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*Preface*  
*to the English Translation*

*The Father has so loved us, that He gave us His Son; but the Son Himself desired this also, and became incarnate, and lived with us on the earth. The Holy Apostles and many people saw the Lord in the flesh, but not all of them came to know Him as the Lord. But I, a sinful one, was vouchsafed by the Holy Spirit to know that Jesus Christ is God.*

St. Silhouan the Athonite

*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*

Jn 14:6

While translating this modern classic of Christian apologetics by Prof. Alexei Ilych Osipov, it became ever more obvious that the English language lacks a sufficient equivalent to the Russian word so central to the overall theme of the book: *Bogopoznanie*, which means “the knowledge of God,” “coming to know God experientially,” or “acquisition of a knowledge of God.” This word requires greater explanation:

*Bogopoznanie* is man’s knowledge of his Creator. It is a gift of God. It is called a gift of God because the uncreated Divine Being infinitely exceeds the knowledge-acquiring abilities of created human beings. Man himself is not capable of fathoming the uncreated existence of God, and needs an act of

the Creator Himself, who reveals Himself to man through His supernatural works of Grace.

*Bogopoznanie* is the fruit of living spiritual experience. It is inextricably bound with a living communion with God Himself, and union with Him. No abstract mental processes and theorizing about God can be called true *Bogopoznanie*. Its authentic source is Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit, revealing itself to those who seek God. The limited human intellect is not capable of replacing this source. The Foundation, Beginning, and Completion of *Bogopoznanie* is the Living God Himself....

Orthodox theological understanding is not the fruit of human reason and thought. It reflects a union of man with God, and reveals the action of Divine Grace....

*Bogopoznanie* is not a one-time act, but rather a process; moreover it is a process that presupposes not only thinking, but, most of all, transforming one's way of life. It is not possible without Divine Revelation. Man knows God to the extent that God reveals Himself to man, but a person must somehow be first prepared to receive Divine Revelation. Natural *Bogopoznanie* is this means by which man can know God by Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

Given that God can be truly known only through living spiritual experience and transformation of life, where does modern man begin? How many people today are even exposed to the correct understanding of theology? Can reason lead us to this understanding?

Whether reason leads us to God or away from Him is a question hovering over the boundary line between Eastern Orthodox

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<sup>1</sup> Priest Oleg Davidenkov, *Dogmatic Theology, a Course of Lectures*. Cited from <http://azbyka.ru/dictionary/02/bogopoznanie.shtml>.

Christianity and Western Christianity and philosophy. What has made us so complicated that we cannot comprehend the Truth? This work by Professor Osipov presents a thorough explanation.

The book is a work of Orthodox Christian apologetics, with special attention to Western philosophical thought. Whether or not we have actually read the works of philosophers like Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, or Schleiermacher, their works have imprinted themselves deeply into our society, and often form the way we think. They are so much a part of us that we do not even think to question their validity. Their purely human “enlightenment” obscures the true Light. It is like a knot that binds us; by carefully pulling apart the knot, we can see where we have gone wrong. What began as an “improvement” upon ancient Christian theology has ended in atheism, with all its consequences—despair, insensitivity, hardness of heart, cruelty.

Also addressed is the supposed conflict between science and religion, the Orthodox understanding of Divine Revelation, the different forms of paganism, Old Testament Religion, and spiritual life as it is understood correctly in Orthodox tradition. There is a chapter discussing how the world came into being. The book ends with the end—eschatology.

Although *The Search for Truth on the Path of Reason* was written partly for the benefit of theological seminary students, it is the publisher’s sincere hope that this book may come into the hands of one seeking the truth with his intellect—that in his despair of ever finding the truth on that path, he may discover it here.

\* \* \*

Several presses in Russia have published the original Russian version of this book, with various additions and corrections. The English translation omits the beginning chapter on the history of

apologetics, along with other material not entirely relevant to people living outside of Russia.

The author mainly uses Russian language sources, but often these citations are in turn quoting sources originally in other languages, including English. Whenever original English text or accepted English translations of other languages were unearthed, they were used in this translation. However, whenever a source was unavailable, the given Russian text was simply translated into English. The translator apologizes to any reader who has knowledge of original sources or of accepted translations that were not used in this translation.

Unless otherwise noted, the footnote citations are of Russian language sources. The New Testament quotations are from the King James Version, while quotations of the Old Testament are from the Septuagint, including the Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition, and other translations. Quotations from the Psalms are taken from the translation by Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Massachusetts.

### *About the Author*

Alexei Ilych Osipov was born in 1938, in the town of Belev, Tula province. Until 1952 he and his family lived in the town of Kozelsk, Kaluga province, which is near Optina Monastery, and later in the village of Optina itself. After 1952 he lived in Gzhatsk, Smolensk province.

When Alexei Ilych graduated from high school, he was offered a chance to go to a university of his choice, but he declined it in

favor studying theology at home under the tutelage of Igumen Nikon (Vorubev †1963). In 1958 he was received into the Moscow Theological Seminary as a fourth-year student on the strength of his tutor's letter of recommendation, after having passed all the exams normally given during the first three years.

The following year he entered the Moscow Theological Academy, graduating in 1963, with a dissertation in the field of ancient Greek language. After graduation he was invited to enter the masters program of the Moscow Theological Academy. He was retained there as a teacher of a newly offered subject, "Ecumenism." In 1965 he was invited to lecture on basic theology in the Academy and, later, in the Seminary. He continued to lecture in both places on such subjects as the history of Russian religious-philosophical thought, Protestantism, modern theological problems, and Western denominations.

In 1969 he received the title of docent; in 1975, professor; in 1985, Doctor of Theology; and in 2004 he was named Distinguished Professor.

Besides his work as lecturer, Professor Osipov has made major contributions in many areas of Orthodox Christian Theology, with particular emphasis on inter-faith relations. He has participated in numerous conferences in Russia and abroad on this subject, and has played a major role in dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and organizations of other Christian confessions. He has received many medals of recognition from the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as from other Christian Churches.

Other works by Prof. Osipov include:

### Books

*Basic Theology: A Course of Lectures for Students of the Moscow Theological Academy* (Moscow, 1994).



*The Orthodox Understanding of the Meaning of Life* (Kiev, 2001).

*Igumen Nikon (Vorubev): Letters on Spiritual Life* (Moscow: Sretensky Monastery, 2005).

*Bearers of the Spirit of Holy Hierarch Ignatius (Brianchaninov)*, (Moscow, 2007).

*God* (Moscow: Sretensky Monastery, 2009).

### Published Articles and Reports

“Violence and Justice,” *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 5 (Moscow, 1973).

“Salvation—Freedom for the World and Fairness in Christ. The Meaning of the Church,” *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 3 (Moscow, 1976).

“On a Few Principles of the Orthodox Understanding of Ecumenism,” *Theological Works* 18 (Moscow, 1978).

A collection of lectures given by Professor Alexei Ilych Osipov has been recorded and circulated throughout Russia. He is possibly the most widely known contemporary professor of Theology in Russia today.

### *Author's Preface*

*I suppose that anyone with a mind will consider learnedness to be the greatest good for us; and not only this our most noble learnedness, which, despising all embellishment and exuberant speech, seeks only salvation and contemplative beauty, but also outward*

*learnedness, which many Christians, from flawed reasoning, shun as something wickedly artful, dangerous, and separating us from God. . . .*

*To the contrary, we should recognize as stupid and ignorant those who, holding to such an opinion, would wish to see everyone as like unto themselves, so that they might hide their own inadequacy by the general inadequacy and thereby escape reproach for their ignorance.*

Saint Gregory the Theologian, Homily 34

It is natural for a Christian to know “the certainty of those things, wherein he has been instructed” (cf. Lk 1:4). But, as the Apostle Peter writes, he should *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear* (1 Pet 3:15). For the Lord Himself commands, *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you* (Mt 28:19–20).

Christian preaching is a complicated and responsible work, because many people’s salvation depends upon its success. It requires knowledge of dogmatic and moral truths of Christianity, an understanding of spiritual life, and specific experience in the main aspects of human existence and activity—first of all religious, philosophical, and scientific. It presupposes knowledge of answers to those questions that most trouble contemporary man. Christian preaching requires special preparation, at which the field of apologetics (basic theology) chiefly aims.

Apologetics is oriented toward people of various convictions and levels of faith—those who have only just entered the gates of the

Church and still harbor doubts, and those who are merely standing “near the Church walls” but seek the Truth, the meaning of life, and are interested in Christianity. For both types—who for the most part have no spiritual background, who have not “experienced” God within themselves—the basic truths of the faith and some kind of factual reassurance are needed, for these things are naturally part of the means by which people acquire their faith and strengthen it. The present work examines many apologetic questions—those of commonly religious, as well as specific Christian character, oriented toward this goal.

Prof. Alexei Ilyich Osipov

## *Chapter 1*

### *Religion*

O knowing soul of mine!  
O heart, filled with foreboding,  
Oh, how you beat upon threshold  
Of a life that is in twain!...

*From a poem by Feodor Tiuchev*

#### § 1. Man, the World, Religion

What is the life of a human being? If it were possible to record it on film and watch in fast forward, we would be left with a rather unpleasant impression.

Of what does an ordinary day in the life of a man consist? Sleep, eat, work, conversation, business, laughter, arguments....And thus it goes on—today, tomorrow, day after day, year after year. A man goes to school, finds a job, gets married, has children, and grows old, sickness comes ... then death. His children and their children repeat the cycle. Various events overlap this basic scenario, but none of them can stop the flow of life itself with its movement towards death. Thus it is for everyone, always and everywhere. Generation after generation comes and goes, like autumn leaves.

Billions of lives filled with joy and sorrows, love and despair, nobility and lowliness, fame and insignificance, have faded into oblivion. What oblivion? What is this oblivion? What is the meaning of human life and mankind?

A gift in vain, and accidental,

O life, why art thou giv'n to me?  
Or why, condemned and sent withal  
To death by fatal mystery?  
Who hath evoked me from unbeing  
By cruel and despotic call,  
My soul hath filled with passions seething,  
My mind with doubts hath held in thrall?  
Before me is no aim, nor interest—  
My heart is empty; mind—a drone,  
I languish, bored and unimpressed  
By life's deafening monotone.

This is how Pushkin, in a painful moment, bitterly described the paradox of human existence and its bewilderment so tragic to us.

Metropolitan Philaret (Drozdov) of Moscow, called “The Wise” even during his lifetime, answered Pushkin at that time with the following lines:

Not in vain, nor accidental  
Hath God given life to me,  
Nor unrighteously judgmental  
Sent this sorrow mystically.  
I, my own despotic master  
Have evil called from darkened depths  
I, 'twas filled my soul with passions,  
And thralled my mind with doubt's unrest.  
Recall to me, who have forgotten Thee!  
Oh, pierce my mental gloom with light—  
Only Thou shalt cause to be  
A heart that's pure, a mind that's bright.

The Metropolitan's reply laid bare the essence of Pushkin's tormented question, and touched him deeply. He wrote an entire epistle in verse, which resounds with unfeigned gratefulness and tender feeling:

Torrents flowed of sudden tears—  
Thy words, like fragrance soaring,  
Assuaged my wounded conscience seared;  
Like bright oil of gladness pouring.

Truly, the question of life's meaning has always been and always will be every person's essential problem. Not everyone is able to find a definitive answer; not everyone is capable of providing an answer to those who doubt. However, within every normal human being is the ineradicable need to find this meaning and a reasonable explanation of it.

What are the choices a person faces in deciding this fundamental question of life?

First of all, there is the choice between *religion* and *atheism*. Agnosticism, which stands between them, cannot claim the status of a world view, inasmuch as it in principle denies a person the possibility of finding even a marginal answer to the main world-view questions: namely, the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the nature of good and evil, the truth, the meaning of life, and so on.

What is the relationship between values of religion and atheism? In order to answer this question, it would be wise to look at religion and atheism as two theories—of the existence (or nonexistence) of God—since the given question is the most important one to both of them. The two fundamental scientific requirements of any theory upon its acceptance could also be

the criteria for evaluating religion and atheism. These requirements are 1) the necessity of possessing facts to support the theory; and 2) the possibility of experiential (experimental) proof of its basic positions and conclusions. Only the theory which satisfies these requirements can be accepted as scientific and deserving of serious attention.

How do religion and atheism satisfy these criteria? As for religion—first of all, it presents innumerable facts which directly witness to the existence of God, the soul, spirits, supernatural powers, etc. In order to be convinced of this, it is enough to take a look at the lives of but a few Russian saints and their many miracles, for example: Saint Xenia of Petersburg (†1803); Saint Seraphim of Sarov (†1833); Saint Ambrose of Optina (†1891), whose wisdom and clairvoyance drew all of Russia to him, even the most famous authors, thinkers, and members of Russian society, such as Nicholai Gogol, Feodor Dostoevsky, Vladimir Soloviev, Lev Tolstoy, and many others); and Saint John of Kronstadt (†1908), who worked many astounding miracles before the eyes of thousands.

Thus, religion does present facts. But Orthodoxy additionally presents each person with the means to test the veracity of these facts and points out a concrete and realistic way to personally learn of the spiritual world. These means are most briefly and precisely expressed by Christ: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8).

But what does atheism propose? First of all, it does not and cannot possess facts of any kind which might witness to the nonexistence of God or of the spiritual world. Furthermore, the very *infiniteness* of the knowable world speaks of the fact that there never could be any such facts, if only because the whole extent of human knowledge at any given moment is no more than

an insignificant islet in the ocean of the unknowable. Therefore, even if there were no God, this would remain an eternal mystery to mankind, which could only be believed in, but never known.

Secondly (and this is the most difficult one for atheism), atheism is in no condition to answer the question most important to it: “What must a person do in order to be convinced that God does not exist?” Without an answer to this question, atheism is no more than blind faith. However, the answer is obvious. There is only one way to be convinced of either the existence or nonexistence of God: by means of a religious life. There simply is no other method.

Thus, religion and atheism together, with paradoxical unanimity, call upon each person who seeks the truth to study and experientially prove the very thing which is called religion.

## § 2. What Is Religion?

Religion, a phenomenon which has been part of human society during the entire course of its history, even to the present time encompassing the greater part of the earth’s population, is nonetheless a realm which is little understood by very many people. One reason for this seemingly strange situation is the fact that as a rule, people evaluate religion according to its external appearance—by the way it is practiced in personal and social life. Proceeding from this is a whole mass of various interpretations of religion, taking for its essence either elements which are only secondary and insignificant, or distortions—something no religion has ever escaped.

Therefore, the question of what actually makes up religion, which of its characteristics are determining and which are insignificant, requires particular attention.



Religion has two sides: the external, as it appears to an outside observer, and the internal, which is revealed to the believer who lives according to the corresponding spiritual and moral principles of a given religion.

Taken externally, religion appears to be first of all a *world view* consisting of a number of conditions (or truths), without which (or at least without one of which) it loses its own self, degenerating into either magic, occultism, or other similar pseudo-religious forms which are no more than products of its disintegration or corruption, or into religious-philosophical systems of thought which have little to do with man's practical life. A religious world view always possesses a social character, and expresses itself in a more or less developed *organization* (the Church), with a particular structure, and a set of morals and codes of life for its followers.

Internally, religion is the direct experience of God.

A preliminary understanding of religion can be obtained from the etymology of the word.

### § 3. What Is Meant by the Word "Religion"?

1. There are several different points of view about the derivation of the word "religion" (from the Latin word *religio*, meaning conscientiousness, piety, reverence, religion, holiness, service to God). Thus, Cicero, the famous Roman orator, writer, and political activist of the first century B.C. considered that this word came from the Latin verb *relegere* (meaning, to gather again, to re-consider, to set aside for a particular use), with a connotative meaning of "showing reverence" or "relating to something with particular attention or respect." Proceeding from this, Cicero sees the very existence of religion as reverence before the higher powers, before the Divinity. This thought of

Cicero's assuredly shows that piety is one of the most important elements of religion, without which religiosity becomes sanctimoniousness, hypocrisy, and empty ritual; and belief in God becomes no more than cold, lifeless doctrine. At the same time, we cannot agree with the statement that reverence toward something mysterious, even toward God, comprises the essence of religion. No matter how great and necessary piety is to religion, it is nevertheless only one of the feelings present in man's religious relationship to God, and does not express its essence.

The famous Western Christian writer and orator Lactantius (†330) considered that the term "religion" comes from the Latin verb "religare," which means "to bind, to join." Therefore he defines religion as a *union of piety* between man and God. "With this condition," he writes, "we are born in order to show a just and dutiful submission to the Lord Who has given us being; to know only Him, to follow only Him. Being bound by this union of piety, we find ourselves in union with God, from which religion has received its name. 'Religion' comes from the union of piety by which God has bound man with Himself...."<sup>2</sup>

Lactantius' definition reveals the very essence of religion—a living union of man's spirit with God, which takes place within the secret chambers of the human heart.

Blessed Augustine (†430) similarly understood the essence of religion, although he considered that the word "religion" comes from the verb "religare" meaning "to come together," and that religion itself indicates a coming together, the renewal of a once lost union between man and God. "Seeking this," he writes, "or rather, seeking out again (from which apparently it has received

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<sup>2</sup> N. P. Rozhdestvensky, *Christian Apologetics* (Saint Petersburg, 1884), 1:136 [in Russian].

the name ‘religion’), we yearn towards Him with love, so that once we attain it, we will be at peace.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the etymology of the word “religion” points to its two basic meanings: *unity* and *reverence*, which explain religion as a mystical spiritual union: a living, reverent unification of man with God.

#### § 4. Religion’s Basic Truths

What are the fundamental *truths* of religion?

The first of these is the confession of a spiritual, perfect, reasoning, and personal Authority—God, Who is the Source (the Cause) of being of everything that exists, including man, and Who is always actively present in the world. This idea of God may be expressed in a way that is quite varied in its form, content, and degree of clarity, in various religions: monotheistic (belief in one God), polytheistic (belief in many gods), dualistic (belief in two divine authorities—good and evil), animistic (belief in a life force contained in all existence; in the presence of a soul within all powers and manifestations of the natural world).

According to the Christian teaching that *God is Love* (1 Jn 4:8), He is our *Father* (Mt 6:8–9), in Whom we *live, and move, and have our being* (Acts 17:28). God is that initial spiritual-personal Being,<sup>4</sup> Who gave existence to all material and spiritual beings, in all their varied forms, known and unknown to man. God is an actually existing, unchanging, personified ideal of good, truth, and beauty, and the final goal of man’s spiritual yearnings. Christianity, as do other religions, partly by this acceptance of God

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<sup>3</sup> *City of God*, citation from H. P. Rozhdestvensky, *Christian Apologetics*, 137.

<sup>4</sup> As opposed to dialectic materialism’s assertion that existence was primary and consciousness was secondary.

as an actually existing ideal, differs in principle from other world views for which a higher ideal does not really exist, but is seen only as the fruit of human dreaming, rational construction, and hope.

The second most important truth of religion is the conviction that man differs in principle from all other forms of life; that he is not only a biologically higher form of life, but is above all else a spiritual being, possessing not only a body but a *soul*, which is the bearer of mind, heart (the sense organs), will, and the personality itself, able to enter into relationship, into *unity* with God and the spiritual world. According to Christian teaching, man is the *image* of God.

The possibility and necessity of man's spiritual unification with God pre-supposes in religion a belief in the *Revelation* of God, and the necessity for a man to live a righteous life, corresponding to the dogmas and commandments of his religion. In Christianity, such a life is called faith, by which is understood not merely a conviction as to the existence of God, but a particular spiritual-moral character of the believer's entire life.

This truth of religion is unbrokenly bound up with a more or less developed teaching on the existence of man's *life after death*, found in different religions. In Christian Revelation we find even more than that: the teaching on the general *resurrection* and eternal life of man (and not of the soul alone), thanks to which his earthly life and activity obtains a particularly responsible character and fully adequate meaning. Christian teaching says, "O man, you live only once, and eternity awaits you. Therefore, choose now, freely and consciously, good conscience and righteousness as your norm of life!" This teaching and conviction is in particularly sharp contrast with atheism, which says, "Man, you live only once, and eternal death awaits you!"

The true face of religion and atheism is most clearly revealed precisely in resolving the question of the soul and eternity. Also revealed is the hidden face of every man, and his spiritual orientation: does he strive for the immortal beauty of spiritual perfection and eternal life? Or does he prefer to believe in the final, absolute law of death, before which not only are all ideals—the antagonism between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and beauty and ugliness—equally meaningless, but even life itself?

By choosing faith, a person bears witness to what he is and what he desires to become. As one of the most remarkable Russian thinkers of nineteenth century, Ivan V. Kireevsky, wrote, “A man is his belief.” Although there are two beliefs [that God exists, or that He does not exist], there is only one truth; and not one thinking person can forget about this.

Also part of the essential signs of religion is the belief in the existence of the *supernatural world*,<sup>5</sup> angels and demons, entering into contact with which (by one’s honorable, or in the latter case, immoral acts), man determines his life to a great extent. All religions accept the reality of the spiritual world’s influence upon a person’s activity and fate. Therefore, it is dangerous in the highest degree to be spiritually united with the powers of evil. The consequence of such a unity is terrible for a person, both temporally and eternally.

An obvious element of any religion is *cult*,<sup>6</sup> or the totality of all of its external services, rites, forms, actions, and rules.

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<sup>5</sup> One great researcher on religion, Taylor (nineteenth century), wrote, “Belief in the existence of a world beyond the sensual comprises the minimum of religion, without which no religion is thinkable.” Cited from Rozhdestvensky, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:141.

<sup>6</sup> *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* gives the following as one meaning of the word “cult”: “the rites, ceremonies, and practices of a religion: the formal aspect of religious experience” (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*. Merriam-Webster, 2002 <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com> [21 Jan. 2009]). “Cult” is a word with various meanings in English, most of which have negative connotations for modern speakers. Spurious religious organizations, cults of personality, etc. have dictated how we interpret this word. However, here and elsewhere in this text “cult” is used according to the author’s meaning as stated in this paragraph. —Trans.

There is yet a whole series of elements present in every religion (its dogmatic and moral teachings, ascetical principles, rules of life, etc.); all of these are organically and logically tied with the main elements previously set forth.

## § 5. The Essence of Religion

It is much more difficult to speak of the internal side of religion than of its external side, since it represents a realm of experiences and concepts that cannot be expressed in words. It is not easy to convey even ordinary feelings. We say, “It was fun,” or “I am having a difficult time.” But another person will never really know what exactly is behind these words. The inner world is deeply individual, and cannot essentially be conveyed. It is the same with religion. To a person who is truly—not just nominally—a believer, it opens up a special spiritual world, God, and an infinitely rich and multi-faceted set of spiritual experiences that cannot be conveyed in words to another person (even if that person is perfectly familiar with the external side of religion). Sergei Bulgakov (†1944), the great Russian thinker and later theologian, expressed this thought in the following words:

Thus, in the most general form, one could give this definition of religion: Religion is [a process of] acquiring the knowledge of God, and the experience of a connection with God.

However,

Religious experience assures one of the reality of another, Divine world; not by proving its existence to him, but by showing it to him. Only he has stepped upon the authentic religious path who has truly met with the Divinity on his life’s path, who has been overtaken by It, upon whom It has poured Its overpowering strength. Religious experience in its

directness is not scientific, nor philosophical, nor esthetical; just as it is impossible to know beauty (but only to be able to think about it), so does thought provide only a pale image of the scorching fire of religious experience.... The lives of saints, ascetics, prophets, religious founders, and living monuments to religion—writings, rites, traditions...—this, and not some distracted philosophizing, is what, together with personal experience, will more likely lead to a knowledge of the realm of religion.<sup>7</sup>

We could present a practically endless amount of testimony as to the nature of religious experience and revelations: states of deep joy, love; the gifts of clairvoyance, healing, and knowledge of what, as the great saint Isaac the Syrian writes, is higher than man (the spiritual world); and many other extraordinary gifts. The Apostle Paul wrote about this using the words of the ancient Prophet Isaiah: *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him* (1 Cor. 2:9).

However, all other similar witness remains powerless if the person himself does not come into contact with the world of mystical Divine life. Without having a living connection with God, without studying the ascetical experience of the fathers, he cannot understand religion, and will inevitably create a deeply distorted image of it for himself. Just what mistakes a man can fall into this way can be seen through the the religious views of three German thinkers: Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher.

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<sup>7</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, *Unwaning Light* (Sergeev Posad, 1917), 6–7.

## § 6. Views of Various Philosophers on Religion

Religion has always been very closely connected with philosophy, and various philosophers have greatly influenced religious teachings. Protestant theology, for example, has been particularly influenced by the ideas of well-known German thinkers. This tendency of theology to depend upon philosophy takes on more and more powerful forms as time goes by. As a rule, this process subjects religion to serious distortions of the most fundamental Christian truths. The above-cited German thinkers' concepts of the Christian religion provide clear illustrations of such distortions.

### 1. Kant's Views<sup>8</sup>

The philosophy of the famous German philosopher and scholar Immanuel Kant (†1804) discloses itself most clearly in his two main works: *Critique of Pure Reason*, and *Critique of Practical Reason*. In *Critique of Pure Reason* he draws the conclusion that human reason cannot attain knowledge of the essence of things. It is possible only to have knowledge of “manifestations,” that is, what comes into being as a result of the mutual action of the real world (“things in themselves,” which are impossible to know) and our capability to attain knowledge of things. Since “things in themselves” cannot be known, Kant draws the conclusion that it is essentially impossible to comprehend God, the soul, and the world. He criticizes the so-called proof of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.

However, because of the existence within us of moral law, which unconditionally demands to be fulfilled, Kant, in his *Critique of*

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<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of Kant's view on this question, see Paul Florensky, *Cult and Philosophy; Theological Works* (Saint Petersburg, 1977), 17:119–135.



*Practical Reason*, asserts that it is necessary to postulate the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Only insofar as a person desires and is able to follow the rules of goodness and righteousness, and has merely accepted the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, allowing it to perfect itself limitlessly, is he able to attain to the highest moral ideals, the yearning for which is part of human nature.

Kant details his views on religion in the above-named works, as well as in his work, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. In Kant's opinion, the concept of God as a moral law-giver is the very content of religious consciousness, and religion itself is man's acceptance of all his moral obligations as God's command. In *Critique of Practical Reason* he writes:

In this manner, the moral laws lead through the conception of the *summum bonum* as the object and final end of pure practical reason to religion, that is, to the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions, that is to say, arbitrary ordinances of a foreign and contingent in themselves, but as essential laws of every free will in itself....<sup>9</sup> Religion according to material or object differs in no way from morality, and the common subject of one or the other consists of moral duties; the difference between religion and morals is purely formal.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, according to Kant, the essence of religion consists in the fulfillment of moral duty as "God's commandments." In explaining his understanding of religion, Kant says that a reasoning man can have religion, but he cannot have any

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<sup>9</sup> English translation by Thomas Kingsmill Abbot.

<sup>10</sup> Cited from N. P. Rozhdestvensky, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:149 (Russian translation from German).

relationship to God, because man can never really know whether God exists or not. He places man, with all his moral laws, in place of God in religion. The result is a sort of universal understanding of religion by which it can exist without acknowledging the existence of God. It is no coincidence that Kant should write in his last great work, *Opus Postumum*, "I am God."

Kant's point of view on religion as the sum total of specific moral obligations is now widespread. The basic thought here leads to the conviction that it is enough for man to be *good*, for this is the essence of religion, while religiousness is something secondary, and not mandatory. Therefore, all of those specific religious demands on a person—faith, dogma, commandments, Divine services and prayers, and all the norms of Church life—are extraneous. All of those things are superstition and philosophy, and may be lightly neglected. From this proceeds the preaching of so-called general human morals, a non-dogmatic Christianity, the essential unity of all religions, etc.

The serious flaw in this understanding of religion is that it ignores the fact that morality itself—and man's entire mode of life—is in the final analysis determined by his world view, his understanding of the supreme ideal, which could be God, or it could be a "god." The Former as well as the latter dictate their respective morals.

If a man's god is glory, riches, power, or his stomach, then the nature of his morals leaves little doubt. One clear illustration of this is John D. Rockefeller's speech to the students of an American Sunday school, during which he said in part,

The growth of business activity is simply the survival of the fittest... The American rose can only grow to its full magnificent beauty and fragrance, inspiring the awe of those who behold it, if it mercilessly prunes the weak growth around

it. This is no more than the realization in life of the law of nature and of divine law<sup>11</sup> (!).

Worship of the golden idol can lead people to acts of merciless cruelty. It is a clear affirmation that the “god” dictates the morals.

But even lofty morals will not bring man closer to God by themselves, for it is not good deeds that purify man’s heart, but rather the war with the passions, and the humility that comes out of it. Saint Isaac the Syrian wrote, “Until a man becomes humble, he does not receive the reward of his labor. The recompense is not given for labor but for humility.... The recompense is not for virtue, nor for toil on account of virtue, but for humility which is born of both. If humility is lacking, then the former two are in vain.”<sup>12</sup> Saint John the Prophet says the same thing about high morals: “True labor cannot be without humility, for labor in and of itself is vain, and counts for nothing.”<sup>13</sup> Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) goes even further to say, “He is not happy who is satisfied with his own human righteousness: Christ has no need for this.”<sup>14</sup>

Works are necessary and beneficial only if they are done out of love for people, and are a means for attaining humility.

Paul Florensky shows very clearly how unspiritual and essentially atheistic Kant’s view of religion is. Analyzing Kant’s understanding of sanctity, he writes,

Our modern thought is inclined to equate the reality [of another world] with moral strength, taking sanctity to mean

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<sup>11</sup> K. P. Hill, *Christian Defense of Morals and Democracy, Dispute* (1992), 1:138 (Russian translation).

<sup>12</sup> *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Moscow, 1858), Homily 34:217. English translation: Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Brookline, 1984), 57:282.

<sup>13</sup> Saints Barsanuphius and John, *Instructions in Spiritual Life* (Saint Petersburg, 1905), Answer 274 (Russian translation).

<sup>14</sup> Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works in Five Volumes*, Vol. 4, (Saint Petersburg, 1905), 24.

the fullness of moral perfection. Such is Kant's sidestepping of religious practice around the flanks, so to say; for morality is thus considered to be a strength coming from this lower world, and this strength is, moreover, subjective.... However, this impotent attempt upon the concept of holiness is in vain.... The very usage of the word is a witness against such attempts. When one speaks of holy vestments, holy utensils, holy water, holy oil, a holy temple, etc, it is obvious that one is in no way referring to an ethical perfection, but of an ontological one. This means that in the given instances the attractive side of holiness is also the ontological supremacy over the world, the ontological abiding outside of this world. It would follow that the whole core of this understanding of holiness resides not in ethics, but in ontology....

If we call a person a saint, we are not referring to his morality. There are specific words corresponding to various aspects of morality. We are rather referring to his particular strengths and activities; to qualities incomparable to those of this world; to his abiding in spheres incomprehensible to ordinary reason ... such a person's morality, not being included in the composition of the understanding of holiness, in part serves as one of the conducive conditions of his other-worldliness, manifesting itself in part as the result of the same.

But a link between these two concepts must be made with threads at once gentle and very elastic.... Thus it follows that if it should be said of some moral act, "it is a holy work," then it is not some Kantian moral inclination which is immanent to the world, but rather an inclination which is anti-Kant, transcendent to the world, and one in essence with otherworldly energies. In calling God Holy—Holy in totality,

the source of all holiness and the fullness of sanctity ... we praise not His morality, but rather His Divine nature....<sup>15</sup>

Any substitution of holiness by morality, or of spirituality by morals, is a serious mistake of Kant and all “Kantians.” Fulfillment of moral obligations without God is like sailing a ship without a helm or rudder.

## 2. Hegel’s Views

Another well-known representative of another equally widespread concept of religion is George Hegel (1770–1831), the famous German philosopher-idealist, Protestant, and apologist.<sup>16</sup>

Lying in the foundation of Hegel’s philosophical system is the teaching of what he calls the Absolute idea (or World reason, World spirit, Absolute, God) as the beginning category which existed before the world, nature, and society began, and which develops dialectically from the abstract to the concrete. Its development occurs through a complex system of logical categories (which, in Hegel’s philosophy, replace everything that exists in reality) in the following manner: every concept presupposes and engenders its own opposite, and together they lead to a third, higher understanding, which transcends them and contains them within itself as its own aspects (for example: coming into being—passing into non-being—being). The third concept becomes in its turn the beginning of another triad, and so on. The unbroken replacement of three aspects—thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis (a position, its counter-position, and their unity)—is a dialectical law (method) of development of the Absolute idea. This

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<sup>15</sup> Priest Paul Florensky, *Sanctified Realities*, Theological Works 17, (Moscow, 1977), 150–151.

<sup>16</sup> His main works are *Phenomenology of Spirit*; *Science of Logic*; *Encyclopedia of Philosophic Science*; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*; and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

dialectical method is at the foundation of Hegel's entire philosophical system. It is divided into three parts:

The teaching of the Absolute Idea in itself, and how it develops in the form of pure logical essences (logic).

The teaching of the Absolute Idea in its other form of being, that is, the teaching about nature (the philosophy of nature).

The teaching of the Absolute Idea as various forms of a specific spirit (the philosophy of spirit). Here the Absolute becomes a reasoning spirit in man's consciousness, and reveals itself in three forms: in art, religion, and philosophy. In art, it realizes itself in the form of contemplation through a sensory image; in religion in the form of imagination; in philosophy in the form of understanding.

Religion, according to Hegel, is on a lower level than philosophy in its self-revelation of the Absolute Spirit, because in religion knowledge comes only on the level of imagination, which is an imperfect modification of philosophical concepts. Therefore religion, in the final analysis, should be replaced by philosophy (of course, by Hegel's philosophy)—that perfect form of the knowledge of the Absolute.

Hegel interpreted the dogmatic teaching of Christianity in an "original" way. He explained the dogma of the Trinity as a symbolic expression of dialectical development of the Absolute Idea according to the triad principle. Naturally, through such an explanation the basic Christian truths lose their true meaning, and are turned into an allegory of philosophical categories.

Hegel's view of religion draws attention to itself not by its peculiar philosophical interpretation, but by its basic idea of the understanding of the essence of religion. Religion is looked upon as a sort of *system of thoughts*, and a believer's main task is *understanding*, in logical discussion, the meaning of its truths.

However, from such an approach the soul of religion—the personal experience of God—is banished, and replaced by theological and religious-philosophical “computer” reasoning about Him. As a result, religion as a living, real connection with God ceases to exist for man.

This deeply false concept of religion is one of the most widespread illnesses amongst theologians, clergymen, and the intelligentsia. They “know” Christianity, and very often this is where their religious life ends. The Reformation is a particularly clear illustration of such a frame of mind. Archpriest Sergei Bulgakov called Protestantism a “professor’s religion,” underlining the rational character of its religiosity. Its fatal error was already condemned by the Apostle Paul: *Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him* (1 Cor 8:1–3). Saint Seraphim of Sarov openly stated the consequence of a reason-based view of religion, and condemned this turning of religion into so-called enlightenment:

Nowadays, due to our almost universal coldness to holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to our inattentiveness to the activity of His Divine Providence for us, we have gotten so that we do not understand the words of Holy Scripture. Some say, “This passage is unclear; for, could the Apostles really have been able to so palpably feel the presence of the Holy Spirit? Could there be a mistake here?” There was and is no mistake.... This all happened because we have departed little-by-little from the simplicity of Christian knowledge, and, under the pretext of enlightenment, wandered into such darkness of ignorance that what ancient Christians formerly understood quite clearly seems too hard to comprehend for us.

They discussed these things in quite ordinary conversations on their understanding of God’s appearance amongst people, and it never seemed strange to those discussing them.<sup>17</sup>

Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov (†1867) wrote about how deeply this sickness can strike a man:

Christ’s words are fulfilled: *When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* We have sciences. We have academies, baccalaureates, masters, and doctors of Theology (that’s right—a laugh, and no more). These degrees are given to people.... However, should some misfortune befall such a theologian it would be clear that he hasn’t any faith, let alone theology. I have met such men. One is a doctor of Theology, but he has his doubts as to whether Christ was actually on the Earth. He says, “Perhaps this is just something people have thought up? Wasn’t there something similar in mythology?” What light can we expect to come out of such darkness?!<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, neither Hegel nor all his “Hegelian” followers were able to understand this.

### 3. Schleiermacher’s View

Schleiermacher’s view of religion and its meaning for man, although differing in form from the preceding one, is actually of the same essence.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1786–1834) was a professor of theology in Berlin and Secretary of the Academy of Sciences Department of Philosophy. His main theological works are *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, *Monologues*, *The*

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<sup>17</sup> *On the Goal of Christian Life, Conversation between Saint Seraphim of Sarov and N. A. Motovilov* (Sergiev Posad, 1914), 33, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Bishop Ignatius, *Letters to Various People*, 2nd ed., (Sergiev Posad, 1917), 78–79.



*Christian Faith*, along with a large collection of sermons. Schleiermacher's general philosophical views are laid out in his *Dialectic* (by dialectics he means the art of philosophical foundation).

Schleiermacher's understanding of God and His relation to the world almost matches Spinoza's pantheistic concepts. While recognizing God as absolutely transcendental to human reasoning, Schleiermacher's views bordered upon Kant's. In his understanding of religion, Schleiermacher also showed himself to be just as one-sided as both Kant and Spinoza.

According to Schleiermacher, at the foundation of being lies absolute world unity, a "one and all," or God. All depends upon God, but this dependence is expressed in the common bond of nature, and not in Revelation or grace—for God is not a person.

Schleiermacher uses the terms, "God," "world soul," and "world whole" synonymously. God's activity is equal to causes in nature: "God has never existed outside of the world; we know Him only in ourselves and in things." All things happen out of necessity; man does not differ from other beings, neither by free will, nor by eternal existence. Just like all the various existences, people are also no more than a transient condition in the life of the universe, which, having come into being must also perish. The usual understanding of immortality and one's hope for reward in life beyond the grave is a tenuous hope.

"The goal and nature of religious life," writes the philosopher, "is not immortality in the form that people believe in ... but an immortality which we already possess in this temporal life; that is, while amongst the finite, to mingle with the infinite, and be eternal in every moment. In this lies the immortality of religion."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> F. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (Moscow, 1911), 111 (Russian translation from the German).

The essence of religion is the contemplation of an endless “feeling of dependency” upon it in unbroken unity. “Religion is a feeling and taste for the infinite...,” he writes. “It is life in the infinite nature of the whole, in one and in all; life which sees all in God, and God in all.... It is the direct apprehension of existence of everything finite in the infinite and through the infinite, everything temporal in the eternal and through the eternal....”<sup>20</sup>

Essentially, Schleiermacher considered that there has always existed and still exists in the world one all-encompassing, eternal religion. The presence of various forms of religion reflects only the difference in strength and morality of those religious feelings which have inspired the creative geniuses who founded religions, but not the truth or falseness of any one of the religions. As one religious researcher wrote, “According to Schleiermacher, religion is a feeling of the infinite in the finite, or the feeling of unconditional dependence, and therefore, every religion is a true religion, inasmuch as it is a matter of feelings. It has no relation to the truths of knowledge.”<sup>21</sup>

According to Schleiermacher, dogmas have not the slightest religious significance in religion. Instruction in the faith and canons is only an outer wrapping which religion condescends to allow, but even this should not be done. One can only hope that with time religion will no longer need the Church. In general, the more religious a man is, the farther he should stay away from the Church. Moreover, an educated man, in order to further the cause of religion, should war with the Church because it is the bearer of dogma, unconditional morality, and canons, which all restrain the feelings. Only with the destruction of the Church is true religion

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>21</sup> O. Pfleiderer, *On Religion and Religions* (Saint Petersburg, 1909), 45 (Russian translation from the German).

possible: “true religion” being a free feeling of awe and reverence before the infinite universe, its harmony and beauty.

Schleiermacher’s view corresponds entirely with the ideas being spread around Russia from the end of the eighteenth century by freemasonry and liberal nobility, and which are bearing their fruit. Archpriest George Florovksy expressed the essence of these ideas well in his writing on the views of Labzin (†1825), the head of the Rosicrucian lodge in Petersburg:

[For Labzin] dogmas and even visible sacraments are not as important as this life of the heart. After all, one cannot please God with “opinions.” “We do not find any talk of dogmas by the Savior.... ” Therefore, all divisions between confessions are only pride of the mind. The true Church is broader than these superficial divisions, consists of all true worshippers in spirit, and encompasses the entire human race. This true ecumenical or “universal” Christianity in Labzin’s interpretation runs into a sort of supra-temporal and supra-historical religion. It is one and the same religion for all nations and throughout all time ... the one religion of the heart....<sup>22</sup>

This illustration shows very well the nature of a religion in which there remains nothing more than “elevated” human feelings. It is total non-dogmatism, the destruction of every separate religion as a specific world view, as a particular “individualism,” and the direct confirmation of what Hieromonk Seraphim Rose precisely called “the religion of the future.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Archpriest George Florovsky, *Paths of Russian Theology*, 3rd edition, (Paris, 1983), 137 (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> See Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* (Platina: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1999).

Orthodoxy teaches that the essence of religion consists in an experience of the Kingdom of God, which is within us (cf. Lk 17:21). But it also says that a feeling of the Kingdom is not the unaccountable experience of something lofty, but rather the experience of God. Abba Dorotheus says, “Because we are full of passions, we must never believe our own hearts, for a crooked rule will make even the straight crooked.”<sup>24</sup> Saint Ignatius (Brianchiniov) even puts it thus: “If good deeds done according to feelings of the heart could bring salvation, then Christ’s coming would have been superfluous.”<sup>25</sup> Orthodoxy indicates quite definite conditions for attaining communion with God (see Chapter 7, “Spiritual Life”). The feeling of experiencing God is something entirely different from what Schleiermacher describes, for it is the consequence of a righteous life in the Church, and not something resulting from a contemplation of the harmony of the world “whole” in its infinity.

## § 7. The Origin of Religion

One of the issues basic to understanding religion is its origin. As an “answer” to the religious awareness that religion has been part of humanity from its beginning, critics have come up with many different variations of a so-called *natural*—that is, a purely human—origin of the idea of God. Their essence can be described by Feuerbach’s aphorism: “It is not God Who has created man, but man who has created God.” Therefore, before setting forth a positive view on the origin of religion, we will take a look at the

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<sup>24</sup> *Abba Dorotheus*, instruction 19. [For an English translation, see Eric P. Wheeler, *Abba Dorotheus of Gaza, Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977). —Trans.]

<sup>25</sup> Ignatius (Brianchiniov), *Five Volume Works*, vol. 1 (Saint Petersburg, 1905), 513.

better-known atheistic hypotheses: the naturalistic, the animistic, the anthropological-theistic hypothesis of L. Feuerbach (†1872), and the social hypothesis.

### 1. Naturalistic Hypothesis

The naturalistic hypothesis, outlined as early as the first century B.C. by the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius,<sup>26</sup> asserts that the idea of God and religion arose as the result of peoples' fear before dangerous natural phenomena (*timor primus fecit deos*—fear created the first gods) since people did not understand the reasons for their occurrence because they did not know the laws of nature.

This psychological explanation does not take into consideration the fact that fear is more likely to motivate people to run away and hide from the phenomenon, rather than venerate it, personify it, and pray to it. Man was afraid of many things; however, he did not deify everything he feared, such as predators, elements, his human enemies, but only a select number of them, often the most inoffensive, such as rocks, trees, etc. Obviously it was not fear that inspired a religious relationship to these things. One soviet researcher of religions, V. D. Timofeev, noted, “Natural phenomena, even the most threatening, such as floods or earthquakes, are not by themselves necessarily going to lead to religious fantasy.”<sup>27</sup> His colleague, A. D. Sukhov, doctor of Philosophy, furthermore asserts that, “Even so, man was never completely crushed by the forces of nature, even during the primitive epoch. This oppression was never absolute.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Titus Lucretius Carus (ca. 99– ca. 55 B.C.), whose only known work is *De rerum natura*, translated into English as *On the Nature of Things*.

<sup>27</sup> Prof. I. D. Panstkhav, ed., *Basic Issues of Scientific Atheism* (Moscow, 1966), 36.

<sup>28</sup> *Natural Sciences and Religion* 3 (1970): 10.

Neither could ancient man's low scientific level of development have been cause for the idea of God to spring up. Primitive man sensed his knowledge subjectively, probably even more so than modern man, who is faced with an abyss of problems, the number of which increases with every new discovery. He was able to explain everything he encountered in his own way. The following example is quite revealing in this regard. One researcher who was studying the primitive Kuba tribe on the island of Sumatra interviewed one of the tribesmen.

Q: "Have you ever gone into the forest at night?"

A: "Yes, often."

Q: "Have you ever heard any moans or sighing there?"

A: "Yes."

Q: "What did you think about it?"

A: "That a tree was cracking."

Q: "Have you heard any screams?"

A: "Yes."

Q: "What did you think about it?"

A: "That an animal was screaming."

Q: "What if you didn't know which animal was screaming?"

A: "I know all of the animal voices..."

Q: "Does this mean that you do not fear anything in the forest at night?"

A: "Nothing."

Q: "And you have never encountered anything there that you didn't know about, which might have frightened you?"

A "No, I know everything there..."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> V. Rimba Foltz, Moscow, 1931, p. 100, cited from E. Svetlov, *Magic and Monotheism* (Brussels, 1971), 37-38 (Russian translation of the German).--

Obviously, for a man with such a psychology the idea of God is superfluous to his understanding of various natural phenomena.

This hypothesis does not stand up under criticism from another angle as well. Science has existed for more than one century; and man saw long ago that he is gradually acquiring more and more ways to explain natural phenomena. Just the same, this revelation, which is so important to him and which frees him from mystical fear before the forces of nature, has not influenced his religiosity. An overwhelming number of people, even amongst great scholars, believed and continue to believe in God, all the way through to the twenty-first century.

The naturalist hypothesis in no way explains the main question: how fear (or to the contrary, ecstasy, or awe) before the surrounding material, visible, audible, and tangible world could inspire an idea of God in the “primitive” consciousness of man, since God is an essentially different kind of being—spiritual, invisible, inaudible, intangible.

But if the phenomena of this world are not able by themselves to engender the idea of God and the other world in man (that is, to provide a beginning to religion), then to the contrary, with such an idea or such feeling present in his soul, man is capable not only of belief in God but also of deifying any natural phenomenon, any being, or any fantasy. Then the fact and presence of religion in all peoples of the world with all their religious diversity become quite explainable.

## 2. The Animistic Hypothesis

The animistic hypothesis (from the latin *animus*, or spirit) was expressed and developed in detail during the nineteenth century by the English anthropologist, Edward Tylor<sup>30</sup> (†1917) in his

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<sup>30</sup> Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917)

main work, *Primitive Culture* (1871). The Soviet religion scholar S. A. Tokarev<sup>31</sup> characterizes his views on religion in the following way:

Tylor understood religion for the most part as belief in spiritual beings, or animism, which he called “minimum religions.” He saw the roots of animistic religion as being in primitive man’s inability to understand such biological manifestations as sleep, dreams, sickness, fainting, or death. In their attempt to explain these phenomena, the “savage-philosophers,” in Tylor’s opinion, came to the idea of the soul as a little twin which sits in every person. He then, by analogy, ascribed similar souls also to animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Thus eventually did the belief in the animation of nature take form, which in turn made the development of mythology possible, and subsequently the different and higher forms of religion, including polytheism, monotheism, and complex theological teachings.<sup>32</sup>

The flaws that make this hypothesis totally unfounded stand out right away.

a) Without mentioning the fantastical quality of this supposition itself, it is highly unlikely that not one man, not two, but all of mankind should be so feeble-minded as to be unable to tell the difference between sleep and reality, and to accept hallucinations and daydreams as reality. It is even more unlikely that such an underdeveloped consciousness could turn out to be capable of reaching such an abstract idea as the existence of God, and firmly hold to it throughout all of history.

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<sup>31</sup> Sergei Alexandrovich Tokarev (1899–1985), ethnographer and historian.

<sup>32</sup> S. A. Tokarev, “Taylor, E. B.,” *Abridged Scientific-Atheistic Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1969), 691–692.



b) Even if we accept, albeit against all logic, that man, during that problematic time past, in some incomprehensible manner, really did possess both the irrationality of a savage and the mind of a philosopher, and accepted his ecstasies, dreams, and so on to be reality, then this would still in no way presuppose a religious relationship to the same. It is an enormous distance from the acceptance of something as really existing to a religious relationship to it and its deification—a distance which the animistic hypothesis unfortunately fails to notice.

c) It is difficult to imagine that a man, even one who has only recently come forth from an animalistic state, as the supporters of the animistic theory assert, would believe in the actual existence of what he imagined in day-dreams and other dreams. First of all, a dream is not something that comes upon him totally unexpectedly, *suddenly* appearing before his consciousness and stunning him with its element of surprise and exclusivity. To the contrary, the phenomenon of dreaming is quite ordinary. Even animals have it. It could be said that man is born and dies with it.

Secondly, the vast majority of dreams are a disorderly combination of fragmented thoughts, experiences, feelings, memories from everyday life, etc.—something which could in no way be recognized as a complete whole and inspire trust in itself.

Thirdly, many dreams should in fact engender complete distrust in dreams. For example: someone dreams he has eaten to satiety, then wakes up only to feel his former hunger. Or, after overcoming his enemy in a dream, a man wakes up to find himself in the same predicament. Is it possible to have faith in such dreams, never mind a religious feeling for them?

d) Within the framework of the animistic hypothesis, the fact that religion is such a common occurrence in mankind appears to be a complete mystery. We know how difficult it is to convince

someone of something that does not fit within the boundaries of everyday experience. It is even stranger to imagine that someone's dreams, ecstasies or day-dreams could convince not one or two people, not a close circle of friends and relatives, not even individual tribes, but all of mankind of the existence of God and spirits.

The flaws of the animistic hypothesis are so significant that even in atheistic circles it has ceased to enjoy any reliability. S. Tokarev says of it straight out, "It is now out of date, having shown its methodological inadequacy."<sup>33</sup>

### 3. Feuerbach's Hypothesis

The Hegelian Feuerbach<sup>34</sup> expressed a somewhat different view on the origin of religion. He based his hypothesis on the old supposition that the personification of the forces of nature by man is the basis of ancient religious beliefs. In his opinion, however, religion grew directly out of the personification of different aspects and qualities, first of all from the abstract nature of man and false interpretations of it. "What is spirit," asks Feuerbach, "if not spiritual activity which has received independent existence due to human fantasy and language; if not spiritual activity personified in the form of a being?"<sup>35</sup> God and gods are, as it turns out, the personification of man's and nature's projected characteristics, misinterpreted by human thought as independent beings.

Feuerbach divides religions into the "spiritual," which are Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, and the "natural," which are all the primitive and ancient pagan beliefs. In the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 692.

<sup>34</sup> Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804–1872)

<sup>35</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Works* in 3 vol., "Lectures on the Essence of Religion" (Moscow, 1923–1926), 3:168 (Russian translation from the German).

“spiritual” religions, according to Feuerbach, “God, different from nature, is nothing other than man’s own existence, and in ‘natural’ religions, the ‘god which is different from man’ is nothing other than nature or some natural being.”<sup>36</sup>

How then, according to Feuerbach, did the supernatural beings arise in man’s consciousness? It turns out to be very simple. They owe their “existence” to “peoples’ lack of knowledge of the organic conditions of the workings of thought and fantasy,” for the Divinity is the “personification of human lack of knowledge, and fantasy.”<sup>37</sup> Mental activity is by nature the “bodily” activity of a particular organ, and is something which man recognized as “bodiless,” in that this “mental activity is the most hidden, most remote, soundless, and subtle.” Therefore, man has “made an absolutely bodiless, inorganic, abstract existence, to which he gave the name ‘God.’”<sup>38</sup> “This being of the imaginative powers,” he writes, “where it is not counterweighted by sensory perception and reason, consists precisely in what [imagination] presents to [reason]”.<sup>39</sup>

This is basically Feuerbach’s point of view on the origin of religion. It can be summed up by the following thesis: “The mystery of religion is anthropology.” This thesis of his proceeds from his understanding of the essence of religion, which could be defined in a word—human-divinity. Feuerbach also attempted to create a new, anthro-po-theistic religion with a cult of man. Sergei Bulgakov defines Feuerbach’s views in the following way:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 214.

Thus, *homo homini Deus est*<sup>40</sup>—this is the laconic formula which expresses the essence of Feuerbach’s religious views. This is not a rejection of religion; it is not even atheism. It is as a counterbalance to theism and anthro-po-theism; moreover, anthropology finds itself playing the role of theology....<sup>41</sup> Feuerbach’s *homo homini Deus est* should be translated as “the human race is god for individual persons; the species is god for the individual.”<sup>42</sup>

What is Feuerbach’s basic mistake and that of his followers with regard to the origin of religion? It is the conviction that religion is a fantastical reflection in the human consciousness of the consciousness itself and all earthly reality. He makes this assertion regardless of the great multitude of geniuses and giants of the human race who have confessed their faith in God.

Just how fantastical is Feuerbach’s hypothesis was apparent from the publication of his works *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) and *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* (1849). His views on religion were criticized even by supporters of the Hegelian school, by which he himself had been formed. This is no surprise. The conviction that God is a fantastical personification of man’s abstract thinking is tantamount to accusing the entire human race of insanity. “For what, if not insanity,” wrote Professor V. D. Kudriavstev (†1892) of the Moscow Theological Academy, “can we call the state of soul wherein a man takes his fantasy to be something which exists in reality, and continually weaves it into all aspects of his life?”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Man is god to man.”

<sup>41</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, “The Religion of Human-Divinity of L. Feuerbach,” *Two Cities* (Moscow, 1911), 1:14.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>43</sup> V. D. Kudriavstev, *Foundation of Philosophy*, 9th ed. (Sergiev Posad, 1915), 125.

Truly, only a mentally ill person could consider his fantasies to be real, living beings, and relate to them as such. Abstractions and faith, created in their objective reality, and even more so, their divinity, are things which stand too far apart to be easily united, as Feuerbach tried to do. This hypothesis could only be plausibly applied to explain the process of religion's degradation, or the origin of various pagan forms of religion, but not to the origin of the idea of God.

#### 4. Social Hypothesis

The social hypothesis is the last word of negative criticism on this subject. Its basic idea quite clearly reveals itself in the following statements:

As a form of social consciousness, religion has therefore from the beginning been a social product, the result of society's historical development. What makes it different from other forms of social consciousness is that its relationship to real life is reflected in an illusory way in it—in the form of supernatural illusions. The religious form of this reflection of real life is in turn conditioned socially: in primitive society, by the feeling of man's powerless in his struggle with nature; and in a class society, by his feeling of powerlessness before societal oppression.<sup>44</sup>

Because of the low developmental level of industrial power, people did not have regular sources from which they could receive the necessary means for existence....This engendered in man an awareness of his complete dependence upon the forces of nature, and the image of it as something standing over him, and as possessing a supernatural character.

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<sup>44</sup> A. F. Anisimov, *Stages of Development in Primitive Religion* (Moscow, 1967), 3–4.

The social roots of religion in primitive peoples are precisely in this industrial underdevelopment. However ... in order for religion to develop, certain gnoseological premises must have been formed. The religious explanation of the world supposes firstly that man became aware of himself as something separate from surrounding nature; and secondly, he had the ability to formulate an entirely abstract understanding of the general qualities of phenomena and things.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the essence of this new hypothesis leads to these basic suppositions:

1. Religion “could develop only in certain stages of development ... of both society and man,”<sup>46</sup> that is, it is something which did not exist in human society from the beginning.

2. The development of religion is conditional:

a) The social factor: “*In view of the society’s industrial underdevelopment*” (in primitive society, the feeling of man’s powerlessness in his struggle with nature; in class societies, the feeling of powerlessness under societal oppression);

b) The gnosiological factor: The ability to “formulate an entirely abstract concept,” when “a person develops the ability to think abstractly.”<sup>47</sup> Abstract thinking makes it possible for *fantastical reflections of reality* to occur in human consciousness; meaning, the supernatural, or religious. Even upon first glance at the basic suppositions of this new hypothesis, its eclectic character is obvious.

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<sup>45</sup> Prof. I. D. Pankshav, ed., *Basic Questions about Scientific Atheism* (Moscow, 1966), 37.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, because this hypothesis claims to be not only the latest word on the subject, but also to be based strictly upon scientific observation, it should be examined in more detail.

Thus, let us look at the first supposition. What is known to science about the exact time when religion first appeared in mankind? Are there any facts known which would confirm the thesis about a time when man had no religion?

The question as to the time of religion's appearance in mankind is directly interrelated with a more common question, namely, when did man himself appear on our planet?<sup>48</sup> As we know, there has never been a final scientific answer to this question. Soviet ethnography<sup>49</sup> generally accepts that man appeared on earth approximately one million years ago. However, this general quantity is linked to the moment at which modern man's supposed ancestors first appeared. But essentially, as it turns out, science only supposes a period of 100,000—at the most 150,000—years. The famous Soviet religion researcher V. F. Zybkovets makes note of this more cautiously: “There is a basis for supposing that through certain projections ... ethnography's beginnings could be traced back to the Mousterian period ... which dates to 100–150 thousand years before our time.<sup>50</sup> The appearance of *Homo sapiens*, according to the suppositions of modern science, can be traced back no further than 30–40 thousand years. Thus, Professor N. N. Dubinin, for example, writes: “Over the course of 10–15 million years a gigantic jump occurred from animal to man. This process was accompanied by internal explosions of impulsive evolution, the most important of

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, S. S. Glagolev, *Man's Past* (Sergeev Posad, 1917).

<sup>49</sup> Soviet ethnography is based upon evolutionary theory. Soviet era anthropological studies were used to promote atheism.—Trans.

<sup>50</sup> V. F. Zybkovetz, *Man without Religion* (Moscow, 1967), 78.

which occurred 30–40 thousand years ago, producing modern man.”<sup>51</sup>

Prof. William Howells, president of the American Anthropology Association and a specialist of world renown in the field of research on prehistoric man, similarly asserts that, “Around 35,000 years B.C., Neanderthal man suddenly gave place to humans of modern physical makeup, who essentially did not differ in any way from modern Europeans, other than by their strong bodily frame.”<sup>52</sup>

What now can be said about the presence of religion during the era “accessible” to ethnography? The Soviet religion scholar S. A. Tokarev considered that even “Neanderthal man, who lived during the Mousterian period (around 100–140 thousand years ago) and possessed a relatively developed consciousness—the beginnings of human speech—could possibly also have possessed the beginnings of religious beliefs.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, no one doubts the presence of religion in man (40–30 thousand years ago) in the Aurignacian and Solutrean cultures—that is, the modern human type, *Homo sapiens*. The Soviet scientist B. Titov, for example, writes, “According to archeological research, around 30–40 thousand years ago man’s biological formation was complete, and modern man appeared. The first bone remains of modern man were found on the territory of France, near Cro-Magnon. This man was named ‘Cro-Magnon,’ after the place where he was found. Excavations of Cro-Magnon settlements have produced rich materials which

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<sup>51</sup> N. N. Dubinin, “The Social and Biological in the Problem of Modern Man,” *Questions of Philosophy*, 10 (1972), 53.

<sup>52</sup> William Howells, *Courier* 819 (1972): 12. See also, “Man,” *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, (Moscow, 1978), 29:50–54.

<sup>53</sup> “The Origin of Religion,” *Abridged Dictionary of Scientific Atheism* (Moscow, 1969), 565.



characterized their comparatively complex religious imagination.”<sup>54</sup>

Many other Russian—and most Western—scientists subscribe to this opinion (for example, the famous ethnographer V. Schmidt, Prof. K. Blaker, and others). V. F. Zybkovets essentially brings this problem to a conclusion in the following words: “The question of religion in Neanderthals continues to be under discussion by soviet scientists. A. P. Okladnikov, P. I. Borisovsky, and others suppose that Neanderthal burials are one proof of religiosity in Neanderthals.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the discussion amongst scholars is only about the religiosity of Neanderthals. As for *Homo sapiens*—that is, man himself—the question is summarily resolved: science knows of no pre-religious history for *Homo sapiens*!

The question of whether or not religion was present in the so-called ancestors of man—*Ardipithecus*, *Australopithecus*, *Paranthropus*, Heidelberg Man, and the rest of the numberless species—is essentially moot as long as the degree of their “humanity” remains undetermined. The fact that these supposedly humanoid beings, which did not possess reason or the other qualities that only humans have, neither had religion, is just as unsurprising as the absence of religion amongst modern-day gorillas or chimpanzees. But let us suppose even that these “pithecuses” and “throposes” were pre-human. Is there even any evidence at the present time proving that they had no religion? There isn’t. The above-cited statement by V. F. Zybkov about the “accessibility of ethnography” extending no earlier than 100–50 thousand years ago sufficiently confirms this.

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<sup>54</sup> V. E. Titov, *Orthodoxy* (Moscow, 1967), 301.

<sup>55</sup> V. F. Zybkovets, *Man without Religion* (Moscow, 1967), 161.

The second thesis of the social hypothesis—about the social factor in the emergence of religion—thus makes no sense due to the absence of irrefutable scientific proof that religion existed in mankind from the beginning. It would follow that there are no premises to confirm that religion emerged as a result of man’s powerlessness in the face of societal oppression in class societies. Religion is much more ancient than class societies, older than social oppression. The very same Zybkovets states that the “History of class society began no earlier than six thousand years ago....”<sup>56</sup> Religion, however, according to these same sources, is about 30–40 thousand years old.

But perhaps religion emerged “as a reflection of peoples’ powerlessness in the face of nature; powerlessness due to their low level of material industrial development?”<sup>57</sup> Where, for instance, did the idea come from that primitive man felt powerless and fearful before the face of nature? Did it emerge from comfortable offices and soft armchairs? It apparently did. For, just as a large city with all of its factories, cars, tangled streets, accidents, catastrophes, and senseless victims is not something which evokes panic, helplessness, or especially religious worship in a city dweller, so for the natural man the wildest jungles are home sweet home.<sup>58</sup> But the rationalist “savage” could probably pose a hypothesis about the emergence of religion in highly developed societies out of man’s feeling of fear and powerlessness before the face of civilization with no more groundlessness than many religious researchers.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>57</sup> “Religion,” *Dictionary of Scientific Atheism* (Moscow, 1969), 597.

<sup>58</sup> It is sufficient to recall, for example, *Dersu Uzala* and V. R. Arseniev. [*Dersu Uzala* is the title of a 1923 book by the Russian explorer Vladimir Arsenyev, about his travels in the Ussuri basin and his guide, the Nanai hunter (ca. 1850–1908) Dersu Uzala, who saved the expedition team from starvation and cold. Arsenyev portrays him as a great man. —Trans.]

Which of these thinkers is right? Obviously, neither is right. Fear does not generate the idea of God (although it often makes one remember Him). Furthermore, there are no grounds for speaking of the presence of some sort of feeling of powerlessness in primitive man before the face of nature, or particular fear for the fullness of one's stomach tomorrow. All of these fears are natural for the "estranged" man of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, who finds himself in abnormal social conditions. In man's primitive communities, even with his low level of material development, he had more opportunities to obtain food and had less fear than people of our present "high technology" societies, who fear unemployment.

The premise of powerlessness in this case truly does confirm a societal origin—but only of the hypothesis, and not of religion.

The final argument of this hypothesis is gnoseological, presupposing the requirement that religious ideas could emerge, and that man developed the ability to formulate abstract ideas. The logic here is sound; only with the presence of abstract thinking is man capable of progressing from impressions made by the world of things to the beginnings of the world of ideas, including the world of religious concepts.

This argument, however, is no more than a repetition of Feuerbach's old ideas, which are unstable from both the psychological and historical points of view. For him and for his followers, the birth of religion relates to a time which is so vague, and to a humanity which is so distant from us, that it loses all real sense of these concepts. The dark night of tens, hundreds, and thousands of millennia to which the birth of humanity is relegated does not allow even the slightest possibility of seriously judging the psychology of a man of those eras. Therefore, one can draw whatever conclusions one pleases. But aren't these

conclusions the fruits of someone's imagination? We have to choose one of two actions: either to accept that the psychology of these early human beings is *terra incognita*, and in this case admit frankly that the origin of religion is a question which cannot be answered by science in its contemporary stage of development; or to look at the psyche of the first humans as being similar to that of our contemporaries, and in this case conclusively refute the fantastical assertion that early humans could have deified their own abstractions, hopes, daydreams, and fears.

Besides which, scientific research states clearly that man's religious awareness is significantly more ancient than his development of abstract thinking. Undeveloped (according to European understanding) peoples, being already religious, as a rule did not have abstract concepts, and often do not have them still. The Russian researcher V. L. Timofeev relates the following interesting fact:

The study of the culture and language of peoples in their early stages of development proves that the development of man's consciousness went from concrete, obvious concepts to more abstract generalizations, which are a deeper reflection of the essence of phenomena and objects surrounding man. Ethnographers have directed their attention to the fact that the language of such peoples is characterized by the absence of many words that are needed to name abstract concepts and the nature of things. Thus, for example, the African Ewe tribe has thirty-three words for various kinds of walking. But this tribe has no word for the idea of walking in general and unrelated to its particular characteristics. Another example is the language of the Kanak people, which has special words to

indicate the bites of various animals and insects, while it has no word for a bite, a tree, or an animal in general.

It is natural that religious images also emerging in the consciousness of primitive man should have had at first a concrete, obvious character, and could not have exhibited themselves in the form of certain faceless and abstract supernatural powers having no comparison amongst material objects surrounding man.<sup>59</sup>

As can be seen from this citation, even some modern peoples and tribes do not yet have a “quite abstract” understanding. But these tribes are most likely higher in their development than those who lived 35,000 years ago and because of this could not have had such an understanding. Nevertheless, both ancient and modern peoples had, and still have, religions which contain such concepts as “God,” “spirit,” “soul,” “angel,” and others.

This obvious contradiction in the discussion about the man of proto-religion—a completely undeveloped half-brute who barely achieved an awareness “of his own person as something separate from surrounding nature,” and at the same time, a philosopher with a bold, original mind and abstract thinking—does not allow us to relate seriously to the last argument of the hypothesis: the gnosiological.

Thus, the social hypothesis has also shown itself unable to answer the question about the origin of religion. Its inadequacies are obvious. It is eclectic; all of its elements have long been outdated. Its only new element, the social element, is seen to be not a realistic reflection of the state and level of development of the

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<sup>59</sup> I. D. Pantskhava, ed., *Basic Questions of Scientific Atheism* (Moscow, 1966), 36.

man of proto-religion, but rather an elementary projection by the modern mind into the dark night of millennia.

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The general presence of religion throughout humanity is one of the most impressive facts of world history. Such a phenomenon could not be the result of chance, of someone's fantasy or fears. It should have its own cause in something fundamental, or be rooted in man's very nature, in the very essence of being.

Negative hypotheses about the origin of the idea of God have played a major role in resolving this question. They have once again with all power of persuasion shown that religion is not a fruit of the "earth." But this being the case, where is its source?

### 5. A Positive View of the Origin of Religion

There remains only one logical, justifiable answer to this question. The answer is that there is a God, Who acts in a special way on man, who is in turn capable, under certain conditions, to accept these Divine actions. Sergei Bulgakov emphasizes,

Thus, to the preliminary and common question, "How is religion possible?" we answer, "Religion is the direct knowledge of the Divinity and a living connection with him. It is possible thanks to man's religious giftedness, through the existence of a religious organ which receives the Divinity and His influence. Without such an organ, of course, that exuberant and variegated development of religion and religions which we see throughout the history of mankind would be not be possible, nor would all its peculiarity."<sup>60</sup>  
Religion is born in the experience of God.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, *Light Unwaning*, (Sergeev Posad, 1917), 16.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid* 7

What are the internal factors which make it possible for man to have this experience, and for faith in God to emerge in him—the beginning of religion?

1. First of all, it is the sincere search for the truth, for the meaning of life, for he who has this testifies thereby that he is spiritually alive. On the contrary, he who is spiritually dead does not search, and naturally, does not find. The Lord therefore did not allow his disciple to first go and bury his father; He said, *Let the dead bury their dead* (Lk 9:59–60), so that the disciple would not also die amongst the corpses. The commandment of Christ the Savior, *Ask and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth: and he that seeketh findeth: and to him that knocketh it shall be opened* (Mt 7:7–8) is the first and most necessary condition on the path to God.

2. Recognition of the wrongness of one's life and sincere repentance of all the evil, unjust and dishonest things done that wound the conscience—interior repentance, repentance before those offended, and repentance before the priest [in confession], if one's soul should allow him to do so.

3. Resolution to uphold the Gospel morality, which significantly differs from the generally accepted, “human” manners.

Thus, seeking, fulfillment, and repentance are the beginnings of Christian morality which reveals God to the seeker; for only the *pure in heart ... shall see God* (Mt 5:8).

Naturally, it is necessary to read and study the Holy Scriptures, especially the New Testament, the works of Holy Fathers and authoritative ascetics of piety, and teachers of the Church, and to attend Church Services. If the seeker does all this with sincere

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yearning for the as yet unknown God, saying, “*O Lord, if Thou dost exist, reveal Thyself to me, a feeble sinner,*” he will inevitably receive an answer.

These conditions, of course, are no more than the most preliminary steps on the path to God, to a personal experience of Him. Just the same, if a person does not do these things, *faith and religion* in the full and true meaning of the words can hardly be born in him.

Just being sure of the existence of God, even less so of the existence of “something supernatural,” does not make a person a Christian. One must have basic knowledge of the Orthodox Faith and the principles of spiritual life proceeding from it, by which the Christian is led into the mystical (as opposed to the external) world of the Church.

In our day, the path to this mystical world is not a simple one. After having come to believe in God, one still has to choose a religion; after becoming convinced of the truth of Christianity, he has to find a church. A dispassionate study is needed of the faith and ascetical experience of the ancient Church (the period of the Ecumenical Councils) in order to see the wrongness of Catholicism, with its deep harm to spiritual life and proud pretensions of its absolute authority in the Church; the rational worldliness of Protestantism; and the sacramental groundlessness—often even open syncretism—of numberless contemporary sects. He must see all of this in order to fully consciously and freely accept Orthodoxy.

## §8. The First Religion

It is important to shed light upon the nature of the first religion, because the answer to this question will provide an understanding



of religion's essence and significance for man. This question can be approached from several positions: the scientific, the ideological (on a corresponding philosophical basis), and the Christian.

*Science.* According to [evolutionary] science, homo sapiens made his appearance, around 35,000 years ago, and had a “relatively complex religious understanding” (see the social hypothesis) in the form of sun worship. But whom did he worship—the sun, or the “Sun of righteousness,” God? Science cannot say anything about this.

Archeologists and ethnographers, in studying the beginnings of European civilization, can see back only as far as the ruins of the temple culture of Malta (4000–2000 B.C.) from which not one written iota was left. From Crete to Mycene (3000–2000 B.C.) only some household notes and several undeciphered texts are left, so one can only guess as to the character of religious beliefs of that time. Therefore, if you do not count the Bible, written history of European religion begins only with Homer's *Iliad*, that is, approximately from the eighth to seventh centuries B.C. But the most ancient dated monument of religious history in the world, a body of texts from the pyramid of King Unas (2450–2300 B.C.) speaks plainly of one Creator “of the visible and invisible world,” Ra-Atum.<sup>62</sup>

The Hindu Vedas, extending back no further than 1000 years B.C., speak of God and gods. Many scholars consider that the more ancient of these texts are closer to monotheism, while the later texts are closer to polytheism and pantheism.

A similar picture emerges with the study of religious sources from other civilizations: the Assyro-Babylonian, Chinese,

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<sup>62</sup> See: A. B. Zubov, “Victory over the Last Enemy,” *Bogoslovsky Vestnik* 1 (1993).

American Indian, Roman, and others. Scholars find obvious traces of monotheism beneath the surface of polytheism.<sup>63</sup>

Materialistic *ideology* proceeding from a belief in the universality and unconditional truth of the theory of evolution, perceives religion as having progressed in the same vein. It assumes that religion began with fetishism, then animism, star-worship, etc., and finally evolved to the higher form of monotheism.

In this concept, however, one can see at least two major mistakes.

The first is the unproven assumption that evolution is applicable to such a particular side of life as religion.

The second is the ignorance of the *fact* that lower forms of religion exist even in the present time, and of the obvious degradation of religious consciousness in more developed societies. Modern civilization is clearly disintegrating spiritually, and this is first of all pre-conditioned by its religious degeneration. Christianity is being squeezed out by a multitude of pseudo-religions, occultism, magic, astrology—that is, all of those things which, from an ideological point of view, are the beginning stage of development in religious consciousness in man on the lower rungs of his existence. This is a clear and obvious devolution, and not evolution, of religion.

The Christian view is based upon the witness of the Bible, which from the very first line speaks of the primacy of monotheism. The commandment to worship the One God is the first among the ten basic commandments of Moses and is repeated many times and

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, A. I. Pokrovsky, *The Biblical Teaching on Primitive Religions* (Holy Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra, 1901); Archimandrite Chrysanthus (Remivstev), *Religions of the Ancient World and Their Relationship to Christianity*, vol. 1–2 (Saint Petersburg, 1873, 1875); and E. Svetlov, *Magism and Monotheism* (Brussels, 1971). (See notes.)

insistently in various ways and situations throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

The objective basis for accepting biblical witness is the fact that the Bible's reliability as one of the most ancient historical written sources is supported by a mass of scientific and, most importantly, archeological research.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, we can speak on sufficient grounds of monotheism as the most ancient religion of mankind, which only later, for various reasons, led to the emergence of other religious forms. We shall name a few of these reasons.

### § 9. The Multiplicity of Religions

The Bible discerns the main factor in the waning of monotheism and the emergence of various religious beliefs to be the moral corruption of people. Thus, the Apostle Paul wrote: *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator* (Rom 1, 21–25).

The above passage outlines the psychological origin and consequences of the spiritual degradation which occurs in a person when the fleshly (cf. 1 Cor 3:3), pagan origins start growing in him, and his spiritual needs are suppressed. In this instance the

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<sup>64</sup> See for example, K. Keram, *Gods, Sarcophagi, and Scholars* (Moscow, 1960); L. Vully, *Ur of the Chaldeans* (Moscow, 1961); E. Tseren, *Biblical Hills* (Moscow, 1966).

Apostle writes about one of the forms of paganism which was most widespread in the Roman Empire. But the causes he indicates are: pride and lack of reverence for God (*they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful*), unbelief, concentrating all their powers upon goals of purely earthly life (*but became vain in their imaginations*), moral looseness (*the lusts of their own hearts*). These causes also lead to the emergence of many other forms of paganism.

Some ancient—not biblical—authors also indicate moral causes as the source of corruption in people’s religious views. Cicero, for example, wrote, “Many think of the gods unrightly, but this usually comes from moral corruption and vice; nevertheless, all are convinced that there is a Divine power and nature.”<sup>65</sup>

There are also a good number of secondary causes for the emergence of new religious beliefs. This is the separation and isolation of nationalities, which enabled them to lose the purity of the original Revelation of God, passed along only *orally*; anthropomorphism of thought, which attributed to God all the human qualities and passions; and, especially, the metaphoric quality of the languages of the ancient peoples, using natural phenomena, attributes of humans, animals, birds, etc, which gradually took on a sacred character and were deified. For example, the sun as the image of God—the source of life and light—particularly often became an object of religious veneration. Thus also did the images of higher gods (Zeus, Jupiter) emerge, as well as various gods and goddesses.

*God is a spirit* (Jn 4:24), and the knowledge of Him depends upon a person’s degree of spiritual purity: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). Therefore, depending upon

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<sup>65</sup> Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*. Cited from V. Kudriavtsev, *The Beginning Foundations of Philosophy* (Sergeev Posad, 1910), 176–177.

a nation's degree of righteousness (or perversity), various conceptions of God arose: one or many, kind or wrathful, righteous or evil, and so on. Every nation that had a feeling of God created an image of Him corresponding to its own level of spiritual, moral, and intellectual development. This is how the different "natural" (pagan) religions came into being.

Another category of religion to which the Old Testament Jewish and Christian religions belong is the *religion of Revelation*. They are monotheistic, and have a direct Revelation of God written in the Holy Scriptures as the source of their teachings. The principle characteristic of these religions consists in the fact that their basic and founding truths are not the result of human dreams, fantasies, or philosophical conclusions projecting various characteristics of man and nature onto the idea of God, but are rather acts of direct Revelation by God Himself. This Revelation had two very unequal steps.

The first step, Old Testament Revelation, was ethnically limited. It was given in language and forms corresponding psychologically to the Jewish people and their spiritual, moral, intellectual, and esthetical capabilities. Because of this, it had a nature imperfect in many ways (cf. Mt 5:21–48) (see Chapter 6, *Old Testament Religion*).

The second step, New Testament Revelation, is no longer oriented towards a particular nation, but has a universal intention. The basic Christian truths (in contrast to those pertaining to all religions) witness to its Divine character and absence of any ideas of human origin. This content has no precedent in the history of religious consciousness! The Apostle Paul writes concerning the most important of these truths, *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness* (1 Cor. 1:23).

## § 10. Not Every Faith Is a Religion.

Although there are many and varied religions, they all have certain common characteristics that set them apart from other world views (see Section 4, Religion's Basic Truths). Teachings which deny even some of the fundamental truths of religion cannot be categorized as religions. In some of these, true materialism and atheism hide behind a religious exterior. In others, mysticism is emphasized along with a conscious and open war against God. In a third category of religious-philosophical systems of thought, the very idea that man needs to have a spiritual connection with God is largely absent.

With respect to the first two categories, we can limit the discussion to the following brief examples. The Judaic teaching of the Sadducees, while fully observing the cult of Old Testament religion, denies its most important truth: the existence of the spiritual world, human souls, and eternal life. (*The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit* (Acts 23:8). Therefore, although Sadducee teaching is found within a religious system, by itself it is not a religion, but rather obvious materialism and in fact, atheism.

Another example is satanism, which accepts the existence of God, but preaches hatred for Him, along with any goodness or righteousness. Satanism is thus a rejection of the very essence of religion, and is nothing more than an ideology of criminality.

Also completely foreign to the nature of religion and, first of all, to Christianity, are such well-known movements as extra-sensory perception, Agni Yoga, Scientology, and others,<sup>66</sup> which offer

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<sup>66</sup> The author names here some of the more widespread movements in Russia. Popular movements in the West could be added to this list, such as Transcendental Meditation, "Hare Krisna," and the like. —Trans.

various psychotropic and mystical methods of supposed healing of various kinds of illnesses.

Just as far from religion are also some of the well-known religious-philosophical systems of thought which have the idea of God's existence, but do not become religions because of it. These are, for example, *deism*, *pantheism*, and *theism*, which have a long history and widespread popularity.

## § 11. Pseudo-religious Systems of Thought: *Deism, Pantheism, and Theism*

1. *Deism* (from the Latin *Deus*, or God). This religious-philosophical movement arose in seventeenth-century England but became particularly widespread in Europe during the following century. Deism accepts the existence of God but looks at Him as no more than the Creator of the world and its laws; it completely excludes the possibility of any sort of Revelations, miracles, or actions of a providential character coming from Him. God is outside the world. He is transcendental (from the Latin *transcendere*, to go out of the boundaries of something)—that is, absolutely unknowable by man. No communion between man and God is possible.

The created world, according to the Deist view, is similar to a perfect timepiece mechanism which, having been made, is left by the craftsman to its own devices. Man is absolutely autonomous, and independent from God. An adequate and full life, not only physical but spiritual, does not require prayer, Divine Services, or Sacraments. There is no need for any help from God or His grace, for this would all disrupt man's freedom. All of mankind's grandiose religious experience is simply crossed out by man's voluntary denial. Therefore,

religion with all its dogmas, commandments, and rules turns out to be an unreliable and senseless teaching. The Church, naturally, becomes extraneous and even harmful.

Thus, seemingly accepting God, deism completely denies any need for Him by man, and thus clears the path to open war with God. It is no accident that the lips of the deist Voltaire uttered such a blasphemous battle cry against the Catholic Church as, “Crush the vermin!” Deism is not the incidental product of the thoughts of some “strange” philosophers. Its psychological roots stretch back to the first created man, who dreamed of becoming “like God” without God, against God, and having begun a “new life” (which is death) in a “new” world. This inherited “self love,” having found a beneficial medium for its development in the worldly church life of that era in the West, gave birth to a multitude of unhealthy things in the human mind and heart. Amongst these are deism, atheism, materialism, freemasonry, etc.

2. *Pantheism* (from the Greek Θεός, or God, and πᾶς, gen. παντός, meaning all, or whole) is a religious-philosophical teaching essentially identifying God with the cosmos (nature, man). God is not thought of in pantheism as some Person existing in and of Himself, independent of the world. He is completely immanent (from the Latin *immanens*, inwardly present to something) to the cosmos. The Jewish philosopher Spinoza (†1677) insisted that “God is nature” (*Deus sive natura*). According to the pantheistic teaching, man is a small part of God, and is aware of himself for but a moment of earthly life in order to dissolve forever in the infinite ocean of Spirit. Pantheism, in essence, denies not only man’s free will, but even the reality of the world, or of God.

The famous Russian philosopher Lev Mikhailovich Lopatin (†1920) quite rightly noted that, according to pantheism, “There is



apparently only one escape for this thought: either pronounce the world a phantom and destroy it in God, or force God to disappear in the world to such a degree that only His name remains.”<sup>67</sup> Pantheism almost always ends in the latter. A peculiar attempt to smooth out this tendency is so-called *panenteism* (from the Greek παν εν Θεω, all in God), a religious-philosophical teaching of the German philosopher Krause,<sup>68</sup> which he presented in 1828. According to him, all that exists abides in God, but God remains a person, and does not dissolve into the world.

Pantheism has a long history and many various forms. It is particularly developed in the Hindu systems of thought. There pantheism has existed for thousands of years. It took on various forms in the West with different thinkers (Spinoza, Hegel, Schleiermacher).

In Russia, it was developed in a very primitive form by Lev Tolstoy. In place of God, he inserted “understanding of life,” which is love. Religious life for him is where goodness consists in suppressing the “animal life” in oneself, in the “good of others, and suffering for that good.” One who lives this way has God in himself, and is thus a “son of God,” just as Christ is. Death returns the “son of God” to the bosom of the Father—God, in which the son disappears, as in the general world essence. In this way, according to Tolstoy, there is no personal God, no personal immortality of man and, it would follow, no real meaning to life; for what would be the sense of such disappearance?

Pantheism, like deism, does not provide any basis for a living, personal relationship of man with God, and therefore religion becomes essentially impossible in it. This basis only appears when

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<sup>67</sup> L. Lopatin, *Positive Problems of Philosophy* (Moscow, 1911), 277–278.

<sup>68</sup> Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832). —Trans.

an impersonal principality (for example, Brahma) incarnates and becomes a personal divinity (for example, Krishna).

3. *Theism* (from the Greek Θεός, God), as a system of thought accepts, in contrast to pantheism, the existence of a personal God, and in contrast to deism, asserts the possibility and necessity of His revelation and providence for the world and man. God is not only transcendental to the world, but also immanent to it. A no less important differentiating characteristic of theism is its acceptance of man's free will, and the possibility of his entering into communion with God. There exist various theistic systems; and because their main precepts are in common with religious truths, the religions themselves are usually considered as having theistic views.

Just the same, theism remains only a teaching and not a religion, which is first of all a particular spiritual life of man linked together with prayer, ascetic struggle, and a living experience of connection with God.

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Professor M. A. Starokadomsky (†1973) of the Moscow Theological Academy gave a brief and precise characterization of these three concepts in his speech preceding his doctoral dissertation.

Only theism, which believes in the existence of an Absolute and all-perfect Person, Who by a free, creative act called the world and man out of nothing and provides for them, can satisfy a living religious feeling. Prayer as the main expression of religious life can be directed only to the all-good Highest Authority over the world, Who is able to give grace-filled help. Neither pantheism nor deism can serve as the foundation of religious life. In the Absolute Substance of

Spinoza, God and the world are as one indivisible whole. In it, everything is bound by a law of iron-clad necessity, and there is no place for bursts of free movement. And *Amor Dei*—love for God—is for Spinoza as it was for the stoics: no more than a voluntary submission to inescapable fate. Also for Hegel the Absolute is at first represented as an abstract, empty concept, and only at the end of the process of dialectical development does it attain self-awareness. Because the movement of this understanding is strictly determined by logical laws, a person's free communion with the Absolute is not allowable here.

Deism presents a similar picture, in which the world is like a clock ideally built, having a strictly measured movement which requires no interference by the Chief Craftsman.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> M. A. Starokadomsky, *Experience of Basic Views of Theism in the Works of Moscow Theological Academy Professors* (Moscow, 1969), typed manuscript (MTA Library).

## *Chapter 2*

### *The Existence of God*

There is no problem more important for man than understanding the meaning of his life. But in the final analysis, this question always leads one to questions about God: does He exist or not? One's relationship to all life changes based upon the answer to this question. Some die in cruel torments for their faith in Him, but do not deny Him. Others cruelly torture and kill because of that same faith, and do not repent. Some proclaim that they know He exists, and in fact prove this by their life and death. For others, this is no more than fanaticism, which should be mercilessly uprooted. Who is right?

There are two methods of knowledge. One is the empirical method—through vision and direct experience. It is the main method used in both everyday life and religion. The other is the rational method, the path of logical intellectual conclusion. It is indirect, it is auxiliary, and only has meaning until something has been proven by experience.

A relatively insignificant percentage of people have had a religious *experience* (vision) that leaves no doubt as to the existence of God. A large part of humanity *believes* in His existence. A smaller part, to the contrary, *believes* in the nonexistence of God. In both categories there are those who are seeking “precise knowledge.” They need arguments and proof in order to step upon the path of their own experience of knowing God. What is proof, and what is it that can be proven?

## § 1. Proof

### 1. An Understanding of Proof

*First of all*, it is necessary to differentiate between the broad and the narrow meaning of proof. Proof in the broad sense is any procedure for determining the truth of any judgment, either by logical reasoning, or by perceiving and recognizing the subjects which act upon the sensory organs, and references to such a perception.

Proof in the narrow sense is a logical analysis of the supposition being proved from several suppositions issuing from the original supposition, the truth of which has already been proven or accepted. The issuing suppositions are called the premises, basis, or arguments of the original supposition, while the supposition, the grounds for truth for which the thesis of proof or conclusion is its goal. The term “proof” in formal logic is understood in this narrow sense.

*Secondly*, there are great differences in proof in various fields of human thought (scientific, social, etc.). These differences are expressed in the different character of basis and thesis of proof.

From the point of view of experience’s participation in proof—out of all fields of science, those disciplines stand out which use experimental data directly in the form of suppositions justified by means of sensory perception, and in which experimental data belong to a generalized, abstract, and idealized form.

Amongst the first kind of disciplines are natural sciences: experimental physics, chemistry, biology, geology, astronomy, and the like, as well as sciences concerned with society, such as archeology, history, and others. Proof, supported by experience (direct and indirect) is called empirical, or experiential. These sciences are composed for the most part of inductive conclusions.

Amongst the second kind of disciplines are mathematics, modern formal logic, some fields of cybernetics, and theoretical physics. In these disciplines, the direct subjects of observation are not sensory perceived things, but so-called abstract objects (concepts) like, for example, mathematical abstraction of a point that has no physical size, the abstraction of an ideally correct geometric figure, and so on. For this reason, experiential inductive proof cannot be used in these sciences, but deductive proof can.

## 2. Proof and Truth

The aim of proof is to show the truth of a thesis. Nevertheless, the truth of some reasoning, substantiated by means of proof, as a rule does not have an unconditional character; that is, in most cases the proven reasoning is only relative truth. The relativity of the truth of proven reasoning proceeds:

*Firstly*, from the fact that the basis of proof only approximately reliably reflects reality: that is, in their turn are relative truths (this is particularly clearly seen in empirical sciences);

*Secondly*, the applicability of the given logic to one circle of objects does not necessarily mean it will apply to another, wider circle. For example, logic applied to finite objects could be inapplicable to infinite objects. The famous Czech mathematician Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848) considered it paradoxical that a large number of all the natural numerals are equal in strength in their own part to a large number of all even (or odd) numerals. His mistake proceeded from the fact that the nature of finite objects (a part lesser than the whole) could not be mechanically extended to infinite objects;

*Thirdly*, there exists a whole series of concepts which, not being clearly determined, could lead to contradictions when used within the framework of ordinary human logic. For example, the concept

of God's omnipotence, faultily understood as an unlimited ability to perform any action whatsoever, leads to a paradox such as the famous question: "Can God create a rock that He cannot lift?" (In actuality, His omnipotence is only one of the manifestations of His love and wisdom. Therefore, God cannot do evil, create another god, cease to be God, etc.)

Therefore, in order to guarantee the truth of the proven reasoning, it is necessary to clearly determine the concepts used and the applicability of the logic used to the given group of objects, and to clarify the non-contradictory nature of the given system. The latter, however, is a particularly difficult problem even for formal arithmetic.

As proven by Hegel, the assertion that a formal system is non-contradictory within the framework of the system itself is unprovable. The great German mathematician, David Hilbert (1873–1943) lamented over this: "Just think—in mathematics, that paragon of reliability and truth, any development of concept and conclusion ... leads to absurdities. Where can we find reliability and truth if even mathematic thinking misfires?"<sup>70</sup>

Modern "development of the theory of knowledge has shown that no form of conclusion can provide an absolutely reliable knowledge."<sup>71</sup>

### 3. On the Relativity of Empirical Proof

Empirical proof, in the final analysis, appeals to experience—that is, to that which can be directly or indirectly known by people (for example, through an instrument, or trust in an authority). No matter how convincing theoretical supposition may seem to be,

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<sup>70</sup> Y. Popov, Y. Pukhachev, "Paradoxes," *Science and Life* 1 (1971):102.

<sup>71</sup> B. V. Akhlibinsky, *Miracle of Our Times: Cybernetics and the Problem of Development* (Leningrad, 1963), 91. See below for something more specific about this in Chapter. 3, § 1:5—The Reliability of Scientific Knowledge.

experience actually provides the most trustworthy criteria for veracity. In the magazine *Knowledge Is Power* there was an article<sup>72</sup> in which the author cleverly “proved” that the giraffe is a mythical animal, inasmuch as any animal with such a long neck would have no chance of survival in the lengthy evolutionary process and struggle for survival. Other interesting examples showing the significance of experience in solving problems are the famous *aporiae* of Zenon (fifth century B.C.), who also cleverly “proves,” for example, the absence of movement in the world, without at all doubting the existence of movement.

What was the reason for such a skeptical relationship to seemingly inarguable, logical proof? Experience. No one believes in the truth of this proof, because “the final proof of any supposition ... can only be in its practical testing.”<sup>73</sup>

Of course, not just any experience can be a sufficient argument. Experiment alone is not very convincing. It is not always easy to prove the veracity of the fact itself, or the correctness with which the experiment was conducted, taking into consideration all the factors that determined its results. Finally, in natural experience, as in artificial experience (experiment), results can often be explained in different ways.

But for all of empirical proof’s relativity, empirical evidence is still the most reliable and fundamental evidence in all natural sciences.

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<sup>72</sup> *Knowledge Is Power* 5 (1967): 28; and 6 (1968): 49.

<sup>73</sup> From the entry for “proof,” B. A. Vedensky, *Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Moscow: 1963–64), Vol. I, 343.



## 4. Conclusions

Thus, proof is the foundation of truthfulness (or falsity) of a given confirmation. Proof which proves the falsity of a thesis is called refutation, or disproof.

Proof in the full sense of the word is proof only in mathematics or logic. But this proof is all about idealized concepts and symbols, and has nothing to do with real objects; however, it is apparently grouped with them in a certain co-relationship.

Empirical evidence no longer has the same strength of logical persuasion. In the realm of physical phenomena it is harder to arrive at mathematical obviousness, and this forces us to use insufficiently grounded premises as proof, which undermines the reliability of the conclusions. Nevertheless, all natural sciences operate on this kind of evidence. Less strict forms of proof are used in the fields of history, philosophy, and questions of world view,<sup>74</sup> to which questions concerning the existence of God are related.

Just the same, the complexity of this question has never been an obstacle to man's awareness in his search for truth through the comparative assessment of arguments in favor of one or the other of the two main, mutually exclusive world views: the religious and the atheistic. There can only be one truth: either there is a God, and thus there is also eternity and meaning to life; or there is no God, no eternity, and man awaits only the senselessness of death. But what are the conclusions of both world views?

We shall take a look first at the more famous arguments for the belief that God does not exist.

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<sup>74</sup> From the entry for "proof," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Moscow: 1962), vol. II, 42–48.

## § 2. There Is No God Because . . .

### 1. Science has proven that there is no God.

This conviction has no ground whatsoever under its feet, and is nothing but propaganda. Scientific proof of the nonexistence of God not only does not exist, but cannot exist in principle, partly for the following reasons:

*Firstly*, natural knowledge as a whole, by determination,<sup>75</sup> studies the visible world.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the foundation of religious truth—the existence of God—cannot be subject to scientific refutation.

*Secondly*, naturally, only scientists are able to reliably know what science proves and disproves. Therefore, the fact that there are a huge number of famous scientists who believe in God and Jesus Christ is the most convincing witness to the fact that science does not refute the existence of God. It suffices to name only a few world-renowned scientists who were religious: the Catholic Canon Nicolaus Copernicus (†1543), who caused a revolution in astronomy; Johannes Kepler (†1630), who founded the heliocentric system; Blaise Pascal (†1662), physicist, mathematician, religious thinker, and founder of classical hydrostatics; Isaac Newton (†1727), physicist, mathematician, and astronomer; Mikhail Lomonosov (†1765), universal scholar and encyclopedia writer; Luigi Galvani (†1798), physiologist, and one of the founders of the teaching on electric current; André-Marie Ampère (†1856), the founder of electrodynamics; Alessandro Volta (†1872), also one of the founders of the teaching on electricity; Gregor Mendel (†1884),

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<sup>75</sup> See Chapter 4, § 1: Forms of Revelation.

<sup>76</sup> The great French scientist and Christian Louis Pasteur, when speaking about science in his scientific conclusions, wrote: “Here there is no religion, philosophy, atheism, materialism, or spiritualism. This is a question of facts and only facts.” (From L. Vasiliev, *Suggestion from a Distance* [Moscow: 1962], 18.)

an Augustinian priest, and the founder of genetics; Jean-Baptiste Dumas, (†1884), the founder of organic chemistry; Sofia Kovalevskaya (†1891), mathematician; Louis Pasteur (†1895), the father of modern microbiology and immunology; Alexander Popov (†1906), the inventor of the radio; Dimitry Mendeleev (†1907), the creator of the periodic system of chemical elements; Ivan Pavlov (†1936), the father of physiology; Pavel Florensky (†1937), priest, theologian, and scholar; Erwin Schrödinger (†1955), one of the creators of quantum mechanics; Vladimir Filatov (†1956), ophthalmologist; Louis de Broglie (†1987), one of the creators of quantum mechanics; Charles Townes, one of the creators of quantum electronics; and many, many others.

*Thirdly*, scientific knowledge can never enable man to encompass the totality of existence, for “on any level of our civilization’s development, our knowledge will only be a tiny island in the endless ocean of the unfamiliar, unknown, and unknowable.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, even if there were no God, science could never say that God does not exist. By asserting the opposite, atheism shows itself to be anti-scientific, and in direct contradiction to one of the most elementary scientific conclusions.

## 2. No one ever saw Him.

This assertion is naïve at the least. We believe in the existence of very many things and phenomena which not only have never been seen by any person, but indeed cannot be seen; for example, the subatomic world, the infinite universe, or our own minds (the existence of latter of which no one is likely to doubt), and so on. God is Spirit, Which “is seen” not with eyes, but by the spirit—by

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<sup>77</sup> Gustav Naan, “God, the Bible, and Eternity,” *Science and Religion* 3 (1959): 23.

a passionless mind and pure heart (cf. Mt 5:8). History contains countless instances of such visions of God.

### 3. The Bible contains many contradictions.

The presence of contradictions in the Bible could have some place in an argument against its being Divine revelation, but it could in no way answer the question of God's existence. Not only Christians believe in God. Furthermore, most of these so-called contradictions are either imagined, or are coming from a simple misunderstanding of the text and various readers' own way of reading them. Only a few events that are stated in differing ways in the Gospels (for example, the number of demonized Gadarenes—one or two; did the cock crow once or twice before Peter denied Christ? and others) and which have nothing to do with the main issues of religion—questions of faith and spiritual life, bespeak only the fact that the entire Gospel history was described by the evangelists with the greatest reverence, without embellishment or imitation. They recorded only what either they themselves saw or heard from eye-witnesses who they knew well. It is remarkable that none of the disciples, nor any Christians of following generations, dared to touch these contradictions. This is yet another important confirmation of the historical authenticity of events related in the Gospels.

### 4. There is much suffering in the world.

“The great amount of unfair and innocent suffering which goes on in the world—isn't this sufficient argument against belief in the existence of God?” This is one of the most oft-repeated objections. It comes from a misunderstanding of the Christian teaching on Divine love, man's freedom, and the nature of sin.

The nature of the relationship between God and man in Christian theology is described by the concept of “synergy” (from

the Greek *συνεργία*, or cooperation, collaboration). Synergy means that man cannot save himself, nor can God save man without man's own will. Salvation is wrought by God, but only under the condition that man wishes it, and will do everything possible in order to become Godlike in his spiritual and moral natures. These natures are portrayed in the Gospels in the image of Christ and His disciples. God cannot bring an evil soul into His Kingdom by force. The soul is required to change, and this is conditioned upon the person's freedom. Until it changes, it will be tortured by the evil abiding within it. Man's suffering springs from the disharmony of his spirit with God, Who is the "Law" of our existence. This is the main reason for all of man's woes.

Saint Anthony the Great (4th century) very clearly shows the reasons for human suffering.

God, is good, passionless, and immutable. If anyone who accepts as blessed and true that God is inalterable, but is perplexed that He (being as He is) rejoices in those who are kind, is repulsed by those who are evil, and is wrathful with sinners but merciful to them when they repent—to these we must say that God does not rejoice or get angry, for joy and anger are passions. It makes no sense to think that the Divinity is happy or sad over human affairs. God is good, and does only good; He does no harm to anyone, and is always the same. But when we are kind we enter into communion with God according to our similarity to Him, and when we are evil we are separated from Him according to our dissimilarity with Him. In living virtuously we are God's, but when we become evil, we are rejected by Him. However, this does not mean that He is angry with us, but rather that our sins do not allow God to shine in us, and unite us instead with the demons. If we later seek out remission of our sins through prayer and good works,

this does not mean that we have won favor with God and changed Him, but rather that through such actions and through our turning to God we have healed the evil within us, and we again become capable of tasting God's goodness. So, saying that God turns away from those who are evil is like saying that the sun hides from those who are blind.<sup>78</sup>

Other Fathers [of the Church] similarly explain the reason for human sorrows (God's "punishment").

*Sin is the transgression of the law* (1 Jn 3:4). Therefore sin carries man's punishment *within itself*. Suffering is the result of sins. With some sins, the reason for suffering is obvious; for example, drunkenness and drug abuse. It is more difficult to see the causes of other sins, particularly psychological/emotional ones, but they affect a person just as cruelly. What disasters haven't such sins as envy, vanity, greed, etc. caused? Don't they cause arguments, enmity, murder, wars, and so on? The Apostle James even said, *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed* (Jas 1:13–14).

On the other hand, the goal of man's earthly life according to Christian teaching consists of his preparation for eternity. Just as a child needs to prepare himself for adult life, so does every person need to prepare himself for the future life with hard work, patience, sympathy and love for other people, and the struggle with the evil arising in his heart and mind. Sorrows are also necessary, for they remind him that this life by itself is temporary and senseless. Sorrows instruct and form a person. The Apostle Paul writes, *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous:*

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<sup>78</sup> *The Philokalia* (Moscow, 1905), vol. I, 90, § 150 (Russian).

*nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby* (Heb 12:11). Saint Isaac the Syrian warns, “He who rests on his virtue without suffering tribulation has the door of pride open before him.”<sup>79</sup> “The spirit of the devil, not the spirit of God, dwells in those who pass their lives in ease [without sorrows].”<sup>80</sup>

The suffering of children has a somewhat different nature. Their suffering is sacrificial, because they are mostly caused not by their own sins, but by the sins of their “close ones” (cf. Jn 9:2). The healthy members of a living body suffer with the sick members and compensate for their function as much as possible; a similar process of healing co-suffering of the sick members by the healthy takes place in the living organism of human society (although with children it is not a conscious process). The healing action of this suffering bears a spiritual character. Children themselves are not aware of this in the given moment. But what God has done through them for their family, and what blessedness they themselves acquired through this act of love, will be revealed to them in the future life. And they will thank God eternally for those sufferings.

Not all children are given these sufferings, but only those who are able to accept them as a gift of God, as an exclusive possibility to suffer for their loved ones. Truly, through these sufferings they help their family to be purified, to come to their senses. Very many people have begun to consider the meaning of this life thanks to their children’s suffering. By remembering inevitable death, they come to believe in God.

We already know that love is stronger than death. But true love is sacrificial, and only the more spiritually pure are capable of it,

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<sup>79</sup> Abba Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies* (Moscow, 1858), Homily 34:218, 219; English translation, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 57:283.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 36:228; English translation, *ibid.*, 60:293.

amongst whom children are foremost. Their sufferings are like the “innocent” sufferings that self-sacrificing people voluntarily face, laying down their lives for others, giving their blood or their healthy organs in order to save another’s life. Enrapt in the impulse of love, these people sacrifice themselves without questioning whether the sufferer is guilty and deserves his calamity, or whether he is innocent. True love does not know such questions. It has only one goal—to save the person. We find the ideal of such love in Christ, Who *hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God* (1 Pet 3:18).

The significance of innocent suffering can be understood only when there is faith that life does not end with the death of the body, that bodily life is a serious preparatory step to eternity, and that no suffering for others will remain without a great and eternal reward from God. The Apostle Paul wrote, *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Rom. 8:18). *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal* (2 Cor 4:17:18).

The deep spiritual explanation for the meaning of sorrows, sickness, and suffering that the righteous have to bear is set forth by the Holy Fathers. Their basic thought was expressed by Saint Isaac the Syrian: “For this reason God allows His saints to be tried by every sorrow ... so that they might gain wisdom from temptations.”<sup>81</sup> “If you wish to acquire virtue, give yourself over to all manner of sorrows; for sorrows give birth to humility.” Most of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Homily 37:229–230; English translation, *ibid.*, 61:295.



those who suffer innocently (according to human understanding) are truly like gold in the fire, purified of the final shadows of sin and passion, and acquire even greater spiritual perfection. This perfection of spirit fills them with such love and joy that they are ready for any kind of suffering. The history of Christian ascetics and martyrs is a clear confirmation of this.

Saint Isaac the Syrian, for example, relates, “Abba Agathon, as it is told concerning him, was wont to say ‘I should wish to find a leper, give him my body and receive his.’ This is perfect love.”<sup>82</sup> When Saint Isaac himself was asked, “What is a merciful heart?” he answered, “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 he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him ... because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God....The sign of those who have attained to perfection is this: if for the sake of his love for men a man were to be given over to the fire ten times a day, he would not be content with this....”<sup>83</sup>

We can see from this that the question about so-called innocent sufferings, which at first glance testifies against the existence of a God of Love, proceeds from the lack of understanding of the nature of these sufferings, and the attempt to make sense of them from a judicial, legalistic point of view, from the position that they are “unlawful” or “unfair.” In actuality, the given question is clarified only through the recognition of love as the highest law of life and faith in eternal life. They reveal the deep meaning of all

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Homily 55:362; English translation, *ibid.*, 76:378.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Homily 48:299, 300; English translation, *ibid.*, 71:344-, 345.

human calamity, the moral greatness of suffering for one another, and especially the suffering of a righteous one for the unrighteous.

On the contrary, if there is no God and no eternity, then what is the sense of all this innocent (!) suffering? A game of blind natural powers, accident, the course of events, or the unpunished arbitrariness of human cruelty? It begs the question, “what was the meaning of the lives of those innocent sufferers and their often cruel, inhuman tortures?” The atheistic answer could obviously only be, “None whatsoever!”<sup>84</sup>

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These are the most often repeated objections to the existence of God. The inadequacy of their argument is, of course, obvious. But every seeking individual should come to his own conviction that there is or isn't a God. Christianity offers a concrete means for proving its own assertions. Atheism not only does not have such means—it cannot have them. For in order to be reliably convinced that God does not exist it is necessary to have a thorough knowledge of all existence as a whole. This, however, is impossible due to the infiniteness of the known world. Therefore, atheism cannot offer any answer to its own *central* question: What should man do in order to be convinced that God does not exist? other than this one: Test the path that religion offers. Atheism has no other solution.

Thus, religion invites, while the absurdity of atheism pushes every sincerely seeking person into a personal, practical realization of the religious conditions underlying the active knowledge of God.

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<sup>84</sup> For more on this question, see, for example: Bishop Theodore (Posdееvsky), “In Answer to the Question of Suffering,” *Bogoslovsky Vestnik* 10 (1909): 286–311; A. I. Vedensky, “On So-called Innocent Sufferings,” *Soul-Profiting Readings* 12 (1891): 505; Archpriest P. Svetlov, *Teachings of the Christian Faith in Apologetic Explanation* (Kiev, 1910): 697.

### § 3. God Exists

Even on the purely theoretical level, there are arguments which aide the unprejudiced to see that an acceptance of God's existence is not the fruit of ungrounded human fantasy, but is rather logically immeasurably more probable and justifiable than the atheistic assumptions concerning the question of the essence of existence and the meaning of human life. Let us look at a few of these arguments.

#### 1. The Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument (from the Greek κόσμος, meaning order, creation of the world, world) was expressed by the ancient Greek philosophers Plato (†347 B.C.), Aristotle (†322 B.C.), and other ancient thinkers. It was subsequently developed by many others. It is based upon the acceptance of causality as the all-encompassing law of existence. Proceeding from this law, one reaches the conclusion that there should be an initial cause for existence itself—that is, of everything that exists. Such a cause, naturally, could only be a super-existence, which is not dependent upon anything else, and exists eternally (that is, it is the “cause” of its own existence). This super-existence is God.

The conditional character of this argument consists in the fact that the concept of causality itself and objective inherence in the entire world's life phenomena has been interpreted in many different ways throughout the history of philosophy. The English philosopher David Hume (†1761) and the German, Immanuel Kant (†1804), for example, denied the objective existence of causality in the world. Hume considered it a matter of what we are used to, and Kant considered it an *a priori* quality of reason. Modern physics also offers us a series of phenomena in which the usual cause and effect relationships are apparently disrupted.

Niels Bohr (†1962), Werner Heisenberg (†1976), and Paul Dirac (†1984), representatives of two different branches of the field of quantum mechanics, confirm that causality in the realm of atomic and subatomic phenomena have lost their unconditional significance;<sup>85</sup> that in world of atoms, statistical regularity holds sway, but not causal regulation. Even so, most scholars and thinkers consider causality to be a universal law of the world.

Should the world have a reason for its existence? This is essentially a philosophical and not scientific question. As the scholar Yakov Zeldovich<sup>86</sup> notes, “The question about originating conditions does not lie in physics. And if we do not accept the postulation that some sort of Divine Power was given, then we must find a scientific approach to the problem of choosing originating conditions.”<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, there is no scientific answer to the question of “origin” (the first causality of the world), nor is there likely ever to be one. The majority of thinkers, both ancient and modern, call this “originating” Creator and Prime Mover (as Aristotle puts it), God.

However, we cannot of course exclude the purely theoretical and other variations on the concept of original cause—for example, the universal soul of the Stoics, the unconscious of Nicolai Hartmann (†1906), or eternally existing matter, and others.

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<sup>85</sup> “In the exact formulation of the law of causality, namely, that if we know the present exactly, we can calculate the future as well, it is not the conclusion which is mistaken, but the premise, inasmuch as all experiments are subject to the laws of quantum mechanics; with the help of quantum mechanics the groundlessness of the law of causality is established.” Werner Heisenberg, *Physical Principles of Quantum Theory* (Moscow, 1932), 61 (Russian translation from German).

<sup>86</sup> Yakov Borisovich Zeldovich (1914–1987), prolific Soviet physicist.

<sup>87</sup> Yakov Zeldovich, “An Idea’s Own Life,” *Literary Gazette* (Feb. 2, 1972): 11.

## 2. The Teleological Argument

The teleological argument (from the Greek *τελεόω*—to finish, bring to completion, to the finish; *τέλος*—end, fulfillment, result; *λόγος*—word, reason, proof) is an argument founded upon the wisdom and perfection found in the observable world. It is one of the most widespread by virtue of its simplicity and convincingness. It is well known from deep antiquity. Religious-philosophical thought of nearly all ages and peoples knows it. Its basic thought can be summed up like this: The world's order, as a whole and in its (known) parts, is amazing by its harmony and regularity,<sup>88</sup> which testify to the supreme reason and omnipotence of its creator. Such a creator can only be God.

There are no empirical grounds for denying the wisdom behind the world's design. Nevertheless, from the formal-logical point of view, the regularity of the world's design as a whole and in its parts cannot be proven. There are other considerations. Kant, for example, proceeding from his own system, spoke of the regularity not of the world, but of reason: "Reason does not get its laws (*a priori*) from nature, but ascribes them to it."<sup>89</sup>

Just the same, the regularity observed in the world has always amazed all natural scientists and thinkers (including Kant), leading the majority of them to the recognition of the existence of a Divine Creator.

Here are a few quotes from well-known modern scholars about this. "The equilibrium between gravitational and electromagnetic interchange in a star," writes P. Davies, "is observed with almost unthinkable exactitude. Calculations show that a change in any of these interchanges by as little as  $10^{-40}$  of its size would result in

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Nicolai Kolchurinsky, *The World Is God's Creation* (Moscow, 2000).

<sup>89</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Works*, Vol. IV, Chap. 1 (Moscow, 1966), 140 (Russian translation from German).

catastrophe for a star of the Sun's type.”<sup>90</sup> Professor Michael Ruse, in contemplating the possibility of a primary cause for the world, writes, “Any understanding of such a cause essentially returns us to the recognition of a Higher Power of one kind or another, which could just as well be called God. Incidentally, it seems to me that this reasoning falls under the class of arguments traditionally known as teleological.” He continues, “In general, the supposition that a certain Reason must be hidden behind the cover of the present existence of the universe, behind its organization, begins to seem more and more plausible in our day and age.”<sup>91</sup>

The well-known Soviet scholar Lev Berg (†1950) wrote, “The main postulate with which the natural scientist approaches an understanding of nature is that there is sense in nature, that it is possible to comprehend it and understand it, that between laws of thought on the one hand and the design of nature on the other is a certain pre-established harmony. Without this silent allowance, no natural science is possible.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, at the foundation of science lies the scientist's belief in the world's intelligent design. This thought was clearly stated by Albert Einstein: “My religion is a deeply sensed assurance in the existence of a Higher Intellect, who reveals himself to us in the known world.”<sup>93</sup>

When the significance of universal constants (the speed of light, the force and mass of an electron, etc.) was established, it was shown that even the slightest changes in their size would cause the universe to be something very different from what it is, and that our forms of life, mankind first of all, could not exist. The

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<sup>90</sup> P. Davies, *Superpower* (Moscow, 1989), 265 (Russian translation from English).

<sup>91</sup> Michael Ruse, “Science and Religion: Still at War?” *Problems of Philosophy* 2 (1991): 39–40, 42 (Russian translation from English).

<sup>92</sup> L. S. Berg, *The Theory of Evolution* (Petrograd, 1922), 67–68.

<sup>93</sup> K. Zelig, *Albert Einstein* (Moscow, 1966), 44 (Russian trans. from the German).

universe, the Sun, and especially the Earth are so precisely suited to man that it simply could not be mere coincidence.

This is entirely resonant with what the Apostle Paul wrote: *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made* (Rom 1:20).

The value of the teleological argument consists first of all in that it places human consciousness before two alternatives—either to accept Intelligence as the source of such a wise design for the world,<sup>94</sup> or to think of it as “something not yet known.” The first alternative opens a lofty and holy meaning of life to man. The second leaves him in a state of total inner confusion and despair.

### 3. The Ontological Argument

The ontological argument (from the Greek ὄν, genitive ὄντος the present tense participle for εἶμί—to be, to exist) is an argument proceeding from the idea of a perfect Being. This argument was first formulated by Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury (†1109). The logic goes like this: If we have a conception in our minds of an all-perfect Being, then such a Being must necessarily exist, for if It had no indication of existence, It would not be perfect. We conceive of God as an all-perfect Being, and so it would follow that He should have also the quality of existence.

René Descartes (†1650) filled out this argument with the thought that it is impossible to imagine the very idea of God coming to be in man if God did not exist.<sup>95</sup> Gottfried Leibniz (†1716) joined to

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<sup>94</sup> “Once, some mathematicians calculated the probability of the emergence of life on earth. It so happened that according to the laws of the world of numbers we have no right to emerge, and if we did somehow emerge, we should not have survived” (*Izvestia*, 189 [Aug. 21, 1970]). The probability of the emergence of life on earth from an accidental connection of molecules is  $10^{-255}$  (V. D. Penelis, *The Inhabited Universe* [Moscow, 1972]). The probability of the emergence of DNA molecules is  $10^{-80038}$  (V. I. Kurashov, Y. I. Soloviev, “On the Problem of “Applying Information” from Chemistry to Physics,” *Problems of Philosophy*, 6 [1984]: 96).

<sup>95</sup> See Subsection 4, The Psychological Argument.

this the supposition that God must exist, inasmuch as the concept of Him contains no inner contradiction. Many Russian theologians and philosophers worked on making sense of this argument. Thus, for example Prince Sergei Trubetskoy (†1905), following the thoughts of Vladimir Soloviev, proceeding from the concept of God the Absolute understood as “all-united being,” accepted the ontological argument as the basis of the question of God’s existence.

#### 4. The Psychological Argument

(From the Greek ψυχή—the soul, spirit, consciousness.) The main thought in this argument was expressed by Blessed Augustine (†430) and developed by Descartes. Its essence consists in the following: The concept of God as an all-perfect, eternal Being is present in human consciousness, and such an idea could not have come from impressions of the outside world (as deeply differing from the way God is imagined)<sup>96</sup> nor as a result of man’s purely contemplative activity, his psyche;<sup>97</sup> consequently, its source is God Himself.

A similar thought was expressed earlier by the famous Roman orator, Cicero (†40 B.C.), who wrote, “If the truth of God’s existence were not understood and accepted in our souls, then opinion alone on this could not be enduring, nor be confirmed by ancient times, nor grow old with the ages and passing generations. For we see that all other invented and empty opinions disappear with the passing of time. Who now thinks that the centaur or

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<sup>96</sup> See Chap. 1 § 7:1, The Naturalistic Hypothesis.

<sup>97</sup> See Chapt. 1 § 7:2, 3, The Animistic Hypothesis and the Hypothesis of Feuerbach.



chimera exists?... Time rebukes false opinions, and affirms natural truths.”<sup>98</sup>

This argument assumes a particular significance in conjunction with the historical argument.

## 5. The Historical Argument

Cicero refers to this argument as the most reliable:

We consider it necessary to show that there is no tribe so savage, nor person who has lost his awareness of moral duty, whose soul was not illumined by the thought of gods. Many think of the gods improperly, but this usually happens due to moral corruption and vice. All are nonetheless convinced that there is a divine power and nature. Such an awareness does not come about from a prior agreement amongst people, nor do people remember the gods only because governmental law enforces it; but in this matter, the unanimity of all peoples should be respected as a law of nature.<sup>99</sup>

This thought is likewise expressed by the ancient Greek writer, historian, and philosopher Plutarch (†120): “Travel through every country—you will find cities without walls, without written language, without government, without palaces, without wealth, without money. But no one has ever seen a city deprived of churches and gods, cities where prayers were not made, or oaths made in the name of divinities....”<sup>100</sup>

Truly, there is no instance in history of an atheistic tribe. What explains this amazing fact? All atheistic hypotheses proposing

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<sup>98</sup> Cicero, *On the Nature of Gods*. Cited from (Sergiev Posad, 1910) 176–177.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>100</sup> V. Kudriavtsev, *Primary Foundations of Philosophy*, 177.

different varieties of the so-called “natural” origin of the idea of God in human consciousness have shown themselves to be inadequate.<sup>101</sup> It remains only and finally to accept that this idea, by which all of mankind has lived throughout the history of its existence, is not a fruit of the “earth,” but rather has its source in God Himself.

## 6. The Moral Argument

This argument has two forms, depending upon the accepted premise. One of them proceeds from the fact that a sense of morality (“moral law”)<sup>102</sup> is present in man; the other proceeds from the idea of man’s moral and spiritual perfection as the highest striving of any mortal being.

The first form. It is an undoubted fact that a moral “law” exists which commands us to do good, and condemns evil through the voice of conscience. Every man is convinced of this through his own experience. There are different points of view as to what the source of this law is, the mains ones being the *biological, autonomous, social, and religious*.

The *biological* point of view explains the appearance of moral law in man as his striving for pleasure, comfort, and material success. His adjustment to life is the only criteria for discerning good and evil. Everything that enables man to “succeed in life” in the best possible way is good and moral, while everything that prevents him from this is, to the contrary, bad. The yearning itself for God is explained as dreams about delights. The fullness of so-called happiness on earth is the only criteria for truth, beauty, and righteousness.

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<sup>101</sup> See Chap. 1, § 7, The Origin of Religion.

<sup>102</sup> By moral law is meant the quality within man of discerning good and evil, the voice of conscience and an inner demand for what is right, which is expressed in the basic principle: Do not do to others what you would not like done to you.

This point of view is too primitive. It ignores some obvious facts of real life—that man is capable of sacrificing his wealth, glory, pleasure, and even his life for the sake of righteousness and truth; that within any society, by far not every act that brings man pleasure or gain is considered moral, but to the contrary are often considered immoral; that even in the most liberal societies which seem to have reached the limits of man’s moral “freedom,” the idea of his moral dignity still persists, consisting, “strangely enough,” in personal sovereignty over lower instincts, sensual egoism, and crude habits.

Kant was a proponent of the so-called *autonomous* hypothesis of morality, according to which man, as a reasoning and completely free being, establishes his own moral law for himself. This law is independent of any outward circumstances, interests, or goals. Kant in this way asserts the independence of personal conscience, which formulates the generally accepted moral norms entirely according to its own inner conviction. Kant calls this moral principle by which all people should be governed *the categorical imperative*. He has two mutually supplementing formulas. The first is: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” The second is: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end.”<sup>103</sup>

The idea of autonomous ethics naturally proceeds from Kant’s deist outlook. But in this also lies its weak point. From the recognition of God as the Creator would follow that all laws (physical, biological, psychological, rational, moral, and spiritual)

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<sup>103</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Works*, Vol. IV, Chap. 1 (Moscow, 1965), 260 (Russian translation from German). English translation of citation from Kant, Immanuel, translated by James W. Ellington [1785], *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3rd ed. (Hackett, 1993), 30, 36.

are given by God, and not by human will. In this respect they exist only inasmuch as unification of the “knot of creation”—man—is kept with God. Professor V. D. Kudryavtsev of the Moscow Theological Academy justifiably wrote, “The true source of moral law, just as of all other laws of our nature ... is beyond us, in the highest nature to which we are obliged for our existence; that is, in God. About the origin of moral law being independent of man speaks psychological experience, which shows this law to have existed in us prior to and independent of any determination made by our reason and will to summon it, as well as of the ideal character of this law, which is inexplicable given the condition of human nature.”<sup>104</sup> Moral law always turns out to be immeasurably deeper than those norms by which man would like to regulate his life, and he does not have the power to change this law, as much as he would like to do so. Even the most hardened criminals, who have chosen another law to govern their lives, often hear the voice of their own conscience.

The *social* point of view comes from the basic idea that moral law is engendered by people’s social life. It is dictated by the interests of the dominant societal groups and classes, and it appears and changes in the course of society’s historical development. The source of moral law, and man’s conscience, is society.

This point of view is nothing more than a sort of synthesis of the first two. Its weak points are obvious.

First of all, moral norms conditioned by social factors in no way settle the matter of a moral law present in human beings. The biological determinism which we find in, for example, animals and insects who lead a “social” way of life (elephants, monkeys, bees, ants, etc.), does not exist in human society. The freedom of will

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<sup>104</sup> Kudryavtsev, *Primary Foundations of Philosophy*, 434–435.

present in human nature can practically never entirely “fit” into any social structure. It is always free to do such moral (or immoral) deeds as would overstep the normal, lawful bounds of society.

There are very many examples of people in the most diverse civilizations, cultures, classes, and societies having one and the same moral outlook, as well as of people living in the same society having diverse morals. Pangs of conscience themselves usually spring from motives of a purely personal nature.

Feodor Dostoevsky portrayed this beautifully in his novel *Crime and Punishment*. The student Raskolnikov murdered the old pawnbroker and her sister. He murdered her out of the idea that it is “not a crime” to kill a “consumptive, mean, stupid old hag,” and that “the old lady is bad,” and that with that “old lady’s money, which will only end up in a monastery,” one could do “a hundred, a thousand good deeds.” What was the result of this “Napoleonic” plan, which is “not a crime?”

To Raskolnikov’s tremendous perplexity and horror, contrary to all his most systematic and “reasonable” suppositions, justifying and even commending the murder of this “old hag” who is no more than “lice, or cockroaches ... (and not even worth those),” he suddenly felt a cruel pain in his soul—not at all because he felt he had committed a crime against society, the law, etc., and not because he felt sorry for the old lady. There was nothing like this in him. He himself could not understand where this terrible inner punishment was coming from, or why.

*Crime and Punishment* is remarkable for its power and clarity in illustrating that there is a different nature to moral law, which every person in any society experiences as acting within himself to varying degrees and after committing different “crimes.”

Secondly, self analysis, or as the Holy Fathers call it, “attentiveness to oneself,” opens a whole world to a person within

his heart, where truly the “devil wars with God” (Dostoevsky). It reveals the world of truth and evil, and reveals to his gaze the true laws of the life of the soul. Before this, all human codes of law, moral norms, ethics, and rules of behavior are no more than the weak, even seriously distorted reflection of the Truth hidden in the depths of the human heart. The social sphere only calls forth *recognition* in a person and stimulates the *development* of moral law present within him, at times expressing itself later in moral norms, codes, etc. Societal life is only the “demiurge” of particular moral norms, and not the *creator* of the moral sense itself, or of the conscience itself. For example, the gift of speech—society is only the condition necessary to develop this *inherent* ability in man, but is not the creator of it. The gift of speech does not develop in monkeys, even when they dwell among humans.

What is the *Christian view* on the origin of moral law in man? It proceeds from the Biblical teaching on man as the image of God (Gen 1:27), whose royal magnitude (*The Kingdom of God is within you* [Lk 17:21]) unfolds in man “according to the strength of his life” (Saint Isaac the Syrian). Moral law in this context is one of the expressions of that fullness of Godlike gifts and qualities with which man was bestowed from the beginning of creation. Moral law is a sort of guardian of man’s purity and holiness. “Conscience is the voice of God”—a beautiful expression of the Christian teaching on the source of moral law in man.

The second form of moral argument was proposed by Kant and supplemented by Professor V. D. Kudriavtsev.

Kant called his reasoning the *postulate of practical reason*. This faithfully represents the character of the given argument, the essence of which consists in the following:

The end goal to which rational and moral beings must strive is the highest good, or as Kudriavstev puts it, absolute perfection. Its

main qualities are knowledge of Truth, realization of total virtuousness (holiness), and the acquisition of happiness. These three elements encompass all the strivings of man as a rational, moral, and perceptive being. Just the same, it is obviously impossible for man to acquire absolute perfection on the earth. Thus the question arises—is this striving for perfection only the general deception of our nature, or does it have a realistically existing ideal?

If the former were true then “all of man’s activities would be a pitiful, tragic-comic chasing of shadows, a yearning for something that does not really exist.”<sup>105</sup> Truly, if the totality of knowledge, virtue, and happiness are only the illusions of our consciousness and not a realistically existing ideal, then not only does our striving for it become senseless, but even human life itself loses all meaning. To escape such an unnatural illogicality in understanding our nature, we can only recognize the existence of God as the highest good, in which man attains the final goal of all his yearnings.

On the other hand, the fact that the degree of virtue in people’s lives does not always correspond to their degree of happiness requires the postulation of God’s existence as an omnipotent, omniscient, and just Being Who wants to and can restore such equilibrium for all people in the future, eternal life. “Nature,” writes Kant,

Cannot establish an agreement between virtue and happiness. This forces us to accept the existence of a cause separate from nature and independent of it. This cause must possess not only a power and might, but also reason; it must be a power which

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<sup>105</sup> Kudriavstev, 194–195.

is higher than nature by its might, will, and mind. Such a Being can only be God. He both desires to and can restore and confirm the unity between virtue and happiness.<sup>106</sup>

Man's ineradicable inner need for constant spiritual and moral perfection forces us, out of the same necessity, to postulate the immortality of the human soul as well.

## 7. Religious-Experiential Argument

First, a small digression.

In 1790 a meteorite fell near a town in southwest France. The mayor drafted a protocol about this event which was signed by 300 eyewitnesses, and sent it to the Paris Academy. Do you think that the scholars of the Academy thanked them for this aide to science? Nothing of the kind. The Paris Academy not only composed a lengthy treatise "On the Absurdity of Rocks Falling from the Sky," but even enacted a special resolution on the subject. Many museums threw meteorites out of their collections in order not to "make a laughing stock of the museum." One of the scholars, De Luc, announced that, "Even if such a rock falls at my feet and I am forced to admit that I had seen it, I will add that I cannot believe it." Another scholar, Godin, added that "It is better to deny such facts than to lower oneself to attempts at explaining them."

What is the problem? Why did respected scholars proclaim war on meteorites? According to the beliefs of ignorant people, the Lord God sends rocks from the heavens. "Since there is no God, then there can be no rocks from the heavens," the Parisian scholars resolved.

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<sup>106</sup> Citation from I. M. Andreev, *Orthodox Christian Apologetics* (New York, 1965), 40.



No, it is not a simple matter to make people believe in new facts that do not fit into the established system of convictions....

If we look carefully at the history of science, it becomes clear that it is the history of a struggle with the worship of the obvious, which has always been presented in the name of everyday common sense. But after all, so-called common sense is nothing other than centuries of people's collected and generalized everyday experience. It would seem senseless to go against it, for it and it alone is the sole criterion of truth. Only with great difficulty do people begin to understand that their everyday experience is in no way absolute, that it encompasses only some superficial sides of events and phenomena, that plain common sense is limited, and that there are many irrefutable facts which do not fit into what would seem to be unshakable, self-evident truth.<sup>107</sup>

Religion as a living personal connection between man and God, according to the words of the Holy Fathers, is the "science of sciences." It is this first of all because of its unique importance for man, and also because of its correspondence to science, which is based upon experience, and is proven by the same. "Generally speaking, when scientific conclusions depart from the facts, preference is given to the facts (on the condition that facts repeat themselves over and over again)."<sup>108</sup>

The existence of God is a fact proven "over and over" many countless times. People of various historical eras, from deep antiquity to our own times, different races, nationalities, languages, cultures, and educational levels, often knowing absolutely nothing

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<sup>107</sup> V. Kliachko, "Science Perceives the World," *Science and Religion* 1 (1967): 72.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

about each other, testify with astounding unanimity to a real, uninterrupted, and deep personal experience of God—specifically the experience of God, and not just “something supernatural,” or mystical.

In science, facts turn a theoretical guess into generally accepted truth. It is enough for a few scientists with the aide of instruments to see traces of elementary particles or a new galaxy for everyone to accept their existence without any doubt. On what grounds can we deny the experience of huge numbers of scientists who are giants in their fields, who testify to a direct (!)—and not through instruments or as traces on photographs—vision of God? Which scientists? Sainly ascetics, who worked miracles, foresaw the future, endured exile for their words of faith and truth, who bore tortures and mockery, shed their blood, and gave their own lives for their unwavering confession of God and Christ, who where not even in their thoughts capable of deceiving, or chasing after human glory.

Where are the grounds for refuting this fact? Perhaps Saints Peter and Paul, Saint Justin the Philosopher, Saint Paul the Simple, Saint Macarius the Great, Saint John Damascene, Saint Clement of Rome and Saint Isaac the Syrian, Saint John the Russian and Saint Savva of Serbia, Saint Sergius of Radonezh and Saint Seraphim of Sarov, Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov and Saint Ambrose of Optina, Dostoevsky and Pascal, Mendel and Mendeleev—it is impossible to name all of those whom the whole world knows—perhaps they only believed in God “out of tradition,” or were dreamers, and old-fashioned?

How can we view a fact so grandiose in the history of mankind? Perhaps it is necessary to think about it, or perhaps “it is better to deny such facts than to lower oneself to attempts at explaining them?” “No, it is not a simple matter to make people believe in

new facts that do not fit into the established system of convictions,” which furthermore require spiritual work on oneself.

Is it really possible to deny God only because everyday experience does not give Him to us? But we know that “everyday experience is in no way absolute, that it encompasses only some superficial sides of events and phenomena, that plain common sense is limited, and that there are many irrefutable facts which do not fit into what would seem to be unshakable, self-evident truth.” Everyday experience gives us almost none of the things modern scientists talk about, but we believe their experience; we believe them without even knowing them or having the remotest possibility of testing the larger part of their assumptions and conclusion. On what grounds do we disbelieve the innumerably greater quantity of religious experiences, the testimony of people who are pure as crystal?

The experience of these experts in the “science of sciences” does not speak of unsubstantiated faith, nor of opinion, nor of an accepted hypothesis, nor even simple tradition, but of the *fact* of their knowledge of God.

Justified are the words of Sergei Bulgakov:

The main experience of religion—a meeting with God—possesses (at least in its highest points) such a victorious power and fiery conviction, that it leaves any other obviousness far behind. It can be forgotten or lost, but not denied. The whole history of mankind, with respect to its religious self-awareness, becomes some kind of perfectly unsolvable puzzle and makes no sense if we do not admit that mankind relies upon living religious experience; that is, if we do not accept that all peoples have somehow seen and known their divinities, and knew about them without any “catechism.”

In the prophets of Israel we continually meet with the words, “And the Lord said unto me.” Have we ever thought about these words? Have we ever tried to understand them, however far removed they may be from our own religious experience? “And the Lord said unto me!” What is this—could it really have been hallucinations, self-deception, charlatanism, a literary practice, or...? But if it is true ... if it is true what is written in these books: God spoke, and man listened, and listened....God, of course, was not heard with physical organs of hearing, but with the heart, with all their being, and the word of God sounded louder than all the thunder in the world, more convincing and certain than all of their reasoning.<sup>109</sup> And “if people of faith began to tell about themselves, about what they have seen and learned with final certainty, then a whole mountain would form under which the mound of skeptical rationalism would be buried and hidden from sight.”<sup>110</sup>

Knowledge of God is an exact science, and not a chaos of mystical ecstasies and unhealthy exultations caused by inflamed nerves. Knowledge of God has its own systems, conditions, and criteria. How can we attain the knowledge of God? It begins with a selfless search for the truth, for the meaning of life and moral purity, and by forcing oneself towards goodness. Without such a beginning, the “experiment” of knowing God cannot be successful. These conditions are expressed in the Gospels briefly and clearly: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, *Unwaning Light* (Sergiev Posad, 1917), 12.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>111</sup> For more detail on this see Chap.1, § 7:5, A Positive View of the Origin of Religion.

*Chapter 3*  
*Religion*  
*and Human Activity*

Man is a great mystery for... man. His thought is boundless, his creativity endless, his heart is capable of encompassing the whole world, and God Himself. There is no other being like him on the earth. This all amazes us, and inspires the natural desire to understand man's nature, the meaning of his existence, the rational goal of his immeasurable creative activity, and the origins of all the many and diverse powers and capabilities hidden within him.

The directions of man's activity are multifaceted. Some are conditioned by his intellectual curiosity, which craves knowledge of everything around him (*science*); others by the need to exist in the natural world (*societal, technological, and economic activity*); the third by a sense of beauty, the desire to embody it in their lives and activities (*art*); a fourth by the unconquerable desire to understand the meaning and aim of their lives, the life of the world, to come to know the truth (*religion, philosophy*). But the foundation and source of all of man's life activity, determining its direction, character, and content, are man's spiritual and moral state, which is formed by his freedom, by the choice he manifests before the face of good and evil, and before the mirror of his conscience. For the spirit creates forms for itself.

Let us take a look and the different kinds of human activity.

## § 1. Science

### 1. Science or Religion?

When the famous French astronomer, mathematician, and physicist Laplace (†1827) presented his five-volume work *Celestial Mechanics*, about the origin and design of the Universe, the Emperor acquainted himself with the text and noted with perplexity, “I do not find any mention of a Creator here.” Laplace, educated in the spirit of so-called “free thinking,” answered proudly, “Sir, I have no need for that hypothesis.” (After every political upheaval, Laplace was able to change his views with extraordinary ease to conform to the current ideology of whoever was in power.) This is how a child of the Age of Enlightenment expressed his relationship to the idea of God—an age which, having “forgotten” about the faith of the Galileos, Copernicuses, Keplers, and Pascals, openly declared war against Christianity under the banner of science. But do religion and science really refute each other?

This question arose only recently in the history of mankind. Religion and science always coexisted and flourished side-by-side without the slightest antagonism. Scientists and believers were often found to be one and the same. Atheist scientists were a rare exception, but even they did not insist that their scientific data *prove* the nonexistence of God. Only in the eighteenth century, especially when a series of French philosophers and social activists called Encyclopedists propagated a slogan about the conflict between science and religion, did this idea gradually begin to take over Europe, and later even Russia, where after 1917 it was instituted as an official tenet of state ideology. Religion was declared an anti-scientific worldview.

In order to see a true picture of the mutual relationship of science and religion, it is necessary to take a look at what foundations science stands upon, what principles determine its development, and what it really can say about God.

## 2. An Understanding of Science

In the [Soviet] *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* science is defined as follows:

Science ... is the system of fostering knowledge, which is attained through corresponding methods of inquiry, expressed in precise concepts, the truth of which is tested and proven by practice in society. Science is a system of understanding phenomena and laws in the world around us, or people's spiritual activity, providing opportunity to foresee and transform actuality in the interest of society; the historically accepted form of human activity "spiritually produced," having as its content and result a purposeful collection of facts, elaborated hypotheses and theories with the laws they are based upon; exercises, and methods of research.

The concept of "science" is used to describe the process of enlarging upon scientific knowledge, as well as all systems of proven, practical knowledge which are considered to be objective truth, and to point out different areas of scientific knowledge and different sciences. Modern science is a complex totality of different branches of science.<sup>112</sup>

In a general classification, science is usually divided into the natural (natural science and hard sciences) and the humanitarian. In the first category are physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy,

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<sup>112</sup> Entry for "science," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Moscow, 1964), Vol. 3.

mathematics, and others. In the second category are philosophical and social sciences. This division of sciences is an important aspect in a correct understanding of the problem of “science and religion,” in that its main question is whether or not religion is refuted by the natural sciences, and not by science as a whole; for by definition science is the entire complex of human knowledge, including religious philosophy and religion itself.

Let us direct our attention to the basic sciences.

### 3. Postulates of Science

In science (natural sciences), just as in religion, there are these obvious conditions—“dogmas,”—which are not proved (and are not provable), but are accepted as starting points inasmuch as they are necessary for constructing the whole system of knowledge. Such conditions are called postulates or axioms. Natural science bases itself, to a small measure, on the following two main positions: first of all, the acceptance of the reality of the world’s existence; and second, of the regularity of its design, and the possibility to have knowledge of it.

Let us look at these postulates.

1) Strange as it sounds, the conviction that the world exists objectively—that is, independently of man’s awareness, is actually a direct, manifest obviousness rather than proven truth: more a matter of faith than of knowledge. The famous philosopher Bertrand Russell (†1970) noted cleverly on this subject, “I do not think that I am sleeping right now and having a dream, but I cannot prove it.”<sup>113</sup> Einstein (†1955) in turn declares “Belief in the existence of the external world, independently of an accepted subject, is the foundation of all natural sciences.”<sup>114</sup> These quotes

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<sup>113</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge* (Moscow, 1957), 204 (Russian translation from German).

<sup>114</sup> Albert Einstein *Collection of Scientific Works* (Moscow 1967) 4:136 (Russian translation from English)



by famous scientists well illustrate the concept of the scientific reality of the external world—it is the subject of faith, or dogma (to express it in theological terms) but not knowledge.

2) The second postulate of science—a belief in the wisdom and regularity of the world’s design and the possibility to have knowledge of it—is the main driving power of all scientific research. But even it is just as much the subject of faith (dogma) for science as the first postulate. Authoritative scientists speak of this with the same certainty. The scholar L. C. Berg (†1950) wrote, “The main postulate with which the natural scientist approaches his understanding of nature is that there is sense in nature, that it is possible to make sense of it, and understand that there is a sort of predetermination of harmony between the laws of thought and knowledge on one hand, and the design of nature on the other. Without this quiet allowance, no natural sciences are possible. Perhaps this postulate is not certain (just as, perhaps, Euclid’s postulate about parallel lines is not certain), but it is practically necessary.”<sup>115</sup> Einstein affirmed the same: “Without the belief that it is possible to encompass reality with our theoretical constructions, without faith in the inner harmony of our world, there could be no science. This faith is and always will be the main motive of any scientific creativity.”<sup>116</sup> The father of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener (†1964), wrote, “Without faith that nature is subject to laws, there can be no science. It is impossible to prove that nature is subject to laws, for we all know that in a moment, the world can resemble the game of croquet in *Alice in Wonderland*.”<sup>117</sup> The well-known

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<sup>115</sup> Lev Semonovich Berg, *The Theory of Evolution* (Petrograd, 1922), 67–68.

<sup>116</sup> Einstein, *Collection*, 154.

<sup>117</sup> Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics and Society* (Moscow, 1958), 195 (Russian translation from English).

American physicist Charles Townes (†1922) wrote, “A scientist should be penetrated early on with the conviction that there is order in the universe, and that human reason is capable of understanding this order. It would be senseless even to attempt to understand a disordered or incomprehensible world.”<sup>118</sup>

But even if these postulates are true (and it is hardly possible to doubt that they are), then a very important question remains. If that question is left unsolved, the very positing of the problem of “science and religion” loses all meaning. This is a question of the reliability of scientific knowledge itself. But first, a brief note about its methods.

#### 4. Methods of Science

The main methods of natural science are observation, experiment, measurement, and guessing (hypothesis, theory). Using these as a guide, we can exactly separate the realm of natural sciences from all other realms of man’s creative activity—humanitarian sciences, art, music, etc. Thus, scientific knowledge is only a small part of human knowledge as a whole.

#### 5. On the Reliability of Scientific Knowledge

This question is so delicate, and its answer so strongly touches upon the very essence of science, that it is better to present the words of the more competent scientists of our century on it.

Lev Berg:

In science, everything that enables its development is truth; and everything that prevents its development is false. In this relationship, what is “true” is analogous to what is “expedient”.... Thus, truth in science is everything that is

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<sup>118</sup> Charles Townes, “The Blending of Science and Religion,” *Literaturnaya Gazeta* 34 (1967).

expedient, which is justified and confirmed by experience, and capable of serving the further progress of science. In science, the question of truth is solved by practice.

The Ptolemaic theory at one time enabled progress in knowledge and was true, but when it ceased to serve that aim, Copernicus proposed a new theory of the creation of the world, according to which the Sun was fixed, and the earth revolves. But now we know that even this view does not correspond to the truth, for not only does the Earth revolve, but so does the Sun. There is a conditional nature, even fiction, in every theory. The correctness of this concept of truth, inasmuch as it touches theory, is unlikely to be disputed by anyone in our times. But the laws of nature in this respect are in the same situation: every law is conditional, and holds as long as it is useful. Newton's laws seemed unshakeable, but now they are recognized as no more than known approximations to the truth. Einstein's theory of relativity has overturned not only all of Newton's mechanics, but all of classical mechanics....

Usefulness is the criteria for acceptability, and therefore, for truth as well. There is no other way to discern truth given to man.... Truth is useful fiction, and departure from it is harmful.... Thus have we defined truth from the point of view of science.<sup>119</sup>

Albert Einstein:

In our striving to understand reality, we are like a man who wants to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the numbers and the moving arms, he even hears the ticking,

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<sup>119</sup> Lev Berg, *Science, Its Content, Meaning, and Classification* (Petrograd, 1922), 18–23.

but he does not have the means to open it. If he is clever he can draw a picture of a mechanism which would correspond to all his observations, but he can never be completely sure that his drawing is the only one that could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his picture with the actual mechanism, and he cannot even imagine the opportunity or sense of such a comparison.<sup>120</sup>

The great American physicist Richard Feynman (†1991):

This is why science is unreliable. As soon as you say something from the realm of experience, something with which you have not made direct contact, you immediately lose your certainty. But we must definitely speak of those realms which we have never seen, otherwise there will be no point to science.... Therefore, if we want some kind of use out of science, we must construct guesses. So that science does not become only simple protocols of conducted experiments, we must advance laws that reach into unknown realms. There is nothing wrong with this—only that science turns out to be unreliable because of it; and if you think that science is reliable, you are mistaken.<sup>121</sup>

The hypothetical nature of scientific knowledge is particularly apparent in the microscopic world. One of the creators of quantum mechanics, Werner Heisenberg (†1976), wrote in this regard:

The activity of the microscopic world must be observed using highly perfected experimental technology. However, it is then no longer the subject of our direct sense perception. The natural scientist must reject the thought of a direct connection

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<sup>120</sup> A. Einstein, Leopold Infeld, *Evolution of Physics* (Moscow, 1966), 30 (Russian translation from English).

<sup>121</sup> Richard Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law* (Moscow, 1968), 77–78 (Russian translation from English).

with basic concepts upon which he constructs his science, with the world of sense perceptions.... Our complicated experiments represent nature not in and of itself, but changed and transformed under the influence of our activities in the process of research.... Thus, we similarly run up against the insurmountable limits of human knowledge.<sup>122</sup>

Robert Oppenheimer (†1967):

I had the opportunity to consult with forty theoretical physicists.... Despite their differences of opinion, my colleagues support at least one conviction. All admit that we do not understand the nature of matter, the laws which govern it, or the language by which it can be described.<sup>123</sup>

Modern Soviet philosophers have expressed their complete agreement with these views. In the collective works *Logic of Scientific Research*, compiled under the direction of the director of the Institute of Philosophy, P. V. Kopnin (†1971), we read:

The ideal of scientific knowledge has always been presented with demands for strict determination, certainty, and exhaustive clarity. Even so, although scientific knowledge has striven for this ideal throughout all ages, it has never achieved it. It has always been that even in the most austere scientific constructs there were always elements, the substantiation and strictness of which were in outrageous contradiction with the ideal. What is especially worthy of note is that often the deepest and most fundamental principles of the given scientific construction fall into this category. The presence of such

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<sup>122</sup> Werner Heisenberg, *Philosophical Problems of Atomic Physics* (Moscow, 1953), 64–66 (Russian translation from German).

<sup>123</sup> Robert Oppenheimer, “On the Necessity of Experiments with High Energy Particles,” *Technology and Youth* 4 (1965):10.

elements was usually accepted as simply the result of imperfect knowledge during the given period in time. Corresponding to such opinions in the history of science, energetic attempts have been made—and still are made—to remove such elements from science. But these attempts have never been successful. At the present moment, we can consider the incongruence of knowledge to the ideal of absolute strictness as proven. In conclusion on the impossibility of completely purging, even from the strictest science—mathematics—“lax” conditions: after a long, stubborn fight, “logicians” had to be brought in....

All this testifies not only to the fact that any system of human knowledge includes elements which cannot be substantiated by theoretical means at all, but also to the fact that no scientific system can exist without such elements.<sup>124</sup>

Similar declarations from scientists and thinkers become even more understandable after a general look at the nature of the development of scientific knowledge. It is all divided into two unequal parts: the first—actual knowledge (strictly tested facts, scientific apparatus) being of an insignificant amount, and second—*lack* of knowledge, which occupies almost the entire spectrum of science (theory, hypothesis, models, and “guesses” in the words of R. Feynman). The most curious thing here is that according to the measure of growth of the first part (knowledge), the amount of the second (*lack* of knowledge) grows significantly more intensively, because the resolution of each problem, as a rule, generates a whole circle of new problems. (G. Naan said for this

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<sup>124</sup> Pavel Vasilievich Kopnin, ed., *The Logic of Scientific Research* (Moscow 1965): 230–231.

reason that “Few people know how much we need to know in order to know how little we know...”)

It is for this reason—that the main moving part of science is never definitive and true—that Feynman spoke of its unreliability. The Polish scientist Stanislaw Lem called this part of science a myth:

Like every science, cybernetics creates its own mythology. “The mythology of science”—this sounds like a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, every science, even the most exact, progresses not only thanks to new theories and facts, but also to the conjectures and hopes of scientists. Progress justifies only a part of them. The rest turn out to be illusions, and therefore mythological.<sup>125</sup>

The modern Russian scientist Vasily Nalimov concludes outright that:

The growth of science is not so much the collection of knowledge as it is the ceaseless overestimation of what has been collected—the creation of new hypotheses that refute the former ones. But then, scientific progress is nothing other than a systematic process of destroying the previous lack of knowledge. Every step of the way, old ignorance is destroyed by the construction of newer, stronger ignorance, which in its turn becomes harder and harder to destroy with time....

Now the question involuntarily arises: Could the fall of certain cultures, like the Egyptian, and the degradation of once very forceful streams of thought, for example, ancient Indian, have occurred because they reached a level of ignorance which would no longer submit to destruction? Who knows how

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<sup>125</sup> Stanislaw Lem, *The Sum of Technology* (Moscow, 1968): 127.

stubborn the force of ignorance will turn out to be in European knowledge?<sup>126</sup>

The conditional nature of scientific knowledge becomes even more obvious when we look at the scientific criteria of truth.

## 6. On Criteria in Science

Because the edifice of science is constructed not only upon the foundation of observation, experiment, and measurement, but also on hypotheses and theories, a serious question arises about the criteria of the latter's veracity. Facts by themselves do not say very much to the researcher until he finds some regularity common to them all; until he "connects" them by one common theory. In the final analysis, any understanding of some group of phenomena, even more so an understanding of the world as a whole, is nothing more than a theory upheld by a large or small group of scientists. But is it possible to prove the truth of a theory? As it happens, there are no unconditional criteria that could make it possible to finally determine whether or not the given theory (picture) of objective reality actually applies.

The most important and reliable criteria is always considered to be that of practice. But even this often turns out to be completely inadequate.

The famous philosopher and physicist Phillip Frank (†1966) cleverly noted in this regard, "Science resembles a detective story. All the facts confirm a specific hypothesis, but the correct hypothesis turns out to be a completely different one."<sup>127</sup>

It is particularly difficult to resolve the given question when several theories at once explain the given phenomenon equally

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<sup>126</sup> Vasily Vasilievich Nalimov, "What Is Truth?" *Science and Life* 1 (1978): 49.

<sup>127</sup> Philipp Frank, *The Philosophy of Science* (Moscow, 1960), 76.



well. “Naturally,” writes one responsible author, “empirical criteria do not work here, because we must choose one of a series of hypotheses which are equivalent to each other in their match with empirical reality; otherwise there would be no difficulty in choosing. Thus the need for secondary criteria arises.”<sup>128</sup>

These secondary, or supplementary, criteria are many, and they are all even more conditional than empirical criteria.

We will name several of them by way of illustration.

1. Criteria of economy and simplicity (Isaac Newton, Ernst Mach). Theory is that truth which is simple to work with, easy to understand, and saves time.

2. Criteria of beauty (Henri Poincaré, Paul Dirac). The beauty of the mathematical mechanism lying in the foundation of physical theory testifies to its correctness.

3. Criteria of common sense.

4. Criteria of “madness”—that is, lack of correspondence with common sense. Gustav Naan writes about this: “What is common sense? It is the embodiment of the experience and prejudice of its own times. It is an unreliable advisor in those instances where we are faced with a completely new situation. Any sufficiently serious scientific discovery, beginning with the discovery of the Earth’s roundness, contradicted the common sense of the times.”<sup>129</sup>

5. Criteria of predictability—the capability of the theory to foretell new facts and phenomena. However, as a rule, all theories have this capability.

And so on, and so forth.

All of these criteria are very far from really testifying to the irrefutable truth of one or another theory. That is why Einstein

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<sup>128</sup> Elena Arkadievna Mamchur, “The Problem of the Criteria of Simplicity of Scientific Theories,” *Questions of Philosophy*, 9 (1966): 159.

<sup>129</sup> Gustav Naan, “On the Problem of Eternity,” *Questions of Philosophy* 12 (1965), 65.

said, “Any theory is hypothetical, never completely reaches a conclusion, is always subject to doubt, and leads to new questions.”<sup>130</sup>

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These scientists’ words and the criteria used by science speak with sufficient eloquence about the (limited) reliability of scientific knowledge. As it turns out, scientific knowledge is always limited and conditional, and therefore it can never claim to be the absolute truth. Nevertheless, it tries to make just such a claim regarding specifically religious questions about the realm of a world with which science does not concern itself.

## 7. Science and World View

The question of science and religion also contains a principle methodological problem. Inasmuch as religion is a world view, then naturally it can only be compared and contrasted with world views. Is science the same way? What is the so-called scientific world view, which so often confronts religion?

Science is in essence a systematic advancement or unfolding of knowledge about the world, which means that it is ceaselessly changing, and is therefore never able to provide a complete and final picture of the world as a whole. Gustav Naan says justifiably that, “On any level of our civilization’s development, our knowledge will represent only an islet in the endless ocean of the unresearched, unknowable, and unexplored.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> P. Cherkashin, *The Gnosiological Roots of Idealism*, (Moscow, 1961), 189.

<sup>131</sup> “Interview with G. Naan,” *On the Dialectics of Knowledge*, 12 (1968), 23.

Another modern scientist, Vadim Kaziutinsky, says with complete certainty that, “All matter (the material world as a whole) is not now, nor ever will be its [science’s] object.”<sup>132</sup>

But if even *all matter*—and this is not even to mention the spiritual world—*is not now nor ever will the object* of research in natural science, then is a scientific world view even possible? In order to answer this question, we must look at what a world view is.

World view is the totality of views on the most basic questions of the existence of the universe as a whole, and of man (the essence of existence, the meaning of life, the concept of good and evil, the soul, eternity, the existence of God). It does not depend upon educational or cultural level, or the person’s abilities. Therefore the scholar and the uneducated can both have the same world view, while people of the same educational level can have directly contradictory convictions. World view always presents itself in the form of either religion or philosophy, but not science. “Generally the structure of religious teaching,” say religious scholars, “does not differ much from the structure of a philosophical system; for religion, like philosophy, strives to give an integral picture of the world, an integral system of personal orientation, an integral world view.”<sup>133</sup>

Member of the Academy of Sciences of the former USSR, Pavel Kopnin, wrote, “Philosophy differs from science by its subject and goal, and comprises a particular form of human knowledge which cannot be subsumed by any other. Philosophy as a form of awareness creates the world view necessary to mankind for all its practical and theoretical activities. Closest of

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<sup>132</sup> Vadim Vasilievich Kaziutinsky, “Astronomy and Dialectics,” *The Astronomical Calendar* (annual) 73 (Moscow, 1969): 148–149.

<sup>133</sup> L. S. Vasiliev, Dimitry E. Furman, *Christianity and Confucianism: The History and Culture of China* (Moscow, 1974), 422.

all to philosophy in its social function is religion, which also came about as a particular form of world view. Therefore science ... alone cannot replace it [religion].... World view ... is neither covered by any one science, nor by all sciences combined.”<sup>134</sup>

Therefore, if we talk about a particularly scientific world view, then such a concept must be in the conditional, most narrow and specific meaning of the word—as the totality of scientific view on the material world, its design, and the laws governing it. Science cannot be a world view because:

a) Questions purely of world view (see above) fit into the category of exclusively religious and philosophical questions, and have no relation to the fields of natural science;

b) Scientific views continually change, a condition which contradicts the very understanding of world view as something finished, entirely specific, and constant;

c) As Vadim Kaziutinisky well notes, “In the natural sciences there are no “materialistic” and “idealistic” theories, only probable and reliable, true and false theories.”<sup>135</sup>

Man’s idea (knowledge) of this world’s phenomena can be either scientific or anti-scientific, but not his world view (religious or atheistic, etc.). Science and world view are two different things having nothing to do with each other, and thus they cannot oppose one another.

But even if one believes in the limitlessness of scientific knowledge and in science’s ability at some uncertain time to solve all the problems of the spiritual and material world, and to reach the level of a world view, a thinking person could not wait for such

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<sup>134</sup> Pavel Vasilievich Koptin, “Philosophy in the Age of Science and Technology,” *Literaturnaya Gazeta* 5 (1968). See “Philosophy,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Moscow, 1970), 5:332—“Philosophy by nature fulfills particular world view and methodological functions which neither separate special sciences, nor the combined totality of concrete scientific knowledge take upon themselves.”

<sup>135</sup> Vadim Vasilievich Kaziutinisky, “Astronomy and Dialectics,” *The Astronomical Calendar* 73 (1969): 146.

a hypothetical future. Life is given to us only once, so mankind must know now how to live, what should guide him, what ideal to serve. He needs answers to the most important questions in life: Who am I? Is there eternal life? What is the meaning of my existence? Is there any meaning to man's existence, to the world's existence? The study of quarks, black holes, and DNA does not answer these questions; nor can it.

## 8. Science and Religion

“Hasn't science proved that there is no God, no spiritual world, no soul, no eternal life, no heaven or hell?” Not only has science not proved such a thing, but it in principle cannot. Here is why.

*Firstly*, science and religion simply cannot be compared with each other, like a kilometer and a kilogram. Each of them is preoccupied with its own side of human life and the life of the world. These spheres can make contact or intersect with each other, but they cannot disprove one another. As the saying goes, “It is disastrous when the shoemaker bakes the pies, and the baker makes the shoes.”

*Secondly*, due to the above-mentioned reasons, science can never say, “There is no God.” To the contrary, a deepened knowledge of the world naturally turns the thoughts of a man of science to the acknowledgment of a Higher Reason—God—as the source of our being. In this light, science becomes even more cooperative with religion. The Christian convictions of many modern scientists testify to this. It is no surprise that one of the representatives of “scientific” atheism, Mikhail Iosifovich Shakhnovich,<sup>136</sup> was quite flustered at the religiousness of some famous Western scientists, and out of his zeal wrote the polemic, “Many bourgeois scientists

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<sup>136</sup> Shakhnovich was not a scientist himself, but a folklorist.

talk about the ‘union’ of science and religion. M. Born, M. Planck, W. Heisenberg, K. F. von Weizsäcker, P. Jordan, and other famous physicists have more than once supposed that science does not contradict religion.”<sup>137</sup> Shakhnovich named only a few modern scientists. But it is a generally known fact that the vast majority of scientists always stood behind that union.

The following remarkable words belong to M. Lomonosov: “The Creator has given the human race two books—the first is the visible world, the second is Holy Scripture.... They both not only assure us of the existence of God, but also of His unspeakable benefactions to us. It is a sin to sow tares and arguments between them.” Science and religion “cannot come into conflict with each other ... only if someone should ascribe mutual enmity to them out of his own ambition, and vain desire to appear clever.”<sup>138</sup>

## 9. Religion and Science

But perhaps the religious world view goes against science, knowledge and progress?

Coming from a broad conception of science,<sup>139</sup> we can justifiably speak of religion as one form of man’s “spiritual production.” Having its own postulates (the existence of God, the immortality of the soul), a particular method of acquiring knowledge (spiritual-moral perfection of the individual), its own criteria for discerning true and false (the degree of similarity between individual spiritual experience and the unanimous experience of the saints—the most competent “engineers” of the human soul), its own goal (the knowledge of God and the

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<sup>137</sup> M. I. Shakhnovich, *Lenin and the Problem of Atheism* (Moscow–Leningrad, 1961), 185.

<sup>138</sup> Mikhail Lomonosov, *Poems*, ed. P. N. Berkov (Moscow: Soviet Writer, 1948), 7.

<sup>139</sup> See 2 of this section: An Understanding of Science.

acquisition of eternal life with Him—theosis), religion is shown to be structurally no different from natural sciences. A particularly essential similarity with the empirical sciences is seen in the need to have the right experience for acquiring reliable knowledge during the learning process. It is no accident that the “scholars” of the Orthodox Church—the great saints—called the correct (righteous) religious life the “science of sciences.”

But religion as an experiential science (“religion-science”) is also a remarkable exception amongst other empirical sciences: religion-science, unlike natural science, is a world view in the full sense of the word. Here is why.

If natural science cannot serve as a foundation for the construction of a world view (be it religious or atheistic), then religion-science, which experientially confirms the existence of God, the soul, and the extrasensory world, becomes a scientific foundation of religious world view. In this sense, religion is a truly scientific world view, unlike all others—the atheistic, the agnostic, and the materialistic, which will always remain nothing more than a faith.

At the same time, a religious world view, including the Orthodox world view, in principle cannot contradict the natural sciences, and especially cannot oppose them, because its basic position includes neither their laws and theories, nor their concrete “details” of knowledge of the material world. Its basic questions are different, and do not at all depend upon what science confirms today, or what it will bring tomorrow. It means absolutely nothing to the religious world view whether the Earth or the Sun are the center of our planetary system, what revolves around what, or out of what “bricks” the universe is built.

The fact that many servants of the Church were also great scientists (see above) is an eloquent testimony to the falsity of the idea of a war between religion and science.

True, some try to show that there is indeed a struggle by presenting clear examples of persecution against certain scientists with the consent of the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. However, the descriptions of these persecutions are much exaggerated. An insignificant number of scientists were actually persecuted, not so much for their scientific views as for their dogmatic and moral apostasy from the faith—that is, for heresies (for example, Giordano Bruno, who called himself a “teacher of a more perfect theology, the son of heaven and earth”).<sup>140</sup>

Besides, all of this is bound up with Catholicism, whose more glaring errors included dogmatizing certain scientific theories of the time (for which the Catholic Church later officially repented).

Finally, in the Middle Ages it was not really a matter of religion warring with science, but rather of old scientific ideas and their proponents (with all the usual human passions attending) warring with the new ones, and using religion to do so.

The modern [Russian] scholar A. Gorbovsky makes an excellent exposé illustrating the main reason for persecution against science. He writes, “Didn’t the thought that ‘rocks falling from the sky’—meteorites—seem just as blasphemous at the time?”

The French Academy of Sciences declared all similar ideas to be mere fantasy, and the great scientist, Lavoisier,<sup>141</sup> labeled them as “anti-scientific.” This term is not used accidentally. Throughout all times, societal consciousness has always had a

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<sup>140</sup> E. Svetlov, *Sources of Religion* (Brussels, 1970), 258.

<sup>141</sup> Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794), French chemist, member of the Paris Academy of Sciences. He was executed by sentence of a revolutionary tribunal. In 1796 he was declared innocent (*Encyclopedic Dictionary*, (Moscow, 1963) vol. 1.



certain reference point from which the inviolable truth was proclaimed. There was even a time when the religious world view was presented as such a standard. Everything that conformed to this world view was accepted as true, while anything outside of its framework was declared false.

In our world, airplanes fly. Their flight is contrary to what the astronomer S. Newcomb<sup>142</sup> mathematically proved—that it is impossible to create a flying machine that is heavier than air.

We use the radio. This is contrary to the authoritative opinion of the famous scientist, Heinrich Hertz,<sup>143</sup> who insisted that it is impossible. (“For remote communication,” he wrote, “we would need a reflector the size of a continent.”)

Today, everyone knows about the monstrous power of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, there was a time when the foremost American military experts said that building an atomic bomb was impossible in principle.

Today, nuclear power plants are supplying electricity. However, some major scientists in the U.S.A., including Niels Bohr,<sup>144</sup> considered the use of nuclear power to be very unlikely.

We study the chemical composition of celestial bodies. This is contrary to the opinion of the French philosopher August Comte,<sup>145</sup> who categorically insisted that man could never do such a thing.

It is now proven that 99% of all matter in the universe is in the state of plasma. However, for thirty years after plasma was

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<sup>142</sup> Simon Newcomb (1835–1909), American astronomer.

<sup>143</sup> Heinrich Hertz (1875–1894), German physicist, specialist in the field of electromagnetic phenomena and electrodynamics.

<sup>144</sup> Niels Bohr (1885–1962), the famous Danish physicist who created the quantum atomic theory.

<sup>145</sup> August Comte (1798–1857), famous French philosopher and founder of philosophy of positivism.

discovered, the scientific world stubbornly refused to acknowledge its right to exist.

The discoveries of Pasteur<sup>146</sup> were not accepted by the French Academy of Medicine.

The discovery of x-rays was greeted with laughter.

Mesmer's<sup>147</sup> discovery of hypnosis was categorically denied by the scientific luminaries of his day.

The French Academy of Sciences for a long time denied the existence of excavated humans, and called the excavated Stone Age tools a “game of nature.”

This list could go on forever—the list of anathemas and excommunications pronounced from time to time in the name of science. It came at best from inert thinking, when, in the words of A. Schopenhauer,<sup>148</sup> “each person considers the limit of his own horizon to be the end of the world. Now, after centuries and decades, we build memorials to those people who were once the subject of anathema and excommunication.”<sup>149</sup>

Gorbovsky does not even mention the most terrifying persecutions in history against scientists in the USSR, even though these scientists were working on the side of the satanists who had seized power, rather than on the side of the Church.

The cause of such persecutions against science were rooted not in Christianity, and especially not in Orthodoxy, but in the evil of human passions, and in the fanaticism spawned by them, which always wars against everything true and alive.

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<sup>146</sup> Louis Pasteur (1822–1895), famous French biologist.

<sup>147</sup> Franz Anton Mesmer (1733–1815), Austrian doctor.

<sup>148</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer (1778–1860), German philosopher/idealist.

<sup>149</sup> A. Gorbovsky, *Mysteries of Ancient History* (Moscow, 1971), 77–79.

## 10. Faith and Knowledge in Religion and Science

The significance of faith and religion is so great that religion itself is often simply called “faith.” This is justifiable, but no more than it is for any other area of knowledge.

The path to knowledge for man always begins with his trust in his parents, teachers, books, etc. His belief in the correctness of knowledge earlier received becomes strengthened (or to the contrary, weakened) by his own subsequent personal experience, turning faith into knowledge. Faith and knowledge thus become a complete whole. This is how man’s knowledge of science, art, economics, politics, and so on also grows.

Faith in a religion is also just as necessary. It is the expression of man’s spiritual strivings, his search, and often begins with trust in those who have experience and knowledge related to it. Only gradually, with the acquisition of related religious experience, does specific knowledge appear with faith—knowledge which grows under conditions of correct spiritual and moral life, according to the measure of the heart’s purifications from passions. As one great saint said, “The soul sees the truth of God according to the strength of its life.”<sup>150</sup>

A Christian on this path can acquire such a knowledge of God (and of the created world) when his faith is mixed with knowledge, and he becomes *of one spirit with the Lord* (cf. 1 Cor 6:17).

Thus, as in all natural sciences faith precedes knowledge and experience confirms faith, so in religion faith, coming from a deeply intuitive feeling of God, acquires its strength only from direct personal experience in the search for knowledge of Him. Only faith in the *nonexistence* of God, in all of its various world

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<sup>150</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies* (Moscow, 1858), 30:195 (Russian translation). The Holy Transfiguration Monastery translation reads, “*Theoria* arises from a virtuous way of life” (66:324).

views, remains not only unjustified by experience, but also in flagrant contradiction to the great religious experiences of all ages and peoples.

## 11. A Few Conclusions

Religion and science are two essentially different realms of human life activity. They have different points of reference, different goals, tasks, and methods. These spheres can touch each other, intersect each other, but as we see, they cannot disprove one another. At the same time, Christianity preaches the two-hypostatic nature of man's existence, the undivided unity in him of spiritual and physical natures. Both answer God's plan for man; and only the harmonious integration of their activities gives man's life a normal character. Such a life presupposes the need for the "bread" of technological development for his body, and the spirit of religious life for the soul. Just the same, man's guiding impulse should always be his moral-reasoning, spiritual impulse.

Christianity sees science as one means of obtaining the knowledge of God (see Rom 1:19–20).<sup>151</sup> But first of all, Christianity sees science as a natural instrument of this life, which must nevertheless be used with caution. Christianity regards science negatively when this two-edged sword wielding such terrible power acts independently of the moral principles of the Gospels. Such "freedom" corrupts the very purpose of science, which is supposed to serve for the good—and only the good—of man (as the famous Hippocratic Oath says, "Do no harm!").

Developing independently from the spiritual and moral principles of Christianity, having lost the idea of the God of Love as the ruling Principle of existence and highest criteria of truth,

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<sup>151</sup> See Chapter III § 3:2, Theological argument.

but at the same time opening up enormous power to influence the world around us and even man himself, science easily becomes a weapon of destruction; from an obedient instrument of its creator it becomes his tyrant and, perhaps, his murderer. Modern acquisitions in the field of microphysics, microbiology, medicine, military and industrial technology, etc. convincingly testify to the real possibility of such a tragic finale.

The Church, having from the beginning received a Revelation of what will be the final catastrophe unless man repents of his materialism, reminds us again and again: “The mind should observe the measure of its knowledge, so as not to perish” (Saint Kallistos Cataphigiotos). This measure in this case is the Gospel principles of life, which, if serving as the foundation for a man of science’s education and through which he learns about the world, would never allow him to turn his unfolding knowledge and power to evil purposes.

## § 2. A Quest for Truth on the Path of Reason

It is impossible that man should never be troubled, if only for fleeting moments in his life, by these questions: Why do I live? What is the meaning of all existence? Where does everything end up? What is truth? For many, these questions have been questions of life and death.

It was for one twentieth-century ascetic of piety, Igumen Nikon (Vorobev, †1963).<sup>152</sup> His thirst for answers to these questions was so great that when he was a student he would spend his last dime, literally going hungry, in order to buy books. He was able to read only at night. At first he immersed himself entirely in science. He

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<sup>152</sup> See Maria Naumenko, *Letters to Spiritual Children* (by Igumen Nikon) (Richfield Springs, N.Y.: Nicodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1997).

followed all of its latest achievements. He yearned for the moment when science would give the final word, and all truth would be revealed. But alas, the more he learned, the more disappointed he became in the ability of science to explain anything about the meaning of life. He found that science was not at all interested in this question.

He turned to philosophy. At one time he became particularly interested in Henri Bergson.<sup>153</sup> He studied the French and German languages. Thanks to his astounding intellectual stamina and talent, he attained such success in philosophy that even his teachers would sometimes come to him for consultation. Even so, his immersion in philosophy never brought him the desired results.

“The study of philosophy,” he said at the end of his life,

Showed me that each philosopher considered he had found the truth. How many philosophers have there been? But there is only one truth. My soul yearned for something else. Philosophy is but a surrogate; it is like chewing gum instead of bread. Can chewing gum satisfy your hunger? I understood that just as science says nothing about God or the future life, neither does philosophy. It became perfectly clear to me that it was necessary to turn to religion.<sup>154</sup>

In 1914 he graduated brilliantly from *realschule* [secondary school emphasizing hard sciences —Trans.] and made a final attempt to find meaning in life without God, without the Church, entering the Petrograd Psychoneurological Institute. But there he met with no less disappointment. “I saw that psychology does not study man at all, only his ‘packaging’—the speed of mental

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<sup>153</sup> Henri-Louis Bergson (1859–1941) was a French philosopher, influential in the first half of the twentieth century.

<sup>154</sup> This and following quotes by Igumen Nikon are taken from tape recordings.

processes, perception, memory.... Such nonsense; it was just as repugnant.” He left the institute after the first year. Soon he experienced a serious spiritual crisis. He began to have thoughts of suicide.

Then one day in the summer of 1915, in the town of Vyshny Volochok, when he suddenly felt a particular sense of total despair, a thought struck him like lightning about his childhood faith: What if God really does exist—shouldn't He reveal Himself? But he was not a believer! From the depth of his soul, in his desperate state, he cried, “Lord, if You exist, reveal Yourself to me. I am not seeking You out of some earthly desire. I only need to know one thing—do You exist, or not?” And the Lord revealed Himself! He revealed Himself [so convincingly], that he said, “‘Lord, let anything happen to me, any sorrows, any tortures, only do not turn me away, do not deprive me of eternal life.’ With my whole soul, completely consciously, I said, ‘I don't need anything, not family life, or anything else; only make it so that I should never fall away from You, that I should always be with You.’”

“It is impossible to relate,” said Fr. Nikon,

That action of grace which convinces a person of the existence of God with the power of something obvious, that leaves no room for the slightest doubt. The Lord reveals Himself as, for example, a bright ray of sun suddenly shines after dark clouds. You no longer doubt: was it the sun, or did someone shine a light? The Lord revealed Himself to me in such a way, that I fell to the ground with the words, “Lord, glory to Thee, I thank Thee. Grant me to serve Thee all my life. May all the sorrows and suffering on earth come upon me, only don't let me fall away from Thee, or lose Thee.”

Then I heard the ringing of a large church bell. At first I paid it no attention. Then, when I saw that it was already almost three o'clock in the morning and the ringing continued, I remembered my mother's words when she told me about the old people who would visit them and say that spiritual people sometimes hear bells ringing from heaven.

He was very unsure about this bell ringing, worried that it might have been a hallucination. He was reassured when he read the autobiography of Sergei Bulgakov, who related concerning his conversion experience that, "Not in vain did I hear the ringing of bells from heaven all that summer." "Then," remembers Fr. Nikon, "I also recalled Turgenev's story 'Living Relics,' in which Lukeria also said that she heard ringing 'from above,' not daring to say, 'from heaven.'" From this, Fr. Nikon came to the conclusion that "together with this spiritual experience, the Lord also allowed me to perceive my communion with heaven in a sensory way." The Lord reveals Himself to some people in an internal way and at the same time, through special outward signs to assure and support them.

A radical change in world view happened in just one moment; it seems a miracle clearly occurred. Just the same, this miracle was the natural, logical completion of his search for truth on the path of reason. The Lord revealed the meaning of life to him, let him taste and see that the Lord is good, and let him know the Truth. This is what Fr. Nikon said about his first experiences after conversion:

After this, the Lord begins to lead a person along a complicated path, a very complicated path. I was amazed when I entered a church after this Divine revelation. I used to go to church earlier—out of compulsion; we were taken to church



during high school also. But what did we do there? I would stand there like a pillar, without any interest, thinking my own thoughts.

But after my conversion my heart opened up a little, and the first thing I remembered when I entered the church was the story about Prince Vladimir's ambassadors [to Constantinople], who upon entering the Greek Church did not know where they were—on heaven, or on earth. So the first perception in the church after experiencing such a state is that you are not on the earth. The Church is not the earth—it is a little piece of heaven. What joy it was to hear, “Lord have mercy!” This had an amazing effect on my heart; all the Services, continual remembrance of the name of God in various forms, the singing, the readings. It evoked a sort of ecstasy, joy; it filled me....

When a person comes and falls down before the Lord, saying, “Lord, do as Thou wilt; I know nothing (and truly, what do we know?), do as Thou wilt, only save me,” then the Lord Himself begins to lead that person.

That young man really didn't know anything about the spiritual path at that time, but he fell down with tears to God, and the Lord Himself led him. “He led me in such a way after this; I lived two years in Volochok, read books, and prayed at home.” This was the period of his “burning” heart,” as Fr. Nikon recalls. He did not see or hear what was happening around him. At that time he was renting half of a private house in Sosnovitsy (near Vyshny Volochok). He was twenty-two years old. On the other side of a thin dividing wall were dancing, song, laughter, and youthful games; they were having fun. They tried to invite him, too, for he

was an interesting person—intelligent, attractive, and educated. But he had lost his taste for the world.

The next two years of his life were a time of unceasing spiritual labors, true asceticism. He was acquainting himself for the first time with the writings of the Holy Fathers, and reading the Gospels for essentially the first time. This is what he said about this period when he had reached the end of his life:

It was only in the Holy Fathers and the Gospels that I found something truly valuable. When a person begins to struggle with himself, when he tries to travel the path of the Gospels, then the Holy Fathers become something he needs, they become his family. A Holy Father becomes his closest teacher, who speaks to the soul; and the soul receives it with joy and is consoled. Those philosophers and various disgusting sectarian teachings evoked boredom, depression, and nausea; but I came to the Fathers as to my own mother. They soothed me, gave me wisdom, and fed me.... Then the Lord gave me the thought to enter the Moscow Theological Academy (in 1917). This meant very much to me.

Another no less dramatic and interesting description of conversion to God and learning the truth was recorded, for example, by B. I. Gladkov in his book *The Path to the Knowledge of God* and by Sergei Bulgakov in *Unwaning Light*. Another very remarkable quest for truth on the path of reason was that of a modern American ascetic, Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose, †1982), as described by Fr. Damascene (Christensen).<sup>155</sup>

The main difficulty in a person's efforts to obtain knowledge is the fact that human society as a whole lives by ideals and

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<sup>155</sup> Fr. Damascene (Christensen) *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2003).

principles entirely different from those of the Gospels. They are beautifully portrayed by Christ's temptation in the desert. The Apostle John expressed them in the following words, *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world* (1 Jn 2:16). In this passage the temptations are not only named, but their interrelationship is shown, as well as their hierarchical rank. In this hierarchy, the biggest and most dangerous passion is pride. More than anything else it distorts a man's essence and thereby hides from him the final goal and true meaning of life in all its aspects. It becomes clear what a person should pay more attention to than anything else: exposing and objectively considering what feeds this passion. Otherwise, his quest for knowledge will not only be completely fruitless, it will also be destructive for him and for all mankind.

Within the huge diversity of pride's manifestations, it can be seen in our civilization with particular power and openness in the cult of reason: that is reason, naturally, of the *old man* (Eph 4:22), or reason which is a slave to its own passions (lusts). In the world's estimation, this reason is the highest court, which decides all of man's problems and demands that all aspects of spiritual life submit to it.

Where can truth be found according to this reason—and with truth, the blessedness of existence and meaning of life?

In science and philosophy. Science provides the first two "lusts," cited above from Saint John the Theologian, while the unchristian spirit of philosophy provides the last one by proclaiming man's self-sufficient greatness. It is precisely in this scientific-technological progress and similar philosophy,<sup>156</sup> and not in God

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<sup>156</sup> Inasmuch as artistic (esthetic) activity make as its pretense not so much the acquisition of truth as the expression and satisfaction of psychological demands and condition of man, the realm of esthetics is not touched upon here.

and holiness of life, that “pride of life” sees the possibility of realizing man’s ancient hope to become *like gods* (Gen 3:5). However, the first man [Adam] quite eloquently demonstrated the outcome of this idea. Therefore, in order for every sincere seeker of truth to ceaselessly appreciate the capabilities of “pure” reason as well as the Christian witness to Truth, it is very important to analyze man’s quest activity.

So, what is truth?<sup>157</sup> In an attempt to answer this question, four main contenders enter the arena of history: *philosophy*, *science*, *mysticism*,<sup>158</sup> and [Christian] *religion*.

Their answers can be briefly outlined as follows:

*Philosophy* (meaning, that area of philosophy in which this question exists): Truth is the sought result of the activity of “pure” reason; for truth is rational, and can be expressed in concrete terms and concepts.

*Science*: Truth is the appropriate acquisition by empirical-rational methods of “objective reality,” or (in the twentieth century) a “useful” model of this reality.

*Mysticism* (of all times): Truth is the inexpressible “Nothingness” which an individual experiences during an inner unification with it, in ecstasy. The concept of “Nothingness” is deeply personal, and therefore it is essentially disconnected from any “orthodox” teaching or religion, but is present in each one of them.

*Christianity*: Truth is God Himself, unfathomable in essence, but infinitely knowable in His actions (energies), revealing

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<sup>157</sup> Priest Paul Florensky gives a rich etymological explanation of “truth” in his theodicy, *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth*, in the second letter, entitled “Doubt.”

<sup>158</sup> The term “mysticism” here and further on indicates a wrong, false spiritual path, according to the terminology of the Church fathers—*prelest* or deception—as distinguished from true knowledge of God, theosis (divinization). “In the language of our fathers the very word “mysticism” does not exist; this is a concept of Western origin” (Archim. Cyprian [Kern], *The Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Palamas*, [Moscow, 1996], 39–40).

Himself to man in many and various ways. The fullness of Divine Truth's self-revelation is given to man in the incarnate Logos—the Lord Jesus Christ, knowledge of Whom is conditioned upon strict laws of spiritual life.

Unlike science and philosophy, the methods of which are rational, mysticism is irrational. Religion, as something which encompasses the fullness of man's abilities to obtain knowledge, offers different methods of knowing Truth that are applicable during different stages of spiritual development—the rational method (scientific theology) and the irrational method (spiritual life).

## 1. Philosophy

Why does the philosophical method of seeking truth evince serious doubts? First of all, because this method is purely rational in essence; it includes known logic (reason) and a conceptual mechanism which makes philosophy a formal system. But if logic is a purely instrumental and passionless thing, then concepts make the situation incomparably more complex.

Without touching upon “universal” problems, we can cite the following fact. Philosophy uses language, which is inevitably a reflection of human activity. And even if we accept the existence of *a priori* concepts, if they are not filled with specific content borrowed from empiricism, even their content would be pointless for the human consciousness, and therefore “inapplicable.” That is, all philosophical constructs and systems are entirely limited by the language of our four-dimensional space and time. Therefore, if someone should hear a language or contemplate a reality exceeding the conceptual limits of this four-dimensional world, then he would not be able to relate them to others due his lack of corresponding word-concepts. The Apostle Paul wrote about just

this very thing: *And I knew such a man, how that he was caught up into paradise ... and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter* (2 Cor. 12:3–4).

This principle limitation of philosophy is made even worse by the fact that all word-concepts (other than mathematical abstracts) are very indeterminate. Because of this, it is not possible to come to logical, clear conclusions by using them. Werner Heisenberg came to a conclusion in this regard which is exceedingly unfriendly to philosophy. He writes, “The meaning of all concepts and words that came about through mutual activity between us and the world and cannot be precisely determined.... Therefore it is never possible to reach absolute truth through rational thinking alone.”<sup>159</sup>

It is interesting to compare this thought of a modern scientist and thinker with the words of a Christian ascetic who lived a thousand years before Heisenberg and knew neither modern natural sciences, nor quantum mechanics—Saint Symeon the New Theologian. Here are his words: “I ... wept over the race of man; for, seeking extraordinary proof, people use human understanding, and things, and words, thinking to portray Divine nature—that nature which neither Angels, nor people can see or name.”<sup>160</sup>

Both of these quotes, as we see, speak essentially about the same thing: truth, no matter how we call it, cannot be expressed with words. It is even more impossible to describe the reality of an  $n$ -dimensional, or infinite world. Perhaps this is how existence is? Furthermore, by probing the truth of what it has conceived within its bowels, philosophy finds itself in an enchanted circle. It cannot prove its veracity (just as any other formal system cannot, as Hegel

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<sup>159</sup> Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (Moscow, 1963), 67.

<sup>160</sup> Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Divine Hymns* (Sergiev Posad, 1917), 272.

demonstrated by his second theorem on the incompleteness of formal systems), because it is in principle incapable of stepping beyond the boundaries of those rational-empirical data which are traced around its logical-conceptual apparatus. In fact, philosophy even came to this conclusion in the course of its historical development, in studying the question of existence.

Schematically the path of reason on this historical-philosophical road can be imagined in the following way.

“What is quintessential substance?”<sup>161</sup> European philosophy began with this ancient Hellenic question. Since the unstable world could not be considered quintessential substance, the first thinkers—the Milesians, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and others—*confirmed* that as a primal substance (“the one in many”) only the metaphysical can be accounted for (water, apeiron, air, fire, proportion).

But such a dogmatic approach, especially in the face of conflicting answers, could not satisfy human reason for long. In the search for quintessence, the knowledge of which would make it possible to understand also the origin of the world and our own personal existence, man began to search for unconditional *proof* of truth. Thus a principle revolution happened in philosophy from the postulation of an ontological goal to its logical justification, and these two planes—existentialism and rationality—determined its fate entirely.

With the onset of a new age in the West, speculation entered the path of total doubt. After all, in order to become a “strict science,” philosophy, in the course of answering the question about an original substance, was forced to first ask the question about the existence of this very substance itself: the question about the

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<sup>161</sup> Otherwise called Gr. *archê* (ἀρχή) or fundamental principle. —Trans.

existence of existence. But even before answering this question, it had to be convinced that man's very conceptual possibilities are reliable, that thought processes are capable of adequately ascertaining reality, and primarily of knowing oneself—that is, to prove the truth of one's own thinking—through one's own thinking. The circle was closed. Doubt, called upon to raise philosophy to the highest level of reliable knowledge of existence, led it into the dead end of recognizing its own complete inability to say something reliable about the most important thing.

These negative results of Western rational philosophy (and in this lies its own peculiar contribution) spurred searches for other non-rational ways of obtaining knowledge, by turning attention to manifest existence. These searches also brought no result. We are speaking here of so-called philosophy of culture and philosophy of existence. The first school took as its foundation testimony of the collective-historical consciousness, which it finds in separate forms of culture. But by broadening the philosophical subject, cultural philosophy has for all intents and purposes departed from the essence of the question: what lies at the foundation of the world?

The second school, the philosophy of existence, also proceeds from manifest existence, but this time not from its outer data but rather from its inner data. Returning to the existence of man, existentialism at the same time breaks with the "hostile Universe" and with all manner of beyond- and extra-personal existence, by which it in fact closes the basic question of philosophy.

Thus, in both cases, there is a return from bare reasoning to "existence," but an existence divested of ontologicality, taken from the phenomenal level of "existence": on the social level—in cultural philosophy, on the individual level—in existentialism. And in both cases the question of truth as quintessential completely disappears from philosophy's field of vision.



The earlier slavophiles (Alexei Khomyakov, Ivan Kireevsky) took a completely different path. These thinkers looked deeply at the root of Western's philosophy's illness, and discerned it to be its "reign of rationality." They called for a construction of philosophy (ontology), developed in Khomyakov's theistic premise of "willing Reason."<sup>162</sup> For though it be impossible to "prove truth" on the path of reason, this does not at all mean that there is no truth, or that there is no other way of knowing it. There is another way of knowing truth which has always been a part of man, because he is a being similar to God. This path runs through a realm no less real than the outside world—the spiritual realm—and opens the possibility for direct vision of God through His Revelation and through the appropriate spiritual life as they are given in Orthodoxy.

Thus, the historical movement of philosophical reason on the quest for the truth leads man to the starting point of a religious world view—the need to postulate God's existence and accept the religious "method" of apprehending Him.

## 2. Science

Reason travels another path of the quest for truth through the natural/scientific study of the world. Although historically this path is significantly shorter than that of philosophy, it is no less effective in its achievements. What are the results scientific thought achieves from its study of existence?

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to a certain extent "from inertia" in the twentieth century, a purely mechanical concept reigned in science, seeing the world as no more than a huge mechanism, working according to strict laws which were

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<sup>162</sup> Alexei Stepanovich Khomyakov, *Works* (Moscow, 1910), 1:347.

given once and for all. Laplace's famous answer to Napoleon when the latter asked about God's place in the world, "Sir, I have no need for that hypothesis," expressed that absolute determinism in understanding the world which lay at the heart of that concept. We know that one of Leibnitz's most cherished dreams was to establish a so-called "universal characteristic"—an algorithm by which "all truth could be derived" through purely mechanical means. But because nature is alive (never mind humanity), and does not submit to "calculation," the concept of probability was added, which attempted to explain everything (even things that simply do not submit to any measurement at all) with a certain combination of causes and chance, or "Chance and Necessity" (the name of a book by the French biologist Jacques Monod).<sup>163</sup>

This "scientific point of view of the world" contains the conviction that the only truth is "objective" truth; that is, the truth which can be witnessed by special observations and measurements, available to every dispassionate researcher. Anything else beyond the boundaries of so-called objective observation and experiment—for example, God, spirit, the soul, eternity, etc.—is subjective, and therefore has no relationship whatsoever to science and truth, and does not deserve any attention.

Modern science, with all its enormous achievements, or more precisely, because of them, behaves more modestly than science of the fairly recent past. Scientists now talk about absolute laws more rarely than they did in the past, and speak more often of theories and hypotheses; less about determinism and more about probability; less about "truth" and more about "models." These models are understood not as mental or graphic copies of reality, but as effective methods of considering the problems of reality for

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<sup>163</sup> Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971). — Trans.

achieving the goals set by man. “By the development of quantum theory it has become obvious that determinate characteristics are so coupled that determining one characteristic means making the determination of the other characteristic impossible. W. Heisenberg expressed this discovery in his uncertainty principle. It turns out that in the very center of the universe we run up against an uncertainty that no observation can overcome. This conclusion contradicts the supposition of our modern age that the world is basically open to total description. It is proposed that an unfathomable mystery is contained within the very nucleus of reality.<sup>164</sup>

There exist four other characteristic traits of modern science which are interesting in their explanation of the degree of reliability of science’s conclusions. First of all, scientists now rarely talk about “scientific method” in the sense of some single universal method of science. They talk about methods, and invent new methods to solve new problems.

*Secondly*, in order to describe one and the same phenomenon, scientists create various supplementary models. One of the more famous examples has to do with the nature of light, whereby, depending upon the goal, light is seen as either a particle moving through space with enormous speed or as a wave in an energy field (wave particles). Both of these seemingly mutually exclusive models proceed from mechanics, but the scientific concept of light does not agree with either of these models separately. Although such dialectic of quantum mechanics is not reconcilable with habitual common sense, scientists admit that the use of these models provides the best possibility for describing the nature of light.

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<sup>164</sup> *Questions of Philosophy 2* (1999); 115.

*Thirdly*, there is the re-thinking of the concept of objectivity in science. According to the traditional way of thinking, science has given an objectivity which is entirely independent of the researcher. But now it is being more often admitted that scientific research is occupied with broadening the questions posed by a human personality, and not some “objective” reality. The sought-out answers are answers to human questions. More than that—especially since the appearance of Heisenberg’s works, there is an understanding that at least for certain subtle experiences—for example, those connected with research into the micro-world—the observation itself affects the results of the experiment, and the knowledge gained in the experiment is in many respects only relative knowledge.

*Fourthly*, the turbulent process of broadening the limits of science makes everything more obvious: that practically no knowledge can be viewed as final (one clear example is evolution in the study of the atom).

These, like other the peculiarities of modern science and criteria accepted by it today, allow scientists and researchers of scientific knowledge to make entirely determinate conclusion about truth in science: “Truth ... is useful fiction.”<sup>165</sup>

This conclusion witnesses to the fact that the final goal of science, even of the most theoretical, is always pragmatic; it is in principle locked into the horizontal plane of interests *only* of this world; there is no place in it for the question of truth as there is in religion and philosophy. This two-dimensionality of science, its complete lack of world view content—that third, vertical dimension—opens the possibility for using its achievements for ends that are ethically and spiritually contradictory.

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<sup>165</sup> L. C. Berg, *Science: Its Content, Meaning, and Classification* (1921), 18–20, 23. For more detail see §1:9, Religion and Science.

The ethical aspect is sufficiently obvious (there are nuclear power plants, but there are also nuclear bombs). The spiritual aspect is a different matter. Here we can mark three main negative tendencies. One of them is the “zero type,” when all questions related to man’s spiritual life and world view, and the problem of truth itself, are labeled as unscientific, pseudo questions. The essence of this agnostic view of things is clear; it is expressed precisely in the words of Christ, *Let the dead bury their dead* (Mt 8:22).

Another tendency, as ancient as it is new, appears in the attempt to advance the boundaries of scientific knowledge at the expense of introducing elements of mysticism and magic into science.

### 3. Science or Mysticism?

Although mysticism and magic have common elements (irrationalism, faith in the presence of supernatural powers, and others), they differ in their relationship to a Higher power. Mysticism has no meaning without this recognition of a Higher power. Mystical knowledge comes only during a state of ecstasy, when “the mystic feels he is an integral Whole.”<sup>166</sup> Finally, the mystic is deeply indifferent to all that the world considers valuable; he does not seek it.

In magic, this is not the case. It is for the most part far from the recognition of One God, ecstasy is not a requirement, and its goals are exclusively of this world. In the opinion of Frazer, it is identical to science. He writes, “Wherever ... magic occurs in its pure unadulterated form, it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any

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<sup>166</sup> Cited from Carl Jung, *Does God Exist?* (1982), 296 (Russian trans. from German).

spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science.”<sup>167</sup>

The task of magic is to induce the spirits, higher and lower powers, to serve man and his earthly interests, regardless of their moral content and spiritual values. A particular category of scientists also considers that ethical criteria are inapplicable to science, and that science must use any means, including the “unordinary,” in order to achieve health, success, and other similar aims.

Thus, some sociologists and psychologists in the West are inclined to see positive aspects in magic and magic cults. In 1921, Freud wrote about the relationship of psychoanalysis to occultism: “An increased interest in occultism is not at all dangerous to psychoanalysis. To the contrary, we should be prepared for the event that a mutual sympathy be discovered between the two.... A union and cooperation between psychoanalysis and occultism could, in this way, become accessible and promising.”

Before making an evaluation of this tendency in modern science, we will briefly discuss the third, “spiritual” tendency in it, which is close to the preceding one. It is aptly expressed by one of the greatest modern American physicists, Charles Townes, in his article with a very characteristic title: “The Blending of Science and Religion.”<sup>168</sup> The main idea of this article is that science and religion are leading man to one and the same goal, but by different paths. That is, the idea of the essential unity of science and religion is asserted.

This idea was often expressed even earlier by Einstein and some other well-known scientists as far back as Aristotle. However, in

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<sup>167</sup> Sir George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Chap. 4, “Magic and Religion” (New York: MacMillan, 1922).

<sup>168</sup> *Literaturnaya Gazeta* 34 (1967).

this case it shows a deep misunderstanding of religion in general and Christianity in particular. Its biggest mistake is that it sees religion as one of the instruments of this life, completely ignoring the goal of religion—man’s preparation for *eternal* life in God. That is, here we find an open attempt to turn metaphysics into physics, to identify heaven with earth, and to make God Himself into no more than a universal principle of the universe. This is perhaps one of the most widespread mistakes of positivist reasoning in its view of the essence of existence and the meaning of human life.

Clearly, this is also the main danger in the idea of a unity between science and magic,<sup>169</sup> which by its unconditional determinism and total confinement within a four-dimensional space and time, does not bring scientific reasoning out to “new horizons,” and it especially cannot give it new, healthy criteria, new understanding of the meaning of human activity, or understanding of the truth.

No less dangerous is the converting of science to mysticism, not only because this will not broaden science’s boundaries of understanding, but because it will inevitably lead to serious consequences for humanity. A mystic does not obtain knowledge of God, and therefore he prefers to speak of a “Oneness,” of a “Divine Nothingness,” the “Endless,” the “Unknowable,” and such like.<sup>170</sup> In the final analysis, the mystic sees himself as god (see Gen 3:5). Mysticism, by drawing man along the unlawful path (see Jn 10:1) of penetrating the spiritual world and insisting upon so-called “freedom” (in fact, willfulness) in spiritual life, actually destroys the very foundations of human life. This is how it

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<sup>169</sup> See Chap. 5, §4, Magic.

<sup>170</sup> See for example, Sergei Bulgakov, *Unwaning Light* (Sergiev Posad 1917).

essentially differs from positive religion, from Orthodoxy with its strict laws of asceticism.<sup>171</sup>

It is obvious that the mistakenness and peril of this tendency in science can be properly evaluated only after studying the Orthodox principles of spiritual life and criteria for acquiring knowledge.

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If not purified of the passions through the right (righteous) Christian life, the path of reason is very telling. The unprecedented scientific, technical, and other twentieth-century achievements made along this path have been accompanied by equally unprecedented powers of destruction. These negative powers manifest themselves first of all in the spiritual and moral sphere, where the greatest danger is the process of destroying the criteria of goodness, beauty, and truth. Now everything is blurred, shown upside down, and mixed up. And neither philosophy, which has withdrawn the very concept of truth from its areas of thought, nor especially science, the development of which in fact progresses independently of any ethical and spiritual criteria, are not capable of stopping this process. The only Restrainer (cf. 2 Thes 2:7)<sup>172</sup>—Christ in human souls—is decisively, and more and more consciously, being excluded from society not only by science, philosophy, and culture, but by the entire atmosphere of modern life.

The best people in Russia warned long ago about the perilous consequences for mankind of this progression in the West. Here is

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<sup>171</sup> See Chap. 5, §3, Mysticism.

<sup>172</sup> *For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.* -



what Ivan Aksakov, a slavophile writer most remarkable for his prophetic pathos, had to say about this:

Progress that denies God and Christ will in the final analysis become regress; civilization will end in despair; freedom in despotism and slavery. Having withdrawn the image of God, man will also inevitably withdraw—indeed he already is withdrawing—the human image, and begin to be zealous for the image of a beast.<sup>173</sup>

This seems to be all too harshly said. But don't the crises of our day and age, unprecedented in their scope and seriousness—moral, social, ecological, economical, etc.—witness to the suicidal character of a “progress” which has denied Christ?

Isn't the (legalized!) propaganda of all manner of immorality and open mockery of the human body and soul, freedom for any kind of perversion, the sovereignty of the golden calf, the dictatorship of criminal clans, and so on, witness to the *regression to a savage state* of a de-Christianized world?

Isn't modern democracy in fact a *despotism* of financial-industrial oligarchies, seeking only their own ends, and window dressing for the *slavery* of the population (*demos* [Gr.]?)

Finally, the total freedom given to occultism, magic, sorcery, even satanism; the open trampling of all that is sacred (“religious freedom”); propaganda of a cult of cruelty and violence—aren't these the withdrawal of the image of God from mankind by modern civilized society, and man's *zeal for the image of a beast* (see Rev 13)?!

There can be no doubt that in the very idea of unlimited knowledge (“of good and evil”) inherent from the beginning in the

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<sup>173</sup> Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov, *Christianity and Social Progress*, cited from A. Palitsky, *On Questions of the Spirit* (Petrograd, 1914), 7.

“project” of our civilization, human reason has allowed an essential miscalculation.<sup>174</sup> Now that the third millennium has begun, this has become an obvious fact.

#### 4. Christianity

Just how is truth understood in Christianity?

In contrast to scientific and philosophical approaches, the very confession of One Personal God essentially changes thought on the question of truth. God is not merely the source of all being and consciousness, but Being itself (*I AM WHO AM* [Ex 3:14]) and Consciousness—that is, Truth itself. This logically natural conclusion is a given in all monotheistic religions. However, in Christianity it essentially deepens, and acquires a character unique in the history of mankind.

Christianity confesses the truth as perfect God-humanity, manifested in an unmingled, unchanged, undivided, and unseparated (according to the definition established by the Fourth Ecumenical Council [of Chalcedon] in 451) union of the Divine Logos and human nature in the God-man Jesus Christ. Christ, in Whom abides *the fullness of the Godhead bodily* (Col 2:9), is the highest achievement attainable to man, the Self-revelation of God to the world, Truth Itself: *I am the way, the truth, and the life, for I am in the Father and the Father in Me* (Jn 14:6, 10, 11). The Truth, as we see, is not what, but Who.

Thus, Christianity confirms that truth is not the mutable created world (including man), not an identical reflection of so-called objective reality in human consciousness, not a higher contemplated thought, not a perfect rational model, and not a

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<sup>174</sup> Saint Kallistos Katathigiotes said, “The mind should observe its measure of knowledge in order not to perish.”

universal function. It is even *deeper and more perfect* than the image of a monohypostatic Divinity, accessible in its highest attainable forms by non-Christian faiths, but the One Who, due to His transcendence, is in principle unfathomable to man.

The knowledge of the truth is now possible (see 1 Jn 2:13; 1 Cor 13:12). Knowledge of it (Him) is the knowledge of God, made perfect by the *whole* of man, and not only by his reason (cf. Mt 22:37). It is realized not in a state of ecstatic dissolution into the Godhead or some special experience of one's existence, but through a particular spiritual-bodily union with Christ in the Church through personal discovery, when a person himself becomes Truth's bearer, member, and participant. (The anticipation of this fullness of being in Truth for a Christian is his participation in the Eucharist, during which a communicant becomes of one body and one spirit with Christ.)

Christianity confirms that the truth is He Who *is* and *always is*. The realization of truth happens only through man's becoming like unto God. Therefore it cannot be known on scientific, philosophic, esthetic, or mystic (occult) paths.

What then proceeds from such a vision of the Truth? The understanding that:

1) Truth is a spiritual, reasoning, good, personal Being, and not a human condition or thought, or logical conclusion, or theoretical abstraction, or especially not a material object.... It is Being, and not a process or result of "intelligent" human activity;

2) Knowledge of truth is not obtained by any of man's capabilities (reason, the senses), but by an integral human personality "integral reason";

3) Knowledge of truth comes about on the path of right (righteous) Christian life, which gradually transforms a person

from a passionate, sick state to a new, holy, God-like state. “The soul sees Divine truth according to the strength of its life”;<sup>175</sup>

4) Only through spiritual union with Christ can there be the correct vision of the created world as being one with the human organism, and not as some foreign object of investigation, experiment, and consumption. Such knowledge turns man from a greedy and blind exploiter of nature into its knowing and loving benefactor and preserver;

5) The present (earthly) life is not a self-sufficing value, but a transient form of personal being, a necessary condition for self-knowledge and the realization in this inconstant world of our freedom before our own conscience, the recognition of our unoriginality, our “nothingness” without God; and through this, the recognition of the necessity of Christ;

6) The knowledge of Christ the Truth is perfect, eternal goodness.

The Christian understanding can be expressed also in the words so great to the Christian, “Christ is Risen!” The infinite perspective of life is contained in these words, and at the same time, its exact and complete meaning. It is in that life which only acquires its meaning by being eternal. This life is the attainment of perfect knowledge in perfect love, which is synonymous with God Himself, for *God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him* (1 Jn 4:16). This life is inexpressible beatitude: *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him* (1 Cor 2:9).

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<sup>175</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies* (Moscow, 1858), 30:195 (Russian translation). The Holy Transfiguration Monastery translation reads, “*Theoria* arises from a virtuous way of life” (66:324). —Trans.

But Godlike love is not just the moral and emotional goodness of man. It is the perfect “instrument” and knowledge of Truth itself, the contemplation of its incorruptible beauty, and the attainment of the essence of all creation.

### § 3. The Foundation of the Church’s Social Service

This analysis is an attempt to explain theologically one of the more serious questions of Church life—those Christian principles by which the Church’s social activities are made possible. This question is not at all new, but it has received a new impulse in connection with the decision of the meeting of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000, which accepted the document entitled “The Foundation of Social Conceptions in the Russian Orthodox Church.” This document is the first of its kind in the history of Orthodoxy, and it received great attention in the broadest ecclesiastical and social circles in Russia and abroad. The problems discussed in the paper touch upon many relevant aspects of social life, and the Council’s authoritative pronouncement on it has great pastoral and canonical significance.

Our understanding of the source of the Orthodox view on social problems can be insufficient without first explaining other Christian points of view, first of all the Roman Catholic view prevalent during the Middle Ages, and the post-reformation view, which basically determined all recent history of European civilization.

S. N. Bulgakov assesses these two directions thus:

The Middle Ages are directly opposed to more recent times, and yet they are very similar to each other, like the concave and convex of one and the same bas relief viewed from various angles. The Middle Ages stressed only Divine authority in

life.... In their attempt to suppress, in the name of this Divine authority, human authority and man's freedom, they fell into "holy satanism," blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (for "where there is the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom"). In more recent times, on the other hand, there is a one-sided reaction against Medieval mentality, a tendency to completely forget about Divine authority. Completely engulfed in an entirely human progress, [this age] borders upon godlessness, practically unrestrainedly sliding into pagan polytheism, naturalism, and idol worship.... The Middle Ages recognized an unearthly heaven, and made peace with the earth only as with an unavoidable evil. The latter times know for the most part only the earth, and that only for personal use; it only remembers heaven on holidays in church.<sup>176</sup>

By "Middle Ages" here Bulgakov means the era after the schism in 1054, when Catholicism's loss of contact with the spiritual experience of the Ecumenical Church led to the appearance of extreme forms of asceticism.

The change from the Middle Ages to the new civilization happened on a religious basis and was conditioned first of all by the "Copernican" revolution of the Reformation in soteriology. If in Catholicism a person was supposed to be saved by bringing the appropriate satisfaction for his sins to God by good deeds, ascetic labors, and prayers, and receive what he has earned from Him, then the Reformation reduced the conditions for salvation to a minimum: neither deeds, nor prayers, and especially not asceticism, but faith and only faith saves a man. Man himself cannot do anything to save himself, inasmuch as faith itself, the

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<sup>176</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, "The Medieval Ideal and Newer Culture," *Two Cities* 1 (Moscow 1911): 169–170.

only thing that saves a man, does not depend upon him, but *only* upon God. Man, in the words of Luther, is no more than a “pillar of salt,” a “block.”

Therefore, his salvation has nothing to do with his participation; there can be no talk of *synergy*; only God decides his fate. Thus, nothing is required from man for his salvation. A method was finally found to free us from any work on ourselves, from everything that is called asceticism in all religions. One can be saved, it turns out, without saving oneself [without laboring for one’s salvation]. There likely never was a greater “triumph of reason” in the history of religion.

This essentially changes the value of all the Christian’s secular activity, even his motivation for work. Instead of the Catholic understanding of work as punishment for the sin of our forefather (*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread* [Gen 3:19]), and the means by which we redeem our sins from God, in Protestantism work becomes a free activity, directed only towards the satisfaction of earthly needs. For Christ already redeemed all the faithful from their sins; and for the faithful, sin is no longer accounted as sin. Work takes on a purely this-worldly value, to the exclusion of any eschatological significance. The energy of the spirit thus departing from Medieval man—energy which was earlier directed toward asceticism for the sake of salvation—is now completely freed up. All of his religious pathos was transferred from heaven to earth, from spiritual goals to everyday practical ones. The task of the Church as a society of believers is relegated essentially to social work from this point on.

The consequences of this soteriological revolution are entirely understandable: the borderline between life according to Christ and pagan life became even more indiscernible. The same S. Bulgakov wrote:

Protestantism, as opposed to Medieval Catholicism, departs from the destruction in principle of any opposition between the ecclesiastical and secular or worldly. Worldly occupations, secular professions ... are viewed as the fulfillment of religious duty, the sphere of which thus broadens to include all worldly activity.<sup>177</sup>

Any ordinary labor and, it follows, earthly life itself with all its values take on a sort of religious character for the faithful. There is a clear return to paganism with its cult of everything earthly. Theological, religious, and philosophical questions arise due to this, along with philosophical systems of thought based upon a new view of the meaning of human life, and man's relationship to earthly activities. Materialism and atheism became the logical result of this process. The Protestant Church essentially turns into just one more charitable department of the government.

The concepts of an “unearthly heaven” and an “unspiritual earth” had different fates. The former, viewing the body as something contemptuous and any care for its needs as something approaching sinful, sank into the past. The second, for which material needs are not only the foremost, but in the final analysis, the only needs there are in the world, grew and developed rapidly during the modern era and is now marching triumphantly through the Christian world. The words of Christ—*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you* (Mt 6:33); *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone* (Mt 23:23)—are increasingly forgotten.

From the theological point of view, these positions could be characterized in Christological terminology as Monophysite and

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., “Popular Economics and Religious Personality,” 190–191.



Nestorian, while the Orthodox point of view would be Chalcedonian. As we know, a referendum of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of 451 in Chalcedon determined that the Divine and human natures were joined in Christ “with no confusion, no change, no division, no separation.” The same Council also condemned the idea that Christ’s human nature is subsumed by His Divine nature (monophysitism), as well as the separation and autonomy of these two natures (nestorianism). In the context of the question at hand, this means that the one-sided spiritualism of the Middle Ages and the materialism of the Reformation are equally condemned. From this angle, the Chalcedonian dogma serves as a foundation for an Orthodox understanding of the nature of the Church’s social actions.

But how does the Church see itself as a subject of social action?

First of all, our attention is drawn to the paradox of sanctity and Divine truth abiding in the Church undivided and without confusion, on the one hand, and on the other, human sinfulness and mistakes. This requires an explanation.

The Church is essentially the *unity in the Holy Spirit* of all rational creation, following God’s will, and thus entering into the God-man Organism of Christ—*His Body* (cf. Eph. 1:23). Therefore, a Christian’s state of abiding in the Church is conditioned not only by the fact of his having received Baptism and other Sacraments, but also by his special communion with the Holy Spirit. All the Holy Fathers insist upon this.

In Baptism, the believer receives the *seed* of grace reborn by Christ in human nature, and thus also receives a real opportunity to *begin* growing spiritually. “Baptism,” writes Saint Ephraim the Syrian, “is only the pre-beginning of resurrection from hell.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> *Salvation and Faith According to Orthodox Teaching* (Moscow, 1995), 60 (reprint from 1913).

Saint Symeon the New Theologian explains, “He who has come to believe in the Son of God ... repents ... of his former sins and is cleansed of them in the Sacrament of Baptism. Then God the Word enters the one who is baptized as into the womb of the Ever Virgin, and abides in him like a seed.”<sup>179</sup>

That is, every baptized person partakes of the Spirit of God and abides in the Body of Christ only to the degree that he keeps the commandments and purifies his soul through repentance and humility. The Church itself abides in a Christian only to the extent that he allows space in himself for the Holy Spirit through the way he lives his life. Therefore, the degree of a believer’s participation in the Church and the character of his membership in it change continually, and his range of fluctuation can be very broad. The prayer of absolution read during the Sacrament of Confession over a *member of the Church* witnesses to this. It reads, “Make peace with him [her] and join him [her] to Thy Church.” The meaning of this prayer is understood. The member of the Church expels the Spirit of God from himself by his sins and falls away from the Church, the Body of Christ, but through repentance he once again partakes of the Holy Spirit and the Church. The measure of this return to the Church’s bosom is always relative; it is directly dependent upon the sincerity and depth of the Christian’s spiritual life.

But the Church is called a visible *society (organization)* of people, *having a unity of faith, Sacraments, authority,* and a ruling bishop. Its members are all those who have received baptism, even including those enemies of the Church who have simply not been excluded from it. That is, the image of any visible church always only partially corresponds to the Church’s First Image, for by far

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<sup>179</sup> Cited from *The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 3 (1980): 67.

not all the baptized are true members of the Church—the Body of Christ; not all manifest and express its faith, or show themselves to be faithful witnesses and fulfillers of the truth preserved by it. This must be understood, for it is very pertinent to any discussion of social action in the Church.

The degree to which it [social action in the Church] is salvific proceeds entirely from an understanding of the two basic truths of Christian life, and mostly by the second commandment about love.<sup>180</sup> Nevertheless, the Christian understanding of love is by far not always the same as the generally accepted one. According to the Christian criteria, not every outwardly good deed is a testimony of love, or is actually good. That is, any benevolent or other social action in and of itself is not always an expression of Christian love. To put it another way, not everything considered good by worldly standards is actually good from the Christian point of view. What can prevent outwardly good deeds from being truly good?

The Lord looks at the hearts of men (cf. 1 Kgs 8:39) and not at their deeds. The Savior condemns those who do *all their works ... to be seen of men* (Mt 23:5), and addresses these wrathful words to them: *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous* (Mt 23:29); *But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone* (Lk 11:42).

The Holy Fathers call humility the supreme quality of Christian love, for humility is the foundation of its pure sacrificial nature, and its true unselfishness. According to the spiritual law revealed

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<sup>180</sup> *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* (Mt 22:37–39).

to the Fathers, there can never be even one true virtue where there is no humility. This first of all relates to the highest virtue, love. “If the supreme virtue, love,” writes Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, “according to the words of the Apostle, is longsuffering, does not envy, is not puffed up, is not prone to wrath, and never fails, then this is because it is supported and assisted by humility.”<sup>181</sup> Therefore, Saint John the Prophet, a co-ascetic of Saint Barsanuphius the Great, said, “True [Christian] labor cannot be without humility, for labor by itself is vanity, and accounted as nothing.”<sup>182</sup>

The Holy Fathers teach most assuredly: good deeds are only those performed with *Christian* love, that is, with humility. Otherwise they lose their value, and even turn into evil; because, as the Apostle says, both sweet and bitter water cannot come from the same spring (cf. Jas 3:11). The spiritual law which the Savior Himself revealed to us also speaks about this: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation* (Mt 43–45).

According to the Fathers’ explanation of this passage, the soul that has been cleansed by Baptism but does not live as a Christian, and is not occupied by the spirit of love, becomes the abode of spirits more evil than those abiding in it before Baptism. That is why believers can be worse than pagans. This is caused by the

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<sup>181</sup> Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, *Works* (Moscow, 1899), 2:99.

<sup>182</sup> Abba Dorotheus, *Soul Profiting Reading* (Moscow, 1874), 262.

ambition, pride, hypocrisy, and other passions that grow with particular fury in a Christian from an awareness of his importance, and deform his soul, turning his so-called good into an abomination before God. Jesus said to them, *Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God* (Lk 16:15).

Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) clarifies it this way:

Unfortunate is the man who is satisfied with his own human righteousness, for he has no need for Christ.<sup>183</sup> The doer of human righteousness is filled with self-opinion, high-mindedness, self-deception ... he repays with hatred and revenge those who dare to utter even the most well-founded and well-intentioned contradiction of his truth. He considers himself worthy—most worthy—of rewards both earthly and heavenly.<sup>184</sup>

From the example of those outwardly righteous but spiritually rotten high priests, Pharisees, and scribes, we can see just what believers with a high opinion of their own worthiness and their service to God and people are capable of. They not only cast out the Savior, but sent Him to the cruelest execution. Apparently there is no question about how “pleasing to God” their social actions were. This illustration provides the key to understanding the activity of any Christian, and any Christian church.

Social action is performed by hierarchs, clergy, and laymen. Its Christian value can be quite varied. Their works can be the deeds of the Church only when they are performed not only by the

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<sup>183</sup> Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *Works* (Saint Petersburg, 1905), 4:24.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:47.

decision of their superiors, but with *Christian* love, the presence and extent of which is hidden from people but clear to God, and directly conditioned upon the person's spiritual and moral state. If Christians act for God's sake, for the sake of fulfilling Christ's commandment of love for neighbor, and have as their goal the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, then the Church works through them, and their works bring forth true fruits for both the benefactors and the needy. Saint Seraphim of Sarov said, "The true goal of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God ... and every good deed done for the sake of Christ is a means for acquiring the Spirit of God." He goes on to say, "Note that good deeds done for Christ's sake will bring the fruits of the Holy Spirit."<sup>185</sup>

As an example, we cite the following remarkable incident which occurred during Ivan the Terrible's advance on Novgorod in 1570. Having sacked this city, he came to Pskov with the same intention.

In Pskov he met the fool-for-Christ, Nicholas Salos. Jumping onto a branch, Nicholas called out to Ivan the Terrible, saying, "Ivanushka, Ivanushka, come and eat (motioning toward the laden tables). Have some tea—you haven't eaten enough human flesh in Novgorod." Then he invited the Tsar to his tiny room, where a piece of raw meat lay upon a clean white tablecloth. "Eat, eat, Ivanushka," he invited the Tsar, but the Tsar answered, "I am a Christian, and do not eat meat during the fast." The fool-for-Christ then said to him angrily, "You don't eat meat, but you drink human blood and have no fear of God's judgment! Don't touch us, traveler. Get out of here! If you touch anyone in God-preserved Pskov you'll fall down dead—like your horse!" At that moment

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<sup>185</sup> *On the Goal of Christian Life* (Sergiev Posad, 1914), 41, 42. (For an English translation of this conversation with N. I. Motovilov, see Helen Kontsevich, *St. Seraphim, Wonderworker of Sarov*, Wildwood, Calif.: St. Xenia Skete Press, 2004]. —Trans.

the Tsar's stableman ran into the room, his face white as a sheet, and informed him that his favorite steed had died. The Tsar quickly left the city without touching a single citizen. Pskov was saved from the bloody horrors experienced in Novgorod. Such was the fruit of one Christian's social work. This is the social work of a saint.

In contrast, social action can be taken by clergy and laypeople about whom the Lord said, *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men* (Mt 15:8–9).

Needless to say, these people's works, though they proceed from the highest ecclesiastical organs, have no Christian content beyond the form, and will bring no good. Even worse—such works often become a direct temptation for many, turning them away from Orthodoxy.

The idea that social activities performed by the Church are always and in all cases done according to the will of the Holy Spirit and do not depend upon the spiritual state, motives, or aims of those performing them, is seriously mistaken. The Church is both Divine and human. The actions of its visible members are only the actions of the Church—the Body of Christ—when they are done for God's sake, and not for any other reasons. *For wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins. For the Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful, and will withdraw himself from thoughts that are without understanding, and he shall not abide when iniquity cometh in* (Wis 1:4–5).

The spirit creates forms for itself. If baptized Christians remain pagans by their lives, then all their activities will be penetrated with pagan content and will in the final analysis be fruitless, even

harmful, although they were done in the name of the Church; for God looks at man's heart. There are plenty of motives for hypocritical good deeds and piety: seeking glory, riches, rank, approval from authorities, etc., and all those things that have often been hidden behind outwardly quite decent and benevolent social actions in the history of the Church.

At the present time, the character of many activities in Christian churches, especially in the West, testify to the steep drop in interest over matters of spiritual life, and a catastrophic sliding towards so-called "horizontal," or to put it simply, purely worldly activity.

Very telling in this regard was the international conference of the World Council of Churches in Bangkok in 1973, on the theme, "Salvation Today." Such a welcome theme this is. What more important topic is there for Christian discussion than that of the human soul's eternal salvation? However, those few Orthodox participants, including those from the Russian Church, were deeply disappointed. Just about everything was discussed at this conference: social, political, economic, ecological, and all other problems of this life. The topic was salvation from various catastrophes: poverty, hunger, sickness, exploitation, illiteracy, aggression by trans-national corporations, and so on. The only salvation which was not discussed—the one for which our Lord Jesus Christ suffered on the Cross—was salvation from sin, from passions, from eternal damnation. Not a word was mentioned about this. The words of Alexei Khomyakov came to mind:

There is a sort of deep falsehood in the union of religion with social concerns.... When The Church interferes in the discussion of bread rolls and oysters, and begins to put its greater or lesser capabilities of solving similar issues on display for all to see, thinking that it thereby witnesses to the



presence of the Spirit of God in its bosom, it loses all right to peoples' trust.<sup>186</sup>

There is no doubt that a Christian's activities performed out of worldly motives do not lead to spiritual benefit and the evangelization of the world, but to the worldlification of the churches themselves.

This and similar worldlification in modern Christianity is a serious step in the direction of accepting the antichrist, for this false savior will solve (in any case, will create an appearance of solving) all the main social and other world problems. Thus, he will become the awaited christ for those so-called Christians who are seeking materialistic *salvation today*. Then *unnoticeably*, with Bible in hand, they will deny Christ the Savior.

Our Church has more than once expressed its criticism of such worldliness in Christian activity ("religious politicking," as E. Trubetskoy put it). It has emphasized that the fundamental goal of the Church's social service is to strive for spiritual and moral health in society, and not the growth of material well-being in and of itself. Saint Isaac the Syrian wrote, "With men, poverty is something loathsome; but with God, much more so is a soul whose heart is proud and whose mind is scornful. With men, wealth is honored; but with God, the soul that has come to humility."<sup>187</sup> For the Holy Church, the words of Christ still show the way: *Therefore I say to you, be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat: and the body more than the raiment?* (Mt 6:25).

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<sup>186</sup> Alexei Stepanovich Khomyakov, *Complete Works* (Moscow, 1886), 2:85.

<sup>187</sup> *Ascetical Homilies* 57:420 (Russian). The Russian translates "scornful mind" as "a high-floating mind." English translation from Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 5:42.

Material prosperity, health, human rights, and so on, by themselves, without the acquisition of spiritual goods, do not make man better. Even worse—as the contemporary writer M. Antonov writes, “A person who no longer has need of material goods, but has never felt the need for spiritual development, is terrifying.”<sup>188</sup> He continues:

Man is not a slave to needs and outward circumstances; he is a free being, but also a bodily being, and therefore he has to satisfy his needs and experience the influences of his environment. Apparently there exists a certain law of measure not yet formulated by science, according to which a person whose minimum requirements are satisfied is obligated to raise himself to a higher level of spiritual life, in order to avoid self-destruction. If this law is not observed, then material and fleshly requirements acquire hypertrophied proportions at the expense of spiritual essentials. Furthermore, this seems to apply to individual and society alike. The modern historical stage of Western countries, with the aggression in them of “mass culture,” clearly proves the existence of such a situation.<sup>189</sup>

The modern psychological situation in the materially wealthy West is an illustration of this thinking. The Finnish Lutheran bishop K. Toyviainan summed up this situation:

According to certain research, more than half the population of the West has lost its goal in life. We are convinced that the subject of psychiatrists’ work will be feelings of depression and despondency, to a much greater extent than suffering

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<sup>188</sup> M. Antonov, *Perestroika and World-View* 9 (Moscow, 1987), 157.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

itself. A person's motive for suicide is often his existential emptiness.

Social work in the Church can only be a service of the Church (and not purely secular activity) and bring spiritual good to people when it is based upon a sincere striving by its workers to fulfill the most important Gospel commandment, and thereby preach the name of Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, *And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity [love], it profiteth me nothing* (1 Cor 13:3).

There are no reasons for social activity in the Church other than to preach Christian love, and turn each person to the path of salvation by teaching this love through word, example, and life. *So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (Mt 5:16).

#### § 4. A Christian's Freedom, the Church's Freedom, and Religious Freedom

The concept of freedom has several dimensions. Here we will note three of them as being the most relevant to the question of a Christian's freedom.

*The first* is the metaphysical. By freedom in this case is understood one of the most fundamental qualities of human nature—*free will*, expressed first of all by a person's moral self-determination in the face of good and evil. Free will is such an important quality that, when it is lost, the personality becomes completely degraded. But as long as self-awareness is preserved, no one can take authority over this freedom—not another man, nor society, nor laws, nor any regime, nor demons, nor angels, nor even God Himself. Saint Macarius of Egypt (fourth century) said:

You are created in the image and likeness of God; therefore just as God is free and creates what He wants ... so are you free.<sup>190</sup> Therefore, our nature is well capable of accepting both good and evil; both God's grace, and the enemy's powers. But it cannot be forced.<sup>191</sup>

A classic saying of the Church Fathers, "God cannot save us without us," excellently expresses the Christian understanding of the sense and meaning of this freedom.

*The second* dimension of freedom is *spiritual freedom*. Unlike outward freedom, it signifies man's authority over his own egoism, his own passions, sinful feelings, desires—over his own self. This kind of freedom is only acquired through a correct spiritual life, making the believer capable of communion with God, Who alone possesses absolute spiritual authority. The saints attained to great freedom, having purified themselves of the passions.<sup>192</sup> Every "ordinary" person possesses relative spiritual freedom (cf. Jn 8:34). Only those who are hardened in evil, who blaspheme the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 31–32) and have become incapable of good, have lost this freedom. Christianity sees the ideal of spiritual life in God in this way, and thereby in principle denies the possibility that some sort of absolute freedom can exist in man ("on this side of good and evil").<sup>193</sup> Archpriest Sergei Bulgakov wrote, "[Man's] freedom is relative.... It stands and falls, is conquered and surpassed on the paths of created life to its

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<sup>190</sup> Saint Macarius of Egypt, *Spiritual Homilies* (Sergiev Posad: Saint Sergius Lavra, 1904), 15 § 21:121 (Russian translation).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, § 23.

<sup>192</sup> Blessed Augustine very successfully relates the degree of sanctity with the degree of freedom when he says, "It is a great freedom to be able to not sin, but it is a very great freedom to be incapable of sinning" (*Magna est libertas posse non peccare; sed maxima libertas—non posse peccare*).

<sup>193</sup> V. S. Soloviev wrote, "Only by believing in the invisible God and acting in faith from God does our will become truly free will; that is, a free leader—free from its own self, from its given factual condition. Here, will acts not only as a psychological phenomenon, but as a creative power, which goes before every phenomenon and is not covered by any fact, that is, it is free in essence" (V. Soloviev, "Works," *Social Benefit* [Saint Petersburg], 3:293).

deification. Freedom is not an independent power in itself, and in itself is powerless when it opposes Divinity.”<sup>194</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian says, “For there is no perfect freedom in this imperfect age.”<sup>195</sup>

The Apostle Paul says, *Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* (2 Cor 3:17). He calls a person who has attained spiritual freedom “new” (Eph 4:24), emphasizing by this the renewal of his mind, heart, will and body. To the contrary, he calls those who live sinfully “old” (Eph 4:22), a “slave” (Rom 6:6, 17), as one who hasn’t the strength to follow what faith, reason, and conscience tell him, and what he himself well knows to be better for him. The apostle Paul describes this state of spiritual slavery as the antithesis to true freedom in the following very expressive words: *For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I... For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do... But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members* (Rom 7:15, 19, 23).

The difference between spiritual freedom and freedom of will was expressed well by Kant: “By freedom in the cosmological (metaphysical—A. O.) sense I mean the ability to have an ontological state according to one’s own will. Freedom in the practical (moral, spiritual—A. O.) sense is the will’s independence from the force of sensuality.”<sup>196</sup>

*The third* aspect is *social freedom*. It indicates the sum of specific personal rights in a state or society. Most of the difficult

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<sup>194</sup> Archpriest Sergei Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Paris, 1945), 521---522.

<sup>195</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies* (Moscow, 1858), 28:190. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 52:262.

<sup>196</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Works* (Moscow, 1964), 3:478.

questions arise in this realm, inasmuch as in society a multitude of different individuals come into mutual contact, all having their own free will. As a whole, this is the problem of man's *external freedom*, or the problem of allowable (by law, custom, religion, generally accepted morals) acts in the outside world.

These three dimensions of freedom enable us to speak with complete specificity about which freedom should be the foremost goal in the Christian's life. It goes without saying that this should be spiritual freedom, which, as was already stated, is acquired only through the process of a righteous life. What sort of life this is, what laws exist in it, by what criteria we can judge the correctness or faultiness of a chosen path, and finally, what steps a man must take in it to achieve such freedom—these are all important questions which require special attention (see Chapter 6, Old Testament Religion).

In other dimensions we should speak of *freedom of the Church*. The Church is both Divine and human. By force of its dual nature it possesses two different freedoms which are incommensurable with each other.

The Church, as an invisible oneness in the Holy Spirit of all those who love Christ (*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me* [Jn 14:21]) is always free, for *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*. It is higher than all external freedoms, rights, and privileges. It does not fear any human limitations and repressions, and persecutions themselves only serve to glorify it the more. So it was during Jesus Christ's earthly life and that of the Apostles, so it remains after His Resurrection and Ascension, and up to the present day—*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever* (Heb 13:8).

The visible Church/community, like any societal and religious organization, needs corresponding conditions for its existence, including religious freedoms regulated by the state.

Religious freedom is the right to openly confess and practice one's religious convictions individually as well as collectively—that is, the right to perform one's religious rites, to preach, have one's own publishing houses, to participate in the educational process, etc. In this regard, religious freedom is no different from those highly important social or external freedoms and rights possessed by various secular organizations, and by all citizens of one or another country.

What value can we place upon these freedoms in and of themselves?

They are obviously needed for the continuation of normal life in society and its members. Nevertheless, as soon as this question touches the actual practice of these freedoms, they immediately become one of the most serious problems of social life, especially at the present time. The main reasons for this are as follows:

*First.* Every right has two sides, and can be used by people not only for the benefit of society and its citizens, but also for certain self-interests, even viciously (for example, not only to inform, but also to defame; not only to preach peace, temperance, chastity, but also to spread propaganda of violence, pornography, etc.). The laws which are called upon to regulate the mechanism of these freedoms are as a rule imperfect, as the reality of our modern life quite eloquently testifies.

*Second.* All of these rights in and of themselves do not orient man towards the most important thing—the acquisition of spiritual freedom. More than that, the catastrophic moral degradation of society and obvious decline in spirituality even in Christian churches of the “free” countries show that external freedom

without the One Who restrains (cf. 2 Thes 2:7) not only does not raise a person's dignity, but often even serves as one of the most effective means to spiritually and morally corrupt and demean him.

This slippery two-sidedness of external freedoms shows that these freedoms cannot be considered as the primary, unconditional, and self-sufficient value that liberal propaganda so energetically insists they are.

The same conclusion proceeds from the Christian understanding of man and the meaning of his life. Christian anthropology is founded upon two conditions equally unacceptable to the humanistic consciousness: 1) the "assigned" Godlike greatness of man (cf. Gen 1:26; 5:1); and 2) his "given" deeply corrupted nature, which required the sufferings of Christ Himself in order to "resurrect his image before the fall."<sup>197</sup>

Real man is spiritually inadequate, sick, and corrupted by the action of a great variety of passions which deform his soul and activity. External freedom is completely unrelated to this condition of man, and not oriented toward his spiritual correction and development, or to the acquisition of what should be the highest goal of all societal establishments—the raising of every individual to the level of human dignity (cf. Eph 2:15).

Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) wrote:

As long as mankind is subject to the influence of sin and the passions, rule and submission are necessary. They will inevitably exist throughout the course of the life of the world; only they may appear, do appear, and will appear in various forms.... Neither equality, nor complete freedom, nor earthly welfare to the degree that ecstatic false teachers wish it and

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<sup>197</sup> Troparion to the Forefeast of the Nativity.



promise it, can ever be.... The relationship of rule and submission will perish when the world perishes—then will rule and submission cease (cf. 1 Cor 15:24); then will there be brotherhood, equality, and freedom; then will the reason for unity, rule, and submission be not fear, but love.<sup>198</sup>

This reasoning enables us to understand the fundamental Christian position as it relates to social, political, economic, and other freedoms. It consists in the assertion that all these freedoms cannot be considered to be primary guarantees for normal human life, as *unconditional* requirements, and especially not as aims in themselves, but only as possible means, or conditions for attaining the meaning of human life. Society's most important task should be the establishment of a moral and lawful atmosphere in which external freedoms are an aide to man's spiritual growth and healing, and not an atmosphere which robs him of his essence, stimulates the passions, and kills the soul itself.<sup>199</sup>

What is needed for this?

In the Orthodox world view, the answer to this question can be found in this basic revelation: *And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him* (1 Jn 4:16). From this it would necessarily follow that love should be the essence of any of man's activities.<sup>200</sup> The Christian understanding of love is

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<sup>198</sup> Articles of Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov on ecclesiastical/social issues. —L. Sokolov, *Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov: His Life and Moral-Ascetical Views* (Kiev, 1915), appendix, 20, 21.

<sup>199</sup> The issue of human rights was particularly actively studied, as we know, by eighteenth-century French thinkers; especially by Rousseau, who was convinced that every individual has natural, inalienable rights, the guarding of which is the most important function of government. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizens (1789) is built upon these fundamentals and gives the following definitions of freedom (rights): "Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law."

Just the same, the concept of what "injures no one else" is very conditional. What followed in history has shown what freedom limited only by this principle has wrought. *The tree is known by its fruits* (Mt 12:33). And the freedom of an aggressive propaganda of immorality—the cult of force, greed, and other vices even at the time of the so-called Great French Revolution and later on (especially during the 1917 revolution in Russia, and in the present time) reveal the complete moral bankruptcy of this concept.

<sup>200</sup> The nineteenth-century Russian Slavophile philosophers A. Khomyakov, I. Kireevsky, Constantine and Ivan Aksakov, and Y. Samarin were very insistent in their thoughts upon the primary importance of Godlike love in man as the necessary condition for his freedom and the establishment

expressed by the Apostle Paul: *Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things* (1 Cor 13:4–7).

Therefore, the basic Christian criterion necessary to appreciate freedom is the fear that comes from love; for love is afraid of causing any sort of moral, psychological, physical, or other harm to a person (society, or state). It is the truest guardian and correct relationship to things, to nature, or to any kind of activity. Saint Barsanuphius the Great said, “Freedom is good when it is joined to the fear of God.”<sup>201</sup> This is the Christian maxim, in the light of which all of man’s freedoms, rights, and obligations, including religious freedoms, can be correctly understood.

When freedom that is not “limited” by the love of the fear of God is set to rule over love, it becomes murderous to man. It leads to the most negative consequences:<sup>202</sup> first of all, to spiritual and moral degradation of society, to ideological anarchism, materialism, anti-culture, and so on. Wherever freedom has been placed at the head without love, there can be no authentic freedom of the individual, for *Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin* (Jn 8:34). Slavery of spirit is the worst slavery a man can be

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of normal human society, and they established and developed this line of thought. Viewing the Church as the head of the conciliar whole, and in this capacity, as the prototype of an ideal human society, Khomyakov, for example, names the following two main constituents as its quality: “We confess the Church as one and free,” for, “freedom and unity—such are the two strengths to which are worthily entrusted the mystery of human freedom in Christ.” The main principle which guarantees the preservation of these principles in the Church is, as he is convinced, love. “This principle,” he writes, is the foundation of mutual love in Jesus Christ” (A. S. Khomyakov, *Theological and Church Publicistic Articles* [Soikin] 109, 205, 44).

<sup>201</sup> Saints Barsanuphius the Great and John, *Instructions in the Spiritual Life* (Saint Petersburg, 1905), 373:253–254.

<sup>202</sup> Truly, the striving for the so-called “fullness of this life,” to pleasure, is unthinkable without complete social and political freedom. The maximum fullness of rights and freedoms is a necessary condition for a materialistic paradise. However, this axiom of materialism is utopian. Kant well said about this, “In fact, we find that the more an enlightened reason gives itself over to thoughts of pleasures of life and happiness, the further the person is from true satisfaction” (I. Kant, *Works* [Moscow, 1965], 4:230).

under, for it brings him the greatest suffering. A. Solzhenitsyn once noted, “We have become fascinated with ideas of freedom, but we have forgotten that the wisest measure of freedom is far-seeing self-limitation.” Even the pagan philosophers understood this.<sup>203</sup>

Isn’t this the reason that the Apostle Paul wrote, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not* (1 Cor 10:23)?

However, any understanding about the need for spiritual freedom and its primary nature for man has been all but lost to mankind. The Apostle Peter, in rebuking the preachers for having outward freedom while “forgetting” about inner freedom, wrote, *For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage* (2 Pet 2:18–19). The same meaning is expressed by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians: *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. ... This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh* (Gal 5:13, 16–17). Further on he names the “lusts of the flesh,” and concludes quite clearly, *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting* (Gal 6:7–8).

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<sup>203</sup> Epictetus, for example, wrote, “He who is free in body but not free in soul is a slave; and likewise, he who is bound bodily but free spiritually is free” (*Roman Stoics* [Moscow, 1995], 252).

Unfortunately, the actual powers that be in the modern world, which determine (first of all through the media) the character of modern man's education and conditioning, decisively deny the very idea of spiritual freedom, and sow only freedom of the *flesh*. What this is leading to is clear to all. Freedom of speech, the press, etc., that is not in submission to the idea of love for man is for the most part in captivity to vice, "the golden calf," and other idols, and easily becomes an instrument for lies, the propaganda of licentiousness, violence, satanism, etc.; that is, it becomes a *legal* instrument of evil.

A fundamental question arises: Can these freedoms be classified as Good and be called Freedom in order to secure a right to exist in normal human society? Isn't it obvious that rights are called freedoms precisely because they are meant to free man from all forms of inner and outward evil, to constructively form and spiritually perfect him, and not to corrupt him spiritually and physically?

What, for example, does the modern freedom of television information do? It has become, according to one popular newspaper's accurate expression, "a television plague of violence." One American psychologist described television in his own country like this: "When you turn on the television, you automatically turn *off* your inner process of becoming human." Truly, if by the age of eighteen, a young man has, according to statistical data in the U.S., witnessed 150,000 acts of violence, around 25,000 of which were murders, then what sort of freedom can we call this? This substitution for spiritual freedom by the freedom for the basest *lusts* is a deadly threat not only in the spiritual sense, but also in the physical sense, like a sword of Damocles hanging over mankind. For, the passions are insatiable, and the more they are indulged, the more destructive and

uncompromising they become. Wherever freedom is placed above love, the godlike man ends, and the man-beast, for whom there are no values other than his own self, begins.

Therefore, modern European civilization with its tender care for the preservation of bodily freedom, cultivating all of the passions including the most shameful, while at the same time destroying the safety of the soul with unbending one-track determination, is more and more obviously leading the peoples of the world to the final circle of death. In the final analysis, all modern crises have as their source this very external freedom raised to an absolute: a bodily freedom which, having lost the concept of sin, becomes an inexorable tyranny.

An event in New York in 1978 is a perfect illustration of this. At that time, the electricity was down for only three hours. Then the fruits of post-World War II “freedom” revealed themselves to the full extent: “Crowds of Americans,” said A. Solzhenitsyn, “began looting and creating havoc....” Fr. Seraphim Rose further comments that, “Forty years ago the lights went out in New York, and nothing happened: people helped each other out, lit candles, and so forth. And now instead they go and break windows, loot, take everything they can get for themselves, kill people, and get away with whatever they think is possible.”<sup>204</sup>

The ruling principle in the modern civilized world is “freedom for freedom’s sake”; that is, a basic primacy of freedom over love turns out to be a strong narcotic for man, which itself kills and is used to kill an increasing number of people. The whole collection of rights that a young person receives simply because he was born, lacking the corresponding upbringing that would enable him to attain moral maturity and steadfastness, could become the cause for

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<sup>204</sup> Hieromonk Damascene, *Not of This World* (Forestville, Calif.: Fr. Seraphim Rose Foundation, 1993), 997.

the unchecked growth in him of elemental, instinctive forces, with all the negative consequences flowing from this. Isn't it about this that ancient Greek wisdom maintained, "All that is received for free is capable of corrupting"?

That is why such freedom is sold for basic comfort. One modern writer justly said about our times, "Everywhere in the world proceeds the death of freedom—political, economic, and personal.... It is easier to live without freedom. More and more people are willingly giving up their freedom in exchange for a comfortable and peaceful way of life. There is no need to make any decisions, and less responsibility."<sup>205</sup>

This denial of freedom is an entirely natural outcome, for when the passions are given freedom and enslave a person from within, they make him pleasure-loving and egotistical, and thus more capable of selling his first-born dignity as an individual for the lentil pottage of ephemeral comforts and pleasures. We can now see pictures of similar transactions in all spheres of life. The Revelation of Saint John the Theologian unequivocally foretells the general, voluntary slavery to the universal deceiver and tyrant in exchange for the earthly paradise he will promise: *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life* (Rev 13:8).

In connection with this, the question of freedom for religious organizations becomes crucial.

The propaganda of freedom of the *flesh* is always hypocritical. The best example of this is in the U.S., a country which most heatedly demands human rights in other countries of the world while openly trampling upon these rights at home.

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<sup>205</sup> P. Kalinovsky, *Passing Over* (Moscow, 1991), 15.

In 1962 common prayer was banned from public schools by a decision of the U. S. Supreme Court. Today, all manifestations of Christian faith in schools—such as having voluntary Bible studies during lunch breaks, saying grace during meals, using a rosary on a school bus, having Christian meetings after school, or even having a Bible sit atop one’s desk—can be and have been prohibited by school authorities, and court decisions have both prompted and upheld their actions.... Courtesy of the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], numerous displays of the Nativity that since the inception of this country were displayed openly in public parks, etc., have been banned, and cities across the country have been forced to take nativity displays down....<sup>206</sup>

Such an understanding of external freedom gives us an opportunity to take a more concrete look at religious freedom as well.

The *religious freedom* of separate individuals does not contain anything fundamentally different in the social sense from other external freedoms. Freedom of religious communities (churches) has its own peculiarity which leads to corresponding problems.

The first of these problems arises in connection with the question of whether or not to recognize organizations as religious. This decision is based upon authoritative common research by theologians and lawmakers, and specific and precise legal criteria of the very concept of religiousness.

The second and no less relevant problem is the evaluation of the moral side of the teachings of the religious organization requesting [legal] registration, which in turn also requires a responsible

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<sup>206</sup> *Not of This World*, 880.

acceptance of moral criteria. The grievous example of Aum Shinrikyo<sup>207</sup> stands out as one clear illustration of the essential need for these criteria. De facto, and in some places, de jure legalization of satanism is one more example of an open challenge against modern social reason and its concept of religious freedom.

The third and perhaps psychologically most difficult problem is the differentiation between the concepts of *equal rights* and *freedom*. This difference is most easily shown by examples.

*The first example.* In a democratic country all citizens are equally free, but not all have the same rights. Its president has significantly more rights than any other citizen of the country. The law itself names the reason for such unequal rights—the will of the majority, which gave him these rights that are greater in comparison with everyone else's. In this apparently “outrageous” inequality consists one of the natural principles of democracy and freedom.

This democratic principle should be equally extended to the resolution of problems connected with the freedom of religious organizations and their equal rights in the spheres of education, upbringing, television and radio information, and so on. This very voice of the majority of the population should decide what religious community—taking into consideration equal rights—should be given more rights in comparison with others. This democratic principle (the recognition of special rights for specific religions) is actually in effect in Germany, France, Greece, and other countries (but meets with nearly insurmountable difficulties in Russia!), for it does not disrupt the principles of religious freedom.

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<sup>207</sup> Aum Shinrikyo, now known as Aleph, is a sect founded by Shoko Asahara in 1984. In 1995 members of the group carried out a gas attack in a Tokyo subway, killing 12 people and injuring many more. The sect has international chapters, including ones in Russia and the Ukraine, where one disciple brutally murdered his parents after hearing “a voice from above” instructing him to do so. —Trans.



In connection with this, it is interesting to note, for example, that Saint John of Kronstadt sharply criticized Tsar Nicholas II for granting equal rights to all religions in 1905.<sup>208</sup>

Holy Hieromartyr Hilarion (Troitsky) viewed the Tsar's decision in the same way.<sup>209</sup>

The famous monarchist and theologian General Kireev commented upon these freeing reforms: "The Tsar does not see or understand what deep changes his laws on equal rights to faiths have wrought in our life. He *confused equal rights with freedom*. No one argues against freedom, but equal right to propaganda is quite another matter."<sup>210</sup>

*The second example.* Let us imagine that a certain wealthy totalitarian sect, having legally bought out all the media of mass information in one democratic country, begins to spread massive propaganda of an idea which is antagonistic to the religious convictions of the vast majority of the people of that country. How can we look at this fact? Would it be a normal expression of religious freedom, equal rights, and democracy, or would it be, to the contrary, a testimony of crude tyranny, obvious disregard for democracy? On the one hand, it all seems to be according to law. On the other hand, an obvious and irrefutable democratic principle, majority rule, has been ignored and flouted. And the reason for this

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<sup>208</sup> See, for example, *Pillar of the Orthodox Church* (Petrograd, 1915), 402. [Let the reader note, that Orthodoxy was the religion of the overwhelming majority in Russia at the time; in fact it was the nation's religious identity and the source of the Russian people's highest values. From a purely sociological point of view, heterodox literature undermined this identity, sowed confusion, and its legalization was therefore catastrophic. — Trans.]

<sup>209</sup> In February 1917, when there was a Local Council of clergy and laity (Поместный Собор), he wrote, "The resolution of March 31, 1905, accepted by the Holy Synod on the calling of the Council: 'I consider it impossible to do such a great work during the times we are experiencing.... I consider that when a more favorable time comes ... to call a Council of the Russian Church.' Year after year passed by ... the situation in the Orthodox Church became unbearable. Ecclesiastical life became more and more disrupted.... Formerly persecuted religious communities received freedom. In the ancient Orthodox city of Moscow schismatics and Baptists hold their meetings unhindered. While for the Orthodox Church, the favorable time had not yet come.... The relationship of the ruling dynasty toward the Orthodox Church is an historical example of unfavorableness.... The Petersburg period of Russian history is ending in horrible shameful and serious calamity for its entire people." Cited from *The Church and Society*, 4 (1998): 60. See also 3:57.

<sup>210</sup> The diary of A. A. Kireev, cited from S. L. Firsov, *The Orthodox Church and the State in the Final Decades of the Existence of Sovereignty in Russia*, (Saint Petersburg, 1996), 315.

would be that that something extremely important was overlooked—the difference between freedom and equal rights. Having given the wealthy sect equal rights with the poorer church of the people, the law disregarded the peoples’ most important right—the right of the majority in deciding main constitutional issues. A similar situation, when a plutocracy (from the Greek *plutos*, or “wealth”), using the slogan of “freedom,” seizes power from a democracy (meaning “the rule of the people”), has become in our times not only an ordinary occurrence, but practically a law of life in the so-called “free” world.

Therefore the right of any religious organization should, obviously, be in accordance with the law to the degree of its democratic acceptance (i.e., acceptance by the majority). Only under this condition do freedom and equal rights not enter into conflict with one another in basic antagonism to that social right which is based upon love.

One of the most highly educated hierarchs of the nineteenth century, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, summarized the Christian view on the question of freedom thus:

As long as mankind is subject to the influence of sin and the passions, rule and submission are necessary. They will inevitably exist throughout the course of the life of the world; only they may appear, do appear, and will appear in various forms.... Neither equality, nor complete freedom, nor earthly welfare to the degree that ecstatic false teachers wish it and promise it, can ever be.... The relationship of rule and submission will perish when the world perishes—then will rule and submission cease (cf. 1 Cor 15:24); then will there be

brotherhood, equality, and freedom; then will the reason for unity, rule, and submission be not fear, but love.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Articles by Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov on ecclesiastical and social issues. L. Sokolov, *Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov. His Life and Moral-Ascetic Views* (Kiev, 1915), Appendix 20, 21.

## *Chapter 4*

### *Revelation*

One of the most important and inseparable conditions of any religious teaching is faith in the possibility and necessity of Divine Revelation. Every religion has its own particular teaching on this subject.

#### § 1. Forms of Revelation

Divine Revelation is divided into the *natural* and the *supernatural*.

By supernatural revelation is meant the direct gift from God of the knowledge man needs for salvation. This Revelation can be *common* and *individual*.

Common revelation is sent down through particular, chosen people—prophets and apostles—in order to make the truths of the faith known to either separate peoples (*the law and the prophets* [Mt 7:12; 22, 40, and others], which are the Old Testament books of the Bible), or to all mankind (the New Testament).

Individual revelation is given to separate individuals with the purpose of instructing them (or sometimes persons close to them). Many such revelations cannot be retold (see 2 Cor 12:4). Therefore, although various experiences, visions, and states are related in the writings of the Holy Fathers and in hagiographic literature, really only the external side is related. In individual revelations, no essentially new truths are communicated; only a deeper understanding of what is already present in common Revelation.

Natural revelation, or natural knowledge of God, is what those conceptions of God, man, and existence as a whole are generally called that arise in man based upon his knowledge of himself and the world around him. The Apostle Paul wrote about this: *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead* (Rom. 1:20). The search for God and the knowledge of God have always been something natural to man.

## § 2. Common Revelation and Its Signs

Common Revelation was given in somewhat hidden form through the Old Testament prophets, and in its fullness through the Revelation of God in the flesh and His Gospels. What particular signs are present in Christian Revelation which would allow us to differentiate it from human guesses, fantasies, intuitions, philosophical insights, etc.?

The first thing that draws the attention of everyone who reads the Gospels is the sanctity, moral and spiritual purity of its teaching, and the amazing example of the ideal to which man is called—Jesus Christ. This special aspect of the Gospels set Christianity apart from all other world teachings and ideals. No other religion (including that of the Old Testament), no other philosophy has known such a height.

The basic teachings of truth in the Christian faith have an unearthly character: a God of Love, a Trinitarian God; the Incarnation of God; the Savior crucified and resurrected; the Sacraments of Baptism, the Eucharist, and others.

These truths of Christianity are just as different in essence from the religious and philosophical insights that went before it, as, by way of illustration, a child is different from the doll that a woman played with in her childhood. Therefore the Apostle Paul exclaims:

*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness* (1 Cor 1:23). The subsequent history of Christianity confirmed this thought to the fullest extent. People have continually tried to distort Christian teaching (e.g., Gnostics, antitrinitarians, Arians, etc.) and still try (as do various sectarians, Theosophists, etc.) to “correct” it. Or, they try to avoid the “stumbling block,” to make it a natural continuation of Judaism, thereby negating its belief in the Divine and messianic dignity of Jesus Christ; or, to escape the “foolishness,” to make it just one of the teachings of this world (e.g., social Christianity, a theology of “freedom,” “revolution,” etc.). The uniqueness of Christianity amongst all other religions is its philosophical “absurdity” (we recall the words attributed to Tertullian, “*Credo, quia absurdum est*”), its non-triviality<sup>212</sup> and essential difference from all existing religions of the time. Even the adversaries of Christianity<sup>213</sup> indicate that Christian teaching came from an unearthly source—that *foolishness of God which is wiser than men* (1 Cor 1:25).

A clear testimony to supernatural Christian Revelation is *prophecy*. By prophecy we mean here the foretelling of things based not on scientific calculation, nor on some special knowledge of psychology, history, economics, politics, etc. These predictions, which cannot be explained by natural causes and touch events many years, decades, even millennia into the future, have always been one of the serious arguments for the truth of the Christian religion. We shall cite several examples of such predictions.

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<sup>212</sup> N. Bohr points out two forms of reasoning: *trivial*, in which an opposite conviction is the refutation of the former, and *non-trivial*, in which opposite reasoning is just as true. In Christianity, for example: God is Three in One, Christ is God and Man, the Eucharistic bread and wine is the Body and Blood of Christ.

<sup>213</sup> Engels, for example, wrote of Christianity, “It stood in sharp contradiction to all the religions that existed before it” (*The Thoughts of Marx and Engels on Religion* [Moscow, 1955], 60).

In the Gospel according to Saint Luke it is written that the Virgin Mary, by an action of the Holy Spirit, announced, *Henceforth all generations shall call me blessed* (Lk 1:48). The Evangelist wrote these words of the young Virgin as something undoubtedly true. And what do we see? From that time on, all Christian peoples do glorify her.

In the Gospels according to Matthew, we find the Lord Jesus Christ's prophecy about the future of His Gospels: *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations* (Mt 24:14); about the fate of the Jewish nation in Jerusalem: *And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down* (Mt 24:2) (Matthew wrote his Gospel in all probability around 62 A.D.,<sup>214</sup> and the destruction of Jerusalem occurred in 70 A.D.); about the Church: *And upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Mt 16:18); about the future of Christianity: *When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Lk 18:8); about the appearance of false Christs and false prophets;<sup>215</sup> about the persecutions of Christians;<sup>216</sup> that: *There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power* (Mk 9:1) (this is in reference to all the saints, beginning with the Virgin Mary and the Apostles,

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<sup>214</sup> *The New Testament* (Brussels, 1964), 408.

<sup>215</sup> *Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not* (Mt 24:23–26). *And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them* (Lk 21:8).

<sup>216</sup> *But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake* (Lk 21:12); *And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake* (Lk 21:16–17).

who “saw” before their deaths the glory and blessedness of Christ’s Kingdom, coming to them with power); about the woman who anointed Him with myrrh not long before His sufferings: *Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her* (Mk 14:9). The fulfillment of these prophecies can be seen (and not just believed) by every modern person.

We find a prophecy about the end of the world in the Epistle of the Apostle Peter: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up* (2 Pet 3:10), which, in light of our contemporary scientific and technological “possibilities,” sounds realistic. Many of the prophecies by Saint John the Theologian have a similar meaning (see, for example, Chapter 16).

However, there is always a danger in accepting various prophecies, visions, dreams, and such like, of this or that person (some of whom may be very pious) as true prophecies. For example, Saint Hippolytus of Rome (third century B.C.) cites one incident. He writes about one quite pious bishop, “There was one representative of the Church in Pontus, a God-fearing and humble man; however he did not zealously study the Scriptures, but trusted more in his dreams. Having been lucky about one dream, then another, and a third, he ... once said in his self-delusion that the [Last Judgment] will happen in a year.... And he brought those brothers to such fear and trembling that they left their households and fields, and many of them destroyed their property ... and



ended up in a state of impoverishment.”<sup>217</sup> Another no less telling event happened with the brothers who came to ask Saint Anthony the Great about certain prophetic visions they had which later came true, but which were actually from demons, as became apparent later.<sup>218</sup>

In connection with this, it must be noted that there is a difference between various predictions and true *prophecies*. False predictions do not contain the most important thing—the stimulation for a person to morally change and be spiritually renewed (by repentance), and the vast majority of them have such an inexact, vague character that they could be understood as one pleases and be ascribed to a large number of vastly differing events.

A source of false predictions and their fulfillment is clearly illustrated in the words of one of the most famous predictors, Nostradamus (seventeenth century). “I witness,” he writes, “that ... a large part of the prophecies are accompanied by the movement of the heavens, and I saw *as if in shiny mirror, in a cloudy vision* (author’s italics here and following) great, grievous, amazing and unfortunate events and adventures, which are coming to the main culture....”<sup>219</sup> “I think that I can foretell much if I will be able to reconcile my inborn instinct with the art of long calculations. But for this is needed great emotional stability which would incline my state of mind towards soothsaying and free the soul from all cares and worries. I have made most of my prophecies with the aide of a bronze tripod, ‘*ex tripode oeneo*,’ although many ascribe to me the ability to use magic things....”<sup>220</sup> “All the calculations I produce

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<sup>217</sup> *Saint Hippolytus of Rome* (Kazan, 1898), 129–130.

<sup>218</sup> *Ancient Patericon* (Moscow, 1874), Chap. 10: “On Discernment,” 2.

<sup>219</sup> Maxim Genin, *Nostradamus, Centuries, Selected Fragments* (Kharkov, 1991), 67–68.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

with respect to *the movement of heavenly luminaries and their mutual influence with the senses* which overtake me during hours of inspiration; moreover, I inherited my moods and emotions from my ancient ancestors” (Nostradamus was a Jew).<sup>221</sup> “And I connect much that is Divine with the movement and course of heavenly luminaries. An impression is created that you are looking through a lens and see as if in a fog great and sad events and tragic happenings....”<sup>222</sup>

This “confession” of Nostradamus leaves no doubt as to the origin of his astrological-numerical “prophecies.” It is magic and cabala.

The extent to which his actual predictions came true can be judged from the following fact. In his book, *Centuries* Nostradamus gives the exact date of the end of the world. It will take place in the year when Holy Friday falls on the same day as Saint George, Pascha on the day of Saint Mark, and the feast of the Body of Christ on Saint John the Baptist. True, he was careful not to reveal which of these combinations of feasts will auger the end of the world. There have already been a number of such combinations.<sup>223</sup>

But how can it be explained why some of his similar predictions did actually come true? One of the reasons is that every person, as an image of God, has the natural ability of foresight, or intuition. In some people it is manifested to a great degree. But in the person who has not purified himself of sinful passions (of the flesh, ambition, pride, etc.), this ability is corrupted, and therefore the person sees “as if through a fog.” The Apostle Paul wrote about

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>223</sup> See Brockhaus and Efron, 41, “Nostradamus.”

human knowledge that is not illumined by the Spirit of God: *For now we see through a glass, darkly* (1 Cor 13:12). Furthermore, the vast majority of soothsayers fall because of their sinfulness under the influence of dark spirits (some unconsciously, others consciously), with all the consequences that proceed from this influence. Therefore, all predictions of this kind (from magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, fortune tellers, etc.) are not only subject to mistake, but are also perilous. Those who have believed in them have often fallen into serious sufferings. That is why the Holy Fathers unanimously forbid going to them, believing in them, or spreading their “prophecies.” *Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch* (Mt 15:14) of deceit, emotional and spiritual illness, delusion, despair, even suicide.

Of great significance to the contemporaries of Christ and the Apostles are *miracles*, which retain their significance to this day for strengthening convictions in the Divine origin of the Christian Gospels.

By miracles we mean the extraordinary action of God upon man or nature, which exceeds (but not always) the limits of known natural laws, and places man before an acknowledgment of the real presence of God with all obviousness and doubtlessness. Miracles can be external (the raising from the dead, the stopping of a storm, the healing of the incurable), and internal (moral rebirth, an unexpected appearance of firm faith in God, and so on). A Divine miracle always calls man to spiritual and moral change, but man, naturally, remains free in his relationship to the Divine call (see Lk 19:8; Jn 12:10; Ex 8:31–32). By this a miracle differs from magic tricks, hallucinations, hypnosis, psychic powers, and from the “miracles” contrived by human fantasy (there is a tradition that Buddha, for example, proved the truth of his teaching by touching

the end of his tongue to the nape of his neck; or, according to one apocrypha, the young Jesus Christ made birds out of clay and brought them to life; and such like), which act only upon man's imagination, psyche, and nerves, but in no way change his moral and spiritual condition, or the character of his life.

Saint John Cassian the Roman names, for example, three causes of miraculous healing. "The first cause of healing," he writes, "comes from grace, which works miracles and is given to chosen and righteous men.... The second cause is for the edification of the Church, for the faith of those who bring the sick for healing, or of those who desire healing themselves. In such cases the power of healing can come even from the unworthy and from sinners, whom the Savior mentions in the Gospels (see Mt 7:22–23).<sup>224</sup> The third kind of healing comes from the deception and cunning of the demons. A person who is captive to obvious vices can sometimes produce amazing effects, and people therefore consider him a saint and servant of God.... This is why the demons will sometimes cry out the names of people who have no qualities of sainthood or spiritual fruits, or pretend they are being burned and forced to depart from the persons they possess."<sup>225</sup>

In connection with this it must be noted that one of the most important signs of a true miracle is the holiness of the life of the person through whom it is worked, and therefore one must have a cautious attitude toward any unusual phenomena and not be hasty about accepting it as miracle of God (see, for example, Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov's chapter "On Miracles and Signs," volume four of *Ascetical Experience* [in Russian]). There can be

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<sup>224</sup> *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

<sup>225</sup> Saint John Cassian the Roman, *Writings* (Moscow, 1892), 440.

exceptions, when a true miracle is worked through a sinful person or even an animal (for instance, the biblical ass speaking to Barlaam), when there is faith, and if the capability for repentance is preserved intact in the person through whom or to whom the miracle occurs. Thus, miracles occur even outside the Orthodox context, even in our own times, for God *wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim. 2:4). Saint Ignatius cites, for example, the incident in which the water used to wash the feet of a robber mistaken for a holy hermit healed a blind nun.<sup>226</sup>

These days we hear about thousands of incidents of various droplets (transparent, bloody, and otherwise) appearing on icons and iconic illustrations of faces, even of those who are not canonized by the Orthodox Church (although an icon can only be the image of a saint canonized by the Church), and statues of Catholic saints. In the United States, in one Catholic family, there is a sixteen-year-old girl who has been paralyzed for eleven years. The statues in her room have begun to stream myrrh.<sup>227</sup> In Italy there have been a number of incidents of myrrh-streaming sculptures of Catholic saints. (We must note here that ascetics of the Orthodox Church such as Saint Ignatius [Brianchaninov], Saint Theophan the Recluse, Saint Ambrose of Optina, and Saint John of Kronstadt have been quite categorical about the delusional qualities of modern Catholic saints.) False miracles have occurred throughout history and still occur.

Nevertheless, what does all of this show? It shows that even obvious supernatural phenomena do not in and of themselves prove the sanctity of those persons, confessions, or religions

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<sup>226</sup> Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *Letters on the Spiritual Life* (Moscow, 1995), No. 90.

<sup>227</sup> *Blagovest—INFO*, 3 (1999): 172.

through which and where they occur. Similar phenomena can occur according to faith (*According to your faith be it unto you* [Mt 9:29]), or by the action of another spirit (see 1 Jn 4:1; Acts 16:16-18), *insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect* (Mt 24:24). They could also be occurring for reasons that we do not yet know.

Here, for example, is a remarkable thing that happened to a spiritual daughter of the holy ascetic of the twentieth century, Bishop Basil (Preobrazhensky) (†1945):

In the home of one of Bishop Basil's spiritual daughters, Eudocia, a lampada before the icon began to light up by itself at midnight. "It seems that the Lord is calling me to rise for prayer," she thought, but actually she had her doubts. Should she accept this as something grace-filled, or delusional? She could already feel a sort of flattering spirit within her heart, telling her what a woman of prayer she is, since the Lord Himself lights the lamp for her.

The next night Eudocia invited her friend, Ekaterina Dimitrievna, and the lampada lit itself in her presence as well. Then she invited a third witness to spend the night. The same thing happened in her presence. This finally convinced Eudocia to accept the phenomenon as something grace-filled....

When the holy hierarch heard about this from her, he said sternly, "No, this phenomenon is not from grace, but from the enemy. And because you accepted it as being from grace, I am giving you a penance: do not receive the Holy Mysteries for one year. The lampada will not light itself again."

Truly, the lampada did not light by itself from that day on.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Basil (Preobrazhensky), Bishop of Kineshma, *Discussions on the Gospel According to Mark* (Moscow, 1966), 12–13.

From this we can understand why the saints always regarded all manner of miracles, visions, dreams, revelations, myrrh-streaming, etc. with such great caution and discerning mistrust. They insistently warn the faithful not to hastily accept all of this as a divine miracle, so that they would not fall into a demonic trap by lightly accepting a lie as truth. They therefore said of various inexplicable phenomena, “Do not blaspheme—do not accept it!”

But false miracles, as a rule, happen to those who are looking for miracles, or inwardly consider themselves worthy of seeing and receiving them—those who have fallen into self-deception (*prelest*).

Holy Hierarch Ignatius strictly warns of the peril of lightly believing in miracles and looking for them.

With the passing of time, with the gradual weakening of Christianity and the harm done to morality, wonder-working men became scarce. In the end, they have disappeared altogether. Meanwhile, although people have lost their reverence and respect for everything sacred, have lost their humility, and the awareness of their unworthiness not only to work miracles but even to see them, they now thirst for miracles more than ever before. Intoxicated with self-conceit, self-reliance, and ignorance, people seek indiscriminately, incautiously, and boldly for everything miraculous; they do not refuse to be participants in the working of miracles, and decide to do it without a second thought. This tendency is more dangerous than it ever has been. We are gradually approaching that time when the broad spectacle of numerous and astounding false miracles will be manifested, and will

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draw to destruction those unfortunate nurslings of carnal wisdom, who will be enchanted and deceived by these miracles.<sup>229</sup>

True miracles happen very rarely. A miracle is accepted by the Church only after scrupulous investigation (see Lk 1:3<sup>230</sup>) of any unusual phenomenon by a competent ecclesiastical commission, and an official confirmation of its conclusions by the Holy Synod (in exceptional cases, by the ruling bishop). This is necessary in order to protect the people from believing in tricks of the devil, sorcerers, fakirs, psychics, psychologically abnormal people, or just charlatans. As long as there is no such confirmation, any question about the phenomenon should remain open for a member of the Church, for *God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints* (1 Cor 14:33).

There have been very many true miracles in the history of the Church, and throughout its existence they have been part of the evidence by which Christianity won the hearts and minds of so many people while it was surrounded on all sides by mortal enemies. Even now, one of the most amazing miracles is revealed to a person who reads the Holy Scriptures and the history of Christianity—the miracle of the preservation and dissemination of the Christian Faith amidst terrible persecutions; the miracle of the existence of the Church.

Such are the basic signs of the truth of the whole Evangelic Revelation. Of course, a final acceptance of Christian Revelation is conditioned not so much upon the weight of external arguments as

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<sup>229</sup> Bishop Ignatius, *Works* (Saint Petersburg, 1905), 4:323–324.

<sup>230</sup> *It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus.* The Russian version of this passage contains the words, *no тщательном исследовании*, in place of *having had perfect understanding of all things*. The Russian translation shows more clearly the author's intention, because, translated into English, we have: *after thorough investigation of all things from the very first.* —Trans.



on the sincerity of the person who is seeking the truth, and his resolve to follow it.

With an acceptance that the New Testament Revelation is of Divine origin naturally comes the acceptance also of Old Testament Revelation (see Mt. 5:17–18). “The Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament, while the New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament” (Blessed Augustine).

### § 3. Individual Revelation and Its Indications

A question of no less importance would also be about the truth of those religious experiences, phenomena, and revelations that a religious person could have. This question concerns the understanding of the existence of spiritual life and a conditional knowledge of the “other” world, because any mistake in this matter is always bound with great danger: he who does not enter into it by the door will be consigned to the lot of a thief and robber! (see Jn 10:1). Curiosity, fantasy, and insobriety in this realm, or attempts to penetrate the spiritual world by any means, are tantamount to suicide. It is well known, for example, that those who have actively been involved in spiritualism have as a rule ended their lives in suicide, or at least in total psychological disorder. All other forms of occultism bring a person to the same end.<sup>231</sup>

Such unlawful penetration into the spiritual world is dangerous in the highest extreme, especially since it inevitably stimulates false revelations, which draw in inexperienced people who are unacquainted with the basics of spiritual life, and destroys them spiritually and physically.<sup>232</sup> Two obvious examples of such

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<sup>231</sup> Reading and even simply being in the presence of occult literature, such as that of E. Blavatsky, A. Besant, N. Roerich, R. Steiner, and E. Shure, has an extremely negative effect upon a person’s psyche. Nowadays a great deal of such literature is being printed.

<sup>232</sup> See for example “On False Teachings...” *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 6 (1992).

“revelations” [in Russia] are those of the “Theotokos Center,” or the “White Brotherhood,” whose outrageous totalitarianism in their interpretation of Christianity speaks eloquently of the nature and worthiness of these “revelations.”<sup>233</sup>

What is needed for the “discernment of spirits” according to the Orthodox teaching? Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) gives a thorough and precise answer to this question in his article, “A Word on Sensual and Spiritual Vision of Spirits.”<sup>234</sup> We will note here the more essential thoughts in this article.

The lawful way to enter the spiritual world and receive true knowledge (revelation) about that world is through a correct spiritual life, presupposing some knowledge of the basics of the Orthodox Faith and spiritual life. The most important condition and indication of a person’s correct spiritual orientation are his awareness of the abnormality and destructiveness of his present spiritual state, and his powerlessness without God to become a new man in the image of Christ. From this comes contrition of heart, sincere repentance, and, what is most important to spiritual life, humility. Saint Ignatius writes,

The first spiritual vision is the vision of one’s own sins, which had been concealed before by forgetfulness and unknowing.... Seeing our inadequacies—this is a safe vision! Seeing our fall and redemption—this is a very needed vision....<sup>235</sup> All the saints considered themselves unworthy of God. By this they revealed their worthiness, which consists in humility.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> These are two relatively recent movements in Russia, typical totalitarian sects, which have been the cause of much physical and mental illness amongst their adherents. —Trans.

<sup>234</sup> Bishop Ignatius, v. 3.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>236</sup> Bishop Ignatius 2-59

In the Gospels all this is called spiritual poverty (Mt 5:3). Spiritual poverty is that *unconditionally necessary state of the soul* in which it is possible for a person to receive true revelation, and a true indication toward the path to the Kingdom of God. God gives this revelation to a person in order to save him, and not in order to satisfy the curious idle mind and empty heart of one who longs to know “what is *there*.” Bishop Ignatius writes:

*Only to the perfect Christian, most often to a monastic who is worthy to see with the eyes of his soul, has the world of spirits been revealed. But even during the very height of monasticism there were very few such people, as Saint Macarius the Great testifies. The quality of all visions sent by God, as Saint John Climacus notes, is that they bring humility and contrition to the soul, fill the soul with the fear of God, the awareness of one’s own sinfulness and nothingness. But visions which we try to grasp willfully, against God’s will, lead us to high-mindedness and conceit, and bring a joy which is nothing other than the satisfaction of our ambition and vanity, though we may not understand this.*<sup>237</sup>

The very nature of revelations also says much about whether or not they are true. If man before the fall was able to see spirits directly and commune with them, then in his present state he can see them only by God’s particular design, and in times of extreme need,<sup>238</sup> with the purpose of reforming and saving him. Therefore, all the holy fathers and ascetics who were experienced in spiritual life decisively warn the Christian about the possibility of falling into what is called *prelest*—that is, spiritual self-delusion, in which

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<sup>237</sup> Bishop Ignatius, 3:18.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

a person accepts his own neuro-psychological and often demonic stimulation and the false visions coming from it as divine revelation.

Saint Isaac the Syrian writes clearly, “Let no one deceive himself and be given over to the deception of visions, for the defiled soul does not enter into the pure kingdom and does not unite with the souls of the saints.”<sup>239</sup>

Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov warns:

Christian ascetical instructors command us generally not to pay attention to any phenomena that present themselves to our emotional and physical senses. They command us to observe a prudent coldness and saving caution towards all phenomena in general.<sup>240</sup>

The Holy Fathers command the ascetic of prayer to remain indifferent toward any phenomena that might occur within him or outside of him, and to pay no attention; he should consider himself unworthy of the vision of saints. They instruct on the one hand *not to judge* visions, so as not to judge a saint, but on the other hand *never to believe in* a vision or hastily accept it as true, in order to avoid falling into the snares of an evil spirit.<sup>241</sup>

In our times, when false mysticism and all manner of “miracles” are spreading in broad waves across all countries of the world (in the U.S., for example, nearly seventy percent of the population claim to have had an experience of extra sensory perception, and

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<sup>239</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies* (Moscow, 1858), 74:530.

<sup>240</sup> Bishop Ignatius, 2:17.

<sup>241</sup> Saint Ignatius, *Collection of Letters* (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, 1995), letter 290.

forty-two percent have communicated with the dead), it is especially important to remember these patristic warnings.

Why does a person fall into this state? The fathers answer, “All forms of demonic *prelest* ... arise because repentance is not placed in the foundation of our prayer, because repentance was not made the source, soul, and purpose of prayer.”<sup>242</sup>

Saint Isaac the Syrian points to another important reason. It is the seeking and expectation of grace-filled feelings, visions, etc. Citing the words of the Savior, *The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation* (Lk 17:20), this great instructor of monasticism says,

What we seek with observation—I mean lofty Divine gifts—is not approved by the Church of God; and those who have received them acquired pride and falls for themselves. This is not an indication of a person’s love for God, but rather of emotional illness.<sup>243</sup>

Saint Ignatius continues Saint Isaac’s thought, saying,

All self-deceived people considered themselves worthy of God; by this they displayed their pride of soul and demonic delusion. Some of them accepted demons who appeared to them as angels and talked with them; to others the demons appeared in their own visage and pretended to be conquered by the ascetic’s prayer, and thus led them to high-mindedness; others stimulated their imaginations, heated their blood, produced a movement of their nerves, and accepted all this as grace-filled sweetness, falling into self-delusion, into total

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<sup>242</sup> Bishop Ignatius, 1:255.

<sup>243</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, 55:372.

mental darkness, and joined themselves to the outcast spirits by the nature of their own spirit.<sup>244</sup>

Clear examples of the “revelations” that come to a person when he is in a state of spiritual delusion are illustrated by the Roman Catholic mystics.<sup>245</sup>

The state of *prelest* is characterized by fanaticism and superior airs.<sup>246</sup> According to Saints Ignatius (Brianchaninov), Theophan the Recluse, and the Optina Elders, the famous book by Thomas à Kempis (fifteenth century) and much other Catholic, Protestant, and, of course, sectarian literature was written in states of *prelest*.<sup>247</sup> The reason for such an assessment becomes clear by the following examples.

Please note that these examples are not presented with the intention of offending the sensibilities of devout Catholics, but rather to show the sharp contrast between these saints’ spiritual moods and practices and those of the Orthodox ascetics and saints. It is tragic that such practices are promoted as models for emulation, thereby leading a devout flock into dangerous spiritual delusion, and shutting the door against true Christian humility, sobriety, and repentance. Although other aspects of these people’s lives may be worthy of admiration, the dangerous lack of mistrust for spiritual phenomena is something any serious Christian must avoid.

Saint Francis of Assisi (†1226), one of the most well-known Catholic saints, prayed very long “about two mercies.” “The first is that I might ... experience all the sufferings that Thou, sweetest

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<sup>244</sup> Bishop Ignatius, 2:126.

<sup>245</sup> For a characterization of Catholic mystics, see Priest Paul Florensky’s *Pillar and Ground of Truth*, example 400.

<sup>246</sup> Bishop Ignatius, 1:559.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:499.

Jesus, experienced in Thy torturous passion. The second mercy ... is that I might feel that unbounded love with which Thou, the Son of God, didst burn.” Such requests reflect subtle pride, for he is essentially asking to be made equal to Christ.

During this prayer, Saint Francis “felt himself completely become Jesus,” Whom he immediately saw in the form of a six-winged seraphim. After this vision, the traces of “Jesus’ sufferings,” painful, bleeding wounds (the stigmata) appeared on his hands.<sup>248</sup>

The nature of the appearance of stigmata is something known in the field of psychiatry: uninterrupted concentration and attention upon Christ’s sufferings on the cross extremely excites a person’s nerves and psyche, and when practiced for long periods of time, stigmata can happen. One well-known psychiatrist offers an explanation of this sort of thing:

Of particular interest are the hysterical stigmata that at times develop in certain religious people who are exhausted by unceasing prayer and an ascetical way of life. Under the influence of morbid self-suggestion, blood circulation can be disrupted in those parts of the body upon which they focus. A psychotherapist can evoke such phenomena through hypnotic suggestion. Local inflammatory and vascular disruption during the patient’s hysterical neurosis can occur even during healthy periods. It is a known fact that on the hands, feet, and head of religiously ecstatic people who vividly experienced Christ’s execution in their imaginations, bloody wounds have appeared.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> M. V. Lodyzhensky, *Unseen Light* (Petrograd, 1915), 109.

<sup>249</sup> A. A. Kirpichenko, *Psychiatry* (Minsk: The Highest School, 1989).

There is really nothing of grace in stigmata, for this sort of compassion toward Christ does not contain that true love, the essence of which the Lord related plainly: *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me* (Jn 14:21). Therefore, substituting dreamy experiences of “compassion” for the struggle with the “old man” is one of the most serious mistakes in spiritual life, a mistake which has led and still leads many ascetics to conceit and pride, to obvious delusion, often bound up with clear psychological disturbance.

Saint Francis’s very life’s goal, (“I have labored and want to labor ... because this brings honor,”<sup>250</sup> “I want to suffer *for others* and redeem the sins *of others*”<sup>251</sup>), shows his fall which he himself does not see; it shows his own sins. At the end of his life, he said, “I am not aware of any sin I have committed which I have not redeemed through confession and repentance.”<sup>252</sup> His dying words were, “I have fulfilled what I should have fulfilled.”<sup>253</sup>

By comparison, we shall cite the last moments of Saint Sisoës the Great (fifth century):

Surrounded by the brothers at the moment of his death, he was as if talking with invisible beings. The brothers asked him, “Father, tell us, with whom are you speaking?” He answered, “With angels who have come to take me; but I am begging them to leave me for a short time, in order to repent.” The brothers knew that Sisoës was perfect in the virtues, and protested, “You have no need to repent, Father.” Sisoës

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<sup>250</sup> Saint Francis of Assisi, *Writings* (Moscow: Franciscan Publications, 1995), 145.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>252</sup> Lodyzhensky, 129.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.



answered, “Truly, I do not know if I have even begun to repent.”<sup>254</sup>

Sisoës’ deep understanding of his own imperfection is the main outstanding trait of all true saints and is the most important sign that their revelations were true.

Here are some excerpts from *The Revelations of Blessed Angela* (Moscow, 1918), also a Catholic saint (†1309). “‘My daughter, my sweet one ... I love you very much,’ the ‘Holy Spirit’ said to her” (p. 95). “I was with the Apostles, and they saw Me with their physical eyes, but did not feel Me as you do” (p. 96). “And Angela herself revealed, ‘I saw the Holy Trinity in the darkness, and it seems to me that I am standing in its midst’” p. 117). She expresses her relationship to Jesus Christ, for example, in the following words, “From His sweetness, and from my sorrow at his departure, I screamed and wanted to die” (p. 101). When this happened, she would begin to beat herself with such rage that the nuns often had to carry her out of the church (p. 83). Or, “I could bring my whole self into Jesus Christ” (p. 176).

One of the greatest twentieth-century Russian religious thinkers, A. F. Losev, gave a sharp but true assessment of Angela’s “revelations.” He writes, in part,

What could be more antithetical to the Byzantine-Muscovite austere chaste asceticism than these continual blasphemous proclamations: “My soul was received into uncreated light and carried up,” those passionate gazes upon the Cross of Christ, the wounds of Christ, ... those forcibly evoked bloody spots on her own body, and so on and so forth? Finally Christ embraces Angela with His arm that was nailed to the Cross,

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 113.

and she, outside herself with rapture, torment, and happiness, says, “Sometimes, from this bodily embrace, it seems to my soul that it enters into Christ’s side. I cannot retell the joy and brightness which it receives there. They are so great that I could not stand on my feet, and lost the power to speak.... And I lay there, and my tongue and members lost the power to move.”<sup>255</sup>

No less telling is the experience of another great Catholic saint, Teresa of Avila (sixteenth century), raised by Pope Paul VI (†1978) to the dignity of a teacher of the Church. She was so preoccupied with “revelations” that she did not see the devil’s deception, even in such a “vision” as this one:

After appearing to Teresa many times, “Christ” says to Teresa, “From this day forward you shall be my spouse.... From now on, I am not only your Creator and God, but also your Spouse.”<sup>256</sup> “Lord, either to suffer with You, or to die for You!” “The Beloved calls the soul with such a penetrating whistle,”<sup>257</sup> recalls Teresa, “that it is impossible not to hear it. This call acts upon the soul so that it becomes exhausted with desire.”<sup>258</sup> Before her death, she again exclaims, “O, my God, my Spouse,<sup>259</sup> finally I will see you!”

The well-known American psychologist William James assessed her mystical experience: “Her conception of religion boiled down

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<sup>255</sup> A. F. Losev, *Ancient Symbolism and Mythology* (Moscow, 1930), 1:867–868.

<sup>256</sup> D. S. Merezhkovsky, *Spanish Mystics* (Brussels, 1988), 88.

<sup>257</sup> Orthodox tradition has it that demons whistle. Christ does not whistle. —Trans.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>259</sup> It must be noted, that although the term “bride of Christ” is often used in connection with women’s monasticism in the Orthodox Church, the use of the word “bride” and “Bridegroom” is also used in reference to Christ’s union with the Christian soul, and with the Church. Note, however, that the word “spouse” is not used in this connection. A spouse is a husband or a wife, united carnally, whereas a “bride,” or “bridegroom” is one betrothed, united sacramentally, and not carnally. —Trans.

to (if I can express it so) an endless amorous flirtation between a worshiper and his god.”<sup>260</sup>

Yet another illustration of Catholicism’s total loss of patristic criteria in understanding spiritual life are the revelations of Theresa of Lisieux, who died at the age of 23, chronologically the last of Catholicism’s higher saints. In 1997, in connection with the one hundredth anniversary of her death, by “infallible”<sup>261</sup> decision of Pope John Paul II she was proclaimed a Doctor [in Russian, “teacher”] of the Universal Church(!). Just what she is teaching the Church can be read in her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*. Here are a few quotes from this autobiography.

“During a conversation before my tonsure, I gave a report of the activities I intend to undertake in Carmel. ‘I came to save souls, and first of all, to pray for priests.’”<sup>262</sup> She did not come to save herself in the monastery, but others. The patristic understanding is that a person leaves the world for a monastery in order to repent of his or her own sins.

She writes about her unworthiness, but then adds, “I always harbor the bold hope that I will become *a great saint*.... I thought that I was born for glory, and sought a path to its accomplishment. And the Lord God ... revealed to me that my glory would not be visible to the mortal gaze, and the essence of it consisted in the fact that *I would become a great saint!*”<sup>263</sup> Saints never have the hope of becoming great saints, because such thoughts would be very prideful. Saint Macarius the Great, whom his co-ascetics called an “earthly god” for the rare loftiness of his life, only prayed, “God

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<sup>260</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Russian translation from English) (Moscow, 1910), 337.

<sup>261</sup> This refers to the Catholic dogma of Papal infallibility. —Trans.

<sup>262</sup> “The Story of a Soul,” *Symbol* 36 (Paris, 1996): 151.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

cleanse me, a sinner, for I have never done anything good in Thy sight.” Later Theresa writes something even more frank: “In the heart of my Mother the Church I will be Love ... then I will be everything ... and through this my dream will come true!”<sup>264</sup>

Here is the love which Theresa lived and teaches her Church: “This was the kiss of love. I felt beloved and said, ‘I love You and entrust myself to You forever.’ There was neither forgiveness, nor struggle, nor sacrifice; already, long ago, Jesus and little, poor Theresa looked at each other and understood everything.... This day brought not an exchange of views, but a mingling, when there are no longer two; and Theresa disappeared like a drop of water lost in the depths of the ocean.”<sup>265</sup> The love she is experiencing here is a purely sensual, dreamy sort of love, and not spiritual love as it is taught by the Holy Fathers.

The methodical development of *imagination* is based in the experience of one of the pillars of Catholic mysticism, the founder of the order of Jesuits and great Catholic saint Ignatius of Loyola (sixteenth century). His book *Spiritual Exercises* enjoys great authority in Catholicism. Ignatius himself said of his book that if one reads it, it could replace the Gospels.<sup>266</sup> He tells the reader to imagine the crucified Christ, to attempt to penetrate the world of Christ’s feelings and sufferings, to mentally converse with the Crucified One, etc. All this contradicts in principle the basics of spiritual ascetic labor as it has been given to us in the lives of the saints of the Universal Church. Ignatius’s methods lead to complete spiritual and often emotional disturbance in the

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>266</sup> A. A. Bykov, *Ignatius Loyola, His Life and Social Activity* (Saint Petersburg, 1890), 28.

practitioner, and from that point, to whatever “revelations.” Here are a few examples from *Spiritual Exercises*.

The contemplation of “the first day of God the Word’s incarnation” consists of a few preludes. The first prelude consists in “*imagining* that this happened before your eyes, the whole historical process of the mystery of the incarnation; specifically: how the Three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity look upon the earth ... how the Holy Trinity, touched by its sufferings, decides to send the Word ... as ... the Archangel Gabriel appeared as a messenger to the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

The second prelude consists in “a living *imagination* of the locality ... in which the Holy Virgin lives.”

The third prelude “is the prayer that I may know ... the mystery of the Word’s incarnation....”<sup>267</sup>

Yet another example of contemplation is the conversation with Christ. “This conversation,” Loyola teaches, “happens when a person *imagines* Jesus Christ before him, crucified on the cross.... Thus turning my gaze toward Jesus crucified, I tell him everything that my mind and heart tell me.... This conversation can be compared to a conversation between two friends....”<sup>268</sup>

The authoritative collection of ascetical writings of the ancient Church, the *Philokalia*, categorically forbids any sort of “spiritual exercises” that are bound up with *imagination or conversations* with crucified Jesus. Here are a few quotes from this collection.

Saint Neilos of Sinai (fifth century) warns, “Do not desire to see with sensory eyes the Angels or Powers, or Christ, so as not to lose

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<sup>267</sup> Lodyzhensky, 139–140.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

your mind, having accepted a wolf as the pastor, and bowed down to your enemies, the demons.<sup>269</sup>

Saint Symeon the New Theologian (sixth century), in discussing those who “imagine heavenly blessedness, the ranks of Angels, and habitations of the saints” during prayer, says plainly that “this is a sign of delusion (*prelest*).” “Those who are on this path are also deluded, who see light with their physical eyes, smell fragrances with their sense of smell, hear voices with their ears, and such like.”<sup>270</sup>

Saint Gregory of Sinai (fourteenth century) reminds us, “Never accept anything you see tangibly or spiritually, outwardly or inwardly, even if it be the image of Christ, or an Angel, or a saint, or if light were to be dreamed of or impressed in the mind.... But anyone who has seen something mentally or tangibly and accepts it ... is easily deluded.... God does not become displeased with those who scrupulously attend to themselves, if they do not accept the one who actually comes from Him, out of caution to avoid delusion ... but rather praises him all the more as being wise.”<sup>271</sup>

The examples presented here show that breaking the laws of spiritual life inevitably brings a deep distortion of a person’s consciousness and feelings (the heart). That person comes into contact with the world of fallen spirits, the spirits of lies and delusion. This leads to false visions, false revelations, and *prelest*. Since no one is immune to spiritual blindness and concealed pride, the unchanging and firm law of the Church is *do not accept any revelations*, but continually abide in repentance and humility.

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<sup>269</sup> Saint Nilos of Sinai, “153 Chapters on Prayer,” *The Philokalia*, Vol. 5:2, Chap. 115 (Moscow, 1884), 237.

<sup>270</sup> Saint Symeon the New Theologian, “On the Three Examples of Prayer,” *The Philokalia* 5 (Moscow 1900), 463–464.

<sup>271</sup> Saint Gregory the Sinaite, “Instructions to Hesychasts,” *Ibid.*, 224.

## § 4. Exorcism

*Prelest*—that is, high opinion of oneself, blindness to one's spiritual poverty, and the “humble” feeling of one's ability to receive revelations—manifests itself in the most varied forms. Most often it is in the bold attempt to prophecy, to rule unquestionably over others' spiritual lives (false eldership), to perform signs and miracles, etc. Falling under this same category is the act of exorcism—something which has gained momentum in the past few decades.

A priest does not have the right to perform *a single* priestly function *without his bishop's blessing*. These modern exorcists often refer instead to the blessing of their spiritual fathers, but this is actually open self-justification, because without the bishop's blessing, any priestly function, especially exorcism (which is something outside the usual list of priestly obligations), becomes an anti-canonical and sinful act, and thus perilous to both the exorcist and his patients. The Council of Laodicea (364 A.D.) resolved that, “They who have not been promoted [to that office] by the bishop, ought not to adjure [exorcise], either in churches or in private houses” (Canon 26). Priests often try to obtain blessings from their spiritual fathers to perform exorcisms, but the latter do not positively bless them. This is a very important indication of the exorcists' spiritual state.

Exorcism had a place amongst the early Christians during a century of extraordinary gifts. Just the same, even then only those Christians who received this gift of the Holy Spirit were able to expel demons. They acted according to the God's will and not their own. In an epistle ascribed to Holy Hierarch Clement of Rome (first century), “On Virginity,” to the ascetic exorcists is prescribed, “Visit those possessed by evil spirits and pray over them. With fasting and prayer let them exorcise; not with beautiful, select, and

elegant words, but as men who have received from God the gift of healing.”

This gift of the Holy Spirit was rare, and there were not a few people who had the desire at that time to exorcise demons, in connection with which the “Apostolic Constitutions” (third century) forbade the ordination of exorcists. The “Constitutions” explain that, “It is a trial of voluntary goodness and of the grace of God through Christ by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For he who has received the gift of healing is declared by revelation from God, the grace which is in him being manifest to all.” By the fifth century, exorcists are no longer mentioned in the East.<sup>272</sup>

The Orthodox Church has always followed the words of the Savior: *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting* (Mt 17:21)—that is, by a strict ascetical life. Correct living leads a Christian to humility and the acquisition of dispassion. Furthermore, the Lord sent this *gift* of conquering evil spirits only to a *few*. According to the teaching of the Church Fathers, all other exorcists, regardless of their rank, are themselves deluded and delude others, hiding their lack of this *gift* of God by extracted blessings for such work.

In the *Lausiac History* we read that Abba Pitirion

Spoke with us at length, and with particular power explained the discernment of spirits, saying that certain demons observe our passions and often turn them to evil. Thus, my children, did he say to us that whoever wishes to cast out demons should first enslave the passions; for whatever passion a man conquers, such is the demon he will cast out. You must little

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<sup>272</sup> For more detail on this, see N. D. Uspensky, *Byzantine Liturgy: Theological Works* (Saint Petersburg, 1921), 31.



by little enslave the passions in order to cast out the demons of these passions.<sup>273</sup>

Saint Barsanuphius the Great said,

It is not proper for all to rebuke the devil, for the demons submit only to those who are strong in God. If one who is not strong will rebuke, the demons will abuse him; for, being in their power, he rebukes. Likewise, forbidding them is the work of great men who have authority over them. Have there been so many saints who forbade the demons as did the Archangel Michael, who did this because he had the power? But we, the weak, must only have recourse to the name of Jesus.<sup>274</sup>

One who has not achieved dispassion and received the gift of the Holy Spirit to cast out demons cannot, as we see, take up such a terrible work as *externally* emulating great saints! For only the dispassionate person is able to enter into open conflict with the evil spirits without harm to himself and the sick. Just the same, there were only a few such people even in ancient times,<sup>275</sup> while in our times—there is nothing more to say. At that, the *saints* as a rule healed the sick and cast out demons “simply” by prayer that was mostly inward and invisible to others, and less often by outward prayer (see the prayers of Saints Basil the Great and John Chrysostom) with the use, for example, of the Sacrament of Confession, Unction, the Eucharist, and without any special sort of

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<sup>273</sup> *The Lausiac History* (Moscow, 1992), 126–127.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 223, question 201.

<sup>275</sup> See Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov), 1:274.

exorcism rites,<sup>276</sup> because such a rite belongs before the Sacrament of Baptism.<sup>277</sup>

Saint Isaac the Syrian cautioned against self-proclaimed exorcists: “Do you think to lecture those who are six thousand years old? And this [your audacious criticism] will itself be a weapon in their hands with which they will smite you, greatly surpassing your wisdom and prudence.”<sup>278</sup> In another homily he says, “He who ... entreats God with the desire that miracles and mighty signs be wrought by his hands, is tempted in his mind by the devil who mocks him. He is a boaster and sick in his conscience.”<sup>279</sup>

There is another important point to be made here. According to the thinking of the Holy Fathers, God allows those people to be demonically possessed for whom this might be the best path to acquiring humility and salvation. Therefore, the saints prayed not that every single one be healed of this infirmity, but only those whom the Lord Himself ordained to be healed—those who would truly benefit from healing. For, if the body is freed from the demon’s rule but the soul is not, there can be very negative consequences for that person. “Having been freed from the demons,” according to the thoughts of Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria, “the person’s state will become even worse if he does not mend his ways.”<sup>280</sup> Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) wrote in one letter, “Remember in your prayers ailing D., who was given over by the ways of God to satan, that her soul might be saved.... In the

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<sup>276</sup> There are many examples of this. One of them is from the life of Saint Hilarion of Optina (Optina Pustyn, 1993), 190.

<sup>277</sup> “No exorcism prayers are needed: they are read over each of you at Holy Baptism. You must entrust yourselves to God’s will and admit that you are worthy of all human and demonic invasions.... (Saint Ignatius [Brianchaninov], *Collected Letters*, 217–218. (The rite of Orthodox baptism includes language which casts the demonic powers out of the person about to receive baptism. —Trans.)

<sup>278</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, 30:137. English translation, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 54:269.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 36:225. English translation, *ibid.*, 60:291.

<sup>280</sup> Blessed Theophylact the Bulgarian, *Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew* (Kazan, 1926), 12:43–45.

spiritual sense, such a punishment from God doesn't at all serve as a negative testimony against that person. Many great God-pleasers have been given over in this way to satan... Demonic possession is much less important than accepting some thought from the enemy that can destroy the soul for eternity."<sup>281</sup> Saint John Chrysostom said, "By the way, the burden of a demon is not at all cruel, because the demon is entirely incapable of casting into Gehenna; but if we are vigilant, then this temptation will bring us shining, glorious crowns when we gratefully endure these attacks."<sup>282</sup>

There is a conversation on this subject between a famous elder, Archpriest Alexei Zaraisky, and a novice, about a demonically possessed girl. "I asked Fr. Alexei why he does not cast the demon out of her, and he answered, how can he know that this is God's will? She receives the Holy Mysteries, and if it be necessary, then Christ Whom she receives is Himself able to cast it out. But if this [possession] serves her as a purifying cross, then why cast it out?"<sup>283</sup>

We must pay attention to the following: The Lord forbade demons to speak through the possessed, and the Holy Fathers categorically forbid us to listen to them. These days, when many people gather at exorcisms,<sup>284</sup> the demons have a fabulous opportunity to "preach" and infect these people with their spirit of deceit, pride, fleshly passions, and so on. Their "sermons" are widely broadcast on television, in newspapers and magazines which copiously cite these spirits' false witness. During these proceedings, the demons often act terrified of the exorcising

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<sup>281</sup> Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *Letters* (Moscow, 1995), 217–218.

<sup>282</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Works* (Saint Petersburg, 1897), 3:1:341.

<sup>283</sup> Novice Symeon, *Journey in a Feeble Boat upon the Stormy Sea of Life* (Moscow, 2000), 72.

<sup>284</sup> The practice of exorcism has gained popularity in Russia in recent years.

“elders,” publicly calling them saints, strong, servants of God, by which they lead the “elders” themselves as well as the simple-hearted faithful into open deception (*prelest*). The results of demonic lies are, as always, grievous. Saint John Cassian warns sternly about this: “Sometimes the demons [work miracles] in order to lift into pride the man who believes he possesses this miraculous gift, and so prepare him for an even more miraculous fall. They pretend that they are being burnt up and driven out of the bodies where they dwelt, through the holiness of people whom truly they know to be unholy.”<sup>285</sup>

These quotations from the saints eloquently testify how they regard the serious question of our time of the healing of the demonized. From these patristic thoughts proceeds the obvious conclusion: modern exorcism is spiritually very dangerous. It is coming not from the charismatic times of early Christianity, when the Holy Spirit worked visibly in the faithful, but rather from the source about which Saint Cassian spoke:

Anyone who wishes to command the impure spirits, or to miraculously restore the sick to health, or to perform some wondrous sign before the people—though he call upon the name of Christ, he is foreign to Christ, for the conceited and proud man does not follow the Teacher of humility.... Therefore our fathers never called those monks who wanted to be known as exorcists good and free from the infection of ambition.<sup>286</sup>

He also wrote,

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<sup>285</sup> Cited from Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1999), 147. (Owen Chadwick, *Western Asceticism* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958]), Conference 15:2, 258.

<sup>286</sup> Saint John Cassian the Roman, *Writings* (Moscow, 1892), 445.

No one should be glorified for gifts and Divine miracles, but only for their virtues, which require mental activity and increased exertion. For very often ... people with corrupt minds and enemies of the Faith cast out demons and work great wonders in the name of the Lord.<sup>287</sup>

It is a great temptation for a person to be healed of sicknesses and achieve other earthly good things by any possible means, without seeing the harm that can come to his soul from this. Modern people simply do not know the risk they are subjecting themselves and their loved ones to by coming to an “exorcism.” The priest, without having received through “prayer and fasting” the gift of God to cast out demons, tries to conquer the evil spirits through the rite of exorcism, and is himself infected by them and infects the ailing. Saint Ambrose of Optina said, “If you do not want to bear sorrows, do not try to help those who are possessed by demons. Saint Symeon of Ephchaita counsels to stay away from those who are possessed by evil spirits.”<sup>288</sup> Saint Ignatius wrote bitterly about those who seek the glory of “wonder-workers”:

Soul-destroying theatrics and the saddest comedy describe the elder who takes on the role of the ancient holy Elders without having their spiritual gifts.<sup>289</sup>

Exorcising evil spirits in our times, when *a righteous man there is no more* (Ps 11:1) can have the most spiritually, psychologically, and physically destructive consequences for the individual as well the society at large; for the sick people themselves as well as for the exorcists. The priest who dares to cast out evil spirits *by Jesus*

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>288</sup> *Create a Clean Heart within Me, O God* (Kolomna, 1995), 299.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 72.

whom Paul preacheth (Acts 19:13) risks subjecting himself to the same abuse from those spirits as is providentially described in the Acts of the Apostles, and he also risks casting the demonized into even greater sickness and suffering.<sup>290</sup>

## § 5. Evaluation of a Natural Knowledge of God<sup>291</sup>

Although the pagan nations were allowed to *walk in their own ways* (Acts. 14:16), God nevertheless *left not Himself without witness* (Acts 14:17). People sought God even in paganism, *if haply they might feel after him, and find him* (Acts 17:27). Some researchers consider that paganism, with the exclusion of separate and clearly defined epochs and social groups, is notable for its intense religiosity, which is disturbing and truly shocking when one comes into contact with it.<sup>292</sup> The pagans always had *the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another* (Rom 2:15), informing them of their moral obligations to God and neighbor. God also revealed Himself to pagans according to their understanding.

Saint Justin the Philosopher says that the Word acted not only “through Socrates, among the Hellenes,” but also “amongst the barbarous nations.”<sup>293</sup> “All have the seed of Truth...,”<sup>294</sup> Christ is the Word, in which the entire race of man is participant. Those who lived in accordance with the Word are Christians in essence,

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<sup>290</sup> The special rite of casting out demons contained in the Trebnik of Met. Peter Moghila (seventeenth century) is of Catholic origin. In the Russian Church, it never received a broad practical acceptance; priests exorcized only by the blessing of their bishop, while Orthodox tradition calls us to cast out the enemy by prayer and fasting (cf. Mt. 17:21). The twentieth-century practice of so-called “group exorcisms” has no canonical basis.

<sup>291</sup> See Chapter 6. Paganism for more detail on this subject.

<sup>292</sup> S. Bulgakov, 327. Compare with: N. C. Arseniev, *In Search of the Absolute God* (from the history of religious thought in the ancient world) (Moscow, 1910), 3.

<sup>293</sup> *Monuments of Ancient Christian Writings*, Apology 1:5 (Moscow, 1863), 4:25.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, Apology 1:44, 83.

although they are considered godless; such were Socrates, Heraclites, and others like them amongst the Hellenes....<sup>295</sup> In every nation, people believe in Christ and await Him.”<sup>296</sup>

Saint Clement of Alexandria wrote that the Lord gave the Greeks philosophy as a step to “philosophy in Christ,” and it served as a sort of Old Testament to them.<sup>297</sup>

The search for God is a natural need of a person’s living soul. Many have come to Orthodoxy after seeking God through the paths of philosophy and various religions. Outstanding examples of this sincere search for God in the twentieth century are two ascetics: the Russian Igumen Nikon Vorobiev (†1963)<sup>298</sup> and the American Hieromonk Seraphim Rose (†1982),<sup>299</sup> who came to Orthodoxy after a torturous search for the truth in atheism, science, and philosophy.

However, a “seeker” often has really nothing more than a fascination with *philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ* (Col 2:8). This is true for those who are not actually seeking the meaning of life—and a life in accordance with this meaning—but rather a mental distraction: “philosophy for philosophy’s sake,” “theology for theology’s sake.” This spiritual illness makes itself known amongst the clergy, theologians, and intelligentsia. Many of these often have no interest in real experience and studying true philosophers and lovers of wisdom—the Holy Fathers—but are

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., Apology 1:46, (Moscow, 1983), 4:85.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., Apology 1:56, 96.

<sup>297</sup> Stromata, 4:8.

<sup>298</sup> See Maria Naumenko, *Letters to Spiritual Children* (by Igumen Nikon) (Richfield Springs, N.Y.: Nicodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1997).

<sup>299</sup> See Hieromonk Damascene, *Fr. Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2003).

interested rather in questions that have no relationship to real spiritual life or salvation. It would seem simple to understand that *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face* (1 Cor 13:12). “Seekers” with a pagan mind set, to the contrary, go through the wide gates and broad paths (see Mt 7:13) of religious-philosophical and theological games, losing their lives in these games, becoming deluded and deluding others. The consequences of this for people can be seen in the examples of Buddhism and Hinduism.

Buddha (†483 B.C.) teaches his followers: “Do not seek support in anything other than your own selves. Enlighten your own selves, not relying upon anything other than yourselves.”<sup>300</sup> He says of himself, “I am all-knowing, I have no teacher; no one is equal to me. In the world of people and gods there is no being like me. I am enlightened in this world, I am the teacher; I alone am the absolute Self, the Buddha. I have reached peace (through the quelling of the passions), and attained Nirvana....”<sup>301</sup> The ancient temptation, *you will be as gods* (Gen 3:5) speaks here in full voice, hiding nothing.

We see the same thing in yoga and in the most authoritative modern Hindu system, Vedanta. In one of the Hindu hymns, “Song of the Sanyasin,” we find the following passionate call from man: “There is no more birth, no ‘I’ or ‘you,’ no mortal, no God! I become all; all becomes my ‘Self’ and undarkened blessedness!”<sup>302</sup>

The authoritative preacher of Vedanta, Swami (teacher) Vivekananda (†1902), recommends the following spiritual practice for his followers: “The Vedanta says, remembrance of our weaknesses will not help. We need healing. Healing from

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<sup>300</sup> V. A. Kozhevnikov, *Buddhism as Compared to Christianity* (Petrograd, 1916), 1:175.

<sup>301</sup> A. N. Kochetov, *Buddhism* (Moscow, 1968), 84. See also Radhkrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (Moscow, 1956), 1:582.

<sup>302</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Jnana Yoga* (Saint Petersburg, 1914), 8.



weaknesses does not consist in forcing a person to think constantly that he is weak, but rather that he think about his strength. Speak to him about the strength that is already in him. Instead of telling people that they are sinners, Vedanta teaches the opposite: ‘You are pure and perfect, and all that you call sin is not yours....’ Never say, ‘I cannot.’ This cannot be, because you are infinite.... You can do everything; you are omnipotent.”<sup>303</sup> Or there is this teaching: “The best man is he who dares to say of himself, ‘I know everything about myself....’ Listen day and night that you are Soul. Repeat this to yourself day and night until this thought enters your blood, and sounds in your every heartbeat.... Let your whole body be filled with one thought: ‘I am unborn, immortal, blessed, all-knowing, eternally beautiful Soul....’ Make this thought your own, and you will penetrate with your consciousness your might, greatness, and glory. May God grant that contradictory superstition never come into your head.... Do you really think yourself weak? It won’t do for you to think yourself a sinner or weak. Say this to the world, say it to yourself....”<sup>304</sup> This is not only something that you need to know and recognize, it is something that you have to feel deeply: “Feel like Christ, and you will be Christ; feel like Buddha, and you will be Buddha.”<sup>305</sup>

“What else is there in religion to learn?” exclaims Vivekananda, and then replies, “Oneness of the Universe and faith in yourself. This is all you need to know....”<sup>306</sup> Vedanta says that there is no God besides man. This may shock you at first, but you will understand it little by little. The Living God is in you; you build

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 277, 279.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 278.

churches and temples, and believe in all kinds of imaginary nonsense. The only God to worship is the human soul or human body.”<sup>307</sup>

These citations are a sufficient illustration of what Hindu Vedantic mysticism is, and a clear illustration of the spiritual fruits of any mysticism. It is open satanic pride (“Make this thought your own, and you will penetrate with your consciousness your might, greatness, and glory.... Feel like Christ, and you will be Christ”)! Compare this to Saint Francis of Assisi, who “felt himself completely become Jesus;” or with Kasimir Malevich, who announced, “I am the Beginning of everything...” and who drew the celebrated black square as the antipode, as the call of wisdom of Divine creation (about which he transparently wrote, “The highest and most complex construction can be considered to be that work which has no existing form in your body”), angrily denying God (“there is no God besides man.... and you believe in ... nonsense”)!

In evaluating natural knowledge of God, the Holy Scriptures and Church tradition are the only criteria that make it possible to separate what is true from what is false. The intuitive feeling of God present in every man’s soul, mind, imagination, and desire, without the firm foundation of God’s Revelation, easily generate the most multiform conceptions of Him, and thus, multiform religions. Therefore, the natural knowledge of God, even in its highest achievements, always suffers from great inexactness, anthropomorphism, and deep distortion of the understanding of God, the spiritual world, and man.<sup>308</sup> An invaluable aide for evaluating the many different ideas born along the path of a natural

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>308</sup> See, for example, S. S. Glagolev, *Supernatural Revelation and Natural Search for the Knowledge of God outside the Church* (Kharkov, 1900).

search for the knowledge of God can be provided by the works of the Orthodox Fathers of the Church, whose essential teaching and experience are particularly accessible, and presented profoundly and precisely to modern man in the books and letters of Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov.

## Chapter 5

### *Paganism*

The Russian word for “paganism” is язычество, which comes from the Church Slavonic word, язык, meaning “nation,” or “people.”<sup>309</sup> During the Old Testament era, Jews called all non-Jewish peoples pagans, rendering a negative connotation to this word and upon those peoples together with their religious beliefs, customs, morals, culture, etc. The term “paganism” passed from the Jewish into the Christian lexicon. However, in Christianity it no longer includes anything connected with nation or race. It now refers to religious teachings and world views having a number of specific indications (see below). Paganism has two main categories: religious and non-religious. The first describes that which is usually called a natural knowledge of God (see above), and includes all religions and religious beliefs that do not accept the Bible as the source of supernatural Revelation. The second refers to all other non-Christian world views.

Priest Paul Florensky characterized paganism thus: “Paganism ... is falsely religious and falsely spiritual. It is the distortion, perversion, and corruption of the true faith which was in mankind from the beginning; a torturous attempt to climb out of spiritual

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<sup>309</sup> The word “pagan” in English comes from the Latin word *paganus*, which means “villager, rustic, civilian.” Such people often clung to their worship of the old gods even after Christianization. The words “heathen” or “gentile” are also used in Church-related meanings. All are linked to the Greek word *ta ethne* (τὰ ἔθνη), used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament to render the Hebrew *goyim*, plural of *goy* “nation,” especially of non-Israelites, hence “Gentile nation.” *Ta ethne* is the plural form of the Greek *ethnos* (ἔθνος) “band of people living together, nation, people.” Since the word “pagan” has from the early twentieth century been applied to modern pantheists and nature-worshippers, we are using it consistently as the basis for translating the related Russian words. —Trans.

confusion. It is ‘spiritual floundering,’ so to speak. Paganism is *prelest*.<sup>310</sup>

By its most essential characteristics, paganism is the complete opposite of Christianity: *Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican* (Mt 18:17). The Lord forbids us to be like the pagans in their use of many words during prayer (Mt 6:7), or in their relationships to people: *And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek [Mt 5:47; 6:31–32].)*

The Apostle Peter calls upon Christians not to do the *will of the Gentiles*, not to walk in *abominable idolatries* (1 Pet 4:3). The Holy Apostle Paul clearly illustrates the depth of man’s fall into paganism (Rom 1: 18–32). He states that the pagans do not know God (cf. 1 Thes 4:5), *but are carried away unto these dumb idols* (1 Cor 12:2).

Although ancient Christian writers say that God will also have mercy upon the pagans and reveal Himself in their minds and reason, they constantly emphasize the essential difference between paganism and the teachings of Christ. Thus, the Christian apologist Aristide, in his *Apologies*, subjects the religious beliefs of “barbarians and Hellenes” to criticism. “Both one and the other,” he says, “are crudely misled. The first by worshipping the elements, and the second by worshipping anthropomorphized Gods.”<sup>311</sup> Another Christian apologist, Tatian, who, as he himself admitted, “had become familiar with the mysteries, and researched

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<sup>310</sup> *Pillar and Ground of Truth*, 674.

<sup>311</sup> Prof. I. V. Popov, *Abstract of a Lecture on Patristics* (Sergiev Posad, 1916), 34–35.

various forms of God-seeking,”<sup>312</sup> says that he rejects “pagan delusions as children’s fantasies,”<sup>313</sup> that pagan myths are “pure nonsense,” and that “it is inappropriate to even compare the Christian knowledge of God with the opinions of pagans, who are sunk in materialism and impurity.”<sup>314</sup> Tertullian addresses the pagans quite summarily: “Your gods and the demons are one and the same, and the idols are the demons’ bodies.”<sup>315</sup>

Paganism is very heterogeneous in form. There are a multitude of its forms: magic, shamanism, all polytheistic religions, satanism, atheism, materialism, and others. But there are signs which are more characteristic of the majority of them: naturalism, idol worship, magic, and mysticism.

## § 1. Naturalism

Naturalism in this case refers to the life principle according to which life’s goal is seen as the maximum satisfaction of all of man’s so-called natural needs—what the Apostle John the Theologian calls *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life* (1 Jn 2:16). Such a life style is usually bound up with a broad moral “freedom.” It proceeds from the understanding of man as a spiritually sound being (“man—that sounds proud”<sup>316</sup>), who therefore needs only the appropriate material and social conditions of life, and opportunities for self-realization. Thus, the Christian teaching about corrupt human nature and the need to heal it from “lusts” in order to attain a fully sound life is foreign to

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<sup>312</sup> Tatian, *Speech against the Hellenes* (Moscow, 1863), § 29, 169.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 170.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 161–162.

<sup>315</sup> Tertullian, *Works, Apologies* (Saint Petersburg, 1847), § 23, 56.

<sup>316</sup> A communist slogan produced by Mayakovsky. —Trans.

naturalistic paganism. The latter is fully satisfied with the present state of human nature, and therefore seeks only “food and shows.”

The natural outcome of this is the deification of man, often in the literal sense, and the deification of surrounding nature. The Apostle Paul clearly describes the nature of paganism when he says that pagans *Changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator* (Rom. 1:25). Even in its best representatives, the pagan world could not overcome naturalism. Philosophical systems of pagan antiquity did not contain the strength needed to break with naturalism forever, and the pagan soul could not “extricate itself from the fatal, inflamed circle of [everyday] existence in order to attain to pure being.”<sup>317</sup>

Just the same, the ideal of naturalistic paganism—maximum pleasure with minimum labor—is more than transparent. Without elaborating upon the ephemeral nature of pleasure, the fact that it must always come to an end for each individual, and its dependence upon many different circumstances that come and go in life, pleasure as a life’s goal cannot bring man unconditional good, because of man’s own nature. The passions are unquenchable, and when they are satisfied they grow, demanding ever more novel pleasures, including those that go against nature. They corrupt the soul and make it egotistical, proud, insensitive, incapable of love or joy, and especially of spiritual experience. The materialistic ideal of life turns man into a spiritual corpse before the death of his body. The Lord said of such people to His disciple, *let the dead bury their dead* (Mt 8:22).

One systematic critic of Christianity, John M. Robertson, admits that pagan cults were penetrated with the “spirit of sexuality.”<sup>318</sup> It

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<sup>317</sup> N. S. Arseniev, *In Search of the Absolute God* (Moscow, 1910), 15.

<sup>318</sup> J. Robertson, *Early Christianity* (1930), 64.

is no accident that Antisthenes, a friend of Socrates, exclaimed, “If only I could catch Aphrodite! I would run her through with a spear for seducing so many respectable and beautiful women amongst us.”<sup>319</sup>

Seductive and outright licentious forms of cult were often an inalienable part of paganism. Plutarch, for example, considered that “dirty” words and rituals were a means of pleasing and mollifying the demons. The Neo-Platonist author of the tract *On Pagan Mysteries* went even further into idealizing phallic cults.<sup>320</sup> Temples were places for amorous intrigue, and, as Minuzzi Felix wrote, fornication was more freely practiced in the pagan temples than in houses of prostitution.<sup>321</sup> Lucian recalls that homosexuality was shamefully praised in the form of a speech in the temples during pagan services. It was also thought that on the festival of Dionysius the one who most pleased the god was the one who drank the most.<sup>322</sup> In Terentia we read how a certain adulterer cited the sin of Jupiter as justification for his own. “If a god acts thus,” he said, “then why shouldn’t I, a man?”<sup>323</sup>

Generally not recognizing the immortality of the soul and denying the general resurrection, paganism—even religious paganism—deprives man once and for all of the real meaning of life. Meaning can only be in life, in the personal appreciation and experience of one’s actions, and not in the insensibility of death. The pagan’s blind, unbending faith in the finality of death (that is, impunity [for immoral acts during life]) can be explained only by

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<sup>319</sup> Cited from Prof. V. I. Nesmelov, *Science of Man* (Kazan, 1966), 2:316.

<sup>320</sup> See N. Arseniev, *In Search of the Absolute God*, 37.

<sup>321</sup> M. Felix, *Octavia*, Russian translation (Moscow, 1866), § 25, 89.

<sup>322</sup> Nicodim Milash, *Rules of the Orthodox Church with Explanations* (Saint Petersburg, 1911), 1:152–153.

<sup>323</sup> Cited from F. Farrar, *The First Days of Christianity* (Saint Petersburg, 1892), 88.



his fear of the voice of his conscience, or of any moral responsibility for his actions. This is where his desperate desire to “live,” to “get all he can from life” comes from. However, the brevity of life cannot be prolonged, and the tragedy of death, senseless to the pagan, unmasks his nearsightedness, revealing the emptiness of those phantom idols by which he lives.

## § 2. Idol Worship

Idol worship (from the Greek εἰδωλολατρεία, from εἶδωλον—vision, phantom, visibility, reverie, idol) means literally worship of idols, the images of gods. In polytheistic religions this was expressed in the cult of various idol gods (for example, in the Greek religion there was the cult of Dionysus, the god of wine and merry-making; Aphrodite, the goddess of sensual love and beauty; and the rest). Sacrifices were brought to the idols, even human ones.

In the connotative sense, idol worship is the worship of such “lusts,” ideals, idols and goals which spiritually blind and degrade man, making him a toy of his own passions. There are many idol/passions. The idea of ruling the world, the cult of money, unbridled immorality under the banner of personal freedom, and other similar idols serve as objects of sacrifice, often of gigantic proportions.<sup>324</sup> The Apostle calls “idol worship” the passion for wealth, for example (Col. 3:5), or gluttony (*whose God is their belly* [Phil. 3:19]). Truly, when the greedy man thinks of nothing besides profits and money, and the ambitious man about nothing besides glory and honor, and they exert all their energy towards the

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<sup>324</sup> “There is data that in Russia before the revolution there were 360,000 clergymen, and by the end of 1919, only 40,000 remained,” was written of one of these sacrifices. V. Soloukhin (“Why I did not sign that letter”). See also, for example, S. Dimitriev, “In the Wake of the Red Terror (on S. P. Melgunov and His Book),” *Our Contemporary* 1 (1991); C. Melgunov, “Red Terror,” *ibid.*, 1–3.

achievement of their aims, they are in fact the servants of idols in the full sense of the words. Abba Dorotheus talks about three main idols which give birth to all the others: “All sins come from either love of pleasure, love of money, or love of glory.”<sup>325</sup>

Any passion, physical, emotional, or spiritual, can become a person’s idol. Tertullian was right in this regard when he wrote, “Mankind’s great wickedness, which includes all other wickedness, a wickedness that causes man’s condemnation, is idol worship.”<sup>326</sup>

Servants of idols—that is, actual pagans—can be people of the most diverse world views and religions—from agnostic and atheist to Orthodox Christian; for one’s faithfulness to God is in the final analysis shown not by love *in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth* (1 Jn 3:18). The Lord warns that *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon* (Mt 6:24).

### § 3. Mysticism

Mysticism (from the Greek, μυστικός, meaning “secret”), is a somewhat broad concept. The well-known modern Catholic theologian Hans Küng, for example, writes,

If we return to the literal sense of the words “mystery,” “mystical,” it comes from the Greek verb μύειν, meaning “to close up (the lips).” “Mystery” is a “secret,” “secret teaching,” “secret cult,” about which the initiates are not supposed to speak. Thus, that religion is mystical which “closes its lips,” that is, remains silent about its hidden secrets in the presence of the profane, and moreover, turns away from the outside

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<sup>325</sup> Abba Dorotheus, *Soul Profiting Reading* (Moscow, 1874), 9:126.

<sup>326</sup> Tertullian, *Works*, Apol. 23:1, “On Idol Worship,” 144.

world, closes its eyes and ears in order to obtain salvation within itself.... Mysticism, according to [the Western religious scholar] Friedrich Heiler [†1967], is “the form of communion with God in which the world and the ‘self’ are radically denied and the human personality dissolves, disappears, drowns in the one and infinite element of divinity.”<sup>327</sup>

The very perception of God takes on a distorted nature in mysticism, in comparison with that of other positive religions. Heiler, in his monumental work *Prayer*, notes that “systematic mysticism frees the imagining of God from all personality attributes, and leaves a naked and pure eternity.”<sup>328</sup>

This understanding of mysticism shows how far it is from the Christian religion which has an openness to the world, a perception of God as a personality, and an entirely different understanding of the conditions and nature of the experiential acquisition of knowledge of God and the sanctity of man. The latter of these differences is of particular significance, for mixing concepts of “mysticism” and “sanctity” in the spiritual realm of life is more dangerous than in any other realm, because it reaches the very foundation of human existence. Therefore, the habitual use of the terms “mystic,” “mysticism,” “mystical experience,” and so on in adjunct to any experience of contact with the “other” world is precarious and can have serious consequences. If both goodness and evil, both the striving for truth and primitive curiosity, both sanctity and satanism, and both Christ and Belial (see 2 Cor 6:15) are standing behind these terms, the broad application of them in Christian theology can very easily instill into one’s consciousness

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<sup>327</sup> H. Küng, *Does God Exist?* (1982), 295.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

a perilous idea of the other world essentially of ascetical paths of all religions.

Here is a little something that can serve as a clear illustration of this:

Following the path of contemplation, Hindu Brahmans came to the same thing that all mystics have come to, no matter what time or nation they lived in. Yajnavalkya and Buddha, Plotin and Psuedo Dionysius Areopagitus, Meister Eckhart and Gregory Palamas, the Cabalists and Nicholai Kuzansky, Jakob Böhme, Reisbruck, and many other clairvoyants of the East and West.... They all unanimously witness that *there* ... there is neither good, nor evil, nor light, nor darkness, nor movement, nor calm.... In the sacred twilight that hides the beginning of beginnings, they felt the reality of the Existing, the *Absolute*. Terrible, unbearable mystery!... It is hard to even call this abyss “God”.... Beyond the boundaries of everything created and organic, Reality was revealed to the mystic eye, Reality which Lao Tzu called the Tao, Buddha, nirvana, the Cabalists, Ein Sof, the Christians, Divine Essence (οὐσία), “Divinity.”<sup>329</sup>

This is an entirely theosophical idea, which completely devaluates the unique significance of the Lord Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and His Divinity in the work of man’s salvation. A similar theosophical idea has a broad understanding of mysticism as its point of support. With the aide of mysticism, it is very easy not only to place the experience of Christian saints in the same row, but even to equate it with the experience of Cabalists (for whom Jesus Christ is a false messiah), Buddhists (who fully deny the

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<sup>329</sup> E. Svetlov (pseudonym used by Fr. Alexander Men), *At the Gates of Silence* (Brussels, 1971), 80–81.

existence of a Personal God), the Tao, nirvana, and Ein Sof with Divine essence, Divinity (compare with Jn 8:42; 15:23).<sup>330</sup> In this way, the very concept of Truth in religion is destroyed, and man is deprived even of the thought of the possibility of fatal error in such a responsible realm of life as the spiritual realm. As a result, he easily becomes the blind toy of dreaminess, self-opinion and, not rarely, of openly demonic powers.

The term “mysticism,” despite its Greek origin, entered Russian theology from the West with this broad and essentially theosophical meaning (see Chapter IV, §2, Mysticism).

The beginning of mysticism is always the same—it is man’s passionate hankering to penetrate the secrets of spiritual existence and receive power over them, the search for higher delights, becoming one with the divinity, ecstasy. It all leads to the same thing—pride. But mysticism exists in all religions. In paganism it exists as a natural manifestation, but in Christianity it exists as a sickness, an abnormality, a distortion of the Christian faith and precepts of spiritual life.

Mysticism has many different forms. All of them can be divided into two main categories: *natural* and *acquired*; although this division is somewhat conditional, inasmuch as it is not always easy to place a boundary line between them.

By natural mysticism is meant the native ability of foresight, healing, clairvoyance, telepathy, and other abilities that are now called “extra-sensory perception.” According to Christian anthropology, these abilities are natural to man, but were distorted as a consequence of the fall, are in a state of “anabiosis,” and therefore manifest themselves rarely.

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<sup>330</sup> Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me; He that hateth me hateth my Father also.

There is a great danger for those who possess these abilities to become ambitious, proud, and develop the accompanying passions. It is very dangerous for a “natural mystic,” an ordinary sinner, to work not upon the patient’s body as in normal therapy, but directly upon his soul. Thrusting his unclean “hands” into it, he infects it, disrupts the subtle, secret order of the soul, and in this way often causes irreparable harm to the psyche, the nerves, and the entire organism as a whole. Therefore, the Church forbids using the services of these “healers.”

Even more dangerous are the influences (for example, by television [or on the internet]) of those who belong to the category of acquired mysticism. Various sorcerers, astrologers, psychic “professionals,” and the like, who consciously develop these abilities in themselves—most often for fame and money—cripple people incomparably worse than do those in the first category. (The television “experiments” of modern psychics are a perfect illustration of this.)<sup>331</sup>

Acquired mysticism is divided into two main branches: the occult and the delusional [*prelest*].

*The occult*<sup>332</sup> path is bound up with man’s longing to penetrate the secret world of man, nature, and spirits not subject to the laws of this world, in order to learn its secrets and to use the hidden powers they contain to their own ends. Related to occultism are magic, satanism, spiritualism, theosophy, anthroposophy, and others. In all of these, man consciously or unconsciously enters

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<sup>331</sup> There have been a number of psychics in Russia who have aired their séances on television, supposedly to heal the viewers. However, most of the viewers became more ill, or demonically possessed. —Trans.

<sup>332</sup> Occultism (from the Latin *occultus*, secret, hidden) is a teaching which recognizes the presence in man, nature, and the cosmos of special, hidden (occult) powers and which calls man to take control of them to his own ends. There are many different kinds of occultisms. For more detail, see § 5. Magic.

into contact with *only* the fallen spirits, as a rule injuring himself irreparably in the process.

*Prelest* (delusional, fantasy) mysticism usually brings man visions, revelations, or delights. The person in *prelest* thinks that he is learning of *that* world, but in actuality he has become the toy of his own fantasies and demonic influences.<sup>333</sup>

Mysticism thus leads man away from God, from the true meaning of life, and directs a person's spiritual development toward a place where subtle pride grows fiercely, making him incapable of accepting Christ as the true God and only Savior. His growing pride encourages his false asceticism, and often opens up extrasensory abilities (in yoga, for example), as well as types of neuro-psychological experience and pleasure, which lead to ecstasy. This all gradually leads a person to the conviction that he is "like a god." This path quite often ends in mystical atheism (as in Buddhism and Samkhya), insanity, hysterics, and suicide.

#### § 4. Magic

Magic (from the Greek *μαγεία*, meaning sorcery, enchantment) is the belief that the laws of this world are subject to occult powers which man can possess with the aide of special activities (spells, rituals, etc.). Nicholas A. Berdayev (†1948) wrote of magic: "Occultism is for the most part a sphere of magic; that is, it is a necessity and not a freedom. Magic is a power over the world that is gained by learning of the needs and laws of the secret powers of the world. I have not seen any freedom of spirit in people who are involved in occultism. They do not have command over the occult powers—the occult powers have command over them.

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<sup>333</sup> See Chap. 4, § 3, Individual revelation and its indications. Chap.7, § 1, ¶ 7, Prelest.

Anthroposophy<sup>334</sup> corrupted the integrity of human personality, and eviscerated the soul no less than psychoanalysis.... Rarely has anyone produced an impression of someone so devoid of grace as Steiner.<sup>335</sup> There isn't a single ray falling upon him from above. He wanted to obtain everything from below; to break through to the spiritual world by passionate force."<sup>336</sup>

Magic, like mysticism, is not tied to a mandatory acceptance of a personal—never mind a single—God. The magical understanding of the world sees it as something unconditionally statistical and predetermined, and leaves no room for freedom to gods, or spirits, or forces of nature. Everything and everyone is subject to primordially existing occult powers. Therefore, he who has found the “key” to it becomes the true ruler of gods, people, and the world. One Hindu saying goes, “The whole world is subject to the gods. The gods are subject to incantations. Incantations are subject to the Brahmans. Our gods are the Brahmans.”

Unlike religion, which sees the existence of man's life in his right spiritual relationship to God, for magic the main thing is the knowledge of what words and actions are needed to use in order to get what one wants. These aims are exclusively earthly (to cast a spell, enchant, destroy a love relationship, etc.), and their attainment is no way connected with man's spiritual and moral purification. The main thing in magic is correctly *doing* it.

An awareness of magic is deeply present in our “old man.” For very many people, Orthodoxy consists in placing candles, “venerating,” donating something, leaving prayer requests,

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<sup>334</sup> Anthroposophy (from the Greek ἄνθρωπος, meaning “man,” and σοφία, “wisdom”)—the mystic teaching which replaces God with man, who has attained “secret wisdom,” “true” meaning of existence, and having become through this a “son of God.”

<sup>335</sup> Rudolph Steiner (†1925), the German philosopher, mystic, and founder of anthroposophy. (Although Steiner's anthroposophy is very popular in the West, especially in Germany and the Netherlands, its roots are in ancient practices of magic. —Trans.)

<sup>336</sup> N. Berdaev, *Self Knowledge* (Paris, 1949), 205–206.



ordering Liturgies, *molebens*<sup>337</sup> and *pannikhidas*,<sup>338</sup> joining in the cross processions, visiting holy shrines, confessing and receiving Communion. The most important part of salvation, life according the commandments and repentance, remains undone. However, without spiritual transformation (in Greek, the word for repentance is μετάνοια [metanoia], which means to change one's way of thinking), all of these external activities are at the least useless, and at the worst harmful, for they can cause one to feel self-righteous and raise his self-opinion over “sinners.”

In Orthodoxy the Sacraments themselves are only saving under the condition of a person's sincere yearning to spiritually and morally change. A purely external participation in them without the awareness of one's sinfulness, without sincere repentance, can even harm one. The Apostle Paul writes of Holy Communion, *For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself* (1 Cor 11:29). But this applies to all the Sacraments without exception. A magical perception of the Sacraments, ecclesiastical rites, and Church practices as a whole is one of the main causes of the Christian religion's degeneration, distortion, and backsliding into paganism.

Pagan consciousness is an enormous evil in man—“to partake of the secrets of existence,” and to put himself in place of God. Magic is a mad attempt at “revolution” against God. According to Holy Scripture, the final step in this revolution will be the appearance of a world tyrant—the antichrist, *man of sin; that Wicked* [in Slavonic, “the Lawless One”] (2 Thes 2:3, 8) in the strongest and most exceptional meaning of the word, *so that he as God sitteth in*

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<sup>337</sup> Prayer rite for the living.

<sup>338</sup> Prayer rite of the dead.

*the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God* (2 Thes 2:4), working false miracles with the help of magic.

## § 5. The Root and Essence of Paganism

What has borne and continues to give birth to paganism in society?

The main cause of its appearance is man's false self-determination. The book of Genesis tells how the first people were tempted to pick the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in order to become "as gods." Instead of gradual spiritual growth, instead of changing themselves in accordance with the all-holy God, people choose the "easy path" which requires no work, *fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold* (Gen 3:6), promising to give the "knowledge of good and evil"—the path of godlessly becoming "god."

This external path of "plucking" the secrets of existence in order to possess their natural and supernatural powers gives birth to magic. From this comes idol worship as the natural result of a corrupt understanding of higher goals and the true meaning of life. Here are the roots also of naturalism, for the loss of the spiritual ideal inevitably brings the cult of the material, the cult of the flesh. Pride, man's striving to put himself in the place of God, the striving for super-consciousness and highest delights, gives birth to the more subtle form of paganism—the mystical form.<sup>339</sup>

In what direction does the general cultivation of paganism go? Does it become more "pagan," or does a certain positive process of returning to the *unknown God* (Acts 17:23) take place?

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<sup>339</sup> See Chap. 1, § 9. The Multiplicity of Religions.

It is indisputable that there were always people in paganism who sought *God if happily they may feel after him or find him* (Acts 17:27). In this sense the supposition is justifiable that even in paganism “a positive religious process occurred,”<sup>340</sup> for, as Saint Justin the Philosopher wrote, “All have the seed of Truth,”<sup>341</sup> and “Christ is the Word of Whom the entire race of man is part. Those who lived according to the Word are Christian in essence, even though they be considered godless; such amongst the Hellenes were Socrates, Heraclites, and others like them.”<sup>342</sup>

Just the same, another thing is no less obvious; this general participation in the Word and sincere search for truth by separate pagans does not determine the general direction of paganism’s development in mankind. *Paganism*, in the final analysis, is *not so much the search for God, as it is the departure from Him*; and progress in paganism was and is more the progress of sin and apostasy than an unselfish search for truth and greater knowledge of God. The idea of “*A kingdom of God on earth*”—that is, the attainment in earthly history of general spiritual and moral perfection and material well-being<sup>343</sup>—does not exist in patristic writings, and essentially contradicts New Testament Revelation (see Mt 24:5–31; Rev, and others). Divine Revelation tells us that *In the last days, shall come dangerous times. Men shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, proud* (2 Tim 3:1–2), so that, *The Son of man, when he cometh, shall he find, think you, faith on earth?* (Lk 18:8). This could only be the consequence of a deep

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<sup>340</sup> S. Bulgakov, *The Unwaning Light*, 323.

<sup>341</sup> Apology 1:7, *Monuments of Ancient Christian Writings*, Vol. 4, 25.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:46, 85.

<sup>343</sup> This idea was energetically defended by V. S. Soloviev until practically the end of his life, and by those thinkers ideologically close to him (Archpriest S. Bulgakov, S. N. Trubetskoy, Archpriest P. Svetlov, N. Feodorov, and others).

and comprehensive spiritual degradation of mankind, and the final reign of paganism. The Lord also reveals to the Church that the fulfillment of creative Divine providence for man is not prepared through history, but through meta-history, when there will be a *new heaven and a new earth* (Rev 21:1).

## § 6. An Assessment of Paganism

The concept of “paganism” is first of all expressed in Christianity by the “old,” inherited seed in man that first appeared as a result of his fall from God, and then sprouted and developed in various shapes and forms throughout history. According to the Christian teaching, man in his present condition is not a natural, normal being, but rather one deeply deformed in body and in soul. Good is mixed in him with evil, the “new” is mixed with the “old,” and he requires continual, conscious spiritual and moral work on his personality in order to become a whole, “new” man (Eph 4:24).

Paganism is thus, first of all, a life disposition which can be described as a false relationship to God, to one’s self, and to the world. Therefore, it includes various religions and world views as well as all those people, including Christians, who live *after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ* (Col. 2:8). For in every human being there lives both a Christian and a pagan by nature. Only the sincere choice of Christ as a life ideal makes a person a Christian. But a person can, on the other hand, confess Orthodoxy, remain officially in the Church, fulfill all its rites and injunctions, yet still be an ungodly pagan in the full sense of the word, for, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven* (Mt 7:21).

## *Chapter 6*

### *Old Testament Religion*

#### § 1. Teaching

Old Testament religion is the name for the ancient monotheist religion which the forefathers of all peoples had from the beginning. However, while it obtained its physical status only through a special Revelation to Moses and other Jewish prophets, it is usually considered to be the Judaic religion before the coming of Christ and the establish--ment of His Church. (After this begins Judaism, or new Judaism.)

One of the main features of this religion, as the Bible relates, is first of all its unconditional monotheism. The assertion of certain scholars regarding the polytheistic character of Old Testament religion does not stand up to criticism and careful analysis of their arguments, the main ones being:

1. From the first lines of the Hebrew text of the Bible, it talks about “*Elohim*,” that is, about the gods and not God (because the suffix יְהוָה “-im” indicates the plural), as it was translated into other languages.

2. In the Bible are mentioned the names of various gods which the Jews worshipped: Adonai, Yahweh, Sabaoth, and others.

3. The frequent biblical anthropomorphism which Old Testament religion used in relation to God bespeaks a primitive concept of God characteristic of polytheism.

With respect to these suppositions, we can note the following:

1. The suffix “-im” in the Hebrew not only indicates the plural, but it is also used to express the fullness of being, quality, and

superlative degree. For example, in the Bible, “heaven” sounds like *shamaim*, or “water” (as an element)—*maim*, etc. This is applicable to the name *Elohim*, which expressed a special reverence before God, and emphasized His exceptionalness and singularity. This usage was as a call to the surrounding polytheism. “In the Hebrew language *Elohim* did not mean ‘gods,’ but was rather a banner of the superlative, which the Hebrew language does not have. The use of *Elohim* instead of [the singular] *El* would have emphasized that it refers not only to the Semitic divinity, but to the Most High God. It is worthy of note that neither *Elohim* nor *Eloach* are encountered anywhere in Semitic literature other than in the Bible.”<sup>344</sup>

Some Church fathers would be inclined to suppose that this name in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament already indicates in a hidden way the Trinitarian Hypostases of God. Saint Basil the Great wrote,

*And God said, Let us make man* (Gen 1:26). Tell me, could this be one Person? It is not written, “let there be man,” but rather, *Let us make man....* Do you hear, O lover of Christ, the speech addressed to the Participant in the world’s creation, to the one *by Whom also he made the worlds* (Heb 1:2)!... Thus, He says to His own Image, to the living Image, announcing, *I and my Father are one* (Jn 10:30).... He says to Him, *Let us make man in Our own image.*<sup>345</sup>

2. Yahweh, Adonai, and other names of God found in the Bible signify not different divinities, but rather different names of the One God, indicating one or another of God’s qualities. Thus, “*Adonai* (Heb.) is the powerful, mighty commander—the Lord.”

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<sup>344</sup> E. Svetlov, *Magic and Monotheism* (Brussels, 1971), 616.

<sup>345</sup> Saint Basil the Great, “Conversations on the Hexameron,” 9, *Works*, Vol. 1 (Saint Petersburg, 1911), 92, 93.

“*Sabaoth* (Heb., genitive plural) are hosts, powers; this word was usually used together with the word ‘Lord,’ or ‘God.’ *Yahweh* (Heb.) is ‘Being,’ the great and holy name of God, which signifies originality, eternity, and unchangeableness of God’s Essence (Ex 3:14).”<sup>346</sup>

3. Anthropomorphism by itself does not provide a sufficient argument in favor of Old Testament polytheism, because not only is anthropomorphism inherent in all religions, it is also inherent in human language itself, for it is a human tendency.

But if the protest against Old Testament religion’s monotheism turns out to be a simple misunderstanding, then the opposing argument is indisputable. The commandment to worship the one God is the first of the Mosaic Ten Commandments and is stated firmly and repeatedly throughout the entire Bible. It is impossible to overlook it.

Old Testament religion has many features common to the majority of religions. For example, there is the teaching on personal Divinity, Revelation, good and evil, retribution, Angels and demons, the need for blood sacrifices, prayer, and many other things.

At the same time, the religion of the Pentateuch speaks indefinitely about the immortality of the human soul (for example, Eccl 12:7), which descends into the nether regions, sheol, the land of oblivion, the place of unconscious habitation, the eternal sleep of death (for example, *A tree hath hope: if it be cut, it groweth green again, and the boughs thereof sprout... But man when he shall be dead, and stripped and consumed, I pray you where is he?... So man when he is fallen asleep shall not rise again; till the*

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<sup>346</sup> G. N. Diachenko, *Complete Church Slavonic Dictionary* (Moscow, 1899), 6, 567, 234.

*heavens be broken, he shall not awake, nor rise up out of his sleep* (Jb 14:7, 10, 12).<sup>347</sup>

“The Law” (Pentateuch) does not speak about retribution after death, the resurrection of the dead and eternal life, or the Kingdom of God. The God of the “Law” is the unconditional Giver of retribution here only, in earthly life. Therefore the religion of the “law” does not raise man above the ideal of pure earthly well-being (shalom).

But in some prophets we already see certain statements which lead us to conclude that the dead do not just sleep eternally; they also experience specific states. Thus, the Prophet Ezekiel says that “those who are slain by the sword” will be placed among the uncircumcised, and go down into the pit (Ez 32:18–32). But the prophet Isaiah says of the lot of the ungodly: *their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched* (Is 66:24).

The Old Testament religion in the person of the Prophets looks for the resurrection of the dead. This hope is expressed by the righteous Job, when he says, *For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I will see my God, Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another: this my hope is laid up in my bosom.* (Jb 19:25–27). Isaiah speaks quite plainly about the general resurrection (*Thy dead men shall live* [Is. 26:19]), and Ezekiel foresees its coming about (Chap. 37). But for the righteous resurrection will be eternal blessedness, while for the sinners it will be reproach (Dn 12:2).

A number of important particularities separate Old Testament religion from the other religions. These are the teachings on the

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<sup>347</sup> The author is here citing passages that are not, strictly speaking, part of the Pentateuch. These passages refer back to those books, since they proceed from their tradition. Eccl 12:7, for example, refers to Gen 3:19 and 18:27. —Trans.



creation of the world from “nothing,”<sup>348</sup> the creation of man in the image of God, man’s fall into sin, and others. Here we shall pause to take a look at the teaching about the Messiah and the particular chosenness of the Hebrews.

1. The expectation of the Messiah (Greek Χριστός, or “Anointed”; Hebrew, *mashiah*, meaning “the Anointed One”) is the central point of Old Testament Revelation, the soul of the entire Old Testament religion. In separate Old Testament books the Messiah is bestowed with various qualities: king, high priest, and prophet. In some texts He unites all of these in Himself (cf. Jer 33:14–18, and others). But most importantly, He is the Savior of all mankind, both Jews and non-Jews, from sin, evil, and suffering, Who will bring truth and righteousness to the earth, and establish an eternal Divine Kingdom of general holiness, love, and peace (cf. Is 2:53; Mic 4, and others).

But *they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction* (2 Pet 3:16); and this includes the Divine Revelation about Christ. The Jewish priests, theologians, and teachers suggested a purely earthly, quite pagan, and political interpretation of the Messiah to their people: He will be a Jewish king to whom all nations will bow down, and a kingdom of total earthly happiness will begin for the Jewish people. It becomes clear from this why the Messiah Who came, the Lord Jesus Christ, was rejected for His teaching on His Kingdom which is not of this world (Jn 18:36), and the Divinely revealed Old Testament religion ceased its existence. Judaism then came about, which preserved much of the external, formal side of the Old Testament religion, but lost its essence.

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<sup>348</sup> See Chap. 8, The Origin of the World.

2. What was the significance and goal of the Jewish nation's "chosenness"? The concept of being "chosen by God" was also seriously distorted amongst the Jewish people, for the most important thing—the conditions for chosenness being faithfulness to God in faith and in moral life—was, in fact, completely ignored, and the whole idea constrained to ethnicity; that is, to flesh and blood. From this proceeds the conviction that chosenness is a forever inalienable and national exclusivity reserved for the Jews, and they are therefore superior over all nations. Naturally, such an idea cannot but impose an egotistical consciousness in man, and this grew deep roots in Judaism.

History in fact shows that the ancient Jews were significantly less developed culturally, philosophically, and scientifically than many of the nations surrounding them (Egypt, Babylon, Greece, India), and the chosenness of the Jewish people was conditioned upon a strictly religious factor: *Therefore you will hear my voice, and keep my covenant, you shall be my peculiar possession above all people: for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation* (Ex 19:5–6). These conditions are testified to by the obvious fact that the Israelite prophets constantly call these people to repentance, rebuking them for being "stiffnecked," *Know therefore that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this excellent land in possession for thy justices, for thou art a very stiffnecked people* (Dt 9:6); for immorality and easy apostasy: *And said to me: Arise, and go down from hence quickly: for thy people, which thou hast brought out of Egypt, have quickly forsaken the way that thou hast shewn them, and have made to themselves a molten idol. And again the Lord said to me: I see that this people is stiffnecked: Let me alone that I may destroy them, and abolish their name from under heaven* (Dt 9:12–14); for stubbornness and disobedience: *I have spread forth my hands all*

*the day to an unbelieving people, who walk in a way that is not good after their own thoughts (Is 65:2); which can be compared to Heb 3:7–11: Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest), and so on.*

The Jewish nation was chosen during the Old Testament epoch for reasons not directly stated in Revelation, just as the reasons are unstated for choosing the Apostle Peter who denied Christ, or Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him. Divine Providence continually chooses one or another nation, or separate individuals, with an eye to their quality of fulfilling specific historical goals. However, the context of the Bible shows that the main reason for choosing the Jewish people was its superlative ethnic ability to preserve the Revelation of salvation of the world through the Lord Christ and preach about Him amongst all the peoples of the earth. But since talents can be realized in quite varied ways, so also the chosenness of the Jewish nation bore a temporary and foreshadowing character, as did the entire Old Testament Law, which had *a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things* (Heb 10:1).

With the coming of the Promised One came the end of the Law (Rom 10:4), *and now the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God* (Rom 9:8). He said also in the prophet Hosea, *I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God* (Rom 9:25-26; Hos 2:23; 1:10.); for from henceforth only those who are of Christ

are *the seed of Abraham* (Gal 3:29). With the coming of Christ, there are not “two Israels and two chosen peoples. There is only one chosen people—the Church, the true Israel, which encompasses both Jews and non-Jews.”<sup>349</sup>

At the Cross occurred the final separation of Israel into two parts (see Lk 2:34): the *little flock* of the chosen, the *remnant* (see Lk 12:32; Rom 11:2–5), which became the beginning of the Church; and the other, hardened part, to which applied the words of the prophet Isaiah, *I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not. And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord GOD shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name* (Is 65:12, 15). This other name is *Christian* (see Acts 11:26).

There is very much specifically stated in the Gospels about the cessation of the chosen status of the Jews who did not accept Christ. For example, in the parable about the wicked keepers of the vineyard, it is written, *Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof* (Mt. 21:43). It is also stated without a parable: *And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 8:11–12).

Judaism sprung from the ground of the Jews’ rejection of Christ and loss of chosen status as an antipode to the Jewish Old Testament religion. Judaism waits for the coming of its christ (who will be, according to Christian Revelation, antichrist)—naturally bringing a

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<sup>349</sup> S. Kazilo, “A Look at the Periodical *Christian Peace Conference*,” *The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 3 (1975); 41.

different teaching—and prepares for him. Unlike the religion of the Old Testament, Judaism represents something more like an ideology than a religion.

The words of the Apostle also become clear from this that *all Israel shall be saved* (Rom 11:26). Here *all* does not mean absolutely all, but only those Jews who at the end of history, when *the fullness of the Gentiles be come in* (Rom 11:25)—that is, when there will no longer remain true Christians amongst the other nations—will accept the Lord Jesus Christ, having the conviction that He is the true Messiah. These Jews, who are the historical *remnant* of the fleshly Israel, will comprise the *whole* (as in the beginning of Christianity) *New Israel*, which will be saved, having entered the ranks of God's chosen. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved* (Rom 9:27). Thus the commandment given to Abraham (see Gen 12:3) will be fulfilled in the Church, for God is true (cf. Rom 3:4).

## § 2. Old Testament Religion and Christianity

Old Testament Jewish religion was an exceptional phenomenon amidst the pre-Christian, pagan world. Its belief in the One God, Creator and Provider; belief in eternal life and resurrection, in reward for the righteous beyond the grave; its greater strictness, in comparison with the surrounding nations, of guidelines for life and behavior, moral purity in culture, the forbidding of human sacrifices, and many other things were no doubt a great gift of God to the Jewish people, and a good leaven for the surrounding tribes and nations. Belief in the coming Anointed Savior gave them hope in the face of seemingly insurmountable impasses in life, set them to prepare for His coming, and helped them to force themselves

religiously and spiritually to live accordingly. Old Testament Revelation also gave a more complete picture of the creation of the world, of man's origin, and the history of his fall into sin.

The Old Testament revelation retains a definite significance in the Christian era as well. Of particular value are the prophetic indications of Christ the Savior. These indications, many of which are amazing in their chronological, geographical, and genealogical accuracy, provide an exclusive opportunity for every dispassionate seeker of truth to see in Jesus Christ the Messiah and Lord promised by God.

The Old Testament Revelation is in many ways essentially *fulfilled* by the Good News of Christ (cf. Mt 5:17)<sup>350</sup> This fulfillment is first of all the truth of the Triune God, the Incarnation, the Messiah, His sacrifice on the Cross and Resurrection, and the Kingdom of Heaven which is not outside man but within him. It is not the ideal of earthly well-being (shalom), but rather *the Holy Spirit which is given to us* (Rom 5:5).

In contrast to the Old Testament, Christ is not the Judaic king over all the world, not a political reformer, not the builder of material life who changes stones into the bread (Mt 4:3–4) of quickly passing fleshly pleasures, but the eternal Bread, the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:16) for all mankind in the eternal existence of the Kingdom of God.

In complete contrast with the Old Testament is also the Gospel teaching on righteousness. If “the law” establishes two kinds of righteousness and two different morals—one for internal relationships amongst Jews, the other for relationships with all

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<sup>350</sup> Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. In the Greek text is used the verb πληρῖσαι (infinitive, aoristos, active, from πληρῖ, meaning “to fill, fulfill, finish”).

other peoples (more about this below)—the Gospel righteousness is one, and demands love for all people without exception.

The New Testament gives another concept of “God’s chosen people” which is different in principle from the old. One is chosen by God not because he was born to Jewish flesh and blood, *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter* (Rom 2:28–29). *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love* (Gal 5:6). With the coming of Christ, outward, national chosenness is ended, and the entire Old Testament religion with all of its sacrifices, customs and laws ceases its existence, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth* (Rom 10:4; see also Mt 5:18). With His appearance, *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people... Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God* (1 Pet 2:9, 10) is the Church, the Christians who abide in it, amongst whom *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ... all [are] one in Christ Jesus. And if [they] be Christ’s, then are [they] Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise* (Gal 3:28–29).

The good news of the New Testament shows how incomplete the very principle of spiritual life in the Old Testament religion was, which proceeded from a “slave and hireling” psychology of man, and from his purely legalistic understanding of God’s commandments. The Old Testament, especially the Pentateuch, seems to express a religion with a clearly materialistic direction. In the foundation of Old Testament religion lie promises and warnings from the Lord to Israel which follow their either fulfillment or

infraction of the laws God had given them. These promises are quite eloquent: *Now if thou wilt hear the voice of the Lord thy God, to do and keep all his commandments ... the Lord thy God will make thee higher than all the nations that are on the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon thee ... Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the droves of thy herds, and the folds of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy barns and blessed thy stores. Blessed shalt thou be coming in and going out. The Lord shall cause thy enemies, that rise up against thee, to fall down before thy face ... And the Lord shall make thee the head and not the tail: and thou shalt be always above, and not beneath: And turn not away from them neither to the right hand, nor to the left, nor follow strange gods, nor worship them (Dt 28:1–14).* The warnings are of a similar character: *But if thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God ... Cursed shalt thou be in the city, cursed in the field. Cursed shall be thy barn, and cursed thy stores (Dt 28:15–68), etc.*

In all of these promises of reward and punishment a preeminently material earthly character is clear, and any sort of spiritual goals or teaching on the Kingdom of God is seemingly absent. There is no plainly expressed thought of eternal life, of spiritual blessings, or of salvation. The highest promise given in the Pentateuch for faithfulness to God is *But you shall walk in the way that the Lord your God hath commanded, that you may live, and it may be well with you, and your days may be long in the land of your possession (Dt 5:33).* Any ring of unearthly salvation, the highest spiritual ideal, is characteristically weak in Old Testament religion. What inspired Old Testament religion more than anything? The teaching of the coming Messiah and belief in His eternal Kingdom. Nevertheless, an understanding of this supreme



Revelation in the Old Testament, like other truths, is conditioned upon the spiritual and moral state of the person who receives them. The overwhelming majority of Jews were thinking of an earthly kingdom of Israel and earthly “salvation.” Even the Apostles *asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* (Acts 1:6). This outward materialism seems to be the most paradoxical and at the same time clearest feature of Old Testament Jewish religion. It is needless to say that the understanding of the meaning of life in Christianity, which directs man’s gaze to the coming city (cf. Eph 13:14), and calls him to seek *first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness* (Mt 6:33), is ever so much clearer.

The nature of Old Testament religion noticeably changes in the Psalter and the prophets. Here we hear more about the pain of sin, repentance, prayer for a clean heart (Ps 50); humility is exalted (Ps 33:19; 146:6; Is 57:15).

The differences in moral teachings between Old Testament religion and Christianity are also essential. If the Old Testament demands fairness with respect to one’s tribesmen (for example “Thou shalt not kill, “thou shalt not commit adultery,” “thou shalt not steal,” and so on (see Dt 5:17—19), then with respect to other peoples it clears the way for more permissive behavior. What is not permitted with respect to a brother is *to the stranger. To thy brother thou shalt lend that which he wanteth, without usury: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all thy works* (Dt 23:20).

Such warning as, for example, *And when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land, for which he swore to thy fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: and shall have given thee great and goodly cities, which thou didst not build, Houses full of riches, which thou didst not set up, cisterns which thou didst not dig, vineyards and oliveyards, which thou didst not plant, and thou*

*shalt have eaten and be full. (Dt 6:10–11); or, Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien, and other passages like these sufficiently testify to the level of Old Testament morality. Those commandments given to the Jewish people during their conquest of the promised lands in God's name are one of the clearer illustrations.*

Old Testament morals were a subject of the Lord Jesus Christ's particular attention. He decisively changed the very principle of interrelationships with people, placing at the head of the corner love for all, regardless of nationality, faith, or gender. *For, says the Lord, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment ... Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven ... For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren*

*only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Mt 5:20–48).*

Regarding the Old Testament's obvious incompleteness, the Apostle Paul writes, *By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Gal 2:16), because whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace (Gal 5:4).*

The Old Testament explanation of the Law oppresses a person by its numerous external customary prescriptions by which the Jews were supposed to be ruled. This led in the final analysis to the turning of ritual law of the “Sabbath” into something of a fetish. Christ condemned this, saying to the zealous observers of the law, *The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27).*

In the Epistle to the Hebrews is an assessment of the essence Old Testament religion: *The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation (Heb 9:8–10). For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never ... make the comers thereunto perfect (Heb 10:1). For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, [the prophet] saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.... In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb 8:7–*

8, 13). In the Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle even calls the Old Testament rules the ministration of death-bearing letters, the ministration of condemnation (cf. Cor 3:7–9).

The Old Testament Revelation of God differs by its clearly expressed *anthropomorphism*: the concept of Him as a Being of justice and mercy; not of that love spoken of in the New Testament Gospel: as the Giver of the Law and Establisher of a relationship with man on a purely *legal* basis, as constantly *changing* His relationship to man depending upon the latter's deeds, as apparently taking care for the Jewish nation *alone*.

How can the incompleteness of divinely revealed Old Testament religion be explained?

Firstly, by the fact that the Old Testament was only the preparation for the coming of Christ, and bore a foreshadowing and temporary nature (cf. Heb 7:18–19, 22; 8:5–8, 13; 9:8–10), being only the shadow of good things to come (cf. Heb 10:1).

Secondly, by its ethnic limitation. Moral and ritual Old Testament rules were designated not for all mankind, but for one tribe only, which was chosen for its fulfillment of a concrete act, and were therefore given for reasons of this tribe's spiritual level, moral particularities, intellectual abilities, etc. The Lord explained why the Jews were given such an imperfect law when He answered the Pharisees' question, *Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?* *Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he [Moses] wrote you this precept* (Mk 10:2, 5). It follows that in those days it was not yet possible to give a perfect Revelation—the *very image of the things* (Heb 10:1)—to all the peoples of the earth, and therefore only the shadow of good things to come was given, and that only to one nation, within the estimation of its spiritual and psychological strengths.

Thirdly, Old Testament religion in principle could not be perfect, inasmuch as the perfection of Revelation was given only through the appearance of God in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16) and man's salvation by Him through His Sacrifice and Resurrection. For this reason the great expert on Holy Scripture, Saint John Chrysostom, said that "The Old Testament ... stands as far away from the New Testament as the earth from the heavens."<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Complete Collection of Works* (Saint Petersburg, 1900), 6:91.

## *Chapter 7*

### *Spiritual Life*

The question of spiritual life is the most important question to every person, because it, in the final analysis, determines the nature, direction, and reasonableness of all his activities. A person's spiritual state is a sort of mother water which brings forth the "crystals" of all those ideas, feelings, desires, anxieties, and moods he lives by—all of his relationships to people, nature, business, things, etc., for the spirit creates forms for itself. A correct spiritual life carries with it a life which is healthy in all respects; it is the source of that well-being for which every person and society naturally yearns. On the other hand, transgressing spiritual laws leads irrevocably to the destruction of the entire structure of life on all its levels—personal, family, and societal.

The concept of *spirituality*, as a rule, is inseparably linked with another no less capacious concept—*sanctity*. These concepts have their own character in different religions and cultures. We shall consider here the Orthodox Christian sense of these concepts.

#### § 1. The Basics of Spiritual Life<sup>352</sup>

(According to the Writings of Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov)

The essence of any religion is contained in the spiritual life, which is its most sacred side. Any entrance into this life demands not only zeal, but also knowledge of the laws of spiritual life. Zeal

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<sup>352</sup> In order to understand spiritual life in our times it is particularly useful to read the following authors: Abba Dorotheus; Ignatius Brianchaninov; Schema Abbot John, *Letters of a Valaam Elder*; Igumen Nikon (Vorubev,) *Letters to Spiritual Children*; Archimandrite Lazar, *The Sacrament of Confession*.

not according to knowledge is a poor helper, as we know. Vague, indistinct conceptions of this main side of religious life lead the Christian, and especially the ascetic, to grievous consequences; in the best case to fruitless labors, but more often to self-opinion and spiritual, moral, and psychological illness. The most widespread mistake in religious life is the substitution of its spiritual side (fulfillment of the Gospel commandments, repentance, struggle with the passions, love for neighbor) with the external side—fulfillment of Church customs and rites. As a rule, such an approach to religion makes a person outwardly righteous, but inwardly a prideful Pharisee, hypocrite, and rejected by God—a “saint of satan.” Therefore it is necessary to know the basic principles of spiritual life in Orthodoxy.

Of great help in this is an experienced guide who sees the human soul. But such guides were very rare even in ancient times, as the Fathers testify. It is even more difficult to find such guides in our times. The Holy Fathers foresaw that in the latter times there would be a famine of the word of God (even though the Gospels are now printed abundantly!) and instructed sincere seekers in advance to conduct their spiritual lives by means of “*living under the guidance of patristic writings, with the counsel of their contemporary brothers who are successfully progressing [in spiritual life].*”

These words belong to one of the most authoritative Russian spiritual instructors and writers of the nineteenth century, Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807–1867). His writings are a kind of Orthodox ascetical encyclopedia representing those very *patristic writings*, but are of particular value to the modern-day Christian.

This value comes from the fact that his writings are based upon his scrupulous study of patristic writings, tried in the furnace of personal ascetical experience, and provide a clear exposition of all

the most important questions of spiritual life, including the dangers that can be met along the way. They set forth the patristic experience of the knowledge of God applicable to the psychology and strength of people living in an epoch closer to us both in time and degree of secularization.<sup>353</sup>

Here we shall present only a few of the more important precepts of his teaching on the question of correct spiritual life.

### 1. Correct Thoughts

“People usually consider thought to be something of little importance, and therefore they are very undiscerning in their acceptance of thoughts. However, everything good comes from the acceptance of correct thoughts, while everything evil comes from the acceptance of deceitful thoughts. Thought is like the helm of a ship. A small wheel and an insignificant board dragging behind a great vessel decide its direction and, more often than not, its fate” (4:509).<sup>354</sup> Thus wrote Saint Ignatius, emphasizing the exceptional significance that our thoughts, views, and theoretical knowledge as a whole have for spiritual life. Not only correct dogmatic faith and Gospel morals, but also knowledge and rigorous observation of spiritual laws determine success in the complex process of true rebirth of the passionate, “fleshly” (Rom 8:5), *old man* (Eph 4:22) into the *new man* (Eph 4:24).

However, a theoretical understanding of this question is not as simple as it would seem at first glance. The many different so-called “spiritual ways of life” that are now being offered to man

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<sup>353</sup> Saint Ignatius Brianchianinov’s works were written during the late nineteenth century.

<sup>354</sup> Not all of Saint Ignatius’ works have been translated into English. At the present time, only the fifth volume of his collected works, *The Arena: An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism*, translated by Arch. Lazarus (Holy Trinity Monastery, 1997), is available in English. This and all the quotes from Saint Ignatius’ writings are referenced from the Russian 1905 publication. Here and afterwards the volume number is shown first, the page number second. —Trans.



from all sides are one of the illustrations of the complexity of this problem.

Therefore, a task of the utmost importance arises: finding the more essential indications and qualities of true spirituality, which would allow one to differentiate it from all the possible forms of false spirituality, mysticism, and *prelest*. This has been sufficiently explained by the Church's 2,000 years of experience in the person of its saints; but modern man, raised in a materialistic and unspiritual civilization, runs up against no little difficulty in assimilating it.

Patristic teachings have always corresponded to the level of those to whom they are directed. The Fathers of the Church never wrote "just for the sake of it" or "for science." Many of their counsels, directed at ascetics of high contemplative life and even to so-called *beginners*, no longer even remotely correspond to the spiritual strength of the modern Christian. Furthermore, the variety, ambiguity, and at times even contradictoriness of these counsels that naturally occur due to the varying spiritual levels of those who seek them can disorient the inexperienced. It is very difficult to avoid these dangers when studying the Holy Fathers without knowing at least the more important principles of spiritual life. On the other hand, a correct spiritual life is unthinkable without patristic guidance. Before this seemingly insurmountable impasse, we can see the full significance of the spiritual inheritance of those fathers, most of whom are closer to us in time, who "restated" this earlier patristic experience of spiritual life in a language more accessible to a modern man little acquainted with this life, who usually has neither a capable guide nor sufficient strength.

The works of Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov are among the best of these "restatements," which provide an impeccably reliable "key"

to understanding the teachings of great laborers in the science of sciences—the ascetics.

## 2. What is the Meaning of Faith in Christ?

Here is what Saint Ignatius writes about this:

The beginning of conversion to Christ consists in coming to know one's own sinfulness and fallenness. Through this view of himself, a person recognizes his need for a Redeemer, and approaches Christ through humility, faith, and repentance (4:277). He who does not recognize his sinfulness, fallenness, and peril cannot accept Christ or believe in Christ; he cannot be a Christian. Of what need is Christ to the person who himself is wise and virtuous, who is pleased with himself, and considers himself worthy of all earthly and heavenly rewards? (4:378).

Within these words the thought involuntarily draws attention to itself that *the awareness of one's own sinfulness* and the *repentance* proceeding from it *are the first conditions for receiving Christ*—that is, the belief that Christ came, suffered, and was resurrected is the beginning of conversion to Christ, for *the devils also believe, and tremble* (Jas 2:19), and from the knowledge of one's sinfulness comes true faith in Him.

The holy hierarch's thought shows the first and main position of spiritual life, which so often slips away from the attention of the faithful and shows the true depth of its Orthodox understanding. The Christian, as it happens, is not at all the one who believes according to tradition or who is convinced of the existence of God through some form of evidence, and, of course, the Christian is not at all one who goes to Church and feels that he is “higher than all sinners, atheists, and non-Christians.” No, the Christian is the one

who see his own spiritual and moral impurity, his own sinfulness, sees that he is perishing, suffers over this, and therefore he is inwardly free to receive the Savior and true faith in Christ. This is why, for example, Saint Justin the Philosopher wrote, “He is the Logos in Whom the whole human race participates. Those who live according to the Logos are Christians in essence, although they consider themselves to be godless: such were Socrates and Heraclites, and others among the Hellenes.... In the same way those who lived before us in opposition to the Logos were dishonorable, antagonistic to Christ ... while those who lived and still live according to Him are Christians in essence.”<sup>355</sup> This is why so many pagan peoples so readily accepted Christianity.

On the contrary, whoever sees himself as righteous and wise, who sees his own good deeds, cannot be a Christian and is not one, no matter where he stands in the administrative and hierarchical structure of the Church. Saint Ignatius cites the eloquent fact from the Savior’s earthly life that He was received with tearful repentance by simple Jews who admitted their sins, but was hatefully rejected and condemned to a terrible death by the “intelligent,” “virtuous,” and respectable Jewish elite—the high priests, Pharisees (zealous fulfillers of Church customs, rules, etc.), and scribes (theologians).

*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick* (Mt 9:12), says the Lord. Only those who see the sickness of their soul and know that it cannot be cured through their own efforts come to the path of healing and salvation, because they are able to turn to the true Doctor Who suffered for them—Christ. Outside of this state, which is called “knowing oneself” by the Fathers, normal spiritual life is impossible. “The entire edifice of salvation

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<sup>355</sup> Saint Justin the Philosopher, *Apology* 1:46.

is built upon the knowledge and awareness of our infirmity,” writes Saint Ignatius (1:532). He repeatedly cites the remarkable words of Saint Peter of Damascus: “The beginning of the soul’s enlightenment and mark of its health is when the mind begins to see its own sins, numbering as the sands of the sea” (2:410).

Therefore, Saint Ignatius exclaims over and over,

Humility and the repentance which comes from it are the only conditions under which Christ is received! Humility and repentance are the only price by which the knowledge of Christ is purchased! Humility and repentance make up the only moral condition from which one can approach Christ, to be taken in by Him! Humility and repentance are the only sacrifice which requites, and which God accepts from fallen man (cf. Ps 50:18–19). The Lord rejects those who are infected with pride, with a mistaken opinion of themselves, who consider repentance to be superfluous for them, who exclude themselves from the list of sinners. They cannot be Christians (4:182–183).

### 3. Know Yourself

How does a person obtain this saving knowledge of himself, his “oldness,” a knowledge which opens to him the full, infinite significance of Christ’s Sacrifice? Here is how Saint Ignatius answers this question.

I do not see my sin because I still labor for sin. Whoever delights in sin and allows himself to taste of it, even if only in his thoughts and sympathy of heart, cannot see his own sin. He can only see his own sin who renounces all friendship with sin; who has gone out to the gates of his house to guard them with bared sword—the word of God; who with this sword deflects and cuts off sin, in whatever form it might approach.

God will grant a great gift to those who perform this great task of establishing enmity with sin; who violently tear mind, heart, and body away from it. This gift is the vision of one's own sins (2:122).

In another place he gives the following practical advice: "If one refuses to judge his neighbors, his thoughts naturally begin to see his own sins and weaknesses which he did not see while he was occupied with the judgment of his neighbors" (5:351). Saint Ignatius expresses his main thought on the conditions for self-knowledge by the following remarkable words of Saint Symeon the New Theologian: "Painstaking fulfillment of Christ's commandments teaches man about his infirmity" (4:9); that is, it reveals to him the sad picture of what really resides in his soul and what actually happens there.

The question of how to obtain the vision of one's sins, or the knowledge of one's self, one's *old man*, is at the center of spiritual life. Saint Ignatius beautifully showed its logic: only he who sees himself as one perishing has need of a Savior; on the contrary, the "healthy" (cf. Mt 9:12) have no need of Christ. Therefore, if one wants to believe in Christ in an Orthodox way, this vision becomes the main purpose of his ascetic labor, and at the same time, the main criteria for its authenticity.

#### 4. Good Deeds

On the contrary, ascetic labors, or *podvigs*—and any virtues that do not lead to such a result are in fact false *podvigs*—and life becomes meaningless. The Apostle Paul speaks of this in his epistle to Timothy, when he says, *And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully* (2 Tm 2:5). Saint Isaac the Syrian speaks about this even more specifically: "The recompense is not for virtue, nor for toil on

account of virtue, but for humility which is born of both. If humility is lacking, then the former two are in vain.”<sup>356</sup>

This statement opens yet another important page in the understanding of spiritual life and its laws: neither *podvigs* nor labors in and of themselves can bring a person the blessings of the Kingdom of God, which is within us (Lk 17:21), but only the humility which comes from them. If humility is not gained, all ascetic labors and virtues are meaningless. However, only labor in the fulfillment of Christ’s commandments teaches man humility. This is how one complex theological question on the relationship between faith and *good works* in the matter of salvation is explained.

Saint Ignatius devotes great attention to this question. He sees it in two aspects: first, in the sense of understanding the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice; and second, with respect to Christian perfection. His conclusions, proceeding as they do from patristic experience, are not ordinary subjects for classroom theology.

He writes, “If good deeds done according to feelings of the heart brought salvation, then Christ’s coming would have been superfluous” (1:513). “Unfortunate is the man who is satisfied with his own human righteousness, for he does not need Christ” (4:24). “Such is the natural quality of all bodily *podvigs* and visible good deeds. If we think that doing them is our sacrifice to God, and not just reparation for our immeasurable debt, then our good deeds and *podvigs* become the parents in us of soul-destroying pride” (4:20).

Saint Ignatius even writes,

The doer of human righteousness is filled with self-opinion, high-mindedness, and self-deception ... he repays with hatred

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<sup>356</sup> *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Moscow, 1858), Homily 34:217. English translation, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 57:282.

and revenge anyone who dares to open his mouth to pronounce the most well-founded and good-intentioned contradiction of his righteousness. He considers himself worthy, most worthy of both earthly and heavenly rewards (4:47).

From this we can understand the saint's call, which is:

Do not seek Christian perfection in human virtues. It is not there; it is mystically preserved in the Cross of Christ (4:477–478).

This thought directly contradicts the widespread belief that so-called “good deeds” are always good and aid us in our salvation, regardless of what motivates a person to do them. In reality, righteousness and virtue of the *old* and *new* man are not mutually supplementary, but rather mutually *exclusive*. The reason for this is sufficiently obvious. Good works are not an *end*, but a *means* for fulfilling the supreme commandment of love. But they can also be done calculatingly, hypocritically, and out of ambition and pride. (When a person sees the needy but instead gilds domes on churches, or builds a church where there no real need of one, it is clear that he is not serving God, but his own vanity.) Deeds that are not done for the fulfillment of the commandments blind a person by their significance, puff him up, make him great in his own eyes, exalt his ego, and thereby separate him from Christ. But the fulfillment of the commandments of love for neighbor reveals a person's passions to himself, such as: man-pleasing, self-opinion, hypocrisy, and so on. It reveals to him that he cannot do any good deed without sin. This humbles a person and leads him to Christ. Saint John the Prophet said, “True labor cannot be without

humility, for labor in and of itself is vain and accounted as nothing.”<sup>357</sup>

In other words, virtues and *podvigs* can also be extremely harmful if they are not founded upon the knowledge of hidden sin in the soul and do not lead to an even deeper awareness of it. Saint Ignatius instructs, “One must first see his sin, then cleanse himself of it with repentance and attain a pure heart, without which it is impossible to perform a single good deed in all purity” (4:490). “The ascetic,” he writes, “has only just begun to do them [good deeds] before he sees that he does them altogether insufficiently, impurely.... His increased activity according to the Gospels shows him ever more clearly the inadequacy of his virtues, the multitude of his diversions and motives, the unfortunate state of his fallen nature.... He recognizes his fulfillment of the commandments as only a distortion and defilement of them” (1:308–309). Therefore, the saints, he continues, “cleansed their virtues with floods of tears, as if they were sins” (2:403).

## 5. Untimely Dispassion is Dangerous.

Let us turn our attention to yet another important law of spiritual life. It consists in “the like interrelationship of virtues and of vices” or, to put it another way, in the strict consequentiality and mutual conditioning of the acquisition of virtues as well as the action of passions. Saint Ignatius writes, “Because of this like relationship, voluntary submission to one good thought leads to the natural submission to another good thought; acquisition of one virtue leads another virtue into the soul which is like unto and inseparable from the first. The reverse is also true: voluntary submission to one sinful thought brings involuntarily submission to another;

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<sup>357</sup> Saints Barsanuphius and John, answer 274.



acquisition of one sinful passion leads another passion related to it into the soul; the voluntary committing of one sin leads to the involuntary fall into another sin born of the first. Evil, as the fathers say, cannot bear to dwell unmarried in the heart” (5:351).

This is a serious warning! How often do Christians, not knowing this law, carelessly regard the so-called “minor” sins, committing them *voluntarily*—that is, without being forced into them by passion. And then they are perplexed when they painfully and desperately, like slaves, *involuntarily* fall into serious sins which lead to serious sorrows and tragedies in life.

Just how necessary it is in spiritual life to strictly observe the law of consequentiality is shown by the following words of a most experienced instructor of spiritual life, Saint Isaac the Syrian (Homily 72), and cited by Saint Ignatius: “It is the good will of the most wise Lord that we reap our spiritual bread in the sweat of our brow. He established this law not out of spite, but rather so that we would not suffer from indigestion and die. Every virtue is the mother of the one following it. If you leave the mother who gives birth to the virtue and seek after her daughter, without having first acquired the mother, then these virtues become as vipers in the soul. If you do not turn them away, you will soon die” (2:57–58). Saint Ignatius warns sternly in connection with this, “Untimely dispassion is dangerous! It is dangerous to enjoy Divine grace before the time! Supernatural gifts can destroy the ascetic who has not learned of his own infirmity” (1:532).

These are remarkable words! To someone who is spiritually inexperienced the very thought that a virtue can be untimely, never mind deadly to the soul, “like a viper,” would seem strange and almost blasphemous. But such is the very reality of spiritual life; such is one of its strictest laws, which was revealed by the vast experience of the saints. In the fifth volume of his *Works*, which

Saint Ignatius called *An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism*, in the tenth chapter entitled, “On caution in the reading of books on monastic life,” he states openly, “The fallen angel strives to deceive monks and draw them to destruction, offering them not only sin in its various forms, but also lofty virtues that are not natural to them” (5:54).

## 6. Correct Prayer

These thoughts have a direct relationship to understanding a very important Christian activity: prayer. Saying as do all the saints that “Prayer is the mother of the virtues and the door to all spiritual gifts” (2:228), Saint Ignatius emphatically points to the conditions that must be met in order to make prayer the mother of the virtues. Violating these conditions makes prayer fruitless at best; but more often, it makes it the instrument of the ascetic’s precipitous fall. Some of these conditions are well known. Whoever does not forgive others will not be forgiven himself. “Whoever prays with his lips but is careless about his heart prays to the air and not to God; he labors in vain, because God heeds the mind and heart, and not copious words,” says Hieromonk Dorotheus, a Russian ascetic for whom Saint Ignatius had great respect (2:266).

However, Saint Ignatius pays particular attention to the conditions for the Jesus Prayer. In light of its great significance for every Christian, we present a brief excerpt from the remarkable article by Saint Ignatius, “On the Jesus Prayer: A Talk with a Disciple.”

In exercising the Jesus prayer there is its beginning, its gradual progression, and its endless end. It is necessary to start the exercise from the beginning, and not from the middle or the end....

Those who begin in the middle are the novices who have read the instructions ... given by the hesychastic fathers ... and accept this instruction as a guide in their activity, without thinking it through. They begin in the middle who, without any sort of preparation, try to force their minds into the temple of the heart and send up prayers from there. They begin from the end who seek to quickly unfold in themselves the grace-filled sweetness of prayer and its other grace-filled actions.

One should begin at the beginning; that is, pray with attention and reverence, with the purpose of repentance, taking care only that these three qualities be continually present with the prayer.... In particular, most scrupulous care should be taken to establish morals in accordance with the teachings of the Gospels.... Only upon morality brought into good accord with the Gospel commandments ... can the immaterial temple of God-pleasing prayer be built. A house built upon sand is labor in vain—sand is easy morality that can be shaken (1:225–226).

From this citation it can be seen how attentive and reverently careful one must be with respect to the Jesus prayer. It should be prayed not just any way, but correctly. Otherwise, its practice will not only cease to be prayer, it can even destroy the one practicing it. In one of his letters, Saint Ignatius talks about how the soul should be disposed during prayer: “Today I read the saying of Saint Sisoës the Great which I have always especially liked; a saying which has always been according to my heart. A certain monk said to him, ‘I abide in ceaseless remembrance of God.’ Saint Sisoës replied to him, “That is not great; it will be great when you consider yourself worse than all creatures.’ The ceaseless remembrance of God is a great thing!” Saint Ignatius

continues. “But this is a very dangerous height when the ladder that leads to it is not founded upon the sturdy rock of humility” (4:497).

(In connection with this it must be noted that “the sign of ceaseless and self-moving Jesus prayer is by no means a sign that the prayer is grace-filled, because [such qualities] do not guarantee ... those fruits that always indicate that it is grace-filled.” “Spiritual struggle, the result and purpose of which is the acquisition of HUMILITY ... is [in this case] substituted by some [interim] purpose: the acquisition of ceaseless and self-acting Jesus prayer, which ... is not the final goal, but only *one* means of attaining that goal.”<sup>358</sup>)

## 7. Prelest <sup>359</sup>

These words of Saint Ignatius point to yet another extremely serious aspect of spiritual life—the deadly danger that threatens the inexperienced ascetic who does not have either a true instructor or the correct theoretical spiritual knowledge—the possibility of falling into *prelest*, or delusion. This term, which was often used by the Fathers, is remarkable for its precise revelation of the very essence of the spiritual sickness it names. In Russian, the root of this word, *lest*, means “flattery,” and the prefix *pre-* indicates a reflexive action. Thus, it means self-flattery, self-deception, dreaminess, or an opinion of one’s own worthiness and perfection, pride.

Saint Ignatius, calling pride the main source of this serious illness, cites the following words of Saint Gregory the Sinaite (fourteenth century):

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<sup>358</sup> Monk Mercurius, *In the Caucasion Mountains* (Moscow: Palomnik, 1996), 7–8.

<sup>359</sup> See also Chap. 5, § 3. Individual revelation and its indications.

*Prelest*, they say, appears in two forms, or rather, finds ... —in the forms of fantasy and effect, although it has its source and cause in pride alone.... The first kind of *prelest* is from fantasy. The second kind of *prelest* ... has its source in ... lasciviousness, which is born from natural lustfulness. In this state, the person in *prelest* takes up prophesying, gives false predictions ... The demon of obscenity darkens his mind with lascivious fire and drives him mad, dreamily appearing to him in the guise of certain saints, making him think he hears their words and sees their faces.<sup>360</sup>

What is the main medicine against this sickness?

Just as pride is the general cause of *prelest*, so does humility ... serve as a true forestaller and prevention against *prelest*.... May our prayer be penetrated with a feeling of repentance, may it be united with weeping, and then *prelest* will never act upon us (1:228).

About another of the most widespread causes for falling into *prelest*, Saint Ignatius writes,

There are grounds for believing that the emotional state of certain monks is that of *prelest*, for they have renounced the practice of the Jesus prayer and mental prayer in general, satisfying themselves with external prayer alone; that is, with unflinching participation in the Church Services and unflinching fulfillment of their cell rule, which consists exclusively of psalmody and verbal, audible prayers.... They cannot escape “self-opinion.... ” Verbal and audible prayer is only fruitful when it is combined with attention—something very rarely

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<sup>360</sup> Saint Gregory the Sinaite, “On the Commandments and Dogmas,” *The Philokalia* (Moscow, 1900), 4:214.

found, because we learn attentiveness for the most part through the practice of the Jesus prayer (1:257–258).

Naturally, this remark relates not only to monks, but to all Christians. Therefore, when Saint Ignatius speaks of *prelest*, he reminds us that,

Whoever thinks that he is passionless will never be purified of passions; whoever thinks that he is filled with grace will never receive grace; whoever thinks that he is a saint will never achieve sanctity. To put it simply: whoever ascribes spiritual activity, virtues, worthiness, and gifts of grace to himself, flattering himself and consoling himself with self-opinion, blocks the entrance to spiritual activity, Christian virtues, and God's grace with this opinion, and opens wide the door to sinful infection and demons. Those infected with self-opinion are completely incapable of spiritual progress (1:243).

All the saints considered themselves unworthy of God. By this they showed their worthiness, which consists in humility. All the self-deluded considered themselves worthy of God, and by this they show the pride and demonic *prelest* which has taken over their souls. Some received demons who appeared to them as angels, and followed after them.... Others stimulated their imaginations, heated their blood, produced movements of their nervous systems, then accepted all this as grace-filled sweetness. They fell into self-delusion, complete insanity, and numbered themselves among the fallen spirits by their own spirit (2:126).

## 8. The Instructor

Unfortunately, any of the faithful can fall into such a lamentable state, just as any ascetic can, if he lives according to his own

reasoning, without a true spiritual instructor, or the guidance of patristic writings.

But if understanding the Fathers is not always such a simple task, then it is even more difficult in our times to find a true instructor. A mistake in this regard can prove fatal.

The Fathers speak most importantly of

1. The necessity for great caution in choosing a guide, and the enormous danger of accepting an unspiritual “elder” as a spiritual instructor;

2. The correct relationship to the spiritual instructor: life according to obedience or to counsel;

3. The paucity in the last times of spirit-bearing instructors who see peoples’ souls (Saint Ignatius says, “We have no divinely inspired instructors!” (1:274).

We shall cite the thoughts of the Holy Fathers on these questions.

*1. On the choice of a spiritual instructor.*

Saint John Cassian the Roman (fifth century):

It is useful to reveal one’s thoughts to the fathers, but not to whoever comes along; rather to spiritual elders who have discernment, elders not according to physical age and gray hairs. Many who were impressed by an outward appearance of age and revealed their thoughts have received harm instead of cure (1:491).

Saint John Climacus (sixth century):

When we desire to entrust our salvation to another, then before embarking upon this path, if we have even a little insight and discernment, we should look over, test, and, so to say, try this rudder, so that we not mistake a simple oar for a rudder, a sick

man for a doctor, a passionate man for a dispassionate, or a storm for a harbor; and thus avoid ready destruction (*The Ladder*, 4:6).

Saint Symeon the New Theologian (tenth century):

Pray to God with tears to send you a dispassionate and saintly guide. Also, you yourself search the Divine Scriptures, especially the practical works of the Holy Fathers, so that in comparing with them what your teacher and intercessor teaches you, you might see this as in a mirror. Place them side by side, take them in according to the Divine Scriptures, and hold them in your thoughts; if you find something false and foreign, discard it, in order to avoid being deluded. Know that there are many deceivers and false teachers in our days (*The Philokalia*, 5:33).

Saint Macarius the Great (fourth to fifth centuries) said that ... we meet souls who have been made partakers of Divine grace ... but because of their lack of active experience are nevertheless still in childhood, and in a very unsatisfactory state ... which lacks true asceticism (1:284). In the monasteries there is the saying about such elders that they are “holy, but not tested,” and caution is observed in counsel with them ... that their instructions be not very hastily and light-mindedly trusted (1:285). Saint Isaac the Syrian even says that such an elder is “unworthy to be called holy” (1:286).

Saint Theophan (Govorov):

In determining them [spiritual instructors] one should use great caution and strict discernment, so as not to bring harm instead



of benefit, and destruction instead of something constructive.<sup>361</sup>

## *2. On the relationship between the spiritual instructor and his flock.*

Every spiritual instructor should bring souls to Him [Christ] and not to himself... Let the instructor, like the great and humble Baptist, stand to the side, consider himself as nothing, rejoice in his waning before his disciples, for it is a sign of their spiritual progress.... Guard yourself against passionate attachment to spiritual instructors. Many have not been cautious, and fell together with their instructors into the snares of the devil.... Passionate attachment makes any person an idol; God turns away in anger from the sacrifices brought to this idol.... Then life is lost in vain, and good works perish. And you, instructor, guard yourself from sinful beginnings! Do not replace God for the souls who have recourse to you. Follow the example of Saint John the Forerunner (4:519).

### *On obedience.*

Those elders who take on the role [of an elder] ... (we will use this unpleasant word) ... are in essence nothing other than soul-destroying actors in a tragic comedy. May those elders who take on the role of the ancient elders without possessing their spiritual gifts know that their very intentions, their very thoughts and understanding of this great monastic work—obedience—are false; that their very way of thinking, their reasoning, and knowledge are self-delusion and demonic *prelest*.... (5:72).

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<sup>361</sup> Saint Theophan (Govorov), *What Is Needed for the Penitent and Those Who Step upon the Good Path of Salvation* (Moscow Theological Academy: Novaya Kniga, 1995), 87.

Some might protest that the novice's faith can compensate for the elder's inadequacy. This is not true—faith in the truth saves, but faith in a lie and demonic *prelest* destroys, according to the teaching of the Apostle (2 Cor 2:10–12) (5:73).

If a guide begins to seek obedience to himself and not to God, he is not worthy to be a guide of his neighbor! He is not a servant of God! He is the servant of the devil, his instrument and snare! *Be ye not the servants of men* (1 Cor 7:23), commands the Apostle.<sup>362</sup>

Ambition and self-opinion love to teach and instruct. They do not care about the worthiness of their advice! They do not think about how they might inflict an incurable wound upon their neighbor with their senseless counsel, which the inexperienced beginner accepts with unreasoning gullibility, with heatedness of flesh and blood! They want success, never mind its quality, or its source! They need to produce an impression on the beginner and morally submit him to himself! They need the praise of men! They need to be thought of as holy, wise, and clairvoyant elders and teachers! They need to feed their insatiable ambition, their pride! (On living according to counsel, 5:77).

Therefore it is necessary to part with a “blind” spiritual guide, according to the Savior's command: *Let them alone: they be blind leader of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch* (Mt 15:14). “Saint Pimen the Great (fifth century) instructed to separate oneself from an elder without delay if it becomes harmful to the soul to live with him” (5:74).

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<sup>362</sup> Saint Ignatius, *Collected Letters*, 159.

### *On life according to counsel.*

Saint Nilus of Sora (fifteenth century) never gave instruction or advice directly from himself, but if asked, offered either the teachings of the Scriptures or of the Fathers. When ... he could not recall an enlightened opinion on some subject, he would leave off answering until he could find some instruction in the Scriptures. This method is apparent in the writings of Holy Hieromartyr Peter Damascene, Saint Gregory the Sinaite, the saints of Xanthopoulis, and other Fathers, especially the later ones. The hieromonks of Optina Hermitage, Leonid and Macarius, also held to this method.... They never gave advice from themselves.... This gave their advice power (1:489).

According to the teaching of the Fathers, the only life ... which is appropriate to our times is a life under the guidance of patristic writings with the counsel of contemporary brothers who are progressing [in spiritual life]; this counsel should also be tested against the writings of the Fathers (1:563).

The modest relationship of a counselor to the one he instructs should be something completely different from that of an elder to an unquestioning novice.... Counsel does not involve the condition of its unfailing execution; it can be followed or not followed (5:80).

Do not be obedient to evil, even though you might have to endure some grief due to your refusal to please men, and your firmness. Take counsel with virtuous and wise fathers and brothers; but assimilate their advice with the utmost caution. Do not be caught up in counsel according to its first effect upon you! (On life according to counsel, 5:77).

Saint Theophan (Govorov):

Here is the best, most reliable method of guidance, or education in the Christian life today! Life in dedication to God's will according to Divine Scriptures and patristic writings with counsel and inquiry amongst those of one mind with you.<sup>363</sup>

### *3. On the lack of spirit-bearing instructors.*

Already in the tenth century, Saint Symeon the New Theologian said that it is difficult to find a dispassionate and saintly guide, "that in these days there are many deceivers and false teachers."<sup>364</sup> Saint Nilus of Sora (1423–1508), in his preface to the book *A Bequeathal to My Disciples*, wrote, "Thus the Holy Fathers say: if in those times one could hardly find a teacher who did not delude by his talk, now, in our most impoverished times, one must seek diligently."<sup>365</sup>

Saint Gregory the Sinaite "resolved to say that in his time (the fourteenth century) there are no grace-filled men, so scarce had they become.... Ever more so in our times the doer of prayer must observe supreme caution. There are no Divinely inspired instructors amongst us!" (1:274).

Fathers distanced from the days of Christ by a thousand years, repeating the counsel of their forebears, already complained of the scarcity of Divinely inspired instructors and of the appearance of many false teachers, and offer the Holy Scriptures and patristic writings as a guide. The Fathers closer to our times call Divinely inspired guides the inheritance of ancient times, and already decisively leave us to the guidance

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<sup>363</sup> Saint Theophan (Govorov), *What Is Needed for the Penitent*, 72–73.

<sup>364</sup> *The Philokalia*, 5:17.

<sup>365</sup> *Bequeathal to My Disciples* (Moscow, 1849), 25.

of Sacred and Holy Scriptures, testing by these Scriptures, accepting with extreme cautiousness the counsel of contemporary ... brothers (1:563).

Now, because of the total paucity of spirit-bearing instructors, the ascetic of prayer is forced to be guided exclusively by the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers (Saint Nilus of Sora) (1:229).

Thus speaks the voice of the Church's sacred tradition on one of the most painful issues of modern spiritual life.

## 9. Catholicism

It would be a great mistake to think that *prelest* is something that sprang up on Orthodox soil specifically. In his article "On *Prelest*" Saint Ignatius says outright that "*Prelest* is the state of all people, without exception, which was produced by our forefathers' fall. We are all in *prelest*. The knowledge of this is the greatest protection against *prelest*. To consider oneself free from *prelest* is the greatest *prelest*. We are all deceived, we are all deluded, we are all in a false state, and need to be freed by the truth. The Truth is our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:230).

Very apropos to our times are Saint Ignatius' thoughts on Western, Catholic saints. In complete agreement with all other saints of the Orthodox Church he says that,

Many of the "ascetics" or "great saints" of the Western Church, which came after its split from the Eastern Church and the Holy Spirit's departure from the it, prayed, attained visions, presumably false ones, through the method I have noted earlier.... Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order, was in such a state. His imagination was so heated and complex that, as he himself stated, he only had to wish and

apply certain exertions and hell or paradise would appear before his eyes.... We know that visions are granted to a true saint of God only by God's grace and by an act of God, and not according to a man's own will or exertions. They are granted unexpectedly, and quite rarely.... The increased asceticism of those who are in *prelest* usually stands right next to extreme licentiousness. Licentiousness serves as an assessment of the flame which consumes the one in *prelest* (1:244).

Bishop Ignatius also shows other causes of deluded states that are hidden from superficial observation. He writes,

Blood and nerves are aroused by many passions: by anger, love of money, lasciviousness, and ambition. The last two passions extremely heat the blood of ascetics who are laboring unlawfully, and make them into frenzied fanatics. Ambition strives for untimely spiritual states of which the person is not yet capable due to his impurity; he contrives fantasies in place of the truth he has not acquired. Lasciviousness, uniting its action with that of ambition, produces delusional false consolations, delights, and intoxications in the heart. This is a state of self-delusion. All those who labor unlawfully in asceticism are in this state. It develops in them to greater or lesser degrees, depending upon how much effort they put into their ascetic labors. Many books have been written by Western writers in precisely this state (4:499).

It is interesting to note that Bishop Ignatius Brianchininov (who studied Catholic ascetic literature not in translation, but in the original Latin), shows the concrete time coordinates of the Catholic ascetics' falling away from the unanimous experience of the saints of the one Universal Church. He writes,

Saint Benedict [†544] and Saint Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome [†604] are still in agreement with the ascetical instructors of the East. But Bernard of Clairvaux (twelfth century) already differs from them sharply; later [writers] depart even further. They immediately grab their readers and pull them toward heights that are not accessible to the beginner; they lift up themselves and others. Heatedness ... fantasy replace all spirituality in them, about which they haven't the slightest understanding. They consider this dreaminess to be grace (4:498).<sup>366</sup>

## 10. There is One Truth

*Prelest*, as we see, happens in those who live not according to patristic precepts, but according to their own thoughts, desires, and understanding, and seek from God not salvation from sin, but grace-filled delights, visions, and gifts. The miserable ascetic usually does “receive” these gifts abundantly in his heated imagination and by the action of dark powers. *Prelest* is therefore not one of the possible, especially not equivalent variations of spirituality; it is not one's own special path to God (as the apologists for Catholic mysticism say), but a serious illness, which eats away the ascetic from within if he does not understand and evaluate it properly.

And this terrible illness threatens to destroy not only separate individuals, but Christianity itself, as we see. If some Christian community or ecclesiastical jurisdiction departs from the principles of spiritual life that have been revealed and sanctified by the vast experience of the Church, it inevitably leads it to a loss of understanding of true sanctity and to the glorification of its open distortions. So also does any departure from the “*royal path*” of

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<sup>366</sup> See the examples in Chap. 4, § 3. Individual Revelation and Its Indications.

spiritual life, paved by the ascetical steps of the saints, lead to similar destructive consequences for every believer individually.

Especially often are transports to “the heights” observable in the newly converted and young ascetics, who have not yet come to know their *old* man, or been freed from the passions, yet are already seeking states natural to the new, perfect man. It is not in vain that the fathers say, “If you see a youngster climbing to heaven by his own will, take him by the foot and pull him down, for this is beneficial to him.”<sup>367</sup> The reason for such mistakes is obvious: lack of knowledge of the laws of spiritual life, or of one’s self. Saint Ignatius cites the following remarkable words of Saint Isaac the Syrian in this regard:

If certain of the fathers wrote that there is purity of the soul, that there is health of the soul, dispassion, and vision, they wrote this not so that we would seek them before the time, and expect them. It is written in the Scriptures, *The kingdom of God cometh not with observation* (Lk 17:20). Those who had expectations gained only pride and a fall. Seeking with an expectation of lofty Divine gifts is something which God’s Church denounces. This expectation is not a sign of love for God, but rather an illness of the soul.

Saint Ignatius concludes this thought with the following words:

When the Holy Fathers of the Eastern Church, especially the hermetics, reached for the heights of spiritual practices, all these practices blended within them into repentance alone. Repentance embraced their entire lives, and all their activities. It was the result of having seen their own sin (2:125–126).

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<sup>367</sup> *Ancient Patericon* (Moscow, 1874), chap. 10:159.



In this vision of one's own sins, which gives birth to true humility and repentance not to be repented of (cf. 1 Cor 7:10), lies the only true hope, and the unshakable foundation of correct spiritual life.

## § 2. On Sancity in Orthodoxy

### 1. God and Man

The essence of religion usually—and justly—is seen in the special unification of man with God, of the human spirit with the Divine spirit. Every religion shows its path and means for achieving this goal. Nevertheless, ever unshaken is the postulate of a common religious awareness of the need for man's spiritual unity with God in order to acquire eternal life. This idea is like a thread that runs through every religion in the world, embodied by various myths, tales, and dogmas, and underlining in various plans and from diverse sides the obvious significance and primary nature of *spiritual precepts* in man's life, and in his comprehension of its meaning.

Having only partially revealed Himself in the Old Testament, God appeared to the extent that man could receive His fullness as God the Word incarnate, and the possibility for union with Him became especially clear and tangible thanks to the Church He created. Membership in it is conditioned not upon the simple act of accepting Baptism, the Eucharist, and other Sacraments, but also upon particular participation of the Holy Spirit. It could be said that all the Holy Fathers wrote about this. Saint Seraphim of Sarov said in one of his conversations, “The goal of Christian life consists in

the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, and this is the life goal of every Christian who lives spiritually.”<sup>368</sup>

Thus, someone who is obviously a member of the Church by all external standards can be at the same time outside the Church if he does not meet the given criteria. This thought may seem strange; hasn't the Christian received the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments? If so, then what other communion can there be? This question has essential meaning for the understanding of holiness in Orthodoxy.

## 2. The Steps of Life

If the old (cf. Eph 4:22) nature was inherited by Adam's descendants in the natural order, then birth from the Second Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:45, 47) and communion of the Holy Spirit happen through a consciously voluntary process of personal activity, which has two principally different steps.

*The first* is when the person who has come to the faith is spiritually born in the Sacrament of Baptism and receives the seed (cf. Mt 13:3–33) of the New Adam, becoming by this a member of His Body—the Church. Saint Symeon the New Theologian says, “He who has come to faith in the Son of God ... repents ... of his former sins and is cleansed of them in the Sacrament of Baptism. Then God the Word enters into the baptized, as into the womb of the Ever-Virgin, and dwells in him like a seed.”<sup>369</sup> But a person is not automatically transformed from the “old man” (cf. Eph 2:22) into the “new” by Baptism (cf. Eph. 4:24). Having been cleansed of all his sins and become like unto the first-created Adam, the believer nevertheless retains after Baptism the *passionateness, corruption, and mortality*<sup>370</sup> of his forebears who sinned. The

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<sup>368</sup> See Helen Kontzevitch, *St. Seraphim of Sarov* (Wildwood, Calif.: St. Xenia Skete, 2004), Chap. IV, “On the Goal of Christian Life.”

<sup>369</sup> St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 3 (1980); 67.

<sup>370</sup> Saint Maximos the Confessor *Works: Book 2: Answers to Thalassius* (Martine: 1993) 42-111

spiritual disruption of soul that he inherited from his parents and ancestors remains in him, as does the tendency towards sin.

Therefore, the sanctity to which man is called does not come *automatically*<sup>371</sup> by the Sacrament of Baptism. This Sacrament is only the beginning, and not the completion; the person is given only the seed, and not the tree itself, which bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

*The second step* is the correct (righteous) spiritual life, thanks to which the believer grows into a *perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13), and becomes capable of receiving particular sanctification by the Holy Spirit. The seed of Baptism for “wicked and slothful” (cf. Mt 25:26) Christians will not be germinated, and will thus remain fruitless (Jn 12:24). But when it falls on good ground, it sends out shoots and brings the corresponding fruit. This fruit (and not the seed) is that very much sought-for communion with the Holy Spirit—sanctity. The parable of the *leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measure of meal, till the whole was leavened* (Mt 13:33), well illustrates the nature of a person’s mysterious change, his communion with the Holy Spirit in the Church, and the actual significance of the Sacraments in this process. Just as leaven mixed into the dough shows its action gradually and under quite specific conditions, so also the “leaven” of Baptism “leavens” the fleshly man into the spiritual man (cf. 1 Cor 3:1–3), the “new dough” (cf. 1 Cor 5:7): not momentarily, not magically, but in time, with his corresponding spiritual and moral change, as shown in the Gospels. Thus, while the Christian receives the talent of

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<sup>371</sup> “But we must bear in mind that in this deadness to sin through Baptism nothing happens mechanically, but rather all happens by the participation of the person’s morally free resolve.” —Saint Theophan (Govorov), *Explanation of the First Eight Chapters of the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Moscow, 1890), 332.

justification freely (cf. Rom 3:24), it is up to him to either multiply it, or destroy it in the earth of his heart (cf. Mt 25:18).

This means the particular communion of the Holy Spirit for the Baptized. This is one of the most important principles of the Orthodox understanding of spiritual life, Christian perfection, and sanctity. It was simply and briefly expressed by Saint Symeon the New Theologian: “All [of the Christian’s —A. O.] striving and all labor should be directed towards acquiring the Holy Spirit, for in this consists spiritual law and goodly existence.”<sup>372</sup> Thus, as we see, the believer who has received the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the Sacraments is still required to “acquire” the Holy Spirit, which is that very sanctity.

### 3. Scripture and the Church

There exists, at first glance, something of a disagreement between the concepts of sanctity in the Holy Scripture, especially the New Testament, and in Church tradition. The Apostle Paul, for example, called all Christians “saints,” although there were people among them whose moral level was far from holy (cf. 1 Cor 6:1–2). On the other hand, from the very beginning of the Church’s existence and throughout all times afterward, people are called saints who are distinguished by their particular spiritual purity and zeal for Christian life, their labors of prayer and love, or martyrdom for Christ, etc.

Nevertheless, both of these approaches signify not a discrepancy in concepts of sainthood, but only an evaluation of one and the same phenomenon on different levels. The *New Testament* use of the term proceeds from the calling of all the faithful, who gave an *answer of a good conscience before God* (1 Pet 3:21), and who have received

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<sup>372</sup> Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Homilies*, 2:30.

the gift of the grace of Baptism, although at the present moment they are still *fleshly*—that is, sinful and imperfect. *Church* tradition logically completes the New Testament concept, crowning with a halo of glory those Christians who fulfilled this calling by their righteous life. That is, both of these traditions speak of one and the same thing—the special participation of the Christian in the Spirit of God. The condition under which this participation is possible is the Christian’s degree of zeal for the spiritual life. *Not everyone that sayeth unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven....Depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mt 7:21–23). The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force (Mt 11:12).*

The Apostle calls all Christians saints by their calling to another, new life in Christ, and emphasizes by this name the opportunity for all Christians to become new creatures (cf. Gal. 6:15). Those who have become *different* in their relationship to the world, who have acquired the Holy Spirit, and reveal its power in our world have been called saints by the Church since the very beginning of its existence.

#### 4. Sanctity (Holiness)

Priest Paul Florensky gives a broad analysis of the concept of sanctity in his book, *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth*. We will cite a few of his thoughts here.

When we speak of the holy Font, of holy Myrrh, of the Holy Gifts, of holy Repentance [Confession], of holy marriage, of holy Unction ... and so on and so forth, and finally, of the Priesthood, a word which [in Russian] even contains the root “holy” [свят (*sviat*)—holy, священство (*sviaschenstvo*)—the priesthood], then we first of all mean the very other-wordly

quality of all of these Sacraments. They are in the world but not of it.... And such is precisely the first, negative facet of the concept of holiness. Therefore, when in succession after the Sacraments we call much else “holy,” then we mean this particular quality, this severance from the world, from everyday life, from the ordinary.... Thus, when God is called “Holy” in the Old Testament, it is referring to His quality of being above the world, His transcendence to the world.

Also, in the New Testament, when the Apostle Paul in his Epistles repeatedly calls his contemporary Christians “saints,” from his lips this means, first of all, that the Christian is separate from all humanity....

Undoubtedly, following just beyond the apophatic concept of holiness, its positive side is contemplated, which reveals the reality of another world in the saint....

The concept of holiness has a lower pole and a higher pole, and it moves ceaselessly in our consciousness between these two poles, rising upward and falling back down.... And this ladder which goes from below to above is considered the path of renunciation of the world.... But it can also be seen as going in the opposite direction. And then it will be considered as the path of grounding world reality through its sanctification.<sup>373</sup>

Thus, according to the thoughts of Fr. Paul Florensky, holiness is first of all foreignness to the world of sin, and renunciation of it. Secondly, it has a specifically positive content, for the nature of holiness is Divine; it is ontologically grounded in God. At the same time, holiness, he emphasizes, is not moral perfection, although it

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<sup>373</sup> See Priest Paul Florensky, “Sanctification of Reality,” *Theological Works* 17 (Moscow, 1977); 148–152.

is inseparably bound with it, but “*of one combined essence with energy that is not of this world.*” Finally, holiness is not only renunciation, the absence of all evil, and not only the appearance of another, Divine world, but it is also the unshakable foundation of “*world reality through its sanctification.*”<sup>374</sup>

This third side of holiness speaks of its being a power which transforms not only man, but also the world as a whole, so that *God may be all in all* (1 Cor 15:28). In the final analysis, all creation should become different<sup>375</sup> and manifest God through itself. However, only man can play the active role in creation in this process, because upon him lies full responsibility for the creature (cf. Rom 8:19–21). And here the significance of the saints is revealed with particular power, for under conditions of earthly existence, they became the basis (cf. Rom 11:16) of the future general and full sanctification.

The saints are first and foremost *other*<sup>376</sup> people, different from those living according to the elements of the world and not Christ (Col 2:8). They are “other” because they conquer with God’s help *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life* (1 Jn 2:16)—all that enslaves people of this world. In this separateness of the saints from the world of three-fold lusts and the atmosphere of sin, we can see one of the principle characteristics of holiness, and the unity of its original apostolic and traditional meaning in the Church.

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth* (Rev 21:1).

<sup>376</sup> “Christians have their own world, their own way of life, mind, word, and activity. It is the same for people of this world, who have their own way of life, mind, word, and activity. Christians are one, lovers of the world are another. Between the two is a great gulf fixed.” —Saint Macarius of Egypt, *Spiritual Talks, Epistles, and Homilies* (Saint Sergius Lavra, 1904), 5:40.

## 5. Laws of Life

The saints have shown by their lives the heights of likeness to God to which man is called and capable of, and what this likeness to God is. It is that spiritual beauty (*very good* [Gen 1:31]), which is the reflection of the inexpressible God, and which was granted to man at the time of creation.<sup>377</sup> However, this beauty unfolds only with the right kind of life, which is called “ascesis.” Fr. Paul Florensky, for example, wrote this about it:

The Holy Fathers called ascesis ... The “science of sciences,” and “art of arts....” Contemplative knowledge, given through ascesis, is φιλοκαλία, or the “love of beauty.” The collections of acetic works long ago named the *Philokalia*, translated into Russian as *Dobrotolubie* (“love of goodness”) is not the “love of goodness” as we would understand it in the modern sense. “Goodness” here is taken from the ancient, common meaning, which implies something more like beauty than moral perfection. In fact, ascesis creates not a “good” person, but a “beautiful” one, and the differentiating quality of holy ascetics is not at all their “goodness,” which even fleshly, even quite sinful people can have, but spiritual beauty, the blinding beauty of a radiant, light-bearing personality—something absolutely unattainable by the flaccid and fleshly.<sup>378</sup>

Ascesis, which is the science of righteous human life, has like any other science, its own basic principles, criteria, and goal. The latter can be expressed in various words: holiness, deification, salvation, likeness to God, the Kingdom of God, spiritual beauty,

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<sup>377</sup> “His Name is not known to us, except the name “Being,” unspeakable God, as He has said (Ex 3:14).” —Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Divine Hymns* (Sergeev Posad, 1917), 272.

<sup>378</sup> Priest Paul Florensky, *Pillar and Ground of Truth* (Moscow, 1914), 98–99.



and others. But another thing is important—the acquisition of this goal presupposes a quite specific path of the Christian’s spiritual development, a particular series of steps, gradualness; it presupposes the presence of special laws which are hidden from the observation of others (Lk 8:10). The Gospel Beatitudes point to this process of degrees (Mt 5:3–12). The Holy Fathers write about a sort of ladder of spiritual life,<sup>379</sup> based upon their long experience of asceticism, and warn us of the ruinous consequences of departing from it.<sup>380</sup> Observing its laws is one of the most important religious tasks; and, in the final analysis, all other knowledge of a theological nature can be boiled down to the understanding of spiritual life, without which any such knowledge completely loses its meaning. This subject is very broad, and therefore we will look here at only two of its main issues.

Humility is the first. According to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, the entire construction of Christian perfection is founded upon humility. Without it neither right spiritual life, nor the acquisition of any gifts of the Holy Spirit are possible. What is Christian humility? According to the Gospels, it is first of all poorness of spirit (Mt 5:3)—a state of the soul which proceeds from the vision of one’s own sinfulness and incapability of freeing oneself from the oppression of the passions through one’s own efforts, without God’s help. “According to the immutable law of asceticism,” writes Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov), “an abundant awareness and sense of one’s sinfulness, granted by Divine grace,

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<sup>379</sup> “Practice in the virtues is like the ladder which the blessed Jacob once saw, one part of which was close to the earth and touched it, while the other reached higher than heaven itself.” —Saint Basil the Great, *Works* (Moscow, 1891) part 1:155; *The Ladder* of Saint John Climacus graphically sets forth this idea of mutual conditioning of both virtue and passions in the spiritual life of a Christian.

<sup>380</sup> “Every virtue is the mother of a second. If, then, you abandon the mother which gives birth to the virtues and go out to seek the daughter before you have acquired their mother, those virtues will be vipers to your soul, and if you do not hurl them away from you, speedily you will die.” —Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, 72:528. English translation, Holy Trinity Monastery, 34:157.

goes before all other gifts of grace.”<sup>381</sup> Saint Peter Damascene calls this vision “the beginning of the soul’s enlightenment.” He writes that with the proper *podvig* “the mind begins to see one’s own sins as the sands of the sea, and this is the beginning of the soul’s enlightenment and a sign of its health. Simply: the soul becomes contrite and the heart becomes humble; one considers himself to be truly lower than all others, and begins to know God’s benefactions ... and one’s own inadequacies.”<sup>382</sup> This state is always linked with an especially deep and sincere repentance, the importance of which cannot be overestimated in spiritual life. Saint Ignatius exclaims, “The vision of one’s own sins and the repentance born thereof is an activity which has no end on earth.”<sup>383</sup> The Holy Fathers and teachers of the Church cite countless times the primary importance of seeing one’s own sinfulness, of ceaseless repentance on the earth, and the new quality born thereof—humility.

What are more basic quotations on this subject?

Humility is a natural virtue, which gives man the opportunity to abide in what is called an *unfallen* state. Especially convincing of this is the history of the first-created man, who possessed all the Divine Gifts (Gen 1:3) but did not have the *experiential* knowledge that without God he is a non-entity, that he is *nothing*; that is, he had no *experiential* humility, and that is why he so easily took a high opinion of himself. But experiential humility comes when a person forces himself to fulfill the Gospel commandments and repents. As Saint Symeon the New Theologian says, “Careful fulfillment of the commandments of

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<sup>381</sup> Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov), 2:334.

<sup>382</sup> Saint Peter Damascene, *Works* 1 (Kiev, 1902), 33.

<sup>383</sup> Saint Ignatius, 2:127.

Christ teaches man about his infirmity.”<sup>384</sup> Knowledge of one’s own helplessness to become spiritually and morally healthy or holy without God’s help creates a firm psychological base for the unshakable acceptance of God as the source of life and all goodness. *Experiential* humility excludes the possibility for a new, prideful dream of becoming *as gods* (Gens. 3:5), and a new fall.

Essentially, the Christian’s true rebirth begins only when he is struggling with sin, and sees the whole depth of his corrupt nature, his essential incapability to be healed without God of his passions and attain the sanctity he seeks. This self-knowledge reveals to man the One Who desires to save him from his state of destruction and can save him—it reveals Christ to him. This is the very reason why the saints ascribe such exceptional significance to humility.

Saint Macarius of Egypt says, “Humility is a great height. Honor and dignity is humility of wisdom.”<sup>385</sup> Saint John Chrysostom calls humility the chief of all the virtues,<sup>386</sup> and Saint Barsanuphius the Great teaches, “Humility has the first place among the virtues.”<sup>387</sup> Saint Symeon the New Theologian confirms that, “Although there are many different forms of His acts, and many signs of His power, the first and most necessary is humility, for it is the beginning and foundation.”<sup>388</sup> Humility gained through correct Christian life is basically a new quality that the first-created Adam did not know. It

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<sup>384</sup> Saint Ignatius, 4:9.

<sup>385</sup> Saint Macarius the Egyptian, *Spiritual Counsels*, 360.

<sup>386</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Works* 1 (Saint Petersburg, 1985), 187.

<sup>387</sup> Barsanuphius and John, 297.

<sup>388</sup> Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Homilies*, 3:36.

is the only firm foundation of an *unfallen* state in man, and his true sanctity.<sup>389</sup>

## 6. Love and Delusion

But if the ladder of spiritual life is built upon humility, then it is crowned with the virtue which is higher than all others (1 Cor 13:13), and which is called God Himself (1 Jn 4:8)—Love. All other qualities of the new man are only its manifestations. God calls man to it, and it is promised in Christ to the faithful. By it were the saints most glorified, by it did they overcome the world, by it did they to a large degree manifest the magnificence, beauty, and goodness of Divine promise to man. But how it is obtained and by what indications it can be distinguished from unwarranted mimicry are not simple questions.

There are two outwardly similar, yet essentially different states of love, about which the ascetical traditions of the West and East speak. The first is emotional love (Jude 1:19); 1 Cor 2:14). It appears when the *goal* of a *podvig* is the cultivation in oneself of a feeling of love. Such “love” is attained mainly by the path of continually concentrating the attention upon the sufferings of Christ and the Mother of God, the imagination of various episodes in their lives, mental participation in them, dreaming and imagining Their love for us and our love for them, etc. This practice is graphically observable in the biographies of practically all of the more well-known and authoritative Catholic saints: Angela, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Sienna, Teresa of Avila, Teresa the Child of Jesus, and others.

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<sup>389</sup> Saint John Chrysostom expresses this thought in the following words: “It [humility] is the greatest protection, an invincible wall, an impenetrable fortress. It supports all knowledge, not allowing it to fall from gusts of wind, nor from rush of waves, nor from the strength of storms, but rather places it higher than all attacks, makes it as if built from diamond stone and indestructible; and it brings down generous gifts from the man-loving God.” —Saint John Chrysostom, *Works*, 4:187.

As we have already stated, this practice often causes nervous exaltation mounting at times to hysteria, prolonged hallucinations, anguish of love (not rarely accompanied by openly sexual sensations), and bleeding wounds (stigmata). These states are considered by the Catholic Church to be states of grace and testimony to their attainment of true love.

In Orthodox asceticism, however, they are considered to be “no more than a deceptive, forced game of feelings, the irresponsible product of fantasy and self-opinion” (2:57), as prelest, that is, of the deepest kind of self-delusion. The main reason for such a negative assessment of Catholic mysticism consists in the fact that in it the attention is focused upon the excitement of emotional feelings, nerves, and psyche; upon the development of the imagination; upon bodily ascesis; and not upon spiritual podvig, which, as we know, consists first of all in the struggle with one’s “old man,” with its feelings, desires, dreaminess; in forcing oneself to fulfill the Gospel commandments, and to repentance. Without this, as the Fathers teach, it is impossible to obtain any spiritual gifts, or any real love. *Neither do men put new wine into old bottles ... but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved* (Mt 9:17). New wine is the Holy Spirit, which allows the faithful to *taste and see that the Lord is good* (Ps 33:9). It is poured into the person who acquires humility by his fulfillment of the commandments and repentance, and is purified of the passions.

Saint Isaac the Syrian wrote to one of his younger co-ascetics:

There is no method for awakening Divine love in the soul ... if the soul has not conquered the passions. You have said that your soul has not conquered the passions and has loved love for God; there is no order in this. Whoever says that he has not conquered the passions and has loved love for God—I do not know what he is saying. But you say not that you “love,” but

that you “have loved love.” There is no place for this if the soul has not attained purity. If you wanted to say this only for the sake of words, then you are not the only one who has said this, but anyone can say this who desires to love God.... And each pronounces this as something of his own; however, in pronouncing these words only the tongue moves, while the soul does not feel what it says.<sup>390</sup>

Saint Ignatius writes, “Untimely striving to unfold a feeling of love for God in oneself is already self-delusion.... One must acquire perfection in all the virtues in order to enter into the perfection of all perfections, into the blending of them, into love” (2:53, 55).

The nature of true Christian love, as we see, is something completely different in comparison with all of its other forms. According to Holy Scripture, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and not a result of one’s own neuro-psychological exertions. The Apostle Paul wrote, *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* (Rom 5:5). That is, this love is spiritual; it is *the bond of perfectness* (Col 3:14), and is, as Saint Isaac the Syrian puts it, “a habitation of the spiritual and abides in purity of soul.”<sup>391</sup>

But the gift of this love is possible only with the acquisition of all other virtues, and first of all humility, which is the foundation of the entire ladder of virtues. Saint Isaac the Syrian especially warns about this. He says, “One of the saints has written: If one does not consider himself to be a sinner, the Lord will not accept his prayer.” Therefore we “bring the region of our heart into good

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<sup>390</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *ibid.*, 55:372–373.

<sup>391</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *ibid.*, 55:389.

order through works of repentance and a life well pleasing to God. The Lord Himself will come if there be a place in the heart which is pure and undefiled.”<sup>392</sup>

“The holy two,” writes Saint John Climacus, “are love and humility; the first raises up, and the second supports the uplifted, and does not allow him to fall.” Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk as if explains these words: “If love, the highest of all virtues according to the words of the Apostle, suffereth long, envieth not, is not puffed up, is not easily provoked, and never faileth, then this is because it is supported and aided by humility.”<sup>393</sup> Therefore the “old” Christian who hasn’t the necessary knowledge of himself and experiential humility, has a love which is changeable, inconstant, mixed with ambition, egoism, lasciviousness, etc; it breathes “emotionality” and dreaminess.<sup>394</sup>

Thus, the love that the saints possess is not an ordinary earthly feeling, not the result of neuro-psychological exertions to awaken love in themselves for God; it is rather the gift of the Holy Spirit, and as such, it is experienced and manifested in a way completely different from even the most lofty earthly feelings. Testifying to this are the fruits of the Divine Spirit granted to all sincere Christians according to the measure of their zeal, spiritual purity, and humility.

## 8. The Fruits of the Spirit

Holy Scripture and the patristic writings continually speak about those states of joy, blessedness, or, to put it in everyday human language, happiness, which are especially strong and incomparable

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 371–372.

<sup>393</sup> Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, *Works 2* (Moscow, 1899), 99.

<sup>394</sup> See for example Saint Ignatius, 1:253–257; 2:124–125; Saint Theophan (Govorov), *Letters on the Christian Life* (Moscow, 1980), letters 11, 21.

to any ordinary experience, and gradually unfold to the Christian who leads the right spiritual life.

Most often these states are expressed by the words *love* and *joy* as the highest concepts that express the fullness of human blessedness. We could cite endlessly the words of the Scriptures, the Fathers, and Liturgical texts which confirm this and testify to this fact which is so important to man: that man, by his God-given nature, by the depth of experience available to him, is a being like unto the One Who is perfect Love, perfect Joy, and All-Blessedness. The Lord says to His Apostles, *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full* (Jn 15:11); *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full* (Jn16:24). The disciples truly were filled with joy, and with the *Holy Ghost* (Acts 13:52).

Saint John the Theologian speaks to his spiritual children: *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God....Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him* (1 Jn 3:1, 2).

The Apostle Paul calls *love, joy, peace* (Gal 5:22) the qualities of the first fruits of the Spirit. He also exclaims: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor thing to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom 8:35, 38–39). He even says that if the Christian does not acquire this great gift, then he is *as a sounding brass, or a tinkling*



*cymbal* (1 Cor 13:1), he is nothing, and all his good deeds and ascetic feats will not bring any benefit whatsoever (cf. 1 Cor 13:2–3). Therefore he prays, *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... that he would grant you ... to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God* (Eph 3:14, 16, 19).

A remarkable confirmation of the truth of the Scriptures is the experience of an innumerable multitude of Christians and all the saints, as reflected in their ascetical, Liturgical, hymnographic, and other works.

It is important to note that the tears of repentance, contrition of heart, and repentance continually resounding within these works that produce, at first glance, an impression of depression, sadness, or oppression, are in fact something of a completely different nature and spirit. For the Christian who sincerely repents and forces himself to a life according to the Gospels, they dissolve into an extraordinary peace of soul and spiritual joy, and are therefore more valuable than all earthly treasures.

In this consists one of the unique qualities of *righteous* Christian life—that the more it reveals to a person the fallenness of his nature, his sinfulness, and spiritual helplessness, the more strongly it manifests to him the closeness of God Who heals, purifies, and grants peace, joy, and manifold spiritual consolations to the soul. This closeness of God, according to spiritual law, depends upon the degree of humility the Christian has acquired, making his soul capable of receiving the Holy Spirit, which fills it to overflowing with its greatest good—love.

One of the most experienced instructors of ancient monasticism, Saint Isaac the Syrian, has given one of the clearest descriptions of

the state that a true ascetic of Christ attains. When he was asked, “What is a merciful heart?” he answered,

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.... For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, and for the enemies of the truth, and for those who do him harm, that they be protected and receive mercy.... The sign of those who have attained perfection is this: if for the sake of his love for men a man were to be given over to the fire ten times a day, he would not be content with this, even as Moses ... and like ... Paul.... Likewise the other apostles accepted many kinds of death because of their fervent desire that men should receive life.... The saints seek for themselves a sign of complete likeness to God: to be perfect in the love of their neighbor....<sup>395</sup>

An illustration of what a person who has acquired the Holy Spirit experiences is the conversation between Saint Seraphim of Sarov and N. A. Motovilov, during which the latter was able, through the prayers of the saint, to feel and experience a taste of the good gifts of the Holy Spirit, and to tell the world about it. “When the Spirit of God comes to a man and overshadows him with the fullness of its inspiration,” said Saint Seraphim, “then man’s soul is filled to overflowing with unspeakable joy, for the Spirit of God makes joyful everything it touches.... The Lord said, *The Kingdom of God is within you*, and by the Kingdom of God he meant the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is within us now, and the grace of the Holy Spirit enlightens and warms us, filling the air with manifold

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<sup>395</sup> Saint Isaac the Syrian, *ibid.*, 48:299–302. English translation, *ibid.*, 71:345–346.

fragrance ... it delights our senses with the most heavenly delight, and intoxicates our hearts with unspeakable joy....”<sup>396</sup>

One recent Russian ascetic of piety, Igumen Nikon (Vorubiev [†1963]), wrote that the spiritual man is an abode of the Holy Spirit (*The Spirit of God dwelleth in you* [1 Cor 3:16]); he is completely different from the emotional or fleshly man. He is a new man, while the emotional man is old. What is new in him? Everything: his mind, heart, will, even his body—his entire state.

The mind of a new (spiritual) man is capable of knowing about events occurring far away; about the past and much of the future. He can know the essence of things and not only their manifestations; peoples’ souls, Angels and demons, and much from the spiritual world. *We have the mind of Christ* (1 Cor 2:16), says the Apostle Paul.

The *heart* of the new man is capable of experiencing such states about which it is written briefly, *Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him* (1 Cor 2:9). The Apostle Paul even writes that, *The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18). Saint Seraphim writes in agreement with the fathers of old that if a man knew about the state of blessedness that can happen even here on earth, and especially in the future life, then he would be ready to live a thousand years in a pit, with worms eating away at his body, only to acquire this blessedness.

Thus the *will* of the new man strives wholly for love and thankfulness to God, to the desire to do God’s will alone, and not his own.

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<sup>396</sup> *On the Goal of Christian Life* (Sergeev Posad, 1914), 17–21. For a full English translation, see Helen Kontzevitch, *St. Seraphim of Sarov*, (Wildwood, Calif.: St. Xenia Skete, 2004).

The *body* of the spiritual man also changes, becomes in part like the body of Adam before the fall, capable of “spiritual feelings” and actions (walking on water, living for a long time without food, covering great distances in a moment, etc.).

In a word, the spiritual man is completely renewed, he becomes different (a Russian word for “monk” is *inok*, meaning, “different”), in mind, heart, will, and body.<sup>397</sup>

The Fathers call this different state of man *theosis*, or deification. This term most exactly expresses the essence of sanctity. It is precisely the closest unification with God, the *acquisition* of the Holy Spirit, about which Saint Seraphim spoke. It is the Kingdom of God, come in power (cf. Mk 9:1) to those of the faithful of whom the Savior said, *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover* (Mk 16:17–18). These signs are some of the clear indications that sanctity is unity with the Spirit of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 6:17), which is *God Who workest wonders* (Ps 76:13).

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<sup>397</sup> Igumen Nikon (Vorubev), *Letters to Spiritual Children* (Holy Trinity Saint Sergius Lavra, 1991), 119.

## *Chapter 8*

### *The Origin of the World*

One of the dogmas of the Christian religion is the teaching on the creation of the world by God: *In the beginning God created heaven, and earth ... and God said: let there be light... And there became light... and there was evening and morning one day*<sup>398</sup> ... *the second day ... the third ... the fourth ... the fifth ... the sixth...* So the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the furniture of them (Gen 1:1–2:1. Also, 2 Mac 7:28; Ex 45:18; Ecc 10:12; Ps 145:6; Jn 1:3; Rom 4:17; Col 1:16, 17; Heb 11:3, and others).

Creation is mentioned in the very first line of the Christian Creed: “I believe in One God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth and all things visible and invisible.”

If we were to sum up the teaching on the Revelation of creation, we would have the following basic precepts:

1. The world did not come into being by itself, but came about as the result of a special creative act of God.

2. The world was not formed by God from eternally existing matter, but rather created—that is, the material itself as well as the world as a whole (the *cosmos*) were called into being from nothingness by the almighty, creative word of God alone.

3. The creation of the world was not momentary, but rather step-by-step, “in six days.”

4. Along with the visible world, that is, the world accessible to our senses, the invisible, extrasensory, spiritual world was created.

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<sup>398</sup> The Hebrew word *yom*, translated as “day,” means not only a day, but also a period, an epoch, an indeterminate space of time, a moment.

Obviously, each of these precepts contains a large body of theological and philosophical issues. Here we will touch upon but a few of them, first of all the question of the existence of the created world.

## § 1. Two Views of the World

On this question there exist two non-Christian religious and philosophical points of view: the dualistic and the pantheistic.

The simpler of the two is the *dualistic* view, which looks at matter as an eternal, independent substance, which is the construction material out of which God only forms the world, like an architect and builder. Matter and the world, from this point of view, are substantial in and of themselves, and in that sense, not dependent upon God. Even if the world were destroyed, its basis—matter—is indestructible.

This concept is not acceptable to the Christian, firstly because there is no Biblical foundation for it. Secondly, it devaluates God, Who is the one and only highest origin and source of being. Furthermore, this concept is inextricably bound with the ideas of metaphysical and ethical dualism, which ultimately lead it out of the boundaries of Revelation.

Another very widespread system of thought is the *pantheistic*. There are very many variations on this system, but the essence is the same—matter and the world are either co-originate with the Divinity (that is, having the same nature as God), or they are entirely nonexistent (the world is a mirage; all is God).

This point of view is just as incompatible with Christianity. Pantheism not only deprives the concept of God of the highest positive predicate with which our human consciousness can bestow Him—Personhood, but even the origin of the world itself is seen as

an act necessary in God, conditioned upon the ontological characteristics of His nature. Therefore pantheistic thought seeks to avoid the very concept of “creation” as something presupposing the presence of unconditional freedom in God. Just the same, as Priest Paul Florensky rightly notes on this issue, “Contrary to Spinoza’s acosmism,<sup>399</sup> and the pantheism of the majority of thinkers, nothing can be concluded about the existence of the world from God’s nature; for the act of world creation—whether we consider it to be momentary and historically ascertainable, or gradual and spread across all historical time, or unfolding in a ceaseless historical process, or, finally, pre-eternal—regardless of all the various ways of understanding it, should be indisputably thought of as a free act, that is, as something coming from God without necessity.”<sup>400</sup> This statement sufficiently clearly formulates one important precept of Christian teaching which differentiates Christianity from pantheism in principle—God’s absolute spiritual freedom as a personal and perfect Being.

The pantheistic cosmology diametrically opposes Christianity in other quite important ways as well. Equating the essence of God with that of the world, pantheism also takes the following step—it essentially does away with the world (or God).

Pantheism also leads the consciousness to the absurd in resolving other important questions of world view: truth and heresy, good and evil, freedom and tyranny, beauty and ugliness, suffering and pleasure, etc. Pantheism offers a truly “unique” resolution to these questions: inasmuch as all these polarities necessarily come, in the final analysis, from one and the same source—“God/the world,”

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<sup>399</sup> Acosmism: In philosophy, the view that God is the sole and ultimate reality, and that finite objects and events have no independent existence ([www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/3977/acosmism](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/3977/acosmism)). —Trans.

<sup>400</sup> Paul Florensky, *Pillar and Foundation of Truth*, 144.

the Absolute—it would follow that there is no essential difference at all between them.

The life-destructive nature of those religious and anthropological conclusions proceeding from systematic pantheism is obvious. It is the confirmation of the equality of all religions; the elimination of any concept of truth as such; the belief that all spiritual paths are equal, regardless of their respective religious or atheistic bent; the nullification of any aim or meaning of any sort of positive ethic (because good and evil are equally inherent in the Absolute). As a result, the only tack left for human life is either passive contemplation, or purely pragmatic activity.

## § 2. The Christian Understanding of the World

Christianity, rejecting both the dualistic and pantheistic conceptions, confirms that the world was created “out of nothing” (2 Mac 7:28), *the worlds were framed by the word of God ... not made of things which do appear* (Heb 11:3). The Evangelist John says of the Logos that *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made* (Jn 1:3). These and many other passages in Scripture, as well as its entire context, all unanimously understood by the Fathers of the Church,<sup>401</sup> speak of creation as an act in which the Three-hypostatic God bestowed real existence to matter itself and to the world as a whole from nonexistence, “from what is not,” or “out of nothing.”

This understanding that the world came “out of nothing” is one of the theological problems of the mystery of creation. This problem arises not from the “common sense” maxim that “nothing can come out of nothing,” but from the mystery of the nature of the

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<sup>401</sup> See for example the sayings of the ancient fathers and teachers of the Church on this question in Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov’s *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Saint Petersburg, 1882), 125–128); Bishop Sylvester, *Experience of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Kiev, 1885), 3:17–44.



world. If we look at the nature of the world one-dimensionally, creation in the Biblical context seems devoid of essence, empty—a nonexistent phantom. However, Christianity stands up against this meonistic (from the Greek μῆών, meaning “not having any essence) conclusion of Christianity with its dogma of the Incarnation and teaching on the general resurrection. There is a seemingly obvious contradiction which requires explanation.

The theological interpretation of creation comes from the ancient teachings of the Church, postulated thoroughly by Saint Gregory Palamas (†1359), on the necessity of discerning in God His essence, or nature, transcendental to the created world; and His energy, or activity, accessible to human knowledge. In this context, the fundamental idea of the theological model of nature is sufficiently clearly discussed in Saint Gregory’s words, “God is, and is called, the nature of all things existing, for everything participates in Him and exists by force of this participation—not in His nature, but in His energy.”

Professor Archpriest V. Zenkovsky (†1962), comments on this statement:

Divine energy penetrates the world, and through these energies the world is upheld by God and ruled by Him. This is the teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas, guarding the apophatic aspect in the concept of Divinity, and at the same time, clarifying the ‘everywhere present’ God in the world of Divine energies. This is important not only to theology and the purity of teaching on God, but also to metaphysics, and to an understanding of the world. This world is more than its measurable and tangible outer covering; rays of Divine energy pass through everything in the world, enlivening and transforming.... Rays of divine energy pass through the entire fabric of the world. These rays do not belong to created

existence, they are not “created,” they cannot be equated with the ‘essence’ hidden from us in God. Without a firm recognition of this difference in ‘essence’ in God and His divine energies, we can understand neither the world as a living whole nor God, without falling into pure transcendentalism.<sup>402</sup>

The well-known Russian religious thinker Evgeny Trubetskoy expresses essentially the same thought. He supposes that, “The pre-eternal Sophia, Wisdom,<sup>403</sup> contains the eternal idea-prototypes of all creation—all of what becomes the world, unfolding over time. This would mean that in the pre-eternal creative act, God sees before the beginning of time nonexistence filled with the limitless variation of positive possibilities. Nonexistence, not related in Him to time, turned into relative nonexistence, that is, into positive potential, or the possibility of distinct existence ... and is that which becomes something in time.”<sup>404</sup>

Saint Maximos the Confessor (†662) wrote about this perhaps most specifically. He says, “From the ages, the Creator, when it pleased Him so to do, imparted essentiality to the knowledge existing in Him, and produced it into being.”<sup>405</sup>

All of these citations contain essentially one and the same thought. Creative divine energy (the idea of “eternal Sophia,” and the divine word) “imparted essentiality” (substantiality, substance) to everything which is nothing in and of itself: matter, the cosmos, spirits, and the crown of creation—man. The created world

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<sup>402</sup> V. V. Zenkovsky, *Basics of Christian Philosophy* (2 vols.) (Paris, 1964), 2:51, 53.

<sup>403</sup> According to E. Trubetskoy, Sophia is the “wisdom and power inseparable from Christ God.” (E. N. Trubetskoy, *The Meaning of Life* [Moscow, 1918], 104).

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>405</sup> Cited from Bishop Sylvester, *Experience of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Kiev, 1884–1885), 3:40.

appeared as the realized divine knowledge of things; divine energies became the basis for the existence of “things,” their “substance.” It follows that the cosmos is nothing and nonexistent without the divine energy which gives it substance. The existence of the world is founded exclusively upon the power or energy of the divine word: *And God said: let there be... And there became* (Gen 1:1). *For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things* (Rom 11:36). Thus, at the foundation of the world lies not some sort of eternal matter, but the uncreated, spiritual idea of God about the world, His energies,<sup>406</sup> and in this sense “God is and is called the nature of all that exists.”

That the world is not, however, an emanation of God (which is pantheism), but rather His creation, was stated by Saint Cyril of Alexandria (†444). He wrote, “To create is something belonging to activity (ἡ ἐνέργεια), while giving birth belongs to nature. Nature and activity are not the same thing; it would follow therefore that giving birth and creating are not the same thing.”<sup>407</sup> In Palamite language it would sound like this: creating is a something belonging to energy, and giving birth belongs to nature. Nature (essence) and energy are not the same thing; thus, giving birth and creating are not the same thing.

Thus, in the given theological interpretation, the created world is not something absolutely external, and especially not foreign to God, or something so contrary to Him that He cannot even touch it, as it would follow from the dualistic world view, or, for example, from the teaching of Philon of Alexandria. Neither is the world an emanation, or the offspring of divine nature (essence), as pantheism is inclined to believe. For in that case neither God nor

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<sup>406</sup> See H. Yannaras, *The World: The Faith of the Church* (Moscow, 1992).

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, ex. 4.

the world would in fact remain as separate realities. The world is not a mirage, nor a phantom, nor a “soap bubble,” as meonism would have it. According to the Christian teaching, the world stands on the one hand inseparably and indivisibly united with its Creator, inasmuch as it is a “realization” of His eternal, uncreated energies; while on the other hand, as something not partaking of God’s nature (essence), it does not mingle with Him, possessing its own nature and retaining its own identity.

This “Chalcedonian” principle of an unmingled, unchanged, undivided, inseparable unity of God with His creation runs throughout the history of the world and is realized in three different levels. *The first level*—the creation of the world, where unity with God according to the “Chalcedonian” principle is found on the level of the world’s participation in God’s energies, but not in His essence. *The second*—Incarnation, whereby the same principle occurs the unification of the natures themselves: the divine and the created, in Jesus Christ. *The third*—the general resurrection, a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1), the restoration of everything, when the unity of God with all mankind and all creation will reach the uttermost attainable degree, when *God may be all in all* (1 Cor 15:28).

It is necessary to draw certain conclusions proceeding from such an understanding of the creation of the world.

First, this is a confirmation of the primary given that there will be a deification of all things created and, mainly, of man. This deification is not something external to the created world, but rather innate to it according to its creation “by seed,” the degree of development of which is conditioned upon man’s freedom. The Apostle Paul writes about this: *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. . . . Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the*

*bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God* (Rom 8:19, 21).

Secondly, the naturalness of man's godlikeness. Inasmuch as "the Creator imparted essentiality" to man, it would follow that not only the soul, but also the body are an image of the Creator of all. From this, the general resurrection can be understood as an act which is natural and necessary, expressing the immutability of God's activity (energy) in relation to man and all creation.

Thirdly, the anti-natural quality of a mechanical understanding of the world. The world, according to the Christian world view, is not a lifeless moving system, not a soulless mechanism, not a subject for experimentation, but rather a living, wisely constructed, beautiful, and wholesome *organism*, which requires the appropriate reasoning and reverent relationship from man.

### § 3. Christian Ecology

This last conclusion has acquired particular significance in the present times, due to the quickly growing threat of man's destruction of his own environment. There is no need to speak here of specific problems connected with the ecological situation in certain regions and in the world as a whole, nor about those scientific-technological measures being proposed and worked out to solve them. The Church has its own special aspect of activity in this realm—the spiritual and moral aspect.

In these times, it has become increasingly apparent that mankind, even if there be peace and justice, will perish if it does not preserve, or to be more precise, maximally restore the wholesomeness of nature. No less apparent is the fact that the cause of destruction of the natural environment as well as the main factor in its possible resurrection is man's spiritual and moral state.

The ecological problem is therefore first of all a spiritual and not a material problem, and its core is the present state, not of man's environment, but of man himself.

It is quite important in this regard for man to have a true understanding of his life's aim, for it will determine the direction and character of all his activities. This aim is clearly expressed by Christ: *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you* (Mt 6:33). If there is no doubt that the main moving force in the destruction of nature was man's egocentrism, his striving for comfort and pleasure, the suppression of spiritual quests by material interests, then it is just as obvious that it is only possible to restore the wholeness of creation through the restoration of the spiritual wholeness of man himself. *Wisdom shall not enter a soul that plots evil, or reside in a body involved in sin* (Wis 1:4).<sup>408</sup>

But how can this restoration be accomplished? *The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God* (1 Pet 4:17), says the Scripture. The restoration of life must begin with the Church. The Church has the science of man which the world so desperately needs. This science of correct (righteous) life is called *ascesis*. In it is shown the objective laws of spiritual life and the means and conditions for man's healing, thoroughly tested by the enormous experience of the saints, the signs of the right path, and of possible wrong turns. It is applicable to all conditions of life and labor, although the degree of success in it (perfection) is naturally conditioned upon them. This science leads man with total reliability to the sought after aim of life—"the sum total of perfection," which is love (cf. Cor 3:14), and which is the only thing capable of leading man out of his crisis. Unfortunately,

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<sup>408</sup> *A New Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 699.

however, this science, which the Holy Fathers called “the science of sciences”<sup>409</sup> by force of its primary importance to man, is the science least known by modern man. It can serve as a firm foundation for the beginning of a real process of restoring life in the churches, and thus, in the world (cf. Mt 5:13), and of the world (cf. Rom 8:19–21).

#### § 4. Hypothesis of the Anti-World

There are certain rather curious modern theories of natural science which lead to the conclusion that the material world is nonexistent. G. Naan, the Estonian scientist, made some interesting statements in this regard in his hypothesis of the anti-world, or the “symmetrical universe.”

Modern-day physics has come to the discovery of so-called anti-particles for practically all known particles. Particles and anti-particles are a sort of twins which differ from one another only by their opposite charges. But if particles are the “bricks” of our world, then anti-particles are only the “guests” in it, appearing only momentarily. When anti-particles meet with particles an explosion occurs, resulting in their mutual destruction, and releasing a huge amount of energy. Based upon numerous observations of anti-particles and the study of their behavior in our world, some scientists have come to the thought that there exists an entire anti-world which is like our world and coexists with it, but differs by its opposite sign.

One of the leading developers of this theory was Naan. Its main point is the supposition that both halves of the Universe—the

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<sup>409</sup> For example, Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov), speaking mainly of the front lines of this science—monasticism—writes, “The science of sciences, monasticism, provides—and we express ourselves in the language of the learned of this world—the most detailed, well-founded, deepest and highest knowledge of experimental psychology and theology; that is, active, living knowledge of man and God, inasmuch as this knowledge is accessible to man” (Bishop Ignatius [Brianchaninov], *Works*, 1:480).

world and the anti-world—come in the final analysis from an absolute vacuum.

He wrote,

That it is possible for something to come out of nothing (emptiness, a vacuum), while strictly observing the laws of preservation, should seem utterly paradoxical. The whole idea of the laws of preservation consists precisely in the supposition that nothing can come from “nothing,” and “nothing” cannot generate something. This developing hypothesis does not argue at all with this supposition. “Nothing” truly cannot generate (only) something, but it generates something more—something and anti-something at the same time! In the final analysis, the basis of this proposed hypothesis lies in the elementary fact that the equation  $(-1) + (+1) = 0$  can be read backwards, from right to left:  $0 = (-1) + (+1)$ . This last equation expresses not only cosmology, but also cosmogony. The “building materials of the Universe” come out of emptiness, a vacuum. On the average, summarily, the symmetrical Universe consists of emptiness alone. Therefore, it can come out of emptiness while strictly observing all the laws of preservation.... Equally equal to zero are all space and time intervals and coordinates. The symmetrical Universe is such that it on the average does not contain anything, even space and time.<sup>410</sup>

This theory of the anti-world is particularly unusual because of its idea that the “material” of the Universe comes out of a physical vacuum, or “nothing.” This idea, on the one hand, is very resonant

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<sup>410</sup> G. E. Naan, “The Symmetrical Universe,” (a report given at the astronomy council of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Jan 29, 1964). —The Tartu Astronomical Observatory, Publications (Tartu, 1966), LVI:431–433.



with the Biblical teaching on the meonism of the material world itself, and on the other hand, it puts forth the question about the moving power which, “splitting” the ideal vacuum and creating a cosmos of amazing harmony and life, stably preserves its unstable existence.

Science cannot propose an answer to this question.

## § 5. Creation and/or Evolution

The Christian belief on the creation of the world by God does not, however, remove the question about the *character* of the world’s origin. Is it creationist (meaning that everything that exists is a result of God’s creative act) or evolutionist (meaning that the world evolved from primordial matter according to laws given it by God)?

Holy Scripture speaks of the “six days” of creation—that is, of the appearance and manifestation of the world in systematic six-step ascension from lower forms to the higher, being man. Does this testify to an evolutionary development of the world? A six-day creation does not in and of itself provide sufficient proof of the world’s evolutionary kind of development, although many Western theologians insist that it does.<sup>411</sup> For, the given six “days” can be looked at as time periods, and as acts of systematic creation *outside* of time by God of new life forms.

Of course, an acceptance of God the Creator does not exclude an evolutionary development of the world as long as God is the moving force. Some holy fathers allowed such a thought. Thus, Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote, “From the first creative impulse, all things existed in their order as if by a certain fruit-creating force,

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<sup>411</sup> See, for example, P. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Russian translation from French (Moscow, 1987).

imbedded in the world's creation for the generation of all things; but no one thing had a separate and actual existence.”

Blessed Augustine develops this thought in the following way: “I think that God at first created all beings; some things actually, and others in their primary foundations.... It is just as a grain invisibly contains everything that should grow into a tree; thus could we imagine that the world also, in the moment when God created all things at once, contained all things that the earth produced, as possibilities and as causes, before they developed into such things as we know them.”<sup>412</sup>

A similar thought comes up in Motovilov's discussion with Saint Seraphim of Sarov, when Saint Seraphim says, “The Lord did not create Adam's flesh alone from the earth, but also his soul and human spirit. But until the moment when God breathed into him the spirit of life, Adam was like the other animals.”<sup>413</sup>

Saint Theophan (Govorov) made a similar statement: “There was an animal in the image of man, with an animal spirit. Then God breathed His Spirit into him, and the animal became man.”<sup>414</sup>

However, the idea of evolution takes on an entirely different character if it excludes God's creative action and looks at the world's existence and all the many different forms of life as the result of some eternal material's self-evolvement. In this case, the given idea turns out to be no more than dream, which although engaging is very far from what could be called a scientific theory. We can point to several serious scientific facts which do not fit, for example, the concept of biological evolution.

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<sup>412</sup> Cited from F. Lelotte, *Solving the Problems of Life* (Brussels, 1959), 91.

<sup>413</sup> *The Discussion between Saint Seraphim of Sarov and N. A. Motovilov on the Goal of Christian Life* (Sergiev Posad, 1914), 11. (For English translation, see, Helen Kontzevitch, *St. Seraphim of Sarov* [Wildwood, Calif.: St. Xenia Skete, 2004]).

<sup>414</sup> Saint Theophan, *Collected Letters*, 1st ed. (Moscow, 1898), 98.

1. Science does not know a law whereby inorganic matter (atoms and molecules) could organize themselves into living cells, never mind generate reason. Michael Ruse, the famous Canadian Professor of Biology and agnostic, when speaking of the idea of a so-called *natural* origin of human reason by way of evolution, wrote, “Just the same, it can be firmly stated that biological theory and experimental practice decisively witness against this. There is nothing in modern theoretical biology that would allow for an irreversible inevitability of the appearance of reason.”<sup>415</sup>

2. The probability of the appearance of life from a chance chaining of molecules is insignificantly small, and equals, according to some calculations,  $10^{-255}$ , which, according to the words of the American scientist Castler, “would in fact mean the impossibility of the appearance of life.” “The supposition that a living structure could appear in one act as a result of a chance conjunction of molecules must be dismissed.”<sup>416</sup> Another American biologist, Ben Hobrinc, gives the following comparison: “The probability of a cell producing itself is, at the most, equal in probability to a monkey typing the full text of the Bible 400 times without a single mistake!”<sup>417</sup>

3. Atheistic evolutionism has particular difficulty resolving the question of the development of different species<sup>418</sup> in higher animals, and insurmountable difficulty in resolving the problem of problems—the origin of man. So far, [secular] anthropology

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<sup>415</sup> M. Riuz, “Science and Religion: Still at War?” *Questions of Philosophy* 2 (1991), 44.

<sup>416</sup> V. D. Penelis, ed., *The Inhabited Cosmos* (Moscow, 1972), 77.

<sup>417</sup> Ben Hobrinc, *Evolution: The Egg without the Chicken* (Moscow, 1993), 66.

<sup>418</sup> On the question of life’s development and the origin of its forms, there are various points of view: Lamarckism, Darwinism, the mutation theory, and heterogenesis. A significant number of scientists subscribe to the theory of evolution (some accepting God as its source, others excluding Him), but many modern scientists deny it, accepting the theory of primordial multitudinous forms. (See, for example, Henry, *The Creation of the Word* (San Diego, 1981); Hienz, *Creation or Evolution* (Chicago, 1983).

supposes only an approximate time of man's appearance (forty to fifty thousand years ago). But how he came about, and who was his biological ancestor, remains an unsolvable puzzle, although there is no lack of hypotheses.<sup>419</sup>

The main thesis of the theory of evolution on the transformation from one species to another does not have any basis in fact; in any case, for all highly organized forms of life.<sup>420</sup> Even in the mid-twentieth century, Professor V. Zenkovsky, for example, wrote, "No less important is the crash of the idea of uninterrupted succession in biology—in the problem of development of one species of animal from another. At first, after Darwin's work, the idea of uninterrupted succession enjoyed great success. But a more attentive study of the facts has shown that it is impossible to build a genealogical tree of evolution of "species" of some animals from others. Whole groups of species turn out to have no connection whatsoever with others."<sup>421</sup>

4. The very concept of life before the present time departs beyond the limits of scientific knowledge. Life, as it turns out, is not a special conjunction of specific material elements, but something *essentially* different. The nature of man's consciousness and personality remains something even more mysterious.

For Orthodox theology, one thing remains basically unaltered—that God is the Creator and Law-Giver of all that exists in the world. How He brought it into existence—whether He created whole, complete layers of existence immediately in "days," or produced them gradually during the course of the "days" from

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<sup>419</sup> See, for example, *Courier* 8/9 (1972); "Man," *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 29:50–54.

<sup>420</sup> See for example, G. Morris, *The Creation of the World: A Scientific Approach* (San Diego, Calif., 1981); V. Trostnikov, "Is the 'Scientific Picture of the World' Really Scientific?" *New World* 12 (1989).

<sup>421</sup> V. V. Zenkovsky, *Basics of Christian Philosophy* (Paris, 1964), 2:35.

lower forms to the higher, from water and earth (Gen 1:20, 24) by force of the laws He established in nature—is of no soteriological significance.

But if “where God so wills, the order of nature is overthrown,”<sup>422</sup> then He could even more readily create the very “laws of nature” as He so pleases. Therefore, it is hard to see how any scientific discoveries regarding the appearance and development of life could, as atheism insists, undermine the Christian world view.

The Christian world view is deeply justified in its logic on the question of how the world came into being. It excludes any blind *faith* in a miracle of the Universe’s *self*-development, life’s *self*-creation, reason’s *self*-appearance, and any other such “miracles.” Christianity speaks of a reasonable Cause of this marvelous world’s existence: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Gen 1:1).

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<sup>422</sup> Dogmaticon, seventh tone.

## *Chapter 9*

### *Eschatology*

#### § 1. Understanding Eschatology and Its Different Aspects

Russian thinkers have always been preoccupied with the problem of eschatology (from the Greek ἔσχατον, meaning end, limit; ἔσχατος, extreme, or last in time). There were periods of time when this preoccupation was experienced as an acute presentiment of the end of history. During other times, the main focus of attention was upon resolving one of the most difficult theological questions—that of eternal torments. At the present time we see a heightened interest in correctly understanding signs of the end of human history and attempts to process current events in Russia and all over the world in the apocalyptic vein. Figuring large in this picture are the coming of antichrist and the number of the beast (cf. Rev 13:18). Nevertheless, the central point of eschatology in Russian Orthodox theology will always be how to acquire that finality within us (cf. Lk 17:21) which is the ultimate goal of life.

Since eschatology is a multi-faceted subject, we can shed light only upon a few of its aspects.

1. Throughout the course of its history and including the present time, the most relevant subject of Russian theology has been the ascetical aspect. It consists in the theoretical and experiential study of the spiritual path that leads to the Kingdom of God. Any positive understanding of it,<sup>423</sup> however, often leads to various distortions.

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<sup>423</sup> See Chapter 7, Spiritual Life

A main distortion, and one that seems to be part and parcel of man's very nature, is the temptation to "pluck" the fruit of entry into the Kingdom of God, instead of cultivating it through labors and *podvigs*. This tendency shows itself in the most varied forms: for example, when one is convinced that salvation can be won through the observation of Church formalities, rules, and typicons, or by external activities and charities, etc. The problem is that a certain norm of Christian life is often forgotten while doing these things: *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone* (Mt 23:23). *The other* refers to the Gospel commandments. As a result, the Christian loses his priceless *eschaton*—the Kingdom of God.

Another equally surrogate form of religious life is theologizing; that is, the preoccupation with theology for theology's sake, without trying to grasp the ways and means of man's salvation. Saint Ignatius Brianchininov wrote very clearly about the consequences of this:

Without this [the fulfillment of Christ's commandments –A. O.], studying the letter becomes something exclusively human, and serves only to enlarge the fallen nature. We can see woeful evidence of this in the Jewish priesthood of Christ's time. Studying the letter while left otherwise entirely to one's own devices gives birth quickly to self-opinion and pride, and thus estranges man from God. Although it presents itself outwardly as gaining knowledge of God, it can be in essence total ignorance and denial of Him. One can drown in unbelief while preaching faith! The mysteries that can be revealed to unlettered Christians quite often remain closed to scholars who

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are satisfied with a purely academic study of theology, as though it were just one of the many sciences known to man.<sup>424</sup>

Yet another “idea” widely held in Protestant circles is the presence and determining action of *eschaton* (meaning in this case the Holy Spirit) not only in the Church, but in all secular life, and in all of its manifestations. This idea, which “forgets” about man’s freedom and his ability to act against God’s will as well as according to it, is growing more and more flesh in the forms of a supposed soteriological equality of all religions (and consequently, the denial of Christ as God and Savior), the Church’s need to accept obvious apostasy from Christian morality, the approval of many anti-cultural manifestations, and so on.

## § 2. Antichrist

The subject of the end of history has been part of Christianity from the beginning. But unfortunately, as history progresses, the joyful expectation of Christ’s Second Coming is more and more being replaced by the expectation of the antichrist. In old Russia, the question of the end of the world became a subject of great significance at the state level. For example, in the fifteenth century the Paschalia (the calculation of the days of Pascha) ended in the year 1492, which corresponded to 7,000 years from the creation of the world; and according to mass opinion it had therefore outlived its existence in time. The year 1666 was awaited with equal anxiety because of the three sixes in it. Naturally, there was never any lack of candidates for the “antichrist.”

Nowadays this is an increasingly painful subject for a significant number of Christians, especially those lacking knowledge of their

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<sup>424</sup> *Saint Ignatius, Works* (Saint Petersburg, 1905), 3:5.



faith. In order to clarify this issue, we must first of all look to what the Holy Scriptures and Church Tradition have to say about this subject.

*Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring (Lk 21:10–11, 25).* These things have happened at various times on our planet, but here it speaks of their catastrophic increase and influential power on man and his environment, and that there will be *Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken (Lk 2:26).* Possibly, one of the main causes of all these anomalies will be the rapid progress of scientific technology.

The increase of lawlessness (cf. Mt 24:12). It is becoming more and more apparent that mankind is lurching towards final spiritual and moral corruption; just before the antichrist appears, there will be an epoch of total “freedom.” Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) wrote, “The antichrist will be the logical, fair, and natural consequence of peoples’ general moral and spiritual inclination.”<sup>425</sup>

*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come (Mt 24:14).* At the present time, there are still many peoples that have not yet heard the Gospels (for example, in China, India, and elsewhere).

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid, 4:271.

*When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place* (Mt 24:15). By this is meant the Christians' (first of all the monastics', clergy's, and theologians') all-around loss of any striving for life according to Christ's commandments, and their preoccupation with *sensual pleasures, love of money, and ambition*; the churches' replacement of their main reason for existence—salvation of human souls from sin—with goals that are purely earthly: economic, political, social, cultural, etc.; the turning of Christian holidays into pagan festivals, and pagan festivals into supposedly Christian holidays; monasteries becoming tourist attractions<sup>426</sup> and places of worldly celebrations. That is, in the final analysis, we are talking about the fact that under the banner of “Orthodoxy,” a secularization of church life is occurring (*When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* [Lk 18:8]). This is nothing new in the history of Christianity. For example, one Western author wrote about the Roman Church during the Renaissance era, “The epoch of the Renaissance gave birth to humanism, which, by uniting Christianity with paganism, provoked such overwhelming self-will that Rabelais formulated a rule in one phrase describing the life of a great many people: ‘Do as you like;’ and Erasmus [of Rotterdam] observed in the year 1501 that no pagan was ever so perverse as the average Christian.”<sup>427</sup> As we see, secularization struck separate Christian churches earlier as well, but there were still oases of spirituality in other parts of the world. The situation now is ever more tragic.

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<sup>426</sup> Even Saint Philaret (Drozdov) wrote, “How dull it is to see that the monasteries all want pilgrims, that is, they themselves are out to get entertainment and temptations. True, at times they don't have means, but more often they don't have non-acquisitiveness, simplicity, hope in God, and a taste for silence.” —Saint Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna, *Works* (Moscow: Otchy Dom, 1994), 359.

<sup>427</sup> Jordan Omen, O. R., *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (Rome-Liublin, 1994), 232.

*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect (Mt 24:24).* Many false Christs and false prophets have appeared throughout the history of Christianity, but the last of them will differ by their “great signs and wonders.” These signs and wonders will lead away many superficial, gullible Christians from the most important thing in life—thoughts of eternal salvation—and draw them into magic, occultism, schisms, and sects—in a word, into paganism.

Undoubtedly, the idea of the oneness of all religions will take hold of everyone’s consciousness (that there is only one religion, and all the existing religions are only varying modifications). This “one religion of the future,” as Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) wrote, will possibly retain the previous form of multiple confessions. But it will essentially be an ideology, because in peoples’ minds will occur a catastrophic trading of the search for the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness for the thirst for an earthly kingdom and all its pleasures; a trading of spiritual goals for worldly, pagan ones, so that all the force of this “religion” will be directed towards acquiring exclusively earthly goods.

More than anything else in Holy Scripture, the most meaningful sign of the coming end of history is said to be the reign of antichrist.

The antichrist’s characteristics are described as *Man of sin ... the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God... That Wicked ... whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders... And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved (2 Thes 2:3–10).* And

*there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months* (Rev 13:5).

Saint Zosima of Solovki points out one of the obvious and simple signs of the coming of antichrist: “When you hear that Christ has appeared on earth, then know that this is the antichrist.”<sup>428</sup> He is not talking about the appearance of many false christs (these are his forerunners), but about one, universal “christ.” After uniting all the nations, he will become the king of the world (*and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations* [Rev 13:7]). Saint Ephraim the Syrian wrote that “of all peoples,... the Jews will honor him and rejoice the most at his reigning.”<sup>429</sup>

The mass media will be gasping in ecstasy, shouting about him to all the ends of the world. And one of the central if not main points of this propaganda will be that all of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah are supposedly fulfilled in him. He *will be born of a virgin* (but a lewd one, and through unnatural means); most likely he will have the signal name *Emmanuel* (meaning, “God is with us”); he will feign *sufferings*, supposedly for the good of mankind; he will be, without a doubt, like mankind’s savior from all catastrophe, a triumphantly *anointed king*; he will be given the *throne of David* (according to tradition, antichrist will be a Jew); he will proclaim *immortality* gained through genetic engineering that he will bestow upon his faithful subjects; he will spread abroad the coming of an *eternal kingdom* and eternal life here on the earth;<sup>430</sup> he will restore *peace on earth*;

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<sup>428</sup> Cited from Saint Ignatius Brianchininov, *ibid.*, 4:271.

<sup>429</sup> Homily 29, on the coming of the Lord; Homily 106, on antichrist.

<sup>430</sup> Compare with Lk 1:33: *And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

he will supply an *abundance* “of all earthly goods” (there will be no more expenditure on armaments, the world population will not exceed the so-called “golden billion,” and scientific/technological progress will reach the heights of development). Furthermore, people will gladly sacrifice their freedom for the sake of comfort. With the help of exceedingly cruel laws and total technological control over every human being, he will fully wipe out crime on the earth, an achievement which will be purveyed as victory over evil; and so on.

All of this will become conclusive evidence for very many Jews that he is the promised Messiah, and for the overwhelming majority of Christians that he is the awaited king (even anointed!), savior of the world, Christ in His second coming. *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world* (Rev 13:8). This is how Jews and Christians together will receive the one who will destroy them all.

The so-called “wonders” worked by antichrist and his protégés will especially impress both believers and unbelievers. In order to be saved from sickness, and especially from death, people are often willing to sacrifice their conscience and honor, and bow down to whomever, even to satan himself. Saint Ignatius wrote a remarkable statement about the thirst for miracles, and the cause and effect of this passion:

Having lost humility and the recognition that they are unworthy not only to work wonders but to even to see them, people thirst for miracles more than ever before. In their intoxication with self-opinion, self-reliance, and ignorance, people grasp indiscriminately, recklessly, and boldly at anything miraculous.... This tendency is more dangerous than it ever has been. We are gradually nearing the time in which a

vast spectacle of multitudinous and astounding false wonders will appear and drag to destruction those wretched nurslings of carnal-mindedness, who will be captivated and deceived by these wonders.<sup>431</sup>

*For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape* (1 Thes 5:3). Mankind has sought for peace and safety throughout history, and with the formation of one government on earth and one world ruler, this goal can actually be attained. Only then will suddenly come the destruction of mankind. The Lord said, *For as a snare* [the last day] *shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth* (Lk 21:35). The Apostle Paul speaks of how suddenly will come the final universal catastrophe: *The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night* (1 Thes. 5:2).

### § 3. Numerical Signs

People are especially prone to give all these external facts an air of irrefutable religious significance. And this will become one of the causes of that terrible catastrophe which Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) foresaw: “Our tribulations should be more moral and spiritual. Lost salt [cf. Mt 5:13] foretokens them and clearly reveals that [the Russian] people can and will become the instrument of the genius of geniuses, who will finally embody the idea of a world monarchy.”<sup>432</sup> “Lost salt” is what Saint Ignatius calls the state of Orthodoxy in Russia, the “genius of geniuses” is antichrist, and our people are the instrument of his reign.

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<sup>431</sup> Saint Ignatius, *ibid.*, 4:323–324.

<sup>432</sup> Saint Ignatius, *Collected Letters* (Saint Petersburg, 1995), No. 44.

Saint Ignatius points to the main reason for Christian apostasy: “He who has not received the Kingdom of God within himself will not recognize antichrist, and without fail he will unwittingly become his follower.”<sup>433</sup> *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie* (2 Thes 2:11).

Not receiving the Kingdom of God within oneself means the spiritual degeneration of Christians. Their mind (the seal on the forehead), and all their activity (the seal on the right hand as a symbol of a person’s activity) are totally immersed in cares over this life alone; over what to eat, drink, and wear, unto complete forgetfulness of the Kingdom of God and its righteousness (cf. Mt 6:31–33). This absolute materialism will become the “name” of antichrist and his greatest ideology. The number 666 is not mentioned by accident in the Revelation of Saint John the Theologian. This number is essentially the Biblical symbol of mammon—the kingdom of earthly abundance, glory, and might. This comes from an historical fact in the reign of King Solomon, when the Jewish nation had reached the height of its prosperity. *Only the weight of the gold that was brought to Solomon every year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold* (2 Kgs 9:14), that is, thirty-two tons, 707.26 kilograms!<sup>434</sup>

Not receiving the Kingdom of God within oneself also means accepting the one who provides food and shows. The majority of superficial believers seek precisely such a king and savior. The Gospel story of the five thousand who were fed with five loaves of bread illustrates this point well: *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet*

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<sup>433</sup> Saint Ignatius, *ibid.*, 4:267.

<sup>434</sup> “According to ancient evidence and preserved coins, the normal weight of the Jewish gold shekel was 3.77 zolotniks (16.37 grams) ... a talent was 3,000 shekels” (E. Niurstrem, Ed., *Biblical Encyclopedic Dictionary*, “Money” [Toronto, 1985], 103). That is, one gold talent was equal to 49 kil., 100 gr.

*that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone (Jn 6:14–15).*

Modern scientific/technological progress has given this theme new and serious impulses. They are bound up with the possibility for total control over every person, even over his behavior to a large extent. In the opinion of a number of computer technology experts, there already are real possibilities for mass control over people. They confirm that the institution of a system of total computer control on our planet is not so far off, and will be completed somewhere between the years 2010 and 2020.

In connection with this, the question of “three sixes”<sup>435</sup> is also understandable. Its psychological particularity consists in the concrete visibility of this symbol, and thus its impressive significance to the inexperienced consciousness. Heightened focus upon this apocalyptic number is stimulated also by the fact that although from the technological and generally mathematical computer science point of view it is not required by systems of computation, nevertheless, many consider that it has become ubiquitous in these systems.

Clearly, those who are foisting this sign upon society *believe* in its magical power, and would like to instill their belief in this idol into everyone, Christians first of all. But the Apostle Paul’s reaction to all pagan beliefs is unequivocal: *an idol is nothing in the world* (1 Cor 8:4). That is, all pagan mystical signs (numbers, depictions, curses, magical spells, sorcery, etc.) by themselves, without *faith* in their significance, have *no power or authority whatsoever* over a Christian who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is marked by His Holy Sacraments.

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<sup>435</sup> The number 666 in Hebrew corresponds to the phrase “cha-melek le-israel,” which means, “the king of the Israelites.”



However, one question arises: since this number is given in the Holy Scriptures as the name of antichrist, couldn't our indifference towards its use be the cause of our unwitting acceptance of the very beast that the Holy Fathers warned us of? In order to clarify this matter we must define what is meant by *unwitting*. Saint Ignatius gives us a thorough answer to this question:

During the God-man's earthly life, lovers of this world crowned their evil works by their denial of Christ and deicide (cf. Mt 23:32), and in the last days of this world, they will crown them by accepting antichrist and rendering him reverence as god (cf. Jn 5:42). Love of the world is a terrible thing! It enters a man unnoticeably and gradually, and once it has entered it makes him a cruel and unbounded master. People gradually prepared themselves and acquired the spiritual/psychological mood which is capable of deicide. They prepare themselves little-by-little, acquiring the disposition and character capable of accepting antichrist (cf. Col 2:7–12).<sup>436</sup>

Thus, the *lover of this world*—that is, a person who lives according to the “elements of this world” rather than the Gospel commandments—will accept the antichrist in a manner *unnoticeable* to himself. He will therefore gradually and *unnoticeably* accept the idea and spirit of antichristian ideology, which is entirely devoted to the creation of *heaven on earth*, since the spiritual world, or Heavenly Kingdom, does not exist for him. Modern theology (so far, mostly Western) is drawn into this ideology more than at other times in history, and makes it the foundation of the Church's mission on earth. The Church's

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<sup>436</sup> Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov, *ibid.*, 5:308.

activities (first of all, social and cultural) become top priority in this context. As a result, it is not the world which acquires the Church, but rather the Church which becomes worldly. An illustration taken from this modern reality is more than sufficient: priests, even monks, in theatres and at all kinds of less than chaste performances; monasteries throwing parties, shows, and secular concerts; Church organizations giving rock-concerts, etc. And all this is being viewed as the Church's mission in the world! What will the Church become from such a "mission?"

Thus, *gradually and unnoticeably* Christians and the Church take on the norms and ideals of a life which is entirely pagan and antichristian, and so will they also naturally accept the antichrist himself as mankind's savior and greatest benefactor. Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov wrote, "Whoever has not confirmed and cultivated his faith by hearing of the deeds of faith will be easily deceived by the teaching of a lie that has taken on the appearance of truth."<sup>437</sup>

The thought of the possibility of *unnoticeably* denying Christ as the result of an *external deception* (for example, the three sixes embedded in the bar code) decisively contradicts one of the most important conditions of the Orthodox Faith—that man's salvation or destruction depends unconditionally upon his conscious, morally free choice of either Christ or antichrist, a choice made through his way of life (*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned* [Mk 16:16]). As all the saints confirm, God Himself cannot save us without our own will. It is even less possible for someone to destroy a person without his conscious denial of Christ and conscious acceptance of *another* as the savior of the world.

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 2:139.

The acceptance alone of this number as a *sign of belief in antichrist* makes it destructive for the Christian. As long as he does not have this belief, the number by itself bears no threat, for it has no religious meaning.<sup>438</sup>

Possibly, the antichrist will make this number his “mark” (as opposed to the Cross of Christ) of acceptance of him as humanity’s savior. Then its acceptance of it *in this capacity* will truly signify apostasy from the Lord Jesus Christ. But beyond this meaning, any fear in a Christian of this number is a sign of superstition, and is without a doubt a source of malicious joy to those who preach this belief, who, like a certain animal, leave their traces everywhere.

Modern progression of apocalyptic moods and expectations is bound up with the obvious degradation of man’s moral state, and especially of his rulers; and of those rapidly increasing tendencies to concentrate political, informational, technological, economic, and military power into a very tight circle of international “supermen,” who are free from moral and other higher human sensibilities and motives. A clear picture can be drawn from all this of how a one-world government could be created, the head of which will be chosen out of this band of “gods,” having unlimited “computer” power, and who will establish a universal enslavement of everyone on earth both individually and nationally. All of this matches perfectly with apocalyptic prophecies about a totalitarian regime under a universal ruler who will call himself the “christ and savior” of all mankind.

The logical outcome of this new world order, under conditions of spiritual, moral, ecological, energy, demographic, and other crises

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<sup>438</sup> In circular No. 2641 from the Holy Synod of the Hellenic Church, Feb. 9, 1998, is written, “The ‘mark,’ be it the name of antichrist or the number of his name, when the moment of its establishment comes, will only bring denial of Christ and unification with antichrist when it will be accepted voluntarily.” —*Electronic Cards and the Mark of Antichrist* (Moscow, 1999), 13.

afflicting the modern world, obviously likewise match the meaning of those final events in the life of humanity, about which the Revelations of Saint John the Theologian speak—the terrible destruction of the entire planet.

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The search for the Kingdom of God always resists the pagan spirit of vain curiosity, especially when interpreting matters bound up with signs of the last times. This spirit fills the soul immeasurably more with the thought of the coming of antichrist than with that of Christ's coming. It instills more faith in the "magical power" of three sixes than in the Divine power of the living-creating Cross of Christ; it instills all sorts of superstitions including a belief in the effectiveness of antichristian signs by themselves, independent of the holiness or sinfulness of the Christian's life. Such false faith denies the Apostle's words about how *an idol is nothing in the world* (1 Cor 8:4), and makes the "believer" tremble before all sorts of "demonic" inventions of the electronic age. The Apostle Paul called this *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* (2 Thes 2:10–11). Therefore the Church does not cease to admonish that only those who purify themselves by keeping the commandments and repentance will truly discern the last times and the man of sin, the son of perdition (cf. 2 Thes 2:3), and will salvifically behold the glorious Second Coming of Christ.



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