

## The “Stavroclast Heresy”?

*Concerning the Soteriology of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky*

Not only do we lack the space here to answer in detail the reproaches of the opponents of Metropolitan Anthony in the sphere of theology, but it would even be superfluous, because they, as a rule, *miss the essential point*, obscuring, and not elucidating, the crux of the matter. The aim of this present, short article is something else: to give to him who wishes to comprehend the essence of this question a positive key to understanding the problems involved.

We will offer but one striking example of such polemics. In the brochure by an anonymous author entitled *The Secret of the Catechism of Metropolitan Anthony* (1988), it is said that his *Toward an Orthodox Christian Catechism* is simply “plagiarism”. Metropolitan Anthony supposedly “assiduously concealed this fact from everyone, hoping that no one would ever discover this secret”. Nevertheless, this “secret” has now “at God’s command, been revealed” precisely “by the investigation set forth here”. Reckoning up the words, our anonymous author comes to the conclusion that 81.17% [!] of *Toward an Orthodox Christian Catechism* consists of the text of the *Comprehensive Christian Catechism of the Orthodox Catholic Eastern Church* (1823) by Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, and he then goes on to denounce the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad for “theft” and “sacrilege”.

There are ninety pages to this “denunciatory” brochure, however, its unknown author did not bear in mind one very elementary consideration which reduces all his mathematical computations to an absurdity: Russia was quite familiar with the *Comprehensive Catechism* — it was studied in the schools there. And therefore it is obvious to all that the matter here is concerning the revision of an older catechism with the objective of freeing it from the influence of Western theories. The opinion that here someone has sought to conceal something is born of an unchurchly mentality and of an inability to think things out. Unfortunately, we still have to contend with ongoing polemics of this sort.

No less absurd is the accusation made against Metropolitan Anthony for the “stavroclast heresy” supposedly contained in his teaching concerning the dogma of redemption. Let us note straightway that the ideas of Metropolitan Anthony form an organic part of the *Dogmatic Theology* of Fr. Justin Popovich<sup>1</sup>, who is rightly considered a “Twentieth-century Father of the Church”, and were further developed by Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco (see: *Vestnik*, No. 1, 1995).

What is it that Vladyka Anthony actually wrote concerning one of the primary doctrines of the Orthodox Church?

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<sup>1</sup> Archimandrite Justin Popovich, *Dogmatika Pravoslavne Tserkve* [Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church] (Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1980), see pp. 367-442.

In his article *The Dogma of Redemption*,<sup>2</sup> written in 1917 at Valaam Monastery, Metropolitan Anthony reveals from a theological point of view the meaning of Christ's redeeming struggle.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, he, in particular, addresses the moment of the Saviour's prayer in Gethsemane, which, according to his interpretation, clearly reveals the essence of our salvation: "...during that night in Gethsemane, the thought and feeling of the God-Man embraced fallen humanity numbering many, many millions, and He wept with loving sorrow over each individual separately, as only the omniscient heart of God could. *In this did our redemption consist*. Not an angel, nor a man. And not at all because the satisfaction of Divine wrath demanded the most costly sacrifice" (*Dogma*, p. 28).

Metropolitan Anthony has been accused of rejecting the Cross and the need for the Saviour's death. On what basis? *On the basis of an incorrect understanding* of the phrase: "In this did our redemption consist". Not having fathomed the sense of what had been said, the opponents of Metropolitan Anthony have attributed to him the assertion that supposedly our redemption was already accomplished at the time of the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, i.e., the moment of the crucifixion and death have simply been replaced by him with another one. But in actuality Metropolitan Anthony has quite a different logic here. The key to understanding Metropolitan Anthony's mode of thinking is an Orthodox ecclesiastical integrity. Holding to this, *we will see that there can be no question of a subdivision into separate moments, and even less of a contrasting them one against the other*.

In what then, in fact, according to the mind of Metropolitan Anthony "did our redemption consist"? Upon a less superficial reading, it is evident that what is meant here is the joining of the Divine *omniscience* (and not of an abstract or general nature, but personal, personally directed to "each individual separately"), and of the human sorrow of Jesus Christ as a sorrowing individual, uniting in Himself humanity — flesh, soul, and mind. The principal intrinsic meaning is here once more emphasized by the author: "That is why God, the God-Man, and only He, could be our Redeemer".

It is perfectly legitimate to focus on one or another moment which especially reveals this union of the Divine and human in Christ, and it in no wise means that other moments are excluded by this. Not without purpose does Metropolitan Anthony precisely here cite a whole series of other events in the earthly life of the Saviour, interpreting them in the same spirit, i.e., without dismembering the life of Christ, but always having in mind the Totality, in other words, "the crux of the matter". Although Metropolitan Anthony was contending against "legalism", against a purely juridical understanding of the saving act of Christ — nevertheless, he does not even consider rejecting, but rather accepts wholeheartedly, various legal comparisons, in the same spirit. Indeed, in the integral con-

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<sup>2</sup> Archbishop Nikon Rklitskii, *Zhizneopisanie Blazhenneishego Antonia, Mitropolita Kievskago i Galitskago* [Life and Collected Works of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky] (New York: North American and Canadian Diocesan Publishers, 1961), vol. 8, pp. 143-186.

English translation by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston: Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, *The Dogma of Redemption* (Montreal: Monastery Press, 1979). Page references in the present article are to this English edition.

<sup>3</sup> The Russian word *подвигъ* (*podvig*) is notoriously difficult to translate because of its many nuances. It generally means: struggle, moral exploit, feat, endeavor, etc.

text of the writings of the Holy Fathers, they have their proper place and use. In accordance with this, even Metropolitan Anthony allows considering redemption “from the viewpoint of criminal, military, or commercial law”. But none of these “juridical modes” can be declared to be the sole one, or to stand in opposition to the others: “None of these explanations contradicts the others in any way, nor *in actuality* do they contradict the explanation which forms the subject of the present article.” And even the juridical interpretation, understood and accepted in such a broader sense, has “very little in common with the explanation of Anselm, Aquinas, and the later Scholastic dogmatic theology, which introduces the idea of a duel here” (*Dogma*, p. 42).

By the “idea of a duel”, Metropolitan Anthony means the psychological basis which stands behind the juridical and economic aspects of the Scholastic doctrine of “satisfaction”. In the opinion of Metropolitan Anthony, behind this doctrine is concealed the medieval, feudal concept of honor. The knightly code of honor demanded a contest in single combat for the sake of “satisfaction”, i.e., for the restoration of the honor of the dishonored party. By transferring this viewpoint to God, it so happened that God the Father, as an infinite Being, was infinitely offended in His honor by man, His creation. Neither [the blood of] a single man, nor [of] all of humanity — inasmuch as they are finite and not infinite — was sufficient to satisfy the infinite God for the insult. This could be wrought only by a being equal in rank with God. That is why the Son of God appears upon the earth: only He, as the most precious of beings, is able, in man’s stead, to take upon Himself the righteous punishment and full wrath of God, by this very deed restoring the honor of God the Father.

The relationships between the Persons of the Most-holy Trinity are understood here incorrectly: God the Father and God the Son are placed in opposition to each other in an inadmissible manner, and the relation between the Divine and human natures of Christ are distorted.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, redemption itself is presented as something external. The theory of “satisfaction” appeared in the West in 1096, in the work *Cur Deus homo* (Why God became man) by Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, i.e., already after the falling-away of Roman Catholicism from Orthodoxy. Western theological thought today recognizes Anselm’s approach as having been revolutionarily novel in comparison with the ancient one of the Holy Fathers. It is possible to say that in this new [Scholastic] approach a division is represented — to be exact, a severance of those links which the Church sees and hymns in its integral perception. *Whereas Metropolitan Anthony lived this integral perception, reasoned by it, and brought people’s hearts back to it — not only by his written articles, but by his entire life, imbued with a pastoral spirit.*

“Christ’s cleansing Blood, saving Cross, life-giving tomb, and healing wounds are all expressions and images which are substituted (in the epistles of the Apostles and Fathers, and in the Church’s prayers) for the general concept of Christ’s redeeming Passion; those aspects of His exploit, of His saving grief and Passion, which make the greatest impression on us, are taken up here, [especially the Holy Cross] ...” *In these words we once*

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<sup>4</sup> This issue was elucidated at two councils of the Orthodox Church in 1156 & 1157 in Constantinople.

again see that one should not even entertain a thought of placing separate moments of Christ's exploit in opposition one to the other. Nor should one oppose the spiritual aspect to the corporeal: "We are, of course, far from insisting that the only meaning of our Lord's bodily suffering and, in particular, of His crucifixion and death was to provide the faithful with a way of conceiving His spiritual grief. It is probable that because of the bond between the soul and the body, there is a deeper mystical sense here..." (*Dogma*, pp. 51-52).

For all the inexhaustibility, incomprehensibility, grandeur and profundity of the exploit of redemption, nevertheless, it is not asserted here that we can know nothing about it. The Lord Himself reveals many of its facets — otherwise for what purpose were we given the accounts of Gethsemane and Golgotha? And what is more, it befits us to delve into the mystery of redemption. *This is precisely what the Holy Church does, both in her hymns, and in the works of the Holy Fathers, which, however, cannot be placed one against the other, inasmuch as they strive towards a God-inspired Whole, which is attained by a life in the Church.*

"Salvation is our conscious process of perfection and communion with God," writes Vladyka Anthony, "therefore, the truths of revelation united with it should be bound to our inner experience and not remain completely un-understood mysteries" (*Dogma*, p. 53).

Not some certain separate actions of the Saviour — such as the prayer in Gethsemane alone, or the Cross alone — serve for the empirical comprehension of the mystery of redemption, *but rather the entire life of Christ taken in its totality.* Christ offered His entire Self — the God-Man. And He poured His life into our life. But in what way?

In considering this question, we should first of all note that Metropolitan Anthony removes the usual division (and the opposition which arises from it) of the "objective" and "subjective" aspects of salvation. By this distinction, we mean the following: by His crucifixion, death and resurrection, Christ has already saved all of humanity, i.e., He has provided the conditions so that every man could be saved (the objective side). But the salvation granted by Christ must still be made his own by every man personally (the subjective side). In the presence of such a — at first glance quite logical — division, the means itself of assimilating the redeeming exploit of Christ remain unelucidated. If the matter here consisted in naught but following a good example, then salvation would be limited to an external "imitation".

In order to resolve this matter, Metropolitan Anthony addresses the concept of "nature" or "essence". And, once again, while not denying the strength of example, he supplements the idea and treats this element more in depth, and finally, by his posing of the question concerning "essence", he transcends it [i.e., the element of mere example]. The Holy Person of Christ "becomes for my consciousness, as it were, a part of my *I*, or, to be more precise, I myself become a part of that personality, a participant, or, to employ the language of the Church, a communicant of its [the personality's] interior life" (*Works of Metropolitan Anthony*, vol. 11, p. 38). Self-love hinders this: "God did not create us for hatred and self-love, and the consciousness of our acute separateness from each other, which each of us has, is an abnormal consciousness, born of sin" (*Dogma*, p. 34).

In regards to the *Dogma of Redemption*, of very great significance is the concept — referred to by Metropolitan Anthony only in passing — cited by him from the *Triodian* concerning the “superhuman prayer” of Christ (*Dogma*, p. 50; cf. the *Synaxarion* for Holy and Great Thursday). According to the Christological dogma of the Council of Chalcedon, two natures are present in Christ, united “unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably”, i.e., the properties or attributes of both natures are not altered by the conjunction. But Christ’s human nature is sinless! The contradistinction between “I” and the “non-I” natural for fallen man, and which through self-love develops into absolute opposition, is totally absent in Christ. Moreover, not only in His Divine consciousness of Self, but likewise in His concrete humanity. And precisely for this cause the removal of this opposition is the foundation of our unity with Christ: Christ is Everyman. Man is sundered by sin, and human nature is sundered by sin. But with Christ the opposite is true: He displays in Himself human nature undivided by sin, and by this very fact, He constitutes anew (“renews”<sup>5</sup>) the interrelations of God and man. Man becomes “a partaker of the Divine nature” (2 Pt. 1: 4).

Here the central idea of Metropolitan Anthony harks back to Saint Basil the Great, who writes concerning the ascetics, that they “restore the primal goodness in eclipsing the sin of our forefather Adam; for there would be no divisions, no strife, no war among men, if sin had not made cleavages in the nature... They have clearly demonstrated to mankind how many blessings were bestowed on it by the Saviour’s incarnation, because in the measure of their strength they gather the one human nature, which had been torn and cloven into thousands of pieces, once more to itself and to God. And this is chief in the Saviour’s incarnate economy: to gather human nature to itself and to Himself and, having abolished this evil cleavage, to restore the original unity” (*Ascetical Statutes*, ch. 18).

It is very important to note that for Metropolitan Anthony “nature” or “essence” are far from being merely a certain abstract sum of the properties characteristic to all individuals (as others were wont to think), but it without fail is linked with activity.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the very concept of “essence” should be conceived of as active,<sup>7</sup> and not abstract. *In this, Metropolitan Anthony, however, agrees with the Patristic doctrine which was most clearly revealed by Righteous Maximus the Confessor*, who demonstrated that will or aspiration are properties of essence. If it were a quality of the person, then Christ would have but one will (hence, mono-theitism). In addition, the Holy Fathers agree that “nature” does not exist outside of personality, i.e., it in no wise is abstract, but exists in concrete manifestations — there is no essence outside of hypostasis. A manifestation of the two wills in the one hypostasis of Christ, being the manifestation of two essences, we see precisely in the prayer concerning the cup in Gethsemane, moreover, the two wills do not oppose each other, but concur totally. Therefore does the Church chant in the words of Saint John Damascene: “Thou didst pray concerning the voluntary cup of Thy saving Passion, as though it were involuntary, thereby exhibiting two wills; for Thou, O Christ,

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<sup>5</sup> “For He that was born was God. Wherefore also, He hath renewed all natures.”(Sunday, First Tone, Theotokion of the Aposticha.)

<sup>6</sup> Lit., “dynamics” (or operations, energies).

<sup>7</sup> Lit., “dynamic” (or operative).

dost have one for each of Thy two natures, even to all the ages” (Sunday, Plagal of First Tone, Matins Canon, Ode 8).

From this point of reference, we can make a fresh approach to Metropolitan Anthony’s controversial assertion that he “must refute the current understanding that our Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane was inspired by fear of the approaching physical suffering and death”. Metropolitan Anthony writes: “This would be entirely unworthy of our Lord”, and he notes the martyrs who reveled amidst their torments — even in pre-Christian times (the Maccabees). The critics of Metropolitan Anthony have said that Christ experienced human weakness (hunger, fatigue), and consequently, the fear of death. *In all fairness it must be said that the one assertion absolutely does not negate the other*. It suffices to understand that there are fears, and then there are fears.

The very same Righteous John Damascene, who speaks of the “weakness of the human will” found in Christ (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book 3, ch. XVII), helps to resolve this *imaginary contradiction* between Metropolitan Anthony and his critics. This Holy Father writes concerning Christ: “His human will was obedient and subordinate to His divine will, not being guided by its own inclination, but willing those things which the divine will willed. For it was with the permission of the divine will that He suffered by nature what was proper to Him. For when He prayed that He might escape the death, it was with His divine will naturally willing and permitting it that He did so pray and agonize and fear, and again when His divine will willed that His human will should choose the death, the passion became voluntary to Him. For it was not as God only, but also as man, that He voluntarily surrendered Himself to death.” And here upon follows the Damascene’s characteristic extension of the action of this voluntary decision, confirmed by [His] exploit, upon all mankind: “And thus He bestowed on us also courage in the face of death” (*Exposition*, Book 3, ch. XVIII).

When Saint John Damascene, in regards to this, speaks of Christ having “natural fear”, one could imagine that this contradicts Metropolitan Anthony, however, a little later this Holy Father explains that *the word “fear” has a double meaning*: one fear is natural, the other — “unnatural”, and this latter sort “arises from treachery of reasoning and want of faith, and ignorance of the hour of death” etc. It, as an “unexpected shrinking”, had no place in Christ: “This our Lord did not assume” (*Exposition*, Book 3, Church. XXIII). It is precisely this fear that Metropolitan Anthony points out as being unworthy of the Lord. A totally different matter is that fear, terror and agony, which, according to the Damascene, “belong to the natural and innocent passions and are not under the dominion of sin”.<sup>8</sup>

Just as Metropolitan Anthony does not deny “the mystical bond of the soul and body”, so too, the Damascene says: “the soul is unwilling to be separated from the body, on account of the natural sympathy and close relationship implanted in it in the beginning by the Creator, which makes it fear and struggle against death”. Here is manifested fully the assent to the will of the Creator, Who brought the world out of nothing into being, “a longing after being and not after non-being”, i.e., *an aversion to non-being*. This aversion

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<sup>8</sup> Also see: Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Homilies 146 & 147.

did exist in Christ. Christ shrank “from that which is destructive of life”. We might add that, in the given instance, this shrinking is not only “not under the dominion of sin”, but is diametrically opposed to sin, since nothing is more destructive to life than sin!

Saint John Damascene emphasizes that precisely in this aversion is manifested the completely *voluntary nature* of this shrinking before death and the taking of death upon Himself: “For although what happened did so according to the laws of nature [Christ possessed a mortal body. *N. A.*], yet it was not, as in our case, a matter of necessity. For He willingly and spontaneously accepted that which was natural”.

What then was it that Christ sought in Gethsemane as He shrank before death and non-being?

Here we come quite close to the thought of Metropolitan Anthony, although he himself does not cite Saint John Damascene. While noting that in Christ there was no *sundering of human nature*, we should likewise realize that Christ’s shrinking from non-being and sin relates also to His own person — but in no wise exclusively only to Him personally. One who reduces Christ to a simple individual entity, as though conceptually severing Him from us, only introduces the falsehood of his own sinful sundering, and such a one thinks according to the old Adam, and not according to the mind of Christ. The shrinking of Christ, in His person, from non-being and death, from death-dealing sin on the one hand, and His completely voluntary acceptance of the consequences of sin on the other, pours into our life that life-bearing, grace-filled principle, which Metropolitan Anthony has in mind. That which Christ experienced — precisely as the sinless God-Man — totally regenerates the relationship of man to God from within, and likewise alters the interrelationships among people at the most profound level: on the level of human nature. Christ pours into the potential<sup>9</sup> of the human will a new dimension.

Saint John Damascene writes that Christ, by His praying concerning the cup, instructs us to prefer God’s will to our own, and moreover, He demonstrates that He “did actually appropriate to Himself the attributes of our nature” (*Exposition*, Book 3, ch. XXIV: “Concerning our Lord’s Praying”). In his next chapter, “Concerning the Appropriation”, the Damascene draws a distinction: the “natural and essential” appropriation differs from the appropriation that is “personal and relative” (*Exposition*, Book 3, ch. XXV). The best example of this is the well-known words of Christ on the Cross: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* (Matt. 27: 46; cf. Ps. 21: 1). According to the Damascene’s interpretation, the Lord pronounced this prayer of King David “as making our personality His own”, having ranked Himself “as one of us”. However, it is clear that “Christ was never forsaken by His own divinity: nay it was we who were forsaken and disregarded” (*Exposition*, Book 3, ch. XXIV). Thus there is maintained a certain internal distancing or abstraction “with subtle distinctions of the mind between that which is seen [the human, *N. A.*] and that which is perceived [the Divinity, *N. A.*]”. Precisely in this manner the Lord “appropriated both our curse and our desertion, and such other things as are not natural: not that He Himself was or became such, but that He took upon Himself our personality and ranked Himself as one of us. Such is the meaning in which this phrase

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<sup>9</sup> Once again, lit., “dynamics” (energies, operations).

is to be taken: *Being made a curse for our sakes (Gal. 3: 15)*” (*Exposition*, Book 3, ch. XXV).

Among his reflections on this topic, Metropolitan Anthony considers *sacrificial, compassionate love* to be of primary importance as that power which communicates itself to us, and which regenerates a man. He considers that Christ, during His saving exploit, precisely by means of this power— both by His divine omniscience, and through His struggling with all the might of His human nature — wrenched us from the mouth of death and Hades. Saint John Damascene, however, attributes “love” and “compassion” to the relative appropriation, and he writes: “But the personal and relative appropriation is when any one assumes the person of another relatively, for instance, out of pity or love, and in his place utters words concerning him that have no connection with himself” (*Exposition*, Book 3, ch. XXV). *It may appear that the reasoning of Metropolitan Anthony is not in agreement with this Holy Father. However, such a conclusion is possible only with the most cursory of glances.* If one looks not at the mere words themselves, but at the heart of the matter, then one cannot help but notice that the reasoning of Metropolitan Anthony is totally concerned with “appropriation according to nature”. Precisely in this consists the distinction noted by him between the “force of example” as a relatively external influence, and “compassionate, sacrificial love”, which is poured directly into the will of man and which transfigures him from within. *Therefore, that which Metropolitan Anthony calls “compassionate love”, meaning the birth pangs of the new man, the regeneration of the old man into the new, this Saint John Damascene calls love for man in that same chapter just cited, saying: “The natural and essential one [appropriation, N. A.] is that by which our Lord in His love for man took on Himself our nature and all our human attributes, becoming in nature and truth man, and making trial of that which is natural”* (*Exposition*, Book 3, ch. XXV).

According to Metropolitan Anthony, precisely by this, His all-encompassing exploit, Christ communicated to our nature the power of will proper to His victory over sin and death. This is the active potential<sup>10</sup> of resurrected man, not in the future only, but likewise in our everyday struggles. This is that power which opens “the doors of repentance” to even the most inveterate sinner, helping him to choose grace-bringing aid. By the activity of this grace is abolished that conditional distinction of the “objective” and “subjective” aspects of salvation:

“The salvation, which Christ brought to humanity consists not only of the conscious assimilation of Christ’s principle truths and of His love, but also of the fact that by means of His compassionate love Christ demolishes the partition which sin sets up between men, restores the original oneness of nature, and obtains direct access to the spiritual bosom of human nature, so that the man who has subjected himself to this action of Christ finds new dispositions, new feelings and longings, not only in his thoughts, but also in his very character, these being created not by himself, but coming from Christ Who has united Himself to him. It then remains for the free will either to call all these to life or wickedly to reject them... But the direct entrance of Christ’s nature, of His good volitions

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<sup>10</sup> And once again, lit., “dynamics”.

