

# The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: *An Attempt to Differentiate Theologems*

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## Introduction

There is probably no other sphere of theology with such an abundance of undifferentiated theologems as the one we have undertaken to examine. Theologians have tried again and again to explain the meaning of this enigma of the biblical narrative. However, the attempt to narrow the scope of attractive theologems in the world of aesthetic theological fiction writers frequently evokes a loud protest: Why accept some exegeses as correct and the rest as incorrect? After all, the Holy Fathers said all these things.

Nevertheless, the task of dogmatic theology lies much deeper than that of aesthetic fiction writers who are carried away by the superficial beauty of an idea or thought, and are reluctant to penetrate its inner sense. Practical conclusions are the main indicators of either the acceptability or unacceptability of a theologem for Orthodox theology. “What does the practical acceptance of this teaching mean to me, personally?”— this is the question that Orthodox dogmatics must answer.

This essay is divided into two parts: patristic exegesis and a brief summary of it.

The first part examines the four different opinions of four Holy Fathers: Maxim the Confessor, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom. They all interpreted differently the meaning and significance of the Tree of Knowledge.<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarity chro-

<sup>1</sup> The numerous opinions of other Holy Fathers is beyond the scope of this article, as they do not directly relate to its purpose, which is to show the practical conclusions that can be drawn from the theory presented. More-



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nology has been disregarded and the most recent has been placed first. A certain “opposition” of the exegeses may also be noted: Maxim the Confessor is diametrically opposed to Gregory of Nazianzus, while the interpretations of Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom in some ways complement each other.

## PART ONE

### The Experience of Patristic Exegesis

#### 1. Maxim the Confessor

Often, completely unfairly, extreme “spiritualistic” positions of platonic speculation are attributed to Maxim the Confessor. One hears the opinion, allegedly shared by Maxim, that the sensual perception of the universe is evil, unlike the “noetic” contemplation of the world in spirit. How justified are these opinions?

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is what Maxim the Confessor calls all the visible world of God’s creation, containing in itself “pleasures and sufferings in a natural way.”<sup>2</sup>

Pleasure and grief, and the desire and fear that follow them, were not initially created together with

human nature; otherwise they would be numbered among those traits which identify that nature; but, according to the teaching of the great Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>3</sup> they were introduced after the loss of the perfection that is characteristic of our nature; they were inculcated into the most irrational part of our nature; and through them, as soon as the commandment was transgressed, we discovered clearly our similarity to dumb creatures, rather than to the blessed image of God. For it was required, when the virtue of rationality was obscured, that human nature would rightfully bear punishment from the very one from whom it had acquired irrational traits. So wisely did God arrange it, that man would come through it to a sense of rationality’s virtue.<sup>4</sup>

That is, sensual pleasure is taken unambiguously as a sign of fall-  
enness.

Since visible creation τῶν ὁρατῶν ἢ κτίσις also possesses the spiritual *logos* that feeds the mind, and the natural force that delights the senses, but perverts the mind, so it (i.e. creation<sup>5</sup>) is called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, in other words, that which possesses the

over, all commentary on the “character” of the Tree of Knowledge (whether it is spiritual or material), and the serpent (who or what he is, his manner of tempting), are likewise excluded, as they do not correspond directly to the main goal.

<sup>2</sup> Maxim the Confessor, “K Falassiiu o razlichnykh zatrudnitel’nykh mestakh Sviashchennogo Pisaniia” [To Falassii concerning various difficult passages in Holy Scripture], in *Tvoreniia*, trans. by A. Sidorov, v. 2, p. 25, *Teologiia* [CD-ROM] (SAIVDS, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> See Gregory of Nyssa, *Bol’shoe oglasitel’noe*

*slovo* [The great proclaimed word], (Kiev: Prolog, 2002), ch. 8.

<sup>4</sup> “Umозritel’nye i deiatel’nye glavyy, vybrannyye iz semi soten glav grecheskogo Dobrotoliubiia” [Speculative and practical chapters selected from seven-hundred chapters of the Greek Philokalia], in *Philokalia*, vol. 3.

<sup>5</sup> The Russian translation (Epifanovich-Sidorov) here is not accurate. The second half of the quoted fragment reads: “...so she is called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, that is,

knowledge of good<sup>6</sup> when it is perceived spiritually, and evil, when it is perceived physically<sup>7</sup> ... That is why God forbade man to partake of it, postponing it for a time, in order that man would first recognize his Beginning [i.e., God] through the blessed Eucharist, and through that sacred partaking strengthen in impartiality and immutability the immortality given to him by grace; and only after that, having become like unto God by the power of worship, he would harmlessly and without danger contemplate God's creations and would receive knowledge about them as a divine being.<sup>8</sup>

But it was that very "bodily vanity"<sup>9</sup> that abducted man from God, distracted him from contemplating the world of higher things, and concentrated his mind on himself,<sup>10</sup> on

his bodily satisfaction. That is the experiential knowledge of a certain kind of "mixture" of good and evil.

By the way, it should be noted that Maxim the Confessor came very close to the meaning of the original, without even knowing ancient Hebrew: תְּדַעַת טוֹב וְרָע (Ge 2:9.17). "The idiom *tov ve ra* [טוֹב וְרָע] does not have anything in common with moral categories: «טוֹב» [tov] – 'pleasing,' and «רָע» [ra] – 'loathsome, poisonous.'"<sup>11</sup> In other words, it is "fascination" and "disappointment," or still more exactly: "orgasm"<sup>12</sup> and "weakness."

In order to understand Maxim's position correctly, it is necessary to understand why partaking of the created, material world is necessarily "evil" for a human being?

In his *Aporias*, Maxim writes that, "the entire nature of existence is subdi-

she is the one possessing the knowledge of good, when perceived spiritually, and of evil, when perceived physically." Thus it develops that the Tree of Knowledge is "a natural force that delights the senses," and not "visible creation," as is clear from the original Greek text. The mistake in the Russian translation is because in the second half of the sentence, the feminine gender is retained, while the subject ἡ κτίσις is translated by the neuter "tvorenie" [creation]. (This commentary and the first part of the text are taken from deacon Andrei Glushchenko's candidate dissertation, "The Meaning of the Anthropology of the Venerable Maxim the Confessor for Modern Orthodox Apologetics," (2002). I would like to thank the author and his academic consultant, Rev. Vladimir Savel'ev, who granted me use of the dissertation and the right to quote.)

<sup>6</sup> There is an error in the Russian translation: the phrase "and Evil" was added by mistake (commentary by Deacon Glushchenko).

<sup>7</sup> From here on, Maxim the Confessor is quoted according to the edition of his *Tvoreniiia*, vol. 2, trans. by Sidorov, because the author of the quoted dissertation did not quote St. Maxim's

text in full, giving the impression that sensual knowledge is evil in and of itself.

<sup>8</sup> Maxim the Confessor, "K Falassiu..., " *Tvoreniiia*, v. 2, pp. 26-27.29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> St. Maxim's thesis has something in common with Plato's teaching about "minds" that have grown cold in contemplation and fallen into the world of material multi-formity, converting themselves into "souls" of material things.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Men', "Iskuplenie," *Put'* No. 6 (1994): p. 237.

<sup>12</sup> This term is to be understood more broadly than the way it is used in sexology: orgasm is a feeling of pleasure, self-adequacy, rapture, and in asceticism is synonymous with pleasure. Orgasm in this meaning can be experienced from anything—even a simple drink of water. This is the feeling experienced by a personality in contact with the universe that the holy ascetics teach must be guarded against (the egoistic charm by illusion with its subsequent "hang-over"), which is why so much space is devoted to specific methods of self-preservation from "pleasure" in the ascetic theology of St. Maxim.

vided into that which can be grasped with the mind, and that which is sensual; the first (grasped with the mind) is called, and is, the eternal, because it received its beginning in Eternity, while the second (the sensual), is temporary, because it was created in time.”<sup>13</sup>

l3goi, without doubt, belongs to the eternal, the contemplation of which is a form of communication with the world and “partaking of the flesh of the world” in Maxim’s system. The variety of created things, material and sensual; all that is temporary, is connected inevitably with the coming destruction, and therefore with disappointment. The one who has tasted the knowledge of material things will also taste the knowledge of their death, which means suffering “hunger” with their decomposition and absence. As l3goi are eternal and inexhaustible, so the one who feeds on them incessantly, will never know disappointment and hunger (cf. Jn 4:13-14; 6:63; 7:37-39).<sup>14</sup>

The saint also writes in *Ambigua* to Ioann Kizicheskii:

Why does the teacher call flesh a cloud and a cover? Because, knowing that every human mind is tempted, and, distancing itself from movement in accordance with nature, it moves [instead] in the direction of passion, the senses and the sensual, having nowhere else to

go when it sins in relation to the natural movement that brings it to God, and [therefore] ruins the flesh in passion and senses (for they both [i.e. passion and senses] relate to animate flesh); [therefore, the teacher] expressed it in terms of a cloud and a cover. For the cloud is a fleshly passion that darkens the soul’s sovereignty, and the cover is a delusion of the senses, fastened on the appearance of sensual objects and guarded [by them] from the passage to that which can be apprehended by the mind, and receiving from them the forgetfulness of natural blessings, and turning all its movement to the sensual, inventing, with the help of the aforesaid, improper anger, and lust, and delights.<sup>15</sup>

As we see, it is the withdrawal from what is perceivable by the mind to the temporal and sensual that is evil for man, who, having loved decay, deprived himself of the true sweetness of fellowship with God. “For every forbidden pleasure usually derives by means of the senses from passion<sup>16</sup> to something altogether sensual. For pleasure is nothing else than the appearance of a sense, imaged<sup>17</sup> in the sensual [power of soul] by something sensual, or the image (τρ3ποϑ) of the action of the senses, formed according to a wordless wish.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Maxim the Confessor, *Aporia* § 35, trans. by I. Prolygina, *Alfa I Omega* No. 40 (2004): p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> For more detail, see Hieromonk Theognost (Pushkov), “Exegesis of Jn 6:63 in the context of the theology of the eternal l3goi in the system of Maxim the Confessor.”

<sup>15</sup> Maxim the Confessor, *Ambigvy k Ioannu*, *arkhiepiskopu Kizicheskomu* [Ambiguas to

John, archbishop of Kizicheskii]. Translated by Archimandrite Nektarii (Iashunskii, P. V.), vol. 2, ch. 6. [www.romanitas.ru](http://www.romanitas.ru).

<sup>16</sup> Note that passion is always an inclination of the personality (hypostasis), but not being, which is why every passion is actual human guilt.

<sup>17</sup> By hypostasis.

<sup>18</sup> Maxim the Confessor, *Ambigvy k Ioannu*...

However, if we read Maxim's text carefully, another question appears: How do we combine his statement that partaking of the Tree of Knowledge was postponed "for a time" (that is, man nevertheless would eat of that tree) with his other statement that the knowledge of good and evil is the name for the sensual knowledge of created things, which has neglected spiritual knowledge in contemplating the *logos* of nature and being? How is it that, nevertheless, they will partake after the glory of deification is received? It seems that at that time partaking of the sensual will not be the knowledge of good and evil, as if it were some kind of mixture! After all, Maxim defined partaking from the Tree of Knowledge as "the passionate knowledge of sensual things," which "made the human mind absolutely alien to the knowledge of God."<sup>19</sup> If, on the one hand, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is the partaking of sensual knowledge of an egocentric personality only, disregarding the knowledge of God, then how is it that Maxim still gives the right to partake from the tree to a deified man, which by then will have "become safe"? In fact, we do not know how Maxim reconciled his two postulates.

However, even on the basis of these words we need not regard Maxim the Confessor as an extreme Platonist-idealist who denies the fact of sensual knowledge in the life of a human being. Even a surface reading

makes it clear that Maxim is not saying that sensual knowledge is evil, but that evil is the abandonment of spiritual knowledge, the contemplation of the *logos* in created things: "However much a person concerned himself with the knowledge of visible things **by means of sense alone**, to that extent he has strengthened himself in the ignorance of God."<sup>20</sup> "Having abundantly partaken of that knowledge **for the sake of sense alone**, like the foolish beasts, and finding by experience that partaking of sensual existence can serve to support his visible and bodily nature, the human being, of course, as one who had sinned against the knowledge of the beauty of God's magnificence that can be apprehended by the mind, mistook a visible creature for God, and worshipped it."<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the position of Maxim the Confessor concerning the Tree of Knowledge may be summarized as follows:

The knowledge of good and evil is the partaking of fleshly "delights," which, being temporal, inevitably lead to disappointment, and also to the death and decay of the creature tempted by it. Besides an ontological crisis in man, the movement away from God and the "preference" for God's creatures is the actual guilt of the human being before God, because man must love God—the sole, eternal Reality—and all creation must be loved in God, not partaking directly of the perishable and temporal flesh of things, but of their eternal *l3goi*, remaining in God and contemplated in God by man.

vol. 3, ch. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

## 2. Gregory of Nazianzus

The human being, having been honored with freedom so that good would belong as much to the one who chooses it as to the one who plants its seed, God placed in paradise (whatever that paradise may mean) to care for the plants of immortality—perhaps of God’s providence, both simple and complex—placed him naked in his simple and unsophisticated life, without any covering and barrier, for such was the lot of the first man. He also gives the law for training in freedom. The law was the commandment: which plants he was to use, and which one not to touch. The latter was the Tree of Knowledge, planted in the beginning not with evil intent, and forbidden not because of envy (may the opponents of God not open their lips at this, and may they not imitate the serpent!): on the contrary, **it was good for use at the proper time** (because that tree, in my understanding, was a contemplation to which only those experienced in perfection may approach safely), but not good for the simple and for those who are not moderate in their desires, just as solid food is not good for the weak, and those who need milk.<sup>22</sup>

Here we see that Gregory of Nazianzus takes a principally different stand from Maxim the Confes-

sor’s point of view: partaking of the fruit for Maxim means a fall from the heights of spirit into the abyss of brute life. For Gregory of Nazianzus, on the contrary, **“it was good for use at the proper time”** and it is not seen as a fall into the crudeness of the material world, but as an ascent upward—as contemplation. And Adam “desired to steal it,” that is, he wished for “magical knowledge.” There is a slight but very important difference between contemplation and magic: pure contemplation is a fruit of love, directed to the Contemplated. Here the purpose of contemplation is not egoistic “possession of knowledge,” but is fellowship itself, contemplation of the Beloved Creator. In contemplation, the one contemplating forgets himself<sup>23</sup> and finds the bliss and joy in the one contemplated. Adam wanted to partake of the fruit without planting the tree; he wanted to eat of the Tree of Contemplation without love, which means without having striven in contemplation. He did not want to dissolve in the Absolute, becoming part of it, but to possess it. This mad idea, planted in him by the devil, darkened his mind: “He looked at the beauty of the tree and his mind was tempted; since then he has lain naked and shamed.”<sup>24</sup> Knowledge is a solid whole and it is the fruit of a whole, selfless love. It cannot be separated from love.<sup>25</sup> But instead of

<sup>22</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, Homily 45, // <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=lib&id=348>

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, the description of the mystical experience of contemplation in the works of Simeon the New Theologian, especially his *Divine Hymns*.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew of Crete, *Kanon velikii* [The great

canon], Song 2.

<sup>25</sup> It is not accidental that the Hebrew “daat” speaks of “knowledge” as of a living, organic process of the personality. Personality learns (“daat”) that it loves God, the world, a woman, or death, sin, vice. The process of being joined together with what is loved may be called “knowledge.”

whole knowledge of God in His uncreated Energies, Adam wanted to receive information—bare information about the Absolute—to use for his own purposes. (It does not matter for what purposes: healing the sick, reconstructing the world, or doing evil; what matters is that man refused God, wishing to possess divinity and manage without God, to be a god in his own eyes.) Pride blinded him and he decided to steal the fruits of that tree which he had not yet planted in his heart—the Tree of contemplation and love. Only love gives true knowledge and makes the knowledge of evil safe (understanding evil through vision only, or approaching it from the side). Satan still tempts man by secret, occult knowledge and the “magical acquisition” of it. Instead of a spiritual ascent in love to glory *qejwsi*~ there is (idolatry) and “magic” *#poqei3si*~ instead of deification.

In order to understand what Adam was “missing,” we need to understand what kind of person he was in paradise. This is what Gregory says about Adam’s condition at that time: God creates man as

“temporary and immortal, visible and perceivable by the mind; an angel who occupies the middle ground between sublimity and baseness, the spirit and the flesh are one and the same—spirit for the sake of grace, and flesh for the sake of exaltation; spirit—to remain in and to glorify the Giver of good, flesh—to suffer, and, suf-

fering, to remember and learn how much greatness God has lavished on him.”<sup>26</sup>

Note that this is said about the first created human in paradise: he had to “suffer and, suffering, to remember and learn how much greatness God has lavished on him.” And where there is suffering, there is also pleasure. This is another point on which Maxim the Confessor differs from Gregory of Nazianzus.

“Paradise was given to us to **enjoy**... for ancient and modern was the commandment that served us as a tutor for the soul and as a **curb to pleasure**.”<sup>27</sup>

Here we see the direct opposite of the opinion of Maxim the Confessor. If he thought that there was no sensual pleasure in paradise at all, then Gregory of Nazianzus thinks that pleasure was restrained by the commandment, that is, it was held within a definite framework, not allowing a quiet sea to become a hurricane of passion. For it is obvious that only things that actually exist can be restrained. If a man did not have real experience in sensual pleasure, then there would be nothing to restrain. It is notable that Cyril of Alexandria teaches something even more radical. Commenting on the words of the Apostle Paul: “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual” (1Co15:45-46), Cyril writes that Adam’s perfection is not unconditional, that’s why he is called “a soul,” or “living being,” but not “spiritual,”

<sup>26</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, Homily 45, // <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=lib&id=348>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

because he is “not fully free of carnal lusts.”<sup>28</sup>

God “creates a living creature, prepared here and sent to the other world, and (which is the end of the mystery) through striving toward God, achieves deification.”<sup>29</sup>

Adam did not desire the life of a beast, but the life of “gods.” This is exactly the temptation of spiritualism: to fly higher than nature. Does God actually have flesh? No, He is Spirit. The first people knew this. And they wanted to become the same “gods”—completely free of suffering and the limitations of the flesh. They did not want to be divinized humanity, but to become “gods” themselves. They did not want to transform and beautify nature, but to steal the promised glory.

Here the temptation to transformation on exclusively human terms receives a very strong antidote: physical limitation. Do you want to fly? This is not yet good for you. “If you see someone naked crawling up to the sky, pull him by the heel,”<sup>30</sup> for vanity and pride move him. Does someone despise suffering flesh? Surround him with greater suffering so that his spirit would be humbled.

The difference between Maxim and Gregory is that the former considered sensual knowledge “safe” only for perfect people, and it follows that the imperfect should not have it, while the latter thought that sensual knowledge of suffering and

pleasure is exactly that starting point which will be won in the glory of contemplation. For Maxim, human sin feeds on “vanity and attraction to pleasures.” For Gregory, the root of sin is in some spiritual thirst for self-idolizing, self-worship, in stealing the heights of the spirit at that stage of existence, when man had not yet attained “the skill of obedience by means of suffering” (see He 5:8). In both cases vanity is the reason for evil, but if, in Maxim’s opinion, vanity results in spiritual degradation, in crude materialism, then Gregory’s point of view is that vanity stimulates pride.

The position of Gregory of Nazianzus concerning the Tree of Knowledge can be summarized in the following thesis: Man wished to outgrow himself not organically by means of maturing in love, but by a “magic jump,” taking a step past the next stage of evolution—from decay to non-decay. This is exactly the same temptation with which the devil tried to test Jesus Himself: “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (Mt 4:3). The temptation of magical power is still offered to man as “occult knowledge”—the same satanic trick that stole miserable man, tearing him away from humble obedience to the divine love of the Heavenly Father.

### 3. Gregory of Nyssa

In general, sin, having destruction hidden within it, seems desirable at first glance. In that fruit there was no pure evil (since the fruit bloomed with beauty), but also no pure good (the fruit concealed evil), but a mix-

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<sup>28</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, In Corinth. XV, *RT.* – *MGr. t. 74, col. 908 D.*

<sup>29</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, Homily 45, //http://www.portal-credo.ru/site?act=lib&id=348.

<sup>30</sup> A monastic aphorism of the fourth century.



ture of both. From this it is clear that real good is simple by nature, it has one face; it is free of any duality and combination with its opposite; while evil is various and secretive; it is called one thing and is experienced as something else; and knowledge of it, that is, experiential knowledge becomes the beginning and reason for death and decay. This is the way the serpent could tempt man, by showing him and impelling him not to open evil, but to evil covered by external beauty. Charmed man ate of it and that food became the mother of death for people.<sup>31</sup>

This important observation of Gregory of Nyssa shows for all time the unchanging truth and reveals every temptation of compromise, every “somehow,” every “to a certain degree.” Good is simple and uncompromising. In this matter, first of all, the saint turns attention to the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It is remarkable in that it is a mixture of opposites; that it presents evil not as something ordinary, but something that carries destruction within itself like a hidden lie that on the outside shows the seductive face of good.<sup>32</sup>

The illusion of good is what often rules the man who is not in humble obedience to God (where he is supposed to be in the opinion of Gregory of Nazianzus), not in direct communion with the knowledge of truth in

prayerful contemplation *λόγοι* – of eternal providence and divine mysteries.

The miserable sinner sets himself as the measure of his actions, he puts his own subjective understanding of “what is good and what is evil” above revelation and obedience to God, who alone truly sees the entire essence of things, and not only their external, attractive appearance. On this point, the fault of subjective orientation of the will is examined in more detail John Chrysostom, and his position reveals the meaning of the position of Gregory of Nyssa.

#### 4. John Chrysostom

The loving Lord, as Creator, foreseeing what harm could happen in the future because of great freedom, raised up *the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, from which (tree) a little later he would will tell man to stay away, so that (the man) would know that he enjoys everything only by the grace and love (of God) to humanity, and that there is a Lord and Creator of his being, and everything visible.”<sup>33</sup>

That is to say, if we quote the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, the tree was planted “for training (#sklw) in freedom.” Asceticism started in paradise, as the art of strengthening in truth, in love, as the improvement and beautification of God-given freedom. Man was to have grown as a personality, develop and excel in love to God. By means of testing, this love toughens and is as if “tested for strength.”

<sup>31</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Ob ustroenii cheloveka* [On the establishment of man], cap. 20, col. 197 sq.

<sup>32</sup> Archimandrite Kiprian Kern, *Antropologiya svt. Grigoriia Palamy* [The anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas], part 1, ch. 3, “St. Gregory of Nyssa.”

<sup>33</sup> John Chrysostom, *Besedy na knige Bytiia* [Conversations on the book of Genesis], 13: 4.

“Our loving Lord, having allowed Adam use everything in paradise, commanded to refrain from only one thing, so that he would know that he is under the Lord, whom he has to obey and fulfil His commands.”<sup>34</sup>

Chrysostom himself does not attach as much symbolic importance to the Tree of Knowledge, as Maxim or Gregory did: for him it is not a symbol, communicating a certain reality (sensual knowledge or contemplation), but is a psychological watershed.

“So it was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil not because it had knowledge of good and evil, but because the knowledge of good and evil was made evident in it; it (served) as training in obedience and disobedience.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the tree has always been the Tree of Knowledge, but for those who fulfil the will of God, it has been the Tree of the Knowledge of Obedience to God, and for those who did not—the Tree of the Knowledge of Evil. That is the knowledge of the empiricist, who learned to differentiate “good” and “evil” in himself. That is not the objective contemplation of the *logos* of creatures by means of the mind, nor the deep sensual partaking of the pleasures of the flesh.

True knowledge (*gn<sup>^</sup>si-*) has no relation to empirical cognition (*proajresi-*), based on differentiation. The replacement of *gn<sup>^</sup>si-* with *proajresi-* is exactly the Fall: instead of accepting the knowledge from above

in pure *gn<sup>^</sup>si<sup>~</sup>e*, man becomes his own criterion for measuring what is good and what is evil. If in the first created man his hypostatic center of personal freedom (*gn<sup>9</sup>mh*) proceeded from reality *gn<sup>^</sup>si<sup>~</sup>a*, then in the act of the Fall, man refused objective knowledge and replaced it with differentiating “cognition” (*proajresi-*). Now the hypostasis *gn<sup>9</sup>mh* will rely only on subjective *proajresi-*. But inasmuch as the latter is also the act of a personality, it means that a person is relying on himself. This replacement comprises the Fall itself: a man sets up his own system of values. And empirically he understands that he made the wrong step.

## PART TWO

What did the devil want from man in the Garden of Eden?

The summary of patristic exegesis just given may seem somewhat non-traditional; almost as non-traditional as the criticism of juridical soteriology in the works of Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky) and hieromartyr Ilarion (Troitsky) seemed nontraditional. Thus, I will try to draw the reader’s attention to the stages of temptation and their meaning, and also to the meaning of the God-Man Christ for our deliverance from slavery to sin.

Man was covered with the glory of God in paradise and did not feel like a “god,” for he did not yet know the “taste” of proud self-knowledge. If he partook and stayed in the same position of non-decaying being, then, it is clear, there would have been no changes in his nature, but his con-

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 14:3.

<sup>35</sup> John Chrysostom, *Vosem' besed na Bytie* [Eight conversations on Genesis], Conversation 7:3.

**sciousness** would be artfully subjected to mutations by the demon-tempter, and instead of impassivity, it would be filled with passions. In the section on Maxim the Confessor above, we saw that in his words the purpose of man was “to strengthen in impartiality and immutability the immortality given to him by grace.” It would be a more destructive condition for him than natural decay if man was liable to decay without impassivity, since eternally sinning without any pain or threat of death would only confirm the thought seeded by the devil: “I am a god, and without God I eternally live and enjoy what He forbade me.”

Some Fathers speak of “arrogance by means of grace.” Alas, there is such a thing. In my opinion, the plan of Satan was not to reduce man to dust and ashes, but to raise up a second Satan from him, in pride. And this is how it would be done:

1. Man received the command “do not” (do not eat). At that time, covered with the glory of God and invulnerable to the process of disintegration, he is blessed. But his blessedness is protected by chastity of the mind first of all (chastity is not the opposite of sexual passion, but the opposite of devotion to mental lewdness). He is blessed, for he is submissive. He does not know craftiness or invidiousness, and has a “simple construction.” He “is naked in his simple and unsophisticated life.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, Homily 45, // <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=lib&id=348>.

<sup>37</sup> To fulfil someone’s command means to accept his power, and to fulfil someone’s will means freely to express love to that person.

2. The devil teaches him to infringe upon nothing less than the **command (will)** of the One on Whom man feels dependence. If I feel dependent on God, then I realize that I am not God. For training in pride the devil tries to destroy man’s feeling of dependence on God.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, God does not need a slave, but a son, who, not from dependence, but from filial love will fulfil His will. Therefore He permitted temptation and allowed the serpent speak its half-truth/half lie: “You will be as gods” (a half-lie, because actually man is called to be *qe-jwsi-* [deified], to be like God, and a half-truth, because if man will partake of this independence he will become “a god in his own eyes,” and *a8tapoqei3si-* [self-deification] will occur). According to this idea, the man should have said: “Yes, let it be so! But I do not want to lose the merit of being a son. I **love** God, but I don’t know you.” God was waiting for that free and spontaneous, “I love,” from man. Then man would conquer the enemy.

3. But the devil “missed.” The one who has lost his peace of mind and conscience cannot be blessed. And the one who is not blessed cannot feel like a god. Man, having been caught by the devil’s trick, **harmed his peace of mind**, first of all; he enticed it with pride! And what does a man like this feel? **Fear!** Here is the real and eternal opposite of true love. It is as if Adam “stole” something (though, in fact, he stole emptiness, but the fact of falling away from love filled him with a certain negative experience, the experience of bitter partaking).

What motivated him to do such a thing? The motive of pride, and the thirst for power and glory. But right away differentiated thinking prompts him: “She, Eve, is my wife, and she wanted to become a goddess over me. This means I am not safe in her hands. So let her not be safe in mine.” They feel mutual shame before each other, the shame of betrayed love. They are, in a word, “denuded” of what they once had—integrity of thoughts and feelings.

Differentiation introduces the process of “sophisticated knowledge,” built on the logical discourse of thoughts: man now fashions his own “logic,” but does not perceive things as they really are in contemplation of the *logos* through the revelation of true gn<sup>^</sup>si<sup>~</sup>a.

Here it is important to note that the first people felt shame before God appeared; that is, the poison of sin did its work. There is something positive in this knowledge of shame: they were not proud, but ashamed of their sin. It means all is not yet lost.

4. It was a real “miss” for the devil. He did not expect that man would be ashamed of his sin. He wanted to win him! Yes, specifically to win. If man had not felt ashamed of his sin, but remained in the same spirit-body construction (which is impossible, existentially), then the devil would suggest:

“Now you are a god! Do you see, you did what God forbade, and nothing happened to you! Doesn’t that mean that you are not dependent on Him? And now do everything that I will teach you!”

But it turned out that the man was not so badly damaged: **he felt ashamed of his sin!** For it could happen that he would not feel even that—indeed, not everybody can feel that now (apparently they have gone further from God than Adam did). Many people “overindulge” with their sin, as if it were happiness!

Evidently, that is why the Lord did not send man straight to Gehenna: He saw that fallen man (as distinct from a fallen angel) still has a chance.

But the devil could not foresee man’s reaction. True, nowadays we may hear that “the devil is a first-class psychologist.” But that is now, as the result of his “experience” of fighting with humanity, the result of many years of empirical observation of men. At the beginning he was not like that. He judged man by himself. But he sinned and was not ashamed.

That is, after the corruption of the cleanliness of his mind, man might not have noticed the corruption. He could fall into a state of delight when reality was closed from his eyes and imagine himself a god. His consciousness might not focus on and evaluate the changes that had taken place. The devil was counting on that. However, man did evaluate his action and was horrified: he understood that the inner spiritual peace and calmness of heart he had lost had made him blessed, indeed!

5. In addition to the injury of the Fall, the Lord applied a certain “remedy” (in the words of John Chrysostom). He inflicted burdens of labor, disease, and so on, not for the purpose of retribution, but for healing.

Burdens and disease, but not death, which came to man by itself through sin, but was not laid on by God. "God did not create death and does not rejoice in the death of the living, for He created everything for existence, and everything in the world is savable, and there is no deadly poison, and there is no reign of Hell on Earth. Righteousness is immortal, but the lie brings death: the impious attracted it with their hands and words, they considered it a friend and pined for it, and contracted an alliance with it, for they deserved its lot" (WS 1:13-16). This is an axiom of the Church's teaching. Death is not inflicted by God as punishment, but rather is the inner consequence of sinful corruption, disintegration, the "split personality" of man.<sup>38</sup>

Someone may object, how is death possible without disease? Naturally, illness is the subjective experience of certain processes in an organism. But who said that the sensation of pain is a necessary condition of death? There is no pain before death from a drug. Nevertheless, it is still death. By dressing our nature in physical limitation, the Lord gave our body a certain receptivity to the sense of pain, to remind it that death is not a

"high," but a torment! In this way, "suffering" is not a torment, but a remedy.

6. Christ came to perfect human nature in love and humility, that is, to have victory over the temptation the devil used on Adam. How is that done? By humility! But humility should not be the result of someone humbling, or "putting down" someone else (which can be seen in many people), but should be the personal free choice of a human being. God in Himself humbles a man, being humble Himself, winning over the temptations of the enemy. And by suffering he learns obedience (Heb. 5), raises us in Love to real glory of real *qejwsi*~, winning over the temptation of the Evil One *#poqei3si*-

## Conclusion

Thus, the reader has been shown that the Christian religion is not a mere collection of childish myths. Our faith reflects the deep, existential experience of human beings, the Fall, and the salvation of humanity in Christ. This is the truth about man and his journey through history, expressed in the language of symbols.

<sup>38</sup> Finally, in speaking about death, people often confuse two realities: the disintegration of a thing into its composite elements (natural aspect), and the spiritual-moral crisis of a personality fallen away from God (existential aspect). The first is not the direct consequence of the Fall. At least, Gregory of Nazianzus does not connect this process with the Fall. "Only God cannot sin...and also, I dare to say [that is, say something daring] that is the nature of Angels... But to sin is a human business, and is characteristic of the earthly condition, for complexity [composite

nature] is the beginning of rebellion." "Nature does not act to isolate and seclude, but, acting and living, it represents the tendency of movement from the whole to its parts. Creation is subject to change, but its changes, under the direction of the all-perfect Creator, may bring perfection out of separation, without crude destruction and without suffering, even in the case of decomposition into its component parts. This decomposition in itself could happen easily and pleasantly, as, for example, anointing oil decomposes into light, and incense decomposes into fragrant smoke."

A human being is a very complex and deeply mysterious being in this world. God created man as His shadow on the earth, as His image. But that image, having freedom, can be darkened, dimmed, and cease to reflect God's Truth in this world. Therefore, the spiritual journey of a human being is a very important and essential part of his existence. A person must receive his true self from God alone, in the mystery of fellowship with Christ!

In the second part, our point of view was expressed concerning the significance of man's temptation in paradise by a fallen angel. But we must remember that what is described there is no less real today. Today as well, the enemy of the human race, the father of lies, the originator of pride, scatters his seed in the hearts and minds of people. The meaning of this reality today cannot be overestimated. The Holy Fathers called Satan "the ape of God"; the enemy mocks the Creator, trying to do everything in such a way that he will not be noticed and taken for that angel of light that fell into darkness, into non-existence, into the depths of darkness and despair.

All the many temptations offered to humans today are presented with one goal: to tear people away from God, to deceive them, to teach them pride, to root them in lawlessness, so that they would be incapable of returning and repenting before God

and loving God. Love is the strength of God. But how the slanderer, the father of lies, has besmirched the word "love"! For we see true Love on the cross—the crucified Christ. However, the enemy of the human race does not cease whispering even today, "That's not it at all! Love is when you yourself are the most important, and everyone loves you. Don't get involved with loving people, use everything for yourself. And anyway, love is sex, pleasure, and nothing else." Everything is done in order to deprive man of his spiritual roots and core, so as to turn the human spiritual personality into a bio-robot that only functions in the physical world. After all, what is a "lie?" It is always a half-truth. And the enemy, like a parasite, skillfully acts on the concepts of good and evil, and on truth, turning it into falsehood. Truth and lies can be compared with a path set before us: here is a straight path, but here the path has become crooked. The devil cannot create anything himself—he can only twist what God has created and confuse man and the world with his crookedness. But it depends on us whether we will give in to what tempts us or not. Therefore, let us keep faithful to Christ, and faithful to God's love. We must remember: We believe in man, while God looks at us with hope. Let us not shame that hope in the hour of temptation.

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