



006 Thursday, Oct. 3, 1983

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : May 2, 2016

Dear Alison,

I seem to recall your mentioning ghosts and such things in a letter several years ago, but I don't remember saying anything in reply. I think these things are in a category similar to that of details concerning Antichrist and the last days: one should know something about them so as not to be led astray by false doctrines and "revelations," but at the same time it can be spiritually dangerous to be too preoccupied with them. As a matter of fact I am somewhat interested in them myself, and I plan to devote a chapter of my book to them, since I think they will have an important (negative) role to play in the near future. The prevalence of books on the subject, both by spiritists and by scientists, is perhaps only a preparation for the approaching seduction of many souls who, having no knowledge or experience of these matters, can be easily led astray by a few spectacular "phenomena." I think it quite possible that the words of Our Lord, "There will be false Christs and false prophets, who will rise up and show great signs and wonders, so that if it were possible, even the elect would be deceived" (St. Matthew XXIV, 24), as well as the false miracles of the "prophet" of Antichrist (Apocalypse, ch. 13), who even brings down "fire from heaven" — that these may refer, among other things, to very extraordinary psychical and demonic phenomena, which materialistic people will have to accept as "miracles."

I have no doubt of the authenticity of many of the phenomena described in books like the one you read. The accounts of scientists are of course more trustworthy than those of spiritists, but only as regards the specific details of observed phenomena; never trust the interpretation of phenomena offered even by the most reputable scientists, for they usually know nothing at all, and never enough, either of spiritual experience or Christian doctrine.

Concerning the dead, Orthodox tradition has preserved much, both of theory and of practice, that the Catholic Church has long since abandoned. Of practice, there is the custom of remembering the dead at every Liturgy and at other special services. Everyone present who so desires submits a list of his own (one list for the living, one for the dead), and the priest reads all the names aloud, besides his own lists. If many people are present this sometimes takes 15 or 20 minutes (which the Catholic Church would surely regard as "inefficient" and a "waste of time"!), but it is a wonderful sign of the unity of all believers, living and dead, present and absent. Another sign of the Orthodox attitude to the dead is the marvelous joyousness — restrained, but still joyous — of the services for the dead, with the constant refrain of "Alleluia" and the emphasis placed rather upon rebirth in a new realm than upon the departure from this world. The coffin of a dead man is placed in Church for the whole day of the requiem service, and other services are celebrated while it is there; the holy atmosphere is beneficial for the departed, and I have found it very beneficial and comforting



for myself when I attend such services. I have told non-Orthodox friends and relatives of this custom and I am always surprised at their uniform reaction: “How depressing!” I find it to be just the opposite; and how can it be otherwise, if we believe in Heaven? It can be nothing but good to be reminded of death and the next life. Another custom is for relatives of the dead to sit up all night (one at a time) the first night reading the psalter over the body.

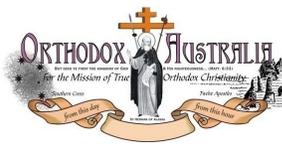
These customs, of course, are themselves based upon definite doctrines: first and most general, that the dead are alive in another realm; second and more specific, that the soul remains in the immediate vicinity of the body for a time and receives immediate benefit from religious services and atmosphere. The most generally accepted account of this is that of St. Macarius of Alexandria, as revealed to him by an Angel to explain the Church’s custom of holding special services on the third, ninth, and 40th days after death. (The Orthodox Church preserves this custom even today, as well as holding memorial services on the anniversaries of death, name-day, etc.)

“When, on the third day, the body is brought to the Temple, the soul of the dead man receives from his Guardian Angel relief from the grief which he feels at parting from his body. This he receives because of the oblation and praise which are offered for him in God’s Church, whence there arises in him a blessed hope. For during the space of two days the soul is permitted to wander at will over the earth, with the Angels which accompany it. Therefore the soul, since it loves its body, sometimes hovers around the house in which it parted from the body; sometimes around the coffin wherein its body has been placed: and thus it passes those days like a bird which seeks for itself a nesting-place. But the beneficent soul wanders through those places where it was wont to perform deeds of righteousness.

“On the third day He Who rose again from the dead commands that every soul, in imitation of His own Resurrection, shall be brought to heaven, that it may do reverence to the God of all. Wherefore the Church has the blessed custom of celebrating oblation and prayers on the third day for the soul.

“After the soul has done reverence to God, He orders that it shall be shown the varied and fair abodes of the Saints and the beauty of Paradise. All these things the Soul views during six days, marvelling and glorifying God, the Creator of all. And when the soul has beheld all these things, it is changed, and forgets all the sorrow which it felt in the body. But if it be guilty of sins, then, at the sight of the delights of the Saints, it begins to wail, and to reproach itself, saying, ‘Woe is me! How vainly did I pass my time in the world! Engrossed in the satisfaction of my desires, I passed the greater part of my life in heedlessness, and obeyed not God as I ought, that I, also, might be vouchsafed these graces and glories. Woe is me, poor wretch!’ After having thus viewed all the joys of the Just for the space of six days, the Angels lead the soul again to do reverence to God. Therefore the Church does well, in that she celebrates service and oblation for the soul on the ninth day.

“After its second reverence to God, the Master of all commands that the soul be conducted to Hell,



and there shown the places of torment, the different divisions of Hell; and the divers torments of the ungodly, which cause the souls of sinners that find themselves therein to groan continually, and to gnash their teeth. Through these various places of torment the soul is borne during thirty days, trembling lest it also be condemned to imprisonment therein.

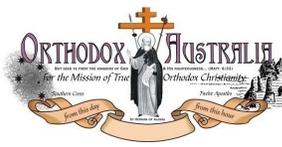
“On the fortieth day the soul is again taken to do reverence to God: and then the Judge determines the fitting place of its incarceration, according to its deeds. Thus the Church does rightly in making mention, upon the fortieth day, of the baptized dead.”

If all of this is true, of course, there is a very basic error in the book you read: that souls remain on earth for an indefinite time in a kind of purgatory: they remain, instead, for only a few days. On the other hand, it is still true that the dead do sometimes communicate with the living, both from Heaven and from Hell, because neither Heaven nor Hell is located in “space” but in a spiritual dimension; both of them, perhaps, are right before our eyes, but we are spiritually blind and cannot see them. The Mother of God and many Saints have often appeared to men, and occasionally a dead relative or friend appears to someone for a special purpose. Among Orthodox people I have heard of someone in Hell (Orthodoxy has no “purgatory”; Hell is the place of purification as well as of punishment) who appeared to a relative to encourage her prayers for him, and of someone else (a suicide) in Hell appearing to his sister in dreadful torment to beg her to stop praying for him, since her prayer only increased his torment and he was irrevocably damned. Certainly the dead who are able to do so pray for us, as we do for them, but judging from the careless preparation most people make for death, they themselves are greatly in need of prayer and are probably unable to give much help to the living. For those who are unprepared, there must be a great shock and a great sense of helplessness upon arriving in a realm wherein every earthly talent and power becomes weakness and impotence, and only spiritual power is of avail.

The reason why it is dangerous to be too preoccupied with these matters (as well as things like clairvoyance and extrasensory perception, which are a spiritual gift of some saints, but often a spiritual evil when used by men insufficiently pure) is that, belonging to the realm of the mind and spirit, they are especially liable to the interference of demons, who live in these realms. The authentic phenomena of spiritism, for example (and there are many of them that cannot be explained as hoaxes), are probably primarily due to the activity of demons; real mediums are apparently actually possessed to some degree by demons masquerading as the dead. If there is a rare case of actual contact with the dead through spiritism (do you remember how Saul contacted the ghost of the prophet Samuel through the Witch of Endor?), the demons take advantage of it for their own purposes.

Friday

The only thing I accomplished yesterday was writing these three pages, having had to work for twelve hours. I’m a janitor in a restaurant at night (until three or four in the morning), which is hard work but quiet. Being a busboy is easier, but one has to smile at people and be properly servile. I



have the same horror you do of the “business world,” and I almost become hysterical when I have to find a job. Once I find a job it’s all right; it’s rather a waste of time, but at least it makes it difficult to become overly proud. I think I lost my last job because they sensed my heart wasn’t in my work, which it certainly wasn’t.

Thank you for your kind offer of a place to go in time of need. Perhaps there will be such a time. Speaking of my family, I saw them last week, and it is obvious that they are becoming more and more worried about me. They would have been only too happy if I had followed a normal worldly vocation, but they set their hopes so high on me and now I turn out to be a religious “fanatic” — so I imagine they must...

A young Russian friend of mine who lives in Monterey showed them some slides of Russian monasteries and churches in North America, and they thought they were “quaint” but old-fashioned, etc. But what really shocked them, my father especially, was a photograph of an old monk who had spent forty years in his cell and hardly even spoke with other people. He has perhaps attained to a high spiritual state, but all my parents could see was the example of a totally “wasted life.” I fear I became rather desperate when I spoke of a life of prayer and spiritual attainment, and how the true values are not of this world but of the next — only to meet with total incomprehension and the suggestion that too much religion is really “sickness.” Well, where communication breaks down at least prayer is still possible; but it makes me both angry and sad to think of the many Protestant ministers posing as preachers of “Christianity,” but actually leading their flock down the path of seduction and leaving them totally unprepared for the severe realities of the next life. I met my parents’ minister; he never once spoke of God or religion, and on hearing I was writing a religious book he seemed anxious to change to topic of conversation.

I have more to say, but I had better send this while I can. Thank you for the photograph; I will try to get a recent one from my father. I really don’t know where the town of Warsaw is; it would be a great good fortune if your town is the one. You might try to find out if there is such an address there. I am enclosing some literature you may find interesting. I have sent to the monastery for some other things, including a very interesting account of after-death experience.

Please remember me in your prayers,
In Christ,
Eugene