

Pastoral School of Chicago and Mid-America

THE ORTHODOX TEACHING ON PERSONAL SALVATION

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by

Victor E. Klimenko, Ph.D.

Des Plaines, Illinois

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Approval Sheet

I have examined this manuscript and verify that it was written by the candidate and meets my standards of scholarly excellence, and the standards of the Pastoral School of Chicago and Mid-America of The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

Rev. John Johnson

Date

Mentor

V. Rev. Martin Swanson, Ph.D.

Date

Dean

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ABSTRACT

In this apologetical work, the Orthodox Christian teaching on personal salvation – as it was understood, expressed, taught, and lived by the Church of the Apostolic, post-Apostolic and Patristic times – is contrasted with the later distortions by Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, which are treated in this work as different branches of the same tree. In the first Chapter, the Orthodox doctrine is presented in an easy-to-grasp format of a list of statements – each followed by a section elaborating on it – arranged in a logical order and exposing a particular aspect of the Orthodox doctrine that is in contrast with the Roman Catholic or Protestant doctrine. An effort was made, however, to present the material in each section as “standing by itself”, without “playing off” of medieval Roman Catholicism or Reformation – which were, of course, not known to the early Church. The second Chapter of the present work outlines the Orthodox criticism of the non-Orthodox Christian doctrines of personal salvation. Similarly to the first Chapter, material is presented in the format of a list of themes that may be addressed in an apologetical dialogue on the matters of personal salvation with a non-Orthodox Christian. The intent was to make a concise presentation of the Orthodox opposition in its complexity – dogmatic, historical, Scriptural, practical, logical, etc. – aimed, among other things, against simplistic arguments along the lines of “what the Bible says” and alike. The Roman Catholic and Protestant documents and texts are not extensively quoted, as their teaching is assumed to be known to the opposing side.

FOREWORD

I was prompted to choose this particular topic for the present Thesis by my apologetical dialogue in the Apologetics class. When my opponent – a Presbyterian pastor – and I got into the discussion of the subject of personal salvation and went through the usual set of Biblical quotes that the two sides read differently, I felt that it was important to emphasize that the Orthodox and the Protestant teachings on salvation do not exactly carry the same weight, as the Protestant teaching of “faith only” happens to be a 16th-century novelty that was born out of the protest against the abuses of the Papacy. Neither the Apostles, nor the Eastern Fathers, nor the Latin Fathers taught about salvation this way.

To my surprise, this statement made an impression on my opponent. He said that he does have a problem with this fact, that this is something he is “wrestling with”, and that he even finds it “troubling.” Another admission that he made was that he (in spite of his being a pastor and a seminary graduate, I would add) never questioned the Protestant views on salvation and never had to deal with the opposing views of the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Churches.

This turn in our dialogue made me also realize that it is not only important for us Orthodox to be able to explain what we believe but also to expose our opponents and listeners to our approach to the Christian faith in general and theology in particular – that

delegitimizes the approaches of the non-Orthodox denominations and individuals and makes their interpretation of particular Biblical quotes largely irrelevant.

Simply put, our teaching on salvation cannot be reduced to a set of Scriptural or Patristic quotes that we just happen to read in a certain way. Our teaching on salvation can be traced back to the early Apostolic Church through the uninterrupted continuity of worship and practice, of the life of the Church. In other words, our doctrine of salvation is embodied by the life that the Church has lived since the times of Christ and the Apostles.

This doctrine is multi-dimensional, and involves dogmatic, historical, Scriptural, ecclesiological, and other aspects. Likewise, the criticism of non-Orthodox doctrines of personal salvation can also be offered from multiple points of view. The present work is an apologetical exercise aimed at outlining this logic, inter-connectedness, and complexity to a non-Orthodox Christian believer.

As was already mentioned, the idea here is to present the Orthodox teaching on personal salvation as something that can be mostly drawn directly from the abundant Scriptural, Apostolic, and Patristic evidence and stand by itself, as opposed to the more common approach of being drawn out of the opposition to the Roman Catholic/Protestant teaching (and “beating Catholics with Protestant arguments, and Protestants with Catholic arguments”).

INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE SALVATION

“The dogma of salvation in Christ is the central dogma of Christianity, the heart of our Christian faith.”¹

We call Christ Himself our “Savior” and in our Symbol of Faith we confess our belief in “One Lord Jesus Christ... Who for us men and *for our salvation*² came down from the heavens and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried...”. By these words the Orthodox Church teaches that the salvation of the human race is achieved by the Son of God, Lord Jesus Christ, Who said about Himself, “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45).^{3, 4}

Why do we call Christ “the Savior”? Likewise, we can also ask: what is salvation? Salvation from what? If we are talking about salvation, someone must be in danger. The answers that the Orthodox Church gives to these questions are tied to the Orthodox teaching about the “original sin” and its consequences. “The doctrine of original sin has great significance in the Christian world-view, because upon it rests a whole series of other dogmas.”⁵

¹ Protosydney Michael Pomazansky. *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition* (Platina, CA: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1984), 195.

² Unless stated otherwise, all italicizing and highlighting is mine – V.K.

³ Unless a part of another quote, all Scriptural quotations are taken from the King James Version.

⁴ N. Uspensky, “Spasenie veroi” (“Salvation through Faith”), <http://www.golubinski.ru/academia/uspensky/spasenie.htm>.

⁵ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 160.

From the beginning, the Church's teaching has been that the nature of man was profoundly corrupted as a result of the fall. Adam and Eve sinned by violating God's order and breaking their connection with God – Who alone is Life. “The breaking of this communion with God can be consummated only in death, because nothing created can continue indefinitely to exist of itself. Thus, by the transgression of the first man, the principle of “sin (the devil) entered into the world and through sin death, and so death passed upon all men...”[see Romans 5:12].”⁶ Our nature was damaged and became completely dislocated. Our wholesome essence got split into three parts – mind, heart, and body – that got in conflict with each other. We inherit that damaged nature, with its *pre-disposition to sin*. “Original sin is understood by Orthodox theology as a sinful inclination which has entered into mankind and become its spiritual disease.”^{7, 8}

“...With the transgression of the commandment, the principle of sin immediately entered into man – “the law of sin”... It struck the very nature of man and quickly began to root itself in him and develop. ... The sinful inclinations in man have taken the reigning position; man has become the servant of sin (Rom. 6:7). Both the mind and the feelings have become darkened in him, and therefore his moral freedom often does not incline towards the good, but towards evil.”⁹ This damage “was transmitted to [Adam's] descendants and weighs upon them.”¹⁰ We are not *guilty* of Adam's sin (as Western

⁶ John S. Romanides, “Original Sin According to Saint Paul”, http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/frjr_sin.aspx.

⁷ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 163-164.

⁸ More often one can see the term “ancestral sin” in Orthodox theology. The Eastern Holy Fathers also used the term “original damage”, as opposed to “original sin” (which is, actually, a much later Western term.)

⁹ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 156-157.

¹⁰ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 160.

soteriology puts it) but still have to deal with its consequences, as it affected the whole of mankind.

This understanding of Adam's sin *as damage* has deep implications for our understanding of what Christ has done for us, because otherwise one could ask: why couldn't a loving God just forgive the sin of Adam? Why did Christ need to come? The Patristic answer to this is that the "original damage" cannot be "forgiven" – it can only be *cured!* Adam and Eve repented – however, "repentance [does not] recall men from what is according to their nature; all that it does is to make them cease from sinning" (St. Athanasius the Great, "On the Incarnation").¹¹

Christ did not make us sinless, as there is still sin in the world, even after the Resurrection of Christ. He delivered us from the *power* of sin, from pre-disposition to sin that man was unable to reverse by himself. The Holy Fathers say that Christ assumed the perfect nature (of Adam before fall) but with all the deficiencies (afflictions) caused by the fall. "The Divine essence, as fleshless, does not partake in suffering. But since it was His Body that got subjected to all these sufferings, we say that the Word was suffering for us, because He Who is without passion was in a suffering body" (St. Cyril of Alexandria).¹² Christ restored our human essence *in Himself*. "Jesus Christ, by uniting humankind and God in His own person, reopened for us humans the path to union with God. In His Own person Christ showed what the true "likeness to God" is, and through His redeeming and victorious sacrifice He set that likeness once again within our

¹¹ St. Athanasius, *On The Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1998), 33.

¹² St. Cyril of Alexandria, "Epistle to Nestorius," http://azbyka.ru/otechnik/?Kirill_Aleksandrijskij/poslanie1_k_nestoriyu.

reach.”¹³ This is how the Church has always understood salvation delivered to us by Jesus Christ.

However, the word “salvation” is used in the Scripture with two different meanings.

“In the preaching of the Apostles, especially worthy of attention is the fact that they precisely teach us to distinguish between the truth of the salvation of mankind as a whole, which has already been accomplished, and another truth – the necessity for a personal reception and assimilation of the gift of salvation on the part of each of the faithful, and the fact that this latter salvation depends upon each one himself. *Ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*, writes the Apostle Paul (Eph. 2:8); but he also teaches, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil. 2:12).¹⁴

“Our *objective* salvation is realized only in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whereas our *personal* or *subjective* salvation, which in the language of the New Testament is called “righteousness”, “holiness”, or “salvation” (in the narrow sense), is realized as a continuance of this objective salvation, with our personal energy or activity acting in cooperation with Divine Energy or Grace.”¹⁵

It is the Orthodox teaching of personal (subjective) salvation that we intend to outline in the present work.

¹³ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1991), 225.

¹⁴ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 197.

¹⁵ Elder Cleopa of Romania, *The Truth of Our Faith* (Thessalonica, Greece & London, Ontario: Uncut Mountain Press, 2000), 154.

CHAPTER 1. THE ORTHODOX TEACHING ON PERSONAL SALVATION

1.1 Personal salvation is the restoration of our original communion with God.

The Orthodox teaching on personal salvation is based on the teaching on the purpose of God's creation of man and the damage suffered by human nature as a result of the "original sin." God created man "in His Image and His likeness" (Genesis 1:26) – that is, God intended man to be *god by grace*. "The loss of the Kingdom of God was the most severe consequence of the fall. Adam and Eve lost blessedness that they had already tasted in Paradise."¹⁶ "After his first fall, man *himself* departed in soul from God and became unreceptive to the grace of God which was opened to him; he ceased to listen to the divine voice addressed to him, and this led to the further deepening of sin in him."¹⁷

Salvation is the restoration of the wholeness of God's image in us, of the possibility of our union with God. It is *the restoration of our original essence*. "Holy Tradition teaches that... we will be saved when we become *like Christ*... Because of our faith in Him and our desire to become God-like, we are not so much saved all at once as slowly changed into the creatures **we were created to be**."¹⁸

¹⁶ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 159.

¹⁷ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 163-164.

¹⁸ Frank Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone: The Quest for Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religion* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), 207.

1.2 Everyone is called to salvation.

Salvation is not for the “elect”, or “chosen people”. God “will have **all men** to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Furthermore, “in **every** nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:35). Christ said: “I... will draw **all men** unto me” (John 12:32). He “died for **all**, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again...” (2 Corinthians 5:15). From Christ the Apostles “have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among **all nations**...” (Romans 1:5). With the Apostles “we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of **all men**, specially of those that believe” (1 Timothy 4:10).

1.3 Personal salvation is a process.

There is a multitude of places in the Scripture testifying to the fact that salvation is not a single act but extended in time: “He that endureth to the end **shall be** saved” (Matthew 10:22), “To us who are **being** saved” (1 Corinthians 1:18), etc. Christ Himself indicates that salvation is a life-long journey: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Apostle Paul exhorts the Phillippians to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

One can get closer to or farther from salvation: “...Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Romans 13:11). Striving to become righteous, one can progress through

various degrees: "...Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).¹⁹ Christ links entering the kingdom of heaven – that is, eternal salvation – to the level of righteousness one is able to acquire.

"...Our Church, however, teaches that our personal salvation is neither a gift, nor a simple work, but rather a process and an undertaking that matures or develops gradually and is realized in the cooperation of two persons: God and man."²⁰

1.4 The essence and the goal of personal salvation is deification (*theosis*).

This process of the restoration of our original communion with God *is* our "personal salvation". As Christians, we seek not simply blessings from God but *God Himself* – and our salvation is the experiential knowledge of God. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). "...The knowledge of God and eternal salvation... are inseparable from each other" (St. Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata").²¹

Growing in the knowledge of God, in communion with God, one becomes more and more *deified* – "in the sense that the Holy Spirit dwells within Christian believers and

¹⁹ Schaeffer, *ibid.*, 74.

²⁰ Elder Cleopa, *ibid.*, 153.

²¹ St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 4:22, <http://www.biblicalstudies.ru/Lib/Father2/Kliment8.html>.

transforms them into the image of God in Christ, eventually endowing them in the resurrection with immortality and God's perfect moral character."²²

Compared to the multitude of terms that the New Testament uses as synonyms for "salvation" – "redemption", "reconciliation", "adoption", "justification", etc. – a later Patristic term *theosis* seems to best encompass the most important aspects of it.

There is an abundance of Scriptural and Patristic evidence showing that the Church has always believed in the possibility of our *theosis* and has seen it as the means of our salvation. "When Christ said, "Repent, for the **Kingdom of Heaven** is at hand (Matthew 4:17)," this is a call to a life of Theosis."²³ "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19). "He, indeed, assumed humanity that we may **become God**" (St. Athanasius of Alexandria, "On the Incarnation").²⁴ "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). "Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, **attaching man to God** by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, **by means of communion with God...**" (St. Irenaeus of Lyons,

²² Carmen Fragapane, "Salvation by Christ: A Response to the Credenda/Agenda," http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/frag_salv.aspx.

²³ Archimandrite George, *Theosis: The True Purpose of Human Life* (Mount Athos, Greece: Holy Monastery of St. Gregorios, 2006), 9.

²⁴ St. Athanasius, *ibid.*, 93.

“Against Heresies”, Book 5, 1:1).²⁵ “(Christ) will have with us such a unity by grace as He Himself with the Father by nature... That glory that the Father gave to the Son, the Son gives to us as well by grace... Having once become our relative by flesh and **having made us partakers of His Divinity**, He (by that) made us His relatives... We have such a unity with Christ... that a husband has with his wife and wife with the husband” (St. Symeon the New Theologian).²⁶

“St. Maximus the Confessor says: “Strong and sure basis of the hope for deification of man’s essence is God’s becoming man, which makes man god in the same measure as God Himself became man. For it is clear that He who became man without sin, can deify the (human) essence without turning into Divinity, having lifted it up to Himself in the same measure, in which He humbled Himself for man.” St. Maximus refers to God as “desiring salvation and hungering for deification” of men. By His immeasurable love for man Christ ascended Golgotha and suffered death on the Cross, which reconciled and united man to God.”²⁷

It is important to emphasize that, according to the Patristic teaching on *theosis*, the human person is not getting absorbed, or “swallowed”, by Divinity. In His “High Priest’s prayer”, Jesus Christ prays to God the Father about His followers that “they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (John

²⁵ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, Book 5, 1:1, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.vii.ii.html> (accessed April 9, 2010).

²⁶ Quoted from Bishop (now Metropolitan) Hilarion (Alfeyev), *Tainstvo very: Vvedenie v pravoslavnoe dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie (The Mystery of Faith: Introduction to Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, Chapter 6, “Iskuplenie” (“Redemption”), http://bishop.hilarion.orthodoxia.org/1_3_3_1_9_5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

17:21). Just as three Persons of the Holy Trinity dwell in each other without losing their individual character, we are also called to “dwell” in God without losing our identity. Through *theosis* we, of course, do not become God *by essence* – we become God *by grace*. Our communion is with the Divine energies – that is, the manifestations of God in this world – not the essence of God.

Finally, it should be noted that, since Christ saved the whole person, our personal salvation involves *both* soul and body. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Romans 12:1). Holiness is not just a moral perfection. Many Orthodox Saints have physically *demonstrated* the fruits of *theosis*. From the lives of the Holy Fathers of the early Church we know many examples of visible, bodily signs accompanying *theosis* – like uncreated light (“the light of Tabor”) surrounding the living Saints. The bodies of some Saints have been miraculously preserved from corruption. In Mark 17 Christ lists the outward signs that will accompany those who will have achieved *theosis*.

1.5 Personal salvation is both in the future and now.

In accordance with the teaching on salvation as *theosis*, the Church has always understood salvation as something that starts and can be already experienced in our earthly life. Christ Himself referred to salvation in present tense: “Behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21) – and assured 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” (Mark 9:1). One can say that “we are gradually saved as we are deified, by doing Christ’s teaching and His commandments.”²⁸

The writings of Apostle St. John the Theologian are especially full of references to eternal life as something already present: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life...” (John 6:54). “We know that we have passed from death unto life...” (1 John 3:14). “...And ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him...” (1 John 3:15). Etc.

Since eternal life is communion with God, the presence of God in us, “it does not have in its essence anything that would prevent its revelation here on Earth; in other words, eternal life – as a state of a human soul – does not depend on the conditions of space and time, does not belong only to the world beyond the grave, but depends exclusively on one’s moral development, and thus, for the elect, can begin in this life.”²⁹

We are not laboring for some future reward, since “for anyone longing for truth and life, that very truth and that very life *are* the reward; because it was for them that he was laboring.”³⁰

One can find a complete Patristic consensus on understanding of our spiritual life as a development that starts here on Earth and continues in the afterlife. Eternal salvation is not something qualitatively new – but a full revelation of what was sown by one in his

²⁸ Schaeffer, *ibid.*, 207.

²⁹ Archimandrite (later Patriarch) Sergii (Stragorodskii), *Pravoslavnoe uchenie o spasenii (The Orthodox Teaching on Salvation)*, Chapter 3, “Vozmezdie” (“Redemption”), http://azbyka.ru/dictionary/17/sergiy_uchenie_o_spasenii.shtml.

³⁰ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*

earthly spiritual struggle. A great ascetic of the 4th century, St. Macarius the Great, who had tasted communion with God in his earthly life, was so permeated with that experience, that he almost could not imagine what else could be given to his soul beyond the grave³¹ and was inclined to believe that on the day of Resurrection it will be just the body that “will be covered and glorified with the Light of God that there is in the human soul **now** – so that the body could reign with the soul, even **now** partaking in the Kingdom of Christ, consoled and enlightened by the eternal light” (St. Macarius the Great, Discourse 2, “On the Kingdom of Darkness”).³²

Jumping slightly ahead, we will add, that, it is in the nature of the Church in general to be simultaneously the preparation for the future (eternal life) and already the fulfillment, the foretaste of it: “On the one hand, the Church herself *is* preparation: she “prepares” us for life eternal. Thus her function is to transform our whole life into preparation. By her preaching, doctrine and prayer she constantly reveals to us that the ultimate “value” which gives meaning and direction to our lives is at the “end”, is “to come”, is to be hoped for, expected, anticipated. ... Yet, on the other hand, the Church is also and essentially *fulfillment*. The events which gave her birth and which constitute the very source of her faith and life have taken place. Christ has come. In Him man was deified and has ascended to heaven. The Holy Spirit has come and His coming has inaugurated the Kingdom of God. Grace has been given and the Church truly is “heaven on earth”, for in her we have access to Christ’s table in His Kingdom. **We have received the Holy**

³¹ Stragorodskii, *ibid*.

³² Quoted from Stragorodskii, *ibid*.

Spirit and can partake, here and now, of the new life and be in communion with God.”³³

1.6 Faith is a starting point of one’s personal salvation.

How does one embark on the journey of *theosis*? First, he needs his will to be awakened to the desire to be with God. *Faith* is what awakes it. Faith is a driving force and the “heart” of one’s spiritual life. How does one get it? God gives faith to those who seek Him. One has to be a seeker of the truth, attentive to his conscience and checking it against the law known to him. Seeing that “spark of seeking”, God will always help.

Without faith in Christ, one cannot be saved because He does not know that God is all-forgiving Love. Knowing himself to be a sinner who deserves punishment, he sees God as an all-powerful, hostile, and unmerciful ruler of the Universe. In this state, being frightened of God and awaiting punishment, one simply cannot spontaneously turn to love for Him – without which there is no salvation. “How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed?” (Romans 10:14).³⁴ One cannot learn that God is a merciful, loving Father because “no man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). One can only learn that God is Love because “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18). Through faith in Christ one gets “boldness and access [to God] with confidence” (Ephesians 3:12). And, seeing that God is a loving Father, one begins to long for Him and love Him in return. Only through faith

³³ Alexander Schmemmann. *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 16-17.

³⁴ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 5, “Vera” (“Faith”).

one can call God “my God” – that is, freely associating oneself with God. Thus through faith a close personal union is established between a believer and God. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15).

The Holy Scripture and the early Church Fathers are absolutely clear on this importance of faith as an outset of one’s journey towards salvation: “He that **believeth** and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that **believe** on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). “Without **faith** it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must **believe** that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt **believe** in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man **believeth** unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever **believeth** on him shall not be ashamed... For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:9-13). “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and **believe** the gospel” (Mark 1:15). “...And so we, having been called through His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety or works which we wrought in holiness of heart, but through **faith**, whereby the Almighty God justified all men that have been from the beginning...” (St. Clement, “First Epistle to Corinthians”).³⁵

³⁵ St. Clement of Rome, “First Epistle to Corinthians”, 32:4, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-lightfoot.html> (accessed April 9, 2010).

Reading the above quotes, one can ask, though: is faith all that is needed for salvation? Here it is important to note that there are two parallel narratives both in the Holy Scripture, and in the Patristic works: one gives an impression of salvation through “saving faith”, and the other preaches the importance of *works* in addition to faith. In every case one has to be careful and should try to understand what each writer was talking about and whom he was addressing.

In the early Church, “faith” meant the entire lifestyle of a believer – as opposed to remaining a pagan or a Jew. Good deeds were taken as an integral part of such “faith”. On the other hand, when talking specifically about “faith” *and* “works”, an Apostle or a Holy Father most often desired to stress that “cold faith” – that is, being a Christian in name only, for social, familial or other reasons – could not save one: one actually has to “work out his salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Thus both narratives – “faith” and “faith *and* works” – are consistent with each other.

In addition to a subjective spiritual experience, “faith” is understood by the Church also as “a *doctrine* to be followed, that is, the entire content of Christ’s instruction to the Apostles (Mt. 28:20), “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3): the teachings of the Church. To believe in Christ as Savior and God is to also believe all that He taught. In other words, the Orthodox say that faith is not merely “that we believe” but “what we believe”.”³⁶

³⁶ Constantine Platis, *Dance, O Isaiah: Questions and Answers on Some of the Differences between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Other Faiths* (Boston, MA: Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston, 2000), 55.

Simply confessing Christ as Lord does not earn you salvation: “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”(Matthew 7:21). Demons are not saved, even though they have faith too: “...The devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19) – and even confess Christ: “A certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:16-17).

1.7 Repentance is a necessary condition of one’s personal salvation.

Thus faith is only the beginning. “Faith only reveals to one the truth that for his prior sins God will not punish him, that, on the opposite, He is ready to accept him and pardon him and recognize him as His son. But this... only clears for one the path to God but does not do anything with him. Before that he was afraid to turn to God, but now he got to know God and stopped fearing Him, and, on the opposite, grew to love Him. But he is still the same man. It is necessary for him not just to begin loving God but actively, really turn to Him.”³⁷

In order to believe *truly*, it is necessary for one to understand the magnitude of his sins forgiven by God, to realize that he is a sinner worthy of death. One can only have true love for God when he realizes the true horror of his sins that God forgave him for free.

³⁷ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 5, “Vera” (“Faith”).

This state – *repentance* – can even be called “the *beginning* of faith.” Without judging himself, one will not ask God for forgiveness – and without asking for forgiveness, one will not receive it and thus will not be saved. One’s return to God starts with repentance. Seeing it, God, like the father in the parable of prodigal son, runs to meet us: “when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

Faith accompanied by repentance – “the faith of the Wise Thief”³⁸ – is thus the true faith that saves. Christ expects repentance from His followers: “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). And He makes it clear that the possibility of one’s salvation is tied to his repentance: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: **repent** ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and **repent**, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou **repent**” (Revelation 2:5). Furthermore, resistance to the Truth once it is known to one – that is, the *lack* of repentance – is something with which salvation becomes impossible: “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men” (Matthew 12:31).

True repentance – the ability to see the depth of one’s sins – is the foundation of the entire “building” of Christian life, which is humility (“Blessed are the poor in spirit...”), the realization that one cannot rid himself of his sins without Christ. The Holy Fathers

³⁸ A.I. Osipov, public lectures, http://www.predanie.ru/mp3/Lekcii_professora_Alekseja_Ilicha_Osipova/.

agree on the primacy of humility in one's spiritual life. We can note here that Adam had all gifts of God but he did not have experience of humility.³⁹

1.8 Baptism is the gateway on one's path to salvation.

Repentance is still not sufficient for salvation. One needs to reject the old life of sin and start the new life. But one cannot be born into the new life spontaneously, as he will keep coming back to his old life. So we need the grace of God to finish what we cannot finish by ourselves. "For he that intends to pursue virtue ought to condemn wickedness first, and then go in pursuit of it. For repentance cannot prove them [the Hebrews] clean. For this cause they were straightway baptized, that what they were unable to accomplish by themselves, this might be effected by the grace of Christ. Neither then does repentance suffice for purification, but **men must first receive baptism**" (St. John Chrysostom, "Homilies of the Epistle to the Hebrews", Homily 9, "On Hebrews 6:1-3").⁴⁰

The early Apostolic and Patristic Church was absolutely clear that baptism was essential for one's salvation, as Christ Himself said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). In His dialogue with Nicodemus, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot**

³⁹ Osipov, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Homily 9, "On Hebrews 6:1-3", <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf114.v.xiii.html> (accessed May 14, 2010).

enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be **born again.**”

(John 3:3-7)

This quote has been the basis of the Orthodox belief about **the necessity of baptism for one’s salvation.** In Chapter 13 of his “On Baptism,” Tertullian proves that salvation through pure faith (“thy faith hath made thee whole” (Matthew 9:22, Mark 10:52, etc.)) only existed before the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. Then Christ imposed the law of baptism, saying, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). Christ’s definition of John 3:5 “...**has tied faith to the necessity of baptism.** Accordingly, all thereafter who became believers used to be baptized. Then it was, too, that Paul, when he believed, was baptized; and this is the meaning of the precept which the Lord had given him when smitten with the plague of loss of sight, saying, “Arise, and enter Damascus; there shall be demonstrated to thee what thou oughtest to do,” to wit—be baptized, which was the only thing lacking to him. That point excepted, he had sufficiently learnt and believed “the Nazarene” to be “the Lord, the Son of God”⁴¹.

Since the earliest times, the Church has believed in the saving, redemptive action of baptism. “Baptism doth also now **save us**” (1 Peter 3:21). “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the **remission of sins,** and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). “We enter, then, the

⁴¹ Tertullian, *On Baptism*, Chapter 13, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.vi.iii.xiii.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

font once: once are sins washed away.”⁴² It, perhaps, goes without saying, that the Church has never believed in the “magical” powers of baptism. The condition for receiving the forgiveness of one’s sins in baptism is his free desire to stop the old life of sin (that is, repentance.) The visible form (immersion) is the symbol of the rejection of that old life.

It is also important to emphasize that baptism has never been seen as a “legal” act of giving the pardon of sins committed. In baptism, one’s sins are not just forgiven by God but *erased*. The early Church believed in the **regenerative power** of baptism:

“According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of **regeneration**, and **renewing** of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). In his First Apology, St. Justin the Martyr describes the early-Church rite of baptism: the new converts “are brought by us where there is water, and are **regenerated** in the same manner in which we were ourselves **regenerated**... In order that we... may **obtain in the water the remission of sins** formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be **born again**, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe” (Chapter 61).⁴³ In general, a complete destruction of one’s sins is the only form of forgiveness of sins known to Christianity.⁴⁴

Having developed the *longing* for God through faith, one truly unites to Christ only in baptism. The Church has always understood baptism as death and Resurrection with

⁴² Tertullian, *ibid.*, Chapter 16.

⁴³ St. Justin the Martyr, *The First Apology*, Chapter 61, “Christian baptism”, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.ii.lxi.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

⁴⁴ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 4, “Spasenie” (“Salvation”).

Christ: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). The new life that one receives in baptism is a mystical union with Christ that Christ Himself likened to one between the branches and the grapevine: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:5-6). In baptism one truly accepts Christ into himself, as a way of life, becomes Christ’s, “puts on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

Justification that one receives in baptism is Christ Himself (St. Macarius the Great.)⁴⁵

Baptism restores the original predisposition of the human soul and human nature in general.⁴⁶

1.9 Personal salvation requires a sustained effort even after baptism.

The Holy Fathers taught that the grace of justification that one receives in baptism is, in a way, temporary – and can be lost.⁴⁷ The seed of the new life received in baptism, “the firstfruits of the Spirit” (Romans 8:23), may remain without fruit in the life of a lazy Christian – just like the talent from the parable of talents (Matthew 25:14-30) or the seed from the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-8) that did not fall into good ground.

⁴⁵ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

In baptism our sins are washed away, but we do not become sinless. Through our weaknesses sins find their way back into our life. Having now Christ in us – Who has ended the dominance of sin over the powers of our soul – we nonetheless have to keep fighting the remnants of our sinful habits. It is not enough to simply reject our old sinful life: it has to be completely eradicated. Our salvation will become eternal if we erase from ourselves the very *possibility* of sin.⁴⁸ Likewise, we will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven if we remain satisfied with the grace of justification we received in our baptism and do not seek to increase it. For this reason we have the command of the Apostle to “quench not the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We should not stop “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13) – in other words, we should not stop until we are *deified*.

The teaching of the Church about spiritual life as a continuing effort has a solid basis in the words of Christ Himself – Who said: “Narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12). “Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:23-24).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

1.10 Personal salvation is acquired through fulfilling Christ's commandments.

What plan should one follow in his continuing spiritual struggle after baptism? The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11) lay out this process in general. There is also a branch of Patristic teaching – called *ascetics* – and an abundance of texts that offer a more detailed plan. The ascetic Fathers have identified eight main sinful dispositions of soul – called *passions* – and the stages through which they take possession of one's soul. Based on their personal experience, these Fathers also developed comprehensive methods of combating each passion and planting in one's soul a virtue opposite to it.⁴⁹

While the overview of the ascetic teaching goes beyond the scope of the present work, we will only stress that the early Apostolic and Patristic Church never looked at one's struggle to fulfill Christ's Commandments – *works*, in traditional terminology – as the means to *earn* salvation. In fact, the Church has always taught that we cannot fulfill any Commandment perfectly. Saints would weep over their virtues for this reason. But then why is trying to keep the Commandments important? Because it opens for one the real picture of himself – the state of that “original damage” that we inherited from Adam. As St. Peter of Damascus said, “the first sign of the beginning of the health of the soul is seeing your sins innumerable as sea sand.”⁵⁰

In other words, in Orthodoxy our good works are looked at as means of *getting to know ourselves*. Forcing oneself to diligently keep Christ's Commandments leads one to

⁴⁹ One can see, for example, St. Ignatius (Bryanchaninov), *Asketicheskie opyty* (*Ascetic Essays*).

⁵⁰ Osipov, *ibid.*

humility. And this is where salvation begins. This is when one realizes that he needs Christ – as one would realize that he is sick and needs a physician. According to the Holy Fathers, before you realize who you really are you cannot even be called a Christian. Seeing how afflicted you are is what puts you before Christ. This is why our works matter! They are not “merits”, they do not *earn* us anything – but they are the means of learning the truth about ourselves that leads us to true faith in Christ.

In general, God is seeking in us the ability to accept communion with Him – and readily gives it to us in proportion with our ability to accept.⁵¹ This ability is what matters. This is why even those who did not have a chance to be baptized (e.g., Christian martyrs, or the Wise Thief) can still get into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the zeal towards good that makes us the members of the Kingdom of Heaven and gives us the ability to accept holiness. It is the disposition of one’s soul that counts: the desire of the Kingdom of Christ. If one is “poor in Spirit” and truly longs for God, salvation will be his, even if he has not done enough good deeds. “It is not those who work that are saved but those who spiritually are always with God, who live for God.”⁵²

It is through keeping the Commandments that the virtues are planted in our souls. Our life on Earth can thus be viewed as the time we have for the “upbringing” of our soul and creating in it the disposition that allows us communion with God. Christ does not need the *actions* that we perform when we keep His Commandments, He does not need our suffering – what He needs is the internal *state of our soul* that manifests itself when we,

⁵¹ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*

⁵² Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 5, “Vera” (“Faith”).

for example, turn the other cheek to our offender. “My son, give me thine heart” (Proverbs 23:26).⁵³

Understood this way, the importance of *works* for one’s salvation finds abundant support in the Holy Scripture.

Christ Himself said: “If a man love me, he will **keep my words**: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). The necessity of works is further illustrated in the following passage: to the man who asked “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”, Jesus says what he needs *to do* – and this is not just to have faith or be baptized: “go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:17-21).

Jesus Christ will judge people based on what they have *done* and *not done*, not whether they believed – “I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in”, etc. Those who have not done these things will “go away into everlasting punishment but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:31-46). “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” (Matthew 7:21). The judgment will be according to one’s works – not faith or membership in the Church: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things

⁵³ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 1, “Pravovoe zhizneponimanie pered sudom Svyashennogo Pisaniya i Svyashennogo Predaniya” (“The Legalistic Mentality before the Judgment by the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition”).

done in his body, **according to that he hath done**, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). “He shall reward every man **according to his works**” (Matthew 16:27). “The righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man **according to his deeds**” (Romans 2:5-6). “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, **according to their works**. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man **according to their works**” (Revelation 20:12-13).

There can be found even a few Old Testament quotes about redemption (forgiveness of sins) *as a result of* works: “Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms maketh an atonement for sins” (Sirach 3:30). “For alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin” (Tobit 12:9).

And, of course, there is a strong Patristic consensus pointing to the necessity of works for one’s salvation.

In the 2nd-century text “The Shepherd” by Hermas⁵⁴, that even enjoyed the status of Scripture in some parts of the early Church, here are the commandments given to the author by the Divine visitor (“the Shepherd”): “Abstain not from any good works, but do them. Hear, he said, what the virtue of those good works is **which you must do, that you**

⁵⁴ Hermas, *The Shepherd*, Part II, “Commands”, <http://ministries.tliquest.net/theology/apocryphas/nt/hermcom.htm> (accessed April 8, 2010).

may be saved. The first of all is faith and the fear of the Lord, then charity, concord, equity, truth, patience, and chastity” (Part II, “Commands”, Command 8, Verse 8).

Interestingly, faith is mentioned in this list as one of the works. “But now I say to you, **if you will not observe these commands, but will neglect them, you will not be saved**” (Part II, “Commands”, Command 12, Verse 16). Neglecting the commandments will result in the loss of salvation.

St. Clement of Rome, in his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians,⁵⁵ writes: “Let us clothe ourselves in concord, being lowly-minded and temperate, holding ourselves aloof from all back biting and evil speaking, being **justified by works** and not by words”(30:3).

“What then must we do, brethren? Must we idly abstain from doing good, and forsake love? May the Master never allow this to befall us at least; but let us hasten with instancy and zeal to **accomplish every good work**” (33:1). “It is therefore needful that we should be zealous unto well doing, for of Him are all things: since He forewarneth us saying, Behold, the Lord, and His reward is before His face, to **recompense each man according to his work.** He exhorteth us therefore to believe on Him with our whole heart, and to be not idle nor careless unto every good work” (34:2-4).

In his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians,⁵⁶ St. Clement specifically mentions the importance of keeping Christ’s Commandments: “Nothing shall deliver us from eternal punishment, if we should disobey His commandments” (Chapter 6). So does St. Polycarp of Smyrna

⁵⁵ St. Clement, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ St. Clement of Rome, “Second Epistle to Corinthians”, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/2clement-lightfoot.html> (accessed April 8, 2010).

in his Epistle to the Philippians⁵⁷ (110-140 AD): “Now He that raised Him from the dead **will raise us also; if we do His will and walk in His commandments** and love the things which He loved, abstaining from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness; not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing or blow for blow or cursing for cursing; but remembering the words which the Lord spake, as He taught; Judge not that ye be not judged. Forgive, and it shall be forgiven to you. Have mercy that ye may receive mercy” (2:2-2:3).

1.11 God does not force salvation on anyone but assists those who *choose* it.

As was already mentioned above, the Orthodox teaching on salvation is based on the doctrine of free will. In his fall man did not lose his free will. Man could still choose to be with God or without Him – he just could not move by himself back towards God, as the path was closed by the “original sin.”

Christ cleared that path, and now our salvation is the matter solely of our choice. God honors our choice – whatever it is. This is the reason God does not make demons disappear: God respects their free will, as free will is a feature of divinity (that, unfortunately, can be misused.) We are saved through cooperation of our will with God’s – called *synergy* in Orthodox theology – the doctrine famously expressed by St.

Athanasius the Great as “God does not save us without us.”⁵⁸ Christ Himself promised His response to those seeking His help: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall

⁵⁷ St. Polycarp of Smyrna, “Epistle to Philippians”, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/polycarp-lightfoot.html> (accessed April 9, 2010).

⁵⁸ Osipov, *ibid.*

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” (Matthew 7:7-8).

On the other hand, God does not force salvation on anyone: otherwise, this would not be “salvation” but rather His re-making us into something that contradicts His Own original design of us. First He made us in His image and now He “saves” us by taking His image away from us and essentially equating us with all other living creatures? When St. John Chrysostom was asked why not everybody is saved, he said, “Because you yourselves do not want to [be saved]. Even though the grace is indeed the grace, and it saves, but it saves only those who desire it, but not those who do not want it and turn away from it.”⁵⁹ Likewise, the Dread Judgment is dread not because someone will be put in hell against his will – but because that will be the final *self-determination* of each human.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, in his “Against heresies”, Book 4, Chapter 37, says that our Lord’s expression, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matthew 23:37), “set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, **to obey the behests... of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God**, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually. And therefore does He give good counsel to all.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, St. Irenaeus says, “God therefore has given that which is good, as the apostle tells us in this Epistle [Romans 2:4-

⁵⁹ Osipov, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ St. Irenaeus, *ibid.*, Book 4.

5, 7 – V.K.], and they who work it shall receive glory and honour, because they have done that which is good **when they had it in their power not to do it**; but those who do it not shall receive the just judgment of God, because they did not work good **when they had it in their power so to do.**⁶¹ Obviously, the early Church believed that God’s judgment – and, as a result, the possibility of one’s salvation – is affected by what one consciously and freely does or does not do.

“The grace of God does not enslave the conscience and freedom of man – but, having revealed to him the love of God and the horror of sin, it leaves it up to man to strive towards this love and... communion with it.”⁶²

1.12 No one can ever be assured of salvation.

The early Church did not believe that baptism guarantees one salvation: “...After we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may **offer hearty prayers** in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so **that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation.**” (St. Justin the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 5, “Vera” (“Faith”).

Martyr, First Apology, Chapter 65).⁶³ Again, it is worth noting that the everlasting salvation is linked to one's *works*.

Even Apostle Paul himself did not feel that his salvation was guaranteed: "...Now is our salvation **nearer** than when we believed" (Romans 13:11) – "nearer" but not a "done deal". "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). We notice immediately that for the Apostle the possibility of his salvation was tied to his ascetic feats. "...If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended..." (Philippians 3:11-13).

The Scripture does say that it is possible for someone, after he has believed, to fall away from faith and lose his salvation: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Peter 2:20-21). This is the reason why the Church never glorifies any living person as a Saint.

⁶³ St. Justin the Martyr, *ibid*.

Even the greatest Saints, up to their last hour, never took for granted that they were going to heaven. It was said about St. Sysoes the Great, who, being on his deathbed, saw the angels come to take his soul and told his disciples that he wanted to ask the angels to give him more time because, in his opinion, *he had not even started to repent yet*. Many Saints would repeat throughout their life the words “Everybody will be saved, I alone will perish.”⁶⁴

1.13 Salvation is possible only in the Church.

“Church and sacraments are the means appointed by God whereby we may acquire the sanctifying Spirit and be transformed into the divine likeness.”⁶⁵

The doctrine of the Church has been of paramount importance to Orthodox soteriology since the earliest times. Christ founded the Church (Matt. 16:17), loved it and “gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). The Church is Christ’s mystical Body (Eph. 1:23), “the pillar and the foundation of the Truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), and “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). The Church has been given the Truth, and it is guided by the Holy Spirit – which makes the Church infallible. One who seeks the Truth will find it by turning to the Church and submitting himself to it.

The early Church was small, visible and well-defined. To become a “Christian” meant to join that visible Church: “And the Lord added to the Church daily” (Acts 2:47). And

⁶⁴ Ware, *ibid.*, 236.

⁶⁵ Ware, *ibid.*, 238.

there was a clear boundary between the Church and the rest of the world: “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them” (Acts 5:13). One would become a member of the Church through the Sacrament of Baptism, after one to three years of intense preparation – with frequent exorcisms, learning the Scripture, mastering prayer, fasting, and other aspects of spiritual life.⁶⁶ All of these things were possible only in the Church. It is natural that the early Church believed that “outside the Church, there is no salvation, because salvation *is* the Church” (St. Cyprian of Carthage). St. Cyprian even went as far as to say that “one cannot have God as his Father if he does not have the Church as his Mother.”⁶⁷

In a purely practical sense we can view the Church as a tool that God instituted for our salvation. In the Church we can partake of the fruits of Redemption delivered to us by Christ. Having become members of the Church through baptism, we nevertheless still have the same corrupt nature, inclined towards sin (“ancestral sin”). It requires an effort on our part to stay clean after our baptism. “Even those full of the Holy Spirit have natural thoughts in them and the will to consent to them” (St. Macarius of Egypt).⁶⁸ The righteousness we receive in baptism is the seed of Christ, “the new Adam” – it is the opportunity to be like Christ. We need to guard that seed and let it grow. This is why we need the Mysteries (Sacraments) that the Church offers to us – most importantly, Repentance and Eucharist.

⁶⁶ Casimir A. Kucharek, *The Sacramental Mysteries: A Byzantine Approach* (Alleluia Press, 1976), 85-99.

⁶⁷ St. Cyprian of Carthage, “Kniga o edinstve cerkvi” (“Book on the Unity of the Church”), <http://apologia.narod.ru/earlyfat/fath/IIIage/kipri1.htm>.

⁶⁸ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 4, “Spasenie” (“Salvation”).

The grace of baptism lost because of sins can be restored in the Mystery of Repentance. The Church has always viewed confession of sins as “second baptism”: just like in baptism, God, seeing one’s true desire to reject sin, erases it and gives him strength to stay in this decision. This reconciliation to God is something we are called to renew again and again. In 2 Corinthians Apostle Paul, addressing the baptized Christians, says: “We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

The Sacrament of the Eucharist – “the Mystery of Mysteries”, instituted by Christ Himself at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25) – unites us to Christ not just spiritually but bodily as well, as Christ saved not just human soul but the whole man. Christ Himself said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:53-54).

“The early Church understood the presence of Christ in the Eucharist in a literal way, preached it and wrote about it.”⁶⁹ “East, West, North and South—the testimony of early Christian writers is always the same: the Eucharist is literally the body and blood of Christ. Not one dissenting opinion!”⁷⁰ Here is one sample text from the 2nd century: “For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by

⁶⁹ Kucharek, *ibid.*, 162.

⁷⁰ Kucharek, *ibid.*, 166.

the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh” (St. Justin the Martyr, First Apology, Chapter 66).⁷¹

The Sacrament of the Eucharist was seen as the last act finalizing one’s membership in the Church. In his First Apology, St. Justin the Martyr describes how in the early Church the “born again” (the newly baptized) were immediately led into the assembly to participate in the Eucharist with everyone else (Chapter 65).⁷²

The Church believes that a parable of Christ, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Matthew 13:33), refers to the mysterious transformation of man and his communion with the Holy Spirit that happens in the Church through the Mysteries. Just like leaven makes leavened dough not instantly, the new person is created not instantly, not magically. As was already mentioned above about baptism, the Church has never believed in the “magic” action of the Holy Mysteries. “According to your faith be it unto you” (Matthew 9:29). Faith, self-examination, and repentance are still required in order for them to have a salvific effect. It is possible that some believers partake in them unworthily: “...Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's

⁷¹ St. Justin the Martyr, *ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1 Corinthians 27:30).

The Church is also the keeper of the tradition of personal salvation, “the life in Christ.” All the Holy Fathers that we have quoted so far are considered the Teachers of the Church not because they were the most learned and knowledgeable but because they were *holy* – that is, they, through the life of asceticism, repentance and prayer, cleansed themselves from their sinful passions and reached *theosis*. The example of such life was given to the Church by Christ Himself.

1.14 Christ’s life on Earth is an example of personal salvation for us to follow.

“We know that Jesus Christ did not bring to us just a teaching, and that the job of the Apostles and the Church was not only to listen to the discourses of Jesus Christ and then pass them in their literal precision from generation to generation: for this purpose the best means is not an oral Tradition but some stone tablets. We know that Jesus Christ brought to us first and foremost a new life and taught it the Apostles, and that the task of the Church Tradition is not just to convey the teaching, but to pass from generation to generation this very life conceived with Christ, to pass that which one cannot be passed by any word, any writing, but only through direct personal interaction.”⁷³

⁷³ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, “Vmesto predisloviya: vopros o lichnom spasenii” (“Instead of Foreword: The Question of Personal Salvation”).

Christ said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). And in His Own person Christ showed us salvation – that is, “what the true “likeness to God” is...”⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Ware, *ibid.*, 225.

CHAPTER 2. THE ORTHODOX CRITICISM OF THE WESTERN CHRISTIAN TEACHING ON PERSONAL SALVATION

The two main “bastions” of Western non-Orthodox Christianity – Roman Catholicism and Protestantism – are not as opposite as many tend to think. In Protestantism, we have “a legitimate, although very insubordinate, offspring” of Latinism.⁷⁵ Protestantism “did not re-establish ancient Christianity, it only replaced one distortion of Christianity with another...”⁷⁶

Many characteristic features of the Roman Catholic and Protestant approaches to personal salvation stem from the same historic background.

2.1 St. Augustine’s radical teaching on original sin as the heart of the Western non-Orthodox theology of personal salvation.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), “perhaps, the most important writer of the Christian West”, was a bishop in Roman North Africa. The legalistic view of salvation – that has truly become a “trademark” of Western Christendom – would not have been possible without his theology of original sin that had grown out of his famous dispute with

⁷⁵ St. Hilarion (Troitsky), “Christianity or the Church?,” http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/christianity_church_e.htm.

⁷⁶ St. Hilarion, *ibid.*

Pelagius, “a British ascetic who lived c. 350-425 and taught in Rome as a well-respected moral preacher and biblical commentator.”⁷⁷

The dispute started with St. Augustine’s publication of his *Confessions* – an autobiography detailing his early spiritual struggles. Pelagius and his circle found two themes in this work to be particularly objectionable – “and so began a controversy that was to mark all of Augustine’s later life, and cause him to elaborate a profound and careful **doctrine of grace that would become determinative for Western Catholicism.**”⁷⁸

First of all, St. Augustine was “setting forth the idea that in fallen man any dependent freedom to do good has been completely annihilated, unless grace comes to his aid.”⁷⁹ In many examples from his early days as a Christian he “seemed to suggest that his moral will was rendered impotent in the face of so many difficulties, and he could only be saved when God came to his assistance and gave him the saving grace to be converted.”⁸⁰

Pelagius countered this “fatalist” view of salvation with an “optimist” one – emphasizing his belief that, while God did give grace to humans, “his primary grace was the freedom to choose and respond. Those who chose the path of goodness would be given further encouragement by God to progress in the spiritual life.”⁸¹ His teaching – while not

⁷⁷ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 256.

⁷⁸ McGuckin, *ibid.*, 40.

⁷⁹ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁰ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 162.

⁸¹ McGuckin, *ibid.*, 257.

immediately standing out as non-Orthodox – was still dangerously bordering on turning “Christianity into a simplistic cult of moral “self-improvement””, where sin and sinfulness were seen solely as a matter of one’s conscious moral choice.

This difference in St. Augustine’s and Pelagius’ views on the process of one’s salvation was rooted in their difference of views on Adam’s sin.

St. Augustine saw Adam’s sin as “a deliberate preference of human pride to the law of God... which then became endemic to the human race. Sin... was in the very bones of the race, as it were, transmitted to the species as a whole”, almost like an infection. As a result, “the human race’s capacity for free moral choice was so damaged... that even the desire to return to God has first to be supplied by God’s prevenient grace.”⁸²

Pelagius denied the inheritance of Adam’s sin by humans. He taught that people are born innocent, with a pure and incorrupt nature – the same as Adam’s – but fall into sin because of their moral freedom, thus producing their own personal “version” of the fall – again, the same as Adam’s – however, the effects of this fall can be completely erased through one’s moral effort. In Pelagius’ view, “disease and death are characteristic of this nature from the creation, and are not the consequences of original sin.”⁸³

Eventually, St. Augustine “won” the dispute, as Pelagianism was condemned at the Third Ecumenical Council. The Orthodox East largely stayed out of this controversy, seeing the

⁸² McGuckin, *ibid.*, 257.

⁸³ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 162.

dispute as a local Western affair and both theologies as opposite extremes. As we already mentioned in Chapter 1, the Orthodox position could be, in a way, seen as a compromise between the Augustinian and the Pelagian views: that in the process of our salvation, our human free will cooperates with Divine grace.

St. Augustine's exaggeratedly negative teaching on original sin and its consequences for human freedom and spiritual capacity – clearly a *theologumenon* not supported by Patristic consensus – became nonetheless the dominant teaching and, eventually, the doctrine of the Western (Roman Catholic) Church. The main problem is that “the Western notion [of original sin] compromises the spiritual goal of man, his *theosis*...”⁸⁴

2.2 Roman law and secular customs as the foundation of the Western non-Orthodox theology of personal salvation.

From Apostolic times, the Christian Church in the West was developing in the highly legalistic Roman society and undoubtedly bore its imprint. Law was “the main element” of the Roman culture and “defined all its familial, social and state relations. Religion was not an exception – it was one of the applications of law. When becoming a Christian, it was from this side that a Roman citizen would try to understand Christianity: in it he was seeking first of all, juridical consistency.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 165.

⁸⁵ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, “Vvedenie” (“Introduction”), Part 1.

A typical young person in the medieval West would learn Latin first, before anything else. And the way one learned Latin then was through studying the best Latin texts available. Those would typically be the speeches by the best orators – who invariably were courtroom lawyers. So, before one would get to study the Gospels, written in Latin, he would already have been immersed in legal terminology and a legalistic way of thinking for years.

So it would be natural for him to start looking at the Gospels as would a lawyer: the world as courtroom, with God as the judge, man as the accused, devil as the accuser, and Christ as the advocate. The law says that the punishment for sin is death. Wishing to defend man, Christ tells the Judge: don't kill him, kill me instead. So, according to this legalistic picture, God the Father agrees to kill His Son instead of man – and thus to forgive man.⁸⁶

This simplistic but convincing (on the human level) picture would also fit very well with the customs existing in medieval Western society. “The Latin-Protestant concept of the Redemption as the revenge of the Divine Majesty, once offended by Adam, on Jesus Christ... grew out of the feudal notion of knightly honor, restorable by shedding the blood of the offender.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Deacon Andrei Kuraev, Public lecture on Catholicism, http://www.predanie.ru/mp3/Lekcii_diakona_Andreja_Kuraeva/.

⁸⁷ Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), “Way Apart: the Difference between Orthodoxy and Western Confessions,” http://www.stjohndc.org/Russian/orthhtrdx/e_Antony.htm.

In other words, the sin of Adam was seen by medieval Roman Catholicism as an *infinitely grave offense* against God which caused His *wrath* – which, in turn, manifested itself in the removal from man of the *supernatural gift* of God’s grace. Man found himself in his original “natural” condition – that is, with his nature not harmed as a result of his fall but brought into disorder: the flesh would now dominate over the spirit, dragging man deeper into sin and eventual death. The aforementioned Augustinian teaching on the spreading of Adam’s sin to the whole human race grew to mean the passing of Adam and Eve’s infinite guilt before God to every human.

The ensuing difficulty concerning the *objective* side of salvation – if Christ assumed the *pure* essence, then there was nothing to heal, so what did He do then? – was resolved by legalistic soteriology in the following way: Christ brought *satisfaction* to God the Father for the sin of Adam.

Here it is important to emphasize that in the West, the very concept of sin grew to mean “*guilt*” – a crime, a violation of law – while in the Patristic theology, sin is always seen as a *wound*, a trauma: you do not justify sin, you *heal* it. (Not surprisingly, the main Orthodox prayer, “*Kirie eleison*” – in which the Greek word *eleison* means “to anoint with oil in order to heal” – never received a Latin translation.⁸⁸) For the sins committed by a Christian after his baptism – that is, the *additional* guilt which was not paid for by Christ – God also needs satisfaction. So what should a believer do to bring it to God? – or, How does one acquire personal salvation?

⁸⁸ Kuraev, *ibid.*

Here the legalistic mindset found support in the fact that one of the dominant analogies used in the Holy Scripture when talking about salvation is the one of labor and reward. Easily understandable on the human level, this view would immediately supply to a Western Christian the juridical consistency of the theology of salvation he wanted to see, prompting him to stop looking for any other foundation of the Christian soteriology. Doing good works became the way for a believer to bring satisfaction to God.

This non-Orthodox, non-Patristic view of good works naturally led to further distortions of the Christian teaching in the Roman Catholic Church: most importantly, the concept of *indulgences* (that is, buying from the spiritual “treasury” of the Church the “extra” good works done by the Saints) – that can be credited with bringing about the Protestant Reformation.

Having developed in the same Western society and having legalistic Roman Catholicism as a “father”, Protestantism was unable to overcome the “forensic” view of personal salvation and instead radicalized it: the difference of the Protestant (Lutheran) soteriology from the Roman Catholic one is that Catholics teach that Christ brought satisfaction to God the Father for the original sin only, while Protestantism teaches that Christ brought satisfaction for *all* the sins of mankind. As to personal salvation, a variation of the same concept of reward was offered: salvation is yours once you bring to God your faith in Christ.

2.3 Medieval scholasticism: replacing faith with the *knowledge* of God.

And as if the excessive legalism was not enough...

Up to the 10th century, theology, as a separate field of learning, did not yet exist in the West. All theological interests revolved around the study of the Holy Scripture. However, in the 11th-12th centuries, the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle spread in the West and spurred interest in society in abstract science – which infiltrated theological matters as well.⁸⁹

Scholasticism developed as a method of learning that placed an emphasis on dialectical reasoning, with the primary purpose of resolving contradictions. Applied to Christian theology, scholasticism sought to unite Christian revelation and Greek philosophy, faith and knowledge. Revelation gave the material for theology, while philosophy gave the form. Scholasticism would not touch the content of the faith – whether correct or incorrect – and would treat it as absolute truth. Its job was to process, assimilate, prove and order the material given by Revelation.

Scholasticism tried to answer questions posed by Revelation: Why did God become human? How is Christ present in Eucharist? Etc. Human mind and logic were given complete freedom to produce all kinds of dialectic formulas explaining and proving every point of faith. The job of philosophy was to present all these pieces in their complex

⁸⁹ The discussion of scholasticism in this Section is based on N. Talberg, *Istoriya hristianskoi tserkvi (History of the Christian Church)* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Pravoslavnogo Svyato-Tikhonovskogo Bogoslovskogo Instituta, 2000), 347-360.

interrelationships, as one theological system. **As a result, the truths of revelation would receive their basis and explanation in human reason and logic – and thus become the subject of knowledge, and not faith.** Faith was being turned into knowledge.

However, it has been known to the Christian Church from the beginning that mere knowledge about God does not mean communion with God. The devil knows about God better than any theologian, but that does not save him.

Scholasticism polluted theology with a plethora of mundane and sometimes nonsensical matters, presented in excruciating detail. The brilliance and resourcefulness of the answer often trampled the theological essence of the question. Thus scholasticism helped raise a multitude of incorrect teachings from an embryonic form or a private opinion to the level of dogma. In general, the rule of scholasticism lifted the *form* of theology above its *content* and became the door to the understanding of the dogmatic teaching of the Church. The actual living faith – as well as anything that would not fit the scholastic models – was rejected.

The 13th and the early 14th centuries are generally seen as the high period of scholasticism. In the 14th century scholasticism evolved into dark and empty formalism. In the moral sphere, scholastic hair-splitting was even used to justify crimes. Scholasticism died off by the beginning of the 16th century but left a long-lasting imprint on Western theology. In particular, it produced a number of new dogmas pertaining to salvation within the Roman Catholic Church.

Three of those new dogmas – the result of an attempt to “systemize” the dogma of Redemption – became of paramount importance in Roman Catholic theology: the merits of the saints, indulgences, and purgatory. The first two in this list are the result of a scholastic taking to the extreme the concept of mutual love and help among the members of the Church: the merits of one (a saint) could be imputed on another (who is lacking them),⁹⁰ with the Church being a natural “financial institution” to control these “transactions.” The desire by the scholastic mind “to nail down” the question of the fate of those who died in repentance but had not yet brought fruits of it produced the concept of purgatory, where one is *paying* God with temporary sufferings.

In the modern era, scholasticism should be credited for the existence of tens of thousands of Protestant denominations disagreeing with one another in terms of doctrine, as everybody is welcome to take a shot at analyzing the “scientific” facts presented in the Bible and constructing his own “scientific” theory of salvation based on them. (Various Protestant theological “gimmicks”, fueled more by the “makes sense/does not make sense” type of “analysis” than anything else, will be addressed in more detail in the subsequent sections.)

The Holy Fathers never had the attitude that everything in Christian teaching can be analyzed and figured out. Many questions were left “unresolved” – such as the question of to whom Christ brought Himself as a sacrifice. An honest answer to another “tough” question (one which prompted Calvin to come up with his theology of pre-destination) –

⁹⁰ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*

“Why did God create those about Whom He knew that they would choose sin?” – is: we do not have the fullness of Revelation about it.

2.4 Purging the teaching of the Church on salvation of its complexity.

In Apostolic and Patristic thought the term “salvation” is used interchangeably with terms like “the Kingdom of Heaven”, “the Kingdom of God”, “redemption”, “acquisition of the Holy Spirit”, “adoption”, “holiness”, “likeness to God”, “deification” (“divinization” or “theosis”), etc. All these terms are synonymous. However, one can see that the Roman Catholicism and Protestantism each have their “favorite”: the former puts an emphasis on “redemption,” and the latter on “justification” – with these aspects of our salvation stressed at the expense of all others.

The Orthodox approach to salvation can be termed as “integrative.” “Christ's incarnation, ministry, death, descent into hades, resurrection, ascension; our sinfulness, repentance, baptism, carrying our cross, “doing to the least of these”, running the race, confidence in God's love and mercy, fear of falling away, putting on the new nature, There is no tendency to pick one aspect of salvation “to reinterpret everything else to fit”. ”⁹¹

Furthermore, “soteriology was never something that became a specific focus of attention in early Christian history. As such it was never specifically defined in the dogmatic or conciliar traditions, although there are recognizable and recurrent themes by which it was

⁹¹ Paul Jacobson, “Orthodox Teaching on Salvation as Compared to That of Protestants,” http://www.stjohndc.org/Russian/homilies/e_HOMSALV.HTM.

approached, notably illumination, purification, redemption, divinization, victory, and reconciliation... **In the Latin West many of the earlier wide range of soteriological images came increasingly to be restricted until the ideas of redemptive sacrificial substitution predominated.**⁹² In other words, the West picked one Scriptural image (legalistic) out of a multitude and built an entire theological system around it.

Likewise, one of the key terms of the Western theology of salvation – “doing good works” – is the result of another such narrowing down of a Patristic theological concept: in this case, the preferred Patristic term is “keeping God’s Commandments” (which are not necessarily external acts.) In general, modern Protestantism is very non-dogmatic⁹³ and tends to replace the “old” concepts pertaining to one’s internal spiritual struggle with an external code of behavior (for example, the so-called Social Gospel movement.)

2.5 Replacing the *content* of personal salvation with one *image* used by the Scripture to describe it.

This is, perhaps, the biggest flaw of the legalistic-scholastic approach to the teaching on salvation that developed in the West.

The legalistic approach had been known to theology before – and it is not illegitimate. Throughout the history, the Holy Scripture has been often preached to people having a pagan religious mentality. For this reason the Divine truths had to be presented in the way

⁹² McGuckin, *ibid.*, 315.

⁹³ Fr. Georges Florovsky, “The Lost Scriptural Mind,” http://jbburnett.com/resources/florovsky/1/florovsky_1-1-scripmind.pdf.

that would be easy to understand by a pagan mind and logic – as well as by people of the lowest ranks of the society.

For example, a multitude of Scriptural quotes may be given that contain anthropomorphic descriptions of God – including descriptions of *passions* like hate, wrath, revenge, etc. – which the Scriptures themselves condemn! God uses these images of Himself as a tough, authoritarian earthly king because that is something people could understand very well.

Among other everyday images we find in the Scripture, the one of salvation as “ransom” was very powerful because “in those times the world knew three forms of ransoming people [Greek verb *lytro-o*], namely... 1) ransoming from captivity, 2) ransoming from prison, for example, for debts, 3) ransoming from slavery.” All three have counterparts in Christian theology: “ransoming from the captivity of sin, ransoming from hades, ransoming from slavery to the devil.”⁹⁴

Another powerful term used by the Apostles is the Greek verb *agorazo* – to buy for oneself at a marketplace (Greek *agora*). “Christ has acquired us for Himself so that we might belong to Him entirely, as bought slaves belong to their Master.”⁹⁵ “Ye are bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23).

St. John Chrysostom – perhaps, more than any other Holy Father – *had* to rely on this kind of “financial” language because in his pastoral practice he often had to confront

⁹⁴ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 205.

⁹⁵ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 206.

heartlessness and selfishness towards poor people. For this reason, in many places in his works we see St. John's "inclination" to calculate when, for what and how much one would receive for every action.⁹⁶ There is no doubt that these quotes – and even more so the similar passages from the works of the Western Fathers – were used for support by the legalistic theologians.

But the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition are not a mere collection of quotations. They both express the word of God and point to the same consistent view on *the essence* of salvation that the Church has always held.

The Holy Fathers were always careful about using this earthly imagery when describing matters of salvation. For example, by "redemption" they understood the reconciliation of mankind to God and adoption by Him. Thus "redemption" was understood as a manifestation of God's *love* for man – and not a demand for a payment in a state of wrath. According to the Patristic view, God's *love* is the only reason for Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. This is supported by the words of the Apostle: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). According to St. Symeon the New Theologian, Christ brings the mankind redeemed by Him as a gift to God, once and for all liberating it from the power of the devil.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 1.

⁹⁷ Alfeyev, *ibid.*

While being legitimate images to explain particular aspects of salvation, the aforementioned analogies of ransom, of labor and reward came to be seen in the West as the dogmatic expression of the very *essence* of salvation. Western theologians developed this dogma further by using it to explain many other theological points connected to it. That, of course, meant a multitude of compromises with the Patristic teaching in favor of the scholastic “success”. For example, the concept of salvation as “ransom” prompted the theologians to ask further questions like, “To whom was that ransom offered?” To this particular question, one of the founders of scholasticism, Anselm of Canterbury (1033 – 1109), gave the answer “to God”.

A “legal” relationship, a “legal” union between God and man – taken as the *essence* of the Gospel – is nonsensical in its core and fails its own test on multiple accounts.⁹⁸ First of all, God, being self-sufficient, does not *need* anything from us. The legalistic worldview is unable to explain the “agreement” in which one of the sides has no practical interest in having its “demands” met by the other. Secondly, the collective “debt” of our “side” of the agreement is constantly growing, as the whole of humankind continues to sin, while we are unable to pay it, as there is nothing we have that is not already God’s. Thirdly, the “reward” we get from God – eternal salvation – is immeasurably higher than any “labor” on Earth with which we could pay for it. Finally, this is a one-of-a-kind agreement, because not only the debt holder is going out of His way to help the debtor – but the debtor considers the debt holder obliged to reward him (the debtor) for trying to pay his debt.

⁹⁸ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*

2.6 Accepting an absurd, non-Biblical image of God.

The Roman Catholic theology of salvation presents God as interested more in the “letter” of the law, in the visible side of our “agreement”, than in its essence: God cannot see our deeds as “merits” but agrees to accept and reward them as such. Likewise, Protestants do not seem to have a problem with believing that God agrees to accept a sinner as sinless because of Christ. Needless to say, both of these views present a flagrant contradiction to the dogmatic teaching of the Church about God as Truth and as Unchanging God, in Whom there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). “Concerning God one cannot say that any kind of process is being performed in Him, whether of growth, change of appearance, evolution, progress or anything of the like.”⁹⁹ God’s attitude toward man does not evolve.

The doctrine of “satisfaction of God’s justice” is not only non-Patristic but also offensive. Man profoundly damaged himself as a result of his fall – and brought upon himself sickness and death – but God is mostly concerned with satisfaction for man’s “insult”? Is He also so petty that, having promised us eternal bliss, He takes away from us all earthly pleasures?

Other aspects of the Western theology of salvation also sharply contradict the traditional Christian concept of God as a loving Father. He appears to be more of a tyrant – solely and arbitrarily deciding who lives and who dies. What is the “saving faith” in Lutheranism? It is a strong agreement with and reliance on the Church’s preaching about

⁹⁹ Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 68.

Christ. One can say that Christ Himself is present in this faith. And justification is determined by this faith in Christ. But where does this faith come from? It is from God, the Lutherans say. So, if one's faith does not depend on himself, but is given by God, then God is *guilty* of the deaths of all those to whom He did not give faith! This is what Luther could not utter – but Calvin did! According to Calvin, God predestined some for perishing.¹⁰⁰ Calvinists do not seem to be bothered by the fact that they are worshipping the “loving” and “just” God Who created some of His children (in His image!) with the sole intent of subjecting them to eternal damnation.

2.7 Reviving the pagan concept of God and man's relationship to Him.

The concept of God as tyrant Who can be and has to be appeased (“satisfied”) is not simply the result of scholasticism run amok – it is also familiar and very appealing to a pagan inside each of us that we are called to conquer. Here we approach the most fundamental difference between the Western non-Orthodox and Patristic Orthodox soteriology: for Roman Catholics and Protestants it is not man who is changing – it is *God* Who changes His attitude towards man. Thus salvation is not an act of change of man, it is in act of change in *God*! This concept of a deity changing from wrath to mercy is characteristic of paganism.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Osipov, *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Osipov, *ibid.*

Neither Roman Catholics nor Protestants will deny that they are longing for God, for holiness – but, like in pagan religions, their idea of salvation boils down to the desire to avoid punishment. This attitude of man towards God is devoid of love.

Most importantly, the Western concept of God is fused with the pagan concept of man as a “dummy” in the hands of God. While Orthodoxy states – on a dogmatic level – that one cannot be saved without his own participation, Protestantism is trying to strip one of any responsibility for his salvation by offering a soteriology that devalues humans as free creatures who make choices that can potentially affect their salvation. This is a false humility that opens the door to a full-fledged pagan life. On the human level, Protestantism can be seen as nothing other than the adaption of Christianity to the desires of a fleshly man: the desire to keep the idea of God but at the same time not to disturb the pagan in yourself.

2.8 Reviving the Judaic mentality.

Calvinism in particular is also a revival of the Judaism-like attitude towards Christians as a people chosen for a special mission: in Judaism it is by blood, in Calvinism by faith. Those who have been chosen for salvation can be identified by an unmistakable external sign in the form of good works. Calvinism is indeed very similar – in cult, and in essence – to Judaism. Their temples – with the services devoid of any sacramental meaning and having an emphasis on the study of the Scriptures – are essentially synagogues.

All Protestants are, in a way, the descendants of the early Church's Judaizing sect of Ebionites, who "considered Jesus Christ to be a prophet like Moses; they demanded of all Christians the strict fulfillment of the law of Moses; they looked on the Christian teaching as a supplement to the law of Moses."¹⁰² While modern Protestants do not, of course, keep the Jewish law, the balance between the use of the Old and the New Testaments in their worship has been severely distorted in favor of the Old Testament. This was, once again, a result of the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* – that sees the Bible as a sole source of authority for Christian faith. "Left with the Holy Scriptures only, these "Christians" frenziedly began studying it... The Bible, three quarters of which, in terms of its overall volume, consists of the Old Testament, became a constant reference book... They began to lose a sense of proportion; they thought of the Old and New Testaments as two equivalent sources of the same Faith, as mutually supplementing each other, as two completely equal aspects of it... Thus the Judaizing sects made their appearance... The commandments given on Sinai became more important than the Gospel teaching..."¹⁰³

2.9 Reviving the ancient heresies defeated by the Church.

Having rejected the Tradition of the Church, Protestantism was bound to struggle between the extremes of old (and already resolved by the Church) dogmatic disputes – such as the Nestorian-Monophysite controversy of the 5th century. "Modern man, deliberately or subconsciously, is tempted by the Nestorian extreme. That is to say, he does not take the Incarnation in earnest. He does not dare to believe that Christ is a divine

¹⁰² Pomazansky, *ibid.*, 375.

¹⁰³ Protospesbyter Michael Pomazansky, "The Old Testament in the New Testament Church," http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/old_new_testament_e.htm.

person. He wants to have a human redeemer, only assisted by God. He is more interested in human psychology of the Redeemer than in the mystery of the divine love... On the other extreme we have in our days a revival of "monophysite" tendencies in theology and religion, when man is reduced to complete passivity and is allowed only to listen and to hope."¹⁰⁴

Virtually every heresy defeated in the early Church and the Church of the era of the Ecumenical Councils can be found in the teachings of modern Protestant sects. For example, Anabaptists, Adventists, Swedenborgians and others have resurrected *chiliasm* (known today as "millennialism") – the heresy associated with the name of Apollinarius, Bishop of Laodicea, according to which "long before the end of the world, Christ will once again return to earth, defeat the Antichrist, resurrect the righteous only, and establish a kingdom on earth in which the righteous, as a reward for their struggles and sufferings, will reign with Him for a period of a thousand years, enjoying all the good things of temporal life."¹⁰⁵

2.10 Replacing personal salvation as internal moral conversion with a fictitious external "legal" act.

We have seen above, when we talked about baptism, that the Apostles and Holy Fathers never saw our forgiveness as a merely external act. If we are truly cleansed from sin,

¹⁰⁴ Florovsky, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Bishop Alexander (Mileant), "End of the World," http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/end_w.htm#_Toc26622239.

there is no need to insist that the merit of Christ is imputed to us and serves as a payment for our sins.

One word that can describe the Protestant idea of salvation is *pronouncement*: a sinner is pronounced righteous by God. Salvation is seen as “some sort of negotiated agreement between us and the Godhead, stipulating, for reasons unknown, that we accept certain obscure statements and rules, and receive in return a reward of eternal salvation.”¹⁰⁶ “In this understanding, Christ’s death does not destroy sin but just liberates man from being responsible for it.”¹⁰⁷ One is “justified” with all his sins intact because of someone else’s (Christ’s) righteousness (“imputed alien righteousness.”)

According to the Protestant teaching, the relationship of the Father to the Son defines the Father’s relationship to us. One can even say that God the Father does not know us and does not see us – except in connection with His Son and what His Son has done. The fact that our faith can be poor does not really matter. God is covering the sins *remaining* in us (Lutheran terminology!) by the perfect righteousness of Christ. He is saving us not because He loves us (John 3:16 is somehow forgotten!) but because of the righteousness of Christ.

The main consequence of such a view of salvation for one’s spiritual life is that it eliminates any requirements for it. A believer is essentially told, “Someone up there agreed to look at you as sinless even though you are still sinful.” Protestants will be quick

¹⁰⁶ Khrapovitsky, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Alfeyev, *ibid.*

to add though, that having been justified, one is called upon to lead a righteous life out of gratitude for the received salvation. In reality this does little to change the fact that one's spiritual life is perceived as ultimately unimportant because it does not influence the fact of whether one is saved or not. Furthermore, human efforts are "even dangerous, as they diminish the merit of Christ."¹⁰⁸ The forensic concept of justification simply does not offer one any meaningful goals for his spiritual life. One's earthly life becomes an automatic and useless "appendix" to an already-received salvation.

However, "the main danger of [the legalistic view of salvation] is that with it one may consider himself having a right not to belong to God with all his heart and mind: in a legal union, such closeness is not presumed and not required; one just has to observe the external conditions of the union. One may not love good and may remain the same old lover of himself; he just needs to keep the Commandments in order to get a reward."¹⁰⁹

This cold attitude of a mercenary who expects a reward for the bounty he brings (to a deity) invariably leads one to the minimalist attitude towards his spiritual life. If one compares the Orthodox and the Western Christian teaching on salvation, he finds that "one is based upon the concept of Christian perfection, or holiness, and from this standpoint evaluates the present reality; the other is firmly established on the *status quo* of the earthly life and strives to determine the minimum of religious practice which still allows for salvation – if eternity truly exists."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, "Vvedenie" ("Introduction"), Part 1.

¹⁰⁹ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Khrapovitsky, *ibid.*

“I think one can construct from the Church Fathers a “normal” Christian life: instruction, baptism, on-going participation in the life of the Church: repentance, confession, receiving the Eucharist. But it is rare that you will find them attempting to answer the question “What can I get by with and still be saved?” or “How far can one be from this “norm” and still be saved?””¹¹¹

This “soteriology” is about finding a simplistic “instant solution” to one’s problems without the “hard part”: internal conversion. One of the “undercurrents” of Protestantism was the need of the post-medieval Europe for “*Christianity lite*” that would do away with the strict moral requirements preventing one from enjoying the new “blessings” of life in a rich, industrialized, rapidly developing society. When enjoyment replaces holiness as the goal of one’s life, salvation as liberation from one’s sins *themselves* is naturally replaced by the legalistic view of salvation as liberation from the *punishment* for one’s sins.¹¹²

2.11 Leaving one’s soul’s thirst unquenched by purging personal salvation of its present-time content.

Another effect of the Protestant “forensic” soteriology on one’s soul is spiritual confusion, as a believer struggling with his sinful inclinations cannot find a true peace through simply being told that he is already saved. On some level he has to keep fighting off his conscience that exposes to him his true spiritual condition. His soul is left in a

¹¹¹ Jacobson, *ibid.*

¹¹² Osipov, *ibid.*

state of permanent longing for the *real*, “internal” salvation – which is the experience of communion with God here and now. The fictitious “forensic” act of salvation simply cannot be tasted in this life. The Protestant term “saved” means “going to heaven (upon death).” Needless to say, the concept of atonement in the afterlife is an accidental product of a legalistic view of salvation and is totally foreign to Christianity.¹¹³

Even the Roman Catholic monasticism is largely lacking in the understanding of one’s spiritual life as a communion with God that is already taking place. “...There are ascetics in the West, to be sure, but their life is dominated by dejected, senseless obedience to the age-old rules and requirements, for which they are promised forgiveness of sins and future eternal life. *Eternal life has already appeared*, as Apostle John says, and blessed communion with God is obtained by unflinching asceticism right now, in the words of St. Macarius the Great, – all this is unknown to West.”¹¹⁴

It was that longing of a soul for *true* salvation that, having “expressed itself, albeit unsuccessfully, in innumerable sects, in many attempts to correct the Catholicism... finally exploded in that horrific upheaval that is called the Reformation.”¹¹⁵

2.12 Dismissing the role of the Church in one’s salvation.

The Protestant “faith only” doctrine (justification through faith alone) means rejection of the Church – the Church that, as we already mentioned, Christ founded (Matt. 16:17),

¹¹³ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 3, “Iskuplenie” (“Redemption”).

¹¹⁴ Khrapovitsky, *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, “Vvedenie” (“Introduction”), Part 1.

loved and “gave Himself for” (Eph. 5:25). 16th-century Protestantism was a revival of Donatism – the 4th-century heresy that preached that the Church must be a church of saints and connected the validity of the Sacraments to the moral state of one performing them – as part of Luther’s opposition to Rome was fueled by corruption among the Roman Catholic clergy. This, in turn, led to the modern Protestant ecclesiology, which can be summarized in the belief that the “true” Church exists only in heaven, while the “visible” Church on Earth is not necessarily “true”: in fact, nobody knows how much the “invisible” and “visible” Churches “overlap”.

Furthermore, Protestants believe that the “visible”, earthly Church can err; and that is why no denomination can claim having the fullness of Truth. In this worldview, the Church hierarchy is obviously unimportant as well. Ultimately, the rejection of Tradition and the invention of false teachings like *Sola Scriptura*, common for all Protestants, can thus be traced to Donatism (as disrespect of the “earthly” Church hierarchy) – because the Church hierarchy, as we know, is the keeper of the Tradition.

“Protestantism... objected [to the Papacy]: why is the truth given only to the Pope? – and added: the truth and salvation are open to every individual independently from the Church. Every person was elevated into an infallible “pope”... Protestantism... with its innumerable number of “popes” completely destroyed the idea of the Church, replaced faith with the reasoning of an individual person and replaced the salvation in the Church with a contemplative confidence in salvation through Christ without the Church...”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ St. Hilarion (Troitsky), *ibid.*

Even though Luther and Calvin split from the Roman Catholic Church, the early local Protestant churches still played an important role: they decided theological matters and were places where one would learn how to read the Bible, worship, etc. In modern American Protestantism this role of a local church is largely extinct and has been replaced by the “just me and my Bible” attitude.

2.13 Persisting in adjustments of an inherently dead-end doctrine.

In addition to contradictions with the *spirit* of the Holy Scripture already mentioned – a loving God Who knowingly creates some of His creatures for eternal torments, an unchanging God Who changes His attitude toward man, a true God Who does not see sin as sin, etc. – the Roman Catholics and Protestants have had a long history of contradictions with their own doctrine of salvation.

Rejecting the notion that salvation can be “merited”, both Catholics and Protestants, nonetheless, see personal salvation as a *reward* for something. “...They would not even understand, let alone agree, that it is precisely moral perfection that is the goal of the Christian life – and not merely the knowledge of God (as Protestants would say) or service to the Church (Roman Catholics), for which virtues, in their opinion, God Himself gives us moral perfection as a reward.”¹¹⁷

The Orthodox Church supported Protestants’ criticism of the Papal abuses which became the integral part of the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation – indulgences, first and

¹¹⁷ Khrapovitsky, *ibid.*

foremost – but Protestant leaders failed to connect with Orthodoxy and went their own way instead, founding a new heresy upon existing heresy. Luther’s doctrine of *Sola Gratia* (“salvation is by God’s grace only”) led to the rejection of everything that the Orthodox Church viewed as means to assist the faithful in their salvation: the Church (as the treasury of the Grace of God), its hierarchy, and the Sacraments.¹¹⁸

“...The first Reformers learned to speak and think using the same Aristotle and Cicero as did their Catholic opponents. For this reason, being indignant over that flagrant distortion of Christ’s truth that they saw in Catholicism, they were seeking to explain it with accidental reasons only – such as the abuses by the hierarchy, etc. – and did not realize that in the place of those conclusions, others, just as false, will appear, because the falsehood is not in the conclusions, but in the foundation itself, in the very point of view on the subject. Instead of rejecting this main falsehood, Protestants only found the strength to reject some fruits of it, and thus only replaced one set of distortions with another.”¹¹⁹

Protestantism rose against Roman Catholicism’s mercenary attitude towards good deeds – however, the legalistic view of salvation that the two of them share could not allow Protestants to escape the concept of “merits.” If one is expected to do any concrete deeds in his spiritual life – like keeping the Commandments – it necessarily divides all Christians into those who do and those who do not, those who do more and those who do less. The legalistic worldview is built on the premise that those who do more are

¹¹⁸ Talberg, *ibid.*, 383.

¹¹⁹ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*

rewarded more than those who do less. But what can this reward be? It cannot be salvation, as all those who have accepted Christ are saved already. Lutheranism (in “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession” written by Melanchthon) was forced to declare that good deeds earn one “other rewards, physical and spiritual, in this life and after it.”¹²⁰

But this makes things only worse. Not only do these rewards still diminish the merit of Christ, they also put Protestantism in a position morally inferior to Roman Catholicism: at least in Catholicism one does good works to earn *salvation* – while in Protestantism one does good works for *earthly* things. And is it even acceptable to desire these earthly things when Christ already gave you eternal life? Does it not make it morally superior to *reject* these things – and thus to do no good deeds that earn them? Also, how can one feel that these good deeds are truly his, if they are the consequences of one’s salvation and thus are produced by the Holy Spirit? Why should one *earn* anything for the work of the Holy Spirit?

This is just one illustration of how Protestantism gets entangled in contradictions with its own doctrine of salvation. To be true to their doctrine, Protestants have to reject the necessity of doing good works. Up to today, this necessity remains unjustified in Protestantism from the dogmatic point of view, because it is something that exists outside of the merit of Christ who already earned us salvation. However, the longing of the human soul for a life of continuing moral perfection forces Protestants to find “creative” ways to string the good deeds along as stemming out of feeling thankful to God, indebted to God, etc.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Unlike the Reformers, the Roman Catholics have always tried to remain faithful to the many centuries of the Tradition of the One Universal Church whose experience taught that doing good deeds is necessary not just as a consequence, as evidence of salvation, but first of all as a *condition* for salvation. Likewise, the Roman Catholic concept of justification is not purely “forensic”: it is not just a *declaration* of righteousness but is also an *infusion* of righteousness. It involves a supernatural act by the grace of God that imparts internal renewal (that is, *holiness*) to the soul of a believer for the sake of the merit of Christ.

However, once again, the legalistic picture of salvation did not leave the Roman Catholics many ways of retreat in the face of the Protestant criticism that no human merit is possible before God: one’s holiness imputed by the grace of God can only be seen as a reward for a merit. Who receives this holiness? Why do some receive it and some do not? That forced the Roman Catholicism to try to diminish as much as possible the human role in receiving this initial renewing grace to make it truly “unmerited.” But in the end, this is not much different from the Protestant teaching: the justification remains an external action imparted to a human without any involvement of his will – and it is thus deprived of any moral value and is unjustified from the very legalistic point of view that both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism insist on. This is the wall that the legalistic view of salvation is not able to overcome.

The Roman Catholics did try though. Let us assume, they said, that the initial infusion of righteousness is unmerited and equal for everyone – however, one can keep it and increase it (with God’s help) and thus increase his reward by his own will. God sees one’s efforts and adds to his holiness. This, however, did not answer the question of whether one is capable of having any merits or of earning anything before God. Catholics tried to remove this obstacle by proposing that it is the infused grace of God that performs the good deeds through one – and thus the human will does not *create* holiness but simply *accepts* it. But here, the same question arises that was mentioned above with respect to Protestantism: if one’s deeds are not truly his, how can he earn a reward for them?

Roman Catholicism responded by declaring that, even though it is the grace of God that is the first and main reason for any virtuous deeds, the human will is the second.

Whenever the grace of God directs itself towards a good deed, one “feels” that like his own inclination and has to *decide* whether to do this deed or not. In other words, human will “transmits” the grace of God into an actual good deed. But can we really say in this case that human will is free? The answer is no. And this brings us back to the same question: if one is not free, how can his deeds be his merits that can earn him anything?

Thus Roman Catholicism was unable to explain, using legal language, the necessity of one’s participation in his salvation. The Council of Trent simply declared that even though “Jesus Christ Himself continually infuses his virtue into the said justified... *we must believe* that nothing further is wanting to the justified,” and that “by those very

works which have been done in God, [they] fully satisfied the divine law according to the state of this life, and to have truly merited eternal life.”¹²¹ In other words, they made it sound like part of the Christian revelation that one must simply *believe*.¹²²

As was already said above, it is the legalistic framework that is the main problem faced by the Roman Catholic and Protestant theology of personal salvation – not the details of their teaching. In the realm of labor, merits and rewards, human deeds are entitled to a reward. At the same time, they cannot have any “justifying power”, because we have already been justified through the merit of Christ. But the downgrading of one’s efforts to the level of having no bearing on his salvation blatantly contradicts the general teaching of the Scripture and the voice of conscience in one’s soul. Roman Catholics and Protestants simply use different ways to disguise this inconvenient fact.

2.14 Introducing theological novelties and redefining the traditional concepts to support new doctrines.

While one can always claim that his doctrine is not new but simply removes later distortions to the Apostolic doctrine – as the Reformers have declared – a sure sign of this claim not being true is a number of theological novelties that this doctrine has produced in order to prop itself up.

¹²¹ “The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent,” Chapter 16, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html>.

¹²² The above discussion is based on Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, “Vvedenie” (“Introduction”), Parts 1 and 2.

Modern Protestantism offers a never-ending abundance of these novelties. For example, the well-known Protestant concept of “getting saved” – as one specific event fixed in time (some even remember the exact time of the day when they “got saved”!) – is one of these novelties. The expression “getting saved” is actually not found in the Scripture.¹²³

We have already mentioned that the Apostolic and Patristic tradition has always maintained that salvation is a life-long effort, in accordance with the Holy Scripture: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), “...to us who are **being** saved” (1 Corinthians 1:18), etc.

If an outsider presses an evangelical Protestant to explain what exactly that “act of salvation” is and why they believe it happened to them on some particular day – he will be dealt another theological “gimmick”: salvation as... realization that you are saved. In other words, one is saved the moment he felt acceptance of the fact that Jesus Christ had died for his sins. This is also often termed as “accepting Christ as personal Savior” and/or “asking Jesus to come into your heart”. Such a realization (“feeling”, “trust”, etc.) of having been “saved” (“redeemed”, “justified”, etc.) is what Protestants call “faith.” Once you experienced it – “faith”, that is – you are saved.

While the Orthodox Church sees the aforementioned spiritual experience as legitimate and vitally important in one’s life, it looks at it as “conversion” and not “faith”. Needless to say, the conversion experience is seen by Orthodoxy as just the very beginning of the journey towards salvation – that by no means guarantees it.¹²⁴

¹²³ Fr. John Whiteford, private communication.

¹²⁴ Schaeffer, *ibid.*, 254.

The Protestant concept of “faith” is an example of redefinition of traditional Christian terminology – that one has to be watchful about when dealing with Protestants. It is important to understand what the Apostles and Holy Fathers meant by the word “faith”. In Apostolic times “faith” meant the opposite to remaining a pagan or a Jew. In Patristic times “faith” also came to signify one’s belonging to the true Church, the Orthodox Church. This being in the true Church – as opposed to paganism, Judaism, or a heretical sect – and adhering to all of her teaching – was what constituted “faith”. In other words, “faith” meant the entire Christian lifestyle, the entire spiritual life of one belonging to the true Church.¹²⁵ The Church never understood “faith” as simply a passive mental conviction in the truth of the Gospel.

Another example of redefinition of terminology is the term “born again” – used by Protestants to refer to someone who used to be a nominal Christian but became a true believer through a conversion-like experience. Jesus Christ does use this term in His conversation with Nicodemus but He refers specifically to baptism (John 3:3-7).

The Protestant concept of “good works” as something that demonstrates that one has already achieved salvation is an attempt to fill a Scriptural concept with a novel theological meaning. It was born out of the necessity to reconcile the “faith only” doctrine with the fact that the Scripture says quite a lot about the importance of good works. According to Protestantism, one cannot be expected to do works to be saved because he is already saved through his faith – hence the “solution”: it is necessary for

¹²⁵ Stragorodskii, *ibid.*, Chapter 5, “Vera” (“Faith”).

one to do works... to *demonstrate* that he is really saved. This is truly a theological “sleight of hand”: seemingly staying true to the Scripture yet asserting something contradictory to it.

Even the Last Judgment – that will ultimately decide whether one is saved or not based on his works – gets a whole new meaning in Calvinism. Simply put, the salvation of the “elect” does not depend on this judgment. The judgment will only determine where they will be in the Kingdom of Heaven. One may ask, “Then what about the sins that the “elect” committed after they were “justified”? Will anyone be judged for them?”

Protestants respond with another theological novelty. Yes, they say, *Jesus* will be judged for those sins.¹²⁶ One can only wonder how this is compatible with the fact that it is Jesus Christ Who will do the judging.

2.15 Misreading, manipulating and editing the Scripture.

There are multiple ways in which Protestants interpret the Scripture– some of them deliberately, some not – to find support for their doctrine of personal salvation. The Orthodox Church has always maintained that the Scripture was written by the Church for the Church – and thus can only be interpreted in the Church.¹²⁷ Any attempt to treat the Scripture differently – for example, as the “message from God” addressed personally to every individual – leads to distortions of unpredictable magnitude.

¹²⁶ This is a quote from a Presbyterian pastor.

¹²⁷ Fr. Georges Florovsky, “Revelation and interpretation,” <http://www.scribd.com/doc/31364644/Florovsky-Georges-Revelation-and-Interpretation>.

The founder of Protestantism himself, Martin Luther – in accordance with his conviction that any individual can be divinely inspired to interpret the Scripture on his own – judged the Scripture based on whether it felt right to his “spirit.” He did not consider the book of Revelation as Apostolic and admitted that his “spirit” “could not stand this book.”¹²⁸ He also did not believe in the Apostolic authorship of the book of Hebrews and the epistles of James and Jude.

Luther felt that he had a license to edit the Scripture. He famously inserted the word “alone” (*allein*) after the word “faith” in his translation of Romans 3:28: “...A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” He also struggled with the book of James. “Luther, more realistic than today’s Protestants, realized that his “faith only” doctrine just did not agree with what St. James wrote, so Luther declared that the book of James is not a canonical part of the Bible.”¹²⁹

Indeed, what we have in the book of James is the repeated refutation of the “faith only” doctrine in plain language: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (James 2:14). “Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20). “Ye see then how that **by works a man is justified, and not by faith only**” (James 2:24). “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

¹²⁸ “Martin Luther”, <http://www.krotov.info/spravki/persons/16person/luther.html>.

¹²⁹ Platis, *ibid.*, 58.

Another verse that bothered Luther was that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4) “Luther, who took the “severe” position on predestination, translated this verse “God wills that all be assisted.” Those before and after him who teach his view on predestination (such as John Calvin) have had to twist (if not mistranslate) this text.”¹³⁰

One of the less radical methods of the leaders of the Reformation in dealing with the “inconvenient” passages of the Scripture is mistranslation of the original Greek text. We will look at just one telling example here.

1 Corinthians 9:27, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway”, must have made the Reformers uncomfortable, because here not only does Apostle Paul talk about his ascetic feats as means of achieving salvation, he is also making it clear that his own salvation is not a “done deal” to him. With respect to his body the Apostle uses the Greek word *hupopiazō* – which means “to beat black and blue, to smite so as to cause bruises and livid spots.”^{131, 132}

In his commentary on this verse, John Calvin downplays the asceticism that the Apostle advocates: “...in my opinion the Apostle has employed the word ὑπωπιάζειν here, to

¹³⁰ Platis, *ibid.*, 61.

¹³¹ *Interlinear Study Bible*, <http://www.searchgodsword.org/isb/>.

¹³² Translated as “to buffet”, “to pommel”, and “to beat” in ASV, RSV and NIV translations, respectively. The Apostle undoubtedly refers to the brutal sport of *pankration*, which was a part of the Isthmian Games that Corinth was famous for.

mean “treating in a servile manner.””¹³³ Furthermore, he uses this passage to attack the Orthodox monasticism: “The ancient monks, with a view to yield obedience to this precept contrived many exercises of discipline, for they slept on benches, they forced themselves to long watchings, and shunned delicacies. The main thing, however, was wanting in them, for they did not apprehend why it was that the Apostle enjoins this, because they lost sight of another injunction – to take no concern for our flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof (Romans 13:14.) For what he says elsewhere (1 Timothy 4:8) always holds good — that bodily exercise profiteth little. Let us, however, treat the body so as to make a slave of it, that it may not, by its wantonness, keep us back from the duties of piety; and farther, that we may not indulge it, so as to occasion injury, or offense, to others.”¹³⁴

Calvin uses the quote from the Apostle’s Letter to Timothy to make the Apostle sound like he opposed the mortification of the body. In Calvin’s point of view, it is not objectionable to “enslave” our bodies to some extent – but only because our fleshly desires may get in the way of “our duties of piety” or because we may “injure or offend others”. No mention, of course, of the fact that our sinful passions get in the way of our *own* salvation. So here we have an example of how Protestant doctrines are “supported” by the Scripture.

And what about the second half of Apostle Paul’s quote? Calvin reads this verse figuratively: “...It will suit better to view this expression as referring to men, in this way

¹³³ John Calvin, *Commentary on Corinthians*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xvi.iii.html>.

¹³⁴ Calvin, *ibid.*

– “My life ought to be a kind of rule to others. Accordingly, I strive to conduct myself in such a manner, that my character and conduct may not be inconsistent with my doctrine, and that thus I may not, with great disgrace to myself, and a grievous occasion of offense to my brethren, neglect those things which I require from others.”¹³⁵ Here Calvin is trying to avoid acknowledging the fact that the Apostle was concerned about his own salvation as well – and instead rewrites the verse in a less “threatening” way, as if Apostle Paul was solely concerned with not offending his flock.

Another method frequently employed is simply ignoring an inconvenient passage.

Regarding the second part of 1 Corinthians 9:27, the Quest Study Bible (NIV) avoids dealing with this issue: “The debate centers on whether the prize lost is salvation itself or reward for faithful ministry. This text alone does not settle the argument.”¹³⁶ The reader is referred to the articles “Can believers fall away? (Luke 8:13)”¹³⁷ and “Should we fear falling? (Heb. 6:6)”¹³⁸. Both offer an argument that those who “fall away” are those who probably never truly believed. Was there a chance Apostle Paul was not a true believer?

Protestants also frequently take Scriptural quotes out of context. For example, “Only believe!” (Mark 5:36) in reality is addressed not to all Christians but to the ruler of the synagogue and in very special circumstances.¹³⁹ Likewise, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5), used by Protestants to “prove” that God provides all the work at our conversion, is talking about “cooperation between God and man. Man can forbid it. Love

¹³⁵ Calvin, *ibid.*

¹³⁶ *The Quest Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 1581.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1431.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1665.

¹³⁹ Platis, *ibid.*, 56.

and obedience are our part.”¹⁴⁰ “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44) cannot be taken as a proof of the doctrine of pre-destination because later in the same Gospel Christ says: “I... will draw **all** men unto me” (John 12:32)¹⁴¹

One of the sincere but still faulty approaches to the Scripture that may lend “support” to the Protestant doctrines regarding salvation is taking the Biblical passages literally, as if the meaning of the quote is self-evident. “This approach was no doubt the first approach used by the Reformers, though very early on they came to realize that by itself this was an insufficient solution to the problems presented by the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*... This approach still is the most common one to be found among the less educated Fundamentalists, Evangelicals and Charismatics – “The Bible says what it means and means what it says,” is an oft heard phrase.”¹⁴²

However, the fact, for example, that salvation is a “free gift” (Romans 3:24, 5:15-17, 6:23) does not automatically mean that this gift cannot be stolen or lost.¹⁴³ Likewise, the fact that the Wise Thief died on the cross right after confessing Christ as Lord cannot automatically “prove” that he earned his salvation without any works: he publicly repented, publicly confessed Christ as Lord, and defended Him when the other thief berated Him. These all are works, not just faith.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Platis, *ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴¹ Platis, *ibid.*, 62.

¹⁴² Fr. John Whiteford, “Sola Scriptura: In the Vanity of Their Minds”, http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/sola_scriptura_john_whiteford.htm.

¹⁴³ Platis, *ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴⁴ Platis, *ibid.*, 57.

Calvin's concept of "predestination" is based on a literal reading of the following: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30) "Predestination means God's pre-assigning of each person to either be saved or lost. Orthodox say this is based only on God's foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29) that the one would make a right use of his free will and the other a wrong; this is the only explanation proposed by anyone until the year A.D. 400. Non-Orthodox with the "severe" view on predestination believe we have no say in this assignment, a view developed by Augustine, who was the first to question free will."¹⁴⁵

Calvin's concept of "irresistible grace" draws its Biblical "support" from the literal reading of the parable of a man throwing a feast (Luke 14:16-24): "...And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." (Luke 14:23) The word "compel" here does not mean "an irresistible invitation, or any forceful constraint of man's will": the Patristic consensus here has been that it simply means "to bring great pressure on."¹⁴⁶

An unconstrained, straightforward reading of the Scripture often involves lumping together different uses of the same term. In rejecting the necessity of works for one's salvation, Protestants make no distinction between two kinds of good works: the works

¹⁴⁵ Platis, *ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Platis, *ibid.*, 62.

produced by God through us (“...it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13), “...he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:21)), which are needed for our salvation, and the human-produced “works of the law”, without faith in Christ, which cannot save. Protestants’ favorite quotes – “...By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Romans 3:20), “a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28), “for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21), “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9), “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5), etc. – obviously, talk about the “works of the law” that one performs without guidance from God, thinking that they are his own and that those works can earn him salvation.

Using modern translations of the Bible – as opposed to the Greek original – to make theological points is not uncommon among modern Protestants. For example, in “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit...” (John 3:5), the Greek original says “anyone” (*tis*) and not “a man” – so it refers to the necessity of baptism for any human being, not just an adult.¹⁴⁷

Roman Catholics are also no strangers to drawing support for their teachings related to salvation from mistranslated Scriptural passages. The Latin translation of “...and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12) as “in whom all have sinned” [Adam, that is] “overstates the doctrine and might be interpreted to imply that all

¹⁴⁷ Platis, *ibid.*, 80.

men are *guilty* of Adam's sin."¹⁴⁸ As we know, this is indeed the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

2.16 Disregarding the Tradition of salvation accumulated in the Church and replacing it with delusional mysticism.

With all that said about the interpretation of the Scripture, it is the Orthodox tradition of spirituality – and not any selection of Scriptural or Patristic quotes – that delegitimizes the Western doctrines of salvation like “faith only.” The Orthodox teaching on salvation can be traced back to the early Apostolic Church through the uninterrupted continuity of worship and practice. The Orthodox Church, since the earliest times, has never lived in a manner that would have been consistent with later Western doctrines.

Having fallen away from the Orthodox *dogmatic* teaching on salvation, Western Christendom also developed a non-Patristic mystical spirituality. Mysticism was a movement concurrent with scholasticism¹⁴⁹ and, technically, opposed to it. However, it could, perhaps, still be called an estranged child of scholasticism, as it possessed symptoms of the same disease – namely, looking for “shortcuts” to salvation, bypassing the “narrow way.”

Mysticism asserted that one can come to the knowledge of God and His Revelation not through dialectic proofs, but through one's spirit ascending to God through the state of

¹⁴⁸ Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition*, *ibid.*, 166.

¹⁴⁹ Talberg, *ibid.*, 359.

ecstasy. In that state one feels the presence of God in his soul, and he is filled and illumined by it. Bernard of Clairvaux (12th century), the Franciscan friar Bonaventure (13th century), and Thomas a Kempis (15th century) were the most famous proponents of mysticism.

The starkest contrast between Orthodox and medieval Roman Catholic spirituality is that in Orthodoxy there is *no* meditation. The Holy Fathers have always warned against deliberately seeking mystical experiences. This teaching is Biblical and Apostolic as well: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4: 1-3). Apostle Paul warns that “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

However, it became characteristic of Roman Catholic spirituality to seek and receive, without discernment, any mystical experience as coming from God. The medieval teachers of mysticism, in fact, encouraged one to imagine, for example, a very detailed and graphic picture of Christ’s sufferings on the Cross – which was intended to induce in one the feelings of repentance and gratitude. With time a practitioner of such mysticism would develop consistent emotional states – the states of ecstasy – that would even manifest themselves physically in the form of wounds similar to Christ’s (*stigmata*).

Protestantism, even though it largely eliminated all mystical spirituality – Orthodox or Roman Catholic – from its tradition, could not help but adhere to non-Patristic mystical practices, as they are much more appealing to human pride and other passions than the ascetic Patristic teaching of “the narrow way”. Many Protestant denominations were born and developed out of their leaders’ receiving “divine” revelations and “ordinations”. In modern Pentecostalism, non-denominational evangelicalism, and charismatic sects, we encounter conviction in their “divine” or “apostolic” authority and possession of the “gifts of the Holy Spirit”, belief in receiving additional “revelations” directly from God, encouragement of ecstatic “prophesying”, speaking in tongues, etc.

To the Orthodox, all Western spirituality is what is called *prelest*’ in the Russian tradition: the state of spiritual delusion. The Holy Fathers have pointed out that without the struggle with one’s “old man” and passions, without fulfilling God’s Commandments, without repentance, it is impossible to achieve communion with God. “No man putteth new wine into old bottles” (Luke 5:37).

CONCLUSION

With God's help, we were able to demonstrate that the teaching on personal salvation held by the entire Orthodox Church today is of Divine origin, internally consistent, and traceable to the teaching of the early One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church – as preserved in the Apostolic and Patristic writings, as well as the Church's two-thousand-year cumulative experience of the "life in Christ". We also demonstrated that the distortions of this Tradition of salvation in Western Christendom go well beyond theological nuances or purely academic historical interest – but are, in fact, evidence that "a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matthew 7:17), and have manifested themselves in a wide range of phenomena having direct implications on one's salvation: from virtually purging the believers' spiritual life of any practical meaning to presenting them with a blasphemous image of God, from distorting the Scripture to fit the new doctrines to accepting the practices promoting mystical delusion. We pray for our non-Orthodox brothers and sisters to our Lord Jesus Christ – "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4) – that He will guide them to the paths of true salvation. "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

Glory to God for all things!

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VITA

Victor Evgenievich Klimenko was born in 1971 in Moscow, Russia, to a family of scientists. Grew up atheist – the situation typical for the 1970s – 1980s Soviet Union. After graduating from high school, entered the Physics Department of Moscow State University to follow in father's footsteps (he is a physicist by training). Upon graduation, in 1993, became a researcher at the P.N. Lebedev Physical Institute in Moscow. In August 1995 left for the U.S. to start graduate studies at the University of Virginia (UVA) in Charlottesville, VA. In 2002, graduated from UVA with a Ph.D. in Physics, moved to Arlington, VA, and got married. Worked for a small engineering company in Rockville, MD, for four years. Since December 2007, Senior Analyst at a small scientific consulting company in Dulles, VA. Married (wife is an Orthodox convert), with two daughters, living in Falls Church, VA.

In July 2002, started attending the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Washington, DC. On August 24, 2002, was baptized by Fr. Victor Potapov into Orthodox faith. Started serving in the altar in the Summer of 2005. The following year also started helping with the readings – the Hours, the post-Communion prayers and occasionally Epistle – almost exclusively at the English-language services. On March 11, 2007 – the Sunday of the Cross – tonsured a Reader by Metropolitan Laurus. On September 14, 2008, tonsured a Subdeacon by Metropolitan Hilarion.