Catholics and to me because I had read *The Way* when I was 16 or 17 and it had made a very inspirational impression on me back then. I remember trying to practice the Jesus Prayer for a day or two, using the Pilgrim’s method – I could not do it for much longer; later, when I took up work on my talk, I understood that that had been fortunate. I gave my talk at the conference. The Orthodox showed interest while the Catholic audience received it in silence. However, one of the famous (I am not going to name him) secular scholars from St Petersburg (not a theologian), a regular participant at all the Bose conferences, expressed his displeasure at my talk. The talk was then translated into Italian and published both in Italy and Russia. Such is its background.

Hierom. Adrian: So it seems as if *The Way of a Pilgrim*, a book by an unknown author that is rather popular here in Russia, is also well-known abroad?

A. I. Osipov: It is not simply well-known abroad, but, as that Chancellor said, Catholic monasteries pay a lot of attention to it. It is being read, studied – it is being followed as a guide.

Hierom. Adrian: Why do you think Catholics are so interested in the book?

A. I. Osipov: This is how things stand. First of all, the Pilgrim achieved the unceasing Jesus Prayer and reached special soul-and-body states at a stunning speed – in just a few weeks, well, maybe a few months, whereas Bishop Ignatius writes that according to the teaching of the Holy Fathers “this takes many years.” The Pilgrim states that when in the beginning the elder gave him an obedience to say three thousand prayers daily, he felt that the prayer became easy and desirable in just two days. After that, the elder ordered him to say six thousand prayers, and after only ten days – twelve thousand. And he “finished the twelve thousand prayers with ease early in the evening,” and “in about three weeks . . . I began to feel . . . that pleasure was simmering in my heart . . . and I myself turned into rapture. The blind man [in the story – **A.Z.J.**] reached the same state in the same lightning-fast way – in less than a week (!); he began to follow the method shown to him by the Pilgrim. “In about five days I started to feel an intense warmth and . . . he began to see light from time to time . . . sometimes, when he was entering his heart in his imagination, it felt as if the powerful flame of a lit candle was kindled with sweetness in his heart and, leaping out through his throat, illumined him; by the light of that flame he could even see distant things.

Such a quick and easy method, compared to the rigorous feat of the struggle with passions undertaken by the Holy Fathers for many years, is very tempting to all who would like to avoid the «no pains, no gains” way.

The second and no less stimulating reason for interest in this book is the vanity and pride that lure people into achieving high states at once, without taking the preliminary steps on the spiritual journey. These passions turn an ascetic into a daydreamer, with quite logical and often terrible consequences for his life.

Bishop Ignatius characterizes such aspirations of Catholic ascetics very pointedly, “They are at once lured and lure their readers to heights inaccessible to the novice, become themselves conceited and make others conceited. A heated, often frantic dreaminess replaces everything spiritual for them—they have no idea of true spirituality. They consider this dreaminess as grace. “Ye shall know them by their fruits,” (Mt 7:16) said the Savior. We all know only too well through what crimes, torrents of blood and decidedly anti-Christian behavior Western fanatics expressed their ugly way of thinking, their ugly feeling of heart.”

Such are the hidden reasons for the interest in *The Way*.

Hierom. Adrian: Do you think that such a quick way is dangerous?

A. I. Osipov: In this case I by no means wish to speak for myself, because I don't have any experience in this matter. My understanding is based on the theoretical study of the Holy Fathers of ascetic life and, above all, on the writings of the holy Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov). Why is it that I turned to his works in particular? As is well known, the oral and written accounts of him by all the Optina Elders and many other pious Russian ascetics are not simply positive, but rather, I'd say, are filled with

admiration. They spoke and wrote about him as a true teacher who had a profound understanding of spiritual life and expounded the way of the Holy Fathers in his writings. I will quote their statements.



St. Ignatius Brianchaninov.

St Macarius of Optina called him “a great mind.” St Barsanuphius of Optina wrote, “When I read his writings, I marvel at his truly angelic mind, his amazingly deep understanding of the Holy Scriptures. For some reason, I am especially favorably disposed toward his writings; they somehow have a special appeal for my heart and my mind, illumining it with a truly evangelical light.” “The fifth volume of Bishop Ignatius’ writings contains the teaching of the Holy Fathers applied to modern-day monasticism and teaches how the writings of the Holy Fathers should be read. Bishop Ignatius had a profound outlook and was, in that respect, probably even deeper than Bishop Theophan [the Recluse – **A.Z.J.**]. His word has a powerful effect on the soul for it proceeds from experience.” Abbot Nikon (Vorobyev) expresses the same thought fifty years later, “How grateful I am to him for his writings! Not to understand and not to appreciate him means not to understand anything about spiritual life. I would dare to say that Bishop Theophan’s writings (may the holy *Vladyka* forgive me) are a schoolboy’s works compared to those of a professor—the writings of Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov). St Nikon (Belyaev) of Optina called Bishop Ignatius’ work “the ABC of spiritual life” – he held it in such high esteem. And it is Bishop Ignatius’ writings that all the other Optina Elders recommended for study, in particular, his teaching on prayer – a true guide to spiritual life.

We find remarkable words about Bishop Ignatius in the writings of Abbess Arsenia (Sebryakova), “I read him with great pleasure, to my soul’s comfort and edification. The words of *Vladyka* himself are dear to me.” Schema-Abbot John of Valaam refers to Bishop Ignatius and offers the bishop’s advice to his own spiritual children as the most authoritative for our times. (In this connection, I would like to point out in parentheses that any Church preacher or writer who, speaking of spiritual life in his writings, does not turn to Bishop Ignatius’ writings, gives a clear testimony to “what

manner of spirit he is of” [Lk 9:55 –**A.Z.J.**] However, turning to those works is not in itself an indicator of the writer’s spirituality). So taking into account this multitude of undoubted spiritual witnesses, I decided to compare the teaching on the Jesus Prayer in *The Way of a Pilgrim* with that of Bishop Ignatius.

Hierom. Adrian: Guidance in practicing the Jesus Prayer is necessary; without it, as you write, we can fall into spiritual delusion (prelest). But what should we do today, when, in the words of Bishop Ignatius (and you agree with them), spiritual guidance and spiritual fatherhood have become so scarce? How then are we to learn how to pray correctly?

A. I. Osipov: First of all, I would remind you once again that when it comes to my advice on the careful practice of the Jesus Prayer, I am not speaking from myself. It is well-known that the Optina Elders used to give this advice to those who had more zeal than sense because, as St Isaac of Syria wrote, «Everything is made beautiful by moderation. Even something considered beautiful will become harmful when done without moderation.” At this point people who don’t understand the conditions required to practice the Jesus Prayer and who have the wrong aim in practicing it, generally fall into self-importance, spiritual delusion and pride. Bishop Ignatius advances the same idea. What should our attitude toward the Jesus Prayer be nowadays? It depends on who practices it. It is one thing for those who have chosen the monastic way, but it is quite a different thing for those who live in the bustle of worldly life.

As far as spirit-bearing teachers are concerned, Bishop Ignatius gave that name to those who had achieved the unceasing God-given Jesus Prayer, reached dispassion and received from God the rare gift of seeing into the human soul. Such teachers could truly point out those hidden passions and their causes that people could not see in themselves. However, speaking of his own time, Bishop Ignatius said words that were extremely offensive to those who saw themselves as spiritual fathers, “We do not have any teachers who are inspired by God!” And he did not simply say that – he said that with an exclamation mark. And he knew the state of monasticism at his time pretty well.

Still, in the absence of advisors inspired by God, Bishop Ignatius offers some very important advice to those seeking spiritual life.

The first piece of advice is to be guided above all by the writings and experience of those ancient Fathers and Russian ascetics who gave advice to people of the same spiritual level as the modern Christian. Of course, to those writings one should add all the works by Bishop Ignatius himself, since he pursued his monastic calling and wrote in the period that was spiritually very much like the modern one – that is why he is the best spiritual advisor for our times.

The second piece of advice is that we should consult those who are of the same spirit as we are, who sincerely seek spiritual life, study and know the writings of the Holy Fathers and, very importantly, have the gift of

discernment. With respect to the last condition (discernment), Bishop Ignatius warns that there were even saints who had reached exalted spiritual states, but, not possessing the gift of discernment, sometimes offered advice that seriously damaged the soul. In this connection, Bishop Ignatius quotes the thoughts of Sts Macarius the Great and Isaac the Syrian, “St Macarius the Great used to say that . . . there are souls that, having become partakers of the Divine grace . . . at the same time abide as if in childhood, because of lack of actual experience . . . in a state that is very unsatisfactory for true ascetic struggle.” They have a saying about such elders in monasteries – “holy but not skilful” – and take care in consulting them . . . to avoid entrusting yourself hastily and thoughtlessly to such elders’ guidance. St Isaac the Syrian even says that such an elder “is not worthy of being called a saint.” It is with such care, it turns out, that we should approach the choice of those whom we can consult.

That is why in our time people who want to learn how to pray and live aright, without spiritual delusion, have to study Bishop Ignatius’ writings most meticulously, for he knew the teaching of the Fathers very well and followed the way of prayer experientially. But, of course, if we manage to find a knowledgeable, understanding and reasonable person, we should seek his advice as well. However, we should consult him as we would consult friends – not as a leader of an absolutist “Orthodox” sect who demands unquestioning obedience. In view of the absence of teachers who are inspired by God nowadays, we can hardly speak of complete obedience even in monasteries; and as for life in the world, such obedience never existed, except maybe in the relationship between false spiritual fathers and false spiritual children, especially false spiritual daughters. It is true, though, that we should distinguish between obedience in administrative issues (according to rank), which is useful for spiritual life and spiritual obedience, which Bishop Ignatius calls a great **monastic** deed.

He wrote, “In vain do you desire to be completely obedient to an experienced teacher. This kind of ascetic struggle has not been granted in our times. It is absent not only amidst Christians living in the world, but in monasteries as well.”

“And many thought that they were working in obedience, but in reality it turned out that they had been obliging their own whims and had been carried away by their zeal. Happy is the man who in his old age will have time to shed a repentant tear over the passions of his youth. The Lord said about the blind leaders and those lead by them, “And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Mt 15:14).

Hierom. Adrian: However, some may object to you that in Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov’s) time there were the Optina Elders and now there are quite a few spiritual fathers and elders who are esteemed among the people. Many seek their spiritual guidance and are willing to completely surrender their wills into their hands. Can’t simple people do the same now?

A. I. Osipov: According to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, we should exercise a great deal of caution in this matter. All the saints warn of it, beginning in ancient times, when the ascetics flourished. For example, St John Cassian of Rome wrote in the 5th century, “It is useful to reveal our thoughts to the fathers; not to whomever happens to be there, though, but rather to spiritual elders who have discernment, who are elders not just because of the age of their bodies and gray hair. Many, having been attracted by the appearance of old age and having expressed their thoughts [to such elders – A.Z.J.], were harmed instead of receiving a remedy.” And look at how emphatically St John of *the Ladder* (6th cent.) speaks of this, “When we...wish... to entrust our salvation to another, then, even before taking this path, if we have just a little insight and discernment, we must study, test, and put this guide to the test, so to speak. We must do so in order not to obtain for ourselves a mere oarsman instead of a helmsman, instead of a doctor – a sick person, instead of a dispassionate man – one possessed by passions, instead of a haven – an abyss, – thus, in order to avoid finding our destruction ready for us” (The Ladder. Sermon 4, Ch. 6). Bishop Theophan (Govorov) used to warn, “In determining who will become [our spiritual fathers – A.O.], we should exercise a great deal of caution and use strict judgment, in order to avoid doing harm instead of good, in order to avoid bringing about devastation instead of doing constructive work.”

But as the ancient Fathers predicted and the latter-day Fathers constantly repeated, the Church is witnessing the process whereby teachers are becoming scarce – the teachers who can see into the soul and can achieve what St Seraphim of Sarov called acquiring the Spirit of God. Clearly, in Bishop Ignatius’ own words, such teachers had already disappeared in his time.

If we now return to the Optina Elders, they fully agreed with Bishop Ignatius on this issue. This is evident from the high esteem in which they held his teaching as well as their own spiritual guidance. None of them would point to someone else, to his predecessor or spiritual father in this way, “Isn’t Fr Macarius, Fr Ambrose, or Fr Barsanuphius, or... a teacher inspired by God?” For they understood the meaning of the Apostle Paul’s words well, “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory” (1 Co 15:41). So even though we are talking about spiritual and even holy people, we nevertheless understand that one spiritual man *differs* from another in glory.

The searching of spiritual people are quite natural and understandable. But when that searching turns into the creating myths, when frequently rather dubious priests are set up as elders, or when some spiritual fathers start acting as if they were elders, then trouble comes. Bishop Ignatius said about them very emphatically and precisely, “Those elders who accept upon themselves the role [of an elder–A.O.]. . . (if we may use that unpleasant word ‘role’) . . . are essentially soul-destroying actors and the saddest of comedians. Let those elders who take on themselves the role of the ancient Elders, lacking their spiritual gifts, know that their very intention, their

very thoughts and notions of this great monastic deed – obedience – are false; their very way of thinking, their mentality and their knowledge are self-delusion and demonic spiritual delusion”. Unfortunately, ordinary people don’t have an understanding of this. They want an elder, naturally clairvoyant, a miracle-worker, a healer, they will flock like sheep without any discernment to anyone who is mentioned to them. From here you get many misfortunes, both of a spiritual order and those concerning everyday life.

I have met people whose lives were totally ruined after believing in a false elder. Taking advantage of his moral authority, such an elder literally gives an order – sorry, “gives a blessing” – to those coming to him to take such decisive steps that ruin their body and soul. He “gives a blessing” to move house, to abandon good jobs, thus plunging the family into utter poverty and causing the disintegration of family relationships. He “gives her a blessing” to sell her apartment and her possessions and enter a monastery. When in a year she is dismissed from it, instead of helping her, the elder tells her: you should have thought for yourself, now go where you please. I know a family whose mother was “given a blessing” by an elder to assign all her young daughters and son to monasteries. The son became a hieromonk, but then three years later he got married. The same thing happened to the daughters and only one of the four remained a nun; the others, after living in a convent, got married.

Why am I talking about this? First of all, to show how far the undiscerning trust of simple believers as well as the spiritual blindness and moral insensitivity of “the elders” themselves can go: they keep believing in and giving these blessings even after witnessing their catastrophic consequences. It is obvious that a clairvoyant elder could not have blessed an act that would lead to defrocking and dismissal from monasticism. And if he is not clairvoyant but still keeps encouraging such acts, then what is the moral level (or the psychic state) of that “elder?!” This serious question is answered by Bishop Ignatius, “Vanity and self-conceit are fond of teaching and giving directions. They do not bother about the quality of their advice! It does not occur to them that they might inflict an incurable wound on their neighbor by their incongruous advice. The inexperienced novice accepts their advice with uncritical credulity, with excitement of flesh and blood! They desire success, no matter its quality and its origin! They have to impress the novice and make him their moral subject! They desire the praise of man! They desire the reputation of saints, intelligent and clairvoyant elders and teachers! They have to satisfy their insatiable vanity, their pride!”

This is exactly what the Fathers called spiritual delusion (*prelest*). And *spiritual delusion* is the delusion that leads to mental disorders.

So in our days we should approach the relationship with an elder with tremendous caution, following the wise rule commanded by our great bishops St Ignatius and St Theophan – to live by advice, not by obedience. Bishop Ignatius urges us to listen to St Nilus of Sora who lived in the 15th century and who already commanded back then, “Nowadays, in view of the extreme scarcity of spirit-bearing guides, an ascetic practicing prayer has to

be guided exclusively by the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers.” And St Pimen the Great commanded us to depart immediately from an elder living with whom turned out to be harmful to the soul.” Otherwise, “belief in man, – says Bishop Ignatius, – leads to frenzied fanaticism.”

Bishop Ignatius writes that advice does not imply the obligation to follow it. If you see something strange, unclear or contradictory in the advice, then you have the full moral right to turn to someone else, to disagree or to turn to the Holy Fathers. And if a spiritual father is truly intelligent and humble, he would even thank his spiritual child for acting rightly and disobeying him. “By no means,— writes Bishop Ignatius,—do evil by obedience, even if you happen to suffer some tribulation for displeasing someone and being steadfast. Consult virtuous and intelligent fathers and brothers, but take their advice with utmost care and discretion. Do not get carried away by the first impression that their advice makes on you!”

In our times we should live by advice, not by obedience. In this connection Bishop Ignatius responds to the most widespread counter-argument, “They will object: the faith of the person carrying out an obedience may replace the elder’s inadequacy. This is false: believing the truth saves, while believing a lie and demonic delusion destroys, according to the Apostle’s teaching” (2 Thess 2:10-12). [*Here, Bishop Ignatius paraphrases Paul’s words “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” - A.Z.J.*] Christ told His disciples, “Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). Can friends be given orders? I guess not.

Hierom. Adrian: One more question. Why do some people connect the Jesus Prayer to some other practices, for example, to the Hindu and Buddhist mantras and meditation? Many people do not understand the difference between those ascetic practices and the noetic Jesus Prayer, the Christian prayer.

A. I. Osipov: If we turn our attention to the essential, then the types of meditation you are talking about are reflections, internal discussions. They do not carry with them the main condition for prayer – repentance. Repentance is supplication. Supplication for what? For our sinfulness, our inadequacy, our inability to live as the Gospel commands. Prayer, as Bishop Ignatius writes, should be said with attention, awe and heartfelt contrition. These things are not required by meditation. Meditation, I repeat, is a concentrated reflection on a great variety of subjects: theological, everyday, spiritual and moral, all sorts.

There exists a very important and vital act in Christian practice – the contemplation of God. However, this also differs from the above-mentioned types of meditation. This contemplation of matters of Christian faith and life goes hand in hand with humility, correct prayer and reverent inward submission of our possible understanding of any matter to God’s will.

This is the main thing that distinguishes prayer and contemplation of God from meditation.

Now for the second thing. Turning to mantras, we enter the sphere of a teaching that is decidedly, we could say, different from the Christian or, more exactly, Orthodox teaching. Mantras, in some ways outwardly resembling prayers or rather incantational prayers, are of a completely different nature. They inherently imply belief in the effectiveness of the very words pronounced, often regardless of the understanding of their meaning. We see it in Hindu practice, for example, in *Japa* mantra, which calls on people to repeat a god's name as much, as often and as quickly as possible, for the name itself purifies man and brings him to the state of *Samadhi*. Mantras, if you wish, are one of the elements of magic and are used in the rites of pagan mystery religions.

A similar idea was promoted by the Russian name-worshippers. However, it is not God's Name in itself that sanctifies. The Name of God is similar to an icon: it is a link to turn our prayers to the Archetype. And human purification is accomplished not through the Name itself, but through correct prayer with God's name uttered in it, as the Holy Fathers taught. When prayer is repeated mechanically, as many times and as quickly as possible, then it "is not prayer at all. It is dead! It is useless, harmful to the soul and insulting to God," – as Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov) wrote.

Currently too, we can see this tendency to understand prayer as a mantra. Books are published which recommend saying the Jesus Prayer – "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" – a huge number of times (14,400 prayers at one go!) from the very beginning. They recommend saying it very, very quickly: 3,600 prayers per hour, that is, one prayer per second ("his tongue, like a little engine, was repeating the short Jesus Prayer non-stop"). This practice runs absolutely counter to the Holy Fathers' experience, which says that we are to say any prayer, including the Jesus Prayer, without haste, paying attention to the words of the prayer, with awe and a feeling of repentance.

Hierom. Adrian: In the West there is an opinion that the ban on using imagination in prayer that exists in Orthodoxy, in the East, is only because of the greater emotionality of Easterners, and in the West, where people are supposedly less emotional, such imagination is not dangerous.

A. I. Osipov: This is self-justification. Look at the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Italians – those people are so fiery that you constantly have to be on the lookout. Wasn't it in Italy that the *stigmata* emerged for the first time in the history of Christianity, with Francis of Assisi? It is not emotionality that matters at all. The reason that Catholicism so ardently protects the possibility and even the need for imagination is quite different. Psychology, yoga and Catholic ascetic experience testify convincingly to the fact that developing imagination and constantly concentrating on mental images is an effective way for people to achieve special exalted states very easily. For example, compassion for Christ (*compassio*) – an ascetic achievement of the same Francis – consisted of mentally imagining and

attempting to empathize with Christ's sufferings and His love for the whole world, as well as with the sufferings and experiences of the Mother of God and other saints.

When ascetics dreamily imagine scenes of love, suffering etc., their nerves and psyche get highly excited, their imagination gets inflamed, and as a result hallucinations and demonic apparitions occur. Such ascetics develop an extremely high opinion of themselves as being full of divine grace and close to Christ and the saints. Western ascetics deem those states God-given. But there is neither God, nor grace in this phenomenon. Bishop Ignatius writes, "The Holy Fathers strictly forbid using the facility of the imagination; they command us to keep the mind formless, not sealed by anything material." "While in prayer, we must have the mind formless and take special care to keep it so, rejecting all the images fantasized through the facility of the imagination . . . Images, if allowed by the mind in prayer, will become an impenetrable curtain, a wall between the mind and God." On the contrary, he warns, "fallen spirits seek to incite our imagination." "Blood and nerves, – he wrote, – are activated by many passions: anger, covetousness, lust and vanity. The latter two passions greatly fire up the blood of the ascetics who undertake their struggles unlawfully, and they turn them into raving fanatics."

Bishop Ignatius tells of one office clerk from St Petersburg who fell into spiritual delusion and attempted suicide, "It turned out that the clerk had been using the image of prayer described by St Simeon; he had inflamed his imagination and blood, which makes man quite capable of fasting strictly and keeping vigils. . . The clerk had seen light with his bodily eyes, fragrance and warmth that he had felt just as tangibly."

"Western Christians strove to enliven their feelings, blood and imagination; they soon succeeded in that and soon reached the state of spiritual delusion and frenzy, which they called holiness. All their visions come from that realm. Eastern Christians and all the children of the Universal Church journey to holiness and purity in a way that is just the opposite of that mentioned above: by subduing their feelings, blood, imagination and even 'their opinions.'"

The main reason for the sorry plight of Western ascetics is that they stopped following the guidance of the ascetic Fathers of the ancient Church and began living according to their own understanding, replaying "movies" in their imagination and worshiping the images contained in them. They substituted fantasies of love for Christ for the struggle against the passions.

Let me quote here a short passage from *The Story of a Soul*, a book by a great Catholic saint, a doctor of their Church, Therese of Lisieux (19 cent.), so that what we are talking about will be clear, "It was indeed an embrace of love. I felt that I was loved, and I said: 'I love Thee, and I give myself to Thee for ever.' Jesus asked nothing of me, and claimed no sacrifice; for a long time He and little Therese had known and understood one another. That day our meeting was more than simple recognition, it was a perfect union. We were no longer two. Therese had disappeared like a drop of

water lost in the immensity of the ocean.” [Ch 4. “First Communion and Confirmation” – **A.Z.J.**]. This kind of “love” needs no commentary.

Such “spirituality” is very contagious, it conforms to the tastes of “the old man” , to his search for spiritual sweetness, to his vanity, to his pride. Unfortunately, the Pilgrim from The Way also followed this easy path, enticing away with himself inexperienced Christians who were seeking spiritual pleasure. In this regard his following advice is quite revealing, “With your imagination, find the spot where your heart is, *under your left nipple* (our underlining – **A.O.**), and fix your attention there.” Whereas Bishop Ignatius warns, “He who strives to activate and warm up the lower part of the heart activates the power of lust...” This is one of the reasons why Bishop Theophan wrote, “Don’t look in the book – The Way. There are pieces of advice in it that are not good for you and they may result in spiritual delusion.

Hierom. Adrian: Thank you very much for the interview and telling us about your booklet, Alexey Ilyich. Our website “Bogoslov.ru” wishes you Divine aid in your teaching and theological work. We look forward to your new books.

Interview by Hieromonk Adrian (Pashin)

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