

Thoughts on Thaumaturgy: A Few Rudimentary Concepts in Greek Orthodox Metaphysics

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*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38
And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. Romans 8:27*

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, because the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by their sinful nature cannot please God. Romans 8:6-8

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given to us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. I Corinthians 2:12-14

But when the kindness and love...our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-5, 7

Creation itself seems futile (not of its own choice, but by the will of Him who made it so). Yet with hope that in the end all Creation would be set free from the effects of death and decay to enjoy the liberty that will come to the children of God in their ultimate glory. Romans 8.

In the same way the Holy Spirit also helps us in our weakness; for we do not know what prayers to offer nor in what way to offer them. Even the pleadings of the Spirit on our behalf are beyond words, yet, the Searcher of hearts knows what the Spirit's meaning is regarding the people of God, because spiritual intercession is in God's will. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, yes, to them who are called according to His divine purpose. Romans 8.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not according to the tradition which he received from us. II Thessalonians 3:6

Follow the straight path which has been charted by our Lord Jesus Christ, and do not allow yourselves to be encircled by sin...Today's path which is followed by various societies is directed

towards sin. The cause of this is the development of civilization - of wrongly conceived civilization - towards which the various leaders are striving by diverse means to direct mankind, trying to create a new way of life, different from that prescribed by the Lord. Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene of Lesvos.

It is commonly said that there is a “western,” juridical model of salvation so common among Roman Catholics and their dialectal opposites, the Protestants. Rome sees salvation as dying in a state of grace, defined in purely negative terms. If one dies having not committed a mortal sin since one's last confession, salvation is theirs. This is the case in both “Council of Trent” and Novus Ordo Catholics (though large numbers of the latter no longer believe in the afterlife). One is either in a state of grace or sin. For this reason, the Roman church eventually abandoned fasting and nearly abandoned the monastic life, for the ascetic struggle ceased to be important to the papal mind given that salvation was based on a “state” of grace rather than the preparation to see Christ. This “state” was mediated exclusively by the clergy. Sins could be forgiven in no other way.

Man prays to God in order to receive things, and the heavens are turned into a cosmic vending machine. When God does not give them what they want, they abandon Him. In the papal system, when one falls into mortal sin, he is cut off from God, receiving no grace until his next confession. In the meantime, he sins as much as he wants, as nothing else is expected of one who is completely cut off from grace, as he, until his repentance, is already damned. If this is an exaggeration, it is only a slight one.

The other model is the Orthodox model, one that might be termed “mystical” for the simple reason that it has to do with participation (as all mysticism must, by definition). It concerns the continued struggle against the forces of “the world” in favor of the forces of spirit (though the rejection of one does not necessarily imply the acceptance of the other). The title uses “thaumaturgy” or the act of wonder working; in this case less dramatically as the results of the ascetic life.

This essay is an extended set of thoughts on the nature of reality for the redeemed, that is, the Orthodox. The Orthodox man is different ontologically from others. The reprobate have no freedom and serve their own interests under many clever guises. This is not a work in theology, since the author is not competent in this area. Rather, it is a work of philosophy as applied to the things of God – a very different undertaking. In truth, Plato and Aristotle have been redeemed and their problems solved by the Logos. Christ becoming man answered all philosophy's problems. However, the reprobate have no access to truth or freedom, so their problems will never cease.

Baptism opens the life of grace in its fullness to man – Eden is restored in the church. Sin, however, dims that light, or, more accurately, the possibility for its reception and actualization. Sin is not so much an act but an attitude. It is the preparation to receive the light which typifies the entire Orthodox life: the Church (thought of in its sacramental sense), is the “mental hospital” in which one is assisted in this struggle. The church is the redeemed universe.

The Orthodox life is a brutal endeavor. Its central, nodal point is the preparation of the human person, that is, body and soul, to become a proper receptacle for the divine light, or the fullness of grace (grace, energy and light being identical concepts). This is the central idea of asceticism. Human life is one of preparation. This is the nature of “suffering Orthodoxy.”

Contrary to the Roman church, the light of Christ can be experienced in this life as well as

the afterlife. There is no distinction here in real terms, as St. Philotheos of Sinai writes, "Let us cut sin out of our heart, and we will find within us the Kingdom of Heaven." And also Blessed Theophylact, "The kingdom of God is always present for him who desires and wills it. When a man's disposition and way of life are like that of an angel, most assuredly this is the kingdom of God." And also Abba Evagrius, "The kingdom of God is knowledge of the Holy Trinity, extending as far as the state of one's mind permits, and filling it with an endlessly blessed life." This too is the renewed universe.

God has joined himself to man through Christ, a truism Christians repeat, though not understanding its implications. Man, to the extent he is baptized and holds the Orthodox Truth, is an "aspect" or "part" of the Holy Trinity; he partakes in the life of the Trinity through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and that is the Spirit's purpose. This is made possible by the fact that human flesh is now seated next to the Father.

Baptism does not eliminate original sin, as the heretics teach, but rather initiates one into the Trinity. St. Gregory Palamas writes, "Through the fall our nature was stripped of divine illumination and resplendence. But the Logos of God had pity upon our disfigurement and in His compassion He took our nature upon Himself, and on Tabor He manifested it to His elect disciples clothed once again most brilliantly. He shows what we once were and what we shall become through Him in the age to come, if we choose to live our present life as far as possible in accordance with His ways." Man, that is, the Orthodox man, is not separated from God in the sense that he exists in an autonomous sphere of earthly life, something separate from heaven and the light. The Orthodox man is ontologically different from the common run of men so long as he maintains this struggle.

For the Orthodox, there is a primary ontological distinction between him and that of the unredeemed, or the heretic. The Orthodox man has the opportunity of being raised above the fallen world of nature, nature taken in its lowest form: one of blind force and coercion, manifest in human life through passion and appetite. The fullness of grace is present at baptism, at confession and at the Eucharist, but this does not automatically permit one to be a proper receiver of it. The church possesses all of this so it can impart it via the sacraments.

The ascetic life makes all this real, and is something achieved over time. For the baptized, grace is ever-present, the ability of man, sunk in sin and passion, to receive it (or even understand it), however, is another matter. The ascetic life permits one, over time, to begin to see God within created nature, to see His activity through logos. The ascetic can begin to see the universal embedded in the particular. Nature is not merely blind force (as the unredeemed see it), but is the habitation of God and his power. God is not up in the sky, but exists in another dimension of reality, imminent in creation, though not identified with it. He exists with the baptized in his fullness and power, but sin and passion obscure His presence. The unredeemed see in creation mere blind force to be manipulated by science, the state or an elite; the ascetic sees God's power.

Nature for the bulk of humanity is merely an arena of blind force. This view is the basis for materialism and fetishism, as the latter is an understanding of certain natural objects as somehow embodying force or power. It is the genesis of paganism (i.e. life after the fall of Adam) in that regard. Its particular epistemology is that of nominalism, the belief that what is real is what the senses perceive and no more.

Objects are brute givens, made up of particular attributes, and partake, in some sense, of the violence and blindness of fallen nature. This is the "world" or "the flesh" in the Scriptural sense, that which leads one to worship power, the state, and the manipulation of natural objects for profit, or the "economy." It is the lowest form of human life. The logical faculty of the unredeemed is merely a slave to passion, and acts in relation to passion as means to ends. Reason

(as nous, rather than pragmatic logic) is able to contemplate spirit, passion knows nothing of it, but recognizes particular objects only. Has any man received lustful thoughts over the “idea” of a woman? No, only this or that particular woman. Therefore, passion recognizes only particulars as bundles of attributes. The brute given, the meaningless lump of flesh rather than the universal that gives it life.

The ascetic life, therefore, is one where the human person is prepared to receive the light of God, both on earth and after his repose. The Orthodox strugglers, after a lifetime of labor, no longer see brute nature, but natural objects as manifesting the universal form of the thing in the Platonic sense, that understanding of objects as existing in the mind of God. They see its “reason” in all senses of that term. Things bear the imprint of God as the creative force. The mystic can see through a person, they can see objects invisible to the unredeemed; they see what the life of the flesh hides from the unredeemed.

The unredeemed see objects/attributes are mere givens, each containing some force, some sort of “pull” over the will. A woman, to the lower human, is merely an object for sexual attraction or some form of sexual exploitation. For the ascetic, the curves of a woman are the “form” of human beauty, the manifestation of God's will for man, the Eros of the love and beauty of God manifest in the human form. There is no “passionate” pull on the ascetic's will (at his best), but rather, the curves of a woman, or the red of an apple, or the color of the sky, are manifestations of God, His Will, His Beauty and His Love. The passionate response is one of domination and absorption; that of worship is recognition.

To the ascetic, things exist as universal ideas rather than brute objects in space and time. St. Thalassios writes in the *Philokalia*,

When the intellect has been perfected, it unites wholly with God and is illumined by divine light, and the most hidden mysteries are revealed to it. Then it truly learns where wisdom and power lie. . . While it is still fighting against the passions it cannot as yet enjoy these things. . . but once the battle is over and it is found worthy of spiritual gifts, then it becomes wholly luminous, powerfully energized by grace and rooted in the contemplation of spiritual realities. A person in whom this happens is not attached to the things of this world but has passed from death to life.¹

Symbolically, the “battle,” that is, the “pull” of the word is signified by the number six and its letter, “F.” In Hebrew, initially from the symbolism of the Egyptians, these refers to this world in its lowest form. It is the domain of power and coercion. It refers to “the double edged sword” in its initial pictographic representation, according to Ukrainian scholar Vladimir Owarchuk. It is the “spine” of creation, that mystic relation between particulars and the passions, and is completed, in Christian life, through the waters of baptism, represented by the number seven.

Seven in Hebrew numerology refers to the “source” or, in its original understanding, the source of the waters of Eden, or the waters of divine truth. On the other hand, six often is represented by a tree, the tree of “secret knowledge” the source of Gnostic ideology. Technology, or the ultimate ideology of “sixness,” or Gnosticism (the “perfection” of creation), is the reverse of the “seven,” or man saving himself, rather than the true meaning of seven, or the source of liberation, divine truth and the overcoming of contradiction.

1 Direct quotes in this paper come from the Four-Volume *Philokalia* set listed in the bibliography.

In the Gnostic mentality, the resolver of contradiction is man, represented by six, the occult “star of David,” (which has nothing to do with ancient Hebrew religion), a hexagram symbolizing technology resolving the contradiction, the “yin/yang” of nature through technology and oligarchy. Since “six” is represented by what appears to be an upright staff (both “sword” and “nail”), it represents the nailing of man to earth, the prison of space/time, the life of sin, the life of the earth. “60” in Hebrew is “the support,” or the tree, the “tree of life” in the garden, the knowledge of contradiction and its resolution; the knowledge of the earth. It is traditionally known as the space/time prison.

600, the age of Noah when he enters the Ark, it is the earth and its pleasures, soon to be altered into perfection, the number seven, beyond space and time, the church itself. In Hebrew the number seven is rendered “Shiva,” adopted by the Hindus for their Goddess of destruction/rebirth; death/life. Seven is rest and godhood, the end of labors. “70” is the number for the “all seeing eye,” perverted by the Masons, but initially was the Eye of God, that which destroys sin and knows all.

Six and Seven, then, are closely related. As Satan attempts to convince people he is God, he becomes the master of counterfeit. There are true and false miracles, true and false religions; six and seven produce religion, tradition and miracles equally, hence the problem, hence the need for the Church and its authority. Six represents one form of the resolution of contradiction, the double edge “yin/yang.” It is technology, the secret knowledge of ideology and the oligarchical elite to create a “better world.”

Seven is the true resolution of contradiction in Christ himself and the waters of baptism. Seven is timelessness, both in the sense of tradition as remaining steadfast another meaning of the tree in ancient paganism. “Tree” might refer to both being rooted to the earth, as well as the steadfastness of tradition. It is both good and evil. The contradiction in nature, as being both good and evil at the same time, therefore neither, the domain of blind force, is resolved either by the Gnostic prison of technology and slave labor to maintain it, or the life of asceticism, the liberation of the will over and above the domain of “treeness” or “sixness,” that is, blind nature. It was this “tree” to which Christ was crucified, “nailed” down by passion and sin.

A virtue is that which permits man to move from the “six” to salvation, to escape the world. A virtue is a set of habits that permit man to ascend the ladder from objects as “brute givens” to objects bearing the universal; to a life where objects manipulate the passions, to one where God is observed working through natural objects and the laws that govern their interaction. Nature appears as love rather than violence.

A vice does the opposite. A virtue is a structure of behavior (or a rule of life) that permits the ascetic to ascend to God in the sense of seeing the universal in the particular, or the spirit that is hidden under the colors and sounds of fallen nature. Natural Law, the laws discoverable by science, is seen by the mystic/ascetic as the loving presence of God directing his creation. For the vulgar, the idea of law, whether civil or natural, is a form of violence, coercion and death, something set above man, something with its own set of obligations and penalties. St. Gregory of Sinai writes in this vein, “Fire, darkness, worm, hell correspond to passions-lusts of all kinds, the all-embracing darkness of ignorance, the unquenchable thirst for sensual pleasures, the stench of evil-smelling sin, which, like precursors and foretastes of the torment of hell, even now begin to torture sinners in whose souls they take root through long-established habit.”

Therefore, good acts are those that permit the ascent to Christ, the ability to view creation properly, and are the sum total of the ascetic struggle. A bad act brings man back to the prison, and ultimately worship, of earthly power. A passion is precisely the attraction that objects within

fallen nature have on the human will, forcing the will to act in one way over another, to be drawn one way, repelled to another. Objects/attributes of nature are viewed purely as means whereby a certain drive can be (temporarily) satisfied.

This mentality is the basis for a life of sin, the life of the world. The repetition of good actions, therefore, are those that, in their totality, raise the human being out of this prison, and into the light of the Trinitarian life that man was created for. "Freedom," properly defined, is the liberation of the will from the prison of cause and effect, of nature in its lowest form. As the repetition of bad acts imprisons one in the earthy world of cause and effect, good actions, repeated over time, create a habit of life, or a virtue.

Sin therefore, does not offend God in the normal sense of the term; but it offends against the dignity of the baptized man. Sin is the gradual effacing of the true destiny of the human person. It is a prison where drives of the will are the only reality (ultimately dissolving objects into the undulations of the will), and objects in space are the means where by these are satisfied. Sin is a prison; it imprisons man in the world of cause and effect, of force and coercion.

Therefore, penance is not compensating God, but is a method to place the penitent back on the right path of asceticism and self-denial; of the training of the will to not seek fulfillment in the world of violence and coercion, but in the liberation only the Spirit can provide. St. Macarius the Great writes,

After a person had turned away from God's commandments and became subject to His condemnation, sin had enslaved him and like a narrow and deep abyss of bitterness, having pervaded inside, captured the soul to its very deepest recesses. Likewise, we can compare the sin within us as a large and leafy tree, whose roots stretch deep into the soil. Thus having entered our soul, sin had overwhelmed it to its deepest recesses, becoming a habit that begins in our childhood and with the years, grows ever stronger leads us toward the vile.

Asceticism liberates the will, and brings it above the world of objects and into the world of universal truth and reality, that of spirit, objects reflecting the will and love of the creator rather than as means to (temporary) fulfillment of the individual's will. Objects are not abandoned, but radically transformed as the fullness of their being is revealed. This is the concept of "transfiguration." Christ did not create a "new earth" after His resurrection (that is at the second coming, when objects will be shown to the Orthodox in their fullness), but God provided human beings who believe in Him to receive of the light; a light that would reveal the fullness of created nature, to reveal its universality, and therefore, for one on the path, the earth is truly a new creation in the redeemed.

This might make some sense out of the debate between nominalists, Aristotelians and Platonists, a debate of great interest to the Church Fathers, all of whom had read the Platonists and assumed their readers did too. The nominalist sees only brute nature and force. Such a view is typical of late medieval Europe and the post-Christian world in general. The Aristotelian sees the outlines of the universal within the particular, while the Platonist wishes to live among the world of Forms, the universal nature of things, things as seen by the mind, rather than by the sense.

Socrates problem was that Athens had become so corrupt that even basic thought and language was decaying. The Forms were now totally separate from the daily world of men. Those still in contact with this realm were seen as freaks and today, would be called "mental patients." Jesus Christ brought Logos, the Creator of the Forms, that Plato only could imagine. His work

was completed in the flesh by Christ. Logos lived among men.

In contact with the world of Forms, the Orthodox saints could see things others could not. They tamed wild animals, predicted the future, saw within people's souls and perceived spiritual realities beyond the bland 3-D world the fall of Adam created. This is the result of the heightened perception of the ascetic saints, the life where the dead weight of objects are transfigured into the life of the archetype, the form, the mind of God. No matter where one looks, from medieval Ireland to Palestine to Egypt to Russia, the life of the ascetic saint is basically the same. He is able, through grace, to transfigure nature because he sees the origin – Logos – working within it. The more corrupt the society, the more severe the censure of such persons will be.

Summarizing the above: Salvation is based on good works in the sense that such good works create virtue, or a disposition of the will where objects in their lowest form (as brute givens) is replaced by a desire to see them in their fullness. He then begins to partake of divinity, being an adopted son of God through the agency of the Holy Ghost, but such divinity, or the divine light, as always been present since baptism. While the fullness of the grace of the Spirit has always been there, a life of vice/sin does not permit a man to perceive it, understand it, or live according to it. This takes place only within the boundaries of the Orthodox church, for it is here, and only here, where the Spirit operates. The Church therefore, so to speak, is the incarnation of the Spirit on earth in that its members partake of the Trinitarian life by virtue of their struggle. In this sense do Orthodox saints say that church is not merely human institution, but that salvation is available only to her ascetic strugglers.

Virtue permits the light of the Spirit to penetrate man completely. Sin renders man brute and obtuse; material and vulgar. As baptized Orthodox people, had we not sinned after our initiation into the Church, we would be so full of joy and grace that we could barely contain it. We could foretell the future, see the angels and saints on a daily basis, be able to tame the most violent beasts, and would be absolutely happy. Space and time would cease to exist, and we would live in the rapture of grace.

This is not the case because men choose the nominal entity, the brute object as a means of satisfying a certain passion. Fear and insecurity demand man possess things and exclude others from them. God is absent in such a life. Asceticism, Suffering Orthodoxy, as Archbishop Averky put it, is a means whereby we are raised above this world, and shown the basis of its creation, in the life of the forms; objects as they exist in God, rather than in our perception, retarded as it is by sin, the world and the Fall.

The extent to which we are prepared to receive the light of Christ on earth, that is our lot after our repose. Orthodox people, at their chrisimation and baptism, receive the Holy Ghost. We are tri-composite, as says St. John of Damascus, we are body, soul and spirit. Unredeemed humanity is merely bi-composite, merely body and soul, both of the earth, and a part of this earthly life. The soul that is not saved is merely a machine that produces methods and means by which passions are satisfied, it does not partake of the Spirit, it is a fallen entity, one that, in itself, does not recognize spirit. It does little else.

At their death of the non-Orthodox or the Orthodox who rejects Christ, they return to the earth, to Sheol or Hades, the place of death, as their soul has no life in it. St. Gregory Palamas writes:

After our forefather's transgression in paradise through the tree, we suffered the death of our soul-which is the separation of the soul from God-prior to our bodily death; yet although we cast away our divine likeness, we did not lose our divine

image. Thus when the soul renounces its attachment to inferior things and cleaves through love to God and submits itself to Him through acts and modes of virtue, it is illuminated and made beautiful by God and is raised to a higher level, obeying His counsels and exhortations; and by these means it regains the truly eternal life. Through this life it makes the body conjoined to it immortal, so that in due time the body attains the promised resurrection and participates in eternal glory.

In other words, prior to our struggle to attach ourselves to the superior things, we are not immortal. Death is the exile of man's consciousness to Hades. The redeemed are immortal; the church will see a recreated cosmos where spirit and matter will be perfectly synthesized, and objects will be shown to us as the perfect interpenetration of spirit, form and matter. The same saint also says, "As the separation of the soul from the body is the death of the body, so the separation of God from the soul is the death of the soul. And this death of the soul is the true death. This is made clear by the commandment given in paradise, when God said to Adam, 'On whatever day you eat from the forbidden tree you will certainly die'" (cf. Gen. 2:17).

In other words, the soul of the unredeemed is of the earth, and is only immortal in a guarded sense. Hades (in Latin "Limbo" from the root "on the edge of"), rather than Hell, is the place for the unredeemed soul, the soul who never knew Christ, and could not be free as a result. Such men are merely natural objects, sunk in a deterministic life, encased in matter and simple perception. In Genesis, Adam is called a "living soul," and yet, once driven from the garden, he is told that "he will return to dust." St. Paul writes, "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (1 Cor. 15:49). And again, ". . .this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:53-54). The Psalmist speaks of the soul being "in the grave" (Ps 89:48). The soul either dies (as the image of the earthly, where all things die) or it lives. If it lives forever, it lives according to the Spirit, and it lives either in heaven (Christ's "right side"), or Hell (Christ's "left").

Souls that were not liberated by the sacraments are mortal, and according to Christ's words, they go to the underworld, into a life of semi-existence. Christ conquered death, but not Hell, since Hell is eternal and a part of the uncreated light of the Trinity. Therefore, those who believe rightly in Christ will not die just as those who do not know Him will die. St. Justin Martyr writes, "But our Jesus Christ, being crucified and dead, and having ascended to heaven, reigned, and by those things which were published in His name among all nations by the apostles, there is joy offered to those who expect the immortality promised by Him." This same saint also writes in his *Dialogues with Trypho*, "the soul is not in its own nature immortal. . . .it is willed to live by God." St. Maximus the Confessor writes, "Death, is principally the separation from God."

The Orthodox have the opportunity to serve God as immortals. How the life beyond this one will appear to us changes to the extent to which we have prepared ourselves for Him in our life on earth. His light will either scorch us (the nature of Hell), or it will warm us (the nature of Heaven), and we merit this state insofar as we have (of have not) prepared ourselves through asceticism. As St. Simeon the New Theologian writes,

As many therefore as are children of the light also become sons of the Day which is to come, and are enabled to walk decently as in the day. The Day of the Lord will never come upon them, because they are already in it forever and continually.

The Day of the Lord, in effect, is not going to be revealed suddenly to those who are ever illumined by the divine light, but for those who are in the darkness of the passions and spend their lives in the world hungering for the things of the world, for them it will be fearful and they will experience it as unbearable fire. However, this fire which is God will not appear in an entirely spiritual manner but, one might say, as bodilessly embodied, in the same way as, according to the Evangelist, Christ of old was seen by the Apostles after having risen from the dead.

Heaven and Hell are internal states that manifest a healthy or a diseased soul. God is singular and integral: how He is perceived by others differs depending on the perceiver. St. Gregory of Sinai writes similarly,

By many mansions (John 14:2) the Savior meant the different degrees of existence in the other world. The kingdom is one, but within it there are many divisions, according to the difference in knowledge and virtue of those who enter therein, and to their degree of deification. For 'there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the; for one star differs from another star in glory,' as says the divine Apostle, though all shine alike in the firmament.

And also St. Augustine writes that Hell is also the domain of God, "You may, however, not improbably contend that all things, it is true, belong to the kingdom of God, because He reigns in heaven, reigns on earth, in the depths beneath, in paradise, in hell (for where does He not reign, since His power is everywhere supreme? 1Cor 15:41)."

St. Issac the Syrian writes,

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

The church militant on earth continues to pray for the souls of the departed, so the light of Christ becomes more and more loving to them, so that they can progress closer and closer towards Christ, or to use another metaphor, to move from the "left" to the "right." As St. Gregory writes, "It is said that in the life to come the angels and saints ever increase in gifts of grace and never abate their longing for further blessings. No lapse or veering from virtue to vice takes place in that life." This is little else than the Spirit, animating the faithful in earth, continuing to shower grace on the dead that we commemorate. Additionally, St. Clement of Alexandria writes,

Accordingly the believer, through great discipline, divesting himself of the passions, passes to the mansion which is better than the former one, viz., to the greatest torment, taking with him the characteristic of repentance from the sins he has committed after baptism. He is tortured then still more -- not yet or not quite attaining what he sees others to have acquired. Besides, he is also ashamed of his transgressions. The greatest torments, indeed, are assigned to the believer. For

God's righteousness is good, and His goodness is righteous. And though the punishments cease in the course of the completion of the expiation and purification of each one, yet those have very great and permanent grief who are found worthy of the other fold, on account of not being along with those that have been glorified through righteousness.

God is not “changing his mind,” when the Church prays for the dead, but it is rather the Spirit that is providing more and more grace to the departed, and we, on earth, part of the Church militant, are nothing other than the “incarnation” of the Spirit. God does not “do our bidding” because the church is a part of God's existence. Prayer, in this light, is not a “petition.” That is a metaphor used by many, but it is not to be taken as the literal truth. Prayer is the communication among the persons of the Trinity, or in our case, the communication between Spirit and the Son (to whom all power has been given). Christ took on Flesh. This means flesh and matter – and all things human but sin – are now part of the functioning of the Trinity.

God knows our petitions before we ask them, and such prayer, therefore, is more of a signal of our dependence and rejection of worldly solutions. Our prayer is the action of the Spirit through the person praying. It is nothing less than the communication that has always taken place among the persons of the Trinity. God gives us what we need, not necessarily what we want. This is precisely the formal notion of hesychastic prayer, or the prayer of the nous.

St. Clement of Alexandria writes,

To describe it with the boldest expression, prayer is a conversation with God. Even if we speak with a low voice, even if we whisper without opening the lips, even if we call to Him only from the depths of our heart, our unspoken word always reaches God and God always hears. Sometimes, however, besides speaking, we lift our head and lift our arms to heaven. In this way, we are underlining the desire that the spirit has for the spiritual world. We are striving with the word to raise the body above the earth. We are giving wings to the soul for it to reach the good things on high.

And St. Isaac the Syrian writes similarly,

Perseverance in prayer cleanses the intellect, illumines it, and fills it with the light of truth. The virtues, led by compassion, give the intellect peace and light. The cleansing of the intellect is not a dialectical, discursive and theoretical activity, but an act of grace through experience and is ethical in every respect. The intellect is purified by fasting, vigils, silence, prayer, and other ascetic practices.

This is why there is no prayer outside the Church, and no prayer of the reposed who were not members of the Church. One might as well pray for the trees and stones. This solves the problem of the early medieval polemics among Aristotelians and Platonists: they refer to the same things, but merely reflect the level of ascetic labor of the individual. Plato realized, though some prophetic insight, that the forms were not mere "givens" but were perceived only after a lifetime of asceticism. For Plato, the contemplation of forms was not to leave the "object" behind, but to fully enlighten our perception of it, to see it in the fullness of its being.

The mystical doctrines of Orthodox asceticism (i.e. Orthodoxy itself), have been effaced

by vulgar western thinking, the mentality of the Enlightenment and the agitation of the non-Orthodox, or the bi-composite. Everything for them is force, an imposition. The universal is never an imposition, only the particular is. The particular object in space is the expression of our sinfulness and fallenness. Seeing the universal, however, seeing God in nature, that is a token of grace, of the results of a lifetime of ascetic labors.

The philosopher and historian can only go so far in issues of theological import. God can be explained in such terms to those whose views are distorted or non-existent. Spinoza's substance is a philosopher's God. As far as it goes, there is nothing wrong with it. It does not go very far. However, it traverses a fundamental plane that few theologians are willing or able to cross. This paper has been no systematic outline of theology, but rather musings and notes of a metaphysician constantly having to explain the faith to people without religion and often, without ideas.

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