

THE DEATH RATTLE

of the Latin Captivity?

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

In previous articles, we have written about the inroads that Western scholastic and rationalistic thought made into the Orthodox Christian lands. This happened at times when Orthodox Christians were at a disadvantage, especially after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman armies. On these occasions, the Orthodox found themselves helpless to defend themselves against the Latin or Protestant missionaries' influences, and so they often resorted to the easy — but dangerous — tactic of using Protestant ideas to fight off the Latins, or Latin doctrines to refute the Protestants. The trouble was, in neither case were they using *Orthodox* teachings to defend themselves. Thus, alien ideas slowly began to insinuate themselves into Orthodox Christian texts.

Now, however, the tide may be turning.

With the migration of millions of Orthodox Christians to the West, many people in Europe and the Western Hemisphere who had never heard of the Orthodox Christian Church before are beginning to see another very different version of Christianity than the variety they were accustomed to. Further, many are turning their backs on the Protestant or Roman versions, and turning to what they are coming to see as a more ancient and original expression of the Church that Christ our Saviour founded.

Even clergymen of some Western denominations are now openly finding fault with some of scholasticism's most cherished ideas, such as Anselm's "satisfaction theory."*

One clergyman, the Dean of St. Alban's Anglican Cathedral in Hertfordshire (England), the Rev. Jeffrey John, has used very stark language to describe Anselm's Theory.

The Rev. John writes that even when he was ten years old, he thought Anselm's explanation for the Crucifixion of Christ was "pretty repulsive."

"What sort of God was this, getting so angry with the world and the people He created, and then, to calm Himself down, *demanding* the blood of His own Son?," asks the Rev. John.

"This is worse than illogical, it is insane. It makes God sound like a psychopath. If any human being behaved like this, we would say they were a monster.

* See our article, "The Shackles of the Latin Captivity — Anselm's Unsatisfactory Theory."

"Well, I haven't changed my mind [since I was ten]. That explanation of the Cross just doesn't work, but sadly, it's one that's still all too often preached."

Another Western religious writer, Dwight Pryor, (*Jerusalem Post Christian Edition*, February, 2010), using somewhat more temperate language, writes the following from a former Jew's perspective:

The multiple images of atonement found in the New Testament, all drawn from the Hebrew Bible* — such as sacrifice, conflict and victory over evil, ransom and redemption, reconciliation, and adoption into a family — gave way to doctrinal "theories of atonement" [in Western "Christianity"]. Justification and a juridical view of salvation began to dominate, conceived more in categories of retributive Roman law than the relational context of a Torah given in grace.

Satisfying divine justice and honor via penal substitution (Christ dying in our stead) suited the West's preoccupation with introspective guilt that prevailed from the time of Augustine and his doctrine of [predestination and] Original Sin (in which all stand guilty from birth for Adam's transgression).

Y/H/W/H, Israel's gracious God, became re-imaged in the popular mind after the likeness of Greco-Roman deities whose anger had to be appeased. Once the Torah was dislodged from its covenantal context of grace, Temple sacrifices were construed as attempts to gain the favor of a judgmental Deity instead of the means of evoking repentance, enhancing fellowship and drawing near to a gracious Father who abounds in *hesed* or lovingkindness.

The sixteenth century Protestant Reformers later charged that "Hellenistic errors" had crept into Latin theology. Though they rejected many of the practices of the medieval church, ironically, Luther and Calvin retained the Augustinian assumptions and Roman worldview that lay at the base of it all.

As we have written in previous articles, the West created their God in the image of medieval, western man. Now, this false image may be crumbling.

Is this the Latin Captivity's death rattle that we are beginning to hear?

* Ed. Note: Actually, the Apostles, for the most part, used the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.