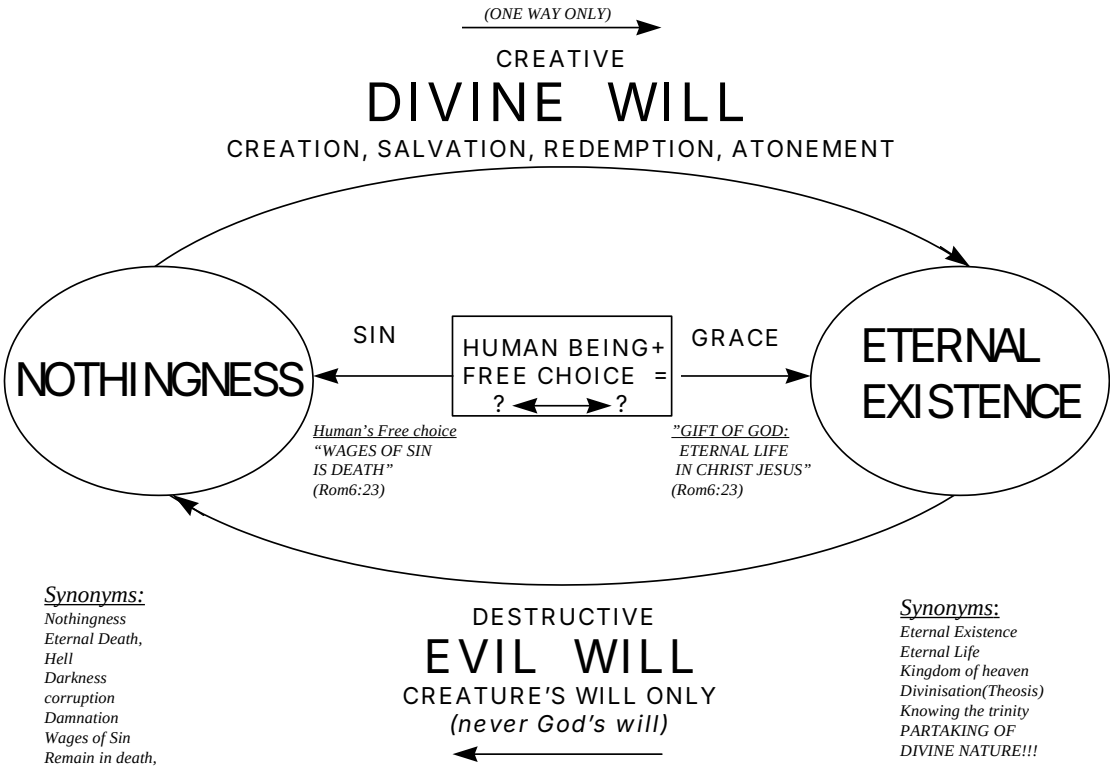
ATONEMENT

BY THE BLOOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES
AS A TYPE OF THE ATONEMENT BY CHRIST'S BLOOD

BETWEEN THE EASTERN AND WESTERN TRADITIONS

(Divine justice; life not death, forgiveness not retribution !)



Synonyms:
Nothingness
Eternal Death,
Hell
Darkness
corruption
Damnation
Wages of Sin
Remain in death,
and corruption.

Synonyms:
Eternal Existence
Eternal Life
Kingdom of heaven
Divinisation(Theosis)
Knowing the trinity
PARTAKING OF DIVINE NATURE!!!

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November 1999

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INTRODUCTION

The image of the slain sacrifice has always been a very powerful ritual, in all primitive religions, which symbolises the relationship between life and death. Perhaps because blood shedding carries a deep mythological language about the fluid of life, its preservation and destruction. It carries the image of offering the most precious and ultimate life providing and mystical element to speak of self-giving or, indeed, the consequence of wrong doing.

But why did man always think that the gods or spirits governing the universe are in need of such an offering to be placated following man's sin, or to provide him with the help, success, blessed crops etc.? When man is left to himself he can only create a god fashioned in man's own image, or as Voltaire said: **"God created man in His own image and man paid Him back the same !"** It seems that one possible answer to this question is to say: as man always felt that the gulf, between his imperfect reality and his deep longing for a perfect existence, is too huge and impassable, he had to try his best to offer the most precious gift to these spirits to win their favour, if at all possible - a bribe, a price or a compensatory payment for the satisfaction of the gods' insulted honour.

Did the Hebrews, however, understand their sacrifices in this sense as the surrounding cultures? Did they really believe that God was so harsh, could be shaken by human evil and ***"in need"*** of these sacrifices to be appeased or to satisfy His justice and honour that their sin has insulted and reduced?! Certainly not, God forbid!

Two main lines of interpretation have developed during the 20 centuries, in the Church. One based on showing the image of God as the **"Lover of mankind,"** and this is predominantly what the Eastern Patristic Tradition has adopted. The Western theological teaching seemed to have turned to the Roman socio-political juridical spirit and concentrated more on showing the image of the **"Fearful Judge."**

The East mainly spoke of **"love and grace,"** where the West spoke of **"law and punishment,"** being the main soil of growth and development of God's relationship with mankind.

Incidentally ***the Bible can lend itself to both systems of interpretation***, and that is why many think that if *any interpretation can make sense and seems logic, therefore it must be the truth itself.* These, many, need to be reminded that Satan in the "Temptation of Christ on the Mount" used the Bible **alone** in the best known biblical twisted, but convincing, logic !

This study will look first at what the Old Testament (OT) said about Atonement as a ritual, followed by the New Testament (NT) explanation of the OT ritual. We will then look into examples of how the East and the West have interpreted the biblical message with *two different spirits*. Some readers may not see this difference clearly, and, therefore, do not believe that the aforementioned statements are a true and honest description of the historical reality, of how the East and West have, at least until recently, been way apart in their logic of interpreting Atonement. For those readers, we will study the witness of contemporary theologians, from different churches to confirm beyond reasonable doubt what this study aims to declare and wishes to heal.

This is not a study to divide but to reunite. We must first see the "separating wall" if we are to demolish it well, once and for all. We all must study the Tradition well, to protect our children from the unkind god created by medieval interpreters, if we are to teach God's true love. Orthodoxy is honesty to the Biblical Tradition, as interpreted by the Orthodox Fathers.

1-THE OLD TESTAMENT (OT) RITUAL OF ATONEMENT

The Old Testament (OT) books speak of the ritual of atonement by offering sacrifices as a **"medication,"** or an **"antiseptic,"** to purify the sinner and his sacred objects of worship from the uncleanness that sin brings about, hence wiping away the sin and the spiritual death that it brings about, manifested in the sense of guilt and all what it entails. That sense of guilt, or "uncleanness of the sinner's conscience" (Heb 9:14), was understood as a separation or an ***"insulation"*** placed between man and God - a dirt that must be washed to allow the spiritual eye to perceive God as the Lover of mankind once again. **The sacrifice was therefore understood as, essentially, a gift *"from God to man"* rather than the opposite.**
It is also quite important to say that the **"therapeutic effect"** of the sacrifice, that medicine, was not essentially in its death but rather in the donation of new life to the sinner, as a type (symbol) of Christ's work - the True Sacrifice. The atoning scapegoat, for example, was not killed but was sent alive, carrying the sins of Israel into the wilderness (Lev 16:21-22). This atonement (therapeutic effect) was achieved by "***sprinkling the blood"*** of the sacrifice (the element of life) on the sinner (defiled by deadly deeds) or the objects through which he worships God and preserves the love relationship with Him. It is a therapeutic effect akin to **"life transfusion," "blood transfusion,"** or even **"genetic engineering,"** if we may use such modern metaphors.

It was all a visual aid, a type of the True Sacrifice that was yet to come. To describe what the union between the immortal Divine nature and the mortal human nature, in Christ, has achieved for us in Him, one might say that God the Father has **"transplanted"** His Son into our humanity, by the incarnation. This same successful

achievement is **"infused"** and **"indelibly imprinted"** in each and every believer through the Sacraments by the life giving Holy Spirit, who takes of what belongs to Christ and gives to the whole of the creation (Jn 16:15). He will continue this process until we become full partakers of the Divine nature (2Pt 1:4), or as St John said, "when Christ appears ***we shall be like Him***, because we shall see Him as He really is" (1Jn 3:3), and as St Paul also said we will be "transformed into the ***same image***" and glory of Christ (2Cor 3:18) !!! This is what the Eastern Fathers have named "Deification," (in Greek: theosis), which was the core principle on which St Athanasius defended Orthodoxy against the Arian heresy.

The main deviation in the West started since the time of Augustine in the 5th century, when the meaning of to "sin against God" (Ps 50:4) was that sin started to be viewed primarily as an "**insult"** to Divine justice and honour. God, therefore, becomes angry for His own honour and insulted justice and seeks to punish for retribution. [The Orthodox understanding of "sinning against God" is sinning against His creation, in damaging oneself by destroying the love relationship between us and God, and the relationship with others, hence sinning against the harmony and beauty intended in our relationships, **but not by making God "*the victim who is damaged*" by our sin. It is inappropriate to think that the "pathology of sin" inflicts its effect on God as its victim rather than, or in addition to, the Creation, see James 1:13 & Job 35:6-8**]

According to medieval Western teaching, since God wants to show mercy to man, He had to offer His incarnated Son as a "**Penal Substitute**," i.e. one to be punished instead of mankind to pay a "**satisfaction"** or a "compensatory transaction" to God the Father to keep His anger at bay and He may then forgive mankind in a just manner (having received His dues by the suffering of the Penal Substitute) and keeping His mercy at work.

These teachings having been taught for several centuries in the West and for a few centuries in the East, by different Western missionary books, have become the truth in the minds of many simple people. Those people keep defending these ***non-biblical non-patristic and certainly unorthodox teachings,*** changing the Orthodox Traditional image of God, the Lover of mankind, to the harsh divinity, as taught by the medieval West and now rejected by most theologians in The Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and some Protestant churches, as witnessed in this study.

Leighton Pullan (Oxford, 1907) in "The Atonement," confirms that Atonement in the OT has nothing to do with the non-biblical teaching of "Penal Substitution," propagated by medieval preachers. He states: "Levitical sacrifices are **never described as appeasing God**, but as rendering the worshippers fit to receive God's favour (p73)….Jewish sacrificial system **does not imply the theory of a mere penal substitution,** according to which the animal simply suffered death in the stead of the sinner. The opinion that this is the fundamental idea of the Jewish sacrificial system is not only false, but has **exercised a mischievous influence on popular views of the Atonement** (p73)….**No sacrifices were accepted in atonement for sins meriting death (Numbers 15:30)[but only for *unintentional sins*, Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27]:** whereas this would naturally have been the case if the system implied the literal [penal] substitution of the victim's death for that of the offerer, [this is perhaps the most crucially important biblical argument against interpreting the sacrificial system

as a type of penal substitution] (p74)….The notion that God was pleased with the smell of the sacrifice - [was] an idea which certainly did not survive in later Judaism (p76)….To make atonement or propitiation by doing away with sin, by cleansing it and withdrawing it away from God's sight….He neutralises and obliterates the sin, He forgives it, and this is an atonement (p67)….***It is first of all worth noticing that we find no direct statement in the Old Testament to the effect that God is propitiated by a sacrifice, or that the atonement is primarily an effect upon His 'face' or His anger"*** (p67).

Preachers who favour the theory of "Penal Substitution" interpret the biblical verses to read that sacrifices were offered for ALL sins, relying on the words "So he shall make atonement…for **all** their sins" (Lev 16:16), on the Day of Atonement. No offering, according to Numbers 15:29-31, could substitute for the penalty of death, for a sin with intent, and, therefore, the Bible cannot support the theory of Penal Substitution: "You shall have **one law** for him who sins unintentionally…. **But the person who does <u>anything</u> presumptuously (with intent),** … he shall be cut off from among his people (killed by stoning, Lev 24: 14-21). Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, **that person shall be <u>completely</u> cut off;** his guilt shall be on him."

The word "all" in Lev 16:16, must mean: "**all <u>un</u>intentional sins**" that could be atoned for, ***otherwise the Law would lose consistency.*** The offering raised by David, when he sinned and a plague affected all the people of Israel, has also been used to defend penal substitution. Preachers defending Penal Substitution teach that this offering appeased God so He forgave the Israelites. This was not a sin offering (for unintentional sins) but "burnt offerings and peace offerings" (2 Sam 24:25), which as described in Leviticus were "a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord," (Lev 1:13) and **not related to sin, intentional or unintentional**, but a "***gift of friendship"***, so to speak.

It is also very important to recognise <u>that the Penal Law in the OT was a disciplinary code for this world relationships and not the reflection of the Eternal Covenant</u> of the love between God and mankind (Is 24:5), which was sealed by the blood of our Lord. That is why Christ our Lord said that He came "to fulfil (perfect) the Law," (Mtt 5:17) which would not have been the case, if it were already perfect. If we review **Christ's justice** as practiced in the cases of: the adulteress caught in the act, the prodigal son, the parable of the indebted servant and the workers of the eleventh hour, we see that His justice has no relation to the OT 'one for one' system: an eye for an eye and a life for a life … etc. The OT was also called, by St Paul, "the ministry of death… the ministry of condemnation," in contradistinction to "the ministry of righteousness" of the NT (2 Cor 3:7-9). *<u>In other words, the temporal penal code of the OT is not to be confused with the Divine eternal justice in God's relationship with mankind. Christ, not the OT penal Law, is the only absolute Divine justice we know.</u>*

The OT books describe the blood and its work in a way that when studied well does not point to Penal Substitution or that the blood was offered from man to God, but the blood was an offering ***<u>from God to man</u>***, as clearly demonstrated when Christ, the True Sacrifice, was offered by the Father to us for our Salvation. His Blood, i.e. His

Life, and His Body, i.e. His Person and Being, are ***offered unto us*** in the Eucharist as our Bread of life and Water of life as He reiterated on several occasions.

"How", and most surprisingly **"why,"** would the Father, who is the Creator of everything, be ***"in need of "*** a sacrifice or anything in this creation to be "satisfied and appeased," as Anselm has taught in the "Theory of Satisfaction of Divine justice by Christ's penal death on the cross"?!!!

Here is the witness of the God inspired Scriptures:
"The blood is the life" (Deut 12:23), "for it (the blood) is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life." (Lev 17:14), "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and **I (GOD) HAVE GIVEN IT TO YOU** upon the altar to make atonement for your souls" (Lev 17:11). The sacrificial blood, the life, is therefore essentially a gift from God to man, as God cannot be in need of anything of what He has created. Atonement is in "**granting life**" to man, and not in "**taking life**" (killing) to appease God! ***God cannot rejoice in death but in life.***

And what is the effect (or in modern medical terms, pharmacokinetics, the way a medicine works) by which the blood of the sacrifice atones? The biblical answer in one word is **PURIFICATION** (cleansing, purging, washing) as in the following:

"So the priest shall make **atonement** for him, and he **shall be *clean***" (Lev. 14: 20);
"For on that (Atonement) day the priest shall make **atonement** for you, **to *cleanse*** you, that you may be ***clean* from all your sins** before the Lord" (Lev 16: 30);
"Then he shall make **atonement for** the **Holy Sanctuary,** and he shall make **atonement for the tabernacle** …and **the altar**" (Lev 16: 33) "You shall ***cleanse* (purify) the altar** when you make **atonement for it**" (Exodus 29: 36).

Atonement for the inanimate objects (the sanctuary, altar and tabernacle) is probably the most powerful proof that atonement can NOT be understood as an act of penal substitution , i.e. a punishment of death to replace another punishment, for these non-living objects (the sanctuary, altar and tabernacle) can not sin or receive punishment. They, however, may be defiled and purified, as all these OT sacred objects of worship were the type of our "*being*," which St Paul described as the "*temple"* of God where the Holy Spirit dwells and which, as Christ has said, can be defiled by evil thoughts of sin and purified by the blood of our Lord's atoning love when we repent.

The discourse of St Paul in Hebrews 9 & 10 summarises this understanding very well for the New Israel - the Church - using the OT ritual of atonement as a perfect type for the **purification and sanctification of life** granted to us by the "blood," i.e. the "life," of our Lord which He shed in us and for us. The Eastern Patristic Tradition has followed the same biblical understanding of this typology. St Paul says:

"And according to the Law almost all things are **purged with blood**, and without shedding of blood there is no **remission (cleansing, forgiveness, or healing as the word is used in medicine)**. Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be **purified with these**, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices …. For Christ…now to appear in the presence of God for us…**to put away sin by the sacrifice** of Himself …. For if the blood of bulls and goats and

the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, **SANCTIFIES** for the **PURIFYING** of the flesh, how much more shall the **BLOOD OF CHRIST…PURGE (purify) your conscience from dead works** (sins) to serve the living God?" (Heb 9:13-26)
"For it is impossible for **the blood** of bulls and goats **to take away sins** (purify, atone, cleanse, lift off). Therefore, … He came into the world … by that we have been **sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"(Heb10:4-10).

If the offering of the sacrifice was atoning by "Penal Substitution" or by appeasing the anger of God, or propitiating His insulted honour or justice, St Paul, the Pharisee, would not have missed the chance to spell out this principal quite clearly while summarising the WHOLE OF THE HEBREW SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM as a type for the sacrifice of our Lord.

- **HOW TO READ ISAIAH 53, AND THE VERSES "HAVING BECOME A CURSE FOR US" (GAL 3:13) AND "MADE HIM SIN FOR US" (2COR 5:21) ?**

This chapter describes what Isaiah saw being inflicted on the suffering servant, who has been understood to be our Lord in His Passion. Those who adopt the juridical typological exegesis (interpretation) see all the suffering of Christ, in this chapter, as ***inflicted by God the Father on the Son***, as Luther explained his interpretation of Galatians 3:13 about Christ, "having become a curse for us," (see later).

Isaiah was in the Spirit seeing what ***WE*** **have done** to the suffering Christ, treating Him unjustly, while God the Father, reluctantly, accepted, knowing that He will eventually win the battle against sin, Satan and death, on our behalf.

The words: "despised… rejected…***WE*** did not esteem Him… yet ***WE*** **esteemed Him** stricken smitten by God and afflicted. **But** (contrary to what we esteemed) He was bruised for our inequities **(by us)**; the chastisement for our peace (the price of our return from death to life and peace in the bosom of our Father) was upon Him (He had to suffer and win for us), and by His stripes we are healed… He was oppressed (God does not oppress)… afflicted …led as a lamb to the slaughter…cut off the land of the living (killed)…," **all describe the injustice inflicted upon Him by *US, not by God***.

For God would not find pleasure in inflicting injustice, but He may see the good that He can bring about from this human wickedness, to embarrass humans into realising their grave sin, which was reciprocated by the deep love and absolute forgiveness of the suffering Christ, hence putting us to shame and bringing us to true repentance and realisation of God's Great Gift - Christ our purifying atoning Sacrifice.

This is the meaning according to the Eastern Fathers (see later), if we read the rest of the chapter in their spirit of Divine love that redeems human injustice by God's version of Divine righteousness: "**Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him**; He has put Him to grief (the pleasure in seeing us saved not His Son tortured). When You **make His soul an offering for sin**, (then comes the reward:) He shall see His seed (the saved humanity), He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand….For **He shall bear their iniquities**. Therefore I will divide

Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide **the spoil** (having conquered death and won the spoil which is His brethren!) with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death,…and **He bore the sin of many** (to remove, cleanse, wipe and "take away the sins of the world" (Jn1:29), not to be punished by God for these sins, as Luther said) and made intercession for the transgressors."

THE WESTERN SPIRIT sees primarily a "punishment fulfilled" and a "victim" who has been bruised by the just God to ***pay a transaction to Divine justice and insulted honour***, and that is why God was "pleased to bruise Him."
THE EASTERN SPIRIT, contrary to this, pierces all human models of penal suffering and forgoes the "shadows of the things to come" (Heb 10:1), to leap up into the realty of Heaven, which is Christ (Col 2:17), and ***enjoy the purification of the human nature (which He acquired) by the purifying blood,*** i.e. life, that He has poured, with His soul, to feed us with the water of life and the bread of life. For all what Christ has achieved for **His human nature** is actually an achievement **"for us, in us,"** for He needed no purification, but our human nature needed purification from death. St Paul recognises that "we are members of His body, ***of His flesh and of His bones***" (Eph 5:30), hence it is ***us*** who were purified, cleansed, washed, atoned for, by His blood, i.e. having offered ***us*** His ***LIFE*** instead of our ***DEATH*** and "infused and transplanted" the life of His Divinity into ***us*** – His Humanity.

Again the word, **sin**, in "He made Him who knew no sin to be **sin** for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him", has been interpreted by St Cyril of Alexandria in his 41st letter to Acacius the bishop of Scythopolis (The Fathers of The Church, Vol. 76 p173-174) as "He was made a ***sin offering,"*** taking the words of Hosea 4:8, "they eat up the **sin** of my people," meaning the priests eat the sin offering. In the same letter St Cyril confirmed his Orthodox teaching that "He (Christ) was not defiled by sin and ***was not subjected to the punishment of sin*** with us" (p175).

Also St Clement of Alexandria has understood the word **"curse"** in Gal 3:13, in the sense that Christ was seen **"in the eyes of His people,"** as a curse when He was hung on a tree, and not in the eyes of an avenging God (cf. Grensted, A Short History of The Doctrine of The Atonement, p28).

2- THE WORK OF THE BLOOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Again if we scan the New Testament for the verses that describe the **"work of the blood"**, we will discover the same message: there is no penal substitution, but ***"REMEDIAL"*** work by God's Sacrifice, which He offers to us, in communion, as "The Medicine of Immortality" or "Antidote", as described by St. Ignatius of Antioch:

"When He had by Himself ***purged*** (cleansed, atoned, purified) our sins, sat on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3); "Whom God set forth to be a **propitiation (*atonement*) by His blood"** (Rom 3:25); "And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son ***cleanses us*** from all sin" (1Jn 1:7); "He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation (***atonement*****) for our sins**" (1Jn 4:10); "Who loved us and ***washed*** us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev 1:5); "These … ***washed*** their robes and made

them white in the blood of the Lamb," "And they ***overcame him by the blood*** of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14,&12:11); "For You were slain, and have ***redeemed us*** (bought, brought back from destruction or loss) to God by Your blood" (Rev 5:9);
"To ***reconcile*** all things to Himself …having made peace ***through the blood*** of His cross" (Col 1:20);
"You who once were far off have been *made near by the blood* of Christ"(Eph 2:13);
"Having now been ***justified by His blood***, we shall be **saved**" (Rom 5:9).

The word **"Justified"** needs to be read in the light of the Hebrew word for justice, "**Zedek**," which as in the Arabic (Semitic) language "sedek", means: faithfulness, righteousness, the attribute of the person who keeps his word and fulfils his promise. The Hebrew word was translated, in English, into "justice" and on other occasions **"righteousness,"** as synonyms. The word "justice" has always appealed to juridical thinking, as it has this legalistic connotation and flavour. The word "righteousness," on the other hand, certainly has the Eastern fragrance and connotation of "doing what is right and perfect" much clearer, and fits the spirit we know of God in our Lord's relationship with us: He will not rest until He brings the whole of the Creation to perfection, ***to do it perfect justice*** when it settles in full glory and beauty in the bosom of our Father and His Father, for ever and ever, amen.

3- EXAMPLES OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ATONEMENT AND REDEMPTION, BY THE EASTERN FATHERS

The spirit of the Eastern Fathers, inspite of any differences, is essentially ***"remedial."*** They have understood the spirit of God as a Father whose attributes must all work in one and the same direction as His love. They all read the apparent harshness of parts of the OT but managed to adhere to a consistent line of exegesis (interpretation) which based their understanding on **"love and grace,"** contrary to the Western theologians who based their work on a superficial literal interpretation of the anthropomorphic language of the OT, hence producing theories and ideas of interpretation which do not all add up to confirm the image of the Lover of mankind, but the image of a **"law and punishment"** divinity. ***It is the New Testament (NT) teaching of Christ, which superseded and perfected the OT, that should interpret the OT, not the opposite; the "reality" should explain the "shadows," not the opposite.*** The OT was called by St Paul "the ministry of death… the ministry of condemnation" in contradistinction to "the ministry of righteousness" of the NT (2 Cor 3:7-9).

The following are just three examples to echo their spirit:

A) ST GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN

This saying has been quoted in most of the Orthodox theology books discussing atonement and redemption. ***He emphatically denies any penal function in the sacrifice of our Lord:***

"To whom was that blood offered that was shed for us, and why was it shed? I mean the precious and glorious blood of God, the blood of the High Priest and of the Sacrifice…If to the devil, it is outrageous! …But if the price is offered to the Father, I ask first of all, how? ***For it was not the Father who held us captive*****.** Why then should the blood of His only-begotten Son please the Father, who would not even receive Isaac when he was offered as a whole burnt offering….Is it not evident that the Father accepts the sacrifice ***not because He demanded it or because He felt any need for it but on account of economy: <u>because man must be sanctified by the humanity of God,</u>*** and God Himself must deliver us by overcoming the tyrant, through His own power, and drawing us to Himself by the mediation of the Son, who effects this all for the honour of God, to whom He was obedient in everything…. What remains to be said shall be covered in a reverent silence… We needed an incarnate God put to death, that we might live….Nothing can equal the miracle of my salvation: a **few drops of blood recreate the whole world."**
(In sanctum Pascha, or. XLV, 22',P.G., t. 36, 653 AB; 28, 661 C. ; 29, 664 A. c.f. The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, V. Lossky, SVS, pp.152-153)

In the Coptic Orthodox Church, in the liturgy of St. Gregory the Theologian we pray with words which confirm that **death (the separation from God not physical mortality) is our own choice, not that of God.** He also uses **remedial and loving freeing metaphors** to describe atonement and redemption, **without any penal substitutionary language** saying:

"Holy, Holy, You O Lord, and Holy in everything…You have revealed to me the tree of life, and warned me of the sting of death. ..[this is] the only tree You told me not to eat of . But I ate by ***my own free will***, and abandoned Your Law ***of my own accord***. ***I discarded*** Your commandments, (and therefore), ***I have chosen for myself the judgement of death.*** (But) You my Lord have transformed my (self-inflicted) **punishment into salvation**… [He then recites several metaphors describing the work of Christ in our nature] You have **treated me with all the medicines** that lead to life. You have sent the prophets for **me the sick**. You gave me the Law as a helper. You administered my salvation when I disobeyed your Law …. You humbled Yourself taking the form of a servant, and **blessed my nature** by its union with Yours…You **freed those who were imprisoned** in Hades. You **abolished the curse** of the Law (death by sin - not by God's intentional will - James1:15,& Wisdom 1&2).
You destroyed sin (abolished, condemned, negated the effect of sin) **in the flesh** (by the Incarnation)."

Again, reading through the liturgical books of the Coptic Orthodox Church, we find no juridical or penal language in **ALL** the liturgical prayers. One "**Catholic Fraction Prayer"** was, however, mysteriously insinuated in the 1970's, in the Coptic Euchologion (a study of different Euchologions printed in 1960s and before

confirmed the absence of this prayer before the 1970's). As ***there is no Coptic language original version for this prayer*** and it is using 11th century language (e.g. to satisfy Divine justice and pay debts) one can, therefore, conclude that it cannot belong to the first ten centuries, and ***should be reviewed and excluded***.

B) ST ATHANASIUS

In his treatise "On the Incarnation," which he wrote when he was around twenty years of age, St Athanasius shows amazing depth of spiritual experience, which earned him the title "the Classic Doctor of the Incarnation", by Rev. Fr. George Florovsky and in The Faith of the Early Fathers he was called "the Hero of Nicea."

The book in summary states that man has become the "cause of his own corruption in death" by his free will. God by the Incarnation of His son offered us a **Champion who accepted to meet Death instead, or on behalf, of us,** while incarnated in the mortal human nature, which He accepted, so that the victory achieved, would belong to us all, who share His human nature. ***Through the Incarnation He, by facing Death, our Enemy, destroyed Death once and for all.***

According to St Athanasius Christ ***destroyed Death*** *by* ***deifying the human nature***, which He united to His Divine immortal nature. His body and blood carry the essence of eternal life. From then onwards the Holy Spirit grants us this ***same*** deified human nature, in the Sacraments - a perfect eternal gift that would never separate from us, "not for an instant or a twinkle of an eye", as we pray in the liturgy. The dogma of Orthodox Christology is not a philosophical point of discussion. *For what has been achieved in Christ's human nature if not* ***transfused and transplanted*** *into us, EXACTLY, we simply can not hope for salvation !!!*

"Deification is itself the Classic Tradition" as witnessed by the Anglican theologian H Turner in his book "The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption" (pp 94-96). Any teaching which claims that the Holy Spirit only grants us "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22) and does not change our nature to that of Christ, at least in the final glorification on the day of the resurrection, is certainly unorthodox and must be resisted, if we are to be true and honest to Orthodoxy.

St Athanasius teaches ***"Championship Substitution"*** *and not* ***"Penal Substitution."*** *The difference is that in the former a champion dies out of love for the sake of the ones he defends and* ***not being obliged by a third party***. *In "Penal Substitution," however, the Substitute dies to fulfil the will and desire of a third party and for the sake of this third party in the first place.* ***Love, therefore, disappears in Penal Substitution*** *and it becomes a drama of suffering, inflicted by the unmerciful third party. The God preached by St Athanasius is completely different from that preached by those who believe in "Penal Substitution" and "Satisfaction of Divine justice on the cross," as taught by Anselm and Martin Luther.*

St Athanasius wrote:

"The thing that was happening was in truth both monstrous and unfitting. It would of course have been unthinkable that God would **go back upon His word** and that man

having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once had shared the nature of the Word should perish and turn again into non-existence through corruption. It was unworthy of the goodness of God that creatures made by Him should be brought to nothing through the deceit wrought upon man by the devil; and it was **supremely unfitting that the work of God in mankind should disappear**, either through their own negligence or through the deceit of evil spirits." (On The Incarnation 1:6)

*Why cannot God "**go back on His word**" regarding the sinner's death, and abolish death simply by a decree from Him, or even accept repentance ?*

St. Athanasius explains that both solutions could not solve the problem**.** Not because of God's inflexibility and unwillingness to forgive, far from it, but because **repentance alone cannot put the lost life back into man,** and **because God has given man the right of free choice**: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil…. Therefore choose life, that you may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may … cling to Him, for He is your life" (Deut. 30: 15, 19-20).

Death according to the words of our Lord: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me **shall never die**," (Jn 11:25-26), is the **death brought on by sin, the spiritual eternal death, the separation from God. We speak primarily of this death**, as the physical mortality is not more than a "sleep" from which our Lord will "wake" us up as He said in the same context when He raised Lazarus (Jn 11:11).

Those adopting the Western line of interpretation take the verse of Deut 30:15, 19-20 and the statement of St Athanasius that God cannot "go back on His word" as a good proof that ***God is the Cause of Death***, as He, being just must punish, by eternal death ! God is pleading: "I have set before you life with Me or existence away from Me (death), please choose life, for I am Life and outside Me there is only nothingness." How can anyone interpret the meaning to read: "I have (by my own economy, because I am just and must punish) set before you life and death, because I am the Cause and only Creator of both; now make your choice out of this menu !" This is exactly what the theories of Penal Substitution and Satisfaction of Divine justice by death speak loudly, albeit unconsciously.

If the problem was that God's honour, justice or will, were transgressed by man's sin, God, himself, would not have had any problem at all to forgive and heal mankind, even by a mere word ! However, abolishing "corruption", the death of sin, would mean **abolishing man's freedom** (which stems from God's freedom) and that is unfitting and unworthy of God , who respects man's freedom immensely.

Therefore, neither abolishing death by a word, nor repentance alone could solve man's predicament. **Only when the Word dwells in the human nature that death will be destroyed once and for all** (as we pray in the Eucharist and say: And the death, which has entered the world by the envy of the devil, You have destroyed by the life giving Incarnation of Your only begotten Son…).

St. Athanasius, confirms these meanings quite eloquently:

"Had it been a case of **trespass only** [and that is what relates to God's honour and majesty] , and not of subsequent corruption, **repentance would have been well enough."** (1:7)

St. Athanasius continues to discuss the **meaning of redemption**: Christ took a body to use it as a tool to meet death, "as fire meets straw and makes it disappear":

"He surrendered His body to death **in place of all**, and offered it to the Father.
This he did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the **law of death thereby be abolished**…it was thereafter voided of its power for men. This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. **Thus He would make death disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire."** (1:8)

Again preachers who favour the theory of "Penal Substitution" read St Athanasius here as teaching Penal Substitution, although at no time does he mention the words Divine justice or that God **demands** death, in the whole of his treatise. As we have seen the phrase "satisfaction of Divine justice, by penal death" was essentially born in the West in medieval times.

- **WHY, THEN, DID CHRIST OUR LORD HAVE TO DIE ON THE CROSS ?**

St Athanasius answers:
" He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, **might become in dying a <u>sufficient exchange for all</u> [i.e. *to meet death as a Champion or a Warier on behalf of all*, and not as a ransom or debt paid to the Father - see St. Gregory's words: to whom was the blood offered?],** and (His body) itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter **put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection.** It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. … Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, **all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection**… the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses, …the whole city is honoured, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so it is with the king of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled and the **corruption of death**, which formerly held them in its power, **has simply ceased to be**. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Saviour of all, the Son of God, **come among us to put an end to death**." (On the incarnation, 1: 9)

His death on the cross was essential, in order to **prove**, by His death, that He had truly been a "**<u>perfect human being,</u>"** similar to us in everything (including mortality) except sin, and that we too, who have the same nature, as humans, will enjoy the **assurance of the same resurrection like Him**. For we have **died,** been **resurrected**, **raised**, and **sat, with and in Him,** to the right hand of the Father, as St. Paul said (Eph 2: 6). The confirmation that this is **<u>the basic biblical reason for Him dying on the cross is</u>** evident in St Paul words: " Inasmuch then as the children have partaken

of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, ***that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is , the devil,"*** (Heb 2:14). Notice here a very important teaching: that it is the Devil, ***and not God***, who "had the power of death"; the Devil who was "a murderer from the beginning," as Christ said (Jn 8:44).

Some phrases of St. Athanasius' were, however, interpreted in a way that made his words look as if he was describing the work of Redemption and Salvation in juridical terms, where he actually did not.
In "The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers", Vol. 4, 2nd series, the volume dedicated to St. Athanasius' works, there is a very important footnote in pages 39 and 40 explaining that the words that were translated from Greek to English as **"Just claims of God",** should have been translated as: ***"Divine consistency of character", or "What is reasonable with respect to God", "i.e. what is involved in His attributes and His relation to us."***

So in "The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers" the paragraph 1:7 reads:
"But repentance would, firstly, fail to guard the **just claim of God**. For He would still be none the more true, if men did not remain in the grasp of death."

On the other hand the more recent and accurate translation introduced by C.S. Lewis (published by St. Vladimir Seminary, New York 1998) reads:
"But repentance would not guard the **Divine consistency**, for, if death did not hold dominion over men, God would still remain untrue."

Once this translation error has been corrected, scanning the computer CD-The Sage Digital Library, 1996, Sage software, including The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers' works, ***the words "just" or "justice" disappear from the whole of the text of" On the Incarnation." St Athanasius did not use juridical, penal, language.***

St. Athanasius, for quite a long time, has been used by theologians who adopted the Western juridical interpretation, as a good model to defend both the "Theory of Satisfaction of Divine justice" and the "Theory of Penal Substitution." Both theories are now heavily criticised by Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and even Protestant theologians; more so in the last twenty years. ***The difference,*** *however, between the juridical interpretations and that of most of the Early Fathers, is* ***essentially a difference in "interpretation" and not of dogma, for we all believe in one Creed****:*
"…For us and for our Salvation…He was incarnated,…was crucified,…suffered death,…arose from the dead…and ascended to the Heavens…." The difference is in trying to work out "models," to simplify, through them, **"how"** did Christ's "incarnation - death - and resurrection" manage to save us. ***This work, of Salvation, is anyhow beyond any human description, language or comprehension !!!***
We can only reject what is incompatible with Orthodox teaching, but not claim full comprehension.

C) ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOME

In his commentary on Hebrews 9, he describes the sacrificial atonement very clearly as **a type for Christ's "purification,"** and like St Gregory and St Athanasius speak of the remedial (therapeutic) effect of the blood **and not of a juridical function**:

"Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission.' Why the 'almost'? why did he qualify it? Because those [ordinances] were not a **perfect purification**, nor a **perfect remission**, but half-complete and in a very small degree. But in this case He says, 'This is the blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you, for the remission of sins.' (Matthew 26:28) Where then is 'the book'? He purified their minds. They themselves then were the books of the New Testament. But where are 'the vessels of the ministry'? They are themselves. And where is 'the tabernacle'? Again, they are; for 'I will dwell in them,' He says, 'and walk in them.' (2 Corinthians 6:16)

But they were not sprinkled with 'scarlet wool,' nor yet 'with hyssop.' Why was this? Because the **cleansing** was not bodily but spiritual, and **the blood was spiritual.** How? It flowed not from the body of irrational animals, but from the Body prepared by the Spirit. With this blood not Moses but Christ sprinkled us, through the word, which was spoken; 'This is the blood of the New Testament, for the remission of sins.' This **word, instead of hyssop**, having been dipped in the blood, sprinkles all. And there indeed the body was cleansed outwardly, for the purifying was bodily; but here, since the purifying is spiritual, **it entereth into the soul, and cleanseth it**, not being simply sprinkled over, but gushing forth in our souls. The initiated understand what is said. And in their case indeed one sprinkled just the surface; but he who was sprinkled washed it off again; for surely he did not go about continually stained with blood. But in the case of the soul it is not so, but **the blood is mixed with its very substance**, **making it vigorous and pure, and leading it to the very unapproachable beauty.**

Henceforward then he shows that **His death** is the cause not only of confirmation, but also of purification. For inasmuch as death was thought to be an odious thing, and especially that of the cross, he says that **it purified, even a precious purification**, and in regard to greater things.
Therefore the sacrifices preceded, because of this blood. Therefore the lambs; everything was for this cause."
(Homily on Hebrews 9, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series I, Vol. 14)

4- TYPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE ATONEMENT AND REDEMPTION BY MEDIEVAL WESTERN THEOLOGIANS

Western medieval theologians gave sin a different definition and diagnosis, hence the different treatment. To them sin is an "insult to Divine justice, honour and majesty." ***The victim, therefore, is God Himself !*** The reaction of God, accordingly, is to be stirred up to wrath, against the sinner who carries the sin, **and not only against sin**. God, according to this teaching must, either punish and destroy the

sinner, or another substitute, a "Penal Substitute," in order that God can remain Holy and true to Himself .

When St. Paul wrote: "God…sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: **He condemned sin in the flesh**, that the righteous requirement of the Law may be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit"(Rom. 8:3-4), Orthodoxy understands **"condemned sin in the flesh"** as in the words of the prayer of the sixth hour, in the Coptic Orthodox Church, and St. Gregory's eucharistic prayer, mentioned earlier in the sense: "**destroyed sin, by the cross, by Your [incarnation and] death You raised the dead; man whom You created, who died by sin.**"

Interpreters who follow the juridical Western line of thought, however, found the only meaning to be: God sent His Son in the flesh to make Him carry all the sins of the world; ***the Father, then, being just, poured His wrath, curse and punishment on His Son (the sin carrier), in order to "condemn sin in the flesh."***
The Son of God, accordingly, becomes **an agent to deflate the anger of the Father.** Words that are inappropriate to describe the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord is called **"the Son of His love"** (Col. 1:13); He cannot become **"the Son of His wrath, curse or vengeance**", never, not for an instant or a twinkle of an eye !!!

The following are quotations from famous teachers of medieval theology:

A) ANSELM, Archbishop of Canterbury, 11th century:
"Sin is nothing else than not to render God His dues". [non-biblical definition]
"To remit sin thus is simply not to punish it, and, since sin cannot be rightly ordered without satisfaction, apart from punishment, if it is not punished it remains not rightly ordered."

"Nothing is less tolerable in the order of things, than that the creature should take the away the honour due to the Creator, and should not repay what he takes away… **It is necessary then that either the honour taken away be repaid, or punishment follow; otherwise God will be unjust to Himself or be powerless to secure either alternative** - which is impious even to imagine."
(cf. Grensted L.W., A Short History Of The Doctrine of The Atonement, 1920, pp.131-132, Longmans,).

B) THOMAS AQUINAS, 13th century :
"By His love and obedience in suffering Christ displayed to God something more than was demanded **as a recompense for all the offence of mankind**: Firstly because of the greatness of the love in which He suffered; secondly, through the worth of that life which He offered as a satisfaction,…And so Christ's passion was not only a sufficient but also a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of mankind."
"By suffering He fulfilled all the precepts of the old Law… The judicial precepts of the Law, ordained especially for those who suffer injury, Christ fulfilled by His passion, suffering Himself to be nailed to the tree for that apple which man plucked from the tree against God's command."

"In this is shown the severity of God, who wills not to remit sin without punishment."
(cf. Grensted. L.W., A Short History Of The Doctrine of The Atonement, 1920, pp.152-153, Longmans, Green & Co.)

C) GERSON, a Catholic theologian:
"**God would never permit unpunished evil** and therefore laid all our sins and faults upon Jesus Christ. Sin is very greatly to be hated because it very greatly displeases the Divine Justice; for you behold God suffering the penalty due to sin, in order to destroy it." (cf. Grensted L.W., A Short History Of The Doctrine of The Atonement, p.169)

D) MARTIN LUTHER, 16th century:
"Sin having been laid upon Him, the Law cometh and saith : Let every sinner die. So if Thou wilt O Christ, be surety, *be* ***guilty and bear the penalty, bear also the sin and the curse***… Be Thou Peter the denier, Paul that persecutor, blasphemer, …David that adulterer…, in a word be Thou the person of all men, who hast wrought the sins of all men; consider Thou therefore how Thou mayest pay and mayest make satisfaction for them. Then cometh the Law and saith : I find that sinner taking upon Him the sins of all men and I see no sin beside, save in Him, therefore let Him die upon the Cross. ***And so it attacks Him and slays Him. This being done the whole world is purged of all sin and expiation made…"***
(cf. Grensted L.W., A Short History Of The Doctrine of The Atonement, p.199)

E) MELANCHTHON (a Reformer, 16th century):
"By the obedience and merit of Him alone the wrath of God is placated… In this Victim are seen the justice of God, and His wrath against sin, and His immense mercy towards us, and the love in the Son towards mankind. Such is the **severity of His justice** that reconciliation would not be made unless the **penalty were utterly paid**. Such is the greatness of His wrath that the eternal Father would not be placated save by the entreaty and death of the Son." (cf. Grensted L.W., A Short History Of The Doctrine of The Atonement, p.206)

F) BOSSUET, a French preacher, 17th century:
"God was quenching and calming His anger by deflating and releasing it. ***He was hitting His innocent Son who was fighting the anger of God.*** This is what took place on the cross, until the Son could see in the eyes of His Father that ***His anger had resolved completely and settled.*** It was then the time for Him to depart from this world." (cf. Bandaly C, God, Evil and Destiny,1993, p226, Al-Nour Publications, Lebanon)

This medieval exegesis was developed in the book Cur Deus Homo? (Why did God become man) by Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century and became known as the

"Theory of satisfaction of divine justice." When Martin Luther, in the 16th century, rejected the abusive authority of the medieval clergy, he unfortunately did not return to the Eastern Tradition but rather continued with the same Anselmian theory of satisfaction, with the difference that he stressed the fulfilment of the punishment of sin by Christ's penal death to achieve this "satisfaction" and satisfy the Divine wrath. The teaching of Luther became known as the "Theory of Penal Substitution;" a punishment instead of a punishment; the innocent punished in place of the guilty, as long as God receives His transactional compensatory payment and can quench His anger. This is the meaning of Atonement in the Western medieval teaching.

This non-biblical system of typological interpretation has been a cause of modern atheism, rejecting such inappropriate theology. Christos Yannaras, and other Orthodox writers have stated that the Eastern Churches have also been infected by this deviated teaching in the past few centuries (known as the time of captivity) but now there is a change of heart and a return to the Eastern Patristic pure teaching of Divine love. Thank God this teaching has been changing in recent times in the West as well, as Bishop Kallistos Ware has written in the Orthodox Church (p229), and with this change the Orthodox are certainly happy.

5- THE WITNESS OF CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX AND OTHER THEOLOGIANS:

The following quotations are an example of how contemporary theologians have ***severely criticised the theories of Penal Substitution and Satisfaction of Divine justice by death, confirming that they do not reflect Orthodoxy in exegesis.*** They also reveal the Orthodox understanding of the Atonement and Redemption:

A) FR. JOHN MEYENDORFF

"**The redemption** of human nature accomplished by Christ, the new Adam, consisted essentially in the fact that a sinless hypostasis, even that of the Logos, freely took human nature in the very state of corruption in which it was (and this implied death) and **by the resurrection re-established its original relationship with God.** In Christ, man participated again in the eternal life destined for him by God. He is freed from the slavery that Satan had imposed through the intermediary of death. In the same way in which ***corruption appeared to the Greek Fathers as a disease contracted by man rather than a punishment inflicted by divine justice, so are the death and the resurrection of the incarnate Word, understood by them*** as, first, the accomplishment in Christ of our common destiny, and then as a new creation that could not be achieved unless the human nature of Christ had really become ours, in death itself. **St. Athanasius writes:**

"The body of Christ was of the same substance as that of all men…and He died according to the common lot of his equals….The death of all was being accomplished

in the body of the Lord, and on the other hand, **death and corruption were destroyed by the Word** which dwelt in that body."

This general outline of the thought of the Greek Fathers on the original **participation of man in the divine life,** on freedom as expression of that participation, on sin as a consequence of servitude to the demon and to the flesh, and finally on redemption which recapitulates **human nature in the risen Christ**, determines the major aspects of the spirituality and asceticism of the Christians of the Byzantine era.

Many hasty, and therefore incorrect, judgements have been passed on this spirituality by authors who considered it from a Western point of view, …, or else by the Anselmian theory of redemption."
(Christ In The Eastern Christian Thought, 1975, pp.117-118, SVS)

B) BISHOP KALLISTOS WARE

"Where Orthodoxy sees chiefly Christ the Victor, the late medieval and post-medieval west sees chiefly Christ the Victim. While Orthodoxy interprets the crucifixion primarily as act of triumphant victory over the powers of evil, ***the west - particularly since the time of Anselm of Canterbury - has tended rather to think of the Cross in penal and juridical terms, as an act of satisfaction or substitution designed to propitiate the wrath of an angry Father***….In the west from the 1930s there has been a revival of the Patristic idea of Christus Victor, alike in theology, in spirituality, and in art; and the Orthodox are naturally happy that this should be so."
(The Orthodox Church, 1993, p. 229)

C) CHRISTOS YANNARAS

"In the Roman Catholic West of the Middle Ages, there was a whole theology created to support this individualistic 'religious' need for objective 'justification', for a transaction with the Godhead, the aim being to provide the fullest possible support of moral self-sufficiency, and by extension for social order. Thus was formulated the theory of **'the satisfaction of divine justice through Christ's death on the cross', and this theory passed both into Protestantism and into Eastern Orthodox writers in the climate of 'Europeanising' tendencies and pietistic influences on the East in recent centuries.**
The image of God is identified with the archetypal ***'sadistic Father' who thirsts insatiably after satisfaction for his 'wounded justice',*** and by logical extension delights in the torment of sinners in hell. This legalistic version of the event of salvation ultimately ends with the redemption of sins being totally objective, so that the price can even be paid in money."
(The Freedom of Morality, 1984, pp.151-153 , SVS)

D) FR. GEORGES FLOROVSKY

"This Divine necessity of the death on the cross passes all understanding indeed. And the Church has never attempted any rational definition of this supreme mystery. Scriptural terms have appeared and do still appear, to be the most adequate ones. In any case, no merely ethical categories will do. The moral and still more the ***legal and juridical conceptions, can never be more than colourless anthropomorphism.*** This is true even of the idea of sacrifice….Christ was not a passive victim, but the Conqueror, even in His uttermost humiliation….**Nor does the idea of Divine justice alone, reveal the ultimate meaning of the sacrifice of the cross.** The mystery of the Cross cannot be adequately presented in terms of the transaction, the requital, or the ransom….

Finally, there could hardly be any retributive justice in the passion and death of the Lord…Not because substitution is impossible,…But because God does not seek the suffering of anyone, He grieves over them. How could the penal death of the Incarnate, most pure and undefiled, be the abolition of sin, if ***death itself is the wages of sin, and if death exists only in the sinful world? Does Justice really restrain Love and Mercy, and was the Crucifixion needed to disclose the pardoning love of God, otherwise precluded from manifesting itself by the restraint of vindicatory justice? …***

And justice was accomplished, in that Salvation was wrought by condescension, by a '**kenosis',** and not by omnipotent might….***The Cross is not a symbol of Justice, but the symbol of Love*** Divine. St. Gregory of Nazianzus utters all these doubts with great emphasis in his remarkable Easter Sermon: 'To whom, and why, is this blood poured out for us and shed…'[the full text already mentioned earlier].

By all these questions St. Gregory tries to make clear the inexplicability of the Cross in terms of vindicatory justice…Redemption was accomplished on the Cross, 'by the blood of His Cross' (Col. 1:20; Acts. 20:28; Rom. 5:9; Eph.1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:22; 1Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9). Not by the suffering of the Cross only, but precisely by the death on the Cross. And the ultimate victory is wrought , not by sufferings or endurance, but by death and resurrection. We enter here into the ontological depth of human existence. ***The death of our Lord was the victory over death and mortality, not just the remission of sins, nor merely the justification of man, nor again a satisfaction of an abstract justice. And the very key to the Mystery can be given only by a coherent doctrine of human death [and resurrection]."***

(Creation and Redemption, p100-104, Norland Publishing Company, Belmont, Massachusetts 02178)

F) CONSTANTINE TSIRPANLIS

"But Athanasius goes deeper by placing himself in the Patristic Tradition of Soteriology, according to which the most important and sufficient reason for the Word's assuming man's nature and death is ***not the satisfaction of God's justice - the juridical Roman Catholic tendency rooted in Augustine and Anselm -*** *but that 'in it [Christ's death] death might once for all be destroyed, and that men might be renewed according to the Image.'"*

"The term 'Satisfaction [of Divine justice]' in the sense in which, for example, Saint Anselm understood it, as well as the Augustinian conception of 'original sin' and of the inheritance of a 'sinful situation' in human nature are ENTIRELY

FOREIGN to the Greek (Eastern) Patristic thought. The main consideration and insistence of this thought is connected always with the tragic opposition between destruction and recreation, corruption and incorruption, death and life, mortality and immortality. The **juridical, transactional,** and practical bent of much (though not all) Western theology has often been noted….Such a theory of Redemption through the death of Christ as satisfying God's justice, had obvious attractions for the legal and practical mind of the West." (Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology , 1991, p. 63, 209, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota).

G) GABRIEL DALY (Prof. of Theology, Trinity College - Dublin, Roman Catholic)

"The felt need to make reparation, in itself a healthy reaction to the thought of wrong-doing which has seriously harmed others, can degenerate into a neurotic desire for punishment. This degeneration of what may be in itself a healthy impulse into an irrational desire may issue in certain theological interpretations, which have in point of fact played a regrettable part in later Christian soteriology.
The worst of these interpretations turn on the notion of an offended God whose anger needs to be propitiated by human suffering. The suffering and death of Jesus have sometimes been interpreted as salvific precisely because they were deemed to have satisfied the anger of a vengeful God.
Those who held this view of God were simply blind to its implicit blasphemy. Carried away by reflection on human wickedness, these interpreters indulged a twisted view of how things are between God and man. They projected onto God some of the meanest and most ignoble of human passions and thus ***they achieved a vicarious, if unconscious, satisfaction of their own dark and unrecognised passions."***
"To atone is to make up for an injury inflicted on another. When applied to God's salvific intention towards men and women, reconciliation is pure grace, and like all grace, it costs. ***The crucified Christ is the price that God pays to bring men and women back from the alienating effects of sin.*** God grants us peace as an absolute gift through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross."
"Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation set a pattern which ***Alexandrian soteriology consistently followed: the Incarnation is itself redemptive*.** **The West has never seemed at ease with the doctrine of deification**. Abstract, mystical and ontological, with an apparent smack of pantheism about it, the doctrine of **deification** has not seem to speak convincingly to literal and legalistic minds such as are not uncommonly to be found in the West." (Creation and Redemption,1989, p.179, 182-186,The Liturgical Press, Minnesota).

H) JEAN-NOEL BEZANCON (Roman Catholic)

"Contrary to what certain theologians thought at the Reformation, then, ***Jesus did not take on Himself the pains of hell in our place, as a punishment which the Father brought on the Son . It is hard to see how that would save us , but we can see very clearly the non-Christian God whom it would reveal.***
So in the logic of the Incarnation, the descent into hell is the will of God, in His Christ, to re-establish and revive human life. It is the ultimate fulfilment of this desire for presence and communion, of this project of Salvation and Resurrection."
(How To Understand The Creed, p.93, SCM Press).

6- DISCUSSION ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ATONEMENT BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST

As we have seen, unlike the Eastern Fathers, who followed the biblical **"remedial"** system in the interpretation of the Atonement, Western theologians in the medieval period started to seek a juridical system of exegesis (interpretation), based on the human corrupt and fallen nature as a model, in the typological interpretation of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The basic deviation was in replacing the **father/child** relationship, of the prodigal son parable, with the **judge/criminal** relationship, of the Roman juridical system, and the **esquire/peasant** relationship of feudalism, hence: replacing God by the Emperor, man by the criminal, sin by the crime, and the righteousness of God by the fallen human Roman system of justice.

We now have to discuss the ***basic theological concepts***, which when defined according to the fallen human nature, our concept of God's attributes and, therefore, the whole of the biblical message starts to deviate away from Orthodoxy:

- **EVIL AND DEATH:**

In the feudalistic era, in medieval times, sin, or the "crime," was measured according to the status of the person against whom the crime was committed. As God is "infinitely great," then **sin was seen as "infinitely great,"** being against God. The obvious pitfall in this teaching is that nothing should be given this attribute, "infinitely great," but God Himself. **Sin in this title is erroneously "deified,"** i.e. given a status that belongs to God alone! This erroneous teaching has the flavour of Gnosticism. The whole of this Creation, anyhow, is "finite," and all what it is or does cannot be described as "infinite."

Evil is essentially a "reduction of good", where **"good" is what God has created and has an ESSENCE**. That is why the Fathers have said that **"Evil is NOTHINGNESS,"** meaning that it tends to reduce and destroy what actually exists; evil has no essence, i.e. does not exist as an entity that can subsist, or continue to sustain its existence. Evil is not an "essence" but a parasitic **"CONDITION"** which we all know well, and may fall into by the enticement of Satan, yet as darkness does not exist, but it is merely the absence of light, evil does not exist, as an essence, and is known as the absence of good. This should never be taken as a reduction of how destructive evil is. It is nothingness regarding its essence but it is a very negative destructive power that drains away all the goodness that God has endowed into His creation. It could be simulated by a severely negative electric charge, that if we are connected to it all our power of life could be **"earthed,"** as we earth the electric current, hence destroy it.

The following table of comparison may simplify the relationship between "Essence and Nothingness". **Essence is** the nature of what really exists, what God has created according to His economy and, therefore, can please and satisfy Him, as a Creator Father, Redeemer Word and Life Giving Holy Spirit.

Nothingness is, on the other hand, the negation and absence of Essence and cannot, therefore, please God or satisfy His justice, for the action of negating what God has willed and created is Evil par excellence ! And how can God find pleasure in what is not according to His loving plan (economy), and justice, for the whole of His Creation?!!!

Essence truly exists; nothingness is a "CONDITION" which does not exist but we discern this condition because we have comprehended the presence of what has an essence, the opposite of this nothingness. The best example to explain this simple, yet deep concept, is: "light and darkness." ***Light*** is the essence that exists and can be studied as a real energy. ***Darkness*** is the absence of the essence of light energy. Someone would say: because we can discern darkness we then should say that darkness exists, and since God is the only Creator, and He is The Omnipotent Pantocrator (Controller of all things), therefore God must have created darkness; otherwise, who else created darkness?!! This may sound as good logic on the surface, but it is a fallacy - a wrong statement and false enquiry. It is also a scientifically incorrect statement, if we speak of physical light and darkness.

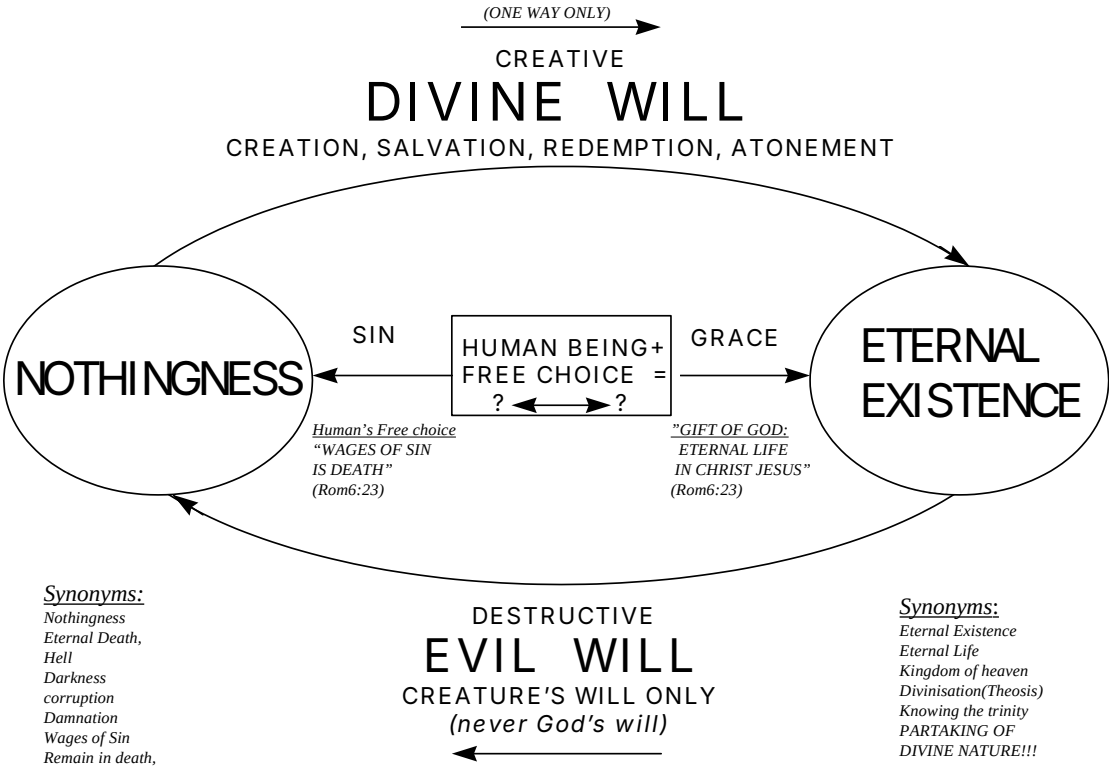
The problem encountered in discussing this concept is the inability of some people to comprehend the difference between the essence that exists and the ***"condition of absence"*** which does not truly exist, but we know well having experienced what exists: e.g. a person born blind does not understand what darkness is, as he has had no experience of what light is ! We also would not have discerned evil, darkness or death if we had not experienced good, light and life.

Study the following opposites very carefully and remember well ***what God has willed, created and hence what would satisfy His justice*** *(the left side only of the table), in contradistinction to* ***the conditions which we create for ourselves and of which God is innocent*** *(the right side of the table).*

In the Eastern Tradition this distinction is quite clear in the minds of the Fathers. In the Western tradition God has created and ordained ***both sides of the table*** *by His will !!! Try to understand the amazing and dangerous difference:*

The Good <u>God created</u>; has ESSENCE; can PLEASE and SATISFY his JUSTICE:	***Conditions of NOTHINGNESS, negation of Good; <u>God is not the Cause; cannot SATISFY His JUSTICE:</u>***
• **EXISTENCE** • **GOOD** • **LIGHT** • **LIFE, ETERNAL** • **GRACE -BLESSING** • **KINGDOM OF GOD**	• **NOTHINGNESS** • **EVIL** • **DARKNESS** • **DEATH, ETERNAL** • **CURSE** • **HELL TORMENTS**

Another representation of the same principles, as they are crucially important to comprehend where did the medieval Western theology deviate and create the juridical system of exegesis, is the following **"Equation of Life and Death,"** or existence and nothingness:



This representation demonstrates that:

- **DIVINE WILL** created us from **NOTHINGNESS**, and desires to develop us through His **GRACE** to move towards **ETERNAL EXISTENCE** (partakers of the divine nature).
- His Will moves only in **one direction**, "calling those things which do not exist as though they exist"(ROM 4:17). **He, being a Creator, cannot destroy what He creates; for the destruction of His work is Evil.**
- **Only the creature, through his evil will, can choose to move against the current of the Divine Will, or forwards according to that Will, to eternal life and EXISTENCE.**
- **TRANSGRESSION** , i.e. moving against the Divine Will, i.e**. SIN, destroys the sinner** and causes his eternal suffering, where he still exists, but in separation from God and eternal life.
- **Repentance** alone "metanoia" (change of mind), by turning back into the direction of the Divine Will, can through the same saving Will ,by the work of Salvation, redeem the dead , who died by his own **FREE-CHOICE.**
- **In Western theology** , the arrow of **DIVINE WILL** can move in **BOTH** directions !!!
- **In Eastern Patristic Tradition** the arrow of **DIVINE WILL** moves in **ONE** direction, to create, re-create, redeem, save and atone, **but never ever to destroy willingly** what He created, or to cut His beloved creation off Himself. He would, however, accept, with sorrow, that the creature with his FREE-CHOICE can make this decision and choose Hell rather than God as a lover.

- **THE "CAUSE" OF DEATH:**

Who, then, is the Cause of the death that sin brings about? God or mankind?

The same analogy (Essence and Nothingness) has been used, very successfully, by the Fathers to explain that **death has no essence**, and does not exist as a created entity, but Death is essentially the absence of life. **Death is, therefore, not created by God** (Wisdom 1:12) and, consequently, as a very powerful conclusion: ***Death can not please God or "satisfy His justice"*** *in an Orthodox sense.* Eternal death, i.e. the death

wrought by sin (rather than simple physical mortality), is a **"CONDITION"** or a state in which ***the person exists but separated*** from the glory of God, that is why it is death par excellence - eternal. For if: "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (by the Holy Spirit)" (Jn 17:3), then eternal death must be the opposite. **We are not discussing physical mortality, when we speak of death in this study, we are discussing the spiritual, eternal separation from God that sin brings about.** Physical mortality is a compassionate act of God to allow us to rest until the last day. We pray in the litany of the departed saying "for there is no death to your servants but it is a transformation."

St Athanasius wrote in his treatise "On the Incarnation":
"For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence [nothingness], so where ***they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again.*** The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore, **when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it**; for it is God alone who exists, ***evil is non-being [nothingness], the negation and antithesis [opposite] of good. By nature, of course, man is mortal***, since he was made from nothing. " (1:4)

So it is man and not God who chose this "returning through corruption to non-existence again." St Athanasius is certainly **not talking about annihilation of sinners**, as in the Jehova's Witnesses teaching, but to him separation from God and His knowledge is just as if that person has condemned himself to "non-existence." Sinners will continue to exist for ever, for eternal life is a gift to all but each person will enjoy or not enjoy the glory of God according to his ability to face, and relate to, the light (Jn 3:19-21).

Those who read God's warnings to man about the death that sin brings about as a proof that God made Death as a just punishment, have not read the Scriptures and the Fathers well. To interpret the words: **"I have the keys of Hades and Death"** (Rev 1:18) as Christ confirming that He is the **Cause and Maker** of Hades and Death, as I have heard recently, is to ignore the whole of the Patristic Tradition and misinterpret what the liturgical songs of the resurrection say as a true interpretation of Christ's relationship with Hades and Death. We praise saying: **"He broke the locks of Hades and destroyed its brass gates." "By death He conquered Death and those in the graves He granted them eternal life."** This is the true Orthodox exegesis of the Revelation 1:18: Christ is the only Authority (the keys) that can "open and destroy" Hades and Death **to free the imprisoned, NOT TO PUT THEM THERE !!!**

The best balance, on which any teaching could be weighed and judged, is the Liturgical Tradition*, as it truly represents the best of what the Fathers have said, hence chosen by the Spirit to remain as the doxology (praise) of the Church. Exegetes who say* ***"we have the Scriptures only"*** *(Sola Scriptura) and give their own version of interpretation are not Orthodox; the latter statement, as we all know, belongs to the Protestant tradition.*

God could never be imagined, after all what He did, and still does, to be the Cause of such separation, of sinners from Him, by His own **"intentional will"**! He, however may, very reluctantly, and with great sorrow, allow, by His **"permissive will,"** those

who do not want to come nearer to His light to remain separated, out of respect to their freedom and not out of a will to cut His children off Himself to punish justly (Jn 3:19-21). Could it be that that is why John, in Revelation, saw Him in His eternal glory as a "slain lamb," still wounded and not healed, because the echo of His love has not been fully reciprocated and returned back to Him by part of the creation?!!

The book of Wisdom states clearly: ***"God did not invent death***…. Ungodly people have brought death on themselves by the things they have said and done. They yearn for death as if it were a lover. They have gone into partnership with death, and it is just what they deserve" (Wisdom 1:12 & 16)…. ***"It was the Devil's jealousy that brought death into the world, and [only] those who belong to the Devil are the ones who will die"*** (Wisdom 2:24). St James also wrote that it is "sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:15). The Western medieval writers, starting with Augustine have conceived this death, as part of God's economy, ordained to allow God to quench the demands of Divine justice to seek and fulfil His desire for retribution for His own benefit! The prophet Ezekiel spoke the words of God saying: " 'Do you think I enjoy seeing an evil man die?' Asks the Sovereign Lord. 'No, I would rather see him repent and live….Turn away from all the evil you are doing, and get yourselves new minds and hearts. Why do you Israelites want to die? ***I do not want anyone to die***….Turn away from your sins and live.'"(Ez 18:23 & 31-32). The Spirit also spoke through Jeremiah saying: "For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water (Life) and hewn (dug) themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water," and therefore **they killed themselves** out of thirst !(Jr 2:13)

These words are very clearly stating that **the death brought on by sin is the spiritual death, the separation from God, and not simple physical mortality,** especially Wisdom 2:24. It is also quite clear that God through the whole of the Scriptures is fighting Death, this "last enemy" that will "be defeated" (1Cor 15:26), so how can anyone claim that God is the Cause of Death?!

Is it conceivable that God the lover of mankind has prepared and acted as the Cause of this Enemy to avenge His justice and honour from sinners? Not only that this is inappropriate but makes no sense that God could be the Physician to treat us from death with one hand, and at the same time we accuse Him of being the Cause of the disease, with the other hand !!!

This seems to be the root of all roots of the Western theological deviation in the medieval era, which all Christians must endeavour to get rid of, if we are to teach the God who is truly the Lover of mankind and reject the god whom we created in the human corrupt image. We can see that when this day comes the world will conceive the purity of Divine love, unadulterated by human corruption which was sought to its worst depths by medieval preachers.

Yannaras has written, in Elements of Faith (p83): "A 'just' God, a heavenly police constable who oversees the keeping of the laws of an obligatory - even on him - justice is just a figment of the imagination of fallen humanity, **a projection of its need for a supernatural individual security within the *reciprocal treachery*** of

collective co-existence. Whatever tricks of sophistry the moralists may contrive [twisting the biblical interpretation to fit their theories, as Satan did in the temptation on the mountain] in order to **accommodate the love of God to justice** [in the human sense], the edifices of their reasoning remain unsound. 'As a grain of sand cannot counterbalance a great quantity of gold, so in comparison God's use of justice cannot counterbalance His mercy,' says St Isaac the Syrian. The God of the biblical revelation and of ecclesial experience is not just [in the human sense]: ***'Do not call God just, for his justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. …Where, then, is God's justice? … 'He is good,' (Christ) says, 'to the evil and to the impious,'*** **Said St Isaac.** "

This change that took place in the West, in the understanding and definition of sin and the death wrought by sin, justice and how the will of God inter-relates with that of man, to some believers is very subtle, and not that obvious. The reason may be because both the Eastern Fathers and Western medieval theologians have used the **same vocabulary**, but with a difference in meaning which is equivalent to the difference between "real diamond" and "imitation glass": only discerned by the heart of those who truly experienced the love of God, not just the jargon of logical arguments. It is crucial to stress that ***logic alone is not a proof of truth: Satan used the best known twisted biblical logic when he tempted Christ on the mountain !!!***

The changes that took place in the West, in medieval ages, have practically altered the image of God, man, the meaning of sin, death, forgiveness, the goal of the cross, worship, intercession and all human relationships such as the relation between the clergy and laity, members of the family and leaders with subordinates, in all the walks of life and management of human resources.

Chrsitos Yannaras, in Elements of Faith (pp112-113), wrote about these changes: "The changes which this theory (satisfaction of Divine justice by penal substitution as in the Anselmian and Lutheran teachings) occasioned in the faith of the Church is **literally incalculable**. It changed the truth of God by subordinating the freedom of His love to the relentless necessity of an egocentric and savage justice, which demanded sadistic satisfaction. The God of the church, from being a Father and 'Passionate lover' of mankind, was ***transformed into an implacable judge and menacing avenger whose justice rejoices (according to Augustine) when it sees the sinners who are tormented in hell***. The successive waves of atheism in the spiritual life of the West in these last centuries, the repeated outbreaks of liberation from the ***'sadistic God' of the Roman juridical tradition***, is not a phenomenon unrelated to this theory of 'satisfaction of Divine justice by Christ's death on a cross', just as the joining of Christian truth to the conscience by an unsurpassed weaving of guilt is not unrelated."

- **DIVINE ANGER AND VENGEANCE:**

Sin, therefore, in the Western medieval teaching, was no more as the East taught, ***"missing the mark,"*** hamartia, but a ***"crime"*** that produces its main damage, or pathology, in God Himself by making Him angry and jealous for His insulted honour and disturbed justice! **In the Eastern Tradition, however, God's anger has been**

described as His jealousy for the beloved Creation, as He is the Lover of mankind. Sin in the Eastern Tradition is a ***"spiritual disease"*** acquired by the man's free-will, and not essentially a crime; sin moves God with compassion **"to save,"** not **"to destroy"** us.

His anger is directed **"AGAINST"** sin, the death it brings forth and against Satan. **His anger, and vengeance, work "FOR" mankind, to save mankind and defend the Creation by destroying death and not by demanding death as a just punishment to destroy the disobedient creation in His anger.** It is the sinner who, by his own freewill, commits spiritual suicide, willingly, when he "divorces" himself from God: the Source of Life.

"God is love," confirms an "essential" attribute of God. But can we say "God is wrath?" No. ***LOVE*** and all the attributes of God describe His **"NATURE,"** as Tradition (the witness of the Holy Spirit in the Church) teaches us. ***ANGER,*** however, is not an attribute of His nature but a temporary **"ACTION"** taken by God to help bring us back to life in God rather than death in sin, out of love. Human anger does not reveal the righteousness of God, for it works for the benefit of one's ego. ***The anger of God, however, works like the anger of the physician "against" the disease and "for" the sake of bringing the patient back to life.*** Jonah knew God well, he said to Him: "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? … You are a gracious and merciful God, **slow to anger** and **abundant in lovingkindness**, One who relents from doing harm." (Jonah 4:2). God has been described by the Holy Inspiration through the prophets as: "keeping mercy" (Ex 34:7), "keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations" (Deut 7:9), "preserves the faithful" (Ps 31:23), but never has He been described as one who "keeps His anger!" It is well recognised that the Scriptures have never used the adjective "wrathful" to describe God, for this is not of His nature.

God's system of seeking vengeance is also amazing, completely the opposite of what human vengeance means: "**Vengeance is Mine**, I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, **feed him**; if he is thirsty, **give him to drink**; for in so doing you heap coals of fire on his head." (Rom 12:19-20). The coals of fire are the embarrassment of the enemy, by the good deeds of love that **bring him back to become a friend**. This is Divine vengeance !!! Can we accept the challenge and live such a costly Christian life?

In the Western medieval writings we find that God's anger is directed "**towards and against" mankind,** and not essentially against sin and death.

God is a Redeemer; He replaces hatred with love, death with life, darkness with light. In the parable of the prodigal son the father was not in any way interested in retribution, far from it, His justice was revealed in the words: **"your brother was dead and now he is alive again, and was lost and is found."** (Lk 15:32). This is redemption, atonement, and justice as seen by our Lord Himself; there is no retribution and satisfaction in the sense taught by Western juridical exegesis. ***In God's terms death is injustice, in the making, and life is the only Divine justice to mankind; amen***

- **HOW, THEN, CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE DIVINE PUNISHMENTS FILLING THE OT AND PARTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (NT)?**

All these punishments should be seen in the light of Divine love and not the tarnished human model of retributive justice, which has been continually attributed to God.

Medieval clergy, in the West, who enjoyed torturing their adversaries, rather than forgive them, sought support to their hatred of others in the creation of a god according to their own corrupt hearts. They therefore developed a new system of typological exegesis of the Atonement based on the idea that to see justice done every sin must be punished to make the sinner pay a satisfaction to Divine justice through this sentence, or Divinely required punishment. ***The whole relationship of the biblical message became a "crime and punishment saga," where in the Holy Trinity one Person punishes and one Person is punished; one pays and the other receives!***

This teaching destroys the beauty of the Trinitarian love between the Father and the Son, and we may also ask: where is the Holy Spirit in the juridical teaching?

In "The Actuality of Atonement" by Colin Gunton (p129), he quotes Edward Irving's phrase describing this kind of deity as the **'Stock-Exchange divinity'** rejecting the views of those 'who resolve all divinity into a debtor and creditor account.'

The Eastern Tradition, however, has viewed the OT punishments as "**disciplinary actions"** of Divine love, **motivated by God's compassion**, and the **final goal** of which is to shake and wake-up the sinful humanity "**to come back to life"**, in the bosom of the Holy Trinity. ***So it is love that disciplines to bring back to life***. God wants to restore this father/child relationship for the sake of the Creation and not for His own benefit! For as God said to Job "if you sin, what do you accomplish against Him? Or if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him? If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He receive from your hand? Your wickedness affects a man such as you, and your righteousness a son of man." (Job 35:6-8). "God cannot be tempted (i.e. shaken or moved in Himself) by evil" (James 1:13), only a human being can be reduced by evil. Also God can not be "in need" of anything for Himself: He is God ! He is love and "love does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil," (2 Cor 13:5).

Of course God, as any loving father, can not stand idle and passive if he sees his children committing spiritual suicide; **He must take action** to save them from such consequences, **no matter how severe this action may need to be -** even if it entails physical death to stop more destruction by sin. Divine anger may be very severe on occasions. Out of love, jealousy and compassion He must continue unceasingly to wake us up to become sober and help us, either with a stick or a crutch as need be, to come back to life. Early physical mortality does not necessarily mean eternal condemnation and perdition. God may after physical death have a different way of redeeming disobedient sinners, albeit not clearly revealed to us, and which He has declared to us through St Peter by saying: "He (Christ) went and preached to the spirits in prison (Hades), who formerly ***were disobedient***, when once the longsuffering of God waited **in the days of Noah,"** (1Pet 3:19-20); a verse that deserves much

meditation, as it does not speak of the eight who survived but ***of all those who died disobedient in the flood !***

- **DIVINE JUDGEMENT AND JUSTICE:**

Judgement in Greek is **"Krisis,"** i.e. **"discernment," "diagnosis," "giving an opinion."** *"Krisis" does not mean to declare a juridical sentence. To "declare a juridical sentence" in Greek is "deekasteeki apofasee."* When we say God expressed His judgement, that "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), this does not mean that it is God who **wills** the "sentence of eternal death" of the sinner, i.e. separation from God. The statement means that God has revealed to mankind that, if we were to choose to continually contract ourselves to sin, without repentance, that is to refuse the counsel of God and His friendship, by this we divorce ourselves from Him, and that is death in the making: "they yearn for death as if it were a **lover**. They have gone into **partnership** with death" (Wisdom 1:16). It was the Devil's jealousy that brought death into the world, and **those who belong to the Devil are the ones who will die** (Wisdom 2:24). ***God is not saying, "if you disobey Me I will kill you," but He is saying "if you choose not live with Me, you are committing spiritual suicide." It takes two completely different gods to say these two statements, if the reader thinks deeply enough!!! One is an unkind person and the other is our Loving Father !!!***

In fact the statement "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), is one half of a paradox, which St Paul loved using as a figure of speech, comparing what sin pays as wages to the sinner who contracted himself with it in "partnership" (Wisdom 1:16) and what God grants as a gift to the one who enters into "partnership" with Him: "For the **wages** of sin is **death**, but the **gift** of God is **eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord." The word "wages" is not, as interpreted by juridical exegetes, a "fine" or a "penalty" or the "price of sin" that has "**to be paid by the sinner to God"** (for satisfaction of His insulted honour and justice to appease His anger) but **the suffering of the consequences of evil, which is "paid by sin to the sinner" directly.**

When we read the parables taught by our Lord in Matthew 24 & 25, describing the horrific fate of the unfaithful servant (Mtt 24:51), the foolish virgins (Mtt 25:11), the lazy servant (Mtt 25:30), the goat and sheep separated (Mtt 25:32) and those who did not show compassion to fellow humans in need (Mtt 25:41,46) … etc. we should remember that these are all parables and metaphors, using human experiences to describe **what sinners will feel like** when they meet the Light, rather than what the Lover of mankind desires by His Economy. However, when He spoke directly, and with no figurative language, to us about the Final Judgement He said:
"And this is condemnation (judgement): that the light (I am the Light of the world) has come to the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds where evil . For everyone practising **evil hates the light and does not come (by his/her freewill) to the light**, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the **truth comes (by his/her freewill) to the light**, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (Jn. 3:19-21).

And those who hate the light will say "to the mountains and rocks, 'fall on us and hide us from the face of Him (the Light) who sits on the throne and from the Lamb !' " (Rev 6:16).

On that day, of "krisis," therefore, each person in the light of Christ, who is the Light, will see where he/she fits and fares among the saints and **Christ, the Judge by reference rather than prosecution ! Each person will choose** the place that reveals his hidden and treasured glory, infused in him by the synergy of his will and the grace of the Holy Trinity, or the place where he finds the least disgrace and shame away from the Light - if such a place, where God is not, can exist !!! ***The Hebrew word for "justice" is "zedek," which is also translated as "righteousness," i.e. to do what is right, by perfecting the creation, not simply "to decree the most accurate penal sentence," as many interpret the words "God is a fair judge" !!!***

Divine justice, therefore, is **re-creative** and **not destructive;** it must **"give life"** not **"take life"** away from the Creation, yet the Creation may, by its freewill, refuse His justice and prefer eternal death (hell)! *Again, we are discussing eternal life and eternal death, not simple physical mortality.* Divine justice is **"to do us justice"** by perfecting us, to **"adjust"** or **"add justice"** when we fall from the perfect image of Christ which we were created to achieve and enjoy forever.

*What is the use of a justice that seeks revenge by **destroying willingly** what it has created?! Where is love in a person whose justice demands the purchase of a **furnace to** burn his children for retribution, under cover of being just, should they disobey him?! Where is the sanity of a man who suggests to his future wife that he is too loving yet if she disobeys him he has **to kill her**, as he is just as well as loving?! Have you ever heard of a physician who, because he had warned his patient against disease and death, has **willingly killed his patient** who disobeyed the advice?!*

St. Isaac the Syrian, in his contemplation on Gehenna (hell) wrote:

"That we should imagine that anger, wrath, jealousy or the such like have anything to do with the divine nature is something utterly abhorrent for us… Nor again can we possibly say that He acts thus out of retribution, **even though the Scriptures may, on the outer surface, posit (reveal) this.** Even to think this of God and to suppose that retribution for evil acts is to be found with Him is abominable. By implying that He makes use of such a great and difficult thing out of retribution we are **attributing a weakness to the divine Nature**. We cannot even believe such a thing can be found in those human beings who live a virtuous and upright life and whose thoughts are entirely in accord with the divine will….For it would be most odious…to think that hate or resentment exists with God, even against demonic beings; or to imagine any other weakness…(attributed) to the divine Nature.
Just because the terms wrath, anger, hatred, and the rest are used of the Creator, we should not imagine that He (actually) does anything in anger or hatred or zeal. **Many**

figurative terms are employed in the Scriptures of God, terms which are far removed from His (true) Nature."
(Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orienalium, Scriptores Syri ,Tomus225 Vol. 555, Lovanii in aedibus peeters 1995, Contemplation on the topic of Gehenna; pp.162-173).

In the first volume of the Philokalia there is **a magnificent text of Saint Anthony** which I must read to you here:

"God is good, dispassionate, and immutable. Now someone who thinks it reasonable and true to affirm that God does not change, may well ask how, in that case, it is possible to speak of God as rejoicing over those who are good and showing mercy to those who honour Him, and as turning away from the wicked and being angry with sinners. To this it must be answered that **God neither rejoices nor grows angry, for to rejoice and to be offended are passions; nor is He won over by the gifts of those who honour Him, for that would mean He is swayed by pleasure. It is not right that the Divinity feel pleasure or displeasure from human conditions.**
He is good, and He only bestows blessings and ***never does harm, remaining always the same.*** We men, on the other hand, if we remain good through resembling God, are united to Him, but ***if we become evil through not resembling God, we are separated from Him.*** By living in holiness we cleave to God; but by becoming wicked we make Him our enemy. ***It is not that He grows angry with us*** *in an arbitrary way, but it is* ***our own sins that prevent God from shining within us and expose us to demons who torture us.*** And if through prayer and acts of compassion we gain release from our sins, this does not mean that we have won God over and made Him to change, but that through our actions and our turning to the Divinity, we have cured our wickedness and so once more have enjoyment of God's goodness. ***Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind****."* [Chap. 150, p 352]

In "Original Sin According to St. Paul," Rev. J.S. Romanides wrote the same meaning, under the subtitle **"The Justice of God and Law"**:

"What man accepts as just and good according to his observations of human relationships within society and nature cannot be confused with the justice of God. The justice of God has been revealed uniquely and fully only in Christ. No man has the right to substitute his own conception of justice to that of God. ***The justice of God as revealed in Christ does not operate according to objective rules of conduct***, but rather according to the personal relationships of faith and love.
There is no life in the following of objective rules. If there were such a possibility of receiving life by living according to law, there would be no need of redemption in Christ…
It is a grave mistake to make the justice of God responsible for death and corruption.

Nowhere does Paul attribute the beginnings of death and corruption to God. On the contrary, nature was subjected to vanity and corruption **by the devil** (2Cor. 11:15; 1Tim. 2:14)…

Neither can the death of Adam, or even of each man, be considered the outcome of any decision of God to punish. St. Paul never suggests such an idea.
To get at the basic presuppositions of Biblical thinking, one must abandon any juridical scheme of thought which falsely refers to extra-Biblical criteria, such as the sense of human justice which demands punishments and rewards according to objective rules of morality…

Thus salvation for man and creation cannot come by a simple act of forgiveness, of any juridical imputation of sin, nor can it **come by any payment of satisfaction to the devil (Origen) or to God (Rome).** Salvation can come only by the destruction of the devil and his power….
The justice of God is not according to that of men, which operates by the law of works. For St. Paul, the justice of God and the love of God are not to be separated for the sake of any juridical doctrine of atonement. The justice of God and the love of God as revealed in Christ are the same thing…

It is interesting to note that every time St. Paul speaks about the **wrath of God** it is always that which is revealed to those who have become hopelessly enslaved, **by their own choosing**, to the flesh and the devil… 'Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the desires of their own hearts to dishonour their own bodies between themselves…'(Rom. 1:24) and again, 'God gave them over to reprobate mind.'(Rom. 1:28). ***This does not mean that God caused them to become what they are,*** *but rather that He gave them up as being completely lost to corruption and to the power of the devil.* ***One must also interpret other similar passages in like manner."***
(St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly, Vol. 4, No. 1&2,1955, pp.9-10)

It is also quite obvious from the parables of the prodigal son and the workers of the eleventh hour that God's justice does not work according to human mathematics or miserly logic. He decided to give the workers who laboured one hour the same as those who worked twelve hours ! When human justice questioned the land lord, who is a type of God, telling him that he was unjust and unfair, he answered: "Friend I am doing you **no wrong (injustice)**… is it not **lawful** to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because **I am good**?" (Matt 20:13-15). **Goodness is the basis of God's just relationship with the whole of the creation.**

In the parable of the Prodigal Son again human justice stood up to question the justice of the father who decided to offer forgiveness and the best party to celebrate his son's return to life. The elder son refused to enter because his brother who returned did not deserve any mercy or love, according to human justice. The reply came quite clear: "It was **right (just and fair) that we should make merry and be glad**, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." (Lk 15:32).

Perhaps the teaching of forgiving my brother "seventy times seven times" uttered from the mouth of God can put us all to shame, for **this is Divine justice**, as manifested when Christ practised what He preached by forgiving us all without reservation on the cross, and *with a good excuse* as well: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."** (Lk 23:34).

- **WHY, THEN, DID GOD PREPARE HELL? OR DID HE NOT?**

St. Basil the Great said: ***"God is not the cause of the torments of hell*** … because the root and origin of evil lies within our own free will" (cf. Trabulsy, The Orthodox Vision of Man, p137 & 143)

This Hell or "state of spiritual death" cannot be of God's economy for mankind. It is most blasphemous to say that God being a just God has decided by His own just will to throw His children into such a death to punish them, eternally. The Bible does not say so, nor do the Fathers, (see later). It is however acceptable to believe that He will not stop the free choice of those who reject to live in His bosom and prefer **the hell of existing eternally away from Him** as they cannot tolerate His love and light (Jn 3:19-21). Reluctantly and with the same sorrow of the father of the Prodigal son, God may have to accept this separation from Him, which is what He described as Gehenna (Hell).

Gehenna, or the **Valley of hannoum,** was a valley outside Jerusalem, where all the remains of sacrifices and waste of the city were set on fire day and night, with warms and rot breeding on. Jesus used this tangible valley to describe "what eyes have not seen and ears have not heard and human mind can not conceive," of what those who rejected the Love and Light will experience in Eternity.

Christ was not by any means trying to say, as medieval interpreters used to teach, that this is the place **God created** to burn the wicked and take revenge from His human and demonic enemies. **The separation from God is far worse in its torments than any suffering we can imagine in our tangible world; yet this is not "*<u>one option</u>*" of God's economy, as some like to teach. This teaching is "spiritual terrorism par excellence," taught by medieval clergy to oppress the laity.**

To those who did not experience love, a tangible fire is the only deterrent from sin. To those who experienced love, separation from the Beloved carries the ultimate pain that could not be imagined. ***We fear most, what we love most.*** *This is the "fear of God" as we learn from the Bible and the Eastern Tradition. Those who love more, fear more;* ***they fear the loss of love; this is the deepest Hell we know of and can preach in the name of Christ.*** *This Hell (or other forms of human imagination, as Dante's Inferno) all carry the brand:* ***"MADE IN HUMAN WILL,"*** *and not by Divine will and justice.*

Hell is the state of the inability to receive, reciprocate and enjoy the love of God and the saints, now and in Eternity (no matter in which environment or temperature!). **"Since freewill exists, hell exists;** for hell is nothing else than the rejection of God. If we deny hell we deny freewill….God will not force us to love Him, for love is no longer love if it is not free; how then can God reconcile to Himself those who refuse all reconciliation?", wrote Bishop Kallistos Ware in "The Orthodox Church" (p261).
It is the choice of man to exist deprived of God, in this experience, in Hell, and not the intentional will of God that ordained this separation. Hell, in Eastern teaching is **"locked from inside!"** i.e. by man's freewill only and not by God's desire.
Again Bishop Kallistos continues: "Hell is not so much a place where God imprisons humans, as a place where humans, by misusing their freewill choose to imprison themselves,…***It is heretical to say that all must be saved, for this is to deny free will; but it is legitimate to hope that all may be saved.*** Until the Last Day comes, we must not despair of anyone's salvation, but must long and **pray for the reconciliation of all [the living and the dead] without exception**. No one should be excluded from our loving intercession. 'What is a merciful heart?' asked Issac the Syrian. 'It is a heart that burns with love for the whole of creation, for humans, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons, for all creatures.' Gregory of Nyssa said that Christians may legitimately hope even for the redemption of the devil." (p262).

Father Matta El-Meskeen (Matthew the Poor) of St Macarius monastery, in Egypt, wrote, in "How Will Christ Judge The World Righteously," saying: "Those who loved darkness more than the light and hated the truth, and preferred wickedness and lies, when they look The Holy Lord in the face and see His light and righteousness shining on their hearts and revealing their inner thoughts, they will suffer excruciating shame, they will go farther back away from the light (Jn 3:19-21) and avoid the vision of the Beloved Face or standing in His presence. They will therefore be granted what they ask for, as the evil spirits in the old requested to flee our Lord's presence and preferred to enter into the pigs far away from Him. ***He allowed them to go, out of mercy!!! Christ will always remain merciful for ever, even to the worst of all sinners and disobedient. It is a compassion that accepts the free choice of those who preferred to deprive themselves of God.*** It is a [self-chosen] eternal punishment as a consequence of rejecting the truth and light. As it was for the demons that requested to enter into the pigs for their rest, so it might be for the sinners they will find rest in their weeping and comfort in the gnashing of their teeth. They may not be able to find relief except in the darkness away from the light and truth of God's presence. They will ask and beg for this darkness, for it may be more restful to them."

<u>Gregory of Nyssa</u> said: "Sin does not exist in nature in a separate state form the free-will; it has no essence of its own." (cf. Traboulsy, Orthodox Vision of Man, p143)
"**It is not the will of the Lord that is the reason why some are saved and some are lost**; were that the case, the cause of their perdition would have to be referred to His will. That some are saved and some perish depends rather upon **their free choice**, who hear the word."
"The doorkeepers of the (Heavenly) Kingdom are careful and they do not play games. They see the soul bearing the marks of her banishment …**The miserable soul accusing**

itself severely of her own thoughtlessness and howling and wailing and lamenting." "The life of torments allotted to sinners is in no **way equivalent to anything that torments the senses here**. If one or the other of those torments is termed in names of something well known here, there is still no small difference.
When you hear the word fire you have been taught to understand **something else than the fire that we know of**, because of that fire having a quality which our fire has not; for that fire is never quenched, whereas experience has discovered many ways of quenching our fire." (Faith Of The Early Fathers, vol. II, pp.55,57,58&49)

Origen, also wrote: **"**Now let us see what is meant by the threatening with eternal fire. We find in the prophet Isaiah (50:11) that the fire with which each one is punished is described as his own; for he says: **'walk in the light of your fire and in the flames which you have kindled for yourselves.'** It seems to be indicated by these words that **every sinner kindles for himself the flame of his own fire, and is not plunged into some fire which was kindled beforehand** by someone else or which already existed before him. **The food and fuel of this fire are our sins,** which are called wood and hay and stubble by the Apostle Paul. And I think that … when the soul has gathered together within itself a multitude of evil deeds and an abundance of sins, at the appropriate time **the whole collection of evil boils up for punishment and is set on fire for penalty.** When the mind itself, or conscience, by divine power receives into the memory all those things which, when it was sinning, impressed upon itself as certain signs and forms, it will see exposed before its eyes a kind of history of each of its own enormities, the deeds which it foully and shamefully performed … **When the soul shall have been found to be outside the order and structure or harmony in which, for the sake of its well-being and useful behaviour , it was created by God, and does not harmonise with itself in the structure of its rational movements, it must be supposed that it will bear the agonising penalty of its own dissension and will feel the punishment of its own inconsistency and disorderliness."**
(The Fundamental Doctrines, Faith Of The Early Fathers, vol. I, p.196)

Evagrius of Pontus, wrote : "Evil is the absence of good, as darkness is nothing but the absence of light."
(cf.Trabulsi, Orthodox Vision of Man, 1989, p.143, Al- Noor Publications, Lebanon)

Augustine repeated the same words: "Evil is Nothingness !"
(cf. Trabulsi, Orthodox Vision of Man, p.143)

CONCLUSION

Exegetes can only interpret and introduce the biblical message through their own experience. We cannot divorce the human experience from the work of exegesis and claim that what a biblical teacher utters is the biblical message devoid of human personal and cultural effects. It could even be argued that there is nothing such as a "text." All written words are essentially a **"pretext,"** until they are processed through human experience when they become a **"living text."** It is this "living text" which shapes and disciplines the mind and heart of the listener, not the "pretext." That is why ***exegesis must submit to the living Church experience and be weighed in the balance of the Tradition and not left to the preferences of individuals.***

We have seen how the medieval age with its socio-political environment have altered the way Scriptures were interpreted by the Eastern Fathers and developed an almost **new god,** different from the Lover of mankind, and thirsty to avenge his insulted honour and justice by accepting transactional compensatory payments by a suffering Penal Substitute - Christ. Medieval exegetes were good believers but had to describe God to the best of their knowledge and cultural models, where **the Church in the periods of spiritual decline became an empire governed by emperors.**

The Eastern Fathers, however, managed to draw on their tender, gentle and rather non-politicised culture, which was much closer to the way Christ lived and described God's relation with His creation using the images of lilies, birds, trees, fishing, farming, a father and his children, or a generous landlord, a party, a feast etc. Their exegesis was baptised into the spirit of **"love, grace and life,"** when they interpreted the Atonement in **"remedial"** and **"championship"** substitutionary language.

In the West, exegesis was more saturated with **"crime, punishment and death,"** and soaked into the spirit of selling and buying, which ended by the indulgences, inquisition courts and burning adversaries at the stake, in the name of "we are the custodians and guardians of Divine justice and honour !" Atonement had to be explained in a **penal and juridical** flavour, which as we have seen was **definitely built on a non-biblical foundation of wrong definitions and presuppositions regarding the meaning of evil, sin and what God aims to achieve.**

In a song the poet said: **"God's way is to love, give and die; Satan's way is to kill, sell and buy !"**

We have also read the **severe criticism of contemporary theologians**, especially the Orthodox, to the **"Theory of Satisfaction of Divine justice by Christ's death",** as described by Anselm, and the **"Theory of Penal Substitution"** as described by Martin Luther.

The most important message we should learn from the Eastern Fathers is that God is not the Cause of Eternal Death, which is wrought by sin and human freewill. If juridical exegetes can grasp this simple, yet profound concept, and see the biblical logic of it, the "separating wall" between the East and West in theology will crumble down as the Berlin wall did, bringing reconciliation and the shining glory of the Lover of mankind once again.

This study is not meant to stress the contrast between the East and West in the typological exegesis of the Atonement but it is a cry, a call and a sincere plea to the Church in the East and West to **return to the purity of the justice of re-creation, not that of retribution, the justice that perfects and strengthens, not destroys and excommunicates.** Let us pray that we will be guided by the life-giving Spirit of Christ, not by those who claim to have "sectioned God's authority" and will act in His place to seek punishment of their opponents, in the name of God, as custodians of Divine justice !

The grave danger of juridical non-biblical teaching is that it has a pious face, yet a very destructive effect on its followers*: If they are clergy they forget forgiveness and believe this to be the summit of holiness; they too must seek retribution, like the god they preach, from all who do not follow them, for obvious egocentric reasons. If they are parents they treat one another and their children quite harshly. If they are senior leaders at their place of work, they develop demonic disciplinary systems, which seek retribution and terrorism, rather than education of the wrongdoer.*

Theology is not dry philosophical arguments between leisurely grey heads in closed dark rooms, far from it; it is our deep understanding of who God, man, and the Universe are and how did He plan their triple relationship. ***If we adopt wrong opinions regarding the attributes of God's nature (as in atonement by Penal Substitution or the teaching of God as the Cause of Death) we misconceive God, man, the Universe and all our relationships !!!***

Vladimir Lossky, in The Mystical Theology of The Eastern Church (pp 65-66), echoed this fact by explaining that the model of **love and relationship between the Persons of the Trinity** is the only hope for humanity to find itself: "The Trinity is, for the Orthodox Church, the unshakeable foundation of all religious thought, of all piety, of all spiritual life, of all experience. It is the Trinity we seek in seeking after God, when we search for the *fullness of being*, for the end and *meaning of existence*…. **BETWEEN THE TRINITY AND HELL THERE LIES NO OTHER CHOICE."**

Finally the aim of this study is to show, or dare I say prove, through a short trip in the history of the typological exegesis of the Atonement between the East and the West, the most joyful and invaluable discoveries I have enjoyed in the past ten years of my theological readings.

These wonderful discoveries of the deep beauty and thrill of Orthodox theology gave me joy beyond words, and I only wish if every person I know can share the same joy with me:

1) **God is a life-giver; He is not the Cause of Eternal Death.**

2) **Christ on the cross did not suffer a punishment** to appease an angry god who demanded this death to quench his anger. This is, to the best of my knowledge and

belief, a teaching that is non-biblical and does not match the spirit of the Eastern Tradition of exegesis.

3) **Atonement is not a punishment instead of a punishment; this idea is non-biblical.** Atonement is the work of the Holy Trinity in the whole of the creation to bring it as a "pure" chaste virgin to Christ for the eternal wedding; the pure Bride for the heavenly Bridegroom, the source of all purity, love and joy. His life (blood) poured into us is the medicine of purity and immortality, which bestows the dream of God and Orthodoxy: Deification forever and ever.

Amen, come Lord Jesus, come O' Holy Spirit, come You are the two arms of God, cleanse us with Your gift of the Atonement, give us that big eternal hug and take us to the bosom of our Father.

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