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The State of The Souls between the Particular Judgement and the Universal Judgement according to the Orthodox Cult Books

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Abstract:

When we talk about judgement, in general, the Christians, since the oldest times, have thought about the Universal Judgement. The expectation of Jesus' return as Judge of the living and of the dead is part of the Christian Creed: all the people will appear in front of Him to account to Him for their deeds. Looking in the New Testament, we can notice that our Saviour Christ has given innumerable examples concerning the eternal life, the judgement and the whole eschatological framework. No one shall escape death, funeral and judgement, which are immediate opportunities of appearing in front of the Creator, the Master of life and of death. The particular judgement is not an event of absolute condemnation and exclusion. It is the moment for discerning, in all freedom of conscience, what is constructive, positive, from what is destructive, negative, in the believer's life. According to the Christian teaching, after the separation from the body, the soul continues his life in a different world, on a different level of existence. The soul makes the human life continue beyond the grave, where all man's faculties are preserved.

Keywords:

Particular Judgement, hymnography, hell, heaven, Universal Judgement, Orthodoxy

The Holy Scripture, when it talks about the state of the souls after death, about eternal life, does not always mention if it speaks about the state that follows immediately after the separation of the soul from the body or about the state that follows after the Final Judgement. More often than not, when it talks about the eternal happiness or torments, it shows that it has in view the Last Judgement. For this reason, the eternal happiness and torments are related to the things that follow the Universal Judgement, being included in the same description or in the same terms. Both the happiness after death and that after the Universal Judgement are called heaven and the Kingdom of Heaven, and both the torments that follow death and those that follow the Universal Judgement are called hell.

“How [dare I] spend my time carelessly? How [dare I] spend the time of my life without trying to focus, unaware of my numerous sins, unaware of the dreadful terror of death and unaware of the judgement by the Judge that can not be bribed? O, who shall save me of the eternal fire? Unless You are merciful to me, You Yourself, Allgood God.”¹

Thus,

“Come, my soul weeping and bringing springs of tears from the heart, call out to the Holy Virgin and Theotokos: For the multitude of your mercies, o pure Theotokos, save me of the dreadful punishment and settle me where the eternal rest and joy and delight is.”²

But, beside all the relation between the two heavens and the two hells, shown by their common name, there is also a great difference between them.

Mark of Ephesus expressed this Orthodox teaching in front of the Latins of Florence saying that

“We say neither about the just that they have taken their part and that happy state, prepared even since here by deeds, nor about the sinners, that immediately after their death they are taken to the eternal torments by which they will be eternally torment-

¹ *The Great Octoechos*, including the Divine Service of the Resurrection on Eight Tones, The Tipography Religious Books, Bucharest, 1952, 8th Ichos, Sunday Evening, at Lord I have called out, Humility Chants, 1st Chant, p. 651.

² *Menologium for the month of March*, Ed. Reintregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2001, The 12th day, Vespers, at Lord I have called out, Glory..., Now..., 4th Ichos, p. 96.

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ed, but both of these will necessarily take place after that Last Judgement Day and after everyone's resurrection. Now they are both in their right places, some resting and free in heaven with the angels and even with God, namely precisely in Paradise from where Adam fell and where the grateful thief entered, before the others... enjoying the happy sight of God and receiving the brightness shining from Him more perfectly and more cleanly than before, when they were alive; the others again are closed in hell in darkneses (Psalm 87: 7) and in the shadow of death and in the lowest pit, as David says... The first rejoyce all glad and joyful, now awaiting and almost having in their hand the kingdom promised to them; the others, on the contrary, with no confort in their sadness and under straitened circumstances, waiting as some condemned the decision of the Judge and knowing in advance those kinds [of torments]. Neither do those receive the heritage of the kingdom and of the good things that the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard and man's mind has not reached, nor are these handed over since now to the eternal torments and to the burning in the inextinguishable fire."³ "For by Your Cross, You have opened the Heavens to the thief, and by Your burial, You have crushed the locks of Hell, and by Your Resurrection, You have enriched everything, O merciful Lord, glory to You."⁴

If the eternal torments have not reached the sinners and the Kingdom has not reached the just but the sinners and the just are both awaited by the judgement unto their perfection and the receiving of what has been prepared for them according to their worthiness, how could we admit an all-purifying fire, an intermediate state between the two judgements, as the Purgatory?

To the question addressed by the Catholic theologians in Florence to Mark of Ephesus, about what the souls see immediately after death - as they were thinking that they had reduced Mark to silence, imagining that

³ Mark of Ephesus, *Oratio aktera de igne purgatorio* apud Fr. Prof. Ph.D. Dumitru Stăniloae, *The State of the Souls after the Particular Judgement, in the Orthodox and the Catholic Teaching*, in "The Orthodoxy", V (1953), no. 4, pp. 545-546.

⁴ *The Great Octoechos*, 5th Ichos, Sunday morning, at Praises, Other Chants of Anatholius, 2nd Chant, p. 386.

he would answer that the soul see God's essence, that there can be no gradual passage from the happiness of the provisional state to that following the Last Judgement, the Orthodox Theologian, knowing the teaching of the Holy Fathers well, said: "What is known according to its essence, to the extent to which it is known, is seized by the knower. But God is not seized by anyone, as He is, by His nature, impossible to be fully seized."⁵

The souls of the departed get to know the spiritual realities more profoundly than at the time when they were in the body (1 Corinthians 13:12), think, desire and feel. Depending on the deeds completed, the soul will be sent to its right place (Romans 2: 7; 2 Corinthians 5: 10): the good, around God, in the place of happiness; the bad, in the company of the bad spirits, in the place of unhappiness. Yet, not all the righteous will enjoy happiness equally, because some have accomplished the virtues to a greater extent, while others to a lesser extent, since people have not breached the will of God equally.⁶

"The trumpets will sound, and the tombs will throw out the dead and all the humans will awake, trembling; those who did good, will rejoice with gladness, waiting for their reward; while those who sinned will tremble terribly, lamenting, being sent to torments and getting separated from the chosen ones. Lord of glory, have mercy on us, as You are good, and make us worthy of the side of those who have loved you."⁷

Our Saviour says concerning the place of happiness that „in my Father's house there are many dwelling places" (John 14: 2), and concerning the torments that await the sinners, He says:

"And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will be beaten with many blows. But the one who did not know, and did things worthy of blows, will be beaten with few blows." (Luke 12: 47-48).

On the happiness that follows immediately after death, on the souls who have served God in the earthly life, conclusive are the affirmations

⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The State of the Souls...*, p. 547.

⁶ Constantin Cornițescu, *The Particular Judgement*, in vol. "Missionary Counsels", EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1986, pp. 871-872.

⁷ *Triodion*, including the Divine Services from the Sunday of the Tax-collector and the Pharisee to the Holy Resurrection), EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2000, The Sunday preceding the Lent when meat ceased to be used, Vespers, Saturday night, at Lord, I have called out, 3rd Chant, 6th Ichos, p. 39.

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of Saint John Chrysostom. He calls Bishop Philogonius happy for having moved to the untroubled life, where the vessel knows no shipwreck anymore, where there is no more sadness, no more pain, no more disease and no more sinful passions and causes of sinful passions, where there is no more mine and yours, this cold word that introduces all the evil things into life and has given birth to innumerable wars; he calls him happy because, leaving this city, he has moved to another city, that of God, and, leaving this Church, he is rejoicing in that of the first born and written in heaven, and, leaving our celebrations, he has moved to the celebration of the angels. It is an endless celebration, where, instead of plenty of wheat, of barley, of fruit, everywhere you find only the fruit of the Spirit: love, goodness, gentleness; instead of famous and nicely dressed men, [you find] scores of thousands of angels, thousands of archangels, cohorts of prophets, meetings of justs. And, in their midst, one can see the King, Whom those there see ceaselessly, as much as they can see, and He adorns them all with the brightness of His glory. Even since here one can see that there is a difference of degree between the happiness that follows the particular judgement, when we will not meet all the people who have lived on earth in the faith in Christ, and the happiness that will follow the Universal Judgement, when we will meet all together.⁸ “The temporary life having passed, those who have lived with faith have moved to You, merciful God, whom [we beg You] to settle in a place of rest, and put on Your right side on the Judgement Day, pardoning their mistakes.”⁹ “Make Your servants worthy of the happy life and of the ceaseless delight of the eternal goods, of the true joyfulness, You Who have moved them out of Your will, Giver of Life, in a place full of greenness, at the waters of restfulness.”¹⁰

The happiness of the just in the eternal world is great and undescribable. Saint Paul the Apostle considers it superior to any joy that man can experience in this life. Being taken away to heaven up to the third heaven, he heard “unspeakable words which are not permitted for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12: 4). The happiness of the soul consists, first of all, in the impetuous joy of living around and in the glory of our Saviour. This living

⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. III, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1997², pp. 201-202.

⁹ *The Great Octoechos*, 4th Ichos, Saturday morning, after the second Stichologion, The Martyrs' Troparion, 3rd Chant, p. 357.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 3rd Ichos, Saturday morning, Canon, 9th Hymn, 10th Chant, p. 273.

even since this life in the intimacy of Christ also supposes an inner transformation of man, his deification by grace, because the light (1 John 1: 5) can only be perceived by those who have the soul full of light (Psalm 35: 9). Prepared in this way, the just will find the fulfilment of his hope of a full living in Christ. In the glory or the light of God, the souls have everything and are free of any want and trouble.¹¹ “There, soul, speaking with the angels free of matter, and always sweetened by the neverending light of the Kingdom above, called happy by God, you shall sing: Blessed are You, the God of our fathers.”¹² God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will be no more tear, no more crying, no more shouting and no more pain anymore.” (Revelation 21: 4). There, “no longer will they go hungry, neither will they thirst again; the sun will not beat down upon them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them and guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:16-17).

Saint John Chrysostom describes this state as follows:

“Imagine the condition of the other life, at least as much as it can be imagined, because in order to do this as it ought to be done, all word is not enough. And from what we hear from this life, as by enigmas, we can get only an imperfect idea. There will be no more pain, sadness and sorrow there (Isaiah 35: 10). What can be more pleasant than that life? There is no more fear of poverty, or disease; there is no more defamer and defamed there, no more sadness, no more anger; no more fury, no more envy and no more appetite for revenge; no more torments in the search for the necessities of life; nothing of those unquenchable desires of authority and power, because the storm of our sinful passions, once put out, will never rise again; everything will be peace, gladness and joy; everything will be smooth and pleasant, all will be day, splendor, light, not the light we see today, but another light whose brightness will be greater than the one of today’s light, just as the brightness of the Sun exceeds that of a candle. There, light is no longer darkened, neither by the night, nor by the clouds; it no longer burns, no longer consumes

¹¹ Constantin Cornițescu, *The Particular Judgement*, p. 873.

¹² *Menologium for the month of April*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2001, Day 2, Matins, Canons, 7th Canticle, 3rd Chant, 8th Ichos, 18.

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the bodies, because there is no longer night, evening, cold or heat there... There is no more old age or needs of the old age, but all that is corruptible is removed, because the uncorruptible glory reigns everywhere. But, what is more significant there, is the continuation of joy by the communion with Christ, with the angels, with the archangels and with the heavenly powers.”¹³

“Moving away from the cold wind of life, soul, you are drawing near to Christ, taking your rest in the place with greenness; there, where you find the river of delight and the light that never dawns and the ineffable gladness and the eternal joy.”¹⁴

According to the Orthodox teaching, an element that makes the happiness of the just after the particular judgement smaller than the one after the Universal Judgement is that they shall receive happiness at the universal judgement together with all those who will believe. Abraham himself, who has in his bosom all the people who go after death to happiness (Hebrews 11: 40), will receive full happiness only at the Final Judgement. One cannot be fully happy with the good things received from God if he does not enjoy them together with others, together with all. This highlights the importance of the communion among all, as valorification, as full fructification of the communion with God, by the contribution of its acceptance by all. This element has been developed afterwards in the tradition of the Orthodox Church, in the fact that, in the provisional state, many souls can be taken out from hell, by the prayers of the living, and in the fact that the saints can help, by their prayers, the living and those who departed in sins, which cannot happen anymore after the Universal Judgement.¹⁵ This is the reason why the Church prays ceaselessly for the departed, when she says: “May You rest with the saints, O Christ, the soul of Your departed servants, where there is no more pain, no more sadness, no more weeping, but eternal life.”¹⁶

Yet, the sinful passions of the soul do not die at the moment of death. Saint Macarius of Egypt says that: “The sinful soul, while still in the body,

¹³ Apud Constantin Cornițescu, *The Particular Judgement*, p. 873.

¹⁴ *Menologion for the month of February*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2002, 19th day, Matins, Canons, 9th Canticle, Glory..., 8th Ichos, p. 139.

¹⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The State of the Souls...*, p. 203.

¹⁶ *Euchologion*, including services, orders and prayers carried out by the priest for different needs in the Christians' life, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2002, Order of the Funeral of the Lay People, Theophan's Canon, Kontakion, 8th Ichos, p. 225.

spreads the stink of his bad deeds, but after death, he spreads it even worse. And, overwhelming him, they make him black and dark.”¹⁷

In contrast with the happiness of the just stands the unhappiness of the sinful. They shall be removed from the face of God (Matthew 7: 23), deprived of the communion with the saints, remaining to live in the company of the unclean spirits (Matthew 25: 41). Living around the unclean spirits means partaking of their way of living, means living in the continual solitude and hatred of those situated on that side. They are devoid of any joy, pray to torments. The qualms of conscience, as a restless worm, torments them ceaselessly (Mark 9: 48), while the fear of the unknown terrifies them (Matthew 22: 13).¹⁸ “The most terrible darkness of death is troubling my soul, and the prying of the devils always amazes me and gives me shivers...”¹⁹ For this reason, let us pray to the Master of life and death, saying

“Cease the attacks of the devils, which come upon me, O Lover of men, [the attacks] of those trying to kill my humble soul and endeavoring to throw me into perdition; make their counsels and their stalking [me] by night and by day and every hour powerless, and set me free, O my Master, from these; put an end to the much troubling cold wind of life, keep me safe from the Gehenna and from the eternal darkness, please, Christ, when You shall come in glory to judge the world, as an All Good.”²⁰

The state of unhappiness that follows the particular judgement is described by a part of the Orthodox theologians almost only as an anticipation of the much greater torments that will follow after the Final Judgement. The difference between the two judgements also consists in the fact that both the happiness and the torments will be borne after the final judgement not just by the souls, but also by the resurrected bodies. This thing also indicates a completion of the happiness and of the torments. The Orthodox teaching that after the resurrection of the bodies the happiness in heaven and the unhappiness from hell will be greater involves an understanding of

¹⁷ Saint Macarius of Egypt, *On the Departure of the Soul* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition about Life after Death*, translated from French by Marinela Bojin, Ed. Sofia, Bucharest, 2006, p. 77.

¹⁸ Constantin Cornițescu, *The Particular Judgement*, p. 874.

¹⁹ *The Great Octoechos*, 4th Ichos, Tuesday evening, at Lord, I have called out, The Chants of the Cross, 6th Chant, p. 321.

²⁰ *The Great Octoechos*, 5th Ichos, Tuesday evening, at Lord, I have called out, Chants to the Powers, 3rd Chant, p. 410.

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the happiness and of the unhappiness as communion or non communion, lived by the entire person, consisting in soul and body. This also makes some souls from heaven suffer among others for being connected to their unspiritualized bodies.²¹

Heaven and hell are also depicted in the funeral and memorial services of the dead of the Orthodox Church. Thus, the priest is praying to God for the one departed into eternity “that He may keep him safe from the gates of hell, from the eternal fire, from the Gehenna of fire and the He may take him to rest in the bosom of Abraham”²², in a place full of light, in a place of greenness, free from worries and pains:

“The God of the spirits and of all the bodies, [You,] Who has stepped on death and have ruined the devil and have given life to Your world, You Yourself, O Lord, give rest to the souls of Your departed servants, in a place full of light, with greenness and restfulness, from where all pain, sadness and weeping is gone. And may You forgive every mistake that they have done, by their words, by their deeds, or by their thought, as a good and people-loving God. Because there is no man alive that does not make mistakes; only You alone are sinless and Your justice is justice forever and Your word is the truth.”²³

Heaven is full of light and hell is full of darkness, as Christ Himself shows, calling it “outer darkness” (Matthew 8: 12). Saint Macarius the Egyptian shows that “The Lord settles the soul in His bosom and His light and grabs him from the mouth of darkness, showing in this way the two places meant for him.”²⁴

Saint John Chrysostom says that “coming out of the body, the soul, invisible for the physical eyes, is taken by the angels and taken either in the bosom of Abraham, if he is a believer, or in the prison of hell, if he is a sinner.”²⁵

²¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The State of the Souls...*, pp. 204, 206.

²² Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition about Life after Death*, translated from French by Marinela Bojin, Ed. Sofia, Bucharest, 2006, p. 170.

²³ *Euchologion*, Order of the Funeral of the Lay People, Prayer at the Litany of the Dead, pp. 204-205.

²⁴ Saint Macarius of Egypt, *Spiritual Homilies* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 171.

²⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, *On the Comfort in front of Death* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 171.

Saint Nicetas Stethatos speaks about the place where the soul goes immediately after death as follows:

“Out of the souls that depart from here, some are pure and with a sweet scent, resembling God, full of divine glory and all-pure light; these are the souls of the saints; separating themselves from the body, they shine like the Sun, due to their justice, wisdom and purity of their life. They are carried by angel friends and taken to the first Light – the supernatural, non-material light, not understood not even by the angels, God Himself, the One glorified and worshipped as Father, Son and Holy Spirit by the multitude of the innumerable powers from the above – ascending as third degree lights among those who are second degree lights. And arriving there, they go and bow in front of the throne of His glory, with holy and pure fear, rejoicing in the Spirit, having cherubim and seraphim and all the heavenly powers around them, by whom they acquire boldness. Then, on God’s commandment, each goes and gets united purely and fully with the angelic cohort of whose glory and order he has become worthy by the partaking of the Holy Spirit during this life here, working the things of God in the Church of the believers, unto the edification of Christ’s body. And he gets united to those like him, to live with them, resting and rejoicing under the protection of their wings until the universal resurrection, which shall happen on God’s command. Whereas other souls are black and very darkened, for their bad deeds, words and thoughts, for their bad habits and bad preoccupations and their inclination to evilness; these are the sinful souls, who leave their bodies with great pain and unwillingly, causing it much trouble and spreading an unbearable stench. These souls, full of darkness, stink and uncleanness, are driven against their will by cruel and dark angels, with great fear and awe, in the depths of hell, and put there as in a prison, deprived of light or comfort; and they are given to the bad and unclean spirit guarding that place, where the prince of darkness is bound with an eternal bind, to be given to the fire together with those like them, the dark devils, and they shall stay there with them for eternity; because, indeed by their acts and their deeds proved themselves friends of these [unclean spirits],

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lending their ears to their sly whispers and fulfilling their will to their own and others' perdition, making themselves examples of evilness in this life and leaving behind them only shame and a bad name."²⁶

At the same time, Marcus Eugenicus depicts the state of the just and of the sinners after the particular judgement as follows:

"Now the just and the sinners are in the places that they deserve. The first, in heaven, at the place of rest and free, stay together with the angels in front of God, as in the heaven from where Adam had himself chased away, and in which the faithful thief entered before others. The last are locked in hell and put in the lowest pit, in the darkness and in the shadow of death (Psalm 87: 6), as the holy king David says, or, according to Job's word, in the country of darkness and disorder, a land of darkness as darkness itself (Job 10: 22). Some are delighted, waiting with joy to enter the Kingdom and perfectly taste the promised goods. At the same time, the others remain in prison and in suffering, deprived of comfort, as some expecting their punishment, and see themselves given to torments."²⁷

Heaven and hell are not places that could be situated in a certain place, because the soul, being by its very nature without a body, cannot be settled in a place, and actually the settling in some place is not proper to it. By heaven and hell we understand non-material and unseen realities, "intelligible and non-physical places"²⁸, states, conditions, modes of existence in which the soul is either happy and fulfilled, or tormented and unfulfilled.

This settling of the just in heaven or of the sinners in hell is only provisional and during this time the just only rejoice "in part" and in an imperfect way of the heavenly happiness promised by Christ the Lord, and the sinners do not suffer all the torments of hell.²⁹

This thing is also shown by Saint Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, who affirms: "The souls of the pious remain in a better place, while the unjust and bad remain in a worse place, waiting there for the time of judgement."³⁰

²⁶ Saint Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, pp. 173-174.

²⁷ Marcus Eugenicus, *Second Homily on the Purifying Fire*, apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 175.

²⁸ Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 176.

²⁹ Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 179.

³⁰ Saint Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 180.

Saint Symeon of Thessaloniki says that

“the just soul receives after death from God joy and comfort according to his advancement in good, yet before the coming of Christ in glory, not even the holy souls reach perfection, receiving only the earnest of eternal life. As far as the sinners’ souls are concerned, they are in hell and in other dark places full of sorrow, tormented by the devils according to the dimensions of their evilness and lack of faith; yet, at the same time, they are not given to all the torments awaiting them.”³¹

A special answer to the question, “Where does the soul live after death?” is given as well by the Archimandrite Iustin Popović:

“According to the divine revelation, the soul after death lives in happiness, and there can be no full torment before the Final Judgement; in the absence of the body, the soul is simpler, and not full man. At the judgement undergone by every man, the souls are separated into two great cohorts: into just souls and sinful souls. For this reason, in the other world there are only two states, corresponding to each cohort, happiness or torment, having each numberless steps, and just two places: heaven or hell, which both have numberless dwellings, too.”³²

The Latin Fathers have the same conception, defending and supporting the idea of particular judgement and of the state of the souls after death in heaven or hell. Saint Hilarius says that “after death, the just are settled at rest, in the bosom of Abraham, while the sinners go to hell, these being provisional states, which only the Last Judgement will establish for eternity.”³³ Saint John Cassian states that the souls „begin to pre-taste, after the death of the body, the things prepared for them for that day of Judgement.”³⁴

³¹ Saint Symeon Of Thessaloniki, *The Fourth Answer to Gabriel of Penopole*, P.G. 155, 844-845, 873 apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 181.

³² Archimandrite Iustin Popović, *Dogmatic Theology of the Orthodox Church* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 183.

³³ Saint Hilarius, *Interpretation of the Psalms*, P.L. 9, 290, 322-323 apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, pp. 183-184.

³⁴ Saint John Cassian, *Spiritual Conversations* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 184.

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Saint Gregory the Great says that “the happiness of the just will increase after the Final Judgement, because then the body partakes of it as well, whereas immediately after death only the soul rejoices.”³⁵

The time in between the two judgements is not yet the eternity, because the souls of the saints go after death to Heaven, and after the universal resurrection they enter the Kingdom of Heaven, just as the sinners go to hell after death and after the universal resurrection they shall be thrown in the Gehenna of fire. However, we must not think that the Kingdom [of Heaven] is totally alien to the heaven and that the Gehenna and the hell are not at all related, except that both the heaven and the hell are temporary, and only after the final act of the Universal Judgement shall become eternal. For the just, the Judgement will mean the eternization of their happiness of now and the perfect enjoyment of the heavenly goods. And for those in chains in hell, there is still hope that their fate could be turned into a better one, by the prayers of the Church and of those who will have prayed for them here, on earth. The temporary character of this interval also comes out of the fact that the soul is separated from the body throughout this period, man’s soul being in an unnatural state, because, according to his nature, man has a dichotomic composition, namely he is both body and soul, and the loosing of the connection between the components that make him a man cannot last forever.³⁶

“Being tormented [by their persecutors], rejoicing, the saints were crying out: these are a change for us bringing us closer to our Master; because instead of the wounds now being inflicted to our bodies, at the Resurrection, bright clothing shall flourish on us; instead of prisons, [we shall partake of] the Heaven, and for having been condemned with the thieves, [we shall be made] worthy of spending our time with the angels. For their prayers, O Lord, save our souls.”³⁷

Saint Irenaeus says that

“During this period of time, the soul is in a state of expectation: awaiting the universal resurrection, when it will join again the

³⁵ Saint Gregory the Great, *Dialogue about Death* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, p. 184.

³⁶ Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, pp. 186, 187, 192.

³⁷ *The Great Octoechos*, 5th Ichos, Saturday morning, Aposticha, The Martyrs’ Troparia, 3rd Chant, p. 455.

body, and the Final Judgement, when together they will be questioned. Therefore, the souls go to the place ordained to them by God, which cannot be seen with the physical eyes, to wait for the universal resurrection there, when the soul will re-join the body; and people will resurrect in the body, as the Lord has been resurrected and so, [being made] complete, they will sit in front of God, to be judged.”³⁸

Thus, it could be said that the happiness of heaven is an eternal mysterious death and resurrection of man in God, together with Christ as man. And this is a continuation of their mysterious death and resurrection on earth. It is not by accident that the Revelation presents not just Christ, as the stabbed Lamb, but also the souls of all those who have been stabbed for God’s word, as staying under the Lamb’s altar of sacrifice (Revelation 6: 9). The divine light in which these souls will rejoice and which they will see, is going to be the light passed through His humanity. The divinity in which people ascend, the divinity accessible to them, is the divinity irradiating in the Christ the Man. Christ dies and is resurrected in heaven with all those whom He comprises in Himself, with all those who form an entirety, a glorified body with Him, with all the people who died and have been resurrected also on the earth with Him. If they are all a mysterious body with Christ, they are all carried in His acts. The sacrifice, not just for Christ, but also for all, has a certain mysterious permanence. Begun on earth, it lasts for eternity, as a sort of “the other side of the resurrection”³⁹, collaboration, a synergical act, eternized, between man and the Man-God.

In general, we, people, have got used to making the mistake of visualizing what cannot be seen, and of seeing everything as material. Saint Marcus of Ephesus says that “heaven is not a physical place where the angels live like us, but a spiritual place surpassing the senses, and if we could call it a place in some way, it ought to be called the place of God.”⁴⁰ And Saint John of Damascus says that

“the place of God would be that partaking to a greater extent of His energy or grace. For this reason, heaven is His throne,

³⁸ Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, pp. 195-196.

³⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The State of the Souls...*, pp. 559-560.

⁴⁰ Apud Archbishop Lazarus Puhalo, *The Soul, The Body and Death*, translation by Virgil Baidoc, Ed. Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 113.

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because there are the angels accomplishing His will; and again a spiritual place is the one where the spiritual and non-physical nature is present in a super-sensible and living manner.”⁴¹

This is also why the texts of cult of the Church include rather teachings on the mistake of people’s fall from the heavenly state, express the state of repentance and regret for the loss of the primordial happiness and only to a lesser extent offer information on the physical or geographic place of heaven:

“You have lifted me up again, me, the one who had fallen terribly, from heaven, by the bitter counsel of the killer of people; on Golgotha You have lifted me up again, Christ, by the wood healing the curse of the wood and killing the snake that had killed me by slyness, You have given me the divine life. O Lord, glory to Your divine crucifixion.”⁴²; and again, „Cry for me, angelic cohorts, the beauties of heaven and the adornments of the plants from there, me, the badly fooled and gone astray far from God.”⁴³

The teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Church tells that “heaven is in the heavens, and hell is in the bowels of the earth.”⁴⁴ Leaving aside the question whether or not heaven and hell are “places”, we can tell for sure that are not places from this world. Saint John Chrysostom exhorts us, when we wish to know more about hell and heaven:

“You are asking where hell is; but why do you need to know? You need to know that hell exists, not where it is hidden... My opinion is that it is somewhere outside this world... Let us endeavor to find out not where it is, but how to avoid it.”⁴⁵

Therefore, heaven and hell are not places that could be situated in a certain place, because the soul, being by its nature non-physical, cannot be settled and actually it is not natural to it to be settled in any place.

⁴¹ Saint John of Damascus, *Theological Discourses* apud Lazarus Puhalo, *The Soul, The Body and Death*, p. 113.

⁴² *The Great Octoechos*, 4th Ichos, Wednesday morning, 1st Chant, p. 323.

⁴³ *Triodion*, The Sunday before the Lent when diary products cease to be used, Matins, The Canon of Christopher the Prime-Secretary of the Emperor, 4th Canticle, 2nd Chant, 4th Ichos, p. 103.

⁴⁴ Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, *The Soul after Death*, translation by Dana Cocargeanu, Ed. Sofia, 2007, p. 151.

⁴⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies to the Romans 31, 3-4* apud Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, *The Soul after Death*, p. 154.

By heaven and hell are designated non-material and non-visible realities: “You have made a heir of the non-material heaven out of the thief who has acknowledged You on the cross as God.”⁴⁶ Sure is the fact that in heaven the soul dwells with God and sees His glory, partaking of the divine light and of all the other energies of God: of life, of peace, of love, of the heavenly happiness. In hell, on the contrary, the soul is deprived of God’s loving presence, of His light and His energies; consequently, hell is seen as a place of darkness, torment, suffering and as the dwelling of death.⁴⁷

Therefore, from all that has been mentioned above, it results that the souls’ fate is settled by God’s Particular Judgement provisionally until the Universal Judgement, and the souls found at the judgement able of the communion with God are not nailed into a state of motionless and individual contemplation of the divine essence, but in a communion of love with the Holy Trinity and with one another, much superior to that on earth. They see the face of God and are not isolated from one another. They praise together God’s glory and serve together in front of the divine throne; and Christ is leading them to the springs of life, namely deeper and deeper into His love, from which they sip and yet it never dries out (Revelation 7: 9-17; 15: 2-3). It is not a motionless contemplation, but a manifestation of love both from the just and from the Trinitarian God. This communion wants to be ever deeper, which is proper to communion (...). God does not stay passive in front of a reason contemplating Him, but communicates Himself to man by love, making His initiative felt in the endless act of His self-giving. As a Person or as a Trinity of Persons united in a supreme love, God is a depth of life and of love of which the soul wants to partake increasingly more, and God communicates Himself more and more, the soul growing not just in knowledge, but in his entire being, in an ever deeper union, in an increasingly deeper likeness, in a more and more profound deification. God is acknowledged as light, yet not theoretically, but with all His being [perceived] as mystery.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Penticostarion*, namely the Holy Services from the Sunday of Easter to the Sunday of All the Saints, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1999, *Duminica a treia după Paști, a Sfințelor femei mironosițe și a Dreptului Iosif* (The 3rd Sunday after Easter, of the Holy Mhyrr-bearers and of the Just Joseph, Matins, Canons, The Canon of the Holy Mhyrr-bearers by St. Andrew of Crete, 9th Canticle, 2nd Chant, 4th Ichos, p. 105.

⁴⁷ Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Orthodox Tradition...*, pp. 176-177.

⁴⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The State of the Souls...*, pp. 207-208.

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Consequently, the just, the people who have made themselves well-pleasing to God, go, leaving the earth, directly in heaven, where they meet the just of the Old Testament, whom God took from hell into heaven at the glorified Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ; God only let behind in hell those who were condemned for the entire eternity, and whose number will grow ceaselessly until the Universal Judgement and will be completed by those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Not just those who do not believe in the Saviour but also those believers who have not repented on earth and who, as a consequence, are more or less burdened by sins, will go to hell after their death.