

## CHAPTER 12

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# EASTERN ORTHODOX ESCHATOLOGY

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DESPITE the fact that, in the doctrine of *ta eschata*, “the last things,” the whole of Christian doctrine—creation, incarnation, redemption, and deification—finds its fulfillment, there is little explicitly defined in the formularies of the Orthodox church, hardly anything more than two phrases in the Nicene Creed: “He is coming in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end,” and “I await the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.” Nevertheless, there is nothing bleakly agnostic about Orthodox beliefs concerning the afterlife, nor is it the case that awareness of an eschatological dimension is absent. Rather, these beliefs are nourished by the rich liturgical life in which the Orthodox participate, which feeds on the hopes and longings of the scriptures and, in the case of the last things particularly, on the experiences and perceptions of the saints, especially as found in hagiographical writings. At the center of all this—the liturgical experience, the scriptures as understood by the Orthodox, and the transfigured lives and experience of the saints—stands the resurrection of Christ, the ultimate fount of all Christian hope. The role of the liturgy and hagiography in shaping Orthodox convictions concerning eschatology is not unlike the case of the veneration of the blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God; there, too, the dogmatic data are limited and largely indirect, and devotion to the Mother of God has been nourished by her role in the liturgical office as a whole and by the liturgical feasts specifically devoted to her, which have drawn on imaginative accounts of her life in the apocryphal literature, the equivalent in this case of hagiography. In both cases, there have emerged the same dangers: the itch to define (which has, perhaps, been more

characteristic of the West) and, not always distinct from this, the risk of reading too literally the imaginative exuberance of apocryphal and hagiographical texts. Bulgakov, in the section devoted to eschatology in *The Bride of the Lamb*, the final volume of his major theological trilogy, *On Divine Wisdom and Godmanhood*, identified these dangers as “rationalism” and “anthropocentrism.” Rationalism, he remarked, is often “anthropomorphism in thought,” submitting to the familiar canons of human reasoning mysteries that lie beyond our fallen experience of space and time, while anthropomorphism tends to prevent eschatology from “being what it is and what it should be, ontology and anthropology revealed in the final destinies of man. The ontological statement of the problem is replaced by a juridical one, and the mysteries of God’s love are measured according to the penal code.”<sup>1</sup> In relation to individual eschatology (that is, the fate and state of the individual person after death), a further danger of anthropomorphism is to see the afterlife as a continuation after death of the life of the soul, envisaged in much the same terms as this life (that is, in terms of existing in space and time), thereby running the risk of reducing Christian doctrine to mythology.

As already remarked, the center of the Christian hope, underlying any eschatology, is the Christian conviction of the resurrection of Christ. Christian experience of this finds its preeminent expression in participation in the Paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection through the celebration of the holy Eucharist, the divine liturgy. What follows will be treated in four sections: “Eucharist as Eschatology”; “Universal Eschatology”; “Individual Eschatology”; “Problems in Eschatology.”

## EUCHARIST AS ESCHATOLOGY

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From the beginning, the Eucharist has had an eschatological dimension. At the Last Supper, after giving the apostles the wine as his “blood of the covenant,” the Lord said, “I tell you, I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine, until I drink with you anew in the kingdom of my Father” (Matt. 26:29). In doing what Christ asked his disciples to do, the church has “proclaimed the Lord’s death, until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). From the beginning, then, the Eucharist was celebrated as an anticipation of the banquet of the kingdom, which would take place as a result of the Second Coming of Christ. In gathering together, Christians look forward to the coming of the kingdom; as they celebrate the Eucharist together, they know themselves to be on the threshold of the kingdom. So in the *Didache*, Christians are exhorted to pray: “As this fragment [of bread] was scattered over the mountains and has been gathered together into one, so let your Church be gathered from the ends of the world into your Kingdom; for yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ to the ages” (*Didache* 9.4). This eschatological dimension has been

preserved in the Orthodox liturgy. The divine liturgy begins with the proclamation: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen"; at the great entrance, there are prayers to the Lord for all present "to be remembered in his Kingdom"; before the holy gifts are brought out for communion, the Lord's Prayer is prayed, with its petition "Your Kingdom come!"; and immediately before communion, one of the prayers ends with the words: "but like the Thief I confess you: Remember me, O Lord, in your Kingdom." This repeated recalling of the kingdom preserves the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist; in the liturgy, as we recall the life and teaching, the death and resurrection of Christ, as we receive his sacred body and precious blood, we find ourselves on the threshold of the kingdom, already partaking by anticipation in the banquet of the kingdom. This eschatological dimension is underlined in other ways. St. Maximus the Confessor, in his commentary on the divine liturgy called *The Church's Mystagogy*, interprets the bishop's entry into the church (with which the Eucharist then began) as symbolizing the coming of Christ into the world in the incarnation. The immediate purpose of the incarnation in reconciling heaven and earth is symbolized by the readings and the ceremonies that surround them, and after the proclamation of the Gospel the bishop descends from his throne in an action interpreted as symbolizing the Second Coming of Christ. Everything that follows—the reciting of the creed, the offering of bread and wine, consecration, and communion—takes place, symbolically, after the Second Coming of Christ. This is confirmed by the prayer of anamnesis in which remembrance is made of "this our Savior's command and all that has been done for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, the Second and glorious Coming again." At the heart of the Paschal mystery, the church is beyond time and looks back, as it were, on the Second Coming, at the same time as it prays "Your Kingdom come!" This eschatological orientation of the liturgy spills over into the daily prayer life of the Orthodox Christian, who is still expected to follow the custom of the early church of praying facing east and standing upright, especially on Sundays. St. Basil the Great explains this custom:

For this reason we all look to the East during our prayers . . . because we seek our ancient fatherland, Paradise, which God planted towards the East. It is standing upright that we make our prayers on the first day of the week . . . It is not only because risen together with Christ, we ought to seek the things above, and through our standing up for prayer on the day of the resurrection call to mind the grace given to us, but because it is a kind of image of the age to come. . . . And this one day is also the eighth, pointing to that really unique and truly eighth day . . . the condition that follows our time, the day that will never end, without evening or tomorrow, the imperishable age that will never grow old. (*On the Holy Spirit* 27.66)

St. John Damascene recapitulated this tradition, adding:

[A]lso, when the Lord was crucified, he looked towards the West, and so we worship gazing towards him. And when he was taken up, he ascended towards the East and thus the Apostles worshipped him and thus he shall come in the same

way as they had seen him going into heaven. . . . And so, while we are awaiting him, we worship towards the East. (*Exposition of the Faith* 85)

This eschatological orientation of Orthodox prayer and worship has several consequences for more general eschatological considerations.<sup>2</sup> The last things are not remote future events, but events made present in the risen Christ, and in the risen Christ the boundaries between death and life have been broken down, as has the separation implicit in our experience of space and time. As Alexander Schmemmann put it:

Christianity is not reconciliation with death. It is the revelation of death, and it reveals death because it is the revelation of Life. Christ is this Life. And only if Christ is Life is death what Christianity proclaims it to be, namely the enemy to be destroyed, and not a "mystery" to be explained.<sup>3</sup>

This also means that the distinction within the Christian community between the living and the departed is nullified; the communion in the risen Christ transcends the separation of the living and the departed wrought by death.

## UNIVERSAL ESCHATOLOGY

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The Orthodox Church lives in the hope of the coming again of Christ in glory, as the creed affirms, and of all that is bound up with this Second Coming: the final judgment, the resurrection of the dead, the transfiguration of the cosmos. All of this is determined by the life on the threshold of the kingdom, experienced in the eucharistic celebration. This eschatological expectation, as we have seen, has implications for the nature of the Christian church, gathered together as the church to celebrate the Eucharist as an anticipation of the banquet of the kingdom. First and foremost, this means that the life of each individual Christian finds expression and meaning in the communion of the church and that the communion of the church nurtures and fosters the life of each individual Christian. As Khomiakov expressed it:

We know that when any one of us falls, he falls alone; but no one is saved alone. He who is saved is saved in the Church, as a member of her, and in unity with all her other members. If anyone believes, he is in the communion of faith; if any one loves, he is in the communion of love; if anyone prays, he is in the communion of prayer.<sup>4</sup>

This conviction has implications both for the final judgment itself and for the life we live in expectation of the coming of the kingdom. To anticipate the next section, on individual eschatology, this conviction lies behind the distinction drawn between the particular judgment of the individual, at the moment of death, and the universal final judgment with the coming of Christ, the Parousia, at the end of time. As Stăniloae puts it, the final judgment is additional to the particular judgment

because the full blessedness or damnation of each individual is organically bound up with [the] end of the world and the activity of humans within the world; that means therefore, that blessedness or damnation is dependent on the result of this activity, and that these results, whether good in the Kingdom of God or evil in Hell, have eternal consequences.<sup>5</sup>

It is for this reason that the eucharistic sacrifice is offered, first of all, for the Mother of God and the saints, as the eucharistic anaphora affirms, for their blessedness will not be complete until the consummation of all human life at the last judgment. This human coinherence has implications for life in expectation of the Second Coming. For while, on the one hand, it must be maintained that the coming of the kingdom with Christ's Parousia is beyond any human expectation or preparation, nevertheless there is, to quote Stăniloae again, "a deep and mysterious solidarity of Christ with the whole course of human life on earth."<sup>6</sup> As with the Eucharist, the holy gifts are *gifts*, not something we can ever demand or deserve, yet truly to receive these gifts and live out their power in our lives demands of each Christian an ascetic commitment, a commitment to fighting against anything in our lives opposed to Christ and nurturing anything that promotes love. St. John Chrysostom remarks, "for grace, if it is grace, saves those who want it, not those who do not choose it and reject it and fight against it continually and are opposed to it" (*Hom. in Rom.* 19). So, too, our life in expectation of the coming of the kingdom has political implications: to promote the values of the kingdom in the societies in which we live "between the times," or at least to seek to create a society in which the values of the kingdom are comprehensible. This will mean, in particular, striving against a culture of death and disposable life, a culture that arbitrarily limits its understanding of "human life" to an undemanding "norm" by excluding the impaired and handicapped, the not-fully-formed and those with failing powers. It will also mean challenging human forms of society that impair the principle of human coinherence by favoring one part of society over others, whether this privilege is based on wealth, birth, race, or occupation. So Berdyaev affirms: "The fundamental principle of ethics may be formulated as follows: act so as to conquer death and affirm everywhere, in everything and in relation to everything, eternal and immortal life."<sup>7</sup>

A central term in the Christian conception of the coming kingdom is the notion of *glory*: Christ will come in glory, the bodies of the blessed will be glorified, indeed the whole cosmos will be transfigured in glory. This has been treated in different ways by different Orthodox theologians: Bulgakov, for example, develops an understanding of the Second Coming as a revelation of glory in a distinctive way. The Second Coming in glory stands in contrast to Christ's first coming, in which he emptied himself of the divine glory and took on the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7); it is a manifestation in glory, as opposed to his first coming in kenosis, self-emptying. In the same way, Bulgakov sees the period from Pentecost, the period "between the times," as the period of kenosis of the Holy Spirit, during which period the Spirit is at work in the church and the world in a hidden way—a hiddenness that will be revealed at the Second Coming. It is not just in the church and human society that the Spirit is hidden, but in the whole natural world:

The kenosis of the Holy Spirit that has descended into the world consists in a limitation of its gifts. . . . The natural world retains its unchangingness in creaturely being; it remains in its unrealized and unfinished state. The fullness of its realization, its transference for the Spirit, its appearance in glory, or glorification, are yet to come. This glorification depends not on a new coming of the Spirit, since the Spirit is already in the world, but on the fullness of its action. This fullness is the transfiguration of the world in connexion with the parousia; it is the new heaven and new earth into which Christ comes. In Scripture, the parousia is accompanied by the fire of the world, the destruction of the world, followed by its transfiguration, but this does not signify a succession or coincidence in time of two parallel events. It is one and the same event: the coming of Christ in glory and the revelation of glory to the world correspond to the action of the Holy Spirit. . . . Pentecost's fiery tongues become the flame of the world fire, not consuming but transmuting the world. This figure represents a hieroglyph of the cosmic Pentecost. If the parousia is the second coming of Christ in the world, this time in glory, it is also the new revelation of the Holy Spirit, of God's glory, upon Christ and in the world. It is not a new coming of the Holy Spirit, for having come at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit does not leave the world but is hidden in the world, as it were.<sup>8</sup>

The transfiguration of the world at the Second Coming fulfills the "groaning and travailing" of creation at the present time (Rom. 8:22); transfigured by glory, the cosmos will be manifest in its beauty, a beauty embracing both persons and things:

The radiant countenance of Christ will enlighten everyone and everything. Things will no more appear to be separated from persons, but as a possession common to all, as a means through which the love of Christ, of the angels and of humans, will come to light in an all-embracing pan-personalism of perfect community.<sup>9</sup>

Daringly, Berdyaev makes his point thus: "Paradise lies beyond good and evil and therefore is not exclusively the kingdom of 'the good' in our sense of the term. We come nearer to it when we think of it as beauty. The transfiguration and regeneration of the world is beauty and not goodness. Paradise is theosis, deification of the creature";<sup>10</sup> and "My salvation is not only bound up with that of other men but also of animals, plants, minerals, every blade of grass—all must be transfigured and brought into the Kingdom of God."<sup>11</sup>

In the last judgment and transfiguration of the world, the one "in whom all creation rejoices," the Blessed Virgin, has a special role to play. Because of her dormition and assumption, the Mother of God has anticipated the resurrection of the dead, and yet, as the troparion for the Feast of her Dormition proclaims, "in falling asleep you did not abandon the world; . . . You passed over to life, for you are the Mother of Life." So in the Second Coming and judgment, the Mother of God appears with her Son (as icons of the last judgment show), not as one to be judged, but pleading for sinners; indeed, Bulgakov speculates, she *anticipates* her Son's Second Coming in her manifestations to the saints, manifestations that have

often been explicitly eschatological in character (such manifestations have not been confined to the Orthodox world: witness Lourdes and Fatima).<sup>12</sup>

The nature of the final judgment and the question of the fate of those finally condemned we will leave to the final section, on problems.

## INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY

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What we have called “individual eschatology” is concerned with the fate of the individual person after death and, in particular, between the death of the individual and the last judgment. The Orthodox conception of this is based on the liturgical rites that accompany and follow the death of a Christian, informed by a theological understanding of what is involved in the judgment of the individual Christian and a sense of the communion of the living and the departed in the risen Christ, finally supplemented by popular traditions that find expression especially in the lives and experiences of the saints. The Orthodox have a service—in essence, an abridged form of the funeral service, called by the Greeks the “trisagion for the departed” and by the Russians the “panikhida”—that is celebrated on appropriate occasions between death and the funeral, such as when relatives arrive for the funeral, and then on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after the death of the departed. This threefold postmortem commemoration has its roots in the ancient commemoration of the departed with lamentation and communal meals on the third, ninth, and thirtieth days after death, characteristic of the Mediterranean world (in the pre-Vatican II Latin missal, requiem masses were prescribed for the third, seventh, and thirtieth days) and initially opposed by the early church fathers as pagan survivals, but eventually Christianized.<sup>13</sup> The panikhida is also celebrated annually on the anniversary of the death. It consists of prayers for the departed, sometimes the blessing of *kollyva* (a kind of cake of boiled wheat), and a lament for the departed—in the light of the resurrection, however, “making our funeral lament a song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,” as one of the verses (the *ikos*) puts it. The prayers for the departed repeat the petition that the departed souls may find “rest with the spirits of the righteous departed” and be kept “in the blessed life that is with you, O lover of human kind.” These services enable the bereaved to give expression to their love and concern for the departed and commend them into the hands of God the Creator, confident in their faith in the resurrection of Christ.

The period of forty days after death, punctuated by the third and the ninth days, is widely understood as setting out—in narrative form, as it were—what is involved in death and the passage to a period of waiting for the last judgment. The first three days are those in which the soul becomes accustomed to its separation from the body, a separation more or less difficult depending on how attached the

soul had become to the body and to earthly concerns. The next six days constitute the period in which the soul is judged with respect to the various virtues and vices that it has acquired in its earthly life. This period is represented as the passage through the “toll houses,” or *teloniai*, staffed, as it were, by an angel and a demon, who between them determine the fate of the soul. In its most elaborate form—in blessed Theodora’s *Life* of her spiritual father, Basil the Younger (tenth century)—there are twenty such toll houses, at which the soul is examined over vain words, lies, calumnies, greed, laziness, theft, avarice, usury, injustice, envy, pride, anger, rancor, murder, magic, sexual impurity, adultery, sodomy, heresy, and lack of compassion and cruelty of heart.<sup>14</sup> During this passage, the soul is assisted against the efforts of the demons not just by the angels of the toll houses, but also by its guardian angel, the prayers of the saints, and the prayers of those living on earth. The passage of the toll houses represents, in a vivid way, what is required for someone to pass from the sin and temptations of this world (“for there is no one who lives and does not sin, for thou [Christ] alone art without sin,” as one of the prayers puts it) to the holy presence of God. From the ninth day to the fortieth day, the soul is introduced to the other world and visits both the heavenly dwelling places and the abysses of hell, but even popular beliefs are extremely reticent over what all this involves. On the fortieth day, the soul undergoes its particular judgment and then is assigned to an intermediate state, a state of waiting in Paradise or Hades, provisional in comparison with heaven and hell, to await the decisions of the last judgment. As to the nature of this intermediate state, Orthodox theology and even popular belief are quite reticent, though the idea that in this intermediate state the soul is in a state of unconscious sleep finds little support, and any idea that the soul will experience further incarnations in its passage towards the final judgment (the idea of reincarnation or, more properly, metempsychosis, popular as this idea was in the Greco-Roman culture that first received Christianity) is firmly excluded. The question of the particular judgment and its distinction from the final judgment is an issue on which the fathers of the church do not speak with a single voice,<sup>15</sup> but we have already seen, above, reasons for maintaining a distinction between these two judgments.

While this comparatively detailed account of the fate of the soul after death is often taken fairly literally by Orthodox believers, and not only at a popular level,<sup>16</sup> it has never been formally defined and rests for its authority less on the fathers of the church than on popular belief, supported by liturgical practice. The essence of what is entailed by the services for the departed can, however, make good claim to formal Orthodox dogma—that the departed are supported by the prayers of Christians, that the communion of living and departed has not been severed by death, and that there is hope for “a place of light, a place of refreshment, a place of repose, whence pain, sorrow and sighing have fled away” for the departed. The narrative detail of the passage of the soul, for instance, the toll houses, are not, however, mentioned in these services, though the idea that death involves judgment and the inescapable realization of what we have made of our lives is. The sequence of services—from the services for the dying Christian, to the commemoration on the fortieth day, and

indeed annually—also serves a pastoral purpose, in assisting the bereaved to cope with their sense of loss and helplessness. The temporal dimension of the services may have more to do with the temporal process of grieving and remembrance than with tracking the departed soul's progress in a state after death, about which little has been revealed to us save God's sure love and Christ's triumph over death in his resurrection. What is certainly to be affirmed, however, is that the comfort provided by these services and prayer for the departed rests on these truths and is no mere placebo.

## PROBLEMS IN ESCHATOLOGY

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Problems of eschatology have long exercised Eastern Christianity. Whereas in the West, eventually, solutions to these problems were generally accepted, in the East these questions remained, and remain, open or at least continue to be discussed. Much of this discussion is bound up with the legacy of the great third-century Alexandrian theologian Origen, to whom errors concerning both the first things (creation and fall) and the last things were attributed and condemned. In this section, four issues will be addressed: the notion of eternal damnation and, bound up with that, the nature of judgment; the question of purgatory; the nature of the resurrection body; and finally, the question of universal salvation, or the final restoration of all (*apokatastasis pantōn*).

### The Notion of Eternal Damnation and the Nature of Judgment

The problem of eternal damnation is essentially how to reconcile such a notion with belief in God, who “is love” (1 John 4:16): what sense does it make to say that God is love and yet has created beings that are to be condemned to eternal damnation? The notion of eternal damnation seems clearly affirmed in the scriptures, indeed in dominical sayings in the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 22:30, 41, 46). For the most part, there has been great reluctance in the East, as in the West, to blunt the force of the words attributed to the Lord about eternal damnation. The problem has been: how to understand them? The most generally accepted way of approaching this issue focuses on the nature of judgment. It picks up the ambivalence of the Fourth Gospel about the judgment of Christ, the Son of man, of whom it is said both that he came into the world for judgment (John 9:39) and that he did not come into the world to judge the world (John 3:17) and, in the same breath: “I judge no one, and yet if I judge, my judgment is true” (John 8:15f.). “True” judgment is presumably judgment that is not arbitrary, but a recognition of the reality of the case. It is in this way

that an influential tradition in Eastern theology has interpreted judgment. The ultimate state of human beings, after the final judgment, is to behold the glory of God's love; for those whose inmost desire is longing for God, this will be ultimate fulfilment, ultimate bliss, but for those whose inmost desire is opposition to God—those who cry, with Milton's Satan, "Evil, be thou my good"—their inmost longing will be eternally frustrated; they will experience eternal torment. It is along these lines that St. John Damascene, following St. Maximus the Confessor, interprets judgment:

For what is punishment, save the privation of what one longs for? According, therefore, to the analogy of desire, those who long for God rejoice, and those who long for sin are punished. And those who obtain what they long for rejoice in accordance with the measure of their longing, and those who fail suffer in accordance with the measure of their longing.<sup>17</sup>

According to John Damascene, in this following a suggestion of the fourth-century bishop Nemesius of Emesa, after death, the soul is unchangeably set in accordance with the fundamental orientation of its longing (the scrutiny of the toll houses may be seen as a colorful way of assessing this fundamental orientation)—a longing that has been refined and tested through life in the world. At the last judgment, this now-fixed orientation is recognized, and that is what is meant by judgment. If this is accepted, then it would appear that eternal damnation is theoretically possible and is a recognition of the ultimate freedom of human beings, created in the image of God, and is experienced as ultimate regret at realizing that one is eternally loved by God and yet no longer able either to accept or to reciprocate it. Whether such an ultimate act of freedom is actually possible is another matter, to be discussed below, under the heading of "Universalism."

## Purgatory

The notion of purgatory, as a kind of third place in the afterlife alongside heaven and hell, has never had any place in Orthodox theology; the very word used by Greek theologians to designate this essentially Latin concept—*perkatorion* or *pourgatorion*, simple transliterations of the Latin word, rather than a genuine translation such as *katharterion*—bears eloquent witness to how foreign the notion seems. This is scarcely surprising, for it is generally accepted nowadays that, whatever precedents there may be for some process or experience of purification of the soul after death, the settled notion of a place, in some way equivalent to heaven or hell in the afterlife, is an idea that only emerged in Latin theology as part of the theological revolution of the twelfth century.<sup>18</sup> The Orthodox East, therefore, encountered it as a strange innovation of Latin theology, to be imposed on them along with acceptance of papal supremacy as part of the cost of reunion in return for Western military support against the Turks. Not surprisingly in such a context, it was rejected. Apart from the absence of such a notion in any accepted fathers (book 4 of St.

Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, well known in Greek since Pope Zacharias's translation in the eighth century, probably carried most weight), the apparent suggestion that there was a third choice in the afterlife—other than heaven or hell—seemed to blunt the stark choice offered in the Gospels. If, however, the question about purgatory is broken down into its constituent parts, then the position becomes less clear. These constituent parts are, first, the question of a particular judgment; secondly, the question of the existence of a place, intermediate between heaven and hell, in the afterlife between death and judgment; and thirdly, whether in this intermediate state souls undergo expiatory suffering and, in particular, whether this suffering takes place through the agency of fire. First, as we have seen, the notion of a particular judgment after death is far from unacceptable in Orthodox theology. Secondly, the idea of an intermediate *state*, neither heaven nor hell, seems generally to be assumed, especially in popular Orthodox belief about the afterlife, though to think of this state as a *place*, comparable with heaven and hell, is unusual. On the third question, the Orthodox position is more clearly negative. The notion that the soul undergoes purification before the last judgment seems implicit in the scrutiny of the toll houses, which presumably has a purpose, and in the value set on prayers for the departed, from which they must in some way benefit. That this purification involves suffering is again readily accepted, especially in view of the general rejection that the soul, as it awaits the Second Coming, is not in a state of unconscious sleep. That this suffering is expiatory is less clearly acceptable. What the Latins mean by expiatory suffering in purgatory is that, by such suffering, the soul renders satisfaction of sins forgiven (*satisfaction* meaning reparation for the effects of sins committed). Certainly, in the past, some Orthodox theologians thought in terms of satisfaction (though historically the notion is one much more characteristic of Western theology) and agreed that the suffering of the departed soul could render such satisfaction; others disagreed and did not see the “fruits of repentance” as satisfaction, which might need to be made up after death. Again, historically, most Orthodox objections to purgatory were to the notion of purgatorial fire, often understood literally (as was the case with the Latins, too). In general, one could say that such scholastic thinking, though common in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Orthodox theologians, is uncommon nowadays.<sup>19</sup> The reticence that we found about how literally any detailed narrative of the fate of the soul after death is to be taken also covers the case of purgatory; the way in which a doctrine of purgatory is in danger of reifying a mysterious process in which the souls of the departed, resting in the hands of God and supported by the prayers of the church, are prepared for eternal bliss is a danger to be avoided.

### The Nature of the Resurrection Body

This—together with the question of the final restoration of all—was one of the issues for which Origen was historically condemned; in the sixth century, there was attributed to him the teaching that the bodies of those raised at the resurrection of

the dead would be spherical, a doctrine he almost certainly did not hold. The central truth affirmed by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is that human beings are not simply spiritual but are constituted by both soul and body: a body on its own is a corpse; a soul on its own is one of the departed; human beings only exist as soul-and-body. Recurrent temptations—strong (though not universal) in the late classical culture in which Christianity first developed—to think of human life in essentially spiritual terms are to be resisted. At death, the body becomes a corpse; the gift of life in the kingdom of heaven means, in some sense, the restoration of the body. In what sense? There is no doubt that the risen body will be different from human bodies as we know them. St. Paul contrasts “our humble body” with the “body of [Christ’s] glory” to which our body is to be conformed (Phil. 3:21); he also contrasts the body “sown in corruption, . . . dishonor, . . . weakness, . . . with [earthly] life,” with the resurrection body, “raised in incorruption, . . . glory, . . . power, . . . spiritual” (1 Cor. 15:42–44). The body of the risen Christ was both recognizable and unrecognizable, occupying space, yet passing through locked doors. Origen insisted, rightly, that the risen body would be different from bodies as we know them and, following the apostle Paul, called them “spiritual.” He was condemned because it was thought that such a “spiritual body” would not be material, which was probably not what Origen intended. In reaction against Origenism (and the spiritualism of a bastard Platonism), the fathers insisted that the resurrection body would be, in important respects, continuous with this body; it would be the same body, raised up, not something quite different. The fathers were well aware that the body is not an unchangeable entity—ingestion of food and excretion make this plain—but they were clearly not aware, as modern medical science reveals, of the extent to which the body changes its constituents over time. The question of the identity between the earthly and the risen bodies is clearly mysterious. All one can probably do is underline the extent to which the body cannot be elided from human identity. It is not just that we have souls *and* bodies, but rather that what we are, even our spiritual capacities, are bound up with our bodies. As Berdyaev once remarked, “The vision of another person’s countenance, the expression of his eyes, can often be a spiritual revelation. The eyes, the gestures, the words—all these are infinitely more eloquent of a man’s soul than of his body.”<sup>20</sup> It is this kind of continuity that must exist between the earthly body and the risen body if we are to say that, at the day of resurrection, we have been raised with Christ.<sup>21</sup>

## Universalism

Origen hoped for the “restoration of all,” *apokatastasis pantōn*, and this was certainly one of the reasons for his condemnation(s). His conviction did not simply rest on a philosophical belief that “the end is like the beginning,” as he affirmed several times in his *On First Principles*. In one of his homilies on Leviticus, he asserted:

We shall now see, how it is to be understood that our Savior will drink wine no more until he drinks it anew with the saints in the Kingdom of God. My Savior even now weeps over my sins. My Savior cannot rejoice, so long as I continue in iniquity. Why can he not? Because he himself is the advocate for my sins with the Father, as John his disciple says, “for if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, and he is the propitiation for our sins.” How, therefore, can he, who is the advocate for my sins, drink the wine of gladness, while I sadden him through my sinning? How could he be in gladness—he who draws near to the altar to offer sacrifice for me, a sinner; he, to whom sorrow returns without ceasing on account of my sins? I shall drink it with you, he says, in the Kingdom of my Father. So long as we do not act so as to ascend to the Kingdom, he cannot drink the wine alone, which he has promised to drink with us. He is there in sorrow, so long as I persist in error.<sup>22</sup>

This is the deeper reason for Origen’s conviction of final restoration for all: it is inconceivable that Christ is to remain in sorrow for all eternity, on account of the failure of any rational creature to respond to his love and to benefit from his sacrifice. Whereas in Western theology, such a conviction rapidly dies out (save for some women saints—“tout un cortège des saintes femmes”<sup>23</sup>—convinced that God’s love could know no limit, but cf. Karl Barth), in Orthodox theology a hope of universal salvation, based on a conviction of the boundlessness of God’s love, has never gone away. St. Gregory of Nyssa interprets the apostle Paul’s teaching that God will be “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28) to mean the “complete annihilation of evil” (*On the Soul and the Resurrection* 7). St. Maximus the Confessor likewise holds out the hope of the salvation of all. The grounds for this are principally the long-suffering love of God for all creation and also the conviction that evil is without substance, but is a corruption or distortion of what is good. These two motives find striking expression in St. Maximus’s contemporary St. Isaac the Syrian, who asserts:

[T]here exists with [the Creator] a single love and compassion which is spread out over all creation, [a love] which is without alteration, timeless and everlasting. . . . No part belonging to any single one of [all] rational beings will be lost, as far as God is concerned, in the preparation of that supernal Kingdom. (part II, ch. 40.1, 7)

He adds, quoting Diodore of Tarsus, “not even the immense wickedness [of the demons] can overcome the measure of God’s goodness” (part II, ch. 39.13). The pain of hell is the result of love: “so it is in hell: the contrition that comes from love is the harsh torment” (*Hom.* 28). Evil and hell cannot be eternal: “Sin, Gehenna and death do not exist at all with God, for they are effects, not substances. Sin is the fruit of free will. There was a time when sin did not exist, and there will be a time when it will not exist” (*Hom.* 27). This conviction that there is nothing outside God’s loving care finds expression in the prayers of the Orthodox church. In the service of kneeling at vespers on the evening of Pentecost, we pray “for those who are held fast in Hell, granting us great hopes that there will be sent down from you to the departed repose and comfort from the pains which hold them.” This hope, amounting to a conviction, that there is nothing beyond the infinite love of God,

that there is no limit to our hope in the power of his love, at least regards as a legitimate hope the universal salvation of all rational creatures, maybe even of the devil himself and his demons. Such a belief has found its defenders among modern Orthodox theologians, such as Olivier Clément,<sup>24</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware,<sup>25</sup> and Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev.<sup>26</sup> It was also the conviction of one of the greatest Orthodox saints of recent times, St. Silouan of Athos, manifest in a conversation with another Athonite hermit, who declared “with evident satisfaction”:

“God will punish all atheists. They will burn in everlasting fire.”  
Obviously upset, the Staretz [Silouan] said,  
“Tell me, supposing you went to paradise, and there looked down and saw  
somebody burning in hell-fire—would you feel happy?”  
“It can’t be helped. It would be their own fault,” said the hermit.  
The Staretz answered with a sorrowful countenance:  
“Love could not bear that,” he said. “We must pray for all.”<sup>27</sup>

## NOTES

1. Bulgakov 2002: 382.
2. See Zizioulas 1994.
3. Schmemmann 1966: 124.
4. Khomiakov 1968: 38.
5. Stăniloae 1995: 292.
6. Stăniloae 1995: 296.
7. Berdyaev 1945: 253.
8. Bulgakov 2002: 400.
9. Stăniloae 1995: 323.
10. Berdyaev 1945: 287.
11. Berdyaev 1945: 294.
12. Bulgakov 2002: 409–15.
13. Cf. Alexiou 1974: 31–35.
14. Cf. Larchet 2001: 109–19.
15. Cf. Larchet 2001: 146–48.
16. Cf. Vassiliadis 1993, Rose 1995, and, with some equivocation, Larchet 2001.
17. John of Damascus, *Against the Manichees* 75; cf. Maximus, *Questions to Thalassius* 59.
18. Cf. Le Goff 1984.
19. On the debate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Ware 1964: 139–60.
20. Berdyaev 1938: 109.
21. For a detailed discussion, see Stăniloae 1995: 328–48.
22. *Hom. in Levit.* 7.2; quoted in Stăniloae 1995: 296.
23. Balthasar 1973: 120f.
24. Clément 1993: 296–307.
25. Ware 2000.

26. Alfeyev 2002: 212–23.  
 27. Sophrony 1991: 48.

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