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Metropolitan of Ephesus (1392–1444)  
Four Works Against the Latins Claims of the Purifying Fire

## Ten arguments showing that there is no purifying fire

1. Among those who see the glory of God, one sees it more perfectly than another—namely, the one who is more purified sees it more perfectly. The concept of "being more purified" introduces the concept of "being less purified," which is to say, being less capable of perceiving the vision of God. For if the greater corresponds to the greater, then likewise the lesser corresponds to the lesser. Yet even the one who has committed some small sins will also see God without experiencing the purifying fire, because he has instead the sufficient loving-kindness of God, according to the words of the great Dionysius, who speaks of divine matters: "To those who have lived virtuously, rewards for their radiant and divine life are granted by the righteous judgments of God, while the defilements they committed through human weakness are forgiven by the goodness of divine loving-kindness; for, as Scripture says, no one is pure from defilement."

2. Furthermore, if certain things are identical in relation to something else, then they are identical in relation to each other (i.e., if "A = C" and "B = C," then "A = B"). If this is so, then by their operation (energy) they do not differ from each other due to their identical nature. Consequently, the result of their operation will not be different but identical. And in accordance with the result of the operation of purification—which consists in turning away from sin, turning toward virtue, and acting upon it—the vision of God is determined. But the pure does not differ from the pure. If all who, having hated sin, performed many good deeds—or did not, because death prevented them—nevertheless, as those who died with good will, are purified through purgatory, then all of them, both the purified and the pure, do not differ from one another; nor do they differ from those who departed life with good will and good deeds. For in the disposition of their will, they are identical, and the lack of deeds is compensated for by passing through the purifying fire. Thus, it follows that neither in operation (energy) nor in the corresponding result do the blessed differ from one another. Since their operation, purified by it, is identical, the result will also equally follow as identical. Therefore, all will see the glory of God equally. But the Church teaches the opposite of this, saying that there are many mansions in the prepared vision of God (John 14:2); from the order and degrees of which the distinction becomes evident.

3. Furthermore, in purified souls, the evil for which there was purgatorial fire is no longer observed; for purification must necessarily result in the removal of evil. But evil and good are opposed to one another as deficiency is opposed to (the fullness of) form. Where there is no deficiency observed, it necessarily follows that their form is perfect, for imperfection arises only due to deficiency. Thus, the purified soul will have perfect goodness, which is understood as "blessedness." But if many perfect things share the same form, they do not differ from one another in the concept of goodness but only differ from one another in number. And since the corresponding result, which is blessedness, is granted only on account of purification, it follows that all the souls of the blessed are in the same vision of God, in which blessedness consists. But this is not true! For the Lord says in the Gospels that there are many mansions in the Father's house (John

14:2), and many Saints, whom it is not fitting to disbelieve, have understood this to signify distinctions in the blessed life. Thus, this is how it stands.

4. Furthermore, turning away from sin is turning toward God and love for virtue, through which we ascend to God. But if to a rightly disposed will is added the practice of virtues, then nothing is lacking. If, however, the soul has an unerring will but the practice of virtues was interrupted by the blade of death, the difference between this soul and the soul that has both will and deeds will only be that it will fall short in terms of deeds, that is, in terms of virtue. If, therefore, this soul also becomes a participant in blessedness without suffering, it is clear that it will not be deemed worthy of the same as the perfected souls. Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of different mansions. If, however, due to its lack, it endures punishment and passes through purgatory, and thereby someday equals the perfected soul, compensating for what was lacking through suffering, then all will equally behold God. This, being an absurdity, is to be rejected.

5. Furthermore, for the attainment of blessedness, a righteousness of will is required, which is characterized by a general good disposition of the soul, and good deeds worthy of reward must also follow it. But the movement of the will and the deeds are necessarily limited to the present life; this is also your view, and you say that for those in purgatory the will is immovable. But if there is no movement of the will in any direction, then one cannot be more deserving than another. Thus, even if souls are not purified by fire, they will not be less worthy of the vision of God, since they died with a good disposition of soul, which is the primary requirement for blessedness. For if purgatory does not transform the will from evil to good—and it is precisely a right disposition of will that is required for blessedness—then purgatory offers nothing in this sense. And what serves no purpose exists in vain; but God has created nothing in vain. Therefore, purgatory does not exist.

6. Furthermore, the justice of eternal torment is based on the immutability of the evil will in sinners; for to a will that eternally sins must correspond eternal punishment. Conversely, it follows that if one who remains eternally unchanging in evil is subjected to eternal punishment, then one who does not endure eternal punishment must not have an immutable will. For if one who has an immutable will in relation to evil is in eternal torment, then one who has an immutable will in relation to good has no need of punishment and instead is worthy of crowns. Meanwhile, as you assert, those who are purified by the purging fire have an immutable will. Therefore, they have no need to be purified by that fire.

7. Furthermore, unchangeability in good disposition leads to sinlessness in a person. For if love for goodness and fervent desire for it cause one not to desire evil, and when a person deeply loves one thing, they turn away from its opposite—while evil is opposed to good and sinfulness to virtue—it follows that love for virtue expels sinfulness. For it is written: **"I said: I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my heart"** (Ps. 31:5). And also: **"Declare your iniquities first, so that you may be justified"** (Isa. 43:26). But you (Latins) say that for those in purgatory, the will cannot change, being wholly good; thus, it turns out that the sinless suffer and unjustly bear punishment.

8. Furthermore, the will can change toward evil as long as the soul is united with the body. But once it is separated from the body, it will be found in what it desired and will remain unchangeable in that state. According to this disposition, it receives either reward or punishment, and does not pass through purgatory.

9. Furthermore, it is more consistent with the goodness of God to not overlook even a small good than to consider a small sin worthy of punishment. However, small good in those who have committed great sins does not receive a reward because of the predominance of evil. Likewise, small evil in those who were righteous in great deeds does not lead to punishment because their better deeds prevail. For if there is no majority in favor of one side, then naturally there is no minority either. Therefore, one should not believe in purgatory.

10. Finally, just as there is small good in those who are otherwise wicked, so there is small evil in those who are otherwise good. But small good in the former cannot lead to the reward given for good deeds, but only brings about a difference in punishment. Similarly, small evil does not lead to punishment but creates a difference in the degree of enjoyment. Therefore, one should not believe in purgatory.

#### Works Mentioned:

1. Dionysius the Areopagite, PG. 3, col. 561, d.

## Refutation of the Latins concerning the Purifying Fire p.1

1. Since it is our duty, while preserving our Orthodoxy and the dogmas handed down by the Fathers of the Church, to respond to what you have said with love, we bring forward each argument and testimony you have written, as a general rule, so that a brief and clear answer and resolution may follow for each of them.

Thus, at the beginning of your report, you say: “If truly penitent souls have departed this life in love (for God) before they had time to satisfy for their sins or faults with worthy fruits, their souls are purified after death by purifying sufferings; but for their relief (or ‘liberation’) from these sufferings, they are aided by the help rendered to them by the faithful living, such as prayers, liturgies, alms, and other works of piety.”

To this we respond as follows: that it is certain that the souls of the departed in faith are undoubtedly aided by the liturgies, prayers, and alms offered for them, and this custom has been in force from ancient times, as testified by many and various sayings of the Teachers, both Latin and Greek, spoken and written in different times and places. But regarding the notion that souls are liberated through some help of purifying suffering and a temporary fire that possesses such (purifying) power, we do not find this in the Scriptures, in the prayers and hymns said for the departed, nor in the words of the Teachers. However, we have accepted that it is possible to assist and provide some small help to souls contained in hell and already given over to eternal torments, either by actual deeds or through an impossible-to-hope-for expectation, although not in the sense of completely releasing them from their torment or offering hope for eventual release. This is evidenced by the words of St. Macarius the Egyptian, who, upon finding a skull in the desert, was taught about this by it through the action of divine power. And St. Basil the Great, in the prayers read on Pentecost, writes the following verbatim: “Who also in this all-perfect and salvific feast of purification grants to those held in hell to receive [help], giving us great hope of relief for those held by the ones who hold them in defilement, and to be comforted by You.” If, however, the souls departed from this life in faith and love, but carrying with them certain faults, whether small ones that they did not repent of at all, or large ones about which they repented but did not manifest the fruits of repentance, such souls, we believe, must be purified from such sins, but not by some purifying fire or by a specific punishment in some place (for, as we have said, this has not been handed down to us); rather, some must be purified at the very departure from the body, through fear alone, as St. Gregory the Great explicitly shows. Meanwhile, others must be purified after departure from the body, still remaining in the same earthly place, before they come to worship God and are granted the blessed dwellings; or if their sins were more grievous and bound them for a longer period, they are held in hell, not to remain in fire and torment forever, but as though in prison and detention under guard. All such souls, we affirm, are helped by prayers and liturgies offered for them, with the cooperation of divine goodness and mercy, which immediately despises and forgives some sins committed through human weakness, as St. Dionysius the Great says in his Reflections on the Mystery of the Holy Departed; while other sins, after a certain time, are forgiven or alleviated

through righteous judgments, either entirely or by reducing their responsibility until the Final Judgment. And thus, we see no need for any other punishment or purification by fire: for some are purified by fear, others by the torment of conscience that consumes them more fiercely than any fire, and others by the very terror of the divine glory and the uncertainty of the future, as it will be. And that this is more painful and punitive than anything else is shown by experience, and St. John Chrysostom testifies in almost all or most of his moral homilies, affirming this, as does the divine ascetic Dorotheus in his *Treatise on Conscience*. As for the notion that the uncertainty of the future torments the punished more than the punishment itself, the Teachers say this, as for example, Gregory the Theologian, in his *Homily on the Destruction of a City*, says the following: “They will receive an unspeakable light and the vision of the Holy and Royal Trinity, but these, along with others—better to say—before others, will receive the torment: to be rejected by God, and the unending torment of conscience.”

2. Therefore, we pray to God and believe that the deceased should be freed from such things, and not from any other torment or fire, aside from the torments and fire that are proclaimed for eternity. And that, moreover, the souls of the departed are freed from their imprisonment in hell, as from some kind of prison, is testified by many, including Theophanes the Confessor, called the "Inscribed," because of his testimony for the icon of Christ, which was sealed with his blood. In one of the canons for the departed, he prays for them as follows: “Free Thy servants who are in hell from tears and sighs, O Savior” (cf. Ps. 31:5). Do you hear? — “tears,” he says, and “sighs,” not some punishment or purifying fire. If, however, there is any mention of fire in these hymns and prayers, it is not of a temporary and purifying fire, but of that eternal fire and unceasing punishment, for the Saints, moved by compassion and mercy for their fellow men, desiring and daring to do the almost impossible, pray to deliver the deceased in faith. For thus says the holy Theodore the Studite, the Confessor and witness of the Truth, at the beginning of his canon for the departed: “Let us all pray to Christ, who from the ages makes remembrance of the dead today, that He may deliver them from the eternal fire in the faith of the departed and the hope of eternal life.” And then, in another troparion, in the fifth ode of the canon, he says: “Deliver from the unquenchable fire, from the impenetrable darkness, from the gnashing of teeth, from the worm that endlessly torments, and from every torment, O our Savior, all those who have died faithfully.” Where is the “purifying fire” here? And if it existed at all, where would it be more appropriate for a saint to mention it than here? Whether the saints are heard by God when they pray for such souls is not for us to investigate, but they themselves, knowing this and moved by the Spirit dwelling in them, knew it; and likewise, the Lord Christ, who gave the command to pray for our enemies and who prayed for those crucifying Him, knew this as well. And though someone may say that when we pray for such people, we are not heard by God, yet all that depends on us, we fulfill; and some of the saints, praying not only for the faithful but for the wicked, were heard, and by their prayers, they snatched them from eternal torment, as, for example, the First Martyr Thecla did for Falconius, and as the divine Gregory the Great did, as it is told, for Emperor Trajan.

3. Therefore, prayers and liturgies are offered for all such people by the Church and by us. That the power of these prayers for the especially mysterious Sacrifice reaches those who already enjoy blessedness with God is evident from the prayers of the liturgy composed by the great John Chrysostom, in which we say: "We offer to You this verbal service for those who have fallen asleep in the faith: the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the confessors, the ascetics, and for every righteous soul that has completed its life in the faith." For, although we do not ask God to grant them blessings (which they already possess), we give thanks for them, and we do this in their honor; thus, a Sacrifice is made for them and reaches them. If we do ask (for them from God), there is nothing surprising in this, for the divine commentator Dionysius the Areopagite, in his Reflections on the Mystery Performed for the Holy Departed, says the following: "For those who have lived in holiness, the hierarch intercedes with God for a bright and divine life, suitably rewarded according to God's righteous judgments, and for the promised blessings, which are to be fully granted, as if proclaiming divine judgments and interceding for divine gifts as their reward, showing symbolically to the present that the blessings he prays for in the sacred service will be perfectly granted to those who have died according to divine life." Thus, when this action extends to all, and through prayers and the sacred mysteries assistance is rendered almost to all who have died in faith, as has been shown, we see no essential need for this help to be delivered only to those in the purifying fire.

4. After this, a little later, you sought to prove the dogma of purifying fire, first referring to what is said in the book of Maccabees, where it is written: "It is holy and profitable to pray for the dead, that they may be released from their sins" (2 Macc. 12:46); and then, citing from the Gospel of Matthew the passage in which the Savior declares that "**whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come**" (Matt. 12:31 and parallels), you say that from this it can be seen that there is forgiveness of sins in the life to come.

But what does not follow from this in any way is the concept of purifying fire, as clear as day: for what is the connection between forgiveness and purification by fire or punishment? For if forgiveness of sins is accomplished through prayers or by divine mercy alone, there is no need for punishment or purification. But if punishment, as well as purification, is established (by God)—for through the first the second is accomplished, and they would be pointless if they did not result in purification—then it seems pointless to offer prayers (for the dead) and sing of divine mercy. Therefore, these references do not so much prove the existence of purifying fire as they refute it: for the forgiveness of sins, for those who have sinned, is presented as an action of some royal power and mercy, and not as a release from punishment or purification.

5. Thirdly, the passage taken from the First Epistle of the blessed Paul to the Corinthians, where he, reasoning about the building upon the foundation which is Christ: — "**gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble**" — adds: "**For the Day of the Lord will show it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test the work of each one, what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire**" (1 Cor. 3:11–15) — it seems that this introduces the

concept of a purifying fire more than anything else, but in fact, it refutes it more than anything. For, first of all, the divine Apostle calls it not purifying, but testing; then, he proclaims that through it both good and honorable works must pass, and such works, clearly, do not need any purification; furthermore, he says that those who bring evil works, after those works are burned, will suffer loss, whereas those who are being purified, in addition to not suffering loss, gain even more; then, he says that this will take place in "that day," namely, the Day of Judgment and the age to come. To suppose the existence of a purifying fire after that dreadful Second Coming of the Judge and the final judgment — is this not the most absurd thing? For Scripture does not convey anything like this, but the One who will judge us says: "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46), and again: "Those who have done good will rise to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:29); so there is absolutely no intermediate place. After separating all those judged into two parts, placing some on His right hand and others on His left, and calling the former "sheep" and the latter "goats," He, without showing any indication of those who must be purified by that (purifying) fire, does not reveal any such thing. It seems that the fire which the Apostle speaks of is the same one that the Prophet David speaks of: "A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about" (Ps. 49:3); and again: "A fire goes before Him and burns up His enemies round about" (Ps. 96:3). Even the Prophet Daniel speaks of this fire: "A river of fire streamed forth, proceeding from before Him" (Dan. 7:10). Since the saints do not bring any evil deeds or signs of evil with them, this fire will reveal them to be even brighter, like gold tested in the furnace, or like the stone asbestus, which, as they say, when placed in fire, appears to be charred, but when removed from the fire, becomes even cleaner, as though washed with water; just as the bodies of the three Holy Youths were in the Babylonian furnace. But sinners, bringing evil with them, will be seized by this fire as the suitable material for it, and it will immediately set them ablaze, and their "work," that is, their evil disposition or action (energy), will burn and completely destroy it, depriving them of what they brought with them, namely, their evil burden, yet it will "save" them, that is, it will preserve and keep them forever, so that they do not undergo total destruction, along with their evil.

6. This interpretation of the Apostle's words is also deemed appropriate by the divine Father John Chrysostom (whom we call "Paul's Mouth," just as he is called "Christ's Mouth"), explaining the Epistle; in this case, Paul speaks through Chrysostom, as it was revealed through the vision of Proclus, his disciple and successor on the throne. Chrysostom dedicated a special treatise to this one statement, so that the followers of Origen would not use these apostolic words to support their way of thinking (which seems more fitting for them than for you), and would not bring harm to the Church by introducing the end of hellish torment and the ultimate restoration (τελείαν ἀποκατάτασιν) of sinners. For the expression that the sinner "will be saved as though through fire" means that he will remain tormented in the fire and will not be destroyed along with his evil deeds and sinful disposition. This is also stated by Basil the Great in the "Moralia," when interpreting the Psalm verse: "The voice of the Lord breaking the flame of fire," saying: "The fire, prepared for the

torment of the devil and his angels, is divided by the voice of the Lord, so that it may have two powers: one – burning, and the other – enlightening; the tormenting and punishing power of that fire is preserved for those deserving punishment; the enlightening and illuminating power is intended for those who are to be illuminated. Thus, the voice of the Lord, breaking and dividing the flame of fire, allows the dark part to be the fire of torment, while the non-burning part remains the light of joy." Therefore, it appears that this dividing and separating of the fire will occur when those passing through it with bright and shining deeds will appear even brighter, and those who bring them will become heirs of light and receive that eternal reward, while those who bring evil and easily burned deeds, punished by their loss, will forever remain in the fire, inheriting salvation, which is worse than destruction, for this is what the expression "to be saved" truly means – that they will not experience the destructive force of fire and will not be utterly destroyed along with their evil. Following these Fathers, many other of our Teachers understood this passage in the same way. However, if anyone interprets it differently, and understands "salvation" as "deliverance from punishment," and "passing through fire" as "purgatory," such a person, if we may put it this way, has completely misunderstood this passage. And it is not surprising, for many of the Teachers seem to interpret Scriptural passages differently, and not all have arrived at an equally exact understanding; for it is impossible for the same text, transmitted with different interpretations, to correspond equally to all these understandings. However, we must choose the most important ones, those that most align with the Church's dogmas, and place the others in second place. Therefore, we will not deviate from the interpretation of the Apostle's words given above, even if Augustine, Gregory the Great, or any other of your Teachers provided a different (inaccurate) interpretation, for such an interpretation supports the idea of a temporary purgatory less than it supports Origen's teaching, which speaks of the final restoration of souls through that fire and deliverance from torment. This was condemned and anathematized by the Fifth Ecumenical Council and definitively rejected as a disgrace for the Church.

7. Thus, this is our response to the Scriptural passages you provided. Then, wishing to present the sayings of the divine Fathers that support the doctrine of purgatorial fire, you first quoted some words from the Fifth Ecumenical Council, which states that everything must follow the Fathers whose sayings you intended to present, fully accepting what they said, among whom were Augustine and Ambrose, who, it seems, teach more clearly than others about this purgatorial fire. But these words are unknown to us, for we do not have the book of the acts of that Council, so we ask you to provide it, if it exists in Greek. For we are quite surprised that in the mentioned text, Theophilus is listed among the other Teachers, who, in general, is known not for any scripture but for his notorious reputation due to his fury against Chrysostom, and who, based on this murder and other injustices, though after death, was deposed and anathematized in a letter attributed to the blessed Pope Innocent.

8. Nevertheless, if we must examine the statements of the blessed Augustine, in the first instance, explaining the Apostle's words, he says that the temporary and passing fire, which the

Apostle speaks of: "he himself will be saved, but as though through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15), cleanses not the main but the lesser sins. But this is contrary to the true meaning of the text as explained by Chrysostom, as I mentioned above; and it also contradicts your teaching. For if, at that "day," both the fire will be revealed and it will be temporary and passing, beginning and ending, which the Apostle does not say at all, then where is that purifying fire, which you teach, and which receives those who have sinned immediately after death? And how long will this fire torment those passing through it if it is temporary and passing? But this is also nullified by the subsequent text taken from the book *The City of God*, where Augustine says: "Those who have undergone temporary punishments after death will not all go into eternal torments, which are to come after the Judgment." Therefore, if the temporary punishments after death—whether fire, as you say, or something else, as we say—will immediately change into eternal torments after that Judgment, then when will the purifying fire take place, and when will it cleanse those passing through it? Here, Gregory the Theologian agrees with what John Chrysostom said, namely, that the fire (which the Apostle speaks of) will not be temporary and passing, but more tormenting and longer-lasting. For, speaking of the Novatians, he writes in his treatise "On the Light": "Perhaps there they will be baptized with the fire of the final baptism, more tormenting and longer-lasting, which devours the material like straw and destroys the light matter of every evil." Do you see how superficially your Teachers approach the meaning, and how they do not delve into its sense as deeply as, for example, the eloquent John and Gregory the Theologian and other worldwide luminaries of the Church?

9. As for the subsequent statements taken from blessed Augustine and the divine Father Ambrose, some of them say nothing definite about the purifying fire, while others, though they speak definitively about it, we do not trust those references: were they not perhaps corrupted and added to, as has happened with the writings of many of our saints, especially since they were not translated into our language and, as we said, they do not have a scriptural foundation? However, it may be said in a reconciling way regarding these statements that these Fathers were compelled, as it were by necessity, to give such an interpretation of the Apostle's words. For, being unable, it seems, to penetrate the meaning of the text due to the change in language during translation, they proclaimed that in regard to some minor sins there would be cleansing and deliverance, so that it would not be thought that by these words the Apostle is declaring that every sin will be cleansed, and thus the end of torment would be introduced, as Origen thought. The same applies to what you say, that blessed Gregory in the fourth book of the *Dialogues* proves the existence of purgatory through many narratives and revelations and declares that there is, indeed, a purifying fire before the time of the future Judgment, interpreting it either allegorically or literally. But the fact that he quotes Scriptural passages to support this does not necessarily imply the correctness of such an interpretation, as we have said before. As for the narratives and revelations he presented, they in no way indicate a specific purifying fire in a specific place; he says that some of the cleansed are appointed to serve in baths for those who wash, while others, through revelation, declared that there are some souls who burn in various places. All this is nothing more than miraculous apparitions and

revelations, specially appointed by God for the conversion and correction of the living. And the fact that there is a general purifying fire for all does not necessarily follow from this. And what he says afterward destroys the doctrine of the purifying fire. For he says that "small" and "lightest" sins of the righteous are cleansed by the presence of other deeds, namely, good deeds in this life; others, at the moment of the soul's departure from the body, are cleansed by the fear alone, as he relates; and others are cleansed after death through the good deeds and offerings performed for them. So, what need is there for a purifying fire when these things can cleanse without it? Thus, this is our response regarding your Teachers, who seem to be in disagreement with ours, for otherwise, it is impossible to reconcile the sayings of the one with those of the other.

10. As for the words of Basil the Great, in which, praying to God for the departed during the Pentecost prayers, he asks for their repose and for their association with the righteous, they contain absolutely nothing related to the purifying fire. According to this, the troparion we sing for the departed, in which we speak to God as if from the departed's perspective: "O Master, have mercy on Your creation, and cleanse it with Your goodness," clearly speaks of cleansing, but not with fire, only with divine goodness and kindness. For it would be in vain to ask for the one being cleansed to be cleansed by fire and still request cleansing by goodness. But the removal of impurity, which causes the soul to be estranged from the vision of God and enjoyment, is sought through the divine goodness itself, and this is called "cleansing."

11. As for the words of blessed Gregory of Nyssa, which follow this, it would be better to remain silent about them and not force us, for the sake of your defense, to bring them into the open. For this Teacher clearly seems to agree with the doctrines of the Origenists and introduces the end of punishments; and in particular, in the words you have quoted, he declares nothing other than that there is some sort of purgatory, a melting furnace, and a drawing to God through suffering and anguish, until the time when the final restoration of all and even the demons will occur, "that God may be all in all," as the Apostle says. Since among other things these words are also presented, we will first respond to them in the way received from our Fathers: it is possible that these are corruptions and insertions made by some heretical and Origenist individuals who flourished in those times, especially in Egypt and Palestine, made with the aim of appearing that they had the patronage of this holy and great luminary. Then, we will say that if the saint truly held such an opinion, it was during a time when this teaching was still a matter of dispute and had not been definitively condemned and rejected by the opposing view introduced at the Fifth Ecumenical Council. Therefore, it is not surprising that he himself, being human, erred in accuracy (of Truth), as this happened with many before him, such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Dionysius of Alexandria, and others, for they, through their writings, also gave some support to those who were not in the right. That this teaching was disputed and by no means purified so as to present an exact judgment is testified by Gregory the Theologian, who, in his treatise "On Baptism," reflecting on that unquenchable fire, says after this: "Unless someone here wishes to understand this more humanely and worthy of the Punisher." Do you see how he allows those who wish to understand this fire

more humanely? But the Fifth Ecumenical Council recognized such an opinion (about the finality of punishment) as the most inhuman of all teachings and, as harmful to the Church and weakening the diligent, condemned it with anathema. Therefore, these sayings, if they were indeed spoken by the wondrous Gregory about that fire, point not to a special purgatory but introduce a final cleansing and final restoration of all; but they are in no way convincing to us, who look to the general judgment of the Church and are guided by Divine Scripture, and not by what each Teacher wrote as their personal opinion; and if anyone else wrote something different about the purifying fire, we have no need to accept it, for neither Scripture nor the Fifth Ecumenical Council has given us a dual form of punishment and a dual type of fire.

12. After this, the words of the divine Dionysius, the great Epiphanius, and the theologian Damaskin are quoted, which in no way speak of the purifying fire; rather, they oppose it (for they say that the forgiveness of sins of the deceased, committed through human weakness, is the work of divine kindness), and show that the deceased are helped by the Liturgies and prayers offered for them. And this is exactly what we think, say, and, as is known, do in action. You also quoted a saying of blessed Theodoret, which is unknown to us, and we do not accept it, and we ask you to inform us: from where it is taken and from which of his books.

13. Finally, you say: "The previously mentioned truth is evident on the basis of Divine Justice, which leaves nothing done inappropriately unpunished, and from this it necessarily follows that for those who have not undergone punishment here, and cannot repay it either in heaven or hell, it is necessary to admit the existence of another, third place, in which this cleansing takes place, so that everyone, becoming pure, is immediately raised to heavenly enjoyment."

To this we say the following, and notice how simple and at the same time just it is: it is universally acknowledged (*ομολογουμένως*) that the forgiveness of sins is also the release from punishment; for the one who receives the forgiveness of sins is also freed from the punishment due for them. And it is granted in three ways and at different times: 1. during baptism, 2. after baptism, through repentance, suffering, and compensation by good deeds in this life, and 3. after death, through prayers and benefactions, and through other things that the Church performs for the deceased. Therefore, the first forgiveness of sins is not connected with labor and is common for all and equal, just like the outpouring of light, the contemplation of the sun, and the changes of the seasons, for it is only grace, and nothing more is required from us but faith. But the second is painful, like "washing his bed with tears every night" (Ps. 6:7), to whom the traces of the blows of sin are painful (Ps. 37:6–7), who walks in tears and with a broken face, imitating the conversion of the Ninevites and the humiliated humility of Manasseh. The third is also painful, for it is connected with repentance and a conscience broken and suffering from the lack of good; however, it is in no way mixed with punishment if it is the forgiveness of sins, for forgiveness and punishment cannot coexist. Nevertheless, in the first and last forgiveness of sins, the greater part is the grace of God, with the assistance of prayer, while very little is contributed by us. The middle one, on the contrary, has little from grace, but the greater part is our work. The first forgiveness of sins differs from the

last in that the first is equally the forgiveness of all sins, while the last is only for those sins which are not mortal and for which each one repented in life. This is how the Church of God thinks, and, asking for the forgiveness of sins for the departed and believing that it is granted to them, she does not determine, as a law, any punishment for them, knowing well that divine goodness prevails in such matters over the concept of Justice.

14. I. And it is evident that those who strive towards the Divinity, this very striving, i.e., love, purifies them, as Gregory the Theologian says – and by purifying, it makes them godlike, communing with such as with those who have already become as if their own; so why after death is this striving much less capable of purifying those who are freed from matter, yet there is still a need for the purifying fire for minor sins?

II. Then, it is more characteristic of the goodness of God not to disregard small good deeds than to consider a small sin worthy of punishment. However, small good deeds in those who have committed great sins will not receive a reward because of the predominance of evil. Similarly, small evil in those who were righteous in great deeds will not lead to punishment because the better deeds prevail: for if there is no larger part, then, of course, there will be no smaller part either. Therefore, one should not believe in the purifying fire.

III. Then, just as there is small good in those who are evil in other respects, so there is small evil in those who are good in other respects. But small good in the former cannot lead to the reward that follows good deeds, but only causes a difference in punishment; similarly, small evil will not lead to punishment, but will result in a difference in the degree of enjoyment. Therefore, it is not worthy to believe in the purifying fire.

IV. Then, if the contemplation of God is the perfect reward for the pure in heart and soul, and not all will receive it equally, it means that not all possess the same degree of purity, and there is no need for the purifying fire if this purity is not perfect in some; for in that case, all would be equally purified by that fire, and thus equally capable of contemplating God. But this is not the case, as symbolically and figuratively happened at the mountain where the Law was given, "for then not all appeared worthy of the same position and order, but one [was worthy] of this, another [of that], according to the purity of each," as Gregory the Theologian says.

V. Then, the same great Gregory the Theologian, in his speculative and mysterious word on Pascha, coming to the point where he says: "We shall carry nothing away, we shall leave nothing for the morning," clearly and openly shows that after this night there is no purification, calling "night" the present life of each one, and not allowing any purification after it.

VI. Then, in his work "On the Destruction of the City," reasoning thus: "I will not speak of the torments there for those to whom He gives mercy here, but I will only say that it is better to be punished and purified now than to be condemned to torment when the time of punishment has come, not purification," he clearly asserts that after departure from here there is no purification, but only eternal torment.

VII. Then, the Lord in the Gospel of Luke, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), teaching about the portion each of them received, says that Lazarus, immediately after his death, was carried by Angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man was also buried after death, and his soul is in torment in hell; and thus, by "Abraham's bosom" indicating the highest repose in the happy portion of those who pleased God, and through "hell" and "torments" presenting the final condemnation and eternal punishment of sinners, He did not leave any other place between them, containing some temporary punishment, but showed that (between the states of the righteous and the wicked) there is a great and impassable chasm, separating the one from the other, and an extreme, with nothing in between – an opposition.

VIII. Then, it would be unbelievable for a soul, having been released from the body and becoming entirely bodiless and spiritual, to be tormented by physical fire, while its body, which the fire should have consumed, has decayed. Truly, after the resurrection, when it receives an incorruptible body, and all creation becomes immutable, and when fire is divided, as we are taught, it will correspond to it being tormented by it, and not only to it, but also to demons, who are both dark and clothed with some kind of matter and rough corporeality, and with an airy or fiery body, as Basil the Great says. But before it receives its body – being only a form, not mixed with matter, though existing by itself – how could it be tormented by material fire?

IX. Then, if the souls of the saints, before the descent of the Savior into hell, were held in hell because of only original sin, but not as in fire and punishment, but as if in a prison and under guard, as the Apostle Peter says in his epistle: **"To whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison"** (1 Peter 3:19), why then should we not consider that this same hell will hold those souls after death, who have sinned lightly here, but still see the need for the purifying fire, from which they can be freed through prayers for them?

X. Then, our venerable Fathers, who lived angelic lives on earth, were often and frequently instructed through visions, dreams, and other miraculous manifestations, and they themselves were taught and taught others about eternal punishment and the unrighteous and sinners in it, and seeing and revealing it as present and already happening, as the parable from the Gospel of Luke describes the state of the rich man and Lazarus, did not announce anything about a purifying, temporary fire.

XI. Finally, this teaching of restoration and the end of eternal punishment, originating from Origen, as was said, and prevailing among some churchmen, including Didymus and Evagrius, as referring to the divine love and easily acceptable among the careless, as the God-bearing John, the builder of the "Heavenly Ladder," says, was, however, forbidden and anathematized by the holy Fifth Ecumenical Council, as producing weakness in souls and making the careless even more careless, since they expect that there will be liberation from suffering and the promised restoration. Therefore, on this basis, the preceding dogma about the purifying fire must be expelled from the Church, as it leads the diligent to carelessness and convinces them not to fight by all means in this present life for their purification, since, supposedly, after death, another purification is awaited.

Works Mentioned:

1. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum* in "Macarius" no. 38, P.G. vol. 34, col. 257, and in the *Vita Patrum*, book III, chapter 172 and book VI, little work 3, 16, P.L. vol. 73, col. 797 and 1013.
2. Dionysius, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chapter VII, 7, P.G. vol. 3, col. 561.
3. P.G. vol. 88, col. 1652–57.
4. Gregory Nazianzus, Oration 16, no. 9, P.G. vol. 35, col. 945.
5. *Octoechos*, Saturday canon for the departed, hymn 8, song 6, Glory.
6. *Triodion of Lent*, Saturday before Meatfare, canon, strophe 1; or in the *Triodion of Bright Week*, Saturday before Pentecost.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Prayer after the consecration of the Holy Gifts.
9. Dionysius the Areopagite, work and loc. cit., see note 28.
10. Chrysostom, Homily IX on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, P.G. vol. 61, cols. 75–82.
11. Basil the Great, Homily on Psalm 28, P.G. vol. 29, col. 297.
12. Augustine, *The City of God*, book XXI, chapter 26, no. 4, P.L. vol. 41, col. 745.
13. Augustine, *The City of God*, book XXI, chapter 13, P.L. vol. 41, col. 728.
14. Gregory Nazianzus, Oration 39, no. 19, P.G. vol. 36, col. 357.
15. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, book IV, chapters 40–55.
16. *Ibid.*, chapter 39, P.L. vol. 77, col. 396.
17. Gregory Nazianzus, Oration 40, 36, P.G. vol. 36, col. 412.
18. Gregory Nazianzus, Oration 45, no. 11, P.G. vol. 36, col. 637.
19. Oration cit., no. 46, P.G. vol. 36, col. 645.
20. Oration 16, no. 7, P.G. vol. 35, col. 944.
21. John Climacus, *Ladder of Paradise*, step IV, P.G. vol. 88, col. 780.

## Refutation of the Latins concerning the Purifying Fire p.2

1. Truly, much investigation and inquiry is necessary in controversial dogmatic matters, when on both sides there are serious and weighty arguments; much benefit can also come from such inquiry when we turn our gaze not to the dispute, but to the Truth, and do not make it our sole goal to win at any cost, but allow that sometimes it is good to be defeated. And this, truly, applies not only to us, who see little and are earthly and very far from true wisdom, but, behold, we hear and believe that this is how it happened even with the very Disciples of the Wisdom itself, Jesus Christ our Lord. For when a question arose among them—whether those who come to faith from the Gentiles should be circumcised and taught to observe the Law of Moses—then the Apostles and elders gathered to study this matter; after much investigation (as it is written), Peter spoke, and James supported him. And in general agreement, all were pleased with the Holy Spirit—not to trouble those who from the Gentiles turn to God (Acts 15:5–6). Therefore, if investigation brought fruit then—unity of those who were seeking—there is hope that we, moved by the same Spirit and bound together by the same love, and aiming for the same goal—which is expressed in finding the Truth—will not fail in the matter before us; and although the investigation has stretched out, we, listening and speaking peacefully and with love, can come to unity, agreeing on what will appear as the absolute truth and will present itself as fitting.

2. Thus, in this, you are in solidarity with us, and together with us, you nurture hope; but you say that we, as if forgetting about this, apply more diligence and try to strengthen our teaching, while yours we seek to refute. But to this, we say that our teaching, whatever it may be, we have by no means outlined, nor have we tried to strengthen anything; and this very thing, you have previously reproached us with, wishing to know more clearly what opinion we hold (about the state of souls after death). Your opinion, however, we will not seek to refute, but to show that it is not necessary, for neither in Scripture is it clearly conveyed to us, nor has it been sanctioned by our Fathers, nor, in general, is it blessed. But still, in order to make it pleasing to you, because this is just, we have outlined our teaching more clearly—not more diligently, but as much as necessary, supporting it; and your teaching, whatever it may be, we will subject to more careful examination. For perhaps the truth found in this will free us from heavy labor and further disagreement between us.

3. We affirm that neither the righteous have yet fully received their portion and that blessed state which they prepared for themselves here through deeds, nor have the sinful, after death, been taken to eternal punishment, in which they will be eternally tormented; but both must necessarily be after the final day of Judgment and the resurrection of all. Now, both are in their proper places: the former—are in complete rest and are free in heaven with the Angels and before God Himself, and already as if in the paradise from which Adam fell, the Good Thief entered before others—and they are often visited in the churches where they are venerated, and they listen to those who call on them and pray for them to God, having received from Him this excellent gift, and through their relics, they perform miracles, and they enjoy the contemplation of God and the illumination sent from there, more completely and more purely than before, when they were alive; the latter, in turn, are

confined in hell, dwelling "in the depths of death's shadow, in the pit of the abyss," as David says (Psalm 88:7), and then Job: "In a land of darkness and gloom, in a land of eternal darkness, where there is no light, nor can one see the life of man" (Job 10:22). The former dwell in all joy and cheerfulness, already awaiting and only lacking the promised Kingdom and unspeakable blessings; while the latter, on the contrary, dwell in all distress and unrelenting suffering, like those condemned, awaiting the judgment of the Judge and foreseeing those torments. And neither have the former yet received the inheritance of the Kingdom and those blessings "which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man" (1 Corinthians 2:9), nor have the latter yet been delivered to eternal torments and burning in unquenchable fire. And this teaching we have received from our Fathers of old and can easily present from the very Divine Scriptures.

4. Thus, in ancient responses, some of which are titled: "The Famous Athanasius to the Prince Antiochus," the following question is asked: "What then, have the righteous received blessings, and the sinful—punishment?" (Answer:) Certainly not. However, the joy that the souls of the saints have now is partial enjoyment, as is the sorrow that the sinful have—is partial punishment. As when a king summons his friends to a feast, and similarly—those condemned to punishment are to be punished—those invited to the feast are in joy before the king's house until the hour of the feast, while the condemned, imprisoned in the dungeon, are in sorrow until the judge arrives. This should be understood in the same way regarding the souls taken before us, I speak of the righteous and the sinful. "Then, if no one, as has been said, has yet entered the Kingdom or Gehenna, how then do we hear about the rich man and Lazarus, that the rich man, being in fire and torments, addresses Abraham?" (Answer:) All that pertains to Lazarus, the Lord said symbolically, just as with the ten virgins and other circumstances in parables. For in reality, the parable of Lazarus did not happen, because sinners in hell do not see the righteous in the kingdom with Abraham, but no one among them, in the darkness, even recognizes their neighbor."

5. Having received this judgment, our Church thinks and proclaims this, and there are arguments for its defense. First, in the Gospel of Matthew, when foretelling the future Judgment, the Lord says: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit,"—from this it is clear that they have not yet inherited; then: "the Kingdom prepared for you," He says (Matthew 25:34)—not given before. To the sinful, in turn, He says: "Depart, you cursed,"—evidently, not already departed—"into the eternal fire prepared,"—not for you, but—"for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41)—and here again, "prepared"—i.e., not yet received by the condemned demons, for how could this be otherwise regarding those who until now, and even until that Day, wander everywhere in the air and freely do their work in those they have deceived? This is also revealed elsewhere, when they cry to the Lord, as written in the same Gospel: "You have come here to torment us before the time" (Matthew 8:29), clearly indicating that they are not yet tormented, for the time has not yet come. Therefore, if the evil demons and the first creators of evil, for whom punishment is particularly prepared, have not yet received the due recompense, but are free to wander wherever they want, what argument could convince us that the souls of those who depart this life in sin are immediately delivered to the fire

and torments prepared for others? What need is there for the Judgment and the resurrection of their bodies, and for the coming of the Judge to the earth, and the terrible and universal spectacle, if before that day everyone has already received according to their merits? And how can the Lord, in the parable of the virgins, say that the virgins, i.e., souls, slept and slumbered, for the Bridegroom was delayed, i.e., they died, and have not yet entered the bridal chamber, until the Bridegroom comes from heaven, awakens everyone as from sleep, and brings some with Him into the bridal hall, while others He excludes, which will certainly happen on that Day? "For then," He says, "the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins" (Matthew 25:1). And how, having departed and entrusted His servants with His property, He then comes and gathers everyone together, demanding from each an account of their deeds (Matthew 25:14 ff.), if each of the servants has already shown their work and received their recompense before the Master's return?

6. And the divine Apostle says in the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Do you see that before that judgment seat and before we all appear together, no one receives according to what they did in the body without the body? But also in the 2nd Epistle to Timothy, he says that the time of his departure has come, and the crown of righteousness is laid up for him—not now, but "which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8). And in the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians, he says: "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1:6-10). And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, speaking of the saints that went before: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39-40). This should be understood in regard to all the faithful and righteous who were before the Lord's Coming. For just as those who came before (the Old Testament righteous) did not reach perfection without the Apostles, so neither the Apostles without the Martyrs, and those in turn—without those who came after them and those who will enter the good Vineyard of the Church later; for this is clearly taught by the parable, according to which workers were called at different times into the vineyard, but at one time all received their reward, and those who came earlier did not receive more than those who came later (Matt. 20:1-8). The greatest Evangelist John also confirms this in Revelation: "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto

every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Rev. 6:9-11). From all this, it is clear that neither the saints are in complete enjoyment of the blessings and future happiness, nor the sinners have yet received condemnation and sent to torment. For how could it be that, being imperfect and as if divided into two parts and without the body, which they expect to receive after the resurrection incorruptible, they have already entered into the possession of perfect rewards? Therefore, the Apostle says: “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end” (1 Cor. 15:23-24). Then shall they be made manifest, he says, then shall they shine, then shall they come to perfection. And the Lord says in the Gospel: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43).

7. Now it remains to bring forth the Church Fathers who agree with this teaching and have adhered to it in all respects. Thus, the great Gregory the Theologian, in his funeral oration for his brother Caesarius, says: “I am persuaded by the words of the wise that every good and God-loving soul, as soon as it is released from the body with which it was bound, comes into a state of perceiving and contemplating the good awaiting it; and after purification, or after putting off (or I do not know how else to express it) that which clouded it, it is delighted by some marvelous delight, rejoices and joyfully walks toward its Master; for it has escaped this life as an unbearable prison, and cast off the chains that weighed down the wings of the mind. Then it seems to already harvest the prepared bliss. And later, it takes the flesh it had here, with which it exercised wisdom, from the earth that gave it and later preserved it, receiving it in a way unknown to us, and known only to God, who has joined and separated them, and with it, it enters into the inheritance of the coming glory. And just as, by natural union with the flesh, it bore its burden, so it now communicates its consolation to it, entirely engulfing it in itself, and becoming one spirit, mind, and God with it, after the mortal and transient life has been consumed by eternal life.”

8. And John Chrysostom, in his 6th Homily "On Statues," says: “Just as a fighter hurries to leave the arena to escape his wounds, and a wrestler desires the end of the contest to be free from toil, so too the one who leads a virtuous, strict, and austere life desires death, to be free from the present labors and receive the prepared crowns, arriving at a peaceful harbor and transferring to a place where there is no need to fear shipwreck.” And in his 4th Homily "Against the Jews," speaking of the martyrs, he says: “They mocked this present life, trampled on tortures and executions, despised death, freed themselves from the delusion of worldly things, entered into the quiet harbor; and now they are added to the ranks of Paul, until the time of their receiving crowns, buoyed up by the expectation of the crowns and having escaped from here the uncertainty of the future.”

9. And again, Gregory the Theologian, in his Homily "On the Destruction of the City," describing the future Judgment, says: “And they shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life—who are now hidden in Christ, but shall be revealed with Him at last—and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment, those whom the judgment of the

unbelieving word has already condemned. And the first will inherit an unspeakable light and the vision of the Holy and Royal Trinity, which will then shine more brightly and purely, and be united entirely with their whole mind (in what I especially call the Kingdom of Heaven); and the lot of the second, besides other things, will be rejection from God and shame in the conscience, which will have no end. All this will be after.” And in his Homily "On the Baptism," in the “New Decalogue” composed by him, he says: “Believe first of all in the resurrection, the judgment, the reward according to the righteous scales of God,” thus showing that the reward will be after the resurrection and judgment, for before that, of course, it will not happen.

10. Therefore, from all this, it is evident that those things which some of the saints saw in visions and revelations concerning the future punishment and those suffering in it are certain images of future things and as it were outlines, and not what is already happening in reality; for example, Daniel, describing that future Judgment, says: “I beheld till the thrones were cast down... the judgment sat, and the books were opened” (Dan. 7:9-10), but it is clear that this did not actually happen, but was spiritually revealed to the Prophet.

11. Thus, if according to all the words cited and the pious teaching of our Church: neither the sinners have yet received eternal torment, nor the righteous – the Kingdom, but both are awaiting the future Judgment for the final and deserved reward that they have prepared for themselves, how could it be that we should accept or permit some other punishment that has already begun to operate, and another, temporary fire that torments the souls of those who lived in a middling moral state (those who lived in a middle way... souls), while the general punishment is still inactive, and the impious, the wicked, and even demons are not yet subjected to it? For the divine Apostle Peter says that even the angels who sinned are held in the prison of darkness, awaiting their judgment: “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them into hell, delivering them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). Do you hear that they, deprived of their former power, are as it were in prison, awaiting that Judgment? In the same way, undoubtedly, the greatest sinners are only partially punished now and are not yet subjected to the final judgment. But we assert that the condition in which those of middling virtue are now, is indeed painful: whether it is shame and remorse, or repentance, or imprisonment and darkness, or fear and uncertainty about the future, or simply deprivation of the vision of God, depending on the sins they committed. It would be most reasonable if we thought and spoke this way; and we cannot accept the idea that a material fire torments and purifies disembodied souls – we ask those who speak such things not to lament us if we find it hard to accept this. But perhaps we can say that they (i.e., the Latin holy Fathers) spoke of a (temporary) fire in an allegorical sense or for the sake of some need at the time or for the benefit of the listeners: for we usually give such reasons to justify novelties and strange teachings that do not align with Scripture.

12. Therefore, the prayers for the deceased – which, having received them from the Apostles and Fathers, the Church offers in the Sacred Offering and in other services performed at various times – are made equally for all who have passed away, and we affirm that these prayers help and benefit all,

and their significance and usefulness extend to all: for sinners and those in hell – so that they may receive, if not complete release, at least some small relief. And speaking in the prayers on Pentecost, Basil the Great writes verbatim the following: “And in this most perfect and saving feast, the prayer of cleansing is made for those who are held in hell, granting great hopes of alleviating those held by the defilers, and sending them comfort through You.” And it is not surprising that we pray for them, for, behold, some (saints) who personally prayed for the impious were heard; thus, blessed Thecla, through her prayers, moved Falconilla from the place where the impious were held; and great Gregory the Dialogist, as it is told, – moved Emperor Trajan. For the Church of God does not despair regarding such ones, and prays for all the deceased in faith, even if they were the greatest sinners, for relief, both in general and in private prayers for them. And this is clear – from the very encompassing expression: “all,” it says, “of the deceased in faith”; it is also clear from the words of Basil the Great quoted above; and it is evident from what the blessed John Chrysostom says in his commentary on the Gospel of John, in Homily 62: “If the deceased was a sinner and greatly offended God, it is fitting to weep; but it is better – not only to weep (for this brings no help to him), but to do something that can help him, such as almsgiving and offerings.” And then, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, in Homily 41, he says the following: “If the sinner has died, it is fitting to rejoice, for his sins have been stopped and no more evil has been added to him, – and it is fitting not to weep, but to help him with what can help him.” And after this: “Why do you grieve, why do you weep, as if this could bring forgiveness to the departed?” And then, in his commentary on Philippians, he writes: “With the deceased, you burn their belongings, how much more should you, the faithful, send with the faithful deceased what belongs to them, not so that it becomes ash like those belongings, but to grant him greater glory; and if the deceased was a sinner, to resolve his sins; but if righteous, to add to his reward and recompense.” And from the very expression used in the Maccabees, suitable for proving the existence of purgatory, “It is good and salutary to pray for the dead, that they may be released from their sins,” it is well known that this appeasement and sacrifice were offered only for those who were impious and idolaters. “For Judas Maccabeus,” as it is told, “when he saw his men slain by the enemy, and after searching their clothes, found items that were offerings to idols, immediately offered a sacrifice and appeasement for each one to God” (2 Maccabees 12). So, if for such (great sinners) prayers and intercessions of the Church have power and bring them great benefit, as they are not yet judged and have not yet received the sentence of the Judge, nor have they been subjected to punishment, how much more will the prayers made for the “middling” ones bring them great benefit: either completely restoring them to the rank of the righteous, if their sins were very small; or, if they remain in the same state, alleviating their suffering and raising them to better hopes. And that these prayers, and especially the sacrificial Offering, are beneficial even for the righteous and those who have lived saintly lives, since they too are not perfect, and these contribute to them in receiving blessings and they do not yet enjoy the complete bliss, is evident from what the divine interpreter Dionysius says in his meditation on the Mystery, performed for those who have passed away saintly: “For those who have lived saintly, the hierarch

entreats from God a bright and divine life, being deservedly rewarded according to the righteous judgments of God, and the promised and yet to be fully granted goods, appearing as if proclaiming the divine decrees and praying for them, as their rewards, divine gifts, and symbolically showing to those present that those blessings which he prays for in the sacred service, will be fully granted to those who have passed away in accordance with the divine life.” Thus, when this action extends to all, and through prayers and sacramental rites help is given to almost all the deceased in faith, as shown above, we do not see any substantial necessity to acknowledge that this help is only provided for those in the purifying fire.

13. And as for what you criticize us for, saying that we assert that such a doctrine of purgatory will lead to moral harm and carelessness in life, we did not say this in an absolute sense, but as a possible consequence that may follow. Indeed, some may be frightened by that purifying fire, which, according to words and belief, is tormenting. But certainly, some will be led to recklessness and carelessness, for the nature of it – unknown as it is – is asserted to be temporary (i.e., having an end). Thus, one can hear many who say: “I would wish that after death there were such a purifying fire, precisely so that relying on this purification, I could sin here without fear.” Similarly, others say: “I wish that those torments had an end, so that I would not be anxious about my sins.”

14. What more is there to say? While we assert that such a doctrine (of purgatory) was not passed down by any of the Teachers, it is quite surprising that you confidently claim that something like this can be concluded from the words of Basil the Great, who in his prayer asks God to grant the souls of the departed to be moved to a place of "refreshment"; and you assert that this text indicates that the souls are tormented by punishment by fire, and that he prays to move them to the opposite state. We are astonished that nowhere in his words or prayers does this saint say or show that he prays to release those souls from the purifying fire – as you eagerly try to prove and imagine that he held such an opinion; as if this text cannot refer to any other notion of relief and release from sorrowful circumstances; for here, David says: "**Relieve me, that I may be refreshed (ἵνα ἀναψύξω), before I depart**" (Ps. 38:14), certainly not burning by fire, but being in various severe circumstances.

15. As for the famous Gregory of Nyssa, you are astonished and consider it harsh and bitter that we opposed his opinion, saying that, being a man, he deviated from the right teaching, and you believe that such an argument can be destructive for all dogmas and for all of Scripture. But in response to this, we will say that there is a significant difference between what is written in the canonical scriptures and the tradition of the Church, and what was written privately by individual Teachers or even personally taught by them; thus, we must believe and align what was passed down by God and harmonize it with each other if something appears not to agree, but to the second, we should not believe unconditionally or accept it without investigation. For it is possible that someone may be a Teacher and yet not speak perfectly in everything. For what need would there be for the Fathers at the Ecumenical Councils if each of them could not deviate from the truth in anything? In this respect, Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, and Gregory the Wonderworker slipped somewhat;

although one of them received the martyr's crown, and the title of the other is enough for praise. And of the divine Dionysius, Basil the Great writes in his letter to Maximus: "Such is our opinion: I do not admire everything written by this man; and there is something that I completely do not approve. For perhaps he was, as far as we know, the one who first sowed the seeds of the heresy we hear so much about, I mean the heresy of the Amonians. The reason for this, I think, is not a bad orientation of the soul, but a fervent desire to oppose Sabellius." And a little later: "We found that this happened with this man. While he zealously opposed the heresy of the Libyan, he subtly fell into the opposite evil due to his great zeal." And a little later: "Thus he exchanged one evil for another, and deviated from the right thinking." And concerning Gregory the Wonderworker, in his letter to his brother, he says the following: "However, in his zeal to convince the Greeks, he did not consider it necessary to be cautious about the terms he used; he thought it wiser sometimes to make concessions regarding the worldview of the one he was persuading, so as not to alienate the opportunity presented to him. This explains why one can find many expressions in him that give considerable support to the heretics, such as 'creature' or 'work' or something similar." And what is surprising if one or another deviated from the right teaching, when here, a whole Council, which took place in Neocaesarea, rich with the fact that among its leaders was also Basil the Martyr, Bishop of Amaseia, was found to misunderstand the Apostle's words, using them to issue a canon? Noting the uselessness of this canon, the Sixth Ecumenical Council speaks of it in the 16th canon: "Since in the Acts of the Apostles it is handed down that seven deacons were appointed by the Apostles: the Fathers of the Neocaesarean Council, in the rules they established, clearly reasoned that the seven deacons should be until the rule, even if that was in a very great city, confirming it with the book of Acts: for this reason, we, comparing the thoughts of the Fathers with the words of the Apostles, found that their word was not about men serving the mysteries, but about the service in the needs of the table." That only the canonical Scriptures are infallible is also witnessed by the blessed Augustine in the words he writes to Jerome: "Such honor and respect should only be given to the books of Scripture, which are called 'canonical'; for I absolutely believe that none of the authors of those writings erred in anything... As for other writings, no matter how great the superiority of their authors in holiness and learning, when reading them, I do not accept their teachings as true solely on the basis that they wrote and thought that way." Then, in his letter to Fortunatus, he writes the following: "Human reasoning, even if this person was orthodox and had a high reputation, should not have the same authority as the canonical Scriptures, so that we consider it inadmissible, out of respect we owe such people, to disapprove of and reject something in their writings, if it should happen that we find that they thought differently than the Truth, which, with God's help, was understood by others or by us. Such is my view regarding the writings of other people; and I wish that the reader would act in the same way with my writings."

16. So, when such respect, as has been said, and faith and obedience should be given only to the canonical Scriptures, what inappropriate action are we committing if we say that Gregory of Nyssa, being a man, deviated somewhat from the correct teaching, and that at a time when this teaching

was a matter of dispute, as we have said before? But if you say that he did not deny the eternal fire (and that he did deny it is clearly seen in his "Catechetical Discourse" and in his "Discourse on the Early Taken (from this life) Infants"), we would be very grateful if you would show that he truly said and thought such things; for we have found nowhere that he spoke of eternal fire and endless torment, or that only small sins are purified; but he said that every sin will be purified by that fire and every punishment will be resolved and will eventually end, since this torment is nothing other than purification, not only of the ungodly and wicked, but also of the very demons, who are to be restored (to their original bright state). Thus, for example, in the "Catechetical Discourse," he speaks about the devil as follows: "Just as he (the devil) carried out his deception for the destruction (of our nature), so the Righteous One, at the same time Good and Wise, used His plan of deception for the salvation of the one who was lost, benefiting through this not only the lost one but also the one who caused our ruin. For by the fact that death approached Life, darkness – to Light, corruption – to Incorruption, the destruction of what is worse was accomplished, and the transition of this into non-existence; and at the same time, help was accomplished for the one who is being purified by this. For just as when some worthless material is mixed with gold, and the masters of gold work destroy the foreign and worthless substance through burning fire and thus restore the more valuable material to its inherent brightness (though the separation is not without difficulty, since time is required for the fire with its melting power to destroy the added material, but nonetheless, it is a kind of healing of gold, aiming to cleanse it from the corruption that has rooted itself in its beauty); in the same way, when death, corruption, and darkness, and every other offshoot of evil are rooted in the nature of the one who commits evil, the approach of Divine power, acting as fire and destroying what is unnatural in the nature, benefits the nature, granting purification, although this separation would be painful. Thus, even the enemy, seemingly, would not dispute that what happened was both just and salvific, if he comes to his senses (awareness) of the benefaction. For just as now those who, for the sake of healing, subject themselves to the knife and cauterization, anger at the doctors, suffering pain from the incision; but if through this healing comes and the pain from the cauterization passes, they become grateful to those who healed them by these means; in the same way, when after a long period of time, evil is separated from the nature with which it is now mixed and has grown, and when restoration to the ancient state occurs for those who are now steeped in evil, there will be unanimous thanksgiving from all creation, both from those who suffered in purification and from those who did not need purification." Then, in the "Discourse on the Departed," reflecting on all forms of sinful state, he says the following: "Thus, in order for nature to retain the power of free will and at the same time to remove evil, the Wisdom of God found such a plan: to allow man to remain in that which he has chosen for himself, so that by tasting the evil he desired, and by experiencing what he exchanged, he would involuntarily return due to the desire for the first bliss, casting off every passion and irrationality, as a burden to his nature, and purifying himself – either in this life, through sobriety and love of wisdom, or after departure, through the smelting furnace of purifying fire." And a little later: "By the movement of free will revolving in

these things in this life, a man, if he makes a distinction between what is proper to him and what is to the irrational, and pays attention to himself, leading a more orderly life, will purify himself in this life from the evil mixed with him; but if he inclines toward irrational immersion in passions, using the animal nature that assists the passions, he will change in another way for the better, knowing after leaving the body the distinction between virtue and vice in the impossibility of participating in Divinity if he has not first purified the impurity in his soul with the purifying fire. This is what made it necessary for us to have a body: for by this, both the freedom of will is preserved and the return to good is not hindered, but through this periodic following, a tendency to the better is born in us, although there are those who already now, in the life of the flesh, live spiritually and in passionless life; we have heard that such were the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and those who were with them and after them, who, through virtue and love of wisdom, attained perfection, I mean – the Disciples, Apostles, and Martyrs, and all those who preferred the virtuous life to material life, and who, though small in number compared to the multitude of those who incline toward the worse, testify that nothing is impossible to those who live in the flesh and lead a virtuous life; while the rest cast off their attachment to matter through healing in the purifying fire, and through striving for good, involuntarily return to the grace, originally granted to nature." Then, in the "Discourse on the Early Taken (from this life) Infants," he says the following: "That it is even possible for someone who has reached such a degree of depravity, after some long periods of time, through eternal purification, to be restored in the fullness of the saved, this is completely evident to anyone looking at Divine power."

17. So, what is said about every sin equally and about all sinners and ungodly ones and the demons themselves is obvious (as they say) even to the blind. And that he says this purification will be after the resurrection and the Judgment is evident from what he says in the same discourse about the infants: "Will that soul also appear with the others before the Judgment of the Judge? Will it give an account of what it did in life? Will it receive the recompense according to its deeds – either being purified by fire, or refreshed by the dew of blessing?" Tell me then, what is the commonality between these words and the purgatory you introduced? – For he asserts that all sinners and every sin are equally purified by that fire, but you say that only some, namely, lighter sins, are purified, and the purifying fire acts only in relation to some (souls), which were not entirely wicked; and he says that this will happen after the final Judgment, but you say that purification occurs immediately after the departure from the body. And are we not correct in acting as we do, not accepting such words (of St. Gregory of Nyssa), considering them either spurious or, if they are indeed authentic, not accepting them as contradictory to the Scriptures and the general dogmas?

Works Mentioned:

1. Pseudo-Athanasius. "Quaestiones ad Antiochum", q. 19. – PG. 28, col. 609.
2. PG. 49, col. 85.

3. PG. 28, col. 904. (These words are not found there. The reference in this note leads to the works of Athanasius the Great. – Editor of "Azbuka Veroi")
4. Gregory Nazianzus. PG. 35, col. 945.
5. PG. 36, col. 424.
6. Chrysostom. PG. 59, col. 348.
7. PG. 61, col. 361.
8. Ibid.
9. This passage is not found in the mentioned work of St. John Chrysostom, although it is quoted as such by St. John of Damascus, but it is located in the 31st homily, PG. 35, col. 375b.
10. Dionysius. "De Eccles. Hierarchia", c. VII, 7. – PG. 3, col. 561.
11. Basil the Great. PG. 32, cols. 298–299.
12. PG. 32, col. 776.
13. Augustine. Class. II epist. 82. PL. 33, col. 277.
14. Class. III ep. 148. PL. 33, col. 628.
15. Gregory of Nyssa. PG. 45, cols. 68–69.
16. PG. 46, col. 524.
17. PG. 46, col. 168.

## The Greeks' Response to the Latin's on the Purifying Fire

The word belongs to Vissarion of Nicaea, but it reflects the thoughts of the Saint and was written by Vissarion in accordance with his opinion.

The Response of the Greeks to the Latins on the Purgatorial Fire, read by Vissarion of Nicaea On June 14, 1438.

1. If, regarding the matters on which we are having this discussion, the most honorable bishops and fathers, the goal were only victory, and we composed this word solely for the purpose of seeking victory with all our might, then we would be acting improperly, and we would certainly not receive just assistance from each other. For us, who have undertaken such a great effort in this long journey here, and for you, who have applied so much care in convening this forthcoming Council, there was no other goal than to accept the revealed truth with love and to reach that celebration for which we pray; let there be great hope that we will part from one another having accomplished, with God's help, everything according to our mutual goal. This applies not only to the present question but we must also hope for everything else, the impossible (for us to resolve), but of course possible for God, as the Divine word says (Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27). But since God, Who cares for this and will care for it, Who, among many other titles, did not deem it unworthy to also be called "**Peace**" (Romans 15:33, 16, etc.), He will not allow our efforts to be in vain, and He will not make our great mutual effort futile, but, becoming the Unity and the "**Cornerstone**" (Eph. 2:20), He will unite us, His distant members, to one another, and make all of us, with respect to each other, one Body under one Head, Himself. But now the time has come to speak a word regarding the matter we have undertaken to investigate, and, being guided by God, we will begin it here.

2. We have not accepted the purifying fire and punishment through a temporary fire with an end, and we know that the Eastern Church does not think in this way, nor about other things we have mentioned. However, we completely agree that the prayers of the Church for the dead in services for them to God can be of help to them, believing the Fathers who established this. That the souls of the saints and those who have not bound themselves to any evil are worthy of eternal life, and that the souls of those who have abused the present life to indulge the flesh and satisfy it, and who had no concept of moral good, are worthy of eternal punishment, – this we acknowledge and affirm, and we praise and admire you, who share this view, and give thanks to God, condemning as unjust what we previously heard about you from those who wrongly made such claims. But concerning the souls that are in an intermediate state between virtue and sin and, being clothed in a passionate body, have committed some non-mortal sins, that they will not be subjected to eternal punishment (for this would not be worthy of divine philanthropy, as we think) nor will they partake of divine glory before they undergo the necessary punishment for failing to do what they should have and cleanse themselves from pollution in that purifying fire, as you have presented in your report, – here, precisely, lies the difference between our views and yours, and this is the point where we do not agree with you. For that such souls are not worthy of eternal punishment is correctly said,

and this cannot be disputed, but the need for a purifying fire is where the stumbling block lies, and this is where we differ.

3. Therefore, we must divide the word on this matter in the following way: the question divides into two sections; each of these sections can, in turn, be divided into two parts. First, it must be investigated: for what sins forgiveness after death is granted by the Creator; second: is this forgiveness granted through punishment or simply by divine philanthropy, moved by the prayers of the Church; if through punishment: then by some other purification, such as imprisonment or darkness and ignorance, or, if necessary, by fire, and that by material fire, as you assert.

4. Having divided the question in this way, we, finally, in the third point, i.e., that souls must undergo punishment through the purifying fire to enter eternal life, do not agree, both because we have not received this from our Teachers and because we are greatly afraid that by introducing a temporary, passing, and purifying fire, we will harm the whole ecclesiastical structure. For when God and the Savior declare that the wicked will go "into the eternal fire" (Matt. 25:41), it must be understood as precisely such a fire; only such a fire is known to the faithful, and they have been accustomed to hear of it from childhood, and keeping this in mind and most of all fearing it, they direct their thoughts and deeds accordingly. But now, if we again introduce the concept of a temporary fire, it is frightening that the faithful, supposing this to be the eternal fire, will begin to believe that every fire is precisely such, and thus will fall into the Origenist heresy and erase from their souls even the memory of the eternal fire, relying on the end of punishment. Hence, truly, there is no one who does not know that, because of this, many absurdities will follow, and people will show great negligence in their way of life, thereby providing much food for eternal punishment. For this reason, we have not declared this up to now, and certainly will not declare it.

5. That those who have stumbled in forgivable matters are granted forgiveness of sins by God even after departing the body, which was the first subject of the question we are studying, – this we hear from the teachings of the Teachers, as they teach about it. It remains to speak of the second and intermediate part of the question, i.e., whether through some punishment, and if through punishment, what kind – imprisonment or some darkness, or simply by the philanthropy of God and through the prayers of the Church, we implore Him to forgive those sins. But it is not yet time to speak of this. But the word must turn to the arguments you have presented, and it must show that the Teachers of our Church in their writings did not mention the purifying fire at all, and those statements you brought to us as examples must be immediately explained, by God's help, according to their meaning.

6. As for the testimony you have cited from the Books of Maccabees and from the divine Gospel of Matthew, we will not speak at length about this, as we have already said above. For it is clear and obvious to everyone that these testimonies speak of the fact that after death some (are granted forgiveness of certain sins; but how this forgiveness is granted, and whether through punishment, and that by fire, they give no ground for such an assumption. That they (these testimonies from 2 Maccabees 12:44–45 and Matthew 12:32) do not introduce the concept of a

purifying fire is clearer than the sun: for what is the connection between forgiveness and purification through fire and punishment? For it must be acknowledged that there is one of two: either forgiveness or punishment, but there is no need for both simultaneously. Christ said, "Anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:32), and He did not add anything more. Similarly, the statement from the Books of Maccabees does not say anything in this sense: "It is good and beneficial to pray for the dead, that they may be released from their sins" (2 Maccabees 12:44–45); here, there is no mention of any punishment, nor is it named, but we only find an exhortation to pray to God for the dead in the hope that they will receive forgiveness of sins.

7. So, the matter stands thus. Let us now move on to the widely-used saying of the blessed Paul and examine what it means, especially by following the interpretations and reflections of our Teachers, and we, ourselves, having understood as much as possible the meaning of all that the Apostle said, will faithfully follow his words until we can penetrate the true meaning of his proclamation. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved, even though only as one escaping through the flames" (ὄντις δε ως διαπυρός" "через Огонь", "огнем") (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

8. First of all, we wish to inform you that the blessed John, golden both in soul and in speech, took upon himself the task of interpreting the Epistles of the divine Herald (the Apostle Paul), as well as all other writings of the Old and New Testaments. It is recounted in his life, and it is written that we believe this as absolutely true, that when he wished to undertake the task just mentioned, he experienced a great dizziness: on one side, contemplating the depth of the Apostle's thoughts, and on the other side, greatly fearing to deviate from his teaching in his interpretation. Therefore, turning to prayer and praying much, asking for help from Paul in the task before him, he proceeded in his work. The blessed Paul, on the one hand, to approve the humility of his spirit, and on the other hand, wishing to show that it was fitting for John to be the interpreter of his epistles, appeared to him as he sat and began his work, whispering in his ear; he appeared to Proclus, a disciple of John and successor of the Constantinople throne. How did this happen? A certain prince, having fallen into misfortune and aroused the royal wrath, came at night to the Great one to ask him to intercede with the king. But Proclus, opening the door of the teacher's cell to enter and announce the visitor, saw a man standing behind John, slightly bending over and whispering in his ear. So, thinking there was someone unknown to him, he returned and told the unfortunate prince to leave and come back later. And this happened over the course of three nights, with the standing man never leaving John, who had already immersed himself in his work and was writing an interpretation of Paul's writings. Whenever Proclus entered to announce the fallen prince, he saw that man standing before John.

When, after three days, the wondrous John remembered the prince (for he had already known about him and it was arranged that he would come), he was surprised that he had not yet come and asked Proclus about it. But he said: "Of course, he came often, but seeing you busy with someone else, whenever I entered, I was amazed and feared to disturb you." When John understood this, he immediately asked about the appearance and clothing of that man, and upon learning that he was bald and resembled the image of Paul, which was hanging there, he greatly praised God and Paul, and with great hope, took up the work with even greater zeal, and, with the help of God and Paul, brought it to completion. What grace is poured out in his words, and what beauty of expression, brilliance of thought, and depth are filled in everything, can only be known by those who understand his language.

9. So, he, in order not to prolong the words further, having reached this point (i.e., 1 Cor. 3:11-15) and interpreting these words of the Apostle, did not say or understand anything like what you say, nor did he proclaim that this saying implies a purifying and temporary fire, but took this passage to refer to the eternal and unending punishment. He understood that the Apostle speaks of wood, hay, and straw as being combustible for the eternal flame, and that fire he understands as eternal; "salvation" for those punished in the fire as remaining in it and as the eternity of the punishment. So that no one, hearing the word "fire," knowing that after the resurrection people will receive their bodies, and sinners at the same time will receive suffering, might think that, while those will suffer and their bodies will be destroyed by that fire, they themselves will eventually be annihilated, especially upon hearing about the burning of deeds, the Teacher, rising against such an understanding, says: "This will not be, this will not be! For those whom that fire will take, it will hold them for eternal punishment, and there will be no redemption there; for although their deeds will be burned, they themselves will not be destroyed but will remain as the punished, preserved and existing in the fire." So, this is how he understood the Apostle's saying; in the same way, many other Teachers understood it, who are not to be disbelieved.

10. If, however, you cited to us the blessed Augustine or someone else from the Latin saints, who understood the meaning of the Apostle's words differently and took them to imply a purifying fire, we will first say—and very justly—that we must recognize that the Greeks understand better what is Greek, and you will agree that the Greek language is better understood by those for whom it is their native tongue. So, if no saint who spoke Greek, whose native tongue it was, interpreted (the Apostle's words) otherwise than the blessed John, then we should trust them more, as such and so great! For the Latin saints gave a different interpretation, on the one hand, because in their translation of the Scriptures they lacked an expression that would precisely convey the meaning of the Greek word, and on the other hand, to prevent a greater evil, they allowed a lesser one. For, as is clear from the very words of Augustine, there were some who applied these words of the Apostle to all sins, believing that every sin would be purified and that eternal punishment would eventually have an end. So, wishing to remove and expel such an understanding from souls, he made a known compromise, conceding to this intermediate kind of punishment, allowing for the existence of a

temporary fire, perhaps brought about by a shortcoming in the Latin translation. For "to be saved" and "to be saved" in the Greek language means nothing other than "to remain" and "to be." But this is the meaning of the Apostle's words: for since fire destroys the nature, and those who remain in eternal punishment will not be destroyed, for in that case their stay would not be eternal, he says that even in the consuming fire they will remain alive and preserved.

11. So, first of all, let us turn to the very statement itself. Since, as we have said, John Chrysostom and the Greek saints interpreted this statement one way, and Augustine and the Latins interpreted it another, let us place ourselves in the middle, and first delve into the apostolic words, following their footsteps, seeking the truth above all that the Apostle wishes to reveal. So, it is this: He says that the foundation has been laid, and no other can be laid, for the same – Jesus Christ – and let no one disbelieve in Him. Up to this point, the matter concerns dogmas, but what follows pertains to wisdom in deeds. For when speaking to the faithful, he says that the teaching of faith, and especially its foundation – which is faith in the Incarnate God – is not to be altered by anyone, and whoever dares to do so should be utterly cast out. But since deeds are dead without faith, and faith without deeds is utterly powerless, after speaking of faith, he extends the word and speaks of matters of building, dividing them into only two parts, without establishing any third or intermediate part: with gold, silver, and precious stones, he calls virtues; and with wood, hay, and straw, that is, by contrast, the opposite materials, he calls evil deeds. And indeed, the judgment you presented would have some foundation if he had divided the sinful state into two parts, saying that one could be cleansed and the other is deserving of eternal punishment. But he does not do this. After listing the causes (*αἰτίαι*) of eternal life – I mean virtues – and the causes of eternal punishment – vices, he then adds that the deeds of each will be revealed. He also adds when this will take place, pointing to that final day when God, coming, will repay each according to his deeds. "For the day will reveal it," he says, "because it will be revealed by fire." For "that Day," there is no doubt, will be the Second Coming of the Savior and the future age, which is rightly called "the day," perhaps because it will be to some degree a day in comparison to the present life, which is related to it as day to night, as he says in another place: "**The night is far spent, and the day is at hand**" (Rom. 13:12). Thus, as it is said, that day will be when, when He comes in His glory, a river of fire will flow before Him, as Daniel the Prophet says: "**A river of fire was flowing before Him**" (Dan. 7:10); and David also says: "**A fire goes before Him, and around Him is a mighty tempest**" (Ps. 50:3); and again: "**Fire goes before Him**" (Ps. 96:3). Blessed Peter also says this: "**But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat... waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat...**" (2 Pet. 3:10, 12, 15). From all this, it follows that the blessed Paul is here speaking of the last day and the eternal fire for sinners. That fire, he says, will test each man's deeds, some purifying them, others, along with their perpetrators, burning them. That the fire has a twofold action, this is asserted by all the Fathers, and especially among them by Basil the Great, who, commenting on the Psalm verse: "**The voice of the**

**Lord divides the flames of fire**" (Ps. 28:7), says the following: "The fire, prepared for the torment of the devil and his angels, is divided by the voice of the Lord, so that in it there are two forces: one – burning, and the other – enlightening; the tormenting and punishing force of that fire is preserved for those deserving of punishment; and the enlightening and illuminating one is meant for the illumination of the blessed. Thus, for the first – the voice of the Lord, dividing and separating the flame of the fire, so that its dark part remains as the fire of torment, and its non-burning part remains as the light of enjoyment." So, this fire has such a quality that, having engulfed the righteous, it enlightens them and makes them radiant, showing them to shine brighter than any gold, while on the other hand, this fire, having engulfed the wicked, burns them and subjects them to eternal torment. That is why he says: "The fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." For those whose revealed deeds will be stronger than that fire, or rather, whose deeds will be suited to its enlightening effect, like to like and similar to similar, and shining with the shining, they will receive their reward; while in the deeds that will manifest its burning effect, those which are fit for burning, and in respect to which the same concept holds true as for any fire in relation to wood, hay, and straw – materials easily destroyed and highly combustible, the doers of such deeds will be punished; but not in the sense that, as the evil deeds are destroyed and consumed by fire, so their doers will be destroyed, for they themselves will remain in the fire and undergo eternal torment.

12. So, first, based on the fact that the apostle did not make a distinction between mortal and venial sins in this passage, but simply divided deeds into virtues and sins; secondly, based on the fact that he announced when this will take place – namely, on the last day, as blessed Peter says; and thirdly, from what he said, that the same burning fire will encompass both those deeds which easily burn and preserve their perpetrators whole, it is evident that blessed Paul is speaking not of a purifying fire (which, according to your opinion, is established for some light sins, and not simply any sin, and which certainly burns the doers of those sins until the judgment, but not the righteous, whose deeds are gold and precious stones), but of that eternal and unceasing torment in which they will remain. But even the text, which says that "they will suffer loss," those whose deeds are easily burnable, shows nothing else but that they are subject to eternal punishment and will lose participation in the divine light of Him Who established this trial – which in no way corresponds to those who, according to your judgment, are being purified, for they truly do not suffer loss, but rather gain, shedding their evil state and being clothed in purity and incorruptibility. Thus, we interpret this statement, and equally such an interpretation appears to correspond to the truth. But if anyone else explains this, understanding "salvation" as "freedom from punishment," and "passing through fire" as "purgatory," it is clear that they have not grasped the exact meaning of the Apostle's words. And it is not surprising, for he is a man, and many teachers, as we see, interpret the sayings of Scripture differently and not all of them have attained to the same exact understanding; for it is impossible for the same text, transmitted in different interpretations, to correspond equally to all of them. But we must, by choosing the most important and most consistent with the Church's dogmas, place the other interpretations in second place.

13. Since you also mentioned sayings from some of the Fathers, which seem to agree with the interpretation you gave, let us briefly address this as far as possible. First, you quoted words from the prayer of Basil the Great for Pentecost, then from Saint Epiphanius, also from the divine John of Damascus, and also from the greatest Dionysius, who indeed declare nothing but that prayers and supplications for the deceased bring them great benefit in their release from some sins – with which you agree and about which, we suppose, there is no need to say much. Then, concerning what you cite from blessed Theodoret, a wise and divine man, famous for his eloquence: if we had found what you quoted as his words among our many writings of his, there would be a need for some discussion and equally some response, but since none of his works we have shows that he said such things, there is no need for us to discuss this further.

14. The last is blessed Gregory, the bishop of Nyssa, who seems more than others to be saying what supports your argument. However, it would be better to honor his authority with silence and not compel us, for the sake of defending these things, to bring him into the debate. Nevertheless, we must still speak about this (as much as is possible), preserving the glory of this Father. – He was a man, and it is not impossible for a man, even if he has reached the height of holiness, to err, especially in matters that had not been previously studied and on which the Fathers, meeting together, had not given judgment. For it is clear that it is easier for many to grasp the truth than for one person, and if there are two people in this matter, it is better than one. Thus, when the question of eternal punishment had not yet been investigated, it seems that he also shared the opinion of the restoration of sinners and the end of torment. In particular, in the words you quoted, he is declaring nothing but that there is a kind of purgatory and a purifying furnace, and a drawing near to God through sorrow and suffering until the time when the ultimate restoration of all, even the devils, will occur, "that God may be all in all," as the Apostle says.

15. In response, we first state what we have received from our Fathers: that it is possible these are distortions and interpolations made by certain heretical and Origenist individuals, who flourished in those times, especially in Egypt and Palestine, with the intent of making it seem as though they had the patronage of this great and holy light. Then, we say that even if the saint did indeed hold such a view, it was at a time when this doctrine was a subject of dispute and had not yet been definitively condemned and rejected by the opposing judgment rendered at the Fifth Ecumenical Council; so there is nothing surprising that he, being a man, made a mistake in precision (of truth), when the same happened to many before him, such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Dionysius of Alexandria, and others, for even they, through their sayings, gave some support to those leading astray. And the fact that this doctrine was disputed and not yet clarified, as to present an exact judgment, is attested by Gregory the Theologian, who in his "On Baptism," reasoning about the unquenchable fire, then says: "Unless it is pleasing to anyone to understand this more humanely and in a way worthy of the Punisher." Do you see how he allows those who wish to understand this fire more humanely? But the Fifth Ecumenical Council condemned such an opinion (about the finality of torment) as the most inhuman of all teachings, harmful to the Church and weakening the devout, and

anathematized it. Therefore, these sayings, if indeed they were said by the wondrous Gregory about that fire, point not to a special purgatory, but introduce the final cleansing and final restoration of all; but they are in no way convincing to us, looking at the general opinion of the Church and guided by the Divine Scriptures, and not considering what each teacher wrote, expressing his personal opinion; and if someone else wrote something about a purifying fire, we need not accept it, for neither Scripture nor the Fifth Ecumenical Council handed down to us a dual punishment and dual kinds of fire.

16. But you said that this was clearly stated by Augustine, Blessed Ambrose, and Gregory the Great. That these are their words, we acknowledge, and it cannot be denied; but although these men were Latins and wrote their works in Latin (yet from what is known to us, it can be seen that) on the one hand, they did not declare anything definite about the purifying fire, but only taught that the liturgies and prayers performed for the departed help them; and on the other hand, if they said anything definite about this, however, none of their writings have we read to this day; nothing that would speak of this subject; perhaps, only recently have the works of Augustine's "On the Trinity" and Gregory's "Dialogues" been translated from Latin to Greek. So what is so surprising if we do not know that which we have never seen, read, or heard? For our Fathers, as well as those who used Greek in their writings, said nothing about such matters, and what the Latins have said is entirely unclear to us Greeks. But perhaps the words of these Fathers that you have quoted can be interpreted in a conciliatory manner, and with good reason, since from the words of Augustine himself and Blessed Gregory the Great it is clear that neither they nor others spoke these things relying on their authority, immediately supporting them with arguments, and presenting them as truth. Rather, they spoke these things, as one might say, out of necessity and limited understanding, and in order to avert a greater evil (which was the idea that every sin could be cleansed). Therefore, considering it harsh to oppose the opinion of many, and fearing that their words would seem unconvincing if, while others believed every sin would be cleansed, they would declare that no sin would be cleansed, they chose the middle path and allowed the lesser evil, in order to make their words seem more persuasive and prevent a greater evil. But for us, there is no need to follow this and accept this opinion on faith. For if they arrived at this conclusion based on the words of Blessed Paul, and they rely on them, considering that the Apostle here speaks about such a fire (and what the Apostle meant has already been broadly explained by us, when we laid out what John Chrysostom said and what flows directly from the text, which is completely different from the understanding the Western Fathers attribute to it), is it so easy for us to accept an opinion that arose from such a beginning, and which is unacceptable to us, and originates from a source that leads to the opposite understanding?

17. The same applies to what you say, that Blessed Gregory, in the fourth book of his "Dialogues," proves the existence of purgatory with many stories and revelations, and declares that indeed there is a purifying fire before the time of the future Judgment, whether he interprets this allegorically or literally. And the fact that he cites passages from Scripture to support this does not

necessarily make this interpretation correct, as we have said earlier. As for the stories and revelations he presents, they do not show any definite purifying fire in a particular place; he says that some of those being purified in this way are appointed to baths serving the cleansing, while others, through revelation, taught that some souls burn in different places; all of this is nothing more than miraculous manifestations and revelations, specially appointed by God for the conversion and correction of the living. And the idea of a common purifying fire for all does not necessarily follow from this. Moreover, what he says after this undermines the doctrine of a purgatorial fire; for he says that “minor” and “lesser” sins of the righteous are cleansed by compensating for them with other deeds, namely – good deeds in this life; others are cleansed at the moment of the soul’s departure from the body by mere fear, as he conveys; and others are cleansed after death through the deeds and offerings made on their behalf.

18. Since you also referred to the authority of the Roman Church as the fifth argument, we will dismiss this: for you should not be unaware that if both we and you were to set ourselves against each other, each introducing as its authority the teachings of each of our Churches, we would never come to an agreement or hold any discussion. But this was the very first and main reason for our meeting: to leave behind any preconceived opinions (*προλήψεως*) and any references to customs that do not aid the discussion, and to judge matters as they appear in themselves, comparing them to the words of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers, and using them as a rule and model for the issues being studied. For if we do not proceed in this way, but begin to judge by referring to customs, then both sides could bring everything into disorder, and we would never agree with one another. Thus, it turns out that neither from here, nor from the cited words, does it follow the necessity of what you assert (namely, the existence of purgatory).

19. Finally, since you made a similar conclusion on the subject at hand and referred to the concept of God's love for mankind, it is necessary to inform you that we, no less, can draw a certain conclusion (and one that is opposite to yours) based on the concept of God's love for mankind, and moreover, from the necessity of various degrees and stages of enjoyment, which necessarily requires the acknowledgment that not all are equally purified, as well as many other arguments, some of which we will present in due time, if necessary. For now, after saying a little on this subject, we will end the discussion.

I. We will say that it is more characteristic of God's goodness not to overlook small good deeds than to regard small sins as worthy of punishment. However, small good deeds in those who have committed great sins will not be rewarded due to the predominance of evil. Similarly, small evil in those who have been righteous in great matters will not result in punishment, since the better deeds prevail: for if there is nothing that represents the greater part, then there will certainly not be anything that constitutes the lesser part. Therefore, one should not believe in the purifying fire.

II. Then, just as there is small good in those who are otherwise evil, so there is small evil in those who are good in other ways. But small good in these cannot lead to the reward that follows good deeds; it can only produce a difference in punishment; likewise, small evil will not lead to

punishment but will produce a difference in the degree of enjoyment. Therefore, one should not believe in the purifying fire.

III. Then, the justice of eternal torment is based on the immutability of the evil will of the sinners; for the will that remains eternally sinful must correspond with eternal punishment. Conversely, if the one who eternally remains unchanged in evil is punished with eternal torment, then the one who does not undergo eternal punishment should be understood to not have an unchanging will. For if the one whose will is unchanging in relation to evil is subject to eternal punishment, then the one whose will is unchanging in relation to good needs no punishment, since they should receive crowns instead. Meanwhile, as you assert, those who are purified by that purifying fire have an unchanging will. Therefore, they do not need to be purified by fire.

IV. Then, if the vision of God is the perfect reward for those pure in heart and soul, and not all will receive it in the same measure, it means not all are equally pure, and there is no need for a purifying fire if this purity is not perfect in some; for in that case, all would have been equally purified by that fire and would, by that same measure, be capable of contemplating God. But this is not the case, as symbolically and figuratively occurred at the mountain where the Law was given: “for then not all appeared worthy of the same position and order, but one to one, another to another, according to the purity of each,” as Gregory the Theologian says.

V. The same great Gregory the Theologian, when writing a speculative and mystical word about Pascha, when he comes to the place where he says: “We will carry nothing, we will leave nothing for the morning,” clearly and openly shows that after this night there is no purification, calling this night the present life of each, and not admitting any purification after it.

VI. Then, in his word "On the Destruction of the City," reasoning thus: “I will not speak of what the torments are there for those to whom here He grants mercy, but I will only say this: it is better to be punished and purified now than to be given over to torment there, when it is the time for punishment, not purification,” he clearly asserts that after departure from here, there is no purification, only eternal torment.

VII. Then, the Lord in the Gospel of Luke, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:20), teaching about the fate that each received, says that Lazarus, immediately after his death, was carried by Angels to Abraham’s bosom, while the rich man was also buried after death, and his soul is in torment in hell; and thus, by referring to “Abraham's bosom,” He signifies the highest rest in the happy lot of those who pleased God, and through “hell” and “torments,” He presents the final judgment and eternal punishment for sinners. He did not leave any other place between them that would involve temporary torment, but showed that there exists a great and impassable gulf between the states of the righteous and the sinners, a complete and unbridgeable opposition.

VIII. Then, for a soul that has been separated from the body and become completely immaterial and spiritual, it would be unimaginable to be tormented by material fire, while its body, which the fire would have consumed, has decayed. Indeed, after the resurrection, when it receives the incorruptible body and all of creation becomes immutable, and when fire is divided, as we are

taught, it will be fitting for it to be tormented by it, and not only for it, but also for demons, who are both dark and clothed with some matter and coarse corporeality (παχύτητα περιβεβλημένοις) and with an airy or fiery body, as Basil the Great says. But before it receives its body, being only a form not mixed with matter, though existing by itself, how could it be tormented by material fire?

IX. Then, our holy Fathers, who lived angelic lives on earth, were often and frequently taught through visions and dreams and other miraculous manifestations about eternal torment and about the impious and sinful souls in it, and as they saw and expressed it through words, as the parable from the Gospel of Luke describes the state of the rich man and Lazarus, they did not announce anything about a purifying fire with an end.

X. Finally, the doctrine about the restoration and end of eternal punishment, which began with Origen, as was said, and became dominant among some Church Fathers, including Didymus and Evagrius, as referring to God's love for mankind and easily accepted among the careless, as the God-bearing John says, the builder of the "Ladder of Heaven," was, however, condemned and anathematized by the holy Fifth Ecumenical Council, as producing laxity in souls and making them even more careless, since they expect that there will someday be deliverance from torments and the promised restoration. Therefore, on this basis, the doctrine of the purifying fire must be cast out from the Church, as it leads the diligent to carelessness and convinces them not to fight with all their means in this life for their purification, since, supposedly, after death another purification is expected.

#### Works Mentioned:

1. The first reference is from the "Life of St. John Chrysostom" (R.G., Vol. 144, cols. 1101–1108).
2. The second citation is from Augustine's "De Civitate Dei" (Book I, Chapter 21) and his "Enchiridion" (No. 18) as well as his treatise on angels (Book III, Chapter 8).
3. The third reference is from Basil the Great's homily on Psalm 28 (P.G., Vol. 29, Column 297).
4. Gregory Nazianzus is cited from his Oration 40 (No. 36) and Oration 45 (No. 11) (P.G., Vol. 36, Columns 412 and 637).
5. Gregory Nazianzus is again referenced in Oration 16 (No. 7), P.G., Vol. 35, Column 944.
6. Finally, John Climacus' "The Ladder of Paradise," particularly step 4, is cited (P.G., Vol. 88, Column 780).

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