



St John's Church News No 41: November 2012

**ЦЕРКОВЬ СВТ. ИОАННА ШАНХАЙСКОГО
ST JOHN'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Military Road, Colchester, Essex CO1 2AN**

His Holiness Kyrill, Patriarch of Moscow and All the Russias
Most Rev. Metropolitan Hilarion, First Hierarch of ROCOR
Very Rev. Mark, Archbp of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain

For this newsletter in electronic form: www.orthodoxengland.org.uk/zchurchnews.htm

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Расписание богослужений / Services in November

Saturday 3 November

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 4 November

10.00 am: Hours and Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Saturday 10 November

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 11 November

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Saturday 17 November

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 18 November

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Saturday 24 November

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 25 November

10.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Reception into the Church in October

After six months of preparation David Perkins, who is originally from Jersey but now lives in Colchester, was received into the Church on Saturday 13 October. Since his family origins are near St Davids in Wales, he took as his patron saint St David of Wales. He made his first communion on the feast of the Protecting Veil on 14 October. You will have noticed David;; standing at the back of the Church. Please congratulate him if you have not already done so!

Wedding in October

On Sunday 14 October, the Feast of the Protecting Veil (Pokrov), Irina Radums and Oskar (Ioann) Radums were married after the Liturgy and the Procession. Congratulations!

Church News

Number of Parishioners

We now have 391 regular parishioners. This represents a considerable increase over the last two years. It would be very good if we were allowed to contact more Orthodox students at Essex University, only a few of whom come to us at present. Numbers at church have also increased. Whereas when we started in 2008 and 2009 we used to see 40-70 on a typical Sunday, numbers gradually went up through 2010 and 2011 and we are now seeing 70-100 on the average Sunday.

Repair to front of Church and Painting

On 28 September a repair was carried out to the front of the Church. The painters had pointed out a piece of rotten wood which our carpenter Tony Humm from Stanway, who is married to a Ukrainian, sorted out for us before the winter weather begins. On 26 and 28 September Fr Andrew also took the time then to paint the three new large icon-stands which required four coats of paint.

Second Half of Railings Painted

Our great thanks to David Perkins for painting the right-hand railings. This means that in the last six months all the railings have been painted, thanks to John Boulden and David, as well as the front of the Church and St John's Hall, both inside and out. When we have enough money, God willing, next year and the year after, we will paint the other outside walls of the Church. The Church already looks very nice when seen from the new road, Roberts Road, which has been put in with the traffic lights in front of the Church.

Pilgrims from Russia

On Tuesday 9 October we welcomed two groups of pilgrims, one from Moscow came in the morning and the other from St Petersburg came in the afternoon. Those from St Petersburg were led by Fr Mikhail Volonin, who serves at the church of St Seraphim of Sarov. Fr Mikhail knew Elder Nikolai Guryanov of blessed memory and we were able to talk to him about the Elder. Both groups stayed for about three hours and Fr Andrew did a moleben to St John for each group. A third group came on Saturday 13 October.

New Candlestands

On 11 October we received four more small candlestands for the shrines (kioty) at the back of the Church.

Igumen Pakhomy (Bruskov), the rector of Holy Trinity Cathedral in Saratov, answers questions about prayer rules.

Prayer is when the soul turns freely towards God. How can this freedom be reconciled with an obligation to read a rule, especially when you do not want to do it?

Freedom does not mean that everything is permitted. Man is so constituted that if he lets himself grow feeble, it is very hard to return to where he was before. In the Lives of the Saints there are lots of examples when ascetics left off their prayer rule in order to show love to newly arrived monks. In this way they put the commandment of love above their prayer rule. But we should remember that these people had attained unusual heights of spiritual life, they were in a state of unceasing prayer. However, when we feel that we do not want to pray, this is just an ordinary temptation, not an act of love.

A prayer rule supports us in a spiritually developed state, which should not depend on some passing mood. If people abandon their prayer rule, they grow feeble very quickly.

Apart from this, we should also remember that when people turn to God in communion, the enemy of our salvation always does his best to come between them. And not to let our enemy do this is not an infringement of our freedom.

When exactly should we read our morning and evening prayer rule?

This is clearly indicated in any Orthodox prayerbook. ‘Having risen from sleep, before anything else, stand reverently in front of the God Who sees all things and, making the sign of the Cross, say...’. Apart from this, the sense of the prayers themselves indicate to us that morning prayers are to be read at the start of the day, when our minds are not yet preoccupied with any other thoughts. As regards evening prayers, these should be read before sleep, after everything else. These prayers compare sleep to death and our bed to our death-bed. It would be strange indeed, having spoken about death, to go and watch TV or chat to our family.

Any prayer rule is based on the experience of the Church which we should heed. These rules do not infringe human freedom, but help us obtain a maximum of spiritual benefit. Of course, there can be exceptions to any rule, these are founded on some unforeseen circumstance.

Apart from morning and evening prayers, what else can laypeople include in their personal prayers?

Laypeople’s prayer rules can include quite a variety of prayers and rites. There can be various canons, akathists, readings from the Holy Scriptures or the Psalter, bows and genuflections, the Jesus Prayer. As well as this, these prayers should include a short or else more detailed commemoration of those who are close to us, both living and departed. In monastic practice there is a custom of including readings from the Holy Fathers in your rule. But before adding anything to your prayer rule, you need to have a good think, get advice from a priest and assess your strength. After all, a prayer rule is to be read regardless of your mood, tiredness and other movements of the heart. If you have promised God something, then you really have to fulfil out. The Holy Fathers say: Even if a rule is short, let it at least be constant. And at the same time we must pray from the heart.

Can we start adding canons and akathists to our prayer rules, of our own accord, without a blessing?

Of course, you can. But if you have not just added a prayer because your heart has prompted you to, but have permanently added it to your prayer rule, then it is better to ask for a blessing from your spiritual father. Looking objectively at the situation, a priest will assess it correctly: will this addition be for the benefit of the person concerned? If you go to confession regularly and have an inner life, then such a change in your rule will in one way or another be reflected in your spiritual life.

But this is only possible if you have a spiritual father. If there is not one and you have decided to add something to your rule, then it is still better to get advice at your next confession.

On days when the service lasts all night and we do not sleep, do we still have to read our evening and morning prayers?

Morning and evening prayers are not tied down to some specific time. But it would still be wrong to read our evening prayers in the morning and our morning prayers in the evening. We should not have a pharisaical attitude to our rule and read it whatever the situation, ignoring the

sense of the words of the prayers. If we are not going to sleep, then why ask God's blessing for sleep? Morning or evening prayers can be replaced by other prayers or by reading the Gospel.

Can women read their prayers at home with their heads uncovered?

I think it is better if women do their prayer rules with their heads covered. This cultivates a sense of humility and shows obedience to the Church. From the Holy Scriptures we know that women cover their heads not for those around them but for the Angels (I Cor 11, 10). This is a matter of personal piety. Of course it does not matter to God whether you say your prayers with your head covered or uncovered, but it is important for you.

How do you read the canons and prayers before Holy Communion? Should they all be read in one go on the evening before communion or can you divide it into parts and read them over a number of days?

We must not adopt a formal approach to our prayer rules. We must organise our relationship to God according to our preparation through prayer, health, spare time and relations with our spiritual father.

At present we have the custom of preparing for Communion by reading three canons: to the Lord, the Mother of God and our Guardian Angel, and then the prayers before Communion. I think it is better if we read the whole rule through in one go on the evening before Communion. But if this is difficult, we can break it up over three days.

Friends and acquaintances often ask how we should prepare for Communion, how to read the Psalter. What should we laypeople answer?

You should answer according to what you yourself know. You must not take on yourself the responsibility of prescribing some strict or compulsory rule for others or saying something you are not sure about. In your answer you should be guided by the general practice of Church life today. If you do not have any personal experience, then you need to turn to the experience of the Church, of the Holy Fathers. If you have been asked a question which you do not know the answer to, then you need to ask for advice from a priest or from the writings of the Fathers.

I have read a Russian translation of some prayers. It turned out that I had understood them in a quite different way. Should we try and understand them in exactly the same way, reading translations, or can we understand the prayers as our heart prompts us?

We should understand the prayers as they are written. You can make an analogy with secular literature. We read a book and understand it in our own way. But it is always interesting to discover what the author wanted to say. It is the same with the prayers. The author of the prayer meant it in a particular way. After all, we are not reading some sort of plot but are addressing God with a specific request or words of praise. We recall the words of the apostle Paul who said that it is better to say five words with understanding than ten thousand in an unknown tongue (I Cor 14, 19). Furthermore, the authors of the majority of Orthodox prayers are holy ascetics who have been glorified by the Church.

What about contemporary prayers? Can we read everything that is written in prayerbooks or should we prefer older prayers?

Personally the words of the more ancient canons and stichira touch me more. To me they seem more profound, more penetrating. But many prefer contemporary akathists because they are simpler.

If the Church has accepted prayers, then we should have a reverent and respectful attitude towards them and try to benefit from them. But we should understand that some contemporary prayers are not of such high quality as the prayers which were composed by the ancient ascetics.

When someone writes a prayer for public use, he must understand the responsibility he is taking on himself. He must have experience of prayer and at the same time be well-educated. The prayers that have been written by contemporary authors all have to be edited and vetted.

What is more important – reading through your prayer rule at home or getting to church on time?

Getting to church is more important. If you are going to church, then public prayer comes first. Though it is true that the fathers compare public and personal prayer with the two wings of a bird. Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing, so we cannot manage with only one wing. If you do not pray at home, but only go to church, then you will probably have problems praying there too. You see, you will have no experience of personally communing with God. If you only pray at home and do not go to church, then you have no understanding of what the Church is. And there is no salvation without the Church.

What can a layperson replace the service at home with, if need be?

Nowadays a large number of liturgical books and various prayerbooks are available. If you cannot get to church, you can read Vespers, Matins and the Typika.

Can you read your prayer rule sitting down?

The apostle Paul writes: All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient (I Cor 6, 12). If you are tired or ill, then you can sit down at church and sit down during your prayers at home. But you should think about what your reason for doing so is. Is it pain, which hinders you from praying, or is it laziness? If the alternative to reading your prayers is doing nothing, then of course it is better to sit down and read them. If you are seriously ill, then you can even read them lying down. But if you are merely tired or overcome by laziness, then you have to fight it and stand up. During services, the Typicon tells when we sit and when we stand. For example, when the Gospel or an akathist are read, we stand and listen, but during kathismas, kathisma hymns or sermons, we sit.

The Dante Affair

Olga Sedakova

The British Government has supported the right of an employer to dismiss an employee for openly wearing a cross in her workplace. Moreover, it is sticking to this position in two other cases which have been taken to court by Christians who are defending their right to wear a cross.

Below, Olga Sedakova, poet, writer, philologist, ethnographer and the holder of a Ph D in theology from the European University of the Humanities, reflects on the battles for the cross.

The fight to wear a cross in Britain is merely an episode in a whole battlefield of cases concerning ‘religious symbolism’ in the ‘post-Christian’ world. I am a direct witness to another episode in the struggle.

Two years ago the Council of Europe demanded that crucifixes be removed from State schools in Italy. Schoolchildren and teachers alike were having none of this and they took to the streets. The argument behind the European decision was that it defended those whom such a symbol might offend – Non-Christians or simply atheists.

Among others, schoolchildren held up posters saying ‘The majority also have their rights’. It was not that all these Italian children and teachers were zealous believers: for many of them (perhaps for most of them) the decision was simply a mockery of an ancient tradition. And they were not having it.

Yesterday I read in «Corriere della Sera» of the outbreak of another battle in this great war: The Commission of European Experts, headed by an Italian Valentina Sereni, has been examining Dante from a legal perspective and concluded that his ‘Divine Comedy’ must be banned from school curricula because it contains ‘elements of racism’, for which criminal liability has now been established. At the very least the text must be censored.

I have studied Dante for many years and was so struck by this diagnosis (racism!) that I read the article to the end.

The Divine Comedy has once before been prohibited reading, but for a different reason. This was because Dante spoke of a number of popes of his age and the right of the pontiffs to wield secular power in such a way that it could only be termed heresy. Dante was one of the first to defend the concept of ‘the division of powers’ into spiritual and secular, in other words, he was one of the fathers of secularism.

This idea, which was implemented in Europe only much later, after the Enlightenment, presupposed that social life is regulated not by theocratic laws, but by universal laws of reason and morality which are presumed to be the same for all people and are contained in human nature itself.

The accusation of heresy was long ago dropped from the Divine Comedy. The papal coat of arms contains two keys - one representing secular power, the other spiritual power – but nobody for a long time has mentioned the secular power of the Church. John Paul II was a personal patron of

the Dante Society. Today's demand to prohibit Dante comes precisely from secularism, at least the form which it has taken today.

So Dante stands accused of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and homophobia.

The first accusation is based on his portrayals of Judas (!), Caiaphas, the high priest Anna, the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees. But Dante invented nothing here; he simply followed the New Testament story. However, that does not redeem him, because the Gospels themselves have been shown to be 'sources of anti-Semitism'.

His Islamophobia is shown by his portrayal of Mohammed who is imprisoned in hell with the creators of schism, suffering terrible and humiliating torments.

There are also homosexuals in Dante's inferno. These he calls sodomites and terms their sin as 'sin against nature'. Dante meets his old friend Brunetto Latini there. Conclusion: homophobia.

Do interpretations of this sort not remind us of the Soviet period, when all works of art from all over world were interpreted from the viewpoint of 'the class struggle' and there were debates about, say, Pindar or Shakespeare? (By the way Shakespeare is now also suspected of anti-Semitism for his 'Merchant of Venice').

But there is a difference. Communist doctrine was never, in any way, a form of secularism, as many of us think. We never had secularism. The Soviet system was an 'ideocracy', that is, a quasi- or para-religion.

Universal, 'neutral' reason was never recognised in Soviet Russia as a criterion, unlike 'the all-conquering teaching'. 'Faith' and 'a total commitment to the cause of the Party' was what was demanded of loyal citizens. They were also required to be 'militant atheists'. This was the world of national rituals (often copied from Church rituals and reinterpreted) and 'shrines': the portraits of leaders played the role of icons, without which it was unthinkable to leave any official premises unadorned. This para-religion had its own 'martyrs' and 'prophets'. Here there was no secularism, that is, no space for the reason devoid of any mythology

Now such 'shrines' and icons' are being defined as 'neo-pagan'. Then they were considered to be just 'neo', very, very 'neo'. An ideocracy is a special spiritual education, a 'transformed' religiosity. In it, pagan symbols are also at the disposition of very different ideas, different idols, untrusted by morality or reason.

Communist doctrine worked through a 'majority' – any minority was viewed as something to be eradicated. Secularism – our starting point – defends minorities and calls on the majority to give way to those against whom it traditionally discriminated.

However, as a result, it turns out that Dante is unacceptable to both secularism and Communism. The Communists tried to censor him in their own way – they liked his hellish Inferno, but his 'Paradise' was another matter.

I think that when we hear of events like ‘the Dante affair’, or the removal of crucifixes or the prohibition to wear a cross, we can say that secularism is becoming a new ideology, that is, a new para-religion, which categorically rejects the use of the reason.

Reason alone should have been enough for the experts to understand that Dante, ‘a 13th century Christian’, as he called himself, could not relate to other religions in any other way. And that much later concepts of ‘anti-Semitism’ and ‘Islamophobia’ are not relevant here. And that Dante could not doubt in the Church’s and the Bible’s teaching about sin.

An ideology – unlike secularism, as it was originally conceived – puts forward certain eternal positions, true for all people and for all time. It cannot help distorting the facts so that they fit its interpretation. It has to hush up or falsify reality, both contemporary and historical. We are witnesses to the ‘ideologisation’ of secularism, and that, as we know, will only leave burned earth behind it.

Moreover, the most important characteristic of ideologies is that they do not in any way respect humanity, they all want to decide every detail for us. Paradoxically, secularism, which defends human dignity and the freedom of the conscience, now looks at human beings as those who will read of the torments of Mohammed in Dante’s ‘Inferno’ and at once become Islamophobes. You must not imagine that someone will think about what he has read and draw his own conclusions. You must simply censor the dangerous part.

And here is another conclusion from ‘the Dante affair’ (after which may well follow ‘the Shakespeare Affair’ or ‘the Pushkin Affair’): We can see just to what extent the European (and Russian) classics were fundamentally Christian. We have no other classics. So, if we do not want to offend anyone, we shall just have to have nothing at all.

Наука покаяния

Архимандрит Тихон (Агриков)
У Троицы окрыленные

Часть I. 1950–1955 гг.
Духовные наставления
(Приложение к I части)

Если вы решили говеть, немедленно явится множество препятствий и внутренних, и внешних. Но они исчезнут, если проявить решимость непременно покаяться. Нам, одержимым “дреманием лености”, неискусным в покаянии, необходимо вновь и вновь учиться каяться; это во-первых. А во-вторых, необходимо тянуть некую ниточку от исповеди к исповеди, чтобы промежутки между говениями были наполнены духовной борьбой, усилиями воли к добру, возбуждаемы воодушевлением близкой новой исповеди.

Здесь же непременно возникает вопрос о духовнике: к кому идти? Держаться ли одного духовника? Можно ли менять духовников?..

Опытные в духовной жизни отцы утверждают, что менять не следует, даже если это только духовник твой, а не духовный отец, руководитель твоей совести.

Бывает, правда, особенно после первой хорошей исповеди у священника, последующие исповеди у него же проходят как-то вяло, холодно, неглубоко, без особых переживаний, и вот тогда является мысль о перемене духовника. Но это недостаточное основание для такого важного шага. Недостаточный духовный подъем во время исповеди часто бывает не по вине духовника, а по причине нашего духовного неблагополучия. Для человека, страдающего язвой греховной, безразлично, через кого он исповедует свой грех, лишь бы как можно скорей сбросить с себя это ярмо греховное и получить прощение. Другое дело, если человек оставил в стороне личное покаяние в своих грехах, занимается на исповеди духовной беседой или, еще хуже, житейскими вопросами. Ибо беседа, хотя и о духовных предметах, может только рассеять, расхолодить исповедующегося, коснуться осуждения других и ослабить покаянное чувство. Исповедь не есть беседа, даже о своих недостатках и сомнениях, а есть **горячее** покаяние сердца, жажда очищения, идущая от острого ощущения близости святыни — невидимо стоящего Христа, Евангелия и креста на аналое, — умирание для греха и оживание для святой новой жизни. Искренняя раскаянность уже есть начальная степень святости. Холодность — удаление от святости, умирание вне Бога.

Как же следует относиться к таинству исповеди? Какова наука самого покаяния?

Первым действием на достойной исповеди должно быть **испытание сердца**. Обычно люди неопытные в духовной жизни не видят ни множества грехов, ни их *гнусности*. "Ничего особенного, как у всех, только мелкие грехи, не украл, не убил", — так говорят обычно многие. А самоуверенность, черствость, раздражение, человекоугодие, слабость веры, недостаток любви, малодушие, ропот, уныние — разве это мелкие грехи? Разве кто может сказать, что он достаточно верит в Бога, что любовь его совершенна? Что каждого человека он любит как брата во Христе? Что мы достигли кротости, безгневия, полного смирения? Если же нет, то в чем же заключается наша христианская жизнь? Чем объяснить нашу самоуверенность на исповеди, как не *окамененным нечувствием*, как не холодной мертвенностю сердца, душевной смертью, которая приближает и телесную? Почему святые отцы, оставившие нам покаянные молитвы, считали себя первыми из грешников, с искренней убежденностью взывали к Иисусу Сладчайшему: "Никтоже согреши на земли от века, якоже согреши аз, окаянный и блудный"? А мы убеждены, что у нас все благополучно!

Чем светлее луч солнца в подземелье, тем яснее выступает беспорядок в разных предметах; чем ярче свет Христов озаряет сердце, тем яснее выступает беспорядок в душе, осознаются грехи, язвы и раны душевые. И наоборот, люди, погруженные в мрак греховный, ничего не видят в своем сердце, а если и видят сколько-нибудь, не ужасаются, так как им не с чем сравнить себя. Поэтому прямой путь к покаянию — в испытании сердца, познании своих грехов через приближение себя к свету Христову. Готовясь к исповеди, следует проверять свою совесть по заповедям Божиим, по жизни наиболее

близких нам святых, по некоторым молитвам (например, 3-я вечерняя, 4-я перед причащением).

Разбирайся в своей душе, надо постараться различать основные грехи от производных. Например, рассеянность на молитве, дремота, невнимание в церкви, отсутствие интереса к чтению Священного Писания. Не происходят ли эти грехи от маловерия и слабой любви к Богу или от лености и беспечности? Нужно отметить в себе своеование, непослушание, самооправдание, нетерпение упреков, упрямство, но еще важнее открыть их связь с самолюбием, высокогуманистичностью и гордостью. Если мы замечаем в себе усиленную заботу о своей наружности, обстановке дома и прочее, не является ли это признаком скорого тщеславия? Если мы слишком близко принимаем к сердцу житейские неудачи, тяжело переносим разлуку, неутешно скорбим об усопших, то не свидетельствует ли это о неверии в Промысел Божий?

Есть еще одно средство, ведущее нас к познанию своих грехов,— вспомнить, в чем обычно обвиняют нас люди, особенно рядом с нами живущие, близкие. Почти всегда их обвинения, укоры, нападки имеют основания. Необходимо также взаимное прощение грехов друг другу, во исполнение заповеди о прощении (Мф. 6, 12).

При таком испытании сердца нужно следить, чтобы не впасть в чрезмерную мнительность и мелочную подозрительность ко всякому движению сердца; став на этот путь, можно потерять чувство важного и неважного, запутаться в мелочах. В этих случаях святые отцы советуют временно оставить испытание своей души и, посадив себя на простую духовную диету, молитвой и добрыми делами упростить и прояснить душу.

Приготовление к исповеди заключается не в том, чтобы только вспомнить или даже записать свои грехи, а в том, чтобы осознать свою вину, довести свое покаянное чувство до сердечного сокрушения и, если можно, пролить слезы покаяния. Отсюда возникает второе положение, нужное на исповеди — **сокрушение сердца**.

Знать свои грехи — это еще не значит каяться в них. Скорбь о содеянном, плач о грехах важнее всего на исповеди.

Но что делать, если "иссохшее греховым зноем" сердце не орошаются живительными водами слез? Все равно надо каяться, каяться в самой холодности и бесчувственности своей, в надежде единственно на милость Божию. Наше бесчувствие на исповеди большей частью имеет своим корнем отсутствие в нас страха Божия и скрытое маловерие или даже неверие. Сюда должны быть направлены все усилия. Вот почему так важны слезы на исповеди. Они смягчают окаменение, устраниют главное препятствие к покаянию — нашу *самость* (Епископ Феофан). Гордые и самолюбивые не плачут. Не могут плакать и те, кто не прощает ближнего, кто таит в сердце зло и обиду, обвиняя других и оправдывая себя. Какое счастье — иметь слезы покаяния! И они даются смиренным грешникам.

Не нужно стыдиться слез на исповеди, если они орошают наше лицо. Пусть очищается душа от скверны греховной и облекается вновь в одежду невинности и чистоты.

Испытание совести и сокрушение сердца неизменно ведут к чистосердечному словесному исповеданию грехов. Таким образом, возникает третий момент исповеди — **словесное исповедание грехов**.

Святые отцы учат, что на исповеди не следует ждать вопросов духовника, а самому нужно исповедовать свои грехи, не стыдясь, не скрывая и не умаляя их тяжести. Исповедь есть подвиг самопринуждения. Говорить надо точно, не затеняя неприглядности греха общими выражениями (например, "грешна против 7-й заповеди").

Очень трудно, исповедуясь, избежать соблазна самооправдания, попыток объяснить духовнику "смягчающие обстоятельства", ссылаясь на других людей, будто содействующих греху. Все это есть признак самолюбия, отсутствия личного, глубокого покаяния. Бывает, что, каясь в каком-либо грехе (например, гневе, ссоре), исповедники невольно входят в осуждение других, выгораживая себя и обвиняя ближнего. Это ложное покаяние, лукавое, лицемерное, противное Богу.

Иногда на исповеди ссылаются на слабую память, не дающую будто возможности вспомнить грехи. Действительно, часто бывает, что мы забываем грехи свои. Но от слабой ли это памяти? Совсем нет. Ведь, например, похвалы, льстящие нашему самолюбию, мы помним многие годы. А вот грехопадения свои не помним. Не значит ли это, что мы невнимательно и рассеянно живем и не придаем нашим грехам серьезного значения?

Признак совершившегося искреннего покаяния — чувство легкости, чистоты, неизъяснимой радости, глубокого мира. И наоборот, недостойное покаяние характеризуется душевным неудовлетворением, сугубой тяжестью на сердце, каким-то смутным, неясным чувством тревоги.

Нужно отметить, что раскаяние не будет полным и полезным, если кающийся не утвердится внутренне на камне решимости не возвращаться к исповеданному греху. Но, говорят, как это возможно? Не будет ли ближе к истине как раз обратное — уверенность, что грех снова повторится? Ведь опытом всякий знает, что через некоторое время опять возвращаешься к тем же грехам; наблюдая за собой из года в год, не замечаешь никакого улучшения, шагнешь вперед и опять стоишь, или еще хуже — шаг вперед и два назад.

Было бы ужасно, если бы это было так. Но, к счастью, это не совсем так. Не бывает случая, чтобы при наличии доброго желания исправиться последующие исповеди и Святое Причащение не производили бы в душе добрых перемен. Но дело в том, что, прежде всего, мы не суды себе. Правильно говорить о себе мы не можем: стали мы лучше или хуже. Может быть, возросшая строгость к себе, обостренный страх греха создали иллюзию, что грехи умножились и усилились и что душевное состояние не улучшилось, а ухудшилось. Кроме того, Господь, по особому промышлению Своему, часто закрывает нам глаза на наши успехи, чтобы защитить нас от злайшего врага — тщеславия и гордости.

Часто бывает, что грех-то остался, но частые исповеди и Причащение Святых Тайн расшатали его и значительно ослабили его корни. Да к тому же и сама борьба с грехом

(может быть, с падениями), страдания о грехах — разве это не приобретение? "Не устрашайся,— говорит святой преподобный Иоанн Лествичник,— хотя бы ты и падал каждый день и не отходил бы от путей Божиих, стой мужественно, и Ангел, тебя охраняющий, почтит твое терпение".

Таким образом, наука истинного покаяния определяется тремя вышеуказанными моментами:

1. а) **испытанием сердца;**
2. б) **сокрушением души;**
3. в) **словесным исповеданием своих грехов.**

The Science of Repentance

Archimandrite Tikhon (Agrikov)
Inspired by the Holy Trinity

Part One: 1950–1955
Spiritual Teachings (Appendix to Part One)

As soon as you have decided to prepare for communion, all sorts of obstacles, both internal and external, appear immediately. But they will disappear if you show determination to repent, whatever the situation. Again and again we who are overtaken by idle slumber and are inexperienced in matters of repentance have to learn how to repent. This is the first thing. The second thing is that we have to draw out a kind of thread from one confession to the next, so that the gaps between preparation for confession may be filled with spiritual struggle, determined efforts to do good, which are inspired by the knowledge that a new confession is in the offing.

Now, as ever, we come to the question of the confessor. Who do I go to? Should I keep to one confessor or can I change confessors?

Priests who are experienced in spiritual life confirm that it is better not to change confessors, even if it is only a confessor, and not a spiritual father, who is guiding your conscience.

True, it often happens, especially after your first really good confession with a priest, that the next confessions are somehow feeble, cold and shallow, without any great emotions, and then the thought comes to you of changing confessors. But that is an insufficient reason for such an important step. A lack of spiritual uplift during confession is often not the confessor's fault, but is due to our own lack of spiritual well-being. The best thing for someone who suffers from the disease of sin is to unburden himself as soon as possible from his yoke of sin and receive forgiveness. It is another thing if someone has put aside his personal repentance for his sins and engages in some spiritual conversation at confession or, even worse, engages in talking about everyday life. This is because a talk, even on spiritual topics, can only distract and cool the ardour of the penitent, and it may involve condemning others and so weakens the feeling of

repentance. Confession is not a conversation, even about our faults and doubts, it is the **burning** repentance of the heart, a thirst for purification which comes from the feeling that the sacred is close – the feeling that Christ, the Gospel and the cross on the stand, is invisibly standing next to us – we are dying to sin and living for a new and holy life. Sincere repentance is already the first step in holiness. Coldness means the distancing of ourselves from holiness, that is, dying outside the presence of God.

What should our attitude be to the sacrament of repentance? What is the science of repentance itself?

The first step in worthy repentance must be **the examination of the heart**. Usually, people who are inexperienced in spiritual life can see neither the multitude of their sins nor the *revulsion* they produce. ‘Nothing special, the same as everyone else, only a few little sins, I didn’t steal anything or kill anyone’. This is what a lot of people are used to saying. Self-assurance, dryness, irritability, obsequiousness, weakness of faith, lack of love, cowardice, the spirit of complaint, despondency – surely these are not little sins? Surely no-one can say that his faith in God is sufficiently strong, that he has perfect love? That he loves everyone else as his brother in Christ? That he has attained meekness, complete humility, that he is never angered? If not, then where is our Christian life? How can we explain our self-assurance at confession if not as *a stony-hearted lack of feeling*, as a coldness and deadness of the heart, the death of our souls, which brings ever closer the death of our bodies? Why did the holy fathers, who left us prayers of repentance, consider themselves the first among sinners and cry out to the Sweetest Jesus with heartfelt conviction: ‘None has sinned on earth as I have sinned, for I am wretched and adulterous?’ Are we so sure that everything is OK with us?

The brighter the rays of the sun shine in the basement, the clearer we see the disorder among the various objects there; the brighter the light of Christ illuminates the heart, the clearer we see the disorder in the soul, the more we become aware of our sins, the illnesses and wounds of our souls. And, conversely, people who are engrossed in the darkness of sin do not see anything in their hearts and, even if they do see something, they are not frightened because they have nothing to compare it with. Therefore, the most direct path to repentance is in the examination of the heart, cultivating the awareness of our sins by drawing closer to the light of Christ. In order to prepare ourselves for confession, we need to examine our conscience according to the Divine commandments, through a life which is closer to the saints, through certain prayers (for instance, the third prayer at Vespers and the fourth prayer before Communion).

Analyzing our soul, we have to try and distinguish the basic sins from those which are the result of those sins. For example, distraction in prayer, sleepiness, inattention at church, a lack of interest in reading the Holy Scriptures. Do these sins stem from a lack of faith and a lack of love for God, or from laziness and negligence? We should note in ourselves any lack of determination, disobedience, self-justification, intolerance of reproaches, stubbornness, but it is even more important to discover their connection with vanity, arrogance and pride. If we notice in ourselves a heightened care for our outward appearance, the situation of our home and so on, is this not a sign of growing vainglory? If we take our failures in life too much to heart, if we suffer separation very deeply, if we are inconsolably sad because someone has passed on, does this not testify to a lack of faith in Divine Providence?

There is another technique which leads us to the knowledge of our sins; this is to recall what people generally accuse us of, especially those who live alongside us, those who are near to us. Their accusations, reproaches and attacks virtually always have some foundation. What is also vital is mutual forgiveness, in fulfilment of the commandment about forgiveness (Matt 6, 12).

When we examine our hearts in such a way, we also have to be careful not to fall into an oversensitivity or excessive suspiciousness towards every movement of the heart. If we do this, we risk losing the ability to distinguish between what is important and what is not important, getting caught up in petty matters. In such cases the holy fathers advise us to put aside this examination of the soul for a time and go on a simple spiritual diet, simplifying and brightening the soul with prayer and good deeds.

Preparation for confession does not consist of just recalling or even noting down our sins, but of gaining an awareness of our guilt, of raising our sense of repentance to the level of heartfelt contrition and, if possible, of shedding tears of repentance. From here stems the second step which is necessary for confession – **heartfelt contrition**.

Knowing what your sins are does not actually mean repenting of them. Sorrow for what we have done, tears for sins are the most important thing of all in confession.

But what can we do if the heart which has been ‘dried up by the heat of sin’, is not watered by the vivifying waters of tears? We still need to repent, to repent for our very coldness and lack of feeling in the only hope of Divine mercy. Our lack of feeling at confession is for the most part rooted in the absence in us of the fear of God and a concealed lack of faith or even absence of faith. All our efforts must be directed towards this. This is why tears are so important at confession. They soften our hearts of stone, removing the main obstacle to repentance – the concentration on our egos (Bishop Theophan). The proud and the vain do not cry. Those who do not forgive their neighbours, who conceal evil and offence in their hearts, accusing others and justifying themselves, none of these can cry. What happiness to have tears of repentance! And they are granted to humble sinners.

We should not be ashamed of tears at confession as they water our face. Let our soul be cleansed from foul sin and be clothed in the raiment of innocence and purity.

The examination of the conscience and heartfelt contrition lead inevitably to the oral confession of sins in purity of heart. In this way, we see the third stage in confession – **the oral confession of sins**.

The holy fathers teach us that we should not expect the confessor to ask any questions at confession, but we should confess our sins ourselves, without being so ashamed that we cannot say them and without concealing or diminishing their seriousness. Confession is a feat of doing violence to ourselves. We need to speak precisely, without covering up the ugliness of the sin in general terms (for example, ‘I have sinned against the Seventh Commandment’).

It is very hard at confession to avoid the temptation of self-justification, attempts to explain ‘mitigating circumstances’ to the confessor, referring to other people, as if they had participated

in the sin. All this is a sign of vanity, the absence of deep, personal repentance. Sometimes, in repenting for some sin (for instance, anger, quarrelling), penitents involuntarily fall into condemning others, protecting themselves and accusing others. This is false repentance, it is cunning, hypocritical and displeasing to God.

Sometimes at confession we make reference to a poor memory which does not allow us to recall our sins. And it is true that we often forget our sins. But is this because of a poor memory? Not at all. For example, we know that when we are praised and our vanity is flattered, we remember it for years. But we do not remember our falls into sin. Does this not suggest that we live inattentively and are distracted and do not place any real importance on our sins?

A sign that repentance has been sincere is a feeling of lightness, purity, unspeakable joy and profound peace. On the other hand, unworthy repentance is characterized by a feeling of dissatisfaction in the soul, a special heaviness in our hearts, and a sort of dull, vague feeling of unease.

It must be said that repentance is not complete or useful, if the penitent has not inwardly affirmed a rock-like determination not to return to the sin that has been confessed. But, as some say, how is this possible? Would it not be closer to the truth to say just the opposite – a certainty that the sin will be repeated? After all we all know from experience that in a while we will once more return to the same sins. Following ourselves year in year out, we do not notice any improvement, we take a step forward and then go back again, or, even worse, we take a step forward and then go back two steps.

It would be awful if this were really so. But fortunately, this is not at all the case. There is not a single case where, given goodwill and the desire to correct ourselves, successive confessions and Holy Communion do not produce changes for the better in our souls. But the point above all is that we cannot be judges of ourselves. We cannot speak of ourselves accurately, whether we have got better or worse. Perhaps, a growing strictness towards ourselves and a heightened fear of sin create the illusion that our sins have multiplied and strengthened and that the state of our soul has neither improved nor worsened. Apart from this, through His special Providence, God often closes our eyes to our successes in order to defend us from our worst enemies – vainglory and pride.

Often the sin remains, but frequent confession and Communion of the Holy Mysteries have shaken it and significantly weakened its roots. In any case, is the struggle against sin (perhaps, against its falls) in itself, the sufferings resulting from sins, not a victory? St John of the Ladder says, ‘Do not fear, if you have fallen every day but have not abandoned God’s ways, stand courageously, your Guardian Angel will honour your patience’.

Thus, the science of true repentance can be defined as consisting of the three above-mentioned steps:

1. a) **The examination of the heart;**
2. b) **The contrition of the soul;**
3. c) **The oral confession of our sins.**

