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# **ON THE NATURE OF SIN**

**F**aith is an orientation of the soul, not an accord with a collection of facts. If sin ultimately means alienation from God, then its cure, true repentance, must consist in a re-orientation of one's mind, soul and life toward Jesus Christ and His great moral imperatives.

## **WHAT DOES "SIN" MEAN?**

The term in Greek ('amartia) means "to fall short of the goal, miss the mark, fall short of one's proper vocation."

This term is rendered in Latin as "sons," "sontis," which means "guilt; guilty," and has a forensic significance. We can see already that there is an important difference here. The terms used in Holy Scripture ('amartia, etc.) refer to something far greater than the Latin term used to translate them. The Latin term (and the understanding usually given to the word in English) is legalistic and juridical and understood in a forensic sense.

Perhaps, also, the absence of an awareness of the meaning of the concept of "energies," both as

Paul uses the word, as the holy fathers have expressed the word, and as we understand it in a more “human” context. Sin is the misuse of our energies, and vice or addiction is a habitual misuse of our energies. Repentance is the re-orientation of the soul toward God through Jesus Christ. It has to do with the struggle to discover and use our energies in a proper manner our energies. “Energy” concerns relationships. We know God through His uncreated energy, which we call Grace. Our relationships with other human beings involve the proper use of our created energies. Perhaps this is the underlying meaning of Christ's two great commandments, which, He said, are the foundation of all the law and the prophets, “love the Lord your God with your whole being, and your neighbour as yourself.” This can be accomplished only through the proper use of our energies.

Ironically, the juridical concept of sin also lowers and degrades the concept of morality. If sin is only a violation of the law, then morality consists only in obeying the law. Such morality could not contribute to one's salvation but could only render one as hypocritical as the Pharisees and as alienated from Christ as the rich young ruler (Mt.16:19- 12).

It was, and is, in fact, perfectly lawful for righteous and moral “pharisees” to throw a poverty-stricken widow out of her house if she owed

them money or they held a lien on the house (see Mt.23:14). In the same way modern "prosperity gospel" moral evangelicals could foreclose on a poor widows' mortgage or lien without violating a law so that it would be a perfectly moral act from a juridical, forensic point of view. "Sin" does not refer simply to a "violation of the law" which is "punished by God's justice." "Sin" can be any act, physical or mental, that creates an alienation of one from God. God is not alienated from us; we become estranged from Him.

Although guilt is not the primary meaning of "sin," this is not to suggest that there is no guilt in sin, and we will discuss this later. The essence of sin should also not be understood as a contravention of God's will in a legalistic sense, nor to fall below a given norm of behaviour. To sin means to violate God's will in this sense, that "God wills all men to turn from their sin and be saved." ( ) Sin means to fall short of the destiny (mark, goal) for which man was created. Since the "goal," "destiny," and "mark" for which man was created is full communion with God and ultimately to become, by grace, partakers of the Divine Nature (*theosis*) (2Pet.1:4), sharing in His glory and immortality, then "sin" (as a noun) means to fall short of the destiny of theosis (participation in God).

In this context, death, then, may be called "the

sin of the world" since death is both cause and result of missing the goal of immortality, which results from union with God, and is the consequence of the alienation or estrangement of mankind from God. Ultimately, alienation from God (which is the cause of death) may be seen as "the sin of the world" which Christ has "taken away" (Jn.1:29)

The Apostle expresses this concept of sin when he says that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rm. 3:23) (that is, "everyone has missed the mark and fallen short of the goal of man's destiny, which is to participate in the glory of God" — theosis). All mankind, therefore, is "sinful," and each one is a "sinner" because, in the life of all and each, we fall short of the destiny for which we were created. "Sins" are those things we do that openly manifest and reinforce our separation from God or "falling short." All sin is "mortal" sin because all sin separates us from the only source of immortality, from God. Indeed, even our virtues can be sin if they somehow separate us from God, for instance, through pride taken in our virtues.

Living and true faith in Christ is an unconditional orientation of the whole person toward the will of God.

God does not condemn man for his sins and sinfulness in this life or even in the life to come (Jn.12:47-48); our own conscience does. We shape

our own destinies. That which we call "hell" is our own creation, and we may experience it already in this life and, by our own choices in relation to our conscience, and experience the fulness of it in the age to come.<sup>1</sup>

God has set as the possible destiny of all people; immortality, participation in the glory of the Godhead, and the joy of the all-embracing Divine Love. God has set this as our destiny and not only taught us how to attain it but in Christ has made it clearly possible for us to arrive at it. Because of his sins, man always falls short of this destiny, but because of Christ, Who, as true human, arrived at this destiny and attained it on behalf of all mankind (Rm.5:12), we can inherit it anyway by choosing to strive for a life in Christ (Rm. 3:24-30).<sup>2</sup>

**SIN IS MORE THAN BREAKING A LAW:  
ALIENATION FROM GOD (THUS DEATH)  
IS THE "SIN OF THE WORLD"**

Death, according to the holy fathers, is not a punishment from God: it is, rather, the result of man's alienation from the Source of life and failure to live up to his destiny of participating in God's immortality. Death is the primary manifestation of estrangement and alienation from God; it is also our principal source of bondage (Hb.2:15) and the

driving force behind individual sins. Thus death (alienation) is the "sin of the world." Mankind is in a form of bondage to the world's alienation from God, which includes that bondage to the fear of death with which Satan holds us in that bondage (Hb.2:15), to the manner in which the world in its alienation deals with the question of death, as Paul again says, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world..." (Gal.4:3). Christ has taken these things away, though many reject this freedom and remain in that bondage or having been liberated, return again to it (Gal. 4:9).

"Sin" refers to all those things which form a barrier between us and becoming partakers of "the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rm.8:12) and participation in God.

We also refer to these things as passions, and we should remember that the word "passion" means "suffering." The passions are sources of inner human suffering, and this form of mental and emotional suffering is the generator of those manifestations that we refer to as sin. We will discuss this later, but these passions are the tares and weeds that clutter the garden of the soul. Defeating these passions requires the gardening of the soul to prepare it so that "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk.17:21), and we can become, by grace, fit "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1Cor.6:19).

From this, we see that the essence of the struggle against sinful passions is really this: we choose to build in our hearts either the principality of this world or the Kingdom of God. The struggle against sin, against the passions, can really be metaphorically defined as man's role in building a new kingdom within himself, as Paul says: "Are ye not aware that to Whom you yield yourselves to obey as slaves, you are truly the slaves of whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death or of obedience [to God] unto righteousness?" (Rm. 6:16)

The principality of this world rules in a man's heart. He chooses to conquer that principality and replace it with the Kingdom of God. He knows that with God's help, by cooperating with divine grace, it can be done. Such a person then becomes an athlete of God's Kingdom. He begins to train for the battle. This war, this "Unseen Warfare," is fought in one's own conscience, mind and soul; each "sin" is a defeat, a failure to conquer one of the enemy's strongholds and attain our goal. Sin is not merely a "violation of the law," as our Saviour made plain to the rich young ruler (Mt.19:16-26). For no matter how perfectly the young man had fulfilled the law, he still fell short of the mark and goal (sinned), not because his wealth was evil, but because he chose to give it, rather than Christ, dominion over his heart. He made a choice between two rulers.

## **THE PROBLEM WITH LEGALISTIC MORALISM IN PLACE OF TRUE MORALITY**

Sin is an existential problem. It is about the human condition, not law. It is a mistake not to see sin as part of the suffering of humanity. It is also a mistake not to see some of the actions which we consider not only sinful but even evil and not consider the psychiatric conditions which underlie some of these actions. When we think of sin only as a moral failing and do not consider some of the underlying causes and attempt to deal with them, then we have reduced sin down to a legal failing rather than a moral failing, and this is one of the difficulties which we often have even in confession. We have too often use the word "moral" when we are actually talking about "legal."

When we look at sin as "breaking a moral law," rather than the struggle with normal human emotions and inclinations, and often with intense inner human pain, then we present a dry, brittle moralism and often prescribe mechanical actions against them rather than understanding that we are dealing with the products of evolution and the nature and inclinations of the following human nature. We should regard sin in a more systemic way and see how the entire Orthodox Christian spiritual life,

including the holy mystery or sacraments, the Divine Liturgy and the system of prayer and fasting offered by the Church, are all a part of our struggle with "sin." In this context, let us continue.

We can already see how ludicrous it is to give any kind of literal or theological significance to the allegorical pictures of sin and corresponding punishments in a purgatory or in a literal hell, such as "visions" in various paterikons, which were often actually concocted stories used as teaching devices for monks. Some of these artificial "visions" show, for example, liars or gossipers being suspended from hot meathooks by their tongues or demons judging souls at toll houses with bus stop-like designations for legally specific sins. Some, in not most, of these "visions" are also evidence of the "visionaries" psychiatric disorders.

We can also see the fatal danger of regarding ourselves as being "as good as the next person" or following the delusion of "I feel really good about myself. I don't feel that I have any sins." People who offer such prideful opinions of themselves are also victims of the legalistic, forensic view of "sin." They are also capable of quite harsh judgment of others. This is why Christ Himself specifically refuted such ideas in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk.18:10-14). The Pharisee, who was "ethically perfect" and spitefully judged the publican, re-

mained unrighteous and was lost, whereas the publican, who was an active sinner, far from being ethically perfect, through repentance obtained righteousness as a gift from God and was saved. Perhaps this delusion is why Paul warns us not to think more highly of ourselves than we should (Rm. 12:3).

We do not enter the heavenly kingdom by means of ethical perfection (i.e., "correct behaviour") in this life, by completely conquering the inclination to sin or by becoming sinless. We enter the heavenly kingdom by grace, by having received it already, in ourselves, in this life, by having the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and having acquired divine grace as a "wedding garment" (Mt. 22:11).

But let no one think that these things are acquired without prayer, fasting and struggle! Sincere faith and the reorientation of the soul is not so easy to attain and not so easy to be steadfast in. Grace is not compulsion and is not magical; it calls for our consent and cooperation. People who boast of themselves that they are "born again" and have "Jesus set their own personal Saviour" are capable of the most harsh and brutal judgments and condemnations of others, of cruel behaviour and very negative attitudes toward others. These are all manifestations of sin and of alienation from Jesus Christ, even while people are claiming to be lawfully united with

Him. And this is why we should take the prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian, which we read many times during Great Lent, very seriously and deep into our hearts: O Lord and Master of my life, take from me a spirit of despondency, sloth, love of money, and vain talk. Rather bestow on me Thy servant a spirit of sober-mindedness, humility, patience, and love. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen.

**REPENTANCE, CONFESSION  
FORGIVENESS AND REMISSION OF SINS  
THE CONSCIENCE: GUILT AND HEALING**

We can never attain true repentance from fear of wrath, judgment or punishment; we can come to it only by means of love. The only fear which can help lead us to true repentance and moral victory is the fear of being separated forever from the love and glory of our beloved Father. At some point, whatever fear might drive us to have regrets for our actions must pass over into love. The “beloved apostle has made it clear that “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” 1Jn.4:18)

When one "repents" from fear of punishment, he is only "repenting" that he cannot get away with it, responding to the natural law of self-preservation. We have civil law to enforce behaviour thru fear of punishment. Fear cannot produce moral behaviour; it can only produce socially correct behaviour according to one or another legal code by force of repression. Only love can produce true morality and moral behaviour. No deed which is constrained or forced by fear of punishment has moral significance; it is hardly useful for salvation.<sup>3</sup>

## **REPENTANCE**

Repentance is not just saying that you are sorry for some action or thought. It involves an intent to struggle to change, not just one's actions, but one's perspective. It is of little use to be repeatedly sorry for a repeated action or haunting thought. One also needs a change in attitude and perspective. Such a change requires prayerful and thoughtful struggle. We need to contemplate why we are sorry for the action, as well as why we repeat it. Ultimately, it is not sufficient simply to regret the action, word or thought, but we must assess why we regret it in order to sincerely focus on striving against the impulse which caused us to do, say or think the action. Self-awareness is an essential part of our

spiritual and moral struggle. Our conscience may inform us that something is wrong, that some attitude or disposition we may have is not right, and certainly not acceptable from an Orthodox Christian point of view. If we wish to take action on this cue from our conscience, we do need some focus, and we certainly need some awareness as to why the action is unacceptable and why and how we need to change the attitude or disposition which led to the action, word or thought. This is actually a healing process, and Confession is part of that process. We should always approach Confession, and the priest should always understand Confession as a part of the healing ministry of the "Church as spiritual Hospital."

**CONFESSION  
THE MYSTERY OF PEACE  
AND RECONCILIATION**

Ultimately, the Mystery of Confession is an element in the process of the purification of our conscience on the path toward Theosis. Taking responsibility for our sins and spiritual shortcomings and coming to sincere repentance helps keep us on that path toward the glorious destiny to which God has called us through Jesus Christ and with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Confession is therapeutic and is a manifestation of the Church as a spiritual hospital. Our conscience is our sternest judge. An unpeaceful conscience is a spiritual illness and can be more tormenting than physical pain. It can even lead to emotional and mental illness and even to physical illness.

The sacrament of confession has been given to us to help heal an unpeaceful conscience and aid in our spiritual struggle. If we confess before an experienced and compassionate priest, this can heal our confusion, cleanse our conscience and strengthen our struggle against our passions.<sup>4</sup>

At times we may feel estranged from God, but we also have times when we feel estranged from our community and even feel estrangement from our own selves. Confession is intended to help us through such times and reconcile us with God, our community, and our own selves. This is psychologically very beneficial. A skilful priest can help us take responsibility for our actions and thoughts in a positive manner, comfort us in our distress, and apply those healing actions and mental dispositions which can make us feel whole and restore our peace of mind.

A primary function of Confession is the act of taking responsibility for one's actions and for those negative thoughts that one allows to occupy one's

mind. Accepting and acknowledging one's responsibility is the first step in the process of moral healing and reconciliation, first of all with oneself, cleansing your conscience and bringing it to peace.

Confession is never about punishment. Punishment and forgiveness are mutually exclusive. If you are punished, you are not forgiven, and if you are forgiven, there can be no punishment. We need to realise this because we often punish ourselves, sometimes ruthlessly. This is destructive. It is far better to be guided in taking responsibility without despair. If the one to whom we are confessing feels that we need to take some action that will help to heal our conscience, make it easier for us to accept forgiveness, and also to forgive ourselves through repentance, these actions are not for the sake of punishment, but are spiritually and mentally therapeutic.

For example, if we are told to make some number of prostrations with prayer, then we might understand a prostration as an image of the death and resurrection of Christ. We should image ourselves as dying to sin and rising to life as we make each prostration and rise up again. Such physical actions that we take when necessary help us in the process of repentance and also help us to be open to accepting forgiveness and also forgiving ourselves. This can be very powerful in helping us to come to

peace and reconciliation.

An important aspect of the healing process is accepting the forgiveness that comes in response to sincere repentance and letting go of the guilt that preceded the repentance. Having received God's forgiveness and the reconciliation with the body of Christ that comes with it, one must readily forgive oneself and not cling to guilt or shame. While we struggle against judging others, we must also realise that judging ourselves too harshly can also be spiritually destructive and can actually lead to unhealthy self-focus. The self-pity that can ultimately arise from this is one of the most destructive spiritual conditions we can develop. Holding on to guilt and shame after one has repented can lead to self-pity and psychological, sometimes physical, illness. When one has received forgiveness from God, it is irrational not to accept that forgiveness completely and forgive oneself with the resolve of truly striving to correct our life.

The spiritual healing and reassurance we receive in confession can lift a heavy burden from our souls and help keep us on the path of spiritual growth toward unity with God, reassuring us of His love just as the prodigal son was assured of the father's compassion. This is why many people feel relieved of heavy burdens following Confession.

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## **RECONCILIATION**

The Mystery of Confession is, in fact, a mystery of reconciliation and reunion with the Church, the Body of Christ, the community of the redeemed. Confession and repentance cannot be separated, as we see, because repentance means to "reverse one's mind" to "reverse one's perspective." Epitimias given under the canons of the Church are never punishments (since what is forgiven cannot be punished) but guides and means of helping in the process of reshaping the mind and will of the one who sins. This is why prostrations, as types of the death and Resurrection of Christ, are the most frequent form of epitimia.

In the Mystery of Confession, the repentant person receives, by Divine Grace, the remission of his sins. What does this mean? Sin means to fall short of union with God. If this "falling short" is remitted, it is obvious that "forgiveness" or "remis-

sion" here means reconciliation with God: precisely, reunion with the Holy Church, the Body of Christ.

Putting aside the crude anthropomorphism of sectarian literalism in interpreting Divine Scripture, let us summarize:

Human nature is yoked by sin,<sup>5</sup> so man can never attain his destiny by himself. For this reason, God became man, truly man, perfect man, and healed human nature, manifesting once more the perfect human nature on earth. Thus, the yoke and bondage of sin and death are broken in One Man. We choose either to unite ourselves with the perfect human nature of Christ (which is united to God) or to remain yoked by the fallen human nature (which is bound to Satan by the power of death. (Hb. 2:15).

We accomplish this union with the true human nature through the Holy Church, which, in a way, constitutes this true human nature being united with Christ God just as a wife is united with and made one flesh with her husband. Our true union with the Church is our real union with God. This is why when we sin again (once more fall short of the goal), we must be reunited with that goal (union with God). This is the essence of the Mystery of Confession-Repentance.

Nothing is given by God as a punishment, but everything He allows to happen is given to teach, to educate, to heal, to save us. God does not punish us

for our sins in the manner often asserted,<sup>6</sup> and He does not become "angry" with us over them (for then, to whom would God confess and repent for being bound with the passion of anger?) We do not, cannot, make "expiation" for our own sins, for then Christ would have died in vain and Holy Scripture would be a lie.

Let us hear the words of St. Antony the Great about this:

"God is good, without passions and unchangeable. One who understands that it is sound and true to affirm that God does not change might very well ask: 'how, then, is it possible to speak of God as rejoicing over those who are good, becoming merciful to those who know Him and, on the other hand, shunning the wicked and being angry with the sinner?' We must reply to this, that God neither rejoices nor grows angry because to rejoice and to be angered are passions. Nor is God won over by gifts from those who know Him, for that would mean that He is moved by pleasure. It is not possible for the Godhead to have the sensation of pleasure or displeasure from the condition of humans. God is good, and

He bestows only blessings and never causes harm, but always remains the same. If we humans, however, remain good by means of resembling Him, we are united to Him, but if we become evil by losing our resemblance to God, we are separated from Him. By living in a holy manner, we unite ourselves to God; by becoming evil, however, we become at enmity with Him. It is not that He arbitrarily becomes angry with us, but that our sins prevent God from shining within us, and expose us to the demons who make us suffer. If, through prayer and acts of compassionate love, we gain freedom from our sins, this does not mean that we have won God over and made Him change, but rather that by means of our actions and turning to God, we have been healed of our wickedness, and returned to the enjoyment of God's goodness. To say that God turns away from the sinful is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind". (*St. Antony the Great, Cap. 150*).

We have set forth in outline the Orthodox

concept of sin and repentance. For a more theological and in-depth study on this subject, we recommend that one read *On The Ancestral Sin* by Fr. John Romanides.<sup>7</sup>

## **GUILT**

We had promised to say something about the question of guilt; we cannot do this without also mentioning the conscience of man. A rational consciousness of guilt is necessary in order to take and accept responsibility for our actions and sins. In circumstances in which such a rational awareness is not possible, the complexion of the matter is changed and must be approached otherwise. Certain forms of mental illness, for example, create a extenuating circumstances and make it difficult or even impossible for the person to have a full awareness that can lead to an understanding of guilt and grasp the essence of true and sincere repentance. In such circumstances, a competent professional, other than a priest, needs to be consulted.

Repentance and forgiveness, if they are to be healing must not leave a person under a burden of guilt. People can become burdened under a weight of guilty feelings and complexes and be destroyed by them. Nevertheless, guilt is a valuable and necessary aspect of human self-awareness. A person who

does not feel guilt when he or she actually is guilty of something is usually referred to as a psychopath. Without the realisation of guilt one could not repent and struggle to change ones perspectives and course of life. How do we have a healthy sense of guilt and how do we deal with that guilt?

The conscience is a holy prophet that has been implanted in us by God. It testifies to us if we are undertaking an action which is wrong, leads us away from God, harms someone else, etc. It is our conscience that informs us that we are guilty of something wrong, and calls upon us to correct ourselves. This is why our Saviour tells us:

"Be reconciled with your accuser/adversary [i.e., our conscience] in the way [in this life], lest he ...deliver thee to the judge....."( Mt.5:25).<sup>8</sup>

To have a healthy conscience is as important, perhaps even more important, than to have a healthy body. Enmity with one's own conscience can result in genuine mental illness. There is, however, no excuse for guilt complexes. If we follow the teachings of some Christian groups, we could be burdened by a crippling sense of guilt over practically every aspect of our ordinary humanity. It is necessary to have some idea of what things we should feel

guilt for and what things about which we should not feel guilt even if we feel regrets

Let us begin by mentioning the "blameless passions," as some of the fathers have called them. What we are speaking of is those "appetites" which are necessary for life. Hunger is not the same as gluttony, for example. However, what might be seen as gluttony might result from a medical condition, and the fact should not be overlooked in cases of such compulsive excesses.

If there is any "rule of thumb" that can give us a general idea of what constitutes "sin" and what does not, then perhaps it is this: If an action or way of life is pursued from egoism, self-centredness and self-love, then it is a sin. If a course of life is chosen which is based in unselfish love and humility about one's self, then it is likely not sinful. This is only a rough "rule of thumb," not a complete criterion. We must pay attention to our conscience.

Egoism and self-centredness are, perhaps, the most clearly defining factors in sin. If we feel guilt for such actions or manners of life, then our conscience is likely trying to bring us to an awareness of this and lead us to repentance — that is, a life of continued re-orientation toward the will of God, toward co-suffering love.

## REMISSION OF SINS AND HEALING FROM GUILT

Remember that repentance means to "re-think," to "turn and go in another direction" with our lives and deeds. These feelings are called "guilt." Without them, we might have a society that is a living hell or nightmare. If the feeling of guilt is transposed into a "complex" or a general sense of ourselves, it can also create, for the individual, a living hell. It can and does create serious neuroses and psychotic disorders. It is a great sin to burden people with a sense or feeling of guilt for their very humanity itself or to leave people unhealed of their actual guilt. Such spiritual abuse is common in Evangelical Protestantism and is the cause of many depressions, suicides and other psychiatric and personality disorders.

How do we approach guilt? This is a fundamental aspect of both prayer and the Holy Mysteries, in particular, Confession — the Mystery of Repentance. Realisation that we are genuinely guilty of some wrong should lead a believing person to pray about the matter and find true repentance. This includes apologising to someone we have hurt and making amends where possible. The Mystery of Confession is given to us so that our parish priest or spiritual father can help us come to true repentance

and find the means to turn our lives around to strengthen our focus on transformation. This determination to turn our lives around is the source of our forgiveness. This process is by no means limited to Confession, although it is referred to as the "Mystery of Repentance." The life of the Church is a mystical or "sacramental" life, a life of continued sanctification. In this divine/human life of the Church, the unseen is revealed through those things which are seen. The presence of the Church is a seamless life in which we do not isolate the Holy Mysteries in some legalistic fashion, nor do we limit them in number as if they were "departments" or "closets" of ritual.

The life of the Church is a unified and harmonious working of divine grace among the faithful. Every aspect of it serves for the sanctification of the believer and his world. We clearly declare in the prayers of the Church that we receive Holy Communion "for the remission of sin and life everlasting."

In the Mystery of Anointing, we also proclaim that we are anointed for the remission and healing of both bodily and spiritual infirmities and receive the remission of sins. The blessing with holy water is for the sanctification of those who receive it. Confession should not be understood in a narrow, legalistic manner, nor should the matter of forgiveness.<sup>9</sup> Confession is not the only manner in which we

receive forgiveness and remission of our sins. With regard to Confession, here is the crucial point: it is easy to gain forgiveness from God sometimes, however, not so easy to forgive ourselves and reconcile ourselves with our own conscience. And yet, Christ has warned us to be reconciled with our conscience in this life. It is in confession that we receive, through the prayers of the Church, "permission" or help in forgiving ourselves so that we do not labour under a harmful and destructive burden of guilt. True repentance should deliver us from the burden of guilt because it reconciles us and brings us into agreement with our conscience. We often need help in this process, and the Church responds to that with the Mystery of Confession.

## **SUMMARY**

Let us briefly summarize these matters. Death is the result of separation from God, Who alone has immortality and is the source of life. Death is the "sin of this world" because through it we "miss the mark," "fall short of the goal." It is the result and manifestation in all mankind of alienation from God. When we refer to individual sins, we are not referring to "breaches of law" but to any and every action which separates us from God or increases our alienation from Him. Fear of death leads us into

more and more individual sins and also into the corporate sins of society (such as neglecting the poor, waging wars of conquest, etc.) The root of all sin is egoism and self-love, and the fear of death pushes man into more and more deeds and lifestyles of egoism and self-love. Thus, "The wages of sin is death" (Rm.6:23) while death is the product of sin (Rm.5: 12). Sin is the falling short of the goal of ever-lasting life in union with God (theosis). Thus sin and death are partners or rather "shades of the same thing."

As the root of them is our egoism and self-love, our self-absorption and self-centredness, the healing of them is the unconditional, co-suffering love of God in Jesus Christ, which recapitulates our nature (Eph.1:10). Having received such a gift of divine love, our struggle is to assimilate it to ourselves and struggle to conquer our own egoism, replacing it with unselfish love. This is the path toward a re-orientation of our lives toward the will of God, and the very meaning of faith, the faith that saves us where works of the law could not, is an unconditional orientation toward the will of God. This is not a call for moral codes or moralisms, but a call for a transformation of the human heart toward unselfish love of God and neighbour.

## ENDNOTES:

1...See St. Mark of Ephesus, *Ten Refutations of Purgatory*, in "Gehenna" by Lazar Puhalo, Synaxis Press, 2010. Romanides, John, *Dogmatiki kai Symboliki Theologia tis Orthodoxon Katholikis Ekklesias* (pp.13-14); Kalomiros, Alexandre *The River of Fire* (St. Nectarios Press). On the actual nature of hell and punishment, see *The Nature of Heaven and Hell According to the Holy Fathers* (Synaxis Press).

2...KJV, etc., translates incorrectly. The following is a correct rendering of the text: "All have sinned, falling short of the glory of God, but are made righteous freely by His Grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice to make us one (with Himself) through faith in His Blood. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His Divine forbearance, He overlooked all the sins which had previously occurred. This He did to demonstrate at the present time that He is righteous and the One Who bestows righteousness upon the one who has faith in Jesus. What then becomes of our prideful boasting? It is ruled out. On what principle? Good works? No, but on the principle of faith. For we maintain that a man is righteous by faith apart from works of the law." (Rm. 3:23-28).

3... cp. St. John Damascene, *Concise Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 2:12.

4...The word "passion" means "suffering," not sin. When a normal human emotion or appetite becomes so powerful within us that it begins to dominate us and bring about inner suffering, we call it a passion. The urge to fulfil this controlling passion leads us into real sin because it is a distortion of that which is natural (even though natural only to the fallen nature). This distortion may even twist our personalities to such a degree that we will commit crimes we normally would not even dream of.

5...We do not categorise sin as "mortal" or "venial." All sin is "mortal" because it alienates from the Source of life. The origin of the Latin idea of "venial sin" lies in Jerome's mistranslation of the Scripture. At 1 Cor. 7:6, he erroneously translates the Greek "*sungnomen*" into Latin as "*veniam*" (guilt necessitating pardon). The word actually signifies "concession," and here means "to allow for individual differences."

6...Such assertion usually come from the "fullness of one's own heart."

7...Zephyr Press,\*\*\*\*,1998

8...SEE Abba Dorotheos in the Philokalia.

9...We do, in fact, often find such legalism in various books written within the Orthodox Church. There are two sources of this. The first has to do with the Turkish conquest of Greece and the Balkans. During that era, books were seldom published in Greece because of the restrictions of the Turkish overlords. Thus many of the Greek texts were printed in Italy, and were adulterated and "laced" by the Latin editors. This adulteration was so blatant that St. Nikodemos of Mt Athos is said to have once wept openly over the corruptions of one of his texts by the Roman Catholic editors and publisher in Venice.